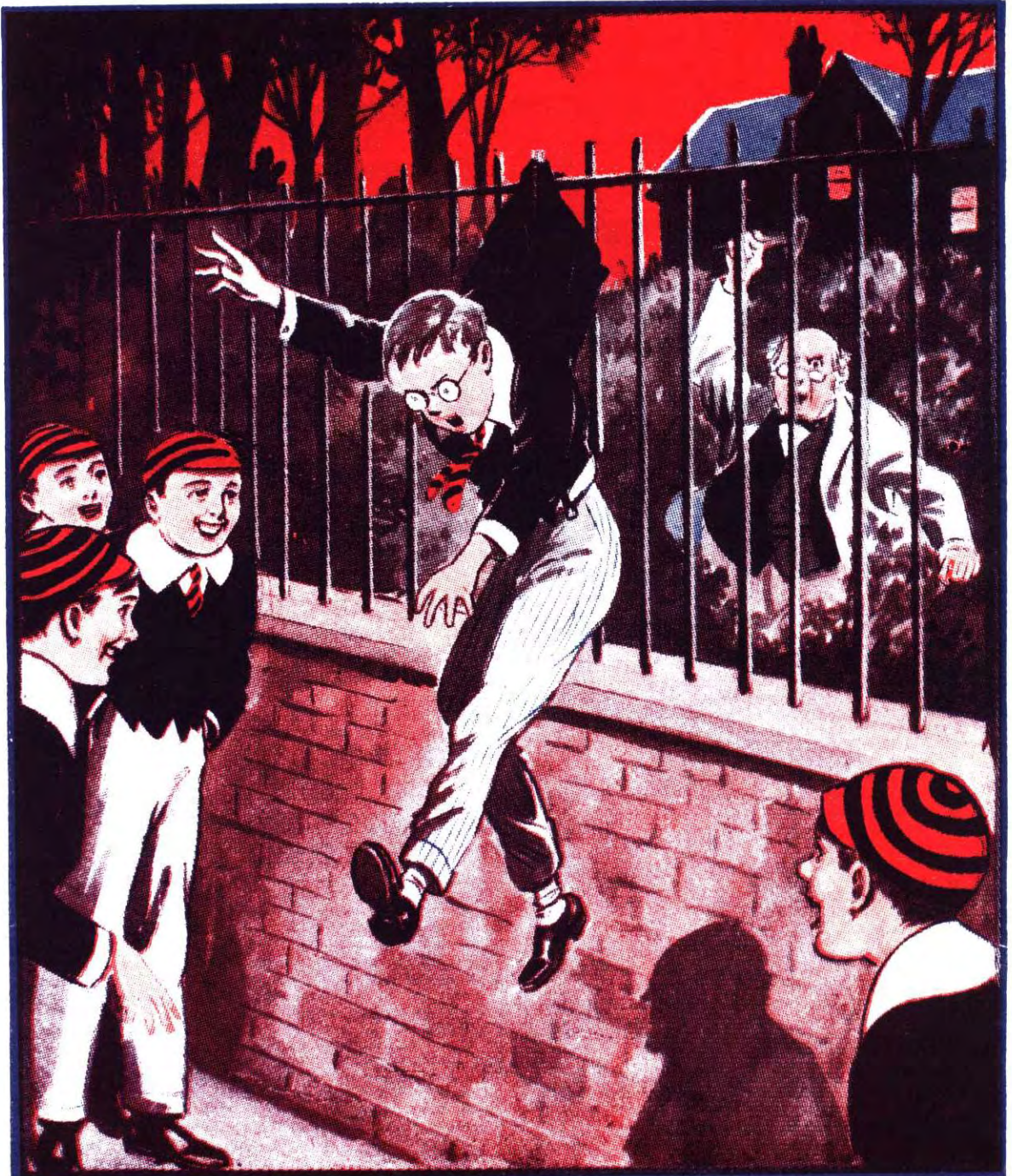


READ "SKIMPOLE THE INVENTOR!" RIOTOUS COMPLETE
SCHOOL YARN INSIDE.

The GEM 2^D



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HERE IS A SCREAMINGLY FUNNY STORY OF SKIMPOLE AND HIS—

SKIMPOLE



As a Detective, Skimpole's a scream! As a Burglar, he takes the biscuit! But as an Inventor he takes the whole giddy biscuit factory!

CHAPTER 1.

Skimpole's Terrible Loss.

SKIMPOLE came down the passage in the School House at St. Jim's with an anxious expression upon his face, and blinking right and left through his spectacles. He was evidently looking for something he had lost; and, to judge by his expression, it must have been something very valuable.

The quadrangle outside was ablaze with summer sunshine, but the oak-panelled passage was dusky.

Skimpole blinked anxiously to and fro.

Tom Merry, looking very fit in his cricketing flannels, came in, with his bat under his arm, and the short-sighted Skimpole walked right into him.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "What is that? Is that you, Merry?"

"Yes, ass!" gasped Tom Merry, seizing Skimpole by the shoulders and backing him against the wall, and then prodding him very gently with the end of his bat. "What do you mean by marching into me, duffer?"

"I didn't see you, Merry. I was looking—"

"Well, you ought to have seen me! You nearly knocked me over. Have you anything to say before I knock your head against the wall?"

"Yes, certainly, Merry. It would hurt; and, besides, I walked into you quite by accident. I was looking for something. I have had a most serious loss."

"Oh, is that it?" said Tom Merry good-humouredly, releasing the brainy man of the Shell Form and stepping back. "What is it? I'll help you to look for it, if you like."

"Thank you, Merry, you are very kind—"

"Well, what is it?"

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"As a matter of fact, I shall have to ask you to promise not to look at it if you find it."

"Eh?"

"That is most important. It is so valuable that—"

Tom Merry glared at him.

"And don't you think you could trust me, you utter ass?"

"Oh, yes, Merry," said Skimpole hastily; "it isn't that! If I had simply lost a gold watch or a purse of money, or a diamond pin, on any trifle like that, it would be different; but—"

"Then what on earth have you lost?"

"The plans of my airship."

"The what of your what?"

"The plans of my airship. Now, I know that you are an honourable fellow, Merry, and not the sort to rob an inventor of his great ideas; still, it would be better in every way for you to have no knowledge of the details of my wonderful invention. You might talk about it, you know, and give the secret away."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughing matter, Merry. The invention is an epoch-making one, and will completely revolutionise war and several other things. I expect to gain at least a million pounds by it. St. Jim's will become known as the school where the famous inventor Skimpole was educated."

"My hat!"

"I have, unfortunately, lost the plans of my airship. I always carry them about with me for safety, but there is a hole in the lining of my pocket, and the papers must have slipped through. If they were found by anybody who understood them—"

"That is not likely to happen."

"Well, you are right, as my ideas are, as a rule, far above the reach of an ordinary brain," said Skimpole modestly. "Still, there is danger of the great invention

—WEIRD IDEAS, FEATURING THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

the INVENTOR!

By Martin Clifford.

being taken from me if the papers are found by any unscrupulous person. As a matter of fact, I have heard that there is an inventor in Rylcombe who is at present at work upon an airship. Suppose my plans fell into his hands? However honest he may be, the temptation might prove too great."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard your laughter as unfeeling, Merry. I am in a very disturbed state of mind. Since I have taken up inventing I have let other matters slide. As you know, I am a Determinist, an amateur detective, and also a poet. I have given up these pursuits to devote myself to my invention. It would be very hard if the fruit of long pondering and calculation should be filched from me."

"Hard cheese!" said Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Yes, rather," said Monty Lowther, who had just come in with Manners, and was listening, with a broad grin. "You know what Shakespeare says on the subject: 'Who steals my purse steals trash, but he that filches from me the plans of an airship robs me of that which not enriches him, but leaves me poor indeed.'"

"You are quite mistaken, Lowther," explained Skimpole. "The invention would make anybody very rich. When I have perfected a few details my airship will take the world by storm. In the meantime, the plans are lost, and if you fellows will promise not to look at them if you find them, I should be very glad of your assistance in looking for them."

"Oh, we'll look!" said Tom Merry laughing. "You're a little less of a bore as an inventor than as a Determinist, so you ought to be encouraged."

"That is hardly a polite way of putting it, Merry—"

"Oh, let's look!" said Lowther. "It won't take long to hunt up and down the passage, anyway."

The chums of the Shell good-naturedly assisted the anxious Skimpole in his search. They hunted up and down the passage, and looked into other corridors and into empty class-rooms, but there was no trace of the missing plans.

"Well, the papers don't seem to be here," said Lowther, stopping at last, very hot and dusty. "I'm sorry, Skimpole, but it's no good looking any further."

"They've been picked up," said Manners. "Still, you have the consolation of knowing they weren't of any value, Skimmy."

"Really, Manners—"

"Are you quite sure you dropped them in the passage?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, no, not at all!" said Skimpole. "I know I dropped them somewhere, and it was very probably in the passage where—"

Monty Lowther seized the cheerful inventor by the throat. "You young villain! You've got us to mooch around this dusty place and fag ourselves out, and you're not sure you dropped the rotten bosh here at all!"

"Please don't be so rough, Lowther—"

"You ought to have your head banged against the wall!" said the indignant Lowther. "Anyway, I've had enough of you and your bosh; I'm off!"

"And so am I!" said Manners. "Come on, Tom, it's time for tea; Skimpole can go and look for his precious plans, or go and eat coke, or—"

"You might come out in the quadrangle and help me look there," said Skimpole. "I must have dropped them somewhere, you know, if I dropped them at all."

"Did you work that out in your head?" said Lowther, with an expression of great interest.

"Yes, certainly," said Skimpole, who was never known to see a joke. "A simple deduction like that presents no difficulty to an intellect like mine. Will you fellows come and help me look in the quad?"

"Yes," grunted Lowther. "I can see myself fagging about in the blazing sun looking for your bosh—I don't think! Come on, Manners!"

Lowther and Manners went upstairs. Tom Merry, who was good-natured to a fault, lingered behind for a moment. "I say, Skimmy, if you had the least idea where you had lost the papers—"

"I haven't," said Skimpole anxiously. "It must have been somewhere in the school, or else in the grounds, unless it was in Rylcombe Wood, when I went to the village."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You young ass! That's rather too big an order. You'd better give the thing up as a bad job. If you can't go on with your invention without the plans—"

"I can't really!"

"Then you can take up Determinism again instead!"

"Really, Merry—"

"Or recommence in the amateur detective line—"

"Really—"

"Or go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry. "I'm off!"

And he followed his chums up to the study.

Skimpole blinked after him.

"Really, that is almost rude of Merry!" he murmured. "They seem to attach very little importance to my great invention. But it is ever thus. How can an extraordinary intellect ever be understood by minds of a lower and commoner order? It is impossible. A genius is never understood, and I must be patient! Great inventors are always mocked by the unseeing crowd until their inventions are adopted, and then they become famous. Dear me, I wish I could find those plans!"

And the passage having been drawn blank, Skimpole, the inventor, went slowly out into the sun-blaze of the quadrangle, blinking right and left in search of the missing plans of the airship.

CHAPTER 2.

Fatty Wynn is Disappointed!

"BAI Jove, deah boys, what's the mattah with Skimpole?"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, who asked the question. He was coming towards the School House with his chums, Blake, Herries, and Digby, when he sighted Skimpole looking round among the old elms. The swell of the School House readjusted his eyeglass, and stared at the brainy member of the Shell.

"He's looking for something," said D'Arcy, after a careful survey of the amateur inventor.

Jack Blake looked at his chum admiringly.

"I say, Gus, you must have a powerful brain to guess a thing like that," he remarked. "When you see a chap rooting about like an old porker, and blinking into every corner, it shows a startling amount of brain power to guess that he's looking for something."

"It's Gussy's training as an amateur detective that enables him to do these things," said Digby solemnly.

"Oh, pway don't wot, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, still fixing the unconscious Skimpole with his eyeglass.

"He's looking for something. Skimpole is an ass, and on several occasions has failed to treat me with pwopah respect. All the same, as he is a short-sighted duffah, it would only be the pwopah thing to do to go and lend him a hand in looking for whatever it is he's lost!"

"Better lend him an eye, I should think," Digby remarked. "What's the good of a hand in a case like that?"

"Pway don't be funny in this hot weathah, Dig! It's wathah wuff on us to have to stand Lowthah's wotten jokes, without you starting in the same line. As a mattah of fact, I wegard jokin' as wathah bad form."

"You can always depend upon Gussy to tell you the proper thing to do," Blake remarked gravely.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's go and help the ass," said the good-natured Herries. "He's blinking about like an owl. I wonder what he's lost?"

"Not money," grinned Dig. "He never has any."

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"Pewwaps it's some of his wotten poems he wants to have puinted in the 'Weekly,'" said D'Arcy, as the quartette walked towards the freak of the Shell. "If that's the case, we'll stop him looking for the bosh!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries heartily.

"Skimpole, deah boy!"

Skimpole looked up. He had been hunting for the missing plans for about half an hour in a blazing sun, and he looked hot and perspiring.

"You look wathah warm, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Are you looking for anything?"

"Yes; I am looking for some important documents," said Skimpole. "I— Where are you going?"

"Oh, if it's only some of your wot we can't help you, deah boy!"

"It is not rot, D'Arcy. It is an important plan—"

"An important what?"

"An important plan!"

"Oh, I see! You've got some plan for taking a rise out of the New House fellows!" said Blake. "Is that it?"

Skimpole sniffed.

"I am hardly likely to waste my time thinking out plans for rows with the New House, Blake. My powerful intellect—"

"Oh, blow your powerful intellect! What is the plan you are talking about, then?"

"The plan—or, rather, plans—of my airship."

"Your what?"

"My airship. I believe I told you before that I was inventing an airship?"

"Yes; I believe you told me some bosh of the sort," assented Blake.

"You are quite mistaken," said Skimpole, in a tone of patient explanation. "It is not bosh. It is simply some defect in your intellect which causes you to regard my ideas as bosh. Bad training in your early youth is probably the cause of the remarkable stupidity I have observed you to display on many occasions."

"It's too hot to lick you, Skimmy!"

"I hope you will do nothing so absurd. If you had studied the higher philosophy as attentively as I have, you would have reflected that it was a mere absurdity to think that you can change a man's opinion by punching his nose. You change nothing but the shape of his nose by such methods. Now, I—"

"Cheese it! I knew he'd start talking if we gave him a chance. Come on, you chaps!"

"I wish you would help me to look for the plans of my airship," said Skimpole. "I have dropped them somewhere, either within the school precincts or outside—I am not at all sure which. There is a man in Rylcombe experimenting in airship building, and if my plans should fall into his hands it would be a terrible loss to me. A rival inventor would probably not be very scrupulous."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My invention was approaching a most interesting point. I had not yet perfected it. I was still in doubt over some details—such as the method of raising the airship from the earth and of propelling it through the air. Most of the other points, however, are clearly designated in the plans I have lost."

"My hat, it is rather rough! Of course, the whole idea is bosh!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"And Skimpole is a silly ass. Still, it's wathah wuff, and if it wasn't so hot, and if Skimmy knew where the things had been lost, and if it wasn't tea-time, and if I wasn't exhausted by playin' cwicket, and if it wasn't too much of a beastlay fag, anyway, I should be inclined to help him look for the missing documents. Undah the circs, however, I think we had bettah go in and have tea."

"That's the first sensible thing you've said to-day, Gussy," Blake observed. "Let's go in by all means."

"If you would like to help me look for the plans—"

"Too hot!"

"If you found them, I should be willing to reward you with shares in the syndicate," said Skimpole.

"What syndicate?"

"The syndicate that will be formed to take up my invention and place it on the market. The shares would be worth thousands of pounds, and it is really a very easy way of making a fortune."

Blake grinned.

"Oh, we're not greedy!" he said. "We ain't in a hurry to make our fortunes. We'd rather have tea. Better a tin of sardines and contentment therewith, than playing the giddy ox in hot weather like this. Nighty-bye!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the chums of the Fourth walked on.

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole. "I am growing quite exhausted, and there seems to be no signs of the plans yet."

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Can I have dropped them in the village? Suppose they have already fallen into the hands of the rival inventor? He is almost certain to embody my ideas in his invention. Even if he were strictly honest, he might unconsciously do so, having once become acquainted with my invention. It is a terrible thought! What shall I do?"

Skimpole blinked on. He had looked pretty well all over the quadrangle, but there was no sign of what he sought. The plans of the airship were gone.

Three youths stood on the steps of the New House and watched Skimpole as he came towards that building, blinking round him in the blazing sunshine. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—the famous "Co."

"Skimmy must be in want of something to do," Figgins remarked. "What on earth is he mooning about there in the blaze for?"

"Looking for something," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn's eyes sparkled.

"Very likely something to eat," he remarked. "I saw Skimpole in the tuckshop just before we went down to the cricket. He may have dropped a bag of tarts, or something."

The three watched Skimpole for some moments. Figgins was leaning against the stone balustrade, and Kerr against the wall. Fatty Wynn looked more active and alert. It was probably the thought of a bag of jam tarts lying about somewhere in the quad that made him alert.

"I say, it would only be good-natured to go and help him," Fatty Wynn remarked, looking out of the corner of his eye at the other two.

"Certainly!" said Figgins, lazily stretching his long limbs. "I'll come."

"I don't mind," said Kerr.

"Oh, don't you two fellows bother!" said Fatty Wynn hastily. "I'll go and help him. You're tired, too, after cricket. I'll go!"

And Fatty Wynn went.

Figgins and Kerr chuckled softly.

"Looking for anything, Skimpole?" asked Fatty Wynn, tapping the genius of the School House on the shoulder in a very friendly way.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"Yes, Wynn, I am. I wish I could find them."

The word "them" confirmed Fatty Wynn in his theory. It could only apply to tarts or sweets; at least, Fatty thought so. The manner of the Falstaff of the New House grew more and more chummy.

"Where did you lose them, Skimmy?"

"I don't quite know," said Skimpole helplessly. "I really ought to have heard them fall. They made a rather large packet, you know."

Fatty Wynn's eyes gleamed.

"Yes, I suppose so. How many were there?"

"Six or seven."

"Seven for sixpence, of course!" murmured Fatty Wynn.

"Anyone would be only too glad to find them."

"Good!"

"Did you speak, Wynn?"

"No. I'll help you to look for them if you like. It would be a great shame for them to be lost."

"It would indeed, Wynn. I think it is very kind of you to take an interest in the matter like this, and to help me look for them."

"Not at all," said Fatty Wynn genially. "I'm only too glad to be able to lend you a hand, Skimmy. Fellows ought to be always willing to help one another in a case like this; and you're shortsighted, too. Have you looked in the School House?"

