

READ THIS WEEK'S SUPER SCHOOL YARN: "THE 'SWOT' OF ST. JIM'S!"

CONTINUOUS
VARIETY!
YOUR FAVOURITE
STARS -
TOM MERRY & Co
INSIDE!

The GEM

2^d



THE
"SWOT" OF
ST. JIM'S!

PEPPY PARS FROM—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! I've some great news for you this week concerning the serial story I have booked to follow the grand series of yarns by Cecil Fanshawe, which are now running in this paper. Most of you, I know, have a liking for really good stories of the Great War, especially those connected with flying. Well, in three weeks' time you will have before you the opening chapters of

"THE SPYFLYERS!"

a thrill-packed yarn of flying adventure, staged in the stirring days of the Great War. The author is popular W. E. Johns, who was himself a fighting pilot of great distinction. W. E. Johns writes with convincing power and sincerity, for he was a first-hand witness, so to speak, of many exciting tussles in the war clouds over the Western Front, and was a mighty good scrapper himself when an enemy plane shot across his bows. Next week I shall tell you more about this super story, so make certain of getting your GEM.

ANOTHER BIG SURPRISE.

Now for another surprise. In next week's GEM you will all be given the opportunity of securing a wonderful FREE Atlas, consisting of thirty-two plates in full colours, showing every country in the world. The complete Atlas is strongly bound and will prove a boon to every modern boy. To obtain this Atlas all you have to do is to collect a number of coupons—and the necessary coupons will appear each week in the GEM and our two companion papers, "Magnet" and "Modern Boy." Nothing difficult about that, what? You'll find full particulars in next Wednesday's GEM, together with the first coupon—that's another good reason why none of you should miss our next number.

"TOM MERRY & CO. IN LIVERPOOL!"

By Martin Clifford.

That's the title of our next long complete story of St. Jim's and it's a winner all the way. So, for that matter, is the next thrilling story in our popular South Seas series. Don't miss it. Readers who have submitted winning jokes will also find their names "in print"—which means that to each of them I shall have pleasure in awarding half-a-crown. You fellows who haven't sent in a snappy joke should get busy right away. Half-a-crown is a useful "spot" of prize money. Now for some pars.

THE MYSTERY HORSE!

Imniskeen is a six-year-old steplechaser, but he's a two-year-old in spirit, for the other day, whilst out training, he took it into his head to bolt. He threw his jockey first, of course, and then
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headed for some adjacent woods. For four days his trainer and stable boys hunted for him, but Imniskeen seemed to have disappeared off the map. Then one night two stable boys who were walking across some fields en route for the village heard the thud of hoofs. Thinking it might be the missing chaser they turned in their tracks and beat it for the stables. Sure enough they found the imprints of Imniskeen's hoofs; furthermore, they found the truant himself in his stable! Imniskeen looked none the worse for his four days' absence, and it's still a mystery as to where he went!

THE "UPSIDE DOWN" RECORD!

Ted Smithson, of Montrose, wants to know who holds the record for "upside down" flying. The answer is Captain Colacicchi, an Italian airman who recently knocked all records sideways by remaining in the air, flying upside down, for as long as forty-two minutes. Whether the gallant captain had a headache at the end of that stunt I don't know, but it's highly probable that he did!

BELIEVE IT OR NOT!

There's an old saying which goes something like this: "Never kill a fox on a racecourse," as it brings bad luck. People who were present at the opening day of a race meeting near Tokio, recently, had good cause to remember the old superstition—so did nine jockeys who rode in one race. The nine of them were unshipped by their galloping horses and all of them received severe injuries. Then it was discovered that a fox had been killed on the racecourse only that morning.

LUCKY DOG!

Joe, a frisky Sealyham, is the lucky dog, for he owes his life to his owner, who refused to have him "done away with" when the veterinary surgeon had tried all he knew to cure Joe of paralysis. A carpenter was called in and between the carpenter and the dog owner a wooden carriage was devised to support Joe's helpless hind legs. With the carriage attachment, Joe was able to take exercise—using his front legs in a normal way, what time the wheels of the carriage did duty for his hind legs. In this way Joe began to enjoy life afresh, chasing rabbits up and down and round about—but seldom catching them, be it said. Between whiles his paralysed hind legs were carefully massaged until, at last, he was able to dispense with his carriage. Good stunt, what!

ONE OF THE SEVEN WONDERS.

"Is the Great Wall of China one of the seven wonders of the world?" asks "Regular Reader." It is—it are! This great wall was built two hundred years before the Christian era by Emperor

Shi Hwang-ti, who could see no better way of keeping out the barbarians that threatened to invade his territory. Accordingly, he put thirty thousand workmen on the job of building this unscalable wall from the sea to the most western point of the Chinese Empire. It took fifteen years, working day and night, to erect this formidable barrier which consisted of granite, boulders, burnt brick, and—horror of horrors—one million bodies of the emperor's subjects! These were thrown in, so it is said, to make the wall extra strong! In some places the giant wall rises to a height of sixty feet; in twenty-five feet wide across the top, and encircles mountains something like a mile high. Don't ask me, "Regular Reader," how many bricks were used in the construction of this super-wall—because I shall have to admit that I don't know!

DID YOU KNOW THIS?

Look at a bowler hat, straw hat, felt hat—any gentleman's hat, and you will find that the "bow" is always on the left side of the hat. Do you know the reason? Well, some French enthusiasts have been digging into the question, and they have arrived at this conclusion. In the long ago, when fashionable gallants wore colourful plumes in their hats, it was found that the drooping plumes got in the way of the sword arm, if the said plumes were fastened to the right-hand side of the hat. So some fellow who was "quick on the draw" shifted his plumes to the left side of the hat. The custom remains to this day, although we have all said good-bye to plumes and swords, and are now content to wear a piece of ribbon on our hats.

NOSE PRINTS!

In the U.S.A. certain folk with pedigree dogs of great value have adopted the "print" system of tracing their animals should a dog-snatcher make off with them and attempt to disguise them. Any dog, according to the experts, can be traced by its nose print—a variation of the finger-print system, used to keep track of criminals. How's that for progress!

GOOD ALL ROUNDERS!

If you want to win the highest honour the St. John's Ambulance Brigade can offer to its cadets, you have to pass twelve stiff examinations. Here are the subjects: Clerical Ability, Handicrafts, Fire Fighting, Nursing, Signalling, Cooking, Life Saving, Hygiene, Natural History, Camping, Public Service and Knowledge of the Order of St. John. If you pass that little lot you receive a badge, which is presented by the Grand Prior of the Order—in these days, the Duke of Connaught. During the last two years more than a thousand cadets have tried unsuccessfully to win this coveted badge; and the joint honour of being the first in the world to win it goes to two fifteen-year-old boys, both from Slough. Congratulations!

THE YORKS. AND LANCs. SCHOOL!

By the way, let me recommend you to the "Ranger"—our splendid companion paper. Apart from its strong programme of flying, sporting, and adventure yarns there is an extra-special complete story of school life at Grimsdale, by famous Frank Richards. Grimsdale School is situated on the Yorks. and Lancs. boundary line, and it houses the most unusual set of schoolboy characters it is possible to meet in a day's march. Fritz von Splitz, the fat boy, is a scream! Jim Dainty, the rebel, Ginger Rawlinson & Co. are the real goods. And as for Dr. Sammy Sparshott, he's the most original headmaster in the world. Get this week's "Ranger"—now on sale—and see for yourselves! 'Nuff said!

A MAGNIFICENT LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL YARN OF
TOM MERRY & CO.!

The "SWOT" of ST. JIM'S!



Herbert Skimpole, the freak of St. Jim's, is quite sure that he will win the Codicote Scholarship, and with it fifty pounds! He does win—but not in the way he expects!

CHAPTER 1. Great Expectations!

"FIFTY POUNDS!" murmured Herbert Skimpole musingly.
Skimpole stood at the door of the School House at St. Jim's, blinking dreamily through his big spectacles at the pigeons in the quad.
There was a thoughtful shade upon the brow of Skimpole, as if weighty matters were moving in his mind.
"Fifty pounds!" he repeated, unconsciously murmuring the words aloud. "It is a large sum, comparatively speaking. What shall I do with it? Oh!"
Skimpole's meditations were suddenly interrupted by a hearty smack on the shoulder. He turned his head and blinked somewhat indignantly at the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—who were just coming out of the School House.
Tom Merry had a football under his arm, and he had administered the playful smack with his disengaged hand.
"Anything wrong with the brain-box?" he asked cheerily. Skimpole blinked at him.
"Certainly not, Merry! I cannot help regarding the question as almost rude! Really——"
"Then what are you mumbling about fifty pounds for?"
"I am expecting that sum——"
"Fifty pounds?"
"Yes; precisely fifty pounds."
"When?"
"In about a month's time."
The chums of the Shell looked at Skimpole, and looked at one another. Skimpole did not look as if he was wandering in his mind; yet he certainly seemed to be. Skimpole's people were poor—so poor, in fact, that it must have cost them dear to send their son to a school like St. Jim's. And fifty pounds was a sum that the richest fellow at St. Jim's had never possessed. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, and the son of a noble lord, seldom could show more than a "tenner."
"You're expecting fifty pounds in a month's time?" murmured Tom Merry.

"Certainly, Merry!"
"Going to rob a bank?" asked Monty Lowther pleasantly.
"Certainly not!" said Skimpole firmly.
"Where's the fifty quid coming from, then?" asked Manners, somewhat anxiously. "If you've discovered a gold-mine in the Head's garden, or a hidden treasure under the dormitory floor, you might let us into the secret."
"Really, Manners——"
"Expound!" said Tom Merry. "We're all short of tin, and fifty pounds would come in handy this afternoon. Where are you going to get all this wealth?"
"Of course, I shall have to work for it!" exclaimed the genius of the Shell. "Surely you are not unaware that there is fifty pounds in cash given with the Codicote Scholarship, as well as free board and tuition for three years, open to competitors in the Fourth Form and the Shell, and I am entering for it."
The chums of the Shell looked expressively at Skimpole.
"You utter ass!" said Tom Merry.
"You shrieking duffer!" said Monty Lowther.
"You unspeakable dummy!" said Manners.
"Really——"
"I have entered for the Codicote Scholarship," said Tom Merry, "and, of course, I rather think I've a chance of pulling it off."
"I've entered for the Codicote Scholarship," said Monty Lowther, "and I've got a feeble sort of impression that I've got a sporting chance."
"I've entered for the Codicote Scholarship," said Manners, as if repeating a lesson, "and I've been thinking that I should possibly come somewhere near the post."
Skimpole shook his head.
"I assure you that you are all mistaken. You haven't an earthly!"
"Why not?"
"Because I have entered."
"Modesty, thy name is Skimpole—Bertie Skimpole!" said Tom Merry.
"Of course, as a sincere Determinist, I am not troubled

by such folly as false modesty," said Skimpole. "I know my powers. With my splendid brain power, I cannot fail to carry off such a simple thing as a scholarship. You see, I am writing a book on Determinism, and have already completed four hundred and eighty-one chapters. A fellow who can do that can win a junior scholarship, I should think."

"I don't think!" remarked Monty Lowther. "But go ahead! With your wonderful brain power——"

"That is exactly how I look at it, Lowther. You do not often see a brain like mine."

"I haven't seen yours yet, and I've only got your word for it that there's one there!" said Lowther. "You can't expect me to take a statement like that on trust."

"Really, Lowther——"

"Come on, you chaps, or there won't be any daylight left!"

The Terrible Three, grinning, marched out of the School House, leaving Skimpole to spend his fifty pounds—in imagination. Their evident incredulity had no effect whatever on the genius of St. Jim's. With his wonderful mental powers, he had no doubt of winning the scholarship, and he was not troubled with the doubts the other fellows had as to the existence of those wonderful mental powers.

"Fifty pounds!" he said, thoughtfully addressing the quadrangle. "It is a large sum. With fifty pounds in hand I could spread the light of Determinism much more effectively at St. Jim's. I will, I think, devote the whole sum to that purpose. Perhaps I might spare a few pounds for the needy——"

"My word," said a voice beside him, "I should think you might! You don't mean to say that you've come into a fortune, Skimmy?"

"Really, Gore, you are interrupting my meditations——"

"Yes; but——"

"As for your rabbit pie, I gave it to a beggar! I could not allow a man to go away hungry while there was a rabbit pie in the House. You can see that——"

"What's that?" roared Gore. "You—you've given away my rabbit pie?"

"Certainly! As I explained——"

Gore looked for a moment as if he would hurl himself upon the generous Skimpole. He was Skimpole's study-mate in the Shell, and the freak of the school frequently aided his supplies to relieve the needs of the tramps who passed along the high road. Gore wasn't at all generous; but even a generous fellow might have grumbled a little when his special feeds were distributed without the formality of asking his permission first.

There were frequent rows between Gore and Skimpole on that subject, and Tom Merry, in the next study, sometimes heard the sounds of strife and expostulations. But just now Gore restrained himself. He wanted to know more about that fifty pounds.

"Never mind the rabbit pie," he said, with an effort.

"I—I dare say the chap was hungry. It's all right."

"Really, Gore, I think my great principles are permeating your dull brain at last, and I am glad to see it. I——"

"You were saying something about fifty pounds——"

"Yes; but I must remark how glad I am to see this change in your selfish and rather brutal manner," said Skimpole, beaming. "Of course, as a Determinist, I do not blame you for being selfish and brutal. It is wholly due to your heredity and environment, mixed in equal proportions. I mean——"

"But the fifty quid——"

"Reared in the vile and degrading surroundings of a slum," went on Skimpole, fairly mounted on his hobby-horse, "how could you expect——"

"Who was reared in a slum, you dummy?"

"Er—I was speaking generally——"

"Look here, you were saying you had fifty quid——"

"Not that I had it, Gore. I am expecting it shortly."

Gore looked at his study-mate hard. Skimpole had his little weaknesses. He would distribute anybody's provisions to the hungry. But he had never been known to tell a lie. He often explained that it was impossible for a sincere Determinist to do so. Neither was he given to boasting. He made no secret of the fact that his own people were poor—in fact, he seemed rather proud of it.

If he said he was expecting fifty pounds, he was expecting it, and Gore felt that he could believe it. As for the Codicote Scholarship, Gore had never so much as heard of it. Gore was not in the least studious, and he did just enough work to enable him to escape lickings. As a matter of fact, he was old enough and big enough to be in the Fifth, and only slacking had kept him in the Lower Form. As for the Codicote, he would as soon have entered for a Marathon race as for a scholarship.

"You're expecting fifty pounds?" he repeated.

"Yes."

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"Quite certain of it?"

"Absolutely!"

"It's a jolly big sum of money."

"Yes; and yet small when one thinks how far it will go in spreading the light of Determinism," said Skimpole. "I shall have to devote every penny——"

"You might spare a few quid for a Form feed," said Gore.

"I am afraid I could not consent to waste money on frivolity, when millions of our fellow-creatures need enlightening," said Skimpole, shaking his head.

"Ye-es; but—— I say, Skimmy, are you hungry?"

"Yes, I am somewhat peckish; but I have no money——"

"Oh, that's all right! It's my treat. Come along to the tuckshop."

"Really, Gore, this is very kind of you. I will come with pleasure. I am, in fact, very hungry, as I have had no tea, and I had very little dinner. Maynard took most of the beef off my plate when I was not looking, and ate it himself. By the time I had remonstrated with him he had eaten the beef."

"Rather rough, wasn't it?" grinned Gore. "Never mind; come and have some grub at Dame Taggles'. She's got some of those nobby little pies."

"I shall be very glad, Gore. I am more pleased than I can say to note this wonderful improvement in your character."

The two juniors entered the school shop, kept within the precincts of St. Jim's by Dame Taggles, the porter's wife. Several Fourth-Formers were strolling up, and they glanced at Gore and Skimpole. To see the two on such amicable terms was a novelty.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye, and regarding them with amazement.

"This is a case of the lion and the lamb, you know."

"Skimpole's converting Gore," grinned Blake, "through the medium of a feed, I suppose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Digby excitedly. "Look there! It's Gore standing treat!"

Jack Blake rubbed his eyes.

"My hat, so he is! Wonders will never cease. Gore must have come into a fortune, or gone off his rocker, or something!"

"May as well make hay while the sun shines," suggested Herries. "Let's go and join them. I don't like Gore, but I don't believe in bearing malice at a time like this."

The chums of the Fourth strolled after Gore and Skimpole. The cad of the Shell was indeed standing treat, and Skimpole, seated on one of the high chairs, was eating away with the appetite of the famished junior.

Gore looked unpleasantly enough at the chums of Study No. 6.

"Want anything?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We want a civil reception, deah boy, and polite mannaahs, though we are vewy likely to be disappointed."

"If there are feeds being stood——" said Blake.

"There ain't!" said Gore emphatically. "I am standing this to Skimpole, because—because he's converted me."

"What?"

"Skimpole stopped a laden fork half-way to his mouth, and looked round at the chums of the Fourth."

"I am very glad I have made a convert of Gore," he said. "You know that he has always been a selfish, rotten sort of beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see what you are laughing at, Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Fourth were still laughing as they walked away.

That Gore had some deep scheme in his mind, as the reason for his unexampled generosity, they were certain, but they could not guess what it was.

Skimpole had no suspicions; he never had. He ate, drank, and was merry. Gore showed no stinginess over that feed. Fifty pounds was a large sum to share in, and it was worth it.

"Dear me," said Skimpole at last, "I really think I have had enough, Gore. Yes; perhaps one more tart, as you are so generous. I am very much obliged to you, Gore. I think we shall get on better in the future."

"I'm sure we shall," said Gore amiably. "You haven't told me where that fifty quid is coming from. I suppose there's no doubt about it?"

"Not the slightest. The money is as good as in my hands already. I was just planning what to do with it when you spoke to me at the door."

"I suppose you'll be standing some feeds in the study?"

"I should like to do so, Gore; but the claims of the needy must be considered before study feeds. I——"

"But, of course, you'd be willing to lend a fiver or so to a chap who was in need of tin—a fellow-Determinist?" suggested Gore insinuatingly.

"Oh, yes, certainly! It would be my duty to do so."
 "Then you can put my name down for it."
 "Let me see," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "That will leave me forty-five pounds with which to spread the light of Determinism. If you are really in need of money, Gore——"
 "I am, Skimmy, old chap. Frightfully short!"
 "It is very generous of you to stand a feed to me when you are frightfully short of money," said Skimpole. "Under the circumstances, I shall be very glad to oblige you. You shall certainly have five pounds out of my fifty."
 Gore chuckled. He knew Skimpole would keep his word, if he claimed the fulfilment of the promise before the fifty pounds were "blued." Where the money was to come from was a puzzle; but, after all, the chap might have rich

CHAPTER 2.
 The Conspirators!

