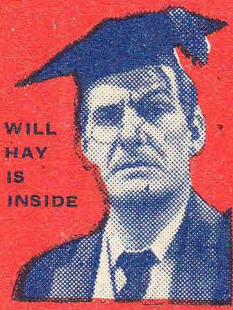


"Here's Wishing You A Merry Xmas!" And this Special Number, like a Christmas Stocking, is full of good things.



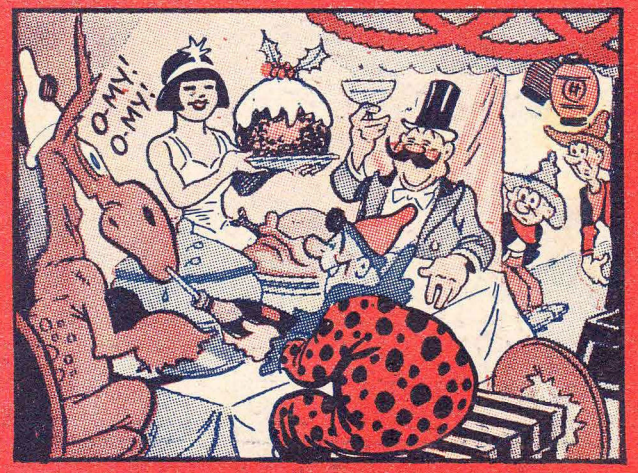
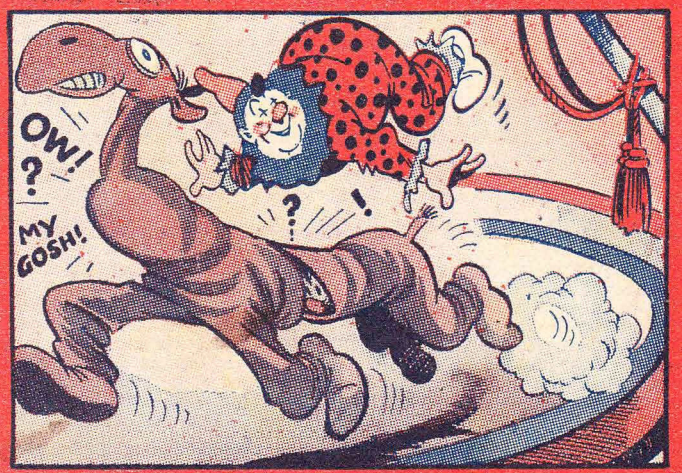
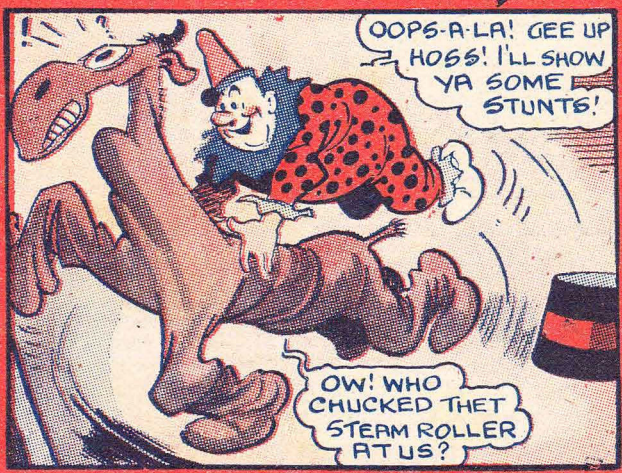
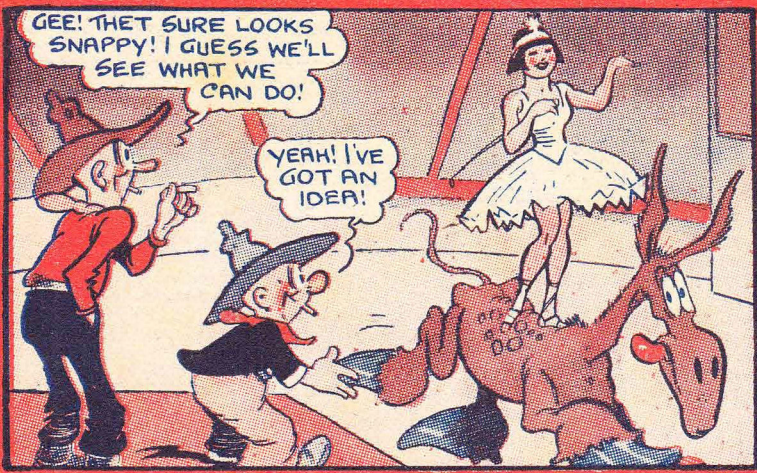
WILL HAY IS INSIDE

