

A MAGNIFICENT PICTURE—FREE (See Page 15.)



The GEM $1\frac{1}{2}$

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DISPERSING THE COMBATANTS

(A Dramatic Incident in the Splendid Long Complete School Tale in this Number.)



The Editor's Chat.



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers.
Address: Editor, The "Gem," The Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

AN AMATEUR DIRECTORY.

Mr. E. A. Pallington, of 21, Milton Road, Croydon, writes to me to say that with the help of a few friends he is compiling an amateur directory, which will contain particulars of all amateur magazines, the names and addresses of these, the editors and staffs, also details of all boys' and girls' clubs, etc., while a section will be devoted to advertisements. It is intended to issue a thousand copies of this book. The volume should be out during March, and Mr. Pallington would be glad to hear from friends anxious to support such a useful work.

THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL.

Miss Violet Quillinan and Miss Mabel Cohen send me a cheery letter about the Holiday Annual, which book delighted them both. By the way, a few copies of the Annual are still to be had by application to the publisher at these offices.

WHY?

A Faithful Reader wants to know why the names and addresses of non-readers have been asked for. Well, this matter is as plain as the nose on the face of Cyrano de Bergerac—the legendary French swordsman, who had a nasal appendage several sizes too big.

You see, I want all non-readers to become readers without the "non." But there is another point. The splendid picture of Jack Cornwall, V.C., is sent to all correspondents who comply with the easy rules attached to this competition.

VERSES.

A great deal of poetry is sent in to me. There is not much room for rhyme, but, of course, the day might come when versifying would be the thing. You would talk of Baggy this way, for instance:

I do not like you, Baggy Trimble,
The reason why, I'll not dissemble;
You are so fat and none too nimble,
I do not like you, Baggy Trimble.

There is a lot of good in verse. Some-

times, when there is no reason, there is rhyme, and one likes to have either rhyme or reason, if you can't get both. Yes, the day might come. People would converse in verse. It would be immensely interesting. Everybody would talk poetry instead of prose, as now.

I'd just as lief
Have your beef,
And please remember the pommes frites,
Nicely done, before the sweet.

That would do for the restaurant. The waiter would carry on easily with a few stanzas praising the menu, and with a few playful digs at the weather, something after this style:

If you are in a hurry,
I cordially recommend our curry;
We've got roast lamb.
What Mary had—and fried ham,
Bloaters' paste, peppercum,
Or, maybe, you could fancy an omelette
au rhum.

Now, there are any number of silent poets knocking around. I rather fancy it would if we all tried to rhyme our words before saying them. We should hear the flustered porter at the station, as he pushed his trolley of luggage about in the crowd, murmur gently:

"Mind your backs, s'il vous plait,
I've got a lot to do to-day."

This would explain his haste. If talk were carried on in this style, how much more peaceful life would be! It is particularly difficult to be angry in poetry. I have been told this. I did not know it, as I never am angry. Besides, to express your wishes in rhyme calls for coolness, and a peaceful sort of way of looking at things.

"THE GEM NEWS."

Congratulations to Mr. J. Friedman, of 54, Chateaubriand Avenue, Montreal, Canada, on his admirable little paper

called the "Gem News." This weekly is the official organ of the Gem Postcard Exchange, and is a well edited, comprehensive little affair, which the GEM is very glad to welcome.

The Editor takes a wide view of his task, and imparts an international interest to his periodical, while through thick and thin he is a wholehearted supporter of the Companion Papers. I wish his bright and well-informed magazine all prosperity.

HOURS WITH NOTHING TO DO.

But please don't think the correspondent is not busy. He is. His duty is to mind the horse, for he travels round the country—and I rather envy him that part—with a traveller in goods, and while the horse investigates his nose-bag, my chum reads the Companion Papers. He sends his best wishes to the papers which while away the time. I hope he will write me another cheery note.

GREYFRIARS CARTOONS.

It will be worth everybody's while to keep a look-out for Frank Nugent's clever cartoons of Greyfriars Celebrities, which are appearing each week in the "Greyfriars Herald." Verb sap, as the Emperor Marcus Aurelius used to say.

NO ADDRESS.

Miss Maudie Elizabeth Hill, of Glasgow, thinks she ought to have been replied to, but she gives no address even now. She wants to know if the GEM cannot be published every day.

Nothing doing, Miss Maudie! It would be pleasant, and I am sure the "Daily Gem" would sell all right; but there are too many difficulties in the way.

Your Editor

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SKIMPOLE'S REST CURE!

*A Magnificent, Long, Complete
Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry and Co.,
at St. Jim's.*

By Martin Clifford.



CHAPTER 1.

Skimmy gives Trouble.

BANG, bang, bang!
The noise echoed and re-echoed along the Shell passage at St. Jim's.

Bang, bang, bang!
The noise grew louder and louder. "Bai Jove, deah boys, is it an air-waid?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in a flustered way, as he arrived on the scene with a crowd of others, to see what all the noise was about.

"Or a Guy Fawkes' stunt out of season?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Or one of Glyn's mechanical inventions?" surmised Blake.

But it proved to be none of these things. It was merely George Gore kicking at the door of his own study.

Bang, bang, bang!
Gore went on kicking and rapping with ever-increasing vigour.

"Stop that!" shouted Tom Merry. "What the dickens do you think you are doing?"

Bang, bang, bang!
"Weally, Goah, deah boy, I mean, you wot-tah—"

Bang, bang, bang!
Tom Merry wasted no more time in words. He seized the bully of the Shell by the shoulders, and twisted him round.

"Leave go, Tom Merry, hang you!"

"Not till you explain what you are making all this row about!"

"What business is that of yours?" asked Gore angrily.

"It's my business to see that you don't make a nuisance of yourself. You're keeping us all from doing our prep by the noise you're making."

"Oh, it doesn't matter so much about prep," said Manners, "but I was just in the middle of a game of chess with Monty, and you've spoilt the game for us."

"Rather!" agreed Monty Lowther. "I was just going to win in three moves."

"To lose, you mean!" snorted Manners. "My bishop would have taken your queen next move!"

"If I'd let you do it——"

"Why, you couldn't help yourself, you dunny!"

"Oh, blow your chess!" interrupted Herries. "I was just practising on my cornet, and Gore here started making such a hullabaloo, that I could hardly hear myself!"

"Thank goodness for small mercies!" murmured Blake. "We were spared your cornet solo, even if we've had to stand the other row."

"Look here, Blake——"

"Weally, deah boys!" interposed Gussy pacifically. "What we wequish to know is why Goah heah has been makin' such a wov!"

"That's it!" said Tom Merry. "Speak up, Gore, and explain yourself!"

"Or the gore will flow," added Monty Lowther humorously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Lowther——"

"Spare me that ordeal, Gore! Don't ask me to look at you, please!"

"Stop rotting, Monty," said Tom Merry sharply. "Now, Gore, are you going to explain yourself, or do you want to be bumped?"

Gore looked sullen. For a long time past he had been on fairly good terms with Tom Merry & Co., but he still resented any interference with his independence.

"I suppose I've got a right to get into my own study," he said, at last, moodily.

"Who's stopping you?" asked Tom Merry in surprise.

"That ass Skimmy! He's locked himself into the study, reading his silly bosh, and now I can't make him hear!"

"More likely the silly ass doesn't want to let you in. Where's Talbot?"

Talbot was the other occupant of Gore's study, and the only fellow at St. Jim's who exercised a controlling influence over both Gore and Skimpole.

"Gone away on a visit to Mario Rivers' father. He won't be back for a day or two."

"Oh!"

Tom Merry understood now why Skimpole had locked himself in. He was afraid that in Talbot's absence Gore

would again begin to make things uncomfortable for him.

"Afraid you'll bully him while Talbot's away," suggested Manners bluntly. Manners never minced his words.

"If you mean that I'm a bully, Manners——"

"Well, you're not as bad as you were," said Manners condescendingly. "But we know you aren't kid-glove yet to old Skimmy by any means!"

"He's enough to make an angel lose his patience!" growled Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Lowther. "If you think you're an angel, Gore, old top, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"Look here, Lowther——"

"What again? I've obliged you by looking once, Gore, but I don't know if I could stand it twice!"

"Oh, rats! You wouldn't like to have Skimmy in your study, I bet!"

"Perhaps not, Gore! He's not a bad chap, but I really don't think I could stand an everlasting dose of his Socialist talk."

"Or his Determinism," added Herries. "I never understand a word that he's talking about."

"You wouldn't!" grinned Blake.

"Eh?" Herries was rather dense, but he understood that gibe. "Do you mean that I—oh, well, I don't want to understand that sort of stuff, if it comes to that."

"Well, how do you expect me to stand it, then?" demanded Gore aggressively.

Tom Merry did not reply to that. He sympathised with Gore's trouble, but he objected to Gore's way of dealing with it. It was all very well for Gore to complain that Skimpole's talk bored him to distraction, but that was no excuse for banging Skimmy's head against the wall, as Gore was in the habit of doing.

Rap, rap, rap!

Tom Merry knocked at the door of the study, in the hope that the genius of the Shell might condescend to reply.

"Go away, Gore! I'm busy on my fiftieth chapter of Professor Balmby-crumpt's eugenics!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Skimmay, deah boy—"

"Is that you, D'Arcy? I'm just reading about the degeneracy of the modern aristocracy. From my knowledge of your habits, I find that Professor Balmcrumpet has gauged the estate of affairs correctly."

"Weally, Skimmay, you insultin' boundah—"

"Open the door, old chap," interrupted Tom Merry diplomatically. "Gore wants to get in to do his prep."

"I must beg you to excuse me, Tom Merry. I am afraid that the presence of Gore would be a disturbing influence to my intellectual trend of mind this afternoon!"

"Gr! Let me get at him!" roared Gore.

"Pax, Gore. You'll never get Skimmay to open the door unless you promise to make it pax."

"What? After being kept out of the study all the afternoon! I'm blowed if I'll do anything of the sort!"

"Oh, well, then, we can't help your troubles. But don't start kicking up a row again, or you'll get it in the neck!"

"If the silly idiot promises not to talk bosh to me, I won't interfere with him."

"That's better! You're not to open your mouth all the time Gore's in the study, Skimmay, and he'll do the same. Do you hear?"

"I hear, Merry. But I am doubtful how much reliance to put on Gore's word."

"What!" yelled Gore. "Do you hear that, Merry? Do you expect me to stand that?"

"Hard lines!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Skimmay knows you, old chap!"

"Shut up, Monty!" Tom Merry did not see the use of angering Gore more than necessary. "It's all right, Skimmay. Take Gore's word this time, and if he doesn't keep it, we'll come along and talk to him."

"Very well, Merry!" shouted Skimpole in reply. "I rely on that. If Gore does not disturb me, I shall read quietly to myself."

"Open the door then, fathead!"

"Don't fluster me, Merry. I must finish the page first, that I am now reading, or I shall lose my line of thought. Ah, that's right!"

And Skimpole rose leisurely to open the study door.

When Skimpole's face appeared at the study door, Gore made an impulsive movement to rush at him. But the others advanced towards him threateningly and he controlled himself with difficulty. It would be dangerous to attack Skimmay in the presence of so many fellows ready to rush to his rescue. Besides, Gore had given his word that he would make it pax, and the time had passed when Gore broke promises as easily as piecrust. He had become much more conscientious in such matters of late.

"Steady, Gore!" said Tom Merry warningly, laying a restraining hand on his arm.

"All right!" said Gore sulkily. "I've made it pax!"

"I am sorry to have excluded you, my dear Gore—" began the genius of the Shell.

Without desisting to reply, Gore entered the study, and took out his books. Skimpole followed him in, and also settled down again in his corner with Professor Balmcrumpet's volume.

Tom Merry & Co. departed, and there was silence in the Shell passage. But Gore was planning a scheme of revenge against the genius of the Shell.

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CHAPTER 2.

Skimmay Can't See.

"GOODNESS gracious!" Herbert Skimpole uttered that exclamation as the rising-bell rang out noisily on the following morning.

"Goodness gracious!" "Listen to the silly ass! What's up with him?" asked Manners, putting one foot gingerly out of bed.

"Feeling the weather, I suppose!" grinned Lowther. "It's enough to make even a Skimmay swear!"

"Dear me!" "Really, Skimmay, you're getting worse!" "Goodness gracious" was bad enough, but 'dear me' is the giddy limit."

"Oh dear!" "There must be something wrong with him!" muttered Tom Merry. "What's up, Skimmay?"

"I—I don't quite know, Tom Merry. But I can't see anything this morning!" said the genius of the Shell plaintively, as he perched his large glasses once more on his nose.

"What!" exclaimed the Terrible Three altogether, and attention was immediately attracted to Skimpole.

"Can't see!" ejaculated Manners. "What the dickens do you mean?"

"There seems to be a blur in front of my eyes. I can't see anything. I—I really—Oh dear!"

"Are you feeling any pain?" asked Tom Merry concernedly.

"Er—yes, I think so. A slight twitch, you know—nothing much!"

