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VOL. 3,
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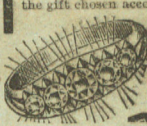
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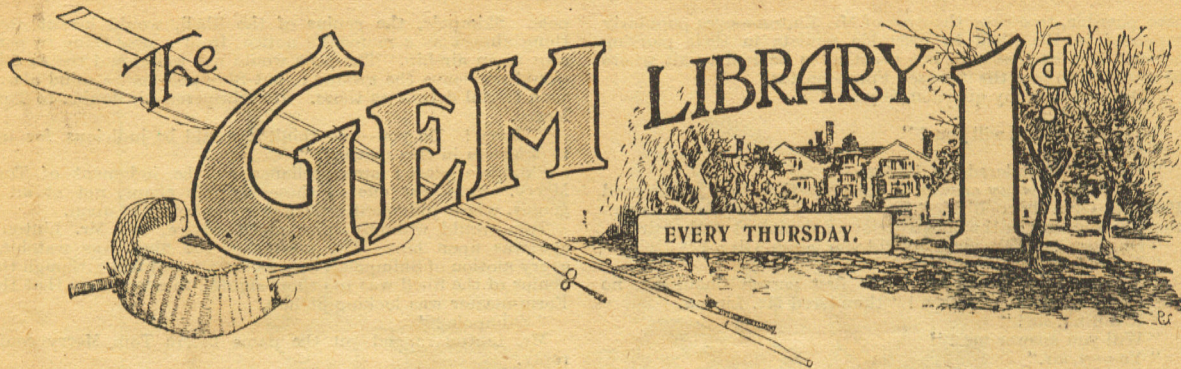
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— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

An Inventor in Trouble.

"HA, ha, ha!"
The sudden laugh rang through the stillness of the Shell Form-room at St. Jim's. It was startling, to say the least.

The Shell were labouring through deponent verbs, and even Mr. Linton, the Form-master, was looking a little sleepy; though he was supposed to be keen on Latin conjugations. The Form-room was very quiet. That sudden laugh, though not loud in itself, rang through the quiet room with the startling suddenness of a thunderclap.

Mr. Linton simply jumped. His book dropped to the floor with a thud. The class jumped, too. Every head was craned round towards the fellow who laughed.

It was Bernard Glyn. Conscious in a moment of the enormity he had been guilty of, the lad from Liverpool sat with a crimson face.

The laugh had been quite involuntary, the outcome of the thoughts that were passing in his mind; though, needless to say, wholly unconnected with deponent verbs or any other verbs.

"My only hat!" murmured Monty Lowther to Tom Merry. "Of all the giddy asses! Fancy cackling in class——"

"You are speaking, Lowther."

"Oh!"

"Take fifty lines!"

"Oh!"

"Glyn!"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you laugh?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"You find something exceptionally amusing in the construction of deponent verbs?" asked Mr. Linton, who was famous for a vein of heavy sarcasm.

Glyn turned redder still, if possible.

He would gladly have sunk through the floor, if that had

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been possible, to escape the eyes of Mr. Linton—eyes popularly supposed in the Shell to resemble gimlets in their piercing power. But as that was not practicable he had to sit where he was, and to face the incensed Form-master.

"Did you hear my question, Glyn?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then answer it, will you?"

"No, sir."

"What!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"That—that is my answer to your question, sir," stammered Bernard Glyn hurriedly. "I did not find anything exceptionally amusing in the construction of deponent verbs, sir."

"Oh, I see! Well, and why did you laugh, Glyn?"

"I—I—I—"

"A parrot-like repetition of the first person singular is no answer to my question, Glyn!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"N-n-n-no, sir!"

"Will you answer me?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"I am waiting, Glyn."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"Then answer me."

"Certainly, sir."

"Well?"

"You see, sir, I—I—I—was thinking, sir."

"Indeed! I grant that is quite an unaccustomed exercise for you," said Mr. Linton, again heavily sarcastic. "But why should this novel proceeding on your part cause you to burst into a horse-laugh?"

Some of the Shell giggled, either because they thought Mr. Linton's remarks humorous, or because they wanted to put him into a good temper by appearing to think so.

The giggle propitiated Mr. Linton a little. His frown relaxed, but his glance was still bent severely upon Bernard Glyn.

The Liverpool lad seemed to be at a loss for words.

"Well, Glyn?"

"You see, sir, I—I thought of a wheeze."

"A what?"

"A rag, sir."

"A—a—a—a rag!"

"An idea, sir."

"Oh, an idea! No doubt the first idea you were ever troubled with, but that does not explain the horse-laugh, Glyn."

"Was it a horse-laugh, sir?"

"I give you one moment more—"

"You see, sir—"

"Well?"

"It was rather funny, sir."

"What was funny?"

"I was thinking of an invention of mine, sir."

"Indeed! The proper place to think of inventions is certainly not the class-room. I must suppose, Glyn, that you laughed from mere vacancy of mind."

"Not exactly, sir. I—"

"Or else that you deliberately intended to show disrespect to your Form-master!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"In any case you were not thinking of the lesson in hand."

"I am sorry, sir."

"Stand out before the class, Glyn."

The Liverpool lad slowly left his place.

Under the eyes of the whole Shell he was feeling very red and uncomfortable. The master of the Shell pointed to a corner of the Form-room.

"Glyn, you will stand in that corner."

"Ye-es, sir."

"You will remain there till the end of the lesson, sir, as an example to the rest of this class."

"Oh, sir!"

"Stand there at once!"

"If you please, sir—"

"Another word, and I will send you in to the Head."

Bernard Glyn slowly turned and walked to the corner. He would not have minded being caned, or even to having a few raps from the pointer, but to be made to stand in a corner of the class-room like a naughty fag in the Third or Second Form was too humiliating.

Glyn was wrathful, but there was no help for it. He stood in the corner, and glared at the Shell, who were mostly grinning. Tom Merry felt sorry for him, but he could not help smiling. Gore was chuckling with enjoyment; he did not like Glyn. Skimpole blinked at him through his big spectacles, and was inclined to rise in his place and make a protest in his behalf. For Skimpole was a Socialist, and held that a chap was as free to laugh in a Form-room as to laugh anywhere else. He thought of explaining this to Mr. Linton; but the pointer looked dangerous, and the Shell master didn't understand anything about Socialism, so Skimpole decided not to mention it. He felt, as a matter of fact, very sympathetic towards Glyn, as a brother inventor. For, much as the Liverpool lad—the son of a famous engineer—was given to inventing, he had a close rival in Skim-

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pole. Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, would invent anything almost at a moment's notice, from a new thing in pen-nibs to an airship. The pens would not write, and the airship would not leave the ground; but Skimpole had a mind above such trivial details as those. He whispered his doubts to Tom Merry.

"Merry! Do you—er—think it would be judicious for me to interfere in this matter?"

Skimpole placed great reliance on the judgment of Tom Merry. Tom was one of those sensible chaps, not at all a genius, whose judgment generally could be relied upon.

Tom would willingly have given advice, but Mr. Linton's eye was upon him. The master of the Shell was watching every motion of Skimpole's lips, as a matter of fact; though the genius of the Shell was too short-sighted to even know that the Form-master was looking at him.

"Skimpole!"

Mr. Linton rapped out the name before Tom Merry could reply.

The amateur Socialist jumped.

"Yes, sir!"

"Stand out here."

"Yes, sir."

Skimpole went out before the class.

"You will stand with Glyn for the rest of the lesson."

"Really, sir! Why?"

"For talking in class, Skimpole."

"Pray allow me to explain, sir. As a Socialist I consider I have a right to talk anywhere, and at whatever length I please."

Mr. Linton gasped.

He had heard of Skimpole's ideas in an unofficial way, but he had never expected to have them worked off on him in the Form-room.

"Skimpole!"

"Yes, sir. I consider—"

"Silence!"

"As a Socialist—"

"Go and stand beside Glyn."

"I have no pronounced objection to standing beside Glyn, sir; but I should like first to explain—ow!"

The "ow" was uttered as the pointer rapped over his knuckles.

Then Mr. Linton pointed to the corner with the pointer.

"Go at once, Skimpole!"

"Yes, sir."

And Skimpole hurriedly went, giving up Mr. Linton as a person too utterly obtuse to have the great truths of Socialism explained to him.

CHAPTER 2.

Inventors Two!

SKIMPOLE joined Bernard Glyn in the corner, and the lesson proceeded. The amateur Socialist blinked at the Liverpool lad.

A greater contrast can hardly be imagined than that which existed between the two inventors of the School House at St. Jim's.

Skimpole was dreamy and visionary, he had huge ideas and many of them, but he never reduced any of them to a practicable shape.

He was the best-natured and most absent-minded fellow in the School House, and he would carry out his peculiar ideas on the subject of Socialism at any expense to himself or anybody else. He never got half through an idea without throwing it aside for something new—something just as visionary and impracticable.

Bernard Glyn was very different. He was hard-headed and practical; his ideas were less far-reaching, but he carried them all out, and he never touched a new piece of work till the old one was finished.

"This is very rotten, Glyn," Skimpole whispered in the corner. "I regard it as a ridiculous position."

Glyn grunted.

"What is wanted in this school is an effective propaganda to convert the Head and the masters to Socialism."

"Rats!"

"Really, Glyn—"

"Ring off!"

"A sincere Socialist never rings off. You see—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Glyn. "I'm thinking something out."

"Is it the new invention?"

"Yes."

"You had better tell me all about it. With my superior intellectual powers, I may be able to assist you. I place my brain power quite at your service."

"Thanks! I'm like Nature in one respect—I abhor a vacuum," said Glyn.

"If you mean to imply that my brain is vacant, Glyn—"



"Oh, smash it up, then—anything you like—only, for goodness sake, let me out!" gasped the School House inventor. "Right-ho!" said Tom Merry; and the Sheel fellows set cheerfully to work.

"Mr. Linton is looking round."
"Dear me."

And Skimpole relapsed into silence. The Liverpool lad's brow was wrinkled in deep thought, and the glimmer of fun in his eyes showed that he was thinking of the same idea which had called forth his sudden and unexpected laugh in the midst of the Latin lesson.

Skimpole blinked at him curiously. He would have given a great deal to know what was passing in the Liverpool lad's mind.

Until Bernard Glyn came to St. Jim's Skimpole had been the only inventor there, and he had to acknowledge that Glyn was a little more practical, and a great deal more successful than himself.

"I say, Glyn," he whispered, when Mr. Linton's attention was diverted again, "what's the wheeze?"

"Ask me another."

"Is it a secret?"

"Yes."

"Then you can tell me. I'm good at keeping secrets."

"So am I," said Glyn grimly.

"Really, Glyn—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

Mr. Linton looked round quickly.

"You were speaking, Glyn."

Bernard could not deny it.

"You will stay in half an hour after last lesson."

"Yes, sir," said Glyn helplessly.

He could have jumped on Skimpole.

Full of his new scheme, and eager to carry it out, the inventor of the School House would rather have had a caning that afternoon than half-an-hour's detention.

He glared at Skimpole; but the amateur Socialist did not mind. He was not unaccustomed to being glared at.

"Dear me, you are in trouble again, Glyn," he remarked. "I was going to ask you after school to lend me some of your electrical apparatus."

"Go and eat coke!"

"However, you need not trouble. I know where you keep it, and I can take it myself."

Glyn snapped his teeth.

"You utter ass!"

"Really, Glyn—"

"If you go into my study—"

"Glyn!" thundered Mr. Linton. "You cannot keep silent, it appears. You will stay in an hour instead of half an hour, and if you open your lips again I will gate you for the two next half-holidays."

Glyn was dumb.

He was not exactly to blame for talking, under the circumstances.

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By Martin Clifford.

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stances, but it was not possible to explain that to the exasperated master of the Shell.

His eyes said volumes of things to Skimpole; but Skimpole was too short-sighted, and too busy with his own thoughts, to heed them.

"Dear me! Mr. Linton seems to be in a bad temper this afternoon," Skimpole murmured. "Perhaps something has happened to annoy him. Glyn, did you say I could have the electrical apparatus in your study?"

Glyn did not speak.

He did not know whether Mr. Linton was listening or not, although his head was turned away, and he dared not risk being gazed for the half-holidays. He glared at Skimpole without a word.

"Then I may have it?"

Glyn did not speak.

"Very well," said Skimpole, apparently taking silence for consent, "I will get the things from your study after school."

Still Glyn did not speak.

Skimpole relapsed into silence, thinking too of a great idea. Skimpole was great on telephones, and he had once constructed a telephone in the School House that caused great trouble. He had dropped the idea for a time, but lately he had revived it, only there was a financial difficulty in the way. Skimpole never had any money, and electrical apparatus, though not expensive, cost money. The difficulty would be overcome if he could draw upon the extensive stock Glyn kept in his study, and that was what the amateur Socialist intended to do.

The lessons ended, and the Shell were dismissed, and Skimpole went out with the rest.

Bernard Glyn would gladly have followed, if only to warn Skimpole with dire threats not to dare to enter his study. But the Form-master's eye was upon him.

"You will remain until half-past five, Glyn," said Mr. Linton.

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"You will not leave the class-room under any pretext."

"Very well, sir."

And Glyn sat down at his desk.

Mr. Linton left the room, and closed the door.

CHAPTER 3.

Caught in the Act.

TOM MERRY, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three—came down the passage arm in arm, calmly pushing the other fellows out of the way, notwithstanding many fierce objections to this high-handed proceeding.

Skimpole tried to stop them, to speak. He caught hold of Tom Merry's button, in the objectionable way he had, and arrested his progress.

"Merry, I want to speak——"

"Go out in the quad and do it, old fellow."

"On an important subject."

"Get along!"

"I'm thinking of establishing a telephone system in the School House——"

"Rats!"

"We've had some," said Manners. "Clear!"

"Really, Manners——"

"You're in the way, Skimmy."

"I'm thinking of establishing a telephonic connection between all the studies, so that we can talk to one another without going out of the rooms," said Skimpole. "I regard this as a great improvement upon existing arrangements."

"Yes, a ripping improvement, if you can talk to a fellow whether he likes it or not," said Monty Lowther. "You're bad enough now, when a chap can dodge you if he likes."

"Really, Lowther——"

"Bunk!"

"I'm raising a subscription of ten shillings a head——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing comic in that, Lowther."

"That's your mistake. I'm going on. Better move."

"Really—ow!"

The Terrible Three marched on.

As Skimpole was standing directly in the way, and as he did not move, of course they had no choice but to march over him.

Which they accordingly did.

Skimpole was left gasping like a newly-landed fish on the flagged floor of the passage, and he was still gasping when a slim and elegant Fourth-Former came hastily along, and tripped over him, and went down on his hands and knees.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth.

D'Arcy fell with his knees upon Skimpole's ribs, and the unfortunate Shell fellow gave a prolonged gasp like escaping steam.

"Ow-w-w-w!"

"Bai Jove!"

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By
Martin Clifford.

"Yow-wow!"

"What on earth's this I've fallen ovah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, without moving his knees, which were jammed into Skimpole's ribs. "It has thwown me into quite a fluttah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Blake. "It's Skimpole!"

"Bai Jove! Is that you, Skimmy?"

"Yes, you duffer! Gerroff!"

"I wefuse to be called a duffah."

"Gerroff!"

"Yaas, wathah! But undah the cires——"

"You—you're c-c-e-crushing mm-m-m-me! Gerroff, you idiot!"

"I uttahly decline to be chawactewised as an idiot."

"Get off him, then," said Jack Blake, grinning. "You'll extinguish Skimmy, if you don't look out."

"I should be sowwy to extinguish Skimmy; but I must decline to move until he has withdwawn that oppwobwious expwession."

Jack Blake and his chum Digby stooped, and, seizing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy by the shoulders, jerked him off the gasping Socialist.

"Wefuse me!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "I wefuse to——"

"Can't be bothered with an inquest now," said Blake, yawning. "Skimmy, my son, what is the idea of taking a nap in the passage?"

Skimpole staggered up.

"I was not taking a nap in the passage, Blake. I was pushed over in a very rude way by Tom Merry. I was proposing to him——"

"Naughty!"

"Oh, pray do not be frivolous, Blake. I was proposing to him to enter into the scheme I am framing for connecting up all the junior studies in the School House by means of a telephone. The exchange would be in my study. The subscription is ten shillings a head for a term, payable in advance. I suppose you fellows will join?"

"Something wrong with your supposer, then?" said Digby.

"Really, Digby——"

"Oh, we'll join when the telephone's up," said Blake, laughing. "You can ask me for my subscription when the telephonic communication is established between the junior studies. Let's get to the cricket, Dig."

"What-ho!"

"Hold on a minute—really, you know. D'Arcy! Pray stop a minute."

Now, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was considerably ruffled by stumbling over the amateur Socialist, he was really the fellow who should have been least likely to stay and be bored by him. But Arthur Augustus was nothing if not polite. He paused, jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and looked at Skimpole.

"What is it, Skimpole?"

"I require assistance in beginning the telephone construction," said Skimpole. "I shall allow my assistant to benefit by the arrangement without the payment of a fee. Will you help me?"

"You see——"

"I should take Glyn into the affair, as he knows a great deal about electricity, but he is obstinate, and very self-willed, and he is absurd enough to think that my ideas are nonsensical, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Pray come and help me. Knowledge of the matter is not required, as I have plenty of that, and any intelligence need not be exerted. Of course, I should not expect that of you. I have brains enough for two."

"Bai Jove!"

"Will you assist me?"

"You are so doocid flatterin' about it, Skimmy, that I weally can't wesist," said Arthur Augustus, with a sarcasm that was quite lost upon the amateur telephonist.

"Very good. Come this way."

"Where are you goin'?"

"To Glyn's study. He has a large quantity of the apparatus necessary for my work," explained Skimpole, leading the way in the direction of the Shell studies in the School House. "I am going to borrow it."

"Bai Jove, will he let you?"

"Certainly!"

"But has he given his permish—does he know?"

"His permission is not really necessary, as under Socialism all electrical apparatus will be nationalised, and of course a fellow has a right to anything he needs for his personal use, at any time. But, as a matter of fact, I have explained it to Glyn, and he does not object."

"Oh, that's all wight then."

"Of course it's all right; come on."

Arthur Augustus gave a glance through the open door at the great quad, and heard the merry cries of the cricketers. Then he followed Skimpole upstairs. The swell of St. Jim's was the most obliging fellow in the world.

They reached Glyn's study, and entered it.

It was the end study in the Shell corridor, and the Liverpool lad shared it with Harry Noble, the junior from Australia, and Clifton Dane of Canada.

But most of the property in the room belonged to Glyn, who was the son of a millionaire, and was indulged in almost everything he wanted by a fond father.

Skimpole knew where the young inventor kept his electrical apparatus, and he opened the lid of a large chest which he pulled out from under the table.

The chest was packed, in an orderly way that used up every available inch of space, with a collection of the things useful to a young electrician.

There were coils of insulated wire, single and double, bells and switches and presses, jars of chemicals, and various other materials and instruments, of many of which D'Arcy did not know either the names or the use.

Skimpole blinked at them with great satisfaction.

"Dear me! This is really excellent."

"Bai Jove!"

"Take all the things I hand up to you, D'Arcy, will you, and pack them into that little bag."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I shall want some hundreds of yards of insulated wire, and a certain number of bells. I had better take the lot. Then a set of receivers. Let me see——"

"Are you sure——"

"I will take half-a-dozen dry batteries, and by connecting them up I shall obtain a sufficiently powerful battery for my purpose."

"—That Glyn doesn't mind——"

"Then I shall want——"

"—Your takin' his pwoperty?"

"Really, D'Arcy——"

There was a hasty footstep at the door.

"My only hat!"

Bernard Glyn looked in.

Filled with uneasiness for his property, he had ventured to disregard the Shell-master's injunction, and to quit the Form-room before the expiration of the hour of detention.

He rushed into the study.

"You rotters!" he roared. "I'll teach you to burgle in my study."

"Weally, Glyn——"

Arthur Augustus had no time for more.

The incensed inventor was upon him.

He dropped the bags containing the purloined property, and went reeling and staggering in a desperate combat with the Liverpool lad.

Skimpole blinked at them.

"Dear me! Pray do not hurt one another, my friends. It is quite contrary to all the principles of Socialism."

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Glyn——"

"Get out!"

"D'Arcy——"

"Wats!"

"Dear me! It is clearly useless for me to remain."

And Skimpole picked up the bag containing the borrowed apparatus, and left the study, leaving D'Arcy and Glyn rolling over and over in a wild and whirling conflict.

CHAPTER 4.

Hoist by his own Petard.

"**B**AI Jove!"

"Now, then——"

"Weally——"

"You ass——"

"I wefuse—— Ow!"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, as he came along the Shell passage. "What on earth's that? An earthquake, or Herries dropping one of his boots, or what?"

"Wescue, deah boy!"

"It's Gussy!"

Tom Merry looked into the study.

He stared in amazement at the scene before him.

Bernard Glyn and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were rolling round the study, but the Liverpool lad seemed to be getting the best of it.

D'Arcy's elegant clothes were in a shocking state.

His collar was torn wholly out, and lay on the carpet—his jacket was split up the back, and his hair was ruffled like a mop.

The swell of St. Jim's was scarcely recognisable for a moment.

"Phew!"

"Wescue, deah boy! This howwid ass is wuinin' my clothes!"

