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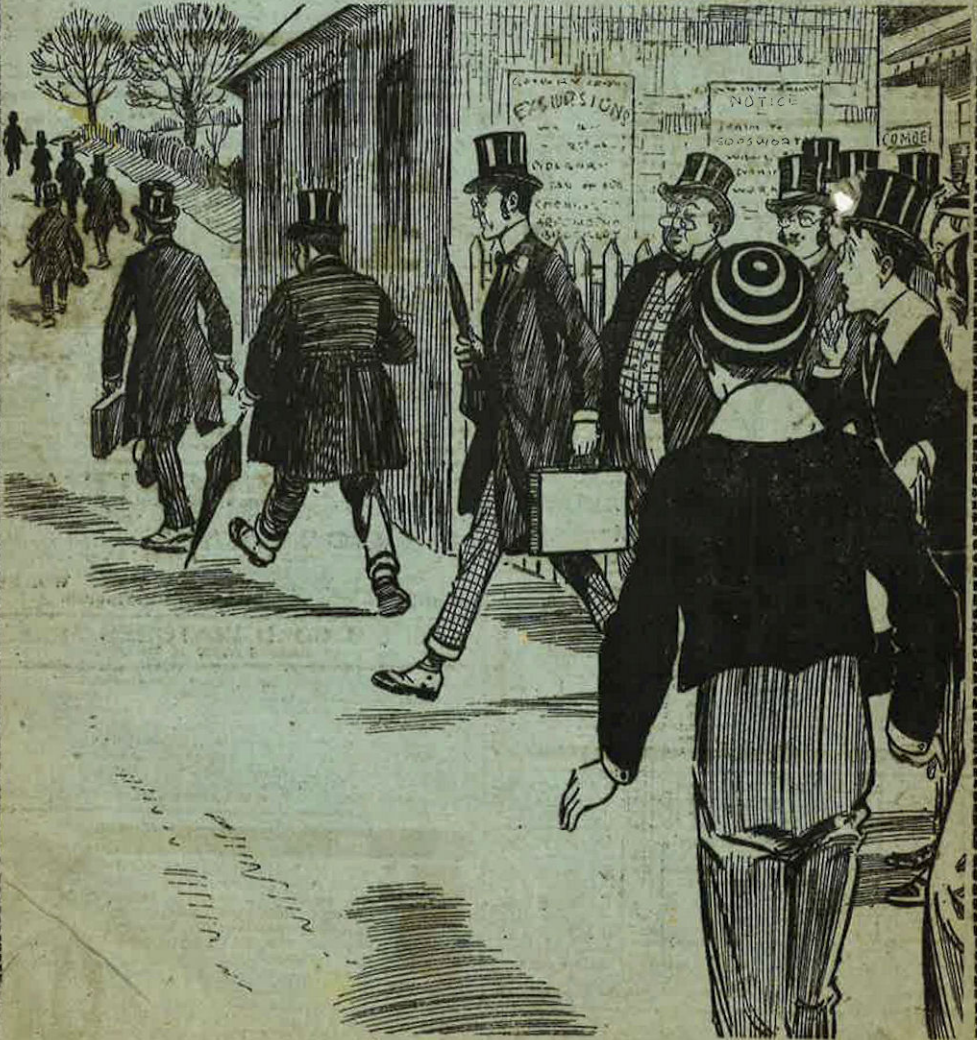
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VOL. 4.

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by
MARTIN
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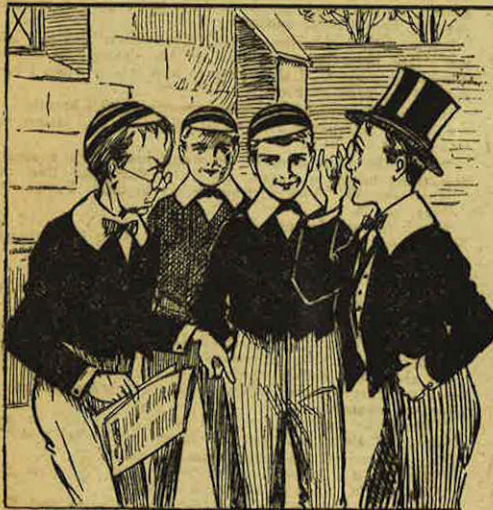
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THURSDAY



THE TERRIBLE THREE'S COMMITTEE.

A Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of
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BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Skimpole's News.

IN the quad, at St Jim's, Herries was relating to Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Digby, a story about the father of his bulldog Towser.

"I tell you," avowed Herries, already quite red in the face, "that Towser's sire was accustomed to posting letters for his master daily. He used to take half a dozen in his mouth at a time, and—"

"Towser would have swallowed them!" put in Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And placing his forepaws up against the pillar-box—"

"Hard on the point," suggested Digby.

"What do you mean?" said Herries wrathfully. "And then he would drop the whole lot in the box!"

"Funny thing," remarked Blake, "but I believe they post letters something like that now!"

"You ass! But one day—"

"Observe the number of days!" murmured Digby.

"One day one of the letters had no stamp on, and—"

At that moment there came up to the laughing group the small, weedy figure of Skimpole, the amateur Socialist, genius, and bore of the Shell at St. Jim's.

He was carrying in his hand, as he approached with his short, quick steps, a copy of a very scientific journal, at which he was blinking through his huge spectacles.

So intent was he upon the open page of the journal that he did not realise there was not a clear path before him until, with great force, he collided with Blake.

Blake had seen him coming and stood stiff, prepared for the onslaught. Skimpole sat down precisely at the same moment as he looked up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared.

"Really, Blake, you ought to have seen where I was coming to, and made way—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is really nothing to laugh at!" said Skimpole, getting upon his feet. "If—"

"Why don't you look where you are going, ass?"

"Really, Blake that is quite absurd! You see—"

"Yes, but you don't, duffer, or you would not—"

"That is not the point, Blake. The real point is how can I be looking at you when I am looking at this paper, which contains something I want to read to you? It is perfectly obvious to any but the mind of an idiot that you—"

"Rats!"

"Oh, ring off, Skimmy!" said Digby.

"Really, you don't understand! I was looking for you, Blake—"

"How did you come to walk into me, then?"

"Really, you are very dense, Blake! What I mean is that I wanted to show you something in this very highly scientific journal—"

"We're busy! Travel!"

"Really, Blake it is of the utmost importance! And when a Socialist comes to you with a matter of—"

"Look here, I was talking about Towser's—" put in Herries, who was annoyed at being interrupted in the course of narrating his story about his bulldog's parent.

Skimpole blinked through his spectacles in manifest surprise.

"But, surely, Herries, you realise that Towser is a mere dog, and—"

"What do you mean by 'a mere' dog?" inquired Herries hotly.

"Why, really, Herries; I should have thought that my meaning was perfectly clear—"

"Bah! Jove, dear boys! Pway what is all the discuss about?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, immaculately attired in clothes that were innocent of as much as a single speck of dust, came up at that moment.

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 120 (New Series.)

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"Skimmy has been looking for me, and walked into me before he found me!" said Blake, laughing.

"Skimmay, I regard you as an ass!" said the swell of St. Jim's, adjusting his monocle and regarding the amateur Socialist through it with a fixed stare.

"Really, D'Arcy, I have really something of the utmost importance to communicate to you; but the moment I speak—"

"You open your mouth!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard that as a weally vewwy funny!" said Gussy. "What is it that you have to say, Skimmay, dear boy? Some of your wretched Determinism, I suppose? You know—"

"Interested as I am in the matter of Determinism, D'Arcy, I have at this moment something to communicate which is of far greater importance to us here for the present moment. It deals—"

"P'raps you've come into some money?" said Blake.

"No, indeed, Blake! But—"

"Or you've heard of someone with more brains than you?" suggested Digby, with a touch of sarcasm.

"No, really, Digby, I have not—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"P'raps the uttah ass has finished his book on Socialism?"

"Really, D'Arcy; no, that is not what I wanted to communicate. As a matter of fact, D'Arcy, I have done just over five hundred pages, and there is no doubt that when I get that book published the world will become so enlightened, that Socialism will be an accomplished thing, and—"

"If this is what you had to communicate when you were looking for me, Skimmy, you can shut up, and travel!"

"No, Blake; what I wanted you to be cognisant of was the fact that in this journal, which I hold in my hands, there is a paragraph which shows how one can be—"

"I'm going to feed Towser!" said Herries suddenly.

And he turned on his heel, still somewhat flushed in the face, and walked away.

"Now, you see," went on Skimpole, blinking after Herries; "he will not hear what—"

"I am afraid, Skimmay, that I must wewmove myself from your presence! I weally must go and bwush my clothes!"

Arthur Augustus walked towards the house.

"Well, really, it is most extraordinary!" said Skimpole.

"Now, you see, Blake, D'Arcy will not hear—"

"I must get in and start prep!" said Blake, winking at Digby; and Blake, grinning, moved off.

"Well, at least, you have the sense, Digby, to stay and hear what I have to—"

"By Jove!" suddenly exclaimed Digby. "I promised to meet Tom Merry in the gym."

While Skimpole was still talking, but as far off as ever from coming to the point, Digby followed Blake, and Skimpole stood blinking after them, amazed.

"Really," he said to himself, "it is most extraordinary! They are utterly devoid of all reason! They have not given me the least opportunity of telling them this important news about the Head!"

Skimmy stood blinking around him, when he suddenly espied Tom Merry with his study chums—Manners and Lowther—coming from the cricket-field.

"Ah, perhaps Tom Merry will have the sense to listen to what I have to say!" he murmured.

And the next moment he was taking little, short, jerky steps towards the Terrible Three of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

Skimpole Imparts His News.

EVEN though Digby had hurried off on the pretext of meeting Tom Merry, and the next moment Skimpole himself saw and went after the hero of the Shell, it did not strike the amateur Socialist that Digby's excuse was only a pretext to get away.

With his scientific journal still open before him, and blinking over the top of it through his spectacles, the amateur Socialist of the Shell at St. Jim's approached Tom Merry.

"Merry?"

Tom Merry had seen him coming, and a nudge to Manners, who was walking next him, was sufficient to communicate the fact that he wanted to avoid the bore.

The Terrible Three walked on as though no one was near.

"Merry!"

Tom Merry & Co. swerved a bit in their path so as to avoid the exponent of Determinism.

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"It's been a splendid game!" said Manners, looking the other way, as though quite unconscious of the fact that anyone had called.

"Splendid!" agreed Lowther, swinging his bat.

"Ripping!" agreed Tom Merry.

"Tom Merry! Can't you see I am trying to catch you?"

Tom Merry appeared neither to hear nor to see.

As the amateur Socialist came towards them on their right they went still further to the left, and increased their pace.

"Looks as if it's going to be a fine day to-morrow!" said Tom Merry, gazing up at the sky.

"Tom Merry! Manners! Lowther!"

"Anyway, it's been a fine day to-day!" said Lowther, unable to refrain from doing something to sustain his name for being the humourist of the Shell.

Skimpole suddenly broke into a run.

The Terrible Three seeing this closed up, and went at the double with good, long strides, against which Skimpole's short steps were useless. At last the latter gave it up, and, stopping breathlessly, muttered:

"It's really extraordinary that Tom Merry did not hear me. He must be going deaf. Ah, deafness is a very interesting subject. I shall have to look into it when I have finished my book on Socialism."

He blinked around him while he recovered his breath.

Suddenly he became aware that something had struck him violently in the back.

"Ow!" he exclaimed, as he went down with a smash. Something heavy sat upon his back, flattening him out.

"Wow—gerrof! You're stopping my breath! I'm—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter of long, lanky Figgins, and Kerr, of the New House, rang out, as Fatty Wynn, having been charged by the former, had bumped into the amateur Socialist.

"Gerrup!" gasped Skimpole. "You're—"

"I'm trying to get up! Oh, dear me, they've shaken me all to pieces!" muttered Fatty as, puffing and blowing, he struggled to his feet.

Skimpole, dusty and dishevelled, scrambled to his feet, blinking around him. His mind was still centred upon the news about the doctor which he had to impart. Suddenly he seized Fatty by the button of his coat, in his particularly offensive manner.

"That was really very stupid of you, Wynn!" he said, blinking. "But I have got something here to tell you!"

Skimpole waved the scientific journal about.

"What is it? A new food, or—"

"No, Wynn. It is a paragraph about—"

"I say," put in Wynn, looking after Figgins and Kerr, who were making off, "I believe they are going to the tuck-shop. And I am most awfully hungry, and if I don't go with them I sha'n't get anything to eat for a long time. I get most awfully hungry at this time of the year!"

But Skimpole held fast on to the button of Fatty's coat.

"I won't keep you a moment. It is really most important. I have endeavoured to tell Blake and Tom Merry and the others, but they are all too stupid to listen to what I have to say, although they haven't the faintest idea of how important it is!"

"But won't some other time do?" Fatty asked, looking longingly after his chums. "Some time when I am not so fearfully hungry!"

But Skimpole was not to be denied.

"It's about the Head—"

"Is he going to stand the school a feed?"

"No. Really, Wynn—"

"I don't think it can—"

"You really must lis—"

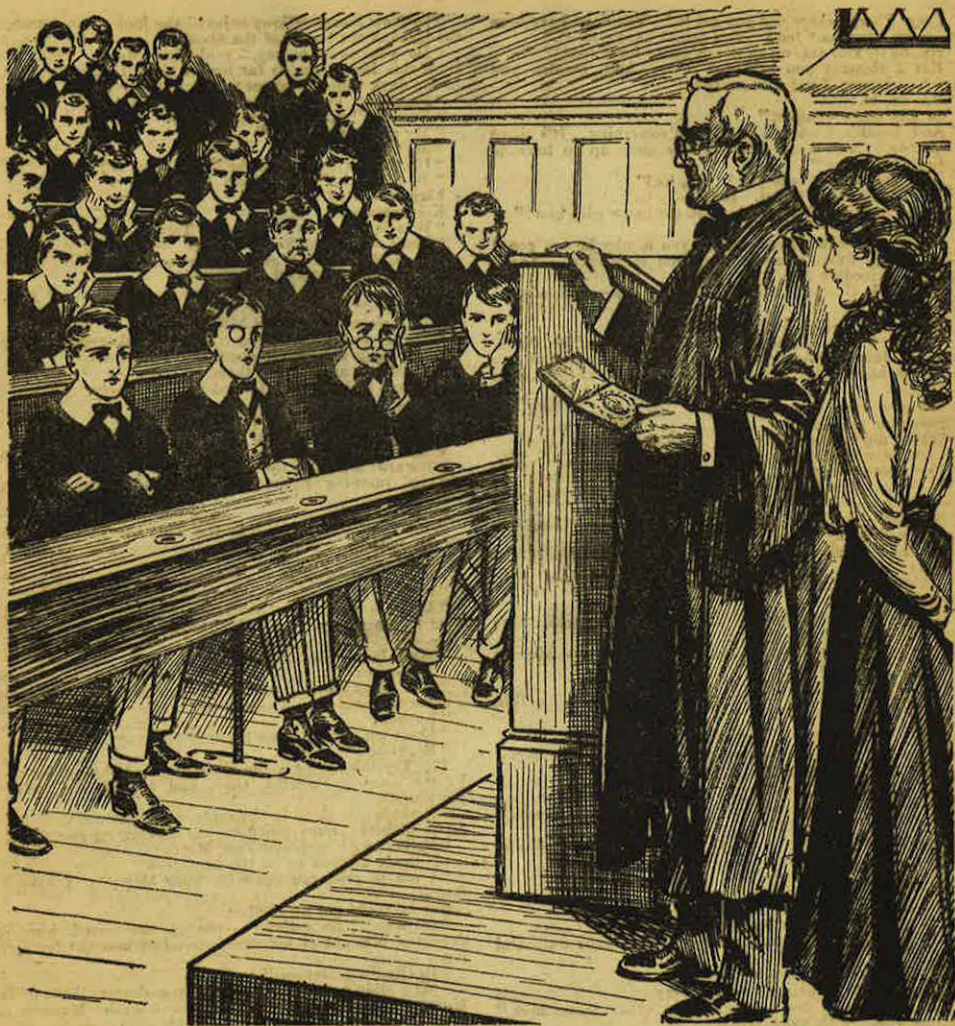
"But I'm so fearfully hun—"

"It's about the great scientific discovery," continued Skimpole, holding tight on to the other's coat-button, "recently made by the Head. He has been awarded the Paris medal for the great amount of good that he has done in the cause of science, and to-day he is to be entertained at a great luncheon in town, where—"

"A luncheon?" gasped Fatty suddenly. "Will he take us?"

"Really, you are an ass! Of course not! He might have taken me if he had thought of it, but you have done nothing in the cause of science. I have written a book—"

"I'm awfully glad you told me about it. But I must go now, or those chaps will have eaten all Dame Taggles's stock up!" And, with a sudden jerk, Fatty broke free, and went as fast as his heavy weight would allow him in pursuit of Figgins and Kerr, who by this time, he supposed, had entered Dame Taggles's shop.



"Boys," said Dr. Holmes, in an unsteady voice, "this moment is the greatest that I have ever known. I thank you all deeply."

CHAPTER 3.

The News Spreads.

FATTY WYNN made his way to the tuckshop, and, to his disappointment, found that his chums were not there after all.

The sight of a heap of tarts piled up temptingly on the counter, made him pause just when he ought to have turned away.

Fatty Wynn could not resist such a sight; it held him in its toils.

"I can't serve you with any more, Master Wynn," came the voice of Dame Taggles, as she appeared from behind her stores, "unless you pay me something off what you owe!"

"I've got some money," smiled Fatty, without taking his eyes off the pile of tarts.

From his pocket he drew a shilling. Placing it on the counter, he took two of the tarts.

"Why," exclaimed Dame Taggles, in her shrill voice, "what do you suppose is the use of that?"

She picked up the shilling.

Fatty paid but little heed to her, for he was busily getting rid of one tart while his eyes roamed over the rest.

"You're owing me fifteen shillings! What is the good of coming here with a shilling?"

"Why," exclaimed Fatty, starting on the second tart, and inwardly deciding which one should be the third. "Of course, I know that is no good to give you an account. I'll take that out in tarts now, and let you have some off the fifteen when I get a letter from home."

Dame Taggles looked from the shilling to her tarts, and from the tarts—no great distance—to the fat junior.

What she had intended to show him was that she ought to have the whole of the shilling on account. But in this object she quite failed, for Fatty Wynn did not stop eating until he had worked out the shilling, and then he looked up to see whether it would be safe to exceed the amount, on credit.

But a certain stern look in the eye of Dame Taggles forbade him, and, turning reluctantly, away he left the shop and returned to the quaid.

There he saw Figgins and Kerr.

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A SPECIAL EMPIRE DAY NUMBER :

"I say, Figgy, where did you get to? You must have been very quick over your feed. You might have waited."

"Ha, ha! You ass, we were not going for a feed!"

"But I thought you said you were. And, besides, you know how hungry I get this weather."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or any other weather."

"And, besides, I wanted to tell you something. It's about the doctor. You know that he has gone up to town to luncheon to-day."

"And forgotten to take you? Ha, ha!"

"No, Figgy, it isn't that. But—"

"Going to bring you something to eat home with him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, Figgy, what I want to tell you is why he has gone! He's won the Paris prize for devotion to science. That's why they're feeding him."

"By Jove! Good old doc.!" exclaimed Figgy enthusiastically.

"Hear, hear!" added Kerr.

In common with the majority of the fellows of St. Jim's, the New House fellows were fond of the doctor, and any success he had achieved was something they were glad to hear about.

"Where did you hear that?"

"Skimpole told me!"

"Where did he get it from?"

"In some scientific paper."

"The doctor's kept it very quiet," said Figgins. "I wonder if the School House kids know anything about it?"

"I wonder—"

"No, they don't. Skimpole said they wouldn't listen to what he had to say."

"Ha, ha! Then we'll go and rag them about it. Come on, Kerr!"

"Right-ho!" And the two juniors started off for the School House.

Fatty did not accompany them on this expedition, there being little prospect of anything to eat in it.

"Fax!" exclaimed Figgins, as he entered Tom Merry's study, followed by Kerr.

"Peace it is!" added Kerr.

The moment Figgins's head appeared in the doorway, Tom Merry picked up a book and took aim.

"What do you want here, kids?"

"We've got something to tell—"

"Get it out, quick!"

"Yes, we're busy!" added Manners.

"Too busy to talk to asses like you!" put in Lowther.

The Terrible Three had just started prep, when Figgy & Co. came in.

They now pushed their books aside, and watched and waited.

