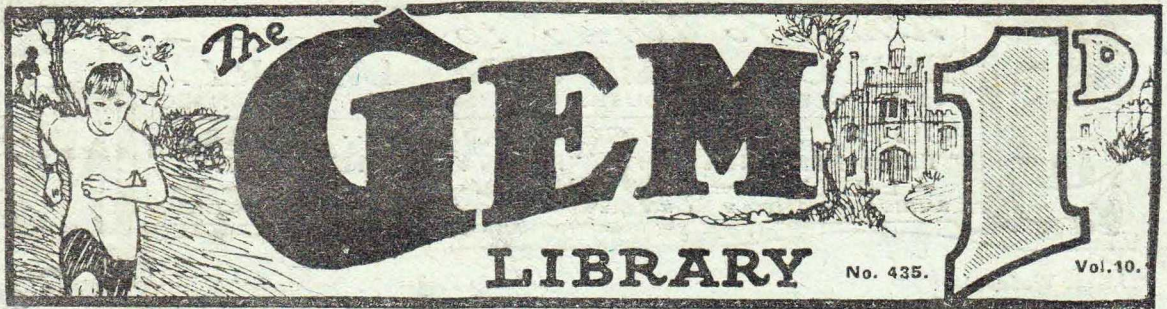


SKIMPOLE THE SPORTSMAN!

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



Monty Lowther and Manners grasped Skimpole's ears, and Tom Merry and Talbot, "bunked" him from behind. The genius of the Shell had no choice about getting into the brake. He got in—in a heap, with a loud roar, and disappeared among the feet of the crowded cricketers.

(A Screamingly Funny Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON ST. LONDON. E.C.
OUR THREE COMPANION PAPERS!
"THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY CHUCKLES.
LIBRARY — POPULAR — 1/2"
EVERY MONDAY | EVERY FRIDAY | EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday:

"UNDER GUSSY'S PROTECTION!"

By Martin Clifford.

Every "Gem" reader knows how thoroughly chivalrous and good-hearted the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is, and though these qualities sometimes lead him to do what appear to be foolish things, no one can ever think the worse of him for them. In the fine story which appears next week, Gussy plays the part of "champion of the oppressed"—no new part for him. But the circumstances in this case are novel. There comes to St. Jim's a new boy, against whom Ernest Levison brings a grave and startling charge. No one believes this charge, though there are things which seem suspicious in the manner of Outram in facing it; but from other causes the new fellow becomes decidedly unpopular. Gussy stands by him when everyone else is giving him the cold shoulder, and before the story ends readers will begin to have a notion that, though St. Jim's may consider Outram an utter funk, it is not want of courage that keeps him from fighting. D'Arcy quarrels with his chums on Outram's account; but the breach is healed, and eventually Study No. 6 accepts the new boy as a kind of honorary member.

"UNDER GUSSY'S PROTECTION!"

A DISCRIMINATING MASTER.

One of my comparatively new readers, who is at a Grammar School not a hundred miles from London, tells me that he has introduced the "Gem" and "Magnet" to quite a number of his school chums, who are all now regular and enthusiastic readers. This is the sort of good work which I always appreciate highly; but my chum goes on to tell me something else which pleases me even more. One of his fellow-pupils was reading a copy of the "Gem" in class—which is not the proper place for reading it, of course; as all, however keen, must agree. The master took it from him, but did not destroy it, as he is in the habit of doing with papers to which he objects. Instead, after looking through it very carefully, during which process he was observed to smile more than once, he said: "I quite approve of this paper—anywhere but in class."

Now, here is a man with a fair and open mind, who, I am sure, is the right kind of schoolmaster. There are times when it seems to me that a solid wall of prejudice against my papers has been raised by parents and masters who have never had the fairness to sample them. When any reader writes me saying that his father, mother, or schoolmaster is down on my papers, I always reply: "Cannot you get them to read a story or two and judge for themselves?" I have no fear at all of the result of any such judgment. Here and there may be a man or a woman so obstinate that nothing will prevail to move them; but I am quite sure that no reasonable and fair-minded person can object to the tone of any paper I edit. Our motto is: "Play the game!" We live up to it, and try all we can to get our readers to live up to it also.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Will all who write to me give their names and addresses, so that I can answer them through the post? I do not wish to leave any letters unanswered; but as things are at present there is scarcely any room at all for Replies in Brief, whereas, if given the chance, I can always manage a postal answer.

NOTICES.

Drummer W. Malkinson, 12383, 1 Platoon, A Co., 14 Batt. Northumberland Fusiliers (Pioneers), B. E. F., France, would be grateful if some reader would send him the "Gem" and "Magnet" regularly, and would also like to correspond with a girl reader.

James Parkes, 90, Church Street, Derby, wants to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, with the chief object of sending gifts to soldiers, and will be glad if any reader interested will send him a stamped addressed envelope for particulars.

Roy Harris, 728, Fifth, Edmonton, Alta., Canada, wants the numbers of the "Gem" from 1 to 200, and is willing to give two dollars for them—that is, 1/4 each.

Private E. Neale, 7881, B Co., 13th Manchester Regt., B.E.F., care of G.P.O., London, would be glad of back numbers of the companion papers.

A. Bland, 21, Edward Street, Walton-le-Dale, Preston, Lancashire, wants to buy Nos. 365-375 inclusive of the "Gem."

R. Ashworth, Helmsdale, St. Hilda's Road, Old Trafford, Manchester, wishes to form a "Gem" League for boys in his district. Stamped addressed envelope is requested with letters.

F. H. Wrighton, 257, Wellingborough Road, Rushden, Northants, wants to buy back numbers of the "Gem" before No. 300.

Sapper Robert Hart, 86416, No. 5 Section, 173rd Co., R.E., B.E.F., France, would be very grateful if any reader can spare him and his chums an old football.

Miss Grace Evans, 222, Blackstock Road, London, N., who is very lonely, will be glad if some girl reader of the "Gem" will write to her.

Bombardier J. Runes, 58324, No. 1 Section, 22nd D.A.C., R.F.A., 22nd Division, B.M.E.F., Salonica, Greece, would be very glad if someone would send him a football, a Rugby one preferred, as he and his chums have quite a good ground to play on.

Cyril R. Taylor, 18, Cobden Street, Blackley, Manchester, wants to buy No. 145 of the "P. P." and the "B. F." 3d. Library issue called "The Flying Armada."

T. W. O'Gorman, 2151, and C. E. Stoner, 1914, No. 5 Dormitory, R.N. Barracks, Shotley, Harwich, both ask for back numbers, and would also be glad to correspond with readers.

J. B. Lohle, 10, Old Compton Street, Soho, London, W., has started a "Gem" and "Magnet" Social League, and also an amateur magazine, and would be glad to hear from readers in any part of the United Kingdom interested. Please enclose stamped and addressed envelope.

E. Lincoln, 9, Haven Bank, Boston, Lincs., wants the number of the "Gem" containing "Brought to Book," that of the "Magnet" with "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," and the "P. P." with "A Boy of Mystery."

M. Aldridge, 110, Lewes Road, Brighton, wants to buy copies of the "Gem" containing "Figgins' Fig-Pudding" and "Figgins' Folv."

A. Brown, 1, Eskdale Street, Tyne Dock, South Shields, wants recruits for a troop of Boy Scouts in his locality. He is authorised by his Scoutmaster.

Arthur Harper, care of Messrs. James Butler Wilks & Co., 29, Coal Exchange, London, E.C., wants more members for the "Gem" and "Magnet" League which he has formed for sending parcels of the Companion Papers to the front. Will those writing please enclose stamped and addressed envelopes?

Private T. W. Bird, 4948, Hut 13f, A Coy., 3/20 City of London Regiment, Hazeley Down Camp, Winchester, would be glad to correspond with readers.

Horatio Coley, 3, Park Villas, Park Road, East Finchley, London, N., would like to hear from readers who have back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet" for sale.

Ernest Jones, 18, Horendale Road, Mossley Hill, Liverpool, wants to form a "Gem" League on social lines, and asks any reader in his neighbourhood who would like to join to write him.

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

SKIMPOLE THE SPORTSMAN!

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



Whack! whack! whack! whack! whack! "Oh, dear! Yaroooh! Knox, my dear fellow—yoop! Wharrer marrer—yooooop! Oh, my hat!" Skimpole dodged out of the study under the flashing cane, and fled.
(See Chapter 4.)

CHAPTER 1.

A Slight Misunderstanding.

WHAT'S the row?" The Terrible Three of St. Jim's asked that question together.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had looked into Talbot's study, in the Shelf passage, to take their chum down to the cricket.

They found Talbot alone in the study. Gore and Skimpole, his study-mates, were out.

Talbot was sitting on the corner of the table, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and a wrinkle of worried thought on his brow.

The Terrible Three eyed him curiously, and Talbot's hand-

some face flushed a little under their gaze. Tom's glance passed him, and fell upon a paper that lay on the table. It was a pink sporting paper, turned inside-out, and marked in pencil. Tom gave a start at the sight of it.

"What's up, old man?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Talbot. "I was thinking."

"Don't!" said Monty Lowther seriously. "These sudden changes—"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Talbot. "I dare say it's no business of mine, but—but I couldn't help thinking about it."

Tom Merry came into the study.

"Is it anything about this?" he asked, tapping the sporting paper with his hand, and speaking very bluntly.

"Yes."

Next Wednesday,

"UNDER GUSSY'S PROTECTION!" AND "INTO THE UNKNOWN!"

"Dash it all, Talbot," exclaimed Manners in astonishment, "you're not—"

The Shell fellow broke off. It seemed too absurd to suspect a clear-headed fellow like Talbot of such folly.

"What's the odds on Swindleum for the Welsher's Plate?" asked Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry. "This isn't Talbot's paper—is it, Talbot?"

Talbot shook his head.

"Well, I thought it couldn't be," said Manners, relieved all the same. Talbot's past was not quite like that of the other fellows at St. Jim's, and old associations might have cropped up. "But you'd better put a match to it, whether it's your paper or not, Talbot. There would be a row if a prefect saw it in the study."

"Must be Gore's," said Tom Merry, with a frown. "I thought Gore had thrown over all that rot."

"So did I," said Talbot. "Gore isn't a bad chap. I found that paper lying on the table when I came in, and—and it gave me rather a shock. Gore got into an awful fix over that kind of thing last term. I shouldn't have thought he'd take it up again. But there's the paper."

"It can't be Skimpole's," grinned Lowther. The chums of the Shell could not help laughing at the idea. Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, had many extraordinary qualities, but he had no vices at all. He was, as Lowther said, a perfectly harmless lunatic.

"No, hardly!" said Talbot, smiling. "It can't be Skimmy's, and it isn't mine; so—"

"It's Gore's, then."

"I suppose so."

"Not like Gore to be such an ass as to leave it lying about," said Manners. "He used to be jolly cautious."

"Well, I found it here," said Talbot. "I was thinking about it. Gore's my study-mate, and he's not a bad chap in the main. I—I was wondering whether to speak to him; only it's so rotten to look like setting up to preach at a chap."

"I'd do more than preach at him if he brought a racing paper into my study!" said Tom Merry wrathfully. "Why can't he keep his dashed blackguardism to himself, if he must be a blackguard? And after the fearful cropper he came last term, too—which you got him out of, the silly ass! Hallo! Here he is!"

George Gore of the Shell came into the study, hastily, as if he were looking for something. He stared at the serious faces of the juniors.

"Hallo! Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yes!" growled Tom.

"Well, you're looking like a set of boiled owls," said Gore politely. "Seen my paper, Talbot?"

"Y-e-es."

"Well, I want it," said Gore, looking in surprise at Talbot's clouded face. "I forgot it when I went out, and I left it here somewhere. I haven't finished reading it yet. Where is it?"

"Gore, old chap," said Talbot quietly, "don't you think it's rather risky leaving that paper on the table in the study?"

"What rot! Why?"

"Well, suppose somebody came in and saw it?"

"Why shouldn't they?"

"Why shouldn't they?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Have you gone off your rocker, Gore?"

"Don't you know it would mean being hauled up before the beaks," demanded Manners, "and very likely the sack to follow?"

"A flogging at least," said Lowther.

Gore stared harder than ever. He seemed astounded.

"A flogging! The sack!" he repeated. "What are you drivelling about? I don't care who sees my paper."

"Suppose a prefect came in and saw it, you ass?"

"Well, why not?" demanded Gore. "As a matter of fact, I'm going to lend it to a prefect when I'm finished with it."

"Knox, I suppose?" growled Tom.

Knox of the Sixth was more than suspected of little peccadilloes of that kind.

"No, not Knox—Kildare."

"Kildare!" yelled the juniors.

They regarded Gore with blank astonishment. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was the straightest fellow that ever breathed. If Kildare, head prefect of the School House, had found that racing paper in the study, there would have been very serious trouble to follow.

"Yes, Kildare. He takes it himself, only he missed his copy this week."

"Kildare takes it?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't he?"

"Oh, don't be a thumping ass!" said Tom Merry crossly.

"You know Kildare wouldn't do anything of the kind."

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"Eh? I know he does! I've seen it in his study!"

"Rot!"

"I've fetched it for him before now."

"Rats!"

"Look here," said Gore warmly, "what are you getting at? It's a jolly good paper, and the Head himself might read it. I've seen Railton reading it, for that matter, and grinning over it."

"The Housemaster!" gasped Tom.

"Yes. He likes it—everybody does. Why, sometimes half a dozen fellows want my paper when I've finished!" said Gore.

"Fellows like Levison and Crooke, perhaps."

"Any fellows," said Gore. "You yourself, Tom Merry. You asked me for it last week, I remember."

Tom Merry jumped.

"I asked you to lend me your pink racing paper!" he howled.

"My which?" howled Gore, in his turn. "You asked me to lend you my 'Chuckles.' And where's the harm?"

"'Chuckles!'" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes. I think you're all off your dots!" said Gore, in wonder. "Everybody reads 'Chuckles.' It's the best comic paper going! I've seen Skimmy gurgling over it. What is there against it, I'd like to know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Talbot. "Did you come here for your 'Chuckles,' Gore?"

"Yes, I did!" said Gore, puzzled and exasperated. "I don't see what you want to run it down for. It's a jolly good paper!"

The Terrible Three blinked at Gore. Gore's words could not always be regarded as the frozen truths, as they well knew.

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry, thrusting the pink paper fairly under Gore's nose. "Look at that!"

Gore looked at it, and frowned.

"You can jolly well take that away, Tom Merry!" he said. "I've chucked up that kind of thing, and I'm surprised to see you taking it up. I always thought you were decent."

"I!" stammered the captain of the Shell.

"You preached at me often enough over it, I know that," said Gore. "I don't want to be personal, but I'd rather you didn't bring that paper into my study. I'm jolly sure Talbot doesn't want to see it."

"Isn't it yours?" shrieked Monty Lowther.

"Mine! Why, you insulting ass—"

"It's all right, Gore," said Talbot. "The paper was on the study table here, and we couldn't help thinking it was yours. Excuse us."

"Oh, I see! You might have asked a chap first, I think," said Gore sulkily. "I don't see how the paper got here, either, unless one of these chaps brought it. 'Tain't mine, and it's not yours, and it can't be Skimmy's. You can go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

And George Gore routed out "Chuckles" from among a heap of impot papers and exercise-books, snorted emphatically, and marched out of the study, closing the door behind him with a bang that was expressive of considerable indignation and wrath.

CHAPTER 2.

Justice for Crooke.

TOM MERRY & Co. looked at one another rather uncertainly.

There had evidently been a misunderstanding.

It was that harmless and necessary journal, "Chuckles," of which George Gore had come in search. The pink paper did not belong to him.

But if it did not belong to Gore, to whom did it belong?

Only three fellows shared the study—Talbot, Gore, and Skimpole. The Terrible Three did not believe for a moment that the paper was Talbot's. There had been a time, certainly, when gambling, and even worse things, had stained the honour of the Toff—in those black days before he had come to St. Jim's. But that was all over long ago. He had seen the light. The Terrible Three knew that he was as straight a fellow as could be found within the walls of the old school. Talbot had said that the paper was not his, and his word was gospel.

Now Gore declared that the paper was not his. As for Skimpole, the idea was absurd. Skimpole had plenty of papers in the study—weird papers on Socialism and Determinism and evolution, and such things. Skimmy's remarkable taste in literature happening to lie in that direction. Skimpole was every imaginable kind of an ass, but he was not any kind of a rascal at all. Skimpole as a betting man was quite inconceivable.

"That paper belongs to somebody," said Manners at last.



"I am going to thrash you," said Talbot, calmly. "That's the only way to deal with you, and I'm going to do it. Come near the school again, and you'll get another dose. Put up your hands." "Look 'ere—1—1—1—yarrooh!" (See Chapter 11.)

"Somebody's brought it to the study and left it here," said Talbot. "I'm glad it's not Gore's, after all."

"Ahem! Gore wasn't brought up at the feet of George Washington," remarked Monty Lowther.

"I believe him," said Talbot simply.