"I'll ruin his chivvy, too!" roared Glyn.

"What's the matter?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Wescue!"

Tom Merry ran into the study.

Glyn happened to be uppermost, and Tom Merry seized him by the shoulders, and jerked him away from his adversary.

Arthur Augustus lay gasping on the carpet.

Glyn was excited, and he struggled as Tom Merry pulled him off, and wrenched himself away from the grasp of the hero of the Shell.

He staggered, and fell plump into an arm-chair.

The next moment he gave a yell.

That arm-chair was well known in the School House at St. Jim's; it was one of the many inventions of Bernard Glyn.

As soon as anyone sat in it, the weight on the seat released a spring, and metal bands shot out and enveloped the luckless sitter. Both Arthur Augustus and Herr Schneider, the German master, had had experience of that chair. Now Glyn himself was given a sample of what it was like.

The metal bands enclosed him in a twinkling, and he struggled desperately, though, as the maker of the chair, he ought to have known how useless that was.

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet.

He presented a shocking sight, but he did not receive much sympathy. Tom Merry burst into a roar of laughter that rang through the Shell passage.

"My aunt! You do look a picture, Gussy!"

"I feel extremely wotten."

"You look it," said Monty Lowther, at the door. "Been having a rough and tumble with a wild-cat or a lawn-mower?"

"I have been thwashin' Glyn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is no cause for wibald laughtah, that I am aware of, Lowthah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Only you look as if Glyn had been thrashing you, that's all," said Lowther. "You ought to be put on the cinematograph like that. Will you wait here a minute, without moving, while I get my camera?"

"Certainly not, Lowthah. I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Here, let me get out of this," gasped Bernard Glyn.

"Ha, ha, ha! What is it Shakespeare says on that subject?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"I do not wemebah Shakespeare sayin' anythin' about Bernard Glyn," said D'Arcy, with a puzzled expression.

"Ass! It's in Hamlet——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass——"

"For 'tis the sport to see the engineer hoist by his own petard," grinned Lowther. "William must have been thinking of something like this."

"Let me out, you grinning ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's a spring——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't let the violent ass out yet," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard him as a dangerous maniac."

"What's the row about?" asked Tom Merry.

"I weally do not know. I was helpin' Skimpole to wemove some things from that chest, when this uttah ass suddenly spwang upon me like—like anythin'. Of course, I had no wresource but to thwash him."

"You thrash me!" hooted Glyn. "You couldn't thrash a blind puppy dog."

"Weally, Glynn——"

"Lemme out of this rotten chair."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I don't know how to work it."

"Neither do I," said Lowther. "Better fetch Skimpole, he's the only other inventor in the School House. Or Blake would take the chair to pieces, as he's a carpenter. Shall I buzz over to the New House and fetch Figgins, Glyn? He's got a new axe for cutting saplings, and he would make short work of that chair."

"You utter idiot——"

"Good. Is that Liverpudlian for 'Thank you'?" asked Lowther.

"You—you——"

"Pway do not wesease the uttah ass, anyway, deah boy. I think I had bettah take some more of these things——"

"You let them alone!" roared Glyn.

"Weally, Glyn, you are an unwearable boundah. You gave Skimmay your permish to bowwow the things——"

"I didn't, you ass!"

"I decline to be called an ass, and I wefuse to have doubt cast upon the word of a friend of mine. Skimmay assured me that he had mentioned the matter to you."

"Yes, ass, he mentioned it, duffer! But I couldn't explain to him that I'd smash him if he touched my things, dummy,

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because old Linton had his gimlets on me, maniac! So do you understand now, idiot?"

"I wegard all those expressions as oppwobwious."

"Ass! Dummy!"

"Undah the cires, if there was a misunderstandin', I am willin' to excuse your violence," said D'Arcy. "I shall not thrash you any more."

"There you are—a reprieve at the foot of the scaffold," said Lowther. "Gussy is not going to thrash you any more. You can consider that you've got off cheap. You know what a Gorgon Gussy is when he's roused."

"Let me out of this rotten chair."

"Bai Jove! How do you work it?"

"There's a spring!"

"Where?" asked Tom Merry.

"At the back, down below. You can find it by feeling for it and pressing it hard. Then the contraption unfastens."

"Vewy good. Pway be patient, deah boy, while I find the spwing."

"Buck up, for goodness sake!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt over the lower back of the chair, pressing his thumb on the padding everywhere in search of the hidden spring.

Suddenly he gave a terrific yell.

"Oh! Ow! Yah!"

He jumped away from the chair as if it had suddenly become red-hot, and danced in the study, with his thumb in his mouth.

"Go it!" exclaimed Harry Noble, the Australian, coming into the study, which he shared with Glyn and Clifton Dane.

"Go it, Gussy! Is this a new thing in breakdowns?"

"Yow!"

"What on earth's the matter?"

"I've pwicked my fingah."

"On the spring?"

"No, on some wotten thing or othah."

"It's all right," said Glyn. "That's only a needle-point. There's several of them arranged there in case anybody should go looking for the spring. I forgot to mention that. It's all right."

"I decline to wegard it as all wight," said Arthur Augustus sucking his thumb. "In fact, I wegard it as all w'ong. I have pwicked my thumb."

"Blow your thumb!"

"I wufuse to look for the spwing any longer. Undah the cires, I shall wotire and twy to wepair the damage you have done to my clothes."

And Arthur Augustus strolled across to the window.

"For goodness sake let me out, some of you!" exclaimed Glyn. "Skimpole's walked off with a lot of my apparatus, and I'm going to scalp him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Find the spring, you guggling asses!"

"Blessed if I like the idea of exploring among those giddy needle-points," said Tom Merry. "Isn't there any other way?"

"No, ass!"

"Suppose we turn the chair upside down, you may drop out," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Idiot!"

"I'll have a go at it with the poker if you like," said Harry Noble. "Blessed if I'm going to squeeze all over that lining full of needle-points—"

"There's only six—"

"Well, I'm not going to touch one of 'em."

"You ass—"

"I'll smash the thing up if you like," said the Cornstalk. "Better get rid of it. I've had to sit in it twice for ten minutes or so, owing to sitting down in it by mistake. I'd be glad to see the end of it."

"Look for the spring."

"Rats!"

"It's all right—"

"More rats!"

"Oh, smash it up, then—anything you like—only for goodness sake let me out!" gasped the School House inventor.

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "We'll help."

The Shell fellows set cheerfully to work. With poker, tongs, and chopper they attacked the armchair manfully.

It was a strong, well-made piece of furniture, and it resisted long. But they were in earnest. The crashing blows attracted attention from all quarters.

Fellows of the Shell and the Fourth Form gathered in the passage to look on. There was soon quite a crowd, and the fellows watched the proceedings of the rescuers with great interest.

In spite of the greatest energy, and a terrific amount of noise, the progress of the rescuers was slow.

Monty Lowther remarked that it was like the rescuers trying to get at some miner entombed in the depths of the earth, only Glyn had the good fortune to be close to his rescuers. That proximity, however, was not wholly fortunate for Bernard

Glyn. For some of the knocks intended for the chair fell upon him, and he was soon in possession of a really extensive and varied collection of bruises. The chair was demolished at last, however, and the youthful inventor was released from the fastening bands.

"Jolly good," said Tom Merry, throwing the poker into the grate with a clang. "We've done it."

"You've nearly done for me, too," grumbled Glyn.

"Well, you had to expect a knock or two."

"Yah!"

"Oh, come on!" said Lowther. "This is what we get for wasting a quarter of an hour on the boulder. I hit the chair oftener than I hit him all the time."

"Br-r-r-r!"

And Bernard Glyn, without stopping to discuss the question as to how much gratitude was due to his rescuers, ran off to recover the property the amateur Socialist had taken away.

He bumped at Skimpole's door, but it did not open.

He kicked at the lower panels, and yelled through the keyhole to the amateur Socialist.

"Skimpole! Skimmy!"

"Yes. Is that you, Glyn?"

"Yes. Open the door."

"I am busy."

"I want those things."

"What things?"

"The things you've taken from my study!" bawled Glyn through the keyhole.

"I had your permission, you know."

"You hadn't, you ass! I never said a word."

"Silence gives consent."

"Look here, you can have some of them, but—"

"I shall need them all."

"But they're mine!" roared Glyn.

"You are quite mistaken," said Skimpole from the safe side of the keyhole. "If you care to listen to the first principle of Socialism, I will explain—"

"Unlock the door!"

"For the present I consider it more judicious to keep the door locked. You see, under Socialism all these things will be nationalised—"

"You giddy ass!"

"But I wish to get on with the telephone construction at once, and it will be probably some weeks before Socialism is established in England."

"You—you—you—"

"Therefore, I cannot return these things to you, Glyn. But if you care about the value of them, I will pay you promptly, every penny, when I receive my share of the Rothschild millions, which will be confiscated under Socialism."

Glyn raved.

The prospect held out by Skimpole of compensation under Socialism was not quite sufficient consolation to the youthful inventor.

He kicked at the door, but Skimpole, being busy, was no longer listening, and he refused to even reply to the lurid threats Glyn howled through the keyhole.

But the Liverpool lad ceased his attack upon the door suddenly. He caught a glimpse of Mr. Linton's figure in the distance, and remembering that he was supposed to be still in the Shell Form-room, he dashed off just in time to elude the Form-master. And Skimpole went on with his work cheerfully, uninterrupted now.

CHAPTER 5.

A Little Secret.

"HA, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"My only summer bonnet!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"There's something funny on the boards. Listen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It came from the end study, tenanted by Bernard Glyn, Harry Noble, and Clifton Dane.

It was a shout of irresistible laughter, and it recalled to the Terrible Three that curious outbreak of Glyn's in the Form-room that afternoon.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three looked at one another. They were coming along the Shell passage to speak to Glyn and his chums, and the roar of laughter had suddenly greeted them. The door of the end study was closed, but the laugh rang along the corridor.

"Pshaw! Some big wheeze, I suppose," said Tom Merry. "Or else this is a new lung exercise, or they're testing the ceiling."

"Better look in," suggested Manners, "as head of the Shell we ought to keep an eye on the wheezes."

"Yes, rather."

And Tom Merry gave a powerful kick at the door of the study.



Skimpole picked up the bag containing the borrowed apparatus, and left the study, leaving D'Arcy and Glyn rolling over and over in a wild and whirling conflict.

It flew open, and the Terrible Three walked in.

The New Firm, as Cornstalk & Co. were sometimes called, were all there, and their faces were wet with tears of merriment.

They stared with far from polite inquiry at the chums of the Shell.

"Hallo! What do you want?"

"We came to speak about the Form-match," Tom Merry remarked. "But we heard a mysterious noise as we came along the passage——"

"A sound something like a lot of fireworks exploding all at once, with a rheumatically old barnyard fowl keeping company," said Lowther.

"Or coals rolling downstairs, to the accompaniment of a man filing a saw," said Manners.

"We thought something must be the matter," went on Tom Merry blandly, as the New Firm looked decidedly cross at this unflattering description of their laughter. "If you feel a pain anywhere——"

"Or an ache——"

"We'll lend a hand——"

"You'll feel a pain somewhere if you don't buzz off," said Noble. "We're busy. No time to talk about Form matches. It doesn't come off for a week, anyway. I'll play. Dane'll play. Glyn'll play. Now cut!"

"Buzz off!" said Glyn.

"Vamoose!" remarked Clifton Dane.

"Look here——"

"Rats! Give us something decent to look at, then p'r'aps we will. The sooner you get on the outside of that door——"

"But——"

"Can't you see we're busy?"

"Busy! Cackling away like a lot of farmyard roosters," exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the idea?"

"Mine."

"I didn't say whose; I said what."

"You can whose, what, which, why, and wherefore, if you like, and all the rest of the pronouns in the grammar books, if you'll only get on the other side of that door," said Glyn.

"Exactly."

"Buzz off!"

The Terrible Three looked wrathfully at the New Firm. They were strongly inclined to rush them there and then.

But it was not worth a scrimmage.

"Well," said Tom Merry, "remember we're going to hear this wheeze. As heads of the Shell, we can't let you youngsters rip."

"Rats!"

"More rats!"

"And many of 'em!"

Such were the disrespectful replies of Cornstalk & Co. The Terrible Three went out and slammed the door with unnecessary violence.

The New Firm chuckled.

"It's ripping!" said Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure you can work it, though?"

"I think so."

"My hat, it will be spiffing! Utterly unheard of!"

"Yes, rather!"

"That little jape of Figgins & Co. in passing off Kerr as Blake's uncle the other day will be a feeble joke to it."

"I should say so."

"If it comes off."

"It will come off all right."

"What about the materials?"

"I've got most of the things."

"And the clothes?"

"We'll collar some of Skimpole's."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door opened, and Jack Blake of the Fourth Form looked in. Behind him the faces of Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy peered into the study.

Cornstalk & Co. looked at them.

"This is a private apartment, gentlemen," said Kangaroo.

"Next door the box-room. Pass on."

"Weally, Kangawoo——"

"We're busy."

"Look here," said Blake, "Tom Merry says you've got a new wheeze on! We've come to look into it."

"Good-bye."

"If it's up against the New House bounders, we don't mind taking a hand."

"Farewell."

"If it's a jape against the Terrible Three, you can count us in. As elder hands, we'll take the lead, if the idea's a good one."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's fair," said Digby

"Adieu."

"Look here——" began Herries.

"Adios."

"You set of grinning asses——"

"Vale!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kangaroo had now got to the end of his variety of good-byes. He sid his hand towards the inkpot. Arthur Augustus made a hasty strategic movement to the rear. He was no coward, but, as he would have said, a fellow was bound to think of his clothes.

"Look here," said Blake, "I dare say you think yourselves jolly deep——"

"We don't think it; we know it," said Glyn blandly.

"Have you really got a wheeze on, or are you rotting?"

"We have—and we aren't."

"What's the wheeze?"

"A secret," said Kangaroo cheerfully.

"You jolly asses——"

"Good-bye!"

"You frabjous, burbling jabberwocks——"

"Farewell!" said Kangaroo, beginning the list again.

The chums of Study No. 6 went out and slammed the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New Firm.

And their mirth rang along the Shell passage after the retiring Fourth-Formers.

Blake & Co. were utterly puzzled.

It was evident that the Shell chums in the end study had a new wheeze of some sort on the boards, but they could not form the faintest idea as to what it was.

"Pewwaps they're only wottin', deah boys?" Arthur Augustus suggested.

Jack Blake shook his head.

"No; there's something on."

"Then what is it?" demanded Dig.

"Give it up."

And Blake's chums had to give it up too. Whatever the new wheeze was, Cornstalk & Co. kept their own counsel about it.

CHAPTER 6.

"Are You There?"

SKIMPOLE was busy the next day. The rules of the school compelled him to devote a certain amount of time to lessons, a fact which Skimmy bemoaned, regarding the hours spent in the class-room as so much sheer waste. Nothing could make him give his attention to his work, however. Even Mr. Linton's pointer had lost its terrors. When Skimpole had a new idea Skimpole was, as Blake said, more Skimpole than ever. He was thinking of telephones now, and his mighty brain simply refused to come down to such

things as Norman kings and decimals and Latin conjugations and declensions.

Having informed his astounded Form-master that England was invaded in 1066 Gerrard, instead of 1066 anno Domini, Skimpole was awarded fifty lines. Five hundred would have made no difference. He was still thinking of telephones. He told the mathematic master that the three sides of an isosceles telephone were equal. The master, who was not inventing telephones, was inclined to think him insane, and gave him a hundred lines, anyway.

Skimpole had quite a collection of lines after morning school, but as they weren't telephone lines they didn't interest him.

The moment he was free from classes he hurried to his study, and resumed work.

He had done a great deal the previous evening. His apparatus was mostly in working order. Glyn had been placated, and had allowed the genius of the Shell to remain in possession of his plunder, only taking away a few things he really required. The cost of the apparatus was nothing to Glyn, who only had to send to his home to get any quantity. His father was proud of his inventive turn of mind, and gave him every encouragement, including unlimited pocket-money.

Skimpole was hard at work all his spare time that day.

By the time the bell rang for afternoon school the genius of the Shell had put up the telephone in his own study, and had run the wires along the Shell passage.

He had connected up Study No. 6, mindful of Blake's humorous promise to pay his subscription when the installation was complete.

He had just time to test the telephone, when he had to go in to afternoon lessons. It seemed all right.

Skimpole was in great good-humour with himself.

After afternoon school, from which he emerged with a couple of hundred more lines to his credit, the amateur telephonist sought out Jack Blake.

The chums of Study No. 6 had gone into the quadrangle to get in some cricket practice before dark, and Skimpole went to look after them.

"Have you seen Blake?" he asked Glyn, who was chatting with Dane and Harry Noble in the doorway of the School House.

The chums of the end study grinned at one another.

"Yes," said Kangaroo. "What do you want him for, my son? Is the telephone finished?"

"Yes, quite ready for use now. I have connected up Study No. 6 with my own study."

"Good!"

"It is now possible to hold a conversation between the two studies," went on Skimpole. "I want Blake to give it a trial."

"Good idea!" said Kangaroo, with a wink at Glyn. "This way!"

"Do you know where Blake is?"

"I saw him not five minutes ago. Come on!"

"Thank you very much, Noble."

"Don't mention it," said the Cornstalk obligingly. "This is a pleasure to me."

And if Skimpole hadn't been so extremely short-sighted he would have noticed that Noble's broad grin indicated that he really was very much amused.

As a matter of fact, Kangaroo was leading the amateur Socialist in a direction opposite to that where Blake and his chums were to be found.

It did not suit the plans of the New Firm for the chums of No. 6 to begin testing the telephone yet.

"What's the little game?" asked Clifton Dane, as Kangaroo hurried Skimpole away in the wrong direction.

Bernard Glyn laughed.

"It's a little wheeze about that telephone. That bouncer collared my props to make the phone, so it's only fair that we should squeeze some fun out of it."

"Yes, rather! But how?"

"I'm going to connect up the telephone with another receiver in my study. Of course, Skimmy won't know. I shall make the connection of the wires in the passage, and he will never think of looking for anything of the sort."

"And then——"

"Then we shall be able to ring up Study No. 6 on the telephone, and talk to them," said Glyn, with a grin. "They'll think it's Skimpole—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It did not take the inventor of St. Jim's long to carry out his plan.

When he had finished his preparations, he waved a white handkerchief from the window of the end study, as a signal to Kangaroo.

The Cornstalk was looking for it, and he promptly led the amateur Socialist in the right direction, and allowed him to find Blake.

"There they are, Skimmy!" he exclaimed, pointing to the chums of Study No. 6, who were in flannels, and standing in a group by the junior pitch, watching the bowling of Reilly to Kerruish's wicket.

"Thank you, Noble. What a long time we have been finding them. I really might have guessed that they would have been on the cricket field."

Kangaroo chuckled as he strolled away.

Skimpole hurried to the chums of the Fourth. He immediately seized Jack Blake by the button, and Jack allowed the end of his bat to drop on Skimpole's toe. The amateur Socialist gave a gasp and released him.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "Is that you, Skimmy?"

"Yes," gasped Skimpole. "I—I have been looking for you. The telephone is installed, as far as your study is concerned."

"The what?"

"The telephone."

"What telephone?"

Skimpole blinked at him through his spectacles.

"The telephone, Blake—you surely remember undertaking to pay the subscription of ten shillings when the telephone was completed?"

"My hat! I'd forgotten all about it."

"Really, Blake—"

"Besides, it was only a joke—"

"My dear Blake—"

"You see, it's all rot, you know," explained Blake patiently.

But Skimpole, naturally, perhaps, couldn't see it in that light.

"I must insist upon your keeping the agreement, Blake. The telephone is up, and I want the ten shillings."

"Under Socialism, all shillings will be nationalised," said Blake calmly. "I shall be entitled to a good many. I'll have ten now."

"Really, Blake—"

"Or rather, on second thoughts, I'll have fifteen. I'm short of tin. Hand over the other five at once, will you?"

"The—other five!"

"Yes. I suppose you're not going to try and dodge me out of my own money, are you?" demanded Blake indignantly.

"Your—your own money!"

"Yes. You owe me five bob."

"I—I—I owe you five bob!" gasped Skimpole dazedly.

"Yes, and I should be really glad of the money."

Skimpole rubbed his bony forehead.

"There is a mistake somewhere," he said. "I will explain to you the whole system of Socialism from the beginning—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Blake hurriedly. "I'd rather pay the ten bob. I'll borrow it off Gussy! Hold on!"

"Before you pay the fee, of course you had better test the telephone," said Skimpole. "Will you come and test it now?"

"Yaas, wathah! Come on, deah boys. I am wathah intewested in telephones. I wegard the telephone as a gweat invention. I could not have done it myself, you know."

"Go hon," said Blake.

"Come with me," said Skimpole. "It is all ready."

"Right-ho," said Blake resignedly.

The Fourth-Formers followed Skimpole into the School House. They went into Study No. 6, and Skimpole went further on to his own room, which was next to Tom Merry's. He looked in on the Terrible Three as he passed.

"If you would care to see the telephone worked, you can come into my room," he said.

"Oh, we'll come," said Tom Merry.

They went into Skimpole's study. Gore, who shared the room with the amateur Socialist, was there, and he scowled and went out when the Terrible Three came in. The cad of the Shell was not on good terms with Tom Merry & Co.

