

# SKIMPOLE the STAR-GAZER!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

## THE FIRST CHAPTER GUSSY IS TOO GOOD!

**T**AP!

"Wacke!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, tapped at the door of Racke's study in the Shell passage, and called.

• He turned the handle, but the door did not open.

"Wacke!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

There was no reply from the study. If Aubrey Racke, of the Shell, was there, he did not seem disposed to take heed of the swell of St. Jim's.

Tap!

"Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus, for the third time. "Weally, Wacke, you had bettah open the door."

"Oh, buzz off!" came Racke's voice at last, gruffly.

*When Herbert Skimpole, the genius of St. Jim's, takes up astronomy it is Racke of the Shell who sees stars!*

"Weally, Wacke——"

"Hook it! You're not wanted in this study."

"You uttah wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I should wefuse to entah your wotten studay in any circumstances what-

evah. I am perfectly well awah, Wacke, why your door is locked. You are smokin', and playin' bankah with Cwooke."

"Cut off!"

"Yes, cut off, D'Arcy!" came in Crooke's voice. "You're interrupting, you know. Cheese it and cut!"

"Weally, Cwooke——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"You wottah——"

"By gad! If you don't buzz off I'll come to you with a crickët bat!" exclaimed the exasperated Racke.

"If you will open the door, Wacke——"

"Ring off!"

"I have somethin' to tell you——"

"Tell it to somebody else, then," retorted Racke.

"It is wathah important to you, Wacke. I have come here to give you a warning——"

"Give it to somebody else. Cut off!"

"Yes, cut off, old bean!" chuckled Crooke. "Here endeth the first lesson, you know!"

"Bai Jove!"

The door of Study No. 9, farther along the Shell passage, was open, and from that study Skimpole of the Shell blinked out through his big spectacles.

"Is that you, D'Arcy?" asked Skimpole genially. "Step into my study, my dear fellow. I'm glad to see you——"

"I am twyin' to speak to Wacke," said Arthur Augustus. "It is awf'ly important, and he has his door locked, and wefuses to open it."

Skimpole shook his head.

"I am afraid that Racke is engaged upon his usual surreptitious and disreputable occupations, my dear D'Arcy." Skimpole of the Shell was a learned youth, and he never used a short word if a long one would do. "You had better leave him to his own disreputable devices, and step into my study. Talbot and Gore have gone out, and I should really like a little chat on the subject of my astronomical investigations. Dear me! What are you grinning at, my dear D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus could not help grinning.

Skimpole was an extremely learned fellow; his bulging brain was simply stacked with all sorts of abstruse

knowledge. What he did not know about entomology and conchology was not worth knowing. Skimpole was always willing, indeed, eager, to impart his knowledge to less learned fellows—but somehow or other fellows did not seem so willing to have it imparted to them.

"I do not see anything of a comic nature in my observations, my dear D'Arcy," said Skimpole, with a perplexed look. "I am at a loss to account for your amusement. I have lately taken up astronomy as a study, and I can assure you that it is a subject of transcendent interest. The investigation of the illimitable regions of the ether——"

"Oh, deah!"

"Pray step into my study," said Skimpole cordially. "I really should enjoy a talk with you, D'Arcy. Every other fellow I have asked seems to be busily occupied this afternoon—dear me, you are grinning again! Is it possible that there is some unconscious and unintentional humour in my observations upon a serious subject?"

"Thanks vevy much, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with a chuckle, "but I weally have got to speak to Wacke."

He knocked at the door of Study No. 7 again.

"Will you hook it before I come out with a cricket bat?" roared Aubrey Racke.

"Weally, you wottah——"

"My dear D'Arcy, Racke does not seem really anxious for your company," said Skimpole. "I, on the other hand——"

"Yaas, but I feel bound to give him a warnin'," said Arthur Augustus. "Wacke is a fwightful wottah, and a disgwace to St. Jim's, and I would not touch him with a barge-pole, of course."

But I do not want to see him flogged, though he deserves it for his wotten conduct. I am goin' to warn him that a pwefect is comin' up to his study. It would be howwid for Wacke if Kildare of the Sixth caught him smokin' and playin' bankah——"

There was a startled exclamation in Racke's study. D'Arcy's words were audible in the room, and they caused quite a change in the mood of Aubrey Racke and Gerald Crooke.

"Great pip! Kildare's coming!" ejaculated Crooke.

"Oh gad!" gasped Racke.

"D'Arcy, you silly owl——"

"Weally, Wacke——"

"Why couldn't you tell us before, you howlin' ass?" roared Racke.

"You blitherin' chump——"

"I was twying to tell you, Wacke," answered Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You are not worth savin' fwom a floggin', but I thought I would dwop in and give you the tip that Kildare was comin'—— Ow! Wow! Yawwooh!"

The swell of St. Jim's broke off, with a wild howl, as a finger and thumb fastened upon his noble ear from behind.

He spun round, yelling.

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, had come along from the staircase; and he had arrived on the scene at an unfortunate moment for Arthur Augustus.

"Ow! Wow! Welease my yah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Ow, wow!"

"You young rascal!"

"Weally, Kildare——"

"So you came along to warn Racke that I was coming, did you?" demanded the Sixth-Former.

"Ow! Yaas! I thought it was up to me to tip him a warnin', you know," gasped Arthur Augustus. "Ow, wow! Leggo my yah!"

Instead of letting go Gussy's noble ear, the prefect gave it a twist that elicited a frantic howl from the swell of St. Jim's.

"Now cut!" he said gruffly.

"Oh, cwikey!"

Arthur Augustus cut; probably regretting that he had come up to the Shell passage to tip Racke that good-natured warning. And Kildare turned to the door of Study No. 7 with a frowning brow and knocked on it with a heavy knock.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

### UNEXPECTED!

TOM MERRY jumped.

Really, it was enough to make any fellow jump.

Tom Merry was leaning idly against a stone buttress on the wall of the School House. Manners and Lowther, with their hands in their pockets, stood before him. The Terrible Three of the Shell were chatting.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and, as there was no match on, Tom Merry's idea was to pick sides for a game to fill up the afternoon. Manners' idea was to take a quiet ramble through the woods around the school, and take a few photographs with his celebrated camera. Monty Lowther's idea was to drop in at the New House and jape Figgins & Co. of that House.

So the three inseparable chums were arguing the matter, when all of a sudden came the surprising incident that made Tom Merry jump.

Something smote him on the head.

It was a cardboard box; not a very heavy object in itself, but as it came whizzing down from a good height, and as Tom's head was protected only by a cap, the falling object landed with rather a hard knock.

No wonder Tom jumped.

Above him, as he leaned on the

buttress, were a good many windows; but naturally he had not supposed that fellows would be throwing things out of those windows. It was quite an unusual happening.

"Ow!" ejaculated Tom.

The cardboard box burst on Tom's unfortunate head, and its contents were scattered round the Terrible Three. There was quite a rain of cigarettes.

Tom rubbed his head.

"What the merry thump——" he exclaimed.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Manners.

"What the dickens——"

"Somebody offering us a smoke in a rather informal way!" grinned Monty Lowther. "But who—and what——" Lowther turned his face upward to stare at the windows of the Shell studies, which were high above.

The next moment he roared.

Another object came whizzing down; and it landed on Monty's upturned nose.

"Whoooooop!" roared Lowther.

It was a little leather box this time, and this box did not come open; it was fastened with a catch. But it was much heavier than the cigarette-box. It rolled from Lowther's nose to the ground, and Monty clasped his injured nose and yelled.

"Oh dear! Ow, wow! My nose! Oh crumbs!"

"What thumping idiot is chucking things out of the window?" exclaimed Manners.

He, too, stared up, ready to dodge, while Tom Merry rubbed his head and Lowther caressed his nose.

Several of the windows above were open; most of them, in fact, the afternoon being rather muggy, even although it was October. No face was to be seen at any window; and

it was difficult to tell from which one the projectiles had come.

Evidently some Shell fellow had dropped the two boxes suddenly from his window; why and wherefore was a mystery.

Manners picked up the box that had smitten Lowther's nose. He slipped back the catch, opened it, and looked in it. The leather box contained a pack of playing cards.

Manners grunted as he snapped the box shut again.

"Cards and cigarettes!" he grunted. "That would be Racke's study, I suppose. But what the thump is he chucking his cards and smokes out of the window for? Might have dropped on a prefect."

"That wouldn't have mattered!" howled Lowther. "Look at my nose! I believe it's swelling."

"I believe I've got a bump on my napper!" grunted Tom Merry.

"I'll jolly well smash Racke——"

"It couldn't have been Racke," said Manners thoughtfully. "He wouldn't be chucking his own things away like this. More likely some fellow larking in his study."

"He shouldn't have such things in his study, then. I'm jolly well going to punch somebody," growled Lowther.

"Bai Jove! What's the wow, you fellows?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, came sauntering up to the Terrible Three. He turned his eyeglass upon them inquiringly.

"I was lookin' for you fellows," he said. "Blake and Hewwies and Dig think that a game of—— Gweat Scott!"

D'Arcy stared at the scattered cigarettes.

"Bai Jove! I am surprwised at you fellows!" he exclaimed. "I was not awah that you smoked."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ass!"

"I wegard you as a disweputable lot, and no bettah than Wacke and Cwooke," said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"Idiot!" said Manners politely.

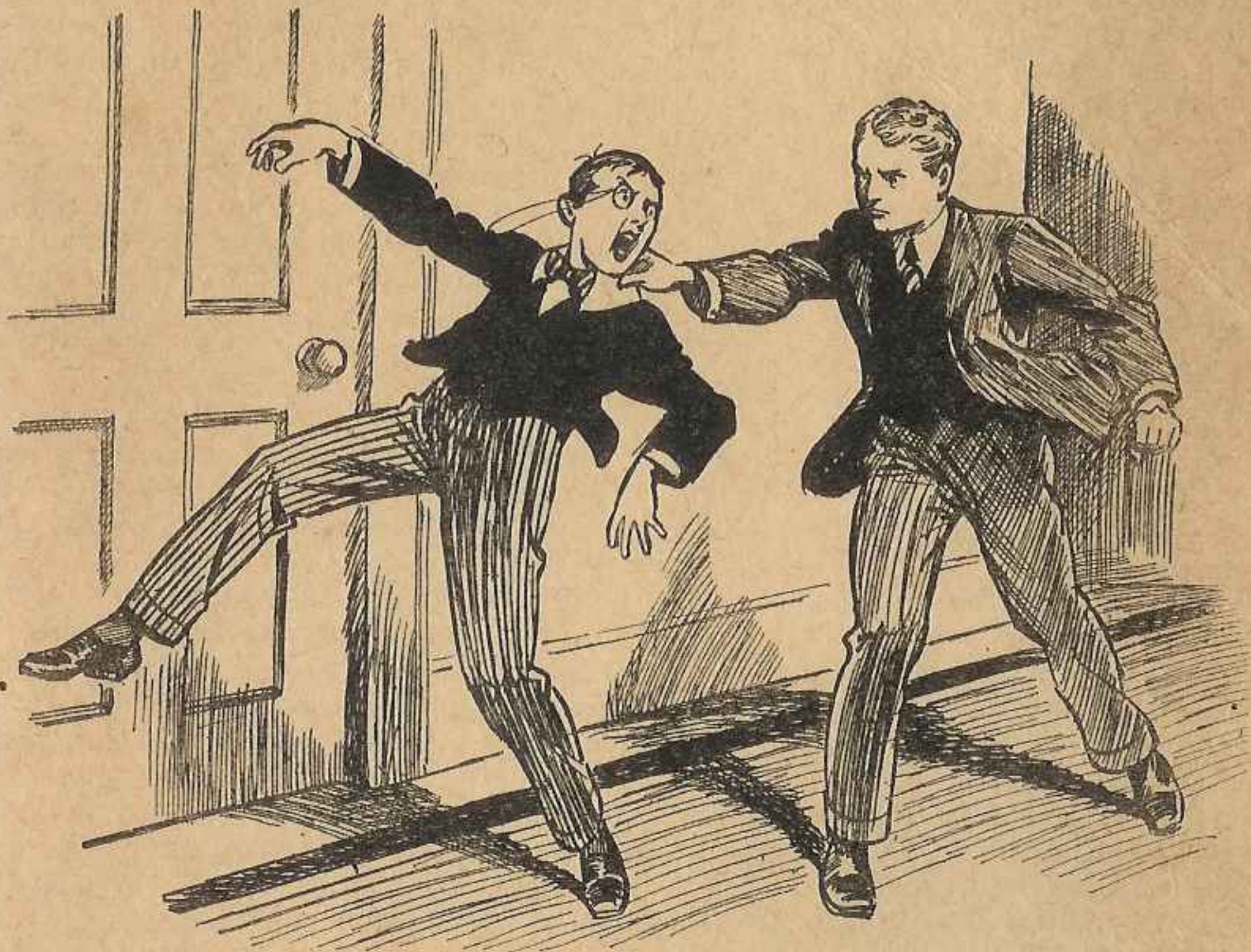
"Weally, Mannahs——"

smokes awound you on the gwound. Suppose a pwefect came by——"

"You silly chump!" bawled Manners. "This muck has just been chucked out of a study window on our nappers."

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Now do you understand, you



"I thought I would dwop in, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus, "and give you the tip that Kildare was comin'—— Ow! Wow! Yawoooh!" The swell of St. Jim's broke off with a wild howl as Kildare's finger and thumb fastened on his ear.

"You frabjous dummy!" said Tom Merry, in measured tones.

"I wefuse to be called a fwabjous dummay, Tom Mewwy. I am surprised and shocked at you," said Arthur Augustus, with great severity.

"I am also surprised at your wecklessness in dwoppin' your filthy

fathead?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I am glad to see that you youngstahs are not pickin' up Wacke's wotten ways," said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! Wathah deep of Wacke to dwop the things out of his study window before Kildare could see them, what?"

" Oh ! Is Kildare after the cad ? " growled Lowther.

" Yaas. I heard him speakin' to Dawwell of the Sixth, you know, and I went up to Wacke's study to tip him a warning. Kildare came up while I was there, and had the cheek to pull my yah." Arthur Augustus rubbed his noble ear, which still felt a twinge from Kildare's vigorous thumb. " I left Kildare knockin' at the door. I suppose Wacke chucked these things out of the window as the only way of gettin' wid of them in a huwwy."

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

" Fancy you fellows bein' just undahneath the window ! " he said. " That is wathah funnay, isn't it ? "

Monty Lowther and Tom Merry glared at the swell of St. Jim's. With a damaged nose and a damaged " napper," they failed to see where the fun came in.

" Funny, is it ? " snapped Lowther.

" Yaas, wathah ! Awf'ly funnay, you know ! " chuckled Arthur Augustus. " Ha, ha, ha ! Your nose looks wathah wed, Lowthah ! Did the things land on your nose ? "

Lowther glared at the happy swell of the Fourth.

" So it was your fault, was it ? " he ejaculated.

" Weally, Lowthah——"

" You had to butt in, and warn Racke, and get these things chucked out on our nappers——"

" Ha, ha, ha ! "

" What are you cackling at ? " roared Lowther.

" Ha, ha, ha ! It weally is vevy funnay, you know, if you look at it in the wight way ! " chortled Arthur Augustus. " You must have thought it was wainin' cigawettes and things ! Ha, ha, ha ! Oh cwumbs ! Yawooh ! Leggo ! "

Arthur Augustus, suddenly grasped by two exasperated Shell fellows, was up-ended before he knew what was happening. He ceased chortling quite suddenly ; the humour of the situation was now lost on him.

" Leggo ! You wuffians——"

Bump !

D'Arcy of the Fourth sat down in the quad. He sat down hard, and roared.

" Yawwoop ! "

Handfuls of cigarettes were jammed down Gussy's noble back as he wriggled and struggled, and these were followed by the box of playing-cards. Then the Terrible Three strolled away, grinning—leaving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gasping for breath and making frantic efforts to extract broken cigarettes from the inside of his collar.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER

#### THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT !

AUBREY RACKE of the Shell opened the door of Study No. 7 quickly as Kildare thumped on it—so quickly that the prefect did not even observe that the door had been locked. Thanks to Gussy's good-natured warning, the black sheep of the Shell had already disposed of the cards and the smokes in the study—they had been dropped from the window, regardless of what, or who, might be below. It was the only way, with not a second to spare, and Racke could only hope that no master or prefect might be walking below. Having thus rapidly cleared away the evidence against him, Racke opened the study door at once, and Kildare of the Sixth strode in.

