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SIX ON THE SCENT!

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



PUNCHING PIGGOTT!

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SIX ON THE SCENT!

A Magnificent
New, Long, Complete Story of
Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Caught in the Act.

BUMP!

"Oh!"

"Yah!"

Tom Merry uttered a breathless gasp, and Baggy Trimble gave vent to a howl that was worthy of a wild Hun.

Tom Merry had run in for his bat, and he came out of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage with the bat in his hand at great speed. Manners and Lowther were waiting for him on the staircase.

At the same moment the door of the next study opened, and Trimble of the Fourth stepped out into the passage.

Trimble was not running. He was stepping out very quietly—in fact, stealthily—and a smear of jam on his fat face perhaps indicated the reason. As a Fourth-Former, he had no business in a Shell study; and certainly he was not chummy with Talbot, Gore, or Skimpole, to whom the room belonged.

He stepped out so stealthily that naturally Tom Merry did not hear him. Hence the collision.

Tom staggered back, gasping. Trimble rolled on the floor. Tom's bat dropped from his hand, and clumped on Trimble's fat leg. Undoubtedly, Baggy had the worst of the collision.

Tom Merry caught at the wall to steady himself.

"You fat chump!" he gasped.

"Yaroorh!" roared Trimble.

"You clumsy ass!"

"Ow!"

Baggy Trimble sat up, spluttering. Tom Merry caught up his bat, and gave him a prod with it, and the fat Fourth-Former pelted.

"Yah! Stoppit! Yoop!"

"Are you coming, Tommy?" yelled Monty Lowther from the stairs.

"Wait a minute!" called back Tom.

"Oh, come on!" shouted Manners.

"I've caught a burglar!" answered Tom Merry.

"Oh, my hat!"

Manners and Lowther came along the passage from the stairs. Baggy Trimble scrambled up, evidently intending to bolt; but the two Shell fellows blocked the way.

"You fat boulder!" exclaimed Tom. "What were you doing in Talbot's study?"

"I—I've just dropped in to help him with his—his Latin!" gasped Trimble.

"What?" yelled the Terrible Three.

The idea of the dunce of the Fourth helping Talbot with his Latin was a little too much. Perhaps Trimble realised that, for he stammered:

"I—I mean, I dropped in to ask Gore for the quid he owes me."

"Well, of all the Prussians!" ejaculated Manners.

"That is to—say, I—I wanted to see Skimpole, about—about—about—"

"Well, about what?" asked Tom Merry grimly.

"About his book," gasped Trimble.

"Skimpy's offered to read me a chapter of his book—"

"And you came to his study to listen to it?"

"That's it, exactly!" gasped Trimble.

"That's the biggest whopper of the lot," remarked Monty Lowther.

"I don't think even Trimble could roll out a top-heavier one than that. He's been raiding the cupboard. Slay him!"

"I—I say, I haven't!" yelled Trimble.

"There wasn't any jam there, and I never looked for it, and it was only a half-pound jar, and I didn't take any, and I never really meant to finish it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Trimble's denials were a little mixed.

"Slay him!" repeated Monty Lowther.

"Is it not written in the edicts of the Lord High Controller of Tommy that whosoever boneth another chap's grub in war-time shall surely be slain? Slay him!"

"Look here, you know—" mumbled Trimble.

"Lucky you've got your bat with you," continued Lowther. "We'll hold him against the wall while you brain him."

"This way, Trimble!"

"Leggo!" roared Trimble, as Manners and Lowther collared him and jammed him against the wall.

"Now then, Tom!"

Tom Merry gripped the handle of his bat with both hands.

"Stand clear!" he said.

Trimble stared at the Terrible Three in terror.

They looked so serious, and Tom Merry's grip upon his bat was so business-like, that the fat junior was almost inclined to believe that he was to be executed on the spot.

"Have you anything to say before you are slain, Trimble?" asked Monty Lowther sternly.

"Yaroorh!"

"Anything else?"

"Yah! Oh! Lemme go!"

"I can't take that down as your last statement before execution, Trimble. It doesn't make sense."

"Yoop!"

"Buck up!" said Manners. "He's keeping us away from cricket. What are we going to do with the body, though?"

"Help!" yelled Trimble.

Crash!

Tom Merry's bat smote the wall, about a yard from Trimble's head. The crash rang along the passage, but it was not so loud as the yell uttered by the terrified Baggy.

"Missed him!" exclaimed Lowther. Try again!

Crash!

"Yaroorh! Help! Murder!" yelled Trimble.

"Look here, Tom, this won't do! Call yourself a batsman?" exclaimed Monty Lowther indignantly. "If you don't slay him next whack, we sha'n't hold him any longer. Now, go it!"

Crash!

"Yarrroooooop!"

"Rotten!" said Lowther, as Tom Merry missed again. "Trimble, you can go and eat coke! Come on, you chaps!"

The Terrible Three, chuckling, walked down the passage.

Baggy Trimble stood and gasped.

"Yah! Rotters!" he stuttered. "I knew you were only playing the goat! Yah! Rotters! You come back here, and I'll jolly well lick you!"

Trimble did not call that out loud enough to be heard, however; and the Terrible Three went on their way. Crooke of the Shell came out of his study.

"What's that thumpin' row about?" he asked.

Trimble did not answer. He scuttled down the passage. Crooke glanced after him, and then stepped into Talbot's study. He had been there about five minutes when Gore of the Shell came in hurriedly. George Gore glanced round quickly for his bat, and saw Crooke.

"Hallo! What do you want here?" he exclaimed.

Crooke started back:

"N-n-nothing!" he stammered.

Gore looked at him suspiciously.

"What blessed trick are you up to?" he demanded.

"I—I looked in to speak to—to Talbot—"

"You're up to something," said Gore. "Get out!"

Crooke seemed glad to get out. Gore took his bat and followed.

A fog of the Third Form was coming up the passage. It was Manners minor. He called to Gore.

"Seen my major, Gore?"

"He's down at cricket," answered Gore, passing on without stopping.

"Oh, blow!" said Reggie Manners.

Crooke looked out of his study again, and, seeing Manners minor in the passage, withdrew his head, and closed his door. Apparently, if Gerald Crooke had any further designs on Talbot's study, he put them off till the coast was clear.

CHAPTER 2.

The Absent-minded Beggar.

WAKE up, old sport!"

"Wow!"

The Terrible Three came down to Little Side, where cricket practice was going on. Skimpole of the Shell was standing there, looking on through his big spectacles, with his brow corrugated in deep thought. Monty Lowther playfully prodded him in the ribs with his bat, and Skimpole woke up.

"Thinking it out?" asked Lowther.

"What do you think of Talbot's form as a bat, Skimpy?"

Tom Merry and Manners chuckled.

Talbot of the Shell was at the wicket, and he was batting finely, and Skimpy had been gazing fixedly at him. But the idea of the great Skimpy taking a keen interest in cricket was too funny, Skimpole's mighty brain soared high above such things. As Lowther had remarked, Skimpy would never be interested in cricket unless it was called cricketology, or at least cricketism. Skimpy was too strong on "isms and ologies."

"Dear me, is Talbot batting?" said

Skimpy. Evidently his great thoughts were far away. "Yes, now I observe it, he is. I was thinking of a more important matter, my dear fellows. Perhaps you could advise me."

"Put your money on your Uncle Montague!" said Lowther encouragingly. "I advise you to give up Determinism, Socialism, and Evolution, and take up games. As a bowler, I believe you could hit a haystack, with practice, and as a batsman, I think you might, in the long run, avoid braining the wicket-keeper if you tried hard."

"You are doubtless speaking humorously, my dear Lowther. I have no doubt that by applying scientific principles to the game I could become an expert cricketer, and probably captain of the games—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But I have no time for such infantile pursuits," explained Skimpole, blinking at them. "As you are aware, I took up Pacifism some time ago—"

"Drop it!" suggested Lowther.

"Upon further reflection, my dear friends, I have decided that the war must go on for the present, and, indeed, I have come to the conclusion that the extremely reprehensible rulers of Germany should, if possible, be crushed in the most thorough manner. I have completed a book on the subject—"

"A which?"

"A book," said Skimpole. "The title is, 'Reflections upon the Present War and the Necessity for Continuing the Conflict until the Injurious System of Prussian Militarism is Completely Extinguished and Obliterated.'"

Lowther fanned himself.

"Is that the book, or the title?" asked Tom Merry.

"That is the title, my dear Merry."

"Ye gods! With a title like that, the book must be a corker!" said the captain of the Shell. "How many thousand chapters?"

"Only three hundred chapters, my dear fellow, but most of them are of considerable length. This book, which completely disposes of all controversy on the subject, I intend to send to the War Aims Committee," said Skimpole, beaming.

"I regard that as work of national importance. I shall not exact payment for the work. I hope I am a patriot."

The Terrible Three grinned.

"Meanwhile," said Skimpole, "to raise funds for printing this great work at my own expense, I have sent my book on Determinism to a publisher in London, offering it to him for one thousand pounds, about a tenth-part its value. The title of the book is—"

"Help!"

"The title is, 'Determinism Explained by an Expert, with Special Reference to the Theories of Professor Balmyscrumpet, and the Exemplification of—'"

"Mercy!"

"My dear fellows—"

"Don't!" said Lowther imploringly. "But what I was thinking of," continued Skimpole, "is this—Don't walk away while I am speaking! Owing to pressure of intellectual labour, undoubtedly I have developed some symptoms of—"

"Insanity?" asked Lowther.

"Of absent-mindedness," said Skimpole. "Have you fellows noticed that I am a little absent-minded?"

"Ha, ha! A little!"

"My dear man, I think I've noticed that, in your case, the mind is entirely absent," said Lowther.

"I had some affair to settle in connection with Crooke of our Form," said Skimpole. "What it is I cannot recollect. I have asked Crooke, and he simply made a rude reply, implying that my future residence will be among the mentally

afflicted at Colney Hatch—a most absurd suggestion. Yet I have some business with Crooke, and I should like very much to recall what it is. Perhaps you fellows can make a suggestion?"

The Terrible Three yelled as Skimpole blinked at them with owlish seriousness.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellows, it is not a laughing matter. These temporary aberrations of memory are extremely incommencing."

"You were going to fight Crooke," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Is that it?"

Skimpole started.

"My word! Of course! Thank you so much for reminding me, my dear Merry! I will look for Crooke at once, before I forget!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The great Skimpy ambled away, and Tom Merry & Co. went on their way, laughing. Skimpole was quite a relief from war-worry, in his way.

Having been reminded of the half-forgotten engagement, which had been haunting his powerful brain, Skimpole ambled away to the School House to look for Crooke.

He blinked into that junior's study first, but found only Racke there.

"Can you tell me the present whereabouts of Crooke, my dear Racke?" asked Skimpole, as he blinked in.

"Find out!" was Racke's polite reply.

"I regret to perceive, Racke, that your manners show no sign of improvement. I consider—"

Skimpole departed without finishing, as Aubrey Racke picked up a ruler. He drifted on to his own study, and, to his surprise, met Crooke coming out.

Crooke started as he saw the genius of the Shell.

"I have been looking for you, Crooke," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "Will it be convenient for you to fight me this afternoon?"

"Silly owl!" was Crooke's answer.

"You will remember, Crooke, that I undertook to bestow upon you a severe castigation for the unpatriotic indulgence of your food-hogging propensities—"

"Let me pass, you idiot!"

"It is possible, Crooke, that the matter may slip my memory again," said Skimpole firmly. "Therefore, I request you to put up your hands on the spot."

"You babblin' chump!" said Crooke savagely. "Let me pass, I tell you!"

"I decline to do anything of the kind, Crooke!"

Skimpole slipped off his jacket, and his bony fist tapped on Crooke's nose, and George Gerald gave a howl of rage.

"Racke!" he yelled.

"Hallo!" said Racke, looking out of his study.

"Lend me a hand with this fool!"

"I'm your man!" grinned Racke.

"Fair play!" exclaimed Skimpole, as the two cads of the Shell advanced upon him together. "I regard this as—ow!—utterly unfair—yow!—and only worthy of Huns—yaroooh!"

"Bai Jove! Fair play, you wottahs!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form ran along the passage. He arrived at a fortunate moment for Skimpole.

Racke and Crooke had him by the arms, and were knocking his brainy head against a door. To judge by Skimpole's yells, the door was harder than the head.

"Release Skimpole at once!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

"Come along, Gussy!" roared Blake. Blako and Herries and Dig were bound for cricket.

"Come an' see fair play, deah boys!"

"Oh, all right!"

Racke and Crooke released Skimpole as Study No. 6 came up. Skimpy rubbed his head and gasped.

"Ow, ow, wow! My dear fellows, will

you see that Racke does not interfere, while I—ow!—castigate Crooke?" he gasped.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Like a bird!" said Jack Blake promptly.

"Leggo!" howled Racke, as the four juniors seized him together.

But Blake & Co. did not let go. They collared Racke, whirled him along to his study, and pitched him in.

Racke howled as he landed on his expensive carpet. Blake closed the door on him, and Racke thought it prudent to leave it closed.

"Now, then, go it, ye cripples!" said Herries. "Buck up, Crooke!"

"I'm not goin' to fight the silly idiot!" howled Crooke.

"Go for him, Skimpy!"

Skimpole went for him.

Crooke dodged round him, and bolted up the passage.

"Aftah him!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha!"

There was a rush along the passage after Crooke. But the Shell fellow dodged down the back stairs and vanished. Crooke was not feeling inclined for a fight that afternoon, or, indeed, any afternoon, if it came to that.

"Wun like anythin', deah boys!" shouted D'Arcy. "We'll bwing him back, Skimpy!"

"Cricket!" said Blake. "No time to waste. Crooke can wait!"

"Yaas; but—"

"Come on, fathead!"

Blake & Co. went back to the stairs, and Skimpole blinked after them. He was in doubt whether he should pursue Crooke, to settle with him before the matter slipped his memory again, or whether he should improve the shining hour by studying the entrancing pages of Professor Balmyscrumpet. He decided on the latter, and ambled into his study.

CHAPTER 3.

An Awful Loss.

"WELL hit, Figgy!"

George Figgins, of the Fourth Form and the New House, was batting. And his chums, Kerr and Fatty Wynn, shouted approval as Figgins made a mighty hit, and the ball vanished into space.

"Good man!" said Tom Merry.

"Jolly good!" said Levison of the Fourth. "If the Form competition depended on cricket, you Shell bouncers wouldn't have much chance."

To which the Shell fellows within hearing made the ancient and classical reply: "Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The Shell are ahead in the competitish so fah, owin' to a sewies of flukes—"

"Series of rats!" said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Weally, Kangawooh—"

"Why, we're miles ahead!" exclaimed Gore of the Shell. "You Fourth Form kids will be nowhere at the finish!"

"We're going to change all that," said Clive, laughing.

"We are!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew. "Wait till we get fairly goin'. Study No. 9 hasn't put its beef into it yet."

"Weally, Cardew, it's Study No. 6 that weally counts."

