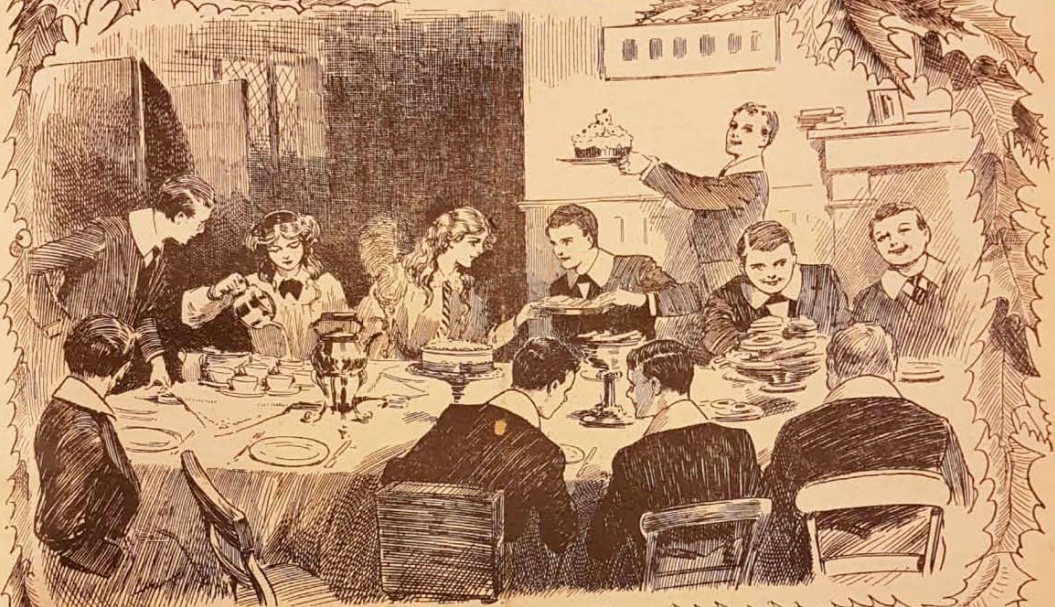


NO INCREASE IN PRICE.  
A SPLENDID CHRISTMAS NUMBER

THE  
**EMPIRE**  
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A COZY TEA-PARTY.

**COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOL DAYS**

A New and Interesting Story for All.  
— BY —  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD**

Tom Merry and Co's Preparations.  
**W**EAALLY, Lowther—  
"Look here, Tom Merry, I've got no more handkerchiefs," said Lowther. "I can't find any, Tom! Trajous duffer!"  
Tom Merry, having finished dusting, tossed the decidedly grimy handkerchief back to its owner.  
"There you are, Monty, my boy."  
Lowther took the handkerchief and looked warlike; but as he saw the end of a canibic handkerchief peep through D'Arcy's pocket, his frown changed to a grin. He crept gently and quietly behind the swell of St. Jim's.  
Tom Merry and Manners watched lowther suddenly seized the elegant of the froster, and pulled him back. D'Arcy gave a yell, the toast went

in one direction, and the fork in another.  
"Ow! Weally—"  
Lowther, quick as thought, jerked D'Arcy's handkerchief from his pocket, and rammed the soiled one in its place, and then dragged D'Arcy to his feet.  
"Sorry, old man!" he said.  
"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You uttah ass! I fearbous duffah! I weally think I ought to give you a foahful thvash-  
"The swell of St. Jim's had not the slightest suspicion of the change made in the handkerchiefs. He was thinking only of his rumpled jacket and his dusty trousers. He glared at Lowther with great wrath.  
"You uttah ass!"  
"Eh, ha, ha!"  
"Bai Jove!"  
D'Arcy made a step towards the humors of the Shell. Monty Lowther retreated through the doorway, laughing.  
"Here, don't forget that toast."  
Here, don't forget that toast," Lowther exclaimed. Manners, as D'Arcy made a movement to pursue Lowther down the passage.  
"Weally, Manners—"

"You'll be late with it for tea."  
"Oh, vevy well! I will give Lowthah a foahful thvashin' another time," said Arthur Augustus. And he returned to his occupation.  
The swell of St. Jim's made round after round of toast. His face was steadily growing to a beetroot colour from the heat of the fire; but he stuck manfully to his task, and the pile of toast on the plate on the fender grew and grew.  
Meanwhile, Tom Merry and Manners laid the cloth and set out the crockery—rather a cracked and varied array of crockery. Tom Merry eyed it with a very doubtful expression.  
"Nip along the passages, and see what you can get, Manners, old man," he exclaimed.  
"Right you are!" grinned Manners.  
And he went. He returned in about five minutes laden with various crockery-ware. He also had a large Delt jug containing a bunch of big roses.  
"By Jove, that's nice!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I never thought of having flowers in the study, but it

will look ripping. Where did you get them?"  
"Borrowed 'em from Kildare's study."  
"Kildare there!"  
"No."  
"Tom Merry laughed.  
"I hope Kildare won't miss them," he said.  
"Oh, he's not the chap to cut up rusty before girls!" said Manners easily. "Afterwards, it won't matter. Look here, we shall want some chairs."  
"Get 'em from somewhere."  
Manners departed. There was the sound of a soft voice in the passage. D'Arcy jumped up off the fender, very hot and perspiring.  
"Bai Jove, the gals, you know!"  
"As to in Tom Merry's Study, COUSIN ETHEL and Dolores came along the Shell passage, escorted by quite a little crowd of punners. They arrived at the study, really looked very cozy, freshly dusted as it was, with a bright fire burning and the tea table laid, glowing with crockery of every colour and

pattern. Tom Merry met his visitors with a cheerful grin, and D'Arcy with the heat of the fire during the toast-making operations.  
"Please come in," said Tom Merry. "I'm afraid you will find it a little crowded."  
"Oh, no!" said Ethel.  
"Not at all," declared Dolores. Her black eyes took in the whole study at one glance, and she wondered in her mind why Cousin Ethel chose to have tea in that poky little room—poor Tom Merry's study—instead of in the big, airy room in the Head's house.  
But a gentle smile remained on Dolores's red lips while she was making these mental criticisms, and no any idea of what she was thinking. More than once there had been an odd expression in Kerry's eyes as he glanced at the Spanish girl.  
"We've got rather a decent spread pattern. Tom Merry met his visitors with a cheerful grin, and D'Arcy with the heat of the fire during the toast-making operations.  
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"We've got rather a decent spread

New Readers should turn to the foot of next page.



