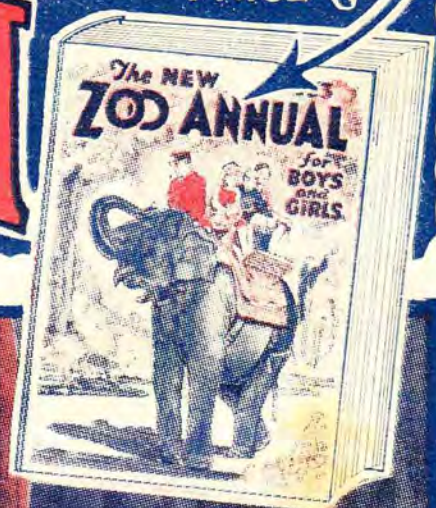


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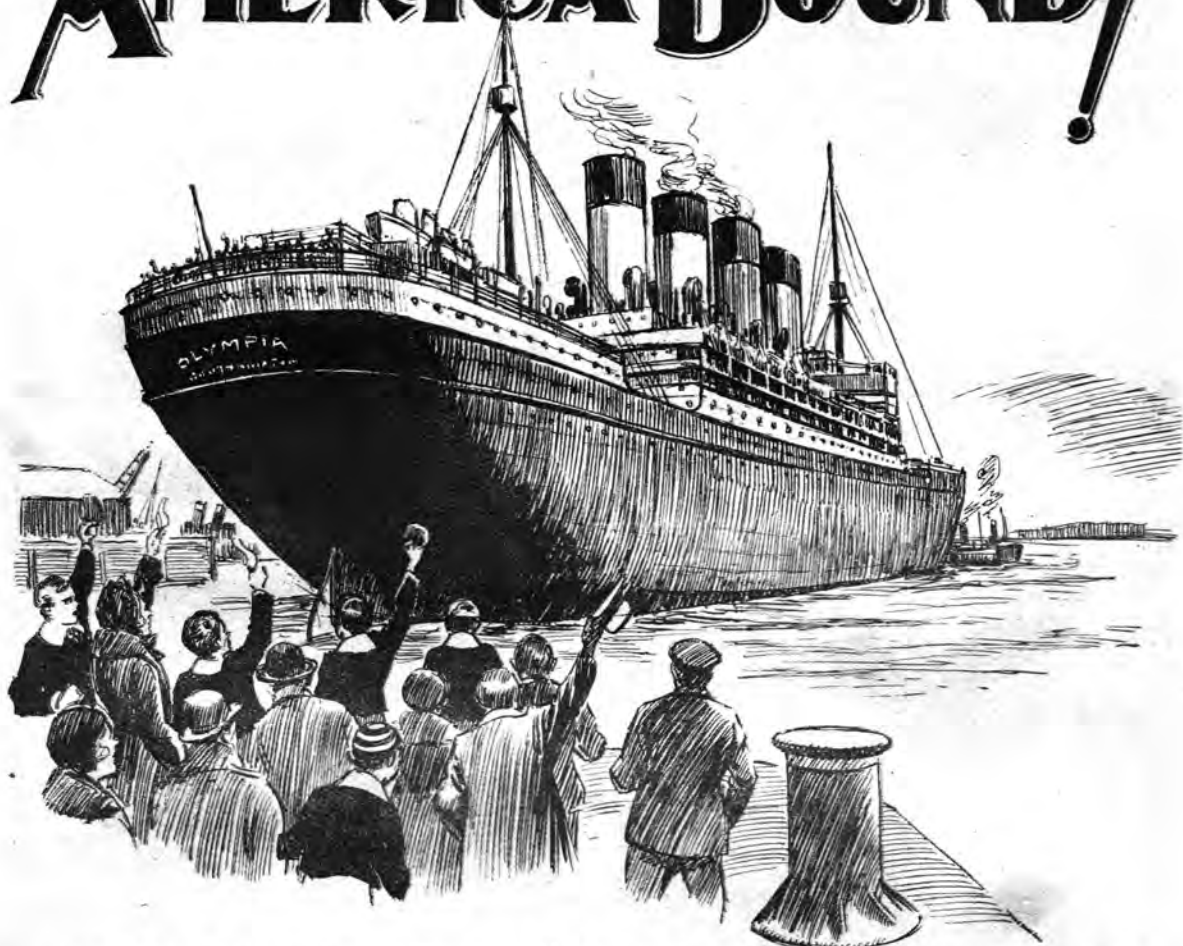
The GEM

2d



A RIPPING LONG YARN OF THRILLS AND ADVENTURE ON—

AMERICA BOUND!



When Tom Merry got a cable from his eccentric uncle asking him to go out to Arizona, he little thought of the strange adventures that were to befall him and his chums before they saw St. Jim's again!

CHAPTER 1.

Breaking Up!

"HERE comes the charabanc!"

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 eeriness 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 charabancs 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 opposite forces of School House

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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 charabanc 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 charabanc, all the same, in the exuberance of their spirits.

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

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

Tom Merry was the first in the conveyance 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 School House juniors drove them back. Manners and Lowther, Herries and D'Arcy, Reilly and Kerruish, crowded into the charabanc 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 charabanc.

By Martin Clifford.

It had halted before the School House, and the driver sat in his seat philosophically smoking his pipe and looking on. The New House juniors clambered over wheels and back, anywhere and everywhere, and were met by hearty smiles from the garrison of the charabanc.

"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 intention, and dropped the orange behind him, and industriously helped Figgins into the charabanc. 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 charabanc by his legs, and bumped in the snow, sat up and adjusted his spectacles, and looked round 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 conveyance 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 the cheek of 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 charabanc was crowded. School House and New House boys were mingled on the best of terms. The driver let in the clutch, and the boys who had not been able to obtain seats drew back to wait for the next charabanc. 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 charabanc 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 vewy 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 Christmas if we don't see the old familiar faces wound the festive board," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally have to apologise for my young bwethah, Tom Mewwy. He is comin' away on a vac with his collah stained with wed ink, and his necktie

all cwooked. I will make him assume a little more respectable appearance before we awwive at your esteemed governess' residence at Hucklebewwy Heath."

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

"Weally, Wally—"

"Rats! Tom Merry's got a spot of ink on his own collah, 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.

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 fealful wuffians!"

"Give 'em a volley!" roared Grimes.

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

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 attack.

"Stop a minute, driver!"

The charabanc halted.

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

In a minute the air was thick with 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 hedge.

"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 farther 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 charabanc 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 charabanc, 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.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's all right. The Grammar eads 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!"

And the St. Jim's juniors, in a compact body, charged the Grammarians. The latter stood their ground well, but there was no resisting the charge. After a brief struggle the Grammar School youths were hurled back into the station, and a running conflict was maintained to the platform by the rival parties. The sleepy porter and the equally sleepy stationmaster of Rylcombe had no mind to interfere. On break-up day at the two schools they expected ructions in Rylcombe. The boys had a store of exuberant spirits to let off somehow.

Saints and Grammarians crowded upon the platform in mingled disorder, shouting and struggling, and the riot was still in progress when the train came snorting in.

"Stand back there!"

Before the train had stopped there was a rush for the carriages. Other vehicles full of Saints had arrived, and Tom Merry's party was greatly reinforced. Tom Merry & Co. made a rush for the nearest first-class carriage, and swarmed into it, shoving the Grammarians recklessly out of the way. Frank Monk clung to the door, and Lane squirmed in along with the Saints. Carboy was sprawling on the platform with three or four more Grammarians across him.

