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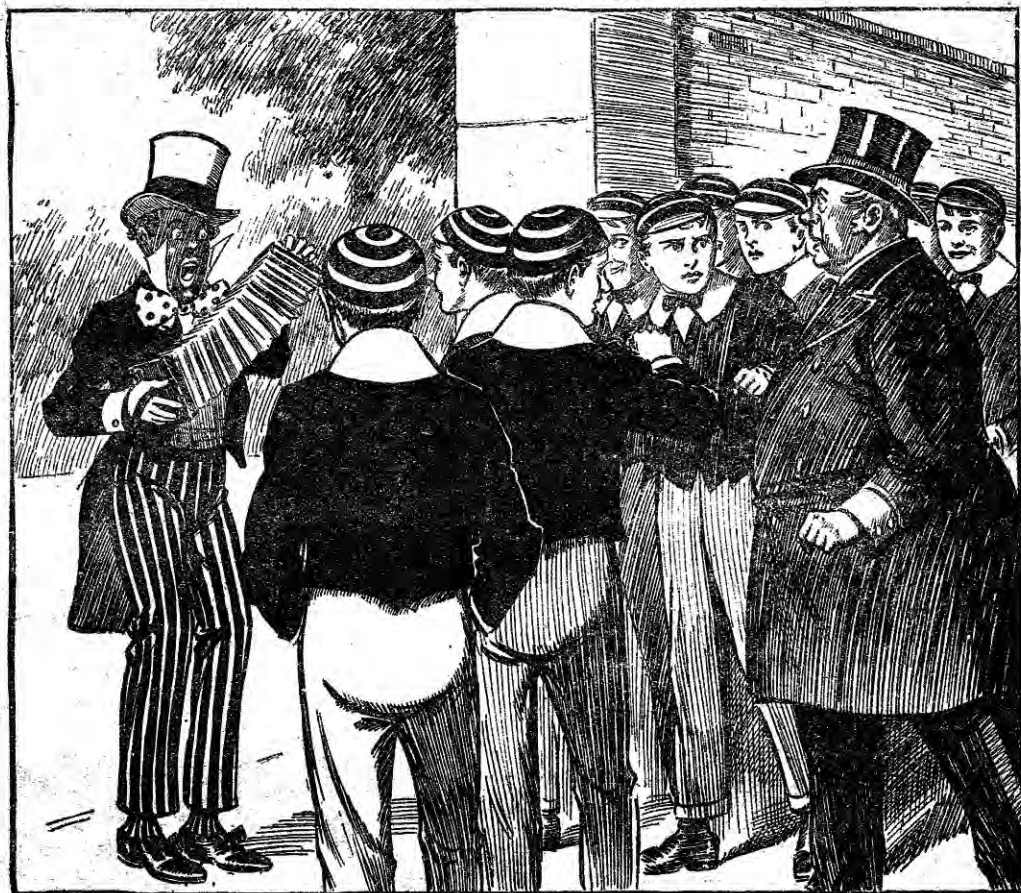
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SKIMPOLE'S WINDFALL!

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



"Lemme pass, young gentlemen!" yelled Taggles. "I've got to turn that feller hout." "Leave him alone!" hooted Wally D'Arcy. "Let him give us a song! Go it, Uncle Bones, give us a song." (See Chapter 7.)

CHAPTER 1.

Skimpole is Too Generous!

"S KIMMY, old chap—"

Skimpole of the Shell blinked up at Talbot through his enormous spectacles, and waved a bony and worried hand—waving him away, as it were.

"Please don't interrupt, Talbot—"

"But—"

"I am very busy! Please go away! I am very busy indeed!"

Skimpole looked busy. He was seated at the study table, which was littered with papers; the floor was littered, too. Skimpole had a pen in his hand, and tuck on his fingers, and a smudge or two upon his intellectual features. His big, bony forehead was wrinkled in thought. Skimpole's mighty brain was evidently working.

Next Wednesday:

"THE LAST HOPE!" AND "COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOL DAYS!"

No. 405. (New Series.) Vol. 9.

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Talbot grinned, but he declined to be waved away. He had the pleasure, or otherwise, of sharing that study with Skimpole. It was tea-time, and Talbot had guests coming to tea. So it was clearly inevitable that Skimpole's mighty mental operations should be interrupted.

"I'm sorry, Skimmy—"

"Not at all! Please run away!"

"It's tea-time—"

"I do not want any tea, Talbot. I am far too busy to think of such trifles."

"But I do," explained Talbot. "So does Gore. And I've got visitors coming to tea. Shall I help you clear the table?"

"My dear Talbot," said Skimpole firmly, "it is quite impossible to have tea in the study this evening. I am making up the notes for my lecture. You can lend me your assistance if you like. It would be necessary for you to miss your tea."

George Gore came into the study. He stared at the littered table.

"Clear that rubbish off, Skimmy!" he said. Gore was not quite so polite as Talbot. In his dealings with Skimpole he sometimes used methods of barbarism.

"Never mind your giddy inventions now," said Gore. "We want tea. You can leave your marvellous airship to be continued in our next."

Skimpole gave him a worried blink. Skimpole was a genius. He could invent airships, and he knew all about Socialism. But, even as a prophet is not honoured in his own country, so Herbert Skimpole was not appreciated in his own study. Gore characterised his inventions as bosh, and his Socialism as rot.

"I am not thinking of airships now, Gore. I have completed the plans of my new airship, and sent them to London. I am expecting shortly to receive a substantial cheque for them. I am now making the notes for my lecture—"

"Bow-wow!" said Gore.

"A large number of fellows are coming to hear my lecture, Gore," said Skimpole gently. "I cannot disappoint them. I hope you will come, Gore. By putting my lecture into the simplest possible language, I hope to make the great truths of Socialism comprehensible to the dumbest mind."

"What?"

"Here comes the fellows," said Talbot, as there was a sound of footsteps and cheery voices in the passage.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, appeared in the doorway.

"Here we are again!" said Monty Lowther affably. "We've come early to help."

"Looks as if help is needed," remarked Tom Merry.

"My dear friends," said Skimpole, in distress, "do go away! With you talking here I shall never get these notes finished, and my lecture is at seven o'clock."

"Are you going to clear that table?" demanded Gore.

"Certainly not, Gore!"

"Lend a hand, you chaps!" said Gore.

Skimpole gave a yell as Gore collected up a double handful of his valuable papers and hurled them into the corner of the study.

"Gore! My notes—you are mixing them. Dear me! I shall get my lecture wrong, and lose this great opportunity of spreading the light—"

"Oh, if that's what you want, we'll help," said Gore. And the next handful went into the study fire.

Skimpole yelled.

"Gore! Wharrer you doing with my notes?"

"Spreading the light," said Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gore, you are utterly stupid! I did not refer to that kind of light," gasped Skimpole. "I really suspect, Gore, that that was a deliberate misunderstanding on your part. My dear Lowther, do not spill the ink over my notes! Merry, please do not stick my papers in the waste-paper basket! Manners, Talbot, you are mixing up my notes—"

But the Shell fellows did not heed.

The study table was cleared in a remarkably short space of time, and the juniors proceeded cheerfully to lay the cloth.

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"Oh, dear!" said Skimpole distressfully. "I have been at work on those notes for hours. Now they are all mixed! You have mixed up Determinism with Socialism, and Evolution with the Origin of Species! Oh, dear!"

"And the rot with the bosh, and the piffle with the rubbish!" said Gore heartlessly. "Shove the kettle on, somebody!"

"Heav! we are, dear boys," said the cheery voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, and the swell of St. Jim's came in with Blake and Herries and Digby. "Bai Jove! What is the mactah with Skimmy?"

Skimpole blinked at him dolorously.

"My notes have been mixed up, D'Arcy. Gore has actually destroyed some of them. My lecture will be spoiled. My special argument addressed to you has disappeared—"

"Addressed to me, bai Jove?"

"Yes. I had hoped to convince you, D'Arcy, that you are a useless encumbrance upon the earth—"

"What?"

"That your existence, and that of the class you represent, is a mistake—"

"Bai Jove!"

"And that your painless extinction is a great desideratum in social progress—"

"You uttah ass—"

"And now Gore has burned my notes," said Skimpole distressfully. "I had hoped to make it clear, even to your limited intellect, D'Arcy—"

"Talbot, dear boy, have you any objection to me givin' that idiot a fearful thrashing in your study?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"My dear D'Arcy," said Skimpole, in surprise, "have I offended you in any way? I am sure I should be sorry to say anything to hurt your feelings."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a sudden roar from Gore. Gore had gone to the cupboard for supplies. Gore and Talbot were standing that feed to the chums of the School House, and they had laid in supplies on a really lavish scale. Gore's eyes almost started from his head as he gazed into the cupboard. It was in the same state as that of the celebrated Mrs. Hubbard.

"Where is the grub?" demanded Gore.

"Isn't it there?" said Talbot.

"There's nothing here."

"But—but we got it all in ready," said Talbot. "Haa some silly ass been larking—"

Skimpole blinked at them.

"Are you referring to the provisions that were in the cupboard, my dear Talbot?"

"Yes, ass!"

"The ham, and the cold beef, and the eggs—"

"Yes, yes!"

"And the gammon rashers, and the cake, and the three pots of jam—"

"Yes!" roared Gore. "Where are they?"

"And the biscuits, and the jelly, and the dough-nuts—"

"Yes, you fathead! What's become of them? We want them!"

"I am truly sorry," said Skimpole. "However, I am sure you will be pleased to hear what I have done with them."

Nine pairs of eyes were fastened upon Skimpole. Nine juniors looked anything but pleased. They were all hungry after footer practice; and in Tom Merry's study, and Blake's study, funds were low. The invitation to a feed with Talbot and Gore had come like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years. And now—

"Where's the grub?" asked Talbot, breathing hard through his nose. "You blithering ass, what have you done with it?"

"As a sincere Socialist, Talbot—"

"Where's the grub?" shrieked Gore.

"I could not refuse to supply the wants of a member of the down-trodden millions. A short time ago a tramp came to the side gate. He was so hungry that he was staggering from side to side, and Toby turned him heartlessly away, declaring that he made the whole place smell of spirits, a very rude observation. Naturally,

I could not let him depart unsatisfied. Fortunately, I had observed you fellows bringing in the tuck. I rushed in immediately—"

"What—"

"Made it into a bundle—"

"Ph?"

"And rushed after that unfortunate victim of our imperfect social system, and presented it to him."

"Bai Jove!"

"He was very pleased," said Skimpole, beaming. "His voice was quite broken as he thanked me. He could hardly speak; in fact, he could hardly stand. He was very pleased indeed."

Nine hungry juniors glared at the charitable and magnanimous Skimpole as if they would eat him.

"You—you've given away our feed to a tipsy tramp," stuttered Gore at last.

"My dear Gore, as a sincere Socialist—"

"Scrag him!" yelled Blake.

"Wag the sillay ass!"

"Bump him!"

"Lynch him!"

"My dear fellows," ejaculated Skimpole. "I—ow—thought you would be—yow!—pleased—yarooh!—I assure you—leggo!—as a sincere—yaroop!—oh, my hat! Oh, crumbs!"

Skimpole disappeared for a few minutes, and nothing could be seen but arms and legs. Dust rose from the carpet, and wild yells from the genius of the Shell. Skimpole sat up at last. Tom Merry & Co. were departing from the study—seeking a feed elsewhere. Skimpole sat and blinked, and groped for his spectacles. His valuable notes had been crumpled up and stuffed down his back, and the ink-pot had been emptied over his brainy head. He gasped, and gasped, and gasped, trying to get his second wind.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Skimpole. "Groo, I am inky! Oh, crumbs, I am hurt! Yow-ow! I have several distinct pains—oh—oh—oh, dear! I suppose I must have offended them in some way—ow-ow-ow! This is—ow!—horrid—yow!"

CHAPTER 2. Many Converts!

TOWARDS seven o'clock that evening the Shell Form-room began to fill.

There was a notice on the door announcing that the sublime Skimpole would be giving his lecture at seven. Skimpole and his lecture were not taken quite seriously. The good Skimmy hoped to spread the light in St. Jim's, but there wasn't the slightest prospect of success. A numerous audience was turning up. But, as most of them brought tin whistles or pea-shooters, and had nuts and apples and other missiles in their pockets, it was probable that the lecture would terminate in a rag. Indeed, it was probable that the lecture would not proceed very far before the rag commenced.

Tom Merry & Co. were in the front seats. Skimpole was already arranging his notes—such notes as he had been able to rescue from ruin—on the Form-master's desk. From that high position, Skimpole blinked over the increasing audience with satisfaction.

He had hoped for a good audience. But he had really not expected such a whacking crowd. The Terrible Three brought in most of the Shell; Study No. 6 led an army of the Fourth; Wally D'Arcy, the minor of the great Arthur Augustus, came in with a horde of Third Form fags; Figgins & Co. came over from the New House.

All the seats were soon taken, and a crowd of fellows were standing. There was a buzz of voices, and a ripple

of laughter. It struck the audience as funny that Herbert Skimpole did not suspect that a rag was intended. Any other fellow looking at the grinning crowd would have guessed that they were there for a "lark." Indeed, no other reason could possibly have drawn them to a lecture upon Socialism—especially by Skimpole.

But Skimmy hadn't the least suspicion. His kind and gentle face beamed with satisfaction as the juniors swarmed in.

There were still a few streaks of ink on Skimmy's bony forehead, and one or two of his notes were still down his back, and made him wriggle a little uncomfortably. He had been busy since his ragging in getting his notes ready again, and hadn't had much time for anything else.

Tom Merry & Co. waited for the lecture to begin. As a rule, they were easy-going with Skimmy. They would dodge him when he wanted to argue, or knock his hat off in a friendly way, and they gently but firmly excluded his contributions on social subjects from the "Weekly."

But they felt that the time had come to make an example of Skimmy. They had come in to a first-class feed that evening to find the cupboard bare. They had been too late for tea in Hall, and they were out of funds. They would have missed their tea altogether had not Figgins taken compassion on them and asked them over to the New House. Piggy was very good; but his supplies did not go far among such a crowd, so the heroes of the School House were unsatisfied and wrathful. They felt that Skimpole needed a lesson. The proper place

for Socialism was in a book. Skimpole had to learn not to put his theories into practice. The juniors were going to give him the necessary lesson free of charge.

When seven boomed out from the clock-tower, the Form-room was crowded. Certainly, no other lecture ever given at St. Jim's had called together such a numerous and distinguished audience.

Skimpole was still busy trying to get his notes into

order. Many of them were missing. The rest were mixed. His long and carefully-thought-out arguments in favour of Socialism were mingled with remarks on Evolution, and valuable observations of Determinism were hopelessly commingled with facts relating to the Origin of Species. As Skimpole made his notes on all sorts of fragments of paper, of all sorts of sizes, the difficulties were great when they were mixed, as the genius of the Shell had not even thought of numbering them. Trifling precautions like that escaped his mighty brain.

Stamp! Stamp! Stamp!

The time-honoured signal of an impatient audience boomed through the Form-room. It was past seven, and the audience was waiting. They had prep to do that evening, and they did not want to waste time. Besides, Levison of the Fourth had brought an egg—a very ancient egg—and he expressed fears that it would not keep much longer.

Stamp! Stamp! Stamp!

Skimpole jabbed his spectacles a little more firmly upon his nose, and blinked down at the audience.

"Tray, be patient, my dear friends!"

"Begin!"

"On the bawl!"

"Go it, Skimmy!"

Skimpole gave up the attempt to get his notes in order. He determined to trust to luck. He cleared his throat with a little preliminary cough.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We have met this evening for a very important purpose. I have every hope of instilling into your minds some rudimentary knowledge of the great truths of Socialism. I shall endeavour to speak in very simple language, suitable to your understanding."

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY: "THE LAST HOPE!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Socialism is so simple, so self-evident, I may say, that its principles may be grasped by the most limited intellects. I have, therefore, every hope of making you all understand—"

"Hear, hear!"

"In the course of the next few hours, I shall explain the matter thoroughly, with especial reference to the bearing of Evolution on the question, and a glance at Determinism."

The audience smiled loudly. The good Skimpy had the impression that he was going to hold forth for several hours. The audience had the impression that the lecture could be counted by minutes.

"Gentlemen," said Skimpole, "or, rather, I should say comrades—comrades—dear me, was that a wasp?" ejaculated Skimpole, clapping his hand to his ear.

It was not a wasp; it was a pea from Figgy's pea-shooter. The fun was beginning.

"Comrades, you are aware that in society as at present constituted, there is a very unequal distribution of wealth. Members of an idle and pernicious-aristocracy expend huge sums upon their personal adornment, and roll in wealth upon the tessellated floors of their marble halls."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I rise to order," said Monty Lowther, getting up. "I appeal to D'Arcy, as a member of the aristocracy, to state whether he has ever seen any idle and pernicious aristocrats rolling on the tessellated floors of his ancestral halls?"

"Certainly not, you duffab! I wegard Skimmay as an ass!"

"I beg you to take your seat, Lowther. I was speaking in a figurative sense," said Skimpole. "I repeat"—he blinked at his confused notes—"I repeat that while the idle rich are rolling in the earliest theory of Evolution as propounded by Darwin—dear me!—that does not sound right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pray, be patient! My notes are a little mixed. While the idle rich roll in filthy lucre and unmanly luxury, the down-trodden millions toil and moil from morn to night, and the voice of their woe sounds in the ears of—of—the huge monsters that walked the earth in the far-away geological epochs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole was getting mixed again.

"Silence, please! Take, for instance, the total sum of the national income—dear me, I have lost the figures! However, this sum, if divided equally among the population of the kingdom, would afford an income of four pounds a week for every family. Comrades, I put it to you whether that would not be a most just and equitable distribution of the national wealth. Fellows like D'Arcy would not be able to buy so many new hats."

"Bai Jove!"

"Public schools, of course, would all be closed—"

"By gum!"

"All you fellows would have to work instead of grinding Latin in the Form-room!"

"Help!"

"But the hungry would be fed, and the poor would not be turned empty away," went on Skimpole, with enthusiasm. "Oh, my dear friends, I repeat—yow-ow-ow!—what's that?"

"That" was a small but very hard apple, which caught Skimpy under the chin.

Skimpy blinked reproachfully at the audience, and went on:

"Comrades, I hope shortly to be able to give you an object-lesson in Socialism. I have sent the plans of the new airship to the editor of the 'Flying Times,' and I have not the slightest doubt that they will be purchased by the War Office. Now that Lord Kitchener is at the head of affairs, I have every confidence in the War Office. I have empowered the 'Flying Times' to place my airship at the disposal of the War Office for whatever sum they care to pay; and, indeed, I am of opinion that by means of my invention the war with Germany will be ended in about a fortnight. The sum I shall receive will

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probably be large. This sum I shall devote to Socialism. Every fellow in need of cash will only have to ask for his just share, and it will be given to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As a Socialist, of course, I shall be entitled to no more than a fair share. My brains are at the service of my fellow creatures. I shall, therefore, divide equally with all claimants."