A New and Interesting Story for All. (Continued from the front page.)

# COUSIN ETHEL'S SCHOOLDAYS

## A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S CHUM

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD

this time." Tom Merry remarked, with a smile, "and Gussy has made heaps of toast."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How hot you look, Arthur!" Ethel exclaimed, with a smile.

"Hai Jove, yaas!"

And Arthur Augustus took out his pocketkerchief, and wiped his warm brow.

Then there was a shriek of laughter in the study.

"D'Arcy had wiped a trail of grime all across his aristocratic features, and the change in his aspect was simply startling."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I entirely fail to see what you duffins are cacklin' at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look in the glass!" gasped Cousin Ethel.

"Hai Jove, Ethel—"

"Look in the glass—"

Arthur Augustus obeyed. Then he gave a jump.

"Great Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Some faithful ass has put the wong handkerchief in my pocket!" gasped D'Arcy. "Hai Jove, I'll give the wotah a fearful thrashing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

The two girls were laughing as heartily as anybody. D'Arcy gave one more look into the glass, and then rushed from the study.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Figgins. "I know Gussy will be the death of me. I wonder who played that little game on him."

"I wonder!" said Monty Lowther, who had come into the study with the crowd. "It was rough on poor old Gussy. Hallo! What's that?"

There was a wild tramping and crashing in the passage, and Manners came tearing up with a chair under each arm, and dashed into the study with his prizes.

After him came Hanecok and Jones minor at top speed.

"Stop him!" yelled Hanecok.

"Stop him!" roared Jones.

"Well, oh!"

They halted in the doorway at the sight of the two girls, and blushed.

"Oh, sorry!" gasped both of them; and fled.

Manners panted, and set down the chair.

"Get 'em!" he gasped.

"Enough, now!" asked Blake.

"Yes, if you two chaps sit on the window ledge."

"Good! We can do that."

Cousin Ethel was placed in the best chair, and Dolores in the next best, at the table. The armchair had been swung out into the passage to leave free room. The juniors seated themselves round the table, or about its room, or at the windows. There were ten boys and two girls in all, and the party was large for the size of the study; but it was no use quarrelling with the accommodation.

Arthur Augustus came in, with his face freshly washed, and clean as a new pin, looking newly alert and garbished, so to speak. A general grin greeted his reappearance, and he replied to it with a lofty stare through his eyelids.

"You don't mind sitting on the wall locker, do you, Gussy?" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh! I—I mean, not at all, dear boy!"

"Hats!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Here's your chair, Gussy, next to Miss Pelham. Sit down, old son."

"Thank you vevy much, Tom Merry!"

Tom Merry had arranged D'Arcy's place next to Dolores. D'Arcy was the greatest lady's man at St. Jim's,

and he knew Dolores better than the other fellows. And Ethel was quite satisfied with Figgins looking after her. Tom Merry thought his arrangement rather diplomatic.

The tea was made, and its pleasant scent pervaded the study. Cousin Ethel poured out the tea.

There was a cheerful fire of chatter round the tea-table. Football was naturally the topic, and for some time it was hardly noticed that Dolores was vevy silent.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was entertaining her with an account of the goals he would have kicked if it hadn't happened that he didn't kick them. He observed at last that Dolores was relying only in monosyllables, and toying with her spoon.

"Another cup of tea, dear gal!" he asked.

"No, thank you!"

"May I pass you the cake?"

"Thank you, no!"

"Speaking of cake," said D'Arcy, "wounds me of a wathah good stovv. There was a fellow named Wolobinson—I forget whether his name was Wolobinson or Wadcliff, but it doesn't weally matter—and he had a cake on his birthday. It was a vevy nice cake with plums, you know. Are you fond of plum-cake, Miss Pelham?"

"No," said Miss Pelham.

"It is vevy nice," said D'Arcy. "Well, this fellow Wadcliff—or Wolobinson—I forget which, but it is not weally material to the stovv—had a plum-cake on his birthday. He had a few friends."

"Pass the water-ses, D'Arcy!"

"Certainly, dear boy!"

"And the salt."

"Here you are."

"Oh, Gussy can't kick for taffee!" Fatty Wynn was saying. "Why, if he'd put the ball at me like—like a New House chap, I should have had to play it over the bar."

"Weally, Wynn—"

"That would have been a corner for you, though," added Fatty Wynn reflectively. "I don't suppose it would have been much use to you chapp."

"Oh, wats?"

"Cressie it, Fatty!" grinned Figgins. "Order! Pass the sugar!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyelids into his eye, and gave Fatty Wynn a withering glance, which was quite wasted upon Wynn, who was just then beaming in great delight upon the cake. D'Arcy turned back to Dolores.

"I was tellin' you about my friend Wolobinson," he remarked.

"Were you?" said Dolores.

"Yaas, wathah! About a birthday cake, you know."

"Indeed?"

D'Arcy was discouraged.

He did not venture the story of Robinson, or Radcliff, and the birthday cake, but found them all uninteresting to her. The swell of St. Jim's became a little silent himself towards the end of the meal. He was discouraged, if the young lady wouldn't talk herself, and he wouldn't listen to him when he talked, there were difficulties in the way of a conversation.

Cousin Ethel glanced at her friend once or twice. Dolores coloured

under her glance, and made an effort to be cheerful and chatty, and succeeded to some extent. But the tea was nearly over now, and ere long it finished, and the crowded company in the study broke up.

"Hai Jove!" D'Arcy confided to Tom Merry. "I weally don't think I get on vevy well with Miss Pelham, you know."

"No!" was tellin' her the stovv about Wolobinson and his birthday cake, you weneahah!"

"Yes, I remember," said Tom, rather lastly.

"It's all wight," said Arthur Augustus, with some dignity. "I wasn't going to tell you ovaah again, Tom! Figgins, but Miss Pelham seemed quite bored, and I didn't finish tellin' her the stovv."

"Go hon!"

"Don't you think it's wathah weal-makable?"

"Simply amazing!"

And D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and gave the hero of the Shell a very dubious glance. But after that D'Arcy did not inflict very much of his society upon Dolores Pelham.

"I want another chap to come with me in the trap when I drive the gals home," he said to Blake, a little later. "Would you like to come, dear boy? I have a pass from Kildare for two, on purpose."

Blake grunted.