Racke and Crooke looked as innocent as they could.

The box of cigarettes, the box of playing-cards, were gone. They had had no time for more.

But there was a haze of cigarette smoke in the study, and there were several cigarette-ends lying about. The black sheep had had no time to deal with these details.

"Oh, it's you, Kildare!" said Racke coolly.

"Yes!" grunted the prefect, with a stare round the study and a sniff at its aromatic atmosphere.

"Good!" said Racke. "Just the man I want to see!"

Kildare stared at him. As it was clear that smoking had been going on in the study, it was rather improbable that Racke really wanted to see a Sixth Form prefect just then. Crooke also stared at his companion. But he remained silent, leaving it to Racke to lie a way out of the scrape if that was possible.

"I've got a complaint to make," went on Racke before Kildare could speak. "Somebody's been smoking in my study."

"What!" ejaculated Kildare.

"You can smell it in the atmosphere," said Racke, while Gerald Crooke almost gasped, his breath taken away by his companion's cool nerve. "Look at these cigarette-ends, too! We found them here!"

Kildare looked grimly at Aubrey Racke.

"There's been smoking in this study before, Racke," he said quietly. "You have been caned for it. I had a strong suspicion that it was going on again this afternoon, and I came to look into it. And now——"

"Now I'm making a complaint, as I said," answered Racke calmly. "Mr. Linton has licked me for smoking, and warned me not to do it again, and of course I haven't."

"You haven't?" repeated the St. Jim's captain.

"Certainly not."

"Nothing of the kind, Kildare," said Crooke, taking his cue from his worthy associate. "I suppose it's not our fault if some cad smokes in our study while we're gone out?"

"I make a complaint to you, as head prefect of the House, Kildare," said Racke. "I think it ought to be looked into."

"It will be!" said Kildare grimly. "It's barely possible that you are telling the truth, Racke. I mean to be just. If you have not been smoking here, you will not be punished. If you have been smoking——"

"If I have I deserve to be punished, of course, after the warning Mr. Linton gave me," said Racke meekly.

"Certainly," said Crooke.

"Turn out your pockets!" rapped Kildare.

"What for?"

"If you've been smoking, as I believe, you haven't smoked your last cigarette, I suppose. Turn out your pockets."

"Oh, very well."

Racke and Crooke turned their pockets inside out. Nothing in the nature of a "smoke" came to light.

"Very good," said Kildare. "I shall search the room. If I find a single cigarette I shall take it as proof that you have been smoking."

And the prefect proceeded to make a search of Study No. 7.

Racke and Crooke watched him in silence.

But for Racke's prompt action after receiving Gussy's warning, certainly plenty of cigarettes would have been discovered in Study No. 7, as well as a pack of playing-cards, which would have been more serious still.

Kildare gave it up at last. He was greatly puzzled. His suspicions were strong, and the evidence was fairly

clear. Yet it was quite possible that Racke was telling the truth; such a trick might have been played in his study by some ill-disposed fellow, and certainly there were plenty of fellows in the School House who disliked Aubrey Racke. Kildare put twenty minutes or more into his search, and he found nothing.

"I hope you are satisfied now, Kildare?" said Aubrey Racke, with great meekness.

Kildare gave him a grim look.

"I am not satisfied," he said. "But I'm bound, in the circumstances, to give you the benefit of the doubt."

He turned to the door.

"You get off this time," he said. "You may be telling the truth—I don't know. You get the benefit of the doubt, as I said. But an eye will be kept on this study, Racke, and I warn you to look out."

And with that the captain of St. Jim's left Study No. 7 and walked away to the stairs.

Racke grinned at Crooke when he was gone.

"What price that?" he said.

"A jolly narrow escape, though," said Crooke. "If that ass D'Arcy hadn't warned us, Kildare would have found the door locked, and then——"

"A miss is as good as a mile," yawned Racke. "I say, we'd better get out and bag the things I dropped from the window before they're picked up by somebody. We shall have to be a bit careful for a time."

"We shall have to chuck it, you ass. We've got out of this scrape, but Kildare will be watching this study like a cat."

"That's all right. We can carry on in the New House," grinned Racke. "We'll stick to Clampe's study for a bit, see? Clampe of the New House has been over here often

enough. Now we'll give him a turn."

Crooke chuckled.

"Good! That will be safe enough."

The two young rascals left the study and the House. They walked round to the wall under the Shell study windows. The Terrible Three were gone, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy also had vanished. On the earth lay fragments of cigarettes, and the little leather box that contained Racke's pack of cards. Manners had thrown it down after looking at it. Aubrey Racke picked it up and slipped it into his pocket.

"Somebody's been at the smokes," he said. "I suppose the box burst when it fell. Tread 'em out of sight."

Then Racke and Crooke walked away cheerily to the New House. Their shady occupations were no longer safe in their own House, for a time at least; but Leslie Clampe's study in the other House was a safe refuge. Clampe of the New House was a member of the shady circle who followed the leadership of Aubrey Racke, and the precious pair were sure of a welcome there. Kildare's authority did not extend to Mr. Ratcliff's House.

A quarter of an hour later Racke and Crooke were smoking and playing banker again, with Clampe of the Shell as a companion. And Clampe's study in the New House was calm and bright, from the point of view of the black sheep of St. Jim's. But there was more trouble in store for the black sheep, if they had known it.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

### NO TAKERS!

"OH deah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that ejaculation in Study No. 6 in the Fourth.



Blake, Herries and Digby looked at him inquiringly.

Tea was over in Study No. 6, and it had been quite a nice tea. The evening was deepening into dusky night. Three members of the celebrated study were feeling cheery and contented. But Arthur Augustus sighed and said:

"Oh deah!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Blake lazily. "Thinking of prep? No need to worry about prep yet."

"I was not thinkin' of pwep, deah boy."

"Then what were you grunting for?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I was not gwuntin'——"

"Grousing, then," said Blake.

"I was not gwousin', Blake. I was thinkin' about Skimpole——"

"Who's Skimpole?" yawned Herries.

"Bai Jove! You know Skimpole of the Shell——"

"Yes; I remember there is such an ass. The thumping duffer wanted to talk to me this afternoon about conchology, or astrology, or astronomy, or something of the kind," said George Herries. "I butted him in his ribs."

"Bai Jove! What did Skimmay do, Hewwies?"

"Sat down."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Hewwies, that's wathah wuff," said Arthur Augustus.

"It's rather rough Skimmy buttonholing a chap and jawing him blind," said Herries. "Let him keep it for the Shell. I hear that Gore chucked his entomological collection into the passage one day, and chucked his entomological books after it, and when Skimmy objected, he chucked Skimmy after the lot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Goah is wathah a wuff bwute, Hewwies."

"Just that! All the same, I sympathise with him, being Skimmy's study-mate. Talbot stands it wonderfully well. But then, Talbot's a jolly good-tempered fellow, and can stand anything. I've seen him listening to your conversation quite politely."

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"But what about Skimpole?" asked Blake. "Don't say you've asked him to the study. I should be sorry to slaughter a guest within these giddy walls; but if Skimpole comes in, Gussy, there will be no alternative. Once his chin gets going, nothing short of that will stop it."

"Skimmay has asked me to his studay, Blake."

"Well, you needn't go."

"Unfortunately, I have pwomised to go."

"Hinc illae lacrymae!" chuckled Dig. "Hence these giddy tears."

Arthur Augustus looked round at his chums.

"The fact is, you fellows, Skimpole of the Shell is an awf'ly clevah chap," he said. "He knows all about a lot of things that end in 'ology.' He weads the most fwightful-lookin' books, with jaw-cwackin' words in them. He has taken up astwonomy, you know."

"I know!" agreed Blake. "I've had some."

"It is a vewy intewestin' subject, Blake. Skimpole can tell you all the latest distances of the stars from the earth, and all that. It's a fwightfully intewestin' subject. Skimmay natuwally wants to talk it over with a kindwed spiwit. Talbot and Goah do not seem to take to it, somehow, and fellows seem wathah shy of dwoppin' in for a chat with Skimpole. Some-

how, I did not like to wefuse when he asked me."

"I know!" assented Blake. "That is the sort of soft ass you are, Gussy. Bores take advantage of it."

"Yaas, wathah, I feah so," said Arthur Augustus. "But I have nevah wepwoached you for borin' me!"

"Eh?"

"And weally it is only faih to let othah bores have a turn—what?"

Blake sat up and regarded his noble chum with a fixed stare. D'Arcy rattled on happily:

"The fact is, a chat with Skimmay about astwonomy ought not to bore a fellow. He's cwammed with knowledge, and it's weally worth acquiwin', you know. Skimmay doesn't specially care whethah I dwop in, so long as somebody does. How would you like to dwop in instead of me, Hewwies?"

Herries chortled.

"Not the least little bit in the wide world," he answered promptly.

"You may be losin' a lot of astwonomical knowledge, Hewwies."

"I don't mind, old chap."

"What about you, Dig?"

"Nothing about me," grinned Digby. "You're not palming Skimmy off on me, old bean."

"I was not exactly thinkin' of palmin' off Skimmay on you, Dig," said Arthur Augustus mildly. "I was thinkin' of lettin' you acquire a lot of astwonomical knowledge fwom him, instead of me, you know."

"Same thing. Forget it."

"Blake, old chap, I wondah whethah you would care to dwop in for a chat with Skimpole," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass inquiringly upon the chief of Study No. 6.

"You needn't wonder," said Blake.

"I wouldn't."

"Astwonomy is weally an entwan-

cin' subject when you get fairly into it," said the swell of St. Jim's, seriously. "The distances of the stars fwom the earth, you know, are weally enormous, and worth knowin'. There is a star called What's-its-name, you know, at a distance of I-forget-how-many-miles fwom the earth, and the light takes, I can't quite wemembah how many yeahs to weach us. Fancy that!"

"Oh, my hat! Did you get that from Skimmy?" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Worth knowin', what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, I do not see anythin' to cackle at. Are you fellows suah you would not like to dwop in on Skimmay instead of me?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Quite sure!" chuckled the three.

"Then I suppose I shall have to go! Oh deah!" sighed Arthur Augustus, and he rose reluctantly from his comfortable chair.

Arthur Augustus left Study No. 6, Blake & Co. chuckling as he went. He walked along towards the Shell passage, but not with eager footsteps. He had told Skimmy that he would drop in for a chat, and Gussy was a slave of his word.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER

### ASTRONOMICAL!

SKIMPOLE of the Shell, as he opened the door, blinked at Arthur Augustus through his spectacles and grinned a welcoming grin. He was glad to see Arthur Augustus, and he welcomed him into his study. The swell of St. Jim's smiled his politest smile. He was for it, and it could not be helped now, and he made up his noble mind to endure it with fortitude.

"Trot in, old fellow," said Skimpole, beaming through his spectacles.

"I am glad, D'Arcy, to find that there is one fellow in the House with sufficient intellect to welcome the acquisition of astronomical knowledge."

"Bai Jove!"

"Take a chair, old chap—not that one," added Skimpole hastily, as D'Arcy sat down. "Dear me! You have sat down on my astronomical chart, D'Arcy, and the ink is not dry. I am afraid that you have spoiled it."

Arthur Augustus jumped up as if he had sat on a tintack instead of an astronomical chart.

"Bai Jove! My twousahs——"

"Dear me! You have smeared it," said Skimpole, blinking at the chart. "You have smudged Sirius quite out, and I cannot distinguish between Jupiter and Saturn now."

"Is there any ink on my twousahs, Skimpole?"

"The ink is of no consequence, D'Arcy—I have plenty of ink. It is the state of the chart——"

"It is the state of my bags that I am wowwyin' about," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Is there any ink on them?"

Skimpole blinked at the bags.

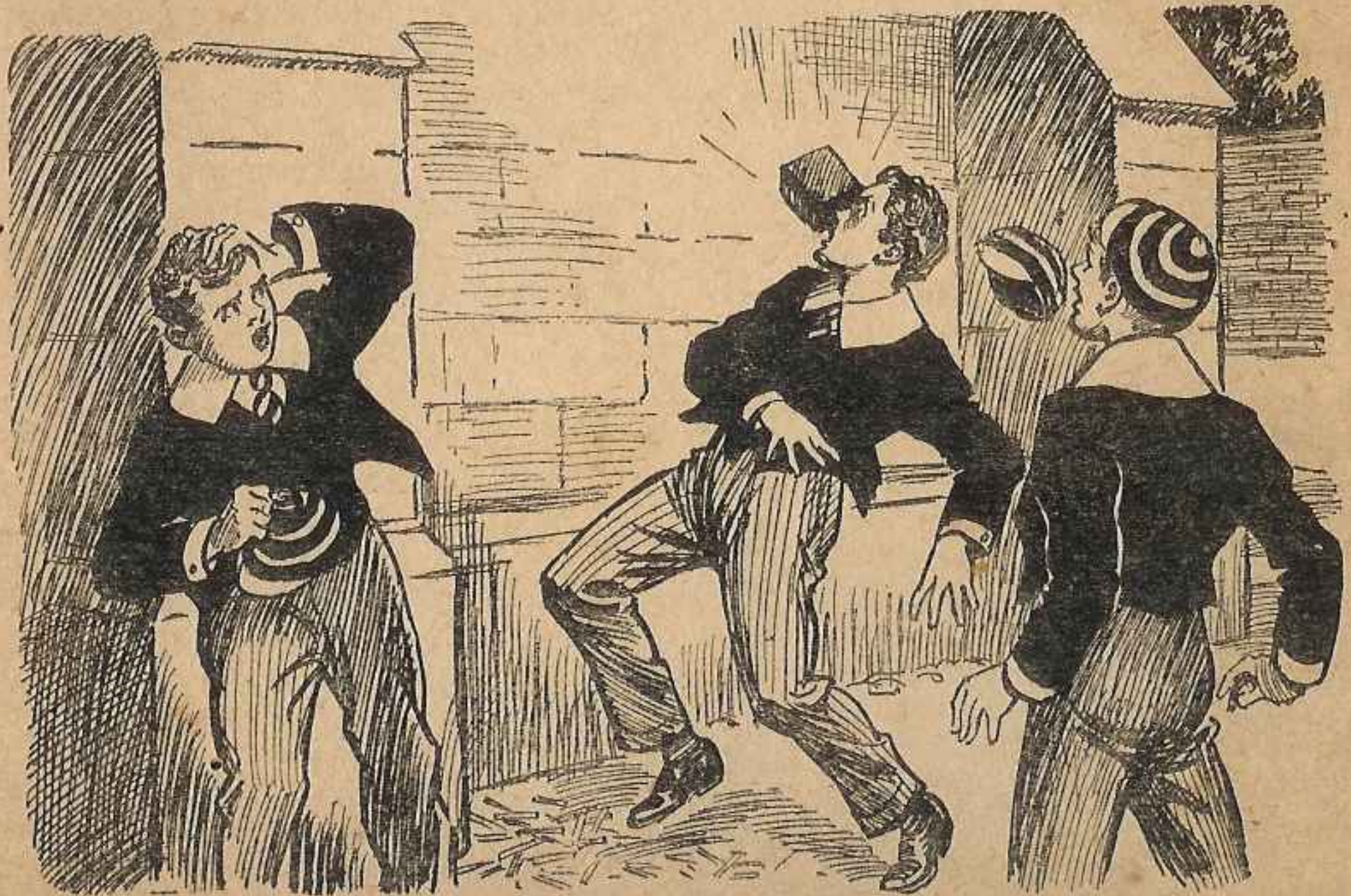
"Yes, indeed, there is something like a chart on the seat of your trousers, D'Arcy—you see, the ink was quite wet and——"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"You have taken quite an impression of it," said Skimpole. "I have no objection, of course, my dear fellow, to your taking a copy of my chart, but——"

"I have a vevy stwong objection to takin' it on my bags!" mumbled Arthur Augustus.

"It means the repetition of a considerable amount of painstaking



Lowther turned his face up to stare at the windows of the Shell studies high above. The next moment he roared as another object came whizzing down and landed on his nose.

labour," said Skimpole. "However, it does not matter."

"Doesn't it?" grunted Arthur Augustus, screwing himself round in a vain attempt to ascertain the precise amount of damage done to his hitherto spotless bags. "Nevah mind — go ahead."

Arthur Augustus sat down in the armchair, after carefully ascertaining that there were no more astronomical charts there.

