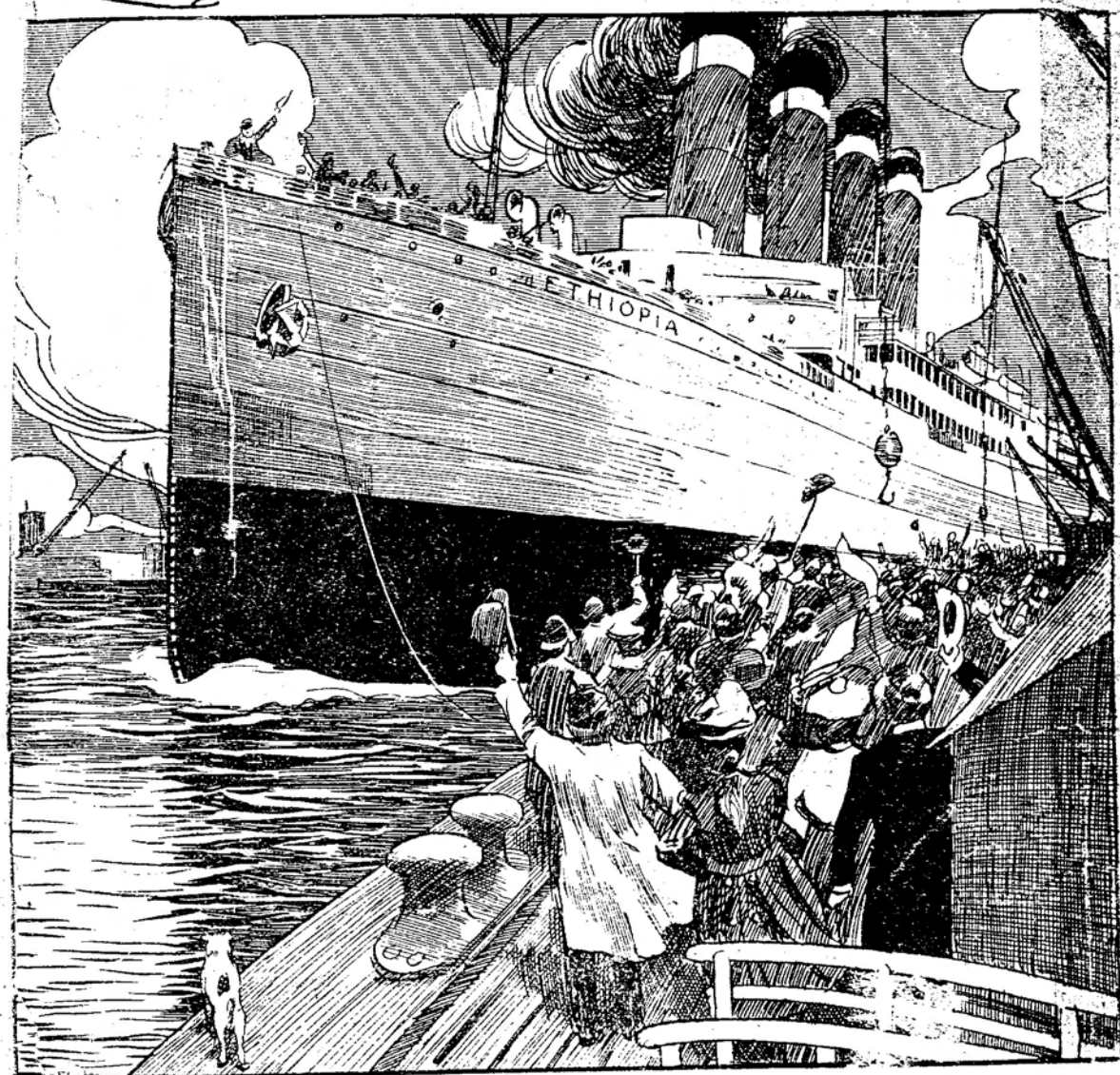
In this number: **Tom Merry's Voyage**

THE GEM LIBRARY 1d.

NEW SERIES NO. 46. VOL. 2.



SLOWLY THE HUGE LINER GLIDED AWAY. TOM MERRY & CO. WERE OFF!

GENUINE LABRADON

GOLD WATCH

FREE FOR SKILL.

B	R	E	A
L	N	O	I
W	L	F	O

In this puzzle you have three lines of letters. When these are arranged in their correct positions they spell the names three well-known wild animals that roam the forest. If your answer is correct we will present you with a genuine Labradon Gold Watch entirely free of cost. Send your answer, plainly written, with stamped addressed envelope, so that we can tell you if correct. When you receive the Watch you must show it and do your best to advertise it, and winners will be required to buy a Chain from us to wear with the Watch. It costs you nothing to try.

THE LABRADON WATCH CO. (Dept. C.C.), 4, Brixton Rd., LONDON.



7/6

7/6 secures immediate delivery of the world-famed "ROBEYPHONE" with 20 selections, and massive 17-inch horn, sumptuously hand-painted in six charming tints, which lasts on easy payment terms to suit yourself at SHOP CASH prices. I supply EDISON, ODEON, COLUMBIA, ZONOPHONE, PATHEPHONE, EDISON-BELL, STAR, and EXCELSIOR Phonographs and Records ON CREDIT, cheaper than all other dealers. Immense Bargains. 5,000 Testimonials.

Write for List No. 23

GEO. Robey

THE WORLD'S PROVIDER, COVENTRY.



6d. DEPOSIT.

This Handsome Phonograph, with large enamelled Flower Horn (Gold lined), and Two Records, complete in case, will be sent to any address on receipt of 6d. DEPOSIT and upon payment of the last of 18 further weekly instalments of 6d. each. Two 1/- Records are given free. Send for Price List of Latest Models, and our Special Offer of a 42/- Phonograph Free.

THE BRITISH MFG. CO. P 24, Great Yarmouth.



1/- WEEKLY

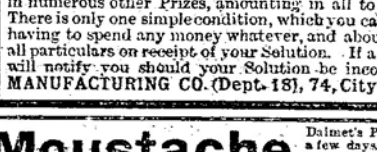
This handsome disc machine, with massive 18-in. flower horn (art colours), gold-lined, plated tone-arm, first-class motor, fitted with our Patent Concert Sound-Box, 200 Needles, and

SIXZONOPHONE RECORDS,

plays 10-inch Records at one winding—the Latest Model—sent to any address on receipt of 1s. DEPOSIT and upon payment of the last of 29 weeks at 1s., making a total of 30s. We supply all makes of Phonographs at HALF SHOP PRICES. Terms to suit yourself. Write for Lists of New Models NOW.

WILLIAMS & CO., Erskine Road, Walthamstow, London.

£500 GIVEN AWAY



We will give £100 Cash to those sending us the Correct Solution of this Rebus. Take your time about it, and remember there is only one Correct Solution. If several correct answers are received, we shall invite a Committee of Competitors to award the cash *pro rata*. If your Solution is nearly correct, you will participate in numerous other Prizes, amounting in all to a total value of £500. There is only one simple condition, which you can comply with without having to spend any money whatever, and about which you will hear all particulars on receipt of your Solution. If a Stamp be enclosed we will notify you should your Solution be incorrect.—THE RADIO MANUFACTURING CO. (Dept. 18), 74, City Road, London, E.C.

Moustache Dalmet's Pomade grows a nice one in a few days. Send three penny stamps for a box to Mr. P. Dalmet, 17, Gray Inn Road, London

TATTOOING. No Previous Knowledge Required. Complete outfit, with designs and instructions, post free, 3/6. Foreign orders 6d. extra. Send stamp for largest price list in the trade.—"Novelties," C. Dept. 67, Britannia Road, Norwich.

VENTRILOQUISM. Anyone can learn this Wonderful, Laughable art. Failure impossible with this book, containing over 30 pages of easy instructions and amusing dialogues. Post free, 6d. Hundreds delighted. "Mesmerism," 1/2.—G. WILKES & CO., STOCKTON, RUGBY.

IF YOU WANT Good Cheap Photographic Material or Cameras send postcard for Samples and Catalogue. FREE.—Works: JULY ROAD, LIVERPOOL.

STAMP ALBUM 4d. POST FREE, or with 100 Stamps, 8d. Both above as free gifts to purchasers of our Shamrock packet, 1s.—DOUGLAS BROS., 80, St. Saviour's Road, LEICESTER.

Now on Sale! Price One Halfpenny!

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY

- - CONTAINING - -

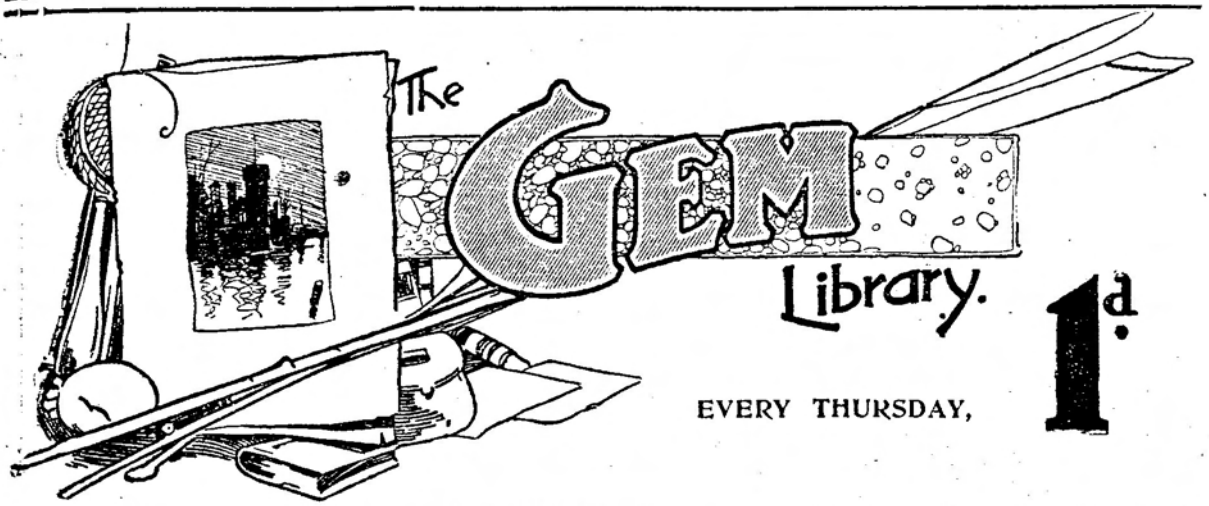
A Grand School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.,

By FRANK RICHARDS.

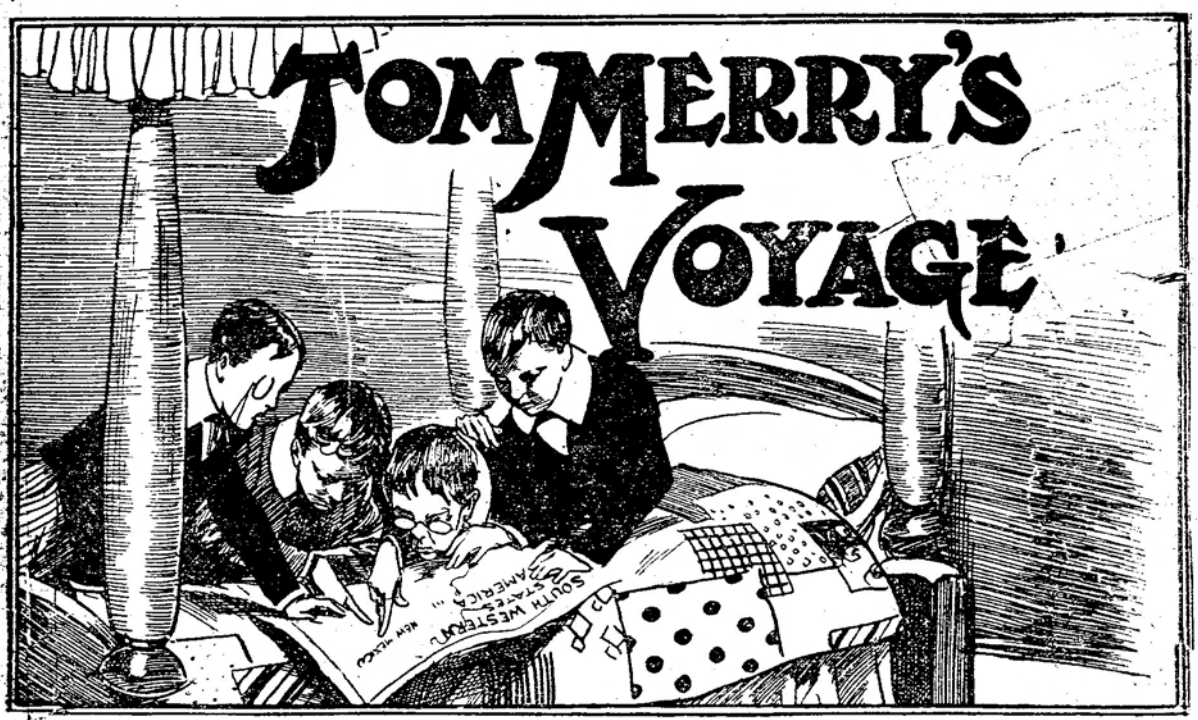
- - ALSO - -

"IN THE RANKS,"

A Splendid Story of Army Life.



Complete Stories for Everyone, and Every Story a Gem!



A Splendid Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Breaking-up.

"HERE comes the brake!"

It was Tom Merry, of the Shell Form of St. Jim's, who uttered the shout, which was echoed by a dozen other juniors.

It was a sharp December day, with snowflakes sailing on a keen wind in the old quadrangle at St. Jim's, but little the crowd of eager, excited boys cared for the weather.

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

The class-rooms were deserted, the great hall dark and silent. Hardly an echo woke in the long flagged passages, and an unaccustomed peace had fallen upon the junior studies.

St. Jim's was breaking-up, and masters and boys dispersing to the four corners of the kingdom, not to meet again till the New Year.

The boys were in high spirits, especially Tom Merry & Co., who seldom suffered from lack of vivacity. The brakes with the seniors in them had rolled off, and the Shell and the Fourth Form were waiting. They enlivened the wait by shouting, cheering, cat-calling, and pelting one another with snowballs. In one corner of the quad a snow-fight was raging between opposing forces of School House and New House boys; but

It was all in fun, for the rivals of St. Jim's felt the genial influence of the season. The snow-fight ended suddenly as Tom Merry shouted out that the brake was coming, and there was a rush of the juniors to secure seats.

There was not the slightest necessity for a rush, for there were plenty of vehicles to carry the boys to Rylcombe Station, and they knew it perfectly well. But they rushed the brake all the same, in the exuberance of their spirits.

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry, waving his cap. "This brake belongs to the School House!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. "Pway buck up, deah boys, and the bwake is ours!"

Tom Merry was first in the brake, before it had stopped, and Jack Blake and Digby were only a moment behind him. Figgins & Co., of the New House, made a rush, but a counter rush of the School House juniors drove them back. Manners and Lowther, Herries and D'Arcy, Reilly and Kerruish, crowded into the brake, and brandished their caps and fists triumphantly at the New House juniors.

Figgins scrambled up from the snow, where he had been bumped over, and shouted to his followers:

"Buck up, New House!"

And he led a desperate attack on the brake.

It had halted before the School House, and the driver sat in his seat, philosophically smoking his pipe and looking on, while the horses steamed in the crisp air. The New House juniors clambered over wheels and back, anywhere and everywhere, and were met by hearty smites from the garrison of the brake, which sent them rolling back on the snowy drive.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom Merry. "Sock it to them!"

"Buck up, New House!" gasped Figgins.

He clambered valiantly on. Tom Merry leaned over and took a grip upon his hair, and grinned in his excited face.

"Off you go, Figgy."

"I won't!"

"Then I'll squeeze this orange down the back of your neck!"

"Ow, you rotter!"

"Boys!"

The voice of Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, stilled the clamour as if by magic. The housemaster had come out on the steps, and was looking on. Tom Merry changed his intentions, and dropped the orange behind him, and industriously helped Figgins into the brake. Blake, who had Kerr by the ears, changed his grasp to Kerr's collar, and helped him in, too. Skimpole, who had just been dragged out of the brake by the legs, and bumped in the snow, sat up and adjusted his spectacles, and looked around him.

"Dear me!" he gasped.

"Come, boys, you must keep a little order," said Mr. Railton good humouredly. "There is plenty of room, and you need not crowd."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly, sir," said Tom Merry. "Are you all right, Figgins?"

"Oh, rather!" said Figgins. "Room for you here, Fatty. Come on!"

"Oh, draw it mild, Figgy! There's no room for Fatty Wynn. He will want a brake all to himself," protested Wally D'Arcy, the younger brother of the one and only Arthur Augustus.

But Figgins only grinned. In the exhilaration of breaking-up for Christmas, he could pardon even cheek from a Third Form fag.

"Here you are, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn clambered in. His plump face was rosy red, and beaming with good humour. The pockets of his overcoat were stuffed out, and all who knew Fatty knew that his personal baggage consisted of eatables.

The brake was crowded. School House and New House boys were mingled on the best of terms. The driver gathered up his reins, and the boys who had not been able to obtain seats drew back to wait for the next brake. Mr. Railton waved his hand in response to the waving of caps.

"A merry Christmas to you, boys."

"Same to you, sir, and many of 'em!"

"Three cheers for Railton!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

And amid hurrahing and waving of hands and caps, the brake rolled out of the gates of St. Jim's, and down the snowy road to the village.

"Bai Jove, I am feelin' quite excited, you know," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as he took off his silk hat to cool his brow, and to brush it with his glove. "It is awful fun bweakin' up, and I am vewwy glad I am comin' to spend the vac with you, Tom Mewwy."

"So am I," said Tom. "I wish all you fellows were coming. But you'll all have to pay me visits some time or other before next term."

"Yes, rather!" said Monty Lowther.

"You bet!" said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! It won't be like Chwistmas if we don't see the old familiah faces wound the festive board," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally have to apologize for my young bwothah, Tom Mewwy. He is coming away on a vac with his collar stained with wed ink, and his necktie all cwooked. I will make him assume a little more wespectable appeawance before we awwive at your estemed governess's wesidence at Hucklebewwy Heath."

"Oh, don't you begin," said Wally.

"Weally, Wally——"

"Rats! Tom Merry's got a spot of ink on his own collar, and he's not an ass like you, anyway, you know," said D'Arcy minor cheerfully.

"Wally, I must say—— Ow-wow!"

Arthur Augustus broke off suddenly with a howl.

He was replacing his silk hat on his head when a snowball suddenly sailed through the air and knocked it off into the brake.

There was a yell of laughter from the hedge.

Three village youths stood there—Craggs, Pilcher, and Grimes, old foes of the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! The fearful wuffians!"

"Give 'em a volley!" roared Grimes.

Three or four more village youths appeared from behind the hedge, and a volley of snowballs whistled towards the brake.

The juniors of St. Jim's were defenceless against the attack, and there were loud yells as the snowballs got home, smashing on noses and ears and chins.

But Tom Merry was equal to the occasion.

"Stop a minute, driver!"

The brake halted.

The juniors swarmed out, gathering up handfuls of snow in a twinkling and kneading the snowballs.

In a minute the air was thick with the missiles, whirling and whizzing to and fro. The St. Jim's attack was vigorous, and Grimes & Co. were driven back through the gap in the edge.

"Give 'em socks!" roared Tom Merry.

The Saints rushed forward, hurling snowballs thick and fast, and Craggs and Pilcher and Grimes and their friends went helter-skelter across the field. Grimes stopped on the further side of a ditch and grinned back at the juniors as he rubbed thick snow from his ears.

"Merry Christmas!" he shouted.

And the St. Jim's juniors sent a cheery shout back:

"Same to you, Grimey, old boy!"

And they clambered into the brake again, and rolled on their way, and ten minutes later arrived at Rylcombe Railway Station.

CHAPTER 2.

Homeward Bound.

A CROWD of youths in Grammar School caps were in the station entrance, and they raised a shout at the sight of the St. Jim's juniors. The Saints clambered down from the brake, and found the station entrance blocked up by the Grammar School boys in a solid phalanx. Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy were at the head of the Grammarians, and they grinned defiantly at the Saints.

"No dogs admitted here," said Monk pleasantly.

"Bai Jove, you know, we shall lose our twain if we don't get in," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's all right; the Grammar cads are here to catch the same train. They're breaking-up to-day, the same as we are. Now, Monkey, get out of the way."

"Rats!"

"Line up!" shouted Tom Merry. "On the ball! [illegible] dog by the

And the St. Jim's juniors, in a compact body, Grammarians. The latter stood their ground. Pongo doesn't was no resisting that charge. After a brief stru youths were hurled back into the station, and d the dog upon was maintained to the platform by the ri sleepy porter and the equally sleepy stationmas had no mind to interfere. On break-up at d usage, and he they expected ructions in Rylcombe. The oys set off at top exuberant spirits to let off somehow.

Saints and Grammarians crowded on the part. The mingled disorder, shouting and strugg and D'Arcy rting in. owther and still in progress when the train came s

"Stand back there!" a rush fome, and Tom

Before the train had stopped there w and Tom had. It was Other brakes full of Saints had arrived, Co. made were greatly reinforced. Tom Merry armed into it, gether the nearest first-class carriage, a the way. Frank path, the Grammarians recklessly ed in along with the Sa clung to the door, and Lane form with three or four mo Carboy was sprawling on the Grammarians across him.

"Look out there!"

"Shut the door!" ing with boys. There were not The train was soon swa



Mr. Dodds made the four juniors strip and bundle into the big, old-fashioned bed, while he piled blankets over them, and added coats to the blankets, and the hearthrug to the coats.

enough carriages for the whole number, but no one was inclined to wait for the second train that was to immediately follow. The engine shrieked, and the boys cleared back. Monk dropped from the carriage door with an orange squeezed over his face, and Lane was hurled bodily out. The guard ran along the train, shouting and excited. But there was no danger of accidents. Tom Merry slammed the carriage door, and as many the trans could crowd there leaned out and waved hands and saluted Cou[illegible]rammarians.

"How goo[illegible]gan to move.

Cousin Ethel Grammarians stood on the platform. Frank

"Why, I pr[illegible]ing his face with his handkerchief, and Lane was she said. [illegible] of "claret" from his nose. But their good-

"Yes, but—[illegible]gh spirits were unabated.

Tom Merry[illegible]ristmas, Monkey!" yelled Tom Merry.

sex to cate[illegible]rammarians shouted back cheerily.

Cousin Hindow of the train was crammed with faces and the juniors[illegible]nds, and the train swept out of the station to the corner sea[illegible]ent of wild shouts and catcalls.

As she was [illegible] sank back into the nearest seat as the train left but while he[illegible]nd the crowded platform disappeared, giving place his coat mc snowy country-side.

into the[illegible]was a gasp from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, upon whose

The[illegible]had involuntarily seated himself.

the "Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are cwushin' my twousahs."

my Sorry," said Tom Merry cheerily. "All the seats seem to be taken up. Who is going to make room for his uncle?"

There were no offers. The carriage was supposed to seat eight passengers, and there were fourteen juniors in it. Juniors were on the seats, and on the arms between the seats, and standing, and on one another's knees. Tom Merry looked round in vain for a resting-place.

"Don't all speak at once," he said, with cheery sarcasm. "Who's going to give me a place?"

"Ask us another," said Blake.

"Weally, deah boys, I suggest that Fatty Wynn should get up, as that would make woom for two others who are standin'."

"Bosh!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm out of breath. I'm feeling a bit peckish, too. Have you got that packet I gave you, Figgins?"

"Packet!" said Figgins.

"Yes," said the fat Fourth Former anxiously. "You remember I gave you a packet of sandwiches to carry, as there wasn't room in my pockets."

"My hat! It must have been the packet that I slammed at Frank Monk, then, as we were coming on the platform. I remember slamming something at him."

"You—you slammed my grub at that Grammar rotter!" howled Fatty Wynn. "You—you wasted good grub! Figgins!"

"You've got enough in your own pockets, I suppose. You look as if you were provisioned for a siege."

"I've got a long way to go. It isn't a short step to Wales," grunted Fatty Wynn.

"Well, you can get a lunch-basket en route."

"I was going to have that, anyway."

"Ha, ha! Have an extra lunch-basket, then; or why not have a special car laden with grub, and roll in it."

Fatty Wynn did not reply to this ribald suggestion. He drew a packet from one of his well-filled pockets, and started upon saveloys. Arthur Augustus, who had a corner seat, had been showing some signs of uneasiness, moving his feet to and fro, and at last he rose with an expression of indignation.

"There is some fearful beastly animal undah the seat!"

he exclaimed. "Somethin' or othah keeps snuffin' wound my twousahs."

"Rot!" said Digby. "How could an animal be in here."

"Weally, Dig, I tell you——"

"Faith, and it's gnawin' my boots!" exclaimed Reilly. "Phwat is it intirely? Howly Moses, it's a dog!"

"Here, let him alone!" exclaimed D'Arcy minor. "It's only Pongo."

"Pongo! Weally, Wally, have you bwought that howwid beast into a first-class cawwiage?"

"Did you think I was going to put him in the guard's van?"

"I wegard you as a young beast, and I insist upon thwowin' Pongo out of the window."

"Right-ho!" said Wally cheerfully. "You can throw him out of the window—if he'll go."

Arthur Augustus looked under the seat. Pongo showed his teeth and growled, and the swell of St. Jim's decided to let him alone.

"I wegard it as extwemely wotten of you to bwing that feahful beast on a visit to Tom Mewwy's wespected governess, Wally."

