

THE ST. JIM'S INVENTORS ARE STILL GOING STRONG!

Mr. Hanson
EVERY WEDNESDAY

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Skimpole's
Thought-Reading
Machine!



SKIMPOLE TRIES THE 'FLUENCE
ON MONTY LOWTHER—THE
HUMORIST OF THE SHELL!

(Read the grand school tale inside.)

THE CRANK OF ST. JIM'S! To those unacquainted with him, Herbert Skimpole would appear to be a genius for things scientific; but to his Form fellows he is only regarded as a chap who has swallowed a dictionary and who was born to have his leg pulled! Thus St. Jim's doesn't exactly enthuse over—



SKIMPOLE'S THOUGHT-READING MACHINE!

A Splendid New Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Cheery Chums of St. Jim's.

BY

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

The St. Jim's Inventors.

WHAT is it?" Tom Merry, of the Shell, asked this question as he emerged from the School House, and paused on the steps.

"Don't ask me, old man," said Monty Lowther, staring. "It looks like a cross between a carrier's cart and a bicycle."

"Jolly neat, though," said Manners critically. It was evening, and nearly time for tea. The Terrible Three, in fact, were on their way to the tuckshop to obtain the necessary supplies.

And round the angle of the New House came a weird and wonderful contraption.

Monty Lowther's description was rather harsh, for the strange contrivance was more akin to a miniature limousine. It circled towards the School House, and came to a halt in front of the School House steps.

A door opened, and Redfern, of the New House Fourth, stepped out.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said cheerily.

"What the thump—" began Tom Merry.

"My saloon bicycle," said Redfern.

"Your which?"

"My new patent," explained Redfern, with a wave of his hand. "What do you think of it? Saloons for the million!"

"The Poor Man's Car!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Exactly!"

"Umpteen miles on a gallon!" grinned Lowther.

"As many miles as you like on nothing!" corrected Redfern. "That's the beauty of this saloon. The body is up-to-date in every way, and the chassis is just an ordinary bicycle. Protection in all weathers. It doesn't matter if it rains, snows, or hails. No macintosh required, and overalls are obsolete."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to grin at!" said Redfern tartly.

"I was just thinking what a good salesman you would make," chuckled Tom Merry. "You're the kind of fellow who could sell macintoshes in the Sahara! But let's have a look at this jigger of yours."

"Bai Jove!"

Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, arrived on the scene, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy examined the saloon bicycle critically with the aid of his famous eyeglass.

"Whatevah is this fweakish thing?" he asked mildly.

"Freakish thing be blowed!" retorted Redfern. "It's my invention for the competition."

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"Gweat Scott!"

The invention mania had hit St. Jim's hard.

Mr. Bernard Glyn had offered some handsome prizes for the best original devices which the St. Jim's juniors could produce. Mr. Glyn was interested in his own son's mechanical productions, and he felt that a little incentive would probably produce a whole host of youthful inventors.

His surmise had proved correct!

The whole school was full of enthusiasts, and many were the extraordinary "patents" which had been produced. Certainly Redfern's patent had caused a sensation.

"My saloon bicycle," said Redfern, proudly, as Arthur Augustus finished his examination. "And if you can't pass any better criticisms, Gussy, I'll dot you one!"

"Weally, Wedfern—"

"My hat! It looks pretty good!" grinned Blake. "You get inside as if it were a motor-car, eh?"

"Exactly the same," said the New House junior. "There's perfect visibility inside, and the body goes right round underneath the pedals, and not an atom of draught can get at you. Absolutely enclosed coachwork."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But surely it is wathah dangewous?" asked Arthur Augustus dubiously. "Weally, Wedfern, you will have a frightful accident if you happen to skid. All that glass will cut you to wibbons."

"Which glass?"

"The glass in the dooah, an' the glass in the wind-swee—"

"That's not glass, ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass by a New House wottah!"

"It's celluloid," explained Redfern. "At least, it's some kind of transparent preparation—the same as they use for side-curtains in motor-cars. There's nothing to hurt, even if I do get a bad skid."

"Well, my hat, it's jolly neat, I must say," said Blake admiringly. "Are you entering this for the Inventions Competition, Reddy?"

"Fathead!"

"Look here, you New House chump—"

"Well, don't ask silly questions," said Redfern. "Why do you think I've spent all my pocket-money, and a whole week of intensive labour? I shall take the first prize with this little beauty."

"Can't be done!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head.

"Why not?"

"I've decided to bag the first prize with my fountain-pen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's funny," said Blake. "I understand that Figgins has earmarked the first prize for himself with his seven league boots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all rot!" said Manners heatedly. "What about my stereoscopic camera? If that doesn't lift the first prize the competition won't be on the square!"

"New House will get the first prize!" said Redfern tartly.

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats!"

"Look here, you School House dummies——"

"Peace, children!" grinned Tom Merry. "There's no need to quarrel about that fifty pounds prize yet. It'll be almost three weeks before the closing day, and by that time Redfern will probably have scrapped his saloon bicycle, and he'll be busy on another invention."

"Not likely!" said Redfern. "I'm broke, for one thing. They all gathered round the machine."

Unquestionably, it was a novelty. The body was modelled exactly on the lines of the saloon body of a modern car. The wind-screen was just the same, the side door closed neatly, and there was a strong roof of varnished imitation leather. The coachwork was mainly sheet aluminium, neatly rounded, and finished in blue enamel. Here and there were red touches, and all the fittings were highly nickelled.

"A machine like this ought to sell for twenty quid," said Redfern, with enthusiasm. "Think what it'll mean for bicycle manufacturers! It'll give the whole trade a new lease of life——"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Tom Merry. "You won't be able to enter this patent of yours, Redfern."

"Why not?"

"All entries must be of simple construction and of general utility," said Tom Merry, quoting from the rules of the competition. "No competitor must spend more than two pounds for materials——"

"I built this saloon for thirty-eight bob!" said Redfern, grinning. "I've got all the items down, and I can prove it. Of course, the bike's another thing. I shall enter the body——not the jigger. This saloon can be fitted to any bicycle within half an hour."

"Well, you deserve a consolation prize, anyhow—for your daring," chuckled Blake. "Any objections to a trial ride?"

"Lots of objections," said Redfern coldly. "So I ought to get a consolation prize, eh? You burbling ass, if I don't get the first prize I shall make a complaint to the judges!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Redfern got into his "Poor Man's Car," keeping one foot on the ground. He pushed off gently, pulled his foot in, and closed the door. The School House juniors grinned as Redfern vanished round by the rear of the New House.

"Poor chap, he's booked for a disappointment," said Monty Lowther. "We can't allow the first prize to go to the New House."

"Wathah not!"

"Or the second prize, or the third prize, either," said Blake. "I understood that Herries is after the first prize. He's busy on his cornet. The idea is to make it automatic, like a player-piano. You just put a tiny music-roll in, and simply blow."

"You silly ass!" said Herries, turning red.

"Well, it's my idea," chuckled Blake. "I gave it to Herries, free of charge, and all he can do is to insult me! But think of the possibilities! No more hideous noises in Study No. 6——"

"What?" roared Herries.

"Dry up, and look at this!" interrupted Monty Lowther. "This is my prize-winning invention. The most marvellous fountain-pen that ever fountained!"

And Monty Lowther produced the wonder with a flourish.

CHAPTER 2.

Not Quite a Success!

"BAI JOVE! There is nothin' weinarkable in a fountain-pen, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with disdain. "The fountain-pen was invented yeabs ago."

"Noah had one, in the Ark!" said Blake tartly.

"But not one like this!" said Lowther, handling his treasure with fond care. "This is a fountain-pen that is going to blot out every other pen on the market."

"I believe it," said Blake. "Particularly the blot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We must expect this feeble humour from the kids of the Fourth," said Lowther patiently. "Here you see three buttons. Tiny buttons, it is true, but they mean much. You press button number one, and the pen writes in blue-black. You press button number two, and instantaneously you have red ink at your disposal. And when you press button number three——hey, presto!——a generous supply of green ink is available."

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "You are twyin' to pull our legs, you duffah!"

"Of course he is," said Digby. "How the merry dickens can a pen write with three different kinds of ink?"

"That's the secret," said Lowther. "If anybody's got a nice clean notebook I'll demonstrate. Gussy, what about yours?"

"I uttally wefuse——"

"Come along, old man," said Monty gently. "Any notebook will do, of course, but think of the great honour of having yours, Gussy! You'll treasure it in after years."

"Weally, Lowthah, if you are not wottin'——"

"Oh, Gussy!" protested Lowther.

"Vewy well," said D'Arcy, beaming. "If you put it like that, deah boy, I will permit you to expewiment on my notebook. I twust there will be no disastah."

"Just wait until you see the pen in action," said Lowther confidently. "Later on, Gussy, when a big company decides to buy my patents, I'll make you a-present of the first pen out of the factory, autographed by your humble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, Gussy—he's quite serious," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've heard a lot about that pen during the last few days, but I wouldn't guarantee its prospects as a prize-winner. In my opinion, it's too complicated."

"Not that your opinion counts," said Monty Lowther coldly. "You're not entering for the competition, anyhow, so kindly confine yourself to such trivial matters as sport!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Go ahead!" he said good-naturedly.

As junior sports skipper, Tom Merry felt that he had no time to devote to thinking out patents. Quite apart from this, he wasn't built that way. The trials of a sports captain are many, and Tom had his hands well filled without adding to his burden.

Nobody quite knew whether Monty Lowther was serious or not. He had such a reputation as a humorist that his three-colour pen was taken as a joke. So Blake & Co. were quite interested to have a look at it.

Arthur Augustus produced his splendid notebook—a beautiful thing of Morocco leather, with gilt edges. Monty opened it, and carefully unscrewed the cap of his pen. To all intents and purposes, it was quite a normal sort of pen in every way.

"We'll try the blue-black ink first," said Monty, touching a little button.

And, surely enough, the pen wrote smoothly and freely in blue-black.

"BAI JOVE! That's wathah good!" said Arthur Augustus admiringly.

"Wait, you chump!" grinned Blake. "I don't suppose it'll write in any other colour."

"Won't it?" said Monty. "How about this?"

He touched another button, and gave the pen a little shake. A blob of ink shot out, and hit Herries in the waistcoat.

"Look out, you careless ass!" roared Herries.

"Don't make a fuss over a trifle," said Monty Lowther. "We inventors can't be bothered over a few trivialities. Now we're going to surprise the natives, Gussy."

Monty wrote, and a line of red writing was the result.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Blake. "It works!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course it works, you ass!" roared Lowther.

"BAI JOVE! I considah that a wathah wippin' invention!" said Arthur Augustus, with enthusiasm. "I must confess, Lowthah, that I was fwightfully suspicious at first. You are such a boundah for japin', you know, that——"

"Even clowns are serious at times," put in Blake. "Let's have a look at the green ink now, Monty. I'm still sceptical."

But he wasn't sceptical a moment later. For when Lowther pressed the third button, that astonishing pen dutifully wrote in green. True, it was somewhat mixed with red at first, but it soon accommodated itself to the scarlet flow.

"What about the first prize now?" asked Lowther triumphantly. "You fellows don't know how much time and thought I have expended——"

"Gweat Scott!" gasped D'Arcy. "Look out, Lowthah!"

"What's the matter, you ass?"

"Your fwightful pen is blobbin'—— Yawwooh!" howled D'Arcy. "Take the fwightful thing away!"

"Yes, go easy, Lowther!" shouted Blake.

"It is leakin' over my waistcoat!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Without any apparent cause, Lowther's wonderful pen was misbehaving itself very badly. All the different coloured inks were running riot, and were pouring out from the nib in a variegated flood. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's notebook was already swamped.

"My hat! Something's gone wrong!" gasped Lowther, in alarm.

He jerked the pen away, and a vivid stream of blue-black, red, and green ink went flying over D'Arcy's fancy waistcoat. The unfortunate swell of St. Jim's backed away, roaring.

"Yawwooh! You uttah wuffian——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, Gussy!" said Lowther. "I didn't know—"
 "I regard you as a careless boundah, Lowthah!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "I weally believe you have done this on purpose! Bai Jove! Kindly remove your jacket!"

"But, my dear old scout—"
 "I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin', you know!"
 "Have mercy on me, Gussy!" pleaded Monty. "It was a pure accident, I assure you. The beastly thing went wrong. Wants one or two adjustments, I expect. This is only an experimental model, you know."

"Lowthah, you are tellin' whoppahs!"
 "Honest Injun, old man," said Lowther earnestly. "Honour bright!"

Arthur Augustus was mollified.
 "Oh, well, if you say honah bwight, deah boy, that is a different mattah," he exclaimed, "cooling down. I will forgive you for wuinin' my waistcoat. Pway allow me to pass, Blake. I must go indoors to change my waistcoat, collah, an' necktie."

"Then we'll see you at supper-time, Gussy?" asked Blake.
 "You fighful ass! We hayen't had tea yet!"

"I was just doing a simple piece of reckoning," explained Blake. "One hour to change waistcoat, another hour to change collar, and two hours to select a necktie."

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

Arthur Augustus walked into the School House with his nose in the air, and Monty Lowther sadly shook his head and stowed his celebrated pen away.

"Not quite a success, old man," chuckled Tom Merry.

"Well, it was all right at first," said Lowther dubiously. "I can't understand why it went wrong. I took an awful trouble to make those valves. There are three different ink chambers in this pen—"

"Never mind about your silly pen," said Manners. "Here come the New House rotters. Get ready to bump them if they're cheeky!"

Figgins & Co., of the New House, strolled over.
 "Pax!" said Figgins, as soon as he came within talking range. "House rows are off for the present. Have you seen Redfern's saloon bicycle?"

"That's stale," said Blake.

"We're beating you chaps, anyhow," said Figgins, with satisfaction. "What with my pneumatic boots, and Redfern's saloon bicycle, and Kerr's patent fire extinguisher—"

"Dry up about the fire extinguisher!" said Kerr. "I haven't got it designed yet, let alone made."

"Well, anyhow, we're cock House!" said Figgins.
 "My only hat!" ejaculated Blake, with a glare. "He calmly comes over here, and says 'Pax,' and then starts crowing about his mouldy old House! Shall we bump him, you chaps?"

"Only thing to be done," said Monty Lowther.
 Figgins grinned.

"Chuck it!" he said. "Only my fun, you silly asses! We want to hear how you're getting on with your inventions on this side. Anything fresh cropped up yet?"

"There's Skimpole's thought-reading machine," grinned Tom Merry. "Nobody's seen it yet, but I understand it's going to be a corker."

"But that won't be any good for the competition," said Kerr. "A thought-reading machine isn't a practical invention."

"And Skimpole isn't a practical inventor," explained Lowther blandly. "We shall have to go along and have a look at him during the evening. I believe in giving these great geniuses a little encouragement. It does them good now and again."

"Blow Skimpole!" interrupted Manners impatiently. "I want to show you fellows my patent camera. If anybody's going to win the first prize, I am. This camera of mine will knock spots off everything that's ever been done in photography!"

"There's nothing like being modest," said Blake. "What is there special about this giddy camera, anyhow?"

Manners was waxing enthusiastic.

"Wait here a tick," he said, "and I'll fetch it."

CHAPTER 3.

The Camera That Didn't!

"BETTER humour him, I suppose," said Figgins indulgently.

"Well, I think I'll be strolling off," said Fatty Wynn. "I don't want to see Manners' silly camera. I've got some scones to toast for tea, and there's the kettle to put on—"

"I'll come with you, Fatty," said Kerr.

"Oh, well, if you're both going, I might as well come,"

too," remarked Figgins carelessly. "Tell Manners we'll have a look at his camera some other day, you chaps."

The New House trio strolled off, and Blake glanced at his watch.

"Tea!" he said thoughtfully. "I must say that Fatty Wynn has got the right idea. We might as well get along to Study No. 6, you chaps."

"Just what I was going to say," nodded Herries.

"Fine!" agreed Digby.

They went indoors, and Tom Merry grinned at Lowther.

"We'll go along to the tuckshop to buy our tommy," he suggested.

Lowther nodded and winked.

"Two-minds with but a single thought!"

They went off rather hurriedly, and a minute later, when Harry Manners hurried out, full of enthusiasm, he came to a sudden halt on the School House steps.

"What the thump—!" he gasped.

He stared round, his indignation rising.

"The rotters!" he said fiercely. "They've all cleared off!"

Interest in Manners' camera did not seem to be very strong. True, Baggy Trimble vouchsafed a certain amount of curiosity regarding the instrument, but Manners was not particularly flattered.

"That your new camera, Manners?" asked Trimble of the Fourth. "I've heard about it—"

"Go away!" growled Manners.

"I was going to give you the benefit of my advice," went on Trimble generously. "I've had a good deal of experience of photography, you know. I've got a wonderful camera at Trimble Hall—"

"Brre!"

"If you don't want to listen, Manners—"

"You can go and eat coke!" snapped Manners.

"Well, perhaps you'll oblige an old pal by lending him half-a-crown?" suggested Trimble hopefully.

"Certainly," said Manners. "I'm always ready to stand by an old pal. Half-a-crown, Trimble? Sure that's enough?"

"I—I meant five bob," said Trimble hastily.

"All right," said Manners. "Let's say five bob."

"Thanks awfully, Manners!" said Trimble eagerly. Manners stared.

"What the merry dickens are you thanking me for?" he asked. "I said I'd lend five bob to an old pal, you fat sponger. Show me the old pal, and I'll whack out like a bird!"

"I'm the old pal!" roared Trimble.

"Opinions differ," snapped Manners. "If you regard me as an old pal, Trimble, I wouldn't like to tell you what I regard you as. In the first place, it would take too long, and in the second place, I don't know the proper words!"

Baggy Trimble gulped, and he, too, was at a loss for proper words. And just then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came downstairs, resplendent in a new waistcoat, a clean collar, and a fresh necktie.

"Where are all the rest?" demanded Manners aggressively.

"I left them outside, deah boy."

"Well, they're all gone now," said Manners. "I went indoors to fetch my camera, and when I came they'd all gone, the rotters! Still, if you'll come outside, Gussy, I'll show you how it works."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, without much enthusiasm, however. "I twust, howevah, that your camewah will not wuin my waistcoat, Mannahs! One wuined waistcoat is sufficient—"

"There's nothing in a camera to ruin your silly waistcoat," hooted Manners. "Come and have a look, Gussy. I'll tell you what—I'll take a snap of you. You look so fetchin' just now that I can't resist you."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, beaming.

"You're killing, Gussy!" declared Manners.

This was the surest way of gaining Arthur Augustus' undivided attention, and the two juniors linked arms and went out into the quad. Baggy Trimble rolled behind, still faintly hopeful.

"About that half-crown, Manners—" he began.

"Buzz off, you fat rotter!" growled Manners.

"I only want to borrow half-a-crown to get some special materials for my new invention," said Trimble plaintively. "It's a bit hard on a chap when he's constantly hung up for capital. I've got some wonderful ideas, but I can't develop them because I'm short of cash!"

"Pway wun away, Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus sternly. "I am afraid that your wondahful ideahs all wun in the same divection. You are a gweeday wascal, an' I don't believe your inventions are weally genuine."

"Really, Gussy—" said Trimble indignantly.

