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"BEWARE!"

**NINE
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"Beware! Leave the woof of this house at your pewil!" Such is the amazing spectral warning Tom Merry gets from a ghostly apparition on the eve of his departure from Eastwood House! Is Tom scared? Not by a "ghost" with an accent that is characteristic of the one and only Gussy!

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry's Resolve!

"**W**EALLY, Tom Mewwy—" "Now, look here, old chap—" "Just listen to me—"

Tom Merry listened patiently, with a faint smile upon his face.

The chums of St. Jim's were sitting round a big log fire in Arthur Augustus' own sitting-room, which was very spacious, with bookcases and trophies on the walls. St. Jim's had broken up for the Christmas holidays, and several of the old friends were spending the holidays at Eastwood House, D'Arcy's place.

It had been a merry Christmas—all the merrier because Tom Merry was there.

On Christmas Eve, Blake and the rest had found the hero of St. Jim's in London, and had forced him, willy-nilly, to come down to Eastwood for Christmas.

Tom Merry had come. But Christmas was now over, and Tom Merry felt that it was time for him to go.

For Tom was not to return to the old school with his chums.

He had his living to earn, and he had to face the world to find a place for himself.

But the moment Tom Merry broached the subject of going there was a general protest from all the juniors.

It was getting near bed-time, and Tom Merry had said that he must be gone on the morrow; he felt that he had stayed too long already.

He listened, with a smile, to the protests of his chums. But they did not change his resolution; that was fixed.

He cast an appealing look round the circle of juniors, half-lighted in the glow from the fire.

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But every head was solemnly shaken.

"Can't let you go," said Jack Blake.

"Certainly not!" declared Herries.

"Rats!" said Lowther. "Stick where you are!"

"I jolly well wish I could!" said Tom. "I'd like to stay here the rest of the vac, and I'd give my little finger to be coming back to St. Jim's with you! But, you know, it's impossible, old fellow!"

"I suppose you can't come back to St. Jim's as all your tin is gone," Manners remarked; "but you can stick here for the rest of the vac."

"No good waiting for something to turn up," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "I've got to make something turn up."

"But you can't go to London again without any tin."

"I shan't try London this time. Not much chance for a fellow there without anything in his pocket," said Tom Merry, shivering as he remembered what he had been through in his short experience of the seamy side of London.

"But what will you do?"

"I hardly know yet."

"Oh, it's wotten!" said D'Arcy. "Stay where you are!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Listen to reason, Tom."

"Don't play the giddy goat, you know!"

"Now, look here, you chaps," said Tom Merry, "look at the facts. I'm here as Gussy's guest, and that's all right. But I'm wearing clothes I've borrowed from you chaps—Blake's trousers, Lowther's jacket, Manners' waistcoat, Herries' boots. It's all very well for a few days, but it's not a thing I can keep up. You don't want to turn me into a sponger, I suppose?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I haven't a shilling in my pocket, and you fellows have to pay my expenses wherever we go. As I said, it's all right for a few days; but if I keep it up any longer I shall

—SPARKLING STORY OF THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S.

By Martin Clifford.

grow into a blessed worm! Put yourself in my place and think it over."

There was an awkward silence. Tom Merry's fall from fortune had touched his old friends very deeply, and they were only anxious to stand by him and help him in his misfortune.

But it was impossible. Each of the fellows, as he thought it over, had to admit to himself that, in Tom Merry's place, he would have made the same resolve that Tom Merry was making.

"Look here, we'll leave it to Cousin Ethel to decide, if you like," said Tom Merry. "I know she'll do the right thing. Let's send her a message, and ask her to come here and decide for us."

"Wippin' ideah, deah boy!"

"And you'll stand by what Cousin Ethel says?" asked Lowther.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. D'Arcy rang the bell and sent the message to Cousin Ethel.

The girl entered the room a few minutes later with a smiling face.

"You want me to umpire in a dispute?" she said, as the juniors rose to their feet. "What is it?"

"Go ahead, Tom."

Tom Merry explained.

Cousin Ethel listened with a quiet face and great attention; her expression gave no indication of her thoughts.

"Well, Cousin Ethel?" said all the juniors together when Tom Merry had finished explaining how matters stood.

"I think Tom Merry is right," said Cousin Ethel quietly. "There is no harm in a boy receiving help from his friends when he is down on his luck, but to get into the habit of it would be bad for all concerned."

"But weally—"

"You asked me to umpire," said Ethel, smiling. "It is not playing the game to raise objections to the referee's decision, Arthur."

"Bai Jove!"

"Now I shall have to run away, because Dolores will be waiting for me. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Cousin Ethel!"

The juniors looked at one another when the girl had gone.

"That settles it," said Tom Merry.

"I—I suppose so!" said Monty Lowther glumly.

"Ethel's right, I suppose."

"Of course she is!"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"But what, Gussy?"

"I wish you weren't goin'."

Tom Merry.

Tom Merry laughed rather ruefully.

"I wish I weren't, Gussy. But what has to be, has to be. But we shall meet again, and before long, I hope."

CHAPTER 2. The Ghost!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY were an extremely thoughtful expression when he retired to bed that evening.

D'Arcy, Blake, and Herries occupied D'Arcy's bed-chamber. It was a large room, and two extra beds

been put into it for D'Arcy's chums. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had the next room.

Arthur Augustus took off his jacket and hung it carefully upon a wooden hanger, and put it in a wardrobe. Then he sat down to take off his boots. He was looking extremely reflective all the time.

"Feeling bad, Gussy?" said Blake sympathetically.

D'Arcy started.

"Eh—did you speak, Blake?"

"Yes. Was it the Christmas pudding that's made you feel bad?"

"Pwag don't be an ass, Blake!" said D'Arcy. "I've been thinkin'—"

"Oh, is that it? I knew there was something unusual the matter."

"Weally, deah boy, I have been turnin' the mattah ovah in my mind," pursued D'Arcy, unheeding, "about Tom Mewwy, you know. Why shouldn't he remain here till the end of the vac?"

"He won't."

"And he's right," said Herries, in his direct way. "We want him to stay, of course; but it is best for him to have his way."

"Yaas; but he might be made to stay."

"Made to?" said Blake, staring.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How?"

"Suppose we had a dodge for keepin' Tom Mewwy here? It would be a good ideah, wouldn't it? If he's goin' out into the cwel world, the longah he puts it off the bettah."

"Well, yes."

"Then I've got a wheeze."

"Go ahead!"

"The ghost!" said D'Arcy in a thrilling whisper.

Jack Blake jumped.

"You ass!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You startled me. What do you mean by the ghost?"

demanded Blake, looking round the room.

"I mean the ghost of Eastwood."

"The which?"

"The ghost of Eastwood. I suppose you know," said D'Arcy, with great dignity, "that there is a family ghost in our family?"

"Rats!" came from Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies!"

"I've heard you say that you don't believe in ghosts!"

said Blake, laughing.

"Well, of course, family ghosts are different."

"Do you mean to say that you believe in the family ghost?" exclaimed Herries.

"Well, not exactly believe in it," D'Arcy said cautiously. "But nevah mind that; that is beside the question. What I was thinkin' of is, suppose the ghost of Sir Roger D'Arcy appeared to Tom Mewwy this evenin'—"

"My hat!"

"And warned him not to leave this house till the end of the vac?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatever for wibald laughter!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I am not thinkin' of a weal ghost, of course. I am thinkin' that I might get myself up as a ghost."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pwag don't cackle, Blake! There is no purpose whatever to be served by cacklin'. What do you think of the ideah?"

"Rotten!"

"What do you think, Hewwies?"

"Bosh!"

"I am sowwy to heah you say so, deah boys, because it shows me that—"

"That the ideah is idiotic?"

"Oh, no! That you are idiotic, you know!"



A Merry
Xmas to
All my Readers
The Editor

"What?" roared Blake.

"I wogard it as an excellent ideah, and I am goin' to work it!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I suppose you chaps will help me!"

"Oh, we'll help you!" said Blake resignedly. "How are you going to get into Tom Merry's room? It will look suspicious if a ghost opens the door."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway shut up, Howvies! I shall be able to get into the woom without openin' the door, as there is a slidin' panel in the wall and a secwet passage. This house is vewy old, and is full of them, you know."

"By Jove!"

"I wathah think that a ghostly visitant will make Tom Mewwy change his mind about leavin' before the end of the vac. And before then I shall have had time to think the mattach out, you know, and I am sure I shall have thought of some dodge of savin' Tom Mewwy from the howwid necessity of lookin' for work."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"And suppose they buzz pillows at you?" demanded Herries.

"Bat Jove! I nevah thought of that. Pewwaps one of you fellows had bettah play the ghost," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"No fear!"

"Undah the cires—"

"Rats!"

And Blake and Herries were very firm upon that point. If Arthur Augustus wanted ghost to be played, it was pretty clear that he would have to play it himself.

Tom Merry did not sleep readily that night.

The Terrible Three had turned in, and the light was out; but there was a fire of logs in the bed-room grate, and it was slow to die out.

Every now and then a tongue of flame leaped up from the dying embers, and danced in strange lights and shadows upon the gleaming panels of the oaken walls.

Tom Merry did not feel inclined to sleep.

Neither, for that matter, did Manners and Lowther.

The Terrible Three could not help thinking of the morrow, when Tom Merry was to go forth into the bleak world—alone.

The chums of St. Jim's Shell lay in their beds, discussing the matter. The fire flickered and died down.

It was half an hour or more before their voices were silent, and Manners was the first to drop off to sleep.

Monty Lowther followed his example.

Then Tom Merry lay thinking, his eyes dreamily fixed upon the fire, which was very low now, glimmering redly in the great fireplace.

There was silence in the room.

Suddenly, in the deep silence, came a sound.

Tom Merry heard it, but he hardly knew what it was. He only realised that it was a sound in the darkness.

It might have been an ember falling on the hearth. It disturbed the hero of the Shell only for a moment.

His eyelids were growing heavy now, and in a few more minutes he would have passed insensibly from musing to slumber.

But suddenly something—an intangible shadow, seemingly—passed between him and the few red cinders that remained of the fire.

Tom Merry started.

It was only for an instant, but for that one instant the red glow of the fire had been blotted out from his view. It could only have been by a form passing between him and the fire.

Tom Merry was wide enough awake now.

He sat up in bed, his wide eyes staring before him, striving to pierce the gloom.

"Who's there?" he exclaimed, in a sharp, clear voice.

There was no reply, but Tom Merry thought that he heard a faint rustle.

There was a grunt from Monty Lowther's bed.

"Hallo! What's the row?"

"There's somebody in the room," said Tom Merry, in a steady voice.

"My hat!"

Monty Lowther rolled out of bed. Tom Merry stepped out, and walked across to the switch of the electric light, which was beside the doorway.

Click!

The room was flooded with light.

Tom Merry cast a quick, searching glance round him.

There was no one in the room but himself and Lowther, and Manners sleeping peacefully in his bed.

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Tom Merry looked amazed.

"Well, my hat!" he ejaculated.

Lowther grinned.

"You were dreaming!" he exclaimed.

"I wasn't! I tell you there was somebody in the room."

"Well, where is he now?" asked Lowther.

"I don't know."

"We should have heard the door go if he'd gone out, and besides, it's still locked!"

Tom Merry nodded. He looked under the beds and behind the wardrobe, but there was no intruder to be seen.

"Well, I'm blessed if I understand this!" he exclaimed.

Manners, awakened by the noises, sat up in bed and yawned and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"Hallo! What's the row?" he asked.

Tom Merry explained.

"Oh, you were dreaming!" said Manners at once.

"But I was wide awake!" objected Tom Merry. "Something passed between me and the fire, and I heard the rustle, too."

"Well, it must have been the ghost," said Manners comfortably. "You know we're on the haunted corridor. One of Gussy's ancestors was murdered in one of those rooms, and he walks the house at Christmas-time, you know."

"You ass, Manners—"

"Well, get back to sleep, and turn the light out!"

"But there was somebody—"

"Oh, rats and mice!"

Tom Merry switched off the light, and the juniors turned in again.

Manners and Lowther had no doubt whatever that Tom Merry had been half asleep, and had dreamed the whole occurrence. But Tom Merry was convinced that what he had seen had been real.

He lay quiet, waiting to see if there would be a repetition of the mysterious occurrence.

Ten minutes elapsed.

In the quiet of the old house, Tom Merry could hear the wind rustling in the leafless branches of the trees outside.

But a rustle, closer at hand than the rustle of the trees, caught Tom Merry's ears all of a sudden.

He sat up in bed, grasping a pillow.

As before, a dark shadow passed between him and the dim glow of the dying fire.

At the same instant, Tom Merry hurled the pillow.

It shot through the air, and evidently came in contact with a solid body, for there was a heavy *biff!* And the sound of a fall.

"Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Coal!"

"Hallo! What's this?"

"The giddy ghost!"

Tom Merry leaped out of bed.

But a faint click showed that the ghost was gone, and that a secret panel had closed behind him.

Tom Merry switched on the light.

The pillow lay in the midst of the cinders, and there were embers scattered far and wide, showing that the ghost had fallen in the dead fire.

The last spark had been extinguished.

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther, with a whistle. "Then there really was somebody, after all!"

"Phew!" said Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes," he said. "It may have been one of those Fourth Form bouncers. Who ever it was, he had a tumble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall be able to sleep quietly now, perhaps."

The chums went to bed.

This time Tom Merry allowed himself to sleep, pretty well convinced that the ghost would not return for a repetition of his unpleasant experience.

But he had hardly sunk into slumber when he was awakened. What awakened him he hardly knew, but he awakened to see dimly a figure in white at his bedside.

A deep voice thrilled in his ears:

"Beware!"

Tom Merry sat up in bed.

"Wh-wh-what!" he gasped.

"Beware!"

It was a deep, thrilling voice, evidently not natural to the speaker; but Tom Merry thought he could guess to whom it belonged.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Ask me not!" said the deep voice. "Take warnin'!"

Tom Merry grinned. The ghost of Eastwood had evidently fallen into the habit of dropping his final "g's."

"Take warnin', youth!"

"Ph!"

"Depart not!"

"What?"

"Depart not from this woof until the end of the vac!"

Take warnin'!"



"Run for a doctor!" exclaimed Blake as Herries rolled off his chair, groaning heavily. Tom Merry hurried out of the room, while Gussy seized a vase or flowers from a stand, threw the flowers to the floor, and flung the water into Herries' face! Herries' "illness" came to a sudden end! "Yarooogh!" he yelled. "Lemme get at him!"

"My hat!"
 "Take warnin' f'rom me, weckless youth—leave the woof of this house at your pewil!"
 And the figure glided away.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.
 He rolled in the bed, yelling.
 On their beds Manners and Lowther were rolling and yelling, too. They had woke up, and they had heard the familiar tones.

There was a click.
 The secret panel had fastened again, the ghost was gone.
 Tom Merry simply yelled.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared back his chums.
 "Gussy—the ghost!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

And a quarter of an hour after that ghostly visitation little was heard in Tom Merry's room but yells and chuckles and gasps.

CHAPTER 3. Bowled Out!

THE next morning, when the Terrible Three came down to the breakfast-table, they found Arthur Augustus D'Arcy already there.

The swell of St. Jim's looked at them rather anxiously.

His half expected to see them pale and wan, as was only to be looked for after a ghostly visitation from the world of shadows.

They disappointed him in this respect.
 Instead of paleness and wanness, their faces were quite rosy, and wore cheerful smiles. True, D'Arcy had heard the laughter as he left the room the previous night after the ghostly visitation; but he attributed that to hysterical fright.

Breakfast was what Blake called a movable feast at East-

wood House during the holidays. They had it when they liked.

Lord Eastwood was not down, and most of his guests had not appeared at the early hour when the St. Jim's juniors rose.

The juniors had the table mostly to themselves, even Cousin Ethel and Dolores, her friend, not being down.

Arthur Augustus was doing the honours.

"Good-mornin', deah boys!" he said.

"Good-mornin', old son!" said Tom Merry.

"I trust you slept well last night, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ripping!"

"Weren't you disturbed at all?"

"Well, just a little."

The Fourth Formers looked at one another. They were getting at the ghost story now. Blake and Herries grinned.

They knew by the Shell fellows' looks that the Terrible Three had not been imposed upon by the ghost of Eastwood.

"What disturbed you?" asked Arthur Augustus, looking at the coffee-pot, which he was wielding, and avoiding the Shell fellows' eyes.

"Somebody came into the room," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"As the door was locked, we could only conclude that it was a ghost."

"Gweat Scott!"

"You see, that was the only possible explanation under the circumstances; only there was one thing that made us suspicious."

"What was that?" asked Jack Blake.

"The ghost had very big feet," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Oh, weally, Lowthah—!" began D'Arcy.