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Of course it is," said Wally. "Where I go, Pongo goes. Besides, what's the matter with the dog? Nice, quiet animal."

"Howwid beast!"

"My bulldog's in the guard's van," said Herries. "It's a bit thick having this unspeakable tripehound in here with us."

"Turn him out, then," said Wally cheerfully.

But Herries declined. The train roared into Wayland, and here the chums of the Fourth had to change. Herries and Digby were going to spend the vacation with Jack Blake at his home in Yorkshire, and Figgins and Kerr were going on to Kerr's Scottish home, and Kerruish to the Isle of Man. With many a handshake and thump on the back they parted, and the train rushed on again, Fatty Wynn still in the carriage, and frantically waving good-bye to Figgins and Kerr from the window, unconscious of the saveloy in his hand.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "When you've done brandishing that saveloy, Fatty—— My word, there it goes!"

The saveloy flew from the excited Fatty's hand, and whisked away over a snowy embankment.

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

He sat down again, and groped in his coat-pockets, and produced a pork-pie, and started operations upon it at once.

"I feel rather rotten at parting with old Figgins," he remarked. "I wish he could have come on to Wales with me. Whenever I feel at all rotten, I find it a good thing to take a square meal. Have you ever noticed that?"

"Can't say I have," grinned Tom Merry. "Go ahead, Fatty, only remember the width of the carriage door."

"What on earth has the width of the carriage door to do with me?"

"Well, you have to change at the next station, and if you can't get through the door——"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Fatty Wynn. And without wasting any more time upon words, he travelled into the pork-pie.

The pie finished, he started upon cold sausage, and then upon ham patties. The supply from his coat-pockets seemed inexhaustible. With true Welsh hospitality, he offered an equal share of all his good things on all sides. But the amount he travelled through himself was a surprise even to his friends who knew his powers in that line so well.

"Go it, Fatty," said Monty Lowther encouragingly. "Break the record, old chap."

"I wish I had my camera unpacked," sighed Manners.

"Oh, don't rot!" said Fatty Wynn, with his mouth full. "I get awfully hungry this Christmas weather, you know. I've always got a pretty good appetite——"

"Ha, ha! We've noticed it."

"But about this time of the year I get extra peckish. There's a lunch-basket being put in the train for me at my station, so I really don't need to keep any of these things by me, and it's easier carrying them inside. Help yourselves, you chaps. It's the last feed we shall have together for a long time."

Fatty Wynn little knew how true his words were, as far as some members of the party were concerned. It was destined to be a long time before Tom Merry would enjoy a feed with the juniors of St. Jim's again.

From Fatty Wynn's ample stores the juniors did help themselves. The train was slowing down when Fatty Wynn commenced operations upon a huge rosy apple. He had no knife with him, and so he was driven to the rather primitive method of digging his front teeth into the apple. He had taken only one bite when the train stopped in the station he had to change at.

"Here you are!" exclaimed Lowther. "Buck up, they're shoving your trunk out!"

Fatty Wynn bundled out of the train. They shook hands hurriedly, and Fatty was left standing on the platform as the train rushed on, waving both fat hands excitedly, and, for convenience sake, holding the big apple with his [illegible] made a very curious figure as he stood thus, the big apple hiding half his fat face, and his hands waving excitedly in the air. That was the last Tom Merry saw, and for a long time to come—in strange lands and among strange people—that picture remained in the mind of the hero of the Shell.

CHAPTER 3.

Home for the Holidays.

"WINCHESTER!" said Tom Merry. "We change here."

The train slowed down in the station in the old cathedral city, and Tom Merry threw the door open. He jumped lightly out, and Arthur Augustus stepped elegantly after him. Wally was trying to induce Pongo to come out from under the seat, a matter about which Pongo seemed to require time to make up his mind, while Skimpole was blinking over a notebook, from the leaves of which protruded a perfect sheaf of loose notes. Skimpole, who was the amateur Socialist and the genius of St. Jim's, did not even know that the train had stopped.

"Get out!" shouted Tom Merry. "Shove them out, Monty, old son."

Monty Lowther and Manners were going on in the train, to Manners' home. Lowther playfully chucked the amateur Socialist under the chin, and Skimpole jumped up, and half his valuable notes scattered over the floor of the carriage.

"Really, Lowther——"

"Get out, you ass! Do you want to come on in the train?"

"Dear me, I was quite unaware that the train had stopped! Now that I observe it, the train certainly has stopped," said Skimpole. "Wait a few minutes while I collect up my notes."

"Ha, ha, ha! The train goes on in one minute."

"I cannot lose my notes. Pray run along and tell the engine driver to stop, Tom Merry, while I am collecting up my notes."

"Certainly—I don't think."

"If I lose these notes I shall have all the work to do over again for the four hundred and forty-sixth chapter of my book on 'Socialism, Determinism, Individualism, Collectivism, and the Land Question,'" said Skimpole.

"Get out, you ass!"

"I really cannot—ow—I can—owoooww!"

Skimpole alighted from the carriage with Monty Lowther's grasp on his collar. He sat down suddenly on the platform, and the remainder of his notes fluttered about him, and were promptly scattered by the brisk wind. Lowther grinned and stepped back into the carriage, and then gave a gasp as a fiendish yell sounded under his feet. He had inadvertently trod upon Pongo, who had at last come out from under the seat in submission to Wally's blandishments."

"The—the beast!" gasped Lowther. "Made me jump."

"You ass!" said Wally wrathfully. "What did you want to tread on him for? Now he's gone under the seat again. Pongo! Good doggie! Pongo, old boy!"

Pongo old boy growled under the seat, and refused to come out.

"Wally, I insist upon your immediately alightin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "The twain will go on in a few moments."

"I can't get out without Pongo."

"Leave the howwid mongwel there. I insist——"

"Now, don't you begin, Gussy."

"I'll hand him out to you," said Lowther, and Wally rather doubtfully stepped from the carriage.

Lowther groped under the seat, and Pongo's bite took its effect upon his thick glove, and then he grasped the dog by the collar, and dragged him out.

"Gently does it," shouted Wally anxiously. "Pongo doesn't like being handled roughly."

"Rats!" said Monty cheerfully, and he tossed the dog upon the platform.

Pongo seemed astounded at this unaccustomed usage, and he remained for a second staring blankly, and then set off at top speed, with his young master tearing in hot pursuit.

The guard was coming along, and it was time to part. The juniors shook hands for the last time, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy and Skimpole stood back, and the train rushed on, Lowther and Manners waving their caps from the window.

The train disappeared round a bend of the line, and Tom Merry replaced his cap on the back of his curly head. It was the last parting.

Tom Merry, D'Arcy, Wally, and Skimpole were to be together for the Christmas holidays at Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, the home of Tom's old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

"Bai Jove! Where's that young ass Wally? Wally! Ah, there you are! I was beginning to hope that that wotten mongwel had escaped."

"Stuff," said Wally, who was looking very red and excited, and dragging upon Pongo's chain. "Pongo wouldn't run away from me, would you, old Pong?"

"What are you dragging on him for, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, well, he might get lost, you know. There's the local over there. Time we got into it."

And Wally led the way to the platform where the local train was already waiting.

Tom Merry looked round for Skimpole. The amateur Socialist, holding his spectacles on with one hand, was chasing the elusive notes that were fluttering about in the wintry wind.

Tom Merry did not waste time arguing with him. He caught hold of him by the shoulder and ran him along without making a single remark, and Skimpole yielded from sheer astonishment.

Tom Merry did not release the amateur Socialist till he had bundled him into a carriage of the local train, and then Skimpole sank breathless into a seat, and blinked at Tom in amazement through his spectacles.

"Really, Merry, I—I——"

"Don't put your feet on my dog, Skimpole."

"Ah! I am sorry but I——"

"Had to catch this, you know," said Tom Merry, as the train began to move. "Just in time to save your bacon, Skimmy."

"But my notes——"

"You can make some more, I suppose."

"I am afraid you do not understand, Merry. Those notes were exceedingly valuable, containing extracts from famous Socialist writers, whose remarks I intended to work up in my book in a more luminous form. Now they are lost."

"Still, they may fall into the hands of railway porters, shunters, and ticket clerks," said Tom Merry. "The loss of those notes may assist in spreading the light of Socialism throughout the whole length of the South Western Railway."

Skimpole brightened up.

"Dear me! I did not think of that. Yes, Merry, now that you mention it, I can see it in that light, and I no longer regret the loss of my notes. What is a little extra work for me compared with spreading the glorious truths of Socialism?"

"To say nothing of the other 'isms.'"

And so Skimpole was comforted.

Half an hour later Arthur Augustus D'Arcy began to look out of the window with great interest. Tom Merry joined him there.

Skimpole was buried in his notebook, and Wally was feeding his dog with biscuits.

The train slowed down in the station of Easthorpe, the last before Huckleberry Heath. This was the station where D'Arcy would have alighted for home, if he had been going home.

A slim girlish figure and a pair of laughing eyes caught the glances of the juniors, and the carriage door flew open before the train had stopped, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy eagerly saluted Cousin Ethel.

"How good of you to be here!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Why, I promised to be here in time to catch the same train," she said.

"Yes, but—but you might have lost it, you know."

Tom Merry perhaps had little faith in the ability of the gentle sex to catch trains.

Cousin Ethel laughed, and took her seat in the carriage, and the juniors sprang in. Cousin Ethel, of course, was given a corner seat, and Arthur Augustus prepared to sit beside her. As she was his cousin he regarded that as his inalienable right, but while he was carefully preparing to sit down without creasing his coat more than was unavoidable Tom Merry calmly dropped into the place.

The look that Arthur Augustus bestowed upon the hero of the Shell might have brought a blush to the cheek of a graven image, but it had no perceptible effect upon Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus sat down opposite his cousin, and continually tried to catch Tom Merry's eye, but in vain.

Tom chatted pleasantly with Cousin Ethel all the way to Huckleberry Heath.

Cousin Ethel was spending part of the Christmas holidays at Laurel Villa, and it had been arranged for her to join the juniors at Easthorpe. It had been D'Arcy's suggestion, and it was rather rough on the swell of St. Jim's to have his cousin appropriated under his eyes like this, and he refused to be comforted by Wally's offer to put Pongo through his tricks in the carriage, and declined quite brusquely Skimpole's offer to read aloud what he had completed of the four-hundred-and-forty-sixth chapter of his great book.

They alighted at Huckleberry Heath at last, and there on the platform were Miss Priscilla Fawcett, with her kind smile and her antique bonnet, and stalwart Mr. Dodds, the curate of Huckleberry Heath.

Needless to say, there was a joyful meeting, and if Tom Merry wished that his governess would not kiss him and call him a pretty boy before a dozen spectators, he was careful not to say so.

CHAPTER 4.
Follow Your Leader.

CHRISTMAS at Laurel Villa was jolly enough. Tom Merry had a way of creating cheerfulness around him wherever he went, and the comrades who spent holidays with him always enjoyed themselves.

Huckleberry Heath was in one of the prettiest parts of Hampshire. In the adjacent woods were rabbits galore for Pongo to chase, and on the frozen river the juniors spent many happy hours. Then in the evenings, with young people from all quarters to make things lively, the hours went by at a great rate. As Tom Merry remarked, all clocks seemed to be running a race in vacation time.

The days passed in a round of merriment, with perhaps a shadow here and there, as on the occasion of an adventure on the frozen river.

During the last days of the term at St. Jim's the juniors had taken up the boy scouts idea with great enthusiasm, and now they had ample opportunity of getting open-air practice.

Tom Merry, who was leader of the patrol of which they formed part, kept his followers in practice, and Skimpole had to leave his books on Socialism, Determinism, Individualism, and other fearsome "isms," to join in the sports in the keen air.

Skimpole would rather have "mugged" over his books, but even the genius of St. Jim's realised that the exercise did him good, and, anyway, there was no denying Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus, too, was sometimes grieved by damage to his clothes, but fortunately his wardrobe was extensive, and he always had a change ready.

One morning when Cousin Ethel was busy with Miss Fawcett in the housekeeper's room, the juniors sallied forth in high spirits. There had been a slight thaw over night, but the air was keen and fresh, and the ice on the river looked thick and secure enough.

"Line up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I mean, form up! Take your chin off your chest immediately, Skimmy."

"Really, Merry, I wasn't aware that my chin was on my chest," said Skimpole. "I was thinking——"

"You can leave that till after Christmas. Left!"

"I was attempting to solve the problem as to whether the influence of heredity is greater than that of environment, or whether the influence of environment is greater than that of——"

"Rats! March!"

And they marched. Wally marched into Skimpole, and nearly knocked him over.

Arthur Augustus, with an air of languid interest in the proceedings, marched after Wally. Pongo trotted after them, barking an accompaniment.

"Now then," said Tom Merry, "follow my leader's a good game for boy scouts. It teaches them to go anywhere and do anything. I'm your leader, and you've got to follow me."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Buck up, there! Follow on!"

And Tom Merry led the way. He ran down to the bank of the river, and slid across the ice, and the juniors slid after him.

Why is Tom Merry like the First Day of the Year?

Send your answer on a postcard to: The Editor, "Gem" Library, 23-29, Bouverie Street, London, E.C. Half-a-crown for the best answer.

The best answer to the riddle published in "The Gem" Library, No. 42, was sent in by E. EASTWOOD, Rhodes Street, Halifax. "Because he is full of 'striking' surprises" was on E. Eastwood's postcard, and the Half-Crown has gone to Halifax.

Then through the wood, where Pongo was soon sniffing on the trail of a rabbit.

"Come back, Pongo! Pong! Doggie, come here!" yelled Wally.

But Pongo was off at top speed.

Wally was preparing to pursue him, when the voice of his leader called him back.

"Hold on there! Keep where you are!"

"But Pongo!"

"Blow Pongo! Follow your leader!"

Wally reluctantly obeyed. He was always afraid that a keeper's gun might put a sudden end to Pongo's playful little ways. But he understood the discipline of a boy scout, and he followed on.

Out upon a wild, rough hillside, patched with scraggy, leafless trees and bushes, the scouts ran, Skimpole beginning to puff and blow.

There was a sudden yell from Arthur Augustus as the wind caught his silk hat—of course he was wearing a silk hat—and carried it off his head and away over the bushes.

"Pway stop a minute, Tom Mewwy. My hat——"

"Blow your hat! Come on!"

"But weally——"

"Follow your leader!"

Arthur Augustus hesitated a moment. Discipline prevailed, and he followed on, leaving the silk hat to its fate.

Skimpole was the next to experience disaster. He stumbled over a root, and sat down, and his spectacles fell off, and he groped for them blindly.

"Pray wait for me," he called out.

"Stuff! Follow your leader!"

"But really, Merry, I cannot. Dear me, where are my glasses?"

The juniors were tearing on. Skimpole found his glasses at last, and adjusted them on to his nose. But the scouts were out of sight.

Skimpole was not sorry for it. He was quite out of breath. He sat down upon a log, and took out his notebook and pencil. Speedily forgetful of his duties as a boy scout, he was soon engaged upon the four hundred and forty-sixth chapter of his great work.

Tom Merry dashed on. His way led through a farmyard, and he dashed through a crowd of cackling geese, which scattered in all directions. One of them ran under the feet of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's rolled over it. The goose cackled terrifically, and Arthur Augustus yelled in return. He had sat down with violence in a puddle, and the muddy water had splashed far and wide. A big, red-faced man came running out of a barn, with a long whip in his hand.

"Dang my buttons!" he exclaimed. "Outer my farmyard, you young ripe!"

The long lash of the whip curled round the legs of Arthur Augustus as he sprang up out of the puddle, and the swell of St. Jim's yelled again.

"Pway hold on!" he gasped. "Weally, my deah sir, I beg of you to westain yourself. I wefuse to be stwuck in this bwutal mannah—ow, ow—— I uttahly decline to submit to anythin' of the sort—ow, ow—— I wepeat, you wottah, that I wegard you as a wude beast, and uttahly wefuse to—ow—wow—wow!"

Arthur Augustus was hopping under the lash of the whip. The red-faced man was evidently not to be argued with. D'Arcy turned, and made a bolt for it, and the farmer dashed after him, still lashing with the long whip.

"Ow! Help! Bwute! Ow!"

But Wally was on the track. The hero of the Third Form of St. Jim's was last, and he came into the farmyard behind the farmer. He did not hesitate for a moment. Right at the red-faced man he charged, and butted him in the small of the back. The farmer gave a startled yell, and went over on his face, and his red features were cooled in a deep puddle. He spluttered with fury, and jumped up with mud and water streaming from his face, but the juniors had lost no time. They were out of the farmyard on the opposite side, and racing across country.

The red-faced man said things more emphatic than elegant, but suddenly his expression changed. He dashed after the boys, but not with vengeful intent.

"Come back!" he yelled. "The bull—the bull!"

But the juniors were too far ahead to hear the warning shout.

They did not realise their danger till a low, rumbling sound came across the quiet meadow, and Tom Merry looked round to see a huge black bull lashing his sides with its tail, and regarding them with a ferocious glare.

"Run!" yelled Tom. "He's coming!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors put on a burst of speed that would have won them prizes on the cinderpath. But the black bull was on the trail. He came charging after them, with his head down and his tail lashing, bellowing as he came.

"Wun!" shrieked D'Arcy, looking round for his younger brother. "Wun like anythin'!"

And the juniors did run like anything.

Tom Merry crossed the stile at the farther side of the field, without touching it with his hands. Arthur Augustus was only a few seconds behind, but he was too breathless to jump. He clambered over, Tom Merry lending him a hand, and rolled down into the frozen grass on the safe side.

Wally was coming on gallantly, but the bull was very close behind him. Tom Merry turned white as he looked back.

"Good heavens! Wally! Buck up!"

His glance went wildly round for a weapon. A great jagged stone lay by the stile, and in a moment he had picked it up. The lowered head of the bull was not more than a yard behind the panting junior. Wally could never reach the stile in time. With a face like chalk, but a hand as steady as a rock, Tom Merry aimed the stone, and hurled it with all the strength of his strong young arm.

It struck the bull fairly between the eyes. The blow was far from sufficient to check the huge animal, but for the moment it blinded him, and he swerved from his course. As he snorted with pain and rage, and blinked round with red eyes for his victim, Wally flung himself over the stile. The next moment the black bull was at the stile, snorting, bellowing, and pawing, but he could not get over it, and the juniors were safe.

CHAPTER 5.

Wally Follows His Leader.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wegard that as a feahfully nawwow escape, you know."

Tom Merry laughed breathlessly.

"You're right, Gussy. I dare say that chap will find some way of getting through the hedge if we wait long enough, so——"

"Wun like anythin', deah boys."

And the juniors ran on, panting. The bellowing of the angry bull died away in the distance behind.

"Follow your leader," exclaimed Tom Merry, increasing his pace when he had recovered his wind a little.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, considewin' where our leadah leads us, I gweatly doubt whethah we had bettah follow any furthah."

"Rats! Obey orders, or I'll have you court-martialled. Follow on."

Tom Merry led by a winding path back to the river. D'Arcy and Wally panted on through muddy meadows, snowy lanes, scrubby hillsides, and half-frozen ditches, till the broad sheet of ice on the river came into sight.

The scouts had reached the river about a mile below Laurel Villa. Tom Merry ran out on the ice, and slid away on the level surface.

Arthur Augustus stopped for a moment to adjust his monocle, and look at the ice. He knew there had lately been a slight thaw.

"Tom Mewwy!" he shouted.

"Come on!"

"I wathah considah——"

"Come on!"

"Oh, vewy well; but if I get dwowned it doesn't count."

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on!"

Wally shot past the swell of St. Jim's, sliding after Tom Merry like an arrow. The elder scion of the house of D'Arcy was not to be outdone by a Third Form fag, and he dashed on after Wally, bareheaded, and with his eyeglass sailing behind him at the end of its cord.

Wally, in too great haste, slipped on an inequality of the ice, and slid some distance on his back, and finished up in a mass of frozen rusty rushes. He gave a wild yell as he landed there, and D'Arcy went skimming past him.

"Buck up, deah boy!" called out Arthur Augustus, en passant.

Wally growled and dragged himself out of the rushes. The ice was thin near the rushes, and one of his boots went through. Tom Merry was skimming ahead at a rate that promised to land him at the grounds of Laurel Villa in a few minutes. Suddenly he was seen to throw up one hand, as if in warning, and slacken pace. But he was going too fast to stop at once, and the danger was seen too late to be avoided.

A great crack extended across the ice, and Tom Merry knew what it meant. He was upon it the next second, and there was a terrific grinding crash under his feet. A second more, and he was in the black water.

How he scrambled through and out on the other side of the sudden gap he hardly knew. But he did it, and dragged himself out on the firmer ice drenched to the skin, freezing with cold, but safe. Arthur Augustus was coming on at top speed, and Tom Merry turned to wave his hands at him in warning.

"Don't! Go back!" he shrieked.

Arthur Augustus came right on.

Whether he was too excited to see the danger, or whether he was governed by a fixed idea that he must follow his leader, Tom Merry did not know; but the fact remained that he came on at top speed for the gap.

A few seconds after Tom Merry had dragged himself out, Arthur Augustus splashed headlong in. The splash of the water drenched Tom Merry again, but he did not care for that. With a white face and wildly-beating heart he knelt on the verge of the firm ice to help the swell of St. Jim's.

A hand came up from the waters, and the face of Arthur Augustus followed it, but the swell of St Jim's neither saw nor heard. Tom Merry grasped his hand, and dragged him out. The ice cracked threateningly, and Tom Merry had just time to whisk Arthur Augustus along to a safer spot when it gave in, and the huge mass slid under the black waters.

It broke off with a sounding crack within six inches of the spot where the breathless juniors were standing. Tom Merry dragged his companion further back.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Bai Jove!"

"Lucky Wally was behind," panted Tom Merry. "He'll have sense enough to—— Go back—go back! For heaven's sake, go back!"

Wally was shooting like an arrow towards the gap. It was wider than ever now, and the ice all round its edges was crumbling under the action of the water. Perilous as the place had been before, it was doubly so now, and Tom felt his heart almost stop beating as Wally shot towards the yawning cavity where the black waters surged.

"Go back!" he shrieked. "Go round—or back! Stop, for heaven's sake, stop!"

But Wally came straight on. He was following his leader, and nothing short of sudden death would have stopped him then.

Right on he came, and shot off the edge of the ice, and plunged into the waters, which for the moment closed over his head.

Arthur Augustus gave a cry and ran wildly forward, as if to throw himself in. Tom Merry dragged him back.

"Stand ready to help!" he muttered hoarsely.

Wally's head came up. He was swimming, with stout and manly strokes, and he came right across the gap, his face white and blue with cold, his lips drawn, but his eyes gleaming with resolve and pluck.

His hands grasped the edges of the ice, but the ice crumbled in his grasp, and he could obtain no secure grip. Tom Merry leaned out to reach him, and there was a crack, and the junior went headlong in. A tall form in an overcoat was coming rapidly down the bank, and Arthur Augustus shrieked for help.

"Help! Mr. Dodds! Help!"

The curate of Huckleberry Heath ran out on the ice. In a moment more he was in the water, and as it was little more than five feet deep in that spot, the tall curate found footing on the bottom, with the water surging round his shoulders.

"Courage, my lads!"

His strong grasp was upon the floundering juniors. Wally was tossed out bodily, and Tom Merry quickly followed. Arthur Augustus gasped with relief. Mr. Dodds, with more difficulty, scrambled out of the gap upon the ice.

"Oh, thanks, sir!" gasped Tom Merry. "You—you——"

"No time to talk," said the curate quickly, "you'll catch cold. Cut off, don't stop for a second till you're indoors. The rectory is nearer than Laurel Villa, come with me."

"But, sir——" Tom Merry felt a natural hesitation at taking three dripping muddy figures into the neat, clean, little rectory. But Mr. Dodds knew that it was no time for hesitation

"Come, I tell you!" he cried sharply.

And he set the example himself. The juniors kept up a hot pace till the rectory was reached, and they arrived in a glow of heat. Mr. Dodds rushed them into his room, and made them strip and bundle into the big, old-fashioned bed, before he attended to himself. He piled blankets over them, and added coats to blankets, and the hearthrug to the coats, and bade them remain covered up for their lives, and then hurried away to get a rub down himself.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, whose breath had been quite taken away by these rapid proceedings. "Bai Jove! I wathah think Mr. Dodds must be accustomed to leadin' the stwenuous life, you know."

"Jolly sensible chap," grunted Wally. "My word, here comes the housekeeper with hot milk. Ripping!"

"Jolly good!" commented Tom Merry.

Leaving the juniors in bed to sip hot milk, the curate, after a rub down and a change of clothes, walked over to Laurel Villa to acquaint Miss Priscilla Fawcett with the happenings, before any news of it should get to her ears from other quarters and excite her alarm. But, gently as the curate broke the news, Miss Priscilla's alarm was terrible when she learned that her dear Tommy had been in the nasty river.

CHAPTER 6.

The Invalids.

"TOMMY! My sweetest little darling! Tommy pet!"

Three juniors were sitting up in bed playing dominoes when Miss Priscilla Fawcett and her maid Hannah burst into the room.

"My darling! My sweetest Tommy! How did it happen, then?"

And Miss Fawcett threw her arms round Tom Merry's neck, and the dominoes went to right and left. Tom Merry gave a yell. He was feeling, thanks to Mr. Dodds' prompt measures, none the worse for his ducking, but he might have been at the point of death to judge by Miss Fawcett's distress.

"My darling Tommy! Keep yourself well covered up. Don't risk getting a chill. If you were to catch cold in your dear little chest——"

"Oh dear!"