"I said it would happen some day!" said Gore. "The idiot has read himself blind, that's all."

"Well, you needn't gloat!" snapped Tom Merry. "Shall I call the doctor, Skimmay?"

"N-no, Merry. I don't think that will be necessary—Oh, my!"

And Skimpole stumbled half-blindly along the side of his bed.

"Here, let me help you along!" said Gore gruffly, as he led Skimpole to the washstand. "Give me your specs. I'll look after them for a bit!"

"Thank you, Gore! That's very kind of you!"

"Don't dress yourself, Skimmay," advised Bernard Glyn, the scientific man of the Shell. "These eye troubles are sometimes very dangerous unless they're attended to immediately."

"That's it," said Tom Merry. "If I were you I'd get into bed again, Skimmay."

"Do you think so, Merry? Perhaps I'd better do!"

"I certainly do!"

"Very well. I bow to your judgment!"

And Skimpole, still assisted by Gore, groped his way back to his bed.

"Here are your specs, Skimmay!" said Gore, as he returned them to their owner.

"Thank you, Gore. You are very considerate!"

And Skimpole adjusted the glasses once more.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "It's wonderful! I cannot see anything now!"

A slight shade came over Gore's face. Manners, noticing it, whispered to Lowther that Gore was not such a hard-hearted beast as they had imagined him to be.

"Run along and fetch Dr. Lambe!" suggested Tom Merry. "Will you go, Monty?"

"Right-ho!" said the humourist of the Shell, readily enough. "If Merry wants the little Lambe—"

"Is this the time for puns?" asked Manners reproachfully. "Come along, Monty!"

Lowther reddened. He joked without predilection at times. It was simply a habit. Gravelly he followed Manners out of the dormitory. He realised that there might be something seriously the matter with Skimmay.

Meanwhile the Shell fellows were surrounding Skimpole anxiously.

"I can't see anything on the surface," said Glyn, as he bent over Skimmay's eyes. "But these troubles are sometimes beneath the surface."

"Let you know, anyway!" snorted Grundy. "You'll be setting yourself up as an expert next."

"I know you'll get a black eye if he doesn't mind his own business!" snorted Glyn wrathfully.

To have any doubts cast on his scientific knowledge was the biggest insult that could be offered to Glyn.

"What!" roared the great George Alfons. "Give me a black eye, will you? Come on, then!"

"Oh dear! Pray do not make such a noise, my good fellows!" sighed Skimpole, as he faced his Form fellows with bare eyes, his spectacles having been laid aside as useless. He could just manage to distinguish their forms now.

"Shame!" said Tom Merry. "Have some sense, chaps! Don't make so much row!"

"Yes, have some sense, Glyn," said Grundy. "I'm surprised at you!"

"Why, it's you who are making all the row!"

"Well, if you don't shut up, both of you I'll knock your nappers together!" snorted Tom Merry.

"Will you, by Jove!"

"When are you boys going down to breakfast?" asked Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, entering the dormitory.

Tom Merry hastily explained the situation. When he had finished, Kildare bent over Skimpole.

"I suppose you have been overdoing it," he said. "Well, don't worry! Dr. Lambe will soon tell us what's the matter with you. Meanwhile, the rest of you had better get into the Hall. Mr. Linton is waiting for you."

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

The juniors trooped out of the dormitory obediently. Many a junior would have been glad to receive as much obedience as Kildare received from the juniors. But then he was a sportsman through and through, and the juniors treated him accordingly.

"Well, Gore?"

Gore stayed behind after the others had departed.

"Here are Skimmay's specs, Kildare. Will you take care of them?"

"Thanks! Dr. Lambe had better see them when he comes. You might tell the Head that I'm staying here with Skimmay for a bit."

"Very well, Kildare!"

And Gore departed.

Left alone with Skimpole, Kildare sat down at the side of the bed, looking anxiously at the brainy junior.

Whatever happened, Skimpole must not be allowed to worry too much. Worry was bad for brain and eyes.

Skimpole was a queer fellow, always wasting his mental energy on "isms," that no schoolboy ought to tamper with; but he had a heart of gold, and most of the decent fellows at St. Jim's were fond of him.

"Feeling bad, Skimmay?"

"I don't know, Kildare. I seem to feel a twinge in my eyes. But perhaps that is only imagination."

"Possibly!"

Kildare was not at all sure that Skim-



"What's up, Skimmy?" asked Torn Merry. "I don't quite know; but I can't see anything this morning," said the genius of the Shell plaintively, as he perched his large glasses once more on his nose. "What!" exclaimed the Terrible Three altogether. (See chapter 2.)

pole had not strained his eyesight, but it would never do to discourage him.

"Anyway, I'd go slow with the books for a bit after this, if I were you," he added.

"I suppose I shall have to. But I am just busy on the interesting subject of eugenics, and—"

"Eugenics?" Kildare cudgelled his brains. Although he was in the Sixth Form, whilst Skimpole was in the Shell, he was not quite sure if he knew what the word meant. "Let me see, that's about air and sunlight, isn't it?"

"Oh dear, no, Kildare! You are thinking of hygiene, I should imagine. Eugenics deals with the human body—about people being fit and strong, and so on."

"Look here, my boy," interrupted Kildare impatiently. "You just go in a bit for physical exercises to keep you fit and strong, and then you won't need to bother your head with eugenics or any other 'ics' or 'isms.'"

"But the race, Kildare!"

"Eh? What race?"

"The human race! I must think of the good of my fellow-creatures, you know."

Kildare was saved from the necessity of replying to this by the entrance of Dr. Lambe, accompanied by Mr. Linton.

"Is this the boy?" asked Dr. Lambe, surveying Skimpole.

"He is the boy," assented Mr. Linton.

"Don't be afraid, my boy," urged Dr. Lambe, as he bent over Skimpole.

"Fear is a sensation that I do not indulge in, sir," replied the brainy man of the Shell.

Dr. Lambe stared at him.

"What a queer lad! Well, well, let me see your glasses."

"Here they are, sir!" said Kildare.

"And are these the glasses that you have been wearing?" asked the little doctor, in surprise.

"Of course, sir!"

"Then I must say—er—er—you had better stay in bed for a few days, my boy."

And Dr. Lambe whispered hastily in Mr. Linton's ear.

"The boy's eyes have suddenly got much weaker. He will have to have much stronger glasses."

"Is there anything dangerously the matter with his eyes?" asked Mr. Linton anxiously.

"I cannot tell yet. I shall come to examine him every day for a few days, and then I can decide."

"Thank you, doctor!"

"Good-bye, my boy!"

"Please, doctor—"

"Yes, my boy?"

"May I read Professor Balmyerumpet's book on eugenics? The print is very large."

"Certainly not, you foolish boy! You must not touch any books. Good morning!"

And the doctor departed, leaving anxiety behind him.

CHAPTER 3.

Looking After Skimmy.

SKIMMY did not stay in bed long. Dr. Lambe decided, after all, that there was no harm in his walking about. But he was strictly forbidden to enter the class-room or touch any books whatsoever.

Skimpole found the time hanging very heavy on his hands. Skimpole had never gone in for any recreation but reading, and he did not know what to do with himself.

It was especially lonely for Skimpole during lessons, when all his Form fellows were in the class-room. He wandered about by himself in the corridors and passages of St. Jim's. At last he made his way to the kitchen.

Mrs. Towle, the cook, was busy cutting up some beef for lunch, when Skimpole came up to her, and began talking

about vegetarianism and the sacredness of life. Mrs. Towle pursed her lips and told him to run away and play.

"An' if we don't kill no sheep where's your mutton coming from?" she asked. And Skimpole turned away, recognising that to talk further with such a woman was below his dignity.

Nancy, the housemaid, was scrubbing the floor of the Shell passage as Skimpole returned to his study. Skimpole at once began talking to her about the rottenness of a social system which forced a sweet young girl like her to go down a wet, cold, and scrubby, whilst other maidens, who were in no way more deserving than herself, walked proudly on marble floors at which they never even deigned to look.

"You're quite right, sir," said Nancy. "I've always thought that I'd like to be a grand lady and have servant girls working for me."

"Dear me, no; that's not what I mean. There ought not to be any servants at all."

"But wouldn't the floors get into a very dirty state then, sir?"

Skimpole walked on quickly. Really, what could one say to such a stupid girl?

He settled down into his chair and took a book up mechanically. Before he knew what he was doing he was reading the fifty-first chapter of Professor Balmcrumpet's eugenics, his eyes greedily devouring the words through the new glasses which Dr. Lambe had ordered for him.

"You idiot!" Talbot, who had returned from his holiday, stood staring at Skimpole. "Put that book down at once!"

"Really, Talbot, you startled me! Do let me finish the fifty-second chapter!"

Talbot wasted no more time in words. He flung Professor Balmcrumpet's precious volume into the fire.

"And I'll fling you after it, Skimmy," he threatened, "if you don't stop playing the fool with your eyes!"

"Then you know—"

"Yes, Merry wired me about you! That's one reason why I hurried my return. I did not want to have a blind Skimmy in my study when I came back."

"Perhaps you are right, Talbot!" said Skimpole meekly. Skimpole respected Talbot's judgment more than that of anybody else at St. Jim's.

"I should jolly well think I am! I'm going to look after you, my boy!"

At that moment the schoolbell rang out.

"Lessons are over!" commented Talbot. "We'll have to find something for you to do."

"Really, Talbot, I—"

"Come out into the open, Skimmy!"

"Dr. Lambe told me to avoid the sunlight, Talbot, so I fear—"

"The dickens he did!" Talbot was disconcerted. "Well, we'll have to discover something for you indoors, then."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

It was Monty Lowther's cheery voice, as he entered the study with the rest of the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6.

"When did you get back, Talbot, old man?"

"Just this minute! And I found this idiot at his book again!"

"Ought to be pitched out of the window!" commented Tom Merry.

"Skimmy, or the book?"

"Eh? Well, if we pitched them out together we'd probably find Skimmy sitting reading the book in the quad, if he managed to survive the fall."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The book's gone into the fire!" said Blake, glancing round the study. "We'd better make a clean sweep of them."

"Hear, hear!" chorused the others, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chimed in with:

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we don't want to shove all the books in the fire. They've cost a bit, and Skimmy may want them again when he's recovered," said Talbot.

"That's so!" agreed Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Let's take them away and lock them up in our study!"

"Good idea!" said Manners. "I'll bag Softnapper's book on 'Aristocracy'."

"And I'll take Topsyoodle's volume on 'Determinism,'" said Lowther.

Each of the fellows got hold of three or four of Skimpole's bulky volumes and began taking them away.

"Really, my dear fellows—"

"Well, you've asked for it, Skimmy!"

"Oh dear!"

And Skimpole sighed as his precious treasures were carted away. His only comfort was that they had not shared Professor Balmcrumpet's fate and been thrown into the fire. He would soon recover them.

"Now, then," said Manners, re-entering the study with a chessboard and a set

of chessmen. "Let me teach you the noble game of chess, Skimmy. It'll keep you busy when you're nothing else to do, without straining your eyes."

"Really, Skimpole!" It was the mocking-indignant voice of Lowther. "Am I to believe that the fascinating game of kings is a stranger to you?"

"Dear me, no, Lowther! I know the theory of chess very well. But I object to playing it on principle."

"On principle!" Tom Merry & Co. stared at Skimmy.

"Yes, my dear fellows! There are kings and queens involved in it, and it is a species of warfare, and I object to royalty and war!"

"My hat! Have you ever met such a balm?" gasped Manners.

"Never!" gasped Lowther. "Or hardly ever!"

"Weally, Skimmy, dear boy, if you were not an invalid I'd give you a fearful thwack!"

"My dear D'Arcy, I do not expect anything else from you. You are a pampered scion of the aristocracy!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Blake. "What's he going to call you next, Gusey, old chap?"

"The poor fellow is insane, Blake! I must take no notice of his remarks."

"Hush, little ones!" said Tom Merry pacifically.

"Look here, young Merry! Who are you calling a little one?"

"You, for one, Blake. Let dogs delight to bark and bite—"

"Let me get at him!"

"Quiet, please!" interpolated Talbot.

"The question is, what are we to do with Skimmy?"

"Let him talk bosh to us," grinned Digby. "That will keep him quiet all right, I reckon."

"Oh dear! I suppose it will have to come to that!" groaned Tom Merry.

"Start away, Skimmy!"

"Talk bosh! Pray, what do you mean by that, Tom Merry?"

"Socialism and Determinism, and all that rot, you know!"

"Really, Merry, I refuse to discuss such subjects with you if you apply such names as bosh and rot to them. It shows that you are not an earnest seeker after the truth."

"Thank goodness!" said Blake fervently. "I was afraid the silly ass was really going to start off."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skimmy, dear boy"—D'Arcy was talking in his most particular and special tone of voice—"won't you come along to my study and have a look at my ties and trousers?"

"Such matters are beneath my notice, D'Arcy."

"Weally, dear boy, if you paid a little more attention to your attire—"

"I refuse to discuss the topic at all, D'Arcy. Dress has no interests for me."

