

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

The GEM

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OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

EVERY WEDNESDAY.



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1925.

WHOSE IS THE FACE AT THE WINDOW?



GREETINGS!

TO Gemites all over the world I extend the old, old wish—A merry Christmas! It may seem to some to be a trifle in advance, for Christmas is not yet upon us; but the Gem is always early in the field, and the wish loses nothing for being voiced so soon. After all, December is the month of Christmas, of Christmas thoughts—yes, and of Christmas presents and puddings! How we all look forward to the 24th, 25th, and 26th! Already letters from reader chums abroad are pouring in, their writers wishing me the Jolliest of Jolly Christmases. They are heartily reciprocated. A good number of my Colonial chums, too, send seasonable greetings to "Gemites at home." It's a great season, the spirit of good will and fellowship reigns supreme. Squabbles are dropped for the nonce, everyone falls to and celebrates the season that—some of us say worse luck—comes once a year. Mind you all get the best out of it; mind you enjoy yourselves up to the hilt. But don't overdo it. Don't let that turkey and the famous Christmas pudding put you in the sick bay on Boxing Day.—Ed.

MORE GREETINGS!

"Just a few words to my vast unseen weekly audience of friends, to wish them the compliments of the season. May every man-jack of you—that includes you, girls—have the time of your lives! I only wish I could be with you to join in the feast and merriment. That cannot be, however, but all the same I shall raise my glass on the 25th and drink the health of the finest set of boys and girls in the world. And my toast shall be: 'Gemites!'—Martin Clifford."

AND STILL MORE!

"Well, you chaps, the Editor has insisted that I should add my greetings to this Chat, and although I pointed out that I had done the trick in the Editorial of the 'St. Jim's

News,' he still insisted that 'Tom Merry' should chin-wag a few words. You all know what I wish you—A thumping merry Christmas.' May the snow be thick upon the ground, may the festive board simply groan under the weight of the good things on Christmas Day, and may you all get your digestions into fine trim. I mean that—I've had some rotten Boxing Days in the years gone by for over-doing it. I've got a glass here, and Monty Lowther has charged it with wine—ginger wine. We're all standing on our hind legs and drinking your health. Cheerio—and Many Happy Returns of Christmas—The Terrible Three!"

PRESENTS!

Several Gemites have written to me for advice on the subject of Christmas presents. Uncles, aunts, etc., have apparently left the choice of presents to their respective nephews, nieces, cousins, etc. "What would you have if you were me?" That's the reigning question in this bundle of "present" letters. Well, chums, you've asked me and I'll tell you. The best present you could have, and I say this in all sincerity, is the "Holiday Annual." But you'll have to be sharp about it—the newsagents are doing a roaring trade and will soon be sold out. Take it from me, the "H. A." is the best value for money proposition on the market.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME!

"HUNTED DOWN!"

Being the sequel to the topping St. Jim's story you have just read. By Martin Clifford.

"WINTER SPORTS!"

A grand sporting supplement by Tom Merry & Co. that should not be missed.

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"ST. JIM'S JINGLE!"

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YOUR EDITOR.

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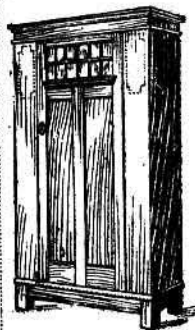
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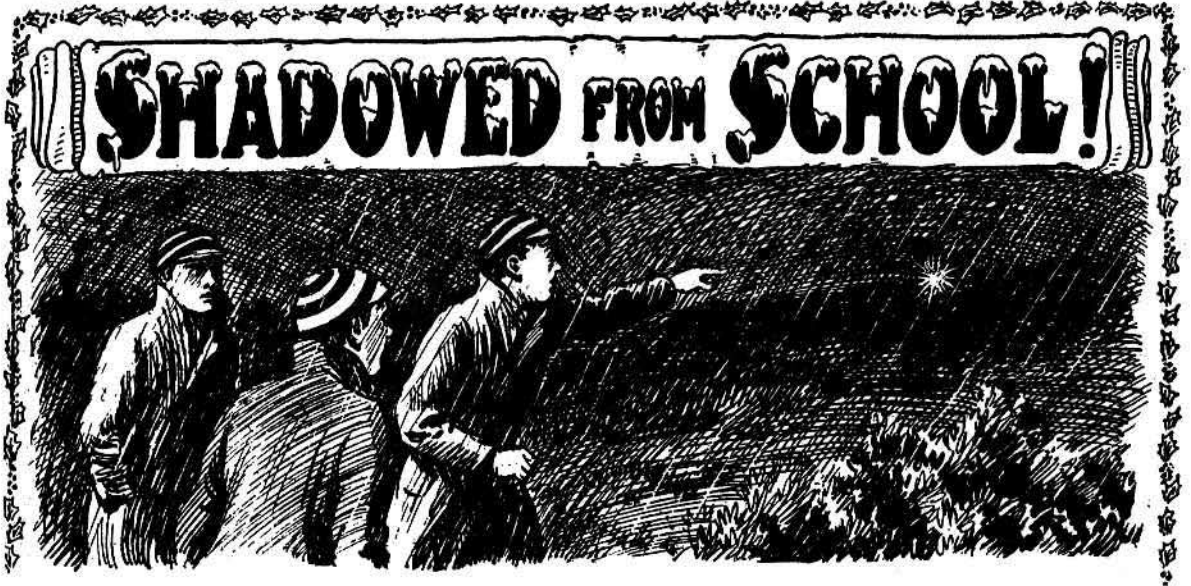
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Gem N., 1925.

A STRANGE BEGINNING! A rain-swept moor, a flicker of light that comes and goes like some strange will-o'-the-wisp, three schoolboys drenched to the skin—and a man with a revolver! Thus starts this week's thrilling story—



A Dramatic Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, dealing with a sensational adventure that befalls them during the Christmas vacation.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Wet!



"NICE!" said Monty Lowther. Lowther of the Shell was a good deal of a humorist. He needed all his sense of humour to take the present situation humorously.

Really it was not nice.

Tom Merry grunted.

Manners growled.

The rain was coming down hard. The dark winter sky seemed to be melting and pouring itself down on the chums of the St. Jim's Shell.

They had turned up the collars of their coats, and pulled their caps down as close as they could. But caps and coats afforded little protection against that downpour.

They were drenched. Their feet felt as if they were swimming in water in their boots.

By the widest stretch of the most optimistic imagination, the situation could not have been considered nice.

The three juniors of St. Jim's tramped, and splashed, and squelched, across Wayland Moor. They had witnessed a football match at Abbotsford, and started to walk back to St. Jim's across the moor. They had calculated that they had just time to do it and get in for call-over. It looked like rain, but they did not mind a shower.

And then, far out on the moor, it came on.

With rain and wind came December darkness; and the rain came down faster and faster, and thicker and thicker.

Shakespeare has remarked that when sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions. Thus it was with the Terrible Three of St. Jim's. It was not only the wind, though that was sharp and keen; it was not only the rain, though that was heavy and drenching; it was not only the mud, though the whole moor seemed to be an ocean of mud. But in the rainy darkness the footpath seemed to have been washed away; and at length the chums of the Shell had to admit that they did not know where they were. They hoped that they were still heading in the direction of St. Jim's. But they were quite uncertain on that point. And uncertainty as to their route, with a stormy December night setting in, was extremely unpleasant.

Hence Monty Lowther's remark that it was nice. Monty spoke with playful sarcasm.

"We're silly asses!" growled Manners. "We oughtn't to have started to walk. We're silly chumps."

"Speak for yourself, old bean," said Monty cheerily.

"I'm willing to admit that you are a silly ass—"

"Fathead!"

"And a silly chump. But—"

"Oh, cheeze it! Don't be funny now, for goodness' sake!" groaned Manners. "I'm fed-up with this! If you're going to be funny, it will be the last straw."

"Why grouse?" said Tom Merry as cheerfully as he could. "Can't be helped, and it's all in the day's work."

"We shall be late for calling-over," said Monty.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry and Manners together. The juniors had long given up the idea of reaching St. Jim's in time for call-over in the School House. In fact, it was pretty certain that the roll had already been called at St. Jim's, while they were tramping and splashing over the darkened moor, miles from everywhere.

"Cheerio!" said Lowther. "We may meet somebody who will show us the way to St. Jim's."

"Yes, that's likely!" grunted Manners. "Lots of people will be out for a walk on a night like this. We may run into a jolly crowd at any minute."

"Oh dear!" groaned Tom Merry.

For once in a way the sunniest junior at St. Jim's felt like grouching.

"If a fellow only knew which way to turn—" growled Manners, coming to a halt, and peering to and fro in the darkness and the falling rain. "You fellows see any sign of a path?"

"Not a shadow of one," said Tom.

Monty Lowther burst into song:

"Show me the way to go home.

I'm tired and I want to go to bed.

I started on a walk about an hour ago,

And I wish I'd trained instead.—"

"Oh, dry up!" hooted Manners. "The water's running down my back in a blessed torrent."

"Dear man! I'd like to dry up; but how's a fellow to dry up in weather like this? Be reasonable."

"This means catching colds all round, all ready for the Christmas vacation!" snorted Manners.

"That's a consolation—we shall have the vacation to lie up in, instead of going into sunny at St. Jim's," said Lowther. "We'll nurse one another over Christmas, and sneeze through the vac. Sneezey thing to do."

"What?" howled Manners.

"Sneezey thing," explained Lowther. "It's an easy thing—catch on? Quite a good pun."

"You frabjous chump! If you begin punning now, I'll jolly well punch you!" exclaimed the exasperated Manners.

Tom Merry laughed. Possibly Monty Lowther was trying

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to cheer up his comrades with his merry humour. If so, he seemed to be rather failing.

"Come on!" said Tom. "No good standing still—we shall catch cold at that rate. If we keep on, we shall arrive somewhere."

"Head first in one of the old quarries, perhaps!" said Manners.

"If you tumble into a quarry, Manners, old man, you'd better go in head-first," said Monty. "It's safer to fall on something soft."

"You—you—you—" howled Manners.

It was quite clear that Manners of the Shell was not in a mood to be cheered up by light and genial humour. No doubt the water running down his back had a discouraging effect on him.

"Oh, we're nowhere near the quarries, at any rate," said Tom. "I wish we had a pocket-torch with us. Can't be helped, though. Come on."

The three juniors tramped on again in wind and rain.

They peered through the darkness as they went, but there was nothing to be seen but dim hillocks on the moor, weeping bushes and bracken, and glistening pools of rain. They tramped over mud and dank grass, without a sign of a path. Suddenly Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"There's a light!"

"What?"

"Look!"

"Oh, my hat! What luck!"

The three juniors stopped, and stared at the distant light. It gleamed and flickered through rain and darkness. For a moment or two they hoped that it shone from a window, and that they were approaching some habitation. But it was soon clear that the light was in motion—a lantern carried by someone unseen who was moving across the moor. And they soon discerned that the glimmering light was approaching them.

"Well, this is a stroke of luck," said Tom. "There's somebody out in this as well as ourselves—"

"A stroke of luck for him!" grinned Lowther.

"For us, at any rate. He's got a light, and we can ask him the way—some shepherd, perhaps."

"If he's looking for lost lambs, he can take us in charge," said Monty. "Shall I call out 'Baa, baa!' to encourage him?"

"Fathead!"

"He's coming this way," said Manners, watching the light. "That looks like an electric torch he's got. Hallo! He's stopped!"

The light ceased to move, and the juniors saw it sweep round in a circle. Manners grunted dismally.

"He's lost his way, same as we have, and he's looking for a path. Another silly chump like ourselves!"

"Looks like it," agreed Tom Merry. "Still, he's got a light, and that's something. Let's join up; it's something to have a giddy companion in misfortune. Get a move on."

The three Shell fellows hurried towards the light. Of the man who carried it they could see nothing, only the gleam of the light turning in a slow circle, as if the bearer were scanning his surroundings in search of a path. But as they drew closer they made out a dim figure in a black macintosh, shiny with rain, and a black bowler hat.

The circling light suddenly stopped, turning on them. There was a sharp cry through the rain and the gloom.

"Beaumont, you scoundrel, I've found you!"

Something that flashed in the light was thrust forward, and Tom Merry & Co., to their utter amazement and consternation, found themselves staring at a levelled revolver.

They stood quite still, staring, too utterly taken aback to make a movement or to utter a word.

But it was only for a second that the threatening weapon gleamed before their eyes. It was lowered the next moment, and disappeared into the black macintosh. And the sharp voice rapped out:

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

CHAPTER 2.

The Man in Black!

TOM MERRY & CO. simply blinked. They stood with the rain drenching down on them, not feeling it now, or heeding the searching wind. Every other feeling was in amazement.

The man in the macintosh came tramping up to them, flashing his light in their startled faces. They dimly made out that he was a man of powerful frame, with a rugged face and penetrating dark eyes. He stared at them, obviously as much surprised by the meeting as the juniors were. But his manner was not threatening now; they even

thought they detected for a moment a faint smile on his rugged face. The juniors could almost have believed that the momentary vision of the levelled revolver had been a trick of the imagination.

"Who are you?" The man's voice was quiet and civil. "You look like schoolboys. What can you be doing out on the moor at this hour, in a storm like this?"

"We are schoolboys," answered Tom Merry, finding his voice at last. "We've walked from Abbotsford and lost our way."

"Oh!"

"And who the thump are you?" exclaimed Manners. "What the merry dickens do you mean by flourishing a revolver, like a film actor? Are you off your rocker?"

The man in black laughed quietly.

"I was startled," he said. "There have been footpads on this moor, and I thought for a moment that I had run into some gang."

The chums of St. Jim's did not answer that. They were quite well aware that it was not the truth. The man had called out the name of "Beaumont," evidently the name of some man he knew, and for whom he was searching on the wild moor. Obviously, he had supposed, when he heard the footsteps of the juniors, that he had come suddenly on the man Beaumont, though in a moment he had learned his mistake.

"So you've lost your way, my boys," went on the man in black in a kindly tone enough. "Perhaps I can help you. Where is your school?"

"St. Jim's, on the Rylcombe Road," said Tom. "It's about a mile from the village of Rylcombe. If we can get on the Rylcombe Road we shall be all right."

"Then I can help you."

"If you're going that way you can help us with your light," said Monty Lowther, eyeing the man curiously.

The meeting with him had been alarming enough, but somehow he did not alarm them now. He was in possession of a deadly weapon, and he had told them an obvious falsehood, yet somehow he did not impress them as a bad character. Had he been a footpad himself the juniors were at his mercy, but plainly, he had no intention of molesting them. The affair was mysterious enough, but there did not seem any cause for alarm for the juniors personally. Doubtless it would have been different for the unknown man, Beaumont, had the man in black come upon him.

"I am not going that way!" said the man briefly. "But I can point out the direction to you. You can see a hill yonder, even in the dark. Keep that to your right, and keep straight on, and you will come out on the Rylcombe road."

Tom Merry stared in the direction the man pointed out. Dimly he could make out a bumpy hillock, crowned with weeping, leafless trees.

"Thanks," he said. "I think I know where we are now. I should have known in the daylight at once. That's where we stopped on a scout run last term, you fellows."

"I think I remember," said Manners.

The meeting had been fortunate, after all, so far as the juniors were concerned. They knew the way to St. Jim's now, though they had still a long and weary tramp before them.

"Come on!" said Lowther.

"One moment," said the man in the black macintosh, in the same civil tone. "One good turn deserves another. I'm looking for a friend—"

"A friend!" ejaculated Tom Merry involuntarily, thinking of that momentary glimpse of the revolver.

"Yes; have you seen anything of a caravan about the moor?"

"A caravan!" exclaimed the Terrible Three in one voice.

"Yes, yes; a caravan."

"My only hat! Is anybody caravanning at this time of year?" exclaimed Tom Merry blankly.

"A caravan, painted red. Have you seen it?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, we should be pretty certain to notice it if we saw anybody caravanning in December," he said. "But if you mean a gipsy caravan, there are generally some on Abbotsford Common."

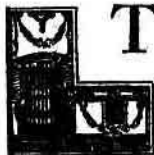
"I don't mean a gipsy caravan," exclaimed the man in black, impatiently. "I mean a caravan—a holiday caravan—with a man—one man—in it."

"We haven't seen anything of it."

The man's penetrating eyes searched their faces in the light of the electric torch.

"You are sure?" he repeated, as if doubtful of their statement, or at least very eager to ascertain whether it was the truth.

"Quite. But as a matter of fact, if we had seen the caravan you speak of we shouldn't tell you anything about



it," said Tom bluntly. "We should want to know something about you first, after what you did when we came on you."

"If you have not seen it that matters little." The man in the black macintosh turned away, his boots squelching in the mud as he went. The light flickered away over the moor.

"Come on!" said Manners, touching Tom Merry on the elbow. The captain of the Shell was standing quite still, as if buried in thought.

Tom did not move. "I'm blessed if I like this," he said. "That man seems decent enough, in a way; but he's armed, and he's looking for a man named Beaumont, and he expects to find him in a caravan—caravanning, in this weather! If he's not some potty lunatic he's after no good."

"Let's hope he won't find Beaumont, whoever Beaumont may be," said Monty Lowther. "He may as well hunt for a needle in a haystack on a night like this."

"That's so. But I—I wonder whether a fellow ought to keep him in sight," said Tom uneasily. "We might follow his light—"

"It's gone!" said Manners. Even while Tom Merry was speaking the light travelling across the dark moor had vanished. It did not reappear.

Monty Lowther made a slight chuckle. "I fancy that idea crossed his mind, as well as yours, Tom. He's shut off his light on purpose. That does it!"

"I suppose it does," said Tom. It was evidently hopeless to think of getting on the track of the man in the black macintosh in the rainy darkness of the moor. "We'd better get on."

And the Terrible Three tramped on once more, taking the direction indicated to them by the man they had so strangely and unexpectedly met on the stormy moor. Several times Tom Merry glanced back, but he saw no glimmer of the

light again; either the electric lamp was shut off for good or the inequalities of the rugged moor hid it from sight.

Keeping the dim shape of the hillock to their right, the juniors tramped on, glad at least to know that they were heading for home. The rain was coming down as hard as ever; their faces streamed with water, their clothes were soaking, and the darkness was puzzling and troubling. They stumbled in ruts and hollows, and tore through unseen bracken, and once they bumped fairly into a lonely tree without even seeing it till they touched it.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Monty Lowther. "I wish we'd trained it from Abbotsford with Blake and his mob. Oh dear!"

