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The GEM 2^D



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MY LEADER!**

LAUGH TILL YOUR SIDES ACHE AT THIS PRICELESS LONG—

PRIME MINISTER



By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Now that there is a Parliament of St. Jim's, the competition for the post of Prime Minister is hot. Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, and even Skimpole the freak all say, "I am the man!" Who gets the "job"?

CHAPTER 1.

Skimpole Comes to Grief!

"BROTHERS!"

"Hullo! What's that?"

"Bai Jove, it's Skimpole again!"

"What's he gassing about this time?"

"Brothers—"

"Hullo, Skimmy! What's the wheeze this time?"

Morning school was over at St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. had come out into the quadrangle, and their attention was immediately attracted by the sight of a gathering crowd of juniors. Skimpole was the centre of it. The amateur Determinist of St. Jim's was on the warpath again.

Skimpole had mounted upon a water-butt, almost under the sill of a window belonging to the School House. It was a coign of vantage from which a speaker could address a large meeting, and Skimpole never failed to attract a crowd when he once started.

His meetings frequently ended in his being ragged by the crowd he had called together; but as a true Determinist he was bound to face persecution in the good cause, as he expressed it himself.

"Brothers—"

"What are you driving at, Skimmy?" asked Tom Merry.

"The ass hasn't any brothers at St. Jim's!" said Herries, shaking his head. "I think he's more off his rocker than ever."

"I am speaking in a general sense," said Skimpole. "Are we not all brothers—all born absolutely equal, and all of us now in chains?"

"Blessed if I can see the chains!" said Blake. "I suppose you are not referring to our watchchains, are you, Skimpole?"

"Please do not interrupt me with frivolous remarks, Blake. I am referring to the chains of ignorance and stupidity and political servitude—"

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"Complimentary, ain't he?" murmured Figgins, joining the crowd. "I say, Blake, what a chance to damp his enthusiasm!"

"Eh, what's that?" asked Blake.

Figgins nodded to the window above Skimpole.

"I was thinking that if a chap opened that window—"

"Yes?" said Blake, with interest.

"And had a water-can, say—"

Blake chuckled.

"Figgins, old chap, you're a giddy genius!"

Blake disappeared from the crowd. Figgins chuckled, and watched Skimpole. The freak of the Shell was far too deeply engrossed in his subject to heed that brief whisper between the two Fourth-Formers.

"But the light is coming," he said, waving his hands in the air to emphasise his remark. "The light is coming! In the St. Jim's Parliament I hope to convert most of the school to the new creed—"

"Rats!"

"Therefore I appeal to your suffrages," said Skimpole.

"I wonder what that means?" said Pratt, scratching his head. "Is that Determinism, or Silly Dufferism?"

"I mean that I ask for your votes."

"Why the dickens can't you say so, then?"

"You are quite right, Pratt; I stand corrected. I should be careful to speak in short words and simple language, suitable to undeveloped intellects, when I am speaking to you fellows."

There was a roar.

"Hark at the rotter!"

"Yank him off that water-butt!"

"Bung him through the lid!"

"Pray be moderate! Violence is no argument. Besides, how are you to improve yourselves unless I point out to you your weaknesses—the fact that you are all ignorant, foolish, rude, and brutal—"

"Yank him down!"

of ST. JIM'S!



"Hold on!" shouted Figgins. "Let him rip! Don't have him off that butt, or you'll spoil a good joke!"

As Figgins spoke the window above Skimpole quietly opened. Most of the crowd saw it, and guessed what Figgins was driving at, and the threatened rush was stopped. Skimpole—who, of course, could not see behind him—had no idea that the window was open, and that Blake was grinning there over his head.

"These faults in your natures," went on Skimpole undauntedly, "are due to a faulty training. Children brought up by parents with bad habits take to vice like ducks to water—I say, like ducks to water!"

And Skimpole stamped emphatically on the lid of the water-butt. There was an ominous creak.

"By Jove, Skimpole, deah boy, you had bettah be careful!" said D'Arcy. "You'll be inside that butt if you stomp again like that. That lid has seen its best days, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole realised the truth of D'Arcy's remark, and he did not stomp again. He contented himself with waving his arms.

"Therefore, everything can be traced to the combined influences of heredity and environment—"

"My only hat! Listen to him!"

"Can you spell those words, Skimmy?"

"Everything," said Skimpole, unheeding, "can be traced to the combined influence hereditament and enviroyny—I mean, heredity and enviroynedity—that is to say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And this proves the correctness of the Determinists' creed, that nobody is to blame for anything. And everything being the effect of a cause, that cause is to blame; or, rather, the cause of that cause, which makes it perfectly clear—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I like the perfect clearness of it!" grinned Lowther.

"Clear as mud!" said Tom Merry. "Go on, Skimmy!"

"What I maintain is—Ow! Ow! Ohohohoooooh!"

A water-can had appeared over the window-sill, and it was turned upon the freak of the Shell. A shower of water descended upon Skimpole, cutting short the flow of his eloquence remorselessly in the middle.

"Ow—ow—groooogh!"

Skimpole gave a wild jump, and lost his footing on the water-butt, and came down upon it in a sitting posture with a heavy bump.

Crash!

The lid was old and worn, and it was never made to stand usage like that. It went through, and Skimpole went through with it.

"Ow! Ow!"

And still the shower of water descended from above.

"Ow! Help! Ow!"

The juniors were too convulsed to lend the unfortunate Determinist a hand for some moments. The yell of laughter that went up might have been heard all over St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Help! Ow!"

Tom Merry ran to Skimpole's aid. He grasped the brainy member of the Shell by the legs and arms, and saved him from sinking too far into the butt.

"Here, stop that!" he roared, as a shower descended from the water-can over his head. "Stop it, Blake, you ass!"

Blake grinned from the window.

"Sorry, Merry! Is it going over you?"

"Yes!" yelled Tom Merry. "Stop it!"

"I'm awfully sorry!" said Blake, without moving. "How do you account for it going over you, Tom Merry?"

"You—you villain! Stop it!"

"The water will be all gone soon. I suppose it's going over you because you're in a line with the spout," said Blake thoughtfully. "That's the only way I can account for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"Come and lend me a hand with Skimmy!" shouted Tom Merry.

"No, thanks; too much water about!"

"Ow! Help!"

"Blake, I'll jump on you for this!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ow! You utter villain! Oh!"

With a last gurgle the water ceased to pour from the can. Blake chuckled.

"There, it's all over now," he said. "You seem to have got pretty nearly as much as Skimpole, Tom Merry. Awfully awkward of you to get in the way of the shooting!"

"You rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Help me out!" said Skimpole, gasping. "I'm fearfully wet!"

Tom Merry dragged him from the barrel and bumped him on the ground.

"There you are!"

"You needn't be so rough, Merry. You have caused me to ache in the spot where you bumped me on the ground!"

"You ass! Look how wet I am! All because you're a silly chump!" said Tom Merry. "I'll jump on Blake when I've changed my clothes!"

And Tom Merry ran into the School House, and Skimpole followed more slowly; and a roar of laughter followed them both.

CHAPTER 2.

The Irish Party.

BLAKE came out of the School House grinning. Figgins thumped him on the back, and Digby gave him an appreciative poke in the ribs.

"Bai Jove, that was wathah funnay!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I nevah saw Skimpole shut up so quickly before, deah boys!"

"Well, he's shut up, for once, now!" said Digby. "I say, I've got something to say to you, Blake. No New House bounders admitted."

And the chums of Study No. 6 walked away together.

"What's the row?" asked Blake, with an inquiring look at his chum. "Something about our latest stunt—the St. Jim's Parliament election?"

"Yes; it's about my standing for Belfast."

"Of course you're going to stand! We shall have to talk to Reilly and make him see reason."

"Of course," said Herries. "If Dig calls himself Maloney, I don't see why they can't be satisfied."

"Murphy, you ass; not Maloney!"

"Maloney's as good as Murphy any day in the week!"

"Well, it's Murphy," said Dig. "My grandmother's name was Murphy, and as I'm a quarter Irish I don't see why I shouldn't represent Belfast."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Reilly's holding another meeting of the Irish Party in his study," said Dig. "I've just heard about it."

"Oh, is that the news?"

"That's it. What's going to be done?"

"Reilly is!" said Blake, looking warlike. "We'll go along to Reilly's study and interview the cheeky young bounders. I'd like to see a chum of mine left out of St. Jim's Parliament, that's all!"

"Yaas, wathah! Let's go and give the meetin' a feahful thwashin'!"

"There's a dozen of them," said Digby.

"Oh, we're only going to explain things now!" said Blake. "The punching business will come afterwards. Reilly is usually a sensible sort of chap, and I dare say he will see reason. We'll try, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah! If you like to leave the explainin' to me, I'll do my vewy best to make him see weason, deah boys."

"Yes, we're likely to leave it to you!"

"What you weally wequiah in a mattah like this is a fellow of tact and judgment," said D'Arcy. "Now, when I offah my services—"

But the juniors were striding on, and D'Arcy's offer was lost. They reached the study occupied by the boy from Belfast, and Blake knocked at the door.

"Come in!" rang out Reilly's voice.

Blake pushed open the door.

"Sure, and ye can come in if ye can find room!" said Reilly, looking up from his seat at the table. "It's pretty crowded entirely!"

Reilly was quite right on that point.

The study was not a large apartment, and it already had a dozen fellows in it, and it was absolutely crammed. Three juniors were sitting on the window-sill, others were on the table, and others still were standing. There was literally not enough room for the chums of Study No. 6 to enter, so Blake went in and the rest stood in the open doorway.

"I've come to speak to you chaps," said Blake, looking round upon the juniors crammed into the study.

They were all Irish boys belonging to the Fourth and the Shell, and both the School House and New House were represented there. House distinctions faded before the higher claims of patriotism.

Reilly looked a little doubtful.

"This is my meeting," he remarked. "I don't know whether I can allow you chaps to come and do the gassing."

"Look here, you kids," said Blake, "you've got to elect Dig—I mean Murphy—to the seat for Belfast. Do you hear me?"

"Rats!"

It was a general chorus of "Rats!" from every fellow in the study.

"Dig is a true-born Irishman, and his name is Murphy."

"Rats!"

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"Do you mean to say you won't?" roared Blake.

Reilly grinned.

"No, we won't! I'm the candidate for Belfast, and the whole constituency has promised to vote for me."

"Sure, and we have!"

Blake was a little nonplussed.

The Irish Party were holding together under the able leadership of Reilly, and it looked as though Study No. 6 would have to give in for once.

"I can't allow this," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "I am bound, as leader of the juniors of this House, to stand up for the freedom of election. You are free to elect Dig—Murphy as Member for Belfast."

"And free to refuse!" grinned Reilly.

"Nothing of the sort! That isn't freedom, that's insubordination!" said Blake darkly. "That sort of thing leads to fellows getting their heads punched."

"Punch away, then!" said Reilly cheerfully. "Look here, I'm willing to leave it to Tom Merry to decide if you like."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rats! As leader of the School House juniors—"

"As leader of the Irish Party—"

"I'm not going to stand—"

"You're interrupting the meeting!"

"If you like to withdraw your candidature—"

"Yaas, wathah! Withdwaw your candidatuah, deah boy."

"Rats! Travel!"

"Then I'll jolly soon—"

"Which way are you going out of this study—on your feet or on your neck?" demanded the Member for Belfast.

"I'm not going!"

"Yes, you are! Collar him, kids!"

"Stand back, or—"

"Yaas, wathah! Stand back, or—"

"Kick them out!"

The Irish Party closed round the four juniors. The odds were too great. The chums of Study No. 6, resisting desperately, were hurled forth into the corridor.

Blake picked himself up from the linoleum.

"Come on!" he roared.

And he rushed back into the attack.

The doorway of Reilly's study was crammed with juniors. They met the rush of the four chums without moving an inch, and the quartet were hurled back as though from a solid wall. Reilly grinned at them from amid his sturdy constituents.

"Better get along, dear boys," he advised.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy. "I'm feelin' in quite a fluttah. My twousahs are soiled, and my waistcoat is wumpled."

Blake glared at the victorious Irish Party. There was no disgrace in defeat when the odds were so great, but Blake did not like the situation. But it was evidently useless to attack again.

"Come on, kids!" he said. "Let 'em cackle!"

And the Irish Party took full advantage of that permission, for their cackle followed the chums all along the corridor.

CHAPTER 3.

D'Arcy Stands On His Rights!

TOM MERRY looked into Study No. 6 a few minutes later. The hero of the Shell had changed his clothes and looked himself again. The Fourth-Formers were putting themselves to rights after their rough experience at the hands of the Irish Party.

Blake's hand strayed towards a cricket stump, but Tom Merry made a gesture in sign of peace. He evidently bore no malice for the ducking.

"It's all right, Blake! You look rather used up!"

"We feel like it, too!" granted Blake. "I suppose you've seen Reilly?"

"Yes. He tells me that you chaps have been trying to interfere with the freedom of election among the constituents of Belfast."

"No; we've been trying to maintain the freedom of election," explained Blake. "We're not going to have the electors overpersuaded by Reilly, you know. They're free to elect Dig to the representation of Belfast—Dig is assuming the name of Murphy for the beastly purpose, you know—"

"Only they want Reilly for their member," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Nothing of the sort. They don't really know what they want. It's a very old political maxim that the public never know what they want, and have to be led by the nose like donkeys. The public is an ass."

"And a jolly obstinate ass sometimes!" said Digby. "I really don't think there's much chance of convincing those

chaps that I'm the fellow they want for their representative."

"We shall have to keep on pegging away," said Blake. "You're going to be Member for Belfast, and that's settled."

"The Irish Party seem to be set on having Reilly," said Tom Merry. "Suppose we found another constituency for Dig?"

"Well, that would alter the case, of course," said Blake, with a nod. "So long as Dig's in the parliament, I'm not particularly set on his representing Belfast. As a matter of fact, his grand-maternal relation—"

"His what?"

"His grand-maternal relation," said Blake, "came from Cork. Cork is a fine, big city, and it would be an honour

"It would make the thing more complete," said Tom Merry musingly. "Kerruish is a decent chap, too, and I should like him to come in. We can make up a constituency of the fellows who've been to the Isle of Man for their holidays."

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good idea!"

"Then we'll get Kerruish elected. Our parliament will have the pull over the other one at Westminster in having a Manx member. Well, I'm glad that's settled about Reilly. It's 'reilly' satisfactory."

"What an extremely wotten pun."

"Well, it's not mine, it's Lowther's," said Tom Merry, laughing.



"Which way are you going out of this study—on your feet or on your necks?" demanded Reilly. "We aren't going!"
"Collar them, kids!" In a few moments the chums of Study No. 6 were hurled forth into the corridor!

to anybody to be a Member for Cork. Digby can still sit under the name of Murphy, and represent Cork."

"Then we'll rig up a new constituency," said Tom Merry.

"No need to always have an even dozen in the constituency. All the chaps from the South of Ireland can vote for Cork, and there are six or seven. We'll consider that settled. And Reilly can represent Belfast."

"I'm agreeable," said Dig. "I'd just as soon sit for Cork."

"Then it's settled, and we can have some peace," said Tom Merry. "By the way, do you know if there are any chaps at St. Jim's from the Isle of Man?"

"There's Kerruish of the Fourth."

"Yes, I know there is; and he wants to represent the Isle of Man in St. Jim's Parliament, but I can't find him any constituency."

"Oh, that's rot! They have Home Rule in the Isle of Man—a House of Keys, or Locks, or something. Can't have a Manx member."

"Don't hurwy away, Tom Mewwy. The elections are fixed for to-morrow afternoon—"

"That's right."

"I have just been nominated for Piccadilly," said Arthur Augustus. "I have no objection to standing for that constituency, you know, but you have not found me any constituents yet. There are no fellows in the school from Piccadilly."

Tom Merry scratched his curly head thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid we overlooked that important fact, Gussy."

"Yaas, wathah; but, you see, I'm not the person to be ovahlooked," said D'Arcy. "I should uttably wefuse to be ovahlooked!"

"My dear Gussy, it's all right. If we can't find you a constituency, you can stand down. The parliament will be all right without a Gus in it."

D'Arcy screwed his eyeglass into his eye and surveyed the hero of the Shell with an extremely disdainful expression.

"I should wefuse to stand down!" he said. "I should uttally and distinctly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy!"

"Then I don't see what's to be done. Do you, Blake?"

Blake shook his head solemnly.

"I'm afraid I don't. Perhaps we could make Gussy a House of Lords all by himself. How would that work?"

"Well, that would have its advantages, because he would hold the meetings all by himself, and nobody would have to listen to him talking—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Then we'll consider the suggestion adopted."

"Nothin' of the sort. I wefuse to be regarded as a House of Lords all by myself. If you wefuse to find me a constituency, I shall appeal to the whole body of the free and enlightened electors of St. Jim's."

"That will be worth seeing," grinned Tom Merry.

D'Arcy sniffed.

"If you care to come out in the quadwangle, you can see it!" he said.

And the swell of the School House marched out of the study.

Blake chuckled.

"Come on," said Tom Merry. "Gussy on his dignity is a sight worth seeing, and I'm rather curious to see how the free and enlightened electors of St. Jim's receive him."

The juniors followed Arthur Augustus into the quadrangle. They found him mounted upon a tub, eyeglass in eye, and a crowd of curious juniors round him. The May sun gleamed upon his gold watchchain and the startling hues of his waistcoat.