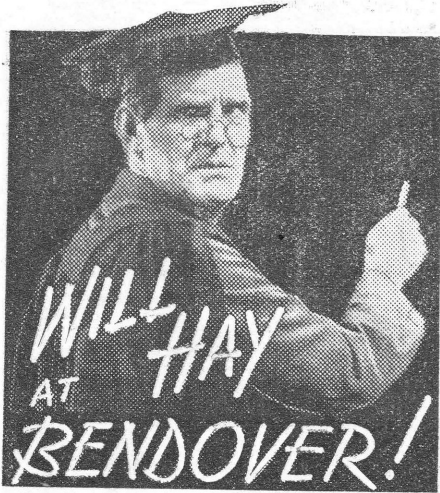
The PILOT

EVERY FRIDAY

2^D

No. 116. Vol. 5. Week ending December 18th, 1937.





By Courtesy of Gainsborough Pictures.

“MERRY CHRISTMAS, my boys!” beamed Will Hay.
 “Same to you, sir, and hundreds of them!”

“We’ve got a few parting gifts for you, sir—”
 “You’ll accept them, won’t you, sir?”
 “Oh, do, sir!”

It was quite a chorus of cheery boyish voices from the brake, crowded with Fourth-Form fellows starting for the station. Bendover School was breaking up for the Christmas holidays. Snow was falling, and the old Bendover quad was carpeted with white. But a spot of snow did not prevent Will from coming out to see his boys off. Will’s face was beaming with Yuletide good-humour; his nose glowed red in the frosty air. Snowflakes fluttered round him, as he stood by the brake, and whitened the summit of his mortar-board. Will did not mind. Will was genial and happy. The prospect of not seeing the Bendover Fourth again for two or three weeks, was enough to make any Form-master happy!

“My dear Bird—my dear Carboy!” bleated Will. “I fear that the rules of the school do not allow a master to accept gifts from his boys. But I will take the will for the deed! In a legal sense, I believe, a will is a deed—ha, ha!”

“But you really must take what we’ve got for you, sir!” urged Dicky Bird. “We shan’t take no for an answer.”

“No fear!” said Jimmy Carboy.
 “Every fellow here’s got something for you, sir!” declared Jerry Smart.

“My dear boys!” exclaimed Will, much moved by this unsolicited testimonial to his popularity in the Bendover Fourth. “You touch my heart—I assure you that I am touched—”



“I always thought he was touched!” came Tubby Green’s voice.
 “Ha, ha, ha!”

“But really, really, I cannot accept gifts from my pupils!” said Will. “I thank you, my dear boys, but I am bound to say—yaroooop! Yoo-hoop! Wharrer you up to? Whooooooop!”

“Hand ‘em out!”
 “Parting gifts from the Fourth, sir—”
 “You really must take them, sir!”
 “Ha, ha, ha!”

Will Hay had no choice about taking those parting gifts from his pupils. He had never even dreamed that the young rascals had parked a stack of snowballs in the brake—it had not occurred to his mighty brain that the parting gifts of the Fourth were in that form!

Whiz! Whiz! Smash! Squash!
 “Yoo-hoo-hoop!” roared Will Hay. “Oh, suffering sardines and whiskered winkles! You little-yoo-hoop-ticks—you iniquitous warts—you-yoo-yaroooop!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled the brake-load of merry Bendoverians. Snowballs whizzed, and squashed, and scattered. They landed all over Will Hay’s features; they sent his mortar-board spinning; they powdered him with white from head to foot. He dodged and jumped, and his foot slipped in the snow, and he sat down. Snowballs rained on him as he sat.

Then the brake rolled away, amid howls of laughter—leaving Will sitting in the snow, blinking after it dizzily over his slanting nose-nippers.

“Urrrgh!” he gasped. “Wurrgh! Little-groogh-ticks! Oooch!” He dusted snow from his garments, and fielded his ancient mortar-board. “Well, Christmas comes but once a year—ooogh!—and boys will be-groogh!—boys! Wow!”