Even Monty's genial humour was deserting him. "Ow!" yelled Manners suddenly.

"What the thump—"

"I've run into something and barked my shin!" howled Manners. Manners was sprawling over something invisible that stretched in the dank grass. Tom Merry stopped and groped, and, to his surprise, found that it was a shaft resting on the ground—evidently the shaft of a large vehicle that was stationary on the moor.

Manners scrambled up, and stumbled over the other shaft, and sat down again.

"Look out!" said Tom. "It's some sort of a cart—"

"A cart here!" grunted Lowther. "There's no road—not even a path. What the thump is a cart doing here?"

"It's a cart, or van, or something, all the same. I can make it out now. Hark, that's a horse!"

A low whinny came from somewhere in the darkness. Manners picked himself up a second time, breathing hard. The juniors peered through the thick gloom, making out the dim shape of a large covered vehicle. Lowther struck a



The caravan door opened a couple of inches, and through the narrow opening a light flashed, so sudden and bright that it dazzled Tom Merry as it struck upon his face. He blinked dizzily in the glare of an electric lamp. He could see nothing of the occupant of the van, but behind the bright light he knew that a man was scanning him. (See chapter 3.)

match, but it was blown out before it was fairly alight. But the Terrible Three knew what they had found.

"It's a giddy caravan," said Lowther.
"Stuck in the middle of the moor, far away from all the paths," said Tom. "Not much doubt that it's the van that man was looking for."

"Blow the van!" groaned Manners. "I've barked my shins. Let's get on, for goodness' sake! We shall have colds for Christmas!"

"Hold on a minute," said Tom. "If this is the caravan that man was looking for, I think we ought to give the owner a tip. That man in black had a pistol, and he meant mischief, whether he's sane or potty. Let's speak to the man here, if there's anybody in the van."

Tom Merry groped his way in wet and darkness to the door of the caravan.

The vehicle was plunged into the deepest gloom; if it was occupied, it seemed that the occupant must be asleep.

But as Tom stopped at the door he heard a sound from within, in a lull of wind. It was a sound of heavy, hurried, suppressed breathing, and it struck the junior strangely. It was like the breathing of a hunted animal crouching in hiding.

The wind roared again, and the sound was lost. But it echoed in Tom Merry's ears. He knew that there was a man in the van, who must have caught some echo of footsteps and voices, and feared that he was found by his searching enemy.

Tom Merry knocked on the door. The steps had been taken into the van, and the door was shut, and doubtless locked. Tom Merry knocked hard on the lower part of the door, which was within his reach. But there came no reply from the caravan—only when the wind was still for a moment again, there came again that hurried, panting breathing of a man who was hunted, and who crouched in fear and trembling.

CHAPTER 3.

Good Samaritans!



KNOCK, knock, knock!

"Oh, come on, Tom!" shouted Manners. "He's asleep, if there's anybody there. For goodness' sake let's get on!"

"He's not asleep," answered Tom. "I can hear him."

"Then why the thump doesn't he answer?" demanded Lowther.

"He's afraid, I think."

"Afraid of what?" hooted Manners.

"That man with the pistol, I should imagine," said Tom quietly. "Patience, old chap; there's something jolly wrong going on, and we're bound to tip this chap a warning, whoever he is. We don't want to hear to-morrow that murder has been done on the moor."

"Oh, my hat!"

Knock, knock, knock!

Tom Merry struck hard on the caravan door with his knuckles.

"Can you hear me?" he shouted. "Nothing to be afraid of; we're friends—schoolboys! Will you answer me?"

There was a movement in the van.

The clear, fresh boyish voice of the St. Jim's junior probably relieved the caravanner of his fears. The door did not open, but a harsh voice called out:

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"It's all right," called back Tom Merry, shouting to make his voice heard through the door and over the wind. "We're schoolboys; we don't mean you any harm!"

"What do you want?"

"Only to give you a warning. Is your name Beaumont?"

"Why do you ask?"

"We've met a man who was looking for somebody named Beaumont, about a mile away on the moor. He was armed, and I believe he means trouble if he finds the man he is looking for. If you are Beaumont, I'm warning you."

"Oh!"

There was the sound of a grating key, and of a bolt being drawn back. The caravan door opened a couple of inches and a chain clinked. The door was chained as well as locked and bolted, and the chain was evidently still securing it so that it could not open very far. Through the narrow opening a light flashed, so sudden and bright that it dazzled Tom Merry as it struck upon his face. He blinked dizzily in the glare of an electric lamp.

He could see nothing of the occupant of the van; but behind the bright light he knew that the man was scanning him.

Tom could hear the unseen man breathing hard, but more calmly now. The sight of the drenched schoolboys had reassured him.

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"Thank you, thank you for your warning." The voice was less harsh now. "You say you met a man, who was searching? What was he like? Was he a man of large build?"

"Yes; a tall man, rather broad in the shoulders," said Tom. "That was all we could see in the dark."

"It was he! Did you learn his name?"

"No. But he mentioned the name of Beaumont; he's looking for a man of that name. He had a pistol."

"Where was this? Where did you see him?"

"About a mile from here, towards Wayland."

"Was he coming in this direction?"

"No."

Tom Merry heard the caravanner panting.

"But he is searching over the moor with a light," said Tom. "He seemed in dead earnest, and he may find your van sooner or later. We bumped into it in the dark; but he has a light. If you are Beaumont, you know now that you'd better be on your guard."

"What is the use?" groaned the unseen occupant of the van. "I am lost here in the darkness—I do not know which way to turn to escape from this horrible moor!"

"We can guide you as far as the Rylcombe road, if you like," said Tom. "If you can get your horse put in we'll lend a hand. Once you're in the village, you're safe enough; I'll tell you where to find the village policeman, or you can keep on to Wayland and go to the police-station."

"If you can guide me to a road, that is enough! Will you do this for a stranger—a man in danger and distress?"

"Certainly!" said Tom.

"I—I can trust you?"

"You must be the judge of that," said Tom Merry dryly.

He felt compassion for the man, who was plainly in a state of trembling terror, but his compassion was mingled with contempt. It was inexplicable to Tom Merry that anyone could yield so utterly to the influence of fear.

"I—I will trust you. I—I thank you, from my heart! I—I will trust you."

The man had made up his mind to emerge from the van: but it was some minutes before the chain clanked again and the door opened. Those minutes had been needed for the wretched fugitive to screw up his courage to the sticking-point. The light was shut off; it was in darkness that the man dropped from the door of the van into the dank grass. He stood among the juniors, and though they were not touching him they knew that he was trembling.

He was a man of slight build, and that was all the juniors could see, except a glimpse of a colourless face in the gloom.

"Where's your lamp?" asked Tom. "We shall want a light to get the horse harnessed."

"I—I think we can do it in the dark—"

"Impossible!" said Tom. "A fellow can hardly see his hand before his face. For goodness' sake, get your lamp!"

He spoke impatiently.

He was willing to help the wretched man all he could, but he was not willing to linger unnecessarily in the pouring rain on the moor.

"If he should see the light!" breathed Beaumont. It was clear now that the caravanner was the "Beaumont" of whom the mysterious man in the black macintosh was in search. He had not admitted it in words, but his actions were a sufficient admission.

"He's too far away to see the light," said Tom. "Anyhow, it's got to be risked, and if the man comes on you now we'll stand by you. The sooner we get going the better."

"Yes, yes."

With obvious reluctance the man turned on the bright light of the electric lamp. The lamp sagged in his hand, its gleam making strange dancing beams in the darkness, so much was he trembling.

"Better give me the lamp, Mr. Beaumont," said Tom, trying to keep the note of contempt out of his voice, but not succeeding very well.

"Yes, yes, take it! Thank you for helping me! You—you do not understand my danger! That—that man will kill me at sight, like a dog!" Beaumont shuddered violently. "He—he thinks I have wronged him! He is hunting me to take my life!"

"Then why the thump did you come to this lonely place?" asked Manners. "You could have driven your van up to the police-station in Wayland, if you had liked, I suppose."

Beaumont made no answer.

There were strange thoughts in the minds of the juniors. It was simply inexplicable that this man should have sought so lonely a spot as the heart of Wayland Moor if he was hunted by an enemy who sought his life, if he could have ventured to demand the ordinary citizen's right of police protection. It was impossible to avoid the conclusion that he feared the police as well as his own enemy.

But even if he was some law-breaker in fear of the police, it made no difference now. The juniors felt bound to help him to escape from a lawless enemy. Even a man whom he

had wronged had no right to take the law into his own hands and shed blood.

Tom Merry took the electric lamp, and Beaumont showed him where to find the horse. The animal was crouching in the rain on the more sheltered side of the halted van, tethered to a wheel. Its eyes blinked pitifully at the juniors in the glare of the lamp.

The three Shell fellows worked quickly, with little help from the trembling Beaumont, whose terrified glances were turning incessantly upon the surrounding darkness. The dripping horse was harnessed in the shafts of the van. And the juniors now had a sight of the man they were helping, in the light of the lamp. His looks did not impress them favourably. He was a slight man, so thin as to look almost emaciated, with a prominent nose and cheek-bones, and sunken, bright, restless eyes. His clothes were muddy, but apart from that he was very well dressed, and in more prosperous times he might have been taken, on his looks, for a well-to-do business man—a City merchant or a solicitor.



Monty Lowther caught up a bundle of wet jackets, waistcoats, and trousers, and rushed on Arthur Augustus, and suddenly enfolded him in them. "Yawwooh!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Are you a little wet now, Gussy?" "Gwooooh! You twightful wuffan!" roared the swell of St. Jim's, struggling in the midst of the dripping, tangled clothes. "Wleasae me! Whoooop!" (See chapter 4.)

Certainly he did not look the kind of man to go caravanning, especially in the winter. His age was at least fifty, his hair scanty and tinged with grey.

"Ready now!" said Tom, speaking as kindly as he could. The man inspired him with a feeling of repugnance that was hard to conceal. "I'll lead the horse. You take the light, Monty."

"Better put out the light now," stammered Beaumont. "We shall get on quicker with the light. You get into the van—we'll walk."

Beaumont obeyed without another word.

The van lurched through mud and dank grass in the streaming rain. Monty Lowther walked a little ahead with the electric lamp; Tom Merry and Manners led the horse, helping him occasionally over rough places. They heard the door of the caravan shut and the lock turn. Beaumont had secured himself in the van again. The caravan rumbled

on over the rough moor, and the juniors came on a path at last and proceeded more rapidly. They were intensely relieved when the van rolled out at last into the Rylcombe road.

"Stop!" said Tom.

He went to the door of the van and knocked.

"You're on the road now, Mr. Beaumont."

The door opened.

"Here's your lamp! If you're going towards St. Jim's we can lead the horse for you another mile, if you like. That's our way."

"Yes, yes, do so."

"But if you want to make for the police-station—"

"No, no, no!"

"Very well," said Tom curtly.

He handed in the lamp. It was not needed now on the

road. Lowther had lighted the front lamp of the caravan now. The juniors led the horse on till they came by the gates of St. Jim's.

Then Tom knocked at the door again.

"We've got to leave you now, Mr. Beaumont! I suppose you're coming out to take charge of the horse?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very well. Good-night!"

Tom Merry rejoined Manners and Lowther. And, leaving the man they had so strangely met to his own devices, the Terrible Three walked to the school gates and pealed on the bell.

CHAPTER 4.

Gussy Gets Wet!



"THOSE fellows will be gettin' wet!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form made that remark in the junior Common-room in the School House of St. Jim's.

The rain was dashing against the streaming panes of the windows, and the hour was getting late. It was not far off bedtime for the St. Jim's juniors, and three members of the Shell had not yet come in.

"Well, I fancy they'll get just a little damp if they're walking across the moor in this jolly old rain," remarked Jack Blake.

"Asses not to take the train home, as we did!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah. I wemembah tellin' them it was goin' to wain," said Arthur Augustus. "But they are wathah thoughtless youngstahs. I twust they will not catch feahful colds all weady for the Chwistmas holidays."

"Bound to," said Dig. "When we break up we shall leave them here in sunny. Lucky for us you took your best silk hat to Abbotsford for a run this afternoon, Gussy, or we might have been caught in it, too."

"Weally, Dig—"

Talbot of the Shell came in and glanced round him.

"Tom Merry not back yet?" he asked.

"No," said Blake cheerily. "The three of them are sticking under something for shelter, perhaps, waiting for the rain to stop. Looks as if they'll have to wait till morning, and come home with the milkman."

Talbot glanced from the window. The quadrangle was a sea of rain.

"It's pretty rotten if they're out in this," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we might have been out in it but for Gussy's silk hat," said Blake. "We should have walked home, too, after the football match, but Gussy was afraid it might rain and spoil his beautiful topper."

"Weally, Blake—"

"So we trained it," said Blake. "As we trained it on account of Gussy's topper we made him stand the tickets. That was only fair. I'm glad now that I didn't squash Gussy's topper when we started. I was inclined to. About fifty people on the Abbotsford ground told him to take it off, so that they could see the game. Several times I came near squashing it."

"You uttah ass—"

"But as it turned out, it's saved us from a drenching," said Blake seriously. "I really think we ought to pass a vote of thanks to Gussy's topper."

"Hear, hear!" said Dig.

"You are an uttah ass, Blake. I weward it as essential for one membah of a partay to be decently dwessed," said Arthur Augustus. "And if we had walked home, we should have been caught in this feahful storm. I weally twust that Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah have got sheftah somewhah."

"I think Mr. Railton is getting anxious about them," said Talbot. "They missed call-over, and if they're not in by bed-time they will have to be looked for."

"Lot of good looking for them on the moor on a night like this," said Blake. "They've got into shelter somewhere. But, my hat! If they've lost their way on the moor, that's jolly serious!"

"We shall have to make up a search-partay," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall be willin' to take the lead, if Mr. Wailton will entwust the dutay to me."

"Yes, I can see him doing it," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"He, he, he!"

That unmusical cachinnation interrupted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Baggy Trimble of the Fourth rolled into the room with a grin on his fat face.

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"Well, what's the matter with you, image?" asked Blake.

"What are you going off like a cheap alarm clock for?"

"He, he, he! Ever seen a drowned rat?" chuckled

Trimble. "That's what they look like! He, he, he!"

"Have they come in?" asked Talbot.

"Yes; jolly well soaked! Dripping!" chortled Trimble.

"Mud from head to foot. Smothered with it! He, he, he!"

Evidently Baggy Trimble found something entertaining in the plight of the Terrible Three. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the fat junior, with a glance of deep disfavour.

"Weally, Twimble, it is wathah wotten to cackle ovah a fellow's twoubles," he said severely.

"Just go and look at them!" chuckled Trimble. "He, he, he! They look as if they'd been swimming in mud. Manners was sneezing! He's going to have a cold! He, he, he! Oh! Leggo! Ooooooop!"

Blake & Co., on their way to the door, stopped a moment for Trimble. It occupied only a moment to up-end that cheerful youth, and sit him down on the floor with a heavy concussion. Baggy Trimble's cachinnation changed into a wild yell, as he was left sitting. Baggy was a fellow who could never sympathise with anybody's troubles but his own, so Study No. 6 kindly gave him some of his own to sympathise with.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were shaking off heavy raindrops in the hall, with a good many fellows looking at them. Baggy Trimble's simile was rather a good one; the chums of the Shell really did look a good deal like drowned rats. Mr. Railton was there, with a very serious expression on his face.

"We're sorry, sir," Tom Merry was saying. "We were caught in the storm on the moor, and lost our way, and—"

"I understand, Merry; but never mind that now," said the Housemaster. "Go to your dormitory at once and turn into bed, and I will ask Mrs. Mimms to send you hot-water bottles. You will be fortunate if you escape severe colds."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Bai Jove, you fellows look fwrightfully wet!" said D'Arcy, following the Terrible Three up the staircase.

"We feel a little damp," said Lowther. "It was wet rain, you know. A dry rain wouldn't have mattered so much."

"Bai Jove, I have nevah heard of a dwy wain, Lowthah!"

"Lots of things you haven't heard of, old bean. Wasn't there a drought in Egypt once, and didn't King Pharaoh have a dry reign for seven years?"

"Bai Jove!"

Evidently even that terrific wetting had not damped Lowther's irrepressible humour for long.

"Buck up!" said Manners. "I'm catching cold, and you'll do the same if you waste time being funny!"

The Terrible Three hurried to their dormitory. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and some other fellows followed them in.

"Perhaps I can help you, deah boys," said the kind-hearted Gussy. "You had bettah get those wet things off as quickly as you can. Bai Jove, you are weally dwippin'. I am afwaid your clothes are wuined."

The three were stripping as fast as they could, to towel themselves down. They were wet to the skin.

"Lost your way on the moor, did you?" asked Blake.

"Yes. It was jolly dark when the storm came on," said Tom. "Luckily we met a man who set us right, after a long tramp."

"It was wathah fatheaded to lose your way, deah boy," remarked Arthur Augustus. "It is wathah a pitay that I did not walk home with you, atfah all."

"What difference would that have made, ass?" asked Manners.

"I should not have lost the way, Mannahs," explained Arthur Augustus mildly. "You see, I am not such an ass!"

Arthur Augustus' intention in coming to the Shell dormitory was to sympathise with the fellows who had come in so very wet. Possibly his manner of doing so was not quite up to the traditions of his well-known tact and judgment. The Shell fellows did not look grateful; in fact, they glared at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Can you see in the dark?" hooted Manners. "Are you a blessed cat?"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Can you follow a footpath that's been washed away by the rain, you footling duffer?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Can you tell north from south, and east from west, when you can't see an inch from your silly nose?" inquired Monty.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Fathead!" said the Terrible Three together.

"Bai Jove! I do not weward that as vewy polite or gwateful, when I am sympathisin' with you chaps!" said Arthur Augustus. "You look fwrightfully wet and mudday, and pwobably you will be laid up ovah the Chwistmas hols, with bad colds; but you should not allow such things to detewiwate your mannahs, you know. I certainly twust

that my manna's would not detewiowate if I got a little wet."

"Let's see!" said Monty Lowther. And the humorist of the Shell caught up a bundle of wet jackets, waistcoats, and trousers, and rushed on Arthur Augustus, and suddenly enfolded him in them.

"Yawwooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Are you a little wet now, Gussy?"

"Gwoogh! You fwiughtful wuffian!" roared Arthur Augustus, struggling in the midst of the dripping, tangled clothes. "Welease me! Whooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther proceeded to towel himself, and Arthur

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, as Lowther made that playful imitation of Gussy's severe remarks.

But Gussy's manners had hopelessly deteriorated. He shook his fist at the Terrible Three as he quitted the dormitory, hurrying away for a wash and a change.

"Dear old Gussy!" said Monty. "So kind of him to come in and cheer us up with a little comic relief."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Shell fellows turned in, and Toby, the page, arrived with hot-water bottles. They were fast asleep by the time the rest of the Shell came to bed; and, fortunately, when the rising-bell awakened them in the morning, they turned out without sneezing, coughing, or giving any other symptom of having caught cold.



St. Jim's Jingles!



No. 14.—GEORGE HERRIES, of the Fourth.

THIS burly fellow in the Fourth My Muse engages now, sir;

His fame has spread from south to north,

And so has that of Towser!

The worthy Herries and his hound Have always stood together;

And side by side they may be found Through fair and stormy weather.

"My dog's the finest ever bred!"

He once declared to Gussy;

That noble youth then promptly said,

"Deah boy, don't think me fussy,

But, honestly, I cannot stand

These playful pwanks of Towsah's;

He weally needs a firmah hand—

He wipped my Sunday twousahs!"

But Herries will not hear a word

Against his canine wonder;

And when adverse remarks are heard

His brow grows black as thunder.

He feeds his dog on juicy bones,

And gravy from a saucer;

A handsome kennel Towser owns,

And a snug bed of straw, sir!



George Herries.

When Towser has been fed and groomed

(Oh, what a job! I'd scorn it!)

Herries has often blared and boomed

'Upon his rusty cornet.

He thinks he plays delightful airs,

And most melodious music;

But, oh, the stuff that Herries blares

Would make both me and you sick!

He "digs" in Study Number Six

With Gussy and the others;

Each to his comrade stoutly sticks—

A loyal band of brothers!

They play the game in British style,

And win our admiration;

Their merry antics raise a smile,

And entertain the nation!

I wish old Herries health and fame,

Prosperity and pleasure;

Perhaps I'd better wish the same

To Herries' canine treasure!

St. Jim's is proud of all its Blakes,

And Greyfriars of its Cherries;

With cheers each rafter also shakes

For honest, good George Herries!

NEXT WEEK:—Mr. HORACE RATCLIFF, The New House Master.

Augustus struggled out of the tangle of wet garments, which fell round him in a circle on the floor. He was wet—there was no doubt about that; and he was muddy—on that point there was no doubt either; and he was wrathful—there was still less doubt, if possible, on that point.

"You wuffianly wottah!" he shouted.

"Go it!" encouraged Lowther.

"Look at me!"

"Excuse me—the sight is too painful!" said Lowther politely. "Get a new set of features, and ask me again."

"Look at me! Look at the feahful state I am in! My collah is soiled, my face is mudday, I am wet all ovah. I am in a fwiughtful state, you unspeakable wottah! I have a vevy great mind to give you a feahful thwashin'! I wegard you as a wuffianly hooligan!"

"Does it strike you fellows that Gussy's manners are deteriorating on account of a little wet?" asked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You feahful wuffian—you fwiughtful hooligan—you—you—you—" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Calmness, dear man," said Lowther. "You look frightfully wet and muddy, and you may be laid up with a cold over the Christmas holidays, but you should not allow a thing like that to deteriorate your manners, you know."

CHAPTER 5.

The Wrong Man!

TOM MERRY & CO. thought a good deal on the following day about that strange encounter on the moor.

The more they thought about it the more mysterious and puzzling it seemed.

Indeed, in the sober light of day it seemed a good deal like a dream. But it was no dream; it was real enough. They wondered what had become of the shifty,

mean-looking man, Beaumont, and whether he had succeeded in making his escape in the caravan through the storm. They wondered what had become of the man in the black macintosh. And in morning break that day they discussed the matter and debated whether they had better keep it to themselves.

"You see, it all sounds so jolly steep!" Tom Merry remarked. "If we told the fellows they'd think we were pulling their leg. More like a film stunt than a real happening."

"No need to tell the fellows," said Manners. "But I
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think we ought to tell our Housemaster. You see, that johnnie really had a pistol, and he was looking for the man Beaumont. Beaumont was scared out of his skin at the bare idea of meeting him. There's something jolly wrong; and my belief is that it's a matter for the police to deal with."

"But if Beaumont wanted police protection he would only have to ask for it," said Tom.

"It's pretty plain that he dared not; he's a bad egg," said Manners. "He doesn't want to meet any men in blue."

"If he's some law-breaker—"

"He jolly well is!" said Monty Lowther. "What would any ordinary man do if a johnnie got after him with a pistol? Call in the police at once!"

"The odd thing is that that johnnie with the pistol didn't impress me as being a bad sort," said Tom. "But he must be a frightful villain if he really was after the man to shoot him."

"That's what it looked like, anyhow," said Manners. "It's jolly mysterious, the whole thing; but I think it's too serious to keep to ourselves. We ought to tell our Housemaster, and leave it to him whether there's anything to be done in the matter."

And after some thinking Tom Merry and Lowther agreed, and the three of them proceeded to Mr. Railton's study in the School House.

Mr. Railton heard their story with very evident signs of surprise. He scanned their faces keenly and put a few questions, obviously in doubt. But he seemed satisfied at last that the Shell fellows were not drawing the long bow.

"It is a most extraordinary matter," said Mr. Railton. "It appears to me that you boys may have prevented a crime, and in that case it was very fortunate that you lost your way on the moor last night. I shall communicate with Inspector Skeat at Wayland on the subject, and if anything transpires I will inform you."

And the juniors left the study, quite satisfied to leave the mysterious matter in the hands of their Housemaster.

Strange as the affair was, it did not linger long in the minds of the Shell fellows. They had plenty of other matters to think about, with the school about to break up for the Christmas holidays.

A couple of days later they were reminded of it when Mr. Railton called them into his study. They found Inspector Skeat, of Wayland, there, and thought they detected an ironical smile on the ruddy face of the official.

"Mr. Skeat wishes to hear the story you told me, Merry," said the School House master briefly.

"Very well, sir."

And the Terrible Three told their story again, the Wayland inspector listening attentively, but still with a smile lingering on his face. The juniors did not need telling that Mr. Skeat fully believed that they had exaggerated some trifling incident into a startling story.

"Well, well, I was bound to inquire into the matter," said Mr. Skeat finally. "Thank you for telling me. But nothing has been seen of a red caravan in the neighbourhood of Wayland—a very unusual season of the year for a caravaning—hem!—especially for an elderly gentleman. The name of Beaumont tells me nothing; not a local resident, I think. As for the man in black—hem!—and his revolver—hem, hem—Are you young fellows quite sure that you did not let your imaginations run away with you a little—what?"

"We've told you exactly what happened, sir!" said Tom Merry, colouring.

"Well, well, that is right; it was your duty to report it," said Mr. Skeat. "Quite right—quite right! By the way, what had you been to Abbotsford for that afternoon?"

"To see the Ramblers play a football match."

"Oh, a football match!" ejaculated the inspector.

"Yes."

"Quite so—quite so! I thought that perhaps you had been to see the films!" said Mr. Skeat blandly.

The three juniors were glad to get out of the study again, and they went with very red faces.

In the quad they looked at one another.

"The silly ass!" said Manners, with a deep breath. "He thinks we imagined the whole thing—as if we've been spinning a yarn like Trimble."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, it does sound steep!" he said. "We haven't told the fellows because it sounds so jolly steep. I suppose that's the view Mr. Skeat would take."

"Anyhow, they seem to have disappeared out of this neighbourhood, both of them," said Monty Lowther. "We sha'n't see either of them again—and I can't say I'm sorry."

Mr. Skeat came out of the House and passed the juniors in the quadrangle, and glanced at them with the same ironical smile that he had worn in the study. He walked on ponderously through the crisp snow that powdered the ground to the school gates.

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"Come on, you fellows," said Lowther.

"What's the game?"

"There's a lot of snow in the hedges in the lane," said Monty. "I think it's up to us to give Mr. Skeat a snowball. We sha'n't see him again till next term, and there mayn't be any snow then."

"Don't play the goat, old man!" said Tom. "He will complain to our Housemaster if we snowball him."

"Fathead! He won't see us. Have we been Scouts for umpteen terms without learning how to lay in ambush? Come on! Hasn't he doubted our word? And isn't that an offence to be wiped out in blood—or at least snowballs? This is going to be a 'Mysterious Attack upon a Prominent Local Official,' and will come in useful for the reporter of the Wayland paper."

Tom and Manners laughed and followed Monty Lowther out of gates. There was a thin powdering of snow in the lane, but the hedges were thick with it. Mr. Skeat's portly form was in view ahead, his heavy breathing making quite a cloud round him in the frosty air. He rolled on ponderously, with the Terrible Three on his track.

At a little distance from the school he turned into the footpath through the wood and disappeared. Apparently the plump inspector was walking back to Wayland by the footpath.

"That does it!" said Lowther cheerily. "We cut through the wood and get ahead of him, and when he comes along a mysterious attack on a prominent local official takes place—and he never knows who did it. Buck up!"

The three juniors clambered over a fence into the wood at some distance from the footpath. They hurried through the frozen wood at a pace the plump inspector could never have equalled. In a short time they were in ambush behind a thicket of evergreens close by the path at a point ahead of the inspector if he was taking the direct path to Wayland. Each of the juniors gathered snow and kneaded a couple of snowballs.

"Keep out of sight," said Monty Lowther. "As soon as we hear his fairy footsteps let fly and bunk. We don't want to wind up the term with a Head's licking for snowballing a fat man."

"No fear!" agreed Tom.

The chums of the Shell waited.

They had allowed for the leisurely pace of the plump inspector, which rather resembled the stately progress of a tortoise. But Mr. Skeat seemed a long time coming, all the same.

Monty Lowther looked at his watch, and looked at it again.

Tom and Manners grinned.

It was quite possible that the stout inspector had turned into another path; they did not know for certain that he was walking direct back to Wayland. In which case, the Terrible Three had taken all their trouble for nothing, and Monty Lowther's little jest would come to nothing—as Monty's little jests sometimes did. But Monty, like a true humorist, could not tolerate the idea of a little jest of his own falling flat, and he did not smile; he frowned.

"Is the fat old frump crawling home on his hands and knees?" he murmured. "He's taking his time, anyhow."

"He is—he are," murmured Tom. "Perhaps he's met a friend and stopped for a talk. Perhaps he's taken another path. Perhaps he's going to keep us waiting here till we're due for lock-up at St. Jim's. Perhaps—"

"Oh, blow your perhapes!" said Lowther crossly. "Why the thump doesn't the man come?"

"It's rather cold here!" murmured Manners.

"If you're funky of a little cold, Manners, you'd better wrap yourself up in a blanket before you go out for a walk," suggested Lowther. "Or you could bring a hot-water bottle along with you."

Manners chuckled.

It was growing more and more probable that Monty's jest was going to be a frost; and that probability made the humorist of the Shell cross.

"Well, he doesn't seem to be coming," said Tom at last.

"Oh, he's coming all right!"

"You see—"

"Rot!"

"It's jolly cold in this wood!"

"Bosh!"

"Oh, let's hang on!" said Manners cheerfully. "We'll stay here over the Christmas vac if Monty likes."

Monty Lowther glared. But before he could reply there came a sound of heavy footsteps on the snowy footpath.

Lowther's face brightened.

His jest was not going to fall flat after all. He gripped his snowballs, one in either hand.

"Ready!" he whispered.

There was a glimpse of an overcoat through the ever-green clump.

Whiz! Whiz!



"Ready?" whispered Lowther, as there came the sound of heavy footsteps on the snowy footpath. Whizz, whizz! Crash! Smash! A loud and startled cry rang out on the footpath, and a hat was seen to fly through the air. "Got him!" gasped Lowther, triumphantly. There was a crash in the evergreens, and a man of powerful build came into view. He was hatless—one of Monty's snowballs had taken off his hat. But he was not Inspector Skeat! (See chapter 5.)

Crash! Smash!
 A loud and startled cry rang out on the footpath, and a hat was seen to fly through the air.
 "Got him!" gasped Lowther triumphantly. "Buck up! Why don't you chuck your snowballs?"
 "Suppose—"
 "Never mind supposing—buck up!" hissed Lowther. "He's fat and slow, but he'll be after us pretty quick."
 "But suppose—" gasped Tom Merry.
 "You footling ass, get a move on—"
 There was a crash in the evergreens, and a man of powerful build came rapidly through. He was hatless—one of Monty's snowballs had taken off his hat. But he was not Inspector Skeat—he bore no resemblance whatever to Inspector Skeat, only that he wore a grey overcoat that was somewhat similar to the inspector's, and probably to a score of others in Wayland; Monty Lowther stared at him blankly. Tom and Manners dropped their snowballs.
 "Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Lowther. "Who—who are you?"
 "You young rascal!"
 "You ass, Monty!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I was going to say, suppose it wasn't Skeat all the time—"
 "Oh!"
 That doubt had occurred to both Tom Merry and Manners; but Monty, in his haste to make a success of his jest, had not thought of it. Evidently his comrades' doubt had been well-founded; for the victim of the snowballs most certainly was not Mr. Skeat. One snowball had knocked off his hat, the other had caught him on the right ear; and he seemed angry—which was not surprising in the circumstances.
 He grasped Monty Lowther with a powerful hand.
 "You young scamp! What's this game—hey?"
 "Oh! A—a mistake—" gasped Lowther.
 "You mustn't make such mistakes—"
 "Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom Merry blankly.
 His eyes were fixed on the powerfully-built man, as if

fascinated. Something familiar in the lines of the tall, powerful figure had struck him; and the man's voice had touched a chord of memory. He knew him now.
 "The man of the moor!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER 6.

The Man of the Moor!



TOM MERRY stared hard at the man. He was quite certain now. The man who had fallen into the juniors' ambush was the man in the black macintosh, whom they had met so strangely that wild night on Wayland Moor. It was the man who had flashed the light in their faces, and whose drawn revolver had startled them at that strange encounter in the storm.
 "The man in black!" exclaimed Manners.
 "That's the man!"
 "Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Lowther.
 The man released him quite suddenly. Lowther jumped back; he had had more than enough of that herculean grip.
 Tom Merry & Co. stared at the man. They had seen little of him that dark night on the moor; but they saw him clearly enough now.
 He was a young man, scarcely over thirty, on his looks, with a rather rugged and very determined face, and clear, keen eyes. There was something of the military in his looks and carriage, and the juniors would have guessed him to be an ex-officer who had seen service.
 It was plain that he recognised them also. They remembered how he had scanned them in the light of the electric torch that night on the moor.
 "You!" he said.

"Us!" said Tom Merry, his face breaking into a grin. "I see that you remember us, Mr. Man-in-Black."

"Quite." The young man smiled, too. "This is an unexpected meeting—and a fortunate one. I forgive you for knocking off my hat with a snowball. I have been looking for you."

"I'll get your hat, sir," said Lowther. "I'm sorry I knocked it off—we took you for somebody else."

Lowther fielded the hat, brushed the snow off it, and handed it to the young man. He glanced along the footpath, but there was no sign of the Wayland inspector. It was clear, even to Monty Lowther, that Mr. Skeat had taken another path.

But Tom Merry & Co. were not thinking much of Mr. Skeat now. They were surprised and interested by this meeting with the mysterious man in black—in whose existence Mr. Skeat did not believe. They had supposed that he was far away long ago; yet apparently he was lingering in the neighbourhood, and, according to his words, he had been looking for them.

What he wanted with them was a mystery. But they felt no alarm, in spite of the fact that the revolver, of which they had had a glimpse on the moor, was doubtless in one of the man's pockets. His conduct that wild night had seemed lawless and desperate; and yet somehow they could not think him a lawless character. At all events, he did not look anything of the kind.

"You said you've been looking for us?" asked Tom Merry. "Well, if that's so, you've found us. Here we are."

"Adsum!" said Manners, as if he were answering to his name at call-over; and the young man smiled again.

But his rugged face became grave at once.

"When I met you on the moor the other night, you heard me mention a name," he said.

"Yes; the name of Beaumont," said Tom.

"You told me you had not seen the man or his caravan."

"Yes."

"I thought from your faces that you looked truthful. But you were lying to me."

Tom Merry coloured.

"If that's what you think the less you have to say to us the better," he said coldly. "Come on, you fellows; it's time we got back to St. Jim's."

"Stop!"

The man of the moor swung into the path of the juniors as they turned away. His face was not pleasant now. It was hard and grim, and his keen eyes glittered.

"Stop!" he said harshly. "Now I've found you, you've got to explain. If you told me the truth that night, I'm sorry I've thought otherwise. But you've got to explain. Don't play the goat; I could handle the three of you as easily as if you were babes in arms."

The three juniors drew together with set faces. All the kindness was gone from the man's rugged face; and they could see that he was once more the man in black—the man who had hunted the wretched Beaumont, a man who, if not a desperado, at least had a lawless side to his character, and was likely to stop at little.

"You need not be alarmed," he went on. "I shall ask you only a few questions, but you must answer them."

"We are not alarmed," said Tom Merry quietly. "You can ask our questions if you like, but we shall suit ourselves about answering them."

"We shall see! After leaving me that night you met the man Beaumont, and helped him away with his caravan."

"We did," said Tom.

"I knew it! I did not find him; but the next day I came on a wood-cutter who had seen the caravan, and he had seen it going along Rylcombe Lane that night, with three boys walking with the horse. I did not need telling who those three boys were. You three!"

"That's so!" said Tom. "What about it?" He smiled faintly. "It's easy to explain. We came on the caravan on the moor, by sheer chance—one of us stumbled over the shafts in the dark. We thought it was up to us to warn the man Beaumont of his danger, and help him out of it. We had never seen him before, and we've never seen him since. Is that what you wanted to know?"

The man scanned his face.

"I suppose that may be true," he said, "but it seemed more likely to me that you knew the man, and knew where he was—"

"Well, if you can't take my word about it what's the good of talking?" said Tom impatiently. "Anyhow, I wouldn't say a word that would help you to find the man."

