

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

The **NELSON LEE**

LIBRARY *AND ST. FRANKS*
MAGAZINE. **2D**



The GHOSTS of GLENTHORNE MANOR

An Enthralling Long Complete Xmas Story of the Boys of St. Frank's.
SPECIAL XMAS No. of the MAG, containing entertaining
CONJURING TRICKS, PUZZLES, XMAS STORIES AND
ARTICLES.



It was a long, wraith-like figure, with a hooded cowl over its head. And the spectral presence moved slowly and ominously towards the tense watchers.



The GHOSTS of GLENTHORNE MANOR!

An Amazing and Amusing
Xmas Story of the Boys of
St. Frank's.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY AT GLENTHORNE MANOR.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH wore a worried frown.

"Can't make it out!" he said anxiously. "Nearly six o'clock, and not a sign of 'em! Something's happened, you chaps. Where's Archie? Why doesn't he get his pater to send some telegrams?"

"No need to get the wind up," exclaimed Church. "You know what girls are. They said they'd be here to lunch, but that's nothing. Perhaps they won't come till to-morrow."

"Or the next day!" added McClure cheerfully.

Handforth frowned.

"None of your sarcastic remarks, my lad," he said severely. "Irene and Marjorie and Doris are the only three girls who haven't arrived. They promised to be here by lunch-time to-day, and they haven't turned up. And now it's dark as pitch, and nearly dinner-time! Something must have happened!"

"I know!" said Church. "They changed their minds!"

"Or lost the train!" suggested McClure.

But Handforth wouldn't be consoled by such commonplace explanations as these. He wasn't particularly worried about Doris Berkeley or Marjorie Temple. His thoughts were mainly for Irene Manners—Handy

having a particular regard for this fair-haired, blue-eyed damsel.

The three leading lights of the Moor View School had failed to arrive at Glenthorne Manor for Archie's big Christmas party. All the others guests had come, with the exception of a few aunts, uncles, and elderly friends, who didn't really count, according to the juniors.

It was a big, merry party.

A goodly number of St. Frank's Fourth-Formers were included among the guests. Even Willy & Co. of the Third were conspicuous, and there were quite a number of girl guests in addition to the Moor View contingent.

Reggie Pitt and his chums were delighted to become re-acquainted with Tommy Watson's sister, Violet, and Christine's sister, Agnes. Both these girls were pretty and attractive, and their brothers were using all their influence at home to have them sent to the Moor View School for the new term.

Ethel Church was in the party, too—much to Handforth's dismay. For Ethel was very much of a tomboy, and she had already struck up a friendship with Ena Handforth. Edward Oswald could see trouble brewing if Ethel ever came to school in the vicinity of St. Frank's. Even Church himself was dubious about the idea, for Ethel was inclined to tease her brother at every meeting

Colonel Glenthorne and Mrs. Glenthorne were in no way perturbed by the non-arrival of Irene & Co. When Archie anxiously spoke to his esteemed pater and mater on the subject, they smiled indulgently, and informed him that the young ladies would turn up all in good time.

Handforth was pacing up and down in the big lounge hall, where an enormous log fire blazed and crackled with old-fashioned Yuletide cheer. And Church and McClure stood by the fire resignedly. Most of the other schoolboy guests were amusing themselves in the Tudor room—a big, oak-panelled apartment which had been expressly set aside by the host for the St. Frank's fellows. Here they could shout and caper and be themselves to their heart's content. In all other parts of the Manor the boys were expected to behave with decorum.

"So here you are, what?" exclaimed Archie, lounging elegantly into the hall and catching sight of Handforth & Co. "News, dear old chappies! In fact, somewhat priceless information concerning Marjorie."

"Marjorie?" repeated Handforth. "What about Irene?"

"The pater has just received a telegram from Irene herself, old thing," replied Archie. "She says that she and Doris are absolutely and positively trickling down by train. And they'll arrive in time for dinner. Rather fruity, what?"

"In time for dinner!" echoed Handforth quickly. "That means they're coming by the express. The train gets in at 6.35."

"Absolutely!" beamed Archie. "A squad of chauffeurs have been instructed to dash off with the family limousine. Before seven, laddie, the dear girls will be joining the gay throng!"

"Thank goodness!" said Church. "Now that's settled, we can go off to the Tudor room and——"

"Blow the Tudor room!" interrupted Handforth, pulling out his watch. "Three minutes past six! Good egg! We've got tons of time to dash along to the station. Let's meet the girls in!"