"It's about the Head—"

"Whose head?" asked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not your fat head, anyway. It's—"

"Oh! Perhaps you have found an idea in your own, and

"Rats! I haven't come here—"

"Tell the truth!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Yes, Figgy, we don't tolerate the other thing here," added Lowther, with mock severity.

"Look here, you asses—" said Tom Merry.

"I've come here—"

"You said you hadn't just—"

"Rats! Don't rot! It's about the doctor."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Tom Merry sarcastically. "Of course, we did not know he had made you his confidant."

"My hat!" said Lowther, staring up at the ceiling thoughtfully. "You can see Figgy sitting in his study when the Head calls on him to ask his advice, and—"

"Look here, you asses!" exclaimed Figgy hotly. "If you aren't interested in any honour that's being done the Head of St. Jim's, of course, we'll go!"

"Rather!" agreed Kerr.

"Why don't you get it off your chest?" asked Tom Merry, as though he had been listening quite intently all the time.

"It's like this. The Head has been devoting himself to the cause of science, and he has been awarded the Paris prize, the first Englishman ever to get it. And to-day they are giving him a feed in London."

Figgy had embellished the account a little. Whether intentional or not it would be hard to say.

But in any case it was excusable.

"My hat!" exclaimed the Terrible Three. "That's ripping! Three cheers for the doctor!"

"Where did you get this information?"

"Why, Lowther, from one of the kids in your House!"

"That's right!" added Kerr.

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The New House fellows enjoyed the look of amazement on the faces of the heroes of the Shell.

"Do you mean to say," said Tom Merry, "that a kid from this House has so far forgot himself as to keep us all in the dark while he comes over and tells—"

"Precisely; he knew we should appreciate it."

"Exactly!" said Kerr, with a grin.

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the New House fellows.

"Who was it?" asked Tom Merry.

Figgins sniffed.

Kerr grinned.

"What's his name?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Shall we tell the asses, Kerr?"

"If we don't they'll go off their rockers—"

"And if we do they'll kill the—"

"Figgy, if you don't tell us his name, we'll bump you!"

"Rather!" said Lowther.

"That we will!" agreed Manners.

Figgins and Kerr looked at each other doubtfully, as though really wondering whether to tell or not.

Tom Merry approached them.

Manners and Lowther backed him up closely.

"What's it to be?"

Figgins and Kerr still stood in doubt.

"The last chance!" said Tom Merry.

Figgins waited until Tom Merry suddenly stretched a hand out towards him, and the other two sprang forward.

Then, jumping backwards, they pulled the door and yelled:

"Skimpole!"

With that word hurled at the Terrible Three, the New House fellows rushed down the corridor, and were lost to view.

"Skimpole! The ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Skimmy, the rotter!" echoed Manners.

"That's what comes of his Socialism," said Lowther. "He goes to the enemy, and tells them the things meant for his friends."

"We'll bump him for this!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And fancy the doctor keeping it so close. We'll give him a cheer the next time we see him."

"Rather!"

"Come on, my sons, we'll bump Skinny first!"

"Right-ho!"

The Terrible Three made their way to the study occupied by the amateur Socialist, Gore, and Mellish, the snook of the Fourth.

Skimpole was alone in the study, seated at the table before a pile of books, from which he was making copious notes.

"Collar him!" grinned Tom Merry.

Skimpole blinked up at the intruders.

"I am so glad you came in, Tom Merry! I have just discovered—"

But he could get no further.

"Oh—wow!" he yelled, as the juniors seized him, and dragging him out of his chair, stretched him out for bumping.

"Really, Tom Mer—" he began.

"Why didn't you tell us about the doctor?" asked Tom Merry, holding him firmly by the neck whilst Manners and Lowther had a tight hold on an ankle each.

"Really, Merry, I did—"

"Bump him!"

"Right-ho!"

"Really I did—"

Bump!

"That's one for knowing it!"

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A SPECIAL EMPIRE DAY NUMBER:

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"I tell you, Merry, I—"

"Again, my sons!"

Bump!

"That's one for not telling us!"

"Merry, really, I ran— Ow-wow!"

"Again!"

Bump!

"That's one for telling the New House kids, first!"

"Wow-ow!" exclaimed Skimpole, as he dropped on the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

"Come on, kids!" said Tom Merry when Skimpole had got upon his feet. "That will teach him—the ass!"

"Really, Tom Merry, I did try—"

But Tom Merry and his chums had gone, and the amateur Socialist found himself gabbling to the wall.

"It is really extraordinary!" he murmured, blinking at the closed door. "They are asses!"

Then Skimpole sat down once more to his books.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. were hurrying down the corridor, bent upon communicating the news about the doctor to Blake & Co., the chums of Study No. 6.

When they entered, Arthur Augustus was standing before the glass.

There was a good assortment of neckwear on the table, all most elegant in pattern and colour, and his chums were persuading him that he looked so well in each one he tried on, that he was quite confused as to which to select.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy! I wegard your comin' in at this moment as most fortunate. I—"

"Hallo, you muff!" grinned Tom Merry, as the three entered. "Bought up a bankrupt stock of rotten old ties? Shop soiled!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wefuse to be called a muff, and these—"

"Rats! We've got some news!"

"Rather!" added Manners.

"Great news!" agreed Lowther.

"Mewwy! Before we listen to what you have got to say, will you please tell me which colour tie you considah most likely to go with my new waistcoat?" asked Arthur Augustus, regarding Tom Merry through his monocle severely.

"Green!" said Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tom Mewwy, you're an ass! My new waistcoat is—"

"What's the news, kid?" broke in Blake.

"Really, Blake, I considah you are extremely wude to inter—"

"The news, my son, concerns the doctor. It appears—"

"You uttah asses! I wefuse to be talked down. I want—"

"What about the doctor?" asked Digby.

"Why, he has been dis—"

"Do you asses heah me? I wefuse—"

"What's he done, Merry?"

"He's distinguished himself in the cause of science, and—"

"Tom Mewwy, if I have to speak again, I shall have no other alternative than to administrah a most frightful—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse—"

"You ass! Ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off! And I wefuse to be chawacterised as an ass. I am trying on new ties, and hurled them as feah—"

Tom Merry picked up the parcel of ties, and hurled them at Arthur Augustus.

Biff!

They struck him in the face, and then fell into the fireplace.

"You uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"I'll—"

"You'll get bumped in a minute," said Blake. "Go on, Merry; don't take any notice of the ass!"

"Blake I wef—"

"Go on, Tom Merry!" chorused the juniors.

And, in spite of Arthur Augustus, Tom Merry went on.

"The doctor has distinguished himself in the cause of science, and is the first Englishman to win the Paris prize. He is being entertained at luncheon in town to-day with all the bigwigs, and we propose to give him a cheer on his return."

"Rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old doc!"

"Another honour for good old St. Jim's!"

"Rather!"

The juniors were so genuinely pleased and enthusiastic

that one of them might have been the winner of the coveted prize. The doctor of St. Jim's must have been touched, indeed, had he seen the enthusiasm displayed on account of his achievement.

Gussy for the moment forgot all about his ties.

"Bai Jove! I considah that is wippin'!"

And then, after a moment's pause, he said:

"I shall write to my gov'nor, and ask him to send me a few fivahs, so that we can stand the doctor a feed. It would be—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally see nothing to laugh at, deah boys! We could quite easly—"

"Rats!"

"Where did you get the news from?" asked Blake.

"Skimpy found it in a scientific journal."

"Skimpole!"

"Yes."

"Thon well jolly well bump him for not coming straight to us to tell us about it. I'm the skipper of the Fourth, and—"

"Let's go and bump him!" said Digby.

"I wegard that as a we Remarkably good suggest," said Gussy.

"Hear, hear!"

Tom Merry & Co. grinned.

"Come on, kids!" said Blake, opening the door, and leading the way out. "We're going to give Skimpy the bumping of his life."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And with a rush Blake & Co. went off.

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

The Terrible Three returned to their own study immediately, for an idea had come to the hero of the Shell, and he wanted to discuss it with his chums without delay.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry & Co. Formulate a Plan.

"LOOK here, kids! I've got an idea!"

Tom Merry threw himself into a chair.

Monty Lowther regarded him with a stare of surprise.

"I've got some prep. to do," said Manners, getting out his books.

"My idea is—" began Tom Merry again. "What are you staring at Monty, you ass!"

"What did you say you had got?"

"A notion!"

"Is it Pacific or Atlantic?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass! Stop rotting!"

"I've heard of men who had land, but never before of one who had an ocean. Really it's—"

"I said a notion!" grinned Tom Merry. "And you know very well what I said!"

"Then why do you repeat yourself?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you asses, I want to speak about the doctor!"

The other two were immediately all attention.

"Gussy suggested giving the doctor a feed, and—"

"Gussy's an ass!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Quite so, my sons; but I've been thinking, since that remark of his, that we might do something to show how proud we are of the good old doctor!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Manners.

"Perhaps if you paid a little more attention to your lessons it might show your pride in him."

"Lowther, you're an ass! I think, perhaps, the feed idea is a little far-fetched, but there is no reason why we should not get up a sort of presentation to him, is there?"

"A good wheeze!" agreed Manners.

"Quite remarkable for Tom Merry," added Lowther, who could not be denied his little joke.

"The question is, what form should it take?" went on Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"We might subscribe for a gold cup for him, or—"

"Or a championship silver belt," suggested Lowther sarcastically. "I vote cups are barred, whatever we do."

"Yes, I think I agree!" replied Tom Merry. "More suitable as tokens of great achievements in sport. But how would it be if we formed a committee?"

"Who would be on it?"

"Well, I'd serve—" said Tom Merry.

"And Tom Merry would serve," murmured Lowther, grinning.

"Hear, hear! And—"

"Oh, I don't want to do it all!" said Tom Merry. "If you want to come on to it, you may!"

"How awfully decent of you!" said Lowther, with a grin.

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Another Gem, *Ed. Long, Complete School Tale* of TOM MERRY & CO.

NEXT WEEK: "WELL PLAYED!"

But Tom Merry was determined to take no heed of Monty's jokes.

He knew that Lowther was, at heart, as keen as he himself to pay a deserved tribute to the doctor. So he went straight on with his plan.

"It's settled, then, that a committee is formed, and that on that committee I serve, and Lowther and Manners serve."

"Hear, hear!"

"Right-ho! Now, the next thing is, what are we to give him, and who are to be asked to subscribe?"

"Wouldn't it be better for the committee to call a public meeting in the common-room to discuss the matter?" asked Manners.

"I don't see that that's necessary," said Tom Merry. "We can arrange the whole thing, and then all we've got to do is to get the tin in."

"That's all!" murmured Monty Lowther significantly.

"Manners could easily do all the collecting."

"I don't think!" said Manners quickly. "I don't mind being chairman of the committee, or—"

"I'm chairman," said Tom Merry.

"And I'll be treasurer!"

"Ha, ha, Lowther! I don't think! I shall have to be chairman and treasurer both. You had better take on the collecting, as Manners can't trust himself with the money."

"Look here, Tom Merry, that's enough—"

"What's the matter, now? You're never satisfied. Very well, it's settled, then, that we collect some money to buy a present."

"What's the present to be?"

"Ah, yes, there's that to be thought about."

"What about a big marble clock?" suggested Manners.

"There's nothing in the doctor's study that would be in keeping with that. Some books might be more to the point."

"A first-class dressing-case."

"I know," said Tom Merry, "a gold watch."

"That's not a bad idea."

"For Tom Merry, no."

"Right-ho, then! It's agreed that we collect the money for a gold watch, and—"

"And we ought to have some nicely worded address engraved on parchment to go with it!" suggested Lowther, becoming more serious as the idea took hold of him.

"Quite right, Monty! Let's make a note of all these points, and we'll start at once, getting together the tin!"

Tom Merry sat himself at the table, and wrote down the points decided upon, and when this was done, the three juniors made a list of the fellows to whom they would appeal for subscriptions, and, dividing it into three, took one section each.

They were just about to start out on this mission, when the door opened, and Arthur Augustus entered.

"I say, Tom Mewwy!"

"Hallo, kid! I want to see you!"

"Yes, he's just the man," said Manners. "Gussy!"

"Well, Mannahs, deah boy?"

"We want you to write to your guv'nor and ask him to stump up a few fivers for us."

"I am afraid, deah boys, that it will be impos. You see—"

"Oh, but you've got to. If you don't—"

"We'll bump you."

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, I wefuse to be bumped."

"You'll have to stump up, then."

"Yes, it's stump or bump."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weward you as uttah asses, and if I had not come here to see you on a matter of the greatest importance, I should immediately withdraw from your beastly studay."

"Rats! You've got to find some money."

"But it's quite impos, deah boy! You see, we've formed a committee to get together a sum of money to give the deah old doctah a handsome present, and I am devoting all my money to that. What are you makin' those howlid faces at, Mewwy?"

"Phev!" whistled Merry.

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther.

"My only Aunt Jane!" muttered Manners.

"Weally, you wottahs, I think you have gone off your beastly wockahs. I am chairman and treasurer of the com—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I fail to see any cause for this wibald laughah. Surely you asses weseize that the doctah has done a gweat work, and it is the duty of everyone to subsowibe."

"Precisely!" said Tom Merry.

"Exactly!" added Lowther and Manners in a breath.

"Then prway why this widdleous attitu—"

"Look here, Gussy, you're late with your suggestion. You see, my son, we have already formed a committee, THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 120.

and we're now going to start to collect sufficient funds to give the doctor a suitable present. Of course, if you won't give anything, well—"

"Tom Mewwy, you're an ass! We have formed the committee, not you. I am collecting the funds, and not you. I consid—"

"Rats, my son! This is a Shell wheeze, and—"

"It is not! I wefuse to admit—"

"Oh, shut up! Travel!"

"I wefuse to twavel! I—"

"Then collar him, kids!"

Manners and Lowther seized Gussy in a fierce embrace.

"You wottahs! You're cwumplin' my clothes! Look! Ow!"

"Bump him, kids!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to be bumped. I will not per—"

Bump!

"Ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

"Again!" laughed Tom Merry.

"I wefuse—" gasped Gussy.

Bump!

"Owl! Wow! You'll wuin my twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three suddenly dropped Arthur Augustus to the floor, and stood aside doubled up with laughter.

"Whose committee is it now?" laughed Tom Merry.

"You uttah wottahs!" gasped Gussy indignantly, as he picked himself up. "Now I shall have to go and change my clothes before I call on Mr. Waitton for a sub."

"You hadn't better go near Mr. Railton! We're going to him for a sub. ourselves," said Tom Merry. "But don't worry; we shall have got his sub. before you have changed your clothes."

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus looked distinctly annoyed.

"You wottahs, you are taking an unfair advantage of me! You know I can't go like this. Look at my beastly twousahs. They're wuined. But as soon as my present bisnay is owah I shall most certainly give you wottahs the most feahful thwashin' you have evah had in your lives!"

And with a dignified step the swell of St. Jim's went out of the study, leaving Tom Merry & Co. convulsed with laughter.

"We shall have to get round quickly," said Tom Merry, when the amusement had subsided, "or these rotters will get all the best subs."

"Rather! Come on! Let's tackle Railton while we've got the chance. Good wheeze making Gussy's clothes dirty so that the ass had to go and change them."

"Rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tap, tap, tap!

There was a knock upon the door just as Tom Merry was about to open it to start off for the Form-master's study, in quest of a donation to the projected present for the doctor.

"Come in!"

The door opened, and Figgins & Co. entered.

"New House rotters again!" cried Tom Merry. "What have you found out this time?"

"We want to speak to you."

"Can't stop. We're just off to see Mr. Railton."

"But it won't take a minute, Tom Merry."

"Not a second!" said Kerr, backing up the leader of the New House section of the Fourth Form.

"I suppose you haven't got any chocate, have you?" inquired Fatty, coming in and shutting the door.

"Rats! What is it, Figgy?"

"We have formed ourselves into a committee to get subscriptions to give the doctor a present. What's the matter, you asses?"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther stared at Figgins.

Before there was time to answer the question into which Figgins's announcement had broken off, the door opened, and struck Fatty, who was standing nearest to it, with great violence in the back.

"Oh! Ow!" exclaimed Fatty, sprawling forward and bumping into Figgy.

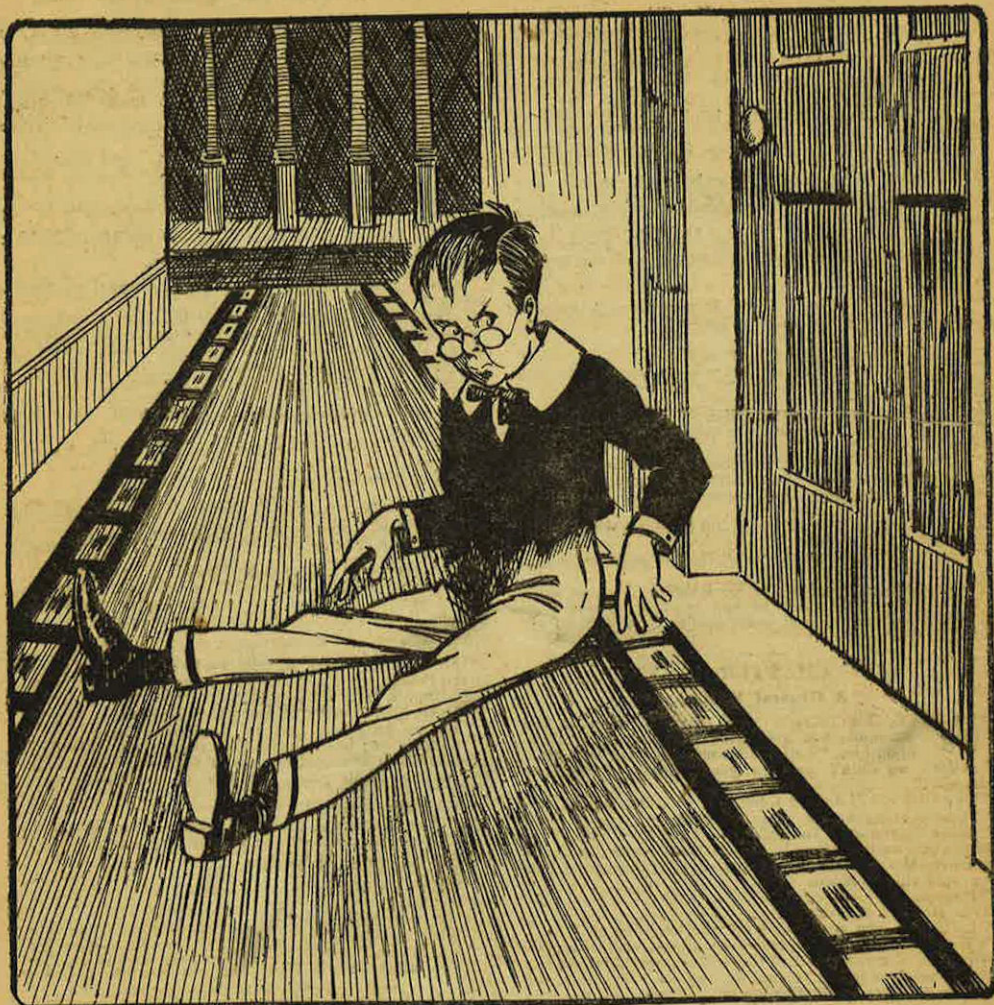
"You ass!"

"I couldn't help it. A blow in the back when you're hungry—"

"Tom Merry!"

It was Skimpole who had caused the trouble. His weedy little figure seemed to blow into the room, and blinking about him, he at last pulled up in front of the hero of the Shell.

"Why don't you mind where you're coming to?" puffed Fatty.



Skimpole tripped and sat heavily down on the floor. "Dear me! Extraordinary!"

"Ah! I didn't see you, the door being shut," murmured Skimpole. "A curious scientific phenomena that. I must really look into it when I have finished my book on Socialism, which I have now got well on the way to the day of publishing. Merry, I want to speak to you."

"You ass! What do you want?"

"I have devised a scheme for showing the doctor that we appreciate his great work in the cause of science, and I want you to let me have some money to carry it into effect. You see, Socialism not having arrived, I, naturally enough, have no money. Now, this scheme requires money, and I am therefore bound to come to those who have it, and who will readily give it to me for such a purpose."

The genius of the Shell paused a moment and blinked about him, perceiving that his words were being received with laughter on the part of the juniors in the study.

"Tom Merry, why are you laughing?"

"Because you're an ass."

"Really, I—"

"Ring off, Skimmy!"