"Well, a chap doesn't like to doubt a chap's word, of course, only Gore has always been a bit of a Prussian in that way. The paper belongs to somebody. Why should a fellow bring it here, and leave it on the table?"

"It's jolly odd!"

"Better find out who it was, and punch his head, Talbot," advised Tom Merry. "Might be one of Levison's tricks. There would have been a row if a prefect had seen it here!"

Talbot nodded.

"Good idea!" said Lowther. "Let's find the cad it belongs to, and bump him. Crooke of the Shell, perhaps. Anyway, Crooke's study is nearest, and we'll start on him."

"I—I say—" began Talbot.

"Bow-wow! The chap being your cousin makes no difference. In fact, you're bound, as an affectionate cousin, to thrash him for his own good."

"Dash it all, he had no right to shove his rotten racing-rag in this study!" said Tom Merry warmly. "Let's go and see Crooke."

"Come on!" said Manners.

The Terrible Three quitted the study, Tom taking the paper in his hand. Talbot followed more slowly. Talbot's desire was to live on peaceable terms, if he could, with his wastrel cousin. But the finding of that paper in his study was a serious matter. There were "blades" in the School House of St. Jim's, who regarded betting on races as quite the thing. That view was not taken by the Head. Any fellow found with a racing paper was quite certain of getting a flogging, and any dealings with a bookmaker meant the "sack," short and sharp.

Crooke was in his study, as a scent of tobacco-smoke warned the juniors when they looked in. The cad of the Shell was sprawling in the armchair smoking a cigarette. He stared insolently at his visitors, and did not remove the cigarette from his lips. Contemptuous looks had no effect on George Gerald Crooke.

"This paper yours?" asked Tom Merry, coming to this point at once, and shoving the racing-paper under Crooke's nose.

Crooke looked at it.

"I daresay it is," he replied.

"You had one like this?"

"Yes."

"What did you leave it in Talbot's study for?"

"Eh? I didn't!"

"Then how did it get there?"

"Did it get there?" yawned Crooke.

"I found it on my study table, Crooke," said Talbot quietly.

"Then I don't suppose it's mine. Your own, most likely," said Crooke insolently. "I suppose you've done a good bit of betting in your time, Toff?"

Talbot flushed, but made no reply.

"It isn't Talbot's!" said Tom Merry hotly. "It looks to me as if some cad has put it in his study to cause him trouble!"

"What rot!" said Crooke, with another yawn.

"How did your paper get into Talbot's study, then?"

Crooke appeared to reflect.

"Oh, Skimmy!" he said.

"Skimmy?"

"Yes. Skimmy borrowed it. Skimmy's in Talbot's study. I suppose he left it there."

"Don't be an ass!" growled Tom. "Skimmy never goes in for anything of that sort!"

"Well, I know he borrowed my paper," said Crooke, with a sneer. "He may have picked up the habit from Talbot."

"You rotten worm!"

"Thanks!"

"Look here. Do you mean to say that Skimpole borrowed this disgraceful rag of you?" exclaimed Tom Merry uneasily.

"He borrowed that paper. He came into my study and asked me for one, and I had that, so I lent it to him."

"It's impossible!" said Talbot. "Skimmy isn't that kind of chap."

"Better ask him," sneered Crooke.

"We'll ask him!" said Tom Merry grimly. "You're cad enough to get Skimmy into your rotten ways, if you could. You'd do anything blackguardly. I suppose a silly ass like Skimmy might be taken in. We'll ask Skimmy. But before we do that we'll show you what to expect for lending decent fellows your rotten racing rags!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

"Here, hands off!" roared Crooke.

The Terrible Three grasped him, and yanked him out of the chair. There was a wild howl of anguish from Crooke as the cigarette went into his mouth. It was very warm at one end.

"Yaroo! Groooh! Gug-gug-gug!"

Bump!

"Oh, crumbs! Grooooooch!"

Bump!

"Gurrrrrrrg!"

Justice having been done, the Shell fellows quitted the study, leaving Crooke sprawling on the hearthrug, gasping for breath, and furiously spitting out the remains of the cigarette.

"Hallo, there's Skimmy!"

Skimpole of the Shell was going into his study. Tom Merry & Co. hurried after him.

They could hardly believe Crooke's statement that the genius of the Shell had suddenly developed an interest in racing matters. They had laughed at Skimmy's Socialism and Determinism and other isms. But if Skimmy was adding blackguardism to his other isms, it was time for his friends to speak to him seriously. Skimmy certainly could mean no harm—he never meant any harm. Perhaps he had discovered a scientific interest in racing. If so, the sooner it was bumped out of him the better.

Skimpole was blinking round the study through his big spectacles when the Shell fellows came in.

He blinked at them as they entered.

Skimpole was a weedy youth in figure, but Nature, which had been rather niggardly to him in the matter of limb and muscle, had compensated him with a remarkable brain. Whether the brain was of first quality was another matter. But undoubtedly there was plenty of it, such as it was. Skimpole's big head always looked several sizes too large. It was adorned with tufts of hair which never would keep down, and his brainy forehead bulged over a large pair of spectacles. The idea of that brainy youth as a sporting-man made the juniors grin, in spite of themselves.

"Have you seen my paper, my dear fellows?" asked Skimpole, blinking at them very anxiously.

"You looking for 'Chuckles,' too?" asked Tom.

"'Chuckles!' My dear Merry, you are jesting. In my lighter moments I have occasionally found amusement in persuing that humorous periodical," said Skimpole. Skimmy had a flow of language all his own. "But at present I am engaged upon matters of a more weighty nature."

"What paper are you looking for, you champion ass?"

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"A pink paper, my dear Merry. A periodical devoted to the pursuits of the racecourse," said Skimpole.

"Well, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Is this the paper, dummy?"

"Yes, that is it, my dear Merry. Thank you very much!" said Skimpole, holding out his bony hand for the paper.

To his surprise, it was not handed to him.

Tom Merry and Lowther seized him by the shoulders, and jammed him into the armchair, with a jam that took Skimmy's breath away.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Now, you silly idiot!" said Tom. "Now tell us what you mean by it!"

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole's New "Ism!"

HERBERT SKIMPOLE set his big spectacles straight on his nose, and blinked at the juniors. Tom Merry & Co. were excited and exasperated. If Skimpole was too big an ass to look after himself, they were prepared to look after him; but it was probable that the process of looking after him would not be gentle. If Skimpole had to have sense bumped into him, they were ready.

"Well?" demanded the four together. "Well?"

"My dear fellows—" murmured Skimpole.

"Look here, Skimmy," said Talbot. "You've got to explain yourself. It isn't exactly our business, in a way, but we're making it our business."

"Thank you very much, Talbot! That is really very kind of you," said Skimpole. "I assure you that I am very much obliged. You see, as a Socialist, I believe in people minding one another's business. A true Socialist never minds his own business."

"Well, we're agreed on that point, at least," said Talbot, laughing. "Now, we're not going to let you get yourself into trouble."

"We're going to give you some good advice!" snapped Tom Merry.

Skimpole smiled pityingly.

"My dear Merry, I fear your advice would not be of much use to me. You see, your mental powers, in comparison with mine, are quite undeveloped."

"Eh?"

"I should not exactly call you a fool," said Skimpole benevolently.

"My hat! You'd better not."

"But I should not be far from the truth if I did——"

"What!"

"Pray do not get excited, my dear fellow," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "I admit that this is a painful truth, and from regard for your feelings, I shall not dwell upon it."

"You silly ass!" roared Tom Merry, while his comrades chuckled. Skimpole was not jesting in the least. Skimpole had never been known to jest. He was speaking with great patience and earnestness. That was Skimmy's way.

"I've a jolly good mind to have you out of that chair and rub your head in the coal-locker!" said Tom wrathfully.

"My dear Merry, what for?" asked Skimpole, in surprise. "I trust I have not said anything to annoy you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed, too, in spite of himself. It really was not easy to be angry with the sublime Skimpole.

"Look here," said Manners. "You've been going in for racing papers. We always knew you were a crass idiot, but we never thought you were a blackguard before, Skimmy. Are you a blackguard?"

"Not at all, my dear Manners. I trust you are not one, either," said Skimmy innocently.

"Then what do you want with a racing paper?" gasped Manners.

"Ah! That is my new scheme," said Skimpole complacently. "I should be willing to explain to you fellows, though I fear that your intelligence would be hardly equal——"

"Are you going in for betting?"

"Yes."

"You are!" shouted the juniors together.

"Certainly, my dear fellows."

"And you're not ashamed to own it!" gasped Tom Merry, in amazement.

"Not at all, Merry."

"Then you jolly well ought to be!" booted Lowther.

"You do not understand, my dear Lowther. The incompetence of your understanding incapacitates you for comprehending——"

"Mercy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellows, this is not a laughing matter. I am taking up this new scheme very seriously. You are aware that I have a benevolent disposition, but have hitherto been prevented from giving it full play by the paucity of my financial resources—"

"Where does he dig up those words?" said Lowther, in wonder.

"You are also aware, I presume, that I am an individual with very unusual, perhaps I might say unprecedented, brain powers," said Skimpole modestly. "A first-class intellect can be turned successfully upon any subject. In Socialism, for instance, my knowledge very nearly equals that of the celebrated Professor Balmycrumpet. In the theory of evolution, I have reached, if not surpassed, the attainments of the famous Dr. Hoaxem. In mechanical matters, I have invented an airship, which is perfect in theory, though unfortunately it will not rise from the ground. In other matters—"

"Look here—"

"Should I turn my intellect upon some frivolous subject as the game of cricket, for instance, I should become a tremendous player in a very short time, and should captain the Shell instead of you, Merry."

"Great Scott!"

"By applying the principles of pure science to the game, I should excel you all with scarcely an effort. I have little doubt that I should be elected captain of the school, and should be worried incessantly by fellows begging me to play and win matches for St. Jim's. Unfortunately, I have no time for this."

"Quite potty," remarked Lowther.

"Not at all, my dear Lowther. If you were more acquainted with scientific subjects, you would be aware that it is not uncommon for insane persons to suspect insanity in others—"

"What!" yelled Lowther.

"It is, indeed, a proof of insanity," said Skimpole, beaming at him. "It confirms my previous observations of you, my dear Lowther. I have feared several times that your mind was a little unhinged."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you asses cackling at?" demanded Monty Lowther warmly.

"Pray do not be angry, Lowther. I do not blame you for this. As a Determinist, I attribute it to the influence of your heredity and environment, and I feel only compassion— Yaroooooh!"

Monty Lowther was dragged back.

"Lemme go!" he roared. "I'm going to shove his silly head in the coal-locker!"

"Cheese it!" said Talbot, laughing. "Skimmy doesn't mean any harm, do you, Skimmy?"

"Certainly not, my dear Talbot. I am sorry I have mentioned that painful truth to Lowther, as he seems to be annoyed," said Skimpole. "Now, if you fellows have finished, I will peruse this periodical—"

"We've not quite finished yet," said Tom Merry. "It seems that you've taken up racing?"

"Exactly!"

"Blessed if I don't think you are really balmy, Skimmy!" said Tom, puzzled. "What are you doing it for?"

"For several reasons, Merry. I have no objection to acquainting you with them. I regard racing and betting, of course, as disgraceful pursuits. Under Socialism, all race-courses will be turned into playgrounds for children. But it is my intention to raise a large sum of money—"

"By betting?" howled Manners.

"Yes; by betting upon the performances of equine quadrupeds," said Skimpole. "My idea is this. I have made the acquaintance of a bookmaker, a somewhat beery person named Weekes, who lives at Wayland. This person is willing to take my bets. I am going to win all his money, and thus, I hope and trust, cause him to give up bookmaking, and take up a more reputable means of earning a livelihood. This will be a good deed."

The juniors shrieked.

"And how are you going to win money from a bookmaker?" gasped Manners.

Skimpole smiled.

"That is quite easy, my dear fellow. After dealing with such subjects as Determinism, evolution, and the origin of species, horse-racing will be merely child's play to me. By bending the energies of my powerful intellect upon this simple subject, I shall master it in a few days, and then, of course, winning money will be as easy as beating you fellows at cricket, if I preferred to exert myself in that direction."

"Just about as easy!" grinned Tom Merry.

"I am glad you agree with me, Merry."

"Oh, my hat!" said Talbot, wiping his eyes. "You're too

funny to live, Skimpole! So you're going to abolish Weekes the bookie by winning all his money? Ha, ha!"

"Yes, but that is not all. That will be a good deed, and will fully excuse my soiling myself by touching such a thing as horse-racing. But that is not the full extent of my intentions. I am going to win a large sum of money, to devote to good works. You are aware that the British prisoners in Germany are starved by the Huns. There is a list of them in Mr. Raiton's study, and fellows send them parcels when they're flush with money. I am going to expend the whole of my winnings for this very worthy object."

"Your winnings!" stammered Tom Merry. "What about your losings?"

"There will not be any losings, Merry. I shall master the whole subject in a few days," said Skimpole calmly. "Then it will be plain sailing. Mr. Weekes will be astonished when I win all his money."

"Ha, ha! So should we?"

"Now, if you do not mind, I will peruse my periodical—"

"But we do mind," said Tom Merry. "We've got to explain to you, Skimmy. I suppose it's no good telling you you are a silly ass—"

"None at all, my dear Merry."

"Well, I won't, then. But you're not going to bet with Weekes," said Tom. "You don't know anything about racing; and if you did, you couldn't beat a bookie at his own game. But even if you could win, you're not going to do anything so dashed blackguardly. See? You don't understand that you're doing wrong, because you're a silly idiot, but you've got to take my word for it. See?"

"You are interrupting my studies," said Skimpole mildly. "We've stood all your 'isms'—Socialism, Determinism, Darwinism, and other silly rot," said Tom; "but when you add blackguardism to the other isms it's time to stop you—for your own good. See?"

"You will shut the door after you, will you not, my dear Merry?"

"You're going to chuck this up!" roared Tom. "What would happen to you if the Housemaster or the Head spotted it?"

"I should probably be flogged. However, I shall not tell them anything about it."

"You might be sacked."

"Doubtless I should find some other sphere of usefulness, my dear Merry."

"Oh, you crass ass! What would your people say?"

"I am sure I have no idea, Merry. Now, if you will leave the study and close the door after you, I will proceed with my perusal of this periodical."

"No good talking to him!" said Talbot, laughing.

"No good at all!" said Tom. "But there are other ways. Give me that paper, Skimmy!"

"But I desire to peruse it— Oh!"

Tom Merry jerked the pink paper away, tore it into half a dozen pieces, and struck a match. Skimpole blinked at him in dismay as the fragments of his precious periodical flared up in the fender.

"That's a beginning!" said Tom. "Now, you've got to look on us, Skimmy, as friends who are going to look after you. You'd better take up airships again, or Determinism, or some other piffle. That's idiotic, but harmless. But we're not going to have our tame idiot sacked from the school. We're going to bump you as a warning."

"Really, Merry—"

"If we ever find you speaking to that rascal Weekes, we shall bump you again harder. We shall keep an eye on you. Mind, this is for your own good. Collar him!"

"My dear Merry—ow! My dear Talbot—yooop! My dear—yaroooooh!"

Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now will you promise to chuck it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Grooh! Certainly not!"

Bump, bump!

"Ow-ow-ow-wow!"

Skimpole sprawled on the floor and groped for his spectacles and gasped.

"Here endeth the first lesson," said Monty Lowther; "and the second's ready as soon as you want it, Skimmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooooooh!"

And Tom Merry & Co. quitted the study, feeling that they had acted the part of real pals to the brainy Skimmy.

Skimpole found his spectacles and jammed them on, and blinked and gasped, and gasped and blinked at a great rate.

"Oh, dear!" he gasped. "Now I shall be compelled to search for another periodical dealing with racing matters—groogh! Perhaps Cutts of the Fifth will lend me one—yow—ow Knox, the prefect. Oh, crumbs! Ow!"

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Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 4.

No Luck!

CUTTS of the Fifth was lounging on the School House steps, chatting with Prye and St. Leger, when Skimpole of the Shell came out. The dandy of the Fifth was looking in high good-humour. His little speculations on the races had turned out well for once, and he was in high feather. He stared at Skimpole as the Shell fellow came up to him. But Skimpole smiled genially.

"My dear Cutts, can I speak to you a moment?"
 "Oh, go ahead!" said Cutts.
 "Can you lend me a racing paper?"
 Cutts jumped.

Prye and St. Leger gasped.
 For Skimpole to prefer that extraordinary request on the steps of the School House, where anyone might have heard him, was astounding—or would have been astounding if Skimpole had been an ordinary fellow. But Skimpole was extraordinary. He blinked at Cutts quite genially.

"A—a—a what?" stammered Cutts.
 "A racing paper," said Skimpole. "I desire to study the form of the horses entered for the Dalton Plate on Saturday."
 "Great pip!"

