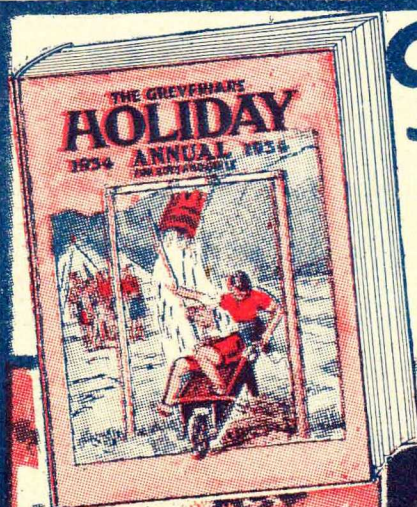


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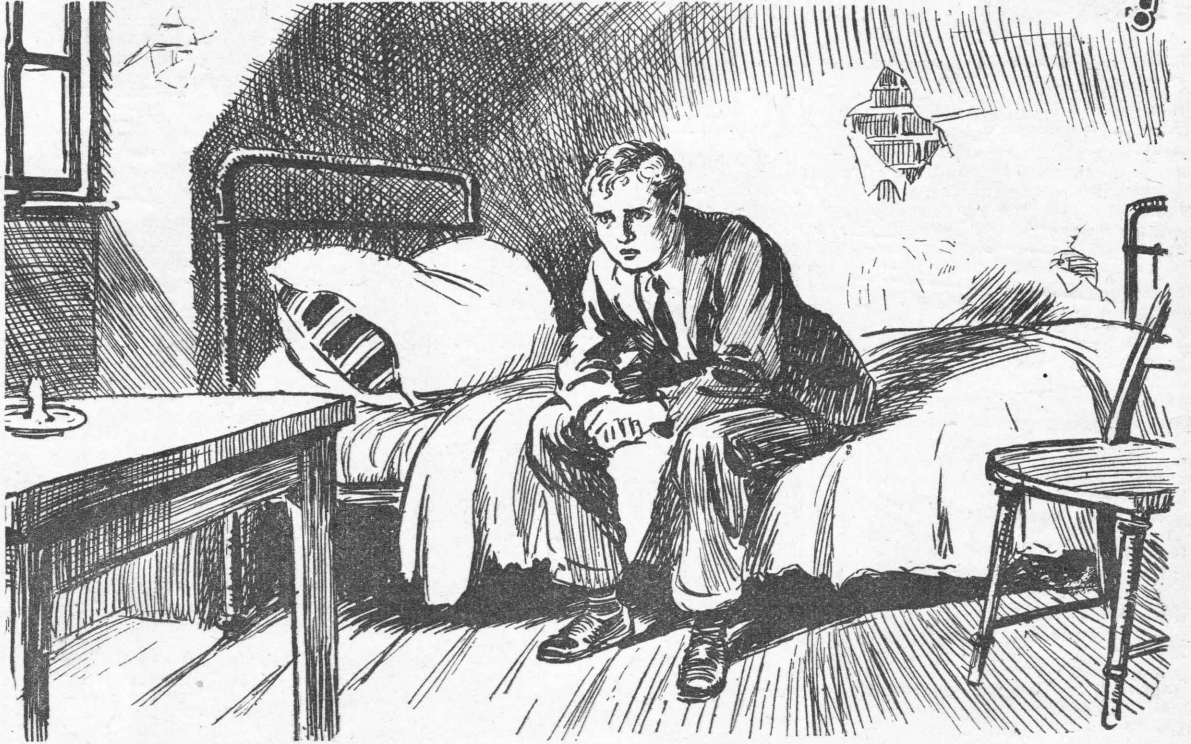
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See the Great St. Jim's Story, "DOWN ON HIS LUCK!"—Within.

HERE'S THE BEST YARN OF THE WEEK—TELLING OF THE—

DOWN ON HIS LUCK!



No work—no food—no money! Such is the unhappy plight Tom Merry is reduced to in his determined but unavailing efforts to make his own way in the world. Yet his dogged pluck is undiminished!

CHAPTER 1.

Off for the Christmas Holidays!

ST. Jim's was breaking-up for the Christmas holidays.

It was a hard, frosty December day, clear as crystal, and bitterly cold. The fellows, as they came out of New House or School House to take their places in the charabancs were wrapped up in great coats, muffled in scarves, enveloped in ulsters, and still they had to stamp their feet to keep warm. Their breath, as they exhaled it, hung like steam in the air, and cheeks were blue and noses were red.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake of the Fourth, as he came out, and snorted on the steps of the School House. "This is what I call kik-kik-kik-cold!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye and surveying the old quadrangle, which had disappeared under six inches of snow. The steps of the School House were clothed in white, and the gaunt, leafless elms stood up like grim spectres. "Bai, Jove, deah boys, it's been snowin'!"

"Go hon!" said Blake. "I say, you chaps, it's been snowing! Gussy says so!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I always said that Gussy ought to be a detective," said Monty Lowther of the Shell. "The way he discovers things at a glance—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"It takes the cake!" agreed Digby. "Herries' bulldog couldn't have discovered a thing quicker—not even a kipper."

"Where is Herries?" demanded Blake, looking round. "The charabanc's waiting, and the ass has disappeared somewhere."

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"Oh, he's gone for Towser!" said Digby.

Arthur Augustus started.

"Towsah!"

"Yes. You don't think Herries would leave Towser to the tender mercies of Taggles during the Christmas holidays, do you?"

"I twust Hewwies does not intend to have that howwid beast in the chawabanc. T'he dog has no wespsect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs."

Gr-r-r-r!

"Here comes Towser," grinned Jack Blake, as he heard the old familiar growl of the bulldog. "Buck up, Herries! The train won't wait all day, you know."

"I'm ready," said Herries.

He lifted his favourite into the charabanc that was waiting outside the School House. D'Arcy surveyed this proceeding through his eyeglass with great disapproval, but that seemed to have no effect whatever upon either Towser or Herries.

Monty Lowther chuckled softly.

"I should advise you to sit on his head, Gussy, and that will keep him quiet," he said, poking the swell of the School House in the ribs.

D'Arcy twisted away.

"Pway don't punctuah my wibs in that way, Lowthah! And I uttahly wufuse to sit on Towsah's head. I wogard it as extremely pwoth that he would bite me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I object to Towsah's pwesence. If it were not Chwistmas-time, I should feel gweatly inclined to give Hewwies a feahful thwashin'."

"Tumble in!" said Manners. "The New House charabanc is just going to start, and we've got to be out of the gates first."

"Yaas, wathah! Buck up, deah boys!"

—LUCKLESS ADVENTURES OF POPULAR TOM MERRY IN LONDON!

By Martin Clifford.

There was a charabanc piling full of juniors outside the New House, on the other side of the snowy quad. At breaking-up time several trains were run in quick succession from the little country station at Rylcombe to Wayland Junction, where the fellows separated in various directions, to the four corners of the kingdom for the holidays. It really mattered very little which charabanc started first; but the School House was always up against the New House, and a race to the station was likely to be exciting.

Figgins & Co. of the New House were already in their charabanc, and other juniors were piling in fast. Figgins was looking over towards the School House through the clear, frosty air, and the idea of a race had evidently entered his head, too.

"I wish Tom Merry was here," said Lowther. "How utterly rotten it is breaking up without him!"

Manners gave a grunt.

"Of course it is," he said. "Hang it! It spoils everything for the Christmas holidays, Tommy being off on his lonesome."

"Don't you chaps know where Tom Merry is?" asked Kangaroo, the Cornstalk.

"In London."

"But where?" asked the Cornstalk. "If a chap knew his address, he might look him up in the holidays."

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"I don't know his address. He wouldn't let us know." Kangaroo whistled.

"Why not?"

"I suppose it's because he's hard up, and he won't let us help him." Lowther made an exasperated gesture.

"Isn't it rotten?"

"Beastly!"

"Jump in, you chaps!" said Blake. "The New House bouncers are nearly ready."

The juniors quickly jumped into the charabanc. The vehicle was very nearly full now. It was supposed to take more, but Blake did not mean to let Figgins get ahead. The New House charabanc, however, was the first away.

"Hould on!" roared a voice, as the School House charabanc moved off. Reilly of the Fourth came pounding through the snow. "Hould on! Sure I'm coming in that charabanc!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

Reilly waved his hand, and yelled.

"Hould on, ye spalpeens, hould on!"

Reilly's eloquence was wasted on the desert air. The charabanc sped on. Down the gravelled drive from the New House the other charabanc was speeding, and it was a race between Blake's driver and Figgins!

"Buck up, School House!" roared the fellows in the quadrangle.

"Buck up, New House!"

"Go it, Blake!"

"On the ball, Figgins!"

Jack Blake urged the driver of the School House charabanc to put on more speed.

The New House vehicle had a slight start, but Blake was determined on passing it.

The crowd of fellows outside both Houses watched the race in great excitement, yelling encouragement to either side.

It was indeed a thrilling run as there was little traffic

to delay progress, and the two charabancs rattled into the High Street of Rylcombe at last without mishap.

The School House juniors reached the station a few yards ahead of their rivals, and there was a yell:

"Hurrah! School House wins!"

"Who's Cook House at St. Jim's?" yelled Lowther.

"School House! School House!"

Blake & Co. tumbled out of the charabanc, liberally tipped the driver, and then entered the station.

In the station there was a surging crowd of juniors.

Figgins & Co. were greatly inclined to go for Blake and his chums, but the remembrance that they were parting for the Christmas holidays had a soothing effect.

Blake slapped the New House leader on the shoulder.

"All serene, old son!" he exclaimed. "We can't help being best, you know."

"Rats!" grinned Figgins. "It was Fatty Wynn made us lose the race; we should have beaten you hollow!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Look at my overcoat!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as a simply disgustin' state to go home in for the Christmas holidays, Wynn!"

"Been using him as a doormat?" asked Blake.

"Yes; he lost us the race, hanging about for sandwiches!"

"Oh, you were beaten to the wide, anyway, you know!"

"Rats!"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Oh, please be quiet!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "What's the good of rowing when the train's starting? Tumble in!"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"Come on, Gussy!"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake!"

"Quite aware of that, my son. Come on!"

And Arthur Augustus was rushed into the carriage. The train steamed out of the station with the windows crammed with juniors, shouting and cheering in the exuberance of their hearts.

But in the midst of the general jollity clouds would settle every now and then upon several faces there.

The St. Jim's juniors could not help thinking of their old chum, Tom Merry.

Where was he that Christmastide?

CHAPTER 2.

Looking for Work!

TOM MERRY was thinking about his chums at St. Jim's while that very race was going on in the frosty morning.

The day that was so clear and bright and cold in the lanes of Sussex was bitter enough, but not clear or bright in London town.

Grey mist hung over the great city, slush was in the streets, damp was in the air, and, in the mist and the slush and the damp, the cold was piercing.

It bit through thick furs, and well-clad men walked quickly in the streets to keep themselves from chilling. It gnawed into the limbs of hungry, ill-clad vagrants.

Men and women, with rags on their limbs and want of food eating the very heart out of them, shivered in the bitter wind and shuddered at the cold damp of the air.

In the streets of London was the glare of lights, the hustle and bustle of the Christmas shopping.

Rich and poor jostled in the never-ending crowd, bright faces, gleaming with hope and happiness, passed by thin and meagre countenances upon which grim poverty had set its mark.

In the midst of the crowd Tom Merry walked, like one in a dream.

Tom Merry had been up and down in London many a time. Now, in his dark days, he remembered many a merry excursion there—excursions to the Zoo, and to the Christmas Fair at Olympia with his chums, in the flush of youth, and hope, and careless gaiety.

In This Issue—

THIRTEEN MORE FREE GIFT PICTURES FOR YOUR ALBUM!

In Next Week's Grand Christmas Number—

THERE ARE ANOTHER NINE FOR YOU!

He was seeing a very different London now.

London from the underside is very different to the view. Tom Merry was seeing the great city now as many a hundred thousand of its crowded inhabitants always had seen it—the great city, flowing with wealth, yet hard as iron to those who needed it most; the city of boundless charity and of boundless want—the maelstrom where the wrecks from all quarters drift and whirl before they are at last sucked under.

Tom Merry was walking the streets of London as many a poor lad had walked them before, with empty pockets and almost empty stomach, and a heart that was growing empty of hope. To Tom Merry, as to many another, London had been the Mecca—the goal. Once in London, in the greatest and richest city in the world, surely there was work for one who was willing to do it; money to be earned by the industrious and honest!

It was not so, alas!

At St. Jim's Tom Merry had been head of his Form, captain of the juniors, a favourite pupil with exacting masters, and a credit to the House and to the college.

In London he found that he was nothing.

What could he do?

Latin hexameters were useless to him now; he could translate Virgil almost as fast as he could write, but nobody wanted Virgil translated. He could have given a very accurate account of English history from the time of the Romans; but with the present moment he was powerless to deal. He could have talked quite passably well to a Frenchman or a German in his own tongue; but he could not win a meal thereby.

His education at St. Jim's had fitted him for a different life—not for this. Now that he was thrown upon his own resources, he realised that he was less able to provide for the passing day than the raggedest urchin who raced up and down Fleet Street with the evening papers under his arm.

It was not a gratifying discovery for the hero of St. Jim's—the most popular boy in the school, who had always seemed to his schoolfellows the ideal of what a British boy should be. But it was so; and Tom Merry accepted the knowledge of the inevitable, and tried to make the best of it.

But what was he to do?

To ask his friends for money was a thing he determined not to do; to write to Miss Fawcett and tell her his straits was impossible.

Miss Fawcett had nothing. Tom was only too glad to know that she had found a safe refuge with Cousin Ethel; that she, at least, would be taken care of.

And Tom set out bravely in search of employment.

Surely a brave, strong, honest lad should not have to seek long for that in vain! But even so it was. Many a weary day passed in the search, and failure after failure was his reward.

Others, less gifted, and less educated in many ways, were more fit for the keen, merciless struggles of London, and they passed him in the race.

On that grim morning Tom Merry walked the streets in the jostling crowds, and thought of St. Jim's.

He knew that it was breaking-up day.

The fellows would be going off in swarms from Rylcombe Station, home for the holidays; and he—

What was his Christmas holiday to be like?

That morning he had risen at six, and had examined the earliest papers with sedulous care, and had walked and walked till his legs were aching to the bone, to answer advertisements. But there was nothing for Tom Merry.

Now he was walking slowly homeward.

He had parted with his last shilling, and he had not spent it upon himself. He had given it to a shivering child. Nothing could ever alter Tom Merry's nature in that respect; while he had anything to give, he would never refuse one who was in want. And surely sometimes, as the old proverb says, giving brings good luck!

Tom Merry turned out of the misty streets, where the lamps were burning in the grim, yellow morning, into the street, or, rather, alley, where he had his home.

His home!

He turned into a great house that, many a long year ago, had been tenanted by wealthy people, before fashion migrated to another quarter of the town.

Tom Merry passed up the great staircase—a staircase with a carved oaken balustrade and great wide steps, where handsome men and graceful ladies once had lightly stepped—now abandoned to squalor and misery.

He reached the top of the house and entered his room there—a small room, with rags stuffed in the window in place of glass, and the paper peeling off the damp walls, and the ceiling discoloured with rain that soaked in through the roof; and for furniture a rickety table, a still more rickety chair, and a hard bed. That was what Tom Merry

had come to, and that would not last him long; that den, miserable as it was, was paid for only till the end of the week, and if he had no more money by then he would have no home.

Tom Merry sank wearily upon the chair.

He was tired and he was hungry; he was hopeless. Again the search for employment had failed.

What was he to do now?

Clump, clump, clump!

There was a heavy footstep on the stairs.

A slight smile broke over Tom Merry's face.

He knew the step.

From the sound it might have been a large and heavy man who was coming up the stairs, but he knew that it was Joe—and Joe entered the next moment.

Joe was a lad of about twelve, but so pinched and thin that he might have been eight or nine. Joe was clad in an enormous pair of trousers cut down for him, an ancient waistcoat used as a coat, and a pair of large and heavy hobnailed boots four or five sizes too large for him. Joe's big brother had lately died, and Joe was dressed in some of his raiment, and those enormous boots were not a burden to Joe, for they were the first boots he had ever possessed in his life, and they kept his feet—not warm, but unrozen.

The little lad came in and gave Tom Merry a grin. His dirty face had certainly not been washed for weeks, and there were furrows of dirt upon it, showing where Joe had been crying. Joe generally cried at the top of his voice and shed copious tears when his father beat him. His father beat him whenever he was intoxicated. He was intoxicated whenever he had any money. And so money coming into the family coffers was not an unmixed blessing to Joe.

"I thought it was you, old pal," said Joe. "I thought I knew yer step. Did yer get the job?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"None of 'em?"

Another shake of the head.

"Love yer!" said Joe. "And you won't, either. Look here, old pal, ain't you got no friends?"

"Yes."

"Ain't they got any tin?"

Tom Merry smiled—something like his old smile.

"Yes."

"Why don't you write to 'em, then, and ask for some?"

Tom Merry was silent. Joe, in his experience of life, had never come across anybody who would not take money wherever and whenever he could get it.

"P'raps you ain't got a stamp?" suggested Joe.

"No."

"Nor a penny to buy one?"

"No."

"Send the letter without one, then," said Joe. "They can pay threepence on it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Why don't you do it?" argued Joe. "Only, look 'ere, if you get any money, don't you give father none. It means a 'iding for me. I was beat fair blue over that bob you gave 'im last week."

"I'm sorry, Joe."

"All right, old pal," said Joe. "But if you ain't got a job, and you won't ask your pals for the brass, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"I do," said Joe.

"Yes—what?"