"If you will allow me to point out that already I have endeavoured to tell you something that you wanted to

know, and your not letting me tell it having ended in my getting bumped, a very primitive proceeding, as I am prepared to prove—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hope you will have the sense to listen to me while I lay my plan before you. I want to buy the doctor a set of scientific instruments, which will show that I, at least, have appreciation for his work in the cause of science. Now, if such things were nationalised, I should not, of course, have to come to you for the money to buy them. But unhappily the nationalisation of scientific instruments has not yet come into being, and so I am obliged to ask you, Tom Merry, to lend me twenty pounds, by means of which I can carry out my object."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Evidently there is some cause for amusement which is too trivial for me to see, and—"

"Yes, there is."

"Ah!"

"You are it," grinned Lowther.

"I am what, Lowther?"

"The trivial cause."

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NEXT
WEEK:

"WELL PLAYED!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will ignore your stupidity. Will you lend me the money, Tom Merry?"

"No."

"Perhaps Lowther—"

"I don't think!"

"Manners?" asked Skimpole, blinking.

"Not much, you ass!"

Skimpole regarded the New House fellows with his blinking eyes for a moment.

Then suddenly he seemed to make up his mind on a course of action which ought to be followed.

"I don't like asking New House fellows to do anything for me, but, regarding myself as a sincere Socialist, I see no other way out of the difficulty. Figgins, I trust you will lend me the money for the purpose I have indicated."

"Rats!"

"Kerr, you will?"

"I'll bump you if you like. It may be a little more primitive, but it would suit me bet—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then I'm afraid it must be you, Wynn."

"Me, Skimpole? Why, I haven't got enough to buy some chocolate, and I'm hungry as a hunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, this is most extraordinary! I shall—"

"Get out of this as quickly as possible, my son," completed Tom Merry.

And before the amateur Socialist could make out what was happening to him, Tom Merry, amidst the roars of the fellows in the study, had opened the door and hurled him out into the passage.

There he tripped over the mat, and sat down with a force that quite disturbed him.

"Dear me!" he muttered. "This is most extraordinary!"

Then, picking himself up, he went back to his own study to analyse his plan, which he had carefully prepared, to see why it had not resulted in his coming back with twenty pounds in his pocket.

CHAPTER 5.

A General Meeting.

"WELL, Tom Merry," said Figgins, when at last Skimpole was gone, and the study door closed upon him, "will you let me have your sub. now? Of course, we didn't suppose you'd listen to that ass Skimpole!"

"Of course not!" agreed Kerr.

"If he'd brought some chocolate with—"

"What do you say, Tom Merry?" repeated Figgy. "Or perhaps you would rather let me put your name down, and hand over the tin when you get your next five-pound note from your old governors."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared.

"Look here, you asses, what are you laughing at?"

"You see, my sons," replied Tom Merry, controlling his mirth with a great effort, "the fact is, we have already formed ourselves into a committee, and we were, when you poked your noses in, just going out for subs. for the very same purpose."

"What?"

"Of course, that's all rot," said Kerr, "to think of School House rotters—"

"Are you thinking of giving a feed?" inquired Fatty. "I suspected that, but Figgy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I assure you, asses, it is not rot! As a matter of fact, there are two committees working on the same job here, and yours makes the third?"

"It's absurd!"

"Quite!" answered Tom Merry. "Naturally, ours is the only one that can be any good."

"Rot! It must be done by the New—"

"If this were a matter that didn't concern the Head, I'd undertake to bump you until you agreed with me!" said Tom Merry. "But being—"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Being something concerning the Head, I think we had better have a general meeting of all the fellows, and decide who is the committee out of the—"

"We'll get up a meeting!" put in Figgy.

"Rats, my son. I'll get up the meeting, and, if you're good, you may be allowed to come! Now chuck 'em out, kids!"

The next moment the Terrible Three charged, and the door being quickly opened, the three New House fellows were bumped out into the passage, where, finding themselves in the enemy's camp—for there was always a state of more or less warfare between the rival Houses—they took to their heels and rushed on breathlessly until they were out in the quad.

"Now, having got rid of them, my sons, we had better see Blake and arrange what is to be done."

"I suppose a little more arranging won't do any harm," grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Manners; and the Terrible Three went off to Blake & Co.'s study.

"Come in, kids; we want to see you," said Blake, who was sitting at his table before a large sheet of paper, headed "subscriptions."

Herries and Digby were leaning over the opposite side of the table.

"What are you doing there?" asked Tom Merry, looking at the paper.

Blake & Co. grinned.

Lowther and Manners, seeing the heading on the paper, coughed.

"This is a list which we hope to fill, after a visit round to all the chaps, with amounts collected for the purpose of giving the doctor some sign of our appreciation of—"

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"My only Aunt Jane!" muttered Lowther.

"But Gussy is already going round!"

"Yes; Gussy, I'm afraid, misses the point. He's doing one on his own—"

"And so are we. And so are Figgins & Co.!"

"What?"

"It's ridiculous!"

"Rot!"

"That's what we think," answered Tom Merry, "and we've come here to arrange matters."

"Of course, you'll drop your scheme," said Blake quietly.

"I don't think!"

"But you must, and so must Figgy! Why, it's rot!"

"Look here, Blake, my son. It's like this. This is not an ordinary matter, and I'm sure the doctor wouldn't like it if he thought there had been a lot of trouble among us over it—"

"Hear, hear!"

"So what I propose is, that we have a general meeting of the Fourth and Shell, and endeavour to appoint a general committee to carry it through."

"Hear, hear!" cried Manners and Lowther.

"But we have arranged it!" exclaimed Blake.

"So have we; but so have other people, and, accordingly, what has been arranged has got to be upset, and something else put up in its place. It's no good of being an ass, Blake."

"What do you mean?"

But Tom Merry was prevented from replying by the door opening at that moment, and Arthur Augustus entering.

"My hat! Look at the ass!"

"My only—"

"What's up, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He looks like a—"

"What in the—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses! What are you laughin' at? I see no—"

But the juniors roared again and again at the plight of Arthur Augustus, the swell of St. Jim's, who would scarcely have been recognisable but for the monocle jammed in his eye, through which he glared angrily.

His collar was missing, his coat was torn, and his face was black from something uncommonly like soot, which had been rubbed well over it, leaving not an inch of flesh to be seen.

In his hand he carried a battered top hat, which would certainly never be usable again for its original purpose.

His face bore obvious signs of having been pulled with great force, and was chokingly tight, whilst the ends hung over his shoulder.

"What have you been doing, Gussy?" chorussed the juniors, when they were able to stop laughing.

"I have been endeavourin' to collect funds for the doctah's feed which I am getting up for him, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, there is nothin' to laugh at! I wogard it as a most sewious thing to wuin a fellah's clothes like—"

"But who did it?"

"Figgy & Co., deah boys. I have given them the most feafuh thwashin' in the—"

"And what have they given you?" grinned Lowther.

"Lowthah, I wogard that as a stupid observation! I approached Figgy as one gentleman should another for a subscription for the doctah's feed, and they were so uttaly wude that I had to thwash them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was impossible to help laughing at the swell of St.



Jim's when he talked of the thrashing he had administered to his opponents, for his appearance seemed to point so obviously to the fact that he had had the worst of a very rough time.

"How much have you collected?" asked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowtah, I——"

"Better go and have a wash," suggested Blake.

"Bai Jove, Blake, doah boy, I must! I had to do, so after visiting these wottahs here."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry & Co.

"Tom Mewwy, I shall thwash you as I have done Figgay. I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottahs! I wefuse to wemain in your company!"

And, with that, the swell of St. Jim's went off in his most dignified manner to wash himself and change his clothes.

"You see," said Tom Merry, when he had gone, and the laughter caused by his appearance had subsided, "it looks as though nothing will be done unless we have a general meeting to arrange things."

"All right," growled Blake. "After afternoon lessons, in the gym."

"Right ho!"

CHAPTER 6.

Mr. Railton Gives Some Advice.

THE fact that the juniors of St. Jim's had come across each other's path so much over the question of honouring the doctor whom they all revered, showed only how very enthusiastic they were in the cause.

The news had spread among all the Third and Fourth-Formers that there was something of the kind on foot, and by the time of the meeting fixed by Tom Merry and Blake, a huge gathering turned up in the gym.

There was peace for the time being between the New House fellows and the School House, the last piece of warfare for a day or so, having taken place between Figgins & Co. and Arthur Augustus.

It was, every junior recognised, necessary to set aside smaller matters for the sake of the cause they were now engaged upon.

Another suggestion of Tom Merry's, whispered during class, found ready favour in the eyes of Blake, Figgins, and Arthur Augustus.

This suggestion was that Mr. Railton should be asked to take the chair at the meeting, and the only one to demur to it was Skimpole, who objected purely, as he said, upon scientific grounds, and because Mr. Railton was not a Socialist.

As, however, Skimpole's left ear found itself suddenly fixed firmly between Blake's thumb and finger, whilst at the same time his nose got intermingled with Tom Merry's hand, to the disadvantage of the nose, Skimpole gave way.

Tom Merry, with general consent, undertook to ask Mr. Railton to preside over their deliberations.

In answer to the full, pleasant, and manly-voiced "Come in!" Tom Merry had entered Mr. Railton's study.

"Well, Merry?" said the Form-master, as the hero of the Shell entered.

"I have come to ask you, sir, on behalf of the fellows of the Shell and the Fourth, whether you will be kind enough to take the chair at our meeting in the gym, which we are just going to hold. It's a meeting called to arrange about giving the doctor a presentation on account of his success—er—in the scientific——"

Mr. Railton had looked up with such a curious expression from his work, at which he had been very busy, that Tom Merry had faltered.

Moroever, the juniors had been so enthusiastic in the cause, that not one of them had been at pains to get an exact description of exactly what the doctor had done, and although this did not matter when talking among themselves, it made it awkward when talking to a master.

Then, suddenly, while his eyes rested on Tom Merry's face, there came into them a new light.

"I am sure the doctor will be very pleased to think that his pupils join with the rest of the world in doing him honour. When is the meeting?"

"The fellows are going in now, sir. They will be all there in a few minutes."

Mr. Railton looked at the work spread before him upon the desk, and then said:

"I am afraid, Merry, this is one of the few occasions when work must wait. I will be in the gym in four or five minutes."

"Thank you, sir. I'll tell the kids—fellows, sir."

"He'll be here in a few minutes, kids!" announced the hero

of the Shell, on his return to the gym, where he had left the others anxiously awaiting the result of his mission.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Railton!"

"Bai Jove! I knew he would not wefuse!"

"Now," was Lowther's comment, "we shall get to business!"

"Arrange things!" said Figgay.

"Or finish arranging them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A chair was placed in a convenient spot at the head of the room, in which the House-master could sit, and the juniors crowded round the room in groups.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Railton, when a welcoming cheer had accompanied him to the chair, "I understand you want to agree upon the means you shall adopt in showing Dr. Holmes how much you are all with him in spirit in his hour of triumph. Now——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Order!"

"Order!"

The juniors cheered, and as the cheer tailed off Tom Merry called for order, and when order was obtained the voice of the swell of St. Jim's was heard.

"Ordah for the chair, deah boys!"

"Now," went on the House-master, "this is not an occasion for long speeches. That time comes later, when we make the presentation I understand you propose. But at the same time, any boy who has anything to say is entitled to a voice in the matter. All such should indicate it by stepping into the centre of the room, and, on being called by name, say what he has to say."

"Hear, hear!" cried the juniors.

At the same time, from various corners there rushed five juniors, and they all collided together in the middle of the room.

They were Tom Merry, Blake, Arthur Augustus, Figgins and Skimpole.

"Ass!" murmured Tom Merry, as Gussy knocked into him.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I'm going to speak first!" said Figgins hotly.

"Come out of it, you asses!" growled Blake, under his breath.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience.

Mr. Railton could not repress a smile, and if it was a smile of pleasure, it was because he liked to see the enthusiasm that the fellows were displaying.

Skimpole, in struggling to stand in front of the others, fell to the floor, and sat blinking at the House-master.

It had all happened in a moment, but it was indescribably funny.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"I think it would be better to have one at——" began Mr. Railton, looking as serious as he could under the circumstances.

But he was not allowed to proceed, for the group struggling in the centre of the room was instantly warmed up by excitement.

There was not one of them who would show disrespect to Mr. Railton, and he knew well enough that none was intended—that nothing, indeed, was further from their thoughts—but in the excitement of the moment they simply did not hear him speak.

Tom Merry suddenly forced himself to the front.

"What we want to do, sir——" he began, feeling very hot and looking very red.

But Blake suddenly shouldered him out of the way.

"You see, sir——"

Arthur Augustus felt that it was his duty to speak first.

"Weally, sir, I must wotest against these—er——" Skimpole, picking himself up from the floor, stood in front of him, and, blinking hard, interrupted.

"As a sincere Socialist——" he began.

"Skimmay, you wottah!" exclaimed Gussy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

Mr. Railton, as much amused as anyone in the room, although he did not show it so plainly, stood up.

"I shall administrah the most fealsh thwashin', Skimmay——" went on Gussy.

"Suggest a feed!" came in a loud whisper from Fatty Wynn, crowded in among the juniors a few yards away.

"Boys," said Mr. Railton, holding up his hands.

"Chair!"

"Order!"

There was sudden silence.

The five juniors, all looking very hot, still shared the centre of the room.

"Yaas, wathah! Ordah for Mr. Wailton!" came in Gussy's voice.

That Gussy, who was as deep in the disturbance as anyone, should call for order struck the juniors as especially funny.

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NEXT WEEK: "WELL PLAYED!"

The roars of laughter broke out again. Mr. Railton himself now joined in without reserve.

"Now, boys," he said, when order was restored, "we shall get no business done if we go on like this. I will call on you in turn, and as Tom Merry was first to the centre of the floor, I will ask him to give us his views."

"Hear, hear!"

The others, including Skimpole—who blinked more than usual, and appeared to be very much surprised at Mr. Railton's ruling—went back to their places.

Tom Merry, very rumped and hot, said:

"What we want to do, sir, is to appoint a committee to get together funds, and to decide what form the presentation shall take."

"Hear, hear!"

"I suggest that we should give Dr. Holmes one of the best gold watches money can buy, but some of the kids—er—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Order!"

"Chair!"

Order was soon restored.

"That's all I have to say, sir, except that I should like to nominate Blake, and Gus—D'Arcy, and Manners, and Lowther, and Skimpole, and Figgins for the committee."

"Hear, hear!"

All the juniors were pleased with the names Tom Merry suggested. As regards Skimpole, to whom there might have been some question, it was now generally known that he had been the first to bring to light the fact that the doctor had distinguished himself.

"I suggest Tom Merry for the committee!" yelled Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

The note of assent rung through the gym., and the echo came from the rafters.

Tom Merry retired to a corner where his chums were standing, and was so heartily banged upon the back by Lowther and Manners that he sat upon the floor, to be hauled up again quickly by his collar, to the general amusement of the meeting.

"The proposition is," said Mr. Railton, rising when order was once again restored, "that Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, Skimpole, and Figgins, with Lowther and Manners, be appointed members of a committee to collect the necessary funds. All of that opinion hold up their hands!"

Every junior held up a hand, Lowther holding up two.

"Now the next point, boys, is the form the present is to take. Tom Merry has suggested a gold watch—"

"Hear, hear!"

"A gold cup."

"Hear, hear! A cup!"

"A feed!"

"Order, please, boys! Let us take the watch first. All in favour of a watch, hands up!"

The hands went up with but few exceptions, and Mr. Railton declared that a gold watch the meeting wished it to be.

"Then that finishes the business," said the House-master; "but before I return to my work I must congratulate you all on the motive with which this meeting was arranged. I should like to add too that I shall be pleased to see the committee in my study privately for a few moments in regard to the matter of a subscription, which I think, as chairman of this meeting, I am entitled to give."

The cheers were deafening as Mr. Railton went out of the room, and the committee were at his study as soon as he reached it himself.

CHAPTER 7.

Collector Skimpole.

IT was something that made the juniors of St. Jim's marvel—the sight of Figgins of the New House rushing at every possible opportunity over to the School House to consult with Blake and Merry without there once being a storm.

The fact was, all differences between the different sects were buried while the "Gold Watch Committee" worked to bring their task to a satisfactory conclusion.

Yet, at the same time, the committee knew themselves that only a temporary truce existed, and that, as soon as their present work was completed, the old state of warfare would be returned to.

Of course, although all the fellows knew about the matter, secrecy of a kind was insisted upon by the committee, in order that the proposed presentation should not reach the ears of the doctor.

After school, on the day following the appointment of the committee, the members were gathered together in Tom Merry's study.

"Now, kids, I'll take the chair—" began the hero of the Shell.

"Oh, I don't think!" exclaimed Blake.

"What's the matter, ass?"

"Of course, I take the chair!" put in Figgins.

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"Bai Jove, Figgay, that is most ridiculous! I shall insist on taking the chair! Of course, you must have a fellow of tact and discretion!"

"Rats!" yelled Tom Merry, throwing himself into the only armchair in the study. "I'm in the chair, so—"

"And you're jolly well coming out of it!"

Blake laid hold of Tom Merry's left arm.

"Collar that other arm, asses!"

"Weally, I considah this a most undignified pwoceeding!" murmured Arthur Augustus, staring at the struggling pair in the armchair.

"Ow-wow!"

"Ass!"

The chair rolled over, and the two candidates for presidential honours found themselves struggling on the floor.

While they were thus engaged, Skimpole, who had been blinking in amazement at them, hopped to the fallen chair, and, setting it up, deposited his weedy figure in it.

"No, you don't!" grinned Figgins. "Come out of it!"

He laid hold of Skimpole, and dragged him to his feet. "Really, Figgins, this is most unconstitutional! Under Socialism the most intellectual would—"

"Shut up, you ass! We want a chairman, not a blessed—"

Skimpole went down to the floor with a crash.

"Ow-oo-wow!"

"Now, then, p'raps you'll agree that I'm—" began Tom Merry, getting free at last and jumping to his feet.

"You'll jolly well see—" replied Blake, scrambling to his feet.

They stared at each other, and were about to fall again when their eyes fell upon Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's had taken the opportunity of seating himself in the armchair, and beamed upon them therefrom.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Deah boys, I call for ordah! The first bisnay we have to do—"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wufuse to shut up! And I must certainly wufuse to be called an ass. You see I—"

"Rats!"

"Ring off!"

"Oh, let's get on with the washing!" said Tom Merry. "Sooner than waste time, I'll agree to a duffer from Study No. 6. And that being so, we may as well have Gussy as any other silly—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, ring off! Let's get to work!"

"Hear, hear!"

The futility of wasting further time was apparent to all, and so business was commenced.

"Tom Mewwy, I call upon you to inform the meetin' how much money you have collected."

"Hear, hear!"

"I haven't actually got the money—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I have a list of promises, amounting to £1 11s. 6d."

"Tom Mewwy, I considah that a vewy small sum to—"

"Who asked you what you considered?"

"Order for the chair!"

"And in the chair!" grinned Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are uttah asses! I shall put down on this sheet of paper the amount of Tom Mewwy's pwoises. Blake, how much have you collected?"

"Oh, mine's in promises, too! None of the kids seem to have any money just now! But I've got £1 8s. promised."

"Weally, Blake, that is worse—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Unless we have ordah for the chair, I—"

"We'll bump you if you don't get on."

"Tom Mewwy, I wufuse to be addressed—"

"Get on then!"

With much dignity, Arthur Augustus wrote down the amount given as Blake's total.

Figgins reported £2 with an air of triumph that Tom Merry and Blake both decided to remember for a future occasion.

Manners and Lowther reported a pound, and twenty-five shillings respectively.

"Skimmay, deah boy, how much have you got?"

Skimpole blinked.

"I have found the utmost difficulty in collecting money. The fact is that Socialism has not spread sufficiently to enable one—"

"Ring off! How much?" asked Tom Merry.

"Really, Tom Merry—"

"Skimmay, you ass, how—"



"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, gazing on the beautiful watch. "Ripping!" said Tom Merry.

"Really, D'Arcy, I am explaining. Had this collection been made a hundred years hence, I should—"

"How much?"

Blake yelled the words in Skimpole's ear so loudly that the amateur Socialist jumped a couple of feet with fright. He landed on Tom Merry's toe.

"Oh! You ass!" cried Tom Merry, and at the same time he hurled Skimpole at Blake.

"Really this—" gasped Skimpole.

"Hold the ass still!" said Manners, and between them they held the amateur Socialist firmly in the centre of the study.

"As a sincere Socialist," he puffed, "I must protest—"

"Do you want bumping?" asked Blake.

"Really, Blake, why should I want bumping? I am a pacific—"

"Skimminy, you ass! Unless you consent to inform the committee how much you have collected, I shall form conclusions which—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should not have thought, D'Arcy, that your brain was capable— Ow!"

The genius of the Shell broke off as Blake pulled his ear.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now perhaps you'll tell us how much you've collected," grinned Blake.