"A somewhat ripe and juicy scheme, but you appear to ignore the fact that snow is flowing down somewhat lustily," said Archie. "I mean to say, the good old grounds are smothered in about nine or ten inches, and the sky is emptying itself absolutely like anything."

"Blow the snow!" said Handforth crisply. "In fact, I'm glad of it! Christmas isn't Christmas without a lot of snow. This is real seasonable weather, and we'll have a tramp to the station."

Church and McClure looked at Archie appealingly.

"I like being polite, and all that, but what's the use?" asked Church. "The girls are coming straight here by car from the

station, and it seems a bit unnecessary for us to get ourselves all smothered——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "Shove your coats on and get ready!"

"Gadzooks!" said Archie, adjusting his monocle. "Why all this frightful speed, laddies? The old bean is somewhat active this evening. I mean, I've just thought of something. Why not whizz down in the Daimler saloon? So much cleaner and drier, don't you know?"

McClure looked at Archie strangely.

"Sometimes," he said, "you're almost human!"

"I mean to say," protested Archie. "That observation, old cherub, is somewhat inclined to be personal. However, we'll let it pass. We'll let it drift away. And now, how about it? Do I order the good old Daimler, or what do you suggest?"

"Order it, fathead!" said Handforth promptly.

And while Archie ordered it, somewhat shocked at being addressed so impolitely, Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey and one or two other Fourth-Formers strolled along from the Tudor room.

"Hallo, what's the bustle?" asked Reggie. "Why this thushness? Why the dashing into overcoats?"

"Of course, I expected you chaps to butt in—you would!" growled Handforth. "Irene & Co. arrive by the 6.35. We're going to meet 'em. Archie's just ordered the saloon."

"Good!" said Reggie. "We'll all go!"

CHAPTER II.

MEETING THE GIRLS.



FERRIS, the staid and portly family butler, stood by while seven or eight juniors passed out through the open doorway and down the snow-swept steps. On the terrace the huge Daimler saloon was waiting.

"I trust you will be back in time for dinner, Master Archibald?" said Ferris severely.

"Oh, rather! Leave it to me, old shadow!" said Archie. "Absolutely! Before you can have time to turn round we shall be back on the old spot with the trio of fair maidens!"

Ferris looked doubtful. He rather disapproved of the Manor being overrun by schoolboys and schoolgirls, and he never lost an opportunity of letting his feelings show themselves. But as the young people didn't care a straw about Ferris' feelings, not much harm was done.

The party went off in the saloon—laughing, merry and gay. There was plenty of time to get to the station and back before

dinner. And this little trip had just come right to fill up a slack half-hour.

"It's a good thing the girls are coming to-day," remarked Tommy Watson. "The party's complete now, or will be soon. We're going to have some fine old times this Christmas."

"Rather!" agreed Jack Grey. "It's three days to Christmas yet, but there's tons of things to do. If the river's all right we'll go skating to-morrow. And don't forget you've got to come down to Grey Towers, in Berkshire, for the last week of the holidays."

"Before that we shall spend a week in London—at Lord Dorrimore's place," said Church. "Pantomimes and theatres, you know. I say, this Christmas is going to be pretty packed."

"Indeed, a very full round of festive joys had been planned. The leading lights of the St. Frank's Fourth were in for the time of their lives. And this present stay at Glenthorne Manor promised to be a fine beginning.

The weather was unusually seasonable.

Two or three days earlier a severe frost had set in, gripping the entire countryside. And now, as though to impress upon people the fact that Christmas was at hand, snow was descending in steady flakes. Indeed, it had been snowing for twenty-four hours continuously—a phenomenal fall.

The big saloon car forced its way through the powdery snow noiselessly, gliding over the feathery carpet with an airy, unreal motion. Having passed beyond the lodge gates, the car turned down the snow-swept main road into Bannington.

For Glenthorne Manor was situated just on the edge of the town. Although surrounded on three sides by glorious park lands, the Manor was practically in the town itself, the lodge gates being scarcely more than a stone's-throw from the high-class, residential part of the High Street.

The run to the station was quite a brief one, and when the Daimler pulled up outside the booking-office the limousine was already waiting, with one of Colonel Glenthorne's chauffeurs in attendance.

"It takes me to think of an idea like this," remarked Handforth, as he and the others tumbled out. "It's only right that the girls should be provided with an escort, when you come to think of it."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "By gad! It's snowing harder than ever, dear old machines! I mean, all this whiteness drifting about. Why, dash it, in some places the snow must be yards deep. Absolutely yards, don't you know!"

