

What is the terror of Temperly Wood? The good folk of Little Bilcombe are far from guessing the real identity of their mysterious visitor!

SAM TODD whistled a merry tune as he trudged through the shadows of Temperly Wood. Sam was extra late going home, for the overseer at the farm was abed with fever, and the boy had a lot more work than usually fell to his share.

He tramped on, thinking pleasantly of the supper awaiting him at the little cottage on the hill, when something curious happened close to him. He turned his head and tried to spot what it was in the deep gloom, but could at first make out nothing.

Sam heard a rustling, then a soft pat, pat, quite near him, then a strange hissing, such as might come from a cat which is nettled about something or other. It was no early owl, nor anything to suggest a fat adder which had been frightened. The wood boasted plenty of vipers. Sam knew all about them; he had

killed a goodish few in his time. He did not whistle now; he only stared. The odd little rustling came again; something was trotting close to him. In the sudden light of the nearly full moon the boy saw a dark form in the undergrowth. It was an odd little animal, and it came on quite unconcernedly as if the wood belonged to it.

Sam stooped to get a better view. He was not afraid. He thought at first it was a cat, but speedily realised his mistake. The strange creature had not the movement, nor the grace of a cat, and most decidedly it was not a dog, at least of any breed that Sam knew. Sam saw its quaint cock ears, its bright eyes glowing with anger in them, its strange orange markings in its rather bronzy green coat. What could it be?

Sam shifted his position to get a

better look, moved by sheer curiosity. The action was not pleasing to the stranger. With a lightning swing round, and with its furry tail lashing, it shinned up the smooth trunk of a beech tree and gained a low branch, from which post of observation it stared down at Sam.

The boy looked up at the stranger in real amazement. He went right up to the tree and raised his hand, intending to take hold of the creature, which did not look so very formidable.

Then he had the surprise of his life. There was a scream of rage, followed by a scuffle, and the lad started back wildly as a sharp claw tore his cheek. The weight of the attacker bore the lad back. He stepped aside, fighting to get rid of his assailant, but tripped, and went rolling with the enraged animal on top of him, tearing at his face, ripping his coat and screaming at him. Sam clutched, thinking he had got his enemy, but he had only secured a bit of fur. There was a snarl close to his ear, and then a flurry and scurry in the branches of the beech, and the angry creature was away.

Sam picked himself up slowly. He was ready to jump out of his skin with fright. A horny beechnut hit him on the head and he turned and ran.

Panting after his run, he gained his home in the village. He was late for supper, and his mother was put out, but the good soul forgot her vexation when she saw the boy's damaged face.

There was plenty of talk at Little Bilcombe. Some said the savage beast which had attacked Sam was a wild pig. That theory was promptly dismissed. There were no wild pigs. It might have been a cat. Sam

sniffed and said it might have been a wandering elephant. Temperly Wood fell into sad disrepute. People ceased to regard it as a useful short cut anywhere. It was left alone, and this suited the mysterious visitor down to the ground.

The plain fact was that the unknown resident in the thick recesses of the wood was no other than a young specimen of the Chinese Giant Panda. About the size of a fox, it looked something like a bear. Its ears were little tufts of black fur set in a round, brownish head, and the dark fur round its eyes gave it the appearance of having been in a particularly ferocious scrap. To add to the quaint effect, its paws curled inward like hands.

How the Panda got there was fairly simple, though not so much so that anybody in the neighbourhood guessed the truth.

It had been brought over in a tramp steamer from Shanghai, for one of the Lascar crew had kept it as a pet. As the ship lay in dock, the Panda had struck for liberty, since the confined hold did not satisfy its roving nature. It had managed to get ashore from boat to boat, then gained a wharf, and after that the region of dockside streets.

How it passed muster is a puzzle. People who spotted it slinking along by the houses thought that it was a prowling cat. It glided on, reaching the country at last, where it felt more at home, and eventually reaching the dim sanctuary of Temperly Wood. It had not been used to hot climates and consequently the chill of winter did not worry it overmuch.

It ranged the whole district. It could, and did, live on the country. Missing chickens were put down to Reynard's account; raids on barns

and fold yards to the rats. And it discovered perfectly satisfactory shelter in the empty rooms of Sudley Grange, the long deserted house to which Temperly Wood rightly belonged.

This derelict house is part of the story, for even before the amazing adventure of Sam there had been weird happenings in the old domicile. There were many sceptics as to the place being haunted, but, anyway, they kept the echoing pile at a distance. Extraordinary noises had

conscious in the densest part of the wood. His gun was by his side, and he seemed to have been pretty badly handled. He explained that something had suddenly gone for him, catching him by the shoulder and half-smothering him. What it was he had no more notion than the man in the moon.

The papers got wind of the affair, and for the first time Temperly Wood became famous. There were those who declared that some immense



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been heard ; it was said that something had been seen peeping out of one of the windows.

John Travers, the farmer of Little End, who had a penchant for looking round, armed with an antique fowling piece, alone stood out, and used to tramp through the wood and past the tenantless stronghold of evil reputation.

A few months after Sam's discomfiture, the farmer was found un-

animal, very likely a left-over from Noah's Ark, was hiding in the wood.

The creature grew bigger and bigger in public estimation as time went on. People were far from dreaming that the cause of all the trouble was a relatively harmless little Chinese Panda, who found the living good and the old house not so bad.

As to the dilapidated house, well there was nothing doing. Stubbs, the agent at Bindings, seldom referred

to it. He knew nobody in his senses would dream of taking it. For one thing it would cost a mint of money to repair it, for the ceilings were always falling, and the spiders had things pretty well all to themselves.