"Yes; and Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther helped to look—"

"Oh, I say, Lowther may have scoffed them!"

"Oh, no; they would have handed them over if they had found them, because Tom Merry said they would. They weren't there. Blake and his friends refused to aid me just now, so I take this as very kind of you, Fatty."

"Not a bit of it! How long ago did you lose them?"

"I can't make that out. You see, they slipped away without my noticing them."

"And you don't know where you were at the time?"

"Unfortunately not."

"H'm! That's rather rotten. It's quite likely that some fellow has picked them up and eaten them," said Fatty Wynn.

Skimpole stopped short, and stared at the fat junior of the New House.

"What did you say, Wynn?"

"I say it's quite possible some fellow has picked them up and eaten them!"

"Are you joking?"

"Certainly not! There are a good many fellows who

would eat them if they picked them up, without stopping to inquire who the owner was."

"But really, Wynn, it's impossible! Why should anyone, however hungry, eat the plans of my airship?"

Fatty Wynn jumped.

"The what?" he yelled.

"The plans of my airship."

The fat junior looked daggers at Skimpole.

"Is that what you have lost, Skimpole?"

"Certainly."

"Some silly, puffing rot about a silly airship?"

"Not at all. The plans of an astounding invention which will revolutionise the science of war and the—"

"Oh, rats!"

"What did you think I had lost, then?"

"A bag of tarts, or sweets, or something," said Fatty Wynn in utter disgust. "Fancy swotting about in the blazing sun looking for the rotten plans of a rotten airship!"

"Really, Figgins, that is almost rude. I have lost the plans of my airship, an invention that will revolutionise warfare and the means of transport. It is most important that they should be found. You remember what the 'Rylcombe Times' said the other day about a local inventor—a Mr. Fish—who was at work upon an airship which he was going to offer to the Government? Suppose my plans were to fall into his hands, and he collared them? My invention—"

"Awful!" said Figgins gravely. "They must be recovered at any cost. Some time ago you were setting up as an amateur detective. Why don't you employ yourself to hunt for the plans, and reward yourself if you find them with a share of the proceeds of the invention? That's a really good idea, and would be supporting home industries, as it were. The case of the missing bosh—"

"The case of the purloined piffle," suggested Kerr.

"This is really a serious matter," said Skimpole mildly. "I would offer a reward for the recovery of the plans,



"Ha, ha, ha!" The juniors in the passage were laughing themselves almost into hysterics. But Blake, Herries, and Digby were not laughing. Blake seized Arthur Augustus; Herries and Digby grasped Skimpole. "Now then," panted Blake. "All together!" "Right-ho!" The juniors dragged hard, and the combatants came apart.

"Fancy looking for a bag of tarts you might say with more reason," said Skimpole, with a sniff. "I should be hardly likely to take all this trouble for mere eatables. The plans of my airship—"

"Oh, rats!"

And Fatty Wynn turned away in disgust.

"Aren't you going to help me look for them, Wynn?"

"No fear!"

"But just now you offered to do so."

"I thought it was grub of some kind, or something valuable, anyway. Catch me looking for piffle like the plans of a rotten airship."

"My airship will revolutionise—"

"Rats!"

Fatty Wynn stalked away indignantly.

Figgins and Kerr, who had overheard it all, were cackling like a couple of geese.

Skimpole blinked at them.

"I say, Figgins, have you seen anything of a large packet of valuable documents?"

"Fraid not," said Figgins. "I've seen something of a howling ass!"

but unfortunately I haven't any money. If any of you fellows would lend me a couple of pounds, I would—"

"Make it a couple of thousand," suggested Figgins. "The airship is worth it, and we should be just as likely to lend it to you."

"Really, Figgins—"

"I've got a really good suggestion to make," Kerr remarked thoughtfully. "There's a detective chap, who's a friend of Tom Merry's—"

"Ferrers Locke?" said Figgins.

"That's it. When he was down here he was very good-natured, as you remember. Suppose Skimmy asked Tom Merry to write to him, and asked him to take up the case?"

"I have no money to pay his fees."

"That doesn't matter. He might take it on, simply for the honour and glory. He would become known to fame as the detective who recovered the plans of the missing piffle—I mean, the missing airship."

Skimpole blinked thoughtfully.

"There is something in what you suggest, Kerr," he agreed. "At all events, I will speak to Tom Merry on the subject, and ask him to write to Ferrers Locke."

And the genius of the Shell marched off towards the School House to seek Tom Merry, leaving Figgins & Co. cackling in chorus at the door of the New House.

CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole's Rival!

"IS that kettle boiling yet, Manners?"

"No, it isn't!"

"Well, I've got the sardines opened, and the jam in the soap-dish. We're waiting for the tea."

"It's jolly hot!" said Manners, turning a crimson face from the fire-grate, where he had set a mass of sticks ablaze, with the tea-kettle jammed on top of them. "Do you know, I think it's rather a mistake to have tea made in the study this weather."

"Oh, rot! We're not going to start feeding in the Hall, I suppose?"

"We'll get a little methylated spirit-stove, then!" panted Manners. "It's too jolly hot to have a fire here! The sticks are burning out, and the beastly kettle isn't boiling!"

"You want some more wood," said Tom Merry.

"I can't see where it's to come from, then."

"Think, dear boy!" said Tom Merry, who was industriously cutting bread-and-butter, standing as near to the window as possible. "It's your turn to boil the kettle, and you must fix it, somehow."

"Use your head, you know," said Lowther encouragingly. Manners glared at the humorous Lowther.

Monty's remark was capable of a double interpretation, and, taken in one sense, it implied that Manners' head was of the material he required for the fire.

"Oh, don't be funny," grumbled Manners. "Keep that

for the winter. When I hear a chap being funny in August I always want to slay him."

"Is that kettle boiling?"

"No!"

"Well, I'm going to start on the sardines," said Lowther. "If you don't jolly well buck up, there won't be any left for you."

"I want some more wood."

"Use your—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Hallo, there's some!" said Tom Merry, pointing to the doorway with the bread-knife. "Corn in Egypt!"

The door of the study was open for the sake of coolness. A large head, adorned with tufts of hair and a big pair of spectacles, had been inserted into the study. It belonged to Herbert Skimpole of the Shell.

Manners grinned.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Chop it off for me!"

"Certainly!" said Lowther.

He picked up the saw belonging to Tom Merry's tool-chest, and started towards the inventive genius of the Shell.

Skimpole blinked at him in amazement.

"What are you going to do, Lowther? Ow—leggo my collar!"

"Manners wants some wood for the fire," exclaimed Lowther, flourishing the saw. "Put your head down, and—"

"Please keep that saw away! It is a dangerous thing for a fellow of your low order of intellect to have to play with."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

Lowther looked daggers at the determinist of St. Jim's. He laid down the saw, and took a firmer grip on Skimpole's collar.

"This way!" he said.

And he led the freak of the Shell out of the study. Skimpole went, for the simple reason that he had no choice in the matter.

Lowther led him half a dozen paces down the passage and jammed him against the wall and released him.

"Travel!" he said.

"But—"

"Travel—"

And Lowther, shaking a warning finger, retired to the study.

Skimpole blinked after him in amazement.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "That is almost rude of Lowther. I shall have to re-enter the study, however, as I must speak to Tom Merry."

And Skimpole put his head in at the door again.

"Hallo, you still here!" exclaimed Lowther, picking up a loaf. "Now, then, look out for your coconut!"

"Please don't be violent, Lowther. I came here to speak to Tom Merry on a most important matter."

"Oh, travel!"

"Manners seems to be taking a lot of trouble over that fire," said Skimpole. "It's a mistake to boil the kettle on the sticks. I could tell you a much simpler way."

"What is it, then?" grunted Manners.

"In your place, I should boil it by electricity," said the inventive genius of the Shell. "Electricity—"

"You'd boil it by what?"

"Electricity," said Skimpole. "Electricity is undoubtedly the coming power. You can use it without pervading an apartment with this unpleasant warmth."

"You unutterable ass!"

"That is really most rude, Manners!"

"You shrieking ass, how are we to get an electric plant in this study?" howled Manners.

"Oh, that is quite simple! The plant could be bought very cheap, and the expenditure of a few pounds would be well repaid by—"

"And where are we to get the few pounds from?"

"I have not gone into that part of the subject. It really has no connection with the matter of electricity. I could devise a simple means of obtaining the power, once you had the plant. I should not suggest a dynamo in this room. You could probably obtain the necessary power from the housekeeper's sewing-machine, properly connected with wires—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "You had better propose that to Mrs. Mimms, Manners."

"The ass," said Manners, "the screaming ass!"

"Is that kettle boiling yet?"

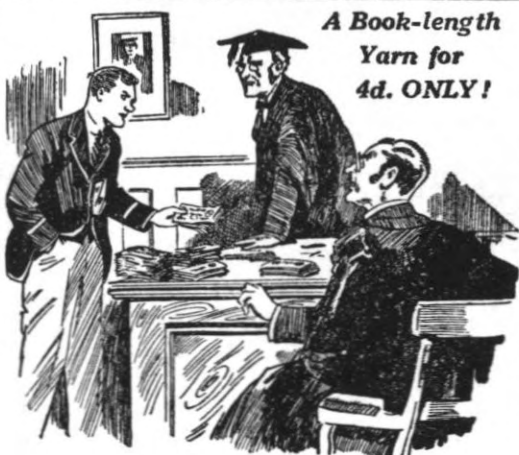
"I want some more wood."

"Unless we behead Skimpole you can't have any! Never mind, though; here's Tom's Latin grammar—"

"Here, you let my Latin grammar alone!"

"Well, you will have to burn something."

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"We'll try your new bat, then," said Tom Merry. "You're jolly well not going to burn my Latin grammar. You've sold yours, and Manners has lent his to Jimson, of the New House, and mine is the only one here."

"Lemme see; here's a bundle of contributions for the 'Weekly'—"

"I haven't read them through yet."

"Then you're in luck. Here you are, Manners!"

"I say, that's rather rough on the contributors!"

"Not so rough as it would be on us if we had to read them," said Manners, jamming them into the fire. "I think this will finish the kettle. It was just on the boil."

"I want to speak to you, Tom Merry," said Skimpole. "I am sorry to interrupt your tea, but the matter is most important."

"Oh, get on; and do cut it short, old chap!"

"I am afraid that will be impossible, as I must explain the matter fully," said Skimpole. "You can, however, proceed with your tea."

"Thank you, I will."

"Is that kettle boiling, Manners?"

"Yes, it's boiling now. Phew!"

"You see, Merry, I have lost the plans of my airship."

"Haven't they turned up?"

"No; they appear to be quite lost. I am in a great state of nervousness lest they should fall into the hands of Mr. Fish—"

"Who may Mr. Fish happen to be?"

"He is a gentleman in Rylcombe who is engaged in constructing an airship. The local paper had a long report on the subject last week—"

"Oh, yes; I heard somebody chattering about the bosh!"

"As a matter of fact, it probably is bosh," agreed Skimpole. "I firmly believe that I alone am on the track of the true secret of aerial navigation. But suppose the plans of my airship were to fall into his hands?"

"Pass the sardines, Lowther."

"You are not paying attention, Tom Merry."

"Yes, I am, Skimmy. Pass the bread, too! Careful with the butter; that's all there is left! Go on, Skimmy!"

"I have heard that this man, Fish, is an enthusiastic inventor, and probably he would use my plans if they came into his hands."

"Too bad!"

"Yes, he would be a rotten Fish to do that!" said Monty Lowther, with a shake of his head.

"I am therefore anxious to recover them. From the fact that no trace has been found of them, I cannot help thinking that someone may have picked them up, and may be keeping them. At a casual glance their immense value might not be perceived, but—"

"Did you have your name written on them?"

"Yes; my name, with the name of my House and school."

"Then anybody who picked them up would bring them to you."

"There are some dishonest people who have a maxim that findings are keepings, you know," said Skimpole dubiously. "Besides, the man Fish would have a very strong interest in keeping the plans. As a sincere Determinist, I am bound to believe that every man is good till he is proved to be bad; but, on the other hand, as an amateur detective, I must acknowledge that suspicion rests upon everyone until the guilty party is found."

"And as a silly ass?"

"As a silly ass, he's bound to go on jawing, I suppose," said Lowther. "Pass the marmalade, Manners."

"Certainly; there you are."

"Indeed, as an amateur detective," went on Skimpole, unheeding, "it seems to me most probable that my plans have fallen into the hands of Mr. Horatio Fish."

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

"Simply by deduction. The plans are lost, and they have my name and address written upon them. As their immense value is not apparent to a casual observer, any ordinary person finding them would naturally return them to me. As a matter of fact, no one in this neighbourhood, with the exception of Mr. Fish, could possibly have any interest in keeping them. On the best Sherlock Holmes' methods, therefore, it is certain that if they have been found it can only have been by Mr. Fish, as he alone would fail to return them to me."

"Wonderful!" said Tom Merry.

"Marvellous!" said Manners.

"Extraordinary!" said Lowther. "How do you do these things, Skimmy?"

"Merely by the exercise of an intellect somewhat above the average," said Skimpole. "Suspicion points to Mr. Fish—"

"But suppose the things haven't been found?"

"That is hardly admissible, as the parcel was a bulky one, and was undoubtedly lost in some public place. It is probable that it has been found."

"Good!" assented Lowther. "When you grow up, Skimmy, you ought to find your sphere in a private detective office, or a private lunatic asylum, or something like that!"

"Really, Lowther—"

"Another cup of tea, Manners?"

"Right-you are."

"The case seems to be pretty well worked out," said Skimpole. "The plans of my airship are probably in the hands of Mr. Fish; but how am I to recover them? That is where you can help me, Merry."

Tom Merry stared.

"How's that, Skimmy?"

"Your friend—Mr. Ferrers Locke, the detective—would probably be able to discover what has become of the plans. Of course, with my great ability as an amateur detective, I could do it as well as he, but I have not a free hand. My time is occupied by lessons, and the restraint of a school. I was thinking that Ferrers Locke would probably be glad to take the case, and have the chance of becoming known as the Man Who Recovered The Plans Of The Airship."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It might mean the chance of a lifetime to Ferrers Locke; it would also be of great service to me. I have no money to pay his fees, but the fame would undoubtedly be a sufficient reward. I want you to write to him—"

"To what?"

"To write to him, and ask him to take up the case."

"My hat!"

"He would probably agree for the sake of the fame, if you fully explained the matter to him. Otherwise, you could ask it as a personal favour to yourself."

"Well, of all the nerve!"

"Will you do it, Merry?"

"Not much!"

"It would cost you nothing, and would be a great service to me."

"My dear ass—"

"Not so much of your chinwag, Skimmy," said Lowther, wagging a warning finger at the brainy man of the Shell. "Travel!"

"But I think—"

"I can't do anything of the sort," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Don't be such an ass, Skimmy!"

"In that case I shall write to him—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Can you suggest any better methods?"

"I can," said Lowther gravely. "It seems that you have only Mr. Fish to fear as a rival in your particular line. Suppose you paid a visit to his place, and examined his giddy airship? There are full particulars of his workshop, and so on, in the local rag. You could investigate—"

"Dear me. I never thought of that!" said Skimpole. "It is certainly a most valuable suggestion, Lowther. I am very much obliged to you!"

"You're quite welcome to it," said Lowther generously.

"Thank you! Would you like to come with me?"

"Yes, awfully; only I'm rather busy."

"Would you like to come, Tom Merry?"

"Well, I feel that I ought to stay with Lowther."

"I should prefer not to go alone. Will you come with me, Manners?"

"I've got some films to develop," said Manners, shaking his head.

"Well, never mind; I will ask Blake. Thank you very much for the suggestion, Lowther!"

And Skimpole disappeared.

The Terrible Three burst into a roar.

"My hat!" gasped Lowther. "Is it possible that the ass will really be such a shrieking idiot as to go?"

"It's rather like him," said Tom Merry, wiping his eyes.

"Suppose we stop him?"

"Oh, it's all right! He won't be able to get into Fish's place. I know it, and there's a wall round it, with spikes on top. Pass the sardines!"

CHAPTER 4.

A Fearful Thrashing!

"FOUND it?"

Jack Blake asked the question, with a grin, as Skimpole looked into Study No. 6. The chums of Study No. 6 had just finished tea, and Digby, whose turn it was to wash the crockery, was clearing cups and saucers into a bowl. Herries was shaking the tablecloth, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, being momentarily idle, was improving the shining floor by polishing his silk hat.

Skimpole shook his head.

"No, Blake; I am sorry to say I have not found it, if you are referring to the packet of valuable papers I have lost."

"Never mind," said Blake comfortingly; "it wasn't of any value, so—"

"It was of immense value! By means of my skill as an

amateur detective, I have worked it out in my mind that the plans can only have fallen into the hands of one person."

"Good! Who is that?"

"Mr. Horatio Fish, the local inventor. I am about to investigate further by paying a visit to his place and looking into the matter. I want a companion——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Someone to help me, and back me up in this enterprise. I shall require to be assisted over walls, and so forth. I am determined to leave no stone unturned to recover my valuable plans. Will you come with me, Blake?"

"Not this evening," said Blake gravely; "some other evening."

"Will you come, Digby?"

"I don't think!"

"Herries?"

"Rats!" said Herries, in his direct way. "If you go fooling about Fish's place you may get arrested as a burglar!"

"For the sake of preserving my wonderful invention, I shall risk that, Herries! Will you come with me, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated. The swell of the School House never failed in politeness, but this was really putting his politeness to a severe strain.

"Well, weally, deah boy——"

"As a matter of fact, I should prefer you to any of the others, D'Arcy."

"Weally?" said D'Arcy, rather flattered. "In that case, I——"

"Yes; you would be much easier to get on with, as, with your somewhat feeble intellect, you would not be so likely to oppose my plans——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake, Herries, and Digby.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his eyeglass, and gave the brainy man of the School House a withering glare.

"Skimpole, you uttah ass——"

"I should really like you to come!"

"I uttably wufuse to do anything of the sort!"

"It would be a chance to distinguish yourself. You have wanted to figure as an amateur detective. Under my lead, and with my advice and assistance, you would have a chance."

"You shwiekin' ass!"

"Really, D'Arcy, you are almost rude! If you do not wish to accompany me on this expedition——"

"Wathah not!"

"Oh, go with him!" exclaimed Blake. "You made such a howling success of the last expedition you undertook together, you know."

"On that occasion the whole mattah was mucked up by Skimpole's absurd, wotten obstinacy and vidiculousness!"

"On the contrary, D'Arcy, it was mucked up by your want of common intelligence, and your refusal to follow the lead of one wiser than yourself."

"You scweamin' duffah!"

"Really, D'Arcy, I am paying you a considerable compliment in asking you to accompany me, considering what a really stupid person you are."