The three Fifth-Formers stared at Skimpole and at one another. Cutts' little ways were suspected in a good many quarters, and had evidently reached Skimpole's ears. But the dandy of the Fifth, of course, had no intention of admitting anything of the kind to a junior. He had some little secrets with Levison of the Fourth, but the sublime Skimpole was not the kind of fellow he cared to repose confidence in.

"So you want a racing paper?" said Cutts. "You confounded young blackguard, what do you think I know about racing papers?"

Skimpole blinked in surprise.
 "I understood that you knew all about racing, Cutts. I have heard the fellows speak of it. Perhaps I was mistaken, however."

"You were mistaken, or else you are a cheeky young scoundrel!" said Cutts, with virtuous indignation. "How dare you speak to me on such a subject!"

"My dear Cutts, if I am mistaken, I assure you that it is most gratifying to me," said Skimpole, beaming. "It shows me that you are by no means the rascally character most of the fellows think—"

"What?"
 "It is very gratifying, Cutts, to discover that you have at least some decency in your character—yoooooop!"

Skimpole suddenly found himself rolling down the steps. He sat up in the quad, in great surprise, gasping spasmodically, while Cutts & Co. strolled away, grinning.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth ran up to give Skimmy a helping hand. "Poor old Skimmy! What did that boundah do that for, Skimmy?"

"I'm sure I do not know, D'Arcy," gasped Skimpole. "I was merely telling him that it was gratifying to find that he was not so great a rascal as is generally supposed—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I fail to see any cause for laughter, D'Arcy. Cutts has acted in a very violent and unreasonable manner. By the way, D'Arcy"—Skimmy caught the swell of St. Jim's by the arm—"could you lend me a racing paper?"

"A—a—a wacin' papah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.
 "Yes. I should be much obliged."

Arthur Augustus fixed his celebrated monocle into his eye and surveyed the genius of the Shell with a withering gaze.

"What do you want with a wacin' papah, you uttah ass?"
 "I want to study the form of the horses for the Dalton Plate."

"Gweat Scott!"
 "I am taking up racing—"
 "Bai Jove!"

"From the best motives, of course," explained Skimpole. "I am going to win all Mr. Weekes' money, and thus compel him to take up a more honourable method of gaining a livelihood."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "The money thus gained I shall expend for the benefit of the prisoners of war in Germany. This is a worthy object. You may, if you wish, aid me in doing up the parcels. Your intelligence will be equal to that task, I think. Do you not think so, my dear D'Arcy?"

"I regard you as a shweikin' ass, Skimpole!"
 "My dear D'Arcy, if you could lend me a racing paper—"

"If you were not a howlin' idiot, Skimmy, I would give you a feahful thwashin' for hintin' that I might have a wacin' papah in my possession!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly.

"My dear fellow—"
 "Oh, wats!"

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Arthur Augustus walked away with his noble nose in the air. Skimpole sighed, and went into the School House, making his way to Knox's study. Skimpole had heard whispers in the Shell of Gerald Knox's manners and customs, and, as a matter of fact, Knox's study was an excellent place to visit in search of a racing paper.

Skimpole tapped at the door and entered. The study was empty.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "Knox is not here. However, I am sure he would have no objection to my looking for what I require."

Skimpole proceeded to look. He was engaged in looking when the prefect came into the study.

Knox stared, as well he might, at the sight of a junior rummaging through his room, turning over papers and books and other articles. The bully of the Sixth was about the last senior at St. Jim's to take that good-temperedly.

"What are you doing?" he shouted.
 Skimpole blinked round.

"Excuse me, my dear Knox. I wish to borrow a racing paper—"

"Wha-a-at!"
 "I am looking for it. Perhaps, however, if you would tell me precisely where you keep your literature of a sporting nature, it would save me trouble."

Knox made a spring for a cane. Skimpole, understanding at last that there was danger, made a spring for the door. But the prefect was first.

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!
 "Oh, dear! Yaroooh! Knox, my dear fellow— Yooop! Wharrer marrer—yooooop! Oh, my hat!"

Skimpole dodged out of the study under the lashing cane, and fled.

He did not stop till he was half-way across the quadrangle. There he paused to recover his breath.

"How extraordinary of Knox to break out in that unaccountable manner!" gasped Skimpole. "I have a great mind to report his brutality to the Housemaster. I suppose I shall have to walk down to Rylcombe and purchase a paper. It is most annoying."

Even Skimpole did not feel inclined to make any further efforts to borrow a racing paper. He trotted down to the village to purchase one.

About an hour later, Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was crossing the quadrangle, when Skimpole almost ran into him. Skimpole was reading a paper as he walked, and was quite buried in it.

"Skimpole!" rapped out Mr. Railton sharply.
 Skimmy blinked at him over the paper.

"Oh, sir! I am sorry! I did not see you!"
 "You should not read while you are walking," said the Housemaster severely. "Dear me!" He caught sight of the title of Skimpole's paper. "What is that? What is that paper, Skimpole?"

Mr. Railton's eyes almost bulged at the sight of the "Racing Tipster." Thunder gathered on his brow, and Skimpole hastily thrust the paper behind him.

"This—this paper, sir?" he stammered.
 "That is a racing paper, Skimpole!"

"Ahem! You—you see, sir—"
 "Hand it to me at once!"

Skimpole reluctantly handed over the paper to the Housemaster.

"How dare you bring such a paper into the school!" thundered Mr. Railton. "Skimpole, I have observed that you are an unusually stupid boy—"

"I, sir!" ejaculated Skimpole, in astonishment. "Not at all, sir! It is quite a common mistake for stupid people to fancy that others are stupid, whereas in reality—"

Mr. Railton gasped.
 "Follow me to my study, Skimpole!"
 "Certainly, sir!"

In his study, the Housemaster selected his stoutest cane—proceeding that Skimpole watched in great dismay.

"Skimpole, you are a stupid boy. But stupidity is no excuse for vice. I have not observed vicious inclinations in you before, and I trust that a severe lesson will prevent them from going any further. I shall cane you severely, and if you are found with such a paper again, I shall report you to the headmaster for a flogging. Hold out your hands!"

Swish, swish, swish, swish!
 "Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

ANSWERS

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"It is very gratifying, Cutts, to discover that you have, at least, some decency in your character—yarooooop!" Skimpole suddenly found himself rolling down the steps. (See Chapter 4.)

Skimpole retired from the study minus the "Racing Tipster," and wringing his bony hands in anguish. For some time after that, Skimpole was rubbing his hands dolefully, and had no time whatever to think of his new "ism."

CHAPTER 5.

Fallen Among Friends.

TOM MERRY & CO., in the kindness of their hearts, kept an eye on Skimpole for a day or two. They really intended to keep a constant eye on him, and to note whether he showed any more sporting proclivities; and in that case to administer another and severer bumping for his own good. But the juniors had their own affairs, and plenty of occupations of one kind or another, and they did not find very much time to expend upon Skimpole.

They asked him several times how the gee-gees were getting on; but Skimpole, scenting another bumping, declined to take them into his confidence. And on Wednesday came a cricket-match with the Grammar School, and they forgot all about the existence of Skimpole of the Shell.

Talbot remembered him just as the team were starting, and while the other cricketers were getting into the brake, the good-natured "Toff" looked for Skimpole. He found him in deep thought, and woke him up with a slap on the back.

"Coming along to watch the match, Skimmy?" asked Talbot.

Skimpole shook his head.

"Thank you, Talbot, but I am afraid I have no time this afternoon!"

"Not detained?" asked Talbot.

"Not at all. I have an engagement."

"Going out with another chap—eh?" Talbot was the last fellow in the world to ask questions, but he had a reason now. He suspected very strongly that Skimpole's engagement was one that would not bear investigation.

"No; I am going to meet somebody."

"Look here, Skimmy, I don't want to push into your affairs," said Talbot earnestly. "But if you are going to meet that fellow Weekes—"

"Dear me! How did you guess, Talbot?"

Talbot smiled.

"It wasn't very hard, Skimmy. Hadn't you better come to the Grammar School instead, and watch the cricket?"

"Impossible! You see, I have already mastered the subject thoroughly, and am prepared to carry out my new scheme," Skimpole explained. "I am surprised at you, Talbot, seeing any objections. I have hitherto had a considerable amount of respect for your character. But, really, this opposition to a very worthy enterprise—"

"Oh, you ass!" said Talbot, half-laughing, and half-vexed. "You fathead, Skimmy! You can't go and meet this black-guard!"

"It is my object to make the man something better than a blackguard, Talbot. You see, he is just over military age, and so has escaped conscription. But if I deprive him of his ill-gotten gains, he will have to take to honest work, and as he has certainly never learned a useful trade, doubtless he will have no resource but to join the Army. Think of that, Talbot—making a miserable character like Mr. Weekes into a

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soldier. It would be the saving of him. Some day he would thank me with tears in his eyes. I am convinced of that!"

"Oh, my hat! You—you think you are going to skin a professional bookie at his own game!" groaned Talbot.

"Undoubtedly! With my brain-power——"
"Look here, you're not going to meet him! Come along to Rylcombe!"

"Really, Talbot, I decline to do anything of the sort——"
"Talbot! Talbot!" Tom Merry was shouting from the brake. "Where's that ass Talbot?"

"Here!" called out Talbot.
"Come on, then, we're waiting!"

"Come and lend me a hand!"
"Eh? What the dickens——"

"Come here, Tom!"
The captain of the Shell jumped out of the brake in surprise, and ran to Talbot.

"What the merry dickens——" he began.
"Skimpole's got an appointment with Mr. Weekes this afternoon," explained Talbot.

"You thumping ass, Skimmy——"
"So we're going to take him in the brake," said Talbot.

"Take his other arm, Tom."
"Ha, ha! Good egg!"

"My dear fellows," protested Skimpole, as the chums of the Shell grasped him by either arm, and propelled him forcibly towards the brake. "My dear—— Ow-ow! I refuse—— Ow! I insist—— Oh, dear!"

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah with Skimmy?"
"He's coming! Help him in!"

"I don't want to get in!" yelled Skimpole, struggling. "I insist upon being released. I—— Yah!"

"Gweat Scott! Why should Skimmy come if he doesn't want to, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

"We're rather crowded already," said Blake of the Fourth.
"There isn't much room for Skimmy's ears in this brake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"He's got to come!" said Tom Merry. "Take an ear each, two of you, and drag him in!"

Monty Lowther and Manners grasped Skimpole's ears, and Tom Merry and Talbot "bunked" him from behind. The genius of the Shell had no choice about getting into the brake. He got in—in a heap, with a loud roar, and disappeared among the feet of the crowded cricketers.

The brake started, and Skimpole sat up among a forest of legs, panting.

"What's the little game?" asked Blake, in wonder.
"Skimmy don't care for cricket. It's cruelty to lunatics to make him watch a game."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"I have no time for cricket!" gasped Skimmy. "I shall be late for my appointment with Mr. Weekes——"

"Weekes!" yelled Jack Blake.
"The silly ass has taken up racing," grinned Tom Merry.

"He's got an appointment with a bookie this afternoon."
"Oh, crumbs!"

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Figgins, of the New House, in astonishment. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Skimmy, you thumping duffer?"

"Groooh! Take your foot off my neck, Lowther, please! I should not be likely to be ashamed of doing a good deed, Figgins! Groooh!"

"A good deed!" howled the astonished Figgins. "Is betting with bookmakers a good deed?"

"Under the circumstances, Figgins, it is."
"Well, my hat!"

"Off his rocker!" said Fatty Wynn.
"My dear Wynn, I do not expect a person of your mental capacity to understand—or, perhaps, I should say, your mental incapacity!"

"What!"
Skimpole struggled to his feet, just escaping a lunge of Fatty Wynn's boot. He blinked round in distress at the grinning cricketers.

"My dear fellows, pray stop the brake and allow me to alight!"

"Likely!" grinned Blake.
The brake was bowling along the leafy lane at a good speed. There was no escape for Skimpole.

"I'd have brought Towser's chain for him, if you'd told me," said Herries. "Blessed if he oughtn't to be chained up, the howling ass!"

"I don't quite catch on," said Figgins. "I know you've got some precious bad characters in the School House, but I'm blessed if I thought Skimmy was one of them. I always thought he was a harmless idiot!"

"Evil communications corrupt good manners," said Kerr

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of the New House, with a sad shake of the head; and the New House fellows in the brake chuckled.

"You New House ass!" said Blake. "We've got a few rotters in the School House, and if you haven't any, it's because they've been sacked. We don't have any expulsions in our House."

"Time you did, though," said Figgins.
"Peace, my infants—peace!" said Tom Merry soothingly.

"Skimmy isn't a blackguard, Figgins; he's only a howling idiot! He's going to put an end to bookmaking by winning all the bookmakers' money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
That revelation of Skimmy's noble object was sufficient to restore everybody to good-humour. The juniors roared.

Skimpole blinked at them in astonishment.
"Surely that is a very noble object!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha! Ripping!"
"Top-hole, bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Skimmy!"
"He's going to turn all the bookies honest!" said Lowther.

"He'll be trying his hand on the shipowners next."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have no time to waste listening to unseemly merriment!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Unless you allow me to alight, I shall project myself from this vehicle while it is in motion, at the risk of sustaining serious injuries by the abrupt impact upon the surface of the earth."

"Fall on your head, Skimmy!" advised Blake. "It won't hurt you if you fall on something soft, you know!"

"Here, hold him!" shouted Tom Merry.
The cricketers grasped Skimpole on all sides.

"Now, will you sit down and keep still?" demanded Tom.
"Certainly not, Merry! I refuse——"

"You're going to jump out—what?"
"No; he's going to project himself from the vehicle!"

grinned Blake.
"Most decidedly I shall make my departure with a minimum of delay!" said Skimpole. "I regard this restraint upon my personal liberty of action as intolerable and indeed incomprehensible——"

"Then we shall have to look after you," said Tom. "Shove him down, and put your feet on him!"

"Hear, hear!"
"Yaroooh— My dear fellows— I object— Yooop!"

Skimpole disappeared under an army of boots. He was pinned down by a dozen boots, at least, and almost disappeared from view. And in that happy state Skimpole of the Shell arrived at Rylcombe Grammar School with the cricketers.

CHAPTER 6.

The Grammar School Match.

GORDON GAY & CO. were on the Grammar School ground, waiting for the St. Jim's team. They looked rather curious when the St. Jim's cricketers appeared, with Skimpole in their midst. Skimpole was walking between Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, and they were holding his arms, and he was wriggling like an eel.

"Well, here you are," said Gordon Gay. "Is that a new recruit, Merry?"

"Ha, ha! No. Skimpole has come to watch the match. He's awfully interested in cricket. Aren't you, Skimmy?"

"My dear Merry, I have no time to waste watching a frivolous game! I insist upon being released immediately!"

"Skimmy wants to get into mischief this afternoon, and we're stopping him," Tom Merry explained, as the Grammarians looked astonished. "I suppose you haven't a dog-chain and a kennel you could lend us for a bit?"

"Merry, I absolutely refuse to be placed in a dog-kennel——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Betah tie him up in the pavilion," said Arthur Augustus. "Gay will lend you a wope."

"Certainly!" said Gordon Gay, grinning. "Or I'll get some fags to sit on him, if you like!"

"Gay, I regard that suggestion as simply ruffianly!" gasped Skimpole.

"Look here, will you promise to stay here till the match is over?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Certainly not!"
"Then a couple of chaps will have to look after you. You, Reilly, and Hammond, as you're not playing, will you take care of the idiot?"

"Sure, I will!" said Reilly. "I'll knock him down intirely if he tries to get away, begorra!"

"And I'll jump on his 'ead!" said Hammond.
"Good! Keep hold of him!"

"Ow! I protest!" howled Skimpole, as Reilly and Harry Hammond grasped him by the arms. "I refuse to be held! I refuse— Yaroooh!"

"Hallo! What's the matter now?"

"You are twisting my arm, Hammond, and causing me considerable agony!"

"That's because you ain't keeping quiet," explained Hammond. "You keep quiet, and you'll be all right. See?"

"I refuse to keep quiet, under the circumstances! I— Yaroooh!"

"Better keep quiet!" urged Hammond.

"Yow! Wow! Under the circumstances, I will refrain from vocal obullitions, notwithstanding the incomprehensible unreasonable treatment to which I am being subjected!" groaned Skimpole.

"Does he always talk in four-point-seven words like that?" ejaculated Gordon Gay.

"My dear Gay, your failure to comprehend simple expressions is merely a demonstration of the incapacity of your intellectual organisation!"

"Help!" gasped Gordon Gay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Merry, before you commence this frivolous game—I sincerely wish, Merry, that you would not peregrinate in a different direction while I am addressing my observations to you!"

But Tom Merry did peregrinate in a different direction, and the remainder of Skimpole's observations were lost upon him.

The Saints batted first, and Gordon Gay & Co. went into the field. A dozen or more fellows had come over with the cricket team, and they mingled with the Grammarian crowd round the field. Skimpole stood between Reilly and Hammond, looking very blue.

