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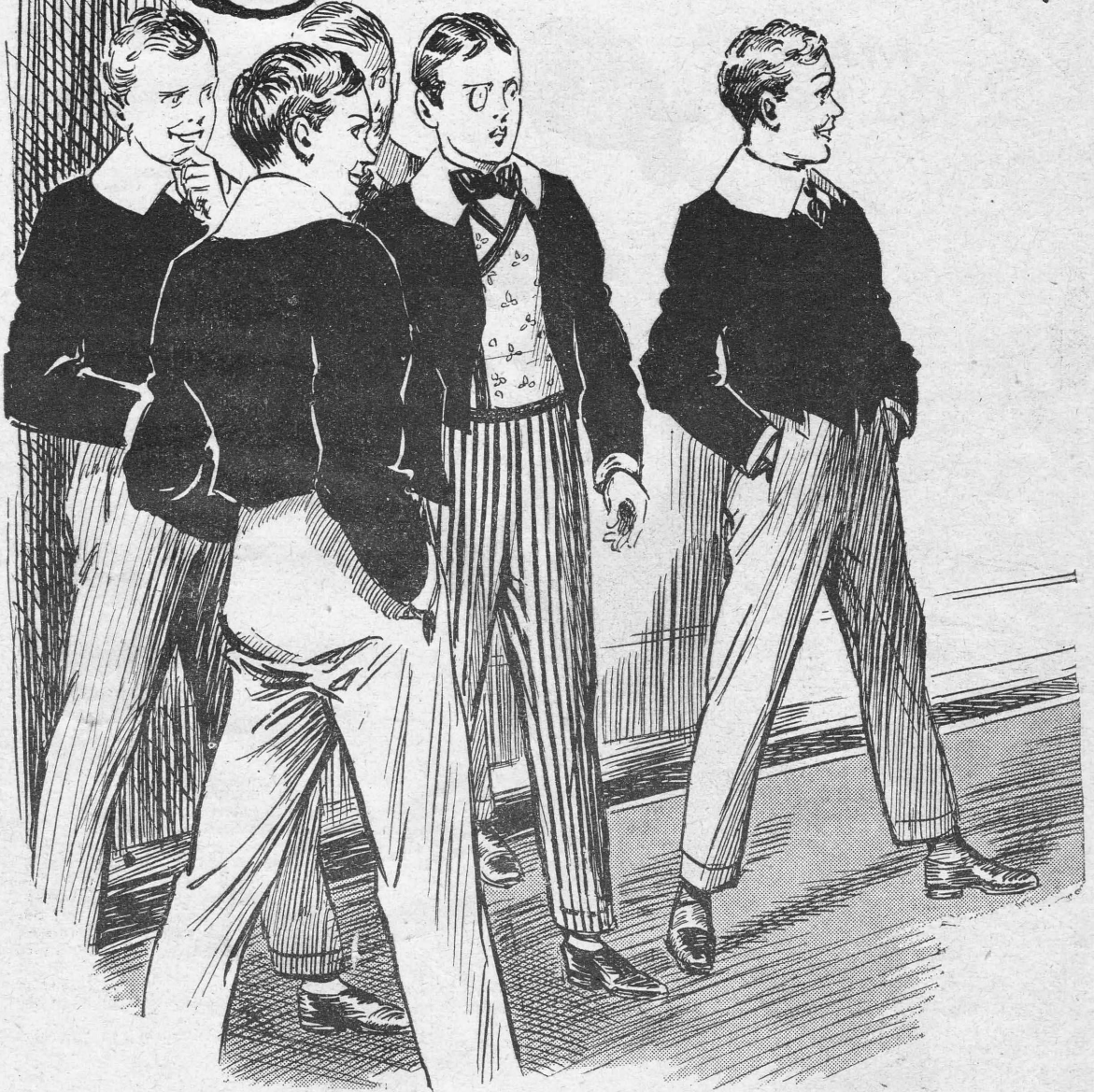


"Captain and Freak!"

Read the stunning long complete school story
dealing with Tom Merry & Co.—inside.

A LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S—

CAPTAIN



CHAPTER I. Cap'n Skimmy

"SKIMPOLÉ—does any boy know where Skimpolé is?" Mr. Linton's tone was annoyed, and his voice quite loud; so loud was it, indeed, that it reached the fellows sitting at other tables in the lofty dining-hall at St. Jim's, in addition to those at the Shell table where Mr. Linton presided. The clatter of knives and forks suddenly ceased and all eyes turned upon Mr. Linton; even the lordly Sixth-Formers condescended to glance in the direction of the Shell table.

But nobody answered Mr. Linton.
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"Skimpolé is absent from breakfast!" went on Mr. Linton, frowning over the ranks of the Shell. "He was absent, I noted, from chapel this morning. Can any boy explain why Skimpolé is not here?"

Nobody could explain—at least, nobody attempted to explain.

But they smiled.

Herbert Skimpolé, the scientific genius of the Shell, was a remarkable youth in many ways—and especially where his absent-mindedness was concerned.

It was not surprising at all, that Skimpolé had failed to turn up for chapel and breakfast. Possibly he had forgotten both. Quite possibly his studious mind was engaged upon some scientific problem, or studying Professor Balmy-

—“STARRING” SKIMPOLE, THE DUFFER OF THE SHELL!

and FREAK!

MARTIN CLIFFORD



Can you imagine Herbert Skimpole—the weedy, crackbrained duffer of the Shell, the fellow who could jaw for hours on any “ology” or “ism” under the sun, but who doesn’t know the difference between footer and hopscotch, the sort of fellow who simply asks to have his leg pulled—as skipper of the Lower School at St. Jim’s? With a situation like that things are bound to happen—and they do!—Ed.

Lowther broke off shortly—Mr. Linton had his eagle eye on them. But it was Tom Merry he singled out.

“Merry!” he rapped out.

“Yes, sir?”

“Can you suggest any reason why Skimpole is not here for breakfast?”

“N-no, sir!” stammered Tom. “That is—”

“Well?”

“He—he may have forgotten—”

“Rubbish!” snapped the exasperated master. “Forgotten chapel and breakfast—forgotten to get up? Absurd! Who was the last boy to leave the dormitory?”

“He was sitting up in bed writing, sir!” said Lowther.

“Writing? Bless my soul! Whatever was he writing at that extraordinary time and place, Lowther?” exclaimed Mr. Linton in astonishment.

“Ahem! You—you see, sir, he has just been appointed temporary junior captain; this is his first morning—”

“I am fully aware of that, Lowther! If this is how he proposes to ignore his duties and responsibilities—however, proceed, Lowther.”

“Y-e-es, sir. He—he was making notes of his duties as junior captain in case he forgot them. I stayed with him a few minutes to—to help him with suggestions.”

There were many grins along the Shell table at that. If Monty Lowther, the most daring practical joker in the Lower School had been making “suggestions” to Skimpole, then it was fairly certain those suggestions would be more entertaining than practical and useful!

“Very well, Lowther,” said Mr. Linton. “You may resume your seat. Someone must go and bring that stupid boy—”

“Shall I go up for him, sir?” asked Monty Lowther meekly.

“Very well!” Mr. Linton nodded grimly. “Be good enough to tell him I shall deal very severely with him if he does not come with you on the instant.”

“Oh, certainly, sir!”

Monty Lowther closed one eye cautiously at Tom Merry and left the room. Within two minutes he was in the Shell dormitory.

Skimpole was there, alone. One bony forefinger was pressed to his bulging forehead, and he was rather vacantly staring at a heap of rather rough-looking clothes on his bed.

He gave a violent jump as Lowther walked in and clapped him on his bony shoulder.

“Come on, Skimmy!” said Lowther severely. “Linton’s sent me for you. You’re to come on the instant or get it where the chicken got the chopper!”

Skimpole blinked at Lowther through his large spectacles in great agitation.

crumpet’s latest volume on Determinism, oblivious of the fact that such things as chapel and breakfast existed. Skimpole often forgot meals—he even forgot classes. He had been known to forget to put on a collar and tie and to wash himself. On one memorable occasion, having gone up to his dormitory for something in the middle of the morning, he had, in a mood of deep abstraction, undressed and put himself to bed—where he had stayed until hauled out by the justly indignant Mr. Linton.

Hence the general smiles—especially at the Shell table. “The awful duffer!” whispered Tom Merry. “Well, he’s making a bad start as junior skipper, at all events. The poor chap will get it in the neck for this. Wonder why he hasn’t turned up?”

“I wonder!” murmured Monty Lowther. “Dear old Skimmy!”

And Lowther gave a soft chuckle.

Tom Merry looked at his chum with sudden suspicion.

“You—you ass, Lowther!” he breathed. “I remember now—you were last out of the dorm except Skinner; you stayed behind gassing to the fathead. Have you been playing one of your silly jokes on him, Monty?”

“My dear man, what a suspicious chap you are!” said Lowther blandly. “Skimmy was sitting up in bed writing out notes of his duties as junior skipper. I helped him; he seemed very hazy about the job. I fancy—shush!”

"My dear Lowther!" he gasped, in great distress. "Something terrible has happened—I am in a state of great perturbation—indeed, of great distress. Never have I experienced such an unfortunate and extraordinary position. My attire has vanished. I am in a most disturbing predicament. In place of my own habiliments are these remarkable articles of dress; they appear to be the dress of a seafaring individual. Extraordinary!"

Lowther assumed an expression of great astonishment as he looked at the old peaked cap, a red scarf, a blue knitted jersey with the name "Mary Ann" printed thereon; a "pilot" coat and a pair of very wide and very baggy blue trousers. By the bed also stood a pair of huge sea-boots.

"I am naturally astounded!" went on Skimpole feebly. "I found these articles of attire in my locker; my own clothes had vanished, nor can I find a single article belonging to me. It is extraordinary! Can you understand it, my dear Lowther?"

As he himself had taken away every stitch of Skimpole's clothing and had substituted the sea-captain's attire—borrowed from the Amateur Dramatic Society's property box—Monty could understand it, naturally! But he evaded the question.

"Extraordinary!" he gasped, looking very solemn. "Still, they're better than pyjamas, Skimmy, I must say. The beaks would be frightfully shocked and waxy if you turned up in the dining-room in pyjamas, Skimmy. Buck up, for goodness' sake, and get into the clobber, Skimmy!"

"But—but, my dear Lowther—" stammered Skimpole.

"Quick!" rapped out Lowther, grabbing the baggy trousers and shoving them into Skimpole's hands. "Get dressed and come along, you awful ass! Old Linton's in a fine bate—he said I was to fetch you at once—on the instant. Get into them—"

"But, my dear fellow—" gasped Skimmy.

"Quick!" said Lowther hurriedly, helping the already flustered Skimpole off with his pyjama-coat. "You don't want to be sacked, I suppose—on your first day as junior skipper, too! My hat! Old Linton will be raving! Better turn up in these, you ass, than in pyjamas!"

"Dear me! But, my dear— Oh! Ah! Pray—kindly do not be so violent— Ow!"

"There, they're on, Skimmy!" said Lowther. "Fasten the braces now, old man! That's right! Now the jacket. It's a little too big, perhaps—"

"But, my dear Lowther—"

"Hallo, your shoes are missing, too! You'll have to shove on these sea-boots, Skimmy!"

Skimpole scarcely knew whether he was on his head or his heels. The baggy trousers were pulled on over his pyjama trousers and fastened before Skimmy was really aware of the fact. The big pilot-jacket followed the woollen jersey, and then the huge sea-boots, Lowther kindly lending a hand—a very swift and ruthless hand. Skimmy was dressed before he knew it.

The suit fitted where it touched, so to speak, and it made the weedy Skimpole look weedier than ever. He was a weird and wonderful sight when Lowther had finished with him.

"Splendid!" gasped Lowther, almost choking in a desperate attempt to stifle his laughter. "Now, come along, Skimmy! Sharp's the word!"

"Oh dear! But, my dear Lowther— Ow! Oh dear!"

The hapless Skimmy found himself rushed to the door. Luckily, the sea-boots were "property" sea-boots, and, though they looked heavy, they were quite light. None the less, they looked like barges on Skimpole's thin legs.

Down the stairs—deserted at that hour—Lowther rushed the feebly protesting and bewildered new junior captain, and then along the passages to the dining-hall. By that time Skimpole was reduced to a state of dazed and flustered helplessness.

"In you go!" choked Lowther.

And, flinging open the door, the humorist of the Shell pushed the agitated Skimpole into the hall, at the same moment clapping the big peaked cap on his head.

Just inside the dining-hall Skimpole stood, blinking about him dazedly.

Once again the clatter of knives and forks ceased suddenly—only more so this time, as it were. A silence followed—a curious tense silence. It lasted for about two seconds, then it was shattered by a howl of laughter that nearly lifted the ceiling of the lofty dining-hall.

Every fellow in the room roared; even the masters laughed, whilst the Shell fellows nearly went into hysterics.

Certainly Herbert Skimpole did look a ludicrous sight. Lowther followed him in and walked calmly to his seat. He left the hapless Skimpole standing, with knees knocking, too dazed even to remove the huge cap, which had fallen over one eye. He looked like a stranded fish.

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"Captain Skimmy!" chortled Blake of the Fourth. "Oh crumbs! Look at him!"

"Bai Jove! This is weally too bad of Lowthah, but—but—"

In his barge-captain's attire Skimpole stood blinking dazedly through his big spectacles at the hilarious break-fasters.

Mr. Railton, Housemaster of the School, rustled up, trying hard to control his features.

"Skimpole, boy, what does this—this nonsense mean? How—how dare you appear in such an—extraordinary attire!"

"Oh dear!" stuttered Skimpole. "I assure you that I am not appearing in this unseemly attire of my own free will. I am the victim, sir, of an extraordinary predicament!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Boy—Skimpole—" gasped Mr. Railton.

"Explain yourself, boy!"

"Oh dear! My dear sir, an extraordinary happening has taken place!" mumbled Skimpole. "I was unable to leave my bed earlier because my ordinary attire has disappeared most mysteriously in the night. In its place was this suit, which is, apparently, a sea-captain's attire. As I understood that Mr. Linton was very angry at my non-appearance, and insisted that I should—"

"That—that will do, I think, Skimpole!" said Mr. Railton, looking suddenly very grim. "I think I understand. You have been the victim of a disgraceful practical joke. Lowther!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

Lowther stood up—he stood up very slowly indeed. "Lowther," exclaimed the Housemaster in a grinding voice, "when the door opened and Skimpole entered, I distinctly saw you place that absurd cap on his head!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Lowther. "Once again the joker of the Shell realised he had made one little slip. "D-dud-did you, sir?"

"Yes, I did, Lowther! And, knowing your reputation for perpetrating practical jokes, I strongly suspect that you know something of this matter!"

"I am inclined to suspect the same, Mr. Railton!" snapped Mr. Linton, looking very hard at Lowther. "Lowther himself has admitted being the last boy to be with Skimpole. He also offered to bring Skimpole here."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Railton in a voice that took every vestige of a smile from Lowther's features. "Very good, Lowther! Are you responsible for this absurd affair? Answer me, sir!"

"Ahem! I—I—I—"

"Yes, or no?"

"Oh crumbs—I mean—that is—you see, sir—"

"Did you remove Skimpole's clothes and substitute those ridiculous articles of attire?" thundered Mr. Railton.

"Oh dear!" Lowther groaned; there was no help for it. "Y-yes, sir! It—it was only a joke, sir—just a joke! As—as it's Skimpole's first day as captain, I—I thought—"

"All I need is your confession, Lowther! I do not wish to know your thoughts on the subject!" said Mr. Railton, with deadly calmness. "Very well, Lowther! You will come to my study at nine o'clock, when I will endeavour to impress upon you the necessity of placing a curb on your propensity for practical joking!"

"Oh, sir!" groaned Lowther.

"You will also take Skimpole back to his dormitory, and you will find his clothes and help him to change," went on Mr. Railton grimly. "If you are both not back within ten minutes from now, your punishment will be doubled! You may go!"

Lowther went—he almost rushed the blinking Skimmy from the room. He did not want his punishment doubled, though he felt more like crawling from the room as he glimpsed the grinning faces and heard the numerous chuckles. Somehow the joke seemed to have fallen horribly flat to Lowther just then.

It seemed flatter still at nine o'clock, when Mr. Railton did his very best to teach the practical joker that jokes were quite out of place in school routine. And it was noticed that, in the Shell Form-room that morning, Monty Lowther appeared to have a curious objection to sitting down.

CHAPTER 2. Glyn's Scheme!

"SKIMMY—"

"Captain Skimpole!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a laugh in the Shell passage. It was after dinner, and quite a number of fellows—both Shell and Fourth—were standing there discussing Herbert Skimpole's appointment as temporary junior captain of St. Jim's.

However Skimpole himself, or the authorities, took that appointment, the Lower School certainly did not take it very seriously. Skimpole, as junior skipper, was to them a screaming joke. Skimpole was an extremely learned

youth; his brain was a fearful and wonderful brain, holding stacks of knowledge upon all sorts of weird and abstruse subjects. He read all sorts of scientific journals and books, and his knowledge of "isms" and "ologies" was both peculiar and extensive.

But what he knew of footer, or cricket, or the interests and pursuits of normal boys was peculiar, and not extensive. Skimpole was, most emphatically, the last fellow to make a successful junior-skipper.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not join in the general laughter, however.

"Weally, you fellows," he said, frowning, "give poor old

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said Blake, looking down at the seated Skimpole. "What are you sitting there for, Skimmy? Thinking out a scientific problem, old chap? But why do it here?"

"Ow-ow! I am severely hurt!" groaned Skimpole, staggering to his feet with the kindly aid of Arthur Augustus. "I fear it was my own fault entirely, however; I should have looked where I was proceeding. I sincerely trust that I did not hurt you by my exceedingly careless behaviour, my dear Blake."

"Ha, ha! Not at all, old chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" There was a yell of laughter from every fellow in the dining-hall as the figure of Herbert Skimpole appeared in the doorway. Clothes that were several sizes too large for him, and which apparently belonged to a sea captain, adorned his weedy form, while a huge cap inclined rakishly over one eye. "Captain Skimmy!" chortled Blake.

(See Chapter 1.)



Skimmay a chance! I am afraid he will have wathah a wough week of it. The job of juniah skippah is a very twyin' and difficult job."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was another laugh at that—at the expense of the swell of St. Jim's. The previous week Arthur Augustus had taken his turn as junior skipper, and he had not made a very successful job of it—though Lowther claimed that he had as a public entertainer!

"Weally, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, eyeing the laughing juniors rather frigidly through his monocle, "I quite fail to see what there is to laugh at in my wemark!"

"Go hon!"

"It was wathah too bad of Lowthah to pull Skimmay's leg this mornin'!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "Howevah, the laugh was weally as much against that wibald ass as Skimmay, who— Bai Jove, heah he is!"

Herbert Skimpole came along the passage. He was walking slowly, with his eyes fixed upon the pages of a huge volume he held before him. The volume was nearly as big as Skimmy himself, and it was really a mystery that its weight did not overbalance the weedy scientist.

He did not see the group of juniors, and he gave a gap and sat down violently as he collided with Blake, who had purposely stood where he was, firmly braced for the collision.

Bump! Bump!

Skimpole sat down hard, and his hefty volume slammed to the floor.

"Ow!"

"It is extraordinary that you do not appear to have suffered from the collision, though I myself am severely hurt," said Skimpole, blinking in perplexity at the laughing Blake. "I must apologise for my inexcusable laxity in—"

"Not at all, old chap! Don't mench!" grinned the leader of Study No. 6. "How's the captaincy going?"

"I am afraid I have not been able to give the matter much time as yet," explained Skimpole, picking up his weighty book from the floor. "While in bed this morning I made a few notes regarding my duties, certainly; but as most of the information was supplied by Lowther, I fear, in view of what happened this morning, that it is not to be relied upon."

"Hardly!" chuckled Blake.

"His statement that I should be expected to bath and wash the Third Form fags is not correct, I am certain," said Skimpole, with some hesitation. "I do not remember Merry having to perform such duties during his captaincy. As for proving my courage by annexing Mr. Linton's pudding at dinner, I am quite certain that Merry never had to do anything of the kind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What's the joke?" asked Tom Merry, coming along just then with Lowther and Manners.

"Skimmy is!" grinned Herries. "He's just telling us what Lowther's ideas of his duties are as skipper."

"Lowther's an ass!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "Take no notice of the silly asses, Skimmy old man! You'll pull

through all right. Don't forget that it's compulsory footer this afternoon."

"My dear Merry," said Skimmy, frowning in his turn, "I am afraid I shall be unable to be present at football this afternoon. I am addressing a meeting on the subject of Determinism versus Free Will—an exceedingly vexed, yet a most entrancing subject for debate and study."

"My dear man, take my tip and drop your giddy lecture," said Tom Merry, staring. "If you cut the footer you'll get it hot—especially now you're skipper. Don't you realise it's compulsory for all? And it's a skipper's job to see all the other fellows turn up, too."

"Dear me! Surely you are wrong!" said Skimpole. "I am assured by Racke and several others that, as junior captain, I can please myself entirely; also that I have the power to excuse any boy from attending practice."

"Oh! So that's the game!" exclaimed Tom grimly. "Racke told you that, did he—the slacking rotter? As for the power to excuse any fellow—well, to a limited extent you have; but it's got to be for a good reason—illness, or extra tuition, or something like that."

"My dear Merry, in this case, the reason is a most excellent reason. You surely do not suggest that a childish and useless game like football can be allowed to interfere with the spread of scientific knowledge. I am most gratified to discover a thirst for knowledge among boys whom I had hitherto considered to be entirely devoid of intelligence. Racke, Crooke, Mellish, and even Trimble have all expressed a very keen desire to hear my lecture this afternoon."

"Oh, my hat!"

Skimpole drifted away, conning the pages of the learned volume as he went. A chorus of chuckles followed him. The idea of Racke & Co. being keen to hear his lecture seemed to tickle the juniors immensely.

"Well, the awful ass!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "Those rotten slackers have been pulling his leg, of course. All they want is to dodge footer practice; they don't intend to turn up at his silly lecture!"

"Nothing more certain than that!" grinned Blake. "But you needn't worry, Tommy; Kildare will jolly soon rout them out."

"Yes, but— Oh, well, it's not my affair!" grunted Tom Merry; and he strolled on with his chums. He was no longer junior captain, and it was not for him to interfere. Meanwhile, Skimmy had met Racke and Crooke farther along the passage, and those two inveterate slackers grinned and stopped him.

"Ready for the lecture, old chap," said Racke affectionately. "We're simply burning with impatience to hear you spout on free tuck—I mean free will, Skimmy! I've managed to persuade Serope and Tompkins to come; so you'll have quite a good audience with Trimble, Mellish, Lennox, and Finn, and us."