"Good old Skimpy!"

"Whack it out!"

"I shall hand it out, my dear friends, as freely as I handed out Gore's supplies of tuck to a hungry beggar—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To resume. In order to acquaint you with the root principles of Socialism, we will take the case of two men on an island—"

There was a roar. Skimpole was not aware of it, but it was agreed among the audience that the first mention of two men on an island should be the signal for a regular fusillade.

Skimpole jumped in astonishment, as fifty pea-shooters came into play, and apples and nuts whizzed across the Form-room in volleys.

"My dear friends— Oh, dear! Whatever— Yarocoh! My dear comrades, this is most unseemly— Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pile in!"

"Comrades—gentlemen— Oh, crumbs! You are interrupting my lecture— Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Skimpole dodged down behind the desk.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a rush of the audience. The lecturer was collared and dragged out from behind the desk, struggling and gasping. The lecture was hopelessly interrupted.

"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "on Socialistic principles, I claim Skimpy's specs as my share of his property."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Lowther, I assure you that that is not—yow!—Socialism—ow! Oh, dear!"

Lowther calmly appropriated Skimpole's spectacles. The unfortunate Socialist blinked round in dismay. Blake jerked off his jacket.

"This is my bit," said Blake cheerfully. "I'm going to give this jacket to a young beggar, Skimpy."

"I claim the waistcoat!" yelled Digby.

And Skimpy's waistcoat was whipped off, and triumphantly appropriated by Digby.

"The collar for me!" shouted Herries.

"Gimme his necktie!"

"I'll have his boots!"

"I'll have his socks!"

"Hurrah for Socialism!"

"My dear friends," yelled Skimpole, "this is not Socialism. Socialism is the confiscation of the property of non-Socialists— Yow!"

"Gimme his braces!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The trousers for me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

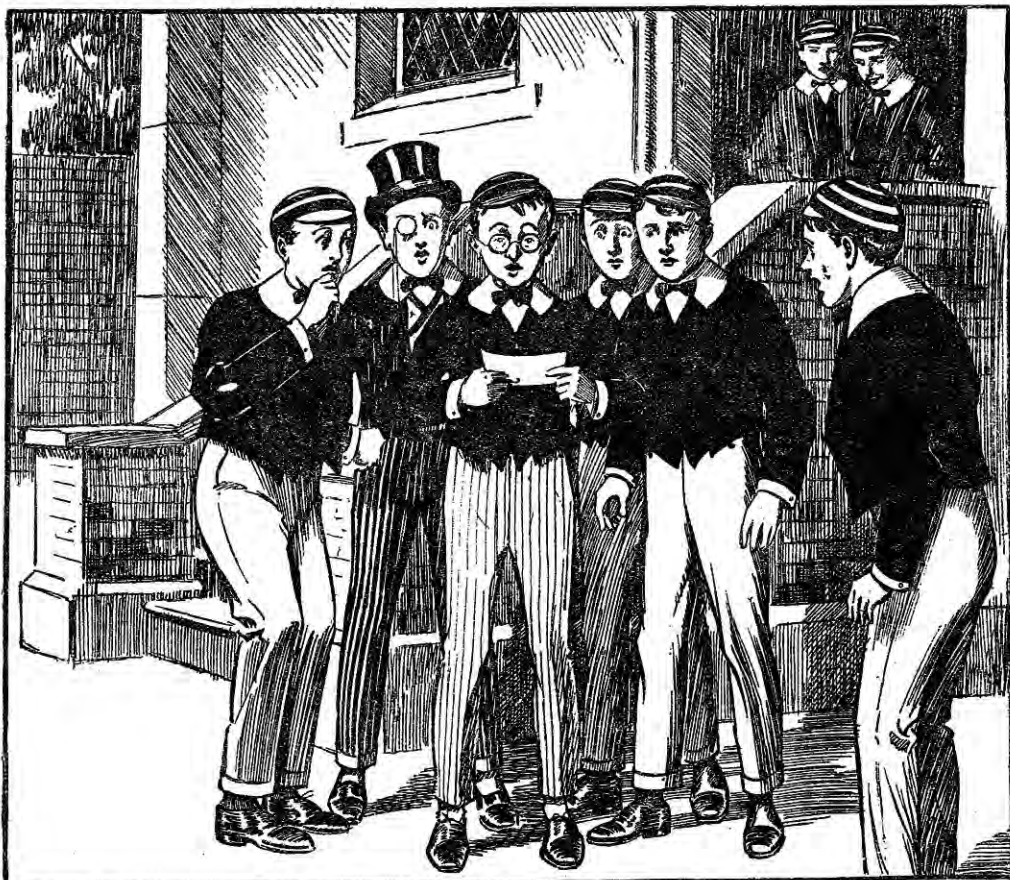
"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "Draw a line somewhere. Leave Skimpy his bags as a share of his own property."

"My dear friends—oh, dear!—please give me my clothes—ow!—I feel quite cold! Yow! Suppose Mr. Lintou should come in— Grooh! However am I to leave the Form-room in this state— Oh, dear!"

"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "an equal distribution of Skimpole's property having been made, the proceedings will now close. Good-bye, Skimpy!"

The yelling audience streamed out of the Form-room. Wally of the Third took poor Skimpy's braces, and Skimpy held on to the few garments that remained, as if for his life.

The unfortunate Socialist of St. Jim's remained in quite a dazed condition. He would willingly have explained to the hilarious audience that they totally mistook the principles of Socialism, which certainly do not mean parting with one's own property. But the audience were



Skimpole slit open the letter, and drew out a folded paper. There was a howl of amazement from the juniors, as Skimpole unfolded it and held it up. It was a cheque for twenty pounds! (See Chapter 3.)

gone, and Skimpole's things were gone with them. The hapless social reformer remained in the Form-room in his shirt and trousers.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Skimpole. "Dear me! I really fear that they must have done this for a joke—an absurd joke! Oh, dear! How ever am I to go out in this state? Suppose I meet Mr. Linton—suppose I meet the Head! Oh!"

Skimpole did not venture to leave the Form-room in his denuded state. He waited, in the hope that some of the japers would return. About a quarter of an hour later Jack Blake looked in, with a coat on his arm.

"Like to borrow a coat, Skimmy?" he asked.

"My dear Blake—"

"Here you are," said Blake. "It's your own coat, and I give it to you as a present."

Skimpole gladly accepted his own coat as a present, and bundled himself into it, and escaped to the dormitory to obtain a fresh supply of other requisites from his box. When he came down to the study he found Talbot and Gore at work on their preparation. Skimpole blinked at them reproachfully.

"Congratulations," said Talbot, laughing. "You made quite a lot of converts at your lecture, Skimmy."

"My dear Talbot—"

The door opened, and Tom Merry looked in. He had a big bundle in his hand.

"Skimmy here?" he asked cheerily. "Here you are, Skimmy—a present for you!"

Skimpole caught the bundle—with his chest—as Tom Merry tossed it to him, and sat down on the carpet with the bundle on his knees. Tom Merry chuckled, and retired. Skimmy opened the bundle.

"Dear me! Here are all my things," he said. "I think it must have been a joke, after all."

"Go hon!" said Gore.

"Under the circumstances," said Skimpole, with dignity, "I shall not, in future, give any more lectures on social subjects."

And he didn't!

CHAPTER 3.

Great Expectations.

"Gussy, old fellow—"

It was Wally of the Third, the minor of the great Arthur Augustus, who addressed his major in those affectionate terms.

It was a day or two after Skimpole's lecture, and a group of School House juniors were collected on the House steps watching for the postman.

The Terrible Three were there, hoping that a letter would arrive for Tom Merry, or Manners, or Lowther—it didn't matter which. The Terrible Three, like the Early Christians, had things in common.

There seemed to be a general dearth in the School House. Money was tight, as a Stock Exchange person would express it.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE LAST HOPE!"

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

Study No. 6 had gathered there, too, to wait for old Blagg. Skimpole of the Shell came along. Talbot was there, but he was only keeping his chums company; he wasn't expecting any remittances.

Then came Wally, and Wally sidled up to his major with such a respectfully meek manner, that it was plain at a glance that D'Arcy minor was hard up, too.

With all D'Arcy minor's good qualities, it could not be said that he overdid respect for his major. Indeed, the scamp of the Third generally treated Arthur Augustus in a very off-hand manner. Only on special occasions was he all that a younger brother really ought to be. This was evidently one of the special occasions.

"Yaas, Wally, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"I say, old chap—"

"Your collah is not vewy clean, Wally."

"I'll change it," said Wally meekly.

"And you have ink on your fingahs."

"I'll go and wash 'em."

The unaccustomed meekness of the hero of the Third astonished Arthur Augustus. He jammed his celebrated monocle into his eye, and surveyed his minor suspiciously.

"Is anythin' the mattah, Wally?"

"Ahem!"

"I twust you are not ill?"

"Rats! No."

"Then I must remark that your mannaahs are vewy much impwovin'."

"I'm taking you as a model, Gussy," said Wally blandly.

There was a chuckle from Tom Merry & Co.; but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded approvingly.

"That's wight, Wally! I'm vewy glad to heah you say so."

"I—I want you to lend me a clothes-brush," said Wally.

"With pleasuah, deah boy."

"And—some tin."

"Oh!"

"We're all stony," said Wally. "Young Jameson, and Frayne, and Curly, and Hobbs—broke to the weary wide."

There was another chuckle from the Shell fellows and the Fourth-Formers, and even Arthur Augustus looked a little suspicious. He could not help suspecting that it was rather the tin than the clothes-brush that Wally really wanted.

"So if you've got any quids knocking round unused—" hinted Wally.

"If you mean sovereweigns, Wally—"

"Oh, sovereweigns will do! Treasury notes, if you like," said Wally affably. "I'm not a particular chap. You see, it's a half this afternoon, and we're all busted."

"That is wathah a vulgah expwession, Wally."

Wally's mouth opened, but he closed it again quickly.

"I am sowwy I haven't a sovereweign, Wally."

"Make it five bob."

"Yaas, I should be vewy pleased to make it five bob, Wally—I mean five shillin's, but I haven't five shillin's."

"Oh, jiminy!" said Wally. "Ladle out a bob and have done with it."

"Unless I weceive a wemittance, Wally, I cannot even give you a shillin'. I have only a pennay, and it is a French pennay. Sewveral people have wefused to take it, and I am goin' to give it to a beggah!"

Wally glared.

"You ass! Do you mean to say you're stony?" he demanded wrathfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And I've been buttering you up for five minutes for nothing, then!" exclaimed the scamp of the Third indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you young wascal—"

"Oh, go and chop chips!" said Wally disrespectfully. And he turned away.

"Are you goin' to change your collah, Wally?"

"No fear!"

"And to wash your inkay fingahs?"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Bow-wow!"

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Wally of the Third marched off. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon his grinning chums.

"I have a gweat mind to thwash that young wascal," he said. "Fancy his butewin' me up, as he calls it, and me nevah suspectin' it. I twust my fivah will come. If I get a wemittance I shall punish Wally severely!"

"You won't give him any?" asked Blake. "Now, Gussy—"

"Weally, Blake, I twust you do not think that I shall keep a wemittance for myself when my minah is stony? Besides, I should not be able to punish him if I did."

"Then how are you going to punish him?" demanded Talbot.

"I shall give him a big whack in my wemittance, deah boy!"

"Is that a punishment?"

"Yaas, wathah! It will be heapin' coals of fish on his head!" explained Arthur Augustus. "He has been pullin' my leg for the sake of a loan of five shillin's. Well, I shall give the young boundah ten shillings, and leave him to his wemorse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any reason for laughtah, deah boys. I wegard that as heapin' coals of fish on his head—a vewy severe punishment!"

"Would you mind heapin' some coals of fire on my head, too?" asked Monty Lowther. "I'm stony, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"When is that blessed postman coming?" growled Blake. "There's never been such a draught in the House before. Not a blessed boblet anywhere. There won't be any tea in the study if a remittance doesn't come!"

"Somebody's bound to get something," said Tom Merry. "We can't all get a miss in baulk."

"My dear friends," said Skimpole, "may I make a suggestion? You here see the advantages of a system of Socialism—"

"Oh, don't!"

"Suppose you made an agreement to share out equally all the money that is received, and then you will all be provided for?" suggested Skimpole. "I am perfectly willing to enter into such a compact."

The juniors grinned. As Skimpole seldom or never had any remittances, he could easily afford to carry out Socialism on those lines.

"I am expecting a handsome remittance," said Skimpole. "I am not sure that it will come by this post, but when it comes it will be, perhaps, a hundred pounds!"

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"Which!"

"Who's going to send you a hundred pounds?" roared Blake.

"I am not sure that it will be a hundred pounds; it may be only fifty," said Skimpole. "I am expecting it from the 'Flying Times.'"

"The—the what?"

"The 'Flying Times'—the great newspaper dealing with aeronautical matters. It is some time since I sent them the plans of my airship."

"Oh, you ass!"

"My plans were very carefully drawn up, and the meanest intelligence will be able to see, at a glance, the value of the invention. The system of the self-acting propeller, requiring no motive force in the machine at all, will save the whole expense of petrol, to say nothing of avoiding all engine trouble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have empowered the editor of the 'Flying Times' to negotiate with the War Office. I have pointed out to him that it would be somewhat difficult for a schoolboy to secure a personal interview with Lord Kitchener. I have heard that Lord Kitchener is a somewhat busy man owing to the war. I thought the matter over, and concluded that, if I called at the War Office, I might not be admitted to Lord Kitchener's presence."

"Barely possible!" assented Blake.

"So I have placed the whole matter in the hands of the editor of the 'Flying Times.' I shall look to him for my payment. I shall be willing to accept any reason—"

able sum, as I am chiefly anxious for my airship to be used speedily, in order to bring this dreadful war to a close within a fortnight or so. I am quite willing to make an agreement with you, to share out all remittances that are received this afternoon on equal terms."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole blinked at the juniors in surprise.

"I do not see anything amusing in that suggestion," he said. "As I am expecting a large remittance, and you fellows are expecting small ones, I do not stand to benefit by the arrangement. I hope you do not suspect me of ulterior motives of that sort."

"We wouldn't suspect you of anything with any sense in it, old chap," said Blake. "I'm willing to agree to whack it out."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Done!"

All the expectant juniors concurred. As they had not the slightest belief that Skimpole would receive anything, they were willing to agree, with the kindly motive of "standing" Skimmy part of their cash if it came, and relieving his perpetual state of hardupness. Skimmy's allowance always went quickly, fellows often coming to the kindly amateur Socialist for a loan, and often forgetting to return it. Skimmy's principles, of course, prevented him from insisting upon the return of a loan. Skimmy was one of the few Socialists who carry their principles into practice.

"It's agweed, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "Whatever comes by this post, if anythin' comes at all, is to be whacked out on equal terms—what?"

"Leave me out," said Talbot. "I'm not expecting a remittance, so I can't take a whack."

"My dear Talbot," said Skimpole, "you are as much entitled to a whack as anybody else. Under Socialism all remittances will be nationalised."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then there are seven of us expectin' somethin'—Skimmy makes eight," grinned Arthur Augustus. "Whatever comes is to be whacked out in eight equal parts."

"Done!"

So it was agreed. It was really a good idea, for among so many fellows expecting cash it was very probable that one at least would receive some, though that one was pretty certain not to be Skimpole.

"Here's Blaggy!" sang out Digby.

There was a rush down the steps to intercept the postman. Old Blagg stopped, with a circle of eager juniors round him, and blinked at them.

"What have you got for me, Blaggy?"

"Stand and deliver!"

"Registered letters or your life!"

"Hands up!"

Old Blagg grinned; he was used to the humorous manners and customs of the juniors of St. Jim's. He began to fumble in his bag.

"Nothin' for you, Master D'Arcy!"

"Oh, wats!"

"Nothin' for you, Master Merry!"

"Oh, rotten!"

"Only one for Master Skimpole!"

"What!"

Old Blagg handed out the letter for Herbert Skimpole, and went on his way. Skimpole took the letter, and beamed benevolently at the juniors through his big spectacles.

"You see now the advantages of a Socialistic arrangement, my dear friends!"

"Bow-wow!" said Blake. "Only a begging letter, I expect, or a bill. Bow-wow!"

"It is from the editor of the 'Flying Times,' I am sure."

"Rats!"

"Look, my dear Blake!" Skimpole held up the letter. On the back of the envelope was a printed line on the flap—the "Flying Times."

"Bai Jove!"

"You see, my dear fellows, as it is an envelope from the 'Flying Times' office, it is extremely probable that the letter is from the 'Flying Times,'" said Skimpole

seriously. "I regard it as almost certain. It is a merely logical deduction."

"Go hon!"

"I wathah think I can guess what is in that lettah, deah boys. The editah of the 'Flyin' Times' is tellin' Skimpole he is a howlin' ass, and wecommendin' him to wun away to a lunatic asylum."

"Something of the sort," said Tom Merry. "My hat, we're fairly done! We shall have to go over to the New House and see if Figgins & Co. can shell out."

"Pray do not hurry away, my dear friends. I have not opened my letter yet. I think it is very probable that there is a handsome cheque in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, let's see what's in it, anyway," grinned Blake. "I dare say the editor is quite eloquent about your flying machine. Go it!"

Skimpole slit open the letter. He drew out a folded paper. There was a howl of amazement from the juniors as Skimpole unfolded the paper and held it up.

It was a cheque for twenty pounds!

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole's Windfall!

"TWENTY pounds!"

"Great Scott!"

"My only hat!"

"Well, this beats the band!"

Skimpole smiled serenely. He was not in the least astonished. But Tom Merry & Co. could not believe their eyes.

"Twenty pounds!" gasped Blake. "Twenty pounds! There must be some mistake!"

"Not at all," said Skimpole. "This can only be a first instalment. They would scarcely have the cheek to offer me so insignificant a sum as twenty pounds for the plans of my airship. If they think I should accept this paltry sum in full payment there is certainly some mistake, which I shall see that they correct."

"But—but it's impossible—"

"Your airship's all silly rot, you know."

"You do not understand these things, my dear fellows," said Skimpole. "My airship is the greatest invention of modern times. It will completely supersede the aeroplane. It will cause a fall in the price of petrol, that liquid no longer being required. The system of a propeller driven by energy created by its own action—"

"Oh, bow-wow! Let's have a look at that blessed cheque! There's something printed on the back."

"Probably a statement that it is merely an instalment," said Skimpole.

The juniors examined the cheque eagerly.

It was difficult to trust their own eyesight. The cheque was quite in order.

"Pay H. Skimpoll the sum of twenty pounds."

"They've spelt your name wrong," said Blake.

"Doubtless the last letter was taken for an L," said Skimpole. "My writing is not very clear. It is meant for Skimpole, of course."

The juniors nodded. From Skimmy's writing, it was certainly not easy for anybody to know whether his name was spelt Skimpole or Skimpoll.

On the back of the cheque was a printed paragraph, with a line filled in in handwriting. There was also a space for a stamp and signature.