THERE was a pattering of rain in the quadrangle, and the football field resembled nothing so much as a mud pie on an extensive scale; but the juniors of St. Jim's did not care for that.
 The football season was in full swing, and a little rain was not going to prevent them from playing.
 It was an informal game, with seven or eight a-side, between juniors of the two Houses of St. Jim's. Tom Merry and his friends had turned up for practice, and the New House juniors had also been practising on their part of the ground, and so they had joined in strife.



Blake and Figgins went down together. There were yells from several other players, who were speeding up and could not stop in time. In a few seconds four or five fellows were piling on top of Blake and Figgins. "Groogh!" gasped Blake. "Ow! Gerroff!" panted Figgins. On the touch line D'Arcy blew furiously on his whistle!

relations—a rich uncle, or something. He remembered meeting a fellow belonging to Greyfriars who had a hundred pounds sent him by an uncle in India he had been named after.

Skimpole slid down off the seat. He was very full, and quite satisfied. Gore tapped him on the arm.

"I say, when will you have the fifty?"

"At the end of the month, Gore."

"And it's quite—quite certain?"

"Absolutely. But pray excuse me now. I have to go and finish my article for 'Tom Merry's Weekly.' If you could let me have the study to myself for the next hour, Gore, I should take it as a favour."

"Certainly," said Gore.

"If you like to come back in an hour's time, I will read you the article," said Skimpole. "It is a real rouser, and will, I think, have considerable effect in helping to convert the whole of the Shell to Determinism."

"Oh, I'll come; rather!" said Gore. "Depend upon me."

And Skimpole went off to finish his article; but when the hour had elapsed, Gore made it a point to forget to go and hear it read.

As there wasn't much daylight left after afternoon school, they wasted no time in preliminaries, but set to with a football and a right good will.

The ground was wet and slippery, and the raindrops pattered about their ears. They were wet, and they were muddy. The football was as greasy as a football could be, and popped about in most unexpected directions.

A run up the field frequently changed itself into a slide and a fall. But the juniors played up heartily. There was nothing "soft" about Tom Merry & Co.

Tom Merry, Lowther, Manners, Blake, Herries, Digby, and Reilly formed the School House side. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had declined. It was not only the trouble of changing his clothes that deterred him, but the certainty of getting frightfully dirty on the field. And he stood under the shelter and watched the game with his eyeglass to his eyes and cheered on his comrades cheerfully.

The New House side was composed of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—otherwise known as Figgins & Co.—with Pratt, French, Evans, and Trevlyn. But their House colours it was impossible to see. Mud bespattered them, and mud

concealed their colours and features, and almost everything else they wore.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What a feahful-lookin' set of w'ecks! I am wathah glad I kept out of this. Go it, Blake, deah boy! On the ball!"

Jack Blake was making a run up the field with the ball at his feet. To dribble a ball that was greasy, on a pitch that was greasier, required some doing, and Jack Blake's motion was acrobatic.

"Bwavo!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Blake nearly slid over, and saved himself with a hop that would have done credit to any frog. "Bravo, deah boy! On the beastlay ball, you know!"

Blake rushed the ball forward. Figgins was speeding to get in his way, and he succeeded. The long legs of Figgins fairly flew over the ground.

Blake tried to elude him, but it was no use. The ball flew somewhere, and Figgins biffed into Blake.

Blake threw his arm involuntarily round Figgins as he lost his footing, and for a few seconds they waltzed together, and then they went over.

There was a yell from several other players. They were all speeding up, and they did not stop themselves in time.

In a few seconds three or four fellows were piling on Blake and Figgins. Figgins struggled desperately, and Blake gasped under the weight.

There was no referee on the field, and so Arthur Augustus took it upon himself to whistle. But the play was already stopped, nearly all the players having added themselves to the heap on the ground.

"Ow!" gasped Kerr. "Get off my chest!"

"Grough! Who's that got his boot in my eye? I'll give him a thick ear!"

"Roll away, Fatty Wynn! Do you hear?"

"Ow! Oh!"

They rolled off and sorted themselves out somehow, and only one form remained prostrate on the ground. It was that of Jack Blake. He was completely winded, and he lay extended on his back on the muddy ground, gasping faintly. His chums gathered round him in an anxious ring.

"My word!" said Digby. "Here's Blake knocked out!"

"It was Fatty Wynn's weight."

"Sit him up and thump him in the back!"

"Ow! Lemme alone!"

"Hold on!" said Figgins. "Stand back, there! I can manage this!"

"Rats!" said Herries. "What on earth can a New House chap know about it? Leave him to me."

"Let him alone, I say! You know jolly well I've been studying the subject of surgery lately, and I know exactly what to do," said Figgins. "What he wants is bleeding!"

"Bleeding?"

"That's it. It's the good old-fashioned remedy for everything, and I don't hold with new-fangled notions," said the amateur surgeon. "Anybody got a lancet?"

"Yes. I usually have my pockets full of them when I play footer!" said Monty Lowther, in a sarcastic tone.

"Don't you be funny, Lowther. This is a serious matter. I tell you, I've studied the subject. If Blake isn't relieved at once he may have—have—I think it's congestion of the—the—I think it's the pericardium, or something I forget the word, but it's jolly serious! Chuck us your penknife, D'Arcy."

"Here you are, deah boy!"

"Look here, Figgins, you're not going to stick that penknife into Blake!"

"Ass! I'm going to bleed him!"

"Duffer! You're not!"

"He'll get congestion of the peri—peri— What do you call 'em?"

Figgins opened the penknife and knelt beside Blake. Blake had pretty well recovered by this time, and there was a steely glitter in his eyes. His foot shot out as Figgins knelt down, and the football boot caught the amateur surgeon on the chest, and sent him rolling over backwards.

Jack Blake jumped up. Figgins sat in the mud and looked surprised.

"Ow! What on earth did you do that for, you image?"

"Catch me being bled like a pig!" said Blake. "You can bleed Fatty Wynn, and see if you can make him any thinner!"

"I was going to first-aid you."

"Don't you bring that penknife near me again, you dangerous lunatic, unless you want a prize thick ear!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Oh, play up!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "It's nearly dark. Where's the ball?"

They played up once more. Figgins looked disappointed. It was not often that he took up a hobby, but when he did he was serious about it. It was growing dark now, and the rain was still falling, and when someone suggested a retirement the idea was adopted unanimously.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the players as they came off the field.

They were certainly a muddy lot, and perhaps it was excusable for the swell of St. Jim's to draw back from any possible contact with them.

"Bai Jove!" remarked D'Arcy. "You do look a feahful-lookin' set! Have you made it a special point to gwab up all the mud you could?"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! I wegard you as a most comical-lookin' lot of boundahs!" said D'Arcy. "Pewwaps you wish you had taken my advice and postponed this? Pway keep your distance, Blake. I do not wish to be contaminated with that howwid mud! Figgins, if you persist in comin' close to me I shall stwike you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep away, you wottahs! Pway let me wetiah ffrom the spot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard with alarm.

The muddy footballers were all round him, and from their expression the swell of St. Jim's knew what was coming. There was no escape for the elegant junior, save by breaking through the muddy circle, and he shuddered at the idea of touching any of them.

"Pway allow me to pass, deah boys! I weally did not mean to offend you with my remarks, and, upon second thoughts, you don't weally look so feahfully dirtay, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't come any neawah. You will wuin my clothes. Lowthah, get away! Tom Mewwy, if you touch me I shall no longah wegard you as a fwiend Mannahs, you howwid wottah, sheeah off! Figgins, you beast! Kerr, you howwah! Pwatt, I shall stwike you! Fwench—Weilly—ow!"

They closed round him. They grasped him, and wherever they grasped him they left fingermarks that any detective at Scotland Yard could have traced them by.

The swell of the School House struggled, but his struggles only made matters worse.

"Pass!" shouted Blake.

And D'Arcy was passed from one to another; and then Fatty Wynn, the Welsh junior, gave the signal for a scrum.

D'Arcy, struggling vainly, was put into the scrum, and they scrummed for him as if he had been a Rucker ball. He squirmed out of the scrum like an eel and ran.

But the state of Arthur Augustus was worse than any of the footballers who had moved his elegant derision.

His clothes were reeking with mud and wet and his collar was soaking, and his shirt was a damp rag, and his silk hat was a concertina. His face was smothered with mud, and his hair seemed like a tousled mop.

He paused for a moment, gasping, to hurl back some remarks at the howling footballers.

"You feahful wottahs! I wefuse to wegard any of you as my friends! I—"

Tom Merry and Blake made a movement towards him, and he darted off; and then the junior footballers proceeded to wash and change, frequently interrupting these proceedings with shrieks of laughter.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus Apologises!

LOOKING very fresh and rosy, and with all the mud gone, the Terrible Three came in, and paused in the upper corridor to look in at Study No. 6.

A junior was there giving the finishing touches to his hair, and he looked round with suppressed emotions as the chums of the Shell appeared in the doorway. Then he looked grimly into the mirror again, and went on brushing his hair.

"Feeling all right, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, with solicitude.

Arthur Augustus did not reply.

"I see you've had a wash," remarked Lowther. "You needed it."

Still silence.

"Got the article ready for the 'Weekly,' Gussy?" asked Manners. "We've got to fix up the number for to-morrow, you know!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round again at last.

"I wefuse to speak to you," he said. "You have tweated me with a gwoss diswpect."

"Oh, come, Gussy!"

"You pwactically wuined my clothes. You made me howwibly dirty. I wefuse to wegard you as fwends."

"I'm surprised at you, Gussy. After the way we treated you, too!"

"You failed to tweek me with pwopah wespect. I'm not weally a particulah fellow, but I insist upon bein' tweeked with pwopah wespect."

Tom Merry looked sorrowfully at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Well, I can only say I'm surprised," he said, "after the language you used when we came off the footer field."

Arthur Augustus started.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Yes, rather," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head solemnly.

"After the language D'Arcy used—"

"Yes, the language," said Manners. "Oh, the language! D'Arcy! Lucky your young brother wasn't there to hear you!"

"But I nevah," said the helpless Arthur Augustus. "I weally nevah—nevah did! You must have misappwehended me, deah boys."

"Now, Gussy, don't prevaricate!"

"I wefuse to admit that I am pwevawicatin'. I wegard you as a set of wottahs. I nevah—"

"Of course, we shan't tell anybody. We've made Blake promise to keep it a secret, too," said Tom Merry.

"Keep what a secret? I wepeat—"

"It's all right. You can rely on us to—to the death!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

The Terrible Three shook their heads solemnly and marched off. Arthur Augustus sat with the silver-backed hairbrush in his hand, looking dazed. He felt certain that



"Ach! Take tat peast away, ain't it!" Herr Schneider smote the bulldog with his book to frighten it, but it was the worst thing he could have done. Right across the table leapt the dog, intent on vengeance. Books and papers went flying. "Towser!" shrieked Herries. "Help! Mercy!" gasped Herr Schneider. "I am murdair!"

"I wefuse to admit that I used any language," almost shrieked the swell of the School House. "You are a set of wottahs, and you know you're wottin'—"

"Of course, we don't want to be hard on you," said Tom Merry loftily. "Everybody forgets himself at times."

"It's due to heredity, I suppose," said Lowther.

"And environment," added Manners.

D'Arcy glared at them. They were absolutely solemn, and for a dizzy moment the swell of the School House wondered what he had really said to the footballers.

"I—I— Wepeat what I said, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry looked shocked.

"Oh, really, Gussy!"

"I insist upon your wepeatin'—"

"Not even to oblige you, Gussy. Miss Priscilla Fawcett brought me up carefully. Perhaps if you had had the care of a good governess, you would never—"

the Terrible Three were rotting; but then they had looked so serious about it. Was it possible that he had forgotten himself, and— Surely not!

He started as three faces looked into the study. They belonged to Figgins & Co., of the New House.

"Bai Jove! What do you New House wottahs want?" demanded D'Arcy.

"Only to assure you that it's all right," said Figgins affably.

"What's all wight?"

"About what you said when we came off the footer field. Of course, it wasn't nice, but we can overlook things said in a moment of excitement."

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Now, don't begin again, Gussy," said Kerr, with a wave of his hand. "I was brought up rather strictly. I can

stand it once, but I can't stand it again. If you begin I shall stop my ears with my fingers."

"You—you—you—"

"In my opinion, D'Arcy owes us an apology," said Fatty Wynn. "We could let him off the apology if he stood us a decent feed, or something of that sort."

"You uttah beast!"

"Look here, D'Arcy," said Figgins severely. "It's all right. We've overlooked it. But if you get into a state of excitement like that again, you'd better let me bleed you. That's the proper thing for excited nerves."

"I wefuse to speak to you. I—"

Kerr put his fingers into his ears. Figgins and Fatty Wynn followed his example, and the three of them marched out with horrified faces.

D'Arcy breathed hard.

A few minutes later, Blake, Herries, and Digby came in. They were looking very grave, and they did not speak to D'Arcy. They began to collect up various manuscripts for the current number of "Tom Merry's Weekly," without even glancing at the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus had been prepared to cut them dead, but he was somewhat surprised by this chilling silence.

After a few minutes he could stand it no longer, and he broke the silence himself.

"I say, Blake!"

Blake did not appear to hear.

"Have you seen my instalment of Sir Fatted and his Fayre Ladye, Dig?" he asked. "I had it written out all ready for the 'Weekly.'"

"Here you are," said Dig.

"I spoke to you, Blake," said D'Arcy, with rising colour.

"Did you?" said Blake. "Cheek!"

"I wefuse to have a wemark of mine chawactewised as cheek! I was intending nevah to speak to any of you again."

"Then you'd better keep to it," said Blake severely. "After the language you were using on the footer field—"

"What language?" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Don't ask me to repeat it. I couldn't. Besides, I must think of Digby and Herries."

"I nevah said anythin'—"

"Oh, Gussy!"

"My wemarks were quite harmless."

"Now you're contradicting yourself," said Blake judicially. "You'd better let the matter alone, Gussy. You can live it down."

"I wefuse to live it down," shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I am certain you are wottin'. You must have misapprehended my wemarks."

"I think we had better withdraw," said Blake with dignity. "He looks as if he was going to begin again."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Come on!"

"You uttah beasts!"

The three chums hurriedly withdrew. D'Arcy followed them excitedly to the door.

"You feahful wottahs! I am just comin' to the editowial office. I had wesolved not to come, but upon second thoughts I—"

"Better not," said Blake, looking round. "You might lose your temper again, and—"

"I insist upon comin'. I wegard you as—"

But the three juniors rushed away and lost the rest of the remark. D'Arcy went back into the study and finished brushing his hair. He was in a state of great excitement, but that was an important matter, and could not be left unfinished.

Then he went along to Tom Merry's study. By this time he was half-convinced that he had indeed, in a moment of excitement, allowed some expression to fall from his lips which had shocked the delicate susceptibilities of the juniors of the School House. But as he drew near Tom Merry's study a sound fell upon his ears.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They were laughing.

D'Arcy, with a crimson face, threw open the door. He expected to see the juniors in convulsions of merriment; but then he wondered if his ears had deceived him. There were nine juniors in Tom Merry's study, and they were as grave as judges. The Roman Senate, when the Gauls broke into the Senate House, could not have looked more stately and solemn than did Tom Merry & Co. as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy opened the study door.

The swell of St. Jim's put up his glass and looked at the juniors.

"You are wemarkably quiet," he said sarcastically.

They exchanged glances.

"I don't want to wound anybody," said Figgins, looking round. "This is your study, Tom Merry, and I suppose a fellow has a right to keep any kind of company he pleases. But if D'Arcy is coming in here, I think I had better retire."

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"I was thinking so, too," said Kerr, looking up. "I'm sorry to have to retire from the editorial staff of the 'Weekly' on the day before going to press."

"But as leaders of the New House juniors, we're bound to keep up a certain amount of respectability," said Figgins.

"That's it," said Fatty Wynn. "Of course, we haven't anything against D'Arcy—it's more for the sake of appearances than anything else."

D'Arcy was dumb. He looked from one to another of the juniors with his mouth wide open like an expiring fish.

Tom Merry shook his head mournfully.

"I quite understand your feelings," he said. "But as School House fellows we feel bound to stand by D'Arcy, and try to lead him back to the right path."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"That's it," said Blake, with a grave nod. "We can't desert D'Arcy at a critical moment in his career. He stands at the parting of the ways, and a helping hand and a kindly word of advice may save him from plunging into the gulf of—"

"You feahful wottah!"

"We feel bound to bear with him," said Digby. "We only hope that he will moderate his expressions, and not shock us."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Perhaps the matter could be settled by an apology," suggested Lowther. "If D'Arcy withdraws all he said—"

"I wefuse to—"

"And expresses his regret, we may be able to act with him on the staff of the 'Weekly.' We can give him the chance."

"What do you say, D'Arcy?"

"I—I do not wemembah usin' any expressions that call for an apology," said Arthur Augustus dazedly. "I was wathah thinkin' that the apology was due to me. Howevah, I am willin' to go so far as to say that if I said anythin' offensive to anybody, I am sowwy for it."

Tom Merry looked round.

"Gentlemen, is that satisfactory?"

"Yes," said Blake, after some reflection; "if D'Arcy does not break out again."

"Very well. Gentlemen, the matter is closed."

"Wait a moment, Tom Mewwy!"

"It's all right, Gussy. We admit you to our society again on an equal footing. The matter is closed."

"I should like to know what it was I said that—"

"The question is out of order. The incident, being closed, cannot be reopened without the unanimous consent of the whole staff."

"But weally—"

"Order! Order!"

Arthur Augustus had to give it up. And the editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" set to work with preternaturally grave faces, and not a single ghost of a chuckle broke the stern solemnity of the study.

CHAPTER 4.

The Staff Is Busy!

SCRATCH, scratch, scratch!

The editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" were busily at work in Tom Merry's study.

There were six of them round the table, writing away at express speed. Figgins was seated on the locker, and Kerr on a stool under the window, with their paper on their knees. Lowther was sitting on the fender with his manuscript on the coal-box, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing up, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

The swell of the School House seemed to be in the throes of deep thought.

He came out of his reverie at last and looked round. All the others were busy, and no one looked up to meet his glance. D'Arcy coughed, and coughed again, and yet no one took any notice. Then he spoke:

"I say, deah boys—"

Tom Merry looked up. He did not speak, but he pointed with the handle of his pen to a notice hung over the mantelpiece. It was a large piece of cardboard with the word "Silence" smeared on it in black ink with a gumbrush.

"Yaas," said Arthur Augustus; "I observe that notice, Tom Mewwy, but—"

"Shut up!" growled Lowther.

"I beg your pardon, Lowthah," said D'Arcy, in his most stately way.

"Granted," said Lowther. "But shut up!"

"I did not mean—"

"Silence!"

"Yaas; but I say—"

"Cheese it!"

"I wefuse to cheese it!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is

a wathah important point, and it concerns the whole editorial staff on the 'Weekly.' I want to put it to you all."

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Manners. "How am I to do a really good article on touching up photographs if you keep on jawing like a gramophone?"