"Let me bring my cornet along and play you a solo, Skimpole," suggested Herries magnanimously.

"No, thank you, Herries! Music has a tendency to irritate me, I fear."

"What?" Herries looked wrathful.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Monty Lowther. "He knows your cornet solos, Herries, old man."

"Well, I don't see what we can do with the silly ass!" said Tom Merry, in despair.

"Oh, I'm fed up to the eyebrows!" said Blake, and left the study, accompanied by his chums, leaving Skimpole alone with Talbot.

"Are you sure there's nothing you want me to do for you, Skimmy?"

"Quite, Talbot!"

"Then I'll join the others!" And Talbot also departed.

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"We intend to use this study, and we ask you to make room," said Gore, looking at Miss Marie. "You cheeky fellow!" Miss Marie faced Gore resolutely. "If there had been any attempt at politeness on your part I might have agreed. But now I intend staying here as long as I please." (See Chapter 5).

Skimpole remained by himself, and sat brooding in his chair for a long time. If there had been another book handy, he would have started reading again, but Tom Merry & Co. had carted all his literary treasures away.

At last he rose, and set out to look for fresh diversions.

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole the Reformer.

"I SAY, Skimmy, old chap—" Skimpole turned round and looked at Baggy Trimble. Baggy was panting and breathless in his efforts to catch up with the brainy man of the Shell.

"I say, Skimmy—"

Skimpole stopped and waited for Baggy to come up. Skimpole had no love for the greedy sneak of the Fourth Form, but he made it a rule never to give offence by ignoring anyone.

"Look here, Skimmy, I'm awfully sorry about what's happened to your eyes. I always knew that reading all that piffle would—"

"My dear Trimble, let me explain to

you that eugenics is not piffle. It is—"

"Yes, yes; I know!" said Trimble hastily. "But what I wanted to say was that I suppose you won't be spending

such a lot of money on books now—eh?"

"I suppose not," said Skimpole meditatively. He had never thought of what he was going to do with his pocket-money in future, if reading was forbidden to him. He had no hobbies, like the ordinary healthy schoolboy. "Can you suggest any good object to which to devote the little allowance I receive, Trimble?"

"Just what I wanted to see you about, Skimmy!" Trimble beamed. "I know a fellow who's badly nourished and half-starved. Think what a lot of good you could do with your spare cash!"

"Really, Trimble? That's very interesting. Who is he?"

"Well, he is rather shy about giving his name. Just hand over the cash to me, and I will see that he gets it, old man!"

"I fear I cannot do that, Trimble. You would probably take it to the tuckshop and purchase indigestible compounds with which to make yourself ill."

"Really, Skimmy! I never get enough to eat here. I'm absolutely starving!" Skimpole stared. He had begun to smell a rat.

"Are you the person to whom I am to devote my pocket-money?" he asked.

"I—I— Oh, really, Skimmy, how can you say such a thing? I'm not a cadger, I hope. But you would really be doing a great deal more good by handing me a snack at the tuckshop than—"

"You are a liar and a deceiver, as well as a greedy glutton, Trimble! I shall certainly not give you any money. And if you worry me any more I shall take it upon me to chastise you—"

"Bah! Silly old fathead!"

"Dear me! Trimble seems quite offended!" murmured Skimpole to himself. "It is strange how some people cannot stand the truth about themselves. I wonder if I ought— Ah!"

Skimpole had arrived at the door of Grundy's study. He knocked confidently.

"Come in, fathead!" It was the great

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George Alfred's voice. Grundy was busy lecturing Wilkins on how he ought to have played in the last football match, whilst Gunn was busy writing a pirate story.

Under other circumstances Grundy would have chased the genius of the Shell out of his study immediately. But he could hardly be so harsh with an invalid.

"Well?" he snapped.
"My dear Grundy!" Skimpole looked round the study with a friendly smile.
"My dear Wilkins! My dear Gunn—"

"Well," repeated Grundy threateningly. "If you have come to talk isms to us, clear out! We've no time for you!"

"Really, Grundy, I should hardly talk about deep philosophical matters to fellows of your limited capacity—"

"My hat! Let me get at him!" hooted Grundy, as his chums restrained him forcibly from hurling himself at Skimpole. "The cheeky bouncer! Limited capacity, indeed!"

"I am sorry if the truth is painful to you, Grundy. I have come to see whether I cannot rouse you to take interest in intellectual matters. You are so self-centred that you have become vain, foolish, and filled with an over-great idea of your own importance."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gunn. "He has hit you off to a T, Grundy, old man!"

"What! Do you mean to say that I am anything of that sort, Gunn? I'll squash you!"

"Pray restrain yourself, Grundy," continued Skimpole, quite unconscious that he was making Grundy's blood boil.

"With regard to Gunn, what I have to remark is that the type of book with which he fills his mind, full of deeds of bloodshed and violence, is bound to lead to a degeneration of the moral fibre—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wilkins. "Go on, Skimmy! I'm enjoying this! You're doing well!"

"Thank you, Wilkins! I have also a word or two to say to you. Your over-indulgence in athletic pursuits has warped your brain, and left you a mere animal, as far as the higher life is concerned."

"Grooh! You all-round lunatic!" howled the outraged Wilkins. "What the dickens do you mean by that? Animal, indeed!"

"At him!" shouted Grundy; and without more ado the genius of the Shell was bundled to the door, and forcibly set down in the passage.

"Really, my dear fellows—" began Skimpole.

But there were no dear fellows to hear. Grundy & Co. had again locked themselves in their study.

Ruefully, Skimpole picked himself up. The lot of the reformer was indeed a weary one.

"Weally, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus in surprise, as he came along the passage with his chums on the way to the playing-fields, "whatevah have you been doin' on the flooh?"

"Taking a rest, of course!" grinned Lowther.

"Isn't that so, Skimmy?"
"My dear Lowther, I deprecate your constant frivolity! I wish you would cure yourself of the habit of everlasting making jests. Dr. Noodle says that prurging is a disease of the degenerate brain."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the chums of the School House.

"Yaas, wathah, Lowthah, deah boy, Skimmy is wight, you know!" chimed in Arthur Augustus.

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And Tom Merry & Co. passed on before Skimpole could give them the benefit of more of his candid opinions.

It was Glyn's study that Skimpole entered next, without even taking the trouble to knock.

"Didn't they teach you to knock in the slum where you were brought up?" asked Bernard Glyn irritably.

Glyn was by himself in the study, busy at a new invention. His study-mates, Noble and Dane, had left him to himself because they knew that the scientific man of the Shell hated to be dis-

urbed them preparatory to pouring the powders into the little jars.

Suddenly Skimpole gave a shriek.
"Oh, dear! Ow! Wow! Wow! Grooh!"

Glyn ran towards Skimpole in alarm. The genius of the Shell was holding his hand to his mouth in agonised relief.

"What the dickens is up? Have you been testing the powders?" asked Glyn.
"—I just put a bit of one powder on my tongue, Glyn, to see whether it was what I imagined it to be, and it has—ow! wow!—burned me!"

"You frabjous idiot! It's lucky you didn't poison yourself!"

And Glyn anxiously made up a soothing drink for Skimpole, which the brainy man drank with evident relish.

"Thank you, Glyn. And now—"

"And now you'll clear out of this!" said Glyn decisively.

And he rushed Skimpole out of the study, and locked the door on him.

"Dear me! Glyn is very hasty!" murmured Skimmy. "I am sure I could have been of infinite service to him in his new invention!"

And he wandered disconsolately up the passage till he arrived at the study occupied by Lucas and Walkeley of the Shell.

Here, if anywhere, Skimpole was likely to find congenial company. For Lucas was a delicate, highly-strung fellow of musical temperament, whose sympathies were in many ways akin to Skimpole's.

The sound of talking and laughter greeted Skimpole's ears as he knocked at the door, and on entering he discovered Mathew Lucas standing up and gesticulating wildly; whilst his chums, Frere and Walkeley, were listening, with half-amused smile.

"I hope I'm not intruding," ventured Skimpole.

"No, Skimpole," replied Lucas. "Come in! I'm just reciting to these fellows my last poem—'The Ode to a Dying Frog.'"

"It's ripping!" said Walkeley.

"Absolutely topping!"

"Oh, rather!" chimed in Frere. "It's killingly funny!"

Lucas looked indignantly at Frere.

"Funny!" he ejaculated. "It's most pathetic!"

"Yes, quite so," said Frere hastily. "I wish you'd let me finish my sentence, Lucas. I was going to say that it's killingly funny to think that people say that a schoolboy can't write good poetry."

"Oh!" said Lucas. "Well, listen to this, Skimmy!"

"My dear Lucas, I really—"

But Lucas went on, unheeding.

"Croak! Croak! Croak!"

The frog began to choke—

"Really, Lucas, it seems to me that the second line is much longer than the first, and—"

"The lines go in alternate metre, Skimmy. I wish you wouldn't interrupt!"

And Lucas started off again.

"Splash! Splash! Splash!"

He heard the water dash—

"My dear Lucas! That is quite illogical! There was surely no need for the frog to suffocate if there was water in the vicinity!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Walkeley. "Ho's got you there, Lucas!"

"Poet versus philosopher," grinned Frere. "Go it, you cripples!"

"Skimpole, you have no poetry in your soul! The sound of the water was in the frog's imagination, of course."

"From my study of natural science,

No. 43.—P.C. CRUMP.



Rycombe's guardian of the law. A man of great dignity, though ponderous, slow, and dull-witted. Of very little use when he is really needed. Has been the victim of many a jape engineered by the juniors of St. Jim's. On the whole, not at all a bad sort. His immediate superior is Inspector Skeat, of Wayland.

turbed at such a time. And now to be disturbed by the egregious Skimmy irritated Glyn intensely.

"My dear Glyn, pray do not be offended. I understand that you are intent on a new type of flying-machine, and I have come to offer you my assistance."

Glyn softened. After all, Skimpole was going blind, and he must bear with him. At the same time he had no intention of letting him interfere with his work.

"Look here, Skimmy!" Glyn motioned towards some packages lying on the table. "I've just got in a new stock of chemicals. I'd be obliged if you'd put them into these jars for me. But take care to keep them separate, old man!"

"But your aeroplane, Glyn—"

"Never mind about that just now, Skimmy. I'll tell you about it later. Get busy with the powders, will you?"

"Very well, Glyn."

And there was a perfect silence in the study for a short time, disturbed only by the sound of the papers, as Skimpole

Lucas, I can affirm that no frog has such an imagination. That is—

"Look here, Skimpole—"

"Really, Lucas—"

Herbert Skimpole and Matthew Lucas were both getting rather hot and excited.

"Oh, leave it at that!" grinned Frere. "It's bad science and topping poetry!"

Lucas looked pleased. As long as it was recognised as topping poetry, he was quite satisfied.

But Skimpole was not so easily placated.

"I have come to remonstrate with you, Lucas," he said. "With an intelligent brain, such as you possess"—Lucas looked highly delighted—"it is a pity," continued the genius of the shell, "that you should waste your time on such trifling pursuits as music and poetry. I think—"

What Skimpole thought is not clear, for the enraged Lucas started, and seemed about to throw himself at the genius of the Shell.

"I don't care what he says about me!" he roared. "But to call music and poetry trifling pursuits—"

"Really, Lucas—"

"Let him off this time, Lucas!" grinned Frere. "He's only a philosopher."

"And an invalid into the bargain," said Walkeley.

Lucas looked penitent.

"I had forgotten that," he said. "But after the way you have insulted the highest of all the arts, I must really ask you to go, Skimpole."

"Very well," replied the genius of the Shell coldly. "I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have done my duty."

And he departed, leaving Lucas in a ruffled state of mind behind him.

Skimpole went straight to Racke's study after that. The smell of tobacco-smoke greeted his nostrils as he entered.

"Dear me, Racke—"

The cad of the Shell was dancing wildly round the room, whilst Mellish, Skroppe and Crooke, who were present, looked extremely startled.

"You skinny idiot!" howled Racke, as he tried in vain to get a burning cigarette out of his sleeve. "I'll slaughter you!"

Thinking it was one of the masters who was opening the door, Racke had thoughtlessly hidden the cigarette up his sleeve, and now he was trying in vain to dislodge it.

"Dear me, Racke—"

Taking off his coat and waistcoat, Racke managed at last to extract the obnoxious weed. Skimpole watched him in wonder.

"I am sorry if I have caused you to burn yourself, Racke, but I deem it just retribution on you. The smoking of cigarettes by fellows of your years is a vile and objectionable habit!"

"Idiot!"

"Dumy!"

"Lunatic!"

"Duffer!"

Such were the exclamations that were flung at Skimpole from all sides.

"I have no desire to cause offence," went on Skimpole placidly, "but I should like to say a few words of warning to all of you. You, Mellish, are cowardly and treacherous, two faults of—"

"Look here, Skimpole!" protested Mellish. "If you think I'm going to stand this—"

And then he stopped. In olden times he could have stood up to Skimpole at fisticuffs, but since Talbot had taught Skimpole something about boxing, Mellish was no match for the genius of the Shell.

