

TOM MERRY & CO. IN DARKEST AFRICA! SMASHING LONG STORY OF THRILLING ADVENTURE INSIDE.

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# The GEM

2d



*The St. Jim's  
Explorers  
at Bay!*

THIS IS THE JUNGLE ADVENTURE YARN IN A MILLION! STARRING—

# The St. Jim's



As the boat suddenly ran into sight of the fighting, the juniors saw a steam-launch aground in the mud of the Congo, with three canoes crammed with savage negroes attacking it. On the deck of the launch, behind a barricade of boxes, a white man was fighting a lone battle!

## CHAPTER 1. Africa Bound!

"GREAT SCOTT!" Tom Merry uttered the exclamation in tones of amazement.

He was standing by the deckrail of the Opossum steamer, with the binoculars to his eyes, scanning the wide blue waters of the Gulf of Guinea.

Tom Merry was having a good time; so were his eight chums from St. Jim's. They were all on deck now, under the awnings in the blazing tropical sun, and all of them looked very brown and well.

Their departure from England in the Opossum had been a big surprise to Tom Merry & Co. But the letter of Sir Richard Standish, one of the governors of St. Jim's, had authorised Captain Crane to take them when he sailed. The skipper had obeyed it without hesitation. And Tom Merry & Co. were en route for Darkest Africa. And they enjoyed it.

Tom Merry and his chums had seen foreign lands before, but Africa—Africa the mysterious, the far-away—exercised a spell upon their imaginations. They could hardly believe in their good luck at first when they found themselves treading the deck of the swift steamer, under suns that daily grew more blazing, speeding southward, ever southward. But they got used to the idea at last, and they looked forward eagerly to their arrival upon the West Coast.

A run ashore, amid tropical forests and jungles and mangrove swamps—it simply dazzled them. As for fever, malaria, poisonous serpents, cannibals, and other amenities of African existence, they did not give them a thought. Fatty Wynn of the Fourth, indeed, declared that a chap

need never be afraid of catching anything so long as he kept himself well in health by frequent and solid meals.

Fatty Wynn was dozing now in a hammock. Most of the juniors were in deckchairs. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was polishing his eyeglass. Figgins was looking out for a sight of land. The steamer was churning on across the Gulf of Guinea. Ahead of the vessel lay the Cameroons and the French Congo, on the port side; and northward the Gold Coast and the Ivory Coast.

A steamer was passing on a different course, heading for the distant Congo, while the Opossum was steaming on towards the West Coast.

The stranger, a smaller vessel than the Opossum, was within easy view of the glasses, and Tom Merry had turned them upon her.

He lowered them with amazement in his face.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter?" asked Jack Blake.

"That steamer!"

"What about it?"

"I can see three men on her deck—three men we know."

"Lend me the glasses."

Blake took the binoculars and turned them upon the steamer, then he, too, uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"The Spaniards!"

On the deck of the passing vessel three men stood in a group; they were smoking cigars and chatting, and not looking towards the Opossum.

Blake recognised them at once.

One of them was an Englishman with a darkly bronzed face and a slouched hat; the other two were Spaniards, and one of them had ear-rings in his ears.

The sight of them brought back to Blake's mind the journey of the St. Jim's juniors to Southampton. They had

THE MOST POPULAR SCHOOLBOY CHUMS IN THE WORLD—TOM MERRY & CO.

# Explorers!

By  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD**

had a packet to deliver to the skipper of the Opossum from Sir Richard Standish. On the road three crooks had made more than one attempt to rob them of it. Gally, Rodriguez, and Yanex, however, had been left behind, as the juniors supposed, in England. It was amazing to see them on the deck of a steamer in the Gulf of Guinea. What were they doing there?

"What is it, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Look!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors took the binoculars in turn. There was no mistake about it; they were the three men who had tried to rob them of the packet on the way to Southampton.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "What are they doing here?"

"What's the trouble, young gentlemen?"

It was Captain Crane's voice. The captain of the Opossum had descended from the bridge. He looked curiously at the juniors.

"The Spaniards, sir," said Tom Merry.

"The men who tried to rob you of Sir Richard's packet?"

"Yes, sir."

Captain Crane looked at the passing steamer through the glasses. The vessel was passing farther from view now. The skipper looked very grave.

"They look three tough customers," he remarked. "I don't know what they are doing here. But, after all, they did not succeed in getting hold of the packet."

"They had hold of it once," said Kerr.

"But we got it back before they were able to open it," said Tom Merry.

Kerr was silent.

"Well, they are going to a different part of the coast, to judge by the course they are steering," said Captain Crane. "You will not see them again."

"I hope not, sir," said Tom Merry.

But he remained very thoughtful. It had been a shock to him to see the adventurers there. Tom Merry and his comrades had been entrusted to take the mysterious packet from Sir Richard Standish to the skipper of the Opossum.

On the road to Southampton the packet had, indeed, fallen into the hands of the crooks, but the juniors had recovered it, apparently unopened. The packet contained valuable papers to be delivered to Mr. Hudson, Sir Richard's agent, at Cape Three Points, on the West Coast. But the packet reposed now in the safe in Captain Crane's cabin. What had brought the three rascals there?

The strango steamer passed on out of view on the wide waters of the Gulf of Guinea. The Opossum forged on her way to the West Coast. But Tom Merry could not get from his mind the mental picture of the three dark, desperate faces.

"The wascals are up to some mischief," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy opined, and the other fellows agreed with him.

It was later in the day that the dark, forest-shaded coast came in sight, and the steamer ran in to her anchorage under the shadow of Cape Three Points. The moment the anchor was down a native boat was seen putting off from the beach. It contained two rowers as black as the ace of spades, and a white man in a big shady hat with a sun-browned face and a cigar between his lips.

The boat pulled out to the steamer, and the white man came on board.

Captain Crane evidently knew him. He shook hands with the newcomer, who glanced in great surprise at the group of schoolboys.

"You have passengers, I guess," he remarked. Sir Richard's agent was evidently an American.

The skipper looked surprised in his turn.

"You did not know they were coming?" he asked.

"No. They haven't come to see me, I guess."

"Sir Richard sent them out to you."

"Hey?"

"I have his written instructions," said the skipper, looking puzzled.

Mr. Hudson stared at him.

"Written instructions?"

"Yes."

"Great snakes!" said the agent. "Then these are the boys that Sir Richard cabled me about—the young rascals who have run away from school!"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the coast agent. "Pway explain yourself, my deah sir. We certainly have not run away from school. We are here by Sir Richard's instructions."

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry.

The American fumbled in the pockets of his loose-linen coat, and drew out a crumpled paper.

"Here's Sir Richard's message to me over the wires," he said, and he read: "Packet coming by Opossum. Delivered to Crane by party of schoolboys who have sailed in Opossum, reason unknown. Send them back in Opossum.—STANDISH."

The juniors listened in blank amazement. But their amazement did not equal that of Captain Crane.

"I tell you I have Sir Richard's written instructions!" he almost shouted. "Do you think I should bring a party of schoolboys to this coast on a holiday—ah?"

The American shrugged his shoulders.

"Show me the instructions," he said. "Are they with the packet?"

"Ay, ay!"

Captain Crane darted below, and returned in a couple of minutes with the sealed packet in one hand and the baronet's letter in the other. He handed both of them to the coast agent.

Mr. Hudson glanced over the letter, and his brown face grew amazed. He removed the cigar from his lips, and read it a second time.

The letter was clear enough. It directed Captain Crane to take the packet to Hudson at Cape Three Points, and at the

same time to take the party of schoolboys with him, and deliver them into the charge of the agent.

"Waal, I swow!" said Mr. Hudson in amazement.

"There's the instructions in Sir Richard's own hand!" said the skipper warmly.

Mr. Hudson scanned the letter closely.

"It looks like it," he admitted. "Wait a minute!"

He opened the packet.

The juniors looked on eagerly. The packet that they had carried from the baronet to the skipper of the Opossum had a great interest for them. There was a mystery about it that excited their imaginations.

Mr. Hudson removed the outer wrapping, and then another wrapping, and then another. A small wooden box was revealed.

He opened it, and uttered an exclamation.

"Great snakes!"

The juniors stared blankly at the box. It contained a folded newspaper—a "Daily Sketch" of the date of the day before the Opossum had sailed. Nothing was written upon it. The box contained nothing else.

"Done!" said Mr. Hudson.

"But—but what does it mean?" gasped Tom Merry.

"I guess it means that this packet has been opened and the papers stolen," said Mr. Hudson. "This letter is a forgery. I guess I'm going to know what you kids have done with them papers!"

The agent's face took on a dark expression, and his brown hand felt behind his belt, and came back with a revolver in it. The shining barrel glimmered in the tropical sun. Mr. Hudson fixed his eyes upon the startled juniors.

"Where are them papers?" he asked.

## CHAPTER 2. In Pursuit!

**T**OM MERRY & Co. stared at the coast agent in astonishment.

There was a savage expression in Mr. Hudson's eyes. The way he handled the revolver showed that he was not unused to handling such weapons.

But Tom Merry was not scared. He was only indignant. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Do you imagine that we have opened the packet?"

"I guess somebody has," said Mr. Hudson. "Sir Richard didn't send out an old copy of the 'Daily Sketch' by special steamer, I guess. This here packet has been opened, and the papers have been taken out, and this old newspaper put in instead. How did this packet reach you, Captain Crane?"

"These boys brought it from Sir Richard."

"I guess you didn't open it?"

"Certainly not," said the skipper.

"Then it was opened, and the paper stolen, by the messenger who brought it to you," said Mr. Hudson.

Tom Merry flushed scarlet.

"I was the messenger," he said.

Mr. Hudson's keen eyes turned upon him. The revolver swayed forward.

"Where are them papers?" he said.

"I do not know. If the packet contained papers, they must be in it now," said Tom Merry, very much flurried.

"I cannot understand it. The packet was certainly not opened while it was in my possession."

"Did it leave your hands at all?" asked the American, looking at him very keenly.

Tom Merry started.

"Three men tried to rob us of it on the road," he said.

"I guess one of them was a Spanish galoot with gold car-rings," said Mr. Hudson.

"That is right."

"And did they get hold of it?"

"Yes, for a short time. But we recaptured it," said Tom Merry. "We found it upon one of them, still unopened. We concluded that he had taken it for himself, swindling the other two, and that he hadn't had time to open it."

"I guess Gally and Rodriguez and Yanex haven't fallen out," he said. "They're all in this. I've seen those three scoundrels at work before. If the packet was in their hands, they opened it at once, and they took the papers. Gally is a clever hand at anybody's fist, and I guess he wrote this letter in Sir Richard's hand to put in the packet, then he sealed it up again with an old newspaper inside."

"Great Scott!"

"Gally has the papers," said Mr. Hudson, putting the revolver back in his pocket. "What possessed Sir Richard to trust them to a schoolboy, gets me."

"He was being watched by the Spaniards, and he thought that a schoolboy could take the packet without exciting suspicion," Tom Merry explained.

"Not a bad idea; only the galoots must have tumbled to the game," said Mr. Hudson. "They laid for you, took the papers out of it, forged this letter, and sealed it up again, and let you recapture it."

Kerr smiled quietly. He was the only one in the party who had had a suspicion that there was something queer about the ease with which the juniors had recovered the packet, unopened.

"We've been done," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry was utterly dismayed.

"Then—then if Sir Richard did not write that letter, it was not his intention that we should sail in the Opossum!" he exclaimed.

"I guess not."

"Nor the Head's intention, either," said Figgins. "What must they have thought, when we didn't come back to St. Jim's?"

Mr. Hudson grinned. Although he and his employer had been done hopelessly by the rascals, he had an American's admiration of cuteness in any form.

"I guess Gally had the papers, and he didn't want you young fellows to go back to the baronet and say so," he remarked; "so he forged a letter to get you taken away in the steamer. I guess it was smart."

"The scoundrel!"

"Quite right. But he's done us," said Mr. Hudson.

"Where the rascals are now is a puzzle!"

"We've seen them!" said Tom Merry.

"Seen them! Where?"

"On a steamer, sailing towards the coast to-day," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Hudson showed some sign of excitement.

"Then they've got the papers, and they're after the rubber," he said. "If we knew where they were going we might ring in a cold deal on them yet."

"I know where they were going," said Captain Crane; "they were steering for the Congo Coast when we passed them."

"Then they know the location," said Mr. Hudson. "I know it, too, I guess, though not close enough without the papers. But I guess I know enough to find them. I guess we're going on the same tack, and you can get your anchor up again, Captain Crane."

"You're not going ashore again?"

"I guess not. I'm going to put this business through, and save the rubber for Sir Richard, if I can," said Mr. Hudson.

"Ay, ay! I'm under your orders, sir."

Mr. Hudson stepped to the side, and called out to the negro boatmen.

"You lib for shore, pretty quick!"

The negroes grinned, and the boat pulled away. Mr. Hudson lighted a fresh cigar, and wrinkled his sunburnt brows in thought. The steamer's anchor was raised, and she glided out again upon the blue waters of the Gulf of Guinea. The juniors, not yet recovered from their amazement, watched the shore recede from sight.

"Well," said Figgins at last, "this is a go!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I never guessed," said Tom Merry ruefully. "I suppose I ought to have guessed, especially as Kerr was suspicious about it. But—"

"I didn't guess what they'd done," said Kerr.

"I wish we could cable to the Head that we're safe and sound," said Tom Merry; "but it's impossible, so it's no good thinking of it. I'd like to get within hitting distance of those scoundrels! I feel as if we're to blame. But we couldn't help it."

"Wathah not! When I meet that man Gally I shall give him a fearful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus, polishing his eyeglass meditatively. "I wegard him as an uttah beast!"

Mr. Hudson came over towards the juniors, with his hands in his pockets and the cigar projecting from the corner of his mouth.

"I reckon I don't know what to do with you youngsters," he said. "We're going into danger."

"Good!" said all the juniors at once.

Mr. Hudson smiled, and showed a double row of teeth, blackened by tobacco.

"That's all very well," he said. "I'm going to try to get those papers back from Gally, and prevent him from robbing my boss of a cool million, I guess. He will fight—there will be shooting. You will have to keep out of it."

"We jolly well shan't!" said Tom Merry coolly. "We lost the papers, although we could not help it, and we're entitled to take a hand in getting them back again. And we're not afraid of shooting!"

"But you're only kids," said Mr. Hudson dubiously. "I reckon I shall have a tough job with three of them against me, but I'm going to put it through, I guess. Sir Richard doesn't pay me a handsome salary to sit round and have the flies fanned off me by niggers."

"But you can't think of tackling the three rotters alone, sir," said Figgins.

"I guess I'm going to do that, sonny."

"You're not. We're going to help!" said Tom Merry determinedly. "You must let us, sir! We are not afraid of the scoundrels, and there are nine of us to lend a hand in dealing with them. There are only three of the rascals, sir, and we could eat them if we once got at close quarters."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Henry K. Hudson cocked his eye at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and smiled over his big cigar.

"I guess you'd knock them with your monocle," he said.

"I suppose that is the most dangerous thing about you, sonny. But I reckon if we get into danger I shall shove you below in a handbox, this side up with care!"

The swell of St. Jim's flushed crimson, and the other juniors chuckled. Arthur Augustus turned his monocle upon the American with a stare that certainly ought to have rooted him to the deck, but which had no perceptible effect upon Henry K. Hudson.

"Weally, Mr. Hudson—"

"Cheese it, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to cheese it, Tom Mewwy! Mr. Hudson has made a dispaavagin' wemark. When we come into contact with those dweadful wuffians, I considah that I shall give a good account of myself, and I considah—"

"We'll see," grinned the American. "I'm going to have them papers back, or burst a biler! If any of you kids know how to shoot, I may let you chip in."

And there the discussion terminated, the American going on the bridge to talk to Captain Crane. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cast a glance of disdainful indignation after him.

"I wegard that man as a wottah!" he said.

"He's all right," said Tom Merry, laughing. "You see, you don't impress strangers as being such a terrific fighting-man as you really are, Gussy."



"Look out!" exclaimed Kerr. M'pong rose to his feet, and next moment he struck with his paddle at Tom Merry's head. Tom adroitly dodged the savage blow, then out came his right, to land with telling force under the negro's chin. It was the signal for a general fight against the treacherous Congo boatmen!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall insist upon takin' my share of the fightin'," said D'Arcy, "and I will show that Amewican that a membah of one of the oldest families in England can fight quite as well as a Yankee boundah!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy concluded with an expressive sniff, which conveyed his complete disdain for Henry K. Hudson and all the opinions he might hold concerning elegant youths who wore monocles.

**CHAPTER 3.**  
**On the Congo!**

"MY hat!" said Digby. "What an aroma!" It was a couple of days later. The steamer was gliding slowly along in sight of the African coast, and from the densely wooded shore came a strange smell that made the juniors sniff and sniff again.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with an expression of great disgust upon his aristocratic features. "If this is how Afwicah smells, deah boys, I shall soon be fed up with Afwicah!"

Tom Merry laughed. "It doesn't all smell like that, I suppose," he said. "I think we're near the mouth of some river, and perhaps it brings decayed vegetation down to the sea. It isn't nice!"

"It's howwid!" "Not enjoyable!" said Figgins. "But we can stand it. I'm anxious to get at those rotters!"

Mr. Hudson was just approaching the juniors, and Tom Merry turned to him.

"I say, Mr. Hudson, what's that awful niff?" The American laughed.

"I guess that's the sweet scent of the Congo," he said. "The Congo?"

"I guess so."

The juniors looked landward with keen interest. The very name of the great river that flows seaward from the heart of Darkest Africa was thrilling to the juniors.

"Where is it?" asked Tom Merry.

Mr. Hudson waved a black cigar towards the distant sandbanks.

"There!"

"Bai Jove! The Congo!" said D'Arcy. "That's where the atwocities come fwom!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Belgians and niggers and rubber and ivory and bananas, I guess," said Mr. Hudson. "That's the product of the Congo. We shall be at Boma to-night."

"Boma!" said Tom Merry.

"The former capital of the Belgian Congo. We shall have to stop here and jaw with the Belgians, and bribe some of them," said the American carelessly. "Then I am going up the river to look for Gally and Rodrigucz and Pedro Yanex."

"And we're coming with you."

The American shook his head, with a grin that showed every brown tooth in his head.

"I guess not."

"But you're not going alone?"

"That's the racket, sonny."

"Bai Jove! I could not possibly allow that. I shall certainly come!"

"Monocle and all!" grinned Mr. Hudson.

"Weally, sir—"

"The niggers would capture you, and use you for a fetish, I guess," said Mr. Hudson, with a roar of laughter. "I haven't any use for you myself. You stay at Boma in the steamer."

"Rats!" said Figgins.

The American laughed, and said no more. But he was evidently resolved. Whether the juniors could help him or not, he did not feel justified in taking them into the deadly dangers of the Congo.

But the juniors of St. Jim's held a very different opinion. They felt that they were entitled to help in recapturing the papers. And they did not like the idea of Mr. Hudson going alone. His cool nerve in setting out alone to track

down three crooks in a wild and lawless country, they could not help admiring. But they meant to take a hand in the game, all the same.