"I wufuse to be addressed as Gussy by—"

"Ah, my dear Trimble, just a moment!" said a thin, mild



Monty Lowther touched a little button and the pen wrote smoothly and freely in blue-black ink. "I don't suppose it'll write in any other colour," grinned Jack Blake. "Won't it?" said Monty. "How about this?" He touched another button, and a fountain of ink shot out, and hit Herries in the waistcoat. "Look out, you careless ass!" roared Herries. (See Chapter 2.)

voice from the doorway. "If you will give me your attention for a moment—"

Baggy Trimble turned round, and blinked as he saw Skimpole.

"Oh crumbs!" muttered the fat junior.

Skimpole, of the Shell, was looking at Baggy Trimble with a curious light in his eyes. It was almost the look of a starving hunter when he finally sees his prey.

"I have a little proposition to put to you, my dear Trimble," said Skimpole. "Owing to unforeseen circumstances, I find myself in a slight difficulty, and it is conceivable that you may be able to assist me."

"If you can lend me half-a-crown, Skimmy—"

"It is just possible that I might be able to accommodate you, Trimble, but that is a matter which we can discuss later," said Skimpole impatiently. "Pray do not bring up the subject of money just now. I am anxious to find a willing subject for the testing of my great invention—"

"Let's go to your study, Skimmy," said Trimble promptly. They vanished.

"The young wascal is pprobably goin' to wob poor Skimmy now!" said Arthur Augustus, frowning. "I think perhaps we had better go indoors, Mannahs, an' rescue Skimmy from the hands of that gweasy young wascal!" Manners snorted.

"If you take more interest in Skimpole than you do in my camera, Gussy, say so!" he snapped. "But I understood that I was going to take your photograph."

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"But nothing!" growled Manners. "Have a look at this camera, ass!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

Manners was exasperated. In his opinion, photography was about the only subject worthy of serious consideration. Sports were all very well, but they naturally came second to camera work. And just when he had produced the most marvellous invention in the history of photography, nobody

apparently wanted to have a look at it. Really, it was too bad!

"Here's the instrument," said Manners proudly.

"Bai Jove! You have two camewahs there, Mannahs!"

"That's just where you make your mistake," said Manners triumphantly. "This is only one camera. That's the whole secret of the patent. There are two lenses and two shutters. But they're so arranged that they take the impression at the same instant on one film."

"Isn't that vevy wevolutionawy, deah boy?"

"Never been done before," replied Manners. "I'm the pioneer!"

"Congwats, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus. "But what is the pwcise ideah?"

He adjusted his celebrated monocle, and took a good look at the twin instrument. He did not gaze at it with the reverence that Manners would have liked. In fact, he didn't seem to realise that he was being privileged to look upon the wonderful Manners' stereoscopic camera.

Actually, it was two cameras incorporated as one, but with only a single film, as Manners had explained.

"This is the camera that's going to change photography all over the world," said Manners modestly. "Before long it'll be applied to the pictures, too. They'll make all the film plays with cameras like this, so that the people on the screen come out like life. Stereoscopic effects, you know."

Arthur Augustus looked somewhat sceptical.

"Weally, Mannahs, I have no wish to thwow cold watah upon your enthusiasm, but it stwikes me that you are bein' twightfully optimistic," he remarked. "Howevah, if you wish to snap me, I have no objection, deah boy."

"After you've seen the result you'll be convinced," said Manners confidently. "You see, both lenses are opened at once, and the two impressions are taken on the same plate at the same second. The result will be a stereoscopic photograph."

"Have you twied it?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I only finished the thing half an hour ago."
 "Bai Jove! Then I'm afraid—"
 "Rats! Go over by that elm, and take up an easy attitude," said Manners. "And do your best to look pleasant, Gussy. I know it'll be a bit of a job, but try hard."

"Weally, Mannahs—"
 "Oh, don't argue!" growled Manners. "Go and pose!"
 Arthur Augustus did so without any further protest, and Manners took the snapshot. There was only one film in the camera, so only one snap was possible. Then Manners hurried indoors to develop without any delay. Tea was a matter that could wait.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, however, went along to Study No. 6, and joined his chums. It wasn't until afterwards that he remembered the photograph. So he went along to the Shell passage, and looked into Study No. 10.

"Ah, Mannahs!" he said, beaming. "I twust the photogwaph was a success?"

Grunt!
 "Weally, Mannahs, I do not wegard that as an arusah!"
 Grunt!

"Don't disturb the poor chap now, Gussy," said Tom Merry, glancing round. "He's in the throes of despondency. He's had a sad blow!"

"Bai Jove! I twust you have had no bad news, Mannahs?" said Arthur Augustus, with concern. "No sewious illness at home?"

Manners looked up mournfully, and shook his head. "I don't know what went wrong, Gussy, but that photogwaph of you is a bit disappointing," he said. "I took a print, but I don't think you'll care to see it."

"Wats! I have a perfect wight to see it!"
 "Well, you've asked for it yourself, Gussy! Gaze!"
 He held up a damp, limp print, and Arthur Augustus took hold of it, and his expression became blank.

"Good gwacious!" he gasped. "What evah is this? I appeah to be wight side up an' upside-down in the same photogwaph, Mannahs!"

"Something like the knave of diamonds, Gussy," nodded Monty Lowther.

"Weally Lowthah—"
 "It came out wrong," said Manners sadly. "There must be something wrong with the lens. I shall have to make some more adjustments. Instead of a stereoscopic effect, you've come out twice!"

Arthur Augustus looked at the photograph with disdain. It was an absolute failure, without question. There was not only a total lack of stereoscopic effect, but the photograph was a freak.

"I must wemark, Mannahs, that I warned you of this," said D'Arcy gently. "It is all vewy well to talk of wewolutionisin' the camewah world, but it is not so fwightfully easy."

Manners grunted, and decided that words were unnecessary.

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole's Latest!

BAGGY TRIMBLE rolled uncertainly into the Shell passage, and paused before the door of Study No. 9. "Oh dear!" he murmured. "I wish I hadn't promised Skimmy to come!"

At that moment the door of Study No. 10 opened, and Arthur Augustus emerged. He gave Baggy Trimble a suspicious glance.

"What are you pwyin' aound heah for, Twimble?" he said severely.

"I'm—I'm keeping an appointment with Skimmy," said Baggy Trimble. "I promised to come to his study after tea, and so I'm here."

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "You are not tellin' me, Twimble, that you are actually wespessin' a promise?"
 The fat Fourth-Former pulled himself up with dignity.

"I should hope that a Trimble never breaks his word!" he said stiffly.

"Gweat Scott!"
 "We Trimbles are famous for our faithfulness—"

"You uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "If it wasn't for the feah of soilin' my hand, and wumplin' my jacket, I would give you a feahful thwashin'!"

And the noble swell of St. Jim's, who had very strict ideas on the subject of promises, strode off. Baggy Trimble continued to hesitate outside Herbert Skimpole's door.

Before tea he had struck a bargain with Skimpole.

He had promised, as a matter of fact, to help Skimpole in a test of his thought-reading machine. Needless to say, money had entered into the agreement. Baggy had promised to undergo the test for the sum of five shillings.

But Skimpole was not quite such a duffer as many fellows were ready to believe. At least, he was not such a duffer as Trimble would have liked. He gave Baggy half-a-crown in advance, and the other half-crown would be forthcoming after the test.

Trimble was now beginning to regret his rashness.

He was quite willing to break his word, and leave Skimpole in the lurch, but the prospect of the other half-crown lured him on. The only point that worried him was that he feared the ordeal. Was it worth half-a-crown? He had no particular faith in Skimpole's thought-reading machine, but there was just a chance that there might be something in it. And Trimble had no wish for Skimpole, or anybody else, to read his thoughts.

But the half-crown won.
 Baggy Trimble rolled into Study No. 9, and blinked.

"Ah, my dear Trimble, I was beginning to wonder if you had forgotten our appointment!" said Skimpole beamingly. "Come in, my dear fellow. I must confess I would have preferred a different subject, but we cannot be too squeamish."

"Where's Talbot?" asked Trimble, looking round the study.

"I regret to say that Talbot is away—"
 "Well, where's Gore?"

"Gore, too, has inexplicably deserted the study of late," said Skimpole mildly. "I believe they have appropriated one of the other studies farther down the passage. A quite incomprehensible departure; but I am in no way perturbed. For I must confess that I find it easier to concentrate upon my subject when I am undisturbed. I am afraid that Gore, in particular, is a somewhat rough fellow."

"Well, what about this test?" asked Trimble, looking round nervously. "I think you ought to give me more than half-a-crown, Skimpole—"

"I fail to understand why you should display this unhealthy appetite for filthy lucre," said Skimpole, with astonishment. "Look upon this experiment in a scientific light, Trimble, and you will soon forget—"

"What's that thing?" interrupted Baggy, pointing.
 He eyed the object warily. He was by no means comfortable, even now.

"What is it?" he demanded.
 Herbert Skimpole beamed.

"That, my dear Trimble, is my wonderful thought-reading machine," he said. "At last, the final adjustment has been made, and all is ready for the initial test. I find it difficult to comprehend why the other fellows have displayed such a lack of enthusiasm for the great work. I have requested at least ten of them to sit for the test, but they have only insulted me in return."

"Then—then I'm the first?" asked Baggy, with more alarm.

"The honour will be yours, Trimble—"
 "I don't want the honour!" protested Baggy. "Look here, Skimmy, you can get somebody else to test your beastly—"

"Really, my dear Trimble!" broke in Skimpole. "I was under the impression that you had accepted the sum of half-a-crown in return for your services? If, of course, you

TALK ABOUT GOOD STUFF!

I WOULDN'T MISS IT FOR ANYTHING!

"I get round to the shop bright an' early Wednesday mornings, an' the first thing I start on is that long yarn about Pete. Gosh, that nigger's a real scream—make's me bust o' laughin' at the things he does, an' you can't read about him anywhere else than in the 'Boys' Realm.' Once he made that lion of his wear a bowler hat—talk about a joke! He calls the lion a Peruvian mouse-hound—some mouser! I like those three sailor chaps pretty nearly as much as Pete—specially Dusty Rhodes and Corny. Corny isn't a sailor, though, he's a camel, and he keeps on turning up when they don't want him. 'Give me the 'Boys' Realm' o' Wednesday's, and I don't want anything else once I get dug into the good stuff inside it. The only way they could improve it is to bring it out twice a week—I could always find an extra twopenny for it!"



are unwilling to proceed with the arrangement, my only alternative is to terminate the entire agreement, which will, of course, entail the return of the money I gave you."

Baggy Trimble blinked.

"I've sent it!" he said defiantly.

"In that case, my dear fellow, there is no alternative whatever," said Skimpole, with relief. "As an individual of honour and integrity, you are compelled to abide by our contract."

Trimble stared. For half a moment he wondered if Herbert Skimpole was trying to be funny. It wasn't often that Baggy heard himself described as "an individual of honour and integrity." But Skimmy was quite serious. It is more than probable that he had not the slightest notion of Baggy's real character. For Skimpole usually lived in a dream world of his own, wrapped up in his "ologies" and his "isms."

"Oh, well," said Baggy, "perhaps—"

"Pray let me point out, Trimble, that we are wasting time," went on Skimpole impatiently. "I had a somewhat bitter experience this afternoon with Racke. I merely requested Racke to sit in front of my machine, so that I could read his thoughts, and the ruffianly fellow not only deliberately tripped me up, but he actually annexed my spectacles, and hid them on a window-ledge down the passage. I spent a frantic half-hour searching for them."

Trimble turned the idea over in his mind. It might be quite a good scheme to annex Skimpole's spectacles again.

"However, that is neither here nor there," continued Skimpole. "We have our arrangement, my dear Trimble, and we will carry it out. As I have said before, you have the honour of being the first patient."

"Patient?" repeated Trimble, with a start.

"Exactly!"

"But look here, you ass," roared Trimble. "I'm not a patient! There's nothing wrong with me! I'm not going to be doctored by—"

"Dear me! This excitement is quite unnecessary," interrupted Skimpole. "I use the word 'patient' in a broad sense, Trimble. My intention is to experiment upon your brain—"

"Wha-a-at!"

"My thought-reading machine, concentrating its remarkable rays upon your forehead, will penetrate the cranium, and disclose the innermost thoughts of that grey matter which I presume to nestle in its customary cavity. In other words, my dear Trimble, I intend to explore your brain."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Trimble. "You're mad!"

"I assure you—"

"You're off your giddy rocker!" roared Trimble. "Help! He's dangerous! He's going to perform an operation on me, and I shall die!"

CHAPTER 5.

Too Much for Baggy!

SKIMPOLE gazed at Trimble in wonder.

"Dear me!" he said mildly. "There is no necessity for you to alarm yourself in this remarkable fashion, Trimble. I assure you that the experiment will be quite innocuous."

Trimble gulped.

"What's—what's innoc— What's what you said?"

"Innocuous?" repeated Skimpole. "Really, my dear fellow, this ignorance on your part is not only reprehensible, but lamentably disturbing. Innocuous means harmless."

"Harmless?" said Baggy, with relief.

"Perfectly harmless!" declared Skimpole. "It intrigues me greatly to know why so many fellows jump to the perfectly erroneous conclusion that my thought-reading machine is detrimental to life and limb. It is no more dangerous than taking a bath."

Trimble started.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "Is it like taking a bath?"

Skimpole had made an unfortunate slip. If this "operation" in any way resembled the taking of a bath, Baggy Trimble was having none of it. Baggy had very decided views on taking a bath.

"No, no, my dear Trimble!" said Skimpole. "Why will you be so literal? I merely used the expression as a simile to emphasise the harmless nature of the proposed test. You have merely to sit down in that chair and compose yourself, and the machine will do the rest."

"But what is the rest?" asked Baggy doubtfully.

"You need not be disturbed as to that," replied Skimmy, rubbing his hands together. "Let us take the X-rays as a case in point. To be exact, of course, we must refer to them as the Rontgen Rays. 'X-rays' is merely a vulgar term universally adopted to suit the proletariat. I claim that my thought-reading machine will be of far greater benefit to mankind than the discovery of the celebrated Herr Wilhelm Konrad Rontgen. I have no wish to belittle the work of that celebrated scientist—"

"He was a German!" said Baggy suspiciously.

"Tut-tut! Nationalities, my dear Trimble, are of no account whatever in scientific matters," said Skimpole testily. "There is a case well known in intellectual circles of a dark-coloured heathen who actually invented one of the most remarkable instruments for the benefit of mankind. Yet this man is not despised because of his unfortunate pigment. Science, my dear Trimble, has no barrier—"

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Trimble.

"I beg your pardon, Trimble?"

"Can't you cut it short?"

"Short?" said Skimpole, blinking and coming out of his dream. "To be sure! Of course—of course! Let us get on with our experiment. As I was saying, the X-rays is perfectly harmless when handled by a competent operator. It is only when inexperienced hands gain control that there are fatalities."

"Fatalities?" said Baggy nervously.

"It is exactly the same with my own rays," said Skimpole.

"Under my expert control there can be no danger."

"Here, half a minute!" said Trimble, with a gulp. "Is— is this machine dangerous if an inexperienced chap gets hold of it?"

"That I am not prepared to say," replied Skimpole cautiously. "You see, you will be the first patient, my dear Trimble—"

"Then you're as inexperienced as anybody!" roared Trimble, his brain working with much more rapidity than usual. "What if something goes wrong, and I'm killed?"

"That would undoubtedly be a slight drawback to my experiment," confessed Skimpole.

"A slight drawback?"

"But in the interests of science—"

"Blow science!" hooted Trimble. "Do you think I'm going to risk my life for a measly five bob?"

"Really, my dear fellow—"

"I reckon I've earned my half-crown, anyway!" went on Trimble warmly. "In fact, you ought to give me the other half-crown, Skimmy! You don't think it's entertaining, do you, to stand here listening to your piffle?"

"Dear me! I hardly comprehend—"

"You ought to make it ten bob!" continued Trimble, edging towards the door. "I'm fed-up with the whole bizney and—"

"But wait—wait!" exclaimed Skimpole, in alarm. "You are surely not thinking of going, my dear Trimble?"

"Yes, I am!"

"But, good gracious, we haven't started yet!"

"Rats! I've finished!"

"Nonsense!" said Skimpole, gazing at Trimble in amazement through his spectacles. "How can you have finished when I haven't even started? Please be reasonable, Trimble! I merely want you to sit on this chair and allow your mind to become a blank."

"A blank?"

"It should be perfectly easy," went on Skimpole, with unconscious humour. "Indeed, I fail to see any reason why you should not be an ideal subject for this experiment. I give you my assurance that you will come to no harm, and that you will leave this room famous. In after years your name will be handed down to posterity as the pioneer—"

"Rats!" growled Trimble. "I don't want to be killed!"

"I am even willing to allow a further five shillings if all goes well," continued Skimpole, in desperation. "It is a sad sidelight on humanity that I should be compelled to offer you money, but I am afraid the flesh is very weak. Sit down, Trimble, and we shall soon be having your thoughts."

"I don't want you to have my thoughts!" said Trimble, looking anxious again. "I say, will this giddy machine tell you all that I'm thinking about?"

"Everything!" beamed Skimpole.

"Oh dear!"

"It will also reveal what your thoughts have been during the past week, if my calculations are correct," went on Skimpole. "You see, the instrument is based upon the principle of—"

"Never mind what it's based upon!" growled Trimble. "I don't like the look of it."

He gazed at the instrument with greater distrust than ever. It was undoubtedly a fearsome-looking contrivance. The whole machine was mounted upon a wooden stand, like a huge camera—a sort of tripod. There was a kind of magic-lantern at the rear. To be perfectly truthful, it was a magic-lantern. Various parts of a microscope were incorporated in front of the lens, and there were even sections of a wireless set dragged in. There were two bright-emitter valves stuck in front, with batteries immediately beneath, in a separate compartment.

Precisely why Skimpole should imagine that this machine would work, only his own peculiar mentality could tell. But he was positively convinced that the "fluence" would

compel any sinner to speak his thoughts aloud. Once the patient was in the chair, and the rays were directed upon him, he would cease to be an independent force. He would become, so to speak, a part of the machine.

Skimpole had worked it all out on paper.

He had covered reams of writing-paper in penning treatises on the subject, and it was a sore point with him that he was having so much trouble to obtain a subject. The thought-reading machine had been ready all day, but nobody had expressed the slightest desire to test its wonderful powers.

"Now, Trimble, kindly sit here," said Skimpole gently.

"Let's have the five bob now, then!" said Trimble.

"Certainly not! After the experiment I will satisfy your greed, but for the moment we must confine ourselves to scientific research," said the genius of the Shell. "Be good enough to sit down, my dear fellow."

Trimble sat down as though he were lowering himself upon a hot-plate, and he held himself ready to spring a yard into the air at the slightest provocation. Bagley Trimble was not one of the world's heroes.

"What's next?" he asked nervously.

Skimpole disappeared behind the magic-lantern, and a match was struck. Nothing happened for a full minute. Trimble sniffed the air, conscious of a pungent, unpleasant odour.

"My hat!" he said. "What's this niff?"

"Merely acetylene gas, my dear Trimble," said Skimpole impatiently. "It is a sad sidelight on my impecunious state that I should be compelled to employ such crude methods. However, it is always the way of pioneers. Who am I to grumble? Ah! Good!"

Pop!

A light sprang into being inside the magic-lantern, and Skimpole muttered to himself with satisfaction. He made one or two adjustments, and then swung the fearsome instrument round so that Trimble found himself looking straight into its eye.

"Take it away!" he gasped frantically.

"Now, you must hold quite still and allow your mind to become a blank," said Skimpole. "You need not be afraid, Trimble. There is no danger of an explosion."