"You're right, young gent!" observed a porter, who was lounging near by.

"Eh? Speaking to me, old horse? Oh, rather!" said Archie, beaming upon the railwayman. "I'm right, what? Well, I

mean, all this snow! A chappie with only half an eye could dashed well see it!"

"There's drifts ten feet deep down the big cutting," said the porter. "It wouldn't surprise me if we had to stop the trains. They're all late as it is. They say as the 6-35 won't get in till after 7!"

"Oddslife!" ejaculated Archie. "That's a bit foul, isn't it? I say, dash it! Have we got to cool our jolly old heels in this bally station for over half an hour?"

"You'll be lucky if it ain't an hour!" said the porter grimly.

"Good gad! An hour!"

"And mebbe two hours!" added the man, as he walked off.

"An optimist—distinctly an optimist!" said Pitt drily. "Did you hear him, you chaps? Mebbe two hours! It strikes me they'll have to leave our dinners on the rack!"

"It's a good thing Fatty Little didn't come with us or we should never have held him down," grinned Tommy Watson. "But I say, the chap can't be right. Surely the train won't be an hour late?"

"Rot!" said Handforth promptly. "These porters are dotty! Fancy snow making a train late! Whoever heard of such piffle?"

But Handforth was compelled to change his views very shortly. For at a quarter to seven the train was still conspicuous by its absence. Somewhere up the snow-choked line it was still wending its way southward. At Bannington it hadn't even been heard of.

And when seven o'clock came the juniors were beginning to get a little tired and impatient. Handforth expressed all sorts of unnecessarily harsh views concerning the railway, not that it didn't deserve his caustic comments. There were other people on the platform, too, all anxiously waiting to meet people who were due to arrive on the 6.35.

"Disgraceful, that's what it is!" snorted Handforth for the fiftieth time. "Imagine it! A whacking great train delayed by a bit of snow! It's only an excuse—these railway companies are capable of anything!"

"There goes a bell," said Church suddenly.

A bell was certainly ringing. It was one of those familiar clangs which anybody can hear on a railway-station. A bustle was observed near the signal-box at the end of the platform. And after a while an official came running along to the station-master's office. The latter gentleman had just emerged, and the pair conversed for some moments.

"I'm going to ask him," said Handforth grimly.

He marched up to the station-master with a bold stride.

"Look here, what's happened to that giddy train?" he demanded. "Any sign of it yet, or have we got to hang about here all night?"

The station-master frowned.

"I don't know about all night, young man, but it'll probably be two or three hours before that train gets in," he replied curtly.

"Two or three hours!" yelled Handforth.

"Yes, my lad—two or three hours!" retorted the station-master. "There's been a snow slide in the big cutting, and the 6.35's in the middle of it. She's snowed right up, and nobody knows when she'll get free!"

CHAPTER III.

SNOWED UP!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE looked rather startled.

"Oh, but dash it!" he protested. "I mean to say, and all that, dash it! Snowed up, and absolutely buried in the cutting. Oddslife! The position appears to be distinctly curdled!"

"Well, it's no good—we can't do anything," said Pitt practically. "We can't go along the line and pull the train in, can we? We can only wait until she comes."

"But it may be hours!" grumbled Watson. "Look here, we'd better go back to the Manor for dinner. The limousine will wait until the train comes in. There's no sense in us hanging about here—"

"You rotter!" interrupted Handforth. "Are we going to leave those three girls snowed up in the cutting? Where's your chivalry? Where's your gentlemanly feeling?"

"Oh, blow! Watson's right!" put in Church. "We can't wait here for hours, I suppose? I'm sorry for Irene and Co., but they're safe enough in the train, even if it is snowed up. It's an express, steam-heated, with a restaurant car, so they'll be comfortable enough. I vote we get back to the Manor."

"Hear, hear!" said McClure. "Dinner's at seven-thirty—we shall just be in time. Let's go!"

The other juniors agreed. Even Reggie Pitt could see that it would be a sheer waste of time to remain at the station. With the train snowed up in the cutting, there was no telling when it would arrive. Certainly the juniors would have time to have dinner in comfort, and come back again before the truant turned up. But Handforth was obstinate—as usual.

"I'm surprised!" he said, speaking in a pained voice, and looking at the others with a kind of pitiful expression. "I'm disappointed, too! You chaps call yourselves sportsmen—and you're willing to go off to dinner, leaving three helpless girls at the mercy of a snowstorm!"