"Don't forget to mention that you wanted us, though, if Kildare or someone should happen to ask," warned Crooke a trifle anxiously.

"My dear Crooke, I shall certainly explain that to Kildare," replied Skimpole mildly; "though I cannot imagine his objecting to our absenting ourselves from football practice for such an important matter. It is utterly absurd to place a trifling matter like football before a scientific lecture. I have every hope that this will be the first of many successful afternoon lectures; and I am exceedingly gratified to learn, Racke, that so many of my Form-fellows are anxious to improve their minds."

"Glad you're pleased, Skimmy!" said Racke affably. "You make a rippin' skipper, I must say, old bean! Common-room at two-thirty, then! Cheerio!"

Skimpole ambled on, glueing his gaze to his big volume again. Racke and Crooke, chuckling, were just passing on, when Glyn came out of his study.

"Hallo! What's the joke, Racke?" he asked, glancing after Skimpole. "I say, is it a fact that Skimmy's not attending footer practice?"

Racke hesitated. Glyn was by no means a slacker, and he knew Glyn would spot the game at once. But he nodded, after a pause.

"Yes, he is," he said carelessly. "Goin' to give a lecture or somethin'."

"No good pretending not to be interested," grinned Bernard Glyn. "I happen to know you rotten slackers put the fathead up to it. Still, it's rather a good wheeze to dodge practice," added the schoolboy inventor reflectively. "But how do you mean to dodge the giddy lecture, Racke?" Racke was rather taken aback at Glyn's attitude in the matter.

"Who says we were goin' to dodge it?" he said sulkily.

"Ass! I can see you beauties listening to Skimmy's footling chin-wag!" grinned Glyn. "You've got some dodge on! What is it?"

"We've no dodge on!" scowled Racke.

"Then what's the good of it?" said Glyn, shaking his

head. "If you don't attend the lecture you'll get it in the neck; you'll have no excuse. That's just what's bothering me. I want to dodge practice, but—"

"You do?" ejaculated Racke.

"Yes; not to slack like you rotters, though," said Glyn, his lip curling a trifle. "Still, the point is I want to dodge it. I've some experiments I want to do this afternoon. I heard you chaps were spoofing Skimmy, and I want to know how you're managing it. See!"

"Oh!"

Racke understood now, and he grinned. In his own way Glyn was a scientist, too—though a much more practical scientist than Skimmy. His experiments and inventions usually worked, whereas Skimpole's did not. And, if anything, Glyn was more enthusiastic than was Skimmy. He allowed nothing to come between his experiments if he could help it. Nothing else mattered—school lessons or sports—when Glyn had an invention or experiment in hand. Glyn, though no slacker, was evidently keen to dodge footer practice now, and Racke grinned.

"We haven't any dodge on. I wish we could think of one," said Racke, with a chuckle. "The only dodge we have is that we've no intention of attendin' practice, and we've not the slightest intention of listenin' to that fool Skimpole wag his silly chin. See?"

"H'm! But that's jolly risky," said Glyn, frowning thoughtfully. "You see, if anybody does ask Skimmy if we did actually attend his lecture, then— My hat! I believe I've got it!"

Leaving Racke and Crooke abruptly, Glyn hurried back into his study. Very curious, Racke and Crooke followed him in, and watched Glyn in silence as the schoolboy inventor rummaged in his cupboard, which was filled with a conglomeration of weird instruments, wires, and tools. At last Glyn fished out a rather battered and somewhat ancient wireless cabinet, with a loud-speaker attached, the valves and other paraphernalia missing.

Glyn chuckled as he placed this on the table.

"What the dickens is that for?" exclaimed Racke. "It's an old—"

"It was a wireless set once," chuckled Glyn. "Now it's only a box with an old loud-speaker attached. But dear old Skimmy won't realise that."

Taking a couple of lengths of wire from his cupboard, Glyn next fixed these to the box, the loose ends being shoved under the bookcase out of sight.

"That'll do for Skimmy," he remarked at last, surveying his handiwork with approval. "Now we'll have him here."

Leaving Racke and Crooke staring wonderingly, Glyn hurried out, and when he returned, two minutes later, Skimpole was at his heels.

Skimpole looked puzzled and impatient.

"My dear Glyn," he exclaimed, "I trust you will not require me many moments, as I am very busy making notes for my—"

"Not two ticks," said Glyn, pointing to the affair on the table. "I just wanted you to see this, Skimmy. Knowing you are interested in scientific inventions—"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, blinking at the box and horn. "It appears to be a wireless loud-speaker, though in an exceedingly dilapidated condition."

"So it appears and was," admitted Glyn. "Now it is my latest invention—just finished, Skimmy," he went on proudly and enthusiastically. "Skimmy, my lad, that before you is the most remarkable broadcaster ever invented!"

"Dear me! A—a broadcaster? But really, my dear Glyn—"

"Can be used in any home by any unskilled person," said Glyn modestly. "All one has to do is to speak into it, or sing into it, and anybody else can be in a room in the same building—or a hundred miles away, for that matter—and can listen, if they want to. See the idea? A private broadcasting station in every home, just like a wireless telephone. And the beauty of it is it can be manufactured for a few pence. What d'you think about that, Skimmy?"

"Dear me! Extraordinary!" gasped Skimpole. "Yet—yet it appears to be an exceedingly simple apparatus, my dear Glyn."

"Simple isn't the word for it, Skimmy," agreed Glyn. "And that's the beauty of it—that and its cheapness of production. I knew you'd be interested, being such a clever and brainy scientist. That's why, in fact, I've fetched you along to be the very first member of the general public to test it, old chap."

"Dear me! I shall certainly be most interested—nay, eager—to test your remarkable invention, Glyn," said Skimpole, still blinking at the apparatus. "Unfortunately, I am very busy at the moment. I am engaged upon making notes for my speech this afternoon. Indeed, the time for my lecture to begin is within a few minutes, my dear Glyn."

"Lecture?" exclaimed Glyn, with well-assumed surprise.

"You—you're giving a lecture this afternoon, Skimmy?"

"Exactly. You see, my dear Glyn—"

"Well, now, why didn't you tell me?" said Glyn, with

reproach this time. "Fancy giving a lecture and never telling me, Skimmy! Too bad! But what a disappointment, old chap, for me. I was relying on you to be the first to test this—this great invention."

"I am extremely sorry, my dear Glyn—"

"Hold on, though!" said Glyn, as if a sudden splendid idea had occurred to him. "I have it—just the very thing, Skimmy!"

"My dear Glyn—"

"A great idea!" said Glyn, with enthusiasm. "You can give your lecture and test my invention at the same time. Of course! Just the very thing! Where are you giving the lecture, Skimmy?"

"In the Common-room, my dear Glyn. But, really—"

"That's the idea, then!" said Bernard Glyn, slapping his leg. "I'll tell the fellows to rush along to the Common-room, while you stay here and lecture into my Glyn Home Broadcaster! How's that?"

"Ripping!" said Racke, putting his hand to his mouth suddenly.

"Splendid!" added Croke, stifling a chuckle with difficulty. "The very wheeze! I can never concentrate on a chap's words when he's lecturing, simply because the chap's personality and face worry me. Now this will do away with that difficulty."

"Oh, quite!" said Racke solemnly. "That's always been my trouble when listening to lectures. I never can concentrate on the chap's words, especially if he happens to be a fellow with a handsome face like yours, Skimmy!"

"Dear me! Really, my dear fellows, this is an extraordinary suggestion! You wish me to speak into this—this remarkable machine, Glyn—otherwise, lecture by wireless?"

"You've hit it, Skimmy," assented Glyn gravely. "And you'll have the honour to be the very first to use my revolutionising invention, remember! You mustn't touch the instrument, mind you. The least thing may upset the delicate adjustment of the—the works."

"Extraordinary! But, really, I—I—I—"

"You'll do it, then? Good!" exclaimed Glyn, grasping the hesitating and weedy Skimpole by his shoulders and dropping him into a chair before the table. "Just sit here with your notes spread before you, old chap. Mind those wires! That's right. Now the fellows can gather in the Common-room. It'll be quite comfy sitting round the fire there listening to your lecture, old chap."

"Rippin'!" said Racke.

"Dear me! Truly extraordinary! I shall, indeed, be most anxious to do as you suggest, my dear Glyn," said Skimpole, quite excited and eager now. "I have attempted on numerous occasions to lecture, as you know, but my difficulty has always been the rude interruptions and noisy inattention of the audience. Now, however, I shall be able to speak in peace and undisturbed. Excellent, my dear Glyn—excellent! If you will kindly show me how to start the apparatus—"

But Glyn was already bending over the "apparatus," with his back to the new junior captain. For several seconds he fiddled with the box and horn, and then he looked up with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Good! That's fixed it," he said, lowering his voice to a hushed whisper. "Now, chaps, come on and leave Skimmy to it. Mind you don't touch the apparatus, and mind you don't leave it, Skimmy. And don't be afraid of making the lecture too long. The chaps won't mind how long they listen sitting comfy round the fire, old chap. Give us five minutes, and then go ahead hot and strong."

"Dear me! Very well, my dear—"

But the dear fellow had gone. And so interested was Skimmy in the wonderful apparatus that he quite failed to note that Glyn had removed the key from the inside to the outside of the lock; also, that he had locked the door.

Out in the passage Glyn chuckled softly.

"That's fixed him up for the afternoon," he murmured. "Now I'm going up to the top box-room to continue my chemical experiments. You beauties can go and eat coke!"

With that, Bernard Glyn hurried away upstairs to the laboratory he had fixed up in the top box-room. He left Racke and Croke to stagger to their study, where they doubled up and howled with laughter.

CHAPTER 3.

The Undutiful Skipper!

"BETTER take charge, as usual, Tommy," laughed Talbot.

There was a chorus of chuckles on Little Side, and all eyes turned on Tom Merry. Tom Merry hesitated, rather a bitter look on his face. Then his good-nature reasserted itself, and he laughed.

He was no longer junior captain, or skipper of football. It was now the job of Herbert Skimpole, to take charge on the footer field. Tom Merry was just one of the crowd. He had a perfect right to refuse to take charge.

Yet Tom Merry was not the fellow to harbour bitter feelings for long. In any case, it was hopeless to expect a fellow like Skimpole to make an efficient footer skipper. Skimpole was more at home with his inquiring nose stuck into Professor Balmcrumpet's volume on Determinism than on a footer field.

As Skimmy was such a harmless, inoffensive duffer, Tom Merry was the last fellow in the world to want to get him into trouble. If he refused to take charge—and others did, also—then there was undoubtedly trouble in store for the scientist of the Shell.

"Perhaps I'd better," he laughed. "We don't want old Skimmy to get it in the neck, the awful ass! In any case, I fancy he's better out of the way; he's only a nuisance on the field. But if old Kildare comes along—"

"He's here now!" chuckled Blake.

Kildare came striding up, and he frowned impatiently at the crowd of footballers.

"Hallo! You kids not started yet?" he snapped. "Get a move on—sharp!" His eyes roamed over the crowd of juniors, and his frown deepened. "Where the dickens is your skipper?" he demanded.

There was a silence, and then Tom Merry spoke.

"I—I was taking charge, Kildare!" he said. "It's all right—we can manage all serene."

"Oh, can you?" snorted Kildare. "But where's that young idiot, Skimpole? This is a thumping fine start for him, I must say!"

"He—he isn't turning up," said Tom, smiling. "He isn't keen on footer, as you know, Kildare. We shan't miss him, though."

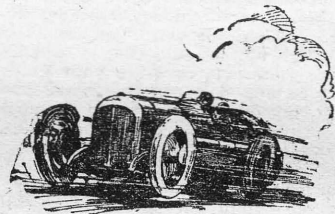
"That's not the point!" said Kildare, though he tried to hide a smile himself. "He's junior skipper, and he must turn up and have a shot at doing his job. And—hallo! Seem to be others missing, too! Who are they?" He looked at Tom Merry, and Tom had to answer.

"Racke, Croke, Mellish, Tompkins, Trimble, Glyn, Scrope, Lennox, and Finn," answered Tom briefly.

(Continued on next page.)

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Kildare's lips tightened grimly. "Is that all?" he asked, with heavy sarcasm. "The usual crowd of slackers, with one or two more, eh? So they think they can do as they like—taking advantage of that young duffer! We'll see! Merry!"

"Yes, Kildare?"

"Take three or four fellows with you and rout out those slackers! Use any method you like, but get them here. I'll give you ten minutes in which to do the job. Understand?"

"Yes, Kildare."

"Get off, then! Skimpole as well, remember!"

Tom Merry selected Blake, Figgins, Lowther, Manners, and Levison, and the six juniors ran off the field and made tracks for the School House. They went first to Study No. 10, where the little party armed themselves with cricket stumps and five bats. Then they made for the Common-room, where they fully expected to find Skimpole waiting for his audience to turn up. But the room was empty.

"Queer!" said Tom. "He'll be giving his blessed lecture in his study, then."

They went upstairs again, Tom looking very grim and his army all grinning. Tom was about to enter Skimpole's study when he halted, listening.

From Study No. 11 close by came a voice—a faint, droning voice that all recognised at once.

"Skimmy!" gasped Tom Merry. "Sounds as if he's got to work already. But—surely those chaps can't be idiots enough to be listening to him!"

It seemed an impossible idea. Even slackers like Racke and Crooke would surely prefer footer to listening to a terrible bore like Skimpole!

Blake unlocked the door and flung it open. Tom Merry & Co. jumped as they saw that Skimpole was alone. He was leaning on his bony hands over the table, expounding into the horn of Glyn's remarkable "broadcaster." Before him were spread his sheets of notes.

The juniors stared blankly at the scene, while Skimpole, his face solemn and tense with concentration on his subject, went on with his lecture.

"Skimmy, you ass—"

Skimpole held up a bony hand warningly, and waved them back.

"What the dickens—" began Blake.

"And, thirdly, my dear friends," droned on the enthusiastic scientist, still waving his hand, "I must point out that this hypothesis, as stated by Kant and Schopenhauer, and supported by Professor Balmcrumpet, that in this noumenal world our choice of character is irrevocable, and that our different characteristics are innate and immutable, and that—Ow! Yow! Merry, my dear fellow—Yooop!"

Skimpole's eloquence came to an abrupt termination as Tom Merry strode into the study, hooked a hand in his collar, and whirled him away from the table.

"Enough of that, old chap!" said Tom. "You'll be dislocating your jaw, or tying your giddy tongue into knots! You're coming down to the footer now!"

"But, my dear Merry," said Skimpole indignantly, "you have interrupted my lecture with brutal ruthlessness! I protest most strongly. You are an enemy of scientific—"

"Oh, gag him, for goodness' sake!" gasped Blake, still staring at the instrument on the table. "What the dickens is the born idiot gaping into that thing for?"

"My dear Blake," stuttered Skimpole, his eyes ablaze with indignation behind his big spectacles, "cannot you understand that you have rudely and brutally interrupted my lecture? My audience will be—"

"Lecture?" ejaculated Tom Merry. "But what the dickens are you lecturing to a giddy, smashed loud-speaker for? Even if it wasn't a wreck, it couldn't understand Determinism any more than a normal, sane person can!"

"My dear Merry, you do not appear to comprehend the situation!" protested Skimpole. "This is Glyn's latest invention—the Glyn Home Broadcaster, I understand he calls it. I do not understand the intricacies of the mechanism of this extraordinary machine, but I am obliging Glyn by testing the machine; at the same time I am lecturing the fellows in the Common-room."

"You—you're whatter?"

"Lecturing them," repeated Skimpole mildly. "It was Glyn's suggestion, and I agree that it is a most excellent suggestion to broadcast my speech in this manner. It—"

"But there isn't anybody in the Common-room!" roared Tom Merry. "We've just come from there—the giddy room's empty!"

"Good gracious!"

Skimpole jumped.

"As for that—that footling thing—why, I'll show you!"

And Tom promptly dismantled the "broadcaster"—in

about three seconds. He showed the astounded scientist that the cabinet was empty of mechanism first. Then he dragged at the wire, pulling the loose ends from beneath the bookshelves.

Skimpole almost collapsed as he blinked at them.

"Dear me!" he stuttered. "I—I fear that I have been sadly misled as to the nature and efficiency of that machine."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared as they understood. The thought of Skimpole "spouting" into the dummy machine under the impression that he was addressing an audience in the Common-room struck them as very funny indeed.

"Mistaken, you born ass!" laughed Tom Merry. "It's all spoof, of course! You've been diddled, Skimmy! You've just been gassing into an empty box. You've had your leg pulled!"

"G-good gracious! And I have already been speaking for quite a considerable time!" mumbled Skimpole feebly. "This is really most extraordinary. But why, my dear Merry, should—"

"Because they wanted to dodge footer, of course, and because they had no intention of hearing your giddy lecture!" gurgled Tom Merry. "Glyn's spoofed you—just to keep you out of the way. I expect he's experimenting tip in the box-room now, and I expect Racke and his crowd are slacking in their studies—smoking, and goodness' knows what else!"

"Dear me! I—I have been most grossly tricked!" gasped Skimpole. "I consider such conduct is most—"

"Hard lines, Skimmy!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Still, we'll deal with friend Glyn. You cut off down to the footer now, old nut!"

"But, my dear Merry, I strongly—"

"Oh, take him down, Levison!" gasped Tom. "Take him down on a string if you like, but don't let him wander! Come on, chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison grabbed the protesting Skimpole by his collar and ran him out of the study with a rush. The rest hurried along to Racke's study. Several precious minutes out of the ten allowed them had already elapsed, and they knew what to expect from Kildare if the slackers were not on Little Side at the appointed time.

They found Racke, Crooke, Mellish, and Scrope lounging in chairs, reading and chatting. There was a thick haze of cigarette smoke in the air, and Tom Merry's face went grim.

"Rout the rotters out!" he snapped. "Out you come, Racke!"

"Here, get out!" roared Racke, jumping to his feet in angry alarm. "You're not skipper now, Merry, you cheeky cad! Look here, we've had Skimmy's permission—Ow! Yooooooop!"

Crack, crack! Thump, thump!

"Yarroooooogh!"

"Yow! Yooooooop!"

"Look here—Yow-ow! Yarrug!"

Crack, crack!

Racke & Co. howled as the cricket stumps and bats got to work in earnest. The next few seconds they proved that even slackers could hustle. Tom Merry and his chery helpers went round the study like a whirlwind, and amid a chorus of howls and yells the slackers went out—with a scrambling rush.

"Footer field at once!" roared Tom Merry after them.

Racke & Co. vanished in the direction of the dormitory, with the evident intention of changing at express speed. There was not likely to be any more trouble with those slackers that afternoon!

As the party of footballers emerged from Study No. 7 a fat figure came rolling along the corridor. It was Baggy Trimble, and he was eating a chunk of toffee. He stopped as he sighted the little party.

"Oh, here's another!" said Blake.

"Oh crumbs! I say, you fellows—"

"Footer field at once, Trimble!" snapped Tom Merry.

"Oh, I say! Look here! Skimmy's given me permission—"

"Cricket stumps!" snapped Tom. "Hallo! He's gone!"

Trimble had gone. He fairly flew as he sighted the stumps and bats, and he also went in the direction of the dormitory. He had scarcely gone when Lennox and Buck Finn looked out of their study, evidently having heard the commotion.

"We'll give you two minutes to change and get down to the footer ground," said Tom pleasantly. "Ready?"

"Here—Oh, all right!" gasped Lennox hastily at the sight of the cricket stumps. "Come on, Finny!"

"Gee! I guess I'm off, all serene!" agreed Buck Finn.

Lennox and Finn hurried away abruptly towards the dormitory. They, too, understood now.

Herbert Skimpole did not even notice the crowd of footballers as he rode along the short cut on the outskirts of Wayland until the ball—a big, rolled-up bundle of newspapers—caught him in the chest. Taken completely by surprise, the weedy Skimpole was knocked clean off his machine. Clatter, clatter! Crash! “Yoooooop!” (See Chapter 4.)



“Now for Glyn,” said Tom. “He’s working on some of his blessed experiments up in the box-room, I believe. Dane and Kangaroo kicked him out of their study because of the stink he was making with chemicals. Come on!”

The junior hurried upstairs to interview Glyn. Glyn usually worked behind a locked door, but he had forgotten to lock the door on this occasion—unluckily for himself.

He scarcely troubled to look up, however, as the routers surged in to interview him.

“Outside!” he snapped. “I’m busy!”

He certainly looked busy. All around him, on various boxes and packing-cases, were jars of chemicals and weird and wonderful instruments. A most fearful smell pervaded the atmosphere of the room. Splintered glass and a dark pool of liquid on the floor seemed to indicate that the schoolboy inventor had had one of his usual “accidents.”

Bernard Glyn himself looked hot and bothered. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his face and clothes were stained and smudged.

“Phew! What a—what a niff!” gasped Blake, holding his nose. “How that merchant can stick it beats me! Collar him, and let’s get out—sharp!”

“We’ll do that soon enough!” snapped Tom. “Now, Glyn, my lad—”

“Here, what’s that?” exclaimed Glyn, looking round at last. “Oh, it’s you chaps! What the dickens do you want?”

“A born idiot,” said Tom pleasantly. “And we’ve found him! We’re going to give him three seconds to clear out of this and get down to the changing-room.”

“If you mean me, you cheeky asses,” said Glyn irritably, “you can go and eat coke! I’m too busy to be bothered with silly footer now. Scoot! If you’re not out of this in two ticks I’m going to bung something over your clobber that’ll make it niff for a month!”

“Oh, are you?”

“Yes. Get out! I’ve had permission from Skimmy to—”

“Cricket stumps!” snapped Tom.

“Eh? Cricket stumps? What the dickens have cricket stumps got to do with—Here, what—Yoooooop! Yarrooooooh! Leggo! Stoppit! Yoooooop! Yow-ow! Why, I’ll—fill—”

Unlike the slackers, Bernard Glyn did not take it lying down. Far from it! As the stumps and bats began to rattle

and thump about his person he gave a roar and charged at the grinning juniors, evidently with the rather ambitious intention of throwing the whole five of them out.

It was Glyn himself who went out, however. Glyn was like a lion attacked in his den, but Tom Merry & Co. were just a little too much for him. He went out of the room, arms and legs waving, and then he went rolling and bumping down the stairs outside. The hapless inventor of St. Jim’s, with a howl of anguish at every bump, descended the stairs in record time.