"No. 7, you mean," said Dick Roy-lance, the junior from New Zealand.

"Put your money on No. 7."

"Weally, Woylance—"

"There goes Figgy again!" said Kerr of the Fourth. "Isn't he in topping form? Good old Figgy!"

"Bravo, Figgy!" roared Fatty Wynn.

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"Even Talbot can't get him," said Kerr.

"Wait and see!" replied Tom Merry. Talbot of the Shell was on his rattle now. It was only practice, but the cricketers were keen on it, as batsman and bowler belonged to rival Houses. The next ball down was watched with great interest by the fellows looking on. As Talbot prepared to deliver, Skimpole came hurrying down from the School House.

Skimpole was looking excited. His face was red, his mouth was open, and his eyes were wide open behind his big spectacles. Evidently something had occurred to disturb the serenity of the genius of the Shell. He arrived breathless on the cricket-ground.

"I have been robbed!" Skimpole gasped out the words. Nobody answered. All eyes were on Talbot. The ball whizzed down, and Figgins played at it—a fraction of a second too late. There was a roar from the Shell, as the middle stump went tumbling.

"Well bowled, Talbot!" "Good man!" "What price that?" "Bai Jove! That was wathah good for the Shell!" conceded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I could not have bowled better than that myself!" "Nor half as well!" grinned Kangaroo. "Wats!"

Skimpole grasped Tom Merry by the shoulder. "Merry!" he stuttered. "Hallo! Buzz off!" "I have been robbed!" "Robbed, you ass? Rubbish! Go away and think again!" said the captain of the Shell.

"I have been robbed!" howled Skimpole. "A crime has been committed in my study! The thief must be found! Oh, dear!"

Skimpole's words drew attention from the cricket at last, especially as Figgy's wicket was down. Skimmy, in his excitement, was shaking the captain of the Shell forcibly. Tom shoved him off.

"Now, what are you burling about?" demanded Tom. "Have you been dreaming?"

"I have been robbed!" shrieked Skimpole.

"Do you mean that something's been taken from your study?"

"Yes." "If it's the jam, it was that fat rotter Trimble."

"Jam!" howled Skimpole. "Is this a time to think of jam?"

Tom Merry's face became very serious. "Do you mean that something of value has been taken?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, yes, yes!" "Much value?" asked Manners.

"Yes. Oh, dear! The thief must be found!" gasped Skimpole. "The value was thousands of pounds!"

"What!" yelled the juniors. "What on earth has he lost?" asked Kerr, in amazement. "Is the silly ass off his rocker?"

"Will you help me search for the thief?" panted Skimpole. "Or perhaps I had better go direct to the police! I suspect that a German spy has been at work."

"Wha-a-at? What have you lost, you shrieking chump?" exclaimed Tom Merry, thumping Skimpole on the shoulder to calm him. It did not seem to calm him, however. He yelled.

"My manuscript!" "Oh, you ass!"

"The manuscript of the book entitled 'Reflections upon the Present War, and the Necessity of—'"

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"Ring off!"

"The Necessity of—" "That's enough, ass! Perhaps Gore used it to light the fire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I haven't," said Gore, laughing. "Talbot asked me to let the silly idiot's rubbish alone."

"It has been stolen!" howled Skimpole. "It was finished, complete, and it would have been of inestimable use to the War Aims Committee. It looks to me as if a German spy has got wind of it, and sneaked in—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "You uttah ass, Skimmy!"

"It is not a laughing matter!" panted Skimpole. "I will go to the police at once—perhaps Mr. Railton will let me use his telephone—"

Levison of the Fourth seized him by one ear and yanked him back.

"Hold on, ass!" he said.

"I insist upon calling in the police!" exclaimed Skimpole.

"Fathead! Somebody's taken the silly rot, and hidden it for a lark," said Tom Merry. "We'll come and help you look for it, if you like. We're nearly done here, anyway."

"It is gone!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

Skimpole was in a state of such wild excitement that something evidently had to be done to soothe him. He was quite capable of telephoning to the police-station that a theft had been committed, which naturally the juniors did not intend to allow.

Tom Merry & Co. walked him away to the School House, and Talbot and Gore and several other fellows went with them.

Skimmy's absent-mindedness was well known, and it was quite possible that he had shoved the valuable manuscript into some corner and forgotten all about it. Not that anybody attached the slightest importance to Skimmy's lucubrations on the subject of the war. If his manuscript had any value, it was only by weight, in view of the paper shortage. Still, it was Skimmy's property, and nobody had a right to meddle with it.

The juniors made a search of the study. No sign of the manuscript was to be seen, however.

It had vanished.

Skimpole watched them impatiently. He was quite assured that the valuable volume had been stolen, probably by a German spy, who desired to prevent the publication of that crushing indictment of the Fatherland. Skimmy was quite alone in entertaining that suspicion.

"Well, it's not here," said Talbot. "Some fellow has taken it for a joke, and hidden it, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Can't you write it out again, Skimmy?"

"My dear Talbot, three hundred chapters, and with paper at the present price—"

"What do you mean by wasting paper in war-time?" demanded Lowther. "Bump him for writing the rot at all!"

"Yaas, that's wathah a good ideah." Skimpole did not heed.

"You observe, my dear fellows, that it has been stolen," he said. "I had better go and ask Mr. Railton to let me use his telephone—"

"You uttah ass—"

"Oh, let him go!" grinned Levison. "On condition he tells Railton what he wants to telephone about."

"Ha, ha! That will be all right. Go it, Skimmy!"

"I shall certainly acquaint Mr. Railton with my loss. Doubtless he will summon an experienced detective from Scotland

Yard, when he comprehends the importance of the manuscript."

"Ha, ha, ha! He will—when!"

Skimpole rushed away to the House-master's study. The juniors grinned as they awaited his return. He was not long gone, and he had a puzzled look when he came back.

"Well, what says the oracle?" asked Tom Merry.

"It is extraordinary!" said Skimpole. "Mr. Railton appears to attach no importance whatever to my manuscript—"

"Go hon!"

"He forbids me to mention the matter to the police."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is most distressing," said Skimpole. "I have always respected Mr. Railton, especially since he was wounded at the Front. But the inference is clear."

"Eh?"

"Tempted by the immense value of my manuscript, our Housemaster himself has evidently purloined it from my study," said Skimpole sadly. "That is the only way of accounting for his refusing to allow me to call in the police. Is it not distressing, my dear fellows?"

"Greatest Scott!"

"You—you—you—" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now, what is to be done?" asked Skimpole, blinking at them. "Should I be justified in visiting the police-station, and denouncing Mr. Railton as the culprit? Are the proofs strong enough? What do you think, my dear Merry?"

"Wh-wh-what do I think?" gasped Tom Merry dazedly. "You howling ass, I think we'd better give you a jolly good bumping!"

"Hear, hear!"

"My dear fellow— Oh, crumbs! Leggo! Yooop!"

"Bump!" "Yooop!"

"That's one for his manuscript," said Lowther. "Now give him one for going to Railton."

"Bump!" "Now another for losing the manuscript!"

"Bump!" "Now another for wanting to find it!"

"Bump!" "And one for luck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump!"

Then the juniors departed, leaving Skimpole sitting on the floor of the study, gasping for breath, and feeling as if several earthquakes and air-raids had happened to him all at once.

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus Has a Brain-wave.

"BAI Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation suddenly—so suddenly that Jack Blake, who was pouring out the coffee, jumped, and streamed the coffee over Arthur Augustus' noble knees instead of his tea-cup.

Arthur Augustus' next remark was:

"Yow!"

"You thumping ass!" exclaimed Blake wrathfully. "Now the coffee's wasted!"

"Oh, ewumbs! My twousahs!"

"Bother your trousers! What did you make me jump for?" demanded Blake.

"What do you mean by yelping at a chap as if you'd been bitten?"

"Oh, you uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus, dazing in despair at his trousers. "You have ruined my bags! My knees are all wet. Lend me your handkerchief, Hewwies, to mop this wotten coffee off."

"Can't you use your own?" asked Herries.

"Imposs, deah boy! It would soil it dreadfully."

"What about mine, then?" roared Herries.

"Well, yours is nevah weally up to the mark, Hewwies, and it would not weally mattah— If you thwow that loaf at me, Hewwies, I shall give you a fealful thwashin'!"

Digby rescued the war-loaf in time. Jack Blake poured more water into the tea-pot. Tea-pot and coffee-pot were one in Study No. 6. The addition of water did not really make much difference, for only a teaspoonful of coffee had gone to the making of a potful, and it was very nearly colourless. War-time was being felt in Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's as everywhere else.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy mopped his knees with a duster, and sat down again, frowning.

"I was goin' to make a wemark, when you acted like a clumsy ass, Blake," he said.

"Glad I stopped you, then," replied Blake heartlessly.

"I wegard that wemark as asinine. A wippin' ideah suddenly flashed into my bwain."

"There was room for it. Nothing for it to jostle against."

"Pway don't make wotten jokes, Blake. We get enough of that fwom Lowthah. About the Form competition—"

"Thought of a way of making up our leeway in points?" asked Blake, rather sarcastically.

"Yaas."

"Good! Keep it a dead secret."

"Whyevah, deah boy?"

"Then we sha'n't have to hear it," said Blake. "Now, about that spin on Saturday, you chaps?"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass wetherly upon Blake.

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake! I have thought of a wippin' dodge for catchin' up the Shell in points. Skimpole is weepin' an' wailin' and gnashin' his teeth about that wotten bosh of his, called 'Weflections on somethin' or othah.' It has been taken out of his study."

"Fed up with Skimmy?"

"Lots of the fellows have been helpin' him look for it," said Arthur Augustus.

"It vanished fwom his studay yestahday aftahnoon, when we were at cwicked. It has not turned up yet, and there appeahs no doubt that it has been purloined by some pwactical yokah who is hidin' it."

"Somebody may have sold it at twopence a pound," said Dig. "That's all it was good for."

"Yaas, that's poss. Now, of course, it doesn't mattah a wap whathah Skimmy's wot evah turns up again," continued the swell of St. Jim's. "But it was a mean twick to wowwy poor old Skimmy ovah his wubbish. The fellow who's wowwyin' him ought to be thwashed."

"What on earth's that got to do with the Form competition?" asked Herries.

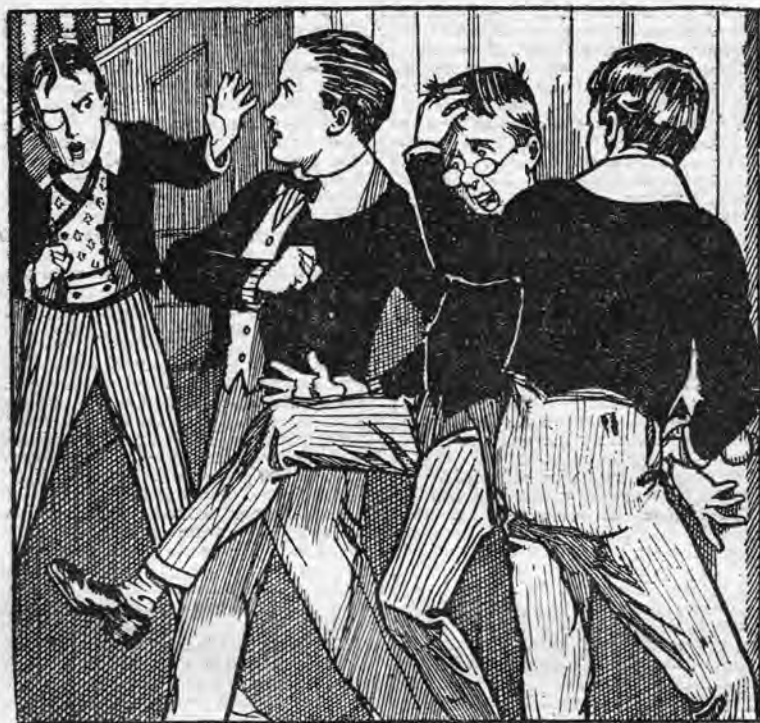
"I am comin' to that, Hewwies."

"You're a good time coming!"

"That's because I am intewwupted by obtuse wemarks, deah boy. I am thinkin' of suggestin' a detective contest—"

"A which?" howled Blake.

"A detective contest between the Fourth and the Shell, deah boy. Shell and Fourth appoint a chap to act as detective to twack out the wobbah of Skimmy's wubbish. A detective fwom each Form, you know, to investigate the case, like Sherlock Holmes, and hand the murdewah—I mean, the boundah—ovah to justice. It's pweety cleah that the wottah doesn't mean to let Skimmy have



Gussy to the rescue.

(See Chapter 2.)

his silly manuscript back, and it would be only decent to find it for him, if poss. But that is a minah point."

"My hat!" said Blake.

"We could awwange twentay points in the big contest for the winnah," said Arthur Augustus. "It would be a weally novel event for the competitish; and as I, of course, should be appointed to wepweent the Fourth, it is a pwactically certain win for our Form."

"You!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"It's not a bad idea," said Herries thoughtfully.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Hewwies."

"Yes, I know. It's not a bad idea, and I think the Shell would take it on," said Herries. "It would be novel, too, and a change from the sporting events in the contest. I think it's all serene."

Jack Blake knitted his brows.

"I think so, too," he agreed, thinking it out. "Blessed if I know how Gussy came to think of it!"

"It flashed into my bwain—"

"That's where a chap benefits by havin' an empty brain-box—things flash into it," agreed Blake. "We'll put this to Tom Merry and the judgin' committee."

If they take it on, we'll appoint a committee of detectives to track down the merry culprit."

"With me as chaiman, Blake?"

"With you as a looker-on, old chap, on condition that you don't offer any advice."

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus in great wrath. "Blake, I am bound to wemark that I wegard you—"

"Come on!" said Blake, jumping up. "Let's go and see the Shell bounders about it at once. This looks like a win for us if they take it on."

Blake and Herries and Dig left the study at once, and Arthur Augustus followed them, breathin' wrath. It really looked as if Gussy, after havin' that brain-wave, was to left on the beach

while his great idea was carried out by abler hands. Gussy was not inclined to admit that any hands were abler. There was going to be argument on that point.

The chums of the Fourth went along to Tom Merry's study, and as they passed the one before it they heard the dulcet tones of Skimpole of the Shell.

"But what am I to do, my dear Talbot? The manuscript has been stolen, and unless I call in the police—"

"Try not to be an ass, old scout!" said Talbot.

"He can't help it," said Gore. "But I've got a suggestion to make. Every time Skimmy mentions his precious manuscript we'll throw things at him—like that."

Biff!

There was a yell in the study, and Blake & Co. passed on, grinning. Evidently the genius of the Shell had not yet discovered his great manuscript, and, like Rachel of old, he mourned for that which was lost, and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER 5.

A Very Novel Event.

THE Terrible Three were chatting very cheerily in their study.