"What?"

"At least, I trust not," said Skimpole amiably. "I believe there is a leak of gas somewhere, but we cannot be bothered with such slight details. Now, remember, hold steady!"

Click!

A shutter went up, and a strange, violet-orange light flickered for a moment, and then concentrated itself upon Baggy Trimble's startled face.

"Yaroooooh!" he howled wildly.

"Good gracious! What in the world—"

Crash!

Trimble jumped up with such violence that the chair went hurtling over, and he staggered to the door.

"I'm blind!" he gasped hoarsely.

"Good heavens! I trust—"

"I knew what would happen!" hooted Trimble, in mortal fear. "You've blinded me! Yow! Yooooop! I'm hurt! Oh crumbs! I'm blind!"

He fumbled for the door-handle and turned it. Then he reeled out into the Shell passage, roaring.

CHAPTER 6. Amazing Results!

TOM MERRY started.

"What the thump's that noise?" he asked, looking up from his prep.

"Sounds like a bull," suggested Monty Lowther.

"That's it, a bull has got loose in the School House, and it's wrecking somebody's study!"

"You ass!" growled Manners. "It's only that worm Trimble!"

Tom Merry went to the door and flung it open.

Baggy Trimble was on the other side of the passage, leaning against the wall and roaring at the top of his voice. He was holding his hands tightly to his eyes. Skimpole was standing in the doorway of Study No. 9, looking alarmed and concerned.

"What's all this?" asked Tom Merry sharply.

"Really, my dear Merry, I fear there has been a slight mishap," said Skimpole, blinking. "Trimble is a victim of scientific research. I am exceedingly sorry that he has become blind, but we must all do our share towards the advancement of mankind."

"Blind!" gasped Tom Merry. "You've blinded him?"

"I fear so. But—"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Tom, running across to Trimble and grabbing him. "Let's have a look at you, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 995,

Trimble! Somebody had better run for the doctor! You fetch Mr. Railton, Monty—"

"Yow!" moaned Trimble. "I shall want compensation!"

Tom Merry started.

"You're soon thinking about compensation, aren't you?" he asked sharply.

"I'm blind!" hooted Trimble. "Skimpole's rotten machine has destroyed my eyesight! If he doesn't give me plenty of compensation I shall write to my people, and they'll prosecute him!"

"Let's have a look at your eyes!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"I—I can't open them!"

"Why not?"

"Ow! They hurt!" moaned Trimble pitifully.

"Well, you can't expect us to believe that you're blind unless we have a look at your eyes," said Monty Lowther. "Skimpole, I think it's very careless on your part to blind poor Trimble like this! He won't be able to see me raising my foot to kick him!"

"Eh?" gasped Trimble, opening his eyes with alacrity.

"Really, my dear fellows, I had no idea the rays would have such a disastrous effect," said Skimpole, with concern. "I can only express my regret—"

"Leave your expressions of regret until they are necessary, Skimmy, old man," said Tom Merry. "There's nothing wrong with Trimble's eyes—he's only spoofing!"

"I'm not!" bellowed Trimble, with another howl. "Yaroooooh! Oh dear! I keep getting spasms!"

"If the five shillings will be of any balm—" began Skimpole.

"Yes, rather!" said Trimble eagerly. "Not—not that five bob's enough! Unless you give me five quid, Skimmy, I'll get my people to prosecute you!"

"My dear fellow, I do not possess such a sum!"

"I'll—I'll take it in instalments!" said Trimble desperately. "If you'll pay me five bob a week for the rest of the term, I won't let the matter go any further! I'll be generous."

"Wait a minute!" said Tom Merry, pushing Skimpole back. "You say you're blind, Baggy?"

"Absolutely!" replied Trimble. "Skimpole turned on his rotten rays, and I lost my sight in a flash! I'm crippled for life now! I shan't be able to do any work in the Form-room to-morrow—"

"That's bad!" said Tom, with a nod. "Open your eyes, Trimble, and stare straight in front of you!"

Trimble did so, and looked blank.

"See anything?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothing! It's all black!"

Tom passed his hand across Trimble's eyes, and the latter didn't even blink.

"Did you see that?"

"No," said Baggy. "I—I mean—see what?"

"That was a bad slip!" murmured Lowther.

"I didn't see anything!" exclaimed Trimble hastily.

"Well, continue to look straight in front of you," said Tom Merry. "I just want to make certain that you're really blind, Trimble. You can't be too careful in these things."

Tom Merry slowly rolled up his sleeves, and Manners and Lowther grinned. Trimble did his best to stare fixedly, but his face was becoming anxious and cold beads of perspiration were forming on his podgy cheeks.

"Now!" said Tom Merry.

"I—I—"

"Hold still, Trimble!" said Tom. "If you're blind it's a very serious matter, and Skimpole will have to pay compensation."

"I will naturally do all I can—" began Skimpole.

"But if you're not blind, porpoise, you're going to get my boot!" went on Tom Merry.

"You leave me alone!" yelled Trimble. "It's—it's a cowardly thing to kick a blind chap! Only brutes do that, and—"

Tom Merry suddenly gave a lunge forward with his right fist. He seemed about to deliver a terrific punch on the end of Trimble's nose. Naturally, if the latter were blind, he could not be aware of this manoeuvre.

At least, for a blind person, he had extraordinarily acute senses.

"Yarooooop!" he hooted wildly.

He backed away, with a howl of anticipated pain. Tom Merry's fist never got near him, but there was no question at all that Baggy had seen it coming.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, my dear Trimble, this is most extraordinary!" said Skimpole, in astonishment. "You appear to have recovered your eyesight with remarkable speed! Let me congratulate you upon your—"

"I—I'm still blind!" gasped Trimble feebly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, Skimmy! He's only been trying to wangle some compensation out of you, the fat worm!" said Tom



Tom Merry gave a sudden lunge forward with his right fist. He seemed about to deliver a terrific punch on the end of Trimble's nose. Naturally, if Trimble were blind, he could not be aware of this manoeuvre. But, for a blind person, he had extraordinarily acute senses. "Yaroooop!" he hooted wildly. (See Chapter 6.)

Merry. "He can see as well as I can! Lend me a hand, Monty!"

"With pleasure!" said Lowther promptly.

"Here, hold on!" gasped Trimble, backing away. "What are you going to do?"

"Guess!" said Lowther.

"You're going to kick me!" hooted Trimble.

"Marvellous!" said Monty. "Right first time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's—it's just what I might expect from you fellows!" panted Trimble. "It's just like you to kick a poor chap who's been blinded! I can't see a thing! I—I shall go straight to the Head and complain about Skimmy, and then I shall write to my people!"

"How can you write if you're blind?" asked Manners.

"Oh dear! I—I mean I shall get somebody to write for me!"

Baggy Trimble never knew when to let well alone. He had been exposed as a fraud, but his limited intelligence failed to warn him that it would be dangerous to continue the deception. He was foolish enough to imagine that there might still be a chance of getting some compensation.

"I am astonished, Trimble, that you should maintain this preposterous deception!" said Skimpole severely. "At first, I will admit, I half feared that you were injured. But now I am assured that you have been attempting to hoodwink me!"

"Well, I want that half-crown!" said Trimble aggressively.

"Most certainly not!"

"You—you swindler!" roared Trimble. "Look here, you chaps, Skimmy promised to pay me five bob for helping him with his experiments, and I've only had half-a-crown!"

"Is that right, Skimmy?" asked Tom Merry.

"In a measure, yes," replied Skimpole. "But I would point out that Trimble has carried out no part of the bargain, although he has received half the money. Indeed, I may safely say that he has wasted a good hour of my time, and my experiments are in no way furthered. It was foolish of me, perhaps, to select such a subject."

"That's enough for me!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Your foot ready, Monty?"

"It's fairly itching!" said Lowther.

Biff! Biff!

"Whoop! Ow! Yaroooh!" bellowed Trimble. "You—you rotters—"

Biff! Biff!

"Yarooop!"

Trimble sailed down the Shell passage, stumbled, rolled over, picked himself up again, and bolted like a fat rabbit. The sounds of his anguish came fleeing up from the lower regions.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pray allow me to thank you, my dear Merry, for your kindly intervention!" said Skimpole gratefully. "I will confess that I was greatly perturbed. I imagined that Trimble was actually injured in the optic nerves. And yet it surprised me, since I cannot conceive how my patent rays could have created such a disastrous condition."

"Baggy's all right, old man," said Tom Merry, laughing. "You were a silly ass, you know, to make any bargain with him."

Skimpole nodded.

"Perhaps I was," he admitted sadly. "But when one is desperate, one is apt to act rashly. I am in a great predicament, my dear fellows. Indeed, it is apparently an insurmountable quandary. I am anxious to test my thought-reading machine, and I can find no subject."

"Is this marvellous machine all ready?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Dear me, yes! The rays are even now at full strength."

"I'm an obliging chap," said Lowther, with a wink at his chums. "If you're so anxious for a subject, Skimmy, how will I do?"

Skimpole blinked at him joyously.

"Really, my dear Lowther?" he said, with eager intentness. "Am I to understand that you are offering your services as a subject?"

"That's the general idea," nodded Monty.

"I trust your charges will be commensurate with my resources—"

"No charges at all!" grinned Lowther. "In other words, Skimmy, I am making this offer, and there aren't any strings tied to it. Lead the way to the lethal chamber! I do a far better thing than I have ever done—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A thousand thanks, my dear Lowther!" said Skimpole breathlessly. "This way—this way! I cannot tell you how delighted I am!"

Monty Lowther gave another wink over his shoulder, and followed Skimmy into Study No. 9.

CHAPTER 7.

More Amazing Results!

"**S**IT down, Lowther—sit down!" said Skimpole. Monty Lowther had thoughtlessly left the door ajar, and Skimpole was far too intent upon his thought-reading machine to notice a trifle like that.

Tom Merry and Manners were at the door, peeping in.

"Is this the death chair?" asked Lowther politely.

"I beg your pardon, Lowther?"

"Is this where we undergo the 'fluence'?"

The humorist of the Shell was in no way ill at ease. A single glance at the instrument had assured him that it was perfectly harmless. There was nothing to be afraid of in a magic-lantern. But if Skimpole had been more alert, he might have suspected the genial Monty of an ulterior motive. Lowther was an incorrigible spoofer.

"I merely wish you to sit in that chair, my dear Lowther, and the rest will be purely mechanical," said Skimpole. "If you wish, I will give you a full account of the theory of this machine before entering upon an actual test."

"Cut out the theory!" said Lowther hastily.

"But, my dear fellow, I can assure you that you will be absorbingly interested," said Skimpole earnestly. "Indeed, the theory is indubitably the most important factor—"

"I'm not much of a chap at theories," said Lowther. "Let's see how the thing goes in practice. Let's get something done, Skimmy!"

Skimpole looked rather disappointed.

"If you are quite firm, Lowther—"

"I'm as firm as a rock," said Monty. "As a matter of fact, Skimmy, I'd like you to know that I'm in the middle of my prep, and I'm only doing this out of the kindness of my heart."

"Quite so, my dear fellow—"

"So get on with the doings!" said Lowther firmly.

"As an alternative to propounding the theory, would you care for me to read you my treatise on the subject?"

"Great Scott, no!"

"It is a very comprehensive outline—"

"Oh, my hat!" said Lowther, who was beginning to wonder if he had been wise, after all. "Can't you cut the cackle, and come to the horses?"

"The horses?" repeated Skimpole, blinking. "Oh, I see what you mean! The horses? I can assure you there are no horses in this study, my dear fellow. Indeed, I am at a loss to understand why you should assume that I have converted this room into a stable!"

A cackle came from the doorway, and Lowther breathed hard.

"What about this 'fluence'?" he asked pointedly.

"Fluence?"

"The marvellous rays—"

"Ah, yes!" said Skimpole. "All in good time, my dear Lowther. Preliminary to that feature, I intend to give you a brief account of my theoretical conclusions—"

"Hold on!" roared Lowther. "You can cut out the theoretical conclusions, and you can cut out the preliminaries! I'll undertake this test, Skimmy, but only on one condition. Understand? One condition. You'll cut out the talk!"

"Oh, but really—"

"Yes, really!"

"You wish me to abandon my preliminary discussion?"

"I don't wish it—I make it a condition."

"I regret exceedingly, Lowther, that you should display such a lack of interest in this all-important subject," said Skimpole sadly. "However, it would be foolish of me to expect a corresponding enthusiasm in one who has not gone thoroughly into the details. I understand that you merely wish me to treat you as a subject?"

"At last you're beginning to get a glimmering of sense," said Lowther. "I came in here to do you a good turn, Skimmy—not to do myself a bad one! What is this sausage machine? This cinematograph projector?"

"I beg your pardon!"

"This cross between a meat-chopper and a valve set?" said Lowther, indicating the instrument. "Isn't it a thought-reading machine?"

"Precisely."

"Then get it going, and let it read my thoughts!"

"If you are really impatient—"

"I'm so impatient that if you don't turn the starting-handle within ten seconds, I shall walk out and leave you flat!" said Monty Lowther firmly. "I don't want to be unkind, but there's a limit to a chap's generosity!"

"Very well—very well!" said Skimpole hastily. "Pray do not think of going yet, my dear Lowther. You have merely to sit in the chair, and make your mind an absolute blank."

"A blank?"

"Think of nothing!" said Skimpole.

"Oh, that's easy!" said Monty. "I'll think about you!"

"No, no!" said Skimpole. "Don't think about me!"

"But you told me to think about nothing!"

"Really, my dear Lowther, either you are extraordinarily dense, or I fail to follow the trend of your thoughts," said Skimpole mildly. "I ask you to think of nothing, and I mean nothing."

"Oh, well, have it your own way," said Lowther. "Go ahead! I'm making my mind as blank as a study cupboard after Baggy Trimble's passed by!"

Skimpole frowned.

"I fail to see how Trimble enters into this—"

"Get on with the washing!" hooted Lowther.

"But we are not dealing with laundry work!" said Skimpole, in surprise.

"Oh, help!" moaned Lowther. "Why did I enter this trap?" He breathed hard. "Skimmy, I'll give you two seconds, and two seconds only! Get-on-with-the-job!"

"Really, Lowther, you are talking with unnecessary violence," said Skimpole, in astonishment. "I can hear you quite distinctly without the occasion to shout at me. I understand that you wish me to turn on the rays at once?"

"Yes!" whispered Lowther faintly.

"Very well!" beamed Skimpole. "Certainly!"

Monty Lowther, who was on the point of nervous exhaustion, was somewhat revived when that orange-violet light hit him in the face. It was somewhat dazzling, and it rather hurt his eyes to look straight into the lens. But it was quite easy to avert his gaze. He noticed that the wireless valves were glowing.

"Do you feel anything, Lowther?" asked Skimpole anxiously.

Monty sat rigid. Gradually a dazed, far-away look came over his face. His eyes took on a glassy expression.

"Lowther," gasped Skimpole, "how do you feel?"

Monty Lowther seemed to hear nothing.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole excitedly. "Without question, something is happening! Success—success! Lowther—my dear Lowther! What are your thoughts?"

"This fellow is a genius!" said Monty Lowther, in a low, monotonous voice. "I wonder how he thinks of all these things? One day, perhaps, he will be famous throughout the world. When I look at him, I can't understand where he gets so many brains."

"Good heavens!" murmured Skimpole.

Monty was speaking quite mechanically, and he framed his words in such a way that it seemed as though he were voicing his idle thoughts. He wasn't speaking to anybody, or asking questions. He was just thinking aloud.

"St. Jim's, of course, is altogether too small to hold him," continued Lowther. "I have always had an idea that Skimmy would startle the world. Later on, he'll probably be Professor Skimpole. And then, in after years, we shall be hearing about Sir Herbert Skimpole. Why not? They might make him Lord Skimmy, even. Or the Duke of Skimm, of Pole Manor. Anyhow, he's sure to skim up the pole one of these days!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The genius of the Shell did not even hear that cackle from the doorway.

"Yes, yes!" he breathed. "Go on, my dear Lowther!"

"He can't remain in St. Jim's for long, naturally," continued Monty Lowther obligingly. "A school like this is too mediocre for the chap's amazing talents. I'm afraid

ANSWERS

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most of the fellows regard him as a bit of a crank, but they're all wrong. Wonder what Tom's doing now? I shall have to be getting on with my prep before long."

"Marvellous!" breathed Skimpole. "Without question, my invention is an unqualified success. He is giving voice to just his ordinary thoughts as they flit through his mind. He knows nothing of my presence, and is, to all intents and purposes, in a trance."

"Blow that beastly prep," continued Lowther. "Can't understand why they have such silly institutions at school. There's Manners' camera, too. The poor fish thinks it's going to be successful, but he's dotty. That camera of his is only worth dumping on the rubbish heap!"

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "I regret to hear that Lowther has such a poor opinion of his chum's accomplishments."

A sort of grunt came from the doorway, but Lowther went on.

"Then again, poor old Manners thinks that he's a decent photographer," he said reminiscently. "Funny how the chaps get such crazy ideas into their heads. Poor old Manners believes that he can take the most wonderful snaps, and he can hardly snap his fingers, H'm! There's Tom Merry, too. Tom's a good sort, but—"

"I feel that I am intruding upon your thoughts too intimately, my dear Lowther," murmured Skimpole in distress. "I really had no idea that you would divulge so much. I think I had better diminish the rays. Indeed, it will be wise to cut them off altogether."

"After all, there's nobody at St. Jim's to beat old Skimmy when it comes to brain work," said Lowther. "Marvellous chap! He's booked for big things in the great world. One of these days he'll find himself locked away in a fine palace of a place, with attendants to wait on him hand and foot. These brainy fellows get all the luck. He'll have beautiful furniture, all padded, and walls padded, too! That's what happens to these geniuses. A great chap, Skimmy!"

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole, his eyes shining. "Success beyond all my dreams! My thought-reading machine is a veritable triumph! Lowther, quite unconsciously, has revealed to me his innermost thoughts!"

And Skimmy clicked something, and the rays were shut off.

CHAPTER 8.

Arthur Augustus Obliges!

MONTY LOWTHER shook himself, blinked, and took a deep breath.

"Hallo!" he mumbled. "Still here, Skimmy?"

He looked round as though bewildered, and then grinned.

"Sorry!" he said with a yawn. "I must have dropped off to sleep for a minute. Well, what about this experiment, Skimmy? Aren't you ever going to turn those rays on, and hear what I'm thinking about?"

Skimpole gazed at him in wonder.

"Good gracious!" he breathed. "Then—then you don't know?"

"Eh? Know what?"

"My dear Lowther, I really— Dear me, this is startling!" said Skimpole. "I hardly know what to—"

"Cut the cackle and get the thing going!" said Lowther impatiently. "But I warn you, if the machine works, you won't be very flattered. I can easily tell you what my thoughts are without you bothering to turn the rays on."

Skimpole smiled indulgently.

"Ah, my dear Lowther, you cannot deceive me like that," he said. "Modesty forbids you consciously to express your opinion regarding my mental state."

"I'll give you a whole account of my opinion, if you like."

"It is the unconscious mind which reveals the truth," said Skimpole. "It may interest you to know, my dear fellow, that the experiment is over."

"Over?" gasped Monty in amazement.

"Quite over," beamed Skimpole.

"You silly ass!" roared Lowther. "Are you trying to pull my leg? Great Scott! Have I said anything without knowing it?" he added with assumed alarm. "Have I spoken my thoughts?"