He arrived at the bottom in a breathless, squirming heap, and the next instant the five had rushed down and collared him again. If Bernard Glyn had had any intention of making a further show of resistance, he was afforded no chance of putting it into operation. In the grasp of five determined juniors he was frog-marched to the dormitory; and by the time they arrived there, if not penitent, Bernard Glyn certainly was subdued, and they had no further trouble with him. In several more seconds he was changed into footer togs and rushed down to the field where Racke & Co. and the rest of the slackers were already at play—even Skimpole, who looked a weird object in footer attire.

The footer dodgers had found it very easy indeed to get round Herbert Skimpole, but they had also made the painful discovery that “spoofing” the new captain of the Lower School did not pay.

CHAPTER 4.

Trouble Ahead!

“CHEERIO, Skimmy! How goes it, old scout?”

The Terrible Three smiled when they met Herbert Skimpole in the quad the following afternoon immediately after lessons. The new junior skipper of St. Jim’s was looking very thoughtful indeed, and certainly not very happy.

“Ah! What, pray, do you mean, my dear Merry?” inquired the new junior captain, blinking in rather a puzzled manner at Tom Merry. “How goes what? I fail to understand you, my dear fellow!”

“How goes the captaincy I mean, ass?” laughed Tom

good-humouredly. "Otherwise, how are you progressing as junior skipper of St. Jim's?"

"Oh! Now I comprehend," observed Skimpole gravely. "I fear the duties of junior captain are somewhat strange and trying to me, my dear Merry. I certainly was not aware that I should be expected to help juniors with their construe and do their lines for them."

"My hat! Who the dickens told you you'd be expected to do that?" ejaculated Tom.

"I received the information from Crooke," explained Skimpole. "I have also helped Racke and Scrope. But when Mellish and Trimble came to me to do their lines this morning I refused until I could have an opportunity of consulting someone in authority on the subject, as it appears to me that—"

"You—you awful ass, Skimmy!" gasped Tom. "They were pulling your leg, of course. The rotters have been taking advantage of you, Skimmy."

"Dear me! I feared so, especially when Trimble assured me that you also were in the habit of doing his preparation for him in the evenings, which is absurd. However, I shall refuse to do any more lines."

"I should jolly well think so," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Those cads ought to be kicked. But what about the footer, Skimmy? You mustn't forget the match to-morrow."

"Dear me! Several fellows have already reminded me that a match or something of that nature is to take place to-morrow afternoon," said Skimmy. "As the matter is of an exceedingly trivial nature, I should be obliged, my dear Merry, if you would explain matters and inform me if the matter does concern me at all."

"Ha, ha, ha! Just a little!" assented Tom Merry. "You see, it's your job to pick the team for the School House, Skimmy. You're House captain as well as junior captain. That means you'll have to pick the team for the School House, and in this case Figgins picks his men for the New House."

"Dear me! Extraordinary! Most odd, in fact!" said Skimpole rather dazedly. "I—I am afraid I would much prefer that someone else did so, however. Gore has threatened to kick me round the quadrangle, and Scrope has threatened to punch my nasal organ if I do not pick them for the cricket—ahem! I should have said football—while Grundy—"

"Take no notice of those rotters, Skimmy," said Tom grimly. "They aren't touch you. And if they try those games on you just tell me, though I fancy they were pulling your leg a bit, old chap. Anyway, don't forget the match. As for the team, either Talbot or I will help you if you like."

"Thank you very much, my dear fellow. And now, to change the subject to more important matters, I propose to give my lecture on 'Determinism.' Dear me! One moment! Pray do not walk away—"

But the Terrible Three had gone, laughing. They did not mind giving Skimpole information on footer, but they had no intention of listening to information from Skimpole on "Determinism."

As Skimpole stared after them, Kildare walked up to him. "Hallo, kid!" he began. "Just hunting you up! You know about the House match to-morrow, of course?"

"Yes, my dear Kildare! I have—"

"Right! I want you to cut off at once on your bike to Wayland. Take this note to the sports outfitters in the High Street. It's the order for the new goal-posts for Little Side," said Kildare. "You'll get back before lock-up if you cut off now, Skimpole. It's to be delivered personally, mind!"

"But, my dear Kildare, I am engaged for this evening, and—"

"Cancel the engagement!" said Kildare briefly. "You're junior skipper now, and it's your job! Cut off!"

Kildare strode away, and Skimpole blinked after him, the envelope clutched in his bony hand.

"Dear me! How very awkward! Extraordinary! I really am beginning to wish I had not undertaken the post of junior captain!" he murmured. "However, I must hurry if I am to return before dark. How very trying!"

And Skimpole hurried away, frowning. Distasteful as the task was, Herbert Skimpole had a keen sense of his duties, or of his duty, at least—and he also knew it was hopeless to argue with Kildare in any case.

He got out his bike and started out for Wayland. To an ordinary junior the ride would have been nothing, but to Skimpole it was quite a tiring journey. He was quite fagged out by the time Wayland town came in sight.

But he was fated not to enter the town. Just on the outskirts the short cut Skimpole had chosen, ran across a piece of waste ground, where a crowd of local youths were playing a fast and furious game of football with piled-up coats as goalposts.

Skimpole did not even notice them, however, and it was not until the ball—a big, rolled-up bundle of newspapers—caught him in the chest, that Skimpole was aware of the footballers at all.

The ball was quite heavy, being soaked with water from immersions in various puddles, and it knocked the weedy Skimpole clean off his machine.

Crash! Clatter! Crash!
"Yarooop!"

Luckily, Skimmy was not going fast at the time, but he was badly shaken, for all that. He sat up and blinked round dazedly at the crowd of youths who rushed up to his aid.

"Hurt, chum?" asked a burly, good-humoured looking youth rather anxiously. "Here, 'elp him up, Alf!"

"Right, Bill!"

Bill and Alf helped the dazed Skimpole to his feet.

"Ow! Dear me! Ow-ow!" gasped Skimmy, blinking around him. "Wha—what was it, my friends? Something—some hurtling projectile struck me very forcibly and knocked me from my machine!"

Bill and Alf grinned now they realised no serious harm was done.

"It was the ball!" grinned Bill. "It caught you in the chest and bowled you over fairly. There it is, and I reckon as we're sorry—"

"Sorry you got in the way," assented Alf, with a chuckle. "It would 'ave bin a goal if you 'adn't!"

Skimmy blinked at the grinning faces, and then he blinked round for the ball.

"Dear me! Extraordinary!" he mumbled, putting his big spectacles straight on his nose. "But are you sure, my friends, that it was a—a ball? It seemed to be more in the nature of a—ahem!—brick! And I do not see a ball, nor does this appear to be a football ground. There are no goalposts—"

"Crikey!" said Bill, eyeing Skimmy admiringly. "Can't he just talk! But he expects us to 'ave jam on it—goalposts, eh? Don't we jest wish we 'ad goalposts. Eh, Alf?"

"Don't we jest! This is our ball, young gent!" grinned Alf; and he held up the muddy bundle of soaked paper.

"Don't need no blowin' up, that don't!"

"Dear me! Most extraordinary! But, my dear friends," observed Skimpole, wagging an admonishing finger at the grinning youths, "in my opinion it is most dangerous for you to play games so close to a public lane. At St. Jim's we play on a specially prepared ground, with goalposts and a ball which is, I believe, manufactured from leather and rubber. I advise you to do the same in order to prevent other regrettable accidents of this nature."

"Oh, you advises that, does you?" grinned Bill. "And who's goin' to buy the goalposts, and who's goin' to pervide a ground for us to play on, eh? We did 'ave one proper ball, but a steam-roller ran over it and busted it proper. Now we're savin' for a new one. As for goalposts, well, what's the matter wi' them coats?"

"Dear me!" remarked Skimpole, shaking his head sadly. "This is, to me, very interesting indeed, my friends. Am I to understand that you cannot afford to purchase goalposts and other sporting paraphernalia?"

"I don't know about that para—what you call it—but I knows we can't afford goalposts," was the grinning answer. "Anyway, we'll get on with our game afore it gets dark."

"One moment, my friend!" said Skimpole, catching Bill eagerly and earnestly by the arm. "Pray do not hasten to end this conversation. It is of the greatest interest to me as a Socialist and reformer. The football aspect is, of course, of small moment. But the fact that you are unable to afford goalposts and balls, nor a suitable ground to play on, is of vital interest to me."

"Crikey!" gasped Bill, while Alf and one or two of the footballers touched their foreheads significantly.

"At St. Jim's," observed Skimpole, shaking his head again, "the pupils are provided with goalposts, and everything necessary for games. The disparity between the two cases is most significant and saddening. Even now I am on my way to order new goalposts and nets from the Wayland outfitter. If you will kindly furnish me with further details of your sad case, I shall be most pleased to include them in my book on Socialism which I have been writing in my leisure moments."

"You—writing a book?" ejaculated Bill.

"Yes—an entirely new work, consisting of fourteen volumes. I have already written thirty chapters of the first volume, and if you will furnish me with all details, I will make your sad case public in my next chapters, my dear friends."

"Crikey! Fancy you writin' a book!" exclaimed Bill, winking at his grinning companions. "But don't you bother about shovin' us in that there book. That won't find us a ball and posts, will it?"

"But, my dear friend, my great desire is to help you—"

"Don't you worry about that!" grinned Bill. "But I tell you what. Didn't you say as they was buyin' new goalposts up at the school?"

"Most certainly! In my view—"
 "Then give us them old ones, then!" chuckled Bill. "That'll be more useful than shovin' us in a book. See?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the footballers seemed to treat that suggestion as a joke.

But Skimmy's eyes gleamed as the meaning of Bill's words penetrated his mighty brain.

"My dear friend," he said, with some excitement. "Your suggestion is one that appeals exceedingly to my Socialistic and philanthropic susceptibilities!"

"Oh! Oh, crikey!"
 "If you will come along, say, at seven this evening," went on the genius of the Shell, his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles, "I shall be delighted to hand over to you the old and unwanted goalposts. I have no doubt also, that I shall be able to supply you with a ball."

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Bill.
 "Ho's only kiddin'!" said one youth derisively.

"You're jokin'!" grinned Alf. "They belong to the school, don't they?"

"Indeed, I am not joking, my friend!" said Skimmy earnestly. "The old posts will, doubtless, be used up as firewood, or thrown on one side. And, of course, in my position as junior captain of St. Jim's, I have the power to do as I decide with them."

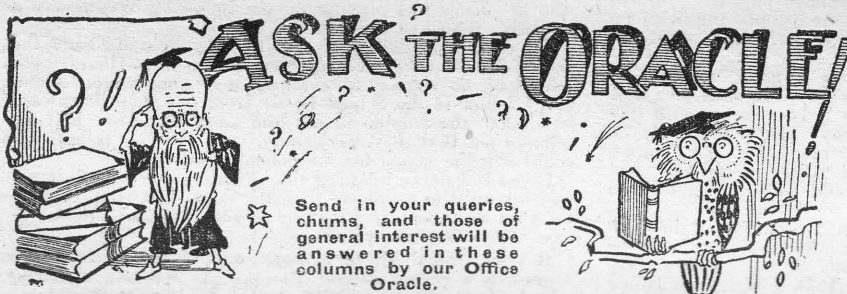
"Crikey! You—you're junior captain—of the football, you mean?" ejaculated Billy, staring blankly at the weedy Skimmy. "My heye!"

"Yes. Only this evening Kildare, the school captain, told me that the job of seeing to the goalposts was my job!" explained Skimpole, with some measure of pride. "They are in my charge, of course. In any case, from a Socialistic point of view, they belong as much to you as to anyone else."

"Um!" said Bill, very doubtfully. "Look 'ere, young gent, is this the straight goods?"

"Good gracious! Whatever do you mean? The goalposts are, as far as my knowledge goes, perfectly straight and undamaged, my dear friend!"

(Continued on next page.)



the other. Nowadays there is a scientific type of patent log which can be towed from the ship's stern, and by means of small metal wings and dials will automatically register the speed at which the ship is travelling through the water. In every ship there is also a log-book in which whatever happens on board is entered. A sailor who commits a serious offence has it entered in this book, which is called being "logged."

Q. What is an escalator?

A. There is no need at all, Charlie Drage of Little Wigan-in-the-North, to apologise for sending in your question. And certainly you may send in as many as you like, only please—please in future don't write in green ink on sugar-bag paper. As I should judge, your particular village hasn't such a thing as an escalator, for you state there is only one bus that leaves the "Plough and Nutmeg" twice a day for Bootle. In London we have quite a few escalators, mostly on the underground railways. An escalator is a flight of stairs always moving, either in an upward or downward direction, so by stepping on to it and standing still we can go either upward or downward according to the direction in which it is moving. The average escalator travels at the rate of about forty feet a minute, and when you get to the top, or bottom, as the case may be, you are supposed to step off with your right foot. This is not compulsory, however, and anyone who wishes to perform acrobatics on his neck is quite entitled to step off with his left!

another way, to mean the border between life and death.

Q. What is a whinger?

A. A short sword, dirk or long knife. It is supposed that the name originated from the whizzing sound of a sword blow.

Q. Was Charles Peace the founder of the League of Nations?

A. No, Bertram Gellibrand, he was NOT! Your cousin Enoch who told you to put that answer in your homework deserves a good rap over the knuckles. The League of Nations is a great institution for the furtherance of international peace, and among others it was fathered by the late President Wilson of the United States. Charles Peace was a burglar and murderer, and he ended his days at the end of a rope.

Q. Who was Jack Johnson?

A. Yes, certainly, Tom Collins, I am only too pleased to answer any question relating to sport. The fellow you mention, Jack Johnson, was a famous negro boxer and heavyweight champion of the world in the years 1908, 1909 and 1910, when he beat respectively Tommy Burns, Stanley Ketchell and the famous "he-bear," James J. Jeffries. Johnson was born in Galveston, Texas, on March 31st, 1878, and at his prime was over six feet in height and weighed no less than 15 stone. Years ago I saw him in the States, and although he had a mighty chest and arms, he was as light as a fairy on his legs. Like most boxers he went to the ring once too often, and was beaten by Jess Willard at Havana, Cuba, in 1915.

Q. What is the longest word in the English language?

A. No, I won't give it up, Gertrude Hodgins! The answer is "smiles"—because there is a mile between the two S's.

Q. Where is the Appian Way?

A. In Italy. It was called the queen of roads and was supposed to have been built in part under the direction of an old-time Roman, Appius Claudius. In the old days it connected Rome with all parts of Southern Italy, and excavations in the middle of last century re-opened a part of this famous old road between Rome and Naples.

Q. What is a coot?

A. My dear Ronald Piccroft, I can't imagine for a minute that your school-teacher, after you had stated the correct number of pints in 57½ gallons, would have then descended to have called you a "coot." So far as I know this is not a word used as a term of either abuse or endearment, and I can only imagine that teacher was pleased with you and said that you were "cute." Perhaps your ears need attention, Ronald. Anyway a coot is a kind of bird resembling a duck, which is able to swim and dive with ease and speed. There are thirteen species of them and they are found not only in Great Britain but nearly all over the world.



This is what a coot looks like—the bird that can swim and dive with ease and speed.

Q. What is The Great Divide?

A. This, "Lover of Geography," is the name of the place on the Canadian Pacific Railway where the line passes from Alberta into British Columbia. It is marked by a granite monument, and consists of a sort of white fence which bears in rustic work the words "THE GREAT DIVIDE" and the names of the two provinces, one on either side. Sometimes the term Great Divide is used in



A landmark dividing Canada and British Columbia.

Q. What is a ship's log?

A. This, Grace Baddock of Burnley, is the instrument used to measure the rate of a ship's speed through the water. Actually at one time it was customary for a sailor to heave a log—or great chunk of wood—over the bow when the vessel was moving and sprint with it along the deck until he reached the poop. The length of the ship was known, and he could work out the speed he ran by the length of time it took him to get from one end of the vessel to

"I mean, is it straight—are the things yours to give?" said Billy, frowning a little. "If you really mean it—"

"Most certainly I do!" said Skimpole. "It is a splendid opportunity for me to put my principles and theories to the test and to practical use. I assure you, my dear fellows, that I have a perfect right to do as I wish with the unwanted sporting paraphernalia. If you will come to the pavilion on our playing-fields this evening, I will hand them over to your charge. The school groundsman is, I believe, ill; but I myself can superintend their removal."

Bill and the rest of the footballers stared at Herbert Skimpole, their eyes gleaming with hope and excitement. Skimpole's guileless face was earnest and eager. It was impossible to doubt his sincerity.

"By Jingo!" exclaimed Bill, his eyes dancing. "I seen them goal-posts when the St. Jim's team was playing Grimes' crowd from Rylcombe, and they're good 'uns yet. We'd be set up proper if we had them, and could save the money to rent a field what we've got our eye on. If it's straight, and you really does mean it, we'll come along like a shot! You count on us!"

"What-ho! We're your men!" came the hearty chorus. Skimpole beamed.

"Very good, my friends!" he exclaimed happily. "I will return at once, and if you will be on the playing-fields no later than six-thirty, I will meet you there and will hand over the unwanted articles."

"Thank you, young gent! You're a good 'un, and no error!" said Bill, his frank features flushed with pleasure. "I knows the ground all right. I been over with the Rammers, too, when they've played your school. Maybe we'll be playin' you there one of these days like Grimes' lot—if we has the luck!" he added rather wistfully. "Not being fixed up with posts and ground we've never had no chance to meet a good team yet."

"Dear me! My dear fellow," said Skimpole, "that can very easily be arranged. I am sure my team will be delighted to play you at any time. I fear that we are engaged for to-morrow afternoon. It is, I believe, a House match. But if Saturday afternoon will suit you—"

"Jingo, won't it just!" said Alf, exchanging glances with Bill and his friends. "This is great! Saturday arfternoon just suits us, don't it, Bill? Is that the goods?"

"Dear me! The—goods? I fear I do not comprehend. However, I must hasten away, and we can discuss arrangements for Saturday later this evening, my friends."

So saying, Herbert Skimpole mounted his machine and rode away towards St. Jim's, having completely forgotten the envelope still reposing in his pocket.

Bill & Co. stared after him, hardly able to believe their good fortune.

"I—I hopes it's all right!" said Bill, rather doubtfully, shaking his head. "If it is, then we're in clover, chaps! But that kid's a good kid, I can see, and he means it right enough. And arter all, they're all rich gents up at the school, and a few old posts an' things ain't nothin' to them, I s'pose. Like as not they'll be glad to get rid of 'em now they got new ones."

"That's it!" agreed Alf. "We'll go, of course, Bill!"

"My 'at! Won't we just!" said another.

"It's worth a tidy walk to get some posts what we've wanted for so long," added Bill. "Crikey! This is a bit of all right! And a match with them young gents on Saturday! It's great! Just the chance we've wanted of getting our club started properly."

And Bill's team agreed with him there. Two minutes later they had donned jackets and were trudging towards St. Jim's.

Meanwhile, Skimpole was cycling homewards, feeling very happy about it all. So full of it was he, indeed, that he never gave a thought to the purpose of his journey to Wayland—in fact, he had completely forgotten Kildare and the order in his pocket. Skimpole's memory—or lack of it—was notorious, and the envelope was still in his pocket when, at the appointed time, he hurried down to Little Side to keep his promise to Bill and his cheery men from Wayland. By that time it was dusk, and the playing-fields deserted—luckily for Skimpole's benevolent scheme.

Skimpole looked very tired and very muddled when he got into the School House that evening—just in time for lock-up. But he was very happy indeed at the pleasing thought that he had put his socialistic theories into practice for once. At about the same time, Bill & Co. were trudging homewards towards Wayland, likewise tired and muddled, but exceedingly jubilant in the possession of the much-needed goal-posts, three footballs, and the prospect of a match on the Saturday afternoon with St. Jim's.

Unfortunately, the absent-minded but well-meaning Skimpole had overlooked the fact that the new posts were not even ordered yet, while he was ignorant of the fact that St. Jim's were already booked for a match with St. Frank's on the Saturday afternoon.

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CHAPTER 5.

Grundy Objects!

SKIMMY, old chap!"

"Well, Trimble?"

"It's about the footer, old man!" said Trimble.

Skimpole groaned.

Skimpole was not interested in footer—he never had been and never was likely to be. But he had to devote a great deal of his time to that trivial subject of late in his capacity of junior skipper.

As a matter of fact, Skimmy was already regretting that he had applied for the post at all. He was a meek, retiring sort of chap, and so much unwelcome publicity he found very trying.

Especially did he find the question of footer trying—very trying indeed.

Though Skimpole himself was not interested in the House match that afternoon, every other fellow in the whole of the Lower School was—or so it seemed to Skimmy. In the ordinary way Skimmy lived, moved, and had his being in a dream-world of his own, absorbed in his deep reflections upon various profound "ologies" and "isms." Footer did not enter into his world, and he usually had no more idea who St. Jim's was playing on the following Wednesday or Saturday than had a South Sea islander.

But on this particular Wednesday Skimpole did know that School House were meeting New House in a House match—he had no chance of evading that knowledge. Almost every fellow in the School House from the Shell downwards had taken the trouble to tell him about it. They had also pointed out that they, personally, were the only fellows who could win the match for the School House.

Instead of doing his prep that Tuesday evening, Skimpole had intended to go ahead with the thirty-first chapter of his book on Socialism, in which he intended to make public the case of the Wayland youths.

But he found literary work out of the question, so numerous were his callers. Fellows like Racke and Crooke, who knew perfectly well they couldn't play footer, came to point out that the winning of the match depended upon their inclusion in the team. Others, who had a great belief in their own abilities, also came to point out the same thing. Not being a judge in such matters, and being an unsuspecting youth, Skimmy believed them one and all, taking their word for it.

He did more. He found that the easiest way to get rid of his troublesome interrupters was to promise them a place in the team—Skimpole having a vague sort of notion that a team consisted of twenty-two players, or thereabouts.

By bed-time Skimpole had done no literary work, but he had promised fourteen fellows a place in the School House match for the following day. By the morning Skimmy had forgotten all about having done so.

But he was not given the chance to forget the match.

While dressing, both Tom Merry and Talbot reminded him that the list for the match was not on the board yet. They also offered, kindly enough, to help him to make the list if he did not feel equal to the task. Skimmy declined the offers, not because he did not need help, but because his mind was on his book, and he did not wish to be bothered with such a trivial matter.

On the way downstairs two fellows—Hammond and Lumley-Lumley—accosted him in turn, and after a quiet chat had wandered away happy in the knowledge that they were "down" to play.

Now, breakfast over, Trimble had waylaid him—also with the intention of discussing the footer.

"Dear me!" murmured Skimmy, blinking rather suspiciously at Trimble. "Pray what have you to say regarding football, Trimble?"

"Only want to make sure you've got me down to play," said Trimble airily, as if it was quite a natural thing for him to be "down." "You know, of course, that there isn't a fellow to beat me in the School House."