Skimpole went to the telephone and rang up Study No. 6.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in great admiration, as the telephone bell buzzed. "The bell weally wings, you know."

"Marvellous!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's so curious that it should ring," remarked Digby. "If it danced a cellar-flap or whistled a tune, it wouldn't be so remarkable."

"Weally, Dig—"

"Shut up, you kids, while I jaw to Skimmy," said Blake.

He took up the receiver.

"Are you there?" came in a wheezy whisper from the telephone.

"What-ho!"

"Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"The machine's all right?"

"Seems so."

"Then I shall expect the ten shillings."

"Will you have it by telephone or telegraph?"

This question was intended as a joke, but Skimpole the genius had a brain above jokes. There was a pause, and then his voice was heard again.

"I fail to comprehend you, Blake. It is impossible to send any solid object, such as silver coinage, by telephone."

"Bai Jove!"

"Go hon," said Blake.

"I will ring off now, and you can bring the money to my study."

"Thanks."

Blake dropped the receiver.

"Well, it works all right," he remarked. "I was only joking with the burbling duffer, but a chap must stick to his word."

"Yaas, wathah."

"You think I ought to cash up, Gussy?"

"Certainly, deah boy."

"Then hand us over the ten boblets."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hand them over."

"I object—"

Objections don't count, unless supported by the umpire. Hand over the boblets."

"I wefuse!"

"Gussy! Growing stingy in your old age! Oh, Gussy! Gus!"

"Certainly not, Blake"

"Then chuck us over the boblets."

"I wepeat that I object—"

"Then go and eat coke," said Blake, rather huffily. "Herrie—Dig—can you raise ten bob between you?"

"Pway don't be hasty, deah boy. Allow me to finish. I object to the—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake, I was about to say that I object to the term boblets. I wegard it as a vulgah expression. I have no objection to lending you the sum of ten shillin's," said D'Arcy, fishing a half-sovereign out of a neat little crocodile purse.

"Pway take them, deah boy."

Blake grinned, and consented to accept the half-sovereign.

"It's all right," he said. "I might have known you were only playing the giddy ox."

"Weally, Blake—"

Buz-z-z-z.

"Hallo! There's that blessed telephone bell again."

"Pway don't go to the telephone for a moment, Blake. I considah that you owe me an apology for suspectin' me of bein' stingy—"

"How was I to know you were playing the goat?"

"I object to that expression—"

"I object to your playing the goat, but that doesn't make you stop it."

"Weally, Blake—"

Buz-z-z-z-z.

The telephone bell rang impatiently.

Blake ran to the receiver.

CHAPTER 7.

A Ragging by Telephone.

BUZZ-Z-ZZ!

"Hallo!"

"Are you there?"

"Where do you think I am?"

"Eh! What?"

"Yes, I'm here. What's the row?"

"Is that Blake?"

"Yes, ass! Blessed if I know who's talking," added Blake, looking up at his chums in Study No. 6. "It's not Skimmy's squeak this time."

"Sure that's Blake?" came the voice from the telephone.

"Yes, ass! I suppose I ought to know."

"Then what have you done with your voice?"

"Eh?"

"What's the matter with your croak?"

"Why, I—I—"

"Hold on, I've got a message for you."

"Then buck up, you dummy!"

"Are you all there—all four of you?"

"Yes, idiot!"

"Good. I want you to do something to oblige me."

"Well, that depends. What is it?"

"Go and drown yourselves."

"What?"

Blake hung up the receiver, and looked round for a cricket-stump. His face was very wrathful.

"That isn't Skimmy," he said. "It's somebody in Skimmy's study having a little joke with us on the telephone."

"Bai Jove!"

Buzz-z-z-z!

"There he is again," said Digby, taking up the receiver. "Hallo! Hallo! Who is it?"

"Are you Blake?"

"No; I'm Digby."

"Same sort of ass. You'll do. Are you going to do that little thing to oblige me?"

"What little thing?"
 "Go and drown yourselves."
 "I believe I know that voice," murmured Digby, putting up the receiver. "Either the thing alters it, or the chap is trying to disguise it. But it's not Skinny."
 Buzz-z-z!
 "Pway allow me to talk to the wottah," said D'Arcy, taking the receiver. "Yaas! Hallo! I'm here, deah boy."
 "Who's that?"
 "It is I, you know."
 "Who's I?"
 "Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."
 "Oh! All at once?"
 "I wegard that remark as fwivolous."
 "So it's you, Gussy. Any news? Anything new in the fancy waistcoat line?"
 "Weally, deah boy—"
 "Did you know young Wally had put Pongo to sleep in your hat-box?"
 "Gweat Scott!"
 Arthur Augustus made one bound to his hat-box. He tore it open—but it contained nothing but hats.
 The swell of St. Jim's breathed deep with relief.
 It would have been just like his hopeful minor, Wally, to put his shaggy mongrel into that hat-box.
 But it was only a false alarm. Arthur-Augustus returned to the telephone.
 "It's all wight, deah boy."
 "What's all right?"
 "Pongo isn't in the hat-box."
 "I never said he was."
 "Bai Jove, I wegard that as weally vewy like a pwevawica-tion!"
 "Hallo! Hallo! Are you still there?"
 "Yaas, wathah."
 "Aren't you going to do that little thing to oblige me?"
 "What little thing, deah boy?"
 "Go and drown yourself."
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Hallo! Hallo! Put Blake on the 'phone."
 "Blake, deah boy, this wude wottah wants to talk to you."
 Blake snorted.
 "I'll talk to him soon," he said. "I want to find out whose voice it is, that's all."
 He took the receiver.
 "Hallo! Hallo!"
 "Is that Blake—Jack Blake?"
 "Yes, dummy!"
 "We're thinking of having some new rules in the School House," went on the voice. "All Fourth-Formers are to wash their necks in the morning and comb their hair."
 "I'll comb your hair for you jolly soon," murmured Blake wrathfully.
 "D'Arcy is to be allowed only nine waistcoats and seventeen silk hats—"
 "Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, who was listening over Blake's shoulder. "I wegard that observation as absolutely widiculous. I have nevah had more than six silk hats at a time in all my life."
 "Herries is to be prohibited from taking a larger size than twenty-seven in boots," went on the voice, "and Digby is not to have baggy trousers at the knees. As for Blake— Is that you, Blake?"
 "Yes, here I am. Keep it up."
 "Good. You are to touch your cap whenever you pass a member of the Shell Form, as an outward and visible sign that you obey the rules."
 "My hat!"
 "No, your cap."
 "I—I—I—"

"If you are good, obedient little boys, and carry out all the instructions of your elders, the Shell, we shall not lick you except when you really deserve it, and it will be for your own good."

Blake dropped the receiver.

"I can't make out who's speaking," he said. "But the chap must be in Skimpole's study, as the 'phone is fixed there and nowhere else. Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake caught up the cricket-stump again. Herries picked up an old boot, one of his own, and a good size. Digby seized a cushion, and D'Arcy hastily drew on a pair of gloves as he followed his chums. If there was to be punching, the swell of the School House wanted to protect his knuckles as much as possible.

The chums of No. 6 dashed along the passage, and rushed upon Skimpole's study. The door of the study was half open, and within it the Terrible Three were still standing with Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, trying to persuade them to join in the telephone idea.

Blake & Co. burst into the study like an avalanche.

They did not stop to explain.

The case did not need explaining.

They hurled themselves upon the Terrible Three, and smote them hip and thigh.

CHAPTER 8.

Misdirected Vengeance.

TOM MERRY rolled on the carpet, and Blake rolled on him. Monty Lowther went down with Herries sprawling over him, and Manners staggered under the weight of Digby and D'Arcy, and fell too.

Never was a surprise more complete, or an attack more successful.

The Terrible Three were vanquished almost without a struggle, but they began to struggle on the floor.

Skimpole gazed upon the scene, blinking with astonishment.

"Dear me!" he said. "This is a very rude interruption, Blake."

"Got them!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Bump them!"

"What-ho!"

"You dangerous maniacs!" howled Tom Merry. "What on earth's the matter with you? What's the little game?"

"I'll teach you to slang me."

"Eh?"

"Go and drown ourselves, eh?"

"What are you jabbering about?"

"Seventeen silk hats, bai Jove! I have nevah had more than six at any one time in my life, you uttah ass!"

"They're mad!" gasped Lowther. "Stark, staring mad. Help!"

"Rescue, Shell!"

"Roll 'em over!"

"Bump 'em!"

"Shove their nappers into the cinders!"

"Hand over that inkpot, Skinny!" shouted Blake.

"Don't do anything of the sort, Skinny!" yelled Tom Merry, as the amateur Socialist reached out for the inkpot. Skimpole blinked at him.

The Terrible Three were utterly helpless, pinned down by Blake & Co., but it did not seem to occur to Skimpole to go to their aid.

"As a sincere Socialist, Merry, I cannot refuse a reasonable request," said Skimpole, shaking his head. "Do you really want the ink, Blake?"

"Yes, quick! Hand it over."

"Stop!" yelled Tom Merry. "He's going to ink me!"

"Dear me! Are you going to ink Merry, Blake?"

"Well, I'm not going to drink it!" snorted Blake.

"I did not suppose you were going to drink it, Blake. That would be a ridiculous proceeding, as ink is neither palatable nor nourishing taken as a beverage. However, if Merry has a serious objection to being inked—"

"I have rather!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Then I shall not hand Blake the ink. I do not wish to be disobliging, however, Blake. I will hand you the blotting-paper, or the paper-knife."

"You utter ass—"

"Really, Blake—"

"Rescue!" roared Manners. "Rescue, Shell!"

"Phew! What's the row here?"

Bernard Glyn asked the question, as he looked in at the door, Kangaroo and Clifton Dane grinning over his shoulders.

"You keep out!" snorted Blake. "This is no business of yours. We're giving these toads a licking for ragging us."

"We haven't—"

"We never—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S MOTOR-CYCLIST."

By
Martin Clifford.

"What are you cackling at, Kangaroo?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Rescue!" gasped Lowther, who was being rolled on the carpet—in none too clean a state—in a way that was positively ruinous to his clothes, and painful to his bones. "Rescue, you cackling dummies!"

It wasn't a polite way of asking for aid, but the Shell fellows were bound to stand by their Form. They entered the study, and the odds being against the chums of Study No. 6, they released the Terrible Three and drew towards the door.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther staggered to their feet. They were rumbled, dusty, and excited.

"Come on!" shouted Lowther, dashing straight at Blake.

Kangaroo stopped him.

"It's all right."

"Leggo!" "Tain't all right!"

The Fourth-Formers, pretty well satisfied with their vengeance, retreated from the study, breathless but triumphant. Cornstalk & Co. stopped the Terrible Three from pursuing them. They didn't want to have any explanations just then on the subject of the telephonic ragging.

Monty Lowther rubbed his aching bones ruefully.

"They're mad!" he said. "Stark insane! They think we've been ragging them, and we haven't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is there to cackle at in that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kangaroo, Glyn, and Dane retreated from the study, still cackling. The Terrible Three looked at one another.

"Blessed if I can make those chaps out," said Lowther.

"I wonder if they've been japing Blake & Co., and putting it down to us?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Well, I'm going to get a brush down," said Tom Merry.

"We'll make Blake sit up afterwards."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Are you going to enter into the telephone arrangement? The fees would be——"

But the chums of the Shell were gone.

Ten minutes later Tom Merry, glancing out of a window, saw Bernard Glyn wheeling his bicycle down to the gates. Cornstalk and Dane were with him, and all three were laughing together.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "Something's on, it's a cert. It occurs to me that the New Co. are getting their ears up a little too much. They will have to be jumped on, hard!"

CHAPTER 9.

A Dead Secret.

"DEAR me!"

Skimpole was blinking round his study with an extremely puzzled expression. It was the day after the installation of the telephone. Gore had just come into the study, and he stared at Skimpole as the short-sighted Socialist nearly walked into him.

"Where are you shoving?" demanded Gore.

"Eh! I am sorry. I did not see you. It is a remarkable thing."

"What is a remarkable thing?"

"Where they have gone to."

"Who? What?"

"My clothes."

"Your what?"

"Clothes! They are gone. I do not refer to the clothes I am wearing, of course," explained Skimpole. "You see, I have other clothes. One of the suits of clothes is gone. You perhaps remember my tweed jacket, Gore, the one with the stripes?"

"Yes, rather," grunted Gore. "A nice object it was. More suitable for a seaside bouncer than a chap here."

"Well, it is gone."

"All the better."

"I kept it hanging on the door in this study," said Skimpole. "It is now gone. Do you know what has become of it, Gore?"

"How the dickens should I know? Nobody has taken it to wear, you can be certain of that. Nobody but you would ever have worn the thing."

"Then there's my trousers—my old ones, I mean. I keep them in the dormitory; but they have been taken away."

"Time they were! Perhaps the House-dame's given them to a rag and bone man."

"Really, Gore, they were not as far gone as that. Then my socks—a pair of my socks are missing, the red ones with the white spots."

"Dazzlers, weren't they?" said Gore. "Do all Socialists wear red socks?"

"Not at all, but I chose that colour as representing my opinions," said Skimpole. "Also one of my red neckties is missing."

"Well, I haven't seen it."

"But it is most remarkable. I have sometimes taken articles of food and clothing to give to the poor at the gates, and did not always have time to explain first to the owners, and I have sometimes been treated with great rudeness in consequence. But I suppose there is not another Socialist in the School House."

Gore roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps there is, and he's been giving away your togs to the poor. Serve you jolly well right. You've given my grub away often enough."

"That was quite a different matter."

"Of course; it always is, when it comes home to oneself," grinned Gore. "I hope the rest of your blessed wardrobe will follow, that's all."

Skimpole blinked at him, but he felt that Gore was not to be argued with. He left the study and inquired up and down the Shell passage for his missing clothes. But nobody appeared to have seen anything of them.

Skimpole's wardrobe was limited, and his old clothes were kept in use till they nearly fell to pieces, and he was very keen on recovering those that had been removed. He did not think they had been given to the poor, even by a budding Socialist, for they weren't quite good enough to be worth taking away by the poor. But where were they? He could only come to the conclusion that they had been hidden for a joke by someone.

Tom Merry suggested to him that he had put them away somewhere in a fit of absent-mindedness, and Skimpole rubbed his buny forehead and reflected upon that possibility. It wasn't at all improbable.

The Shell, however, had something more interesting than Skimpole's old clothes to think about just then. That there was something going on in the end study was apparent to the whole Form, and the Shell were puzzled.

From the moment when Bernard Glyn had burst into that sudden and startling yell of laughter in the class-room, and had brought down upon himself the wrath of Mr. Linton, thereby, the Terrible Three had known that there was something in the wind.

They had been on the track ever since, but they had discovered nothing. Blake and his chums were equally interested and equally unable to discover what was going on.

The door of the study was always kept locked when the New Firm weren't in it, and generally when they were.

Most of the Shell studies would have opened to a key belonging to the other studies; but not so the end room. Bernard Glyn had taken care of that. The Liverpool lad had put a Yale lock on it himself, and had had three keys made for the lock, and those keys were carried by the three Shell fellows on their watch-chains.

There was no getting into the study without a key, and there was no getting a key from any member of the New firm. The Shell were baffled.

Most of the fellows, naturally, were intensely curious to know what the secret was hidden behind the locked door of the end study. Tom Merry, as head of the Shell, took up the position that the New Firm mustn't get its ears up. Blake assumed that as No. 6 was the top study in the School House, it was entitled to know all about it. Skimpole, convinced that some invention was in progress, offered his aid to Bernard Glyn, and was surprised to have it declined without thanks. After that he set his wits to work to discover some means of penetrating to the study, and the ways and means he devised were wonderful, but unfortunately impracticable.

And still the New Firm went on their way calmly and said nothing.

The Shell knew something on the subject. They knew that Glyn had ordered some things in Rylcombe which had been delivered in a tightly-nailed up packing-case. They knew that the three chums were constantly at work in the study. But that was all. Mellish of the Fourth even tried to investigate by way of the keyhole one day, but he found that the new lock gave no access of that sort.

Even the boys' maid, who had the pleasant task of keeping the Shell studies in order, could afford no information. She had been enlisted by the New Firm on their side, as it were, by a generous tip, and the prospect of more tips. She arranged only to clean the study when there was one of the three present. On such occasions some of the fellows had been able to get a peep into the room; but on such occasions any secrets were carefully hidden. Nothing was to be discovered. The maid was as ignorant of what was going on as the Shell fellows and the Fourth-Formers.

It was not only the Shell and the Fourth who were curious on the subject. The fags of the Third wanted to know all about it. D'Arcy minor even had the nerve to question Cornstalk & Co, but he did not receive much satisfaction.

Kangaroo told him that they had committed several homicides, and were hiding the bodies in the study. Clifton Dane confided to him that they were inventing a new aeroplane, which folded up into the size of a pocket-handkerchief and was hidden behind the clock when the boys' maid came in. Bernard Glyn

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said it was a new thing in wireless telegraphy, and offered to send Wally a wireless wire to let him know all about it later.

And all this information was greeted with scornful sniffs by the hero of the Third, who resolved that he would get at the facts all the same. But he received little encouragement from the juniors. Tom Merry told him, when his help was asked, that fags had better go on fagging, and not bother. Blake advised him to cut. Wally cut, and took counsel with his chums in the Third Form, Jameson and Curly Gibson.

"Of course there's something on," said Jameson, "I've known that a long time. And it's something in connection with that ass Skimpole."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I've been keeping my peepers open. Those two Shell duffers are rival inventors, and I know it's something up against Skimpole. The way they were grinning when Skimmy was questioning them the other day put it into my head. They've got Skimmy's photo in the study, too."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I don't know, but it looks to me——"

"Never mind what it looks to you," said Wally, rather unreasonably. "Don't jaw; we've got to get into the study."

"Can't be did."

"It's got to be did."

"Well, if you can pick a Yale lock——"

"There's a window."

"Rats!"

"It you say rats to me, young Jameson——"

"Well, how are you going to get into the window?"

"Somehow! We're going to work it, if only to show those duffers in the Fourth and Shell that the Third know how to do these things."

"Hear, hear!" said Curly Gibson heartily.

"Don't make that row, young Gibson."

"Look here, D'Arcy minor——"

"Shut up! There's that ladder of Taggles's——"

"They'll see us putting it up to the window."

"Not if we do it after dark."

"They'll be in the study in the evening."

"We can pick a moment when they're out."

"Well, I suppose it could be worked," said Jameson slowly. "Taggles will want a bob at least to lend us the ladder and hold his jaw."

"That's all right; I'll borrow it of my brother Gus."

"Good!"

And so the plot was plotted by the scamps of the Third—and it was to have a startling result that Wally & Co. were far from foreseeing.

CHAPTER 10.

D'Arcy Minor is Scared.

THAT evening the New Firm had tea in their study, as usual, and remained in the room behind a locked door until nearly eight o'clock. Curious fellows who wandered up the Shell passage, and listened outside the end study, heard mysterious sounds within.

Sometimes there was a tapping, as of a hammer. Sometimes the noise of a chisel, or a screw-driver. Sometimes a sound of someone mixing colours. And all the time suppressed chuckles.

Mellish, with his ear to the door, heard a few words uttered in an incautiously loud tone, and marvelled over them much.

"It's full size now, Dane, old man."

"Yes, rather."

"Can't shove it into the box again."

"No—can put it under the table when we leave the study."

"What about to-morrow when the maid's here?"

"Well, one of us will be here, Kangaroo, and we can keep it covered with a cloth or something."

"That's all right."

"My hat! If it only works——"

"It will work," said the voice of Bernard Glyn. "Haven't you seen the mechanism in motion already?"

"Well, it's marvellous!"

"It's ripping!"

"Hush! There's somebody outside."

Mellish stole away, more amazed and mystified than when he had come. What on earth were they talking about? Was it, indeed, an aeroplane that the Liverpool lad and his friends were inventing—a model, of course?

When the New Firm came out of the study they carefully locked the door.

Then they strolled down to the common-room, to be greeted with stares and curious questions, and to parry them all.

A Third Form fag looked into the common-room and saw the New Firm there engaged in passing more or less polite remarks with the Terrible Three.

The fag chuckled, and scuttled away to report.

"It's all right, young D'Arcy," he said, putting his head into the Third Form-room, "they're downstairs, jawing."

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NEXT
THURSDAY;

"THE ST. JIM'S MOTOR-CYCLIST."

By
Martin Clifford.

"Good!" said Wally.

And Wally, Jameson, and Gibson scuttled out into the dusky quadrangle. They almost ran into a slim and elegant figure, and Wally stopped it at once.

"Hallo, Gus!"

"Weally, Wally——"

"Lend me a bob, Gus!"

"Do you mean shillin'?" asked D'Arcy, in his most stately way.

"Yes. Buck up!"

Arthur Augustus felt in his pocket.

"I twust, Wally, that you are not goin' to squandah this shillin' in wiotous extwagance," he said. "This is the second shillin' I have lent you to-day."

"I've still got the other, Gus; this is in case one isn't enough. Taggles is a rotten old extortioner!"

"Taggles! What about Taggles?"

"Nothing," said Wally, regretting that he had spoken. "Hand over the tin!"

"I decline to hand over the tin without an explanation, Wally. I am afraid that you are about to play some twick."

"Rats!—Hand it over!"

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

"Don't be a cad, Gus!"