"Blake, I have collected a shilling; but if—"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"My hat!"

"A blessed shilling! Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Really, you asses, I fail to see any cause for amusement. Had this collection been made a hundred years—"

"Is it in cash, or is it a promise?" asked the humourist of the Shell.

"I am glad to be able to inform you, Lowther, that the money is in cash."

And Skimpole, blinking around him, fumbled in his pocket for a few moments, after which he produced a shilling and handed it very seriously to D'Arcy.

"Skimminy, you're an uttish ass!" said Arthur Augustus, writing down the amount.

"Really, D'Arcy—"

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NEXT WEEK:

"WELL PLAYED!"

"Who gave that splendid donation—in cash?" asked Lowther.

"Mellish gave it to me, and——"

The juniors stared at the name of the toady and sneak of the Fourth was mentioned.

"Phew!" whistled Tom Merry.

And he asked me to see that his name was put high up on the list of contributors, so that——"

"The cad!"

"The sneak!"

"Bai Jove!"

"So that the doctor would see it! I promised that——"

"What?" chorussed the juniors.

Skimpole started, and blinked, but proceeded.

I promised that I would make the proper representations in the right quarter, and Mellish, who is really a very foolish person, threw a book at me, and actually——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really I see nothing to laugh at. He threatened that if I dared to communicate what I have told you, to the committee, he would kill me. But as——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

Skimpole blinked hard at the interrupters.

"Really, I see no cause——"

"Mellish is a sneak!" said Manners in disgust. "We——"

"We'd better bite that shilling and see if it's good."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Lowther, I regard that as a very good suggest, Fwaps you will bite it for us, and report to the committee?"

Rounds of laughter greeted the retort of the swell of St. Jim's.

"I move," said Tom Merry, when order was restored,

"that the shilling be returned to Mellish."

"Hear, hear!"

"But," blinked Skimpole, "that would be wasting my labour, and——"

"And I move," added Blake, "that Skimpole be instructed to return the shilling——"

"Really, Blake, think for a moment——"

"Also, that if Skimpole does not bring along a better report of his collection by the next meeting, we jolly well——"

"Bump him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Deah boys, I put that wresolution."

The juniors agreed with much noise, and the next moment Skimpole found the shilling thrust in his hand, and himself thrust none too gently out of the study into the passage, where he sat down heavily on the floor.

"Dear me! Dear me! Extraordinary!" he muttered.

CHAPTER 8.

The Committee Subscribe.

"Bai Jove, you uttah asses! I cannot have a membah of the committee excluded from half our de——"

"What's the matter now?" asked Blake.

"Why, my deah boy, we have more biznay to do, and Skimmay must be brought back."

"Oh, rats!"

"Lowther, that is a disrespectful remark, and——"

"Get on with the wash——"

"I wefuse! Skimmay is on the committee, and I must have him heah! Tom Mewwy, will you kindly bring that ass, Skimmay, back!"

It was clear that Arthur Augustus had made up his mind, in which case the juniors knew from long experience, nothing on earth would cause him to shift his ground.

Besides, there could be no doubt as to the reasonableness of what he said.

Therefore, just as Skimpole was half-way down the passage, rubbing his back regretfully, he heard himself hailed.

"Skimmay, come back, you ass!" cried Tom Merry.

"What did you want to run off for?"

"Really, Tom Merry, I didn't run——"

"Oh, come in and don't talk so much!"

Skimpole entered, protesting that he had gone quite against his will, but the juniors paid no heed beyond grinning at him.

"I see by my list that we have got contributions amountin' to £7 4s. 6d.," said Arthur Augustus. "And as that is a vey weduculous sum, I think we had better make it up to show that we mean biznay. I shall subscribe a fivah. Tom Mewwy, what will you subscribe?"

"I'll write off for a fiver at once!" said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy! I considah that a vey hand-some pwee——"

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy! I considah that a vey hand-some pwee——"

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy! I considah that a vey hand-some pwee——"

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy! I considah that a vey hand-some pwee——"

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"Thank you, Tom Mewwy! I considah that a vey hand-some pwee——"

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy! I considah that a vey hand-some pwee——"

"Oh, rats! Get on with the washing!" said Tom Merry. "Tom, Mewwy, please respect the chair! Blake, deah boy, what shall we put down as your sub.?"

"I shan't be able to manage more than two-ten," said Blake awkwardly.

"Thank you, Blake, that is most handsome!"

"Hear, hear!"

Manners, Lowther, and Figgy agreed to give the same amount.

"And now, Skimmay, what can I put down for you?"

Skimpole blinked.

"Well, you see, D'Arcy, I haven't got any money, so that it is rather difficult for me to give as much as I should like."

"Make it a shilling!" grinned Lowther.

"Really, Lowther, I fail to see the reference to the shilling. I should be pleased to subscribe liberally if I had any money, but as I never have any money, I don't see quite what I am to do. But I think on this occasion, seeing the purpose for which it is required, I will see if I can't get some money. If it had been a hundred years hence, and Soc——"

"Ring off!"

"Really, you see, the fact that I have no money is entirely due to the present state of society. But on this occasion I shall try to get some money, so perhaps, D'Arcy, you will let the amount of my sub. remain in abeyance until I see how much money I can get."

"That is a good suggest, Skimmay. I will put down 'Skimmay, query.'"

"How much does that make?" asked Blake, seating himself on the corner of the table.

Gussy made a calculation.

"That makes, deah boys, the grand total of £27 4s. 6d."

"Hear, hear!"

"That ought to be enough."

"Not at all, deah boys! My guv'nor's gold watch cost about £75."

"We've got a lot to get in yet then."

"Rather! Of course, there's Skimmay's to come."

Skimpole blinked, but the juniors passed him over, for they knew that he was really very anxious to subscribe to the funds now being raised.

"However, deah boys, we ought to have no difficulty. And I propose that we should now begin to write to firms of jewellers who make good watches and ask them to send us catalogues of watches at about £75 each."

"That's a good wheeze!" said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"We must bowwow a London Divectowwy," went on Gussy, and write——"

"Write to all of 'em," said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"And then we shall get a good selection," added Manners. This was agreed upon, and Skimpole, who had once worked out a system for renaming the streets of London according to their relative distance from the sun, had a post-office directory in his study, which he was about to produce. For a long time the juniors sat copying out the names of watchmakers and jewellers. In the end, they posted fifty letters asking for catalogues.

When this was done the present business was over, and each member promising to do his best to get in as much money as possible, the meeting was adjourned.

CHAPTER 9.

Mellish and His Sub.

THE first efforts at collecting had not been very successful, but when the juniors at St. Jim's saw the lists with the committee's subscriptions upon them, there was a regular rush of funds. The seriousness of the effort was established finally, and those few fellows who had not been over keen at the start were very anxious to be in what was now proved to be a success.

Wally D'Arcy, the inky-fingered fag of the Third, and Gussy's minor, informed his elegant brother that he would make every junior in his Form part up with at least a sixpence.

And a warm time of it the juniors had until Gussy's minor was able to hand to him a hatful of I O U's, sixpences, and shillings, with an occasional half-crown.

The hatful represented £7 15s., and was a goodly addition to the funds, making the total £34 19s. 6d.

Skimpole, having been threatened with a bumping, which he had no desire to experience, took little, short, quick steps all over the school in search of subscriptions, finding instead, however, trouble for himself.

He had headed a huge sheet of paper with the words "Presentation to the Doctor. Mr. Skimpole's list," and with this pasted on a piece of cardboard, tucked under

his arm, and a fountain-pen in his ear, he interrogated all and sundry who came across his path.

His first misadventure was with Reilly, the Irish lad, whom he met after morning school, hurrying across the quad, to the playing-fields.

"I say, Reilly!" he cried, as he quickened his short steps in an effort to reach his prey.

He had accosted so many already that he was beginning to be shunned.

Reilly winked what he was after, and hastened away.

Skimpole, however, was not to be outdone in this manner. His steps were very short, but he could get a good many in to the minute.

Away he went.

Reilly winked at a number of juniors he passed.

They laughed at Skimpole as he followed.

"I say, Reilly!"

On went Reilly.

"Dear me!" muttered the genius of the Shell.

"I say, Reilly! Reilly!"

Still Reilly kept ahead.

"Extraordinary!" muttered Skimpole. "I seem to be shouting quite loudly, too. Really, there seem to be quite a number of persons going deaf in the school lately!"

He blinked about him as he ran.

"Dear me!" he thought, as he perceived Figgins & Co., grinning. "What can those kids be grinning at? Reilly!"

He made a frantic effort to increase his pace.

As he jerked his head forward his fountain-pen fell out of his ear, and splattered half its contents down his collar.

Stopping to pick it up, he heard loud laughter all round him.

But it did not occur to Skimpole, who never saw a joke, that they were laughing because Reilly was purposely hurrying away from him, and only pretending not to hear from him.

Suddenly the Irish lad stopped.

"Reilly, I have been calling you for a long time, and running after you, too!"

"Ye don't mean it?" said Reilly, with a stolid countenance.

"Yes, really I have!"

He was quite breathless with his exertions. Pulling his list from under his arm, he held it out to the other.

"I want you to give me a subscription for this!"

"Do ye?"

"Yes, Reilly, please; and although you are not a Socialist I am sure you will recognise this as a great and good work, and support it by giving ten pounds or so——"

"It's certainly a foine idea!" said Reilly, reading the wodings—which was about all there was——on the list.

"I am glad to hear you say so, Reilly. That shows you to be what I had not before suspected—a person of some intelligence, and I have——"

"It's undoubtedly a splendid idea, Skimmy!"

"Quite so, Reilly; it really is! Now, I have a fountain-pen here, with which you may write your name, and op——"

"A really excellent idea!"

"Quite so, Reilly! You may write your name down with this pen, and opposite it put——"

"It's as grand an idea as I have ever seen!" said Reilly, in tones of deep admiration.

"Yes. And opposite your name you may write the amount of your donation."

"I say, Kerr!" shouted Reilly to Kerr, who was standing near.

"Hallo, kid!"

"Isn't this a splendid idea?"

"What's that?"

"If you'll just put your name——" began Skimpole.

"Why, this about a presentation to the doctor!"

"My hat!" said Kerr, taking the list. "Splendid!"

"Reilly is going to contribute, Kerr! Perhaps you would like also to appear on my list!"

Kerr looked at Reilly.

"A splendid idea, isn't it?"

"Ripping!"

Reilly handed back the list.

"But you have not put your name——"

"I'm already down for ten bob on another list!" grinned Reilly. "Good-bye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors around roared with laughter.

Skimpole blinked around him.

"Dear me! Extraordinary!" he muttered.

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole Does Not Return the Shilling.

LET somewhat dazed by the treatment he had received at the hands of Reilly, who, as he explained, had already given his sub. to another list, Skimpole endeavoured to reason out the position.

He was still reasoning when Monteith, the sarcastic prefect of the New House, passed him.

Being really keen about collecting subs., all men were fish to Skimpole's net.

Reasoning out such an abstruse problem as the why and the wherefore of Reilly's treatment, it could not be supposed that he would think of the very obvious fact that if Monteith gave a sub. at all—and seniors had not as yet been invited to join in the presentation—the New House prefect would prefer to give it to Figgins, a new House junior.

In the mind of the amateur Socialist and genius of the Shell, these trifling considerations did not exist.

"I say, Monteith!" he cried.

Monteith paused and regarded him.

The first point he noted about Skimpole at that moment was the fact that his collar was covered on one side with ink, the result of the fountain-pen falling from his ears.

"Well, you nice, clean little School House boy, what do you want?"

Skimpole blinked.

Any other junior would have resented the sarcasm in Monteith's words and tones.

But Skimpole was impervious to such shafts—not because he was tough, but because he did not see the point.

"Will you kindly look at this list, Monteith?"

With a rather hard and unkind grin, Monteith took the list.

"Well, kid," he said, with something of a sneer, when he had read it, "what's it all about?"

"Really, Monteith; I should have thought that even the intelligence of a New House prefect would have——"

Monteith's face grew grimmer.

"I'll give you a lesson in manners if you're not careful!" he said angrily. "What do you mean?"

"Really, Monteith, I see no cause for anger. It is perfectly plain!"

"What?"

"Reduced to its simplest terms, it is simply a matter of a collection to enable a presentation to be made to the doctor."

"Oh!"

Monteith realised now that the junior had not intended to be sarcastic.

Accordingly he recovered his usual humour.

"And you want me to subscribe?"

"Really, Monteith, it would be awfully good of you if——"

"Shall I make out a cheque?"

The sarcasm was lost on Skimpole.

"Really, Monteith, that would be excel——"

"Or perhaps you would like it in notes?"

"Really, Monteith, either would——"

"Or I might have sufficient gold about, if you could send over a box!"

"Really, Monteith, whichever you——"

"Ha, ha! You young ass!"

And with a laugh Monteith went on his way.

Skimpole stood blinking after him.

"Dear, dear me!" he exclaimed.

For a few moments he stood speculating upon the experience he had just been through.

Whilst he reflected he stood with his right hand thrust in his trousers pocket.

His fingers came upon a coin.

He blinked, for it was unusual for him to have any money.

"Dear me!" he murmured

He drew out a coin.

He blinked at it as it lay in the palm of his hand.

It was a shilling.

"Dear me!" he murmured again. "Why, that's Mellish's; and I have forgotten to return it!"

It happened that Mellish was passing at that moment, and, seeing that Skimpole was blinking at something which lay in the palm of his hand, he crept up softly behind him, and, knocking the amateur Socialist's hand upwards, sent the shilling flying into space.

Skimmy started, and blinked at Mellish as he turned round.

"What did you do——"

Then he saw it was Mellish.

And the fact that it was Mellish's shilling dawned upon him at the same moment.

"Really, Mellish, that was an exceedingly stupid proceeding!" he said.

"Yah! You shouldn't stand day-dreaming, and then you

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wouldn't have lost your bob! It went right over there in the grass!"

The sneak of the Fourth grinned.
"Mellish, you haven't got the brains of a ladybird! You've—"
"Oh, I've got no time to talk to idiots like you! Look out if my name doesn't appear at the top of the doctor's list!"

And with those words Mellish went away chuckling as though he had done a very clever thing.

"Mellish is a cad!" muttered Skimpole. "Any other person, even of the narrowest intellect, would have assisted me in the recovery of the lost property."

After blinking at Mellish for some moments, the genius of the Shell started to hunt for the lost coin.

But he was not sure even in which direction it had gone, for he had been very startled when Mellish had knocked his hand.

At last he gave up the search.
He was Socialist enough to be able to leave somebody else's property in the grass without bothering very much about it.

And, besides, it was Mellish's, and it was Mellish's fault, all of which made a very great deal of difference.

"I shall go at once and see Mellish, and explain to him the exact position of affairs," he muttered.

He started off towards the School House, and had not gone a few steps before he met Arthur Augustus.

Skimpole blinked at the swell of St. Jim's, and was passing on.

But Arthur Augustus hailed him.

"Skimmay!"
"I am sorry, D'Arcy, but I have to go at once to Mellish and tell him that I can't return the shilling which—"
"Bai Jove, Skimmay!" said Arthur Augustus, regarding Skimpole through his monocle. "You must return it, Skimmay!"

"Really, D'Arcy, but you see I—"
"You must return it, Skimmay! It would be against the dig. of the committay to keep it. It would spoil the whole ideah of the pwesentation to the doctah. I insist, Skimmay—"

"But, D'Arcy, you see—"
"I will not argue with you, Skimmay! I considah you are an uttah wottah to think of not weturnin' the shillin' in the face of the facts!"

And before Arthur Augustus could hear any explanation he turned on his heel with his most dignified air and walked away to join Blake, who was a few yards away.

Skimpole blinked after him for a few moments, and then hurriedly resumed his way.

He was determined to get rid of this matter once and for all.

He found Mellish in his study with Gore, who of late had been a much more decent chap than formerly.

"You see," Mellish was saying, "if you subscribe your namo will be—"

Gore was not listening, for he had a book open before him which he was interested in.

And just at that moment the genius of the Shell entered.

"Ah, Mellish, I want to speak to you with regard to your contribution to the list for the presentation to the doctor."

"Is my name going to be first on the list?"
"No, Mellish. You see—"
"What d'you mean—no?" said Mellish threateningly.
"You see, Mellish," went on Skimpole, blinking through his huge spectacles, "when you came up to me a few minutes ago you knocked your shilling out of my hand, and—"

"What?" yelled Mellish, his face pale with passion. "You mean—"

"That that was your shilling—exactly!" said Skimpole, saying it like a pupil repeating a lesson.

Mellish sprang at the amateur Socialist, and, seizing him by the collar, cried hoarsely.

"You young idiot! You mean to say that was my—"
"Ow-vow!"

But Mellish shook Skimpole to and fro.
"You mean you have lost my money!" he roared.

Gore suddenly sprang to his feet.

Mellish had just boasted to Gore of how he had treated Skimpole outside, and Gore pieced the facts together.

Seizing Mellish by the collar, he dragged him off and threw him to the ground as a terrier a dead rat.

"You're a miserable beast!" he said.

Mellish muttered something inaudible under his breath, and sulkily scrambled to his feet.

Skimpole stood blinking in silence for a few moments, and then remembered that he had not half concluded his business.

"The committee made me promise to return your subscription," he said; "and I was just coming to do it when you knocked the money out of my hand. It was a really very brainless thing to do, Mellish. Such acts interfere with law and order, and would not be tolerated for a moment in a Soc—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Mellish, and he slunk out of the study.

To Gore, at his request, Skimpole related all that had happened.

"You are an ass, Skimmay, but, still, I'm glad you had the courage to come here and carry out your committee's instructions—that is, as far as you could, seeing you had lost Mellish's shilling."

And then Gore chuckled.

There was, he thought, something very funny about the way that shilling had been lost.

Skimpole started off again in search of donors, for he had still a lot of leeway to make up.

Going along the corridor he met Arthur Augustus again.

"Skimmay!"
"Yes, D'Arcy."

"Have you returned that shilling?"
"No, D'Arcy. You see—"

"Bai Jove! Then you will return it at once!"
"But I can't—"

"Skimmay, I shall administah the most feahful thwashin' if you don't—"

"But you see, D'Arcy—"

"There is no excuse, Skimmay! You are placing the committee in the most awkward posish. Now, shall I thwash you, or—"

"There's Noble!" suddenly exclaimed Skimpole. "And I want to see if he will subscribe."

With those words he darted off.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus, glaring after the genius of the Shell angrily through his monocle. "The wottah! But he shall weturn that shillin' to that end Mellish! It would spoil the honouvable spiwit of the pwesentation. I'll give him the most feahful thwashin' if he doesn't return it at once!"

And, much perturbed, the swell of St. Jim's marched after the amateur Socialist.

But before he had gone many steps Skimpole had disappeared.

"The wottah!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I will have him latal!"

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Five juniors rushed out at the same time from various corners of the room, and collided with a crash in front of the chairman. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the meeting.

CHAPTER 11. The Gold Watch.

THE morning of the second day after the first committee meeting was one long to be remembered by Tom Merry and his chums. And it was the arrival of the first post, with fifty odd catalogues of all shapes and sizes from the firms of jewellers to whom the committee had written, that marked it as a red-letter day.

Some of the catalogues were three or four inches thick, "Letters for Master Tom Merry!" said Taggles, the porter, peering beneath the weight of a huge sack, as he staggered into the study.

Tom Merry held out his hand for the letter.

"It's this sack, Master Merry! And very 'eavy it is!"

"That sack!" queried Tom Merry.

He looked in amazement at the mail-bag, sealed with red wax.

"My hat! What's the giddy game?" muttered Lowther.

"It's some mistake!" grinned Manners.

"The postman's got to take the sack back, sir."

Tom Merry, in a state of amazement, cut the string that was sealed round the neck of the sack, not noticing that Taggles had shuffled off.

"My only Aunt Jane! What's it all mean?"

For the moment they had forgotten their applications for catalogues.

And even had they remembered them, they would not have dreamt of receiving a mail like this.

They had had no previous business relations to any extent with big jewellery firms, and they had no idea of the enormous amount of money such firms spend in the production of magnificently-printed catalogues of many hundreds of pages.

Manners and Lowther lent eager hands in the work of unfastening the bag, and scarcely had they done so than Taggles came staggering along the passage again with a second load on his back.

"There's on'y two more like this, Master Merry!" said Taggles, gasping under the load.

"Phew!" whistled Manners and Lowther.

"Even Dr. 'Olmes don't 'ave as many letters on his birthday as this!" went on Taggles, fishing for information.