In the red sunset the steamer entered the Congo. The swift vessel cleaved the brown waters, which smelt all the stronger at close quarters. But the juniors were growing accustomed to the smell now.

As they glided on to Boma, Mr. Hudson, reclining in a deckchair, with his long legs reclining one over another, and a cigar, of course, in his mouth, told them some particulars of the strange affair which they had long been curious to know. Tom Merry brought up the subject.

"Would there be any harm in our knowing what the trouble is, sir?" he asked. "I know that Gally and the rest have stolen some papers belonging to Sir Richard Standish. But that's all. It seems jolly mysterious!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Hudson nodded genially.

"I guess you can know," he said. "It was being kept dark to keep it from Gally and Rodriguez, but I guess it can't be kept dark from them now. There was a man on the coast who discovered a new rubber territory, in a region where rubber has never been found before. I reckon you know that rubber is one of the chief products of this hyer one-horse country."

The juniors nodded.

"Well, a new rubber region is a big find," went on Mr. Hudson. "Sir Richard is the head of a company that does big business on the Congo, and the man who made the discovery—Kelly, his name was—offered him the secret. You see, if Sir Richard could get a concession from the native king, and make terms with the Belgians, he would command the new supply of rubber. It might mean a million pounds—it might mean five million, according to the price of rubber in the market."

"I see."

"Sooner or later the discovery would be made, anyhow, and the new region worked dry. Well, Kelly made plans and maps, and took them with him to London, and drove a bargain with Sir Richard. He also took coast fever with him, and died in London. His share goes to his wife and family, if the thing is worked. Sir Richard sent the papers out to me, for me to get to the native king, and to work the game at Boma with the Belgian officials. You see, the Belgians claim to rule the whole country hereabouts—it's

marked as theirs on the map. But without the papers I can't locate the territory, you see. I must get them back from the galoots who have boned them. They're ahead of us, but—"

"They're making for the place, then?"

"I guess so. But I've got a good chance of catching them up and getting the papers back. If I can do it, my fortune is made; if I can't, I guess I shall never go down the Congo again, and they won't ever say 'Howdy-do?' to me again on Broadway, New York," said Henry K. Hudson, blowing out a cloud of smoke. "But I guess Henry K. Hudson will work the riddle!"

"They are bound to resist?"

"I reckon!"

"That settles it," said Tom Merry. "We're coming!"

Henry K. Hudson laughed, and lighted a fresh cigar.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Left Behind!

**B**OMA was blazing under a tropical sun. The wide, evil-smelling river, the dark swamps in the distance, the white houses of the Belgian officials, the huts of the natives, lay scorching under the blaze.

The juniors, as thinly clad as possible, in shady Panama hats, lounged breathlessly on the deck of the anchored steamer, which was scorching to the touch.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's monocle hung idly at the end of its cord. The rim of it was too hot to allow him to insert it into his eye.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wondah how long Mr. Hudson is goin' to be?"

Officials had come on board the little steamer, and gone. Mr. Henry K. Hudson had gone with them, and several hours had elapsed, and he had not returned to the ship.

He had not said what time he would return; he had not, in fact, said that he would return at all, and the juniors had asked Captain Crane, and had received an enigmatical smile in response.

"I wonder when he is going to start up the river?" said Figgins. "He seems to be losing a lot of time, considering that Gally & Co. are getting farther away every minute, and nearer to the prize."

"Yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact, I have vewy little faith in the chap, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a wise shake of the head.

"I wish he'd come back," said Tom Merry. "Hallo! The men appear to be getting ready to go down the river. The steamer can't be sailing without Mr. Hudson."

"Bai Jove! Let's ask the skippah!"

The juniors ran to the steps of the bridge. Captain Crane was busy giving orders to the seamen. In the first pause Tom Merry called to him:

"Are you going up the river now, sir?"

Captain Crane smiled.

"No, my lad! I'm going down the river!"

"Back to sea?"

"Ay, ay!"

"But Mr. Hudson—he hasn't returned!"

"He isn't coming back," said Captain Crane. "He has gone up the river, hours ago, in a steam-launch. He kept it dark, because you boys wanted to go, and he didn't want a fuss."

"He's given us the slip," said Tom Merry, in dismay.

The captain smiled again.

"You boys are coming back to England in the Opossum," he said.

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"We're not going back to England leaving Mr. Hudson to face those three scoundrels alone!" he exclaimed.

"But he's gone."

"How long?"

"Two hours."

"Bai Jove! I wegard it as a wotten twick!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly. "He has given us the slip, and I do not wegard it as playin' the game."

"He's not going to leave us behind like this," said Figgins.

"But he has done it, deah boy!"

"What price following him?" asked Tom Merry, looking round.

"Bai Jove!"

"If he's only two hours ahead we may overtake him," said the hero of the Shell. "Are you all game? Shall we go?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What-ho!"

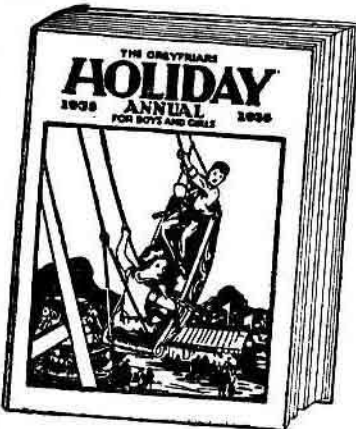
"Ripping!"

Tom Merry ran to the side of the steamer. Native boats were plying on the river in crowds, some with fruit in

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great piles to sell at the ship's side, some empty, to take people to and from the landing-stage of Boma.

Tom waved his hand to a large boat containing three black oarsmen. The boat was ranged up to the steamer immediately.

"Jump in!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors had few belongings. What few they had could be fetched up from below in a few minutes.

Figgins, Blake, and Lowther ran down for them. The rest of the juniors jumped into the boat. Captain Crane had turned away, but he turned back as one of the seamen called his attention to the action of Tom Merry & Co. He came striding towards the side of the steamer with a very excited face.

"Belay there!" he shouted. "What are you doing? This isn't a time to go on a pleasure trip when we're just sailing."

"We're not going on a pleasure trip, sir," said Tom Merry. "This is business. We're going after Mr. Hudson."

"What!"

"You need not wait for us in Boma; we can come here by another vessel, if you like," said the St. Jim's junior.

"You young madmen—"

"Thanks!"

"Come on the ship immediately!"

"Can't be done!"

"Wathah not!"

"Do you think I'll let you go up the Congo on your own?" roared Captain Crane. "Come back at once, or I'll come and fetch you!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You'll find it rather difficult to fetch nine chaps," he said; "and I warn you we shall resist. We mean business."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Lowther, Blake, and Figgins came on deck with hastily

to show their faces at St. Jim's again. Henry K. Hudson had left them behind. All they could do was to follow him whether he liked it or not. If they could not find him, that would not be their fault; they would have done their best. But they would not give up the task till they had had a hard try. And it was quite possible that on the wide reaches of the Congo they might themselves come in contact with Gally and his companions, and win back the papers without the aid of Henry K. Hudson at all. That would be a triumph for the juniors of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass back towards the steamer. It had disappeared. The boat was gliding on swiftly up the rolling river. Some of the juniors were very serious and thoughtful; Fatty Wynn was looking decidedly so.

"Cheer up, Fatty!" said Figgins, slapping the fat Fourth Former on the shoulder. "Are you thinking of the cannibals?"

"No, I'm not," said Fatty Wynn peevishly. "I'm thinking of the grub."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter," said Fatty Wynn seriously. "I think we ought to stop at Boma and get some provisions. We have plenty of money—at least, Tom Merry and Gussy have, and it's all the same."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We can't stop at Boma," said Kerr quietly.

"Why not?" demanded Fatty Wynn warmly.

"Because Captain Crane would jolly soon have us stopped. He thinks we're going into fearful danger. I dare say we are, and he would appeal to the Belgian officials to stop us, and send us back on board the Opossum."

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "That's very likely."

The chief of the negro boatmen turned to Tom Merry with a wide grin. The white roofs of Boma had disappeared now behind a bend of the river.

## CHRISTMAS IS COMING—

*So is Our Grand YULETIDE GHOST YARN of the Eerie Adventures of the Chums of St. Frank's!*

**—STARTING NEXT WEEK!**

tied bundles, which they tossed into the boat. They jumped in after them.

Captain Crane almost danced with rage and excitement. To let the juniors go up the Congo "on their own" seemed impossible to him. But if they were determined, he had no power to stop them. As for the negro boatmen, Tom Merry had already shown them a ten-shilling note, and they were sure to back up their employers—the juniors.

"You can't go!" yelled the skipper.

Tom Merry grinned.

"We can," he replied. "It's all right, sir! If anything goes wrong, you're not to blame. You couldn't help it, you see."

Tom Merry tapped one of the negro boatmen on the shoulder, and pointed up the river. He had picked up some of the lingo of the coast on board the steamer, and he was able to speak to the men.

"You lib for dem river," he said.

The negro grinned.

"Mo lib sharp quick, massa."

The three negroes paddled away up the brown stream. Captain Crane was almost dancing with rage and dismay on the deck of the steamer. But he was powerless to do anything else. The boat glided swiftly up the wide Congo, and disappeared from his sight.

### CHAPTER 5.

#### A Fight on the River!

**T**OM MERRY & Co. had taken a desperate step; how desperate they did not realise at the time.

In a boat, without provisions, without firearms, without little more clothing than they stood up in, they had embarked upon a voyage they knew not whither, excepting that it was into the heart of Africa, among cannibals and lions and snakes, and white men little less savage than the black barbarians of the forest.

Yet they did not hesitate.

To return to England and say that they had lost the papers entrusted to them, and that they had let a man go singly in search of them, with three desperate enemies to encounter—that was impossible. They would be ashamed to tell Sir Richard such a story; they would be ashamed

"You lib for where?" asked the boatman.

"Up the river. What's your name, my man?"

"M'pong."

"Well, M'pong, we're going a long way up the river, and if you take us in your boat we'll pay you well," said Tom Merry. Then, as the black man looked puzzled, he went on: "You lib for dem river all the time, savvy?"

"Me savvy."

"Me lib for pay," said Tom Merry, showing a ten-shilling note.

The black man's eyes glistened strangely.

He bowed his woolly head to Tom Merry and took his paddle again. The three paddles moved the boat along at a good rate. The negroes began to chatter at one another in their own dialect, not a word of which was understood by the juniors. But Kerr, the keen Scotsman, watched the expression of their faces, and his own face grew very grave.

"What's the trouble, Kerr?" asked Tom Merry, looking at him.

"Parlez en Francais," said Kerr, and he went on in that language. "That chap understands English as well as we do. I don't think you were wise to show him a note."

Tom Merry started.

"He wouldn't work for us if he wasn't sure of his pay," he replied in French.

"But now he knows you have plenty of money. And we're alone on the Congo with three big niggers, and any one of them looks as if he would commit murder at a shilling a time."

"Phew!" said Tom Merry, in English this time.

He had certainly not thought of that. He had taken the boat and its crew into service by chance; he was in too great a hurry to get away from the steamer to pick and choose. But now that Kerr had called attention to the fact he realised that it was a very risky business for the juniors to trust themselves to the black boatmen in this way. The blacks could tell easily enough that the boys had money, and their clothes and their watches would be worth a small fortune to the negroes of the Congo.

If the three blacks should turn upon them—Tom Merry was far from suspicious by nature, but now that Kerr had spoken he could not help observing that there seemed to be an understanding among the negroes.

The paddles worked incessantly, and the boat travelled up the river at a surprising speed. It seemed as if the black boatmen, instead of having to be driven to work, as usual, were as keen as the juniors in the race up the river—unless they intended foul play and were in a hurry to get far from the white man's town in order to carry out their plans.

Tom Merry & Co. realised, with a chill, that if the negroes turned upon them it would not mean simply robbery. The black men were of the Congo—the place where human life is held cheap. They would not leave the juniors alive to tell tales in Boma. If they robbed them they would murder them; there was not the slightest doubt upon that. The yellow waters of the Congo would roll over the dead bodies and hide the crime.

Tom Merry's teeth set grimly.

If it came to a fight with the three blacks, after all, there were nine of the juniors, and they would give a good account of themselves.

The blacks had no weapons expecting their paddles. They were clad only in dirty loincloths and could have no weapons concealed about them. The unfortunate thing was that Tom Merry & Co. were unarmed. But they could hold their own with their fists.

The juniors, with such thoughts in their minds, could not help feeling uneasy, and perhaps their uneasiness betrayed itself in their looks.

M'pong cast quick and suspicious glances at them after a time and chatted to his comrades, and dark, ugly looks came over the faces of the negroes.

The boat was by this time many a long mile from Boma, and the banks, clothed in forest, seemed destitute of any sign of human habitation.

The sun was setting over the great trees in the distance and the surface of the river rolled a flood of crimson.

"Look out!" exclaimed Kerr.

M'pong rose to his feet, and next moment he struck with his paddle right at Tom Merry's head. That savage and murderous attack was the first warning of hostility.

But the hero of the Shell was ready. He was watching M'pong, and he ducked his head, avoided the vicious blow, and hit out with right and left. His right caught the negro under the chin, his left in the ribs as the man staggered, and M'pong gave a wild howl and fell backwards over the gunwale.

There was a splash, and he disappeared into the deep waters of the Congo.

An instant more and the other two blacks had rushed upon the juniors, and the boat was rocking and swaying violently as they closed in contact.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Saving a Savage!

"BACK up, St. Jim's!"

It was a strange cry to be heard on the wide waters of the Congo—to echo among the mangrove swamps of Central Africa.

The boat rocked wildly, and the combatants rolled to and fro. The juniors had met the blacks more than half-way, attacking them with fists furiously. And as they were more than four to one, and the leader of the enemy was gone, they had the better chance.

The active lads had seized upon the black ruffians and were wrestling with them so closely that they had no chance to use their paddles.

Blake and Kerr and Figgins and Lowther had dragged one of them down, and with a great combined effort they flung him over the side into the river.

Then all the juniors turned upon the other one.

Under a shower of blows the remaining black retreated to the end of the boat, gnashing his white teeth like a wild animal, and as the juniors came at him he leaped into the water and swam for the shore.

The St. Jim's juniors remained in possession of the boat. It was rocking so violently that a wash of water came over the gunwale.

"Careful!" called out Tom Merry. "We shall capsize in a minute!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! I feel in quite a fluttah!"

Tom Merry shaded his eyes with his hands from the glare of the sun and looked across the crimson river.

Two of the blacks were swimming steadily towards the distant shore, and as he looked he saw them reach the mangroves and drag themselves out of the water.

Where was the other one—M'pong? The rascal had tried to murder them; but Tom Merry hoped that M'pong was not drowned.

It was terrible to punish even so hopeless a savage with death.

"Can you see M'pong, you fellows?"

"Gwecat Scott!"

"What—where is he?"

"Cwooddiles, deah boy!"

"Oh!"

They could see the hideous creature now. The snout showed above the water. The crocodile had headed M'pong off from the shore. The negro had paused, and was swimming in a fresh direction, and the crocodile was pursuing him and gaining fast. There was no hope of escape for the negro.

Tom Merry's heart turned sick.

It was his first real sight of the conditions of Central Africa—of Nature, wild and savage and untamed.

The negro never even thought of swimming towards the boat. He would have expected to be brained by a paddle if he had approached it.

He was striving to swim across the river, as the crocodile had cut him off from the nearer shore, but the attempt was hopeless.

Tom Merry grasped a paddle.

"We must save him!" he muttered hoarsely. "Paddle away!"

Most of the juniors knew how to handle the paddles. They had paddled canoes often enough on the silvery Rhyl at St. Jim's. These paddles were different, but they succeeded in handling them. The boat glided towards the swimming negro, and then for the first time M'pong looked at it. He rolled his eyes at the juniors, showing the whites of them, with a look of horror and despair that went straight to their hearts.

Tom Merry waved his hand.

"This way, M'pong! Lib for boat!"

M'pong did not change his direction. The Congo negro is not quick of apprehension. He either did not understand or did not believe.

The juniors paddled quickly. The boat glided through the water, and interposed between the crocodile and his victim. The snout of the huge brute crashed against the frail timber of the boat, and made it shake and tremble from stem to stern. M'pong was on the other side of the boat.

"M'pong! M'pong! Here—lib for boat, quick!"

The negro understood them. He could not doubt his ears; he could see now that the juniors desired to save him from the crocodile. His huge, black hands grasped the gunwale of the boat, and the juniors gripped him.

M'pong came over the side of the boat, and rolled in, and lay gasping, and streaming with water.

Crash!

The boat trembled again as the crocodile crashed upon it. The brute seemed to have turned its fury upon the boat. As it came near, Blake and Figgins struck at it with the paddles, but they might as well have struck at a stone wall.

"We must run for it," said Tom Merry.

"Paddle away, deah boy!"

The paddles worked actively.

The boat ran swiftly against the sluggish current, and the next rush of the crocodile missed it; and then the brute appeared to give up the contest, for it disappeared among the floating logs on the current.

The juniors breathed more freely.

"That was a close shave for all of us!" muttered Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm jolly glad that croc's gone," grinned Monty Lowther. "This boat is a rotten old crock, and he was the stronger croc of the two."

"Bai Jove! How can you make rotten puns at such a time, Lowthah?"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Well, we're safe and sound," said Tom Merry. "But what are we going to do with Pongo?"

The black sat up in the boat, dashing the water from his face, and stared at the juniors.

They sat round him, ready to fling him overboard at the slightest sign of hostility. But there was no hostility in the manner of the black man.

## CHAPTER 7.

### On the Track!

M'PONG sat upon his haunches, and crawled forward towards Tom Merry.

Some of the juniors made a movement; but it was clear that M'pong did not mean mischief. He crawled to Tom Merry's feet, and knocked his forehead upon the bottom of the boat. Then he squatted up and looked at the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry watched these proceedings in growing surprise.



"Massa lib for save M'pong," said the black. "M'pong lib for serve massa like slave."

"You saved his life, he reckons," said Kerr, "and he's going to serve you faithfully now, instead of murdering you for your gold watch. I dare say it's what he would call playing the game."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"Well, if he means it, that's all right," he said. "It would be much better to have him along with us in exploring this giddy river, of course, as we don't know the place in the least. But if he is treacherous—"

M'pong evidently understood.

"Me lib for serve massa. Lib for die for massa!" he interjected.

"That means he'll die for you if necessary," said Kerr.

"Bai Jove! I wathah think he's all wight, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Let's give him a chance."

"Good!"

"It's all right, M'pong. Now we lib for dem river, sharp."

"Yes, sah."

And M'pong, having recovered his breath, sat down to his paddle again. Three juniors took other paddles. But M'pong easily did as much work as them. His huge, brawny arms were tireless. For the fate of his companions he seemed to care nothing; he did not say a word about them, or give a glance along the faded shore. The only clear thought in the dull brain of the savage was that he wished to serve Tom Merry for having saved his life.