"Starve," said Joe laconically.

Tom Merry shivered a little.

"I hope it won't come to that, Joe," he said. "I'm going to have another try."

"Look 'ere," said Joe, lowering his voice, "why don't you try the captain?"

"The captain?" said Tom Merry, puzzled.

"Yes—Captain Rake."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought. He had seen the man who was called the "captain" in that wretched building—a man who was sometimes flashily dressed, with gaudy rings on his fingers; sometimes in tatters; sometimes wildly intoxicated, and fighting with other ruffians in the court below. The captain had puzzled Tom Merry a great deal, and he repelled the lad quite as much. There was something about him that raised Tom Merry's instant distrust.

He had shown some desire to make the lad's acquaintance, but the language Tom had heard him pouring forth in one of his drunken fits had been quite enough to choke off any chance of that.

Tom Merry had fallen into deep poverty, but there was a lower deep he would never fall into—blackguardism.

And so he had avoided the flashy captain.

"What could Rake do for me, Joe?" he asked.

"Find you a job," said Joe.

"How so? He does not seem to have a job himself."



As Captain Rake came up, his foot appeared to slip on the pavement. He lurched forward and fell against the old gentleman, throwing his arms around him for support. But neither Tom Merry nor the old man realised that it was a sham—that the captain was a pickpocket!

Joe grinned.
 "You're green, old pal," he said. "But you shan't starve, even if you are green. You come along with me, and I'll show you the captain."
 "But—"
 "Come along, old pal! You ain't going to starve."
 "But he may not want to see me."
 "That's all right!"
 "But—"
 Joe dragged him by the arm, and Tom Merry went. After all, he was at the last ditch now, and if the captain could and would help him—at all events, he could see.

CHAPTER 3.

A Promise of Employment!

"**E**RE 'e is!"
 Joe pushed open a dirty door which gave admittance to a dirty room. Misty daylight came faintly in through a dirty window and mingled with the glimmer of a dirty lamp. A man sprawled in a rickety chair, with an old coat round his shoulders, warming his feet at a fire, and sipping brandy-and-soda.
 He looked round as Joe opened the door.
 "Keep that door shut!" he growled.
 Tom Merry drew back, but Joe marched in.
 "Ere 'e is!" he announced.
 Rake looked at Tom Merry dubiously, and finally gave him a nod.
 "Sit down," he said.
 "Ere's a chair," said Joe, dragging one forward. "Mind, one leg's gammy!"
 Tom Merry sat down, keeping in a sitting posture by a

feat of balancing. The captain sipped and kept his eyes upon Tom Merry the while.
 "My old pal wants a job, Mr. Rake," said Joe. "He's down on his luck, he is. Ain't you, old pal?"
 "Yes," said Tom Merry.
 "I can help you if you like," said the captain lazily.
 "You can get out, Joe. What's your name?"
 "Tom Merry."
 "Well, Tom Merry, so you want a job?"
 "I've been trying to get work," said Tom Merry quietly.
 "I can't get it, and I won't ask help of my friends. If you could give me any information, or anything to help me get work, I should be very much obliged."
 "I can help you, I think," said Rake. "You're down on your uppers; no work, no money—nothing between you and starvation—eh? You'd take on anything, I suppose?"
 "Anything, so long as it's honest."
 The captain's eyes twinkled in a peculiar way.
 "Honest?" he queried. "What do you call honest?"
 Tom Merry's eyes widened.
 "I don't quite understand you," he said. "But I suppose what I call honest is what everybody else calls honest. I cannot do anything else; but, of course, you are not suggesting that I should?"
 "Of course not!" said the captain, sipping his brandy-and-soda. "Of course, I am a man of strict principles myself."
 This was said in a tone that implied that Rake regarded the statement as something extremely good, and to be enjoyed. He chuckled over his glass.
 "Now, look here!" he went on. "Look here, my lad! You're a clever youngster, and you can think. Mind, I am only putting a case. Suppose the current ideas about honesty are a little rocky—suppose the good things of this

world are not fairly divided; then wouldn't it be right, eh, for a fellow to help himself a little from those who can spare it?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"You're a sensible lad," urged the captain. "You know it isn't right for some to be so very rich and others so very poor."

"I suppose not," said Tom Merry. "But if you think it can be remedied by a poor man becoming a scoundrel as well as poor, you are mistaken. Anybody who steals is vile and base, however great his need. I may starve, but I will cut off my hand before I will steal!"

Tom Merry's voice rose, and his eyes flashed as he spoke. There was no mistaking the lad's sentiments on that subject, at all events.

The captain looked at him with an amused smile.

"Darn me!" he exclaimed. "One would think I was offering you a job as a pickpocket. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, from what you said—"

"I was only testing you, my lad," said the captain, in a tone of great heartiness; "as a matter of fact, I can find an opening for a lad, but he must be strictly honest. Any lad who has the slightest taint of suspicion against his character would be of no use to me."

Tom Merry's face brightened up.

"I'm sorry!" he added impulsively.

The captain waved a dirty hand.

"Not at all!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad you answered up as you did; it shows me that you are the lad I want, one I can thoroughly rely upon."

"Then you can give me employment?"

"I can get it for you," said the captain. "I mean business."

He thrust his hand into his trousers pocket.

"Look here! Here's a half-crown in advance!"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I'd rather earn it first, sir," he said.

The captain grinned.

"Very well," he said. "I'll see that you do. You can

his true character for anyone better acquainted than Tom Merry with the seamy side of the great metropolis.

He clapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Ready, my lad?"

"Quite, sir," said Tom Merry brightly.

"We'll start, then. Sure you won't have something to drink first?"

"Quite sure, thank you!"

Tom followed the captain down the dirty, misty street, into one of the broad, echoing arteries of London's traffic, and in a few minutes they were in the midst of the crowd.

CHAPTER 4.

The Pickpocket!

TOM MERRY walked with a lighter step as he accompanied the captain down the misty, crowded street. Tom Merry was hungry, and he was tired, but the thought of obtaining work at last cheered him on wonderfully.

As yet he knew nothing of what the captain intended for him, but he did not suspect that he was being deceived. Why should Rake deceive him? The man had nothing to gain by doing so—nothing that Tom Merry could see.

The captain was silent for some time. He looked at Tom Merry sideways several times, and always there was a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

Tom Merry ventured to ask a question at last.

"What kind of work am I to do, sir?" he queried.

"Well, let me see. I believe you've had a good education?" the captain said.

"I think so, sir."

"Can you translate French?"

"Oh, yes, easily!"

"Would you be willing to take on a post of translator, say, to an elderly gentleman?" asked the captain thoughtfully. "I could not obtain more than a pound a week for you at first; but the work would be light."

Tom Merry's eyes danced.

"A pound a week!"

He had tramped weary mile on mile after "jobs" that offered fifteen shillings a week and less. A pound a week—for work of an agreeable and refined nature—he could have hugged the gallant captain on the spot.

"Oh, sir!" he exclaimed.

"You'd like it?"

"Yes, rather! I don't know how to thank you!"

"Oh, not at all!" said Captain Rake airily. "I'm only too glad to help you. It's a thing I couldn't do myself, you see, but I can get you the job—and I will."

"Oh, thank you so much!"

The captain halted suddenly. He stooped, and rose with a little leather purse in his hand.

"Run after that gentleman!" he exclaimed. "He has dropped his purse."

Tom Merry lost no time. He dashed after a stout, elderly gentleman whom the captain pointed out to him, and the captain followed him more slowly.

"Excuse me, sir, you've dropped a purse!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Eh?" exclaimed the old gentleman. "What?"

"You've just dropped a purse, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

The captain came up with the purse in his hand. The old gentleman was unbuttoning his overcoat in a very fussy way, and feeling in his pockets. Captain Rake's foot slipped on the slippery pavement as he came up, and he lurched forward, and fell against the old gentleman, and threw his arms around him for support.

"Bless my soul!"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Rake. "I slipped—here's your purse, sir—I saw it drop from your pocket, and sent my boy to call you back."

"Thank you very much!" exclaimed the old gentleman. He might not have been much impressed by Captain Rake, but Tom Merry's honest, frank, obliging face was a passport to his character. "Thank you—but that is not my purse!"

"Not your purse?"

"No! Dear me!" said the old gentleman, feeling in his pockets. "I have lost my purse, however—but that is not it!"

"But this dropped from your pocket, sir," said Tom Merry.

"No; you must have been mistaken. My purse must still be where I dropped it, though," said the old gentleman, hurrying back the way he had come.

Captain Rake looked very concerned.

"Somebody else must have lost a purse," he remarked. "I have picked up the wrong one, Tom! It's very odd! I will take this to the police station. Come on!"

(Continued on page 8.)

TOO LATE!



Doctor: "Give up smoking and you will live to be eighty."

Farmer: "It be too late."

Doctor: "It's never too late."

Farmer: "But Oi be eighty-eight now!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Osborn, 20, Wolverton Gardens, Hammersmith, London, W.6.

come out with me now. Wait for me in the passage, and I'll join you as soon as I'm ready."

"Certainly. Thank you so much."

Tom Merry's face was much brighter as he waited in the hall outside. The wind blew cold and keen in at the open doorway, and the lad shivered there. But work was to be had—work at last—honest work.

Tom Merry, however, had much to learn yet. Anyone in Blucher's Buildings could have told him the real character of Captain Rake; but Tom had little in common with the other occupants of the house, and had little to say to them, and never even thought of asking them for information.

Clump, clump, clump!

Tom Merry smiled as little Joe came clumping up in his heavy boots.

The little lad's pinched face was very eager.

"E's took you on?" he asked.

"He is going to find me employment," said Tom Merry.

"A l!" said Joe. "You mayn't like it at first—I know you're queer—but it's the only way, old pal. And you can't starve."

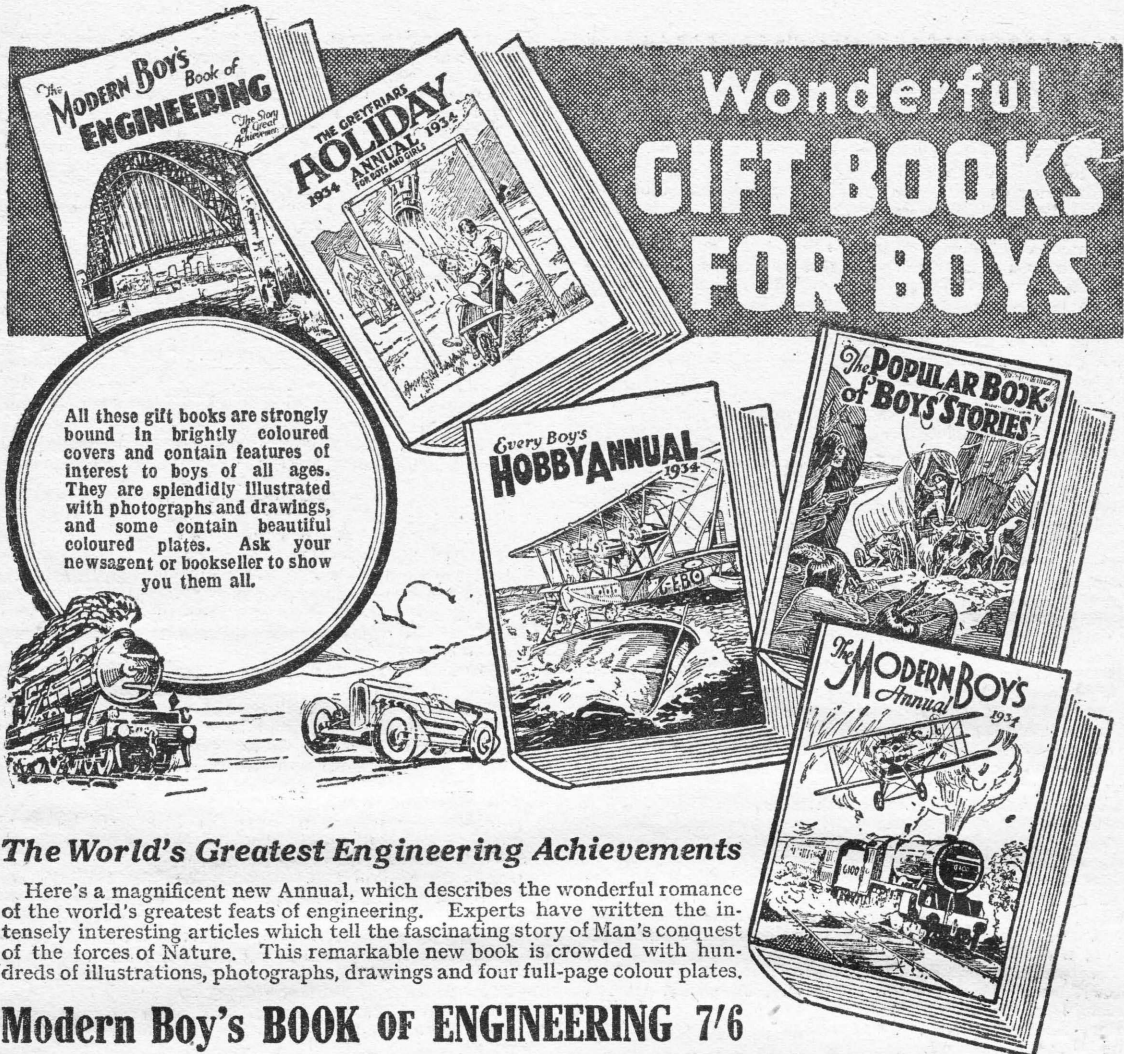
"What do you mean, Joe?"

But Joe clumped off without vouchsafing any explanation, leaving Tom Merry considerably puzzled.

Captain Rake did not seem to be in a hurry to join his young protege. It was more than half an hour before he emerged from his room.

He had made a great change in his appearance in that time. He was shaven, and his clothes were brushed, and his face washed, and he looked much the better for it—but he was not likely ever to look respectable. He had a horsey, flashy appearance, which would have marked him down in

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DOWN ON HIS LUCK!

(Continued from page 6.)

"Hadn't we better help that old gentleman look for his purse?" asked Tom Merry.

"No; we'd better get on!"

The mist of the street soon shut them out from the view of the old gentleman, who was peering about for his purse. Rake sauntered on with a careless air, but he seemed to be in no hurry to reach the police station to give up the purse he had found, or to get to the place where Tom Merry was to be introduced to his employer.

As a matter of fact, the captain was beginning to puzzle Tom Merry a great deal!

He did not seem to be in a hurry to get anywhere, and the course he followed seemed more designed for covering as much ground as possible than for any other purpose.

But Tom Merry had learned to be patient.

The captain halted at the wide corner where Shaftesbury Avenue crosses Charing Cross Road. A number of people, as usual, were loitering outside the Palace Theatre, some of them reading the notice-boards of performances to be given that night.

Among the latter were three individuals who would have attracted a second glance anywhere.

One of them was a negro of splendid build, and the other two stalwart fellows with sun-tanned faces, showing that they had spent a great deal of their time at sea and in tropical climes.

The coloured gentleman was reading a notice of a ventriloquial performer who was to appear at the Palace that evening, and remarking upon it with interest, a broad grin upon his black countenance.

From where he stood, Tom Merry could hear what he said; indeed, there were few people up and down the pavement who could not hear the negro's powerful voice.

"Golly! Dat seems like old times, Jim!" the negro remarked to the younger of his two companions. "I tink we will go and see dat show to-night!"

Jim laughed.

"Just as you like," he said. "Though I don't suppose it will be anything like you could give, Rastus!"

"Oh, I gib in dere," said the negro. "Dere is only one Rastus, and I'm dat nigger! Golly, we'd better be mobing, I tink; it's cold!"

"You would naturally find London cold in December, Rastus!" said the other of the party, laughing. "It's different from Darkest Africa!"

"Bery different, Buck! Come along!"

The three moved off.

Captain Rake ran towards the spot where they had been standing and stooped to the muddy pavement. He rose, and showed Tom Merry a gold cuff-link.

"One of those chaps dropped that," he exclaimed. "Did you see which one it was, Tom?"

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"No!" he said.

"Better run after them and tell them," said the captain. Tom Merry hesitated a moment.

Why, he could hardly have told! But he had been greatly struck by the kind good-nature in the face of the negro, and by the looks, too, of Rastus' white companions. He ran after the trio, who were waiting at the edge of the pavement for a seemingly endless stream of taxicabs to pass before crossing the road.

"Please stop a minute, sir!" he exclaimed. "One of you has dropped a gold cuff-link outside the Palace!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Rastus, turning his big, dark eyes upon Tom Merry. "Dat is bery obliging of you, my boy! Where is de link? Buck, is it you who are scattering your wealth in dis way?"

"I reckon not!" said Buck.

"Den it is you, Jim?"

"Not guilty," said Jim, laughing.

"Den it must be me," said Rastus. "Here—hallo! Hold on, old hoss!"

Captain Rake bumped into him on the slippery pavement.

"Sorry, sir!" exclaimed the captain. "My foot slipped—quite an accident. Here is the gold link you dropped, sir!"

"But I didn't drop it, old hoss," said Rastus. "De missing link doesn't belong to me!"

"My mistake," said the captain. "Sorry! It must have been that gentleman."

And he dashed away, pursuing an imaginary gentleman in the mist.

"T'ank you beryl much, all de same, my boy," said Rastus.

"Not at all," said Tom Merry.

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He was turning away to follow the captain when a grasp of iron was laid upon his shoulder.

"Hold on, sonny!" said Buck quietly.

"What do you mean?" asked Tom Merry indignantly.

"Let go my shoulder!"

"I reckon not!"

"Buck, dat is bery impolite," said Rastus. "I'm surprised at you, old hoss! Why don't you let de young gentleman alone?"