They had many causes for satisfaction. Tom Merry had received news that his uncle at the Front was well and going strong. Monty Lowther's uncle, who was too old for the Front, was on war-work, but he had found time to send his nephew a cake of large dimensions—not the cake of pre-war days, certainly, but a cake at least, and an agreeable change from war-bread. Manners' father, on the same day, had sent him a new roll of films as a present, possibly because he had received a good report of Reggie—rather an odd cause and effect, but that was Mr. Manners' way.

Under all these circumstances, the

Terrible Three felt that they did well to be cheerful, though they would probably have been cheerful anyway. Now they were discussing still another cause of satisfaction—their gain of points in the great and famous Form contest. They agreed that it was quite natural that they should be well ahead of the Fourth—in fact, it was inevitable, from the point of view of the Shell. Still, it was very satisfactory.

They smiled genially on the chums of Study No. 6 as the four presented themselves. They listened politely to the suggestion Blake & Co. had come to make.

"It's a good idea, though Gussy thought of it," concluded Blake. "If you take it on, we'll agree to put twenty points on the result."

"Done!" said Tom Merry at once. "It's a regular corker—quite unique in the list of events—and it will give fellows a chance who don't come out strong on games."

"Pewwaps it would be only faiah to warn you, Tom Mewwy, that you will be at wathah a disadvantage in the mattah."

"How do you make that out?" asked Tom.

"You see, I am wathah a dab at mental problems an' things, and there is very little doubt that I shall trawck down the wascal, you know. I feel it is only faiah to point that out to you before you take it on."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three, and a chortle came from Blake & Co.

"I weally fail to see the joke, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, in mild surprise.

"There's a looking-glass over the mantelpiece," remarked Lowther.

"I am awaah of that, Lowthah."

"Well, look in it."

"What for?"

"To see the joke."

"You uttah duffah!"

"If it's a go, we'll call in the committee and fix it up," said Blake.

"It's a go!" said the Terrible Three with one voice.

"Looks like an easy win for us," said Manners. "Perhaps we ought to mention that we now of a clue already."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. Most likely you're making a mistake. And you wouldn't have the gumption to follow up a clue, anyway," said Blake affably.

"I'll cut off and call the committee."

The sports committee consisted of Lefevre of the Fifth, chairman, and Levison minor and D'Arcy minor of the Third, Frank Levison being keeper of the records. The two fags soon arrived in the study. Reggie Manners came with them. The rift in the Third was closed again now, and Reggie was, for the present, on the best of terms with his old pals Wally and Frank. Jack Blake returned without Lefevre, however.

"Well, where's the giddy chairman?" asked Lowther.

"Ahem! He says we can come to his study if we like," said Blake. "Lots of side these Fifth Form chaps put on, if you ask me!"

"Well, we may as well go," said Tom, smiling. "Lefevre takes a lot of trouble over the competition, you know. He's a good sort."

"Better call in Figgins," said Herries.

"Figgys has a voice in the matter, as head of the New House Fourth."

"I'll fetch him," said Blake. "You fellows get along to Lefevre's study."

There was a general movement to the Fifth Form passage. Cutts of the Fifth was standing at his door, chatting with St. Leger, and he smiled sarcastically at the sight of the juniors. The dandy

of the Fifth did not understand why Lefevre wasted his time, as Cutts called it, in refereeing for juniors. Certainly Cutts would not have been so obliging.

Cutts' supercilious smile was answered by disdainful looks from the juniors, and Arthur Augustus paused, to fix a withering stare upon him. Somehow, Cutts did not look withered, however. He laughed.

Lefevre was grinding deep at mathematics when Tom Merry & Co. arrived. He put his papers aside, however, and looked up good-humouredly. Cutts glanced into the study after the juniors were in.

"Still playin' that kid's game, Lefevre?" he grinned.

Lefevre looked at him.

"Yes. I find it a bit more interesting than banker, thanks!" he answered.

"Take your face away, Cutts! It's a worry!"

"Oh, rats!" said Cutts, and he took his face away, and himself with it.

"Now, then, what's the game, kids?" asked Lefevre. "Cut it short."

Tom Merry explained, with considerable assistance from D'Arcy. Blake arrived with Figgins while the explanation was going on. Figgins, having heard the wheeze from Blake on his way across the quad, was quite keen on the idea.

"Not a bad scheme," said Lefevre. "Skimpole's rubbish can't have been stolen, of course; but it looks as if he won't get it back now, as it was taken away yesterday. It's a shame, if the silly rot was of value to him. But I'm blessed if I see how you're going to find out who took it."

"I am wathah a dab—"

"But it will give you some mental exercise, anyway. Do you all agree that twenty points shall be assigned for the event?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins together, answering in chorus for the Fourth and the Shell.

"Make a note of that, Levison minor."

"What-ho!" said Frank Levison.

"Now, as to the rules of the contest," said the captain of the Fifth, entering quite thoroughly into the idea. "The task is to spot the fellow who took the manuscript from Skimpole's study, and prove it against him."

"That's it."

"As the rubbish may have been destroyed, we won't make it a point that it must be recovered," said Lefevre. "How it left the study, and by whose hands, is the point, and it's got to be proved."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I should suggest a committee of three being appointed by each Form to take up the investigation—it may cause confusion if everybody in both Forms starts as a detective," said Lefevre, with a smile.

"That's a good idea," agreed Tom Merry.

"The winner of the twenty points will be the Form whose representatives discover the truth, with proof, concerning the missing manuscript. Put that down in black and white, Levison minor."

"Got it!" said Frank.

"There you are, then," said the Fifth-Former. And he turned back to his maths without waiting till the juniors were gone.

Tom Merry & Co. left the study, quite satisfied. Cutts and St. Leger stood in the passage grinning. Lefevre's study door had been open, and evidently the two blades of the Fifth had heard the talk within, and considered it entertaining.

"So you've got a thief in the Lower School, have you?" remarked Cutts, with a sneer, as the juniors came out.

"And gambling rotters in the Upper School!" said Figgins. "Awful, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gerald Cutts scowled, and made a stride towards Figgins. The New House junior looked at him coolly, without budging an inch.

"Go it!" he said invitingly.

"You cheeky little cub—"

"You cheeky big cub!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as an impertinent boundah, Cutts!"

Cutts, with an angry exclamation, made a grasp at George Figgins. The next moment he was on the floor, with three or four juniors sprawling over him. St. Leger jumped back into his study. He did not want any.

"Gurr!" came from Cutts, in gasping tones. "Gerroff!"

Wally of the Third was sitting on his face. Never before had D'Arcy minor had a chance of sitting on the Fifth Form bully. Naturally, he was not going to lose this opportunity.

"Did you speak, Cutts?" he inquired.

"Groogh! Gerroff! Who's that stamping on my legs?" shrieked Cutts.

"Me!" answered Frank Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerroff!" raved Cutts.

Lefevre looked out of his study.

"Hallo! You playing a kid's game, too, Cutts?" he asked. "Don't make so much row about it, old chap!"

"Draggemo!" spluttered Cutts.

"Help me, you idiot!"

"One kids' game is enough for me," answered Lefevre. "I'll leave that game to you, Cutts."

And the captain of the Fifth closed his study door.

"Will you get off?" raved Cutts.

"Say 'please,' prettily!" answered Wally.

"You young cub—"

"That won't do. Tread on him harder, Frank," said Wally calmly. "You kneel on his tummy, Reggie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, don't!" shrieked Cutts. "I—I'll say anything you like. 'Please,' prettily! Oh, crumbs! Gerroff!"

The juniors got off, howling with laughter, and they streamed away out of the Fifth-Form passage, leaving Cutts gasping on the floor. The dandy of the Fifth did not look much like a dandy as he crawled away. For the next ten minutes Cutts was busy making remarks in his study which would certainly have earned him the sack if Dr. Holmes had overheard them. Meanwhile, the Fourth and the Shell were excitedly discussing the new event which was to win twenty points for both Forms—if the anticipations freely expressed were realised! That, of course, was not possible; but there was not the slightest doubt on either side of success.

CHAPTER 5.

Three on the Track.

"A WOTTEN awwangement!" That was the opinion of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, for what it was worth.

The rest of the Fourth did not seem to think it was worth much. They went on their way regardless.

There had been a meeting of the Fourth, both Houses well represented, to select the representatives of the Form. Three fellows were to be picked out to play the part of Sherlock Holmes—a Committee of Investigators. Kerr, of course, had to be one of them—that was taken for granted. Even the School House admitted that, when brainy work was to be done, Kerr couldn't be left out. There was controversy about the other members. But Levison was settled upon

with general consent, for one. The third was, after much discussion, Dick Roylance, of New Zealand. And Arthur Augustus, more in sorrow than in anger, announced his firm opinion that it was a rotten arrangement.

"I trust," he said to his chums, "that I am not the sort of fellow to be pushin'! But it is a question of beatin' the Shell; and, for that reason, it would have been bettah to select a fellah of tact and judgment."

"This study is left out," remarked Herries.

"Well, they're are three of the best for that kind of bizney," Jack Blake said generously. "If it was cricket, or swimming, or running, or wrestling, or jumping, this study would come out strong. But we don't want to be bagging everything. Give the second-class chaps a chance!"

"Bai Jove! Those three chaps would be wathah watty if they heard you chawactawise them as second-hand, Blake."

"Facts are facts, old scout."

"Yaa, wathah! Still, a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Bow-wow!" said D'Arcy's chums altogether; and Arthur Augustus sniffed and dropped the subject, though he still entertained great doubts as to the success of the Fourth in the detective contest.

The Shell was represented by the Terrible Three. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were ready to take on the task, and do their best. But even the Shell had some doubts as to whether they were equal to Kerr & Co. when it came to such matters as keenness, sagacity, braininess. In fact, the Fourth Form, in this peculiar line of business, had more reason to be satisfied with their representatives than the Shell had.

Next day the investigation began. Nothing had been heard of Skimpole's wonderful manuscript, and Skimmy was still mourning over his loss. After lessons most of the fellows were out of gates, for training for the great Marathon race was going on keenly. That great event was to wind up the celebrated sports competition in fine style, when it came off. Meanwhile, there were points to be gained on lesser events; the detective contest being one of them—not the least important, considering the number of points dependent upon it.

The Terrible Three held a council of war in their study, being cheerfully left to their task by the rest of the Shell.

"We've got a clue!" Manners remarked.

"Trimble?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"We caught him sneaking out of Skimmy's study," said Tom, with a nod. "We thought he had been raiding the cupboard. So he had. Gore missed his jam. But it looks now as if he was after something else, too."

"Only, why should he touch Skimmy's rot?" asked Lowther. "It's no value, and he couldn't eat it."

"True, O King! But he's always playing tricks, and he might have played a trick with Skimmy's bosh. Anyway, he was on the spot, and he's our game to begin with."

"Hear, hear!"

That brief council having decided this point, the chums of the Shell looked for Baggy Trimble. They found him in his study, in warm argument with his study-mate, Percy Mellish. Mellish was rather excited on the subject of a tin of pilchards, which Trimble declared that he knew nothing about. The arrival of the Shell detectives interrupted the argument.

"Here's the merry criminal," said Monty Lowther. "Trimble!"

"Hallo?" growled Trimble.

"Where's Skimmy's manuscript?"

Lowther thought that rather masterly. By assuming that Trimble had taken the manuscript, and implying that his guilt was known, Lowther hoped to catch him. If guilty, Trimble was certain to show at least some sign of confusion. But he didn't. He blinked at Lowther.

"How should I know?" he demanded.

"Own up!" said Manners sternly. "You were caught sneaking out of Skimmy's study on Wednesday afternoon."

"I wasn't!"

"Why, I caught you—ran into you!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I—I—I mean, I was there to—to speak to Talbot. If you shake me again, Lowther, I'll kick your shins! I had some of Gore's jam, if you want to know. The beast kicked me afterwards."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He didn't know I'd had it—he kicked me on suspicion," said Trimble, warmly.

"A rotten Hun, I call him!"

"Now, look here, Trimble," said Tom Merry, taking up the investigation. "We want to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. What did you do in Skimpole's study that afternoon?"

"I sampled Gore's jam," grunted Trimble.

"Did you take anything else?"

"There wasn't anything else. I—I mean, of course I didn't! I wouldn't!"

"Did you touch Skimpole's manuscript?"

"Rats! No!"

"Did you see it?"

"Never even heard of it. I might have taken it if we'd wanted a fire in the study. But we didn't."

"Did you see anybody else in, or near, the study?"

"Only you fellows!"

"What?" ejaculated the detectives all together, and Mellish grinned.

"Well, you were there, with me," said Trimble.

"Ass! Anybody else after we left you?"

"Only"—Trimble broke off suddenly.

"Only who?" asked the Terrible Three at once.

"I—I didn't see anybody."

"You were going to mention a name," exclaimed Manners.

"I—I wasn't."

The Shell detectives looked at him sharply. Trimble was red and confused, and very obstinate.

"Whom did you see in the passage?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Well, the fact is," said Trimble hesitatingly. "I—I think I saw a chap, but I'm not quite sure. I must try to think who it was. I'll really try, for I'd like to oblige you chaps."

"He's going to make up some yarn," said Mellish.

"Yah!" was Trimble's reply to that.

"We'll give you half an hour to think it over," said Tom Merry. "Then we'll come back for information. Look out for trouble if you haven't any!"

"Look here, you know—"

"Rats!"

And the Shell detectives left the study, to pursue their investigations in another quarter. Trimble blinked after them down the passage, and then, with a very cautious expression, made his way to Crooke's study. The fat junior had remembered seeing Crooke in the passage, and he was wondering how much it was worth to Gerald Crooke to have that fact kept dark.

CHAPTER 7.

Three More on the Track.

"WELL?"

Dick Roylance uttered that monosyllable interrogatively.

Roylance and Levison were in the quadrangle, where Kerr joined them, after seeing Figgins and Fatty Wynn off at the gates on running practice. The three Fourth Form detectives were letting the training slide for a time.

"Here we are, ready to begin!" grinned Levison. "What's your idea, Kerr?"

Kerr smiled.

"It's not an easy job," he said.

"Granted."

"But if anybody can tackle it we can."

"Passed unanimously," agreed Dick Roylance.

"I don't think those Shell-fish will beat us," said Kerr. "But it may end in a draw—no discovery made. Goodness knows what's become of Skimmy's awful bosh! It's quite as big a problem as finding a missing body or a kidnapped millionaire. First thing is to get all the particulars of the missing article. Let's see Skimmy about that."

"He's in his study," said Roylance. "Come on!"

Skimpole of the Shell looked up from a big volume as the three Fourth-Formers came into his study. He did not seem pleased at the interruption. He had been consoling himself for his loss by plunging into deep study of the abstruse problems of Evolution as expounded by the great Dr. Loosetop.

"You haven't found your dashed piffle yet, old sport?" asked Roylance.

"If you are alluding to 'Reflections on the Present War and the—'"

"Cut it short!" said Kerr.

"A truly scientific intellect, Kerr, never cuts it short."

"We're after that missing manuscript," explained Kerr. "We're going to find it for you if we can."

"That will be a work of great national importance, Kerr."