"You, Skroppe," went on Skimpole, "are, unfortunately, possessed of a very unpleasant personal appearance—"

"What?" yelled Skroppe.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Crooke. "He means your face, Skroppe, old man!"

"But that is no reason, Skroppe, why you should add an unpleasant character to it. You, Crooke, are mean and deceitful—"

"Let me get at him!" howled Crooke. "If you think I'm going to stand this—"

NO. 44.—WILLIAM GUNN.



Chiefly renowned as a staunch supporter of Grundy. Follows him in all his schemes more closely than Wilkins, the other member of the trio of chums. A somewhat quiet fellow who has read a great deal; has supplied Grundy with many of his great ideas. Quite one of the best of the Shell juniors in every way. Shares Study No. 3 with Grundy and Wilkins.

just because you're a blind owl, you're jolly well mistaken!"

"I do not blame you, Crooke. Your heredity is against you. And the same remark applies to Racke, whose father's millions were obtained most inhumanly from war profits. I consider—"

But that was enough for Racke & Co.

"At him!" howled Racke.

And the cads of the School House hurled themselves in a bunch upon the genius of the Shell.

But Skimpole was too quick for them. Out of the door and up the passage he fled, till he reached his own study. There he met Talbot.

Racke & Co. scowled as they saw the Toff. They had no desire to stand up against Talbot at fisticuffs.

"Take care of your lunatic, if you don't want us to murder him!" howled Racke. "I warn you, I'm not going to keep my hands off him much longer!"

And Racke & Co. hastily departed to their own quarters.

"My dear Talbot—"

"It's no use, Skimmy! Don't try your gibberish on me! But when you get into the study, you'll find a victim ready for the slaughter!"

"A victim? What do you mean, Talbot?"

"Go in and see," grinned Talbot. And he went on his way to the playing fields.

Skimpole, much mystified, entered his study, where a pleasant surprise awaited him.

Meanwhile Racke & Co. were nursing their grievances.

"The rotter!" gasped Racke. "Fancy coming to tell us what he thinks of us! Of all the cheek—"

"Well, he certainly didn't seem to think much of you," grinned Mellish. "What was that he said about your father's millions?"

"Never mind that, Mellish. He didn't tell me I'm a lying sneak, anyway!"

"Don't start calling each other names now for goodness sake!" growled Crooke. "We've had quite enough of that sort of thing from Skimpole."

"And to think that Tom Merry and that crowd take the chap to their bosoms," said Racke. "That's the giddy limit!"

Racke's comment was not exactly true. Tom Merry & Co. did not take Skimpole to their bosoms. But they tolerated him, and they liked him better than Racke or any of his cronies.

"I say, you chaps!"

It was Baggy Trimble who entered. "Well?" snapped Racke. "What do you want, Tubby?"

"Really, Racke, you might speak a little more politely. I've got an important announcement to make—"

"Some more of your lying fables. I suppose! Carry them somewhere else! We've got one tale-bearer in the company already." And Racke glanced significantly at Mellish.

Mellish reddened, but he said nothing. He could not afford to quarrel with his wealthy patron.

"Look here, Racke—"

"If you've got anything to say, say it!" snapped Racke. "If you haven't, dry up and get out!"

"I've a good mind not to tell you anything now, Racke."

"Speak up!" said Mellish. The cad of the Fourth was very inquisitive.

"Well, if you chaps are willing to show your friendship by standing me a feed—"

"I thought so!" snapped Racke. "Keep your important information to yourself, you cadging rotter!"

"Very well!" said Trimble haughtily. "Then I'll tell you nothing about what Teddy saw Gore doing at the optician's in Rylcombe. So there!"

And he waddled out of the study with his nose in the air.

"What's all this?" asked Crooke. "What was Gore doing at an optician's? Has he taken to wearing spectacles?"

"Oh, it's some bosh of Baggy's!" said Racke lightly. "You ought to know the fat freak by this time!"

But Racke would not have spoken so lightly if he had known that for once Baggy really did have some important information.

Racke & Co. dismissed the subject of Baggy, and began once more discussing ways and means of getting their own back against Tom Merry & Co. for the many defeats they had suffered at the hands of the captain of the Shell.

CHAPTER 5.

Skimpole's Secretary.

"COME in, Skimpole!" It was a pleasant voice that greeted the genius of the Shell as he returned to his own study. And it was a pleasant face that smiled at him. Both face and voice belonged to THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 629.

Miss Marie Rivers, the school nurse, Talbot's girl-chum.

"Really, Miss Marie, I—"

Skimpole stopped, hesitating. He had never been a ladies' man, and he hardly knew how to speak to a girl.

"Sit down, Skimpole—or shall I call you Skimmy? I believe that's what your friends call you, isn't it?"

"Certainly, Miss Marie! Just as you like. I—"

"You see, I've made myself at home in your study. Now I want you to sit down, so that I can have a good talk with you."

Skimpole obeyed silently. He had not yet recovered from his surprise at seeing Marie Rivers in the study.

"Believe you are a very learned man, Skimmy!" said Marie solemnly.

"Oh, really, Miss Marie, I should hardly say so, though, perhaps, rather above the average. To which branch of learning do you refer?"

Marie Rivers avoided answering that question. She knew as little about Skimmy's "isms" as Tom Merry & Co. "I want you to tell me about your voyage to America," she said suddenly.

Skimpole started. It was a very long time since he had taken a trip to America in the company of Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the details of it had become faint to his mind.

"My voyage to America? Really, Miss Marie, I have lost interest in that matter. I should prefer—"

"I am sure that you could recollect the facts if you tried," said Marie. "Just to please me, you know! Didn't you intend writing a book about it once?"

Skimpole nodded eagerly.

"Yes," he said, "but the publishers were very rude. I've still got some of the letters they sent me about it."

And Skimpole hunted up some old papers in a little chest at the side of the table.

"Oh, here they are, Miss Marie! Shall I read them to you?"

"Of course not, Skimmy! How can you suggest such a thing? But would you care to let me have a look at them and—"

"Certainly, Miss Marie!"

And Skimpole handed his letters to the school nurse.

Marie could hardly restrain herself from laughing as she glanced at them. They were certainly very scathing.

"Let me see. What does this one say?"

"Dear Master Skimpole.—Your work is rubbish. We should advise your selling it to the Rylcombe grocer for waste-paper. Yours sincerely,

"MOULDY & MOULDER."

"How very impolite!"

"These men have no sense," said Skimpole sadly. "They cannot recognise real genius."

"Geniuses have always had a hard time of it in this world," said Marie encouragingly.

"The other letters are very similar," sighed Skimpole. "Do you intend reading any more of them?"

"No; I think I've seen enough now," said Marie, putting the bundle of letters away. "Do you know, Skimmy, I think I know why the publishers are so nasty?"

"Do you really, Miss Marie? I wonder—"

At that moment an interruption occurred. Miss Marie got a little shock as the door burst open, and Gore came in with the violence of a whirlwind, followed by Buck Finn and several more of his chums.

Gore and his followers drew back as they saw Miss Marie.

"Sorry, Miss Marie!" said Gore. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 629.

gruffly. "We want the study for ourselves now."

"You rude boy!" Miss Marie had risen, and was looking quite angry. "Is that the way to talk to a lady?"

"A what?" giggled Trimble, on the outskirts of the crowd.

And Buck Finn added sarcastically:

"I guess there's plenty of room in the sanny for the school nurse and her patients, Miss Marie!"

Gore glanced angrily at his followers. He was not as great a cad as some of the others.

"Don't be ruder than you can help, chaps!" he said. "All the same," he continued, looking at Miss Marie, "we intend using this study, and we ask you to make room."

"You cheeky fellow!" Marie faced Gore resolutely. "If there had been any attempt at politeness on your part, I staying here as long as I please."

"That is quite right," assented Skimpole. "Gore is a ruffian again of late, might have agreed. But now I intend though he has shown signs of improvement in the past. I—"

"Shut up! I don't want your jaw!" said Gore fiercely, as he advanced towards the genius of the Shell; but Gibbons and Boulton restrained him.

"Leave him alone! He's going blind!" said Gibbons uneasily.

"Going blind! There's nothing wrong with—"

Then Gore bit his lip, realising that he had already said too much.

Miss Marie sat down again placidly at the table.

"About those letters, Skimmy—" she began.

"Come into my study!" suggested Boulton. "We'll be quite comfy there."

"Right-ho!" said Gore at last.

He did not see how he could out Miss Marie from the study without laying hands on her, and he was not far enough gone yet for that.

And Gore & Co. trooped out, vanquished by the school nurse.

"About those letters," continued Miss Marie. "I think they show that your style of writing is too high for ordinary readers. You want small words for small minds, Skimmy, you know."

Skimpole nodded. He realised that there was a good deal of truth in what Miss Marie said.

"Well, Skimmy," continued Miss Marie, "my idea is that you should tell me all about your American experiences, and I'll put your story into my own words. What do you say?"

"But, my dear Miss Marie, I really cannot allow you to take all this trouble."

"Nonsense, Skimmy! I should love to! Do tell me I may!"

Skimpole, of course, was only too glad to take advantage of Marie's offer. Marie got pen, ink, and paper, and soon she was busy putting into her own words what Skimpole told her about his trip to America. The time passed so quickly that when the tea-bell went both were extremely surprised.

"Dear me, Miss Marie! I did not know that I had been keeping you here so long."

"That's all right, Skimmy! We'll finish the story to-morrow, and then perhaps we'll be able to get it published. That would be fine, wouldn't it?"

And, smiling brightly, Miss Marie departed.

Skimpole blinked after her.

For a change, the brainy man of the Shell was feeling quite happy.

CHAPTER 6.

Talbot Makes a Discovery.

"GOAH, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered Gore's study, holding a letter in his hand.

"Goah, deah boy!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Oh, is that you, Skimmy? Where's Gore?"

"I do not know where Gore is. He was here earlier in the afternoon, and made himself very unpleasant to Miss Marie."

"The brute! If I had been Leah I should have given him a fearful thrashing!"

"Really, D'Arcy, I do not know if you are superior to Gore at fistfuffs. I imagine it is possible that he may have given you the fearful thrashing."

Arthur Augustus surveyed Skimpole scornfully through his monocle. It was a brand-new monocle, carefully polished, and Skimpole should have been withered by Gussy's glance. But he seemed quite unconcerned.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Talbot, entering.

"What's brought you here?"

"I've come to give Goah a letter, Talbot, deah boy! It's from the optician at Wylcombe. I've just been to get a new monocle, and he asked me to do him the favah of delivewin' this letter to Goah."

"From the optician at Rylcombe?" said Talbot, in surprise.

"What the dickens has Gore got to do with an optician? His eyes are as good as new."

"I weally don't know, deah boy. The optician said he was sendin' Goah, the account foah the glasses, an' hoped that they fitted his friend's eyes."

"Has Gore been getting glasses for you, Skimmy?" asked Talbot.

"Dear me, no! Dr. Lambe brought me my new glasses himself, and I paid cash for them."

"Then whom has Gore been getting glasses for?"

Talbot was suddenly struck by an idea. "Gussy, old chap—"

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"I wonder if it would be wrong to look at this chap's account?"

"But why, deah boy? What affiah is it of ours?"

"I should like to see the date when the glasses were purchased."

"Really, Talbot," interposed Skimpole, "there can be no harm in it. It is an open account, not a closed letter."

"Then—"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy, if it's an important affiah, I should think it would be quite wight. What's it matten?"

"I can't explain the difficulty until I've seen the account. Well, let's look."

The account was opened, and Talbot gave an exclamation.

"I thought so! These glasses were purchased by Gore the day before Skimmy was taken blind."

"Really, Talbot, I'm not—"

"Never mind, Skimmy, old man. I guess things are even better than you think."

"What do you mean, Talbot?"

"The rotter! I shouldn't have thought it of Gore. I thought he had more sense. If it had been Rakke, or Mellish, or any of that crowd—"

"That do you mean, Talbot, deah boy?"

"But Gore—"

"Yes, what about Gore?" asked that worthy unpleasantly, as he entered, accompanied by his cronies.

"Did you buy specs at the optician's?"



The juniors threw themselves upon the tramp together. In vain he struggled to get away, but it was too late. He was surrounded. "You young hounds!" he shouted, trying to bring his cudgel into play. (See Chapter 10.)

in Rylcombe on the tenth?" asked Talbot abruptly.

Gore was startled, but recovered himself.

"What if I did?" he said aggressively. "Yes, what if he did?" chimed in Baggy Trimble.

Gore turned furiously on his fat follower. Trimble had only joined Gore's crowd of late. He had usually been associated with Racke & Co., but had deserted when they refused to stand him any more feeds. Now, to the surprise of Gore's chums, Gore had allowed Baggy to join his crowd.

"Shut up, Baggy!" Gore said, warningly.

"Oh, really, Gore! I'm not likely to give the game away, I should hope. Besides, they can't know anything about Teddy's seeing you buy those specs in Rylcombe."

Teddy was Trimble's minor, who wore glasses.