"See if your pocket's picked first, Rastus!"

"Eh?"

"Pocket!" howled Buck. "See if it's been picked by a pickpocket!"

"Oh, Buck!"

"Is your watch safe?" demanded Jim.

"Yes, of course— Oh!"

"Well?" said Jim with a grin, as Rastus pulled an empty hand out of his watch pocket. "Is it there?"

"Golly!"

"Is the watch there?" roared Buck.

"No!"

"I thought not!" said Buck grimly, and his hand tightened upon Tom Merry. "Your pocket's been picked, and I've got hold of the thief!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Feed for Tom!

TOM MERRY gave a low, hoarse cry. He realised it all, now; and he realised too clearly how blackly suspicion must fall upon himself.

He realised that he had been used as a tool by the pickpocket, for that Captain Rake was a pickpocket he could have no doubt.

The earlier incident of the old gentleman whose purse Rake had pretended to find was on a par with this.

Tom Merry's innocent face and evident honesty were of great use to the thief, and he was of use, too, to hold the victim in talk, and give Rake an opportunity and an excuse for bumping into him and relieving him of his watch or purse in the same moment.

Rake was gone now.

Tom Merry was left to bear the brunt of the rascal's guilt.

The boy was almost sick with horror.

Buck's grasp was firm upon his shoulder, and he could not have escaped if he had wanted to, but he did not even think of it. To prove his innocence—to clear his character in the eyes of these three men—that was all he thought of. And although Buck's grasp was like iron, his face was not hard. He believed Tom Merry to be a thief, but he pitied the lad's youth and evident shame.

"Golly!" said Rastus, with a look of great distress upon his black face.

"You'll get the watch back all right," said Buck. "Come back here out of the way, and we can make him give it up. I suppose you don't want the young rascal to be arrested?"

"Nebcr!"

"I—I am not a thief!" panted Tom Merry. "I—I did not take your watch. You can search my pockets if you like."

"I reckon your partner took it, then," Buck remarked dryly.

"He is nothing to me. I don't know him."

"You were with him."

"He promised to get me a situation," said Tom miserably. "I—I suppose you don't believe me. Heaven knows, I never would be a thief! I'd die a thousand times first!"

The negro nodded.

"Dat is right, my boy," he said. "Stick to dat."

"I reckon he hasn't stuck to it."

"Wrong, Buck."

"What do you mean, Rastus?"

"Dis boy ain't a thief," said Rastus, with a shake in his voice. "Thieves don't speak and look like dat, Buck."

"Right!" grinned Jim. "I'm rather inclined to agree with Rastus, Buck. The boy doesn't look like a thief."

"I reckon I'd think the same from his looks," said Buck. "But if he isn't a thief what was he doing with one?"

"I've explained that," said Tom Merry. "I'm looking for work, and he offered to help me get a job."

"And you didn't know he was a thief?"

"Certainly not!"

"It's a tall story, I guess, but I'm rather inclined to believe you, youngster," said Buck. "I should advise you to be a little more careful in your company, that's all."

"I shall be more careful," said Tom Merry.

"And your watch is gone, Rastus. Anything else?"

"Only my purse, old hoss."

"Anything in it?"

"Nothing; only my money," said Rastus.

"You chump!" exclaimed Buck. "Did you think I was asking you if your Sunday trousers were in it?"



Tom Merry was turning away to follow Captain Rake when a grasp of iron was laid upon his shoulder. "Hold on, sonny!" said Buck quietly. "What do you mean?" asked Tom. "Let go my shoulder!" "I reckon not," said Buck. "See if your pocket's picked first, Rastus!"

"Don't get excited, Buck. De money doesn't matter, as I can borrow of you two," said Rastus cheerfully. "But about dis boy—"

"I reckon he can go."

"I reckon not, Buck."

"Look here—"

"Don't argue, Buck! You know I'm always in de right."

"Then why can't he go, you old image?" demanded Buck.

"Because he's hungry," said Rastus. "Hasn't he said already dat he's looking for a job? I'm going to find him a job—eating a good dinner."

Tom Merry flushed scarlet.

"Oh, sir—"

"You leabe it to me, my boy."

"But I cannot accept charity from you, sir," said Tom Merry, with scarlet cheeks and a firm voice. "I'm not a beggar, sir."

"Who's talking about charity?" demanded Rastus angrily. "Buck, were you talking to de young gentleman about charity?"

"No, old chump!"

"Were you, Jim?"

"You know I wasn't, Rastus."

"And," said Rastus, "I wasn't, either. You'm on de wrong hoss, my boy. Nobody was talking to you about charity, and you've been misjudging dese respectable young men. I'm going to stand you a good dinner, but dat is a different matter."

"But—"

"Dis way," said Rastus, putting his hand through Tom Merry's arm. "Look here! Hab you had your dinner?"

"No."

"Hab you had any brekker?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Are you hungry?"

"Ye-es."

"Dere, I knew it!" said Rastus triumphantly. "Come along! Buck, you know where dere is a really first-chop, first-class, bang and slap-up grub department?"

"I reckon not," said Buck.

"Jim, I call upon you to be de guide. You am de chap dat knows London."

"Right!" said Jim, laughing. "Follow me!"

"Come on, boy! What's your name?"

"Tom Merry."

"I like dat name. So you am looking for work?" said Rastus, as he followed Jim and Buck, still retaining a hold upon Tom Merry's arm.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Dat ain't my name," said Rastus. "My name's Rastus."

"Yes, sir."

"You can call me Rastus; it comes more natural, I t'ink."

"Yes, Rastus," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"Here's the place!" exclaimed Jim, as the party reached a pleasant-looking restaurant.

"Good! I'm getting bery hungry myself. Come in, Tom!"

And Tom followed Rastus into the restaurant.

Tom Merry wondered whether he was dreaming when he found himself sitting at a table, with a spotless serviette over his knees, and a good dinner before him, and three cheerful faces turned towards him.

The meeting with Jim, Buck, and Rastus seemed like a dream. Three kind faces, and the kindest and jolliest of them all the black visage of the big negro, with its flashing, white teeth, and big dark, tender eyes. Tom Merry had not realised how hungry he was till he saw the food before him, and its scent greeted his nostrils. It was as great a change after Blucher's Buildings, as Blucher's Buildings had been after St. Jim's.

Rastus beamed upon his youthful protege.

Rastus enjoyed a good meal himself, and, just as much, he enjoyed seeing another fellow enjoy one. And to help the poor or downcast, to assist a lame dog over a stile, that was always a pleasure to Rastus, whose big heart matched his big body.

Tom Merry, though he tried not to show any great keenness, could not help letting it be seen how hungry he was. As a matter of fact, he was almost famished. Where would he have dined that day had he not met Jim, Buck, and Rastus? Nowhere, in all probability.

Rastus gave his orders with great magnificence, apparently oblivious of the fact that he had lost his purse, and had no money about him. But doubtless one of his friends was prepared to settle the bill, which was certain to be a large one.

Rastus had a gigantic appetite, and he made Tom Merry eat as if the lad were endowed with a similar one.

If Tom had eaten a quarter of what his kind host pressed upon him, he would certainly have been ill.

As it was, he ate well and heartily, and with the good food inside him he found his courage and his spirits slowly but surely returning.

CHAPTER 6.

Friends in Need!

RASTUS, with a delicacy that one would have hardly expected of so big and powerful a fellow, asked Tom Merry questions about himself.

His intention was so evidently kind that Tom Merry never thought of concealing anything, but he told

his story simply. After the view the three comrades had taken of the affair outside the Palace, too, he felt that they were entitled to know about him.

"I reckon you've had bad luck," Buck remarked.

"Golly, it's too bad!" said Rastus. "Look here, Buck, can't you t'ink of anything for our young friend to do?"

"I reckon I'll try," said Buck.

"And meanwhile," said Jim, "you must allow us to look after you a little, Tom."

"Thank you!" said Tom Merry.

"I t'ink I can easily find something for you to do," said Rastus, with a sage nod of his head. "I t'ink dat will be all serene, old hoss."

Tom Merry's lips quivered.

He could see that the three kind comrades were thinking of helping him, and he knew, too, that they, obviously birds of passage in London as they were, could not find him any employment, and that their help would only be some form of charity, skilfully disguised to save his feelings.

And, grateful as he was, Tom Merry did not mean to accept it.

He meant to fight for himself, and although he might not refuse a helping hand, charity in any form he would never touch.

The dinner was finished at last.

"Do you smoke, Tom?" Rastus inquired, as he pulled out a pipe.

"No, sir."

"Rastus."

"I mean Rastus."

"Good! Bery good!" said Rastus, with an approving nod. "Don't you do it. It's a bery bad habit to get into, specially cigarettes. Wait till you're my age, Tommy, and den smoke a pipe. Where's my matches?"

"I reckon you've lost them," said Buck.

"Golly! Where are yours, den?"

"You borrowed 'em this morning."

"Where are your matches, Jim?"

"I lent them to you last night."

"Golly! I say, waiter—waiter, old hoss!"

The waiter came up, and many a head was turned round in the restaurant, as Rastus hailed him in stentorian tones, more suitable to the deck of a ship in a hurricane than to the place where Rastus now found himself.

"Yessir!"

"It's all serene," said Rastus, pulling out a match-box and striking a match. "I tought I had lost my matches, but I hadn't, so I don't want any."

The waiter gave him a very peculiar look, and retired.

Rastus smoked in contentment.

"I t'ink dat we will pay a visit to Blucher's Buildings dat our young friend has told us about," he remarked. "If dat rascal hab gone back dere I should like to gib him a frashin'! And dere's dat boy Joe—I must do somet'ing for him."

"Oh, all right!" said Jim, who knew that there never was any chance of turning Rastus from a purpose he had formed. "Let's be off!"

"Waiter!" roared Rastus.

The man came up.

"Yes, sir?"

"Gib me my bill, please."

"Yes, sir. There you are, sir."

"Only two pounds free shillings," said Rastus, glancing at it. "Sure you habn't made a mistake, waiter?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Den it is bery cheap," said Rastus. "Look here, I suppose you don't mind if I send you dis money later?"

"Eh?"

"I hab had my pocket picked," explained Rastus.

"Sir!"

"It's all right," interposed Jim, before the waiter could explode. "Hand me the bill, waiter. My friend has had his pocket picked, but I will settle the bill!"

"Yes, sir."

"Really, Jim, I am sure de waiter would not hab de slightest objection to leabin' it ober for two or free days."

Jim laughed, and paid the bill, with so big a tip that the waiter brightened up wonderfully.

"Come on, den!" said Rastus. "You be de guide, Tom."

"Yes, Rastus."

Tom led the way through the misty streets, in which the early winter dusk was falling thickly.

Rastus' jolly face grew graver and graver as they turned out of the lighted streets into poorer quarters, where gloom and damp, and cold and fog reigned. His kind eyes were shadowed as he saw thin, gaunt faces—thin hands—stretched out for charity. He felt in his huge pocket for money, but he had none, and he borrowed nearly all that Jim and Buck had, and it was all distributed before Blucher's Buildings were reached.

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To the inhabitants of that delectable mansion the sight of the three comrades was as novel and interesting as that of a fire engine.

A crowd gathered round to watch them.

A very brief inquiry elicited the fact that nothing had been seen of Captain Rake; and, indeed, the captain was not likely to return there and place it in Tom Merry's power to denounce him to the police.

Little Joe came clumping up in his big boots to meet his friend. He glanced in a startled way at Jim, Buck, and Rastus.

"Wot luck, old pal?" he whispered.

"None," said Tom Merry, looking steadily at the urchin of the gutter. "That man Rake was a thief, Joe. Did you know it?"

Joe sniggered.

"You 'ad to do something, old pal," he said.

"You knew he was a thief, and you let me go with him, Joe?" said Tom Merry reproachfully.

"You was bound to come to it sooner or later, old pal. No good starving first," said Joe, with a grin.

"I shall never come to it, Joe, but I don't reproach you. I suppose you meant to help me, in your way," said Tom Merry, with a sigh.

"I just did, old pal."

"Golly!" said Rastus. "Dat is a bery bad way of helping anybody! I'm going to help you, Joe, but in a bery different way. Lend me some money, Buck."

"I reckon you've nearly had the lot," said Buck. "Here's the rest."

"Thanks, old hoss!"

"I say, don't you go giving no money to father!" exclaimed Joe, in great alarm.

"Why not?" demanded Rastus.

"Cause he'll get squiffy and lam me," said Joe promptly. "He 'arf-killed me the last time he was squiffy, all over Master Merry givin' 'im somethin'."

"Golly!"

"What can we do to help you, then?" asked Jim, in a low voice.

Joe cocked his eye thoughtfully at the sun-tanned young man.

"Gimme 'arf-a-crown," he said.

Jim handed him the coin, and Joe rushed out into the court with a whoop. In a moment he had a crowd of equally ragged and dirty little urchins round him, and was hurrying off to spend the precious coin—a mine of wealth to him.

Jim, with a saddened face, tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"You have a better chance of getting out of this place than that lad has," he said. "We must do something for you, Tom Merry."

"If you can get me work, sir, I shall be grateful," said Tom Merry. "But real work—not charity. I've got nothing but my self-respect left, and I don't want to lose that."

"Golly! Dat is all right, Tom, but—but you must live!"

"I shall find work, Rastus."

"You will take dis pound to go on wid," said Rastus.

"Take it as a Christmas present from Rastus, Tom."

Tom Merry accepted the note.

"Thank you, from my heart!" he said.

"Dat is all right. I shall look into de matter ob finding some employment for you, Tom, and let you know."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the three comrades shook hands heartily with Tom Merry, and left him.

Tom Merry looked after them down the misty street.

"Heaven bless them!" he muttered. "And Heaven bless Rastus most of all!"

And in the dark days that followed, it was like a gleam of sunlight to Tom Merry to think of the kindness of the three comrades, and he seemed to draw comfort from the remembrance of the kind voice and the friendly face of Rastus.

CHAPTER 7.

Gussy's Good Idea!

"WOTTEN!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that observation.

He flung himself down in an armchair in an apartment at Eastwood House, before a big, blazing fire.

Jack Blake was seated at the table, playing chess with Monty Lowther. Manners was roasting chestnuts at the fire. The two Shall fellows had come down to Eastwood House together to spend Christmas with D'Arcy. They had brought many of their St. Jim's habits with them to the stately home of Lord Eastwood.

"Wotten!" repeated D'Arcy.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" said Blake. "His lordship been cutting up rough?"

D'Arcy sniffed.

"I am sowwy to have to say it, deah boy, but my govannah has wefused to play the game!"

"Off with his head!" said Monty Lowther.

"Pway be sewious, Lowthah!"

"What has he done?" asked Manners. "Stopped the flow of fivers?"

"Worse than that, deah boy! He has wefused to copowate in a wippin' scheme I thought of for settin' Tom Mewwy on his feet!"

"But what do you want to set Tom Merry on your father's feet for?" asked Monty Lowther innocently.

"Weally, Lowthah, I don't mean anythin' of the sort, and I believe you are wottin'. I mean settin' Tom Mewwy on his own feet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason for this diswepctful mewwiment, Blake! I have suggested to my govannah gettin' Tom Mewwy appointed to some secwetawy's post undah Government, with a big salary and nothin' to do, you know! It would suit Tom Mewwy's posish admiwably. But the govannah says it's imposh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway cease that howwid cacklin', Blake! I have been urgin' the govannah, but he has done nothin' but laugh! I wegard it as wotten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Somethin' else will have to be done for Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy. "Look heah, you chaps, we've got to find him!"

"Find him?" said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That would be rather difficult," Blake remarked, becoming grave again. "He's in London, and we're in the country."

"We can go to London."

"My hat!"

"I've been thinkin' of it!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Look here, Tom Mewwy has only witten once since he left St. Jim's, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Since then we've heard nothin' fwom him."

"Not a word!"

"He hasn't even given us his address in London."

"No!"

"He thought he had a chance of employment when he went up to London, and he was goin' to let us know if it turned out all wight. And as he hasn't let us know, I pwesume it has turned out all wong!"

"Most likely!"

"Then the poor chap is there on his uppahs, without any work and without any money," said Arthur Augustus. "Look here, it won't do!"

The chums looked grim enough.

As a matter of fact, the doubt as to the fate of Tom Merry was weighing upon their spirits and shadowing their Christmas holidays.

The little party at Eastwood House would have been very different if Tom Merry had been there. Where was Tom Merry?

"We simply can't stand it," said D'Arcy. "I suggest goin' and lookin' for Tom Mewwy, and bwingin' him back heah, whethah he likes it or not!"

Monty Lowther nodded.

"I'm on, for one," he said.

"What-ho!" exclaimed Manners.

"Of course, it's a good idea!" said Blake. "Blessed if I know how Gussy came by such a good idea!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Any of the other fellows coming?"

"Yaas, I will wiah to Hewwies. I know he can come. Dig is with his people, and can't leave them for Chwistmas. Figgins and Kerr are in Wales with Fatty Wynn, and they won't be able to come. But five of us will be enough to look for Tom Mewwy."

"Good! Buzz off and send the telegram to Herries, and let's see if he can come," said Blake. "We'll leave first thing in the morning."

"Vewy well!"

And the telegram was sent.

The chums of St. Jim's made their preparations for going up to London the following morning.

Arthur Augustus was gently dissuaded from taking a cabin-trunk and a hat-box, and to satisfy himself with a suitcase.

That he consented to do, on condition that he was allowed to place the overflow of shirts and collars in Blake's bag.

"Shove 'em in, my son!" said Blake generously.

Arthur Augustus shoved them in.

As soon as his back was turned Blake shoved them out again—out of sight under the elegant junior's bed.