"Look out there!"

"Shut the door!"

The train was soon swarming with boys. There were not enough carriages for the whole number, but no one was inclined to wait for the second train that was to follow immediately. 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 juniors as could crowd there leaned out and waved hats and caps to the Grammarians.

The train began to move.

The defeated Grammarians stood on the platform. Frank Monk was wiping his face with his handkerchief, and Lane was stopping a flow of "claret" from his nose. But their good humour and high spirits were unabated.

"Merry Christmas, Monkey!" yelled Tom Merry.

And the Grammarians shouted back cheerily.

Every window of the train was crammed with faces and waving hands, and the train swept out of the station to the accompaniment of wild shouts and catcalls.

Tom Merry sank back into the nearest seat as the train left the station, and the crowded platform disappeared, giving place to the wide, snowy countryside.

There was a gasp from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, upon whose knees he had involuntarily seated himself.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, you are ewushin' my twousahs!"

"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 room 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 School rotter!" howled Fatty Wynn. "You—you wasted good grub! Figgins!"

"You've got enough in your 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, 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 savels.

Arthur Augustus, who had a corner seat, had been showing some signs of uneasiness, moving his feet to and fro, and rose at last 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 gnawing my boots!" exclaimed Reilly.

"Phwat is it entirely? Holy Moses, it's a dog!"

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

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

"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 throwin' 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 extremely wotten of you to bwing that fearful beast on a visit to Tom Mewwy's respected governess, Wally."

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

"Of course it is!" said Wally. "Where I go, Pongo goes."

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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 savoley in his hand.

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

The savoley flew from the excited Fatty's hand, and whisked away over the 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 supplies 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, 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 at 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 went on, waving both hands excitedly, and, for convenience sake, holding the big apple with his teeth. He made a very curious figure as he stood there, 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 which leaves protruded of loose notes.

Skimpole, 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 genius of St. Jim's under the chin, and Skimpole jumped up, and half his valuable notes scattered over the floor of the carriage.

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 trodden 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



"Good-bye," shouted Lowther, Tom Merry, and D'Arcy as the train went on and left Fatty Wynn standing on the platform. He was a curious figure, standing there waving both his arms, with an enormous apple held in his mouth!

"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 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 Determinism, Individualism, and Collectivism," said Skimpole.

"Get out, you ass!"

"I really cannot—ow—I can—owowww!"

to tread on him for? Now he's gone under the seat again! Pongo! Good old 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—"

"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 taking no effect upon his thick glove, 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 astonished 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 Merry's old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. Tom Merry had invited Skimpole at the last moment, out of the kindness of his heart.

"Bai Jove! Where's that young ass, Wally? Wally! Ah, there you are! I was beginning to hope that that wotten mongrel 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 Pongo?"

"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 Determinist of St. Jim's, 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 genius of St. Jim's 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 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 Determinism throughout the whole length of the Southern 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 Determinism?"

"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—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

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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 his 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 was 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 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 overnight, 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."

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

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

But Pongo was off at top speed.

Wally was preparing to pursue him, when the voice of the 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.

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 the barn with a long whip in his hand.



"I wefuse to be stwuck in this bwutal mannah! Ow, ow, ow! I uttally wefuse—ow—ow—ow!" Arthur Augustus was hopping under the lash of the whip. The red-faced farmer was obviously not to be argued with, as D'Arcy made a bolt for it. "Ow! Help! Bwute! Ow!"

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. Then he snatched up his hat, stuck it on his head, and ran on.

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 to his nose. But the Scouts were out of sight.

Skimpole was not sorry for it. He was quite out of

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

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 westwain yourself! I wefuse to be stwuck in this bwutal mannah! Ow, ow! I uttally decline to submit to anythin' of the sort—ow, ow!—I wepeat, you wotiah, that I wegard you as a wude beast, and uttally 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 its 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 cinder-path. But the black bull was on the trail. He was 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 hand. 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's face turned white as he glanced 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!

"**B**AI JOVE!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I wegard that as a fearfully 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 whothah we had bettah follow any farthah!"

"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 frozen 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 ddowned 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 rushes. He gave a wild yell as he landed there, and D'Arcy went skimming past him.

"Buck up, deah boy!" called out D'Arcy major 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 moments. 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. Arthur Augustus was coming on at top speed, and Tom Merry turned to wave his hand at him in warning.

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

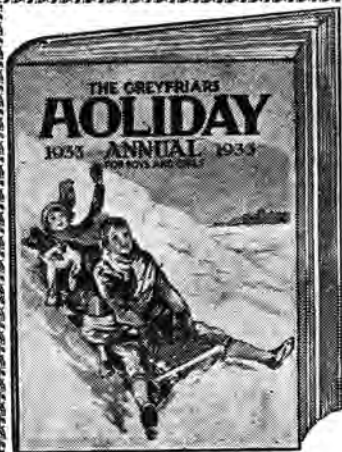
Arthur Augustus came right on.

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 edge 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.

Tom Merry grasped his hand and dragged him out. The ice cracked threateningly, and Tom Merry had just time to



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whisk Arthur Augustus along to a safer spot when it gave way, 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 farther 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.

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 would follow his leader, and nothing short of sudden death would stop 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.

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 then bundled them 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, and then hurried away to get a rub down himself.

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

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

"Jolly good!" commented Tom Merry.



A hand came up from the water and the face of Arthur Augustus followed it. Tom Merry was grasping his hand to drag him out when he saw Wally D'Arcy shooting like an arrow towards the gap! "Go back! For Heaven's sake, go back!" yelled Tom.

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

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.

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Don't risk getting a chill. If you were to catch a 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 Fawcett 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 was 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 way."

"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 window-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 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 car dashed past them, with a gentleman sitting in it. It was Dr. Snipe hurrying to the rectory.

"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 the doors of 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! Tommy has

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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 the 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 condition.

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 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 window-pane 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 playing at 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 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 serene!"

"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 aiming for your head, and you moved it," said Tom Merry severely, "with the result that the ball 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 game of football 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 merriment, 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 awestruck 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 while returning to India."

"I hope not, Miss Fawcett," said Mr. Dodds, who saw no

grounds for deducing so startling an inference from the 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, with an expression of wonderment 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 a considerable amount 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 everybody 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's 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 wogard as weally 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 Boshykoshy Islands. How fortunate for my darling!"

"How ripping!" said Skimpole thoughtfully. "With a sum of money like that, one 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.

"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 Olympia 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 farther 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 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!"

"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 at 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—"

"There'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 Determinism in new countries. It would be a 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 Determinist, 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, so 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 ideah myself. Look here, Tom Mewwy, I'm comin' with you."

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

"Weally, Wally, it will be impos—"

"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 cheekay wapsallion!"

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 Olympia."

"My darling Tommy—"

"Well, you said 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 get used to the idea. My sweetest child, you will need all sorts of things—weeks and weeks of shopping—"

"If I'm going, it's only polite to go when uncle wants me," replied Tom Merry.

"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 Red Indian outfit, you know—and I'll tell him to write 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 everybody's mind. And when bed-time 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 pages 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!"

"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, farther 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 up long ago," said Tom Merry, rather regretfully.

"I would wathah wead about bwigands than meet them, I think. A feahful lot of ill-dressed 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 surprise 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 you by the next steamer."

"I should forbid you to do anything 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 approach 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."