"Not a giddy syllable," said Manners emphatically. "I can't say I liked him much on his looks; but I hope he's at a safe distance now."

"You do not know where he is?"

"No."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 930.

"Or in which direction he went after you left him?"

"No."

"Where did you leave him, exactly?"

"Find out!" said Tom Merry bluntly. "You know that we led his horse along Rylcombe Lane. I couldn't say a single word to help you further. If the man's wronged you there's law in the country, and the law is good enough for you."

The man gave a sardonic laugh.

"So Beaumont thinks, I've no doubt," he said. "So you refuse to answer my question?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry steadily.

"It matters little. Is the man a relation of yours?"

"Eh? No," said Tom in astonishment.

"Has he any connection with your school?"

"Not that I know of."

"You do not know any St. Jim's boy who has a relation named Beaumont?"

"I can't remember having heard of any."

Again the keen eyes scanned his face. The man was evidently in doubt. The chums of the Shell eyed him curiously. They were not afraid of the man, though they knew him to be armed and lawless. They were wondering what was to be the outcome of this strange interview.

"Listen to me," said the man at last. "I know that Beaumont had some connection with St. Jim's. What the connection was I do not know; I suppose it might be that he had a nephew or other relative at the school. You helped him the other night, and your explanation may be the true one, but it may mean that you yourself are his relative, and that you are trying to shield him."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You're welcome to think so if you like," he said carelessly.

"You deny it?"

"I don't take the trouble," said the captain of the Shell coolly. "I refuse to say a word to a man who's hunting another man with a revolver. I'd try to throw you off his track if I could. You can think that Beaumont is a relative of mine if you like."

"Or mine!" said Monty Lowther genially. "If it will give you any pleasure, Mr. Nobody, you can put him down as my favourite uncle."

"Or my grandfather," suggested Manners; "or you can set him down as my second cousin, twice removed."

The juniors grinned, quite undismayed by the black, threatening look on the face of the man confronting them. It was quite probable that the powerfully-built man was able, as he had said, to handle the three of them, but the chums of the Shell did not intend to take orders from him on that account. And assuredly they had not the slightest intention of uttering a word that would help him to track down the hapless fugitive.

"You are jesting with a dangerous man," said the man at last.

"I know that," retorted Tom Merry, "and it may interest you to know that what happened on the moor has been reported to the police."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Beaumont would not thank you for that," he said. "He is less anxious to deal with the police than with me. If he is a relative of yours you have done him an ill turn—if you are speaking the truth."

"Oh, chuck it!" said Tom angrily. "I'm fed-up with this sort of talk. Let us pass, and go your own way."

"One more word," said the man quietly. "I know that Beaumont has some connection with your school. I once saw, in his office, a letter on his desk, addressed to St. Jim's—addressed, so far as I remember, for I took no notice of it at the time, to the headmaster. I saw this by chance, without heeding it, but I recalled it afterwards—after I learned that St. Jim's boys had helped him to escape from me. Once more I ask you, is the man a relative of any of you three boys?"

The Terrible Three grinned. They could understand the man reaching such a conclusion, though it was quite groundless. Evidently he was utterly baffled in his search for Beaumont since that wild night on the moor, and this was the only clue he had; and it was, in truth, no clue at all. In his desperate determination to find the missing man he was catching at straws.

"Will you answer me?" he snapped.

"I've answered you," said Tom. "I will not say a word to help you. If the man's wronged you, go to the police."

The black, threatening look intensified on the man's rugged face, and the Terrible Three thought, for a moment, that he was about to spring on them. It was plain that he was making a great effort to control a fierce temper, which he was not in the habit of governing.

But he restrained himself.

"Very well," he said. "You will tell me nothing—you know more than you will tell me. Let it rest at that."

Without a word more he turned, and strode away along

the footpath, leaving the chums of the Shell staring at one another.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Lowther. "That chap is quite convinced that the giddy Beaumont belongs to one of us."

"Let him think what he likes," said Tom. "The more mistakes he makes the less likely he is to hit on the right track. I didn't like the looks of Beaumont, but this man means mischief if he finds him."

"He does, for a cert! But, I say, it's jolly queer about that man Beaumont having some connection with our school," said Manner's, as the Terrible Three started through the wood on their way back to St. Jim's. "There's nobody of that name that I remember. Of course, any of the fellows might have an uncle or a cousin of that name."

"Come to think of it, the johnny's got reason for thinking as he does," said Lowther. "There's nothing in it, as far as we're concerned, but if the man's connected with the school, it's most likely through some relative there."

"It might be," assented Tom. "I say, I suppose it's no use mentioning this meeting to Mr. Skeat? He would only think we were drawing the long bow again. Let it rest."

And the chums of the Shell walked back to the school in a very thoughtful frame of mind. Quite unexpectedly they had met the man of the moor a second time, and they wondered whether they were destined to see anything more of him, little dreaming of the strange events that were to happen that Christmastide.

CHAPTER 7.
The Man Who Fled!



"BEAUMONT!"

Tom Merry almost jumped. It was two or three days later, and the eve of break-up at St. Jim's. The Christmas holidays were the one topic in the school now. The man of the moor had quite passed from the minds of the chums of the Shell, and they had ceased to think about the strange affair at all, but the name of Beaumont, uttered in his hearing, startled Tom Merry and brought back the curious episode to his mind.

It was Cardew of the Fourth who spoke. Cardew was chatting with his study-mates, Levison and Clive, in the Fourth Form passage, when Tom Merry came along, and that name on Cardew's lips struck his ears. The captain of the Shell stopped at once.

"What name did you say, Cardew?" he exclaimed.

Cardew looked at him.

It was so unlike Tom Merry to be curious about the affairs of others, that his sudden question caused Levison & Co. to stare. Tom coloured.

"Excuse me!" he said. "You see, I thought I heard you speak the name of Beaumont—"

"I did," said Cardew.

"I've lately come across that name," said Tom, "and I've wondered whether any St. Jim's chap had a relation of the name. That's why I spoke—of course, I'm not asking you



Miss Priscilla Fawcett was bidding her seventh affectionate farewell to Tom Merry when the guard gently, but firmly, saved her life by extracting her from the carriage doorway. (See chapter 10.)

anything about your affairs. The name struck me all of a sudden as I heard it, that's all."

Ralph Reckness Cardew laughed.

"Nothin' private about it," he said. "I was speakin' of a legal johnny named Beaumont—no relation of mine. I don't think the Cardews have any giddy relatives in the purlieus of Lincoln's Inn Fields or Chancery Lane."

"Oh! A lawyer?" said Tom.

"A giddy solicitor, who has let me down!" said Cardew. "Horrid proceedin' on the part of a legal johnny; but there it is! I was tellin' these chaps to evoke their sympathy; and I'll tell you, if you like—I'm keen on sympathy in my misfortunes. What would you do if a legal johnny forgot to send on a tenner from your kind uncle, and left you expectin' it in vain?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"Too bad, just at Christmas-time," he said. "Has it happened, or are you only gammoning, as usual?"

"Solid fact!" said Cardew. "Listen, an' I will a tale unfold, as Shakespeare said, and as a peacock might have said. You've heard of my Uncle Lilburn—sportin' old johnny—not so very old, either, but looks fairly well-worn, owin' to his jolly sportin' life. I fancy he must have had some luck on the steeple-chasin'—don't look shocked, Clive; how's a fellow to prevent his uncle backin' horses?"

"Fathead!" said Clive.

"I fancy his horse must have got home, for once—generally his gee numbers about tenth or eleventh. Anyhow, he decided to send me a tenner for the Christmas holidays. He doesn't often squeeze out tenners, or even fivers, and I fancy he expected a letter of warm thanks, not to say tearful gratitude, which he didn't get, the reason bein' that I never got the tenner, and so couldn't wedge in with a grateful letter! Of course, I'd write a letter, grateful or ungrateful as required, for a tenner any day. But I never knew there was a tenner till Lord Lilburn wrote and asked me if I'd got it, and whether I thought it worth the trouble of acknowledgin'. Sarc, you know!"

Cardew sighed.

(Continued on page 16.)



Edited by TOM MERRY.



A BRIGHT Merry Christmas to you all, my chums! May you have the time of your lives, and enjoy your merry capers to the full!

Perhaps you think me a trifle premature. Well, better to be early than late with Christmas greetings, or, as Baggy Trimble calls them, the "condiments" of the season! This is our Christmas Number, and the festive day is still some way ahead; but we naturally wished to get our Christmas Number completed before breaking up for the vacation.

Monty Lowther suggests that we ought to publish our Christmas Number on Mid-summer Day, because the English climate is far more "Christmassy" then! What an insult to the Clerk of the Weather! It is true that of late years Christmas has been mild and muggy. The old-fashioned traditional Christmas, with its blinding snowstorms and bitter frosts, seems to have vanished. Perhaps we shall get a revival of it this year, but it's never safe to prophesy. You never know what the Clerk of the Weather has got up his sleeve. The old rascal may be planning a heat wave!

But who cares a straw about the weather? Christmas is Christmas, whether the rain pelts down by the bucketful or the jolly old sun shines gloriously. You may take it from me that the St. Jim's fellows will enjoy yourselves up to the hilt, whatever the out-of-door conditions may be like.

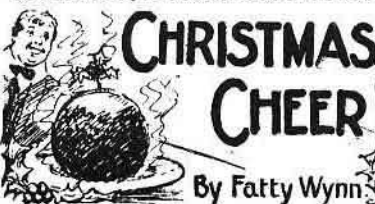
The Christmas spirit is already in the air at St. Jim's. And what a magical effect this Christmas spirit has, to be sure! It seems to transform crusty folk into cheery folk, and killjoys into merry-makers. Even Mr. Ratcliff, the usually sour and ill-tempered Housemaster, has actually been seen to smile recently! Manners managed to "snap" this unique incident, and, although Mr. Ratcliff caught him in the act, he didn't "snap" back!

Then there is Taggles, the porter. As a rule, Taggles looks upon life with a jaundiced eye, and is perpetually scowling and growling. But now—possibly in expectation of some handsome "tips"—the weather-beaten countenance of the school porter is wreathed in smiles. Taggles welcomes the arrival of Christmas, for it means that he is left in peace for a brief spell, and can take his ease in his parlour, where the "young rips" cease from troubling and the jaspers are at rest!

When the chums of St. Jim's sit down to their Christmas dinner, they will not forget to think of the thousands and thousands of

loyal readers, far and near, who will also be celebrating Christmas in the true British style which Charles Dickens immortalised. And we will toast that great army of readers in ginger-wine, and send out cheery thought-waves, wishing you, one and all, a right jovous Christmas!

Tom Merry



CHRISTMAS-TIME is turkey time; Let its praise be told in rhyme. The fatted turkey has been slain To grace the festive board again. See him steaming on the dish, The finest turkey you could wish! Tasty bird, with tender hide, Lots of stuffing crammed inside. Every boy will be a grinner When he sees his Christmas dinner!

Christmas-time is pudding-time; Plump plum-puddings are sublime! Here's a beauty, fine and big, Crown it with a holly sprig, Eager nephews, happy nieces, Carefully dissect their pieces. Silver coins may lurk within To make the treasure-hunters grin. Gobbling gaily, our delight is, Fearing not appendicitis!

Christmas-time is feeding-time; Tarts are topping, pies are prime. There are mountains of supplies, Sweet and succulent mince-pies, Christmas cakes, with coats of ice— It's a gorgers' paradise! Lots of tasty, tempting things Fit for schoolboys—and for kings! Older folks are supercilious, Saying we shall all be bilious!

Christmas-time is concert time; Welcome pierrot, clown, and mime! Welcome, all ye merry throng, Charming us with dance and song! Moving us to mirth and laughter, Fairly shaking every rafter! "A merry heart goes all the day," And Christmas charms all care away. On with the merry dance or ball! A bumper Christmas, one and all!



Taken at Random from the Editor's Postbag.

From HARRY WHARTON, of Greyfriars: "A Merry, Merry Christmas, Merry! All my pals join me in wishing you, and all the St. Jim's fellows, a right royal time. Tell Fatty Wynn to go steady with the plum-pudding on Christmas Day. If he swallows too many threepenny-pieces he will have a silver-mine inside him, and some enterprising surgeon will want to prospect it! And tell Baggy Trimble to call a halt when he's had twelve helpings of turkey. A thirteenth helping is unlucky; it means a bilious attack! Good luck to all of you throughout the festive season!"

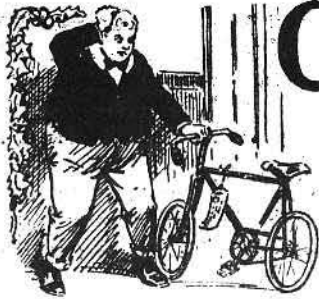
From JIMMY SILVER, of Rookwood: "The season's greetings, old top, and may you have the jolliest Christmas ever! Tell the members of your footer eleven not to exceed the feed limit on Christmas Day. Remember, we're coming over to Eastwood House to play you a match on Boxing Day, and you'll need to be fighting fit. Pass the season's greetings on to Gussy. We wish him a weally wippin' time, bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

From BILLY BUNTER, of Greyfriars: "My Dear Old Pal,—Just a few lines to wish you the condiments of the season—many happy returns of Christmas Day, and all that sort of thing, you know. If you have not yet decided where to spend the vack, will you come along to Bunter Court, and bring as many pals as you like? The more the merrier! We've got akomodation for at least a hundred gests, and I can prommis you a really topping time, with plenty of grubb, dances, wireless conserts, and other kinds of bankwetts. Let me know when you are coming, and how many you are bringing, and I will send a cupple of my pater's limmosines to St. Jim's to fetch you along. You will come as paying gests, of corse; but my pater isn't a propheteer. Five ginnies per day per fellow is all that he charges. And that's jolly reasonable in these hard times. Hopping to hear from you by return.—Your old pal, BILLY BUNTER."

(Yes, I'll make you hop, you fat duffer, when I get hold of you! Of all the colossal check, your letter fairly takes the bun!—Ed.)

From THE EDITOR OF THE "GEM" LIBRARY, etc.:

"Merry, St. James's College, Rylcombe.—Hearty Christmas greetings from self and staff to you and all at St. Jim's! May you thoroughly enjoy your well-earned vacation."



CHRISTMAS PRESENTS!

By Ralph Reckness Cardew.

THE jolly old festival of Yuletide is looming very close, and already, on the eve of breaking-up day, Christmas presents of all sorts and shapes and sizes are arriving for the St. Jim's fellows. The ancient postman, staggering like a beast of burden beneath a bulging sack, is crossing the quadrangle as I write. Down at the school gates a carrier's van has just drawn up, and Taggles the porter is busy unshipping parcels and packing-cases.

Far be it from me to decry the time-honoured custom of giving presents at this time of the year. But I do wish our paters and uncles and aunts would show a little more discrimination in the choosing of suitable gifts for their sons and nephews. Better still, I think it would be a jolly good plan if the aforesaid sons and nephews were allowed to choose their own presents. It would save a lot of misunderstanding and disappointment.

A few weeks before Christmas, every fellow should receive a printed form, to be filled in and posted to his people. Something in this style would fill the bill:

"My Dear Pater,
Mater,
Uncle,
Aunt,

It will be Christmas-time in another month, week, day, and you will hour,

doubtless be trotting round to the big stores to buy Christmas presents. May I assist you with your selection? I shall be

requiring a motor-car, aeroplane, steam yacht, motor-cycle and sidecar, gramophone, bicycle.

knitted muffler.
chest protector.
hot-water bottle.
rag doll.
humming-top.
set of marbles.
box of tin soldiers.

needing a This letter should greatly assist you in the task of choosing a suitable present.

I remain,
Your affectionate son,
adoring boy,
loving nephew,
sincere young hopeful,
TOM.
DICK.
HARRY."

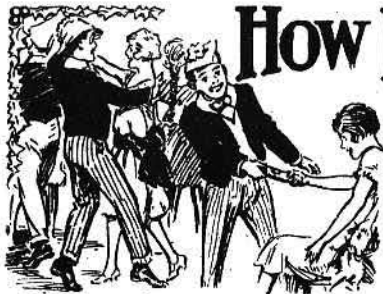
Strike out words not required.

Do you twig the bright idea? Such a plan would, as I say, save no end of disappointment and disillusion. A fellow would receive just the sort of presents he required, and there would be no heartburnings.

Last Christmas, a well-meaning old aunt of mine sent me a child's scooter. She has never been able to realise, the dear old soul, that I am no longer a puny infant in knickerbockers. Now that I have reached man's estate—well, nearly!—I do not need such a kindergarten toy as a scooter. Of course, I thanked my aunt profusely for it, and pretended it was very acceptable; but I was obliged to give it away to Manners' minor, of the Third. It would have been beneath my dignity, begad, to race around the St. Jim's corridors on a scooter.

The little scheme I have already outlined would also put an end to the absurd duplication of presents. I received three books last year, from three different sources. Opening the first parcel, I saw that it was a book called "Treasure Island," by Robert Louis Stevenson. Opening parcel number two, I saw that it was a book by Robert Louis Stevenson, called "Treasure Island." Opening the third parcel, I found it was the same book, by the same author. And I already had six copies of "Treasure Island" on my study bookshelf!

I commend my bright and brainy scheme to the noble army of paters, maters, uncles, and aunts, and I hope they will adopt it next Christmas, if it is too late to do so this year.



HOW I SHALL SPEND CHRISTMAS!

Plans and Programmes for the Festive Season.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY:

"I shall spend Christmas, dear boys, in twuly wuwul mannah at my patah's cuntwy seat. Feastin' by day an' dancin' by night will be the pwopah capah. But, of course, I shall be careful not to gorge to excess, because I shall be playin' in a footah match on Boxin' Day. I am takin' a party of twiends to Eastwood House with me, an' I shall be vewy busy assistin' my patah to entahtain them. I have already pucked my special Christmas wardwobe, which will consist of three dress-wuits, three lounge ditto, a dozen fancy waist-coats of divahs hues, scores of socks an' neckties, an' a large numbah of shinin' silk toppahs. I always believe in bein' well-dressed for the festive occasion. I should not dream of sittin' down to my Chwistmas dinnah lookin' like a twamp. No, wathah not!"