"You know how delicate you are!"

"I'm not delicate!" roared Tom Merry. "I'm all right!"

"My dearest Tommy!"

"Ow! Don't! I'm all right! Look here, I'm going to get up!"

"My darling! You shall do no such thing. Do you wish to risk your life? Tommy, Tommy, I beg of you not to be rash!" shrieked Miss Fawcett.

"I think Tom is quite well enough to get up now, Miss Fawcett," said Mr. Dodds, who had followed the old lady into the room, with a lurking smile.

Miss Priscilla gave him a glance of reproach.

"Oh, Mr. Dodds, and you know how delicate Tommy is. He must remain in bed for the present, until a doctor can be sent for, and then he must be removed in the carriage and put to bed very carefully at Laurel Villa!"

"I won't!" shrieked Tom.

"Bai Jove!"

"Let me tuck you in, darling," said Miss Priscilla; and Tom submitted with a groan, and the bedclothes were tucked tenderly round him. "Lie still while I send for a doctor. Would you like Hannah to sit beside you and hold your hand?"

"No!" shrieked Tom.

"Very well, then. Remain quite quiet, and in a few minutes Dr. Snipe will be here. Remain very quiet. Let us leave the room, Hannah, as our presence seems to excite the poor boy. Dear me, he looks quite feverish."

And they left the room. Tom Merry sat up in bed the moment the door had closed. Wally was grinning, and even Arthur Augustus could not restrain a smile. But it was no laughing matter for Tom Merry.

"Look here," he whispered excitedly, "I'm not going to stand this. I'm not going to stick in bed and have that Snipe chap fooling over me. Why, he always backs Miss Fawcett up, and he'd send me medicines, and if I took 'em I should get really ill. I'm off."

And Tom Merry bounded out of bed. Wally and D'Arcy followed his example. Neither had any desire to become patients of Dr. Snipe. Mr. Dodds had left a parcel in the room, and Tom guessed what it contained. The curate had thoughtfully brought them a change of clothes from Laurel Villa. Tom tore the parcel open, and the juniors dressed like lightning.

"There's no time to waste," said Tom Merry, breathlessly. "She'll make somebody fairly fly for the doctor. We can't go downstairs or she'll spot us. The window's the only thing."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm game," said Wally, grinning. "What larks!"

Tom Merry opened the window. There was a big tree outside, which in the summer-time rustled its foliage against the diamond panes. It was leafless and frozen now, but there was a strong branch within easy reach, and Tom Merry did not hesitate to swing himself upon it out of the window.

"This way, kids!" he grinned. "Follow your leader, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry slid along the branch and scrambled down the trunk. D'Arcy and Wally followed him fast. They dropped into the garden and bolted for the gate.

A tall figure was walking up and down in the garden: it was that of Mr. Dodds, keeping in motion to warm himself. His eyes fell upon the three juniors as they scuttled towards the gate, but he gave no sign of having seen them. Perhaps he sympathised with Tom Merry in his desire to avoid being made an invalid of. Tom drew a quick breath as he saw the curate, but Mr. Dodds continued his walk and the juniors hurried on.

A moment more and they were outside the gate, in the lane that led past Laurel Villa.

"And now sprint for it!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

They broke into a run. A little gig with yellow wheels dashed past them, with a gentleman in a silk hat sitting in it. It was Dr. Snipe's gig, and Dr. Snipe himself hurrying to the rectory.

ANSWERS

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "We've had a narrow escape!"

And they ran on faster than before, and never halted till they were safe within doors at Laurel Villa.

Meanwhile the little doctor had alighted at the rectory, and was hurried off by the anxious Miss Priscilla to the bed-room.

"My darling Tommy—why—what——" Miss Fawcett stared at the empty bed in dismay. Then her glance travelled to the open window. "Oh, dear! dear! Tommy has had a sudden access of delirium and hurled himself out of the window, and—and——"

"Nothing of the sort, madam," said the doctor, looking out of the window. "There is no sign of them in the garden."

"I think they must have gone home," remarked Mr. Dodds blandly.

"Dear, dear! Tommy, of course, was light-headed!"

"All three were not likely to be light-headed, surely, Miss Fawcett."

"Then how do you account for it, Mr. Dodds?"

"Perhaps they felt quite well."

But that was a theory Miss Fawcett found it impossible to accept. She hurried off at once to Laurel Villa in search of Tom Merry, whom she fully expected to find in an almost dying state.

CHAPTER 7.
An Amazing Message.

"GOAL!"

Tom Merry was shouting out the word as Miss Fawcett and Hannah entered the gate. There was a crash of breaking glass from behind the house.

"Dear me!" gasped Miss Priscilla. "Poor, poor Tommy! He is feverish—indeed, dangerously light-headed! Oh, dear, I wish Mr. Dodds had come."

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, if you count the windowpane as a goal——"

"Chuck out that ball, somebody!"

Miss Fawcett and her faithful retainer hurried round the house. Tom Merry, Wally, and Arthur Augustus were playing a rough-and-ready game of football on the lawn. Tom was keeping one end, against the combined attack of Wally and his brother. And he had just brought the ball right up to the house in a grand dribble, and put it right in through a pane of glass.

"Tommy! My darling Tommy!"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Go in and throw out that ball, Hannah, there's a dear!"

"Tommy, you must not—you must go to bed!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "Excuse me, dear, but I'm all right. I shall get dangerous if Dr. Snipe comes near me. Otherwise I'm all sereno."

"But, my dear, my dearest boy——"

"I'm all right," insisted Tom Merry. "All I want is somebody to throw out that ball. I'm sorry the window's broken, but it was Gussy's fault!"

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Yes, it was. I was kicking at your head, and you moved your head," said Tom Merry, severely. "Then it went through the window."

"Oh, weally——"

"On the ball! Come on!"

Tom Merry rushed off. Miss Fawcett gave it up at last. She could not carry Tom Merry off to bed by main force, and so she let him have his way, though with many misgivings.

The juniors finished the football game in high glee. They were feeling none the worse for their ducking in the river; it had only, as Wally remarked, given them an extra keen appetite. Skimpole came wandering in, in time for lunch, with the four hundred and forty-sixth chapter of his great book still in an unfinished state.

That was a merry day at Laurel Villa, and in the evening they were merrier still. Several girl friends of Cousin Ethel's had come over, and the old house, ablaze with lights and glistening with holly and mistletoe, wore an aspect of Christmas hospitality and good cheer that might have brought a genial smile to the face of a gargoyle.

Christmas was passing very pleasantly, but the fun and merriment were destined to be strangely interrupted. Boys and girls, amid much mirth, were acting charades, when there came a sudden, unexpected sound ringing from the door.

"Rat-tat! rat-tat!"

It was a double postman's knock, and it meant a telegram. Telegrams were almost as rare as dodos in Huckleberry Heath. When anybody there received a telegram it was the talk of the village for weeks afterwards. Miss Fawcett turned quite pale, and looked round for Hannah.

"A telegram, ma'am," said Hannah, coming in quietly, with an awe-struck look on her face.

"Pray open it for me, Mr. Dodds," said Miss Fawcett faintly. "I am convinced that it is to tell me that my brother has been drowned in returning to India."

"I hope not, Miss Fawcett," said Mr. Dodds, who saw no grounds for deducing so startling an inference from the buff envelope of a telegram.

"Pray read it, Mr. Dodds."

"Certainly."

The fatness of the envelope surprised Mr. Dodds. The length of the message within amazed him. He looked it over, and an expression of wonderment grew upon his face.

"What is it?" asked Miss Priscilla faintly.

"No bad news, Miss Fawcett. Nothing at all wrong."

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes, indeed. It is a cable from Tom's uncle, Mr. Poinsett——"

"Dear me! But Mr. Poinsett lives in America—in—in a place called Alabama, or Arizona, or Mexico, or Montreal, or something."

Mr. Dodds smiled.

"This wire is from him, and must have cost fifty pounds to send, I should say."

"Dear me!"

"The cost of a cable is very great, and the message is as long as an ordinary letter," said Mr. Dodds. "I think you have told me that Tom's American uncle is—is somewhat eccentric. That accounts for this remarkable telegram. It contains no ill news—quite the contrary, I am glad to say."

"Pray read it out, Mr. Dodds. We are all friends here," said Miss Fawcett, with her sweet smile. "If it is good news from my darling Tommy's uncle, I am sure all my sweet pet's friends would be glad to hear it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And boys and girls, who indeed were feeling very curious, gathered eagerly round, the Christmas games forgotten in the new excitement. Tom Merry was very curious himself. He had never seen his American uncle, but he had often heard of him as an eccentric gentleman and a very rich rancher in the Far West. Mr. Poinsett was the brother of Tom Merry's mother, whom Tom did not remember, but who, he had heard, had been Mr. Poinsett's favourite sister.

Letters from the American uncle had been few and far between at Laurel Villa. Tom had written a letter once to Mr. Poinsett at the instigation of Miss Fawcett. Dear old soul as she was, she had a keen eye to her ward's advantage, and she did not see why Mr. Poinsett's millions should go out of the family when he made his will.

Tom, quite innocent of any thought in that direction himself, had written a schoolboy letter in his big schoolboy hand, but there had never been a reply to it. But that was not surprising, considering the well-known eccentricity of Mr. Poinsett's character.

It was just like Gabriel Poinsett to neglect to write, and then spend a small fortune on a cable as soon as the whim seized him to communicate with his sister's son.

The curious expression upon Mr. Dodds' countenance showed Tom Merry that the news was of a curious nature. He was naturally eager to know what it was, and had no doubt that it concerned himself.

Mr Dodds glanced round the circle of excited faces and coughed, and read out the message from the Far West.

"Dear Miss Fawcett——"

"Dear me," murmured Miss Priscilla, "how very polite, when every word must have cost perhaps five shillings."

"Bai Jove, that's what I wegard as weal good form."

"Dear Miss Fawcett," resumed Mr. Dodds, "I have received Tom's letter——"

"Dear me, it was written more than a year ago."

"——Tom's letter, for which please thank him."

"Your uncle thanks you for your letter, my darling," said Miss Fawcett.

"Good," said Tom Merry. "Jolly expensive thanks, too."

"Pray go on, Mr. Dodds."

"Certainly. For which please thank him," resumed Mr. Dodds. "I like the letter. I have never seen my nephew. I want to see him. I am growing old, and have been thinking of late of the disposal of my property in case of my decease."

"Cool old card, anyway," murmured Wally.

"——of my decease. I should like my sister's son to inherit my wealth, which may amount to something like five millions."

"Pounds!" shrieked Miss Fawcett.

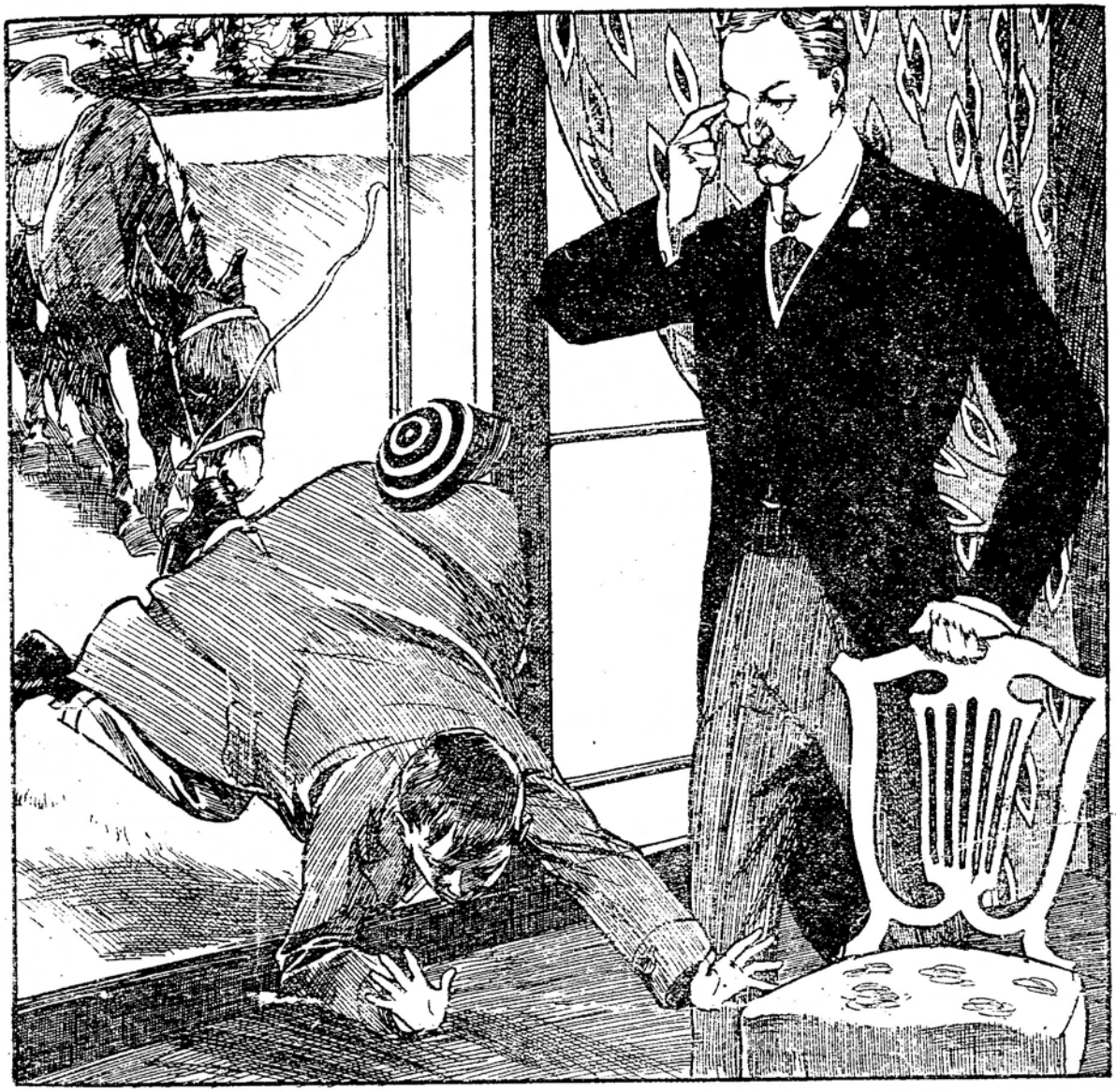
"Dollars, I should imagine," said Mr. Dodds with a smile. "But a very respectable sum, Miss Fawcett."

"Dear me," said the old lady. "I—I should think so. I should so like my darling boy to be a millionaire. I am sure he would spend the money on good works, such as supplying trousers and tracts to the benighted natives of the Boshykosky Islands. How fortunate for my darling."

"How ripping," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "With a sum of money like that, wholly devoted to the cause of Socialism, we could——"

"I am afraid there are some conditions attached, Miss Fawcett," said Mr. Dodds mildly. "Shall I continue?"

"Pray do," said the old lady, in quite a flutter.



"Is this your latest style of entering a room, Walter?" asked Lord Eastwood, with a grim smile. "Or am I to understand that you have chosen your father as a new victim for your practical jokes!"

"——But before I think of making him my heir I must, of course, see him."

"Dear me, your uncle is coming to England, Tommy darling!"

"I think not," said Mr. Dodds.

"Dear me! How can he see Tommy then? But pray go on. I am interrupting you."

"——I must, of course, see him. For that purpose he must pay me a visit at once to my ranch in Arizona——"

"Oh, no, no!" shrieked Miss Fawcett. "No, no, no!"

But Tom Merry's eyes were sparkling. Wally gave him a thump on the back.

"You lucky dog!"

"No, no, no! You would not go, would you, Tommy?"

"Wouldn't I just like to!" exclaimed Tom Merry delightedly.

"Oh, my darling Tommy—but pray go on, Mr. Dodds."

"And then I shall be able to form my own opinion as to whether he is worthy to succeed to a fortune of five millions when the time comes. If the boy is a worthy son of my dear sister, he will be my heir. If I do not like him, I shall pay the expenses of his journey out, and of his return journey, and matters will be as they were before."

"Dear me! How very unnecessary," murmured Miss Priscilla. "In every letter I have written to Mr. Poinsett I have explained what a dear good boy Tommy is, and how like his poor dear mother."

"Mr. Poinsett apparently wishes to judge at first hand," smiled Mr. Dodds. "To continue:

"The liner Ethiopia leaves Southampton in a few days. Cable me that Tom has taken his passage. With best wishes for Christmas,—GABRIEL POINSETT."

The message was finished, and a silence fell upon the group. It was broken at last by Miss Priscilla.

CHAPTER 8.

New Prospects.

"OF course," said Miss Priscilla, "Tommy cannot go!"

Tom Merry murmured "Rats" under his breath. The moment he had heard the message he had made up his mind to go, but like a kind-hearted lad he wanted to break it gently to Miss Fawcett.

"Indeed," said Mr. Dodds, "that will be a great loss to Tom. A fortune of five million dollars is not offered to one every day."

"There are things more precious than money," said Miss Fawcett. "I was thinking of poor darling Tommy's precious health, for one thing. Then besides, he will be so lonely, leaving the school he is so attached to, and going into a strange country by himself."

Tom Merry's face fell a little.

In the first delight at the idea of travelling in a far and strange land, he had certainly forgotten St. Jim's and his chums there. The colour came into his cheeks for a moment as he thought of it.

"Yes, there's that," he said. "That will be rather rotten."

"Besides, the climate might not agree with him. Do you know whether Arizona is in the northern hemisphere or the southern hemisphere, Mr. Dodds?"

"In the northern hemisphere, Miss Priscilla," said the curate with a smile.

"Then it may be a terribly cold region——"

"But—er—we are in the northern hemisphere ourselves, you know," murmured Mr. Dodds. Miss Fawcett's idea of geography was a very vague one. "Arizona is much further south than this country, and is, I believe, very warm."

"If it is very warm it will not agree with Tommy. A hot country would be the worst possible thing for one of his delicate constitution."

"I believe the climate is medium, neither very hot nor very cold."

"Dear me, then I am sure it would not do for Tommy. It is a pity to let the five million dollars go, as so much good might be done with it for the cannibals in the Boshykosky Islands, but when it is a question of Tommy's very life——"

"I shall be all right," said Tom Merry.

"Of course you don't want to go, Tommy?"

"Not if you don't want me to, dear," said Tom Merry, sincerely enough. "If you are going to worry about it, I'll stay at home. But otherwise, I'd give anything to go."

"Dear Tommy!"

"You see, I shall be back at St. Jim's for the next term," said Tom. "It will only be like having an extra few weeks on the Christmas vac. I shall be in Arizona in a fortnight or so, and——"

"It is thousands and thousands of miles away."

"Not quite so much as that," said Mr. Dodds, with a smile. "But it certainly is about six thousand miles. But in these days of ocean liners and fast railways, the travelling is not much to think of."

"If Tommy really wishes to go——"

"That's a dear," said Tom Merry, kissing his old governess on the cheek. "I knew you would decide for the best. I'm going, then! Hurrah!"

"My dear Tommy——"

"Hurrah! How I wish you chaps were coming with me," said Tom Merry rather wistfully. "That would be glorious."

"I should like to come very much," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "It would be a glorious opportunity of spreading the light of Socialism in new countries. It would be a great pleasure to me to address meetings of cowboys and Red Indians. I will come with you if you like, Merry."

Tom Merry laughed.

"What about your people, Skimmy?"

"As a Socialist I should claim the right to please myself in any case, but as a matter of fact, my father would be glad to take me away from St. Jim's for a term, as it would be easy to arrange with the Head for the fees to stand over till the next term. My people are poor, you know," said Skimpole with great simplicity.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, "I wathah like the idea myself. Look heah, Tom Mewwy, I'm comin' with you."

"Then I'm coming too," said Wally cheerfully.

"Weally, Wally, it will be imposs——"

"Bosh! I couldn't let you go to America without coming to look after you," said D'Arcy minor. "I should be anxious about you."

"You cheeky young wapscallion——"

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled.

"It would be ripping if we could make up a party," he exclaimed. "You chaps can interview your people on the subject, and if they won't agree, you can run away, and I'll stow you in my cabin on the Ethiopia."

"My darling Tommy——"

"Well, you say yourself that I can't go alone," said Tom Merry, laughing. "But, I say, we shall have to buck up with getting the outfit, as the steamer starts in a few days."

Miss Priscilla shrieked.

"A few days! My darling boy, I must have some weeks to—to get used to the idea! My sweetest child, you will need all sorts of things—weeks and weeks of shopping——"

"Now we can't disappoint my uncle," said Tom Merry diplomatically. "If I'm going, it's only polite to go when he wants me."

"Yes, yes; but——"

"As for the shopping, we can buzz through that, and Cousin Ethel will help us."

"Certainly," said Cousin Ethel, laughing.

"I only wish the other fellows were coming," said Tom. "That would make it really ripping."

"Bai Jove, you know, Blake has an uncle in Wyoming—the chap who sent him that Wed Indian outfit, you know—and I'll tell him to w'ite to him, and get an invitation," said Arthur Augustus.

"Good wheeze! Now about the reply to this cable. We can't afford one of the same length——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better just wire 'Right-ho—coming!' That will be concise—and cheap."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I am afraid your uncle will expect a little more than that," said Miss Fawcett. "But the cable can be seen to to-morrow. For this evening, let us continue our charades."

But there was little interest in Christmas games after that. The exciting news was in every mind. And when bedtime came, and the guests had departed, Tom Merry took a huge atlas up to bed with him, and the four juniors sprawled across the bed examining the page devoted to South Western United States.

"Here's Arizona!" said Tom Merry, tracing it with his finger. "Looks a jolly big place. Let's see—bounded by Utah on the north, New Mexico on the east, and California on the west—and Old Mexico—that's Mexican territory—on the south. Here's the Colorado River—and the Mogollon Mountains—and the Navajo Indian Reserve—and here's Tombstone! Why, the names alone are enough to make you want to travel there!"

"Tombstone! Is that weally a weal place, Tom Mewwy?"

"Well, it's on the map. Sounds cheerful, doesn't it? I believe my uncle's ranch is not far from Tombstone, further west towards Arivaca. Yes, here's Arivaca, jolly close to the Mexican border. We shall see something of the Spaniards. There used to be brigands there, but I suppose they're all hung long ago," said Tom Merry, rather regretfully.

"I would wathah wead about bwigands than meet them, I think. A feahful lot of ill-dwessed and wude wuffians, I have no doubt."

"We shall have to take the railway from New York," said Tom Merry. "Why, that will be crossing over half the United States! Jolly long railway journeys, where you run on all day and night for half a week. My hat, what yarns we shall have to tell when we get back to St. Jim's!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You fellows must come—that's settled. I won't go without you. Your governor is at Eastwood, Gussy, and you must go over and interview him. We'll come with you and back you up."

"That's wathah a good ideah! We'll take him by surpwise in the mornin'," chuckled the swell of St. Jim's. "I don't know about Wally, though."

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "If I were left behind, I should bolt, and follow by the next steamer."

"I should forbid you to do anythin' of the sort, Wally."

"Fat lot of difference that would make," murmured the disrespectful younger brother.

"Howevah, as you particularly wish to come, I will appwoach the governah on the subject."

"Better leave it till last," said Tom Merry cautiously. "After you've got permission to go, Wally can claim it as a piece of mere justice; but Lord Eastwood would never give permission to the two of you together."

"Yaas, that's vewy twue. About Skimpole——"

"Oh, that will be all right," said Skimpole airily. "My pater will be glad to let me go, and the only difficulty is to make some arrangement about paying the expenses of the journey. As you know, I haven't any money."

The three juniors looked at one another and chuckled. Skimpole spoke very contemptuously of money; though how the journey was to be undertaken without money was a puzzle.

"Well, permission to go is the first thing," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! But by the way, what will your uncle say to a cwowd of fellows invadin' him like this, Tom Mewwy?"

"Oh, that's all right! I'll shove it in the cable to-morrow that I'm bringing some friends. If a chap can't take his friends to see his own uncle, whose uncle can he take them to see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And it was settled.

CHAPTER 9.

D'Arcy Visits His Governor.

"HURRAH!" shouted Tom Merry, as he jumped out of bed the following morning.

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed and groped under the pillow for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and turned it upon the hero of the Shell.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"Nothing. That's only high spirits," said Tom Merry. "I've been dreaming about Arizona, and dreaming that I saw you being scalped by a Navajo Indian. Hurrah!"

"Weally, Mewwy, I should not care to be scalped by a beastly Navajo Indian, and, anyway, it would be nothin' to 'hurwah' about."

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom Merry. "Won't it be ripping! To the west, to the west, to the land of the free, where the mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea," he went on, breaking into song.

"Rats!" said D'Arcy minor, sitting up in bed. "To the west, to the west, to the land of the Trust, where for one who gets on quite a hundred go bust."

"Ha, ha, ha! Up with you, Gussy! You've got to interview your governor this morning, and you ought to catch him young—I mean early. Up with you! I feel quite sprightly this morning," said Tom Merry. "This news makes me young again."

"Bai Jove——"

"Out you come! I claim Gussy for the next waltz."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

Tom Merry was not to be denied. He grasped the swell of St. Jim's and yanked him out of bed, and waltzed him round the big be-room. D'Arcy, in his loose and flowing pyjamas, which boasted almost as many colours as Joseph's celebrated coat, waltzed round willy-nilly in the grip of the hero of the Shell, protesting breathlessly

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I insist—I——"

"Waltz me round again, Willy!" sang D'Arcy minor. "Go it, kids! I'll give you the music."