"What did you say?" asked Lowther, fixing his eyes inquiringly on the swell of St. Jim's.

"Oh, all wight—it's all wight!"

(Continued at foot of next page.)

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KEEP YOUR CHUMS AMUSED WITH—

FUN FOR THE XMAS PARTY



Here are some jolly tricks and games that will keep the Christmas party going with a swing.

EVERY Christmas party has its dull moments when the Christmas spirit seems to flag, and everyone sits about wondering what to do next.

Here's your chance to step in and ginger up the proceedings. It's a good idea to open your "show" with a trick that will raise a laugh, a good one being to ask the other guests if they can make a fresh egg stand upright.

You'll see fellows trying themselves into all sorts of knots trying to make that egg sit up, but none of them will succeed unless the secret is known. The solution is to shake the egg vigorously until the yolk inside breaks and gets mixed with the white. Then, with a steady hand, you can balance the broad end of the egg quite easily on any smooth, even surface, such as a sheet of glass.

A Tough Nut to Crack!

Here's another puzzle. Say to your audience:

"Two boys were arguing about the sharing of some nuts they had just gathered. One said, 'If you will give me one of your nuts I shall have as many as you.' 'Sez you!' replied the other chap. 'Give me one of yours instead, and then I can divide equally with your brother Jack, and will still have as many as you.'"

The puzzle is, how many nuts had each? Answer: One had five nuts and the other had seven. But your pals will find the puzzle a tough nut to crack!

Mind Reading!

Having got the party going with these puzzlers, everyone will probably be ready for a lively game. One of the

best party games is Mind Reading. You appoint someone as the Mind Reader, and he goes outside while the rest choose an object in the room which he will have to name when he returns.

You, as Master of Ceremonies, previously make the Mind Reader an accomplice, and explain to him quietly before the game starts that, when he returns to the room, you will point to various objects and say: "Is it this?"

He will know when to say "Yes," because you will point to a black object immediately before indicating the correct article. But how it will puzzle your guests to know how the Mind Reader guesses right every time!

The "Electric" Club.

Now for a good laugh-raising game—the "Electric" Club. Send someone



Give "Jimmy Green" a gentle whack with the stick when you and he are covered by the blanket. If you are quick with the movement, he won't guess that you did it.

out of the room while you explain to the rest of the party that they are all members of the Electric Club, with the exception of the fellow outside, who will be made a member when he returns.

Then arrange some odds and ends—a matchbox, a vase, a pack of cards, and so on—on a table, and get the members of the club to choose one of these articles.

You explain that when the non-member is invited back into the room, he will be told to pick up each of the objects in turn. Members must keep quiet until he picks up the right object, and then they all give a terrific yell.

When the fellow outside returns, tell him that you will elect him to the Electric Club provided he can choose the right article from the things on the table, and that he is to pick them up one by one and inspect them. He will know the correct article because he will feel a harmless "electric" shock.

The "shock" is the shock of surprise he gets at the sudden uproar when he handles the right object!

"Jimmy Green!"

"Jimmy Green" is another first-class fun game. Somebody goes out of the room while you explain the game to the rest of the party. That "someone" is to be the "Jimmy Green."

When he returns, you tell him that you and he are going to lie together on the floor and be completely covered with an old blanket. The others, one of whom has a stick, sit close round on chairs, with their hands behind their backs. The member of the party who has the stick will then hit one or other of you with it, and both of you must hob up quickly and try to spot who did the hitting.

But when you and "Jimmy Green" get under the blanket, you take the stick secretly and give the fellow beside you a gentle whack.

Up you both pop, glaring round to see who did the hitting. He won't guess it's you for a long time if you are quick, and don't make your movement in whacking him noticeable.

By sending two or more fellows out of the room while you explain the "Jimmy Green" game, and only letting them come back singly, you can work this trick on more than one guest. The first "Jimmy Greens" can then get their own back on those who come after them.

"You're pouring the coffee over the tablecloth!" shrieked Blake.

"Bai Jove! So I am!"

"Did you see the ghost, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry.

"N-n-no."

"What did the giddy ghost say to you?"

"What was his language like?" asked Herries.

"Awful!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yes?"

"Oh, I—Will you take sugah?"

"Certainly! Of course, we know that it was somebody playing ghost, because he smelt very strongly of onions," said Lowther. "He had been eating fried onions and drinking beer."

Crash!

The coffee-pot fell upon the crockeryware, and the coffee ran in streams over the tablecloth. There was a shout from the juniors, but Arthur Augustus did not heed.

He jammed his monocle into his eye and glared at Lowther.

"You feahful beast—"

"Eh?"

"You know you are wottin', you feahful wottah!"

"Why, how do you know?" demanded Lowther innocently.

"You couldn't have been there."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

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"Where's the joke?" inquired Manners. "Gussy couldn't possibly have been there, because the door was locked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Besides, it couldn't have been Gussy playing ghost—think of the language."

"The awful language—"

"You uttah wottahs—"

"Blessed if I see why Gussy should be getting his hair off," said Lowther, tackling his second egg. "It's not my fault if his family ghost smells of onions."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I regard you as a pwevawicatin' ass, Lowthah. I regard you as anothah pwevawicatin' ass, Mannahs! I considah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" roared Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha! Do you think we didn't know it was you?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Do you think we should believe that you had an ancestral ghost with exactly the same giddy accent that you lather on to us?"

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you knew—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Depart not from this woff!" groaned Monty Lowther.

"Stay undah this woof till the end of the giddy vac. Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus looked from one to another of the juniors. His face was scarlet. He saw that he had inadvertently given himself away as the ghost of Sir Roger.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"You're bowled out, Gussy," grinned Tom Merry. "It's jolly kind of you, old chap, but I don't think it would have worked even if the real ghost had come. I can't stay till the end of the vac. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, my only hat!" roared Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! It appears that the wheeze has not worked," said D'Arcy, grinning at last. "Bai Jove, you know! What's to be done now?"

"I should recommend ringing for some more coffee," said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! You're wight!"

And Arthur Augustus rang for some more coffee.

CHAPTER 4.

Herries is Taken Ill!

THE kindly attention of the Eastwood ghost having failed to shake Tom Merry's resolve, the hero of the Shell prepared for his departure after breakfast. That Tom Merry must go sooner or later they knew, but they were naturally reluctant to lose sight of him.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's idea of some dodge for keeping him at Eastwood till the end of the vacation found favour in all eyes. Manners and Lowther being as keen about it as the Fourth Formers.

"And how is it to be done?" Lowther wanted to know.

Arthur Augustus sat with an elbow on his knee and his chin resting in his hand, and his brows corrugated with thought.

"I was thinkin' it out," said Arthur Augustus, looking up.

"No more ghosts, I hope," said Lowther sarcastically.

"Certainly not. I was thinkin' that pewwaps one of you chaps could fall ill."

"Ill?" said Manners, staring.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why on earth should we fall ill?"

"That's the wheeze."

"Blessed if I'm going to be ill, wheeze or no wheeze!" said Lowther emphatically.

"Ass! I don't mean weally ill."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Suppose one of you chaps pretended to be ill, you know, and Tom Mewwy would be so anxious about you that he wouldn't go till you were well again," the swell of St. Jim's explained eagerly.

"Well, there might be something in that," Blake remarked.

"I was thinkin' that Blake could pretend to be ill, you see, as Blake is wathah a good actah, and, in fact, has done vewy well in the Amataul Dramatic performances at St. Jim's."

"Hear, hear!"

Jack Blake winked at the window.

"No fear!" he remarked.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I feel sure that I couldn't do it. One of Tom Merry's best chums is the man. I suggest Lowther or Manners."

"Vewy well—"

"Oh, I couldn't do it!" said Monty Lowther. "Besides, I feel that this is a matter for the Fourth Form, not for the Shell."

"Just what I was thinking," Manners assented.

"Howies, then?"

"Oh, rats!" said Herries uneasily.

"Weally, Howies, old chap, you're just the fellow, you know," urged Arthur Augustus.

"Why don't you take it on yourself?" demanded Herries.

"Weally, you know, I shall be wanted to arrange the whole bisney, and I cannot be stage managah and leadin' actah, too."

"I'm not much of an actor."

"Why, you're ripping!" said Blake. "Isn't he?"

"Yes, rather!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, if you really think I could do it," said Herries dubiously.

"I am sure of it, deah boy."

"Oh, it's a dead cert!" said Manners.

"Safe as houses!" declared Monty Lowther.

"Well, what am I to do?" asked Herries, evidently only half liking the task, in spite of the flattering assurances of the juniors.

"All you have to do is to fall down and groan feahfully," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We'll do the wost."

"Well, I suppose I could do that."

"Of course you could," said Lowther. "Groan and shriek a bit."

"Hush!" whispered Blake. "Here comes Tom Merry!"

In a moment the altercation was hushed. Herries, remembering the part assigned to him, lay back in his chair, and prepared to groan.

The others stood round, with faces long and serious.

Tom Merry came into the room. He was looking serious enough.

"Well, my bag's packed," he said.

Groan!

Tom Merry started.

Gro-oan!

Herries rolled off his chair, and groaned heavily.

Tom Merry looked alarmed.

"Great Scott! What's the matter with Herries?" he exclaimed.

"Bai Jove!"

"Are you ill, Herries?" asked Blake, in great concern.

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Have you got a pain?"

"Is he in a fit?"

Groan! groan!

"Run for a doctor, or something!" exclaimed Jack Blake, in alarm. "There's a doctor staying in the house, I believe, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas; Dr. Nipper. He'll be in the gun-woom with the gov'nah."

Tom Merry hurried out of the room.

Arthur Augustus seized a vase of flowers from a stand, threw the flowers to the floor, and flung the water into Herries' face to revive him.

There was a formidable yell from Herries.

"Yaroooogh!"

He leaped to his feet, dashed the water out of his eyes, and rushed upon the swell of St. Jim's like a bull.

Arthur Augustus dodged round Blake in alarm.

"Keep off, you ass!" he gasped.

"Lemme get at him!" yelled Herries. "I'll teach him to douse me with water!"

"You ass! I was only keepin' up appearances!"

"Appearances!" roared Herries. "Lemme get at him, I say. I'll teach him to keep up appearances by dousing me with cold water!"

"You duffah!"

"Hold on, Herries—"

"Tom Merry will hear you—he can't be gone far yet—"

"Let me get at him!" roared Herries.

(Continued on the next page.)



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"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a roar of laughter from the doorway.

The chums swung round.

Tom Merry was standing there, his hands to his sides, roaring with laughter. He had heard Herries' stentorian tones, and had turned back. He was gazing at the juniors with eyes wet with mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! The game's up now!"

"All your fault, you silly chump!" grunted Herries, mopping his wet face with his pocket handkerchief. "Ow! I'm soaked!"

"I refuse to admit it was my fault. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry came back into the room, still chuckling.

CHAPTER 5. Skimpole's Timely Arrival!

THE St. Jim's juniors looked at one another rather sheepishly.

Herries' "illness" had come to a sudden end owing to D'Arcy's enthusiasm in keeping up appearances, and it was evident that the game was up.

The wheeze had failed, and Tom Merry had seen through it, as was evident from his laughter.

The hero of the Shell laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"That was a jolly quick recovery, Herries, old man!" he exclaimed.

"It was all Gussy's fault," he said.

"Weally, Hewweys—"

"Well, as you're not ill, we can say good-bye," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Bai Jove!"

"Rats!" said Lowther. "Are you really going this morning?"

"Must, old man."

"From the local station here?"

"Yes."

"We'll come with you as far as that, anyway."

"Good! I shall be glad to have you."

"We shall come, too," said a soft voice, as Cousin Ethel came into the room with her friend, Dolores Pelham.

"Won't we, Dolores?"

"Yes, indeed," said Dolores, turning her big, dark eyes upon Tom Merry very kindly.

"Thank you so much!" said Tom Merry. "You're all so good that it's simply rotten to have to leave you."

"Wait till I get a dry collar on," said Herries.

"Right-ho, old man!"

"I will ordah the big cah," said Arthur Augustus.

By the time the big car used for station work was ready, and brought round to the house, Herries was in drier attire. Tom Merry had already bidden farewell to Lord Eastwood, his kind host, and Wally.

With the girls and his chums he entered the car, and the vehicle drove away in the clear, frosty morning.

Tom Merry sat very silent. He had made a resolve to have nothing more from his friends and to go out into the world to seek his fortune.

What would the end be? He could not tell.

But in spite of the dubiousness of the future, he felt cheered and strengthened by his resolve, and invigorated, too, by the frosty clearness of the air.

After all, why should not the future be bright?

"You are going to London?" Dolores asked him.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; I shall head for Southampton."

"That is a seaport?" asked the Spanish girl.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"You are thinking of going to sea?"

"Yes; it is possible that I may."

Dolores clasped her hands.

"Oh, how pleasant it is to be a boy!" she exclaimed.

"You are going out to a life of freedom and adventure, and we girls have to remain quietly at home."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't think I am to be envied," he said. "I'd much rather go back to school. I'm going because I have to."

I fancy that a life of freedom and adventure, as you call it, means hard work and short commons. Not that I'm afraid of it, either. I hope I shall get through somehow."

Dolores nodded; she became thoughtful.

The car drove into the village and up to the little station.

The whole party accompanied Tom Merry into the station.

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and upon the platform, and there they had to wait five minutes for the train.

There was a sombre silence. Parting with a dear friend is never pleasant, and under the dubious circumstances the parting now was doubly painful.

Arthur Augustus' usually sunny face was quite gloomy.

Tom Merry looked the most cheerful of the party.

But it is probable that his cheerfulness was for the greater part assumed in order to avoid depressing his friends by low spirits.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, for about the tenth time. "It's wotten, you know."

Blake grunted.

"Tom Mewwy, old son, I wish you'd take that othah fivah," D'Arcy said in a whisper.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"But you are stonny, deah boy."

Tom Merry smiled.

"I have five pounds," he said.

"Yaas, but—"

"It's all right, Gussy."

"Look here," said Lowther. "No more of your blessed disappearing, you know. You've got to let us hear from you pretty frequently."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Promise!" exclaimed Manners.

"You see—"

"Come now, honour bright?"

"You see—"

"Here comes the train," said Monty Lowther. "We won't let you into it unless you promise. We'll hold you back, I tell you."

Tom Merry laughed.

"All right, I promise!" he exclaimed. "I'll let you know where I am once a week! Is that all right?"

"All serene!"

The train came into the station.

"Good-bye, and good luck!" said Cousin Ethel. "And mind you remember that you always have good friends here, Tom Merry."

"I'm not likely to forget it," said Tom Merry.

"No; I am sure of that," said Ethel. "But when you are away—"

"Dear me! Is that you, Tom Merry?"

A youth in large spectacles, with a bumpy forehead and blinking eyes, descended from the train.

He raised a large hat to Cousin Ethel, and blinked at the juniors. And from the St. Jim's fellows came an exclamation in a sort of chorus:

"Skimpy!"

Skimpole of the Shell grinned.

"Yes, here I am!" he exclaimed.

"Hallo, old Skimpy!" said Tom Merry. "Jolly glad to see you again, but I've got to get off by this train. Good-bye!"

"Stop a minute!"

"The train—"

"Never mind the train," said Skimpole, laying a restraining hand on Tom Merry's shoulder and regarding him through his big glasses.

"But, you ass, I must catch it—"

"Wait!" said Skimpole solemnly. "I have made a special journey to consult you, Merry, and what do I find? I find you leaving your friends suddenly in the middle of the vac. Surely there has not been a quarrel?"

"There's been no quarrel, fatho!"

"Stand clear, there!" shouted the guard.

Tom Merry took a step towards the train, but Skimpole, frail but determined, stood in his path.

"I am sure there must be some reason for this sudden departure!" he exclaimed. "It is my duty as a philosopher to keep friends together. You must stay, Merry!"

"Good old Skimpy!" ejaculated Lowther, perceiving in Skimpole a useful ally. "You've missed the train now, Tom!"

The train was moving now. It gathered speed, rumbling over the station and disappearing down the line. It was gone, but Tom Merry was not in it. The hero of St. Jim's was still standing on the platform with his chums.

"I am glad I prevented you leaving, Tom Merry," said Skimpole, smiling.

"So are we!" grinned Lowther and Manners and Blake and Herries in unison.

"Bai Jove, yaas!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Skimpy, old son, you're weally done somethin' useful for once!"

"There'll be another train," said Tom Merry.

"My dear Merry," said Skimpole gently, "I can see from your determination to leave that something has happened. Pray reflect that at the Christmas season friends should join together in happiness and good will. Besides, I want to ask your advice!"

"My advice?" repeated Tom Merry, laughing. "I'm afraid I'm not in a position to be able to advise anybody." "On the contrary, you are the only fellow to whom I can turn in my difficulty," said Skimpole seriously.