"I weally don't suppose you will wite a weally good article undah any circs Mannahs. I was thinkin'—"

"Attention!" said Tom Merry. "Everyone take notice of the extraordinary circumstance mentioned by D'Arcy! It ought to go into the 'Weekly,' under the heading of 'Natural Phenomena.' Is that all, D'Arcy?"

"No fear!"

"Then the only alternative is to publish a double numbah."

"More rats!"

"I do not see how the difficulty is to be othahwise met," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I leave it to Tom Mewwy, as chief editah, expectin' all the stuff I wite to go in. By the way, I don't seem to be gettin' on vewy well with the article, and I always find my bwain works quickah if music is goin' on. I suppose you fellows won't object to my turnin' on Tom Mewwy's gramophone?"

There was a yell of protest.



The two cads stole up the garden path towards the window. "This is the room!" whispered Mellish. "The window is fastened, but we'll soon have that up." So saying he drew a chisel from his pocket and gently prised up the window.

"I was thinkin'—"

"Yes; we've got that down."

"I uttably wefuse to have my remarks tweated in this wibald mannah, Tom Mewwy. Unless I am tweated with pwopah respect, I shall wesign from the editowial staff, and that would place you in a doocid awkward posish, with your only weally good contwibutor gone."

"Don't be hard on a poor chief editor, Gussy."

"I don't want to be hard, Tom Mewwy, but a pwopah considewation for my personal dig may leave me no alternative but to wesign. Howevah, to wesume. I was thinkin' that this week I should want double my usual space."

"Rats!" said several voices.

"As, besides my article on fashions, I shall want a couple of columns for an article on music," said D'Arcy, unheeding. "My discovey that I have a wemarkable tenah voice has turned my attention to that subject. I am thinkin' of puttin' in an article on singin' evewy week."

"Right-ho! You can put it in in place of your fashions article."

"Nothin' of the sort. If one of you fellows likes to wesign his space to me for a few weeks—"

"Weally, deah boys, if you are such unmusical asses, you ought to be glad of an opportunity of studying the thing," said D'Arcy severely.

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther. "There's ten fellows in the study, and hardly room to breathe now. There's no room for a row."

"If you wegard music as a wow, Lowthah—"

"Keep away from that gramophone!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort! You wemembah what Shakespeare says, 'The man that hath no music in his soul is fit for tweasons, stwatagem, and spoils. Let no such man be twusted!' I agwee with Shakespeare in that wemark. I have been witin' an 'Ode to Music' for this numbah of the 'Weekly.'"

"Keep off that gramophone!"

"Wats!?"

And Arthur Augustus wound up the machine, and selected a record and laid it on the turntable. Lowther rose from the fender, D'Arcy put in a needle, keeping a wary eye on Lowther, and started the gramophone.

The stirring strains of the "Soldiers' Chorus," from "Faust," filled the room with sound.

Now, nobody objected to the "Soldiers' Chorus" in itself, but in a crowded room, with at least nine juniors hard at brain work, it was really a little too much.

Monty Lowther made a spring at D'Arcy.

"Shut it off!"

"Wats!"

"Well, I will, then!"

"I wepeat, Lowthah, that my bwain works bettah when I have just listened to some music."

"Rats! I don't believe it ever works at all!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"Look here, Lowthah—"

The door opened, and Skimpole looked in. He blinked mildly at the busy editorial staff of the "Weekly."

"Would you chaps mind making a little less row?" he asked. "I am working up for the exam for the Codicote, you know."

"Oh, wats, deah boy! You haven't any chance for that!"

"Really, D'Arcy, I think it is practically a certainty for me."

"But I have entahed, deah boy!"

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, I wathah weckon I am gettin' that scholarship!"

"Dear me! I have often feared that you were suffering from incipient softening of the brain, D'Arcy, but I have never had any direct proof of it till now. I—"

"You uttah ass!"

Lowther shut off the gramophone. Blessed silence descended upon the study. Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye and stared at Lowther.

"I wegard you as an unmusical ass!" he said. "Howevah, I am willin' to leave the mattah to the majowity. What do you fellows say?"

"Silence!" roared the fellows.

"Vewy well. But I must remark that I wegard you as a set of unmusical asses. I suppose there will be no objection to my singin' a tenah solo to wefwesh myself in the midst of my labahs?"

"Yas, rathah!" shrieked Blake. "Dry up!"

"If you put it that way, Blake, I shall wefuse to dwy up. It will wefwesh me considerably to sing the 'Pwize Song' from the 'Meistersingers.'"

"You'll get scragged if you do!"

"I shall uttably wefuse to get swaggad!"

And Arthur Augustus started:

"Morgenlicht leuchtend im resigen Schein,
Von Blut und Duft,
Geschwellt die Luft—"

"Oh Ow! O-o-o-o-o-o!"

Arthur Augustus suddenly stopped as a Latin Grammar caught him under the chin.

The swell of St. Jim's did not like a Latin Grammar much at any time, but to take it externally, under the chin, was most unpleasant of all.

He sat down.

"Now, you jolly well shut up!" said Manners, who had hurled the volume. "Blessed if it's not as bad as the gramophone!"

"Mannahs, I wegard you as a beast!"

"That's all right, so long as you do it quietly."

"I considah you a wank outsidah!"

"Good!"

"I uttably wefuse to co-opewate with you on the editowial staff of the papah!"

"Hurrah!"

Arthur Augustus rubbed his chin, bestowed a glance of withering scorn upon Manners, and strode from the study.

And the editorial staff, with a gasp of general relief, settled down to their interrupted editorial labours again.

CHAPTER 5.

A Elow for Two!

TOM MERRY rose from the table with a sigh of relief. "Well, that's done," he said. "If you fellows are finished, we may as well get down to the gym and stretch ourselves a bit."

"Nearly done," said Figgins, without looking up from the instalment of the "Black Chief of the Red Braves." "I will bury my scalping-knife in your chest—"

"Eh?"

"And hurl your remains to the wolves of the forest—"

"What?"

"Oh, it's all right! That's only a speech of the Black Chief of the Red Braves," said Figgins. "To be continued in our next. I think that's a rather good curtain."

"I'm done!"

Blake looked up, scratching his head.

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"Anybody know a rhyme for mediæval?" he asked.

"Blessed if I do," said Tom Merry. "Put to be continued, and leave the rhyme over for the next number. I'm going down to the gym. When you've finished, put the sheets together. They've got to go down to the printer's to-night, or we shan't have the number on Saturday. You fellows are so late with your copy that there won't be any time to look over the proofs, so take extra care now."

The door opened.

"Hallo, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry, looking round. "Have you got your article finished? I'm going down to the printer's with this soon."

"I have not yet finished the article, Merry. Somehow the inspiration refused to flow. Even the greatest brains fail to come quite up to the mark at times. I have been working on the exam instead, but I find the matter somewhat harder than I had anticipated. I had given it no attention before to-day. I find that a part of the subject consists in questions on Roman history and geography, and I am somewhat hazy on those subjects."

"Fancy that duffer entering for the Codicote!" murmured Kerr. "Why, I expect to have a pretty stiff tussle for it myself!"

"Have you entered, Kerr?" asked Skimpole, catching the words.

"Of course—weeks ago! I'm rather expecting to pull it off."

"So are we all," laughed Tom Merry. "So are a dozen other fellows in the House."

"Really, I should like to make a suggestion to you," said Skimpole, with an air of deep pondering. "I find that it will take up a great deal of my time to work up for the exam. I shall have to leave aside all my Deterministic propaganda for a time, and give up my amateur detective studies. Of course, if I devote my remarkable brain powers to the subject, you fellows won't have any chance!"

"Not an earthly, of course!"

"So I suggest that you should all resign from the competition—"

"What?"

"And leave me a clear field."

"Well, of all the nerve!"

"I fail to see it in that light. If you work and I work, I am bound to get the scholarship. If you resign, I shall get it easily. The result will be the same, and I shall be saved the trouble of working."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see anything humorous in that suggestion, Merry. I may say that others besides myself regard me as a certain winner—Gore, for instance."

"His faith is great!" murmured Kerr

"Really, Kerr—"

Gore looked into the study. He gave Skimpole an exceedingly amiable nod.

"Hallo, old chap! Coming down to the gym?"

"Yes—er—certainly. Gore, I was just—"

"Come on, then. Don't stay here with those swots," said Gore.

"We're not swotting," said Herries indignantly. "We're working up this week's number of the paper."

"Lot of rot, I call it!" said Gore.

"There's the door," said Tom Merry. "Or perhaps you'd prefer the window."

Gore passed his arm through Skimpole's.

"Come on, old chap!"

The whole editorial staff stared at them. The extraordinary amiability of the bully of the Shell was too amazing for words.

"Certainly, Gore," said Skimpole. "But just wait a moment. I was speaking to Tom Merry. Merry, will you please oblige me in this matter by resigning from the competition?"

"Ask me another!"

"Will you other fellows resign?"

"I don't think!" said the other fellows in chorus.

"I consider this as rather selfish of you. I am certain to get the scholarship if I work for it, and I am really very much in need of the fifty pounds."

"The what?" said Gore, starting. "What's that?"

"I was speaking of the fifty pounds given with the Codicote Scholarship, for which I have entered, Gore."

"Is that—that—that the fifty pounds you were telling me about?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"You—you won't get the fifty pounds unless you win the Codicote Scholarship?" asked Gore, scarcely able to articulate.

"Certainly not. But there is no danger—I am certain to win it. If these fellows persist in competing with me, I shall exert my wonderful brain powers, and then, of course, the thing will be a certainty."

"You—you—you—" stuttered Gore.

Skimpole gazed at him in amazement. "Is anything the matter, Gore? You appear to be annoyed."

"You—you confounded idiot!" roared Gore. "You—you welsher!"

"Eh?"

"You've diddled me out of a feed!" yelled Gore. "You told me you were going to have fifty pounds, and promised me a fiver out of it!"

"Well, that is quite correct."

"Yes, if you win some measly scholarship or other—and you've got about as much chance against Merry or Blake as a kid in the Third Form has!"

"Really, Gore—"

"You—you welsher!"

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

And the staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" simply yelled. The discovery of Gore's true motives in chumming up with Skimpole struck them as comical.

The cad of the Shell glared at them fiercely. "I'm surprised and shocked, Gore, at discovering these mercenary motives!" said Skimpole loftily. "I imagined that I had converted you, and I hoped that you would enable me to say—Ow!"

Skimpole had not meant to say "Ow!" but the ejaculation was uttered involuntarily as Gore's fist smote him on the nose.

The freak of the Shell staggered back, and sat down violently upon the knees of Fatty Wynn, and Gore stamped out of the study and slammed the door with a slam that made the table jump.

"Here, get off, you bony duffer!" said Fatty Wynn; and he gave Skimpole a gentle shove that sent him sliding to the floor.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole dazedly. "I feel as if I had—had received a shock!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Determinist of St. Jim's was dragged up by Blake and Tom Merry and stood upon his feet. He pressed his handkerchief to his nose, and it was immediately dyed crimson.

"Dear me, I think my nose is bleeding!"

"It looks like it!" grinned Blake. "That handkerchief is a study in scarlet already. Mop it up! Will you lend Skimmy your hearthrug, Tom Merry?"

"Certainly! He's quite welcome!"

"Dear me, I think the handkerchief will be sufficient! This is very rough and rude of Gore. I am opposed to every kind of violence, or I should certainly follow him and strike him forcibly. I am ashamed to say that at the present moment it would afford me considerable gratification to strike him forcibly!"

"You're all right," said Figgins. "A little bleeding is what a chap wants when he's in too good a condition. You don't want it all from the nose, though. I'll just let a little blood from your wrist."

"Eh?"

"Keep still! Lend me your penknife, Kerr!"

"Here you are, Figgy."

"Dear me! What are you going to do with that knife, Figgins?"

"Bleed you a little, my son. Hold still!"

"But I—I don't want to be bled. I am bleeding considerably at the nose."

"My dear chap, I've made a special study of this subject. In fact, I've taken surgery up as a hobby," said Figgins. "That is all right; I know what I'm about. Hold out your wrist!"

"I—I—I—"

Tom Merry exchanged glances with Blake. Blake caught hold of Figgins' arm, and Tom gently but firmly extracted the penknife from his grip.

Figgins resisted.

"Don't be an ass, Merry! This is a serious matter!"

"I know it is," said Tom Merry. "I strongly object to pigsticking in my study! If you want to bleed anybody, try Fatty Wynn in your own study!"

"Well, I never thought of that, but it's not a bad idea. It would do Fatty good."

"Would it?" said Fatty Wynn, looking dangerous. "If anybody starts bleeding me, there will be a jolly big row, I warn you!"

"It's for your own good, Fatty."

"Oh, rats!" said Fatty ungratefully.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I think I shall have to go and hold my nose under a key, or slip a cold water tap down my back—I mean—"

"Good idea!" said Tom Merry.

And Skimpole left the study, still with his handkerchief to his nose, and ruby drops spotting the linoleum as he went down the passage.

(Continued on next page.)



Send your Jokes to—
"THE GEM JESTER,"
 5, Carmelite Street,
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Half-a-crown will be paid for every joke that appears in this column.

IRISH!

Pat (to his wife): "Begorra, I see we've had no luck in the sweepstake!"
 Wife: "Sure, Pat, an' we never was lucky."
 Pat: "Faith, an' it's a good job we didn't buy a ticket!"
BERTIE PATON, Coltness Mains, Wishaw, Lanarkshire, Scotland.

IF!

Photographer (to employer): "Would you like me to photograph your men at work?"
 Employer: "Yes, if you can catch them at it!"
ALFRED BRISTOW, 137, Gascoigne Road, Barking, Essex.

ONLY JUST!

Sam: "What are you doing these days?"
 Bill: "I'm an exporter!"
 Sam: "An exporter?"
 Bill: "Yes. Just sacked by the railway!"
VICTOR HOWE, 67, Buxton Road, New Mills, via Stockport.

SO WERE THEY!

The new foreman, by name Dodgin, was walking round the works, when he found two men having a smoke.
 "Who are you?" they asked.
 "I'm Dodgin, the new foreman."
 "So are we; come and have a smoke!"
S. MURPHY, 137, Shakespeare Crescent, Patricroft, near Manchester.

QUITE TRUE!

Angler: "It was an enormous trout I caught. I've never seen such a big fish!"
 Friend: "I don't suppose you ever have!"
JOHN BRIGGS, 17, The Green, Stony Stratford, Bucks.

DO THEY?

Nobby: "How can ghosts go through closed doors?"
 Jimmy: "They use skeleton keys!"
RAYMOND COX, 34, Durden Street, Smithdown Road, Liverpool.

QUITE SO!

Poet (to office boy): "Do you know if the editor has looked through the poems I sent him?"
 Boy: "Yes, sir, he did glance at them."
 Poet: "Oh, just a cursory examination, I suppose?"
 Boy: "That's right, sir. I never heard him use such language in my life!"
KENNETH SHEPPARD, 128, Fishponds Road, Tooting, S.W.17.

THAT'S NOTHING!

Friend: "Milton spent fifteen days writing one page."
 Ex-prisoner: "I've spent fifteen years on one sentence!"
D. PATTERSON, 72, Seaview Road, Walsley, Cheshire.

CHAPTER 6.

A Mysterious Disappearance!

GEORGE GORE had an extremely unamiable expression upon his face as he strolled into the gym. There was some satisfaction in the damage he had done to Herbert Skimpole's nose. But, thinking of the time and trouble and money he had wasted in cultivating the friendship of the Determinist of the Shell, all for nothing, made Gore perfectly wild.

Mellish and Sharp noticed his looks, and sympathetically inquired the cause. They were Gore's chums, but fellows like Gore had very little understanding of the true meaning of chumming. As a matter of fact, neither Sharp nor Mellish was displeased by Gore's glum looks, and they derived considerable enjoyment from the recital of his wrongs.

"After I'd stood him a jolly good feed!" said Gore impressively. "Then to find out that he wasn't going to have any tin at all! Why, what are you laughing at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Mellish.

"He, he, he!" cackled Sharp.

"Why, you grinning dummies——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

Gore scowled at his hilarious friends. He was looking in a dangerous temper, and the two Fourth Form juniors quieted at last.

"Excuse me!" grinned Mellish. "It struck me as—rather funny. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Something else'll strike you jolly soon!" growled Gore. "Oh, don't be ratty! Fancy you being taken in like that, though!"

"Clean done!" chuckled Sharp.

"I shouldn't wonder if he planned it all from the beginning, and Tom Merry was at the bottom of it!" went on Mellish, who knew very well that such was not the case.



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But Mellish had an imagination far too free and soaring to be trammelled by any regard for facts.

Gore was in a humour to believe anything, however.

"I shouldn't wonder," he assented. "They were laughing like a lot of hyenas in Merry's study when I found it out."

"You could get your own back," Mellish observed carelessly.

Gore stared at him.

"How?"

"When I passed Tom Merry's study a little while back the packet was lying on the table there, ready to go to the printers."

"Oh, was it? How do you know?"

"Well, I looked in."

"Why didn't you chuck the thing into the fire?" said Gore savagely. "I would!"

"Well, it's still there," said Mellish.

Gore wrinkled his brows. He was smarting, and in a mood to hit back hard for his fancied injuries. If the copy for the "Weekly" were destroyed, Tom Merry & Co. would have something else to laugh about.

"Where's Tom Merry now?"

"In the gym," said Mellish. "He came in a few minutes ago, I think. Yes, there he is over yonder, talking to Finn."

Gore looked across. Tom Merry was chatting to Buck Finn, the sparely built, keen-eyed, American youth.

Buck Finn had been laid up lately with influenza, and he was still looking a little pale, but very nearly his old self.

"I think I'll go and have a stroll round," said Gore abruptly.

Mellish and Sharp grinned at one another as Gore left. They knew his intention, and they pictured to themselves the faces of the editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" when the copy was found to be missing.

A few minutes later Gore looked into Tom Merry's study. The room was empty, and in the middle of the table lay a packet neatly wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine.

Gore's eyes gleamed as he stepped into the study.

He picked up the packet. Yes, there was the name of Mr. Tipper, the Rylcombe printer, on the outside, in Tom Merry's big hand.

Gore thrust the packet under his jacket, and turned to the door again.

There was a footstep in the corridor.

The cad of the Shell started and drew back. Was it someone passing, or—

The next moment he knew. Jack Blake came into the study.

The Fourth-Former gave a start on seeing Gore there.

"Hallo, Gore!"

Gore muttered something and left the study.

Blake looked exceedingly puzzled.

"Wonder what the rotter was doing here?" he muttered. "Some little game, I suppose. Where's that packet for the printer?"

Jack Blake had a pass from Kildare to go down to Rylcombe and take the copy for the "Weekly," and he had just come to the study for it. He had been told that it was on the table, but the table was bare. He glanced round the study, but there was no sign of a packet, and he remembered Gore.

Gore's guilty look and his presence in the study were explained in a flash. He had taken the copy of the "Weekly."

In a twinkling Jack Blake was out in the corridor.