"Really, my dear Trimble, I certainly was not aware that you were a footballer," said Skimpole, mildly unbelieving. "I have little knowledge of the game, but I am quite sure—"

"Tom Merry will tell you that I'm the best footballer in the School House," said Trimble. "There isn't a fellow—Ow! Yoop! Leggo, you— Oh, it's you, Tom Merry!"

"Yes, it is me, old bean!" said Tom, retaining his grip on Trimble's ear. "So I'll tell Skimmy that you're the best footballer in the School House, will I?"

"Oh, crumbs! I—I meant to say—I didn't know you were coming along—"

"I know you didn't, old chap!" said Tom pleasantly. "Here, take a little run, old fat man, and go and spin your fibs somewhere else!"

"Oh, really, you— Yow! Yoop!"

Trimble departed hastily, Tom's boot just missing him as he went.

Tom's face changed, and he frowned as he turned to Skimpole.

"The fat ass was pulling your leg, Skimmy," he said grimly, "and I fancy he's not the only one who's been doing that. Look here, what about that list for the match this afternoon? It should have been on the board overnight."

"My dear Merry, I have been very busy—very busy indeed!" said Skimpole, with mild remonstrance. "And, after all, my dear fellow, it is a very trivial matter. Surely it is only necessary to tell the fellows chosen without going to the necessity of making out a list of their names. Really—"

"It's your job to make a list for all to see," said Tom, a trifle impatiently. "But that isn't all the trouble, Skimmy. I've heard queer rumours—that you've been telling various duds that they're down to play. It's not my affair, though I'm on the footer committee. Still, I can't stand by and see the House match mucked up by duds who've been pulling your leg. Who are you playing?"

"My dear Merry, I am sure I do not know," said Skimpole, blinking fast, and frowning in an effort to recollect. "Quite a number of fellows have bothered me in the matter. It is most absurd and exceedingly trivial. To a scientific mind such matters—"

"Blow your scientific mind!" said Tom, smiling despite himself. "I'll have to see Talbot about this. I thought he was helping you with the list, and it seems he thought I was. But I've heard you've already promised one or two chaps. Grundy's swanking that he's chosen—that awful dud!"

"And Mellish!" grinned Blake, as he came up with his chums in time to hear Tom Merry's last remark. "And Racke and Crooke looked jolly pleased about something. I shouldn't be surprised if Skimmy hasn't promised them, too. They won't say anything, though, because they know it'll be scotched if it gets out before the match."

"Yaas, wathah! You must weally take your job sewiously, Skimmay, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus severely. "You weally must not play that feahful duffah Gwunday. He will uttably wuin the School House chances of a win. I stwongly advise you to stick to the usual team, deah boy."

"Dear me!" Skimpole looked quite distressed as well as bewildered now. "Dear me! I really do not remember what I have done in the matter at all. But I will gladly avail myself of your advice, my dear fellows. If you really assure me that Grundy is not a good footballer, then I will tell him I have reconsidered my decision in the matter. I do hope he will not be cross."

"What hopes!" chuckled Lowther. "Why—"

"Bai Jove! Heah comes Gwunday now," observed Arthur Augustus. "Bettah tell him now—get it over while we're heah, deah boy."

"Much better!" grinned Blake.

Grundy came striding along the passage. He certainly looked very pleased with himself. To get a chance to play in even a House match was something remarkably uncommon for George Alfred. He gave the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. a lofty look, and Skimpole quite a genial nod.

"Made that list up yet, Skimmy?" he asked carelessly.

"Not—not yet, my dear Grundy," said Skimmy, a trifle nervously. "You see—"

"Don't forget me for centre-forward," reminded Grundy firmly. "I insist upon that. I'm at home in any position, but centre-forward suits my style best. Don't forget! And if you want any tips before the match, just come to me."

"Ahem! You—you see, my dear—"

"And you'd better take your orders from me on the field, too!" advised Grundy. "An awful duffer like you, Skimmy, will only make a fearful hash of things! In fact, I think you'd better keep off the ground altogether. Leave the match to me—I can easily get a good man to fill your place."

"Bai Jove!"

"Dear me!" mumbled Skimpole, looking very upset. "I fear I must explain, my dear Grundy, that I shall not be able to offer you a position in the team after all!"

"What?" roared Grundy.

"I regret very much that I am obliged to change my mind in the matter," said Skimpole nervously. "D'Arcy has informed me that you are a fearful duffer, and that you will utterly ruin all chances of the School House winning."

"What?" hooted Grundy again.

"I—I feel obliged to take the advice of D'Arcy and Merry, who also assures me that you are a—a dud—which means, I believe, that you are not a good footballer," explained Skimpole mildly.

Grundy went red in the face with wrath.

"Well!" he gasped. "Well, my hat! Check! Me—a

dud! Me—a fearful duffer! Me ruin the School House chances, eh? And—and D'Arcy said that?" His powerful voice ended in a bellow.

"Yes, my dear Grundy. But—"

"Then I'm going to smash that burbling tailor's dummy!" hooted Grundy excitedly. "Why, I'll—I'll—"

Grundy was always a fellow of impulse, and he acted on impulse now. He rushed at Arthur Augustus like a mad bull. The swell of the Fourth jumped back in alarm, but Grundy's big fist tapped his aristocratic nose for all that, and Arthur Augustus yelped.

"Yow! Bai Jove! Wescue, deah boys! Yow! Oh, gwreat Scott!"

Crash!

Arthur Augustus went down on his back, with the irate Grundy on top of him, pummelling him ferociously.

Luckily for Arthur Augustus help arrived before the war-like Alfred had time to do much damage. The next moment Grundy was dragged off by Tom Merry & Co. and held fast.

"Chuck it, Grundy!" grinned Tom Merry. "Skimpole's skipper, and if he says you're not playing, then that's enough!"

"Is it? It jolly well isn't!" howled Grundy furiously. "This is all jealousy on your part, Tom Merry, you rotter! I tell you Skimmy's put me down, and I'm playing! Leggo!"

The juniors let go—but they grasped Grundy again as he made another rush at Arthur Augustus, who had scrambled to his feet.

"No good!" gasped Blake, as he continued to struggle. "Better take him home to his giddy keepers!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The suggestion was adopted at once. Grundy was turned over despite his raging struggles, and his arms and legs gripped. Then he was frog-marched along to his own study. Wilkins and Gunn were chatting in there, and they looked quite disinterested as the crowd appeared in the doorway with the spreadeagled Grundy in their midst.

"This belongs to you chaps," said Tom Merry. "Where shall we put it?"

"Oh, chuck it anywhere!" said Wilkins, carelessly and inelegantly.

"In the coal-scuttle if you like!" said Gunn.

Crash!

"Yarroooogh!"

Grundy went flying into the study, to collapse in a sprawling, yelling heap on the hearthrug. Tom Merry closed the door and the chums walked away, laughing. As they went they heard a terrific commotion from Grundy's study. Evidently George Alfred Grundy objected strongly to his study-mates' casual treatment of the situation, and he was making his objection clear to them—with his fists!

"That's settled Grundy's hash!" gasped Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Wonder what other idiots Skimmy's put down for his team? My hat! Where is he?"

But Skimpole was conspicuous only by his absence. The genius of the Shell was really tired of discussions on the question of footer, and he had drifted away. Possibly he was a trifle apprehensive regarding Grundy. At all events he had disappeared, and Tom did not see him until he turned up for classes in the Form-room.

Nor did Tom get the chance to speak to him at morning break. Skimpole was well up to Form-work, and it was rarely he got into trouble with Mr. Linton. But this morning he did. For neglecting prep the evening before he was kept in during morning break.

Tom was obliged to wait until morning lessons ended, and he caught the new junior captain as he was leaving the room. Tom was really worried about the matter. As ex-skipper he could scarcely interfere, and he did not like to interfere. Nor would he have done so had it been anyone else but Skimpole. He knew, however, that Skimpole was utterly ignorant of footer matters, and that the result of leaving the match in his hands would be disastrous.

"Now, Skimmy," he began, "what about that list, you awful ass? Have you done anything?"

"My dear Merry, I have, as yet, been quite unable to give the matter any thought," said Skimpole. "I really fear that the task is beyond me, and I am very disturbed and worried regarding it. I should be extremely grateful, if you would kindly undertake the task of forming the team for me. I would indeed! And especially do I wish that I had not agreed to captain the team."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lowther.

"But Figgins was most emphatic about the necessity of me being in charge," went on Skimpole.

"Figgins was?" almost yelled Tom.

"Yes. I did not intend to take part at all. But both he and Kerr assured me that my presence would be imperative in order to inspire my team."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"The—the rotters!" gasped Tom. "They were pulling your leg, of course, Skimmy. It would just suit Figgy's book for you to play. But—but if you don't wish to play, old chap—"

"My dear Merry, I certainly do not. But if it is my duty—"

"Not at all, Skimmy!" said Tom hastily. "If you could play it would be different, of course. But about this list—have you seen Talbot yet?"

"No, my dear fellow—"

"Then see him at once," said Tom grimly. "I can't make your list out for you; you're the skipper, and the fellows wouldn't allow it. But Talbot's vice-captain, and they couldn't object if you gave him authority to make it out. Go to him at once, there's a good chap!"

"Very well. I will certainly take your advice and ask Talbot to make out the list," agreed Skimpole.

"That'll do, then," said Tom.

Herbert Skimpole, the frown of perplexity and worry lifted from his bony forehead, ambled away in search of Talbot. For what was probably the first time in the history of St. Jim's, the junior skipper was anxious to relinquish his job of choosing the House footer team. It was amazing; but, then, never before had the Lower School had such a skipper.

CHAPTER 6.

Who's Playing?

"TIME to be going down, I fancy!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!" said Lowther, with a grin. "You seem to be taking it for granted that you're playing, Tommy."

"Well, I do!" assented Tom, with a smile. "I don't think old Talbot will give me a miss. Still, one never knows, of course. Anyway, I'm going down to have a look at the list; it should be up now."

"My hat! Rather!" said Manners. "It's jolly near time for the match now. Come on!"

The Terrible Three prepared to go down to Big Hall to have a look at the notice-board there. Since dinner the three chums had been in the study—Tom Merry writing home to his guardian; Manners pasting photo films into an album; and Lowther writing his joke column for "Tom Merry's Weekly."

Tom himself had scarcely given the matter of the match another thought. He knew the selection would be safe enough in the capable hands of Talbot of the Shell. He also felt certain that Talbot would not dream of leaving him out of the team.

Though not so certain, both Manners and Lowther also had great hopes of a place in the team. Still, as Tom himself said, one never knew. Like Tom, they were, however, quite prepared to take it smiling if their names were missing from the list.

Just as they were about to leave the study the door flew open, and four juniors marched in. They were Blake, Herries, D'Arcy, and Digby of the Fourth, and they all looked wrathful and excited.

"Oh, here you are, Tommy!" snorted Jack Blake. "Look here, what the dickens does it mean? That dashed list isn't on the board yet!"

"Wha-at?"

"You said Talbot was selecting the team," said Blake, in great wrath. "You told us so at dinner. The fellows want to know, and old Talbot can't be found anywhere."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "But—but where is Talbot? Skimmy told me he would ask him to select the team, and I left it at that."

"Well, the list isn't up, anyway," said Blake. "I want to know if I'm playing or not. If I'm not, I'm going to the pictures at Wayland."

"I'm pretty certain of playing, in any case!" said Herries, with satisfaction. "They can't do without me in goal. I'm not waiting any longer. I'm jolly well going to change—and blow the list!"

With that George Herries marched out.

"Well, this beats the giddy band!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "It weally is gettin' too thick, you know. This comes of puttin' fellows like poor old Skimmy in authority. But if that list isn't up within a few minutes there will be a wow! The fellows are gettin' vevy impatient."

"Some have already started changing!" said Blake grimly. "There's something rummy about this lot, Tommy. Racke, Crooke, and several more chaps say they're playing. It must be a joke of someone's. And Grundy swears he's going to play."

"We'll see about that!" snapped Tom. "You're sure the list isn't up?"

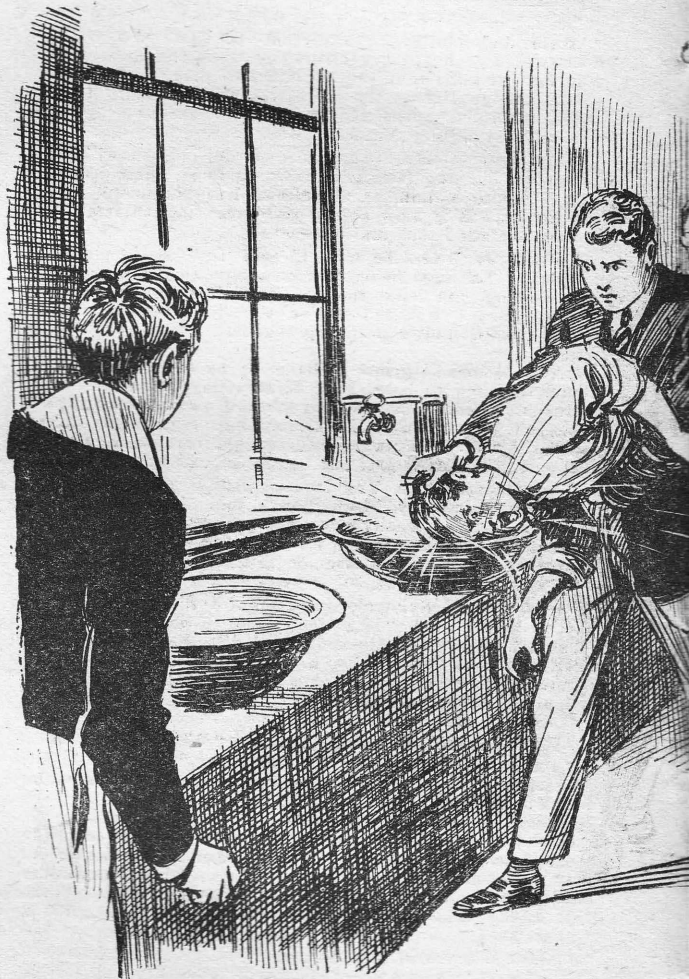
"Quite! Just come from Big Hall now. There's no end

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of excitement going on there," said Blake. "But the list isn't there. Some of the regular players you've told to be ready have gone down to the changing-room, though. They aren't waiting to be officially told by Talbot."

"It's queer!" said Tom. "It isn't like Talbot to forget! My hat! I—I hope that duffer Skimmy hasn't forgotten all about seeing Talbot. We'd better go and see the chump!"

The juniors hurried along to Skimpole's study, which he shared with Gore and Talbot. They found only Skimpole in the study. He was seated at the table, busy writing, with a great sheaf of manuscript before him, and almost hidden by a pile of huge volumes.



The uproar in the changing-room was at its height when Kildare time the battle was a thing of the past. Even the truculent Grundy ducked his head into one of the wash-basins that had

Tom Merry hooked a hand in Skimmy's collar and yanked him to his feet.

"What about that list?" he roared. "Where's Talbot?"

"Ow! Really, Merry, you are excessively violent!" gasped Skimpole, squirming. "I am afraid Talbot has not returned yet."

"But where is he?" hooted Tom.

"He has gone on a message for Mr. Railton, I understand!" mumbled Skimpole, blinking rather apprehensively at his visitors. "He went immediately after dinner, and I did not get an opportunity—"

"Didn't you ask him about the list?" shrieked Tom.

"I did not get the opportunity, my dear Merry!" protested Skimpole. "I inquired after him, and Trimble told me he had gone to Rylcombe to send a wire for the Housemaster."

"Then—then nothing's been done?" gasped Tom.

"My dear Merry, I am extremely sorry," said Skimmy. "But I came here to wait for his return, and I have been so engrossed in my literary work that I have completely forgotten what is, to me, a trivial and absurd task."

"Oh, you—you—"

"Bump him!" gasped Blake.

"My dear friends—Ow! What—Yoooop!"

Bump!

Skimpole sat down hard on the carpet, his pen flying one way and the pile of sheets scattering all over the room. The juniors tramped out, Tom Merry frowning with anger. It was useless to bother further with Skimpole. In the passage they bumped into Kildare. The captain of the school was looking very grim.

"Where's that young idiot Skimpole?" he snapped. "D'you know the list for the afternoon's match isn't up yet, Merry?"

"Yes."

"How's that?" snorted Kildare. "This sort of thing won't do at all! I'm getting fed-up with it!"

"Well, in a way, it was my fault, perhaps," said Tom, anxious to shield the guileless Skimmy. "I advised Skimpole at the last moment to get Talbot to make the list up. He agreed. But, unfortunately, Mr. Railton's sent Talbot to the village, and he can't be found."

Kildare snorted again.

"I expected something like this!" he rapped. "Well, it's



appeared on the scene. He sailed in with a will, and in a very short cooled down when the captain of St. Jim's lifted him up bodily and opened to be nearly full of cold water. (See Chapter 7.)

nearly time for the match to start, Merry. I'll put you in charge. You'll get the usual team together and play the New House—you to skipper the team. You understand?"

Tom's face set bitterly for a moment. It was partly owing to Kildare's "slanging" that he had "got his back up" and resigned the captaincy—which had led up to this series of tragedies over the captaincy. But Tom was not the fellow to harbour bitter feelings for long. He realised that it was up to him to forget personal grievances for the good of the House.

"Is that an order, Kildare?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," said Kildare, with a grunt. "You were a young ass to resign the captaincy, Merry. You see what it's led to—though it's not for me to criticise Mr. Railton's scheme of giving these duds a trial at the job. Anyway, I'm asking you to take the job of skipper on for this afternoon, as Skimpole seems to have made a hopeless mess of it. I understand he hasn't even attempted to get a team together."

"Very well, Kildare," said Tom. "I'll get the fellows together at once—if they are still at hand."

"Right! I'll be along presently to see how things are going," said Kildare gruffly.

He walked on, frowning. Though fully aware that his "ragging" of Tom Merry had led in some measure to the

present state of affairs, Kildare was far from being enthusiastic over Mr. Railton's scheme of allowing six fellows like Grundy, D'Arcy, Skimpole, Mellish, Fatty Wynn, and Tompkins of the Fourth to take it in turns to be temporary captain for a week each. Grundy and D'Arcy had already had their turns, and had made a hash of things. Now Skimpole was doing the same, and there was every prospect of the others doing likewise.

True, Mr. Railton had had some excuse for doing as he had done. Tom Merry had refused to reconsider his decision to resign, and practically every fellow in the Lower School had backed Tom Merry up, even to the extent of refusing to put up for the captaincy in his place. Blake, Levison, Talbot, Clive, Noble—all the leading lights, in the School House at all events, had refused, hoping that Tom would withdraw his resignation.

But the captain of the Shell's determination had not wavered. And as the six named juniors had been the only ones willing to stand, Mr. Railton had made the extraordinary decision to give them a trial as junior captain in turn for one week each.

So far, little harm had been done—indeed, the whole thing was looked upon by the Lower School, and a big part of the Upper School, as very entertaining indeed. But Kildare did not share the general view.

Nor did Tom Merry, for that matter. Still, it had to go on, for Mr. Railton was not likely to cancel the scheme without strong cause. But Tom, as well as Kildare, was looking very serious now.

He led the way to study after study in search of the regular members of his team. Levison and Kangaroo were found mooning in their studies. In Big Hall three other members of the regular team were roped in. They were the only fellows who had waited by the notice-board—the rest had vanished.

"Gone to the changin'-room!" said Cardew, with a chuckle. "You're looking very solemn, Thomas. Come along to the jolly old changin'-room, and smiles will wipe away that frown. I fancy so, at least!"

"What d'you mean?" snapped Tom.

"Come an' see!" said Cardew, with a yawn. "Dear old Skimmy. What a lad he is!"

And they went.

CHAPTER 7.

An Outsize in Teams!

"PHEW! Sounds like trouble!" said Tom Merry blankly.

It certainly did sound like trouble.

When yards away from the changing-room Tom Merry & Co. and Cardew became aware that something unusual was going on in that apartment.

Angry voices raised on high, sounds of scuffling, and a certain amount of laughter came from behind the closed door. And the voices seemed very numerous indeed.

"Sounds as if half the blessed school's in there!" gasped Blake.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it is, dear men!" murmured Cardew. "When brainy lads like Skimmy get goin' somethin's bound to happen!"

Tom Merry flung open the door of the changing-room. Then he jumped.

"M-my hat!" he ejaculated.

The room was crowded. Between twenty and thirty juniors were there, and all seemed either already changed into footer togs or in the act of changing. And all seemed to be shouting at once—with the exception of a few bright youths, who were nearly hysterical with laughing.

"I tell you I'm playing!" came Grundy's powerful voice above the general uproar. "Skimmy's told me so. He's proved he knows more about the job of skipper than we thought he did!"

"Rats! The born idiot wants a strait-waistcoat! You're not playing!"

"I am, I tell you! Why, I'll punch your head, Clive, if you say I'm not!" howled Grundy. "Where's Skimmy?"

"Yes, where's Skimmy?"

"Where is the dummy?"

It was a general roar.

"What the dickens—" Tom Merry squeezed into the room, with Blake and the rest behind him.

It was a very tight squeeze. Someone sighted Tom, and there was a yell.

"Here's Tom Merry now! Look here, Merry, didn't you tell us that Talbot—"

"Blow Tom Merry! He's a back number now! Skimmy's our skipper!" bawled Crooke, cramming on a footer shirt.

"Where's Skimmy?"

"Yes, where's Skimmy?"

"And where's Talbot?"

More than two score of youthful voices yelled, howled, or shrieked for Tom Merry, Skimpole, and Talbot respectively. The general din was terrific.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, blinking dazedly through his eyeglass at the hectic scene. "This is weally most wemarkable! Can you explain it, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther suddenly. "I fancy I can! These must be the chaps Skimmy's told can play in the match—with the regular men Tom Merry told to be ready. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, as he also understood. "Oh, that—that awful young idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake, Digby, and Manners joined in a howl of laughter with Lowther. Cardew smiled round him blandly as he counted the fellows present.

"This is no end entertainin'," he observed. "Skimmy's evidently told sixteen men they can play, with himself makin' seventeen. Add to those Talbot's regular team who've turned up to play, countin' you in, Tommy, an' that makes twenty-seven men! Dear me! Won't the New House chaps get a jolly old swipin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't stand grinning there, Tom Merry!" shouted Herries angrily. "Come and settle this—clear these silly fools out! Here, get off my locker, Gore!"

"I jolly well won't!" roared Gore excitedly. "I'm playing, and I've as much right to use a locker—more right, in fact, than you have."

"Won't you?" hooted Herries. "Then I'll jolly well make you!"