(Continued on next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Fine footballs are awarded every week for the two best jokes received, and a half-a-crown is paid for every other joke that appears in this column.

FULL HOUSE!

Jones: "How are you getting on in your new house?"
 Smith: "Oh, fine! We've furnished one room by collecting soap coupons."
 Jones: "Why not furnish the other seven rooms the same way?"
 Smith: "I can't—they're full of soap!"
 A football has been awarded to "A Reader," 81, Horseley Heath, Tipton, Staffs.

NO WONDER!

Customer: "I've had two bottles of your hair restorer, but nothing's happened."
 Barber: "That's odd—I can't understand it."
 Customer: "Well, I don't mind drinking another, but that's the last!"
 A football has been awarded to C. Mackay, 7, Patchett Street, West Gorton, Manchester.

HEAVY-HANDED!

Tom Merry: "What's the difference between Fatty Wynn buttering some bread and Latham caning us?"
 Monty Lowther: "I give it up."
 Tom Merry: "No difference—they both lay it on thick!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Ling, 23, Bourne Street, Hull, Yorks.

STRIKING!

Father: "What's wrong with these matches—they won't light?"
 Son: "They were all right when I bought them, because I tried them all!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to V. Payne, 124, Lovel Avenue, Welling, Kent.

THE ATTRACTION!

New Doctor: "Is there really a patient in the waiting-room?"
 Maid: "No, sir; that gentleman comes once a week to read the serial story!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to "Regular Reader," 234, Brockley Grove, Brockley, London, S.E.4.

PROOF?

Muggins: "I say, how long can a man live without brains?"
 Juggins: "I don't know—how old are you?"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. Horne, 18, Bedford Gardens, Campden Hill, London.

HARD LUCK!

Theatrical Agent: "Good news. I've booked your performing pigeons for a six weeks' tour."
 Hard-up Client: "Too late—I've eaten the lot!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Lovatt, 236, Princess Street, Saint John, N.B., Canada.

CAUSE AND EFFECT!

Ship's Officer: "That's eight bells; it's my watch below."
 Old Gen: "Dear me, I never heard a watch strike so loudly before!"
 Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Shepherd, Homeleigh, 4th Avenue, Sandgate, Queensland, Australia.

D'Arcy, in blissful ignorance of the fact that the greater part of his spotless linen was reposing under his bed, finished packing his bag very carefully.

He had finished by the time the answer to his telegram was brought.

He opened it. He gave a little grunt as he read the answer, and the juniors looked at him.

"Can't he come?" asked Blake.
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "It's all right, then?"
 "Yaas, it's all wight!"
 "What are you grunting about, then?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I was not awah that I was gwuntin'!"
 "Let's sec the telegram!"

D'Arcy held it up for his chums to sec. Then the cause of his grunt was apparent. The message ran as follows:

"All serene. Coming to-night. Will bring Towser. He'll be useful.—HERRIES."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "He's going to bring Towser!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Herries thinks that Towser will be useful in tracking down Tom Merry," grinned Manners. "You should have warned him off."

"Pewwaps he may forget to bring Towsah," said D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not wegard it as a laughin' mattah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

And a couple of hours later Herries arrived—with Towser.

CHAPTER 8.

Moved On!

TOM MERRY had reason to be glad that he had accepted the pound note that Rastus had so kindly insisted upon his taking.

It was all that stood between the boy and starvation during the following days.

In the grim, grey streets of London the hero of St. Jim's tramped to and fro in search of work. But work was not to be found. An odd job here and there, that meant a shilling or two; that was all.

In the hurrying Christmas crowds there were many like Tom Merry, in search of jobs, in search of food, and finding none.

He was only a unit among the many thousands. Many a grim winter morning he started out to look for work with an empty stomach to begin the day upon.

He had said farewell to Blucher's Buildings now. He could not afford even the miserable room there. And he was afraid that Rastus or his friends might look for him there. Tom Merry had nothing left now but pride; but, as is not uncommon in such a case, that was growing more dominant, almost touching. He was penniless, shabby, well-nigh hopeless, but his cheeks were ready to flame and his eyes to flash at the thought of being considered a beggar.

Better anything than that!
 Often in these dark days he thought of his friends—how gladly they would have helped him!—of the chums at St. Jim's, who would have shared their last crust with him.

But he did not write.
 If he could not pull ahead by himself, he would not become a burden to his friends. He was long past the thought of picking and choosing his employment. He would take anything that offered food and shelter. But nothing offered.

What did the future hold for him?
 He could not think of it. And he was growing dulled with want and suffering, and he could not think clearly now. He was falling into the fatal way of thinking only of the passing day, and never looking before or after.

Christmas Eve!
 Tom Merry thought of the day, and all that it implied, as he moved with the busy crowd through the foggy, slushy streets. Many a Christmas Eve could he remember in his young life, but nothing like this!

He remembered the old house at Huckleberry Heath, the rooms decorated with holly, the happy faces and bright laughter, the smoking Christmas puddings—all the old associations of Christmas-time—his chums, his old governess, and Cousin Ethel.

The grim, grey streets, the unthinking, hurrying crowds, the lowering sky, the hideous buildings—they seemed like phantoms of a horrible dream as he thought of the past.

But they were real enough.
 Tom Merry stood at a street corner, shivering in the cold wind, his shabby clothes an ill protection to his shivering limbs, his cheeks pale, his nose red—an unpicturesque figure of want and pain.

Where was he to go now?
 Where?
 A hand fell upon his shoulder. He started and turned round and looked into the stolid face of a policeman—a not unkindly face.

"Yes?" he said inquiringly.
 "Move on!" said the constable.

"What?"
 "Move on!"
 "Move on!" repeated Tom Merry dazedly. "I'm not doing any harm!"

His eyes burned and then filled with tears. Move on—move on! It was brought home to him with the clearness of a knife-cut that he had fallen into the class that is "moved on" by the police.

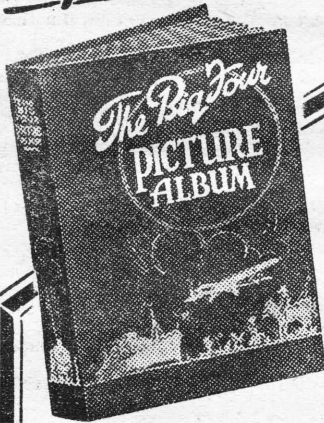
He looked shabby enough, and thin enough, and starved enough, to steal, perhaps; in any case, he was a member of the submerged classes now, and he had to "move on!"

The policeman tapped him on the shoulder again.
 "Come on, my lad!" he said. "You can't stay here—you must move on!"

"Where?" said Tom Merry unconsciously.
 The constable looked at him, and then his big gloved hand touched Tom Merry's and there was a glint of a shilling in it.

(Continued at foot of next page.)

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ALL THE NEWS ABOUT NEXT WEEK'S SPECIAL XMAS ISSUE!



Let the Editor be your pal! Write to him to-day, addressing your letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! As Christmas draws nearer it is always a reminder of the rapid passing of time. It hardly seems a year ago that I was preparing the last Christmas Number of the GEM, but I was reminded of it during the last few days, for I have been busy on our latest Yuletide Number. It will be on sale next Wednesday, and, let me tell you right away, it's a real bumper issue, and, of course, it will contain the next set of Free Gift pictures—nine of them—for your album.

The chief item on the Christmas programme is the ripping yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's, and for festive fun, football, and adventure, it simply cannot be beaten! Martin Clifford has broken all Christmas-story records with this tip-top tale, which is entitled

"GUSSY THE GHOST!"

Tom Merry, who has had more than his share of trouble lately, is spending Christmas at Eastwood House, the home of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But the penniless Tom is reluctant to impose too much on the generosity of his kind host, and

decides to depart before the holiday is over. Of course, his St. Jim's chums are dead against his leaving, but they realise that Tom, who must find work soon or starve, is right, when they put themselves in his position. So it is that Tom retires to bed, two or three days after Christmas, with the full intention of leaving the next day. It is then that Gussy gets a brain-wave. He decides to become the ghost of one of his ancestors with the idea of giving a spectral warning to Tom to leave the house at his peril. How Gussy fares as a ghost, and how Tom's departure is eventually delayed, is told in fascinating style in next week's grand Yuletide yarn.

To Irish Free State Readers.

Readers in the Irish Free State are requested to note that when free gifts are offered with the GEM, they can only be supplied when the article is of a non-dutiable character.

"Take it," he said, "and move on!" And he repeated "Move on!" in a loud and ferocious voice, as if afraid that someone might have observed his act of kindness.

"Thank you!" said Tom Merry.

He could not refuse the man's kindness. But, hungry as he was, he could not use that shilling. He passed an old lady selling matches and dropped it into her lap. The old woman stared at him, surprised that one evidently in greater want than herself should give her so much.

"Heaven bless yer!" she cried.

Tom Merry moved on.

**CHAPTER 9.
Off to London.**

"**T**IME!"

"Eh?"

"Time!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Time!"

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes, and groped for his eyeglass. He jammed it into his eye, and stared at Jack Blake through it.

"What do you mean by wepeatin' that widiculous word in that widiculous mannah, Blake?" he demanded.

"It's time to get up."

"Oh, I see!"

"Up you get! Do you want to lose the train?"

"Certainly not, deah boy."

"Then get up!" roared Blake. "By Jove! I'll swamp you with water if you don't turn out of bed!"

"I should uttably wufuse to be swamped with watah—oh, stop it, you ass! I'm gettin' up!"

"Buck up, then!"

Arthur Augustus turned out. He wrung the cold water from his pyjama-jacket and stared angrily at Blake.

"You uttah ass—"

"What?"

"You fwabjous duffah—"

Blake brandished the sponge, and D'Arcy dodged round the bed.

"Hold on, you uttah ass—I will dwess!"

"Buck up, then! I'm not going to have this expedition mucked up because you're a slow ass!" said Blake severely.

"Buzz!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Buck up, Lowther! Get a move on, Manners!"

"Oh, rats!"

"The train goes at nine, and it's past eight, and we've got to get to the station. Herries has gone for Tower!"

Herries was already down. He had arrived the previous night, bringing the famous bulldog.

Arthur Augustus, being host at Eastwood House, put on a smile of forced politeness to greet Herries, and his bulldog. He could not say what he thought of Tower while Tower's master was his guest.

But he thought the more.

Herries was very enthusiastic about the search for Tom Merry. He pointed out very keenly to the other fellows what a splendid acquisition Tower would be in the circus. The other fellows snorted.

The chums hurried down and found breakfast ready, and a good many of the Eastwood House guests at the table, and Herries with them.

(Continued on the next page.)

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Lord Eastwood greeted his youthful guests in a kindly and somewhat stately way.

"Arthur has told me where you intend to go to-day, and I wish you every success," he said. "I shall only be too glad to see Tom Merry if you succeed in bringing him home. But mind you do not get into trouble in London."

"Oh, that's all wight," said D'Arcy. "I am goin' to look aftah them, you know."

Lord Eastwood smiled.

"And who is going to look after you, Arthur?"

"Oh, weally, patah—"

"I'm sorry I can't come," said Wally, from the other side of the table. "But, look here, if you chaps don't find Tom Merry I'll run up to town with Jameson to-morrow morning and find him for you."

"Weally, Wally—"

"It's a go!" said Wally. "Pass the toast, Gussy!"

After breakfast the chums walked to the station. A single dressing-case contained their belongings, D'Arcy's case having been left behind. The swell of St. Jim's was half-way to the station before he discovered that he was carrying the wrong case.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "This is your case, Blake!"

"Is it, really?" exclaimed Blake, with an air of the greatest astonishment.

"Yaas, watah!"

"Never mind—I've no conscientious objection to your carrying it."

"That's all wight, so long as you have mine."

"Eh?"

"I say, it's all wight so long as you have mine."

"Oh, I see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared, Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Buck up!" exclaimed Herries.

"What for, Hewvies? We are in good time for the twain!"

"Yes; but Towser would like to run!"

"Weally, Hewvies— But, bai Jove! You are not cawwvin' a case!"

"Great Scott!"

"My case has been left behind!"

"My word!"

"This is wotten! I must go back for it," said Arthur Augustus.

He dropped Blake's case into the road and started back. Jack Blake caught him by the shoulder.

"Hold on, ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You'll lose the train."

"I will huwvy!"

"Rats! The train goes in seven minutes, and it will take you that to get to Eastwood House, without getting to the station afterwards."

"I am afraid it cannot be helped, Blake. I cannot go to London without even my pyjamas, in case we have to stay the night."

"I'll lend you some."

"Yaas, but your pyjamas are such a howwid inartistic colour, Blake. Besides, there are othah things."

"Oh, all right—you can lose the train and we'll go on without you!" said Blake resignedly. "Come on, you chaps!"

"I wufuse to lose the twain!"

"Come on, kids!"

"We will go by a latah twain—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Bosh!"

"I wufuse to have my wemarks chawctawised as bosh! I insist upon your withdwain' that expwession, Blake!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,347.



Sent out after fur robbers, Mick Ray, of the Mounted, discovers, after a in a blizzard. Mick sets out in pursuit, and endeavours to get ahead



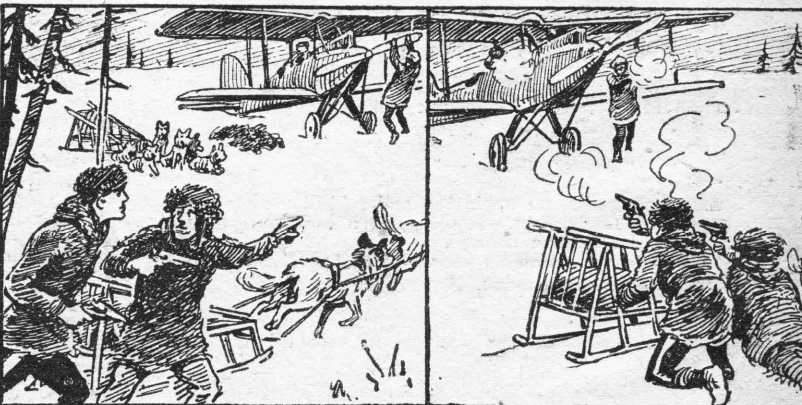
"I must take a short cut if I'm to reach the plane before the fur robbers," Mick decided. But the trail was a hazardous one, and when crossing a frozen river the ice suddenly began to crack.

Then began a frantic ride for life over drifting floes. With brilliant skill, managed to guide the terrified dogs floe to floe, but more than once they met with disaster.



The Mountie ran ahead to move the tree. Even as he bent over it, however, a figure, concealed among the trees, sprang forward and pounced on him. It was the pilot of the abandoned aeroplane.

Over and over they rolled in the fighting desperately. But the sudden of the attack had taken Mick at an advantage, and he found himself hanging over the very edge of the precipice.



One of the men tried to swing the propeller, but at that moment Mick's Indian chum, Eagle Eye, came running forward. "Robbers no get away—me disable machine of the skies!" he shouted.

Realising they could not escape in plane, the crooks started to shoot at Mick and Eagle Eye, who dropped behind Mountie's sledge and returned the fire. Soon a fierce battle was being waged.

(Don't miss Mick's exciting Chris

MOUNTED!

Wild West!

at the crooks are heading for their aeroplane, which they had abandoned
try to join his Indian chum, Eagle Eye, who is camped by the plane.



st they reached the steep bank, and
s scrambled up through the snow.
e on which Mick was standing began
and only just in time did he leap to



Now the trail narrowed and ran alongside
a wooded bank, with a sheer precipice on
the other side. "Hallo, what's happened
here?" muttered Mick, as he saw a tree
lying right across the trail.



a herculean effort Mick managed to
knees in his foe's stomach. A sudden
and up shot his legs, and the fur
catapulted over his head, to dis-
into space.



At last Mick approached the spot where
the plane had been left. "Gosh, they're
going to beat me on the post!" muttered
Mick, for the fur robbers were already
loading their loot into the machine.



one of Mick's bullets penetrated the
ank of the plane, and in a moment
shine had burst into flames. "Got
" shouted Mick, rushing forward to
the crooks as they leaped clear.



Mick started back for headquarters, with
the prisoners securely bound and dumped
in their own sledge. "Well, Eagle Eye,"
he said, "I reckon you and I have put paid
to their schemes!!"

ures. See next week's pictures.)

"Poof!"
"I decline to—"
Blake seized the dressing-case and
rushed on. The other fellows followed
him.
Arthur Augustus hesitated a few
moments, and then hurried after them.
"Upon the whole, deah boy, I will come
with you now!" he exclaimed. "But it is
wotten to leave my case behind."
"Rats!"
"Weally, Lowthah—"
"Buck up!" exclaimed Herries.
"I wegard it as wotten of you to have
forgotten my case, Blake."
"I!" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment.
"I forget your case?"
"Yaas, wathah!"
"But I didn't!"
"But you left it behind."
"Yes; but you can leave a thing behind
without forgetting it," said Blake cheer-
fully.
"Weally, Blake—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"I twust, Blake, that you did not leave
my case behind delibewately, and with
malice aforethought!" exclaimed D'Arcy.
"Rats!"
"I should wegard it as a wotten act—"
"Here comes the train!"
The juniors broke into a run. And a
few moments later Arthur Augustus forgot
all about the case that had been left
behind, in insisting that Towser should
not occupy a seat in the carriage.
And so, through the grey, misty morning
of Christmas Eve, the juniors of St. Jim's
started off for London in search of Tom
Merry.

CHAPTER 10. Searching for Tom Merry.