The parting gifts of the Bendover Fourth



had been numerous, if not valuable. Will was feeling quite dizzy, as he tottered back to the House.

From the doorway emerged a tall, angular figure—that of Colonel Chatterton, the chairman of the governors, who had barged in on breaking-up day. The colonel stared across the snowy quad at Will, noting his swaying, uncertain steps, and attributing it to something stronger than snowballs.

“Good gad!” ejaculated Colonel Chatterton. “Is it possible! Scandalous! The man is actually tottering! Mr. Hay! Do you hear me, Mr. Hay! Kindly come here this moment, Mr. Hay!”

Will Hay looked across at him. Colonel Chatterton waved an imperious, beckoning hand.

“Come here at once!” he roared.
 “Coming, sir!” called back Will cheerily. And he started at a run. When the chairman of the governors was in a hurry, it was not for common mortals to keep him waiting! Will scudded.

It was sheer ill-luck that he stepped on a slide, with which Dicky Bird & Co. had been amusing themselves while they waited for the brake. Will did not notice the slide—he did not even know it was there, till he stepped on it. Then he knew!

He was running, when he started on the slide. After that, he did not run—he whizzed! He shot along that slide like an arrow from a bow. He fairly flashed.

Colonel Chatterton had told him to come at once! But he had hardly expected him to arrive so rapidly! Will arrived like a cannonball, and shot off the end of the slide, landing on an overcoat that was buttoned over an extensive and well-filled waistcoat. He hardly knew what was happening, for the moment. That slide had taken him by surprise. And Will took the chairman of the governing board by surprise. He struck like a battering-



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ram, and Colonel Chatterton went over backwards. Over him went Will Hay.

Bump, bump! The colonel bumped on the snowy earth—Will Hay bumped on the colonel!

"Oooooooogh!" moaned Colonel Chatterton feebly, as all the wind was driven out of him. "Moohh!"

"Oh, my only winter bonnet!" gasped Will Hay. He sat up dizzily. He did not notice, at the moment, that it was the colonel's face he sat up on! The colonel did—at once! Will sat and gasped for breath! "Blow me tight—I mean, bless my soul—oh crikey!"

There was a suffocated howl under the master of the Bendover Fourth.

"Urrgh! Gerroff! Gurrgh!"

"Suffering oysters!" gasped Will. "Wha-a-at am I sitting on? Oh, my only silk socks! Sorry, sir; I did not notice—it was your face—no harm done, I trust—"

Will jumped up. Colonel Chatterton staggered to his feet. He glared round him.

"Where's my walking-stick? Where's that stick? Where's that dashed stick? Where has that thundering stick got to? Where—"

Will Hay faded out of the picture. He realised that it would be injudicious to wait till the colonel found his walking-stick! He guessed in one what the colonel was going to do with that stick! Never in all his career as a stage and screen star had Will Hay made so prompt an exit!

The shades of night were falling fast, as the poet expressed it, when Dr. Shrubb tapped at Will's study door and looked in, with a genial and benevolent smile on his scholarly features.

"Ah! Here you are, my dear Hay!" said the Head. "I have looked for you several times—but you were not to be seen. I have something to say before I leave, Hay! I desire to show you, my dear fellow, the confidence I repose in you, though you have not

been with us long—really a testimonial to your trustworthiness—"

"You do me proud, sir!" said Will modestly. "If the testimonial is in the form of cash, I assure you that it will be welcome—very welcome—"

"Eh! What! Kindly be serious, Mr. Hay! One member of my staff will be left in charge here over the holidays! I have decided upon you, Mr. Hay!"

"Eh?"

"Good-bye, Mr. Hay—a merry Christmas!"

"Oh crumbs! I say—look here, can't you trust somebody else—old Choot is fearfully trustworthy—so is Shandy—and—"

But the Head was gone.

B UZZZZZZZZZZZ!

Will Hay was quite glad to hear the telephone-bell ring on Christmas Eve. It was, of course, very gratifying to be specially trusted and relied upon by his chief. But otherwise, putting in the Christmas holidays at a deserted school was not fearfully exhilarating. Will fairly jumped to the telephone.

"Hallo! Is that Mr. Hay?" came a deep, wheezy, rather husky voice over the wires. "What?"

"Speaking!" bleated Will.