"Of course, I'd like to come," he said.

"Then come, dear boy."

Blake shook his head.

"No," he said heroically, "take Figgins."

D'Arcy started.

"Yes, Figgins!"

"Hai Jove! Do you think Figgv is wathah struck with Miss Pelham, wewaps?" said D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hai Jove! It's barely poss. that she might have preferred sittin' beside Figgv at tea," said D'Arcy slowly. "She was awfully bored with us, you know. It seems odd that anybody should prefer Figgv; but there's no accountin' for tastes, is there?"

"Not at all," said Blake.

"If you'd like to let Figgv come instead of you, Blake, I'll take him."

"Do!" said Blake.

"Vevy well!"

And while the girls were gone into the Head's house for their coats and hats, D'Arcy approached Figgins, who was standing chatting with Kerr and Wynn, with a somewhat lugubrious expression upon his honest face.

"Figgins, old man!"

"Hallo!" said Figgins, rather gruffly.

"I was wonderin' if you'd care to come in the trap to St. Freda's," said D'Arcy. "Blake thinks you might like to."

Figgins jumped.

"Me!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah, dear boy!"

"Oh, I say, Gussy, this is awfully decent of you," Figgins exclaimed.

"Not at all, dear boy. I shall be drivin', you know, and there ought to be somebody to talk to the gals, of course. I'm sure you'll like to have a drive with Miss Pelham," said D'Arcy humorously.

"Miss Pelham," said Figgins vaguely. "Oh, yes, of course, I'll come with pleasure, Gussy, and I think it's vevy decent of you."

"Not at all, dear boy."

And Figgins dashed off for his coat and cap.

OH, SILENCE!

"Quite weal-makable!"

Cousin Ethel and Dolores came out of the Head's house, wrapped in their coats for the drive home to St. Freda's. Both of them looked vevy charming, and many of the fellows gathered round envied D'Arcy and Figgins that drive.

Figgins came racing up with his coat on.

"Right!" he gasped. "Here I am!"

Dolores looked at him.

"Are you coming?" she said.

"Yes," said Figgins, his enthusiasm considerably dashed by Miss Pelham's one. "Gussy has asked me, and—"

"We shall be glad," said Cousin Ethel.

"Why, of course," said Dolores, with a charming smile.

And Figgins recovered again.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Figgins will talk to you while I drive, you know. I'll let you drive comin' back, Figgv; but while the ladies are in the trap, I think we had better take every care."

Figgins laughed; he didn't want to drive; he'd rather sit.

"All right, old lid," he said.

"Quite weally, dear gal!"

"Quite," said Cousin Ethel.

The juniors gathered round. There were many good-byes to be said. Ethel had said good-bye to Mrs. Holmes and the Head; but there were quite a crowd of juniors in the quad, to see her off.

"Good-bye, Cousin Ethel!"

"Good-bye!" said Ethel brightly.

"And thank you all so much for the pleasant afternoon we have had."

"It's you that's made it pleasant, Cousin Ethel," said Tom Merry.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the Shell's fellow.

"Hai Jove, Tom Merry, I wegard that as a vevy generous remark!" he said. "You do not often express yourself so well."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, if you pass it, it's all right, Gussy," he said.

"Yaas, wathah! You see—"

"Good-bye, again," said Cousin Ethel.

She waved her hand from the trap. Dolores did not wave her hand. Perhaps she thought she did not know the juniors of St. Jim's well enough.

D'Arcy took the ribbons, and the trap moved off through the dusk, the lamps gleaming out ahead as he drove away.

Tom Merry and his chums looked after them as they went. When the glowing lights of the trap were lost in the darkness of the road, the juniors turned back to the house.

"Was that a ripping girl Cousin Ethel is," Tom Merry remarked.

"Yes, rather," said Blake. "How do you like her friend?"

Tom Merry paused for a moment before replying.

"Well, any friend of Cousin Ethel's must be nice," he said at last.

And Blake nodded, and it dropped at last.

Dolores—little thinking, and still less caring, what impression she had made upon the St. Jim's fellows—sat in the cushioned seat, with her coat about her and the thick rug over her knees, for the night was cold. All Arthur Augustus's attention was given to the road, for the country road was almost pitchy dark, and he had to think wholly of his duties as a driver. Figgins was left to entertain the two girls during the drive—a thing that it was difficult for Figgins to do. For though Figgins, in his big, honest heart, regarded all girls with a feeling akin to veneration, and worshipped Cousin Ethel in particular, still that did not help him as a conversationalist. In fact, Figgins—like many fellows who can do things—did not excel as a talker. He felt it incumbent to talk now, however, and he manfully did his best.

"Jolly game, wasn't it?" said he.

Cousin Ethel smiled in the darkness. She knew that Figgins would talk, and she knew that she would talk too; because it was the subject that interested him of all others, and he generally assumed all the rest of the world to be as keenly interested in the subject. But Ethel knew what Dolores, already bored to death with the afternoon's game and the talk about it.

"Yes," said Ethel slowly, thinking of some means to change the talk to a subject more agreeable to Dolores. "I should like to come over and see another match?" Figgins said eagerly.

"I would," said Ethel, "certainly."

"How good! We can easily arrange it," said Figgins. "Miss Pelham is fond of seeing a good game, isn't she?"

"I suppose?" he asked, at an afterthought.

If it had been light enough, he would have seen Miss Pelham's lip curl. But luckily it was too dark.

"Oh, yes!" said Dolores.

Ethel made a movement. She did not like to hear Dolores say so. She knew that Dolores disliked the mention of the subject. Yet Dolores called for some remark, and Ethel would not judge her friend harshly.

"You like to see the fellows play football?" Figgins said.

"I have vevy seldom enjoyed anything so much as to see a football match."

"How good!" exclaimed Figgins, in his honest, unassuming way. "It will be such a pleasure to see, Miss Pelham, if you will come over with Cousin Ethel next time."

"Oh, I shall surely come if Ethel will bring me," said Dolores softly. "I think St. Jim's is a grand old place. I love it."

Figgins was feeling vevy happy. He felt that he had not liked Miss Pelham hitherto as much as she deserved. She was evidently a nice girl now, and quite worthy to be a friend of Cousin Ethel's.

Ethel was silent.

To her candid mind every one of Dolores's remarks was unpleasant; she knew that they could not be sincere. But she could not very well hint as much to Figgins.

So she said nothing. She would not name a party to a game in which Figgins was to be made a fool of.