"You dotty ass!" snorted Church. "Irene and Co. aren't the only ones—the train's full! And even if we do stop here, what can we do?"

"Do?" retorted Handforth. "Why, go to the rescue, of course!"

"What!"

"Go along to the cutting, and save the girls from their peril!" went on Handforth grimly. "That's what we'll do."

Pitt shook his head sadly.

"I've often heard that heat turns a chap's brain, but I never knew that snow would do it," he said with a sigh. "Poor old Handy! This is what comes of writing Trackett Grim stories. We shall have to take you along to see a specialist."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Well, while we're about it, a dozen specialists, what? One specialist might be enough for an ordinary lunatic, but, I mean, Handy, you know— Well, there you are!"

Handforth glared.

"All right—sneer as much as you like!" he said icily. "Who cares? I hope I'm above that sort of petty rot! We're going! Understand? We're going along to the cutting—it's only half a mile up the line. And the rest of you, can go and eat coke!"

"I hope we shall eat something more appetising!" chuckled Grey.

Church and McClure looked very uneasy. Without any telling, they knew that they were included in Handforth's significant "we." And now they casually edged their way towards the exit.

"Might as well be going," remarked Church carelessly. "You chaps ready? Come on, Mac—let's stroll outside—"

"Not much good strolling," said Pitt. "You'd better bunk for it!"

Handforth gazed at his chums fiercely.

"You do!" he roared. "By George! If you chaps desert me, I'll slaughter you later on! Come on—you're coming with me! We're going to rescue Irene and Co. from the snowdrift."

"But they're not in a snowdrift!" howled McClure.

"Well, the train is—and that's the same thing!"

"But what can we do?" demanded Church fiercely. "How the dickens can we help? Shall we take some ropes, and then tie 'em round the buffers of the engine and pull the train along? Or shall we push it from behind?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to chirrup to it!" suggested Reggie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a crowd of rotters!" snorted Handforth. "Come on, you chaps—we'll be off!"

"You've been off for ages!" sneered Church recklessly. "You can jolly well go alone, you fathead! And the sooner you get lost in a snowdrift, the better! You're mad!"

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "Mutiny! Take that, blow you!"

But before Handforth could start any fighting he was seized by Pitt and Watson and Tregellis-West and dragged back.

"Lemme go!" he gasped furiously.

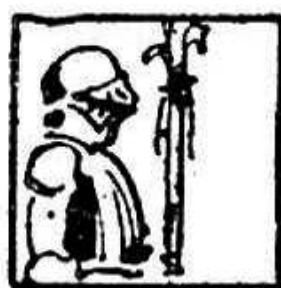
"Not likely!" said Pitt. "No brawling on the platform, my lad! Besides, this is Christmas-time! We can't allow fighting during the festive season! This is the time of cheer and good-will towards all men!"

"These fatheads ain't men!" panted Handforth, struggling.

"They will be one day—and that's the same thing," said Pitt. "Take my advice, and be pals. Go on—kiss and be friends!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ARMOURY.



THE train pulled in triumphantly.

Station officials bustled about with an air of proud victory, and the platform was soon alive with freshly-alighted passengers. For, being so close upon Christmas, the passenger traffic was unduly heavy.

The juniors kept their eyes sharply open for Irene and Co.

Handforth dodged up and down the platform, dashing at every young lady he

BOOKS OF SPORT, SCHOOL AND ADVENTURE

A Grand Budget of Christmas Reading for All!

The Boys' Friend Library

No. 741. THE LUCK AGAINST HIM.

An Absorbing, Long Complete Story of Professional Soccer. By JOHN W. WHEWAY.

No. 742. THE OUTCAST OF ST. BASIL'S.

A Splendid Tale of Schoolboy Life and Adventure. By HENRY ST. JOHN.

No. 743. THE RIVAL SPORTSMEN.

A Superb Yarn of Athletics and Adventure. By VICTOR NELSON.

No. 744. FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS.

A First-rate Story of Two British Actors in England and America. By ATHERLEY DAUNT.

The Sexton Blake Library

No. 359. NEXT OF KIN.

A Story of Absorbing Mystery and Clever Deduction, with Special XMAS Interest.

No. 360. THE CASE OF THE JADE-HANDLED KNIFE.

Another Splendid Story, dealing with the Further Adventures of DR. HUXTON RYMER.

No. 361. IN THE LAND OF THE RIFFS;

Or, Sexton Blake, Sheikh.