"Many thoughts, my dear Lowther."

"What did I say?" asked Lowther anxiously.

"Nothing of which you would be consciously ashamed, I can assure you," replied Skimpole. "I find it quite impossible, however, to repeat the many statements you made regarding myself. I would like you to know, Lowther, that I have no such egoistical leanings. I cannot, for very modesty, tell you what you have said."

"Oh, well, if you like to get these funny ideas, that's your affair," said Lowther, rising to his feet. "The test

is over, then? All right, Skimmy. Glad to have helped you."

"My gratitude is very great, my dear Lowther," said Skimpole earnestly. "I thank you heartily. If you would care for another test, I have no objection to—"

"But I have," said Monty. "No more, thanks!"

"Then permit me to read you my treatise. One moment, Lowther," said Skimpole, as his visitor moved towards the door. "Dear me! I am addressing you, Lowther. I wish to express— Good gracious! He has gone! I trust my rays have not afflicted him with deafness."

Outside, Monty Lowther found himself in the grasp of his two comrades. They dragged him into Study No. 10 and closed the door.

"Now, you ass!" fumed Tom Merry. "What's the giddy idea?"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"My good deed for the day," he explained blandly.

"What?"

"Skimmy was looking so cut up that I took compassion on him," chuckled Lowther. "It hasn't cost me anything, and it might keep the poor idiot quiet. I always believe in being kind to the afflicted."

"You silly ass!" said Tom Merry with a chuckle. "Do you call it being kind to pull the poor chap's leg like that? He didn't even notice anything wrong when you hinted that he'd be locked in a padded cell one day."

"Poor old Skimmy!" grinned Monty Lowther. "He really thinks that machine of his is a triumph, and I hadn't the heart to undeceive him. Why not let him dream of his coming fame?"

"That's all very well," said Manners aggressively. "But what about me?"

"You?"

"What about that rot you talked?" demanded Manners.

"What do you mean by saying that my patent camera's no good?"

Monty looked shocked.

"I'm surprised at you, Manners, old man," he said sternly. "When a fellow unconsciously speaks his thoughts aloud you ought to be gentlemanly enough to ignore them, especially when you're listening at the keyhole!"

Manners turned red.

"I wasn't at the keyhole!" he roared.

"Well, at the crack, then."

"You knew I was there!" hooted Manners. "You said all that on purpose, you spoofing rotter!"

Monty grinned.

"Perhaps I did," he admitted. "Who knows? Anyhow, it was all in a good cause, just to spoof old Skimmy. Go ahead with your camera, old man, and it's quite possible that you'll achieve a triumph every bit as great as Skimmy's."

Tom Merry chuckled and Manners glared.

"Funny ass!" he said tartly.

"It's my great failing," sighed Monty, sitting down at the table. "Don't chide me with an imperfection that was born in me."

"You silly ass!"

"Haven't we wasted enough time?" asked Tom Merry peacefully. "Let's forget all about Skimmy, and get on with some work. Manners, kindly throw over P. Vergilius Maro from the bookshelf."

Manners grunted, and fairly hurled Tom's Virgil at him. And the Terrible Three continued their prep. Monty Lowther paused now and again to utter a chuckle, but otherwise Study No. 10 was peaceful.

And while this state of affairs existed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was strolling in the quad in all his glory. He had finished his own prep and was now taking the air.

It was a mild evening, and the dusk was growing thick. D'Arcy was thoughtful. He had been having rather a heated argument with his chums of Study No. 6, and had really come outside to "cool off." Gussy always became heated when the subject of his neckties was raised. He had burned with indignation when Blake had contemptuously hurled six of his favourite neckties out of the study cupboard.

"I wondah who those fellows are?" murmured D'Arcy, puzzled.

Ever since he had come out he had noticed two figures lounging near the gateway. They were strangers. One was a tallish, thin man, and the other was heavy and stout. They were well dressed, and they appeared to be greatly interested in the architecture.

"Pewwaps I can be of some service," murmured D'Arcy, as he wended his way towards the gates. "It is wathah incumbent upon a chap to do the honahs when stwanganah evince an intewest in the old school."

He was upon the men almost before they realised it, and he politely raised his glossy topper.

"Good-evenin'!" he said, beaming. "Is there anythin' I can do?"

"Eh? Well, no, thanks," said the thin man with a start. "At least, I don't think so. We—we're just having a look."

"Yaas, wathah! So I saw."

"The fact is, we're thinking about sending our sons to St. Jim's," went on the stranger, regaining his confidence. "Yes, that's it, isn't it, Mr. Martin?"

"You've hit it, Mr. Twist," agreed the other man with a nod. "Fine school, St. Jim's."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "So you are thinkin' of sendin' your sons heah? How wippin'! I wondah which House they will be placed in. I feel that it is my duty to warn you that the New House is wathah a barn of a place. There are a few decent fellows there, but the School House is weally the only House at St. Jim's!"

This was a prejudiced view, and Mr. Twist and Mr. Martin took very little notice of it.

"We haven't decided which House our sons are going into yet," said Mr. Twist. "That's only a small matter, anyhow."

"Bai Jove, it is a fwightfully big mattah!" said Arthur Augustus. "An' will your sons go into the Third, or the Fourth?"

"The third or fourth what?"

"Good gwacious!" said Arthur Augustus, adjusting his eyeglass. "I am afraid we are at cwoos purposes. Pewwaps you would like me to escort you wond the school? You will get a much bettah ideah of the place. Kindly follow me, gentlemen."

"Oh, it doesn't matter—"

"No twouble at all, I assuah you!" said Arthur Augustus graciously.

CHAPTER 9.

Strangers Within the Gates!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was a very unsuspicious youth.

It never occurred to him that these strangers might have made him a mis-statement. They had told him that they were thinking of sending their sons to St. Jim's, and he accepted the information without question. And it was obviously his duty to do the polite thing.

He could not see the men very closely in the dusk, but a vague idea crossed his mind that he had seen them before somewhere. It was only the faintest of faint impressions, and he had no time to thresh the matter out in his mind.

Perhaps he had seen them in a car passing through Rylcombe, or it was quite possible they were prominent gentry from Wayland. They were well dressed, and that went a long way with Arthur Augustus.

"Heah we have the School House," he said, indicating the picturesque pile with a wave of his hand. "Wathah good, don't you think? A fwightful lot better than the wabbit-hutch acwoss the way!"

"A wonderful piece of architecture!" declared Mr. Twist, with enthusiasm. "Yes, certainly! Beautiful—beautiful!"

"I was sure you would appreciate it!" said Arthur Augustus. "If you would care to be escorted to the Head, I shall have much pleassah in wunnin' you wond to Doctah Holmes' fwont door."

"Ahem! I do not think that is necessary this evening," said Mr. Twist hastily.

"The Head will be fwightfully pleased to see you—"

"No, it doesn't matter," said Mr. Twist firmly. "To tell you the truth, my boy, we did not intend to enter the school grounds at all."

"Just a pweliminary scout wond?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Martin. "A preliminary inspection."

"It is wathah a good ideah to have a look at the school before you send your sons along," said Arthur Augustus, with approval. "If you will come with me, I will take you indoors—"

"We won't go indoors," said Mr. Twist.

"Weally? Pewwaps I can persuade you to come acwoss to the New House?" said D'Arcy, ever ready to be of service. "You will then be able to compare the difference."

Gussy walked off in advance, and Mr. Martin nudged his companion.

"We'd better get out!" he muttered anxiously.

"It's all right," said Mr. Twist. "This kid's safe!"

"I believe he's one of those young beggars who helped to throw us into the ditch last week!" said Mr. Martin. "If he recognises us, he might call a crowd of the other rats—"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Twist. "He hasn't recognised us. We've got to find out something about the carburettor. And this boy is just the kind of young fool we can question in safety!"

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Arthur Augustus might not have felt complimented if he could have heard this whispered conversation. But he was walking on, serenely unconscious of it. He noted, of course, that the men were talking in low voices, but he was far too polite to obtrude himself.

"The New House, as you see, is a wamshackle place," he said, with a touch of disdain. "I should stwongly advise you to bah the New House altogetbah. It is weally no bettah than a shed!"

It was fortunate for Gussy that the redoubtable Figgins was not within hearing. Curiously enough, Figgins was of the fixed opinion that the School House was no better than a chicken-run.

As a matter of fact, both the Houses at St. Jim's were splendid examples of architecture, and Mr. Twist and Mr. Martin appeared to take a deep, absorbed interest in them. They were really gaining time.

Arthur Augustus certainly did not recognise them as the two rascals who had attempted to steal Bernard Glyn's motor-cycle less than a week ago. Tom Merry & Co. had come on the scene, and Messrs. Twist and Martin had been hurled in the ditch, and the motor-cycle recovered.

Messrs. Twist and Martin were rash to come to the school in this open way.

But greed is ever rash.

These two rascals had evinced a great interest in Bernard Glyn's patent carburettor. It was this instrument which had originally caused Mr. Bernard Glyn to organise the Inventions Competition. Glyn was still working hard on his motor accessory.

His carburettor was expressly designed for the use of crude oil, and he had succeeded in vaporising this type of oil in his preliminary experiments.

On the occasion that Mr. Twist and his precious companion had first learned tidings of this carburettor Skimpole had been with Glyn in Wayland, and the two men were under the fixed impression that Skimpole was the inventor of the carburettor. They had heard Skimpole talking about it, and he was certainly the more learned of the two Shell fellows, so far as appearances went.

So the developments were likely to be interesting.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had no suspicion whatever. His simple mind had accepted these men for what they professed to be, and he was all for escorting them round and showing off the school to its best advantage.

"It is wathah a pity that the light is not stwongah," he said regretfully. "Pewwaps you will come in the day-time? If you will ask for D'Arcy, I shall be delighted to show you wond pwoperly."

"That's very decent of you, kid," said Mr. Twist.

"Bai Jove! It is wathah—"

D'Arcy checked himself. He was about to protest. Being called a "kid" did not appeal to him. But politeness, after all, was the keynote. He could hardly protest.

"My son was talking about St. Jim's quite a lot," remarked Mr. Twist thoughtfully. "It seems that he knows one of the boys here."

"That is vewy pwobable," said Arthur Augustus.

"A boy named Skimpole."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You know Skimpole?" asked Mr. Twist.

"Old Skimmay?" smiled D'Arcy. "Ewewybody knows Skimmay, deah boy! A bit of a cwank, in his own way. Skimpole of the Shell is wathah a queeah sort of chap."

"So I gathered," said Mr. Twist.

"The inventah," smiled D'Arcy. "The St. Jim's genius!"

"By gosh!" murmured Mr. Martin.

Mr. Twist pressed his arm, and laughed.

"The inventor—eh?" he repeated amusedly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Old Skimmay is a fellow with fwightfully wummy ideahs."

Mr. Twist felt himself growing rather hot. Then he hadn't been wrong! Skimpole was undoubtedly the boy he wanted! The inventor! How could Mr. Twist know that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was unwittingly putting him on the wrong trail?

If it came to that, how could Mr. Twist know that St. Jim's was full of inventors at the moment? He naturally assumed that there could be only one boy of such a type. And D'Arcy's references to Skimpole had clinched the matter.

D'Arcy proceeded to clinch it further.

"It appeahs that Skimmay had just invented anothah wemarkable gadget," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a smile. "A wathah wonderful contwivance, accordin' to Skimmay's statements."

"Oh, I don't suppose it's worth anything!" laughed Mr. Twist.

"Good gwacious! Wathah not!" said D'Arcy. "Skimmay's ideahs are always a fwost. This contwivance is pwobably as feahfully imposs as any of the othahs."

Arthur Augustus meant as impossible as the rest of the St. Jim's inventions. But Mr. Twist and Mr. Martin took

his words in a different way. They thought that D'Arcy was referring to Skimpole's previous ideas.

"Do you know what this latest gadget is?" asked Mr. Twist carelessly.

"Oh, some impossible stunt, of course!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally have forgotten. But it is hardly necessary to discuss Skimpole. He an' his inventions are not worth talkin' about. If it is not too dark, we can have a glimpse at the playin' fields."

He walked off in that direction without waiting for the visitors to express their wishes.

"The kid says that patent is no good!" muttered Mr. Martin.

"The idiot!" hissed Mr. Twist. "That's just what we want. By gosh, they don't realise the value of it! These schoolboys are only kids—and Skimpole himself doesn't

"Well, we've laid low for a week, and everything's still all right," interrupted Mr. Twist. "Don't growl! We sha'n't make any blunder to-night, Martin! Leave this to me!"

CHAPTER 10.

An Introduction from Gussy!

"B AI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his eyeglass into his eye.

He had almost reached the playing fields, and he was under the impression that the visitors were close behind him. But when he glanced back he found that he was practically alone. The two strangers were a hundred yards away, still in the quad—still studiously admiring the



CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE!

PRESS DAY AT ST. JIM'S.

TOM MERRY'S study—Number Ten,

Presents a striking spectacle;
'Tis filled with literary men—
Filled, too, is each receptacle,
With stories, poems, reams of trash
Which Merry has rejected;
Authors who hoped to make a splash
Now crawl away dejected!

When the "St. Jim's News" goes to press

There's always great activity;
For making a morass of mess,
The "subs" show much proclivity.

There's daubs of ink upon the door,
And splashes on the ceiling;
And swamps of "Stickphast" on the floor,

Just where old Gussy's kneeling!

Manners and Lowther, Glyn and Blake,

In breathless haste are scribbling;
Around them flows an inky lake,
For fountain pens are dribbling!
Tom Merry's brow is furrowed deep
Over his Editorial;

Soon he starts up, as if from sleep—
His voice rings dictatorial!

"We've contributions by the score,
So all intruders, vanish!"
He waves his hand towards the door,
Authors and bards to banish.
But see—they firmly stand their ground,
Then a fierce battle rages;
With juniors sprawling all around
Buried by sheaves of pages!

Never a Press Day runs its course
Without a battle royal;
Tom Merry leads his fighting force,
And all his "subs" are loyal.
They spend one half of that great day

In labours journalistic;
The other half, in fistic fray,
And punches pugilistic.

The issue is complete by eight,
And heads are throbbing dizzily;
For aching craniums are the fate
Of those who toil so busily.
On Gussy's suit is many a stain,
He joins the band of grouchers;
Says he, "I'm goin' to pweess again!"

Then goes to press—his trousers!



NEXT WEEK: "THE HOUSE DAME."



know that he's got hold of a fortune-making scheme in that carburettor. It ought to be as easy as pie to buy it off him, if we could only get in touch with him."

Arthur Augustus had certainly helped things along well!

He might easily have given the whole game away by mentioning the thought-reading machine, but Gussy had forgotten it. He had given these men the impression that nobody took any notice of Skimpole. And that, of course, was true. They weren't to know that they were on the wrong track!

"How can we get in touch with the kid to-night?" asked Mr. Martin.

"It ought to be easy—with this young fool to help us," said the other man. "There's no time like the present, either. The longer we delay the more risk!"

"You're right there!" muttered Mr. Martin. "This neighbourhood isn't any too healthy for us—particularly after what happened with that blamed motor-cycle! We made a blunder there—"

architecture in the dusk. By a curious chance, nobody else had addressed them.

One or two seniors had passed from House to House, and young Wally, of the Third, had come in with his two chums, Reggie Manners and Frank Levison. But they had gone indoors without taking any notice of the two strangers.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard this as wathah bad form. I am afwaid the visitahs are not vewy well bwed."

He retraced his steps, and looked at the men coldly. "I undahstood you were comin' to view the playin' fields," he said, in his most frigid manner. "Howevah, if you are not intewested, I will say 'good-evenin'!"

"That's all right, sonny," said Mr. Twist hastily. "Sorry!"

"Oh, in that case—"

"My friend and I apologise," said Mr. Twist, recognising D'Arcy's chilliness. "The fact is, we were so

interested in this superb building that we momentarily forgot our manners."

Arthur Augustus beamed.

"As one gentleman to another, I accept your apology in a gwacious spiwit," he said delightedly. "Pway say no more about it, sir. I am fwithfully glad that you appreciate the beauties of the School House!"

"It's wonderful!" said Mr. Twist. "But—"

"You'll observe the ivy clingin' round the door," said D'Arcy. "You will note the famous buttresses—"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Twist. "But—"

"If you'll come inside I will show you—"

"We'd rather not go inside, thanks!" said Mr. Twist. "As a matter of fact, we wanted to speak to you about young Skimpole."

"Bai Jove! He's hardly worth bothewin' about," said D'Arcy, in surprise. "Skimmay's a fwithful duffah. I do not wish to wun the chap down, but ewevybody knows that he is ewankay."

"I've no doubt you're right," agreed Mr. Twist heartily. "In fact, I am sure you are, from what my own son has told me. At the same time, he's the only boy at St. Jim's that Horace knows."

"Howace?" repeated D'Arcy aghast.

"My son," lied Mr. Twist.

"Gweat Scott!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway pardon me, but—but— Powwaps it would be a kindly act on my part, sir, to give you a word of warnin'. As a fellow of tact an' judgment, you can wely upon me to know the wight thing. It would be vewy wiskay to send your son here with a name like that!"

"Oh, you needn't worry—"

"Quite apart from the fact that old Wattay is named Howace, I am afwaid your son would be wagged wathah feahfully," said Gussy, with concern. "Mr. Watchiff is the mastah of the New House, an' his name is Howace. You had bettah call your son somethin' simple, such as Clawence or Cecil."

D'Arcy's alternatives were not particularly brainy.

"Oh, that's a matter that can be easily adjusted," said Mr. Twist, growing impatient of Gussy's long-windedness. "As I was saying, Horace knows nobody but Skimpole, and I would rather like to meet this boy."

"You wish me to introduce you?"

"That's the idea!" said Mr. Twist promptly.

"Nothin' easier," said Gussy. "Pway come with me, gentlemen! I will take you stwaight to Skimpole's studay. You will then be able to have a look at the indoor suwoundin's."

Mr. Martin gave his companion a nudge.

"No!" he muttered tensely.

"H'm!" said Mr. Twist. "Do you know if Skimpole is alone?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said the unsuspecting D'Arcy, who had noticed nothing out of the common. "Skimmay usually has two othah Shell fellows with him—Talbot and Gore. But I undahstand that they have cleahed out, owin' to Skimmay's fwithful invention."

"Well, if he's alone, we might as well go along," said Mr. Twist. "Perhaps we could have a word with him through his study window, though," he added, as another thought struck him. "That would save us going indoors."

D'Arcy looked at him in amazement.

"Isn't that wathah a wemarkable suggestion?" he asked. "The Shell studies are upstairs, an' it will be wathah awkward—"

"Oh, upstairs, are they?" said Mr. Twist hastily. "That's different."

"That is Skimpole's studay window," said Arthur Augustus, pointing upwards. "You cannot mistake it."

"Yes, I see; but—"

"Howevah, it may be difficult to cawwy on a conversation," continued Gussy. "I will throw a stone at the window if you like—"

"No, certainly not!" laughed Mr. Twist. "I was thinking the studies were on the ground floor. We'll go indoors, and you shall lead us—"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "Skimmay's light has just gone out!"

"Confound!" muttered Mr. Twist.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" said D'Arcy.

"Nothing—nothing!"

"I am afwaid it may be wathah awkward now," continued the swell of the Fourth. "It is highly pwobable that Skimmay has gone to the Common-woom, an' that will entail introductions to wathah a ewowd."