In the fading daylight the juniors looked round at the banks they were passing. Swamps and forests, forests and swamps! Here and there, at long intervals, something like a sprawling village on the banks, with naked negroes and scrambling children—here and there the white walls of some Belgian post. The farther they went, the slighter grew the signs of civilisation.



"M'pong!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Lib for boat, quick!" Just in time the boat interposed between the negro and the crocodile, and the juniors quickly grasped M'pong and helped him over the gunwale. Blake struck at the crocodile with a paddle, but he might as well have struck at a stone wall!

"I dare say he might be able to get us something to eat, too," Fatty Wynn remarked. "I don't know how you fellows feel, but I'm getting hungry."

"Very well, M'pong," said Tom Merry. "You want to come with us—you lib to come up dem river along massa."

The negro nodded emphatically.

"You lib for serve true and neber steal."

Another emphatic nod.

"We'll trust you, then. After all, you fellows, it's his boat," Tom Merry remarked. "We don't want to steal it. If he stays with us, we'll pay him for the use of his boat, and for his services, just the same as if nothing had happened."

"But we'll keep an eye on him," said Kerr.

"Oh, yes, rather!"

M'pong bumped his thick head upon the bottom of the boat again.

"No lib for pay," he said.

Tom Merry smiled.

"That looks like the real thing," he said.

"We shall see," said Kerr.

"Well, I trust him, for one," said Tom Merry.

Night came down upon the Congo.

M'pong still paddled on, waiting for orders. Fatty Wynn was very hungry now, and growing dangerously near a state of hysterics on the subject. Tom Merry tapped M'pong on the shoulder, and the black looked at him.

"We are hungry," said Tom Merry. "Where can we feed? Lib for eat."

M'pong grinned.

"Yes, sah!"

He pointed to the distant bank, swallowed up in the darkness.

"Lib for buy food," he said.

"Take us there, then."

"Yes, sah!"

The boat glided towards the shore in the darkness. Kerr looked very uneasy, and so did some of the others.

"He'll run us into some blessed nigger village," muttered Kerr. "There's no law and order in this country, out of the range of the Belgian guns. We may get a crowd of nigger fiends round us, and we shall be done for."

"I trust him," said Tom Merry.

"That's all very well, but—"

"Well, we must have food. We shall be famished by morning. It's a risk that we've got to take, it seems to me."

"I suppose so," admitted Kerr. "Look here, we'll stay in the boat and give M'pong money to go ashore and buy food. If he is faithful, he'll bring it to us. If he isn't, we don't want to trust ourselves ashore with him."

"Good old Kerr!" said Figgins admiringly. "He works these things out in algebra, I believe. I think Kerr is right, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry nodded.

"All serene," he said. He went towards M'pong as the boat glided into the shadow of the shore. "M'pong, you lib for food quick. We wait in the boat. Savvy?"

"Yes, sah!"

"Here is some money; you lib for pay."

"Yes, sah!"

The boat stopped. From somewhere in the darkness came a gleam of light, but the juniors could see no signs of a village. M'pong held a handful of silver coins in his hand and clambered among the low-hanging mangroves and disappeared in the darkness.

The juniors waited in the boat.

At a sign of treachery they were ready to paddle away, and they listened intently, and watched in the darkness.

But the gloom was too intense for them to see far.

It was amazing to the juniors that M'pong should find his way among the mangroves on the shore, but doubtless he knew the locality well.

Many minutes passed, and there was no sound of his return.

"He's deserted us," said Kerr.

"I don't think so," said Tom Merry quietly. "Anyway, we'll give him a chance."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm awfully hungry," said Fatty Wynn patiently. "It was jolly careless to leave the steamer without any grub, when you come to think of it, Tom Merry."

"We mightn't have got away at all if we'd stayed for grub, Fatty."

"Well, I'm famished."

There was a rustle in the mangroves.

"Look out! Here's M'pong!"

M'pong it was. He came back with two rush baskets strung upon his back, and he rolled them into the boat. Then he followed them in, panting. Fatty Wynn dragged upon the baskets, and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. "Cold chickens and jelly?" asked Monty Lowther.

"No, you ass, but it's a good prog, and there's plenty of it; that's the chief thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was plenty indeed. There was dried fish of several sorts, and Indian bread, and fruits of many kinds, and a variety of nuts, and a curious kind of brown cake.

Fatty Wynn lost no time in beginning, and the hungry juniors joined him quickly enough. M'pong paddled the boat out into the wide Congo again while they ate.

Under the stars that studded the wide, blue heavens, the boat glided on on that strange voyage, and the juniors, having finished their meal, lay down in the boat to rest, one or two of them keeping awake to watch.

Tom Merry offered to relieve M'pong at the paddle, but the negro shook his head; he seemed tireless. With a slower but steady stroke he paddled on through the silent hours of the starry night.

## CHAPTER 8.

### In a Tight Corner!

ANOTHER day—glaring sun and blazing heat on the rolling Congo. And yet another, and another, each the same as the previous one—heat and sun—mosquitoes by the myriad—mangrove swamps with sickly smells—primeval forests, whence came at night the roaring of ferocious beasts; each day, each night, was like the previous one, but strange and wild to the juniors.

From St. Jim's to the Congo was a wonderful change, and they did not easily get used to it, but at last they dropped into the way of their surroundings.

During those days they kept a keen watch for any sign of the steam-launch and the American.

But they did not see Henry K. Hudson. Tom Merry had explained to M'pong what he was seeking on the river, and the black man entered into the quest keenly enough, and made inquiries of passing boats and rafts, and at the native villages on the banks. The Congo black was invaluable to the juniors; without him they would have pushed on just the same, but he made the difficult task more easy. He could speak the dialects of the river, and gain information that would have been sealed to them, and on several occasions he brought news to Tom Merry that a

steam-launch had passed a day or two days before, as the case might be. And Tom Merry was relieved to know it—it proved that the juniors were on the track, and that Henry K. Hudson had not yet overtaken the three crooks.

It was a race up the Congo—a strange race, and the juniors felt the thrill of the excitement of it as the days passed on. M'pong seemed able to purchase any quantity of provisions, and the juniors were kept well supplied. Even the keen and canny Kerr was convinced by this time that the black man was faithful. The juniors improved as paddlers with practice, and they brought the boat along at a good speed, and M'pong paddled at night when they were resting.

Tom Merry's chief worry was that he and his companions were unarmed. They had cut themselves cudgels in the thickets, and shaped them with their pocket-knives, and these would be useful enough in a fight, but of more deadly weapons they had none. And they were venturing into wild regions, where lions prowled unchecked, and wild elephants crashed through the forests, and cannibals lived upon the banks of the river, and human bones could be seen decorating the huts of the ju-ju men.

But they never thought of turning back.

The love of adventure, inbred in every British boy, was strong in Tom Merry & Co., and it was growing keener now amid their wild surroundings.

More than once, the juniors thought, M'pong had averted an attack from savage negroes by talking to them in their own dialect. They could not help feeling that they would not have gone so far without fighting but for the help of the black man. And the juniors found themselves growing quite attached to M'pong.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as he fanned himself with a plantain leaf on the fifth afternoon, in the blazing glare of the sun. "Bai Jove, I'm gettin' wathah to like this life, you know! I wgard it as bettah 'han gwindin' Latin in the class-rooms at St. Jim's."

"What-ho!" said Figgins emphatically.

Crack!

Tom Merry sprang to his feet.

"Hark! What was that?!"

Crack!

It was the report of a rifle. The sound came clearly across the wide waters. The sharp report echoed a thousand times in the great trees, which flung the sound back upon the river again.

The juniors were all upon their feet now.

Crack, crack!

The reports were lighter, and evidently came from a revolver. Then the sharp, loud crack of a rifle was heard again.

Tom Merry shaded his eyes with his hands and scanned the river.

The firing came from behind a point of thickly wooded land that jutted out into the Congo. Who was firing, and what he was firing at, could not be seen.

The firing was so rapid that it seemed as if more than one rifle was being used. But Kerr did not think so.

"It's one man firing all the time," he said. "The ping is just the same each time. He's using a rifle and revolver alternately. He must be pretty hard pressed, I should think, and he's trying to keep a crowd off."

"Yaas, wathah! Paddle away, deah boys; we're goin' to see what's the mattah!"

"Yes, rather!"

M'Pong looked earnestly at Tom Merry.

"Lib for run," he said. "Savages—cannibals—lib for eat Massa Tom. Lib for run."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That may be out friend in danger, M'pong. Paddle away."

The black made no further objection. M'pong and three juniors handled the paddles, and they made the boat fly. It rounded the neck of land and ran suddenly into sight of the fighting.

A steam-launch was aground in the thick, yellow mud of the Congo. Behind the mudbanks was a stretch of sickly mangrove swamps, and beyond them the forest. In front of the stranded launch was the wide river, and on the river three canoes with savage negroes cramming them. The horrible, bestial faces of the blacks showed that they belonged to the lowest type of Congo savage.

Some of them wore human bones strung on their necks and round their middle. They were armed with clubs and spears, and some of them were hurling spears at the launch while others paddled.

On the deck of the launch several boxes and packing-cases had been piled up to form a sort of defence against the spears. Behind this barricade a white man was kneeling, and the juniors caught a glimpse of him. The boxes before him and around him were studded with spears that had stuck into them, and there was a rough bandage

round the white man's forehead. But his keen, grey eyes were steady, and the hand on his rifle never faltered.

Crack, crack, crack!  
The white man was picking his men as if he were shooting at a target. In each canoe one man rolled over under the fire, and each man shot down was one of the paddlers.

Crack, crack, crack!  
Three more paddlers, dead or disabled, rolled over among the legs of their companions.

The aim of the white man was evidently to keep the canoes from getting too close. But in spite of the execution, the savages paddled nearer. Then a hand grasping a revolver came into view over the barricade, and a rain of rapid shots scattered among the blacks. Thrown into confusion, the negroes tumbled over one another, yelling wildly, and the canoes drifted farther off.

"It's Mr. Hudson!" exclaimed Tom Merry.  
"Did you see him?"  
"Yes, for a second."  
"And he's alone!" muttered Figgins.  
"Yaas, wathah!"  
"We're going to help him," said Tom Merry. "I think we'd better try to get to the launch and get on board. The niggers haven't seen us yet, and they're knocked out for a bit."

The savages in the canoes had retreated now. The three canoes had drifted some little distance on the river, and deep groans and cries came from them. But there were still a score of savages unhurt, and they were uttering cries of rage.

"Lib for dem smoke boat, M'pong," said Tom Merry.  
"Yes, sah."

The boat ran swiftly along the shore towards the stranded launch. The negroes in the canoes were too much occupied to see it at first. Tom Merry called out in English as they neared the launch:

"Mr. Hudson! Don't fire!"  
There was a cry of amazement from the launch.  
"Thunder! Who's that?"  
"Tom Merry!"

"Well, carry me home to die!" ejaculated the American.  
"Look sharp! You'll have their spears about your ears in a shake of a lamb's tail!"  
"Buck up!"

The boat ran against the hull of the launch. There was a yell from the blacks—they had seen it now. Spears came hurtling through the air, but they fell short, splashing in the river.

The juniors clambered on board the steam-launch quickly enough, followed by M'pong. There came a fiendish burst of yells and the canoes came paddling on to the attack again. The dead had been flung into the river—perhaps the wounded with them—the Central African black is not particular. Brandishing their spears, the blacks came on.

"Better get under cover," said Mr. Hudson coolly—as coolly as if the juniors had come to pay him an afternoon call, and he had been expecting them. "I guess this is going to be hot. Go below, especially you with the monocle!"

"Weally, sir—"  
"Get below!" roared Mr. Hudson. "Into the cabin—into the engine-room—anywhere! You're in the way! If any of you kids can shoot, there are a couple of rifles standing behind the hatch there. Lots of cartridges here. Below, the rest of you!"

Crack, crack, crack!  
The American, his eyes gleaming under the blood-stained bandage on his forehead, was firing again, and his firing was answered by wild yells from the Congo cannibals.

**CHAPTER 9.**

**At Grips With Cannibals!**

**A**RTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY made a jump for the rifle.

He did not even stop to fix his monocle. He grasped one of the magazine rifles and loaded it with quick, precise fingers. Arthur Augustus had shot often enough at home at Eastwood, and he was a good shot. Tom Merry seized the other rifle, and Figgins picked up the revolver Mr. Hudson had laid beside him.

The three of them joined in the firing.  
The savages were making a determined onslaught now. Paddling furiously, they brought the canoes with a rush right up to the launch, though black after black rolled over under Mr. Hudson's rapid shots.

The three canoes bumped against the launch together, and the blacks swarmed up the side. There were a dozen of them at least, brawny, ferocious savages, spear in hand, with madly glaring eyes.

(Continued on the next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Half-a-crown is awarded to the sender of every joke that appears in this column.

**DIFFICULT TO DIGEST.**

"Any complaints?" asked the orderly officer.  
"Yes, sir," answered the orderly; "the bread's wrong, sir."

"What's the matter with it?"  
"It contradicts the laws of gravity, sir. It's as heavy as lead but it won't go down!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Grundy, Estelle, Slad Road, Roughley, Sutton Coldfield.

\* \* \*

**IN GAOL.**

Tramp: "Yes, mum, I was a prisoner for seven years."  
Lady: "But the War didn't last as long as that."  
Tramp: "'Oo's talkin' about the War?"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Stone, 17, Craven Road, Addiscombe, Surrey.

\* \* \*

**NOT SO AP-PAIR-ENT.**

Visitor: "Are you and your brother twins?"  
Willie: "No; but we're so much alike that you can't tell us apart unless we're together."  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Ward, 35, Haig Street, Dunston-on-Tyne.

\* \* \*

**ZIGZAG.**

First Sportsman: "How on earth did you miss that partridge?"  
Second Sportsman: "Well, it flew zigzag, and when I shot at zig it flew zag!"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Brown, 89, Kendal Rise Road, Rednal, Birmingham.

\* \* \*

**AN EGG POSER.**

A man had two eggs a day, yet he had no chickens, the eggs were not given to him, and he did not buy them or steal them. How did he get these eggs?  
He had ducks!  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Flowers, 46, Butlin Road, Henlane Estate, Coventry.

\* \* \*

**THE LARGE PARTY.**

Blake: "We had a large party in our study to-day."  
D'Arcy minor: "All your chums?"  
Blake: "Oh, no! Just Fatty Wynn!"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss G. Dendoff, 1,356, 45th Avenue West, Vancouver, Canada.

\* \* \*

**A GATE OF ANOTHER SORT.**

Angus: "'Twas a big gate to-day at the football match, Jock."  
Jock: "Ay, 'twas! I ripped my trousers trying to climb over it!"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Livingstone, Fernbrae, Hope Road, Brooklands, Sale, Manchester.

\* \* \*

**CAUSE AND EFFECT.**

Wilkins: "Skinflint says that when charity is needed he is the first to put his hand in his pocket."  
Bilkins: "Yes, and he keeps it there till the danger is over!"  
Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Pitt, 84, 2nd Street, Orange Grove, Johannesburg, South Africa.

"I guess this is the last round," said Henry K. Hudson coolly. He jammed his teeth hard upon his unlighted cigar, and fired the last shot in his rifle.

A negro rolled over with a splash into the river. It was at this moment that the juniors chimed in. Crack, crack, crack!

Figgins was pumping away with the revolver as fast as he could pull the trigger. Tom Merry and D'Arcy fired with the magazine rifles almost as fast. They did not need to take aim—they pumped bullets into the thick of the crowded savages.

The sudden burst of firing swept the cannibals back.

With bullets tearing through them at close range, nearly all of them hit with the fast-flying lead, they surged back over the side of the launch.

Splash, bump, splash!

Into the river, or into the boats, the cannibals dropped. The juniors were still firing, though their lead swept only the empty air now.

Henry K. Hudson chuckled grimly.

"I reckon you can save your cartridges," he drawled. "They've gone!"

He loaded up his rifle, and then laid it down, struck a match, and lighted his cigar. He blew out a cloud of thick, strong smoke with a great deal of satisfaction.

What were left of the cannibals had fled, the canoes paddling away in mad haste. The crocodiles of the Congo had taken heavy toll of the assailants.

Henry K. Hudson rose and stretched his limbs, and yawned.

"You've saved my life, you kids," he said. "That last rush would have finished it. I never reckoned I should get out of this alive. But how on earth did you get here? I want to know!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We didn't stay behind, that's all," he said.

"You followed me up the river, hey?"

"I guess so," grinned Jack Blake.

"Captain Crane ought to have kept you on the steamer."

"Ho wanted to."

"And you reckoned you wouldn't stay?"

"Exactly."

"Well," said Henry K. Hudson, "I ought to wade into you with a rope's-end, I guess, but you've saved my life, so I suppose I must say I'm glad to see you."

"Yaas, wathah! And I am vewy glad we came along in time to take a hand, sir; though I hope and twust I have not killed anybody."

"Oh, you couldn't hit a house," said Mr. Hudson, showing all his brown teeth in a great grin. "You needn't be afraid of that, Master Eyeglass."

D'Arcy coloured.

"Weally, Mr. Hudson—"

"Well, hyer we are!" said Mr. Hudson, smoking away at a great rate, and apparently deriving great satisfaction from the black cigar, the mere smell of which made the juniors feel a little qualmy. "Hyer we are, and I guess it's no good telling you to go back."

"Ha, ha, ha! No fear!"

"Then you will have to come with me. The launch will hold you, I guess, once you get her off the mud—and your black man can stoke."

Tom Merry turned to M'pong.

"You lib for stoke?" he said.

"Yes, sah!"

"You've got your nigger in good order, I must remark," said Mr. Hudson. "I wish mine had been half as good, and I guess I shouldn't have been in this fix."

"How did it happen?" said Tom Merry.

The American shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I owe it to Gally and Rodriguez. They got wind of my being after them. You see, they are going up the river in a native boat with rowers, and so I gained on them in a steam-launch. But they were ready for me—the tarnation scoundrels! They had this gang of niggers all ready primed, and as soon as they attacked the launch my niggers vamoosed, engineer and stoker and all, and I was left on my lonesome. The launch drifted into the mud, and I've been shooting ever since—and I guess I've made them black cusses sorry for themselves—some!"

"It was pretty deep of Gally," said Tom Merry. "I wonder how he induced the cannibals to go for you?"

"I guess he's been up this hyer river before, and knows the ropes," said Mr. Hudson. "He's had dealings with them cannibals many a time, I reckon. He's paid them for this. But I guess I've taken some of the shine out of their black hides this time. But enough jaw! The niggers who have got away may come back with hundreds more,

and if we're still here they'll torture us to death with their ju-ju business. I suppose you wouldn't like to be buried up to your neck in sand, with the midday sun burning your head to a blister, and honey smeared on your nose to attract the ants?"

"Good heavens!"

"Do they really do these things?" asked Figgins, shivering.

"They do, my son. I've seen 'em," said the American. "And when you've seen all that I've seen you'll be willing to take a pot-shot at a Congo cannibal whenever you get a chance. But let's get the launch off. I guess if you tow her after that boat of yours, she'll come off the mud."