BAGGY TRIMBLE:

"I haven't quite decided yet weather to spend Christmas at Trimble Hall, my pater's country seat; Trimble Towers, my pater's town seat; Trimble Manor, my pater's seaside seat; or to board my pater's luggussurious houseboat, which is moored in the Thames at Wapping. It is a queschun which will require thinkin' out. Perhaps, after all, I shall give my relations a miss, and go and keep my pal Gussy company at Eastwood

House. He confided to me the other day that his Christmas party would be a wash-out without me. You see, I'm the life and sole of any Christmas party, and my sossiety is in great demand all over the country. I have written to ask my pater what size his Christmas pooding will be, and I am gettin' the same information from the cook at Eastwood House. I shall natchurally go to the place where they serve up the biggest pooding!

FATTY WYNN:

"I am not quite sure yet where I shall spend Christmas. Possibly I shall pay a visit to my Aunt Bertha in the mountain district of my native Wales. Aunt Bertha invited me last year, but I didn't go because of a little mistake in the telegram she sent me. It was worded as follows:

"'Shall be delighted to have you here for Christmas. There will be plenty of fasting.—AUNT BERTHA.'

'Great Scott!' I ejaculated, on reading that telegram. 'My aunt seems to have got Christmas mixed up with Lent! Fasting, indeed! I'm dashed if I'm going to spend Christmas at a place where there's no turkey, no plum-pudding, no mince-pies, no good cheer of any sort!' And I didn't go. I discovered later that the post-office girl

had made a mistake in transcribing the wire, which should have read: 'There will be plenty of feasting.' The omission of one little letter can make a tremendous difference sometimes."

HERBERT SKIMPOLE:

"I shall probably spend Christmas in prison. Don't be shocked, dear readers! I have not transgressed against the law in any way. But I have taken up the study of criminology, and one of my uncles, who is a prison governor, has invited me to spend the vacation with him, so that I may have an opportunity of studying prison life and conditions. That sarcastic fellow Lowther says that I ought to spend Christmas in a lunatic asylum. 'If you did,' he observes, 'they would be certain to keep you there—as an inmate!' Now, I call that a deadly insult, and if only my biceps were a little more strongly developed I should send Lowther away on breaking-up day with a black eye!"

EPHRAIM TAGGLES:

"The Editor of the 'St. Jim's News' wants to know 'ow I shall spend the restive season, as he calls it. I shall spend it in me little parlour, puffin' the pipe of peace. Mrs. Taggles will be a-sittin' at my side, free from the worritin' routine of the school tuckshop. We're an 'ard-workin' pair, as ever was, an' we thoroughly deserves a respit from our labours. If the young gents of St. Jim's is liberal with their Christmas boxes, we shall 'ope to invest in a choice turkey for our Christmas dinner. Mrs. Taggles 'as already made the plum-pudding; an' she says, givin' a meamin' glance at me, that she 'opes the mice won't get at it before Christmas Day! Fancy callin' 'er 'usband a mouse! If it wasn't for the fact that it's Christmas-time, I should be inclined to quarrel with 'er. Well, I 'ope we shall 'ave a seasonable Christmas, with plenty of snow on the ground, like it was when Good King Wench's Lass looked out; an' I 'ope the young gents of St. Jim's will enjoy themselves to their 'earts' content!"

Supplement II.

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(Continued from page 13.)

"Sheer sare! I wrote then and mentioned the triflin' detail that I hadn't had any tenner, but was open to receive same by the next post, with due thanks."

"And then?" said Levison.

"Then the band played!" said Cardew. "Next letter from Uncle Lilburn, he tells me that he was callin' on his solicitor, Mr. Beaumont, the day he decided to send me the tenner, and it was from that jolly old legal luminary I should have received it. You see, Uncle Lilburn's legal bizney is—or was—done for him by this solicitor, Beaumont. Now he's done Uncle Lilburn's nephew instead—poor little me!"

"What rot!" said Levison. "Solicitors bolt with their clients' funds sometimes, but not for a tenner."

"I think my poor little sprat went along with somebody else's whale," said Cardew, laughing; "or perhaps in the pressin' haste of makin' his arrangements to bolt, Beaumont forgot all about it. It's quite possible. You see, a tenner to him mightn't be so much as it is to a chap in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's."

Tom Merry listened attentively.

The name of Beaumont had struck him; it was not a common name. He remembered that the man of the moor had mentioned being in Beaumont's office, when he had seen a letter addressed to St. Jim's, and so was appraised of Beaumont's connection with the school. A solicitor, naturally, would have an office; and if Beaumont was Lord Lilburn's solicitor, that would supply the connection with St. Jim's, which the man of the moor had not been able to fathom.

It was borne in upon Tom's mind that the fugitive he had encountered on Wayland Moor was, in fact, the man of whom Cardew was speaking; and he listened to the dandy of the Fourth with more attention than he was accustomed to bestow on Cardew's whimsical talk.

"Uncle Lilburn was quite knocked to hear that I hadn't had the tenner," went on Cardew. "His man, Beaumont, was generally very attentive to business—a bit of a cringer, in fact, and ready to kowtow to any extent to the jolly old nobility. In fact, he was after business with my grandfather, old Lord Reckness; but granddad never would have anythin' to do with the man; and I remember hearin' once that he advised Uncle Lilburn to chuck him. Keen old gent, my grandfather! But my belief is that Beaumont used to act as go-between when Uncle Lilburn raised money to pay for his fireworks on the races, and was too useful to be chucked. I'm shockin' you again, poor old Clivey! Didn't you know that the nobility an' gentry go to the money-lenders when they're landed in Stony Street?"

"Ass!"

"Thanks!"

"Get on with it!" said Levison of the Fourth. "I dare say you're pulling our leg all the time."

"Honest-Injun!" said Cardew. "Well, Lord Lilburn hiked round to see Mr. Beaumont, an' most likely was goin' to say some nasty things to him—my Uncle Lilburn has an edge to his tongue when he's cross. But the man was gone. Gone a couple of days when his lordship dropped in, and found an astonished clerk in charge, who didn't know anythin' about Mr. Beaumont's movements, exceptin' that he had been burnin' papers galore in the stove in his office for days on end, and had failed to turn up one mornin', and never sent word since. Looks like a bolt—what?"

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry.

"I fancy Uncle Lilburn must have had a little money in Beaumont's hands, for he went off to the man's private house to inquire after him. House closed up, servants gone. No trace of Beaumont. Just vanished into thin air—if a solicitor can vanish into thin air. But that's not the tragic part of the story," added Cardew.

"Is there a tragic part?"

"Yes—awfully! Uncle Lilburn wrote and told me about this, but never seems to have thought of puttin' another tenner into his letter."

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"But what's the tragedy?"

"That's it. I lose the tenner."

"Ass!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, it's a bit tragic, at Christmas-time, when tenners, and fivers, and even the humble pound-notes, come in jolly useful. My tenner has gone from my gaze like a beautiful dream!" said Cardew. "I daresay Beaumont used it towards his fare to Buenos Ayres, or wherever it is that solicitors go to when they bolt."

Cardew eyed Tom Merry curiously.

"Now I've told you the tale, it's your turn," he said. "You don't happen to have come across Beaumont, I suppose, by any weird chance?"

"I don't know," said Tom honestly. "Have you ever seen the man, Cardew?"

"Several times."

"Is he slight, and thin, with very sharp eyes, a bit like a rat's?"

Cardew laughed.

"That's the johnny. You've seen him."

"Has he ever written to St. Jim's? I've a reason for asking."

"Lots 'o' times. Whenever my Uncle Lilburn sent me a tip, it generally came through his solicitor; he would simply tell Beaumont to do it—saved him trouble. He's as lazy as his nephew," said Cardew. "Only it was always sent through the headmaster. That's one of our rules, you know, though it isn't always kept—more honoured in the breach than the observance, in fact. But Uncle Lilburn kept to the rule. Possibly he didn't always believe that I wanted a new cricket-bat or a new tennis outfit when I gave him a gentle hint on the subject, and felt that the money would be safer passin' through the Head's hands. It's a distrustful world!"

It was all clear to Tom Merry now.

The addressed letter the man in black had chanced to see in Beaumont's office had evidently been written on account of his communication with Dr. Holmes at St. Jim's with reference to Cardew. It was not, as the man in black supposed, the fact that Beaumont had a relative at St. Jim's, though that was a natural supposition in the circumstances.

"Now go ahead," said Cardew. "So far as I know, there's no fuss about Beaumont goin'. I mean, the police aren't interested in the matter. Uncle Lilburn isn't the man to stir up a scandal over a few hundreds he may have lost; and Beaumont's other clients don't seem to be kickin', so far as I know. The man seems to have had private reasons for boltin'—and very likely it was just absent-mindedness that made him take my tenner with him! But if you can give me his address, I'll call on him and ask for it."

"I can't do that," said Tom. "But I've certainly seen the man. Manners and Lowther have seen him, too. It must be the same man, from what you've told me. We haven't talked about the matter in the school, it is such a queer story; but I'll tell you, of course, now."

And Tom Merry related the episode of the strange meeting on the moor.

Cardew whistled when he had heard it.

"That's the man," he said. "By gad, that's how he disappeared so completely, then—he bunked in a caravan! What a wheeze! Anybody askin' questions at railway-stations and garages wouldn't get much satisfaction. But who the thump can that johnny be who's after him?"

"Some client that he's rooked," said Levison.

"Rather an unusual way of gettin' his own back—goin' after the man with a gun!" chuckled Cardew. "Some chap who's been through the war, I fancy, an' got used to guns. Some fellows have all the luck; I'd have liked to be on in that scene. And he's still hangin' about St. Jim's—what?"

"He was, the other day," said Tom. "He's got it into his head that Beaumont is connected with the school in some way."

"I could have told him how it was if he'd asked me instead of you," said Cardew, with a laugh. "Oh, gad! Fancy old Beaumont bunkin' in a caravan in December, with a johnny with a gun after him thirstin' for gore! But that caravan is no end of a wheeze. I shall remember that if I ever become a defaultin' absconder!"

Tom Merry went to his study, where Manners and Lowther learned what he had learned from Cardew of the Fourth. Quite unexpectedly, the Terrible Three had come to know more of the mysterious Beaumont, though the reason for his flight and for the fierce pursuit of the man in black remained still unknown to them.

"It's jolly odd!" Manners remarked. "It looks as if Beaumont's rooked the man, who could call in the police if he liked, but chooses to take the law into his own hands. That would make it clear why Beaumont doesn't apply to the police for protection, as an honest man would. He may have dished the chap out of a large sum—all he had, perhaps. People trust solicitors with their money, and a

bad egg may do a lot of mischief. Still, that's no excuse for the man going after him with a gun."

Tom shook his head.

"No; and we can only hope that he won't find him. If the man of the moor goes on haunting us, to trace Beaumont through us, that will keep him pretty wide of Beaumont's track—as we are never likely to see the fellow again."

Lowther chuckled.

"We'll jolly well pull his leg, if we find him hanging about again!" he said.

But in their walks abroad, during the short remainder of the term, the Terrible Three saw nothing of the rugged-featured man in black; and again he had passed from their thoughts by the time St. Jim's broke up for Christmas.

CHAPTER 8.

Shadowed!



REMEMBAH, you fellows—"

"You bet!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "All three of you for Christmas, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, standing in his usual graceful attitude at the door of the railway-carriage at Wayland Junction.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Monty Lowther, with a playful imitation of Arthur

Augustus' noble accent.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Now, then, Gussy!" bawled Jack Blake, from amid the mob of St. Jim's fellows crowding the Wayland Station. "Buck up! The other platform for us!"

"Yaas, deah boy! Good-bye, Tom Mewwy! Good-bye, Lowthah— Oh, bai Jove!"

A tall, powerfully-built man, in a dark raincoat brushed past the swell of St. Jim's, and stepped into the carriage.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turned his celebrated eyeglass on the man with a withering stare. That withering stare, however, was quite lost on the passenger, who sat down in the farthest corner, and buried his face in a newspaper. He did not glance at any of the juniors.

"Train's going, Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "Good-bye, old man! Rely on us for Christmas."

"Stand back, please!" shouted a porter.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped back, and the door slammed, and the train moved out of the station.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther looked from the window, and waved their hands to D'Arcy, and Blake, and Talbot of the Shell, and other fellows in the crowd on the platform. Then, as the train rushed on down the line, Wayland Junction and the swarm of St. Jim's fellows disappeared from sight, and the chums of the Shell sat down in their seats.

There were a good many other St. Jim's fellows on the train; but as it happened, the Terrible Three had the carriage to themselves, excepting for the brusque passenger who had shoved in at the last moment.

That passenger was sitting in the far corner, hidden by the "Daily Mail" he had unfolded, and the juniors took no special heed of him. They had not looked at him as he hurried in, and it did not occur to them that they knew the man or that he knew anything of them.

"Well, we're off," said Tom Merry. "Can't say I'm sorry to get to the end of the term—what?"

"Not exactly," said Manners. "We've had a jolly term; but Christmas hols. beat the best of terms!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

"You fellows will find it a bit quiet at Laurel Villa," said Tom. "My old governess isn't in the best of health; but I'm bound to give her a few days—and I want to, of course. There will be no end of doings at Eastwood House, when we go on to see D'Arcy, to make up for it."

"You won't find it exactly gay at Holly Lodge, when you come on with me," said Lowther. "But old Gussy always does things in style, and we'll paint Eastwood House red when we get there."

"We'll do some pantomimes when we join my people in town after Christmas," said Manners. "Talbot will be there, too. By the way, we may see something of Levison when we go down to your place, Monty. Levison and Clive are putting in part of the vac with Cardew at a place somewhere near Holly Lodge, so Levison told me."

Monty Lowther did not answer. His glance had turned on the passenger in the corner, who had lowered the newspaper and was looking over the top of it at the juniors.

"Oh, my hat!" said Lowther. "Fancy meeting you, sir!" The man put the newspaper down on his knees. It was the man of the moor.

"So you are off for the Christmas holidays," he said.

"That's it," said Tom Merry, looking at the man. "Jolly queer that you should get into the same train!"

"Yes, isn't it?"

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. The meeting had surprised them for the moment; but they realised at once that the man was dogging them. They smiled as they realised it. Evidently he had totally lost the track of the fugitive in the caravan, and hoped to pick up Beaumont's traces again by shadowing the chums of the Shell.

Monty Lowther closed one eye at his comrades.

"Take care what you say, you fellows," he said. "There's a child among us taking notes."

Tom and Manners laughed.

They had no special desire to put the man's mistake right; the more obstinately he followed a wrong track, the less likely he was to get on the right one. Little as they liked

or esteemed the absconding solicitor, Beaumont, they were very willing to do all they could to keep the lawless pursuer from discovering him. Whatever Beaumont's offences, it was for the law to deal with him.

"Is your uncle likely to meet us at the station, Tom?" went on Lowther.

"My uncle!" repeated Tom, in surprise. He was about to add that his uncle was in India, when he caught Lowther's wink. "Oh, no; not at the station!" he said.

"That's good!" said Lowther.

A gleam came into the eyes of the passenger in the corner seat. But he said no word; and resumed the perusal of his paper.

Tom Merry & Co. chatted cheerily as the train ran on. There was a light fall of snow, and the country-side gleamed white under the steely December sky.

"We stop here," said Tom, at last, as the train drew up in a little Hampshire station.

The juniors alighted; and they were quite prepared for the shadower to alight also. As they walked down the platform they glanced back, and saw him behind them.

"The dear man caught on!" grinned Lowther. "I fancy he must have guessed from what I said, Tom, that jolly old Beaumont is an uncle of yours."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I fancy so," he said. "Serve him jolly well right to pull his leg for having the cheek to shadow us like this."

"I wonder where that Johnny Beaumont is all the time?" grinned Manners.

"Nowhere in this county, most likely."

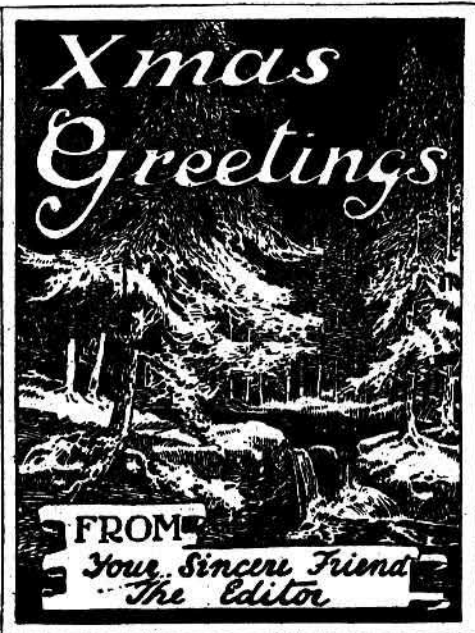
"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was something entertaining to the juniors in the curious mistake under which the man in black was labouring.

Leaving their bags to be sent on, the Terrible Three left the station to walk to Laurel Villa, the home of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess and guardian.

They were not surprised to see the man in the dark raincoat emerge from the station after them and follow in the same direction. In fact, they would have been surprised if they had not seen him.

Obviously he had watched for the juniors in the crowd of schoolboys when St. Jim's broke up, and was following them in the unfounded hope of getting into touch with the elusive Beaumont by their means. They were quite willing to give him his head, so to speak. The missing solicitor was not likely to be anywhere near Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, Hampshire.



The juniors arrived in the December dusk. As they walked up the path to the house the man in black stopped at the gate. He looked after them, looked steadily at the house, and then walked away and disappeared into the shadows.

"He knows where to find us now," grinned Lowther. "He's going to haunt us here, same as he did at St. Jim's! What a jolly old jest to keep him busy over Christmas."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, here we are again," said Tom Merry as the door opened.

"My darling Tommy!"

And the captain of the St. Jim's Shell was enfolded in the affectionate embrace of Miss Priscilla.

CHAPTER 9.

The Face at the Window!

DURING the next two or three days Tom Merry & Co. kept a wary eye open for the man of the moor.

They fully expected to find him hanging about the vicinity of Laurel Villa, but, rather to their surprise, he did not put in an appearance.

He had shadowed the schoolboys to Tom Merry's home, obviously hoping thus to get on the trail of the missing solicitor, Beaumont. But nothing more was seen of him there.