And Herries punched Gore on the nose. Gore howled, and promptly hit back. The next instant they were fighting furiously.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry blankly. "Is—is this a fact, Clive? Have all these hopeless duds been told to play?"

"Must have been?" snorted Clive. "That hopeless idiot Skimmy seems to have been dishing out places right and left. He must have thought he was picking chaps for a blessed paper-chase. All these duffers—even Mellish and Tompkins—seem to have been told they can play!"

"But—but?" ejaculated Tom hopelessly, "Skimmy told me he'd leave it to Talbot!"

"Well, he must have told these idiots before that, and forgotten to cancel the places afterwards! The—the born idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom feebly. "What's to be done? Look here! Hold on, Grundy, not so fast! Wait a bit; I've got something to say about this!"

"I'm not waiting. I don't want to hear what you've got to say, Tom Merry!" bawled Grundy, squeezing his way towards the door. "You're a back number! You shut up! I'm going on the field! I'm playing!"

"You're not!" said Tom Merry, setting his lips. "Kildare's given me orders—"

"Blow Kildare's orders!" shouted Gore, who was anxious not to hear Kildare's orders, knowing quite well what they would be. "Chuck Tom Merry and his crowd out, Grundy!"

"I'm going to!" shouted Grundy. "Clear out of this, Merry!"

"Listen to me! Kildare— Here, stand back, Grundy— Yow!"

Tom Merry fell back as Grundy's fist crashed into his chest. It was enough for Tom. His eyes gleamed.

"Out with these idiots, you chaps!" he snapped. "Back up!"

"Yaas, wathah! Thwow the duds out!"

The next moment Tom Merry and Grundy were at grips, and scarcely three seconds later their example was followed by a dozen others. Within one minute the whole room was a mass of struggling, bowling juniors in footer attire. Only Cardew kept out of it, and he looked on, nearly hysterical with laughter.

Backwards and forwards the battle swayed. Tom Merry's men doing their best to throw out the men "selected" by the absent-minded Skimpole, and those indignant youths striving their utmost to return the compliment, so to speak. The uproar was terrific.

The battle was at its height when Kildare—true to his promise to "be along presently" opened the door and looked in.

He stared transfixed at the exciting scene within. But only for a moment. Then he sailed in with a will, cuffing heads and ears right and left, now and again bringing two heads cracking together.

"Stop it!" he roared. "You hear! Stop this, you young idiots! What the dickens—"

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Crack! Cuff, cuff, cuff!

"Look out! Oh, my hat!"

"Kildare! Look out, chaps! Yooop!"

"Yow! Ow-ow! Oh, crumbs! Ow!"

The room resounded with howls and yelps as the captain of St. Jim's fairly got going.

Kildare was a strong-handed fellow, and he neither minced his words or his actions. In a very short time the battle was a thing of the past. Even Grundy quietened down when Kildare, after trying in vain to make him cease the struggle by cuffing, lifted him up bodily and, carrying him across to the wash-basins, ducked his head into a basin that happened to be nearly full of cold water.

That cooled down even the truculent Grundy.

Hugging damaged noses and rapidly-darkening eyes and various other injuries, the dishevelled footballers and would-be footballers stood about and blinked at Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's eyed the company, with a face in which anger and amazement strove for the mastery.

"Great Scott!" he articulated at last. "What the dickens does this mean? Merry, what the thump has happened? What are all these young idiots doing in footer togs?"

Tom Merry mopped a damaged lip and gasped.

"It—it's all owing to—a—a—"

"Mistake?" suggested Cardew, from the doorway. "Dear old Skimmy had an idea there were twenty-seven men in a footer team instead of eleven, Kildare."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean to tell me that Skimpole told all these chaps they could play?" almost yelled Kildare.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" asked Cardew.

"Well, well—"

Words failed Kildare.

"And we're going to play!" bawled Grundy, who looked as if he had been through an earthquake. "Skimpole's my skipper. He knows a good man when he sees one. He's selected me to play. I asked him. I shoved my fist under his nose and asked him whether he thought I was good enough or not. He said yes—told me I could play at once. He's a good chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He told me I could play, too—told me last night," said Racke sulkily. "And as he hasn't backed out, I mean to play."

"Same here!"

"Yes, rather!"

It was an indignant chorus from Skimpole's team.

Kildare glared.

"Well, my hat!" he gasped. "So that's it, is it? I heard that something funny was going on. And—and didn't you know this when I spoke to you, Merry, you young ass?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"No, I didn't," he said. "I thought there was something funny going on, though. These chaps haven't made a shout about it, excepting Grundy and one or two more. They must have known the thing would be knocked on the head if it got out. They knew perfectly well—most of them—that they weren't up to playing in a House match. But they kept it quiet, knowing you or somebody would stop it if it got out they were down to play."

"I didn't, anyway," grunted Grundy. "I know my form, and I told everybody I was playing. Think I'm that sort. Why, if you say that about me, Tom Merry—"

Grundy threw aside the towel he was using and started towards Tom Merry. Kildare grasped him and sent him whirling back again.

"That's enough of this foolery!" he snapped. "I think I understand. Well, now you'll hear my say in the matter. I'm skipper of St. Jim's, and what I say goes. The team Skimpole's selected—if he has selected it—is cancelled. The team that will play against the New House this afternoon will be skippered by Tom Merry, and will be the usual team that plays in House matches. That's enough. All but the men in Merry's team can change and clear—sharp!"

"Oh!"

"Oh, I say, that's a bit thick!"

"Clear!" shouted Kildare. "The kid who has anything more to say will get my boot!"

Nobody had anything more to say—not to Kildare, at all events. But when the captain of St. Jim's had left the room Grundy gave a snort.

"All right!" he gasped, red in the face with wrath, and with water still dripping from his hair. "All right! I won't play. I refuse to play now. But I'm going to take it out of that burbling bandersnatch Skimpole. He's let us in for all this!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear! Come on!"

Grundy charged out of the room in great wrath. After him went the disappointed would-be footballers in an angry

swarm to interview Skimpole. They vanished, and a roar of laughter followed them from Tom Merry's team.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Skimmy!" grinned Tom Merry. "I'm sorry for the young ass. But he'll have to stew in his own juice, I'm afraid. It'll teach him to be more careful, perhaps. Anyway, let's get changed and get out. We'll never hear the last of this 'rom Figgy and his lot."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah! wuff! But I'm afwaid poor old Skimmy will get it wathah wuff. I think I'd better wash up and wescue him fwom those wottahs."

"Do you?" snapped Tom Merry. "Well, you'd better think again, old chap. You're playing and it's gone time already. Get changed—sharp, you ass! Skimmy must rescue himself, the duffer."

"Very well, deah boy. I am vewy sowwy for Skimmy, though."

For the present, however, the good-hearted Arthur Augustus had to content himself with being sorry, and he changed in double-quick time. Then the team hurried out and made tracks for Little Side.

CHAPTER 8.

"Oh Where, Oh Where—??"

"BUCK up, you chaps!" said George Figgins. "My hat! It's going to be a scream! I made it quite clear to Skimmy that he's simply to skipper the team, and— My only hat! You should see the crowd of duds he's got together! I squinted into the changing-room as I came along, and I spotted chaps like Grundy and Racke and Mellish and Tompkins changing into footer togs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl of laughter in the New House dormitory at that information.

"I heard Grundy was playing and one or two more duds last night!" grinned Figgy, in great glee. "I saw we were in for some fun then. Skimmy, of course, poor ass, hasn't the faintest idea who can play footer and who can't. He seems to have been handing out places right and left. In fact, it looked to me, when I squinted in, as if he'd picked about half a dozen more chaps as reserves as well."

"Perhaps he thinks it's Rugger!" chuckled Kerr.

"Goodness knows what his idea is," said Figgy, "but there certainly were more than eleven chaps in footer togs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll give the duds no rest!" chuckled Figgy. "We'll give it 'em hot and strong. The idea is, mind, to score as many goals as we possibly can. We'll be able to crow for terms with a score of about thirty to none against them. And we'll easily make it thirty if fearful duffers like Skimmy and Grundy and Tompkins are playing. What a chance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. howled at the thought. It certainly was a great chance. Tom Merry and his followers might say that it wasn't a fair match—that only the duds were playing from the School House. But the fact would remain that the School House would lose by goals innumerable—a tremendous licking. That Tom Merry & Co. would not be allowed to forget in a hurry. That was Figgy's idea, at all events.

It was an idea that, naturally enough, appealed greatly to the cheery youths of the New House.

"All's fair in love and war, and a joke's a joke," grinned Figgins. "We're going to play up for all we're worth, duds or no duds. Remember, it's goals we're after—as many as we can possibly shove through."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the wheeze! Good old Skimmy! Ain't we thankful he isn't a New House chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's get off, then," said Figgins. "They'll be on the ground by now, I should think. It's nearly time, anyway."

But the School House team of "duds" had not put in an appearance. In fact, Little Side was deserted when Figgins and his merry men arrived there and trotted on to the ground.

They did not trot on very far, however. In fact, they scarcely took a dozen steps on to the footer field, for Figgy suddenly pulled up, his eyes nearly starting out of his head.

"Hallo! What—?"

"Why, what— Oh, great Scott!"

A chorus of startled, amazed questions and exclamations arose as Figgins' followers also stopped and stared. They, like Figgins himself, nearly fell down in their astonishment.

"Mum-my only aunt!" articulated the New House leader at length, finding his voice again. "Why, where the dickens are the goal-posts?"

"And the—the nets?"

"And the—the corner flags!" yelled Redfern. "M-mum-my hat! Am I dreaming? Has there been a giddy earthquake, and have the blessed things been swallowed up?"

Figgins did not answer the question. He simply couldn't. He just stood and stared round the ground. Gone were the familiar goal-posts and nets and corner flags. The ground, like Mother Hubbard's cupboard, was bare; the things they looked for and expected to see were gone.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Kerr blankly. "What's this mean? What's happened, Figgy?"

"Looks to me as if the instalment men have been to collect 'em!" grinned Owen. "This comes of not keeping the instalments up. We must see the giddy treasurer of the club about this!"

There was a chuckle—but it was not a very hearty chuckle.

In a bewildered and dumbfounded group the New House players—or would-be players—stood and stared at the places where the posts and nets and corner-flags should have been. They were standing thus when Lawrence came rushing up. He had called at the pavilion, on Figgy's order, to get a ball out of stock.

"I can't find any balls, Figgy!" he exclaimed, looking a trifle astonished. "There were three balls in stock, weren't there—the new one and two spare ones. But—mum-my hat!"

Lawrence suddenly became aware of the absence of the footer-field "furniture."

"Why, where on earth—"

"Just what we want to know!" said Figgins faintly. "But d'you mean to say there are no giddy balls either, Lawrence?"

"Not one—I've searched the whole blessed pavilion!" said Lawrence. "This beats the band. Had you been told anything about this, Figgy? If you had—"

"Of course not!" snapped Figgins. "I'm absolutely knocked over! Kildare can't know anything about it, either, or he'd have let us know. And where's the blessed groundsman?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"He's ill at home with the flu—I know that!" said Figgins. "But that can't have anything to do with this queer bizney! This beats cock-fighting hollow, chaps! Can somebody have pinched 'em?"

That really seemed the only possible explanation of the mystery. The New House eleven were still looking blankly at each other when there was a shout and Tom Merry and his men came trotting on the ground, looking very fit and keen. But they stopped short long before they reached Figgins & Co. And as they stopped thus Kildare, in his referee attire, came along behind them.

"Sharp now, kids!" he rapped out rather irritably. "You're late enough, you young idiots. Why the dickens are you standing there like a lot of stuffed— Great Scott!"

Kildare almost collapsed in a heap as his glance went over Little Side. It took him some moments to regain his breath, and when he did regain it he gave a roar.

"Where's the thumping goal-posts? And where's the thumping nets? And where— Great Scott! Why, even the blessed corner flags have gone!"

There was a chuckle.

"It's nothing to laugh at!" bellowed Kildare wrathfully. "Where the dickens are the things—the goal-posts, the—the nets—the flags? What the—the—" Words failed Kildare.

"If—if this is a House joke—" began Figgins, glaring at Tom Merry.

"If this is one of your silly japes, you mean!" said Tom Merry, glowering back at Figgy.

"If—if it's a joke!" said Kildare with terrific grimness, "it's a joke somebody will have to pay for. Doesn't anybody know where the dashed things are?"

Nobody knew! The twenty-two dumbfounded footballers just looked at each other.

"They were here last evening at five or thereabouts," said Tom Merry. "We were here booting a ball about. We went about five-thirty. There was nobody on the ground then, but everything was all right. The things must have been shifted in the night."

"And none of you kids know anything about it?"

"No!" It was a chorus.

"Well, this beats anything," breathed Kildare. "Mr. Railton wouldn't give orders for them to be shifted without telling me—in fact, it's not his job and he wouldn't do it. And I've given no such orders. Why, the new posts were only ordered last evening. I sent that young ass, Skimpole— Phew! I suppose that young idiot can't have made a muck of things again!"

"Skimmy—how on earth could he?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Goodness knows! He may have told the sports outfitter to come and take the old props away—though it seems a mad thing even for Skimpole to do. Besides—"

Kildare was interrupted.

"My hat!" exclaimed Levison, suddenly startled. "I—1 wonder! When I was cycling along the lane past the playing fields in the dusk last night I spotted Skimmy. He was talking to a crowd of working chaps from Wayland—at least, I took them to be that."

"Skimmy was?"

"Yes. They looked decent chaps, though, and I just nodded to Skimmy and went on. But—but I wonder—"

Tom Merry wondered too, now.

"Phew!" he breathed. "And—you remember, Monty; we met him coming in just before lock-up. He looked jolly tired, and he was muddy—his hands especially. I wondered then what on earth he had been doing. And—well, you never know what that ass will do."

Tom's words, added to Levison's information, caused a sensation. The fellows looked at each other. Kildare's mouth set.

"We'd better go and see Skimpole, I think!" he said grimly.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! If Skimmy has done this—"

The two teams followed Kildare in an excited crowd as he made hasty tracks for the School House. Up the stairs they streamed, and on to the Shell passage.

As they entered it they became aware of a commotion proceeding from Study No. 9. Above a queer sort of bumping noise sounded a doleful squeaking and a well-known voice—the voice of George Alfred Grundy, raised in wrath.

"That's it! Give the burbling idiot socks! We'll teach him to make fools of us!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yow-ow! Yoooop! Yarrooogh!"

"Now again, chaps!"

Bump, bump bump!

The bumps were followed by more dismal squeaks from the hapless Herbert Skimpole. Apparently the disappointed would-be footballers were venting their disappointment upon the weedy person of the new junior captain.

"They're bumping poor old Skimmy!" said Tom Merry frowning. "We're just in time!"

"I think we are!" said Kildare grimly.

He strode up to the door of Study No. 9 and flung it open. A startled gasp arose as the occupants saw the captain of St. Jim's standing in the doorway.

There were plenty of them. Grundy was there, of course, and so were Racke & Co., Gore and the rest of Skimpole's team. In the midst of them, seated dismally on the carpet, was the hapless Skimpole, and he was wailing in anguish.

"So this is the game!" exclaimed Kildare, marching into the room. "Stop that, Grundy, or you'll have me to deal with. Bullying won't do here!"

"B-bub-bullying?" ejaculated Grundy.

"That's what I said!" snapped Kildare. "Clear out of this, the lot of you!"

"But, look here—" began Grundy.

"Clear out!" roared Kildare. "Take fifty lines, Grundy, and if you're not out of here in two ticks I'll lick you!"

"But—" Grundy said no more. He did not like the look on Kildare's face. He departed, and the crowd followed him quickly enough. Tom Merry and the rest of the footballers followed Kildare into the study.

"Now, Skimpole!" said Kildare sternly, when the breathless genius of the Shell had been helped to his feet. "Pull yourself together! We want to know if you know anything about the goal-posts which are missing from Little Side?"

"Ow—ow!" gasped Skimpole. "Ow! I am exceedingly hurt! I have been brought into heavy concussion with the floor, and I am breathless and injured! Those thoughtless fellows have treated me with monstrous rudeness and brutality! For no reason at all they rushed upon me, sending my manuscript flying all over the room. Indeed, I distinctly saw Racke empty the ink over—"

"Dry up!" hooted Kildare. "Answer my question, you young ass, and never mind your silly manuscripts!"

"Ow! Oh, dear! Yow! Very well, my dear Kildare! I am extremely grateful to you for rescuing me from my unfortunate and painful predicament—"

"Answer me!" thundered Kildare. "Do you know anything about those dashed goal-posts?"

"Ow! Good gracious. Pray—Ow! Very well, Kildare," gasped Skimpole, suddenly observing the storm signals on the skipper's face. "I—I will answer your question in one moment. D-dud-did you say goal-posts? Dear me," added the genius, clasping his bony forehead reflectively. "I really have some recollection regarding goal-posts. Yes, I think—Ah, yes, of course! I handed them over last evening to those Wayland youths. Quite so!"

"What? Then—then—" spluttered Kildare.

"Yes, I remember it well now," said Skimpole, his brow

clearing. "Being an earnest Socialist, I was excessively saddened—"

"But what on earth for?" shrieked Kildare. "How—what—why the thump did you give away the thundering goal-posts and things off Little Side, you young duffer?"

"Dear me!" stammered Skimpole, eyeing Kildare very apprehensively. "I am surprised, shocked, by this exhibition of anger, Kildare! Pray why are you so angry at my philanthropic action in handing over those discarded goal-posts? Being a sincere Socialist, I was saddened to see those Wayland youths playing football with rolled-up paper as a ball and jackets as goal-posts. And, remembering that new posts were to be ordered, I decided it only right that they should have them. Under Socialism—"

"You—you hare-brained young idiot!" gasped Kildare. "You—you gave them away to some kids from Wayland?"

"Certainly, my dear Kildare! I am sure the fellows here, being well-circumstanced, will not object to my action," said Skimpole mildly. "I told the youths they were fully entitled to them, and last evening I went down to Little Side and superintended their removal, knowing they were to be replaced by new ones. I really trust," said Skimmy, blinking around at the astonished faces, "that I have done right, and that you all approve of my action, my dear friends?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip!"

"So—so that's it!" breathed Tom Merry. "Just what Skimmy would do. Why isn't he in a home?"

"The—the born idiot!"

"The—the footling, crank-brained lunatic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

Apparently Lowther saw the funny side. Nobody else did, however. They blinked at the mildly-astonished Skimpole as if they could eat him.

"Well, this beats anything," said Kildare, eyeing Skimpole as though he were some queer animal. "I suppose it's useless to rave; he knows no better. He ought to be in some sort of home. He must be potty to do a thing like that!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Tom Merry, eyeing Skimmy blankly. "D'you know what you've done, Skimmy? You've mucked up the match this afternoon. We've neither goal-posts nor ball."

"Dear me! How very unfortunate!" said Skimpole, not very impressed. "However, it is a trifling matter, surely?"

"Trifling!" hooted Tom. "Oh, you—you ass! When are the new posts coming, Kildare?" he added, taking a deep breath and turning to the captain of St. Jim's.

"They should be here to-morrow," said Kildare; "or Friday, at latest. What did the outfitter say, Skimpole? Did he give any date for delivery?"

Skimpole wrinkled his brows, and then he gave a violent start and fumbled in his pockets.

"Dear me!" he gasped. "I fear—I really fear that your errand completely escaped my mind, Kildare. Meeting those youths quite made me forget all about it, so saddened was I at their plight. Ah, here it is!"

And from a pocketful of papers Skimpole withdrew an envelope and handed it to Kildare. That worthy blinked at it.

"You—you mean to say you didn't deliver the order, after all?" he roared.

"Ow! Dear me! I fear I completely forgot to deliver it. I am extremely sorry, my dear Kildare."

"Oh, you—you—"

Words failed Kildare for the moment. He shoved the envelope into his pocket, after a hasty glance at it, and took a step towards Skimpole. Then, as if realising the uselessness of bestowing a licking upon the genius of the Shell, he stopped short.

"You young ass!" he said in measured tones. "Well, I'll have to see to this myself. Though—Merry, take this to Wayland at once. You know what to do."

"But—but the match?"

"The match is off, of course, you young idiot!" snapped Kildare, keeping himself in hand with an effort. "You've no dashed goal-posts and no ball. The Sixth are playing a practice match, and the Fifth are playing Abbotsford here, as you know. And they've no spare balls, in any case. The match is off. It can't be helped. It strikes me that the sooner you take the job over again the better, Merry!"

With that frank admission, Kildare stamped out of the study and departed, his face still wrathful and almost dazed. The footballers gazed at Skimpole. That worthy blinked back at them apprehensively.

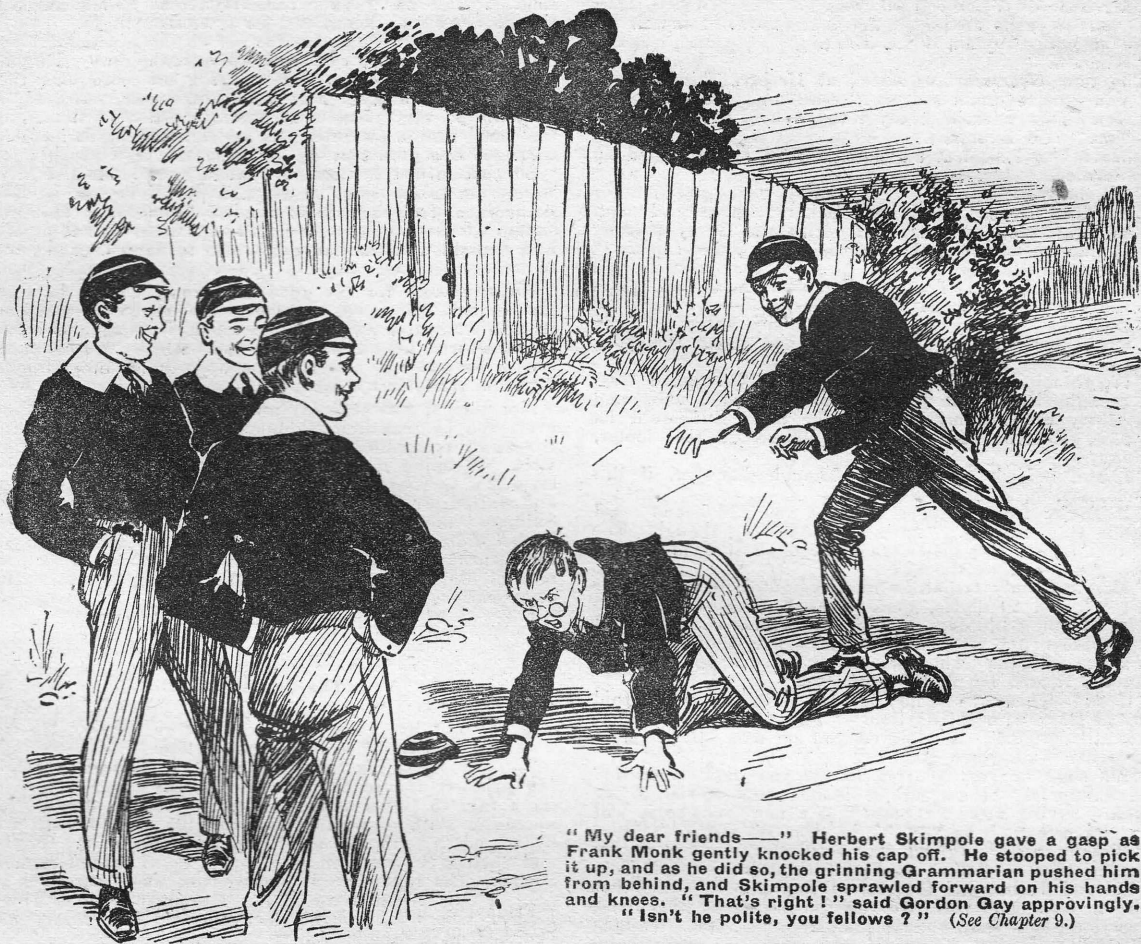
"You—you potty idiot!" snorted Tom Merry, in great wrath. "If it was anyone else but you—"

"Bump him!" shouted Herries excitedly. "Done us out of the match! Let's finish what those cads were doing when we came in."