"Right you are, sir!"

The juniors set to work actively at once under the burning sun.

A rope was passed from the stem of the launch to the stern of the boat, and the juniors manned the latter and paddled away.

The launch was stuck in soft mud, partly heeled over; but the steady pull upon her dragged her into shallow water, and then she floated on an even keel.

"All O.K.!" called out Mr. Hudson. "You can come aboard, M'pong, if that's your name. You'll bank up the fires, I guess, and stoke."

"Yes, sah!"

The juniors clambered on board again. The steam-launch was a good size, and a very handsome and useful vessel. When the engine was throbbing again she moved out into the main channel of the river at a good speed, dragging the boat after her. Mr. Hudson drew a knife to cut the rope.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry. "That boat belongs to M'pong."

"I guess I'll pay him for it," said Mr. Hudson. "We can't tow it all the way up the Congo. We may have to go hundreds of miles yet, and we may have to hustle."

He cut the rope, and the boat drifted away.

The launch throbbed on up the brown river. Now that the juniors were on board, they made a more than sufficiently numerous crew for the little steamer, and Mr. Hudson apportioned them their duties.

"I guess we don't want any slackers here!" he remarked. "If you're staying aboard the launch, my sons, you're working."

"We don't want to slack, sir," said Digby. "We're willing to work."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, you can't work, Master Eyeglass!" said Mr. Hudson. "I'll let you slide. But the others can buckle to. Take it in turns to help M'pong with the stoking."

"Weally, Mr. Hudson—"

"No back talk to the skipper of this hyer craft," said Mr. Hudson, with a wave of his cigar. "You can't work! Keep your eyes open, you kids!"

The juniors were on the look-out without being told.

In the distance behind, a number of canoes shot out from the mangroves of the river bank. Mr. Hudson chuckled as he saw them.

"They've come back," he remarked. "I guess they'll have a try to catch us—but they won't work the rifle, I reckon."

The American was right. The canoes pulled out after the launch, but the little steamer simply walked away from them, fast as they paddled. In a quarter of an hour the last of the canoes was dropped out of sight astern.

The steam-launch throbbed on up the Congo

## CHAPTER 10.

### Run Down.

**H**ENRY K. HUDSON seemed to be in high spirits now. He removed the bloodstained bandage from his forehead and washed the cut there, and Tom Merry tied a fresh bandage for him.

He smoked black cigars in quick succession, the strong tobacco seeming to have no effect upon him, excepting to make his brown teeth a little browner. He frequently burst into a chuckle as he scanned the wide reaches of the river.

"You think we shall find them soon?" Tom Merry asked, as the sun was sinking in the west towards the far Atlantic, turning the great river into a rolling flood of crimson and gold.

"I guess so. You see, I know they were close at hand this morning, and they can't have got very far. We shall run them down."

"Good!"

(Continued on page 14.)

THERE'S GOOD NEWS FOR YOU IN—



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.

**H**ALLO, chums! The good news I have for you this week, as you have probably guessed, concerns the great Christmas story of the adventures of the St. Frank's chums. Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks has written many splendid Yuletide yarns—they are a speciality of his—but of them all this one is undoubtedly the best. You will vote it the finest Christmas story you have ever read. The title is:

#### 'HANDFORTH THE GHOST-HUNTER!'

and it tells of the eerie and nerve-tingling adventures of the boys of St. Frank's in a forbidding, old haunted house.

The one and only Edward Oswald receives an invitation from his uncle for him and his friends to spend Christmas at Handforth Towers, in Norfolk. Handy makes up a party of twenty, which includes a few friends from Moor View Girls' School. But from the moment they arrive at their destination, unexpected things start to happen. Handforth Towers isn't a bit like the mansion the party expect to see. It is an old, creepy and deserted place, with only a wizened old caretaker and his witch-like wife to welcome them. But that's only the start of many mysterious and ghostly adventures the St. Frank's boys are to experience that Christmas, which proves to be the most thrilling of their lives.

The grand opening chapters of this wonderful story will appear in next week's number. Spend your Christmastide with Handforth's party—have a good time and be thrilled!

#### "TOM MERRY'S CANNIBAL!"

The third and final yarn of our great series of the African adventures of Tom

Merry & Co. is another triumph for that master author, Martin Clifford. It is crammed full of the exciting experiences of the St. Jim's juniors—adventures in the jungle with wild animals; a fight with a shark at sea on the journey home, and the amazing arrival of the juniors back at St. Jim's with a Congo cannibal! For M'pong, whose life Tom Merry has saved, won't leave the junior. And what a sensation he causes at the school! You'll simply revel in this yarn which, combined with all our other grand features, sets the seal on a ripping issue. Don't forget to order your GEM early, chums!

#### AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING.

An Australian reader—J. Bowers, of Sydney—writes to tell me that a most unusual meeting of a football committee recently occurred in his town. It was unusual in as much as the place where it was held. This is what happened. The committee of the New South Wales Football Association were called together for an official meeting to deal with the behaviour of certain players in league matches and other business. The committee entered a lift, to be conveyed to the floor where the meeting was to be held. But the lift stuck in the shaft. The committee was imprisoned, for all efforts to release them were in vain. Thereupon the chairman declared the meeting open, and they got down to business in the cramped space of the lift. It was not more than two hours later that they were freed, and by that time they had dealt with all their business.

#### PEN PALS COUPON

1-12-34



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

F. Harker, 10, Queen Street, Carlin How, East Yorkshire, wants a correspondent; age 12-14; football, cricket, stamp collecting, cigarette cards.

Frank Wade, 4, Bedford Terrace, Hopwood Lane, Halifax, Yorks, wants a correspondent in Glasgow; age 14-16.

Dennis McLeod, c/o P.O. Florida, Transvaal, South Africa, wants pen pals.

Charlie Sykes, 110, Spring Street, Queenstown, Adelaide, South Australia, wants correspondents.

Arthur James, 33, Lynton Road, Wallasey, Ches., wants

#### FORCED DESCENT.

John is a sixteen-year-old London page-boy, and, like many other lads, he is fond of flying. And he's proved that he's got plenty of nerve for it, too, for never has an aviator so youthful had such a nerve-tingling experience as befell John just lately. He had got a pilot friend to take him up in a plane, and do some stunting. Naturally, a parachute was strapped to his shoulders for safety; but John little knew how mighty useful that chute was to be.

Gaining a height of 6,000 feet, the pilot performed all sorts of stunts with the machine, and then did a roll, the plane turning over on its wings. Imagine John's horror when he found himself falling out of the cockpit! But did he lose his head in those frightful moments? Not John! As he turned over and over in the air, falling, he felt for the ripcord of the chute, and pulled. A terrific jerk at his shoulders told him that it had opened, and thereafter John's journey back to earth became a gentle glide. It will be a long time before John forgets the horror of the moments of his first parachute descent, but it's hardly likely to discourage so keen an aviator.

#### A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE!

Talking of John's amazing escape reminds me of another lucky escape from death. But this one happened on land. A drayman, of Fomhill Heath, Worcester, was leading his horse and dray over a level crossing at night, when the South Wales express came thundering along. The drayman frantically strove to get the horse and cart clear of the line, but it was too late. With a terrific crash the express hit the dray, and smashed it to smithereens. The driver of the train promptly stopped and came running back, to see the drayman safe and sound, still holding the frightened horse's head. But of the cart there was no sign. The force of the impact had smashed the shafts and traces, leaving the driver and his horse uninjured. It was a fortunate escape, but it emphasises the danger of level crossings, and the urgent need for either tunnels under them or bridges over.

#### IT MADE ME LAUGH.

"Ah, my friend," said Brown to his neighbour, "it is deeds, not words, that count!"

"Oh, I don't know!" said White. "Have you ever sent a telegram?"

#### THE EDITOR.

correspondents in the Dominions; age 14-15; stamps and relics.

Leslie F. Harrison, 277, Kingston Road, New Malden, Surrey, wants pen pals; China, Canada, India; curiosities and magazines.

Alan Boughton, 23, Edithna Street, Landor Road, Stockwell, London, S.W.9, wants pen pals.

Howard Rowe, Whittinghame College, 62/66, The Drive, Hove, Sussex, wants a correspondent in England or Australia; age 10-12; cricket, football, cigarette cards.

Harold Farmer, 143, Main Street, E. Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, wants pen pals; model boats, planes, and to exchange newspapers; age 11-13.

Bill Wilkinson, 130, Morimer Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wants pen pals; age 14-17; the Navy, motor racing, cycling.

Harold Davies, 68, Downhills Park Road, Tottenham, London, N.17, wants pen pals; age 9-15; Australia, America, New Zealand.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,398.

## THE ST. JIM'S EXPLORERS!

(Continued from page 12.)

"And I'm glad to have you kids with me," said Mr. Hudson. "The scallywags won't have much chance against a crowd. I shouldn't have been justified in bringing you up here with me, but now you're here, I'm glad. See?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I see! I hope we shall find Gally & Co. But suppose they leave their boat and take to the banks. What then?"

The American grinned.

"They'll not be likely to do that," he said. "They would be eaten by the niggers the first day on shore, I guess. Besides, it's no easy thing to travel on the banks of the Congo. You'd have to blaze your way through the thickets with an axe in some places, and to tramp over fever swamps in others. They'll keep to the river, unless they're driven to take to the land; and if they're driven ashore they'll get back to the river just as fast as they can."

"I suppose you're right."

"I reckon I am, sonny."

Night descended upon the Congo. The moon sailed high over the African forests. The launch throbbed on through the night. From the banks came the deep roar of lions prowling in the forest for prey.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, turning his eyeglass upon the sombre woods. "I should like to have a shot at a lion, dear boys!"

Mr. Hudson chuckled.

"I guess you'd run if you saw one," he remarked. "And you wouldn't stop for your monocle, neither."

The swell of St. Jim's sniffed indignantly.

"I wegard your remarks as wide."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A chap can wear an eyeglass and still keep his end up in a fight," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard you as a Yankee bounder."

"Cheese it, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"It's all right, I guess," said Mr. Hudson, chuckling. And he turned away quite good-humouredly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave him a withering look through the monocle which amused Mr. Hudson so much.

"I twist that bounder will not provoke me into givin' him a fearful thwashin'," he remarked.

"No, that would be too fearful," agreed Monty Lowther. "But I would help to sweep up what was left of him after you'd finished, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I say, what about grub?" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm getting hungry. I don't know whether there's enough grub on this craft for all of us."

"Better look," said Monty Lowther.

Fatty Wynn approached Mr. Hudson, and questioned him on the subject. The American laughed.

"I guess there's plenty of grub here," he said. "Tins of meat, and biscuits, and plenty of tea and sugar."

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'll be cook, if you like, sir, and get the grub ready. I generally do the cooking in the study in the New House at St. Jim's."

"Go ahead then."

Fatty Wynn went ahead. He soon had a meal ready, and the juniors ate on deck, in the moonlight, with good appetites. Henry K. Hudson was scanning the river banks on either side.

THE CEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,398.



No. 42. Vol. 1. (New Series.)

## LOCAL "DERBY" MATCH AT ST. JIM'S

### OLD RIVALS GET TO GRIPS

### GUSSY'S GREAT GAME

By Jack Blake

A pane of glass is a potty thing to wear in your eye during a footer match—don't you agree? Every fellow in the Junior Eleven was united on that point—but nothing would stop Gussy, when his mind was made up! Remembering the humorous remarks Gordon Gay & Co., of the Grammar School, have passed regarding that eyeglass, Gussy was particularly keen to show our near rivals, on and off the footer field, just where they got off!

Gay won the toss, giving us a stiff wind to kick against. It's better sometimes kicking against the wind than with it, because with it the backs and half-backs are prone to over-kick the forwards with the ball. Merry got the "pill" across to Gussy on the wing, and Gus immediately showed the Grammarians a clean pair of heels. I'll say old Gussy has speed! He simply flew down the touch-line, the ball at his toe, eyeglass gleaming in his eye. Wootton major made an attempt to tackle, but a lightning swerve carried Gussy past. Carboy, between the sticks, stood ready to repel anything. Boomph! He wasn't good enough to repel Gussy's drive. Like a shell the ball zipped into the top of the net! Good old eyeglass!

The wind changed then, however—and so did our luck. Kerr for once missed a tackle, and Gay had an easy opening, which he made full use of. Frank Monk rounded off a dazzling dribble with a smashing shot. Fatty Wynn had no earthly chance of saving either of these goals. Saints attacked on the right. Lowther passed across to Merry, who sent on to Gussy, and Gus—eyeglass and all—hit the ball on the full volley. Sizz! Carboy took a faceful of mud, but never touched the ball! Two all!

From the re-start, though, the Grammarians ran us off our feet, showing us some flashing football. Gay netted with a cross-drive Wynn never saw, and Figgins had the misfortune to put the ball through his own goal—four to two against St. Jim's. Three wanted to win—but it wasn't too much for Gussy! Gussy sent across a great centre which Lowther converted into a goal with ease. A few seconds later Gussy again centred, this time for Tom Merry to ram home an "unstoppable." Four all! Fatty Wynn next distinguished himself, saving five shots in succession, and then throwing clear. With only ten minutes left, Saints returned to the attack like hungry lions, and Gussy's eyeglass was once more in evidence! Gordon Gay & Co. did not laugh at it when Gussy's head bobbed up, eyeglass glinting in the dying sun, and nodded the leather into the far corner of the net. The fifth and final goal for St. Jim's, and a gallant victory for Gussy—and his eyeglass! Having shown what he can do, I'll bet old Gussy won't wear it again at footer. He's like that, you know!

## JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther  
Calling



Hallo, everybody! Did you hear about the fellow who was looking for an opening in the City, and stepped down a manhole? He found it! Hot news—I hear radio is to be used to exterminate germs. The trouble at present is that they won't listen-in! Mr. Linton tells us that prehistoric boys never slacked at their work. Still, who wants to be prehistoric? More hot news—I hear that the new "One-Way" streets in Wayland you can only get knocked down one way. Don't laugh—it's the law of gravity! "Of course," said the oldest inhabitant, hobbling along on two sticks, "the old age pension isn't much but I make a bit extra running errands! A "sticky" messenger he'd make! Now, one of the two shipwrecked sailors on the desert isle remarked: "Can you keep a secret?" Mr. Linton got into a crowd of train in which several other gentlemen were reading newspapers. He was very annoyed to find, after half an hour's work, that he had solved his neighbour's crossword puzzle instead of his own! "What is a wisecrack!" demands Gore. A wise crack, Gore, is what a mouse disappears into when pursued by the House Dame's cat! Unpleasant as Mr. Ratcliff can be, we understand that he never wants his own back. He's got lumbago in it. We have a new clock in Study No. 10. It's a champion speed-merchant—does an hour in forty-five minutes! Of course, you heard of the two Edinburgh men who set out in a rowing-boat for the Black Sea to fill the fountain pens? It was one of them who tried to bend down and pick up a "saxpence" in the street—but his Scottish braces wouldn't "give"! Then there was the Scot who was born in Australia, to save the fare. All right—call a truce! As the Irishman said: "As more of it, and I'll break every bone in your body, you spineless jellyfish!" A friend just returned from Switzerland says they play football keenly there, but it's very "up and down." Still, a stout heart "Alps"! Oh, I hear that, after listening to carol singers for over an hour, old Pepper, the Rylcombe miser, admitted they were a "tonic, so far." (Tonic sol-fah.) Even "soh," he didn't go "fah" as to cough up any "doh"! Do you know why Wally D'Arcy is doing a "detection" task at this very moment? Because he wrote in an essay that the Black Prince was the son of Old King Cole! Gussy's tail was telling him that he never asks a gentleman for money. But after a certain time he concludes that his customer is no gentleman, and then he asks him! STOP PRESS! The only clue in a Wayland burglary is a faded lined glove. The question is—who had a hand in it?

Here's a slippy one to finish:

Is it difficult to learn to skate? Ask "Hopeful." No, "Hopeful," I'm sure you'll soon "tumble" to it!

All right—I've crossed my fingers!



Week Ending December 1st, 1934.

## ST. JIM'S SPOTLIGHT THESE NAMES MAKE NOISE

### SITTING OUT IN A SNOWSTORM—

Herbert Skimpole arrested everybody's attention. Seated on a circular seat under one of the old elms, a much-frequented spot in summer months, the bulging-browed genius of the Shell seemed entirely oblivious of the snowflakes which whirled about him and settled even on the heavy volume on which his eyes were riveted. The fact that snow was gathering about his feet, and was already creeping over his shoes, as though eager to engulf him, did not appear to disturb Skimpole in the least! Juniors, well wrapped-up in overcoats, caps, and scarves, stopped to stare at Skimpole. To their gaze, Skimpole, lacking even an overcoat, seemed unconscious. Skimpole's sanity, always a doubtful quantity, had apparently left him at last! Tom Merry was about to take action when Mr. Linton, the Shell Form master, arrived on the scene. At the sound of Mr. Linton's voice, the snow-covered Skimpole awoke, as though out of a trance. He leaped up, becoming aware of his audience for the first time. In answer to Mr. Linton's query as to what he meant by attempting to catch his death of cold, Skimpole replied that he was deep in a new psychological work by Professor Balmy-rumpet, which put forth the theory that all feelings were subjective and not objective—in other words, that it was not really cold sitting in the snow—it only seemed so! To Skimpole's astonishment, Mr. Linton wasted no time discussing Professor Balmyrumpet's theory, but packed Skimpole off indoors for a hot bath and bed. When Tom Merry & Co. looked into the Shell dormitory, they found Skimpole sneezing too hard to answer their questions. Regarding the professor's theory, evidently it was "snow" use!

### I DON'T LIKE FOOTBALL—

was the statement attributed to George Figgins of the New House, and hotly commented upon by various juniors. For Figgins, keenest of footballers, to make such a remark seemed an impossibility—but Pratt, a truthful fellow, had distinctly overheard Figgins say: "I don't like football!" in a loud voice in his study. To solve the mystery, Tom Merry took his chums over to the New House, and taxed Figgins. Accused of making the statement, Figgins stared, and then burst into a roar of laughter. He explained that in an argument with his chum Kerr, he had said he didn't like football when it interfered with cricket—in other words, when the football season began too early and curtailed the cricket season, Figgins being a great cricket enthusiast. In the footer season proper, however, Figgy invariably puts his best "foot" forward!

## DRAW FOR ST. FRANK'S AGAINST RIVER HOUSE

By Clarence Fellowe (the Rhyming Reporter)

A really most exciting fray, I very much regret to say, gave no result—you see, the ball went once into each citadel. Nipper at first secured the lead, hoping this would prove the seed of many goals—yes, shoals and shoals! Sad to relate, this was not so—St. Frank's were just a trifle slow, and River House, with "winning" guile, levelled the scores in dashing style. St. Frank's made one last fierce attack—too late to score—alas, alack!