"Gentlemen of St. Jim's—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Havin' been unweasonably ovahlooked by the nomination committee, I am compelled to appeal to you for your suffrages. I stand before you as a—"

"As a silly ass," said Pratt.

"Nothin' of the sort! I stand before you as a—"

"As a howling duffer!"

"Certainly not! I stand before you as a candidate for election to the Parliament of St. Jim's; but, unfortunately, I have no constituency, havin' been weeklessly ovahlooked in that wathah important particulah. I think that the general voice of the electors of St. Jim's should weturn me to parliament, and then a constituency could be found for me."

"Colney Hatch would be about your mark," said Kerr.

"What price Gussy as Member for Colney Hatch?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Member for Colney Hatch! Hear, hear!"

"I should wefuse to be considahed Member for Colney Hatch!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I weally considah—"

"Make it Bedlam, then," said Fatty Wynn. "We're not particulah on a point like that. What price Gussy as a Member for Bedlam?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Pway do not wot, deah boys. This is wathah a sewious mattah, and I should like to wogard it sewiously. I am afraid the school parliament will not be much of a success unless I am there to keep an eye on the youngstahs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And so I considah that—"

"What is all this noise here?"

It was a sour, unpleasant voice. And it was a sour, unpleasant face that the juniors saw as they looked round. Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, had come upon the scene, and his look showed that there was trouble coming. Mr. Ratcliff was always specially "down" upon Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three, having had many difficulties with them, chiefly due to his own domineering, interfering nature.

As a matter of fact, the New House master had no authority to interfere with School House boys, especially on the School House side of the quadrangle; but Mr. Ratcliff had a love of interfering that he never tried to control. There were few juniors who would even have thought of offering any opposition to a Housemaster; but the sublime coolness of the swell of St. Jim's was equal to even that.

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle and looked at the Housemaster.

"Did you address me, sir?" he asked.

"I addressed all of you. What is all this noise here?"

"I believe the noise was caused by these youngstahs shout-in," sir," said D'Arcy. "I am makin' a political speech, if you please, sir."

"Then stop all such nonsense at once, and all of you boys disperse!" said the New House master harshly.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled, and so did Blake's. This wholly unjustifiable interference "got their backs up" at once. But D'Arcy never turned a hair.

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"Pway, Mr. Watcliff—"

"Not a word, D'Arcy! Get down off that ridiculous tub at once!"

"If you please, sir, I think I am quite within my wights in addressin' a political meetin' on the School House side of the quadwangle," he said.

The New House master frowned.

"I suppose you do not intend to disobey me, D'Arcy?"

"Undah the cires, sir, I don't see how I can bwreak up my meetin' consistently with my personal dig," said D'Arcy. "You see, sir—"

"Will you get off that tub, D'Arcy?"

"I may say, sir, that we have Mr. Wailton's permission to address meetin's in the quadwangle on our own side—"

"D'Arcy—"

"So long as we do not make too much noise, sir. If you think we are makin' too much noise, I will impress upon my wespectful heawahs to modewate their twansports."

His respectful hearers began to chuckle. The crowd did not disperse. They all knew very well that Mr. Ratcliff was exceeding his authority, and, having found a leader in D'Arcy, they were inclined to see the matter out.

The Housemaster's brow became black as night.

"D'Arcy!" he almost shouted.

"Yaas, Mr. Watcliff. I heah you perfectly well," said D'Arcy languidly. "If you will allow me to explain to you—"

"Obey me instantly!"

Arthur Augustus did not move. There was a thrill in the crowd. To disobey a master, even when he was in the wrong, was a serious matter.

"If you will allow me to explain, sir—"

Mr. Ratcliff made a stride towards D'Arcy.

"If you do not immediately obey me—"

"What is the matter here?"

Mr. Railton's voice broke in quietly. Mr. Ratcliff swung round towards the School House master with a face inflamed with rage.

"The matter!" cried Mr. Ratcliff. "The matter is that this boy, belonging to your House, has directly refused to obey me!"

"Pway allow me to explain, Mr. Wailton."

"Certainly. But be brief, D'Arcy."

"Certainly, sir. You see, we were holdin' a meetin' in the quad, as we have your permish to do, and Mr. Watcliff intewupted us in a wathah unweasonable mannah—"

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "Did you ever hear of such nerve?"

"I twied to explain to him, but he gwew wathah excited, sir," said D'Arcy. "I shall be glad if you will tell him that we have your permish to hold meetings on our own side of the quadwangle, sir, and then pewpaws he will wetiah and allow the proceedings to go on."

The boys gasped at D'Arcy's speech. The swell of St. Jim's was unconscious of displaying an unheard-of nerve in his remarks. He was speaking quite naturally, saying what he thought, and he considered that Mr. Ratcliff, as a reasonable man, could not fail to see that he was quite in the right. Mr. Ratcliff, however, did not look either convinced or pleased.

"This utter insolence—" he began hotly.

"Weally, sir, I fail to see insolence in my vewy sensible wemarks. I do not appwove of either insolence or impertinence; it is a sign of low bwedin', and certainly I have never been guilty of such an offence against good form."

Mr. Railton tried not to smile.

"I really do not see any reason for interfering with this meeting," he said. "But if the noise troubles you, Mr. Ratcliff, I will certainly disperse it. Please disperse, boys."

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth. The School House master had spoken so to save his colleague's dignity before the boys, but his words were a snub, nevertheless. There was no question of punishing D'Arcy, or even calling him to account.

"If you intend the matter to end here, Mr. Railton—"

"I do not see what other decision I could come to, Mr. Ratcliff!" said the School House master quietly.

"Oh very well!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Very well!"

And he walked away very quickly. A hiss would have followed him, but Mr. Railton's presence restrained it. The School House master walked into his House, and then the boys broke into a general chuckle.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "That was one in the eye for Ratty!"

"Rather!" said Blake. "Good old Gus!"

"Stood up to him like a little man, and no mistake!" said Digby. "We shall have to find Gussy a constituency after this, kids!"

"Rather!"

The juniors surrounded the tub upon which D'Arcy was mounted. The swell of the School House, obedient to his

own Housemaster, was about to descend. Herries and Walsh caught him in their arms as he was getting down.

"Hallo! What the deuce are you doin', deah boys?" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Pway don't be asses!"

"Shoulder high!" exclaimed Digby.

"Right-ho!"

"Weally, deah boys——"

"You're a giddy hero, Gussy!" chuckled Blake. "Shoulder high, kids, and round the quad!"

The laughing juniors shouldered the amazed dude of the School House. The fellow who had calmly faced and argued with a most unpopular master of St. Jim's was a hero in their eyes. As soon as he saw that it was an ovation, and not a ragging, D'Arcy resigned himself contentedly to his fate.

"Pway don't wumple my twousahs more than you can help, deah boys," he said, as he was hoisted upon the shoulders of Walsh and Herries. "Don't bump into my waistcoat. If you could hold me a little less tightly I should be more comfy. No need to twist my beastlay ankles off, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha! March!"

"Carry him under the windows of the New House," suggested Digby. "That will make Ratty wriggle!"

"Yes, and fetch him out with a cane!" said Tom Merry. "Keep on our side of the quad. He can see us, and that's enough."

"Right-ho!"

"Round he goes!"

Arthur Augustus was marched off shoulder high. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye and surveyed the crowd patronisingly from his somewhat perilous perch. The juniors bore him round in triumph and the fact that a glimmer of a face could be seen at the window of Mr. Ratcliffe's study in the New House added to their satisfaction. The New House master was watching them from his window, and the boys could imagine with what feelings.

Arthur Augustus' triumph came to an end suddenly. One of his bearers stumbled, and Gussy's weight bore him over. Walsh rolled on the ground, and D'Arcy rolled over him, and, clutching wildly at Herries to save himself, dragged him down, too.

The swell of the School House sat up, looking rather dazed.

"Round again!" exclaimed Blake.

"Thank you, I have had quite enough," said D'Arcy. "I appreciate your attentions vewy much, but I have had quite enough for the present."

And Arthur Augustus skipped into the School House, and the ovation was over. But after that there could be no question that D'Arcy was to have a seat in the St. Jim's Parliament, if a constituency had to be invented for him at the last moment.

CHAPTER 4.

The Elections.

THE next day—a half-holiday—was fixed for the parliamentary elections at St. Jim's. There was a large crop of impositions in the Junior Forms during morning school. But morning lessons came to an end at last, and the Lower Forms were free to think of the more important—to them—affairs of the school parliament.

The candidates for the various constituencies had been nominated, and most of them were pretty sure of their election. There were rival candidates for some of the constituencies, however, so that the result of the elections was not certain yet. Some, like Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins, were certain to be elected unanimously.

Perhaps the busiest fellow in the school at that time was Herbert Skimpole. The Determinist of St. Jim's was getting anxious about his seat in the school parliament. No constituency at St. Jim's seemed to be particularly "gone" on Determinism.

Skimpole sought for support among the influential members of the Shell and the Fourth Form, but with indifferent success. He looked into Tom Merry's study after dinner, and found the Terrible Three extremely busy. Tom Merry had a big book on the table, ready to record the result of the elections, which were to take place in the gym, and were soon to commence.

"I say, Merry——" began Skimpole.

Tom Merry looked up.

"Clear out, Skimpole!"

"I want to ask you——"

"Oh, what is it? Buck up!"

"Which constituency would you advise me to stand for?"

"Take your choice."

"But will you back me up?"

"Oh, no!"

"Don't be a rotter, Merry. I think you might back me

up. I should make a better Member for London than Walsh, who has put up for it."

"You must tell that to the constituents."

"You have a lot of influence with them——"

"It wouldn't be fair to use it against Walsh. Besides, as a true Determinist you ought to be opposed to the use of influence. Get out!"

Skimpole got out. He ambled along to Study No. 6, and found the chums of the Fourth Form getting ready to go down to the gym.

"Hallo, Blake! I see you're busy," said Skimpole.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "We're just going down to the elections, deah boy. You can come along, if you like, Skimpole. You're not standing for anything, are you?"

"Yes, I am candidate for London."

"Eh?" said Blake. "I thought Walsh was putting up for London."

"So he is; I am his opponent."

"Well, I suppose you'll get chucked out, so it's all right."

"If you fellows would like to back me up——"

"Us fellows wouldn't like to do anything of the sort. We're busy. Travel!"

Skimpole went out into the quad.

The juniors were crowding into the gym. The boys of St. Jim's not concerned in the election were mostly out in the playing fields, and the juniors had the great building all to themselves.

Tom Merry had ordained that each constituency should elect its candidate in turn, and then make room for another, the result being entered in the big book Tom Merry had specially provided for the purpose.

A crowd of juniors stood at the door of the gym to greet the Terrible Three as they came down. There was a cheer as Tom Merry was seen coming, with the book under his arm.

Skimpole stepped into his path.

"Merry, before it is too late——"

"Oh, don't bother me now, old chap!" said Tom Merry good-naturedly. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"But it is extremely important for me to have a seat in St. Jim's Parliament——"

"Get out!" roared twenty voices.

Skimpole blinked round upon the excited electors through his spectacles.

"I can explain the great principles of Determinism to you in short, simple phrases suitable to your intellects. I can penetrate through the depths of ignorance and folly and prejudice, and enlighten you——"

"What!"

"Yes, my brethren, even your ignorance and stupidity cannot be considered invincible. I can let in the light upon your mental darkness——"

"Kick him out!"

"Chuck him in the fountain!"

There was a rush at Skimpole. The freak of the Shell dodged, but the indignant juniors were not to be denied. Skimpole took to his heels, with a yelling mob after him.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"Let's get to the elections——"

"Hallo! Look at Skimmy!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors had cornered the Determinist of the Shell. The ducking in the fountain was not an attractive prospect to Skimpole, and he glared round desperately for an avenue of escape. A water-pipe leading up to the side of the gym offered the only means, and the unhappy propagandist swarmed up it.

The juniors crowded below him, roaring with laughter. Skimpole clung desperately to the pipe.

"Really, my misguided brethren!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Will you promise to leave off talking if we let you off the ducking?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"No!" gasped Skimpole. "As a sincere Determinist it is impossible for me ever to leave off talking——"

"Then go into the fountain——"

"I will cease to explain my views for a time."

"I thought you would. Let him alone, chaps, but if he says another word ending with 'ism,' shove him into the fountain!"

"What-ho!"

And the electors returned to the gym.

Skimpole slid down the pipe, and followed them rather dubiously.

The gym was crowded with the free and enlightened electors of St. Jim's. Tom Merry opened the proceedings with a neat speech, which made a good impression.

"And now let the constituencies roll up," said Jack Blake.

The constituencies rolled up.

They came in alphabetical order, and as most of them had only one candidate, the proceedings were not delayed.

Reilly, needless to say, was elected for Belfast among the earliest, and Figgins for Bristol, and Fatty Wynn for Cardiff. Herries for Chester, and Tom Merry for the Colonies followed, then Digby-Murphy for Cork, and Monty Lowther for Durham.

Kerr was opposed for Glasgow by Macdonald of the Shell, but he carried it by a majority of one, and Figgins and Wynn cheered heartily. Figgins & Co. were now all three assured of seats in the school parliament, and they could afford to take things easily. Manners came next, with a bumping majority for Liverpool.

Jimson and French contested the city of Leeds, and Jimson was at the top of the poll by two votes. Then came the election for London. Walsh had regarded himself as the only candidate, but as the constituency marched up to vote Skimpole and Gore came forward.

There were a dozen voters, one of them being Gore's chum, Mellish, who voted for him, being the only one that did so. The other eleven voted for Walsh, and Skimpole looked at them more in sorrow than in anger.

"You don't know what you're losing, that's all," he said. "Cheer up, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry. "There may be a vacancy later on, and you'll have another chance."

And the freak of the Shell brightened up at the idea. Harrison of the Fourth was elected for Manchester, and then came the election for the Isle of Man. Kerruish, the candidate, was the only Manxman at the school, but Tom Merry's idea had been carried out of forming a constituency of fellows who had been to that beautiful island for their holidays. And Kerruish was elected unanimously. Then came the election of D'Arcy for the rather curious constituency of Piccadilly. But the constituency had been made up of six or seven fellows, and they plumped for D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's had the proud consciousness that he would have the right to inscribe "M.P. St. J." after his name.

Blake's election was last, for Yorkshire, and, of course, he had a majority. The elections over, Tom Merry carefully went over the list of members in the book, checked by Figgins and Blake. Then the list was read out to the crowd, and each candidate received a cheer in turn.

Tom Merry closed the book with a snap. "Gentlemen, and free and enlightened electors of this great and famous school," he said, "the first elections are now over, and St. Jim's Parliament is duly elected. The first session of the parliament will commence on Saturday afternoon, the Houses of Parliament for the present being the woodshed. The honorary Speaker, Mr. Railton, will, unfortunately, not be able to be present, but a Speaker will be duly elected. I hope that the inauguration—"

"The what?"
"The inauguration—"
"Well," said Blake, "that's a jolly good word!"
"That the inauguration of the Parliament of St. Jim's will mark a new era in the history of the school, and will lead to the improvement of our minds—"

"Well, you need it," said Figgins.
"The meeting is now at an end, the elections having been carried out to a satisfactory conclusion," said Tom Merry. "The proceedings of the St. Jim's Parliament will be duly reported in the famous magazine known as 'Tom Merry's Weekly.'"

And Tom Merry stepped down. Fatty Wynn nudged him as the meeting dispersed.

"I say, Merry, don't you think that an occasion like this ought to be celebrated? What do you say to a big feed?"

"Good wheeze!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, kids! Talking makes me hungry. Fatty Wynn is going to stand a feed to all the elected candidates."

"Oh, really, Merry, I—"

"Never mind; my mistake," grinned Tom Merry. "Come along, kids, and I'll stand the feed."

"That you won't," said Figgins. "We'll stand half."

"Just as you like, Figgy."
And Tom Merry passed his arm through Figgins', and walked him off to the tuckshop; and, needless to say, the whole of St. Jim's Parliament followed promptly.

CHAPTER 5.

Skimpole's New Scheme!

TOM MERRY was walking down the corridor when he bumped into Skimpole of the Shell. The junior captain of the school brought his hand down with a powerful smack on Skimpole's shoulder, and the brainy man of the Shell Form started out of his brown study.

"Ow! You startled me, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry looked at him severely.

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"What do you mean by going about with your eyes shut?" he demanded.

"The fact is, I was thinking," said Skimpole. "I've got a new idea."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Tom interestedly.

"Yes, and—"

"Then I'm off."

"I say, Merry—Tom Merry—"

But Tom Merry was gone. Skimpole rubbed his bony, prominent forehead, and stared after him through his spectacles. Skimpole was brainy, and he was simply crammed with ideas, but his ideas, as a rule, were not popular in the School House at St. Jim's. Whenever he had a new idea he was eager to tell it to someone. But his House-fellows were by no means equally willing to listen. His study-mate, Gore, had threatened to brain him with a cricket stump if he ever mentioned any word ending in "ism" in the study they shared. Skimpole felt that he was a misunderstood genius, but he was wary of the cricket stump.

"H'm! Merry does not seem curious about the matter at all," murmured Skimpole. "But I must have someone's assistance in carrying out the idea. Perhaps Lowther or Manners would be willing to help."