"Eh?"

"Oh, twavel along, ass!"

"But you would be useful to help me over walls or into windows, and so——"

"Perhaps, though, I should be better without you, as you would probably muck up the affair, as you did the last."

"I wufuse to admit that I mucked it up."

"Oh, there is no doubt upon that point! The affair was mucked up, and, as it was not I that did it, it must have been you," explained Skimpole. "Of course, as a Determinist, I do not blame you for being a silly ass!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It is undoubtedly due to the combined efforts of heredity and environment. Every human being must necessarily be what he is at birth and what he becomes afterwards—that is one of the great truths of Determinism. You were probably born with a defective intellect——"

"Gweat Scott!"

"And your training has developed the defectiveness; until, at the present moment, you are little better than an idiot. I——"

"You wotten ass! I shall have no alternative but to administah a feahful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Pway take your jacket off!"

"Nothing of the sort. A feahful thrashing would not alter the case in any way."

"Then withdraw your words!"

"It is impossible to withdraw the truth!"

"Then I have no resource but to thwash you!"

And Arthur Augustus commenced by giving Skimpole a tap on the nose that made him stagger against the door. Then the swell of St. Jim's danced round the brainy man of the Shell, brandishing his fists.

"Bai Jove! Come on—come on! Bai Jove!"

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"As you know, I am opposed to violence!" gasped Skimpole. "But, as a Determinist, I have to admit that if I am guilty of violence it is undoubtedly due to my heredity and environment. I shall, therefore, thrash you, D'Arcy!"

"Come on, then, you wottah!"

And the combatants, equally excited, rushed at one another. Blake, Herries, and Digby dragged the table back to give them room, and then sat on it and cheered.

"Bai Jove!"

"You ass!"

"I shall thwash you——"

"I shall give you a licking——"

"Take that, you ass!"

"Take that, you chump!"

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"Hurrah!" roared Digby. "Go it, ye cripples!"

"Keep it up!" shouted Herries. "Two to one on Gussy!"

"On the ball!" yelled Blake. "Go it!"

"I am going it, deah boys! I am goin' to give this sillay ass a feahful thwashin'."

"I am going to give this bloated aristocrat a severe chastising!"

"I wufuse to be chwactewised as a bloated aristocrat!"

"Go it!"

"Buck up!"

"Look out in goal!"

"Hurrah!"

The combatants were "going it" with a vengeance, there was no doubt about that. They went for one another hammer and tongs. The news was not long in spreading up and down the passage—the noise spread it. Fellows came from far and wide to look on, and the passage outside Study No. 6 resembled a pit door of a London theatre on a first night.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, pushing his way forward. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Blake; "only a little argument. Skimpole and D'Arcy are arguing it out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The din was growing terrific. The fellows, crammed in the doorway and passage, craning over one another's shoulders to look, were cheering frantically. D'Arcy had got Skimpole's head into chancery. Blake had picked up Skimpole's spectacles to save them from being trodden on, but the freak of the Shell did not need them now now. He pommelled away at D'Arcy's ribs, and D'Arcy pommelled away at his features.

Skimpole roared and struggled and tramped to and fro, and the two combatants reeled and crashed against the table upon which Blake, Herries, and Dig were sitting.

The table was not built for a crash like that. It went reeling, and the three juniors slid off at various angles, and found themselves in a heap on the floor, amid a mass of crockery and bread-and-butter.

"Ow!" roared Herries.

"Ah!" gasped Dig.

"Groo!" grunted Blake.

Skimpole caught his foot in Dig's leg, and reeled over and dragged Arthur Augustus on top of him. Both fell on Digby, who gave a yell.

"Gerroff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd in the passage.

Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

"Oh, this is too good!" he sobbed. "It is really too good!"

The juniors in the passage were laughing themselves almost into hysterics. But Blake, Herries, and Digby were not laughing now. They were hurt.

They scrambled up in wrath, with vengeful looks.

Skimpole and D'Arcy were struggling on the carpet. Blake seized Arthur Augustus. Herries and Digby grasped Skimpole.

"Now, then," panted Blake, "all together!"

"Right-ho!"

The juniors dragged hard, and the combatants came apart. Arthur Augustus struggled wildly in Jack Blake's muscular grip.

"Pway welease me, deah boy! I haven't finished givin' that wottah a feahful thwashin'."

"Hold on!"

"I wufuse to hold on. I uttably wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. Pway welease me, or I shall lose my tempah and stwike you!"

"Look out, Blake!" sang out Monty Lowther. "You know what Gussy's like when he loses his beastly temper."

"Yaas, wathah! Welease me immediately!"

Blake grunted.

"I'll hold this silly ass," he said; "you chaps sling Skimpole out. Sling him at those grinning asses there!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Please don't be violent!" gasped Skimpole. "I am feeling very breathless and exhausted. I—— Ow! Oh!"

Biff!

Herries and Digby faithfully carried out Blake's instructions. The amateur inventor was hurled at the crowd in the doorway. The Terrible Three scrambled back in time, and Skimpole crashed upon Gore of the Shell and Reilly of the Fourth. He clasped the latter round the neck and clung to him for support.

"Ow!" roared Gore. "Get off, ass!"

"Faith, and leggo!" yelled Reilly. "Sure, he's hanging round me neck, entoiely. Gerroff, you spalpeen. Get off!" He gave the freak of the Shell a shove which made

"Bai Jove, let me get at the wottah!"

Skimpole pushed through the crowd, and disappeared. The grinning juniors slowly dispersed.

Blake released the bellicose swell of the School House. "You wottah!" gasped D'Arcy. "I no longer wegard you as a fwiend. I— Bai Jove, where's my hat?"

"What hat?"

"The hat I was bwushin' when that dangewous maniac came in."

"Blessed if I know!"

Digby gave a cackle.



Arthur Augustus strolled along the passage towards the Shell dormitory, and a hand suddenly came out of an alcove in the wall and grasped him by the shoulder. D'Arcy gave a startled gasp. "You young donkey!" said Kildare.

Skimpole sat down in the doorway. The brainy man of the Shell blinked round him dazedly.

"Dear me," he gasped, "I feel very bruised and exhausted! That was almost rude of you, Reilly."

"Faith, and I—"

"Travel along!" exclaimed Blake. "I can't hold this duffer much longer!"

"I insist upon bein' immediately weleased."

"Rats! Keep quiet!"

"I shall stwike you!"

"Bosh!"

"I no longer wegard you as a fwiend, Blake!"

"Good!"

"Weally—"

Skimpole staggered to his feet, and rubbed his nose, from which a stream of claret was issuing. He was looking very dazed.

"If you will give me my glasses, I will retire," he said. "Thank you, Digby. I hope D'Arcy will be improved by the thrashing I have given him."

"There it is, Gussy!"

The swell of School House gave a howl of anguish. There was the hat, certainly, but it bore now only a very faint and distant resemblance to a hat. It had been trampled on by half a dozen feet, and, as Digby remarked, it wasn't much use now, even as a concertina.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy gazed at the hat for a moment, and then made a rush for the door. Blake caught him by the arm and jerked him back.

"Where are you going?"

"Pway welease me!"

"But where are you going?"

"To give Skimpole a feahful thwashin'!"

"Hold on!"

"I wefuse to do anything of the sort. Pway welease me, or I shall no longah wegard you as a fwiend."

"Oh, draw it mild, Gussy! You have given Skimpole a fearful thrashing."

The swell of St. Jim's cooled down somewhat.

"Do you weally think so, Blake?"

"Yes, certainly!" said Blake, winking at Herries and Digby with the eye farthest from D'Arcy. "I think it is probable that you have done him severe injury—perhaps injury that he will never recover from."

D'Arcy's jaw dropped.

"Bai Jove!"

"I think it's extremely prob," said Digby solemnly. "He staggered away as if he had something broken inside—perhaps the spinal column of the pericardium."

"Oh deah!"

"I think he had his neck sprained, too," said Herries. "Didn't you notice how he had his neck twisted and his head on one side, as if the carotid artery had been broken in two?"

"Ha, ha, ha!—I mean, suppose he dies?"

"Oh, weally, Blake—"

"I think that's very likely," said Digby, with a shake of the head.

"Oh weally, Dig—"

"The least D'Arcy can do," said Herries solemnly, "is to make an offer to Skimpole's people to stand half the expense of the funeral."

It dawned on Arthur Augustus at last that his chums were rotting. He adjusted his monocle, and gave them a withering stare.

"Weally, deah boys, I wegard your wemarks with feahful contempt."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are a set of impertinent wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I no longah wegard you as fwiends!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As every fresh remark of D'Arcy's seemed to send his chums nearer to violent hysterics, the swell of the School House gave it up at last, and walked out of the study, with his nose in the air. And a yell of laughter followed him down the passage.

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins Comes to the Rescue!

PRATT of the Fourth, looked into Figgins' study in the New House with a grin on his face. Figgins & Co. were finishing tea. Figgins had just taken the last portion of cake, and put it on his plate, when Pratt looked in. Figgins glanced up.

"Hallo, Pratty!"

"Skimpole's inquiring for you," grinned Pratt. "Thought I'd look in and tell you."

"Tell him I'm dead," said Figgins. "Tell him anything. Kill him! Only don't let him come into this study."

"He looks as if somebody has been killing him already," said Pratt, with a chuckle. "Here he comes! I'll call some of the chaps and sling him out, if you like."

"Oh, let him come in!"

Skimpole was coming along the passage. The amateur inventor of St. Jim's looked decidedly the worst for wear. One of his eyes was discoloured, and his nose was very much swollen.

Pratt grinned.

"Well, I've warned you, Figgy," he said. "We'll sling him out, if you like."

Skimpole blinked at the obliging Pratt.

"That is really almost rude, Pratt," he remarked. "Let me point out to you—"

But Pratt was gone.

Skimpole blinked into the study.

Figgins and Kerr looked at him curiously. Fatty Wynn absently removed the cake from Figgins' plate to his own, and began to eat it.

"Well, you do look a sight, Skimmy!" said Figgins.

"Have you been wrestling with a mangle?"

"Or trying to stop a motor-car with your face?" asked Kerr.

"I have been used in a ruffianly manner," said Skimpole. "I have been fighting with D'Arcy. I am pleased to say that I gave him a fearful thrashing. He wanted me to withdraw some observations which were perfectly true, and, of course, as a sincere Determinist, I could do nothing of the sort. Then he proceeded to violence."

"Yes, you look as if he did. I say, where's my cake?"

"Your cake?" said Kerr.

"Yes, where's it gone? Why, blessed if that cormorant Wynn isn't bolting it!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly.

"Am I?" said Fatty Wynn, with a start. "By Jove, so I am! Simply absent-mindedness."

"Yes; you're an absent-minded beggar," said Figgins witheringly. "That makes about the tenth piece you've had."

"Only the ninth, Figgy, honour bright!"

"You—you—"

"I get so hungry this August weather," said Fatty Wynn plaintively. "There wasn't much for tea, you know—only ham and bacon and eggs and sausages, and I had to fill up with cake. You see—"

"Yes, I see a cormorant," said Figgins.

"You can have what's left—"

Figgins looked at what was left. There was almost sufficient to cover a half-crown. He shook his head.

"You can finish it, Fatty. If you're still hungry, you'd better start on the coal in the locker. When are you going to take your face away, Skimpole?"

"That is hardly a polite way of putting it, Figgins."

"I suppose not; but you haven't answered my question."

"Come to think of it, why did you bring it here?" asked Kerr.

"I have a proposition to make to you fellows—"

"Go ahead!"

"I have, by my wonderful skill as an amateur detective, traced the theft of the plans of my airship to Mr. Horatio Fish, the local inventor—"

"Have you set Ferrers Locke on the track?"

"Tom Merry refuses to write to him. When I asked him, he told me not to be an ass—a reply which I could not help regarding as almost rude. However, I think I can manage very well without the assistance of Ferrers Locke—for the present, at any rate."

"Good! You are going to give yourself a job as detective?"

"I am going to investigate the matter myself. I shall require assistance, and I have come to you, Figgins."

Figgins winked at the Co.

"That's very kind of you, Skimpole."

"Not at all, Figgins. I have sought assistance in my own House in vain, and I have made up my mind that the honour shall belong to the New House."

"Oh, really, Skimmy! That's rather rough on the School House, you know."

"I know it is, Figgins. But I am quite firm on the point. Now, what I want to know is, are you fellows willing to help me?"

Figgins suppressed a chuckle.

"That really depends upon what you're going to do, Skimmy."

Kerr and Wynn stared at their leader. They had expected Figgins to give Skimpole his opinion in language more expressive than polite. But they saw the next moment, from the humorous twinkle in Figgins' eye, that the chief of the Co. had some "wheeze" in his mind.

"That is very simple," said Skimpole. "From the description in the local paper, I know the exact situation of Mr. Fish's house and grounds. He has a place outside the village near the banks of the Rhyl, and his workshop is built in the garden. My idea is to penetrate to the workshop and examine his model, and if I find that he has used my ideas, I shall know for certain that he is the finder of the missing plans."

Figgins nodded in a thoughtful way.

"But suppose Mr. Fish finds you on his premises—"

"I shall, of course, use the greatest caution."

"Suppose he keeps a watchdog?"

"I should quell him with the power of my eyes."

"Well, you really seem to be prepared for everything."

"A brain like mine would naturally be prepared for everything. Even I, however, require some assistance. I am not an athlete—"

"Oh, come, Skimmy," said Figgins, with a glance at the freak of the Shell's weedy form, "you don't do yourself justice, you know."

"I dare say that, if I had the time to devote to it, I

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should become far more athletic than any other fellow in the Lower Forms at this school," said Skimpole. "It is easy enough to excel in such matters as cricket and football and running; very different from the work required to write a really good book on Determinism, as I have been doing lately, or to invent an airship."

"I suppose so," said Figgins, with great humility. "When I come to think of it, you are a great deal more like a scarecrow than an athlete."

The Co. chuckled.

"I require some assistance in getting over walls, and so on," said Skimpole; "that is where I should be glad of your help. Later, you will become famous as having had a hand in the recovery of the plans of Skimpole's great airship—"

Figgins looked at the Co.

"Would you like to become famous?" he asked.

"Certainly!" said Kerr.

"Anything you like!" assented Fatty Wynn.

"Then it's settled. We're going to follow Skimpole's lead in this matter, and see if we can't pull him through it—I mean, help him through."

"Thank you very much, Figgins. I am going to visit the house of Mr. Fish to-night, and commence the investigations at once."

"Good wheeze!"

"It will not be safe to do so until after lights out. Will you meet me in the quadrangle, say, at ten o'clock?"

"Certainly!" said Figgins. "That will be half an hour after lights-out for the Fourth Form, and everybody will be asleep in our quarters. We can sneak out of the dormitory easy enough."

"Easy as winking," said Kerr.

"Easy enough," said Fatty. "If we're going out, though, we'd better take some sandwiches with us."

"I am very much obliged to you, Figgins," said Skimpole; "I am sure you will be very useful to me in this affair."

"Yes; I am quite sure of that, Skimmy. We shall do you more good than you expect—I mean, we shall make it a point to be useful. What nobler aim could there be in life than to be useful to the great Skimpole?"

Skimpole blinked suspiciously at Figgins, but the chief of the New House juniors was quite serious.

"Then it is settled, Figgins?"

"Quite settled."

"You will meet me in the quad when the clock strikes ten—"

"In the dead vast and middle of the night," said Figgins, who had recently been rehearsing with the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, and still had Shakespeare running in his mind, "I'll meet you in the churchyard—"

"Really, Figgins, I do not understand you. There is no churchyard nearer than Rylcombe, and that is too far away."

"Meet him round the bandstand," suggested Kerr.

"But there is no bandstand at St. Jim's," said Skimpole, looking bewildered.

The inventor of St. Jim's was not blessed with a sense of humour.

"Well, then, I'll meet you at Philippi," said Figgins, making the appointment that Brutus made with the ghost of Julius Caesar.

"I do not know where Philippi is, Figgins—"

"Ah, in that case, we'll make it the quad," said Figgins. "What do you say to the wall by the slanting oak?"

"That will be excellent, as it is a good place to climb over."

"Then it's settled, Skimmy. We'll be there in the still night, when the church clock booms forth the solemn hour of—"

"You can't hear the church clock from the school, Figgins. Better fix it by the clock here at St. Jim's."

"You unpoetical old villain, that's all right! When the clock in the clock tower strikes ten, I'll be waiting for thee by the giddy old oak."

"Thank you very much."

"And now I advise you to go and buy a beefsteak for that eye," said Figgins; and Skimpole left the study.

"What's the little game?" demanded the Co. simultaneously, as the door closed.

Figgins chuckled.

"You heard it all arranged, my sons?"

"Yes," said Kerr. "But you don't really mean that you are going to get out of the dormitory at ten o'clock?"

"Can't fail to keep an appointment."

"But you're not going out of bounds at night, surely, on such a fatheaded jape?" exclaimed the Scottish partner in the Co.

"Did I tell Skimpole I would go out of bounds?"

"Well, no."

"I told him I would meet him by the wall at ten o'clock. So I will. And I told him we'd do him more good than he expected. So we will. We'll cure him of getting out of his House of a night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The silly ass may go round burgling places and getting arrested if we give him his head," said Figgins. "We don't want a St. Jim's chap to get into trouble. At the same time, we do want a jape up against the School House."

"Yes, rather!"

"We'll meet Skimpole in the giddy trysting-place and make an example of him. It's all for his own good, you see—"

"Quite so."

"My idea is to put him through it in the way that will cure him of wanting to break bounds of a night, and of going around asking respectable young men like us to be his accomplices in burglaries."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. laughed in chorus.

Meanwhile, Skimpole, without a suspicion that his new allies were simply "rotting," was making his preparations for the expedition.

CHAPTER 6.

Skimpole Makes Preparations!

TOM MERRY—

"Hallo, Skimmy! Where did you get that eye?" "Does it look very bad?" asked Skimpole. "It is very unpleasant. My spectacles are a little crooked owing to this swelling, and it causes some uncertainty in my vision. However, it cannot be helped. I want to speak to you, Merry—"

"Cut it short, old chap!"

"I want to borrow—"

"Sorry, quite stony."

"I want to borrow—"

"Broke to the wide. Ask Manners."

"I want to borrow—"

"So am I," said Manners. "I want some new films, and I can't get them until my allowance comes down. Ask Lowther."

"I want to borrow—"

"Well, I've got a bob left," said Lowther. "I'm going to keep it left, too."

"I want to borrow—"

"Not good enough. Go and ask D'Arcy, he's rolling in filthy lucre."

"I want to borrow a rope—"

"Eh?"