### FULL RESULTS

ST. JIM'S .. ..	5 RYLCOMBE GRAM. SCHOOL .. ..	4
D'Arcy (3), Lowther, Merry	Gay (2), Monk, Figgins (through own goal)	
RIVER HOUSE ..	1 ST. FRANK'S ..	1
Brewster	Nipper	
GREYFRIARS ..	9 ABBOTSFORD ..	0
REDCLYFFE ..	1 HIGHCLIFFE ..	5
ST. JUDE'S ..	2 CLAREMONT ..	2

### LEAGUE TABLE TO DATE

	P.	W.	D.	L.	F.	A.	Pts.
Greyfriars .. ..	10	8	1	1	48	13	17
St. Jim's .. ..	10	8	1	1	52	16	17
St. Frank's .. ..	10	8	1	1	40	16	17
Rylcombe G. S. ..	10	6	2	2	31	22	14
Highcliffe .. ..	10	5	2	3	28	17	12
River House .. ..	10	4	4	2	27	18	12
Rookwood .. ..	10	5	2	3	33	24	12
Abbotsford .. ..	10	3	0	7	14	36	6
Bagshot .. ..	10	1	3	6	8	24	5
Redclyffe .. ..	10	1	2	7	11	46	4
St. Jude's .. ..	10	0	3	7	9	34	3
Claremont .. ..	10	0	1	9	11	46	1

## CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER



Two Rylcombe villagers applied at a new housing estate in Wayland for labourers' jobs. "I'm only allowed nine men along each side in these nine houses I'm putting up," said the foreman, "but if you can fit yourselves in without breaking that rule, the jobs are yours." Can you see how the villagers worked out that little problem and got the jobs? The houses were arranged as in the sketch, with three labourers in each house.

(Solution next week.)

Solution to last week's puzzle: TOMATO.

"I suppose we shall keep watch to-night, sir?" Tom Merry remarked presently.

"I guess I shall, sonny."

"You can't stay awake night and day, sir. Better let us take it in turns."

"Yaas, wathah! I shall insist on taking my turn with the watching."

"Oh, you'd go to sleep," said Mr. Hudson.

"Weally, sir—"

"But I guess you can take turns, some of you," said the coast agent. "Tom Merry, and Figgins and Blake—you seem the likeliest—and you, Kerr. You can take it in turns, two at a time, in case one nods off. You can wake me at midnight."

"Yes, sir."

The American stretched himself upon the deck and was asleep in two minutes, a revolver by his side.

Henry K. Hudson was not likely to be caught napping, whatever happened.

The speed of the launch had been reduced so that she was doing little more than keeping her own against the sluggish current of the Congo.

Tom Merry was steering and watching, and Figgins watched, too, while M'pong was at work below. The other juniors slept on the deck.

The night passed without alarm. The juniors were used, by this time, to the cries of wild beasts in the forests, and they hardly noticed them.

Mr. Hudson was awakened at midnight, and he took the wheel, and did not close his eyes again. He seemed to be able to exist on very little sleep.

Tom Merry awakened soon after dawn.

The launch, at a good speed now, was throbbing and puffing up the river, which gleamed and rippled in the rising sun.

Huge forests rose on either side of the stream, and the juniors could see monkeys climbing and clinging in the branches, and chattering to one another with a strange sound. More dangerous animals could be seen—a huge serpent writhing over a branch that extended over the river, and a lion crouching in the thicket.

The sight of the king of beasts thrilled the juniors. They had seen lions in the Zoo at London, but to see one wild in an African forest was another matter. And, after one look at him, they felt glad that he was upon the shore, and they were upon the boat.

Mr. Hudson scanned the lonely river with unrelaxing eyes.

On either bank there seemed to be no sign of human life. Even savages did not live upon the solitary upper waters of the Congo.

The juniors were eating their breakfast when a sudden exclamation from Mr. Hudson caused them to spring up, forgetful of crackers and corned-beef.

"I guess I've spotted the cusses."

Ahead, on the gleaming river, a boat was floating with six negroes at the oars. It looked like a ship's boat. In one end was a canvas shelter, with the sides open, and under the canvas three white men were sprawling lazily and smoking. White men by race, at least, their faces being burnt by the sun to almost the hue of the black faces of their companions.

One of them was less swarthy than the others. The juniors had only to look at them to know them. They were Gally and the two Spaniards—the scoundrels who had robbed Tom Merry of Sir Richard's papers in the wood in far-off England and who had sent him on a wild-goose chase to West Africa with a dummy packet. In the sun the juniors caught the gleam of gold in the ear-rings of Juan Rodriguez.

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## Stop Press

The Match of the Season!

ST. FRANK'S v. ST. JIM'S

Next week's star Eastwood League match,

"Bai Jove, there they are!" Mr. Hudson showed his brown teeth in a smile of great satisfaction.

"I guess that boat can't walk away from steam power," he remarked.

"Wathah not!"

"Keep under cover," said the American. "Those rascals will shoot."

He picked up his rifle. Tom Merry took one of the others, and Figgins another. They were all the firearms on board, with the exception of Mr. Hudson's revolver. But the other juniors had their cudgels, as well as spears that had been dropped on board by the cannibals who had boarded the launch.

The launch's crew were undoubtedly more than a match for the men in the boat, even if the negro oarsmen sided with their employers, which was very doubtful.

Besides that, it was easy for the launch to run down the boat and smash it, and throw its crew into the water, if Mr. Hudson chose.

The throb of the launch on the silent river soon caught the ears of the men in the boat. They were seen to raise themselves, and look back across the gleaming Congo.

As they sighted the launch, they sprang to their feet.

The American chuckled.

"I guess they're surprised to see us," he remarked. "They reckoned I was eaten by the cannibals by this time, and they never expected to see you here. Ha, ha, ha!"

The three men in the boat were staring blankly at the launch and the faces of the crew. They seemed to be lost in astonishment.

Henry K. Hudson waved his brown hand.

"We're after you!" he shouted, the wind carrying his voice the distance. "I guess we're on you this time, you scallywags!"

The answer was sudden. The dusky hand of the ear-ringed Spaniard went up, there was a flash, and a sharp report, and a bullet whistled past the ear of the American.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Escape!

**C**RACK!

The report followed the whistle of the bullet.

Henry K. Hudson did not move a muscle.

"I guess that was a poor shot," he remarked. "Our dusky friend was in too great a hurry. Cover—quick!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Lie down!"

The juniors threw themselves flat on the deck.

The three rascals in the boat were firing now, and bullets whistled over the launch. The adventurers were desperate; they did not intend to yield up the papers while they had a chance left. Gally was shouting to the black oarsmen to row hard, and the boat travelled at a greater speed in the water.

Henry K. Hudson took aim at one of the black rowers, and shot him in the arm. He did not wish to kill the man; but he intended to stop the boat. The shot had the result that he anticipated.

The wounded black sprang up with a wild yell, clutching at his arm, and his oar slid into the water. Without a moment's hesitation the wounded man sprang into the river and swam for the mangroves along the bank. In a second the other five had thrown down their oars and followed his example.

The three white men were left alone in the drifting boat without a chance of stopping the flight of their crew.

The boat rocked on.

The loud curses of the abandoned adventurers could be heard across the gleaming water of the Congo. Rodriguez in his rage turned his revolver upon the swimming blacks and fired three or four shots. The bullets splashed up the water round the negroes, and one of them gave a sharp yelp and sank out of sight.

Gally seized an oar and paddled the boat towards the bank. Rodriguez and Yanex kept up a fire on the launch. But Henry K. Hudson was master of the situation. Bales and boxes had already been rigged up to screen the steersman, and Tom Merry steered the launch without danger from the fire. Henry K. Hudson lay at full length on the deck, his rifle before him, and his keen grey eyes on the enemy.

His magazine rifle was spitting fire.

The juniors were excited. Lying on the deck they could see little, but the sound of the incessant firing and the bullets whistling overhead thrilled them. How was it going to end?

They realised, with beating hearts, that it was a fight for life or death; that the three desperadoes, if they could, would kill every soul on board the little steamer, and that Henry K. Hudson was shooting to kill.

On the Congo every man's life depended upon himself and his rifle, and there was only his own conscience to answer to.

Crack, crack, crack!

The oar splintered in Gally's hand, struck by a bullet.

The man started and fell on his knees in the boat—a lucky accident for him, for Henry K. Hudson's next bullet whistled clear over his head.

But the boat was rocking now close to the thick mud of the bank.

Crack, crack, crack!

Startled monkeys looked from the branches of the big trees on the river banks and chattered incessantly as the deadly bullets flew beneath.

There was a sudden sharp shriek from Yanex, the Spaniard, and he tumbled backwards into the boat with a crash.

He lay there, moving feebly.

Hudson chuckled softly. He had put at least one of the enemy hors de combat. The launch was closing upon the boat now, but the boat was already at the mud on the edge of the belt of mangroves. The range was very short.

Gally and Rodriguez leaped out of the boat, knee-deep in mud, and plunged ashore.

They held their rifles over their heads as they tramped and splashed through the mud, making for the cover of the mangroves.

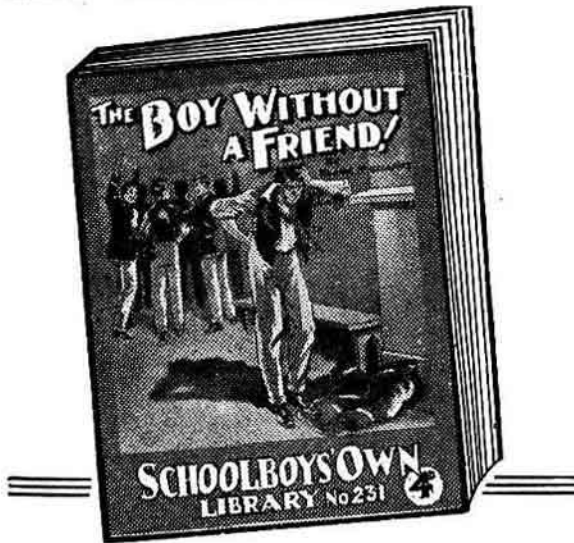
Henry K. Hudson leaped to his feet.

There was no fire to fear from the enemy now; their backs were turned in flight.

The American, standing on the deck, threw his rifle to his shoulder and pumped out bullets after the fleeing adventurers.

Tom Merry uttered a cry.

He was not used yet to the merciless warfare of the heart of Africa.



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"Mr. Hudson, have a heart; they are running!"

The American snapped his brown teeth.

"And the papers with them! Hold your tongue!"

Tom Merry caught his breath.

It was true; Gally or the ear-ringed Spaniard had stolen papers in his possession, and if they escaped the papers were lost.

Henry K. Hudson had not ceased to fire while he was answering Tom Merry. His magazine rifle was spitting bullets all the time.

Crack, crack!

Bullets tore the mangrove branches and splashed up the soft, thick mud round the fugitives as they tramped madly for the shore. In the boat, rocking on the edge of the swamp, lay Yanex, groaning. Not a thought did his comrades give to the wounded Spaniard. They were thinking only of themselves and of the precious papers.

They followed a zigzag course, leaping and plunging to and fro to avoid the bullets of the American. Gally clapped a hand to his head suddenly, and drew it away with the fingers streaming red. But he plunged on and disappeared into the mangroves.

The ear-ringed Spaniard paused for a second to look back and shake a clenched fist at the launch, and then he disappeared after his companion.

Henry K. Hudson muttered something between his teeth. He threw down his empty rifle and caught one from Figgins and pumped away every shot into the mangroves.

But no cry answered.

The adventurers had evidently gained a place of safety. From the boat, faintly across the river, came the sound of the groans of the wounded Spaniard.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That poor wottah must be suffevin' howwibly! What are you goin' to do for him, sir?"

Henry K. Hudson shrugged his shoulders.

"I am going to search him for the papers, though there

The American stood up and looked towards the mangroves. Then he leaped back on the launch, and rapped out an order.

Tom Merry ran towards him.

"Mr. Hudson, you are not going to leave that man there?"

Mr. Hudson stared at him.

"I guess I am!" he replied.

"You—you can't! He's wounded!"

"So should I have been, I guess, if he'd been able to shoot a little straighter," said Mr. Hudson carelessly.

"Yes; but—but—"

"Nuff said! Our way lies up the river, I guess!"

"Mr. Hudson, his comrades will not return for him; I am sure of that. They have deserted him. Besides, the boat will drift off in a few minutes. He will lie there in the blazing sun till it oversets, and then the crocodiles—"

"Perhaps you're right," said Mr. Hudson. "A bullet through the head now would be more merciful!"

He reached for his rifle.

"I did not mean anything of the sort!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly. "He is wounded. I don't care whether he's an enemy or not, he must be taken care of!"

"But we can't stop here for days—weeks—looking after a wounded thief," said the American, laughing at the idea.

"We can take him on board."

"I guess this launch isn't being run as a floating hospital, sonny!"

"Look here, Mr. Hudson, we must do it! If we left that poor wretch there, it would haunt me for ever!" said Tom Merry. "He must come on board."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He can be disarmed, and a wounded man can't do much harm, anyway, sir," said Figgins.

"And we'll look after him," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Hudson hesitated. Under his rough exterior he had a kind heart enough, but life on the West Coast of Africa had hardened him. Mercy to an enemy was an idea

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### "HANDFORTH THE GHOST-HUNTER!"

isn't much chance that he has them," he replied. "Rodriguez or Gally would have them, I guess."

"I mean he must be assisted in some way."

"Stuff!"

"My deah sir—"

"Hold your tongue, Master Eyeglass!"

"Weally, Mr. Hudson—"

The American turned away. He kept a keen eye on the shore in case a shot should come from that direction. The two adventurers who had escaped still had their rifles, and they might be looking for a chance of sniping. But the mangroves grew too thickly in the mud to allow men on the dry land a chance of shooting; there were fifty yards of the swampy thickets between the river and the land, and they screened the launch as much as they screened the escaping adventurers.

The steam-launch ran up to the rocking boat on the edge of the swamp, and Hudson, after a last keen glance round, jumped into it.

Yanex groaned deeply.

His dusky hand made a motion towards the knife in his belt, but he could not draw it—he had no strength. The American's bullet was deep in his shoulder, and the Spaniard was badly wounded.

Mr. Hudson picked up his rifle and cartridge belt and tossed them on board the launch.

"I guess they will be useful," he remarked.

A look of hate flashed over the face of the wounded man.

"Caramba! I have them not!" he muttered faintly.

"I guess that's so, but I'm going to see."

And Henry K. Hudson went scientifically through the Spaniard's clothes. He was soon satisfied. Yanex had none of the papers. The man was merely a follower, and his leaders were not likely to trust him with the precious papers.

"Who has them," asked Mr. Hudson—"Gally or Rodriguez?"

"I will tell you nothing!"

"Do you want me to pitch you over to the crocodiles?"

Yanex shuddered.

"Gally has them!" he muttered.

which was seldom heard of on the banks of the Congo. The wounded Spaniard was watching the launch with dull eyes. He had not the slightest expectation of pity. He would have finished a wounded enemy himself with a knife-thrust, and he had no better expectation of mercy.

Mr. Hudson looked at the juniors, and his better nature seemed to awaken at the sight of their earnest, boyish faces.

"I guess you don't know the Congo," he remarked. "But have your way. You can get the brute on board if you like."

"Thank you, sir!"

Mr. Hudson lighted a black cigar and whistled carelessly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass scornfully upon the American.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I told you fellows all along that the man was a wottah!"

"Oh, it's only his way!" said Digby.

"Wats! A man who would speak disrespectfully of a fellow's monocle would do anythin'!"

Digby grinned. The juniors all bore a hand in getting the wounded Spaniard aboard. Yanex did not understand in the least why he was being so treated. He muttered something in Spanish which the juniors did not understand. Mr. Hudson watched the whole proceedings with a satirical smile, and then the launch throbbed on her way up the river with the wounded Spaniard on board.

#### CHAPTER 12.

##### The Quality of Mercy I

THROUGH the blazing sunshine of the Congo the little steamer chugged on.

Henry K. Hudson was keeping a keen look-out on deck, but he was no longer watching the river for a boat. The enemy was on shore now, but the American expected to see something of them.

That Gally and the ear-ringed Spaniard would keep on their way he was certain, and he was equally certain that

they could not hope to reach their destination by land, through cannibal tribes and impassable forests. They must take the river again sooner or later, and when they did so he hoped to spot them.

So far up the wild river they had no chance of obtaining a fresh boat and rowers; they would have to depend upon stealing some native canoe and paddling themselves. They would be utterly at the mercy of the launch if the American succeeded in setting his eyes upon them.

Tom Merry & Co. were busier with the wounded Spaniard than with thoughts of the missing papers or the escaped adventurers. It might be weak and dangerous to spare an enemy in such a country, but the juniors did not choose to think of that. They only knew that they came from a land where human life was held as sacred.

The wretched man was placed in a bed, and the boys did what they could for him. They could not extract the bullet, but they stopped the bleeding, and washed and bandaged his wound. The wounded man asked eagerly for a drink, but his lips curled up contemptuously when water was brought. It was whisky that he wanted, but it would have been sheer poison to him in his state. And soon thirst drove him to drink the water. His black eyes rested continually upon the juniors as they took turns in looking after him.

His wonder was evident in his face. He did not know why his life was spared, he did not know why he was cared for, and his looks betrayed it.

"Senorito," he said, towards sundown, as Tom Merry came up with a cheery smile—"senorito, what is your intention?"

"We're looking after you," said Tom Merry.

"To take me back to Boma and send me to prison?"

The junior laughed.

"No; to get you well."

"Why?"

"Well, because—because we are, you know."

Yanex was silent for some minutes. Tom Merry offered him a drink, but he declined it with a movement of the head.

Thinking that he wished to rest, Tom Merry was about to withdraw, but the Spaniard made him a sign to remain.

"Hold, senorito!"

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, senorito; but I can do something for you."

"For me!" said Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Si, senorito! You are the nine—you are the boy who carried the papers of Sir Richard Standish from the school in England to Southampton, to deliver them to the captain of the Opossum?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"Rodriguez heard all the plan, from a window-sill in the school," said Yanex, with a faint smile. "We knew it all along, when you left the school with the papers, senorito. But listen. Those papers that you were robbed of—are you answerable for them?"

"In a way—yes," said Tom Merry. "Sir Richard will not blame me for being robbed of them, perhaps, but unless we recover them it will be very unpleasant for me to face him. It will inflict a heavy loss upon him for the benefit of a set of rascals."

Yanex grinned again.

"They have deserted me," he said. "I stood by them from first to last, and they deserted me, wounded and dying as they thought, to die in the sun. If they win the prize now they will not share with me—I have dropped out of the game."

Tom Merry nodded. He thought that very likely. It would be weeks before the wounded man was able to look after himself, even if he recovered at all. The adventurers were not likely to seek him out to share with him.

"Senorito, you are trying to save my life, after I have done nothing but try to injure you," said the Spaniard, in a low voice. "Listen! Get your leader to swear that he will cure me, if he can, and set me free, and I will tell him what I know of Gally's plans, and help you to recover the papers you have lost."

Tom Merry started.