A crowd of juniors had seen Taggles coming up, and they came crowding round the study door looking in bewilderment at the Terrible Three, who were on their knees on the floor wrestling with the mail-bags.

"Opened a post-office, kids?" asked Blake, thrusting himself through the throng. "My hat!"

"It's a competition we've been in for, and these are our prizes," explained Lowther ingeniously.

"Why," suddenly exclaimed Tom Merry, "it's the catalogues about the gold watches!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The contents of the two bags were quickly turned out upon the floor, and a goodly pile they made.

Taggles staggered up with two more sacks, much bent at the knees over the last one.

"What's the matter with your legs, Taggles?" asked Tom Merry.

"It's the weight, sir!"

The juniors grinned.

"He's got half-a-crown's!" said Lowther.

Taggles mopped his forehead, and then, taking the empty sacks, looked expectantly at Tom Merry.

"If these were birthday presents," said Tom Merry to the porter, "of course I should be able to give you at least a shilling!"

The porter's face clouded.

The juniors grinned.

An ominous silence followed, during which Taggles would, had he dared, have said things never heard at St. Jim's.

"Here you are!" laughed Merry at last. And he handed the porter five shillings.

"Thank you, Master Merry!"

Taggles's eyes beamed at the two half-crown's.

"One of them is for the postman!" added Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, who had watched Taggles's changing expressions.

Taggles, however, thought it wise to show no more disappointment than he could possibly help, so he hurried off, his knees having suddenly straightened up.

"We'd better have a committee meeting before school," said Tom Merry, "and open this lot."

"Yes; we've got about an hour."

"Good!"

"All kids not on the committee, hook it!"

There was a great deal of pushing and stumbling necessary before those who were not required could be got rid of, but at last the committee were in the study with the exception of Arthur Augustus and Skimpole.

The former was doing a morning sprint, and the latter finishing a chapter of his book on Socialism.

With paper knives, penknives, and other available implements the work of opening the packages was begun.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus, entering when the work was in progress, peeped in the doorway, and regarded the unusual scene with amazement.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"All hands on deck!"

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle.

"Bai Jove!" he repeated.

Skimpole, coming along rapidly with his little short steps, failed to see the swell of St. Jim's, and walked right into him, sending him stumbling forward on to a pile of packages.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Skimpole, blinking.

"You ass, Skimmay!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, scrambling among the packages in an effort to get to his feet.

"Really, D'Arcy, I didn't see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're an uttah ass, Skimmay! I have only just dived afloat my spint, and you have now caused me to wumple my clothes!"

"I am very sorry, D'Arcy, but the unexpected sight which greets my eyes as I—"

"Pway wing off, deah boy!" said the swell of St. Jim's, getting on to his feet at last. "A gentleman can do no more than apologise."

"Come on, you kids!" said Tom Merry, who was hard at work with the rest. "There's work to do!"

Arthur Augustus found himself a place at the table and began.

Skimpole stood blinking.

An idea had just invaded the realms of his masterly brain.

"Tom Merry, I have just thought of something which causes—"

"If it causes you to come and get on—"

"No, Merry. I beg of you all to stop a moment. Really, it is—"

"Rats! Get on with those!"

Tom Merry threw half a dozen huge packages at the genius of the Shell.

Biff!

"Ow-wow!"

One of the packages struck Skimpole on the nose, and he fell backwards on to the heap of letters.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared.

"Really, you asses, I see no cause for laughter. I must insist that you all stop at once. It is usual when so large a mail is received, to take every precaution against sickness by disinfecting every package before it is opened. I will get my doodoriser, and—"

Skimpole had started up, and made for the door.

"Come back, you ass!" yelled Tom Merry.

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But Skimpole proceeded to open the door.

Moved with a common inspiration, the other five members of the committee shot a package at Skimpole's head.

Biff, bang, crash!

"Ow-wow-oo!"

Skimpole sank in a heap on the floor.

"I really believe I have caught something already!" he muttered, blinking. "And certainly you fellows seem to be seized with hydrophobia in its most—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimmay, I considah that weally vevy funny!"

"Which, D'Arcy?" asked Skimpole, blinking.

"Why, deah, boy, your having caught somethin'. Weally vevy funny! Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, I fail—"

"Oh, shut up, you ass!" cried Tom Merry.

And, springing across the heap on the floor, the hero of the Shell seized Skimpole, and dumped him down again on the mail. At the same time he locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

For a while no other sound than the tearing and rustling of paper disturbed the silence of the study, whilst the juniors worked against time to get the letters all open before school bell rang to summon them to morning lessons.

By Tom Merry's instruction they were not stopping to examine the contents of each package as they opened it, but merely getting rid of the covers, and piling up catalogues and letters for consideration afterwards.

Suddenly, however, D'Arcy dropped a letter on the floor, and, in picking it up, he read the contents.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

"What's up?"

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove!"

The swell of St. Jim's stared at the letter.

"What's the matter, ass?"

"Bai—Jove!"

He adjusted his monocle, and muttered his favourite expression again and again.

"He's gone mad!" whispered Figgins.

"Been expecting it for a long time," added Lowther.

"Bai Jove, Mewwy! Don't you see what is goin' to happen?"

"To you, ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses! All these people are goin' to call this afternoon with samples!"

"My hat!"

"My only—"

"My giddy aunt!"

For a few moments the juniors stood spellbound.

The possibility of a visit from fifty odd commercial travellers had never entered the juniors' heads until this moment.

They suddenly ceased work.

Then Tom Merry grabbed a few of the unread letters in the hope that only one or two would call.

But no.

Orders for gold watches of the value of seventy-five pounds were far too hard to obtain.

Every firm was sending a representative.

And, as there was only one suitable train coming from London, they were all coming to St. Jim's by the two o'clock.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, this is awful! What the deatth will say when he sees from his studay window fifty odd twavellers enterin' St. Jim's, I—"

"It's rotten!"

For a few moments there was no suggestion forthcoming.

"I am perfectly willing to interview them all!" said Skimpole suddenly.

"That would certainly be a way of killing them off!" remarked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's not much to laugh at, my sons!" said Tom Merry gloomily.

Apart from the fact that the whole business would be quite out of order and unprecedented, it meant, as Tom Merry saw plainly, that the doctor would discover what the juniors were doing.

"How would it do to send telegrams to them all, putting them off?" suggested Manners.

"We should waste our money. If they didn't come to-day, they would to-morrow," said Tom Merry. "They'll all try to get the order."

"Yass, withah!"

"What's to be done, then?"

"I wonder!" grinned Lowther. "If we could tip the porter to tell them all as they arrive at the station that it's all a joke, and nobody wants a watch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That may be vewy funnay, Lowthab, but it is not bisnay!"

"All right, ass!" growled Lowther. "Don't get on your dig about it. You never could see a joke!"

"Lowthab, I wefuse to be called—"

"Shut up, Gussy! Let's th—"

"I wefuse to shut—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Tom Mewwy, if you persist in being wude to me I shall leave you to get out of this difficulty by your—"

"Don't be cruel, Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, my sons, it's no good rotting. As a committee, we have got to manage this business, an—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And the question is—how are we going to manage it?"

"Rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How would it be— Yes, this will do."

"What will?"

"Get it off your chest!"

Tom Merry paused to consider his plan duly before putting it into words.

"How would it do if the committee met the travellers at the railway-station, and did the business in the waiting-room?"

"Bai Jove! I wergad that as a good ideah!"

"That might—"

"Yes," chorused the juniors, "that would do it!"

"We should have to wire all of them, telling them!"

This plan was agreed upon as the only way out of their difficulty.

CHAPTER 12.

The Gold Watch Committee See the Travellers.

THAT it was a half-holiday was fortunate for the gold watch committee, but that there were any lessons at all to be done was distinctly unfortunate.

The members of the committee found it utterly impossible to attend properly to their lessons.

Tom Merry astonished Mr. Railton by adding two to three and making eight of it, whilst Arthur Augustus staggered the class by stating that the time all over the world was the same at any given moment. Figgins wrote in his geography paper the astounding information that Cape Town was the capital of Cairo, and Skimpole got a hundred lines for interviewing imaginary travellers about gold watches, in a voice that could be heard all over the class-room.

The truth was, that the threatened invasion of St. Jim's by fifty odd commercial travellers, and consequent possible explanations to the doctor, had got thoroughly upon the nerves of every member of the committee.

They had carefully kept the matter a secret, knowing that otherwise the whole of St. Jim's would turn up at the station, a state of affairs that would not assist them.

As they made their way to the station they did not look altogether happy.

Tom Merry, indeed, had a sort of foreboding that all was not going to work out according to their wishes.

He perceived there was something so very unusual in the idea of interviewing commercial travellers at the railway-station—something, indeed, that would not altogether inspire confidence in the representatives of the firms to whom they had applied.

The telegrams had been sent off before morning lessons, so that every firm would know what to expect.

But Tom Merry, although his idea had seemed all right at first blush, now had some secret misgivings about it.

"Tom Mewwy, I considah that was weally an excellent ideah of yours," said Arthur Augustus, as they passed out of the gates of St. Jim's.

"Yes," answered Tom Merry.

But his voice was heavy.

"And I considah, deah boy, that you are deservin' of the thanks of the committay!"

"We might wait to see how it works out first. Tom Merry's ideas—"

"You shut up, Monty. You didn't appear to have a better!"

"No idea at all is better than a bad one!" grinned Blake.

"If having no ideas is good," growled Tom Merry, "then you are a kind of an angel."

"I've got as many ideas as you! And most of them—"

"Not half as good!" filled in Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I wergad that as wathah funnay, Lowthab!" observed Arthur Augustus.

"It takes vewy little to please an ass like you," said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, I wefuse to be weferrid to as an ass. You are exceedin—"

"Get out of the way, you muff!" said Figgins, stumbling up against the swell of St. Jim's.

"Figg— Ow! Look at my toppah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The result of the collision was that the swell's top hat fell over his eyes, and then, in trying to save it from falling to the ground, he rubbed the nap the wrong way.

The juniors roared as they made their way along, leaving Arthur Augustus staring angrily at his hat.

"Bai Jove! You uttah ass, Figgay! How can I interview twavellers with a hat like that?"

The juniors looked back and roared.

"Come on, you dummy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We want to be in—"

"I wefuse—"

"We want to be there before the train comes in."

"I wefuse to be weferrid to as a dummy, and I wefuse to come on with a hat like this. It is wuined! Figgay, I shall give you a feahful—"

The distance between the juniors and Gussy was widening, and the latter was wondering whether he had time to get back to St. Jim's to change his hat.

"It would serve you uttah asses wight if I were to leave you to see the twavellers by yourselves," he muttered.

He polished his hat well on his sleeve, and then, having stared at it very carefully through his monocle for a few moments, he decided to go on.

"For the honour of St. Jim's I can't let these asses see these twavellers without my assistance."

They reached the station a quarter of an hour before the train was due, and whiled away the time in arguing as to the best means of handling the representatives they were expecting.

The old porter, who knew them all well, raked together all the chairs to be found on the station, and turned the small waiting-room into something approaching an office.

It was agreed that Tom Merry should take a seat in the waiting-room at the table, and the rest of the juniors should place themselves along the platform, so that they could explain to the travellers where Tom Merry was to be found, and at the same time see that none of them escaped towards St. Jim's.

This last was the most important point, for if an enterprising man got to the col, it was likely that the doctor would hear of him, and get to know of their secret.

Arthur Augustus took up his stand at the door of the waiting-room for the purpose of seeing that no more than one traveller came in at a time, and also to indicate where Tom Merry was to be found.

The shrieking whistle of the distant train was heard.

"Here she comes, kids!" yelled Blake from the far end of the platform.

"Right-ho!"

"Here she comes!"

"Bai Jove; They're comin', Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus.

Their preparations were complete.

The train was fast approaching.

Soon there would stand upon the platform fifty odd London commercial men.

An odd sight indeed for that country station, where passengers to and fro could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Tom Merry, in the waiting-room, felt anxious.

Blake waved his hat at the approaching train from sheer excitement.

Skimpole blinked, and muttered again and again a select form of address which he imagined would meet the occasion of dealing with a jeweller who had come from London to sell a seventy-five pound presentation gold watch.

Nearer came the train.

Now it entered the station.

Whizz-z-z!

The breeze that rushed along the platform was terrific.

"Bai Jove, my toppah!" screamed Arthur Augustus.

His top hat had been caught by the breeze and whirled fifty yards down the line.

"Ass!" ejaculated Tom Merry from inside the room.

Before Arthur Augustus could recover from his surprise the train had pulled up, and silk-hatted, frock-coated gentlemen began to leap from all the compartments.

"Don't go after your blessed hat! Stick at the door!" said Tom Merry, fearing that if the door were left he would be positively invaded.

"But, deah—"

"Oh, rats! Stop where you are!"

Gussy's hair, usually so orderly, floated in the breeze.

Right opposite to where he stood two travellers got out and stood looking about them.

Tom Merry, looking through the window of the waiting-room, observed that they all seemed to be surprised to see each other there.

"Are you looking for Tom Mewwy, deah boy?" asked the swell of St. Jim's.

"Mer—" began the first traveller.

"Merry!" said the second. "Yes, that's the gentleman I want."

"This way, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus admitted one.

"You'll find Tom Merry in the waiting-room!" sang out Blake to the group of men who passed him.

"That's the way—just there!"

"In the waiting-room—that's right!"

So all along the platform directions were being given by the various members of the committee.

Now the travellers gathered round the waiting-room and peered in.

Then a side of the question struck them which had entirely escaped the juniors.

It was, that even allowing only the smallest possible amount of time for each representative's interview, something near half a day must pass before the last one could be seen.

For the most part they were the accredited representatives of first-class firms, and not men who would endeavour to crush each other out of turn.

The natural result was that they thought it would be a good idea to go to St. Jim's, of which, of course, they had heard, and seek interviews with the head-master, with a view to getting any further business that might be going in the future.

At the same time, they thought that would be a good way of casually verifying the business they were now on, which was being conducted in such a way as to give it more or less the appearance of being a practical joke.

These men had all been trained in the same walk of life, and it was natural that the same ideas should occur to them all.

All it needed was for one to make off in the direction of St. Jim's, and the rest would follow.

"You will not be kept waiting long, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"I'll come back a little later," said the man nearest to him.

He started from the station.

It did not occur to the juniors at that moment that he had any thought of going to the col.

But immediately he had gone out of the station, others started off too.

"My hat, they're making for St. Jim's!" gasped Blake, in a horrified whisper.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

Now they were all moving off the platform.

"I say, deah boys," cried the swell of St. Jim's, endeavouring to intercept a group of them—"I say, the ordah is to be given heah!"

They looked at Gussy and smiled.

He supposed they were laughing at his top hat, that lay upon the line, irreparably damaged by the train, which in going out of the station, had passed over it.

"If you will kindly wait heah, deah boys!" he said.

"You'll lose the order if you go away," ventured Blake, getting anxious.

Skimpole blinked at one man and endeavoured to engulf his mind in the mysteries of Determinism, but the commercial man was too keen on keeping up with his brethren to stop.

At last there was not a man left on the station, excepting the one in the waiting-room with Tom Merry.

He did not seem at all in a hurry to surrender the field to his competitors.

At last he came out.

He looked along the platform in surprise.

Where were all the others? he wondered.

"Tom Mewwy," gasped Gussy, plunging into the room, "they've all gone to the col.!"

"What?"

"All gone to the col.!" repeated Blake.

"Look at the long string of 'em," added Figgins, "all curling up the road!"

"My hat!"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"You asses!" said Tom Merry crossly. "What did you let 'em go for?"

"We didn't let 'em."

"If you'd done a little less jaw in there—"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, this is all your beastly fault! I wegard—"

"Shut up, ass!"

"I wefuse to—"

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"It's no good standing here talking," said Blake gloomily. "From what I can see of it, the blessed business is going to be known to the Head before we've even bought the watch."

"Rotten!"

"Disgusting!"

"Can't anybody suggest a really good idea for seeing the travellers?" asked Lowther sarcastically.

"Look here, kids, we've got to get back as quick as we can, and see if something can't be done," said Tom Merry disconsolately.

"I call that a very brilliant idea," said Blake. "Come on!"

And the juniors started off in the wake of the long trail of jewellers' representatives.

"Wait a minute, you asses!" said Gussy. "What about my toppah?"

"Hang your toppah!"

"We'll, Blake—"

"Oh, come on! It isn't even worth hanging."

The juniors looked at the hat and grinned.

"I shall most certainly weevah it."

"It certainly wants recovering—with polish," grinned Lowther.

And while Arthur Augustus rescued his mangled hat from the line, the committee, in spite of its adversity, laughed loudly.

CHAPTER 13.

The Travellers See the Head-master.

DR. HOLMES, being one of those splendid men whose characters do not alter in the searchlight of success, was working quietly in his study while the usual scene just described was going on at the railway-station.

He was working, moreover, at the ordinary school routine work, and actually, during that afternoon, made notes to talk with Mr. Railton about three of his pupils who were on the Gold Watch Committee.

He was, indeed, just frowning about Master Skimpole's work, when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

Binks, with a more or less dramatic air, cultivated from the cheap American papers, "invaded," as he would have said himself, "the sacred precincts."

He bore in his hand—or, perhaps, it would be better to say he balanced on the tips of his fingers—a silver tray, upon which was a huge pile of visiting cards, some of them large and some of them small.

With a sweep, Binks went to the doctor's desk.

"There's more to foller, sir!"

The Head looked up from his work.

"What did you say?"

"There's more of 'em below, sir!"

The doctor looked at the tray.

Then he frowned, and looked at Binks.

Binks rather enjoyed the fact that the doctor was puzzled, because he thought he was puzzling him.

"What is this, Binks?"

"Waiting-cards, sir. There's as many again to come, sir."

"Dear me!"

The doctor took up the top one.

"Hobbs & Co.," he murmured. "'Jewellers.'"

He took the next one.

It contained the name of another well-known firm.

Then he took a handful of the cards, and rapidly ran his eye over them.

"This is very extraordinary!" he murmured. "Did all these people ask to see me?"

"All these, sir, and as many again!"

"Do you mean—er—are they all waiting?"

"Yeessir! They extends from the door to the other side of the road and back again!"

Binks had never felt so important before.

The doctor got up from his chair in amazement, and looked out of his window.

"Good gracious!" he murmured.

For a few moments he was nonplussed.

He had sent for no representatives of jewellery firms, and he could not imagine firms such as those bearing the names he had seen on the cards coming out on "spec." to get orders, especially all coming the same day.

The supposition was incredible.

It never occurred to Dr. Holmes to get hasty and send all these people away.

He was too well aware of the value of a business man's time.

He knew there must be some reason for this visit, although, for the life of him, he could not guess at it.

"Is Mr. Railton in?" he asked suddenly.

"No, sir! Mr. Railton is hout!"

"Well—er—bring up the first gentleman to see me."

"Yessir!"

In a few minutes Binks opened the door again, and ushered in a tall and highly respectable-looking individual, who bowed to the doctor as he entered.

"I am afraid I must apologise for disturbing you, sir," he said, "but it is not every day we are favoured with inquiries from such places as St. James's College, and you must forgive me if I am mixing the most of my opportunity."

"Pray sit down," said the doctor, indicating a chair.

"Thank you!"

"I am afraid there is some mistake. I have sent no inquiry. Might I ask the nature of it?"

"No, sir. Not you personally. But an inquiry has come, and I thought while I was here I might venture to ask you to see me."

"But there are a number—er—of you?"

The traveller smiled.

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Oh, yes?"

"Oh, yes?"

"Have you all had the inquiry, then?"

"I'm afraid we have. But competition is expected in our business. I should like to make it clear that I have not come to complain at that. That—"

"Really, what is puzzling me, is that you have an inquiry. Might I ask the nature of it?"

The traveller thought in silence for a moment.

Then he said:

"I cannot see any reason for not doing so, sir. On the contrary, it seems to me that it might help me to be able to show that anyone from this great institution has favoured us with the inquiry. I am only anxious that any future business may be heard of by us. The inquiry is from Mr. Tom Merry."

"Mr—er—Tom Merry!"

"Yes, sir, that is the name. In case there should be any privacy about the matter, I am sure you, sir, will not ask for further information. Doubtless the fact that I have mentioned a name well known in this establishment will be sufficient to prove the truth of my statement that we have actually had an inquiry."

"Oh, certainly!" said the doctor. "I am much obliged to you. I respect your confidence. I am afraid I, personally, have no orders for you."

"At some future time, perhaps?"

"If there is anything, I will certainly let you know. Good-day!"

The traveller bowed himself out, considerably puzzled, no less puzzled, in fact, than the doctor himself.

Dr. Holmes rang for Binks as soon as he had gone.