Tom Merry wondered whether he had discovered his mistake. A little local inquiry certainly would have informed him that there was no one of the name of Beaumont at Laurel Villa, or visiting there. Whether he had been undecieved or not, he seemed to be gone, and Tom Merry, on the whole, was rather glad of it, though assuredly he hoped that the man had not discovered the real track of Beaumont. Monty Lowther was a little disappointed. The playful Monty had looked forward to obtaining a little harmless and necessary amusement by pulling the shadower's leg. Still, there were plenty of other entertainments in the holidays, and the chums of St. Jim's did not exactly miss the strange man who had followed them from the school.

The holiday days passed quickly enough. On the evening before the date of the Shell fellows' departure for Lowther's home, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came over from Eastwood House in a big car, with Blake and Herries and Digby and cousin Ethel, and Doris Levison, who was staying with Ethel for Christmas. And Arthur Augustus had an item of news for Tom Merry & Co., which he told them over tea.

"I've seen that wude boundah again," he said.

"Eh! Which?" asked Tom.

"You wemembah the day we bwoke up at St. Jim's I saw you fellows off at Wayland Junction, and a big chap shoved past me vewy wuffly to get into your cawwiage—"

"Oh!"

The Terrible Three were interested at once.

"You've seen that chap?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! I knew him at once, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "We passed him in the cah about a mile fwom heah. I gave him a cwushin' look. He had the cheek to stare at me."

"What a neck!" said Lowther gravely.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly.

"But I gave him a vewy cwushin' look."

"What happened to him?" asked Lowther.

"Eh?"

"Did he fall in a faint?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You don't mean to say he survived it?" asked Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

Tom Merry looked very thoughtful. Apparently the man in black had not vanished, after all, though he was keeping away from the immediate vicinity of Laurel Villa.

"I am suah he felt vewy put down when I looked at him," said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "He stared at me, and I gave him as cwushin' a look as I could. You noticed him, Blake?"

"That fellow on the road that you made faces at?" asked Blake.

"Bai Jove! I did not make faces at him, Blake! I cwushed him with a look!"

"He had the cheek to stare at Gussy," said Blake. "Wondering, I suppose, what he was doing outside the Zoo!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"And Gussy made no end of a face at him," said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Like a gargoy!" testified Herries.

"Weally, Hewvies—"

"It seems that the man had the awful neck to shove past Gussy when he was in a hurry to get into the train at Wayland," said Blake. "Some fellows have no end of cheek! He ought to have lost his train rather than have run the slightest risk of rumpling Gussy's coat. So when Gussy saw him on the road he naturally made faces at him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I did not make faces at him!" almost shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Did I make faces at that boundah, Ethel?"

"You frowned at him!" said cousin Ethel, laughing.

"Quite a grim frown!" said Doris Levison.

"Yaas, wathah, I admit that I fwounded. I felt that it was the wight thing to set the boundah down," said Arthur Augustus. "In fact, I cwushed him with a look!"

"Gussy does these things sometimes, when he's on holiday," said Blake. "Exuberant spirits, you know. I thought he was going to put his fingers to his nose—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Luckily he stopped short of that," said Blake. "But he made no end of a face at the chap."

"I wufese to admit for a moment that I made a face at him!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wegard you as an ass, Blake. I considah—"

"Goodness gracious!" came Miss Priscilla's gentle voice from the head of the table. "Are you little ones arguing about something?"

"Little ones!" murmured Arthur Augustus, quite overcome. And the expression on Gussy's noble face was, as Blake remarked afterwards, worth a guinea a box.

It was a merry evening at Laurel Villa. The Terrible Three and the party from Eastwood House made the quiet old house ring with unusual merriment, and Miss Priscilla's kind old face beamed on them. Mr. Todd, the curate, came in, and two or three others of Miss Priscilla's neighbours. Manners presided at the piano, though he was sternly debarred from handing out anything of a classic nature, most of the party preferring ragtime.

Even Miss Priscilla joined in a dance, blushing and smiling as Arthur Augustus led her out with his courtliest grace. Then there were musical chairs, and the fun and merriment were going strong when all of a sudden there was a startled exclamation from Arthur Augustus.

"Bai Jove! That boundah again!"

"What?"

"Where?"

"Look—at the window!"

"Great Scott!"

A dozen pairs of eyes were turned on the window. Pressed against the frosty pane was a face, and two keen penetrating eyes were staring into the lighted room.

It was only for a moment that the face was visible.

As the startled eyes of the merry-makers turned on the window it vanished like a ghost.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"This is rather too thick!" he exclaimed. "Come on, some of you, and we'll jolly well collar him!"

Tom Merry rushed out at the nearest door. Snow was falling lightly, and the gardens gleamed white in the wintry stars. Manners and Lowther followed him, and two or three other fellows.

Under the window, where the face had been seen, there were tracks in the snow.

But the man was gone.

The tracks led away through frosty shrubberies, and Tom Merry and his friends followed them to a fence on the road. The snow had been brushed off the fence, showing that there the watcher had climbed over and made his escape.

"Not much good going after him, Tom," said Lowther, staring along the dark, snowy road.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No! But, by Jove, if he shows up here again we'll jolly well give him a lesson."



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"It's weally extwaordinawy, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "What could the man want heah, deah boys? Do you think he's a burglah?"
 "Oh, no!" said Tom. "Only a prying ass! Let's get in."
 And the juniors returned to the house.

CHAPTER 10.

A Shock for the Shadower!

TOM MERRY and Manners and Lowther left Laurel Villa the next morning, to proceed to Holly Lodge, where they were to put in a couple of days before going to Eastwood House.

Miss Priscilla came down to the station to see her darling Tommy safe in the train; and stood at the carriage door, to impress upon him to keep his feet on the foot-warmer all the way, and to be very, very careful not to get out of the train before it stopped.

She impressed these things, and others, upon her dear Tommy in a clear, distinct voice that was heard by quite a crowd of people, Manners and Lowther manfully repressing anything in the nature of a smile.

To Miss Priscilla, Tom Merry, captain of the Shell, and the champion junior footballer of St. Jim's, was still the darling little Tommy of earlier times, and she never felt quite safe in trusting him out of her sight. But Tom Merry received it all with cheery kindness and affection; he was too grateful for the dear old lady's unflinching kindness and affection, to care for a little awkwardness now and then, and he was quite indifferent to what others thought about it.

Miss Priscilla kissed him six times good-bye, though she was to see him again in a few days, when he was to take her to Eastwood House. She was taking a seventh affectionate farewell kiss when the guard gently but firmly saved her life by extracting her from the carriage doorway; and then she waved her handkerchief till the train was out of sight.

It was not till then that Manners and Lowther exchanged a grin; and Tom Merry, catching the grin, smiled cheerily. "Look out, Tom!" exclaimed Lowther suddenly, in a startled voice.

"Eh, why?"

"You've got your feet off the foot-warmer."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners.

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Tom, reddening.

"Hush!" said Lowther. "Don't shout, old man! Remember you're delicate."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Manners.

One of Miss Priscilla's most fixed beliefs was that Tommy was delicate; though, really, the captain of the Shell looked anything but that.

"Look here, you ass——" said Tom Merry warmly.

"Shall I shut the window?" asked Manners.

"No; leave it open."

"But what about the draught? If you should take a chill, my dear child——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're sure you've got flannel next to your skin, Tommy?" asked Lowther, with an air of great solicitude.

Tom Merry's reply was not in words.

He suddenly reached over, caught Manners and Lowther by a collar each, and brought their heads together with a resounding concussion.

"Crack!"

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

"Have some more?" asked Tom cheerily.

"You silly ass!" gasped Lowther, rubbing his head.

"You've jolly nearly fractured my skull, banging it against Manners' wooden head! Ow!"

"Wow!" gasped Manners. "You silly chump! I've a jolly good mind——"

"All because we're anxious about our darling Tommy's delicate health," said Lowther reproachfully. "Here, hold on, you silly ass! Chuck it! Pax!"

And peace was restored.

The train ran on through the snowy landscape, and at each station, when it stopped, Tom Merry & Co. glanced out at the passengers on the platforms. They were thinking of the man of the moor.

Since that startling glimpse of the face at the window, at Laurel Villa, they knew that the man in black was still shadowing them; and they had little doubt that they would be shadowed further.

Monty Lowther chuckled at the idea of the shadower following them on to Holly Lodge; but Tom Merry did not take the matter humorously now. It was, as he had said,

getting too "thick," and he was more than fed-up with the man of the moor. The thought of being shadowed through the Christmas holidays was irritating to him. And it was clear by this time that the man whose name even they did not know, intended to stick to their track, in the delusive hope of their leading him to the man he sought. It was a strange situation, and Tom Merry, for one, had had enough of it.

But the man was not seen during the journey. The thought came into Tom Merry's mind that perhaps he was in "another carriage of the same train. And when they alighted at the station for Holly Lodge, within sound of the roar of the wintry sea, the three juniors kept their eyes open for the man in black.

"There he is!" whispered Manners suddenly.

A tall, athletic figure was seen among the few passengers who had alighted at the little station. Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. It was the man of the moor, in a dark raincoat and a bowler hat. He did not glance at the juniors, but walked out of the station ahead of them. But when they came out a few minutes later, he was lounging in the street, smoking a cigarette and staring idly at the notices posted up outside.

"Here's the car," said Lowther. "Nunky's sent the car for us."

"Hold on a minute," said Tom. "I'm going to speak to that fellow."

He walked over to the man in the dark raincoat.

"You've followed us here!" he said abruptly.

The man looked down at him.

"Have you guessed this?" he asked.

"Look here, we're fed up with it," said Tom angrily.

"You've been shadowing us ever since we left school; you had the cheek to stare in at the window at my home and startle everybody——"

"Looking for your blessed Beaumont, I suppose?" said Manners.

"Exactly."

"You cheeky ass!"

The man frowned darkly.

"You had better go your way," he said. "I mean you no harm, as you know very well; but I am not a patient

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from previous page.)

man, and I do not take impertinence from schoolboys. You had better go."

"And you're keeping this up, are you?" asked Tom savagely. "We're going to my friend's home now, and I suppose you are going to follow us there?"

"Perhaps."

"How would you like the police to deal with you?"

The man laughed lightly.

"How can the police deal with me?" he said. "When I break the law, it will be a different matter. What can you tell me of that you met me one night on Wayland Moor, in Sussex, and that I had a revolver in my possession. That I have followed you here. The railways are free to all. Go to the police-station as soon as you choose."

Tom set his lips.

He knew, or, rather, felt, that the man was lawless and reckless; that he was pursuing the missing solicitor, Beaumont, with savage intentions—even to bloodshed. But there was no proof of it. There was nothing to tell, save the strange story he had already told to Inspector Skeat at Wayland, and which Mr. Skeat had disregarded. Had he regarded it, however, it was difficult to see what he could have done in the matter. Unless Beaumont chose to demand police protection, the law could not intervene. The intentions of the man in black, whatever they were, were known only to himself. Until he transgressed the law he could not be touched.

The man's rugged features had an ironical smile, as he looked at the St. Jim's junior.

"You can do nothing," he said lightly. "Go your way, my boy, and meddle as little as you can in affairs that do not concern you, and which may be dangerous for you."

"It is you who are the meddler!" snapped Tom Merry. "And I can tell you we are fed-up with your following and spying."

The man shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

Tom breathed hard.

"Hold on!" murmured Lowther. "I've got a wheeze! Let's send the bags on the car, and walk."

"That will only make it easier for that rotter to follow us to Holly Lodge!" grunted Tom Merry.

"We'll make him sorry he followed. It's a wheeze, old man! There's yards of snow along the lane."

Tom Merry's face broke into a grin.

"Good egg!" he said.

And the Holly Lodge chauffeur being directed to take the bags on board, the three juniors started to walk to the residence of James Lowther, M.P., J.P., the uncle of Monty of the Shell. Holly Lodge was about a mile from the station, and half-way to the house Monty called a halt. Looking back along the winding, snowy lane, they could see nothing of the man in black, but they were quite assured that he was following them. Still deluded by his belief that the chums of St. Jim's had some connection with the lawyer, Beaumont, he was relentless on the trail.

"This is where we wait for him," murmured Lowther.

He drew his comrades from the lane, into cover of a corner of an old wall. There they proceeded to knead snowballs till they had a stack of them ready.

Monty Lowther peered round the corner.

"He's coming!" he murmured.

"No mistake this time?" grinned Manners. "We don't want to bag the wrong man again."

"It's all right, fathhead!"

Heavy footsteps came tramping up the lane. The juniors waited breathlessly. They had been out of sight of the shadower when they had dodged into ambush, and they were sure of taking him by surprise.

The powerful form came into sight at last, passing the corner of the wall.

Whiz, whiz, whiz! Crash! Smash!

"Oh, great gad, what—"

Whiz! Smash! Crash!

Snowballs fairly rained on the man in black. He staggered in the snow, taken utterly by surprise by the sudden attack; his foot slipped, and he went down.

"Collar him!" shouted Tom Merry.

The three juniors rushed on the man as he sprawled in the snow.

"You young rascals! Grooogh!"

"Roll him into the ditch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Powerful as the man was, the three juniors were strong and sturdy, and they had him at a disadvantage. He struggled fiercely as they grasped him and rolled him across the lane through the snow. There was a ditch on the other side, crusted with thin ice. The heavy figure rolled on the ice, and it cracked instantly.

Crack! Splash!

"Grooogh!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 930.

Spluttering and gasping, the man crashed through the broken ice, and sprawled in a foot of mud and water. The ice broke round him into innumerable fragments as he struggled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's a tip to keep your distance, you rotter!" panted Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps! Let him sort himself out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell started again at a run, leaving the man of the moor struggling out of the muddy ditch.

They looked back at a distance, and saw the man, muddy, drenched, dripping, his hat gone, his rain-coat a muddy, limp rag, his face smothered and streaming with water. He stared after them, and shook an angry fist in the air, in reply to which Monty Lowther politely kissed his hand in farewell. Then the chums of the Shell trotted on cheerily to Holly Lodge.

CHAPTER 11.

Turning the Tables!

"YOU fellows will be a bit bored here—"

"Not a bit of it!"

"Bosh!"

"But I've a wheeze to liven things up," said Monty Lowther.

It was at breakfast the next morning at Holly Lodge. James Lowther, Esq., M.P., J.P., had already breakfasted at an earlier hour, and gone out to attend a meeting of the local magistrates. The three juniors had breakfasted to themselves, and they were in cheery spirits. But, except for the high spirits of the Terrible Three, there was not much in the way of jollity about Holly Lodge. Monty Lowther, who really was attached to his crusty uncle and guardian, felt that it was up to him to put in a few days of the vacation with Mr. Lowther; but he had been rather doubtful about asking his friends there. However, it was a rule of the Terrible Three that, wherever they went, they went together, and Tom Merry and Manners were not exacting.

Christmas festivities were not precisely in the line of the grave and serious Mr. Lowther. He had many local duties, being a conscientious magistrate, and chairman of an infinite number of local bodies, and when his duties did not call him forth, he was generally shut up in his study, perhaps busy preparing parliamentary eloquence for the next session of the House of Commons.

He was polite and kind to the juniors, but he could not, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be considered merry or bright. The Terrible Three were likely to see little of him, excepting at meals, while they remained at Holly Lodge, and there were no other guests. Fortunately, the chums of the Shell were accustomed to being sufficient unto themselves.

"Oh, you'll be bored all right!" said Lowther, as he cracked his third egg. "My uncle is no end of a good old sport, and worth his weight in gold, but I can't call him jolly. He gives them jolly serious stuff in the House of Commons, and when he isn't giving it to them, he's getting it ready to give 'em. But I've got a wheeze."

"You generally have," said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"This way with the coffee! What's the wheeze?"

"The man of the moor," said Lowther.

"I hope we've seen the last of him!"

"We haven't, by long chalks. He's on the trail like a giddy tiger, and a snow-balling won't stop him. Now, that outsider has been shadowing us ever since school broke up, and my idea is to turn the tables on him and shadow him."

"Eh?"

"That's the wheeze," said Lowther. "We'll spend all our time here out of doors—"

"That's not a bad idea," assented Tom. "Can't do better in fine frosty weather. Lots of skating to be had here, too."

"Never mind skating. We're going after the man of the moor," said Lowther. "He's been hunting us, and now we'll hunt him. It will be no end of a game. He's a hefty blighter, but we can handle him all together. We've done it once, and can do it again. He's hanging about the place somewhere, of course. We're going to understudy Chingachgook, and trail him down like giddy Red Indians. Every time we find him we'll bump him in the snow, and duck him if there's anything handy to duck him in. In the long run he will get fed-up."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Good egg!" he said. "I'm fed-up with the man's cheek. We'll give him all the trouble he wants till he clears off."

"I'm on!" assented Manners.

And after breakfast the Shell fellows put on their coats and left Holly Lodge for a long ramble.

They walked down to the village, and looked about them there, and called in at the inn; but the man in black was

not to be seen. After their experience of him at Laurel Villa, however, they felt sure that he was in the vicinity somewhere, and that he already knew where they were staying. Leaving the village, they walked along the seashore. It was a wild and desolate shore, fronted by cliffs worn into strange shapes by the waves, and a grey sea rolled in upon the sands with an incessant booming. Far out on the wide Channel the juniors could see the smoke of a steamer, rolling on the rough water, the only sign of life on a wild and choppy sea.

The Terrible Three sat down on a rock to rest, and to dispose of a bag of chestnuts Lowther had brought with him.

"No luck, so far," said Tom Merry with a grin. "I shouldn't wonder if the johnny has tumbled to it by this time that we don't know anything about his missing solicitor."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Talk of angels!" he said.

"My hat! There's the man!" ejaculated Manners.

At a distance from the juniors, close by the edge of the tumbling sea, half-hidden from them by intervening rocks that cropped out of the sand, was a tall figure, its back to them.

The man was staring seaward; they could see only his back, but there was no mistaking that powerful figure. It was the man they had met on Wayland Moor, the man who had flashed the light and the revolver in their faces that wild night near St. Jim's.

Tom Merry's brow darkened.

"So he's here, after all!" he said. "You were right, Monty. But what is it he's looking at?"

"That's the giddy Hermit's Rock," said Lowther. "You can wade to it at low tide; but the tide's in now. Some johnny who liked the fresh air built a bungalow on it once, but he gave it up—too jolly lonely for anybody but a jolly old misanthrope. They say a hermit lived on it once—must have had tastes like Robinson Crusoe!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet, and looked out towards the isle.