"Received the amount stated on the other side of cheque, being payment of first instalment 'The Skimmer of the Skies.'"

The last words were in handwriting.

There followed the space for signature, with a square marked "If for £20 or over, a penny stamp is required."

Under that was another line.

"This cheque, when signed in the space indicated, will be taken as a full receipt, and no answer is necessary."

"You see, my dear fellows, there is no mistake," said Skimpole calmly. "It is a common system in business to have the receipt form printed on the back of the cheque, to save correspondence. They have named my airship 'The Skimmer of the Skies'—a very good name for it. As I surmised, it is only an instalment. Such

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a ridiculously small sum could not be sent in complete payment."

"Isn't there a letter with it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Dear me, yes; there is a letter in the envelope."

"Fish it out, you ass!"

Skimpole fished the letter out. It was merely a printed form, and stated:

"Enclosed please find the payment of work as stated on back of cheque. Yours faithfully, K. Jones, Cashier."

It was headed "Flying Times' Office, Black Lion Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C."

"Well, this beats the giddy band!" said Tom Merry. "It's genuine enough. Blessed if I ever thought there was anything in Skimmy's airship."

"I wathah think we owe Skimmay an apology, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "We have regarded him as a thumpin' ass, and it turns out that there is somethin' in his weird ideahs, aftah all. I withdrew my remarks about your bwains, Skimmay."

"There must be something in it if they're paying cash for it," said Lowther. "But I'm blessed if I understand it."

"It beats me," said Manners. "Well, I congratulate you, Skimmy."

"Yaas, wathah! Congwats, old man!"

"Congratulations, Skimmay!" chorused the juniors. They were astounded, but they were really pleased to see old Skimmy get a goal like this at last.

"The Housemaster will cash it for you," said Herries. "I suppose you haven't a bank account, Skimmy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Unfortunately, no," said Skimmy. "With my next cheque I shall start a banking account, however. Will you lend me a pencil, somebody. I will now make the calculation."

"What calculation?"

"This cheque has to be divided into eight equal parts."

"Then you want a pair of scissors, not a pencil," remarked Lowther.

"I mean the cash has to be divided, my dear Lowther," explained Skimpole, in his solemn manner. Skimmy's mighty brain was not receptive of jokes. "If the cheque should be cut into eight pieces, it would lose its value. The bankers would decline to pay on each piece separately."

"Go hon!"

"Eight into twenty goes—how many?" said Skimpole. "Exactly two pounds ten shillings each, I think."

The juniors looked at Skimpole, and looked at one another. Skimmy was evidently prepared to carry out his Socialistic agreement to the bitter end.

But Tom Merry & Co. were not. They had entered into that agreement with the benevolent idea of "whacking" out their expected remittance with Skimmy. But they had no intention of "scoffing" his cheque.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "We're not touching the cheque—are we?"

"Wathah not!"

"Of course not," grinned Blake. "Don't be an ass, Skimmy. The cheque's yours, you duffer! We never dreamed you were going to get a whacking sum of money."

"My dear fellows, an agreement is an agreement, and a sincere Socialist is bound to carry out his principles. I insist upon sharing this cheque out."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"My dear fellows—" urged Skimpole.

Tom Merry patted him on the back.

"It's all right, Skimmy. We're not going to rob you. But I'll tell you what—you can stand tea to the whole company, if you like. As we're all stony we'll let you do that much, but no more."

"Yaas, that's a wippin' ideah."

"I would greatly prefer to keep the agreement," said Skimpole distressfully.

"Well, we won't let you, and that's flat. An agreement can be cancelled by a majority vote," said Tom Merry. "Hands up for cancelling the agreement."

Seven hands went up.

"You see, Skimmy, you're outvoted. As a sincere Socialist, you have to bow to the majority."

"Quite so, my dear fellows," said Skimpole, satisfied at last. "If you put it like that I must give way, of course. But I should like to stand a really handsome feed. Will you fellows order the things while I go to the Housemaster?"

"What-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. did not need telling twice. It was tea-time, and they were hungry. A handsome spread in the study was better than tea in the Hall. Skimpole ambled away to the Housemaster's study to raise the wind on his cheque, and Tom Merry & Co. trooped down to the school shop.

They spread the news on the way.

It was received with astonishment and incredulity.

"Skimmy—a cheque—twenty pounds—giddy airship!" stuttered Figgins, of the New House. "Ganmon! Whose leg do you think you are pulling?"

"Draw it mild!" urged Kerr.

"Give us an easier one!" hooted Fatty Wynn.

"Honest Injun!"

"Honest Injun!" was indubitable. Figgins & Co. could not doubt after that; they could only gasp.

"Come to the feed," said Tom Merry. "Skimmy's standing sam."

"You bet!" said Fatty Wynn promptly.

The news spread—received with amazement, with wonder, with gasping. That Herbert Skimpole would ever receive anything but ridicule for his inventions, the St. Jim's fellows had never dreamed. Evidently, the school had entertained an angel unaware.

Herbert Skimpole was a "mute, inglorious Milton," who had suddenly come to light. Hitherto he had blushed unseen, and wasted his sweetness on the desert air. Now he was suddenly in the limelight. Doubting Thomases, who said it was impossible, had to be convinced by Tom Merry's statement that he had seen the cheque. It was amazing, it was impossible, but it was true! Skimpole had always maintained that he was a genius, but he had been quite alone in that opinion. The fellows began to believe it now. Certainly there must be something in Skimmy, if an experienced man in the flying world was willing to pay him twenty pounds as a first instalment on his invention.

"It beats Banagher!" said Reilly of the Fourth.

"Sure I've heard that the fool of the family sometimes turns out to be the janus. But who'd have thought it of Skimmy?"

Nobody would have thought it of Skimmy! But it was true—there was the cheque! Skimmy had gone to the Housemaster to get it cashed. Doubt wasn't possible. The St. Jim's fellows could only wonder.

Dame Taggles opened her eyes at the extensive orders that were given in the tuckshop. Skimmy had said that it was to be a handsome spread, and the juniors felt that they were entitled to make it a handsome one. Skimmy's cheque had to be celebrated in proper style.

"We'll pay for these things presently, Mrs. Taggles," said Tom Merry. "Skimmy's standing the feed, and he's got to get a cheque cashed. It's all right."

"Very well, Master Merry. You know I don't give credit for more than a few shillings, even to you," said Dame Taggles. "You have ordered thirty shillings worth."

"Tain't tick; we'll come down after tea and settle. Our study always keeps its word."

"Yes, yes, I know you always keep your word, Master Merry."

Dame Taggles had no hesitation in handing out the goods on the strength of Tom Merry's word.

Laden with parcels, the chums of the School House proceeded to Study No. 6, accompanied by Figgins & Co., and Reilly and Lumley-Lumley, and several other

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fellows. It was quite a large party, and Study No. 6 soon presented a very festive appearance. But even Fatty Wynn agreed that they must wait for Skimmy.

CHAPTER 5.

A Surprise for the Housemaster!

"COME in!" said Mr. Railton.

Skimpole had tapped at the door of the Housemaster's study in the School House. The genius of the Shell trotted in, with the cheque in his hand. Mr. Railton was at work, but he laid down his pen good-humouredly, and regarded Herbert Skimpole with a glance of inquiry.

"What is it, Skimpole?"

"I am sorry to interrupt you, sir," said Skimpole. "It is rather a pressing matter."

"Well, go on!"

"Am I interrupting you, sir?"

"You are, Skimpole. Pray do not lose time! What do you want?"

"Then I am sorry. I feel it very much when Gore and Talbot interrupt me, when I am busy in my study," said Skimpole. "Only the other day, when I was preparing notes for a lecture, they—"

"Will you tell me what you want, Skimpole?"

"Certainly, sir; that is why I am here!" said Skimpole, surprised by the question. "When Mr. Carrington was our Housemaster, sir, he used to oblige us by cashing little remittances for us sometimes. He cashed a cheque for D'Arcy once—"

"Well, well, you want the cash for a postal-order, is that it?" asked the Housemaster. "I have no objection, but I really wish you would not waste time. How much is the postal-order?"

"You are under a misapprehension, sir. I have no postal-order."

"You did not come here to ask me to cash a postal-order for you?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then what do you want?" exclaimed Mr. Railton testily.

"I should like you to cash a cheque, sir."

"Why could you not say so at once? One of your relations has sent you a cheque?"

"Not a relation, sir—"

"Well, well, it doesn't matter whom. You could pass it through the post-office bank, Skimpole, unless you are in a hurry for the money."

"If you would change it, sir, and pass it through your bank, I should be under a great obligation, as the fellows—"

"How much is it?"

"Twenty pounds, sir," said Skimpole, coming to the point at last.

Mr. Railton jumped. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the school, and the son of a noble lord, did not have whacking remittances of twenty pounds at a time. The Housemaster stared at Skimpole.

"Do you mean to say, Skimpole, that someone has sent you a cheque for twenty pounds?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly, sir."

"Such a sum of money should not have been sent without permission from the Head. But perhaps it is to purchase a bicycle, or something of that kind?"

"I have not yet decided upon the expenditure of the cheque, sir, excepting that I am standing a feed to begin with. If you will kindly change it for me—"

"My dear boy, I do not keep twenty pounds in my study," said Mr. Railton. "I can, however, advance you something, and give you the rest when the cheque is passed through the bank. Kindly let me see the cheque. It is extraordinary that such a sum of money should be sent to a junior."

"Here is the cheque, sir. I am expecting some more shortly."

"Indeed!"

"This is only a first instalment," explained Skimpole. "I have sold an invention to the editor of the 'Flying Times'—my new airship, sir."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

Mr. Railton's hand slipped from the cane. Skimpole's statement was so extraordinary that the Housemaster's impression was that his cane was being pulled.

But the genius of the Shell looked at him quite solemnly. Skimmy did not look as if he were joking. He did not, indeed, look as if he were capable of joking. Life was a very serious business for Skimmy.

"Let me understand you aright, Skimpole. I have heard of certain ridiculous experiments you have made in your study. I have heard that there was an explosion on one occasion—"

"Yes, sir; I have had several little accidents," said Skimpole cheerfully. "But my experiments are not all ridiculous, sir. That is quite a mistake. Glyn calls them ridiculous. It is an error into which a mind lacking in intelligence would naturally fall."

"What?"

"I am referring to Glyn's mind, sir," said Skimpole hastily.

"You state that you have invented an airship—"

"Yes, sir; on a new system—"

"And—you have sold it—"

"I have sold the plans, sir. I sent them to the editor of the 'Flying Times,' empowering him to dispose of them to the War Office."

"You—you—you thought it possible that the War Office would make use of an invention of yours?"

gasped Mr. Railton.

"Certainly, sir. At one time I should have regarded it as hopeless. But since Lord Kitchener became Secretary for War, sir, there has been a great change at the War Office—at least, so I have heard. I have been told that the officials keep awake all day long, sir, and that quite intelligent men have been promoted to responsible positions, a change, sir, that must make for good in any Government department. Under these new circumstances, I have no doubt that my invention will be accepted."

"Dear me!"

"The editor of the 'Flying Times' thinks so, sir, as he has sent me a cheque for twenty pounds as a first instalment upon my invention."

"Impossible!"

"Here is the cheque, sir."

Mr. Railton stared at the cheque. There it was, right enough. The Housemaster rubbed his nose and blinked at the cheque. Skimpole blinked at him.

"The Skimmer of the Skies," said Mr. Railton, "That sounds like the name of a story."

"No; that is the name they have given my airship, sir. A very appropriate name."

"This is extraordinary!"

"Not at all, sir. The fellows were all surprised, too. I do not see anything to be surprised at. I have been at work upon my airship for a very long time, and I have perfected it at last. I could not make a model, as I was forbidden to use the gas again, after an explosion happened in my study, and Glyn was so very unreasonable about my taking his materials. But I was quite certain that, as soon as an intelligent man saw my plans, he would see at once what a splendid idea it was."

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Railton. "If there is no mistake here, Skimpole, you are a remarkably clever boy, and deserve great credit. But, I repeat, that I cannot understand it. I am amazed! Before I can give you the money for this cheque, I must pass it through the bank. I will write to my bankers, and ask

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them to clear it at once, to establish whether there has been any mistake. Then, if it is all right, you will receive the twenty pounds."

"I should prefer—"

"I can do nothing else, Skimpole. If this cheque passes the bankers, it will prove that you are entitled to the money. Otherwise, although it seems in order, I think there must be some mistake. You must wait."

"Oh, very well, sir."

"You must sign the cheque, and I will send it away this afternoon."

"Certainly, sir. Can you give me a stamp? I lent my last one to Levison."

Mr. Railton placed a stamp on the space marked for it, and Skimpole signed the receipt on the back of the cheque, "H. Skimpole."

"Very well, Skimpole. You may go. As soon as I hear from the bank I will tell you."

"Thank you, sir!"

Skimpole quitted the study, quite satisfied. Mr. Railton's precaution was only a reasonable one, and Skimpole was not in a hurry for the money. The genius of the Shell was a trifle absent-minded, and he had quite forgotten that a tremendous feed was being ordered on the strength of that cheque.

But, as he quitted the Housemaster's study, Jack Blake bore down on him and dragged him off.

"Come on, Skimmy. Is it all right?"

"Certainly, my dear Blake! I—"

"Railton's passing the cheque."

"Yes, certainly! He—"

"Good! Come on; the feed's ready."

"Thank you, my dear Blake. I am somewhat hungry," said Skimpole. "I do not usually think much of such matters. However, I am quite ready for tea."

Blake marched Skimmy into Study No. 6, where tea was ready, and a whole army of juniors were waiting for him. There was a cheer as he came in.

"Bravo, Skimmy!"

"Here's the giddy genius!"

"There isn't a fellow in the New House who can invent airships and get cheques for twenty quids!" grinned Digby.

"I give in," said Figgins. "I'd never have believed it possible. How do you do these things, Skimmy?"

"I will explain the whole thing from the very beginning, Figgins."

"Help!" gasped Figgins. "Sorry I spoke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shove Skimmy at the head of the table," said Blake. "Skimmy's the founder of the feed! Here you are, Skimmy! Pile in!"

Skimpole piled in, and so did the rest of the party. Study No. 6 was crowded, and all the crowd were in the greatest of spirits. Skimpole of the Shell, for once, was a hero!

CHAPTER 6.

After the Feast, the Reckoning!

SKIMPOLE beamed over the well-spread board through his big glasses.

Skimmy was a benevolent youth, and he liked to see people happy. It was for that reason that he frequently handed out Talbot's and Gore's supplies from the study cupboard to hungry tramps. But those little weaknesses were fully forgiven him now. Skimpole, the much misunderstood Skimpole, was a genius—a giddy genius. People don't pay out cheques of twenty pounds for nothing. The "Flying Times" was paying Skimpole twenty of the best merely as a first instalment. Therefore, the value of his much-derided airship could be considered as proved.

The prospect of wealth that spread out before Skimpole was dazzling. Instalment after instalment of the payment for his wonderful "Skimmer of the Skies" would raise him to wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

Now was an opportunity for Skimpole to carry out the Socialistic ideas he had so long preached, while shortness of cash prevented him from putting them into practice. And Skimpole could be relied upon to do it.

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Of course, as a rule, a Socialist is as keen in looking after his money as a non-Socialist. But Skimmy was not that kind of Socialist. Skimmy not only believed in his theories, but was prepared to act upon them when in possession of wealth. That was something altogether unique in the Socialistic line.

Under the influence of their new admiration for Skimpole, and of the feed, the juniors, for once, allowed Skimmy to talk Socialism. He explained to them at full length the theories of Professor Balmeyerumpet and Dr. Loosetop and Herr Dummkopf. He told them of the great works of that celebrated Socialist poet whose tuneless message to the down-trodden is published at a guinea a volume. Skimpole was fairly given his head for once, and the juniors, feeling that that was quite enough, did not take the trouble to listen. They devoted their personal attention to the feed.

The feed was voted a great success.

When it was over, and the juniors were all feeling highly satisfied, Skimpole was still running on, apparently being somewhat like unto the little brook that went on for ever. But the party broke up.

Tom Merry gave Skimmy a tap on his bumpy forehead, and brought him out of the submerged tenth and the down-trodden millions with a jump.

"After the feed the reckoning," said Tom. "You're got to pay Mrs. Taggles a little call, Skimmy."

"I shall be very pleased to call upon Mrs. Taggles, my dear Merry. Is she in need of advice or assistance?"

"Eh! She's in need of thirty bob for this feed," said Tom.

"Dear me!"

"And it was to be settled immediately after tea," said Tom.

"How very unfortunate!" said Skimpole.

"I don't quite see it," said Tom, puzzled. "No trouble to walk over to the tuckshop and hand over the cash, is it?"

"No; but—"

"Thirty bob wasn't too much, was it?" asked Tom. "You said it was to be a handsome feed."

"Certainly not, my dear Merry! I should have been equally satisfied if it had been three pounds."

"Then what's the matter?"

"It unfortunately happens that I have no money," said Skimpole, blinking at him.

There was a yell from the juniors.

"No money!"

"It is really very unfortunate—"

"But—but the cheque!" roared Blake. "Isn't Railton cashing that cheque for you?"

"Certainly."

"Then why haven't you any money?"

"Mr. Railton prefers to wait till the cheque is passed before he hands me the money, or any part of it," explained Skimpole. "It is really very absurd of Mr. Railton, but he was very decided. However, it makes no difference. Mrs. Taggles will be paid in a few days."

"In a few days!" groaned Tom Merry. "She won't wait a few days for thirty bob! I've given her my word that it shall be paid this evening."

"It will be all right, Merry. I will explain to Mrs. Taggles that she really has no right to expect payment at all, and that if the debt is settled it will be really an act of grace. Under Socialism all jam-tarts and gammon rashers will be nationalised."

"But we ain't under Socialism yet, and Mrs. Taggles has to be paid this evening," said Tom, in great dismay.

"It is a matter of little moment. Now I was explaining, when you interrupted me, about the iniquitous beginnings of the present social system. Suppose there were two men on an island—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry, exasperated. "Bother your two men on a blessed island! Dame Taggles has got to be squared!"

"Impossible, my dear Merry! Consider this—we will suppose that there are two men on a desert island. Would it be just that one man should charge the other man rent for permission to live on that island? Evidently not! Then how can it be just that, on a larger island, with a larger population, one set of men



In the flower-pot was a heap of money. Half crowns and two shilling pieces, shillings and sixpences, filled the flower-pot to the brim, and gummed to the side of it was a paper, which bore the inscription: "PLEASE TAKE SOME!" (See Chapter 10.)

called landlords should charge all the rest a regular sum for permission to live in their own country?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake dry up!"

"The private ownership of land is therefore a horrible iniquity. So long as land is in private hands—"

"Will you cheese it?"

"The sufferings of the down-trodden will continue," said Skimpole, without showing any sign whatever of cheesing it. "I may add that, according to the ancient law of England, land cannot be held as private property, and all landowners are, according to law, trespassers."

"Dry up!"