Lowther and Manners, Tom Merry's chums, were standing in the hall, looking at the cricket notices on the board there, when Skimpole sighted them and bore down upon them.

"I say, Lowther—"

"No, you don't," said Lowther, promptly walking away. Skimpole turned to Manners.

"I say, Manners—"

"Do you?" said Manners, and he walked after Lowther. Skimpole rubbed his forehead again. He always did that when he was in a thoughtful mood, and some fellows said it was with a view of helping his brain to work; that useful organ being very slack in its functions.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpole. "It seems curious that a really good idea should go begging like this. I suppose I had better go along to Study No. 6."

And a minute later Herbert Skimpole was tapping at the door of Study No. 6.

"Come in, fathead!"

It was the voice of Jack Blake. Skimpole opened the door and entered. The chums of Study No. 6 had finished their preparation, and were chatting together, and they all left off and stared at Skimpole as he came in.

"Hallo, Skimmy!" said Blake, as cordially as he could.

"I want to speak to you chaps—" began Skimpole.

"Sorry, but we're just going out—"

"It's too bad," said Digby; "but we can't stop."

"Come on!" said Herries.

"Weally, there is no such tewwific huwwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. "I weally considah it nessawwy to be polite to a visitah, even if he is a feahful boah like Skimpole—I do weally. Suppose we give the silly ass a few minutes, you know, deah boys."

"Oh, very well!" said Blake resignedly.

"Go on, Skimpole," said Arthur Augustus encouragingly.

"Twy not to boah us more than you can help, deah boy."

"I have been thinking—"

"Oh, of course, in a case like that we're called upon to do something!" said Blake. "What have you been thinking with, Skimpole?"

The brainy man of the Shell ignored this question.

"I've been thinking, you kids, about the St. Jim's Parliament and so on. The elections are over now, and the school parliament is elected."

"We know that, Skimmy—"

"But I was not elected to a seat, owing to the prejudice prevailing at St. Jim's against all really good and new ideas."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I am not complaining, for as a true Determinist I must uphold the freedom of election, even if I suffer by it—"

"Bwavo!"

"But I really think it would be a good idea to form another constituency among the fellows, and have a by-election, so that I could get into the school parliament—"

"Rats!"

"But that is not my idea. With the stress of business that will come with the opening of the school parliament, it seems to me necessary that there should be methods of more direct communication between the School House and the New House."

Jack Blake stared.

"Blessed if I see how communication can be more direct than it is now," he said. "The New House stands almost opposite to the School House, on the other side of the quadrangle, and it's only a couple of minutes' walk across."

"Oh, Skimmy has a new idea!" said Digby, with a grin.

"It's a wheeze for shifting the New House across the quadrangle and putting it next door to the School House."



The juniors had cornered Skimpole. A ducking in the fountain was not an attractive prospect, and a water-pipe leading up the side of the gym. offered the only means of escape. The unhappy propagandist swarmed up it. The juniors crowded down below roaring with laughter. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole shook his head.

"Nothing of the sort, Digby. It would be impossible to do so. My idea is to connect the two Houses by means of a telephone."

"A what?"

"A telephone," said Skimpole. "I have dabbled in this sort of thing myself, and I know just how simple it is. You know, we had a telephone rigged up in the Common-room once, and could speak to fellows in the gym."

"I remember."

"Well, I was thinking of putting up something on a bigger scale. It would be easy enough to run a wire to the New House. It could be supported on the wire that is already up, for that matter. We could have a receiver in Figgins' study in the New House, and another in mine—"

"But you're not a member of St. Jim's Parliament."

"I think I ought to be appointed Secretary to the Government pro tem, till there is a by-election."

"H'm!"

"Anyway, the telephone is a ripping idea. We're not allowed in one another's Houses after a certain hour, and with the phone we could talk up to any hour at night. We could make arrangements over the wires without the trouble of crossing the quadrangle. The Head has the telephone in

his study, and I don't see why the Lower Forms shouldn't have one also."

Blake nodded.

"There's something in that. If you want to rig up a telephone, Skimmy, I haven't any objection."

"Yaas, wathah! Let the boundah have his own way, by all means."

"Then, as you like the idea, I'll fully explain my plan," said Skimpole, sitting down. "I can make the whole thing clear in half an hour. In the first place, we shall want—where are you going, Herries?"

"Got to go and feed my bulldog," said Herries, quitting the study.

"Well, in the first place, there will have to be a general whip round to cover the expenses, but don't be alarmed—that won't be more than a few pounds. Where are you going, Digby?"

"I'm going to see if it's raining?"

"It's not raining—"

"I'd rather see for myself, thank you!" said Digby, walking out of the study.

"Well," said Skimpole, "when the funds are raised, you can leave the purchasing of the materials to me. We shall require a— Are you going, Blake?"

"Yes; there's something I forgot to say to Digby."

"But—"

But Blake was gone.

Skimpole fixed his eyes on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I'm glad to see you take a deeper interest in the matter than those fellows, D'Arcy," he remarked. "Now, in the

first place, we shall require a— D'Arcy! Gussy! I say!"

But the swell of the School House had followed his chums. Skimpole looked round the deserted study, and rose to his feet with a sigh.

"This is really very rough," he murmured. "I suppose I had better go and speak to Figgins & Co. about it."

And the brainy man of the Shell descended to the quadrangle and walked across to the New House.

Figgins & Co.—Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn—were standing on the steps of the New House when Skimpole came up.

"I say, Figgins—"

"Hallo!" said Figgins.

"I've got a new idea."

"Have you?" said Figgins. "You won't tell it to me, will you, old chap?"

"I've just come across to tell you—"

"Then there's only one thing to be done," said Figgins, making a rapid sign to the Co.

The next moment Skimpole's cap was jammed over his eyes, and he was bumped down in a sitting posture on the steps. Figgins & Co. walked away, and Skimpole stared after them with a bewildered expression.

CHAPTER 6.

The First Meeting of St. Jim's Parliament!

SEVEN o'clock boomed out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's, and Tom Merry rose and laid down his pen in the study he shared with Manners and Lowther in the School House.

"Time we were off, kids," he remarked.

Lowther yawned as he closed his book.

"Oh, right you are! The session opens at half-past, doesn't it?"

"Yes; but we want to be in time."

"Rather!" said Manners. "As we take the leading place in St. Jim's Parliament, we have to be on the spot at the start. I hope those young bouncers in Study No. 6 will see things in their proper light, and back us up."

The first meeting of St. Jim's Parliament was to take place in the woodshed. This was only temporary, until more commodious accommodation could be found.

The School House and the New House at St. Jim's had ceased from their usual rows to take an equal interest in the election. But it was certain that the keen House rivalry would revive again within the walls of the woodshed.

Tom Merry would not have cared for that, for there were twelve School House members of parliament to eight of the New House, and therefore the School House ought to have had the majority. But the School House members were divided among themselves.

Jack Blake claimed to be the leader of the School House juniors, a claim which the Terrible Three regarded as absurd. It was extremely probable that Blake would want to be head of the party in parliament, and that would certainly lead to a split.

A split in the School House ranks meant the majority to the New House, for the New House members were solid under the leadership of Figgins.

"We'd better speak to Blake before we get to the meeting," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I'll put it to him plainly that if we don't stick together, Figgins & Co. will take the lead in the House, and that ought to convince the most obstinate bouncer."

"It's a good idea," said Manners. "But Blake is awfully obstinate."

"Well, we can only try."

The Terrible Three quitted their study, and looked into Study No. 6 in passing. That famous apartment was empty, but in the hall downstairs the four chums were talking together, and Tom Merry bore down upon them. Blake was looking at his watch.

"About time we got along to the woodshed, I think," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo, you kids!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Who are you calling kids?" asked Blake, with dangerous politeness.

"Sorry—I meant cads! But I want to speak to you before you go to the meeting. It's rather important—"

"Oh, fire away!"

"You know that there are twelve School House fellows in the St. Jim's Parliament—"

"Yes, and that gives us the majority."

"If we stick together."

"Well, we ought to do that," said Blake. "It's no good falling out with one another, and letting the Government fall into the hands of the New House chaps."

Tom Merry brightened up considerably.

"That's what I was thinking, Blake!" he exclaimed. "I'm jolly glad to see you take the same view of the situation that I do. If twelve School House members stick together, they can run the show. Figgins & Co. will have to form the Opposition."

"That's the idea."

"Then I can depend upon you fellows to back me up?"

"Eh?"

"I say I can depend upon you fellows to back me up?"

"There seems to be a slight mistake somewhere," said Blake pleasantly. "I thought you were proposing to back me up."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Tom Merry warmly. "As leader of the School House juniors, I naturally take the lead of the School House party in parliament."

"Excuse me, I have always been under the impression that I was leader of the School House juniors. Perhaps I was mistaken."

"Not much doubt on that point," said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, seat! You fellows are practically new boys here."

"New boys!" exclaimed the Terrible Three indignantly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You

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see, you haven't been at St. Jim's long, and it is weally like your feahful cheek for you to think of wunnin' the show!"

"How long have you been here yourselves?" asked Tom Merry wrathfully. "You came a few weeks before I did, I suppose."

"Anyway, you can't get out of the undoubted fact that I am leader of the School House juniors."

"Rats! And many of 'em!"

"Now, come, Tom Merry; do be reasonable! If you back me up against the New House party, we shall run the show, and I will give you a post in the Cabinet."

"Catch me! As your elder, I cannot possibly follow your lead."

"Elder! About a couple of days my elder, I suppose!" snorted Blake.

"Two months and seven days!"

"Well, then, you're old enough to have more sense! It isn't that I specially want to take all the fat for myself, but I couldn't trust School House affairs to your management."

"I certainly couldn't consent to follow the lead of a Fourth Form kid."

"And I jolly well tell you—"

"Pway don't get excited!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I can suggest a third alternative—a weally wippin' way out of the difficulty, deah boy!"

"What's that, Gussy?"

"Suppose you both waive your claims in my favah? I am the last fellow in the world to put myself forward in any way, but what you weaquah for a parliamentawy leadah is a fellow of tact and judgment, and so—"

"Oh, ring off!" growled Blake.

"Cheese it!" grunted Tom Merry.

"I wufuse to wing off! I absolutely decline to cheese it!" said D'Arcy, screwing his eyeglass into his eye, and surveying the two disdainfully. "I am suggestin' a weally wippin' way out of the beastlay difficulty, and if you do not immediately adopt it, I wegard you as a pair of extwemely silly asses. You would have the gweat satisfaction of knowin' that the management of the School House party was in the most capable hands poss, and also—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"Well, we shan't agree, and it's a quarter-past," said Tom Merry. "This question will have to be thrashed out within the walls of parliament."

"Good!" said Blake. "Mind, if Figgins becomes Premier, it will be all your fault!"

"All yours, you mean!"

"Oh, don't argue! Let's get to the meeting!"

And the School House juniors went down the steps. Other members from the School House were on their way. Reilly, the Irish member, who represented Belfast, joined them, with Harrison, the Member for Manchester.

At the door of the woodshed they encountered Figgins & Co.

Figgins greeted them with a cheery grin.

"Hallo! I see you're in time. The doors are closed at half-past seven, and all late members have to stay out in the lobby."

"Bai Jove! Where's the lobby?"

"Oh, you imagine the lobby!" said Monty Lowther. "You can fix up anything with the aid of a little imagination."

"Of course you can," agreed Figgins. "There's Lowther imagines that the feeble piffle he works off on us is humour, and it's quite a mistake, of course. All due to imagination."

"Look here, Figgins—"

But Figgins had entered the House of Commons. The members followed him in. The woodshed was a commodious place, considering, and the juniors had shifted back the faggots, gardening implements, and other impedimenta which Taggles, the school porter and general hand, kept there. Benches had been arranged for the members to sit on, on the two sides of the woodshed, separated by a gangway in proper style.

"This looks all right," said Tom Merry. "Of course, we shall have to get better quarters later on; but these will do for the first session."

"Unless Taggles comes along and turns us out," suggested Monty Lowther.

"If Lowther is going to be funny," said Blake, "I move that we turn him out before the start. I can stand anything but Lowther's jokes!"

"I second that motion," said Digby emphatically. "If we let him go on he'll start making puns and asking conundrums next, and we shall have to stop him, so we may as well stop him now."

(Continued at foot of next page.)



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"Oh, don't be asses!"

"I shall move that no jokes, real or alleged, be made within these walls," said Figgins. "Life isn't worth living if Lowther is going to be funny."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, take your seats!" said Tom Merry. "I believe it's usual for the Government to be decided upon before a General Election—it's according to the party that's returned to power. But we haven't settled that yet. We shall have to put it to the vote. Therefore, I propose—"

"What authority have you got for proposing anything?" asked Blake.

"Well, I suppose somebody must make a start."

"That can be left to me, I propose—"

"Rats!" said Figgins. "I propose—"

"Bai Jove, we shall neyeh get on at this wate! If you fellows want to pwopose things, take it in turns, or else leave it to me."

"Good!" exclaimed Reilly. "You are wasting time."

"Who's wasting time?" asked Blake.

"You are!"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Reilly?"

"Rats!"

Blake made a motion towards the Member for Belfast. Reilly squared up in a businesslike way. Tom Merry pushed between.

"It's not in order to quarrel within these walls," he exclaimed.

"Bosh! We've had rows in the woodshed before now." "This isn't a woodshed on the present occasion—it's the House of Commons."

"Oh, I forgot! I'll meet you again presently, Reilly."

"Sure, and I shall be ready for you," said the Member for Belfast.

"Oh, wing off, deah boys, and let's get to business!" said D'Arcy. "We want a beastlay Speakah, you know."

"Yes, Mr. Railton has consented to be honorary Speaker, but we want a working one, too. Now, who's for Speaker?"

"I propose Digby," said Blake.

"Hands up for Digby!"

Nobody had any objection to Digby for Speaker, and so Digby was duly selected. Then D'Arcy had something to say.

"What pwice a speech fwom the Thwone, deah boys?"

"A what?"

"A speech fwom the Thwone. You can't open Parliament in the pwopah style without a speech from the Thwone."

"There's something in that," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But we must wait till the Government is selected. Of course, there is going to be a School House Government, and a New House Opposition."

"Something of the sort," said Figgins, "only vice-versa."

"We have the majority."

"But you don't all vote together."

"I hope Blake will see reason."

"I hope Tom Merry will see reason—"

Figgins chuckled.

"Then you're jolly sanguine, both of you, to hope anything of the sort. My idea is that a New House Government should be formed, and that New House politics be adopted by this Parliament. The New House members are in favour of making me Premier."

"That doesn't say much for their taste, does it?"

"No personalities are allowed within these walls," said the Speaker. "I call upon the honourable Member to withdraw his honourable observation."

"You're starting your functions jolly early. Dig."

"Within these walls I am Mr. Speaker!"

"Mr. Rats!"

"The proceedings cannot proceed until the Member for York proceeds to tender an apology."

"Bai Jove, what a lot of pwceedings!"

"Oh, choose it, Dig!" said Blake, the Member for York.

Digby's countenance assumed a severe and lofty expression. It was evident that he meant to uphold the dignity of his position as Speaker of the St. Jim's House of Commons.

"I call upon the honourable Member for York to withdraw his unparliamentary expressions," he said, "otherwise, I shall have no alternative but to commit him to the charge of the Sergeant-at-Arms."

"Oh, draw it mild, Dig! This is a nice way to talk to a chum."

"Chums are not recognised within these walls."

"I don't see that being in a woodshed makes any difference."

"You are now in the House of Commons."
 "My mistake. I know I'll jolly well give you a thick ear when I get you in the study again if you put on any more side, Dig!"
 "Call the Sergeant-at-Arms!" said Dig. "The Member for York will be confined in the clock-tower for unparliamentary language!"
 "Look here——"
 "You're in the wrong, Blake," said Tom Merry. "Apologise to Mr. Speaker."
 "I'll see Mr. Speaker——"
 "Withdraw!"
 "Look here——"
 "Order!"
 "Withdraw!"
 "Well, I withdraw any unparliamentary expressions I may have used," said Blake. "I really feel the most profound respect for Mr. Speaker."
 "Hear, hear!"
 "The Member for York must withdraw his remark reflecting upon the taste of the New House members of this Parliament," said the Speaker, with unrelaxing brow.
 The Member for York snorted.
 "Oh, very well, I withdraw everything! Is that all right?"
 "Certainly, if the honourable Member for Bristol is satisfied."
 "Oh, I'm satisfied!" grinned Figgins.
 "Good! The proceedings can now proceed," said Mr. Speaker.
 And the proceedings forthwith proceeded.

CHAPTER 7.

An Unparliamentary Interruption!

TOM MERRY rose to his feet. He caught the Speaker's eye, and proceeded. The other juniors eyed him with a steady stare.
 "Mr. Speaker——"
 "Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther, rather prematurely. They were not likely to be backward in backing up their chum and leader.
 "Order!"
 "I move that a Cabinet be elected from the School House members."
 "Hear, hear!" shouted the School House members.
 "Rats! Rats!" yelled the New House juniors.
 "Order!"
 "Divide!" shouted Blake. "'Vide—'vide!"
 The division was taken. Naturally enough, on such a motion, all the School House members voted with Tom Merry.
 The Speaker looked them over, and declared that the ayes had it.
 Figgins grunted.
 "Never mind," he murmured to Kerr. "When it comes to forming a Government they'll begin to row among themselves, and that's where we come in."
 And the Member for Glasgow nodded assent.
 "These are the Government benches," remarked Tom Merry. "We are the Government. The next question to settle is, which is Prime Minister among us?"