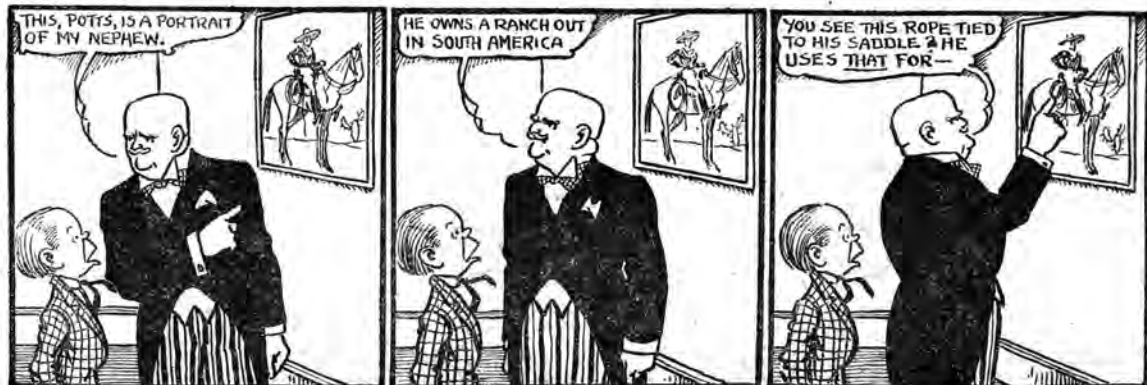
The three juniors looked at one another and chuckled. Skimpole spoke very contemptuously of money; though how the journey was to be undertaken without money was a puzzle.

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

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

"Oh, that's all right! I'll shove it in the cable to-morrow

Potts, the Office Boy!



that I'm bringing some friends. If a chap can't take his friends to see his 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 huwrah 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 with you! 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 bed-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 piece of paper over a comb, and started buzzing the melody of the latest waltz.

Tom Merry warmed to his work, and the breathless and gasping D'Arcy was whirled to and fro, till at last the waltzers waltzed into the musician, and all three of them went, with a loud bump, to the floor.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry scrambled up, laughing.

"Now I feel relieved," he said. "If you've 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 furthering the cause of 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. Miss Fawcett kept a pony trap, but no car.

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 uttably refuse to bes!wide any quiet animal suitable for an old lady to ride!"

"Very well, I'll have Bob, and you can have Mr. Giles' 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'."

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 gentlemen!" 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 lane. 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 headfirst 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

BAITING THE BOSS!



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 snowdrift, 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 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 his 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 in 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 at the thought that the donkey meant to dash right into the french windows.

Wally, seeing that nothing could be done, cheerily waved his cap as the donkey shot through the windows.

Lord Eastwood started up from his desk in astonishment.

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 time.

Neddy, the donkey, satisfied with the mischief he had done, trotted out, 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, Wally?" 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!" gasped Wally. "The beast ran away with me! 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 Arthur—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 afraid the young wascal had broken his neck, you know! I shall have to give him some lessons in widin'."

"Rats!" said Wally.

"Pway don't use those vulgah expvressions, Wally, in the presence of your parent!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "I assuah you, sir, that I endeavour by ewery means to cure that young scallawag of his vulgah and wotten ways."

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I twust, sir, that you are not busy this morning, as we have come ovah on a vewy important mattah."

"As a matter of fact, Arthur, I am somewhat busy," said Lord Eastwood. "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 Awizona to inherit 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 practically imposs for Tom Mewwy



"Bow—wow—wow!" barked Pongo. Wally rushed at him and staggered, and the next moment Wally bumped ag

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 return 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 impos for me to wun away, as that would be diswespectful; but I should be very 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 would get scahfully wotten, you know, and wish he hadn't gone. Besides, he will wequiah some fwient with him to look attah 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' permission."



A frieky animal skipped between Captain Punter's legs. The captain met him and sent him flying. "Sorry!" gasped Wally.

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

"Well, well, I will think it over," 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 is fair for the 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 linalis are as safe as the Thames steamboats, sir," said D'Arcy. "You wemembah we spent last wagh on a steamah, and came home all wight!"

"Yes, I remember. Well, I will think it over. 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 it over, 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 afraid 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 will have to walk, Gus," said Wally cheerfully. "Neddy's botted, 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 Merry. "I'm all right!"

"I think you had better change your things," said Miss Fawcett 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 to London for the extensive shopping that was required before the voyage on the Olympia was undertaken.

CHAPTER 11.

A Little Shopping!

THERE was excitement at Laurel Villa that evening. The excitement started at 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 now from all parts and at all times.

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 were 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 AND 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, HERBIES, AND DIGBY."

Then came a wire from Belfast.

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"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-born, 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. 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 mountain, 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 Cousin Ethel. Women are born shoppers, and, with plenty of time and no sparing of expense, 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 Eskimo, 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 Skimpole senior was naturally pleased.

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.

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 Methuselah, 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, in the wilds of which Tom Merry was to penetrate, and where he must be prepared for all eventualities.

Boots for walking, shooting, football, dancing, as well as 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 chums. 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 prewpared."

"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 country!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, aghast. "Surely in the twentieth century there is no country so benighted that the people don't wear silk hats?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pewwaps I shall make it a dozen, then," said the swell of St. Jim's regretfully. "Pewwaps a dozen will see me through, 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 uttaly frivolous, 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 brace 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 revolvers 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 we might wear a tiepin."

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

"A-a-as," said D'Arcy, who had lately become deeply read in Wild West lore. "But suppose we get held up by woad agents en route?"

"By what?" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Woad agents. That is the cowwect term, I assuah 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."

CONSTRUCTIONAL TOYS.

There are new thrills awaiting the boy who is mechanically minded this year—for Meccano Ltd. have lately added a new series to their Constructional Toy Outfits. Last year they added a series of Aeroplane Constructor Outfits, by means of which boys are able to build splendid models of many different types of aeroplanes. Recently there was added a series of Motor Car Constructor Outfits with which most realistic models of "sports" cars can be made. Meccano Outfits can be bought at any large toy shop.

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“I assuah you, Tom Merry, that the term is quite cowweet. And even if we are 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’ bein’ wobbled. As I was sayin’ even if we are not held up by woad agents—which, I assure you, is the cowweet expression—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 Olympia.”

“Why not, pway?”

“Because you’re the kind of ass who would be likely to fire the revolver off to see if it was loaded. It wouldn’t blow your brains out, of course, as you haven’t any, but it would make a mess 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 shootin’ 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 Far 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 pistol; 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 he 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 on the subject with him.

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 kind-hearted. 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 currying favour 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—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 Olympia—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 possible.

Tom Merry came upon him when he was marking the trunks for the direction of the Olympia’s men, and he watched him curiously. Upon six of the trunks D’Arcy laboriously traced the words, “Not required during voyage.”

“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 wequiah 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 the steamah, but that was because we were travellin’ with the mastahs. 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 twunks.”

“I shall wequiah 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 on 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 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 the paint and brush over the railway embankment, and walked home.

The luggage went off by railway to Southampton, and was stored away on the Olympia, while the juniors were spending their last days at Huckleberry Heath.

Wally kept his own counsel.

The day came for 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

(Continued on page 19.)

NOTES AND VIEWS FROM—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! I've got another gem of a story for you next Wednesday, featuring the St. Jim's juniors. Just take a squint at this title—

"TOM MERRY & CO. IN NEW YORK!"