"Binks, tell all these gentlemen who are waiting, that I am very sorry, but I am unable to see them, as I am very busy."

"Yessir!"

Binks had reached the door in a few steps.

"And, Binks—" added the doctor thoughtfully.

"Yessir!"

"Just find Master Merry, if he is in, and tell him I should like to see him at once."

"Yessir!"

Binks went out, and the doctor sat thoughtful for a few moments. And after that he proceeded with his work.

As it happened, it was some time before Tom Merry was found by Binks.

The committee reached the school just as the travellers were retiring from St. Jim's, having heard that the doctor could not see them.

They all eyed the one who had had an interview, with jealousy, supposing that the reason for their own refusal was that he had secured all the orders there were to be obtained.

Seeing them go away, the juniors thought nothing could be done, and that it would be better to let well alone.

"Look at 'em!" said Blake grimly, as they came along.

"Bai Jove!" And Binks has taken their names in, too!" added Arthur Augustus.

"Yes," agreed Manners. "The hall door is open!"

"Phew!" whistled Figgins.

Skimpole blinked at them.

A feeling of horror passed through them all.

Then they saw one man come out, wearing a much more pleased expression than the rest.

They watched eagerly from the other side of the road, halting as they passed.

Binks was seen to make dramatic gesticulations to the crowd of silk-hatted men who were eagerly waiting for an interview with the head of St. Jim's.

"My hat!" whispered Tom Merry. "They're going!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Blake.

"Do!" gasped Tom Merry, not without some unconscious scorn. "Do!"

"Yes. What are you—"

"Why, let 'em go. They've done all the harm they can, or they wouldn't be going. It's almost certain the whole thing is out, and—"

"I feah that you are wight, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, who was carrying his hat under his arm.

"What shall we do if the doctor has found out about the present?" asked Blake.

"Oh, I don't know!" growled Tom Merry. "It's just rotten!"

That was exactly what they all felt about it.

It seemed to them that the effect of their work would be spoiled if it were discovered by the doctor before they had carried it through.

In doleful silence the Gold Watch Committee made their way into Tom Merry's study.

They were all very upset.

Even Lowther's usual good spirits and habit of seeing the funny side of things, could not help him to make a humorous remark upon the situation.

Tom Merry threw his cap into a corner.

Arthur Augustus stood making a minute examination of his silk hat, aided by his monocle, although it is doubtful whether he saw the damaged hat at which he was looking.

Tap, tap!

"Come in!" the juniors growled in chorus.

The knock sounded like trouble, for it was a fine afternoon, and few, if any, of the fellows were spending the "half" indoors.

The door opened, and Binks appeared.

"Dr. 'Olmes wants you, Master Merry!"

An involuntary groan escaped the lips of the members of the Gold Watch Committee.

Tom Merry looked at his chums, and then said involuntarily:

"All right!"

Binks went.

For a moment the hero of the Shell stood waiting.

But there was no suggestion forthcoming from the others.

A question, however, there was.

"Will you tell him?" asked Blake.

"Bai Jove—" began Arthur Augustus, looking up from his damaged hat.

"It seems to me, my sons," said Tom Merry, "that there's very little left to tell. But if the doctor doesn't already know what we had the travellers here for, I'll eat my head before I tell him!"

"Hear, hear!"

It was a very subdued exclamation that came from the members of the committee, but it was a very cheering one to Tom Merry, because it showed that he had them with him in the course he proposed to adopt.

Then, without losing a further moment, he hurried away.

Tom Merry, as he knocked at the Head's study door, would sooner have been going in to get a certain caning than to meet the unknown interview that awaited him.

"Come in!"

Tom Merry opened the door.

The doctor looked up, frowning, as he entered.

"Yes, sir?"

"A number of gentlemen have called here"—the Head indicating a heap of visiting-cards that made Tom Merry shudder—"with regard to orders for jewellery!"

The doctor paused a moment, and watched Tom Merry closely, whilst the latter was conscious of only one thing, and that was that the Head had mentioned jewellery, and not gold watches.

Could it be that the gold watch had not been mentioned?

Tom Merry held his breath, and waited.

"It appears Merry, that you have sent out inquiries on a large scale, and as you must be aware, it is against all rules to have over fifty representatives of jewellery firms calling here on account of a breach."

Tom Merry let his breath go with something of a sigh—a sigh of relief.

Clearly the doctor had not come upon the truth of the matter.

Were that so, Tom Merry could stand anything.

"Have you any explanation to offer, Merry?"

"N-n-no, sir!"

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"I had hoped that an explanation would have appeared to you to be due to me. I ask you again, have you none to offer?"

Tom Merry was silent for a few moments.

No, he told himself, he would not give the secret away.

He had the greatest respect for the authority of the Head

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NEXT
WEEK:

"WELL PLAYED!"

of St. Jim's, but here was a case where he would go through fire and water, rather than explain.

And he was conscious that if the doctor only could know, he would be the last man in the world to ask for the truth.

At length, as the doctor's frown increased, he answered.

"No, sir!"

The doctor's manner was very cold when he spoke next.

"In that case, Merry, I fear that I must demand an explanation of your extraordinary behaviour from you. You will tell me, please, the meaning of this extraordinary business!"

Tom Merry felt himself drifting into untold difficulty.

To refuse now meant practically defying the orders of the head of St. Jim's.

That was something for which Tom Merry had no relish.

Yet the present case was so different, somehow.

Oh, if he could only explain, without letting the doctor into the secret!

"Do you hear me, Merry?" asked the doctor severely.

"Yes, sir!"

"Then why don't you reply?"

"I'm afraid I can't, sir!"

The doctor looked puzzled.

In the case of almost any other junior he would have adopted very pre-emptory measures, but Tom Merry was known to him to be a lad whose honour could be relied upon.

"I fear that you are labouring under some mistaken idea, Merry," said the doctor presently. "You must be aware that I cannot allow this matter to rest where it is, but for the moment I am busy. You will go to your study, and remain there until I send for you."

"Yes, sir."

And Tom Merry, aware that the respite was only given to him to grant him a further opportunity of mending his ways, left the doctor's study.

The moment he had gone the doctor sent for Mr. Railton, who, however, was not in yet.

CHAPTER 14.

The Committee Discuss the Situation.

"GOT a licking?"

"Gated?"

"Does he know?"

"Buck up!"

"Cheero!"

These exclamations greeted Tom Merry as he returned from his interview with the doctor.

The hero of the Shell explained to the anxious juniors what had taken place.

"My hat! So it's not over!"

"More to follow—eh?"

"Bai Jove, deah boy! It is a most awkward posish!"

"It was ripping of Tom Merry not to let on!" observed Blake.

"Especially as he has got us all into the mess!" said Figgins.

"What d'you mean?" asked Manners.

"I knew what it would be when we let School House kids into it."

"You rotter!"

Blake glared at the New House junior.

"I'll give you a thiek—"

"Check him out!" suggested Manners.

Figgins looked defiant.

"Bai Jove!"

"Let School House kids into it, did you?" yelled Blake.

And as he spoke, he hit out and landed a heavy blow in Figgins's chest.

Figgins endeavoured to defend himself, but the attack had been too sudden.

"Ow-wow!"

With a yell he went backwards, bumped heavily into Arthur Augustus, who fell against the table with a crash, and then toppled over sideways, and fell with his head in the coal-box.

"You uttah—"

Figgins, unable to regain his balance, wobbled about for a couple of seconds, and then crashed into the fireplace.

"You let us in to it, did you?" roared Blake, standing over his fallen antagonist. "I'll jolly well—"

"You beast, Figgay! You've ruined my clo—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you asses laughing at? Poof! Can't you see I can't get my head free!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared as they observed the struggles of the swell of St. Jim's to get his head free.

It was not held tight, but the handle of the box had fallen over his head, and lay like a noose upon his neck.

Even Blake's features relaxed, angry as he was.

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"You wait till I got up!" spluttered Figgins, very red in the face, as he did his best to get upon his feet.

"Wescow!" yelled Gussy, struggling on the floor.

Manners stooped over the swell of St. Jim's. The latter grabbed at his neck, and Manners lost his balance and rolled on the top of him.

"Ow! You uttah—"

"Idiot!" gurgled Manners, in a stifled voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgay, on his feet again, rushed at Blake.

The latter got his head into chancery, and pommelled it.

BiFF—biFF!

"You—let—us in?"

Blake punctuated every word with a blow.

"Ow-wow!" yelled Figgins, his long, lanky body writhing with his struggles.

"Mannahs, you're chokin' me!"

"Leggo my neck, then!"

Bang, crash!

The coalbox was suddenly sent flying into the fireplace.

"Look here, you asses, this is not getting on with the washing!" grinned Tom Merry. "Come on, drop this rotting until afterwards!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Skimpole, who, crouching up in a corner, had blinked upon the scene from a point of personal safety.

"This is what we call arranging matters!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you let us in, then?" persisted Blake, still pommelling Figgins.

"N-n-no!" yelled Figgins, at last, unable to stand any more of it.

"Right-ho!" gasped Blake, exhausted by his exertions.

With all his force he sent Figgins flying from him.

BiFF!

Skimpole's was a point of safety no longer, for, to his amazement, Figgins landed with his head in the amateur Socialist's waistcoat.

"Ow-wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just look at my clothes!" said Gussy, once more upon his feet. "My collar is—"

"Look at his face!" grinned Lowther.

Certainly Gussy's face looked none the whiter for its close contact with the coalbox.

"You uttah wottahs! Mannahs, you are an uttah ass! I am not sure that I ought not to thwash you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, kids!" said Tom Merry. "Business!"

"I weally can't do bisny in this condish!" murmured Gussy.

"Then clear out! Are you going to get on with the washing, or—"

Figgins, to whom the last words were addressed, scrambled to his feet.

"It's pax for now!" he said meaningly.

"I wefuse to clear out, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus. "My clothes are uttally wuined."

"Oh, go and eat coaks!"

Tom Merry lifted the coalbox into its place, and seated himself at the table.

"Come on, kids—business!"

"Gussy, go and clean up, and hurry back!"

With a dignified stare, the swell of St. Jim's went away.

"Now, the question is, what's to be done!" said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther, with unnecessary emphasis.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The first point is," went on Tom Merry—"how much money have we got now?"

"Gussy's got it down."

"Where's Gussy?"

"He's gone to fivitate!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, my sons, we'll begin to look over the catalogues. Hand over a pile, Monty."

"Right-ho!" And Monty Lowther passed over some of the price lists.

"What about that chap you saw at the station?" asked Manners, vainly endeavouring to wipe away from his face the signs of his recent struggle with Arthur Augustus.

"I've made a note of certain pages in the catalogue to which he referred," said Tom Merry, "and we'll have a look at them!"

While the committee were engaged in searching the catalogues, Arthur Augustus returned in all the glory of a clean collar, and a change of clothes.

"Bai Jove! Now I feel as though I could do some bisny!" he murmured.

"The first business for you to do, Gussy, is to tell us the grand total, up to date, collected."



"I will consult my memowanda on the subject," replied the swell of St. Jim's.

He took out his pocket-book, and made a calculation. "Fifty-five pounds, seven shillings, and fourpence!" he announced.

"Does that include Skimmie's?" inquired Lowther.

"No, deah boy, it does not."

Skimpole blinked.

The juniors did not further refer to his subscription.

"We've still got to whip round," said Tom Merry. "We want to get the best watch that can be bought."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rather!"

"Any old thing will not do."

"What about trying the Fifth and Sixth Forms?" asked Tom Merry.

"I have already asked Monteith," began Skimpole.

"Monteith? Ha, ha!"

"Cheek!" said Figgins.

"Really, I do not—"

"You mean to make it a general school presentation?" asked Blake, following out Tom Merry's idea.

"Yes. Why not?"

"I shouldn't care to ask them," said Manners.

"Why not?"

"Looks as if we were asking for their help."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So it would."

"Bai Jove, we must not do that, deah boys! If they were to ask us—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear 'em doing it?" grinned Lowther.

"Weally, Lowther, I think they might."

"Not."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, for the time being let us look out a watch for seventy-five pounds," said Tom Merry. "We'll place the order, and then we've just got to make up the money, and that's all about it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove, that is a vewy good ideah!" said Gussy. "I can always rely on my guv'nor, you know."

"Hear, hear!"

The juniors set to work again with the catalogues, and after a long discussion, settled on a watch of which the specification was given, by one of the best known firms in the world, for seventy-five guineas.

They wrote off the order and enclosed a portion of the money on account, together with strict injunctions as to the monogram to be engraved upon it, and the necessity for secrecy in the matter.

"Now we'll post that at once," said Tom Merry.

The juniors were about to start when the door opened, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, entered.

"Hallo, Kildare!" chorused the youngsters.

"What are you all at, eh?" smiled the skipper of St. Jim's.

"We're holding a meeting," said Tom Merry.

"Is it about this presentation?" asked Kildare.

"Yes, Kildare. It is," answered Tom Merry. "It's between the Third and Fourth and the Shell, you know."

"Oh!"

"We've ordered a gold watch," went on Tom Merry, anxious to let Kildare know that they were so far advanced with their arrangements that no new idea could be listened to.

Tom Merry thought from the captain's manner that he had called about the presentation.

And, as it proved, he was right.

"You've ordered it, eh?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That is, of course, the order is written out?" said Manners.

"Of course," agreed Merry.

"Wathah!"

"But what about the money?" asked Kildare.

"Oh, that's all right! We've arranged all that."

"Yaas, bai Jove! We've got fifty-five pounds seven and fourpence, you know, Kildare. And, of course, my guv'nor—"

Kildare was obviously surprised.

It was now perfectly clear from his manner that he had come in at the instigation of the Fifth and Sixth to make some arrangement—possibly to take the matter out of the hands of the juniors.

"How much is the watch to cost?"

"Seventy-five guineas!" answered Merry.

"So you're still wanting funds?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"My guv'nor, you know—"

"Be better to keep it in the col., wouldn't it?"

"Oh, we shall get the money all right," said Tom Merry, with an air of confidence.

"You see," said Kildare, "the Fifth and Sixth have decided to give the Head a watch."

The juniors stared, but left the reply to that announcement to Tom Merry.

The latter was quite equal to the occasion.

"Oh, then he'll have two gold watches, that's all!"

Kildare suppressed a grin.

"The Fifth and Sixth thought you would like to chip in with them, perhaps!"

The committee relied entirely on Tom Merry.

He replied:

"Awfully sorry, Kildare, to disappoint. But, you see, our matter is all arranged."

"Yaas, wathah! You see, my guv'nor would—"

The juniors grinned.

They realised now that the Fifth and Sixth was practically asking them if they might join in.

Kildare was getting at it with due regard to the dignity of the Upper Forms; but that, clearly enough, was what it amounted to.

Meanwhile, Kildare was doing a sum in mental arithmetic. "You're still wanting twenty-three pounds, seven and eight?" he remarked.

"Something of that sort," agreed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, Kildare, did you do that in your head?" asked Gussy.

There was a grin.

"It's wight, too, Kildare!" added the swell of St. Jim's, after studying his notebook for a moment.

"You cheeky young sweep!" laughed Kildare. "Well, I think we had better subscribe that. You see, it will please the doctor all the more if it comes from the whole school."

"I'm not so sure, Kildare. But if these kids agree, I don't mind."

"What do you say?" asked the captain of the col., looking round at the amused faces.

"Of course," added Tom Merry, as an afterthought, "we manage the whole thing, and make the presentation as already arranged."

Seeing that the watch was already decided upon, Kildare made no objection to this, in common fairness, although he grinned inwardly as he wondered what some of the upper fellows would say.

"We all agree!" said Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

"Right-ho, kids, I'll have twenty-three pounds collected for you!"

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "It's awfully decent of you, you know; but you can buy a present of your own, if you like!"

Kildare suppressed a laugh and went out.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Gussy, when he had gone.

"Hurrah!" added Tom Merry. "They've had to come and ask us, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now we'll go and post the order."

"Hear, hear!"

They made for the door.

"Oh," suddenly ejaculated Tom Merry, "I forgot!"

"What?"

"Forgot which?"

"I'm confined to my study, by the doctor's orders."

"That's rotten!" said Blake.

"Never mind, my sons, it can't be helped. I'll do some prep. to fill in time."

And Tom Merry seated himself rather gloomily at his chair, and opened a book, which, however, once he was alone, failed to interest him.

He had not been long alone before the door opened and Mr. Raitton entered.

CHAPTER 15.

Mr. Raitton's Views.

BERGERNESS had grown apace at St. Jim's; and now not only the juniors, but the Fifth and Sixth Formers themselves, as well as the Form-masters, thought of little else.

Of course, the fact that the seniors had joined in Tom Merry's presentation was a great triumph, and was eagerly discussed all over the col.

It was probably because Mr. Raitton realised how successful Tom Merry was, that caused the Form-master to experience a keen sense of sympathy for the hero of the Shell, as he entered and found him confined to his room.

Yet, combined with that feeling of sympathy, there was at least a suggestion of a smile about the Form-master's mouth.

He had interviewed the Head. And he knew why Tom Merry was spending in. It was about that he had come to see him.

Dr. Holmes had told him about the arrival of the commercial travellers. Mr. Railton had guessed the explanation. "Merry, the doctor tells me that you have had an extraordinary procession of London jewellers here!"

For a moment Tom Merry looked serious.

If Mr. Railton had been consulted by the doctor about it, was there not a grave possibility that Mr. Railton might have explained what this piece of jewellery Tom Merry was buying, was?

The thought flashed through Tom Merry's mind.

But it did not do justice to Mr. Railton, as the junior was quickly to find.

"Yes, sir! Does the doctor know what I wanted to see them?"

"No, Merry."

"Hurrah—I mean, that's splendid, sir!"

Mr. Railton smiled.

"If the doctor had not sent for me, Merry, you would have been in a very awkward position. What would you have done?"

"Took the licking—that is put up with it, sir!" answered Tom Merry grimly.

"You would have refused the explanation he required?"

"I could not have helped myself, sir."

"Why not?"

"Why, sir, to explain would have meant giving away a secret which belonged to the whole school. It is not only I, but the whole school, who want the matter kept secret. And besides, I didn't send for the travellers. They just came of their own accord."

"How was that?"

Tom Merry explained, being quite unable to refrain from grinning.

There was no doubt that Mr. Railton smiled this time.

"Well, I think it will be quite fair to all concerned if I tell you exactly what has taken place between the doctor and myself. For this is quite an exceptional case, and I should like you to feel that I do not think you are in any way to blame; a view which I am sure the Head will take when he knows the truth."

"Thank you, sir."

Tom Merry brightened up considerably now.

"I guessed what the travellers wanted here, and I understood, therefore, that you had a good reason for refusing the explanation asked for. Now I have undertaken to the Head to look into the matter and report to him, but I shall not make my report until after the presentation."

"By Jove, sir! That is ripping of you!"

"The presentation must, therefore, be hurried on, and—"

"We've just posted the order for the watch."

"That's good, Merry! If you will give me the name of the firm, I will write a letter as well, hurrying them up."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

Tom Merry wrote down the required name and address, and handed it to the Form-master.

"And now, Merry, I want to speak to you about a side of this incident which does not appear to have occurred to you."

Tom Merry looked up.

There was a sudden seriousness which puzzled the junior, coming as it did when everything seemed satisfactorily settled.

"You were quite prepared to take punishment from the doctor for refusing to explain?"

"Why, yes, sir! I could not have helped it!"

"Well, Merry, if you had been punished you would have been the cause of placing the doctor in a very unfortunate and rather undignified position."

"Unfor—"

"Yes. Don't you see that the doctor would ultimately have found out that he had punished you for something done in the course of paying a tribute to him? And how do you suppose he would have felt in those circumstances?"

"My hat—or—I mean I never thought of that, sir!"

"So I could see."

"It would have been rot—beastly!"

"It is just as well, Merry, when taking so serious a step as defying your Head-master, to see all sides of the question first."

Mr. Railton had spoken in the most friendly tones, just as one great friend would have explained a difficult problem to another less enlightened in the particular matter under discussion.

"However, all trouble will be avoided. I hear the whole school have come in now, Merry?"

"Rather, sir!"

"Splendid! I am quite proud to have been chairman at your first meeting."

He had opened the study door.

"You are free to go out, Merry! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

The study door closed upon the Form-master, and Tom Merry

Merry sprang to his feet and cake-walked about the room in his elation.

CHAPTER 16.

Cousin Ethel Makes a Promise.

[T might have been anything between a wild Indian dance and a Cockney's idea of the Highland sword dance that Tom Merry was doing when suddenly the door opened.

"I say, kids—"

But Tom Merry got no further.

With one foot suspended in the air he stopped dead.