And in a couple of seconds he had jammed a paper over a comb, and started buzzing the melody of the waltz song from "Romeo and Juliet." Tom Merry warmed to his work, and the breathless and gasping D'Arcy was whirled to and fro, and hither and thither, till at last the waltzers waltzed into the musician, and all three of them went, with loud bumps, to the floor.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

Tom Merry scrambled up, laughing.

"Now I feel relieved," he said. "If you're done dancing, Gussy, we'll get dressed. If you'd rather go on, I'll take you round again, though."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am stwongly tempted to cease to wegard you as a fwiend."

"Why, I thought you were fond of dancing."

"Yaas, but not in a bed-woom with a dangewous lunatic," said Arthur Augustus.

And the juniors proceeded to their toilet. They were all in high spirits; and Skimpole was beaming at the prospect of preaching Socialism, Determinism, and several other "isms," to audiences of cowboys, ranchers, and Red Indians. It was arranged that Skimpole should stay in and write to his father, while the other three went over on their delicate mission to Eastwood.

After breakfast they prepared to start. The question was, how to get across to Eastwood, which was several miles distant. The roads were heavy with snow, and driving would have been very slow and a great bore, and the juniors felt too gay that morning for anything slow. Bicycles were out of the question, of course, and Miss Priscilla's suggestion that they should walk could not be entertained for a moment.

Tom Merry shook his head decidedly at the bare idea.

"Too tame," he said. "You know, great travellers like us can't do anything in a commonplace manner."

"But you are not a great traveller yet, my dearest boy."

"Well, we shall be in a fortnight's time, so it's all the same. We've got to find something to ride on. Bob, the pony, will do for Gussy—he's a nice quiet animal, fit for any old lady to ride——"

"I should uttahly wefuse to bestwide any quiet animal suitable for an old lady to wide."

"Very well, I'll have Bob, and you can have Mr. Giles's piebald. As for young Wally, I suppose we shall have to leave him behind."

"Rats!" said young Wally cheerfully.

"Well, perhaps Mr. Giles will lend you his donkey. He's a rather ill-tempered, obstinate sort of brute, but if you can ride—can you ride?"

"Can I breathe?" said Wally sarcastically.

"That's all right then. Come over to Giles's."

Farmer Giles knew Tom Merry well, and greeted him with great cheerfulness. He willingly agreed to lend his piebald and the donkey. The piebald was quiet enough—as quiet as Miss Fawcett's pony Bob—but the donkey was a tougher customer. Even Wally, who feared nothing that went on four legs, eyed Neddy doubtfully. The donkey was a big, strong brute, with a wicked gleam in his eyes, and a way of showing his teeth that reminded one of a bulldog. But Wally was not the fellow to hesitate. He saddled and bridled the donkey, and sprang upon his back.

The three juniors started off from the farm, Farmer Giles looking after them with a grin on his ruddy face.

"Take care with that moke, young gentleman," he called out. "He allers means mischief when he starts quiet."

"That's all right!" sang out Wally cheerfully. "I can manage him."

The three riders plunged on through the snow. Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus liked their ride well enough in the frosty winter morning through the frozen lanes. They would have preferred more spirited steeds, but the ride was very pleasant. But Wally soon had his hands full with his mount.

Neddy trotted on obediently for some distance at a good pace, and then suddenly, without the slightest warning, halted, and lowered his head. The unprepared rider shot forward over the donkey's ears, and plunged head first into a snowdrift.

"Look out!" shouted D'Arcy.

But the shout followed the fall. Neddy threw up his heels, and turned round to trot calmly home to the farm. Arthur Augustus, who in spite of his elegant ways could do anything on a horse, intercepted him and caught his rein in passing, and brought Neddy to a halt.

Tom Merry jumped down. All that could be seen of Wally was a pair of legs, protruding from the snow drift, but murmured words of wrath could be heard. Tom caught the unfortunate rider by the ankles and dragged him out.

Wally came to light with a very red face. His cap was still buried in the snow, and his hair was matted with damp, his collar a limp rag. He stood up rather dazedly and glared at Neddy.

"My only Aunt Jane!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at? I was taken by surprise. I thought the brute was going quietly! He won't do that again!"

Wally scrambled on the back of the donkey. He did not beat the animal, as many riders would have done. But there was a grim determination in his youthful face now. He was prepared for Neddy's next little game.

The three riders went on. Neddy stopped suddenly, apparently expecting history to repeat itself. But Wally was ready for him. He dragged at the rein, and sat tight, and gave Neddy a sharp cut with his riding-whip. Neddy looked round at him, and then trotted quietly on. Wally chuckled.

"Knows his master already," he remarked.

It really seemed as if Neddy knew his master. The ride went on quietly till the gates of Eastwood came in sight. The juniors cantered up the snowy drive, and came in sight of the great facade of the fine old house. At the French windows opening on the lawn Arthur Augustus caught a glimpse of a familiar figure.

"Bai Jove! There's the governah!"

Lord Eastwood had come to the French windows to look out upon the snowy lawn, and breathe the fresh morning air. He had a pen in his hand. He did not see the juniors as he turned back into the room.

What demoniac spirit of mischief seized upon Neddy at that moment we cannot say; but suddenly leaving the drive, he bolted across the lawn in the direction of the open French windows of the library.

"Hold on, deah boy!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Stop, you ass!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"I—I can't!"

Wally dragged on the reins furiously. There was a crack, and they snapped in his grasp. After that, there was no hope of controlling Neddy. He dashed right on, the scared junior clinging to his back, and Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus held their breath in terror at the thought that the donkey meant to dash right into the French windows.

But Neddy was too wise to hurl himself upon glass: he knew a trick worth two of that. Within six feet of the open windows he stopped dead, and Wally shot across his ears for the second time, and flew right in at the open window, and landed on his hands and knees on the carpet.

Lord Eastwood turned his head at the sound of the bump, and looked at his hopeful son.

CHAPTER 10.

Arthur Augustus Puts it to His Lordship.

LORD EASTWOOD looked at Wally, and Wally looked at Lord Eastwood. There was silence in the library for some seconds. Neddy the donkey, satisfied with the mischief he had done, trotted away, and this time D'Arcy did not catch him. D'Arcy and Tom Merry were hurrying on to see what had happened.

"My only Aunt Jane!" gasped Wally at last.

Lord Eastwood smiled grimly.

"Is this your latest style of entering a room, Walter?" he asked. "Or am I to understand that you have chosen your father as a new victim for your practical jokes?"

"I—I'm awfully sorry, dad," gasped Wally. "The beast ran away with me! I thought he was coming in himself, till he stopped. I hope you weren't startled."

"I was very startled," said Lord Eastwood. "But as I don't suppose you came in like that on purpose, I pardon you. Go away."

"But——"

"I am busy. Dear me, here is Augustus—and Merry! How do you do, Merry? I am very glad to see you, and I am glad you chose a more quiet method of entrance than my youngest son."

"Bai Jove, sir!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! I was afwaid the young wascal had bwoken his neck, you know. I shall have to give him some lessons in widin'."

"Rats!" said Wally.

"Pway don't use those vulgar expwessions, Wally, in the pwesence of your pawent," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I assure you, sir, that I endeavour by evewy means to cure that young scallywag of his vulgah and wotten ways. I twust, sir, that you are not busy this mornin', as we have come ovah on a vewwy important mattah."

"As a matter of fact, Arthur, I am somewhat busy," said his father. "But if you have come on important business, pray go on. Be seated, by all means."

"The fact is, sir, that Tom Mewwy's Amewican uncle has cabled to him to go out to Awizonah to inhewit a fortune of five million dollahs——"

"Not exactly that, sir," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I am to go out and visit my uncle, and if he likes me he is going to make me his heir."

"I congratulate you, Merry."

"Thank you, sir. Of course, I don't know if he will like me yet, and it all depends on that."

"Yaas; and as it is pwactically imposs. for Tom Mewwy to go alone all that feahful distance, I think I ought to go with him to look aftah him," said Arthur Augustus.

"You! Arizona! But Lent term begins at St. Jim's in the third week of January," said Lord Eastwood. "I am afraid that there is not time for you to undertake so long a journey, Augustus, although, of course, I have no doubt that you would be able to look after Tom."

"But there is no need for me to weturn to St. Jim's at the beginnin' of the term, sir," said D'Arcy eagerly. "I can get back easily in time for the half term, if necessary, sir and the twavellin' will do me worlds of good."

Lord Eastwood looked thoughtful. It would be no very serious matter to miss a half-term at St. Jim's; but D'Arcy's proposal was certainly a very startling one. A journey to France or Germany would have been feasible, perhaps; but America—and Far-Western America—rather took his lordship's breath away.

"I twust you won't wefuse, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "It would be imposs. for me to wun away, as that would be dis-wespectful; but I should be vewy much disappointed if you wefuse your permish. Think of Tom Mewwy, sir, goin' out all alone to an extwemely stwange countwy, and twavellin' six thousand miles all by himself. He will get feahfully wotten, you know, and wish he hadn't gone. Besides, he will wequire some fwiend with him to look aftah him."

"I should like Gussy to come, awfully, sir," said Tom Merry. "I would keep an eye on him and see that he didn't get into trouble."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"The proposition is a very startling one," said Lord Eastwood. "I must have time to think, and I must ask Dr. Holmes's permission."

"I am sure that will be all wight, sir."

"Well, well, I will think over it," said Lord Eastwood. "There, don't look disappointed. Unless I think of some weighty reason against it, you shall go."

"Oh, thank you, sir. I knew I could wely on you," said D'Arcy.

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry. "It will be ripping for me to have Gussy with me, sir, and if Wally could come, too——"

"Walter! Dear me, he is far too young!"

"Oh, really, dad!" said Wally. "Why, Gussy will get killed on the railway, or scalped by the Indians, if I don't go with him. Besides, what's fair for one is fair for the other. It will be only for a few weeks, anyway. We might come home by way of China and Japan, too, and see something of the world."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, we will see," said Lord Eastwood. "Travelling is certainly a splendid thing for boys, and teaches them alertness and self-reliance. But America is so very far off, my dear boys."

"The linahs are as safe as the Thames steamboats, sir," said D'Arcy. "You wemembah we spent last vac. on a steamah, and came home all wight."

"Yes, I remember. Well, I will think over it. I cannot say any more than that at present," said Lord Eastwood.

And the juniors took their leave, in high spirits. Lord Eastwood was taking time to think over it, but both Arthur Augustus and Wally felt pretty certain that he meant to let them have their way. After all, in these modern days a journey to Western America was little more than a trip to France had been in earlier times. Arthur Augustus turned back at the window, as Tom Merry and Wally went across the lawn. Lord Eastwood looked at him.

"There is one mattah, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "If we go, Skimpole goes with us. I think you have seen Skimpole."

"A—a rather curious youth, who wears glasses, and talks a great deal of nonsense, if I remember," said Lord Eastwood.

"Yaas, wathah! That's Skimmy. Well, sir, he'll come with us, but he hasn't any money, so I should have to awwange to pay his expenses. Would you have any objection to that, sir?"

"None at all," said Lord Eastwood, smiling. "But have you the money?"

"I am afwaid I should have to wely on your genewosity for that, sir," said Arthur Augustus modestly.

His lordship laughed.

"Well, well, we will see," he said.

And Arthur Augustus departed. He found Tom Merry astride of the piebald, and Wally mounted upon Bob. Neddy the donkey had disappeared.

"Bai Jove! I will thank you for one of those beasts," said D'Arcy.

"I'm afraid you'll have to walk, old Gus," said Wally cheerfully. "Neddy's bolted, you know."

"Why, you young wascal——"

"You can go after the other donkey and see if you can catch him," grinned Wally.

"I will tell them to bwing my own pony out," said D'Arcy with dignity. "Pway, wait for me, deah boys."

And the three juniors had a pleasant ride home. It came on to snow just before they got home, and Tom Merry found Miss Fawcett anxiously waiting for him at the door of Laurel Villa.

"My darling boy, I was so anxious about you!" she exclaimed in great relief. "Have you got your feet wet?"

"No," said Tom, turning red. "I'm all right."

"I think you had better change your things," said Miss Priscilla anxiously. "I have had your dear little slippers warmed ready."

And Tom Merry changed his things forthwith, and came downstairs in his dear little slippers, which had been worked by Miss Priscilla's own hands. And the juniors heard joyfully that on the following morning they were to go up to London for the extensive shopping that was required before the voyage on the Ethiopia was undertaken.

CHAPTER 11.
A Little Shopping.

THERE was excitement at Laurel Villa that evening. The excitement started in the local post-office, and spread through the village, and all Huckleberry Heath was agog with the busy doings at Miss Fawcett's. The excitement was caused by the unwonted plentifulness of telegrams directed to Laurel Villa. One telegram was sufficient to interest all Huckleberry Heath. But telegrams came from all parts, at all times, now, and again and again the local postman or else the grocer's boy came tramping through the snow to Laurel Villa with the familiar envelope in his hand.

For Tom Merry had written to all his friends of St. Jim's, scattered into the four corners of the United Kingdom for the Christmas vacation, telling them the news, and asking them to come and see him off at Southampton if they could possibly manage it. And from all his chums wires came pouring in, as soon as they received his letters.

The first wire was from Manners. It was as follows:

"Lucky beast! Of course we shall see you off.—Manners. Lowther."

Then came a telegram from Yorkshire, signed by Jack Blake and the juniors who were staying with him.

"Ripping! Wish we were coming! Shall see you off, of course.—Blake. Herries. Digby."

Then came a wire from Belfast.

"Faith, and some spalpeens have all the luck. Shall see you off.—Reilly."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "We shall have a giddy crowd, and no mistake. Hallo, there's another wire—two more, by Jove!"

The wires proved to be from Fatty Wynn, who announced that he was coming to Southampton on the day of sailing, and from Jameson of the Third Form at St. Jim's, who declared his intention of seeing Wally off if he went with Tom Merry.

Later on came a wire from Scotland.

"We're coming to see you off, rather!—Figgins and Kerr."

"The more the merrier!" grinned Tom Merry.

Following the wires, next morning came crowds of letters, containing all sorts of congratulations and good wishes. Skimpole was observed to be very thoughtful during breakfast, and when the juniors went upstairs to prepare for the journey to London, he unburdened his mind.

"It would be very painful to be quite broken off from our friends," he said. "I have been thinking of a new scheme——"

"Chuck us over that shoe-horn, Wally—ow—I didn't say chuck it at my head, you duffer!"

"A new scheme. Why should we not establish a system of wireless communication between the ranch in Arizona and St. Jim's?" said Skimpole.

"A what of which?"

"A system of wireless communication. Wireless telegraphy has been carried to great lengths lately, and I fail to see why we should not establish communication with the school, say from the summit of a mountain in the Rockies."

"And how would you get on to the summit of the mountaan, fathead?"

"That is a secondary consideration. A system of wireless——"

"And how would you put up the installation?"

"I have not studied the subject yet, but——"

"Then you'd better study it before you buy any of the things," grunted Tom Merry.

"I am afraid I could not purchase the things, which would cost hundreds of pounds, but if we could raise the money——"

"We'll have a whip round in the Shell at St. Jim's," said Tom Merry sarcastically. "If the kids put up twenty pounds each, we might manage it."

"Really, Tom Merry——"

"Hallo, it's time we were off!"

The juniors rushed pell-mell downstairs, and they found Miss Priscilla Fawcett and Cousin Ethel ready for them. Cousin Ethel looked very sweet with her charming face surrounded by white furs. The party drove to the station in high spirits, and were soon speeding along the iron road to London.

And then commenced a day of shopping that delighted the heart of Miss Fawcett, and, perhaps, that of Cousin Ethel. Women are born shoppers, and with plenty of time and an unlimited cheque-book, they contrived to have a very good time. Tom Merry attempted to stem the tide at first, but it was in vain. He gave it up at last. Miss Fawcett purchased all sorts and conditions of things, nothing being too expensive for her darling Tommy.

As Arizona was in the northern hemisphere, Miss Fawcett had an idea in her head that it was a cold country, and so, of course, a visit had to be paid to the winter clothing department at the stores. Tom Merry attempted to expostulate, but Miss Fawcett knew better.

"My darling Tommy," she argued, "suppose Arizona should turn out to be a country on the very verge of the Arctic Circle?"

"But it's nearer the equator, dear."

"It is in the northern hemisphere, my darling!"

"But the northern hemisphere is bounded by the equator on the south, which divides it from the southern hemisphere," said Wally, rather proud of his Third Form knowledge of geography.

But Miss Priscilla only smiled.

"My dear children. I know it is near the Rocky Mountains, and some of the Rocky Mountains are in the region of perpetual snow."

"Only the tops of them," said Tom Merry. "Lots of mountains in tropical countries have their summits in perpetual snow."

"My darling, pray do not oppose me, or I shall be very anxious about you, thinking of you shivering with cold in the regions of perpetual snow."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, go ahead, then," he said resignedly.

And Miss Fawcett went ahead. She purchased thick woollen things suitable for an Esquimaux, and fur-lined coats and cloaks and rugs sufficient for an expedition to the North Pole. The amount of the bill made the juniors open their eyes, but Miss Fawcett only smiled. She would willingly have spent her last penny in fitting out Tom Merry comfortably for his long journey.

Wally and D'Arcy and Skimpole had shopping to do, too. Lord Eastwood had given his consent, and Skimpole's father had gladly acquiesced in the plan. His son was going as D'Arcy's friend, and D'Arcy was seeing to the expenses, and, as a true Socialist, Skimpole senior was naturally pleased at his son travelling with a lord's son. Skimpole had some purchases to make, but they were chiefly in the direction of scientific instruments and books with titles that gave Tom Merry a headache to look at them. Skimpole was full of the idea of spreading the glorious light of Socialism on the prairies of the Far West, and he went forth on his mission armed with "Das Kapital" and other fearsome volumes on the subject.

A sufficient quantity of winter clothing having been laid in to last Tom Merry for the rest of his life, if he lived to the age of Methusaleh, Miss Priscilla turned her attention to other departments. Tommy would want a telescope for use on the steamship, and a new panama hat to wear in Arizona if it turned out to be a sunny country. Miss Priscilla seemed to have no idea of looking it out on the map and ascertaining what kind of a country it was. She persisted in speaking of it as if it were a totally unknown place, into the wilds of which



"If you do not go away immediately, I shall call a seaman to remove you, Master D'Arcy!" said the captain sternly.

Tom Merry was to adventurously penetrate, and where he must be prepared for all eventualities.

Boots—walking boots, shooting boots, football boots, dancing shoes, bed-room slippers, and what not, were purchased in great quantities. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's purchases fell far short of Tom's. In only one direction did D'Arcy's new possessions exceed those of his chum. He bought a complete set of silk hats, sufficient to last him in spite of every conceivable accident.

"I don't mean to wun any wisk this time," he confided to Tom Merry. "You wemembah I took only four on the steamah last vac, and a sewies of deplowable accidents happened to all of them. This time I shall be pwepared."

"How many are you taking?"

"I was thinkin' of twenty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you think that will be enough?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Suppose they don't wear silk hats in Arizona; they might take a dislike to you, you know, and——"

"Bai Jove, surely it's a civilised countwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, aghast. "Surely in the twentieth centuwy there is no countwy so benighted that the people don't wear silk hats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pewwaps I will make it a dozen, then," said the swell of St. Jim's regretfully. "Pewwaps a dozen will see me thwough, if we don't make a long stay there."

"How many are you going to wear at a time, though?"

"I wegard that question as uttahly fwivolous. Tom Mewwy. Now that the question of the toppahs is settled, there is the mattah of the wevolvahs."

"The which?"

"The wevolvahs. In all the stowies I have wead about the Wild West, the fellows always cawwy wevolvahs, just as we cawwy a cane in England. We must have a pair of wevolvahs each, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is there to cackle at in that, Tom Mewwy?"

"My dear ass——"

"I object to bein' called an ass."

"My dear duffer, I think we had better leave the revolver till we get to Arizona. We mayn't require them after all you know."

"But the fellows in Wild West stowies always wear wevolvahs as you might wear a tie-pin."

"Ye-es, but in the Wild West itself I don't suppose pistols are as common as in stories about the Wild West," said Tom Merry. "I'd really rather leave the revolvers till we get to the ranche. Mr. Poinsett will tell us whether we need revolvers or not."

"Ya-a-as," said D'Arcy, who had lately become deeply read in Wild-Western lore, "but suppose we get held up by woad-agents en woute?"

"By what?" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Woad-agents! That is the cowwect term, I assure you. We call them highwaymen in England, but in the Fah West they are called woad-agents."

"Rot, old chap! A road-agent must be a man who deals in roads, as a house-agent is a man who deals in houses."

"I assure you, Tom Mewwy, that the term is quite cowwect. And even if we are not held up——"

"Why on earth should they hold us up?" demanded Tom Merry, looking puzzled. "We should be a tidy weight for anybody to hold up."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I believe you are wottin', you wottah, Hold up is a term signifyin' being wobbed. As I was sayin' even if we are not held up by woad-agents—which, I assure you, is the cowwect expwession—we may be attacked by Wed Indians. It would be wathah wotten to be scalped, you know!"

"Yes, I suppose so—but the Red Indians all live on reservations now, and I suppose there are policemen to see that they don't scalp people."

"I would wathah twust in a twusty wevolvah."

"Oh, do leave the revolver alone. If you had one, you couldn't berth with me on the Ethiopia."

"Why not, pway?"

"Because you're the silly kind of ass who would be likely to fire the revolver off to see if it was loaded. If you didn't do that, you'd look down the muzzle, with your finger on the trigger, and of course it would be loaded. It wouldn't blow your brains out, of course, as you haven't any, but it would make a muck on the steamer; and so I think revolvers ought to be barred."

"What about a wifle, then?"

"If we need any firearms, Mr. Poinsett will see to it when we get to Arizona."

"Yaas, but I must weally take out a set of shooting things, you know, even if I don't have a wevolvah; and, as a mattah of fact, I don't see how it will be safe for us to twavel in the Fah West without a twusty wevolvah."

And the end of it was, that beside his guns, of which he took out an imposing set, Arthur Augustus did purchase a revolver, but knowing Tom Merry's views on the subject, he packed it away without mentioning the circumstances. That trusty revolver was destined to be heard of again, however.

CHAPTER 12.

The Hour of Parting.

THE last day at Huckleberry Heath was a busy one. All concerned were too busy to think much, but a shade of sadness came over some of the faces at times. Tom Merry was eager to go; but, all the same, there was something of a wrench in parting from old familiar faces.

And Miss Fawcett, though she realised that it was best for Tom to go, and though she would not have stood in his way for any consideration, felt her heart heavy at parting with her darling boy.

He was going into a strange land, among strange people, amid strange manners and customs, and who could tell what would happen ere she saw him again?

It was possible that she might never see him again. He was going to a wild land, where death came suddenly to many an adventurer, and was thought more lightly of than in older settled countries.

But for fear of troubling Tom in his happiness, the good old soul concealed her anxiety and her fear.

Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, had written his permission for the four juniors to absent themselves for the necessary few weeks, which might possibly be prolonged into months; for the term of Tom Merry's stay in Arizona was very indefinite.

The journey was a long one, and the period of his probation might be of any length; but there was something in the idea that appealed to Tom.

He was not the sort of fellow to curry favour for a millionaire's fortune: but the prospect of so rich an inheritance naturally excited him. Before he started, Mr. Dodds had a quiet talk with him on the subject.

The curate of Huckleberry Heath liked Tom Merry, and took a deep interest in him, and, like Miss Fawcett, he felt a certain amount of anxiety as to the boy's future.

"Your uncle is an eccentric gentleman, Tom," he said; "but he is very upright, and very kindhearted. So much I can remember of him. I think I need not caution you to use none but frank and manly means of pleasing him. Anything in the nature of sycophancy he would see through at once."

Tom Merry coloured.

"I thought you knew me better than that, sir," he said.

"So I do, Tom; so I do," said the curate warmly. "But you are going out among great temptations. You are going to a country where mere money is thought a great deal more of than in England—and there are few people here who would not be glad of a chance of inheriting a million, my boy. You might be tempted to belie your own character, and in doing so I am certain you would injure your cause. Be your own frank, manly self, and I think you will succeed with Mr Poinsett."

"I shall remember your advice, sir."

"There is another matter, Tom. You are going into danger—not physical danger, I mean—but danger of temptation—danger of being led into wrongdoing. You will meet many kinds of people, many of them the worst possible people for a boy to meet. You will be tempted, Tom—in many ways. I know that in such an hour you will think of home—of your friends—of the pride your old governess takes in you—of the pride I take in you, Tom, my dear lad—and you will act in a way that becomes a manly, clean-living English lad."