—and then promise yourself a treat. A treat it is, believe me! Fun, thrills, adventure—each play their part in this fine complete tale of your old favourites, so be sure you read it. And don't on any account miss the next story featuring

"LIGHTNING BRUCE BRADMAN!"

This plucky speed king is involved in another whirlwind adventure next week, and no one will be able justly to complain at the end of the yarn that it lacks thrills. Why, it teems with 'em! Potts, the Office Boy, is also remembered in next week's programme. You'll find him just as funny as ever. One more thing before I get on to my news pars—order next week's GEM in advance! Got that? Good!

THIS WEEK'S STRANGE STORY.

A Scotsman found himself in the police court on a charge of begging, and when taxed with the offence, admitted it. The presiding magistrate next inquired of the police whether anything was "known" about the accused, and the police replied that although his finger-prints had been taken, no previous conviction had been traced. Whereupon the magistrate dismissed the accused with a caution and told him to clear out of the town pronto. That Scotsman obliged with alacrity. Barely five minutes had passed when an inspector rushed into the court saying that a telephone message had just come through from Scotland Yard—where finger-prints records are kept—to the effect that the Scotsman had thirty previous convictions against him! Well, well!

A KNOWING HORSE!

Nincompoop was the name of this particular racehorse, which was rather a handicap, but he proved his intelligence in a peculiarly strange manner. While racing at Hurst Park recently, Nincompoop was seriously injured, and the vet pronounced the unhappy verdict that the horse would have to be destroyed. Mr. Geoffrey Pease, his trainer, remarked to a friend that he couldn't bear to see the old animal shot, and turned and walked away. Nincompoop, as if understanding what had been said, hobbled after them, which so moved Mr. Pease that he decided to give the horse another chance of life, and had him taken back to his training stables in Warwickshire! Bravo!

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COULD YOU BEAR THIS?

How would you like to be waited upon by a real live bear—waited upon in the sense that Bruin would play the part of waiter and bring your grub to you on a tray? No takers! Well, an enterprising London restaurant reckons to supply a New Year's Eve stunt on these lines for the benefit of its customers. Already five Russian bears are being rehearsed for the job, and to accustom them to the clamour of the average restaurant the band and the diners will make as much noise as possible. But what if the bears run amok? What if they forget the parts they have been so assiduously rehearsing when the "first night performance" comes off?

AN OLD AFRICAN CUSTOM.

Dick Canray, one of our loyal readers in Africa, writes to tell me of a strange method of punishment in fashion among a certain East African tribe. Dick says that when a native is found guilty of stealing he is securely bound up and dumped with a hefty pile of sticks beside him. The idea is that any passing member of the tribe, if he feels so inclined, can help himself to a stick and give the helpless prisoner a good hiding! Methinks stealing among this particular tribe of darkies is a very rare occurrence.

PLAYING THE GOAT!

Rex is the very proud goat mascot of the 1st Welch Regiment, and on special occasions, ceremonies, and church parades he heads the parade clad in a decorated coat of scarlet and gold. But Rex got into deep disgrace the other day. The regiment was lined up for church parade—every soldier was as stiff as a ramrod. Even Rex stood strictly to attention as the band began to play. The order was given in a clarion voice for the regiment to "march"; then the unexpected happened. Rex, the goat, simply flopped down on his side and refused to budge. All the chieftain of the soldier who was the official escort of the goat failed lamentably. The soldiers marked time, the band went on playing, and finally Rex the goat was "arrested" and taken back to barracks. The excuse given in his favour later on was that he had missed the presence of Goat-Major Serns, who was his personal commanding officer, at reveille that day, and had refused to obey the orders of anyone else. Rex's personal commanding officer, it was explained, had been called away from barracks for a few days.

THE MOST AMAZING ESCAPE!

Fred Lake, of Newcastle, writes to ask if I have heard of the "most amazing

escape from prison during this century." Frankly, I find it hard to say that I have, for I am not particularly interested in such things. But Fred is. He declares that in the year 1899 a convict escaped from his American prison by sawing away the bars of his cell with his socks! Wants a bit of believing, what? The explanation given is that this daring convict twisted the threads of his socks in soap and sand, and then filed through the metal bars! If he did this, Fred, he deserved to escape!

FASTER AND FASTER!

When Sir Malcolm Campbell brought a new land speed record to Britain last spring, of 253.968 miles per hour most of us said, in effect, "think Heaven he's got through safely." Now this daring, courageous speedman is determined to have another cut at the job. He's out to raise his own record to something like three hundred miles an hour! Daytona Beach will be the "course" again, and this time "Blue Bird"—the fastest car in the world—will be fitted out with a new 2,500 horse-power engine. Between the tenth and fifteenth day of February, 1933, the next attempt is reckoned to take place. All "Gemites" will wish our intrepid speedman "Good luck" and a "safe passage."

HEARD THIS ONE?

"Why do you keep raising your hat when you meet the barber, George?"

George: "To show him what a fraud he is. You see, last year he sold me a bottle of hair-restorer, and I'm still as bald as ever!"

MOON-STRUCK!

Scientists are mighty keen to reach the moon, and a number of them still cling obstinately to the idea of a rocket being able to take a human being there in safety. All manner of experiments have been worked out on paper. Now comes news that a German engineer has received permission from the local authorities to seal himself up in a special rocket which will be "touched off" and sent whirling into the blue above us. This venture is to prove how practical the rocket idea is. Inside that rocket the engineer will be waiting for the moment when the projectile will rise no longer and begins to fall back to earth again. But the engineer won't fall with it; he intends to hop out quick in a special parachute. We wish him luck!

EAGLE VERSUS PLANE PILOT!

How would you like to meet a warlike eagle roaming the skies thousands of feet above the ground, even allowing for the fact that you were in a fast-moving aeroplane and had a gun with which to defend yourself? Sounds thrilling, eh? And thrilling it was for a young Italian pilot engaged on mail-carrying who encountered such an eagle recently. He fired at it with his revolver several times as it swooped down to attack him, and recorded hits, but the eagle became only more infuriated with its wounds and endeavoured to get to close quarters. Once its talons got busy the plucky pilot began to collect some souvenirs of his fight in the form of scratches and gashes, but he kept a cool head, waited his opportunity, and then stabbed the eagle good and hard. It fluttered down to earth, whereupon the pilot landed his plane, collected his trophy of war, and flew back to his aerodrome. Seeing is believing, so when he had told his strange story he produced as evidence the dead eagle. Nobody disbelieved him after that!

AMERICA BOUND!

(Continued from page 17.)

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 develop 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 wobb'n' 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 wefuse 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 all for you," he said.

"Thanks awfully!" said Tom Merry. "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's 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!"

"It won't be 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 placed 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!"

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, deah 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 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 fellow?"

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 that moment, and Wally was looking after Pongo. Skimpole was sitting on a bench, deeply absorbed in a speech he was preparing for the cow-boys 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 voyage—that I can 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 Popplewallah 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, Popplewallah II., for the American Cup."

Tom Merry's eyes opened wide.

"By Jove! How ripping!"

"Yes, I yacht a good 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 it 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 came up the stairs from the first-class berth, 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 right now. This is a bit different from the cruise on the Condor."