"Hear, hear!"

"Collar him!"

It was a combined shout. A general move was made towards the hapless and well-meaning Skimmy. But for once that youth was wise in his generation. He gave one look at



"My dear friends—" Herbert Skimpole gave a gasp as Frank Monk gently knocked his cap off. He stooped to pick it up, and as he did so, the grinning Grammarian pushed him from behind, and Skimpole sprawled forward on his hands and knees. "That's right!" said Gordon Gay approvingly. "Isn't he polite, you fellows?" (See Chapter 9.)

the wrathful faces around him, and then, with a startled yell, he made a jump for the door.

It was a remarkably good jump for the weedy Skimpole, and it took him through safely. Then he took to his heels with a speed that was truly astonishing, vanishing round the corner of the passage.

The new skipper of the Lower School was scarcely seen again that day. He kept well out of the way, which was just as well for him. With no match on, and with no ball to play with, the exasperated footballers would have been sorely tempted to use Herbert Skimpole as a football that afternoon and evening.

CHAPTER 9.

Skimmy Going Strong!

"DEAR me!"

Skimpole gasped the exclamation rather apprehensively, and he looked apprehensive.

It was the next evening. Lessons being over, Skimpole had gone for a walk to the village. It was not on an errand in connection with his post as captain. Since the fiasco of the previous afternoon, Skimmy had had no need to bring his authority into use in any sort of way as junior skipper—a fact Skimpole, more than anyone else, perhaps, was thankful for.

It was in connection with his literary work that Skimmy had been to the village. In the rough-and-tumble the previous afternoon practically all his supply of paper had been trampled upon or inked, and that evening he had taken the opportunity to obtain a fresh supply from the local stationers.

Now, with a bulky parcel under his arm, he was returning, in the early dusk, to St. Jim's.

Then he came face to face, at a turn in the lane, with Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, Carboy, and Wootton major of the Grammar School.

They lined up in front of him and barred his path. Evidently the jokers of the Grammar School were in the mood for either trouble or a jape. When the Grammarians met a St. Jim's fellow in such circumstances, it usually did mean trouble for the latter.

Hence Skimpole's apprehension.

"Dear me!" he repeated nervously, blinking at the four grinning faces. "G-good-evening! Pray allow me to pass, my dear friends!"

"We're his dear friends!" murmured Gordon Gay. "Now isn't that nice of him, you fellows?"

"So kind and affable," agreed Frank Monk, gently knocking Skimpole's cap off.

"My dear friends—"

Skimpole stooped to pick up his cap. As he did so Wootton major pushed him from behind, and Skimpole sprawled forward on his hands and knees.

"That's right," said Gay approvingly. "That's the way you must always greet us Grammar School chaps—on your hands and knees, Skimmy! Isn't he polite, you fellows!?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" gasped Skimmy, staggering to his feet. "Oh dear! My dear friends, I do trust that you do not intend to be rough and unkind! Pray allow me to pass without further molestation."

Gordon Gay laughed cheerily. As a matter of fact, he had no intention of "molesting" Skimmy further. Being a trifle playful with the weedy Skimpole was a different matter from "ragging" him, as they would certainly have done had he been a fellow able to take care of himself. But Skimpole was a little below their weight.

"It's all right, Skimmy!" he chuckled. "We shan't hurt you, old bean. You can trot on in a second. We only want you to hand a message to Tom Merry—at least, if he's skipper yet."

"You mean junior captain, my dear Gay."

"Just that. Has he got his job back yet?" asked Gay.

"No, my dear fellows," said Skimmy, greatly relieved to hear he was not to be "ragged." "Tom Merry is certainly not our junior skipper now. You—"

"Then just hand this to the fellow who is," said Gay; and he handed Skimpole a folded note. "It's only about the footer on Saturday, Skimmy. We've an open date Saturday, and we want to fix a match up with you chaps if we can."

Skimpole beamed as he understood.

"My dear Gay," he replied, with no little pride. "Then that can be easily arranged, my dear fellow. I myself am now the junior captain of St. Jim's."

"Wha-a-at?"

The four Grammarians stared at Herbert Skimpole.

"You—you're junior skipper?" ejaculated Gordon Gay.

"Yes. This week it is my turn to hold that important position," said Skimpole.

Gordon Gay looked at his chums. Then they doubled up and howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear friends!" exclaimed Skimmy, in astonishment.

"Pray why are you laughing? There is surely nothing of a humorous nature in the fact that I am junior captain?"

"Isn't there?" choked Frank Monk. "Our mistake, old chap! Ha, ha, ha! I always believed there were slates off and screws loose at St. Jim's. But now——"

"Dear me! I was not aware that any slates were off, or screws loose at our school buildings," said Skimpole.

"You surprise me——"

"Never mind your surprise, old chap!" laughed Gay.

"I thought it was the limit when we heard Grundy and old Gussy were having a go at the job. But—we'll let it pass, though. If you're in charge of the footer, Skimmy——"

"I am, indeed, my friends. Though—however, if this communication is for me——"

"If you're footer skipper it is for you, old bean!" said Gordon Gay, smiling. "No need for it now, though. The question is, can you give us a game on Saturday? We've nothing on, and we thought——"

"Most certainly I shall be most delighted to arrange the matter," said Skimpole, quite pleased at such an opportunity of doing his duty in a practical manner. "I am, I must confess, not very interested in sports, and Talbot has agreed to pick the teams for me. But I will tell him that I have arranged the matter with you."

"Good! Then there's no need for us to trot over," said Gordon Gay, with satisfaction. "Hold on, though, what about the ground? We played you on ours last time, so if you like we'll come over——"

"We shall be very pleased to see you—most pleased!" said Skimpole. "I am sure it is quite immaterial to us. We are having new goal-posts and a new ball, so it will be quite nice to have you."

"Awfully nice!" agreed Gay solemnly, winking at his grinning chums. "Well, that's all right, then. Tell Tom Merry and Talbot and the rest of your tame lunatics that we're in form, and will give you the licking of your lives. If we don't hear from you we shall know it's O.K. Ta-ta!"

Playfully tipping Skimmy's cap over his eyes again, Gordon Gay turned back with his chums. They had not gone many yards when suddenly Gay stopped, with a deep chuckle.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Frank Monk. "What's the joke?"

"A giddy scream!" chuckled Gordon Gay, his eyes gleaming. "We'll pull those chaps' legs no end over this. Fancy that awful duffer as skipper! Call him back a sec—no, my hat! Better not send it with him, or they might guess we knew. Who's got a sheet of paper and a pencil?"

Frank Monk had his pocket-notebook with him, and at Gay's request, he tore out a sheet, and handed over the pencil.

"Now what's the game?" he demanded.

"Only sending a little challenge to St. Jim's," grinned Gay. "I'm going to challenge the present junior skipper of St. Jim's to a stand up fight to decide which is top school. If they refuse—and they'll have to, I fancy, then we'll see they never hear the last of it. We'll pull their legs for ever and ever."

"But—but that duffer Skimpole's just told us he's skipper," objected Wootton major, who was rather dense. "You can't fight a silly noodle like that!"

"I know—that's where the joke comes in!" chuckled Gay. "You see, they can't take it on—Skimmy wouldn't in any case. It'll put them in a fine stew and no mistake! I shall say that if they refuse we'll know they funk us, and that will make 'em fairly squirm, not knowing what to do. See?"

"Oh, my hat! Great!"

"They may guess we know who is skipper there," grinned Gay; "but that won't matter, anyway. It won't help 'em any, and won't make Skimmy fight me. They'll have to refuse the scrap, and then—well, we'll pull their giddy legs unmercifully. We'll send 'em letters calling 'em funks, and we'll generally make 'em squirm. How's that for a weeze?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter of his chums told Gay what they thought of it.

"Then we'll do it!" chuckled the Grammar School leader, with satisfaction. "I'll write the challenge at once, and

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send it with one of our kids—to-morrow would be best, though. We'll challenge 'em for to-morrow night."

"Ripping!"

Gordon Gay and his companions went their way, laughing uproariously at the prospect of the great score over their rivals at St. Jim's. Meanwhile, Skimpole was ambling homewards, very pleased at having been able to arrange the match—quite forgetting, of course, that he had already arranged one for Saturday with the Wayland youths!

So pleased was he, indeed, that he actually had it in his wandering mind when he reached St. Jim's—an amazing occurrence for the absent-minded Skimpole. He went straight to his study, intending to speak to Talbot at once and explain what he had done, also to hand over the note to him.

Unfortunately for his good intentions, Talbot had had his tea and gone out. So Skimpole—as usual—postponed it, and hurried through his own tea, very anxious indeed to get on with his literary work, now he had plenty of paper. So far he had not had a single opportunity of getting on with his thirty-first chapter!

Not until it was time for prep did Talbot turn up, however, and by that time Skimpole, of course, had forgotten the affair completely in his concentration on his literary work. Keeping in mind the trouble with Mr. Linton in class that morning, however, he put away his manuscripts and started prep. The subject of football did not even enter Skimmy's mighty brain, and so the evening passed, and Talbot did not learn of Gordon Gay and Co.'s arrangements for Saturday—nor did anyone else. There was every prospect of Skimmy's absent-mindedness leading to still further complications!

CHAPTER 10.

The Challenge!

"HALLO! That for me, kid?"

"Yes; it's from Gordon Gay, Merry. He said you could send an answer later."

Handing the note over, the Grammar School fag grinned and scudded away. It was never safe, even for a fag, to linger near the precincts of St. Jim's. The unceasing state of warfare between the rival schools was by no means confined only to the members of the Fourth and Shell at St. Jim's and the Fourth Form at the Grammar School. The fags were at loggerheads, too—very much so.

In a few seconds the flying Grammar School Third-Former who had brought the note for Tom Merry had vanished up Rylcombe Lane.

"From Gordon Gay!" chuckled Manners. "That means trouble, I bet!"

"Not necessarily!" answered Tom Merry, with a laugh. "He may think I'm still skipper, and this may be about the footer."

So saying Tom tore open the envelope. But as his eyes scanned the written communication inside it was quite clear at once to Lowther and Manners that the note was not in connection with football.

Tom read it, and then he gave first a whistle of astonishment, and then a snort of wrath.

"Oh, the—the rotter!" he gasped. "The awful rotter!"

"What is it?" asked Lowther curiously.

Tom Merry passed over the note in grim silence. It was short and read as follows:

"I, Gordon Gay, junior captain of Rylcombe Grammar School, hereby challenge the present junior skipper of that lunatic asylum known as St. Jim's, to a fight, to decide definitely and for all time which is top school—with or without gloves. If the St. Jim's junior skipper refuses this challenge, then we shall know what to think—that he funks the combat, and that in so doing he and his fellow lunatics publicly admit the supremacy of the Grammar School. If this challenge is accepted (which, knowing the character of St. Jim's as we do, we very much doubt) then the challenged may choose time and place for the battle.

"Hereby signed and witnessed this day,

"Gordon Gay, Junior Captain,
"Rylcombe Grammar School."

There followed the names of Frank Monk, the two Wootton brothers, Carboy, and Mont Blanc.

Lowther and Manners stared at the communication in blank consternation. As they stared, Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy came strolling along.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" remarked Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "Whatevah is the mattah? You look as if you have just weived some weally feahfully bad news. I twust——"

"Look at that!" gasped Tom Merry. "The—the cheeky rotters! My hat! They've got us fairly this time!"

The chums of Study No. 6 read the letter over Blake's shoulder. Four exclamations of wrath and dismay expressed

their opinion of that cheery missive when they had finished.

"The cheeky rotters!" snorted Blake, in great excitement. "It's a leg-pulling stunt, of course. The fearful bounders have heard that Skimmy's our junior skipper. They're taking advantage of that to pull this wheeze over us. Oh, the—the rotters!"

"It's not playing the game!" groaned Manners. "My hat! We can't make Skimmy meet Gay, even if he would. And if we refuse the challenge they'll crow for terms, and if we accept it, and Skimpole's wiped out—as he's bound to be—we get it in the neck, just the same. Oh crumbs!"

"Bai Jove! It is weally a feahful pwedicament to be in, deah boys. I cinsidah Gordon Gay an uttah wottah to take advantage of our wotten posish like this!"

"The—the crafty bounder!" choked Tom Merry. "He knows jolly well that Skimmy's skipper, or he wouldn't have sent a thing like this. But—but he's got us fairly!" he added, with a rueful grin. "We're dished and done!"

"Bai Jove! Do not despair yet, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus sagely, wrinkling his brows. "Pewwaps we shall think of a scheme to dish the feahful wottahs. Why not tell Figgay, and have a wound table confewence? The mattah is vevy sewious!"

It certainly was. If Tom Merry, or Blake, or someone else who could stand a good chance against Gordon Gay, had been skipper, all would have been well. But—as they knew well enough—the Grammarian leader would never have sent the challenge in that case. Gordon Gay had no intention of fighting any of them, in fact—not without good and serious reason, even to prove who was the better man. It was simply a scheme to take advantage of the amazing position in the Lower School at St. Jim's, and pull off a great jape that Tom Merry & Co. would not be allowed to forget for terms.

Confronted by so serious a problem, Tom Merry, for once, was not averse to seeking advice even from the New House rivals. In such matters New House and School House always stood together, shoulder to shoulder.

So, after a little consideration of the matter, the School House juniors made their way to the New House to see Figgins about it. That great man was in his study with Fatty Wynn and Kerr.

"It's pax!" said Tom Merry, as the New House trio jumped to their feet at the sight of their rivals. "No larks this time! We've come on important business, chaps. We're in a hole, to be quite frank!"

"You always are!" said Figgins pleasantly. "That casual ward you call a House is a hole—a fearful hole!"

"But we're not there now," said Lowther sweetly. "Tommy said we are in a hole—now. He means the New House, of course!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Does he?" said Figgins, a warlike gleam in his eye. "Well, you'd better remember that we can jolly soon put you out of it—on your necks!"

"We'll remember it," grinned Tom. "But it's peace this time, Figgay. Look at that!"

He handed Gordon Gay's precious challenge to Figgins. The lanky leader of the New House juniors read it slowly. Then he whistled, and handed it to his chums to read.

All three looked blank afterwards.

"Well, that's the limit!" ejaculated Figgins, frowning. "Looks as if we're all fairly in the soup!"

"My hat, yes!" said Fatty Wynn, shaking his head. "It's a catch, of course. But it's not playing the game."

"Hardly!" agreed Figgins. "Well, what's to be done?"

"Ask old Kerr," said Fatty Wynn, looking at the keen-witted Scotch junior. "He's the man for a job of this kind."

"Yes; if we can wangle out of this hole, Kerr's the man to show us the way," agreed Figgins. "Can you think of anything, Kerr, old man?"

Kerr was already looking thoughtful. He suddenly chuckled.

"Well, yes," he said modestly. "I think I have a wheeze. Why not let Skimmy meet him—with gloves on?"

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

Kerr grinned at these uncomplimentary terms.

"I mean Skimmy the Second, not the real Skimmy!" he chuckled. "What about me as Skimmy the Second? I fancy I can put up a good scrap against dear old Gay. What d'you think?"

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat! The very wheeze!" grinned Tom Merry delightedly. "But you'll have your hands full with Gay!"

"I don't think so," smiled Kerr. "I should, in the ordinary way, I know. But, remember, Gay will think he's up against a duffer, and will scrap accordingly—if he scraps at all. I'll stand a good chance, never fear!"

"Great!" said Figgins, with a wild whoop. "I knew old

Kerr would think of a wheeze. You measly School House chaps had better always come to the New House for your ideas! You'll——"

"Look here——"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Figgay——"

"Peace, my infants!" interrupted Tom Merry. "It's nearly time for afternoon class, and we've got to send an answer, remember. I vote—if Kerr really means it——"

"I do!" grinned Kerr. "I fancy I can pull it off. Old Skimmy's easy to impersonate, and we can easily borrow a spare pair of specs from him, and the rest of my make-up I can get from the Dramatic Society's property-box. Leave it to me."

"Ripping! Then it's a go!" said Tom Merry, his brow clearing. "We'll send an answer at once, and we'll make it five-thirty in Rylcombe Wood—somewhere under the trees. It'll be getting rather dark by that time, and there'll be little chance of Gay & Co. seeing through the wheeze. So let's get down to the details."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the New House and School House leaders "got down to it." Gordon Gay was booked for a surprise—if all went well!

CHAPTER 11.

Knocked Out!

"I DON'T quite like it!" said Frank Monk.

The Grammarians were discussing the reply to their note.

"Well, I'm a bit disappointed myself!" admitted Gordon Gay. "I'd hoped the fatheads would have to refuse the challenge, and so pull the flag down. Still, it's only sheer bluff, of course! They'll bring poor old Skimmy here on pretence, so they can say they did accept the challenge. But when Skimmy does come—well, they'll have to climb down quickly enough when it comes to the pinch. Skimmy won't stand for it!"

"I suppose that's right enough," said Frank Monk, shaking his head dubiously. "It might be just bluff, as you say. But—supposing they've exchanged skippers? And what if it happens to be Talbot, or Figgay, or Blake? You won't have such an easy task then. In fact, you might even get licked!"

"Rats! Still, I never thought of that!" admitted Gordon Gay, frowning. "They could easily change skippers just for the occasion. I mean, they could perhaps get a fresh one appointed, though I'm blessed if I can see how they could in the time. I believe it's some weird scheme of their Housemaster's to have chaps taking turns as skipper. Still, it's done now, and I'll have to take my chance."

"It'll be a lark, anyway," grinned Harry Wootton. "For the spectators—yes," said Gay rather gloomily now.

"If it should happen to be Tom Merry, though——"

The prospect of his opponent being Tom Merry was not, apparently, a pleasing one to Gordon Gay.

But he soon had good cause to cheer up—or he imagined he had! For just then Carboy gave a yell:

"Here they come! Oh, good!"

"And Skimmy's with them!" yelled Frank Monk, in great glee.

It was true enough!

The Grammarians were waiting under the falling leaves of the brown trees in Rylcombe Woods. It was a very shady spot—quite gloomy, in fact, for dusk was already settling down over the woods. They had wondered, and they had groused, in fact, about the St. Jim's juniors choosing such a time and spot for the battle. But not one of them dreamed of suspecting that there was a special reason for it.

So they fairly chortled with delight as they sighted a crowd of St. Jim's juniors coming through the woods—with Skimpole between them! They could see his badly-fitting Etons, and the glint of his big spectacles. If anything was needed to settle the matter it was the sight of a bulky volume under Skimpole's arm.

"Great Scott! I see the game!" breathed Gordon Gay. "Well, my hat! They've not told poor old Skimmy what he's wanted here for—they're leading him like a lamb to the slaughter."

"That's it!" grinned Frank Monk.

"Rather hard lines on Skimmy!" gurgled Carboy. "Make a giddy ring, chaps!"

There were at least a score of Grammarians waiting under the trees. They formed a ring as the St. Jim's juniors came tramping up, Skimpole—if it was Skimpole—blinking about him in puzzled wonder.

"But, my dear Merry," he was saying in his squeaky voice, "is it necessary for me to come all this way in order to read to you the latest book on 'Determinism,' by Professor Balmcrumpet? Surely—Dear me! Whatever are all these boys doing here?"

"They're waiting for us," said Tom Merry grimly. "At

least, they're waiting for you, old fellow. Now, Gay, old chap, get your coat off. You've got gloves, I hope?"

"Yes, but—" gasped Gay. "You—you really mean to put that fathead up against me, Merry?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry. "That is, unless you'll call this rot off, Gay. It's hardly playing the game to make a duffer like Skimpole stand up to you!"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway be a sport an' call it off, Gay, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Call it off!" added Blake, shaking his head. "What's the good of useless slaughter?"

"If you'll own up that Grammar School is top school!" said Gay sweetly.

"No fear!" said Tom Merry doggedly. "Well, poor old Skimmy will have to go through it, then! For the good name of St. Jim's."

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, in apparent great alarm. "What does this mean, my dear Merry? Am—am I to understand that Gay wishes to engage in a bout of fisticuffs with me?"

"I'm sorry, old chap," said Tom Merry, finding it an extremely difficult matter to keep his face straight. "But you're not here to read us piffle, but to keep up our end against these Grammar School bounders! If Gay licks you, then I'm going to have a go at him."

If Gordon Gay had any doubts at all they fled as he heard that! He mentally made up his mind that there should be no possible doubt as to his licking Skimpole—if Skimpole really would face him, which he scarcely could believe possible. Certainly he felt sorry for Skimpole. The poor duffer had obviously been tricked into coming; wild horses would not have dragged him there had he known the truth. It was rather thick, thought Gay. Still, here he was, and the thing had to be gone through now.

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Gay. Aloud he said: "Look here, I don't want to kill that insect, Merry. If he wants to back out, let him!"

"He isn't going to back out. Now, Skimmy, here are the gloves. On with them."

"Oh—dear! My dear, dear friends! How can you be so brutal! I won't fight—Ow! Lowther, pray release me!"

But Lowther did not release him—he crammed the gloves somehow on Skimmy's hands, and tied them. Possibly Skimmy wasn't struggling so hard as he pretended to be.