That was evidently Dolores's object. It amused her wiald, vevyward spirit to take this advantage of Figgv's unassumingness.

"And the boys are all so nice," said Dolores deliberately. "Especially that nice boy with the handsome blue eyes. What was his name?"

"Tom Merry?"

"Oh, no! Are his eyes blue?"

"Why, they're as blue as the sky," said Figgins, in astonishment.

"Are they really?" said Dolores carelessly. "No, I mean the good-looking boy who was standing near us, and did not play."

Figgins wrinkled his brow.

"A School House boy?" he asked.

"He had a carnation in his coat."

"Why, that was Mellish!"

"What a pretty name!" said Dolores.

Still Ethel did not speak. She knew Mellish well. Mellish, she felt, was who she called the red of the Fourth at St. Jim's. Dolores had not resuscitated two words, said his name, and certainly had a peculiar taste if she considered him handsome. But Dolores had noticed that there was no love lost between Mellish and Figgins. That was why she was praising Mellish now. Figgins would never have dreamed of it. That a girl could deliberately try to rattle his temper by praising a fellow he disliked would never have occurred to Figgins as possible. Why should Dolores want to rattle his temper, at last, that night?

"I dare say it's a pretty name," said Figgins vevy loyally.

"Is he a friend of yours?" asked Dolores.

"Well, you see, he's a School House chap."

"But you have friends in the School House?"

"Oh, yes!"

Dolores laughed.

"But you do not like Mellish, I see. Of course, it is not because he is so good-looking; I am sure that wouldn't offend you?"

"Blissed if I care, see that he's good-looking," said Figgins. "I've never heard anybody say so before. Why, stand him beside Tom Merry, or Blake, or Kerr, and he'd look nothing!"

Dolores laughed again.

"Not at all," she said, looking matter-of-factly at Figgins.

"Why don't you like him?" asked Dolores.

Ethel Cleveland is a new girl at St. Freda's, and on her first day at school is attracted by the personality of Dolores Pelham, a high-spirited girl of Spanish descent. Ethel subsequently saves Dolores from deep disgrace, and the two become firm friends.

Ethel one afternoon takes

GLANCE OVER THIS.

Dolores over to St. Jim's College, where Arthur D'Arcy, her cousin, is at school, and the Spanish girl is introduced to all Ethel's boy friends.

The two girls watch a football match between the rival houses of St. Jim's—the New House and the School House, after which they are

invited to tea in Tom Merry's study. The juniors prepare for the tea. D'Arcy is sitting on the fender, making tea, when Monty Lowther enters the study.

"Good old Gussy!" he exclaims. "Go ahead! Are you fond of making tea?"

(New page with the story)



ETHEL'S SCHOOLDAYS

A TALE OF TOM MEYER'S COURT BY MARY CURRIE

"I haven't said that I don't, Miss Pelham."

"But you don't!"

"Well, no, I don't."

"Ethel could not touch Dolores's eyes as she wanted to, without knowing that she was giving her friend a signal. That would not have done."

"But why?" said Dolores.

"I don't get on!" said Figgins, who was not to be drawn however cleverly, into talking about a fellow he disliked, behind his back.

"Fellows don't get on, sometimes, on your mind," said Miss Pelham.

"Never about football!"

Figgins laughed in his good-natured way.

"That's rather a big order," he said. "What shall I tell you?"

"About the game—how it is played," said Dolores. "Ethel was explaining to me, but I did not follow her clearly. I should like to hear the details of the game, especially the off-side rule."

Now, if there was a subject Figgins was good upon, it was the off-side rule. He forthwith launched into a disquisition upon football in general, and the off-side rule in particular. He waxed eloquent upon that subject, and did not notice how very silent Cousin Ethel was.

"No, you are not late," she said. "Come in, Ethel. Dear me, how pale you look! Was it very cold in the trap?"

"Oh, no!" said Ethel quickly. Figgins glanced at her hastily. Now that they were standing in the light he could see that Cousin Ethel's look of eager alarm melted.

"I am all right, Figgins," she said. "Come in, Dolores. Good-morning for seeing us here."

"Yes, indeed!" said Dolores.

"But, love, you know the pleasure I was all on our side," said D'Arcy, in a very dull drivel way. "It will be good, rather," said Figgins.

"Good-night, Ethel! Good-night, the girls," he shook hands with Figgins. "Good-night, Miss Penfold."

The juniors moved to the doorway again. Figgins had some slight hope to the door for one good-bye more. But she did not move, remaining very close to Miss Penfold.

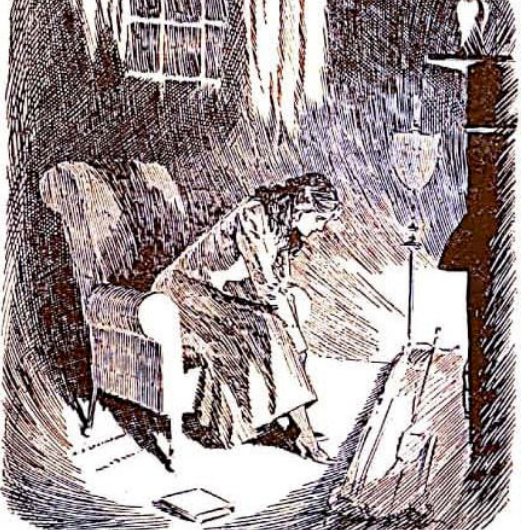
The juniors clambered into the trap, and D'Arcy drove off.

"That was a wippin' drive here, Figgins," he remarked. "The horse required all my attention, so I wasn't able to help you."

"That's all right, Gussy."

"I trust you did not bore the gals too much?"

"Oh, we had a jolly talk!" said Figgins. "Miss Pelham is awfully interested in football."



Cousin Ethel sat looking into the fire, lost in thought.

"Wats!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, she is, is she?" said D'Arcy, "buying himself with the reins. "Quite a slip of the tongue on my part, dear boy. Gee up, there—gee up!"

"We had a ripping talk," said Figgins, rather warmly.

"Very good, dear boy."

And Arthur Augustus did not pursue the subject.

"And Arthur Augustus did not pursue the subject."

"I thought Cousin Ethel looked a little tired when we left her," said Figgins, after a long pause.

D'Arcy winked at the dark trees along the lane.

"Did she weally, dear boy?"

"I thought so."

"Well, pewwaps she was tired."