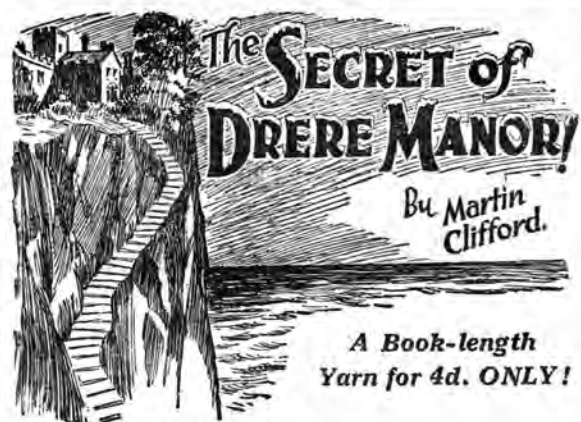
"Yes, I suppose we've got our sea-legs; and the ship's bigger, and doesn't roll so much."

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

"You are what?"

"I am goin' up on the bwidge to wemonstwat! I must see the captain!"

"What on earth's the matter?"



Tom Merry & Co., the cheery chums of St. Jim's, decide to spend their Christmas holidays with Kit Wildrake, in a lonely manor, high on a cliff-top, overlooking the sea. Strange things happen in Drere Manor when a ghostly visitor arrives, and the St. Jim's juniors have many thrilling adventures before the ghost is eventually laid. Boys, here is a really gripping Christmas adventure yarn, packed with thrills that will set your nerves tingling! Get a copy today—and get the thrill of a lifetime!

Ask for No. 186 of

SCHOOLBOYS' OWN Library

Now on Sale at all Newsagents - 4d.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,297.

"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 pound. 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 pound note when he sees it, at all events!" grinned Tom Merry.

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

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

"He said that, as far as he knew, all the twunks labelled 'Not Required' had been stacked away, and the othahs put in the cabin. I labelled six of mine not required, and the othah six ought to be forthcoming. 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 pound note possibly not having worn off yet. He did not know what had become of the missing trunks, and he was 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 headquartahs 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'm thinking of borrowing ten shillings of Gus to tip him. He's looking after Pongo a treat!"

"I am very glad of that," said Tom Merry solemnly. "If Pongo was 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!

"M Y 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.



Captain Punter was applying a match to a cigarette. He lighted it, and the next moment he jumped clear of the deck. Bang! In the silence of mid-ocean the explosion sounded terrific. "Yarough!" The captain gave a fearful yell.

"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 Olympia, 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 extremely sorry, sir—"

"Go down!"

"But I have a complaint to make!"

"Go back immediately!"

"It is a mattah weequin' 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 return to the deck, and I throw upon you the entire responsibility of my bein' compelled to appeah at dinnah in unsuitable attiah."

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!"

"It's all vewy well for you to jest upon a sewious mattah, 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 twunks labelled 'Not wequiahed on the voyage' were stacked away, and all othahs are in the cabin. 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' trunk was there, and stood out in the open space, as it was too large to be shoved under the berths. Arthur Augustus began to unfasten 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 pwesent 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!"

"Well, 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 hats.

"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 laughter. Tom Mewwy, I am surprised 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 transiit. I have nothin' but this twunk of silk hats and my bag in which my personal belongings 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 Awizona 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, 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 a game of nap, penny points could mount up. They were soon using silver instead of coppers.

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 pounds odd in 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 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 *Olympia*, 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 *Olympia*, 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 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 *Olympia* granted.

"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-es," 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 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."

"H'm! 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-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 anythin' 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 willingly to wound anyone. Punter rose and strolled away without making any reply, and Arthur Augustus dropped nonchalantly into his vacant seat.

"Gussy, old man, why did you speak to him like that?"

"Because I wanted to get wid of the boundah," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I have been gwovin' 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—"

Tom Merry & Co. in New York!



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"Pway don't call me an ass, Tom Mewwy! I object vewy stwongly to the expvession. I wepeat that I am 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 weavin' a wing that is not weal."

"Eh? He's wearing a wing? Are you off your rocker?"

"I am not off my weckah," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "And I wepeat that his wing is not weal. A man who would weah 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 wegard with attention details of personal attiah, 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 fwienly, 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 Poppeywallah 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 wegard myself as justified in lookin' into the Army List."

Tom Merry was silent. If Punter was 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 under my pwotection," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall take it as a weal favour if you will have nothin' 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 captain's efforts with Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry having been unsuccessful, he 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 to 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 from 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."

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

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.

There 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 confidently. "Keep quiet, Pongo! Quiet!"

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 pet the dog's head, and Pongo promptly bit his fingers, and the captain gave a yell.

"Anything the matter?" asked Wally.

"Ow! The 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! Pongo, 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-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! Pongo, Pongo!"

"Bow-wow-wow!" barked Pongo.

Wally rushed at him, and he skipped between the legs of the captain and he 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, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,297.

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, heah he is!" exclaimed D'Arcy, turning his monocle upon Wally. "You young wepwobate, what are you gwin' 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, chuckled 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 rottin' 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 junior 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 match 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.

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.

"By the way, 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, Guz. Your trunks are on board the Olympia, only they're down in the luggage hold among the things not required on the journey."

"Impos, dear 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 see it!"

"There it is!"

"Bai Jove, I saw that, and I took it for a cloud, you know!"

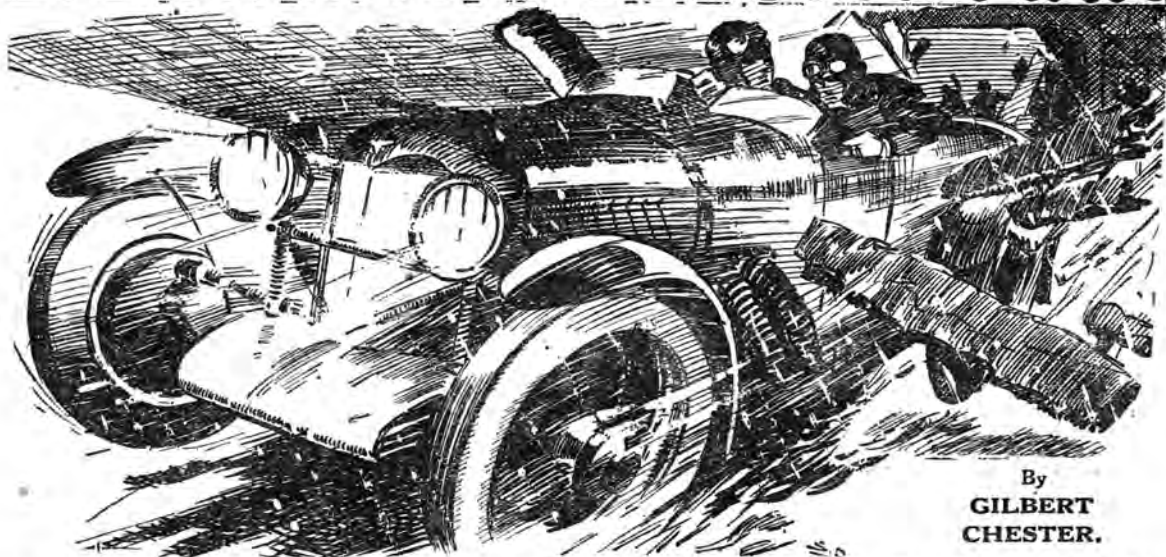
Tom Merry did not speak. His eyes were fixed on the new world that was emerging ahead, and his heart was beating fast. The Atlantic lay behind him. Before him a new life in a new land.

THE END.