"You know my voice, of course—"

"Oh, quite! Who's speaking?"

"Really, Mr. Hay, if you do not recall the voice of Colonel Chatterton—"

"Oh, yes! Quite! How do you do, sir? Having a jolly time, I hope? Punishing the port—what?"

"I have rung you up, Mr. Hay, to ask whether you would care to step over to Chatterton Chase and dine this evening?"

"My dear sir," said Will, beaming at the telephone, "you touch the spot! I would! Just a few!"

"We are having a little fancy-dress affair here this evening, Mr. Hay. Will you come

in fancy dress?" went on the husky voice. It sounded as if Colonel Chatterton had a spot of cold, and Will certainly did not recognise the old military gentleman's usual testy bark. "Now, the idea is this—I want you to come as Father Christmas! Can you manage the costume?"

"Easily!" purred Will. "I have a Father Christmas costume among my gadgets, left over from film days."

"Then there will be no difficulty," went on the voice. "Come in your costume, Hay. I want you to knock at the door and present yourself as Father Christmas. You get the idea?"

"Oh, quite!" agreed Will. "I'll do it like a shot! Quite a bright idea, colonel—seasonable, and all that!"

"Exactly! Then I shall expect you, say, at seven-thirty; and when my butler opens the door, you walk in as Father Christmas!"

"Rely on me, sir! Quite a lark! I'll play up!"

"Good! I'm sure you'll have a good time this evening, Hay—in fact, I think I can promise you a really lively time! Seven-thirty! And you knock, and walk in as Father Christmas! Good-bye, Hay, my dear fellow!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

Will Hay put up the receiver. He grinned with all his teeth. This, really, was frightfully sporting of a tough old nut like Colonel Chatterton. It was rather a weird idea, perhaps, to ask him to arrive in the Father Christmas costume, and walk in thus; but no doubt the colonel intended it as a surprise for his other guests. Really, it was quite a merry idea, and Will was more than ready to oblige. This kind invitation came like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years to the member of Dr. Shrubb's staff who was left over at Bendover.

Will would not have felt, probably, quite so bucked had he been aware that, at a place about fifty miles away, Dicky Bird of the



Bendover Fourth put up a receiver on a telephone and grinned across it at Jimmy Carboy. "The old ass took it down like milk!" murmured Dicky.

"Lapped it up!" chuckled Jimmy. "Lucky you thought of having a spot of cold, though! If he'd spotted your voice—"

"Oh, he can't spot a thing!" chortled Dicky Bird. "I thought of this stunt when I heard the Head mention to Choot that Hay would be sticking there over the holidays. Why not provide him with a little fun? Bet you he will find it quite lively when he walks in at Chatterton Chase got up as Father Christmas!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Jimmy Carboy.

"Old Chatterton will have a fit, probably!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And old Hay will have another!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the two young rascals roared.

Will Hay, at Bendover School, was sorting out his Father Christmas costume, little dreaming that his departed pupils were thinking these kindly thoughts of him, and planning to provide him with a little liveliness over the Christmas holidays.

WILL HAY tramped out cheerfully into December darkness and falling snow. Snow was thick on the roads, and there was no chance of getting a taxi from Didham. But it was only two or three miles to Chatterton Chase, and Will was a good walker. He was well wrapped up against the cold, with a big ulster on over his costume, and a pair of wellingtons, and a cap pulled down over his ears.

He toddled cheerfully away from Bendover, and headed by dark lanes for the residence of the chairman of the governing board. Snow powdered him all over, and every now and then he slipped, and the winter wind howled and wailed; but Will, thinking of the warmth and brightness and hospitable welcome at the Chase, did not mind in the least.

In the winter dark, he did not meet a soul on the way till he was quite near the Chase, passing along the fence that bordered the lane. Then suddenly, from a dark gap in the fence, a whispering voice came to his startled ears:

"What's that, Spadger?"

"Tain't nothing, Rooty, you fool! Think there's anybody out in this?"

"I tell you somebody's coming!"

"Sez you!"

Will Hay halted and peered through the darkness. His footsteps made little sound on the carpet of snow. Dimly, he made out two shadowy forms in the gap in the colonel's fence. Evidently, he had startled them, and he hastened to explain.

"Quite all right, my dear fellows!" bleated Will. "Merely a harmless and necessary schoolmaster going to a party, and— Oh! Ah! Ow! Yarough! Great pippity pip!"