"Weally, Wally——" D'Arcy handed over the shilling—"there is the shillin', deah boy! Now you are upon your honah to explain!"

"We're going to borrow Taggles's ladder, and look in at the window of the end study," explained Wally, in a whisper.

"Bai Jove!"

"You can come and hold the ladder, if you like."

"That would hardly be consistent with my dig, deah boy! I will come and make the ascent to the window if you like."

"Well, you'd make a muck of it, you know."

"Weally, Wally——"

"Come on, Gus! Taggy mightn't let us have the ladder, but he knows you're harmless," whispered Wally.

"That is hardly a respectful way of puttin' it, deah boy, but anythin' to oblige."

And D'Arcy major accompanied his hopeful younger brother, Taggles willingly agreed to leave out his ladder, and not to hear anybody moving it, for the consideration of eighteenpence.

It was very dark in the quadrangle. The juniors ran the ladder across to the School House without mishap, and it was planted in the shadow of a giant elm, under the window of the end study in the Shell passage.

"That's all right," said Arthur Augustus. "Hold my toppah while I go up, Wally!"

"You wouldn't be able to get the window open, Gussy."

"Weally, Wally——"

"Better hold the ladder for me."

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

"You see," explained Wally, "the ladder's pretty dirty, and you'll spoil your clothes, for a dead cert."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know!"

Arthur Augustus took his foot off the ladder.

"I will hold it for you, deah boy!"

"Right you are!"

And Wally skimmed up the ladder before Gussy could change his mind. He was soon on a level with the window. He pressed his nose flat against the glass and peered in.

The interior of the study was even darker than the quad, and Wally, of course, could see nothing.

He felt the sash of the window carefully with his hands.

The window was open a couple of inches at the top for ventilation, and Wally found it easy enough to raise the sash.

It slid up with a slight noise.

He put his head into the room and listened.

It was quite still and silent.

The New Firm were downstairs, and the door was locked. Wally was quite safe from interruption.

He chuckled softly as he drew himself into the window and set foot upon the floor of the study.

The secret would not be hidden long.

There was nothing in the nature of spying about it; his conscience was quite easy on that score. He had declared that he would investigate the secret, to the New Firm, and they had laughingly told him to go ahead. Wally looked upon himself as a scout in the enemy's country. Of course Cornstalk & Co. had not foreseen anything of this sort.

Wally stood in the dim study and looked about him.

So far as he could see in the dusk there was nothing unusual about the room. The chairs, the table, the bookcase, the clock, loomed up dimly from the dusk.

ANSWERS

Where was the secret ?

What was it ?

Wally did not care to strike a light. The glimmer under the door, and out of the window, would have given him away, even to casual observers.

He groped his way about the study.

As his eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, he discerned the objects about him more distinctly.

There was a large box near the bookcase, and Wally opened the lid and looked in. The box contained tools, clothes, and several other things he could not quite make out.

But nothing to give a clue to the mystery.

"Ah !"

Wally uttered that exclamation suddenly, in a suppressed voice.

He had suddenly caught sight of something that protruded from under the long cloth on the table.

He stooped and looked at it.

The hair seemed to rise on his scalp as he saw that it was the top of a head—the hair, and the tips of the ears, were quite plain, even in the gloom.

Wally's heart stood still for a moment.

What did it mean ?

But the next second he guessed. Someone else had penetrated to the study, and had dodged under the table on hearing him coming.

Wally's brow darkened.

"You ass!" he muttered fiercely. "Why couldn't you speak ? I won't give you away ! Don't make a row !"

There was no reply.

"Can't you hear me, you dummy?" muttered Wally. "You duffer ! I'm D'Arcy minor—can't you answer ? Who are you ?"

Still the same eerie silence.

Wally was exasperated. He took a tight grip on the hair of the half-seen head, and gave a sharp tug.

"Now will you speak, you ass ?"

Then he started.

The form under the table had neither moved nor spoken.

"My only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally, feeling a creepy sensation beginning to come over him. "Wh-wh-what's the matter with him ?"

He lifted the table-cover and threw it back upon the table.

He could now see underneath, and he made out the lines of a human figure lying upon its side.

There was something familiar, even in the gloom, in the big, bumpy forehead, and the spectacles, and the striped tweed jacket.

"Skimpole !"

The figure was silent.

"Skimpole !" Wally's voice was shrill with a vague terror.

"Skimpole ! What's the matter ?"

Dead silence.

Wally, with a trembling hand, touched the face of the silent figure. It was hard and cold. His hand wandered to the breast—there was no pulsation there.

The boy staggered to his feet.

"Oh, oh ! He's dead !"

It was a gasping cry of horror.

With a bound Wally was at the window.

He bundled out, and went sliding down the ladder at lightning speed. Not for the wealth of the Indies would he have remained in that room a second longer !

CHAPTER 11.

No Entrance for Gussy!

"**B**AI JOVE !"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation as Wally came sliding down the ladder.

Wally was too horrified by his discovery in the end study to think of the fellows standing at the foot of the ladder.

He came down with a wild rush, and his boots plumped upon his major.

Arthur Augustus staggered back.

Wally bumped upon the ground, and caught Jameson round the neck to save himself from falling.

Jameson gave a roar.

"Ow ! Hold on ! Leggo !"

"Bai Jove ! You uttah young ass !"

Arthur Augustus staggered against the wall. He looked down at his beautiful waistcoat. He could not see it in the gloom, but he knew that it was badly damaged by the heavy impact of his minor's feet, and he could tell by the feeling that his chest was damaged.

"What's the row ?" demanded Curly Gibson. "Did they catch you there ?"

Wally did not reply.

He released the struggling Jameson, and hung on to the ladder with both hands, gasping for breath and trembling in every limb.

Arthur Augustus detached himself from the wall.

"I am extremely sorry, Wally," he said. "But, undah the cirs I have no resource but to thwash you. You have thwown me into a fluttah, and uttably wuined my waistcoat."

"Why doesn't he speak ?" said Jameson.

Curly Gibson shook Wally by the shoulder.

"Gone deaf ?" he demanded.

Still Wally was silent, and shaking.

Jameson peered into his face, and saw how white and strained it was, and uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Hold on, chaps ! There's something the matter with him."

"There's somethin' the mattah with my waistcoat."

"He's ill !"

"Bai Jove !"

"Look at him !"

Arthur Augustus's wrath vanished in a moment. He peered at his younger brother's face in the gloom.

"Bai Jove ! What's the matter, Wally ?"

"Skimpole !"

"Skimpole !"

"Yes."

"What about Skimpole ?"

"He's there !"

"What ?"

"He's in that study."

"Well, supposing he is ?" said Jameson. "That's nothing to be scared about, is it ?"

Wally shuddered.

"He's dead !"

"What ?" shrieked Gibson.

"Dead ?" gasped D'Arcy.

"Yes !"

"Imposs, deah boy !"

"I saw him," Wally shuddered violently. "I touched him."

"Bai Jove !"

"Rats !" said Jameson, incredulously. "He can't be ! I saw him not an hour ago. He was all right then, and gassing away as usual."

"He's dead !"

"Rot !"

"I tell you I touched him," said Wally, angrily. "His heart wasn't beating. He was lying under the table, still and cold."

The juniors were silent.

It was impossible to doubt Wally's earnestness.

"Good Heavens !" muttered Curly. "It can't be possible ?"

"Wathah not !"

"Go and look yourself then !"

"I—I think I won't go up," stammered Gibson. "You go, Jimmy !"

Jameson shook his head.

"I don't want to go !"

"Bai Jove, I'll go !" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "If poor old Skimmay is dead, we may be able to wendah him first aid or somethin'."

"He won't want it if he's dead."

"He can't be dead !"

Arthur Augustus mounted the ladder. A face looked out of the window above ; a light gleamed out into the dusky quadrangle.

"My only hat !—here's a ladder !" said a well-known voice.

"Phew ! That accounts for the window being open."

"Those young bounders have been here !"

Kangaroo looked out of the window.

Arthur Augustus was not six feet below him, and the Cornstalk recognised the swell of St. Jim's.

"Gussy !"

"Yaas, wathah !"

"So you are scouting !" grinned Harry Noble ; "bring the ink here, Dane !"

"Right you are."

"Pway don't be a beast, Kangawoo. I am coming up to investigate, because Wally says Skimmay is in your study and dead undah the table."

Kangaroo started.

"Wally ! Has he been in here ?"

"Yaas, wathah ! He says Skimmay is dead undah the table !"

"The young sweep !"

"Is Skimmay dead undah the table, deah boy ?"

"Of course not, ass !"

"I wufuse to be called an ass. My minah says Skimmay is dead undah the table, and I am comp' to investigate."

"Rats !"

"Here's the ink," said Clifton Dane, putting his head out of the window. "Will you have the squirt ?"

"Yes, rather !"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Scouting is not allowed in this study," said Kangaroo, blandly. "Where will you have it, Gussy ?"

"Weally, Kangawoo— !"

Squirt !

Arthur Augustus gave a yell as a stream of ink caught him between the collar and the neck. He slid down the ladder at express speed.

Kangaroo chuckled, and filled the squirt again. A stream of scattering ink fell over the Third-Formers at the foot of the ladder.

There was a scattering at once.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, as he scudded off out of reach of the squirt. "I don't believe Skimmay's dead at all; but I know I'm jollay inkay. I'm goin' to get a wash!"

"It's all bunkum," said Jameson. "Skimmay wasn't there. It was your nerves in the dark, young D'Arcy."

The fact that Wally did not hit out from the shoulder was a sufficient proof that he was not in his usual mood.

"It wasn't," he said. "I'm going to see about it."

"Where are you going?"

"To the end study."

"But—"

"Come on."

And they hurried into the School House, meeting with some startled stares from the fellows they met. Their faces were spotted and streaked with ink. But Wally little cared for that. He marched straight up to the end study in the Shell passage, and kicked fiercely at the door.

CHAPTER 12.

An Astonishing Resurrection!

KICK!

Bang!

Crash!

"Here, draw it mild," said Jameson. "You'll have a prefect up here soon!"

"I don't care!"

"But I tell you—"

"Shut up!"

And Wally kicked and banged and thumped away right heartily. Wally's face was still pale and strained; the horror of that terrible discovery was still strong upon him. He meant to find out the truth, anyway.

There was a sound of movement within the study.

But the door did not open. The light streamed out from underneath. The Yale lock held the door fast. The New Firm evidently did not intend to open the door.

Bang! Crash! Kick! Bang!

"Oh, go away," came Bernard Glyn's voice from within.

"Open this door!"

"Rats!"

"Buzz off!"

"Take a run!"

"What have you done with Skimmay?"

"We've eaten him for tea."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jameson.

Wally turned upon his chum fiercely.

"What are you cackling about?" he demanded.

"Nothing, only—"

"Then shut up! Help me make a row on the door!"

"You're bringing the whole passage here!"

"All the better!"

Bang! Crash! Bang!

The Shell were crowding out of their studies in blank amazement. Noise was not infrequent in that passage, but Wally's clamour at the door of the end study was a little out of the common. And it was unusual for Third-Form fags to have the nerve to kick up a row in the Shell quarters.

Tom Merry's hand dropped upon Wally's shoulder.

"Here, ease off," he exclaimed. "What's this row about?"

"Lemme alone!"

"That's all very well, but I can't work while you're making this unearthly row," said Tom, good-humouredly. "Chuck it!"

"I'm going in!"

"They won't let you in!"

"They've got to!"

"What's the matter with the kid?" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "What's the trouble, Jameson? What are you fags doing here, anyway?"

Jameson made a grimace.

"Wally says Skimpole's in the study," he said. "He says he's dead under the table."

Tom Merry jumped.

"Dead! Under the table!"

"So he says."

"Look here, Wally, if you begin romancing like this—"

"It's not romancing," said Wally doggedly. "I got in at the window, and I saw him and touched him. He was cold and stiff."

Tom Merry looked startled.

"Blessed if I can make it out," he exclaimed. "Ease off a minute while I speak to the goats in there."

The hero of the Shell knocked at the door.

"I say, kids," he called out. "Is anything wrong in there?"

"Not much," called back Bernard Glyn. "We're all right."

"Wally says Skimmay is in there."

"Rats!"

"He says he's under the table."

"More rats!"

"And that he's dead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You see, Wally, there's nothing in it. You must have made a mistake. If Skimmay were dead in there, they wouldn't be making fun of it."

"I'm going in."

"But you can't!"

"I'm going to."

Bang! Crash! Bang!

Wally was in deadly earnest. Gore suggested slinging him along the passage, but Tom Merry set his foot on the suggestion. Crash! Bang!

"What the dickens is all this row about?"

It was an angry voice. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's came upon the scene, with a cane in his hand.

"What are you doing, D'Arcy minor?"

"Kicking at the door."

"He says Skimmay is dead in the study," said Tom Merry.

Kildare started, as well he might.

"Impossible! What do you mean, D'Arcy minor?"

"I got in at the window, and I saw and touched him," repeated Wally. "He's in there, and he's dead."

"Are you joking, D'Arcy minor?"

"Do I look as if I were?"

"I don't understand this," said Kildare. "If you're joking on such a subject, I'll give you a licking you'll remember."

"Look in the study and see."

"I will."

Kildare knocked at the door. The Shell fellows stood round with bated breath. The door would have to open now; there was no denying the authority of the Head of the Sixth Form.

"Open this door, you youngsters," called out Kildare.

There was an exclamation of dismay inside the study. Kildare rapped again sharply with his knuckles. A key clicked in the lock, and the door swung open. Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn looked meekly at the captain of St. Jim's.

"Yes, Kildare?"

They all three spoke at once, in the meekest possible tone. Kildare looked at them, and looked round the study. There was no sign of a dead body, either under the table, or anywhere else.

"D'Arcy minor says Skimpole is in here?"

"He isn't, Kildare."

"They've hidden him," said Wally.

Kildare entered the study and looked round. Wally was evidently in deadly earnest, and it puzzled Kildare. If Skimpole's body had been in the study, it was inconceivable that the three chums would have concealed it. What did the whole affair mean?

"Has Skimpole been in here, Glyn?"

"No, Kildare."

"Has anything happened to him?"

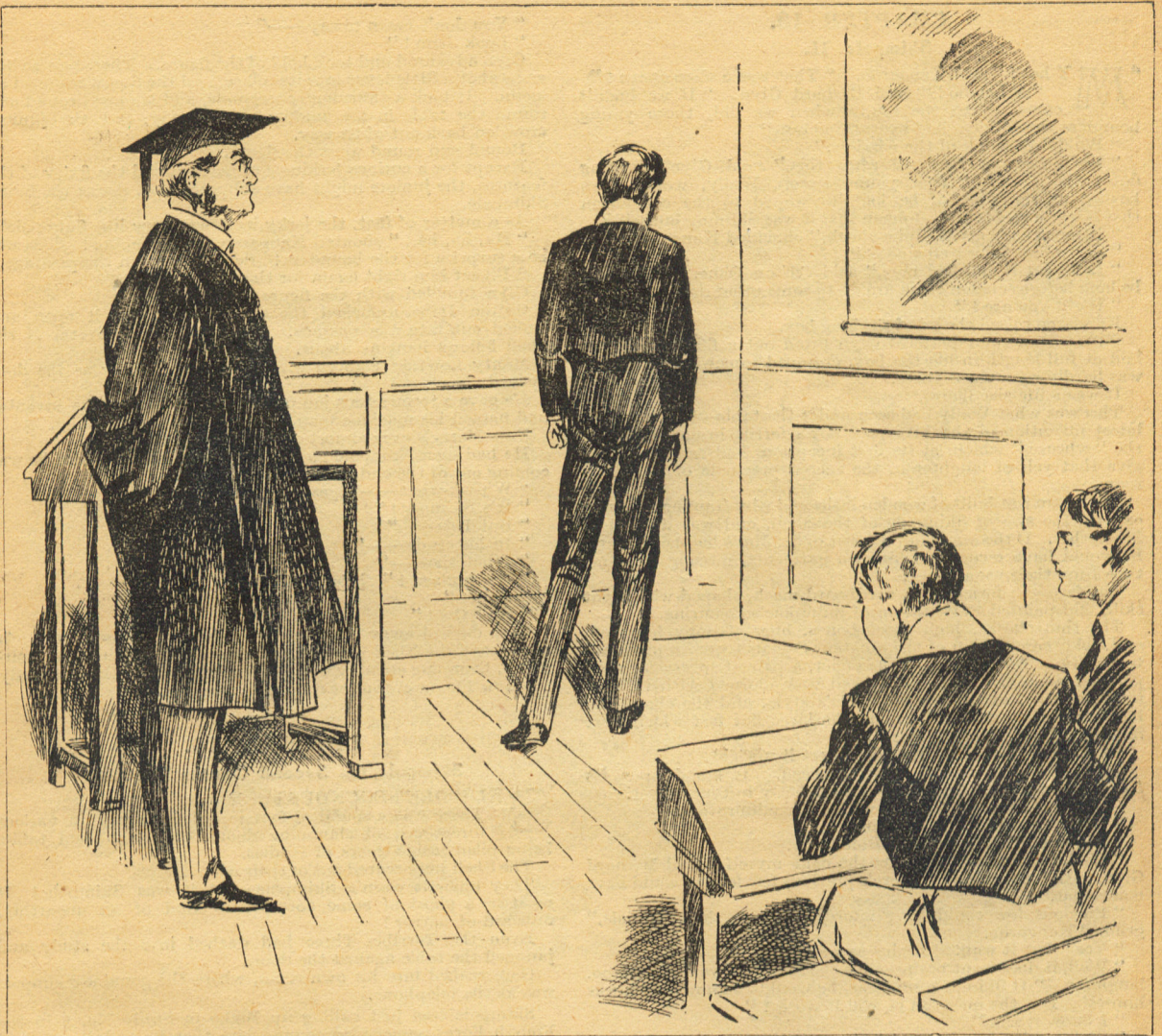
"Not that I know of."

"You have been dreaming, D'Arcy minor," said the captain of St. Jim's, abruptly. "I don't understand you at all."

"PLUCK,"

Now on Sale, Contains

"THE FIGHTING PARSON."



Bernard Glyn slowly turned and walked to the corner. He would not have minded being caned, or even to having a few raps from the pointer, but to be made to stand in a corner of the class-room like a naughty fag in the Third or Second Form was too humiliating.

"They've hidden it. Look in that box."

Kildare made a movement towards the long box beside the bookcase. Kangaroo sat down on it, as if by accident.

"There! They won't let you see into it!" exclaimed Wally triumphantly.

"Have you any objection to my looking into that box, you fellows?"

"Well, you see——" began Kangaroo.

"You see——" began Clifton Dane.

"You see," said Bernard Glyn—"you see, there's an invention of mine in there, and—and I don't want to give the secret away. See?"

"But——"

"My only Aunt Jane!"

It was a sudden and startled exclamation from Wally.

A well-known figure was pushing its way through the crowd in the passage—the crowd making way for it with a buzz of amazement and merriment.

Wally stared at it dumfounded.

For it was Skimpole!

Jameson gave a yell.

"Skimpole!"

"Skimpy!" muttered Wally. "My only Aunt Jane!"

Skimpole blinked at them.

"I heard a disturbance," he said. "It has interrupted my calculations. Is there anything the matter?"

"No," said Tom Merry laughing, "unless you're dead. Are you dead?"

"Dear, me! What a curious question, Merry. No, I am alive."

"Look at him, young D'Arcy."

"He must have been pretending," said Wally dazedly "But he was quite cold when I touched him."

"You touched me! You have not touched me! I fail to comprehend."

"I touched you when you were under the table, here."

"Dear me! I fail to understand! I have not been under the table, there! You must be dreaming, D'Arcy minor. Why should I get under the table?"

"Look here," said Wally wrathfully. "Do you mean to say that you weren't under that table ten minutes ago, when I got in at the window?"

"Certainly not!"

"My only Aunt Jane! What a fearful whopper! Why——"

"You are dreaming."

"It was a case of nerves in the dark," said Jameson, dragging Wally out of the study. "Come on, before Kildare licks you."

Wally thought he might as well. He scudded off with Jameson before Kildare could decide whether to lick him or not. And the crowd broke up, nothing more, of course, being said about looking into the box which Glyn had declared to contain his invention.

Bernard Glyn closed the study door behind the last of the investigators, and locked it, with a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER 13.

Skimpole II.

"MY hat!" said Kangaroo. "That was a close shave!"
 "What-ho!" said Bernard Glyn. "If we hadn't come up to the study when we did, those young bounders would have had everything out."

"We didn't think of the window."
 "We'll keep it fastened after this," said Glyn, drawing down the blind. "That young sweep, Wally, would have bowled us right out if he hadn't jumped to the conclusion that it was a real turtle—I mean that it was Skimmy himself."

"It must have given him a shock," chuckled Kangaroo.
 "Serve him jolly well right!"
 "Let's get it finished now," said Clifton Dane. "It won't be long before some of them are up to some other dodge."
 "Right you are!"

Kangaroo raised the lid of the long box. Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn lifted out a figure that was laid at full length inside the box, cramped somewhat, for there was hardly room for it there.
 It was a life-size figure.

This was what Wally had seen under the table—this was the latest invention of the Liverpool boy's fertile brain—that was the "wheeze" which, at its first inception, had caused him to give that yell of laughter in the sacred precincts of the classroom.