"That's easily settled," said Blake promptly. "I'm Prime Minister!"
 "Weally, Blake, I think——"
 "Rats to you, Gussy!"
 "Weally——"
 "Of course, I'm Prime Minister," said Tom Merry.
 "Put it to the vote!"
 Figgins rose to catch the Speaker's eye.
 "I beg to ask whether it is in order for the Government to settle their own personal questions of precedence within these walls?" said the Member for Bristol.
 The Speaker looked puzzled.
 "No," he said at length, "it's not in order. Tom Merry ought to take a back seat——"
 "Oh, cheese it!"
 "That language is unparliamentary!"
 "Rats! So it is for a Speaker to mix himself up in a dispute."
 "Hear, hear!"
 "If you criticise the conduct of the Speaker, Tom Merry, you will be conducted to the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms!"
 "Look here——"
 "I tell you——"
 "And I tell you——"
 At this juncture the door of the woodshed opened, and Taggles came in. He stared in amazement at the sight of the House of Commons.
 "Why, what the——"
 The Speaker rose and pointed to the door.
 "Get out!"
 "What? Get hout? I like that! Get hout of my own woodshed!"
 "Strangers are not admitted to the debates of the St. Jim's House of Commons," said the Speaker severely.
 Taggles looked at him dazedly.
 "He's orf his 'ead," he murmured—"clean orf!"
 "Get out!"
 "Look 'ere, wot tricks are you young rips hup to in this 'ere shed?" said Taggles. "Get hout, all on you, at once!"
 "Depart!"
 "I ain't goin' to depart if I knows it. You're goin' to get hout!"
 "Bunk!"
 "Blessed if I don't report yer all to the 'Ead," said Taggles, "a-setting round in yer woodshed like a lot of 'ens!"
 The St. Jim's House of Commons turned red with wrath. To be compared to a lot of hens sitting on the benches was a little too much for the members.
 "Get out!" roared twenty voices.
 "I hain't a-goin' to get hout!" said Taggles. "I come 'ere to saw wood, an' I'm goin' to saw wood, young gentlemen; so the sooner you get hout, the better."
 "I commit this rude and obstreperous person to the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms!" said the Speaker.
 "Orf 'is 'ead—clean orf 'is 'ead!"
 "Are you going?"
 "No, I ain't!"
 Tom Merry rose.
 "I move that the House resolve itself into a committee to deal with this question," he exclaimed, "and that the committee forthwith proceed to eject this rude and disrespectful person."

Potts, the Office Boy!



"Hear, hear!"
 "The ayes have it!" declared the Speaker.
 The House rose as one man, and rushed at Taggles.
 The alarmed school porter skipped out of the woodshed with surprising agility.
 "Orf their 'eads," he gasped—"clean orf their 'eads! A settin' round like a lot of 'ens and clean off their 'eads!"
 "Duck him in the fountain!"
 Taggles dashed off at top speed, with the House of Commons in pursuit. The alarmed porter, fully persuaded that the juniors had taken leave of their senses, dashed into his lodge, and slammed the door and locked it.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.
 Taggles looked out of the window. He had a poker in his hand, and his face was pale.
 "Go away, you young rips!" he shouted. "I'll report you to the 'Ead, a-settin' round in my woodshed like a parcel of 'ens!"
 "Look here, Taggles—"
 "I'll report yer!"
 "Oh, it's no good talking to him," said Figgins. "We shall have to find a new place of meeting, that's all. The woodshed's done in!"
 "The box-room in the New House is really the place," remarked Kerr.
 "You mean the disused study in the School House," said Blake.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Nothing of the sort!"
 "We shall have to find a new meeting-place, anyway," said Tom Merry, "and somewhere where we shan't be in danger of interruption. We might have been passing the most important measures when that ass Taggles popped in."
 "I fancy we've done enough meeting for this evening, anyway," said the Member for Cardiff, otherwise known as Fatty Wynn. "I know I am jolly hungry. I didn't have much tea; only a beef-steak pie and a few sausages and potatoes, and some jam tarts. I get fearfully hungry in this June weather. Come on, Figgins!"
 And Fatty Wynn started towards the New House. The first meeting of the Parliament of St. Jim's was over.

CHAPTER 8.

Jack Blake, Prime Minister!

SKIMPOLE was standing in the Hall when the School House juniors came in. He immediately came towards them.

"I say, where have you chaps been?"
 "First meeting of the St. Jim's Parliament."
 Skimpole looked reproachful.
 "And you didn't tell me?"
 "You're not a member."
 "Still, I ought to have been there. I could have advised you upon many points of parliamentary procedure. Never mind. At present I am thinking about the telephone idea. Have you thought anything further about it?"
 "Not a word," said Blake.
 "Now, look here, Skinny—" said Tom Merry.
 "But it's a really ripping idea," said Skimpole. "If we all have a whip round to raise the money, it won't come very heavy on each, and you fellows are not usually mean."
 "Yaas, wathah! I have been thinking, deah boys, that

it's wathah a good ideah to have the telephone put up if it can be contwived," said Arthur Augustus. "It will show the Upper Forms at this school what the Fourth Form can do."

"Something in that," said Blake. "When you come to think of it, there's something rather taking in the idea of a telephone between the Houses. We can ring up Figgins in his study and rag him over the wires."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "It would be a novelty," said Digby. "I don't see why we shouldn't go in for it, if it can be worked. But can it?"

"Oh, I'll answer for that!" said Skimpole confidently. "I've got a relation in the business, and I can get things cheap. I've studied the thing in the holidays, and I know just what we want."

"Well, it would be great fun, anyway," said Tom Merry. "Shall we go in for it, chaps?"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "I don't mind," said Blake. "If it's a subscription of about five bob apiece, it won't break us, I suppose?"

"Of course it won't," said Skimpole, "and I dare say it can be worked for less than that. Of course, the amount of subscription depends upon the number of subscribers."

"Yes, I suppose it would," said Lowther sarcastically. "Can you work things out like that in your head, Skimpole?"

"Certainly, Lowther," said Skimpole, who was never known to see a joke; "that is quite simple. You see, if each—"

"You'll have to ask Figgins about it," said Tom Merry. "You can't knock holes in the walls of the House, either, or the powers that be will be on your track. Are you thinking of taking the wires down the chimneys?"

"Certainly not, they can be taken in at the window."

"That means leaving the windows open."

"Which is very good for the health," said Skimpole.

"But I could bore—"

"Yes, by Jove you could! You always do."

"I could bore—"

"Could you bore Figgins as much as you do us? If you could, go and do it. It will serve the New House boulder right."

"Really, Digby—"

"If he dies under it we'll club up for the funeral expenses," said Blake.

"I wish you would be serious."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway be sewious, deah boys!"

"I could bore—"

"My hat! There he goes again! We know you could, and do, and nothing will stop you," howled Blake.

"I could bore a hole in the window-frame for the wire, and so the window would not have to be left open."

"Oh, I see! Are you thinking of asking the Head's permission to put up the phone?"

"Oh, no! He would only refuse, so it's no good asking him. I shouldn't like to do anything against his wishes."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, go and speak to Figgins about it, and if he comes into the thing, we'll back you up, too!"

"Thank you, Merry! I have no doubt that Figgins will take up the idea when he knows that I have your support."

And Skimpole went off, looking very pleased.

"It's not half a bad idea, when you come to think of it,"

REASONABLE!



Blake remarked. "It will be awfully good fun telephoning to the New House. But I expect Skimpole will make a muck of the thing. He generally does."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've got to get the question of the leadership of the School House party settled before the next meeting of Parliament," Tom Merry remarked. "Have you decided to do the reasonable thing yet, Blake?"

"Certainly! I stand to what I said."

"Br-r-r-r-r! The only thing is, then, for the School House members to meet and settle the question. We're all here, so we may as well go into the club-room at once and get the question settled."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The members for the School House ascended to the club-room. It was a disused study in which the Merry Hobby Club were allowed to hold their meetings. It was rather a large room, but twelve juniors pretty well filled it.

"Now," said Tom Merry, "we are agreed upon one thing, we don't want the Government to fall into the hands of Figgins & Co."

"Hear, hear!"

"But if we split our vote, Figgins will have the majority."

"Sure and he will!" said Reilly.

"Therefore we must all stand together under a common leader."

"If you back me up—" said Blake.

"I call upon all to back me up," said Tom Merry. "Not because I'm particularly set upon being Premier, mind you, but because I want the thing to be a success."

"I call upon you to back me up," said Blake, "not because I'm afflicted with any desire to stand forward myself, but for the good of the cause."

"Sure, and you're both very generous and unselfish!" Reilly remarked. "Suppose, as you really don't want to put yourselves forward, you both stand down, and allow a fellow from Belfast, say, to become Premier?"

"Impossible!" said both of the intending Prime Ministers at once.

"Faith, and I don't see why!"

"Well, you see—"

"Well, you see—"

"The fact is," remarked Harrison, the Member for Manchester, in a thoughtful sort of way—"the fact is, they're a pair of conceited bounders."

"Look here, Harrison—"

"Look here, Harrison—"

"It's an old saying that what Manchester thinks to-day, all England thinks to-morrow," said Harrison. "What I say is, that a Manchester chap ought to be Premier."

"I suppose you wouldn't put Manchester before Liverpool?" said Manners sarcastically. "I represent Liverpool, and—"

"I jolly well should!"

"Then you're a jolly ass!"

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Order! Shut up!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ordah, deah boys! The dispute could be settled in the most satisfactory way by makin' me Pwemiah. I would give you all posts in the Cabinet, and then every-one could be satisfied."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think that's wathah a good idea—"

"Now, look here—"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewwy!"

"Yes, I know I am, Gussy. Look here, you chaps, it's no good talking—"

"You're doing a jolly lot of it, though," Herries remarked.

"It's no good talking," repeated Tom Merry. "The Premiership lies between Blake and myself, and outsiders are barred."

"Now, you're talking sense," said Blake cordially enough.

"Well, so long as it comes to the Fourth Form," said Reilly.

"So long as it comes to the Shell—" said Manners.

"There you go again!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "You are weally makin' a personal mattah of what you should wegard as a question of great public intewest."

"The only way is to put it to the vote," said Reilly.

"Hands up for Tom Merry as Premier and leader of the School House party in St. Jim's Parliament."

Five hands went up, belonging to the five Shell juniors in the meeting.

"There you are! Now hands up for Blake!"

There were seven hands raised this time, being the number of representatives from the Fourth Form. D'Arcy hesitated about putting his up. He was still firmly persuaded that in the interests of the Parliament as a whole he ought to be Premier. But he was loyal to his chum, and he voted for Blake.

Blake gave a satisfied grin.

"What do you say now, Tom Merry?"

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"Well, I admit, of course, that you have the majority of mere numbers," said Tom Merry. "The majority of talent and intelligence is unquestionably on my side."

"I wegard that remark as dispawagin' to the Fourth Form."

"Rats!" said Blake cheerfully. "Anyway, it's the majority of numbers that counts in parliamentary proceedings. Talent and intelligence don't count for anything in the real House of Commons, as you know very well."



A water-can had appeared over the window sill and him, cutting short his flow of eloquence. "Ow! G landing in a sitting posture on the lid of the butt. Or

"Yaas, wathah! Blake is Pwime Ministah, deah boys, unless he chooses to do the weally weasonable thing, and wesign the post to me."

"No fear!" said Blake.

"I am speaking for the good of the cause."

"Sure, and every ass present seems to be doing that!" Reilly remarked.

D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass and gave the Member for Belfast a withering glare.

"Are you alludin' to me as an ass, Weilly?"

"Order, there!"

"I insist upon Weilly explainin' on the spot whethah he

was alludin' to me as an ass, or whether he was not alludin' to me as an ass."

"The question is not in order," said Digby. "I rule that—"

"Pway what have you got to do with wulin' anythin'?"

"I'm Speaker—"

"You are only Speakah within the walls of the woodshed—I mean, within the walls of the House of Commons. On the pwesent occasion you are nobody."

"Quite right!" said Tom Merry. "The cheek of some kids in the Fourth is simply amazing to me, and—"

"What's that?" roared half a dozen voices.

"Withdraw!"

"Rats!"

"Withdraw!"

"Oh, we'll withdraw!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Come on, kids, and let those Fourth Form youngsters run away and play!"

"Look here, Tom Merry," exclaimed Blake, "hold on!"



turned on Skimpole. A shower of water descended upon him, and the freak of the Shell, leaping into the air and the lid went through, and Skimpole went through with it!

"I've been elected leader by the majority of the School House members of Parliament—"

"The majority of mere numbers."

"Bosh! I've been elected leader by the majority that count. Am I to depend upon your support in forming a Government? I am willing to allot you a seat in the Cabinet."

"Well, if I have first choice—"

"Oh, come, don't be an ass!" said Blake warmly. "I must provide for my own friends first, like a real Prime Minister."

"Well, what am I to be?"

"Lemme see. We might make you President of the Board of Trade, or something of that sort."

"Not good enough," said Tom Merry decidedly. "Unless I am made Secretary for India, at least, I shall not be satisfied, and I shall be unable to conscientiously support this Government."

"If there's a split the New House party will turn us out of office on a vote of want of confidence," said Blake. "I appeal to your patriotism."

"Well, at present I shall support the Government," said Tom Merry, after some consideration. "I reserve the right to form an independent party if I choose. I can plough a lonely furrow if I like, I suppose?"

"You can go and eat coke if you like," said Blake politely. "So long as we stand together against the common enemy I'm satisfied. We have stirring times before us. If Skimpole gets in on a by-election, we shall have the advancing tide of Determinism to face."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then there's the Irish party to be dealt with. If Reilly demands complete independence—"

"Faith and I—"

"Upon that question the Government reserves its opinion," said Blake. "I am in favour of granting to Ireland all that can be granted, while keeping in mind the necessity of safeguarding the Empire. I admit the reasonableness of Unionist views, while at the same time acknowledging the justice of Irish aspirations."

"My hat! I believe you were born for a Prime Minister, Blake," said Tom Merry admiringly. "You couldn't have put it better. And I suppose you admit the absolute correctness of the Conservative attitude, while at the same time sympathising fully with the undeniably just claims of Liberalism?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You don't understand politics," said Blake, with a sniff. "Come on, you chaps, let's get to Study No. 6 and draw up a programme of the new Government."

And the School House members left the club-room.

CHAPTER 9.

The Telephone!

SKIMPOLE was very busy the next day or two. The freak of the Shell had taken up the idea of the telephone in deadly earnest. The interview with Figgins had proved a success. Figgins & Co., when the matter was once explained to them, rather fancied the idea of direct telephonic communication with the rival House.

They anticipated exchanging badinage with the School House fellows over the wires.

"You see, we can slang the rotters a treat, and they can't get at us over the wires," Figgins observed sagely. "That will be rather a novelty."

"They can slang us back," observed Fatty Wynn.

"I know they can; but when it comes to slanging, I fancy we can keep our end up, and a little bit over," said Figgins.

"True!"

"Besides, it will be a joke to ring Skimpole up and make him explain something about Determinism, and leave him talking to nobody," chuckled Kerr.

"Good idea! He may exhaust his vocal capacities that way, and become a little less of a bore," Figgins agreed.

So the New House Co. paid up their subscription to the telephone fund, and Skimpole was entrusted with the task. The other juniors took the matter more or less as a joke, but Skimpole was in deadly earnest. Whenever he got an idea into his head he was in deadly earnest over it—for a time, at least—and he had taken up the matter of the telephone quite seriously.

As he said, the matter was not so difficult as it looked. His relative in the line of business supplied him with the necessary materials at cost price. Skimpole knew how to put up the apparatus, and, as he said to Tom Merry—"there you are!"

Getting the wire round the roofs of the mass of buildings that formed the ancient college from the School House to the New House was the most difficult part of the task, and was accomplished at the risk of several necks. Fortunately none was broken. Tom Merry & Co. helped Skimpole to the fullest extent in the work, and it was a proud moment for all of them when the installation was complete.

The work had been done secretly. It was of no use taking the masters or prefects into their confidence; they all felt that.

"It's quite possible that something might go wrong with the telephone, or perhaps with the Head's wire," Tom Merry remarked. "He would be prejudiced against any telephone fitting being done by juniors, in any case."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

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"Strictly speakin', the Head would have no wight to interfere with us, but masters at schools assume all sorts of wights."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, and if the Head knew that Skimpole had used his wire as a support for this new one I fancy he would be annoyed."

"It was the simplest way of supporting my wire," explained Skimpole. "I really don't see why the Head should object."

"Suppose something goes wrong?" said Lowther.

"Nothing can go wrong; I fixed the thing up myself."

"That's all very well, but things do go wrong in the best regulated telephones."

"They won't go wrong in this case," said Skimpole, with conviction. "If there were any defect, it would be more likely to show in the Head's wire than in ours, so it's all right. I've taken care of that. But, as you say, it's more judicious to say nothing about the matter to the masters. It will save argument."

And so the secret was kept.

When the work was done, and the juniors had an opportunity of testing the wires, they were all in an eager mood. Even the business of St. Jim's Parliament had been neglected in the interests of the telephone fitting.

"I'll get into my study," said Figgins; "you can ring me up, and we'll have a little talk over the wire to test the thing."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry.