A Powerful Story of Detective Work and Adventure in Spanish Morocco, Introducing Cavendish Doyle of the Secret Service, etc., etc.

No. 362. THE CASE OF THE SLEEPING PARTNER.

A Most Fascinating Tale of Intrigue, Mystery, and Adventure. By the Author of "The Brixham Manor Mystery," etc., etc.

Now on Sale.

Price Fourpence Each!

"Don't!" murmured Church, with a slight shiver.

"Well, considering it's Christmas, I'll let 'em off!" said Handforth generously. "But only on condition they promise to come with me down to the cutting——"

"Great Scott!" shouted Grey, pointing. "The train's coming, you chaps!"

They all stared down the line eagerly. And, sure enough, the headlights of the express were in sight. While the juniors had been arguing the train had extricated itself from the drift.

"Good egg!" said Pitt heartily. "Just in time to avert murder!"

caught sight of—and causing many of these latter damsels to regard him with open suspicion. But he couldn't see any sign of the three Moor View girls.

Pitt and the rest, more practical, stationed themselves near the exit, where they could keep an eye on the string of new arrivals. But the entire throng passed out through the booking-office, and Irene and Co. were nowhere to be seen.

"Somewhat drab and mottled, as it were," observed Archie anxiously. "I mean to say, the dear old things absolutely haven't come! A bit thick, what? Especially after the good old wire!"

"Just like girls!" grunted Watson. "They send a giddy telegram, and then miss the train! My sister's always doing it!"

"Sisters will do anything!" said Church, with feeling.

Handforth came up, looking blank.

"I say, here's a go!" he exclaimed with concern. "I hope nothing's happened! Perhaps they got out at the wrong station by mistake——"

"Or fell out on the line," suggested Pitt. "Or perhaps they got buried in a snow-drift! You never know with these girls, Handy! Why not go back to the cutting and make a search?"

Handforth glared.

"This isn't a matter to joke about!" he said sternly. "Something awful's happened! Irene sent that wire, and she and the others haven't come. There's been an accident or something. I tell you it's awful!"

"Tragic!" agreed Pitt. "We've been brought here on a fool's errand, and we'll be half an hour late for dinner. If that isn't awful and tragic, what is? These girls ought to be lectured. You can never trust any of 'em—they're as changeable as a giddy weather-vane!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Well, how about the old trickling business? That is to say, what about dashing into the limousines and saloons and whizzing back? The good old vest is getting somewhat slack!"

So the juniors returned to the waiting cars—after ascertaining that the next train was not due until 9.45—which meant that it would probably crawl in at about 10.30. On this snowy night, all trains were at sixes and sevens.

Handforth refused to be consoled during the drive home. The other fellows accepted the logical view that Irene and Co. had missed the train—by no means a startling thing for young ladies to do. But Handforth insisted that something disastrous had happened.

"It's no good—you can't kid me!" he declared. "Irene sent that wire about catching the train. Once Irene says a thing, she means it! She's a girl of firm purpose."

At the Manor the juniors ran up the snowy steps, and burst into the cheery warmth of the great lounge hall. It was very bright and inviting in there, after the wildness of the night.

"Hallo, Ted!" sang out a familiar voice, as Handforth strode in first. "Sorry we sent you to the station for nothing!"

Handforth paused in his tracks and stared. And the other juniors followed his example. For there, in the hall, calm and smiling, were Irene Manners, Doris Berkeley, and Marjorie Temple!

"Then—then you came, after all!" exclaimed Handforth eagerly.

The girls were attired in their evening frocks, and looked as though they had not stirred out for hours. There was no indication that they had just arrived from a railway journey.

"Of course we came!" laughed Irene, as she shook hands. "But just after sending that wire, we found out that my pater wouldn't be using his car—so we came down by road. Jolly, wasn't it?"

"Oh, stunning!" said Pitt, grinning. "Handy thought you'd got lost in an avalanche, and we had to hold him back by sheer force. He was going to search the whole line from here to London!"

Handforth was looking rather red.

"You sent another wire, of course?" he said. "Just like the post-office people to keep it hanging about!"

Irene and Co. smiled.

"Of course we didn't send another wire," grinned Doris. "Why waste a shilling? We just changed our minds—that's all!"

All the juniors except Handforth were amused—in a rueful kind of way. Just because of a feminine whim, they had been kept cooling their heels on the platform at Bannington Station for nearly an hour! Very eloquently the fact was brought home to them that girls were changeable creatures.