"I want to borrow a rope of you fellows—"

"Why didn't you say so before?"

"Really, Merry, you didn't give me a chance. I know you chaps have a long, knotted rope in your study, as you have used it to descend into the quadrangle from your window, I believe. I want to borrow the rope."

The Terrible Three stared at the freak of the Shell.

"What on earth do you want with the rope, Skimmy?"

"I require it."

"Yes, I can guess that much, as you want to borrow it, but what do you require it for?"

"I should prefer not to explain."

"Are you going to break bounds?"

"Please do not, by asking awkward questions, put me under the painful necessity of prevaricating," said Skimpole.

"Well, Skimmy, my son, you could have the rope and welcome, but I can't approve of your breaking bounds," said Tom Merry, shaking his head.

"You need not approve, Merry. That is really a matter of indifference, and—"

Lowther chuckled.

"Knock his head against the wall, Tom. That's what he wants."

"Please don't be violent," said Skimpole, retreating a pace. "I have had enough fighting for the present. I am feeling rather fatigued. Will you lend me the rope, Merry?"

"You can have it if you like," said Tom Merry; "but I advise you not to be a silly ass, Skimpole."

"Thank you. Where is the rope?"

"In the cupboard in the study, under the box. But—"

"Thank you."

Skimpole walked on, leaving the Terrible Three looking at one another doubtfully.

Monty Lowther grinned.

"It means that he's really going out," said Lowther.

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Tom Merry looked rather troubled.
 "We ought to stop him."
 "I don't see how we can. He could get out without the rope. If we stopped him to-night he'd go another night."
 "I suppose so."
 "He may get into trouble, though," said Manners.
 "Suppose we watched to-night to see if he went out, and went after him—"
 Tom Merry's eyes glimmered.
 "That's a good idea. We may be able to give him a lesson about going out of a night and making his kind schoolfellows anxious about him."
 "That's it. The ass wants the rope to lower himself over the wall, I expect. If we should happen to be on the spot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "One of us had better stay awake, then—"
 "Good!" said Lowther. "It's your idea, Manners—"
 "Yes. I think of these things, you know."
 "So you had better stay awake—"
 "Eh?"
 "It's settled," said Lowther. "Manners stays awake to-night and watches for the tame lunatic, and wakes us up if he goes out."
 "Do I?" said Manners.
 "Well, it was your own suggestion."
 "We'll toss up for it," said Tom Merry, laughing. "My hat! I believe Skimpole's airship is going to be more trouble than his Determinism, or his amateur detectivism."
 Skimpole, meanwhile, had walked on to Study No. 6, where the chums of the Fourth were doing their preparation.
 Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were busy. They looked up as the inventor of St. Jim's, looked in.

"I say, Blake—"
 "Get out!"
 "I want to borrow—"
 "We're busy."
 "I want to borrow a dark lantern—"
 Jack Blake gave a jump.
 "You want to borrow a what?"
 "A dark lantern."
 "Better apply to the Burglars' Federation, or somebody in that line," said Blake. "We haven't any dark lanterns in this study."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I wegard it as feahfully impertinent for you to come here, Skimpole, and suggest that we keep dark lanterns on the beastly pwemises!"
 "I desire to hold no converse with you, D'Arcy."
 "Bai Jove!"

"I look upon you as a ruffian! You have damaged my features to such an extent that I cannot keep my spectacles on straight, which is a great inconvenience to me."

"I am sowwy, deah boy; but, weally, what can you expect when you pwovoked me to give you such a feahful thwashin'?"

"I fancy the thrashing was on the other side."

"What?"

"It was received by you."

D'Arcy laid down his pen and jumped up.

"Bai Jove! If that is the way you wegard the mattah, you uttah wottah, we will finish that scwap now, on the beastly spot!"

Digby caught the swell of the School House by the arm and dragged him back.

"Hold on, ass!"

"I wefuse to hold on; and I uttably and absolutely decline to be chawactewised as an ass!"

"Chuck it!" said Blake severely. "You've made row enough, you two. If you start again, we'll knock your nappers together and sling you out of the room!"

"I wefuse to be slung out of the woom!"

"We haven't any dark lanterns, Skimmy, and if we had we wouldn't lend them to you to play the giddy goat with."

"Really, Blake—"

"So get out!" said Herries. "You're interrupting the washing! Get out—travel!"

"My dear Herries—"

"Bunk!" roared three voices in unison.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "You may welease me, Dig. I do not intend to thwash this silly wottah any more! Upon weflection, I think he has had punishment enough. I wequest the ass to wetire before I am pwovoked. I shall be vewy wuff if he wouses my tempah!"

"If you haven't a dark lantern—"

"We haven't! Bunk!"

"I could make an ordinary bicycle lantern do. Mine is broken, and I think that one of yours would—"

"Travel!"

"If you will lend me yours, Blake—"

"I'm not going to help you to make a bigger ass of yourself that Nature made for you, Skimmy. Go and eat coke!"

"If you will lend me yours, Digby—"

"I won't! Vamoose!"

"You, Herries—"

"No! Scoot!"

"In that case I appeal to D'Arcy—"

"I should have vewy much pleasuah in accedin' to your wequest, deah boy, if only to show that I bear no malice after givin' you a feahful thwashin'; but I am afwaid that you want the lantern to bweak bounds and visit Mr. Fish's quartahs, and make a silly ass of yourself genewally. Undah the circs, I am compelled to decline to lend you a lantern."

"I shall be able to borrow one somewhere else, I suppose," said Skimpole. "Do you think I am offended by your refusal? As a Determinist—"

"Oh, pway twavel along, deah boy!"

"As a Determinist, I regard every human creature as being what he is, because his nature is what it is, and his early surroundings were what they were; and therefore his actions are necessarily what they are, and he thinks what he thinks and does what he does—"

A Latin grammar came hurtling through the air; and Skimpole, ceasing his exposition of the wonderful truths of Determinism all of a sudden, dodged along the passage and disappeared.

"Of all the howling asses," said Blake, "that chap is the howlest! He's going to break bounds to-night, as sure as a gun, to look for the plans of his giddy airship!"

"Yes, rather!"

"If he belonged to our Form, I'd keep an eye on him and make an example of him," said D'Arcy; "but I suppose it's no business of ours."

"Certainly not," said Digby. "Let's get on."

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"I decline to shut up until I have finished my wemarks!"

Potts, the Office Boy!



I was thinkin' that that extremely silly ass is goin' to bweak bounds to look for the wotten plans of his widiculous airship, and he may get into twouble!"

"Serve him right!"

"Yaas, it will serve him wight, in a way; still, I don't like the ideah of a silly ass gettin' into twouble for want of a guidin' hand. I can tell you what's the pwopah thing to do—"

"Don't bother!"

"Wats! I think we ought to keep an eye on Skimpole."

"You can if you like. Dry up!"

"I wufuse to dwy up! Upon weflection, I think that it is vevy pwob that I have handled him too severely, and in that case I owe him some wecompense. Perwaps I ought to look aftah him a little."

"Go and do it, then, and don't jaw!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Shut up!"

"Weally, Herries—"

"Silence!" roared Blake. "I've got to finish my prep, you young villain!"

"Vevy well. Undah the circs, I think I ought to look aftah Skimpole, and I think I will go and acquaint him with my determination."

"Please do!"

And Arthur Augustus went in search of Skimpole, and silence fell in Study No. 6, broken only by the scratching of pens.

CHAPTER 7.

D'Arcy Looks After Skimpole!

"H AVE you seen Skimpole, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Pway tell me where he is."

"I really don't know. It's an hour since I saw him."

D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye and gave the humorous Tom Merry a glance that ought to have shrivelled him up on the spot, but didn't!

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I have no time to waste in wottin'! I wish to see Skimpole vevy particularly. I am goin' to look aftah him."

"Eh?"

"I considah it my duty to look aftah the ass. I have been lookin' for him for some time, but he seems to have disappeared, the silly ass! It is weally a feahful bothah."

"He was going up to Reilly's study when I saw him last," said Manners.

"Weally, to Weilly's study?" D'Arcy looked very thoughtful. "I am not on the best of terms with Weilly. He has nevah tweeked me with pwopah wespsect. But I suppose I had better go and look for him."

And the Swell of the School House made his way to Reilly's study.

Reilly was in the study, with his feet on the table, with a copy of the "Magnet" in his hands. He looked and grinned at Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo, Gussy! What do you want?"

"I want Skimpole. Have you seen him?" asked Arthur Augustus, in an extremely dignified way.

"Yes; he came here a while ago," grinned Reilly. "He wanted to borrow a dark lantern."

"Bai Jove!"

"He said a bicycle lantern would do."

"And you lent him one?"

"Sure and I didn't, Adolphus!"

"Weally, Weilly, my name is not Adolphus, and I wish you would not use that widiculous expression!"

"Well, Algy, then," said Reilly. "I didn't lend him one. You see, I haven't one, so it wouldn't have been easy. I told him where he could get one, though, so it was just as good."

"Vevy good! Tell me where he went, and I shall be able to find the duffah. Whose lantern is he goin' to get?"

"Yours."

"Weally, Weilly—"

"I mentioned to him that you had left your new acetylene lamp in the bike-shed, and he said it would do."

"Bai Jove, I weward that as—"

"He doesn't know how to light it, but he took a hammer and chisel along with him to experiment."

D'Arcy glared.

"You uttah ass, I would give you a feahful thwashin', but I havq no time to waste. I must go and stop that dangewous maniac bweakin' up my new lamp."

And Arthur Augustus hurried away. He lost no time in getting to the bicycle shed, and the glimmer of light from the open door showed him that someone was there.

He started as a loud clink fell upon his ears.

Clink, clink, clink!

"Bai Jove, Weilly was speakin' the twuth, then!" gasped D'Arcy. "The uttah ass is bweakin' my lamp!"

He ran into the bicycle-shed. In the glimmer of a candle stuck on a ledge, Skimpole was at work upon an acetylene lamp. The inventor of St. Jim's evidently did not know the simple arrangement of the gas lamp, and he was investigating. Instead of unscrewing it, he was chipping it open with hammer and chisel.

"You uttah duffah!" shouted D'Arcy. "Stop!"

"Ah, is that you, D'Arcy?"

"What are you doing to my lamp?"

"I am opening it. I have thought of a great improvement in cycle lamps."

"You cwass idiot, you have buckled it up all round!" exclaimed D'Arcy, seizing the lamp and rescuing it. "I shall have to send this to London now to be straightened out. If you wanted to open it, why didn't you unscrew it?"

"Dear me, that would have been simpler, but, as a matter of fact, I was thinking of a great improvement in cycle lamps."

"Let me catch you with my lamp again, bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "You ought to be in a stwaight jacket. If I had not already given you a feahful thwashin', I should give you one now. I have been lookin' for you—"

"Indeed!" said Skimpole. "If you desire information on the subject of Determinism, I shall be happy to explain to you at full length."

"I don't want anything of the sort."

"If you are interested in detective work I shall be happy to—"

"I am not intewested in detective work!"

"You are curious on the subject of my airship. Although I am compelled to keep my great secret to myself, I am quite willing to explain to you the general principles upon which my airship is constructed. Imagine a cylindrical shell—"

"I am not cuwious about your wotten airship!"

"Imagine a cylindrical—"



THE BIG ARTIST!



"I am goin' to look aftah you."

"Nonsense, D'Arcy! I do not require your assistance in my expedition, as I have found assistance elsewhere. Imagine a cylind—"

"I think you are goin' to act the giddy ox!" explained D'Arcy. "I am, therefore, goin' to look aftah you and keep you out of twouble."

"Stuff! I refuse to be looked after!"

"That makes no diffewence," said the swell of the School House. "I have made up my mind on the point, so it is no good arguin', deah boy. You are not goin' out of the School House to-night!"

"Who says so?"

"I do, Skimpy! I shall not give you my permish!"

"Really, D'Arcy—"

"Weally, Skimpole—"

"I regard you with contempt—as a bloated aristocrat!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as bloated! I admit that I am extremely awistocwatic. I object to the term bloated!"

"I am going forth to-night—"

"Then I shall go fifth and bwing you back!"

"You will do nothing of the sort, or I shall use violence. Your lantern would probably be of no use to me, so I will not take it. I remember now that Gore keeps his lantern in the study, and I can borrow it. I shall not ask Gore, as he is very unreasonable on such points."

And Skimpole quitted the bicycle-shed.

Arthur Augustus followed him, and entered the School House only a few paces behind the inventor of St. Jim's. Skimpole went upstairs, and D'Arcy went upstairs, too.

Blake, Herries, and Digby, having finished their prep, were coming down. They stopped and stared at the freak of the Shell and his shadower.

"What on earth are you up to, Gussy?" demanded Blake.

"I am lookin' aftah Skimpole," said D'Arcy, over his shoullder as he passed on.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole went on to the study which he shared with Gore of the Shell. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took up his position in the passage a few paces from the door, and leaned in a graceful attitude against the wall.

The Terrible Three came up to the study a few minutes later, and they stopped to look at D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's nodded.

"Tired?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, yaas, I am a little fatigued, deah boy."

"Curious place to choose for taking a rest, isn't it?"

"I am not takin' a west, Tom Mewwy."

"What are you doing, then—keeping the wall up?"

"I am lookin' aftah Skimpole."

"You are whatting?"

"Lookin' aftah Skimpole. You are aware that I have given him a feahful thwashin'. I wegard it as a duty to look aftah the ass and keep him out of trouble. I wegard your laughtah as wibald, and shall be glad to be welieved of your pwesence."

The chums of the Shell went into their study cackling.

Skimpole did not come out of the study till near bed-time, and then he stared at D'Arcy.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "What ever are you doing leaning up against the wall of the passage, D'Arcy?"

"I am lookin' aftah you, deah boy."

"Really, D'Arcy, you are becoming annoying. You remember the thrashing I gave you a short time ago?"

"You wemembah the thwashin' I gave you—"

"I shall repeat it if—"

"I shall pwobably wepeat it if—"

Skimpole walked on. D'Arcy followed him, and shadowed him to the junior Common-room. There he kept him under observation till bed-time.

When the Fourth Form and the Shell went up to bed, D'Arcy was obliged to lose sight of his victim, as the Forms had separate dormitories. But the swell of the School House had not abated one jot of his determination. When Arthur Augustus got an idea in his head, it required, as Jack Blake said, a team of wild horses to get it out.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and head prefect of the School House, saw lights out in the Fourth Form dormitory.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not undress. Blake looked at him curiously as he got into bed with his shirt and trousers on, only his jacket being placed on a hanger on the wall. Kildare had left the juniors, cautioning them that he would expect them all to be in bed when he returned in five minutes.

"Why aren't you undressing, Gussy?" demanded Blake.

"It would be superfluous labah, deah boy, as I'm goin' to get up again."

"What are you going to get up for?"

"To look aftah Skimpole."

"Ass! I've spoken to Tom Merry on the subject, and he says he's going to keep an eye on the lunatic to-night!"

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"Tom Mewwy will pwobably go to sleep and forget all about it, Blake. At any wate, I have made up my mind to look aftah Skimpole, though I cannot say that he is at all gwateful for the twouble I am takin'."

"Get your things off!"

"I am goin' to wemain as I am."

"You will rumple your trousers," said Digby—a remark that touched Arthur Augustus in the tenderest spot.

"Bai Jove, yaas! I think I had bettah wemove my twousahs, when I come to think of it, and keep only my beastlay undahclothin' on."

"Go to bed, and don't be a silly ass!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

D'Arcy removed the trousers which were in danger of being rumpled, and slid into bed again. He was quite unconscious of the fact that an inch of high collar showed above the top of the sheet when he put his head on the pillow.

Kildare came in and glanced about the dormitory.



"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "This is most unpleasant and ran full tilt into the airship. It was supported lightly on its legs, as it went to the floor, and

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, Kildare, deah boy."

"What the dickens do you mean by going to bed with a collar on?" demanded the captain of St. Jim's, staring at the junior in amazement.

"Bai Jove, I forgot that!"

"Take it off immediately! Why, you have your day shirt on, also! I never expected to see this utter slovenliness in a boy like you, D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus turned scarlet. Slovenliness in personal matters was about the last sin he could possibly have been guilty of. The whole dormitory giggled from end to end.

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Get up immediately. I see you have not even removed your socks and underclothing. Disgusting!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"You will take one hundred lines for this, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, you do not compwehend," stammered the unhappy swell of the School House. "I did not mean to sleep in my things."

"Then why did you go to bed in them?"

That was a poser, as the junior could hardly explain to the captain of the school that he had intended to leave the dormitory after lights out.

Arthur Augustus was silent. Kildare looked at him keenly.

"You will write out one hundred times 'Personal slovenliness is disgusting,'" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Oh, weally—"

"And mind nothing of the sort occurs again."

"Bai Jove!"

"Take those things off immediately, and put on your pyjamas. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, D'Arcy! Quick, now!"

There was nothing for it but to obey.

Arthur Augustus changed into his night garments, and



—wow!" Mr. Fish clutched at him. Skimpole twisted away, and the impact sent it flying. There was a terrible crash. Fish gave a howl of anguish!

Kildare, with a severe look, turned away. He extinguished the light.

"Good-night, youngsters!"

"Good-night, Kildare!"

The door closed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up in bed. He quivered with indignation as he heard the chuckles up and down the room.

"Shocking dirty chap, that D'Arcy," Mellish's voice was heard to remark. "Not nice for the chap who sleeps in the next bed to him."

"Rotten!" said Walsh.

"My idea is that he ought to be disinfected," said Keruish. "It's rough on us, as it is. What do you think?"

"Faith, an ye're right!" said Reilly.

"You uttah wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus. "You know vewy well that I was only keepin' my things on because I was gettin' up again!"

"That's all very well," said Herries. "Kildare thinks

you're slovenly, and Kildare's opinion is quite good enough for me."

"Quite so," said Digby.

"He was labouwin' undah a misappwehension."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I could not vewy well explain to him undah the circs." D'Arcy stepped out of bed. "Howevah, that makes no difference. I am goin' to look aftah Skimpole."

"The obstinate ass!" grunted Blake.

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"Kildare will very likely have his eye open."

"I shall have to wisk that."

D'Arcy dressed himself as well as he could in the dark. Blake, Herries, and Digby tried their eloquence on him in turn, without being able to dissuade him. The swell of the School House could be very obstinate when he liked.

"If you fellows like to come with me," he said, as he tied his last bootlace, "I shall be vewy pleased to give you my permish."

"Oh, rats! Not so much of your chinwag!" said Blake.

"You can go and eat coke!"

"Vewy well, deah boy. I am goin'."

And D'Arcy quitted the dormitory and closed the door. A light was burning at the end of the passage.