The place was deserted. Blake heard a sound towards the stairs, and ran in that direction. He rounded a corner and almost ran into Skimpole. The genius of St. Jim's was studying a huge volume as he walked up the passage.

"Have you seen Gore?" gasped Blake.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"Did you speak?" he asked. "I am just getting into the interesting part of Professor Jawfull Jabbar's great work on Determinism. I shall, to a certain extent, take this as my model——"

"Has anyone passed you?"

"As my model for my own book. I have only finished some four hundred and eighty-three chapters, so far, so there is plenty of room left for—— Ow, ow!"

Blake shook him violently.

Skimpole broke off, gasping, and the huge volume containing the valuable meditations of Professor Jabbar dropped with a crash to the floor, and Skimpole's spectacles slid down his nose.

"Dear me! Blake, really——"

"Has anybody passed you?"

"Yes, someone ran by me; but, really——"

"Was it Gore?"

"Yes, I think so. Yes, I am sure. I remember he dropped something from under his jacket, and stopped to pick it up, and—"

But Blake was gone. He was descending the stairs three at a time, leaving Skimpole in a state bordering on stupefaction.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole, replacing his spectacles and picking up the huge volume of Jabbarian wisdom. "Dear me, I cannot help regarding that as almost rude of Blake!"

Blake flew down the stairs. It was unfortunate that Kildare of the Sixth was coming up at the same moment. Blake bumped into a broad chest, and an iron grip on his collar brought him to a stop.

Kildare grasped the banister with his other hand and glared at the junior wriggling in his grip.

"You—you young—"

"Let—let—lemme go, Kildare!"

"Yes, I'm likely to!" said the captain of St. Jim's. "You nearly sent me downstairs on my neck!"

"I'm in a hurry—"

"Come into my study and I'll give you a lesson about going downstairs in a hurry!"

"Oh, really, Kildare," gasped Blake, "I'm after Gore! He's collared the copy of our 'Weekly,' and he's up to something with it!"

Kildare hesitated a moment, and then his grasp relaxed.

"Cut!" he said briefly.

Blake did not need telling twice. He cut, and went down the rest of the stairs like lightning. Then he glared round in search of Gore. The cad of the Shell was not to be seen.

Blake grasped Reilly by the shoulder. The Irish junior was reading the notices on the board, when he was suddenly whirled round by Blake's sudden grasp.

"Faith, and what—"

"Have you seen Gore?"

"Gore, is it? Faith, and he went into the quad a minute ago."

Jack Blake dashed into the quad. It was very dark there, and there was no sign of Gore to be seen. Up and down he rushed excitedly; but if the cad of the Shell was there he kept well out of sight. Tom Merry and Buck Finn were coming out of the gym, and Blake dashed towards them.

"Have you seen Gore?"

"Gore?" said Tom Merry. "Not lately."

"I guess not," said Buck Finn.

"Did you leave the copy of the 'Weekly' where you told me, Merry?"

"Yes, of course I did!"

"Then it's gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes; and Gore's taken it!"

Tom Merry, as excited now as Blake, seized him by the arm.

"Sure?"

"He was in your study; he sneaked out like a kicked dog!" said Blake rapidly. "Then I saw the packet wasn't there. I was after him like a shot, but he's dodged me."

"We'll jolly soon hunt him out!"

"I guess I'll lend you a hand!"

Tom Merry's whistle rang through the gloom of the quadrangle. It was a signal well-known to his chums, and they were not long in gathering. A minute more and the news was known, and Tom Merry & Co. were hunting far and wide for the vanished Gore.

CHAPTER 7.

Towser Distinguishes Himself!

GORE was not, as a rule, much sought after. But just now he was being sought after to a remarkable extent.

A dozen juniors hunted for him high and low, asking every fellow they met for information.

Information was hard to gain. Some had seen him, and some hadn't. Nobody appeared to know where he was now.

The hunters separated, and took different directions. Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners did the Shell passage, searching every study. Buck Finn and Blake drew the box-rooms—blank. Digby and Herries hunted through the Fourth Form studies. They routed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy out of the Common-room, and made him join in the hunt.

D'Arcy, who was still suffering considerably from damage to his dig, declined at first; but when he learned that the copy of the "Weekly" was in danger, he bucked up at once. To have his fashion column and his interesting information on music lost was not to be thought of.

He joined in the quest with great ardour.

Figgins & Co., on a chance that Gore might have taken refuge in the New House, hurried off thither and searched for him. But it soon became clear that Gore was not there.

Where was Gore?

Nobody appeared to know. In the midst of the exciting search, while the fate of the "Weekly" hung in the balance, Digby remembered that he had a German imposition to take in to Herr Schneider, and that it was overdue. He rushed off to Study No. 6 to get it.

Herries, who was considerably dusty from a search in a lumber-room, was suddenly struck by an idea.

"Towser!"

"Eh?" growled Blake. "Thinking of that rotten bulldog now, when we may have all our work to do over again! Scat!"

"I'm thinking of Towser—"

"Oh, go and feed him then!"

"I'm not thinking of feeding him. It's time, though," said Herries, looking at his watch. "But what I was thinking of is that Towser might track down Gore."

"Rats!"

"Look here," said Herries warmly, "you know jolly well what a marvel Towser is at tracking down people. You remember how he tracked down the burglars who robbed the chapel."

"More rats!"

"Well, I'm jolly well going to try Towser, that's all!"

"You'll get into a row if you bring him into the House," said Lowther.

"Well, it's worth risking a row to get the copy of the 'Weekly' back."

"Yes; but—"

"Besides, Blake says that Towser can't track down the rotter, and I know jolly well he can. I'll just show you."

And Herries, not to be argued with, rushed off for his favourite.

Tom Merry laughed.

"There'll be ructions if Herries starts tracking people indoors with that ghastly bulldog," he said. "But hang it all, where can Gore be?"

The search had lasted more than half an hour. There was ample time for Gore to have destroyed the "Weekly" if he had so wished. But Tom Merry thought he would hesitate to do so.

"You see, if we hadn't spotted him—"

"If I hadn't spotted him, you mean," said Blake.

"Well, yes, if Blake hadn't spotted him, he would very likely have made an end of the copy; but now he knows we're on his track, he won't dare," said Tom Merry, with conviction.

"He could deny knowing anything about it," said Lowther.

"Yes, and I know he wouldn't mind lying; but we should find some traces of it sooner or later," said Tom. "Two or three quires of foolscap aren't got rid of quite so easily. And when we found the fragments—well the proof wouldn't be conclusive enough for a court of law, but it would do for us, and Gore would have one of the highest old times of his life. And he knows it!"

"Bai Jove, I wathah think you are wight, Tom Mewwy. What do you think the wottah will do, then?"

"Most'ly likely hide it somewhere, and pretend to know nothing about it."

"Bai Jove! We'll wag him till we make him tell us where it is."

"Yes, rather! And that's why he's keeping out of the way."

"Where can the wottah be?"

"That's a blessed mystery. Hallo, here's Herries with his blughound! 'Ware prefects, old fellow!"

"Blow the prefects!" said Herries, dragging on Towser's chain. "Have you got anything belonging to Gore—his cap, or boots, or anything?"

Gr-r-r!

Towser apparently didn't like being kept waiting for his supper. He was looking far from amiable. His growl made Arthur Augustus draw back hastily.

"The wotten dog is not safe, Hewwies!"

"He's safe enough, unless one of the prefects sees him."

"I mean he is not safe for us at close quarters."

"It's all right if you don't look at him. Towser doesn't like being looked at, that's all."

"I'm just going up to Schneider," said Digby, coming along with an imposition in his hand. "I forgot about my lines."

"Have you got anything belonging to Gore? Hallo! Quiet, Towser! What is he sniffing at?"

"My imposition, I believe," said Digby, snatching it

hastily out of the bulldog's reach. "It was left on the table at tea-time, and some herring got on it. It's on the last sheet, so I hope Schneider won't notice it."

"Keep him quiet, Herries." "I am keeping him quiet," growled Herries. "I suppose you don't want a bulldog to be as quiet as an Egyptian mummy, do you? He obeys me in everything. Quiet, Towser! Now watch him shut up."

Gr-r-r-r!
"Quiet, old boy! Quiet, doggie!"
Gr-r-r-r!
"Well, we're waiting for him to shut up," said Blake patiently.

"Oh, rats!" said Herries crossly. "Towser isn't a measly mongrel, afraid of every word. If he wants to growl, he growls. Don't you, Towser, old boy?"

Gr-r-r-r! said Towser, old boy.
"There you are!" said Herries triumphantly.
"Wonderful!" said Tom Merry, with due solemnity. "I see that you can lead Towser with a thread—everywhere he wants to go. What on earth is he trying to get after Digby for?"

"Quiet, Towser! Stop!"
"Ha, ha, ha! He's after the herring on the paper!"
Towser strained at the chain. He made so much noise when Herries tried to restrain him that the junior, in fear of being pounced upon by an angry prefect, let him have his way. Towser strained and pulled on, and arrived along with Digby at the door of Herr Schneider's study.

Dig had just tapped, and a deep voice had bidden him "Come in!" Towser made a snatch at the imposition as Dig went in, but the junior held it in the air.

Herries gave a sudden exclamation as the door flew open. For there, seated demurely at Herr Schneider's table, was George Gore.

"Gore!" gasped Herries.
Gore looked round with a sweet smile.
"I can't come now, Herries," he said. "Herr Schneider has kindly consented to help me with my German verbs."

"Dat is so," said Herr Schneider, beaming through his spectacles. "I likes to encourage te study among te poy, and I tink tat Gore especially is fery mooch in need of taking his vork more seriously."

"My imposition, sir," said Digby.
"You may place it on te table, Digby," said the Herr.

From where he sat he could not see Towser, but suddenly became aware of the bulldog's presence.

As Digby laid the impot on the table, Towser made a sudden spring for it.

It was useless for the startled Herries to attempt to stop him. The sudden spring had dragged the chain from his hand.

Towser scrambled on to the table.
Herr Schneider started up with a shriek.
"Ach! Take tat peast away, ain't it!"

Herries rushed forward. Digby sprang to his aid. But they were too late. Herr Schneider smote the bulldog with his book to frighten him away, and it was about the worst thing he could have done. Towser forgot all about the fascinating scent of herrings that had led him on. He went in for vengeance.

Right at the stout German he scrambled over the table. Books and papers, an inkpot and a globe, went crashing to the floor.

Herr Schneider took one look at the bulldog's jaws and fled.

He dodged round the table, and Towser dashed after him with clinking chain.

"Towser!" shrieked Herries.
But Towser was too excited to heed his master's voice.

"Ach!" gasped Herr Schneider. "Help! Mercy! I am murdair! Help!"

Digby flung himself desperately between the bulldog and his prey. If Herr Schneider should be bitten, the consequences would be endless for the juniors.

Towser, baffled, was greatly inclined to bite Digby instead, but he recognised one who had often fed him, and bulldogs have good memories.

Digby clutched his collar and held him off, and Herr Schneider promptly gained the other side of the table again.

"Ach!" he gasped. "Mein gootness! Haf you got tat tog safely, Tigby?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Digby.
"You vas ein prave lad! Hold him tight!"

"Yes, sir," said Digby heroically. As he was in no danger, he could be as heroic as he liked, and he did not let the opportunity slip. "I won't let him bito you, sir. He shall—shall tear me in pieces first!"

"Prave poy! Hold him!"
"He's all right, sir!" gasped Herries. "Only a little trisky!"

"You vicked poy! But for that prave lad I might have been torn in pieces, after," said Herr Schneider. "You

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shall be reported to the Housemaster, ain't it, and tat fearful peast shall be shot!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped the dismayed Herries.
"I haf said it! Go, and take tat peast mit you pefore."

"Oh, sir—"
"Not a vort!" said the German master, with a majestic wave of the hand. "Go!"

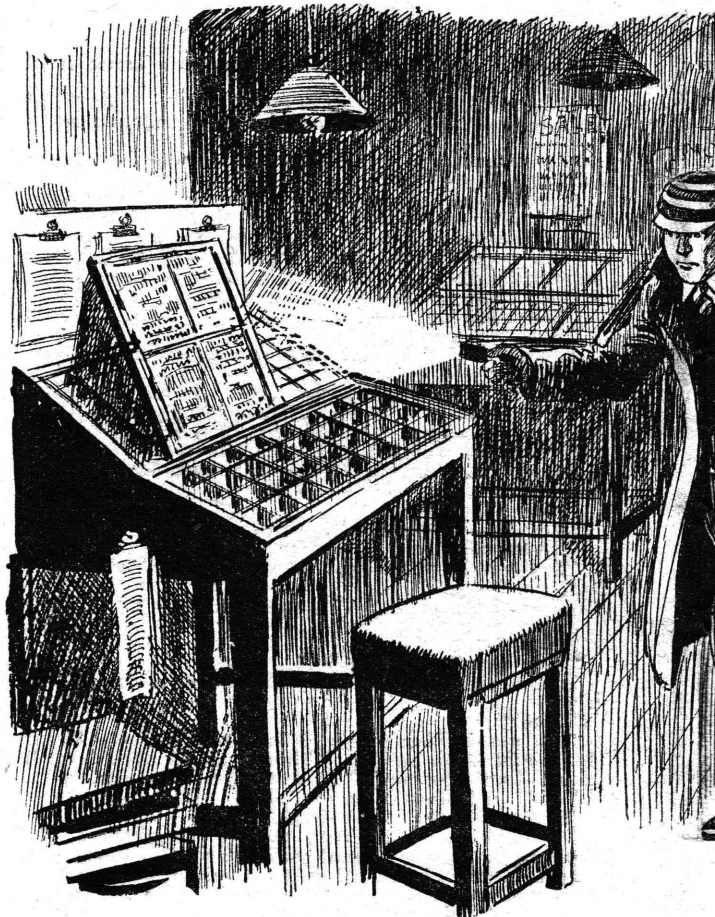
Herries dejectedly took the chain of the bulldog.

Tom Merry & Co., all attracted by the disturbance, were in the passage outside. They were looking at Gore very expressively, but Gore appeared not to see it.

"As for you, Tigby, my prave lad," said Herr Schneider, "I am fery grateful to you, and if you asks a favour, I grants it."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Digby.
"You vas a prave poy. You may go. You also may go, Gore. I cannot after tat shock go on mit te Sherman verbs, But I helps you annoder time."

Gore gave a disquieted glance at the juniors in the



passage. But there was nothing to be done, and he left the study. And Jack Blake and Tom Merry linked their arms in his, and marched him away quite affectionately.

CHAPTER 8.

A Case of Doubt!

TOM MERRY & Co. led Gore away without a word. The cad of the Shell made one or two efforts to shake himself free in vain. Then he went quietly lest worse should befall him.

Herries had a dejected countenance. Reporting to the Housemaster meant a caning; but that did not worry Herries. But the German master had declared that Towser should be shot.

Towser had caused trouble so often before at St. Jim's that there was a very strong feeling against him in many quarters. His violent death would probably cause rejoicings among those who had been selected by Towser for the purpose of trying his teeth. But to Herries, Towser was all

in all. Even his cornet paled into insignificance beside Towser.

It was a much debated question in Study No. 6 in the School House, as to which was the more utterly intolerable in the study—Herries' bulldog of Herries' cornet. Blake had openly declared that he would stand a feed to anybody who would smash the cornet. Arthur Augustus had hinted that he had a spare fiver for anybody who should be responsible for the demise of Towser. But now that the fiat had gone forth, they were all sorry for Herries.

If Herr Schneider made a point of it in his complaint to the Housemaster—and he was certain to do so—there would be only the alternative of the death of Towser, or of sending him away from the school. And Herries had a dismal foreboding of how Towser would be received if he sent him home.

"It's too bad," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry, Herries. Of course, it's rot about having him shot. Railton will let you send him away instead."



Gore shone the light from his torch on to the printer's formes. He was looking for the type of "Tom Merry's Weekly." Suddenly he paused, reading. What was this? Latin? "My hat!" gasped Gore. "It's the paper for the Codicote Scholarship Exam! What luck!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't want to send him away," said Herries miserably. "It's hard cheese," said Blake. "I can't say I like Towser as a companion, but it's hard cheese, all the same."

"Yaas, wathah! Undah the circe, I withdraw seweral remarks I have made concernin' Towsah."

"It's all the fault of that squirming rotter," said Figgins. "If Gore hadn't taken the copy of the 'Weekly'—"

"Bai Jove! Figgins is wight. It's all Gore's fault!"

"Better get the critter back to his kennel, before there's more trouble, Herries, old man," suggested Monty Lowther.

Herries nodded gloomily, and led Towser away.

The juniors gathered round Gore, who was looking scared, but impudent at the same time. They debated various modes of torture, but it was agreed that it should not commence till Herries came back. As the chiefly injured party, he was entitled to have a hand in it.

Herrie was not long gone. He came back with a vengeful glitter in his eyes.

"Better get him into the box-room," he said. "I think

five hundred whacks with a cricket bat will about meet the case."

"Bai Jove! Dwaw it mild, old chap!"

"Look here," said Gore, "lemme alone! I don't know what you're talking about. It wasn't my fault Herries' mongrel went for old Schneider!"

"If you call my dog a mongrel, Gore—"

"Well, I don't care what kind of a beast it is. You can't say it was my fault it burst into Schneider's study—"

"Yes, it was. He was tracking you."

"He was whattin'?"

"Tracking you. You know jolly well you were only fooling Schneider—you were only pretending to want his help with those rotten verbs to keep out of our way." Gore grinned faintly. "We've been hunting you everywhere, and at last I thought of tracking you down with Towser."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling about, you image?" demanded Herries, turning to Digby. "Do you mean to say that Towser didn't track Gore down, when he went to Schneider's study?"

"Ha, ha, ha! He was following the scent of the herring on my impot!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, don't talk utter bosh!" said Herries irritably. "It's amazing to me how everyone runs down Towser—a nice, quiet, affectionate, intelligent dog. He's got into a mess for doing what we brought him into the House to do; and you can't even give him the credit of running down Gore."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"And so it is all Gore's fault Towser has got into a row," said Herries. "He's going to be jolly well ragged for it, too!"

"Yaas, wathah! I quite agree with Hewwies there."

"Look here!" said Gore. "What's the row? I don't care whether Towser tracked me or not! What confounded business have you to be tracking me? What have I done?"

"You know jolly well what you've done!" exclaimed Blake hotly. "What were you doing in Tom Merry's study when I went there?"

"I went to borrow his German Grammar."

"Why, you—you—"

"As he wasn't there I looked in to see whether it was lying about in sight, and, as I couldn't see it, I was coming out when you came in," said Gore coolly. "I'm blessed if I see what business it is of yours."

"Now look here, Gore—"

"If Tom Merry doesn't like me going into his study, it's for him to say so, and not for a Fourth Form kid!" said Gore. "Mind your own business!"

"You—you—you—" gasped Blake. "You took the copy of the 'Weekly' off Tom Merry's table, and you know it!"