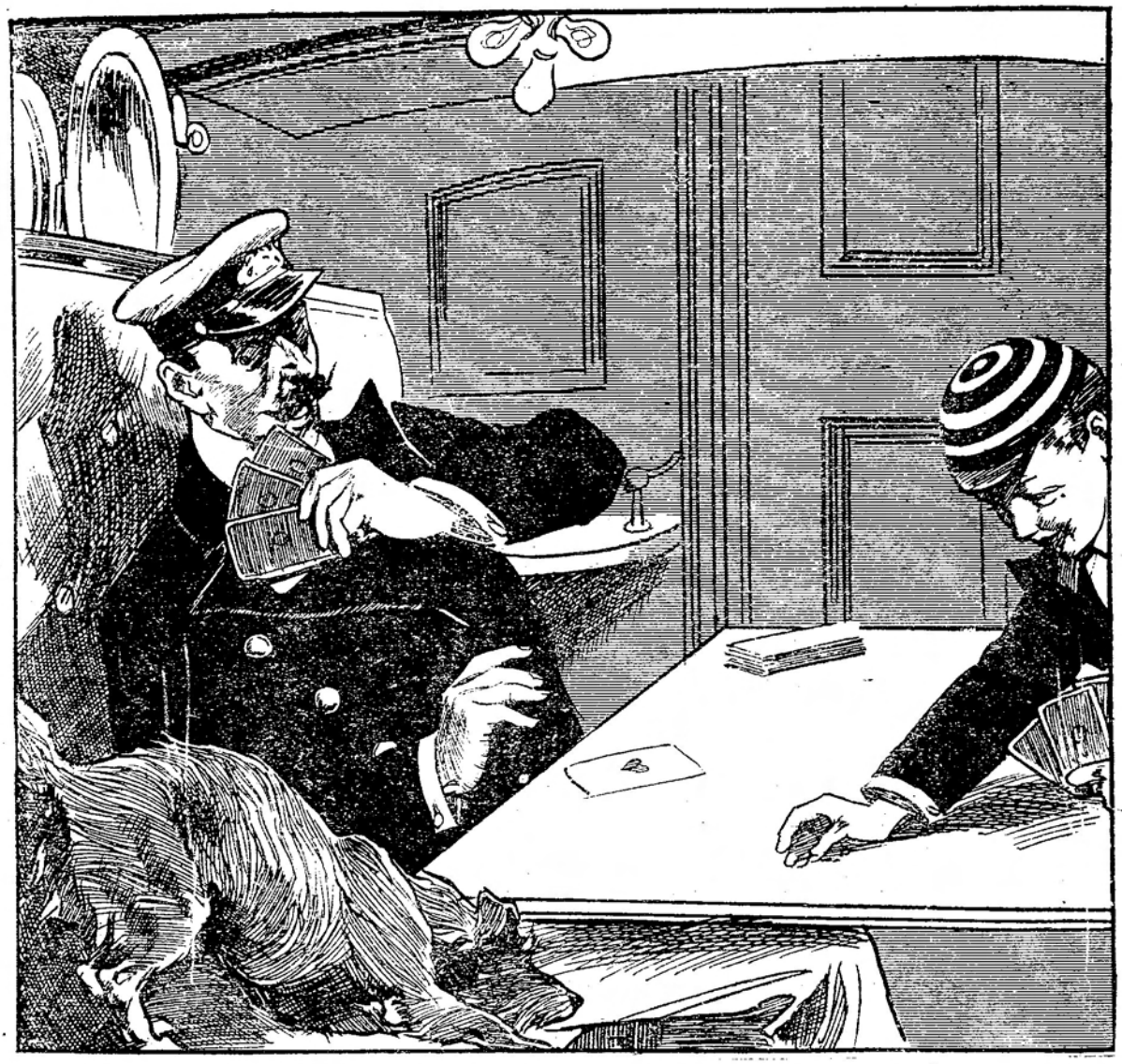
Tom Merry coloured a little once more.

"I understand you, sir," he said quietly. "You may rely on me."

"I know I can, Tom," said the curate, pressing his hand. "But remember what I have said; and remember that you are to a great degree responsible for the younger boys who accompany you."

"I shall remember, sir."

And Tom Merry did remember, as he needed to in the time that was coming. All was prepared now for the departure. The cabin had been booked on the Ethiopia—a cabin with four berths, so that the juniors could be together. The luggage was packed up at Laurel Villa, and the amount of it excited the admiration of the whole village. Arthur Augustus alone had twelve boxes and trunks, all of them packed as full as they would hold. Tom Merry came upon him when he was marking the trunks for the direction of the Ethiopia's men, and he watched him curiously. Upon six of the trunks D'Arcy laboriously traced the words "Not required during voyage."



"I—I—I'll—never mind, it's all right! Good old doggie!" said Captain Punter, who would willingly have flayed the "Good old doggie" alive at that moment.

"Aren't you going to do the rest, Gussy?" asked Tom, as the swell of St. Jim's paused from his labours.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Certainly not. I shall wequire those six twunks."

"But, my dear ass, there will be only room for you to take a single cabin trunk, for use during the voyage."

"Wats!" said D'Arcy. "I wemembah that I was done in the mattah of luggage when we spent last vac. on a steamah, but that was because we were twavellin' with the masters. This time we shall be on our own."

"Yes, but——"

"I shall insist upon woom bein' found for six twunks."

"Oh, take the risk, if you like, but I warn you——"

"Wats, deah boy! It will be all wight."

Tom Merry laughed and passed on. The carrier was expected every moment, and Arthur Augustus hastily finished his daubing.

"Here's the carrier!" exclaimed Wally.

"It's all finished, deah boy."

"You've done only six of the trunks."

"I shall wequire the west duwin' the voyage."

Wally's eyes twinkled, but he said no more just then. The carrier's van, large as it was, was piled with trunks for the railway-station to its fullest capacity, and it moved off down the lane at a snail's pace, surrounded by an admiring crowd of village children.

D'Arcy rested from his labours, but D'Arcy minor was still busy. He calmly took the brush and paint his brother had been using, popped them into a bag, and walked after the carrier's van. He was ahead of it at the railway-station, and he nodded coolly to the carrier when he came up.

"Shove 'em on the platform," he said. "There's some directions been left undone, and I want to finish 'em before they're put in the train."

Owing to Miss Fawcett's great care, the luggage was sent to the station a good half-hour before the train came in, so Wally had plenty of time.

He calmly went round D'Arcy's trunks, and added an inscription to all but one of them: "Not required during voyage." The one he left unmarked was the trunk that contained D'Arcy's dozen new silk hats.

Wally chuckled as he finished his work.

"I rather think that will be a lesson to Gus," he murmured. "My hat! he will be surprised."

And Wally tossed paint and brush over the railway embankment, and walked home.

The luggage went off by railway to Southampton, and saw stowed away on the Ethiopia, while the juniors were spending

their last days at Huckleberry Heath. Wally kept his own counsel.

The day came for the parting. Of course, Miss Priscilla and Cousin Ethel had to come to Southampton to see the voyagers off. And from all quarters of the kingdom came Tom Merry's chums to wish him bon voyage.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were the first to arrive, and they came to Laurel Villa, and passed a night there. Then came Figgins and Kerr in the morning, having travelled all night from Scotland. Fatty Wynn joined them when they changed trains at Winchester, and Reilly was waiting for them on the platform at Southampton. Manners and Lowther were on the steamer, and they rushed up to greet the party as they came over the side.

"Lucky dog!" said Lowther, thumping Tom Merry on the back. "I tried to get permission from my uncle to come with you, but he wouldn't hear of it."

"And my governor was adamant," said Manners. "I'd like to come, Tom. You can get some ripping photographs in the Far West."

"I wish you could come."

"Look here, Tom, I've brought you my camera," said Manners. "I want you to take a precious lot of photographs. You needn't trouble to develope them; just send me the films. I can do the rest. That will be the next best thing to coming with you."

"I'll do it with pleasure, old chap."

"I say, Gussy," said Herries, taking D'Arcy by the arm, "we're awfully sorry to lose you, you know, though we used to chip you a lot at St. Jim's."

"Yaas, I am sure you are, deah boy."

"And I'll tell you what, Gussy: you can have my bulldog, if you like," said Herries, in a burst of generosity.

Arthur Augustus repressed a shudder. Herries' bulldog was his pet aversion, and Towser's teeth and D'Arcy's trousers had more than once made close acquaintance. Wally was bringing Pongo with him, of course, and that was one dog too many, in D'Arcy's opinion. But he wouldn't have said so to Herries for worlds.

"Thank you vewy much, Hewwies," he said. "But I couldn't think of wobbin' you like that. Besides, it would be wuff on Towsah, as he's so fond of you."

"Never mind," said Herries heroically, "you can have him."

D'Arcy shook his head. "No, Hewwies, I should refuse to wob you."

Meanwhile, Fatty Wynn also had a parting gift to make. He presented a bundle to Tom Merry with an air of mysterious importance that duly impressed the hero of the Shell.

"That's for all of you," he said.

"Thanks awfully," said Tom. "But what is it?"

"Guess."

"Something to eat?" asked Tom, from his knowledge of Fatty.

Fatty Wynn grinned and nodded.

"That's it," he said. "Pork pies, real Welsh pork pies—they're a dream. I came jolly near opening the parcel in the train, and eating them myself. I get so hungry in this Christmas weather. But I resisted it. I brought them for you chaps, and here you are."

Tom Merry squeezed the fat Fourth-Former's hand.

"Thanks, Fatty! It was really ripping of you."

"I thought you'd like 'em," said the gratified Fatty.

A bell rang. Miss Priscilla threw her arms round Tom Merry's neck. Figgins, who had been shaking hands all round, drew nearer to Cousin Ethel, with the evident intention of looking after her on the journey home. Arthur Augustus eyed this proceeding with a somewhat curious expression.

"My darling boy," sobbed Miss Priscilla, as she clung to Tom, "when shall I see you again! Oh, my darling boy!"

There were tears in Miss Fawcett's eyes, and tears were coming into Tom Merry's, too. But he tried to smile.

"It won't be for long, dear," he said, as he kissed his old governess, "and you know I shall remember all the advice you have given me."

"I am sure you will, my dearest boy. You will not forget the Purple Pills for Pink People. I have placed a box containing a thousand in your trunk, and if you should need more, cable to me. In a case of urgency expense is not to be considered."

"Yes, dear."

"Then there is the cod-liver oil. I have packed twenty bottles, which will perhaps be sufficient to last you."

"Quite sufficient, I think."

"And the Terra-Cotta Tabloids. Take one every hour, and six after every meal, and any further number when you feel a longing for them."

"I'll take a lot of them every time I feel a longing for them."

"And remember, when you are riding on the prairie, to be sure to keep your feet dry."

"I'll remember."

"If you should camp out any night, don't sleep on the ground, as it will be bad for your delicate chest. I am sure that it would be possible to take a bed with you, and remember not to sit in a draught."

"I will remember everything—everything, dear."

"I think we must get ashore, Miss Fawcett," said Mr. Dodds, and he grasped Tom Merry's hand. "Good-bye, my lad, good-bye, and God bless you."

"Good-bye, sir."

"God bless you, indeed," sobbed Miss Fawcett. "But He will bless you, for you will always deserve His blessing."

The handshaking was over, the last kisses bestowed, and all who were not booked for the voyage crowded back to the landing-stage. The great steamer was humming and buzzing with busy life. D'Arcy shook hands with his cousin for the last time.

"Take care of her, Figgins, dear boy," he said.

"Rather!" said Figgins emphatically.

They were all ashore now. The steamer lurched, and moved. A gap of water, ever widening, separated the ship from the shore. Handkerchiefs were waved by the crowd ashore, and caps waved in return from the steamer.

"Good voyage and good luck!" shouted Lowther.

"Faith, and the top of the weather to ye!"

"Good-bye!"

"God bless you, my dear boy!"

And the liner churned away, and the crowd on the shore, and then the shore itself, grew very dim.

CHAPTER 13.

Across the Atlantic.

TOM MERRY stood by the rail, gazing back at the shore, growing dimmer and dimmer, while the steamer throbbed on, and the water churned away behind. At that moment Tom Merry would willingly have abandoned his dreams of adventure, his chance of a fortune, to be back once more among his friends, among the old familiar faces. It was the moment of depression that was inevitable at the first long parting, and Tom Merry's heart was very heavy.

But the sea was shining round him, the sea breeze singing in his ears. While he felt gloomy and constrained, he knew that it would wear off; that ere long he would be looking forward instead of backward. Strange lands and strange people were before him, and the instinct of travel and adventure was strong in his breast, as with most healthy British boys. He gazed back till his native land was nothing but a blur, and his eyes were a little blurred, too.

"Your first voyage, young sir?"

It was a pleasant voice near his elbow, and Tom Merry turned his head. He was glad of anybody to chat with at that moment, to distract his thoughts from what he had left behind him, and the sorrowful face of Miss Priscilla.

Arthur Augustus had gone to look after his luggage, that being a distraction sufficient to save him from any sentimental considerations at the moment, and Wally was looking after Pongo. Skimpole was sitting on a bench, deeply absorbed in a speech he was preparing for the cowboys of Arizona on the subject of some "ism" or other.

Tom Merry glanced at the man who addressed him. He was a rather handsome fellow in a yachting cap, though a keen eye would have detected signs in his face that told of an ill-governed life. But the eyes of a schoolboy were not keen to see things of that kind.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "The first long voyage—that I remember, at all events."

The stranger smiled.

"Then you have made a long voyage that you do not remember?"

"I was born in India," Tom Merry explained. "I was brought home as a baby."

The stranger seemed interested.

"How curious," he remarked. "I was born in India, and brought home as a baby. You may have heard of my father if you are acquainted with Indian people—Colonel Punter, of the Poppleywallah Fusiliers."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I am Captain Punter," said the stranger, "on leave at present from my regiment, and going out to New York on yachting business. I am thinking of entering my yacht, Poppleywallah II., for the America Cup."

Tom Merry's eyes opened wide.

"By Jove! How ripping!"

"Yes, I yacht a great deal," said the stranger negligently. "Must get rid of the time somehow, and I had the misfortune to be born rich."

And he laughed, as if that were a good joke.

And Captain Punter proceeded to chat about his travels, though curiously enough he kept off the subject of India; possibly because he thought Tom Merry might be accurately informed about the country he was born in.

According to the gallant captain's own account, he had been nearly everywhere and done nearly everything, and his yarns were of great interest to the boy just starting out on his travels. Tom wondered whether he would ever meet with such thrilling adventures as Captain Punter had been through.

The captain left the junior after a time, and strolled away, smoking a cigar; and Tom Merry envied him the ease with which he smoked a cigar on the deck of a steamer. Not that Tom wanted to smoke a cigar, but it argued that the captain was a tried traveller, and accustomed to ocean-going. And, indeed, as Tom discovered afterwards, Captain Punter spent a great deal of time on Atlantic liners.

Tom was beginning to feel a little uneasy himself. He was a better sailor than he had been at one time, the vacation on the steamer some time ago having had its effect upon him. And upon the huge ocean liner there was little rolling; it was a good deal like walking about a street. But Tom felt just sufficient qualms to keep him from going down to lunch.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy——"

Tom was looking away over the water when the excited voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy broke on his ears.

The swell of St. Jim's had just come up the stairs from the first-class berths, and his face was very animated.

"Hallo, Gussy! Feel bad?"

"Yaas, I did feel wathah bad at first," admitted Arthur Augustus cautiously. "But I am all wight now. This is a bit diffewent fwom the cwuise on the Condor."

"Yes, I suppose we've got our sea-legs; and the ship's bigger, and doesn't roll so much."

"And I am too wowwied at the pwesent moment to think about sea-sickness, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' up on the bwidge to wemonstwate."

"You are what?"

"I am goin' up on the bwidge to wemonstwate. I must see the captain."

"What on earth's the matter?"

"My luggage has been lost."

"Lost!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy excitedly. "There is only one twunk in my cabin, and all the othah eleven have been lost."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Impossible, old chap. If one came here safely, the others must have come. Besides, they were directed plainly enough, with your name and destination. Why don't you ask the steward about them?"

"I have asked him. He is an extwemely civil chap. I told him I was sowwy to twouble him when he was so busy, and gave him a soveweign. He said it was no twouble to do anythin' for a weal gentleman, and I thought that was wathah nice of him. So many boundahs twavel first-class nowadays, you know, but that shows the steward knows the weal thing when he sees it."

"He knows a real sovereign when he sees it, at all events," grinned Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Do you think the soveweign would have influenced his opinion at all?"

"Possibly—a little bit. But what did he say about the luggage?"

"He said that as fah as he knew all the twunks labelled 'not wequired' had been stacked away, and the othahs put in the cabin. I labelled six of mine not wequired, and the othah six ought to be forthcomin'. They are not to be found—only one of them. Our steward is a vewy decent chap—quite concerned about it."

"Let's go and see him, then."

And the juniors proceeded in search of the steward. Mr. Briggs, who was good-nature itself, the effects of the sovereign possibly not having yet worn off. He did not know what had become of the missing trunks, and he was very sorry, and he would certainly look into the matter as far as he was able; and he strongly advised Mr. D'Arcy to postpone an interview with the captain on the bridge.

"It is bettah to go stwaight to head-quartahs in a case like this," said D'Arcy. "It would be imposs. for me to wear the same suit of clothes morning, afternoon, and evenin'."

"Impossible, of course. Something would happen."

"Pway don't wot. This is a sewious mattah. Will you come up on the bwidge with me?"

"Not much!"

"Then I shall go alone."

Tom Merry caught the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder.

"Now, don't be an ass!" he said. "Passengers aren't allowed on the bridge, especially boys. We've been placed under the charge of the captain, but that doesn't mean that we can do as we like. Don't be an ass!"

"I must have my twunks."

"Well, the skipper hasn't got them in the chart-house, or in his breeches' pocket."

"It is a mattah for the personal attention of the captain, I considah."

"Look out the chief steward first; he may know more about it than Mr. Briggs."

"Yaas, pewwaps that's a good ideah."

And Arthur Augustus went off in search of the chief steward. Wally came along with a cheerful grin on his face, and dug Tom Merry in the ribs.

"It's all right," he announced.

"What's all right? Don't dislocate my ribs, you young ass."

"Blow your old ribs! It's all right about Pongo. Mr. Briggs—that's our steward—has undertaken to look after him and see that he's all right. He's a jolly chap, Briggs is, a very decent sort, and I am thinking of borrowing half-a-sovereign of Gus to tip him. He's looking after Pongo a treat."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Tom Merry, solemnly. "If Pongo were not being well looked after, I should not sleep on this voyage."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said D'Arcy minor. "I say, has Gus been bothering about his trunks?"

"Yes. Do you know anything about it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And D'Arcy minor walked away, still laughing.

CHAPTER 14.
Tempted, but True.

"My only hat! Look there!"

It was Tom Merry who uttered the exclamation. The sun was setting on the sea, and Tom Merry was thinking that it was time to go in search of something to eat, when a sudden shout from the direction of the bridge came to his ears.

"Get down there!"

Tom Merry swung round.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was calmly mounting the steps of the bridge, apparently oblivious to the gesticulations of an officer above, who was waving him back.

Captain Mainwaring, the commander of the Ethiopia, had just come out of the chart-house, and he looked at the junior in amazement. He crossed over to the top of the ladder, and made a gesture to the junior to return to the deck.

"You are not allowed here," he said severely.

Arthur Augustus took his hat off with a polite bow.

"I am extwemely sowwy, sir——"

"Go down!"

"But I have a complaint to make."

"Go back immediately."

"It is a mattah wequiwin' your personal attention!"

"Will you go down?"

"It concerns my twunks——"

The captain turned pink.

"If you do not go away immediately, I shall call a seaman to remove you, Master D'Arcy," he said sternly.

"Vewy well, sir," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I will weturn to the deck, and I thwow upon you the entire wesponsibility of my bein' compelled to appeah at dinnah in unsuitable attire."

And D'Arcy went back.

Tom Merry seized him at the bottom of the steps and marched him off forcibly.

"You utter ass!" he exclaimed. "You ought to have been knocked off. If I were the skipper I'd put you in irons!"

"Wats! Skippahs can't put passengers in irons!"

"I'd lay in a special set, then, if I were a skipper and had passengers like you!" said Tom Merry witheringly.

"It's all vewy well for you to jest upon a sewious subject, Tom Mewwy; but how am I to dwess for dinnah when my clothes are lost?"

"Hasn't the chief steward been able to tell you anything?"

"No; he says that all trunks labelled 'not required on the voyage,' were stacked away, and all others are in the cabins. But there is only one twunk belongin' to me in my cabin."

"Perhaps that contains enough things to last you this evening," suggested Tom Merry.

"Yaas, that is poss.," assented D'Arcy. "I nevah thought of lookin'. Let's go and have a look, deah boy."

The juniors descended to the cabin they shared. Arthur Augustus's trunk was there, and it stood out in the open, as it was too large to be shoved under the berths. Arthur Augustus began to unfasten the numerous straps, Tom Merry lending him a hand.

"Got the key?" asked Tom.

"Bai Jove, you know, it's on my bunch; but I can't wemembah at the present moment where I put my bunch of keys," said D'Arcy, in distress.

"Well, of all the dummies——"

"I object to bein' called a dummy!"

"Why, it's not locked!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the lid of the trunk came up in his hand.

"Bai Jove, you know, I must have forgotten to lock it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cacklin' at, Tom Mewwy?"

"Look here!"

Arthur Augustus looked. The big trunk was packed full with silk hats—nothing else—silk hats galore, but only hats. The elegant junior's face was a study. On his last voyage he had been short of silk hats, and he had made up for it this time. But it was rather unfortunate that the only trunk now at his disposal was the one packed with silk toppers.

"Bai Jove, I am weally a vewy unfortunate fellow, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You'd better hold an auction of these!" grinned Tom Merry. "I don't see that these toppers are much good to you. You can't go in to dinner wearing a dozen silk hats and nothing else."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry laughed loud and long. He could not help it. Wally looked into the cabin, and went off into a yell at the sight of the trunkful of toppers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wally, I insist upon your immediately ceasin' this wibald laughtah. Tom Mewwy, I am surpwised at you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally. "Haven't those other trunks turned up yet?"

"No; they have not."

"You'll have to share my things for the voyage, then," grinned Wally.

Arthur Augustus replied to this suggestion only with a disdainful sniff. Wally left the cabin almost doubled up with merriment. Even Tom Merry's mirth was nothing to D'Arcy minor's.

"Bai Jove, what am I to do, you know?" said D'Arcy, in perplexity. "It's pwetty plain that my twunks have been lost in twansit. I have nothing but this twunk of silk hats and my bag, in which my personal belongin's are packed, including, fortunately, my twusty wevolvah."

"Your which?"

"My twusty wevolvah."

"You don't mean to say that you've got a revolver after all?" demanded Tom Merry, perfectly aghast.

"Yaas, wathah! I cannot face the pewils of the wilds of Awizonah without a twusty wevolvah. Fortunately, that is not lost. I am thinkin' of pwactisin' shootin' in this cabin, you know, at a mark on the wall."

"If you do I shall practise wringing the neck of a dangerous lunatic, so look out," said Tom Merry, warningly. "And if I come across that revolver I shall chuck it overboard."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

Tom Merry quitted the cabin. Dinner was being served in the dining-saloon—a vast apartment which it was difficult to believe was not in an hotel on terra firma. The juniors had quite got over the few qualms they had felt, and they were ready for a good meal, and they enjoyed it. Arthur Augustus was somewhat worried about his clothes, but he was hungry. It happened that Captain Punter had the next seat to Tom Merry, probably by arrangement between that gentleman and the steward. The Indian captain took a great interest in the junior, and Tom found his chat very entertaining. Arthur Augustus, curiously enough, did not take to the captain. He gave Punter one glance through his eyeglass, and after that his manner was cold.

It was a cold but clear evening on deck, when they went up to the promenade. The Indian captain still hung about the juniors, and Tom, who had as yet made no other friends among the passengers, was pleased with his company. And when the captain suggested a game of dominoes in his cabin, Tom assented. Dominoes, however, soon palled upon the Poppleywallah captain, and he suggested cards, and turned out a pack which he happened to have very handy. Tom had no objection to a game of cards, though he would have rather strolled in the clear winter starlight on deck. But when Captain Punter suggested penny points, "just to make the game interesting," Tom struck. Penny points seemed really too insignificant to be considered playing for money, but Tom Merry had sense enough to remember the old adage, "Resist the beginnings," and he politely but firmly declined.

"Any objection?" asked Captain Punter, in amazement.

Tom Merry coloured. Like many boys in the presence of temptation, he felt a little ashamed of doing what he knew to be right. It would be so easy and so sociable to do the other thing.

"I have promised never to play for money," he said simply.

The captain laughed.

"But you don't call penny points playing for money. It's just using pennies as counters."

"Well, let's use something else as counters."

"Ha, ha! I'll tell you what—we'll use the coins as counters, to be returned at the end of the game," said Captain Punter, "If we don't keep them, that can't be considered as playing for money."

Tom was naturally anxious not to appear as a prig in the eyes of his jovial friend, and after a momentary hesitation, he accepted the proposition. If the coins were returned at the finish, certainly that wasn't gambling, as neither could win or lose anything. But it was astonishing how, at the game of nap, penny points could mount up. They were soon using silver instead of coppers, and then gold came upon the table. The captain's luck was cruel. He lost continually, and lost with perfect good humour, showing by his manner that the money was nothing to him. At the end of an hour Tom, much to his amazement, had three sovereigns and a little heap of silver at his elbow, when the captain suggested a stroll on deck.

"Certainly," said Tom. "Here's your money. I started with fifteen pence, and the rest belongs to you."

The captain shook his head laughingly.

"My dear lad, I can't take it."

Tom's face changed.

"But that was the agreement."

"Ye-es, in a way; but what I really meant was that I wouldn't keep any winnings. Put the money in your pocket, my lad; it's yours."

Three pounds odd was a very considerable sum to a boy of Tom Merry's age; but never for an instant did he waver. Although he was not yet suspecting his friend the captain of ulterior motives, he knew that he ought not to take the money, and he was determined not to take it. He drew back from the table.

"I cannot take it," he said quietly.

"But it is yours."

"It is not mine. That would be gambling."

The captain's eyes glittered for a moment. But he laughed good-humouredly, and swept the money into his pocket.

"Just as you like," he said. "I'd rather you kept it, that's all. Let's go on deck."