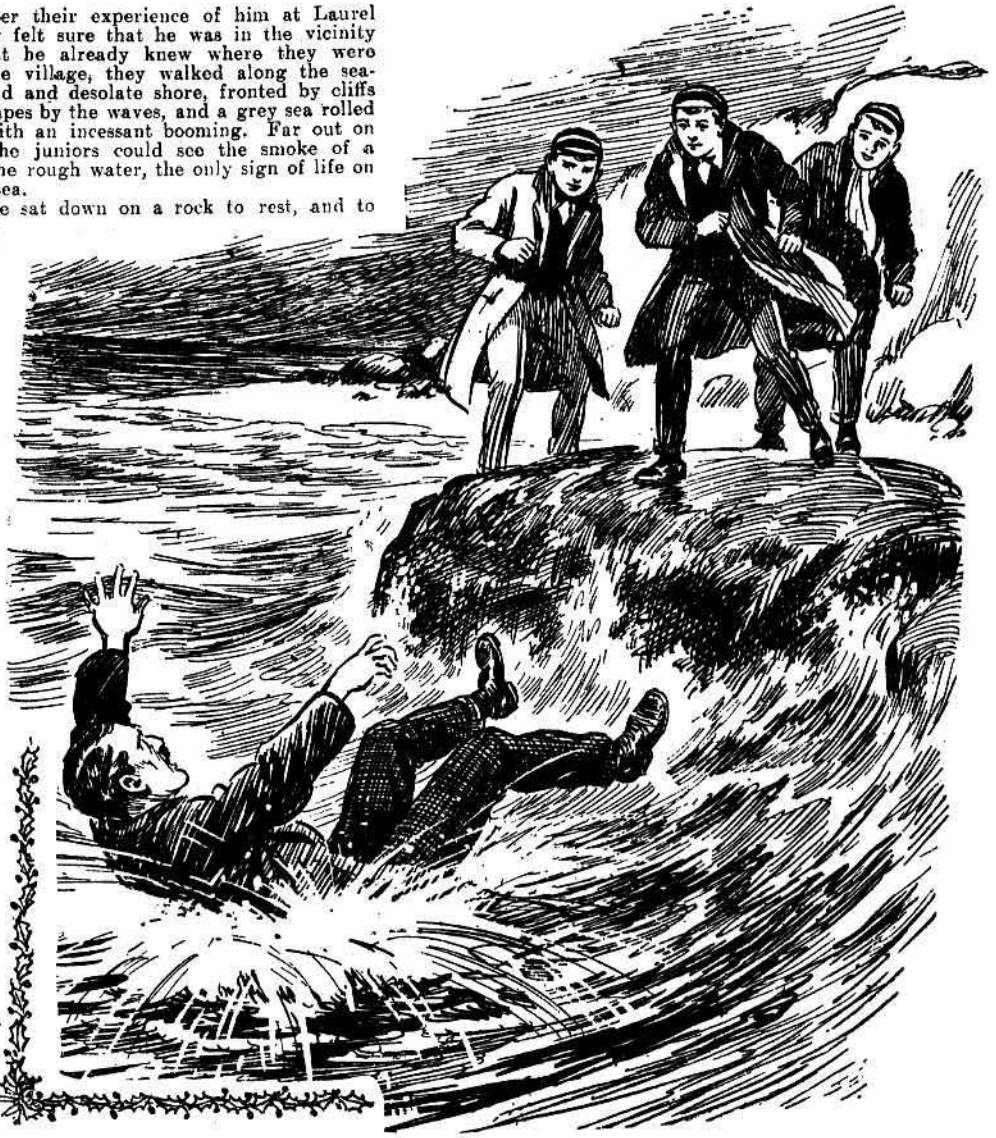
It was little more than a rock, jutting a few feet above the level of high water, and looked utterly barren; but he could discern a few scrubby, wind-torn trees that swayed, leafless, in the sea wind. The bungalow could not be seen from the shore. But now that Tom's attention was drawn to it, he could make out a thin drift of smoke from somewhere on the islet, which must have proceeded from a chimney.

"Is there anybody at the bung now, Lowther?" he asked.

"No; it's been deserted for years."

"Well, there's jolly well somebody on the rock," said Tom. "There's smoke, and the proverb says there's no smoke without a fire. Some tramp camping in the bung, perhaps."

"I suppose that that's what our merchant is staring at," said Manners. "Look here, we came out to look for him, and we've found him. This is where we give him the first lesson."



Crash! Tom Merry & Co. rushed right into their quarry, and he went spinning backwards. There was a terrific splash as he landed on his back in the sea. "Goal!" roared Monty Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 11.)

"Let's!" said Tom. The chestnuts were finished, and the man in black was still standing by the water's edge, staring seaward. The juniors picked their way among sand and shingle towards him.

He did not turn his head, evidently quite unaware of their presence.

As they came closer, they saw that he was standing on a shelf of rock, right on the edge of the water, with the waves breaking fairly at his feet, curling over his boots unheeded.

He could not have been placed more favourably for a ducking, and the juniors were quite determined. They had taken the man's shadowing as a jest at first, but they were more than fed-up with it now, and their intention was to make him fed-up, also.

"Now!" whispered Tom Merry. The whisper, or some scrape of a boot on the sand, caught the man's ear, and he turned quickly.

At the same moment the juniors rushed at him. Crash!

The three of them rushed right into him at the same moment, and he went spinning backwards.

There was a terrific splash, as he landed on his back in the sea.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Goal!" gasped Lowther.

A wave was rolling back from the shelf of rock; for an instant the man disappeared from view, and then the receding wave left him uncovered, sprawling, drenched, on the wet sand.

The three juniors of St. Jim's grinned down at him from the rock.

"Better get out of that before the sea comes back!" called out Tom Merry.

The man staggered up.

His rugged face was convulsed with anger.

He tramped over the wet sand to the rock where the juniors stood, as the incoming wave came roaring on behind him.

It overtook him, and drenched him again, as he grasped the rock to pull himself up on the flat surface. The water surged and bubbled round him, only his head and shoulders emerging from it. The wave receded again, leaving him drenched and dripping.

"Have another, old bean?" asked Monty Lowther affably.

"Lots more, if you want any," said Tom Merry, with a grim look. "We're fed-up with your shadowing, Mr. Nobody, and you've got to chuck it—see?"

"The sooner you chuck it, the dryer you'll be," said Manners. "We mean business, you know, and we're not standing on ceremony."

The man did not answer; he clambered up the rock, his face savagely set and his teeth clenched.

"Dear me! He looks quite angry!" smiled Monty Lowther. "Are you cross, my good man? Perhaps you'd better have another to improve your temper."

And Monty reached out with his boot, and gave the clambering man a hefty shove back.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The drenched man slipped back from the wet rock, and sprawled on the sand, just in time to catch another surge as it came rolling in from the Channel. He leaped up fur-

for Christmas, and we're not going to have you shadowing us there—catch on?"

"I—I—"

"We don't know anything about the man you were searching for," went on Tom. "We let you suppose so, just to pull your silly leg, because you had the cheek to follow us from school. If we did know anything about Beaumont we wouldn't tell you, and we'd take jolly good care to keep it dark. Now take yourself off, and let us alone; or you'll hit against worse trouble than this next time. Come on, you chaps!"

The Terrible Three released the man, and moved off. He sat up, panting for breath; and, powerful as he was, evidently too spent to renew the struggle. The rocks hid him from their sight as they walked back to the road, and they reached Holly Lodge in cheery spirits for lunch.

CHAPTER 12.

The Man in Hiding!



WHAT about the giddy Hermit's Isle?" asked Tom Merry, after lunch. "The tide's out by this time."

"Not a bad idea," said Manners. "We didn't visit it when we were down here for Easter. Let's."

"Nothing there but seagulls," said Monty Lowther. "But we may as well. We'll keep our eyes open for the jolly old shadower!"

It was a fine frosty afternoon, and the chums of the Shell started out in cheery spirits. They followed the road for a mile, and then turned into a path over the lonely, wind-swept cliffs. It was a solitary stretch of shore, and not a soul was to be seen as they tramped down from the cliffs to the wide ridges of sand where the water crisped and murmured.

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ously, with the water round his shoulders. The Terrible Three chuckled.

"Time we went," yawned Monty. "We shall be late for lunch if we waste any more time on him. Ta-ta, old bird!"

The man was clambering up again, as the chums of St. Jim's turned and walked away across the sand. His face was set with fury.

"Here endeth the first lesson!" chuckled Lowther. "I'm sure the chap will get fed-up, in the long run, if we keep up this game. Anyhow, we can keep it up as long as he does."

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Manners.

Tom Merry glanced back.

"It's not quite ended yet," he said. "He's after us."

"Let him come; we can handle him, if he wants any more!"

"You bet!"

The Terrible Three turned as the angry man came tramping across the sands in fierce pursuit. He rushed right on them savagely, and the three juniors collared him at once, and all four came down on the sands together with a crash.

The next few minutes were extremely lively.

Tom Merry & Co. were three to one, and they were sturdy fellows; but the man was powerful, and he gave them plenty of trouble. Indeed, it was evidently his belief that he could handle the three of them; but in that belief he over-estimated his powers a little. After three or four wild and whirling minutes, he lay on his back on the sand, panting and gasping, with Tom Merry kneeling on his chest, and Manners and Lowther holding his wrists. He lay and panted, and glared up at them furiously.

"Got him!" gasped Manners.

"Let go!" hissed the man in black. "You young scoundrels! By gad, I—I—I'll—"

He broke off, panting.

"Now, look here, my man," said Tom Merry quietly. "We've ducked you, because you jolly well asked for it. Every time we come on you in this neighbourhood again, we're jolly well going to give you some more of the same—see? We're fed-up with you. We're going to another place

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 930.

There was no sign to be seen of the man of the moor. If he were still in the neighbourhood he was no longer haunting the shore. But the juniors were thinking little of him now. Tom Merry and Manners were keenly interested in visiting the lonely rock out at sea, where, once upon a time, a hermit had dwelt in windy solitude, and Monty Lowther, who knew the place well, was quite pleased to play guide and cicerone to his chums.

The tide was out, and the long stretch of sand between the shore and the islet was uncovered. Deep pools of water lay here and there, and the rocks that cropped up from the sand were wet and slippery.

"Follow the man from Cook's," said Monty Lowther cheerily. "Mind where you tread, or you may take a header—some of these pools are jolly deep! You'll have to pick your way a bit carefully."

"Lead on, Macduff!" answered Tom Merry.

And he trod in Lowther's footsteps, and Manners followed on behind.

The islet, which was almost enclosed by the hollow curve of the shore, was not more than a hundred yards from the land. But they were a difficult hundred yards to traverse.

With great care the juniors picked their way over soft wet sand, among slippery rocks, and deep pools of sea-water, amid innumerable crabs and shell-fish that had been left by the tide.

They reached the rocky islet at last, and clambered up the steep rocks to terra firma.

"Here we are!" said Lowther, rather breathlessly. "Not much to see. There don't seem so many seagulls about as there used to be. There's the jolly old bung."

It was a little building of timber, with weather-board roofing; with heavy wooden shutters fastened over the windows. Doubtless in stormy weather those shutters were needed to save the windows. Round the building was an enclosed garden, with a crazy-looking fence; but the garden seemed to produce little but weeds. There were three or four hungry-looking stunted trees, and some evergreens in a sort of shrubbery; but evidently the garden had had no attention for years.

A thin column of smoke was rising from the chimney, and the juniors looked at it curiously. So far as Lowther knew, the place was untenanted, and had been untenanted for years, but evidently there was some sort of occupation now. The front door stood wide open.

"Somebody's here," said Tom Merry. "Must be a tramp who's chanced on the place and made himself at home."

"Must be, I should think," said Lowther, puzzled. "But this is rather out of the way of tramps. You see, the place can't be seen from the shore—and there are people only a mile away, who don't know that it's here. It's been for sale for years and never found a buyer—even in these days of house shortage. Must be some giddy tramp, I suppose; but it's jolly odd for a tramp to have dropped on it. Let's look in."

"Well, I suppose we needn't knock and ask permission, if it's a tramp in possession," said Tom.

"Ha, ha! No."

The juniors moved through the gateway: the gate lay beside it, evidently torn from its hinges in some gale long ago. They walked up the weedy, muddy path to the bungalow, and stepped inside. There was a narrow hall, or passage, upon which the door opened; on either side of the passage a room. That was all. One room was apparently a bed-room; the other was what an estate agent would have called a living-room and kitchen combined.

But, to the astonishment of the juniors, there were plain signs of habitation—not of the temporary camping of some wandering tramp.

On pegs in the hall hung some overcoats and umbrellas, and a heavy stick stood leaning on the wall, close by a large portmanteau. In the kitchen a fire burned in a rusty stove, diffusing a comforting heat through the little building. On the table were the remains of a meal; and a large cupboard, with a glass door, used as a larder, seemed to be crammed with food of various kinds.

"Well, my hat!" said Manners. "Somebody's looking after himself pretty well here. Looks as if he expected to stand a siege."

Lowther stared round him in astonishment.

"This beats the band," he said. "Some giddy Robinson Crusoe must be living here, though he's out at present, and can't tell us we're welcome. When he comes in perhaps he'll ask us to tea; we'll be three Men Fridays for the afternoon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors crossed the little passage, and looked into the other room. A camp-bed was there—unmade; evidently slept in the previous night. Shaving materials were on a table; a half-unpacked trunk was in the corner. The room was dim, the shutters being closed. But it was easy to see that it was a room in regular occupation.

The back door at the end of the passage was bolted. Lowther unfastened it and glanced out at the back. There was a coal-shed, and it was stacked with coal and faggots. Lowther whistled as he closed the door and secured it again.

"I say, it's pretty plain that this place has been taken by somebody, after all," he said. "Somebody's living here, and it must be somebody who has a right to live here, or all these things couldn't be here. They must have been carted here some time for him. Looks to me as if we'd better get out. The merchant mayn't be pleased to see three strangers rooting about his place—even nice chaps like us."

"I was just thinking the same," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But the man must be about somewhere, and we'd better speak to him and explain. I rather think we owe him an apology—if he's got a right here."

"Let's cut, anyhow," said Manners.

The juniors returned to the open doorway at the front of the bungalow and scanned the deserted expanse before them. The islet was tiny, scarcely a hundred yards in extent, but it was so rocky and broken that anyone might have been within a dozen yards unseen.

"Hallo, that must be the Johnny!" said Manners.

In the distance a man came into sight over the rocks.

He was a slight, thin man, and seemed to stoop a little as he walked. He wore a thick overcoat, and a slouched hat pulled down over his brow. He walked with his hands behind him, his eyes on the ground, as if buried in deep thought.

The juniors gazed at him curiously. They emerged from the house and went down the rough path to the gate, towards which the man was advancing. But he did not lift his eyes, and did not observe them. They could not see the bent face under the shadow of the slouched hat, but there was something in the man's look that struck them as familiar, as if they had seen him before somewhere.

They reached the open gateway and stood aside there, waiting for the man to come up. It was obvious that he was the occupant of the lonely bungalow on the islet, doubtless its owner, and, in the circumstances, they felt bound to

speak to him and explain their intrusion. Possibly, too, they were rather curious to have a look at a man who was leading a life of such solitude, with no companionship but that of seagulls.

The man looked up suddenly, as if all at once aware of their presence. He was almost upon them when he saw them.

The juniors heard him gasp.

Two sharp, bright, startled eyes, full of terror, fixed on the schoolboys for a second, and then, before they could speak, before they could make a move, the man raced by them and raced up the path to the bungalow.

In a flash, as it seemed, he reached the door and plunged in, slamming the door after him with frantic haste.

There was a rattle of bolts and bars.

Tom Merry & Co. stood motionless. They were too astounded to move or speak.

For in that instant when that wild, terrified glance was turned upon them they had recognised the man.

"Beaumont!" breathed Tom Merry at last.

"Good heavens!"

It was the man of the caravan, the hunted man they had met on Wayland Moor! Well they knew the thin features, the shifty, watchful eyes, the pale terror of the man's worn face.

The juniors stared at one another.

"Beaumont!" repeated Tom Merry, as if still unable to believe what he had seen. "The missing solicitor—the man who bolted, the man we saw in the caravan that night—"

"The man who was hunted!" said Manners in a shaking voice. "Scared to death! He didn't even know us! The sight of a face was enough for him! I fancy that chap's half off his rocker with sheer funk!"

"My only hat!" murmured Lowther.

It was amazing, but the juniors had to believe their eyes. That hunted fugitive whom they had never expected to see again—the wretched man they had helped to escape from his pursuer that wild night on Wayland Moor—he was the mysterious tenant of the lonely bungalow on the isle. This was his hiding-place, then! This was the remote refuge he had been seeking when he fled from his relentless pursuer.

Tom Merry stared at the bungalow. The door was fast. From the little building came no sound. Somewhere within the building was a hapless wretch palpitating with fear. And another thought came into Tom Merry's mind. Where was the man of the moor—the man in black whom they had seen only that morning staring at the isle? The thought of him brought a chill to Tom Merry's heart. A fatal chance had helped the man-hunter. It was by a mistake, a delusion, that he had shadowed Tom Merry & Co. from school, yet by a fatal chance that shadowing had led him to his prey—or, at least, within reach of his prey, if he only knew!

"Let's get out of this!" muttered Manners. "That fellow's face has given me a chill! Let's cut!"

None of the Terrible Three was disposed to linger. In silence they tramped back across the wet sand to the shore. Behind them the bungalow disappeared from sight among the rocks of the Hermit's Isle. In silence, with overcast faces, they tramped over the cliffs and reached the road that led to Holly Lodge. The December dusk was falling. In the dimness a tall figure passed them, tramping up the road. It was the man of the moor, and he glanced at the juniors and knit his brows and tramped on. They were not thinking now of handling the man. They stared after him till he vanished in the December gloom. The man in black was gone.