"Er—right-ho!" said Skimpole. "As telephonist, I, of course, operate the instrument."

Tom Merry slapped him on the shoulder.

"Not at all, old chap! We're going to do the right thing.

You've had most of the trouble of putting up the phone, and I'll take the job of testing it."

"But I'd really rather—"

"Yes, I know how unselfish you are, but I'm not going to take advantage of it. Come on, kids, let's go and have a jaw to Figgins."

"But, really, Merry—"

"That's all right!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You can rest from your labours, Skimmy, while we test the telephone."

And Tom Merry rang up Figgins.

Somewhat to the surprise of the juniors, the call was answered. The telephone was working.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!"

"Are you there?"

"Yes, fathead!"

"Is that Figgins?"

"Of course it is! Don't you know my voice?"

"No; I thought it was a bullfrog or something croaking into the instrument."

A kind of growl was audible from the other end.

"Hallo, hallo!"

"That you, Merry?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Kerr!"

"Oh, I thought it was a different croak! Did you dig up that voice?"

"Oh, go and eat coke! Put us on to Skimpole."

"Skimmy! Skimmy! You're wanted!"

"I am here," said Skimpole, taking the receiver from Tom Merry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Is that you, Figgins?"

"No; it's Kerr. Is that Skimpole?"

"Yes."

"Will you explain to us the first principles of Determinism, Skimpole?" came Kerr's voice through the instrument.

"It will be about the most thorough test you can put the instrument to. If it will stand that it will stand anything."

"Certainly," said Skimpole.

"Go ahead, then!"

Skimpole went ahead. Tom Merry & Co. stood round chuckling. Skimpole talked into the receiver as if he were on a platform. For fully five minutes he talked, working off words seldom found outside the dictionary and propagandist literature. He had been at it for five minutes, when Figgins & Co. walked into the study.

Skimpole dropped the receiver with a gasp.

"Figgins!"

"Hallo!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Kerr! I thought you chaps were at the other end of the wire."

"So we were. Did you think you were talking to us?"

"I certainly thought—"

"Quite a mistake," said Figgins blandly. "We only put you on to test the telephone, you know. Have you been at it long?"

"Really, Figgins—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I regard that as weakly vewy funny, Figgins!"

"Well, you ought to know," said Figgins. "You ought to be a judge of fun, being such a funny merchant yourself."

"If you intend that remark in a dispaawagin' sense, Figgins—"

"Rats! I say, the telephone is a great success. We shall be able to ring you fellows up when it's time for the St. Jim's Parliament to meet."

"Will you?" said Blake grimly. "You mean that I shall be able to ring you up? I am Prime Minister in this parliament."

"Oh, really, Blake, don't be an ass, you know!"

"I am Prime Minister," said Blake. "I have the support of nearly two-thirds of the members of parliament, including the Irish Party."

"That's all very well—"

"Exactly! The parliament will meet again to-morrow, and will ring you up to let you know the exact time," said Blake loftily. "There are several important measures to be proposed from the Government benches, and some announcements to be made concerning ministerial appointments."

"So you rotters are sticking together, after all?"

"We have effected a coalition for the purposes of administration," said Tom Merry.

"My hat! Skimpole couldn't beat words like those!"

"The School House will form the Government, and the New House the Opposition," said Blake. "The Minister of War will propose to-morrow to declare war upon Rylcombe Grammar School, and the Minister of Education will move that all the New House kids be compelled to wash their necks of a morning—"

"The Minister of Education will get moved himself if he

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moves that," Figgins remarked. "I shall move that the Prime Minister be awarded a thick ear, too!"

And Figgins walked out.

Blake gave Tom Merry a freezing glare. The hero of the Shell was chuckling.

"There's nothing to laugh at in Figgins' absurd remarks, Tom Merry," said the Prime Minister of St. Jim's severely. "Come along, chaps. I shall send a whip to each of you bouncers when the meeting is called, and you will be expected to turn up."

And Blake departed, with his nose in the air.

Monty Lowther gave a chuckle.

"My hat! Blake is taking the job on seriously, and no mistake! I never thought of Parliamentary Whips, but, of course, it's the thing."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "By the way, I am goin' to be Secwetawy of State for Education, you know, and I have some gweat weforma to pwopose—especially in the dwess department. A wesselution passed by St. Jim's Parliament will have some weight in the coll, you know, and I hope to see a gweat improvement in the dwess of the membahs and the school genewally."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I suppose you'd like to see all the Lowers Forms sporting fancy waistcoats and eyeglasses?"

"Wathah not! That would be goin' a twifle too far!"

"By Jove, it wouldn't be a bad idea, though!" Monty Lowther remarked to Tom Merry, as the chums of the Shell walked away to their own quarters. "It would be a ripping joke on Gussy—and you can get eyeglasses cheap."

The telephone-bell rang as Skimpole was left alone in his study. The freak of the Shell of St. Jim's hastened to answer the call.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that Skimpole?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind giving me an exposition of Determinism—something really full and complete, that will give me a good idea of the subject?"

"Really, Figgins—"

"I'm not Figgins. I'm Pratt."

"Oh, Pratt! Certainly, I shall have very great pleasure in enlightening you upon this most important subject, Pratt."

"Go ahead, then!"

Skimpole was soon embarked upon a stream of explanation. After about five minutes it occurred to him that Pratt was very quiet, and he broke off to call him. There was no reply to his call.

"Pratt! Pratt! Are you there, Pratt?"

There was no reply.

Skimpole hung up the receiver, with an annoyed expression. It was evident that Pratt had been "pulling his leg." A few minutes later the telephone-bell rang again.

"Hallo!" said Skimpole into the receiver.

"Hallo! Is that Skimpole?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"I'm French."

"What do you want, French?"

"I'm curious to know something about Determinism. Would you mind explaining its meaning fully to me?"

"I should be very pleased, French; but I'm afraid that this is intended as a joke. I cannot, however, as a true Determinist, neglect any opportunity of making a convert to the sacred cause. Determinism is—Are you there, French?"

There was no reply.

It was evident that French, after getting Skimpole started, had basely deserted his receiver, and was leaving Skimpole to talk to the desert air.

"This would be really exasperating to any but the most enthusiastic propagandist," murmured Skimpole, as he hung up his receiver. "I really—Dear me, there is the bell again! I suppose it is French who has come back."

"Hallo, hallo!"

"Hallo! Who is that?"

"I'm Jimson."

"What do you want?"

"Since hearing your ripping speech the other day I've been very curious on the subject of Determinism," said Jimson. "Would you mind explaining to me over the wire the first principles of Determinism?"

"I would willingly do so, Jimson; but I am afraid you are dealing with the subject in a light and jesting spirit, and therefore I cannot undertake to enlighten you over the telephone. But I would willingly come to your study in the New House, and bring my books on Determinism with me, and we will spend a pleasant couple of hours together examining its rudiments."

"You'll do what?"

"I'll come over to your study in the New House, and bring my books on—"

"If you do, you'll get brained with a cricket bat!" said Jimson. And he rang off.

Skimpole did not go over to the New House to Jimson's study. But for a time, at least, he was not called up again on the telephone.

CHAPTER 10.

The Eyeglasses!

THE Prime Minister of the St. Jim's Parliament sat in his study, with knitted brows. Great thoughts were evidently moving in his mind. Blake was taking his position seriously, and he meant to make the office of Prime Minister respected if it could be done by the exercise of ministerial authority.

"Anything on?" asked Herries, looking at his leader's knitted brows.

"Don't interrupt the meditations of the Premier!" said Digby in a chiding voice. "You don't know what vast questions of politics and diplomacy he may be evolving in his mighty brain."

"Yaas, wathah! If you are in any difficulty, Blake, don't mind askin' my advice. I am always willin' to help you youngstabs out of a fix."

Blake's brow did not relax.

"There will be a meeting of St. Jim's Parliament on Saturday afternoon," he said. "I have reason to suspect that the Opposition intend to give the Government some trouble."

"Bai Jove!"

"Figgins intends to propose some measure which will have the effect of dividing the School House vote. Something to make a row between the Shell and the Fourth you know, which will set the Shell members against us, and then the New House minority comes to the top."

"Rotten!"

"I have appointed D'Arcy and Herries whippers-in to the party," said Blake. "I had better write out their instructions."

"Why not give 'em by word of mouth?" asked practical Herries.

Blake froze him with a glare.

"Are you going to begin to argue with the head of the Cabinet, Herries?"

"Well, you see—"

"In important cases the instructions must be given in writing."

"Oh, very well! It's all one to me."

"Give me a pen, Dig, will you?"

"Here you are, my fountain-pen!"

"Now," said Blake, "we must make sure of Tom Merry turning up to the meeting. He isn't so likely as the others to fall into Figgy's little trap, and he will keep those Shell-fish in order, perhaps. You have to see to that, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Blake wrote on a slip of paper and handed it to D'Arcy. The swell of the School House read the slip carefully.

"Don't forget the whip for Tom Merry on Saturday!"

"Am I to keep this?" asked D'Arcy innocently.

Blake glared.

"Do you think I have written it out for fun?"

"But I can wemembah quite well."

"Never mind what you can remember; you've got your instructions from the head of the Cabinet in writing, and you've got to take care of them."

"Oh, very well!" said D'Arcy. "I haven't the slightest objection, I'm sure. Anythin' to oblige a friend!"

Blake wrote on another slip of paper, and handed it to Herries.

"Whips for all the Fourth Form members on Saturday."

Herries looked it over.

"Am I to keep this?"

"Yes, ass!" roared Blake.

"Oh, all right! No need to be rude about it!" said Herries, as he stuffed the slip into his trousers pocket.

"Anything for Dig?"

"Of course not, Dig's Speaker!"

"Oh, yes; I forgot! Have you any more questions of high politics to think out, or any more instructions to give in writing, or shall we go for a turn in the gym?"

Blake rose to his feet.

"Come along!" he said.

The cares of State had rolled from his shoulders, and he was a Fourth Form junior again.

The chums of Study No. 6 walked out into the quadrangle. There was a group of juniors at the door, and all of them were chuckling.

"Anything on?" asked Blake, looking at them.

"You'll see!" grinned George Gore. "I say, Gussy, what price eyeglasses?"

(Continued on page 19.)

TAKE A LOOK INTO—



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

HALLO, chums! We've kicked off with a tip-top story for the first week in June, and those that I have booked to follow it are even better. Wait until you read next week's fine long yarn of Tom Merry & Co.—you will laugh as you have never laughed before. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—to say nothing of Herbert Skimpole—fancies himself as a detective, quite as good as Sherlock Holmes or Sexton Blake. In next Wednesday's long story of St. Jim's you will be able to judge for yourselves how much truth there is in his claims. Look out for

DETECTIVE D'ARCY,

and get ready for a real treat. By way of contrast, David Goodwin's grand story of the Navy fills the bill admirably. Ned and Jinks are in the thick of adventures with their mysterious foes, but these two sturdy young Britishers manage to hold their own. Potts, the Office-boy, "flashes" across next week's pages in another humorous "strip," whilst those of you in search of interesting news pars will find a batch to your liking. Finally, there will be two more coupons for your collection, which will be worth 50 points. See that you cut them out and put them with the others you have saved. One more thing—order your GEM in advance.

THE LIMIT!

They've got a cute way of making road hogs observe the speed limit at Fort Sam Houston, in Texas. If twelve miles an hour isn't fast enough for these people they get it in the neck in more senses than one. Through the town the road has been specially and deliberately laid with "bumps." Even at the maximum speed of twelve miles an hour the motorist finds his passage over these bumps anything but a pleasant experience. At thirty miles an hour he's nearly thrown out of his car—at forty, well he is thrown out of his car. And that's that!

THE INVITATION!

A youngster appeared in the courts the other day charged with the "unlawful summoning of the fire brigade." It appears that the brigade turned out with their usual sickness when the alarm bell went. But, alas, there was no fire. When cross-questioned the youngster responsible explained that the fire alarm simply said "Break the glass," so he thought he'd see what would happen if he accepted that invitation. Now he knows better! Railway companies are a little more careful in these matters. They add to their "invitation" to pull the alarm signal the qualifying words "only in case of emergency." So 'ware you chaps of that!

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impulse which tempts you to ring a bell when a notice asks you to "Please ring," or "Knock once," or "Break the glass."

HEARD THIS ONE?

Teacher: "You can't sleep in my class, Brown."

Brown: "Yes I could, sir, if you didn't speak so loudly when you are lecturing."

A READER'S QUESTION.

"How deep is the deepest oil well?" asks Tom Ferguson, of South Shields. And the answer is nine thousand seven hundred feet, or nearly two miles into the earth. This well is "still going strong" in California, and the expert drillers reckon that they can pierce yet another three hundred feet before they cry quits with Nature.

THE ANIMAL DUEL!

If you had been at Whipsnade Zoo a few weeks back you would very likely have seen an amazing duel between two American bison. A and B—we will call them that—had a tiff over something, so they decided to settle it in their own fashion. Then commenced a head-to-head pushing match, in which sharp-pointed horns played a painful part. For two hours A and B waged their fight, what time the rest of the herd gathered round in a circle and watched. At the end of that time A went a fearful gallop on the grass. Immediately the Whipsnade attendants rushed up to protect him from a savage dispatch at the horns of the still infuriated B. But the fight had gone on too long already—A never recovered from his wounds or his exhaustion and he "snuffed it" shortly afterwards!

BIG BONUS COUPON!

Of course, you are collecting our Gift Coupons—that goes without saying—and you know that the bigger your total is the better chance you stand of winning a handsome prize. Well, here's a bit of news for all of you who are set on getting a really grand total. In this week's "Magnet"—our companion paper, which is noted for its long complete school stories of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars—there is a BIG BONUS COUPON worth 250 POINTS. In addition, there is, of course, the usual coupon worth 50 points. So, if you have twopenny to spare this week, visit your newsagent and get the copy of the "Magnet" Now On Sale. The title of the sparkling school story is "THE SECRET OF THE PRIORY"—a yarn you will enjoy to the

full, whilst those of you with a liking for stories dealing with the Great War will find "Wings of War" a real thriller!

SEA BED TRAVEL!

Take your seats, ladies and gentlemen. We are just about to submerge. The commander of the latest "submarine bus"—an invention of a French engineer which looks a mixture of armoured tank and boat—bells his orders. A hatchway flap bangs shut, the motors begin to hum, and soon the underwater bus is travelling on the floor of the sea. Through the numerous unbreakable glass windows you are able to catch a sight of the different forms of underwater life, and even if the machinery of this strange craft breaks down the passengers need have no cause for alarm. By a simple movement of a lever, the "cabin" of the "submarine bus" can be freed of its chassis, whereupon its own buoyancy will take it to the surface of the water. This new invention will appeal to many seaside visitors in search of novel thrills, for its inventor claims that it is perfectly safe—which is more than can be said for the submarine used for warfare.

THE GOLDEN PENCIL!

How would you like to be able to write your name in letters of gold? It's quite possible, thanks to the "electric pencil" which has just appeared on the market. This pencil has to be plugged in to a wall socket and the electric current speedily makes the fine nib hot. Over the article upon which you wish to write you spread a sheet of gold paper. The heat from your electric pencil, which you use in the ordinary way, melts that gold paper and fixes the outline of your writing on to the object for keeps. Quite a stunt, what? Notepaper, personal cards, lamp-shades—there are all manner of things you can practise your gold writing on to advantage!

THE SQUADRON OF DEATH!

When we see film stories of the air and gaze at machines crashing into the earth or the sea in flames, we often comfort ourselves with the reflection that the whole thing is a "fake" and that no lives have been risked in the making of this particularly thrilling film. But in many cases film directors with an urge for realism insist upon real planes and real human beings doing these suicidal stunts for the entertainment of the film-going public. Thus sprang into being a squadron of crack flying-men who would crash into the earth at a hundred and fifty miles an hour for an agreed upon sum of money or dive headlong into the sea at two hundred miles an hour. These dare-devils of the skies came to be known as the "Squadron of Death," for no stunt was too dangerous for them to attempt. Twenty-three gallant airmen formed that squadron at one time, but now their record reads "Eighteen killed, four crippled, one able-bodied." The latter—the only one left who is able and willing to risk his life again—carries on him the scars of thirty-four "certain death" crashes. His injuries have included a broken neck, ribs broken nine times, a dislocated backbone, and a dozen wounds from flying wreckage in the shape of busted cylinders, broken propellers, etc. Despite this formidable collection of damages, however, the "able-bodied" survivor of the "Squadron of Death" is quite cheerfully prepared to tempt fate again at a price of five hundred pounds!

YOUR EDITOR.

PRIME MINISTER OF ST. JIM'S!

(Continued from page 17.)

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye and gave Gore a calm survey through it.

"Did you address me, Goah?"

"Yes, Gussy! What price eyeglasses?"

"I wegard your remark as fivvolous and impertinent!" said D'Arcy, with hauteur. "Pway come on, deah boys!"

The chums walked on, leaving the juniors chuckling. Blake was rather puzzled. But he soon saw the reason for the merriment.

Half a dozen youngsters of the Third Form were solemnly parading in the quad with eyeglasses stuck in their right eyes, and as soon as they saw D'Arcy they fell into line with him.

Arthur Augustus looked at them in amazement.