"And if the law were enforced, all present so-called owners of land would be compelled to make restitution."

"My hat! I believe he's wound up!"

"In modern times corrupt practices have grown up, and the good old law has fallen into disuse owing to the influence of landowners in Parliament. But wait, my dear friends, until we get a Socialist majority," said Skimpole, his eyes gleaming through his spectacles, "then we shall confiscate everything—everything except our own personal belongings will be nationalised."

"Ring off!"

"All landlords will be set to honest work, and—yarooooooh!"

The juniors were fed up. Dame Taggles had to be paid, and the cheerful Socialist had no money. Under those circumstances, the juniors were not likely to listen to a lecture on the land question.

They laid violent hands upon Skimpy, and the amateur Socialist shot through the study doorway and slid along the linoleum in the passage.

A wild yell floated back as Blake slammed the door.

The question of land nationalisation being thus disposed of, Tom Merry & Co. were able to turn their attention to the more pressing question of paying Dame Taggles her thirty shillings.

"It's an awful fix!" groaned Tom. "We're all stony, and I've given Mrs. Taggles my word to pay after tea! She's got to be paid, though the skies fall. Just imagine that cheerful idiot letting us feed when he hadn't the cash—if he'd told us in time, we could have taken the things back! Now it's too late!"

"Well, a little too late!" agreed Lowther.

"Bai Jove! It's a frightful fix!"

"Better have a whip-round," said Talbot. "I've got six bob. I was going to stand a tea if Skimpy hadn't come to the rescue."

"My hat! I wish he hadn't!" said Tom Merry.

"The blithering idiot!"

"He means well," grinned Lowther.

"People who mean well ought to be boiled in oil! We've passed our word to pay up this evening, and, even if we clear out Talbot, we still want twenty-four bob! Twenty-four bob—it might as well be twenty-four quids!"

Figgins & Co. turned out their pockets. They had one-and-ninence among them.

"Every little helps," said Figgins.

"Twenty-two and threepence wanted!" said Manners. "I dare say we can manage the threepence, but what price the twenty-two?"

"Sure, I've got a threepenny-bit," said Reilly.

"Oh, good!"

"Only Mrs. Taggles has refused it twice already, says it's bad."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE LAST HOPE!"

"Fathead!"
"I guess I'm stumped," said Lumley-Lumley.
"Leave it till Saturday, and I could lend you all the thirty."

"Can't be did! Dame Taggles will kick up a row; besides, we promised. She'll think we don't keep our promises," said Tom Merry, running his fingers through his curly hair in desperation.

"It's got to be done," said Arthur Augustus. "It's a question of honah with us. Dame Taggles has to be settled with this vevy evenin'."

"How? It's got to be done, but how?"

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

The dismayed juniors held a wild council of war. But there seemed no way out. It was because everybody was so excessively hard up that Skimpole's feed had been welcomed so joyously. Now Skimpole's feed had to be paid for, they were still in the same stony state, and their word was pledged.

It was a horrid dilemma!

They talked it over, they discussed it under every aspect, but the staring fact remained that twenty-two shillings and threepence were still required, and the meeting broke up at last, the fellows departing in various directions on borrowing expeditions. But they had little hope. For already, owing to the tightness of the money market, they had borrowed all they could on all sides. The borrowing wheeze was, as Blake put it, a sucked lemon.

But something had to be done! There was no doubt at all about that. The question was—what?

CHAPTER 7.

A Black Deed!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wore a determined and thoughtful frown.

He was alone in Study No. 6.

The other fellows were all on the war-path, going up and down like lions, so to speak, seeking what they might devour.

They had a little luck.

A shilling here, a sixpence there, twopences and threepences, were gathered in. But the principal part of the sum required was beyond their borrowing powers.

The only member of the little party who was not worried was Skimpole. Skimpole had shut himself up in his study to make plans for the disposal of the twenty pounds when the cheque was cashed. Socialistic schemes were fitting through his mighty brain. And that mighty brain could not be brought down to such trifles as were worrying Tom Merry & Co. at that moment.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was thinking it out with wrinkled brow. The swell of St. Jim's felt that it was up to him. He was accustomed to looking after his chums in a fatherly sort of way. True, Study No. 6 did not receive his fatherly way in an appreciative spirit. But Arthur Augustus felt that it was up to him. As a fellow of tact and judgment, he realised that if he didn't get the fellows out of this awful scrape they would never get out.

The chums of the School House naturally prided themselves on the fact that their word was their bond. Dame Taggles had been promised her money that evening. As Skimmy had failed them, they had to raise it, though the skies fell. Arthur Augustus thought it out. The determined frown upon his aristocratic brow seemed to indicate that he had thought of a way.

"It's wotten," he murmured. "A fellah must be careful of his dig! But honah comes first; our personal honah is involved in this mattah. I am resolved!"

That settled it.

Having made his resolution, whatever it was, Arthur Augustus proceeded to put it into execution. For the next quarter of an hour he was packing things into a large cricket-bag. With the bag in his hand he quitted the study. He dodged quickly out of the School House and made his way to the woodshed; the door of the woodshed closed upon him, and he disappeared from human ken.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. were still on the trail. They had agreed to gather at six to compare notes. As six boomed out from the clock-tower the crowd of juniors met in the quad outside the School House.

Tom Merry held out his cap.

A few shillings, several sixpences, and a little shower of coppers fell into it from all sides.

Tom Merry counted up the cash. "Six-and-six," he said. "No; there's a threepenny-bit—six-and-nine! Six-and-nine added to seven-and-nine makes fourteen-and-six. That leaves fifteen-and-six wanted to make up thirty bob."

"We've dried up everybody," said Blake dismally.

"Where's Gussy? Gussy hasn't turned up. Perhaps Gussy's made a raid somewhere," said Dig hopefully.

"Not likely!"

"We've got to get the rest somehow," grunted Lowther. "We can't fail to keep our word to Mrs. Taggles. Blow that ass Skimpole!"

"Hallo! What the dickens is that?"

The unmelodious strains of a German concertina resounded through the quadrangle of St. Jim's.

The juniors stared at the queer figure that came towards the School House.

It was a nigger minstrel.

Apparently the minstrel did not know that strolling players were not admitted within the gates of St. Jim's. He was evidently there to give a performance, in full war-paint—striped trousers and jacket, white waistcoat, black face, and broad-brimmed silk hat complete. He drew terrific strains from the cheap concertina as he sawed with it. If he was playing a tune it was unrecognisable.

"Hallo!" called out Tom Merry. "You'd better clear off. Minstrels are not allowed in the ground, chappy!"

Tom's idea was to give the stroller a friendly warning before Taggles, the porter, dropped on him and turned him out. The juniors themselves had no objection to seeing a nigger minstrel performance, though at that moment they would have been unable to contribute coppers when the hat was passed round.

But the nigger took no notice of Tom Merry. He sawed away with the concertina, and the racking strains drew a crowd from all sides.

"My only Aunt Jane!" shouted Wally of the Third.

"Here's Uncle Bones! Give us a jig, uncle!"

"Play up, Sambo!" roared Jameson.

"Go it, Snowball!"

"Hurrah!"

A numerous crowd speedily gathered round the minstrel as he sawed away at the concertina. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked out of his study window, and called to the performer.

"Clear off!"

The concertina sawed away with unmelodious music. Kildare was unheeded. Taggles, the porter, came out of his lodge, and stared at the nigger in astonishment and indignation.

"My heye!" said Taggles. "My heye! I never see that rascal come in! I'll soon shift 'im hout!"

And Taggles rushed upon the scene to "shift" the coloured gentleman. But the crowd wedged together round him, grinning, and kept Taggles off.

"Lemme pase, young gentlemen!" yelled Taggles.

"I've got to turn that feller hout!"

"Leave him alone!" shouted Wally. "Let him give us a song. Go it, Uncle Bones! Give us a song!"

"Keep back, Taggy! He's just going to begin."

"On the bawl, Sambo!"

Sambo started. And when he started there was a gasp from Tom Merry & Co. For this is how the nigger minstrel started:

"Way down upon the Swanee wivah,

Fah, fah away!

That's whah my heart is turnin' evah;

That's whah the old folks stay!

All the world is sad and dweawy,

Eweywhah I woam!

Oh, dorkies, how my heart grows weawy,

Fah from the old folks at home!"

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"Gussy!" shrieked Blake.

"Oh, my only hat, Gussy!" sobbed Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no mistaking the unmistakable accent of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It could have been recognised anywhere. It was, as Blake had said, an accent that could be cut with a cheese-knife. And now they looked at Uncle Bones more closely, the juniors could recognise the nigger minstrel "clobber" they used in their amateur concert performances.

There was a general gurgling from the whole crowd. Taggles stood thunderstruck. Kildare almost fell out of his window.

And the nigger minstrel sang on:

"Come and kiss me, honey—come and kiss me, do!"

Honey, deah, I love but you!

Of all the coons there'll be none as true,

As I will be, my deah, to you.

So kiss me, honey—kiss me do, do, do!

Oh, kiss me, honey, honey, do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him a copper!" shrieked Wally. "Give Gussy a copper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton came striding out of the House. The crowd made way for him. They could not sheer him off as they sheered off Taggles. The Housemaster fixed his eyes upon the nigger minstrel. He had not heard his voice yet.

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed the Housemaster. "You are not allowed inside the grounds. Kindly go at once!"

"Weally, sir, I twust you will allow a poor stwollin' playah to give a little performance to the young gentlemen."

Mr. Railton almost fell down as he heard Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice proceeding from the nigger minstrel. He gazed speechlessly at the black face.

"I am weally not doin' any harm, sir," pursued the minstrel. "I twust I may give a little performance, sir, in the interests of chawity. I want to help somebody who is vevy hard up—in fact, quite on the wocks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy!" stuttered Mr. Railton at last—"D'Arcy of the Fourth! Is it possible? What does this ridiculous masquerade mean? How dare you?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! This is no laughing matter!" thundered the Housemaster. "D'Arcy, how dare you disguise yourself in this ridiculous manner, and make a disturbance in the quadrangle?"

"Oh, cwums!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Follow me to my study!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "This is unheard of! I shall punish you most severely! Follow me at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The nigger minstrel, with a dismayed expression upon his black face, followed the angry Housemaster into the School House. A wild yell of merriment followed him. For the moment even Tom Merry & Co. had forgotten their financial troubles. They were almost in hysterics.

CHAPTER 8.

All Through Gussy!

JACK BLAKE wiped his eyes quite weakly.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy!" gurgled Lowther. "Gussy! This is why he disappeared! This is Gussy's way of raising the wind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he's raised Railton instead!" gasped Tom Merry. "Poor old Gussy! Oh, dear! He will be the death of me!"

"Let's go and bail him out!" exclaimed Blake. "Railton thinks he's done it for a trick. If we own up about the famine in cash, he may let him off lightly. He will see that he's only a silly idiot then."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums hurried off to the Housemaster's study, still gurgling. Arthur Augustus' extraordinary method of attempting to raise the wind almost overcame them. They felt that if the matter were explained to Mr. Railton he might deal more lightly with the swell of St. Jim's. Mr. Railton was a good-tempered man, as a rule—though he had not looked very good-tempered when he spotted Arthur Augustus in his nigger minstrel rig.

Tom Merry tapped discreetly at the door, and opened it. The juniors filled the doorway as Tom stepped in. Mr. Railton glanced round angrily. He had selected his stoniest case already.

"Kindly leave my study, all of you!" he snapped. "D'Arcy, hold out your hand! I am going to punish you in the most exemplary manner for this amazing freak! Such a prank is unheard of—unheard of! I am astounded at such impertinence!"

"Weally, Mr. Wailton—"

"Hold out your hand at once!"

"May I speak a word, sir?" said Tom Merry meekly.

"I—I want to explain—"

"Do you know anything about this extraordinary freak?" exclaimed the Housemaster angrily.

"Ye-es, sir!"

"If you were a party to it, I shall punish you also!"

"Ahem! The—fact is, sir, it—it was through you, sir—"

"What?"

Tom Merry jumped at the thunder in the Housemaster's voice. But he stuck manfully to his guns.

"If you'll let me explain, sir—"

"I am waiting for you to do so," snapped Mr. Railton.

"You—you see, sir, Skimmy—I mean Skimpole—had a winking cheque this afternoon. He was standing a big feed out of it, sir, and it came to thirty bob. Then, after the feed, the silly ass—I—I mean Skimmy, that is, Skimpole—told us that you hadn't given him the money for the cheque—"

"That is the case. But what has that to do with this extraordinary prank of D'Arcy's?"

"The feed had to be paid for, sir, and we were all stony. I—I mean short of money—"

"We've been borrowing all we could, sir," said Blake, taking up the tale.

"But we couldn't come near it," said Lowther.

"And Dame Taggles was promised the cash for this evening—"

"went on Manners."

"And so you see, sir—"

"That ass—I—I mean Gussy—that is, D'Arcy, did this. I suppose he did it to—raise the wind, sir. The silly chump—I mean it was very thoughtless—"

"But he didn't mean any harm, sir—he never does!"

"A chap can't help being a duffer, sir—"

"It was all through Skimmy not getting the cash for his cheque—"

Mr. Railton waved his hand for silence as all these explanations came upon him at once. However, he began to comprehend.

"D'Arcy!" he rapped out.

"Yaas, sir."

"Did you adopt this utterly ridiculous garb of a negro minstrel in order to obtain a collection of coppers?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Oh, by gum!" gasped Tom Merry. "I thought he did, sir. I'm sorry. I took it for granted—"

"Then what on earth did he do it for?" murmured Blake.

"You did not, D'Arcy?"

"Wathah not, sir."

"Then why did you do it?"

"To get a collection of silvah, sir," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Wha-a-t?"

"A collection of coppers would have been of no use, sir. I twusted that, by givin' a weally good song and tune, I should be able to wope in a collection of tannahs and shillin's, sir."

"You are a very stupid boy, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Your object, then, was to make a collection of money?"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE LAST HOPE!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
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"Yaas, sir."

"And do you consider that a proper and dignified proceeding?"

"As a mattah of fact, sir, that wrowwied me vewy much. A fellah must considah his dig. But you see, sir these fellahs were in a feahful fix, and they hadn't the bwains to get out of it themselves. I wegard it as bein' my dutay to look aftah them—they are always gettin' into swapes. I considah—"

"Dry up, you ass!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

Mr. Railton's frown had relaxed considerably. Indeed, it was not easy to keep frowning while his eyes rested upon the swell of St. Jim's with his black face and red-striped nigger garments.

"It appears, Merry, that you have incurred a debt that was to be discharged from Skimpole's cheque?"

"Yes, sir. It was Skimpole's feed," explained Tom Merry. "He never thought about havin' to wait till the cheque was passed, and—and we didn't, either. We ordered the stuff, and now we can't pay for it, unless we—we raise the tin."

"It was a question of honah, sir. Honah comes befoah dig!"

Mr. Railton's mouth twitched.

"I am glad to see you have very correct ideas on that subject, D'Arcy; but to disguise yourself as a negro minstrel, and give a ridiculous performance in the quadrangle, to raise a few shillings from the boys, is—is—is—"

"I was goin' to give them value for their money, sir—a weally good song and dance. I hadn't got to the dance when you intewwupted me."

The juniors almost yelled. The idea of Arthur Augustus doing a nigger-minstrel dance in the quadrangle was almost too much for them. Mr. Railton gave a hurried cough.

"You are a ridiculous boy, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove!"

"I forbid you ever to do anything of the kind again, and you will take two hundred lines."

"Vewy well, sir. Bnt, undah the cires—"

"As for the debt you boys have incurred," said Mr. Railton, "I will advance you the money to pay Mrs. Taggles, and will stop it from the money due to Skimpole when it comes, if it does come—otherwise from your allowances. How much is it?"

"Thirty bob—aheem, shillings, sir!" said Tom Merry delighted.

The Housemaster laid down a sovereign and a half-sovereign, which were promptly captured by Tom Merry, and the juniors quitted the study, after thanking the kind-hearted gentleman warmly.

"You had better go and clean yourself at once, D'Arcy," said Mr. Railton; "and if ever you appear in that ridiculous costume again—"

He left the rest to the imagination of Arthur Augustus, and closed the door.

"What a blessed brick!" exclaimed Blake. "We can go round handin' back those tuppences and threepences now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah; I wegard Wailton as a bwick!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I'll cut off and pay Mrs. Taggles," said Tom Merry. "You fellows can distribute all those blessed tanners and tuppences to the owners. We shan't want 'em now. What a giddy relief!"

"Yaas; I am vewy glad that I have saved the situation."

"You!"

"Yaas, wathah! If I had not been the means of callin' Mr. Wailton's attention to the mattah he would not have advanced the cash. I wegard it as quite cleah that I have got you fellahs out of this swape. Undah the cires, I am quite willin' to do the two hundred lines."

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"Oh!"

"You fellahs can always wely on me. Whenever you are in a difficut posish you cannot do bettah than leave it to a fellah of tact and judgment."

And Arthur Augustus walked away, leaving the juniors staring. They had been under the impression that they owed their escape from the dreadful scrape to Mr. Railton. Arthur Augustus, however, evidently put it down to his own account.

Tom Merry cut off at once to the tuckshop to settle that troublesome account. The rest of the Co. made a general visit to their creditors, returning the small sums that had been borrowed on all sides. Arthur Augustus proceeded to the dormitory to clean up. Naturally, he did not go alone. Half the School House followed him, grinning. In the dormitory they urged him to do a song and dance. They offered him halfpennies, and Wally even offered him a biscuit if he would sit up and beg. Arthur Augustus was glad when he had finished cleaning and changing, and could escape to Study No. 6 and lock himself in.

CHAPTER 9.

Hard Cash.

SKIMPOLE'S windfall had caused great commotion and excitement, but the disastrous result of Skimpole's feed, on the strength of the wonderful windfall, had caused belief in that windfall to ebb. A cheque was a cheque, of course, but most of the juniors declared that they wanted to see the colour of the money before they hailed Skimmy as a giddy genius. And the money seemed a long time coming.

The belief gained ground that there had been some mistake about the cheque, and that the cash was not coming at all. Tom Merry & Co. made up their minds that the thirty shillings advanced by Mr. Railton would have to be stopped out of their own allowances. They did not mind that very much: they had had the feed, anyway. But they told Skimmy what they thought of him, his inventions, his "Skimmer of the Skies," and his brains in the plainest of English.

Skimpole only blinked at them solemnly, and told them that the money would come along in a few days. To which they replied disrespectfully:

"Bow-wow!"

A few days later, however, Mr. Railton called Skimpole of the Shell into his study after morning lessons. Tom Merry & Co. observed it, and they were interested once more. They guessed that it meant news of the cheque. As the Housemaster's door closed behind Skimpole a crowd began to gather in the passage.

Mr. Railton regarded Skimpole with some curiosity as the genius of the Shell stood blinking by his study table. Mr. Railton could not understand it. He had always regarded Skimpole as a duffer. And now—

"Skimpole, I am glad to say that the cheque has passed the bankers, and I have received the money for you."