"You mean that?" he exclaimed.

"Si, senorito!"

"I will call Mr. Hudson at once, then!"

In a couple of minutes Henry K. Hudson stood by the bedside of the Spaniard. There was a very keen expression upon the face of the American.

"I guess I'll make that promise you want," he said. "I don't want to send you to prison, even if the Belgians would take the trouble to send you there. Now, what can you tell me about the papers? Have you seen them?"

The Spaniard shook his head.

"No; merely a glance, and I understood little of them, as they are written in English, and I speak English, but

do not read it. And Gally and Rodriguez explain nothing to me."

"That was sensible of them, I guess. But what do you know, then?"

"I know where they are making for, senor."

The American's grey eyes gleamed.

"I guess that's O.K.!" he said. "If you know that, you know the region the maps cover. It was on the Congo?"

"Si, senor. They were making for Ubangi, and they intended to follow that river and land at N'lolo, and then strike north on land."

The American gave a long, low whistle.

"My hat! If that's the truth, you're worth your weight in gold to me, Yanex. We shall strik the Ubangi river in a couple of days, and I might have run on right up the Congo, and missed the scoundrels. I knew that the rubber land lay up the Congo past Stanley Pool, and somewhere near the Ubangi regions, but I guess I didn't know it was up the Ubangi. Kelly kept that dark from me, at least. Are you telling me the truth, Yanex?"

"By all the saints, senor."

"Look here!" said Henry K. Hudson. "You are in my hands now. If you have told me the truth, you shall have your liberty and a hundred dollars. If you have lied, Yanex, and I miss them, I swear I will give you to the ju-ju men on the Congo to make a human sacrifice of—savvy?"

The Spaniard shuddered.

"I have told you the truth, senor."

"I guess you have, Yanex; but if you've deceived me, better think it over, and yaup out the facts, or the ju-ju niggers will have a white man to torture—if you call yourself a white man."

And Henry K. Hudson lighted another cigar, and strolled away.

The wounded man fixed an earnest look upon Tom Merry.

"I have told the truth, senorito," he said.

"I'm sure you have," said Tom Merry; "and you won't be sorry for it. You've done right. And, as for those scoundrels who left you to die, they do not deserve anything at your hands, excepting this."

The Spaniard's eyes gleamed.

"You are right, senorito. Give me a drink."

Henry K. Hudson came to see the Spaniard again several times. He began to take care of the wounded man, and he extracted the bullet from his wound. After that Yanex improved very much, though it was clear that many days would elapse before he was able to stand upon his feet.

Henry K. Hudson put the launch at full speed ahead now. If the adventurers were making for the Ubangi, as he believed now, they might cut across country, or follow one of the numerous subsidiary streams of the Congo. He had had the luck to happen on them once; it was not in reason to expect the same luck a second time. But the information Yanex had given him made his task more easy. He had to get ahead of the adventurers, which was easy in the steam launch, and lay for them, as he expressed it, on the banks of the Ubangi, near N'lolo, where they intended to land.

Mr. Hudson knew the Ubangi as well as any white man knew it, and he had been to N'lolo as an ivory trader.

The American was very gleeful now. It was clear that he anticipated success; and he was quite willing to give Tom Merry & Co. their share of the credit.

"I guess it was good business saving that scallywag," he remarked. "Things like that work out as paying ventures at times. Those galoots who deserted him reckon that he's gone under; they won't even dream of this. It will be a little surprise party for them at N'lolo on the Ubangi—some!"

And he grinned.

"You kids have done it!" he said. "If I pull off this rifle, I shall let Sir Richard know that you kids did half, at least. You saved my life, and you got me this information by being soft-headed, soft-hearted, green-horns—"

"Weally, Mr. Hudson—"

"But the greenhorn comes out ahead of the old hand sometimes, and that's what you've done," said Mr. Hudson. "I will give you all the credit. And I guess we shall ring in a cold deal on Rodriguez now."

And Mr. Hudson rubbed his brown hands together, and chuckled with satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 13.

### Gussy and the Tiger!

"THE Ubangi," said Mr. Hudson.

The steam launch throbbed on up that little-known river in the heart of the Dark Continent.

The juniors gazed in awe and interest at the darkly wooded banks, trodden seldom by white man's feet—by few, if any, save those of Belgian officers.

"Well, we can call ourselves explorers now, at any rate," Figgins remarked. "Precious few white men have been where we are now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And an eyeglass has never been seen on this hyer river before, I guess," said Mr. Hudson, with a chuckle.

Arthur Augustus sniffed angrily. He was growing exasperated with Mr. Hudson's incessant little jokes at his eyeglass, his elegant manners and customs, and his supposed softness in every way. The swell of St. Jim's was really roughing it as well as anybody, but the American persisted in regarding him as a soft "dude," as he called it in the American language.

He really had no reason to hold that opinion, unless it was because of the care D'Arcy lavished upon the remains of his silk hat. The swell of St. Jim's had only one topper with him, and he had a belief that some occasion might arise when it would be necessary to wear one, and so he

swell of St. Jim's lay on the deck, the back of his head resting upon his hands, and gazed dreamily up through the foliage overhead as the launch drifted on.

The sandbanks were thickening ahead, and Mr. Hudson gave the order to slacken speed. The launch was crawling through the water now.

Suddenly the swell of St. Jim's gave a start.

He sat up on deck, and then jumped to his feet, jamming the monocle more tightly into his eye, and scanning the thick tree over the steamer.

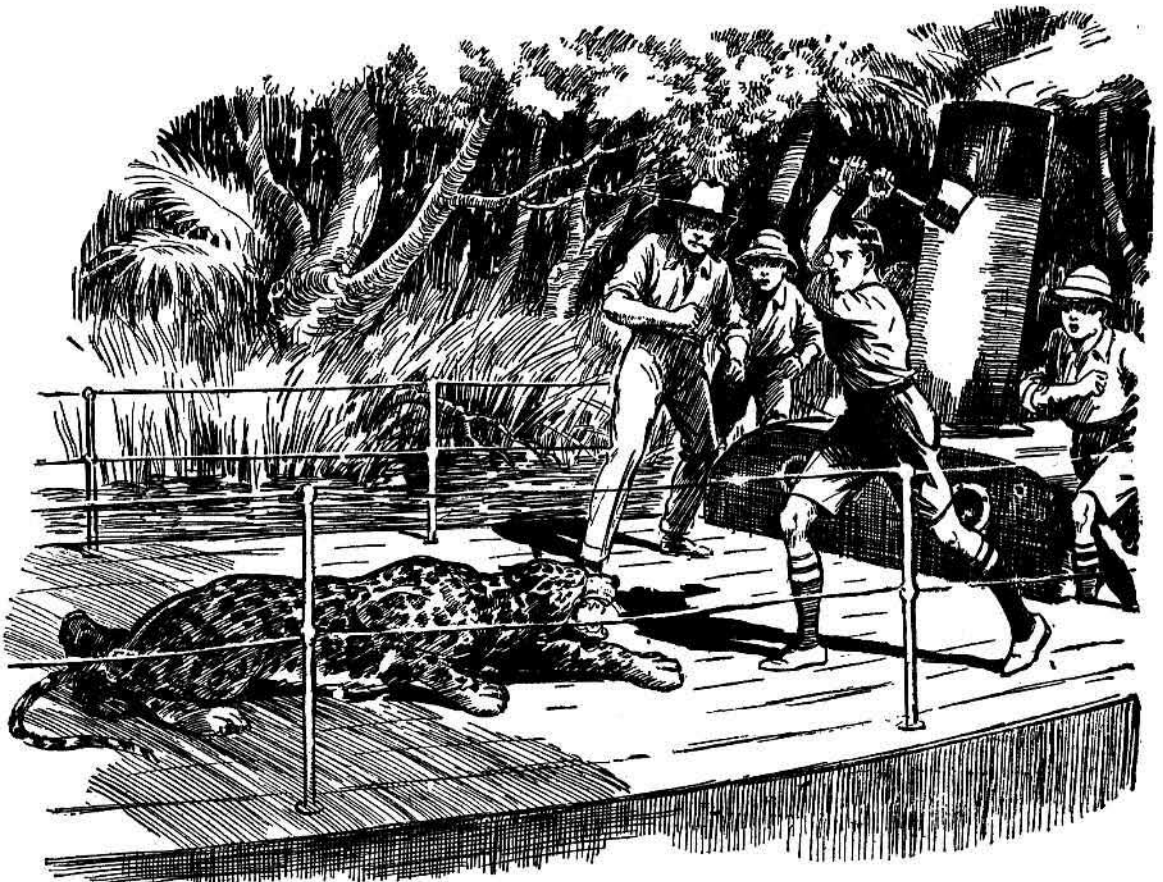
"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"Gweat Scott—look out!"

From the thick branches over the steamer a sinuous form dropped like a cat upon the deck. A cat it was—but a huge cat with spotted skin, and great, greenish-yellow eyes that glared with hunger and ferocity.

It was a leopard!



A quiver ran through the leopard's body as it crouched ready to spring at Mr. Hudson. But on the instant Arthur Augustus acted. With no thought of his own danger, he seized an axe and dashed forward to attack the animal!

was guarding that topper like the apple of his eye. As he explained to his chums, his haters had no branch establishment on the upper waters of the Congo.

But D'Arcy was getting "fed-up" with Mr. Hudson's jokes. He persisted in adorning his face with the eyeglass out of British independence. He was longing for some opportunity of putting the Yankee in his place, and his chums had several times restrained him with difficulty from an open "row" with the coast agent. Though if Arthur Augustus had lost his aristocratic temper and slanged the American as hard as he could, in all probability Mr. Hudson would have taken it as a joke, and roared with laughter over the fury of the swell of St. Jim's.

D'Arcy turned his back upon Mr. Hudson—a proceeding which only brought a further chuckle from that gentleman. The juniors were all grinning; even M'pong, who was on deck just then, grinned. Arthur Augustus frowned at the black man.

The sun was setting, and the juniors sat down round the deck to their evening meal. Mr. Hudson was watching the river ahead. The launch wound on through sandbanks, churning under overhanging branches of gigantic trees. The

animal was the first the juniors had seen at close quarters, though they had caught distant glimpses of several in the forest from the passing launch.

They stood spellbound.

The leopard was in savage mood, evidently hungry. It had dropped upon the deck close behind Mr. Hudson, and he had not seen the animal; his eyes were upon the difficult passage ahead. At the exclamation of D'Arcy he turned and saw the animal within six or seven paces of him. He sprang back, and a long quiver ran through the leopard's sinuous body as it crouched to spring.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave one quick look round, seized an axe, and dashed forward, with no thought to his own danger. Just as the leopard was rising to the spring, the axe descended with all the strength of the sturdy junior's arms in the blow.

Crash!

The leopard screamed wildly with pain, and fell short in his leap, rolling on the deck with clawing feet.

"Great snakes!" ejaculated Mr. Hudson.

For once the cool American was unnerved; his hard brown face had turned a ghastly colour, and he stared blankly at the struggling leopard.

D'Arcy rushed upon the leopard again, axe in hand. Then Mr. Hudson recovered himself. "Stand back!" he shouted. "If he claws you, you're dead!"

He grasped his rifle, and threw it to his shoulder. D'Arcy halted.

The leopard, hard hit as he was, was by no means disabled, and he was turning upon D'Arcy with gnashing teeth and glaring eyeballs.

Crack, crack!

Two bullets crashed into the yellow head, and the leopard tumbled over again. This time he did not rise.

The American, cool as ice now, advanced upon the struggling, writhing animal, pouring in bullets at close quarters from his magazine rifle.

The terrible creature shuddered and shivered, and the wild glare died out of its eyes.

It was dead.

Mr. Hudson tossed the rifle aside. He looked at the slain leopard, and he looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's dropped the axe.

Tom Merry found his voice.

"Great Scott! What a narrow escape, Mr. Hudson!"

"I guess it was."

"Oh, Gussy!" said Blake. "How could you?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Fancy Gussy coming out as a giddy hero!" grinned Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Gussy, the leopard slayer—Gussy, the mighty hunter!" chuckled Kerr. "Oh, Gussy! What will they say at St. Jim's when we tell them?"

"Won't they have pictures of him in the school rag," grinned Monty Lowther. "Won't they have a thrilling description of him in 'Tom Merry's Weekly'!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Why didn't I have my camera here!" exclaimed Manners. "Gussy, old man, stand with your foot on the body and the axe in your hand, will you—head well back, eyes forward—attitude like Ajax defying his laundress, and I'll take a photograph."

"I refuse to do anything' of the sort, you uttahn ass!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "And I regard you as a lot of sillay asses!"

"Oh, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry, slapping him on the back. "It's only fun! We're proud of you! You're a giddy hero! You've saved Mr. Hudson's life—perhaps some of our lives as well. We couldn't have shot the brute as Mr. Hudson did. Gussy, old man, you're a hero! Gimme your list!"

"Oh, weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Henry K. Hudson came towards the swell of St. Jim's, a very peculiar expression upon his brown face. He seemed more taken aback by Arthur Augustus' action than by the terrible danger he had passed through.

"Will you give me your paw, young 'un?" he asked quietly.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the American with a great deal of dignity.

"Pway excuse me!" he said. "Undah the circes, I pwefer not to shake hands with you, sir. You have tweeked me with the gwosset diswepsect evah since our first meetin', and I cannot regard you as a friend. I should pwefer not to shake hands with you!"

"I guess I apologise," he said.

"Oh, weally! Undah those circes—"

Mr. Hudson grinned a little.

"I reckon that yellow beast would have had me down in a second more, and I should have been clawed to ribbons," said Mr. Hudson. "I guess he would have clawed some of you after he'd clawed me, too. You saved my life, and you showed pluck, young 'un, which many an old hunter in these forests would be proud to have. There ain't many galoots, I guess, who'd get within armslength of a leopard willingly. I take back all I've said about your eyeglass. Gimme your paw!"

"As one gentleman to another, sir, I accept your apologies," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a very stately way. "I shall be pleased to shake hands with you."

And he did!

## CHAPTER 14.

### The Last Fight!

**T**HICK forest, with a break amid the masses of green where a clump of huts appeared, and among the huts, negro women and children basking in the sun.

The steam-launch throbbed to a standstill. The explorers had reached their destination; this was N'lolo.

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A canoe came pulling out from the shore.

Henry K. Hudson waved his hand at the big black man in it. The man had a necklace of bones round his neck, and the juniors shuddered as they looked at them. Yanex, who was now sitting in a deckchair, though still very weak from his wound, turned deadly pale at the sight of the man.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom Merry.

"Ju-ju!" whispered the Spaniard. "A ju-ju priest! They are the bones of murdered men he wears round his neck."

Tom Merry shuddered.

Mr. Hudson looked down at the man in the canoe, and entered into talk with him, in a barbarous dialect of which the juniors did not comprehend a word. The ju-ju man grinned and nodded, and finally paddled away, evidently in a mood of satisfaction.

Mr. Hudson lighted a cigar, evidently very well satisfied, too.

"I guess we shall have them when they arrive," he said.

"How so, sir?" Tom Merry asked.

"I've made a bargain with B'poma. He's a thief of a priest, and can do as he likes with the king and the people here. He's agreed to have the whole tribe on the watch for Gally and Rodriguez, and if they come to this bank for thirty miles up or down, they can't get through. It's all O.K. now, I guess, even if we miss them."

"Good! But what is he going to do it for?"

"Pay, my son, pay! I'm going to send him some traps from the coast. I've done the same before," said Mr. Hudson. "A ju-ju man has to keep up his reputation, you see, or he might be ju-jued himself any time, and a rival take his place. This chap has the power of performing miracles, and he is going strong."

"Miracles!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"I guess so. He can produce sudden light in complete darkness without flint or steel or matches, and it strikes the niggers as wonderful."

"Well, it is wonderful, if he can do it!" said Figgins.

"I reckon it's not so astonishing when you know he's got a dollar electric lamp hidden in his rags," said Henry K. Hudson.

"Oh!"

"Electricity is as much known to these benighted niggers as aeroplanes or artificial teeth," said Mr. Hudson. "He's got them right to heel with his giddy miracles."

"What a rotten swindler!"

"Well, yes, but I guess there are swindlers in other countries, too. People like being taken in, I guess. This scallywag wants to be set up with torches, and I guess I'm going to do it if he hands over them two rascals."

"Bai Jove! I don't half like this," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a murmur to his chums. "I should refuse to have any dealings at all with that disgustin' black wottah!"

But Mr. Hudson evidently thought differently.

Probably he did not trust his ju-ju friend sufficiently to go ashore; at all events, the explorers did not leave the launch at all, but as they had ample supplies, they did not need to.

Several days passed quietly within sight of N'lolo. The natives brought fruit in canoes to sell, but there was no sign of hostilities. Henry K. Hudson was evidently well known there. The explorers waited for the coming of Gally and Rodriguez.

As the days passed the juniors began to doubt.

The two adventurers, making their way through the wild African forest, had a thousand dangers to encounter. It was only too probable that they would perish by the way. Would they ever arrive as far on their journey at N'lolo?

But Mr. Hudson did not seem to doubt.

He spent his days stretched under an awning, smoking innumerable cigars and yawning. He appeared content to wait.

It was on the fourth day that the monotony was broken. Tom Merry had awakened at the gleam of dawn, and he stood stretching himself and looking out over the river, when he caught sight of a canoe paddling up the river against the current.

The juniors paid little attention to it at first, for canoes were common enough on the river near N'lolo. But as he glanced at it a second time he started.

There were two men paddling it, both white men.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

He dashed towards Henry K. Hudson, who was sleeping on the deck, and shook him by the shoulder. The American opened his eyes and yawned.

"Hallo, sonny!"

"They're here!"

"What!"

"They're coming!"

"Waal, carry me home to die!"

(Continued on page 22.)

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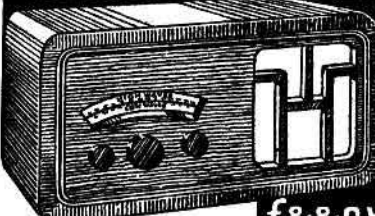
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Henry K. Hudson jumped up and grasped his rifle. He ran to the side and looked over the gleaming river.

Then his eyes blazed.

"I've got 'em now!" he muttered.

The launch was almost hidden by the drooping branches of a great tree. The American had planned that. The canoe paddled on, and the juniors, who were all watching now, saw the ear-ringed Spaniard point with his paddle towards the village of N'lolo. The canoe did not pull in towards the bank, so it was pretty clear that the two adventurers did not deem it safe to land at the village, but intended to paddle on to the deserted bank beyond.

Henry K. Hudson grinned.

The worn look of the adventurers showed that they had not had an easy time in the African forests. Gally had a bandage round his head. They were worn and haggard, but there was determination in their bronzed faces.

Henry K. Hudson muttered a word to Tom Merry.

"Silence!"

He levelled his rifle.

"You—you are not going to shoot?" muttered Tom Merry.

"Not a word!"

The canoe was coming within easier range. In a few minutes it would pass within thirty feet of the launch. Then the American could pick off the two adventurers like partridges if he chose.