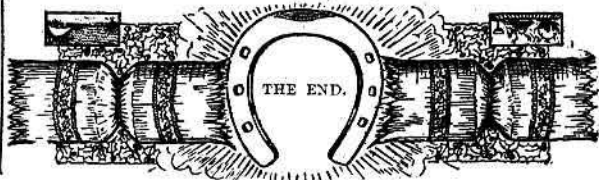
"He's still here!" muttered Tom Merry. "Still hanging about, watching! If—if he knew—"

He shivered. If the man in black knew what the St. Jim's juniors now knew, what fearful tragedy might happen amid the lonely rocks of the isle. And at any hour he might make the discovery.

"We've got to think this out!" said Tom Merry. "We've got to take a hand in this, you fellows."

And his comrades assented, little dreaming of what it was to lead to, and of the wild and terrible Christmastide that was before them.

(Look out for the sequel to this splendid yarn, entitled "HUNTED DOWN!" by Martin Clifford, in next week's GEM.)



TIME TO KICK!

When a director of the worst team in the three Leagues offers one of the finest forwards in the country a place in his team on a month's trial it is time for that forward to kick. But Dick Hastie suffers the insult in silence and accepts! Why?

A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE

BY
SYDNEY HORLER.



Dick Refuses!



MR. TOVEY beamed.

"Yes, Mr. Hastie, here I am, and I don't intend to go until I have your signature to a certain form! My directors were discussing you over the week-end, and they are prepared to make you the most generous offer in their power. I understand that you are training for a solicitor. Well, Mr. Robertson, one of our directors, is a big London lawyer, and he is ready to take you into his office straight away, to give you a position with him, and to do everything in his power to make your social life in London happy.

"Apart from that, the directors are willing to pay you the maximum wage allowed by the League. I need scarcely tell you that, playing for a team like the Swifts, you will soon come under the eye of the proper authorities, which will mean that it won't be very long before you will be receiving an International Cap—that's my honest opinion! Now, I've come a long way to see you, I've told you all there is to tell you, and I bring you the best wishes of Mr. Mapleson, our chairman, and of Wally McKinnon, our team manager.

"Wally's last words to me were: 'Tell the boy I'll make him the finest inside forward in the four counties before the season is out!'

"Now, Mr. Hastie!"

The scout, confident of the success of his mission, pulled out a fountain-pen, unscrewed the top, and handed it to Dick, whilst he smoothed a paper out on the table and then stood aside.

It was a tense moment. Dick never forgot it. The scene burnt itself into his memory. He looked from the smiling Tovey to the inscrutable Jimmy Burn. The football reporter had not said a word; he now merely stared through his spectacles. But that look, in the familiar phrase, spoke volumes. It reminded Dick of the promise he had given on the previous Tuesday evening; it reminded him also of the debt he already owed to David Martin.

But, all the same, this was the greatest temptation he had ever known. Apart from Burn and David Martin, he hated everyone he had met in his native town. He loathed the very name of Springdale; he longed to leave the place and never return to it again. Now that his sister had been safely installed with an aunt in Manchester, he felt that, whatever ties he might have in Springdale, they were powerless to keep him in the town.

Yet, whilst he stood with the pen in his hand, a memory flashed across his mind. He saw himself facing that horde

of angry, belligerent men—men whom, it was alleged, his father had defrauded. He saw himself facing these men, and declaring that he would stay in Springdale, and that he would not leave the town until he had paid back every penny of his father's debts! Something rose up in his throat that almost choked him, but he put the pen on the table.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Tovey, but I can't sign," he said. "It does not rest with me."

"Does not rest with you? Surely you're a free agent?" Annoyance and disappointment were mingled in the football scout's voice.

"I'm not a free agent in this matter, Mr. Tovey. I'm sorry you've come all this way only to be disappointed. Please tell Mr. Mapleson and Mr. McKinnon that it is with the deepest regret I have to refuse their most kind offer. There is no team in the world I would rather play for than the Swifts, but—"

Dick finished the sentence by turning away.

He did not know what followed until he heard a door bang, and then felt a hand thump his back.

"Good for you, Hastie!" Jimmy Burn said. "You're a fellow of your word. And the Swifts aren't the only team that can bring out an International, remember!"

Two days later, to his great surprise, Dick Hastie received a letter from the Springdale Albion Club. It was signed by Benjamin Travers, the very man who had only a few days before refused his application for a trial, and read:

"Dear Sir,—If you will be good enough to report yourself here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, I shall be pleased to consider your application to join Springdale Albion F.C."

It was difficult for Dick to realise that this letter was authentic. He did not know, of course, what had gone on behind the scenes since the previous Saturday. He did not know what a tremendous sensation had been caused in the town by Jimmy Burn's latest article narrating how Hastie, through a sense of town loyalty, as he had expressed it,

had refused the magnificent offer of one of the finest clubs in England in order that he could be free to accept any chance which the Springdale Albion directors might make him. Dick knew nothing of either circumstances; but because he realised that both Burn and his employer, David Martin, would be pleased at the news, he immediately wrote an acknowledgment of the letter.

Then, with the communication in his hand, he went to David Martin.

"What do you think of this, sir?" he asked.

Martin studied the letter with deep earnestness.

"You must certainly go down there, my lad," he said.

"There is nothing I should like better than to see you playing for the Albion—rotten team as it is at present. It may be a much better team one of these days," the cloth manufacturer added quickly. "Anyway, here's your chance, and I want you to make the most of it. Any time off that you may want for training purposes you are very welcome to, although later on, no doubt, you can come to an arrangement with Mr. Meadows to train at night after business hours."

David Martin was tactful enough not to add anything more. Shrewd as he was, he could not understand what lay behind the invitation. He put it down to the directors bowing their heads before the storm of public opinion. But in this he was wrong, as subsequent events were amply to prove.

Through the Fire!

DICK HASTIE had very mixed feelings as he climbed the bank at the entrance end of the Springdale Albion ground the next morning and looked down at the football pitch upon which he was destined to play so many historic games. It was a miserable morning, and nothing more depressing than the appearance of this big, deserted football ground at that moment could scarcely have been imagined. The desolation sank into the boy's soul. He had a feeling that everything in the world was going wrong, that this unexpected invitation carried a threat instead of a fair promise.

Dismissing these thoughts with an effort, he walked quickly round to the back of the grand-stand and paused for a moment outside a door over which was a painted sign:

"HOME PLAYERS."

A man in a dirty grey sweater eyed him curiously.

"What d'you want?"

"I have come to see Mr. Meadows."

The grimy one jerked his thumb.

"You'll find him in there," he said.

Feeling very much like a new boy on his first day at a big school, Dick opened the door and walked down a long passage. On his left was another door, from behind which came the hubbub of many voices. He knew this to be the dressing-room of the Albion players, and knocked.

"Come in, can't yer?" growled a voice.

Answering this crude invitation, Dick pushed the door open and stood in the doorway. He saw a number of men changing from their street clothes into football togs. Regarding them with a cynical eye was a surly-faced individual whom he recognised as Joshua Meadows, the team manager.

"Hi, you, shut that door, can't yer?" A player standing half-naked yelled the insulting command. It did not require a second glance for Dick to recognise in this brutish individual the man Tunney, with whom he had come to blows the previous Saturday. Tunney was equally quick in recognising the newcomer, and he turned to Burleigh, the centre-half, with a grimace.

"You'll have to behave yourself now, Steve," he said, a remark that caused every other man in the room to stare at Dick, who was now engaged in conversation with the team manager.

Joshua Meadows did not seem very pleased at meeting the recruit, and he curtly handed him over to a very remarkable-looking individual, who proved to be the trainer of the team.

"Andy" Anderson had once been a grocer's assistant. He still looked a grocer's assistant. His perfervid enthusiasm for football, however, had led him to throw up his job in the grocery store and take a series of courses in massage and physical exercises in order that he might secure a post which he coveted very dearly. The somewhat strange ambition of Andy Anderson was to become a trainer to an important professional football club; but it was only after many heart-aching disappointments and mortifying refusals that—at a miserably cheap wage—he secured an appointment with the Springdale Albion Club. No man could have had a more miserable existence, for, possessing no real power, each and every player under his care made a point of insulting him at every possible opportunity. That he stuck to his work was eloquent testimony to the remarkable interest Anderson still displayed in the sport he so dearly loved.

Like will call to like, and in that first moment of meeting young Hastie conceived a liking for this fellow-underdog. On his side the trainer recognised in this youthful recruit a person infinitely superior to every other player on the Albion staff. He determined to do everything he could to help this boy, whose passage, he knew, would be very rough and difficult in the future.

"Good-morning! If you come with me I'll give you a locker," said the trainer.

The respectful tone which Anderson had used caused the Albion players to exchange glances. As he walked across the room Dick could not help noticing the smirks and grimaces which passed, nor did he fail to hear the meant-to-be cutting remarks with which his personal appearance was criticised.

"Regular swell, ain't he?"

"My word, quite a toff!"

"Looks as though he'll bust, though, if he's charged."

This was too much, and Dick swung round.

"I don't think I shall," he said coolly; "nothing was broken on Tuesday, at any rate."

It was not a diplomatic remark to have made, in the

circumstances; and Dick was made quickly aware of this, but he resented this fresh evidence of prejudice. Why couldn't these fellows be decent enough to give him a fair show? He, on his side, was perfectly willing to let the evil recollections of Tuesday be forgotten and to become as friendly as was possible with these new comrades. After all, he would have to play with them. Why need there be this venomous animosity?

This ungracious reception made the recruit feel a distaste for the men around him; but as he changed he tried to fight this feeling. Still, the impression remained that he was definitely alone—and that he was likely to remain alone.

INTRODUCTION.

DICK HASTIE, a young fellow of twenty, and a born footballer, playing for the Bohemians, a clever amateur side, is approached by

J. B. TOVEY, a football "scout" on the look-out for fresh talent, who declares that if Dick will join the famous Swifts he will make an International of him within two years. Dick, however, has to turn the tempting offer down, for

ROBERT HASTIE, his father, suddenly disappears, leaving behind him a host of clamouring creditors.

DAVID MARTIN, a cloth manufacturer and an ex-footballer, who has known Hastie for some time, is anxious to help the lad, as also is

JAMES BURN, a "live-wire" reporter on the "Springdale Gazette."

Despite evidence to the contrary, Dick believes in his father's innocence, and promises the angry creditors that he will pay back every penny entrusted to his father.

With only a few shillings in his pocket, Dick sets out to find work, but he is viewed with suspicion everywhere he goes. Having pledged himself to remain in Springdale, he seeks a job with the notorious Springdale Albion, a footer club renowned for its shady reputation; but BENJAMIN TRAVERS, the Albion's managing-director, happens to be one of Dick's father's creditors, and he turns the lad down.

Later, Hastie is interviewed by Burn, who comes to Springdale in the hope of restoring the good name of the Springdale F.C., and the story Dick unfolds makes good "copy" for the "Gazette." Burn's scathing article causes no little discussion. David Martin puts up a fight to get on the Springdale Albion board of directors, but so strongly entrenched are Travers and his cronies that Martin's efforts prove of no avail. He, nevertheless, offers Dick a job in his warehouse.

Tovey meets Burn, and, still anxious to capture Dick's signature, accompanies him on another flying visit to the lad.

(Now read on.)

When he was fully changed Joshua Meadows came and stood by his side.

"We have decided to give you a month's trial, Hastie," he said. "It is up to you how you make use of it. For the remainder of the week you will train with the rest of the players, and on Saturday you will turn out for the Reserves. And don't get thinking such a mighty lot of yourself, because it may be that you'll prove like ever so many others—a rotten failure!"

It was on the tip of Dick's tongue to retort that he had not proved such a "rotten failure" on the previous Tuesday, but he was sick and weary of answering, and so remained silent. He watched the majority of the other players troop out of the dressing-room, and then left himself. Just as he was leaving the door he felt a hand touch his arm.

"Don't take any notice of 'em, sir. They're ignorant, and they don't know any better. You're a real player, that's more than can be said for the majority of that trash."

Before the boy could thank him Andy Anderson had turned away.

The schedule of training laid down for that morning was ball practice. Like practically every other portion of their training, it was not taken seriously, however, by the majority of the players. Practical jokes seemed the order of the day, for each Albion player's idea of improving his shooting consisted of getting to within about six yards of the two goalkeepers and then trying to bore a hole through one of them with his shot.

The ball never seemed to come Dick's way, except by accident. Already he was being isolated and kept apart. It seemed a definite policy, as though the players had agreed upon this before taking the field.

He had turned away in disgust when a heavy form barged into him.

ing. He felt himself to be the superior of his critics, not only as a man, but as a footballer. The thought gave him confidence.

Fate was certainly interfering in a most extraordinary way with the doings of Dick Hastie. The newest recruit to the Albion playing staff had been informed on Thursday that he would turn out for the Reserve team two days later, but on Friday information reached the ground that Tunney, the regular inside-left of the Albion's first team, had met with an accident whilst motor-cycling, and would be unable to play.

Joshua Meadows greeted the news with a burst of profanity.

"That means that we shall have to play that young Hastie," he told the chairman of the club.

"How's he shaping?" asked Benjamin Travers.

The team manager lowered his voice.

"It may be a piece of bad news to you, Mr. Travers," he rejoined, "but if you ask me for my honest opinion he's got more real football in his ten toes than all the rest of our other louts put together!"

Instead of rejoicing at the news the chairman scowled.

"That so?" he sneered. "But I'm fixing up a way to settle him all right. Play him on Saturday, if you've got to, Meadows. It'll be about the last time he will play. I only sent him that letter just to stop the mouths of these busybodies in the town."

So it was that Hastie stood with the rest of the Springdale Albion team at the preliminary "kick-in" before the match with Midechester United on the following Saturday. His appearance had been greeted with a remarkable round of cheers, a fact which had made his colleagues scowl, and caused them to mutter among themselves.

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A grinning face met his. "Sorry, don't you know, and all that sort of thing," said this player, in an affected tone, "but we have to practise charging on Thursday mornings."

All around were the smirking Albion players.

Dick took swift action.

"Is that so?" he replied nonchalantly, and then, stepping sideways, he charged the man with such force that he fell headlong to the turf. "You need a little improvement in that direction yourself, apparently," he said.

Just then, the ball coming his way, he trapped it with a deft flick of his boot, and, in the same instant, shot. The ball never rose higher than six inches from the ground, but it sped with a remarkable velocity to a corner of the goal. The goalkeeper who should have saved the shot was apparently mesmerised at the pace, and the ball flashed past him without his making any effort to stop it.

There is nothing that rouses the admiration of the average professional player so speedily as a display of snap-shooting, and in spite of themselves, the Albion professionals stared, and stared again.

The defeated goalkeeper left his charge.

"How'd you do it?" he asked.

"Like this," replied Dick, who, for the first time since arriving at the ground, now felt sure of himself. Without any further statement he let drive at another bouncing ball.

Once again he rattled home a thunder-bolt. This time it was the other goalkeeper who was defeated. Indeed, he had no time to get out of the way, for the ball hit his chest and knocked him hurtling into the net.

Stony silence greeted this second feat.

Then across the field came a hurrying figure. It was "Andy" Anderson.

"The sooner you other fellows learn to shoot like that the sooner you'll get goals!" cried the trainer. "Come into the dressing-room now, or I sha'n't have time to give you all a rub down."

The players addressed obeyed the order sullenly. As they crossed the turf they grouped themselves together, and the hate they felt for Hastie showed in their eyes each time they looked at him.

The Dick Hastie that walked alone back to the dressing-room was a different Dick Hastie, however, than he who had been filled with depressing thoughts earlier in the morn-

ing. He himself, however, was feeling buoyant and confident. He was determined to make good that afternoon, and to see that their confidence in him was not misplaced. It was not conceit that caused him to have no fear about his debut. The very fact that he was an Ishmael in the team—the signs of animosity against him had increased rather than diminished since Thursday—caused his sense of manhood to be aroused.

The game had not been in progress more than two minutes, however, before he realised that he was suffering under a great handicap. It was the obvious intention of the rest of the team to starve him. Whenever Burleigh, at centre-half, or Nesin, at centre-forward, had the ball they swept it out to either extreme wing, with the result that Dick's play, for the first ten minutes, consisted in running about the field, and never touching the ball. During that period he did not receive a single pass.

Wilson, his own partner, was a member of the conspiracy. The outside-left played as though he alone constituted the left-wing of the Albion, and never once sent the ball inside for his partner to receive; and this in spite of the fact that on the few occasions Dick was able to secure possession by tackling an opponent he gave Wilson passes which drew ready appreciation from the crowd. Twenty minutes after the opening whistle a startling change occurred. Wilson was careering down the wing when he was heavily, but fairly, charged by the visitors' right-back. With a groan that could be heard by the spectators, he reeled over the touch-line. A player who shirked his training as much as possible, and who was never, consequently, in the best of condition, he lay flat and inert.

When Anderson trotted over to him he shook his head in answer to the question: Was he all right? Members of the local ambulance corps, who were present, were then forced to carry the helpless outside-left to the dressing-room.

A moment later Dick, who had by instinct taken up the extreme wing position, trapped a ball which would have swerved over the touch-line and got it under control to the accompaniment of a fresh burst of applause from the crowd on that side of the ground.

"Go it, lad!" came the cry, and Dick raced forward.

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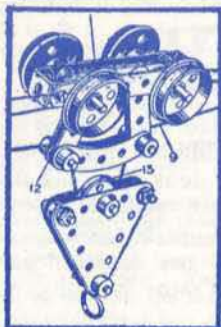
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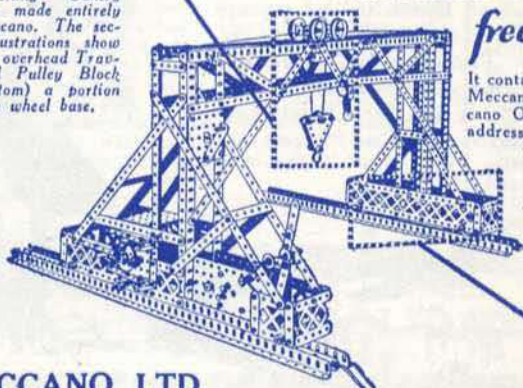
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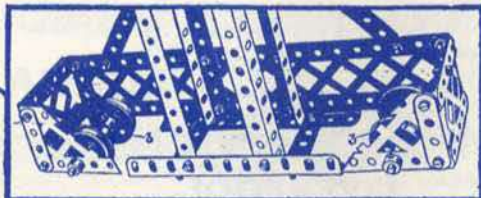
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