The chums stared at him with interest.

Skimpole was an eccentric though harmless idiot, addicted to the study of countless "ologies" and "isms." At St. Jim's he was regarded with kindly tolerance. But Tom Merry had never made a particular friend of him. Why he should appeal to Tom now was a mystery. His sudden appearance had served one good purpose, however—it had prevented Tom Merry from leaving. And for doing that the chums were grateful to Skimpole.

"If Skimmy wants Tom Merry's advice," said Blake, "we'd better get back to Eastwood House and talk in front

Skimpole stepped gingerly into the big car, gasping a little as he was squashed among the chums, who sat close to allow comfortable space for Cousin Ethel and her friend Dolores. The big car rolled away towards Eastwood House, every face wearing a smile. Skimpole had cheered the chums up more than he imagined. Tom Merry was still with them, and they felt quite well disposed towards Skimpole.

"Snowing, by Jove!" remarked Blake, as a scurry of flakes swept across the road ahead of them. It had been grey above and intensely cold, and the snow was not surprising. As the car ran along, the flakes descended quite heavily, and the snow began to lie.

"My dear D'Arcy, you remember asking me to drop in during the Christmas vac?" said Skimpole.



Boomp! Skimpole's boot met the ball fairly and squarely as he kicked for goal, but the shot was wide of the goal-post. The ball flew straight towards the snowman, hitting it full in the face and knocking Gussy's topper flying! "Goal!" yelled Lowther. "Well shot, Skimmy!"

of a fire. It's too draughty on this platform for a conference."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "Besides, there are plenty more twains latah in the day, if Tom Merry is still set on goin'. And I do not see how a junaiah captain can refuse to give advice when it is asked—what?"

"Hear, hear!" "Quite impossible," said Lowther, with great solemnity. "Skimpole wants Tom Merry's advice, and Tom must give it. Let's all pile in the car. Start another day—what do you say, Tom?"

Tom Merry grinned and nodded.

The eagerness of his chums to keep him with them touched him, and he had missed the train now, anyway. Skimpole greeted Cousin Ethel and her friend Dolores with quaint courtesy, after which he gazed at Tom Merry and nodded.

"I believe I recall something about your leaving at the end of last term, Merry," he said. "I thought it was a joke, however."

"I'm afraid it's very far from a joke, Skimmy," said Tom Merry as they left the station.

"Pray do not allow your troubles to affect you unduly," said Skimpole brightly. "It is wonderful what can be done by the application of the philosophical principles laid down by Professor Balmcrumpet. Professor Balmcrumpet says—"

"Hop in the car!" grinned Lowther,

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"I hope I have not arrived at an inopportune moment?"

"Not at all, old chap! You came just at the right moment!"

"I am glad of that," said Skimpole with relief. "I would have notified you of my coming, but I made up my mind to act only this morning. It is very unusual for me to travel so early."

"Don't worry, old son," said Lowther. "We'll make you comfortable!"

The car sped on back to Eastwood House, the party chatting cheerily.

CHAPTER 6.

Skimpole's Trouble!

"NOW, Merry!"

That afternoon found the chums gathered round the big fire in the library after lunch. The philosopher of St. Jim's coughed as though to unburden himself.

What he wanted to ask Tom Merry's advice about was a deep mystery. For Skimpole to suddenly decide to visit Eastwood House it must obviously be something of importance. What it was did not worry the chums a great deal, since its immediate effect had been to keep Tom Merry at Eastwood House another day. But they were naturally curious.

"Speak up, and don't be shy!" urged Tom Merry, busy with a chestnut.

Skimpole eyed him solemnly through his big spectacles. "I expect you are all rather curious to know why I have travelled here to ask Merry's advice. I have come to ask Merry about my health!"

"Your what?" ejaculated Lowther in astonishment. "My health!" repeated Skimpole. "Do you take Tom for a giddy doctor?" demanded Blake in amazement.

"Not in the least," answered Skimpole.

"Then what in the world——" Lowther touched his head significantly.

"My dear Lowther," said Skimpole in surprise. "Why are you making that ridiculous gesture?"

"It's the plum pudding," said Lowther seriously. "You've had too much plum pudding this Christmas!"

"The—plum pudding?" repeated Skimpole.

"Yes. It is not generally known, but in some rare cases plum pudding will affect the brain," said Lowther, with complete gravity.

"You don't say so, my dear Lowther?" gasped Skimpole in obvious alarm.

"I do say so," reiterated Lowther.

Skimpole touched his brow. Then he shook his head sadly.

"I fear it is worse even than I thought!"

Tom Merry laughed, and the rest burst into a roar. "Come on—out with it!" grinned Tom. "Lowther was only leg-pulling, you ass. What's biting you, anyway?"

"My health!" repeated Skimpole, serious as a judge. "I was only rotting, fathead," said Lowther. "Plum pudding won't do you any harm if you don't scoff too much of it."

"I don't suppose a giddy philosopher like Skimmey descended to touch the plum pudding this Christmas, did you, Skimmey?" asked Blake.

"That is what I have come to see Merry about," said Skimpole shaking his head again. "To my sorrow, I broke a life-long rule this Christmas. I ate some plum pudding!"

"A—what?" gasped Lowther, stifling a roar of laughter. "A course of intensive training," repeated Skimpole firmly. "Training is the reason for Tom Merry's sports supremacy, I am convinced. Is that not so, Merry?"

"Training has a lot to do with it, I'll admit," said Tom.

"Exactly. Then I want you to train me," said Skimpole, a smile appearing on his face at last.

"T-train you?" said Tom Merry.

"Put me through a course of physical exercises," said Skimpole earnestly. "Make me work hard—let the sweat pour from my brow. I have muscles and sinews, just as you have. I want you to develop them!"

With a great effort Tom Merry kept a straight face.

Monty Lowther tried hard, but he could not manage it. He exploded with a roar. Blake and Manners and Herries joined in. Even D'Arcy, despite a sympathetic feeling for Skimpole, could not hide a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"Ho, ho, ho!" shrieked Blake.

"Skimpole the athlete!" gasped Herries. "I shall die in a minute!"

"Bai Jove, Skimmey, you weally are a funny ass!" said D'Arcy.

Skimpole looked very stern.

"I fail to see any cause for risibility," he remarked. "That's because you're not looking at yourself!" grinned Lowther.

"Well, Merry, what do you say?" asked Skimpole, ignoring the scoffers.

Tom Merry held back a grin nobly.

"You're quite right, Skimmey, old chap," he said quietly. "Physical jerks will do more for you than pills and that muck. But I can't cure your dyspepsia in a day, or even a week, if it's long standing. In any case, I'm leaving Eastwood House to-morrow."

"There is no time like the present!" said Skimpole determinedly. "For once I am not prepared to theorise. These pains from which I suffer are ever-present, and I have made up my mind to dispel them."

I appeal to you, Tom Merry, to pre-

LOOK, CHUMS! ANOTHER FIVE GIVEN WITH NEXT COLOURED PICTURES FOR YOUR ALBUM! WEEK'S ISSUE!

"Weep, weep, the sinner confesseth!" chuckled Blake.

"I ate too much plum pudding," said Skimpole. "Far too much. Never having tasted it before, I did not realise that it was unusually heavy for the digestive organs. As a result of my indulgence, I have suffered from the most agonising pains in my abdomen ever since!"

"Drefful!" sighed Lowther. "You're getting as bad as Fatty Wynn, Skimmey."

"But what do you think Tom Mewwy can do?" asked D'Arcy, regarding Skimpole fixedly through his monocle.

"I should recommend a doctah, deah boy. There is one stayin' in the house, if you would care——"

"No!" Skimpole raised one hand firmly. "I have consulted a doctor. He told me I was suffering from chronic dyspepsia, and gave me some pills to take after or before meals, I forget which. I have taken them, and they have had no effect. It is for this reason that I have come to consult Tom Merry!"

"I don't believe in pills very much myself," agreed Tom Merry. "But frankly, I don't see that I can do anything to help you, Skimmey, old chap!"

Skimpole pointed a long and bony forefinger at Tom Merry.

"I regard Merry as one of the finest all-round athletes for his age to be found in England!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners! "But what——"

"Merry keeps himself fit," said Skimpole. "He never suffers from dyspepsia. Do you, Merry?"

"Not that I know of," answered Tom Merry, grinning.

"I thought not," said Skimpole, nodding. "And there you have the reason for my visit. I have abused my digestive organs, and they are in open revolt. Unless I do something about them, I shall never regain the peace of mind consistent with the study of Professor Balmy-crumpet."

I have appealed to a doctor, and as I said, he gave me pills. I woke early this morning, and decided to see Tom Merry without delay."

"But just what do you expect me to do?" asked Merry.

"I can't swap digestions—and I wouldn't if I could!"

"You can put me through a course of intensive training," said Skimpole tensely.

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scribe a course of physical exercise for me at once!"

There was a silence as the chums regarded Skimpole. There was no doubting that Skimpole was perfectly serious in his sudden desire to become an athlete. The baleful effects of the plum pudding he had "taken on board" had evidently driven him to decisive action. He was ready to be put through the mill—and, as far as that went, he had come to the right quarter.

"If you really want to train, Skimmey, you can start now!" said Tom Merry.

Skimpole's eyes gleamed.

"Tell me what to do!" he exclaimed.

While the rest watched, suppressing chuckles, Tom Merry attempted to make Skimpole adopt an erect stance.

"No, don't stick your tummy out so much," said Tom Merry, pushing Skimpole's stomach in slightly. "That's better. Now hold your head up, and look straight ahead—not on the ground, as you usually do. That's right. Now square your shoulders—get that hump off your back—keep your knees together—and breathe long and deeply."

Skimpole made a valiant effort to follow out those instructions all at once, but he forgot half of them in trying to remember the others, and ended by lifting his hands helplessly.

"I am afraid I shall not be an apt pupil," he said.

"Stick to it!" said Tom Merry. "Try touching your toes. If a fellow can touch his toes without bending his knees, there isn't very much wrong with him!"

"Really, Merry?"

Skimpole's face brightened, and he made a gallant effort to bend down and touch his toes without bending his knees. But half-way down he found his knees bending, and although he touched his toes his knees were far apart!

"Not so good!" said Tom Merry. "Try again!"

Skimpole tried, but it was useless. His weedy frame did not respond to the sudden demands he was making on it. He stood up at last, purple in the face, gasping and blowing. Tom Merry sat down and took another chestnut.

"It's no good," he said, as Skimpole gazed at him appealingly. "You'll never make an athlete, Skimmey. Your best

course is to take a few simple exercises every day, and you'll gradually improve."

"But, my dear Merry, I am determined to effect an improvement at once!" said Skimpole. His gaze swept round the chums. "If there is no other way, I must challenge you!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Blake sat up, and so did Lowther and Manners and D'Arcy and Herries. All stared at Skimpole, frail but undismayed, as he faced them.

"I challenge you all to—to a game of football!" said Skimpole.

"Bless your little heart, you've never played football in your life!" shrieked Blake.

"That is no reason why I should not commence now!" said Skimpole coolly. "Are you afraid to play with me?"

"Afraid?" Blake gasped inarticulately.

Lowther gasped, and D'Arcy put his monocle in his eye and allowed it to drop out again.

"Nunno, we're not afraid, old chap," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "You really mean you want us to give you some footer practice? Is that it?"

"You heard me correctly," answered Skimpole.

"All right—what about giving it to him?" asked Tom Merry, grinning at the thought.

Blake and Herries nodded together.

"All right—we'll give it to him!"

Lowther and Manners nodded, still gasping.

"We'll give the dummy what he's asking for!"

"Bai Jove! Yaas, watah!"

CHAPTER 7.

Footer—With Skimmy!

"WHAT are you getting out your footer boots for, Wally?"

Jameson, of the St. Jim's Third, bosom friend of Walter Adolphus D'Arcy, Arthur Augustus' younger brother, chuckled. Wally was rarely happy unless he was up to some mischief. He was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, though most of his pranks were innocent enough. Wally was not vicious. He was, as Lowther put it, "the cheekiest fag on earth!"

And his grin at the moment suggested that he was engaged on something particularly congenial. Hence Jameson's inquiry.

"Get yours out, too, old chap!" replied Wally, chuckling.

"What's on?" demanded Jameson.

"Skimpole!"

"Oh, that lunatic!" said Jameson, understandingly.

"Have those fellows got over their dumps sufficiently to jape Skimmy? I thought they were all moulting because Tom Merry is down on his luck."

"They're shelving the dumps for a bit, anyway," said Wally.

"The ass Skimmy would make a fellow forget anything. The ass has challenged them—actually challenged them—to a football match!"

"Is he going to play the lot?" asked Jameson blankly.

"No, ass. But he's going to show them how to score goals—and Gus says we can join in if we like."

"And do we like?" grinned Jameson.

There was a sports field in front of Eastwood House, on which, in summer, the House Eleven were wont to meet the villagers at cricket. Now, with goal nets complete, it stood ready for Skimpole's demonstration.

The two fags were early on the ground—or the scene of the execution, as Wally put it. So keen were they on the "rag" with Skimpole, that they lent a hand readily in clearing the snow away. It had stopped falling now, and the ground beneath was in fine condition for football.

"Mind the snowman, Skimmy!" sang out Monty Lowther, as the chums came down to the footer field, with Skimmy; changed into footer garb—lent by Gussy for the occasion—on their midst.

"It's a jolly good snowman—better than you Shellfish could make, any day!" retorted Wally D'Arcy, resenting Lowther's aspersions on the snowman, on which he and Jameson had laboured for the greater part of that morning.

The snowman, a really impressive figure so far as girth and height were concerned, stood just to one side of the goal net. The snowman was completed with a top hat filched from D'Arcy major's wardrobe, and a natty walking-cane, also filched from the same source, gave him a most aristocratic appearance.

"Bai Jove, dear boys, who is that wemarkable figah supposed to wewpesent?" asked Arthur Augustus, as he "spotted" the snowman.

"You, old top!" answered Wally.

(Continued on next page.)



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

DAD'S DEFINITION.

Son: "Dad, what is a boss?"

Father: "A boss, my son, is a man who comes to the office too early when I am late, and too late when I am early!" A football has been awarded to F. Clifton, 76, North Street, Bicester, Oxon.

COMPLIMENTS.

It was the festive season, and a very grimy man presented himself at the door of Mrs. Brown.

"Compliments of the season, ma'am," he said, touching his cap. "I am the man that empties the dustbin."

"Thank you—the same to you," was the reply. "I'm the woman that fills it!"

A football has been awarded to J. Ellison, 31, Gladstone Road, Gloucester.

SO NEAR.

Boss: "You've been late every day this week. Haven't you a clock?"

Office Boy: "Nearly, sir. I only want nine more coupons!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Hunter, 623, Govan Road, Glasgow, S.W.1.

SCHOOLBOY HOWLER.

Teacher: "Can any boy tell me the meaning of the Latin term 'Nota Bene'?"

Boy: "It is slang, sir, for 'absolutely peniless'!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Vincent, 36, New Walk, Leicester.

RETURNED WITH THANKS!

"Now, boys," said the headmaster, addressing the school on breaking-up day, "I hope you will all have a merry Christmas, come back fit and well, and work harder in the New Year."

"Thank you, sir!" chorused the boys. "The same to you!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to K. Ward, 557, Bromford Lane, Washwood Heath, Birmingham, 8.

LONG-WINDED.

There had been a series of talks on keeping fit.

"What an amazing example for us all was our last speaker," said the chairman. "Threescore years and ten old, and yet he could tire out many a man younger than himself."

Came a voice from the audience: "And so he has!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Tongue, 97, Abbots Crescent, Highams Park, London, E.4.

CAUGHT OUT!

Boy: "Have you heard the tale about a beg, dad?"

Father: "No, son."

Boy: "That's where you lie!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Panting, Taynton, Kenley, Surrey.

TRY AGAIN!

Two blacksmiths had finished heating a piece of iron, and one placed it on the anvil.

"H-h-h-h-h-hit it," he stuttered to his companion.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-where?" asked the other.

"Aw, h-h-h-h-h-heat, we'll h-h-h-h-heat to h-h-h-heat it again now!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Peace, 44, The Green, Darlaston, S. Staffs.

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"Bai Jove, Wally, your impudence increases daily. I weally shall have to administah that lickin' I've been pvoomisin' you—for your own good—"

"You—and who else?" inquired Wally cheekily.

"The best way with a younghab bwothah is to ignore him," said Arthur Augustus to his chums. "I have found that the best way—in fact, the only way—to deal with a young wascal like Wally— Woop!"

D'Arcy major had not really meant to finish his remark with that exclamation. He did so because a muddy ball plumped quite unexpectedly on his chest, and he staggered back, to sit down involuntarily in a puddle.