"Yet also didn't look tired when we started."

"When you started talkin' football, do you mean?"

"Certainly, dear boy."

And the drive continued in silence for some time after that. But presently Figgins broke the silence.

"I say, Gussy!"

"Yaas, dear boy."

"I know Cousin Ethel likes talking football; we've talked it lots of times, and she talks as much as I do, or more."

ham's Ethel's friend, and so she must be nice."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"All the same—"

"Yaas?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Another long silence. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy devoted his attention to the horse. Figgins sat with his hands in his pockets, and with a thoughtful frown corrugating his rugged brows.

"Look here, Gussy—" he exclaimed, at last.

"Yaas, dear boy!"

"Is it possible—" Figgins paused.

"Yaas?"

"Is it possible—"

"Well!"

"Is it possible, Figgins, that depends upon what you are talkin' about, you know," said D'Arcy, with great patience. "Pewwaps you might explain a little further."

"It isn't possible that I've offended Cousin Ethel in any way, is it?"

"Bai Jove! Why should you think so, dear boy?"

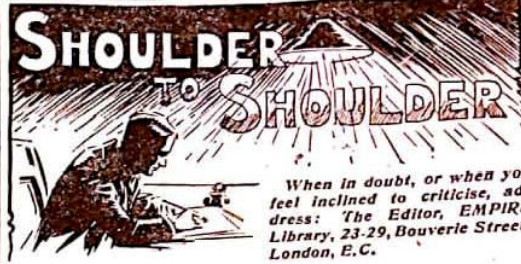
"I don't know."

"Then don't think it," said D'Arcy. "Cousin Ethel knows you're always putting your foot in it, you know. If you've been clumsy. To be quite frank with you, Figgins, I've often wondered how gals can stand you, but Ethel seems to stand you all right. I shouldn't wowsy."

(Another long instalment of this absorbing tale next week.)

All the "Star" Authors write "Empire."

THE EDITOR'S TWO COLUMNS.



When in doubt, or when you feel inclined to criticise, address: The Editor, EMPIRE Library, 23-29, Bouverie Street, London, E.C.

"TWO LITTLE WAIFS."

OUR new story will start in next Wednesday's issue, and I feel sure that the author, Reginald Gray—I dare say well known to many of you—will score a distinct success, for

POSTCARDS.

The Empire Library forms a link between all readers who owe kinship to the Mother Country by means of the

WIDE-WORLD POSTCARD EXCHANGE.

SMILING FACES.

"TWO LITTLE WAIFS" seems to me one of the best tales of its kind that I have ever read.

The main characters in the story are Phil Fernay and his sister Lucy. These two little waifs were left alone in London, and have a very hard time of it. Phil, notwithstanding the fact that he has to look after his blind sister, is anything but downhearted; and I am certain that you will read with pleasure the story of his fight against cruel circumstances.

Another character in our new story which will appeal to all of you is a cheery, happy youngster, known as Peter Shorelitch. Peter always has a laugh on his happy face and a merry word for the downhearted.



The funny man's idea of happy expressions.

Now, having told you this much about the story which will appear in these pages next Wednesday, will you take my word for the rest, and make a special point of ordering your copies of the EMPIRE Library in advance?

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LETTERS FROM MY READERS.

It is impossible for me to answer individually all the letters of congratulation I have received about the stories in the Empire Enlarged Library, but I can, and do, thank you all for your kind appreciation and the help so many of you have given me by recommending this paper to new readers. Beyond writing to me, there is very little that a reader can do that is so helpful to an editor as personally recommending their favourite paper to non-readers, and again I trust my sincere thanks to the many who have done me

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(Only one place to be written here.)

Please write very clearly. No. 58.

THIS GOOD TURN.

In return for your interest in this paper, I can only say that, apart from doing my best in the matter of providing you with good stories—stories that you like—I shall be pleased to help you in any way I can with advice, information, or good counsel, by post.

Some few letters, of course, that are of general interest I can answer in these two columns; but, as you will see, space is so limited that I suggest that the better way is for all my correspondents to enclose in their letters to me a stamped, addressed envelope.

You will notice in this issue two new features, one being a little short story of popular Gordon Gay, and the other a series of five pictures, by our comic artist. I should very much like to know what you think of Gordon Gay and Wandering Willie. If you do not feel inclined to write me a long letter, then just drop me a postcard.

CAN YOU WRITE A LIMERICK?

Most of you can make a good Limerick, or can remember a good one that you have heard. Well, send it up on a postcard addressed to

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A Merry Christmas to You All—Ed.

The Editor, EMPIRE Library, 23, Bouverie St., Fleet St., London.

I will pick out the best Limerick received each week and publish it on this page, awarding half a crown prize to the sender.

THE EDITOR.

A NEW STORY.



# THE LAND OF THE BLACK



A TALE OF Harold Saxon's Adventures in Search of the Tree of Strength. By F. ST. MARS.

**WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE.**  
Harold Saxon, gentleman adventurer, is making an expedition into Central Africa in search of the strength of the semovent—of the nature of which he has already written by Gonawonga, a native and his two sons.  
After many adventures by the way, he has reached the home of the black—Morri—reached, and the country begins to change. Cliffs and rocks take the place of the rolling plains, and the sun turns from brown to black.

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ing in the sunlight, uncertain whether to charge or remove. Mostly they rumbled. Once they did, and one was removed from the herd from attacking the caravan.

Then it would be one of the giant black bears that Stanley wrote about, a glossy saddle antelope bounding away, or a leopard, black as night, all the leopards were black, but— a dimness smothered in black mud from wallowing in pools by the black river.

From the rocks and ravines, as they passed them, rose scree and whistling black ravens and crows, continually overhead, circled.

"Yes," said Harold, "we've reached the Land of Black again. We've got to keep our eyes skinned. Now begins the dangerous part of the journey. What has gone before doesn't count. Nobody knows what may happen at any moment now."

He held up his finger as he spoke. From somewhere over the trees came a deep, booming, drumming sound.

"The 'bell'!" said he; and they knew that night they pitched camp in the very centre of the forest, clearing they could find. They had no camp, for goodness alone knew what horrors might come as well as the dark, especially near cover.

The porters went about with their teeth chattering, and collected enough firewood for three camps.

"They're afraid—my word, they're afraid!" I do," said Harold, "I'm glad if I do!" "I wish I were 'come'—straight I do!"