Arthur Augustus strolled along in the direction of the Shell dormitory, and a hand suddenly came out of an alcove in the oak-panelled wall, and grasped him by the shoulder.

D'Arcy gave a startled gasp. But it was only Kildare. The big Sixth-Former shook the junior as a mastiff might shake a mouse.

"You young donkey!" said Kildare.

Arthur Augustus wriggled in the powerful grip of the captain of the school.

"Weally, Kildare—"

"I guessed that you were going to leave the dormitory, you young ass. You deserve to have a jolly good licking!"

"I twust you will not forget the considewation due twom one gentleman to another," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

The captain of St. Jim's chuckled.

"Where are you going?"

"I am afraid I must wefuse to ansawah that question."

"Do you want me to knock your head against the wall?"

"Certainly not, Kildare. I wegard that question as widdleous."

"Then you had better be careful how you speak. You will take two hundred lines instead of one hundred, and return to your dormitory at once. And give me your word that you will not leave it again to-night."

"Weally, Kildare, I don't see how I can do anything of the sort. You see—ow! Pway let go my yah!"

"Are you going to promise?"

"You see—ow, wow! Yaas, wathah! Yaas, I think upon reflection I will make the pwomise, Kildare. Ow!"

"Good!" said the captain of St. Jim's releasing him.

"Now go back to your dormitory, and think yourself lucky for not being reported to your Housemaster."

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Cut off!"

D'Arcy thought he had better cut off. He returned to the Fourth Form dormitory.

The Fourth-Formers were wide awake, and they heard the School House swell come in. There was a volley of questions at once.

"Hallo, Gussy!"

"What have you come back for?"

"Have you left the other ass in the lurch?"

"I wefuse to ansawah any questions on the subject," said D'Arcy loftily. "I have given up my idea, for a good weason."

He rubbed his burning ear in the darkness. "But I do not considah that you wottahs are entitled to an explanation."

"I think I can guess the reason," chuckled Blake. "Did you get licked, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I decline to ansawah fwivolous questions, Blake."

The dormitory echoed with chuckles from end to end, but Arthur Augustus maintained a stony and dignified silence. His word was sacred, and he could not leave the dormitory after his promise to Kildare. The idea of looking after Skimpole had to be given up. But, as it happened, the Terrible Three were looking after Skimpole.

CHAPTER 8.

The Plotters!

"ARE you fellows asleep?" Skimpole asked the question in a voice loud enough to awaken any of the fellows who were asleep.

Tom Merry came out of a doze with a start. The task of keeping awake had been assigned to Manners, and he

had kept awake for nearly a quarter of an hour. Skimpole's voice, however, brought him fully to himself.

"Are you asleep?"

There was a suspiciously loud snore from Tom Merry's bed, and it was followed, as if it had been a signal, by similar sounds from Lowther and Manners.

"This is very fortunate," murmured Skimpole. "They are all fast asleep, and sometimes some of them keep awake right up till ten o'clock. I shall not be observed now."

Skimpole stepped out of bed, and drew on his clothes. Then he took out the coiled rope he had hidden under his mattress, and a bike lamp from his washstand, and he crossed to the door in a stealthy way.

Tom Merry listened till he heard the door close, and then he whipped out of bed.

"Quick, you fellows!"

"I say, I think we may as well let him run on," said Lowther. "On second thoughts it doesn't seem worth while to— Grooooo! Keep that sponge off my face, you shrieking lunatic, or I'll dust up the linoleum with you!"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Get up, then!"

Lowther slipped out of bed, and Manners followed suit. The chums of the Shell dressed quickly enough in the darkness. A sleepy voice came from Gore's bed.

"Hallo! What's up?"

"We are!" said Lowther.

"What are you going to do?"

"Mind our own business."

Gore grunted, and turned over to go to sleep again. The Terrible Three quietly left the dormitory. The passage was dark, but there was a light in the hall below.

It was pretty certain that Skimpole had not gone downstairs. "He'll get out of his study window," whispered Manners.

"Most likely he's going to use the rope for that."

"How are we going to follow without a rope?"

"He'll have to leave it there. He can't unfasten it from below. Besides, he will want to climb it to get in again."

"True!"

"Come on!"

They hurried to Skimpole's study. The door was closed, and they heard a sound from within. Tom Merry silently opened the door about an inch, and the chums of the Shell glanced through the aperture.

There was a glimmer of starlight through the open window. A dim form could be seen in the patch of light, and a murmuring voice could be heard.

"Dear me, the oil is running down my trousers! I wish I had not filled the lantern now. It is very unfortunate!"

The Terrible Three suppressed a chuckle.

Skimpole had slung the bicycle lantern round his waist. The rope was tied to the leg of the table, and the end dangled over the window-sill into the dusky quad.

Skimpole blinked out of the window into the dark. Apparently he did not much like his task now that the time came for performing it; but the hour of the appointment was nigh, and there was no time to hesitate.

The inventor of the Shell swung himself upon the window-sill, and there was the sound of a bump as he knocked his head against the sash.

"Dear me! Oh dear!"

Skimpole rubbed his head and fumbled with the rope. As he pulled on it to test it, the table was dragged close to the window.

"Dear me," murmured Skimpole. "How fortunate that I thought of testing the rope before I trusted my weight to it! My forethought has probably saved me from serious injury."

The table jammed against the window-ledge and the rope seemed secure. Skimpole dragged at it, and as it held fast, he trusted his weight on it.

The Terrible Three watched the head of the freak of the Shell sink out of sight.

"He's gone!" muttered Tom Merry.

"The shrieking ass!" said Monty Lowther. "Did you ever see a clumsier variety of a silly cuckoo before?"

"There never was one," said Manners, "and never will be. Fancy that screaming ass thinking of burgling a rabbit-hutch, even!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on!"

The chums of the Shell entered the study. The stillness of the hanging rope showed them that Skimpole had reached the bottom, and was safely landed.

"I'll go first," said Tom Merry.

"Buck up, then!"

Easily enough Tom Merry swung himself from the window, and went slithering down the rope. He dropped

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lightly into the quadrangle, and Manners and Lowther followed.

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Can you see Skimpole?"

"I can't!"

"We shall have to track him by the smell of the cycle oil," said Lowther, sniffing. "There is a strong smell of it just here."

"He spilt most of what he had in the lantern, I suppose."

"But where has he got to?"

It was too dark to see far in the quadrangle. Skimpole had lost no time, and he was out of sight.

"Let's get to the wall," said Tom Merry. "He must mean to get over it, and by following it we're bound to come on him."

"True. But how does the ass propose to get over it?"

"Climb, I suppose."

"Not much of a climber."

"Oh, you don't know what an inventor can do when he's in deadly earnest. Come on; we may be in time to hang on to his feet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three ran quickly through the dusk towards the wall. They did not know at what precise spot the amateur inventor meant to reach it, having no knowledge, of course, of his rendezvous with Figgins & Co.

Skimpole, as a matter of fact, was keeping straight on for the slanting oak, which marked a spot where the school wall could be scaled without much difficulty, and he reached the rendezvous without a suspicion that his Form-fellows were on the track.

Three dim forms loomed up out of the gloom. Ten chimed from the clock tower of St. Jim's.

"Is that you, Skimpole?"

"Yes, Figgy."

"Good!"

"So you've come," said Kerr. "We've been here a good five minutes. Still, you're in time. Are you prepared?"

"Certainly!"

"Got any sandwiches?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No; I did not think of them."

"Well, of all the howling asses!"

"Never mind the sandwiches," said Figgins, in a deep, bass voice that startled Skimpole. "What do sandwiches matter at a moment like this?"

"Well, I'm rather hungry," said Wynn.

"What do sandwiches matter?" repeated Figgins. "What is more necessary is a dark lantern!"

"Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain one," said Skimpole. "I have, however, brought Gore's cycle lantern."

"And a rope?"

"I have left Tom Merry's rope hanging from the window."

"And a mask?"

"Dear me, I never thought of a mask!"

"Lot of good you are as an amateur cracksman!" grunted Figgins. "Blessed if I've ever seen such an innocent criminal as you are!"

"'Criminal' is hardly the correct term, Figgins. I am merely going to enter Mr. Horatio Fish's house to ascertain whether he has borrowed any of my ideas."

"Suppose he discovers you?"

"With my great sagacity, I shall obviate anything of the kind."

"That's all very well, but your giddy sagacity may be at fault, or there may be a watchdog to give the alarm. If you are going to burgle, you must do the thing thoroughly. You must have a mask."

"But I haven't one."

"That's all right. Some burglars blacken their faces instead of wearing masks, as it saves trouble and works out cheaper. Luckily, I thought you'd very likely forget to bring a mask, so I have brought a bottle of ink with me."

"A—a what?"

"A bottle of ink and a brush. I will paint your face black with it—"

"Really, Figgins, I'd rather you didn't!"

"Do you want to be recognised by Mr. Fish?"

"N-no, but—"

"Do you want to be sent to penal servitude for fifteen years?"

"Good gracious, no!"

"Then you must be disguised. I will blacken your face with ink, and then no one will be able to recognise you."

"It is very thoughtful of you, Figgins—"

"Of course it is. Have you got that bottle open, Kerr?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Where's the brush?"

"Here it is—in the ink."

"Give it to me. Ready, Skimmy?"

"Really, Figgins—"

"Stand still, or it might go in your eye. This will jolly soon disguise you, old man. Stand still, and don't talk."

"But, really, Figgins, I think I'd rather— Geroorooch!"

"What on earth are you making that noise for?"

"Geroorooch! It went in my mouth!"

"Well, I told you not to talk!"

"Yes, but— Geroorooch!"

"There it is again! I wish you'd keep your mouth shut, Skimmy! You're wasting the ink!"

"I—I— Geroorooch! Ow! Wow!"

"This won't take long," observed Figgins, painting away industriously. "I do wish you'd keep still, Skimpole! Is it all black now, Kerr? It's rather hard to see in this light."

"Looks about done," said Kerr.

"Well, I can't see any white patches," said Figgins, surveying his handiwork with a critical eye. "It's a jolly good disguise!"

"Ripping!"

"It feels very uncomfortable," said Skimpole. "I suppose it is a good idea, though. I wish I had thought of a mask."

"Oh, you can't think of everything, you know," said Figgins. "Lucky you've got a chap like me to think of things for you. You might have been recognised, tracked down by the police, and sent to penal servitude for trying to steal a valuable invention."

"I should have explained—"

"They mightn't have believed you, my pippin."

"That is unfortunately true, Figgins. Under the present rotten system of society it is an undoubted fact that many unscrupulous persons do not tell the truth."

"I believe it is," agreed Figgins. "I think you're finished now. Doesn't he look a dream, you chaps?"

"A regular nightmare," murmured Kerr.

"This is better and more efficacious than a mask," went on Figgins. "If it comes on to rain, or if you tumble into a ditch, you are quite safe, as this won't come off under any circumstances."

Skimpole gave a jump.

"What?"

"You see, it's indelible ink—"

"Ow! Ow!"

"What's the matter? Have you got a pain somewhere?"

"If it won't come off, I—"

"That's all right; you're quite safe."

"I shan't be able to get it off to-morrow!"

"By Jove! I never thought of that!"

"Oh! Good gracious! Dear me! I shall have to turn up in class with a face like a nigger! You—you villain!"

"If that's what you call being grateful, Skimmy—"

"You—you ass!"

"I think this is about the last time I shall help anybody commit a burglary," said Figgins, looking at the Co. with an injured expression. "Of course, I might have expected this from Skimpole!"

"What am I to do if it won't come off?" hooted Skimpole.

"Well, it's no good meeting trouble half-way. You don't want it off till after the burglary."

"It's not a burglary; it's an investigation. But I'm thinking of to-morrow morning. Suppose it won't come off?"

"Oh, it's certain to wear off in time!"

"How long?" hooted Skimpole.

"Well, it would probably be all gone by the end of the term—"

"You—you villain!"

"Oh, come away!" said Figgins. "I never expected gratitude, but really this is a little bit too thick! Come on!"

"Stop a minute," said Skimpole anxiously. "In spite of the terrible predicament you have placed me in for to-morrow, I cannot forget that my investigation is most important. I want your assistance."

"You can want it. I've had enough of your chin-wag!"

"Please don't go, Figgins," pleaded Skimpole. "Upon reflection I think you are probably mistaken, and that the ink is not indelible. However, I must now think of my airship. Please help me over the wall."

"I'm afraid that I must refuse to have anything further to do with the matter, unless you withdraw the expressions you have used," said Figgins in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's most stately manner.

"I withdraw them, Figgins. I spoke hastily."

(Continued on page 19.)



"Come on Hope!"

Hope looks like making it in record time . . . stout fellow, Hope. (Captain of the soccer team, too. And that team's *fit* . . . from strenuous training.)

Wrigley's takes its share . . . and the team takes *its* share of Wrigley's. The pure cool flavour refreshes—keeps the mouth fresh.

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HALLO, chums! I've got great news for you. In next week's GEM you will find a DOUBLE-LENGTH Story of Tom Merry and Co., entitled:

"SACKED FROM ST. JIM'S!"

To make room for this grand treat, I am holding out the start of a new serial story until the following week, so you fellows who have written in asking for a long St. Jim's story from "cover to cover" of the GEM have got your wish. Martin Clifford has excelled himself in this grand story, which is an ideal mixture of fun, sport, mystery, and adventure—so be sure you read it!

NON-SWIMMERS—NOTE!

Water-wings—those inflated balloons you sometimes wear when you are learning to swim—have got a serious rival in the shape of "pneumatic mitts." These "mitts," about a foot long, and shaped like cigars, are strapped to the forearms. When inflated, it is said they will buoy up the heaviest man, and keep his head above water. In America, these "mitts" are popular with the non-swimmers, as they do not interfere with the correct strokes and inspire the most timid bathers with confidence. Look out for them, you non-swimmers—they'll be on the market over here shortly! Then you will soon "do your length"!

A FLYING START!

So many would-be transatlantic flights have ended in tragic disaster almost at the moment of starting, owing to the terrific run the plane requires before it will "take the air," that some bruiny merchant has hit on the idea of giving them a flying start by means of a runaway. The runaway is built several feet above the ground, something like a scenic railway, only, of course, without those breath-taking curves and loops, and down the centre of it is a set of rails which keep the plane running on a dead-straight course. From a roomy platform the heavily-fuelled plane, due for a long-distance flight, starts off on its journey. Down the steeply-inclined runaway it hurtles, gathering speed much more quickly than it could do from a "standing start." The end of the runaway merges with the aerodrome, and along this the plane finally speeds for a short distance, until it becomes air-borne. This method of getting a heavy plane into the air, is proving quite effective as it reduces the space usually required for a take-off by more than half.

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PIRATE TREASURE!

Cocos Island, in the Pacific, has figured more than once in the news, for strange tales of pirate treasure hidden upon it have leaked out through the ages. Now, it seems that those tales had substance in fact, for it is reported that over twelve million pounds of pirate treasure have been unearthed by means of a "divining rod." What those people think, who spent weary months and much money on an expedition to Cocos Island, not long ago, would be worth knowing, as it is reported that the vast treasure was unearthed no more than thirty feet away from where they had pitched their camp. And if the power of speech could only be vested in that treasure for a few moments—what hair-raising yarns of piracy and cruelty could be told!

THE SAFETY TYRE!

How would you like to be travelling in a motor-car doing a speed of fifty miles an hour, with somebody taking pot shots at your tyres with a gun? That was the experience of a tyre expert, some little while ago. Shot after shot was poured into his tyres, while he was travelling at full speed, but nothing untoward happened. Gradually the car slowed down and came to a standstill, and holes large enough to put three fingers through were to be found in the tyres. With the ordinary every-day tyre it is more than probable that the car would have skidded violently and overturned. But in this test, a "super-balloon tyre" beat the common or garden affair. Imagine a balloon tyre (you must have seen them on the road at some time or another), then picture it twice the size. That is the sort of fellow which took the gunshots "nicely." By reason of its low pressure and its large diameter, the air leaks out very slowly in the event of a puncture, and does not collapse suddenly. This is comforting news to the motorist who is dead scared of a puncture when road-hogging!

HEARD THIS ONE?

Pat: "Where you going, Mick?"
Mick: "To the station, begorra. I'm catching the four o'clock train."
Pat: "Then you'll have to hurry. I've just missed it!"

BOMBS FOR BANDITS!

Faked number plates have frequently assisted the modern bandit to hide his tracks when he has shaken off the initial pursuit of the police, but there are more ways than one of "killing a cat." The latest method practised by our

hard-working police to put a stop to the car bandit takes the form of bombs! Not of the explosive variety, for these bombs, egg shaped, contain nothing but paint. Thus when a "suspect car" makes its getaway the pursuing police, even if they can't catch up with the fleeing bandits are content to hurl their bombs at the car. The bombs burst, and a shower of green and white paint splashes over the car, making it so conspicuous that the eventual capture of the bandits is a practical certainty. A special chemical has been introduced in the manufacture of these bombs which render the job of removing the paint a matter of exceptional difficulty. We wonder whether the bandits will be able to "laugh this one off."

UP TO DATE GEOGRAPHY!

In America the educational authorities have hit on a novel method of teaching geography. A large thirty-six foot map mounted on three-ply wood is cut up into haphazard sections, and the pieces are then jumbled together. In the "geography lesson" the pupils are given a certain time in which to solve this jigsaw puzzle, and put the pieces in their correct positions. Not a bad idea, what, and it certainly makes for "brighter geography."

PEDAL POWER!

Some of the natives of Northern Rhodesia wouldn't be without their wireless for worlds. One chief of a tribe came to be possessed of a pukka wireless transmitting and receiving set, but he was for some time perplexed as to how he could supply sufficient power to work it. Then the tandem bicycle came to his aid. The wheels of one were discarded, the frame fixed into the ground, and geared to a generator. Now in the saddles of the old-time tandem you can see two natives pedalling away for hours on end. On the handlebars before them are two gauges which tell them how quickly to pedal; and by this means the village is in direct wireless contact with the next station, which is something like five hundred miles distant. If you looked at the wireless set it would evoke your interest, for it is thoroughly up to date, but you would be inclined to jib at the platform upon which it rests, for this is nothing more than a number of old packing-cases fixed together. The main thing, however, is the generating power—and the natives contribute their share of pedalling on the old tandem readily and enthusiastically.

A REPLY TO J. W. (DUNFERMLINE).

This enthusiastic reader of the GEM writes and asks how many "stars" there are on the American flag. He says his pals are arguing about it. One declares that the flag carries forty-two stars, the other is convinced that it carries forty. The answer, J. W., is forty-eight stars, which are arranged six in a row to represent the number of States there are in the Union.