Skimpole shook his head rather mournfully over his blotted chart, and laid it aside.

D'Arcy looked with some curiosity at Skimpole's telescope.

The genius of the Shell had an immense allowance of brains; his bony forehead fairly bulged with intellect. There was plenty of quantity, whatever the quality was like. But he did not have a very large allowance of pocket-money, and D'Arcy was rather surprised to see so large and evidently expensive a telescope in his study.

"A good instrument, D'Arcy," said Skimpole, with pride. "With this telescope I am able to make very extensive investigations into the illimitable regions of space. I had some little difficulty at first in acquiring an instrument of which the cost was twenty-five pounds——"

"Bai Jove!"

"Several fellows declined to lend me the necessary cash," said Skimpole. "Although I explained to them that scientific investigation was a matter far transcending in importance any mere sordid question of a pecuniary nature, they did not seem to see it, somehow. Even Talbot, who is generally somewhat intelligent, and by no means parsimonious, declined to draw all his money from the bank for the purpose of purchasing

this useful astronomical instrument."

"Did—did he?" gasped D'Arcy.

"He did, indeed!" said Skimpole, blinking at the swell of St. Jim's with the seriousness of an owl. "Why, I do not know!"

"Oh!"

"Fortunately, Blankley's Stores at Wayland have instituted a method of purchase which placed the instrument within my reach," said Skimpole. "It is called the hire-purchase system, D'Arcy. I am paying for this telescope at the rate of a pound every fortnight."

"I—I see."

"The first pecuniary consideration having been duly handed over, the telescope was delivered," explained Skimpole. "I trust that I shall be able to keep up the payments. It does not appear wholly probable, as I seldom have any money. I fear, too, that if the payments are not made, Blankley's may place sordid considerations of money before the interests of science, and may take the telescope away."

"I—I think that's vewy pwob," gasped D'Arcy.

"However, we must hope for the best," said Skimpole brightly. "Blankley's can scarcely expect me to withdraw my intellect from the contemplation of starry infinitudes in order to solve so sordid a problem as that of payment for an astronomical instrument. Possibly I may borrow the money of you——"

"Oh!"

"Your gold watch, for instance, could be disposed of to raise the requisite sum."

"Bai Jove!"

"But never mind that now—these, after all, are mere sordid details, unworthy of consideration," said Skimpole. "Let us proceed, my dear

D'Arcy. I have fixed up my telescope, as you see, at the window, to cover the section of the firmament which I am now investigating. I have already formed certain theories of my own with regard to the motion of the planets, and on the much-discussed question of their inhabitants. Perhaps you would like me to explain them to you."

"Oh, deah!"

"What did you say, my dear fellow?"

"Oh! Nothin'! Wun on, old chap!"

Skimpole of the Shell ran on. He did not notice that D'Arcy's eyes had closed as he leaned back in the armchair.

The drone of Skimmy's voice had a soporific effect on Gussy.

He nodded off.

The theories Skimpole had formed, though no doubt far and away ahead of any common or garden theories on the subject, did not keep Arthur Augustus awake. In fact, they lulled him to sleep.

He awoke suddenly. It seemed to him that somebody had called his name.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "All wight—I've heard evewythin' you fellows were sayin'—I—I mean——"

"My dear D'Arcy——"

"I—I—— Oh! Yaas!" Arthur Augustus realised where he was, and realised, too, that Skimmy was not aware that he had nodded off. It was dark in the study now, only a glimmer of starlight coming in from the sky.

"I am truly gratified, D'Arcy, to perceive that you were so deeply absorbed in this enthralling topic."

"Oh! Yaas!"

"I trust that my exposition of the

subject has been perfectly comprehensible to you."

"Oh! I——"

"If not, I should have no objection whatever to explaining the whole thing over again from the beginning."

"Pway don't twouble, old chap!" gasped D'Arcy. "It—it—it's as cleah as—as anythin'!"

"Very good," said Skimpole. "Now shall we look through the telescope, my dear fellow? A little practical demonstration——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus was a little interested at last. Looking through a powerful telescope on a starry night was quite interesting. He rose from the armchair, and bent his head to the lower end of the long tube.

Skimpole blinked at him beamingly through his big spectacles.

"The telescope is now directed at the moon, my dear D'Arcy," he said. "Although it is not, of course, so powerful as the instruments in the great observatories, I hope to make discoveries hitherto hidden from less intelligent astronomers. Any deficiency of the instrument may be compensated by additional intelligence on the part of the observer. Certain traces and aspects of the lunar surface have convinced me that the moon is inhabited, and I entertain every hope of ascertaining unquestionable facts in support of my theory. What do you see, my dear D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Augustus breathlessly.

"Do you discern anything that appears to partake of the nature of motion?" asked Skimpole eagerly.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! I can make out a face—a weal face——"

"A human face?" gasped Skimpole.

"Yaas, wathah! Two of them—no, thwee!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in great excitement. "Thwee faces—gathahed wound a table. Bai Jove! They are quite young fellows—boys, in fact. They wear Eton jackets, just as we do at St. Jim's——"

"Is it possible?"

"Yaas, wathah! Now one of them is turnin' wound—Bai Jove! He looks awfully like Figgins of the New House."

"It is probable that the inhabitants of the lunar world, D'Arcy, bear a close resemblance to the inhabitants of our earth," said Skimpole. "Let me see, my dear chap—let me see—should the atmospheric conditions change, the observation may well be lost——"

"Wait a minute——"

"Please let me look——"

"Oh, vewy well!"

D'Arcy raised his head as Skimpole lowered his mighty brain.

Crash!

The back of D'Arcy's noble napper came into violent contact with the bulging forehead of the St. Jim's astronomer.

"Yawwoop!"

"Ow! Wow! Oh!"

The two juniors sat down suddenly on the floor, clasping their heads in anguish and seeing more stars than the most successful astronomer ever saw through the most powerful of telescopes.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER

### THE MEN IN THE MOON!

TOM MERRY stopped at the door of Skimpole's study and threw it open. Manners and Lowther stopped with him. The Terrible Three, on their way to their own study for prep, were quite alarmed by the sounds they heard proceeding from

Skimpole's room, and they stopped to investigate. There had been a crash, a thud, and a combination of anguished yells, and the latter were still going on.

"Ow, ow, ow! You fwightful ass! Yow-ow-ow!"

"My dear D'Arcy—— Yarooop! Ooooooh!"

"You feahful duffah! Ow, ow!"

"Really, I cannot avoid regarding your action as being the outcome of illimitable stupidity, D'Arcy. Wow!"

Tom Merry stared into the study.

It was dark there, but in the moonlight at the window he discerned a large telescope reared up, directed out of the window at the sky; and on either side of the lower end a junior sat rubbing his head.

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Tom cheerily. "Anybody killed?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

D'Arcy staggered to his feet, still rubbing the back of his noble head. Skimpole was a brainy youth, and the full weight of his powerful intellect had smitten Arthur Augustus, and the result was painful.

"That ass Skimpole——" gasped D'Arcy.

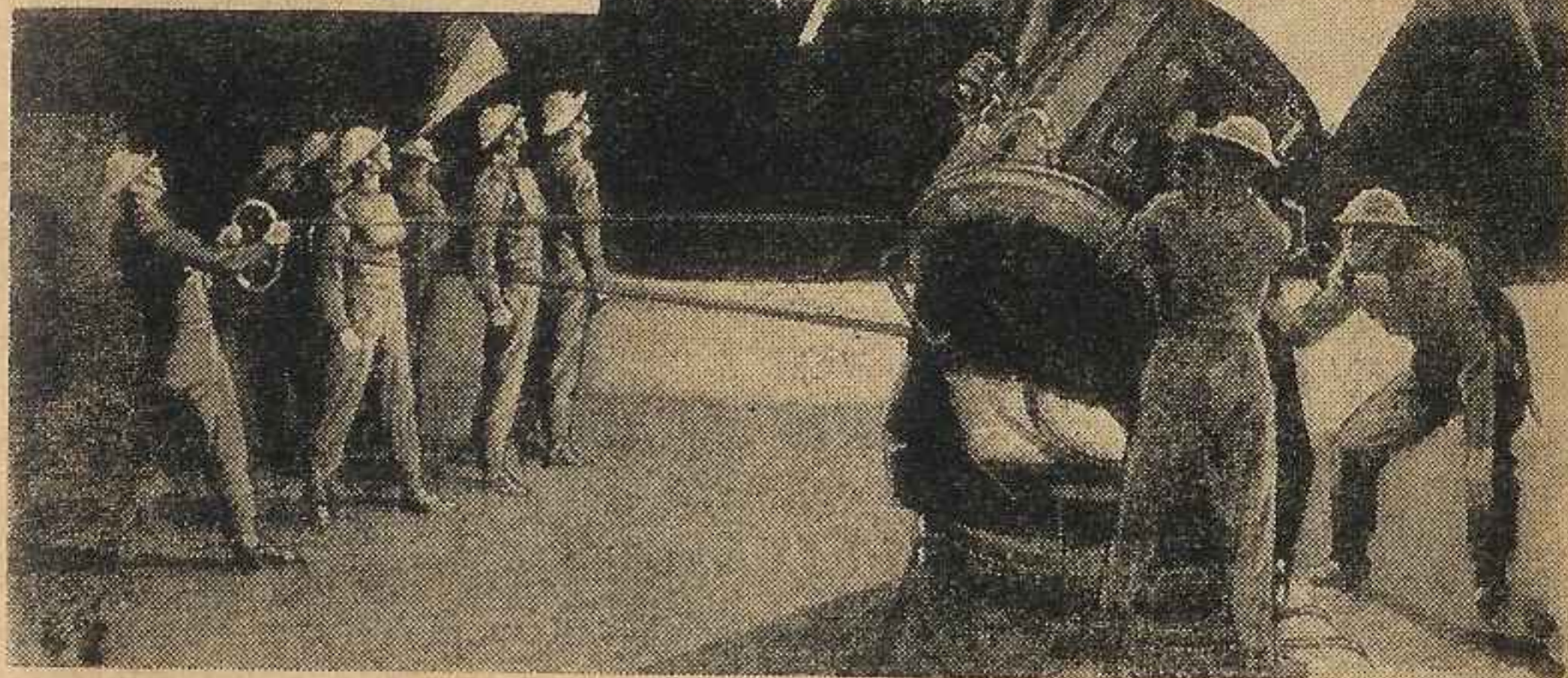
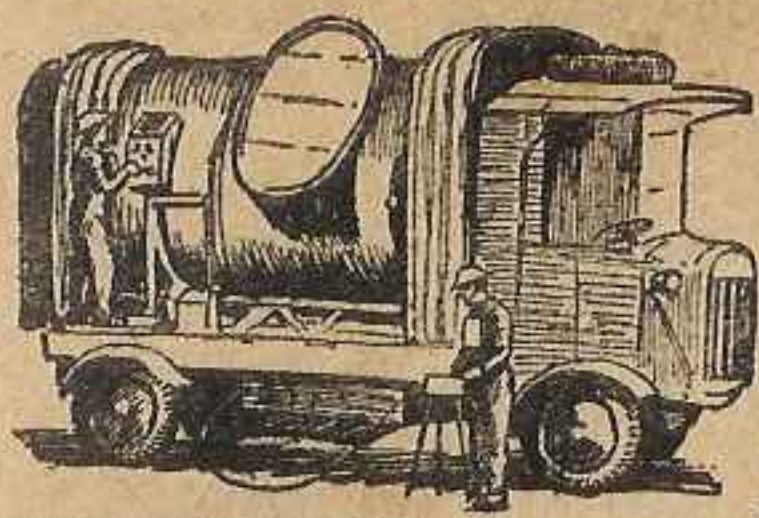
Skimpole picked himself up, caressing his bony forehead. His mighty brain had received a shock.

"My dear fellow," he said, "your inexcusable and extraordinary obtuseness in suddenly raising your head while I was stooping down to the telescope was the cause of this unfortunate and disconcerting collision with my cranium."

The Terrible Three chuckled. Evidently the two astronomical investigators had knocked their heads together at the telescope.

"All serene," said Lowther, comfortingly. "You've only banged your heads; and there's nothing in

## THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



When the presence of raiding bombers is discovered by the Sound Locator—shown on left of illustration—searchlights are swept across the sky in great arcs. Directly one searchlight picks out a hostile craft two other beams are concentrated on it which almost blind its crew, and the conjunction of beams is a signal for defending fighters to attack.

The illustration shows a 90 c.m. searchlight in operation; the beam controlled from a distance by the projector controller, who turns the beam by walking in a circle, and elevates it by turning the control wheel. The beam is produced by an arc-lamp, the flame of which consists of carbon vapour superheated to incandescence at a temperature of 5,430 degrees Fahrenheit.

The searchlight illustrated is mounted on a wooden

base, but they are often set on four small "track units," or caterpillar wheels, to give them mobility.

Inset is a mobile searchlight of the type invented by Major Jack Savage. It has 3,000,000 candle power, and by its light a newspaper can be read five miles away. Its peculiar advantage is that it sends up not one beam but a pattern of beams, so making a grid or a series of concentric circles in the sky. The beam consists of 300 parallel beams, each deflected by a mirror along the path required.

The searchlight is set on a revolving drum with two compartments, one for generating the mass beam, the other for breaking it up into 300 rays and transmitting them. The power for generating the electricity supply is produced by the lorry engine.

either of them to be damaged."

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass——"

"It is an extraordinary but far from uncommon circumstance," said Skimpole, "that an individual of extremely limited intellectual powers is prone to underrate the intellect of others. In your case, my dear Lowther, the deficiency of mental

power amounts almost to imbecility, if you do not mind my mentioning it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, weally, you fellows," said D'Arcy, his keen interest in the inhabitants of the moon reviving as the pain in his noble napper abated, "we have made a wathah wemark-

able discovery. I have actually seen the chaps in the moon through this telescope."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which?"

The Terrible Three stared at D'Arcy Skimpole, on his knees at the lower end of the slanting telescope, already had his eye glued to it. He had forgotten the shock to his bony forehead in his breathless interest in the proceedings of the man in the moon.

"What the thump do you mean, Gussy?" demanded Manners. "Mean to say you can see anything in the moon that hasn't been seen before?"

"Yaas, wathah! Can you see them, Skimmay?"

"Yes," gasped Skimpole. "The view is amazingly clear. I can see three persons—three youthful persons. One of them is a very plump youth, and he is eating what appears to be a pie."

"You can see that?" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes, yes, with absolute clearness."

"In the moon?" shrieked Tom.

"Undoubtedly, my dear Merry. The telescope is trained towards the moon. I have fixed it very carefully—in fact, with the most sedulous care."

"This will be great news for the Astronomer Royal!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "They never see these things at Greenwich."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's look," said Tom. "I've looked up at the man in the moon sometimes, but I've never seen him eating a pie before."

"Pray take my place, my dear Merry," said Skimpole. "Your absurd incredulity will soon evaporate under actual observation of this astounding phenomenon."

Tom Merry knelt down at the lower end of the telescope and applied his eye to it. He wondered what he was going to see—though certainly he did not expect to get a near view of the manners and customs of the man in the moon.

But he started as he looked.

Three figures, apparently in a lighted room, came into view—three figures that were quite distinct.

One of them was seated at a table; another, a rather long-legged youth, was standing by the table, and Tom could see his lips moving in speech; and the third was tucking into a large pie.

For a moment Tom Merry was amazed. As Skimmy had said that the telescope was carefully trained on the moon, Tom naturally supposed, for the moment, that that was so. But the next moment it occurred to him that Skimmy had got the direction a little wrong.

The long-legged fellow had features that were familiar to Tom Merry. Tom Merry had never seen the man in the moon at close quarters; but he had seen George Figgins of the New House often enough.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared suddenly.

"My dear Merry——"

"Weally, Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom.

"Do you not see them, Merry?" exclaimed Skimpole.

"Ha, ha! Yes! Figgins is jawing, and Fatty Wynn eating a pie, and Kerr getting on with his prep!" roared Tom Merry.

"Figgins! Wynn! Kerr!" repeated Skimpole.

Tom Merry rose from the telescope and wiped his eyes. Owing to a little error in direction, the telescope was trained on a high window in the New House, on the other side of the St. Jim's quadrangle. It was in



Figgins' study, over the way, that Skimpole had made his remarkable discoveries.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus faintly.