"BAI Jove!"
"What's the matter?"
"It's foggy, deah boys!"
"Go hon!" said Blake, as he
stepped out of the railway train at the
London terminus. "You surprize me!"
"Weally, Blake—"
"It's jolly foggy, and no mistake,"
said Herries anxiously. "I hope this
won't be bad for Towser's chest."
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, blow Towzah!" said D'Arcy. "I
was only wondewin' how we are to find
Tom Mewwy in this fog!"
"Well, I don't suppose we shall run
against him at the first street corner, any-
way," Monty Lowther remarked. "London
is bigger than the quadrangle at St.
Jim's."
"Yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact,
deah boys, we have entahed on a big
task," said the swell of St. Jim's thought-
fully. "We ought weally to have taken
a more businesslike step, such as puttin'
an advertisement in the papah!"
"This way!" said Blake. "Did you
say you wanted to carry this case,
Gussy?"
"No, Blake; I did not say anythin' of
the sort."
"Are you going to carry it, Manners?"
"Not much."
"Well, we can leave it in the cloak-
room," Blake remarked. "This way!
Take care of that beastly dog, Herries!
They ain't allowed a free bite, you know!"
"Towser won't bite anybody unless they
look at him."
"Weally, Hewwies—"
"This way!"
The juniors of St. Jim's left the
station.
When they stood outside, in the deep
London mist, the hopelessness of their
task entered upon them.

To search for anybody in London was like looking for a proverbial needle in the haystack; and such a search was likely to be as successful as the one the juniors had entered upon.

They stood and consulted on the slushy pavement. "Anybody got a suggestion to make?" asked Blake. "Blessed if I have," said Manners. "Yaas, wathah!" "Oh, you have, have you, Gussy?" "Yaas. Let's take a taxi." "What?" "Let's take a taxi-cab." "Why?" "Well, it will be less exertion than walking, you know, and we may as well save up our strength."

"Ass!" "Weally, Blake—" "Come on!" said Blake. "We'll make a start! Let's trot along the streets and have a look round."

And that the juniors did. Arthur Augustus kept his monocle jammed into his eye, and he peered into face after face, in the hope of recognising Tom Merry among the passing throng.

Needless to say, this method did not succeed.

SAFETY FIRST!



Father: "Tommy, this hurts me more than it does you."

Tommy: "I thought that board in my trousers wouldn't do him any good!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Robins, 3, Maes-yr-hau! Cottages, Crose Inn, Pontyclun, Glamorgan.

The juniors spent some hours in walking about, till they were tired and very hungry, and then Blake proposed an adjournment for lunch.

This motion was seconded and passed unanimously, and they entered a restaurant for a meal and ate it with a good appetite.

Over the lunch they discussed the programme.

How to find Tom Merry was a puzzle, but upon one point the juniors were determined—they wouldn't give in till they had found him.

They did not know his address in London, and had no idea even in what quarter of the city to look for him.

Herries depended very much upon Towser's instinct; but if Towser had possessed the gift of scent of Sexton Blake's famous bloodhound, it was not clear how he was to track down Tom Merry in the vast extent of London.

Herries, it is true, had showed him a boot belonging to Tom Merry, and Towser had sniffed it over, apparently thinking it was offered to him to eat, and had rejected it with scorn. When he was trotting alongside his master, he was not in a good humour, for the fog annoyed him, and the crowds of people jostled him—and Towser, as Herries explained, did not like being jostled.

The discussion came to nothing, and the chums left the restaurant and tramped the streets again in the misty day.

Suddenly, to Herries' delight, Towser began to show signs of excitement.

He tugged at the chain by which his master held him, and tried to get away, and Herries had plenty to do to hold him in.

Herries turned an excited face to his chums.

"Come on!" he shouted.

"Weally, Hewwics—"

"Keep that dog in!" shouted Blake. "He'll get under a motor-bus and drag you under!"

"Rats! He's on the track!"

"What?"

"Towser's on the track!"

"Bosh!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"Hold him in!"

"Oh, come on and don't jaw!" said Herries crossly. "We came to London to find Tom Merry, and I suppose you're not going to hold back now Towser's got on his track!"

"Well, you ass—"

"Come on, I say!"

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And Herries was dragged off by Towser. The chums followed—not because they believed that Towser was on the track, but because they did not want to lose Herries.

"The ass!" growled Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! I must admit that Howwics is actin' like a chump!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Come on!" said Herries breathlessly. "See how eager he is! You remember the last time he did some tracking, Blake?"

"Yes; he tracked down a steak-and-kidney pie in the New House!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Herries. "I mean the other time!"

"The time he tracked down the kipper, do you mean?"

"Look here, if you're going to talk piffle, you may as well shut up!" said Herries angrily. "I should think you can see that Towser means business this time!"

Towser certainly meant business, whatever it was. He was dragging furiously at the chain, and several times almost jerked it from Herries' hand.

As the chums were close to Oxford Circus now, and the streets were crowded with Christmas traffic, Herries and the bulldog excited a considerable amount of interest.

Pedestrians who found Towser dodging among their legs, or running into them, did not bless Herries; and several of them said uncomplimentary things about Herries' and his bulldog.

But Herries did not mind.

He kept on, till the chain became entangled in the legs of a stout old gentleman, who brandished a fat umbrella and made a swipe at Towser.

"Hold on!" roared Herries. "He'll bite!"

Towser growled furiously. The old gentleman tried to get free of the chain, and it was jerked from Herries' hand.

"Look out!" shouted Herries.

But Towser was gone!

He was not likely to let an opportunity like that pass him.

He dashed away among the legs of the moving throng, and Herries rushed after him, bumping into people in the most reckless way.

"After him!" cried Blake. "There'll be trouble soon!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hark!" grinned Monty Lowther. "There's trouble now!"

A terrific noise of barking, snapping, growling, and scrambling came from a quiet entry at the side of the path, and the chums of St. Jim's burst upon the scene in time to see Towser rolling over and over in deadly combat with a dog.

Blake burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a giddy dog-fight—that's what Towser wanted."

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries was trying to catch hold of the chain. It was whisking about and clinking as the two dogs struggled, and Herries had no chance.

"Towser!" shouted Herries. "Come off! Quick! Good dog! This way! Towser!"

But Towser did not heed.

"Call the brute off!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "If the owner of that dog comes by, there will be trouble. It looks a valuable dog, too."

"Call him off, Herries, old man."

"All right," gasped Herries. "It's all serene. Towser obeys me like a lamb. Towser! Towser, old boy! Good doggie! Towser!"

Towser heeded not. Like the expiring gladiator, he heard it but heeded not. He was too deeply interested in his combat.

"Herries, you ass! Call him off!"

"Ain't I calling him off?" roared the exasperated Herries.

"Yaas, but make him come."

"He won't come," said Herries. "Towser isn't one of those rotten, poor-spirited beasts that sink about just as you tell 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Look here, Blake—"

"Bai Jove! There'll be a wow soon!"

"Stop 'em!"

A voice was calling from the mist.

"Rory! Stop dat, stop it, I tell you! Golly!"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Here comes the owner of the dog, Herries, old man, and he's a big nigger. Now you can explain matters to him."

CHAPTER 11.

Rastus Gives a Clue.

RORY'S master dashed up. The big dog at once ceased to fight Towser, and extricating himself from the bulldog, he trotted over to the big negro. The latter patted his head, and put out an enormous boot to push Towser back as he would have pursued Rory. But his action was very gentle, and he did not hurt Towser.

"Golly!" exclaimed the dark gentleman. "You had better hold in dat dog, my boy! I t'ink dat Rory will tear him into two-free pieces."

"Rats!" growled Herries. "You've come up just in time to save your dog's life, that's all."

He gripped Towser by the collar, however, and held him quiet.

The big negro grinned. It was clear to everybody, excepting Herries, that Towser had taken on too large a contract in tackling Rory, and had not the big negro stopped the fight, matters would have gone very hard indeed with the bulldog.

"Dat is all right," said the black gentleman, good-humouredly. "I t'ink dat your dog must hab started it, young gentleman. Rory is bery peaceful."

"Well, that's right," said Herries. "You see, Towser was following on a track, and your dog must have got in the way."

"Weally, Hewwies——"
"Rats!" exclaimed Blake warmly. "Towser went for Rory because he was spoiling for a fight. He wasn't following up any giddy track."

"Look here, Blake——"
"Look here, Herries——"

"You ass——"
"You fathead——"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared the big negro. "Don't you begin to fight, too, den. Let dogs delight to fight at night, it is dere nature to. But children, you should neber——"

Blake burst into a laugh. "It's all right," he said. "Only Herries thinks too much of that ghashtly beast. We're sorry your dog was attacked, sir."

"Dat is all right. I t'ink dat my dog hab not been much hurt, and I hope dat de young gentleman's dog is all serene."

"You owe the gentleman an apology, Hewwies, deah boy."

"Well, I'm sorry!" said Herries.

"Dat is all right!"

"Come on, you kids!" exclaimed Blake. "We shan't find Tom Merry by letting Towser fight every blessed dog he comes across. Come on!"

The big negro uttered an exclamation.

"Skuse me, young gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "What name did you say?"

"Tom Merry!" said Blake in surprise.

"Golly!"
"Surely you don't happen to know him?"

"Golly!"
"My hat!" exclaimed Blake. "If we've happened on a chap who has met Tom Merry——"

"Bai Jove!"

"Golly! Ob course I hab!" exclaimed the big negro.

"I'm Rastus!"

"Yes. I hab met Tom Merry!" exclaimed Rastus. "I suppose dat it is de same Tom Merry. You belong to St. Jim's?"

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Den it is de same."

"Bai Jove!"
"So you are looking for him?" exclaimed Rastus, his face brightening. "You are de friends of dat poor boy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"
"We're his best chums, sir!" exclaimed Monty Lowther eagerly. "If you could tell us where to find him."

"I don't know 'bout dat," said Rastus. "But I can take you where he libes, or where he has libed. I don't rightly disremember de name of de place, but I can take you dere."

"My hat!"
"What luck!"

"Bai Jove! You are a fwiend in need, and no mistake, sir," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Will you allow me the honah of shakin' hands with you, sir?"

"Golly! Dere you are!"

D'Arcy's slim fingers disappeared within the huge black palm, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a wail of agony.

"Ow!"
"What's de matter!" asked Rastus.

"Ow! You are cwushin' my fingahs, my deah sir! Ow!"

"Golly! I'se sorry!" said Rastus. "I was so pleased to meet a friend of Tom's. You'm come to London to look for him?"

"Ya-as, wathah!"
"Den follow me——"

Rastus started off at a tremendous pace. The boys broke into a trot to keep pace with him; but suddenly Rastus halted.

"It's a long way from dis place," he remarked. "Dis place is called Oxford Hippodrome, ain't it?"

"Oxford Circus," said Blake, with a grin.

"I don't see any bery great difference. Dey are bery similar t'ings," said Rastus. "Howsumever, dis ain't de place. We had better take a cab."

"Six of us?" said Manners.

"Golly, yes! Hi, hi, you, taxi!"
"Taxi take only four!"

"Two ob you can sit on de floor."
"Then the dogs——"

"Dat is quite right," said Rastus. "We will hab two taxis. Hi, anoder one!"

Two taxis were captured, and the party embarked. Rastus and D'Arcy and Blake went into one, with Rory. Herries and Manners and Lowther entered the second one with Towser.

Rastus gave some directions to the driver, and the taxis started off.

"Well, I'm blessed if this ain't a go!" exclaimed Lowther. "Fancy happening on Tom Merry's track like this!"

Herries snorted.

"Happening! What do you call happening?" he exclaimed indignantly. "It was Towser!"

"Towser?"
"Yes, certainly. He hasn't followed up the track exactly as I expected, but if he hadn't gone for Rory we should never have met Rastus."

"Well, that's true enough," said Manners. "But I don't see that we owe Towser many thanks for being a quarrelsome beast; that's what it amounts to."

"Oh, I don't expect you to do Towser justice!" snorted Herries.

And he patted the huge head of the bulldog, which was resting on his knee, as if to assure Towser that there was one person in the world, at least, who understood him, and fully appreciated his wonderful gifts.

Meanwhile, in the other taxi, Rastus was explaining how he had met Tom Merry, and from his description of Tom Merry's lodgings the chums were able to instruct the driver to reach within a certain distance of Blucher's Buildings.

"I t'ink I take you dere," said Rastus. "Den I hab to leabe you, or Jim and Buck will be t'inking dat dere has been an accident. I hab come out only to take Rory for a run, and dey will t'ink dat I hab been gone a bery long time."

"It's awfully kind of you to take all this twouble for us, sir," said Arthur Augustus gratefully.

"Yah, yah, yah! Dat is not'ing!" said Rastus. "I t'ink dat I take any amount of trouble to help dat poor boy!"

"You're a jolly good sort, sir," said Blake.

"Yah, yah, yah! I'm Rastus, dat is all. I am bery fond of children," said Rastus. "I like all you nice little boys!"

The juniors smiled in a sickly way. They did not mind being considered nice, but to be classed as little boys was a descent from their great dignity. But they could forgive that even to the generous, great-hearted negro.

The taxicabs had stopped at last.


"This is near as I can get, sir," said the driver, looking in at Rastus and the juniors in the cab.

"Dat is all right, old hoss. Here you are, and de house is de first down dat turning," said Rastus, pointing. "Now I must go, or Jim and Buck will be going out to look for me. Good-bye, and good luck, laddies!"

The juniors shook hands with the big negro, and then Rastus, paying the taxi-drivers in a way that made them

(Continued on next page.)

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open their eyes, strode off with his huge strides, with Rory at his heels.

Blake looked after him.

"Well, that chap's as black as the ace of spades," he remarked. "But that chap's a gentleman, every inch of him, and I never met a more decent fellow."

"Yaas, wathah! I quite agwee with you, Blake, and I trust I shall have some furthah opportunity of improwin' the acquaintance of our fviend Rastus."

"Well, here's the way!" remarked Lowther.

And the chums of St. Jim's went down the misty street to Blucher's Buildings.

CHAPTER 12.

Too Late!

BLAKE and his comrades shivered as they looked at the grim, gaunt-looking building. This was the place where Tom Merry had—or had had—his lodgings!

The great house had once been a grand residence, and in the old days long gardens had surrounded it. Long ago they had been built upon, and the house, once approached by sweeping drives, was now hemmed and crowded in on every side by ramshackle buildings, and the walls of warehouses. The broken windows, the dirty walls, struck disgust and horror to the juniors.

But it was useless to shrink from the place—they were there to find Tom Merry!

"Spare a copper, sir!"

An undersized, pinched-looking lad in a pair of huge boots clumped up to them. He held out a skinny hand for coppers. D'Arcy felt in his pockets, but Blake laid a restraining touch upon his arm.

"Hold on!" he said.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let me speak, Gussy. What's your name, kid?"

"Joe, sir."

"Do you live in this house, Joe?"

"Yes, sir; I lives 'ere," said Joe.

"I suppose you know most of the people who live here?"

"I jest does, sir."

"We've come here to look for somebody—"

"If it's the captain, he's flitted," said Joe, with a grin.

"It isn't the captain, whoever he may be," replied Blake.

"It's a lad—a chap about my age, named Tom Merry."

Joe jumped.

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes."

"Blow me!" said Joe.

"Bai Jove! What does that mean? Are you speakin' a foweign language, deah boy?"

"Strike me pink!" said Joe, staring at the chums of St. Jim's. "Maybe you're pals of Tom Merry's, genelmen?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's just what we are," said Manners. "Is he here?"

"It's a pound-note for you if you can tell us where to find him," said Blake.

Joe's face fell.

"Which I wish I could," he said, with evidently genuine regret. "But 'e's left 'ere, sir."

"Left?"

"Yus! 'E's bin gone two days, sir."

"And don't you know where he has gone?"

Joe shook his head.

"I'm sorry I don't, sir. Which he was the real sort, 'e was, and 'e was kind to me, and I'd ha' done anyfing for 'im, sir. But 'e went, and I don't know where 'e's gone."

"Haven't you seen him since?"

"Not an 'air of him, sir."

"Nor heard from him?"

"No, sir."

"Rotten!" said Herries. "Luckily we have Towser. He may be able to pick up the trail from here."

"I'm sorry I am unable to tell you anything," said Joe, looking hungrily at the pound-note in Blake's hand. "But it's no good telling you lies, sir. I don't know. I only know that he ain't anywhere near 'ere, as I should 'ave kim across 'im, sir."

The disappointment was sickening, after the chums had allowed their hopes to rise so high.

They had discovered Tom Merry's lodgings, only to find that Tom Merry had gone, without leaving a clue behind.

"You see, sir, 'e couldn't 'ave paid the rent any longer, sir," explained Joe. "'E was only paying two bob for the room, sir, but 'e was broke."

Blake shuddered.

Tom Merry could not afford to pay the rent of that hideous den in the black heart of London! In Heaven's name, where was he now, then?

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"Good heavens!" muttered Monty Lowther, and his face was quite pale.

"Well, it can't be helped," said Blake bravely. "We shall have to look farther, that's all. You can have the note, all the same, kid."

"My heavens!" said Joe hoarsely. "You're a gentleman, you are, sir!"

"Here it is!"

Joe hesitated.

"Could you gimme small money, sir?" he said. "I couldn't get that note changed, sir. They'd say I stole it!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I could only get it changed at Nobby Jones', sir, by pretending I'd pinched it, and 'e'd charge me four bob on it!"

Blake counted out a pound's worth of silver, and Joe, with his face beaming with delight, secreted it amongst his rags. Then the chums of St. Jim's slowly left the grim alley, and made their way into a lighted street again.

"Bai Jove! It's wotten!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Where now?" said Blake.

"Towser—" began Herries.

"Oh, blow Towser! We're not looking for a dog-fight; we're looking for Tom Merry!" said Blake crossly.