He had a very special appointment with Mr. Weekes that afternoon, and he was in a most exasperated frame of mind. The interference of Tom Merry & Co. with his personal liberty excited even the gentle and patient Skimmy to anger. If he had been going to do blackguardly things like Levison or Crooke or Mellish, he could have understood it, but his object was noble and worthy. So far from desiring to encourage or participate in betting transactions, he was merely going to use the system of betting to force a rascally racing man into honest paths—by winning all his money and devoting it to a good object. True, it was against the rules of the school, but Skimmy had satisfied himself that the rules of the school could be disregarded in this case. Even if called before the Head himself, he did not fear to explain his conduct, though, from a doubt as to whether the Head would be intelligent enough to understand, he preferred to keep the matter dark.

Skimpole cast imploring glances at Reilly and Hammond alternately, but those two heartless youths only chuckled. There was no escape for Skimmy. Skimmy was so annoyed that he felt justified in using actual violence to regain his liberty. But, unfortunately, violence was of no use, as either Reilly or Hammond could have knocked him into a cocked hat with one hand.

Skimpole had to grin and bear it, hoping that sooner or later the vigilance of his guards would relax.

Hammond and Reilly were very interested in the cricket, but they kept hold of Skimmy's bony arms. It was an innings worth watching. Tom Merry and Talbot were at the wickets when the rest were down, and they were keeping the innings alive in great style.

Gordon Gay and Wootton major and Mont Blong assailed the wickets in vain, and the runs piled up.

It was not till the St. Jim's score had touched a hundred that Talbot was caught out at last, and the innings ended in a roar of cheering from the Saints round the field.

There was a rush for Tom Merry as he came off, and he was shouldered back to the pavilion amid shouts and the waving of caps.

"Hurroo! Hurroo!" roared Reilly, who had Tom's right leg, while Clifton Dane of the Shell had his left.

"Hooray!" roared Hammond, thumping him in the back.

"Bravo, Merry!" shouted the crowd.

"Oh, rats! Chuck it!" said Tom.

He scrambled down before the pavilion amid cheers.

"Reilly, you ass—Hammond, you duffer—where's Skimmy?"

"Tare an' 'ounds——"

"Oh, my 'at!"

Reilly and Hammond looked hastily round. They had joined in the rush for Tom Merry, and completely forgotten Skimpole for the moment.

Skimmy had not neglected his chance.

He was gone!

"Stole away, bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, you duffers——"

"Sure, I forgot that baste for a minute!" exclaimed Reilly. "I'll cut afther him, and bring him back aloive or dead intirely!"

Reilly tore away to the gates, with Hammond after him. The Grammarian innings had begun when they returned—without Skimpole. The great man of the Shell was far away, but it could not be helped, and Tom Merry dismissed Skimpole from his mind.

The Grammarian cricketers gave him plenty to think about.

CHAPTER 7.

Skimpole's Plunge.

THE Grammarians kept Tom Merry & Co. quite busy until the summer sun was sinking, and long shadows fell across the cricket-ground. It was a well-fought match. The Grammar School first innings totalled sixty, leaving St. Jim's well to the good. But Tom Merry's second innings was unlucky, Talbot having the bad luck to be caught out for four, and Kangaroo being bowled for nothing at all. Figgins was dismissed for a duck's egg by Gordon Gay, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for three.

Tom and his comrades fought hard against the tide of ill-luck, but the innings closed for thirty-five runs.

Gordon Gay & Co. batted a second time with high hopes. But Talbot, with the ball, proved dangerous, and Fatty Wynn was in great form, and the wickets fell fast. Nine down for sixty, and last man in, and the shadows lengthening. St. Jim's were safe enough on the result of the first innings, but they were as keen as the Grammarians to finish the match.

Fifteen to tie, and Gordon Gay at the wicket with Mont Blong, the French junior. Gay was making the running, and the figures went up to sixty-two, sixty-six, sixty-eight, seventy!

Five more to tie! And Mont Blong contributed three, amid yells of applause from the Grammar School crowd.

"Two to tie!" grunted Tom Merry, as he tossed the ball to Fatty Wynn. "Go in and shift that boulder Gay, Fatty, or we'll scalp you!"

Fatty Wynn grinned, and went in to shift Gay. A single run brought Mont Blong to face the bowling. One more to tie, two to win, and still light enough to finish—just enough.

Then there was a roar as the ball went down, and was cut away by the French junior, and Talbot of the Shell made a jump into the air, and held it!

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Hooray!"

"Bravo, Talbot!"

And the Grammarian match was over, St. Jim's the winners by a single run.

Needless to say, Tom Merry had not given a thought to Skimpole, and the genius of the Shell did not come into his mind again till the St. Jim's fellows were in their brake returning home.

Then the captain of the Shell suddenly remembered him.

"By Jove! I wonder if Skimpole's home yet!" he exclaimed.

"We'll find him rolling in money!" grinned Blake. "He's had plenty of time to scalp Mr. Weekes—perhaps. Poor old Weekes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When the cricketers arrived at St. Jim's, Skimpole's kind friends looked for him.

Study No. 6 had joined the Terrible Three and Talbot in their enterprise of keeping Skimmy out of mischief. As D'Arcy remarked, it was up to them to see that the silly duffer did not come a "muckah." They did not have far to look for the genius of the School House. Skimpole was in his study, and they found him there. He blinked at them, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Have you seen Weekes?" exclaimed Talbot.

"Certainly, I kept my appointment."

"Bai Jove! You've been makin' bets with him?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, you feahful wascal!"

"You horrid blackguard!" said Digby.

"You rank outsider!" said Herries.

Skimpole smiled patiently.

"My dear fellows, you do not understand. My motive is not pecuniary gain, as in the case of Knox or Cutts or Levison. My object is to force Mr. Weekes into honest means of gaining a livelihood, and at the same time to obtain a large sum of money to devote to feeding the prisoners in Germany. There is only one point upon which I am doubtful."

"Oh, you're doubtful on one point!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Yes, my dear Lowther. I doubt a little whether I am acting in a somewhat high-handed manner towards Mr. Weekes. Have I the right to subject him to such a violent change of life?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But my object is good, and I am convinced that in the long run Mr. Weekes himself will be thankful," said Skimpole. "I shall continue to make bets with him so long as he has any money left, and then he will have no choice but to take to honest work. I shall then ask you fellows to help me make up the parcels for Germany. It will be a somewhat extensive labour."

"You uttah ass!"

"You've actually made a bet with Weekes?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You've bet money on a horse?"

"Certainly. I had no choice about that. I should have been equally pleased to bet on any other quadruped. But races, it seems, are only run with equine quadrupeds," said Skimpole.

"Fathhead! I didn't suppose you had bet on a donkey or a rhinoceros!" howled Tom Merry. "How much have you bet?"

"Five pounds!"

"Five pounds!" shouted the juniors.

"Certainly. However, Mr. Weekes has bet a larger sum, as the odds are ten to one against the horse I have selected. Mr. Weekes will have to pay me fifty pounds when my horse—Blue Bird—wins on Saturday!"

"You think a horse will win at ten to one against?" grinned Lowther.

"Yes. You have heard of outsiders romping home!" said Skimpole. The good Skimmy had evidently picked up a new phraseology from the perusal of the "Racing Tipster." "Blue Bird is a rank outsider, but he will romp home. There is not the slightest doubt that I shall win fifty pounds—a very considerable sum!"

"And you think a downy old bird like Weekes is betting for the special purpose of handing you fifty quid on Saturday?" shouted Manners.

"My dear Manners—"

"What do you know about horses?" demanded Blake.

"Practically everything that is to be known, my dear Blake. I have studied the subject for two days."

"And mastered it in that time?" grinned Tom Merry.

"Perfectly. A brain that can deal with evolution and the origin of species finds such trifling matters mere child's play. Pray do not be uneasy, my dear fellows. I am assured that my horse will win. I have not the slightest doubt on that point!"

"And—and suppose he doesn't?"

Skimpole smiled benevolently.

"I cannot suppose impossibilities, my dear Merry. With my thorough knowledge of the subject, I have selected a certain winner."

"And you've handed that swindling rascal Weekes five solid quids?" said Tom. "Oh, you champion ass!"

"Not at all. I have handed him nothing in the way of a pecuniary consideration. I should certainly have done so, but there was a difficulty in the way, as I had no money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you're gambling on the nod?" exclaimed Lowther. "Well, that don't matter so much. You'll lose, but you needn't pay the swindler!"

"Blessed if it isn't jolly near swindling of Skimmy!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "Betting is rotten, anyway; but to bet when you haven't the money to pay your losses is like picking pockets!"

"In this case, my dear Merry, the impossibility of losing makes the matter right. However, in the remote case of losing the bet, I should pay Weekes—I should feel bound to do so!"

"And where would you get the tin?" asked Talbot.

"I should borrow it of you, my dear fellow."

"Wha-a-at!"

"As you are my study-mate, I should borrow it of you, Talbot. Of course, if you should chance to be short of money, I would allow Tom Merry to lend it to me."

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"Would you?" said Tom grimly.

"Yes, or D'Arcy," said Skimpole, beaming.

"But I do not anticipate anything of the kind, as the quadruped I have selected, after careful study, is absolutely assured of terminating the contest successfully."

"Well, of all the howling idiots!" said Tom Merry, quite aghast. "If the silly ass had picked out a respectable bookie—but, of course, a respectable bookie wouldn't make bets with a schoolboy. Skimmy, you dummy, don't you know this man Weekes is a drunken blackguard—an awful rascal who has been warned off the course, and is known to be a rank outsider even in his own business?"

"That, my dear Merry, adds to my desire to reclaim him."

"Duffer! Ass! Dummy!" said Monty Lowther. "My hat! There isn't a word for you! Still, as you can't win, and you can't pay, there's no harm done. Weekes can whistle for his money."

"I am afraid, Lowther, that in case of Blue Bird losing, I should be bound to pay him—at least, if your fellows could lend me the money," said Skimpole. "Otherwise, I should have to ask him to wait. I must be honourable, even in dealing with a low and blackguardly person like Weekes. But I do not entertain the idea for a moment, since I have exercised all my judgment and knowledge of the matter in selecting the quadruped—"

"Not much good talking to the howling idiot!" said Tom Merry. "Bump him!"

"My dear Merry, I protest— Oh, dear! Help!"

During five minutes there was a sound of heavy bumping in the study, to an accompaniment of yells of anguish.

Then Tom Merry & Co. went to tea in Study No. 6, leaving Skimpole gasping on the floor.

It was the best they could do, and they had done it with a will. Skimpole was groaning at intervals for the remainder of the evening. But the next day he was quite cheery.

He had got over the bumping, and he was anticipating fifty pounds on Saturday, and his benevolent mind dwelt upon the good works he was going to perform with that handsome sum. And that was a full consolation to Skimmy.

CHAPTER 8.

Also Ran.

DURING the next few days, Skimpole of the Shell was the object of considerable interest among the School House juniors.

Although no word was breathed in the hearing of masters or prefects, most of the juniors knew of Skimpole's new "ism."

The mere idea of Skimmy as a sportsman made them chuckle.

The genius of the Shell knew all there was to be known about Determinism and Darwinism, or, at least, was satisfied that he did—his peculiar brain was admirably suited to such matters. But what he did not know about horses and racing sharpers would have filled large volumes. Skimpole was admitted to be a funny ass by all who knew him; but as a sportsman he was a funnier ass than ever. His lack of knowledge on the abstruse subject of horse-racing was only equalled by his lack of knowledge of human nature.

His belief that Mr. Weekes would hand him fifty pounds on Saturday if his horse won was really touching. Anybody who saw Mr. Weekes could see that that boozey gentleman was far from possessing fifty shillings, let alone pounds. If, by some miraculous chance, Skimmy's selected geegee did win, there was not the slightest possibility of collecting the stakes from a frowsy and disreputable blackguard like Mr. Weekes.

But Skimpole remained in blissful unconsciousness of that important fact. He looked forward to Saturday with cheery confidence.

Tom Merry & Co. were also a little curious about the result. Skimpole's essay in blackguardism was too absurd to be taken seriously, and his sublime unconsciousness that he was doing wrong was some sort of excuse for him. The chums of the School House considered, too, that he would have his lesson when the race was run. Either he would lose, which was most probable, and thus discover that he had not quite mastered

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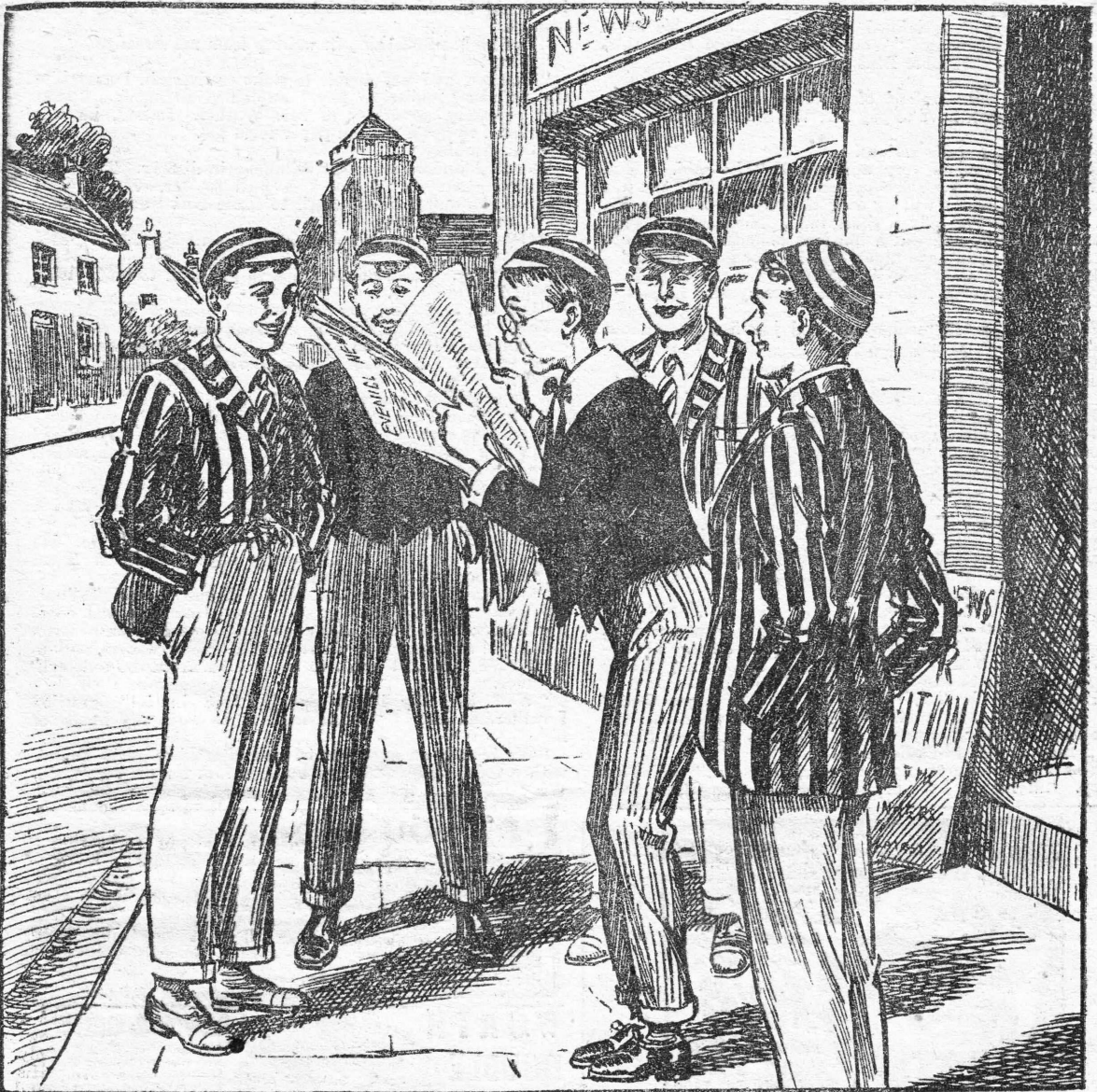
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OUT TO-DAY!



The four juniors stood round Skimpole in a grinning circle as he opened the paper to look at the racing results. "Ah! Here it is," said Skimpole, blinking at the paper. "Dalton Plate at two o'clock—that is the race, my dear fellows." "Well, what's the winner?" asked Talbot. (See Chapter 8.)

racing matters, or he would win, and Mr. Weekes would fail to pay him—an equally valuable lesson.

After lessons on Saturday, Tom Merry & Co. were playing cricket. When the game was over, they looked for Skimpole, prepared to lock him in his study if he showed any disposition to visit Mr. Weekes of Wayland.

They found Skimmy loitering about the quad. He was waiting.

"Well, how goes the geegee?" asked Tom.

"I do not know yet, my dear Merry. I am waiting for the evening paper, which will give the result of the race. When I have received official information that Blue Bird has won, I shall call on Mr. Weekes for the money."

"You won't!" said Tom cheerily.

"My dear Merry—"

"We'll trot down to Rylcombe with you and get the paper," grinned Lowther. "Let's be put out of our suspense."