"Now we're ready, Skimmy! Go ahead!"

"Look here!" gasped Gay.

"If I hit that insect, there'll be a funeral—Here, what—

Crash!

Gordon Gay was on his back, sent down by a pile-driving punch from Skimpole's right!

"There!" gasped Skimpole, prancing above the amazed and astounded Gay. "If I have to face brutality and battle, then I will face it boldly. I am not a fighting man, but I will do my duty, come what may. I really trust I have not hurt you, my dear friend, but your pugnacious attitude frightened me. And I was obliged to act upon the wise advice to get my blow in first, my dear Gay. Kindly get up so that I can proceed with this regrettable business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow!" gasped Gordon Gay, hugging his jaw, which felt as if a battering-ram had struck it. "Ow! Wow! Oh, my hat! Am—I am dreaming? Oh, all right, you little worm! If you will have it—"

He jumped to his feet and made a rush for Skimpole, Those two blows had been sheer flukes, of course! He fully expected Skimpole, indeed, to turn tail and bolt when faced with a whirlwind attack.

But Skimpole did not!

He stood his ground, and not being prepared for a clever defence, Gay rushed right on a glove that seemed like a doorpost to the Grammarian. At all events, he collided violently with it, and sat down hard.

Thump!

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther. "Are you sitting this dance out, Gay, old chap?"

The St. Jim's fellows were howling with laughter. The Grammarians were looking on in stupefied amazement. They could not understand it at all—naturally enough.

"For goodness' sake pull yourself together, Gay!" shouted Frank Monk in great alarm. "That duffer's got more in him than we thought, you idiot! Don't act the goat—smash him!"

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"He's had a monkey gland grafted on!" called Lowther. "Better look out, Gay!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gay jumped up again, his face red with wrath and humiliation. He was dazed and bewildered, and he blinked dizzily at Skimpole, who was dancing about in front of him, his gloves waving like a windmill. He felt absolutely hot with shame as he heard the hilarious laughter, and his lips set grimly. It was no good—he would have to scrap in real earnest.

But he was really shaken up by this time. Those blows had been remarkably hefty ones—for Skimmy. At all events, Gay stood a trifle groggily on his feet, and as he stood there Skimmy made a rush.

"Look out, Gay!"

"Oh, great Scott!"

Biff, biff, biff! Whack, whack, whack! Skimpole was like a human hurricane, so to speak. The bemused Gordon Gay hadn't a ghost of a chance against him. Right and left, Skimmy let the Grammarian leader have it, and Gay reeled and shook under the onslaught, feebly and hopelessly defending himself.

"Gay, you awful idiot!" shrieked Carboy. "Wake up! You'll be licked!"

But Gay was already licked—though it was scarcely either skill or force on Skimpole's part that had licked him; it was sheer shock and surprise. It caused him to lose his head, and Skimpole played punch-ball with him.

Crash!

Once again he went crashing down, and this time he stayed down. He was whacked!

"Dear me!" gasped Skimmy, blinking down in alarm at his prostrate opponent. "I hope and trust I have not killed him! Ow! Oh, dear me! Good gracious! What have I done? What would my dear master, Professor Balmy crumpet have to say to me now! Booh-huh-hoo!"

And Skimmy burst into tears—or pretended to!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's fellows were shrieking with laughter.

And while they laughed Skimpole removed his glasses, then his mop of straggling, straw-coloured hair. Then he took out a handkerchief and rubbed the grease-paint and other make-up from his face.

There was a shout from the Grammarians—a shout of startled amazement.

"Kerr!" howled Frank Monk. "We've been diddled! It's Kerr all the time. It isn't Skimpole at all!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Carboy. "Dished and done! Gay, you fearful idiot!"

"Ow!" gasped Gay. "Ow-ow! Oh, my only hat! Kerr! Oh, you—you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gay blinked up dizzily at the grinning japer.

"Smash the rotters!" howled Frank Monk. "Smash 'em—go for 'em!"

"Better not!" advised Tom Merry cheerfully. "We're twenty-three to twenty, counting Gay, who's whacked. Better take it smiling. This is a St. Jim's win, eh, Gay, old bean? But we'll mention this to you again—just a few!"

"Yaas, wathah! St. Jim's is top dog!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now we'll leave you, or we shan't be in by lock-up," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Good-bye, Gay, old chap! Try a beef-steak for that eye!"

"Oh, you—you rotters!" gasped Gay, staggering to his feet. "Never mind! Our turn will come, and we'll jolly well lick you to a frazzle to-morrow, anyway. You see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's crowd hurried away, roaring with laughter. But as they entered the gates of St. Jim's Tom Merry frowned a little.

"What the dickens did Gay mean by saying he'd lick us to-morrow?" he said, looking puzzled. "We'd better look out. They must have some game on."

"Likely as not!" grinned Blake. "Still, we've licked 'em to the wide to-day and blow to-morrow!"

And in high good spirits, and wiping the tears of meritment from their eyes, Tom Merry & Co. hurried in to answer call-over. But Tom could not help wondering what Gay had meant. He was to be enlightened in the very near future, however.

PERCY MELLISH, THE "BLACK SHEEP," HAS A GO AT THE CAPTAINCY NEXT WEEK, BOYS!

Mind you read:

"A Schoolboy's Temptation!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Oh, my hat! Yoooop!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Carboy. "Dished and done! Gay, you fearful idiot!"

"Ow!" gasped Gay. "Ow-ow! Oh, my only hat! Kerr! Oh, you—you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gay blinked up dizzily at the grinning japer.

"Smash the rotters!" howled Frank Monk. "Smash 'em—go for 'em!"

"Better not!" advised Tom Merry cheerfully. "We're twenty-three to twenty, counting Gay, who's whacked. Better take it smiling. This is a St. Jim's win, eh, Gay, old bean? But we'll mention this to you again—just a few!"

"Yaas, wathah! St. Jim's is top dog!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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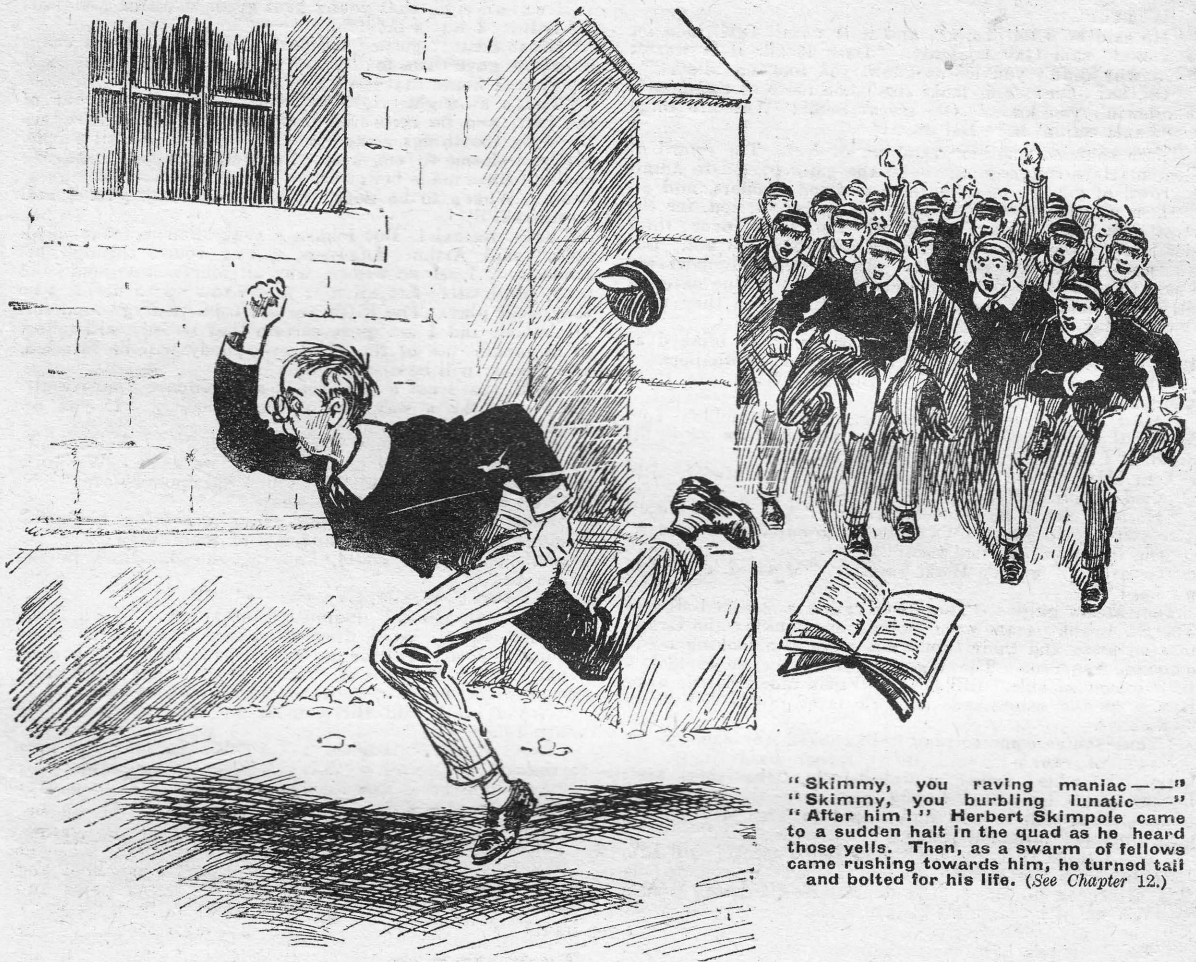
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"Skimmy, you raving maniac—"
 "Skimmy, you burbling lunatic—"
 "After him!" Herbert Skimpole came to a sudden halt in the quad as he heard those yells. Then, as a swarm of fellows came rushing towards him, he turned tail and bolted for his life. (See Chapter 12.)

CHAPTER 12.
Exit Skimpole!

TWO-THIRTY!" remarked Tom Merry, glancing at his watch. "Better trot back and change, I think. Those St. Frank's chaps will be along presently."
 "Yaas, wathah! We were wathah lucky in fixin' a match with them so early in the season. Come along, deah boys!"

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. left the footer ground and made for the gates. They had been to have a look at the new goal-posts and nets, which had arrived and been put up that morning. At the time, of course, they had been very "waxy" with the well-meaning Skimpole over the missing old posts and the balls. But they had got over that long ago—indeed, they were very glad to know they had been of real help to the Wayland youths.

They would gladly have had a "whip-round" to buy new posts—had such a course been necessary, which it wasn't—rather than dream of trying to get them back. But they had no intention of trying, whilst Mr. Railton, when he heard the story, had laughed heartily over it. So that little misunderstanding had ended happily—luckily for the well-meaning Skimpole.

It was now Saturday afternoon, and the new posts were up, while two new balls had been purchased to replace the other three which Skimmy, in putting his Socialistic principles into practice, had handed over to the Wayland footballers.

Tom Merry & Co. were looking forward keenly to meeting their old friends from St. Frank's. Talbot, as vice-captain, had chosen the team, and Tom Merry had his old position at centre-forward, and the team had been changed little—Skimpole not having been consulted in the matter at all.

At the gates they found a crowd of juniors waiting to cheer the arrival of the visiting team, as was the custom. And just as Tom Merry & Co. hurried up they heard the hoot of a motor-horn, and a large charabanc drew up at the gates. From it poured a swarm of St. Frank's fellows, carrying handbags, and looking very fit and keen.

"Hurrah! Good old St. Frank's!"

The St. Jim's juniors shook hands warmly with Nipper and his merry men, and they had just finished doing so when a straggling crowd of juniors came tramping in cheerily at the gates behind the St. Frank's fellows.

They all wore Grammar School caps, and they all—or most of them—carried handbags. Behind them, right along the lane, could be seen dozens of other Grammarians juniors tramping towards St. Jim's, though they were not carrying bags.

Tom Merry & Co. nearly collapsed as they recognised Gordon Gay & Co. In their turn Gordon Gay & Co. looked rather astonished at sight of the St. Frank's men.

"Hallo!" said Gordon Gay, blushing a little as he met the stares of the St. Jim's fellows. "Here we are—going to give you the licking of your lives as I promised you! You scored last night, Merry, but we're going to score in another way to-day. But what the dickens are these St. Frank's men doing here, Thomas?"

"M-m-mum-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "What I want to know is what you're doing, here? Think you've come to play the giddy Sixth, or the giddy fags, or what?"

It was Gordon Gay's turn to stare.
 "Eh? What the dickens are you getting at?" he exclaimed warmly. "We've come to play you cripples, of course!"

"Wha-at?"
 "Just that!" said Gay, nodding. "And, what's more, we're going to lick you! These St. Frank's chaps going to play your second team?"

"No, we're jolly well not!" said Nipper, eyeing Gay rather grimly. "We're playing Tom Merry's crowd, of course. What's this chap getting at, Tom Merry?"

"Blessed if I know!" stuttered Tom, glaring at the puzzled Gordon Gay. "What's this game, Gay? We're playing St. Frank's this afternoon—a match fixed up before the blessed season started. Are you potty? We've fixed up no game with you!"

"Of course you have!" howled Gay. "I fixed it up with your dashed skipper the other night—that duffer Skimpole!"

"Wha-at?"

"He said he'd tell Talbot, and if it wasn't O.K. he'd let us know!" said Gay heatedly. "Dash it all, if it wasn't O.K., why didn't you let us know, you fooling idiots?"

"Oh, bai Jove! This looks like some more of Skimmay's blundewin', you know! Oh, gweat Scott! Who are these merchants comin' in? Bai Jove!"

There sounded another tramping of feet. The crowd of Grammarians congregated round the gates parted to admit a crowd of youths, most of them wearing mufflers, and all of them wearing cheerful grins. They also carried, for the most part, footer boots slung by the laces over their shoulders. Some wore footer togs, and some did not. But all were evidently going to play football—somewhere! From the fact that they came cheerfully in at the gates of St. Jim's, it almost looked as if they imagined they were due to play there!

Tom Merry & Co. nearly fell down as they blinked at Bill and Alf, and the rest of the Wayland footballers.

"Oh, great pip!" ejaculated Blake. "What are these merchants after, Tommy?"

"Must have come to the wrong place!" mumbled Tom Merry, though a queer suspicion was already forming in his mind. "I say, what do you fellows want?"

Tom Merry asked the question politely and kindly. Bill grinned at him.

"Here we are!" he said cheerfully. "And I hopes we'll give you a good game. We mean to do our best, anyway!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Gweat Scott!"

"Great pip!" gasped Blake faintly. "More of 'em! Oh, my hat!"

Tom Merry gulped. There was rather a strained silence. The St. Frank's team were looking on blankly; the Grammarian team and their supporters were also looking on in astounded silence. The Wayland youths began to look a little uncomfortable. Bill's cheerful grin faded a little as he looked at the astonished, startled faces of the crowd of schoolboys.

"You—you've come to play us?" choked Tom Merry.

"Yes, of course!" said Billy, rather hesitatingly. "I hopes," he added rather apprehensively, "that there ain't no mistake! Isn't that young gent 'ere—the chap with glasses, what said he was junior captain 'ere?"

"Skimpole!" groaned Blake. "Skimpole again!"

"Yes, I think that was the young gent's name," said Bill. "He fixed up the game with us. Told us to come along this afternoon to meet your team. If—if there's bin a mistake, an' if he oughtn't to 'ave asked us—" He broke off falteringly.

"There—there's been more than one mistake!" stuttered Tom helplessly. "We'd already fixed up with St. Frank's—this team," he added, indicating Nipper & Co. "We—we can't play more than one team! That—that awful idiot you saw must be absolutely potty! He misinformed you!"

"Oh!"

The disappointment and dismay in the faces of the Wayland youths made Tom flush uncomfortably.

"I'm sorry!" he said quietly. "But you're not the only chaps he's let in like this. He fixed up a match with these chaps from the Rylcombe Grammar School, too. There are three teams here to play us. So what the dickens are we to do?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"It's nothing to laugh at, you ass!" snapped Tom heatedly. "These fellows have tramped all the way from Wayland!"

"And we've tramped from Rylcombe!" said Gordon Gay pointedly. "We've also mucked up the afternoon, it seems to me! Where's that—that born idiot, Skimpole?"

"Yes, where is he?"

It was a roar.

"No good asking for him!" gasped Tom, his face crimsoning as he saw the curious glances exchanged among the St. Frank's fellows. "Look here, you chaps, something must be done, though I'm blessed if I know— Oh, here's Kildare!"

Kildare strode up, his face showing utter amazement as he looked at the swarm of St. Frank's fellows, Grammarians, and Wayland youths.

"What the—what the dickens does this mean?" he demanded, looking at Tom Merry. "What on earth are all these fellows doing here, Merry?"

"Better ask Skimpole," said Tom helplessly. "He's let us in for this. He's fixed up matches with the Grammar School and with these Wayland chaps, and said nothing to us about it. And, as you know, we're booked to play these St. Frank's chaps!"

Kildare was astounded.

"It—it's all right," faltered Bill, looking very unhappy. "We'll clear out. There's bin a mistake—I can see that. It ain't our fault, and it ain't yours. We'll go. Only," he added, an idea suddenly seeming to strike him. "I—I hopes

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as it was all right that young gent givin' us them goal-posts an' balls? I was a bit doubtful—"

"Great Scott!" gasped Kildare. "Then you're the chaps Skimpole gave them to?"

"Yes. I hopes that—"

"That's all right—right as rain!" Kildare was one of the best, and he recovered himself swiftly. "It saved us throwing the things away—or the goal-posts, at all events. You're welcome to 'em, kids. Don't worry about that. We couldn't have made better use of them, in fact! But—great Scott! What's to be done? This is a merry pickle, and no mistake!"

"Yaas, wathah! But I have a suggestion to make, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, gazing round through his monocle. "I see no reason why all four teams should not play, a'fah all! Let all four teams toss up to decide who they shall play. The Fifth are not usin' their groud this aftahnoon, and I am quite certain that nobody will object to us makin' use of it. Then ewevybody will be satisfied, and nobody will be disappointed."

"Well, that's not a bad idea!" said Kildare approvingly. "It's certainly a way out of the difficulty. If you St. Frank's chaps don't mind—"

"Not at all!" grinned Nipper cheerfully. "We're ready to play anybody, and to lick 'em if we can! We quite understand the position. We've met Skimpole before!"

"And you Grammar School chaps?"

"Same here!" said Gordon Gay, recovering his good-humour at once. "We understand more than these St. Frank's chaps ever could, knowing the St. Jim's fellows as we do."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Gay, you—"

"Cheese it, Gussy!" laughed Tom Merry. "Then that's the idea, then! We'll draw for sides, and toss up as to grounds. Jove! It'll be quite exciting! Hold on, though! What about you Wayland chaps? D'you mind which team you play—St. Frank's, the Grammar School, or us?"

"Not a bit!" said Bill eagerly. "And thanks, young gents, for—"

"Don't mench!" laughed Tom. "It's Skimmy you have to thank."

"And here he is now!" yelled Herries. "Skimmy, you raving maniac—"

"Skimmy, you burbling lunatic—"

"Skimmy, you feather-headed chunk of imbecility—"

Skimpole nearly dropped the huge volume he was carrying as he came strolling across the quad and heard the yells. He came to a sudden halt and blinked at the swarm near the gates.

"After him!" yelled Grundy. "Collar him, making a muck of things like this! Duck the silly chump in the fountain!"

There was a rush of fellows towards Skimpole—not to duck him in the fountain, but to ask for an explanation.

But Skimpole did not wait. Perhaps he had heard that last suggestion of Grundy's, perhaps recollection came to him as he recognised the Wayland youths and the Grammarians. At all events, he stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once. He turned tail and bolted for his life, scuttling into the School House like a frightened rabbit.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

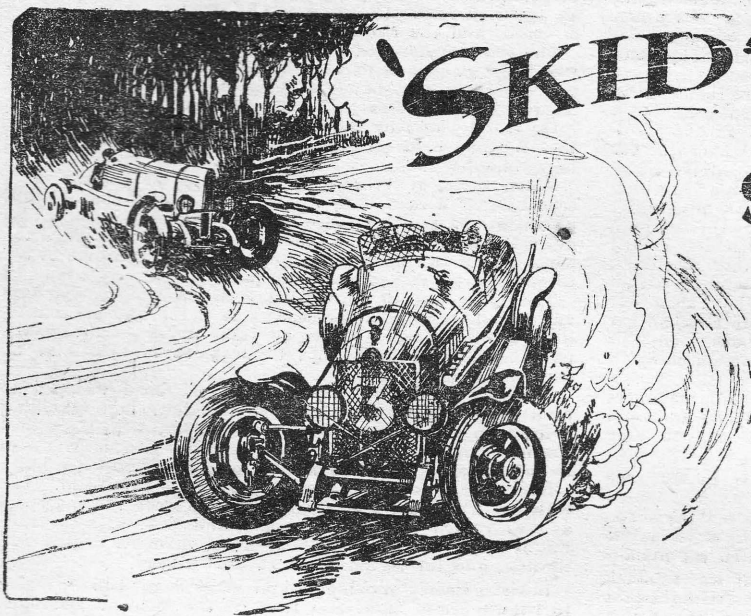
A howl of laughter followed him, in which all the footballers joined. Then, with everybody merry and bright once again, a general move was made for the playing-fields. And soon two strenuous games were in progress, one on Little Side and the other on Big Side, St. Frank's playing the Grammar School and St. Jim's ranged against the Wayland youths. And two hard-fought games they were. To the astonishment of the St. Jim's fellows, their opponents—Wayland Rovers they called themselves—proved by no means duffers at the game. In fact, it was only in the last few minutes of the match that St. Jim's scored the third and deciding goal of the game. The two teams streamed off the field, with the promise of a return match in the near future, and to learn that St. Frank's and the Grammar School had drawn with two goals each. So ended the exciting afternoon, amidst laughter, cheers, and all good-will.

So ended also Herbert Skimpole's week of office as junior skipper of St. Jim's, which was undoubtedly as well for the school as it was for that brainy youth himself. At all events, nobody was more relieved than was the scientific genius of the Shell. Skimpole meant well, and he had done his best. But he had been no more of a success as junior captain than had Grundy or Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It remained to be seen whether the remaining three—Mellish, Fatty Wynn, and Tompkins—would make a better job of it.

THE END.

(Next week's magnificent yarn of St. Jim's features Percy Mellish in the role of junior skipper. Note the title: "A SCHOOLBOY'S TEMPTATION!" and then prepare yourself for a thrilling and dramatic story.)