"Look here, Blake—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Suppose we twy the Park?" said Arthur Augustus reflectively.

"Hyde Park?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What for?"

"Well, I have heard that the unemployed often west on the benches in the Park," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Tom Mewwy might be there."

Blake shivered.

"Well, I suppose we may as well look there as anywhere else!" he exclaimed. "We've had enough of wandering up and down the streets."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors tramped onwards, through streets that were lighted up, although it was early in the afternoon.

At the Marble Arch they turned into the misty Park.

It was cold and windy, and wayfarers hurried on with their collars turned up against the chill.

The juniors shivered as they looked about them.

In spite of the bitter cold, many of the benches had occupants.

Towser strained at the chain almost every time he came in sight of another dog. Towser seemed to be in a fighting mood that day.

But even Herries had given up supposing that Towser's desire to bolt might indicate that he was on the track of Tom Merry.

In the misty afternoon skaters were gliding merrily on the frozen surface of the Serpentine.

In one place a board indicated that the ice was thin, and dangerous to skaters; but in other places it was covered with merry, whirling forms.

"That would warm a chap up a bit," remarked Blake, as he looked on.

"We've got to look for Tom Merry, though."

"Hallo, Towser!"

"Stop him!" shouted Herries, as Towser jerked away the chain and ran.

"He's gone!"

"Why didn't you stop him?" roared Herries.

"Why didn't you hold him?" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! Let the beast go, Hewwies! You can advertise for him in the morning papah, you know!" said Arthur Augustus.

Herries made no reply to that remark.

He was breaking into a run on the track of Towser. If the bulldog lost himself in the recesses of the misty Park, he would never be found again.

"Oh, come on!" said Blake resignedly. "More time to be wasted by that blessed bulldog. I suppose it can't be helped."

"Well, he won't get across the Serpentine, so we can soon run him down."

"Won't he? Look there!"

Towser could be seen dashing out across the ice suddenly, between the legs of a crowd of people who were watching the skaters. Herries did not see him; he was rushing on. Blake and the rest followed Herries; but by the time they overtook him, Towser was far out of their sight, and where he was, or what he might be doing, they did not know.

"I'm not going without him," said Herries.

"But he's lost!"

"I don't care!"

"You can advertise for him."



"Towser!" gasped Tom, as he swam to the drowning dog. The bulldog's hind legs had ceased to struggle in the ice-cold water, and the ice was too thin to support his weight. It yielded again under his forepaws, but Tom Merry's grasp on his collar saved him from going under.

"Rats!"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"I shouldn't wonder if he's on the track of Tom Merry all the time," declared Herries.

"Wats!"

"Well, I'm going to look for him, anyway," said Herries.

And he did, and the juniors of St. Jim's followed him, consoling themselves for the waste of time by making all sorts of remarks about Towser.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry—Hero!

TOM MERRY paused.

The lad was walking along the bank of the Serpentine. He was cold, and he was hungry. He had no skates, but the thought had come into his mind that, by sliding on the ice, he could warm up his shivering limbs, and restore the circulation that seemed to be dying in his fingers and toes.

A sudden shout from a group of skaters had caught his ears, and he turned towards the frozen stream.

From the opposite side of the Serpentine a dog had come upon the ice, and was running directly past the notice-board that gave warning that the ice there was thin, and that there was danger.

The ice was cracking under the dog's weight as he ran. He was a big, heavy bulldog, and the ice there was thin and brittle.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

He recognised the bulldog.

Bulldogs may be very much alike, but there was only one Towser, and Tom Merry knew that it was Towser that he saw.

Even as Tom Merry muttered the exclamation the ice gave a loud crack, and the bulldog disappeared under the water.

There was a gush of black water over the thin ice, and it cracked and gave in still more, and there was a rapid scurrying back of any skaters that happened to be within measurable distance.

The head of the bulldog came into view.

Towser could swim, and he was a strong and brave dog. But it was clear that the bitter, icy cold of the water was paralysing him.

Twice he strove to drag himself upon the ice, and each

time it cracked under him, and he sank back right under the dark water.

Then he was seen with his front paws on the ice, and the water round him bubbling and frothing as his back legs paddled it.

He was not trying to drag himself out again—the cold had gripped him too hard.

The look on the dog's face as he battled there with bitter cold and death went to many a heart.

But there was no help for him.

To venture out on the ice within a dozen yards of the spot where the dog was swimming, meant being engulfed.

There were exclamations of pity and concern on all sides.

But when Tom Merry, with a gleam in his eyes, ran down to the bank, half a dozen voices shouted to him to come back.

"Stop!"

"Come back!"

"You young fool! You'll be drowned!"

Tom Merry paid no heed.

He did not even think of the danger. He could not see that look on Towser's face and leave him to die. He meant to go to Towser's aid.

He stepped out on the ice.

Half walking, half sliding, he drew near to the spot where the hole gaped in the ice, till the cracking of the thin crust beneath his feet warned him that it was dangerous to go farther.

There he halted.

"Towser! Towser!" he called to the dog.

Towser gave him an eloquent look, but that was all. The dog's strength was fast going, and already the battling of his legs was becoming feebler.

"Towser!"

Tom Merry ventured nearer.

There was a loud crack, like a pistol-shot, under his feet, and he realised that the ice was going.

With a great effort he flung his weight forward before he went through, and slid on at top speed towards Towser.

It was the only way of reaching the dog, and he succeeded.

In a moment more he was struggling in the icy water beside the dog.

There was a cheer from the crowd on the bank, now growing and thickening in numbers, at the heroism of the boy.

It was followed by a groan. They watched him with tense anxiety. Surely the only result of that brave action would be that the boy would perish as well as the dog.

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Tom Merry shuddered from head to foot as the icy water closed round him.

The icy coldness of it seemed to penetrate into his very joints with the keenness of a sharp knife.

The water was up to his neck, but his head did not go under, for he struck out and swam, and kept afloat.

"Towser!" he gasped.

The ice had cracked again under the bulldog's forepaws.

Towser's hind legs had ceased to battle, and the ice was too thin to support his weight. It had yielded. But Tom Merry's grasp was on his collar.

Tom Merry's firm hand held the head above water.

The lad drew the bulldog to him as he swam and battled for life in the chilly water.

There was only one chance for him, and Tom Merry knew it.

That was to smash a way through the ice to a spot where it was firm enough to bear his weight.

Could he do that? Would his strength last against the bitter chill of the water? And he was faint with hunger and fatigue.

Tom Merry set himself to the task.

Men in the crowd had rushed for help to the life-saving station, but Tom Merry knew that the end, one way or the other, would come long before help could arrive.

He struck his arm down upon the ice, smashing it to splinters, and forced a passage through the yielding crust towards the shore.

The crowds there saw his object, and encouraged him with loud shouts, and many of the more venturesome came out upon the ice to help him as soon as he should be near enough to reach.

But a dozen yards separated him from the nearest.

Crash, crash!

The ice broke, and splintered and cracked, and Tom Merry, slowly but surely, forced his passage onward.

Twice he tried the ice with his weight, and each time it gave in, and he sank back into the biting waters.

All the time he held Towser fast to him.

It was sink or swim together for the dog and the boy.

A constable was the farthest out on the ice to help him, and he was kneeling down with his hands outstretched to aid.

Closer and closer Tom Merry drew to him.

"Come on, my lad," said the policeman. "Buck up! You're nearly here!"

Tom Merry looked at him; he knew the voice.

It was the kindly policeman who had moved him on in the street. Tom Merry was very near at this moment to the last "move on," after which the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

The shadow of grim death was upon Tom Merry, and he felt it.

His limbs were numbed, his breath came in short, choking gasps, and a light was swimming before his eyes.

Still he clung to the bulldog, and still he fought his way onwards—blindly, desperately, instinctively.

Was it the end? He felt himself sliding—sliding back—back—and the mists were closing in upon him, black and grim!

But a sudden grasp fastened upon his shoulder—it was the firm hand of the constable.

Tom Merry felt vaguely, as in a dream, that he was drawing from the water. He was freezing with cold, but the biting chill from the water was gone, and the weight of the bulldog was no longer upon him.

They all fled, and darkness rushed down upon him, enveloping him.

His eyes opened.

They wandered round a circle of anxious faces. The sound of a loud cheer was in his ears with an echoing boom like distant thunder.

A dog was licking his face.

Where was he?

Darkness again!

CHAPTER 14.

Found!

"**B**AI Jove!"

"Can you see him?" asked Herries eagerly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pointed across the Serpentine.

"Look!"

There was a crowd on the ice, a crowd on the bank, and a constable was dragging a boy and a dog from the cracking ice.

Herries gasped.

"That can't be—be Towser!"

"He went out on the ice," said Monty Lowther.

"And he's been in, and somebody's fished him out," said Blake. "Trust Towser to get somebody into trouble."

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"Well, he must have been a jolly decent chap to go in for him," said Herries. "I'm going across."

"Come farther along first, ass! You don't want to follow Towser through the ice, do you?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, buck up! Towser may be hurt!"

The chums ran out on the ice, where Blake judged it was safe, and slid rapidly across to the other side of the Serpentine.

They landed very quickly, and ran towards the crowd that was still gathered round the fallen lad. Someone had run for a taxicab to take Tom Merry away, and others were chafing his hands and feet.

"Towser!" shouted Herries. "Towser!"

Towser whined.

"That's Towser!" shouted Herries. And he burst through the crowd.

There were angry exclamations on all sides.

"Stand back there!"

"Stop shoving!"

"Now, then—"

"It's my dog!" cried Herries.

"Then you ought to have taken better care of him," said the constable. "He's near been the death of this young chap."

Herries glanced at the insensible form.

Then he staggered and almost fell.

"Tom Merry!" he gasped.

"Do you know him?"

"Know him!" panted Herries. "Blake! Lowther! It's Tom Merry! Towser's found him!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!"

The chums of St. Jim's rushed up.

"Tom Merry!"

"Tommy!"

Tom Merry's eyes opened for a moment, as if the voices of his chums had the power to call him back from the land of the shadows.

"Hallo, kids!" he said faintly.

Then he was senseless again.

"Put this wound him—quick!" exclaimed D'Arcy, stripping off his thick coat. "Quick, officah!"

The coat was slipped on Tom Merry; Lowther's coat was round him in another minute, and then Manners'.

"Here's a taxi!" exclaimed a voice.

"The nearest doctor's!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors bundled into the taxi with their chum. Towser dragged himself in very quietly, as if he knew that he had been to blame. Herries was surreptitiously rubbing his favourite dry with his own muffler and chafing his frozen limbs. Towser might have nearly caused the death of Tom Merry—but Towser was Towser!

The taxicab whizzed off at a spanking speed.

In three minutes or less it drew up outside a house where a red lamp burned through the gloom of the December afternoon.

Tom Merry was rushed indoors, and was in the doctor's hands in a very short space of time.

The medical man acted with promptitude.

Half an hour later Tom Merry came to himself, in a warm bed, with hot-water bottles at his feet, and a warm atmosphere round him, and a shaded lamp burning.

He opened his eyes and looked round in amazement.

"What—what—" he began.

He was going to ask what had happened, but the remembrance of it flashed back into his mind before his lips had fairly formed the question.

"Towser!" he gasped. "He's all right?"

"Yes, my lad," said the kind-faced man at the bedside, "the dog's all right—and thank goodness you're all right, too, now!"

"Good old Towser! I thought he was gone once," said Tom Merry. "I thought I was gone, too, for that matter. Herries would have been off his rocker, I think, if old Towser had gone down."

There was a choking sound from the bed-head.

Tom Merry turned his glance in that direction.

"Hallo, Herries!"

"I—I—" stammered Herries. "I—I don't know what to say, Tom Merry. You're the deentest chap who ever lived!"

"Oh, rats! Look here, where am I? How did I come here?"

"You're in my hands," smiled the doctor, "and your friends brought you. And in a few hours' time they'll be able to take you away if you wish."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo! You there, too, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy, old son!" said the swell of

(Continued on page 22.)

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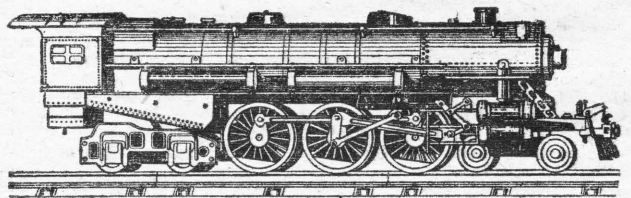
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DOWN ON HIS LUCK!

(Continued from page 20.)

St. Jim's, coming to the bedside with the rest. "Thank goodness we have found you!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry stared at them blankly for some moments, and then he grinned faintly.

"Well, I suppose I had better say thank goodness, too!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER 15.

A Merry Christmas!

TOM MERRY, an hour later, was sitting up at a table, in a thick dressing-gown, enjoying a hearty dinner. His chums were not eating, but they watched him eat. Tom Merry was in a perplexed frame of mind. He did not understand it at all yet, but he felt much better for the rest and the dinner and the cheery looks of his old chums.

"You've been looking for me, then?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Without knowing your address, either," said Monty Lowther reproachfully. "You might have let us know it, Tom."

Tom Merry flushed.

"You know my reason, Monty."

"Yes, I know it—and I think it's rotten not to let your friends know where to find you. You ought to let us help."

"I can't, Monty."

"We twacked you to Bluchah's Buildings," D'Arcy remarked.

Tom Merry started.

"You've been there?"

"Yes."

"How on earth?"

"It was through Towser!" Herries exclaimed.

"Towser!"

"Yes. It was my idea to bring Towser to help search for you, and it has been a ripping success," said Herries.

"Wats!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I wepeat—wats!"

"The fact is," said Blake, laughing, "Towser got into a fight with a dog belonging to a negro chap, Rastus, and we learned from him about your lodgings."

"You've met Rastus?"

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Jim Dandie, 167, Somerville Drive, Mount Florida, Glasgow, wants correspondents; especially overseas.

Leslie Jones, Battersby Farm, Torkington Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport, Ches., wants correspondents in Australia, France and America.

Jack Gale, 70, Stanley Park Road, Wallington, Surrey, wants a pen pal in England, Italy or Spain, interested in films, camping and snaps.

Arthur Croxall, 28, Oxford Street, Spondon, nr. Derby, wants to start a corresponding football club; ages 11-13.

Wilfred Doy, 2nd Batt. Scots Guards, Tower of London, E.C.3, wants correspondents in the Dominions.

Miss Elsie Hedwyck, 67, Onett Street, Hockley, Birmingham, 19, wants girl correspondents in the States and Canada.

Miss D. L. Davies, 18, Bramshill Gardens, Highgate, London, N.W.5, wants a girl correspondent interested in films—Ireland, Egypt, Mexico or Greece.

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"Yes—and a ripping chap he is!" said Blake.

"But we lost your track again at Blucher's Buildings," said Herries. "No one knew where you had gone. Towser picked up the trail again."

"Towser!" yelled the juniors.

"Yes, Towser," said Herries obstinately. "I haven't the slightest doubt—I mean there isn't the slightest reasonable doubt that Towser was scuttling across the Serpentine like that because he had scented out Tom Merry on the other side."

"My hat!"

"Rats!"

"Wats!"

"Bosh!"

"Oh, all right! You needn't do Towser justice!" said Herries. "I know Towser and I know what he can do. I don't care."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Anyway, it was through Towser, by accident, that we found you, Tommy," said Manners. "And now we've found you we're not going to let you get away again—I can promise you that!"

"Wathah not!"

Tom Merry looked troubled.

"I'm more than obliged to you chaps," he said. "It does me good to see your chivvies again—more good than you'll understand, after what I've been through lately. But—"

"No 'buts,' deah boy. We are goin' to take you down to Eastwood."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The situation's unchanged," he said. "I have no money, and I must look for work. I can't sponge on you, Gussy."

"My dear chap—"

"It's impossible, old fellow. You can't spend your money on me. My hat!" Tom Merry broke off suddenly. "This is a giddy West End doctor's place, and it must have run you into a pretty penny on my account already."

"Oh, no! Not five pounds so far!" said D'Arcy innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows.

"It's jolly good of you, and you know I don't mind being obliged to you," he said. "But I can't take more—it's impossible!"

"Well, that's all right in a way," said Blake, after a pause. "But you can come down to Eastwood for a holiday, at least. Everybody has a Christmas holiday, you know."

"But—"

"You must come!"

"But—"

"I have pwomised my patah to take you home," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I twust you will not make me bweak my word, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry smiled.

"But—"

"Look here, you've got to come!" said Monty Lowther resolutely. "If you're not willing, we shall take you by force. Anyway, you're coming!"

"If we have to run you down there by the scruff of your neck and the seat of your bags!" said Blake grimly.

Tom Merry laughed—his old cheery laugh, that rang very pleasantly in the ears of his chums.

"You see, you can't do any good by starving in London," Manners remarked. "Work isn't so easy to get. Down at Eastwood we'll have a jolly Christmas and talk over the future—all of us put our heads together and make some plans, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! I feel that I shall hit upon a weally stunnin' plan, you know, when I have time to think it out."

"But I've no tin—"

"Well, Gussy doesn't charge his guests admission fees, or send a bill in. Do you, Gussy?"

"Wathah not!"

"I've no clothes—"

"I'll lend you some of Gussy's," said Blake.

"But—"

"No 'buts.' You're coming down with us by the next express."

Tom Merry laughed again—merrily, happily.

"Right you are!" he said. "I'll come."

"Hurrah!"

"Bwavo, deah boy!"