Harold laughed, as he superintended the placing of the cases of ammunition on a floor for his tent. He always did this, for ammunition and guns were vital to their very existence, and he liked to have them where he knew they were safe.

Each case was made up into a package of from fifty-five to sixty pounds weight, which is the load for an African black porter to carry. Harold was picking up these loads by ones, twos, and threes and fours, and without ceasing placing them as he wanted them placed.

Then something went wrong with the top of his tent-pole, and catching one of the heaviest porters—a man weighing little under twelve stone—round the waist he laid him on his back, a little child to see the King pass, over the heads of a crowd.

And later one of the horses became restive, pulled its pickets up, and bolted because a fly was on its face. It dragged one man that hung on to its rope some way before he let go, and knocked another flying who tried to stop it. Then it came by Harold, going for all it was worth.

Harold jumped. Harold leaped. Harold caught the beast on his head-ropes in his right hand. Then Harold stopped, digging his heels into the ground as he did so. So did the horse stop. He stopped with a jerk that flung him sliding on his back, kicking, and wondering what on

earth or under it had happened. The end of that rope might have been fastened to a mountain, but it wasn't. Harold had hold of it, that was all.

Jim, who was getting used to these little miracles, merely shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Somebody again," granted he, and by his pipe.

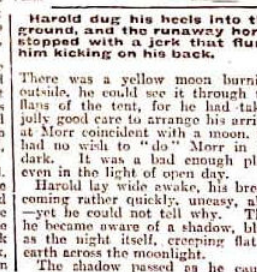
But the chief and his sons looked on in interested amazement, watching Harold's every movement, for to them strength was the greatest asset of life: they admired it beyond all things.

Next to strength, they admired craft and skill, with weapons. Harold had all these gifts, and his strength was greater than the strength of any two men they had ever heard of; therefore he was a person to be much respected—almost worshipped. I believe they would have followed him to the death, and I know Gonawonga twice offered him the governorship of half his kingdom.

Little did Harold know, however, how soon he would have need of that strength. He spent the evening fixing up his electric wires, and went to sleep confident that nobody—not even the Morrians, than which no human beings are more perfect "creepers"—could enter the camp unannounced.

Alone!  
Harold awoke suddenly with his feet feeling one bare at home when there is a cat in the room. He could not tell how long he had been asleep—probably hours.

It was very still. All was quiet. Nothing seemed to have happened.



Harold dug his heels into the ground, and the runaway horse stopped with a jerk that flung him kicking on his back.

There was a yellow moon burning outside, he could see it through the flaps of the tent, for he had taken good care to arrange his arrival at Morr coincident with a moon. He had no wish to "do" Morr in the dark. It was a bad enough place even in the light of open day.

Harold lay wide awake, his breath coming rather quickly, uneasy, alert—yet he could not tell why. Then he became aware of a shadow, black as the night itself, creeping flat to earth across the moonlight.

The shadow passed as he caught up his rifle—it happened, luckily, to be his powerful 35 Winchester—and there was Harold sat up.

"What the blazes are they?" he muttered to himself.

Suddenly Loyal, who was lying asleep just outside the tent because of the heat, gave a yell—not a bark, but the heat, and there were growings, a yell. And there were growings, much deeper than any Loyal could make, at the door of his tent.

Harold was always at a bark, but it seemed to him as if the night had about him got up and ran away. He was conscious of this at the moment, but stop to investigate. Something that must have been standing at his head moved under the side of the tent, and something else went out on the other side. He half saw, half guessed, as he leaped at the shadows running, like the shadows of men.

Arrived at the tent door, he peered out, and instantly looked straight into the glaring eyes of a black leopard—and a mighty big one at that.

Harold was always a quick and catlike in his movement, and never more so, possibly, than now. His rifle was at his shoulder and the shot fired in no more time than it takes to snap one's finger. He did not aim as you do at the animal, the rifle clutched across him. He rarely did. Simply he stared hard between those great staring eyes, as the leopard crouched for a spring, and, throwing up the rifle, and without looking at it, or removing his gaze, fired at the other full moon-patched bullet, weighing 250 grains, crashed straight through between the eyes to the brain. Forthwith the leopard stood on end, spun half round, and fell backwards—dead.

It was a beautiful shot, but Harold had no time to rejoice at it. Loyal was at death grips with another black leopard, and others were all over the place.

Band! went the rifle, and the second leopard left Loyal and began running round in circles.

Harold had no time to take further notice of him, for out of the tail of his eye he was aware of something hurtling at him through the air. He spun round like any top, and fired, springing aside on the shot. The result was to bring a springing leopard down heavily at his feet. But it was only wounded in the fore paw; before Harold could fire again it was upon him.

Followed a wonderful sight. Harold sprang again to one side, but the beast crooked out its unwounded paw, much as you see a cat with a mouse at home, and tripped him as he fell. Even as he fell, however, Harold's lightning brain was at work, and, twisting in mid-fall with a catlike twist, he thrust the stock of his rifle between the great, reeking jaws of the beast.

(A very interesting instalment of this splendid story next week.)

nephew he hated, and Henry would be cast out. But shortly after he died, Arnold, who had heard of his state, and was returning to England, was wrecked in the cargo-boat he was travelling upon—for he was poor—and was drowned at sea, with his wife and—as was supposed—his child.

Talbot started grimly. "You guess now?" said the squire on "I—I think— But go on—go on!"

(To be concluded.)

## In the Land of Morr.

The rocks themselves gradually changed to biscuit-colour, and then to grey, and finally to black. Black as coal they were, and like coal. They were like glass black glass. Under foot powdered and splintered and crackled like glass. Moss covered the ground in wet places, especially near the river, and ran black but clear, and was good to drink.

The trees became huge forest trees, black as the rocks. Harold sought they were always there, and were scattered, as before, nor did they grow in impenetrable forests, but in open spaces between and around green as green could be.

The country was hilly, and the trees tall and green clothed it all. "All just like it was before," said Harold, as he rode at the head of the column with the others. "How do you men seem to take it, Jimmy?"

"Take it like a dose of rhubarb," answered Jim, who had just ridden up from the tail end of the column. "I'm flung but the fear of your friend's 'short-stroke' on his little toothpick."

Harold had christened the chief's tooth-like weapon the "toothpick," and so it was always called afterwards—"only, as I see, the fear of them two keeps 'em' beggars from 'shakin' down their loads an' doin' 'em' in!"