"What's that about Teddy?" asked Talbot sharply.

"Nothing!" snapped Gore. "Teddy Trimble was in the shop when I bought the glasses for a friend, that's all."

"What friend?" pursued Talbot relentlessly.

"Weally, Talbot, deah boy, what are you drivin' at?"

Talbot turned to Skimpole.

"Where are the specs you had on when you first felt queer?" he asked abruptly.

"Gore took charge of them, my dear Talbot."

"Ah, I thought so! Quite a deep plot! Now then, Gore, speak up, and tell the truth! Did you exchange the specs you bought in Rylcombe for Skimpy's specs in the night of the tenth?"

"What?"

It was a startled exclamation from the bystanders.

Quite a crowd of juniors had arrived on the scene.

"The rotter!" murmured Blake.

"The scoundrel!" said Manners.

"Wait a minute! What are your proofs, Talbot?" asked Tom Merry.

Teddy Trimble hurried forward.

"I was in the shop when Gore bought the specs," he said. "And he told the optician to make them in the same size frame as Skimpy always bought there."

"It's all a plot!" growled Gore. "I refuse to say anything."

"I guess that puts the lid on," said Buck Finn, hurrying away.

Gore's other quondam chums followed him. They had no use for Gore when he was under a cloud.

Tom Merry & Co. remained behind. Talbot looked in concern at Gore.

Much as he resented Gore's mean action, he could not forget that Gore had been chummy with him for some time past.

"Gore, old man, what does it all mean? Surely—"

"It's plain enough now," said Tom Merry. "Gore bought a pair of weak glasses on the tenth. In the night he took away Skimpy's glasses, and put the weak glasses in their place. When Skimpy put the glasses on next morning he couldn't see through them. Naturally, they weren't strong enough. So the doctor thought his eyes had gone wrong. It's quite clear."

"My hat!" gasped Lowther. "What a rotten trick!"

"Shut up, Monty!" snapped Tom Merry. "The point is, what are we to do with this rotter?"

"Have you anything to say for yourself, Gore?" asked Talbot sharply.

"What if I did or it? What harm

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has it done the mad ass? Just stopped him reading for a bit, and a jolly good thing, too!"

"Really, Gore—"

"The point is," said Talbot, "that you might have worried the life out of the chap by a trick of that sort."

"He hasn't worried much!" sneered Gore.

"Really, Gore—"

"I happen to know that he has. If Miss Marie hadn't come along to cheer him up, he would have been down in the bottom dumps by now," said Talbot.

"Besides," said Tom Merry, "it isn't playing the game, and you know it, Gore."

"Are you never going to stop jawing at me?" asked Gore irritably.

"Do you intend making amends?"

"How the—"

"Things can't go on as they have been going on. Mr. Linton must be told!"

"Are you going to sneak?"

"No. But are you going to confess?"

"What for?"

"To allow Skimmy to get back into the class-room again. He isn't going blind, or anything like it, and he ought to be doing his Form-work," said Tom Merry.

"Good little Tommy!" sneered Gore in his old manner.

"We've had all that sort of back-biting out long ago, Gore," said Tom Merry quietly. "Do your duty like a man, and we'll overlook what you've done."

"Come on, Gore," urged Talbot. "Be decent!"

Gore stood thinking silently, and the cunning expression of yore came once more over his features.

"Very well, I'll confess," he said.

CHAPTER 7.

Gore's Confession.

"SEE here, Skimpole, are you going to confess your share in this affair, too?" asked Gore, turning abruptly on the genius of the Shell.

"Dear me, Gore—"

"What's all this, Gore?" asked Tom Merry sternly. "What's Skimmy got to do with the plot, except as victim?"

"Victim!" snorted Gore. "The whole thing was concocted between him and me, of course, to get him an extra holiday from lessons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Racke, who had come up with some of his pals. "It's as plain as a pikestaff."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "It's no use trying to get out of it like that, Gore. That excuse won't wash."

"For goodness' sake, don't make matters worse by telling lies!" implored Talbot. "Get the affair over and done with."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy," added Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Now that you're not quite such a wottah as you used to be!"

Gore hesitated. Perhaps it would be best to tell the truth, after all.

Then from the back of the crowd came the voice of Racke, like that of an evil genius.

"See how they're backing up their pal Skimpole! Don't let them do you down, Gore, old man!"

That voice strengthened Gore in his evil resolution to keep up the lie.

"I don't see why Skimmy should get off scot-free," he said. "He's had as much to do with this as I have."

"Is there any truth in this?" asked Tom Merry, turning on Skimpole.

"Really, Merry, I have no idea to what Gore is referring. I certainly

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never asked him to exchange my glasses."

"Of course not," said Talbot. "The idea is absurd! Skimmy is a dozen different sorts of an ass, but he's not a rotter."

"Rot! They're down on you, Gore, because you're not a goody-goody. Keep your end up!"

It was the voice of Racke, of course.

Blake and Herries seized Racke forcibly by the scruff of the neck, and sent him sliding down the passage, till he collided with the banisters. It was the only way of getting rid of him.

"Now," said Blake, "get on with the washing, Gore. We've got rid of your backer-up for you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" grinned Lowther. "He's become a sitter-down, now!"

And he pointed at Racke, who was sitting at the top of the stairs, holding on to the banisters to prevent himself from falling.

"Well?" said Tom Merry, turning once more to Gore. "Are you going to make a clean breast of it to old Linton or not?"

"Oh, I'm quite ready to confess everything to Linton!" said Gore.

"Good for you!" said Tom Merry.

"But what do you mean by everything?" asked Talbot suspiciously.

"I'm ready to confess my share in the jape—that's all it is—"

"And a jolly rotten jape at that," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy—I mean, you wottah?"

"Provided Skimpole confesses his," finished Gore.

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble, who had once more appeared on the scene. "That's right, Gore, old chap, you—"

Blake and Herries seized Baggy by the scruff of the neck, and sent him sliding along the passage, just as they had done Racke.

"Wow!"

"Yaroooh!"

The shouts came from Racke and Trimble, who had collided in the passage. Trimble, flying down the passage, had bumped into Racke, who was coming back.

"You clumsy brute!"

"You fat idiot!"

"You rough duffer!"

"You stupid porpoise!"

Such were the epithets that Baggy Trimble and Aubrey Racke flung at each other in the first shock of the collision.

Then Trimble, noticing the angry glare in Racke's eyes, dashed down the stairs, with Racke in full pursuit.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Monty Lowther. "Baggy on the rack! A moving picture!"

"Racke on Baggy you mean!"

grinned Digby. "I think Baggy was underneath that time!"

"Good thing for Racke, then," said Monty. "We should have had a squashed Baggy if it had been the other way about."

"Wouldn't have mattered much," said Blake. "A Racke more or less at St. Jim's is a matter of very little importance."

And the others grinned. Even Talbot and Tom Merry joined in the laughter, though the business of Gore's plot was regarded by them as a very serious affair.

Gore was slipping away as Talbot laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Steady, Gore! We're not satisfied yet."

"What do you want, then, hang you?"

"Your promise to confess the whole truth to Linton, of course."

"I've told you I'd do so, if Skimmy confessed his share."

"But what do you want me to confess, my dear Gore?" asked Skimmy, in surprise.

"That you told me to get you the other specs, of course, so that you might pretend there was something wrong with your eyes, and get a holiday from work."

"But my dear Gore, that is not true."

"Of course, you'd deny it!" sneered the bully of the Shell. "After getting me into all this trouble over it."

"Look here, Gore," said Talbot bluntly. "Your yarn is absolute rot! If Skimmy had thought there was nothing the matter with his eyes, he wouldn't have worried as he has been doing."

"That's only his cuteness, of course."

"Confound it, has Skimmy any cuteness of that sort?"

"Besides, he was worrying about the taking away of his books, not about his eyes at all."

Tom Merry & Co. looked doubtful. There might be something in that. But a glance at Skimmy's honest face reassured them.

"If that is so," said Tom Merry, "how does it come that on the tenth you and Skimmy were such bad friends that you were kicking up a row because he wouldn't let you into the study?"

"That was part of the plot, too," said Gore. "We laughed over it when we were by ourselves."

"Really, Gore! Your untruths are atrocious!"

"Yaas, wathah, Goah, you wottah!"

"Well, I for one don't know if there isn't, perhaps, some truth in it," said George Alfred Grundy, whose arrival had been quite unnoticed. "The chap who says I've got a limited mental capacity is rotter enough to do anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lowther. "There isn't a chap present who wouldn't say that about you! Though you've got an unlimited capacity for brag and swank!"

"What?" yelled Grundy, glaring at the humorist of the Shell. "Let me get at him!"

"Keep him off!" said Lowther, in mock agony, pretending to hide behind Blake and Herries.

"Let me get at him!" repeated Grundy, trying in vain to get round Blake and Herries.

Blake and Herries seized Grundy by the scruff of the neck with the intention of doing to him what they had done to Racke and Trimble.

But the George Alfred was made of different stuff. He struck out with his fists, and Blake and Herries had their work cut out to deal with him.

"Rescue!" shouted Grundy; and his loyal henchmen, Wilkins and Gunn, came running up.

Wilkins and Gunn might agree with what Lowther had said about their chief's brag and swank, but they felt it their duty to assist him in time of peril.

Soon a miniature battle was raging. Manners and Lowther, Digby and D'Arcy, Noble and Dane and Glyn came to the assistance of Blake and Herries, whilst several fellows rushed up to help Grundy, not out of any affection for the burly Shell fellow, but out of spite for Tom Merry & Co., amongst them being Buck Finn and Gibbons and Boulton, who had decided to stand by Gore after all, now that things did not look quite so black against him.

Tom Merry and Talbot held Gore, but the bully of the Shell made a fight for it. He was helpless in the grasp of the two champions of the Shell, however.

It was not until the arrival of a fresh battalion of foes led by Racke and Crooke that Tom Merry and Talbot were forced to leave go of Gore, and defend themselves against numerous foes.

Naturally, such a battle could not last long without attracting attention from the higher powers. A battalion of prefects, led by Kidare, arrived on the scene, and dispersed the combatants with their ashlants.

"Now return to your studies immediately, all of you!" snapped Kidare. "And take five hundred lines each!"

"And the juniors ruefully obeyed."

"Well," said Talbot, as he found himself with Gore and Skimpole in the study, "have you made up your mind yet to confess?"

"Confession be hanged!" growled Gore. "I'm not going to be made a sacrifice for that white-faced specimen there." And he sulkily turned his back on his study-mates.

Talbot looked at Gore in perplexity. Could there be any truth in Gore's accusation, after all? Was it possible that Skimpy had really had a hand in the plot?

CHAPTER 8.

Looking for a Leader.

"WAA! I reckon old Gore's got his eye-teeth cut!"

The speaker was Buck Finn. Gore's former friends were assembled in Buck Finn's study to decide whether they ought to drop him or to back him up against Tom Merry & Co. Buck Finn and Lennox Gibbons and Boulton were present.

"Of course, that yarn about Skimpy's telling him to change the specs is all bunkum," said Boulton. "Any ass can see that."

"I don't," said Gibbons.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the assembled juniors.

It was not for nothing that Gibbons was known as the dunce of the Shell.

"You're the ass that proves the rule," explain Boulton.

"Look here, Boulton. I may not be as clever as some people, but what I say is that we're either Gore's chums or we are not. If we are, what's the sense in believing that he did a rotten thing like that?"

"I agree with that," said Lennox. "I think it was mean of Gore to try and get out of the mess by shoving the guilt on Skimpy's shoulders."

"What was he to do?" asked Boulton. "He couldn't let Tom Merry and Talbot and that lot rag him baldheaded. It's against human nature."

"I guess that's horse-sense!" chimed in Buck Finn. "Gore's a cute bouncer, and I admire him for it!"

"It's no use talking like that," said Lennox. "I shouldn't drop Gore for playing the trick with the specs, though it was a silly sort of thing to do. But it goes against the grain to be palmy with a fellow who tells mean, deceitful whoppers to get out of a mess."

"Hear! Hear!" said Gibbons. "All the same, I don't see why we can't believe old Gore?"

"Rap! Rap! Rap! It was a knock at the door."

"Come in, father!" sang out Lennox. Racke, Crooke, and Scrope entered.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Lennox coldly. "If I'd known that I'd have thought twice about it before I'd have asked you to come in."

"Look here, Lennox," interposed Buck Finn. "I reckon this is my study as much as yours, and I don't see that you have any right to bar Racke just because he likes a game of poker and a bit

of a spree. I'm not averse to a bit of a flutter myself at times."

"Lucky for you it's not very often, then," said Lennox drily. "What do you chaps want?"

Racke coolly seated himself before replying, and Crooke and Scrope followed his example.

"Talking about the Skimpy affair, I suppose?" said Racke at last.

"Yes," said Lennox. "What's it got to do with you? It's ages since Gore had any connection with your crowd."

"If he doesn't take care," said Crooke snappily, "it'll be a case of our cutting him! He's been getting himself into a fine mess!"