Gore looked surprised.

"I took what?"

"The packet containing the copy prepared for the printer," said Tom Merry sternly.

"Blessed if I know anything about any packet! Is that what you have been chasing me around for?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I can't give you any information. If this is a little joke of yours, Blake—"

"Mine!" howled Blake.

"Yes, yours! If this is a little joke of yours, you'd better own up and produce the thing."

"Pro-pro-produce it!" almost stuttered Blake.

"Yes. The joke has gone quite far enough."

Blake looked as if he would jump on the voracious youth. Figgins held him back. "The juniors were looking very curiously at Jack Blake."

"Bai Jove," remarked D'Arcy, "if this is weally a little joke, Blake—"

"It isn't!" shrieked Blake.

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, I don't know anything about it," he remarked. "Blake was the last fellow to be seen with the packet—"

"I wasn't—I didn't—I—"

"It's my belief that Blake has played some joke with it," went on Gore coolly. "He'll own up to-morrow, or the next day—"

"Let me get at him!" roared Blake.

"Hold on!"

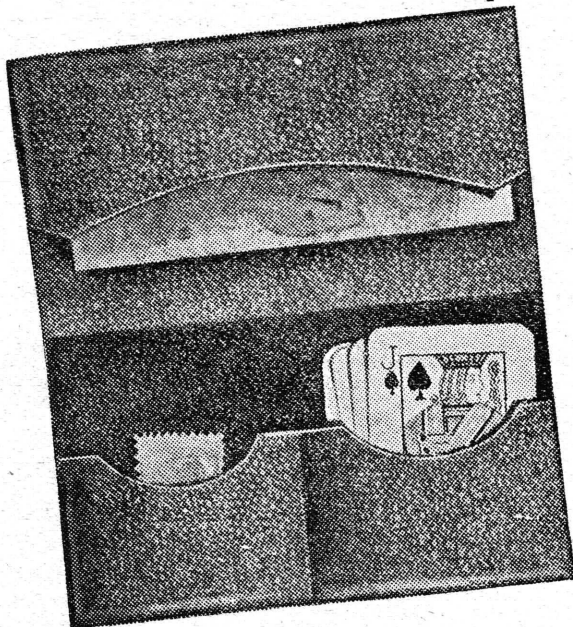
"Weally, I cannot ewedit that there is anythin' in Gore's assertion, as I know him to be an untwuthful person, and I can wely on the word of my fwiend Blake," said Arthur Augustus. "I suggest that we wag him."

"Look here—"

Tom Merry looked steadily at Gore.

"Do you give us your word that you don't know anything of the packet, Gore?"

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Gore hesitated a moment. It was hard to look into Tom Merry's clear eyes and tell a direct untruth.

"I don't see why I should be catechised!" he exclaimed. "I've told you why I went to your study. If Blake didn't take the packet, somebody else might have. You oughtn't to leave it lying about if it was valuable."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"There's something in that," he said, at length. "It's suspicious against Gore; but the packet might have been taken by someone else."

"I wecommend waggin' him, anyway."

"I'm jolly sure he took it!" said Blake.

"So am I," said Herries. "I've got to part with my bulldog—"

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"There's no connection between your bulldog and whether Gore took the packet, old chap."

"I know I've got to part with Towser, anyway, and Gore ought to be made to smart for it," said Herries obstinately.

"I'm for leaving the ragging over till we find out for certain," said Tom Merry. "It would be unpleasant to rag Gore, and then discover that some other cad—I mean, some other chap, had taken the packet."

Herries grunted. He was certain that Gore was guilty, but as his only reason was that he had to part with Towser, his position could not be regarded as logical. The rest rather unwillingly agreed with Tom Merry.

"I wegard Tom Mewwy's statement of the mattah as cowwect," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Gore is a feahful wottah, but it would be a doocid awkward posish to discovah that we have waggid the wong wottah. I wecommend that he is allowed to go, and to come up for judgment if called upon."

"Start him with a kick," said Kerr.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "Suppose we fine him—make him stand a feed all round, and—"

"Oh, scat! Get off, Gore!"

"It's a jolly good idea!" said the fat Fourth-Former. "I'm jolly peckish. I get very hungry in this February weather."

Blake, who was only half-convinced of the propriety of letting Gore go unpunished, started him with a kick, and the cad of the Shell did not retaliate.

He was only too glad to escape so cheaply.

He scuttled off, chuckling, to retail the joke to Mellish and Sharp. And when the Terrible Three went to their study a little later, they heard the sound of chuckling proceed from Gore's room. But there was one junior in the School House who was in no mood for chuckling. It was Herries. He went into Study No. 6 and plumped himself into the easy-chair, and refused to speak.

His chums were sympathetic, but unable to console him. Herries was mourning his loss, and was not to be consoled. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's kind offer to cheer him up by singing a tenor solo from "Tannhauser" was received so brusquely that the swell of St. Jim's gave up the attempt at consolation on the spot.

CHAPTER 9.

A Respite for Towser!

"**B**AI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered the exclamation suddenly.

Blake and Digby looked at him, but Herries remained morose and preoccupied. He had plenty to think about in the sad plight of Towser.

"I have thought of an ideah," explained Arthur Augustus. "I am wathah touched—"

"Why say 'rather'?" grunted Blake.

"Weally, Blake, you misappwehend my meanin'. I am wathah touched by the extwemely dispiwited expwession upon Hewwies' bwow, and though he has been somewhat wude to me, still—"

"With all his faults you love him still," said Blake, with a nod.

"Yaas, pwecisely—"

"Well, he's still now," said Blake—"quite still."

"Pway leave those wotten witticisms to Lowthah, Blake. As you know, I have always objected to Towser—"

"You let Towser alone!" growled Herries.

"You misappwehend me, Hewwies!"

"Well, shut up, then!"

"I decline to shut up! You misappwehend me entirely. I have been stwuck by an ideah on the vewy subject of that wotten bulldog—"

"You'll be struck by something else jolly soon!" said Herries darkly.

"I should uttahly wefuse to be stwuck by somethin' else, Hewwies. And I must say that you are not vewy gratefule for my ideah, which is conceived in the spiwit of genewosity and self-sacwifice. When I think of the constant dangah my twousahs are in through that beast Towser, I am

tempted to hold my tongue, and let the twouts be sent away."

Herries started.

"Do you mean to say that you have got a wheeze for getting him let off?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, with dignity. "That is pweicely what I mean to say."

"Well, go ahead!"

"Undah the cires—"

"Oh, cut the cackle, and come to the hosses!" said Blake. "I don't like that cannibal beast nosing round, but on Herries' account I'll allow you to get him off, if you can. I hope Herries will be properly grateful."

"Oh, rats!" grunted Herries.

"How can I come to the point, when Blake keeps on intewwuptin' me? What I was thinkin' of is this: What did our respected German mastah say to Dig?"

"What did he say to me?" asked Digby, staring.

"You saved him fwom bein' bitten, at a feahful wisk to yourself."

"Well, I saved him from being bitten," grinned Digby. "I don't know about the risk to myself. Towser wouldn't bite me."

"I wasn't thinking of that. He might have torn your waistcoat, and, as a mattah of fact, he did tear a went in your twousahs."

"Are you ever coming to the point, D'Arcy?" asked Blake politely. "If you're understudying a gramophone, I'll go for a walk."

"Pway be patient, deah boy! Herr Schneider said that if Digby asked him a favah he would gwant it."

"So he did," said Digby. "I remember now."

"Well, deah boys, that's the wippin' ideah! Dig can go to Herr Schneider and ask him a favah—ask him to ovahlook the mattah, and let Hewwies and his beastly dog off."

Herries jumped up, and gave D'Arcy a thump on the back that sent him staggering across the study.

"Splendid!" he shouted.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "You—you uttah ass! You've nearly broken my back, and probawly wumped my jacket feahfully."

"Good wheeze!" repeated Herries heartily. "Buzz off, Dig!"

To his surprise Dig showed a decided lack of enthusiasm. Herries shook him by the shoulder.

"Buzz off, Dig, before Schneider has time to go to Railton! What the dickens are you hanging about for?" Digby rose slowly to his feet.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I'm sorry for you, Herries; but I don't enjoy the society of dogs as much as Gussy does—"

"I was speakin' in a spiwit of self-sawwifice."

"I'll do my best," grunted Dig. "I'll make it all right if I can, Herries—in a spirit of self-sawwifice."

And Digby left the study.

Herries followed him down the passage, to wait anxiously outside Herr Schneider's door for the verdict, and Blake looked at D'Arcy fixedly.

"Well, you are a giddy ass," he said. "I'm glad for old Herries' sake; but you've perpetuated that bulldog now."

"I am afwaid so," said D'Arcy. "But poor old Hewwies was so feahfully downhearted about it, you know. He actually weplied wudely when I offahed to sing him a tenor solo fwom 'Tannhauser,' which showed how awfully cut up he was. I felt that I must do somethin'. That bwute Towsah has no pwopah respect for a fellow's twousahs, I know. But a decent fellow ought to be always pwepared to sawwifice even his best twousahs on the altah of fwien'dship."

Herries and Digby entered the study a few minutes later. As Herries was beaming there was no doubt as to how the appeal had gone.

"All wight?" asked D'Arcy.

"Yes, ripping!" said Herries. "Schneider's not such a bad sort."

"Good sort!" said Digby. "He wriggled at first, but I put it to him strong, and he couldn't get out of what he had said. Towser's let off."

"And look here, D'Arcy," said Herries, in a burst of gratitude, "I'm awfully obliged to you, you know. You can take Towser for a run round the quad if you like."

"Thank you vewy much, Hewwies. Pewwaps I will avail myself of your kind ofah anothah time. Jus' at pwesent I am—"

"Excuse me!" said Skimpole, puttin' his head into the study. "I hear that you want me."

And the genius of the Shell came in.

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole's Skill!

SKIMPOLE blinked at the chums of Study No. 6, and the four Fourth-Formers stared at Skimpole.

"This is the first I've heard of it," said Blake casually. "And how could you possibly imagine that anybody wanted you is a mystery to me."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Really, Blake, I think I am right," said Skimpole, adjusting his spectacles and taking out a large notebook. "You have had a loss—"

"It's all right now," said Herries, who naturally could think only of one subject just then. "Towser's all right."

"I was not speaking of your bulldog, Herries. I hope he is lost—I mean if he is lost I shall certainly not take up the case. I hear that the copy of the 'Weekly' has been purloined from Tom Merry's study."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am willing to help you in my capacity of amateur detective," explained Skimpole. "I do not mind giving my brain a rest from the mighty problems of Determinism for a short time while I solve the mysteries which would perhaps baffle Scotland Yard. If I find the missing will—I mean the missing packet, and restore it, perhaps you will withdraw your frivolous competition for the Codicote Scholarship."

"Bai Jove!"

"You see, I am going to get that scholarship, but if there are competitors I shall have to work hard for it, and I should prefer to save the time," Skimpole explained. "As the exam is held shortly I should have to spend all my time over it, and I have many other irons in the fire. But about this lost document. It was last seen by whom?"

"By the person who saw it last," said Blake.

"Ahem! Blake, I understand, went to Merry's study for it and found it gone."

"I didn't find it at all."

"Yes, that is what I mean. Gore was in the study—"

"Yes, both of them."

"Both?" said Skimpole, staring. "I do not understand." "There was Gore of the Shell," explained Blake. "That was one. The other was from your nose. It was still spotting Tom Merry's carpet."

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as wathah funny."

Skimpole took a couple of minutes to see Blake's little joke, and then he frowned portentously.

"This is no subject for jesting, Blake," he said. "I am surprised that you can jest so."

"Jest so," assented Blake.

"Really, Blake, there you are, doing it again! If these documents are really lost, I should be glad to find them. Pray be serious. Gore declares that you must have taken them for a joke on Tom Merry."

"I suppose Gore is looking for a thick ear."

"If you are guilty—"

"Eh?"

"If you are guilty, Blake, the documents are doubtless concealed in this study. I will make a search."

"Will you?" said Blake grimly.

"Certainly."

"Weally, Skimpole, I wegard you as an uttan ass!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I should wecommend Blake to kick you out of the study."

"Ha!" said Skimpole. "You fear the search, then?"

"Bai Jove! I?"

"Yes, you! D'Arcy is the guilty party. The thief is discovered!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Search him!" commanded Skimpole.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"This is no laughing matter, Blake. The packet is doubtless concealed about the person of the culprit."

"Ha, ha, ha! Where?"

Skimpole looked thoughtful. As a matter of fact, the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim's, with its closely fitting attire, would have shown at once if the bulky packet of the copy had been stowed away about it.

"H'm! Yes," said Skimpole. "He has probably concealed it somewhere else; in that hatbox, in all probability."

The amateur detective strode towards the leather hatbox in which Arthur Augustus kept his Sunday topper.

With a bound, D'Arcy was in the way.

"Stop! Bai Jove! My Sunday toppah's in that box!"

"Ah! Then I have discovered the hiding-place of the loot!"

"You feahful ass!"

"The plunder is stored in that hatbox!" said Skimpole.

"You blithewin' chump!"

"There stands the culprit! There—"

"Bai Jove! I'll show you!" said D'Arcy, as he tore open the hatbox.

Then he almost staggered with amazement. For in the place of the silk hat that should have reposed there, was a packet wrapped in brown paper, squeezed and jammed carelessly into the box.

"My hat!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Not your hat!" yelled Blake. "There's the manuscript."

"Bai Jove!"

"It's the copy!" exclaimed Digby, rubbing his eyes. "Fancy it being D'Arcy all the time!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"What have you done with your hat, Gussy?"

"I haven't done anythin' with it!" shrieked the unfortunate swell of St. Jim's. "Some uttah wottah has taken my hat away and stuffed this thing into the box."

"Oh, draw it mild, you know."

"I wufuse to draw it mild! I nevah saw that befoah; I mean I nevah saw it heah. Somebody has done this for a twick!"

"Come!" said Skimpole, in a tone of remonstrance. "Now that your guilt is detected, D'Arcy, you had better make a clean breast of it!"

"Bai Jove! I'll—"

"I have found the culprit and the missing documents," said Skimpole, looking round. "As an amateur, I accept no fees for my services, but—"

"You feahful dummay! I tell you I don't know how that manuscript got into my hatbox!" shouted D'Arcy.

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! It was Blake, of course. He must have put it there!"

"Eh! What's that?"

"I wegard a pwactical joke of this sort as in the worst of taste, Blake."

"Well, of all the chumps—"

"I wufuse to be chawactewised as a chump! I—"

"Hallo, here's the hat!" said Herries, picking up a silk hat from under the table. "It couldn't have been Gussy did it, or he'd have taken care of the topper."

"My hat! Bai Jove! It's neahly wuined!"

"I have discovered the culprit, and—"

"Look here, wasn't it you, D'Arcy?"

"No, certainly not. I should not be likely to play such a silly twick with my own toppah. If it wasn't you—"

"It wasn't."

"Then it must have been Gore."

"Of course! It was Gore!" exclaimed Digby. "Tom Merry guessed that he wouldn't dare to destroy it, in case we found it out, and that he would hide it somewhere."

"Really," said Skimpole. "I— What are you doing, Blake?"

"Slinging you out, old chap!"

"But I— Really— Oh! Ow!"

Skimpole's remarks were finished in the passage.

"And now," said Blake, "I'll get down to the printer's with this stuff. There's still time if I hurry. You chaps can pay Gore a visit."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Jack Blake, armed with his pass, left St. Jim's for the village, while the others called for Tom Merry, and they went to look for Gore.

Herries thoughtfully took a fives bat along with him.

Fellows passing along the Shell corridor a little later heard voices raised in heated argument in Gore's study, and then a sound as of beating carpets. And the next day it was observed that Gore showed a strong dislike for a perpendicular position, and did not sit down at all if he could possibly help it.

CHAPTER 11.

A Slight Altercation!

"FEEL bad?" asked Mellish sympathetically.

It was the afternoon of the day following. Gore had twice or thrice been called to order by Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, for not keeping still in his seat.

He was leaving the class-room now in the worst of tempers, and as the Fourth Form were also coming out, Mellish met him in the wide-flagged passage.

Gore replied to the sympathetic query only with a scowl.

Tom Merry & Co. were talking in the passage in a cheerful group. The copy of the "Weekly" was safe in the printer's office, Blake having taken it there just in time the previous evening. The juniors were chatting now about the approaching examination for the Codicote Scholarship. They

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were nearly all entered for it, and each was firmly of the opinion that he had the best chance of pulling it off.

But their rivalry was quite friendly.

The scholarship, founded some two centuries before by a dead-and-gone lord of Codicote Hall, near St. Jim's, was worth the winning. It was for three years' free board and tuition at St. Jim's, and a sum of fifty pounds in cash. It was open only to members of the Fourth Form and the Shell, and there were a good many entries.

Tom Merry, Blake, and Kerr were popularly supposed to have the best chances, but there were eight or nine others who had put their names down.

Skimpole had done so among the rest, though it was only now, when the examination was drawing nigh, that he had begun to turn his attention to it, from the more engrossing subject of Determinism.

Tom Merry was speaking of Skimpole now, and the other entrants for the Codicote were listening with mingled expressions.

"As a matter of fact," Tom Merry remarked, "if I had known Skimmy was entering I shouldn't have put my name down."

"Why?" demanded Figgins.

Tom hesitated for a moment.

"Well," he said frankly, "Skimmy wants it more than I do. You know, his people are pretty hard-up, and the scholarship, if he won it, would mean a lot to him—and them. And it was really founded for the purpose of helping poor scholars, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! I am twuly sowwy, now I come to think of it, that I am going to win the Codicote," said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "Howevah, I shall ask my govahnah's permish to make Skimmy a pwesent of the fifty pounds."

"You needn't worry," said Figgins. "I'm going to get the Codicote."

"Weally, Figgins, this conceit—"

"Why, what about your own?"

"There is a gweat diffeence between a pwopah weliance on one's own powahs, and silly conceit," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I uttably fail to see anything to gwin at in that remark, Wynn."

But Fatty Wynn grinned all the same, and so did the others.

"Gussy's right on one point," said Blake. "Figgy won't get it. I haven't decided yet what I shall do with the quidlets."

"Better get 'em first," suggested Lowther.

"I'm going to have a new twenty-five guinea camera out of the fifty," said Manners. "That's really why I entered for the scholarship."

"Well, I'm sorry about Skimmy," said Tom Merry. "Outside our select circle, I think he would have first chance. But I think it must be admitted that there are three or four fellows here who will lick him hands down."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We could resign as far as that goes," Blake remarked.

Tom Merry shook his head decidedly.

"Impossible—at least, without a jolly good reason. The Head would inquire into it, and then we should have to own up—and look like a lot of good little boys out of a story book."

Blake shuddered.

"My hat! That wouldn't do! I'm sorry for Skimmy, but I'm not going to be shown up as a good little Georgie for his sake."