Something jarred on Will's chin, and he went over in the snow. It was a set of knuckles—very hard knuckles—that had jolted him. Two shadowy figures closed in on him as he sprawled.

But Will was up in a twinkling, and dodging. It dawned on him that these two were not harmless pedestrians like himself; it was only too clear that they were bad characters, alarmed by his approach. Will had no use for footpads at close quarters. He dodged and ran.

There was a patter of feet in the snow behind him. But he reached the open gates of Chatterton Chase and scudded in. If they had pursued him, they did not pursue him farther. Half-way up the drive, Will dropped into a walk. Whoever they were, he had left them outside, and he was done with them.

Will gave them no further thought. He walked cheerily on up the drive, the lighted windows of the mansion gleaming through the snowflakes in front of him.

He arrived in the porch. The great door of the house was closed, but a single electric bulb glimmered in the porch. There Will paused. According to the colonel's instructions, he had to enter as Father Christmas, and he had his costume on ready for that purpose. All he had to do was to discard his snowy outer garments before he rang the bell.

He peeled off the big ulster, kicked off the

wellingtons, and took off the cap. He rolled them up in a bundle, and deposited the bundle in a corner of the porch. The glimmering light showed him arrayed in red trousers and a red gown, trimmed with white fur, and red shoes similarly trimmed. He drew the hood of the gown over his head, letting down the mask attached to it over his face, and blinking through the eyeholes. He was now Father Christmas complete, and quite unrecognisable as any other person.

Grinning cheerily under the mask, Will rang a peal on the bell, and knocked with the heavy brass knocker. The door was opened by the butler of Chatterton Chase. The look of polite inquiry on Stilton's portly face was changed into one of amazement and alarm as he stared at the strange and startling figure on the threshold.

"Wha-a-a-t!" stammered the butler, staggering back a pace. "What—who—what—"

Will stepped cheerfully in. "All serene, old thing!" he said. "Just Daddy Christmas dropping in! Your master is expecting me! Where's the jolly old colonel?"

"You—you—what—what—"

Will glanced round the hall through the eyeholes of the mask. He had rather expected to see Colonel Chatterton there, with a crowd of amused guests. But there was no one to greet him except the butler, and the butler was gazing at him in alarm, apparently under the impression that he had some wandering lunatic to deal with.

A door opened, and Will had a glimpse of a dining-room. But the doorway was nearly filled by the figure of Colonel Chatterton, staring into the hall.

"What is it, Stilton?" barked the colonel. Then, as he caught sight of Father Christmas, he jumped nearly clear of the floor. "What—who—what the dooce—who—what is that?"

Will Hay blinked at him in surprise through the eyeholes of the mask. After what had been said on the telephone, this reception at the Chase was quite unexpected.

"My dear sir—" burred Will.

For a moment the colonel stared at him, as if petrified. Then he came striding into the hall, his face almost purple with wrath.

"Who are you?" he thundered. "What are you? Some mountebank—some clown—some irresponsible lunatic—or what? Answer me, sir!"

"Humming haddocks!" gasped Will. "Aren't you expecting me? I'm Will Hay."

"Will Hay!" shrieked the colonel.

"Master of the Bendover Fourth."

"Good gad! What are you doing here?"

What does this mean?" shrieked Colonel Chatterton. "Let me see your face, sir! Let me see whether you are the person you claim to be! By Jove!" He glared at Will Hay's pleasing features, as the mask was pushed up. "Yes, it is Hay! It is that fool, that nincompoop, that clown Hay! Now explain yourself! What does this masquerade mean?"

"Wha-a-t?" stammered Will, blinking at him in bewilderment. "Look here, wharrer you mean?"

Colonel Chatterton shook an enraged fist under his nose, so suddenly that Will made a backward jump. His feet caught in the tail of Father Christmas' gown, and there was a rending sound as he tangled and sat down. From the doorway of the dining-room two or three faces looked—laughing. But Colonel Chatterton was not laughing; he was foaming! He towered over the bewildered master of the Bendover Fourth, glaring down at him.

"What does this tomfoolery mean?" he roared. "You, a master at Bendover, coming to my house got up in this manner! Am I to understand that you have walked the public roads, sir, in that ridiculous outfit—you, a schoolmaster? By gad! Are you intoxicated, sir? Is that it? I suspected it the other day at the school! Now I am sure! How dare you, sir, come here in that absurd guise, and in a state of intoxication!"