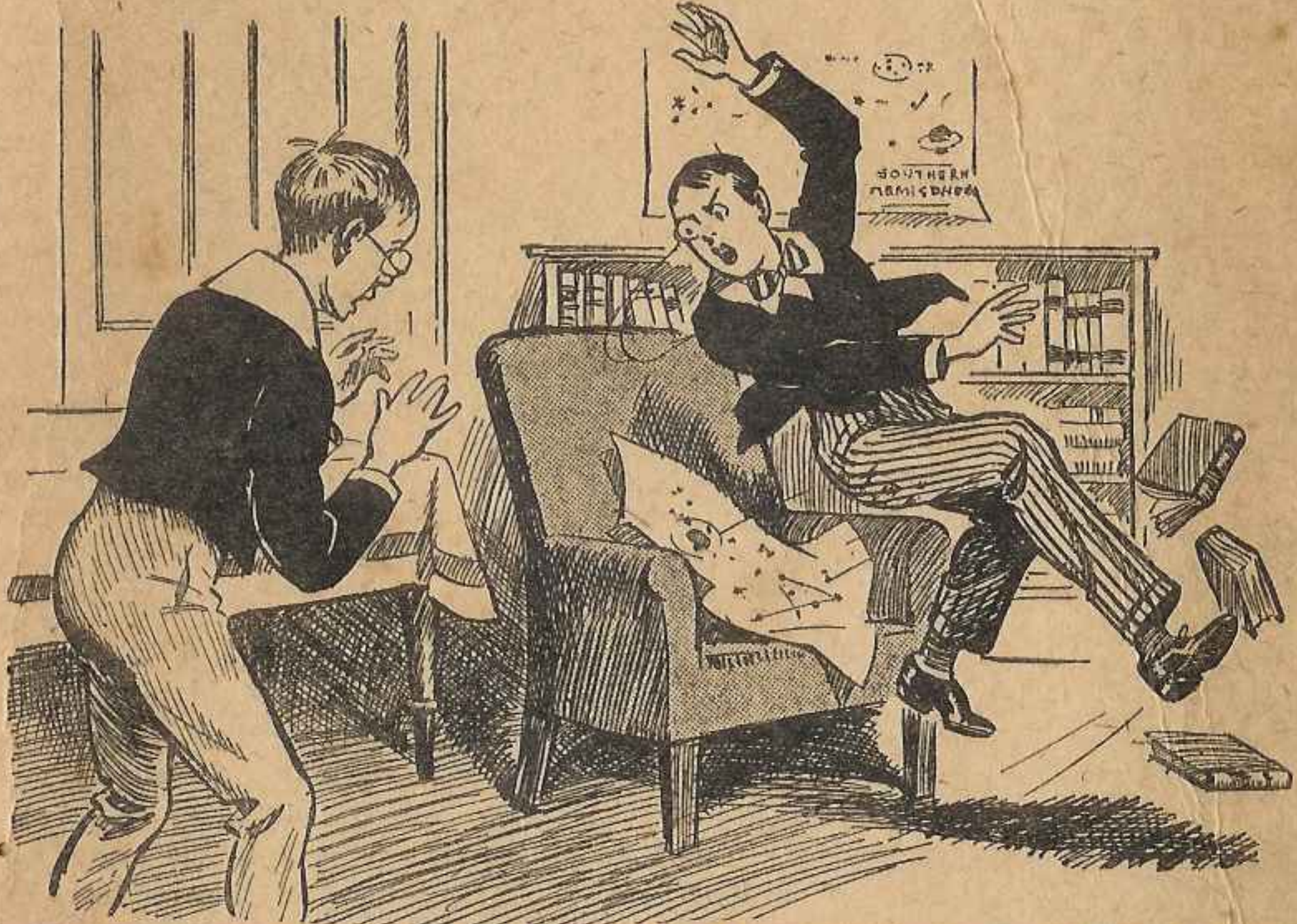
"Impossible!" exclaimed Skimpole. "The telescope is directed towards the moon, my dear Merry—just over the roofs of the New House."

"Let's look!" chuckled Manners.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"I—I thought one of the fellows looked like Figgins," said Arthur Augustus. "I mentioned it to you, Skimmay."

Skimpole did not answer. The expression on his face was one of blank dismay. His disappointment was great. Instead of a discovery that was to make the Astronomer



Arthur Augustus jumped up as if he had sat on a tintack instead of an astronomical chart. "Bai Jove! My twousahs——" "Dear me," said Skimpole, blinking at the chart, "you have smeared it."

Manners and Lowther looked in turn, and chortled. They could see nothing of the moon through Skimpole's telescope. But they had a remarkably clear view of the interior of Figgy's study in the New House.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus in disgust. "Mean to say I was look-in' at a beastly New House window all the time, you fellows?"

Royal hide his diminished head, Skimmy had only been observing the manners and customs of three New House fellows in a New House study. It was a blow.

"I wegard you as an ass, Skimmay," said D'Arcy, as the Terrible Three went chuckling from the study. "You told me the telescope was twained on the moon. It was twained

on Figgay's window across the quad. I regard you as a fozlin' fathead, deah boy."

"My dear D'Arcy——"

"Bai Jove! It's high time for pwep," said Arthur Augustus; and he retreated to the door.

"Hold on, my dear fellow—never mind prep!" said Skimpole. "I will readjust the telescope and make an observation of the lunar surface. If the present atmospheric conditions prove favourable, I entertain not the remotest doubt that—— D'Arcy! D'Arcy! Dear me! He is gone."

Arthur Augustus had fled. Skimpole shook his learned head and proceeded to readjust the telescope, and at length had a full view of the moon sailing over the New House.

Long and earnestly Skimmy gazed at the orb of night; but apparently the atmospheric conditions were not so favourable as might have been desired, for the man in the moon did not come into view. Skimpole gave it up when Gore of the Shell came tramping into the study for prep and put on the light. Gore stared at the St. Jim's astronomer.

"Silly owl!" he ejaculated.

Talbot of the Shell followed Gore in, and gave Skimmy a nod and a smile as he prepared for prep. But neither of the Shell fellows desired to share in Skimmy's astronomical observations; both of them turned deaf ears to him when his chin began its almost-perpetual motion. Skimpole sighed and made an effort to bring down his own mighty intellect to the level of prep; Mr. Linton, in the morning, had to be considered. It was said of old that a prophet is unhonoured in his own country; and certainly in his own study the St. Jim's astronomer met with a woeful lack of appreciation.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

### FIGGINS TAKES A HAND!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Fire away, old bean," said Tom.

The rugged face of George Figgins of the New House was grim and grave. On that sunny Saturday afternoon something seemed to have disturbed the usually cheery equanimity of Figgins of the Fourth.

"What's the jolly old trouble?" asked Tom.

"That cad Racke," grunted Figgins.

"Oh, bother Racke!" said Tom Merry. "What does Racke matter?"

"Nothing at all," said Figgy. "But I'm fed-up, and I'm not standing it. I'm speaking to you as junior captain of the School House, Tom. It's not a matter for House rags, so I want you to have a hand in it, too, see?"

"In which?" inquired Tom.

"I fancy something's happened to scare that shady outsider in your House," said Figgins, with a grunt. "I suppose you know his little games, as he's a School House man?"

Tom Merry nodded. He was very far from being unacquainted with the little games of the black sheep of the Shell; though, as a rule, he bestowed very little attention upon Aubrey Racke. He simply regarded him with a more or less good-natured contempt, and certainly he was not proud of him as a School House man. Still, he wondered what Figgins was worrying about. The shady escapades of a School House man had nothing to do with the leader of the New House.

But George Figgins proceeded to explain.

"The rank outsider seems to have had a scare in his own House," he

said. "He used to come over to our House occasionally, to Clampe's study in the Shell. But now he's always there."

"I see," assented Tom. "Kildare nearly nailed him a few days ago, I remember. I dare say he's got the wind up."

"Well, Clampe's a bird of the same feather—they're much of a muchness," said Figgins. "We're not proud of Clampe. Still, he's as much a fool as anything else—not such a rotter as Racke."

"I fancy Racke is leader," said Tom. "The fellow ought to be bunked from the school, as a matter of fact."

"He would be if the Head knew what we know," said Figgins. "Only we can't sneak, even about a rotten outsider, of course. But I'm junior captain of my House, and I think it's up to me. Every half-holiday, and nearly every evening, Racke comes over to my House, sometimes with Crooke and sometimes alone, for smoking and banker in Clampe's study. It's getting altogether too thick. I'm not a fellow to preach, I hope, or to butt into things that don't concern me. But there's a limit."

"There is," assented Tom.

"It means a row, too, if it comes out," said Figgins. "Mr. Ratcliff may spot them, and it would mean a flogging for Clampe, and perhaps the sack. I don't want to see a New House man bunked from St. Jim's."

"Why not speak to him?" asked Tom.

"I've spoken to him, but it makes no difference. I want Racke to keep clear of our House."

"That's all right. Kick him out next time he comes," said Tom cheerily. "Kick him hard, and give him one extra for me."

Figgins grinned.

"That's all right," he said. "But he's a School House man, and it would mean a House row. We don't want that on such a subject, see? You're his House captain; I'm Clampe's. I think we ought to chip in together. Then Racke won't be able to make a House row of it."

"Quite right," said Tom. "Racke's little games have been stopped in the School House, for the present, at least, and it's rather thick to carry on in your House. Next time he calls to see Clampe give me the tip and I'll join up, and we'll handle them together."

"He's over there now!" growled Figgins.

"Oh, I was going down to the footer!"

"Come along to the New House first. If you'll root out Racke, I'll root out Clampe, and we'll make them play footer instead of banker, what?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'm your man," he said. "It's not compulsory practice to-day, but we'll make it so for those two shady rotters. It will do them good."

"Come on, then!"

And the rivals of St. Jim's walked away amicably together to the New House.

Tom Merry fully sympathised with Figgins, though it was seldom that the rival juniors saw eye to eye.

Since Aubrey Racke's narrow escape from Kildare the blackguard of the Shell had been extremely careful—in his own House.

Indeed, some of the fellows had wondered whether Racke was treading the path of reform at last.

Tom realised now that the cad of the School House had simply transferred his blackguardism to the other House. Leslie Clampe's study, over the way,

was now the headquarters of the black sheep of St. Jim's.

Naturally, Figgins did not like it. He was very keen about the honour and good name of his House. The New House had its own black sheep, such as Clampe. That couldn't be helped. But Figgy would not see his House being made the gathering-place of School House outsiders.

Figgins was a good-tempered and patient fellow, and at first he had said nothing; but the sight of Racke butting into his House day after day had finally "got his goat," so to speak.

He was, as he said, fed-up, and he had resolved to put a sudden end to Racke's proceedings, in the New House, at least. And Tom Merry was quite ready to lend a hand in the good work. In the same circumstances he would have taken just the same line.

The two juniors mounted the stairs, then went along the Shell studies in the New House and stopped at Leslie Clampe's door. Figgins knocked.

"Hallo, who's there?" called out Clampe.

"I'm here!" growled Figgins.

"Cut off, then!"

Figgins turned the handle of the door. It was locked.

"Let me in, Clampe," he said quietly.

"Rats! I've got some visitors, and I don't want to add you to the number, thanks!" answered Clampe.

There was a laugh in the locked study. The unpleasant laugh of Aubrey Racke was easily recognised.

Tom Merry looked inquiringly at Figgy. He was prepared to deal with any junior of his House whom he found there. But in Figgy's own House it was for Figgy to take the lead.

George Figgins was quite prepared to take it. He had been rather a long time making up his mind on the subject, but now that it was made up Figgins was quite determined. He rattled the handle of the door.

"Will you let me in, Clampe?"

"I've said no. Go and play footer, and don't bother!"

"I give you one minute," said Figgins quietly. "After that I shall smash in the lock. If the row brings a prefect up here, that's your look-out. I've warned you!"

"Good man!" murmured Tom.

There was a stir in the locked study now. Crooke's voice could be heard in an alarmed whisper.

"Better let the cad in, Clampey. We don't want Monteith or Baker of the Sixth butting in. Old Ratty himself might hear."

The door was unlocked and thrown open. Figgins strode into the study and Tom Merry followed him in, and three young rascals round a table on which lay money and cards and cigarettes, stared at them inimically.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

### ROUGH ON RACKE!

AUBREY RACKE had a cigarette in his mouth, and he blew out a cloud of smoke in the direction of the newcomers. That was to show them how little he cared for their opinion of his occupation that sunny half-holiday. Gerald Crooke looked rather uneasy, however, while Clampe was savagely angry and uneasy at the same time. Certainly no member of the shady trio was pleased to see the visitors.

"Well, what do you want, now you're here?" demanded Clampe savagely. "Butting into a man's study——"

"I want these two cads to clear

back to their own House," said Figgins grimly.

"You cheeky rotter! They're guests in my study."

"They're smoky, gambling, disreputable rotters, and they're keeping clear of the New House," said George Figgins. "And if you give me any back-chat, Clampe, I'll bang your napper on the table as soon as look at you!"

Racke and Crooke exchanged glances. Leslie Clampe breathed hard with rage. But he backed away a little. The weedy, seedy waster of the New House was not looking for a fistical encounter with so hefty a fighting man as Figgins of the Fourth.

"You've no right to interfere in my study!" said Clampe.

"That's rot, and you know it! You might jolly well get bunked from the school, and a pretty disgrace that would be for our House!" exclaimed Figgins hotly.

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, it's got to stop," said Figgins. "If it was once or twice, I don't know that I should chip in; you can go your own rotten ways. But you're turning the New House into a regular thieves' kitchen. Racke and Crooke, you can get out."

"Don't go!" said Clampe.

The two School House fellows eyed Figgins evilly.

"I'm not goin'," said Racke. "And if you rag us in this House, Figgins, you'll jolly well get it back from our side, with interest."

"I expected that," said Figgins scornfully. "You'd like to turn it into a House row. I leave those cads to you, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry stepped farther into the study.

"I've nothing to do with you, Clampe," he said. "I leave you to

your captain. Racke and Crooke will travel."

"I shan't!" said Racke.

"On your feet or on your necks, whichever you prefer," said Tom calmly. "I don't mind which. Take your choice. I can handle two seedy wastrels like you two at the same time."

Crooke gave his comrade an uneasy glance, and then passed Tom Merry and left the study. His footsteps died away down the passage.

"Follow on, Racke."

"You cheeky rotter——"

"If you want to blow off steam, old bean, you can blow it off as you go. I'll come with you. You're going to change for footer."

"I'm not going to play footer, you fool!"

"Your mistake; you are. You're going to have an hour's practice along with more decent chaps," said the captain of the Shell coolly. "It will do you good, and shake some of the filthy smoke out of your lungs. Get a move on!"

"Same with you, Clampe," grinned Figgins. "Football's the order of the day."

Leslie Clampe ground his teeth.

"It's not compulsory practice to-day," he said. "I'll be hanged if I will!"

"You'll be banded if you don't!"

"Look here, Figgins——"

"'Nuff said!" interrupted Figgins. "You're keeping me away from footer practice with this palaver. Are you going, or will you put up your hands first, and then go?"

George Figgins put his own hands up and advanced upon Clampe of the Shell. Clampe backed round the table—then to the door—then into the passage. With a face white with rage he tramped along the passage,

with the grinning Figgins walking after him.

"I'm waiting for you, Racke," said Tom Merry politely.

"I'm not goin'!" said Aubrey Racke, choking with rage. "Do you think you can order me about as you like, you meddlin' cad?"

"In this matter, yes," said Tom. "Figgins has spoken to me about your coming over to his House to smoke and gamble, and he has a right to ask me to put a stop to it. If I don't interfere, Figgins will, soon enough; but it's up to me as junior captain of the School House. I won't tell you that you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself; you know that."

"I don't want any sermons from you!" said Racke savagely.

"I won't give you any," said Tom. "But if you don't get out of this study and this House sharp, I'll give you a thumping good licking."

"You bullying rotter——"

"Oh, rats, cut it out!" said Tom contemptuously. "You know what you'd get if Kildare spotted you here, or Mr. Railton or Mr. Ratcliff. Are you going?"

"No!" hissed Racke.

"Then I shall shift you."

Tom Merry advanced on Racke, as Figgins had done on Clampe. But Racke was made of rather sterner stuff than his associate of the New House, and his fury gave him a little more courage than usual. His hands came up, and he faced Tom Merry savagely, hitting out.

"Go it, then, if you want it," said Tom.