Mr. Twist had already arrived at this conclusion.

"Well, never mind," he said, with regret. "It doesn't matter. Don't trouble, young 'un. It was only a whim, in any case. Master Skimpole can rest content without being bothered by two old fogies like my friend and myself. Thank you for your services."

"Pway don't mention it, sir!"

"We'll bid you 'Good-evenin', then," said Mr. Twist.

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"Good-evenin', gentlemen!"

Arthur Augustus raised his silk hat, bowed, and retired.

"A good thing, too!" muttered Mr. Martin, with relief. "I thought you were going indoors, at first—and that would have been fatal. We couldn't help running across some of those young brats who pitched us into the ditch the other day."

"I was ready to chance it," growled Mr. Twist. "But I've got a better idea, now. That young idiot accidentally told us which room Skimpole uses. That one!" added Mr. Twist, nodding towards the School House. "That one up there! And Skimpole is working on that invention of his! We'll come back later, Martin!"

"Gosh! You don't mean—"

"I'm going to have that carburetor!" said Mr. Twist grimly.



Grundy had nearly got one foot to the floor, and was preparing "Yaroooh!" howled Grundy wildly. The bed simply fell into to the floor with a bang, and the spring curled itself round him juniors.

In the meantime, Arthur Augustus had no sooner arrived at the School House steps than he ran into Skimpole.

"Bai Jove! Skimmay!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Do you wish to speak to me, my dear D'Arcy?" asked Skimpole, blinking.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I have no objection to a conversation with you, D'Arcy, but I would like to remark that I am somewhat busy with my own thoughts at the moment," said Skimpole. "I have met with an astounding success, and it is only natural that I should be somewhat elated. I will confess, indeed, that my mind is in a turmoil of—"

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "If it comes to that, Skimmay, your mind is always in a turmoil—assumin', that is, that

you have a mind at all! I am wathah doubtful on the mattah myself."

"I trust you are not trying to insult me, my dear D'Arcy?"

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, there are two stwangahs who are wathah anxious to be intwo-deuced to you. If you will come with me, I will do the honahs."

Skimpole hesitated.

"Really, my dear D'Arcy, I am not at all ready to meet strangers just now," he said plaintively. "I have already informed you that my mind is in something of a turmoil, and I came out into the open in order to settle myself. I need quietude. I wish to wander forth in solitude, so that I can commune with—"

"Good gwacious!" interrupted Gussy. "You must allow

Wayland. And Mr. Twist finally took it for granted that he was face to face with the inventor of the Crude-Oil Carburettor.

"Splendid!" he said. "So this is the ingenious young gentleman? Well, well! I am delighted to meet you, Master Skimpole!"

"I am honoured!" said Skimpole, rather at a loss. "Perhaps you will be good enough to introduce me, my dear D'Arcy? These gentlemen, I fear, have the advantage of me."

"Bai Jove! I have nevah heard their names!" said Arthur Augustus, with a start. "But that is a mattah which can be quickly cowwected."

"It doesn't matter," said Mr. Twist hurriedly. "Our names would mean nothing to our young friend here. I merely wished to see him because my own son is acquainted with him. Thank you, young 'un!" he added, looking at D'Arcy in an unmistakable way. "Good-night, again!"

It was plain that Gussy was no longer wanted.

"Oh, wathah!" he said, taking the hint. "I have no wish to intwude if there is a pwivate—"

"Gussy!" came a roar from the School House doorway.

"Bai Jove! That sounds like Blake's voice," said D'Arcy.

"Hi, Gussy!" came another roar. "My hat! Has anybody seen that burbling dummy knocking about anywhere?"

"Weally, Blake—"

Arthur Augustus hurried towards the School House, leaving Skimpole in the hands of the enemy.

CHAPTER 11.

Skimpole Refuses!

MR. TWIST could hardly credit his good fortune.

Not only had he got hold of Skimpole himself, but the dusk was now growing so deep that the quad could be almost described as private. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, by another lucky chance, had been called away naturally. Mr. Twist felt that this was his lucky evening.

Skimpole was quite mystified.

He could not understand why any strangers should want to see him, and he had certainly no desire to see any strangers. He was so filled with his great success—as evidenced by Monty Lowther's activities—that he wanted to be alone, so that he could rejoice.

He had tried to speak with some of the other Shell fellows, but this had proved a failure. He had attempted to get them to share his joy, but they had only grinned at him.

Solitude was the only remedy.

And now these strangers were disturbing him. Skimpole felt that it was really too bad.

"You certainly have the advantage of me, my dear sir," he said, looking at Mr. Twist coldly. "And I was not aware that I am in any way acquainted with your son."

"That was only my joke," said Mr. Twist.

"Indeed!"

"Yes," said the other. "I really wanted to have a quiet word with you about your invention."

"Good gracious!" gasped Skimpole. "Who—who has told you—"

"There's nothing like getting straight to the point," said Mr. Twist in a low voice. "I've heard about this invention of yours, and it interests me greatly. Both my friend and myself are very keen to know you better, and to examine this apparatus."

"I am delighted!" said Skimpole, his feelings undergoing a complete change. "This is an unexpected honour! I take it, then, that you are both scientific gentlemen?"

"Oh, we're scientific all right," said Mr. Twist promptly.

"I am more pleased than I can express!" beamed the genius of the Shell. "Let us go for a stroll round the quad and discuss a knotty problem in entomology which has been exercising my mind for some little time."

"Ahem! Quite so!" said Mr. Twist, with a cough. "But that's hardly the idea."

"There is a branch which I am particularly interested in at the moment—quite apart, of course, from my great invention," continued Skimpole. "I wonder if you have any knowledge of that particular form of Crustacea which deals with Entomostraca?"

"What?" said Mr. Twist faintly.

"I am very intrigued by the lower forms of Crustaceans," continued Skimpole, warming to his subject. "They are, as you will, of course, know, characterised by a variable number of body segments. A further feature is the absence of the gastric mill, and I believe that life customarily begins in the nauplius stage."

"By gosh!" said Mr. Twist, quite out of his depth.

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limb out, when there was an ominous crack. Cra-a-ash! pieces: girders stuck out at every angle. Grundy bumped an affectionate embrace. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Shell Chapter 12.)

me to wemark, Skimmay, that you are vevy much like a gwamophone. Pway come with me, an' do not be such an uttah ass!"

He seized Skimpole's skinny arm, and marched him forcibly across the quad.

The two strangers were just making for the gates.

"One moment, gentlemen!" sang out D'Arcy. "It is wathah wemarkable, but Skimmay has just come out, so I can intwduce him to you stwaight away."

Mr. Twist and his companion turned.

"By gosh!" murmured the former. "This is lucky!"

They waited, and the two juniors came up. Mr. Twist's eyes gleamed in the dusk. He recognised Skimpole at once as the boy he had previously seen with the motor-cycle in

"Then, of course, we have the further orders—"

"Hold on—hold on!" gasped the stranger. "Surely we can discuss these subjects another time, Master Skimpole. Just now I want to talk to you about this invention of yours."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," said Skimpole. "My invention! That, naturally, is the all-important subject at the moment. We can, as you say, safely leave the engrossing topic of crustacea for a further occasion. My invention! I am delighted that you know so much about it!"

"Have your experiments been successful?" asked Mr. Twist cautiously.

"My dear sir!" beamed Skimpole. "Successful is hardly the word to use! I can safely assure you that my apparatus has achieved final triumph! Indeed, I have been surprised myself at the overwhelming evidence of success."

Skimmy's enthusiasm was catching.

The men, of course, thought that he was talking about Bernard Glyn's carburettor—and Skimmy thought that these men were interested in his thought-reading machine!

Neither party guessed that they were at cross-purposes.

Mr. Twist and Mr. Martin had no doubts whatever. Skimpole was such an obviously learned sort of fellow that he was unquestionably the type which would produce an invention.

"Well, I'm a business man," said Mr. Twist, getting straight to the point.

Skimpole started.

"Indeed?" he said. "But I understood that you were scientific—"

"Scientific men can be 'business men, too,'" interrupted Mr. Twist hastily. "My business instincts are, at the moment, uppermost. And I am quite willing to pay you the sum of ten pounds, in cash, for this experimental apparatus of yours."

Skimpole started again.

"Dear me!" he said, looking at the men coldly. "I am afraid that I have been talking to you under a misapprehension. I must point out at once, my dear sirs, that my apparatus is not for sale. Good gracious, no! Certainly it is not for sale!"

"For ten pounds—"

"I am thinking of the future," said Skimpole loftily. "Money is nothing to me, my good sir! Indeed, I regard money with abhorrence. When civilisation is based upon a correct standing, there will be no such atrocity as money. But that stage of society will not, I fear, come into being during our own lifetimes. We can, however, all work towards the common end."

"Well, fifteen pounds—"

"This constant repetition of financial subjects distresses me," said Skimpole. "My dear sir, do you suppose for a moment that I would sell my wonderful machine?"

"You can keep the machine," said Mr. Twist, thinking that Skimmy was referring to the motor-bike. "We only want the carburettor."

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, blinking. "I fail to grasp the analogy."

"You know well enough that we want this apparatus of yours," growled Mr. Twist. "And we are willing to pay you twenty pounds—"

"And what of the scientific honour which is rightfully mine?" demanded Skimpole eagerly. "Good gracious, no! Would you urge me to sell my birthright for a mess of pottage? I am on the point of achieving fame! My name will become renowned throughout the length and breadth of the world!"

"Yes, but—"

"When science learns of my great triumph, the name of Skimpole will be on every lip," continued the genius of the Shell, carried away by his own imagination. "And you would rob me of this great honour, and claim the credit for my invention!"

Mr. Twist winced. This, exactly, was what he was after—although he had no desire whatever to purchase the wonderful thought-reading machine.

"You are only a schoolboy," he urged. "People will only laugh at you when you claim to have achieved anything noteworthy. But by accepting twenty pounds in cash now you will be rewarded—"

"Certainly not!" interrupted Skimpole.

"I want you to think carefully—"

"I have thought quite carefully already," said Skimpole coldly. "I am distressed at this mundane turn in the conversation. Indeed, I find myself compelled to close the interview at once. I have no desire to continue a discussion which can only bring me further distress."

Mr. Twist was desperate.

He had never expected such a stumbling block as this. The boy was certainly a crank—just as D'Arcy had said. Mr. Twist had assumed that he would be only too ready to accept a fat little sum of money. But in Skimpole the man had got hold of the wrong customer! Skimpole regarded money

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with abhorrence—as a necessary evil. It is doubtful if Skimmy would have fallen, even if he had been offered a thousand pounds.

"Just a minute, young man," said Mr. Twist gruffly. "You're on the wrong rails! This invention of yours is all nonsense! You think it's valuable, but I can tell you that it isn't! And if you've got the sense of a gnat, you'll take my twenty pounds and consider yourself lucky!"

Skimpole looked at Mr. Twist frigidly.

"I am in no way inclined to sell my invention," he said.

"And when you compare my intelligence to that of a dipterous insect, I am merely appalled! Let me assure you that the members of the Culicidae family—in other words, the common gnat—are blood-sucking creatures of the mosquito order. I dislike being compared to a blood-sucker!"

And Skimpole walked away, very much annoyed.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Mr. Twist helplessly.

"Mad!" said Mr. Martin.

"He may be mad, but he's got the right idea in that carburettor of his!" growled the other. "What's more, we're going to have it! He won't sell, so there's only one alternative!"

They walked out of the gateway, and just at that moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his chums of Study No. 6 came out into the quad.

"Wonder who those men are?" said Blake, staring. "I noticed them knocking about some time earlier."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, Skimmy, is anythin' the mattah?"

Skimpole, who was just going indoors, paused.

"I must inform you, D'Arcy, that I am very surprised at the company you keep!" he said severely.

"Bai Jove!"

"Look here, Skimmy, you ass—" began Blake thoughtfully.

"Do not misunderstand me, my dear Blake," said Skimpole. "I was not referring to yourself, or to Herries, or to Digby. Dear me, no! My remarks concerned the rascals whom I have just left."

"What?" said Blake.

"The two strangers—"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I trust you have not fallen out with them?"

"They had the unparalleled impudence to compare my intelligence to that of a dipterous insect of the Culicidae family," said Skimpole heatedly. "I have no wish to see them again, and I am astonished, my dear D'Arcy, that you should claim acquaintance with them."

He marched in, and Blake and Herries and Digby concentrated their gaze upon the pink Arthur Augustus.

"What does he mean, Gussy?" they demanded.

"Weally, you fellows, I am quite flustahed," said D'Arcy. "Those men are shady characters," said Blake accusingly.

"I'm surprised at you for mixing with shady characters, Gussy."

"You uttah ass!" shrieked D'Arcy. "They are not shady characters! They are merely intewested in Skimpole's invention."

Blake stared.

"Interested in Skimpole's invention?" he repeated.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then I amend my view," said Blake promptly. "They're not shady characters at all—they're lunatics!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 12.

Grundy's Portable Bedstead!

WITHIN half an hour Skimpole had completely forgotten the recent disturbance which had so unsettled his mind. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, too, had given no further thought to the two visitors.

And when bed-time came for the Lower School, the men might never have existed, for all the discussion they created in the Shell and the Fourth.

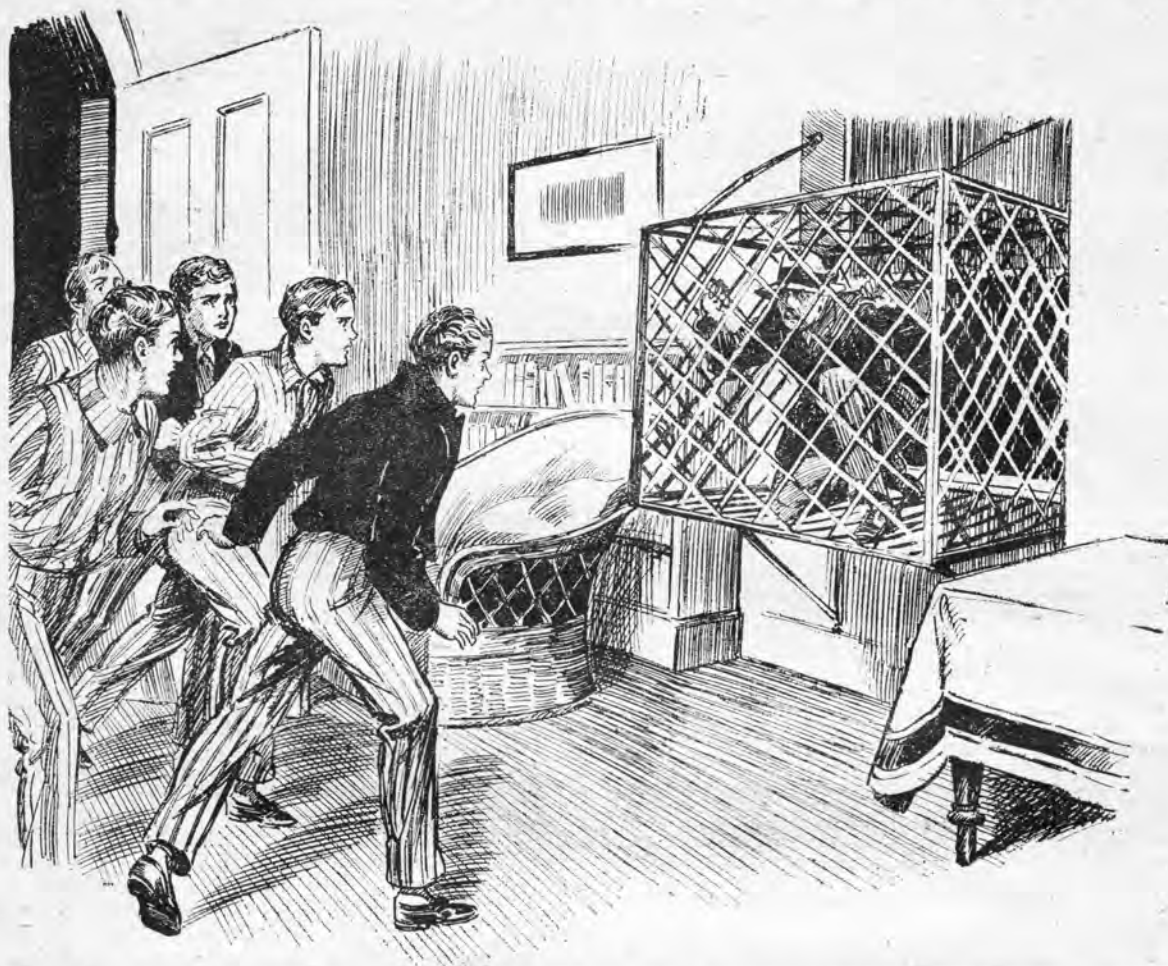
Most of the talk was connected with inventions, of course. New patents were springing up every hour. Somebody or other was bringing out a fresh invention every minute. The majority of these were mere ideas, and were squashed as soon as they were suggested.

But some were more substantial.

In the Shell dormitory, for example, when that Form went to bed, the great George Alfred Grundy announced that he was about to spring his great triumph upon a waiting world. The waiting world expressed itself freely.

"If you invented it, Grundy, old man, it's bound to be a dud," said Lowther. "I don't want to be personal, of course—"

"You wait until you see it!" interrupted Grundy aggressively. "Until now, Wilkins and Gunn are the only fellows



The Terrible Three, Talbot and Gore, dashed into Study No. 9, and a metallic clatter sounded. "I knew it!" roared Talbot. "I've caught something!" Tom Merry lit the gas. "My only hat!" he gasped. "Great Scott!" For in front of the window there was a curious cage arrangement, forming a kind of complete trap—and within it, like a bird in a cage, was a man! (See Chapter 14.)

who have been permitted to examine my patent, and they're both crazy with enthusiasm."

"They're both crazy, we know," admitted Lowther. "But it's the first time I've heard that their malady had developed through enthusiasm. We always thought that they were crazy because they lived in the same study as you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You funny idiot!" roared Grundy.

"If it comes to that," said Lowther, "it stands to reason they're crazy. If they weren't crazy they wouldn't stand you!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Wilkins, turning red.

"Chuck it!" growled Gunn.

"We've worked for days on this invention of mine," continued Grundy, glaring round, "and at last we've got it completed. I've decided to demonstrate it to all the rest of you. But if you don't want to see it, just say the word!"

"Oh, Grundy, don't be hard!" said Manners gently.

"Have mercy on us!" said Lowther. "What is this invention, anyhow?"

"My new suitcase," retorted Grundy.

"Is that what you call an invention?"

"This suitcase is different from any other!" bellowed Grundy. "As I said before, we've worked on it for days—"

"I suppose you mean that Wilkins and Gunn have worked on it?" grinned Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it comes to that, it was probably invented by Wilkins and Gunn," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy danced.

"I invented it myself!" he hooted. "These fatheads made one or two suggestions, but I squashed them. I wasn't going to have them claiming the idea as their own. The whole thing has been made in Study No. 3, and if any ass pinches the idea I'll smash him!"

"You'll be perfectly safe in broadcasting the idea, old man," said Aubrey Racke. "It'll be a sad day when we've got to pinch our ideas from you!"

"If you want a thick ear, Racke—"

"Let's have a look at this invention, and we'll soon find out whether it's worth pinching," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "A suitcase, eh? It's a funny thing, but I thought suitcases were already in use?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This one of mine is a patent," said Grundy, with an air of superiority. "What are you going to say when I tell you that it's not only a suitcase, but a complete bedstead as well?"