The figure was built of wooden laths and wire framing. It was exactly the size of Skimpole of the Shell, and was dressed in his clothes. If the amateur Socialist of St. Jim's had been there, he would have recognised his own garments, missing for some time from their usual place.

The face was formed of a cardboard mask, shaped with great skill, and painted in imitation of Skimpole's colouring.

The thin cheeks, high cheek-bones, huge, bumpy forehead, and sickly complexion of the amateur Socialist were reproduced to the life. And to add to the effect, a pair of spectacles were perched upon the nose. The head was adorned with tufts of irregular hair, exactly in Skimpole's style, and the shambling figure was there to the life, and the large flat feet which were Skimpole's distinguishing feature.

With many a chuckle the chums set it upright. The figure was wonderfully balanced. It stood upon its feet without the slightest sign of a tendency to topple over.

Cornstalk & Co. surveyed it with great admiration.
 "It's marvellous!" said Kangaroo.
 "Ripping!" exclaimed Clifton Dane.
 "Well, I rather think it takes the cake myself," said Bernard Glyn, with just pride. "There's precious few fellows could have made that."

"Precious few could have afforded to buy the materials," grinned Kangaroo.

"Yes; but it wanted brains as well."
 "Well, it does want brains—like the original," said Kangaroo, laughing. "If Skimpole saw this, he wouldn't know which was himself. But the question is, will it work?"
 "I know it will."

"Well, we've seen it work in the study. But a longer walk—"
 "You'll see."

Bernard Glyn lifted the jacket at the back, and disclosed a key fastened in the middle of the figure's back, between the shoulders. It was something like the key of an alarm clock, which is not detachable.

There was a clacking sound as he wound the key round and round.

His chums looked on with great interest. The clockwork mechanism inside the figure was not the most wonderful part of it. The balancing was more amazing.

Click! click! click!
 Bernard Glyn let the key go at last. The mechanism was wound up to its fullest extent.

"Now, then!"
 "Let her go, Gallagher," grinned the Cornstalk.
 Glyn pressed a button below the key.

The figure moved.
 The right leg was lifted, and slid along the carpet before the other; and then the left leg overtook and passed it.

The figure advanced upon the Australian, who promptly dodged out of the way.

"Great Scott!" he muttered, "It's—it's uncanny! Blessed if it isn't alive!"

"It was dead when young Wally found it," grinned Dane.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The figure strode on. It marched straight into the opposite wall, and stood there, the legs working spasmodically, trying to get onward.

Glyn's eyes gleamed with triumph.
 "There you are, kids!"
 "You can't make him turn round," said Noble, regretfully.
 "That's all you know."

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NEXT THURSDAY:

"THE ST. JIM'S MOTOR-CYCLIST."

By Martin Clifford.

"You don't mean to say—"

"Look here!"

Glyn advanced and took hold of the figure. There was a click as he shot a little lever into its place, and the figure tramped on again. It took a swerving course now, and tramped round and round the table in the middle of the study, and the juniors crowded back out of its way.

Round and round went the figure.

Except for a curious jerkiness of motion, and the fixity of the features, the juniors might have supposed that it was the living Skimpole.

As a matter of fact, the jerky walk was very like Skimpole's.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Kangaroo, "it's ripping! This will be a surprise for the bounders! Send him down the passage."

"I'll set him right again for that."

Glyn fumbled with the figure.
 Clifton Dane unlocked the door. He threw it open and looked out into the passage. There were still several of the Shell fellows hanging about.

Monty Lowther glanced towards the end study as the door opened.

He gave a tremendous jump as Skimpole II., as the inventor had named his machine man, strode out of the doorway.

Tom Merry's eyes almost started from his head. He had seen Skimpole go into his study, and yet here he was coming out of the end room in the passage.

"Wh-wh-what—" gasped Tom.
 "It's Skimmy!"

"But he's—"
 "In his study—"

"What the—"
 "It's a ghost!" shrieked Gore.

"Help!"
 "Oh! Ow!"

Gore dashed away breathlessly. The rest followed suit. In a moment the Shell passage was cleared of all but that weird figure, tramping steadily on. In the doorway of the end study, the New Firm were suffocating with laughter.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole the Second Causes Trouble.

SKIMPOLE SECUNDUS strode on. There was a sound of footsteps dying away in various directions, of slamming doors, of chairs and tables being piled inside doors of studies.

The Shell were scared out of their wits. They knew it wasn't Skimpole—yet it was Skimpole! It must be a ghost of some sort—some kind of an unearthly, unheard-of horror!

Even the Terrible Three had dashed into the study and jammed the table against the door.

Gore rushed into his own room, where the genuine Skimpole was at the telephone.

Skimpole was just calling up Blake in Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, to remind him that he hadn't yet paid up the ten shillings fee.

He dropped the receiver in amazement as the door opened, and he caught sight of the startled face of Gore.

Gore rushed in, slammed the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Then he dragged over the table and jammed it against the door, and piled the armchair upon it with feverish haste.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Skimpole.
 Gore turned upon him.

He ran straight at Skimpole, seized him by the arm, and pinched him hard. Skimpole gave a yell.

"Good!" exclaimed Gore, in great relief.
 "Eh! What?"

"Good! You're not a ghost."
 "Ghost!"

"Yes," gasped Gore, sinking into a chair; "the other chap's the ghost."

"You must be mad. I fail to comprehend. What have you barricaded the door for?"

"The ghost."
 "What ghost?"

"Your ghost! Hark!"
 There was a fresh yell and a scamper of feet in the passage.

Skimpole II. was finding fresh victims.
 While Skimpole I. was vainly trying to understand Gore's terror, Skimpole II. was striding along the Shell passage in solitary state.

He reached the corner of the Fourth Form passage, and came face to face with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy had washed the ink off and changed his collar, and was coming along to demand an explanation at the end study, not being aware of the scene made there by Wally, and its result.

He started as he saw Skimpole II.



THE GREYFRIARS BATTLE! This picture appears on the cover of "THE MAGNET" Library, price one half-penny, now on sale, and illustrates an exciting incident in the school tale, entitled: "Boy Scouts from the Faderland," by Frank Richards.

"Bai Jove, is that you, deah boy?" he exclaimed, jamming his eyeglass into his eye, and surveying the oncoming figure.

Skimpole II. made no reply.

He walked straight on, with a slow and stately stride, and the swell of St. Jim's looked a little annoyed.

"Weally, deah boy, I addresssed you just now."

No reply.

"I wergard it as only the polite thing to take the twouble to weply when you are addresssed, Skimmay."

Still silence.

The figure was brushing past Arthur Augustus now. The swell of St. Jim's stood his ground. He wasn't going to be shoved out of the way like this.

But the figure pushed on grimly.

"Skimpole! Why don't you speak, you ass?"

D'Arcy almost reeled aside, and Skimpole II passed him triumphantly, and after bumping on the wall, curved round into the Fourth Form passage.

D'Arcy's eye glittered behind his eyeglass.

"Skimpole, you ass!"

No answer! Skimpole II. strode on.

"Bai Jove! I wathah think that I'm goin' to teach you mannahs, you uttah wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

And he rushed after the figure and clapped his hand upon its shoulder.

Then he recoiled with a yell.

Under the cloth of the jacket a number of fine points were

arranged, business ends outward, and D'Arcy felt as if he had tried to take up a handful of needles.

"Ow! wow! yow!"

Skimpole II. marched on unheeding.

Blake, Herries, and Digby had left their prep, and were looking out into the passage, startled from their work by the outbreak of noise and the slamming of doors.

Arthur Augustus waved his hand to them.

"Stop him, deah boys,"

"What ho!" said Blake.

Skimpole II. came striding past the study.

Blake reached out and caught him by the arm.

"Hold on," he exclaimed, "Why—what—"

The grasp on his arm had swung Skimpole II. round from his course. The figure came tramping in at the study door. He marched right into Blake, and sent him reeling, and tramped into the study.

"Great Scott!"

"What the —"

"He's mad!"

Skimpole II. tramped right across the study to the fire-place and then appeared to be trying to walk into the grate.

He stood there, with his nose against the clock, tramping upon the fender and fire-irons with a terrific noise.

There were several plates on the fender, keeping sausages and chips warm for the Fourth Form chums when their prep should be finished.

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By
Martin Clifford.

NEXT
THURSDAY;

"THE ST. JIM'S MOTOR-CYCLIST."

CHAPTER 15.
The Secret Out.

Skimpole II. made short work of them. Blake & Co. watched him aghast. They could only think that Skimpole had gone mad. "Right off his rocker," said Herries; "Down, Towser." Towser, the bulldog, was under the table. Towser was not allowed in the house, but Herries often had him there all the same. Towser had a peculiar fancy for sampling the calves of everybody he could get at, and he seemed to consider that he was entitled to his free bite off every person he met.

Herries waved him back as he put his head out from under the table. "Down!" "Gr-r-r!" said Towser. Tramp! tramp! tramp! went Skimpole II. on the crashing plates. "Mad!" muttered Digby. "Great Scott! Better call for help!"

"Bai Jove!" "Gr-r-r!" "Down, Towser! Here, you brute——" But Towser did not stop. He seemed to be exasperated by the proceedings of Skimpole II., and he flew at the thin legs of the mock Socialist. Gr-r-r-r! "Come off, Towsy, old boy." But Towsy old boy did not come off. His big teeth fastened upon the leg of Skimpole II. Skimpole the Second uttered no sound.

He did not seem to be hurt. The chums of the Fourth watched him in utter stupefaction. Towser seemed to be surprised himself. He let go Skimpole II.'s leg, and took a better grip. Still Skimmy made no sound. But the drag on his leg jerked him round again, and he walked to the door.

"Skimmy! Stop, old chap——" "Towser!" "Bai Jove, Skimmy——" Skimpole II. did not even turn his head. He marched out into the passage, Towser still clinging to his leg and hopping along amazedly after him. Skimpole II. marched straight against the opposite wall, and hit it with a crack that ought to have made him yell with pain. But he did not.

Towser dragged at his leg and dragged him round. He strode back the way he had come, and the Shell fellows, who had ventured to peep out of their studies, promptly slammed their doors again.

"My only hat!" gasped Blake. "What's the matter with him?" "Mad, deah boy——wight off his giddy wockah!" "Or hypnotised," said Digby. "Perhaps Clifton Dane's been hypnotising him, you know. He did once before." "Bai Jove!" "That's it," said Herries. "When people are hypnotised they don't feel pain, you know." Blake nodded quickly. "You've hit it. He's hypnotised. Let's get after him and see that he doesn't come to any harm."

"Yaas, wathah!" And the chums of study No. 6 rushed out after Skimpole II. Right along the Fourth Form passage they went, and as they came by the door of Gore's study it opened, and a well-known form popped out. Skimpole had succeeded in inducing Gore to let him open the door at last.

"Bai Jove!" shrieked D'Arcy. "Look!" "Great Scott!" Skimpole blinked at them through his spectacles. "Dear me! what is the matter?"

Jack Blake looked at Skimpole, and then at Skimpole the Second, who was striding on in advance, and he thought his head was turning round.

Digby staggered against the wall. "Then it's not hypnotism!" "It's a g-g-g-ghost!" "Dear me! What——" Skimpole broke off as he caught sight of his double. "Oh!" he gasped.

Towser was tearing at the leg of the unresponsive figure. Skimpole II., yielding to the jerks, swung round, and came striding towards the passage again, towards the startled Fourth-Formers.

They looked at it, and they looked at Skimpole. Then they ran.

It was no wonder! The whole thing was so utterly uncanny, it might have shaken stronger nerves. Skimpole reeled back into his study, and Gore slammed the door. The Fourth-Formers dashed away with thumping hearts.

"Wun!" gasped D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin'!" "Yes, come on, quick!" muttered Jack Blake. And they ran! And after them, in incessant pursuit, came the steady tramp-ing of Skimpole II.

"HELP!" "Wescue!" "Oh! oh! oh!" The Fourth-Formers made a wild break for the stairs. Skimpole II. strode after them. Towser had left off worrying his leg now. A leg that had neither flesh nor blood in it had no interest for Towser. He could not keep on biting at lath and wire.

Skimpole II., undisturbed now by Towser's attack, marched straight on towards the stairs after the fleeing chums of the Fourth.

Blake & Co. went helter-skelter down the stairs. Kildare was coming up, and they rushed into him and carried him away in their flight.

The St. Jim's skipper clung to the banisters. "What on earth——" he begun. "Run! run!" gasped Blake. "Eh! What the——" "Wun like anythin', deah boy!" shrieked D'Arcy; and he fairly jerked the captain of St. Jim's from his hold.

Kildare, willy-nilly, broke loose and went whirling down with them. At the bottom of the staircase he grasped Blake with one hand and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with the other.

"Now, then," he roared, "what does this mean?" "Bai Jove!" "The ghost!" "Are you mad?" "Skimpole's ghost!" "Skimpole again! I——" "Look!" yelled Blake. "There he is!"

Kildare's glance followed the direction of the junior's outstretched finger, up the lighted staircase. At the top the figure of Skimpole appeared. But to the eyes of Kildare he was Skimpole the First.

There was a rapid patter of footsteps in the passage behind him. The danger of the staircase had occurred to Bernard Glyn. The New Firm were racing after the machine man. But they were too late.

Skimpole II. stood upon the top step, still staring straight before him through his spectacles.

Then his right leg advanced over the top step, but did not step downwards. Skimpole II. trod in space—and fell!

A cry of horror broke from Kildare as the machine junior toppled headlong forward. Skimpole II. did not even make an effort to save himself. He fell blindly, helplessly upon the stairs, with a crash that sounded more like wood and tin than flesh and bones. Then he rolled to the bottom.

"Good heavens!" cried Kildare. "He's killed!" Arthur Augustus shook his head. "A ghost can't be killed!" "Ghost! That's Skimpole!" "Skimpole's in his studay, deah boy!"

But Kildare paid no attention to Arthur Augustus. The figure rolled to the bottom of the staircase, and Kildare rushed to it as it lay on the mat.

It lay terribly still! Not a cry had come from Skimpole II. But now a strange sound could be heard from his interior—something like the ticking of a clock.

"Tick! tick! tick!" Kildare hardly noticed it in his horror and excitement. The crash of the falling body had caused several doors to open—boys and masters were hurrying up on all sides.

"What has happened?" cried Mr. Railton. "An accident, sir." "What! Skimpole?" "He's fallen downstairs, sir." "Good heavens!"

Mr. Railton knelt beside the fallen form on the mat at the foot of the stairs. He placed his hand upon the breast of the junior.

Like Wally, in similar circumstances, he felt no movement there, no sign of life. His face went very pale.

"Skimpole!" No answer—no sound save that curious ticking! "He—he can't be dead, sir!" stammered Kildare. "Heavens!" "Bai Jove! It's not a ghost, deah boys, it's solid enough! Bai Jove, there's machinewy of some kind in it, too!"

"My hat!" "This is not a living body," said Mr. Railton, recovering himself. "Dear me! What can this mean?"

"Not—not a body, sir!" "Certainly not." "Is—is—is it a ghost, Mr. Waitton?" "Certainly not, D'Arcy. Don't be absurd!" "Weally, Mr. Waitton——" Mr. Railton rose to his feet.

"It is an absurd trick," he said. "This is a figure made life-size, and made to resemble Skimpole."

"Bai Jove!"

"But it is certainly not Skimpole." Mr. Railton felt over the body. "It is made of some kind of wire framework, padded and stuffed, I think."

"My only Aunt Jane!" yelled Wally, who was one of the first to arrive on the spot. "That's what I saw under Glyn's table."

"Glyn's table!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "Is it possible that this is another of the absurd contrivances of Glyn?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir. It's not a ghost aftah all, deah boys. I am weally vevy much relieved to discovah that it is not a ghost aftah all."

"Great Scott!" gasped Kildare, staring down at the figure. "It's jolly well made, anyway. I took it for Skimpole."

"So we all did," said Blake. "And when we saw Skimmy himself cheek by jowl with it, it was rather startling."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Do you mean to say that this figure actually walked along?" demanded the House-master in amazement.

"Yes, sir; rather. It walked into our study and out again," said Digby. "We thought it was Skimmy all the time, and we thought he was off his giddy rocker—er—I mean, we thought he had gone dotty, sir."

"Amazing!"

"Yaas, wathah, I wegard it as extremely amazin'!"

"Tell Glyn to come here at once."

The New Firm were regarding the scene with some dismay from the top of the stairs.

They had intended to play a great many little "japes" with Skimpole II. before the secret was let out; but the accident at the stairs had knocked their plans in that respect into a cocked hat.

The news of the real state of affairs quickly spread, and while the New Firm came demurely to answer for their misdeeds to the House-master, the scared juniors in the studies unlocked and unbarriaded their doors, and poured out to swell the crowd gathered in the lower hall about the inanimate figure.

Mr. Railton looked sternly at Cornstalk & Co.

"Glyn, did you make this figure?"

"Yes, sir," said the Liverpool lad.

"We helped, sir," said Clifton Dane quickly. "We were all in it, sir."

"What-ho!" said Kangaroo. "It was a case of three of a kind, sir. But it was only a jape. We didn't mean any harm."

Mr. Railton looked at them a little uncertainly.

The latest invention of the Liverpool lad had certainly caused a great deal of excitement, and had been the cause of his receiving a shock. But, as a matter of fact, there was no rule against an enterprising junior making a mechanical figure if he wanted to.

"You caused me a very painful shock by this," he said. "For a moment I thought it was Skimpole who had fallen downstairs."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Bernard Glyn, sincerely enough. "Of course, we never intended him to fall downstairs, sir. We didn't expect him to really turn the corner in the passage, but he managed it."

"I must say that it is very clever, and does your mechanical genius credit," said the House-master. "You must be careful not to cause so much excitement on another occasion; nor do I think it is a good idea to parody the form and features of your

schoolmate in this curious figure. Otherwise, I see no harm in such a mechanical construction."

"Thank you, sir."

"I presume that it is damaged by falling downstairs," said Mr. Railton, "otherwise I should be very glad to see it in action."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured D'Arcy. "I should like to see it in action now that I know what it is, you know."

Bernard Glyn bent beside the fallen figure.

Its light weight and the thickness of the paddings had prevented it from taking any serious damage in its fall down the staircase.

The whirring of the mechanism inside was stopped as the young inventor clicked a lever in its place under the jacket.

"Lend a hand, Kangy," he said.

"What-ho!" said the Cornstalk.

He laid hold of the figure. Between them they lifted it carefully to its feet, and stood it upright. The boys crowded back to make room.

"Is it all right?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Right as rain, sir. Shall I set it going?"

"Certainly."

Bernard Glyn released the figure.

With a slow and solemn tread Skimpole II. marched off down the long hall to the door.

The boys watched it in astonishment, which was equalled by that of the House-master.

Skimpole, who had come downstairs, blinked at his double in amazement.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "This is most surprising. That is where my missing clothes were gone to."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Glyn—"

"Bai Jove, it's more natuwal than life!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jutting his monocle into his eye, and gazing after the marching figure of Skimpole the Second. "It's a great improvement on the original Skimmy, as it doesn't talk, you know."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I vote that we shut Skimpole I. up in the box in the end study and have Skimpole II. in the Shell instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Skimpole blinked at Tom Merry, not knowing whether to take him seriously or not. Glyn followed the machine man, and turned him at the door. Skimpole II. came marching back with regular steps, looking straight before him through his spectacles.

"Amazing!" said Mr. Railton. "I think it would be as well, however, Glyn, to—er—to circumscribe the evolutions of this wonderful figure. I should also recommend you to remove the likeness to your Form-fellow."

"Yes, sir."

And Mr. Railton went back to his study. The New Firm carried the machine man upstairs, followed by a curious crowd.

"So that was the wheeze," said Tom Merry. "That was the deadly secret."

"Yes," said Glyn, laughing; "and a jolly good one, too."

"Well, yes; we'll give you the credit of that," said the leader of the Terrible Three, magnanimously. "It was a good wheeze."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking round through his eyeglass. "Do you know, deah boys, I couldn't have thought of a bettah wheeze than that myself."

And the dear boys cordially agreed that he couldn't.