But the house was taken at last, and by no other than an astute old professor who spotted the ruin one day when trudging through the countryside. He was much taken by the beauty of the district, and would have made no bones as to price. As it was, he got the whole property for a mere song, and he had the residence made habitable, with fresh floorings where the planks were rotted away.

The professor was a man of the early morning, and one summer day, long ere the first cock had heralded the sunrise, the secret of the place was made manifest to the learned savant as he sallied out into the dewy garden. He caught sight of a fleck of brownish fur in the tall grass of the meadow, which was cut off from the roseroy by a trim fence.

The fleck was the Panda. The animal crept out of concealment and came sidling up to the professor, whose

interest and sympathy were unbounded.

He knew what it was. He had often speculated about the species. Here was the creature which had terrified Sam and left a stout farmer flat on the earth like a hewn log.

The professor knew the animal's name. Possibly this fact warmed the heart of the Panda towards the professor. Anyway, it listened kindly as the learned man talked to it, and then to testify its appreciation it rubbed its head against the professor's rumpled trousers.

They were friends. The Panda returned to the house and took a saucer of milk. It really liked human companionship, and as a stowaway on the tramp in the confined quarters of the Lascar, it had never been unfriendly.

Once again the old house came into the papers, and so did Temperly Wood. The Zoological Society was ever so much interested and its members came down in parties, but the professor declined to send the Panda to a zoo. One does not part with a friend.

AN ODEFUL TRIBUTE TO THE ESTEEMED COMPANIONFUL PAPERS

BY HURREE SINGH

The "Magnet" and the "Gem" are fine ;
I chant their praises songfully ;
They both unite to keep us bright,
And gay when things go wrongfully.
The stories of our worthy school
Are written with some skilfulness.
When troubles come and we are glum
They nobly fill the billfulness !

The Famous Five are all alive
With every playful prankfulness ;
In work and play they lead the way,
And take the frontful rankfulness.
We ever seek to shield the weak,
And fight their battles proudly ;
Then, when the fray has cleared away,
We laugh both long and loudly.

Terrific are the penful powers
Of Sahib Richards, Frankfully.
With eager joy the British boy
Devours his stories thankfully.
And Martin Cliff describes each tiff
With much amazing mirthfulness ;
If cads condemn the good old "Gem,"
We'll wipe them off the earthfulness !

Long may we read of feastful feed ;
Of goals obtained with kickfulness ;
Of japeful larks on gay young sparks,
To whom we give the lickfulness.
Whoever looks for ripping books
To make the hours fly dancefully,
Should never fail to read each tale,
And order them advancefully !



INDEX

	PAGE
Amazing Proceedings of Timothy Tupper, The <i>Story by Owen Conquest</i>	49
Billy Bunter's Bike! <i>Story by Bob Cherry</i>	209
Billy Bunter's Postal Order. <i>Poem by Johnny Bull</i>	194
Case of the Beak's Black Eye, The <i>Story by Martin Clifford</i>	23
Crazy Week at St. Jim's! <i>Article by Monty Lowther</i>	21
False Witness! <i>Story by Martin Clifford</i>	135
Ferndale Recruit, The <i>Story by Charles Hamilton</i>	183
Fighting the Flames! <i>Story by Martin Clifford</i>	151
Ghosts of Greyfriars. <i>Article by Tom Brown</i>	195
Greyfriars Portrait Gallery, The	221
Greyfriars School Song	222
Greyfriars versus St. Jim's—And You're the Ref.! <i>Feature</i>	67
Grundy's Dream. <i>Poem</i>	149
Jimmy Silver. <i>Poem by the Rookwood Rhymester</i>	134
Laughing Outlaw, The <i>Story by Ralph Redway</i>	105
Music Hath Charms! <i>Story by Frank Richards</i>	9
Mystery of the Broken Fishing-Rod, The <i>Detective Kerr Investigates</i>	147
Odeful Tribute to the Esteemed Companionful Papers, An <i>Poem by H. Singh</i>	231
Ode to Horace Coker, An <i>Poem by Dick Penfold</i>	116
Plates in Colour :	
D'Arcy's Daring Rescue!	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Saving His Enemy!	<i>Facing p. 112</i>
Public Benefactor No. 1! <i>Story by Owen Conquest</i>	122
Referee's Decisions, The <i>Solution to Feature on Page 67</i>	121
Remove Football Team, The <i>Poem</i>	66
Rip Van Winkle at Greyfriars. <i>Article by Bob Cherry</i>	117
St. Jim's Portrait Gallery, The	150
Sir Fulke's Warning! <i>Story by Frank Richards</i>	69
Solution to The Mystery of the Broken Fishing-Rod	181
Statistics for Schoolboys! <i>Article by Harry Manners</i>	207
Terror of the Wood, The <i>Story by Clive R. Fenn</i>	228
Tuckshop Tragedy, The <i>Poem by Dick Penfold</i>	197
When Tubby Sat Tight! <i>Story by Owen Conquest</i>	198
With Our Compliments <i>By Harry Wharton</i>	3



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 Mix the Self-Raising flour, salt and Suet with cold water to a stiff paste. Roll out thin, and spread over with jam, marmalade or golden syrup. Roll over, pinch top and bottom edges together. Dip pudding cloth in boiling water, flour it, and wrap round pudding, tie ends with string. Steam for 2 hours. Sufficient for 4 to 6 persons.



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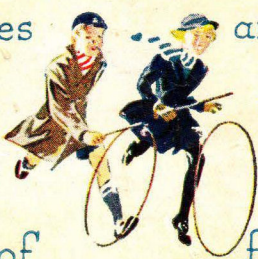
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