"That's easy!" replied Lowther. "We shall say you're telling whoppers."

"Rats!" roared Grundy. "My suitcase is a folding bed—legs, springs, and everything! What do you think of that? That'll knock a few spots off Redfern's fatheaded saloon bicycle, and Figgy's idiotic pneumatic boots, and Skimmy's crazy thought-reading machine!"

"Really, my dear Grundy, there is hardly any necessity to pass disparaging remarks," said Skimpole mildly. "I would have you know that my thought-reading machine has proved an unqualified success. If there is any scepticism on the point, I refer you to Lowther."

"It's marvellous!" said Monty solemnly. "I sat in front of the thing, and it read my thoughts like a book!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind about your silly thoughts!" howled Grundy. "Are you going to attend to me or not?"

"Well, you'd better buck up, old man," said Tom Merry. "Kildare will be along presently, and if he finds you messing about with your freak suitcase he'll probably bone it. It'll be lights-out in another ten minutes."

Grundy started.

"My hat, yes!" he said. "Now, where the merry thump

Is that suitcase? I put it somewhere, I know! I brought it up—"

"Under your bed," said Wilkins tartly. Grundy dived under his bed, and came out with an ordinary suitcase.

It was certainly a big one—about the largest size in suitcases that is made. But nobody could deny that it was a plain, straightforward, common or garden suitcase.

An interested crowd gathered round Grundy. "And your bed's inside that thing?" asked Crooke sceptically.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you fathead!" yelled Grundy.

"Then it can't be a proper bed," said Lowther, with conviction.

"You'll see whether it's a proper bed or not!" roared Grundy. "I'm going to sleep on it to-night, anyhow! That'll prove its worth, won't it? Just think how useful it'll be for camping! In the summer-time, people can take their beds wherever they go!"

"Sort of take up your bed and walk?" suggested Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" growled Grundy.

He snapped open the suitcase, and the Shell fellows peered within. There were numerous spidery metal girders in view, and a closely-folded spring. Grundy proceeded to unwrap it.

"First of all you grab hold of this bar and pull it out," he said. "Then you take hold of this one and hoist it up. You see, it all unfolds—H'm! Wait a minute!"

"It doesn't unfold!" murmured Monty.

Click!

"That's got it!" said Grundy, with relief.

"It does!" grinned Monty.

Piece by piece the patent folding bed came out. There were all sorts of cantilever ideas employed, and when the last girder was clicked into position the thing undoubtedly resembled a camp bedstead.

It was narrow, and it was rather short, but it was certainly a bedstead. It stood on legs, and there was a tight spring.

There were many freely expressed comments.

"Jolly good, Grundy!" said Manners. "Did you do this all yourself? Did you think it all out in your own little brain?"

"It's my idea entirely!" said Grundy, with a defiant glare at Wilkins and Gunn.

"We did some of the work!" protested Wilkins.

"Work!" sneered Grundy. "What's work? It's the idea that counts, not the hired labour!"

"I like that bit about hired labour!" growled Gunn. "When we asked you to lend us a couple of bob, you told us to go and eat coke because we'd been shirking! That was after we'd put in a four hours' spell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The bed's all right, Grundy, but where's the special sleeper?" asked Monty Lowther.

"The which?" said Grundy.

"Haven't you made this bed to the specifications of a living skeleton, or something?" asked Monty. "Skimpy might be able to sleep on it, but it wouldn't be any good for an ordinary chap. I'd rather go to sleep on a clothes line than risk my neck among all those rods!"

"You ass!" said Grundy, with disdain. "I've made this bed for myself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Grundy!"

The great Grundy didn't seem to realise the humour of the situation. He was one of the biggest fellows in the Shell, clumsy and heavy. And that bed looked so frail that even the skinny Skimpole would have hesitated before trusting his weight upon it.

But Grundy had full confidence in his own invention.

"It looks weak—eh?" he said, with a superior glare.

"Well, it does look a bit fragile," said Tom Merry.

"But it's made on the cantilever principle," retorted Grundy. "It's so constructed that the more weight you put on it the stronger it is. That's the whole idea of it. Look here!"

He sat on the spring, stretched himself out luxuriously, and allowed his full weight to distribute itself over the bedstead.

The other Shell fellows watched in expectant silence.

There were one or two protesting creaks, and the bedstead seemed to wobble slightly like a jelly. But it didn't collapse.

"It's as strong as the Tower Bridge!" declared Grundy aggressively. "And this spring is tremendously comfortable, too. When I make a thing, my sons, I make it!"

"With the help of Wilkins and Gunn," murmured Monty Lowther.

Grundy sat up, frowning.

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"Satisfied?" he asked defiantly.

"We'll be satisfied when you've got safely out of it," said Racke. "If you can climb out of it without crashin' we'll admit that you've—"

"You frabjous dummy!" roared Grundy. "I can jump up and down, and dance a hornpipe on this spring if I want to!"

He proceeded to put his words into effect.

He didn't actually dance a hornpipe, but he heaved himself up and down with all his strength. Grundy didn't like these repeated imputations as to the stability of his patent bed.

"Go easy, you ass!" said Wilkins, in alarm.

"It'll never stand that 'treatment!" roared Gunn.

"Won't it?" jeered Grundy. "It's standing it now. As I said before, when I make a thing, I make it! I designed this bed on the latest scientific principles, and—"

Crack!

"Great Scott!" gasped Grundy. "What was that?"

"Heave up and down again," suggested Monty, "and we'll tell you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy commenced climbing out of the bed. He wasn't sure, but it seemed to him that the spring was sagging inwards. At all events, it wasn't quite so stable as it had been originally. Grundy's great weight had put a heavy strain on it.

He had nearly got one foot to the floor, and was preparing to climb out, when there was another ominous crack. The bed shook, and Grundy lost his balance and fell back again.

Cra-a-ash!

"Yaroooo!" howled Grundy wildly.

The bed simply fell into little pieces. It disintegrated itself in the most startling fashion. Girders stuck out at every angle. Grundy bumped to the floor with a hard bang, and the spring curled itself round him in an affectionate embrace.

CHAPTER 13.

Midnight Alarms!

"POOR old Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy was fighting desperately amid the wreckage of his famous bed. It coiled round him, it got in the way of his legs, it wrapped itself round his neck.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh, you unfeeling asses!" said Monty Lowther severely. "When Grundy makes a thing, he makes it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He didn't tell us how he makes it, but now we know!" added Lowther dryly. "It's just as well to be sure of these things. Thanks awfully, Grundy, old man, for the demonstration! We've enjoyed it immensely."

The Shell shrieked with laughter, and at that unfortunate moment the dormitory door opened, and Kildare of the Sixth looked in.

"Not so much noise in here!" he said. "I shall come round with an ashplant—Hullo! What the—Who's that on the floor?"

"Only Grundy," said Lowther. "He's just demonstrating his new bed, you know. You mustn't take too much notice of it just now. All these girders and things have their own places, but they seem to have got mixed. Grundy, of course, isn't really supposed to sit in the middle like that. He's only doing that as a part of the demonstration."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare advanced into the dormitory.

"When you've done acting the young idiot, Grundy, perhaps you'll explain what this means?" he asked. "Who told you to bring that lot of old iron into the dormitory?"

"Old iron!" howled Grundy. "It's my patent bed."

He rose to his feet with dignity, the bed spring still wrapped round his middle like a suit of chain-mail. One of the girders unfortunately got between his legs, and he staggered wildly.

"It's a wonderful bed, Kildare," said Lowther. "Two minutes ago it was perfectly whole, and now it's all smashed up. You'd need a sledgehammer to do that to any other bed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to shut up?" hooted Grundy, glaring at Lowther. "Something went wrong. I don't know what it was, but one of the girders must have slipped."

"If you're a girder, then you're right!" agreed Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Less noise here!" snapped Kildare. "If you go on like this, you'll have Mr. Railton in here. I'll give you two minutes to get into bed, and not a second longer! If you're not all in bed within two minutes I'll have the whole lot of you detained to-morrow afternoon!"

"Oh, Kildare!"

"I mean it!" growled the St. Jim's skipper.

He walked out, and the Shell finished its undressing with the speed of lightning. It was a half-holiday on the morrow, and nobody had any desire to be detained.

Grundy, thoroughly disgusted, kicked the remains of his patent underneath Gunn's bed and flopped into his own. He was hurt in one or two places, but he was too thoroughly annoyed to say anything about these pains. He had intended to arouse the envy of the entire Shell, too.

"It was your fault, Gunn!" he said, as he turned over in bed.

"My fault!" snapped Gunn, who was just preparing to get between the sheets. "Well, of all the nerve—"

"I told you to make that catch stronger—"

"And I did!" shouted Gunn hotly. "You needn't try to blame me for anything, Grundy! Both Wilkins and I told you that the bed would fall to pieces. Blow you and your beastly inventions—Yaroooh!"

Gunn was leaping into bed when he gave a sudden howl.

"What the merry dickens—"

"I'm injured!" shrieked Gunn.

He jumped out of bed again and tore back the clothes. There was an ugly, ominous hill in the middle of his bed.

"What's that?" asked Wilkins, staring.

"What is it?" snorted Gunn, rubbing himself. "Why, that idiotic invention of Grundy's, of course! It's a pity he couldn't shove it under his own bed, instead of under mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell laughed with callous amusement. And Grundy looked almost happy. At least, he was getting a small compensation.

"That girder might have gone through me like a sword!" growled Gunn, as he hauled the offending monstrosity from under his bed. "I've never seen such—Yow! I've barked my shin now! Blow the beastly thing!"

"Give it back to Grundy!" suggested Monty Lowther. "He's so pleased with it that he'll probably like to have it as a bed companion. When Grundy makes a thing, he makes it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy seethed like a volcano, but he didn't trust himself to speak. And when Kildare looked in again the dormitory was quiet.

"If I hear any noise from this dormitory, I'll know where to look for the culprit," said Kildare, glancing at Grundy.



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CYCLING IN TRAFFIC!

A KEEN reader of the GEM wants my opinion on the safety, or otherwise, of riding a bicycle in traffic. There's very little to be said on this subject, for the safety of the cyclist depends principally upon the soundness of his brakes. Without brakes—and there are heaps of young fellows who will persist in riding a cycle without brakes—riding in traffic is extremely dangerous. In fact, cycling anywhere without the means to pull up in emergency is a practice which is generally condemned, and rightly so.

DO GREASE PAINTS INJURE THE SKIN?

That's the query from a reader in Stockport who is a bit of an enthusiast in the amateur theatrical line. As far as I know, modern grease paint is not injurious to the skin. Indeed, there are many actors and actresses who say that it is beneficial. Now, as to the method of applying it. In cold weather, especially, it is recommended that a little ordinary grease, like coconut butter, or cold cream, should be rubbed gently into the skin before applying the grease paint. This thin coating of grease underneath the paint makes it considerably easier to remove the paint at the end of the performance. But care should be taken to use very little of the coconut butter, for if it is rubbed into the skin too generously, the perspiration from the face will "unfix" the make-up to such an extent that the actor or actress will be constantly dashing back into the dressing-room to "powder" the troublesome paint. After the performance, the best method of removing the paint is to rub a little cream, or coconut butter, into the skin, then "wipe" off the make-up with a towel. That done, the skin should

"You kids can make as many contraptions as you like, but if they interfere with any of the school routine they'll be confiscated."

"We've only just started," chuckled Talbot. "You wait until next week, Kildare. St. Jim's won't be recognisable then!"

Kildare went out, and within a very short time the Shell was asleep. True, a muttered conversation had been kept up for some little time between Grundy & Co., and Grundy's complaining voice could be heard in every corner of the room. He was sad at heart over his failure.

At last even he succumbed to the call of Nature, and slept.

All went well until close upon midnight. It wanted about five minutes to the hour, when there came a sudden thud from below in the building. It was a curious metallic thud, and the Shell dormitory seemed to shake.

Tom Merry started up in bed.

"What was that?" he asked sharply.

"Eh?" mumbled Manners. "Wasser time?"

"I don't know what the time is," said Tom. "But there was a crash just now from downstairs somewhere. There's no wind to-night, and—"

"By Jove!" said Reginald Talbot.

"Did you hear it, too?" asked Tom Merry.

"Something woke me up, but I couldn't tell you exactly what it was," replied Talbot. "You said there was a crash, though. What kind of a crash, Merry?"

"Well, it sounded a bit metallic."

"My burglar catcher!" said Talbot excitedly.

"Your what?"

"My patent burglar catcher!"

"My only aunt!" said Tom blankly. "Is this another invention?"

CHAPTER 14.

The Prisoner!

TALBOT jumped out of bed.

"Yes!" he panted. "I fixed it up just before coming up to the dorm. I never dreamed for a moment that I should catch anything, but I fixed it up on the off-chance."

"How many more of these inventions?" said Tom Merry, getting out of his own bed. "You may be wrong, Talbot, (Continued overleaf.)"

be sponged with warm water in order to remove any grease that has remained in the pores, and finally sponged with cold water in order to close the pores again. Care should be taken when removing a make-up to see that all traces of paint are removed, for there's nothing worse than to see anyone walking about with patches of grease paint round their eyes and ears.

HE BITES HIS NAILS!

"A. J.," of London, confesses to the bad habit of biting his nails, and he asks me for a cure. Frankly, "A. J." ought to exercise his will-power in this matter, for he is of an age to have left such a childish habit behind him long ago. If, however, he finds that his will-power is not equal to the task, I would suggest that he dips his finger-nails into a solution of quassia chips. A bottle of this mixture can be made up by any chemist for a few pence.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"RIVAL INVENTORS!"

By Martin Clifford.

That's the next exciting story in the special "invention" series for which thousands of readers have been asking. This is a topping yarn, chums, and you'll enjoy every line of it. Mind you read it!

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Now that you have sampled the opening chapters of this grand new serial you'll be looking forward to the continuation of it in next week's GEM without any urging from me. Tell your pals about this new "Hardy" story, boys.

"THE HOUSE DAME!"

Is the title of the next poem by the St. Jim's Rhymester, and, of course, it features Mrs. Martha Mimms. You'll like this effort, take it from me. Cheerio, chums!

Your Editor.

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but I suppose we'd better go down and have a look. Where did you fix this thing?"

"In Study No. 9."

"But I thought you'd shifted out—"

"Of course not!" said Talbot. "Gore and I gave Skimmy the run of the study, but it's still ours. And I fixed up this burglar catcher at the last minute."

"But who the thump would want to get into your study?" asked Tom Merry. "Nobody would be likely to pinch Skimmy's invention."

"Dear me!" came a voice from Skimpole's bed. "What is that, my dear Merry? Surely there is nobody attempting to steal my thought-reading machine? Oh dear! This is terrible! I had better hurry down at once!"

"You had better stay where you are!" growled Tom Merry, who was hastily putting some clothes on. "You needn't worry about your silly machine, Skimpole. Nobody's likely to touch that."

But Skimpole was frantic.

"You don't understand!" he shouted desperately. "There were two men in the quadrangle this evening, and they urged me to sell them my invention!"

"What?"

"I assure you this is the truth!"

"The poor chump has been dreaming!" said Monty Lowther. "That thought-reading machine of his is valueless. It's only a mixture of a magic-lantern and a microscope and a few odds and ends. An old-clothes man wouldn't give a couple of bob for it."

"Really, my dear Lowther, I am amazed!" ejaculated Skimpole. "You are perfectly well aware that my invention is an unqualified success. You, of all fellows, should know that there can be no question as to that."

"Brrrrh!" said Lowther.

"That sound, Lowther, is unintelligible!" protested Skimpole.

"I meant it to be," said Lowther, as he pulled his trousers on. "Are you other fellows ready? We'd better hurry down, and—"

"But let me convince you, my dear fellows!" urged Skimpole. "These men were most pressing in their demands. They offered me twenty pounds for my invention!"

"What?"

"Really, this is perfectly true," said Skimpole with distress. "If burglars have broken into Study No. 9, it is only too obvious that they have come in search of my world-awakening invention. The thing is too obvious. I must go down at once! I must save my machine! Let the police be informed! Let—"

"Gag him, somebody!" said Tom Merry grimly. "He's been having a nightmare, and he isn't properly awake yet."

"Really, my dear Merry—"

"Come on!" said Tom. "We'll soon settle the point. I expect the beastly contrivance has simply fallen down, and there's no burglar at all."

"It couldn't have fallen down," said Talbot. "It's a kind of cage arrangement, and it fits round the window. As soon as anybody attempts to get in it springs into place, and cages him completely in. I was counting on the first prize—"

"Never mind the first prize now," interrupted Lowther. "Let's see what kind of prize we've got in the trap."

And the Terrible Three, Talbot, and Gore hurried out.

and made their way down the Shell passage. Talbot was the only one who really believed that the burglar catcher had been successful.

The others hardly knew what to expect.

They dashed into Study No. 9, and a metallic clatter sounded.

"I knew it!" roared Talbot. "I've caught something!"

Tom Merry quickly lit the gas.

"My only hat!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Great Scott!"

In front of the window there was a curious cage arrangement, not unlike a lot of iron trellis-work. It extended from one side of the window to the other, and, indeed, formed a kind of complete trap. Even the top was barred in.

And within it, like a bird in a cage, was a man!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Tom Merry. "You were right, Talbot, old man!"

They stared at the intruder.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry keenly. "Haven't we seen this chap before? Isn't he one of those rotters who tried to pinch that patent carburettor?"

"You've hit it!" said Manners, nodding. "Oh, so that explains it. That's why he broke into the school!"

Mr. Twist, who was the prisoner, writhed.

"You young idiots!" he panted. "I'm—I'm no burglar! I made an arrangement with one of the boys to meet him—"

"Which boy?" broke in Lowther.

"Skimpole!" retorted Mr. Twist quickly.

"Skimmy?"

"Yes," said Mr. Twist, seizing his advantage. "I arranged with him to meet him at midnight, and he told me that this was his study."

"Well, it is, if it comes to that," said Tom Merry doubtfully.

"Are you trying to make out that I am a common burglar?" went on the man, assuming indignation. "What is this idiotic cage?"

"My hat!" gasped Talbot. "I—I didn't know—"

"The thing is an outrage!" stormed Mr. Twist. "I am aware, of course, that this meeting with Skimpole was something in the nature of a prohibited proceeding, but it is ridiculous to assume that I am breaking into the school. Where is Skimpole? Why cannot he keep his appointments?"

It seemed that Mr. Twist's bluff was going to succeed.

The juniors were certainly struck by the man's plausible story. Skimpole had been talking to some strangers in the quad that evening, and this was Skimmy's study. Nobody could tell the peculiar workings of Skimmy's mind. And it was quite on the cards that he had arranged with this man to get into the study, only to forget all about it. And in that case he could hardly be classed as a burglar.

Mr. Twist was desperate.

He had come to the school with the intention of stealing Bernard Glyn's carburettor. But as he was under the impression that Skimpole was the inventor, he had made for Skimpole's study, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy having very kindly pointed out the particular window to him.

Mr. Twist had thought it very easy and simple.

A ladder to the wall, a slipped catch, and nothing more. The invention was bound to be in this study, and he would be out again within three minutes. But nothing could alter the fact that he was a housebreaker, and liable to arrest and imprisonment. And here he was, caged!

Small wonder that he was desperate.

Mr. Martin was waiting outside, but Mr. Martin would not wait very long when he discovered that his companion had been caught. In fact, it was quite probable that Mr. Martin was now shaking the dust of St. Jim's from his feet.