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY:

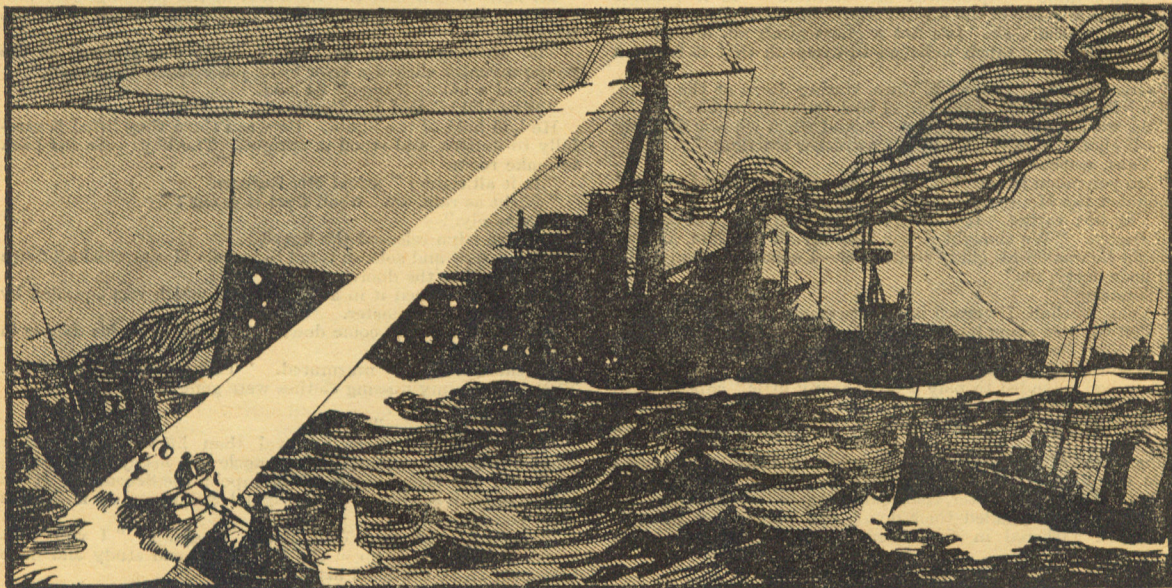
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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz, the German commander. At the time when this instalment opens, Sam and Stephen are on board the old battleship *Challenge*, commanded by Lieutenant Cavendish, who is engaged in a fight with a powerful modern German cruiser. The *Challenge* is terribly battered, and on the Germans' approach to receive her surrender, Cavendish throws out grappling-irons and leads a boarding-party. After a desperate hand-to-hand fight, he reaches the bridge of the German, and rings off the engines.

(Now go on with the story.)

As in the Days of Old!

A bullet whizzed past Cavendish's head from somewhere as he grasped the lever, but he was untouched.

"She's ours! They can't stand up to us!" cried Stephen.

Now the ship was stopped, there was time for a single glance round to see how matters were going. The bridge gave a view over every part of the cruiser's decks, and a stirring view it was. Stephen was right in the cry that burst from him.

Fore and aft, all along the line, the hand-to-hand fight raged. The hordes of men from the poor old *Challenge* were beating back their adversaries, and the German crew, though numerous and well-armed, went down in all directions under the slashing strokes of those short, strong blades with the muscle of Britishers behind them.

Sam saw one of the bosuns of the *Challenge*, a huge ox of a man, cut clean through the stock of a rifle just behind the trigger-guard, and split the skull of the man who had raised it. Many of the bluejackets were down, but for every one there were two Germans lying on the reddened decks, and from end to end of the ship it was the same. So sudden had been the attack that no strategy

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or science could be brought to the Germans' aid. They had to fight it out with steel and muscle alone.

"Come on, let's get down among 'em again!" cried Stephen, mad with excitement, jumping for the ladder.

Cavendish burned with impatience to lead the fight again. The temptation was bitter. But all was going well with the boarders, and his place was on the bridge, whence he could command the ship.

"Take a hand in it on deck, then, you two!" he cried. "I must stay here. Sam, get below with a strong party as soon as ever you can; put a guard over the engine-room and magazine!"

The boys dashed down the ladder and made for the lower deck. Cavendish's voice could be heard hailing through a megaphone (speaking-trumpet) bidding the rest of the *Challenge's* crew remain on her and keep guard, much to their disgust.

As the last of the boarders who were allowed over the side sprang on to the cruiser, Sam dashed to the head of them, and bade them follow him. They needed no second order, for all the ship's company knew the knack and skill of the cadets.

"One last rush and they're ours!" cried Sam. "Come on, lads; drive 'em into the stokehold!"

From his place on the bridge, chafing because he was forced to hold himself back, Cavendish saw that the victory was with his men. In all directions the Germans broke and gave way. Fully half of them were cut down, and in four or five directions the decks were completely cleared. Still they continued to fall, and all those who poured up from below found themselves utterly unable to stay the fierce, desperate men from the crippled battleship.

To use any of the German guns or Maxims was out of the question, so mixed up were the combatants. The deep cheers of the bluejackets and the hoarse cries of the German sailors mingled with the snapping of rifles and the clang of steel. In another two minutes the Germans, fairly broken and cut up, were hemmed in at the bows and stern with no prospect but to die where they stood, or jump overboard. Some of them, panic-stricken before the terrible British cutlasses, did the latter.

Directly the after-companion-way was clear, Sam rushed to it and darted down below, revolver in his left hand, and fifteen or twenty men behind him. Cavendish drew

"THE ST. JIM'S MOTOR-CYCLIST."

By
Martin Clifford

a breath of relief as he saw him go, for the young commander knew Sam could be trusted to do the right thing, and do it swiftly, once inside. He shouted to Elcombe to lead a second party down in support, for the sound of sharp fighting came up the hatchway. And just at that moment the first-lieutenant of the cruiser, now in sole command, and seeing that nothing was left for his men but slaughter if they held out, and that the ship was utterly in the hands of Cavendish's huge crew, he made one last desperate effort to rally the remainder. It failed, and above the din of the fight rose loudly the cry for quarter.

"Throw down your arms!" ordered Cavendish in the German tongue, and his voice rang out above the hubbub. "Let every man drop his weapon, or be cut down!"

"I surrender!" cried the German officer hoarsely, "to save what is left of my men!"

With a ringing cheer Stephen and the bluejackets dashed through the crowd who were still holding out in the stern. Stephen cut the flag-halyards of the poop-staff with a stroke of his sword, and hauled the German colours fluttering down from their place. The cheers of the Challenge's crew rose loud and high.

On every side the German sailors stacked their weapons swiftly and stood disarmed. They had fought a good fight, and more than half of them were down, but to continue the struggle now they were driven apart and cornered was useless. The Challenge's crew were relieved, too, for they had no wish to slaughter brave men in a hopeless struggle. The terrible scene of carnage on the decks was enough to make the fiercest sigh with relief when peace came.

The German first-lieutenant, looking very white in the face, and with one arm disabled by a cutlass blow, walked along the deck as Cavendish came down from the bridge, and tendered his sword to the young Britisher with a trembling hand. It was a strange reversal of events. But twenty minutes before the German captain had demanded the same ceremony from his supposed prisoner. Now he lay dead on his own bridge with a sword-thrust through the breast, and it was his second in command that surrendered to the man who had killed him in open fight. But Cavendish did not as much as touch the sword's hilt.

"Thank you, sir. Keep your weapon," he said courteously. "I don't require that form. You have fought gallantly, and the fortune of war is with us."

"It is so," said the German resignedly.

"I have your word, of course, that no attempt to damage the ship shall be made now she is surrendered?"

The German officer hesitated. He wished he had had time to open the sea-valves and sink her, but that was past praying for now.

"Ja gewiss," he said, with a sigh. "I am in your hands, and will, of course, act honourably. You have my word."

"You are wounded," said Cavendish. "Better get that cut bound up at once, Herr Lieutenant. And now we must get these poor fellows taken below and attended to at once. The surgeons of both ships will have their hands full."

Sam came up from below at that moment, and saluted Cavendish formally.

"I've put an armed guard over the engine-rooms and magazines," he said. "There was a German sub-lieutenant trying to work some gear that looked to me like opening the Kingston valves, or whatever they call them. He tried to shoot me, so I had to do the same for him, but he is not much hurt. The valves are all right; I've guarded 'em."

"Well done!" said Cavendish. "I knew you would do whatever was needed. The ship is surrendered, an' now we must put things straight. These poor beggars are nearly wiped out."

"I say!" exclaimed Stephen. "The Challenge is near her end! She's going fast!"

A hail reached them from the deck of the British ship. Her plight had been almost forgotten in the heat of the fight, but now she was in the extremity of peril. Her decks were settling almost flush with the water, and her bow rising slowly. One glance was enough to show that her end was at hand.

"All aboard here from the Challenge!" shouted Cavendish, springing over on to the citadel. "Pass over the wounded first! Call up the stokehold crew. Quick, for your lives!"

It needed all the smartness of the British crew to tranship their wounded and themselves in time. The whole of the engine-room staff and all the non-combatants were still aboard her.

The stokehold crew came tumbling up from below, where they had been anxiously awaiting permission to leave

their posts, for the water was over the footplates and rising rapidly. Directly they were on deck they helped with a will to hoist aboard the cruiser all those who were too badly hurt to move. And all the while the Challenge was settling rapidly.

The wounded once transhipped, Cavendish ordered all the rest to save themselves as swiftly as possible. To think of taking any kit or belongings was out of the question. For some moments it looked doubtful whether all would escape with their lives. The surrendered remnant of the German crew watched grimly.

"Come on, Bob! She's takin' her last dive!" cried Stephen, the words wrung from him by his anxiety.

Cavendish took no notice. He had no intention of leaving till the last man was off the ship, and so low was she below the German by this time that they had no easy task.

"Take the bridge, Mr. Elcombe!" he called coolly to his subordinate on the cruiser. "Stand to give her full speed ahead, and sheer off to starboard when I give the word. Cast off all chains there, fore and aft, and throw back the grappling-irons!"

Some of the chains had already burst under the strain, but the others were pulling heavily on the German's side as if to drag her down. They were cut away swiftly with chisel and mallet, and Cavendish felt the sinking vessel heave under his feet as she prepared to go to her grave beneath the waters.

He took one last look round, standing alone on the citadel as the foaming waters met over her stern-rail. Then, catching the rope that was swung out to him from the cruiser, he shinned up it nimbly, calling to Elcombe as he did so.

Even before Cavendish gained the deck of the prize the latter was swiftly sheering away and drawing out from the dangerous neighbourhood of the Challenge. The young officer joined his lieutenant on the bridge, Sam and Stephen accompanying him, and, turning, he watched his late command going to her doom.

Shattered and abandoned, the old battleship took her final plunge with grim, majestic slowness. She had fought her last fight, and died with her honours thick upon her. Down went her stern. The massive steel bows sheered right up in the air, showing the remains of the shattered ram which the destroyer's torpedo in Margate Roads had torn off.

As she reared up on end the bodies of the dead rolled from the nearly upright decks and plunged sullenly into the frothy waters around her. It looked as though those who had fought and died aboard her were coming to life and trying to save themselves from the sinking vessel. Then, with a great roaring of pent-up air escaping through her ventilators, she went down stern first, and the sea closed over her for good and all. Her steel masts vanished, and nothing was left save the seagulls wheeling and crying harshly over the tossing waters that marked her exit from the world.

Stephen had turned his head away with a shudder, and Cavendish's face looked drawn and tense. He recovered himself presently, and gave the warrant-officer who was with him a course to steer.

"She's done well," said Cavendish quietly, "and those who were aboard her died with honour. This ship is her prize, and the spirit of the old Challenge will live in her. I'm sorry for the German No. 1 there, for I can understand how he feels."

The officer who had surrendered the ship came forward. His arm was bound up by one of his own men, for he had refused to take up the time of the surgeons while there were men worse hurt than himself; and he had been directing the carriage of the wounded men below, by Elcombe's leave.

"I have yet to learn the name of this ship," said Cavendish. "Will you inform me?"

"The Furst Moltke," replied the officer; "first-class armoured cruiser."

Sam looked round over her great bulk, now that for the first time he had leisure, and drew a long breath.

"My word!" he said quietly. "This beats all I've seen throughout the war! I'd never have dreamed of it! It's Nelson's time come back again. A hundred years of science an' engineerin' swept away in a minute, and nothin' but the strong right arm left to decide the battle."

"An' right enough too!" put in Stephen, with much feeling. "It's a pity there isn't more of it, instead of slaughterin' each other with burstin' shells a couple of miles apart. Only we all thought it was past an' done with ages ago."

"It'll never be done with while we've got the old breed with us," said Cavendish, nodding towards his crew; "though it was chance, and the Germans' cocksureness

that gave us our opportunity. It's the one thing I was hopin' for when I put to sea, though I scarcely dared reckon on it. All we had was men; no guns nor speed, but men. Keep her another point away, quartermaster!"

Cavendish put the navigation of the ship in Elcombe's hands while he made a tour of her, and when he returned he gave orders for the sheeting of those who had fallen in the fight. This sad duty took long, but when finally the last of the departed was sewn in his hammock with a fire-bar at his feet, Cavendish rang off the engines, and the Furst Moltke lay motionless on the sea while the Burial Service was read.

The German ship carried a Lutheran chaplain, and the Challenge had had aboard a young Anglican, who was now with them. The two ministers joined issue, the solemn service was read, prayers offered up, while both ships' companies uncovered and the dead were committed to the deep.

Then, with lighter hearts, the crew took the Furst Moltke on her way, and when another mile or two had been travelled the three young campaigners had leisure to admire their prize.

"She's a splendid vessel," said Cavendish enthusiastically, "as modern and up-to-date as can be. Only launched this year. It's a gorgeous prize to pick up in the way we did, an' no mistake!"

"Can any use be made of her? Do you think it'll be possible to handle her against the Germans?" said Stephen eagerly.

"It's hard to say that. There's no room for making mistakes in naval warfare, and our men'd know nothing of her guns and gear. It's not like handling the Sausage, you know; an' there's no time to get a big crew used to her."

"She must be some use."

"I'd tackle it like a shot if I were ordered. She'd be a lot better to guard the Straits with than the poor old Challenge, even as it is. But if Frankie's ships were here, I doubt whether he'd care to have her manoeuvring with him. Mightn't depend on her, you see. We've got to run to Sheerness and dump this German crew anyhow, an' get fresh orders. Confound the delay!" he added irritably.

"Isn't there wireless telegraphy aboard?"

"Yes; a full instalment. But the Challenge hadn't, so we'd nobody who could work it, nor who knew the code an' system. There wasn't a telegraph aboard, and I don't know it myself. Of course, we can't make the German staff call up the British Fleet; they couldn't do it."

"Besides, they'd sell us, naturally," said Sam. "We shouldn't know what they were telegraphin'. There's nothing for it but Sheerness, I suppose. If— But what's yonder?"

He broke off suddenly, and looked keenly to the north-west. A curl of smoke could be seen over the sea, and a pair of short signalling-masts that looked like those of a war-vessel. Cavendish had the glasses to his eyes in a moment.

"A cruiser!" he said. "And she's one of ours too, by what I can see!"

Cavendish rang for the utmost speed the ship could yield, and she responded. The Challenge's engine-room staff were now in charge, and Mac, foremost among them, had not taken twenty minutes to make himself master of the Furst Moltke's engines, which were very fine ones. The vessel flew along at a good eighteen knots, and rapidly she neared the stranger.

"British, right enough!" said Cavendish. "A second-class cruiser—the *Persse*, I think. But what the dickens is wrong with her? She ain't movin' that I can see, yet her funnels—"

"She's aground, isn't she?" cried Stephen suddenly.

"Yes, she's hard an' fast!"

"By gum, you're right!" said Sam. "The lightship's not there any longer, but that's about where the sand lies."

The boys were right—the British ship was ashore. It sounded strange enough to speak of a vessel being "ashore," since she was so far from any land as to be out of sight of it, for Margate, the nearest point, was thirty miles south. But that fatal shoal, the Kentish Knock, a submerged sandbank lying far out in the North Sea, had picked her up.

"Lucky there ain't any sea running, so she's not likely to be hurt," said Cavendish. "The tide's risin'. We must speak her at once."

"But what are those?" said Stephen eagerly, pointing to three dark lines moving swiftly over the sea towards the cruiser.

"Torpedo-boats!" cried Cavendish, as he saw them for the first time, appearing through the heat haze that

shimmered over the sea, for the British cruiser was yet far distant. "They're going for her! Here, Jackson and Fernes," he cried to two of his best gunners from the Challenge, who had already seen the craft, "man those two Nordenfeldts on the upper deck—quick! Turn 'em on those torpedo-boats yonder the moment you get their range! Mr. Elcombe, have the other guns manned instantly!"

"Are they German boats—are you sure?" exclaimed Sam, straining his eyes.

"German—yes! Can't you see? There go the *Persse's* guns!"

Three quickfirers on board the stranded cruiser began to speak rapidly. It was plain by now that the torpedo-boats were rushing her, and that they had got her in a very awkward fix. She could only bear on two of them.

"They'll sheer off now we're on the scene!" said Stephen hopefully.

But the torpedo-boats did nothing of the kind. Stephen had forgotten that the Furst Moltke was not likely to be taken for a British ship. Her guns were slow in opening, for the Challenge's gunners were not used to them. They were Nordenfeldts, luckily, but their range-finders were quite different to those used in the British Service.

Cavendish ordered every man of the German crew below at once, and had the hatches clapped on them. Below and on deck the Furst Moltke was so well guarded by the numerous hands of the Challenge that there was no fear for her from that source. As rapidly as possible his best hands manned the other guns. Ready as Cavendish always was, the idea of fighting with his newly-won prize had scarcely entered his head. A quick run home into harbour was what he had intended, whereas here was one of his own fleet in sore distress and peril.

Bitterly anxious were the young commander's thoughts as he raced his vessel ahead. Would he be in time? One of the torpedo-boats was beyond, in line with the *Persse*, and could not be fired at. Would the Nordenfeldts never start?

Ammunition had to be sent up in the lifts—there seemed to be none at hand. Cavendish called himself all the names under the sun for his negligence, yet it is not given to any man to master all the details of a captured iron-clad in half an hour.

"They'll get her!" he said bitterly. "She can't move, and I shall be too late!"

The range was still long, and the chances looked ugly for the stranded vessel. The torpedo-boats had a long way to run before they could reach effective range, but the *Persse* was at a terrible disadvantage. Chafing with impatience, Cavendish was wondering whether his guns could make good enough shooting when they did open fire, and every moment he expected to see the *Persse* struck by a torpedo.

To his utter amazement the three torpedo-boats suddenly stopped dead, and, turning swiftly, held off out of range of the *Persse* and lay to. So concentrated was Cavendish's mind on the need of saving her that his usual quickness of understanding failed him.

"Are they afraid of her?" he muttered. "What are they lying-to for?"

"It's us!" cried Stephen. "They take us for one of their squadron; not a doubt of it."

"Of course! What a fool I am!" exclaimed Cavendish. "They know nothin' of the Furst Moltke bein' taken. They reckon we've got the stranded *Persse* safe as a house, an' that there's no need for 'em to go in an' get sunk now. Signalman," he cried hastily, "out with the flags from the charthouse locker, and run up the Fleet code-flag if you can find it! I hope to goodness he can find one near enough to ours!" added Cavendish fervently. "They should have learned an' copied it by now, the Germans!"

"What are you signallin' for?" said Sam, watching the torpedo-boats anxiously.

"Why, we shall have the *Persse* firin' into us else! I wonder the dickens she hasn't already!" said Cavendish.

"Why not have hoisted the ensign?"

"I don't want to bring those wasps of torpedo-boats in again till we're near enough to protect the *Persse*!" said Cavendish impatiently. "They might get her now, if they knew. I don't trust these blessed German guns. Second signal there—International Code—'Be ready to pass hawser!'"

The signalman had already found a copy of the British Navy code-flag in the signal-racks of the wily German, though there were none of the rest of the system. He ran that up at once, and followed it with the message Cavendish gave him, flagged in the ordinary International Code.

"That'll fetch the torpedoes down on us if the beggars have any sense!" muttered Cavendish. "But we ought to

do 'em anyway now! Must let the *Persse* know. Worst of not having our own code here!"

The answering pennant fluttered to the signal-yard of the *Persse*, and an astonished ship was she.

"Boat ready to lower there, and a line!" called Cavendish to Elcombe. "Get that steel hawser laid ready, and another to back it! Now," he added, looking at the *Persse* as they drew nearer, "if I only knew how close I dare go? Won't do to get aground myself—an' we draw more water than she does; twenty foot at least!"

"Twenty? Then you can go within fifty yards of her," said Sam. "I know all the depths round the Knock, an' the watch-buoy's still there for a guide, though the light-ship's gone. The *Persse's* just on the edge, an' the sand's steep-to. She ought to come off with a good haul, now the tide's up."

"I'll try it," said Cavendish, keeping a wary eye on the torpedo-boats, and wondering how long it would be before they rushed him. He was only surprised they had not done it already. "All gunners ready, there! Stand by the hawser!"

"Who the dickens are you?" roared an astonished voice through a megaphone from the *Persse*, as the *Furst Moltke* stopped just out in the deep water.

"Latest addition to his Majesty's Navy!" shouted Cavendish in reply. "Take my hawser aboard, pass a second, ring your engines on when fast, an' we'll have you off in a jiffy!"

"Look out for those torpedo-boats; they'll rush you when you're spotted!" came the answer.

"Does the maniac suppose we don't know that?" said Cavendish in disgust. "Look lively with those hawsers!"

With incredible speed the lines were passed, the steel hawsers winched aboard, made fast to the bits, and stopped down. Then the *Furst Moltke* moved slowly ahead, tightening the steel ropes, and the *Persse's* propeilers churned violently.

Almost at the same moment the torpedo-boats saw or guessed what was in the wind. Their shrill syrens hooted to each other, and they came leaping in to the attack at bewildering speed.

"She's moving!" cried Sam, as the *Persse* began to give way slowly; and his voice was drowned in the drumming of the guns.

"So soon!" muttered Cavendish, as he saw the deadly little vessels move to the attack, at that most critical of all moments. The *Persse* stuck in her place like a rock, and the hawsers thrummed and squealed under the strain. On came the torpedo-boats.

Crash! One of them was blown to fragments as a lucky shell struck her. The *Furst Moltke's* guns sprayed the water all round the remaining two, but still they came on relentlessly.