WITH SKID TEN MILES BEHIND THE LEADER IT WOULD SEEM THAT HE'S WELL OUT OF THE RACE. BUT ONCE AGAIN SKID PROVES THE OLD SAYING THAT A RACE IS NEVER LOST UNTIL IT'S WON!



'SKID' KENNEDY- SPEED KING!

A BRILLIANT NEW SERIAL OF
MOTOR-RACING ADVENTURE,
STARRING JACK KENNEDY, A
YOUNG SPEED MERCHANT.

WRITTEN SPECIALLY
FOR THE "GEM" BY

ALFRED EDGAR.

(The Motor-Racing Author.)

INTRODUCTION.

JACK KENNEDY makes a name as a daring boy speedman, and is called "Skid" because of his cleverness in handling a racing car. With his chum—

FRED BISHOP—and his brother, Ben Kennedy, he is sacked from the Falcon Six Motor Works through the jealousy of—

PHILIP SLADE, the Falcon star racing driver. The boys get jobs in the show-rooms of the Saxon Motor Company, while Ben goes into the Saxon racing stable. Saxon and Falcons are deadly rivals, and it is not long before Jack is racing against Slade in various speed events. A team of three Saxons are entered in a Grand Prix race at Brooklands. The evening before the event, a confederate of Slade's—Carnaby—tamper with the tyres of the Saxon machines. On the first furious lap, Jack bursts all his tyres; as he pulls into the replenishment pit to replace them, he sees his brother, Ben, bringing his car in, also with burst tyres, and then the third car in the team limps up. "Carnaby's got at our tyres!" exclaims Jack. "He's squirted acid through the valves, or something!" "Then we're done for!" Fred gasps; he is acting as Jack's mechanic. "The spares have been treated the same way—we can't race without tyres!"

(Now read on.)

Ten Miles Behind!

JACK stood with a bit of burst tyre in his hand, the rubber discoloured from the acid which had been squirted through the valve. He dropped it, and leaped to the spare wheels that were stacked on the plank in front of the replenishment pit.

He twisted the dust-cover off a valve and stared at the metal beneath; it was corroded and stained a brownish-green. The spares had been tampered with, like the tyres on the cars. There wasn't a sound tyre to be had—the Saxons were as good as out of the race!

Ben's car came to a stop, and the third machine pulled up behind it, its driver joining Ben as Jack showed them what had happened to the spare tyres.

The watching crowd stood aghast as they saw the lamed Saxon racers pulled up. They had just seen Jack snatch the lead on the first lap of the race, and they had been applauding him for the wonderful way in which he had skidded his car to avoid disaster when the first of his tyres burst.

Along the straight, past the halted team, speeding machines were streaking, their threshing wheels slinging grit and dust at Skid Kennedy's car. Sunlight drenched the great expanse of Brooklands track, shining on the hurtling racers and the long row of replenishment pits—actually, wire enclosures before which all cars had to stop when they needed repairs or fuel.

"Carnaby did it!" Fred gasped the words as they crowded round the spare tyres, examining them all and finding that every one of them was useless. "He got at 'em when he laid out the watchman last night!"

"It doesn't matter who did it, the thing is that it's done!" Jack said tensely. "And Slade's getting away now—winning! Can't we get any more tyres from somewhere?"

He shot the question at Mr. Lloyd, the manager of the

Saxon firm. The grey-haired man was leaning across the plank, some of the colour gone from his face.

"There's no chance of it," he said. "Our tyres are a special size, and we'd have to send to the works to get more!"

"Haven't we got a sports car here?" Jack asked. "Couldn't you get the tyres off that?"

"Yes—off my car!" Mr. Lloyd gasped. "It's parked just behind here!" He shouted to a couple of mechanics, then raced madly from the pit, while Jack turned to his brother as Ben said:

"When he gets the tyres they'd better go on your machine, Jack. There'll be enough only for one racer, and yours is the fastest! We'll have to retire with the other cars."

"Then you drive my machine," Jack answered. "You're a better driver than me, Ben, and you—"

"No, you carry on, young 'un! Get your wheels off—jump to it! There's not a second to waste if you're going to do any good!"

There was no time for argument. There was but one set of tyres available, and Jack was to have them because his car was the fastest of the three Saxons. By the time more tyres could be obtained for the other two machines, the delay would have been so great that it would be useless for them to take part in the race.

But if Jack could get away swiftly, he might yet catch Slade and the leading machines, might yet show the mettle of the Saxon, and win!

He and Fred jacked up the axles, and wrenched off the lamed wheels just as the first of the wheels from Mr. Lloyd's machine were handed over. By luck, the tyres were in fairly good condition, but they were not actual racing cords. Still, they were the best that Jack could get, and his jaw squared as he worked on.

Cars were storming past every minute. He guessed that by now Slade must be a couple of laps in the lead. It was just as he and Fred knocked the last wheel home and wrenched away the jacks that Ben yelled:

"Slade's three laps and a bit in the lead, Jack. Put your foot down, boy—after him!"

"Show your speed, Skid!" Fred yelled, as Jack slipped into the narrow cockpit.

He tugged his goggles down over his eyes, and a second later the mighty Saxon shot away, humming towards the bends at the end of the finishing straight, engine roaring, and exhaust booming on a vengeful note—ten miles behind the leaders!

All Out!

THE great crowd which packed the Brooklands enclosure had heard a lot about the boy speedman. They had come to see Skid Kennedy drive, in the expectation of watching him in a thrilling race, but they had not expected anything like the race they witnessed now.

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Jack knew what he was doing. When he roared into the speed-fight again, he wanted to slam the throttle wide and drive all out, but he didn't. For two laps he restrained the pulsing speed of his thundering machine, waiting until every part of the engine was thoroughly warmed up—and then he let the car go!

The mad blare of its exhaust ripped out across the concrete enclosure as the car changed from a machine to a coloured demon on wheels. Jack flung it at the sand-banked bends at such a speed that it looked impossible for him to get round, but he always cleared them safely.

Now and again a furious skid would see the threshing tyres slicing sand from the ends of the banks, flinging it high in wild defiance as the car hurtled on. On the high banking of the Brooklands speedway the machine looked like a sliding speck of colour, overhauling other machines, passing some of them as though they were standing still.

He caught Slade on this banking, while the Falcon car was yet duelling for leadership with the white German car and the blazing red Roma. Jack passed above them, his car a tyre's width from the lip of the banking, lurching in its terrific speed.

He left the other machines behind, and the team managers of rival cars could see that if Jack held his speed he would regain the lead before half the race was run, so they signalled to their drivers to go faster yet.

Ere Jack was on his tenth lap, every car in the race was shifting at a cracking pace—and still he overhauled them! On the fifteenth lap, he again picked out the shape of Slade's Falcon in front, and he set his teeth as he hugged down behind the wheel and set to catch the man.

Slade was still two laps in the lead, and it was as Jack cleared the bends and rocketed into the railway straight that he found himself at the heels of the red Roma, only thirty yards behind Slade, with the German machine just in front.

The Italian driver saw Jack coming up, and he pressed his car to its limit. At far above a hundred miles an hour the two machines tore on, riding neck and neck as they ripped at the banking which marked the end of the straight.

Jack could hear the scream of the Italian car as it dithered on the concrete, leaping under the strain of its colossal speed. He saw the driver's shoulders hunch as he fought his car into the curve. The tail of the machine slid round—the driver wrenched on the wheel to straighten it—the car skidded the other way and shot out of control, sheer across Jack's radiator!

Instantly Jack stamped on the brake pedal, and flung the wheel over. The Saxon skidded deliberately, just missing the other machine's tail. Jack yanked his car straight as he saw the Roma heave to the top of the banking.

The off-side front wheel went over the edge. The car bucked high, started to slide backwards down the track, tipped over and then leaped wildly into the air, smashing on its side and hurtling full at the Saxon!

Men with field-glasses at the far side of the course had seen the miraculous skid with which Jack had first avoided the machine, and now he skidded again, straightened, and let the Roma rip down the track behind him, to strike the grassy bank that edged the inside of the course, then go whirling on in a mighty cloud of dust, with debris streaking high and the white-clad figure of the driver pitching from the machine to the grass, escaping death by bare inches.

The Saxon rocked on, leaping to top speed again. Skid Kennedy's heart was thumping from the narrowness of his escape. But he forgot the smash as he went after Slade and caught him, then passed him, with the crowd cheering wildly as he went down the straightaway to the bends.

Machines were cracking everywhere under the terrific pace, and still the fiercely-driven Saxon caught and passed those machines which were left on the Brooklands Oval; and when half the distance was run Jack was less than a lap behind Slade, who still held the lead. It was then that he pulled in for more fuel.

"Your tyres won't last at this speed!" Ben yelled at him as he came on. "But we've got no others!"

"I'll beat Slade if I don't do anything else!" Jack gasped, as he slammed the petrol pipe into the tank.

"Slade's is the only Falcon left in the race!" Ben told him; and with this knowledge Jack went away once more.

He knew that his tyres would not last out, but if he could beat Slade nothing else mattered. Signals were flying from the Falcon pit, desperately ordering Slade to go faster.

Already Slade was driving like a madman, knowing that Jack was coming up behind. If Skid Kennedy passed the Falcon again, only an accident could prevent the boy winning. Slade knew it.

He flogged his machine until the engine seemed to scream in protest, until the spanging of the exhaust sounded with an agonised roar. He asked the Falcon for its last fraction of speed, and the car gave it.

The crowd marvelled at the way Slade was driving. He was a goggled devil as he crouched behind his cord-bound steering wheel, iron hands slinging the machine through the bends, fighting it straight.

He saved yards by battling his machine to the inside of the sweeping turns of the famous course, and all the time he was hoping that Jack would burst another tyre.

When there were barely a dozen laps to go, the tense crowd let up a roar as they saw Jack come off the banking almost at the Falcon's tail. Together the machines stormed down the straight for the yellow sandbanks that marked the bend. Slade saw Jack coming up, and he pulled over to try to cut him off and prevent him passing.

The long nose of the stalwart Saxon nudged sideways and poked forward at the other side of the Falcon, beating Slade's wily move, and as he came level Jack saw the pallid-faced speedman's lips twisting on his teeth as he cursed.

Neither would give way as the first bend whipped to meet them. They went into it together, both skidding a little on the curve, then shooting clear, with the crowd roaring Jack on. When he got past the Falcon he would be in the lead, all set to win—if only his tyres held out.

Neck and neck they swooped towards the next bend. The whirling wheels all but locked, so close were the machines as they roared through the turn. And now, with the railway straight in front of him, Jack gave his engine full throttle, and the Saxon began to draw ahead.

In the Falcon's smoking cockpit Slade flogged his machine to its uttermost limit, and then, in the moment that Jack thundered into the lead, Slade eased his car over. His head craned from behind the tiny windscreen, and an iron hand on the shifting steering-wheel brought one threshing front tyre up behind a spinning rear wheel of Jack's car.

Both cars were moving at terrific speed, wheels kicking on the concrete. But Slade brought off the thing for which he was working. He knew that Jack's tyres must be wearing through, while his own were sound. If Slade could get that front wheel to touch Jack's, the latter's weakened tyre was certain to burst from the impact.

A touch on the steering, a last effort from the Falcon's screaming engine, and the tyres touched! Slade felt a sudden mighty wrench on his steering; it was all he could do to pluck his machine clear as Jack's tyre burst. The Saxon's tail slewed round, then Jack straightened the car out and slowed, while Slade thundered triumphantly into the lead once more!

Grit Wins!

JACK guessed that there would be a spare wheel from Mr. Lloyd's car; he could use that to finish out the race. With a burst tyre flapping and slapping from the rim of his rear wheel he took his car on, watching the Falcon as it soared away in the lead.

Fred and Ben, watching from the Saxon pit, saw Jack come in. They had the spare wheel ready, and Fred worked with fiendish energy to make one of the fastest wheel changes that Brooklands had ever seen.

From the time he stopped until he ripped into the race again Jack stopped for but a matter of seconds. When he went forward once more, it was with the knowledge that Slade had stolen half a lap the lead by his craftiness.

The crowd cheered Jack on. He knew that if he burst another tyre he was done, and he knew that he could never catch Slade unless the Saxon gave him everything that was in her mighty engine. He forgot his own safety now. Skid Kennedy and the Saxon became speed incarnate.

The long, low car screamed into the bends and rocketed out of them. It went down the straights like a coloured comet and took the long Byfleet banking in one mad, tumultuous zoom. Every time Jack passed the paddock the crowd urged him on. He could just hear their cheering through the bellow of his full-throated exhaust.

He guessed that Slade was punishing his speed-iron now, and it was but three laps from the finish when Jack saw him again. The Falcon was just leaving the bends as Jack came into them. Two laps from the finish Jack was a bare hundred yards behind, and he was right on Slade's tail when the machines started on the last lap of the race.

Out of the bends they came. Jack could hear the Falcon's engine screeching as Slade thrashed it on, but he could not hold the cyclonic pace of the Saxon. Jack could see the angle of the man's jaw and the instruments on the board

before him. He could see Slade's hands knotted on the steering-wheel, caught the glint of the man's goggled eyes as he glanced across at him.

They hurtled towards the curve which led from the straight to the Byfleet Banking, and it seemed to Jack that Slade was boring him into the inside of the turn. He had to fight to get his car round, and Slade came still closer, flogging his machine to try to get ahead and run Jack off the track.

Jack could hear the thunder of the rival car rising to a tormented note, lifting the crescendo as the Falcon slid ahead, cutting Jack off, forcing him to the soft earth inside the track, driving him to smoking disaster and a crash in which only death could await him.

His wheels were already biting the edge of the concrete. Death waited inches away. The Falcon seemed to shriek in triumph, and then, in the very instant that Slade's purpose was almost accomplished, the Falcon's screeching was lost in a mad clattering.

The car dropped away. Jack, one wheel skimming the broken lip of the track, hauled his machine clear of the curve, and behind him he heard the wild rattle of broken metal, while the Falcon weaved and danced on the track ere it slowed.

Slade had wrecked his engine in trying to hold Jack's speed and ride him to his doom!

While clouds of smoke were yet pouring from the broken Falcon, the black-and-white winner's flag slashed down as Jack took the Saxon across the finishing line!

Carnaby Again

THE moment that Jack brought his race-racked machine to a stop, Saxon mechanics swarmed down on him. They dragged him out, then chaired him round the paddock and out in front of the frantically applauding crowd.

After that, Fred and Ben and Mr. Lloyd got him away across the track to the old shed which had formed the Saxon racing camp. There they eased his thirst with lemonade, and kept the crowd away while he rested.

The race had taken a lot out of him. All Jack wanted just then was a good square meal and a lot of sleep. Ben and Fred saw to it that he had both, and on the Monday morning he turned up as usual at the Saxon show-rooms in great Portland Street.

In the big window, Mr. Lloyd had had placed the car which had won the big Brooklands race. It stood there with its paintwork all marred from oil and dust, and its tyres worn so thin that the canvas showed through in places.

The car attracted a big crowd, but almost as big a crowd of customers came into the show-room to look at Saxon cars, and to see the boy speedman who was earning so great a name for himself. Some of the customers wouldn't believe that the lean, sinewy, clear-eyed youngster was really the famous "Skid" Kennedy, because he looked so young.

But when he began to talk about the cars which were on show, they realised that only Skid Kennedy could demonstrate them with so much enthusiasm. All the time, Fred worked with him in his own active, unassuming way, opening and closing doors, and showing off the gadgets on the cars.

The pair were at it all day, and in the evening Mr. Lloyd called them into his office. He told them that, as a result of Jack's win at Brooklands, they had done more business that day than in a whole month previously.

"I think we've got the Falcon people pretty well in hand," he told the boys. "They've been knocking at us right and left until now, but if things go on like this it'll be they who go bankrupt, not us! You youngsters are the finest salesmen I've ever known. Any idea how many cars

you've sold to-day, Jack?"

"Five, I think, sir!" Jack grinned.

"It's not five—it's eight," Mr. Lloyd answered. "I'm putting all your commission away in the bank for you, as we arranged, and I paid in a cheque this morning for winning the big race.

Well, we've just hit the Falcon people very badly," he went on, "but they'll want watching, because they'll not give up the fight yet. The big Motor Show at Olympia isn't such a long way away; if they can pull off some spectacular stunt between now and then, they might do us yet."

"We'll keep our peepers peeled," Fred assured him. "If they try anythin' funny, they'll be up against me an' Skid," he added. "The sooner it comes off, the better, too. I've got a bone to pick with that chap Carnaby next time we meet!"

Carnaby was very much on Fred's mind. He had a natural dislike of the dandy ex-salesman, and, in addition, the watchman mechanic whom Carnaby had knocked out when he tampered with the racing tyres—chanced to be a pal of Fred's. Fred wanted to avenge him.

Fred's idea of revenge ran mainly to buckets of thick, black, and greasy, gear oil. He reckoned that dumping a couple on Carnaby's head would just about even things up, especially if the dandy chanced to be wearing spats and a wasp-waisted new suit!

During the whole of the next week they saw nothing of Carnaby, nor of Slade.

"It's funny, y'know," Fred commented on the Saturday morning. "Slade hasn't been anywhere near the Falcon show-rooms opposite, nor have any of their racing staff. Wonder where they've got to? I've got a feeling they're up to something!"

"They can't be," Jack told him. "There aren't any more big races now the summer's gone. They're just lying low for a bit, that's all," he went on. "Doing anything this afternoon? If you're not, what about coming out with me on that super-sports car and testing it? The customer asked me to put it through its paces before he took delivery, so that he'd know the machine was all right."

After their midday meal, Jack piloted the long, powerful semi-racing machine up Great Portland Street, through Regent's Park, and away out on the arterial road which led to the north. They were seventy miles out of London when the engine developed a minor defect, and the two set about putting it right.

They were a long while on the job, because it was tricky, and neither would be satisfied until the engine was running perfectly. By that time dusk was falling, and then Jack switched on the lamps as he headed homewards.

The car was humming along at a mile a minute, when Fred leaned across and yelled:

"Jack, that's the Falcon works over on the right. Ease up and let's have a look at 'em! We might run across that rotter Carnaby!"

Jack slowed the machine as he made out the dark bulk of low-roofed buildings—the works from which he and Fred and Ben had been sacked through the crafty jealousy of Slade. A lane ran along one side, and he swung the car into it, then sent the machine burbling slowly along.

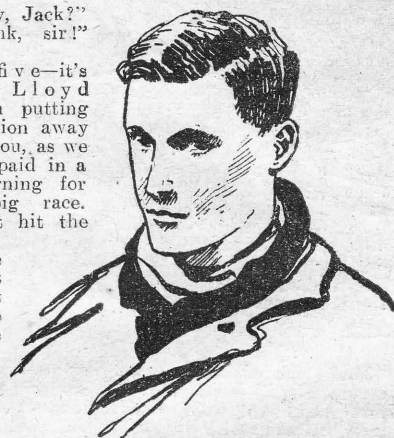
"They haven't put up any workshop extensions like we have, anyway!" he commented. "Perhaps they're not doin' so well as Mr. Lloyd thinks!"

Fred nodded, as he said:

"Keep going, this lane runs right round the works!"

The brick wall dropped away and was replaced by a low fence. They could see over the top of it, and they noticed that while all the main buildings were in darkness, there was one, standing apart from the rest, in which lights showed.

The brick wall dropped away and was replaced by a low fence. They could see over the top of it, and they noticed that while all the main buildings were in darkness, there was one, standing apart from the rest, in which lights showed.



FRED BISHOP, the plucky mechanic who sits beside Skid in the great racing car which hurtles round bends at breakneck speed.



JACK KENNEDY, the dare-devil young speedman who has earned the nickname of "Skid" because of his cleverness in handling a racing car.



'SKID' KENNEDY-SPEED KING!

(Continued from previous page.)

"That's the old shed where they used to put stuff ready for scrapping," Fred said. "They've got big lights over there. Stop her, Jack, and let's have a look. It's a—Hallo! Who's that? Slade!" He pointed over the fence as the car stopped.

In the light which streamed from the door of the building the two made out the form of the rival speedman, striding along with bent head, talking to two other men. He vanished into the darkness.

The boys stepped from the machine and peered through the gloom. They saw that the shed which used to be used for scrap metal had now been encircled by a wooden fence. Half a dozen notice boards were stuck up around it, and they could make out the lettering on some of them: "Keep Out—No Admittance." "No Work Hands Allowed Here." "Keep Out."

"What d'you make of that?" Fred asked.

"Well, it looks as though they're working late on something they've got in the shed," Jack answered. "Something they want to keep dark!"

"In that case, we'll have a look at it!" grunted Fred, and he vaulted the fence as he spoke. Jack followed him; he knew that there would probably be trouble if they were caught on the Falcon premises, but he had a feeling that Slade was planning some big coup.

The rival had taken his Brooklands defeat so quietly that his attitude was full of suspicion. Besides, why was the shed hedged about with warning notices, and why had a fence been built round it to keep everybody at a distance?

They were half-way towards the shed when Jack remembered their car still had lights showing. He looked back,

but the lights were hardly visible, because the machine was standing sideways on. Together the boys climbed the palings around the shed and went on across the open ground.

No sound came to their ears. As Jack and Fred neared the open doors they discovered that they carried heavy bars, and that a massive lock secured them. In addition, iron bars had been put up outside the windows of the buildings, and the grimy panes had been replaced by frosted glass, through which it was impossible to see.

They paused near the doors and listened. There was no sign of Slade and the other two men now, nor was there any indication that anyone was inside the big shed.

"Sounds like it's empty," Fred whispered. "Let's look in. If anybody shows up we can bunk for the car. Come on!"

They crept forward, treading lightly on the hard-packed earth before the doors. They edged round them, reached the threshold of the building, and looked in.

Two powerful electric globes hung down from the roof, flinging their brilliant light on what lay beneath. It was the chassis frame of a car, built from massive steel, and looking tremendously heavy and strong. In cradles just behind it were the partly-assembled shapes of three enormous Falcon engines, and the boys could tell that they were meant to go into the frame of the car.

They were looking at the parts of a car which was to have three tremendously powerful engines. All around was the material for building it, benches and tools and equipment. In a distant corner another light shone down on a broad desk, which was littered with papers.

A man was bending over them, apparently studying the plans of the machine. Some faint sound made him turn his head, and in that instant he sighted the boys. The man swung off his stool, stared at them for a moment, then came jumping across the floor.

As he came Fred shot forward—because the man was Carnaby!

(It is obvious to Jack and Fred that their rivals at the Falcon Works are out to build a monster car that will create a new world's land speed record. But that doesn't worry them any, just now, their attention is focused on Carnaby—the man who did the dirty on them in the Brooklands race. For thrills and unexpected situations next week's fine instalment will want a lot of beating. You'll read it, of course!)



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