

How Tommy Spent His Christmas.

By "ROLLINGSTONE."



"**W**HAT larks!" exclaimed Tommy, as he opened a letter from his old bachelor uncle, inviting him to spend his Christmas away up in the backblocks. A cheque was enclosed of what Tommy regarded as phenomenal fatness, and a post-script permitted him to bring up a couple of chums if he thought fit.

The invitation was not exactly a surprise. A similar one had arrived at this delectable period of several previous years, the memorable occasion on which Tommy shot a ruffianly old wild bull, will be remembered by constant readers of this Magazine. No, it was not exactly a surprise, but it was a great relief to get the letter, for this had been Tommy's last term at school. He felt himself a man now, and somehow he had a sort of notion that with his school-days, holidays also would vanish, and that his uncle might prefer asking younger lads up to the station. But this doubt dissolved, Tommy, with his mind relieved, hastily scribbled a reply. He hated letter-writing as a rule, and rightly guessed that his uncle would not care to wade through much of his lamentably illegible scrawl, so his note was brief and to the point. It began with a line from an old song inverted to suit the occasion. "Dear Uncle make room for your Tommy and two chums. Thanks for the tip. Glad to see wool is up." This was an inference drawn from the

size of the cheque. Tommy rarely studied market reports. A few similar sentiments hastily scrawled and the note was promptly dispatched.

Then Tommy turned his attention to the selection of his associates. He felt prouder and more important than the Premier himself, when he happens to have vacancies on the Ministry to fill, for what sane lad would not infinitely prefer the patronage he had to dispense to a portfolio? The selection required much thought and consideration. The aspirants to what had hitherto proved a yearly honour were legions as Tommy's long list of prematurely sent Christmas presents abundantly testified. That Tommy placed some value on the perquisites attached to his present position goes without saying, for he ran the list of donors through his mind placing them in carefully graduated order of merit; but that he was not altogether mercenary, his final selection proved.

"Let's see, that purse-proud new-chum fellow, Fitz, heads the list. I can't pass him, though he has only been with us one term. The beggar blows so infernally about hunting and shooting at home, and says everything here is so beastly colonial. He gave me the best present, there's no getting away from that. The beggar can well afford it. Besides, he'll give us some good sport, uncle will enjoy taking him down a bit. It won't be playing it too low down on Fitz either, for what he learns will be cheap at the price. Now about the other—let me see.