In the doorway stood a dainty picture of girlish beauty, surmounted with a charming hat trimmed with pink roses.

Behind her stood Arthur Augustus.

"Good afternoon, Tom Merry!"

"Miss Cleveland!"

"Yes. How are you?"

"Bai Jove, deah boy, have you gone off your wockah?"

Tom Merry, red in the face, did his best to collect his thoughts quickly.

"I'm quite well, Miss Cleveland," said he, shaking hands.

"I was just—"

"A beautiful afternoon. What a shame you can't go out!"

With infinite tact the girl thus prevented the necessity of Tom Merry explaining the comical antics he had been up to when she entered.

"Arthur has told me all about it. I am so pleased with your scheme, for the presentation is going so well, but very sorry that you have got into your difficulty with the doctor."

"But it's all over."

"Really?"

"Don't wot, deah boy!"

"It let Mr. Railton has fixed it all up splendidly!"

And Tom Merry explained what had happened.

"I considah Mr. Wainton is a wick!" said Arthur Augustus. "A weal, wippin' bwick!"

"He is splendid!" agreed D'Arcy's cousin Ethel. "Now all will be plain sailing?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I wonder, Tom Merry, if you would let me give a contribution towards the present? I should just love to join you!"

"That is very kind of you indeed! And why not? You are a frequent visitor here, and, for my part, I should only be too pleased to see you do so."

"I think, Ethel, that it is a mattah for the entire committay."

"Oh, if you think anyone will be offended, of course I'll not say anything further about it. Of course, if you don't want me to be in it—"

"Ethel, pway don't wot!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Of course, we should only be too pleased!" said Tom Merry hurriedly. "Gussy, you're an—or—dummy!"

"Tom Mewwy, I wufuse to be called a dummy in the pwesence of a lady!"

"And I'm sure you would not quarrel in the presence of one, would you, Arthur?" asked Cousin Ethel coyly.

"Bai Jove, Ethel, I am exceedingly sowwy!"

And Arthur Augustus bowed.

"I'm perfectly sure the committee will be delighted to know that you are so interested in the matter. Hallo, here comes Figgins!"

Figgins came bowling into the study, not expecting to see Cousin Ethel there.

"I say, you ass—"

The next moment he stopped, and his face went as red as a Turner sunset.

"Oh, I—I didn't see!" he stammered.

"How do you do, Figgins?" asked Cousin Ethel, pretending not to notice his confusion.

"Quite well, thank you, Miss Cleveland! I didn't know you were coming."

"Neither did I until the very last moment. Are you on the committee for the presentation?"

"Yes, rather! They couldn't manage it by—"

"By themselves! Of course not!" said Cousin Ethel.

Figgy flushed up again.

"I wonder," he said, stammering a good deal, after a pause which appeared to be very uncomfortable for him, "whether Miss Cleveland would present the watch to the doctor?"

"Figgy, I wogard that as a wippin' suggest!"

"A good wheeze!" said Tom Merry.

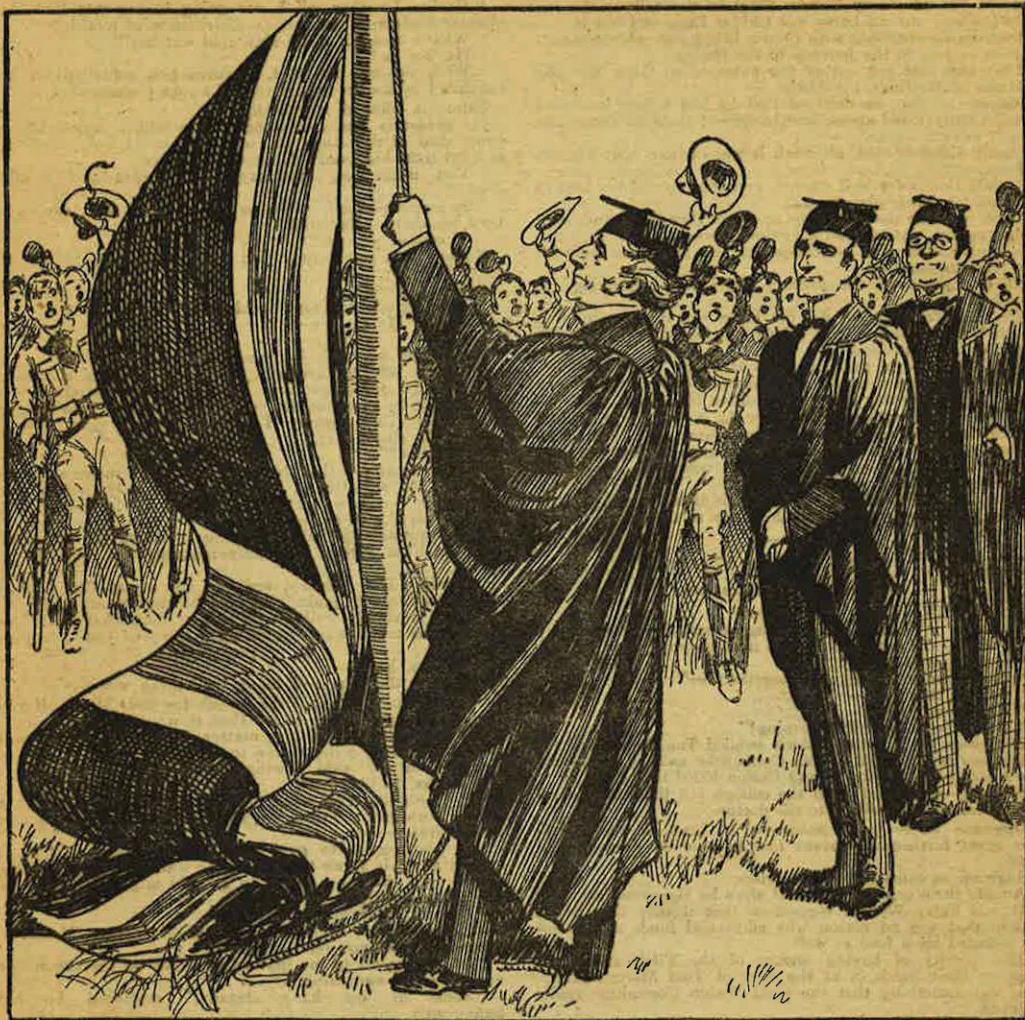
At that moment the rest of the committee came in, and after exchanging greetings with Cousin Ethel, they listened to the proposition by Figgins.

Lowther deliberately winked at Tom Merry when he heard it was Figgins's own original idea.

But Cousin Ethel did not see that.

"I think it's a splendid idea!" agreed Blake. "I can hardly believe Figgins thought of it!"

"Look here, Blake!"



"Hip, hip, hurrah!" Led by the Cadet Corps, the Grammarlans cheered lustily as Dr. Monk ran the halyard through his fingers, and hoisted the Union Jack to the top of the flagstaff.
(An incident in the specially-written, long, complete school tale of Gordon Gay & Co. entitled: "EMPIRE DAY AT RYLCOMBE," by Prosper Howard, in "THE EMPIRE" Library. Now on sale, price one halfpenny.)

"Ripping wheeze—"

"Will you consent to do it for us, Miss Cleveland?" asked Tom Merry.

"I should be only too pleased, if the senior boys won't mind."

"What have they got to mind about?" said Figgins savagely.

"Bai Jove! They're nothin' to do with it, Ethel! We are the committay, aren't we, deah boys?"

"Rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

"When is it to be?"

"We shall have to write and let you know. It all depends when the watchmakers send the tick-er-watch!" answered Tom Merry.

"All right, then, Tom Merry, I'll come, if you let me know the day. It was very kind of you to suggest me, Figgins."

Figgins beamed.

"It isn't often he thinks of anything decent, either!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins himself joined in the laugh.

He could stand even one of Lowther's jokes against himself after the gracious thanks of Cousin Ethel.

"Will you stay to tea, Miss Cleveland?" asked Blake.

"Yes—" began Figgins.

"I didn't ask you, Figgy. I asked Miss Cleveland."

"No, thank you, Blake! I have promised to get back. But next time I will."

"Are you sure you can't stay?" asked Figgins.

"Quite sure, thank you!"

"Then we're all very sorry," said Tom Merry, speaking for the rest of the juniors.

"Rather!"

"You are not more sorry than I!" replied Cousin Ethel. "But I am really afraid it is quite impossible. Perhaps, Arthur, you will see me to the station?"

"I'll come, too!" said Figgins.

"Yes; so will I!" echoed Blake.

"We'll come, if we may!" said Tom Merry.

Miss Cleveland smiled her assent, and the Gold Watch Committee put aside its tasks for the time being for the more

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pleasant one of seeing Cousin Ethel to the railway-station.

On the way out the party met Clifton Dane and Noble. Exchanging greetings with Cousin Ethel, they obtained permission to join in the journey to the station.

They had just got out of the gates when Glyn, the boy inventor of St. Jim's, cycled up.

Raising his cap, he declared that he had a new invention to tell Cousin Ethel about, and begged of them to wait while he put away his bike.

Cousin Ethel agreed, although it was obvious that Figgins did not.

At last they were well started, and Figgins did his best to walk next to their girl chum.

Upon one side she was taken up by Arthur Augustus, who, as her cousin, claimed and held the premier right of escort.

Upon the other side her companion was never the same for two minutes together.

At one point of the journey Glyn was explaining his invention.

The next moment, he did not know exactly how it came about, but he found himself a long way behind, with Figgins in the enviable position.

But Figgins, like the favourites at Court in olden times, was allowed but a short spell of triumph, Blake manning in some inexplicable way to get the position himself.

Noble soon supplanted Blake, but the Australian chum had scarcely said two words before Clifton Dane was in his place.

Tom Merry, however, had all along intended that position for himself, and he soon got it, and, what was more than the others had been able to do, held it.

It was, in a subdued way, a very exciting walk, and perhaps Cousin Ethel enjoyed it as much as any of them.

CHAPTER 17.

Arranging the Speeches.

"WHEN will the watch come?"

"When are you going to present it?"

"I say, Merry, has it come yet?"

"Is it to be to-morrow?"

"Have you got enough tin together?"

"To buy that gold?"

"Has it come yet?"

"Will it be here by the morning?"

Such were the questions which assailed Tom Merry and his colleagues of the Gold Watch Committee as they re-entered the school grounds after seeing Cousin Ethel to the station.

Nothing was talked of in the college but the presentation to be made by the fellows to the doctor.

Opposing forces made peace—or, at least, a truce—until this great forthcoming event had become an accomplished fact.

Suggestions came from all quarters.

Among them one was repeated often by the same boy.

It was Fatty Wynne's suggestion that if they did give a watch, that was no reason why additional funds should not be collected for a feed as well.

The novelty of having seniors of the Fifth and Sixth popping their heads in at the door of Tom Merry's study, too, was something that the Gold Watch Committee really enjoyed.

The Upper fellows were, it is true, off-handed in their manner, but keenness breathed in every word.

"I say, don't you kids go and make a mess of it, you know!" said a Sixth-Former.

"You shall hear as soon as the watch arrives," replied Tom Merry.

And the Sixth-Former went away.

When he had gone the juniors enjoyed a chuckle.

But it was a brief chuckle, because the next inquiry came so quickly on the other one.

A moment after the Sixth-Former just referred to had left the study the door opened, and Skimpole entered.

Skimpole was the last member of the committee to arrive on this occasion.

"Come on, Skimmy! We've got to arrange what is to be said at the presentation."

"I am really sorry to be late!" said Skimpole blinking. "But I have just been finishing the three thousandth page of my manuscript for my book on Socialism, and—"

"Well, we don't want to hear about it!"

"Really, Merry, I have just been dealing with a most interesting problem. It is—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Let's get to bisnny, deah boy!"

"D'Arcy, I must point out what that problem is, because it bears upon our present labours!"

"Get it off your chest, quick!"

"We don't want a whole chapter, mind!" said Lowther, shaking a warning finger.

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"Really, Lowther, all I was going to say was that this chapter deals with the unequal distribution of wealth."

"What's that got to do with gold watches?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you see, Lowther, it shows how contributions are regulated by the amount of capital a man possesses."

Skimpole blinked awkwardly.

He evidently had something to say which caused him a great deal of difficulty, and which he could not get disentangled from his usual talk about Socialism.

"You uttah ass, Skimmy! What are you talking about?"

"It seems perfectly plain to me, D'Arcy, that wealth is very unevenly distributed!"

"Of course, you ass!"

"Have you really only just found that out, Skimmy?" asked Lowther.

"Really, I—"

"Oh, ring off, you ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Really, Merry, I—"

"Rats!"

"Let's get on with the washing."

Skimpole blinked, and relapsed into thoughtful silence.

"The first thing we have to do is to decide about the speeches to be given at the presentation," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I don't think you need wovwy your head about that."

"Why not?"

"Why, because I shall be vevy pleased to make a speech for you. As a matter of fact, I have already thought one out, and it is only a matter of going over it to—"

"Go hon!" put in Lowther.

"The question is, who is going to make the speech?" went on Tom Merry, purposely ignoring the swell of St. Jim's.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, are you not aware that I have already offered to make a speech for the committay?"

"I am perfectly well aware of that, but what I am not aware of is that the committee have accepted your generous offer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—I mean, you uttah wot—"

"I don't mind making the speech for you, Merry, if you like. Of course, I am aware that it wants—"

"Wubbish, Skimmy! A matter of this sort requires a man with tact and disowetion to—"

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther significantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It would be only right to have the speech made by a New House fellow," said Figgins. "I am sure the doctor would prefer—"

"If just occurs to me," broke in Manners, "that as Cousin Ethel is going to present the watch on behalf of the school, that the exact words to be said might very well be left to her excellent discretion."

"Hurrah, Manners!"

"I wogard that as a most sensible obsevation, Mannahs. I congwatulate you on—"

"Still, it seems to me that some fellow on the committee ought to say something."

"Some of 'em have already," muttered Lowther humorously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What I think the doctor would like best," went on Tom Merry, "would be to receive the watch from Cousin Ethel's hand, and—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And then to receive the committee as a sort of deputation, the members to make a few remarks. Or, better still, one of them to act as spokesman, and—"

"And the others to prompt him whenever he broke down," put in Manners.

"Bai Jove, that seems a vevy good suggest. I weally think that if you all come in with me, and I make a few wemarks to the doctor, that—"

"You'll bust the whole show!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I considah that a most wewehensible insinuation. What do you mean by suggestin'—"

"Oh, nothing, of course, Gussy! Only you know what an ass you are. You would only—"

"Lowthah, I wefuse to be called an ass! I will administah a most feashful thwashin' to you if you don't—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! Let's get on with the washing."

"I wefuse—"

"You'll get bumped in a minato!"

ANSWERS

"I refuse to be bumped. I—"

"Shut up, you ass! Can't you see you're taking up all the time with your rot?"

"Tom Mewwy, you're an impertinent ass! I—"

"I know what we'll do, my sons," said Tom Merry; "we'll all make speeches."

"Hear, hear!"

This suggestion met with the immediate approval of the committee, and the matter was considered settled.

"And now, kids, there being no further business to do, the committee is stashed up until the ticker arrives." And Tom Merry put on his cap and made for the door.

"I should like a few words with you in private, Tom Merry," said Skimpole.

Tom Merry eyed the genius of the Shell.

The request was rather an extraordinary one coming from that source, and the tone in which Skimpole spoke was not quite his ordinary one.

"Right-ho! When these asses have cleared out," said the hero of the Shell.

CHAPTER 18.

Skimpole's Proposals.

"TOM MERRY!" said Skimpole, speaking not quite so readily as usual, and blinking more than usual, when they were alone.

"Well, ass, what d'you want?"

"I have written an extra contribution for the 'Weekly.'"

"Well?"

"I have it here, Merry."

And Skimpole pulled a bulky manuscript from his pocket. "Great Scott! What are you playing at, Skimmay? Why, you ass, the paper wouldn't hold it if there were nothing else in it; and as we don't want to kill the journal, I'm certainly not going to put in all your stuff."

Skimpole blinked, and after a moment's silence said:

"I suggest, Merry, that you use it as a serial."

"All right, I'll read it. What's it about?"

"It's about the unequal distribution of wealth, Merry."

"You seem mad on that subject, Skimmay."

Tom Merry opened a drawer in his desk and crammed the manuscript in among a lot of very mixed oddments.

Skimpole stood blinking at him.

"Merry!"

"Well, ass? Upon my word, I believe you've gone off your chump!"

"What I wanted to ask you, Tom Merry, was, could we not be paid for our contributions to the 'Weekly'?"

"I—"

Tom Merry first stared; then he burst out laughing.

"I really see nothing to laugh at," murmured Skimpole quite seriously. "It is work, and every man, under my system of Socialism, would be worthy of his hire."

"But, my dear ass, where would the money come from?"

"That, Merry, is for the management to arrange."

"Ha, ha! That's good Socialism! Of course, that's what they all say. But, you ass, where do you think the management of the 'Weekly' is going to get the money from to pay for contributions?"

"That, of course, is for the management to decide, Merry," answered Skimpole, with great solemnity. "As a sincere Socialist, I should not interfere with them in their work."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry roared with laughter.

Then, suddenly, something about Skimpole's manner suggested an idea to him, and he regarded the amateur Socialist seriously.

"Right-ho, Skimmay!" he said suddenly, in altered tones. "Leave it with me. We'll look into it."

"I should like to know to-morrow morning, Merry, if payment could be made for that manuscript just now, it would be a very great convenience to me."

"Right-ho! I'll let you know, Skimmay."

"Thank you, Merry!"

And with short, quick, jerky steps the amateur Socialist hurried out of the study.

Left to himself, Tom Merry was thoughtful for a moment. Then he suddenly made up his mind about the problem that occupied his attention.

He rushed out of the study, and sought Arthur Augustus, whom he found answering—or, rather, trying to answer—a dozen questions at once as when the watch was expected to arrive from the watchmaker's.

"Gussy, I want a word with you, my son."

"Yaas, deah boy!"

The pair evaded the questioners, and made their way into Tom Merry's study.

"Skimmay has just been talking to me," said the hero of the Shell.

"Yaas?"

"Has he weighed in his sub. yet?"

"No, deah boy."

"Well, he wants to know whether the 'Weekly' can afford to pay for contributions."

"Bai Jove!"

"And he has written an extra one this week."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared through his monocle.

"He wants to be paid for it by to-morrow."

"Bai Jove, deah boy!"

"I was wondering whether he wants the money for his sub."

Arthur Augustus stared. After a long pause, he said:

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, I should nevah have thought of that! Skimmay's an ass!"

"Quite so; but I think he's anxious to subscribe."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You see, Gussy, I'm a bit hard up; the whole of the five I got to-day has gone for my sub."

"Yaas, wathah! But I've got a couple of sovs., deah boy. If you want to pay poor old Skimmay, the ass, for his contubition, you're quite welcome to that."

"Thanks, awfully! I'll borrow it."

"I think, Tom Mewwy, you have stuwck a wipping ideah. I will get the two sovs. twom my othah twousahs pocket at once."

"Good!"

Arthur Augustus went off, and returned in a very little while with the two sovereigns.

"There you are, deah boy! I think it is a wippin' ideah of yours. I wish it had occurred to me."

"Thanks!"

The two were silent for a few moments, during which Arthur Augustus surveyed Tom Merry through his monocle studiously.

"Bai Jove!" he said at last. "You're a bwick, Tom Mewwy!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

And the hero of the Shell hurried off to Skimpole's study, and paid him two sovereigns for his contribution, calling him an ass for writing such stuff, and threatening to kill him if he wrote any more.

CHAPTER 19.

The Presentation.

THE morning following the events recorded in the last chapter was the opening of a red-letter day in the annals of St. Jim's.

The old col. had been proud of many a master and many a student, but it had certainly never been more proud than it was to-day.

The letter from Mr. Railton, the Form-master, had worked magic with the great firm of jewellers, who had immediately had the doctor's initials engraved upon the case of one of the best gold watches that ever was made.

The firm wired Mr. Railton that the watch was coming by train, in the care of a special messenger, and would arrive by one o'clock.

Mr. Railton communicated the news to Tom Merry before breakfast.

The Gold Watch Committee, each member answering half a dozen questions at once to seniors, fags, and Fourth-Formers, held a meeting twenty minutes before breakfast, certainly the earliest committee meeting that had ever been held within the old walls of St. James's College.

"Before you begin your business, Tom Merry," said Skimpole, blinking, "I must have a word with D'Arcy."

Then Skimpole buttonholed the swell of St. Jim's.

"I wish to hand you my sub," said the genius of the Shell.

"Thank you, deah boy!"