"Hold on!"

Mr. Hudson's voice rang suddenly across the river.

The two men started convulsively and gazed round. They did not see the launch for a minute. Then they saw it, and the American with levelled rifle.

"Hudson!" muttered Gally, between his teeth.

"Caramba!"

"Hands up!" said Mr. Hudson. "Mind, you'll get it in the neck if you touch a weapon. Ah, would you!"

Gally made a wild plunge for his rifle. He caught it up and flung it to his shoulder.

Crack!

Mr. Hudson kept his word. He fired before Gally could press the trigger.

Gally gave a terrible cry and rolled over in the canoe. Rodriguez clenched his hand, with a wild glare towards the steamer, and then leaped into the water. The water closed over his head, but he came up again a dozen yards away, towards the farther bank.

Crack, crack!

Bullets splashed into the water round him. But he swam

on, and disappeared among the tropical vegetation across the river. In the canoe Gally lay still.

The juniors shivered.

The launch drew out of the shadow of the great tree and glided beside the rocking canoe. Mr. Hudson waved the juniors back and descended into the little craft.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another with pale faces. It had been a fight to the death. If Gally had succeeded in firing, Mr. Hudson would have fallen dead upon the launch.

The juniors did not look into the canoe. Mr. Hudson was there for five minutes. He came on deck again with a bundle of papers in his hand.

"The papers, sir?" Tom Merry asked eagerly.

"I guess so."

"Gally had them?"

"Yes. Rodriguez has got away, but I guess he can't do any harm. I've got the papers," said Mr. Hudson. "Rodriguez has seen them, but he'll never find the place without the maps. It's all O.K."

"And—and Gally?" asked Tom Merry, in a faltering voice.

"Better ask no questions," said Mr. Hudson briefly. "It was his life or mine."

The juniors shivered. They knew what that meant; they knew that there was a dead man in the canoe that went rocking and gliding away upon the shining current of the Ubangi.

They said nothing. There was nothing to say. But a longing was growing up within them to be away from that land of savage deeds, and back in a country where law and order reigned. Perhaps Mr. Hudson divined their thoughts.

"We've won this hyer game, I reckon," he remarked. "I've got the papers. You boys will have to go back to school, I guess—hey?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a better place for you than the Congo, I reckon," said Mr. Hudson, with a smile. "I shan't stop to say good-bye to my ju-ju friend. Down the Congo is our way."

And the steam-launch throbbed away on the current.

THE END.

*(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the further thrilling adventures of Tom Merry & Co. in the African jungle, and the sensational outcome of their taking a Congo Cannibal back to St. Jim's! See "TOM MERRY'S CANNIBAL!"—in next week's grand number.)*

## Pen Pals

(Continued from page 13)

Robert Burgess, 28, Langside Place, Langside, Glasgow, wants pen pals; age 16-19; England, Australia, America, South Africa; cricket, football, sculling, old numbers of "Nelson Lee."

Micky Braham, 44, Sidmouth Road, Brondesbury Park, London, N.W.2, wants pen pals; age 12-15; films, books, swimming.

Jolly P. Shroff, Rastid Building, 50, New Charni Road, Bombay, wants correspondents.

C. D. Johnston, Larpent, Victoria, Australia, wants correspondents; exchange match brands.

Keith Schroder, Mitchell Street, Kyneton, Victoria, Australia, wants correspondents; age 17-20; newspapers, world affairs, public speaking.

Miss Maureen Flanagan, 94, Simpson Street, E. Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants girl correspondents outside of England and Australia; music, drawing, reading, pets, stamps.

Sig. H. E. Smith, H. Q. Section, "S" Field Battery, R.A., Jubbulpore, Central Provinces, India, wants pen pals; age 20-25.

Miss Patricia Flanagan, 94, Simpson Street, E. Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants girl correspondents in England, Newfoundland and Canada; age 9-10; pets, films, card collecting.

Bob Haslem, 55, St. John Street, Windsor, S.I., Victoria, Australia, wants to hear from stamp collectors.

William Harold Lister, 138, Clark Road, Durban, Natal, South Africa, wants correspondents; age 15-16; any subject and stamps.

Leonard Lasky, 51, Theobalds Road, London, W.C.1, wants to correspond with a Jewish reader.

Miss Molly Williams, Cartref, 9, Dean Street, Brighton, wants girl correspondents; age 12-14.

Philip Tierney, 18, Tasburgh Street, Grimsby, Lines, wants a correspondent interested in the companion papers and "Schoolboys' Own Library."

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Miss Joan Buck, 92, Clarence Road, Riccarton, Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand, wants a girl correspondent in South Africa; age 11-12.

Miss Kathleen Daly, 14, Princess Street, Riccarton, Canterbury, New Zealand, wants a girl correspondent in India; age 12-13.

Keith Swales, 33, Nelson Crescent, Napier, New Zealand, wants to hear from stamp collectors; age 12-14.

Miss Judy Clare, 91, Graham Road, Dalston, London, E.8, wants a girl correspondent in Canada, U.S.A., Australia, or South Africa; age 12-14; sports, especially swimming, art, films.

B. Cooke, 68, Doveridge Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, wants pen pals; age 14-16; Canada, Australia, U.S.A.; cycling, sports, engineering.

Patrick Cross, 87, Cornwall Street, Masterton, New Zealand, wants to hear from a London reader.

Ted Wahlstrom, e/o Hospital, Porirua, New Zealand, wants pen pals; age 26.

E. Coupland, 52, Kipling Street, Bermondsey, London, S.E.1, wants a pen pal in America; age 17-18.

Robert Burgess, 28, Langside Place, Glasgow, wants pen pals; age 16-20; cricket, football, sculling, and old "Nelson Lees"; Australia, America, England, South Africa.

Miss I. J. Making, Lower Quinton, near Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, wants girl correspondents in Scotland, Ireland and the Lake District; age 15-17.

James Way, 1089, Cannon Street, E. Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, wants a pen pal who will exchange English photos for Canadian ones; age 13-15.

Basil A. Smith, Barnards Cottage, Friday Bridge, Wisbech, Cambs, wants pen pals.

Edward Stickings, 44, Yewfield Road, Willesden, London, N.W.10, wants a pen pal in Australia; age 10-14; stamps, gardening, cycling, films, cigarette cards.

Miss Doris King, 10, Clarendon Gardens, Maida Vale, London, W.9, wants a girl correspondent in the British Isles; age 13-14; theatricals, Girl Guides, writing stories.

Alan Beech, 21, Carlton Road, Barr Hill, Pendleton, Salford 6, Lancs, wants to hear from stamp collectors; age 12-15; Gold Coast, Papua, Australia.

Eric Williams, Bronllwyn, Caradoc Road, Aberystwith, Cardigan, wants to hear from Scouts in the Empire.

BIG THRILLS AND BIG SURPRISES IN THIS COMPLETE ST. FRANK'S YARN!

# The TEN TALONS OF TAAZ!



BY EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

## The Tenth Victim!

AS the rising bell clanged out in the Ancient House at St. Frank's, Tommy Watson turned over grumpily in bed, and then sat up, yawning

"Burrrrrr!" he shivered. "It's cold!"

He looked at the other beds in the little dormitory he shared with Nipper and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. The latter was sitting up and stretching himself, but Nipper was conspicuous by his absence.

"Mornin', dear old boy!" said Sir Montie cheerfully. "Frightful bore, this dashed risin' bell! It's bad enough to get out of bed when you're forced, but Nipper apparently got up for the sheer love of it. Energetic chap, Nipper."

Watson yawned again.

"He was talking last night of polishing up his ball control," he said. "I expect he's gone out to the footer field to do some practising on his own. There's the Helmford match the day after to-morrow, and Nipper reckons he's out of form."

"But it's raining," said Montie, as he glanced out of the window. "He must be keen if he's practising in the wet."

They finished dressing, and went downstairs.

There were only a few fellows about. They stood for some moments in the Ancient House doorway, looking out on the wet, depressing Triangle. Then they went into the cloak-room to get their overcoats.

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie suddenly.

"What's up?"

"Nipper can't be on Little Side," replied Montie, pointing to the floor. "His footer boots are here. His overcoat and cap are here, too."

"He must be in the study," said Tommy Watson.

They went to Study C, in the Remove passage, but it was empty. "Then they asked one or two fellows if they had seen Nipper that morning. Nobody knew anything about him.

"Funny!" said Tommy, frowning. "What on earth made Nipper get up so early? He hasn't gone out, and he doesn't seem to be in the House— Oh, my only sainted aunt! I wonder—"

He looked at Tregellis-West in alarm.

"Yes, old boy; I'm wonderin', too," said Montie quietly.

"But—but if he had had the 'call' during the night, he would have been back long before now," said Tommy Watson, in a low voice. "Unless— But that's unthinkable! Nipper's the one chap of the 'marked ten' who couldn't possibly fail."

"Don't get imagining things, Tommy boy," murmured Montie. "I dare say he has gone to the West House to see Pitt, or somebody."

While talking, they wandered into the lobby, their faces grave. They found Vivian Travers standing by himself, and there was a letter in Travers' hand.

"Seen Nipper?" asked Tommy and Montie, in one voice.

"No; and we shan't see him yet, either," replied Travers evenly. "At least, if I'm right about this letter, we shan't. It looks ugly to me."

They saw that the envelope had a black lining. Travers had withdrawn a second envelope, and this bore the words: "Open this when you are alone." The outer envelope was addressed in block capitals, and there was no stamp on it, proving that it had not come through the post.

"I found this in the rack just now," said Travers—"and a minute later you tell me you can't find Nipper. It looks a bit queer. You had better go and collect the others. They might as well be present when I open this."

Thoroughly alarmed now, Montie and Tommy hurried off and rounded up six Removites—Handforth, Church, and McClure, and Archie Glenthorne, Reggie Pitt, and Jack Grey. They found Travers in his study. The nine juniors were all agog.

"Now, don't get excited," said Travers, with his usual serenity. "This letter may have nothing to do with our old pal, Taaz. It may be a silly, practical joke. But as Nipper is officially the 'final victim,' and as he seems to have vanished, it rather looks like a case of two and two making four. Anyhow, here goes."

He withdrew the inner envelope, taking no notice of the advice that he should read the contents when he was alone. He slit the flap, withdrew a sheet of notepaper, and took a quick glance at it.

"Yes, it's the chopper all right," he said grimly. "Listen to this!"

They crowded round, anxious and breathless, seeking to look at that sinister missive. But Vivian Travers, as icily cool as ever, waved them back.

"Don't rush," he said. "I'll read it out: 'You were the first offender to answer the Call of Taaz, and therefore this letter is addressed to you. The tenth boy has answered, and it is the will of Taaz that his test shall be applied in the presence of his nine friends. You will pass the word to the others, and obey orders. The nine shall be in the deep depression in Belton Wood, known as Death Gully, at

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## THE SCARAB OF DREAD!

midnight of this day. Let no boy fail. If one word of this is passed beyond the nine, if schoolmasters or police are informed, you will never see your friend again. Obey. It is the sacred order of Taaz."

Travers ceased speaking, and looked up at the circle of anxious faces.

"Is that all?" asked Montie tensely.

"Just that."

"No signature?"

"Nothing more at all."

"By George! They must have grabbed Nipper during the night!" said Handforth, who was always good at seeing the obvious. "They bagged him while we were asleep—but instead of dealing with him at once, out of hand, they've kept him."

The others all burst into excited talk. One and all, these nine Removites had answered the dread "call" of Taaz. They knew what it meant!

Vividly, they remembered the cause of it all; they remembered taking a lifeboat out to a wrecked steamer during a gale. In the saloon they had found a curious set of Tibetan priests—worshippers of Taaz, the Vulture God. And because Handforth had torn the veil from the face of Raa-ok the high priest, all the boys had been doomed to death—for death was the reward of all unbelievers who gazed on the face of Raa-ok.

But the high priest knowing that they had come on an errand of mercy, had spared them. They had been bidden to return to their school, and had been warned that one and all would be "called" to undergo an ordeal of courage; if they succeeded, Taaz would be satisfied. The boys had had no option but to obey, and after that the priests had mysteriously disappeared. Yet, from time to time, the Removites had been obliged to obey the summons—and this summons had come, mostly, in a mysterious way. The priests of Taaz, by some method of will concentration known only to themselves, had "called" their victims. The past weeks had been full of anxiety and worry and thrills. Now it was nearly all over, and the climax was at hand. Nipper, the last of the ten, was in the hands of the grim yellow men. And for him, it seemed, there was to be a change in the usual procedure. The other nine offenders—who had already undergone desperate trials—were to be present at Nipper's ordeal.

"Well, there's one thing about it," said Travers coolly. "We know just where we stand. No need for us to make any frantic efforts to find Nipper. At midnight to-night we shall join him in Death Gully."

"A dashed awful place, what?" commented Archie Glen-thorne. "I mean to say, how frightfully suggestive! Couldn't they have chosen a happier spot for this bally performance?"

"They're wily birds, these priests," said Reggie Pitt, half admiringly. "I've only been in Death Gully once, and I can't think of a better place for a secret meeting. It's been called Death Gully for donkey's years—and it's right in the thickest part of Bellton Wood, away from all paths. It's a deep hollow amid the trees, and you don't know anything about it until you stumble into it. There's dense undergrowth on every side."

"I believe a few tramps and poachers have fallen into it—to their deaths—over a period of some score of years," said Travers. "That's why it's called Death Gully. I don't even know how to get to it. But we shall have to find our way there at midnight. These yellow pals of ours have got to be obeyed," he added, looking round steadily. "We've all been through the mill, and we know there's no bluff about Raa-ok and his myrmidons. It's pretty clear that the priests mean to make this final ordeal a regular corker. And we're to be the audience. We can do nothing until midnight."

"I believe you're right," said Handforth reluctantly. "But, by George, it's going to be an anxious time—waiting until to-night. Let's have a look at that letter again."

Travers was about to hand it over when he arrested his hand.

"For the love of Samson!" he ejaculated, staring.

The sheet of notepaper was absolutely blank! Even the words on the inner envelope had vanished. The boys tried all the usual tests for invisible ink but there was no result. "Cunning beggars!" said Travers at length. "Now I can understand why the envelopes have black linings. When the light got to the writing, it disappeared after a time. The priests of Taaz are taking no chances."

"If you ask me, they're mad," said Watson bluntly.

"How so?"

"Well, there'll be a hue-and-cry soon, and when to-night comes, and Nipper is still missing, the Beaks will get worried," replied Watson, reasonably enough. "There'll be search parties sent out. How can we go to Bellton Wood in secret?"

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Nobody could answer the question. And further discussion was interrupted by the clanging of the bell for breakfast. As they crowded out into the passage they met Mr. Alington Wilkes, their Housemaster.

"I was coming to see you, Watson," said Old Wilkey, who was looking rather annoyed. "Do either you or Tregollis-West know anything about this errand of Nipper's?"

"I—I don't know what you mean, sir," said Watson, trying to remain unconcerned.

"Didn't Nipper tell you that he was going off early this morning?" asked Mr. Wilkes. "Don't you know anything about this note?"

He showed them a brief letter, unquestionably written by Nipper, which merely said that Nipper had been obliged to rush off to London. He hoped that Mr. Wilkes would not mind. He would be back on Thursday and explain. The letter, it appears, had been found in the school box.

"He didn't say anything to us, sir," said Watson truthfully. "As a matter of fact, we were wondering where he was."

"Oh, well, I dare say he will have a good enough explanation," grumbled Old Wilkey. "Perhaps his guardian, Mr. Nelson Lee, telephoned him unknown to us."

The Housemaster went his way, and the Removites looked at one another.

"I say!" burst out Watson. "Then everything's all right! Nipper's gone to London!"

"Nipper is in the hands of the priests of Taaz," interrupted Travers. "Can't you see the cunning of this move? The blighters forced Nipper to write that note—and it's an answer to your little problem, Watson. There'll be no search parties. Old Wilkey is satisfied that Nipper went off of his own accord."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "Easy enough for the yellow beggars to drop that note in the letter-box during the night. Naturally. Mr. Wilkes thinks Nipper left it."

"But we know differently," said Vivian Travers coolly. "Well, we can do nothing until nightfall; so let's go and have a jolly good breakfast!"

In the depths of Zinestero Castle, that grim old building in the heart of Bellton Wood, which had been erected by a Spanish nobleman, and which was now empty and deserted, there were many dark and noisome cells. For the castle, demolished in Spain, had been re-erected in Sussex in its original form—with dungeons and everything.

In one of these cells, or dungeons, Nipper sat in complete darkness. He had blankets for warmth, and there was a comfortable little camp bedstead for him to lie upon. But there was no escape. The thick oak door was locked and bolted on the outside. There was no window.

Nipper remembered nothing, although he was now very alert, with all his wits about him. He did not even know for certain just where he was, but he had a pretty shrewd idea. He had gone to bed in his own dormitory, and he had awakened in this blackness. He knew, after only a minute's thought, that the sinister priests of Taaz had "willed" him away from St. Frank's.

Nipper wondered why his captors were delaying. He had been awake for hours, and the luminous dial of his watch told him that the time was ten o'clock. Outside, then, it was full day; the boys of St. Frank's were at lessons. He wondered what his chums were doing, what they were thinking.

But, most of all, he wondered why he was being held a prisoner. In every other case, the "victims" had been dealt with summarily, and had then been allowed to return. Why this alteration of procedure?

He suddenly sat forward on the bed, for he fancied he had heard shuffling sounds. The next moment the heavy bolts on the door were thrust back, the door opened, and two robed yellow-faced men came in, one of them carrying food and drink. The other was Yeza, the chief of the attendant priests. He was carrying a quaint lamp, which gave a flickering yellow light.

"Eat, my son!" said Yeza briefly.

"Why are you keeping me here?" asked Nipper steadily.

"What's the game? Why don't you—"

"It is not for you, infidel youth, to ask questions," interrupted Yeza. "The will of Taaz must be obeyed."

He signed to his companion, and without another word they turned and went out, locking and bolting the door behind them.

#### In Death Gully!

**M** IDNIGHT! In the depths of Bellton Wood the blackness was like something solid. It was a cold, bitter night, with a strong wind sighing and moaning through the leafless branches of the trees.



Nine schoolboys, keeping very close together, had left the woodland path, and were plunging into the dense mass of undergrowth. A minute after leaving the path they were swallowed up completely, for Bellton Wood hereabouts was almost impenetrable.

The juniors had had no difficulty in breaking bounds and getting away from the school. Remaining wakeful after lights-out, they had risen and dressed at eleven-thirty. Meeting by appointment in the lane, they had quickly reached the wood. Now they were nearing the end of their strange journey. Every heart was beating rapidly. For there was something sinister in this midnight mission, and the very blackness of the wood added to the sense of drama and mystery. For Nipper's sake, they were obeying their instructions to the letter.