"Wathah not! I could weally stand anythin' but that. And some of the fellows might think we were too lazy to work for the exam, and were twyn' to get some cheap cwidit, you know."

"Some of them would be jolly certain to say so," said Kerr. "Gore, for instance. He's confabbing over there with Mellish now, and looking as if he was planning some dirty trick."

"Very like he is."

The chums strolled out, leaving Mellish and Gore still confabbing, as Kerr termed it. Gore had been inclined at first to meet Mellish's sympathy with his knuckles, but the cad of the Fourth had a suggestion to make that roused Gore's interest at once.

The Shell fellow was smarting and longing for vengeance, as Mellish knew very well; and Mellish had old scores to pay off against Tom Merry & Co., and was very willing to use Gore as a catspaw.

"The copy isn't in print yet, you know," Mellish was remarking. "I know that Tiper doesn't turn the copies off till Saturday morning."

"What about it?"

"There's a chance to put a finger in the pie, if you like to take it. It would be a ripping joke on Tom Merry if his paper came out on Saturday with some alterations in it."

"But how can I get at the paper, when it's in Tiper's house?" said Gore peevishly.

Mellish grinned.

"That's all you know. I've strolled round Tiper's house, and I know how easy it would be to get in from the garden. I—"

"I understand," said Gore savagely. "You've thought of a wheeze for mucking up the 'Weekly,' and have spied out the lay of the land, but you haven't pluck enough to carry it through yourself. You want me to do it."

"H'm! I'm showing you a way to get level with those cads!"

"I'm on!" said Gore. "We'll go together."

Mellish shrank a little.

"I—I didn't mean—"

"I know you didn't," assented Gore sneeringly. "But I mean it. You'll come along with me and show me the way, and keep watch while I get at the paper. I'll get a pass from Knox; he'll give me one if I offer to bring him some cigarettes from the tobacconist's."

And as dusk was falling that evening, Mellish and Gore slipped quietly out of the school.

Knox, the prefect, had provided him with a pass, on the condition that Gore was to bring him the "smokes" from the village. Mellish was far from willing to join in the expedition, but Gore was not to be gainsaid.

The cigarettes were purchased in Rylcombe, and then the two young rascals turned their steps in the direction of Mr. Tiper's house.

Mellish had evidently been on the scout for information, and had picked up a great deal. Gore's surmise was correct; the cad of the Fourth had schemed out the present jape from beginning to end, but had not had the nerve to do the work himself.

He explained all he had learned as they went along, and Gore listened attentively. Mr. Tiper carried on his business in his private house, on the outskirts of Rylcombe. He was a single man, and was accustomed to spend his evenings at the Golden Pig. On these occasions the house was quite empty, as the "charlady" who "did" for Mr. Tiper always went at dark.

As Gore listened to the result of Mellish's investigations into the household arrangements of Mr. Tiper, the jape appeared to become easier and easier.

"It will be as simple as rolling off a form," he remarked. "I'll get in and alter the type, while you keep watch. Is this the place?"

"Yes, here you are. That gate creaks; better get over it."

"I see you know all about it," grinned Gore.

"Well, I've been up as far as the window," Mellish confessed. "This way."

They stole up the dark garden-path. An uncurtained window looked out on the garden, and there was no gleam of light from it. Mellish touched the window.

"This is the room."

"The catch is fastened," said Gore, in a whisper, after squeezing his face against the glass to see.

"It's shut, but it's broken; the window will open all right."

"Well, we'll try."

Mellish drew a chisel from his pocket, and the sash was prised up. In spite of the apparently fastened catch, it rose easily enough. Mr. Tiper was a careless man in some respects, but as there was nothing in his house worth a burglar's trouble, he had never had any fear of house-breakers.

The two juniors pushed up the sash, and then Gore climbed over the sill. Mellish waited outside.

"Buck up!" he whispered.

"Right you are!"

Gore withdrew a torch from his pocket and snapped on the switch. He looked round the room, where Mr. Tiper and a youthful assistant turned out the weekly "Rylcombe News," and various local printings as well as the more important publication, "Tom Merry's Weekly." His eyes alighted upon the forme containing the valuable lubrications of the editorial staff of the school paper—in type, and ready to be turned off on the press first thing in the morning.

Gore's eyes glittered as he saw them.

His first impulse was to loosen the type in the formes and scatter it into "pie," an action that would have postponed the publication of the "Weekly" till long after the date fixed. The printer would have had all his work to do over again, and the feelings with which he would have done it afforded Gore considerable satisfaction to contemplate. But, after all, the brunt of the thing would have fallen upon Mr. Tiper, who was his own compositor, and Tom Merry & Co. would only have had to wait a few days for the paper.

Gore decided that he must think of something better than that.

To mix up the type, putting lines from one page into the middle of another, was the next idea. That was

certainly better, and Gore looked round for the tweezers to take out the type.

His eyes fell upon other formes, ready set up by Mr. Tiper, and, thinking that they might perhaps belong to the "Weekly," he looked at them. To read the type backwards in the formes was no easy task to Gore, who had very little acquaintance with the interior of a printing office.

He managed to struggle through it, however, growing more and more puzzled as he proceeded.

"My hat!" he murmured. "I never knew that any of the silly asses wrote articles in Latin for the 'Weekly.' Showing-off, I suppose!"

It was certainly Latin, but as he spelled at it painfully, Gore realised that there was something familiar to him about it.

"My hat!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Tacitus!"

He was distinctly puzzled.

What on earth the contributors to "Tom Merry's Weekly" could be printing a section of the "Annals" for he could not understand.

Mellish looked in cautiously at the window.

"I say, Gore, how are you getting on?"

"Look here," said Gore, "I don't catch on to this! They've got some 'Tacitus' set up for the 'Weekly!' They must be off their chumps!"

"Off yours, more likely!" grinned Mellish.

"Well, look here!"

Mellish looked cautiously down the garden. All was quiet and still. He climbed into the room and stood beside Gore. He looked puzzled, too, as he glanced at the forme and found that Gore's statement was correct.

"Curious," he said. "I wonder— My only hat!"

He broke off in amazement.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" snapped Gore, staring at him.

"Fifty pounds!" murmured Mellish.

"Eh? What are you chattering about?"

"My hat! If I'd only known! It's too late to enter now for the Codicote."

"Of course it is. You have to send in your name at the beginning of the term," said Gore, mystified. "What are you talking about that now for?"

"Don't you see? This forme doesn't belong to the 'Weekly'!"

"Rats! I suppose Tiper isn't setting up Latin for anybody in Rylcombe," said Gore sarcastically.

"No, of course he isn't. He's setting it up for Dr. Holmes."

"What?"

"Can't you see?" said Mellish impatiently. "This is going to be the printed exam. paper for the Codicote."

Gore jumped.

"My word! If only I'd entered."

"Yes," said Mellish, with a sigh, "if we'd known! But it's no good talking about that now. There's some fellows at St. Jim's would give a little finger to see this paper."

"I should say so."

"I wonder— Suppose we made notes of it and work it off that way? We could give hints to some of the chaps at a bob a time!"

"Ass! It would come out! You couldn't trust even a fellow who was entered for the exam. He might give us away!"

"I suppose it would be risky!"

"Of course it would!"

"It's a pity, though!" Mellish looked over the locked formes. "Here's the Latin prose, and here's the questions on Roman history. A chap who had a look at this could take the Codicote on his head!"

Gore grinned gleefully as a curious idea came into his mind.

"It's all right. Look here, these formes are the same size, and the type is the same fount. Suppose we shift some of the 'Weekly' out and shift some of this stuff into its place?"

Mellish stared, and then he chuckled.

"Good! Then the exam. questions and the Latin prose will come out in the 'Weekly' if Tiper doesn't notice it."

"Why should he? He'll find these formes just as he left them—and I know he's going to knock off the copies of the 'Weekly' first thing in the morning to send them up to the school. Ten to one he'll print 'em without noticing anything—in fact, I believe his boy does most of his hand-press work."

"Good! It's worth trying, anyway. My hat, it will be funny to see their faces—and Railton's, and the Head's!"

The work did not take long. Mellish, who was much lighter-fingered than his friend, did it—and did it well. Wedges of the exam. matter were put into the pages of

the 'Weekly,' an equal quantity of Figgins' 'Red Indian' serial being transferred to the Codicote formes. At a glance the formes all looked exactly the same as they had looked before.

Chuckling, the two young rascals left the room, carefully closing the window. They stole on tiptoe out of the garden, and in a few minutes were speeding back to the school.

CHAPTER 12.

Skimpole Does Not Listen!

SKIMPOLE sat in the study he shared with Gore. There was a wet towel gracefully twined round his mighty brow, from which drops dripped upon the table and upon a nicely bound Horace belonging to Gore.

Skimpole was hard at work. The genius of St. Jim's had realised at last that he had been wasting time. While preparing to spread the light of Determinism he had been careless about preparing for the Codicote exam.

Although the scholarship was not to be awarded till the end of the term, the exam. was to be held shortly. The date had been known from the beginning of the term, and Skimpole certainly ought to have swotted in readiness. He had plenty of excuses for not having done so. He had not returned from his American travels until after the term had well started. Then he had been busy writing his famous book on Determinism that was to revolutionise the civilised world. It seemed a pity to put off the revolution for several weeks while he won a scholarship—and Skimpole might have refused to do so on his own account. But Skimpole senior was imperative.

Skimpole senior wanted his son to win that scholarship. It was a strain on his resources to keep his son at St. Jim's, and the scholarship would have settled the difficulty for him.

Skimpole was a dutiful son. As a sincere Determinist, as he would have put it, he was bound to show great respect to his parents. Therefore, with more than one sigh, he had put off the revolution and applied himself to the task of getting the Codicote.

But now that he was getting to work in real earnest at last, he found unexpected difficulties in the way.

The work was hard. Skimpole could have passed an examination in Determinism, or any other "ism," for that matter. But in Roman history he was deficient, and Latin prose had never been his strong point. It was a question of hard work, and to hard work Skimpole applied himself.

The difficulty now was to make up for lost time, and get ahead of his competitors in the race.

If Tom Merry and Kerr had been out of it, he would have felt more at ease.

Blake, he thought, he could probably equal, though the keen Yorkshire lad was a dangerous opponent. But Tom Merry was strong on the subjects dealt with in the Codicote exam, and Kerr, the eanny Scotsman, was known to have classical attainments that put many fellows in the Sixth Form to blush.

And so, in spite of Skimpole's almost sublime self-confidence, he was uneasy, and he was working away now like steam.

In spite of his peculiar ways, manners, and customs, Skimpole was really brainy, and he had a gift for hard work when he liked.

The wet towel round his head was an aid to thought. He worked away, careless of the drops that were spoiling the cover of Gore's Harace, and splashing on his paper as he worked. He looked the picture of intent industry when the door opened and Gore looked in.

Gore stared at him.

"Hallo! What are you up to?"

There was no reply from Skimpole. He was too deep in his work.

"Got a headache?"

"Er—did you speak, Gore?"

"Yes, ass! What have you got that rag round your fat chump for?"

"It's a towel."

"I know it is, dummy! What's it for?"

"To assist the working of the brain, and keep the head cool," explained Skimpole. "I am working for the Codicote exam."

"H'm!" said Gore. "I hope I shan't disturb you, getting tea. Mellish and Sharp are coming, and they'll be here in a minute or two."

"Really, Gore—"

"Why, you—you ass! Look at my Horace!"

"Dear me! It appears to be wet!"

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"You—you duffer! You've spoilt it!"

"I'm sorry! But please don't get excited, Gore. I will buy you a new one out of the money paid with the Codicote Scholarship."

A sudden idea occurred to Gore. He had snatched up the volume, and was about to use it as a club on Skimpole's head, but he refrained. He laid it down, and closed the door carefully and mysteriously.

Skimpole did not notice it. He was deep in his work again.

"Skimmy!"

Skimpole looked up, blinking.

"I wish you would not speak now, Gore—"

"Shut up! Do you want to win the Codicote?"

"Yes, of course. At my parents' request, I am making a special point to do so, much to the detriment of my other studies. I regard it as a sincere Determinist's duty to respect the wishes of his parents."

"You've got no chance against Kerr or Tom Merry."

"I think I have an excellent chance. It is simply a question of hard work. As for the others, I am still more certain of beating them."

"You'd like to get out of the work, then?"

"Certainly. I am wasting valuable time. These laborious hours would be much better devoted to spreading the glorious truths of Determinism—"

"Would you like a tip from me?"

"You cannot help me, Gore. You are extremely ignorant for a boy of your age, and on classical subjects especially. Thank you all the same."

"Look here, you dummy! Suppose I could tell you the exact questions for the exam, and the Latin prose chosen?"

"That, of course, would make the whole matter simple; but you cannot. Besides, it would not be honourable for me to take advantage of such information. It would be my duty, as a sincere Determinist, to report the whole matter to the Head."

"Look here! Don't start humbug with me! You want the Codicote, and I want a slice of the fifty quid," said Gore eagerly. "I've seen something this evening—never mind how or where—and I can tell you. I can easily go back and undo the little joke, as far as that goes."

"Really, Gore, I do not follow."

"Never mind that. Look here! I can get you all the points of the exam, and it will be a walk-over for you. What do you say?"

"I hardly know what to say," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "I must overlook the despicable suggestion, as it is dictated by regard for me."

"Oh, come off! I want ten out of the fifty."

"Ah! Then you are suggesting that I should act in a dishonest way, from mercenary motives. I am afraid that I despise you, Gore."

"You can take the offer, or leave it?"

"I shall certainly leave it."

Skimpole rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and his brow wrinkled up. Gore watched him anxiously.

He imagined that Skimpole was turning the temptation over in his mind, and thinking it out. Skimmy certainly was thinking very deeply.

"Well," said Gore impatiently, when the silence had lasted a couple of minutes, "are you thinking it out?"

"Yes, certainly, Gore."

"And what do you say?"

"I really hardly know what to say. I was thinking—"

"Better take the offer. I—"

"I was not thinking of that."

"Not thinking of that!" howled Gore. "What do you mean? What on earth were you thinking of, then?"

"I was thinking that something ought to be done to bring you to a more honest and moral frame of mind," said Skimpole benevolently. "I cannot call to mind at the present moment precisely which of my books would do you most good. There is the great volume by Professor Jawfull Jabbar—"

"You—you—you—"

"Or the smaller, but equally valuable volume by Scratchford, entitled—"

"You—you shrieking ass!"

"Or, perhaps, an article I have marked in the current number of the 'Trumpeter'—"

Gore picked up an umbrella from the corner. But just then the door opened, and Mellish and Sharp came in.

"Tea ready?" asked Mellish.

Gore gave Skimpole a vicious look.

"Not yet," he said. "We'll get it between us. Skimpole is working for an exam, and we must be careful not to disturb him."

"Dear me, that is extremely considerate of you, Gore," said Skimpole.

"Yes, isn't it?" grinned Gore. "The fact is, it's my

intention to be considerate—very! Come on, kids, and don't fail to be considerate towards Skimpole."

"What-ho!" said Mellish. And they set to work.

CHAPTER 18.

Skimpole in Search of Peace!

"MIND! you don't disturb Skimpole, Mellish," said Sharp, pushing a chair against the table, and causing Skimmy to scatter blots right and left.

"Certainly, Sharp, I am very careful."

And, by way of showing his care, Mellish sent a swish of water from the kettle across the table.

"Really, I wish you would be a little more careful!" Skimpole exclaimed. "You have quite spoiled my paper, and I was going to show it to Mr. Railton."

"Indeed! Too bad!"

"If Sharp and Mellish were to retire——"

"A jolly big if!" grinned Mellish.

"Suppose you go and have tea with Mellish, Gore?"

"Suppose I don't?" suggested Gore, as if proposing another alternative. "Get the bacon out of the cupboard, Mellish. You can chip the potatoes on the table, Sharp."

"Really, Gore, I—I suppose I had better retire."

"Yes," grinned Gore. "I suppose you had."

And the unfortunate "swot" collected up his books and his inky foolscap, and disconsolately retired from the study. And the three worthies left there, howled with laughter and went on with their feed.

Skimpole looked into Tom Merry's study. The Terrible



"Please don't push the table like that, Mellish. You may overturn it. Oh!" Books, papers, and inkpot shot off the table and fairly rained upon Skimpole. "Dear me!" he gasped. "My work is all spoiled!"

Skimpole sat down again—more forcibly than he had intended, for Gore had pulled his chair away. Skimmy sat down on the carpet, and gasped.

"Dear me!"

"Dear us!" said Gore. "What are you doing down there, Skimmy?"

"Someone has removed my chair, I think."

"Well yes, it does look like it."

"I feel quite dazed. It is a most dangerous trick to play. Please don't push the table like that Mellish—Sharp! You may overturn it— Oh!"

Books and papers and inkpot shot off the table and rained on Skimpole.

He jumped up.

"Dear me! My work is all spoiled! I——"

"Well, we wanted the table for tea," said Gore. "That's cleared it. Could you sit on the locker and study, Skimmy?"

"I am afraid I must have the use of a table."

"H'm! Go and ask Tom Merry for his, then. We want this."

"Really, Gore——"

"Yes, really," said Gore. "Upon the whole, you wouldn't be able to work much with us three talking and cooking."

Three were busy there. They were looking warm and somewhat fatigued. Buck Finn had been showing them some American football in the gym, and the first instructions in that fearful and wonderful game had left them rather sore.

Skimpole blinked at the chums of the Shell, and looked for a vacant place to dump down his property.

"Can I work in here?" he asked. "Gore and Mellish and Sharp are making a row in my study. I suppose you chaps are working for the Codicote?"

"No; this is prep."

"I've finished working for the Codicote," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's better to take these things gently—better than letting it alone for a long time, and then cramming at the finish."

"Yes, I think you are probably right, Merry. I should like to do my work here, if you fellows would be sure not to move or talk."

The Terrible Three looked at one another. "That's awfully kind of you, Skimmy," said Monty Lowther, apparently overcome by the offer. "but we won't encroach on your kindness."

"I'll tell you what I will do," said Manners.

Skimpole looked at him inquiringly.

"I'll biff you with that cricket-bat if you don't travel and let me get on with my prep."

"Really, Manners—"

"Oh, scat!"

Skimpole scatted. He went down the passage with his belongings under his arm, and looked into several studies in search of a quiet place to work. The occupants were mostly at prep, but whatever they happened to be doing they did not appear to be yearning for the company of Skimpole. Various polite objurgations, and a few whirling books and inkpots, sent him faring forth again.

He quitted the Shell passage in despair, and looked in at Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. Four cheerful youths had finished their prep there, and were discussing the coming cricket season. Skimpole came in, and four pairs of eyes—to say nothing of an eyeglass—were fixed upon him immediately.

Skimpole gave an affable nod.

"I'm glad you chaps are not using your table," he remarked.

"Weally, Skimmy, I fail to see how that circ can be of any interest to you."

"I should like to do my work here."

"Would you?" said Digby, hitching the poker towards him with his foot.