"Yes, sir," said Skimpole.

Skimmy was not in the slightest degree surprised. He had expected it.

"I received the sum of twenty pounds," said Mr. Railton. "I understand from Tom Merry that you were to pay the thirty shillings due to Mrs. Taggles, which I have advanced."

"Quite so, sir. I had forgotten it, but it is quite correct."

"Then I have eighteen pounds ten shillings to hand you, Skimpole."

"Exactly, sir!"

"There is the money."

Mr. Railton laid three five-pound notes, three sovereigns, and a half-sovereign on the table. Skimpole collected them up carelessly, and shoved them into his pocket.

"Thank you, sir! I suppose you will

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"I have great pleasure in presenting you with this sovereign, my dear Taggles." "Oh, lor'!" "Pray do not spend it in drink, my dear Taggles," said Skimpole, beaming at him. "Under my system the drink traffic will be abolished." "Mad!" murmured Taggles. "Mad as a 'uter or a March 'are." (See Chapter 9.)

not mind cashing other cheques when I receive them? That one was only an instalment."

"Certainly," said Mr. Railton. "To avoid possible errors I shall pass the cheques through the bank before cashing them. Skimpole, I congratulate you! You have certainly shown remarkable cleverness for a boy of your age! It is clear that my opinion of you was not a correct one. Ahem! I should advise you to be careful with so much money. You had better ask your father to take charge of it."

"I was thinking of devoting it to doing good, sir," said Skimpole. "There are many unfortunate poor people in the world, sir, especially in war-time, and I have been looking forward to relieving distress with this money."

"My dear boy," said the Housemaster, "that is very generous, but—certainly I have no fault to find with such an intention—but pray be careful that you are not imposed upon, and that it is genuine distress that you relieve."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

Skimpole quitted the study, and Mr. Railton rubbed his chin very thoughtfully as the door closed behind him. Skimpole's heart was certainly all right, whatever might be said of his head. Money talks, as the proverb declares, yet the Housemaster still found it difficult to believe that Skimpole was a genius.

In the passage Skimpole found about fifty fellows waiting for him. They all greeted him with questions:

"Well?"

"Cheque a wrong 'un—what?"

"Been licked?"

"All a jape?"

Skimpole blinked at them in surprise.

"My dear fellows, the cheque was all right. Did I not tell you so?"

"Where's the cash, then?"

"I have it in my pocket."

"In—in—in your pocket?"

"Yes."

"Show it up," said Gore sceptically.

"Yaas, wathah! Let's see it, Skimmay."

"Certainly, my dear fellows!" Skimpole dived his hand into his pocket, and it came out empty. He had dived it into the wrong pocket. Skimmay had a genius' full allowance of absent-mindedness. "Dear me! The money does not seem to be here!" said Skimmay, in wonder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly well knew it wasn't," said Gore.

"It is very extraordinary! Mr. Railton certainly handed it to me—"

"Gammon!"

"Ah, it is perhaps in the other pocket!" said Skimmy, as if struck by a bright idea. "Yes, indeed; here it is." The juniors stared as Skimmy showed a fist full of banknotes and notes. There was a buzz of astonishment.

"I have paid the thirty shillings for the feed, Tom Merry," said Skimpole, blinking at the captain of the Shell. "As I told you, there was no cause for alarm. I have now eighteen pounds ten shillings. If any of you fellows are in need of money, you have only to say so. As a sincere Socialist, of course, I do not regard this money as belonging to me personally. Every person in need of money has a right to ask it from any other person who possesses it."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"It is a great pleasure to me," said Skimpole, his benevolent eyes beaming through his glasses, "to have an opportunity of putting my principles into practice. I shall immediately change all these banknotes into gold and silver, and I hope that anybody in need of money will come to my study and help himself."

"Gwreat Scott!"

"Oh, rather!" yelled Mellish of the Fourth. "Lend me a quid, Skimmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Certainly, my dear Mellish!"

Mellish almost fell down as Skimpole handed him a sovereign. That even the most Socialistic Socialist would carry out his principles to that extent seemed incredible. But Skimmy was inexperienced in the ways of the world, and he was not yet aware that it is uncommon to hold Socialistic beliefs and a comfortable fortune at one and the same time. Principles of that kind are generally exemplified in all kinds of books excepting cheque-books.

But Skimpole was in deadly earnest. Mellish's thin fingers closed on the sovereign.

"You—you mean it?" he stuttered.

"Certainly, my dear Mellish. You have as much right to that sovereign as I have to your bicycle if I should need it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let me catch you after my bike, that's all!" murmured Mellish, as he beat a retreat with the sovereign.

Mellish was not a Socialist.

"A quid for me?" chorried Levison.

"Here you are, my dear Levison!"

"Oh, my hat! I'll pay you this when Socialism comes in, Skimmy, out of my share in the Bank of England!" said Levison.

"Very well, Levison."

"I say, gimme a quid," yelled Piggott of the Third.

Skimpole cheerfully handed Piggott a sovereign, and the young rascal scuttled off with it. Skimpole's windfall was going.

"Would you like some money, Tom Merry?"

"Ha, ha! No, thanks!"

"Would you like some, Talbot? You sold your bike the other day. If you would like to repurchase it, here is plenty of money," said Skimpole.

Talbot chuckled.

"Thanks awfully, Skimmy; I won't rob you."

The juniors were yelling with laughter. At this rate, Skimpole's windfall was not likely to last him long. Most of the fellows, of course, refused to rob him, but there were some like Levison and Mellish and Piggott who had few scruples on that point. Skimpole was likely to be in need soon of another instalment.

A happy crowd marched Skimpole off to the tuckshop, where he changed his banknotes for gold and silver, and stood a new feed in celebration of his new riches. Dame Taggles benefited to the extent of another thirty shillings. Several fellows extracted little loans, and when Skimmy emerged from the tuckshop, his windfall was reduced to twelve pounds.

But Skimmy did not mind. He met Taggles, the porter, in the quadrangle, and greeted him genially.

"My dear Taggles—"

"Hallo!" said Taggles.

"I have frequently heard you remark, my dear Taggles, that you are a very hard-working man," said Skimpole, blinking benevolently at the surprised porter. "It is true that I have never seen you do any hard work, but—"

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I should be far from doubting your word. Owing to the slenderness of my financial resources, my dear Taggles, I have hitherto been unable to gratify you with any considerable gratuity."

"My heye!" murmured Taggles.

"So I have great pleasure, at the present moment, in presenting you with this sovereign, my dear Taggles."

"Oh, lor'!"

"Pray do not spend it in drink, my dear Taggles," said Skimpole, beaming at him. "Under Socialism the drink traffic will be abolished."

Skimpole ambled away, leaving Taggles staring dazedly at the gleaming sovereign in his horny fist.

"Mad!" murmured Taggles. "Mad as a 'atter or a March are!"

And it is much to be regretted that Taggles, in spite of Skimpole's warning, expended most of that sovereign in support of the drink traffic.

CHAPTER 10.

Riches Take Unto Themselves Wings!

TALBOT stared when he came into the study at tea-time.

Skimpole was there, with his nose and spectacles buried in a huge volume, in deep and entranced study of the lucubrations of Herr Dummkopf, translated into poly-syllabic English by the celebrated Professor Loosetop.

On the table was a flower-pot.

In the flower-pot was a heap of money. Half-crowns and two-shilling pieces, shillings and sixpences, filled the flower-pot to the brim. And gummed to the side of the flower-pot was a paper, which bore the inscription:

"PLEASE TAKE SOME!"

Talbot stared at the flower-pot, and stared at Skimpole. The genius of the Shell blinked up at him.

"What on earth's that?" demanded Talbot.

Skimpole smiled.

"That is my latest idea, my dear Talbot. I think it is excellent. You see, some of the fellows who are hard up do not care to say so. I have thought of the excellent idea of putting the money there, so that anybody who wants any can come and take it. I have changed it all into small silver for that purpose. Every fellow will be able to take exactly what he needs. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see any cause for laughter, my dear Talbot. It is an easy method of distributing the money, and it saves me a great deal of trouble personally."

"And how long do you think it will last, at that rate?" gasped Talbot.

"That is a matter of indifference to me, my dear fellow. When I need any money I help myself from the pot, the same as the other fellows. Of course, I have as much right to the money as anyone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish of the Fourth looked in.

"Skimmy, old man—"

"Yes, my dear Mellish."

"Piggott says you've got a free supply of cash here."

Skimpole waved a bony hand towards the flower-pot.

"Help yourself, my dear Mellish."

"Oh, my only hat!"

Mellish helped himself. He took a fistful of half-crowns and departed chuckling.

"Oh, you ass, Skimmy!" said Talbot. "Don't you see that only the unscrupulous rotters will collar your cash? The other fellows won't."

But Skimpole was deep again in Herr Dummkopf's wonderful book, and he did not reply.

Talbot went into the Terrible Three's study to tea. Tom Merry & Co. yelled when they were told of the flower-pot.

While they were having tea, they could hear almost incessant footsteps in the passage, coming and going. Skimpole's flower-pot was evidently doing a roaring trade.

Unscrupulous fellows like Levison and Mellish helped themselves without the slightest intention of reimbursing Skimpole; they took the amateur Socialist at his word, and helped him to live up to his principles.

Other fellows helped themselves to loans, with the intention of repaying them; though it was probable that some memories would be short afterwards.

When Talbot came back to do his preparation, he found an empty flower-pot on the table.

"Where's the tin, Skimpy?" he asked.

"Eh! In the flower-pot, my dear Talbot."

"It's empty."

"Dear me! Then it has all gone," said Skimpole.

"And you don't mind?" grinned Talbot.

"Why should I mind, my dear fellow?"

"Ha ha ha!"

Talbot cleared off the flower-pot and sat down to his prep. That evening there was a reign of plenty in the School House. Fags who had helped themselves from Skimpole's supply held high revel.

And the general wish was that Skimpy would soon get another instalment on his invention.

Now that the cash had really materialised, the fellows were willing to give Skimpy credit for being a real genius; and a large number of them were willing to lend him their full assistance in getting rid of the money.

Quite an army of them, in fact, were looking forward to the next instalment.

Skimpole, indeed, appeared to be the most indifferent of all. On the day following his windfall, he was in his usual state of shortness of cash.

After lessons, Tom Merry & Co. found him outside the tuckshop, going through his pockets with a very thoughtful air. Tom Merry had had a remittance that day from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and so the Co. were "on their legs" again. The captain of the Shell gave Skimpy a friendly slap on the shoulder, which made the weedy youth stagger.

"Stony, Skimpy?"

"Yow! Oh, yes, my dear Merry! I do not appear to have any money left," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "I have asked Mellish for a small loan, but he is unfortunately out of funds also. I suggested that I should sell his bicycle—"

"You—sell Mellish's bike?"

"Why not?"

"Ha, ha! What did Mellish say?"

"His reply was quite rude, Merry. I do not know why, but he grew quite excited, and said several rude things. He doesn't appear to understand Socialism at all. Of course, Socialism implies give and take. Mellish appears to be under the delusion that it is all take and no give—a very common error, I fear. However, I hope to enlighten Mellish's mind some day. Meanwhile, I have no money."

"Then it's lucky I have," said Tom Merry. "Come in, Skimpy; one good turn deserves another."

"My dear Merry, I am very glad to have converted you to my principles—"

"But you haven't—only to the extent of a feed," grinned Tom Merry. "If you start selling my bike I shall slaughter you!"

However, the good Skimpole had a good feed, and over the feed he explained to the Terrible Three what he intended to do with his next instalment.

"I shall bring general joy to the hearts of the poor," said Skimpole, beaming. "You may have seen certain ragged persons hanging about the lanes—persons who are so poor that they cannot even afford to wash themselves. Well, I am going to seek them out, and ask them to come here—"

"Here!" ejaculated Lowther.

"Certainly! I suppose I have a right to extend the hospitality of the school to my poorer brothers?"

"Oh my hat!"

"I am thinking of a mass meeting in the quadrangle," said Skimpole enthusiastically. "I shall make a round of the countryside, and tell every poor person I meet to come here. Then I shall make a speech to them, explaining that they owe their sufferings to the defects of the social system, and urge them to work their hardest to secure the nationalisation of the land. Then, as proof of sincerity, I shall distribute all my money to them. Of course, poor people cannot be expected to believe you unless you practise what you preach."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is a mistake of many social reformers," said Skimpole, with a shake of the head. "In the vacations, I

have sometimes attended Socialist meetings. I have seen very fat and well-fed lecturers arrive in cabs and expensive clothes. The effect upon a poor audience is deplorable. It makes them suspect that many social reformers are merely unscrupulous men, on the make."

"Does it really? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, it is a mistaken impression. At least, I hope so. I confess that in the Socialist movement many mistakes are made," said Skimpole sadly. "I think it is a mistake for a celebrated Socialist poet to sell his poems, specially addressed to working-men, at a guinea each. It leads working-men to suspect that he desires mere money."

"Go on!"

"However, I shall not make that mistake. After addressing my meeting, I shall give to each according to his need, and, of course, shall not bother about retaining any filthy lucre for myself. By that means I shall convince them of my sincerity, and shall enlist their aid in the great work to be done—the great work of freeing humanity from the clutches of the plutocrats."

"Have another ginger-pop?"

"For reflect, my dear friends—suppose there were two men on an island—"

The Terrible Three fed.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "I wish fellows would not walk away when I am speaking to them! Very many of them do it—very many. I suppose it is absent-mindedness."

The idea of Skimpole's forthcoming meeting of all the beggars and tramps he could collect in the quadrangle at St. Jim's tickled the chums of the Shell immensely. It was likely to be an interesting meeting, but they could not help thinking that it might mean trouble for Skimpy.

CHAPTER 11.

Skimpole's Meeting.

"**W**HEREFORE that beaming brow, oh sublime Skimpy?"

Monty Lowther addressed that humorous question to Herbert Skimpole about a week later. It was a half-holiday, and the Terrible Three were going down to cricket practice when they met the genius of the Shell. Skimpole's benevolent face was truly beaming.

"I am holding my meeting to-day," Skimpy explained.

"Oh, my hat!"

"The second instalment came—as I think I mentioned to you that it would—and to-day I have received the cash for the cheque," said Skimpole. "I am now going forth to collect an audience of the humble and down-trodden—"

"So you've got another twenty quid in your pocket?"

"Yes, my dear Lowther."

"Why not put it in the bank, Skimpy?" suggested Tom Merry. "You'll find it useful some time, you know."

Skimpole shook his head.

"I have my duty to do as a sincere Socialist, my dear Merry. I hope you will attend my meeting. I am now going forth—"

"Have you got permission?"

"Permission for what, my dear fellow?"

"To hold a merry meeting in the quad," grinned Lowther.

"Permission is not necessary. The quadrangle is, in point of fact, national property—all private land being held in defiance of the law."

"Oh, dear! But the Head—"

"If the Head should interfere, I should be compelled to explain that I regard him as a usurper."

"You—you—funny ass! You'll get a flogging!"

"I am prepared to suffer for my principles. The meeting will take place at five o'clock in the quad. Every poor person I meet on my way I shall urge to come and shall promise him financial relief. I have no doubt that I shall get a good audience."

"It depends on the number of tramps who happen to be in this part of Sussex just now," chuckled Lowther.

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"For goodness' sake, Skimpy, don't be such a blessed ass!" urged Tom Merry. "You'll get into an awful row!"

Skimpole blinked at him pityingly.

"You do not understand, Merry. The cause needs martyrs. I am perfectly prepared to be a martyr."

And Skimpole ambled away to the gates. The Terrible Three gazed at one another.

"Well, it's lucky he's prepared to be a martyr," murmured Lowther, "for certainly he will be one if he holds a meeting of tipsy ragamuffins in the quad. Well, we can't stop him, so let's get down to the cricket."

And the chums of the Shell got down to the cricket. Tom Merry & Co. were very keen on cricket about this time as the match with Greyfriars was approaching. On the cricket field they soon forgot all about Skimpole.

They came off the field and adjourned to the tuckshop for ginger-beer about five o'clock. They were enjoying their ginger-pop when the voice of Taggles was heard.

As a rule, the voice of Taggles could hardly be heard from the lodge to the tuckshop. But the voice of Taggles was now raised in wrath, and, indeed, resembled the roar of a bull of Bashan.

"Get hout! What blessed cheek coming in 'ere! My heye! Har you gettin' hout, or har you waiting to be pitched hout?"

"Hallo! That sounds like a row," remarked Monty Lowther; and the juniors, naturally interested in a row, hurried out of the tuckshop and made for the gates.

Taggles, the porter, was confronting three tattered, dirty, and half-tipsy tramps who had just come in at the gates. The trio were about the roughest specimens the St. Jim's juniors had ever seen. All three of them had been drinking, and they looked quarrelsome. And they came rolling into the quad as if it belonged to them.

Taggles was red with rage as he confronted them with a big stick in his hand. For those three bery ruffians to invade the quadrangle was naturally exasperating to the porter, though the task of throwing them all out together was probably a little beyond the old gentleman's powers.

"The 'orrid beasts!" howled Taggles. "Coming in 'ere—drunk as fiddlers! My heye! Will you get hout?"

"We was asked 'ere," roared one of the three—"was invited 'ere—and we're coming in, see! You get hout of the way!"

"Houtside, I say!"

"Land him one, Snookey!"

The gentleman addressed as Snookey rushed at Taggles, and roared as the porter's stick came down. The next moment Taggles was picked up and tossed bodily into his lodge. Snookey & Co. came on triumphantly.

"Bai Jove! We'd bethah thwow those boundahs out, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry gasped.

"It's Skimpole's meeting!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The cry is still they come," chortled Lowther. "Look at that lot!"

Half a dozen more ragged specimens came in at the gates. They blinked round them, and followed Snookey & Co. into the quad. Taggles remained in his lodge. He was not quite equal to dealing with this invasion.

The juniors retreated to the School House. It was no business of theirs to interfere, and, indeed, the ruffianly crowd that was coming in did not look safe to interfere with.

Skimpole had evidently had great success in making a collection. Two or three hours scouting had unearthed quite an army of tramps.

More and more came in at the gates of all sorts and ages and sizes, in all states of dirt, tatters, and drink.

Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was the first master to spot them. He came forth from the New House like a lion from his den.

"What is the meaning of this?" he shouted. "Go away at once!"

Snookey rolled up to him.

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"Who you torkin' to?" he demanded.

"My man—ahem!" Mr. Ratcliff backed away. "No violence—no violence—I—I shall telephone for the police! I order you to go away!"

"Horder your grandfather!" said Snookey. "I been asked 'ere to visit a young gent, and I been promised money for my trouble. I ain't going without it, not for any old cove in a nightgown—see!"

Mr. Ratcliff's gown was certainly not a nightgown; perhaps Snookey was being humorous. He proceeded to shake a large, knotty, and exceedingly dirty fist under Mr. Ratcliff's nose, and the New House master retreated incontinently into his House and rushed to the telephone.