"Bow-wow! It will be twenty points for the Fourth. Now, I suppose it's certain that the manuscript is missing? You know what an absent-minded beggar you are, Skimmy."

"The room's been turned inside-out and upside-down," said Levison. "We can answer for that."

"We'll take that as settled, then. Now, when did you miss it, Skimmy?"

"On Wednesday afternoon, Kerr."

"What time?"

Skimpole reflected. "It was just after I was fighting with Crooke in the passage—"

"Oh, you've had your terrific combat with Crooke, then?"

"It was commenced that afternoon, Kerr, but Crooke evaded the conclusion of the combat by a sudden and reprehensible withdrawal from the scene at considerable speed—"

"Then you missed your rot—I mean, your book?"

"Yes, Kerr. I came into the study, and found that it was gone."

"Where was it before that?"

"On the table."

"A big article?" asked Kerr.

"Five hundred pages of foolscap."

"You unpatriotic chump to waste paper like that in war-time!" exclaimed Roylance.

Skimpole gave him a pitying smile.

"That remark is a revelation of the extreme paucity of your intellectual development, Roylance. My book, if published by the War Aims Committee, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 540.

would have produced a tremendous sensation."

"Br-r-r! It must have been big enough to be seen," said Kerr. "When do you last remember seeing it, Skimmy?"

Skimpole reflected again, rubbing his bony forehead as an aid to thought.

"In the morning, Kerr. Immediately after dinner that day I was in the study, wrapping up my 'Determinism Explained' to send off by post to a London publisher. The 'Reflections' volume was then lying on the table. I remember it perfectly, for I glanced through the pages, greatly struck by the extreme lucidity with which I had presented the—"

"What did you do next?"

"I walked down to the post-office with the volume on Determinism, and posted it to Messrs. Skiggins, the publishers."

"Leaving the 'Reflections' on the table?"

"Yes."

"Did you see it when you came in?"

"I did not happen to come into the study again till the afternoon. That was after I had been scrapping with Crooke in the passage. Then the precious volume was gone."

Kerr exchanged a glance with his comrades.

"You found Crooke near your study?"

"He was coming out of my study when I met him."

"My hat! What had he been doing in your study?"

"I really do not know, Kerr. It did not occur to me to address any inquiries to him on that topic."

"Crooke's not friendly with any chap in this study," said Kerr. "No reason why he should come in here?"

"None at all, my dear Kerr, unless, of course, he had been taken with a sudden fancy for studying social problems, and in that case he might have been in search of literature on the subject."

"Fathead!"

"My dear Kerr—"

"Come on, you chaps!" said Kerr. "This looks like business. Crooke's our game!"

Roylance and Levison nodded assent. The sublime Skimmy had not thought of connecting Crooke with the loss of his manuscript. His powerful brain did not, perhaps, work very quickly. But to the Fourth Form detectives it was pretty clear what Crooke had been there for.

Since Skimmy had been on the war-path against Crooke the cad of the Shell had regarded the harmless Skimmy with a deadly hatred, and it was only too probable that he had planned a raid of Skimmy's manuscripts, thus hitting poor Skimmy in his tenderest spot.

And, with high hopes of success thus early in the investigation, Kerr & Co. started for Racke's study to look for Crooke.

There was a buzz of voices in that study as they approached.

Crooke's voice could be heard.

"You fat, sneaking rascal, you didn't see me in the passage, and you know you didn't!"

"Why, you rotter, you spoke to me!" exclaimed Trimble.

"Hallo!" murmured Kerr. "Looks like evidence—what?"

He knocked at the door and opened it. With all his keenness as an amateur detective, Kerr did not feel inclined to obtain information by the dubious methods of the eavesdropper.

Racke and Crooke were together in the study, and there was a haze of cigarette-smoke there. Both were scowling at Baggy Trimble.

They transferred their scowls to Kerr & Co. as the Fourth Form detectives entered.

"What do you want?" snapped Racke.

"Nothing from you, old top!" said Roylance.

"We've got to talk pleasantly to Crooke."

"You needn't!" snapped Crooke. "I don't want to talk to you!"

"We're after Skimmy's manuscript."

"I don't know anything about that."

"What were you doing in Skimmy's study on Wednesday afternoon, Crooke?" asked Kerr.

"Nothing. I wasn't there."

"Skimpole met you coming out."

"That wasn't on Wednesday afternoon," said Crooke calmly. "That was on Tuesday."

"Oh!" ejaculated Kerr.

"You know what a blithering ass Skimmy is," said Racke, with a grin.

"You can't take his evidence."

The three detectives looked a little nonplussed. Certainly Gerald Crooke's

"You mean that Crooke's going to tip you to keep it dark?" said Kerr, who had not been blind to the signals between the two.

"Look here, you know, you're insulting, Kerr!" said Trimble. "Of course, I don't mean anything of the sort."

"If you've finished here you may as well get out," suggested Aubrey Racke.

"There is the door, you know!"

"We're not finished!" answered Roylance grimly.

"Look here—" began Crooke, in a savage tone.

He broke off as there was a tramp of feet in the passage, and the study door was thrown open.

CHAPTER 8.

Guilt?

"HOLD on, Talbot!"

"Hold on, Gore!"

The two Shell fellows stopped as the Terrible Three came up. They were in their running-clothes, and were going down to the gates when they were hailed, with Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Glyn. All of them were in training for the Marathon.

"Hallo, you fellows coming out, after all?" asked Talbot.

"No; we're on the detective stunt. We want some information," answered Tom Merry. "You chaps share Skimmy's study, you know, and it's occurred to Monty's mighty brain that you may have some idea about the missing manuscript."

"Tain't in the study, that's all I know," said Gore.

"Quite so. But were either of you in the study on Wednesday afternoon?" asked Monty Lowther. "If so, did you see any sign of a merry marauder?"

"I didn't happen to go in till tea-time," said Talbot. "I was with you fellows at cricket, you know."

"I went in for my bat," said Gore, recollecting. "By gad! Why, Crooke was in the study, I remember!"

"Crooke!" exclaimed the Terrible Three together.

"Yes, rather—I turned him out," said Gore. "He looked jolly startled when I found him there, too."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "No-body else there at the time?"

"No. I had an impression that he was rummaging about," said Gore. "When I missed my jam afterwards I thought of him; but I worked it out that that was Trimble. I kicked Trimble, not Crooke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Crooke was after something," said Gore, with conviction. "He's got his knife into Skimmy. Skimmy is on his track, you know, whenever he remembers it. There's a terrific fight coming off some day, and Crooke isn't enjoying the prospect."

"I know. Crooke's the man!" said Manners. Thanks, old top!"

Talbot and company went on their way, and the Terrible Three returned to the School House in a state of great satisfaction. Crooke had been rummaging about the study shortly before the manuscript was missing! They did not want much more evidence than that.

The three detectives tramped up to the Shell passage, and pitched open Crooke's door. They knew the two black sheep were at home.

To their surprise, they found Trimble and Kerr, Levison and Roylance, in the study with Racke and Crooke.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Same to you!" grinned Roylance.

"We want Crooke—"

"First in the field, my boy!" said Kerr. "Our game!"



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word was decidedly unreliable; but Skimpole's absent-mindedness was a standing joke, and his remembrance could not be relied upon any more than Crooke's word.

"But what's Trimble doing here?" asked Kerr quietly.

"I—I came in for a smoke," said Trimble.

"We couldn't help hearing what you said as we came up," said Kerr. "You saw Crooke in the passage on that occasion, Trimble."

Trimble gave Crooke a significant look, and Crooke gave him a curt nod. It was evidently a signal.

"I didn't see Crooke," answered Trimble calmly. "I mean, not on that occasion. I was referring to some other time."

"Our game!" repeated Roylance and Levison firmly.

"Oh!" said Tom, pausing.

It was a fair claim. The Fourth Form detectives were first in the field, and the justice of the claim could not be denied.

"Have you got proof?" asked Lowther.

"Not yet. We're investigating."

"We've got proof!" said Manners.

"You silly asses!" roared Crooke. "What proof have you got? Go and eat cake! I don't know anything about Skimmy's fool manuscript!"

"Crooke wasn't in that study on Wednesday," said Racke. "It's a mistake of Skimmy's."

"It's not a mistake of Gore's, though," said Lowther. "We've just had it from Gore that he found Crooke rummaging in his study on Wednesday afternoon."

"Oh!" exclaimed Kerr & Co.

Crooke gritted his teeth. The game was up now, so far as that particular denial was concerned. It was established that he had been in the study just before the loss of the manuscript.

Baggy Trimble looked uneasy. It did not seem as if his silence was worth purchasing at this rate.

"And Crooke's the fellow Trimble saw, I'll bet you," said Manners. "That was the name he was going to mention."

"Oh, I say!" murmured Trimble.

Crooke snarled.

"Well, I admit it!" he exclaimed. "I was in the study. Gore turned me out, and I went in later, and that fool Skimpole met me as I came away. Trimble's just asked me for five bob not to mention that he saw me in the passage about that time."

"You fat rascal!" roared Tom Merry. "So that's why you were keeping the name back?"

"Oh, I—I say! I—I—" stammered Trimble. "I—I meant— Oh! Leggo!"

Six detectives seized Baggy Trimble at once. He was hurled through the doorway, and he landed in the passage with a crash and a yell.

"Jump on him!" roared Lowther.

"Yaroooh!"

Baggy Trimble fled for his life. His little financial enterprise had not worked out successfully, after all.

"Crooke's the man!" said Manners.

"Fool!" snapped Crooke.

"Our man, please," said Levison. "First in the field, you know!"

"Oh, let these chaps have him," said Kerr generously. "We resign our claim in their favour."

"What!" exclaimed Roylance and Levison together.

"Let's be generous," said Kerr.

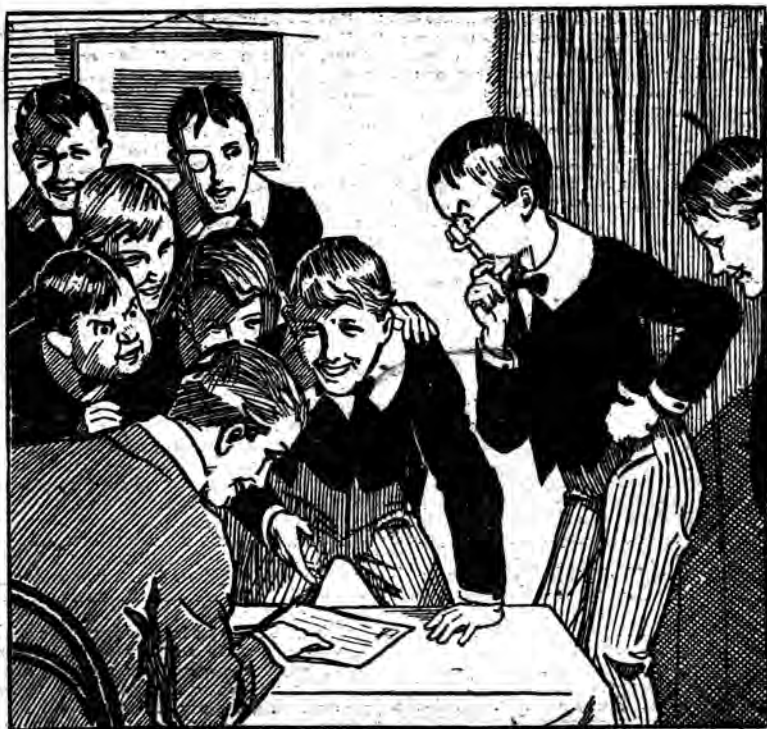
"Look here—"

"My dear men, come along, and let these Shellfish enjoy Crooke's society. This smoke is worrying my lungs."

The Scottish junior sauntered out of the study, and his comrades, much amazed, followed him. They had agreed that Kerr was leader; but they felt very doubtful now about following his lead.

The Terrible Three were equally surprised. Having run down the culprit, they did not expect to be allowed to bag him so easily as this. And the same doubt smote them all at once—was Crooke the culprit? Kerr was their rival in this contest, but that did not prevent them from having a very profound respect for the Scottish junior's keen sagacity. The only explanation of Kerr's conduct was that he had come to the conclusion that Crooke was not the culprit, and that naturally made the Shell detectives doubtful.

There was a short silence in Racke's study, and Racke and Crooke grinned. The dubious and almost crestfallen look of the Terrible Three tickled them. Why Kerr had dropped the pursuit at a point



Skimmy is Surprised!
(See Chapter 11.)

when success seemed certain was a puzzle to Racke as well as to Tom Merry & Co., but it was clear that he no longer regarded Crooke as guilty.

"Well, have you done?" asked Crooke at last. "You're interrupting our game. Got the cards, Racke?"

"Never mind your rotten game for a minute or two," said Tom Merry quietly. "I can't understand what Kerr's got in his bonnet; but I think you're the man, Crooke. What were you doing in Skimpole's study that afternoon?"

"Find out!"

"We mean to!" said Tom Merry grimly. "You'll find it safer to answer questions put to you, Crooke."

Crooke thought so, too, as a matter of fact.

"I went there to rag that idiot Skimpole," he said sullenly. "I was going to make a bonfire in the grate of his fool manuscripts."

"And you did?"

"No, I didn't. I couldn't find them."

"What?"

"That's the truth," said Crooke sulkily. "Gore came in and interrupted me, looking for the bosh; but I went in later, and fairly hunted for the manuscripts. I had given it up as a bad job, and was coming away, when Skimpole met me. And that's all I've got to say."

"The manuscripts weren't burnt in the study," said Lowther. "There was no sign of that when we searched, after Skimmy called us in. Crooke's as good as confessed that he took them."

"I tell you they weren't there!" shouted Crooke.

"That's rot! They must have been there. We've had it from Skimmy that he saw the manuscript there just after dinner."

"Trimble was in the study before me," said Crooke sullenly. "You fellows caught him, and ragged him, coming out."

"He was after Gore's jam, I know that," said Tom. "We thought of him at

first. He wouldn't mention he'd seen you. He'd have mentioned that fast enough if he'd been the guilty party. Trimble's a little beast, but he's not got his knife into poor old Skimmy as you have. Why, you've confessed that you went there to bag the manuscript!"

"I didn't find it, though."

"That's a bit too thick," said Manners. "Kerr's an ass, and you're our man, Crooke!"

Crooke's eyes glittered.

"You haven't asked me if I saw anybody else around!" he sneered.

"Well, did you?" asked Tom Merry. "We're open to receive clues, and to follow them up. We don't want to bag the wrong man, of course."

"Well, I did see a kid hanging about the passage," sneered Crooke.

"Name?"

"Manners minor!"

"What!" shouted Manners major.

"Don't you want to get information?" jeered Crooke; while Aubrey Racke chuckled loud and long. "I saw Manners minor hanging about the passage between my two visits to Skimmy's study. Now I come to think of it, he must have been the chap who boned the rubbish. It's just such a trick as he played on Levison minor when he stole that potty book of records and hid it in a tree. So if you're keen on finding Skimmy's manuscript, Manners, go and ask your minor for it!"