"Yes, come on, Skimmy."

"Certainly, my dear fellows."

Skimpole walked down to the village with the Terrible Three and Talbot, and the evening paper was duly purchased from the village newsagent.

The four juniors stood round Skimpole in a grinning circle as he opened the paper to look for the racing results.

"Ah, here it is!" said Skimpole, blinking at the paper. "Dalton Plate at two o'clock—that's the race, my dear fellows!"

"Well, what's the winner?" asked Talbot.

Skimmy looked puzzled.

"There is something very odd about this," he remarked.

The juniors chuckled.

"Very odd indeed," said Skimpole. "My horse does not seem to be mentioned. Three names are given—Mahomet, Billiard Ball, and Snooker's Pride. It is very odd."

"Ass! They're the first three horses in the race. Mahomet's won, and Billiard Ball and Snooker's Pride are second and third."

Skimpole shook his head.

"Impossible!"

"Eh? How is it impossible?"

"Because Blue Bird must have won."

"Fathead!" shouted Tom. "Look at this! 'Also ran: Davy Jones, Cherry Ripe, and Blue Bird.' Your gee-gee came in last."

"Also ran!" chortled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Skimpole, rubbing his bony forehead in amazement. "Would you conclude from this, my dear Merry, that Blue Bird has lost the race?"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"Dear me! Then instead of receiving fifty pounds from Mr. Weekes, I shall have to pay Mr. Weekes five pounds!"

"Exactly."

Skimpole looked quite serious.

"Dear me! That is very unfortunate," he said. "You see, I have no money. Perhaps you had better lend me five pounds, Talbot, and I will go over to Wayland and pay the man. It will be for only a short time. Next week I shall make a larger bet, and win a hundred pounds. I shall then return your five, and have ninety-five left for good works."

"Are you good at arithmetic, Skimmy?" asked Talbot.

"Certainly, my dear fellow. That is a very easy subject to me."

"Then you can tell me how to lend you five pounds out of three shillings and sixpence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole reflected.

"I am afraid that is impossible, Talbot," he said at last. "A larger sum cannot be deducted from a smaller."

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Skimmy's worked that out in his head, you chaps. What a brain!"

"Perhaps you can lend me five pounds, my dear Merry?"

"With pleasure, if you will tell me how to do it with ninepence."

"You, Lowther—"

"Like a bird," said Lowther affably. "I've only got one-and-six to do it with, but with a brain like yours, Skimmy, I dare say you could manage that somehow."

"Manners, my dear fellow—"

Manners chuckled.

"I've got seven-and-six, and I'm keeping it in my trousers pocket," he remarked. "If I had as much loot as a ship-owner, I wouldn't lend it to you to pay a swindling racing sharper, my dear Skimmy."

"Then it appears that I shall not be able to pay him," said Skimpole, quite undisturbed. "I will write to him regretting my inability to do so. Perhaps at some future date I may be able to liquidate the debt."

"You won't write to him, you shrieking ass!" said Tom Merry. "If he got hold of anything in writing from you,

he would be able to blackmail you, and he's quite rascal enough."

"But he has something in writing from me already."

"What?"

"You see, as I was unable to stake ready cash, I gave him my written promise to pay," explained Skimpole. "That was necessary according to Mr. Weekes. Indeed, he was very keen to get a written paper from me."

"Oh, crumbs!"

The four juniors stared at Skimpole in dismay. They had wondered that so "downy" a bird as Mr. Weekes had allowed the duffer of the Shell to make bets "on the nod." They understood now.

"He's got your written paper, with your signature?" said Tom Merry faintly.

"Certainly. I had no objection to giving it to him. Why should I?"

"Oh, you ass! Oh, you crass idiot!" groaned Tom Merry. "You'll be jolly lucky if you get that paper back, even for five pounds! Don't you understand what you've done, you howling ass? Suppose Weekes showed that paper to the Head?"

Skimpole blinked in surprise.

"Why should he do that, my dear Merry?"

"I'm jolly certain he'll do it, if you don't pay him, dummy! Don't you know it's enough to get you flogged and sacked from the school if Dr. Holmes knew?"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "But, considering the excellence of my motives, I am sure the Head would take a lenient view."

"Fathead! The Head doesn't know you as we do. He doesn't know you're a blithering idiot!" groaned Tom.

"You're booked, you dummy!"

The Terrible Three looked utterly dismayed, and Talbot's handsome face was very grave. Even Skimpole had come down out of the clouds, as it were, and looked serious. Even Skimmy's mighty brain could realise that it was painful to be flogged, and still worse to be expelled from the school in disgrace.

"Well, the silly idiot's put his foot in it!" growled Lowther, at last. "I feel inclined to wash my hands of him."

"We took it on ourselves to look after him," said Talbot, with a faint smile. "We've bumped him for his own good. We can't desert him now."

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"I suppose not."
 "But what's going to be done?" exclaimed Tom Merry.
 "That rascal won't part with the paper unless he's paid. And if he isn't paid, he'll threaten to show Skimmy up to the Head. That's what he's got the paper from him for."

"He must be paid," said Talbot quietly.
 "Five pounds!" said Manners, with a whistle.
 The juniors exchanged glances. Five pounds was a large sum for the Shell.

"Can't you do something towards it, Skimmy?" exclaimed Lowther, shaking the genius of the Shell by the shoulder.

"At present, my dear Lowther, I have no money. I am sorry. Perhaps in a short time I may be able to dispose of the plans of my airship for a large sum."

"Oh, shut up, for goodness' sake! We've got to manage it, somehow, I suppose," growled Lowther. "Some of the other fellows may whack it out with us."

"Let's get back," said Tom.
 The chums of the Shell walked back to St. Jim's in a pensive mood. Skimpole was in a scrape, and they had to get him out of it; and there was a very considerable possibility that, in getting him out of it, they might get themselves into it. And, good-natured as they were, they almost regretted that they had ever undertaken the difficult task of looking after Skimpole.

CHAPTER 9.

Back Up!

"**B**AI Jove! What a fearful swape!"
 There was a very serious meeting in Study No. 6. Eight juniors, with very grave faces, surrounded Skimpole. Skimmy himself was the least concerned of all present, but even he was looking

grave.
 "Of all the born idiots!" said Jack Blake, in measured tones.

"Of all the howling maniacs!" said Herries.
 "The silly ass ought to be boiled in oil!" said Digby.

"Where the merry dickens is five quid coming from?"
 "I—I suppose he must be paid," said Blake hesitatingly.

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry. "Of course, the swindling rascal ought not to be paid. But he's got Skimpole's paper with his signature on it. If it's worth nothing to him, he's sure to send it to the Head to get even. He got it to hold over Skimmy's head, of course."

"Oh, the born dummy!" said Blake.
 "My dear fellows," murmured Skimpole, "I am really sorry it has turned out like this. However, pray do not bother about it. Probably something will turn up."

"Fathead!"
 "Weekes will turn up, with your paper in his paw!" growled Monty Lowther.

"The wottah will have to be paid, and that papah destroyed," said Arthur Augustus. "Considerwin' that Skimmy is a born idiot, deah boys, it's up to us to get him out of this swape. We must waise the money."

"You regard me as an idiot, D'Arcy?"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"Pray do not think I am offended," said Skimpole. "It is a very interesting scientific circumstance. It proves the theory that persons of an idiotic tendency are apt to regard cleverer people as idiots—"

"You uttah ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

"Shut up, Skimmy!" said Tom, laughing. "Do hold your silly tongue, old chap! We're going to get you out of this on condition that you promise not to land yourself in another scrape of the same sort."

"That's understood," said Blake. "Otherwise, the silly ass may as well be sacked this time as next time."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 Skimpole blinked at them.

"My dear fellows, I cannot quite agree to such an exceedingly unreasonable proposition. It is, unfortunately, true that, somehow, I have failed to select the winner. But I have not the slightest doubt that next time—"

"There's not going to be any next time," said Tom Merry grimly. "You'll give us your word on that, or you can get out of this by yourself."

"That is rather unreasonable, Merry. If this matter comes to the knowledge of the Head, he will not allow me to enter into any further sporting speculations."

"Hardly!" grinned Tom.

"That's the first thing," said Blake decidedly. "You'll make that promise, Skimmy, or you can clear out, and go and eat coke!"

Skimpole reflected. The juniors were all in deadly earnest on that point. If they saved Skimpole from that scrape, it was only on condition that he did not get into another. Skimmy evidently regarded their attitude as un-

reasonable; but he thought of an interview with the Head—and the swishing birch—and he made up his mind.

"If you insist, my dear fellows, I appear to have no alternative, I will, therefore, make the promise. I warn you, however, that you are preventing me from obtaining large sums of money for a very worthy object."

"We'll chance that. Honour bright, you know."

"Honour bright, my dear Merry. Perhaps it would be better, in many ways, for me to perfect the plans of my airship, instead of expending my time upon speculations of a sporting nature," said Skimpole thoughtfully.

"Much better. Have you arranged where to meet this rotter, and pay him?"

"Yes; I have to go to the Black Bull, in Wayland, to receive my winnings—or, as it turns out, to pay my losses. Mr. Weekes will be there at seven."

"Then you'll have to go over on your bike," said Blake. "There isn't much time to spare. And we've not got the money yet."

Talbot glanced round.
 "It's agreed that we whack it out equally," he asked—"I mean, so far as we can? Every chap hands out what he can spare?"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 Arthur Augustus, who was, fortunately, in funds, started with a pound note. Blake, with a very expressive grunt, added a ten-shilling note. The rest of the contributions were in silver.

"Total, three pounds," said Talbot. "We've got to raise two more. I've got some tin in the bank you know. I can borrow it, and settle again out of that. Gore will lend me a quid, and perhaps Kangaroo, or Glyn. I'll see."

The Toff quitted the study.

Very expressive looks were cast at Skimpole. Talbot never borrowed money for himself; and now he had to make a round of borrowing for Skimmy. Skimmy, however, had gone off into a day-dream, and hardly noticed that Talbot was going out. The juniors waited for the Shell fellow to come back, passing the time by telling Skimpole what they thought of him—quite without disturbing the equanimity of the genius of St. Jim's. Talbot returned at last.

"All serene!" he said. "Gore's stood a quid, and Kangaroo and Glyn ten bob each. I'm getting the tin out of the post-office bank next week to square them. There's the five. Put it in your pocket, Skimmy."

"Certainly, my dear Talbot."

"Now buzz off!" growled Blake.

The Terrible Three and Talbot accompanied Skimpole to the bike-shed, and the bicycle was wheeled out.

"You won't be back before locking-up," said Lowther.

"I suppose you didn't think of that—what?"

"Such a trifle naturally did not enter into my mind, my dear Lowther."

"Well, I dare say Railton will impress it on your mind when you get back. Buzz off, and break your silly neck, if you can!"

"Remember, Skimmy," said Talbot, "you're to get your paper back from Weekes in exchange for the cash. Don't part with the money without the paper."

"I will be very careful, my dear Talbot."

And Skimpole biked away.
 The chums of the School House went in in a far from easy frame of mind. Skimmy was going to the Black Bull at Wayland—a low public-house, which was, of course, strictly out of bounds for St. Jim's fellows. That was another trifle that had escaped Skimmy's lofty mind. But it could not be helped, and they could only hope that he would not be "spotted."

When Mr. Railton took calling-over, Skimpole was marked down as absent. He came in about an hour later, Taggles having to unlock the gates to admit him, and had the pleasure of receiving two hundred lines, after an interview with Mr. Railton in his study.

Tom Merry & Co. were waiting for him in the passage when he came out of the Housemaster's study, and they seized him and marched him off to their own quarters, anxious to know the result of his visit to Mr. Weekes at Wayland.

CHAPTER 10.

Money Wanted.

SKIMPOLE was looking very cheerful, in spite of the two hundred lines.

"Is it all right?" demanded Lowther.

"Quite all right, my dear fellow."

"You've paid that wotten bwute?" asked D'Arcy.

"Certainly."

"And weceived your papah in exchange?"
 "Yes."

"Oh, good!" said Blake. "That's all over, anyway. And if you ever get into a scrape like that again, you silly ass—"

"We'll scalp you," growled Manners.

"My dear Manners—"

"You'd better burn the paper," said Tom Merry. "The sooner it's out of existence the better."

"Very well, my dear Merry."

Skimpole fumbled in his pocket, and took out a folded paper. Talbot arrested his arm as he was about to toss it into the fire.

"Better make sure of it," he said. "Weekes is a downy rascal. I suppose you've examined it carefully, Skimmy?"

Skimpole blinked at him in surprise.

"My dear Talbot, I do not see the necessity. I handed Mr. Weekes five pounds, and he gave me the paper. However, I will look at it, if you wish."

"Didn't you look at it when he gave it to you?" yelled Blake.

"I did not think of examining it, Blake. It was folded, just as you see it now. I suppose Mr. Weekes would not be likely to give me the wrong paper by mistake."

"Oh, you silly ass!"

Tom Merry jerked the paper from Skimpole's hand, and unfolded it. It was blank. Skimpole stared at it, with his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles.

"What an extraordinary thing!" he exclaimed. "The stupid man has given me a blank piece of paper instead of my note."

"Well, my hat!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"It is of no consequence," said Skimpole. "I will call on him again on Monday, and ask him for the right paper. This is an absurd mistake."

"Oh, you ass! You duffer!" groaned Tom Merry. "It isn't a mistake. The rotter is keeping the paper on purpose."

"My dear Merry, why should he do that? The paper is valueless to him now that the money is paid."

"Fathead!"

The juniors were in utter dismay. It was, of course, evident that the cunning Mr. Weekes had deliberately retained the paper, taking advantage of Skimpole's unsuspecting stupidity. He could only have retained it for one purpose—blackmail. The paper was worth more than five pounds to an unscrupulous rascal.

With that paper in his hands, Mr. Weekes could hold the unfortunate junior under his thumb, and probably Mr. Weekes was dreaming golden dreams on the strength of that document—of extracting pound after pound from his victim.

That paper was an undeniable proof that the junior had entered into betting transactions with Mr. Weekes—and the effect, if it should be produced to the Head of St. Jim's, could be imagined.

It was useless to rag Skimpole for his stupidity, though the juniors felt strongly inclined to do so. The matter had to drop. Skimpole was serenely convinced that it was ended; but Tom Merry & Co. knew better, and they were looking forward to the next few days with apprehension.

Five pounds would not last a man of Mr. Weekes' character long. When he wanted money again he would have recourse to his hold over Skimpole—that was why he had retained the tell-tale paper.

As it happened, Skimpole had very little money, and could not have produced much profit for a blackmailer. But all Mr. Weekes knew of him was that he was a fellow at an expensive public school, and he naturally concluded that he would have some resources. And the fact that Skimpole had paid him five pounds in ready money had doubtless impressed the rascal with an idea of Skimpole's wealth.

If Skimmy could raise five pounds, he could raise more—and more—and more—that was how Mr. Weekes was certain to look at it.

Indeed, it was more than probable that Mr. Weekes had entered into dealings with the St. Jim's junior, rather with a view to blackmail than to winning a single bet.

Tom Merry & Co. had exhausted their financial resources—for nothing. But even if they had been able to pay any further demands, they would not have been foolish enough to do so. For if Mr. Weekes started blackmailing, it was quite certain that his demands would grow the more, the more they were met.

Skimpole's friends could only wait and see.

They "saw" soon enough.

On Monday evening Talbot came into his study, and found Gore chuckling, and Skimpole looking decidedly worried over a letter.

Gore grinned at Talbot as he came in.

"More trouble," he remarked cheerfully. "Skimmy's being dunned by a bookie. Ha, ha!"

"Well, that isn't exactly a laughing matter, Gore," said Talbot quietly. "Is that a letter from Weekes, Skimmy?"

"Yes, my dear Talbot. I fail to understand it, since the man has been paid," said Skimpole. "Doubtless he is labouring under some misapprehension."

"Give me the letter!"

Talbot read the letter with knitted brows. It ran:

"Dear Sir,—I 'ope you ain't forgotten that you owe me five quids on a bit of paper. I can't afford to wait. Come and see me this evening. I'll wait at the stile in Rylcombe Lane at six.—Yores truly,
J. WEEKES."

"The man is evidently under a most extraordinary delusion," said Skimpole, blinking at Talbot. "You remember that I liquidated that liability on Saturday."

"It's a swindle, you ass!" said Talbot. "He wants to be paid over again."

"Dear me!"

"Well, of all the idiots!" said Gore. "Are you seeing that thundering ass through this, Talbot?"

"Yes, if it can be done."

"If you're short of tin, I can stand another sov.," said Gore.

Talbot shook his head.

"Thanks; but the man isn't going to get any money from us. He won't part with the paper—I can see that."

"I—I say, that stile is jolly near St. Jim's," said Gore. "Anybody might see him there. It's risky."

"He means us to understand that," said Talbot. "It's meant to frighten Skimmy into bringing him more money."

Gore whistled.