Racke gave his cronies a warning glance. It suited his book at present to be on good terms with Gore's chums.

"Are you chaps going to sit still while Tom Merry & Co. are sacrificing Gore to save that mad idiot Skimpole?" he asked.

"If we were sure that Gore's story is true—" began Lennox.

"Well, it so happens that I can prove it!" said Racke.

The others stared at him. Only Crooke winked knowingly at Scrope.

In the privacy of their study, Racke, Crooke, and Scrope had hatched a little tissue of falsehoods. Now, Racke was playing this yarn off on Gore's chums for the purpose of working them up against Tom Merry & Co.

"You see," said Racke, "Baggy has got a little habit of tying up his bootlace outside study doors—"

"Tell us something new," rawned Boulton.

"Besides," said Lennox. "I like to call a nasty action by a nasty name."

"Oh, all right!" said Racke. "If you don't want to hear—"

"Go on!" said Boulton hastily. "You must tell us, now that you've started."

Cut the cake, and come to the horses!" advised Buck Finn.

"Well, Baggy was eavesdropping outside Skimpole's study," proceeded Racke, "and he heard a conversation between Gore and Skimpy—"

"When?" asked Lennox sharply.

"On the ninth. Skimpy was arranging with Gore about the change of glasses."

"If your yarn is true, why didn't Baggy spread it?" asked Lennox.

"Because Gore bribed him not to. Haven't you noticed how very chummy Gore has become lately with Baggy?"

"I guess I have, anyway. I was surprised at it, too, seeing that Gore never could stand the fat clam!" said Buck Finn.

"Very well, then. What more do you want?"

"But is Baggy's yarn true?" asked Lennox.

"Look here!" said Gibbons. "You seem to be looking for an excuse for dropping Gore!"

Lennox reddened.

"Of course, I'm backing up Gore, after all this," he said hastily.

"That's it," said Racke. "The question is, how can we show Tom Merry our disapproval of his attempt to make Gore confess to Linton?"

"Yes, that's it!" said Boulton.

And there was silence in the study. Gore's chums were really perplexed. But Racke & Co. were only pretending to think. They had come with a scheme all cut and dried.

"I guess me, me," said Racke at last, "that the only thing to do is to call a meeting of protest."

"I guess you've hit it!" said Buck Finn excitedly. "That's the very thing!"

But Lennox and Boulton looked doubtful.

"Tom Merry and his crowd would wipe up the floor with us!" Boulton protested.

"Besides, we want a leader," said Lennox. "Who's going to take the lead against Tom Merry?"

"I guess Racke could do that," suggested Buck Finn.

"No. That wouldn't do," said Racke hastily.

"What we want is a chap against whom Tom Merry's crowd can raise no personal objections. A chap who'll stand up against Tom Merry because he thinks an injustice has been done!"

"Well, that role wouldn't suit you," grinned Boulton. "Whom do you suggest?"

And Racke's reply nearly took his hearers' breath away.

"The only chap who's got sufficient standing to lead a revolt against Tom Merry," he said, "is Figgins!"

Buck Finn and his friends gasped. They had expected any name but this.

Figgins was the leader of the New House juniors, in the same way as Tom Merry was the leader of the School House juniors. But he was a straight-forward, honest fellow, as much opposed to the little ways of Racke & Co. as Tom Merry himself.

"Figgins!" said Boulton and Lennox and Gibbons all together. "Never!"

"You're potty, I guess!" chimed in Buck Finn.

"Look here!" said Scrope. "I think Racke's talking sense. If Figgins thinks there has been an injustice committed, he'll back Gore up against the Head himself!"

"Well, that's true," said Boulton.

"There's no harm in trying, anyway."

And Racke led the way to Figgins' study in the New House.

"Come to invite us to a smoking-party," asked Figgins, as Racke & Co. entered.

Kerr and Wynn, who were also in the study, grinned.

"Look here, Figgins," said Racke. "We know that you're a straight man, and we've come to ask you to remedy an injustice!"

Figgins looked pleased. Wynn beamed at the compliment paid to his leader.

But Kerr looked suspicious.

The Scottish junior was suspicious of Racke, even when he was paying compliments—perhaps more than that at any other time.

"What's it all about, Racke?" asked Figgins.

Racke explained, giving his own version of the story. Figgins & Co. listened attentively.

"And now," concluded Racke, "we've come to ask you to take the lead against Tom Merry."

Racke had chosen an unfortunate way of putting it.

"So that's the game, is it?" said Kerr.

"You're trying to make a quarrel between us and Tom Merry & Co. for your own purposes, are you?"

Racke reddened, and Lennox intervened.

"Look here, Kerr!" he said.

"You've no right to say any such thing! We've come to Figgins because we think he's the proper man to get matters put right!"

"Oh, I am not doubting your motives!" said Kerr quietly. "I dare say you have all been misled by this scheming rotter here!"

"Let Figgins speak for himself!" snapped Racke. "I suppose he's got a mind of his own?"

But that was the wrong way to ap-

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pronech Figgins. The long-limbed and rugged New House leader had unbounded admiration for his Scottish chum.

"I agree with what Kerr says," he replied. "Tom Merry is a good man, and I'm not going to interfere in School House affairs, though I'm quite ready to stand up to him when it comes to a House row!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn. "That's the ticket, Piggy!"

After that, there was, of course, nothing to be expected from Figgins in the way of leadership. Racke & Co. wound their way back to their own House.

After a great deal of discussion, it was decided that Grundy should be asked to take the lead against Tom Merry, a position that he was only too eager to fill.

CHAPTER 9. Grundy's Rebellion.

"HALLO! Hallo! Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "What's all this?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom Merry. "Let's look!"

There was a crowd surrounding the notice-board, and they grinned as the Terrible Three approached. There was a surprise in store for Tom Merry.

"The cheek!" gasped Manners. "The impudence!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry wasted no time in words. He took down the notice, and tore it into shreds.

For the notice had read somewhat as follows:

"NOTISS!

"As it has been discovered that Tom Merry is not a good kaptin, and favors his friends in matters of justiss, I call upon all self-respecting members of the Shell form to attend a meeting in the Common Room this afternoon.

Signed. G. A. GRUNDY."

It did not need Grundy's name at the bottom to show who had written this notice. The weird and wonderful English of it would have been enough to do that.

"We shall be there!" said Tom Merry grimly. "And if Grundy is up to any fancy tricks there will be ructions!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners. "It's about Skimmy's affair that he's got his back up, of course."

"Not he," said Tom Merry. "He just wants to get some kudos for himself. He doesn't care a hang about Gore or Skimmy."

Which was, perhaps, not quite just to Grundy, who fancied that there had been a real miscarriage of justice. And there were many who agreed with him that it looked as if Skimpole had had a hand in Gore's scheme, and was now trying to back out of it and lay all the blame on Gore.

There was quite a crowd in the Common Room when Grundy mounted a chair.

"Gentlemen, and all the rest of you!" he began.

"I spy strangers!" yelled Racke. "We don't want Fourth-Formers here. This is a Shell affair!"

"We've got as much right here as you Shell-fish!" snapped Blake.

"Try and turn us out if you can!" yelled Herries.

"We jolly well will!" snapped Grundy. "At them, chaps!"

And a Form battle would probably have started if Talbot had not interfered.

"Look here, Blake," he said pacifically. "If we start a Form row, we'll

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never get the business of the meeting through. A serious charge has been brought against Tom Merry as captain of the Shell, and if his accusers prefer that only members of the Shell should be present during the discussion, I don't think you will make trouble."

"Oh, if you put it like that," said Blake, "I'm agreeable to leaving, and I know the rest of the Fourth will follow me out."

And he departed, followed by the other members of his Form.

"Good old Talbot!" murmured Glyn. "He's got some tact!"

"Rather!" assented Harry Noble. "Let's hear what the Grundy ass wants to babble about."

"Gentlemen and all the rest of you!" "We've had that once!" cried Monty Lowther. "Try a new record, Grundy!"

"Shut up, Monty!" hissed Tom Merry. "Let's get all this over and done with. Don't interrupt."

"Gentlemen and all the rest of you!" began Grundy, and then stopped for a moment and looked at Lowther. But the humorist of the Shell said nothing, and Grundy continued.

"You've been called together here because Tom Merry has proved himself a rotten captain!"

"Bosh!" yelled Manners. "Rats!" shouted Glyn.

And a series of catcalls greeted Grundy's statement, mixed with cheers from his own supporters.

At last Grundy made his voice heard above the din.

"If Tom Merry and his friend are afraid of hearing the case against him—"

"That's just it!" growled Racke. "Keep it up, Grundy!"

At that Tom Merry mounted a chair. "Just a word, Grundy!" he said.

"But I haven't finished yet!" "I'm not going to defend myself yet. I only want to call on my own friends to give Grundy a fair hearing, and I hope his pals will do the same when my turn comes."

"Hear, hear!" said Grundy. "I agree to that. And if anyone interrupts you when your turn comes, Tom Merry, he'll have to deal with me."

And Tom Merry got down from his chair.

"I'm not going to keep you long," proceeded Grundy; and Monty Lowther refrained with difficulty from cheering.

It was at this point that Skimpole was as much to blame as Gore for the spectacle business, and Tom Merry has no right to demand a confession from Gore without asking Skimpole to do the same."

"Doesn't he know everything?" murmured Clifton Dane sarcastically.

"Tom Merry has a grudge against Gore because he's not one of his followers, and that's why he's so hard on him. What I think is—"

"Have you finished?" snapped Harry Noble. "We don't want to know what you think. We want facts!"

Look here, Noble—"

But Grundy suddenly descended from his high position, as his chair was pulled from under him by Noble's chums, Dane and Glyn.

"Now then, Merry, state your case!" said Harry Noble, who seemed to be constituting himself chairman of the meeting.

Tom Merry rose on a chair and faced the meeting calmly. He had a clear conscience, and was afraid of nothing.

"Chaps and fellows!" he began. "Booh!" hissed Aubrey Racke. "Sah!"

George Alfred Grundy walked quietly up to Racke, and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Where will you have it, Racke?" he asked. "I've given my word to Merry to let him have a free speech, and if you don't keep quiet you'll feel the weight of my fist!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted everybody present, except Crooke and Scrope, who were Racke's followers. And Racke subsided sulkily.

"Chaps and fellows!" repeated Tom Merry. "I don't pretend to be an ideal captain, but I've always tried to do my duty—"

"Hear, hear!" The shout of applause was almost unanimous.

"I may have made a mistake in this particular instance—"

"I should jolly well think so," said Boulton, but a glance from Grundy checked him.

"And I'm ready to give in if it can be proved that I've done so. But I do say that all the evidence goes to show that Gore worked the spectacle business off his own bat, and poor Skimmy was merely the victim of the plot."

"Hear, hear!"

This time the applause came only from Tom's followers.

"Rot!" yelled Scrope. "Bosh!" shouted Gibbons.

Again George Alfred's glance checked the turmoil. Grundy was a hefty fighting-man, and no one wanted to feel the weight of his fists.

Tom Merry got down from the chair, and Harry Noble mounted the rostrum. There was immediate silence. The Australian junior was generally respected.

"I'm not taking sides in the Gore business," he began; "but I do think that our honourable friend Grundy has not done justice to Tom Merry."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's impossible to find out at present whether Skimmy had a part in the plot against himself or not—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I certainly think that we ought to show our confidence in Tom Merry by a show of hands. I call upon all those who think that Tom Merry has done his best to raise the right hand."

And Harry Noble set the example by raising his own.

For a second there was no movement. Every member of the School House Shell was present except Gore and Skimpole, and it was doubtful how the voting would go. Then a flock of hands shot into the air, as fellows made up their minds to vote in support of Tom Merry. They belonged to Manners and Lowther and Talbot, Dane and Glyn, and Lucas and Walkeley and Frere. There were nine hands raised in all, including Noble's. Tom Merry himself refrained from voting.

"Nine votes for Merry!" said Noble, who was still on the rostrum. "Now, all those who think that Merry has forfeited confidence, please raise the right hand."

Racke and Crooke and Scrope raised their hands immediately. They were ready to vote against Tom Merry on any pretext. Then Buck Finn, Gibbons, and Boulton followed, for the sake of their friendship with Gore. Leunox raised his hand next, and, lastly, Wilkins and Gunn.

"Aren't you going to vote?" asked Wilkins, looking at Grundy, in surprise.

"No. Tom Merry refrained from voting, and I'll do the same to balance things!"

"My hat!" gasped Wilkins. But he agreed with Grundy's determination. There was nothing in the fair play.

"Nine votes against Merry!" said Noble. "The voting is even!"

After that there was nothing to be

done. Tom Merry evidently had lost the confidence of half his Form.

"Rotten!" murmured Racke. "One more vote and we'd have dished the boulder!"

"Why didn't that idiot Grundy vote?" asked Crooke angrily.

"But then Tom Merry would have voted on the other side, and it would have come to the same thing in the end," said Boulton.

"I guess he wouldn't," said Buck Finn.