Manners did not reply in words. He made a rush at Crooke, who jumped up and dodged round the table.

Tom Merry caught his chum by the arm.

"Hold on, Manners!"

"Do you think I'm going to hear him telling lies about my brother?" roared Manners.

"All the better, old bean!" answered Lowther cheerily. "Crooke is lying, of course—that unlucky affair of the book of records put it into his head. But his lying proves that he's guilty."

"Oh! Well, that's so," said Manners, pausing. "You fellows don't believe—"
 "Of course we don't, ass! Crooke, you will be called up before the sports committee this evening, and shown up, when we bag the points for the Shell."
 "I tell you I never—"
 "Rats!"

The Terrible Three quitted the study. Crooke's attempt to throw suspicion upon Reggie Manners settled the matter for them, and removed their last doubt. Crooke was the man, and they had bagged him; and it only remained for the points to be claimed for the Shell.

CHAPTER 9.

No Points.

"I DO not wish to remark 'I told you so,' but weally—"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy left the sentence unfinished to add to the effect.

Study No. 6 were looking rather blue. So were a good many others in the Fourth. For the news had spread that the Shell detectives had bagged their man, and were claiming the twenty points for the Shell.

Lefevre of the Fifth had been notified, and he had agreed that the sports committee should meet in his study after tea, for Tom Merry to make out his case, and the points to be assigned. It was serious news for the Fourth. Already the Shell were greatly ahead in points for the great Form contest. Such a lump as twenty more points added to their score made the prospect look hopeless for the lower Form. Even if they won the Marathon it would not make up for this, added to the previous leeway.

Arthur Augustus did not say "I told you so"; but he certainly looked it. The failure of the Fourth Form detectives was easily explained, from Gussy's point of view. They had lacked the assistance of a fellow of tact and judgment. That was all there was about it. And Gussy sorrowfully reminded his chums that he had offered his assistance, even at the risk of being regarded as "pushin'."

"It's rotten!" said Blake uneasily. "Of course, this study ought to have had a hand in it. I see that now."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "But it's not certain yet," said Dig. "The Shell claim the points, but they've got to make out their case."

"Oh, it looks clear enough. Crooke's the man—it seems that he owns up that he went to the study for the manuscript," said Blake gloomily. "That's as good as proof, now the manuscript's missing."

"Looks like it," said Herries glumly. "Those asses ought to have thought of Crooke, as he's so bitter against Skimmy. It was really self-evident that Crooke was the man."

"I should assuwardly have regarded Crooke as the man. I don't want to swank, you know, but I must make that remark."

"A baby could have seen that," said Dig. "Pity we didn't take the job in hand. I had my doubts about those chaps."

"Yaas, wathah! I freely admit that I had vewy gweat doubts about them," said Arthur Augustus. "Now, a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Br-r-r-r-r-r!"
 "Weally, Blake—"

"You fellows are wanted in Lefevre's study," said Roylance, looking into No. 6. "The committee's meeting."

"Ass!" said Blake.

"Hallo! What's biting you?" demanded the New Zealander.

"What do you mean by letting the Shell win?" demanded Herries.

"Have they won?"

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"Well, haven't they?"

"Not that I know of," answered Roylance, with a grin. "They're claiming the points. That's a different matter from getting them."

"Oh!" said Blake, brightening up. "There's a doubt, then?"

"A jolly big one!" grinned Roylance. "That's why you're wanted. Kerr wants you to be present."

"Oh, we'll come," said Blake, greatly relieved. "That blessed Scot has got something up his sleeve! Come to think of it, I've got a lot of faith in Kerr."

And in a more cheery mood, the chums of the Fourth proceeded to Lefevre's study in the Fifth Form passage. The sports committee were there—Lefevre, Levison minor, and Wally. Frank Levison had his famous book of records with him, ready for the new entry—if needed. The Terrible Three had arrived, and they brought Gerald Crooke with them. Crooke had not wanted to come, but he had been persuaded—the persuasion taking the form of a grip on the back of his neck. Figgins & Co. were there, too—Figgins and Fatty Wynn wearing merry smiles, for some reason best known to themselves. Kerr was serious, but Levison was smiling, too. Blake & Co. walked in with Roylance, and Lefevre nodded to them.

"I won't ask you to sit down," he said, "unless you have a fancy for the floor. Don't mind crowding my study. Kerr says it's necessary for you kids to be present. I dare say he knows what he means."

"Blessed if I see why!" said Tom Merry.

Figgins chuckled.

"Put your money on Kerr!" he said. "We keep a Scotsman in our study to think things out for us. Kerr's the man."

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn emphatically.

"Well, to business," said Lefevre. "Twenty points are claimed by the Shell. They say Crooke bagged Skimpole's blessed manuscript. I think everybody's present now, unless Kerr would like an army of the Third, and a few of the Sixth."

"Not at all!" said Kerr cheerfully.

"Then let's get to business. State your case, Merry."

Tom Merry stated the case. The captain of the Fifth and the juniors listened without interruption. The case sounded conclusive enough. Crooke had been seen in Skimpole's study shortly before Skimmy missed the manuscript by two different witnesses—Skimmy himself and Gore. Trimble had seen him outside. Crooke had denied the fact. It had been proved, and then he had confessed that he had gone to the study to rag Skimpole's manuscript. If he was innocent, why his denials, and his attempt to bribe Trimble not to mention his name? He confessed what his intention in the study had been. The Shell detectives submitted that he had carried out his intention. Hence his falsehoods when questioned. That was the case for the Shell.

It was so conclusive that Study No. 6 looked glummer and glummer as Tom proceeded. They had no doubts left. Even Figgins and Fatty Wynn looked very serious, in spite of their tremendous faith in their Scottish chum. Kerr, Levison, and Roylance had an impassive expression.

"Well, that's settled," said Lefevre. "I don't see how the Shell claim can be disputed. Kerr enters a protest, however, and I must give him a hearing. You can ring on, Kerr."

Kerr quietly stepped forward.

"With all respect to the acknowledged abilities of the Shell, he began, "I think they've got the wrong man."

"Rats!" said Manners.

"Order! Go ahead, Kerr!"

"I hope to prove that Crooke was not the man," said Kerr calmly.

Crooke brightened up. He had been looking very apprehensive as he heard his guilt so clearly established. He was looking forward to a ragging. But denials on his part were futile. He had already denied what was known to be true, and his word was worthless.

"Crooke visited the study to bag the manuscript," continued Kerr. "The question is, did he bag it? On his first visit certainly not, or he would not have paid the second visit."

"That's so!" said Tom Merry.

"As he came away after his second visit he met Skimpole. Skimpole went for him, to settle the fight that's been hanging about so long. Crooke called to Racke to help him, and then Blake and the rest came up to see fair-play. That's what's happened, as I've heard the story."

"That's so," said Blake. "I told you about it when you asked me, though I'm blessed if I knew what you wanted to know for."

Kerr smiled.

"These fellows are witnesses," he said. "Skimpole was fighting Crooke, and they watched him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Was Crooke carrying a bundle at the time?"

"Eh?" ejaculated Blake. "No! Certainly not!"

"If he had brought Skimmy's manuscript away from the study, he must have had it about him when he was fighting Skimmy. Did you see it?"

"My hat! No!"

"Hold on," said Lefevre, looking rather curiously at Kerr. "A chap could slip a manuscript into an inside pocket, couldn't he?"

"Not Skimpole's manuscript."

"Why not?"

"Because it was five hundred pages of foolscap."

"Five hundred pages!" gasped Lefevre.

"Skimmy is rather a goer, you know," said Kerr. "That was the size of it. Five hundred pages of foolscap. I don't know how much it would weigh, but it would weigh a thumping lot. If Crooke was carrying a bundle like that these chaps must have seen it. In fact, he would have had to drop it when he was fighting Skimmy. Did they see it?"

"No fear!" answered Study No. 6 with one voice.

Crooke burst into a laugh. It was a simple point to take, but it was only Kerr who had thought of it. It was clear now that that was what had come into Kerr's mind when he had so generously abandoned his claim to Crooke in favour of the Shell detectives.

"You see," continued Kerr in a sweet and silky voice, "we got from Skimmy that he met Crooke coming out of his study, and started fighting him on the spot. For the moment I overlooked the point which these Shellfish have kindly overlooked all the time—that a big bundle of manuscript would have come into evidence on such an occasion, and even Skimmy would have seen it. That came into my head while we were questioning Crooke; so I handed him over to Tom Merry, feeling that Shell fellows ought to be encouraged to exercise their brains."

Lefevre grinned.

"I went back and asked Skimmy about it," continued Kerr. "I learned from that ass that Blake and his pals had chipped in when Racke and Crooke started ragging him together. I laid in wait for Blake when he came in from his run, and he told me what had happened."

He made no mention of having noticed a bundle about Crooke on that occasion. That settled it, to my mind. Skimpy tackled Crooke as he left the study. Blake & Co. came on the scene while the scrapping was going on. Nobody saw anything of a bundle. Inference: Crooke didn't bring Skimpy's tremendous manuscript out of the study at all."

"Simple as A B C," grinned Crooke. "Much obliged to you, Kerr. I've told these fatheads that I went to look for it, and that it wasn't there."

"It was missing before Crooke went to look for it," said Kerr. "That's my case. What says the honourable committee?"

The Terrible Three looked at one another.

Lefevre laughed.

"I'm afraid there's been a mistake," he said. "We can't assign points to the Shell on this. What do you youngsters say?"

"Crooke's not the man," said Levison minor slowly; "that's clear. Skimpy missed the manuscript just after the fight, and Crooke was hunting for it just before the fight, so he couldn't have taken it before."

D'Arcy minor nodded.

"Crooke's cleared," he said. "He meant to play a dirty trick, but somebody else had been before him."

"What do you say, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry coughed.

"Ahem! I—I suppose—ahem!"

"Oh, let's own up!" said Lowther. "That boulder Kerr has knocked our case into a cocked hat. It wasn't Crooke."

"Put your money on Kerr!" murmured George Figgins.

Frank Levison closed the book of records with a snap.

"The event is still open," said Lefevre. "Try again."

And the juniors left the study. Crooke, in the passage, burst into a mocking laugh.

"Try again!" he sneered. "If you want a clue, I saw Manners minor hanging about the passage!"

"You lying cad!" shouted Manners.

"Ask Gore!" sneered Crooke, backing away. "I'm sure Gore must have seen him there as he passed."

Manners dashed at Crooke, who fled. Tom Merry and Lowther looked rather serious as they followed their chum. The mention of Gore gave some weight to Crooke's statement. They decided to call on George Gore.

"You heard that, Kerr," said Levison.

"What about speaking to Gore?"

"Those Shellfish are going to do that," said Roylance.

Kerr smiled.

"Let 'em," he said. "We'll speak to Manners minor."

"You think it possible that Reggie—" muttered Levison.

"Everything's possible. But I don't think it likely."

"Oh! You're going to ask him whether he saw anybody in the passage," said Roylance, with a nod. "If he did, that's something."

"And if he didn't, that's still more," said Kerr.

"What!"

"Come on!" said Kerr.

And, without explaining his decidedly mysterious remark, George Francis Kerr led the way to the Third Form-room to interview Manners minor.

CHAPTER 10.

Under Suspicion.

TOM MERRY & CO. came down the passage to the door of the Third Form-room. They were looking very clouded.

Manners' brows were knitted. His

chums were worried. They had asked Gore, and Gore did remember that Manners minor had been in the Shell passage on that famous occasion. It seemed too rotten to suspect Reggie of a dirty trick on poor Skimpy's precious possession. But he had been on the spot, and he had to be questioned. And the Shell fellows had not forgotten the trick Reggie had once played with the book of records, when he was on bad terms with Frank and Wally. They were worried, and half-wished that Arthur Augustus had not thought of that brilliant scheme of making an event of the finding of Skimpy's manuscript.

"Hallo! Those Fourth Form worms here!" growled Manners, as they came into the Form-room. "They seem to be ahead of us."

Kerr & Co. were there, talking to Wally, Frank, and Reggie. Reggie looked rather sulky. They smiled at the Terrible Three came in.

"Look here, what are you getting at?" Reggie Manners was saying morosely. "Suppose I did go to the Shell passage, what then?"

"We only want to know, you know," said Levison.

"If you think I touched Skimpole's rubbish—" began Reggie hotly.

"I don't think so," said Kerr.

"Oh, you don't!" exclaimed Reggie.

"Not in the least!"

"Reggie wouldn't do that sort of thing," said D'Arcy minor. "But, if you don't think he did, what are you bothering about?"

Manners of the Shell looked relieved.

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He was glad, very glad, to hear that remark of Kerr's.

"Here are the rival detectives!" grinned Levison minor. "Now, then, all stand round and ask questions together."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the fags, gathering round the rival detectives in a crowd. "Go it!"

The Third Form seemed entertained.

"Well, you Fourth chaps were here first," said Tom Merry. "Fair play's a jewel. You go ahead."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr. "You went to the Shell passage that afternoon, Manners minor. What for?"

"To speak to my major."

"He wasn't there?"

"No. I met Gore, and he told me that Harry was down at cricket."

"That's all right. What did you want to see your major for?"

Reggie grinned.

"To borrow a bob," he answered.

"And he came into my study afterwards and borrowed it," said Manners eagerly. "That's fair and square."

"Did you notice anybody else hanging about the passage, Manners minor?"

"I noticed Crooke blinking out of his door for a minute. He took his head in again when he saw me," answered Reggie. "I didn't take much notice of it at the time."

"Nobody else?"

"Only Gore, with his bat."

"Good man!" said Kerr. "Thanks! You Shell fellows can have this bird, if you like."

Kerr & Co. left the Third Form-room.

Manners minor looked rather surlily at the Terrible Three.

"Got any questions to ask?" he snapped.

"You didn't go into Skimpy's study at all, Reggie?" asked Tom.

"No, I didn't. Why should I?"

"I was sure Reggie had nothing to do with it," said Manners, with a deep breath. "Why should he? He's got nothing against Skimpole."

Piggott of the Third chimed in.

"Hasn't he?" he jeered. "Skimpy collared him the other day in the ruins, you know that—grabbed him that time Gore and Clampe were shut up there. Reggie was wild about that."

"I wasn't!" roared Reggie, with a furious look at his former pal. "I helped Skimpy let Gore out. You fellows know that. I don't owe the old duffer a grudge. I think he's a silly idiot, that's all!"

"Looks to me as if it was Reggie boned Skimpole's bosh," said Piggott. "He was on the spot, and nobody else—Yaroooh!"

Reggie rushed at Piggott, and that cheery youth found his head in chancery. His sneering remarks changed to a wild yell.

"Go it, Reggie!" roared D'Arcy minor.

A terrific scrap was still in progress when the Terrible Three walked out of the Third Form-room. They had gained little by following that line of inquiry. But the possibility that Reggie had played an impish trick was not quite to be dismissed.