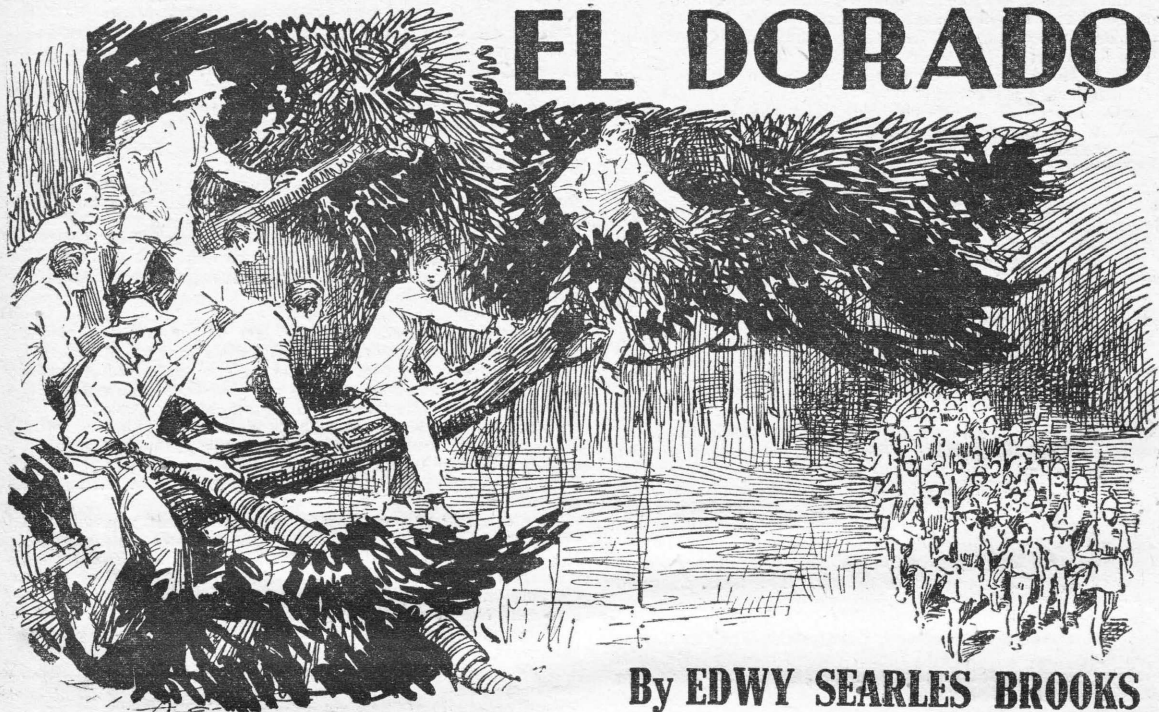
And by the next express Tom Merry went. And after what he had been through, it is needless to say how he enjoyed his Christmas at D'Arcy's place. And so for Tom Merry, down on his luck, it turned out to be a merry Christmas, after all!

THE END.

(Watch out chums, for next Wednesday's great Yuletide yarn of holiday fun, footer and adventure, which appears in our Grand Christmas Number. The story's entitled: "GUSSY THE GHOST!" 'Nuff said!)

ANOTHER BIG-THRILL INSTALMENT OF OUR POWERFUL SERIAL!

THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

In a super airship, the Sky Wanderer, a big party of St. Frank's fellows, under Nelson Lee and three other masters, set off on an educational tour of the world. With the party also are Lord Dorrimore and his black friend, Umlosi. The airship is following a course over the wilds of Brazil when it is brought down by a powerful suway, and everyone aboard is made prisoner by the Arzacs, a race of White Giants ruled over by Professor Cyrus Zingrave, a dangerous criminal. The airship party escape again, however, in three immense chariots drawn by "prehistoric" triceratops. But the strange "steeds" suddenly stampede!

The Battle of the Monsters!

IN vain Nelson Lee pulled at the reins; the monster paid no heed. It was either frenzied with mad fright or wild with primeval rage; Lee did not know which. The great creature, like its companions, had heard some forest sound—some call of another monster.

The speed increased. More than once Lee expected to see the chariot crash over on its side, causing serious injuries to its young passengers. Mercifully, however, it did not overturn. There was a lake ahead, its black-locking water gleaming sullenly in the moonlight. There were great reeds and rushes along its borders. And then, almost before Lee realised it, his chariot was plunging through soft, boggy swamp. They were near the lake's edge, where, rising majestically, there were immense trees. The branches overhung the water, and the foliage was so dense that the night sky was blotted out. Lee felt creepers sweeping past him. The speed became much less as the wheels churned in the mud.

With reports like gunshots, the harness broke, and the triceratop, now free, went plunging, with a tremendous commotion, through the shallows. The chariot, fully adrift, began to settle down with a starboard list into the watery bog.

"Jump, Umlosi!" yelled Lee.

They both flung themselves clear together. With a dull splash they struck the black water, and they found, to their relief, that there was sufficient depth for them to swim.

"The chariot!" panted Lee.

The water was lukewarm, and gave forth a curious smell

of decayed vegetation. Lee grasped one of the chariot's wheels, and pulled himself up. "Guv'nor!" came a breathless voice. "Thank goodness you're safe! I thought—"

Craaaaash!

Nipper's words were interrupted. Near at hand there had been a great splashing and churning; now there was a terrific splintering crash as the second chariot collided with the first. The shock was so great that the triceratop was set instantly free, the harness breaking completely. Lord Dorrimore was flung into the water, and many of the St. Frank's seniors were hurled against the chariot's side, sustaining painful bruises. Quite a few of the juniors, too, were flung about like ninepins. Yet, astonishingly enough, none was seriously hurt.

The two chariots, interlocked, were thoroughly bogged. Nelson Lee, Dorrie, and Umlosi managed to climb up, and they joined the boys.

"Nobody can say, brothers, that we are not having an exciting night," observed Browne, in his calm way.

"Look! Look over there!" gulped Tommy Watson.

The third chariot, with Sir Hobart Manners and the men of the airship, had been dragged in a different direction by its maddened steed; it was nearly fifty yards distant, lying drunkenly on its side, half-wrecked. The triceratop had broken free, and Sir Hobart had been flung from his driving position. Between this chariot and the other two there was a large expanse of muddy water, for the isolated vehicle had come to a standstill at the very edge of the lake, where its offside wheels had toppled over into the dense reeds.

"They're safe, anyway," said Dorrie, with relief. "Gad, Lee! What was the cause of it? Why did those infernal brutes stampede like that? We're lucky to be alive—"

"What's that?" yelled Handforth.

So dense were the trailing creepers which came down in festoons from the great trees that the boys were obliged to push them aside, in order to gain a clear view of the moonlit lake. Handforth's shout had been dramatic, for his voice was charged with amazement and something akin to fear.

Nelson Lee felt his arm gripped by Dorrie; they both stared into the lake. There was an upheaval taking place in the water, as though an awful disturbance of the lake's bed had commenced. Even in that tense moment Lee saw

that the three triceratops had completely vanished in the shadows of the dense forest.

The black water bubbled and seethed, and great waves broke against the chariots' sides. Something rose out of the depths—something shapeless, something impossibly huge. It reared up and up, water dripping from it in cascades.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Dorrie, aghast.

"Wau! I smell danger, N'Kose—I smell death!" rumbled Umlosi. "The mighty monsters which broke free are but insects in comparison with the thing which now rises from the black waters!"

"Look! It's a head!" screamed Gulliver, in terror. "The—the thing's a sea-serpent!"

It was, indeed, a head—so huge that the human mind boggled at the size of the beast's body. It rose up and up, and the startled St. Frank's boys saw the moonlight gleaming on tremendous jaws. There were two watery eyes, shining balefully, and wide nostrils. The head, lifted aloft on the great neck, continued to soar up; and then came the body, a thing like a mountain, heaving out of the water.

"A brontosaurus!" muttered Nelson Lee, his thoughts all for the safety of the boys. "By Heaven, Dorrie, the brontosaurus of prehistoric times was an infant in comparison with this appalling creature! No wonder the Arzacs built those great protective walls—"

"It's coming for us!" broke in Dorrie. "We're finished, Lee! Nothin' short of a naval gun would stop this thing!"

The air was filled with the shouts of alarm which arose from the boys, and they were not ashamed of their terror. They were trapped. They were marooned on the half-sunken chariots. To plunge into the water would be folly. The mountainous thing of the lake now towered high above; its stupendous neck was reaching out, swaying, water dripping from it. The snake-like neck reached forward, and, all in a moment, the nightmare head was reaching right over the nearest chariot.

"It's got us!" shrieked somebody.

The jaws had opened; some of the fellows caught a glimpse of a horrid cavern-like mouth. The head dropped lower and lower.

"By glory, it's after me!" yelled Lord Dorrimore.

He stood as though transfixed, paralysed. The jaws were immediately above him, and there was no escape. He, like the others, heard a dull, roaring noise, like a gale sweeping through a great railway tunnel.

Then came another sound. It was a bellowing, screeching roar, and it was immediately echoed by a second—and then by a third. The night air was rendered hideous, and the sounds arose deafeningly. Vaguely the boys heard, too, a fearful splashing of the water. And the head of the brontosaurus turned—just as those dreadful jaws had been about to seize Dorrie. Up it went, and round; then an answering cry came from that tunnel-like throat—a cry so fearful that for seconds afterwards the boys could hear nothing.

Nelson Lee was the first to realise what the interruption meant. The screeching roars had been uttered by the three triceratops; those monsters had not stampeded because of fear, but because they had heard, or scented, a primeval enemy. Now they were attacking—they were plunging towards the brontosaurus with the obvious intention of giving battle. The brontosaurus itself swung round heavily, and a portion of its mountain-like body touched the side of a chariot, and the side splintered like a matchbox. Nelson Lee was cold with fear—for the boys. He knew that a titanic struggle was about to take place.

"The creepers!" yelled Lee suddenly. "Dorrie, look! Boys—the creepers!"

In that second confidence had returned to the great detective's voice. He had seen a way of escape—and would have seen earlier but for the dramatic disturbance in the lake.

"What do you mean, guv'nor?" panted Nipper.

"These creepers!" bellowed Lee. "Grab them, boys! Climb into the tree branches, so that you will be clear of this terrible battle!"

"Up for your lives!" shouted Dorrie.

As he spoke he yanked Chubby Heath above his shoulders, and the Third Former grabbed at a creeper and went

swarming up into the black depths of the tree like a monkey.

"That's the style!" said his lordship. "Good lad!"

They were all grasping at the great creepers now and swarming up. From a distance Sir Hobart Manners and the men of the airship watched in dull horror.

They were isolated—they could do nothing to help their companions. And they knew—better than any, since they had such a clear view—that the brontosaurus and the triceratops were about to engage in a death struggle. It had seemed to them, at first, that no power on earth could save Nelson Lee and the boys from destruction.

But now there was a chance.

Ignoring the hideous commotion so near at hand, Lee continued to shout instructions to the boys; he and Dorrie and Umlosi worked like niggers, helping the younger boys to grab at the thick, trailing lianas.

The battle was already in progress; the "prehistoric" monsters were engaging in a death struggle, the triceratops attacking their enormous enemy with a blind ferocity which was horrible to see. The water churned, the creatures screamed and bellowed, and the two chariots, disturbed by the commotion, rocked and swayed and ground splinteringly one against the other.

It was touch and go.

Nelson Lee waited until the last of his companions had grasped at the creepers. He sent up a prayer of thankfulness as he saw Fenton, the last of the boys, clutch a two-inch-thick liana and swarm up into the mysterious darkness.

One of the triceratops, lunging madly, crashed with devastating force against the chariot on which Lee stood. Already half smashed, the side crumpled to fragments, splinters flying in all directions. Nelson Lee leapt for his life; he grasped a liana, and swung to and fro, climbing as he did so.

The monstrous combatants changed their ground; they swung nearer, and Lee fell against the wet, slimy side of the brontosaurus. He was flung headlong, but, somehow, he managed to retain his grip of the creeper, which was like elastic under his grip. He swung clear, climbed higher—and was out of danger.

Just above, he found two tree branches, each many feet in thickness, and each spreading out scores of powerful limbs. The tropical creepers grew everywhere, festooning between the branches.

And perched up here, squatting on the branches, were the boys. Dimly, through the shadowy gloom, they could see what was taking place.

And they knew just how narrow their escape had been.

For in the next moment the vast bulk of the brontosaurus, lurching away from its three attackers, crashed into the bogged chariots. Those great vehicles were literally trampled to tiny fragments; they vanished, plunging beneath the black, muddy surface. And the monsters were now fighting on the very spot where the chariots had stood.

There arose a wild, deafening chorus of nightmare cries, and so appalling was the din that the scene was one of inconceivable horror.

Sir Hobart's Bluff!

"ARE they safe?" asked Squadron-Leader Truscott, in a low voice.

"I think so—I pray Heaven they are!" replied Sir Hobart hoarsely. "This is ghastly, Truscott."

The first navigating officer of the Sky Wanderer nodded. He and all the others had got clear of the capsized chariot, and were standing on the lake's bank. They were mortified by the helplessness of their position. The other chariots had been too far distant—isolated by the stretch of evil water. In any case, Sir Hobart and his men could have done nothing, for there had been no time. Almost paralysed with horror, they had watched the battle of the monsters.

It was difficult to see much, for the four creatures seemed to be entangled in a heaving, mountainous mass. Their screams and bellowings made the night hideous, and the black lake, as far as the eye could see, was disturbed.

"What can we do now, sir?" asked Mr. Vickers, shouting in order to make himself heard. "That stampede ruined everything. We don't even know where we are."

"Let us be moving towards the forest," said Sir Hobart. "I have no doubt that Mr. Lee is getting the boys out of the tree as quickly as possible. We must join forces—and then finish our journey on foot. We cannot be far from the airship now."

"We'll see no airship to-night, sir!" shouted one of the men. "Look behind you!"

"What on earth—" began Sir Hobart, and then he stopped abruptly.

So engrossed had he been in watching the titanic struggle of the monsters that he had looked in no other direction. Most of the other men, too, had been unaware of the new peril. Now it was too late.

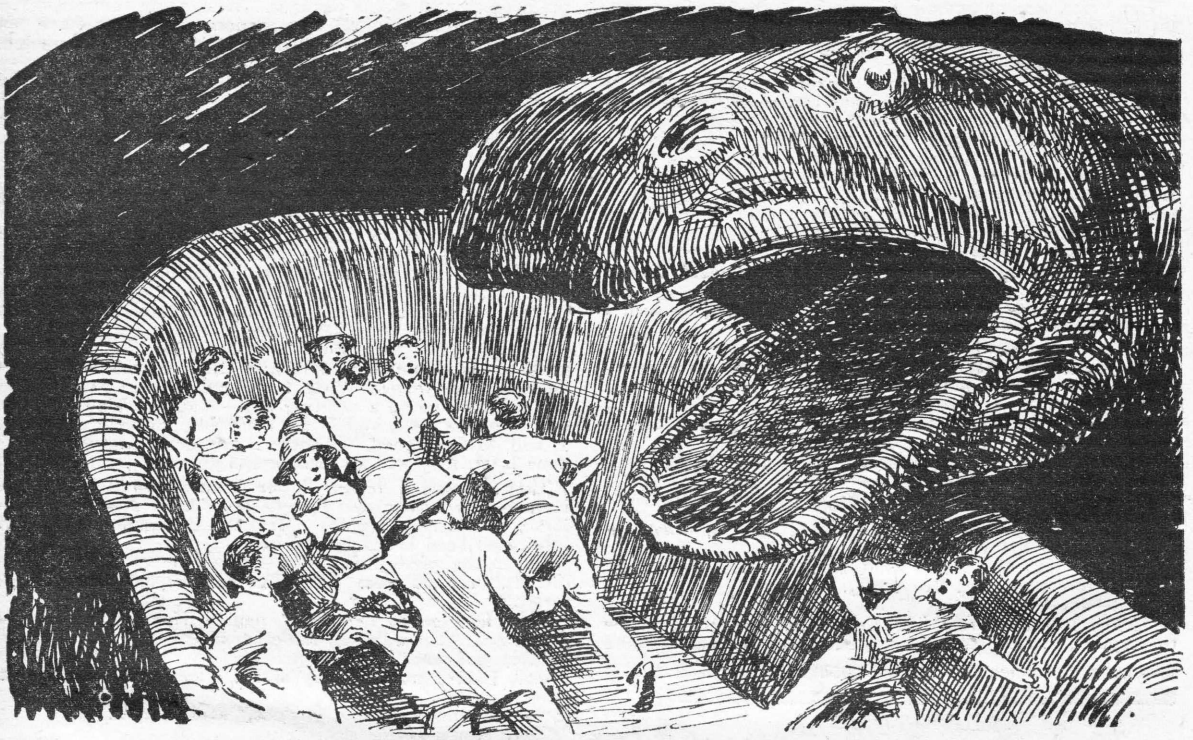
St.
Frank's
STAMP
WHO'S
WHO



A. Glenthorne. C. Gore-Pearce. B. Travers.

(Three more portraits next week.)

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In a moment, the hideous head of the monster was reaching right over the chariot. "It's got us!" shrieked somebody. The jaws had opened, and the St. Frank's fellows caught a glimpse of a horrid cavern-like mouth. The head dropped lower and lower! There seemed no escape for the marooned party!

Through the thick grass came scores of White Giants—their enormous figures looking almost grotesque in the moonlight as they came on at a loping double. In their lead was the tireless Captain Oss.

"Well, we had a run for our money," grunted Mr. Vickers.

Sir Hobart turned swiftly, and he was staring towards the spot where the monsters were still fighting so frenziedly. There was no sign—no sound—of the rest of the party. Indeed, even if the boys had been shouting at the tops of their voices, they could not have been heard, owing to the fearsome din which was going on directly beneath them.