And the next minute they were fighting.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The black sheep of the Shell was soon panting helplessly for breath,

and his defence weakened. A crashing set of knuckles landed on his nose, and Racke went spinning across the study into the doorway.

He landed there on his back with a yell.

"Oh gad! Oh, you rotter!" he panted, as he sat up dizzily.

"Any more?" asked Tom cheerily.

"Hang you!"

Aubrey Racke staggered to his feet.

His nose was streaming red, and he dabbed it savagely with his handkerchief. He backed out of the doorway into the passage as the captain of the Shell advanced upon him.

Racke did not want any more. Very much indeed he did not want any more.

"Well, are you finished?" demanded Tom.

"Yes, you rotter."

"Get down to the footer, then."

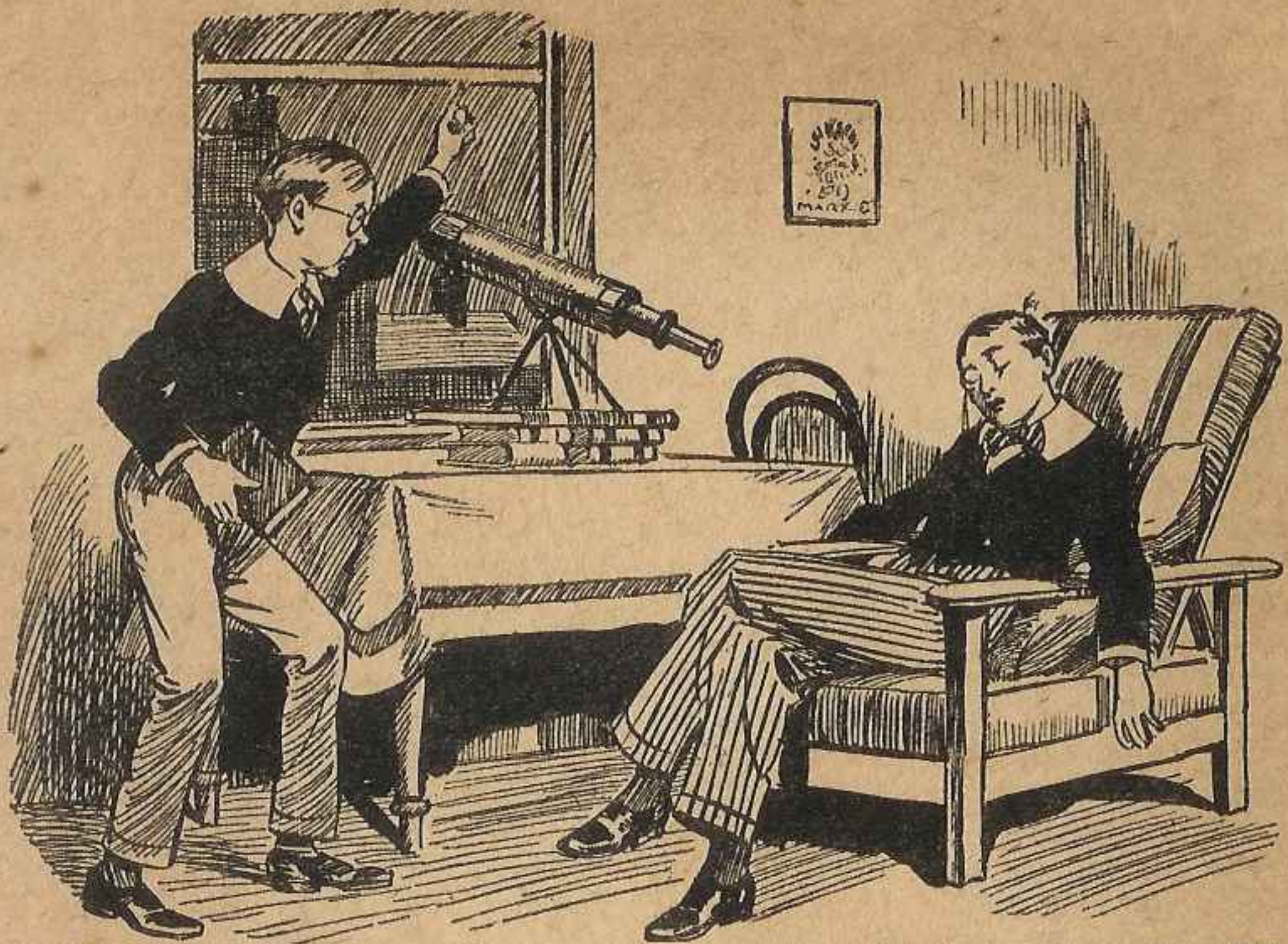
"I—I won't!"

"Then you're not finished," said Tom Merry quietly. "I'm going to lick you, Racke, until you get along to the footer."

"Oh, you rotter!" panted Racke.

"You can take it as a warning for the future," said Tom. "I can't have my time wasted on a half-holiday rooting smoky cads out of the New House. I ought to be on Little Side now. The fellows are waiting for me. Get a move on; you're wasting time."

Racke dabbed his nose and tramped along the passage to the stairs. He was boiling with rage, but there was no help for it. Savage thoughts of vengeance thronged in his mind as he tramped sullenly down the stairs and out of the New House. But vengeance had to wait. He did not intend to face the fists of the captain of the Shell again. Under Tom Merry's grim eye, in the School House,



Skimpole of the Shell talked on, and the drone of his voice had a soporific effect on Gussy. He nodded off to sleep.

he changed for football, and walked down Little Side with Tom.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he spotted them. "Heah comes Tom Mewwy with Wacke. You're late, Tom Mewwy."

"I waited for Racke," said Tom, with a smile.

"Bai Jove! Is Wacke playin' on a day when it isn't compulsowwy pwactice?" ejaculated D'Arcy in astonishment.

"Yes. Keen on it, aren't you, Racke?"

Aubrey Racke muttered something under his breath. He did not seem very keen on it, but, keen or not, he had to put in practice for an hour, with Leslie Clampe as a companion in misfortune.

When the practice was over, the

two slackers slouched away from the football-field together, scowling.

"Now let's get back to your study and finish our little game," muttered Racke.

Clampe gave him a sour look.

"What about your study?" he asked.

"N.G. Kildare has his eyes on me."

"Well, my study's N.G., too," snapped Clampe. "I'm not going to have any more rows with Figgins. Wash it out."

"If you're afraid of Figgins——" sneered Racke.

"Oh, chuck it!" said Clampe rudely. "Not so afraid of Figgins as you are of Tom Merry, and chance it."

Racke gritted his teeth.

"Then you don't want me in your study?" he asked.

"No more than you want me in yours," said Clampe sourly. "It's not good enough. We shall have to chuck it for a while, till those two meddling rotters find something else to think about."

"By gad!" Racke set his teeth hard. "I'll make both of them sorry for meddling with me!"

"Will you?" sneered Clampe. "What's the matter with your nose? Knocked it against Tom Merry's knuckles? Want to knock it there again?"

"There's more ways of makin' a fellow sit up than by punchin' his nose," said Racke between his teeth. "Lots of ways. We can put our heads together and think of a way."

"Count me out," said Clampe, and he tramped away towards his own House, leaving Racke alone.

Racke tramped into the School House in a black rage. He tramped up to the Shell passage to his study. He was tired from his unaccustomed exercise on the footer ground, and he wanted a rest. Skimpole met him in the passage and peered at him benevolently through his glimmering spectacles.

"My dear Racke, your aspect seems to indicate that you have experienced some perturbation," said Skimpole.

"Cheese it and let a fellow pass!" growled Racke.

"My dear Racke, I see no occasion whatever for this most uncalled-for ebullition of irritable temper," said Skimpole with mild reproof. "I was going to ask you, Racke, if you would care to step into my study——"

"You silly chump!"

"It would afford me considerable gratification to impart to you the result of my latest astronomical observations, and—— Yarooop!"

Whooop! Oh, dear! Ow! Yoop!"

Skimpole sat down suddenly as Racke thumped him on the chest. His spectacles slid down his nose, and Skimmy groped for them wildly, gasping for breath. Racke tramped into his study and slammed the door.

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Skimpole, as he gathered himself up, gasping. "Oh, dear! I shall certainly not ask Racke into my study again. Ow! He seems to be frightfully ill-tempered. Ow-wow!"

And Skimpole ambled away, still gasping.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER

ROTTEN!

"WOTTEN!"

"Your own bally fault!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Come along to the gym and chance it," suggested Dig.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his aristocratic head.

The state of affairs was indeed rotten, or, as Arthur Augustus described it, wotten.

It was evening, and on that special evening a boxing-match had been arranged in the gym—a foursome, with Study No. 6 on one side, and Figgins & Co. and Redfern of the New House on the other side.

It was quite an important affair, and a crowd of fellows of both Houses in the Fourth Form were going to see it. The New House Fourth Formers were confident in a general victory for Figgins & Co., while those members of the Fourth who boarded in the School House were equally convinced that Study No. 6 would win all along the line. And it was exactly like Gussy, as his comrades agreed, to get an imposition at that



very time, and to have to cut the boxing.

D'Arcy had been unlucky. He had kicked Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. Every fellow in the House would have admitted freely that the more Baggy Trimble was kicked the better it was for Trimble and the House generally. It was almost a bounden duty to kick Trimble.

But Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, did not see it in that light. Form masters had their own ways of looking at things.

Mr. Lathom had come on the scene while Trimble of the Fourth was roaring and fleeing down the passage with D'Arcy's elegant boot helping him along. The swell of St. Jim's was fairly dribbling Trimble along the corridor, and the bellowing of Baggy was like unto that of the celebrated Bull of Bashan of ancient times.

Whereupon Mr. Lathom had called Arthur Augustus to order and sternly imposed upon him three hundred lines, with the further order to repair to his study immediately and write them out, which was likely to keep Arthur Augustus busy till time for prep and completely washed out the boxing fixture.

"Isn't it just like Gussy?" said Herries. "He was bound to kick Trimble just when old Lathom was coming round the corner."

"Weally, Hewwies, I did not see Lathom comin' wound the cornah!" said Arthur Augustus. "But had I seen him, I should have kicked Twimble just the same."

"Trimble would keep, fathead!" said Dig.

"Imposs, deah boy. Twimble was sayin' something about my Cousin Ethel, a thing no fellow could stand."

"Fat little beast!" agreed Blake. "Still, you could have kicked him

in the dormitory after lights out."

"I felt bound to kick him at once, deah boy. He actually had the cheek to say that Ethel asked him to meet her at the Head's gate when she was stayin' at St. Jim's. He said it loud enough for sevewal fellows to heah. I had no alternative but to kick him. I weally wish I had kicked him hardah!"

"You could have kicked him later on, fathead!"

"I will kick him latah on, as well, deah boy."

Blake grinned.

"Well, it's done now," he said. "But the New House men will be saying that you backed out of boxing Reddy."

"Wats! They must know that I should have licked Wedfern all wight. I beat him a few days ago, you wemembah. What I am doubtful about is how you fellows will get on with Figgins & Co."

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible wemark, Blake. Pway put your beef into it. Figgins is weally a good man, you know, and Fatty Wynn is wathah hefty, though he's so fat, and Kerr is a deep card. You will have your hands full," said Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"Oh, you can leave those New House bounders to us," said Blake carelessly.

"It's feahfully wotten!" said D'Arcy. "Pwobably you will be licked."

"What?"

"And if I had met Weddy, it would have been at least one victowry for our studay, you see."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Well, you can get on with your dashed lines," said Blake. "Just

like you to bag an impot at this precise moment."

"Oh, just!" assented Dig.

"Gussy all over!" agreed Herries.

"Weally, you fellows——"

Blake & Co. left Study No. 6, leaving their hapless chum to settle down to three hundred lines from the *Æneid*. At the head of the stairs Aubrey Racke of the Shell was loafing. He called to the three.

"I hear that you fellows are boxing Figgins & Co. in the gym presently," he said.

"You've heard aright," answered Blake curtly, and he walked on with his friends. He did not want to talk to Racke of the Shell.

Racke scowled.

"I might give you a look-in," he called out. "When's it coming off?"

"Half an hour from now," said Blake, over his shoulder. And the three Fourth Formers went downstairs.

Racke glanced after them with a sour grin and then strolled along the Shell passage. He tapped at the door of Study No. 10, which belonged to the Terrible Three. There was no answer from within, and Racke opened the door and entered. Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther had gone to the club-room after tea, where there was a meeting of the Shell Debating Society, as Racke knew. He had tapped at the door only to make sure.

Racke was about five minutes in Tom Merry's study, and when he emerged he glanced this way and that way, like Moses of old, before he stepped out into the passage.

But there was no one in sight; the Shell fellows had not yet come up for prep and the passage was deserted.

Racke walked hurriedly away.

He was loafing on the stairs again

when the Terrible Three came up. He gave them a sour grin as they came along.

"Not going to see the great doings in the gym?" he asked.

"What giddy doings?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co.," said Racke.

"My dear man, we don't take the stunts of these Fourth Form kids seriously," said Lowther. "The little fellows can amuse themselves without our assistance."

"Might give them a look-in, though," said Tom Merry, pausing. "No hurry for prep."

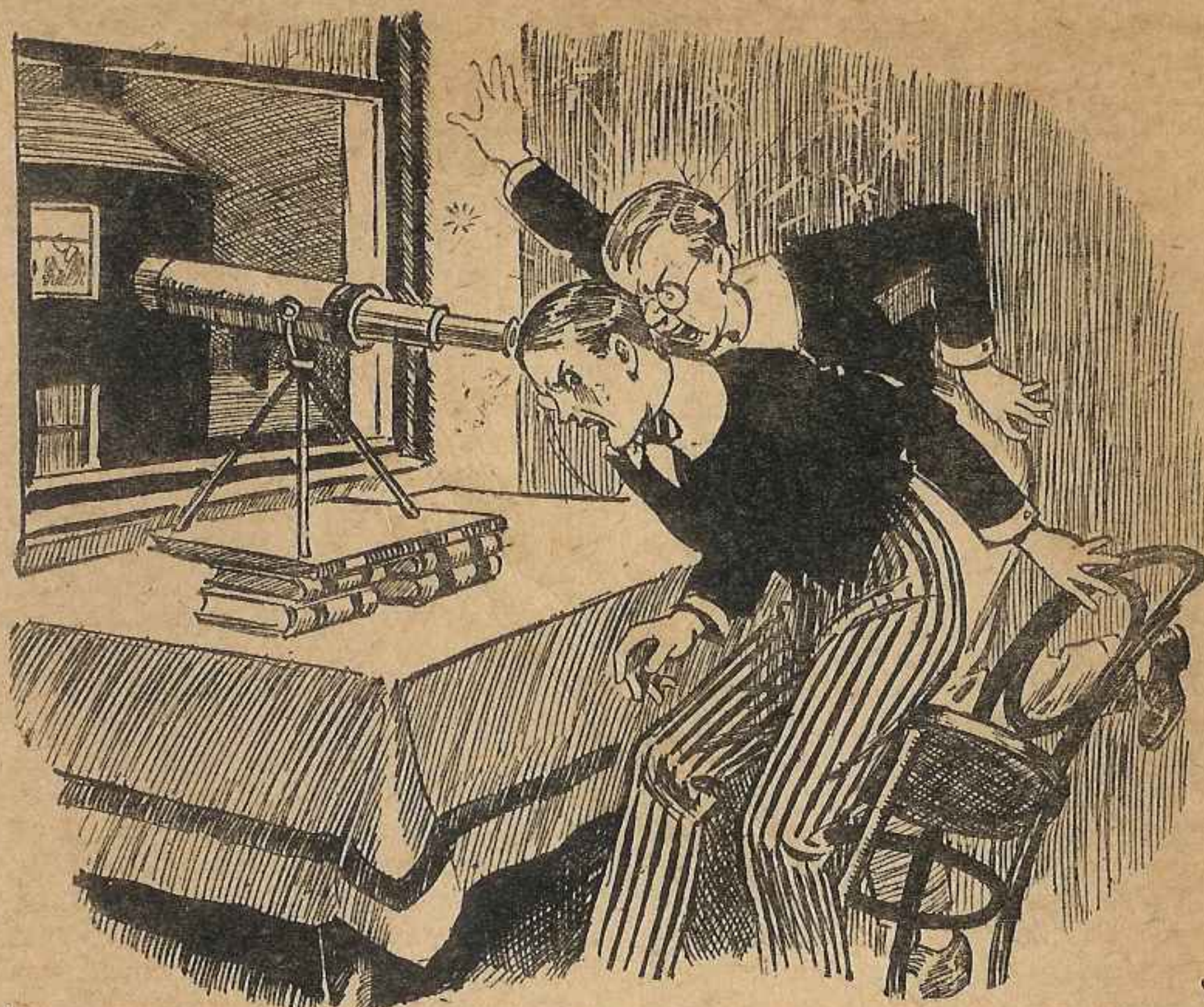
"Oh, come on!" said Lowther. "Too much honour for the Fourth—it will turn their infantile heads if we take notice of them."