"Bai Jove! There is a cuvious sight, Blake!" he remarked. "I suppose there is somethin' wrong with the sight of these youngstahs all of a sudden."

Blake grinned.

"Perhaps," he replied. "I wonder whose idea this is? I say, young Curly, what have you got that window-pane in your eye for?"

Curly of the Third screwed his monocle—which was made of plain glass—tighter into his eye, and stared at Blake.

"Are—you—aw!—alluding to my monocle?" he drawled.

"Yes, you young ass!"

"It is—aw—a present from Monty Lowther—aw—"

"Oh, I might have guessed that these Shell rotters were at the bottom of it!" said Blake. "Never mind, Gussy; imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, you know!"

D'Arcy stared at the grinning youngsters.

"I wegard the whole pwoceedin' as impertinent!" he exclaimed.

"Did you address me?" demanded Curly haughtily.

"You young wascal—"

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "Let's get into the gym!"

"Weally, Blake, I am wathah in a quandaw! I cannot allow this gwoss impertinence to pass unpunished!"

"Wade in and lick the lot of them, then!"

"Yaas; but ought I to lick these youngstahs or to lick Lowthah for puttin' them up to this gwoss impertinence?" said D'Arcy.

"Is that a conundrum?"

"Pway be sewious!"

"My dear Gus, you must work this out in your own head," said Blake. "I can't help you with problems of that sort. Come on, kids; I'm going into the gym!"

And Blake, Herries, and Digby walked on, leaving Arthur in an undecided frame of mind. Finally, he followed them, and Curly of the Third, and his comrades promptly followed him, strutting in imitation of D'Arcy's graceful walk.

A yell of laughter came from a dozen directions, and Arthur Augustus turned red.

"You young wascals!" he exclaimed, turning round.

"How dare you tweek me with such gwoss diswesspect and impertinence?"

"What's the matter with you?" said Curly, in an aggrieved tone. "Can't a chap wear a—aw—monocle if he likes, without you chipping in?"

"You impertinent young wascal—"

"Rats!" said Curly. "Sorry—I mean, wats!"

D'Arcy made a stride toward the Third-Formers. They promptly melted away; but they did not go far. They were evidently out for fun, and Arthur Augustus keenly realised how extremely undignified a figure he would cut if he started chasing the elusive fags around the quadrangle.

He stopped to reflect. And as he stopped the fags came round again, eyeglass in eye, with solemn features, as if bent on anything but a joke.

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye and looked at them witheringly.

"You impertinent young wascals—"

"Aw—did you address me?" said Curly, from a safe distance.

D'Arcy, with a frown upon his aristocratic brow, strode off towards the School House. Right in he went, and right up to the study of Tom Merry, where the Terrible Three were doing their preparation. He threw open the door and strode in.

The chums of the Shell looked up.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Manners presently. "Is it a custom to come into a room without knocking in the slum you were brought up in?"

Arthur Augustus turned crimson. Any reflection upon his manners touched him in his tenderest spot.

"I beg your pardon, Manners—"

"I should think you do!"

"And yours, Tom Merry—"

"Granted!" said Tom Merry. "Good-bye!"

"I have come heah to thwash Lowthah!"

Monty Lowther rose from the table and pushed back his cuffs.

"Certainly!" he said. "What are you going to thrash me for, Gussy? Let me know before you slay me."

"You have incited the Third Form fags to tweek me with gwoss diswesspect!"

"Imposs!" exclaimed Lowther. "They would never do it. They would be awed into immediate trembling submission by a glance from the monocle of the one and only Augustus!"

"I wegard you as an impertinent wottah!" said D'Arcy. "You have supplied the fags with eyeglasses—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And incited them to tweek me with gwoss diswesspect in the quadwangle—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You may wegard it as a laughin' mattah, Lowthah. But I wegard it as gwoss impertinence. The fags will keep up that silly joke till they have broken all the eyeglasses—"

"Very likely! Ha, ha, ha!"

"And this is why I came here to administah to you a feahful thwashin'. Lowthah. Are you weady, you wottah?"

"But I say, Gussy—"

"Of course, if you wish to apologise—"

"Not at all. But I plead extenuating circumstances," said Lowther, with a grave and solemn manner.

"There can be no extenuatin' ciros in a case of gwoss impertinence like this, Lowthah. I wegard you as a wottah!"

"I did it for your good!" pleaded Monty Lowther. "I thought that possibly if you knew how great an ass you were, you would try to become rather less of an ass—"

"You are addin' insult to injury," said D'Arcy. "Pway stand aside, you two fellows, and keep out of the way while I thwash Lowthah!"

And Arthur Augustus rushed valiantly to the attack.

Whatever might be the weakness of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, he had heaps of pluck, and he would have tackled any odds to avenge an insult to his dignity. He closed with

KEEP



THIS

Lowther, and they went reeling and staggering round the study in a deadly embrace. Tom Merry and Manners stood looking on, shaking with laughter.

"Go it, Gussy!" shouted Manners. "Ha, ha, ha! Get his napper into chancery!"

"Yaas, wathah! I shall give him a feahful thwashin'!" panted D'Arcy.

"Bravo! Lowther, you are as good as dead! Can I have your fishing-rod when you are laid in the cold ground?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The combat suddenly ceased. D'Arcy had staggered against a chair and fallen, and he plumped on the carpet with Monty Lowther on his chest.

"Ow!" gasped the swell of the School House. "Ow! You are wumplin' my waistcoat feahfully. Get up! Monty Lowthah, I insist upon your gettin' up immediately, so that I can wise and give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners. "That's cool, if you like!"

"Lowthah, you howwid wottah—"

"Will you apologise if I let you get up, and make it pax, Gussy?" asked Lowther, taking a comfortable seat on the chest of the fallen swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus struggled and wriggled in vain.

"Certainly not!"

"Oh, very well! Give me my books over, Tom. I'll do my prep here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I uttably wefuse to allow you to do your pwep on my chest!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I insist upon your immediately welaasin' me!"

"Will you make it pax?"

"No! Ow, ow! Yes—perhaps I will, if you apologise!"

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"Not much!"

"Then I will waive the apology. You are uttably spoilin' my beastlay clothes! Pway awise, you wottah! I make it pax!"

The grinning Lowther rose. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy picked himself up, looking very dusty and dishevelled. He adjusted his monocle and glared at Lowther.

"I must let you off that thwashin', as I have made it pax!" he exclaimed. "But pway wemembah that I wegard you with feahful contempt!"

And the swell of St. Jim's strode from the study, leaving the Terrible Three convulsed.

CHAPTER 11.

Tom Merry's Letter Home!

TOM MERRY rose from the table a quarter of an hour later.

"Aren't you fellows finished yet?"

"No," said Lowther. "Don't wait for me."

"That's all right. I've got to write to my old governess," said Tom Merry. "I'll write the letter while you finish."

Tom Merry was a good correspondent so far as his old governess was concerned. In spite of many peculiar little ways, Miss Priscilla Fawcett was a lovable old soul, and Tom Merry was very fond of her. He dutifully wrote his weekly letter, and dutifully read the much longer letter he received in return. While Manners and Lowther were finishing their prep, he wrote to Miss Fawcett.

"Anybody got an envelope?" he asked, when he had finished.

Nobody had. Tom Merry put the letter in his pocket and rose. Stationery was not kept in large stocks by the juniors, and somebody had lately borrowed all Tom Merry's envelopes and forgotten to replace them. As Tom rose, he caught sight of a slip of paper on the floor.

He stooped and picked it up. He stared a little as he read what was written on it.

"Don't forget the whip for Tom Merry on Saturday."

"What on earth is this?" he exclaimed. "I suppose Gussy dropped it when you were waltzing with him, Monty. 'Don't forget the whip for Tom Merry on Saturday.' What the dickens was Gussy carrying that about for?"

Lowther chuckled.

"It's his instructions from the Prime Minister, I expect."

Tom Merry comprehended.

"I see; a whip to the meeting on Saturday," he said, laughing. "Gussy would have the Prime Minister on his track if it were known that he had lost his written instructions. I'll give this back to him when I see him."

And Tom Merry thrust the slip into his pocket.

The Terrible Three went into the quadrangle. The dusk was falling, but some of the Shell were playing leapfrog, and Tom Merry and his chums joined in. It was nearly dark when Tom Merry came in, and remembered the letter in his pocket destined for Miss Priscilla Fawcett at Huckleberry Heath.

"By Jove, I nearly forgot it!" he exclaimed. "Have you got an envelope, Walsh?"

"Yes, in my study," said Walsh. "You can have it if you like. I've only had some fish-bait in it."

Tom Merry sniffed.

"Thank you! I want it for a letter to my governess."

"I've got some new ones," said Reilly. "I'll get you one, if you like."

"Thank you, kid!"

Reilly brought the envelope, and Tom Merry extracted a stamp from one of his pockets, borrowed a fountain-pen to address the letter, and hastily thrust the letter into the envelope, and cut across the quad just in time to catch the collection at the school letter-box.

"That's done!" he remarked, as he came in, breathless but satisfied. "Miss Fawcett will get it by the first post to-morrow morning now, at Huckleberry Heath."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came along the passage. He haughtily ignored Lowther, carefully nodding only to Tom Merry and Manners.

"I say, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hallo, Gussy! Have you come to apologise to Lowther?"

"Certainly not! I shall certainly wufuse to wegard Lowthah as a gentleman until he apologises to me," said D'Arcy. "But for the fact that I have been constwained to make it pax, I should now administah to him a weally feahful thwashing'. But what I wanted to say to you was, have I left a slip of papah in your study? I have missed it twom my beastlay pocket, and I can't find it, and it has occurred to me that it might have dwopped on the floor while I was chastisin' Lowthah!"

Lowther stared.

"While you were—what?"

"It seemed to me that the boot was on the other foot," grinned Tom Merry. "Perhaps I was mistaken. I did see a slip of paper on the floor, Gussy, and I guess that it belonged to you. Here it is!"

Tom Merry went through his jacket pockets in search of the slip of paper, but did not find it. He looked rather puzzled. He went through the pockets again with the same result.

"I say, did either of you chaps notice which pocket I put that slip of paper in?" he exclaimed.

"I didn't," said Lowther. "Wasn't looking."

"Same here," said Manners.

Tom Merry felt in all his pockets in turn. But the valuable slip of paper containing the written instructions of the School House whip failed to appear.

"I'm sorry!" said Tom Merry. "I put it in my pocket to return to you, Gussy, and now it's gone. I suppose I dropped it when I was playing leapfrog. I'll go and have a look in the quad, if you like."

"Not at all, deah boy; it's weally of no consequence!" said Arthur Augustus. "Blake will be exasperated when he knows that I have lost his written instructions; but, after all, that is not a mattah of great consequence. He can easily wite them out again. By the way, in case I forget to tell you to-morrow, don't forget to turn up at the meetin'. The New House boundahs have some wheeze on for splittin' our beastlay majowity, and bringin' in the Opposition, or somethin' of that sort."

"Oh, we'll have our eyes on them!" said Tom Merry. "We'll turn up, never fear!"

And Arthur Augustus, still frigidly unconscious of Monty Lowther's presence, walked away. Two or three Third Form fags appeared out of various corners with monocles in their eyes, and walked after him.

Lowther chuckled.

"They're keeping up the joke," he observed, as D'Arcy's voice was heard in the distance threatening the fags with condign punishment. "The laugh is against Gussy this time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young wascals—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"You wottah!" yelled Arthur Augustus. He closed with Lowther, and they went reeling round the study, overturning everything in their path. "Ha, ha, ha!" "Go it!" Tom Merry and Manners stood looking on, shaking with laughter.

CHAPTER 12.

A Surprising Telegram!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, stood in the Sixth Form class-room, with a telegram in his hand and an expression of almost idiotic bewilderment upon his face.

It was Saturday morning, and the Head had been conducting the Sixth Form upon an interesting excursion into Greek roots when that telegram arrived. The amazement of the Head as he read it was visible to the whole class.

"Dear me!" murmured the Head, adjusting his glasses and reading the telegram again. "Dear me! There must be some strange mistake! Dear me! Kildare, I leave you in charge here for a few minutes!"

"Yes, sir," said the captain of St. Jim's.

The Head left the Sixth Form room, and went in search of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House. Mr. Railton was always his right-hand man in a case of difficulty. Mr. Railton was taking the Shell that morning, and it was to the Shell class-room that the Head proceeded.

"Can you spare me a minute, Mr. Railton?"

"Certainly, sir."

The Shell looked on with interest as the two masters consulted together in low tones. There was evidently something the matter, from the Head's worried expression, but the tones of the masters was too low for the boys to hear what was said.

"Read that telegram, Mr. Railton," said Dr. Holmes. "It is really most amazing. Can you understand it?"

The Housemaster read the wire.

"Please postpone punishment till my arrival. Am coming immediately." "P. FAWCETT."

The Housemaster and the headmaster looked at each other in equal astonishment.

"Can you understand it, Mr. Railton?"

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I have not the faintest idea what it can mean, sir."

"It is from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess and guardian," said the Head. "But what can it mean?"

"That is a mystery. Can she have an idea in her head that you intend to administer some punishment to Tom Merry?"

"How should she imagine so?"

"I cannot guess. Tom Merry is not the sort of lad to write complaints to his governess; and, besides, there is, I believe, no question of punishing Merry."

"Certainly not, as far as I am concerned."

"He is very frequently in hot water," said Mr. Railton, with a smile. "But of late he has been very busy with a school parliament the juniors are getting up, and he has had no time to break any of the college rules. His conduct has been quite exemplary, in fact. I cannot understand this."

"I remember once there was a wire sent to Miss Fawcett by a mischievous lad which brought her post-haste to the school," said the Head, after a pause. "This may be the result of some trick of the same kind."

"I should not be surprised."

"I suppose there is no way to prevent her coming?" murmured the Head. "She may have started by now, and a telegram to Huckleberry Heath would get there too late."

"Unfortunately, that is very probable."

The Head sighed slightly. He liked and greatly respected Miss Priscilla Fawcett. But he had sometimes found the good lady very trying on her visits to the school.

"I—I should be glad if this visit could be—er—postponed," the Head remarked. "But if Miss Fawcett has already started, it is too late; but—"

"I do not know how frequent the trains are from Huckleberry Heath," said the Housemaster. "But I remember that Miss Fawcett is on the telephone. There may be time to"

ring her up before she starts. A wire would have to be sent from Rylcombe, and would be pretty certain to get there late; but on the telephone—

The Head brightened up.

"You are right, Mr. Railton. At all events, I will ring Miss Fawcett up immediately, and if she has not already started I may be able to explain in time."

The Head hurried away. In a few moments he was on the phone in his study, but to his amazement there came no answer to his call. The vagaries of the young lady at the exchange were familiar enough; but in this case it was evident that there was something wrong with the wire, and the communication was off.

"Dear me!" said the Head, as he laid down the receiver. "This is most annoying! My last chance of stopping Miss Fawcett is gone. The good lady will have a long and tiresome journey for nothing, and I—ahem—"

The Head sent for Taggles, and instructed him immediately to procure a man to examine the telephone and attend to it, and then he returned thoughtfully to the Sixth Form room.

The man was not long in arriving, and he found nothing wrong in the Head's study, and pursued his investigations farther, and when the boys came out after morning school they saw him on the School House roof at work with the wire.

Tom Merry laughed as he glanced up.

"That's some of Skimpole's work," he remarked. "Something wrong with the Head's telephone."

"Impossible!" said Skimpole, who was craning his neck to look up. "I have really not interfered with the Head's wire, except to use it as a support for mine, where the two wires cross, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha! There's something wrong with it, at all events."

"That is not my fault. I was very careful."

But the Terrible Three laughed again. They were pretty certain that Skimpole was at the bottom of the trouble, though the amateur telephonist of St. Jim's was certain of the contrary.

Skimpole stood watching the man at work, while the chums of the Shell strolled out of the gates of St. Jim's. It was a fine May afternoon, and the leafy lanes tempted them. But Skimpole's thoughts were not in the leafy lanes or on the sunny river. He was thinking of the possibility of a by-election of the Parliament of St. Jim's, and he went to his study a little later to write out a speech he had been thinking of to be delivered to the electors.

Skimpole sat at his table, scratching his nose and chewing the handle of his pen, when the telephone bell rang.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I hope that it is not a joke from the New House again! It is very annoying to be interrupted while composing a speech—"

Ting-ting-ting!

Skimpole, with a patient resignation, took up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Allo! Har you there?"

Skimpole looked surprised.

"Dear me! That is not Figgins' voice. It is the voice of a person who misplaces his aspirates. Surely—"

"Har you there?"

"Yes; I'm here."

"All right now!"

"Eh?"

"All right now, miss?"

"There is some misapprehension," murmured Skimpole. "I do not know who this person is, but I cannot imagine why he should call me 'miss.'"

"All right?"

"Yes; I am certainly all right."

"Right-ho! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye! But—"

But the unknown speaker had rung off. Skimpole hung up the receiver in bewilderment.

"I really cannot understand this," he murmured. "It must surely be a joke of someone in the New House, or else someone has used the telephone, imagining that it was connected up with the exchange. Ah, yes, that must be it! And that accounts for him addressing me as 'miss.' But why should he ring up the exchange to ask the young lady if she is all right? Perhaps he is her sweetheart, or something. But I do not really quite understand it."