"Question is, 'ow long'll 'em' fur 'old 'em, 'Arnold?' the squire one asserted.

"I wanted to see you, Talbot," he said, without waiting for either to speak. "My time is short, and I have a good deal to say. Dr. Bayley thinks that I shall live till midnight, but I feel that I am close to the finish.

The squire smiled grimly. Arthur looked at him. The grim smile lingered on the haggard face. "You think it curious that I should venture to ask anything of you, Talbot, after what has passed—after what I have done? You are quite right—"

Harold shook his head. "Harold to tell. About till a greater fear come along, I suppose."

He was scanning the dense shades of the trees, which always grew straight up to the clearings, and by man. He seemed to think that way and all at ease. Once or twice he pulled up his horse and look hard at the trees, and once, also, he sent Loyal in among the shadows, finding anything.

"What's the matter? Lost anything?" Jim asked, after a bit. "No; only I was wondering if these Morriars are watching us by any chance. You know how they did last time."

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I take it that's in the contract!" he replied. "Only I wonder as 'ow our porters'll behave when they gets to know their people as 'Well, see all round 'em'!"

"Well, see all round 'em'!" Jim meant to have them all over our camp at night this time like they were last. You know those electric bells and wire I've brought? They'll just beat 'em. I've brought 'em, right out to help guard us. If we stretch the wire around and attach it to the bells, no one can very well enter the camp without knocking against a wire and making the bells ring."

"No; that's a useful dodge, but look 'ere now!" Jim was pointing ahead. "Never mind about those things. Did you ever see a sight like this 'ere? Talk about Drury Lane pantomime! This is a pantomime—a blessed wonderland, if ye like!"

"Rather a creepy one, though," finished Harold.

The clearings, as has been said, ran all round the belts of timber, so that the whole somewhat resembled a great river cut up with innumerable rocks and islands. Thus they were always able to walk in the open, and never once penetrated the shadows of the mighty trees smothered with mass upon mass of vines, creepers, ferns, festoons of bearded moss, and flowers of every colour—mostly purple—over and around which flew birds and insects of rainbow hues.

But it was not this that Jim meant. It was the sights ahead—the sights as they turned each bend of the gloomy black trees. Now it would be a herd of elephants, tusks gleam-

## REVIEWS OF SKITS

By CHARLES HAMILTON.  
The Squire's Secret. "Let the police know," he went on. "I'm going to tell them everything now. Let them arrest him—don't let him get away."

"Let 'em," said Talbot. "Rupert here will never be arrested, for he has with such a terrible accident last night that he will be a dead man before this morning."

"Let 'em have a start. You will come down now, Talbot—"

The squire touched Talbot upon the shoulder, and nodded. "I must go now," he said gently. "I'll come and see you again if you are not too busy."

Talbot nodded; he could not trust himself to speak.

"Years ago," said the Squire of Lynwood, "before you were born, Talbot, there were two brothers at Lynwood—Arnold the elder, and Henry the younger, my father. They lived with their uncle, the then Squire of Lynwood. The elder—the heir—quarrelled with his uncle, and left the estate, and never returned. He had married against his uncle's will, and was cast off during the old man's lifetime, though, as the estates were entailed, they were bound to come to him when the uncle died."

Talbot nodded again. He wondered what this could have to do with him; and he felt a light was breaking through the darkness that had long shadowed the secret of his life.

"The younger nephew married according to his wish—the lady whom the

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NEW STORY OF THE SCHOOLBOY ACTOR

GORDON GAY'S CHRISTMAS JOKE

A Tale of Rylcombe Grammar School by Rasper Howard

CHAPTER 1. Tadpole Makes a Resolution.

I HAVE decided... "Toast, please, Taddy!" "I have decided..." "After you with the butter!"

"I have decided..." "Marmalade this way!" Tadpole, the genius, or, as his chums had it, the nuisance of the Fourth Form at Rylcombe Grammar School, sniffed indignantly as he passed the marmalade.

Gordon Gay noticed his expression and grinned. It was Christmas Eve, and the schoolboy actor and his friends of the Fourth Form—Jack and Harry Wootton and Horace Tadpole—were discussing a hearty breakfast in the Head's dining-room at the Grammar School.

Lane and Carboy, of the Fourth Form, were also of the party who were spending Christmas as the guests of Frank Monk, the headmaster's son, in the otherwise deserted Grammar School.

"Never mind, Taddy: have another try," remarked Frank Monk, with a laugh. "What have you decided?"

"I have decided to make an important resolution for the New Year," said Tadpole, with the air of one making an announcement that might change the fate of nations.

There was a general grin round the table. "Good for you, Taddy! It's a bit precious, but let's hear your precious resolution!" exclaimed Gordon Gay.

"I have resolved that for every one of my wonderful pictures that I sell during the coming year I will paint a duplicate, and present it free gratis to the school."

CHAPTER 2. Tadpole's Masterpiece.

FOLLOWING Tadpole's startling announcement, the juniors stared at one another in breathless silence. The next moment there was an unrestrained roar from six throats simultaneously. "Ha, ha, ha!"

So this was Tadpole's wonderful resolution!

Tadpole, in spite of his friends' efforts to undecieve him, persisted in regarding himself as an artist of supreme, if unappreciated, talents, and the juniors of Rylcombe Grammar School never knew to what wild heights his fancy would soar next.

But this latest of his, as Harry Wootton murmured hysterically, "fairly took the bun!"

The Grammar School genius drew himself up in intense indignation at the way the announcement of his great resolution had been received.

"My dear fellows—" he began coldly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear asses—"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"I regard you as a set of silly dummies!"

And Tadpole strode out of the breakfast-room. For at least five minutes after their indignant clamor had left them the juniors round the breakfast-table shrieked helplessly.

"My—my hat! Taddy really is too rich," murmured Frank Monk at last, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief. "But we don't want to hurt the silly duffer's feelings. Let's go after him and smooth him down."

"Right—ho!"

And the juniors trooped off to find the offended genius.

They discovered him, as they guessed they would, up in his bedroom, which he had rigged up as a sort of temporary studio as well.

He was contemplating an enormous canvas, roughly framed, which he had set up on two chairs. The canvas was covered with a large amount of paint of all colours, and took up a great part of the little room.

Tadpole drew himself up with an offended air as the juniors filed into the study with grave faces; but he was a good-natured and forgiving fellow for all his eccentricities, and, accepting their apologies with a good grace, he was soon beaming again.