"Blessed if I see what you're going to do, then. That man Weekes isn't a real bookie—he's an awful rogue who's been warned off the course, I hear—a regular welsling blackguard. He's been in prison, too. Mind how you handle him—he's just the kind of rotter to get squiffy and come up to the school and make a scene."

"Oh, dear!" said Skimpole. "What are you going to do, Talbot? Really I do not feel quite equal to dealing with such a character. Do you think it would be any good to see him, and point out that he is acting in a very unscrupulous manner?"

"Ha, ha!" roared Gore.

"My dear Gore—"

"I don't think that would be much good, Skimmy," said Talbot, with a smile. "It's not much use your seeing him. I will go, if you like."

"Jolly risky," said Gore.

"Perhaps you could deal with him better than I could," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "It will also save my time."

"Your—your time?" said Talbot.

"Yes. I am very busy now perfecting the plans of my airship," said Skimpole, beaming. "I am quite satisfied to leave the matter in your hands, my dear Talbot. In fact, I should prefer to hear nothing more about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Gore.

"My dear Gore, I fail to see any cause for this excessive risibility," said Skimpole, in surprise.

Talbot quitted the study with the letter. Whether Skimpole's time was valuable or not, it was evident that he was quite incapable of dealing with the bookmaker. The appointment had to be kept, otherwise Mr. Weekes was quite reckless rascal enough to come up to the school. Somehow—anyhow—the blackmailer had to be kept away—Skimpole had to be saved from the result of his folly—and Talbot intended to do his best. But he had very little hope of the result.

CHAPTER 11.

The Only Way.

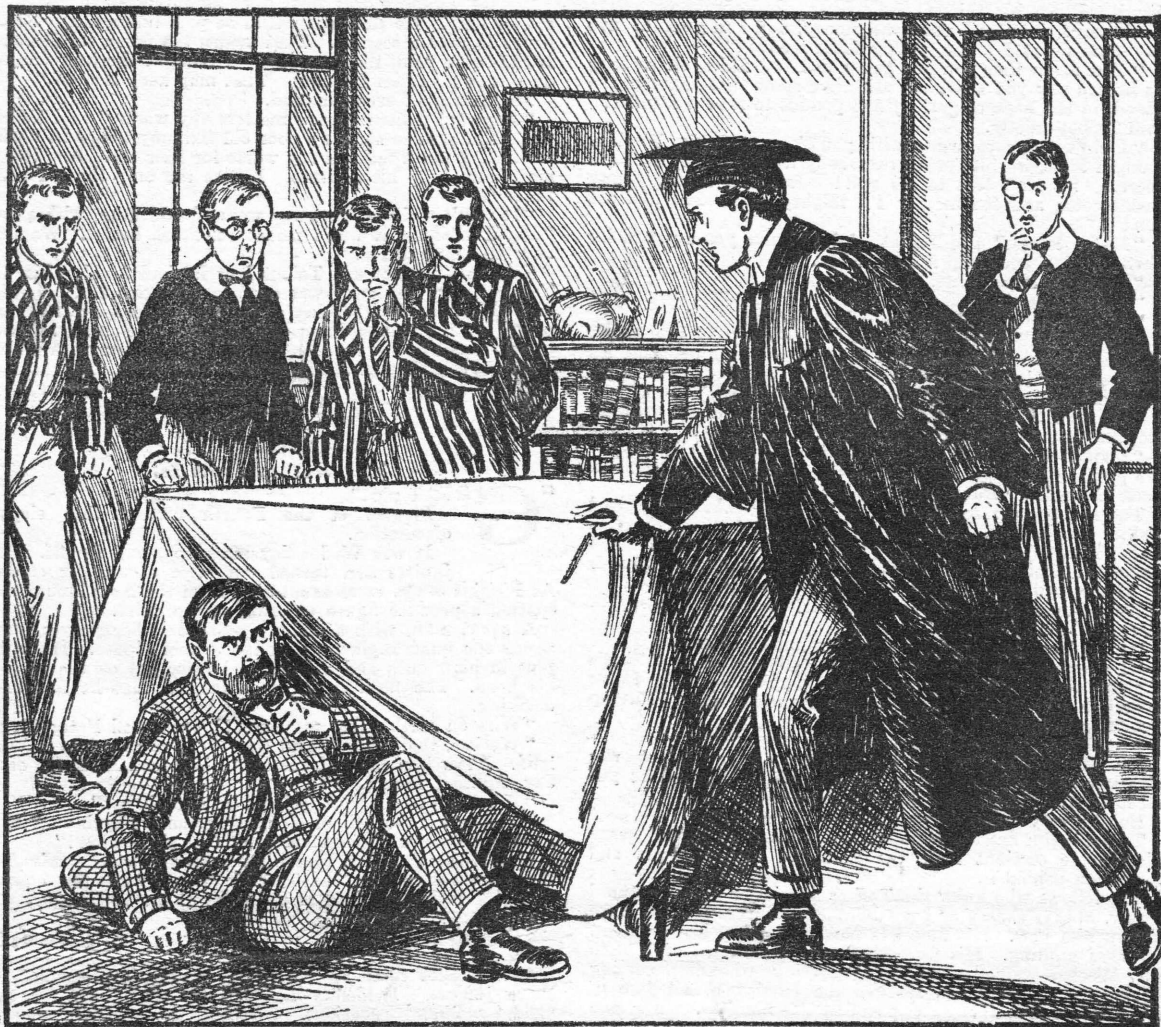
MR. WEEKES was leaning his shoulders on the stile, smoking a black pipe, and exhaling a genial odour of tobacco and strong spirits. He was watching the road towards St. Jim's, and he grunted when six o'clock rang out from the distant village. Skimpole of the Shell was not in sight; but a handsome athletic

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Mr. Railton advanced to the table as the Juniors stepped backwards, and jerked it to one side. The sprawling form of Mr. Weekes was revealed. "I thought so," said the Housemaster, grimly. "Now, my man, you will kindly explain your presence here." (See Chapter 13.)

junior was coming up the lane, Mr. Weekes stared at him surlily, expecting him to pass. It was Talbot of the Shell, and he did not pass. He stopped.

His eyes ran over the squat, beery, odorous Mr. Weekes, with a glance of disgust and contempt.

"You are Mr. Weekes?" Talbot asked abruptly.

"That 'ere's my name," said the bookmaker. "I don't know you, young gentleman. Perhaps you've brought me a message, wot?"

"I have come here for Skimpole."

"Werry good!" Mr. Weekes rubbed his hands. "I 'ope you've brought the spondulicks?"

"I have brought you nothing."

Mr. Weekes looked ugly at once.

"Skimpole paid you what was due on Saturday," said Talbot quietly. "You did not return him the paper he signed."

Mr. Weekes grinned.

"That 'ere paper is worth more'n five quid," he remarked. "Fifty would be nearer the mark, I reckon."

"I have come for that paper."

"My heye!"

"As Skimpole has paid you, you have no right to keep back the paper," said Talbot as patiently as he could.

"I ain't worrying 'bout that," said Mr. Weekes, quite unabashed. "I'm 'ard up. That there paper's worth a lot to me. A rich young gentleman 'as to pay for his little games—wot?"

"Skimpole is not rich."

Mr. Weekes closed one eye.

"He is poor," said Talbot. "He has only a small allow-

ance, and he spends it immediately. He has only a few shillings a week."

"He 'anded me quids—five quids—on Saturday," grinned Mr. Weekes.

"That was raised by his friends to get him out of the difficulty."

"Then his blessed friends can raise some more," said Mr. Weekes coolly. "They'd better, if they don't want to see the young gentleman showed up!"

Talbot paused. Mr. Weekes evidently believed that he was on a "good thing," as he would have called it. Probably he was keen enough to judge that Skimpole was not wealthy, but he considered that his people must have money, and Skimpole could get it from them, or that he had well-to-do friends from whom he could borrow. Where the money came from Mr. Weekes did not care in the least, so long as it came.

"If I 'ave to come up to the school there will be trouble," said Mr. Weekes, with a grin. "I got the paper signed by the young gentleman."

"The Head would pay you nothing."

"I fancy that paper's worth five quid to save a scandal, if it comes to that," said Mr. Weekes coolly. "And it's worth more so long as I 'old it."

"What do you want?"

"I want two quids down, and the same every time I'm 'ard up," said Mr. Weekes. "Twice a week, say."

"And how is Skimpole to give you that out of four shillings a week pocket-money?"

Mr. Weekes shrugged his shoulders.

"I dessay he can raise it. He raised five quid. P'r'aps his friends will shell out to save his bacon. Let 'im write 'ome

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for it. Pawn his things, if he likes. I don't know and I don't care. I know I want the money, and I'm goin' to 'ave it. That's wot I know, young feller-me-lad!"

"You mean that you are going to bleed Skimpole so long as he can pay you anything, and then show that paper to the Head, in the hope of getting five pounds to save a scandal?" said Talbot quietly.

"I ain't going to argue with you!" snorted Mr. Weekes, stung a little, in spite of his extremely thick skin, by Talbot's scorn. "I ain't 'ere to see you! Let that skinny young raskil come and see me, or I'll mighty soon come and see 'im!"

"Listen to me," said Talbot. "I will give you a pound for that paper, if you hand it over to me."

"Good-bye!" said Mr. Weekes.

"You refuse that offer?"

"Nice evening, ain't it?" said Mr. Weekes.

"Very well," said Talbot, still very quietly. "You won't get anything. Skimpole can't pay you anything, and his friends won't let him, if he could. You will not get a single shilling. And you will not come near the school."

"Won't I?" grinned Mr. Weekes. "And who's goin' to stop me, my fine young gentleman?"

"I am," said Talbot. "I shall do my best, at all events." He peeled off his jacket, and threw it on the stile, and pushed back his cuffs. "Put your hands up, Mr. Weekes."

The fat, beery rascal blinked at him. He was a man, and Talbot was a boy. But the athletic Shell fellow looked as if he could give an account of Mr. Weekes without much difficulty. Tobacco and spirits and late hours did not conduce to fitness, and Mr. Weekes was not in fighting condition.

He detached himself from the stile, and backed away in alarm.

"Look 'ere, don't you lay a 'and on me!" he said.

"I am going to thrash you," said Talbot calmly. "That's the only way to deal with you, and I'm going to do it. Come near this school again, and you'll get another dose. Put up your hands."

"Look 'ere, I—I—I—yaroooh!"

Mr. Weekes had to put up his hands, for Talbot was attacking. His beery face crimsoned with rage, and he put all his "beef" into the contest that followed.

But he very quickly had "bellows to mend."

Talbot, grim and determined, pressed him hard, and every blow came straight from the shoulder, with strength and resolution behind it.

The fellows who knew the Toff as a quiet and good-natured fellow, always cheery and good-humoured, would hardly have known him now. His face was hard and grim, his teeth set, his eyes glinting. His fists—that seemed as hard as iron to Mr. Weekes—rained upon the staggering, wheezing, cursing bookmaker. Few blows reached the handsome, set face of the Shell fellow, though the ruffian did his best. For five minutes Mr. Weekes felt as if he were caught in a threshing-machine, and then he went down on his back with a crash.

It was as thorough a licking as Mr. Weekes had ever experienced, and he had had some experiences of that kind during his career as a welsher.

He lay on his back in the dust, blinking dizzily up at the Shell fellow of St. Jim's. Talbot stood over him, breathing hard.

"Ang yer!" groaned Mr. Weekes. "Ang yer, you young 'ound! Ow!"

"Are you going?" said Talbot.

"Ang yer, I ain't goin' for you!"

"I give you one minute before I kick you into the ditch."

Mr. Weekes thought better of it. He staggered to his feet, grabbed up his battered hat, and started. Talbot watched him as he shambled away across the fields.

The rascal disappeared from sight at last, and the Shell fellow walked back thoughtfully to the school. The Terrible Three met him as he came in.

"Hallo, where did you pick up that nose?" asked Monty Lowther.

Talbot smiled, and rubbed his nose, where Mr. Weekes' knuckles had landed one blow.

"And what the dickens have you been doing with your knuckles!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Row with the Gram-marians?"

"No. I've met Mr. Weekes."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Talbot held out Skimpole's letter, and the chums of the Shell read it. Tom Merry's brow darkened.

"So that was it? As we thought—blackmail," he said. "But—but what have you done?"

"He would not part with the letter," said Talbot quietly. "He wants four pounds a week for keeping it dark."

"My hat! Where does the ass think Skinny could get it?"

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"After Skimmy was bled dry, he intended to claim the money here. He thinks it would be paid in exchange for the paper to save a scandal. That means the finish for Skimmy. He can't be paid, that's certain. I thought the best thing to do was to give him a hiding. That may keep him off."

The Terrible Three chuckled.

"Anyway, it hasn't made matters any worse," said Talbot. "If he intends to show up poor old Skimmy unless he's paid, the hiding won't make it any worse for Skimmy. And it may make him keep his distance. It was the only thing I could think of."

"It won't make matters any worse," said Tom, with a nod. "But I'm afraid it won't make 'em much better. We shall have to wait and see."

Skimpole did not ask Talbot how he had fared, when the Toff came in. Skimmy was deep in his wonderful invention once more, and Mr. Weekes and all his works seemed to have passed entirely from the mighty brain of Skimmy. Skimpole's friends looked forward to the next few days with uneasiness. Skimmy's own equanimity was wonderful to behold.

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Weekes Calls In.

"GREAT pip!" Figgins of the Fourth uttered that elegant ejaculation.

It was Wednesday afternoon, and the St. Jim's juniors had turned out after dinner for cricket. As Figgins & Co. came sauntering from the New House they spotted a peculiar figure entering at the gates.

A squat man, with a stubbly beard and beery eyes, came across the quadrangle towards the School House. He had a pipe in his mouth and a battered bowler hat on the back of his head. The flush in his face showed that he had been drinking.

"Who on earth's that merchant?" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "Weekes, the bookie," said Kerr. "I've seen him in Wayland. I saw him chucked out of the Wayland Arms the other day, fighting squiffy."

"What the merry thunder does he want here?"

"Visitor for the School House!" grinned Figgins. "They have some weird acquaintances on that side—what!"

Mr. Weekes, with a somewhat unsteady tread, arrived at the School House. The Terrible Three were just coming out. They stopped dead at the sight of the bookmaker.

"Weekes!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lowther. "He's come for Skimmy, and all the fat's in the fire now!"

Mr. Weekes came up the steps, leering insolently at the three juniors. Evidently he had nerved himself for that visit by liberal potations. Without the peculiar courage imparted by strong drink even Mr. Weekes would not have had the audacity to present himself at St. Jim's.

"Arternoon!" said Mr. Weekes affably. "Young gentleman of the name of Skimpole 'ere—wot?"

"You—you've come to see Skimpole?"

"Wot? Young gentleman owes me some money," said Mr. Weekes. "P'r'aps you'll be good enough to tell 'im I've come."

The Terrible Three stood in dismay. If they had met Mr. Weekes outside the gates they would not have hesitated to duck him or rag him to any extent, to send him about his business. But they could not rag him on the steps of the School House. A master or a prefect might come upon the scene at any moment.

"You can't see Skimpole," said Tom hurriedly. "You'd better go quietly."

"I ain't going without my money!"

"Skimpole paid you—"

"That's a lie!" said Mr. Weekes cheerfully.

Tom's eyes blazed and his hands clenched, but he held himself in check. The one chance of saving Skimpole from the punishment of his folly was to get Mr. Weekes away quietly before he was seen. Not that there was much chance.

"Look here," said Tom, "if you're found here—"

"Where's Master Skimpole?" said Mr. Weekes defiantly. "I've come for my money, and if I ain't paid I'm goin' to the 'Ead."

"Gweat Scott! Who is that fearful boundah?" Arthur Augustus came out, and his eyeglass dropped out of his eye at the sight of the visitor.

"Weekes—to see Skimpole!" said Tom Merry hopelessly.

"Bai Jove! Bettah get him out of sight," said D'Arcy anxiously. "Old Wailton may come out any minute!"

"He won't go!"

"Pway lend a hand all wound, and we'll chuck him out, deah boys!"

"Hold on, Gussy! If there's a row, Railton will hear and come out!" exclaimed Tom hastily.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!" Mr. Weekes pushed into the House. Dearly the juniors would have liked to collar him and hurl him headlong down the steps. But it was not to be done.

"Where's that young Skimpole?" demanded Mr. Weekes. "Where's that young swindler—what?"

"Hush?" "I ain't 'ushing!" said Mr. Weekes, raising his voice. "Wot I wants is my money, and that's wot I'm going to 'ave!"

"Bai Jove! Pway don't speak so loudly!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You will attract the attention of the House-master!"

"I ain't afraid of no bloomin' 'Ousemaster!" "Come up to Skimpole's study!" exclaimed Tom, in an agony lest the ruffian's voice should reach the House-master in his room. "This way!"

"Right you are!" said Mr. Weekes. "I don't want no row, 'slong as I'm paid. But if I ain't paid there's goin' to be trouble! You 'ear me?"