Tom Merry laughed, and went on to the study with his chums. Aubrey Racke loafed on the stairs for some time, with his hands in his pockets, but he went downstairs at last and out of the House. He looked in at the door of the gym, which was lighted up and crowded with Fourth Form men. Blake and Herries and Digby were there with Figgins, Kerr and Wynn, with Lefevre of the Fifth as referee.

Racke stared at them for a few moments. He noticed that D'Arcy was not with his comrades, but attached no importance to that circumstance—he was not interested in the School House fellows. For reasons of his own, it was Figgins & Co. in whom the cad of the Shell was interested.

Figgins & Co. were there, thinking of a boxing victory over the champions of the rival House, and certainly not wasting a single thought on Aubrey Racke.

Racke smiled sourly and walked



D'Arcy raised his head as Skimpole lowered his mighty brain. Crash! The back of Gussy's head came into violent contact with the bulging forehead of the St. Jim's astronomer. "Yawwoop! Ow! Wow! Oh!"

away. But he did not return to his own house.

• It was to the New House that he bent his steps.

While Figgins & Co. were busy in the gym, Racke also was going to be busy in quite a different way—in Figgins' study. For many days had Racke nursed his vengeance; and now his hour had come.

## THE TENTH CHAPTER

UNEXPECTED!

• **M**Y dear D'Arcy!"  
 "Oh cwikey!" groaned  
 Arthur Augustus.  
 Really, it was too bad!

Arthur Augustus was sitting in Study No. 6, busily writing lines for Mr. Lathom instead of taking his appointed part in the boxing contest in the gym. That was bad enough, but it seemed that there was worse to come. As Shakespeare would have put it, "thus bad begins, but worse remains behind." The brainy forehead and big spectacles of Skimpole of the Shell loomed in at the doorway.

No wonder D'Arcy groaned. Missing the boxing was bad—grinding out lines was worse; but being bored in addition by the scientific genius of St. Jim's was worst of all. Added to the rest it was intolerable. Arthur

Augustus was a polite and long-suffering youth. Fellows bored him as they never ventured to bore anyone else. But there was a limit. In spite of the manners and customs that stamp the caste of Vere de Vere, D'Arcy was powerfully inclined to hurl the inkpot at Skimmy.

Skimpole was usually deaf and blind to hints, but even Skimmy would have been bound to take a hint if it came in the shape of a hurtling inkpot.

Arthur Augustus refrained, however. He expressed his feelings with a faint groan, and the inkpot remained where it was.

Skimpole blinked and peered at him.

"Are you ill, my dear D'Arcy?" he inquired.

"Nunno."

"I imagined that I heard you give utterance to a sound expressive of some kind of physical discomfort."

"Only bored, deah boy."

"Then you will be glad to see me, my dear fellow."

"Eh?"

"A little chat will relieve the monotony which has produced this undesirable effect upon your spirits," explained Skimpole.

D'Arcy smiled faintly. Evidently the ineffable Skimpole did not guess that he was the cause of the boredom.

"The fact is, I am wathah busy, Skimmay," he said. "I have to get these wotten lines done for Lathom before pwep."

"That is somewhat unfortunate, D'Arcy, as I was going to request you to join me in some astronomical observations—— Why, you are groaning again, my dear fellow. You must have a pain somewhere."

"Oh deah!"

"Gore has knocked over my tele-

scope," said Skimpole. "Both Gore and Talbot have declined to join me in the enthralling pursuit of investigating the illimitable ether this fine starry evening, and have gone to see some frivolous boxing affair in the gym."

"Eh?"

"Some foolish and frivolous boxing affair. Gore stayed behind a few minutes to knock over my telescope. Gore is a very inconsiderate fellow. He seemed to think that there was something of a humorous nature in upsetting my instrument."

"I am wathah hard at work, Skimmay——"

"Yes; you mentioned that before, my dear fellow. Now, it is not easy to mount the telescope at my study window," said Skimpole. "Owing to a shortage of mere money, I have been unable to purchase all the apparatus required for astronomical work. Instead of mounting my telescope as such instruments are mounted in observatories, my dear D'Arcy, I am compelled to fix it up on a stack of books and things, and in these circumstances the adjustment to a correct focus is a matter of considerable difficulty. For this reason I should be glad of your assistance."

"Are you wound up, Skimmay?" groaned Arthur Augustus, his thoughts and his hand straying to the inkpot again.

"I scarcely perceive the purport of that inquiry, my dear D'Arcy," said Skimpole, with a puzzled look.

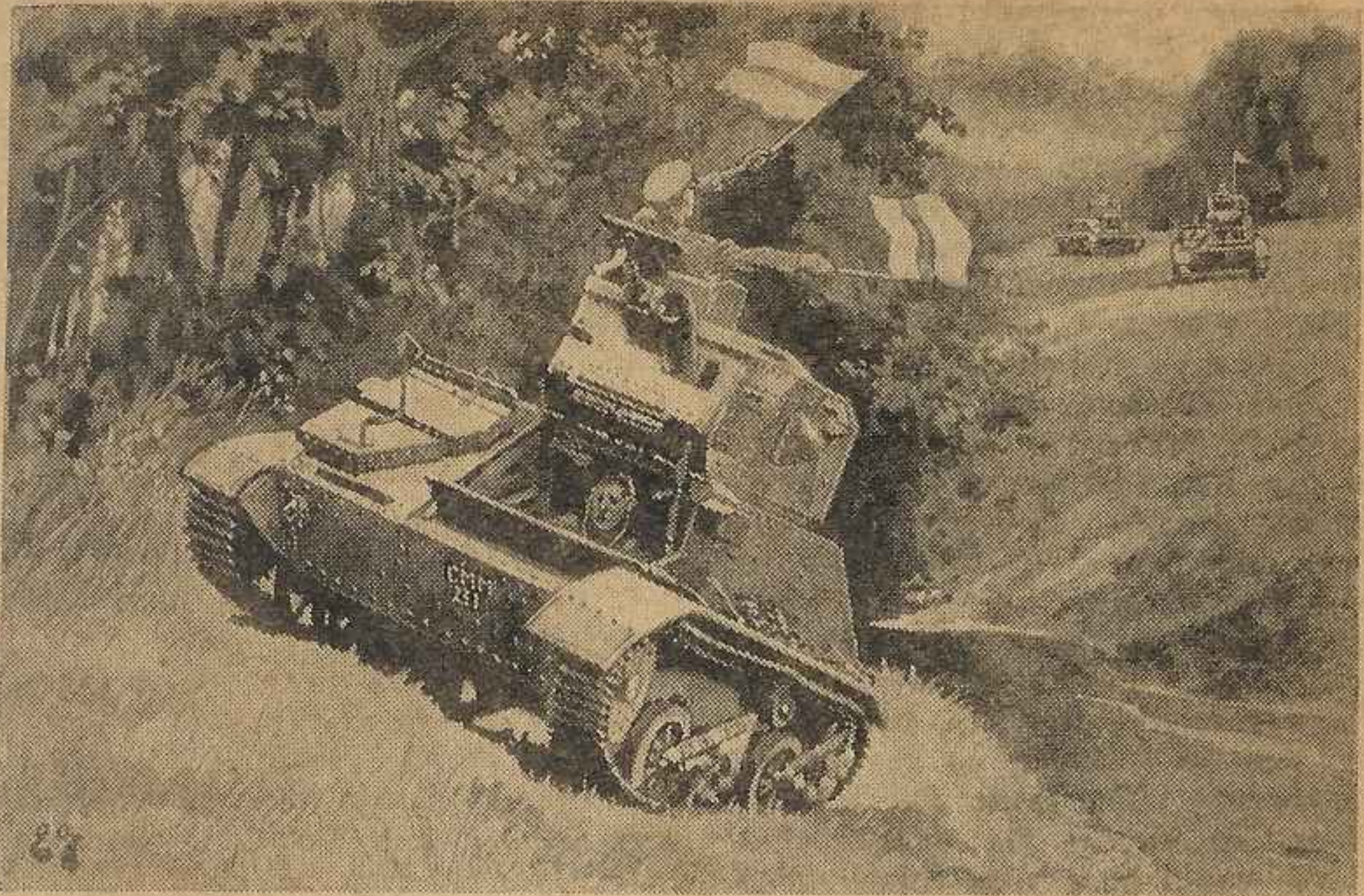
"Wun away."

"My dear fellow——"

"I've got to get these lines done before pwep!" howled Arthur Augustus. "You are wastin' time. Buzz off!"

Skimpole appeared to comprehend at last. It was not so easy for his

## THE MODERN BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION



The advantage of the Mechanised Cavalry, illustrated here, over all army forces is mobility. Light tanks can cross the most difficult broken country at a speed greater than any other vehicle. Armoured cars can travel at the same rate as ordinary motor-lorries, though they have to keep to the roads.

The chief use of Mechanised Cavalry is reconnoitring—spying out the land before the advance of less mobile troops. The tanks shown in the illustration are of the Light MK V type, armoured against rifle fire and equipped with one light and one heavy machine-gun.

They weigh approximately 4 tons 15 cwt., fully equipped, and have a cruising speed of 12 m.p.h. across country. The tanks can cross a ditch 5 ft. 3 in. wide and ford a river 3 ft. deep, while on a hard surface they are capable of a speed of over 20 m.p.h.

Above is shown a section of the Mechanised Cavalry crossing open country; the signaller in the turret of the tank in advance is semaphoring information back to the tanks in the rear, while the wireless operator is receiving orders transmitted from Headquarters.

scientific intellect to grasp anything perfectly obvious—in that respect it resembled, perhaps, many more celebrated scientific intellects. But he could comprehend the meaning of a convulsive grasp upon an inkpot.

“My dear D’Arcy, if you do not care to leave the lines unwritten—”

“Cleah off, you ass!”

“Pray give me your attention, my dear fellow, and do not allow yourself to become excited,” said Skimpole

soothingly. “Although the matter is quite unimportant, in comparison with my scientific investigations, I fully realise that you do not desire to be subjected to castigation by your Form master. I will, therefore, help you with the lines, and then you can come along to my study and render me assistance in the adjustment of my telescope.”

“Oh!” said D’Arcy.

“I trust, my dear D’Arcy, that that

proposition meets with your unqualified approbation."

Arthur Augustus grinned and nodded. Really, it was quite a good idea. Mr. Lathom was a short-sighted gentleman, and on a good many occasions Fourth Form impots had been the work of many hands instead of one. It was no worse to be bored by the astronomical Skimmy than by grinding lines—or not much worse.

"It's a go, old chap," said D'Arcy.

And Skimpole sat down to the table in Study No. 6, dipped a pen in the ink, and undertook a section of the *Æneid*. Two pens instead of one travelled over the paper, and the impot grew apace. Skimmy did not even talk during the rapid scribbling. This was obviously not from merciful motives, but because he was in a hurry to get back to astronomy. The sooner the lines were done the sooner the genius of the Shell would be getting busy again on his hobby. So the two juniors worked in silence, save for the scratching of the pens, and for quite a long time Skimmy's chin had an unaccustomed rest.

The impot was finished at last. Arthur Augustus rose from the table with a sigh of relief.

"I'll wun down with this to Mr. Lathom," he said, "and then——"

"Then hurry up to my study, my dear fellow."

"Yaas," murmured Arthur Augustus.

The lines were duly landed in Mr. Lathom's study, and then Arthur Augustus' reluctant footsteps trod the Shell passage. Undoubtedly Gussy would have preferred to get along to the gym, where the boxing was in progress. At least he could have witnessed it and encouraged his comrades by his presence. But a

bargain was a bargain, he had finished his lines early with Skimmy's help, and he was bound to play up.

Skimpole blinked a welcome at him as he came into the Shell study.

He was already at work remounting the telescope at the study window. The long tube protruded over the window-sill, looking skywards.

"Weady, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus as cheerfully as he could, like a fellow resigned to his fate.

"Very good, my dear fellow. I desire to focus the glass on the lunar luminary——"

"The which?"

"The lunar luminary——"

"Oh! The moon! Yaas," said Arthur Augustus.

"As you will perceive, it is now rising over the chimneys of the New House," said Skimpole. "On a previous occasion we were deceived by an incorrect focus, inadvertently obtaining a view of Figgins' study instead of the lunar luminary."

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"I do not see anything of a risible nature in that somewhat unfortunate misapprehension on our part," said Skimpole, in surprise. "However, to proceed. Pray kneel down at the lower end of the telescope and keep your eye to it. I will adjust the tube, and you will tell me when you get a clear view of the lunar luminary, and then I will secure it in position. You comprehend?"

"Yaas, wathah."

D'Arcy carefully laid a sheet of impot paper on the carpet for the protection of the knees of his trousers—a more important matter to the swell of St. Jim's than any astronomical observations, even than the discovery of a new star to add to the hundreds of millions already discovered.

Then he knelt down and put his noble eye to the lower end of the big telescope. Skimpole proceeded to adjust it.

"Now, my dear D'Arcy——"

"Yawoooooh!"

"Eh! What is the matter?"

"Oh, cwikey! You have jammed the beastly thing in my eye!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"Dear me! Has it hurt you?"

"Wow! Yaas!"

"The momentary discomfort will probably pass away very soon, my dear fellow. It is a matter of little moment," said Skimpole. "However, I do not mind waiting while you rub your eye, if that will afford you any relief. Tell me when you are ready."

Arthur Augustus suppressed his feelings and rubbed his eye.

"Weady!" he said at last.

Skimpole proceeded again. Arthur Augustus, taking more care this time to keep the telescope out of his eye, gazed through the long tube. Blackness met his view.

"Do you see anything yet, my dear fellow?"

"Nothin'."

Skimpole continued to adjust and re-adjust the telescope. Arthur Augustus uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hold on!"

"Is that the correct focus?"

"I can see a light," said D'Arcy.

"I don't think it is the moon, but—— Bai Jove! Hold on a minute, Skimpole!"

D'Arcy stared through the telescope while Skimpole held on.

Evidently the tube was not sufficiently raised, for it was pointing at the front of the New House across the quadrangle instead of over the roof of that building.

The Fourth Form windows in the New House were all dark, the fellows being in the gym for the boxing match there.

But suddenly a light had flashed in one of the windows.

D'Arcy had a fair view once more of Figgins' study in the New House. A junior had entered the room and switched on the light. That was the sudden light that Gussy had seen.

With the light on in Figgins' study across the way, D'Arcy had a full view of the interior of the room, with the aid of the telescope.

To his amazement he saw that it was Aubrey Racke of the Shell who had turned on the light.

What Racke, a School House fellow, could be doing in a New House study with the owners absent was rather a puzzle.

Racke had been a pretty constant visitor in Clampe's study there, but certainly he had no business in Figgy's study; certainly he would never have ventured there if Figgins & Co. had been at home.

"The wottah!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Playin' some twick on Figgay, I suppose. Wacke does not genewally go in for House wags."

"What do you see now, D'Arcy?" asked Skimpole.

"I can see Wacke of the Shell in Figgins' study."

"Dear me! We are wasting time!" said Skimpole peevishly.

"Hold on a minute, though. Wacke is up to somethin'."

Skimpole held on impatiently. He was not in the slightest degree interested in Aubrey Racke's proceedings in Figgins' study in the other House.

D'Arcy watched Racke cross to the window after turning on the light. The Shell fellow drew the blind with a quick hand.

The study was at once blotted out from view.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

Evidently Racke was in the New House for a "rag"; and upon the whole, Arthur Augustus rather approved. Ragging the New House fellows was a better occupation than smoking cigarettes and playing banker in Clampe's study.

It did not occur to D'Arcy's mind, just then, that Racke was intending anything more than a "rag" such as often took place between the rival juniors of St. Jim's. He was not likely to guess the black and bitter thoughts of a mind like Aubrey Racke's.

"Go it, Skimmay," he said.