The Shell detectives, as a matter of fact, were all at sea. Crooke, against whom suspicion was blackest, had been cleared by Kerr. Trimble might have been the culprit, but it seemed pretty clear that he had only been in the study after Gore's jam. Moreover, he certainly was not carrying a great bundle of manuscript when he crashed into Tom Merry coming out. Reggie certainly could have slipped into the study and taken it away unseen, and it looked as if he was the only fellow who could have done so.

Even Manners was uneasy, though he held to his faith in his minor. Tom Merry and Lowther hardly knew what to think.

Prep claimed the rival detectives soon afterwards, and the matter had to be dismissed for the time. But in the Common-room that evening there was a great deal of discussion on the subject.

Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers were discussing the pros and cons of the matter. And, as all the facts were known, suspicion pointed to Manners minor, as Manners major soon discovered.

Roylance and Levison expressed no opinion on that matter.

As for Kerr, he was in the New House, and was not seen that evening. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a very thoughtful expression when he came in, and he bore down upon Levison and Roylance, who were chatting with Cardew and Clive.

"This looks wathah black against Mannahs minah, you fellows," he remarked.

"Go hon!" answered Levison blandly.

"Do you weally think it was Weggie, deah boy?"

"We're leaving the thinking to Kerr," explained Levison. "All we do is to agree with what he thinks."

"Exactly," assented Roylance, with a grin.

"If it is Weggie, it comes vewy wuff on poor old Manners," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

"Howevah, we have to bag the points

for the Fourth, you know. Have you boundahs finished makin' up your case?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Bettah stwike the iron while it is hot, you know. The Shell boundahs may spot Weggie by then."

"Kerr's orders," answered Roylance.

"But why is Kerr leavin' it till the mornin'?" asked Arthur Augustus, in perplexity.

"He says it's because he's expecting a telegram."

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"A—a—a telegwam!"

"You've got it."

"But what has a telegwam to do with Skimmey's manuscript?" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, in bewilderment.

"Ask Kerr."

"Wats! The fact is, deah boys, that it was Weggie—it's just like the twick he played with young Fwank's book of records—and it is up to you to claim the points for the Form."

"Bow-wow!"

"Unless you do so, I shall do so," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "We cannot afford to lose twenty points at this stage of the Form competition. It was Mannahs minah wight enough."

"You silly ass!" roared Manners, who had come in in time to hear that remark. Arthur Augustus calmly turned his eyeglass upon the Terrible Three.

"I wufuse to be called an ass, Mannahs! Tom Mewwy, I claim twenty points for the Fourth, havin' discovered the culpwit."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"You can claim them if you like," he said. "I can't think it was Reggie."

"Wata! Ewerybody thinks so."

"I must say it looks like it," observed Jack Blake.

"Silly lot of chumps!" snorted Manners.

"Bai Jove! I believe Tom Mewwy and Lowthah more than half think so!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "When the sports committee meets, Tom Mewwy, I shall claim those points for the Fourth, if the culpwit turns out to be Mannahs minah. I may as well remark that I felt all along that I was the chap to bag the points, and I wegard myself as havin' done so."

And with that, and a disdainful glance at the angry Manners, Arthur Augustus walked away very loftily.

Manners set his lips, and left the Common-room.

The event was having an unfortunate outcome. Unless the real culpwit was found, suspicion was sure to rest upon Reggie, from the remembrance of his old trick with the book of records; and though proof might not be forthcoming, the suspicion was unpleasant enough. He could only be cleared by the discovery of the culpwit; and how was he to be discovered? If it was not Reggie, who was it?

Manners could not even think of a reply to that question. And, keen as he was for his Form to win the great sports competition, Manners found himself wishing that Kerr would get at the truth, even at the cost of a loss of twenty points for the Shell. For, unless it was Reggie who was guilty, the Shell detectives had to confess themselves beaten. And all, therefore, depended on Kerr of the New House.

CHAPTER 11.

The Absent-minded Beggar Again.

LEFEVRE'S study at two! That was the word on the following day, Saturday. There was a cricket-match in the afternoon, and the meeting of the sports committee was to take place first.

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Kerr & Co. were claiming the twenty points for the Fourth.

That news caused great excitement.

In reply to many eager questionings, Kerr & Co. said nothing, excepting that all would be told at the committee meeting. They would not even name the culpwit.

Tom Merry & Co. were curious—and anxious. They feared that Reggie was the culpwit, and that Kerr had found proof. Yet, since the questioning in the Form-room, at which the Shell fellows had been present, Kerr had not even seen Reggie. He had seen Skimpole, and asked him all sorts of questions. He had been down to Rylcombe the previous evening, and that morning he had received a telegram. Whether all that had anything to do with the case of the missing manuscript the juniors could not tell, but they were very curious. Neither were the fellows certain that the Fourth Form claim would be substantiated. The Shell had already claimed the points once, and failed. And the Shell were of opinion that the Fourth Form claim would probably fail also.

As soon as Manners heard of the rendezvous in Lefevre's study, which was at dinner-time, he looked pale and troubled. The moment he was out of the dining-room he bolted for the New House, and looked for Kerr.

"Who was it?" he panted, catching the Scottish junior by the arm.

Kerr smiled.

"All serene!" he said. "It wasn't Reggie."

Manners gasped.

"Thanks, old chap!"

He walked away greatly comforted. He did not care much who it was—hardly cared if the Fourth bagged the points—so long as it wasn't Reggie. Kerr shook his head as he looked after him.

"I was bound to tell him that much, Figgy," he said. "Bound to put him out of his suspense, though it rather spoils the effect of the denouement. Never mind, we're going to bag the points."

Promptly at two o'clock the committee met in Lefevre's study, presided over by the captain of the Fifth. Frank Levison's book of records was open on the table. Wally sat with a magisterial expression on his face. Reggie Manners was there, to back them up, he declared, though what backing up they required was not very clear.

The Terrible Three came in with Figgins & Co. and Skimpole, whom they had met in the passage. Kerr was bringing in Skimpole for reasons best known to himself. Levison and Roylance followed them in. The three detectives of the Fourth seemed in high good-humour. Study No. 6 arrived a few minutes afterwards, one of them rather excited, Arthur Augustus, though by no means "pushing," could not help feeling that the credit was due to him for detecting Reggie. However, as the Fourth were claiming the points anyway, he generously waived his claim to distinction.

"Pwobably Kerr will fail to pwoduce pwof that it was Weggie," he told his chums. "In that case, I shall take the mattah in hand. You fellows wud admit that I told you all along that a fellow of tact and judgment was wequiahed on this job."

And Blake & Co. admitted it, only adding a doubt as to whether Gussy possessed the qualifications referred to.

"Well, here we are!" said Lefevre. "This time, I understand, the Fourth claim the points. Go ahead!"

"Go it, Kerr!" said Roylance and Levison together.

"My dear fellows," said Skimpole,

"if you will excuse me, I will retire, as I intend to spend the afternoon in the study of Professor—Yooop!"

Monty Lowther playfully lunged at Skimmey's ribs, and Skimmey was gasping for the next few minutes.

"Stay where you are, fathead!" said Kerr. "You're a witness. Gentlemen, the Fourth Form detectives, having discovered who abstracted the manuscript from Skimpole's study, claim the twenty points."

"Name!" said Lefevre.

"Herbert Skimpole!"

"What?"

It was a general shout of astonishment. Levison and Roylance grinned, and Figgins and Fatty Wynn exchanged a blissful wink. They were in the secret. But everybody else looked astounded.

"Is this a joke?" said Lefevre gruffly.

"Not at all. Skimpole's the man," answered Kerr calmly.

"You mean to say that Skimpole took his own rubbish away, and started all this fuss for nothing?" exclaimed Frank Levison.

"My dear Kerr," said Skimpole gently, "that is a very unworthy aspersion to make. I am shocked and pained, Kerr, and I should be exceedingly angry did I not attribute this extraordinary suspicion to the undeveloped state of your intellect—"

"You deny it, Skimpole?"

"Certainly, my dear Lefevre."

"Let a chap finish!" suggested Kerr.

"Skimpole took the manuscript away without knowing it, owing to being a born idiot."

"That's rather thick," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it's a question of proof," said Lefevre. "If Kerr proves his statement, the points go to the Fourth. It's up to Kerr."

"Up to us three!" said Kerr. "We worked it out together. I'll run through the proofs. After dinner on Wednesday, Skimmey went to his study to wrap up a book to send to Skiggins, the publishers—"

"The silly ass!" commented Lefevre.

"What then?"

"Skimpole declares that the missing manuscript was then on the table, where he was wrapping up the other rot."

"I saw it at the time," said Skimpole.

"Quite so. Then Skimmey went to the post-office to post his book to Stiggins. While he was gone, Crooke routed in his study, and was interrupted by Gore, and Trimble raided the jam. Tom Merry met Trimble coming out, and he wasn't carrying a manuscript weighing about seven pounds—"

"Certainly he wasn't," said Tom.

"That clears Trimble. Crooke has already been cleared. Manners minor was hanging about the passage, too. When he was gone, Crooke went into the study a second time, came out, and met Skimmey, and scrapped with him. I believe Manners minor's denial that he touched the manuscript."

"I should jolly well say so!" said Reggie warmly.

Kerr smiled.

"Because I have proof that he didn't!" he added.

"Oh!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, polishing his eyeglass very thoughtfully.

"We know the fellows who were in, or near, Skimpole's study," resumed Kerr. "They saw no one else hanging about between the time when Skimmey was there after dinner and the time when Skimmey returned and scrapped with Crooke. The interval was not a long one."

Skimmy went to the post-office on his bike, and only stayed jawing a few minutes on the cricket-ground afterwards. The interval was filled up thus—Trimble's raid on the jam; Crooke's first visit, interrupted by Gore; Manners' minor in the passage, and Crooke watching for him to go; Cooke's second visit, followed by the fight with Skimmy. Skimmy's discovery that the manuscript was missing immediately followed that.

"That's so," agreed Tom Merry, listening attentively.

"It follows," continued Kerr, "that either Manners' minor took the manuscript or—it wasn't taken at all! Having discussed it, we three preferred to work on that theory. We worked it out that the manuscript hadn't been taken, Skimmy, with great kindness, unconsciously helping us with the proofs."

"My dear Kerr—"

"On that afternoon," resumed Kerr, "you wrapped up a silly book about 'Determinism,' and posted it, Skimmy?"

"It was not a silly book—"

"How many foolscap pages were in it?"

"Two hundred, my dear Kerr."

"And five hundred in the missing manuscript?"

"Yes, approximately."

"After questioning Manners' minor yesterday, I put a question to Skimpole," said Kerr. "I asked him how much he had paid on the book he posted to Skiggins."

"Wha-at?" ejaculated Tom Merry. "I don't see the connection."

"You will! The sublime Skimmy revealed the fact that he had been unable to send his rot by letter-post as it was too heavy, and had sent it parcels-post," said Kerr. "And he had paid the maximum rate."

"That is the case," assented Skimpole. "I thought it excessive, but the young lady appeared too busy to listen to my arguments on the subject. Indeed, she showed some signs of impatience—"

"I had guessed by that time what had happened, you see," explained Kerr. "Five hundred pages of foolscap weigh, roughly, seven pounds. Add about half as much, and you get near the maximum weight allowed for parcels-post. Well, Skimmy's book of two hundred pages couldn't have weighed anything like that, though Skimmy's wonderful brain was too powerful to think out such a detail. What happened is this—the howling ass wrapped up both manuscripts together!"

"Great pip!"

"He had them together on the table, you see, and brown-paper galore to wrap his precious rot-in for the post. Absent-mindedly he wrapped up the whole dashed

heap of rubbish instead of only part of it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And hiked off with it to the post-office and sent it away," said Kerr. "That's what became of the missing manuscript."

"Bai Jove!"

"Skimmy, you idiot!"

"Skimpole, you chump!"

Skimpole gave the juniors a pitying smile.

"I hope, my dear fellows, that you attach no importance to this absurd theory of Kerr's," he said. "It is quite possible. It is true that both manuscripts were lying on the brown paper together, and I admit that the parcel seemed remarkably heavy, and was very inconvenient on my bicycle. But—"

"What made the rot weigh nearly eleven pounds, then?" demanded Kerr. "Your rot of two hundred pages wouldn't weigh half that."

"Perhaps I used an excessive amount of string," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "Really, such a trifle is not worth the expenditure of brain-tissue involved in thinking it out, Kerr. But I assure you, my dear fellows, that I could not have made such a mistake, and I still think that Mr. Railton—"

"Shut up!" bawled Lowther.

"Well, Kerr's theory is jolly ingenious, and it looks as if it might be correct," said Lefevre. "Skimpole is idiot enough, I know that. But the points can't be awarded without proof."

"We've got proof!" grinned Levison. "That was where I came in—and Roylance. We thought of it together."

Kerr felt in his pocket.

"Of course, we knew there'd have to be proof," he said. "These chaps made the suggestion—"

"Oh, you'd have thought of it!" said Roylance.

"Well, anyway, they suggested it, and I biked down to the post-office, and sent off a telegram to Skiggins, in London," said Kerr. "I asked them whether they had received two manuscripts from Skimpole, giving the titles, and prepaying a reply. The reply came just before dinner to-day. Here it is."

He took a telegram-form from his pocket, and laid it on the table. It ran:

"Both manuscripts received, entitled 'Determinism Explained' and 'Reflections on the Present War.' Awaiting remittance to pay return postage.—SKIGGINS."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, as they read that telegram. Skimpole did not laugh. He blinked at it in great surprise.

"Dear me! That really sounds as if those obtuse publishers intend to reject my book on 'Determinism!'" he exclaimed. "Do you consider that within the bounds of possibility, my dear fellows?"

"Just an inch inside," grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That settles it," said Lefevre, laughing. "Kerr's got the man—the howling ass himself! The Fourth Form wins this event."

"Hear, hear!" said Levison minor and Wally together.

Tom Merry nodded.

"It's a fair catch," he said. "Of course, who'd have dreamed of suspecting the fathead himself—"

"Kerr did!" chortled Figgins.

"Good old Kerr!" chuckled Fatty Wym. "Kerr did!"

"My dear fellows, it really looks as if Kerr is correct," said Skimpole. "That certainly accounts for the excessive weight of the parcel. Perhaps you fellows will lend me the money to send for the return postage of my 'Reflections on the War,' as it is a matter of national importance for it to be placed in the hands of the War-Aims Committee without delay."

Nobody heeded Skimpole. Frank Levison made the entry in his book of records, to the great satisfaction of the Fourth-Formers present. The Shell fellows did not look so pleased. It was a clear win for the Fourth; and it was all Skimpole's fault. And when that matter had been settled the Terrible Three took Skimpole by the ears and the neck to escort him home.

Skimpole went back to his study in a series of bumps, with a succession of loud yells. The Terrible Three felt that that was the least they could do. And afterwards Manners was seen to clap Kerr on the back, and congratulate him very cordially. In the Fourth Form there was much rejoicing.

"The curious thing is," was Arthur Augustus' comment, "that the Fourth have won the points without any assistance from this study. How do you account for that, Blake?"