An idea had come to Sir Hobart, and it brought a glitter into his eyes. But before he could speak he and his companions were surrounded; a solid body of Arzac's, breathing hard from their run, encircled the British party.

"You make trouble—we kill!" said Captain Oss fiercely.

There was a change in his manner. Earlier, he had been immobile, impassive. But now he was frankly antagonistic. He had had enough trouble during this hectic night! And while he was speaking he was looking round anxiously, suspiciously.

"Where are the others?" he demanded.

"You ask that?" shouted Sir Hobart—and his companions were astonished to hear the passionate fury in his voice. "Can't you see? Listen! Did you not hear the chariots being smashed to a million atoms?"

Captain Oss stared across the disturbed waters.

"It is danger to come here—they always fight," he said. "The others are dead? The lake-beast kill them?"

"All—all!" shouted Sir Hobart.

He noticed, subconsciously, that there was a lull in the fight at that moment; the monstrous creatures were no longer making their dreadful cries. And Sir Hobart raised his voice—knowing that it would reach Lee and the boys, hidden in the tree branches.

"They are all dead—killed by the monsters!" thundered Sir Hobart. "And you—you are to blame!" He strode up to Captain Oss, and, apparently, in a paroxysm of rage, he crashed his two fists into the Arzac officer's chest.

"You are to blame! You and your villainous King Yoga! Dead! All those boys dead! Terrible—terrible!"

His acting was superb; he was like a man driven frenziedly insane by the stark horror of a tragedy he had just witnessed. Even Captain Oss was impressed. Gently he seized Sir Hobart's hands, and pushed him away.

"They kill themselves!" he grunted. "They come here themselves!"

"But it was you who drove them to it!" flashed Sir Hobart.

Captain Oss stood silent; he took in that grim scene with one long, comprehensive glance. He knew—or thought he knew—exactly what had happened. There was the terrible message in plain sight; there were the monsters still fighting their gargantuan battle. And not a sign of Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrmore, and the St. Frank's boys! Was it not obvious that they had all been killed when the chariots had been destroyed? Even without Sir Hobart's furiously passionate outburst, Captain Oss would have been driven to the one inevitable conclusion.

"The king will be angry," he said, in a hard voice. "Me! I shall get blame! They are dead. Come! We go back to El Dorado."

He gave orders to his men; they commenced moving, and the prisoners were compelled to march with them.

"Well done, Manners!" said Nelson Lee admiringly.

"It was a brainwave," said Lord Dorrmore. "Upon my word, Lee, I never thought that the old chap had it in him."

"He was shrewd enough to take advantage of the opportunity," said Lee. "By making the Arzac believe that we were all dead, Manners prevented any search. We have our full liberty, and it is for us, Dorrie, to make use of it before the dawn comes."

Lord Dorrmore glanced round and shrugged.

"What can we do?" he asked. "Look at the poor beggars!"

Whilst the battle had raged, Nelson Lee had urged the boys to climb higher and higher. Thus they had gained the upper forks and branches of the mighty tree.

The fugitives were no longer interested in the battle, although the sounds of strife had practically died down. Lee had little doubt that the mighty brontosaurus had killed its three attackers.

Dorrie's remark was occasioned by the sight of the St. Frank's fellows. In the upper branches the boys had had no difficulty in finding places where they could stretch themselves and rest. Most of them had flung themselves down, thankful for the respite. For hours the boys had been suffering acute excitement, and they were exhausted. Most of them fell asleep.

"There are several hours of night left," said Lee, who had just returned from a climb to the tree-top. "I have a mind, Dorrie, to spend at least one of those hours in a little scouting trip—with you. Come to the top of the tree with me."

"Go easy, guv'nor!" said Nipper anxiously.

"Aren't you asleep, young 'un?"

"Not me!" said Nipper.

There were one or two others wakeful, too—notably Handforth, his younger brother Willy, and Fenton of the Sixth. But they were left there whilst Lee and Dorrie climbed to the top of the tree.

"Glory be!" ejaculated Dorrie, as he pulled himself up last to a fork, and clung there next to Lee. "We're up in the heavens somewhere, aren't we? What a height?"

They were both clear of the greater mass of the forest; they stood there in the pale moonlight, and Dorrie found that he could see for miles across the silvery countryside. Indeed, he could see on the road, far away, some slowly-moving spots. He needed no telling that they were the Arzac vehicles, conveying Sir Hobart Manners and the airship men back to El Dorado.

"You're looking in the wrong direction," said Nelson Lee quietly.

The sporting peer turned round; and then he gave such a start that he nearly lost his hold.

"Ye gods!" he yelled.

It was small wonder that he was startled, for there, seemingly almost beneath him, he could see an enormously long, silvery object in a grassy valley, just clear of the forest belt. He was looking down upon the great hull of the Sky Wanderer.

The Forlorn Hope!

"BUT this is amaz'!" exclaimed Dorrie, when he found his voice.

"Not at all; it's what we might have expected," replied Nelson Lee coolly.

"But—but—"

"When I climbed to this eyrie before, I expected to see the airship," continued Lee. "I knew that we had covered

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the greater part of the distance. Well, there she is, Dorrie. Looks fine—eh? By all appearances the Arzacs have not yet commenced the work of destruction. As I anticipated, they are leaving it until to-morrow."

"And to-night," said Dorrie, with a gulp, as he stared into Lee's face. "You—you mean—"

"It's a forlorn hope at the best, and I do not imagine for a moment that we can succeed," said Lee, becoming grave. "You and I know something of the airship's control, Dorrie. But what of the boys? If we get the Sky Wanderer into the air at all we stand a chance of destroying her, and killing ourselves—"

"You don't mean that," interrupted Dorrie. "You've more faith in yourself, Lee. An' what is the alternative? Inevitable recapture, as soon as daylight comes—a return to El Dorado, to face Zingrave's vengeance. My dear man, there's only one course for us. We've got to grab the Sky Wanderer."

"Easier said than done," replied Lee. "There are probably large numbers of White Giants encamped there—guarding the vessel. What I propose, Dorrie, is that you and I should go on a scouting trip—at once. We'll find out the lie of the land, and in the meantime the boys can sleep. It will do them good. If there is any desperate work to be done later, they will be fresher and stronger for the sleep."

They descended to the lower branches, and they were immediately bombarded by questions from Nipper, Handforth, Willy, and Fenton. For Lord Dorrimore's voice, at least, had been heard by the boys.

"Yes, the airship is there—scarcely more than a mile distant," replied Lee. "She lies just beyond this belt of forest."

"Oh, let's go to her, sir!" panted Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "I'll wake all the other chaps—"

"No, not yet," interrupted Lee sharply. "Let them sleep. Before we take any action, Dorrie and I must do some scouting."

"We'll come with you, guv'nor," said Nipper.

"No; you'd better sleep."

"Sleep!" echoed Nipper. "Do you think we can sleep when we know that the airship is so close? The others—yes. They don't know. But you can't expect us—"

"Oh, let 'em come!" interrupted Dorrie. "We're wastin' time."

"Somebody must stay here in charge," said Lee, looking round. "Umlosi, we shall want you with us."

"I am ready, Umtagati," said the impassive African.

"Well, I'm afraid it will have to be you, Fenton," said Lee. "There is no other man we can leave here. And you are the captain of the airship school."

"I'll stay, sir," said Edgar Fenton readily. "You can leave the boys to me."

Good fellow that he was, he completely concealed his disappointment. He was left in charge, while the others commenced the long descent.

It was, after all, comparatively easy, for there were so many lianas that they were in no danger of falling.

At last they stood on the solid ground, waist high in the dense undergrowth.

"This way," said Lee briefly.

He forced his way through the undergrowth, and presently they came out into clear ground beside the lake. Far away in the distance they could see a ripple on the water; they beheld a monstrous thing moving. It was the victorious brontosaurus. The three triceratops, no doubt, were lying dead in the water.

The little party in the open lost no time. Lee led the way, skirting the trees, and presently they made their way down a grassy slope, round the fringe of an abutting belt of the forest. Quite suddenly they came in full sight of the Sky Wanderer, and they halted, Lee enjoining silence.

They were right on top of the stern of the airship—she towered scarcely more than two hundred yards away.

"By James!" exclaimed Lee in a low, exultant voice.

That first glance had told him all that he wanted to know: for he had seen something which had been invisible to him from the tree-top. There was an Arzac camp here, and at a rough estimate, Lee judged that there were fully a hundred men. But the White Giants were not encamped immediately below the hull of the airship; they were quite a distance away. The reason for this was obvious; there were no less than half a dozen blazing fires, built in a ring. Within this ring were the Arzacs, some stretched on the grass, others moving about.

"Why are they so far off?" whispered Nipper.

"The airship is an unknown quantity to them—they dare not light the fires at close quarters," replied Lee softly. "And the fires are necessary, I imagine, to keep off such brutes as mastodons and triceratops!"

"What are we going to do, sir?" asked Willy eagerly.

"Well, we are so near that I think we can risk boarding the airship," replied Lee. "The grass is long—we can crawl forward on our stomachs, and we shall be unseen."

"But what about the others, sir?" asked Handforth.
 "I'm beginning to think this is a case where a handful can succeed where an army might fail," replied Lee grimly.

Lord Dorrimore nodded. He had been thinking the same thing.

"Follow me!" said Lee softly. "Get down on your hands and knees, and keep low. And, remember—not a sound! One false move will mean disaster!"

The detective led the way, and he was as silent and snake-like as Umlosi himself. Lee had remembered the damage which the Sky Wanderer had sustained. Several of her gas compartments were gaping open. She had come down, in fact, because of her lack of buoyancy. If all the schoolboys were aboard her now she might be sluggish in rising—and that would give the White Giants a chance, perhaps, to prevent her from getting clear. But with a mere handful aboard, she would be light; she would rise like a feather, once the telescopic grips were released. Nelson Lee thought of all these things.

Like shadows they crept on, worming their way forward through the long, dense grass. Nearer and nearer. As yet, there had been no alarm; there were no sounds from the Arzac camp. And over the approaching raiders, the airship's bulk loomed enormous.

Lee was ready to spring up at the first suspicious sound. There was a chance that some of the White Giants were guarding the airship's ladder; yet Lee had seen no sign of any such guard. But he was ready. He saw the aft ladder now—in position, just as it had been when the party had been captured the previous day.

A quiver passed through the detective as he felt his hand clasp the cold metal of the stairway.

"Careful, now!" he warned, in a soft whisper. He raised himself up; he stood upon the metal stairway, and with fleet footsteps he ran up. He was ready for anything. In his rear came the others, making no sounds. In the distance, some of the Arzacs were piling fresh fuel upon the fires.

But not one man glanced in the direction of the airship during that fateful moment.

Nelson Lee reached the top; he strode straight into the outer lounge, which was a wide, spacious section of the ship, giving access, on either hand, to the inner stairways which led up to the promenade deck.

"Oh, my hat! We're in!" gurgled Handforth. "We've done it!"

"It's like coming back to life!" whispered Willy. "Or waking up from a nightmare."

Nelson Lee had run quickly up the stairway; he took a quick look up and down the promenade deck on the starboard side. He returned. He repeated the operation on the port side. Again he returned.

"Well, we're alone—we're in possession," said Lee, his voice rock-steady. "But even if we had planned to get all the other boys, we could not have succeeded. So it's up to us, Dorrie. Just the six of us!"

"Why could not the plan have succeeded?"

"Because I made a miscalculation," replied Lee grimly. "Dawn is at hand!"

"Great Scott!"

"There's a shade of difference in the sky," continued Lee. "Dawn will be here very soon—and in an hour there will be almost full daylight. We could not possibly get the boys aboard in time!"

"Then what do you propose?" asked Dorrie, looking about him somewhat helplessly. "I mean, hang it, this place is like a floatin' city! The hugeness of it scares me! What can we do—alone? Three men and three boys! This ship needs a score of experienced men to handle her!"

"Yet we've got to make the attempt—desperate as it is," replied Lee. "It is our only chance. First of all, however, I want to feel an automatic pistol in my pocket. If there's going to be further trouble with the White Giants—I mean to be ready. You told me, Dorrie, that you had arms and ammunition aboard—hidden away somewhere!"

"Yes," said Dorrie briskly. "I'll show you!"

He led the way up the stairs, and from the main lounge, amidships, they passed through a fireproof doorway into the very interior of the vessel. Here, there were skeleton-like girders stretching in all directions; there were great gas compartments; and, enormously large, the fuel containers, with their wonderful automatic supply valves. It was safe to switch on an electric light, for no glimpse of the light could be seen outside. Lord Dorrimore led the way along a narrow metal gangway to some small store-rooms. Opening one of these he switched on another light.

"Here you are!" he said. "See those cases? Rifles! Plenty of ammunition in the smaller cases. There are machine-guns in these crates. You'll find the automatics in that smaller box!"

It was soon open, and Lee lovingly fingered a powerful

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automatic pistol of the most modern design. He broke it open, inserted a magazine of cartridges, and balanced the weapon again in his hand.

"Now I feel better, Dorrie," he said. "You'll take one, too—and you, Umlosi!"

"Nay, Umtagati," said Umlosi. "Here is my weapon." He displayed his trusty spear, which he had secured a minute after coming aboard. With that spear in his hand, Umlosi was ready to face any foe.

"Better let the boys have automatics," said Dorrie. "They know how to use firearms—even Willy."

The boys took the automatics eagerly enough. They knew how desperate the situation was, and they could be trusted. They were all trembling with the excitement of this great adventure. A mere handful of six—and they were to attempt to get the Sky Wanderer into the air!

They quickly descended to the main lounge, and here Lee held a quick consultation—after assuring himself that the White Giants were still unsuspecting.

"Listen to me carefully," he said. "We've got to take this chance. There is no need for me to tell you what Zingrave will do if he gets hold of us again; he is organising his forces, and I doubt if he will be satisfied—like Captain Oss—that we are all dead. With the coming of daylight he will send out a huge force to scour the country. We shall never get such another chance as this."

"By George, I'll bet we shan't, sir!" said Handforth, his eyes aglow. "We can do it, too. Why not?"

"That's the spirit, Handy," said Lee approvingly. "Why not, indeed? If I send you to one of the engine-rooms, old chap, do you think you can manage it?"

"Try me, sir," replied Handforth promptly. "Dash it, what about my Morris-Minor? I know how to handle engines."

Nelson Lee coughed. "I think you'll find a little difference in the engines of this airship," he said dryly. "However, before you get the order to start up, I will take you to one of the engine-rooms and show you exactly what to do. Come, we'd better waste no time. We'll do it now."

They went to the nearest engine gondola—it was reached by a narrow metal tunnel which led downwards and outwards from the main body of the vessel. Here, Lee told his listeners exactly how the engine could be started—and what to do afterwards. He explained the mechanism of the engine-room telegraphs—which were operated from the control-room.

After that, Lord Dormore was sent off to one of the main engines forward; Nipper went to the other. Handforth and Willy remained amidships. The engines here were not so important, but they were necessary.

"Do nothing whatever until you get the telegraph signal from me," Lee had said as a final word. "Then, when the signal comes, start your engines on the instant. Then await my orders. There must be no hitch, or, instead of rising into the air we shall only wreck the airship."

The detective himself made his way to the control-room forward. He could not switch on any of the lights, for they would have been seen in the Arzac camp. But he knew every detail of the controls. Through the big windows he could see the Arzac fires clearly, and he could see, too, the perceptible difference in the sky, showing that dawn was near at hand.

"Thou art a bold man, Umtagati," said Umlosi. "Tis possible that we shall escape. But what of the others? Hast thou given them a thought?"

"You mean the boys in the trees—sleeping?" asked Lee. "Come, Umlosi, do you imagine that I should forget them? Our main object is to get away from this force of Arzacs as quickly as possible. If we can do so, we can bring the airship down beside the lake. Remember, there are so few of us aboard, that we shall rise easily—lightly. Fenton, who is wakeful in the treetop, will hear the sound of the airship's engines."

"Wau! Thou thinkest of everything, my master," said Umlosi.

"The instant Fenton hears the engines he will know that we are aboard the airship—and he will arouse the other boys," continued Lee. "He will get them out of the tree and have them waiting in readiness. There will be other sounds to arouse the boys, too, as you will presently hear, if all goes well. I have arranged certain matters with N'Kose."

Lee's hand was firm as he quickly operated the engine-

room telegraph. The same signal went to every gondola: "Start your engine!"

He waited tensely, expectantly.

And then, on the still night air, came the low, powerful throbbing of an engine—to be immediately increased. Lee felt the deck beneath him vibrating slightly. His gaze was fixed upon the Arzac camp; he saw the White Giants stare round, the men who had been sleeping rose staggeringly to their feet. Then there was a general move towards the Sky Wanderer. The Arzacs came streaming across.

Again the telegraph: "Full speed ahead!"

And in that same second Lee pulled a lever back. He saw the forward "claws" relax their grip of the earth; they came up grotesquely, telescoping into the body of the vessel. The other claws, aft, came free at the same moment. The Sky Wanderer rolled sluggishly for a moment, her nose rose, and she moved forward—completely free of the earth.

She was away!

Lord Dormore, having seen that his engine was running well, flung open a window of the gondola; he leaned out, and there, streaming towards the ship, shouting madly, were the White Giants. Dorrie grinned, and flung something.

Bang!

There was an ear-shattering report, accompanied by a flash of blinding fire. Dorrie had flung a hand-grenade, but he had directed it so that it exploded well clear of the Arzacs. Another followed—and another, and the White Giants fell back in confusion, terrified.

Up went the Sky Wanderer, higher and higher, clearing the trees magnificently. She was away, and Nelson Lee, in the control-room, felt a glow of utter exultation.

So far, success was theirs—but the real ordeal had yet to come!

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