However, more important matters claimed Skimpole's attention, and leaving the mystery unsolved he returned to his pen and paper, and was soon deep in the composition of the speech which was to enlighten the St. Jim's electors on the important subject of Determinism, and several other "isms."

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CHAPTER 13.

Miss Priscilla is Alarmed!

"MY hat!"

It was Tom Merry who uttered the sudden exclamation.

The Terrible Three were sitting on the top bar of a gate in Rylcombe Lane, when Tom Merry suddenly caught sight of a figure approaching from the direction of the village. Familiar enough was the figure to the eyes of the hero of the Shell.

"My hat! It's my old nurse!"

It was indeed Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and the old lady was evidently in a hurry. Her bonnet was tied on awry, and her general appearance was not nearly so neat and prim as was usual with her. She was coming up the lane at a great rate, and the sight would have been comical but for the earnestness and solemn purpose in her perspiring face.

"Coming to see you, Tom," said Manners. "Didn't you know?"

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"I hadn't the slightest idea."

"That's curious. She looks as if something were wrong," said Monty Lowther. "Alarmed for your health, I expect, and coming down with a special bottle of cod-liver oil."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Or perhaps a box of Purple Pills for Peculiar People."

Tom Merry slid off the gate.

"I'm going to meet her," he said. And he ran up the lane towards the hurrying old lady.

Miss Fawcett caught sight of him, and uttered an exclamation of joy.

"My darling Tommy!"

The next moment he was clasped in her arms.

"My sweetest child! And they were going to whip him, then! Never, never, while his old nurse is there to protect him, the sweet boy!"

Tom Merry struggled. Miss Priscilla Fawcett was a dear old soul. But she never would realise that Tom Merry was growing up. To be hugged in public and called a dear boy at fifteen was not exactly gratifying to the hero of the Shell.

"Dear Miss Fawcett—"

"But they shall not whip him, then!"

"I—I—"

"I came down instantly. You have not been whipped yet?"

"Whipped? No!"

"Then the headmaster had my telegram in time. Oh, I have been in such a flutter!" said Miss Fawcett. "I caught the first train down from Huckleberry Heath. But the journey is so long, and I was afraid that you might have the whipping before I arrived, though Hannah wired immediately to the headmaster. Thank goodness I am in time, my darling child! And there was no vehicle at Rylcombe Station, and I have hurried—"

"My dear nurse—"

"But you are safe now, my darling! You are safe now, with your old nurse to protect you," said Miss Fawcett.

Tom Merry was scarlet. Manners and Lowther had turned their heads away from the affecting scene. Miss Fawcett thought it was due to their emotion, and she respected them for the manly tears which compelled the two juniors to put their handkerchiefs to their faces. But Tom Merry knew very well that they were struggling desperately not to yell with laughter in the presence of Miss Fawcett.

"Come on with me!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "Come to the doctor, and I will see that you are not whipped, my darling! You are not strong enough to bear punishment, my sweet boy!"

"But, my dear—"

But Miss Priscilla hurried on. Tom Merry gave in, feeling that it was best to get Miss Fawcett inside the school as soon as possible. Fellows were gathering round to look on, and a scene of pathos in public was a horror of horrors to Tom Merry, as to most boys.

As soon as they were gone, Monty Lowther threw himself down on his back on the grass beside the lane and yelled.

"Oh, hold me, Manners!" he gurgled. "I know I shall break something! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't!" gasped Manners. "I want somebody to hold me! Oh, my darling child, and did the naughty schoolmaster want to whip him, then! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho! Poor old Tommy!"

"Poor old Tommy! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry hurried on towards the school with Miss Fawcett. What had brought the good lady so suddenly down to St. Jim's he could not imagine. Fellows looked at



Tom Merry slid off the gate on which he was sitting with Manners and Lowther. "I'm going to meet Miss Fawcett," he said, and ran up the lane towards the hurrying old lady. Miss Fawcett caught sight of him and uttered an exclamation of joy. "My darling Tommy!"

them as they progressed across the quad, and Figgins & Co. raised their hats to Miss Fawcett with great politeness and lurking grins.

Study No. 6 were on the steps of the School House, and they took off their caps courteously.

"It is a weal pleasuah to see you again, Miss Priscillah," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway allow us to welcome you to St. Jim's."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "We are so glad to see you, and so is Tom Merry. Doesn't Merry show it in his face, kids?"

"He do—he does," said Digby.

"I'll punch your head presently," said Tom Merry, in a fierce whisper.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I must see Dr. Holmes immediately!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett. "Where is the Head? My good man, show me in to the Head immediately!"

"The 'Ead is just going to 'is lunch, ma'am."

"I am sure he will excuse me. Show me in at once!"

And Miss Fawcett, who was not to be denied or delayed, was shown forthwith into the presence of the Head of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry would gladly have escaped, but Miss Fawcett held tightly to his hand, and he had to accompany her, whether he liked it or not. He stood with scarlet cheeks in the presence of Dr. Holmes.

"Ah, good-morning, Miss Fawcett!" said the Head, shaking hands with the visitor. "I am—er—glad to see you. Won't you—er—sit down?"

"Oh, Dr. Holmes, I am so glad my telegram reached you in time!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett, sinking into a chair. "If you had whipped Tommy in the present delicate state of his health, the results might have been terrible."

The Head glanced at the sturdy, well-set-up junior, the champion athlete of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, and smiled slightly. Nobody but an anxious old nurse could possibly have imagined Tom Merry to be delicate.

"My dear Miss Fawcett—"

"The result would certainly be very serious. It might cause shock to the system, and Tommy is very delicate. You must not judge by that deceptive flush in his cheeks."

"My dear nurse—"

"My dear Miss Fawcett—"

"Promise me—oh, promise me that you will not whip him, dear Dr. Holmes!"

"But I had no intention of doing so!" exclaimed the amazed Head. "Whipping is not a punishment in vogue in this school, in any case. Boys are caned, and sometimes flogged. But there is no question of punishing Merry at all."

"But—"

"There is evidently some mistake. Is it possible that you have been the victim of some absurd practical joke, Miss Fawcett?"

The old lady looked amazed as well as relieved.

"But—but I came to this conclusion from the slip which Tommy enclosed in his letter to me, which reached me this morning."

The Head looked severely at Tom Merry.

"Is it possible, Merry, that you are the cause of—"

"Certainly not, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There was nothing in my letter, that I know of, to cause Miss Fawcett to—"

"But this is it," exclaimed Miss Fawcett, extracting a slip of paper from her bag, and passing it to the Head.

Dr. Holmes adjusted his spectacles, and looked astounded.

as he read: "Don't forget the whip for Tom Merry on Saturday."

"Bless my soul! What can this mean?"

He had read the sentence aloud, and so Tom Merry understood. The junior involuntarily burst into a laugh.

Dr. Holmes looked at him.

"Merry—"

"If you please, sir, I can explain," said Tom eagerly. "That slip got into the letter by mistake. I wondered what had become of it. I suppose when I put it in my pocket it went into the folded letter, and then I posted it."

"But what does this mean?"

"Oh, it's a whip, sir! It belongs to D'Arcy, and it's his instructions to see that I don't miss the meeting of St. Jim's Parliament to-day."

The Head looked puzzled.

"The St. Jim's Parliament?"

"Yes, sir. It's a House of Commons got up among the Junior Forms, on the lines of the real one, but with improvements."

"Ahem! I understand now. I remember Mr. Railton telling me something about it. You see, Miss Fawcett, it is all a mistake. The whip in this case is only a parliamentary whip. That is, of course, an urgent call to a member to be in his seat for an important debate."

"Thank goodness!" gasped Miss Priscilla. "Thank goodness! I did not quite know what to make of the slip, but I concluded that it was an instruction to some under-master to punish darling Tommy on Saturday, though I could not think how it had come into my dear child's possession. Then my terrible alarm was without foundation?"

The Head smiled.

"Quite without foundation, Miss Fawcett."

"I am so glad! But, as you know, dear Dr. Holmes, Tommy's health is so delicate that I was afraid—"

"Yes, I fully understand—"

"I came away in so great a hurry that I had time only to snatch up a bottle of cod-liver oil to bring to Tommy—"

The Head took pity upon the crimson junior.

"Yes, yes! All is explained now. You may go, Merry."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You will lunch with me, Miss Fawcett—"

"Certainly, Dr. Holmes. Thank you very much! I shall return to Huckleberry Heath by the next train, much relieved in my mind."

It was possible that Dr. Holmes was much relieved in his mind, too.

Tom Merry quitted the study. Miss Priscilla arranged the strings of her bonnet.

"I left Laurel Villa in too great a hurry to leave any instructions," she said. "Could you telephone after lunch and instruct Hannah to have the trap at the station to meet me, dear Dr. Holmes?"

"With pleasure, madam!"

"Thank you so much! I am afraid I have quite startled you by this sudden visit."

"Oh, not at all!"

"But I was so terribly alarmed for my darling Tommy—"

"Lunch is served, sir!"

And the Head escaped at last from the harrowing particulars of Tom Merry's early career.

CHAPTER 14.

A Strange Talk on the Telephone!

TOM MERRY rejoined his chums with a very rich colour in his face. Lowther and Manners made no allusion to Miss Fawcett, but it was easy to see that they were suppressing a strong desire to chuckle. Tom Merry explained the cause of the old lady's sudden visit to St. Jim's, and the chums of the Shell agreed that it was all D'Arcy's fault. They went in rather late to dinner. When the meal was over Skimpole went up to his study again, and the Terrible Three followed him there.

The freak of the Shell was already busy when they came in. He was poring over a paper pamphlet with the imposing title of "Determinism: A Treatise upon the Theory that Effect is Result of a Cause, and that every Cause is the Producer of an Effect." The brainy man of the Shell looked up as the chums came in, and stuck his pen behind one of his large ears.

"Do you want to speak to me, Merry? I am rather busy just now, looking up points for my election speech."

"But the elections are over."

"I am expecting a by-election, which will give me the opportunity of carrying on my propaganda work within the walls of St. Jim's Parliament. The more I study the subject of Determinism—"

"Ring off, old chap! I mean, ring on—ring on to Figgins. We want to ring him up for the parliamentary meeting."

"I thought Blake was going to do that."

"Blake can go and eat coke!"

"Can he?" said a voice at the door. And the chums of Study No. 6 looked in. "I thought you kids might have the cheek to usurp my functions, so I came along. As Prime Minister in St. Jim's Parliament, I call the members together."

"Yaas, wathah! I should stand upon my wights as Pwime Ministah if I were Blake. I wegard these persons as—"

Ting-ting!

"Hallo! There's Figgins & Co. started ringing us up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I'll just see what the—"

"No, you won't," said Blake. "I'll just see—"

"I tell you—"

"Now, look here—"

Skimpole stepped to the telephone and took up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"I wish you would attend to my call a little more promptly."

"Hallo, Figgy is in a hurry!" remarked Blake, who was close enough to Skimpole to hear what was said. "But that doesn't sound like his voice, either."

"I was delayed, as I was busy upon a speech," said Skimpole. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting, but it really doesn't matter."

"What do you say?"

"I say it really does not matter."

"I shall complain of this impertinence."

"Oh, rats!"

"What?"

"I said rats!"

"I—I—I—"

"If you've got anything to say, say it; if not, ring off."

"I—I—I—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Skimpole. And he rang off.

"Good-bye, Dr. Holmes! Thank you so much! And— Oh, yes! You telephoned to Huckleberry Heath, did you not, to tell them to have the trap at the station?"

The Head was looking a little flustered as he shook hands with Miss Fawcett.

"Er—I rang up the exchange," he said, "but I was not put on to your number. I was replied to with the grossest

"DETECTIVE D'ARCY DUD!"

And doesn't he look it in the small cover reproduction of next week's GEM shown below! He's been looking for clues in a well!



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OUT NEXT WEDNESDAY

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impertinence. I am afraid that the operator must be intoxicated, or something of the sort. I will ring up again a little later—or, rather, I will send a wire to Huckleberry Heath, which will answer the purpose."

"Thank you so much, Dr. Holmes! I must say good-bye to my darling Tommy."

Tom Merry was not to be seen; but someone remembered having seen him go to Skimpole's study, and he was sent for. He came down in haste to say good-bye to his old governess.

Dr. Holmes, after seeing Miss Priscilla off at the door, returned to his study, still looking very flustered.

He intended spending the half-holiday preparing examination papers; but he had barely settled down at his desk when the telephone-bell rang.

"Dear me!" murmured the Head. "I suppose they are ringing me up to explain about the intoxicated operator."

He took up the receiver.

"Hallo, hallo!" came from the other end.

"Hallo!"

"Oh, you're there, are you?"

"Yes," said Dr. Holmes, rather surprised by this mode of address, "I am here."

"Why the dickens didn't you answer before, then, you ass?"

The doctor nearly dropped the receiver.

He had known of carelessness and impertinence at the telephone exchange, but he had never been addressed like that before.

"What—what did you say?"

"I said why didn't you answer the call before?"

"If you have rung before, I was not aware of it. I have been absent from my study."

"Well, you shouldn't be, when I'm talking to you. Never mind. It's the woodshed again at three o'clock."

"What!"

"Deaf?" said the voice. "I say it's the woodshed again at three o'clock."

"What—what—"

"My hat! The chap's deaf or silly. The woodshed—again—at three—o'clock! Understand that?"

"No—n-n-no—I don't think I quite understand. There is some mistake somewhere. Are you the exchange?"

"The what?"

"The exchange!"

"Don't be an ass, old chap! You know who I am, so what's the good of making little jokes about the exchange? Don't be a silly ass!"

"Bless my soul!" murmured Dr. Holmes.

"Well, are you coming?"

"Eh?"

"Are you coming?"

"Coming where?"

"To the woodshed, fathead!"

"I—I think there must be some mistake. I am convinced that there is some mistake. I must be speaking to the wrong person. Do you know who I am?"

"Ass! What are you getting at now?"

"I am Dr. Holmes."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"I am Dr. Holmes, of St. James' Collegiate School."

"Why don't you say you are Carnera or Jack Hobbs, Figgy?"

The doctor gave a jump.

"Bless my soul! The operator must be under the impression that he is speaking to Figgins. Hallo! Do you think you are speaking to Figgins of the Fourth Form?"

"I know I am, cuckoo!"

"This is really remarkable!"

Dr. Holmes hung up the receiver, and rang for the page-boy, whom he sent to fetch Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster of the School House came in in a few minutes. He looked in, some surprise at the Head's flustered face.

"Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Something is certainly wrong, Mr. Railton," said the Head. "You see, the telephone-bell is ringing. I should be glad if you would answer the call, and tell me what you make of it. I am utterly astounded."

Mr. Railton looked somewhat mystified, and took up the receiver.

"I have heard to-day that some mechanical genius in the School House has lately connected the two Houses by telephone," said Mr. Railton. "Is it possible that the wires have become connected, or something of that sort?"

The Head passed his hand across his brow.

"Dear me! I knew nothing of that."

Mr. Railton spoke into the telephone.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo, you New House rotter!"

"I am Mr. Railton."

"Oh, are you going to be funny again?"

"Don't you know my voice, Blake?"

"Well, it's something like Railton's, but I suppose you're Kerr. Kerr can imitate any chap's voice. No good trying to take me in, Kerr."

"I am Mr. Railton, and I am in the Head's study. I command you to come here immediately."

"Yes, I'm likely to go into the Head's study and get a licking for my cheek, to please you, Kerr!"

"I tell you I am Mr. Railton—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

The Housemaster laughed involuntarily. It was impossible to be angry when it was quite clear that Blake firmly believed he was talking to a New House junior.

"Where are you, Blake?" he said.

"You know jolly well that I'm in Skimpole's study."

Mr. Railton turned from the telephone.

"Blake is speaking from Skimpole's study, sir," he said. "Will you send the pageboy to fetch here everyone who is there at present? That will clear up the matter."

"A good idea," said the Head.

And the school page was promptly dispatched upon his errand. In five minutes a sound of many footsteps was heard in the passage, and the grinning pageboy opened the door and ushered in eight rather scared-looking juniors.

The Head surveyed them severely.

"Blake, I understand that you were talking over the telephone just now."

"I—I was talking to Figgins in the New House, sir."

"You were talking to myself, and then to Mr. Railton, on this telephone."

"I—I—I—"

Blake was too astounded and alarmed to say more. But Tom Merry came to the rescue.

"Blake didn't know, sir," he said; "we have a telephone from Skimpole's study to the New House, and Blake was talking to Figgins. We couldn't understand the answers we got. We thought it was Figgins or Kerr pulling our leg—I mean joking with us."

"How could your telephone possibly have become connected with mine?"

Skimpole looked puzzled.

"It is impossible, sir!" he exclaimed. "I put up the wires most carefully."

"Then that is why my telephone was out of order this morning!" exclaimed the Head.

"Impossible, sir! I was too careful for anything like that to happen—"

"It is evidently the case," said the doctor; "yet the workman, when he had finished, told me that he had spoken through to the exchange, and that it was all right."

Skimpole gave a jump.

"Ah, that explains!"

"Explains what, Skimpole?"

"Why, sir, the stupid ass—I mean, the man must have connected up the two telephones by mistake. Somebody spoke to me this morning, and I thought it was Figgins joking, as he addressed me as miss—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "It was the repairing chap speaking through to the exchange!"

"I suppose now that it must have been. I said that I was all right, though I did not understand his inquiry—"

Mr. Railton was trying not to laugh. Even the Head could not help smiling.