Skimpole of the Shell came in with the last batch. By the time Skimpole arrived, there were forty or fifty tramps in the quadrangle, most of them at least half tipsy, and all of them noisy and excited. Mr. Railton came out of the School House in a state of amazement.

"What are you doing here?" he exclaimed.

"It's all right," chirped Skimpole. "These gentlemen have come here at my invitation."

"What!" roared the Housemaster.

"I am about to address a meeting, sir. Gentlemen—"

"Skimpole!"

"Really, sir—"

"Come into the House at once, Skimpole—or, rather, I will fetch you."

"'Ands off the young gent!" bellowed Snookey. "He ain't paid up yet!"

"'Ands off, old gent!"

"Let 'im alone!"

Half a dozen bery fellows interposed between Mr. Railton and Skimpole, and the Housemaster was hustled back, gasping.

Tom Merry & Co. rushed to his aid. They were not going to see their Housemaster handled. But Mr. Railton waved them back.

"Stop! Stop at once! Go back!"

"Weally, Mr. Wailton—"

"Go back, I say! Obey me at once! Now, you men, whoever you are, I request you to leave these premises immediately."

"Yah! Bah! Shut up!"

"Otherwise I shall telephone for the police."

"Yah! Booh!"

Mr. Railton went into the House. The Head, in a state of great astonishment, met him in the hall.

"Whatever has happened, Mr. Railton?" Dr. Holmes exclaimed.

"A—a—a crowd of ruffians have invaded the quadrangle, sir. They—they appear to have been asked here by that utterly absurd boy, Skimpole, and they refuse to go."

"Bless my soul!"

"I had better telephone for the police, I think."

"Yes, yes, certainly!"

The Head looked out of the doorway, over the steps crowded with grinning juniors. But he did not venture out to tackle that dreadful-looking crowd. Skimpole, heedless of everything but the business in hand, was already mounted on the stone-step of the fountain in the quad, addressing the meeting.

CHAPTER 12. Trouble for Skimpy!

"GENTLEMEN—"
"Ear, 'ear!"

"Pray excuse me for addressing you by that obsolete and ridiculous expression. I should rather have said, brothers and comrades—"

"Wot's he torkin' about, Snookey?"

"Blowed if I know, Mick!"

"Where's the rhino? There was going to be some rhino. We ain't come 'ere for nothing, I know that!"

"Comrades and brothers," pursued Skimpole, blinking at them, "I am about to address you on the subject of Socialism."

"Wot's that, Snookey?"
 "Some bally rot," said Snookey. "Wot I want to know is, where's the rhino? I'm thirsty."

"Same 'ere."
 "Where's the rhino?" roared a dozen voices.
 "Gentlemen—I mean comrades—we will begin at the beginning. Suppose there were two men on an island—"

"Where's the rhino?"
 "Look here, young shaver," roared Snookey, shaking his fist under the startled Skimpy's nose, "you said—distinct you said it—that if me and my pals was to come 'ere at five o'clock, the rhino would be 'anded out! So I says to you, says I, as one gentleman to another, where's the rhino, says I!"

"My dear friend, pray be patient. All the money I have is entirely at your service. I have twenty pounds, which will be distributed to you according to your needs. You are all welcome."

"My heye! And it out, then!"
 "He's gammoning! 'Ave him hover!"

"Scrag 'im! It's gammon!"
 "Where's the rhino?" roared Snookey threateningly.
 "But I have not yet made my speech, my dear fellow—"

"Ang your speech! Bust your speech! I can't drink your speech, can I? And I'm thirsty!"
 "You may help yourself to the water in the fountain—"

Snookey shuddered.
 "The water is free to all!" said Skimpole. "Under Socialism, all water will be nationalised. You, my dear friends, instead of looting about the lanes in a filthy and ragged condition, as at present, an eyesore to all that see you—"

"Wot?"
 "Instead of that, you will be provided with work—"

"He's mad!"
 "You will not even know the taste of intoxicating liquor. You will work, and be clean and happy, instead of being in your present revolting state—"

"Knock him over! Insulting young 'ound!"
 "You are living proofs of the defects of the present social system," went on Skimpole. "You—I believe your name is Snookey—you are offensive to the sight, and indeed offensive to the sense of smell. This is caused by—yaroooooooh!"

Snookey appeared to be fed up. He yanked Skimpole off the step of the fountain with a heavy hand, and bumped him down in the quad.

"Yah! Oh! Oh, dear! My dear friend—" gasped Skimpy.

"Where's the rhino? We ain't wasting time 'ere! If you don't 'and out the spondulics, according to promise, we'll smash yer!" roared Snookey.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear! Pray do not be violent! I assure you, my dear friends—"

"Jump on 'im!"

"Kick him!"

"Smash him!"

"Where's the rhino, you young swindler?"

Tom Merry & Co. were preparing for a charge. But, fortunately, Skimpole stemmed the tide of indignation by producing the rhino. He had intended that to come after his speech, as a dramatic finish. But the gentlemen were too impatient.

Snookey calmed down as the "rhino" was handed out. Skimpole's first windfall had disappeared quickly, but his second was gone like a flash.

There was a wild scramble of the beery, smelly, and whiskery gentlemen to clutch at the money. In about three minutes Skimpole was "stony" once more, and Snookey & Co. were making for the gates, seeking the shortest path to the Green Man to quench their thirst.

Half a dozen who had been shoved aside in the scramble

gathered round the gasping Skimpole with outstretched hands.

"And it out! You ain't going to leave me out!"
 "I ain't come 'ere for nothing! Pay up, you swindler! Fetching an honest man half a mile for nothin'!"

Skimpole blinked at them in dismay.

"My dear friends and comrades—"

"Not so much jore! 'And it out!"

"I have, unfortunately, no money left—"

"And it out!"

"It is impossible! I have given away all I had, I assure you. I beg you to be calm. Pray do not shove me—oh, dear—help—yaroooooh!"

"Rescue!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Wescue the sillay ass!"

Skimpole was in need of rescue. The exasperated gentlemen who had not had part in the sharing, were bumping him in the quad, and rolling him over, and ragging him till he was breathless and more dead than alive. The School House juniors charged, and Skimpy was dragged out of the clutches of his dear friends, brethren, and comrades.

They rushed him away to the School House, and the remnant of the meeting, with a final yell, disappeared out of the gates. And Taggles rushed promptly forth and locked the gates when the last one was gone. When the police force of Rylcombe arrived on the scene—consisting of P.-c. Crump—all was calm and bright. Which was perhaps fortunate for Police-constable Crump, for certainly he would have found it a very large order to handle nearly fifty tramps at once.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Skimpole, clinging exhaustedly to Tom Merry. "I am quite hurt! I am breathless!"

"Oh, dear!"

"You utter ass, Skimpy—"

"They seemed very impatient!" gasped Skimpy.

"They have gone, and I fear that the money may be spent in drink, as I had not time to make my speech. It is very unfortunate. I should have enlightened them on the land question, and warned them that by giving way to drink they were playing

into the hands of the capitalists. Oh, dear!"

"Skimpole!"

It was the Head's voice.

Skimpole blinked at him. To his surprise, the Head looked very angry.

"Yes, sir."

"Am I to understand, Skimpole, that you are responsible for having brought that crowd of dreadful persons within the gates of the school?" thundered the Head.

"I certainly invited them to come here, sir."

"You—you invited them?"

"Yes, sir. I intended to make them a speech, and to distribute money. They were, for some reason, so anxious about the distribution of money that they did not wait for the speech. It is very unfortunate—"

"Skimpole, you will follow me to my study—"

"Really, sir—ow!"

Skimpole was marched away with a finger and thumb, compressed like a vice upon his ear.

"Poor old Skimpy!" murmured Lowther. "He said he was ready to be a martyr; now he's going to have a first-class chance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The uthah ass!" said Arthur Augustus. "Weally, the fwithful duffah ought to be inside a lunatic asylum, you know!"

"I don't think there will be any more mass meetings in the quad," chuckled Lowther. "Poor old Skimpy!"

From the Head's study there soon proceeded sounds of anguish. Why the Head was angry Skimpole could not understand. But there was not the slightest doubt that he was angry—in fact, furious.

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

The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's was prepared to be made a martyr for his principles, but he had not anticipated the martyrdom he now went through. It was the licking of Skimmy's life.

When he crawled away from the Head's study at last the unfortunate social reformer of St. Jim's felt that the life of a sincere and enthusiastic Socialist was not worth living.

CHAPTER 13. Skimpole Sees It All!

"EXTRAORDINARY!"

Skimpole's face was extraordinary, too, as he uttered that remark.

It was the day after the second windfall. Skimmy was not expecting another instalment yet from the purchasers of his wonderful airship. But a packet, addressed to Skimpole, had arrived, and on the outside was a label, which showed that it came from the office of the "Flying Times."

It was not registered, and even if it had been it could scarcely have been supposed to contain banknotes or cheques; it was too large for that. But the juniors were very curious to know what it did contain.

They gathered round Skimpole in the common-room, and Tom Merry lent him a penknife to cut the string, and he opened the packet on the table.

A set of weird-looking plans came into view. They were the plans of Skimpole's airship.

No wonder Skimmy said it was extraordinary. After paying two instalments of twenty pounds each on his airship, they had sent his plans back. It was certainly very puzzling.

"Perhaps they want you to make some improvement, dear boy," suggested D'Arcy.

Skimpole shook his head.

"Impossible! There is no room for improvement in my airship. It is the very last word in scientific construction!"

"There's a letter," grinned Lowther. "What do they say, Skimmy?"

It was a typewritten letter on paper headed "The 'Flying Times,' Black Lion Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C." And it ran—the juniors all helping the astonished Skimpole to read it:

"Master Herbert Skimpole, St. Jim's, near Wayland, Sussex.

"Dear Master Skimpole.—We return herewith the plans you so kindly sent us. If you will make a study of the most elementary principles of mechanics, you will probably discover in the course of time that a machine, howsoever constructed, cannot be propelled without motive power. We may add that a machine constructed on the principles here depicted could not be propelled by any motive power at all, however powerful. We conclude that these plans were sent to us as a practical joke. If, however, you are serious in the matter, we advise you to begin the study of the subject before proceeding to make inventions.—Yours faithfully,
"THE 'FLYING TIMES.'"

"That's not bad advice," said Blake thoughtfully. "By the way, did you ever study the subject?"

"Genius, my dear Blake, works by inspiration. I do not need close study like many fellows with more ordinary brains. It is extraordinary. This person cannot have submitted my plans to the War Office after all. Lord Kitchener would certainly not have rejected my invention. He is a man of very superior intelligence."

"I'm not surprised at the blessed bosh coming back," remarked Tom Merry. "But what have they been paying Skimmy for? He's had forty pounds already."

"There must have been some mistake," grinned Lowther. "They've been sending Skimmy somebody else's cheques."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimmy will have to refund."

"That would be quite impossible," said Skimpole. THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 405.

"If there were a mistake I should, of course, be willing to return all the money I have left. As it amounts to only one halfpenny, however, they would probably not be satisfied."

"Probably not. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll get a letter next explaining the mistake, and asking for the giddy cheques!" chuckled Levison. "If you don't shell out they'll send a bobby."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nonsense!" said Skimpole. "I cannot believe there is a mistake. Of course, my plans being sent back is a mistake, that is evident. I shall certainly refuse to take any notice of a story of a mistake about the cheques. That is all rot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole dismissed the matter from his mighty brain. But the other fellows were very eager to know about the next communication from the "Flying Times." They felt certain that one was coming. They were right; it came that evening. Nearly every junior in the School House was deeply interested in it, much more than Skimmy appeared to be, and a whole army marched up to Skimpole's study with the letter.

"Here you are, Skimmy!"

"Open it and see if it's a writ."

Skimpole reluctantly laid down the great volume of the learned Professor Loosetop, and opened the letter.

"Read it out!" chorused the juniors. Skimpole's correspondence was a matter of general interest now. Skimmy did not want to keep it to himself, however. As a sincere Socialist, he admitted that his correspondence was as much anybody else's property as his own.

"It is extraordinary," said Skimpole. "After their returning the plans of my airship, with absurd remarks, I am not surprised, however, at anything they do."

"Sir,—It appears that two cheques, each for the sum of £20, have been forwarded to your address in error.

"Owing to the similarity of name causing confusion, two cheques intended for Mr. H. Skimpoll, the author of our serial, 'The Skimmer of the Skies,' have been sent to you.

"We find that these cheques have been passed through the bank. Mr. Skimpoll being a new contributor, his signature was unknown to the bankers, or the error would have been detected immediately. We now have these cheques, and it is evident that the signature thereon does not resemble that of our contributor, Mr. Skimpoll, in the least. This bears out Mr. Skimpoll's statement that he did not receive the cheques, did not endorse them, and did not cash them.

"Your conduct in cashing these cheques, which you must have known were not intended for you, requires explanation. We shall be happy to receive your explanation immediately, and at the same time a reimbursement for the sum of £40 sent to you in error.—Yours faithfully,
THE 'FLYING TIMES.'"

Tom Merry & Co. simply gasped. It was all explained now. "The Skimmer of the Skies," which Skimpoll had taken to be a name applied to his new airship, was the title of a serial story, apparently just beginning in the "Flying Times."

Cheques for the first and second instalments of that story had been posted, and by the addresses of Skimpole and Skimpoll getting mixed by some careless clerk, they had been posted to St. Jim's instead of to the author's address.

H. Skimpoll had inquired after the payment for his two instalments, which had led to the discovery that the cheques were not endorsed by that gentleman. Or perhaps the cheques had been returned to the office by the bankers in the usual way, and then the cashier had noted that the endorsement had not resembled the signature of H. Skimpoll. At all events, the discovery had been made, and the "Flying Times" very naturally required an explanation—and £40.

The explanation could have been furnished easily enough. Skimpole would have had no objection to explaining. But the £40 was quite another matter.

Of that handsome sum of money Skimpole had exactly one halfpenny left. It was absurd to expect either Mr. H. Skimpoll or the editor of the "Flying Times" to be satisfied with restitution to that extent.

"I say, this is rotten," said Tom Merry. "Where are you going to get forty quidlets from, Skimmy?" "I have no intention of getting them, my dear Merry. I fear that there is more in this than meets the eye. I cannot help suspecting that German influence has been used to cause the rejection of my airship. As you know, the German spy system is still very complete in this country. The waiters and chauffeurs have been interned, but wealthy German spies are still at large. It is clear to me that they have been at work here. It is an attempt to suppress my airship, probably directed from Potsdam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughing matter!" said Skimpole solemnly. "This flimsy pretence that the money was intended as payment for some absurd serial—to some probably imaginary person named Skimpoll—is evidently only an invention to conceal the fact that German influence is at work. I shall write a very severe letter to the 'Flying Times,' if—if—"

"If what?"

"If one of you fellows will lend me a stamp."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Argument was wasted on Skimpole. He was deaf to reasoning. Knowing that his airship was the very last word, the actual limit in scientific possibilities, he could only conclude that the editor of the "Flying Times" had yielded to the sunction of German gold. It was the only possible explanation, according to Skimmy.

And Skimpole sat down to write his reply, with a grinning crowd of juniors round him.

Having sealed up the remarkable epistle, and stamped it, Herbert Skimpole sallied forth to post it, leaving his study crowded with juniors in a state of hopeless hysteria.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole Does Not Object.

"WALLY wound, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave the warning.

A stranger had entered the school gates and, after a word with Taggles, started for the School House. And Tom Merry & Co. "rallied round" immediately Arthur Augustus gave the word, the swell of St. Jim's being the first to spot the visitor.

Tom Merry & Co. had debated the matter, and decided to see Skimpole through. The genius of the Shell had evidently got himself into a bad box. That the £40 had to be returned was quite certain; and Skimpole would be lucky if he did not get into trouble for endorsing cheques that did not belong to him.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped in the path of the new-comer as he approached the House, and raised his topper gracefully.

"Pway excuse me, sir," he said.

The stranger stopped. He was rather a good-looking gentleman, and seemed good-humoured.

"What is it?" he asked.

"May I inqiah whethah you have called in reference to Skimpole?"

"Yes, I have called to see a young gentleman named Herbert Skimpole, or his headmaster. I am Henry Skimpoll."

"It's all wight, deah boys, we've got him."

"Ahem! What—" began Mr. Skimpoll, somewhat surprised by that remark.

"You see, we're all Skimmay's fwinds," explained Arthur Augustus. "Skimmay is weally a born idiot, you know, and we are seain' him through."

Mr. Skimpoll laughed.

"He wrote a most extraordinary letter to my editor, in reply to a demand for the return of the money sent to him by mistake," he said. "Instead of taking legal measures, I have decided to call and see whether the matter could be amicably arranged. If Master Skimpole does not return the money, I must see his headmaster."

"That's all wight. I'll show you up to Skimmay. Come on, deah boys! It's all wight, my deah sir, we've wresolved to see Skimmay through."

Mr. Skimpoll nodded, and accompanied Arthur Augustus to Skimpole's study.

Tom Merry & Co. marched after them. They found Skimpole writing. He was busy with a letter to Lord Kitchener.

"This is Mr. Skimpoll, Skimmay," said Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Skimpoll, this is the duffah!"

"My dear D'Arcy—"

"Mr. Skimpoll has come for his forty quidlets, Skimmy," said Tom Merry.

Skimpole blinked at Mr. Skimpoll through his spectacles. He looked a little surprised. The author of "The Skimmer of the Skies" did not look like a German spy, even Skimmy had to admit that.

"So this is Skimpole," said Mr. Skimpoll, with a smile. "I trust you understand that a mistake was made, Master Skimpole. It was not intended to send you anything in payment for your invention, which, I am told, you sent to my paper. You received the cheques that should have come to me for two instalments of my story. Surely you understand that, my boy?"

Skimpole blinked at him thoughtfully.

"I am willing to accept your assurance on that point," he said. "If the editor of the 'Flying Times' really intended to reject my invention, it proves that he is a man of very low mental capacity, and so liable to make absurd mistakes. I have just looked at the latest number of the 'Flying Times,' and I find that it contains a serial story, entitled 'The Skimmer of the Skies.' This bears out my statement. I am satisfied. I do not blame you in any way. Good-evening."

"But the matter is not quite settled yet," said Mr. Skimpoll. "It is necessary to return the money sent you in error."

"Oh, the money!" said Skimpole carelessly. "You have called about that?"

"Yes."

"Dear me! What a great amount of trouble you take over a trifle! I am sorry it is not possible for me to return what remains. It may be possible to arrange—"

"But the money must be returned. You surely cannot have expended the sum of forty pounds in a fortnight, you, a schoolboy!" exclaimed Mr. Skimpoll. "I do not wish to cause you serious trouble over a trifle; if you return what remains, it may be possible to arrange—"

"I will willingly do so," said Skimpole, going through his pocket. Dear me! Where is that halfpenny? I am sure I had a halfpenny left! I must have put it somewhere, or lent it to somebody. Have I lent you a halfpenny, D'Arcy?"