"Simply unaccountable!" grinned Blake. "Don't try!"

"It is weally extraordinary."

But there were a good many fellows in the Fourth who did not regard it as extraordinary in the least.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's —"HERRIES' SPECIAL TURN!" by Martin Clifford.)

CADET NOTES.

THERE are very active days ahead for the Cadet Corps throughout the country. The season for camps is now beginning, and everywhere arrangements are being made for the lads to go either under canvas or into billets in farm-buildings, etc., for a week or two in August. There are many difficulties in the way of organising such camps, not the least of which is that so large a part of the country is in prohibited areas for this purpose. However, no doubt in most cases these and other difficulties relating to travelling facilities and food supply will be overcome, and large numbers of boys who are members of Cadet Corps will secure the advantages of a pleasant and healthful holiday and at the same time improve their training and knowledge of drill and discipline.

We mentioned in these notes last week that the recruiting of boy mechanics for the Royal Air Force had been again suspended, and that

it appears to be useless for further applications to be sent in for that branch of that Service. Large numbers of such applications continue to reach us, however, and we can only repeat our advice to the writers to join a local Cadet Corps and obtain the training and experience it will give them, ready for use later on if they need it. The R.A.F. is open to a small number of lads of 17 or so if they have had two years' experience as a fitter or a mechanic, but otherwise it is quite useless to send in further applications for any branch of the Air Service at present.

Wolverhampton Cadets had a great day recently when the corps was reviewed and a new gymnasium and recreation-room for the use of its members was formally opened. The Cadet Corps paraded about 350 strong, and took part in the ceremony of the official opening of the new institution, which was performed by the mayor and supported by all the leading citizens of the town. Subse-

quently the corps was inspected by Colonel Churchwood and other officers. The corps is attached to the 4th Battalion of the Staffordshire Volunteer Regiment, and owes much to the zeal and interest which has been taken by that battalion in its progress and work.

In connection with a Southern Counties Cross-Country Association Meeting at Epsom recently, a two-miles team race for Cadets on the time-trial principle—the time of the fourth to count—was won by Allyn's, who also supplied the third team, Wilson's Grammar School splitting the pair. The teams were: Allyn's "A"—G. V. Constantinidini, A. O. C. Hood, S. B. Lewis, H. L. Murche, 13 minutes 1 second. Wilson's—Sergeant Clowes, Lance-Cpl. Bowes, Pte. King, Pte. Smith; time, 13 minutes 9 1-6th seconds. (2) Allyn's "B"—C. E. D'Arcy, A. B. Randall, D. I. C. Smith, A. B. Clafford; 13 minutes 36 1-6th seconds. (3).

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 540.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 13.—George Figgins.

MANY people, believe firmly that thirteen is an unlucky number. For my own part, I am quite free from such superstitions. If I were not, I should not make Figgins No. 13 in this series. Rather should I look out some number supposed specially lucky—if any such there be—for him.

For George Figgins is really one of the best. I can quite understand the feeling of the readers who complain that they do not hear enough of the New House trio, though I am not in the way of making any complaints about Martin Clifford myself. Figgy and Kerr and Wynn are all essentially attractive, and they are so well contrasted, too. Figgy is much of a sort with Tom Merry, though there are plenty of points of difference. Kerr, with his shrewd, analytical mind, his cleverness at almost everything he takes in hand, is every bit as nice a fellow, yet of far less ordinary type. And Fatty Wynn is utterly unlike them both, outwardly and in brain. When you get deeper down you see the points of likeness—the things that really matter must be more or less the same in all good fellows, because these are the things that make them good fellows.

There is nothing specially remarkable about long-legged, plain-spoken Figgins. He is good at all games, of course, and up to the average of the Fourth in the Form-room; but that is not enough to make him remarkable. He is the leader of the New House juniors, and he has some of the real stuff of leadership in him; but even there his capacity falls short of anything that could be called out of the ordinary, and the chief cause of his acceptance as leader is his being such a decent fellow rather than his being such an able one.

Figgy is one of the characters in the St. Jim's stories which goes back to the days of very long ago, when the yarns appeared in the now suspended "Pluck Library." This means that he was before even Arthur Augustus, and some time before the Terrible Three; while Grundy and Trembleand Cadew are almost as new-comers compared with him. He was one of the three with whom Jack Blake had his first encounter at the school, as has already been told. The House rivalry existed then as it does now, and School House and New House juniors were sworn foes in name, though often enough the best of friends in reality.

For this House rivalry has no real bitterness in it. The feud is half—more than half—humorous. Every opportunity to score over the rival House is eagerly taken, and no one is keener to score than Figgy, though the scoring wheezes usually come from the fertile mind of Kerr. But who, after Kerr and Fatty, are Figgy's best chums? Why, the Terrible Three and the chums of No. 6, of course! No other New House fellow—not even Dick Redfern—counts as they do. And the friendship is there just the same while plots to take a rise out of the "School House bounders" are being engineered. If you do not see this—if you take the House rivalry as real feud, with bitter feeling in it—then you miss the true meaning of it all.

Figgy, like the rest of us, is not perfect. Once his courage suffered a bad lapse, though there was some excuse for it. The Head had threatened expulsion to the person or persons guilty of an aggravated ragging of Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. Monteith and Kildare were at daggers drawn, and there was a pretty general suspicion that the skipper of St. Jim's had had a hand in the ragging. He had not. That sort of thing is quite out of Kildare's line. Figgins was at the bottom of it, and he had real wrongs to avenge upon Monteith. But the notion of being expelled kept him silent for a time, though he despised himself for not having the pluck to speak out. In the long run he owned up frankly, and apologised handsomely to Kildare, as it was but right he should.

Moral courage is, however, a rarer attribute

than physical courage, and both are liable to sudden and not easily explainable lapses. You cannot know that a fellow is a funk because you know that he has failed once at a pinch. His courage is not flawless, that is all which is proved. But the funk has a habit of failing at pinches, and gives himself away otherwise even when it does not happen to him to have crises to face. Figgy is most certainly no funk. Again and again he has shown how much real courage of the highest sort there is in him. He saved Cousin Ethel's life once. He showed up no end well in the trouble at the Black House on the moor, when Ethel was practically a prisoner to her great-uncle, the villainous Dr. Gadsby. Those of you who read that fine story will remember the Red Room and the snake, and Figgy's protection of the girl. He had only a cricket-stump for weapon, but he tackled and killed the snake.

There is not much love-making in the St. Jim's stories. That sort of thing is rather outside the ordinary run of school life, and to



dwell upon it is not worth while. But it is of no use to pretend that George Figgins' feeling for Ethel Cleveland is one of mere friendship. It goes much deeper than that—so deep that in this one respect Figgins seems beyond his years. His love for D'Arcy's pretty cousin has in it something stronger and deeper than the "calf-love" which is all that a boy of his age can feel—according to the great majority of grown-up people. I am not sure that I agree with the great majority. Of course, most of the so-called love affairs between boys and girls are mere moonshine. But not all of them—as I know. I should not say that Figgy's feeling was mere moonshine. Not that in this case we are told of any actual love-making. But, reading between the lines, one gathers that the girl cares for Figgins in a different way from the rest. They are all her friends—Arthur Augustus, Blake

and Herries and Dig, the Terrible Three, and many more. She has been ready to take up the cause of more than one fellow upon whom the rest were down; Cousin Ethel has plenty of generosity and plenty of charity. St. Jim's is fond of her; but St. Jim's is not fond of her in quite Figgy's way, and her fondness for St. Jim's generally lacks something of her feeling where the long-legged chief of the New House juniors is concerned. It was of him she thought first in her awful terror at the Black House, though it was only by accident, in the stress of emotion, that she gave away the fact. When they went on a rescue expedition—Tom Merry, Gussy, Blake, Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn—and the question arose as to who should be the two to get into the house and guard Ethel, it was agreed at once that Gussy, her cousin, must be one. Blake offered to be the other; but Tom Merry, himself more than ready to go, insisted that Figgy was the man for the job. "Ethel would like Figgins to be the one—no good blinking that," said Tom. "She thought of Figgy first of all. Figgins must go." That was particularly decent and sympathetic of Tom. Gussy did not object, though he objected strongly to the theory that, as the girl's cousin, he might be regarded almost as a brother to her. Arthur Augustus has no wish to be regarded as a brother by Cousin Ethel, and he has often shown signs of jealousy when Figgy evinced too proprietary an interest in her. But we all know Gussy's little ways. He has probably fallen in and out of love with Ethel a score of times, with any number of other charmers, from fifteen to fifty or thereabouts, making impressions on his very impressionable heart in the intervals.

Figgins has never told Cousin Ethel in so many words that he loves her, one takes it. He is too shy for that. But she knows it well enough. And Figgy's friends know it. He can be light-hearted in his own troubles, as a rule; but he was terribly worried, unable to rest or to sleep, when Ethel was in danger.

It is a long time ago since his first meeting with her was recounted, "Tom Merry's Day Out" was the story. Figgy scored. He took Cousin Ethel off in the trailer of his hired motor-bike after the motor-car with the party to which she properly belonged had broken down. How had it come to break down? Well, Figgy and Kerr could tell you that!

But Cousin Ethel will have a special article devoted to her, and we had better leave her now. It is natural enough, however, that she should occupy so big a space in this account of Figgy, for she fills a big place in his life; and his devotion to her is one of the things that matter most about him. It would be easy to show that he has strong affections and a warm heart without even mentioning it; the manner in which he has often stood by his chums would prove that. But thousands of fellows who are good chums would never be capable of Figgy's devotion to a girl.

Into the history of the House feud it would be impossible to go here. Many stories turn upon it; but for the most part they are the chronicles of japes, with nothing that matters much in them, interesting as they are to read about. And most of the best wheezes were Kerr's. Some of them may be mentioned when Kerr is dealt with.

There was the time when Figgy's father was under a cloud—through no fault of his own—and poor old Figgy went about with his head high, but his heart very sore and his nerves very raw. But that story is as much Fatty Wynn's as Figgy's. Do you not remember Fatty's loyal championship of his chum?

Then there was the episode of Koumi Rao. That will be dealt with later; but it needs referring to here so that one may point out the influence of Figgy's friendship and Figgy's honest scorn upon the wayward and ill-governed nature of the Indian prince. Between them Tom Merry, whom Koumi Rao

had persisted in regarding as an enemy, made a man of the Jam of Bundelphore. And when he was tempted again, by the rascally German intriguer Schultz, Figgy stood by him like a true chum.

But Figgy goes wrong sometimes. He went wrong in the matter of Dick Brooke. Jealousy was at the bottom of that—jealousy because Brooke and Ethel Cleveland were friendly. Figgy insisted upon Brooke's fighting him at a time when the day-boy was working hard for an exam very near at hand, and Figgy's own chums told him he was wrong. But that was all put right later, and Brooke and Figgins have been on the best of terms since. Talking about exams, one is reminded that Figgy—by no means a particularly studious person, as a rule—was the victor in one of these once. He won the Bishop's Medal,

greatly to the surprise of his friends. He had to work desperately hard to win it; and out of his devices for getting time to swot by himself there came trouble.

There was feud between Figgins and Redfern; but in that there was more excuse for Figgy than in the Brooke case. And, of course, Dick Redfern is a natural rival to Figgy, and has more than once set up as a leader against him. That has not prevented, and is not likely to prevent, their having a high regard for one another. Redfern is a fellow with the stuff of leadership in him, and he finds it hard to knuckle under. And now and then the New House juniors do find fault with Figgy, and talk about electing a new chief.

Some of you will recall the very famous story of the fig-pudding. But that proved

little about Figgy's character. It showed him, as a cook, far inferior to Fatty Wynn. Fatty would never have tried to make a fig-pudding of syrup of figs, which happens to be a medicine—a fact of which Figgy was not aware. And some of you will remember Figgy's pluck at the circus, when he went to the rescue of the lion-tamer—in "The Pride of St. Jim's." And most of you will be able to think of many things to which I have not referred—things that might well have been mentioned had there been room. But there is not room for everything. All that matters is that you should get a picture of George Figgins as he is—plucky as the best, loyal and generous, devoted to Cousin Ethel, a rare good all-round man in the playing-fields, not markedly clever, but yet no duffer; wrong-headed sometimes, but always right at heart!

THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him with Vavasour. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of Merton's eyes in a fight with Ponsonby. In their absence Flip gets too friendly with Pon and the rest of the nuts and, without any real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He goes with the nuts to a gambling den at Courtfield, quarrels with Pon, and is knocked senseless just as the warning "Police!" is heard. Flip comes to himself in a cellar, bound hand and foot. He is let out, however. He makes up his mind that the only thing for him to do is to run away, as returning to Highcliffe means certain expulsion. Then he meets Peter Hazeldene, who has run away from Greyfriars. Goggs, of Frankingham, comes to Highcliffe. Flip and Hazel go to London, and are robbed by roughs. They meet an officer friend of Flip's. Hazel runs off and Flip follows. Johnny Goggs meets the pretty post-girl, and a general argument ensues between Chiker, Goggs, the nuts, the Caterpillar, and Miss Gittins.

Making the Best of it.

"MY word! What a silly ass the chap is!" muttered Flip to himself, as he bolted after Hazel. He had not stopped to think whether he should follow or not. If he had stopped he would probably have been too late.

The street down which Hazel had fled was practically deserted, and the sound of his footsteps came clearly to Flip's ears, though Hazel was invisible for most of the time. Twice Flip glimpsed him as he passed under a lamp, and each time he saw that he had gained on him a little. At his best, Peter Hazeldene was a long way from being Flip's equal as a runner; and just now he was a long way from being at his best.

But Flip remembered the Embankment and the trams, and felt that not until he had gripped Hazel by the arm could he feel safe. There was another thought that troubled him more than that of the trams, too. No wonder that Hazel's many desperate speeches should crowd in on his mind, and that he should think of the dark river running sullenly down there, flecked by the lights from the bridges.

Was that what Hazel was seeking? Flip never knew for certain. Often afterwards he thought that it must have been. For not until Hazel had reached the river-wall did Flip reach him, and then only by a reckless leap in front of a tram—a leap which made the driver say things not to be found in polite vocabularies.

Flip gripped hard, and Hazel turned upon him a face that looked like madness.

"Oh, you fool! You absolute idiot!" Flip gasped, angry at last.

"I—I couldn't help it! It seemed the only thing to do!" replied Hazel wildly.

He strove against Flip's hold, and his eyes turned again to the dark, sullen river.

"To bolt the only thing to do?" asked Flip, yet feeling sure that it was not merely bolting Hazel had meant. "Why, you chump, what need to bolt was there? Walter Leith wouldn't give a chap away. He would have helped us, and I could have taken it from Walter—he wouldn't have worried if it hadn't come back; and I shouldn't, either. There are some fellows like that, you know."

The madness died out of Hazel's face, and he began to look ashamed.

"I—I'm beastly sorry, Flip!" he said humbly. "It all came over me in a rush. I felt that it was a trap, and that I couldn't trust anyone—not even you!"