"Just changed their minds—that's all!" murmured Reggie, in a confidential whisper to Handforth. "There you are, my son! What about your pet theories? Once Irene says a thing, she means it! Poor old Handy! One day you'll realise that girls are privileged to change their minds as often as you biff old Church and McClure!"

Handforth grunted, and stalked off. He felt annoyed. The other juniors felt annoyed, too. But they were soon as good-tempered as ever again. The party was now complete, and all anxiety was at an end.

After dinner there was a kind of quiet spell. The gentlemen were smoking in the library, or playing in the billiards-room. The ladies had retired to the drawing-room.

And as the Christmas festivities were not really due to commence for another day or two, the juniors felt rather at a loose end. They gathered together in the Tudor room, where they could be free and easy.

"Don't worry—the party hasn't got going yet," said Pitt cheerily. "We don't start the real jollifications until Christmas Day. But there'll be plenty to do in the meantime."

"Rather!" said Patty Little heartily. "Great pancakes! The grub here is the best I've ever sampled! As for the chocolates and fruits, and all the other things——"

"Hallo! What's the matter with Church?" interrupted Handforth curiously. "What's wrong with the ass? Look at him!"

Church had just entered, and he was certainly looking a bit shaky.



And in the flickering light, casting long shadows, were three figures.

"I say, you chaps, there's something queer about the armoury!" he said, in a husky voice. "I was in there just now, and I heard all sorts of moans!"

"Moans!"

"Yes, and creakings and whinings!" said Church, glancing uneasily over his shoulder. "I can tell you, it gave me the creeps! I believe that rummy old place is haunted!"

CHAPTER V. VERY STRANGE!



LYSSES ADAMS SPENCER
laughed
sceptically.

"Aw, gee! Where do you get that stuff?" he asked. "Say, you can't pull that kind of dope on me."

brother! There's nothing in all these haunted chambers! That stuff's the bunk!"

The American boy in the Fourth was always very emphatic in his opinions, and quite frequently he got into minor trouble on that account. Ulysses had an idea that his opinion was worth that of ten other fellows—just because he was an American.

"You can call it what you like!" growled Church. "But there's something uncanny about that armoury! I went in there to look for my sister, and I found the place empty. And I heard moans and groans coming from the very walls themselves. I can tell you, it shook me a bit."

"What kind of moans and groans?" asked Pitt curiously.

"I don't know—but they sounded horrible."

"Say, you make me tired!" growled Adams. "You'd best can that line of bull right now! If we had a house like this over in New York, we'd sure pull it down and build something snappy!"

"Where's Archie?" asked Pitt. "He'll be able to help us here."

"Oh, he's around some place, I guess," said Ulysses. "Say, that guy's too lazy to live! Maybe he's taking a nap—"

"What-ho!" said Archie, strolling in at that moment. "All the good old lads gathered together, what? I just floated in to ask if any of you old tulips would care for a dance, or something frightfully exciting of that sort. Just a preliminary caper, what?"

"Never mind the caper!" said Pitt. "Church has just heard groans and moans in the armoury. Is the place haunted, Archie? Don't evade the question. Let's know the horrid truth at once!"

Archie stiffly adjusted his monocle.

"Haunted!" he repeated. "The armoury? My dear old chunk of gingerbread, what absolute rot! No offence, of course, but I mean to say! Dash it all, we haven't been haunted for years!"

"Does that mean the Manor used to be haunted?" asked Buster Boots.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie proudly. "That is to say slightly, old thing. Well, it's like this. The Manor is frightfully ancient—the ancestral home of the fighting Glenthornes, and all that sort of rot! I mean, Oliver Cromwell absolutely slept here once, and the family history has a kind of rumour that the dear old boy positively admitted daylight into several priceless Cavaliers. This Cromwell chappie was a bit of a dashed goer when it came to sword-play, and all that sort of bloodthirsty business!"

"We're not talking about Cromwell!" said Pitt patiently. "And we don't want to hear about your giddy family history. When the manor was haunted, what sort of ghost roamed about? When did he walk?"

Archie scratched his fair hair.

"As a matter of fact, laddie, the good old apparition didn't precisely walk," he replied. "As far as I can understand, he used to flow about the place like a dashed goldfish in a bowl! That is to say, the good old spectre floated up and downstairs, through keyholes and what not, leaving a kind of brimstone effect in the rear. A somewhat foul odour of vaults, and all that sort of stuff."