"I was just looking over my pictures when you came in," he said, with a beaming smile. "It is the season for Christmas presents just now, of course, and I quite expect a buyer or two might drop in this afternoon."

"Rats!" murmured Harry Wootton softly, but not quite softly enough.

"Did you speak, Wootton?" asked Tadpole, putting his hand to his ear, while the other juniors frowned on the luckless Harry.

"I—I—I was just saying, of—of course," stammered Harry, "you never know when a—a buyer might come in, d—do you?"

Tadpole nodded his head in agreement. "Quite right, Wootton! I have a feeling that a genuine buyer will drop in and buy one of my works this afternoon—perhaps my latest."

And Tadpole indicated the enormous canvas with a wave of his hand.

Harry Wootton nodded his head like a clockwork Chinaman. He felt that he might have hysterics if this lasted much longer.

At the same time an observer might have noticed a gleam sparkle in Gordon Gay's eyes. Frank Wootton, in fact, did notice it, and he knew the schoolboy actor well enough to know that a "wheeze" had suddenly come into his head.

"What is it, Gay?" he whispered eagerly.

Gordon Gay grinned.

"Wait and see," he whispered.

While Tadpole was gazing in rapture at his canvas the juniors turned to the door. They had made their peace with Tadpole, and they wanted to go now.

Tadpole on the subject of art—especially his own art—always bored them to distraction. Gordon Gay, the two Woottons, and Monk had passed out in safety, when Tadpole suddenly turned. He ran across to Carboy and Lane, who were just about to follow the others, and grasped them by the shoulders.



Carboy and Lane looked at Tadpole's "masterpiece" in silence, and then turned away, weeping bitterly.

"What do you think candidly of my latest masterpiece?" cried the amateur artist, with enthusiasm.

Carboy and Lane returned reluctantly, and took a long and careful look at the fearful and wonderful daub on the big canvas.

Then, without a word, they turned on their heels and walked out of the room, their handkerchiefs to their eyes, weeping bitterly.

Their feelings were too deep for words.

CHAPTER 3.

Gordon Gay as "Mr. Robinson."

DEAR SIR,—I have heard that you have some pictures for sale, and as I am in the neighbourhood I will call in about three o'clock this afternoon

in the hope of being allowed to inspect one or two.—Yours faithfully, W. ROBINSON."

The above letter was delivered to Horace Tadpole just after lunch, which had followed a good morning's tobogganing; for the snow lay thick on the countryside, and gave promise of a good old-fashioned Christmas-tide.

Tadpole blinked at the letter in high excitement, and read it aloud to the juniors.

There was a general whistle of astonishment.

"Plews!"

"My hat!"

"A real buyer at last, Taddy!"

Tadpole folded the letter with a smile of satisfaction.

"Yes, you fellows, I have no doubt Mr. Robinson will prove to be an extensive buyer of my works. I confess I am not surprised. My goodness! It's nearly half-past two already! I must go to my room and get my pictures ready for Mr. Robinson to see."

And Tadpole departed in great haste.

"Well, my hat! I never thought anyone would be ass enough to come and see that young spoofer's pictures!" said Frank Monk, with a perplexed grin. "We must be there to see the fun, anyway!"

to inspect the "works of art" which Tadpole had ranged round the walls of the room. Tadpole swelled with conscious pride.

"This is my latest masterpiece, sir," he explained, indicating the huge picture propped up on the chairs with a careless gesture.

"Indeed!" Mr. Robinson peered at the colour-plastered canvas. "Ah! Very realistic! I always did like seascapes!"

Tadpole gave a jump.

"Seascapes, sir?"

"Certainly! Oh, I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Tadpole. How stupid of me! I took this—this object in the background for a ship at first. Of course, I see now that it is a haystack. A haystack on fire, and a very lifelike haystack, too!"

The juniors stifled their laughter, while Tadpole gave the beaming Mr. Robinson an indignant look.

"Really, sir," he said, in a tone of remonstrance, "I always considered those two cows in the foreground to be particularly natural-looking."

Mr. Robinson looked astounded.

"The—the cows, Mr. Tadpole?"

"Certainly!"

"Just—just so, Mr. Tadpole. You—you are quite right. It's—it's a very good—er—cow. And how much do you want for this—er—masterpiece?"

Tadpole beamed again immediately. So he was not mistaken. Mr. Robinson was a real buyer. He considered deeply for a moment.

"Well—er—shall we say twenty pounds, sir?" he remarked at last, with the assumption of great carelessness.

The juniors gasped. To ask twenty pounds for Tadpole's feeble daub struck them as quite the limit in cheek.

Mr. Robinson nodded his head thoughtfully, while the juniors held their breath.

"I am afraid that's rather more than I want to give," said Mr. Robinson at last calmly. "I wanted one at about eightpence."

The onlooking juniors could stand it no longer. With sundry gasps and choking noises they rushed from the room, and a few minutes later Mr. Robinson emerged, staggering under the weight of Tadpole's "masterpiece."

The juniors watched him and his burden down the drive in grinning amazement.

"So you came to terms after all, Taddy?" asked Frank Monk, trying not to roar.

Tadpole turned a rather red face to the captain of the Grammar School juniors.

"Yes; I let him have it quite cheap," said Tadpole, with dignity. "As he was my first customer—"

"How much?" interrupted Harry Wootton.

"Half-a-crown," answered Tadpole, with a lofty air, strolling carelessly towards the door.

In the midst of the terrific roar of laughter that followed the genius of the Grammar School's departure, Gordon Gay strolled into the room.

He was grinning broadly, and marks as of grease-paint, such as actors use for making-up purposes, showed about his face and under his ears.

"Oh dear, Gordon Gay, you ought to have been in Taddy's room when Mr. Robinson came!" almost sobbed Frank Monk, helpless with laughter. "It was just great! Why weren't you there?"

"I was," remarked Gordon Gay calmly, "and I spent half-a-crown there!"

THE END.

The Adventures of Wandering Willie.



1. Wandering Willie, the tramp cat, sets out to find a home and someone to love him.



2. Coming across a house with its windows open, our pussy slipped inside, and decided to bestow his affections there—



3. Little thinking, as he lapped up a basinful of milk and some catmeat, that possibly he might not be wanted at all.



4. Such, however, was the case, as William, feeling rather annoyed at being told to "get," had a few words to say about it—



5. And then left, feeling fatter and with the thought that perhaps he had better look about for something else.