"I—I—I haven't—I—I didn't—I—I wasn't!" stammered Will helplessly. "Mean to say you didn't want me to come here as Father Christmas?"

"What?" yelled the colonel.

"If you didn't, what the dickens do you mean by making out you did?" demanded Will indignantly. "Here I come tramping miles through the snow, just to oblige you, and this—"

"Are you mad?" roared Colonel Chatterton. "By Jove! You must be absolutely insane! To walk into a man's house, got up as Father Christmas—by gad!"

"But you asked me to!" shrieked Will.

"I asked you! How dare you say that I am a party to such maniacal proceedings! Mad—mad as a hatter! Stilton, help that man up! I will help him out of the house. Mr. Hay, you will hear more of this. I will bring the matter before the governors, by gad, sir, at their next meeting! Great gad! A schoolmaster, parading the public roads got up as Father Christmas! Scandalous! Outrageous!"

"But I haven't—I didn't—I—I mean—"

"Take that man to the door, Stilton!" roared the colonel.

The butler grasped Will Hay and heaved him to his feet. In a state of utter bewilderment, Will was led to the door. Behind him stalked the colonel. As Will stood in the doorway, the colonel lifted his right foot, and it shot out.

"Yarooooop!" roared Will.

He shot out of the doorway, across the porch. There were three steps outside, but Will did them in one. He rolled in the snow on the drive, gasping.

"Oh, suffering centipedes!" spluttered Will. "What a night! What a merry Christmas! What a— Oh crikey!"

"It is snowing, sir!" came the butler's voice, as Colonel Chatterton barged out of the doorway after him.

"I do not care if it is snowing cats and dogs!" roared the colonel. "I will kick that clown—that harlequin—that—that masquerading lunatic—the whole length of the drive! I will—"

Will Hay stayed to hear no more. He scrambled up in the snow, gathered up his gown, and ran. Colonel Chatterton's help out of the house was enough for him; he did not want the colonel's help down the drive! Darkness and falling snow swallowed Will Hay, leaving the colonel snorting.

SUFFERING snails!" moaned Will Hay. He had found shelter from the falling snow. He had parked himself in a little summerhouse in the grounds, a short distance from the house. Outside, the snow fell thickly; inside, Will Hay gasped and moaned. He realised, by this time, that he could not have been expected at Chatterton Chase; that some iniquitous japer had pulled his leg over the phone, and that the call had not come from the colonel at all. His reception was a proof of that. But that knowledge did not help him much now. What he was going to do was the question, and Will did not know the answer.

Snow was coming down by the cartload. Bendover was several miles away. He had left his ulster, his cap, and his wellingtons in the porch, and wild horses would not have dragged him back there to retrieve them. But to tramp through miles of thick snow in red slippers, dressed as Father Christmas, was really not a practical proposition. It was fearfully cold in that summerhouse; but it kept the snow off, and Will crouched in the deepest recess, farthest from the wind, and pondered dismally over what he was going to do.

Perhaps, at a later hour, he might venture back and grab his outer coverings. But he did not feel sure. In the meantime—

Trudging footsteps in the snow interrupted his dismal reflections. Two dark shadows loomed faintly at the entrance of the summerhouse.

Will suppressed his breathing. For the moment, he dreaded that he had been run down by the colonel and Stilton. Then a husky, muttering voice reached his ears.

"In 'ere, Spadger! We got to wait—get out of the blinking snow."

"I'm arter you, Rooty."

Will Hay hardly breathed. He was glad that he was in the deepest, darkest recess of the building. Spadger and Rooty stepped in, and sat down on a bench hardly two yards from

him. But they did not peer in his direction. It never occurred to them that there could possibly be anybody there. They sat with their backs to him, muttering.

Will's problem was settled—to some extent. He knew what he was going to do now. He was going to remain as still as a mouse while those two dangerous characters were in the offing. Muttering voices came to his ears. He caught words every now and then as the two dim shadows muttered together, and gradually it dawned on him why they were there. They were waiting for the house to close for the night, after which they were going to give the colonel's safe the once-over.