"Certainly. If you fellows wouldn't mind leaving off talking, I should get on all right here."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake took out his watch.

"I've seen some cheeky kids in the Shell before," he remarked. "I think Skimmy takes the cake. I give him three seconds to get on the outside of the door. One—"

"Really Blake—"

"Two—"

"But I should like to explain—"

"Three!"

"Under the peculiar circumstances of the case—"

Jack Blake jumped up and grasped the poker. Skimpole was on the outside of the door in a twinkling. He dashed along the passage, shedding books and papers at almost every step.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "All the fellows seem to be very unreasonable. Perhaps I had better try the Form-room."

And he marched into the wide passage upon which the Form-rooms opened and looked into the Shell-room. It was lighted up, and a circle of admiring juniors were there, surrounding Buck Finn.

The American junior was executing a Navajo war-dance for the delectation of his delighted Form-fellows.

"Ahem!" said Skimpole. "Would you fellows mind clearing out—"

"Get out!"

"Buzz off!"

"Bunk!"

Skimpole got out. He looked into another Form-room and found the Fifth Form Debating Society hard at work. Into the sacred precincts of the Sixth Form quarters even a Determinist could not venture.

From the Third Form Room came loud voices. Skimpole found the door open, and looked in.

The heroes of the Third had finished prep, which they did in the Form-room under the supervision of Mr. Selby. They were left alone now, and they were improving the shining hour by getting up an amateur boxing competition between D'Arcy minor and Dudley.

The younger brother of Arthur Augustus had the gloves on, and so had Dudley; but both had received some hard knocks, to judge by the appearance of their features.

"If you little boys would run away—" began Skimpole.

"Hallo! What's that thing crawling in there?" asked Wally, stopping after a round.

The Third-Formers looked round. Skimpole looked round, too, not realising that he was himself the "thing" alluded to.

"Shove it outside!" said Dudley.

A crowd of fags rushed at Skimpole, and he was outside in the twinkling of an eye.

The remnants of his books and papers went no one knew whither.

He picked himself up and gazed at the solid oak door of the Form-room, which had been slammed and locked after him.

"Dear me! Where are my—my books and papers? I have only a sheet of foolscap left, and—and a pencil."

Skimpole blinked doubtfully.

"Ahem! Perhaps I had better give up studying for the exam this evening, and—sketch out the four hundred and eighty-eighth chapter of my book on Determinism."

And he did.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole's Chance!

"THE 'Weekly's' come," Tom Merry remarked, as the chums of the Shell left the Form-room after morning school that Saturday. "Tiper promised me that it should be delivered by twelve, and French says he saw his man coming across the quad. I expect we shall find it in my study."

"Good!" said Lowther. "These kids expect it, too, apparently."

The chums of Study No. 6 had joined them immediately, and Figgins & Co. were quick to follow.

In a party the editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" made for the study.

Blake asked Lowther in honeyed tones whom he was calling "kids," but Tom Merry pushed between them in time. They reached the study, and there sure enough was the parcel containing the twenty-five copies of the "Weekly."

"Good!" said Manners, taking out his penknife to cut the string. "Tiper's kept his word. He's busy on Saturdays, too. Looks all right."

He opened the parcel, and the neatly printed and pinned copies of the famous "Weekly" were exposed to view.

"I should say it does look all right," said Tom Merry rather indignantly. "I edit this paper!"

"Yaas, wathah, and I contwibute!"

"I hope Tiper's made no blunders this time," said Figgins. "Every time Merry is too lazy to look over the proofs something goes wrong."

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Well, if it isn't laziness it's something else. You know jolly well you don't even have a proof sent in most cases."

"I suppose you don't want a Saturday paper to come out on Monday? Of course, you chaps always keep me waiting for your stuff."

"Yes, of course; it always is anybody's fault but the Editor's," assented Figgins. "Only the trouble is that Merry's laziness, or whatever it is, leads to blunders in the

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printing. You remember that, a week or two ago, the ass printed my serial as 'The Black Thief,' instead of 'The Black Chief.'"

"Well, that's only a difference of one lettah, Figgins." Figgins snorted. He opened the top copy of the paper to look immediately at his serial and make sure that nothing of the kind had happened this time.

"Ah, here it is!" exclaimed Figgins, with satisfaction. "I'll read you out a bit."

"Don't trouble, old chap."

"No trouble at all. The Black Chief of the Red Braves. A stirring Red Indian serial, by G. Figgins. Chapter XXX. The Massacre. Ahem! 'The Black Chief of the Red Braves drew his tomahawk from his belt, and the keen-edged weapon whirled through the air and descended with a sickening thud—'"

"Bai Jove, that's wathah thwillin'!"

"Upon the head of the defenceless scout. The hapless Broncho Bill had only time for one cry. He cried—'My only hat!'"

"Rot!" said Blake decisively. "Scouts don't say that," "I mean—"

"Besides, if the Black Thief—I mean, the Black Chief—had given him such a oner he wouldn't have had time for three words. He would have said 'Oh!' or 'Oh, help!' at the most," said Blake, shaking his head.

"Look here," roared Figgins, "I'm not talking about what the Black Chief said. I said that myself."

"Yes, and I tell you—"

"Look there!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look at my serial! Some utter idiot has mixed it up with Roman history or something!" shouted Figgins.

"Look at it, mixed up with hic, haec, and hoc. Some dummy has done this for a joke."

"My only hat! That's Tacitus!"

"Bai Jove! Fancy Figgins cwibbing fwom Tacitus, you know!"

"You ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. If you choose to plagiawise fwom Tacitus, of course, it's your own business, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Figgins must have copied down a Latin exercise by mistake, or written an imposition unconsciously in the place of his 'Black Chief' instalment."

"I didn't!" raved Figgins. "My instalment was all right when I left it with Tom Merry. Some idiot has done this for a joke."

And he looked aggressively at Monty Lowther.

"Well, what are you glaring at me for?" demanded Lowther warmly. "Do you think I would touch your rotten 'Black Thief' with a barge pole?"

"Some idiot has done it!"

"If you mean to call me an idiot—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Peace, my children. The contribution wasn't altered in the editorial office, Figgy. I know that. It's a printer's error."

"But how on earth would the printer know anything about Tacitus?"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"My hat!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Look here! Codicote Examination, February 25th. Look! These are the questions, and that is the Latin prose."

"Bai Jove!"

"My word!"

"My Aunt Selina!"

The juniors stared at the strange addition to Figgins' serial in amazement. There was no doubt about it. The type had been a little displaced in being changed into the wrong forme, and some of the questions were missing. But there was no mistaking it. Every fellow who looked at that page had the scholarship in the hollow of his hand, so to speak.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry at length. "That ass Tiper has mixed the formes somehow—he is printing the exam papers—and he's shoved most of it into the middle of Figgy's serial."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Chance for somebody to rope in fifty quid," said Monty Lowther.

"Don't be funny, Lowther. This is serious!"

"So is Lowther's fun."

"Cheese it, deah boys. We have to considah what to do. Aftah what we have learned, it would be wathah wotten to entah the exam."

Tom Merry nodded glumly.

"We couldn't do it. We know the whole thing now, and as we know what the questions are to be, we couldn't help looking up our knowledge on the subject. The exam papers will have to be set again, or we shall be barred."

"After all, we have equal chancess. We've all seen the thing—"

"What about the fellows who haven't—Skimmy and French and Pratt and the rest?"

"I forgot that."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The question is, are we to report the whole matter to Mr. Railton and have fresh papers issued, or to resign?"

"I don't want to resign."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"I don't want to, either. But we're close on the exam now, and it would mean a lot of hard work for Railton to get out fresh papers. It's partly the exam work that's knocked him up lately. I say, you chaps—"

Tom Merry paused, and they all looked at him.

"Well?" said two or three voices.

"You remember what I was saying about Skimpole yesterday? This puts us out, unless we give Railton his work to do all over again. Suppose we resign?"

The juniors looked at one another grimly. They all wanted the distinction of winning a valuable scholarship, yet they had to confess that not one was in such need of it as Skimpole was.

There was a long silence.

It was Arthur Augustus who broke it.

"I wegard Tom Mewwy's suggestion as an excellent one, deah boys, and I for one wesign with pleasuah. After all, it will save us work."

"Good!" said Lowther. "I resign for another."

"Oh, I suppose you can count us all in!" said Figgins gloomily. "I wanted it, to show my people I could work. Still, considering, too, that it was really founded to help poor chaps, Skimmy ought to have it if he can get it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then it's agreed," said Tom Merry, looking round.

"It's a bit of a wrench to all of us; but it's what we ought to do, you know. Is it a go?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes!"

And so it was agreed. And with somewhat downcast faces the juniors consigned the pages of the magazine that bore the tell-tale questions to the fire.

For that week at least Tom Merry's "Weekly" was fated to appear without Figgins' serial. And before he allowed a copy to go out of his hands Tom Merry scanned every other page, to make sure that nothing was wrong with them.

The fact that ten juniors had withdrawn from the competition for the Codicote Scholarship was certain to excite remark. The fellows who were considered to be "in the running" had all drawn out, and of the competitors who were left there was no doubt that Skimpole was the fellow with the best chance.

But Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, naturally wanted to know something about it, and on Monday he sent for Tom Merry.

Tom guessed what he was wanted for. He made his way quietly to the Housemaster's study, but he coloured a little as Mr. Railton's eyes were fixed upon his face.

"You have withdrawn from the Codicote Exam, Merry?" Mr. Railton remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"May I ask your reason?"

"I—we—several of us decided to draw out, sir."

"Yes, I am aware of that. But the reason? I approve to a certain extent of self-sacrifice, Merry, but I could not approve of your giving up the scholarship for the sake of the youth who at present seems to have the best chance of winning it. Was that your motive?"

"I—I—I—"

"That would be carrying self-denial too far," said Mr. Railton. "I may mention that I must have the facts in this case, Merry."

Tom Merry hesitated and coloured.

But he was not the fellow to prevaricate, and there was nothing to do but to make a clean breast of it.

Mr. Railton listened quietly while he told the story. The Housemaster drummed on the table with his fingers for some minutes.

"The date of the exam would have to be put off," he said musingly. "It would, of course, mean a great deal of trouble. But—"

"We'd rather have it as it is, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly. "Skimmy—I mean, Skimpole, may not be able to stay at St. Jim's after this term unless he gets the scholarship—"

"Very well, Merry. I will let you have your way in this."

"Oh, thank you, sir! We should all be sorry to lose

(Continued on page 28.)

BATTLER BART GOES IN SEARCH OF—

BLOOMS OF DEATH!



By
CECIL FANSHAWE

Peril Island becomes more perilous than ever when Battler Bart Crewison comes ashore—at least, it does for his enemies!

CHAPTER 1. Peril Island!

BLOOMS of death, eh? Jolly name for 'em! And mighty rare and valuable, you say, Lu Sing? What would you pay us for a few specimens, old lad?"

Big Bart Crewison, known as Battler throughout the South Seas, drewled the question.

But his eyes flashed.

Despite his mask of indifference, the gigantic Battler was mighty interested. So also was his younger brother, Dick.

The brothers scented an adventurous trip, with handsome profits hanging to it. They were always game for any adventure in their trading schooner, the Radio Ray, which they manned with a crew of five sturdy brown Kanakas.

They had just landed at Perpeete Island, after a hazardous pearling voyage.

Now they sat in the hot, dark shop of fat Lu Sing, the wealthy Chinese trader, selling him their pearls.

Actually, they were in the back-parlour, seated on cushions, with a punkah swishing lazily over their heads. Because he liked and admired Battler, Lu Sing was showing the brothers his treasures, and had just unlocked a large, brass-bound box.

Battler and Dick peered down at two weird-looking waxy flowers.

They were broad flowers, jet black, shiny as polished ebony, and splashed with red dots, and all about them a tangle of slender rootlets, like the tentacles of an octopus.

The black blossoms gave off a heady, overpowering scent. To young Dick there seemed something evil about them. The lad gasped, mopped his face, and suddenly the dim room seemed whirling round and round.

"Phew!" Battler started up. "What the deuce! Open a door. Great boilers! Those things smell like a dentist's gas gadget!"

Lu Sing slammed the box and locked it.

"You see?" He smiled queerly.

"Black orchids!" exclaimed Battler. "I smelt 'em!"

"Blossoms of death," observed the Chinaman.

"Tell us," grunted Battler, his eyes gleaming. "If your price is O.K.—maybe we'll turn jolly old orchid hunters."

Lu Sing sized up Battler, noting his square jaw, immense, muscular limbs, craggy fists, and deep chest.

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Then he nodded and told.

He told how he had come by his two specimens of the blooms of death.

It was a Danish sailor, said Lu Sing, who brought him the black flowers. The sailor said he had got them on Peril Island in the valley of gods. From the top of a great pyramid, surrounded by jungle, could be seen a narrow, overgrown ravine, at the end of which was a cavern. In there grew the blooms of death.

That was the Danish adventurer's story.

He had been unwilling, or unable, to say more. In fact, Lu Sing had had a job to understand him, and he had shortly died.

"Here, in this parlour, Mistel Battler," crooned the impassive Chinaman, "of a strange sickness. That is all."

Battler rose, his head amongst the punkah curtains.

"How much would you pay?" He grinned down.

"One thousand pounds each," Lu Sing sighed wearily.

"But what use? Never have I seen anything like these flowers. They are evil—yes? I think you and your blother best leave them alone."

Battler laughed. He had made up his mind. So had young Dick. With cheery farewells and promises to honest old Lu Sing, they hurried out of the dim, lamp-lit parlour, snatching up their sun-helmets. A thousand pounds for a flower was a useful sum, and Battler and Dick knew Lu Sing could and would pay.

It was dark outside, the tropical night sky gemmed with glittering stars. The host of junks and proas in Perpeete Harbour lay wrapped in shadowy gloom.

Even as the brothers burst out through the matting on to Lu Sing's back veranda, they almost crashed into three white men, seated at a round table. Battler knew them—Sidney Sam, bearded adventurer; Dutch Hans, the big-fisted skipper of a pearling schooner; and "Digger" Jones. Digger was short, grizzled, and skinny, a gold-miner who never feared to enter the worst jungles, and who was said to be on friendly terms with many of the worst head-hunting tribes. Many said he was, in fact, half-native.

They looked a tough trio.

But they had never interfered with Battler and his young brother, for obvious reasons.

Curt greetings passed. Then Battler and Dick hurried down to the harbour and aboard the Radio Ray.

Battler knew the whereabouts of Peril Island. But the brothers' Kanaka crew had never been to it, didn't know its English name, which was rather fortunate. Even Tokelau

Jim, their hefty, grinning, brown bo'sun, might have shied off an island so ill-named.

"Belay there, m'lads!" Battler roared cheerily.

And soon the lights of Perpecte Harbour were twinkling behind them in the darkness, as they forged away across the vast starlit Southern Pacific.

Battler and Dick thrilled inwardly. Both guessed their quest for the blooms of death would lead them into perilous adventures. But neither dreamt just what grim danger they were heading into.

They sailed for three days and nights, big Battler and young Dick taking turns at the helm. They were buffeted by typhoons and fierce rain-squalls. They were then becalmed on a blazing tropical sea, and had to fall back on their gas-engine. Swirling deadly currents swept them through rock-bound straits, with jungle islands, inhabited by hostile savages, on either hand.

But at last they reached Peril Island.

Then they were chugging up a steamy river, with dense green mangrove forest reaching down to either bank. The forest seemed alive with monkeys, brilliant birds, and savage winged insects.

They held on up the river in the Radio Ray. Soon, however, the river became a narrow, muddy stream, with the tropical jungle almost meeting overhead. Battler and Dick decided to proceed in a boat, taking only Tokelau Jim, leaving the other Kanakas on board their schooner.

Then their troubles started in grim earnest.

At times they had to hack the overhanging creepers and vines to make way for their boat. At times they had to get out and push it, wading through slimy weeds, knee-deep in warm, slushy water.

The jungle was all about them like a dense curtain. It towered up and over them, and the hot air was stifling.

"Blow Lu Sing's sailor chum!" Battler grinned, mopping his sunburnt face. "Apparently he said the river passed near the valley of gods, so we might hope to see stone elephants, sharks, and all kinds of ugly ju-ju-s, any minute. Then we've got to spot the pyramid. Seen any gods about yet, Dick?"

"I haven't," grinned Dick, for, in fact, nothing could be seen except the walls of rank vegetation.

"Nor have I," grunted Battler. "And I don't think much of this river. It's a ditch."

"Plenty sweat!" groused Tokelau Jim, as they pressed on slowly. "My word, master, plenty sweat for catchum flowers!"

And soon the brothers had a queer feeling of being watched. They saw no one, heard no one; but both were aware of that uncanny feeling of unseen eyes on them. As night shut down, it seemed almost that the jungles of Peril Island were haunted.

Tokelau Jim became mighty uneasy.

As they splashed and rowed through the hot gloom the big Kanaka peered around nervously. He fancied the great, knotted mangrove roots, which wound amongst the swampy sedge, were ghosts and demons.

"We be followed, masters!" he gasped suddenly, rolling his eyes.

"Gammon!" grinned Battler. "No talk um rot!"

But Battler was uncomfortably aware that shadowy, invisible figures had been following them for hours. Tokelau Jim said he thought a canoe was trailing them.

"Let it!" grinned Battler. "No white man can know we're up here. And somehow I don't think any natives will—"

That instant a bloodcurdling shriek sounded from round a bend ahead. It was a wild scream that rang through the jungle, scaring cockatoos and parrots. Up in the lofty branches monkeys gibbered with terror.

Tokelau Jim gasped and dropped his oar. But Battler and Dick reckoned the cry was one of human fear, and sent their boat splashing forward.

Suddenly they came on a hair-raising sight.

On a green stretch of bank they dimly saw a small brown man, almost naked, and gripping a long blowpipe. He was screaming in terror. Fast-gripped he was, in the coils of a huge boa-constrictor.

Evidently the great snake had just dropped from a branch, to wind itself round its human victim quick as lightning. Not yet had it got its grip on some object with its tail, however, which would enable it to get the necessary leverage for a final, deadly, bone-crushing squeeze.

But there was no second to lose.

At once Battler saw he dared not try to shoot the snake. It would be impossible to do so without injuring its victim. The monster reptile had got the arm of the little brown man locked in its jaws, while its tail thrashed round in the undergrowth, seeking purchase.

With a shout Battler dropped his rifle in the boat.

Then he went plunging and splashing forward through the muddy water and mire, Dick gasping at his heels.

Then one mighty leap made Battler, and seized the snake's jaws in his huge fists.

He gripped the upper and lower jaw of the monster, and exerted all his massive strength to force them open.

A grim struggle followed in the sweltering gloom. Battler's great muscles bulged and cracked. He set his teeth, and sweat rained off his iron-hard body. Battler was strong as four ordinary men. But even he knew he would be powerless if the huge snake got the death-grip on something with its tail.