"Wathah not, deah boy?"

"Or you, Merry?"

"I never borrow whacking sums like that, Skimmy."

"Ah, here it is!" Skimmy extracted the halfpenny from the lining of a pocket, and laid it on the table. "You are very welcome to this, Mr. Skimpoll. I wish the sum were larger, as you appear to be very keen about money. However, such as it is, you are very welcome to it. Pray take it. Good-bye!"

Mr. Skimpoll looked fixedly at the genius of the Shell. Skimpole, quite out of patience, sat down and went on with his important letter.

"Then I must see the headmaster," said Mr. Skimpoll.

"I am afraid that this boy is not in his right senses."

"Yaas, he's quite sane, exceptin' that he is a Socialist, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway don't wowwy the headmastah. We have all made up our minds to see Skimmay through. We are goin' to pay the money—somehow."

"Ahem!"

"You see, sir, Skimmy would get into an awful row," said Tom Merry. "His father would have to pay it, and his father would nearly slaughter Skimmy. We've made up our minds to pay it for him. We regard it as a debt of honour. Skimmy whacked out the money when he had it, and we're going to see him through."

"I twust, sir, that you will not be hard on Skimmay," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy persuasively. "He can't

(Continued on column 2, page 27.)

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For nearly ten years now my thousands of friends have backed me up in every single undertaking, and I owe them a debt which I can never repay. But if it be true that the more one asks the more will he receive, then I need have no fears for this latest and best venture of all. I want every Magnette, every Gemite, every Popite, every Friendite, and every boy and girl who has admired Harry Wharton and his famous chums in the past, to give "The Greyfriars Herald" such a splendid leg-up that it will soar far above every other halfpenny paper yet published.

I will not speak of the tremendous disappointment it will cause me if the "Herald" fails to get the necessary support. The blow would be a terrible one, and would hit me very hard indeed.

All together, then, readers, and see that on Monday next you perform the best day's work of your lives!

YOUR EDITOR

OUR FIRST INSTALMENT.

COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOL DAYS

A Magnificent Serial Story dealing with the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's and their Girl Chum. Specially published at the earnest request of readers of the "Gem" Library.

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Off to School.

Ethel Cleveland stood in the open doorway, looking out. There was a touch of frost in the air; the wind was crisp and keen. It brought the colour into Ethel's cheeks. She made a charming picture as she stood there, framed in the doorway, though she was quite unaware of the fact—a picture of bright English girlhood, with her bright eyes, soft round cheeks, and lithe, graceful figure.

But there was a shade of seriousness upon the young girl's brow. Ethel was leaving home—leaving for school. She was waiting there for the vehicle that was to convey her to the station.

She looked as she felt, serious and thoughtful. Her lines had hitherto fallen in pleasant places—her young life had been a happy one—not that she had been wholly without troubles. Her father's death—she could faintly remember that—and of late, her mother's ill-health, had cast a shadow upon the house. But, happy or not, the old life was ending now—ending to-day. Her mother had been ordered abroad for her health, and Ethel was going to a boarding-school.

A new life, full of possibilities, lay before her. What would St. Freda's be like? What would the girls be like, and Miss Penfold, the principal? Would she be anything like little Miss Prynne, the governess who had hitherto had the charge of Ethel's education? If so, the girl thought, with a smile, she would get on very well at St. Freda's. For little Miss Prynne was Ethel's devoted slave, and everything that Ethel did was right in her eyes, and had not Ethel been really a sensible and willing pupil, her education would have been in a parlous state.

Mrs. Cleveland was gone—she had left for the South the day before. There was nothing now to hold Ethel to her home, and she was anxious to leave for St. Freda's. Miss Prynne was to take her there—or, rather, as a matter of fact, Ethel would take Miss Prynne there, for Ethel was always the guiding mind of the two.

What would St. Freda's be like?

Ethel knew girls who were at boarding-school, but she had only a vague idea what they were like, and at St. Freda's she did not know a soul. As a matter of fact, Ethel knew more of boys' schools than of girls' schools, for she had a cousin at a public school in Sussex, and had often visited St. Jim's for the cricket and football matches—when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, her cousin, had very proudly walked his pretty cousin round the old school, and shown her off to the admiring and envious eyes of the other fellows. Ethel was "Cousin Ethel" to a great many boy chums at St. Jim's. If St. Freda's were like St. Jim's, she would like it immensely; but—

What would it be like?

"Ethel!"

The girl, absorbed in her thoughts, did not hear the small, piping voice. She was looking out into the gardens, deep in a reverie.

"Ethel!"

Little Miss Prynne came along the hall, and Ethel started, and looked round. Miss Prynne was fair and forty, if not fat, and she was about the same height as her pupil. Miss

Prynne looked very prim and neat and orderly. She had a little bag in her hand, and a carefully-rolled umbrella hooked on her arm. There was a sound of wheels outside just as Miss Prynne came to the door.

"You are quite ready, Ethel?"

"The girl nodded.

"Quite ready, dear."

"Here is the trap. James, pray be very careful with those boxes—especially with the hat-box."

Two minutes more, and the trap was bowling down the lane, and the wind was blowing Cousin Ethel's fair curls back from her face, and bringing the scarlet into her cheeks.

The girl's eyes sparkled.

But her spirits were not high. There was a slight cloud on the fair brow, a slight drooping of the pretty little mouth.

Ethel was feeling lonely.

She was going out into a new world—alone. If only she had had some companion—someone with whom to exchange conjectures and confidences! There was Miss Prynne, but Miss Prynne, though kindness itself, was not exactly the confidante Ethel wanted. Miss Prynne's conversational abilities extended very little beyond "Yes, dear," and "No, dear."

Ethel thought of her Cousin Arthur. He had told her that he would get leave from St. Jim's if he could, and see her on the journey to St. Freda's. But evidently he had not been able to come.

Ethel sat very silent.

Miss Prynne, who was in a state of mental perturbation, wondering whether her hat-pins were fastened securely enough to resist the strong wind, was not in a mood for conversation, either.

In the lane, a lad in uniform was plodding along slowly towards Cleveland Lodge. He stopped at sight of the trap, and began waving his arms frantically.

It was the telegraph-boy from the village. The trap stopped at once.

The lad came up to the side of the vehicle, touching his cap. He had a telegram in his hand.

"For Miss Cleveland, mum."

Cousin Ethel took the telegram.

The colour wavered in her cheek for a moment. The thought was in her mind that it might be from her mother—that it might mean that something was wrong.

She opened it hastily.

Then, as her eye ran quickly over the message on the strip of paper within, she smiled. Miss Prynne was looking at her anxiously.

"What is it, Ethel dear?"

Ethel laughed.

"It's from Arthur—the dear boy!"

She handed the telegram to Miss Prynne. The little governess adjusted her black-rimmed glasses, and read:

"Dear Ethel,—I've got leave, and I shall be at Wayland Junction to meet you. Look out for me.

"ARTHUR."

It was from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE LAST HOPE!"

Miss Prynne smiled.

"It is very kind and thoughtful of him, Ethel dear."

"Yes, isn't it?"

The trap bowed on again.

Cousin Ethel's face was brighter now, and her eyes were sparkling. She looked very cheerful when she took her seat in the train, with Miss Prynne opposite.

And as the train approached Wayland Junction, needless to say, Cousin Ethel was looking out of the window, and as soon as the train entered the station, she caught sight of a group of juniors standing on the platform.

CHAPTER 2. Cousin Arthur.

"Bai Jove!"

"Hallo!"

"That's the twain!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who spoke. Arthur Augustus, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was looking a perfect picture. Nothing could have exceeded the elegance of the cut of his Etons, unless it was the beautiful pattern of his waistcoat, or the glossiness of his silk hat. From his natty boots to his gold-rimmed eyeglass, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was elegance itself. The two other fellows wore school caps, which showed off D'Arcy's glossy topper to the best advantage.

The two were Tom Merry of the Shell Form and Figgins of the Fourth. There were many juniors at St. Jim's who had been eager to come, and Arthur Augustus, to do him justice, was willing to bring them. But only two had been able to obtain leave, and those two were Tom Merry and Figgins.

Tom Merry looked very handsome and tidy, as he usually did; but Figgins was more than usually elegant. Figgins was, as a rule, careless in his dress, and his neckties had always offended the vision of Arthur Augustus. But on an occasion like this, Figgins could come out strong. Figgins was in his Sunday best, and his necktie was only a little on one side, and his boots shone with a polish almost as aggressive as that of D'Arcy's silk hat.

Figgins had hesitated long between a cap and a topper, and finally, the others being impatient, had rushed off in a cap. He pleaded, in answer to D'Arcy's remarks on the subject, that it was more comfortable, and that Miss Cleveland would not be in the least likely to notice what he was wearing. An argument at which Arthur Augustus took the liberty of snuffing.

As the train came into the station, Figgins turned pink, and then crimson. He caught Tom Merry by the shoulder, and the Shell fellow turned and looked at him, with considerable surprise as he noted the changing hues of Figgins' countenance.

"Hallo! Anything up?" he asked.

"I was going to—to ask you—"

"Go ahead!"

"Is my necktie quite straight?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, about as straight as it always is," he replied.

"Oh, come," said Figgins warmly, "you might tell a chap how it looks! Is it on one side?"

"Yes; I'm afraid it is, a little," said Tom Merry, cocking his eye thoughtfully at the necktie.

"Well, which side? Quick, the train's coming in!"

"Left."

Figgins put up his hand to the necktie, and gave it a drag to the right.

"Is that all right?" he asked hastily.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Bai Jove, it's all wright, and no mistake," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his gold-rimmed monocle upon the necktie. "Wathah too much wright, I should say."

"Too much to the right?" asked Figgins anxiously.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins gave the troublesome necktie a drag back to the left, and it came undone, and the ends streamed out in his hand.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins glared.

"You cackling duffers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"Boww! I've got to look after my cousin," said D'Arcy. And he stepped towards the train, which had now stopped alongside the platform.

Cousin Ethel was waving her hand from the window. The three juniors lifted hat and caps, and ran towards the carriage. Figgins made a hasty effort to clutch his necktie. THE 3D. LIBRARY.—No. 405.

into place, but naturally without success. Tom Merry tore open the door of the carriage, but it was Arthur Augustus who extended a graceful hand to assist the ladies to alight.

Cousin Ethel smiled brightly at the juniors.

"I am so glad to meet you here!" she said softly. "I was feeling very lonely."

"The pleasuah is on our side, deah boy—I mean, deah gal," said Arthur Augustus. "With your permish, we are goin' to see you as fah as St. Fweda's."

"Have you leave for so long?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I shall be delighted, of course!"

"It will be ripping," said Figgins eagerly, as Cousin Ethel's glance turned upon him.

Then he coloured to the hue of a beetroot. His necktie was streaming over his waistcoat, and Cousin Ethel's eye had involuntarily rested upon it.

"A—A slight accident," murmured Figgins. "I—I—"

"It was so kind of you to come and meet me," said Cousin Ethel, apparently not noticing Figgins' confusion, and thereby putting him more at his ease. "I think my boxes ought to be taken out of the luggage-van."

"I'll see to it!" exclaimed Figgins eagerly.

And he rushed off.

The boxes were already on the platform, and the train was about to move on. Figgins paused where the boxes lay to tie his necktie. In the looking-glass of an automatic machine he got it straight at last.

Cousin Ethel had to change trains at Wayland, and she had to wait ten minutes. Figgins saw the boxes placed upon a trolley and trundled off to another platform for the St. Freda's train, and then he returned to the group.

Tom Merry had lifted a little bag out of the carriage, and an umbrella, neatly folded. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stretched out his hand for them.

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy!"

"Nothing to thank me for," said Tom Merry blandly.

"I am goin' to cawwy them."

"Rats!" said Tom in an undertone, Cousin Ethel being for a moment occupied in helping Miss Prynne to adjust her veil, and having no eyes for the juniors.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and stared frigidly at his companion.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"More rats!"

"I am goin' to cawwy my cousin's bag and umbwella!"

"You're jolly well not!"

"I insist—"

"You can jolly well insist till you're black in the face!" said Tom Merry warmly. "But I'm jolly well going to carry them, so there!"

"Look here, Tom Mewwy—"

"Seat!"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort! I'm goin' to cawwy that bag, and I insist upon your immediate handin' it ovah to me!"

"Rubbish!"

"I decline to have my remarks chawacturised as wubbish. I should be sowwy to have to thwash you in the presence of a lady, but—"

"You'd be jolly sorry for yourself if you began!"

"Look here, you boundah—"

"Look here, you ass—"

"Give me that bag!"

"Rats!"

Arthur Augustus took hold of the bag. Tom Merry did not let go. It looked like a tug-of-war for a moment.

"I trust, Tom Mewwy, that you will not attract Ethel's attention by a scene of unseemly dispute," said Arthur Augustus.

"I'm going to carry this bag."

"Fwy don't be an obstinate ass!"

Arthur Augustus gave a jerk. Tom Merry gave a jerk, too, and jerked the bag away from the grasp of Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's gave him a wrathful glare through his eyeglass.

"You uttah wottah—"

"Cave!"

Cousin Ethel was looking round.

Perhaps she had caught a tone of the suppressed but wrathful voices. The train was gliding out of the station, and Miss Prynne gave a sudden cry.

"My bag!"

"Your bag, dear?" said Ethel.

"Yes. Oh, dear! I have left it in the carriage—and my umbrella!"

"Oh, no, you haven't!" exclaimed Cousin Ethel. "Tom has them—see?"

Miss Prynne gave a little gasp of relief.

"Oh, thank you so much, my dear boy! You shall carry

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them, if you like. How very thoughtful of you to take them out of the carriage!"

Tom Merry looked at Miss Pryne, and then at the bag and umbrella he had burdened himself with. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smiled into space.

"You can have them if you like," murmured Tom Merry, sotto voce.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Not at all, deah boy. I wouldn't wob you for anythin'!"

"Look here—"

"I wouldn't deprive you of the pleasur of cawwyin' Miss Pwyne's bag and umbrellah for worlds, deah boy!" Arthur Augustus assured him.

And he smilingly escorted the two ladies along the platform, while Tom Merry followed with the bag and the umbrella.

CHAPTER 3.

The Escort.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked at his watch.

"There's another seven minutes before your twain goes, Ethel," he remarked, "and it's not in the station yet. I wath think that the buffet is the comwest capab."

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins, joining them. "Miss Cleveland must be awfully hungry. I remember the time I first went to school. I was awfully downhearted till I had a feed at the buffet, and then I felt all right."

Cousin Ethel smiled.

"Perhaps I could eat a bun," she said meditatively.

"This way, deah boy—I mean, deah gal!" said D'Arcy.

And he led the way.

In a minute more Cousin Ethel and Miss Pryne were sitting at a little table, upon which a grinning waiter deposited pile after pile of pastry of the most indigestible appearance.

In the innocence of their hearts the juniors wanted to comfort Ethel as they themselves might have been comforted.

If Ethel had eaten a tenth part of what was affectionately pressed upon her, Miss Penfold would certainly have received an invalid at St. Freda's that day.

But Ethel didn't.

She smilingly accepted cake and tart, and nibbled, thus pleasing the juniors without incurring any serious consequences to herself.

Miss Pryne accepted a little dry toast, astounding the boys thereby. How anybody could eat dry toast when there were jam-tarts in abundance was a problem that Tom Merry & Co. did not attempt to solve.

"Another tart, Miss Ethel?" said Figgins.

Ethel laughed.

"No, thank you, Figgins!"

"A cream-puff?"

"Oh, no!"

"Bottah twy these cream-tarts," said D'Arcy. "I can assure you that they are weally wippin'."

"Thank you, no."

"Then I'll tell the waitah to bring some ices."

"Just one ice," said Tom Merry.

And Cousin Ethel assented.

"Well, just one."

The ices were disposed of, and there was a clatter in the station as the train came in.

Figgins took a last surreptitious look into a mirror to ascertain that his tie was still straight, and the party left the buffet.

Tom Merry found corner seats in a first-class carriage for Cousin Ethel and Miss Pryne, and they were safely disposed there, and the famous bag and umbrella were restored to the little governess.

The three juniors entered the carriage, and Figgins closed the door and stood against it with the amiable intention of keeping all other passengers out.

A passenger or two tried the door, and found it fast, and passed on to the next carriage. Then a son-of-a-bitch—stately-looking dame, dressed very quietly in dark grey, put her hand to the door, and Figgins hesitated. It was a "lark" to keep her out of the carriage, perhaps, but with a lady it was different.

Cousin Ethel touched Figgins on the sleeve.

It was enough.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE LAST HOPE!"

Figgins pushed open the door, and stepped back for the lady to enter.

The lady in grey stepped in, and glanced at the girl and the juniors with a most kindly expression upon her kind face.

"Thank you!" she said, in a very pleasant voice.

She sat down in the farther corner of the carriage. Figgins closed the door again, and the train rolled out of the station. Except for the lady in grey, the party had the carriage to themselves.

"Well, this is wathah jollay!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If I wememba how coovently, we have a half-hour's wun to St. Freda's. It will be wippin' havin' you for a neighab at school, Ethel!"

"Yes, won't it?" said the girl brightly.

"We ought to get up a footah match, or somethin'." Arthur Augustus remarked. "I suppose we shall see you pretty often, you know. Do you know what the pwincipal is like?"

"Miss Penfold? No; I have never seen her," said Ethel thoughtfully. "But I have heard that she is very kind and good."

"Good! I suppose she will wegard it as the pwopah capah for your cousin to come ovah and see you pretty often?" Cousin Ethel laughed.

"I don't know."

"I shall wegard it as my dutay to keep an eye on you, you see," explained Arthur Augustus, in the most fatherly manner. "As your eldah—"

"But you are only a few weeks older than I am, Arthur."

"That is a twiflin' matlah. You must wememba that boys have so much more experience and knowledge of the world than gals," said D'Arcy. "I don't want to blow my own twinnep, of course, but I am genevally considahed a fellah of tact and judgment. I look aftah all these chaps at St. Jim's."

"My hat!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Mawwy—"

"It's a little weakness of Gussy's to imagine that he looks after people," explained Figgins. "As a matter of fact, he's a trial to us!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

Cousin Ethel smiled. She knew the little ways of her elegant cousin very well. As a matter of fact, Ethel was far more capable of looking after Arthur Augustus than the swell of St. Jim's was of looking after her. But Ethel was far too tactful to ever allow D'Arcy to discover the fact. Arthur Augustus was a nice boy, and Ethel wouldn't have wounded him for worlds.

"As your eldah," resumed D'Arcy, "I should wegard it as my dutay to look aftah you. And as your matlah is now abowd, I think it doubly my dutay to keep an eye on you, you know. In any time of stress and twouble, I trust you will come to me for advice."

"Oh, of course!"

"I should always be happy to place my experience at your service," said D'Arcy. "I know a lot of dodges, too, about school, that I can put you up to. I wondah if you gals ovah go in for japes?"

"For w-w-what?"