His good-humour made Tom feel compunction at once. He felt that he had wounded his new friend a little, and naturally a man of the world like Punter would not think much of his schoolboy scruples. He was feeling a little uncomfortable as he went on deck with Captain Punter. On the promenade Punter opened his cigarette-case, and offered it to Tom. The junior coloured and drew back.

"I—I don't smoke," he said.

Punter laughed good-naturedly, and selected a cigarette himself and lighted it. Tom had an uncomfortable feeling that the captain regarded him as a booby, and he was strongly tempted to accept a cigarette and smoke it just to show that he was not. But his good sense came to his aid, and he did not.

CHAPTER 15.

D'Arcy the Protector.

CAPTAIN MAINWARING, the commander of the Ethiopia, tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as he was going downstairs later. The steamer's captain was a handsome, ruddy-faced man of middle age, with a kindly eye and smile. The St. Jim's boys were under his protection on board the Ethiopia, and the captain had a sense of duty, and he was keeping an eye on them. He had observed Tom Merry's growing friendship with the Indian captain with a disapproving eye.

"I want to speak a word to you, my lad," he said.

"Certainly, sir," said Tom Merry, stopping, with his cheery smile.

"You have struck up a friendship with one of my passengers—a Captain Punter?"

"Yes, sir; he has been very kind."

The captain of the Ethiopia grunted.

"I dare say he has. Now, my lad, I don't want to say a word against Captain Punter—he may be a captain for all I know—but I'd rather you didn't have too much to say to him."

"Isn't he—isn't he all right?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise. "He seems to me to be very pleasant and obliging."

"Ye-ees," said Captain Mainwaring, rubbing his chin; "I'm not saying he isn't all right. He's certainly pleasant enough—rather too pleasant, perhaps. But you youngsters are sailing under my protection, and it's my duty to keep an eye on you. You're a sensible lad, Merry, and I think you'll understand that Captain Punter is a gentleman for you to keep away from, without asking me to explain further."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I—I suppose you know best, sir," he said. "But he's very polite, and I don't see how I can avoid him without wounding his feelings."

"Hum! You needn't exactly avoid him, perhaps—only don't accept invitations into his cabin, and don't enter into any little games—a game of cards just for fun, or anything of that sort. Do you understand?"

"Ye-e-es, sir; I think so," said Tom Merry slowly.

Captain Mainwaring left him, and Tom Merry went on to the reading-room. He was joined there ten minutes later by the Indian captain, who had finished his smoke on deck, and apparently yearned again for the society of his young friend.

"Slow here, isn't it?" said Punter. "They're having some music in the saloon, and want me to sing—but I won't. Curious how a military man is sought after in society. I'd rather have a chat with you here. I like hearing about your school—and the fellows there. There's that lad who's with you—D'Arcy. I suppose he belongs to rich people?"

"Yes, very rich," said Tom Merry.

"He seems to have a great deal of money for a boy of his age?"

"Yes, he has."

Captain Punter looked at the junior. Tom was feeling very uncomfortable. Captain Mainwaring's warning had struck him forcibly, remembering as he did that game of nap in Punter's cabin. Punter saw that there was a change in Tom's manner, and as he had observed him in conversation with the steamer's captain, he drew his own conclusions. His eyes glinted a little, and he fell into silence. A few minutes later Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered the room.

"Heard anything of the luggage?" asked Captain Punter, with an agreeable smile.

"No," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the captain. "I have not heard anythin' of the luggage."

The captain flushed red.

There was no mistaking the coldness of D'Arcy's tone and look, and Tom Merry looked at his friend in surprise. It was not like D'Arcy to willingly wound anyone. Punter rose and strolled away without making any reply, and Arthur Augustus dropped nonchalantly into his vacant seat.

"Gussy, old man! What did you speak to him like that for?"

"Because I wanted to get wid of the boundah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I have been gwowin' anxious about you, Tom Mewwy."

"Anxious about me!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard myself as bein' to a certain extent your pwoteetah on this voyage, you know."

"If you are going to be an ass——"

"Pway don't call me an ass, Tom Mewwy; I object vewy stwongly to the expwession. I wepeat that I am gwowin' vewy anxious about you, and I considah it my duty to Miss Pwiscillah to keep you out of bad ways."

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Tom Merry, a little nettled.

"I mean that I see with gweat wegwet that you are makin' impwopah acquaintances."

"If you are alluding to Captain Punter——"

"Captain Wats! He's no more a captain than I am, deah boy."

"How on earth do you know?"

"My deah Mewwy," said D'Arcy, with an assumption of superior wisdom that made Tom strongly inclined to shake him. "I wecognised the fellow as a boundah the moment I set eyes on him."

"He's been all right to me," said Tom half-angrily. "What right have you to call him names."

"Pway keep your wool on, deah boy, while I explain. The fellow is weawin' a wing that is not weal."

"Eh! He is wearing a wing? Are you off your rocker?"

"I am not off my wockah," said D'Arcy, with dignity, "and I wepeat that his wing is not weal. A man who would wear a sham wing would do anythin'."

"Oh, you mean a ring?" exclaimed Tom Merry laughing. "Ass! I haven't even looked at his ring; didn't even notice that he had one."

"You have not been twained to wegawd with attention details of personal attire, deah boy. But the moment I observed his sham wing I suspected him of bein' a boundah. I have wathah a keen eye in these mattahs, you know. I saw that he was determined to be fwiendly, so I decided to look him out."

"Look him out!"

"Yaas, wathah! I bowwowed an army list fwom the libwawy, and looked for the name of Puntah. Captain Puntah, of the Popplewallah Fusiliers, is not mentioned there, and seems to have been quite unknown to the compilahs."

Tom Merry started.

"Then he is not a captain?"

"He is a humbug, deah boy. Of course, I don't like the ideah of lookin' out particulahs about a fellow, but I was convinced that he was a humbug, you know, and so I wegarded myself as justified in lookin' into the army list."

Tom Merry was silent. If Punter were sailing under false colours, there was ample reason for Captain Mainwaring's warning against him.

"Fwom a sense of duty to Miss Pwiscillah, I wegard you as undah my pwotection," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall take it as a weal favah if you will have nothing more to say to this wottah, Mewwy."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry, and he walked away. But he took D'Arcy's advice, all the same, and the next time Punter proposed a game of nap in his cabin, he declined in a manner that made the pseudo captain realise that he might as well give the matter up then and there, and turn his efforts in a new direction. And he did so; and with Wally he seemed to have much more success.

CHAPTER 16.
Larks on the Ocean Wave.

THE weather, in spite of the season, was good, and the run of the Ethiopia across the wide Atlantic was very enjoyable to the juniors. Arthur Augustus was the darling of the lady passengers, and was much in request in the little entertainments among the passengers. Tom Merry was also very popular. As for Wally, he showed a preference for the society of the stokers and firemen, and among them he was a little hero. More than once the indignant Arthur Augustus beheld his brother come up from below as black as a sweep, and gave him lectures on the subject. Wally grinned good-humouredly at the lectures.

"My dear dummy," he replied cheerfully; "you stick to the lady passengers, and I'll stick to the engineers and the stokers. I'm learning a lot of things that may be jolly useful some day, and they're a jolly set of fellows. Blow my clothes! Do you think I am going to allow clothes to stand in the way of friendship?"

"Fwiendship! Weally, Wally——"

"They're ripping chaps, and they're my friends," said Wally obstinately. "You're an ass, Gus. You'll be getting married as soon as we arrive in New York, I can see that."

"Wally, I uttahly wefuse to allow you to make such wibald wemarks."

"Well, it looks like it to me. There's Mrs. Bounty, the American widow—you were walking on deck with her in the moonlight——"

"I was tellin' her about the decowations at Eastwood House," said D'Arcy. "She is vewy intewested in them, and in our family. She asked me if my governah was a widowah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cacklin' at, Wally?"

"Poor old dad! No wonder she's interested in Eastwood House. Well, you can go on telling Mrs. Bounty about the decorations at Eastwood House, and I'll go on talking sense with the firemen."

And he did. Like Tom Bowling of old, Wally was the darling of the crew. As for Skimpole, nobody noticed him much, and he noticed nobody. He was planning a Socialistic campaign in the wilds of the Far West, and all his time was taken up in reading over his volumes and making extracts and composing speeches. He offered, indeed, an invention of his to the chief engineer, but it was received with contumely. It was an invention, which, if successful, would enable one man to attend to the whole of the ship's machinery, and empower the company to dispense with the services of its staff of engineers. The way the chief engineer received the offer made Skimpole decide not to be generous in that direction again.

Captain Punter was almost the only passenger to talk with Skimpole, and he only managed to get into talk with him by affecting a deep interest in Socialism. Skimpole would have held forth on that subject for hours, but the gallant captain soon discovered that Skimmy was the moneyless member of the party, and not a pigeon worth plucking. And as soon as the captain discovered that, Skimpole found himself left severely alone. Punter was not the kind of man to be bored for nothing.

His efforts with Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry having been unsuccessful, Punter devoted himself to Wally, and made such progress in that young gentleman's favour that it occasioned anxiety to both Tom and D'Arcy.

To their remonstrances the hero of the Third Form at St. Jim's replied with his usual cool cheek.

"I wish you'd let that chap alone, Wally," said Tom Merry seriously. "He's a bounder, and he shows it more clearly every day."

"My dear kid, I can look after myself," said Wally.

"I suppose he has asked you to play cards?"

"Yes, certainly. I'm going to play in his cabin this evening."

"I wish you wouldn't, Wally."

"Don't you be worried. I can look after myself."

Arthur Augustus tackled the young rascal on the subject, with the same results. Wally was not to be argued with.

"The fellow is an uttah boundah, Wally," said D'Arcy reprovingly. "He is not fit for you associate with."

"I know he isn't, old chap."

"He isn't a weal captain at all."

"I know that, Gus."

"Then why don't you keep away fwom him, you young wepwobate?" demanded Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Oh, he's amusing," said Wally, with a yawn. "And that's a lot more than you are, Gus. Take a little run, old chap."

And Wally strolled off, leaving his elder brother speechless with indignation.

Tom Merry was a little uneasy about Wally, but he had a feeling that the young scamp could take care of himself, as he said, and he was right.

Captain Punter was congratulating himself. He was savagely angry, under his mask of good temper, at his failure to win the

good graces of two mere schoolboys, and he would have brought Wally to ruin if he could, simply out of revenge.

But it happened that Wally was well provided with money, too, and so the plucking of this very young pigeon was likely to be profitable. Nothing could be more innocent or unsuspicious than Wally's face when he presented himself in the Indian captain's quarters that evening, the last but one of the voyage.

The adventurer welcomed him warmly. The door was closed, and Punter produced cigarettes. Wally had accepted one from him the previous evening, and he had it still in his pocket, and, as a matter of fact, he had pierced a hole down the centre, and squeezed a pinch of gunpowder into it. The gallant captain was quite unaware of that, or of anything that was passing in Wally's mind.

"You will smoke?" he said pleasantly.

"Hand 'em over," grinned Wally.

The captain threw over the case, and then took out the cards.

Wally affected to be selecting a smoke, and at the same time slipped the cigarette he had doctored back into the case. He took one, and put it between his lips to keep up appearances, but did not light it.

"A light?" said the captain, extending a vesta.

"No, I won't light it yet," said Wally.

"Better have a light."

"Bosh! I tell you I won't!"

Wally had a direct way of speaking.

The captain smiled and assented. The cards were dealt, and Punter suggested penny points.

"Not worth while," said Wally. "Make it a bob a time."

Punter stared a little, but assented. He placed a little heap of money on the table, intending to excite the cupidity of the junior.

Thers was a scratching at the door, and Wally opened it to admit Pongo.

The mongrel skipped into the room.

"You don't mind Pongo, do you?" said Wally.

"Oh—er—no!" said Captain Punter, with a forced smile.

"He's a ripping dog, you know, though he's a bit frisky indoors," said Wally confidentially. "Keep quiet, Pongo! Quiet, Pong!"

But Pongo wouldn't be quiet. He ran round the card table, and frisked round the captain's legs. Punter longed to kick him out of the cabin, but that would hardly have done, so he refrained. He stooped to pat the dog's head, and Pongo promptly bit his fingers, and the captain gave a yell.

"Anything the matter?" asked Wally.

"Ow! The fiendish beast! He's bitten me!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I mean, I'm sorry. Pongo, you naughty dog!"

"I—I—I'll—never mind, it's all right! Good old doggie," said the captain, who would willingly have flayed the good old doggie alive at that moment.

Pongo growled.

As a matter of fact, Wally, while affecting to be calming him, was exciting him by secret signs to further antics. There was a complete understanding between the dog and his master. Pongo growled and barked, and Wally jumped up to chase him, and Pongo, entering into the fun of the thing, skipped and darted round the narrow cabin in high glee.

The captain looked on with a face like a demon, though he worked up a ghastly smile whenever Wally looked at him.

"Come here, Pongo! Pong, you bounder, lie down!"

Pongo persisted in skipping and dodging.

Wally, in hot pursuit, crashed into the card-table, and it went flying. Cards and coins flew into various corners, and Captain Punter rapped out a furious oath.

Wally looked at him quickly.

"Sorry, sir. What did you say?"

"N-n-n-nothing," muttered the captain, white with anger.

A suspicion crossed his mind that the boy was "rotting" him, and his eyes glinted furiously at the thought.

"Pongo! Pong! Pong!"

"Bow-wow-wow!" said Pongo.

Wally rushed at him, and he skipped between the captain's legs, and Captain Punter staggered. The next moment Wally bumped up against him, and he measured his length on the floor.

"Sorry!" gasped Wally. "Come here, Pongo!"

The captain sprang up in a fury.

"Get out of my cabin!" he roared.

"Eh? What?"

"Get out of my cabin, or I'll kick you out!" yelled Punter. "You are doing this on purpose, you whelp! Get out!"

"Aren't we going to have a little gamble, then?" asked Wally innocently.

"Get out!" shrieked Punter.

And he really looked as if he would hurl himself at the junior.

Wally, chuckling gleefully, skipped out of the cabin, followed by Pongo. He went serenely on deck, and found Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus there. The two juniors were seriously debating whether they should go down to Punter's room and compel Wally to come out under threat of appealing to Captain Mainwaring.

"Bai Jove, here he is!" exclaimed D'Arcy, turning his monocle upon Wally. "You young weprobate, what are you gwinnin' at?"

"Such a lark!" chuckled Wally.

"What has happened?" asked Tom Merry.

"Pongo got into the cabin. I let him in. I chased him round, upset cards and cash, chucked the noble captain over on his beam-ends—no end of a ghastly row," chuckled Wally. "He's dropped my friendship now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Wally, is it poss that you were only wottin' all the time?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in amazement.

"What do you think, my son?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"He was going to kick me out when I cut," said Wally, chuckling. "He gave me a fag yesterday. I've shoved it into his case again, with a pinch of gunpowder in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'll be surprised when he starts smoking it."

The three juniors roared. They were still laughing when the gallant captain came on deck.

Punter looked very disturbed and annoyed, and he cast a glance that was far from amiable in the direction of the three juniors. He could guess that Wally's narration of the doings of Pongo was the cause of their merriment.

The unlucky adventurer stalked past the juniors, and paused on the promenade deck to light a cigarette, as a solace to his disturbed nerves.

The juniors watched him with interest.

"I wonder if it's the one," murmured Wally. "I put it next in the case, so that it would come next when he went for one."

"We shall jolly soon see," chuckled Tom Merry.

The captain was applying a fusee to the cigarette. He lighted it, and the next instant he jumped clear of the deck.

Bang!

In the silence of the night in mid-ocean the explosion, slight as it really was, sounded loud enough.

The captain gave a fearful yell.

There were exclamations from all sides. Captain Mainwaring's voice was heard, demanding what was the matter.

Punter stood amazed, but the truth dawned on him as he heard the yells of laughter from the St. Jim's juniors.

He made a step in their direction, his face convulsed with rage, and the juniors scattered, still shrieking with laughter.

Captain Punter sedulously avoided Tom Merry & Co. after that. He gave Wally glances that sometimes showed the depth of his feelings, but Wally only chuckled.

The following afternoon the juniors were looking out eagerly ahead. Captain Mainwaring expected to sight land, and the juniors looked for it eagerly. It was a new world they were about to see, and eager enough they were.

"Land!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus eagerly. "There it is!"

"Ass! That's a sea-gull!"

"Bai Jove, so it is!" said D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass. "I wondah where the land is. That dark cloud yonder looks like wain, doesn't it?"

"It's a good distance off."

"That weminds me. As soon as we get ashore I have to send a cable home about my missin' luggage. I can't go on bowwowin your clothes all the time we are in Amewica, Tom Mewwy."

D'Arcy minor chuckled.

"You needn't worry about a cable, Gus. Your trunks are on board the Ethiopia, only they're down in the luggage hold among the things not required on the voyage."

"Imposs, deah boy. I marked six of them not required."

"And I marked five more," said Wally coolly.

"Eh?"

"You see, I couldn't have you blocking up the cabin with your lumber," said Wally cheerfully. "I went after the carrier, and marked them at the railway station."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"You—you cheeky young wascal!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway hold my toppah for a few minutes, Tom Mewwy, while I give Wally a feahful thwashin'!"

"Land!" shouted someone.

D'Arcy looked round eagerly. He forgot all about thrashing Wally, and turned his eyeglass to the west.

"Bai Jove, I can't see it!"

"There it is!"

"Bai Jove, I saw that, and I took it for a cloud, you know!"

Tom Merry did not speak. His eyes were fixed on the new world that was emerging into his sight, and his heart was beating fast. The Atlantic lay behind him. Before him a new life in a new land.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry next Thursday, entitled "Tom Merry in New York." Please order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

NEXT THURSDAY: "TOM MERRY IN NEW YORK." A Splendid Tale of Tom Merry. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Please tell your Friends about this Story.—Ed.

BRITAIN INVADED!



A Powerful and Stirring War Story.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

The Greyfriars School Cadet Corps, commanded by Captain Sam Villiers, scout, are standing about in small groups, talking anxiously, when the clattering of hoofs is heard, and a young farmer from one of the homesteads on the cliffs comes galloping in on a sweating horse, and reins up hastily.

"The furriners are on us!"

he cries. "There's a whole fleet o' tugs an' barges an' ships o' war headin' in for Frinton Gap, wi' thousands o' men aboard! They're Germans, an' they're goin' to land!"

Captain Sam Villiers was at his side in a moment.

"How far off are they?"

"Four mile out when I left, an' comin' in fast. I seed the men aboard 'em wi' my own telescope, an' the sun glintin' on their helmets; an' I've tried to send messages at the telegraph-offices, but none can't get through. They tells me all the wires is cut. Let me go! I must push on!"

* * * * * * * * * * *

Nearly all the boys are killed or captured when the first German column attack and capture the school.

However, Sam Villiers and his brother, Steve, manage to escape and gain the Colchester garrison, who have turned out and entrenched themselves for the defence while the main forces come up.

The boy scouts tell their story to the British general, and, after a good sleep, go out and reconnoitre.

Sam Villiers Scores.

Sam Villiers is able to capture the German plans, and thus saves the British forces from a terrible defeat.

General Sir Sholto Nugent retires with his men, and manages for a time to keep the Germans in check.

Hearing that their home, mother and sisters, are in danger, the two boy scouts hasten with all speed to Cotehall Towers. Helped by a fisherman named Ned, they manage to defeat a troop of Uhlans who attack Moat House, the lodge to Cotehall Towers.

(Now go on with the Story.)

How Sam Mined the Moat House.

My brave boys!" said Mrs. Villiers, coming hurriedly down the tower stairs to greet her sons. "You've beaten them off—a dozen grown men turned tail before my sons! You have made me the proudest woman in Britain!" she exclaimed. "I care nothing for what happens now that I've seen the enemy's backs!"

"I say, mother, that's all very well," said Sam, rising and reloading his revolver; "but you and the girls must get away from here as quickly as it can be done, before they're back on us. The Moat House will have to go!"

"What, Aubrey? But you've beaten them!"

"Beaten a troop of Uhlans; but there's no use our pretendin' that three of us can hold a house against the German army. With a single field-gun they can knock it into bricks in twenty minutes, and kill everybody in and near it."

The boys' mother nodded. She loved the old house, but she knew they were right.

"If you stay, I stay, too," she said.

"You must go at once, mother, please. I'm on tenterhooks while you and the girls are here. Ned, you and Steve will take our mother and sisters to Cotehall at once."

"Very well, Aubrey," said Mrs. Villiers reluctantly; "if you promise to follow after us! What are you going to do?"

"I'll come after you in two hours' time, if all goes well. You needn't be afraid that the Moat House will do the enemy any good—I'll see it doesn't do that. You'll be safe at Cotehall, an' out of reach of the fighting."

"How are we to go, sir?" said Ned. "We'll have to douse the fire to get across."

"No; you'll go by the old cellar passage, that comes out far beyond the moat. There's no time to explain that now. Steve knows the way, and he'll go with you. Take 'em along quickly, Steve, an' mind you aren't seen leaving the outer entrance, or you'll give it away.

"Right-ho!" said Stephen. "Come along, people; we've got to hurry!"

He did not wait to ask what Sam's plans were, for the first thing to do was to see the non-fighters safe, and, after

hasty farewells between the elder boy and his mother and sisters—for none knew whether they might meet again—Stephen went into the house with his charges, and they were seen no more. Sam, who knew there was not likely to be any difficulty about their retreat, at once set to work.

"If any German thinks he's going to make use of this place as a centre, I pity him," said Sam, as he went to the old keep. His first care was to test the amount of petrol remaining; and, finding there was enough to last another hour, he left that part of the business and overhauled a stock of dry-batteries and electric accumulators which were kept in reserve for his father's motors.

These were soon tested and found in perfect order, after which Sam rolled out his two great coils of silk-covered electric-bell wire, and carried one of them to the old secret cell underground beneath the keep tower.

As he came up again he cast a glance across the park, and saw in the distance a good-sized body of men, mounted and unmounted, moving towards the house. They were Germans, as a single look was enough to tell him.

"I've got to fix something that'll keep those jokers busy," he said. "I'm not nearly ready yet."

Sam's ingenuity had full play for the next twenty minutes, and though he would not have admitted it, he was enjoying himself hugely. He buttoned five or six bolsters into his father's old shooting-jackets, with a cap on each, and placed them at the windows, with just enough showing to make each look like a man crouching behind the sill.

He then fished up from the keep cellar several repeating alarm-guns, which the Cotehall gardeners used in spring to keep the birds off the seeds. They were timed to go off with a sharp report at intervals, and Sam, loading them swiftly, placed them at the windows beside the dummy figures, with the muzzles pointing outwards, and set them going.

"That's what you call an armed resistance," he said, grinning, and wishing Steve were there to enjoy the grim joke. He went to the tower and set another of the petrol-tanks running, which caused the flames in the moat to leap higher, and as he came out he saw the German force had halted a good five hundred yards short of the moat, and were training a gun of some sort on the house.

It was no reckless rush of cavalry this time, but a scientific attack that was meant to destroy all resistance and capture the place. There were some thirty men besides the gun, as Sam saw, and, stepping behind the stone seat, he fired five shots from his revolver in their direction.

Almost immediately there was a sharp, loud rattling, and the Germans' gun began to belch a stream of small one-pounder shells at the house. As the first one arrived, Sam darted deftly in through the door and made his way back through the passage to the keep.

"Only a pom-pom," he said to himself; "that won't knock the house down, but it'd wipe out the defending party if there were any. I'll let it have full play on the bolsters. It's evident they want to capture the house for their own purposes, an' I'll just go an' get it ready for them."

The alarm-guns began to bang away fitfully from the windows every now and then, and the German pom-pom replied with a fire that rained small shells about the walls and into the rooms.

Sam was hard at work below ground, hauling out the eight great copper cases of smokeless sporting powder—which Squire Villiers, who had his game-cartridges loaded at the house, kept on the premises—and opened them up. Four he placed together in the cell below the keep, and dragged down two small tanks of petrol to keep them company.

Four more he placed in the cellars of the house itself, stowed away in the darkest wine-bin, and from both of these roughly-made mines he led a pair of electric wires. Rapidly stapling the wires along the angles of the walls, well out of sight, he ran them to the cellar-flap under the very bowels of the house, and passed them down.

Working like a slave to get the task done in time, he heard the continual din and crash of the German shells as they beat round the house and burst inside the rooms, while the sharp banging of the alarm-guns—three of which were now blown away and silenced—answered them feebly.

As the row increased, Sam felt inclined to stop working and roar with laughter, and only the need for hurry prevented him. He connected up the electric accumulators with the cases of powder, and, taking with him a couple of small bell-pushes, he went back to the innermost cellar with his horn lantern and opened the flap again, showing a dark cavity, where he had already lowered the wires.

"For the present I'll say good-bye to the Kaiser & Co.," he said, "or, rather, au revoir. The petrol won't last much longer, an' it sounds as if my guns were bein' silenced. The list of killed an' wounded must be awful—six bolsters shockingly mutilated, an' great slaughter of shootin'-jackets. Now for a little engineerin'."

He lowered himself down through the cavity, with the lantern, and pulled the flap down above him. He was now in a passage leading under the house and moat, with a length of nearly a quarter of a mile. Once it had been a monks' passage, when the Moat House was a priory, and later had been used for the hiding and transit of kegs that never paid duty, in the lawless days when even country squires did not object to filling their cellars by the smugglers' aid on the East Coast.

There was no need to fix the wires here, and Sam let them trail along the ground, paying them out till he was near the outer end of the passage. Here he stopped, and, attaching an electric bell-push to each pair of wires, he hooked them on to a ledge of stone on either side, and went on to the outlet.