"RATS" OF BRISTOL,

Thanks for your interesting letter. Tell your pal that he has lost his wager of "two ginger-pops," for it is as you said—RATS ARE USED FOR MONEY on the island of Har.

YOUR EDITOR,

SKIMPOLE THE INVENTOR!

(Continued from page 17.)

"Good! We may as well lend him a hand, chaps!"

"Certainly!" said the Co.

"Please help me over the wall," said Skimpole. "I could climb the ivy, I think, but I should prefer to have a bunk up. Give me a bunk up, Figgins."

"Certainly! We'll take a leg each, Kerr."

"Right you are!" said Kerr.

"Please be careful!" said Skimpole. "Dear me! If you are both going to help, you must come close together, or you will dismember me. Now! Ow! You are not anywhere near the wall, and I feel as if I were going to fall down."

"Come on, Figgy!" said Kerr.

"Come on, Kerr!" said Figgins.

The juniors moved on, holding the inventor of St. Jim's in the air by his legs. Skimpole held on to their heads with either hand to save himself from toppling over. But instead of going towards the wall, Figgins and Kerr were walking away from it.

"Figgins! Kerr!"

"What's the matter now?"

"You are going away from the wall."

"Are we really?"

"You are! You are going towards the School House."

"Great Scott! So we are! Follow your leader, Kerr!"

"Right ho!"

Figgins and Kerr swung round and marched off in a different direction at a good speed.

Skimpole clung frantically round their necks.

"Figgins! Oh, stop! You are walking straight into the elms!"

"By Jove, you've warned us only just in time," said Figgins. "You'd have had a bump in a minute or more. This is what I call clumsy of you, Kerr."

"Try again," said Kerr.

"Come on, then."

The juniors walked very fast in another direction. It was not towards the wall, and Skimpole gasped out in exostulation. They turned round again and made for the wall, and Skimpole gasped as he was rushed up to the solid brickwork at a speed which threatened to dash him to the ground by the impact if he touched it.

"Stop!" he panted. "Stop!"

Figgins and Kerr stopped so suddenly that Skimpole nearly toppled over.

Fatty Wynn was standing holding his ribs and cackling like a hen. He evidently saw something funny in the whole proceeding.

Figgins and Kerr were quite serious, however.

"Can you get hold there?" asked Figgins, backing away from the wall so that Skimpole would have needed arms four feet long to get a hold.

"No, I can't! Get nearer."

"Come along the wall to an easier place, Kerr."

"That is all right if you let me—"

"That is all right, Skimpole. We'll find a soft spot for you."

The two juniors rushed Skimpole along the wall. The ivy trailed past them, and dashed in the airship inventor's face.

Skimpole gasped and grunted.

"Stop, Figgins! Ow—wow!"

There was a sudden collision in the dark. Figgins and Kerr had suddenly dashed right into three dim figures that were coming quickly along the wall in the shadow of the ivy. The forms were those of the Terrible Three.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins.

He staggered back and let go Skimpole. The inventor of St. Jim's bumped down with a grunt, while Kerr gave a yell.

"School House rotters!"

"Go for 'em!"

"New House rats!" gasped Tom Merry. "Give 'em socks!"

The juniors did not stop to ask questions. In a moment there was a wild and whirling combat proceeding in the shadow of the ivied wall. Fatty Wynn dashed up and joined in. The foes were three to three, evenly matched in point of numbers, for Skimpole did not join in. He had more important matters on hand. It had dawned upon him that Figgins & Co. were simply "rotting," and that they had no intention of allowing him to pass the bounds of St. Jim's.

While the House rivals were engaged in conflict Skimpole climbed the ivy and dropped over the wall into the road. The row in the quad continued, but the inventor of St. Jim's heard nothing of it. He was on his way to pursue his investigations in the habitation of Mr. Horatio Fish, the local inventor.

CHAPTER 9.

Out of Bounds!

"HOLD on!"

It was Figgins who gasped out the words. Tom Merry had got his head into chancery, and it occurred to Figgins about the same time that there was really nothing to row about.

"Chuck it!"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry, releasing his foe at once.

"It's all right, Figgy!"

"Is it?" gasped Manners. "My nose doesn't feel at all right!"

"Nor my left eye!" grunted Fatty Wynn.

"By the way, what are we fighting for?" inquired Tom Merry in a casual sort of way.

Figgins chuckled.

"Blessed if I know! I just went for you because you are a School House rotter."

"And I went for you because you're a New House rat!"

"Where's that ass, Skimpole?"

"That's what I want to know."

"By Jove, I believe he's bunked!" said Figgins. "Pax, you fellows! If that ass has gone out there will be trouble."

"We may as well go in," said Fatty Wynn. "I've got some sandwiches in the dormitory. I thought we might be hungry after this run out. I think—"

"Oh, blow your sandwiches!" said Figgins. "We never meant that ass to get out. Are you out after him, Merry?"

"Yes; we're keeping an eye on him."

"Well, he asked us to help him out, to burgle Mr. Fish's place, to see whether Fish had collared any of his giddy invention. We were rotting him a treat, when you came blundering along. We had painted his face black, and were going to march him round till he was fagged and agreed to go in and give up the idea. Then you came bumping in like a parcel of owls—"

"Well, we didn't know, of course," said Tom Merry. "It can't be helped."

"If only you had stayed in bed—"

"Like good little boys," said Kerr.

"Oh, not so much of your gas!" said Lowther. "If the shrieking ass has got over the wall, he's got to be fetched back. You New House chumps can go back to bed, and we'll go after him."

"That's a good idea," said Fatty Wynn. "I've got some sandwiches in the dormitory—"

"Cheese it! If you go after him, we're coming, too."

"Let's all go," said Tom Merry. "I'm going, anyway. The ass has gone to Fish's, and he may get up to some idiocy, and be arrested as a burglar."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Better look round for him a bit, and make sure he's gone," said Fatty Wynn, "and that will give me time to cut back to the New House—"

"What do you want to cut back to the New House for?"

"I've got some sandwiches in the dormitory—"

"Then you can go and guzzle them. We're not going to waste time."

"It's no good starting out hungry. That's a rotten idea. If you like to wait for me for five minutes—"

"Five rats!"

"I could do it in four minutes if I don't stop to eat anything—"

"Bosh!"

"Well, I might do it in three, hurrying—"

"Come on, kids! I'm going over the wall!" said Tom Merry.

"Aren't you going to wait three minutes?"

"Three rats! Go and eat coke—or sandwiches!" Tom Merry swung himself into the ivy. "Come on, you chaps!"

Figgins and Kerr, Manners and Lowther, followed fast enough, while Fatty Wynn stood hesitating.

The five juniors were soon on top of the wall.

"Aren't you coming, Wynn?"

"Well, I don't think I should be justified in risking my health by starting out hungry, you know. If you like to wait three minutes—"

"Oh, get home!"

Tom Merry dropped into the road. The others followed, and Fatty Wynn was left alone in the quadrangle.

He rubbed his plump chin reflectively.

"Well, they don't need me," he murmured, "and it's a

try to waste those sandwiches. I'd much rather go after Figgins, as a matter of taste, but from a sense of duty I think I ought to see that good sandwiches are not wasted. Raskin says somewhere that it is wrong to waste good bread, so it stands to reason it would be very wrong to waste bread-and-butter and ham-and-mustard. I think it would be only right to go back to the dorm and bolt the grub."

Which Fatty Wynn proceeded to do without delay!

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three and Figgins and Kerr were on the road. They knew the way perfectly well to the abode of Mr. Fish, famous for a quarter of a mile round Rylcombe as the inventor of an airship. There was a short cut through the wood to the bank of the river, near which was Mr. Fish's garden wall.

"I suppose Skimpy went this way," said Tom Merry, as he turned from the lane into the footpath. "There doesn't seem to be any sign of him."

"Well, we couldn't see it in the dark here, if there were," Kerr remarked.

"Hallo, there's a light on the path!" exclaimed Figgins suddenly, as the juniors pressed on through the deep shadows of the wood.

"Halt!"

Tom Merry rapped out the word, and the juniors stopped. There was certainly a light on the footpath, and it was coming towards them. It glimmered through the darkness about waist high, and puzzled the juniors very much.

"It can't be Skimpy!" muttered Lowther. "He wouldn't be coming back."

"And he wouldn't have his lantern alight."

"Then who—"

"Quiet! It's Crump!"

"My hat!" murmured Figgins.

Crump was the local policeman. It was his lantern that was glimmering along the dark path. Tom Merry had just caught a glimmer of his helmet above it.

"Better get into cover!" muttered Figgins. "Crump doesn't like us any too much, and he might as likely as not report us at the school."

"Quite likely."

"The question is, how?" muttered Kerr. "There's no cover here in a hurry."

The juniors backed against the thick bushes. In this spot the bushes bordering the path, growing between the trees, were thick and thorny, and it was no easy matter to force a passage through them. Figgins muttered something under his breath as a thorn tore his hand, and Manners gasped from a sudden scratch on the face.

"Hold on!" muttered Tom Merry.

"What's the game, then?"

"We can't get through this. He'd hear us, anyway, and might start looking to see what it was. We shall have to bump him!"

"What?"

"He hasn't the faintest idea we're here. As soon as he comes close, we'll rush past, and if he tries to stop us we'll bump him over."

Figgins chuckled.

"Good! And to-morrow all Rylcombe will know how he was attacked by a desperate gang of poachers. You know Crump!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Stand ready, and pull your caps over your eyes. We mustn't give him time to recognise us, though."

Mr. Crump came steadily on. He had no idea that the juniors were there; but if he had met and recognised them he would probably have considered it his duty to march them straight back to school and report them. There might be reason in that, too; but it did not suit the views of Tom Merry & Co.

The light glimmered closer.

Mr. Crump caught a glimpse of dark forms crouching against the thickets, and halted.

"Now then!" muttered Tom Merry.

The juniors were ready. They rushed forward in an instant, and dashed past the startled policeman.

Mr. Crump instinctively threw out his arms to stop them, and seized hold of Tom Merry and Figgins.

But it was only for a second.

The two juniors, as they felt themselves seized, bumped against the portly policeman with all their strength, and he reeled; and then Kerr and Manners and Lowther bumped on him, and he rolled over in the grass.

In an instant more the juniors were away and scudding down the footpath at top speed in the darkness.

Mr. Crump sat up in the grass.

He heard the receding footsteps of his assailants dying away towards the river, and he jumped up and took the opposite direction. Whom or what they were he had not the faintest idea, and he was not curious for a closer investigation just then. He knew that the odds were against him, and that was enough.

Tom Merry & Co. ran swiftly on, till the river gleamed

at the end of the path. Then they slackened down and listened. There was no sound of pursuit.

"Done him!" gasped Tom Merry.

Figgins chuckled.

"There will be a big yarn over that to-morrow. But Crump doesn't want any more now. The worst of it is that we shan't be able to tell our side of the story."

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"He would have had a fit if he had met Skimpy, with his black chivvy," Kerr remarked. "I suppose Skimpy is a good way ahead, and was off the path before Crump came along. This way to Fish's!"

They turned into the towing-path, and a few minutes more brought them to the wall of Mr. Fish's garden. It was a high wall, surrounded by spikes in formidable array, and not at all easy to scale.

Tom Merry gazed up at it with a doubtful eye.

"I don't see how Skimpy could have got over that," he remarked. "Is it possible that we're on the wrong track, after all?"

"Nice comforting suggestion at this time of day!" grunted Figgins.

"Well, I don't see how— Hallo, look here!"

Tom Merry stepped quickly to the wall. Something was dangling from one of the spikes, and a closer glance showed that it was a looped rope.

"By Jove, Skimpy's been here. This rope has been taken from a boat—Fish's own boat, very likely. Good old genius!"

Tom Merry dragged on the rope. It was looped over the spike, and made the climb easy. The inventive faculties of the genius of the Shell had evidently been at work.

"Well, if he could get over, we can," said Figgins. "Go ahead!"

"Hark!"

From the other side of the garden wall a terrific crash sounded through the silence of the night.

CHAPTER 10.

A Narrow Shave for Skimpy!

SKIMPOLE was indeed in the inventor's garden. While the juniors had been on the track Skimpy had not been losing time. He had observed Mr. Fish's boat moored to the willows on the bank, and when he found himself stopped by a spiked wall, he had borrowed the rope from the boat, looped it over a spike, and climbed over.

The spikes, formidable as they looked from below, were not very sharp, and the inventor of St. Jim's succeeded in getting over them once he was on top of the wall. He dropped into the garden with a gasp of exertion and relief.

The garden was very dark. There were large trees growing inside the wall, and their foliage shut out most of the light of the stars. But a glimmer of light through the gloom caught Skimpy's eye. It did not come from the house, which was quite dark; it proceeded from the open door of a wooden building near the end of the large garden.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpy. "This is most fortunate for me, but very careless indeed of Mr. Fish!"

It was the local inventor's workshop from which the light proceeded. Mr. Fish was evidently up and busily engaged. The door of the workshop was open, and the light streamed out into the garden, and penetrated through the evergreens to the spot where Skimpy had dropped in.

Of course, Mr. Fish never expected an observer within his own walls. But there was an observer on the spot now.

Skimpy, with his eyes gleaming eagerly behind his spectacles, pushed his way through the rustling evergreens towards the light. He came out upon a gravelled path.

There he paused for a few moments to take his bearings. A crunching step sounded on the gravel, and Skimpy gave a jump. There was someone else in the garden beside himself.

He stood for a moment helpless; but the steps were approaching, and there was no time to waste. He slithered back into the evergreens, hoping that he had not been seen.

A measured step approached along the gravelled path.

Skimpy blinked out from the laurels, and saw a little stout gentleman, bareheaded, with his hands clasped behind him, slowly pacing along the path in the light from the open door of the workshop.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimpy. "It is Mr. Fish!"

He knew the inventor by sight. Mr. Horatio Fish was a well-known figure in Rylcombe. Skimpy comprehended now why the workshop door was open. Mr. Fish had evidently been engaged upon his invention, and had taken a turn in the garden to rest awhile from his labours. Doubtless he was working out some acrostic problem, for he was muttering to himself as he paced slowly along.

"Ten thousand volts," he murmured. "Let me see! Ten thousand volts—"

He passed on. Skimpole watched him anxiously, and was relieved to see that he did not enter the workshop. He passed on, and disappeared into the gloom.

"Dear me, this is really an excellent opportunity!" murmured Skimpole. "I can now examine the place, and see whether my ideas have been purloined!"

He stepped quickly towards the open door and entered.

The workshop was an extensive one, well fitted up, and lighted by electric light. Mr. Fish was a wealthy man, and devoted time and money to his hobby. Whether he would ever navigate the clouds was a question; but it was certain that he was indefatigable in the pursuit of his object.

Skimpole gave a gasp as he entered. Upon trestles in the middle of the room was supported a long, cigar-shaped object.

"My airship!"

It was certainly a model airship, and it was the same shape as that designed by Skimpole in the missing plans.

He was gazing at Skimpole with eyes that nearly started from his head.

"Wh-what is that?"

He gasped out the words. Skimpole had forgotten the black upon his face, but it was very apparent to the amazed Mr. Fish.

"Excuse me—" began Skimpole.

Mr. Fish recovered himself somewhat.

"Villain! You have come here to steal my invention!"

"I—"

"You are here to discover my secret?"

"I—"

"Scoundrel, I will have you arrested!"

"I—"

"Villain, wretch, traitor, spy!"

"I—"

Mr. Fish was working himself up into a fury. He rushed at Skimpole, and the inventor of St. Jim's dodged round the airship. Mr. Fish pursued him, and Skimpole made a break for the door.



As the juniors crouched back in the hedge the policeman walked slowly towards them. "As soon as he comes close, rush out and bowl him over!" whispered Tom Merry. The policeman's light glimmered closer. "Now then!" muttered Tom. Led by Tom Merry and Figgins the juniors rushed at the constable.

Skimpole stood gazing at it.

"What opportunities this man of mediocre intellect has had," he murmured. "Given the same opportunities, I should, with my abnormal brain-power, have revolutionised the science of aerostatics before now. I suppose there is certain to be a general resemblance in form between Mr. Fish's airship and mine, and I must examine it more closely, to see whether my ideas are being worked up here. Ah, here are the rotators! They are exactly as in my plans! I— Dear me!"

Skimpole broke off abruptly as a footstep sounded on the threshold.

It was Mr. Fish!

The inventor entered the workshop, still with his chin sunk and his hands clasped behind him, buried in thought. Skimpole stood in the full glare of the light, but the inventor did not immediately perceive him.

"Ten thousand volts," he murmured. "I— Good gracious! Wh-what is that?"

He had caught sight of Skimpole.

The inventor of St. Jim's glanced at the door, but Mr. Fish was in the way. He was fairly caught; but Mr. Fish seemed the more alarmed of the two.

The inventor dodged back again and cut him off from the doorway, and Skimpole doubled and fled. Mr. Fish was close upon his track, and he had caught up a hammer from the table. What he intended to do with it, Skimpole didn't know, but he was not anxious to find out by experience.

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "This is—is most unpleasant! I—ow!"

Mr. Fish clutched at him. Skimpole twisted away, and ran full tilt into the airship. It was supported lightly on the trestles, and the impact sent it flying. There was a terrible crash as the airship went to the floor.

Mr. Fish gave a howl of anguish.

For a moment he stood petrified, staring at the airship, which had suffered considerably in the crash. Skimpole took advantage of the respite and dashed through the open doorway into the garden.

In a moment the infuriated inventor was on his track. Skimpole crashed through the laurels and arrived under the wall at the spot where he had entered. Then he halted, with a gasp of utter dismay.

He had dropped into the garden, leaving the rope hang-

ing, where it had served his purpose in climbing the wall. It was on the wrong side of the wall now. A great inventive genius is apt to overlook such trifles, and Skimpole had certainly overlooked the fact that he was making himself a prisoner in Mr. Fish's garden.

"Dear me," gasped Skimpole, "I—I am lost!"

He could hear the angry inventor crashing to and fro in the garden in search of him. He thought of the hammer in Mr. Fish's hand and shivered. To his amazement, a head rose into view over the wall.

"Is that you, Skimmy?"

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes, ass! We have followed you; and it looks like being a good thing for you, too!" said Tom Merry, holding on to the spikes and looking down at Skimpole severely.

"Please help me out, Tom Merry!"

"Not unless you promise never to come here again, my pippin!"

"Help! The man is looking for me, and he has a hammer in his hand!"

"By Jove, that looks serious for you, Skimmy! Still, he can't brain you! You have no brains!"

"I believe he intends to be extremely violent if he finds me! I should be much obliged if you would help me out, Tom Merry!"

"Not unless you promise never to come here again."

"Really, Merry—"

"Take your time, Skimmy, if you mean to risk the hammer. Those are the terms."