"Well, it's jolly rummy, that's all I can say!" said Talbot. "Skimpole didn't say anything about an arrangement to meet anybody, did he?"

"Somebody had better fetch him," said Tom Merry briskly.

Mr. Twist was in agony.

"I tell you the whole thing's a mistake!" he raved. "I arranged with Skimpole to buy his invention, and he was afraid that the school authorities would step in and prevent it."

Skimpole was the last person in the world whom Mr. Twist wanted to see. For Skimmy, of course, would "blow the gaff." He would explain that he had made no arrangement to sell his invention, and Mr. Twist would be exposed as a crook.

"Look here, boys, open this confounded cage and let me out!" he said anxiously. "A master might come here soon, and it would be very awkward for me. You don't want me to get into any trouble like that, do you?"

"Better let him out, I suppose," said Lowther. "Skimmy's

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to blame, evidently, though why any sane person should want to buy his dotty invention beats me."

Mr. Twist laughed.

"I am aware, of course, that this apparatus is freakish and utterly valueless," he said "I know that Skimpole's contrivance is the product of a mere amateur, and quite useless. But I wanted to encourage the boy, and help him. It was just a little act of kindness which I desired to perform on the quiet."

"Yes, let him out, Talbot," said Manners uncomfortably.

Mr. Twist began to hope. The instant he was out he would make a bolt for it, and leave the Shell fellows to think what they pleased. His story sounded plausible enough, and the boys naturally concluded that he was actually speaking about Skimpole's thought-reading machine. But Mr. Twist was adopting a disparaging tone to belittle Glyn's carburettor, which he was really talking about all the time.

Talbot made a move towards the burglar catcher.

"Just a minute," said Tom Merry grimly. "Don't touch it yet, Talbot, I'm not satisfied."

"What—what do you mean?" gasped Mr. Twist.



"Great Scott!" gasped Talbot. "Hi! Help! Rescue, Shell! Back up, you fellows!" He and Gore rushed towards Mr. Twist. But the rescuer turned to the window, dived out, and slid down the ladder so rapidly that he burned both his hands. (See Chapter 15.)

"Just what I say," replied Tom. "Skimpole was fully awake before we came down here, and he distinctly said that he had refused to part with his invention. I'm suspicious. It seems to me that you've burgled the school because Skimpole wouldn't sell."

The man changed colour.

"It's not true!" he said hoarsely.

"Well, you don't seem to relish the suggestion, do you?" said Tom. "Monty, dash upstairs, and fetch Skimpole. This thing doesn't seem to add up right! But Skimmey will know!"

"Right!" said Monty Lowther.

He rushed off, and Mr. Twist became frantic. Just when he had seemed on the point of gaining his freedom, too! The glare he bestowed upon Tom Merry was so ferocious that the captain of the Shell was convinced.

Lowther reached the Shell dormitory, and found Skimpole in the grasp of Grundy & Co. They were holding him down by force.

"Let that ass go!" said Lowther quickly. "He's wanted downstairs!"

"What's up?" asked Grundy eagerly.

Monty Lowther was cautious.

"Oh, nothing much!" he said lightly. "You fellows needn't bother, anyhow. We don't want the whole Shell roaming about the House, or we shall be gated for a month."

"My dear fellow—" began Skimpole breathlessly.

"That's all right," said Lowther. "Come on, Skimmey! Your machine is safe enough, so you needn't worry yourself."

He hurried Skimpole out before any of the other fellows could ask questions. And a minute later the pair arrived at Study No. 9. Skimpole was pushed in, and Mr. Twist inwardly groaned.

"Ah, the ruffian!" exclaimed Skimpole excitedly. "That is the man! That is the scoundrel who I spoke to in the quad this evening. He tried to buy my invention, but I refused to sell it."

Tom Merry's jaw became grim.

CHAPTER 15.

Mr. Twist Wriggles Out!

SKIMPOLE was looking very indignant and angry. "I am pleased to see that you have captured the rascal, my dear fellows!" he said, with satisfaction. "I beg of you to hold him tightly, and to hand him over to the police at the first opportunity."

"Just a minute, Skimmy," said Tom Merry. "Did you arrange to sell your invention to this man?"

"Certainly not!"

"It's a lie!" shouted Mr. Twist hoarsely.

"Really, you outrageous scoundrel—"

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "Did you make an appointment to meet the man here at midnight, Skimpole?"

"Good gracious, no!" replied Skimpole. "Certainly not! I made it quite clear to the rascal that I desired no further acquaintance with him whatever."

"My hat!" said Lowther sadly. "Then we were nearly tricked. Brains—brains! Tommy, congrats! If you hadn't had a large supply of common sense, we should have let this man go!"

"I'm going to fetch Mr. Railton," said Tom Merry quickly. "One or two of you had better come with me, to bear me out. Monty, you take Skimmy back to the dormitory—we don't want him any more now."

"I seem to be a messenger-boy!" said Lowther tartly.

"I have no desire to return to the dormitory," said Skimpole. "I am determined to remain here until this scoundrel has been placed in the hands of the police! It is quite useless for you to pull at me, Lowther. I decline to accompany you!"

"That's a pity," said Lowther, "because you're coming!"

"My dear fellow, I insist—"

But Lowther insisted, too, and Skimpole was escorted back to the Shell dormitory. The fewer juniors out of bed, the better. Mr. Railton was not likely to look upon a general disturbance with a kindly eye. Besides, Skimpole would monopolise the entire conversation if he was allowed to remain.

"You've served your purpose, old man, and now you're going back to your little cot," said Monty.

"But my invention—"

"That's safe enough."

"They are attempting to steal it—"

"So it seems, but it's one of life's major mysteries," agreed Lowther. "Why any sane person should attempt to steal your invention, Skimmy, is beyond my comprehension."

"But, my dear fellow, you know well enough that my machine is revolutionary!" protested Skimpole. "You, yourself, tested its remarkable powers, and you know that it is startlingly successful."

"Oh, yes!" said Lowther dubiously.

He hadn't the heart to tell Skimpole that he had been

spoofing him, and that the thought-reading machine was about as successful as Grundy's famous bed.

The whole thing was a mystery.

A mere word on Mr. Twist's part would have explained all. But some little imp of Fate was keeping up the deception. The man was still firmly of the opinion that Skimpole was the inventor of the carburettor, and he had heard nothing from any of the juniors to make him alter this view.

Mr. Twist's feelings were too deep for words.

He was in that patent cage of Talbot's, and Talbot himself and Gore were keeping guard. Talbot was gloating.

"It's something like a miracle!" he said, glancing at Gore.

"This thing of yours working?" asked Gore.

"No, you idiot!" snapped Talbot. "I mean, it's something like a miracle for a burglar to come here on the very first night I set the trap."

"I'm not a burglar!" snarled Mr. Twist.

"The less you say, my man, the better!" frowned Talbot. "Why, I only thought of fixing up the catcher at the last minute. I left the window open, too—on purpose to tempt any possible maurauder."

Mr. Twist writhed.

Not long since, he had congratulated himself upon finding the window open. It had not occurred to him then that this had been merely a lure. He had thought himself in clover.

"It only shows you," went on Talbot. "There must be something providential in my setting the trap just this particular night. This man came here to pinch Skimmy's invention—"

"But why?" asked Gore. "It's not worth putting in the dustbin!"

"That's his business," said Talbot. "Perhaps he thinks the silly thing is worth something, for some reason. Anyhow, he'll soon be safely locked up, and then handed over to the police. Is that Mr. Railton now?"

Gore went to the door.

"Not yet," he replied. "Bound to be here in a minute, though."

The captured man nearly foamed at the mouth. He was merely dealing with schoolboys, but when the Housemaster arrived on the scene he would be beyond all hope. How could any man have expected this preposterous cage to be fixed in position?

In a frenzy Mr. Twist seized the metal-work and shook it.

"Let me out!" he snarled desperately.

"Steady!" roared Talbot. "You'll break it!"

This was precisely what Mr. Twist wanted to do—and Talbot's alarm put an idea into his head. Perhaps the cage wasn't so strong as it looked! Talbot, at all events, seemed none too confident!

With a tremendous burst of strength, the crook wrenched at the iron bars, and the whole cage swayed ominously. It was the man's sheer frenzy which helped him.

He knew that a master would be on the scene at any moment. The window was open, and there was a ladder ready. If only he could get—

Snap! Snap!

The cage swayed more alarmingly than ever, and the next moment Mr. Twist lifted it clean away from the window, and the whole contrivance went hurtling over into the room.

"I knew it!" yelled Gore. "I told you the rotten thing was no good!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Talbot. "Hi! Help! Rescue, Shell! Back up, you fellows!"

He rushed towards the triumphant Mr. Twist. Gore, too, made a similar rush. But the man swung the wreckage round, and placed it between himself and the juniors.

He turned to the window, dived out, and slithered down the ladder so rapidly that he burned both his hands. But he hardly noticed it at the time. With his heart beating rapidly, he dashed for the wall, and managed to get over. Mr. Martin was waiting.

"Got it?" asked the latter eagerly.

"No!" snarled Twist. "They nearly got me!"

In the meantime, Tom Merry was hastening with Mr. Railton to Study No. 9. Manners was with him, and

(Continued on page 23.)

"HERE WE ARE, THEN!"

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The Day of Sorrow!

FOUR years ago, Adam—four long, weary years ago—and still no sign!

Tears filled the mother's eyes as she stared out of the window at the glories of the garden, now looking their brightest, their greenest, and their best in the freshness of the spring.

The gardens of the Grange were noted far and wide. They had been planned by a master hand and a master mind more years ago than one would care to count.

The beauties of shrubberies, of trees, of herbaceous borders, were unrivalled.

As Mrs. Byrne stared out at them they were shrouded in mist and wet with the teeming rain. Now the day was moving to its close though night was yet far away.

Adam Byrne, a fair-haired, blue-eyed stalwart lad of nineteen, came to his mother's side and, linking arms with hers, looked up into her face, a sad smile, as tender as a girl's, playing about his sensitive lips. And yet there was nothing feminine about him. He possessed the depth of chest, the width of shoulder, the strong, well-knit frame and sturdy limbs of the Astons, his mother's race.

"Mother, dearest," said the boy, "don't take it so badly to heart. It may seem callous to hear me talk like this, but there is still hope."

"Not a vestige of hope, dear son," smiled Mrs. Byrne. "Not a shred. On this day four years ago your father departed for his last big game hunt and exploration, taking your sister with him. I let them go, refusing to go with them, for somebody had to rule at home and see to your father's estate and affairs. Also, you were younger, then, dear heart, and your education had to be attended to. Besides, I was in poor health, and the doctor decided that it would be better for me to stay here. So I stayed. But your dear father went, and Rosa with him."

"Why didn't Rosa stay at home, mother? She was ill, I know, but with careful nursing and attention, she would have got better, and—"

"Adam, she would never have got better. That was why your father went and took her with him. The voyage, the change of climate, the wild life in the open—these things would rid her of the danger of decline which, the specialists decided, would develop and kill her if she remained in England."

"I know," said Adam, with a frown. "It's an odd

thing, mother, that only rumours and dribbles of news have leaked through, never anything definite."

"That is because your father strayed beyond the bounds of civilisation, beyond the limits of British Central Africa, in his enthusiasm, eager to obtain new specimens for his museum, anxious to probe into untrodden byways, and believing that he was immune."

The boy sighed.

"It's jolly queer that none of the party has ever been heard of since they vanished from the isolated station, or camp, known as Pocatella," he said. "Odd, too, that none of the valuable heads and skins of which he wrote should ever come back to the agents at Durban to whom he said he was sending them. Strange when his last letters were so full of joy and hope, because Rosa was so strong and bronzed and well; and then silence—not a word!"

"No word has come, my dear," said the mother, in a voice that shook, and she set her arm fondly round the shoulders of the boy, "because your father and Rosa are—dead. No trophies and skins and valuables have ever reached us because they were never sent. They were either stolen far out in the wild lands, or else they were left to rot because your father could not send them, and so—"

Her voice broke.

"But what is the use of talking about it any more, Adam?" she said. "I have talked until my heart has broken. I wish it had been my lot," and she spoke passionately, "to have gone out there and died with your father and the girl child I loved better than my life! To think that I met your dear father out there and married him, far in the bush, and travelled with him upon three of his great travels. And yet it was not permitted that I should die with them, but rust here at home, cribbed, caged, confined!" Her voice rose to a wail of distress so that the boy caught her in his arms, shocked, and drew her back from the window.

"Mother," he cried, "it is the sight of the dreary grey sky and the never-ceasing rain which is getting on your nerves—and the day, the anniversary. But you should not worry. You must not worry, dear. It makes my heart heavy to hear you; and, mother, I can't help feeling all the time that dad is not dead—that he and Rosa are alive, and that some day we shall see them again, and—and—"

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The mother, turning, took her son's face between her hands, and raising it gently, looked into his eyes. They were as blue as the Southern Seas and burned with a steadfast fire which revived for a flicker the flame of hope in her heart.

"I used to believe," she sighed, "that your father possessed the gift of prophecy. Would that he had, and that the gift had descended to Adam, his son!"

She turned away with an animation that pleased him, for he knew that his mother was still resolute and brave, despite her momentary shrinking under the weight of her grief. Pulling a cord, she drew the heavy curtains across the big, leaded windows to shut out the sight of the dismal rain.

"I wish I'd been old enough to go with father, mother," grumbled the boy.

"And I am glad that you were not, my dear," replied the mother. "For there would have been no one left to me, then."

"One day I will go out and clear up the mystery," announced the boy, with upflung head.

"One day I hope you will, Adam," returned the mother. "And when that day comes, I shall go with you, for I would like my bones to rest beside those of your father whom I loved, and my dear, poor, frail girl baby whom I adored. But that time has not come yet."

"Was it only because my sister Rosa was so ill father went out there into the wilds for the last time, mother?" inquired the boy.

"Yes, Adam!"

"Why couldn't they have lived on the coast near the sea, where the climate was so mild? Rosa would have recovered there just as easily, perhaps."

"Because your father is not a man to idle away his time doing nothing, Adam. He could not. He has always travelled, explored, hunted, spent his days amid the undisturbed beauties of Nature, and he had the means. He took three white men and forty natives with him when he left the confines of the scattered civilisation to which he had gone. His last letter was full of hope and the joy of living. And yet not a word has come to hand of any of them since. The expeditions which were sent to trace them, returned beaten and baffled. Only the dead bodies of the natives had been found. They must all have been killed. It is to be hoped that they died soon, and were not dreadfully tortured and maimed before—"

Mrs. Byrne ceased speaking, biting her lip to master her emotion, and rising, she walked sadly away.

Then Adam, roaming through the beautiful old house—the home in which he had been born—found himself a prey to overpowering restlessness.

The day—his mother's mood—unsettled him. From room to room he went, then back into the big hall again, where were to be seen the great heads of the wild beasts which had fallen to his father's gun. Here were magnificent masks of rhino, of hippopotamus, of every variety of antelope, big and little, to be found upon African soil, of lion and elephant, and some specimens of animals, the very existence of which had been unknown until George Willis Byrne had shot them down in regions into which white men had never before penetrated.

Strawn upon the parquet flooring of the hall—which made a veritable museum—were to be seen magnificent skins of beasts of rare value, tributes also to the skill of the master hunter who had slain them.

Set upon a pedestal, where a veiled light fell upon it, was a marble bust, the head of which was now turned towards Adam. Here was the father whom Adam had known and worshipped, to the very life. The artist had caught the whimsical smile of the fine, open face, the serene expression of the steadfast eyes, whilst building up the whole head on somewhat nobler lines than real life had shown.

As he stared at the bust, something stirred within Adam.

It almost seemed to him that the lips of marble moved, that the eyes lit up.

"Father!" he cried involuntarily, moving forward in awe.

It was wonderful! Despite its chilly whiteness, the marble seemed to be alive! And it came to Adam then that his father lived.

The boy knew that his imagination was playing with him; he knew that his mother's show of grief had upset him, stirred his nerves; but still he believed that this was a sign; his father lived, and if George Willis Byrne still breathed, wherever he might be, whatever fate had befallen him, Adam felt that Rosa, the sister whom he loved and whose delicate health had urged the father and big-game hunter to Africa for the last time, was with him.

Curiously enough, Adam could not think of his father living and his sister dead.

For a long while Adam stared into the effigy's eyes, marvelling again at the amazing skill of the artist who had made this thing seem like life. Then, with a sigh, he turned away, and, leaving the house, wandered about the grounds, in spite of the never-ceasing rain.

He was young. He was strong. He possessed the restless spirit, the love of wandering which had driven his father to the far corners of the earth.

He possessed money—for the Byrnes were very wealthy. If it were not for leaving his mother alone Adam felt that he would pack up to-morrow and go out to Central Africa, and start from the point where his father was last heard of to try and trace his fate. And he felt that he might succeed though so many expeditions had failed. But, alas! he must remain in England awhile.

He could not go wandering yet. He must be patient. Perhaps a call would come. If it did not, in the years that lay before him he would form yet another of that long line of pioneer adventurers whose name is legion in the history of the British Empire, who have gone out into the wilds and laid bare, through much suffering and self-sacrifice, the secrets of Nature in lands unknown, so that they who followed after might reap the benefit.

Adam withdrew into a sheltered summer-house, and sat there staring out into the mist and the rain, until, shivering, he knew that it would be wise to go back into the house.

This he did. He went in search of his mother, and found her at last seated in a deep armchair in his father's study.

"Mother," said Adam, shocked, "you mustn't stay here alone."

His mother smiled sadly as Adam turned on the light, for the curtains were drawn.

"I wanted to be here—alone with my thoughts," she answered sadly. "For to-day, at all events."

Mrs. Byrne looked ill. She must be roused out of this morbid mood, Adam felt. He went straight to the telephone, and was almost immediately put through to Manor Court, where the Franklins, old friends of the Byrnes, had lived for half a century and more.

Harry Franklin lived there with two small brothers and his mother. Harry's father had died three years ago. Harry, who had come of age last year, had inherited the bulk of the Franklin fortune. An old school and college chum of Adam's, Harry Franklin was as fine a specimen of young British manhood as it would be possible to meet.

A piping small, but cheery voice answered to Adam's call.

"That you, Don?" said Adam. "Is Harry there? Then ask him please to come to the telephone."

"What's the trouble, old sport?" came Harry's deep, rich baritone, over the wire, a minute later. "Rotten sort of day, isn't it? Gives one the creeps!"

"I know, Harry, you know what this day is, and means, to me and mother?"

"And to me? Why, yes, old boy!" boomed the deep voice on the telephone, and now there seemed to be a shake in it. "I have thought of nothing else since I got up this morning. Adam, it seems only yesterday your father and Rosa set out on that ill-fated journey. I can see them now smiling cheerfully as the train drew out of the station. It meant a lot to me when your sister went, old man, though I was only a boy at the time. I shall never forget her prettiness, the way she looked at me, and— Well, I



As Adam stared at the bust something stirred within him; it seemed to him that the lips of this marble bust moved, that the eyes lit up. (See this page.)



As the message came through Mrs. Byrne shifted in her chair, her face white and strained, her eyes big with fear. Harry, whose fingers had strayed towards the wireless cabinet, turned and looked at Adam, afraid. (See page 27.)

couldn't get away from the house in the wind and the rain, and then the mist. It fed me up, Adam."

"Mother, too, and me. I say, I want to drag the mater out of herself if I can. May we come over to-night, Harry?"