It was so choked with gorse-bushes and broom as to be almost undiscoverable from the outside: but both the brothers knew the passage well, and had often used it. By this way Stephen had taken his mother and sisters.

Sam, after listening carefully, pushed his way out through the bushes and crept up through the knoll just beyond, whence he could see the house, now some distance away. It was between him and the attacking party, except for one party of Germans, who were prospecting round the back side of the moat; but Sam could still hear the rattle of the gun.

"Right!" he murmured. "The petrol won't last much longer, an' then they'll get across. One touch on those buttons will lift the house an' the keep off their foundations; but I won't do that till I know what the beggars yonder mean to do. Perhaps we can save the house. Can't wait for 'em to get in now. I must push along an' see that the mater and the girls are safe."

He went back down the knoll and struck straight across country for the low hills behind, keeping under shadow of the hedges. When he reached the higher ground he looked back, and saw in the moonlight the distant figures of Germans advancing on the house. All was quiet there now. The firing had stopped, and the petrol in the moat had all but burnt out. Looking like a drove of ants at that distance, the enemy were bridging the moat with tree-trunks and making their way over.

"I'd give a month's money to see the beggars' faces when they get in an' find the dead an' wounded," grinned Sam; "but duty lies forward."

He hastened on down the slope, for even at night a scout never stands on the skyline, and on the next ridge, in a splendid position, stood the great manor-house of Cotehall Towers, for which the Villiers had left their smaller dwelling of the Moat House two centuries before, as has been said, only using the latter as a second house. Sam made all haste to reach his home, and as he crossed the wide park and neared the house he saw somebody hurrying down the carriage-road towards him. It was Stephen.

"Is that you, Sam? Is it all right?" he said, as soon as he was within hearing.

"Yes. Are mother an' the girls safe?"

"Safe? Yes; they ain't in any danger just now; but the Germans hold the house."

"What!" cried Sam.

"They've occupied the whole country-side, it seems, an' there's a beastly Prussian captain of Engineers here, with his men!"

"How many men?" said Sam quickly.

"There are eight or ten in the house, and they are all billeted on us. The men are below in the kitchen quarters, guzzlin' an' makin' everybody wait on them. They ain't holding the house as a fortress, you know; they're simply quartered there. Ned wanted to go for them; but I made him wait till you came, because of the mater an' girls. They don't know anything about the affair at the Moat House."

"Great Scott! You mean to say these scoundrels are here?" exclaimed Sam, his brow darkening, as he hastened on to the house. "Let me—— But you were quite right, Steve, to stop Ned. We don't want the men below roused yet. Go an' keep Ned quiet, an' hold on till we see what's happening. I want to find the mater first."

He made his way at once into the great square hall and went upstairs to the dining-room. He was hardly able to realise that Germans were occupying the house of Villiers as if it were their own. He was soon to understand it, for as he threw open the door of the banquet-hall, in search of his mother, a strange sight met his eyes.

How Sam Drove a Bargain.

The great dining-hall, well lighted, was before him, and by one end of the table, with his spurred heels cocked up on a second chair, lounged a German colonel of Engineers—a square-faced, grizzled man, of about forty.

At his side were the remains of a fowl and a bottle of wine, now nearly empty. He sat there with the air of owning the

whole place. Some distance away stood Mrs. Villiers, looking very white and proud, her eyes turned scornfully on the lounging officer, who had claimed the house as his quarters, and demanded to be served with the best. He took no notice of the mistress of Cotehall, and was occupying himself by picking his teeth.

Sam took in the scene with one glance, and the colour leaped to his cheeks.

"Mother," he said, "do you know what this means?"

"I can only tell you," she replied, "that this person came here with his men soon after we arrived, and has done as he pleased here, with great insolence. He forced the butler to wait on him and provide him with a meal. I have sent the girls to the other wing of the house, and waited here for you. It seems we are helpless," she added bitterly. "The country-side appears to be in their hands, and none of our troops are on this side of Chelmsford."

The German officer had taken no more notice of Sam than to look him up and down contemptuously as he came in, and the young Englishman's cadet uniform was so stained and weather-worn by all it had gone through that it hardly looked like a Service suit.

With the blood boiling in his veins, but outwardly calm, Sam turned towards the officer.

"Explain the meaning of this," he said quietly in German.

The man looked at him insolently, without moving.

"Understand that I, Colonel Pilnitz, of the Kaiser's Engineers, am quartered here," he said, as if he were speaking to a servant. "By the way, there are some of my men below. Go and see to it that their wants are attended to."

Sam, white to the lips, looked him in the eyes.

"Get up from that chair!" he said curtly.

The German glared at him as if he disbelieved his ears.

"What did you say?" he muttered gutturally.

"If you are not out of that chair in three seconds, you German cad," exclaimed Sam, taking a couple of steps forward, "I'll show you the way!"

A sharp oath broke from the German's lips as his hand moved swiftly towards his revolver. But in a twinkling Sam caught his wrist, and, jerking the weapon from its leather holster, flung it away. The next moment they had grappled, and the chair went over with a crash.

"Take care, Aubrey!" cried his mother, turning white.

The two combatants were on their feet, and the German, purple in the face with rage, was trying to bear Sam down by sheer weight. He made no allowance for the agility and steel-like muscles of the young Briton, who was, besides, a first-class wrestler. Sam had already taken the under-grip, and as the German bore forward he twisted himself aside, and, using his body as a lever, he swung the officer clear off his feet with one skilful heave. The next moment the German toppled right over Sam's shoulder and fell on the floor with a crash that made the very table jump.

Sam was beside him in a moment, and sat down on the small of his back, to make sure of his not rising; but the fall had stunned the German, and he did not move. Stephen came darting up the staircase, and, entering the room, gave a cry of delight as he saw what had happened.

"Get that pistol on the floor, Steve!" cried Sam; and the younger boy sprang to secure it. "Mother, you go out at once. Don't hesitate. Join the girls in the east wing; don't leave it."

"Here come the men," said Stephen, as six or seven German engineer-riflemen came running up the stairs and reached the door before Mrs. Villiers could leave.

"Back!" cried Sam, in their own tongue, whipping out his own revolver and holding it to the prisoner's head. "Your colonel dies when the first of you puts his foot into this room!"

The men hesitated and stopped short, and Stephen himself looked taken aback. A deep grunt came from the fallen colonel as he slowly opened his eyes, and screwing his head round—for he lay on his face—he saw the revolver barrel within an inch of him.

"You understand," said Sam quickly. "Bid your men draw back, or you are a dead man!"

A muttered oath came from the German's lips. Stephen, for a moment, expected to hear him refuse; but, after a short pause, he gave a curt order, and the men drew back from the door.

"Let this lady pass!" ordered Sam.

And Mrs. Villiers, still looking pale, glanced gratefully at her son and left the room.

"Throw down your arms there," said Sam, when she had gone. "Quick! Don't stop to think! Your colonel must die if you hesitate!"

The men slowly leaned their rifles against the landing wall, as a grunt came from the prisoner, and just then Ned came up the staircase with a huge old-fashioned horse-pistol in each hand.

"Hallo, there!" he said, presenting his two weapons as he came up behind the Germans. "What's wrong here? Any help wanted? Glory! Is that you settin' on the hofficer, Master Aubrey?"

"Right-ho! Stand there an' hold the stairs, Ned," said Stephen to the marshman, who had naturally not seen the beginning of the affair, and was consequently astonished.

"I found these old barkers in the mornin'-room, Master Stephen, an' I filled 'em up with powder an' swan-shot," said Ned, staring at the scene in the dining-hall. "They ain't exactly what you call modern, but I reckon they'll blow a fine old hole in any Dutchman at close quarters!"

"Well done, Ned!" said Sam. "You marshal those seven privates downstairs—don't let 'em touch their weapons—and you go after them with your revolver, Steve. Lock 'em in the cellars, an' if anyone tries to resist on the way blow his head off! You quite comprehend, colonel," he added, in German, "I hold you responsible for your men's behaviour?"

The prostrate colonel growled again, and the strange sight was witnessed of seven German privates marshalled downstairs by an armed longshoreman and a cadet with a revolver. Sam bade Stephen come back as soon as they were disposed of, and he did so, leaving Ned to keep guard over the locked door. He returned to find Sam still sitting on the captive's back.

"I've stowed 'em, Sam, as you told me," said Stephen. "I expect they'll get as tight as owls when they start consoling themselves with the governor's champagne an' whisky; but it's all in the day's work."

"You don't mean to say you've locked them in the wine-cellars?" exclaimed Ned.

"Yes, I did. Old Perkiss, the butler, is nearly cryin' about it; but I told him that in time of war you couldn't ——"

"You young ass, I meant the coal-cellar, of course!"

"You didn't say so, lieutenant. The wine-cellars were handiest, so I bunged 'em in there. Shall I go and——"

"No; leave it now; it can't be helped. Give me that decanter of brandy off the sideboard. This chap has had a good hard shakin'."

He gave some to the German, who gulped it down. Sam sat warily over him with his revolver.

"Do you give your parole, colonel?" said his captor.

"No, I do not," said the prisoner savagely; "I refuse it!"

"Then, of course, I've got to bind you. I should be sorry to do it to an officer, but I didn't think much of your manners when I met you at table," said Sam, as Stephen rapidly tied the little fingers of the man together behind him with twine. "You are a valuable asset to us, as I expect you know, an' we can't afford to risk losing you. Is the rest of your command anywhere handy?"

"I shall answer no questions, so ask me none!" growled the German officer fiercely. "You may think yourselves fortunate that you are not dead men—or dead brats, rather—at this moment! Do not think I disarmed my men merely on my own account."

"Of course not. I never supposed you to be a coward," said Sam. "I must say, in my dealings with the Germans, I haven't found them that. But your life is valuable to your side. I take it you are in command of important operations round here, and it would be awkward if you were wiped out."

"You know nothing about it," muttered the German.

"Well, I guessed it," said Sam. "An ordinary officer would have ordered his men to come on, an' taken his shot through the head. I can understand it was unpleasant for you to do what I said, an' save yourself. I don't mind saying I rather respect you for it. Every man ought to think of his service an' country first. An' you were reckoning that as your men are holdin' the district here, an' there aren't any British troops handy, that you'd have a chance of bein' rescued before long."

The officer was silent.

"You said you were Colonel Pilnitz, too," added Sam. "I've heard in our camp of your name as a big bug in the engineerin' line in your Service. You'd be a loss to it just now."

"I shall answer you nothing," said the German sullenly.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Well, if you won't answer us anything, I don't see why we should do the same for you," said Sam. "However, I'll make you one proposition to chew on. If you'll ensure me the safety of this house, and a safe-conduct for the people in it from any attack by your troops and guns, we'll give you your liberty."

The German officer stared.

"Is this your house, then?"

"My father's," said Sam. "It is the house and estate of Villiers, and was ours centuries before Germany was ever heard of as a nation. I don't fancy having it knocked to pieces by your men, nor to have Germans quartered here. To make sure of my mother's safe return to London, and

to save the house, I'll set you on your pins again, and you can clear out. As a German officer at least you will be unable to break your bond, even if your manners to ladies could do with a great deal of mending. Is it a bargain?"

Colonel Pilnitz thought for a few minutes. He was a slow man, like most of his race.

"No," he said presently, his eyes glinting viciously at the boys. "I will make no compact with a pair of brats who have taken me in by accident!"

"I'll leave you to think it over," said Sam.

And, beckoning Stephen to him, the boys withdrew to the long windows at the other end of the room, out of earshot of the German. The short summer night was nearly past, and the dawn was beginning to straggle through the leaded panes, for the brothers had been some time with their prisoner.

"He'll have to agree, Steve," said Sam; "it's plain he's very keen to get away. He's lookin' pretty restless now, an' it's likely he's wanted for some important service when the daylight comes. He's an Engineer."

"But, I say," protested Steve, who had been rather bewildered by Sam's proposals, "of course, it'd be a cruel thing to see the old house smashed up, an' our fellows shot, an' all that, but have we the right to let this chap go? If he's as important to his side as all that, sha'n't we be savin' Cotehall at the expense of the old country? You said a chap's got to think of his Service first——"

"Quite right, old boy," said his brother, with a grim wink; "but when you've got nothing to lose charge a big price for it. We can't keep this Colonel Pilnitz, so let's sell him as dear as possible."

"Why can't we?"

"My dear Steve, how can we take a German colonel across miles of country, full of Germans, an' all by ourselves? It's a sheer impossibility to get him away to the British camp, an' it'll be broad daylight in half an hour. We could barely get through by ourselves. We'd be captured, an' he'd be rescued, for an absolute dead certainty, an' not a ha'p'orth of good done."

Stephen looked rueful, for he never liked to confess to impossibilities; but he knew it was true.

"He's bound to get away, you see," said Sam, "whatever we do. Suppose we were cornered properly? We can't shoot him, even then. I was only bluffin' when I threatened him with the pistol before his men. If they'd taken me at my word, hang me if I could have shot him!"

"It made me feel a bit queer," agreed Stephen.

"It may be all right, that sort of thing, but fightin's fightin', while blowing a helpless man's head off, even to save your life, is too much like butchery, an' I couldn't have made my finger pull the trigger. He thought we meant it, though. They ain't squeamish, you know, the Germans, if it's going to do their side any good, an' plenty of 'em would have done it."

"So I've heard. Of course, war's a tough game, but I'm glad you didn't, Sam. I see what you mean about Pilnitz."

"We can't keep him, you see, we can't take him away, an' we can't slaughter him. That's how I reckon it. But he don't know we wouldn't do the latter, so as he's got to go anyway, we'll make something out of him. To save Cotehall will be a big thing, if we can do it, though risky. We'll have a jolly good try——"

"Blow it! I forgot to tell you," said Stephen. "What a fool I am! When you were having the row with Pilnitz, an' the men rushed upstairs, there was one who didn't come with the rest, but bunked off down the park. It's occurred to me he most likely went to warn the next outpost, not knowing how big the row was."

"Just so," said Sam coolly; "an' it's also likely there was somebody else about who's got wind of what's happened since, an' carried the news. So just go up to the cupola on the roof, Steve, where you can see all round the horizon, an' keep a good look-out, for I reckon we shall get a call before sun-up. I think I saw a German flag at the flagstaff on the roof when I came in, by the way, though it was rather dark to see. Not very smart of 'em to leave it flying after sunset. If it is, Steve, haul it down, an' run up our old Union Jack again."

Stephen departed up the staircase, and Sam walked over to the prisoner, who was sitting with bowed head in a big armchair, and glowered savagely at the cadet.

"Well, colonel, have you come to any decision?" said Sam.

The prisoner made no reply.

"I suppose you're calculating on a force of your men coming to the rescue pretty soon," added Sam, dropping into the armchair opposite him. "I fear it won't make your case any better when they turn up. In fact, you'll be in rather a tighter place than ever."

Still Colonel Pilnitz did not answer, though it was easy to see Sam's remark gave him food for thought. They had sat there for fully half an hour, when Stephen came running down the staircase and into the room. He hesitated a moment as he saw Sam with the prisoner.

"What news, Steve?" said Sam, with a nod.

"You were right about that warning, Sam. There's a full half-company of Prussians an' a gun halted opposite the house, within six hundred yards. They've formed up, an' it looks as if they're goin' to shell us!"

"Ah," said Sam coolly, "I shouldn't wonder! The chap who got away probably told 'em the German guard here got the worst of it, an' were mopped up by the sudden risin' of the people in the house. It'd sound better like that, as he ran away. Did you run up that Union Jack, as I told you, Steve?"

"Yes, I did."

"That accounts for it, then. They suppose we've got the upper hand, an' wiped the billeted Germans out. They don't reckon on Pilnitz being a prisoner here. So they're going to wipe us out, without making any bones of it, an' knock the house to smithereens, too, I suppose. Cheerful folk!"

"It is no more than you did to the Boer farms in your African war, when they fired on your soldiers," growled the prisoner, in German.

"Oh, so you understand English, eh?" said Sam. "Of course, all German officers have to. Well, do you feel like closing with that bargain of mine? If you don't you'll be a corpse inside the hour. Hark! There goes the first shell!"

Colonel Pilnitz swore.

"You have not the choice," he said viciously. "Your house and you are bound to fall before our guns, and you cannot help but surrender."

"Not at all. I am now going to send my mother and sisters out by the back, under escort of my brother here, and he knows how to get them safely away. When that is done, you and I, colonel, will sit in this room while the house is brought down about our ears. And they evidently mean to blow it into smithereens—which a single field-gun can easily do—as a lesson to English householders. Do you hear that shell? It wasn't a bad shot, though the range is short."

The German officer cursed savagely as a shell burst with a devastating crash close to the big window, blowing in the panes.

"You dare not do it!" he cried. "You are trying to fool me!"

"I beg your pardon," said Sam quietly, "but I am in earnest. If the house is to be destroyed, I give you my word to sit with you here till we are both wiped out by the fire of your guns, and buried in the ruins of Cotehall. It rests with you whether you die here, or go free, and leave me the house undamaged."

"Are you boy, man, or devil?" cried Pilnitz savagely. "I wish I knew! If it were only for myself I would make no terms with you; but I am wanted urgently in the field, and must submit. I give my word, then, as an officer of the Kaiser, that as far as my authority carries this house shall not be attacked or destroyed unless it is used against our forces."

"But understand," he cried fiercely, "I will give no safe-conduct to you two! Since you told me this house is your father's, I know who you are, and the strong wish of General Von Adler to capture you. If that is what you ask, then I will stay here, and take my chance. All I will allow you is half an hour to get your women-folk away, as that is the reason for your bargain. They will reach safety, it may be, but you yourselves will not escape us!"

"Oh, that's all right!" replied Sam. "Give us half an hour to see the ladies out, an' if you can put salt on our tails at the end of that time you're welcome to. But I'll have the warranty in writing, if you please, with your signature, so that I can show authority to protect the house later, if it's needed. Here's paper and an inkstand. Cast his hands loose, Steve. Mind, I'm standing over you with this revolver, colonel."

Muttering to himself, the officer swiftly dashed off six or seven lines.

"Yes, that'll do," said Sam, running his eye over it. "Tie his fingers again, Steve, as I might have to leave him a moment or two. Now you hop off with this paper as quick as you can move, an' take it to the officer in charge of the men who are bombarding us, under a flag of truce. I must make sure that Colonel Pilnitz's authority is good enough to save the show before I let him go. When you return, if all's well, he shall be set loose. Look sharp, or those shells'll be knocking spots off us!"

Stephen made all speed down to the stables, where he found Sam's black charger, standing saddled in the first stall. Casting him loose, and jumping on his back, the boy galloped out across the park, straight towards the attacking party.

As he went he unslung his carbine, and knotted a large white handkerchief to the barrel. A shell came screaming past his ear on its way to the house, and two or three rifle-

bullets whistled by. Stephen raised the carbine high and galloped on, the white cloth fluttering in the wind.

The field-gun ceased firing, and, though a rifle or two cracked, these now stopped, and there was silence as the black horse galloped on. Stephen, who had more than expected to be shot down when the firing first failed to cease, now saw his flag was having the desired effect, for the time, at any rate. He pulled up to a walk as he came near the Germans, who made up a full half-company of forty, besides the crew of the gun, which stood menacing and silent, its black muzzle seeming to threaten the young messenger. The men and their leader, though silent, looked as menacing as the gun as they stared at the bearer of the white flag.

"All right, so far," thought Steve. "But I wonder what they'll do when I tell 'em about Pilnitz?"

Putting on a bold front, he spurred his horse forward, and pulled up before the German force.

"The officer of this company!" he cried, in a clear voice.

How the Uhlans Captured Ned of Northey.

A tall, clean-shaven youth, in the uniform of the Prussian Field Artillery, standing apart from his men, answered Stephen's call.

"I command here," he said. "Who are you, and where are you from?"

"From Cotehall Towers, under a flag of truce," replied Stephen.

"If you are one of the civilians who have risen against Colonel Pilnitz and killed him and his men, I can give no truce to you or to the house," returned the young German.

"Civilians!" snorted Stephen, forgetting his martial dignity. "Civilians be hanged——"

"That's just what they will be," returned the lieutenant, with a grin flickering at the corners of his mouth.

"Look here, I don't want any of your nerve!" retorted Stephen indignantly. "I am Sergeant Villiers of the Greyfriars Cadet Corps, in the King's Service, and we're topside, in spite of you and your gun. Here's a message from Colonel Pilnitz, who's alive an' kicking, an' so are his men. They are our prisoners."

The lieutenant took the missive handed to him, read it through, and whistled. In spite of his being an enemy, Stephen rather liked the look of him.

"Looks like a white man," he thought. "More than most of 'em. Smart chap in his service, I should say. That gun was well handled."

The German examined the letter carefully.

"You know what's in this?" he said.

"Yes, it's a mandate from Colonel Pilnitz that Cotehall is not to be bombarded, in return for his release," said Stephen. "I'll take it back, if you don't mind. Do you agree to it?"

"I've no option," said the lieutenant. "He commands, an' he's got to get away, of course. Rough on Pilnitz having to write this, though. Well, I must keep my gun here till you let him go, you know. Then we'll retire."

"All right," said Stephen, "I'll go and turn him loose. You won't need to use any more shells on Cotehall Towers."

"Hang me if I'm sorry!" said the lieutenant. "War's war, but I'm not fond of knockin' people's family homes down."

Stephen nodded, and, wheeling his horse, galloped back to the Towers.

"It's all right, Sam," he said. "Rather a decent bird, the gunner-lieutenant."

"Then your captivity is at an end, colonel," said Sam. "By the way, don't send any of your men to follow us, because that won't be playin' the game."

"There will be no need," said Pilnitz grimly: and in another two minutes he was on the gravel before the house, and Stephen opened the wine-cellar door and let the prisoners out.

His fears were realised, for they came out arm-in-arm, their faces rather flushed and wreathed in wobbly smiles, singing at the top of their voices the chorus of a song about "Der guter Wein," as they gambolled up to their colonel.

"I'm afraid they're rather cheerier than they ought to be," said Sam. "My young brother locked them in the wine-cellar instead of the coal-cellar. Well, good-bye, colonel. I'm sorry if we've inconvenienced you since we've arrived, but it's the fortune of war."

"Make the most of your half-hour!" said Pilnitz savagely, gnawing his moustache.

"I mean to," returned Sam, as the colonel strode away, swearing at his men. "Now, Steve, hurry! Call up Ned, an' shove the two best horses in the light carriage."

While this was done, Sam went and acquainted his mother with the news. She and the girls had been out of harm's way in the west wing, and great was the rejoicing when they learned that the home was saved. Mrs. Villiers, hearing it, wanted to remain, but Sam insisted that she must go right away from the war and the Germans altogether; and in another ten minutes they were all bowling swiftly along the London Road, Ned included.

They were held up twice by the rifles of German pickets, but Colonel Pilnitz's letter at once let them through, and the boys did not leave the carriage till they reached Ingatestone Station. The main line was held by the British, and there was no difficulty in sending the ladies up by train to London. A train was just arriving with many other refugees as the carriage arrived, and the leave-taking was swift.

"My heart is sore to leave you, boys," said Mrs. Villiers sadly; "but there is no calling you from your duty."

"Yes; we must get back," said Sam. "It's a load off our minds to know you and the girls are safe, mother. We can work with free hands now."

"You have borne yourselves like men," said his mother proudly. "Promise me, boys, to get to your father and let him know, if you can, what has happened. He will be in agonies of anxiety if he goes to Cotehall and finds no news of us, and the place shelled."

"We'll seek him out the moment we've done our work beyond here," said Sam. And then came the farewells.

"Heaven bless you, boys!" said Mrs. Villiers, her cheeks wet, as the train steamed out. "Day and night I shall pray for your father and you, for King and country, and if every Briton does his duty you will rid us of the Kaiser's scourge, and drive his hordes back into the sea!"

The train sped on its way, the girls waving from the windows. The boys—and Ned, too—felt more than a little choky as they left the station, for the odds were against their ever seeing the departed ones again.

"To work!" said Sam, thumping his brother on the back as they reached the road. "That's the best cure for the blues!"

"I'm ready," said Stephen. "Which way now?"

"Straight back towards Cotehall. "I've more than a notion we've been followed up, in spite of what Pilnitz said."

"Why Cotehall? What about father?"

"We haven't finished our work at the Moat House yet. We've got to make a job of that. And to Cotehall we go, because that's the last way they'll look for us. Once we pass that search-party, all's clear."

They marched rapidly back along the road for three miles, and then left it for the fields. Sam, bidding the others keep close to him, led the way with his accustomed skill, for there was no field or wood near Cotehall that he did not know like a book. He presently entered a small dingle full of thick bracken and bushes within sight of the high-road, and there made his companions hide alongside him.

"The half-hour's up three times over," said Stephen. "Wonder if they'd have kept to it if they'd caught us?"

Another half-hour passed in silence, and then a scattered party of six Uhlans and a sergeant came riding by, looking over the road and country-side in all directions. One of them passed within twenty feet of the hiding-place.

"They're after us," murmured Sam, when the enemy had ridden on out of sight. "That's the little search-party. Pilnitz means havin' us. Von Adler won't be pleased with him, an' our bird 'ud like to have that letter back. Come on, we're clear now. They'll go spreading out westwards all the way for us."

They pushed on towards Cotehall, and found there were now no signs of Germans nearer than a couple of miles of it, at which range Sam's glasses made out a considerable army to the eastward, nearer the River Crouch and the sea.

"That'll be Pilnitz an' his lot," said Sam, "doin' the work he was so keen to get away for. Pity we had to lose him; but, as you've seen, we could never have got a resisting prisoner through the lines an' outposts."