"Well, I promise; but I think—"

"Honour bright!"

"Yes, honour bright; but I think—"

"Never mind what you think! Here's the rope!"

Tom Merry jerked the rope over the inner side of the wall.

Skimpole seized it gladly and drew himself up.

There was a crash in the laurels and a yell from Mr. Fish as he came on the scene.

"Ah, I have caught you!"

Skimpole made a desperate effort, and dragged himself over the spikes.

Mr. Fish made a grab at him and caught the tail of his jacket.

There was a rending of cloth as a spike went through the jacket.

Skimpole slid down outside the wall and hung there by the jacket, which was impaled.

"Help!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help!"

The juniors shrieked with laughter.

Skimpole, with his black face glimmering in the starlight, hanging from the wall by the impaled jacket, his heels beating a tattoo against the bricks, was a curious object.

"Let me go! Help! Unfasten me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's after me; he's got a hammer!"

"He won't hammer you," gasped Tom Merry; "he only wants to catch you!"

"I might be arrested!"

"Serve you jolly well right, too!" said Kerr.

"Help!"

"Lay hold!" gasped Tom Merry. "Now, then, all together!"

They grasped Skimpole round the body and legs and hauled away.

Skimpole yelled, and the jacket gave a loud tear and parted.

Skimpole came down in a heap, dragging most of the juniors with him.

"Clumsy ass!" growled Figgins, rubbing the side of his head.

"Really, Figgins—"

"Come on! It's about time we were off! Fish is blowing a police whistle!"

The shrill scream of the police whistle came from the garden. Mr. Fish was blowing it energetically. Nobody was likely to hear it in the lonely place, but it sounded alarming enough.

Tom Merry & Co. scuttled off, and kept on the run back to St. Jim's.

The shrill of the police whistle died away in the night.

"Please don't hurry me like this!" gasped Skimpole. "I am fatigued!"

"No time to waste, fathead!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Take his other arm, Figgy!"

"Right you are!"

"I really wish— Oh dear!"

In spite of Skimpole's expostulations the pace did not slacken for a moment till the school was reached. Then the amateur inventor was bundled over the wall, and the juniors followed him.

"Good-night," grinned Figgins. "We've had a rather exciting time, but it has been good fun. Keep an eye on that ass!"

"Really, Figgins—"

"Good-night," said Tom Merry. "We'll watch him!"

The New House juniors hurried off to their own House. The Terrible Three and the amateur inventor went on to the School House, and Skimpole was taken back to the Shell dormitory.

"Now go to bed," said Tom Merry, "and if you get up again, look out for squalls, that's all!"

"Really, Merry, as a sincere Determinist, I must insist upon my right to do exactly as I please."

"And as a sincere ass, you will get dotted on the nose, then!"

"I shall not get up to-night, I am too fatigued. My jacket is utterly ruined. It is a new jacket, too, and I only changed from my old one yesterday. It is most annoying. I shall have to put on my old one to-morrow."

"Oh, bless your jacket! Go to bed!"

And Skimpole went to bed at last, and the Terrible Three were able to return to their slumbers.

Meanwhile, Mr. Horatio Fish, having finished his solo on the police-whistle, had awakened a servant, and sent him off post-haste to Wayland, where the telegraph office was open late, to send a wire to London. And the wire was addressed to Ferrers Locke, the famous detective.

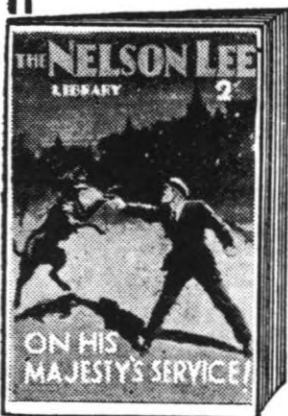
CHAPTER 11.

Ferrers Locke Solves the Mystery!

"FERRERS LOCKE! Thank goodness you've come!" Mr. Horatio Fish almost gasped out the words as he shook hands with the famous detective. Ferrers Locke had alighted from his car at the gate of the inventor's garden, now bright with the morning sunshine.

There was a slight glimmer in the eyes of the detective, a curious curve of his clear-cut lips, which Mr. Fish did not notice.

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"Stop, Figgins! Ow-wow!" There was a sudden collision in the darkness. Figgins and Kerr, carrying Skimpole, had suddenly dashed right into three dim figures that were coming quickly along the wall in the shadow of the ivy. "Oh!" gasped Figgins.

Ferrers Locke had come in reply to the urgent telegram. But he knew Mr. Fish, and it was probable that the detective was not so impressed by the urgency of the case as the inventor was himself.

"Yes, I am here," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "I understand, from your wire, Mr. Fish, that an attempt was made upon your airship last night."

"That is the case. You remember me showing you my model when you were staying in Rylcombe?"

"Yes; you were kind enough to do so."

"That model has been seriously damaged. A desperate attempt has been made to surprise the secret. But come in, and—"

"Let us get to work at once," suggested the detective. "There may be no time to lose. As a matter of fact, I wish to find time to-day to visit St. Jim's, while I am in the neighbourhood. The attempt was made in your workshop?"

"Yes; shortly before eleven o'clock last night."

"Let us go to the workshop."

Mr. Fish led the way. The airship still lay where it had fallen from the trestles.

An imperceptible smile glided over the lips of Ferrers Locke. Perhaps he did not believe in that airship.

"I had left my workshop to take a turn in the garden," explained Mr. Fish. "I was thinking out a problem, whether ten thousand volts—"

"Yes, and then?"

"I returned to the workshop, to find what I at first took to be a horrible negro in the room. Upon reflection, however, I think it was a ruffian with his face blacked for purposes of disguise."

"More probable. What did you do?"

"I rushed at him. He eluded me, and in the chase the

airship was knocked over. It is greatly damaged—some of the rotators broken, and the—"

"And the ruffian escaped?"

"He got into the garden. I followed him, and chased him to the wall, and almost caught him, but he had accomplices near at hand."

"Ah, this grows interesting!"

"They helped him over the wall, just in time to escape. He caught his jacket on a spike, and had to tear himself away. I blew my police-whistle, but there was no policeman near. The whole gang got away."

"You have informed the police?"

"Yes; and they have been here this morning, and I have heard a startling confirmation of my belief, that a gang of desperadoes is in the neighbourhood—probably the emissaries of some foreign Power sent here to steal the secret of my airship," said Mr. Fish excitedly. "As you are aware, my airship will mark a new epoch in the annals of warfare, and will—"

"Yes, but what—"

"And will bestow irresistible power upon whatever country first adopts it as a weapon of offence. I shall, of course—"

"But what did you learn from the police?" asked Ferrers Locke, striving to keep the excited inventor to the point.

"Ah, yes! You see, Mr. Locke, I am naturally very excited. Should the secret of the airship fall into the hands of a foreign Power—"

"Yes; I understand the terrible consequences that would follow, but pray go on."

"The police informed me of an outrage that had occurred in the wood, apparently about a quarter of an hour before the attempted theft of the secret of my airship. P.c.

Crump, while on his rounds, was attacked by a gang of ruffians in the dark. I heard the account from the constable's own lips. He fought desperately, but against overwhelming odds, and, after felling several of the scoundrels with his truncheon, he was overcome by force of numbers. The ruffians left him lying in the grass. They made off, and escaped. Mr. Crump at first attributed his adventure to the enmity of a gang of poachers, upon whom he has had his eye for some time, but upon learning of the outrage here he at once guessed that it was the work of the same gang."

The detective looked very thoughtful.

"And are the police in possession of any clues?" he asked.

"Not at present; but Inspector Skeets holds out hopes of running down the scoundrels shortly. He is inclined to think the gang are ordinary burglars, but I am quite certain in my mind that they are emissaries of a foreign Power, probably Russia."

"Why Russia?"

"Because, while the rascals were helping their accomplice over the wall, I heard a few words spoken by some of them."

"Ah! In Russian?"

"No; they spoke in English. But one of them addressed the ruffian on the wall as Skeemi, as near as I could ascertain the sound. That is certainly a foreign name," said Mr. Fish. "It had a Russian sound in my ears."

"Skeemi!" said Ferrers Locke thoughtfully. "The word seems familiar to me. Can you describe the fellow at all?"

"I only know he had a blackened face, and wore spectacles."

"Spectacles?" said the detective, with a start.

"Yes; doubtless a part of his disguise. He had the stature of a boy, but the features of a desperate and hardened criminal."

"Spectacles! Skeemi! Skimmy! My hat!"

"What did you say, Mr. Locke?"

"Are you sure the name you heard was not Skimmy?"

"It certainly might have been. Is that the name of some desperate scoundrel known to you, Mr. Locke, who might be entrusted by the Russian Government with the task of surprising the secret of my airship?"

The detective smiled.

"No, sir. It is an abbreviation of the name of a boy known to me who imagines himself to be an inventor of an airship, and who is quite scatterbrained enough to undertake last night's adventure if the idea crossed his mind."

Mr. Fish jumped.

"That theory is quite inadmissible," he said.

"Why so?"

"Because the gang were evidently emissaries of a foreign Power. Now I come to think of it, it is possible that the name I heard was Skeemski, or Skeemoffski."

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"Well, I will take up the case at once," he said. "No, I don't require any rest. Show me where the ruffian crossed the wall, and I will try to trace him from that point."

Mr. Fish did so, and Ferrers Locke examined the spot where Tom Merry & Co. had helped Skimpole over the wall the previous night.

The detective strolled along, taking the path towards the school, leaving Mr. Fish gazing after him with an extremely doubtful expression. Mr. Fish was not insensible to the honour of being chosen as the mark for the machinations of a foreign Power. He was not at all inclined to change his gang of foreign desperadoes for a company of reckless schoolboys.

Ferrers Locke reached the gate of St. Jim's. Morning lessons were over, and the boys were pouring out into the quadrangle. There was a shout as the chums of the Shell caught sight of their old acquaintance. They came racing up, and the detective shook hands in turn with Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther.

"Jolly glad to see you, sir!" said Tom Merry. "I hope you have come to see us."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"I have come to see the individual who entered Mr. Horatio Fish's garden last night and looked at his airship."

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"My—my only hat!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Fish wired to me to come down to see into the case," explained Ferrers Locke. "Come, I see you know all about it, Tom. Tell me the whole story, and you may depend upon me to make it as easy for you as I can."

"Very well, sir," said Tom Merry. "I'm blessed if I know how you jump on us so quickly, though! We left no trace behind that I know of. Here's Figgy! I say, Figgy, Mr. Locke is tracking us down for that affair last night!"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins cheerfully. "Make a clean breast of it. It's all the fault of that ass Skimpole. I hope there wasn't any serious damage done, sir."

"Nothing—unless Mr. Fish's valuable secret was discovered."

"Ha, ha, ha! Skimpole discovered nothing but a spike."

"Tell me the story, Tom."

Tom Merry frankly related the happenings of the night. Figgins chimed in with details.

Ferrers Locke laughed over the story of the blacking of Skimpole's face till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Then Skimpole really discovered nothing?"

"Certainly not. I don't believe there was anything to discover. Mr. Fish seems to be a crank, much the same as Skimmy, from what we hear."

"And he has promised never to enter Mr. Fish's premises again?"

"Yes. He'll keep his word, too. Hallo, here he is to speak for himself!"

Skimpole had discerned the detective from a distance, and he was bearing down upon Ferrers Locke. He had his old jacket on, and there were still traces of ink lingering about his ears and the roots of his hair. In spite of its

(Continued on page 28.)

EXPULSION OF TOM MERRY!

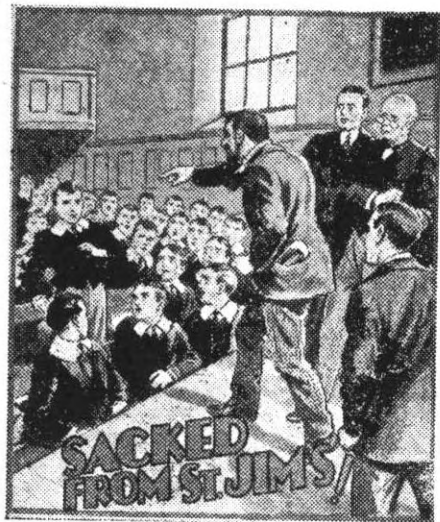
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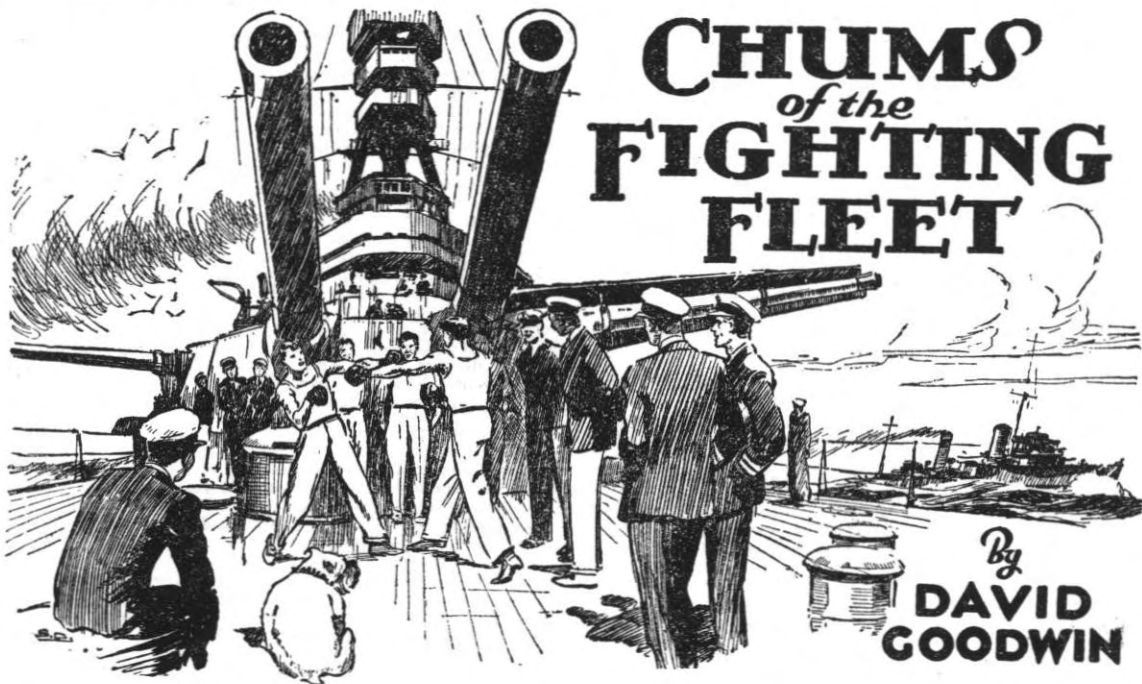
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The Rescue!

BRIARLEY gave a cry and dashed for the opening of the wall.

"Stop him! Pin him! He's got the stolen notes!" shouted Ned.

The man with Ralph grappled hold of Briarley in a moment, and a revolver was pressed to the renegade's neck. Ralph took no notice of Briarley, but leaped in through the gap straight for the sound of his brother's voice.

"Where are you, Ned?"

"Here! Cut Victor loose first! He's nearly done!"

In a twinkling the boys had their bonds cut free—none too soon for Jinks, whose lips were already under water. Ralph hauled them both to their feet—they were too stiff to rise—and held them up with an arm round each.

The middies were bundled head-first into the launch, nearly on top of the man who had seized Briarley. To Ned's amazement, it was Mr. Elking. The renegade had collapsed and surrendered; Elking had him on his face in the launch, and was binding his wrists behind his back.

"Got 'em both? Off we go, then!" cried Mr. Elking, springing to the engine. "Look out astern! Here's Voroff's launch on top of us!"

A petrol-launch, with a crew of five or six men, came swiftly round the bend by the quays, and a couple of pistols spat viciously as she circled round Ralph's craft. Two bullets struck the engine-cover; Ned felt the wind of another upon his cheek. In a moment Ralph whipped out a revolver and returned the fire.

The launch was now tearing ahead, the other one in full chase, but beginning to lose ground. A tall man sprang up in the bows of the pursuing vessel, his eyes fixed on Ralph, and took deliberate aim with his six-shooter sighted over the crook of his arm. His finger was in the very act of pressing the trigger when a swift snapshot from Ralph's pistol brought him headlong into the river.

The pursuing launch had slowed down to pick up the man who had fallen, and there was tremendous commotion astern. Oaths and cries of dismay were heard, but the vessel Ralph was steering held on her way with ever-increasing speed, and in a few moments was round the bend of the river and dashing southwards towards the sea.

"We nearly ran it too fine!" cried Ralph. "Are you hurt, Ned?"

"No," said his brother. "Vic, are you all right?"

"Barring a pint of Scheldt water I swallowed in the cellar," said Jinks. "Look! There's the dawn rising. I never thought I'd see it again. Ralph, do you know this beggar with the rope round his wrists is Briarley, our old assistant-paymaster—the chap who got you court martialled?"

"You bet I know it!"

"Ah! But do you know he's got the stolen notes on him?"

"What!" cried Ralph.

"Sure thing!" said Ned. "And I've got the rest. See here! They're the proofs of your innocence, Ralph—the proofs you never reckoned to see! He'd got the whole lot with him, and Jinks and I are witnesses that he confessed to stealing them! We've got him by the short hairs; you'll get your sword back and your name cleared."

Jinks joined in with a yell of triumph that woke the echoes along the banks.

Ralph Hardy could hardly realise it. He turned quite white, and passed his hand over his forehead. Then he gripped the hands of the boys convulsively.

"I owe it to you two. You have saved my honour!"

"Well, you've saved our lives, old chap," said Jinks. "But how did you get on to it? We thought you were at the Hague; so did Voroff's men."

"My journey to the Hague was a blind," replied Ralph. "I came back through Veere, and on to Rotterdam in a barge, Elking with me. We were in the town four hours before Voroff's men knew anything about it, and we learned that you had been lured away by one of their agents and trapped. I was in a terrible way then, for both Elking and I knew they meant making short work of you. We knew of this cellar of theirs that opens on the river—"

"You knew of it?" cried Ned.

"Yes, for a year past; but how to get to it I have never been able to discover," put in Mr. Elking. "It is reached by secret passages among some of the old houses on the wharves, and I don't know even now where the entrance to it is."

"Nor do we. They blindfolded and gagged us," said Ned.

"They would, of course. It is reached by a trapdoor? I thought so. Well, though we did not know how to reach it by land, we knew where the outer wall of it was facing on the river. So we came along to it as quickly as ever we could raise this launch, which Mr. Elking was able to get hold of," said Ralph. "We knew the chances were you would be in that trap, and the only way to get at you was to blow part of the wall in. It was a big risk; we might have killed you; but it was the only chance. We floated a buoy of nitro-glycerine alongside the wall and fired it with a fuse. Luckily, the wall's soft concrete, undermined by the damp, and it caved in easily."