"Well, if you can't trust me, I don't know who there is you can!" snapped Flip. "We're in the same boat, and we promised to stick together whatever happens. Don't be such an ass!"

Something of his old sullenness came again upon Hazel.

"I've said I'm sorry!" he mumbled. "Best thing to do would be to go to your friend's hotel. I won't go in, though. I shall wait

outside. But I know you'll come back to me all serene—unless he won't let you!"

"Oh, you're potty! I tell you Walter Leith can be trusted all the way."

"I can't help it! I can't trust him if you can! I can't trust anyone but you!"

"And not me all the time!" snapped Flip.

"I'm sorry. I think I was half mad, old man!"

"More than half," said Flip, cooling again, and actually grinning. "But we can't go to the hotel."

"Why not?"

"Don't know where it is. Don't even know its name."

"We can go back to where we left him."

"We did leave him, didn't we?" answered Flip, grinning again. "Wonder what he thought of it?"

"He must have thought me a weird ass," Hazel admitted.

"He'd be a weird ass himself if he was off doing that," said Flip. "You're an unexpected sort of chap, Hazel. But never mind that. We'll go back. Walter may have hung about, though I shouldn't think so. He could hardly have expected to see us again."

"Wait a moment! I'm not sure it's safe, Flip. Mobby might grab us."

"Oh, Mobby's ancient history by this time—as ancient as Julius Cæsar. Besides, he wouldn't grab you. Simply wouldn't be bothered!"

"It would be just as bad if he got you, though."

"There's only one of Mobby," said Flip. "If there were three of him he might hold me. As there's only one, that one would only get a few thick ears trying it on. Come to that, he may not really have been after us at all. Might have been up here for several other things, you know."

They returned to the Strand; but they did not see Walter Leith again. It was not to be wondered at that he should have gone.

"Fed up!" said Flip briefly.

But it had not been exactly that. Captain Leith would have waited all night had he had the least belief in the possibility of their return. But he had failed to understand that the sudden bolt was Hazel's doing, and he had quite given them up.

"My hat! I've done it now!" groaned Hazel.

"We're no worse off than we were before we saw him just now," Flip replied. "Don't make a fuss about nothing. We'll do what we meant to do—take the trams out beyond town, and then strike into the country until we can find a barn or a haystack."

"Seems the only thing to do," Hazel agreed meekly. "How much have you got left, Flip?"

"Oh, a few shillings—five, I dare say. Enough to keep us in grub for a day or two. And what do lodgings matter when you can't settle down in them, and like a haystack better?" returned Flip cheerily.

Hazel could not feel cheery. He was very

silent on the bus. It was a bus, not a tram, they took after all; and it landed them at Mitcham, beyond which Hazel said the country began.

But they had still some weary tramping to do before they found free quarters for the night; and Hazel was utterly exhausted when at last they covered themselves up with hay.

Luckily they had been able to get something to eat at Mitcham; and, as Flip said, they were all right for breakfast, and for an appetite for it, as they would certainly have a walk first.

Hazel only groaned at that, as he had groaned at other attempts at consolation. But he spoke drowsily a few minutes later.

"It's all very well for you, Flip," he said. "You know it isn't your fault. I don't believe you'd have done a bunk at all if it hadn't been for me, and—"

His voice trailed off into a numbling in which no words were to be distinguished. Then it ceased. He was asleep.

Flip lay gazing up at the stars in the frosty sky.

"It's a bit of a job," he murmured. "But it's got to be done, and that settles it. Wish I could see the end of it, though! If Hazel goes and—ugh! I won't think of that. Got to be done. I promised Marjorie, and it's simply got to be done!"

He nestled drowsily into the hay, and within a minute had followed Hazel into the land of sleep.

The Nuts Hear the Truth.

"I DIDN'T think you had it in you, Gaddy! I didn't, by gad!" said the Caterpillar.

"You needn't take every dashed word that cad said as dashed gospel!" snarled Gadsby.

Chiker and Miss Gittins had taken their way towards Courtfield, on far better terms with one another than had seemed possible a little earlier. No doubt Mr. Chiker would get the rough side of his niece's tongue on their homeward way. But that could have been no new thing to him; and his confession had certainly cleared the air as far as they were concerned.

And the five Highcliffe juniors were on their way back—the opposite way, of course.

Johnny Goggs walked on one side, saying little. Ponsonby was farthest from him, and not less silent. Vavasour walked next to Pon; and Vav had nothing much to say. De Courcy was on the left hand of Goggs. This brought Reginald Gadsby into the middle place, a position which the Caterpillar seemed to consider his rightful one, for he had forced him to take it, linking his arm with Gaddy's in a way that seemed to the gentle Gaddy suggestive rather of force than friendship.

Of all the five Gadsby had the least disposition to talk. It would have suited him far better to retire into seclusion for a while.

Chiker had given the game away completely; and it is just possible that Gadsby saw what he had done in a new light. To say that he was utterly ashamed of himself would be saying too much; but he was sensitive to the contempt which he knew Goggs and the Caterpillar, and perhaps even Pon and Vav, felt for him.

"If contradictions were to be made at all, they should have been made earlier, dear boy," said the Caterpillar urbanely.

"He's such a dashed violent brute," Gadsby replied sulkily. "If I'd told him he was a liar he would have half-killed me."

"I think not. I really think not, Gaddy. My friend Goggs would have prevented that."

"Excuse me, De Courcy, but I am not at all sure that you are right," struck in Goggs. "I might have interfered had it gone farther than half-killing, but if Chiker had kept within that measure I really think I could have endured it. I am free to confess that I do not like Gadsby. Even before this I considered him an eminently offensive and wrong-minded individual. Now—well, I do not care to say what I think of him!"

"That's right, dash you! Kick a chap when he's down!" snarled Gadsby.

"But if Goggs waited until you were up—in any moral sense—the time of waitin' would be very long, dear boy; an' you do really so badly need kickin', y'know!"

"Chuck it!" snapped Gadsby, trying to drag his arm away.

But the Caterpillar maintained his relentless grip.

"It refuses to chuck itself, Gaddy," he said whimsically. "do not desire to dwell upon the fact that I have paid a fiver for your benefit, but—"

"That be hanged for a tale!" fumed Gadsby. "You wouldn't have shelled out a blessed bob for me, I know that well enough. It was partly your dashed inquisitiveness, an' partly that you've taken a fancy to Derwent, though I'm dashed if I can see why."

"Those were two of my motives, certainly, dear boy. But you must at least admit that, incidentally, I have done you a good turn. Without the fiver Chiker would have made matters unpleasant for you."

"He's made them dashed unpleasant as it is, by gad!"

"Has he? Well, yes, that may be the case. It cannot be altogether comfortable for you to have your little secrets laid bare not only to Goggs an' me, but also to your bosom chums, Pon an' Vav. They can hardly feel quite pleased at the unconscious parts they played in the drama, I should imagine."

"Leave me out of it, by gad!" growled Cecil Ponsonby.

"I cannot, Pon; you ask too much. Gaddy did that, but I am hardly a Gaddy. Why did he leave you out? That is the question that baffles my discernment. What reason had he to think that you, or the dear Vav, had minds superior to the most treacherous scheme which could occur to him? Dashed if I know!"

"Derwent was a chum of mine. Gaddy knew that I wouldn't do anythin' against him," answered Pon lamely.

"Oh, absolutely! We didn't wish Derwent any harm," chimed in Vavasour.

"You're a dashed liar, Vav!" retorted Gadsby furiously. "You hated Derwent just as much as I did, only you're such a rotten

funk! If it hadn't been for that you'd have been in it right up to your dashed neck. I couldn't trust your nerve; that was the long an' short of it."

"This," remarked the Caterpillar, "scarcely sounds like a contradiction of the Chiker story."

"The brute's yarn's true, to a certain extent," Gadsby said sulkily. "But things didn't fall out the way I expected. I wanted to get my own back on Derwent; but I never tried to get him sacked, or anythin' like that."

"May—I observe—that Derwent has not been sacked, and that it appears quite possible that he will not be?" put in Goggs coldly.

"You mean that the Head— Oh, I say, you know, you can't do that, by gad!"

Gadsby was in great alarm.

"And why cannot I tell the Head the story as I know it?" inquired Goggs.

"It was understood that no one should let on—that it was in confidence— Oh, I say, if you're goin' to do that—why, anythin' might happen! I might even be expelled myself!"

"I should consider that very probable," Goggs replied icily.

"Don't be judicial, Goggs, dear boy!" said the Caterpillar. "Try to look at this thing as I do; it's no end of a study in human nature, by gad! Not the nicest or the highest kind of human nature, I grant you; but interestin'—dashed interestin'! I can't judge Gaddy an' Pon—"

"Leave me out of it!" growled Ponsonby again.

"Sorry, dear boy, but it's quite imposs! You're in it—right up to your dashed neck, in the eloquent phrase of our mutual friend, Gaddy!"

"I don't see it. I had no dealin's with Chiker."

"No, dear boy. You did but act as decoy for Gaddy. Nothin' he could have done would have taken Derwent to the choice resort of choice spirits which is the centre of the whole story. But you could get Derwent there, an' you did. You say he was a chum of yours. By Jove, you're a chum to be proud of, Pon! It isn't every fellow's friend who would have done for him what you did for Derwent!"

"You've been to such places yourself, confound you!" snapped Pon.

"Oh, I don't deny that to the best of your ability you did as much for me as you did for Derwent! It wasn't the same thing, quite. I was never Derwent's equal in innocence; you an' I have been birds of a feather. Pon! I used to think, before I was plucked as a brand from the burnin', that there really wasn't a lot to choose between us; but I see now that I was wrong. There's a dashed strain of sentimental weakness in me that would never have let me rise to your superb height of villainy, whatever the occasion."

"Look here, De Courcy, if you can't keep a civil tongue in your head—"

"My tongue, Pon, is an unruly member. You must bear with it, I think. It happens—it's all wrong, of course, for such a very superior rascal as you are ought to be able to knock out an' an' all comers, by gad!—but it happens that I can thrash you whenever I feel inclined to do it! An' I don't mind confessin' that I never in all the variegated annals of our acquaintance felt

much more inclined to do it than I do at this moment! As a villain, Pon, you have my complete admiration; but when I look at you in another light, considerin' you as a member of the same school as myself—well, I'm dashed if I don't find you pretty loathsome!"

Through all the light irony of the Caterpillar's speech—or, rather, beneath it all—there ran something stronger and deeper which told that he was really stirred. Goggs had recognised it from the first; and now even Vavasour, dullest of the three nuts, saw it. The lightness of the irony was absent for a moment, the mask was dropped, and they all had a glimpse at De Courcy's true feeling concerning Pon. It left none of them any room for the delusion that these two could ever be anything but enemies as long as they lived.

The stinging contempt roused Pon. Rupert de Courcy could always pierce his hide.

"I don't see what I've done to justify any such talk as that from you, De Courcy!" he said. And there rang in the words an appeal to the old friendship between them that the Caterpillar could not have ignored if any least remnant of friendship had been in him.

There was none, as his answer made plain. "Don't you, Pon?" he said. "Then you do not yet realise your true share in this affair. Let me make it clear to you, an' to Gaddy, as to his share. We will leave Vav out of it for the present."

"I'm not really in it—absolutely not!" said Vavasour hastily. "I didn't plot against Derwent. I didn't wish the chap any harm. I—"

"Helped in the keepin' back of a letter that you knew he was waitin' an' longin' for out of sheer good feelin' towards him, by gad!" struck in the Caterpillar, scorn in every note of his voice. "Trucked to Gaddy's vengeance—stood in with him in financin' that den of thieves! Oh, you're right outside it all, Vav, of course! But we'll let you be outside for the present, I think. That's enough for you. Now to Gaddy's share."

"I'm fed up with all this!" snarled Gadsby, wrenching violently at the grip of steel upon his arm. "I won't listen to another dashed word! What blizney is it of yours, anyway, you sneerin' Pharisee?"

"You can't get away from me, Gaddy," drawled the Caterpillar. "An' it's lucky for you that you can't, for the instant you did I should knock you down. An', by gad, how I should enjoy doin' it!"

Gadsby sulkily ceased to struggle. He had to go through with this, and he knew it. It was part of the punishment the Caterpillar designed for him. Gadsby had a sneaking hope that it was the worst part of it, too. He could not bring himself to believe that De Courcy would do anything that meant the expulsion of him and Pon. Goggs might—not the Caterpillar!

Derwent gave Gaddy a hidin', which Gaddy had fairly asked for, went on the Caterpillar, in a level, unemotional tone. "Nothin' much in that, a fellow might think. Plenty of hidin's have come Gaddy's way; he goes about askin' for them, by gad! It's the duty of any decent chap to give Gaddy's sort a lickin' now an' then, y'know. Eh, what, Gaddy?"

Gadsby only growled.
(To be continued.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"HERRIES' SPECIAL TURN!"

By Martin Clifford.

This story is different from the sports yarns which have lately been appearing; but, for all that, it deals with the competition. George Herries of the Fourth, whose keenness for music is great, organises a special musical competition, which takes the form of rival concerts between the Shell and Fourth. Herries is determined to win points for his own Form, and to that end goes in for a special turn on his own account, which he conceals carefully even from his near and dear chums—Blake, D'Arcy, and Digby. Of that concealment comes unexpected trouble; and of the special turn itself comes— But one must not tell everything. Our old friend Mr. Horatio Curll, of Roser-Moser Opera fame, reappears in the story, which ought to be to the taste of all of you.

LIST OF TOM MERRY STORIES IN THE "GEM"—(continued).

- 217.—"Tom Merry's Masquerade."
- 218.—"In Honour Bound."
- 219.—"Tom Merry's Peril."
- 220.—"Towser Minor."
- 221.—"The Shadow of Shame."
- 222.—"The Schoolboy Mutineers."
- 223.—"Figgy's Folly."
- 224.—"Gussy's Canadian Cousin."
- 225.—"For the Sake of the Side."
- 226.—"The St. Jim's Picture Palace."
- 227.—"The New House Rivals."
- 228.—"Shunned by His Father."
- 229.—"Facing the Music."
- 230.—"The Whip Hand."
- 231.—"An Affair of Dishonour."
- 232.—"The Limit."
- 233.—"Tom Merry's Legion of Honour."
- 234.—"D'Arcy's Libel Action."
- 235.—"Tom Merry's Concert Party."
- 236.—"Tom Merry & Co. in Ireland."

- 237.—"Stage-Struck!"
- 238.—"Bought Honours."
- 239.—"The Spy of the School."
- 240.—"Rough on Ratcliff!"
- 241.—"The Sentence of the House."
- 242.—"The Prefects' Plot."
- 243.—"The Wrong Team."
- 244.—"The Flooded School."
- 245.—"The Schoolboy Scouts."
- 246.—"One Against the School."
- 247.—"Buffed!"
- 248.—"Caught Red-Handed."
- 249.—"Hard Times."
- 250.—"Nobody's Study."

Your Editor