"Japes—jokes, you know—pwactical jokes. Now, if Miss Penfold turns out to be a boundah—I mean, if you don't like her, you know, and she is down on you—I should wecommend you to give her a high old time."

The lady in grey in the farther corner of the carriage looked curiously at Arthur Augustus, as if greatly interested in his remark, but the swell of St. Jim's did not observe it.

"You could put jumpin' cwackahs in her desk," said D'Arcy thoughtfully, or it would be a good ideah to put some wats in her hatbox!"

"Arthur!"

"Yas; that would be jollay good. Of course, I shouldn't play a twick like that on a lady, as it would be unchivalwous in a gentleman to do anythin' of the sort, but I suppose you wegard a mistwess as we wegard a mastah—as an object to be japed as much as poss."

"Ha, ha!"

"You see, Ethel—"

"I don't think I shall indulge in many japes at school, as you call them," said Ethel demurely. "I think, perhaps, jokes of that kind are more suitable for boys' schools. I cannot imagine myself putting rats in a hatbox, for instance."

"It's wathah a good ideah, though, if the pwincipal is a boundah!"

"I am sure Miss Penfold will not be a bounder."

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The lady in grey smiled, and was about to speak apparently, for she moved her lips, but she changed her mind and remained silent.

The conversation turned to other subjects, and the juniors chatted cheerily with Cousin Ethel as the train swept on towards King's Burford, the station for St. Freda's.

It seemed to the party a very short time before the station was reached.

The train stopped at last.

Arthur Augustus assisted his cousin to alight, and Figgins—who was always more useful than ornamental—rushed off to see to the luggage.

The lady in grey descended, too, and disappeared while the juniors were placing Ethel and Miss Prynnne and their various belongings in the station hack.

"Everythin' on board," said Arthur Augustus. "All wight, Ethel?"

"Yes; all right, I think!" said Ethel cheerily.

"Then I suppose it's good-bye. We shall see you on the first half-holiday, Ethel!"

"Oh, yes, do!"

"Nothin' you want to ask my advice about before you go?"

"No, I think not," smiled Ethel.

"Vewy well."

And Ethel shook hands with the juniors one after another, and then the three lads stood in a row, hat or cap in hand, as the hack drove off to St. Freda's.

Cousin Ethel looked back, and waved her hand, till the hack passed a curve in the road, and the station and the three juniors disappeared from sight.

Arthur Augustus heaved a sigh.

"It's wuff on Ethel goin' to a new school alone," he remarked. "I wememba the time I first came to St. Jim's. You fellahs chipped me wottenly. Tom Mewwy wasn't there then, but the othah boundahs were vewy chipin'."

"But you go about asking for it," said Figgins. "Now, anybody but an idiot would like Cousin Ethel at once, at first sight."

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry heartily.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yas, wathah! I suppose you're wight as wegarda Cousin Ethel."

And the three juniors went back into the station to catch their train back.

Cousin Ethel's face was very bright as the rickety old vehicle rattled along the leafy lane towards St. Freda's.

The meeting with the juniors of St. Jim's had cheered her greatly.

She did not know what St. Freda's would be like, and she was a little uncertain how she would like it—but, at all events, she had kind friends not far away—and that was a comfort.

The hack drove up to the great stone gateway of St. Freda's, and up the drive to the great grey stone house, and stopped.

Cousin Ethel had arrived at her new home.

CHAPTER 4.

A Surprise.

Miss Tyrrell, the second mistress at St. Freda's, received Ethel Cleveland. Morning classes were still going on, and Ethel caught a hum of voices from the big school-room as she came in. Miss Tyrrell was a slim, dark-complexioned lady, with a keen eye, and a clear, incisive voice, but her look was kindly as she greeted the new pupil. She explained to Ethel that Miss Penfold, the principal, had been out for some time, had only just returned, and would come down shortly. Then she returned to her duties, leaving Ethel and Miss Prynnne to wait till Miss Penfold came down. It was Miss Prynnne's duty to deliver Ethel safe and sound into the principal's hands before she left her. And Ethel was glad for her to stay as long as possible—the only familiar face amid strange surroundings.

Ethel sat by a window, looking out into a garden fresh and bright even in winter. St. Freda's was a handsome building of grey stone, standing in wide and sweeping grounds. Ethel caught sight of a tennis lawn in the distance, with noble elms growing beyond. A gravel path ran under the French windows of Miss Penfold's drawing-room, and along it, as Ethel looked out, came a girlish figure.

It was that of a girl of about Ethel's own age, but as dark as Ethel was fair, with large dark eyes and red, pouting lips. The lips were pouting very much just now, and there was a wrinkle of anger in the youthful forehead, and the eyes were very bright.

The girl passed under the windows, unconscious of the glance upon her from within, and disappeared round a curve of the building.

Ethel wondered who she was. It was evidently one of the pupils of St. Freda's, and equally evident one who was not exactly equable in temper.

Ethel was still thinking of the pretty, passionate, dark face, when the door opened, and she turned from the window.

A lady in grey entered the room.

Ethel gave a little start of surprise.

It was the lady in grey of the railway-carriage—her travelling companion from Wayland Junction.

It did not occur to Ethel for a moment who she was, the thought coming into her mind that this was doubtless the relative of some pupil of St. Freda's.

The lady in grey came directly towards her, a slight smile upon her calm, clear-cut face.

"Miss Cleveland," she said, "and Miss Prynn?"

"Yes," said Ethel wonderingly.

"I am Miss Penfold."

Ethel blushed.

"Dear me!" said Miss Prynn.

"I hope you will like St. Freda's," went on Miss Penfold. "It was your cousin, I think, who was giving you good advice in the train?"

"Yes," stammered Ethel.

"He seemed to have some apprehension that the principal of St. Freda's would turn out to be what he calls a bouncer!"

"Oh!"

"I think we shall get along very well," said Miss Penfold, with a smile.

"I—I am sure of it!" stammered Ethel. "I—I am sorry—"

"Not at all! Master D'Arcy is more accustomed to boys' schools than to girls' schools, naturally, and he is not aware that jumping crackers in a hatbox would be a little out of place at St. Freda's."

"Dear me!" said Miss Prynn.

"But you have had a long journey," said Miss Penfold. "You must have a little refreshment, and then go to your room to rest until dinner. The pupils dine at one o'clock here, and then you will have an opportunity of seeing something of your new companions."

Ten minutes later Miss Prynn had taken her leave, with a little tear on either cheek as she parted with her charge, and Ethel threw her arms round the little governess's neck, and hugged her affectionately ere she went.

Then she was left alone in her new home.

The quiet-voiced, neatly-dressed maid showed her up to her room.

The dormitory at St. Freda's was divided into a series of cubicles, small but very cosy, so that each girl had an apartment to herself, but the whole of them were open to the glance of anyone passing along the dormitory.

Ethel was a little tired, but more excited. Miss Penfold had recommended her to lie down until dinner, but she did not feel inclined to do so. After removing the signs of travel, she walked along the row of neat little cubicles to the large window at the end of the great room, and looked out into the grounds. She was thinking of the dark, passionate face of the girl she had seen in the garden, and wondering who she was.

A footstep behind her made her turn her head.

Ethel uttered a little exclamation.

It was the girl she was thinking about who stood before her, regarding her with an attentive and interesting gaze.

"So you are the new girl?"

The stranger spoke abruptly.

Although she was certainly not more than fifteen years old, she had already assumed a manner towards Ethel as if she were ten years older than the new girl.

Ethel nodded.

"Yes," she said a little timidly.

"You are Ethel Cleveland?"

"Yes."

"You will get on here," said the dark girl abruptly.

And there was something like a sneer on the red lips.

"I hope so," said Ethel.

"Oh, you are sure to! You are the kind of girl that Miss Penfold will like. You will like the school and Miss Penfold. Bah!" The girl made a passionate gesture. "I hate it!"

(Another long instalment of this grand school serial next Wednesday. To avoid disappointment order your copy early.)

SKIMPOLE'S WINDFALL!

(Continued from page 21.)

weally help bein' a howlin' ass, you know—some fellahs are born like that; and the mistake was weally made by your papah in the first place. Of course, the money will be returned. I am goin' to take the mattrah in hand."

"Well, of course, I do not wish to do anything hard," said Mr. Skimpoll. "But I cannot afford to lose forty pounds, and my editor would most decidedly decline to lose it. It must be paid."

"If you will give us a week, sir, it shall be paid, on the word of honah of Study No. 6," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

Mr. Skimpoll seemed to have some sense of humour. He bowed gravely in reply to Arthur Augustus' assurance.

"That, of course, is quite sufficient," he said solemnly. "I will wait a week before I speak to this extraordinary boy's headmaster, on your assurance that the money will be paid. I accept the word of honour of Study No. 6."

Tom Merry & Co. chuckled, but Arthur Augustus made a graceful bow.

"Will you honah us by comin' to tea in the study, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "It will be a vewy gweat honah to entahtain a weal live authah."

Mr. Skimpoll accepted the invitation, with a smile, and the Co. marched him off to Study No. 6. Herbert Skimpole was left in peace at last to write his important letter to Lord Kitchener. Henry Skimpoll was quite royally entertained in Study No. 6, and when he departed it was on the best of terms with Tom Merry & Co.

After he was gone, the Co. looked at one another.

"We're in for it!" remarked Blake.

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "Skimmy did us well while he had any money, and we can't let the chopper come down on him. It's a debt of honour for the school, and we've got to see it paid. We've got to raise a Skimmy fund."

"We'll call it the Funny Freak Fund!" suggested Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"Hallo! Here he is!"

Skimpole blinked into the study.

"Will one of you fellows lend me a stamp? I must get this letter off to the War Office."

"Stamps are off," explained Tom Merry. "We've got to raise forty quids for you, and we're not going to make it forty pounds and a penny. We're going to pay your debt to Mr. Skimpoll, and save you from getting the chopper."

"I am sure I have no objection," said Skimpole. "If the man is in need of the money, I regard it indeed as a worthy object. Pray do not think that I mind in the least. But that stamp—"

"You—you don't mind!" stuttered Blake.

"Not at all, my dear Blake. Why should I mind?"

"Do you know what may happen to you if the money isn't paid?"

"Really, I have not thought about it. I have some more important matters to think of. But to come back to a more important subject, can you lend me a stamp?"

The juniors did not lend Skimpole a stamp. They took his letter to the War Office, crumpled it, and dipped it in ink, and stuffed it down his back. Then they ejected Skimmy violently from the room. Skimpole returned to his study without a stamp, and in a state of great astonishment, and when he had painfully extracted that letter, it was not in a fit state to send to the War Office or any other office.

Tom Merry & Co. had set themselves a difficult task. They had to raise a fund for Skimpole. And all they had towards it, so far, was Skimpole's benevolent approval.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday's grand, long, complete story of St. Jim's is entitled "THE LAST HOPE!" Order early.)

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The fine array of features stated above will be given to every British boy and girl on receipt of—sixpence? No; not at all! The whole lot can be obtained for a modest halfpenny.

How can any Genite resist this great and generous offer? Order your three copies of "The Greyfriars Herald" at once! You will want one, your chum who is a non-reader will need one, and then there's your soldier chum in France or the Dardanelles.

I can definitely promise this—that if "The Greyfriars Herald" is purchased by every single reader of the "Gem" Library, "Tom Merry's Weekly" will make its appearance very shortly.

Up, lads and lassies, and prove your loyalty!

SPLENDID WORK FOR THE SOLDIERS.

Miss Doris Eugene Frodin, the "ministering angel" of Hampton-in-Arden, has endeared herself for all time to the wounded Tommies in the local hospital by her magnificent generosity. I have had the privilege of perusing some splendid letters which Miss Frodin has received from some of the "gentlemen in khaki," and I heartily endorse all their expressions of praise and admiration.

My girl chum suggests that a great military dance should be held in her district later on, when "Pat and Mac and Tommy and Jack and Joe" can meet and have a jolly old fling. The editor of the companion papers is not forgotten, either, for he has been invited to the great function; and I should like to thank Miss Frodin here and now for her kind invitation, and for her noble efforts on behalf of the British soldiers. Such good work will not go unrewarded.

"CUT THE CACKLE AND COME TO THE HOSSES!"

The Origin of the Phrase Explained by a Gemite's Father.

I am much indebted to Mr. C. B., of East Twickenham, for paying a visit to my sanctum in order to explain how the above expression originated.

Years ago Mr. Ashley, proprietor of a very old and well-known London theatre, was accustomed to taking a prominent part in the circus-ring. Before this part of the performance was enacted, however, a play of a dull and uninteresting nature used to be performed, and Mr. Ashley, longing to show the audience what good acting really was, grew into the habit of impatiently exclaiming: "Oh, for goodness sake cut the cackle and come to the hosses!"

Mr. C. B. is the father of one of my readers, and although on the far side of forty, he is himself a most ardent and enthusiastic reader of the good old "Gem."

(Continued on page 33 of cover.)

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

L. P. (Bedford).—There is no weekly paper published by Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. There will, in all probability, be a double number of the "Boys' Friend" in a few weeks, since the present features are proving so popular. Best wishes!

J. G. (Gorton).—The character you mention is still at St. Jim's. I will pass on your suggestion to Mr. Clifford. Thanks very much!

Laura V. (Seaford).—I have already made extensive arrangements for the sending of back numbers to our wounded soldiers. See the announcement concerning Miss Frodin in this week's Chat.

"An Admirer of Talbot" (Birmingham).—Thank you very much for your complimentary letter. Talbot has dark hair and blue eyes. No; Kildare hasn't a minor at St. Jim's.

W. A. Sutton (Leamington Spa).—I appreciate your kind suggestion, but I have grown quite tired of the cavilling critics, and feel that it is high time they took a back seat. I have endeavoured to treat them as fairly as possible in the past, but all to no purpose. Grouser Stephens and others of his kidney are still determined to do all they can to ruin the "Gem." They simply won't play the game, so I suppose I must let them flourish like a green bay-tree.

"Incognito" (Barnstaple).—Your well-worded letter impressed me not a little, and I am deeply grateful to you for your loyalty. The next threepenny-book story dealing with St. Jim's and Greyfriars appears early in December. So your solution of the Great Secret was quite correct. I congratulate you!

Frank C. (Rotherhithe).—I was not greatly struck with the nursery-rhyme you sent me. Have a shot at something else.

Footman Nash (Marble Arch).—Very many thanks for your letter! While the stars shine and the rivers roll, as Koumi Rao would put it, I shall endeavour to keep "cryme" out of the "Gem." Little Willie Malpas will not be humoured. Write to me again, there's a good chap!

F. G. (Stalybridge).—The idea you mention was exploited, more or less, in the story entitled "The St. Jim's Volunteers." I don't think my readers would care for a "ditto repeato."

Leonard S. Graham (Cape Province).—Sorry I have no more copies of A. C. Michael's famous war picture available.

Reneta (Norbiton).—Frank Courtney & Co. will come into the limelight on December 3rd, when the next Frank Richards' threepenny book, entitled "School and Sport," will be published. The Christian name of Redfern is Dick. I will bear your suggestions in mind. "The Boy Without a Name"

will be supplied to you from this office on receipt of four penny stamps.

"A Weekly Reader from South Africa" (Johannesburg).—The reason why Mayne is not mentioned in cricket stories is because cricket has shut up shop a long time ago. Footer's in full swing now. There are plenty of good Talbot yarns in store, but I dare not publish them consecutively, as certain readers do not care much for "The Toff" for some unaccountable reason.

Oliver Muriel Offord (Brighton).—Very many thanks for your letter. The characters you mention will figure prominently in future stories. Your good wishes are cordially reciprocated.

A. F. Read (Birmingham).—I am glad to hear you speak so highly of Talbot. Quite a lot of fellows regard him as their ideal, which proves that the Talbot haters are in the minority. His birthday is on January 14th.

Bertie R. (Johannesburg).—Very pleased indeed to welcome you as a reader of "The Greyfriars Herald."

"A Loyal Reader" (Tottenham).—I will see what I can do for you.

W. W. G. (Glastonbury).—One of the best stamp firms I can recommend is Messrs. Bright & Son, 164, Strand, London, W.C., to whom you should write.

N. Samuels (Liverpool).—So far as boxing is concerned, Dick Julian and Jack Blake are a well-matched pair. I hesitate to predict the possible result of an encounter between Kildare of St. Jim's and Wingate of Greyfriars. D'Arcy is not an exceptionally fine footballer.

"T. 138 and T. 75" (Dunston).—The artist for the "Gem" is R. J. Macdonald, and for the "Magnet" C. H. Chapman. Sorry I cannot agree to do as you suggest.

T. B. (Atherstone).—Thank you very much for your loyal letter! You should send in your storyettes on a postcard.

C. E. S. (Balham).—The name of the Indian junior at St. Jim's is Koumi Rao. He will be in the limelight again shortly.

T. M. (Putney).—The regiment in question is the Honourable Artillery Company.

James H. (Malta).—Glad to hear from you again. You have my best wishes for success in "the great game."

"The 'Gem' Social League" (Maidstone).—I thank you most sincerely for your letter and kind suggestions. The latter shall be duly noted.

A. E. Harrison (Wolverhampton).—Take plenty of open-air exercise, and keep off smoking. You might also try a series of physical exercises for a few minutes night and morning. I cannot give you an opinion on the advertiser you mention.

Herbert Armitage (Leeds).—Many thanks for your letter. A splendid story on the lines you name is coming along shortly in the "Gem." Look out for it! Your verses are very clever, and I am indeed sorry that lack of space precludes me from giving them a show.

Alice B. M. Jones (Macclesfield).—Your contribution is very interesting. I shall have something to say about it later on.

Robert Stevens (Poplar).—If you watch the Chat pages of the companion papers—especially that of the "Penny Popular"—you will, from time to time, see the names of British Tommies requiring books.

J. B.—No Correspondence Exchange is now being run in connection with the "Gem" Library.

"An Inquisitive Reader" (Portsmouth).—The cost of constructing aeroplanes varies a good deal, of course, though I should say your prediction was nearest the mark.

Frank B. (Birmingham).—Many thanks for letting me see the sketches. They are not quite good enough for reproduction, however.

A young British boy, age 13, would be very glad to hear from some soldiers in his Majesty's Army. Address, R. Mortimer, 12, Balmoral Crescent, Queen's Park, Glasgow.

R. Barber (Gorton).—Very many thanks for your letter. Sorry I do not know of a "Gem" or "Magnet" Club in your district.

F. Scott (Paisley).—You have asked me a "poser," but I should say that Tom Merry was the best footballer and the best boxer in the Shell. There are many other fellows almost up to Tom's weight, though.

"A Never-miss-one-week Reader" (Spalding).—The next threepenny book story introducing Tom Merry & Co. appears on Friday, December 3rd. Need I say "Order in advance"?



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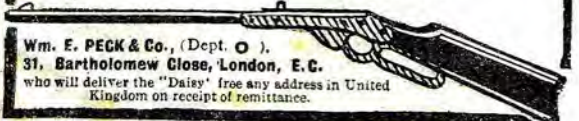
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