Suddenly a whoop burst from his lips. He had forced the snake's jaw apart, and swiftly he shifted his steel-like grip to its throat.

But, like lightning, the snake released its victim, and flung it coils, like a ship's cable, round Battler.

Battler found himself suddenly swathed in squeezing coils, felt a terrible, terrific pressure on his chest and legs. He glared into the snake's eyes. With all his might he kept the monster from dragging him towards a stump of tree. Once that tail got anchorage even Battler would be done for.

And somehow he held the head of the reptile away from him. He kept that huge head, armed with hideous fangs, at armslength.

"You can shoot now, Dick, old lad!" he uttered calmly.

With one shot, Dick blew the monster's head to pieces. Battler laughed grimly as the terrible coils relaxed and collapsed. Then both brothers turned to the brown man they had rescued.

He was a slim fellow, not much more than a lad, with his woolly hair powdered white with wood-ashes. Battler knew the big snake's bite was not poisonous. But the brown lad had dropped exhausted when rescued.

Now, however, he scrambled up, and eagerly snatched up his long blowpipe.

He seemed a bit scared of the white brothers. But his rolling eyes showed his amazement and appreciation of Battler's enormous strength. In harsh, guttural tones—speaking the usual "beche de mer" lingo of the islands—he gasped his thanks.

Then young Dick got a brain-wave.

The lad hurriedly questioned the brown youth, even as the latter, who called himself Kerobo, made to vanish into the jungle.

Did Kerobo know the valley of gods? Would he guide them? Did he know the ravine which led to the cavern and the blooms of death?

To the delight of the brothers, brown Kerobo nodded reply to all the questions. So the yarn of the Danish sailor, told to fat Lu Sing back at Perpecte, was not moonshine! And brown Kerobo promised to lead the brothers to the top of the great pyramid, whence the ravine could be marked down below them.

But he would not do more. Kerobo seemed to dread that ravine for some strange reason.

"But that'll be enough, old lad!" Battler grinned delightedly.

It was too dark to proceed, however, so the party camped for the night by the river. But brown Kerobo insisted on sleeping by himself, near a fire of his own, some distance off.

At the following dawn, however, Dick and Battler got a nasty surprise. Brown Kerobo had vanished.

CHAPTER 2.

The Valley of Gods!

"WELL, I'm hanged!" Dick exploded. "The ungrateful little bounder needn't have snaked off—without even leaving us some direction to go on!"

The two brothers and Tokelau Jim stood staring at the cold ashes of their brown guide's fire.

In vain they called and shouted. Brown Kerobo had vanished utterly, with his blowpipe.

Without him it now seemed there was small chance of finding the valley of gods. Battler had already decided that the great stone images, said to be in that valley, must be relics of a long-extinct race of men. The gods must be hidden by centuries of tropical vegetation.

Easily the brothers might pass that valley unawares, might never find it. Soon they might wander off the correct branch of this dwindling river; they might never find the exact stream, originally mentioned by the Danish sailor, as running near the valley.

"We'll jolly well go on, anyway," snapped Dick. "We're no worse off than before we rescued Kerobo—"

"Stop, master!" Tokelau Jim broke in excitedly. "Me think'm this feller Kerobo no walk about! Someone catch'm him asleep, pack along canoe like blazes—savvy?"

Battler and Dick gasped.

Had Kerobo's brown pals pounced on him, borne him off in the night, to prevent him leading white strangers to the valley and the sinister black orchids? Did the natives of Peril Island not wish the ravine revealed for some superstitious reason? Or had someone else kidnapped Kerobo?

"We'll follow, anyway, old scouts!" Battler gritted. "A thousand pounds a bloom is what we're after!"

The brothers and Tokelau Jim hurried back to their boat, hidden amongst weeds and mangrove roots. Then they pushed off. Tokelau Jim's keen eyes were able to spot the direction taken by the strange canoe in the night. He could see where the dense water-weeds had been brushed apart and had not yet closed up again, though a white man would have seen nothing.

Again the stalwart Kanaka bo'sun voiced his opinion that white men were about. He reminded Battler of his warning the previous day.

"Maybe white fellers done catch'm Kerobo!" he grunted. "Who the blazes knows we're here? How could a white fellow kidnap a chap like Kerobo, even asleep?" Battler grunted; but began to have doubts himself.

They pulled on through the sludge, at times getting out, pushing.

They moved, sweating, through greenish gloom—the perpetual twilight of tropical forests. About them was the soft, slow gurgle of water. Gigantic trees towered up all round to terrific heights, festooned with creepers and wild vines, shutting out the sun. The brothers felt like ants as they forged up the steamy stream, through masses of rank plants.

Battler was determined to recover brown Kerobo if possible. The wild lad had looked honest, not the sort to desert those who had rescued him from the boa-constrictor.

And the keen-eyed Tokelau Jim never lost the track of the strange canoe through the sedge. Suddenly he gasped excitedly and pointed to the bank.

"Them fellers with Kerobo land near that rock, masters," he whispered.

A moment later, gripping rifles, Battler, Dick, and Tokelau Jim landed. They could see no canoe, but did not trouble to search for one in the dark undergrowth, for an indistinct trail led away from the swampy river into the jungle.

Thrilling with excitement, the brothers thrust along that trail. It was too gloomy to see footprints, but displaced foliage told their Kanaka bo'sun they were heading right.

Suddenly, however, it became impossible to see any more signs.

They pulled up, feeling utterly lost, and glared round into the hot gloom helplessly. That instant Dick uttered a gasp of amazement.

"My hat! What's that, Battler?"

And Battler saw that Dick was pointing to a huge stone figure, shaped like a standing man but with a head like a monstrous bird. Twenty feet high was that huge, grey image, but only portions were visible, for all about it was thick jungle.

Excitedly the brothers flung themselves forward, with Tokelau Jim following fearfully.

A moment later they made out other great shapes towering above them from out of rank vegetation. Some were shaped like four-legged beasts, some had fish-heads, the heads of others were crudely human.

"Great boilers! We've struck it!" Battler gasped, his eyes gleaming. "We're in the valley of gods, old scouts!"

There was no doubt about it.

For some seconds the brothers stood spellbound, craning up at the towering figures all around. Then excitement gripped them. They had found the valley—there was no more need or use to search for brown Kerobo. It seemed hopeless, anyway.

"We want the pyramid, my lads," Battler strove to speak calmly. "Once atop the pyramid we can spot the ravine—according to the yarn of Lu Sing's sailor pal. Come on!"

Feeling more ant-like than ever, with those huge silent shapes looming up all round, the little party pushed forward. They strained their eyes for a glimpse of sloping walls which would denote a pyramid.

Now they saw more vast ruins, huge stone platforms, great pillars, broken walls. All around were the relics of a long-vanished race of giants.

Silence fell on them. There was something awe-inspiring about the valley of gods. But suddenly Dick uttered a low gasp of excitement and went stumbling off to his right.

The lad had spotted a great, stone block in the undergrowth; above it, through the higher branches of trees, he glimpsed other masses of stone.

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Battler and Tokelau Jim joined him, to find the lad had, in fact, discovered the pyramid.

The trio stood at the base of the great monument, staring upwards. Its summit was lost amongst the tops of great trees, over a hundred feet high, and its sloping sides were covered with rope-like vines and all kinds of dense plants—the growth of centuries. The pyramid was built of gigantic blocks of stone, however, and the trio could see the time-worn blocks rising away above them, like huge steps.

"Bully for you, Dick, old son!" Battler breathed excitedly. "Up we go! But no noise! It's just possible the bounders who kidnapped Kerobo are before us, up above yonder. We know they headed for this valley!"

Dick gulped and nodded.

Then the trio slung their rifles and started stealthily up the great monument.

Higher and higher they rose, seeing the jungle drop away around them. It seemed they climbed for ages, thrusting up through masses of strange plants, clambering from block to block.

All at once they heard voices close above them.

Battler smiled grimly and uttered a warning hiss. The trio unslung their rifles and climbed on. A few minutes later they suddenly inched their heads up over the edge of the pyramid's summit. Gasps escaped them.

They were high amongst the top of the highest jungle trees, looking at a small, flat platform of stone. On that platform were grouped four figures.

"Dutch Hans! Sidney Sam!" gritted Battler. "And Digger Jones—with our Kerobo!"

At once Battler recognised the three adventurers, into whom he and Dick had nearly crashed on the back veranda of Lu Sing's shop, away back at Perpete Harbour.

He saw the enormous Dutch skipper gripping brown Kerobo's arm, saw that the wizened, swarthy little Digger had a pistol to the native lad's head. Bearded Sidney Sam was pointing away down at the jungle, gesticulating excitedly.

All was plain.

The three villains had overheard Battler and Dick talking plans with fat Lu Sing that evening at Perpete, and had decided to trail the brothers, and somehow beat them to the blooms of death.

All the way to Peril Island had the ruffians followed the brothers. And, of course, Digger Jones had kidnapped brown Kerobo while he slept, to make him guide them.

No ordinary white man could have done that job. But Digger was half-native.

"So that's the ravine down yonder, eh?" Digger was leering, even as Battler & Co. stealthily arrived. "Now, Kerobo, me lad, what's dangerous about it? Speak up, savvy? You're going along that feller ravine, to get them blooms for us, while we—"

"No, he isn't!" roared Battler, and leapt up on the pyramid top.

Aghast, the three ruffians whipped round. For various reasons they had not tried to kill the brothers while they slept, and had, in fact, thought they could not be followed through the dark jungle to the valley of gods.

Instantly Dutch Hans stunned brown Kerobo with a blow of his great fist, then the three rogues sprang at Battler & Co.

Revolvers crashed and spat flame. But Battler ducked, then he, young Dick, and Tokelau Jim rushed at the villains like tigers. A ferocious fight followed atop of the pyramid. There sounded blows, shots, and yells. Dick ducked aside from Digger's pistol, then drove his rifle muzzle into the wizened rascal's stomach, doubling him up.

Tokelau Jim closed with Sidney Sam, and both sprawled, fighting tooth and nail. Battler, meanwhile, was at grips with big Dutch Hans, the pearling skipper.

Both men were big and powerful. They rocked locked together. But once again Battler gave proof of his incredible strength. Even as the Dutchman tried to work his revolver round to Battler's heart the latter heaved with all his might.

Teeth clenched, muscles cracking, Battler swung Dutch Hans roaring above his head, hurled him outwards.

Away flew the big Dutchman. Then he could be heard crashing and bumping down the pyramid slopes, bursting through the rank shrubs. He vanished from sight.

That instant came a shout from Dick:

"Hi, stop, Kerobo! We shan't hurt you—"

But Kerobo, coming round, was terrified by the white men's fighting. He sprang away downwards, disappeared. And Dick's voice snapped off, as Digger Jones clubbed the lad with his pistol, then swung and fired at Tokelau Jim.

Together Digger Jones and Sidney Sam bolted, dropping away downwards out of sight.

"Confound 'em! They've escaped!" Battler roared. "No matter, lads!" he shouted, seeing Dick rise only dazed, and



With all his strength Battler kept the monster from dragging him down. Once that tail got anchorage, it would be all up with Battler. Somehow he kept the huge head, armed with hideous fangs, at arm's length. "You can shoot now, Dick, old lad!" he said calmly.

Tokelau Jim merely bleeding from a flesh wound. "I think Dutchie got a bit bent—he fell hard down yonder. We'll beat the other two to the ravine, by ginger!"

"That must be it!" Dick cried.

The lad pointed away down to a depression in the spread-out jungle below them. The depression was plainly a ravine between low hills, its mouth marked by a red spire of rock.

"Right again!" roared Battler. "Come on, lads!"

Away down the bush-covered slopes of the great pyramid leapt the trio. From block to block they bounded downwards, crashing through shrubs, hidden at times from each other's view. They went flying down in mighty leaps through the air.

But before they were half-way down they heard a sharp crack, sounding from somewhere away in the thick stuff on their left.

Followed a cry; then the sound of some object crashing, bumping downwards.

"The curs!" roared Battler. "They must have shot Kerobo—to prevent him rejoining us. The fools! That shot'll bring all Kerobo's pals on our heels!"

CHAPTER 3. Poison Gas!

THE brothers and brown Tokelau Jim were aghast.

All three realised that the malicious shot, probably fired by Digger Jones, would bring the brown jungle-folk swarming after them.

The latter would not care who shot Kerobo. They would be out for vengeance, would be out to exterminate all the white men—the three rogues and Battler's party alike! And Kerobo's folk were armed with blowpipes and poison darts.

It seemed mighty unlikely that any of the whites would live to tell the tale. Their retreat would be cut off by a horde of invisible jungle-folk.

But Battler was determined to get the blooms of death before planning escape from Peril Island. That must wait.

The brothers dashed in the direction of the shot, leaping perilously over the blocks of stone. But they found nothing. A sinister silence had fallen now on the valley of gods.

They couldn't find Kerobo. There was obviously nothing for it but to dash for the ravine, marked down from the pyramid-top, and try to beat Sidney Sam and Digger to it. Dutch Hans had probably broken his thick neck.

In a moment the brothers were once more running through the valley of gods, surrounded by the uncouth stone giants. Behind them ran their Kanaka bo'sun. All were wary of being ambushed by their enemies; but nothing happened.

Battler had carefully marked down the ravine.

Suddenly the gasping trio found themselves at its entrance, marked by the great red spire of rock. They halted, excitedly to stare along the little defile, which was narrow,

with grey granite cliff-like walls, thickly covered with shrubs. At the end appeared a sort of cavern, a lichen-covered grotto, of which the mouth was thick with strange ferns.

"That must be the place," young Dick gasped excitedly. "The blooms of death are in that cave."

"Come on then!" snapped Battler. "We win! Nothing very deathly about this ravine, after all!"

Indeed, the dim, narrow ravine, overhung by great tropical trees, looked harmless.

Even as the brothers ran forward, however, they put up a small deer from the grass at their feet. They saw the little animal dash into the ravine, stop suddenly, leap round, then drop prone.

"My hat!" Dick gasped, halting. "See that? It's dead!"

The party stopped, dumbfounded. What was wrong with the ravine?

"I'll jolly well find out!" snapped Dick, and before Battler could stop him the plucky lad ran forward.

Hardly was he in the ravine than a strange, sickly smell filled his nostrils. He recognised it—the smell of the black orchids, of the blooms of death! He staggered, felt his senses going, saw the ravine walls whirl.

That moment he was jerked back by the giant grip of Battler. In a moment he recovered. He stood, gasping, racking his brains.

"I've got it!" he almost whooped. "There's a poisonous gas in that ravine, Battler! It rises from the ground—then—then—we can't go in!"

The mystery of the ravine was cleared up. Invisible, poisonous gases, rising from cracks in the ground, dealt death to anything that entered.

Even Battler felt beaten. It was maddening. But once again Dick showed his sharp brains and eyesight.

"That buck was gassed, and I jolly nearly was," the lad cried excitedly, "but look at those birds, Battler, nesting in that wall in there! They're O.K. That means the gas is heavy, doesn't rise more than about ten feet."

"We're not ten feet high, you young ass!" snapped Battler. "We can't go in!"

"We can make stilts!" yelled Dick.

Battler gasped in admiration.

A moment later the brothers and Tokelau Jim were fashioning crude stilts for themselves for all they were worth. They cut straight poles from the jungle, pared them, backed foot-rests; and in a short time they were ready.

"Now!" cried Dick. "But we'd best bind cloths round our faces."

They did. And then, presenting a strange spectacle, the trio went stumping into the deadly ravine.

On their tall stilts they stumped in between the bush-clad grey walls.

Thump! Thud! Thud!

Battler led, face wrapp'd in a strip of his shirt; Dick followed; last came Tokeleau Jim, taking enormous, awkward strides. They looked like weird denizens of the jungle themselves.

Even so, all smelt the sickly gas in brief puffs that swirled up to them on hot air currents. But Dick proved right. Their heads were above the main volume of the deadly vapour; but a fall would spell disaster.

They balanced themselves by touching the grey walls at intervals on either hand. And in a few seconds they brushed through the hanging clusters of ferns into the dark grotto at the end of the ravine.

Muffled gasps of excitement burst from them.

The light was bad! But all three could see the damp, dripping walls of the hot, steamy cavern; and they saw, clustering in niches, about half a dozen of the black blooms they had dared so much to find.

Six great waxy flowers they saw dimly, jet black, splashed with scarlet dots, and having clusters of frail rootlets all about them. They were the same as Lu Sing's two specimens—six black orchids.

"Blooms of death—worth a thousand quid apiece!" Dick spluttered excitedly. "I guess they absorb the gases in here—that's how they give off the same rotten smell."

There was no time to talk, however. Despite their high stilts and facecloths, all were beginning to feel dizzy.

Battler worked swiftly. Higher than the others, on account of his own height, he inhaled the upper air deeply, then stooped, and rapidly dug the six ill-omened blooms

from their niches, and transferred them to a haversack, which he wore suspended from his shoulder.

Then he signalled to Dick.

A moment later, a thrill with triumph, all thumped out of the grotto, went stumping back out of the ravine.

They had triumphed over countless difficulties, determined enemies, and even the deadly peril of the ravine, but Battler had been long in the South Seas, had experienced many reverses of fortunes in savage islands. He shook loose his rifle, with a warning gesture to his young brother.

A week later, haggard and torn, Battler handed to rich Lu Sing in Perpete, two of the black blooms of death. The other four had been ruined.

"But I pay two thousand pounds, Mister Battler!" gasped the amazed Chinaman delightedly. "Perhaps, later, you go fetch me more, eh?"

Battler grinned and shook his head.

"And I shouldn't advise anyone else to try," he drawled. "Digger's gang found those orchids are really blooms of death. I can't think how your sailor pal got his specimens, Lu Sing—I suppose he managed to make friends with the jungle lads. Of course, Digger's gang meant the jungle fellows to think we had kidnapped Kerobo, meant us to draw pursuit off them. That's why they didn't kill us while we slept, which was their worst bloomer."

"Many strange things happen on Pelil Island," nodded the impassive Chinaman. "I warned you. And now no one else will ever bling me these wonderful black blooms."

(There are thrills galore when Battler, Bart meets "NARADA THE GIANT!" in next week's gripping adventure yarn!)

THE "SWOT" OF ST. JIM'S!

(Continued from page 23.)

Skinny, and he really is working very hard for the exam-sir!"

"But about this curious mistake at Mr. Tiper's office," said Mr. Railton, shaking his head. "I do not understand that. I had a note from the printer on Saturday evening excusing himself for delay in sending me the papers, as something had gone wrong with the formes. He said that he could only account for it by supposing that someone had entered his house and played a practical joke with the formes."

Tom Merry started.

"In the circumstances I shall not inquire into the matter," said Mr. Railton, with a slight inflection upon the personal pronoun that was unmistakable.

Tom Merry took his leave with a thoughtful expression on his face.

Ten minutes later George Gore, who was in the gym, was surprised to see ten serious youths march up to him and surround him.

He made a movement to escape, but a heavy hand was laid upon his collar.

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