Tom hurried the rascal up the broad staircase. What was going to be done he simply could not guess, but his instinct was to keep Mr. Weekes out of sight if possible.

It might be possible to make some terms with him—at all events, if he was seen, the game was up so far as protecting Skimpole was concerned.

Fortunately, masters and prefects were not in the hall just then; only some juniors were on the spot, and they stared at Mr. Weekes without comment. Skimpole's adventures as a "sportsman" were known far and wide, and the fellows guessed that this was the result of them, and there was general compassion for the unfortunate Skimmy.

"It's the sack for the silly ass!" remarked Levison of the Fourth. "That horrid bouncer won't be here long without being spotted. Blessed if I'd have anything to do with him!"

"Those silly asses will be hauled over the coals for it!" said Crooke, with a sneer. "Catch me having a hand in it!" But Tom Merry & Co. were not thinking of themselves.

Mr. Weekes was hurried up to the Shell passage, and into Skimpole's study. Talbot and Gore were on the cricket-ground, but Skimpole was in the room, blinking over a huge volume of the valuable lucubrations of the celebrated Professor Balmycrumpet. He blinked up at the three distressed juniors as they piloted Mr. Weekes in, followed by D'Arcy.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, in surprise. "Well, here's your precious friend!" growled Monty Lowther. "And now what are you going to do with him?"

"I want my money!" said Mr. Weekes truculently. "Five quids is wot you owe me, Master Skinny Skimpole, and that's what I've come for!"

"You are labouring under a misapprehension, my good man," said Skimpole. "I have already liquidated that obligation."

"Are you payin', or are you not payin'?" roared Mr. Weekes.

"Certainly not!"

"Orlright! Then I'm goin' to the 'ead!" Tom Merry stepped quickly between the ruffian and the door.

"Hold on!" he said quietly.

"You let me pass, you young 'ound!"

"Another step, and I'll smash you!" said Tom savagely.

"You're staying here for the present!"

Mr. Weekes backed away, in alarm. The sturdy junior could have knocked him across the room, and Mr. Weekes realised it.

"Goin' to keep me 'ere, are you?" snarled Mr. Weekes, his reddened eyes gleaming with rage. "Well, I'll soon bring the 'ead 'ere with a yell or two! I'll—"

"Speak lower, you cad!" said Tom. "Give one shout, and you'll get your teeth knocked down your throat! Mind, I mean business!"

His hands were itching to be on the rascal already. Mr. Weekes backed further away, and he did not utter the yell or two.

"Look 'ere!" he said. "You look 'ere—"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"Gussy, old chap, cut off and bring Talbot here! He's changing in the dorm."

"Yaas, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus sped down the passage. In a few minutes Talbot arrived in his flannels. Mr. Weekes blinked at him and backed round the table.

"You keep your 'ands off me!" he gasped. "I ain't come 'ere for a row, I tell you. I come 'ere for my money!"

Talbot came quietly into the study and closed the door.

"Nobody's seen him yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," said Tom—"only some of the fellows. But—"

but it was a miracle that none of the Sixth happened to be near—"

"They'll see me yet!" said Mr. Weekes truculently.

"They'll 'ear me, too, if I don't get my money!"

"Silence, you cur!" rapped out Talbot.

Mr. Weekes threw himself sullenly into the armchair. The juniors exchanged glances of dismay. The rascal had come, and how he was to be got rid of was a problem that passed all their powers of solution. They looked at Skimpole.

The genius of the Shell, evidently bored with the proceedings, had turned to his valuable volume again, and was deeply intent upon the extremely important subject of evolution, and the origin of species. There was a long pause.

The door suddenly opened, and Blake looked in.

"Is he here?" he gasped.

"Yes. What?"

"Railton's coming!"

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Railton!"

"He was on the cricket-field, and spotted him from there!" panted Blake. "He saw him come into the House. I cut off to tell you he was coming. He looked rather waxy!" "All U P!" said Monty Lowther. "Oh, Skimmy, you silly idiot—"

"Let 'im come!" grinned Mr. Weekes. "Let 'im come! I'm ready to see him, I am!"

"You fool!" burst out Tom Merry. "When Railton sees you he'll give you a horsewhipping, to start with!"

Mr. Weekes' jaw dropped. Apparently he had not thought of that possibility.

"Get out of sight!" said Talbot quickly. "Look here, you want money, not a thrashing. If Skimpole gets clear of this I'll see that you have five pounds!"

"Now you're talking!" said Mr. Weekes amicably. "Mind, I want the 'ard cash afore I go!"

"If Skimpole gets clear you shall have it," said Talbot.

"Get under the table—that's the only place! Sharp's the word!"

"Railton's got a cricket-stump in his hand," Blake remarked casually. "He knows Weekes by sight, you know."

That was enough for Mr. Weekes. He made a dive under the study table.

Tom Merry pulled the cover lower on the side towards the door. Then the juniors hastily placed chairs round the table and sat down.

"Read aloud, Skimmy!" said Lowther.

"Certainly, my dear fellows!" said Skimpole, with a beaming smile.

"Bai Jove!"

It was the last desperate attempt to save Skimmy from the inevitable. The juniors were seated round the table, and Skimpole was reading aloud to them, when Mr. Railton's step was heard at the door.

CHAPTER 13.

Mr. Railton Settles the Matter.

TAP!

The door opened, and the House-master looked in. The juniors rose respectfully to their feet, taking care, however, to keep close to the table. Under the table Mr. Weekes was as silent as a mouse.

Mr. Railton was looking stern. His eyes dwelt scrutinisingly on the juniors.

"I am sorry to interrupt you," he said. Mr. Railton was always courteous even to the scamps of the Lower School. "A very extraordinary thing has happened. A man of very bad character, named Weekes, has been seen to enter this house. I understand that he was brought upstairs. Have you seen him?"

"Weekes, sir?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"I—I saw him in the hall, sir," said Tom.

"He came upstairs?"

"Yes, sir!"

"I do not see him in the passage, so I presume he is in one of the studies," said the House-master.

"Yaas; I think he went into a study, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

"Did he come to visit any of you?"

"Wathah not!"

"Do you know where he is?"

The juniors looked round the study.

"I—I can't see anything of him, sir!" faltered Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton smiled grimly.

"Is he in this study?"

"This—this study, sir!"

"I think I spoke plainly, Merry. Is Mr. Weekes in this study?"

"I—I don't see him, sir!"

"What are you all doing here?"

"Ahem! Skimmy is reading out to us, sir!" gasped Blake.
"Do you generally change into your flannels when Skimpole reads out to you?"

"We—we were just going down to the cricket, sir!"

"I hope, my boys, that you do not intend to prevaricate," said the School Housemaster severely.

"Nunno, sir!"

"But this comes very near it!"

"Oh, sir!"

"In fact, I have very little doubt that the man is in this study. Kindly step away from that table!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Mr. Railton advanced to the table, as the juniors stepped backwards, and jerked it to one side, the sprawling form of Mr. Weekes was revealed.

"I thought so," said the Housemaster grimly. "Now, my man, you will kindly explain your presence here."

"Oh, jiminy!" gasped Mr. Weekes.

Mr. Railton grasped him by the collar, and jerked him to his feet. The juniors stood dumb with dismay. The game was up now, with a vengeance.

"You keep your 'ands off me!" said Mr. Weekes, with an attempt at bluster. "You touch me, and I'll 'ave the law on yer, I can tell you that. I ain't afraid of no blooming 'ousemaster!"

"What is this man doing here, Talbot? This is your study."

"He—he came to—to see a chap, sir," faltered Talbot.

"To see you?"

"No, sir!"

The juniors looked at Skimpole. They were all "in it," but it was time for the genius of the Shell to own up. They had done their best. Skimpole blinked at them, and closed his big volume with a sigh. Evidently he did not like coming down from the important subject of evolution to such a trifling matter as this.

"This disreputable and somewhat dishonourable person came to visit me, sir," said Skimpole.

Mr. Railton started.

"You, Skimpole! Is it possible that you have had any dealings with such a man?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Railton, in astonishment. "And how many of you others have been concerned in this disgraceful affair?"

"Weally, Mr. Wailton, I twust you do not suspect us of havin' dealings with a wascally chawactah like that?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"I am here to judge that," said the Housemaster grimly.

"We—we were trying to get old Skimmy out of it, sir," stammered Tom Merry. "He—he can't help being a silly ass, sir. We—we thought we ought to help him."

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

Mr. Railton frowned.

"Then this man has had dealings only with you, Skimpole?"

"Certainly, sir! The other fellows are hardly equal in intellectual powers to the task of spotting certain winners," said Skimpole.

"What!" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Skimmy was taken in by that rotter, sir," said Talbot.

"He didn't mean any harm, sir—all the fellows know he's a silly idiot—ahem!"

"Taken in, was he?" snarled Mr. Weekes. "I like that! That young gent came to me to put a bit on a 'orse. Now he's lost, he don't want to pay. I'm 'ere for my money, and I ain't going without it!"

"The man's been paid, sir!" said Tom Merry hastily. "We paid him to get Skimpole's note back, and then he wouldn't part with it!"

"You had no right to pay him, Merry. You should have had no dealings with the man, as you very well know. However, I shall not be hard upon thoughtless boys for trying to help a foolish boy out of a scrape. Mr. Weekes, you declare that you booked a bet on a horse from this stupid boy?"

"You bet!" said Mr. Weekes. "And I got his paper to prove it, too, and that there paper's worth five pounds!"

"Give it to me!"

"I ain't partin' with it without the money," said Mr. Weekes.

"Blake, fetch me a cane from my study!"

"Yes, sir!"

Jack Blake hurried away. He came back with the cane, and the juniors rubbed their hands in anticipation.

"Will you give me that paper, Mr. Weekes?" said the Housemaster, as he took the cane from Blake.

"Not without the money—"

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Mr. Weekes had no time for more. The cane was lashing across his shoulders, and he dodged round the study to escape.

Lash! Lash! Lash! Lash!

"Bwavo!" chirruped Arthur Augustus, in great delight.

"Yaroooh!" roared Mr. Weekes. "Stoppit! Chuckit! Help! Yooop! 'Ere's the blooming paper! Oh, crumbs!"

He hurled the paper on the table, and the cane ceased to lash.

"Look at that paper, Skimpole, and tell me whether it is yours."

Skimpole blinked at the paper.

"That is it, sir."

"Very good. Destroy it at once."

"Look 'ere!" gasped Mr. Weekes; but a threatening motion of the cane cut him short. Mr. Weekes had had enough of that, and he was looking longingly towards the door.

Tom Merry struck a match, and Skimpole held the paper in it. It was consumed in a few seconds.

"You may go, Mr. Weekes," said the Housemaster quietly.

"You have been rascal enough to make bets with a school-boy, and you have been punished. Let me find you anywhere near this school again, and I will thrash you soundly. Go!"

"I ain't goin' without— Yaroooh! Yoop! 'Elp! Oh, crikey!"

Mr. Weekes dodged out of the study, and fled. He did the stairs three at a time, and bolted out of the School House.

"Now," said Mr. Railton, "that rascal has been dealt with, and it remains to deal with you, Skimpole."

"I should prefer the matter to close now, if you do not mind, sir," said Skimpole mildly.

"Shurrup, you ass!" whispered Blake.

"You have entered into betting transactions, Skimpole?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Not at all, sir."

"Wha-a-at?"

"You see, sir," beamed Skimpole, "my motive was good. My intention was to win all the money of Mr. Weekes, and thus force him to take up an honest livelihood. I am sure, sir, that you will be prepared to admit that this was an extremely commendable object?"

"Skimpole!"

"The large sums I intended to obtain from him, sir, I should have expended in providing sustenance for the prisoners in Germany. Thus two good works would be done at the same time."

Mr. Railton looked fixedly at the genius of the Shell.

"And you had no doubt, Skimpole, about your ability to do this?"

"Not in the least, sir," said the cheerful Skimmy. "With my unusual mental powers, sir, I was able to master the subject in a very short time. Indeed, within a reasonable period, I fully anticipated collecting a fortune of considerable dimensions, but these somewhat obtuse fellows have made me promise not to pursue my avocation, sir, and have insisted that I shall have no further connection with racing matters. Otherwise—"

"Skimpole!"

"Yes, sir! You see—"

"I see, Skimpole, that you have acted in a disgraceful manner, but that you are too stupid to understand the seriousness of your action. I shall, however, attempt to impress it on your mind. Hold out your hand."

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Skimpole doubled up.

"I trust, Skimpole, that that will be a lesson to you," said Mr. Railton. "Any further folly of this kind will be more severely punished."

Mr. Railton left the study, Tom Merry & Co. following him out, leaving Skimpole to groan.

The genius of the Shell had escaped cheaply, though he did not feel very happy at the present moment. For a considerable time deep groans were heard from the study, and it was some hours before Skimpole could return to the entrancing pages of Professor Balmcrumpet with any degree of comfort. But the lesson he had received had impressed itself even upon Skimmy's powerful brain; and his new "ism" was a thing of the past, and nothing more was heard of Skimpole the Sportsman.

THE END.

(Do not miss "UNDER GUSSY'S PROTECTION" next Wednesday's Grand Story of the Chums of St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford.)

INTO THE UNKNOWN!

This Week's Long Instalment
of a Magnificent New Serial
Story of Thrilling Adventure.

By **DAGNEY MAJOR.**

The Previous Instalments Told How

Mr. THOMAS WHITTAKER, accompanied by his son REGGIE, JIMMY REDFORD, LARRY BURT, a Chinese servant named SING LOO, Dr. PHENNING, and a party of natives, of whom Phwa Ben Hu—nicknamed TOOTHY JIM—is leader, sets out to explore Patagonia in search of a specimen of the giant sloth, which is believed to be still existent there.

The party reaches Patagonia, and eventually discover a rocky city, apparently uninhabited, which has been hewn out of the side of an extinct volcano. Here they find a drawing, and Dr. Phenning asserts that it is a crude representation of the giant sloth.

(Now read on.)

A Rude Surprise.

The boys were at once all excitement, and Jimmy dashed out to go and tell the others, who quickly came to see what surely must be the oldest picture in the world.

"That proves," said Mr. Whittaker, "that the giant sloth must have lived in these parts."

Further searchings among the rock-chambers resulted in the discovery of more drawings, flint arrow-heads, and axes.

While the doctor and Mr. Whittaker discussed these relics of a bygone age, the three boys went on their own and proceeded to what appeared to be the largest of all the chambers.

In that they found a big sort of sarcophagus, covered over with big stones, which the boys managed, with great difficulty, to raise. Inside the stone coffin, or whatever it was, were flint spear and arrow-heads, with a quantity of crystal-like stones lying loose by them. As Reggie scrambled about this chamber, feeling the walls, and tapping them to see if they were hollow, his companions suddenly gave vent to a cry of horror as, without a hint of warning, the ground under Reggie's feet suddenly caved in and, with a cry of despair, the boy completely disappeared.

Larry darted to the edge of the black hole and, peering over the edge, called frantically to his friend; but there was no answer.

Then Larry and Jimmy rushed out, calling for help.

Quick as legs could move them, the doctor, Mr. Whittaker, and Sing Loo came running up.

"Reggie's fallen down a hole in the cave," gasped Larry, "and we can't make him hear us!"

In a moment Mr. Whittaker was fastening a rope round his waist, and told the doctor, Sing Loo and the two boys to lower him down the gaping cavity.

Quickly he disappeared down the black gap. But they had not far to lower him—twenty feet at the most.

"All right!" he cried from below. "I've reached bottom! Reggie's unconscious! It's a secret chamber of buried treasure! As soon as I've fixed the rope to Reggie's waist, haul up carefully!"

Presently the signal came from below, and those at the top of the hole very carefully pulled up their precious burden.

The doctor immediately took charge of the injured Reggie. "Ah, a bruised head and a sprained ankle!" he said. "And I'm thankful it's no worse!"

Immediately he bore him outside and took his patient to his own mule, where he began to apply restoratives.

Meanwhile, Mr. Whittaker, relieved at the doctor's verdict on Reggie, was exploring the bottom of the pit.

"Are you there?" he shouted up presently.

"Rather!" came the cheery reply.

"Well," said the expedition leader, "Reggie, by his fall, has discovered a very fine lot of buried treasure. There are gold ornaments, shields, silver vases, priceless jewels and gems down here, all heaped up anyhow. Buried treasure of the Incas, I expect, and brought here secretly from Peru and Mexico so as to save it from the Spanish."

Larry and Jimmy gave a whoop of excitement.

Presently Mr. Whittaker shouted to be hauled up, and very soon he was on firm ground once more, bearing in his arms some massive gold vases, a silver shield, bracelets and earrings. The sight of these, tarnished and dulled as they were, brought a murmur of admiration from the boys and Sing Loo.

Under one arm Mr. Whittaker held a hard, somewhat large piece of tough hide, with here and there some scanty tufts of coarse, reddish hair adhering to it.

"That," he said mysteriously, bending over the skin, "is to us the most priceless thing of all. This piece of hard-dried hide made the covering over the top of the hole through which Reggie fell, and that, covered with stones and loose earth, made a rough and ready trap for the unwary—"

He paused a moment, examining the ancient piece of hide.