"It's all the stupid fellow's fault, sir," said Skimpole.

"He certainly ought not to have connected up the two wires. Of course, as a Determinist, I do not blame him for being stupid. It is evidently due to the combined influences of heredity and environment—"

"That will do, Skimpole. As it is all a mistake—"

"I hope that you couldn't think I meant to talk like that to you, sir," said Blake, very red in the face; "I'd sooner bite my tongue off. I thought I was talking to old Figgins all the time, and that he was joking. I am very sorry—"

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"I accept your apology, Blake. But I must ask you kindly to take down the telephone. You may go."

And the juniors, extremely glad to escape so cheaply, went. When the door closed, Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton burst into a hearty laugh. And Tom Merry went over in person to the New House to inform Figgins of the time for parliament to meet.

THE END.

(Arthur Augustus is at it again next week! He decides to become a detective! Follow him on the laughter trail in "DETECTIVE D'ARCY—D U D!" next Wednesday.)

HERE'S OUR THRILLING NAVAL ADVENTURE YARN. START READING IT NOW!

CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET



Although he is only the junior midny on the Victorious, Ned Hardy is determined to clear the name of his brother Ralph, who was dismissed the service after being "framed" with a robbery. Hoaxed by a forged letter, Ned and his pal Jinks fall into the hands of foreign spies, but are rescued by two young prizefighters, who capture two of the spies. Ralph arrives on the scene with some policemen, and the two rogues are arrested. Later, Ned and Jinks return to the Victorious.

Ned's Great Ride!

"THEY say the Thunderbolt's lying out in the roads, and the Admiral of the Fleet is coming into harbour on his own," announced Acland, coming up on to the boat deck in the slack hours of the second dog-watch.

"Blow the Admiral of the Fleet!" said Jinks wrathfully. "We've been here five whole solid days, and no leave for any of us! It's time to mutiny, if you ask me!"

"That sounds well from a chap who had a whole day and a night off at Chatham, when his betters were sweltering between decks!" said Wexton.

"Get to your stations, you chaps!" ordered Keppel sharply. "Yonder's the Thunderbolt's chief launch coming up the harbour!"

"So it is! 'Tin-Top' himself in the sternsheets!" said Jinks, watching the approaching vessel. "Old nuisance! Our Raggy is the admiral I can do with."

Sir Francis Frobisher, Admiral of the Fleet, paid a state visit to the Victorious that afternoon, and everyone was rather despondent, fearing that something had gone wrong, and that shore leave would be harder to get than ever.

Their despair turned to joy when news came that two-thirds of the midshipmen would be allowed the next afternoon off, and that they could leave at the end of the forenoon watch, directly after eight bells. Jinks, Ned, Acland, and Keppel were all among the free brigade.

At half-past eleven next morning they saw the Thunderbolt's steam-launch come alongside, with the admiral and a large and commanding lady in the sternsheets.

"Not such a bad old buffer, 'Tin-Top,' is he?" said Jinks, as he and Ned dwatched from a safe distance of the boat deck. "That's Lady Tin-Top alongside him. Plenty of beam for her draught, hasn't she? Reminds you of the old ram-bow battleships they used to build. They say the Thunderbolt sinks two feet on the waterline when she goes aboard."

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"I say, there's Raglan going down the gangway, and Buckley, too!" said Ned, as Rear-Admiral Raglan and his flag-lieutenant, both in grey flannel suits, went aboard the launch, and were welcomed by the admiral and Lady Frobisher.

A huge luncheon-basket reposed in the sternsheets of the launch also. Evidently the party was going to enjoy itself. The craft steamed off towards Harwich Jetty, where some white dresses were seen among the people waiting.

"'Tin-Top's giving a picnic party," said Keppel, joining the two chums.

"Doosid vulgar of him, I call it!" sneered Wexton. "Grubbing on the beach like a lot of cheap trippers! Not keeping up the dignity of the Service!"

"I suppose you'll keep it up in the saloon bar of the Great Eastern Hotel," retorted Keppel, "or playing penny snooker in the billiard-room! I say, you chaps, how about popping over to Felixstowe? Better fun there than at Harwich, and a ripping beach to bathe from. Always a jape to be had there!"

Half a dozen of the middies chimed in at once, and voted the idea a good one, Ned and Jinks among them. They all set out in the second cutter half an hour later, crossed the estuary, and landed at Felixstowe Dock, whence a train took them into the town.

"Great thing about this show," said Jinks approvingly, "we shall be well away from anybody belonging to the Victorious; whereas in Harwich they'll be all over the shop. Not half a bad place, either!"

At Felixstowe arose the question of "grub." It turned out that everybody was short of pocket-money. Keppel suggested that the Felixstowe hotels were enough to break a millionaire.

"There's a topping little inn at Bawdsey Ferry, two or three miles along," he said. "We can get a good blow-out there without paying ten bob a head for it, and there's more to do there, too."

The six middies set out forthwith. It was a brilliant hot day, and they had a bathe on the way, once clear of

the town. They skylarked the whole way to Bawdsey Ferry till they reached the point where the Deben River flows into the sea, and had a square meal at the inn. After an hour's rest by the ferry they went half a mile back along the beach towards Felixstowe, and, picking the best place on the whole shore, decided to pitch their quarters there for the rest of the afternoon. They had brought along three dozen of ginger-beer from the inn and put it to cool in a pool left by the tide.

Ned suggested a swimming race, and some sprints on the sands after. While they were arranging the programme, Acland prowled about with a pair of field-glasses he owned, and which he was always using. He climbed some distance up the cliff, and returned looking rather disturbed.

"Who said we were out of reach of the skipper here?" he said. "There old Tin-Top himself, and all his party, not far away, beyond the breakwaters over there."

"What!" exclaimed Keppel.

"I saw 'em all through my glasses—he and Lady Frobisher, and old Raglan, and Tin-Top's daughter, and some other girls. A regular party. They've got the luncheon-basket emptied, and a regular swell spread laid out on a tablecloth."

"Why the dickens can't the old bird have his picnic somewhere else?" said Jinks wrathfully.

"Well it don't matter," returned Keppel. "We've as much right here as all the giddy admirals in the fleet! Who's coming for a swim? I'll race you to Bawdsey Buoy and back, young Hardy!"

The beach was nearly deserted up to the breakwaters, and four of the middies were out of their clothes in a very short time. They had a glorious swim, Acland proving himself the fastest at side-stroke, and beating Ned and Keppel, who were almost equal, by about five lengths.

Nobody troubled to dry himself—the sun did that for them. Some sprint races followed and a wrestling match or two. It was good enough to be in the open air on such an afternoon, with no drill or instruction, and a cool beach under them, instead of the baking hot decks and metal-work of the battleship.

At last they rested, lying full length on the sand, ready for another swim at any moment, but quite content to do nothing. Smiler was grinning amiably and panting. The middies talked in drowsy undertones, watching the dripping gulls, and listening to the cool rippling of the sea.

Presently Jinks sat up and gave a hail as he saw a boy coming along the beach from the ferry, riding a donkey, and leading three more.

"Aho! shouted Jinks. "This way, the moke merchant!"

"Good egg!" said Ned, jumping up. "Bring that blood-stock over here, young 'un! How much to hire the lot for an hour?"

The donkey-boy was rather taken aback to find himself surrounded by four half-naked midshipmen of the King's Navy.

"They ain't saddled, gents!" he said, grinning.

"What's that matter?" said Keppel. "You chaps can ride bareback, can't you? Starters this way for the ginger-beer stakes! The winner to be the first who covers the course to the Martello tower and back, and drinks down a bottle of pop at the winning-post! This way to the scales, gentlemen!"

The donkey-boy accepted three shillings, and the steeds were whirled out of his hands and quickly mounted. Acland was promptly thrown over the nose of his jack-ass, and landed on his face on the sand. The donkeys all had bridles, but not one had a saddle, and the middies rather wished they had put their clothes on before the race was over. Jinks and Keppel were the only ones who had dressed after bathing.

Away went three of them in a wild scurry towards the Martello tower, several hundred yards away, Jinks dashing off with a good lead.

Ned was left at the post. He was no great rider at any time. His moke shot him off and would not let him mount again.

When the racers returned—Jinks and Keppel riding a dead-beat to the finish—they found Ned and his steed circling round and round each other, churning up the sand.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" cried Ned furiously. "This silly brute won't let me board him! Heave to, can't you?"

"We'll boost you on to him!" said Keppel, seizing the donkey's bridle.

They hoisted Ned on to the back of his steed like a sack of potatoes. The jack-ass gave one kick and set off at full speed, Ned yelling and bumping up and down wildly.

"Hold on! Wait for us!" cried the others.

Jinks and Keppel, scrambling on to their steeds as well as they could for laughing, pursued with fierce war-whoops. The others sprinted along on foot.

Ned's donkey was fairly bolting by this time, and how

his rider stuck on he could hardly have told. Straight for Felixstowe and home raced the jack-ass, his hoofs sending the sand flying.

"Christopher!" groaned Ned. "It's like riding a giddy circular saw!"

"Head him off the breakwater! Steer clear of Tin-Top!" shouted Acland's voice faintly behind.

Ned could no more steer the donkey than he could have guided a whirlwind. The pair of them went hurtling through a gap in the breakwater, and Ned gave a gasp of dismay at what he saw in front of him.

Right ahead was the admiral's picnic party, in the very middle of a late lunch. Sir Francis and his wife, Raglan of the Victorious, the admiral's daughter, two other girls, and the flag-lieutenant, were all sitting round a snowy white tablecloth, on which was spread a sumptuous repast. The donkey, who cared no more for admirals than pebbles on the beach, charged blindly ahead as straight as he could go. He was through the breakwater and upon the party before there was time to turn him.

"Great Jupiter!" panted Ned, his hair rising in horror, for he had nothing on but a pair of bathing drawers and his midshipman's cap.

A wild yell, mingled with shrill screams from the picnic party, froze his blood, and he tugged at the donkey's head frantically.

"Come round, you brute!"

"Hi, look out!" roared the admiral, purple in the face.

"Starboard your helm, you fool!"

But before the words were out of his mouth Ned and his donkey were on the tablecloth. The Felixstowe steed never paused in his mad career, except to give a kick that made Ned embrace him round the neck, and nearly unshipped his rider altogether. Straight as a bullet from a gun he thundered slap into the middle of the admiral's picnic, and scattered it to the four winds of heaven.

The Reward of Virtue!

ASHELL from a fifteen-inch gun bursting in the middle of the picnic party could hardly have wrought more havoc than Ned and his donkey. They plunged in among the viands like a landslide.

Lady Frobisher gave a whoop of fright, and heeled over backwards on top of the flag-lieutenant, nearly driving him bodily into the sand. Raglan, the admiral, fell headlong. Ned nearly came off in the middle of the tablecloth, but the donkey charged on, scattering the dishes far and wide. One hoof struck a pigeon-pie, leaving a trail of devastation behind him that a destroying angel might have been proud of, after stopping on the cloth to deliver a couple of furious kicks.

"Back her, you idiot!" roared the admiral. "Hard astern both screws!" The donkey shot ahead, Ned clinging round its neck, and it looked as if both of them were going to vanish in the distance. "Heave-to, you scoundrel!" the admiral yelled. "Heave-to, or I'll sink you! Gunner, drop a shell across his bows!"

The flag-lieutenant, though nearly flattened out by Lady Frobisher, struggled to his feet and obeyed the order nobly. He seized a plum-cake and hurled it at the departing donkey.

For a cross-shot, it was a magnificent one—the cake burst right upon the donkey's ears. The beast shied violently, gave one last kick that shook Ned's hold loose, shot him off like a sack of coals, and departed towards the horizon like a grey streak.

Ned only wished the sand would open and swallow him. He picked himself up, clad in all the majesty of Nature, a pair of bathing drawers and a middy's cap that even the fall had not shaken from his head, and faced the outraged picnic party. Then, blushing all over, he gave a gasp and rushed for the tablecloth. He snatched it from the ground and wrapped himself up in it.

"What do you mean by it, you naked ruffian?" roared the admiral, in a choking voice. His face was purple, and he looked as if he were on the very verge of apoplexy. "Come here! What the how—which— Hold me, somebody, or I shall run amuck like a confounded Malay—I shall! Why, he wears a Navy cap! Who are you, sir?"

"It's one of my midshipmen!" exclaimed Raglan, as rage choked the admiral into speechlessness and he strode forward. "Hardy" he cried, "how dare you, sir? This shocking attire—before ladies—"

"Frightfully sorry, sir!" gasped Ned, in a trembling voice. "Couldn't help it! I was bathing, the donkey ran away with me—just as I was—straight for your lunch!"

"Midshipman! One of yours—what?" wheezed the admiral, fighting for breath. "Must be court martialled and shot, by gad! Leave him to me, Raglan—leave him to me!"

Admiral Frobisher, looking like a freshly boiled beet-
root, fairly pranced up to the midshipman. Ned gave
himself up for lost. The admiral did not seem able to get
a word out. He gobbled like a turkey. Suddenly there
came a wild titter from behind him, from the admiral's
daughter. The four girls were giggling desperately.

The admiral, taking breath to pronounce sentence, stared
at the middy's scared face peering over the top of the table-
cloth, his wet hair, full of sand, plastered over his face,
and his bare legs trying to hide themselves. The admiral
panted, choked, and then gave it up, and broke into a
roar of laughter.

He laughed till the beach echoed and the seagulls took
to flight—he laughed till he collapsed on the sand and
sat down heavily, his hands holding his sides, still laughing.

Raglan had to laugh, too. Lady Frobisher was shaking all
over like a jelly. As for Lieutenant Buckley and the girls,
they were laughing as if they never meant to stop.

Poor Ned had to stand up in front of them and bear it
as best he could. He drew the tablecloth tightly round
him, as if it were a winding-sheet. He almost wished it
was one.

A forlorn and lonely object, he faced the gales of laughter
that beat around him like the waves round a lighthouse. He
saw his companions standing up on the breakwater in the
background, grinning like devils.

"You young devil!" wheezed the admiral, wiping his eyes.
"What's your name?"

"Hardy, sir," said Ned miserably, saluting with his free
arm. "I—I'm frightfully sorry—"

"Haven't laughed so much for years, begad," said the
admiral, breaking out afresh. "Constantia, give me a fresh
handkerchief. And, for goodness' sake, Buckley, mix me
something stiff! Not too much soda! Well, you young
rip, we shall have to give you a free pardon, after all.
Are those your companions in sin on the breakwater?"

"Yes, sir."
"I gave half the gun-room shore leave to-day," said
Raglan; "but if I'd foreseen this—"

"Best thing you could do!" said the admiral. "Here,
Hardy, go and get into your clothes!"

"Yes, sir."

"And then come back here and join us at lunch, and
bring those other rips with you! Do you hear? Plenty
of food left in the basket besides what your Arab steed
trod on. Off with you! Give you six minutes to dress in!"

Ned gasped out his thanks and fled, pursued by a final
gust of laughter from the whole party.

His head was in a whirl. He could hardly believe he
had come out of it scathless, and he still felt a fearful fool.

When he arrived on the other side of the breakwater his
messmates literally fell on his neck.

"Of all the giddy oxen that ever grazed, you're the

giddiest!" said Jinks, as soon as he could speak. "What
did you say to 'em?"

"What time are you to be hanged at the yardarm?"
exclaimed Aeland.

"Yardarm be blowed!" retorted Ned. "Tin-Top said he
was doosid pleased to see me, begad, and why hadn't I
come before? I've got to get into my duds! Go on, fetch
'em, Aeland, will you?—and then lunch with the admiral
by special request. If you chaps can behave yourselves
decently I'm to take you, too. Now then, get a move on,
and help me into my clothes!"

"My aunt!" said Keppel, with a whistle. "This takes
the biscuit! Look alive, you rotters!"

Those who were not dressed struggled quickly into their
clothes. The donkey-boy was paid off, and bidden to take
himself and his charges by the longest way round.

"Didn't the admiral say anything about cutting your
throat, Hardy?" asked Aeland, as they set off to join the
party.

"Said he was dashed glad to see there was one officer
in the fleet who could ride. A little thing like that doesn't
worry Tin-Top!" replied Ned.

"Who said the age of blessed miracles had passed?"

"We're in for a good thing. My moko smashed up most
of the things that were spread out, but there was tons
more stuff in the basket. Better shut up now—we're near
the breakwater! Look contrite, you sinners!"

Looking as if butter would not melt in their mouths, the
party of middies joined the admiral's picnic. Sir Francis
received their salutations gravely with a twinkle in his eye,
introduced them to his wife and the other ladies, and made
them welcome.

It might have been thought that, after such a disaster
as Ned's, the party would have fled for their lives rather
than accept the admiral's invitation.

But midshipmen are famous for the coolness of cold-
drawn brass, and the youthful officers from the Victorious
made themselves quite at home. They devoured a sumptuous
and luxurious lunch, Jinks stowing away whole a lobster
mayonnaise, as well as a healthy quantity of dressed ham
and seven or eight cream meringues. Aeland made short
work of a cold chicken and a truffle, and the others did
better still.

They did the whole thing with perfect grace, and chatted
meanwhile with the other members of the party, who did
not want any more lunch.

(Ned's luck certainly seems to be in, but he'll need
all the luck in the world if he's going to escape from
the trap that is being laid for him! There are big
thrills coming!)

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