"Which of us will they get?" muttered Sam.

Both engines were doing their utmost aboard Cavendish's prize and her tow, and the water boiled and foamed between the two great ships, while the three German torpedo-boats came dashing in towards them like cobras making ready to strike.

Only for a moment did the tense anxiety last. The first shots from the *Furst Moltke*, in truth, went so badly astray that it seemed she had no chance of stopping those venomous little foes. But immediately afterwards Cavendish's men proved themselves equal to using the German guns with as deadly effect as their own, and the shells began to strike home.

There was little enough time to spare. Within thirty seconds the attackers would be near enough to discharge their torpedoes, and the two cruisers linked together by the tow-rope could not provide an easier mark. They were caught at the worst possible moment.

"Now for straight shootin', or we're done!" muttered Cavendish.

The *Persse* was the first to score. Her forward guns were going hard, and two four-inch shells from her port fore casemate screamed past the *Furst Moltke* and struck the leading torpedo-boat full amidships. The wicked little craft was blown to pieces, and disappeared in a grey cloud of steam, while a few seconds afterwards the *Furst Moltke's* quick-firers crippled the second, blowing away her funnel, and wrecking her stern and rudder just as she drew within range.

The German craft, swinging round helplessly, let go a torpedo from one of her deck tubes in a desperate effort to strike her slayer. The aim was hasty, but the commanders of the two cruisers had an anxious time as the unseen messenger of death was speeding towards them. A line of bursting bubbles on the calm surface soon showed the track of the missile, and for a moment it seemed to be making straight at the *Furst Moltke's* stern.

The big cruiser was ploughing along at the utmost speed

the tow would allow her. There was an interval of breathless suspense, and then the line of bubbles breaking clear on the farther side beyond the frothy water churned by the *Moltke's* screws showed, to Cavendish's huge relief, that the torpedo had passed between the two ships and just missed.

Meantime, the guns had rattled away swiftly at the third of the trio, and with two small shells clean through her, she suddenly swept round in a curve, seeing the case was hopeless, with both her consorts sunk, and ran for it at her utmost speed.

She was too late. The avenging guns followed her with their hail of missiles, and before the third torpedo-boat was out of range, she was shattered and sent to the bottom, leaving nothing but a greasy patch of ashes and oil on the surface to show where she had gone down.

"There goes the last of them!" said Cavendish grimly. "Thought they had a soft thing on when they caught the *Persse* ashore. I wonder that fellow didn't come on an' take his chance; it's no use turnin' tail once you start a torpedo attack. Mr. Elcombe, convey my compliments to the gunners on their work. They got the hang of those German Nordenfeldts very smartly."

"Very good, sir!"

"And hail the *Persse* to cast off the hawsers. She's well clear of the sands now."

In another five minutes both the cruisers were out of all danger from the Kentish Knock. Cavendish steamed round to see if there were any survivors of the torpedo-boats' crews to pick up, but not one did he find, for the sharp shell-fire had blown the boats to pieces. They had made a terrible mistake—for themselves—in tackling the *Furst Moltke*. Both the cruisers hove-to abreast each other, and the commander of the *Persse* came off in a folding Berthon boat, all regular ship's boats, of course, having been discarded long ago, when preparing for active service.

"Why, it's Nolan!" said Cavendish, as he saw the officer coming across. "I was under him once on the *Severn*, when I was a swotty. Didn't know he'd been shifted."

Captain Nolan came up the side, evidently consumed with curiosity and gratitude mixed.

"What, is it you, Cavendish?" he exclaimed, as the young officer received him in due form. "Well, I owe you my sincerest thanks for helping me out of an infernally tight place. They'd have got us but for you."

"Glad to have been any use, Captain Nolan," said Cavendish cheerfully.

"But what on earth does this mean?" said Nolan wonderingly, looking over the *Furst Moltke* and several of the German crew who were now on deck. "This is one of their big protected cruisers, surely? Are you a prize crew?"

"Yes, that's it," replied Cavendish. And Sam winked at his brother.

"By Jove, what a capital capture!" said Nolan. "She looks hardly damaged. Who put you aboard? What ships took her?"

"We did."

"What!"

"I was sent out on guard duty in the Straits with the *Challenge*—"

"That old rattle-trap!"

"Yes; she was a bit ancient, wasn't she? But I'd plenty of men, you see, a double crew, in fact, an' when this ship shot us to a standstill an' came in rather too close, we boarded her an' took her over. I'm bound to port with her to get rid of my prisoners."

"Great Jupiter!" said Captain Nolan, surprised out of all propriety. "Well, I've heard a lot of you lately, Cavendish, but you seem to be going stronger than ever. This is about as smart a thing as has been done at sea all through the war. So you saw we were stranded, an' came to help us—eh?"

"These confounded sands are a regular death-trap now the lightship's gone, and there's nothing left to mark them. But, by Jove, when I saw you heave in sight—one of the biggest German ships—I thought we were fairly cooked, and there was nothing to be done but fight it out, or sink ourselves to avoid capture. Of course, we thought you were the enemy at first."

"The chief thing I feared was that you'd fire into me," said Cavendish. "It wouldn't have been any wonder."

"I nearly did," said Nolan, with a smile. "I was keeping my broadside till you got close up. But your coming straight in like that, without firing, made me wonder what was up, and, taking a good look at your decks through the glasses, I saw the uniforms of your men, and noted they were British. Couldn't believe my eyes at first. Then your code-flag went up, and the signal, and that put me all right."

"Glad you spotted it. The Germans were more unbelieving than you; they never tumbled to what had happened till they actually saw the signal. Come to think of it, they were most likely in consort with this prize of mine before we fell in with her."

"And they couldn't imagine her changing hands at such short notice," said Nolan, laughing. "Well, you've captured a fine ship, and made one of the biggest scores in the war."

"D'you think she'll be any use to us this time?" said Cavendish eagerly, for he knew Captain Nolan was a man of great experience.

"Can't say. Rather ticklish, I should think, adding a ship like this to our fighting-line, when everything's needed to go without a hitch. We've nobody who knows her, you see. I should say that when she's been overhauled, and some of our own guns put in, and various other things done, she might be very useful—at any rate, for patrol work."

Cavendish looked rather glum.

"The war might be over before she's as they want her, then," he said. "I believe Frankie—Sir Francis, I mean—would use her if he knew, and take his chance. What's happening up North, captain? We can't get any news."

"We're still manoeuvring to bring the Germans to battle, and very slippery they are. We've given them some very heavy jars, but they're working like mad in their own country to get ready two battleships, that were damaged early in the war, and which would make a big difference to them. Nothing will induce 'em to meet us in force till those are ready."

"I should have thought the admiral could manage it."

"He could if they'd face him; but they break up and scatter, and reform again, and do everything to gain time. The admiral's a grand fighting-man, you know, but there's no denying he's slow, though you and I oughtn't to mention it," said Nolan, with a wink. "When he does bring 'em to a fight, it'll be a pukka one."

"Talking of which, I must get back aboard and rejoin my squadron off Lowestoft as quickly as I can. I'm attached to Frobisher's Squadron, and he sent me down here to scout. What with a morning mist and the absence of the lightship, that infernal Kentish Knock nearly did for me. Well, I shall have something to report to him now. What are you going to do?"

"I must take this crew of prisoners to port, and get shut of them as quickly as I can," said Cavendish; "then the cruiser must be overhauled, I suppose, as you say. I wish I could report her to the admiral, and get orders. He might give me a chance."

"I'll report her at once, of course, by wireless," said Nolan. "Haven't you a Marconi installation aboard this German bumboat of yours?"

"Yes; but I've nobody to work it; and, of course, we can't trust the German operator near it now," returned Cavendish. "I say, Captain Nolan, couldn't you set it right for me, and lend me somebody who understands it?"

"Certainly; I'll lend you one of my junior telegraphists. I can't spare more, nor much time, either; but my chief operator shall come off and key up the instruments to our fleet standard for you. After what you did for me it won't be much return."

"If you can do that," said Cavendish joyfully, "you'll have repaid me a dozen times for the little I did. With your leave I'll signal your orders to the *Perse* at once."

In a very short time the Marconi operator of the British cruiser was aboard, and set to work at once to set the wireless telegraph apparatus aboard the *Furst Moltke* in order. Luckily, the former owners had not had time to demolish it, and Cavendish had removed the German operators and put a guard over it.

Captain Nolan's expert soon put it right, keyed it to the proper pitch, and left aboard a competent subordinate to take charge of it.

"Now you're fixed up," said Captain Nolan, as he went over the side. "I'll send my own report off by wireless at once, explaining what's happened, and if the admiral has any orders for you, you may very likely get them direct."

He returned to the *Perse*, which at once leaped away at full speed, bound northward, and the two crews cheered as the ships parted company. A salute was exchanged, and soon the *Perse* was hull down in the distance, and disappeared from view.

Cavendish turned southwards again, and laid his course for the Prince's Channel, leading through the shoals to the mouth of the Thames.

"I don't care if it snows now!" he said cheerfully. "We've made a rattlin' good business of it; and as we're in touch with the Admiral of the Fleet, he's quite likely to give us a job. I can't believe a use won't be found for a fine man-o'-war like this."

"Captain Nolan didn't seem to think so," said Sam.

"He's a bit unenterprisin'," said Cavendish. "These old chaps get a shade too careful an' scientific, to my thinkin'."

"Nobody'd accuse you of bein' unenterprisin'," replied Stephen, with a grin. "What you mean is, Nolan hasn't THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 80.

got your colossal cheek. You've enough to supply an entire fleet."

"Of course, you haven't any yourself, eh," said Cavendish, "you blushing little violet?"

"No; that's why I admire it in other chaps," Stephen retorted. "But hallo, what's gone wrong with the works?"

The *Furst Moltke's* engines suddenly struck work, as if they had received notice from a Trades Union, and the big cruiser slid to a standstill. Word came up through the tube that they had broken down, but that it was not very serious.

Cavendish, chafing at the delay, asked McBrayne to report to him, and presently the engineer arrived.

"What is it, Mac? Shall we be long?" said the young commander.

"A matter o' forty minutes, maybe. I've a puir opeenion o' the way these Dutchmen run their engines, and it's a wonder she hasn't broken down before. But the Challenge's chief is at work on her, so now there's a Christian in charge o' your engines, they'll do, once he's got them running. Though he's but an engine-room artificer, he's a Scot, the Challenge's chief, and a man. Ye might not think it, but I'm fra the North mysel'."

"I thought she was steaming rather base-over-apex when she attacked us this morning," said Cavendish. "Look here, Mac, you're chief in Kennedy's place. Go and take charge, like a good fellow. He's a good man; but engines like these are a lot outside the weight of an engine-room artificer, though they could spare us nothing better for the old Challenge. Mr. Elcombe, please go down and see that Mr. MacBrayne is formally placed in charge. Hustle things up, Mac, for it'll go hard with us if we sight any of the enemy while we can't move."

"I'll tak charge willingly," said Mac, turning to go below. "And I'm thinking Kennedy will no be sorry, either, for it's big work for a man o' his experience. Till now I've been but a looker-on, so to say."

The repairing received a filip when Mac took charge, and Cavendish waited as patiently as he could, keeping a keen look-out for any strange vessel. Luckily none appeared; but though Mac managed to shorten the time for repairs, the *Furst Moltke* was obliged to let go her anchor to avoid being driven on to the Tongue shoal by the tide. By the time she was under full steam again, and had weighed the anchor, the day was closing in.

Hardly was the cruiser in full trim again, when a call upon the wireless telegraphing receiver was announced. Cavendish, eager to know what was being communicated, went to the instrument. The operator Nolan had lent him was busily engaged with it, and Cavendish saw a curious-looking tube with two bright points inside, a stream of sparks buzzing and spluttering between a couple of brass knobs, and a keyed board. He waited a little while the expert attended to it and took notes on a paper form.

Why the *Furst Moltke* Flew No Colours.

"What does it say?" queried Cavendish.

"I can't make it out, sir," was the reply. "The transmission isn't working properly, but it's evidently from the admiral. The only word I can make out, besides his code-sign, is 'Sheerness.'"

For some time they waited, the operator replying with his transmitter; but finally the electric waves stopped altogether, and the only readable words taken down were: "Good—Sheerness."

"You're sure it's from our fleet, and not from any German ship?" said Cavendish.

"Certain, sir," was the reply. "For one thing, they don't know our code, and it's the admiral's private sign."

Cavendish went on deck.

"Means I'm to take her into Sheerness, of course," he said. "Well, I'd reckoned on doing that, but I'm jolly glad to have it from headquarters. Perhaps we shall get some orders that'll make us sit up, if the beastly thing will only work."

"If the admiral thinks she can be used to patrol the Straits, it'll be something," said Stephen.

"Hang it all, she must be better than the old Challenge, for any sort of job. We're still goin' pretty slow, I see. Mac's engine's not quite fettled up yet, no doubt. There's the Ooze buoy, anyhow, and Garrison Point's in sight."

"They'll wonder who the dickens we are," said Sam. "Suppose the forts open fire on us?"

"We'll show 'em who we are! There have been no colours hoisted since your young brother pulled down the German flag. Mr. Elcombe, bid the signalman get out a white ensign, and hoist it at the poop-staff. She is an H.M.S. now, and she shall wear the colours!"

There was a short interval, and Elcombe brought the rather surprising news that no white ensign was to be

ound. The flag of the King's Navy did not seem to be in the Furst Moltke's collection.

"How on earth is that?" said Cavendish. "Well, then, run up the reserve flag."

But there was no blue ensign either. Not even the "red duster" of the Merchant Service to boot.

"I think I can explain," said the German first lieutenant of the cruiser, who was, of course, at liberty, and on parole. "Our captain would never carry any British colours in his flag-room."

"Why on earth not? Surely the rules require you to carry flags of all nations in the ships of your Navy, don't they?" said Sam.

"Doubtless, Herr Commander, but it was a boast of our captain from the start of the war that he would carry no British flag till he had taken one from a British warship, which he vowed would not be long."

"Ah!" said Cavendish drily, and said no more on that head. It was strange to hear of such a resolution now that it had fallen out just the other way round, but he did not want to give pain to his prisoner.

"Order the signalman to make a full-sized white ensign from the bunting in the flag-room as quickly as he can," said Cavendish. "And take as much help as he needs."

"Won't a signal be good enough, if you fly it at the fore-yard, so the forts can see?" said Sam.

"This ship," said Cavendish, "was taken on the high seas, an' she goes into Sheerness with a British flag of our own making, or I'll eat her."

"Quite right, skipper!" put in Stephen. "You're a soulless brute, Sam."

"I'm not sentimental, but that idea just gets me where I live," said Cavendish; "an' I'll rejoice to see what sort of a twelve-foot flag my handymen'll make. I'll take you a small bet it's ready in thirty minutes."

The flag was soon under way, and progressing rapidly, the signalman and a boat's sail-maker cutting out the long sheets of bunting, and stitching them up deftly. Meanwhile, the Furst Moltke had entered the channel of Oaze Deep, and was fast approaching the mouth of the Thames.

"The old Sausage was very well in her way," observed Cavendish. "We saw a lot of sport in her. But you can do a heap more with a ship like this; an' if we only get the chance—"

"Three vessels coming up astern, sir, just in sight," said Elcombe, walking down the bridge, and pointing seaward.

Cavendish turned and eagerly focussed a telescope on three hulls on the horizon, each with a long trailer of smoke streaming aft.

"By Jove!" said Stephen. "Ironclads, d'you think? Lucky for you they didn't turn up when our engines were crooked, eh? That is if they're Germans. Are they?"

"Can't quite make 'em out yet," said Cavendish. "Ring the engines to dead slow, Mr. Elcombe. We'll wait and see. There's a foreign cut about them. No," he added a moment later, "they're not ironclads, anyhow, but steamers—precious big ones at that!"

"More of the armed raiders—the Mary Anns?" suggested Sam.

"Don't look it to me. They're coming in for the Thames at a rare rate. They're fast merchantmen," he continued, after a long pause. "Three or four thousand tons apiece, at the very least, and all holding together."

In a very little while the boys' glasses showed the strangers more plainly. They were great, powerful freight-steamships, of the largest size; their red, rust-flaked sides and high fore-castles making them loom high.

"Aren't they shoving 'em along, too?" said Stephen. "Hallo, they're slowin'—they've stopped!"

As if checked by a rope tied to them, the three big steamers came to a halt, still a long distance off to the eye unaided by glasses, and appeared undecided.

"They've spotted us!" said Sam.

"They're Germans!" exclaimed Cavendish. "Nothing else, by the build of 'em. By gum, they're German transports carryin' stores for the Kaiser's army—probably food. Mr. Elcombe, stop her dead! Keep her just breasting the tide."

"But what brings them in here?" cried Stephen.

"To take stores to Thames Haven, of course! They've taken advantage of our squadron's bein' away up North, an' not a single vessel spared to keep 'em off the Thames except a hulk like the Challenge. They're sent to make a flyin' dash across from Antwerp, for you can bet Von Krantz'll be jolly glad of full supply an' reserves for his men. We've stopped that game lately, but here's the chance come back."

"They've winded us, an' stopped, though!" exclaimed Sam. "Now they see us here they funk it. Aren't you going in chase, Bob? It's odds we don't catch 'em now, with the distance they are away. They look chippers, too."

"But they haven't turned!" cried Stephen. "They're comin' on again!"

The three steamers, as he said, had leaped into their stride again, and were heading once more for the Thames mouth, straight towards the Furst Moltke.

"Mr. Elcombe," said Cavendish quietly, "send all German prisoners below, please, and keep them there. Don't let one remain on deck. Gun-crews, stand by!"

"What are they up to?" Stephen exclaimed wonderingly. "Why, they must be English ships, after all. They're coming straight up!"

"You chump!" said Sam. "How long is it goin' to take you to learn what we are? Do we look like a British ship, d'you think? There'll be German fleet men aboard those steamers, and you don't suppose they wouldn't know the Furst Moltke when they see her!"

"My aunt!" said Stephen. "They suppose this ship holds the Thames mouth, and is here to escort 'em in, then! They'll be running right into our jaws, an' we sha'n't even need to chase 'em! Unless they find out in time what the matter is—"

"Blackwell!" called Cavendish.

"Yes, sir," said the signaller, coming out of the flag-room with part of a huge, nearly finished, white ensign in his hand.

"How are you getting on with that flag?"

"Won't take long to finish, sir, now."

"Ah, well, don't hurry unduly over it! Do you see, Blackwell? Keep on working, of course, but you need not break your neck about it. I don't want to tire you."

"No, sir," said Blackwell, looking rather astonished as he went back to his work.

Stephen grinned.

"Of course," remarked Cavendish, keeping a wary eye on the still approaching steamers, "I've never sailed under wrong colours, and very seldom without showing any colours. I don't like it. But it's very unfortunate there's no British flag aboard, because I'm afraid these steamers are makin' a mistake, and takin' us for Germans."

"What a pity!" chuckled Sam. "And we can't even show 'em what an error they're makin'."

"You'll bear me out it's the fault of the late German commander, and not mine," said Cavendish, with great gravity. "He refused to carry British flags at all. I've very much fear he's let in those steamships for rather an awkward fix by doin'-so. And it really seems as if that slow-coach Blackwell won't have the new one ready in time to show 'em before they get too near to escape."

"Right!" said Stephen. "But aren't you troublin' yourself unnecessarily, old boy? I thought it was the thing to keep yourself dark, an' let the enemy make mistakes if they choose, anyhow."

"The case is a bit different now we're sailing on a prize," said Cavendish. "I don't like takin' people in deliberately; an' it isn't the same with merchantmen," he added, his eyes twinkling. "But, at the same time," concluded Cavendish, his face growing harder, "the people of London are starvin' for want of what's aboard those steamers, an' I'm to take all three of 'em, an' send 'em up the river for a present, and at any cost."

"You bet!" said Stephen. "Finished the flag yet?" he added, with a wink, to a bluejacket who came out of the bunting-room.

"No, sir," said the sailor, with a grin. "Blackwell's been an' sewed the last seam all wrong, an' he's got to unpick it."

"The signaller's tumbled to the blessed situation," said Sam.

"Catch a bluejacket not spottin' a wheeze like that!" replied Stephen. "But I shouldn't like to be all tied up with rummy scruples like you, Bob."

"He ain't much tied up with 'em that I can see," said Sam. "Blackwell's unpicking 'em for him—stitches and scruples, too. My only aunt, but just look at those three bee-yootiful steamers simply racin' down to us! They're in luck to fall in with one o' their Navy's strongest men-o'-war to escort 'em to their port. All their troubles are over now."

"Lucky for them the Persse didn't happen on 'em—eh?"

"Yes, and for us, too. Are they never goin' to pull up? No; they take us on trust all the way. They'll be aboard us in a minute, at this rate. Look at 'em signallin' like mad! Aren't you goin' to reply, Captain Cavendish?"

"They're usin' private code or German Navy signals," said Cavendish. "We can't read those. But it'd be uncivil not to answer, an' if we can make 'em happy by showin' 'em a few flags, here goes! Blackwell, run up a string of pennants an' burgees—any that come first to your hand. Look sharp! They might get uneasy if we don't welcome them."

"I'd give a ward-room lunch to know what those mean, if they mean anything," grinned Sam, as the string of

flags—put on anyhow, just as Blackwell took them from the racks—fluttered smartly up to the signalling-yard. "Give 'em something to think about. Have they no eyes, that they don't spot us?"