"Unless I'm very much mistaken," he said impressively, "this hide is a very small part of the skin of the giant sloth."

Then, just as they all crowded towards the entrance to the stone chamber so as to examine their treasures in a better light, they gave a cry of incredulous amazement.

Right in front of the entrance stood a group of enormously tall dark, copper-coloured men, all of them with drawn bows and arrows, ready to shoot. No man was under eight feet in height, and superbly proportioned. The only clothes they wore were rough cloths of skin round the loins.

So totally unexpected was their appearance that the whole party were completely taken off their guard, and not one of them had rifle in hand. Impulsively Reggie darted back to get his gun, and at that instant an arrow whizzed past his head.

White Magic.

"Not a man of you move," whispered Mr. Whittaker tensely, "or it'll all be over with us. Do as I do."

As he spoke, the leader of the expedition throw up his hands. Everyone of the party did the same.

Then the somewhat harsh, strident voice of the foremost

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "UNDER CUSSY'S PROTECTION!"

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

giant broke out into a torrent of incomprehensible language, in which the words "Boya torsha" were often repeated. When he had finished his harangue, the other giants all cried out "Heiyo, heiyo!"

Mr. Whittaker and his little party still stood with their hands thrown up above their heads. The boys' arms were already aching cruelly. All wondered how much longer they could keep them raised.

Sing Loo was the first to let both arms fall to his sides. That was the signal for another marvellously-aimed arrow to come swishing into the cave. It passed through the Chinaman's large wide-brimmed Chinese straw hat.

Up went the Chinaman's hands again.

Then, borne through the still, silent air, there came the horrid, nerve-racking sound of one short, sharp, ear-piercing shriek.

It evidently came from the expeditionary party who had not passed through the entrance to the rock city. The boys paled, Mr. Whittaker quivered slightly. Quick as thought, the idea flashed through Mr. Whittaker's mind—the rest of the party had also been taken unawares, and one of the natives had met with a sudden end.

Sing Loo suddenly plopped down on his knees and began frantically praying to the gods of his ancestors to deliver him from the muchee too big foreign devils.

At this the leader of the giants seemed to be appeased, and his own bow and those of his followers were lowered.

Thereupon Mr. Whittaker and the boys instantly fell on their knees and bowed to the ground. This was met with evident satisfaction by the giants, who all murmured "Heiyo, heiyo!"

The leader then advanced, followed by his men. Quickly, firmly, they made the expeditionary party prisoners by securing them with long, fibrous thongs which hung in coils from their necks. As soon as all were securely bound, the chief giant motioned them to rise, and while two stalwart natives remained in the cave, the rest, led by the chief, motioned the prisoners to rise and to follow them. Mr. Whittaker and his charges could only just manage to hobble, for their legs were bound in such a way as to enable them to take only very short strides.

As soon as they passed through the arched entrance to the rock city, Mr. Whittaker saw a sight that he never forgot.

The worst had happened. The whole of his party, including mules, horses, baggage, and natives, were prisoners of the giants.

There were a hundred of these big, fine-looking, copper-coloured men mounting guard over the cavalcade with bows and arrows and flint-headed spears. Some of the natives already lay lifeless by the mules, some of which were also lying dead.

Suddenly Mr. Whittaker became aware that the doctor was the centre of an awed-looking crowd of giants. The cause of their wonder was soon apparent as Mr. Whittaker's party, accompanied by their guards, neared the doctor.

The medico was shouting and gesticulating with his hands. At one moment one of his hands blazed with the strong light of a tiny electric torch; at another moment there was no torch and no light—both hands were held up empty.

The doctor had probably saved the whole position by making the natives think he was a great magician. He was doing some of his famous conjuring tricks—sleight-of-hand manipulations with the torch—and the giants were amazed, incredulous.

"Bravo, Phenning!" yelled Mr. Whittaker excitedly. "Keep it up—keep it up, man! They'll think you're a fire god, or something, and they'll make you witch doctor to the whole tribe!"

Even Sing Loo and Larry and Jimmy could scarce forbear to cheer, and their guards were so dumbfounded at the doctor's apparent perfect control to make fire appear and disappear at will that they heeded not the boys' shouts of delight.

Mr. Whittaker was relieved to see that Reggie, although securely bound, was sitting up near the doctor, smiling faintly, but not much worse for his fall.

Dr. Phenning continued to do some very simple sleight-of-hand and conjuring tricks. He made coins appear from nowhere, and caused them to disappear into space, as it were. Then, showing both hands empty, he boldly approached one of the giants, and produced from the man's ear a pack of cards, which he spread out fanwise.

The giant gave a yell of fear, and sprang away, then raised his spear threateningly. But the voice of his chief came quick and harsh. Instantly the big man lowered his weapon, and bowed the knee before the doctor.

Instantly every copper-coloured giant there, including the

chief, bowed themselves to the ground, and made obeisance to the doctor.

By a simple act of sleight-of-hand the whole position was saved.

Then a hundred harsh, strident voices broke the silence.

"Heiyo! Heiyo! Heiyo!" came from every throat.

It was an acknowledgment, surely, thought Mr. Whittaker, that they recognised something worthy of note.

Then the leader of the giants, raising his bow-and-arrow above his head, as if in token of submission, once more broke out into a torrent of unknown words. Continually he pointed to the doctor and to all the whites and the Patagonian natives.

Every now and then loud cries, as if of assent, broke from the throats of the giants, and suddenly, by an order from their chief, every man ran to a mule, llama, and native, who were left alive, and took up his position by its side. Then, between two rows of stalwart guards, all the Britishers were told by a sign to march forward. The doctor, picking up the lame Reggie in his arms—and, strangely enough, without a word of protest—fell in line, and the next moment the whole party were moving forward to an unknown destination.

The doctor was the only one who was unfettered; the rest had to hobble along as best they could.

What was to be their ultimate fate?

The chief of the giants led the way along a scarcely perceptible path cut through the undergrowth, along the plateau for about a mile, then they began to gradually descend.

Thick trees and shrubs hindered their view, and talking among the prisoners was not allowed. Mr. Whittaker had spoken once, but not again, as directly he raised his voice the cruel tip of a flint spear-head pricked his neck from behind.

Suddenly, as the party were about half-way down the slope of an open clearing, an involuntary gasp of astonishment escaped all as their eyes beheld a truly wondrous sight.

Away down in the valley, sheltered by towering cliffs, wooded hills, and scrub, there was spread out before them a wonderful city, that had been hidden from the gaze of civilised man since the dawn of its foundation.

Cut into the far sides of the rocks which seemed to wall in one side of the City of the Giants were mighty pillars and crude carvings. Buildings of rushes and stone were thickly dotted about the centre of the vale, and one huge building—evidently of rock or stone—towered up in the centre, capped by a mighty tower, which rose up in sections like a Chinese pagoda; but its architecture was more like that of Ancient Egypt or Babylonia, for the edges sloped outwards and narrowed towards the top.

At the tower's summit there gleamed, scintillating and flashing in the sun, a mighty mass of brass or gold—at that distance it was impossible to say which metal—and it gave an extraordinary sense of dignity to the whole city.

Then suddenly a halt was called, the whole party was blindfolded, and the rest of the journey was completed, as far as the expedition was concerned, in total darkness.

Presently their feet trod on smooth rock, and the party rightly concluded they had reached their destination.

All unexpectedly there burst upon the ears of the prisoners a subdued but mighty humming of voices, as if the whole population were indulging in an outburst of surprise.

As Mr. Whittaker and his fellow-travellers walked along they gradually became aware of an extraordinary heat, which rose from their right.

Then their guards pulled them up. They heard the cries of "Heiyo! Heiyo! Heiyo!" Then came silence, broken by the sudden crash of metal clanging against metal. Silence again, and then they heard their giant chief holding forth vigorously in his strange tongue.

Every now and again he paused, and another voice, still more harsh and strident, poured out a volley of unmeaning words. This was kept up for some time. Then came another long silence of what seemed to the party of interminable length.

Then, quite unexpectedly, the giant guards pulled off the bandages from the eyes of the whites.

Well might they all gasp with astonishment at what they saw. Right in front of them, which at once accounted for the heat they had noticed as they walked along, yawned a slow-moving "river" of molten lava. Beyond this, about forty feet away on the other side, was a large and somewhat high stone platform, on which stood, what Mr. Whittaker and Dr. Phenning rightly concluded, a little knot of giant priests, clad in some long-flowing robes of platted straw, with chaplets of gold round their heads. As far as the eye could see, on the roofs of the houses and on the far sides of the lava stream, was a vast concord of giant people—men, women,

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

A BEAUTIFUL FRENCH WOMAN'S TRIBUTE TO "HARLENE HAIR-DRILL"

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(Signed)

"GINA PALERME."

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10. Unruly, Wiry Hair?

7. Over-dryness of the Scalp?

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(Photo: Rita Martin.)

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GEM, June 10th, 1916.

INTO THE UNKNOWN!

(Continued from page 20.)

and children. The river, about twenty yards lower down, was spanned by a rough bridge.

But what made Mr. Whittaker, the doctor, the boys, and Sing Loo recoil in horror was that one of the priests held a child by one arm right over the boiling stream.

They were evidently about to sacrifice a human being, in accordance with their religious rites.

Now this was a sight that no Britisher could stand without protest. Stealthily, very, very carefully, the doctor felt for his revolver. He was the only one of the party who had not been thoroughly searched and disarmed. Mr. Whittaker watched him out of the corner of his eye, wondering how he was going to save the child if he shot the priest, for then surely both would fall into the fiery lake.

Fortunately for the doctor, the whole of the guard who had accompanied them from the rock city above the valley were bowed down prostrate, facing the platform on which his reverence and his fellow-priests were standing, so they did not see the Britisher's quick movements.

With sure and deadly aim, the doctor fired—and hit his mark. The billet the bullet found was a tall, fat priest who was standing just a little to the left of the man who held the child over the dreadful lava river. He gave just one cry, then toppled over into the terrible, molten grave.

The priest, holding the child, started back in affright. Then there was a wild stampede from the stone platform; the giant guard who were prostrate by the Britisher's rose up with cries of dismay and rage. Three of them seized the doctor, three seized the unhappy Larry, who happened to be nearest, and the next instant the whole expedition was bound again, facing a menacing row of spears raised threatening above their heads, while a great crowd of people came pouring over the little bridge, headed by the priests, who were crying out and gesticulating wildly.

The child victim, intended for the lava-river, had been left to its fate, and lay, an unconscious heap, on the stone platform on the opposite side.

On the narrow, rocking bridge were a big crowd of struggling giants, all striving to get across as quickly as possible. Then came a regular jam—the heaving, fighting crowd were wedged in and unable to move. They were scrambling over one another in their mad haste to cross the lava-stream and wreak their vengeance on the strange white people.

The bridge swayed and rocked under the unaccustomed weight and strain. Suddenly there was an ominous crack—then came a rending, splitting noise, and the whole structure caved in, precipitating the seething mass of humanity into the stream of molten lava. The next second, the molten river was free of every giant.

This horrible disaster appeared to momentarily stupefy the giant guard into covering subjection.

With weird, wailing, cries, they prostrated themselves towards the doctor again.

"For Heaven's sake, Phenning," gasped Mr. Whittaker, in a hoarse whisper, "do something, say something, can't you? Can't you see they take you for a fire-god, and that they believe you have control over this infernal lava-river? It's the torch that started it, and you'll have to keep it up, or the whole lot of us'll be pitched into this boiling mass!"

Just as he spoke, Mr. Whittaker looked up. Over him stood a great giant of a priest, nearly nine feet high. In his hand he held a flaming torch—an emblem of his priestly office.

Now, as luck would have it, Larry was next the doctor, and, although the boy was a rare plucked one, his stout heart failed him when the huge priest suddenly grasped him and whirled him up in his great, muscular arms high into the air.

"Good heavens!" groaned Mr. Whittaker. "He's going to throw the boy into the molten river!"

But at that instant there came a rending crash of thunder; then a jagged flash of fork lightning seemed to play upon the priest's head with dazzling sheen. The man gave a cry, tottered forward to the very brink of the lake, with Larry in his arms, then stumbled, and, pitching forward, fell towards the terrible river of molten lava.

Tottering, with one hand outstretched as if groping in the dark, while with the other the giant priest held the terrified boy, the great, tall figure stumbled nearer, ever nearer towards the lava river.

For one brief moment, the doctor and Mr. Whittaker held their breath, petrified with the horror of the thing.

His copper-coloured Reverence had been struck by lightning—rendered blind at the supreme moment. And it was to Nature's intervention that the boy owed his life.

Then, in one breathless second, the doctor saw a long, thin line come hurtling and whistling through the air—the noose dropped with deadly certainty over the priest's head, and the

next moment the cord was drawn tight, there was a tremendous strain, a jar, then a short, strong pull, and priest and boy fell heavily to the ground, right on the very edge of the boiling lake!

With agility, born of terror and despair, the plucky lad quickly rolled away from the danger, and then lay an inert, unconscious heap at the doctor's and Mr. Whittaker's feet.

Then suddenly there rose a subdued murmur, gradually growing to a dull, hoarse roar, ending in a mighty shout, which broke from the throats of fifteen hundred copper giants.

Midst the tumult and the noise, came another loud, reverberating peal of thunder, and then the whole mass of big people, as if like one man, bowed low to the earth, with foreheads touching the ground, and a great sobbing cry, like the sea might give when imploring the wind to grant it rest after much turmoil, rent the air. It sounded to the doctor something after the nature of an appeal of supplication. Then came a sort of dirge or chant, repeated like some burden or refrain, deep and monotonous, from the throats of all who knelt. O'er and o'er again the voices, subdued and not unmusical, rose and fell. Came then a silence, whilst Mr. Whittaker, the doctor, with ever watchful eye, and ears on the alert to catch the faintest trace of treachery, watched the priests near them with extra vigilance.

At last, from the rostrum, on the opposite side of the lava river, there rose a great, tall, gaunt, priestly figure, and in a deep, penetrating voice, he addressed the now silent throng.

What he said, the expedition party could not tell; but every now and again his voice rose to a wild, frenzied shriek; then he would pause whilst fifteen hundred voices cried in unison:

"Darringa. Oh, oh, oh! Pharata Baalu. Oh, oh, oh! Pharata Baalu!"

At length his Reverence on the rostrum ceased speaking, and two priests, who stood near the doctor and Mr. Whittaker, prostrated themselves before the two whites, murmured something in their strange lingo, then undid their bonds, and those of the boys and Sing Loo, and motioned them all to rise.

Beckoning to twenty-four splendid specimens of that giant, copper-coloured race, each of whom carried a large shield of stout hide, framed with bronze, the priests made a motion with their hands. Instantly four shields were poised low together, linked by big, supple hands, and made a sort of dais or platform on which Dr. Phenning was first asked to be seated. The rest of the whites, except the still unconscious boy, who was gently lifted on to the shields, were ordered by signs and strange words to do the same. Amidst a great, thunderous roar of cheering and beating of many hundred hands against hide-shields, the white men, including Sing Loo, were slowly raised far above the crowd, amidst the wildest demonstrations of awed enthusiasm.

And then Mr. Whittaker knew that they were saved from a dreadful death in the boiling river.

"You've saved us, Phenning, old man!" cried Mr. Whittaker. "Saved us, by gad, with your conjuring and electric torch. They think you're the god of fire, or something, come down on earth, and that that can control the lava river. They're all afraid of us. That old beggar on the rostrum's been singing our praises, I should think. And you've got to keep it up, my friend."

"It's been a narrow squeak," shouted back the doctor, "and I've got all my work cut out to maintain our superiority and to think out new schemes." But, by Jove," he added, with a grave face, and looking towards the still unconscious boy, who was also poised aloft on their shields, "it was a narrow squeak for him!"

Just as he spoke, the fainting boy made a slight movement, then slowly struggled up into a sitting posture, looking very dazed and startled.

"Keep still, my boy!" shouted the doctor encouragingly. "You're all right! Do as we do, and watch us closely."

The boy signalled back that he understood. At sight of his stirring, a greater burst of hoarse cheering broke from the crowd, and then the whites felt a double sense of security.

Reggie and Jimmy, borne aloft on their shields, looked at one another from the slight distance that separated them, and grinned.

"Wouldn't have missed this for anything!" whispered Reggie.

"What a stunning film it'd all make!" commented Larry. "I wonder what the old copper archbishop, or whatever he is, is going to do with us," he added.

"I expect he'll put John Chinaman in the choir and make him sing 'Loo,'" grinned Reggie. "And, oh my golly, just look at the silly lunny!" he broke off, pointing with his hand in the direction of the Chinaman.

Sing Loo seemed to have entirely abandoned all sense of Oriental placidness and dignity; with remarkable agility he was performing a wild fandango on his platform of four shields.

(Another splendid long instalment of this remarkable new serial next Wednesday. Order your copy of the GEM in advance.)