"Woop! Gerrrough! Wally—you young wascal—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the footballers.

"Bai Jove! Are you fellows goin' to stand and cackle like a set of laughin' hyenas instead of helpin' me up?" roared D'Arcy major wrathfully.

"Here's a hand, old chap!" gasped Tom Merry, aiding Gussy to his feet.

"And here's a foot for you, you cheeky young rotter!" said Blake, suddenly letting out at Wally. Wally D'Arcy skipped aside just in time.

"When you fellows have finished with your horseplay, I am ready to start my training," said Skimpole, with dignity.

"Come on, then!" said Tom Merry, placing the ball at Skimpole's feet. Skimpole presented a very remarkable figure, his knobby knees and spindly shanks showing up in contrast to the well developed limbs of the other fellows. Added to that, he had refused to take off his glasses, declaring he could not see without them, though Blake had

warned him that it was dangerous to play football in glasses.

"Try a few pot-shots first, Skimmy!" urged Tom Merry, doing his best as junior captain to imbue Skimpole with the rudiments of football. "I'll go in goal."

Fatty Wynn was the regular goalkeeper for the junior eleven, but Tom Merry, who played at centre-forward, was useful between the sticks—more than able to cope with the sort of shots Skimpole was likely to send in!

"Go it, Skimmy—shoot!" roared Monty Lowther.

Skimpole did his best. He took a look at the ball, hesitated, and then retreated to get a longer run. He almost started, then turned and went still farther away in order to get a still longer run.

"Phew! This one's going through the back of the net!" murmured Blake, as Skimmy began to run towards the ball at last.

"Look out, Tom!" chirruped Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah—look out, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

Skimpole was running towards the ball, from a distance of perhaps twenty yards—space enough to get up a really terrific "punch." As he approached the stationary ball, Skimpole was doing quite a considerable speed, running gawkiy and wildly, but grimly set on his object. As Skimpole was about to kick, Tom Merry crouched, ready to save, expecting a really hard shot.

Boomph!

Skimpole's foot met the ball—met it fairly and squarely! The ball flew—but not towards Tom Merry. It flew away to the left of the goal, completely wide of the goalposts. But it did not lack an object. It flew straight as a die towards Wally D'Arcy's snowman—catching that figure in the face and knocking its head clean off with the force of the impact! As the head rolled on the ground, and Gussy's "topper" rolled, too, Wally let forth a yawn, and the chums of St. Jim's let forth a yell of laughter!

"Goal!" yelled Lowther.

"Oh, well shot, sir!"

"Good man, Skimmy!"

"You silly ass, you've busted my snowman!" hooted Wally, the only fellow present who was not laughing, with the exception of his comrade, Jameson.

Skimpole looked quite pleased. His shot had found a billet. He had scored. He did not seem to realise why the juniors were laughing.

"Dear me, that was a good shot, was it not, Merry?" asked Skimpole delightedly.

"Oh, a great shot, old man!" gasped Tom Merry, wiping his eyes. "Not quite straight—but you can't learn everything at once!"

"I think I ought to try goalkeeping now, Merry," said Skimpole genially.

"But aren't you going to try some more shots?" asked Tom.

"That was a very good start," said Skimpole. "I must learn to excel in all departments of the game. Will you send in a few shots to me, Merry?"

Apparently, Skimpole had put all his "punch" into that terrific shot, and was desirous of a change. Tom Merry vacated the goal, and Skimpole took up his stand. He stood beaming while Tom Merry placed the ball.

"Come a little nearer, Merry," said Skimpole. "I cannot see you very well at that distance."

"Ye gods!" gasped Wally. "He can't see the ball at a dozen yards!"

The football "training" seemed likely to degenerate into a farce, and none of the fellows felt like shooting at Skimpole standing helplessly between the posts.

"Go on, shoot!" called Skimpole.

Tom Merry hesitated. As he did so Wally D'Arcy pushed past him.

"Leave Skimpole to me, you men!" he said cheerily. "I'll send him in a shot to save!"

"Keep it low, Wally," warned Arthur Augustus.

"Wemembah Skimmy's specs!"

"Trust me!" said Wally.

He took a short run, and let fly.

Whizz!

"Yooooooop! Yaroooh!"

Tom Merry & Co. hardly saw the ball. Skimpole certainly didn't. It was a swift shot—swift and body-high. The hard leather caught him fairly and squarely in the wind—and Skimpole, after one gasping grunt, collapsed like a pricked balloon!

The ball did not enter the goal. Skimpole had saved—but he was lying prone! Wally emitted a heartless chuckle.

"Yah! Is that the way you Shellfish keep goal?"

"You young wascal! Skimmy may be seriously hurt!" said D'Arcy major.

Many hands helped Skimpole to his feet. He gasped and gasped and gasped as though he would never stop gasping.

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

Hallo, Chums! Your Editor and his Staff, our authors, Martin Clifford and Edwy Searles Brooks, and our artists all join together in extending the heartiest of Christmas Greetings to all Readers of the GEM.

That is a sincere wish that cannot be beaten, and nor for that matter can the Yuletide Number in which it appears, the twenty-seventh in the long and successful career of the Old Paper.

Twenty-seven years is a very long period, and much has happened in that time to change this old world of ours; but the old-fashioned Christmas and the hearty good will and festive spirit that is always associated with it, still remains unaltered. It is the season of the year that is most welcomed by everyone, simply because of what it signifies.

Christmas, 1907, was when our first Christmas Number appeared, and then the Gem was more or less a newswoman, having only been in existence a few months. But it was even then in the forefront of boys' papers; and now, Christmas, 1933, sees it still leading the way for wholesome school stories that have ever been the

delight of British boys and girls. The GEM has stood the test of time—the real test of any publication—and to-day it is going stronger than ever, with as loyal a band of readers as any editor could wish for.

“THE RAMBLERS' RECRUIT!”

This is the title of the next ripping story in the “Tom Merry” series. As you have

To Irish Free State Readers.

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

But after his head had been folded between his knees a few times he found his “wind” returning, and he came back to earth, as it were.

“Did I save the shot, Merry?” he asked dazedly.

Tom Merry was quite pleased to be able to answer in the affirmative. Skimpole's face lit up.

“Then I am not a bad footballer, after all!” he exclaimed. “I shall improve, of course. I—I think perhaps I have had enough for one day. What do you think, Merry?”

“I think you have, old chap,” said Tom Merry, forbearing to grin. “You'd better go in and sit down for a while.”

And to the astonishment of the footballers, Skimpole walked off the field wearing an expression of blissful satisfaction, convinced that he had made the makings of a footballer in him, and that he was well on the road to curing his dyspepsia!

CHAPTER 8.

The Farewell Concert!

“**W**HAT about a farewell concert, dear boys?” There was a silence.

“I think it might help to cheer Tom Merry up, you know, weady to tswavel in the mornin’!” suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, swinging his elegant legs from the table in the library.

The long, cosy winter evening being upon them, the juniors were eager for some diversion to take their minds off the approaching departure of their leader.

“You got a good idea once in a century, Cussy!” agreed Blake. “This may be it, for all we know. But—who's going to perform?”

“I was thinkin' you fellows can all do somethin’,” said D'Arcy thoughtfully. “Tom Mewwy is speakin' in your patch now, so we could spew it on him as a surprise.”

“Good idea,” assented Blake readily enough. “But what can we do?”

read—or will read—in the yarn in this number, Tom joins up with a team called Wayland Ramblers, who play near St. Jim's. Being close to his chums, and with the prospect of a job being found for him as well, it seems to Tom that the tide of bad luck has turned at last. It has, for matters improve still further for him in the next grand story—but not before a scoundrel, a football foe of Tom's, tries to bring disgrace upon him. This stunning yarn of exciting adventure and football, in which Tom plays for the Ramblers against St. Jim's, you will vote the best of the series so far. Watch out for it next Wednesday!

In the next powerful instalment of

“THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!”

you will read of the thrilling adventure that follows the escape of the St. Frank's boys in the Sky Wanderer. They are attacked by an immense flock of huge pterodactyls, and the airship and its passengers are in peril, for the Sky Wanderer is battered from stem to stern by the flying monsters. What happens will thrill you throughout the next stirring chapters.

In addition to FIVE MORE ripping PICTURES, in full colour, there will be another exciting picture-story of “Mick o' the Mounted!”—the GEM Jester's prize selection of jokes, and three more St. Frank's portraits, and your Editor's Notebook completes the next splendid programme.

Before I conclude let me remind you once again of the amazing value for money offered in “THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL,” now only 5/-, and “THE POPULAR BOOK OF BOYS' STORIES,” which has been increased to nearly two hundred pages, but still sells at 2/6. The “H.A.” is packed with grand school and adventure yarns, and many other fine features, while for big-thrill adventure stories the “Popular Book” cannot be beaten! Both make excellent Christmas presents.

Cheerio, Chums!

THE EDITOR.

“I was thinkin' pewwaps Blake might do a Yorkshire clog dance—”

“I can't dance, fathead!”

“With feet that size, you ought to be able to!” said D'Arcy. “What about you, Hewwies?”

“Nothing about me, old chap.”

“I was thinkin' you might get your bulldog, Towsah, to do some tricks? The wotten beast has no respect for a fellow's twousahs, but I could toleivate him in here for once—for Tom Mewwys's sake.”

“My dog Towser doesn't do tricks,” said Herries sulphurously. “I think people who make dogs do tricks are just being cruel to the dogs.”

“Vewy likely,” assented D'Arcy. “And I don't weally want Towsah in here, anyway. Pewwaps Lowthah can suggest somethin'?”

“I could do a saxophone solo,” said Lowther thoughtfully. “Oh, wippin'!”

“But my saxophone is at home, fifty miles away,” added Lowther regretfully. “In any case, I haven't really learned to play it properly yet.”

D'Arcy breathed hard. He turned to Manners as a last resource.

“Surely you can do somethin' worth watchin', Mannahs?”

“Yes, rather!” said Harry Manners.

“Oh, good! What can you do best, old chap?”

“Take photographs!” answered Manners.

“But, my dear Mannahs, takin' photographs isn't an entertainment—”

“It is, the way Manners does it!” grinned Lowther. “I mean, you cannot do it to entertain Tom Mewwy to-night, Mannahs. Besides, I doubt vewy much if he would be entertained. He has probably seen you takin' your wotten photographs before, and is heartily sick of it.”

D'Arcy jammed his monocle in his eye, surveying Manners suspiciously. “I believe you are merely wottin', Mannahs!”

“Go hon!”

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"This is a serious debate," insisted D'Arcy, his monocle gleaming at each fellow in turn. "We are gathered here to devise an entertainment to cheer Tom Mewwuy up on his last night at Eastwood House, and all you fellows can do is refuse to make suggestions. I do not regard you as a bit helpful!"

"I could take some photographs by flashlight, same as I did Christmas Day," offered Manners.

"No, Mannahs, I wemembah you made us all look like freaks. I am sure Tom Mewwuy would not like a photograph of himself lookin' like a freak to take with him when he faces the world to-morrow!"

"What about you, old son?" demanded Blake.

"What about me, deah boy?"

"Yes, you. Aren't you going to set the ball rolling? We—we could even put up with one of your tenor solos, just to please Tom Merry!"

It was a big sacrifice on Blake's part, and his tone suggested that he thought so. D'Arcy glared at him.

"Weally, Blake. I have offahed on several occasions to sing one of my tenor solos, and you have invariably found some footlin' excuse to avoid it. You cannot appreciate art. Bai Jove, here is Skimmay! Powwaps he can help us cheer Tom Mewwuy up."

Herbert Skimpole came into the library, coughing a little. Otherwise he looked none the worse for his unaccustomed exercise of the afternoon.

"My dear D'Arcy, did I hear you say you desired me to cheer somebody up?" asked Skimpole.

"Yaas, deah boy! I have appealed to all these fellows in turn, and not one of them will step into the bweach. It's up to you, Skimmay!"

"Yes, it's up to you, Skimpole!" urged Blake. "You're the funny man in this party!"

"I am afraid I do not understand," said Skimpole, eying them with perfect solemnity. "I was not aware that I am a funny man."

"We want you to do a turn," explained D'Arcy. "Somethin' calculated to cheer Tom Mewwuy up. He's leavin' us to-morrow, you know, to seek his fortune out in the world, and we thought it would be a happy gesture on the part of his old friends if we gave him a sort of farewell concert to-night. You see?"

"I understand," said Skimpole. "I shall be interested to watch the turns."

"On the contrary, you are the leadin' turn!" said D'Arcy firmly. "I have just wemembahed. Last term you twiced to give a lecture in the Juniah Common-woom."

"I was howled down," said Skimpole indignantly. "A number of rude youths at the back of the room began singing 'We're Happy When We're Hiking,' and the whole audience took it up, so that my lecture was lost!"

"Have you still got that giddy lecture, Skimmay?" asked Lowther.

"I have my complete notes," answered Skimpole, with dignity. "It is one of the most detailed papers on the subject ever written. It would only last three and a half hours, if you would care to hear it—"

There was a gasp from the chums, but D'Arcy took the plunge. Anything to entertain Tom Merry!

"Vewy well, Skimmay, deah boy. Pway fetch your lecture, and pewwaps it will make Tom Mewwuy sleep well, if it does nothin' else."

Skimpole beamed, and hastened to fetch his lecture.

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MICK O' THE

Our Thrilling Picture-Story



It was Christmas Eve, and Mick and his Mountie comrades were making the barracks festive with seasonal decorations. "Hi, Mick, I want you!" cried the inspector, entering the doorway at that moment.



"Hard luck, Mick, but it looks as if you're going to miss Christmas dinner," went the inspector. "Plug Kelly has been robbing the Indians, and I want you to arrest him."



There he saw Plug Kelly thrashing a youngster with a stick. "You're going to tell me where your dad is if I have to flay the skin off your back!" Plug was shouting, and then stopped as he saw Mick.



With a swift movement Plug forced the boy between himself and the Mountie and then whipped out a revolver. "Drop your gun," he snapped to Mick. "If you fire it's ten to one you'll hit the kid."



Plug kicked, scratched and clawed, but coolly Mick ducked and dodged, and then—Thud! Suddenly his fist shot out and connected with Plug's jaw, and the man crashed to the floor, out to the wide.



With Plug handcuffed, Mick then learned that the boy's name was Jim Bates. "Plug my guardian while dad's away up North," Jim told Mick. "Guess you'd better come along to the barracks with me, Jim."

(Follow the further thrilling adventures)



Mick set out over the frozen tundras, determined to be back in time to celebrate Christmas. On the way he passed a colleague taking Christmas supplies to the barracks. "Happy Christmas!" called Mick.



Eventually he arrived at Plug Kelly's log cabin. Mick was about to demand entrance in the name of the Law when he heard a loud scream from inside. Without more ado, Mick forced his way in!



Realising Plug spoke the truth, Mick was obliged to drop his gun. But the boy, who had now sprung aside, turned the tables in dramatic fashion. He suddenly pulled the rug, knocking Plug off his balance.



In a moment, Mick pounced on the man, and together they rolled over and over the floor, struggling furiously. Plug tried to grab his gun, but the boy ran forward and kicked it out of his reach.



The return journey was made in record time, and, arriving at the barracks, Plug was marched away to the cells. "Good for you, Mick," said the inspector jovially. "You're just in time for Christmas dinner."



The Mounties made Jim their guest of honour, and they sat down to a wonderful dinner, with plenty of roast turkey and Christmas pudding. "Here's to a Merry Xmas!" cried Mick, happily—and it was!

While he was gone, Tom Merry came in. He glanced from one to another of his chums, detecting something in the atmosphere.

"We—we've got up a concert for you, Tom!" began Lowther, clearing his throat rather loudly. "Sort of farewell concert, as it were. We—we've engaged some of the best comic talent available."

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"Does that mean I've got to listen to some of your puns, old chap?" he asked tactfully.

"Nunno. I know you've heard them in the study at St. Jim's. So we got hold of a real star—Skimpie. He's going to give us a lecture."

"Oh?"

Tom Merry settled himself in a comfortable chair, and crossed his legs. The other fellows formed a half-circle with him, leaving a space for the lecturer on the rug by the fire.

Skimpole's re-entry prevented further comment.

Skimpole was delighted at this unexpected opportunity of reading his lecture. He had been annoyed at the reception it had had in the Common-room at St. Jim's. But here was an appreciative audience—and Skimpole forgot his past disappointments at the thought of addressing six attentive fellows on his favourite subject. He bore under his arm a voluminous file, and took his stand on the rug. There was a pause, while Skimpole coughed, preparatory to beginning. His cough seemed to be troubling him. The juniors were silent. Unbeknown to Skimpole, they were bracing themselves.

Skimpole took a long breath, and was about to commence when the door opened again, and a cheeky face looked in.

"What are these fellows up to— Oh golly, it's a rag on Skimpole!"