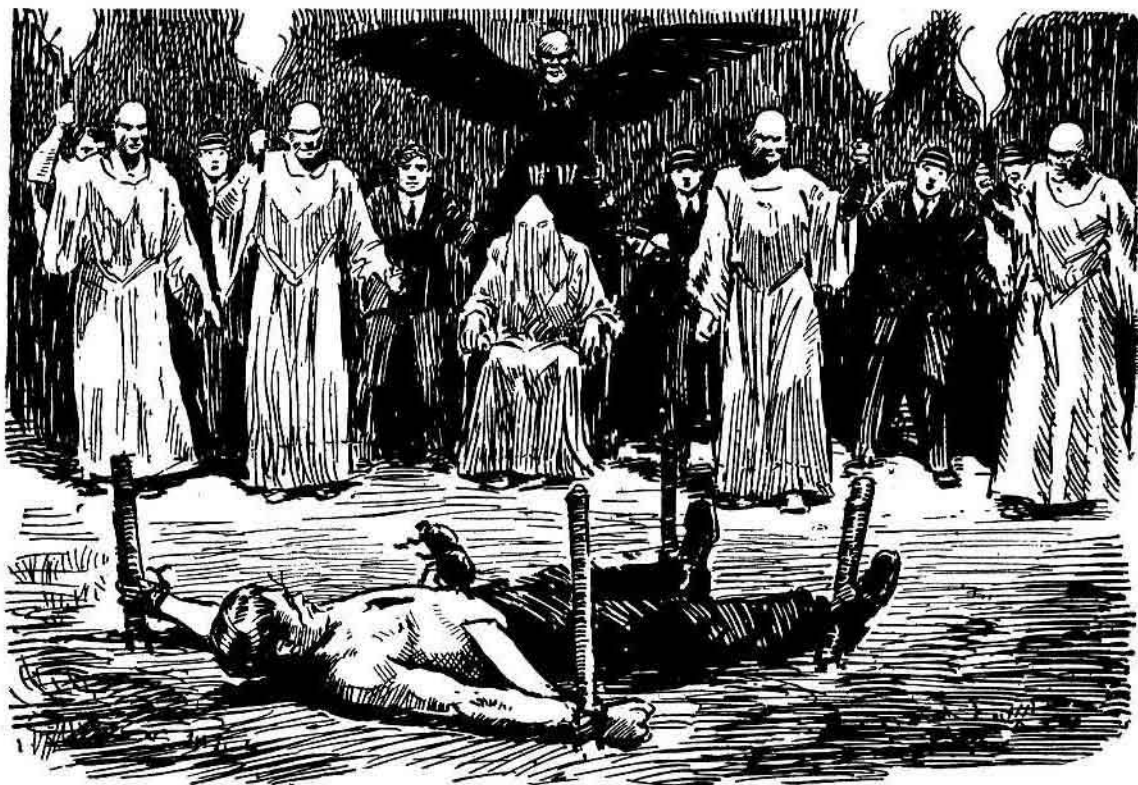
Reggie Pitt, who was leading, forcing his way through the undergrowth, suddenly halted with a sharp exclamation. Quite near him a yellow light had come into being, and he saw a robed figure standing motionless and impassive.

As a spot in which to indulge in heathen rites it could not have been bettered.

A thick rope had been fastened to a tree which stood on the very lip of the abyss; one by one the boys were commanded to slide down. At the base they found themselves gazing upon a strange and awe-inspiring scene.

The robed priests were standing, at short intervals apart, in a semicircle. Immediately facing the nine boys was a great carved chair, with the image of Taaz, the Vulture God, perched on its back. In the chair sat the wizened, veiled figure of Raa-ok. The priests ranged on either side of him held flaming torches aloft, and the ruddy, eerie light, with black shadows beyond, lent the entire scene a sinister glamour.

In front of the great chair there was a clear space, the ground rocky and smooth; and here, bound hand and foot, lay Nipper. He gave his schoolfellows a calm nod and a confident smile. That smile of his reassured them. As yet he had come to no harm.



As a piece of twig fell from a tree, it struck Nipper in the eye. The sharp pain caused him to give a spasmodic jerk, and on the instant, the horrible beetle on his chest rose up to strike! It was a moment of stark horror—for death was in the beetle's fangs.

"It is well!" said the voice of Yeza. "You have obeyed, then. There are nine here?"

"Yes, there are nine," said Pitt, speaking with some difficulty.

"No others?"

"Not a soul."

"It is well," said Yeza again. "Follow."

He turned, and the juniors, now breathing hard with suppressed emotion, obeyed the order. And for some time they plunged on through the blackest depths of the wood without a word being spoken.

They went in single file, Yeza leading the way with his flickering lamp. And so at length they came to the sheer, treacherous edge of Death Gully, shaped like a bowl, in the heart of the wood. The sheer sides of the abyss extended right round the gully, with dense trees growing to the very edge. Thus, an unwary walker, penetrating the wood, could very easily plunge down to the gully's bottom, which was composed mainly of rocky ground, strewn with boulders.

On every side of the gully, for half a mile in every direction, the wood was absolutely thick, without a path or track. Lights in the bottom of Death Gully could not penetrate a dozen yards beyond the sheer cliffs of the bowl.

"Begad! Frightfully glad to see you're all serene, old boy!" called Sir Montie. "This is a beastly sort of business—"

"Silence, unbeliever!" broke in Yeza sternly. "It is not for you to raise your voice in the presence of Raa-ok the Magnificent!"

He made a sign. Several of the yellow men came forward, and the schoolboys were ranged in a single line, with their backs to the rocky cliff. The priests bared their wicked-looking daggers.

"Let no infidel boy seek to interfere, or death will be his reward," said Yeza impressively. "Let there be silence."

A low chanting came from the other priests, but this presently died away. The only sound came from the moaning wind in the trees overhead. Then the thin, piping voice of Raa-ok, that wizened man whose age could not be guessed, rose weirdly into the air.

"And so, my children, we are together again, exactly as we were together at our first meeting," said Raa-ok. "Many days have passed since then, and nine of you have faithfully answered the call of Taaz. Some acquitted themselves well; others failed, and were deserving of death. But they escaped death, and their lives are their own. Taaz is ever merciful."

He paused, and two of the priests moved forward and raised Nipper to his feet.

"There remains the tenth," continued Raa-ok, in that same unnatural voice. "If he pleases the omnipotent Taz, he shall have his life also; and henceforth you will be free to go your own way. Let this last boy, then, prove that he is worthy. Commence!"

Instantly the bonds were removed from Nipper's wrists and ankles. His upper clothing was taken from him, even to his shirt and undervest. He stood there, bare to the waist. He was calm and fearless.

The onlookers now saw that four stakes, some distance apart, had been driven into the rocky ground. Nipper was laid flat on his back and spreadeagled. His wrists and ankles were tied to the stakes, so that he could not rise. Not a word was spoken as the priests proceeded with their work. And the nine boys who watched dared scarcely breathe. Even Handforth whispered no word. There was something tense and dramatic in this scene.

It was puzzling, too. One priest had now come forward, and from a curious vessel he was pouring a sticky, greenish liquid on to Nipper's chest, until a small pool was formed.

A short, flat piece of wood—a section of a box lid—was placed against his side, one end resting on the ground, so that it formed a sloping bridge. The priest made a little trail of the sticky juice—from the pool on Nipper's chest, down the "plank," and then along the rocky ground for a distance of nine or ten feet. At this spot stood a quaintly carved casket. The trail was no thicker than a string, but it glistened in the ruddy light.

It was Yeza who moved forward and quickly slid back a section of the casket, so that a door was opened. For some moments nothing happened. The priests stood like statues, and the nine boys watched with staring, fascinated eyes.

"Oh!" came a sudden gulp from Tommy Watson. Something had moved within the casket; it emerged into the light, revealing itself as a beetle-like insect of incredible size. It was moving slowly along that string-like trail, and its horny back glimmered greenly. It was obvious that the creature was consuming the sticky juice—and moving on and on towards the plank, which, in turn, led directly upwards to Nipper's bared chest.

"No, no!" panted Sir Montie. "Can't we do something? The fiends—the devils!"

"Let there be silence!" said Yeza slowly. "Only with silence can the boy retain his life."

The nine watched with ever-increasing horror. They were dumbfounded, stricken. They remembered their own ordeals, and, alarming as they had been, this present business was infinitely more terrible.

"My son, your life depends upon the quality of your courage," came the piping voice of Raa-ok. "What you see is the sacred scarabeus of the temple of Taz. For many centuries this species has been bred by my priests. There is no other beetle in the world so large—or so dangerous. The sacred scarab of Taz lives only on the juice of the Tibetan root, klaabi."

Nipper, who knew exactly what was going to happen, had his gaze fixed on the slowly approaching beetle. He knew that the scarab had been held sacred by the ancient Egyptians, and it was reasonable enough that this Tibetan sect, perhaps as ancient as the Egyptians themselves, also held the scarab in sacred awe.

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But to Nipper this grisly insect was a monster beetle that would soon be crawling on his chest.

"It is for you, my son, to remain motionless," continued Raa-ok impressively. "The sacred scarab has had no food for seven days; it will follow the trail of klaabi juice until it reaches the pool on your chest. Make no movement, and it will consume the juice, but it will do you no injury. But let me warn you."

The thin voice changed its note and became more of a whisper.

"Move as much as an eyelid, quiver a single muscle, and the giant scarab will attack. One bite will mean certain death. Your courage, then, must be of the strongest, and it rests with you whether you live or die."

Every one of the St. Frank's boys had heard the high priest's words. They were sick with apprehension. Handforth, indeed, raised his voice in protest. But again he was warned that any disturbance might cause the sacred scarab to attack the helpless Nipper. Dead silence alone could keep Nipper alive.

And so a tense and rigid silence fell on that barbaric scene—a silence broken only by the sighing and whistling of the wind. The boys stood with their backs to the cliff, bent forward, half crouching, staring intently. The priests seemed utterly unmoved.

And the monster scarab moved along the trail nearer and nearer, consuming the root juice as it progressed. Already it was on the "bridge," creeping upwards towards the bare body of the yellow men's victim.

#### The Ambush!

NIPPER felt as though his blood had turned to water as the great scarab's front legs came off the "bridge" and rested on his bare skin. But by great self-control he prevented the slightest sound leaving his lips, and not a muscle of his body quivered. He remained perfectly still.

The beetle on his chest looked utterly monstrous, vile, and terrifying. It moved on, and he could feel its claw-like feet sinking into his skin; he could see its hideous jaws at work, as its mouth sucked up the root juice of the klaabi plant which was its food.

But after that first moment a complete calmness came over Nipper. His courage had never been in doubt—although this ordeal was a severe enough test of the finest courage. He was certain that while he remained motionless there would be no danger. Therefore, Nipper faced his ordeal confidently, coolly. That he was horrified goes without saying, for it was an agonising experience. Every moment was fraught with peril.

As the scarab moved, Nipper felt his flesh creep; but he had made up his mind that he would obey orders to the letter. And presently he grew more accustomed to that intolerable tickling sensation. He just waited. He even closed his eyes, and his expression was almost placid.

And his nine schoolfellows gained confidence, too. Nipper's courage reassured them. But the tension was not relaxed, and it would not be relaxed until that awful scarab was back in its casket. The boys watched with bated breath, their scalps tingling, their flesh creeping.

Already half the pool of klaabi juice had gone. Then suddenly something unforeseen happened.

A tiny piece of twig fell from above. It fell, as luck would have it, fully upon Nipper's left eye. And only a second before he had opened his eyes again. The sharp pain of it was so sudden that he gasped aloud, and gave a spasmodic jerk.

On the instant the great scarab rose up, and the light shone on its greenish, shimmering body. It was about to strike!

It was a moment of stark horror. Then—  
Crack!

The scarab, as though hit by an invisible club, went rocketing off Nipper's chest, to fall with a dull thud on the rocky ground, where it lay on its back, its great legs moving helplessly. Nipper was amazed, for he was the first to recognise that sound as the unmistakable report of an automatic pistol! He knew, too, that the bullet must have come parallel with the ground, or he himself would have been struck. And the man who had fired the gun was a dead shot, or he would never have taken such a chance.

The priests were confused; they seemed stunned, indeed, by that sudden and unexpected interruption.

"Look!" shouted Church, pointing.

An amazing thing was happening.

Two grassy banks, one on either side of the gully, seemed to be bursting open as though a minor earthquake was taking place, and they were exuding human beings!

Men, five on either side, leapt out into the open, and each man carried a gun. Bright beams of light suddenly

blazed—for the men, who had apparently come from the bowels of the earth, were carrying powerful torches, too.

"Mr. Lee!" roared Handforth, in wild excitement. It was true enough. One batch of men was led by Nelson Lee, the famous detective; and the other batch of men was led by Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard.

They spread out fanwise, closing in rapidly on the stupefied Orientals.

"Throw up your hands!" came the sharp, decisive voice of Nelson Lee. "If you attempt any trickery, we shall fire!"

"Infidels—infidels!" piped Raa-ok, in a shrill, rising scream. "Kill them! Kill them!"

But Yeza and his attendant priests were still momentarily helpless from the shock of this dramatic surprise. Before they could even grab for their murderous knives, the efficient Scotland Yard men went round like lightning. Handcuffs clicked briskly over yellow wrists.

Only when it was too late did some of the priests attempt resistance. There were some scuffles, a few shouts, but it was all over so rapidly that the St. Frank's boys blinked and gaped.

In less than one short minute the entire tables had been turned. The priests of Taaz, instead of being masters of the situation, were handcuffed prisoners! There was no danger from Raa-ok, for he was a helpless cripple. For many, many years he had sat in that great carved chair, and his hands and forearms were mummified.

no evidence that those yellow aliens were practising mischief which is punishable by law," replied Nelson Lee. "It was necessary to catch them red-handed, and I do not doubt that the evidence which Inspector Lennard can place before the Home Office will be all-sufficient."

"You're right there, Lee," said the chief inspector, nodding. "When you first came to the Yard to-day and spun your yarn, I thought you were off your nut. And so did the Commissioner. But he let you have your way, and when I take this yarn to him he'll know that you were right—as usual."

"Well, I think it was worth the trouble," agreed Nelson Lee. "There's not a doubt that these Tibetans are a menace to the peace of the land."

"Even now I can't get it," said Nipper helplessly. "How in the name of goodness did you hide yourselves in this gully, gov'nor? How did you know that I should be brought here?"

"It beats me, too," put in Handforth. "We kept the secret. We had a letter this morning, and we were warned—"

"Just a minute," said Vivian Travers coolly. "I'm the brazen culprit."

"What!"

"Fact!" said Travers contentedly. "I didn't say anything to you other fellows, because I thought you might object. But I saw no reason why I should take notice of that warning. It's about time these beastly heathens were

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"Come on!" panted Watson suddenly.

He and Tregellis-West leapt forward, and before they reached Nipper their pocket-knives were out. Triumphantly they slashed through their chum's bonds, and then they helped him to his feet.

"Thank goodness, you're safe!" gasped Watson, half choking.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Nipper. "You chaps seem to be more jumpy than I am!"

"Well, the fact is, old boy, we were lookin' on, you know," said Sir Montie. "A frightful ordeal for us—it was, really."

"I rather thought I was the one who was going through the ordeal," said Nipper. "Phew! Thank goodness it's over! But I'm jiggered if I can understand where the gov'nor came from. It's the first time I knew he was a magician."

Everybody was talking at once. Nipper strode forward and grabbed Nelson Lee's arm.

"All right, young 'un?" asked the detective.

"Right as rain, sir."

"Hope I didn't scare you with that shot—but I wasn't taking any chances," said Nelson Lee. "That beetle might have bitten you, but I doubt it."

"Where were you?"

"You saw what happened, didn't you?" replied Lee, with a laugh. "I was watching everything; my head was completely concealed in the half-dried ferns of that grassy bank."

"But—but if you and the inspector and the others were there all the time, sir, why didn't you act sooner?" burst out Handforth, somewhat indignantly. "Why did you allow Nipper to go through that awful ordeal?"

"Because, until Nipper actually went through it, we had

brought to book; they've tried to kill two or three of us, and they've made our lives hectic for weeks past. Well, just after breakfast, I happened to see in the paper that Mr. Lee had returned to London last night after a month or two abroad. I rang him up and asked his advice. That's all. He thought I was kidding at first, but when I assured him I wasn't, he pressed me for all the details, and then he told me to go ahead, but to say nothing to the others."

"But how did you get here so quietly?" asked Nipper.

"We've been here for many hours—and I can give you my word we got the cramp," replied Nelson Lee. "After getting Travers' message, I went straight to Scotland Yard. Inspector Lennard promised to co-operate with me, and we came down here with eight men. We dared not wait until nightfall, for we had an idea that the priests would be prepared for any surprise attack. But there was very little chance that they would come into this gully by daylight. That meant that we had several hours to prepare. We penetrated the wood, got here, and excavated burrows in the grassy banks. We brought some planking with us, on which we arranged the turf. The banks looked quite normal—but, actually, they were like trapdoors."

"And you were concealed in there all the time—watching!" said Handforth admiringly. "By George! That's what I call the real goods! You're a corker, sir!"

"We thought it necessary to be actually on the spot," explained Nelson Lee. "We had to be in a position to obtain definite evidence of unlawful activities."

"It is wrong!" came the piping voice of Raa-ok. "We of Tibet are peaceful men; we respect your great country. We came to England to protest against the flying of aeroplanes over our lands."

"That is a matter for the Government," said Nelson Lee. "By persecuting these schoolboys you have broken the law."

"There has been no persecution," insisted Raa-ok. "The infidel boys have merely obeyed the laws of the temple of Taaz. What you have seen this night was a test of one boy's courage. The great scarab, which you have killed—and may demons possess you for that act!—was harmless. It would not have bitten the boy even had he moved. But this made no difference to the test of courage, for he was made to believe that it could kill him."

"I am sorry, my friend, but that does not change the position," said Nelson Lee sternly. "These boys need no longer fear your vengeance, and thus they are free to speak. There is no doubt in my mind that you have more than once attempted deliberate murder."

"That's true, sir!" burst out Hamforth. "They tried to kill me once. They tied me in a cave on Surf Island, and when the tide came in I was nearly drowned. It was Churchy and Mac who saved me."

"Your laws, infidel boy, are not our laws," broke in Raa-ok. "You offended Taaz, and death was to have been your penalty."

Nelson Lee turned to Inspector Lennard.

"You see, their mentality is different from ours," he said, with a shrug. "It is quite impossible to reason with them. They think they have done no wrong."

"They ought to be shoved in prison!" said Tommy Watson fiercely.

The priests of Taaz, having been marshalled out of Death Gully, were taken out of Bellton Wood and placed in several police cars which were in readiness. They were not placed in the criminal dock; for the case was so exceptional that the Home Office—as Nelson Lee had expected—intervened.

The next day Raa-ok and his attendant priests of the Taaz Temple were escorted by detectives to the London docks. Here they were placed on a ship bound for the East—and, in a word, they were deported as undesirables.

Thus they went back to Tibet, and St. Frank's knew them no more.

The menace was over, and Nipper and his fellow-Removites breathed freely once again, and life at the old school was good to them.

THE END.

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