(There's another ripping yarn in this grand series, called "Tom Merry & Co. in New York!" in next Wednesday's issue)

HIGH-SPEED THRILLS AND HIGH-SPEED ADVENTURE WITH—

LIGHTNING BRUCE BRADMAN



By
**GILBERT
CHESTER.**

Bruce Bradman, the Speed King, will take on any job—as long as there's plenty of danger attached to it! So when Jim Cope comes along with a wild-cat scheme, Bruce just jumps at it!

The Strange Intruder I

IN the darkness a board creaked with the suddenness of a pistol-shot. Bruce Bradman, gentleman adventurer and motor-racing ace, sat up abruptly in bed, and peered forward at the patch of grey that was the window.

A cold draught met his face. Dimly he could see the curtains wavering against the dull glow of the outer night. Then, nearer this time, a board jarred to a stealthy footfall. "Burglars, by gosh!" Bruce thought, and slipped noiselessly to the floor. "The sash is raised—"

He glimpsed the outlines of a human shape, and leapt at it.

With a startled gasp the intruder jerked round violently. Bruce got a fresh ju-jitsu grip, flung his man to the floor, and with a bound was a-top of him.

"Just move, my friend, and I'll bust your arm for you," he warned.

"All right!" His captive gave a stifled moan. "Confound you! Have a heart!"

Bruce slackened up a little, but braced his muscular frame in readiness for the first sign of renewed resistance.

"Very well; but get this—I've got you put, sonny!" he grunted. "And now, where's that gun of yours?"

His free hand ran deftly over the other's form, searching for a tell-tale bulge, when the room door was flung abruptly open.

"Wot's hup, cap'n?" a hoarse voice demanded from the threshold.

"Some fellow got in, Joe," Bruce threw back crisply. "Just snick that switch on, will you? We'll have a look at him."

Joe Anson obeyed, and the room was flooded with brilliant light. As his short but burly ex-sailor servant lurched forward, Bruce sprang to his feet.

The intruder picked himself up from the carpet, and, with a wry face, stood nursing a painful wrist.

"Dash it! But they were right when they said you were tough, Mr. Bradman!" he muttered, biting his lip. "And quick! You're lightning! No wonder they nicknamed you Lightning!"

Bruce said nothing. He was staring hard at his uninvited visitor. Instead of the rough-looking crook he had expected, he found a man of very different type—young, and about his own age.

His features were clean-cut, and rather handsome in a virile way. He wore a smartly tailored lounge suit, and was, in short, the kind of chap who, any fine morning, might have been seen sauntering down Bond Street or Piccadilly.

"Sakes alive!" Bruce exclaimed, in surprise. "Who the deuce are you—Raffles?"

The stranger suppressed a rueful smile.

"Not exactly. I don't know that there's enough of me to raffle, anyway."

"Huh! Funny, eh?" Bruce's stern, grey eyes fixed him. "Well, now you're here, what's your little game?"

"There isn't any game. I simply wanted an interview."

"Then why not lean on the jolly old bell-push, and shove your card in at the front door in the time-honoured manner?" Bruce inquired, with elaborate sarcasm.

"Frankly, because I couldn't afford to be seen waiting on your doorstep, my dear sir!" the young man returned coolly. "However, talking of cards—"

He took a silver card-case from his pocket, extracted a slip of pasteboard from it, and passed the slip to Bruce.

"H.R.H. the Rajah of Selong." Bruce read the neatly engraved characters.

His eyes narrowed. He had heard of the white man who, single-handed, had made himself master of the Malay island state of Selong, and of his son, now studying at an English University. From current Press reports, he knew, too, that the rajah had recently died, and that his undergraduate heir had, while still in England, succeeded to the throne.

"So you're the Rajah of Selong, eh?" Bruce murmured.

The stranger laughed softly, his steel-blue eyes a-dance with fun.

"As a matter of fact, I'm not," he drawled calmly.

"Then what the dickens do you mean trying to spoof me with this comic card?" Bruce demanded sharply.

Uninvited, the young man dropped into a chair. He threw one leg coolly over the other, and gazed up smilingly into Bruce's face.

"It isn't you I'm out to spoof, Mr. Bradman; it's other people. I believe you've spoofed so many people yourself that you'll probably appreciate my position. When one puts up a bit of bluff one—er—has to take liberties. I admit I've taken one to-night. But it's in a good cause, and one which, I hope, will appeal strongly to you. That's why I'm here."

Bruce's lids lifted. He dropped into a chair opposite his remarkable visitor.

"What about getting down to brass tacks?" he suggested tersely. "Come across."

The other nodded. His manner changed.

"My name's Cope—Jim Cope, of Uppingham and Trinity," he announced, giving his Public school and college. "Old Sam—that's the new rajah—is my pal at the Varsity. He's appointed me his aide-de-camp, and it's on his behalf that I'm here. Is that clear?"

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"As mud," Bruce commented. "Go on."

"In a nutshell, the position is this. Sam's over here at the University, and while he's sittin' with wet towels round his achin' brow, gettin' the low-down on Plato, his old man up and dies out in that Malay island where he's rajah. Got it?"

"Dimty, old chap—dimty," Bruce murmured.

"Well, certain parties in Selong don't cotton to the idea of havin' another white man to rule them. They're planning to revolt and grab the island before Sam gets back. He's had the griffin from the old heathen that's prime minister or something over the blessed place."

"Then why don't they get on with it?" Bruce demanded.

"Because they're waitin' for a shipment of arms for the risin'. If old Sam can nip back in time before the fireworks arrive, he'll have 'em on toast. And that's where you come in."

"That's obvious," Bruce agreed sarcastically. "You ought to be in Parliament, you're so clear. Don't mind me. Fire ahead!"

"What I'm gettin' at is this," Cope resumed doggedly. "There's a gang of these beggars over here, keepin' tabs on Sam. The minute he starts for home they'll cable, and their pals out in Selong will revolt without waitin' for the guns."

"No doubt," Bruce concurred. "But where do I come in, and why?"

"If he can sail East in disguise and unspotted, he'll reach the island unexpectedly, in time to stamp on the rebellion. But they're watchin' him so hard, he'll never do it unless their attention is diverted in another direction. In a nutshell—"

"It's in a coconut-shell by now," Bruce proffered, grinning.

"Confound it! I'm bein' as curt as I can," Cope protested. "The scheme is this. I'm here to see you, dressed up in old Sam's togs. I've been shadowed—I know that. They think I'm him. So when you set out on your car on a trans-Continental motor trip out East, with a passenger wearin' a false beard, they'll think I'm Sam, tryin' to creep back home to Selong in disguise. The passenger, of course, will be me."

"And then—"

"The spies they've got watchin' Sam here will follow on our trail. While they're hard at work, tryin' to murder us, old Sam will simply take the first ship home and spring a surprise packet on his loyal subjects."

"You mean, you think I'm easy," Bruce put in caustically. "Come clean, now. This yarn you've spun me is all bunk. You were after my motor-racing trophies, weren't you, young feller-me-lad?"

"You're wrong," Cope said earnestly. "What I'm after is your motor-racin' experience—your A1 at Lloyds, one hundred per cent guaranteed-to-bust-through-anything reputation. They say you're the ace of speed—the one man alive who can smash through any odds. I'd do anything for Sam, but I'm takin' a big chance. It's a good old world, and I'd like to live out my three score an' tea if poss—"

Cope crouched down sharply in his chair, his head and shoulders hidden behind its capacious leather back. His voice trailed off into the merest whisper, while his ears strained, listening.