"Shut that door, Wally!" rasped Arthur Augustus severely.

"Rats, we're coming in!" answered Wally coolly. "Come on, Jammy. Skimpole is going to do his comic turn!"

D'Arcy turned a grim glance on the two fags as they joined the circle unbidden and drew up chairs.

"If you two young wascals are goin' to be pweent, you must sit quietly and not interwupt!" he warned. "Skimpole is about to read us a vewy interestin' paper on—on— Bai Jove, what is the paper about, Skimmay?"

"The lecture is entitled, 'Heredity in Garden Produce,'" answered Skimpole.

"Go it, Skimmie!" murmured Blake. Skimpole cleared his throat, coughed again, and paused. His cough seemed to be getting worse. But he began at last, putting a wealth of feeling into his words.

"When we come to consider the effects of Heredity as applied to Garden Produce, we are amazed. Heredity is a subject of which the average man knows little, and of which the average gardener is entirely ignorant. Think, if you can, of the terrible fact that ninety-nine out of a hundred gardeners grow their vegetables in complete ignorance of the influence which myriads of past generations of the same vegetable will have on the resulting crop. This means to say," went on Skimpole, his voice throbbing with emotion, "that the common or garden marrow grown by the unthinking gardener is descended directly from another marrow, till we get back through thousands and thousands of marrows, till we eventually arrive at a

theoretical Great Marrow, which may be taken as a type for all marrows."

Blake drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and jammed it into his mouth just in time to prevent an outburst of laughter.

"Marrows," continued Skimpole, "are a great study. There is much more in a marrow than meets the eye. To the ordinary observer there is nothing prepossessing about a marrow. It is large, heavy, and shapeless. But it may spring a surprise on the grower. Wow!"

Skimpole hopped suddenly on one leg, clutching at his face. Somebody had sprung a surprise on him!

"Something—something hit me on the cheek!" gasped Skimpole.

"Xaw-aw-aw! Is there much more of this?" demanded Wally restlessly.

"Is this the way you wepay Skimmay for twyrin' to cheer Tom Merwy up?" asked Arthur Augustus, more in sorrow than in anger.

Tom Merry winked at Lowther and Manners. Whether Skimpole was cheering the junior captain up was a moot point, but he was wound up now, and there was no stopping him. He coughed again, and restarted in second gear, as it were.

"Marrows are frequently grown to giant size for exhibition purposes," said Skimpole, his voice throbbing with indignation. "This is a degrading practice, both for the marrow and for the grower. A marrow which is encouraged merely to grow and grow loses all shape and symmetry, till it becomes merely so much poundage to weigh down the scales in its owner's favour at a show!"

Lowther nodded, and grinned.

"My pater's gardener grows marrows," he remarked. "He

BUMP!



Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Calway, 76, Bates Road, Brighton.

had a prize one last summer, and he sat up all night with it for weeks before the show."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole ignored the interruption, and ploughed determinedly on. "A marrow should be treated as something having individuality—"

Pop!

Skimpole started, leaping nearly clear of the floor at that sudden pop.

"What was that?" he demanded.

"Only me popping this paper bag," said Wally D'Arcy innocently.

"Wally, I request you to refrain from poppin' papah bags while Skimmay is weadin' us his lecture!" began D'Arcy major heatedly.

"I cannot go on if there are to be continual disturbances," said Skimpole. As he spoke, he burst into a fit of coughing, till Monty Lowther obligingly patted his back.

"You'd better give the jolly old larynx a rest, if you ask me," said Lowther seriously. "You've got a nasty cough from somewhere."

"I believe you are right, Lowther," said Skimpole. "It has been troubling me all day."

Lowther winked at Tom Merry and Manners. Here was a chance to stop Skimpole from lecturing further without hurting his feelings, which none of them wanted to do.

"Skimpole, old chap, you should look after a cough," said Lowther, with deep seriousness.

"Yes, indeed. I must get some cough mixture—"

"You came here especially to consult Tom Merry, didn't you?" asked Lowther.

"Why, yes—"

"Then listen to me. Tom had a cough last term, but I cured it for him."

"You did?" asked Skimpole, wide-eyed.

"Well, I suggested a cure," said Lowther, more exactly.

"Soon after that, the cough was gone. It may have been the doctor's medicine, or it may have been my cure. You can judge for yourself when you've tried my cure."

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"But what is the cure?"

"This cure was widely practised by the American Indians at one time," said Lowther impressively.

"You mean it is not practised now?"

"No. They all died off."

"Then I do not think—"

"They all died off for various reasons. But the cough cure is infallible. Listen!"

While Skimpole watched, fascinated, Lowther tilted his head back and began to emit a low, moaning sound. He sustained it for several seconds, his face a mask of gravity.

"Oooooo-ooooooo!"

"Great Scott!"

"Weally, Lowthah—are you ill, deah boy?"

"Not a bit of it," said Lowther, ceasing to moan.

"That's my cure. You just tilt your head back and moan softly and gently. Don't on any account strain the vocal chords. This cure just gives them a little exercise, and—corrects the slant of the uvula. You know what this is?"

"The uvula is the funny little thing that bobs up and down at the back of your throat, isn't it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Right, right. Now, Skimpy, if you want to cure your cough, just keep making that sound every few minutes, and you'll be as right as rain in a twinkling!"

"You really think so, Lowther?" asked Skimpole.

"It won't do you any harm, anyway," said Lowther.

Skimpole stared at Lowther, but the jester's face was as motionless as that of a Chinese. The other fellows held their breath, hardly daring to look at Skimpole for fear of laughing. Skimpole tilted his head back, drew a long breath, and began to moan!

"Oooooo-ooooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally D'Arcy, unable to contain himself any further, rolled helplessly in his seat as Skimpole emitted that weird noise.

"Shut up while Skimpole does his throat exercise!" snapped Lowther.

Skimpole tilted his head back farther and let forth an even longer groan:

"Oooooo-ooooooo!"

"That's right," said Lowther, serious as a judge. "You do that once every few minutes and keep it up. It will keep your mind off heredity in marrows, at any rate."

"Ooooo-oooo-oooo!" groaned Skimpole obediently.

"And—now I think you'd better get a throat gargle," said Lowther, containing himself with the utmost difficulty.

"Just run up to the bath-room and have a good gargle. That ought to do your cough good."

"That is a good idea," agreed Skimpole. "And I must not forget to make the noise you suggested every few minutes. Thank you, Lowther!"

And Skimpole left the chums, to get a gargle for his throat. As he left the library a weird noise floated back to them:

"Oooooo-ooooooo!"

Skimpole was doing his throat exercise!

Lowther was kicking up his heels.

The rest were following suit!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Skimpy will be the death of me yet!"

"That—that frabjous, burbling jabberwock!" choked Wally D'Arcy, clasping Jamson for support. "I wish we had him in the Third. He'd brighten up classes with Selby."

"It was too bad, Monty," grinned Tom Merry.

But he joined in the roar of laughter which went up. He couldn't help it. Skimpole had succeeded in cheering up Tom Merry on his last night at Eastwood House.

CHAPTER 9.

The "Ghost" Walks Again!

"BED!" said Blake.

It was time for bed.

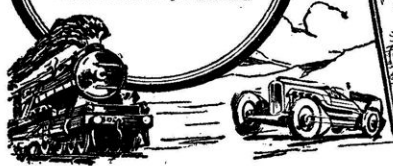
Nobody wanted to go very much. They had been suppressing the thought that was uppermost in their minds—the thought of saying good-bye to Tom Merry on the morrow. It had to be, but it went against the grain to let a staunch chum like Tom go out into the world, perhaps never to see him again.

Lowther cracked some of his puns, but they fell flatter than usual. D'Arcy was tactful, but tact could avail nothing against the facts, which were grim and insurmountable. Tom Merry seemed least worried of all. Perhaps he realised that the only way to meet troubles is to wait till they come, and then give them only as much attention as they deserve.

For the present he was letting the morrow wait its turn.

(Continued on page 13.)

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GUSSY THE GHOST!

(Continued from page 16.)

Skimpole had not reappeared. Probably he was finding solace in his room with a tome by Professor Balmcrumpet or Professor Looetop, his favourite authors. Possibly he was still bemoaning every few minutes, as instructed by Monty Lowther.

"Bed, bad Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "Sleep well, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"You bet!"

"Well, good-night, kids!" said Blake.

"Kids yourselves!" grunted Manners.

"Good-night, Tom Merry!"

"Good-night!"

The Terrible Three retired to their room and got undressed.

"I wonder if Gussy will play ghost again?" grinned Lowther, as he slid between the sheets.

"I've got a pillow ready for him if he does," remarked Manners.

"It would be just like the silly ass to spoil our night's rest," said Lowther. "He means well, but if he comes in here again we'll pillow him, well and truly."

"Yaw-aw-aw! I'm sleepy! Good-night, you men!" said Tom Merry.

"Good-night, Tom!"

Silence descended over the big room in which the Terrible Three slept together. The log fire flickered lazily, dying down. The wind blew gustily outside, and clouds scudded across the sky. A hazy moon shed a faint radiance across the beds through the high window.

The Terrible Three slept. They could not have slept longer, when Tom Merry awoke suddenly, sitting up in bed and staring into the dimness. A sound had brought him back from slumber—a most unusual sound, faint yet persistent. It resembled a low, long-drawn-out moan.

"Monty! Manners!" breathed Tom Merry.

Lowther roused up.

"Hallo! What's the matter?"

"Listen! Can you hear it?"

The moan came distinctly to their ears, close at hand, yet muffled.

Manners sat up.

"Wha-at's that?" he ejaculated sleepily.

"Somebody, or something, moaning," said Lowther.

"Grog!"

"Sounds beastly uncanny," said Tom Merry. "There it is again."

Once more that long-drawn moan came to them through the night.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, with decision. "I'm going to find out."

Lowther hesitated, then he, too, slipped out of bed. Manners mumbled, but he followed.

The three juniors slipped on jackets, and then crept to the door of their room. The moan came again from the corridor outside. It was a most bloodcurdling moan—enough to make any fellow's flesh creep—especially at dead of night in a house reputed to be haunted by a spectre of a long-gone D'Arcy.

Gently, so as not to give the "ghost" warning, Tom Merry turned the door handle. If it was D'Arcy himself up to his tricks again, the Terrible Three had had enough of it, and D'Arcy was due for a record bumping, by way of correction. On the other hand, the dreadful moaning suggested something more—perhaps Sir Roger D'Arcy in ghostly armour!

Tom Merry led his chums along the corridor. As they crept there was a fresh moan, long-drawn-out, terrifying. It seemed quite close at hand.

The three chums braced themselves to meet anything as they crept along the corridor.

The moon shone hazily through a window over the landing, and it was from this direction that the moans seemed to come.

Straining their ears the chums caught the sound of a faint footfall. They breathed with relief. A real ghost would not make any sound, even supposing there to be any real ghosts. But a "japer" like Arthur Augustus would, and the Terrible Three were ready and eager to deal with Arthur Augustus.

The moan sounded again—a yard or two distant.

PLEASE NOTE.

In last week's issue, the Erector address was incorrectly given in the coupon as 169, Kingsway, W.C.2. The correct address is 109, Kingsway.

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A shadowy figure loomed up, and, with one accord, the Terrible Three sprang on it.

Thud! Bump!

"Yarooogh! Wow-woooop! Help, help, help!"

It was not a member of the Terrible Three who was yelling for help. It was the figure they had grasped. And it was yelling for help right lustily.

The Terrible Three did not heed the unknown's yells. They were wrathful, and justly so. They grasped the ghost firmly, and bumped him—not once, but many times. Held by the feet and arms the ghost had no chance of escape. In a few breathless seconds he received what must have been the record-bumping of his life. His yells awoke the echoes, but in their excitement the Terrible Three hardly heard them.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Help, help! Dear me! Burglars! Fire! Help!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Bai Jove! Whatvah is the mattah, deah boys?"

It was the well-known voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy which stopped the Terrible Three. D'Arcy's voice came from behind them, and there was no mistaking it. D'Arcy himself came scurrying up, clad hastily in a vivid dressing-gown, with Blake and Herries close at his heels.

They had evidently heard the noise in the adjoining corridor, and had come in alarm to investigate. As D'Arcy's voice rang in their ears the Terrible Three let go the "ghost" as if it had been red-hot. Whoever it was, it was not D'Arcy, as they had imagined. Certainly any fellow playing ghost deserved a bumping, and Tom Merry & Co. were not repentant. But they were curious to know whom they had been bumping with such terrific zeal.

"Hold on a sec, you men! I've got a torch."

It was Wally D'Arcy, with Jameson. Wally clicked on his torch, and its rays were directed fully on the dishevelled figure reclining on the floor. A bony face peered up at the chums—a bony face from which dangled a large pair of spectacles, hanging from one ear. A quivering voice gasped:

"Dear me! What—what has happened? I have been attacked! Three miscreants seized upon me and assaulted me! Has there been a robbery?"

"Skimmy!" yelled Tom Merry.

"We've been bumping Skimmy!" gasped Manners, holding his head. "And we thought it was Gussy playing ghost again!"

"You sillay ass! What—what were you prowlin' around the corridor at night for, Skimmy?" demanded D'Arcy.

"I—I was only following out Lowther's instructions," faltered Skimpole.

"I didn't tell you to promenade up and down the corridor, moaning like a giddy spectre!" hooted Lowther.

"You told me to tilt my head back and make a crooning noise once every few minutes!" said Skimpole indignantly. "I have been doing as you said ever since. Finding I could not sit up in bed and perform the exercise properly, I took a walk in the corridor, where I could tilt my head back and croon, as you told me."

Lowther stifled a shriek.

"Go on, Skimmy!"

"I had been walking up and down, perhaps, five minutes, when three miscreants set upon me without warning—"

"We were the giddy miscreants," murmured Tom Merry.

"Never mind; carry on!"

"You!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Pray why did you treat me with such violence?"

"We thought you were Gussy—and we'd had about enough of Gussy, the ghost!" explained Tom Merry, chucking. "I say, we're really sorry if we've hurt you, old man!" "No—no, I am not hurt; merely bruised," said Skimpole, as he was helped with much solicitude to his feet. "Really, I feel I shall have to discontinue Lowther's treatment for to-night, however."

"I should discontinue it altogether, old chap," said Lowther contritely. "Stick to the throat gargle; it'll do a lot more good."

"You really think so?" asked Skimpole.

"I do," said Lowther solemnly.

"Good!" said Skimpole. "It was certainly very arduous to keep tilting my head back and crooning. Dear me! It is getting quite late. I had better get back to bed. Good-night, everybody!"

And, with his equanimity restored, Skimpole went back to his room, leaving the rest of the chums almost bursting with suppressed merriment. They nobly forbore to laugh till Skimpole's door shut after him; then they yelled.

"Bai Jove! I am glad I was not playin' ghost again. I should have weaved the bumpin' of my life!"

"Trust those Shellfish to pick the wrong customeh!"

grinned Jack Blake.

"Rats!"

"Good-night, Shellfish!"



As the Flindale goalkeeper flung out a hard shot, a lithe figure leaped forward, a head met the ball, and it whizzed back past the goalie into the corner of the net. "Goal!" Tom Merry had scored the winning goal for Wayland Ramblers on the stroke of time!

"Good-night! And if you feel like playing ghost, remember what happened to Skimpole!" chuckled Lowther. Tom Merry went in with his chums to spend his last night at Eastwood House.

CHAPTER 10. Player Wanted!

ON the following morning Tom Merry kept to his resolve and bade farewell to his kind friends at Eastwood.

Skimpole was leaving the same day, and he entered Tom Merry's carriage at Easthorpe Station.

The St. Jim's juniors stood, with Ethel and Dolores, on the platform as the train sped out of the station.

"Good-bye—and good luck!"

Tom Merry waved his hand back to his chums; then the train swept round a curve in the line and the juniors disappeared from sight.

Tom Merry was gone.

With saddened faces Arthur Augustus and his chums turned away.

Tom Merry's face was sad also as he sat in the carriage and looked out of the window upon the countryside, clear and cold in the hard frost.

The last few days had been very merry, but now it was time to face the stern realities of life once more.

He was plunged into silent thought, and Skimpole made several remarks without the hero of the Shell hearing him.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "I trust you are not getting deaf, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry started.

"Eh? Did you speak, Skimpole?" he said.

"Indeed I did, Tom Merry!"

"Sorry! I was thinking. What did you say?"

"Is there anything the matter?"

Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"Oh, no!"

"You seem somewhat downhearted," said Skimpole, blinking at Tom Merry benevolently through his spectacles.

"Well, I'm leaving the fellows, I don't know for how long, you know."

Skimpole nodded.