"Then I'm jolly glad Grundy had the decency to refrain from voting," said Lennox. "We don't want it to seem that all the fair play is on their side."

"Where's Gore?" asked Grundy, coming up.

"Dunno!" said Racke. "He seems to have disappeared since lessons. Nobody seems to know what's become of him."

"And where's Skimmy?" asked Lennox.

"Also disappeared," said Racke, who seemed to know everything.

"Perhaps they're fighting somewhere," suggested Gibbons.

Everybody laughed. It was just like Gibbons to suggest such a thing.

"I guess that's not likely," said Buck Finn.

"Marie Rivers has also gone out," said Racke. "I dare say they've gone out together."

"Who? Gore and Marie?" asked Wilkins, in surprise.

"No, Skimmy and Marie. Having a good time together somewhere."

It was not what Racke said so much as how he said it that grated on Grundy.

Smack!

Grundy smote Racke on the face. The cad of the Shell reeled to the ground.

"Here, I say——" gasped Crooke.

But he dared say no more. Grundy's look was enough to quell him.

"Anybody else want the same?" asked Grundy.

But there were no takers.

Grundy strode off, followed by Wilkins and Gunn.

He might be willing to make a stand against Tom Merry where a matter of justice was concerned, but he had no intention of becoming a party to the meanness of the cads of the Shell.

"The rotter!" gasped Racke, rising.

"Id——"

"Lots you'd do!" sneered Lennox. "It serves you right!"

"That it does!" said Gibbons.

And Boulton also looked thoughtful.

"Look here!" said Racke.

"Oh, we've had enough of you, Racke!" said Lennox, as he walked away.

Gibbons and Boulton followed him.

"Trouble in the family already!" grinned Monty Lowther, who had been watching the scene from the other side of the room.

"You've got nothing to be afraid of, Tommy."

And Monty Lowther was right.

There was too much disunion amongst the enemies of Tom Merry ever to make them really dangerous to the captain of the Shell.

Tom Merry nodded quietly, but he was still looking thoughtful. Had he been right or wrong with regard to Skimpole's affair?

Only time would show.

CHAPTER 10.

Gore Kates' Cool.

"WHAT are you doing here, Skimmy?"

Marie Rivers uttered the words in surprise as she came

upon the genius of the Shell lying under a tree in Rylcombe Wood reading.

Skimpole rose hastily.

"Fancy meeting you here, Miss Marie!" he said. "That is a pleasure I did not expect."

"Nor I," replied Marie, smiling slightly.

"But what do you mean by reading again? Dr. Lambie said you might take a little excursion out of doors, but he did not tell you to start spoiling your eyes again."

"But there is nothing seriously the matter with my eyes," said Skimpole.

And he hastily explained the situation, only omitting Gore's name.

Miss Marie listened with interest.

"What a shabby trick!" she exclaimed.

"And who is the plotter?"

"I fear I cannot tell you that," said Skimpole.

"Never mind, Skimmy. I think I can guess. But I'm very glad there's nothing really the matter with you."

Skimpole looked at Miss Marie gratefully. She seemed to lend a poetic charm to the dullness of life.

"I've got some good news for you, Skimmy," continued Miss Marie.

"Where do you think I've just been?"

"To Rylcombe, I presume."

"Quite right, Skimmy. I've been to see your publisher."

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"My publisher!" echoed Skimpole, nonplussed.

"Shall I say our publishers?" queried Marie Rivers mischievously. "Your American story has been accepted." Skimpole jumped. His eyes sparkled with excitement and pleasure.

"How extremely satisfactory!" he exclaimed.

That was just like Skimmy. Any other boy would have said "Ripping!" The word "satisfactory" seemed rather tame for the occasion.

"I'll tell you all about it later, when I see you again in St. Jim's," pursued Miss Marie. "I must hurry on now. Oh, by the way, I forgot to give you the money!"

"Money!" repeated Skimpole blankly. "Yes. The publisher paid me down ten pounds cash for the story. Here it is."

Marie Rivers opened her dainty reticule, and extracted two five-pound notes.

"Oh, I really cannot take it!" remonstrated the genius of the Shell. "I could have done nothing without your assistance, Miss Marie."

"It's your money, Skimmy. Think what a lot of books you'll be able to buy with it."

Skimpole hesitated. That certainly was an important consideration. At the same time he felt that a share of the money rightly belonged to his secretary, and Miss Marie had jokingly styled herself.

In fact, without the clever manipulation and re-writing of the story at the hands of Marie Rivers there would have been no chance of its getting into print at all.

On the other hand, Skimpole thought of all the charitable deeds he could accomplish with ten pounds.

Neither Miss Marie nor Skimpole knew that in the thicket close at hand the evil fate of a rascally tramp was watching them with eyes that filled with greed at the sight of the money.

"Take it, Skimmy. It's yours," said Marie, stretching out the money towards him.

"Really, Miss Marie—"

Before Skimpole had time to utter another word the tramp sprang forward and snatched the fivers from Marie's outstretched hand.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped the brainy man of the Shell. "What was that?"

But there was no one there to answer Skimmy's question. Marie Rivers had already set off in full pursuit of the thief.

Skimpole did not hesitate. Fool he might be, but coward he certainly was not. Unhesitatingly he joined the chase.

On and on went the tramp, getting deeper and deeper into the wood. On and on went Marie in pursuit of him, with Skimpole panting breathlessly far behind her.

Suddenly the tramp disappeared from sight. He had dodged round a corner, and was waiting behind a thicket, his dangerous-looking cudgel grasped firmly in his hand.

Around the corner appeared Marie, scanning the view to catch a sight of her quarry. But the tramp was nowhere to be seen. He remained securely in ambush until Marie had passed him. Then he sprang from his lair, eager to bring his cudgel down upon her head.

Skimpole was still round the corner, and, anyway, too far off to intervene, and the tramp was sure that there was nothing between him and the girl. But he was mistaken in his calculations, for, just as he raised his cudgel to strike, a burly lad threw himself in front of the

tramp, and received the blow of the cudgel on his own head.

It was George Gore!

"Oh!"

Gore uttered that single exclamation as he fell senseless to the ground, but it was enough to warn Marie. Swiftly she turned, and as the tramp raised the cudgel to strike again, she caught him by the arm.

"Help!" she shouted at the top of her voice. "Help!"

"Now, I hang you!" shouted the tramp fiercely, trying to free himself from Marie's grasp, but Marie held his arm as if in a vice. It was not for nothing that Marie had had training with the Angel Alley gang in her younger days, together with Talbot, the "Toff."

"Help!" repeated Marie in an agony of suspense. If the tramp got his arm free, he would become very dangerous indeed!

And help was, indeed, at hand.

At the bend of the road Skimpole had run full tilt into Blake & Co., who excluded from the Common Room on account of Grundy's meeting, had decided to spend the afternoon in the woods.

"Weally, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Skimpole ran into him. "Pwae be careful! You are wumplin' my twousahs!"

"Marie—in danger!" panted Skimpole, running on without stopping. And at that moment Marie's shout for assistance rang out for the third time.

"Help!"

"Marie in danger! Great Scott!" gasped Blake. "Come on, chaps!"

"Rather!" chorussed Herries and Digby and Gussy in one voice.

The juniors threw themselves upon the tramp together. In vain he struggled to get away, but it was too late. He was surrounded.

"You young hounds!" he shouted, trying to bring his cudgel into play without success.

"It's all right, Miss Marie!" said Blake, as he twisted the cudgel out of the tramp's hand. "You can let go of his arm now."

"I am so glad you arrived in time!" said Marie fervently, as she bent over Gore. "This poor boy has saved me at the risk of his own life!"

"Gore!" gasped Skimpole. "Dear me!"

And the others were equally surprised. "What are we to do with this specimen?" asked Blake, surveying the tramp, who was helpless in the grasp of the chums of Study No. 6.

"Let me go this time!" whined the tramp. "I'll never do it again!"

"What d'you take us for?" asked Blake contemptuously. "Gael is the proper place for such beauties as you!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy.

"Tie him up with this!" suggested Digby, producing a thick rope from underneath his coat. "It's a Buck Finn's lasso rope, and I intended practising with it in the wood."

The tramp struggled desperately, but in vain. He was as a child in the grasp of the sturdy juniors.

"Now, then," said Blake briskly, "away to Rylcombe gaol with him. Take him along between you, Herries and Digby."

And Herries and Digby set off for Rylcombe, leading the helpless tramp between them.

"Good-bye," said Digby, in departing. "Give Gore my love when he wakes up, and tell him he's a man!"

"If he hadn't come up at the proper

moment," said Marie gravely, "I should have been struck down by the tramp instead!"

And admiration for Gore's heroic deed filled the breasts of Skimpole and Marie Rivers and Blake and D'Arcy, as they wended their way back to St. Jim's, carrying the still senseless body of Gore back between them.

Gore lay in sunny for several days suffering from shock, brought on by the dastardly blow he had received.

Skimpole, though himself exhausted by the adventure in the wood, insisted on watching at Gore's side, during the night. The first night he managed to sit up the whole of the time, in spite of the remonstrances of Miss Marie, who offered to relieve him.

But on the second night he fell asleep at Gore's side, and he was carried to his bed in the dormitory without his being aware of the fact.

After that Skimpole gave up watching at Gore's side, but he still insisted on coming into the sunny every few hours to inquire how Gore was getting on.

And Miss Marie always welcomed him with a bright smile.

On Gore's recovery, Talbot prepared a splendid study-deed to celebrate his return. Miss Marie was present, and Skimpole did most of the speechifying. But the others were too busy enjoying the good things spread before them to get bored by the genius of the Shell.

When the guests had departed, Talbot, Gore, and Skimpole were once more left by themselves in the study.

"I don't deserve all this, you chaps," said Gore, with tears in his eyes. "I was a brute to old Skimmy."

"My dear Gore!" Skimpole looked benevolently at the erstwhile bully of the Shell. "I have long since forgiven you for any inconvenience you may have caused me. Let us be reconciled!"

"I say bravo to that!" chimed in Talbot. "And for a start, Skimmy, I want you to promise that you'll never, never, never talk Socialism, or Determinism, or any other ism in this study till you're asked."

"My dear Talbot—"

"Well?"

"I assure you that I had no intention of inflicting boredom on my study-mates. In any case, I shall probably be too busy writing for the papers. My story has brought me letters from the editors of various magazines asking me for contributions."

"Good old Skimmy! Hearty congrats!" said Talbot. But he doubted whether Skimpole's future literary efforts would meet with any success unless he was again assisted by Marie Rivers.

Gore took out the watch he was wearing, and glanced at it significantly.

It was a beautiful gold ticker, and had been presented to Gore as a memento of his heroic deed. It had been purchased with the ten pounds recovered from the tramp.

"If ever I feel like punching Skimmy's head," he said, "I'll just look at this watch and control myself!"

Talbot grinned. But Skimpole was already too deeply immersed in the seventy-fourth chapter of Professor Balmyscummet's volume to hear what Gore said.

Skimpole's Rest Cure had come to an end!

THE END.

(Another grand story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "Rags of the Fourth." Order your copy EARLY!)

OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY!



THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Jim Quinton of the Sixth Form at Harwood's, Bigglesdale, by the will of John Quinton, his father, is to succeed to a great position at Karradon in Africa. A great deal of mystery is attached to the position which John Quinton really held; but he is supposed to have been almost as powerful as the king himself. Mr. Matlock, the late John Quinton's solicitor, makes known details of the will to Jim Quinton, who at once decides to carry out his father's wishes. He is then introduced to Tim Daly, Erik, and Nijellah, a negro, who are to be his servants.

In their presence the solicitor hands to Jim a sealed packet of papers, which John Quinton had left solely for his son's perusal.

Jim has enemies in Dillon Bracaster, another Six-Former at Harwood's, Bracaster senior, Cyrus Kerzon, and a fellow named Flaxman, who call themselves the Karradon Syndicate. Eventually the rival parties reach Africa, and Jim and his friends, including Dick Willoughby, a school chum, who had joined the party, set out for Karradon.

One night they are attacked by the Manzi tribe, presumably under the direction of the Syndicate. Daly sends Jim, Dick, and Erik on to the "Quinton Dump," while he stays behind with Nijellah to parley with the attackers.

(Now Read on).

A Surprise for Jim.

ERIK led them now into a smaller room off the main cavern, but only Quinton and Willoughby followed him. The two Karradon boys remained in the larger place.

This smaller room was roughly furnished with two or three chairs, a table, and several odd boxes.

"Bazar Quinton came here," Erik explained, and Jim guessed that he was speaking of his father. "Nobody would buy ivory for quite a long time. Quite safe here."

Even while he was speaking he had been unfastening one of the boxes, from which he took out a small stove. Quinton and Willoughby had brought with them their own personal packs, and the two Karradon boys had carried larger ones in this present emergency. In a very short time Erik had made cocoa, and biscuits had been produced.

While he was busy the little man explained various details to Quinton. They had come the shortest way to the Dump to-night, but the donkeys would come by a different route. Erik hoped that they would arrive safely soon after daylight.