And Skimmy went it. The telescope was raised till it commanded a view of what Skimmy called the lunar luminary. Then it was fixed in position, and all was ready for Skimmy's astronomical investigations.

D'Arcy rose and shook out the knees of his trousers and smoothed them carefully.

"That's all wight, Skimmay?"

"Quite, my dear fellow. If you would care to remain and share in my observations——"

"Thanks awf'ly, old chap!" said D'Arcy hurriedly. "But I wathah think I will get along to the gym and see how Blake and Hewwies and Dig are gettin' on with those New House boundahs."

"If you really prefer to waste your time upon such frivolous and unthinking occupations——"

Apparently D'Arcy did so prefer; for he was gone before the learned Skimmy had finished.

Leaving Skimpole to watch the latest proceedings of the man in the moon, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked cheerily into the gym and

joined the crowd of Fourth Form fellows there, in time to witness the finish of the boxing match.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

### THE HAND OF THE ENEMY!

FIGGINS & Co. walked back to the New House from the gym, arm-in-arm, with cheery faces, in the midst of a crowd of New House juniors.

Figgins & Co. were quite bucked.

The boxing match had finished, and on points the New House trio had had rather the better of it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy attributed that result to the fact that he had not been present to tackle Redfern; in which case there would have been at least one sweeping victory to the credit of the School House, in Gussy's noble opinion. Figgins & Co. attributed it to the general superiority of their House. The margin had been narrow; but there had been a margin, and the New House rejoiced accordingly.

In the New House Figgins & Co. remained chatting with their friends for a time, fighting the battle over again, and then adjourned to their study for prep. It was, as a matter of fact, rather late for prep, and the heroes of the Fourth had no time to waste.

Figgins led the way into his study and switched on the light.

As the study was illuminated the three juniors gazed round them in wonder and wrath.

The study had not been exactly tidy when they had left it. Junior studies seldom were. But its present state was not untidy—it was in a condition of havoc.

If a cyclone had struck the room during Figgins & Co.'s absence it could scarcely have done more damage.



Not a thing was in its place. Hardly a thing that could be broken remained whole.

The three juniors gazed at the wreck, aghast.

Evidently some determined ragger had been hard at work, and the outcome of his labours was almost unnerving.

The table lay on its side with one leg wrenched off it. The looking-glass lay in the fender in three pieces. Ink and jam and other things soaked in the carpet and splashed the walls. Broken crockery littered the floor, with smashed inkpots and pens and torn books.

For a moment or two Figgins & Co. were silent, their breath quite taken away by what they saw.

"My only hat!" stuttered George Figgins at last.

"The—the—the rotters!" eiacu-

lated Fatty Wynn. "Look—my pie—the steak-and-kidney pie we were going to have for supper! Smashed on the floor—trodden on! My pie!"

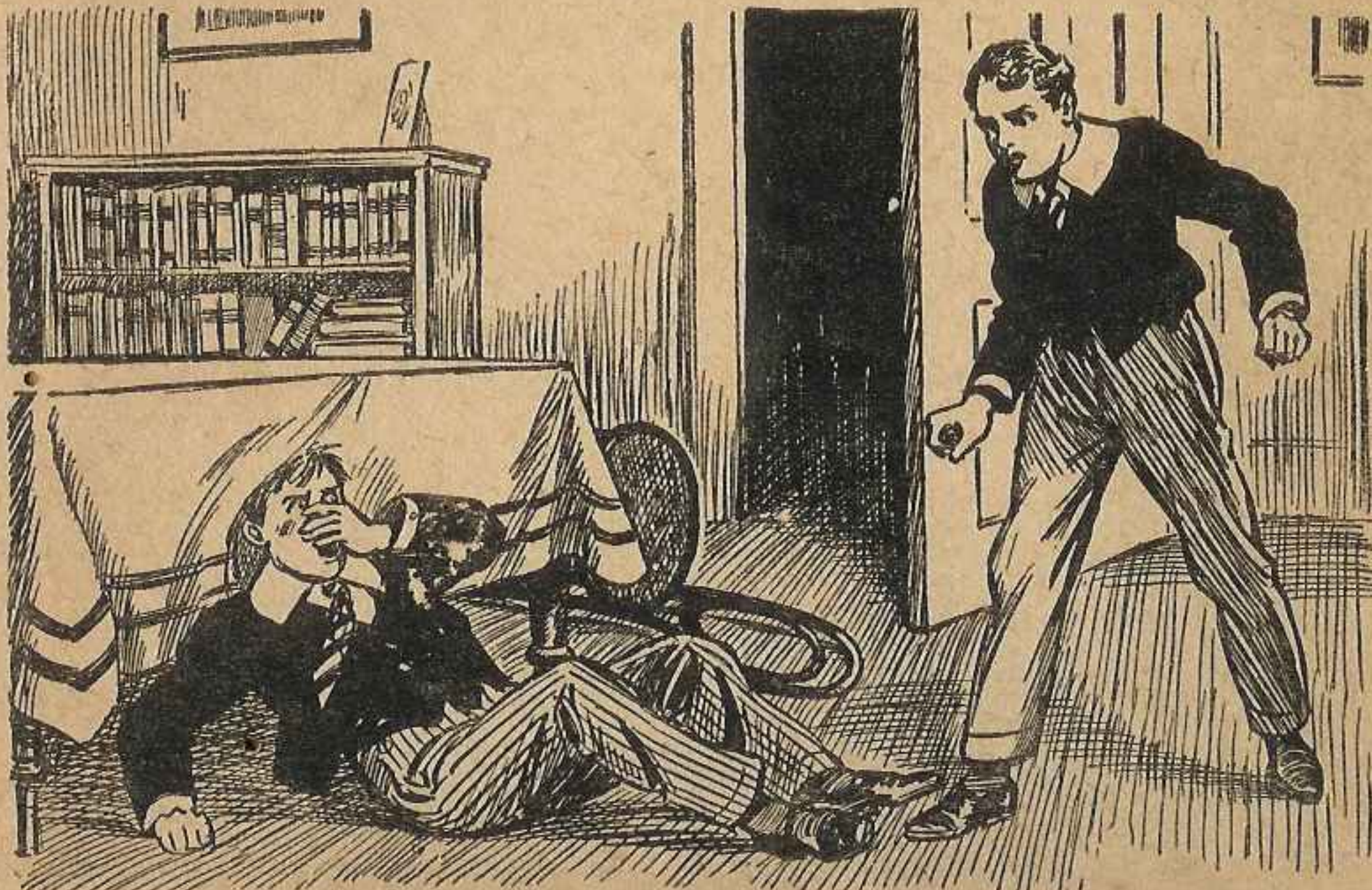
Kerr gritted his teeth.

Study raggings were not uncommon among the St. Jim's juniors; but there was a limit. It was an understood thing that no real damage was done on such occasions.

The utmost possible damage had been done on this occasion. The study looked as if some utterly reckless hooligan had wreaked his rage upon it.

"Somebody's got to pay for this!" said Kerr. "This isn't a rag—this is a rotten outrage! Who can have done it?"

"A House raid, of course," said Figgins. "No New House man would do it. Some of the School House cads came over while we were busy



"Oh gad! Oh, you rotter!" panted Racke as he sat up dizzily. "Any more?" asked Tom Merry.

"Hang you!" gasped the black sheep of the Shell.

in the gym. All the studies were empty—it was a chance for the rotters."

"But who?" said Kerr, wrinkling his brows. "Blake and his gang were in the gym with us. Tom Merry's lot have been gassing about raiding us, but they wouldn't do a thing like this."

"No fear!"

Fatty Wynn gasped with wrath. In the general wreck of things the ruined state of his pie was worst of all from Fatty's point of view.

"Rotters!" he gasped. "Ruffians! Hooligans! Mucking up a fellow's pie! My hat! We'll smash 'em!"

"We'll jolly well give 'em toco when we find them out!" growled Figgins. "Why, this means a new outfit of furniture for the study. Hardly a leg left on any of the chairs."

"Look at the clock—smashed in pieces!" said Kerr.

"Look at my pie!"

"Hallo! What's this?" exclaimed Kerr suddenly.

The Scottish junior's keen eye was roving round the wrecked study in search of a clue to the perpetrators of the outrage. He stooped and picked up a handkerchief.

"Good!" exclaimed Figgins. "If that was dropped here there might be a fellow's initials on it——"

"Look!" said Kerr, pointing to the corner of the handkerchief.

"T.M."

"Tom Merry!" breathed Fatty Wynn.

The New House trio stared at the handkerchief. Evidently it had been dropped by the raggers; it was soaked with ink and sticky with jam. They knew those initials well—they had seen that monogram before, which was carefully worked into most of Tom Merry's things by

the loving hands of old Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

"That does it!" said Figgins, between his teeth. "I half expected to see those chaps in the gym—now I know why they weren't there! They were ragging our study."

"The rotters! My pie——"

"It's too thick!" said Kerr. "We've had rows enough with Tom Merry's gang, but we've always played the game on our side. This sort of thing isn't playing the game."

"No fear!"

"Tit for tat!" said Figgins. "We're not letting this keep! I'm going over to the School House now. You fellows coming?"

"You bet!"

Prep, with the study in that state, was out of the question. Prep could have been done in another study, certainly; but the chums of the New House were not thinking of prep now. They were thinking of vengeance. Any ordinary rag they could have taken good-humouredly, to be repaid in kind at a convenient time. But wrecking a fellow's room like this was not a matter to be taken with good humour. It was an outrage that had to be avenged, and Figgins & Co. did not intend to let the grass grow under their feet.

They hurried down the stairs and out into the quad, with set faces.

They fairly raced across the quadrangle. It was time for all juniors to be in their Houses; but Figgins & Co. did not think of that now. They intended to see the Terrible Three.

"Hallo! What do you New House bounders want!" asked Levison of the Fourth, meeting the trio as they came into the School House.

Figgins & Co. scudded up the staircase without stopping to answer,

leaving Levison staring after them.

"Bai Jove! New House boundahs!"

In the passage above, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass on the New House trio. Blake, Herries and Digby—not yet at prep—stared at them.

"Time you fags were in your House!" said Blake. "You'll have old Ratty on your track."

Figgins did not heed.

"Is Tom Merry in his study?" he asked.

"I think so," answered Blake.

"Time we were in ours, you chaps, or we shan't get any prep done to-night. What's the trouble, Figgins? If you've come over here on the giddy warpath——"

Figgins & Co. ran by, heading for Study No. 10 in the Shell.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Those New House boundahs are lookin' wathah excited. I suppose they haven't come ovah for a House wow at this houah."

"Looks like it!" grinned Herries. "We didn't punch them hard enough in the gym; they want some more."

"Let's go and give them some more, as they've come over specially to ask for it!" suggested Dig.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Blake.

"Listen to that!"

From the Shell passage came a terrific uproar!

Crash! Bump! Yell!

Study No. 6 stared at one another.

"Sounds like giddy war!" grinned Blake. "Let's get along and lend a boot to kick out those cheeky New House cads!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Blake & Co. headed for Tom Merry's study, towards which the terrific din was attracting a crowd of other fellows.

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### SOMETHING LIKE A SHINDY!

TOM MERRY, Manners and Lowther were at prep, thinking of anything but New House raiders, when the door of Study No. 10 was hurled suddenly open and Figgins & Co. rushed in.

The three Shell fellows looked up in surprise. They were surprised to see fellows from the other House so late in the evening, and still more surprised by that unceremonious entrance. But they had no time to ask questions.

They had barely time to jump up from the table before the three invaders were upon them.

"Collar the cads!" roared Figgins.

"Down them!" panted Fatty Wynn.

"Pile in! Give the rotters jip!" roared Kerr.

Crash! Bump!

The Terrible Three of the Shell were at least a match for Figgins & Co. But the sudden hefty rush of the enemy fairly hurled them spinning.

The three of them went sprawling right and left, and Figgins & Co. went sprawling over them.

They were taken so utterly by surprise by this sudden and terrific attack that they hardly resisted for a minute or two.

Crash! Bump! Crash!

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gerroff!"

"What the jolly thump——  
Yooop!"

"Give 'em jip!" roared Figgins. "Bang their heads! Knock 'em out, and then we'll wreck the study!"

"Yes, rather!" panted Kerr.

"What's this game?" roared Tom Merry, struggling in Figgins' grasp. "My hat! I'll jolly well lick you! Lemme gerrup!"

Bang!

Tom's head smote the study carpet, Figgins having a grip on both his ears. There was a fearful yell from Tom.

"Yaroooooooh!"

"Take that!" gasped Figgins.

"And that!"

Bang!

"Yow-ow-wooop!"

Tom Merry took them; he couldn't help it. But he twisted up on Figgins, got a grip, and whirled him over. It was Figgy's turn to bump on the floor, and the two juniors rolled over, struggling. Meantime, Lowther was wrestling furiously with Kerr, and Manners resisting breathlessly under the squashing weight of Fatty Wynn. Half a dozen dog-fights all at once could hardly have produced the terrific uproar that raged in Tom Merry's study in the Shell.

Shell fellows from the other studies crowded round the door. Talbot and Gore looked in from the next room; even Skimpole was drawn away from his astronomical stunts. Racke of the Shell was the next who came along, and he stared into the study at the fighting juniors, with a malicious grin on his face. Aubrey Racke, so far, was the only fellow who knew the cause of the commotion. Racke had expected it, and he had come along to enjoy it.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Talbot of the Shell. "Separate them, you fellows!"

"Oh, let 'em have it out!" grinned Gore. "My hat! What a rumpus!"

"A termination of this most extraordinary ebullition appears to me to be eminently desirable," remarked Skimpole.

"New House cads!" exclaimed Kangaroo of the Shell. "Shall we lend you a hand, Tommy?"

"You keep off!" roared Figgins. "These cads have wrecked our study, and we're going to mop them up!"

"Bai Jove! They're goin' it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, arriving breathless at the door of the study with his comrades.

"What-ho!" grinned Blake. "Go it, ye cripples!"

"You'll have the Housemaster up here at this rate!" shouted Glyn of the Shell. "Chuck it!"

Crash! Bump! Yell! Whoop!

The struggle in Study No. 10 was going strong! Furniture flew all over the room, right and left. Books and papers were scattered far and wide, and the dust rose from the carpet.

Seldom or never had so terrific a scrap been witnessed in a junior study. The crowd thickened at the door.

"What is it—a dog-fight?" drawled Cardew of the Fourth, coming along with Levison and Clive.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop it!" shouted Talbot. "You'll have Mr. Railton or the prefects here. Lend a hand, you chaps!"

"What-ho!" assented Blake. "Collar those New House cads, you fellows. They can't come kicking up a shindy in a respectable House."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Talbot led the rush into the study, and Blake & Co. and several more fellows followed him. The excited combatants were so mixed and mingled that it was not really easy to separate them. Utterly ignorant as they were of the cause of the fierce attack, Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther were wildly excited now and in a fighting mood, and they were giving Figgins & Co. as good as they handed out.

But the School House fellows grasped the fighting juniors on all sides—some of them receiving a punch or two in the process—and at last the Terrible Three were rounded up on one side of the study, and Figgins & Co., grasped by many hands and securely held, were prisoners on the other side.

The din of combat died away. Six panting juniors glared at one another and gasped for breath. Six noses streamed with crimson.

"Weally, Figgins——"  
 "You dummy!"  
 "If you chawactewise me as a dummay, Figgins, I shall give you a feahful thwashin' myself!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly.

"You footling chump——"  
 "Let us go!" bawled Fatty Wynn.  
 "We're man to man, and those cads aren't going to sneak out of a hiding after what they've done!"

"Stand aside, you duffers!" howled Lowther. "I suppose we can lick



Bang! Tom's head smote the study carpet, Figgins having a grip on both his ears. "Yaroooooooooooh!" yelled Tom. "Take that!" gasped Figgins. "And that!" Bang! "Yow-ow-whoop!"

"Now, what on earth is all this about?" exclaimed Talbot.

"Goodness knows!" panted Tom Merry. "Those New House hooligans rushed in here all of a sudden, and started. Let go! We're jolly well going to thrash them now we've begun!"

"Let them come on!" shouted Figgins. "Let go my arms, you School House cads! Let go, I say!"

these New House cads, can't we?"

"Hold on!" said Talbot. "You can't keep up this shindy. You'll have the Housemaster here. If you want to scrap, the gym's the proper place, with the gloves on."

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "Rot!" bawled Figgins. "We're going to lick them now, the rotters!"