"And I suppose the change in your fortunes has had a somewhat depressing effect?" he remarked.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I am very sorry," said Skimpole. "Perhaps I could

relieve your mind and while away the time till we reach

Lowcot Junction by a little entertaining conversation."

"Oh, don't trouble, old chap!"

"No trouble at all," said Skimpole obligingly. "Not in the least. I have a book here; it is the famous volume of Professor Balmcrumpet on the subject of Determinism. I trust you are interested in Determinism. If so, I will explain the whole matter to you at full length."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "But—but I'm not interested in the least."

"That is all the more reason why I should explain the matter, as it is a subject every person should be interested in."

"Chuck it, old man!"

"Not at all, Tom Merry. This opportunity may never recur. I will explain. Determinism is the science which proves that everything which is, is as it is, and exists in no other form than the form it bears."

"Go on!"

"It proves that hereditary things are due to heredity, and that the qualities we get from our surroundings are caused by our environment."

"Wonderful!"

"Yes, it is indeed a wonderful discovery. There is a common idea that Determinism is merely old nonsense under a new name, but I assure you that this is not the case. The names of Balmcrumpet and Loosetop are sufficient to show how seriously it should be taken."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Suppose," went on Skimpole cheerfully—"suppose you are a murderer—"

"What!"

"Or a thief—"

"Eh?"

"Sh! I blame you for having reverted in conduct to the brutal instinct of some remote ancestor? Certainly not. If you were to attack me with the utmost violence and strike me on the nose, should I blame you? Of course not. My dear fellow, it would simply be the savage nature of the ancestor creeping out, and you would be no more to blame than if you stole my watch."

"Honour bright?"

"Certainly!"

"Then here goes!" said Tom Merry.

And his knuckles came sharply upon Skimpole's nose. The genius of the Shell gave a wild howl.

"Yow! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole rubbed his nose hard and put his spectacles straight and blinked at Tom Merry in bewilderment.

"What did you do that for, Tom Merry?" he demanded. "Why, you're not blaming me surely?" demanded Tom Merry in surprise. "It was due to my herodity, or my environment—I am not sure which."

"Yow! You ass! I was only putting a case. Science is not a thing that can be put into practice on all occasions, of course," growled Skimpole, rubbing his nose. "You have caused a considerable pain in my nose."

"My blessed herodity!" said Tom Merry.

Skimpole grunted, and drew to the farther end of the carriage before he proceeded with the further exposition of the brilliant principles of Determinism.

"You are quite mistaken," he began. "You were wrong—"

"Rats! I must have been right, if I'm not to blame, and you said I'm not," said Tom Merry. "That's common sense."

"My dear fellow," said Skimpole patiently. "Science has nothing to do with common sense. What an idea!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The train stopped.

"All change 'ere!" sang out a porter.

"Dear me! It is Lowcot Junction," said Skimpole, blinking out of the window. "We shall have to part here, Tom Merry. It is very unfortunate, because I intended to fully explain the principles of Determinism to you, and I have not had time. I hope you will accept Professor Balmypumpet's volume as a parting gift."

RUBBING IT IN!



(Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Caste, 45, Winslow Road, Hammersmith, London, W.6.

Hairmore: "Why do you always raise your hat when you meet the barber?"

Hairless: "To show him what a fraud he is. I bought a bottle of his hair restorer, and I'm still as bald as ever!"

"I'm afraid I couldn't carry it, Skimpy, old chap. Thanks all the same. Good-bye!"

And Tom Merry shook hands with Skimpole on the platform and walked out of the station, carrying his bag in his hand.

Tom Merry did not intend to go farther on his way by the railroad. He had little cash, and what he had it was necessary to be careful with.

The weather was frosty and fine, and Tom Merry was a good walker. The rest and the merry holiday at Eastwood had done him a great deal of good after his privations in London. He felt fit and cheerful, and ready to face the world.

With his light bag in his hand, he tramped along the lane from Lowcot Junction. The roads were hard and bare, and there was frost on the bushes and the trees. The keen wind did not trouble him. He was soon in a glow with the exercise.

While after mile passed under his feet, and he was five miles from the junction when he stopped at a wayside inn to rest and purchase a frugal lunch of bread-and-cheese, with a glass of milk.

The inn was on the outskirts of a village, and opposite it was a level expanse fenced in, where a couple of goalposts showed Tom Merry that football was played.

A crowd was gathering on the road, and Tom Merry guessed that a match was coming off ere long, and he was tempted to stay and look on.

He had intended to rest at the inn for an hour, and so he made up his mind to watch the first part of the match, at least.

The innkeeper, a jovial old fellow, willingly gave him information about the match.

The local team was playing Wayland Ramblers, and Tom Merry started as he heard the name.

Wayland was the market town not far from St. Jim's, and he had often heard of the Wayland Ramblers, and had seen them play. He had never played with them, however. The Waylanders were a grown-up team, and not likely to meet juniors in a match.

The footballers from Wayland naturally interested Tom Merry, and his interest deepened when the innkeeper told him that the players were now staying at the inn.

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They came out a few minutes later to go on the ground. Tom Merry looked them over keenly.

They were a very fine set of young fellows, belonging to the business section of Wayland Town, and their manager, Mr. Philpot, was with the team. Mr. Philpot was a banker in Wayland, and several of his clerks were in the team. They were chatting cheerfully as they came out of the inn, with coats over their football garb. There was no dressing-room on the village ground.

Tom Merry knew two or three of the fellows by sight, having seen them play in Wayland when he was at St. Jim's; but no one there knew him, and he did not expect to be recognised.

Nor was he. Some of the players glanced at the lad eating his bread-and-cheese at the bench outside the inn, but that was all.

"A fine day for the game, my lads!" said Mr. Philpot, rubbing his plump hands. "We shall beat them—eh, Yorke?"

Yorke, the Wayland captain, nodded his head. "I am sure we shall, Mr. Philpot," he said.

"Come, we'd better get on the ground now."

The team walked over the road to the gate, and passed in. The home eleven, in blue and white, were already on the ground.

Tom Merry finished his lunch, and leaving his bag in the charge of the innkeeper, followed the players across, and paid threepence for admission to the ground.

A goodly crowd was collecting, but there was plenty of room to stand, and Tom Merry chose a place well up to the front.

In spite of Mr. Philpot's confidence that his team would win, Tom Merry, as he glanced over their opponents—the Rimdale Athletic, they were called—had his doubts about the matter.

The Rimdale fellows looked more powerful upon the whole, and they were certainly an older team; and the way they were punting the ball about looked as if they knew their business.

Tom Merry was of opinion that the Waylanders had all their work cut out to win; and as for the crowd, they evidently considered that the visitors had no chance at all—after the fashion of the home crowd.

The teams were on the ground, but there was another five minutes to elapse before the time fixed for the kick-off, and the referee was not yet on the scene. As a matter of fact, the gentleman who was to referee the match was staying in the inn for a final drink before appearing.

The players had no mind to hang about doing nothing in the cold in their extremely scanty attire, so both teams had a punt about.

Tom Merry noticed the inside-right of the Wayland team—a young fellow of about eighteen, very light and very fast.

He was very reckless in the punting, and several times took unnecessary risks, and suddenly he went to the ground in a collision.

It was a pure accident; but it was severe for the Wayland man. He went down heavily, and another fellow stumbled and fell upon his legs.

There was a cry of pain from the inside-right.

The punting stopped instantly.

Mr. Philpot dashed up to the scene, and the players gathered round with anxious faces.

"Are you hurt, Grey?" exclaimed the Wayland manager.

The winger groaned.

"I—I'm afraid so, sir," he gasped. "It's my ankle!"

"Not serious, I hope!"

"It hurts!"

The crowd was serious and silent. They were glad the accident had not happened to a home player. But it was hard luck for the Ramblers to have a man injured just before the commencement of the game.

Mr. Philpot and Yorke examined the fallen player's ankle.

Their faces showed plainly enough that the injury was serious.

"A bad sprain," said Mr. Philpot quietly. "It must have twisted over as he fell. Was there ever such cruel luck!"

"It's rotten, Mr. Philpot!"

"Can't Grey play, sir?" asked several voices.

"No," said Mr. Philpot, "not to-day—and not for some weeks, I think. Carry him to the inn."

Several of the Waylanders raised the player from the ground, and he was carried out of the footer field and across the road to the inn.

Mr. Philpot and Yorke stood consulting, with grave faces.

"It means playing a man short," the manager remarked.

"Owing to Simpson being ill, we haven't brought a reserve."

Yorke nodded.

"It's hard luck, sir. The worst of it is, that Rimdale are in such good form that we have our work cut out with them, anyway."

"Then, playing a man short—"
"It means disaster."

Mr. Philpot pursed his lips.

"Suppose we could get a man here to take Grey's place," he said. "There must be a good many fellows in the crowd who can play footer."

"I don't know about asking a Rimdale man to play against Rimdale," said the Wayland skipper dubiously.

"Well, better anything than a man short."

"I don't know that anybody would offer."

"I could ask, anyway."

"Well, it wouldn't do any harm, sir," assented the Wayland captain.

"I'll do it!"

Mr. Philpot walked over to the ropes.

"One of our men has sprained his ankle, and won't be able to play in the match," he said. "Anybody here offer to play as a substitute?"

The village fellows looked at one another.

No one felt inclined to offer to play against his own team; and, as they wanted their eleven to win, such a recruit could hardly have put his heart into it.

Tom Merry glanced round.

Then he stepped forward.

"Will you try me, sir?"

Mr. Philpot looked at him, and smiled for a moment.

Tom Merry was much below the team in weight and size, of course. The idea of playing a boy under fifteen at first appealed to the Wayland manager as absurd.

But as he glanced over the lad's well-knit figure, erect head, and clear, steady eyes, the Wayland gentleman's expression changed.

"You don't belong to this town?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Tom Merry."

"You have played inside-right?"

"Centre-forward, inside-right, or half—just as you like, sir," said Tom Merry. "I was junior football captain at St. Jim's."

"St. Jim's? The Public school near Wayland?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Philpot looked scrutinisingly at the junior.

"You belong to St. Jim's?" he asked.

"I did up to Christmas, sir."

"Ah, I forgot! Of course, it is the vacation."

"I have left the school, Mr. Philpot," said Tom Merry. "I'll play for you with pleasure this afternoon, if I am any use."

"Well, the junior captain at St. Jim's ought to be able to put up a good game," said Mr. Philpot. "What do you think, Yorke?"

The Wayland captain had been looking Tom Merry over with an approving eye.

"Try him, sir," he said.

"You think it's a good idea?"

"Certainly, Mr. Philpot!"

The manager turned to Tom Merry again.

"Thank you for your offer," he said. "We'll try you with pleasure. You can have Grey's things; they won't be too large for you—much. Thanks, my lad! This way."

Tom Merry's eyes danced as he followed the manager into the inn.

In a very few minutes Tom Merry was standing up in Grey's footer shorts and jersey, which fitted him much better than he expected.

Then, with a light heart, he came down to the footer field, where he found the referee on the scene, and the teams ready to begin.

CHAPTER 11.

A Chance for Tom Merry!

TOM MERRY lined up with the Wayland men.

Yorke gave him a pat on the shoulder and a smile of welcome.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed. "You look very fit, and I think you'll do us credit. We're jolly well obliged to you, anyway!"

"Not at all!" said Tom Merry brightly. "I'm only too jolly glad to have a tussle at the old game—and the harder the better."

Yorke laughed.

"Well, this will be a stiff tussle enough," he said.

And the Wayland captain was right.

Rimdale won the toss and gave the Waylanders the wind to play against, and the ball was kicked off under that advantage. And, with the wind behind them, Rimdale led off with a hot attack.

(Continued on the next page.)

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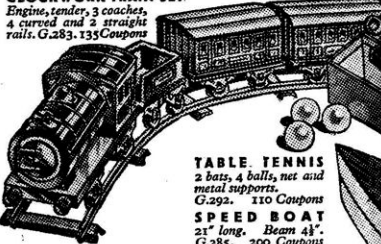


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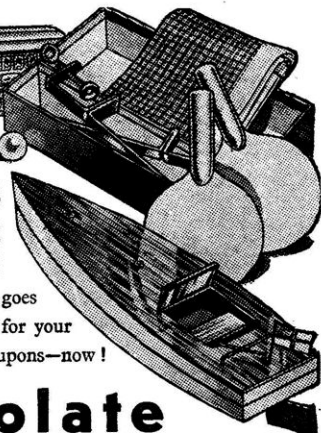
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Tom Merry played very cautiously at first, taking the measure of his comrades and his opponents.

He soon decided that the Rimdallers depended more upon strength and weight than upon finesse, and the Waylanders, while they were faster, were of little use in a charge against their heavy adversaries.

The wind, too, was a great advantage to the home team.

By speed, and quick, fine play, the Waylanders held their own, but again and again the enemy came perilously near to goal.

Tom Merry backed up the centre-forward well, but he soon discovered that he need expect little support from the outside-right.

The winger was a slight, wiry man, with a very dark complexion, and Tom Merry heard him called Blane by the others.

He assumed a manner towards Tom Merry, from the first, that was not pleasant to the lad, as if the latter were a mere schoolboy, and it would be useless to pass the ball to him under any circumstances.

As a matter of fact, Blane was a selfish player, and liked to keep the ball to himself when, strictly speaking, he should have passed, and Tom Merry's presence in the team gave him the excuse he wanted.

But he was quickly called to account by his skipper.

He had taken the ball along the touchline, and was tackled by the back, and could have let Tom have the ball with perfect ease.

Instead of that, he made a desperate attempt to kick, and the ball was headed back, and sent into midfield.

Yorke simply glared at the winger.

"Why didn't you pass to your inside man?" he shouted

"Lot of good that would be!" sneered Blane.

Yorke's eyes flashed.

"You'll pass next time, or there'll be trouble!" he rapped out hotly.

Blane bit his lip hard.

There was no time for more. A Wayland forward had brought the ball on again for an attack.

But the ball was cleared, and the chance passed, and more than one of the Waylanders looked darkly at the outside-right.

Blane was in a bad temper, too.

With Yorke's eyes upon him, he dared not "starve" the inside forward as he had been doing before; but there was no real cordiality in his play now, and he was better pleased when Tom Merry missed a pass than when he captured one.

Under such difficulties it did not seem likely that the hero of St Jim's would distinguish himself, or that he would make the Wayland Eleven believe that they had an acquisition in the new recruit.

But fortune favoured the hero of the Shell.

He captured a pass out from the centre, and brought it well up the field, and then let the centre have it back just in the nick of time, and Yorke sent the ball whizzing in.

There was a yell as the goalie missed it.

It was the first blood to the Waylanders; and, although Yorke had kicked the goal, it was due more to Tom Merry than to the Wayland skipper.

Yorke knew that himself, and he clapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as they went back to the centre of the field.

"Good for you, my lad!" he said. "Splendid!"

Tom Merry flushed with pleasure.

"I'm glad you are satisfied!" he exclaimed.

"More than satisfied, my boy!"

Blane sneered.

"I didn't see anything in it," he said. "Anybody could have made that pass, I should think."

Yorke turned upon him.

"You couldn't, for one!" he exclaimed. "Your passing to-day has been rotten all through—bad from start to finish!"

Blane turned crimson.

"Of course, I couldn't expect to show up so well as a schoolboy just out of school!" he exclaimed sneeringly.

"Whether you expect to or not, you haven't done it!" said Yorke. "Line up and hold your tongue!"

And Blane ground his teeth and was silent.

The ball was kicked off again, and Rimdale got the equalising goal just before the referee blew his whistle for the interval.

Mr Philpot clapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as the Wayland players came off.

"Excellent, my lad!" he exclaimed. "Much better than we could possibly have expected. Don't you think so, Yorke?"

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"Yes, I do, Mr. Philpot!" said Yorke heartily. "I don't think we miss Grey, as a matter of fact, sir. The lad more than fills his place."

"I was thinking so myself."

"If Grey isn't able to play in our match next week, sir, perhaps the lad would be able to fill his place for us again," Yorke suggested.

"That would be splendid!" said Mr. Philpot. "What do you say, Tom Merry? Will you be in our part of the country next week?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Where are you going now?"

"Nowhere in particular, sir," said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, I'm looking for work."

Both Mr. Philpot and Yorke looked at him curiously, and Tom Merry flushed a little under their gaze.

"Looking for work?" the manager repeated.

Tom Merry nodded.

"What kind of work?"

"Anything, sir, that's honest," said Tom Merry again. "The truth is, sir, I've had ill-luck; all my money's gone, and I've had to leave school, and I'm looking for a chance to earn my own living."

"I see," said Mr. Philpot, pursing his lips thoughtfully. "It is possible that I may be of some assistance to you, as far as that goes. I'll tell you what, my lad. Come and stay with me for a week at my place in Wayland, and I'll see what can be done. It will be no loss to you."