He hoped, too, that Meljor Daly would soon come. The Meljor had been hurt, but he had medicine with him. Erik was quite sure of that. Yet it was plain that the little man was worried

about Tim Daly, and would not be content until he saw the Meljor again.

His hopes regarding the donkeys were fulfilled. Quinton and Willoughby were still asleep when they arrived, but the clattering and shouting in the outer cavern quickly awakened them, and they went out to find the donkeys being tied up again at the far end of the cavern. It was apparently not the first time that the place had been used as a stable, and Quinton guessed that some of the porters who had remained faithful to them had also been here before.

During the morning Quinton explored the vicinity of the dump. In the brilliant sunshine the forest had lost much of its fearfulness, and they were quite near the edge of it now. Erik explained that, apart from its other advantages, this place was not far from a stream which was very rarely dry. However long they might be compelled to stay here they were fairly certain of a reasonable water supply.

"Ripping sort of a place to camp out, Jim?" Willoughby suggested, after they had been shown round by Erik. "We're staying here, I suppose till Tim Daly turns up."

"Yes," Jim agreed slowly. "Until Daly comes along we can't do anything else. I hope he comes soon."

Already a vague doubt was filtering into Jim's mind regarding the future. He had asked Erik various questions, knowing that the little man had more instructions from Daly than Jim had himself. But Erik was never very communicative, and he boiled down his knowledge into very brief sentences.

"We wait twenty-four hours—perhaps a little longer, bazar," Erik answered. "If Meljor Daly does not return, he told me to say to you, 'Carry on.' Meljor Daly trusts you, bazar. We all trust you. You will carry on. The people of the Karradons are waiting for you."

"Yes, I know," Jim agreed quietly, but did not speak the doubts which were in his mind.

He did not lack courage, but he had not yet the knowledge which was necessary for a task of this kind. And Tim Daly? Had he done right in leaving him last night, despite Tim's very definite instructions to get away?

The day dragged on slowly, but there was no sign of Tim Daly or Nijellah and his two friends. Jim tried to learn everything he could of the possibilities, but last night's attack was something of a mystery even to Erik. The nearest people to these forest lands had always been friendly.

That night Jim slept very little. The tiny fears regarding Tim Daly had begun to take on definite shape, and he began to regret that he had wasted so much time before taking action. Before he rose he had made up his mind on the course he meant to follow.

As soon as he was up Erik was by his side, and Jim began to ask him questions at once. Did the Karradon, who spoke a little English, know the way back to the place where they had left Meljor Daly?

"He knows the way, bazar," Erik replied doubtfully; "but he should not go alone."

"I'm going with him," Quinton answered. "I want you to stay here with Meljor Willoughby, Erik."

"What's that, Jim?"

Willoughby had overheard part of the conversation, and was anxious to understand more fully. When Jim explained that he intended to go back to their last camping-ground, and find out what he could of Tim Daly and his companions, Willoughby protested at once.

"I'm coming with you, Jim," he declared. "And Erik will come, too."

Quinton shook his head emphatically. "Look here, Dick," he began firmly, "when I was Senior Fours captain at Harwood's, you didn't argue when I said a thing had to be done. You did it, because you knew I'd thought the whole business out. And I've thought all this out very carefully. You and Erik stay here, because you've got to carry on, if I happen to drop out. I'm going to make a will, Dick."

It was plain that Erik did not like this new plan; but Jim had formed his opinions very cautiously. He had promised to go back for Tim Daly after twenty-four hours. A hundred reasons might have made it impossible for Daly to come to the dump, and he would be relying on Jim's return. But there might be some danger in it, and Quinton recalled certain words which his father had written him. He was to see that his heritage was handed on to someone who would use his power rightly. Who was better than Dick Willoughby?

Something of this Jim explained to Willoughby and Erik. He laid it down, too, that he was now in command, and that they were both under his orders. After that they ceased to protest, and Quinton wrote out a brief form, which set forth to all concerned that everything of which James Quinton died possessed was to belong to Richard Willoughby.

loughby, who would be guided in all that he did by Erik.

The native of the Karradons, who understood and spoke a little English, was called into the conference. He quickly grasped what was expected of him, and in less than an hour Jim had made all his arrangements and given his final instructions.

"I hope I'll be back here inside eight hours," he told Willoughby before he left. "But we shall be all right for food and water for a good deal longer; and you'll recognise the trail, Dick?"

"I shall, old son," Willoughby answered, and tried to appear as cheerful as possible.

It had been arranged to try the old paper-chase idea; and Quinton was leaving a trail of paper behind him, not a very strong one, perhaps, but enough to satisfy that he had passed that way in safety.

He had also discovered among his possessions a small amount of red paper. If, later on, Willoughby and Erik saw this, they would know that at that point Jim Quinton had sighted danger.

By daylight the road back to the camping-place was not nearly so terrible as it had been in the darkness. In places, it is true, there was not any too much light; but Ranallah, Quinton's guide, was very sure of his way, and within three hours of leaving the dump they came across their own light carts and the piles of baggage they had been forced to leave behind.

To Quinton it looked, even in the brief glance he gave it, as though the packages had already been rifled. But for the time he was not greatly concerned about their possessions. It was Tim Daly he wanted to see.

He would have gone straight on to the clearing where they had pitched their camp, but his guide pulled him back, and held up a warning finger.

His efforts to explain his fears or his fancies would have been laughable under different conditions. In curious English, and by many wonderful grimaces and gesticulations, he indicated to Jim that it was unwise to venture into the open. There were people about, or, at least, there might be, so Quinton gathered.

Very cautiously the two went round the edge of the camping-ground, keeping always well within the shadow of the trees. Jim's heart began to sink as he made the tour. Unreasonably perhaps, he had been buoyed up all the time by the idea that he would find Tim Daly still squatting on the ground. He might be wounded or ill, and Nijellah might be incapable of doing anything, but at least Jim hoped to find them somewhere near the same place.

But there was no sign of Daly, or of Nijellah, or any of his friends. Only the blackened remnants of their fires remained as witness of the camp they had made here.

"No good?" Jim's companion asked him. "Meljor Daly-gone?"

He waved his arms to indicate something. It seemed that Ranallah had an instinct for the dramatic, and in the middle of his waving he stopped suddenly, and peered excitedly through the undergrowth amongst which they stood.

When he turned he again held his hand up in warning, and indicated that Quinton should look himself. His attitude and manner suggested that he had beheld some strange mystery, and he appealed to Jim for explanation.

"Not Meljor Daly!" he whispered. "White man! Bad-bad!"

Peering through the trees, Jim saw a tall, lanky figure strolling across from the woods on the other side. He was, as Ranallah had said, a white man, and he was smoking a cigarette in the stolidly affected manner which only one fellow in all the world could have assumed.

Jim recognised him at once, and was far more mystified and amazed than Ranallah had been. For the lanky youth, attired in wonderful "Colonial outfit," and evidently well-satisfied with himself, was none other than Dillon Braster!

And, quite unconscious of the fact, so Jim imagined, Braster was coming directly towards him!

In Quest of Daly.

FOR a few moments Jim Quinton stared through the bushes and shrubs which protected him from the time, and tried to grasp the reality of what he saw.

Dillon Braster! How had he got here? There was no mistaking the fellow, yet—it seemed absurd and in-

situation. Braster was certainly no friend of Jim Quinton's; but for the moment it might be advisable to treat him as one. It would scarcely do to let Ranallah deal with him as an enemy!

"A friend—in a way," Jim answered, and smiled again reassuringly at his companion. "I'll speak to him!"

"Bazar's friend!" Ranallah repeated. "Not kill him!"

His face lost all its look of urgent wonder and excitement which had been evident a moment or two before. A calm, contented grin settled over his features, and, twisting himself quietly, he relapsed gently into a sitting position.

By now Braster had crossed the open ground, and was standing, doubtful and hesitant, at the edge of the wood. He was directly opposite Quinton, and the latter could see him quite clearly. He judged that Braster was either doubtful of the wisdom of entering the wood alone, or that he was not quite sure of the exact spot he wanted.

He made up his mind suddenly at last, and plunged into the undergrowth. Quinton rose swiftly, and, as Braster



Ranallah jumped up swiftly. His free arm went quickly round Braster's neck, and a moment later Braster was being swung round away from Quinton. (See page 19.)

credible! A dozen different questions and ideas flashed into Jim's mind. Were they at the back of the trouble of two nights ago? He felt that he wanted to run forward at once, seize Braster, and compel him to tell the truth!

Ranallah touched him gently on the arm, and Jim turned for a moment to the Karradon, who was struggling to put into English the questions he wanted to ask Jim.

"White man come here," he said, with gestures to explain his meaning. "Bazar's friend, or—gr-rh!"

Jim smiled as he comprehended exactly what Ranallah wished to convey. But it was more difficult to explain the true

flung aside the impeding branch, the two came face to face!

"Hallo, Braster! Having a stroll?" Jim spoke in a calm, normal voice, just as he might have done at Harwood's, but its effect on Braster was galvanic.

He jumped back as though he had been shot. The cigarette fell from between his fingers, and his lips opened slightly in momentary fear.

"All right, Braster! You needn't look so frightfully worried. I want to have a short chat with you. That's all!"

Jim's hand came forward and gripped Braster by the shoulder. Just for an instant they stood facing each other.

Then Bracster acted in a manner which amazed Quinton.

He sprang forward and closed with Jim, making a violent effort to throw him to the ground. The bare idea that Dillon Bracster would ever have the pluck to tackle him in a fair fight was something which Quinton had abandoned long ago.

But now, as his arms closed about Quinton, Bracster began to call out loudly:

"Help! Quick! Help! Help!"

Quinton realised the danger instantly, and knew that Bracster's courage was merely a momentary matter. He was relying upon someone else to come and help him out of this difficulty. Jim struggled free from his grip and attempted to put his hand over Bracster's mouth.

"Stop that, Bracster!" he commanded. "If you want to fight, we'll have it."

Again Bracster, having released his hold for a moment, made another violent effort to fling himself upon Quinton. Apparently, in his astonishment on first seeing Jim, he had failed to observe the figure of Ranallah, who, so far, had watched the meeting of the two "friends" in wonder.

But Bracster's second cry for help decided Ranallah. It might be that he had misunderstood Bazar Quinton, but certainly this intruder was his friend. He jumped up swiftly, but kept a sure grip on the rifle he carried. His free arm went quickly round Bracster's neck, and a moment later that youth was being swung round away from Quinton.

Just what had happened even Quinton could not have said, but Dillon Bracster suddenly slipped from Ranallah's arms,

limp and inert. He lay very still and quiet, and the next moment Ranallah was pushing Jim further forward into the forest.

"Quick—quick!" Ranallah's eyes were once again very wide-open and filled with excitement. "Up tree, Bazar!"

So much Jim grasped of his English; but it was Ranallah's gestures which were the clearest guide to his intentions and desires. He half-dragged Jim through the undergrowth for a few paces, then stopped at the foot of a great tree and pointed upwards for a moment.

It flashed into Jim's mind that this was probably the most sensible course they could adopt for the present, and he acted promptly on Ranallah's suggestion. The Karradon, indeed, gave him a helping hand, and the thick creeper which wound about the great trunk made its climbing a fairly simple task. Within a very few seconds Quinton had clambered on to one of the lower branches.

Ranallah came after him, and Jim went a little further up the tree, then turned to his Karradon companion again.

Conversation between the two was not an easy matter; but, all things considered, they rubbed along together well. Jim gathered that Ranallah was afraid the other white man, Bracster, had given enemies who answered his call; but the Karradon guessed they would be foes and that they would begin a hunt for them.

Jim questioned him regarding what he had done to Bracster, but all that he could gather was that his old enemy was merely temporarily out of action. He would waken presently.

After that, Ranallah set an excellent

example by investigating the small stock of food he had brought with him and beginning to make a meal. Jim was not slow to follow the same course.

For five minutes they ate in silence. The first interruption came when, from somewhere quite near at hand, they heard a man's voice shouting aloud:

"Dillon—Dillon! Where are you?"

It was repeated again and again, and then Quinton fancied he heard an answering groan. The impatient cry was confirmed very quickly, for a moment or two later he could hear young Bracster's voice.

"Help! Oh, help! I'm here! Help!"

A few minutes later the wisdom of Ranallah's strategy was fully proved. Following Dillon Bracster's cry for help, there was a considerable amount of shouting and calling, and presently Quinton could hear the voices of both the elder Bracster and Cyrus Kerzon talking in an excited way and giving instructions.

They were evidently intent on making a search of the immediate neighbourhood, and presently, from their position, both Quinton and Ranallah caught a glimpse of their trackers. Kerzon, indeed, stood almost at the foot of the tree in which they were sheltering, and Jim felt some what as King Charles must have done on a certain historic occasion.

With Kerzon were half a dozen native boys, each armed with a curious bow and arrows, though later on Jim saw one of the same tribe carrying an old-fashioned rifle. Kerzon was evidently giving them instructions, and they separated presently at his bidding.

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Don't Wear a Truss.

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