There were more grins than gravity aboard the Furst Moltke as the three transports came up so unsuspectingly. The crew had seen some hard fighting recently and abundant bloodshed. They appreciated a pleasant little victory like this for a change, without noise, fuss, or dead men. The big steamers looked so fat, so well laden, so smugly pleased with themselves. All danger, they thought, had been left behind on the high seas. They steamed up the fairway to the Thames as if they owned it.

On the captured cruiser few men were to be seen. Cavendish did not unduly show off his bluejackets in their British uniform, as yet. He thought there would be time enough for that, and he kept them in the casements or below. Not a single one of the prisoners was in view. They might have given a natural touch to the illusion, certainly; but then Cavendish thought they might try to signal the danger to the transports in some way. It was what he would have done in their place, and he sympathised with their feelings. It would be unpleasant to have to shoot them for doing it.

Even Cavendish was surprised at the slapdash way the steamers came on. They had long been within easy reach of his guns, and he was sure of them now. His "spoof" signal was sent up merely to gain a little more time, and give them something to think about, for to leave theirs unanswered would create suspicion at once. He knew that as soon as they saw his reply meant nothing they would realise their error; and so fast had they steamed that they were actually almost within hail.

The string of mixed-up signal-flags did it. Cavendish smiled grimly as he saw the transports, a minute later, suddenly check themselves and go full speed astern. They looked like a troop of deer that suddenly find themselves within striking range of a tiger. The Furst Moltke—a few hours ago the pride of the Kaiser's Navy—was in the hands of the British, and with British crews behind her guns! At last they realised it.

The great cruiser had swung gradually round, and now she leaped forward with a rush, coming within speaking distance of the steamers, which were each a length apart. The Furst Moltke fired a shell across the bows of the leader, and Cavendish clapped a megaphone to his lips, and roared through it in German:

"Transports aho! Heave-to, and surrender, or I'll blow you out of the water!"

The consternation and panic aboard the laden steamers could be seen plainly. Their skippers cursed frantically in German, undecided what to do for the moment. The hindmost transport, circling round, made a vain attempt to run for it.

In an instant two shells crashed through the iron bows of her, high up near her hawse-holes. It did her no great harm, for Cavendish had no wish to damage her; but it had the effect of showing her the folly of trying to escape, and her captain instantly stopped her and signalled his surrender. All three lay waiting and terrified as the Furst Moltke steamed slowly past them.

"How was dot ship come into British hands?" roared the skipper of the leading steamer, with rage and astonishment.

"You'll hear all about that in time, if you're lucky," returned Cavendish, through the megaphone. "You and your consorts are my prisoners! Remain hove-to while I send my prize crews aboard you; and remember that on the least trick you attempt to play me I shall rake you fore and aft with shrapnel!"

The transports understood. Away went the Furst Moltke's boats, as swiftly as they could be launched and manned, and as they pulled across the water the big cruiser kept her guns trained menacingly on the captured ships. Their skippers knew better than to throw away the lives of themselves and their crews.

Cavendish had abundant men to spare for such duty, and he sent a full prize crew on board the leader first, under Elcombe. The other two were then boarded by armed guards, under warrant-officers, who took charge. In a very little while Elcombe, after making a brief inspection, hailed the cruiser, and his report was confirmed from the other ships.

"Crammed to the hatches with grub, sir! She's simply bursting with provisions and rifles and ammunition. There must be three thousand tons of freight, at least!"

"Excellent!" cried Cavendish. "Sam, this is where you score. Before any interferin' chump can put his oar in, we'll present two of these cargoes to your pal Mulholland for the League of Britons."

"Bob," said Sam, his eyes glistening, "I wish I'd a dukedom to give you. You should have it on the spot. It's the one thing the league needs to win."

"Pass forward there!" cried Cavendish to the leading steamer. "Advance at half speed, all three, in line ahead. Remember, I'm behind you, and shape your course past Garrison Point."

And, to the utter amazement of Sheerness and its garrison, the Furst Moltke steered into the harbour, with a ready-made white ensign flying proudly from her poop-staff, driving before her three laden German transports, and saluted the fort as she picked up her moorings off the Lapwell Bank.

The Wrath of the Port Admiral.

Hardly had the Furst Moltke swung to her moorings when the shore, all along the sea-wall, was lined with crowds of people from Sheerness, and tremendous cheers came echoing across the water. Every house and pole rapidly became gay with flags. The enthusiasm was immense.

"If there was a band," said Stephen cheerfully, "I suppose they'd be strikin' up 'See the Conquering Hero Comes,' or some flappedoodle of that sort. Eh, Bob? Don't you feel gratified?"

"Those three tanks full of grub are gratification enough for me," returned Cavendish, pointing to the captured steamers which had anchored just outside him. "But they've read the signals ashore, evidently, an' if they're feelin' pleased—why, everybody's happy. Here comes the almighty Fenwick, who's actin' as Port Admiral."

"He don't look particularly pleased," said Sam. "There's a frown on his august brow," he added, watching the officer in the stern-sheets of a boat that was putting out from the dockyard. "I don't cherish that chap much."

"Doesn't like to see anybody else prosperin'," remarked Cavendish. "He was fairly rude to me last time I was here."

"Beastly little Jack-in-office!" growled Sam. "However, he can't well be anything but civil now."

It remained to be seen whether Sam was right. The boat pulled alongside, and Fenwick, who had been away when the Challenge sailed, came up the side with great dignity. Cavendish received him with all due formality.

"I wish to know, sir," said the official, "why you failed to salute the colours at the fort when entering?"

Cavendish was rather taken aback by this. He did not expect it at such a time.

"I dipped my ensign when I came in, sir," he said.

"You did not do so till you were past the fort, sir! I will not have this slackness. Understand that! Now, sir, your report, please. Where is the Challenge?"

"At the bottom of the Channel," said Cavendish politely.

Then envy and malice of Fenwick were plain enough to see. He was a "shelved man" himself, having been relieved of his command for running his ship ashore in fair weather, and was now dockyard superintendent at Sheerness since the retaking of the town from the Germans. By virtue of his former rank he was temporary commander of the port, and being a man who hated to see others succeed, such an exploit as Cavendish's, on the part of a youngster only half his own age, filled him with disgust.

"At the bottom of the Channel! Is that a proper fashion to announce the loss of your ship?" exclaimed Fenwick viciously. "Go on, sir! How did this disaster happen?"

"I don't think it's much of a disaster, sir, as we took this cruiser after she'd sunk the Challenge; and we captured those three transports off the Girdler Light. But I thought I had signalled that news to you while approaching the harbour."

"I am not satisfied with such a report, sir. I require fuller details," said the Port Admiral, with a snort. "In the meantime, what is that thing you are flying from the poop-staff?"

"That is a white ensign, sir," replied Cavendish; while Sam muttered something, under his breath, about kicking the Port Admiral over the side.

"White ensign! It looks more like part of the lower deck laundry, sir."

"It was made rather in a hurry," said Cavendish patiently, "as there didn't happen to be one in the German's flag-room. I don't consider it a bad one, sir, myself."

"You don't consider! Who the deuce asked you, sir, what you considered or what you didn't! Be good enough to—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Elcombe, saluting Cavendish; "commanding officer of the Sheerness forces alongside."

"By gum, it's Colonel Blake!" exclaimed Stephen, as he looked over the side and saw the military officer boarding from a launch. The colonel came up the gangway, saluting Cavendish and Fenwick, the latter looking very displeased at the interruption. There could not have been a greater contrast than the keen, bluff-looking colonel made to the sour-faced Fenwick.

"Glad to see you, Cavendish," said Colonel Blake. "Heartiest congratulations. Here's a telegram for you from the Admiralty; another for you, Commander Fenwick."

He handed an official envelope stiffly to the port commander, who opened it and turned green as he read it. Cavendish tore his open, and flushed with pleasure. It ran as follows:

"Admiralty congratulate smart capture Furst Moltke and transports. Lieutenant Cavendish to retain command advanced brevet-rank captain. Prepare for sea, and open wireless communication with Admiral Howard. Act at once upon his instructions. Captain Cavendish also full authority as port commander while at Sheerness. "VERNINGHAM."

"It's from the First Sea Lord," said Cavendish. "Colonel Blake, you bring me great news."

"How did this arrive, and when?" said Fenwick, stammering with anger; for his telegram bade him give up his port authority and take charge of the dockyard only. "How could it get here so soon? And what is the meaning of it?"

"It came by wire to the Fort, before Captain Cavendish had even anchored his ship," said Colonel Blake coldly; "and I gather that it means he is in full command here, of all outside the land forces, and that you return to your work at the dockyard."

Fenwick's look of disgust almost made the brothers snigger aloud. He turned to the colonel, opened his mouth as if to speak, thought better of it, and then shut his teeth like a rat-trap and stamped down the gangway into his boat, omitting even to salute Cavendish.

"Good riddance!" murmured the colonel, under his breath. "Cavendish," he added aloud, gripping the young officer's hand, "let me be the first to congratulate you on your promotion. By gad, sir, it's the finest piece of work I ever heard of!"

"Oh, it was largely luck, colonel," said Cavendish, "and having a first-class crew at the back of me! But how in the world did the Admiralty get to hear of it so soon, and how was this telegram returned?"

"That's soon explained," said the colonel, with a half smile. "I read your signals from my station at the Fort while you were steaming towards Sheerness, and I saw they announced you had captured this ship, and the laden transports as well."

"So, having my telegraph-clerk with me, I wired off immediately to the Admiralty direct. Their quarters are now at Wimbledon, you know, and we connect with them. I knew that little bouncer Fenwick would waste time, and probably make himself unpleasant. He's put all our backs up here, and is quite incompetent; in fact, they're very sick of him at headquarters. The First Sea Lord was there, received my wire, and replied at once. "You're now the right man in the right place, and Fenwick is back at his job in the dockyard."

"I can't feel any great pity for him," said Cavendish, "for nobody could have made himself more confoundedly unpleasant. I hardly believed my ears when he started ragging me about not having dipped my flag soon enough. Well, I'm greatly obliged to you, colonel."

"All I wanted was to see somebody in charge who's fit for the job," said Blake. "It would have been heart-breaking to see that useless little bouncer bullying a better man than himself. Veringham knows me, so he acted on my report. We don't forget what you've done for us here, Cavendish, or your young friends, either," he added, turning to the brothers and shaking hands with them heartily. "You've seen some rough service, young gentlemen, since you took the news through the German lines from Shorlands, when we were fighting Von Weisshaus."

"Nothing much, sir," said Sam; "one or two small jobs that fell in our way, but Cavendish has done the real work. What have they done about the Kaiser's station at Boleyn Hall?"

"Surely you've heard about that! One of our cruisers put in and blew the place to pieces from the Thames with her big guns. It was a five-mile range, but she got it all right. Must have astonished 'em. Probably the Kaiser and his staff cleared out before much damage was done; but he's got to find new quarters now," chuckled the colonel; "and he won't get such useful ones again. Yes, we've heard all about it down here. Anything I can do for you, Cavendish?"

"Thank you, colonel; if you could take charge of my prisoners for me as soon as I've dumped them ashore, I should be glad."

"Of course, I've got to do that. I'll send word ashore for a couple of companies of the Bedfords to meet an' take charge of them. We'll quarter them all in the Old Fort."

It'll be a bit of a strain on our resources, feeding them, though," said Blake rather anxiously.

"I'll land you a store of provisions to make up for it. There's a few thousand tons in the transports."

The work of getting the prisoners ashore was begun at once, and carried out smartly. The wounded were taken off first, both British and German, and placed in hospital. Then the rank and file were put in the care of Colonel Blake's men, and decent quarters found for them. The Furst Moltke's first lieutenant and the other officers, being on parole, were not placed under any restraint, and Colonel Blake invited them to be guests of the mess ashore, which they gladly accepted. Cavendish took leave of the first lieutenant with every courtesy.

Mac Brings Bad News.

"I can feel for that chap," he said, when the German officer had gone. "It's jolly hard on him, losing a ship like this."

"He didn't exactly lose it. Her captain did that, an' he's dead," said Stephen.

"Then he's the luckier man. If it ever comes to my lot to lose a man-of-war and her crew to the enemy, I hope I mayn't survive it. I'd rather die three deaths."

"Well, don't let's get sentimental," said Sam, for he saw Cavendish felt strongly on the subject. "What about those fat transports yonder? I suppose," he said, with a sigh, "the blessed Admiralty'll collar them."

"I've had no orders about that," said Cavendish. "I nabbed 'em myself, and I shall stick to my word an' hand one of 'em over to you for Mulholland and his League of Britons."

"It's awfully good of you," said Sam, flushing; "but won't you get into a row about it? Suppose they order —"

"You forget I'm the port admiral of this mud-puddle, just appointed," said Cavendish, with a grin; "an' the vessels in it are under my orders, prizes included. We'll take an inventory of those three steamers, an' I shall send 'em where they can do most good. A couple are wanted by the starvin' folk of London, and Mulholland'll make the best use of the other, with her arms and ammunition as well."

Both the boys were delighted at such a lift, for they both had the interests of the league at heart, and hoped to join it before long. All the German sailors were soon cleared out of the ships, a full examination of the cargo-books—which were in excellent order—was made, and Cavendish telegraphed to the mine-stations and defences up the river, bidding them expect the vessels. On the very next tide he sent all three steamers off, with enough men to look after them, and an engineer apiece for the short journey. They were despatched to the Surrey Docks, and Mulholland's agents were notified to take charge of the largest, which carried the rifles and ammunition.

"I don't think the Admiralty will interfere now, even if they send fresh orders," said Cavendish.

"A port admiral's no small potatoes," grinned Stephen.

"Come to think of it, my authority covers all the salt water up to London as well," said Cavendish; "but you needn't think I fancy the job, my giddy cadet. The sooner I'm quit of it the better, for what I want is to find a use for this fine new cruiser of ours. She may be a Dutchman, but there must be some good in her."

"You're in direct communication with Lord Howard, the Admiral of the Fleet, aren't you?" said Colonel Blake, who had rejoined Cavendish.

"I wish the dickens I was," said the young captain. "Accordin' to the Admiralty I am, but this wretched wireless installation of mine is out of tune, and I can get no proper message. The admiral's a couple of hundred miles away, and his message reached my receivers, but only a word or two could be made out. I think that young telegraphist, who is the only one Nolan could spare me, is hardly up to his job."

"I can lend you a first-rate man, if that's all," said Colonel Blake. "We have three ashore, more than we need; and though we've a wireless installation, I can't communicate with Lord Howard, because we've not been allowed his private fleet code. But you can put it in the hands of my man, to work aboard here, and keep him."

It was exactly the thing Cavendish wanted, and he thanked his stars again for Blake's presence. He was itching to get some sort of a commission from Admiral Howard, fearing the cruiser might be "shelved," and when the telegraphy expert arrived, and announced, after a trial, that he would be able to take messages accurately, all on board the Furst Moltke rejoiced.

"How is it the Admiralty don't give you orders direct?" said Sam.

"Not they. All the fightin' fleet's in Howard's hands, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 80.

and you can't have two people handling it. The Admiralty won't put their oar in, they'll leave it to him. I hope we hear soon, whether I'm to go or stay."

Meanwhile, Cavendish was anything but idle. In addition to his own crew, half of whom now needed a rest badly, and got it, he pressed into the cruiser's service nearly all Fenwick's dockyard hands, much to that official's disgust. Cavendish was now senior to Fenwick, who therefore had to obey orders. The Furst Moltke was rapidly being licked into shape according to Cavendish's ideas, which were distinctly different to German ones. He kept the Nordenfeldts and quickfiring, for which there was plenty of ammunition, and which his men were quite able to handle. But the bigger guns in the barbettes were a problem, for cartridges were running short for them.

"She'd have been able to get a fresh supply from her fleet store-ships at sea," said Cavendish, "but we can't, an' there are no shells in England for this type of gun, either."

"Wireless message, sir," said the telegraphist's orderly, bringing it to him transcribed on a paper form.

"From the admiral, by Jove!" exclaimed Cavendish, opening it. "Two hundred miles north!"

"Mount 4.7 guns from Irex (stop) four six-inch guns coming from Woolwich mount in your barbettes (stop) coal and be ready proceed instantly to sea on receipt orders from me (message ends)," ran the instructions.

"Excellent!" cried Cavendish joyfully. "Orderly, bid the telegraphist reply, message received and orders being carried out!" He turned to the boys. "This is great! He means to use us, after all. Mr. Elcombe, take a tug to Chatham at once, strip the Irex of her 4.7s, and bring them down here with all speed. Take all the men you want."

"What's the Irex?" said Stephen.

"Second-class cruiser, crippled in action, and shelved. I never knew she'd been taken to Chatham. Her guns'll be just the thing. An' those six-inch ones from Woolwich—that's better still! I'll find a way to fit in these barbettes, or I'll eat 'em!"

"Lord Howard must have telegraphed to Woolwich, then! He's in communication with 'em!" said Sam eagerly. "This looks like real business! He wouldn't fit us out like this if he hadn't a big use for us!"

"I've coaled already!" said Cavendish, for the emptied lighters were on their way back to shore. "All we need is the guns now, and they ought to be down from Woolwich this next tide! It'll be an all-night shift fitting 'em!"

"Won't you go into dock, to do it?"

"No fear! Mightn't be able to get out again when we want to, an' I mean to be ready for the admiral's call even if it comes the minute the guns are aboard. Not goin' to take any chances of delay, you bet! There goes Elcombe—brisk youngster that—he's backin' me up well!"

Busily the work went on, and in two hours Elcombe returned from Chatham, and the four 4.7 guns were hoisted aboard the Furst Moltke. With the help of the best of the dockyard-men and a couple of gun-mounting experts

Elcombe had brought from Chatham, Cavendish set up the guns so that they would work thoroughly well in the German casements, to his great delight.

"They're even better!" he said to Sam. "They'll be able to shoot much straighter downwards, if needed, than the German guns did. See how they lie. Those six-inchers ought to be arrivin' from Woolwich soon! Hallo, Mac, what is it?"

"I'm sayin'," said the Scots engineer, coming forward, "d'ye ken there's two plates buckled on this ship, half-way down her bilges, under water?"

"What!" cried Cavendish. "Is the damage serious? Surely it can't have hurt her armour?"

"Na, na, waur than that. It's under the armour-belt, right under water, an' next the King-ston valve."

"My word!" said Cavendish. "D'you mean she can't go to sea?"

"I wouldna' go so far as to say that," replied Mac, with exasperating slowness, "but it's hard to tell the extent o' the damage from inside. Ye'll just have to dry-dock her, or else send a diver down to examine the place."

"Then it'll have to be the latter!" said Cavendish. "To put her in dry-dock would mean takin' her to Chatham, and perhaps two days' delay there even if there's nothing much the matter. Mr. Elcombe, rouse out the dock-yard divers at once!"

The Avenging Submarine.

Here a difficulty arose, however. There was not a single diver at Sheerness. There was a fully-equipped barge with diving-plant, pumps, and dresses, belonging to the dockyard, with men who understood the working of the gear, but the actual divers had been withdrawn to Harwich, where there was great need of them.

"Mac," said Cavendish, chafing with impatience, "will you go down and inspect?"

"I'm sorry, but I'd be quite useless," said the engineer regretfully. "I've tried it before, but as soon as I'm a fathom deep the blood flies to my head an' I'm just insensible. I'm thinkin' it's constitutional."

"Then I'll go myself, rather than have any delay!" exclaimed Cavendish. "Barring Mac, I can tell more surely than anyone else if she needs docking. Heaven grant she doesn't! Bring the barge and gear alongside and moor it by the gangway."

"Can I come, too, Cavendish?" said Sam. "I've been down in Harwich harbour in a suit several times, an' maybe you'd find me useful if this is your first trip."

"All right. I shall be glad of your company under water," said Cavendish. "I'm most at home on top of it, but this thing's got to be done, and I sha'n't be satisfied unless I see the damage with my own eyes. We'll go together."

"And me?" said Stephen.

"No, old chap—three's a crowd. Stay on the barge and watch the bubbles," said Sam, to his brother's disgust.

The big, flat iron vessel that carried the diving-gear was moored alongside next the cruiser's gangway, and the boys descended, Cavendish with them.

"You'll have to be slung in a rope-cradle, sir," said the head man in charge of the gear, "or a bridle under the arms, whichever you choose, because, o' course, you can't walk round her, as she's in deep water. You know the signals to use by the life-line?"

Sam did, but Cavendish did not, and they were explained to him.

"And, look here," he said, "you know the Morse telegraph code, of course. If there's anything I want to communicate I'll use it, with pulls on the life-line—long pulls for dashes an' short ones for dots. Don't pay attention to any other, and act on them smartly!"

"Very good, sir. I've used that plan before," said the operator.

The great cruiser lay gently at her moorings, though with full steam up, while Cavendish and Sam, equipped in the rubber suits, copper helmets, and leaded boots, were lowered over the side, everybody awaiting the news anxiously.

Cavendish heard for the first time the strange singing in his ears that the diver knows, saw the dim green light close around him, and felt the pulses in his head swell and beat quicker as he went down, down, down. The huge steel side of the Furst Moltke seemed to be gliding up past him as the rope slings, which were hitched under his arms and round his chest, supported him. Sam was a yard or two away.

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