"And didn't he ever moan?" grinned Tommy Watson.

"Not absolutely," said Archie. "A sigh or two, perhaps, but the Glenthorne ghost was too dashed polite to indulge in actual moans. I mean, the pater wouldn't have one of those roisy phantoms at any price! We Glenthornes bar anything boisterous in the ghost line, you know."

"Well, there's something queer about the armoury, anyhow," said Church obstinately. "I wish you chaps would come along and listen! I'm not nervous as a rule, but those sounds made my hair crinkle!"

"You giddy baby!" said Handforth curtly. "Fancy being scared over nothing! We'll all go to the armoury and show you up! Come on, you chaps—let's investigate the mystery!"

Full half the juniors crowded out of the Tudor room, went across the hall, and then down one of the wide corridors towards the armoury. Just before they reached this particular apartment, they noticed one of the maids hurrying towards them in a panic-stricken kind of way. She was a small, delicate girl, and quite refined-looking.

"Hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Archie, adjusting his eyeglass. "Good gad! What's all this, Lucy? What's the hurry? I mean to say, you look somewhat shaken, old dear!"

"Oh, Master Archie, I'm frightened!" exclaimed the girl, in a whisper. "I—I was just passing the armoury, and I heard—oh, I don't know! I can't describe what I heard! But I'm sure the house is haunted!"

CHAPTER VI.

LOOKING FOR THE GHOST.



THE juniors looked at one another curiously. Here, strangely enough, was independent corroboration of Church's peculiar story. The girl was genuinely scared—as the Fourth-Formers could see at a glance.

She was Lucy Minns, the daughter of the deaf old lodge-keeper. Minns had been in the Glenthorne service from boyhood, and Lucy herself had been born in the lodge. She was not exactly a real maidservant. She held an excellent position as lady's maid to a countess. But she was home for the Christmas holidays, and had willingly consented to help with the extra work at the Manor.

"Oh, but come!" said Archie. "I mean, come, come! As some of these frightfully siangy chaps say, be good enough to draw it mild, Lucy, old peach! I mean, draw it easy. What about this haunting business? You haven't heard these dashed moans before, what?"

Lucy Minns hesitated.

"No, Master Archie," she replied. "It's the first time I've heard anything in the house. But down at the lodge— Oh, I've hardly slept a wink for two nights past! The lodge is haunted!"

"How? In what way?" asked Pitt.

"I don't know—I can't tell you!" replied the girl. "Father laughs at me, but he's so deaf that he can't hear much. Nothing disturbs him at night. But I'm almost afraid to go to bed!"

The juniors pressed her for further information, but she seemed reluctant to enlarge upon the hints she had given. Indeed, she requested the juniors to forget what she had already told them.

"Perhaps I'm silly," she declared. "The housekeeper says it's all imagination, and perhaps she's right."

Lucy hurried off without another word, and the juniors looked, after her retreating form, curiously uneasy.

"I don't quite like that," growled Handforth. "The girl's scared stiff, you know! Afraid to go to bed! She oughtn't to sleep down in the lodge if she's nervous. Of course, I don't believe in ghosts—never did."

"Well, let's examine the armoury," put in Jack Grey.

The juniors opened the door of the great, gloomy apartment and passed in. There were no lights switched on, but faint moonbeams came through the tall, old-fashioned windows. The snow had now stopped, and the moon was trying to shine over the whitened countryside.

"Ugh! It's a bit creepy in here!" muttered Tommy Watson uneasily. "Let's switch the lights on."

"Not likely!" whispered Handforth. "That'll ruin all the ghostly effect! We'll stay here—"

"Listen!" breathed Church. "What—what's that?"

"Eh? What's what? Oh, you mean—"

Handforth broke off, for he, too, heard the unaccountable sound which had occasioned Church's remark. All the others listened just as intently. Faintly, mysteriously, a kind of continuous groan sounded in the air. Nobody could say exactly where the sound came from. But it quivered in the atmosphere, mysterious and eerie.

The armoury itself was a creepy apartment by moonlight.

It was an enormous room, with a high, domed roof. A gallery ran all round the walls. In the corners, and in other places, fully mounted suits of armour were stand-

ing about, looking like grim, ghostly sentinels in that uncertain moonlight.

The walls were smothered with guns and muskets and pistols, and, indeed, firearms of every description and every period. There were swords, lances, rapiers, and other weapons of war. And every one of these death-dealing implements had been handled in battle by a Glenthorne.