Ned gave a brief report of what had happened to the two of them since their capture in the tobaccoist's shop. Ralph's eyes blazed, and he moved towards the prisoner.

"You scoundrel!" he cried hotly. "You would have murdered these lads to get me gaoled if you had not been caught in your own trap!"

"It wasn't my doing, sir! I had to do what I was ordered! They would have killed me! I never meant murder! I didn't want—"

"You will say what you have to say at the court martial—and at your own trial afterwards!" said Elking sternly.

"And your only chance is to tell the whole truth!"

"I will—I will!" moaned the renegade. "It's no use my denying it now. And I'd as soon be in a British gaol all my life as at the mercy of Voroff. I'll give 'em away, sir; I'll tell all that I know."

The End of Voroff & Co.!

THE launch was tearing down the wide estuary at fifteen knots, a great, white cushion of foam at either bow, and for some time nobody spoke. The triumph of victory over long-endured wrongs was glorious. In less than an hour they were at sea, and the anchor-lights of the Victorious were in sight.

"Ralph," cried Ned, "you've the right to board her now. You'll go back with us to England."

Ralph shook his head.

"I shall go back by the mail steamer," he replied. "My place is not on the Victorious until my name is publicly cleared; but I'm going to put you aboard her, and hand over to the admiral the proofs to be produced at the court martial."

The launch ran alongside the gangway of the flagship. Her crew were greeted by the amazing sight of Ralph Hardy, of all people in the world, mounting her gangway, with Ned by his side, Jinks following in charge of a prisoner, the gun-room officers on the upper deck stared, dumbstruck.

Admiral Raglan, emerging from his cabin, halted as he found himself faced by Ralph, and gave a start.

"Mr. Hardy!" he exclaimed. "How came you on this ship, sir?"

Ralph saluted.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he replied. "I have to deliver this prisoner into your hands. As you see, he is ex-Paymaster Briarley, of this ship, and he confesses to the crime with which I was charged at the court martial. Here are the stolen notes, which were found upon him. The prisoner is also implicated in the attempted murder of Midshipmen Hardy and Jinks at Amsterdam, and it is to them I owe the recovery of these proofs. I place them in your hands, sir, and I demand a court martial!"

Admiral Raglan took fully twenty seconds to find his voice.

"Mr. Hardy," he said, "you could bring me no news more welcome! Till the court martial takes place, I must say no more."

Ralph saluted and turned to go. Ned darted after him to the gangway.

"Ralph," he exclaimed under his breath, "you'll take care! You won't let Voroff get at you on the voyage back? They may yet—"

"There is no more danger from them to us or to the Navy," said Ralph. "You saw the tall man who fired at me from the launch?"

"The one you brought down? Yes."

"That was Voroff himself. Piet Voroff, head of the whole crew. He was the master-brain that directed them and held them together. Now he is dead they will fall to pieces like a barrel with the hoops off. Voroff & Co.'s day is ended."

Conclusion.

IN the wide stern-cabin of the old Victory, as she lay in Portsmouth Harbour, with her "Jack" flying, the president of the court martial, Admiral Frobisher, smiled benignly at his colleagues as they sat round the long table. The case had been heard, the evidence fully sifted, the cabin cleared once more, and the court had arrived at its judgment.

Across the table, lying athwart-ship, was the prisoner's sword, as it had done through the trial. Now was the crucial moment. If its point was towards the prisoner when he was next brought in it meant that he was condemned. If the hilt were towards him, then he was acquitted with honour.

"We are all agreed, then, gentlemen?" asked the president.

"Agreed!" said the others.

Sir Francis placed the sword lengthways upon the table, with its hilt towards the door.

"Let the prisoner be brought in!"

The master-at-arms escorted into the cabin Lieutenant-Commander Ralph Hardy, formerly of H.M.S. Victorious.

"Mr. Hardy," said the president, rising, "the court finds that you are entirely innocent of all charges brought against you, and that your conviction four months' ago was a miscarriage of justice. Further, this court regrets poignantly that a great wrong has been done to a brave and zealous officer."

The admiral raised Ralph's sword and held out its hilt to him.

"The court returns you your sword. May you long wear it in the service of your King. Your commission will be restored to you, with an increase in rank to commander."

Ralph Hardy tingled in every nerve as his hand grasped the hilt of his sword once again.

"The court wishes to add," concluded Sir Francis, "that very great credit is due to the courage and resource of Mr. Midshipman Hardy and to Mr. Midshipman Jinks in helping to clear up this wrong, and in obtaining the evidence which we have heard to-day. Mr. Hardy, I congratulate you on your honourable acquittal!"

Ex-paymaster and renegade-spy Briarley is now working out a sentence of fourteen years at Dartmoor, which is rather less than he expected or deserved. The power of Voroff & Co. is broken—they have not recovered from the loss of their leader, and are not likely to.

Sub-Lieutenant Grimshaw was so disgusted at the result of the court martial that he applied for a torpedo-boat command, got it in due course, and crumpled his boat up against Dover Breakwater shortly afterwards. He is now occupying a shore berth at the dockyards, and considers himself a very ill-used man.

Wexton's career ended more briefly. The true facts of his dealings with the Chatham Chicken leaked out, the story was soon all over the Fleet, and Wexton found the gun-room too hot to hold him. He received a "ragging" at the hands of his indignant brother-officers, after which he hurriedly applied for leave, which was granted, and at the same time a hint from headquarters that he had best resign his dirk and belt and withdraw from the Navy at once to save being cashiered. He took the hint, and spends his time now in abusing the Service ashore.

When the court martial was over, Ralph Hardy, Ned, and Jinks went home on leave, and it was the happiest day in old Captain Hardy's life when he welcomed his son home again, and confessed that he had wronged Ralph. The old man's joy and contrition were touching to see. He could not make enough of his sons now, and Jinks was the honoured guest at Briars Hall. They spent a hectic three weeks there.

Then came the call to duty once more. Mr. Langley had been given the command of a cruiser, and the full rank of Commander of the Flagship was conferred upon Ralph Hardy, the first-lieutenant having been transferred. In ten days' time the three were back on board again.

That same night, Commander Hardy, leaning on the after-rail of the Victorious, with Lieutenant Hart beside him, heard the whaleboat returning from shore with six of the middies in her. The plash of oars and the sound of voices raised in song drifted through the soft autumn night, Ned's clear tenor jovially leading the chorus:

"Then here's to the snotties—
The stout little snotties!
Good luck to the snotties wherever they be!
The dirk and the patches,
The bruises and scratches,
The song of the snotties who sail on the sea!"

The two officers by the rail laughed, and Hart looked at his companion.

"If it wasn't for those young demons, where would you be now, Hardy? We needn't worry about the Navy as long as we grow the young 'uns of that breed!"

Ralph Hardy thought of his newly returned sword, and agreed from the bottom of his heart.

THE END.

SPECIAL COVER TO COVER ST. JIM'S YARN NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"SACKED FROM ST. JIM'S!"

A thrilling yarn of mystery and cricket featuring
Tom Merry and Co., Blake and Co., and Figgins and Co.

ST. JIM'S SPOTLIGHT

By OLD BOY

HOW THE SAINTS KEEP FIT! Methods of Well-known Sportsmen.

YOU would have to go a long way to find a fitter bunch of fellows than the sportsmen of St. Jim's. Kildare, the school captain, for instance, recently broke a long-distance running record, and every Saint, down to the smallest fag, has got the sport craze, and has his own special method of "keeping fit," even if they can't all break records!

Inquiring from Kildare himself, I learned that he believes in the value of always keeping on the move. Kildare never slouches about, even when out for a casual stroll. He swings along, his shoulders well back, chest expanded, breathing deep, and covering the ground at a tremendous pace. I can vouch for this, as I accompanied Kildare on one of his walks, and, believe me, he made the pace a stiff one!

A game of "Follow your Leader" is a good way to ensure lissomeness and general adaptability, especially for juniors, who have no dignity to consider, and can follow their leader wherever he chooses to lead them. Tom Merry endorsed this, being a daring leader himself, and having, in fact, been "lined" only the day before for leading a pack of athletic juniors over the gymnasium roof.

Monty Lowther told me, quite seriously for once, that he goes in for jumping. Long jumping, high jumping, any kind of jumping, in fact, even jumping on a bus. Lowther said it is surprising how fellows walk flat-footed without noticing it, when with a little practice, they could spring about like kangaroos.

Talking of kangaroos, Kangaroo of the Shell looked into the study at that moment, and on learning of my quest for information, plumped immediately for what is now called "hiking."

"Riding a horse is great fun," said Kangaroo, whose youthful days were spent in the Australian Bush country, "but if you can't get hold of a horse, just walk, and keep on walking. It's wonderful what a twenty-mile tramp will do to a fellow who says he feels slack!"

Roaming farther afield, I buttonholed George Figgins, skipper of the New House juniors, and Figgy instantly urged me to box, box, and then again box. Boxing, in Figgins' opinion, licks everything as a means of acquiring a quick eye and a reliable punch. He admitted that you might possibly acquire a black eye or even a knock-out, but what's that, asked Figgy, if you learn to look after yourself in any place and against any opponent?

Dick Redfern said that football beats all rival sports, and if you can stay an hour and a half of fast, keen footer, you haven't much to worry about. As "Reddy" is a first-class right halfback, he ought to know. Rather eager to know what a heavier-built fellow would recommend, I tackled Fatty Wynn on the subject. Fatty was quite definite that keeping goal at footer and bowling at cricket would keep any fellow absolutely in the pink. To convince me, Fatty took me down to Little Side,

where I watched him skittle half a dozen batsmen out at the practice nets with really ridiculous ease. But, then, Fatty Wynn is a genius with the ball, which makes a difference.

Young Wally D'Arcy, brother to Arthur Augustus, volunteered that cooking herrings over a Form-room fire could be an exciting sport, but on being warned that this was a serious inquiry, he voted for swimming. As Wally is swimming champion among the fags, I was not surprised.

One or two fellows have unusual sporting hobbies, such as Clifton Dane, who spends much time at tracking alone in the woods. Kerr is a great tracker, a first-class scout, in fact, but his heart and head are bound up with chess problems, which can hardly be included in the sport category. Talbot plays squash racquets in a recently-built court behind the gym, and his chief opponent is Jack Blake. Tom Merry, Blake, and Talbot all told me that sculling is one of the finest toughening sports there is.

Finally, I interviewed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in Study No. 6. Gussy was, as usual, trying on a new tie, but paused to agree that sport would turn a weedy fellow into a giant if he kept at it assiduously.

"Take myself, for instance," said Gussy. "You would hardly credit it, but when I first came to St. Jim's I was wathah a weakling, you know, but Blake and the othah fellows made me feel that an effort was demanded of a fellow, and I put my shoulder to the wheel, and now—"

"And now—" I prompted. "Now, deah boy, I wun, box, wow, play footah and cwicket, with the best of them. In fact, I may say with modesty that there are not many fellows who could—"

I had to interrupt Gussy there, as time was short. But there is no doubt that Gussy and the rest of the Saints all owe their fitness to keeping up to the mark not in sudden spurts, but all the time!

GUSSY TELLS YOU ABOUT HIMSELF!

"Yaas, wathah, I agree with you that a fellow should always twy to keep up his personal appearance," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, flicking a speck of dust from his sleeve.

"A fellow owes it to himself to see that he doesn't stwike othah people as a scarecrow. Take myself, for instance. Without wishin' to boast, I may peawps say that, whatever the occasion, I am warely, if ever, dwessed unsuitably. A fellow like Blake will go to the theatre in Wayland in a schoolcap, but I should never think of doin' so without a toppah. Yes, I have heard that toppahs are goin' out of fashion to-day, but that is a perfectly widiculous idea. They will come back. Yes, of course, I agree that a fellow shouldn't be just a walking tailor's dummy. A fellow should be able to put up his fists just the same, even if he is nattily attired. It's a weally funny thing, but whenever I go to the village in a toppah, some wough villager is sure to throw a turnip

or somethin' equally disgustin' at it. I have had to chastise more than one urchin for doing it. It is most disturbin', too, the way people look at a fellow wearin' a toppah. They stare as if they'd never seen one before. Just wudeness, I suppose. The decline of mannahs is one of the gweat draw-backs of modern times. Nobody seems to have time to say please or thank you, they just wush past an' wumple a fellow's clothing without a word. Only this mornin', Goah of the Shell pushed past me on the stairs and stamped on my foot. As I was wearin' a new pair of patent leathers, I was vewy annoyed!"

"And what did you do?" I queried. "Bai Jove, what did I do?" ejaculated Augustus excitedly. "Do you see my eye?" He indicated his left eye. I had noticed that it looked a bit swollen.

"Is it vewy bad?" asked Gussy. "It looks a bit blue," I answered. "Never mind," Gussy smiled reminiscently. "Goah has a much worse one!"

THIS WEEK'S CRICKET.

Match played Saturday.

St. Jim's 51 (Talbot 22) and 187 (Merry 76, Talbot 34).

Rylcombe Grammar School 123 (Gay 57, Monk 39) and 62 (Gay 30).

Fatty Wynn took eight for 32 in the Rylcombe second innings.

On a perfect pitch, St. Jim's made an inexplicably bad start, Tom Merry being out first ball for a "duck," and Blake and Figgins following him for 2 and 1 respectively. Levison made a stand and with Talbot took the score to 30, and Noble hit fairly freely and carried his bat. Rylcombe hit out strongly and Gordon Gay's 57 was a valuable innings. Faced with a heavy deficit, the Saints batted with confidence, and Tom Merry more than atoned for his duck with a brilliant 76, in compiling which he never gave a chance. Talbot backed up well. Set 116 to win, Rylcombe made a promising beginning, but on the dismissal of Gordon Gay by Fatty Wynn, they crumpled up, and the last few batsmen fell to the wiles of the Falstaff very cheaply.

The better side won.

RADIOGRAMS.

Harry Manners is an expert amateur photographer, and has sold more than one of his snaps to the Press.

One of A. A. D'Arcy's ancestors actually did come over with the Conqueror, but Gussy would be the last to tell you so.

Harry Noble, the Kangaroo from Australia, is able to ride a fiery mustang.

George Herries is devoted to his bulldog Towser, with which he has won numerous prizes.

Monty Lowther is a skilled amateur stage producer, light comedian, and conjurer, so his future appears bright.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,276.

SKIMPOLE THE INVENTOR!

(Continued from page 24.)

indelibility, it had fortunately come off in the wash—most of it.

"Dear me, it is Mr. Locke!" blinked Skimpole. "I am so glad to see you, sir. I have a most important case I should like to put in your hands."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir. I have lost the plans of my airship—"

"Oh, cheese it, Skimmy!" said Tom Merry.

"Please do not interrupt me, Merry. I have lost the plans of my airship, Mr. Locke, and I have reason to fear that they have fallen into the hands of a certain Mr. Fish. If you would take up the case I should not be able to reward you with mere fees, but you would become known to posterity as the man who recovered the plans of Herbert Skimpole's airship."

"It seems that you have been investigating yourself."

"Yes; but in a weak moment I allowed Tom Merry to extract a promise from me that I would discontinue my investigations in that quarter. It was very annoying, but as a sincere Determinist it is impossible for me to break my word. If you would care to take up the case, I should be glad to give you particulars. I carried the plans, for safety, in a large packet in the inner breast-pocket of my jacket, and yesterday morning I found a hole in the lining and the papers gone. I deduced that they had been found by Mr. Fish."

"You are sure you have lost them? There is something very bulky in the breast-pocket of your jacket at the present moment."

"Eh?"

Skimpole felt in the pocket indicated. There was certainly a bulky package there, and he drew it out and blinked at it in amazement.

"Dear me!"

"Well, what is it?"

"The missing plans."

Ferrers Locke laughed heartily.

"Then they were in your pocket all the time?"

Skimpole looked dazed.

"Dear me! I am really very much surprised!"

"Of all the asses," said Figgins, in measured accents—"of all the asses that ever assed, I think that ass Skimpole is the most assinine!"

"Really, Figgins, that is almost rude!"

"It's jolly well the truth!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"You've been raising Cain over those rotten plans of a silly airship, and here they are in your pocket all the time. What you want is boiling in oil!"

"I—I— Dear me, I have hit upon the explanation! You will remember that my jacket was torn last night," said Skimpole, blinking. "I put on my old one this morning

That is the explanation of the mystery. You see, when I put on my new jacket, I forgot to change the packet from the pocket of the old one. The new jacket had a slit in the lining, so when I felt in the pockets for the plan, I naturally jumped to the conclusion that they had fallen out."

"Naturally, for a howling ass!"

"You see, I forgot the fact that I had changed jackets in the meantime. Dear me, I might never have found the plans if I had not had to change into my old jacket again. It is really very remarkable."

"Very remarkable indeed," said Ferrers Locke. "The next time you lose any valuable documents you had better look in all your pockets before you commit a burglary or begin housebreaking or trespassing."

"I shall certainly take your advice, Mr. Locke."

"Under the circumstances, I think I can make your peace with Mr. Fish. But let me advise you never to let anything of the kind occur again. I hope to see you again before I return to London, boys. Now I must return to Mr. Fish."

The detective, with a cheery nod, walked away.

The Terrible Three turned to Skimpole with expressive looks.

Figgins took a gentle grip on the back of his collar.

"I think a ducking in the fountain would about meet the case," he remarked.

"Good idea!" said the chums of the Shell together.

"Really—"

"And then we'll burn his plans."

"Really—"

"And if he makes any more we'll burn him."

Skimpole twisted himself away and ran. He did not stop till he was in his study and had the precious plans of his wonderful airship safe under lock and key.

Needless to say, Mr. Horatio Fish did not accept Ferrers Locke's explanation as to the happenings of the previous night. He had a great respect for the famous detective's judgment. But he was not willing to give up his theory of a gang of desperadoes commissioned by a foreign Power to discover the secret of his airship.

He wore a superior smile when Ferrers Locke explained; and when the detective had taken his leave, Mr. Fish's first step was to purchase a bulldog, a burglar-alarm, and a gun. He was firmly convinced by this time that the name he had overheard was in reality Skeemoffski, and he did not mean to be caught napping again.

Ferrers Locke had lost an admirer, but that did not trouble him very much. Indeed, he looked very jolly and good-humoured when, after school at St. Jim's, he had tea in Tom Merry's study, with ten cheerful juniors, before taking the train back to London.

THE END.

(Now look out for next week's extra long story of Tom Merry & Co. It's a winner.)

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