"You're very kind, sir!" faltered Tom Merry.

"Not a bit of it!" said Mr. Philpot heartily. "If we could get you to play in poor Grey's place next week it would be a good thing for us, anyway. But, there, time's up; we'll talk of it after the match."

And the players went into the field again.

The whistle went for the second half, and now the Wayland Ramblers played with the wind behind their backs.

They had managed to keep level in the first half with the wind against them, and so now their hopes were brighter, especially as the wind was keener now.

The second half was hot and fast from the start. The Rimdale men charged heavily, and although there was no foul play they claimed their strict rights in the matter of heavy charging to the very full.

By sheer weight they drove their attack home, and the ball was placed in the Wayland net.

The crowd cheered loudly. Rimdale were one up now; but the Ramblers were playing up splendidly to get level.

With a fine combined attack they brought the leather up to the home goal, and broke through the defence.

Yorke, at centre, was well marked, and Tom Merry had the ball.

"To me!" shouted Blane.

He was not so far wrong, for a pass out seemed to be the only chance. But Tom Merry knew that if he passed out, Blane would not send in the ball again, and nothing would come of it. He preferred a pass to Carter, the inside-left. With a beautiful ground pass he sent the ball across to the inside-left, and Carter was on it like a shot, and before the surprised defence knew what was happening, he had slammed the ball into the net.

"Goal!" gasped Yorke.

Goal it was.

"It's the kid's goal," said Carter genially.

And Tom Merry was slapped on the back till he was sore. Blane was scowling at him savagely.

Mr Philpot was clapping his hands till his gloves burst. The stout gentleman who presided over the Wayland Ramblers Football Club was wild with delight.

The score was equal now, and there was a quarter of an hour more to play. Many of the players were quite gruelled now, and some had hardly a run left in them. Play was much slackier till about five minutes before the close.

Then both sides, conscious that a draw was imminent, bucked up.

Again the home attack swept up to the Wayland goal, and the defence had all their work cut out to keep it intact. Play went to midfield again, however, and then the Ramblers worked their way along the touch-line towards their opponents' goal. In the last few minutes of the game they were crowding before the Rimdale goal, and the referee was seen to look at his watch.

Mr Philpot looked very anxious.

"Play up, boys!" he shouted. "One more for Wayland!"

The "boys" were doing their best. Yorke sent in a hard shot, and the goalkeeper fisted it forth; but as it came out

(Continued on page 23.)

STOP HERE FOR NON-STOP THRILLS!

THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!



THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

In a super airship, the *Sky Wanderer*, a big party of St. Frank's fellows, under Nelson Lee and three other masters, set off on an educational tour of the world. With the party also are Lord Dorrmore and his black friend, Umlozi. The airship is following a course over the wilds of Brazil when it is brought down by a powerful surge, and everyone aboard is made prisoner by the *Azacs*, a race of White Giants ruled over by Professor Cyrus Zingrave, a dangerous criminal. The airship party escape, however, but the crew is recaptured. While the St. Frank's boys remain hidden in a huge tree, Nelson Lee and five others get aboard the *Sky Wanderer* and succeed in flying away in the giant airship.

A Desperate Bid!

EDGAR FENTON, his heart beating fast, stood in the great tree-top, clutching at one of the enormous lianas to steady himself. Excitement had gripped him, for he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own ears.

Throb, throb, throb! Throb, throb, throb, throb!

It came faintly, but distinctly, over the tangle of Azac-laud jungle. The unmistakable, rhythmic murmuring of powerful engines.

"Great Scott!" muttered Fenton unsteadily. "They've done it! They've got hold of the *Sky Wanderer*!"

Left in charge of the sleepy St. Frank's boys, Fenton had been anxious, uneasy. But the throbbing sound, coming through the night air, told him everything that he wanted to know. His usual dignity deserted him. In that moment he was no longer the captain of the Airship School, no longer a staid Sixth Former, but a very excited boy.

"Hi!" he yelled. "Wake up, you chaps! Listen! Mr. Lee and Dorrie have bagged the airship."

His shout awakened many of the exhausted boys. They sat up blinking, startled.

"Do my ears deceive me, brothers, or can I hear a familiar and welcome sound?" came the voice of William Napoleon Browne, with all its customary precision and coolness. "Correct me if I am wrong, but if this sound is not the purring of internal combustion engines, then I am third cousin to the Shah of Persia!"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

"It is—it is!" shouted Chambers of the Fifth. "The airship's coming!"

Others yelled, and within the space of a few seconds, all the boys were wideawake. They scrambled to their feet, clutching at the tree branches and the creepers. None of them could analyse their real feelings; they only knew that they were desperately excited. That throbbing sound meant so much—and promised so much more.

"Listen—everybody!" shouted Fenton urgently. "Keep your heads! Keep cool! Listen to me, and do as I say!"

His voice, so commanding, did much to check the chaotic excitement.

"The *Sky Wanderer* is in the air, and that means that Mr. Lee and the handful who went with him have succeeded," continued Fenton. "We must get to the ground as quickly as we can. But don't rush. Take it steadily."

"Sound advice, Brother Fenton," said Browne. "Yet there is little time to lose, and—"

Booom!

The explosion, sharp and detonating, sounded from afar, and, owing to the distance, it rolled and boomed ominously.

"Great Scott! That was a bomb!" gasped Church. "They're fighting! Where's Handy? Mac, old man, do you know where Handy is?"

"I'll bet he went with Mr. Lee," replied McClure fiercely. "The rotter! He might have awakened us! We've been left out of this adventure!"

"On the contrary, Brother McClure, we are well in it!" said Browne. "The real excitement has yet to come."

Booom!

There came another explosion, and it had the effect of electrifying the boys into action. They went swarming down the great tree, taking all sorts of desperate risks.

One or two of them lost their grip, and went crashing down; but, mercifully, there were so many of the great lianas that the falling boys were checked, and they were able to obtain a new grip. After that they were more cautious.

Fenton did his utmost all the time to keep the fellows in order, but with such excitement gripping them it was well-nigh impossible. However, there were no casualties, barring a large assortment of bruises and scratches.

Then commenced a mad scramble through the tangled undergrowth. Within a few minutes—although it seemed hours—the airship schoolboys burst out of the forest. They

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went streaming across the open grassland, not far from the lake's shore. Here, in the moonlight, they were clearly visible. Fenton was again hard at work. He had given instructions to Morrow, Biggleswade, Wilson, and other seniors. Each one was yelling at the top of his voice, calling the roll. Fenton himself took the Fifth; Morrow and Biggleswade shouted the names of the Removites, and so on.

In spite of the tension the roll was called, and every boy was found to be present, with the exception of Nipper, Handforth, and Willy.

"We're all here, thank goodness! The others are with Mr. Lee," said Fenton, his gaze searching the sky. "Listen! The airship is close now. The throbbing of her engines is filling the whole air."

"Look!" thundered Stevens of the Fifth. "Something monstrous floated over the tree-tops, not four hundred yards away. It seemed as though a miniature world was about to collide with the earth. It was the Sky Wanderer!"

"Hurrah!"
"She's coming!"
"We're saved!"

It was almost too good to be true. The boys watched the great airship, her hull shimmering in the moonlight, as she rolled sluggishly into full view. It seemed to them that she was down at the tail, and that her stern only just succeeded in clearing the tree-tops. Suddenly the dazzling beam of a searchlight swept down and illuminated the scattered boys in sharp relief.

"Stand ready!" came the warning voice of Lord Dormore, magnified into a perfect roar by means of an electrical amplifier. "Mind the grappling claws, boys! Stand clear, and be ready to board!"

"Hurrah!"
At the controls of the Sky Wanderer, Nelson Lee was quite calm, but he had misgivings. With the aid of his handful of helpers he had got the crippled airship off the ground. But bringing her down was another matter. But it had to be done in order to rescue the other members of the party. And Lee knew all the time that the White Giants were coming at full speed across the country. He doubted if there would be time to get the boys aboard. If it could be done, it would mean liberty. Escape from Arzacland! Freedom instead of years of slavery and torture under the ruthless rule of Professor Cyrus Zingrave!

He gave a prearranged signal, which Lord Dormore heard. The airship was swerving giddily towards the ground, and scores of boys were running for their lives, for it seemed to them that nothing could avert disaster. The incredible bulk seemed doomed to crash nose first.

"Stand clear!" came Dorrie's warning shout. "Mind the grappling claws!"

Lee, in the control-room, had already signalled to the engine gondolas. The engines became silent, the great propellers just ticking over. The Sky Wanderer rolled lazily.

The two forward claws came down telescopically. Their metal prongs missed some of the running boys by inches. They clutched at the ground, digging up the grass, tearing the earth; but they held firm. The Sky Wanderer's descent was checked; she slewed like some dying monster, and her stern dropped. The starboard claw, aft, fouled a tree, and the tree crashed down. The claw, striking the ground, crumpled, and there was a crunching of metal. It even reached Nelson Lee's ears, and for a second he feared the worst. But the other after claw secured its grip, and, with a shuddering quiver, the airship stood at anchor.

Nelson Lee, perspiration streaming down his face, ran out of the control-room; he dashed to the entrance decks, and in a moment he had operated the iron ladders, lowering them into position.

"Boys—boys!" he shouted. "Hurry! But come aboard in good order! There are two staircases—"

"Hurrah!"

"We're coming, sir!"

They came in a mob, and the very thing which Lee had feared looked like taking place. The foremost boys reached the stairs; they started climbing, and others came tearing

up behind them. There was a jam. But Fenton was soon restoring order, and the boys came up the stairs with lessening confusion.

Lord Dormore made his appearance, grimy and hot. "Good man, Dorrie!" said Lee briskly. "Take charge of the seniors! Get two of them to each of the stern engine gondolas; get others to assist with the other engines!"

"Leave it to me!" said Dorrie crisply. "That's just why I'm here! Come on, Browne! Good man! I thought you'd be one of the first up. I'm baggin' you as my mechanic."

"Brother, I'm your man!" said Browne promptly.

"Then get straight to the starboard engine gondola amidships!" ordered Dorrie. "Here, Morrow, you go to the port gondola!"

His lordship raced off. He dashed up the stairs leading from the entrance deck to the promenade deck. From here he could obtain a clear view from the countryside, and, as he had expected, the White Giants were approaching.

For this "hop" from the airship's original landing-place to this spot was only a matter of a mile or so. The Arzac guards, seeing the airship come down, had lost no time in giving chase.

Nelson Lee was looking very anxious. Even now the rescue might fail. It was impossible to go until every boy was aboard. The White Giants were in strong force, and they were coming on at the double. And these extraordinary men, with their great stature, could run at an incredible speed. The moonlight was fading; dawn was coming.

The Arzac guards swept on towards the anchored airship. They were near at hand.

"Hurry—hurry," shouted Nelson Lee, as he stood on the entrance deck. "Fenton, how many more?"

Fenton was still on the ground, superintending everything. He heard Nelson Lee's call.

"Not many, sir!" he shouted. "We'll soon be aboard!"

"Stevens," said Lee, swinging round on the Fifth Former, who stood near him, "I'm going back to the control-room. Every second counts. As soon as the last boy is aboard, dash forward yelling the word 'Go!' Keep yelling it, and I shall hear you."

"Right, sir!" said Stevens breathlessly.

Lee hurried off; he reached the control-room and stood ready. The tension was terrific.

Lord Dormore, on the promenade deck, could see everything. A cold fear was gripping his heart. The last boys were mounting the ladders, but now the White Giants were streaming up. The leaders were so close at hand that they were reaching the ladders before the last of the boys were aboard.

"I hate doin' it, but there's no alternative!" muttered Dorrie.

He pulled a hand grenade from his pocket. With a swift move, he jerked back a little lever; then, leaning over the rail, he flung the grenade towards the enemy.

It was a risk—desperate. For there was a chance that some of the boys would be injured, and another chance that the airship herself would suffer damage. But it was the only effective way of checking the White Giants.

There was a blinding flash, an ear-splitting report, and Dorrie heard a scrap of metal whine past him, and he actually saw it tear through the outer fabric not five yards from where he stood.

From below came a confusion of wild sounds—the shouting of the boys, the cries of the Arzacs as they fell back. Several of the leaders had been injured, and they were sprawling in all directions, those behind falling over them. It was confusion.

"O.K.!" came a sudden yell from Fenton below. "All aboard, up there!"

As he spoke he leapt up the ladder; two White Giants were at his heels, and they gripped at him. With a desperate kick he was free.

Stevens heard the shout; he acted on the instant. Like a maniac he went running from the entrance deck—straight towards the control-cabin.

"Go!" he bellowed at the top of his voice. "Go! Go! Go!"

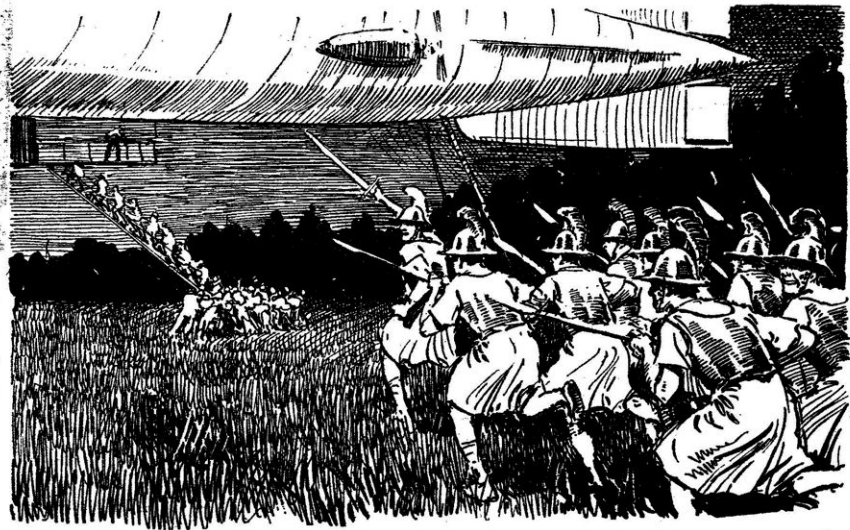
He did not know what was happening at the ladders; he only knew that the last boys were climbing them. Nelson Lee, hearing the shout, acted like lightning. The ladders could wait. He gave the necessary signals; the engine-room telegraphs sounded. And, like clockwork, those in charge answered. The engines roared into life.

At the same moment Lee caused the giant grappling claws to release their grip. The airship staggered; three telescopic grappling claws went back neatly into their sockets, and the nose of the vessel dipped alarmingly. For one dread second it seemed that she would crash to destruction. But Nelson Lee, with rare skill, caused the lifting vanes to take the Sky Wanderer up in a long, slanting ascent. Yet she was still very drunken in her movements—more so now, because of the fact that her load was greater.

St. Franks
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WHO



"Juicy" Lemon A. Morrow. A. McClure.
(Three more portraits next week.)



In strong force the White Giants swept on towards the anchored airship! The St. Frank's boys frantically rushed up the ladder to get aboard the Sky Wanderer before the Arzac arrived. But there was still a crowd on the ground, and it looked as if the rescue would fail, for the enemy were near at hand!

The last boys on the ladders gripped at the rails; they gripped at one another. For the ground had fallen away beneath them; the ladders quivered and shook. Friendly hands clutched at them, drawing them up to safety. And, just below them, some of the White Giants had secured a hold on the ladders, and now they were being taken up with the vessel. At the last moment they released their hold and fell back to the earth, some of them suffering injury.

The Sky Wanderer, with every one of the St. Frank's boys aboard, was away!

Zingrave in a Rage!

ALTHOUGH clear of the ground now, the airship was rising so slowly that it was doubtful if she would clear the forest trees which practically surrounded her.

Most of the boys had swarmed up to the promenade deck, where they could obtain a clear view. They were clutching at the rail, watching, tense with the excitement which filled them. They saw the tree-tops scrape beneath them as the airship rose upward.

Three of the telescopic grappling claws had been drawn in when Nelson Lee operated the lever. But the fourth claw, twisted and crippled, had jammed, and it hung well below the body of the vessel.

Higher and higher rose the Sky Wanderer, and now she was over the highest trees. The mighty vessel was getting into her stride. Her engines were running with rhythmic regularity.

Furthermore, as the minutes passed, Nelson Lee was getting the hang of the controls better. The additional members of the crew, too, made his task the lighter. Each engine gondola was now fully manned. Other boys had been told off to undertake additional duties, too.

Nelson Lee had every reason to congratulate himself. The airship had taken off without a single officer or man of the Sky Wanderer to assist. And now the proud ship, crippled though she was, was riding on an even keel, gaining speed, crossing the Arzacland countryside with regal majesty.

Nipper, relieved by one of the seniors, who was eager to take a responsible job, made haste to the control-room. He found Nelson Lee calm and resolute.