"All right, then it's fixed!" he exclaimed suddenly, and in a loud voice. "We'll drive East on your car together. This bet of yours to go overland to Shanghai will serve as—"

Thud! Bruce shot out of his seat like a panther, and landed by the half-open window, where a dark form crouched behind the sill. Two gleaming white eyeballs, framed in a sharp brown face, peered at him from an annex roof. As he reached for the eavesdropper a knife blade flashed up viciously.

Bruce's quick hand gripped a bony wrist in nick of time. The knife went tinkling to the slates.

Its owner gave a cry of pain, and wheeled in Bruce's strong grip. Bruce tightened his hold, but the hand went slack within his grasp. Hand and wrist slipped free, like some greased hawser. A flash, and a turbaned figure went scuttling along the roof ridge.

Bruce vaulted through the window in pursuit. He glimpsed a native skim down the slates and drop to some mews below. Barefoot in his pyjamas, Bruce followed. He jumped full on the other's back as he scrambled to his feet.

"Got you!" Bruce cried. "And now—"

He let go as two short, squat shapes rushed at him.

Thwack! His lightning left shot out, and took a native on the jaw. The fellow reeled; a knife sailed high in the air.

Bruce side-stepped as the second Malay closed. Then, warned by a rush of feet, he sprang for the wall, aware that a knot of short, brown figures charged in a semi-circle.

His back to the wall, he faced them grimly with his

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naked fists. Aloft, a bracket lamp shed its dim rays on his stern-jawed features, its light reflected in his eyes aflame with battle.

Six knife blades rose, glinting in the lamplight. The enemy bore in, crouching to spring and break through his puny guard.

"Come on, you scum!" he growled, bracing himself for the expected rush.

It did not come. As the light fell on his face a man in the background shouted something in a foreign tongue.

The knot of natives wheeled. A second, and they had taken to their heels, scampering for the nearest corner, as though the devil were behind them.

Bruce let them go. He realised that, thanks to the lamp, they had recognised their error. He was not the man they were after.

He walked coolly round to the front door of his flat, and found Joe Anson emerging to look for him. Together they went up to the flat where Cope was waiting.

"Satisfied?" Cope queried, grinning, as they entered.

Bruce nodded.

"Quite. I accept your explanation. In short, I'm quite ready to believe you were not after the family plate."

"Splendid! And now will you go one further, and take on this little job of work? They say you simply live for high adventure. Well, you'll get it this trip with a vengeance. That ought to tempt you."

"H'm!" Bruce hesitated, his eyes on the sailor.

"I'll be fair, though," Cope said gravely. "If you take this thing on, it's a thousand to one against your coming through alive. The enemy will stick at nothing to stop us. If you were anyone else than the redoubtable Lightning Bruce Bradman it would be tantamount to murder to start you on this stunt. As it is—"

"As it is," Bruce cut in, "I'm your man!"

He held out his hand, and Cope gripped it. The bargain was sealed.

The House of Mystery!

AT the wheel of his great red racing-car Lightning Bruce Bradman peered forward into the snow-swept night. Against the windscreen a ceaseless storm of fluttering snowflakes beat, veiling the endless pine-woods that flanked the mountain road.

Beside the speed crack sat Jimmy Cope, his features awathed in muffler and upturned collar. On the dickey seat astern a stout, bespectacled Babu shivered, in company with Joe. At the last moment before setting out, Cope had added him to the party to act as interpreter.

The four travellers had left London without incident, and had crossed France unmolested. En route, they had seen no sign of the Selongese, though not for a single instant did the three white men relax their vigilance.

Now they were near the mighty mountain ranges which marked the Italian frontier. For hours they had fought their way through the thick snows of Haute-Maurienne, in French Savoy, a drear and lonely waste of upland forests, cleft now and then by wide, bleak fields.

Everywhere the thick carpet of snow lay unbroken, save where, at intervals, a solitary cross rose by the wayside. Each marked the spot where some unlucky wayfarer had perished in an avalanche. And as these ominous memorials succeeded one another, the native's teeth chattered with something more than cold.

Its rear wheels slipping on the frozen surface, the racer laboured up a steep incline. High-g geared for the track, the bus was never built to cross such country.

Bruce's expert car listened warily to the drone of the straining engine. Then, as they neared the crest, the engine began suddenly to cough and splutter. A few more yards and it petered out altogether.

"Confound it!" Bruce exclaimed, jabbing at the self-starter button. When only a harsh whirring answered him, he glanced at the petrol gauge. "Hallo, we're nearly out of juice!"

"But we only filled up a few miles back!" Cope objected. "I know—"

Bruce sprang out into the snow, and, as Cope followed suit, whipped up the floorboards.

From the petrol-pipe streamed a fine jet of liquid.

"Union nut's worked loose!" Bruce muttered, reaching for a spanner. "The whole tankful's leaked away. Here's a pretty kettle of fish!"

He straightened up to glance at his companions, who had gathered around him. As he did so a weird, ghostly howl went up from the forest. It was answered by another and yet another in the distance.

"Wolves!" Cope breathed, frowning. "These woods will be full of the blighters. We can't stop here!"

"You're right!" Bruce agreed tersely. "There's only one thing for it. We'll man-handle the old bus to the crest and see what lies beyond."

Between them the four men pushed the car up the remainder of the grade. As they stopped, out of breath, on the summit, the blackness of a night-cloaked valley loomed below.

From the neighbouring timber another wolf howl went up. It was greeted by an answering chorus, wailing in the woods. The brutes were closing in. Ravenous with hunger, they would be dangerous.

The four men looked at one another grimly. Stranded as they were, there was nothing for it but to face up to an unpleasant situation.

"Looks like a night in the trees!" Bruce granted. "Those brutes can't climb. So, unless we're frozen stiff and fall off—What's the matter Hari?" He looked round sharply as the Babu caught at his arm.

"Sahib, look!" Hari pointed down into the valley, where, half shrouded by trees, a single light shone out in the far distance. "We may yet circumvallate the divers perils of refrigeration and carnivorous quadrupeds. This luminosity denotes existence of residential proximity. Let us bunk like billy-ho for salvation!"

"By Jove, a house!" Bruce cried, scanning the distant light. "But bunk—I know a trick worth two of that! We'll

Joe and Hari jumped down the instant the car came to rest inside the courtyard. The sailor had taken but a few steps when he stumbled over something in the snow.

"Drat!" he exclaimed, picking himself up. "What the dooce—'Allo!" He made a grab at the object over which he had fallen. "Ere, skipper, we've come to the right 'arbour!"

As Bruce came forward he held up a petrol can. Others, half-covered by snow, were ranged against the wall.

"Splendid!" Bruce laughed, and strode on towards the house door.

He knocked, then stood back, waiting. There was no reply.

Again he knocked, with like result. Finally, surprised at the utter silence, he crossed to a ground floor window, and peered into what seemed a large room.

There was no lamp, but the fire on a deep, open hearth cast a dim, red radiance about the stone-flagged floor. Slowly his eyes made out a table, benches, and a ladder rising to the ceiling in the back part of the room.

Then, with a low cry of horror, he strained forward. Dangling from a great beam overhead was the motionless body of a man!

Drawn by his cry, the other three sprang to him. As one they peered in through the pane, staring mutely at the grisly thing that hung, a sinister shadow against the red of the fire.



From the dark recesses of the alcove a brown, claw-like hand reached for Bruce's hip. A jerk and his gun was wrenched away. As he spun round Bruce found the weapon covering him. "Be still!" a thin voice hissed.

take this down-grade by gravity. There's a spot of juice still in the tank. With luck we'll get there!"