"We've done very well, I think," said Stephen. "We ought to hurry north as soon as we've finished here, an' let General Nugent or somebody know that there's an important game goin' on here."

"I expect they know it; but our men have got their hands full all round, an' there's such a muddle; they haven't got all the reserves to the Colours yet. We must—— Hallo! Why, it's Farmer Jepson an' young Phillips!"

The sound of horses approaching at a gallop made the boys take cover and seize their weapons; but they soon saw there was nothing to fear. The two horsemen who rode swiftly along the chase leading to Cotehall were known to them—one a farmer on the estate, and the other his foreman.

"What, be it Master Aubrey?" cried Jepson, reigning up

as he saw Sam step out. "How's all at Cotehall? I'm come from your father, who's achin' to know if the Germans be this way, an' if his wife an' girls be safe, for he's ordered not to move his troop afore ten."

"My father? Where is he?" exclaimed Sam. "All's well here!"

"Glory be!" said the farmer. "Glad he'll be at the news. He's at Stock, with his troop o' Yeomanry; an' a rare hard fight they had at dawn with a patrol o' Prussian Lancers, an' wholly wiped 'em out. I came across him waitin' wi' his men half an hour since; an' seein' he was eatin' his heart out for fear of his wife an' daughters, I offered to ride down this way an' find out for him."

"Great guns! It's a miracle you got through, Jepson!" said Stephen.

"I couldn't ha' done it but for ridin' very light," said the farmer simply. "We was fired on twice by pickets, as they call 'em, an' I've a bullet through my hat."

"How did you come?"

The farmer told him the route he had ridden from Stock.

"No wonder you had narrow shaves. You should go round by Crowsheath on your way back. If you'll give my father this message, Jepson, I'll be awfully obliged."

He put in a few words the state of things at Cotehall, and the escape of his mother and the girls. Jepson listened attentively, and Sam told him briefly the best way to go back to avoid the Germans.

"You've done splendidly, young gentlemen!" said Jepson. "Gosh, your father'll be a proud man! Joe an' me will ride back poste-haste an' let 'em know all's safe. Good-bye, an' good luck!"

"He's a grand fellow, old Jepson," said Sam, as the farmer galloped off. "I say, Steve, now we know where the governor is we ought to try an' find out what Pilnitz is up to, and how many men he's got. If we get the news quickly to father, he may be able to come down an' give him socks, if he's got enough men to stand any chance."

"Right," said Steve; "that's the thing to do! But what about the Moat House?"

Sam went into Cotehall Towers at once, and, ascending to the cupola on the roof, whence he could command a view of the other house, he watched it carefully through his glasses.

"This is bad," he said—"or, rather, it would be if we hadn't mined the place!"

"Why?"

"There's a company of Engineers there, a field telegraph, an' a transport corps. They're making the place into a regular base, an' that means there's goin' to be a big German force along here soon, an' the Moat House an' keep will be very important to them. I wish I could tell from here just what the Engineers are up to; but it's something big, or there wouldn't be a full company of 'em. It means there's trouble brewin' there for our men when the big fight comes, an' there's only one thing for us to do."

"What?" said Stephen, as they descended.

"Blow it up. I mined the house an' keep before I left—that's what I sent you on for. The wires lead through the underground passage, an' there's only a couple of buttons to press. I don't think it can fail. The only thing is that we're both wanted round Pilnitz's men away yonder. I'll take too long to scout both sides of him, an' one of us is likely to get nabbed, anyhow. It won't do to fire the mine at the Moat House first, either. I don't know which of us to spare for the job, Steve."

"Let me do it, Master Aubrey," said Ned, who had joined them, and overheard.

"You, Ned!" said Sam.

"I know the way there. I helped bring the womenfolk away yesterday."

"It's a dangerous job. I don't know if I ought to give it you, as you're a civilian, an' would get shot if you're caught."

"They'd shoot any of us if they nabbed us at it," said Ned quietly. "It's no riskier than you playin' round Pilnitz yonder, when he'd give two fingers to get hold of you. I can do it while you go after him."

"Right! Then you shall, Ned. You've got a head on you, an' can go as quietly as any of us. It won't be hard gettin' to the place, anyhow. Listen, an' I'll tell you just what to do."

Sam gave him instructions how to find the two bell-pushes he had left on the wires in the underground passages, and told him to press them both, the left-hand one first.

"That leads to the keep-tower," he said. "If you blow up the house first you'll destroy the wires leadin' to the keep, which is the most important of the two. See?"

"I'm there," said Ned. "I'll go now, an' you needn't fear I'll fail you, Master Aubrey."

"I know you won't, Ned. When you've done it, lie low in the passage-way till dark—they'll never discover it, nor know how the damage was done. Then come out at nightfall, an' follow on to Stock, where you'll get news of us."

The three parted, and Ned, his eyes glistening with delight at having an important mission entrusted to him, went his way. The tough young marshman, who was in his element when stalking fish, fowl, or men, did not take long to come within reach of his goal, and the way was not a hard one. There were no Germans between Cotehall and the Moat House.

The latter place was guarded by sentries, however, who patrolled on the inner side of the moat, and there was also a watcher on the top of the tower. It was this latter only that troubled Ned, whose sharp eyes spotted him from afar; but he approached down a long line of hedge which hid him from the view of the tower.

The entrance to the passage, as may be remembered, was nearly a quarter of a mile from the house itself, and Ned at last reached it after a good deal of waiting and watching, during which time he saw a numerous party of German Engineers as busy as ants about the Moat House, and now and then a patrol of Uhlans, who were riding round and round slowly a good way off the centre, passed near the hedge where Ned lay waiting for his chance. The place was well guarded, but the solitary scout had no great difficulty in reaching the spot he sought, and when the Uhlans were round at the other side he slipped across, and through the screen of bushes into the cool cavity behind them.

It took Ned but a minute to find the two bell-pushes, and when he had hold of them he realised that he held the fate of the Moat House and the company of Engineers in his hands.

Tough as he was, for a moment Ned's heart misgave him.

"It's ugly work, killin' men like that," he said to himself. "It seems like murder. An' I believe they don't do it in war nowadays, nor Master Aubrey didn't mean it either. It's the tower an' house he wants to go, and blow me if I can murder them poor devils. Let's see if it can't be managed, anyhow."

He went to the entrance, and peered over the brink of the little dell cautiously. He saw that the Germans were going to and returning from the house in a large party at intervals, each time bearing with them gear or stores that he could not make out the nature of. It comforted Ned's qualms, however, and he chose the moment when they left the house, and darted in to his two switches.

"Some will have to go. Those who are in the house, if there's any!" he muttered. "It's for the Old Country's sake. Them against us, an' it's my duty."

His finger pressed the left-hand switch, and then instantly the right.

Two explosions like muffled thunder reached him, and the ground seemed to shake underfoot and all through the tunnel. The earth from the passage roof trickled down over his head in little showers of dust and pebbles, shaken loose by the shock. A confused, distant shouting reached him, and then all was still.

Ned stood stock-still, grasping the switches as if they were handles to hold on by. Moat House and Tower, both must be gone, he knew, though he could hardly realise it. The echoes of the two explosions were still rumbling faintly along the passage.

"I wonder if they're blown to bits?" thought Ned, a cold sweat breaking out on him, for this kind of work was new to the young marshman. The power to blow up two buildings by the pressure of his fingers on a button while hidden safely underground, was outside his experience. Then he threw down the switches, and tried to imagine the scene outside.

The faint sounds of shouting and the murmur of distant voices reached him in his dark retreat, and Ned felt an overpowering longing to see what the result of his act had been.

"Gosh! I'd give a couple o' fingers to see just what's happened!" he muttered. "I feels cooped up here like an eel in a float-box."

He stole down towards the mouth of the passage, and listened. All seemed strangely quiet outside now. The demon of curiosity gnawed him beyond bearing, and presently he looked out through the screen of bushes. There was nothing to be seen. The Moat House was only visible from the top of the little slope on which the passage opened, and Ned felt he must have a look at it or die.

He crept up among the broom-bushes and peered over the brink of the dell. One glance showed him there had been no failure about the explosion. Of the keep-tower

only the two lower storeys stood, and the house itself was a shell. The powder stores had not been enough to blow it sky-high, as Ned half expected, but they had lifted up the inside and roof so that they fell back and left the back and front walls standing alone like ragged ramparts.

The company of German Engineers were swiftly getting their stores and gear together beyond the house, and, by their numbers it was plain that few, if any of them, had been caught by the explosion. Half of them were already marching swiftly away towards Pilnitz's position, under the charge of an officer, and Ned chuckled as he thought of the surprise and consternation the sudden collapse must have caused them.

A single glance was enough to show him all this, and he was about to retreat again, when a sudden yell behind him made him crouch flat. But it was too late. Tearing round the field at full gallop came a party of Uhlans. One of them had already seen him, and they were upon him before he could dart back to his lair. He made a spring for it, hoping to get in before they saw where he went, but three of the cavalrymen, dashing into the dell by the lower end, cut him off.

"Catch him! Don't lance him!" shouted the lieutenant in charge of the Uhlans, and next moment a big German had flung himself bodily on to Ned and bore him to the ground.

The young marshman had his assailant by the throat as they rolled over, but the struggle did not last, for two more Uhlans sprang down as they reined in their horses, and among them Ned was secured and made prisoner. They jerked him to his feet and held him fast as the lieutenant approached.

"A civilian, Herr Lieutenant," said the sergeant of the Uhlans, who was holding Ned, "but he——"

"Civilian! A spy more likely!" said the officer, as he rode up to the prisoner, and looked him over fiercely. "Who are you, fellow? Give an account of yourself quickly!"

"It's no good jabberin' at me!" said Ned, in good, round Essex. "I don't talk your lingo; an' I'd tell you nothin' if I could."

"Have you taken a prisoner, Steinmetz?" said the captain of the Engineer company, who had ridden up on seeing the disturbance. "What is he?"

"Don't know; but we'd better shoot him and make sure," said the lieutenant. "He's here for no good. Where did he come from, Hagen?"

"I didn't see, sir, but he was diving into these bushes when I rode him down," said the Uhlan who had seized Ned first. "Maybe there's some more, sir. Ach, the lance goes right through!" he said in surprise, as he thrust his weapon at the bushes on the slope.

As he happened to hit on the spot where the screened opening was, naturally the lance met no resistance.

"What!" said the Uhlan lieutenant. "Let us see into this."

He parted the bushes, and, of course, found the passage at once, cutting away the scrub with his sword. The two officers glanced grimly at each other as they saw the opening.

"He's only a rat who lives in a hole, after all!" said the lieutenant, in disgust. "Queer animals these British are! I thought perhaps we'd caught a prisoner worth taking, but if he only lived in there for fear of our troops——"

"Don't be in a hurry. I fancy there's more in it than that," said the Engineer officer, with a keen glance of suspicion, first at the entrance, and then at Ned. "Keep your prisoner, lieutenant, while I search this place. This is in my line, it seems."

He took a revolver in one hand, and disappeared into the dim light of the passage, and round the corner of it. Ned waited with a beating heart, the Uhlans mounting guard over him, and the lieutenant watching the entrance and gnawing his moustache.

The young marshman had little hope, since the passage was discovered. Before that he thought he might possibly be spared, as he was a civilian, and there was no open proof he had been at work against the invaders. But he knew well that only one fate could await him if they found the explosion was due to him.

The waiting was the worst part of it all. The Engineer officer seemed to be gone an age. But when at last he reappeared, Ned's heart sank within him, for he saw by the grim look on the German's face that the switches had been discovered.

"You have done well to catch this man," said the captain to the Uhlan officer. "My suspicions prove correct. The house was mined; for electric wires lead to it from this passage; and the switches are there still. It is to this English pig"—he pointed savagely to Ned—"that we owe the blowing up of the house and tower and the wreck of my plans."

"Potzausend!" cried the Uhlan, with an oath. "Then he shall be shot at once; or, better, hanged to a tree, for a lesson to the rest of his countrymen!"

"Let it be done without delay!" cried the Engineer, who was beside himself with rage at the thought of the disaster Ned had brought to his schemes. "You hear, Britisher!" he said fiercely to the prisoner, in broken English. "You will deny this outrage, no doubt, but that avails you nothing, for your guilt is clear. Have you anything to say before you are executed?"

"Outrage be blowed, an' guilt, too!" retorted Ned. "What guilt there is is on your side, sneakin' over here an' raidin' us when there's no war. That house is the house o' my masters, an' it's theirs to blow up or let alone, as they choose. I did it, an' I'm glad of it! That's all I've got to say!"

"We need waste no time," said the Uhlan contemptuously. "Bind his hands, sergeant. Get a halter, and we'll string him up close by the house where he can be seen."

"Wait a little," said the Engineer, who had understood Ned's reply. "Don't be in a hurry, Steinmetz. He says he belongs to the house. Colonel Pilnitz had better see him first. He may be one of those youngsters the colonel is so anxious to get hold of, and who got away this morning."

"Well, but he'll be just as safe with a rope round his neck. The Herr Colonel can recognise him just as well."

"Colonel Pilnitz's orders were that they were to be brought to him alive!" said the Engineer grimly. "You need have no fear about the result. Take your prisoner inside the moat, and I will let the colonel have the news, for I go to him now to report."

The captain rejoined his men, and departed, and the Uhlans, binding Ned's hands behind him with a strap, fastened the latter to the sergeant's horse, and forced him to go with them. The moat had had a rough, broad bridge of planks thrown across it, and over this rode the mounted patrol. Ned was able to see at close quarters the havoc the explosion had caused, and, in spite of his hopeless plight, it gave him a feeling of grim satisfaction.

"I've left my mark on 'em, anyway," he muttered to himself. "P'r'aps if I'd known they were goin' to hang me like a dog, I shouldn't ha' taken so much trouble to see 'em clear before I blew the place up."

His captors dismounted, and the strap that bound him was made fast to a staple in the wall of an outhouse that had escaped the general wreckage. Two troopers, with unslung carbines, were set to guard him, and the rest of the squad took things easy, being bidden to rest and let their horses graze.

Presently more Uhlans came in—a full troop of them. They had been scouring the neighbourhood since the explosion in search of any suspicious person, and seemed rather jealous of the lieutenant's luck in capturing the offender.

The time dragged by. Half an hour, three-quarters, one hour. Ned needed all his fortitude to bear it, for he knew his fate was sure. The troopers talked or joked among themselves as they glanced at him, but still no message came.

"Shot or hanged, it's all one so long as they make haste," thought Ned, his heart like lead within him; "but it's this waitin' that's cruel!"

Then he looked up, and saw across the park two or three mounted men approaching at a canter. They were not Uhlans, and soon Ned recognised the foremost as Colonel Pilnitz; the others were officers in his command.

In a minute the party had crossed the moat from the park side, and was met by the captain and lieutenant of the Uhlans, who saluted. Colonel Pilnitz looked in a very bad humour indeed as he saw the wrecked house and tower.

"I have heard the details of this disaster," he said sharply, as the captain began his report, "and the rest I can see for myself. Where is the prisoner who was the cause of it?"

Ned was pointed out to him. There was a flash of recognition in the colonel's eye, but he looked disappointed.

"This is not one of the two I wanted," he said, "though he was with them this morning, and appears to be in their service. Let him be shot forthwith."

The Uhlan captain saluted.

"I have not time to see the execution carried out," said Pilnitz. "Draw your troop up, and do the thing quickly, but in proper form. It is well these British civilians should know what to expect when they attempt to hinder us. When it is done, follow after me to the marshes."

Colonel Pilnitz, after a short inspection of the ruins, wheeled and galloped away, muttering savagely to himself, and followed by his staff. The Uhlan captain's commands rang out, and Ned was detached from his staple, and led out before the front wall of the wrecked Moat House.

The troop mounted, and drew up a little way beyond; the lieutenant beside them. Six troopers had already been chosen for the firing-party, and their horses were held by two others, apart from the main troop.

"Place him with his back against the wall!" said the captain; and Ned was left with bound arms, facing the six troopers with their carbines, who were marched forward, and halted twenty paces before him.

"Prisoner," said the captain harshly, "you are about to suffer death in accordance with the Commander-in-Chief's proclamation, condemning to be shot any British civilian caught obstructing the operations of the Kaiser's forces. So perish all his enemies!"

"Fire away, an' don't talk so much!" said Ned, between his teeth; and he faced the firing-party without a tremor.

"Ready! Present!" cried the Uhlan captain.

The six carbines were levelled at Ned's breast.

How the Yeomen Rode to Cotehall.

"I hope I haven't given Ned a job outside his weight," said Sam rather doubtfully, as he and Stephen struck out to the eastward from Cotehall.

"Don't see how he can make a mistake, if he goes to the place an' presses the buttons," replied Stephen.

"I should never forgive myself if anything happened to him, though. He ain't in the Service. Only we needed an extra hand badly."

"He's bound to be all right if he obeys orders, an' stays in the passage," said his brother. "They'd never find it if they searched for a year. Which way to Pilnitz, Sam?"

"Follow me, an' we'll part at the right time," said Sam, and, losing as little ground as possible, he led the way out round Cotehall, and through the woods at the south-east.

The young scout had no difficulty in dodging the single German outpost that guarded the way, and having got round this, half an hour more brought them within sight of the dry marshes skirting the estuary of the Crouch.

There, in plain view, were Pilnitz's two companies of Engineers, spread out over the ditch-covered plain, and busy as ants. Sam watched them for some time without speaking.

"That's a rummy place for a fight," he said at last; "but it's evident they expect to make a stand there with a big force. They're cuttin' trenches all over the place!"

"P'r'aps it's meant to fall back on, in case they get socks up by Colchester."

"I believe you've hit it, young 'un. They don't leave much to chance, these Germans. An' although it's in the open, it'd be the dickens of a strong position, with all the men in deep trenches, an' guns on the tops of those slopes an' behind the river-wall."

"But why is Pilnitz doin' trenching work? A line regiment or two could do that in no time."

"He's got something more on than that. We've got to see what his Engineers are up to. You skirt round that side, keepin' well under cover, an' I'll go this way. Go slow, an' take care you aren't caught. Meet here again in half an hour."

The boys separated, and each went his way, creeping along the ditch-bottoms, and taking advantage of every hedge. All that they saw of the distant Germans and the work that was going on they made mental notes of, but it need not be set down here at length. It was a very pretty bit of scouting, and in less than half an hour they met again in the little copse, and told each other what they had seen.

"That's it," nodded Sam; "he's mining the whole front, in case of an attack when the troops are there. It'd be an awfully ugly smash for our men if they were caught in such a trap—he could blow up a regiment or two in one go. It ain't fair war. But there's another thing. I know the Crouch dykes an' the Crouch tides, an' there's something I think Pilnitz has overlooked, engineer though he is."

"I think I know what you mean," said Stephen.

"Now our job's to get back an' report. The news'll be worth a lot to Nugent. We must reach him by evening."

Sam relaxed not a whit of caution in getting to Cotehall again, which the boys reached safely. Their horses, which they had left in the stables, were once more mounted; for as Sam said, they would have to travel speedily, and risk a shot or two. Stock was the first point to make for, and the boys led their horses the first mile, till they were well away from Cotehall.

"I say, the Moat House is still standing," said Stephen, as they sighted it over a mile away on the right. "Ned hasn't touched it off yet. How's that?"

"It'll take him a good while to get there if he has to dodge the patrols," returned Sam. "He—— By gum! There it goes!"

Even as their eyes rested on the distant house, they saw it suddenly lift and collapse, like a man who receives the strong right knee of an enemy in his back.

"Hold the horses, Steve! I must spend a minute here, an' see what's done!" exclaimed Sam.

He lay flat on the crest of the hill, and levelled his powerful field-glasses at the scene. For over a minute he watched the Engineer company trying to save their gear, and scurrying out; and then he saw something that sent the blood from his cheeks.

"Good heavens!" he muttered, aghast. For another minute he peered through the glasses, and then, springing up, ran back to his brother. "Steve, they've got him!"

"What, Ned?" cried the younger boy.

"A party of Uhlans have nabbed him outside the passage entrance! They've got him bound, an' they've discovered the place!"

"Then he's no better than a dead man!" said Stephen, with a groan.

"Up with you, Steve!" cried Sam. "We must ride to father an' his Yeomen as fast as the beasts'll carry us, an' bring them to the rescue!"

In another moment the boys were speeding to the northward as fast as their horses could gallop. They took no heed of roundabout routes or avoiding the enemy now, but went the shortest way.

Not a word passed between them during the ride. They bent low on their horses' necks as four or five shots whizzed by them from a German outpost near the main road, but in ten seconds they were past, and out of sight. At last the village of Stock came into sight, well beyond the last of the enemy's pickets, and the short, hard ride came to an end as a Yeoman sentry challenged them.

They answered, and dashed past him into the bivouac, where a full troop of stalwart Essex Yeomanry were at their midday meal. They sprang up as the boys galloped in, and a tall, handsome man, who commanded the troop, hastened forward.

"Sam! Steve!" he called.

"Father!" cried Sam, reining up short abreast of him. "You got my message from Cotehall? Mount an' ride—bring the troop with you! Ned Musset, who helped us get mother away an' saved our lives, is caught by a troop of Uhlans, an' they're goin' to shoot him!"

"Can you save him, dad?" cried Stephen. "If you can't, we must ride back! We——"

"Report quickly what the force is, and where!" said Captain Villiers.

In a few words Sam told him of the blowing up of the tower, and its result.

"To horse, boys!" cried the captain to his troop, springing to his great iron-grey charger. "A hard ride, and a fight at the end of it!"

(Another long instalment next Thursday. Order your copy of "THE GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price 1d.)

"IN THE RANKS." A Splendid Story of Army Life, in the "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Halfpenny.



WHOM TO WRITE TO: The Editor, "GEM" Library, 23-9, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

Tom Merry in New York.

The new conditions surrounding the chums of St. Jim's lead to some highly exciting adventures, Captain "Puntah" being very much in evidence. In fact, a little too much so for the comfort and well-being of Arthur Augustus.

Needless to say the cute Yankee does not get much change out of Tom.

Now, to you all A MERRY CHRISTMAS is the wish of

The EDITOR.

Printed and published weekly by the Proprietors 23, Bouverie Street, London, England. Subscription, 4s. 4d. per annum. Saturday, December 20th, 1908.

£500

TO BE GIVEN AWAY.



We will give £100 for the correct solution of this rebus. Take your time about it; if you think you are right, send your solution to us at once. It represents a familiar saying of great antiquity. Remember, there is only one correct solution. Probably very few will send in the right answer. If more than one is received we shall invite two non-contestants to award the cash *pro rata*. There will also be many consolation prizes of one guinea each. Other handsome cash prizes of £15, £10, and £5 will be given, apart from this competition. There is only one easy condition, which need cost you nothing, and about which we will write when we receive your solution. If a stamp is enclosed we will inform you if your solution is incorrect. Finally, every promise in this advertisement will be scrupulously carried out, and all will be treated with equal justice.—DE LUXE JEWEL CO. (Dept. 3), 6, Duke Street, Strand, London, W.C.

The BUFFALO KING AIR GUN.

Shoots death-dealing bullets with terrific force, killing Birds and Rabbits easily at long range. Round shot, darts, or slugs used. Send for list. LARGEST STOCK IN THE WORLD.



4/6 each, post free.

Frank Clarke, Crown Gun Works, 66, Gt. Charles St., Birmingham

VENTRILOQUISM.—Anyone can learn this Wonderful, Laughable art. Failure impossible with this book, containing over 30 pages of instructions and amusing dialogues. Post free, 6d. Thought Reading included Free.—IRONMONGER, Publisher, ILKESTON.

THE UNIVERSAL PRINTING OUTFIT.

1/- For Marking Books, Papers, Linen, etc. Any 3 lines of wording can be printed. Contains good supply of type and everything ready for use. Post free. F. R. IRONMONGER & Co., Station Rd., Ilkeston. **1/-**

SPECIAL BOOKS. "Boxing," 4d.; "Thought-Reading," 4d.; "Handcuff Mystery," 4d.; "Conjuring," 4d.; "Riddle Book" (containing 2,000), 4d.; "Book of Tricks," 4d. Lot 1/4, all post free.—F. R. IRONMONGER, Publisher, ILKESTON.

FREE.—As an introduction to other wonderful new novelties, send 4 stamps to defray cost of postage, packing, &c., &c., for which we will send you the greatest, delightful and most laughable novelty on earth. Thousands already given away.—Address, IRONMONGER, Novelty Emporium (Dept. 25), Ilkeston.

The Boy Detectives' case this week in

THE MARVEL

"The Disappearance of Dr. Glyn."

By DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR COLES.

READ IT.

GIVEN AWAY with the

BOYS' FRIEND

With this week's issue of the BOYS' FRIEND will be given away the first of a series of Plates under the title of the BOYS' FRIEND Gallery of

Famous Footballers and Football Teams.

Each Plate will give the names, weights, and heights of the players, and will be worth framing. Get the BOYS' FRIEND this week (price 1d.) and secure a fine Plate of the

LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL TEAM.

3

NEW NUMBERS OF

"THE BOYS' FRIEND"

3D. COMPLETE LIBRARY

NOW ON SALE.

No. 67.
"THE SECRET OF ST. WINIFRED'S,"
A Complete Tale of School Life.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

No. 68.
"SEXTON BLAKE'S TRUST,"
A Thrilling New Story of the Great Detective.

No. 69.
"A LANCASHIRE LAD,"
An Enthralling Tale of the Cotton Mills,
By DAVID GOODWIN.

THEY ARE

BOOKS YOU CAN READ AND ENJOY

PRICE:

3D. EACH.

Dale

26/12/