"Guv'nor!" burst out Nipper. "You're a marvel—you've done it! You've dished old Zingrave, and we've got the Sky Wanderer back!"

"It is early yet to congratulate ourselves, young 'un," said Leo steadily.

"But we're in the air!" protested Nipper. "We escaped from the White Giants, too! Isn't that good enough?"

"Only one thing will be good enough," replied Nelson Lee. "We've got to get right away from Arzacland—back across the mighty swamp—back to the civilisation we know. Even if it is only a backwoods mining camp it will do. But it must be a place which is on the map."

Nipper stared.

"But what of Sir Hobart?" he asked. "What of Squadron-Leader Truscott, and Mr. Vickers, and all the others?"

"They will have to wait."

"Wait? Wait until when?" asked Nipper.

"Until we can come back with a rescue party," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "My main object now is to make certain of the boys' safety, and the only way to do that is to take the airship right over the swamp. It is dawn already, and you know what that means, Nipper. As soon as the sun rises—"

"Great Scott! You mean the Destruction Ray," said Nipper. "It can only be operated in the sunlight."

"Exactly; and with that deadly instrument Zingrave can bring us down again," continued Lee. "Therefore, we must get completely out of range before the sun rises."

"I suppose you're right, guv'nor," admitted Nipper, staring down at the passing countryside. "Look! There's the Great Wall! We shall be passing over it in a minute. Why, we're going towards El Dorado, aren't we?"

"I believe so, although it is more or less by chance," replied Lee. "My main thought was to get the airship to a higher altitude and to set her going at full speed. I believe we shall cross the city, but Zingrave can do us no harm while the sun is not shining. Later, we can definitely set our course. Manners and the others are prisoners—we could not possibly help them even if we fanned. If this country was ruled by the White Giants alone I might consider staying on. But Zingrave is the king, and he has sworn to take vengeance on us. If we are recaptured—"

"Yes, I know, sir—you needn't say it," interrupted Nipper. "But you will come back again, guv'nor?"

"I shall come back with a powerful force," replied Lee, his strong face grimly set. "Zingrave is welcome to Arzacland, for all I care, but he must give up his British prisoners, including the other men he captured. Once we are all safely out of Arzacland—once we have brought

the airship down in civilised territory, then we can make our plans."

Nipper's eyes sparkled. "It's going to be exciting, gov'nor," he said. "But not for you," replied Nelson Lee. "The Sky Wanderer will be repaired as quickly as possible, and then she will resume her original world flight, her educational school trip. But I shall not be aboard then; I shall be organising the rescue of Sir Hobart and his companions."

"And I'll jolly well be with you, sir," said Nipper doggedly. "You're not going to dish me out of a thing like that!"

"Well, don't get excited," said Lee, with a quick smile. "We're not out of this present wood yet. When the time comes I shall get the British Government to act; I shall have a squadron of bombing planes come over Arzacland—to conquer Zingrave."

Nipper's eyes sparkled. Revelling in his new freedom, he foresaw the excitements of the future. But he did not foresee the unexpected. As Nelson Lee had truly said, they were not yet out of the wood!

Professor Cyrus Zingrave was cold with fury.

At such times he was far more dangerous than when he was openly enraged. He was standing in the golden reception chamber of the palace and Captain Oss, travel-stained, haggard, stood before him, a towering and dignified figure. At the rear of Captain Oss stood a number of other travel-stained officers.

"So this is the information you bring me," said the self-styled King Yoga, his voice silky but deadly. "You tell me that you have recaptured the men, but that the boys are dead. Lee is dead, Dormimore is dead! Where is your proof?"

THE SKYWAYMAN



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Captain Oss, a weary man, protested vigorously. "They killed, your Majesty," he said. "The lake-beast crushed them—"

"Did you see their bodies?" demanded Zingrave. His hypnotic eyes were upon Captain Oss, and, glad though the officer was, he almost cowered. Like all the other White Giants, he was helpless in the presence of this small but dangerous man. Zingrave's magnetic personality spread throughout the great golden chamber like an aura. He was a man of forceful personality—he was a genius.

"Could we find bodies, your Majesty?" asked Captain Oss sullenly. "They were in the lake—in the mud. The great beasts had trampled upon them. Did not the man Manners say that he saw them killed?"

"I do not believe Manners—I believe only my own eyes," replied Professor Zingrave curtly. "You shall be relieved. Captain Oss—you have done enough for one night. But others shall take your place. There must be a wide search—I shall not be satisfied until it has been proved beyond doubt that Lee and Dormimore and all the boys are dead. You, Captain Datt, will take orders."

Another officer stepped forward, impassive and majestic. "I obey your Majesty," he said, in stilted English. "You will take five hundred men," ordered Zingrave. "You will return to this lake, and—"

He paused, and on his face came an expression of incredulous amazement.

"Your Majesty is ill?" asked Captain Oss bluntly. "Listen, you fool!" said Zingrave. "Do you hear something?"

A pin could have been heard to drop in the ensuing silence, for Zingrave had held up a hand and no man dared to move. And in that dead silence there came a faint sound, unfamiliar to Arzac ears but well known to Professor Zingrave.

Throb-throb-throb! Throb-throb-throb! "Engines!" shouted King Yoga suddenly. "Do you hear? It is the airship! What can it mean?"

Even as he asked himself the question he told himself the answer. It could mean only one thing—Nelson Lee lived, and Nelson Lee had gained possession of the Sky Wanderer! And that thought led to others. Not only was Lee alive but Lord Dormimore was well, and probably all the boys! They had fooled Captain Oss!

Zingrave sprang to life. He went out to the Arzac officers, he swept out of the golden chamber; he ran like a hare up a great golden staircase, and emerged upon a wide balcony. The dawn light had grown, and the sun would soon be rising over the distant forests.

And there, sailing in the sky in all her majesty, was the great airship! She was cruising right over the centre of El Dorado, proud, defiant—triumphant.

"So!" snarled Zingrave, gripping the golden rail in front of him until his fingers were waxen white. "Fools! Fools! They were tricked—and Lee has triumphed!"

From the moment of having Captain Oss' report, Zingrave had doubted the story of the "wholesale slaughter." Knowing Nelson Lee as he did, he had entertained a lurking fear that the great detective had stolen a march on him.

And here, in the sky, was the proof!

So low was the Sky Wanderer flying that her vast bulk seemed to cover half the city as she passed serenely over. Professor Zingrave, standing on the golden balcony, gritted his teeth with helpless rage. For the sun had not yet risen—and he had no offensive weapons with which to bring the airship down.

And there, plainly visible, all along the promenade decks, were the boys of St. Frank's!

"Dead, are they?" screamed Zingrave, losing all control of himself. "Look, you fools! There are the boys—our victims! While you marched back to the airship!"

He was almost beside himself; for, in that Nelson Lee would fly right away from the outside would take steps to inform the outside would return with a mighty force.

The prisoners in Zingrave's hands were useless to him. He had no grudge against the crew of the airship. He could use them as he would gain no satisfaction from wreaking his vengeance on them. Nelson Lee and Lord Dormimore and the boys were different; he owed them many an old score, and they were escaping!

By this time, practically the whole city was awake. The unfamiliar purring of the airship's engines aroused the population. Most of them were staring up, and they were frightened. Already the rumours had got abroad that the strangers were possessed of magical powers. Here the strangers were possessed of it! For, in spite of all King Yoga's soldiers, they were flying openly over the city in their strange and monstrous ship of the air.

Attacked by Flying Monsters!

"WELL, there goes El Dorado," said Handforth, with regret. "Rather a pity we're going off like this."

"A pity?" said Church, who, with McClure, had once again joined his leader. "You're dotty! We're going back to safety—to civilisation!"

"Still, we might have had some ripping adventures," said Handforth. "By George! What excitement!"

"Well, it's over now, thank goodness," said McClure. "We're off—and Mr. Lee means to take us back across the swamp. If you ask me, we shall be jolly lucky if we make it!"

He was not the only passenger who had noted the Sky Wanderer's sluggish and reluctant progress. She was maintaining a straight course, and so far, her substitute commander had managed to keep her on a level keel. But try as he would, Lee could not gain height. Too much gas had escaped from the broken gas chambers; and there had been no chance to make repairs. And Nelson Lee knew that to make the long journey across the dense swamps and forests would be fraught with a thousand perils. But those perils were as nothing compared to the prospect of rain falling into Zingrave's hands. There was no alternative—the airship had to go on, perhaps, Lee would be able to coax her higher. He would have to do so, indeed, in order to cross the rugged mountains which ringed this land.

But for the moment, he was concentrating upon getting the Sky Wanderer as far from El Dorado as possible. Already the sun was peeping over the forest trees. Within a very short time the solar rays would be of such intensity

"But they're too far off, Handy," muttered Church, with a strange fear gripping him. "They're an awful way away—and if they were birds, we shouldn't see them at all. They do look like aeroplanes."

"But there are hundreds!" said Travers uneasily.

The airship was keeping a straight course now, heading in a direct line towards the outer range of hills. Nelson Lee, at the controls, was thankful to be so far away from El Dorado. Soon he would make a determined effort to gain height. With every minute that passed he was growing more familiar with the problems of navigating the great vessel.

Nipper, who had left the control-room, and had gone up on the starboard promenade deck, arrived just in time to discover the excitement. He, too, stared in astonishment at the strange things in the sky—which were now growing more distinct, bigger, and even menacing.

Without a word to the others, Nipper went dashing down the wide stairs from the promenade deck; he burst into the control-room, his face red with excitement.

"Guv'nor!" he panted. "There's something—"

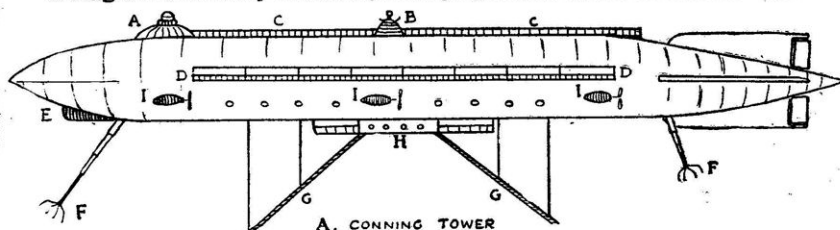
"I know!" snapped Lee. "It's a new peril, and we must do our best to avoid it."

As he spoke, he was staring through the glass shields—his gaze full upon the sky things. And Nipper noticed that the airship was changing her direction. Lee was sending her off at a direct tangent, in order to avoid close contact with the other occupants of the sky.

"But what are they, guv'nor?" asked Nipper blankly.

"I don't know, but I think I can guess," replied the great detective. "They are not birds, for they are too large. They are flying monsters."

A Diagram of the Sky Wanderer, the Flying School of the St. Frank's Boys.



A. CONNING TOWER
B. SEARCHLIGHT. C. RAILED-IN PROMENADE DECK (UPPER DECK). D. PROMENADE DECK AMIDSHIPS (FLUSH WITH SHIP'S SIDE)
E. CONTROL ROOM. F. TELESCOPIC GRAPNEL-CLAWS. G. TWO STAIRWAYS. H. ENTRANCE DECK. I. ENGINES.

that they could be captured by the instrument on the top of the great central building. One experience of that ray was enough for Lee.

The Great Wall had been left behind, and the Sky Wanderer was forging steadily onwards, when the first slanting rays of sunlight came horizontally across the trees, to turn the silvery hull into gold. But now the greater danger was past. Full daylight had come, but the airship was beyond reach of Zingrave's destruction ray.

"Oh, well, it's all over now—we're free!" said Travers of the Remove, as he leaned over the rail of the promenade deck. "Upon my Samson, it's been a hot night, my boys!"

"Not only hot, laddie, but frightfully hectic," said Archie Glenhorne, jamming his monocle into his eye, and surveying the tangled treetops with all his power. "Aren't we in the ground? I mean, oughtn't we to be getting higher?"

"What he's doing—and, by Jove, he's well so far," said Bob Christine of the come to think of it, I can hardly realise happened since last night. We were in underground, and—"

"Old thing," said Archie, who was staring at the airship. "I don't want to be pricelessly see aeroplanes?"

"Aeroplanes?" exclaimed Jimmy Potts. "You're mad! How could there be aeroplanes here?"

"Well, I mean to say— Over there, old boy!" said Archie, pointing. "Those rummy looking dots in the sky."

"Great Scott!" shouted Travers.

He had seen them now; not a mere half-dozen dots, but hundreds. They were far, far off, and, as yet, it was utterly impossible to guess what they were.

"Birds!" said Handforth gruffly. "What else can they be but birds?"

"Great guns!" gasped Nipper. "You mean pterodactyls!"

Lord Dorrmore came bursting in at that moment.

"That's the word, kid—pterodactyls!" he shouted. "H're you seen 'em, Lee? Hundreds of 'em. The sky's full! Take a look through these glasses, an' you'll have a fit!"

But Nelson Lee had no time to bother with field glasses; he was busy with the controls, striving to keep the airship well above the trees, striving to take her away from this new danger.

Nipper took the glasses, however, and no sooner had he focused them than a gasp escaped him. For he could now see the true nature of the monsters which flew in the sky. They were of an incredible size—vast, black-looking monsters with weird and horrible heads. They flew in two separate flocks—hundreds of them, and each monster was almost the size of an aeroplane! Pterodactyls! Vile things with fang-like teeth, and with great wings like those of a nightmare bat.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nipper, as he turned to Dorrie with round eyes. "Do you think we shall clear them?"

"We've got to—or we're finished!" said Dorrie. "The sky's black with the brutes. If they come into collision with us—" He shrugged. "Well, you can imagine what will happen, can't you? A dozen of them would be enough to upset our equilibrium."

"I think we shall miss them," said Lee steadily.

Never for a moment did he take his gaze from the strange flock. He was not unduly alarmed. For it was any odds that these creatures of the wild would take fright at the very appearance of the airship.

"Well, thank goodness for that!" said Lord Dorrmore, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,348.

as he noted that the sky ahead was clear. "I began to fear that we were in for another spot of bother. The brutes are shooting off. Gad! Look at 'em! The sky's as black as ink over thro, and— Hallo! What's wrong? By the Lord Harry! They've changed direction, Lee! They're coming at us!"

Nelson Lee did not answer. His lips were set in a thin line. Again he caused the Sky Wanderer to change direction—always endeavouring to steer her clear of the pteractyl host. But now it was apparently impossible; for the flying monsters were coming full tilt across the sky. It was clear that they were making a definite and determined attack on the Sky Wanderer.

"Guv'nor!" muttered Nipper, with a gulp. "We'll never do it! What does it mean? Why are they coming for us like this?"

Even Nelson Lee could not offer an explanation. Yet, in reality, it was simple enough. Nelson Lee's very move to secure safety had proved fatal. For the sun, slanting on the silver body of the airship, reflected the dazzling rays. And the pteractyls were blinded, bewildered.

On came the winged monsters in their hundreds, and the morning sky was shadowed by their massed bulk. Again the Sky Wanderer twisted, turning sluggishly. But her speed, compared with the pteractyls, was as nothing. There was no escape; a collision with this mighty flock was inevitable.

All along the promenade decks, the boys were shouting in their excitement. They were watching the hurtling horrors.

Thud! Thud! Thud! The leaders of the flock collided with the airship's hull, and some of the boys caught a vision of a monstrous pteractyl, maimed and screaming, go hurtling down past the promenade deck. The craft heeled over crazily, and her great metal girders groaned under the strain.

Disaster—utter destruction—was imminent!

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GUSSY THE GHOST!

(Continued from page 22.)

a little figure leapt forward and a head met the ball, and it whizzed back past the goalie into the corner of the net.

There was a yell: "Goal!"

The whistle rang out.

Tom Merry had headed the ball into the net almost on the stroke of time, and he had won the match for the Wayland Ramblers.

The players crowded round him as he walked off the field, and Mr. Philpot grasped him warmly by the hand.

"You've done it, my lad!" he exclaimed, shaking Tom Merry's hand again and again. "You've done it! The winning goal, by Jove!"

"It was ripping!" exclaimed Yorke, slapping Tom Merry on the back. "I hope the kid will play for us next week, sir."

"Oh, we'll make him!" said Carter.

Mr. Philpot dropped his hand on Tom Merry's shoulder.

"What do you say, my lad?" he exclaimed. "Will you come home and stay with me as my guest for a few days and play for us in our next match?"

It was hardly possible to refuse, for did Tom Merry wish to do so. He was more likely to find the employment he sought with Mr. Philpot's aid than without it, and the kindness of the Wayland footballers, with one exception made him anxious to do anything he could to oblige them.

"Yes, sir," he exclaimed. "Thank you very much for your kindness!"

An hour or so afterwards Tom Merry was in the train speeding towards Wayland, with the crowd of footballers in a merry mood over their victory.

THE END.

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