"Do. Make Mrs. Byrne come, Adam boy. Tell her there will be only me and my mater at dinner, for Don will have gone to bed, and we'll be as happy as we can—see?"

"You're a good chap, Harry. I'll bring the mater right along."

The Message through the Ether!

IT was with some difficulty that Adam managed to persuade his mother to drive over to Manor Court, but he did at last succeed, and the wheels of the car had scarcely borne the vehicle past the gates of the Grange before Mrs. Byrne began to brighten visibly.

The mere fact that she was being forced to do something helped her, and she was smiling wistfully as they entered the fine house known as Manor Court.

And at dinner she began to talk interestedly, drawn out of herself by the charm of her hostess and friend, Mrs. Franklin, and the brightness of Harry Franklin.

She liked Harry. Everybody liked Harry. In the years which seemed now so far away Harry and Rosa, when toddling mites, had plighted their troth, and when the fear of consumption and early death had driven Rosa away it was only the knowledge that the journey was necessary that had steeled Harry to endure, for the boy had moped and suffered for long after she had gone, and when the news was circulated that all trace of father and daughter had been lost, though the massacred bodies of the natives who had accompanied them had been found, Harry had almost died.

To-night, if one had listened to his bright conversation, his gay, boyish laughter, one would never have believed that he could ever have felt deeply at all, seeing that it was the anniversary of the day when Rosa left Studley to begin the journey which was to lure her and her father into the wild and unknown regions somewhere south of the Equator.

Harry was just the brightest, the breeziest, the most irresponsible lad in all the world, to judge from his talk and his laughter.

He made Mrs. Byrne smile a dozen times that night, and

he kept up a running fire of conversation, which lasted until long after dinner was over and an adjournment to the drawing-room had been made.

There, because of the damp, unpleasant day, not because it was necessary, a bright fire was burning, the curtains had been drawn over the windows, all the lights had been switched on and the room made as cheerful and bright as possible.

The two women, drawing apart, began to talk to each other; observing which, Harry frowned.

"Adam," said Franklin, "we've got to keep your mother from talking about your father and Rosa. It's bad for her to remember. She looks ill—worn. I say, heard my new loud-speaker?"

"No," smiled Adam.

Harry, crossing the room, opened a handsome cabinet of polished walnut, panelled with birdseye maple, twisted a knob here and a knob there, closed the doors of the cabinet again, and within a few seconds a voice as natural as if the speaker himself was within the room, instead of addressing a microphone in a broadcasting station nearly fifty miles away, announced an item of music.

Then the strains of a cheerful dance echoed loudly, and Mrs. Byrne, turning her head, smiled.

"Harry," she said, "that is as natural an effect as I have ever heard. How many valves are there?"

"Oh, only three!" replied Harry Franklin, with a smile. "I am an economic worker. I don't believe in those five, six, seven, eight, and nine valve sets, with all the gadgets and stunt transformers and fixings, which one can do without. Purity and power without distortion is what I aim at."

"And you've certainly got it, Harry," smiled Adam. "But where's the new loud-speaker?"

"Inside the cabinet. I adapted it to my own use."

"And you made your own cabinet and fitted everything? It was clever of you, Harry. And you don't even use an outside aerial, do you?" asked Mrs. Byrne.

"Why, yes," Harry smilingly confessed.

"That's strange, for I've seen no sign of one."

"You would if you were to look very closely for it," laughed the boy. "But I have practically concealed it, insulating it perfectly. You cannot even find a trace of the aerial wire or earth connection in this room. I don't like the look of wires hanging about."

The music jazzed delightfully. In spite of herself the

lonely visitor felt cheered. She even began to tap her foot to the lilt of the pleasing tune.

So the time passed pleasantly until the nine o'clock time signal was given and the news and weather forecast presented.

"I think you had better turn it off now, Harry," suggested Mrs. Franklin. "The music is very pleasing, but we have had enough of it."

"All right, mater."

Harry moved towards the set, and as he did so the deep voice which had given out the news said, with startling clearness

"I have to give out a SOS message—if one can call it such. It is not a message calling upon the party immediately concerned to make a journey. But it is certainly the most remarkable message that has ever been broadcast."

Harry Franklin stopped in the act of shutting off the wireless current.

"How interesting! I wonder what it can be?" murmured Harry's mother.

"The message comes to us from Baruda, in Central Africa, where it was received and dispatched to the nearest town, and thence relayed to England, after verification, thus enabling us to give it out to-night," the voice went on.

Mrs. Byrne shifted in her chair, leaning slightly forward, her face white and strained, her eyes big with fear.

Harry, whose fingers had strayed towards the cabinet, turned and looked at Adam, afraid.

"The message intimately concerns the wife and son of George Willis Byrne, big-game hunter and explorer, of the Grange, Studley, near Featherstone, who, it will be remembered, left this country four years ago to-day with his daughter, and, after wandering into the wild country north-west of Pocatella, were lost, their party of natives being murdered to a man."

Harry stood transfixed now, his face as white as Mrs. Byrne's. Adam had sprung to his mother's chair, and, bending, had set his arms around her. She, staring up at him, with her left hand clutching at the region of her heart, seemed about to faint.

"To-day, the fourth anniversary, and the news has come, mother, through the air," whispered Adam.

"Yes, Adam; but what news—what—"

"The message we have been called upon to broadcast is as follows: 'George Willis Byrne, who is writing this in the hope that the messenger who bears it may pass through unknown regions and many dangers to safety, and so deliver it into the hands of a white man, begs who ever may receive it to see that a message is broadcast at once to England, telling Georgina, his beloved wife, and Adam, his much loved son, that he and his daughter Rosa are alive and well, but without the power or means of leaving the strange people and wild country to which they have been borne. The bearer of this who is risking his life in our service will explain, if any can understand his tongue, what has befallen us, and may, in the event, guide a party of rescuers back to free us. May the good Lord provide.'

"Signed, George Willis Byrne, in the city called Barcombba, north of the Silver Glacier, beneath the mountain of the Hidden Crest, for which steer."

The voice ceased, and, with a cry of wonder, Mrs. Byrne arose.

"Adam—Adam, can it be possible?" Adam's mother was shaking fearfully, her face drawn, tears welling into her eyes. "I cannot explain it, but for the last month I have been strangely restless, and to-day I have suffered frightfully, as if some strange event were about to happen. Can the message be true? Your father and Rosa, my girl, my dear lass, my love, still alive and well?"

Adam's face was pale, too, and set.

"It must be true, mother," he said. "For surely nobody would dare to broadcast such a cruel lie."

"It must be true," agreed Harry Franklin, his cheeks burning feverishly, his eyes alight. "And now we soon shall find them."

"Listen!"

The voice began to speak again, echoing strangely in the room, delivering surely the most astonishing message that had ever been sent through the ether.

"Such was the main message received at Baruda, and written upon a piece of notepaper, bearing the watermark of a well-known firm. It was scratched by a quill pen and written in ink. Upon the other side of the sheet was written the following: 'We who are prisoners in the hands of a strange people, who rescued us from death and who treat us kindly, are sending this message—the fourth we have sent from this unknown land—in the hope that it may bring us rescue from our captivity. I have taught the

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bearer a smattering of English and some Portuguese, so that he may make himself understood should his native tongue, a strange and curious lingo, be incapable of understanding. He will tell you the rest.'

Again there was a pause. Mrs. Franklin had risen once more. The two women, the boy and his friend, but recently of man's estate, stood in a row staring at the magic cabinet.

"The message arrived at Baruda a month ago. A settler there, a man named Beavan, took every possible step to ensure its rapid transit, but delays in journeying from that remote and wretched place to the confines of civilisation were naturally many, and then there was the question of verification before the message could be broadcast. The handwriting of the message was examined by men who knew George Willis Byrne intimately, and has been compared with letters written by him and proved to be identical. So the message has been issued, relayed, and finally transmitted by this company."

"Mrs. Byrne and her son, as well as all lovers of broadcasting, will be interested to know that an expeditionary force has already been sent out to try and locate the unknown country where it seems that George Willis Byrne and his daughter are held prisoners. The moment news comes to hand it will be sent on with all speed. Meanwhile, it is to be regretted that the messenger who staggered into Baruda, stricken with fever, dying from starvation and exposure, and wounded by wild beasts, died the morning after his arrival at the hut of the settler Walter Beavan. Indeed, he had only the strength left to utter the words 'Letter, baas,' and to produce the carefully protected message from the leather case in which it was rolled, and which he had carried sewn in the loin-cloth he wore, before sinking into a stupor from which he never recovered. Astonishing to relate—and it is not the least interesting phase of an astonishing and romantic story—he proved to be a native of a race such as none who have explored or travelled in any part of Africa have yet seen."

The voice trailed away, and was succeeded by silence, after which the blare of a jazz band startled the two women and the two boys, who were yet too amazed by the astonishing story they had heard to speak another word.

With a low cry Harry Franklin leapt to the cabinet he had made and turned off the current from the dull emitters.

"Oh, Adam, my boy—my son!" cried Mrs. Byrne, looking as greatly distressed now that good news had arrived as before when she was a prey to an unquenchable sorrow. "If only it were true—if only your father and Rosa, my darling, could be reached and saved!"

"I am sure it is true," said Adam, his face radiant. "I felt this evening, after you had spoken, when I looked into the smiling eyes of my father's effigy, so true and so lifelike, that it was so. Mother, we have wealth. If dad and Rosa are alive we can find them."

"But if they are prisoners in an unknown land, far from where white men have ever previously trodden, what then?"

"I'll find them, mother," said Adam, with conviction.

He was young. He did not know what fear meant. The blood ran fast and warm in his veins. Besides, he had something of that pioneer spirit which had driven his lost father to do and dare so much in the wild places. Why should he not go forth and search until he found?

"If you were to go and be lost, as they were, I should be left alone."

"I'll not lose myself, mother."

Harry Franklin, meanwhile, had been thinking hard. The story had thrilled him to the bones. His handsome face was set and stern. He was thinking of Rosa Byrne, the girl he had loved ever since they were children together, who had pledged herself to him the night before she sailed with her father for the Cape—a prisoner in the hands of wild men. She would be safe from harm, he knew, as long as her father was with her. And the fact that her father was alive, so many years after he had disappeared after the murder of his devoted followers, was proof that he held some sort of an ascendancy over the people into whose hands they had fallen. But supposing George Byrne were to die. What then?

An expedition had gone forth already. If it failed—and the probabilities were, since exhaustive search had been made at the time Byrne disappeared, that it must fail—others would follow it.

Yet nothing that the brave and unselfish searchers could do in that way would be equal to an effort made by Adam—Byrne's own son—and he himself—Harry Franklin—who would lay down his life willingly to save Rosa and bring her back safe and sound to civilisation.

"Of what are you thinking, Harry?" asked Mrs. Franklin, eyeing her boy tenderly.

"I was wondering," murmured Harry, "what Adam

thinks of doing? It's early to speak about it, I know, but I would like to hear his views."

"I want to go out to Baruda—at once!" Adam replied, his face lighting up.

"I knew you would say that, Adam. Mother, if Adam goes—and I think he ought to go—I want to go with him."

"But your career at home!" cried the mother, in dismay.

"Mother, I have no career at home. I have responsibilities, I know, and must meet them. I have a lot to do in the town and in the shire; but all those things can carry on until I return. I want to go with Adam to Baruda."

"It is a fever-infested country, I believe. Beyond it are swamps and then impenetrable forests. Farther still are snow-capped peaks and lonely, desolate regions, where none can live for long, and even wild animals are scarce. There are miasmatic rivers, infested with insects, teeming with crocodiles and great man-killing beasts. Then there is the desert, where none can live who are not properly equipped and inured to the climate. Whence, north, south, east, or west of Baruda, would you go in search of your father, Adam?"

Mrs. Byrne spoke with conviction. Once she had been within ten days' march of that far outpost of civilisation known as Baruda, where it seemed a solitary white man lived. That was when she had accompanied Adam's father on his second big-game hunting expedition. Then the torrential, fever-laden rains had turned them back, and so she had never reached the wild country beyond Baruda and Pocatella, in which Byrne's column of devoted natives had been massacred, and wherein all trace of the explorer and his daughter had been lost.

"I don't know which way I would head, mother. It would depend upon what news came to hand when we got there. But we would go well equipped with guns, stores, provisions, and medicines of all kinds, spare clothing, and presents for the natives. We would take with us wireless apparatus, which might help. We would fly our own aeroplanes and search the land in every direction from the air."

"Your petrol supplies would be bound to give out and land you in the deuce's own mess, Adam," smiled Harry Franklin. "But I agree it would be useful to take one or two machines—say two—all the same. If the journey were far to the land in which Rosa is interned—why, then, we could make light of distance through the air. It might enable us to reach them. But, first, let us decide. Mother, would you object to my going with Adam to Baruda?"

"No, my boy."

"Mother, would you object to my going to Baruda?" asked Adam of his mother.

"No, my son; and if I were younger I would go with you."

"It might be advisable to wait until further news arrives, if any, or to wait until the expeditionary force sent out to search for George Byrne and Rosa has made its report," said Mrs. Franklin.

"It may never report," said Adam warmly. "Before ever it succeeded or failed, we would have reached Baruda if we started at once. If it failed we would be there to take advantage of any information it might be able to give us, and to move on without delay. Mother, I would like to begin to make my preparations for the journey to-morrow."

Mrs. Byrne, setting her hands upon her boy's strong shoulders, looked earnestly into his eyes. What she read there made her smile wistfully.

"Adam, you really want to go?"

"I must go, mother! I could never stay at home now."

"Then," decided the mother, "go you shall!"

"And Harry," said Mrs. Franklin, "shall go with you, Adam. And we two mothers will stay at home and comfort each other every day whilst we wait and long for news of your success and safe return."

The Coming of the Great White Bird!

BAAS—baas! White baas! Howh! The big bird comes!"

The excited and bony native who brought the news came rushing to where Walter Beavan, settler, sat cleaning out the barrel of a rifle.

Like magic the word had travelled through the land that great flying birds that were not of the flesh, which bore no feathers and ate no food, though they consumed huge quantities of the water that stinks and bursts into flame if one set fire to it, had taken possession of the air.

None in the neighbourhood of Baruda had yet met any native who had seen one of these great birds. Yet ever since the strange man with the skin of pink and brown had staggered fever-stricken to the Bass' hut with that written message from the great white traveller whom the spirits had taken to their secret place, there had been talk of one of these great birds of the air coming to the settlement.

Now Giba, the native servant of Walter Beavan, said that the bird had come.

The bearded and lightly-clad settler frowned as he cast a sun-tanned visage upwards and stared at the sky.

"Let it come, Giba," he said.

"But white baas—it will kill—"

"Then, if it must kill, let it kill; but it will not kill, O Giba." And Walter Beavan smiled grimly.

Beavan was a giant of a man, whose huge bony frame was not sufficiently covered it would seem at a casual glance. Yet what flesh it bore consisted of fibre hardened against fever and disease and muscles made of steel. Some of the clothing he wore he had made himself. It was of light material, and hung loosely upon him. His stout leather boots with huge soles were the only heavy things he wore.

There was a gleam of interest in his eyes as he scanned the tops of the trees, for a great forest stretched for miles it seemed below and away from the clearing in which he sat.

Above the forest were the cloud-flecked heavens and the blinding sun.

Beavan's hut stood at the top of the clearing or rising ground which had been opened out by native labour, and was as level as a parade-ground.

Not a tree-stump remained. The hut built of logs could be shut in during the rainy or bad season of the year or left open in the heat of summer. It was protected by a palisade whose gate was shut at night, when two great watch-dogs prowled or sat on guard whilst Beavan slept.

Over there near the forest and sheltered from the bad weather, under the lee of the forest, as it were, were ranged many native huts, thatched and sanitary enough, for Beavan had seen to that.

The only figures showing in the clearing when the native Giba ran up with his report—and how he had heard the news none can tell—were Giba and Beavan himself.

But, like magic now, natives, men and women, boys and girls, with barely a stitch of clothing on their bodies, came out of the shelter of the huts and stared gaping skywards.

"Be hanged if he isn't right!" growled Beavan, as he shaded his eyes and looked—for there in the far distance appeared a speck which grew every moment larger!

(Be sure you read next week's thrilling instalment of this powerful adventure yarn. Meanwhile, put your chums wise to this grand new treat. After reading the first instalment, they, like you, will anxiously await for next week to come round.)

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SKIMPOLE'S THOUGHT-READING MACHINE!

(Continued from page 22.)

Monty Lowther came along the Shell dormitory. But as they entered the passage Talbot and Gore came rushing out.

"He's got away!" shouted Talbot.

"What?" roared Tom Merry. "What about your cage?"

"He collapsed—like Grindy's bed!" stormed Gore.

"I feared it!" said Monty Lowther. "Another invention gone west!"

"You needn't crow!" snorted Talbot. "What about your beastly pen?"

"Boys—boys!" commanded Mr. Railton. "Silence! What is all this commotion?"

"The man's escaped, sir!" panted Talbot.

Mr. Railton strode into the study, gave one glance at the patent burglar catcher, and then picked his way to the window. He looked out into the dark night.

"Shall we give chase, sir?" asked Tom Merry eagerly.

"No, certainly not!" replied the Housemaster. "It is a pity you boys couldn't keep hold of the man while you had him imprisoned! It is pitch dark to-night, and it would be a waste of time to go after him."

"I thought my cage would hold him, sir," said Talbot loudly.

"Well, we can't do any good by grumbling at your cage, Talbot," said Mr. Railton. "But perhaps you will realise that these things are not quite so easy to design and manufacture. You mustn't put too much faith in them. A constructor is always liable to imagine that his own product is infallible."

"Yes, sir," said Talbot meekly.

"Well, you're a bright pair!" said Tom Merry, with a snort.

"This man, I understand, came here to steal Skimpole's invention?" went on Mr. Railton. "I say, I understand it, but that is wrong. I can't understand it at all."

"Neither can we, sir," said Tom Merry. "I expect that was just a yarn."

"Obviously it was," replied the Housemaster. "Skimpole evidently got into conversation with this shady character, and it is quite likely that he unwittingly gave away some details of the school geography—which, of course, was exactly what the man was after. He got his information, and broke into the school to rifle the silver drawers and the other receptacles for valuables. I am afraid it will be quite useless to inform the police, even; but I shall, of course, do so in the morning."

"It's a pity we can't give chase, sir," said Tom Merry. "You had better go to bed," replied Mr. Railton. "The scoundrel is a mile away by this time, at least."

"Well, my burglar catcher wasn't a complete failure, sir," said Talbot defensively. "The chap may have escaped, but he was prevented from robbing the school. You've got to admit that, sir!"

Mr. Railton's eyes twinkled.

"Yes, Talbot, you are undoubtedly right there," he replied. "So, although your burglar catcher has failed to hold its victim, it has at least been of sterling service. Now get back to your beds, boys," he added.

And so they went to bed.

By the morrow the little incident was almost forgotten. It was incredible that anybody could really believe that Skimpole's thought-reading machine was really worth anything. Tom Merry, at least, felt that there was something deeper behind it all. But as nothing else happened he forgot it.

And Herbert Skimpole continued his experiments. Even he did not imagine that the future might hold some further excitement!

THE END.

(Now look out for the next exciting story in this ripping series entitled: "RIVAL INVENTORS!" You'll enjoy every line of it, chums. Don't forget—order next week's GEM Library to-day!)

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