He sprang in behind the wheel while his three companions shoved the car into motion. As it started down the sharp descent they swung aboard, and, ever gathering speed, the racer coasted down the hill.

Once—twice the blazing headlight beams caught a lean, grey form skulking between the trees at the roadside. Then a bend hid the spot, and, like a silent phantom, the great car raced on for the lower levels.

As luck had it, the down-grade ended with the friendly light not far away. As the car struck level ground Bruce switched on, and the engine fired. Now that the tank was no longer tilted, the tiny store of petrol that remained could reach the outlet.

A few yards farther on a squat shape hove in view. It was a house, from the upper window of which streamed a beam of light. It was this they had seen from the hilltop.

Set a little back from the road, the house was built around a tiny courtyard—a lay-out characteristic of the country. An open archway yawned in the high, brick walls, with twin gates drawn back, and dimly visible owing to rays from the upper window-pane.

"Better back her in," Bruce said, locking the bus around, tail on to the gates. "The courtyard will be too narrow to turn in. And, anyway, we'll need our lamps to drive out."

Since the lighted window shone out into the court, he could see where he was going as, very gingerly, he reversed the racer in under the arch.

"My heavens!" Cope broke the silence. "So that's why they didn't answer!"

"That's why," Bruce agreed grimly, and stepped for the door.

Half-way Joe stopped him.

"Cap'n, wotcher doin'?" he breathed tensely, and gripped Bruce's arm.

"I'm going in, of course!"

"You ain't, if I can 'elp it!" the sailor growled. Despite the cold, great beads of sweat stood out upon his brow.

"This place is no bon! Let's get out of it! I'd rather face the wolves!"

"You superstitious chump!"

Bruce thrust past, and threw the door open. It was unlocked.

Followed by Cope and the Babu, he hurried into the room, while the seaman caught up a petrol tin, and, in a frenzy, started filling the tank.

"This place is skeery," he muttered, scowling at the shadows of the yard. "I feels it in me bones. S'posin' they fixes that there dead 'un onter us?"

Inside the room, Bruce went up to the hanging figure. A black visaged fellow, it hung there, swaying slightly in the wind that blew icily through the open door. When Bruce touched him, he only spun slowly on the rope end, his limp hands jerking lifelessly.

"Suicide!" Cope muttered.

"You're wrong," Bruce cut in, as the corpse swung round.

Driven in deep between the shoulder-blades was a knife, its haft protruding. "It's murder! Wait here. I'll have a look at the upper floor," he announced, after a moment. "Perhaps someone is skulking up there."

He drew his automatic, and went up the steep ladder. He thrust his head cautiously through the trapdoor above. An unfurnished attic met his gaze. Its sole contents were a long, oak chest against the wall, and a barrel on which a petrol lamp was standing.

The lamp was in line with the dormer window. Its brilliant white rays were those which had attracted Hari's attention. Yet why had the lamp been placed there in this empty room? Its presence would draw attention to, rather than divert it from the farmhouse.

"Perhaps you're after loot, my friend," Bruce murmured, regarding the big oak chest.

A man could lie full length in it, and the murderer might have hidden there. Most French peasants hoarded money in their homes instead of banking it. The car's arrival might have caught the assassin unawares, while he searched for loot in the upper story.

Nodding to himself, Bruce advanced on the chest, and, his weapon raised, lifted the lid. But the chest was empty. "That murder's jarred me," he breathed.

He gave a suppressed laugh, his back close to an alcove panel. He did not see that it was swinging slowly outwards on its silent hinges.

From the dark recesses of the alcove a brown, claw-like hand reached for his hip, and the gun-butt protruding from his holster. A jerk, and the gun was wrenched away. As he spun round he found the weapon covering him. From the black void of the alcove two rolling whites of someone's eyes gleamed at him.

"Be still," a thin voice hissed. "or—"

Crash! Bruce smashed the panel home against the skulker with a lightning plunge, and flung himself against the woodwork, groping for a catch.

A muffled blast of sound boomed behind the wood. A bullet whizzed past his ear, and he ripped aside as the skulker put a burst through the panel.

Bruce leapt to seize a bench—the nearest weapon—but too late. On all sides other panels flew open. From each recess a native sprang out into the room.

The nearest dashed at Bruce, drawing a knife as he came. Bruce whirled the bench up, caught him on the shins, and sent him sprawling. Before he could raise the bench again a second native rushed at the Englishman.

Bruce dropped the bench and ducked. The blade slashed by and missed. He drove a lightning right between the native's eyes, and, as he reeled back, leapt for the ladder.

A single bound took him half-way up. Below a dozen hands clutched him. He smashed a heavy heel down at an upraised face, then, with another leap, gained the top rung of the ladder. He rolled free on the attic floor and sent the trap crashing down into place.

"Bruce, what's happened?" Cope cried, springing to him. "A trap! Your pals—" Bruce panted, rushing to the chest.

The trapdoor was lifting. As it rose, he flung the chest on to it and forced it down again.

"That skylight—at the back!" he cried, adding his own

weight to the chest, which jerked upwards sharply. Below it, the trapdoor rose and fell as the foe tried to force it open. "Drop to the ground—run round the house—and get those yard gates open."

Cope drew his gun, gripped it by the barrel, and smashed the rough-hewn slates outwards with the butt. In a minute a gap yawned between the rafters.

"Through with you, man!" he ordered, seizing Hari's arm.

Cope whirled him off his feet, and, forcing him bodily through the gap, sent Hari sliding down the outer slates. As the thick snow below received the Babu's fat body, Cope swung out after him. Bruce heard the scurry of his going as he slid for the gutter.

Below the trap was shuddering to a rain of blows. Then a loud voice barked an order, and a bullet crashed up through the chest.

Bruce waited for no more. He jumped up, flung the petrol lamp at the trap, and, as its charge swept in a blaze across the rotten boards, stove in the dormer window with the barrel.

He squeezed his hefty figure through the frame and dropped to the yard below. As he sprang for the car he blundered into someone heavily. He felt two strong hands clutch him as, with his opponent, he fell forward into the snow.

"Drat ye, ye varmint!" Joe's husky voice panted, and Bruce let go.

"Loose up, you chump—it's me!" he gasped, and stumbled to his feet as the sailor released his grip. "The bus—jump to it!"

He sprang behind the wheel as the house door flew open. A tidal wave of natives broke from it, their shrill cries rising through the whirr of the self-starter.

A knife hissed streaking past Bradman's ear. A bullet chipped the door moulding.

A flash of flame answered from the racer's fishtail exhaust. A blast of detonating sound smashed back off the circling walls of the courtyard.

Like an arrow from a bow, the red bus leapt, a hail of churned-up snow hurtling back in the pursuers' faces. Head on, the racer charged the double gates and took them with it. They vanished in a hail of riven wood. The red bus burst out to the track beyond.

"Okay! We're here!" Cope's cool voice called.

The rajah's aide swooped like a phantom through the driving flakes. He dragged the trembling Hari with him, pitched him head first into the dickey, then grabbed the bulbous back and jerked aboard.

The racer gave another blast and shot out into the night, her blazing headlights swooping to her plunge. One arm hooked round the dickey strut, Cope snapped a brace of shots back at the dark forms by the arch, then cocked a leg across the side and slid in-board, still gripping his smoking pistol!

"Done 'em, by Jove!" he chuckled.

(Next week's GEM contains another thrilling yarn of Bruce Bradman entitled: "Yusuf the Terrible!")

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