"Here are two sovereigns! If this collection had been made a hundred years hence, I should have been able to give five times as much; but it's all I can manage now. There you are, D'Arcy, that will make two pounds less for you to take from the senior fellows; who, really, come after us in this very important matter."

"I considah that this is vewy handsome of you, Skimmay," said D'Arcy, booking the amount and taking the money.

Then he turned to the committee.

"Look heah, deah boys!"

"Where?" asked Lowther.

"Skimmay has given us a most handsome contubition of two pounds towards the present. That makes two less to come twom the Fifth and Sixth."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Skimmay!"

"It is only my duty to appreciate a man like the doctor," began Skimmay.

"Now, don't spoil it by making a speech," said Manners.

Tom Merry did not look at Arthur Augustus, nor Arthur

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Augustus at Tom Merry during this part of the business, but both felt that the event was in keeping with the great day that was upon them.

Arthur Augustus tried to think of something else, and in doing so, thought of a score he had still to settle with Skimpole.

"Have you returned the shillin' to Mellish, deah boy?" he asked.

"No, D'Arcy. You see—"

"Then you are an nttah wottah! You must return—"

"But, D'Arcy, through Mellish I have lost the shillin'!"

"How?"

"What d'you mean?" asked Manners.

The whole of the committee became immediately interested.

Skimpole explained what had happened.

"The rotter!" was the comment that came from every member of the committee.

"Bai Jove!" added Gussy, as an afterthought. "And, aftah all, there is no beastly list to go to the doctor!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's been forgotten."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nevah mind, deah boys, as we are all going to make a speech, the doctah will heah all about it."

"Heah, heah!"

"Gussy's speech will be enough for any one man to stand!" observed Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I—"

"Look here, my sons! We've got no time to lose. If we don't get on with the washing we sha'n't get through before brekker."

Tom Merry's advice was listened to, for it was already getting late.

"What about Cousin Ethel?" asked Figgins, reddening.

"Bai Jove, Figgay, deah boy, I must send her a wire!"

"That's most important, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"Vewy true, deah boy! I will send the wire immediately the committay is over."

"Then the next point is, kids," went on Tom Merry, "the time of the presentation. Mr. Railton suggests that we go to the doctor's study at half-past two!"

"Mr. Railton knows the best time, deah boys," said Gussy. "It's beastly awkward, though. It gives so little time for a fellah to change his clothes."

"Clothes don't count when you're doing a job like this," said Lowther, giving utterance to something that was very true, although the humourist of the Shell did not know it.

"Right-ho, my sons! It's half-past two, then?"

"Heah, heah!"

"Will that suit Cousin Ethel?" asked Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah! She pwomised to come, and she will be theah."

"Heah, heah!"

"Then the only other point is," went on Tom Merry—"that we arrange to accompany Miss Cleveland to the doctor's study with the ticker, and let all the fellows know that it is going to take place."

"Heah, heah!"

"Is there nothing else to arrange?" asked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Unless we alter the arrangement of your nose!" grinned Tom Merry, "I know of nothing!"

With a rush the committee broke up, each member going his own way to prepare for breakfast, whilst Arthur Augustus went to send off the wire to Cousin Ethel.

Binks began to feel the brightness of the day by the size of the tip which the swell of St. Jim's gave him for hurrying to the post-office at once.

Binks was accustomed to receiving good tips from Arthur Augustus, but the present one, in his own words, "banged the lot!"

Then came breakfast.

And in this respect, Fatty Wynn explained afterwards on many occasions, the day was a red-letter one.

For, with the single exception of himself, the juniors were quite unequal to eating.

But if the breakfast was a failure what was to be said of the morning lessons.

Mr. Railton, ever a kind, but also a just master, found his patience frequently exhausted.

When Arthur Augustus was awarded fifty lines for talking in class, after being warned six times, he got up and thanked the master as effusively as though he had just received a very handsome present.

It was no good.

Lessons had to go by the board; and Mr. Railton, knowing the cause, eventually let matters take their course.

"What time will it be there?"

"Will it keep good time, Tom Merry?"

"I'm afraid it will be too late!"

"Yes, it would have been much better to have had a feed."

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Whispered across the class, these were the remarks that came to Tom Merry's ears all the morning.

At last, twenty minutes before the proper time, Mr. Railton dismissed the class.

With a rush the juniors went for the door.

D'Arcy, Tom Merry, Clifton Dane, and Noble collided in the doorway.

"Leggo my clothes, you beast!" cried D'Arcy. "I shall have to chance—"

"Ow, wow!"

Bill! Crash!

The crowd came upon the struggling group.

Down they went upon the floor, whilst others climbed over their backs and made for Tom Merry's study.

"Now, boys, do be careful!" said Mr. Railton, to whose well-tried patience this was about the last straw.

"Bai Jove, you uttah!"

But D'Arcy could not get up.

They wriggled all over him and rolled him over and over on the dusty floor.

Tom Merry at last got free and made a dash for his study.

Had the messenger arrived with the watch?

When he reached his study he found he could not get in.

It was packed full of juniors who had reached there before him.

"Pull 'em out, Blake! Come on, Figgay, lend a hand!" yelled Tom Merry.

The committee thus summoned to do an unexpected piece of work, set to with a will.

Figgins got one eye closed up immediately, and couldn't tell who his assailant was.

His one anxiety now was what would Cousin Ethel think?

But the damaged eye had a far-reaching effect, for it made him a most useful member of the committee then.

He lugged and tore and pulled at every junior that came in his way, while there was one left in the study.

"That's got rid of 'em!" panted Tom Merry, brushing away some signs of strife from his nose, when at last the committee stood alone in the room.

"My hat, yes! But hasn't the watch come, then?" asked Blake.

"I thought they were in here looking for it."

"No fear, my sons; the chap wouldn't let go of that watch without my signature."

"Whatever you do, don't die before it comes!" said Lowther.

"Cheerful chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall go and change my attire," said Gussy. "Pway, Tom Merry, send for me the moment the watch arrives."

"Right-ho!"

Figgins stood holding his hand up to a red eye.

"Figgay, my boy, you had better come and put some cold cream on your eye. I should not like Cousin Ethel to see one of my committay with a beastly optic like that!"

Figgins accepted the offer of cold cream with alacrity.

"Have you got the watch?" asked Kildare, coming in suddenly.

"Not yet, Kildare. I hope the chap hasn't lost the train!"

"You haven't given him time to get from the station yet."

"That's why you came in to see it, eh, Kildare?"

There was a general laugh.

Everybody laughed at anybody to-day. It was a red-letter day—the day of the presentation.

At last the messenger arrived, and immediately after him came Cousin Ethel.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, gazing on the beautiful watch.

"Ripping!"

"My hat!"

"Isn't it a stunner!"

The committee had certainly never seen a watch to compare with it.

Even the one of Lord Eastwood's, to which Arthur Augustus had referred, was not, he now said, to be compared with this.

They looked at it shut, they looked at it open. They listened to its ticking, and waited with breathless eagerness for the church clock to strike so that they could compare the time.

The committee set their own watches by it, and Skimpole said that under Socialism every working man would have one like it.

"We'll give it to Railton until after dinner," said Tom Merry. "We can't have it on show here, it'll get smashed. If anybody wants to see it, they must go to Railton."

"Good wheeze!"

"That's the ticket!"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy! Hark, here come the chaps! They've seen the messenger."

Tom Merry turned the key in the lock.

"Open this door!"

NEXT WEEK: "WELL PLAYED!"

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"Look here, kid, where's that watch?"

"The young fools will overwind it, or—"

Bang! Crash!

"Open this door!"

The din outside was indescribable.

"How are you going to get to Mr. Railton with it, Merry?"

asked Blake eagerly.

"You'll get mobbed!"

"And the watch will get smashed!" added Manners.

"No fear!" said Tom Merry. "We'll pretend Skimpole has got it. You kids get him up in the corner, and keep asking him to let you see it, while I open the door. Then while they're asking Skimmy to let them see it, I'll slip off to Railton."

"Good wheeze!"

"I regard that as a wippin' ideal!"

"Splendid!"

"Ready?" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The door opened.

Juniors and seniors were crowded there.

"Where's that watch?"

"We've got as much right to see it as—"

"Who's got it?"

"Hi, you're smashing me!"

"Gerroff my foot!"

"Tom Merry, where's that watch?"

The scene was indescribable.

"Skimmy, he'll show you!" yelled Tom Merry.

They swooped down upon Skimmy, and the amateur Socialist thought that he would never live to finish his book on Socialism.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry escaped, and hurried off to Mr. Railton, who undertook to take charge of it until he actually placed it in Cousin Ethel's hand in the doctor's room. The doctor will place it on view when he has it in his possession, and there'll be less likelihood of an accident to it than, whilst every fellow will get an opportunity to see it."

"Have you arranged with the doctor yet, sir?"

"No; he knows nothing yet. I shall go in at half-past two, and ask him to receive a deputation, then I shall open the door, and Miss Cleveland and the committee will come in."

"I see, sir!" said Tom Merry, trembling with excitement.

Dr. Holmes sat at his desk, hard at work, as usual.

Mr. Railton had just entered the room to speak to him.

Outside stood, crowded against the door, Cousin Ethel and the Gold Watch Committee.

Figgins showed a continual desire to turn away one side of his face from her, and perhaps it was as well, for the cold cream, although it may have been comforting, did not improve the appearance.

After the committee, stretching in a long line all the way along the corridor were the fellows, those who supported the deputation by their presence, and that was everybody in the school.

Down the stairs the queue extended, and outside into the quad, where, there being breadth of space, the long line resolved itself into a mob, which, being able to see nothing of the proceedings, contented itself with pushing those in front as hard as possible.

"You're smashing me to Lits!"

"Aas, that's my toe!"

"O-wow! Get your boot off my foot!"

These were the cries that ascended in the crowded passage. Suddenly a light shot across the passage, and they knew the Head's door had been opened.

Mr. Railton looked out.

"Come along, Miss Cleveland, and the committee!" he whispered; and he slipped the watch, which was in a handsome leather case, into her hand.

The doctor heard the noise outside, and looked about him in amazement.

He bowed to Miss Cleveland without understanding why she was there.

"Dr. Holmes," she said. "It is my very great pleasure to hand you on behalf of this committee, representing the whole of the students at St. Jim's, this gold watch as a token of their—of their deep respect and affection for you."

The doctor was staring blankly before him.

As yet he could not realise what was taking place.

The sweet voice of Cousin Ethel and her well-chosen words, said with a simplicity that made them ever to be remembered, sounded as yet afar off to him. Yet they were coming nearer.

Yes, now he heard distinctly:

"The present moment has been chosen, Dr. Holmes, for making you this presentation, because every boy in your college wishes also to mark the pride he feels in a head master who should so distinguish himself in the cause of science as you have done! Here is the watch"—she held it

out towards him. "My hope is that you may live long to count the time by it, and enjoy the respect and esteem of the boys of St. Jim's."

Dr. Holmes took the watch, his face alight with ineffable pleasure.

The juniors had each prepared a speech, and Tom Merry was to lead off after Cousin Ethel.

But their breath was quite taken away by the very excellence with which she had done her part.

They stood staring at the doctor, and then saw that his eyes had not quite their usual look about them.

There was a pause.

"Go on, Tom Merry!" whispered Blake.

"Ass! He's forgotten."

"Bai Jove!"

"You see, doctor," Tom Merry began—it was not the beginning he had intended, but it was a start—the kids—that is the fellows—thought that you would prefer a watch to a cup!"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, you're making a feahful hash of it!" broke in Arthur Augustus. "Doctah—er—it is with vewy great pleas—"

"I mean, of course," went on Tom Merry.

"We hope it'll keep good time, sir!" put in Blake.

"Shut up, you asses!" said Tom Merry, under his breath.

The doctor realised that the speeches they had intended had got rather mixed.

"I am deeply grateful for all the good things you would tell me!" he said, with charming simplicity.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Railton," said the doctor, "would you mind getting the fellows into the big hall for me?"

"Certainly!"

The Form-master went out, and passed the word along that the doctor wanted to talk to the fellows in the hall.

The committee stood in doubt for a few moments, and then, finding that Mr. Railton was going out, turned and followed him.

"You will wait for me, Miss Cleveland?" asked the doctor, placing a chair for her.

"Well I'm blest!" said Figgins to himself, as he looked over his shoulder.

Soon the boys were crowded into the big hall, and the doctor, carrying the watch in his hand, and leading Cousin Ethel, entered.

Cheer after cheer rang out.

"Boys," he said, his voice unsteady with emotion, "this moment is one of the greatest that I have ever known. The honour which the world at large has done me does not afford me one tittle of the pleasure I get from this occasion.

"The affection which the boys of St. Jim's bear me, is something which it was not in the power of kings to do for me. You have heaped up my cup of pleasure to the brim.

"I thank all you boys for giving me this great moment, and I shall never look at this watch without thrilling with happiness.

"It is perhaps right that I should refer more particularly to the committee. Tom Merry—"

"Hurrah! Hear, hear!"

"He and his friends are certainly to be congratulated upon the way in which they have carried out their part in this kind presentation!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The secrecy with which the matter has been handled does the greatest credit to all concerned, as well as adding immeasurably to my pleasure."

"Hear, hear!"

"I think, boys, that we should now take a half holiday."

"Hear, hear!"

"I must confess that I am too overjoyed to work myself."

The doctor repeated his thanks, and cheers came forth from the assembled school like which none had been heard before.

Then they broke up, some going to the doctor's study to see the watch, others going into the fields.

All that afternoon fellows came and went in and out of the study, looking at the prize which the doctor had valued so highly.

Figgins, now that the presentation was over, and Cousin Ethel had returned, went over again to the New House, for there were immediate signs that the Gold Watch Committee was dissolved.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally think it was wippin'! The doctah was weally quite affected!"

"Rather!"

"I vote," said Tom Merry, "that we have a sprint. I feel as though I must run or jump, or do something!"

And a sprint they had, to relieve feelings which had been at the highest tension.

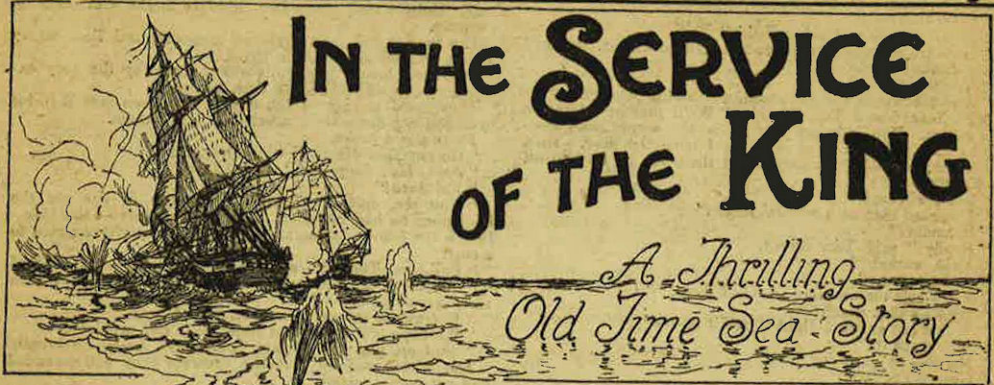
THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "Well Played!" by Martin Clifford, next Thursday.)

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The First Chapters of a Splendid Serial Story.



By Lieutenant Lefevre.

READ THIS FIRST!

Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, whom peculiar circumstances have forced to become a highwayman, one night holds up the carriage of Admiral Sir Sampson Eastlake. He is overpowered, however; but the good old admiral offers him a chance of serving the King in the Navy instead of handing him over to justice. Oswald, therefore, joins the frigate *Catapult* as a midshipman, under the name of John Smith. The frigate is wrecked owing to the incapacity of Captain Burgoyne, her drunken commander, and a mere handful of the crew escape in a small boat, which is entirely unprovisioned. Mr. Fryer, the first lieutenant, is mortally injured, and becomes delirious. "How long will he take to die?" asks the captain hoarsely, of the ship's doctor, as the dying man's ravings become more violent.

(Now go on with the story.)

An Anxious Time.

"Silence!" said Telford sternly.

"You order me! You dare?" shouted the captain, with an oath.

He had been drinking from the flask, and the raw spirits had set his blood and brain afire.

"Yes, I order you. Be silent!" said the doctor sternly.

His voice seemed to have an effect on the brute. He fell back in his seat, and relapsed into sulky silence.

"Telford, are you here? It is dark. Am I alone? What is it?"

It was Mr. Fryer's voice. Once more he was conscious.

"Yes; I am here, Fryer. How are you feeling?"

"I am dying, old friend; but, thank Heaven, I do not suffer now! I have been dreaming, Telford. How long before the light?"

"Two or three hours before dawn," replied the doctor quietly.

Silence for a moment. Then, in a regretful voice, Mr. Fryer spoke:

"I am sorry. I shall never see the sun again—never again! Two or three hours. It is too long, Telford. My time is shorter than that."

Then a long pause.

"You are still here, near me, Telford? How dark it is—how dark and silent! Heaven bless you, Telford! Heaven bless you all!"

And the silence—a silence this time eternal.

The doctor felt the hand in his grow cold and rigid. He bent low, and placed his cheek against Mr. Fryer's lips.

"He is dead!" he said quietly.

There was no answer, only a stifled, half-choking sob from Babbington, but in the darkness none knew from whom it came.

The night was waning. A gray light had come stealing up over the sea and sky. Presently, in the east, a pale primrose glow; a shaft of yellow light struck upwards, piercing the grey mist; and then, with a rush, the sun came up in primrose and violet. Another day had dawned.

And by the light of the new day they gazed anxiously over the wide expanse of water, and saw nothing.

"We shall sign a sail to-day," said Mr. Pringle hopefully.

"Please Heaven!" said the young Marine lieutenant.

But as the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens, the hope that had come to them with the dawn dissolved.

Fiercely the sun's rays beat down upon them, and nowhere was there shelter—not one spot of shelter for their aching, throbbing heads, not one drop of moisture for their parched lips.

Early in the morning they had cast the body of the lieutenant overboard, and it had sunk at once like a stone down into the cool, green depth of the sea.

In the stern sheets Mr. Brabazon crouched, shielding his head from the sun with his arm; the captain beside him, lying back apparently asleep, the empty flask lying by his feet.

Forward, Oswald, Maxwell, and Babbington were huddled together, watching with straining, aching eyes the endless line of the horizon stretching away unbroken, and encompassing them on every side.

The rest were sitting and crouching in attitudes of utter dejection in the middle of the boat.

Benton seemed to be suffering the most. His lips were shrivelled and agape, showing his tongue, swollen and black. He lay flat upon his back, with his face turned up towards the sweltering sun, groaning and muttering inarticulately, and scratching ceaselessly with his finger-nails at the planks on which he lay.

Dr. Telford tore off the sleeve of his shirt, and steeped it in sea water, then bound it round the head of the semi-conscious man. For a few moments it seemed to afford him relief, and then the hot rays drew the water out of it in a cloud of steam. Again Dr. Telford dipped it into the sea, and replaced it on Benton's head; and this he did a dozen times more, thinking only of the man's sufferings, and apparently oblivious to his own.

Suddenly a wild, startled shriek aroused them all—even Benton. The captain had sprung up in the boat, his face working frightfully, and his eyes starting with horror.

His movements caused the boat to rock furiously from side to side, and in another moment he would have swamped them all; but Mr. Pringle grasped him fiercely by the arm, and forced him back into his place.

They could see now what had startled the captain on his awakening from his semi-drunken stupor. The body of Mr. Fryer had risen through the water, and was floating alongside the boat, bobbing up and down with the slight motion of the sea.

The dead man had come back to join his living companions, his ghastly face and wide-open, sightless eyes turned up to the sunlight sky.

Again and again they tried to push it away with the oars, but the current brought it back each time. They tried to force it down in the water, but it floated still. Then, giving up their sickening, loathsome task, they relapsed into inactivity and silence, and all through the long, long day the dead man floated beside them.

(Another long instalment of this great adventure serial will appear next week. Be sure to order your next copy of the "Gem" in good time.)

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By
PROSPER
HOWARD.



The sergeant-major stepped forward and read out the list of names of the juniors in the order they were to fire.

"For the Grammar School:

"Carboy
"J. Wootton
"Morgan
"Donaldson
"H. Wootton
"Carpenter
"Lane
"Preston
"O'Donnell
"Gay

"For Greyfriars College:

"Nugent
"Cherry
"Singh
"Desmond
"Bul-trode
"Linley
"Stott
"Skinner
"Ogilvy
"Wharton

"For St. Jim's College:

"D'Arcy
"Kerr
"Figgins
"Blake
"Manners
"Herries
"Digby
"Wynn
"Noble
"Merry"

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