The hour was late when they stirred at last. A final mutter, and they crept out of the summerhouse into the snow and darkness. Will Hay breathed a deep, deep breath. He was free now to cut back to the porch for his clobber, and clear; but he shook his head. He simply could not leave those two thieves of the night to carry on.

He crept out in his turn. There was nearly a foot of snow on the ground, and, dark as it was, it was quite easy to follow the deep footprints of the pair of cracksmen. In a few minutes Will Hay was close to the french windows of the library, and he heard a faint crack as a lock gave. Another minute, and he was peering in—watching a tiny gleam of light from a flashlamp that moved and wavered in the gloom. A husky mutter reached him:

"Ere it is, Rooty—be'ind this 'ere picture!"

"Go it, Spadger!"

There was a sound of a tool at work. Then suddenly the library door was opened, and a flood of light illuminated the room as the electric light was switched on. A large figure in a flowing dressing-gown stepped in from the hall, and the two burglars jumped and gazed at it from the safe, and Will Hay, from the window. It was Colonel Chatterton—evidently sleepless.

"Now, where did I leave that dashed cigar-

case?" came the colonel's bark. "Where the dickens did I leave that dashed— Great gad!"

He broke off at the sight of two figures that leaped at him. In a second he was on the floor, a hand clapped over his mouth.

"Quick, Rooty!" panted the Spadger. "That jenny—quick! Keep him quiet!"

Will Hay billowed in at the french window. "Stop!" he thundered. "Hands up! Stick 'em up before I shoot! Hear me?"

Spadger and Rooty spun round in amazed alarm. Their eyes almost started from their faces at the sight of Father Christmas. Will's right hand was lifted, and something small and round and dark was in it, levelled at the two startled rascals.

"Hands up!" roared Hay. "I never miss! A bullseye every time—that's me! I give you one second before I shoot you dead! Stick 'em up!"

"Old on, guv'nor!" yelled Rooty, and his hands went up over his head. "I ain't kicking! Don't shoot, guv'nor—don't!"

"Don't!" howled Spadger, his hands fairly flying towards the ceiling. "It's a fair cop! We'll go quiet! Quiet as lambs, sir—only turn that thing another way!"

"Keep 'em up!" said Will grimly. "If I begin on you, you will never know what hit you!" He grinned at Colonel Chatterton, who was sitting up, blinking at him dazedly. "Good-morning, boys—I mean, good-evening, colonel! May I trouble you to ring for assistance, while I keep those scoundrels covered with this deadly weapon?"

"Mr. Hay!" gurgled the colonel. "Great gad! My dear Hay, you have shaved me—I mean saved me! In another moment that scoundrel would have knocked out my brains—"

"If any, sir—quite!" agreed Will. "Call the servants, sir!"

Colonel Chatterton tottered to his feet. He rang and rang, and startled servants came

crowding. Spadger and Rooty, seized by many hands, were taken away, to be locked in a coal-cellar till morning. Colonel Chatterton came over to Will Hay, his hand outstretched.

"My dear Hay!" he exclaimed. "My dear, dear fellow! I apologise! I apologise most profoundly! You have saved me; you have saved my property! How can I thank you, Hay? You will forgive me, I am sure! You will stay the night, Hay! You will eat your Christmas dinner with me to-morrow. Say that you will do so, my dear Hay!"

"My dear sir, say no more!" bleated Will. "I will eat my Christmas dinner here to-morrow, with pleasure—yours also, if you like. Any old thing!"

"But how very, very fortunate that you happened to have a revolver about you, my dear Hay! How did you happen to have such a weapon?"

"That is easily explained, sir!" grinned Will. "I hadn't! And if those two blighters had cut up rusty, I hardly know how I should have handled them with a fountain-pen—"

"A fuf-fuf-fountain-pen!" stuttered the colonel. "You—you held up those two burglars with a—a—a fountain-pen! Great gad! My dear Hay, what nerve—what resource—what amazing presence of mind—what courage!"

"My long suit, sir!" said Will modestly.

Dicky Bird and Jimmy Carboy wondered exactly how Will Hay's visit to Chatterton Chase had turned out. They would have realised that it had turned out quite satisfactorily if they could have looked into Chatterton Chase, the next day, and beheld Will travelling through the turkey!

Will Hay is back at school again next week, and his latest role is that of a hypnotist! For laughs this is a yarn that you'll find hard to beat. See that you're "in on the ground floor" when "The PILOT" is being sold next Friday.

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