"You're jolly well going to be kicked out of the House!" exclaimed

Blake indignantly. "What the thump do you mean by rushing into a School House study like a lot of hooligans?"

"Kick them out!"

"Kick those New House cads out!"

"Yah! Funks!" shouted Fatty Wynn. "If we'd caught you in our study you wouldn't have had a crowd of rotters to help you!"

"You fat idiot!" snapped Manners.

"Let me get at him!" shrieked Fatty Wynn, struggling; but Levison and Clive had his arms and they held on, grinning.

"But what is the wow about?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Before you kick the cheeky wottahs out, let them explain what they are makin' this feahful disturbance for. What have you done to the sillay asses, Tom Mewwy?"

"Nothing that I know of," said Tom. "I haven't the faintest idea why the silly idiots butted in here!"

"That's a lie!" roared Figgins.

"What?"

"You know what you've done, all right. And these chaps wouldn't back you up if they knew what you'd done, you rotter!"

"Bai Jove! What——"

Tom Merry controlled his wrath. He realised now that there was some mistake.

"You footling ass!" he said.

"I've done nothing that I know of. But if I have done anything, give it a name!"

"Oh, cheese it!" snorted Figgins. "I dare say you're ashamed of it now, but I suppose you're not going to deny it?"

"Deny what?" roared Tom.

"Wrecking our study while we were in the gym!"

Tom stared at the New House junior captain blankly.

"Wrecking your study?" he repeated.

"Yes, you rotter!"

"You've been ragging in the New House, you fellows?" asked Blake. "Even if you have, that's no excuse for a shindy like this. There have been rags before, without all this fuss."

"It wasn't a rag!" hooted Figgins. "I tell you the place is wrecked—everything smashed up—even the furniture smashed——"

"And my pie——"

"Everything wrecked, and even our school books torn up!" said Kerr savagely. "That's not what I call a rag. I call it hooliganism."

Blake whistled.

"That's a bit over the limit, you chaps," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You silly chump!" roared Tom. "We haven't done it! We haven't been in the New House at all."

Figgins gave a scornful laugh.

"Well, I was surprised at your acting so rottenly, but I never expected you to tell lies about it," he said.

"You silly chump!" exclaimed Tom, his cheeks crimson. "We haven't been in your rotten House, or your measly study. But we're ready to wipe up the floor with you. Get out of the way, you chaps!"

"Hold on," said Talbot quietly. "Don't be a fool, Figgins. If Tom says he hasn't been in your study, he hasn't been there."

Snort from Figgins.

"Then how does he account for that?" he exclaimed, holding out a pocket-handkerchief. "Whose is that?"

"Mine!" said Tom, looking at it.

"We found that in our study among the wreck," said Kerr. "It

was dropped there when the study was ragged."

"By the rotter who ragged it!" hooted Figgins. "Now will you say again that you haven't been in the New House this evening?"

Tom Merry stared blankly at the handkerchief.

"It's mine," he said. "I suppose I must have dropped it somewhere, as you seem to have picked it up. But I never dropped it in the New House—I haven't been in your House since the day I came over with you to root Racke out of Clampe's study."

"Oh, draw it mild!" sneered Fatty Wynn. "That won't wash."

"Weally, Wynn, if you doubt a School House man's word——"

"Dash it all, it's queer," said Kangaroo of the Shell. "How the thump did your hanky get there, if you haven't been there, Tom?"

Tom laughed contemptuously.

"Perhaps the fellows who wrecked the study left it there to make these silly fools think I had done it," he answered. "If Figgins really picked it up in his study that's the only way I can account for it. Certainly I haven't been in his study."

"Oh!" said Figgins.

"Gammon!" growled Fatty Wynn. But Kerr gave a nod.

"Our leg's been pulled," he said. "You can't blame us, Tom Merry, finding your hanky there—after a House raid. But——"

"You silly chump!" exclaimed Manners. "Are we the kind of fellows to do what you say has been done to your study?"

"Well, somebody's done it," growled Figgins. "If it wasn't this study, we want to know what School House rotter it was."

"Find out, and be blowed to you!" said Lowther, mopping his streaming nose. "Anybody but a born fool would ask questions before he started punching heads."

"Look here——"

"Oh, shut up. Get out of our study, and to-morrow we'll jolly well thrash you all round!" hooted Lowther.

"You're jolly well welcome to try," said Figgins. "I don't half believe that it wasn't you, either—the hanky was there—and it was dropped——"

"Chuck it!" said Talbot quietly. "Somebody has done this to make a row between you fellows. You ought to try to find out who it was instead of slanging one another."

"Oh, rot! It's too thick," snapped Figgins. "Want me to believe that some fellow ragged my study and left Tom Merry's hanky there to put it on him? It's too thick."

"That's how it stands," said Tom Merry. "Anybody who wanted one of my hankies could bag one—there's some here in a box in this study, for that matter. But you can jolly well believe what you like, Figgins. I'll make you swallow all you've said, and a little more."

"Bai Jove!"

It was a sudden startled ejaculation from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He stared round at the crowd at the door, and fixed his eyes upon the grinning face of Aubrey Racke, of the Shell.

"Wacke!" he exclaimed.

"Eh? What about Racke?"

"Wacke's the wottah!"

And before the startled Racke could back away Arthur Augustus made a jump at him, grasped him by the collar, and dragged him headlong into the study.

## THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

THANKS TO SKIMPOLE!

TOM MERRY & Co. stared.

Racke roared

The cad of the Shell came headlong into the room, overturned by the sudden grasp on his collar. He rolled on the carpet, and roared in wrath and astonishment.

"Wacke's the wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"What——"

"Gussy——"

"What the dickens——"

"I wepeat, that Wacke is the wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Own up to it, Wacke!"

Aubrey Racke sat up quite dizzily.

"You silly owl!" he gasped.

"What the thump do you mean? I'll jolly well lick you——"

The juniors stared at D'Arcy. Blake & Co. wondered whether their noble chum had gone off his aristocratic rocker.

"Look here, Gussy——" began Blake.

"Pway do not intewwupt me, Blake! That feahful wottah Wacke has done this," said Arthur Augustus.

"Own up, you cad!"

Racke staggered to his feet.

He gave the swell of St. Jim's an evil look.

"You burbling dummy!" he hissed.

"I know nothing about it. What do you mean?"

Racke spoke boldly enough. He knew that he had not been seen entering Tom Merry's study to purloin the handkerchief. He knew that he had not been noticed creeping stealthily into the New House. He had finished his ruffianly work and cleared before Figgins & Co. had returned to their House. Even if he should be suspected, there was absolutely no jot or tittle of evidence to connect him with

the rag in Figgins' study. D'Arcy's accusation came like a thunderclap to him, but he was quite prepared to brazen it out.

Figgins & Co. had calmed down now. Kerr's keen Scottish brain had grasped the facts at once. When Tom Merry explained he knew that there had been a cunning scheme to set the two studies by the ears. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were still rather dubious but open to conviction, as it were.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised an accusing forefinger and pointed it at Racke's sullen, evil face.

"That's the wottah!" he said.

"Do you mean to say that Racke wrecked our study and left Tom Merry's handkerchief there to fool us?" demanded Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a lie—a rotten lie!" snarled Racke.

"Bai Jove! If you venture to chawactewise my wemarks as lyin', you unspeakable wottah——"

"Go easy, Gussy!" said Blake.

"If you know anything about it, cough it up instead of blowing off steam."

"Weally, Blake——"

"What do you know about it, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry impatiently.

"That uttah wottah, Wacke, is the man," said D'Arcy. "I suppose he has done this in wevenge because you and Figgins wooted him out of Clampe's studay and put an end to his wotten games there."

"I dare say he would," said Tom, with a glance at Racke. "I've been nowhere near the New House. I never knew anything had happened till these fellows burst in like a lot of lunatics!"

"Well I'm dashed if I know how you know what happened in the New



House, Gussy," said Herries. "We left you in your study doing lines, and then you came down to the gym."

"Yaas; but——"

"Have you been over to our House this evening?" asked Kerr.

"Not at all."

"You didn't follow Racke there, then?"

"Certainly not. I should not be

listen to that ass talking out of the back of his neck, I don't!"

"Stay where you are, Wacke——"

"Rats!"

Aubrey Racke sought to push out of the study. But three or four fellows blocked his way.

"Not yet, old bean," said Blake agreeably. "We'll have this out first. Gussy may be talking sense—he doesn't often, but he does at times."



"Wacke is the wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Own up to it, Wacke!" Aubrey Racke sat up quite dizzily. "You silly owl!" he gasped.

likely to walk in the same divection as that wottah if I could help it."

"Then what the thump are you talking about?" demanded Figgins. "You can't know anything about what happened in our House if you haven't been there."

"Weally, Figgins——"

Aubrey Racke backed to the doorway.

"I'm getting out of this," he said. "I'm fed-up! If you fellows like to

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Let me pass!" exclaimed Racke furiously. "I've told you I know nothing about the matter. If there's any bullying I shall go to my House-master, I can jolly well tell you!"

"Hold on, Racke," said Tom Merry quietly. "We've got to have this out. If you really know anything about it, D'Arcy——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Come to the point!" bawled Blake.

"I weally wish you would not wear at a fellow, Blake. I have mentioned a lot of times that I dislike bein' woared at!"

"You—you——" gasped Blake.

"Pway lend me your yahs, deah boys, and I will explain," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Wacke says that he has not been in the New House this evenin'."

"I repeat it," growled Racke. "I'll sing it to a tune if you like!"

"He says that he has not been in Figgins' study——"

"And I haven't," said Racke. "If any fellow can say that he's seen me anywhere near the New House, or anywhere near Figgins' study, let him say so. I've been in my own House all the time."

"That settles the mattah, deah boys."

"How does it?" shrieked Blake.

"Wacke's denial that he has been in Figgay's studay is a vevy plain pwoof of what he did when he was there, you see."

"But was he there?" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How do you know, ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"You—you image——"

"For goodness' sake explain, Gussy," said Talbot, laughing. "Where were you this evening? You've already said that you never went over to the New House."

"Yaas, wathah! I was doin' lines in my studay," explained D'Arcy. "Owin' to Lathom gettin' his wag out about my kickin' Twimble——"

"Yes, yes; but——"

"I kicked Twimble wathah hard, but he asked for it——"

"Never mind Trimble now," said

Tom Merry. "If you were in your study doing lines, how the thump can you know anything about what happened in Figgins' study on the other side of the quad?"

"You see, Skimpole came in——"

"Bother Skimpole!"

"Really, my dear Merry, is not that observation somewhat uncalled for, and indeed inconsiderate?" said Skimpole mildly, blinking into the study with his big spectacles. "You will acknowledge, my dear fellow——"

"Can it!" interrupted Tom impatiently. "Look here, Gussy——"

"Skimmay helped me with my impot, and I helped him with his telescope in return," said D'Arcy. "One good turn deserves anothah, you know. Then I came down to the gym. I was too late for the boxin'——"

"Never mind the boxing now. Is that chap ever coming to the point?" asked Blake in despair.

"Weally, Blake, I have come to the point!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "I have told you how it happened now, and you know that Wacke was the wottah who wagged Figgay's studay in the New House."

The juniors stared at D'Arcy.

Apparently the swell of St. Jim's was satisfied that he had made the matter clear.

"You footling idiot!" said Racke.

"Weally, Wacke——"

"But what are you driving at?" roared Tom Merry. "You say you were doing lines in your study, and then fooling around with Skimmy's silly telescope in Skimmy's study——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you were nowhere near Racke at all?"

"Not at all, deah boy. I object vevy much to bein' anywhere neah Wacke. I wegard him with disgust."

"You—you——" gasped Blake. "Are you going to tell us how you know that Racke was in Figgins' study—if you do know it?"

"I suppose I can believe my eyes, Blake?"

"Your eyes?" stuttered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I saw him there."

"You saw Racke in my study?" yelled Figgins.

"Yaas!"

"When you hadn't left this House at all?"

"Exactly."

"Mad!" said Racke. "I'm not staying here to listen to a lunatic wanderin' in his mind!"

Blake grasped Arthur Augustus by the shoulder and shook him forcibly. There was a howl from Gussy.

"You uttah ass! You have made me dwop my eyeglass! Mind you don't twead on my eyeglass, you fellows——"

"Will you tell us what you mean?" shrieked Blake. "Are you trying to pull our leg, you chump?"

"I have told you, Blake."

"How could you have seen Racke in Figgins' study in the New House, you frabjous ass, when you were in this House?" raved Blake.

Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jove! Haven't I mentioned that I saw him thwough Skimmay's telescope?" he asked innocently.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Through Skimpole's telescope?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! I ought to have mentioned that, first, of course," said Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at, deah boys. You see, Skimmay was fixing up his telescope to look ovah the

woof of the New House, and I was helpin' him. I was just lookin' thwough it while Skimmay fixed it. I saw Figgay's study window, just as you fellows did the othah night, you know, when Skimmay fancied that he had spotted the man in the moon——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, the telescope was lookin' wight at Figgay's study window, and I saw Wacke come into Figgay's study, switch on the light and dwaw the blind," said Arthur Augustus. "Aftah the blind was dwawn I could not see any more, of course. But as Wacke has denied goin' into the New House at all——"

Aubrey Racke made a rush to escape.

He understood now, as all the fellows did. With all the care he had taken, with all his cunning caution, he had never dreamed of this—he had never given a thought to Skimpole's astronomical stunts, and assuredly never dreamed for a moment that he had been spotted from the telescope at Skimmy's study window.

But he understood now—and he rushed for the doorway. Half a dozen hands grasped him and dragged him back.

"We've got it at last!" said Blake. "Even Gussy comes to the point at last, if you let him run on long enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"So it was Racke!" said Tom Merry, with a grim look at the cad of the Shell.

"Racke!" said Figgins, with a deep breath. "This is the rotter's revenge, I suppose, for what he got the other day—setting us to punch one another for nothing."

"Setting you, you mean," grunted

Tom. "If you'd had the sense of a bunny-rabbit——"

"Look here——"

"Well, you look here!"

"Oh, don't begin again!" exclaimed Blake. "You've given Racke enough entertainment as it is, I should think."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, that's so," said Tom, with a laugh.

Figgins & Co. looked very contrite. Their leg had been pulled, and they were sorry; but their regret did not mend the damaged noses and other features of the Terrible Three. Neither did it mend their own.

"We—we're sorry, you chaps!" stammered Figgins.

"We were taken in," said Kerr. "We really ought to have known that you fellows wouldn't rag a man's study in that way. Sorry!"

"We take it back!" said Fatty Wynn. "After all, you've given us as much as we've given you."

"Let it go at that," said Tom Merry. "But as for Racke—Racke, you unspeakable toad——"

"Leave him to me!" said Figgins. "You fellows stand round and see fair play, and leave him to me."

"Done!"

Aubrey Racke during the next ten minutes had the time of his life. It was a fight with Figgins, or a ragging from all the fellows present; and Racke chose the lesser evil.

But by the time George Figgins had finished with him Racke was wondering dizzily whether it was, after all, the lesser evil of the two.

Seldom had a fellow been so thoroughly licked.

"We'll call in at Racke's study as we go!" said Figgins.

"Do!" grinned Tom Merry.

"I say, that's my study, too, you

know," said Crooke, in alarm. But Crooke was not heeded.

There were sounds of havoc in Racke's study when the New House trio got busy there. Probably Crooke's property suffered a good deal as well as Racke's. That could not be helped. Certainly by the time Figgins & Co. went back to their own House the study looked quite as dismantled as Figgy's. And Aubrey Racke, when he crawled dismally into his wrecked study, realised—as he had sometimes realised before—that the way of the transgressor was hard.

"It was Skimmay, weally, you know!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy told his chums.

And the fellows admitted that really it was Skimmy. But for Skimpole and his telescope Racke indubitably would have been successful in his cunning scheme and would have escaped scot-free.

Certainly Skimpole himself did not attach any great importance to the incident. He was still in hopes of discovering a new star or spotting the personal habits of the man in the moon. Possibly he might have done so but for a trifling shortage of cash when the instalment on the telescope was due to Messrs. Blankley.

In what Skimmy could only regard as a spirit of sordid greed Messrs. Blankley took away the telescope upon which the genius of the Shell had not paid the instalments; which put an end to the career of Skimpole as a star-gazer. No new star had been discovered, the habits of the man in the moon remained a mystery, but Skimpole returned to entomology and found solace therein.

THE END