The family slogan was no idle one—"The Fighting Glenthornes!" For centuries, Archie's ancestors had been in the forefront of every conflict in England's history. Archie's two elder brothers were both officers in the Guards, but were unable to attend this family gathering, as they were away on foreign service.

The armoury, in all truth, was a remarkable museum of the family war relics. A coat of mail used at Agincourt—a breast-plate from the field of Worcester—and such like trophies, were prominent in the collection. The Glenthorne history could be traced down through all its glorious past by a tour through the armoury.

And at night, without the lights turned on, the place seemed filled with the spirits of all those warriors who had fought for their king and country.

And that queer, uncanny moan was a bit unnerving.

"It seems to be coming from beyond the further wall!" whispered Reggie Pitt. "What's on the other side of it, Archie?"

"That wall?" said Archie. "Well, the fact is, I don't absolutely remember— Ah! But wait! The good old brain begins to stir! Of course. The picture-gallery. Absolutely!"

"Then we'd better slip out of here, and investigate the picture-gallery," said Pitt grimly. "We might be able to fathom the mystery from the other side. Come on!"

The others were ready enough to leave the armoury. The place was already getting on their nerves. But what had the picture-gallery in store?

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET OF THE PICTURE-GALLERY.



N OBODY was about when the little party of juniors passed out of the armoury into the corridor. The big house was still quiet—the gentlemen being at billiards or in the smoking-room, and the ladies in the drawing-room. The west wing, where the juniors were searching, was practically deserted.

"Look here, why not wait until to-morrow?" suggested Church. "We can't do much at night-time, and the others will be wondering where we've got to."

"Yes, and I promised to see my sister

after dinner," said Watson. "Suppose we chuck up this game?"

"Rats!" declared Handforth. "You're getting nervy! Fancy being afraid of a fatheaded ghost! We've started on this hunt, and we'll jolly well keep it up!"

"Hear, hear!" said Pitt. "I don't think there's much to be scared of. As a matter of fact, I've got a bit of a suspicion——"

"Listen!" interrupted Grey tensely.

They were approaching the picture-gallery, and those unearthly moaning sounds were now even clearer than before. The Fourth-Formers paused, looking at one another in the dimness of the moonlit corridor.

"Come on!" growled Reggie. "We'll settle this!"

He strode forward, took hold of the great double doors of the picture-gallery, and thrust them open. As he did so, a truly terrifying sound came out with full force. Those doors were of thick, solid oak, and had deadened the sounds within the gallery until they had become vague, and mysterious.

But this sudden move was illuminating.

Reggie Pitt pushed forward, and the other juniors crowded behind him. The picture-gallery was dark, except for a pair of candles burning up one of the far corners. And in the flickering light, casting long shadows, were three figures.

"Oh," said Pitt. "So you're the ghosts!"

"Ghosts!" echoed an impatient voice. "Who's looking for ghosts? Clear out of here, you giddy Fourth-Formers! This is our private affair! Just like your nerve to butt in!"

Handforth pushed his way to the front, and stared.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated. "My minor!"

"What did you expect to see—a tiger with four tails, or something?" asked Willy Handforth sarcastically. "I don't want to be personal, Ted, but your face worries me! Shove off, for goodness' sake! We're practising!"

"Practising!" said Edward Oswald blankly.

"Yes, for the waits," explained Chubby Heath.

"Waits!"

"You know—carol singing!" said Willy. "My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth. "Carol singing, by George!"

"No, carol singing by us!" said Willy blandly. "I'm playing the trombone, Chubby has got an old trumpet, and Owen minor is doing his best to blow the inside out of this flute!"

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"And we came here looking for ghosts!" he chuckled. "This only proves what the imagination can do, my sons! We heard the horrible sounds of this trombone coming through the armoury wall, and we immediately mistook 'em for groans!"

"Not such a mistake, either," grinned

Chubby. "Willy, give a sample! If these chaps don't call 'em groans, I'm a Dutchman. I never knew a trombone could make such a horrible, unearthly din!"

"What about your rotten trumpet?" roared Willy.

"Peace, little ones!" said Pitt gently. "Don't start scrapping before our very eyes! But if you must continue this painful torture, why not take your fiendish instruments to the middle of Bannington Moor? You'll kill every rabbit within a radius of ten miles!"

Willy sniffed.

"All right—you wait!" he threatened. "You wait until after bed-time to-night. We mean to sing carols under the windows! I've already got the first four bars of 'Good King Wenceslas,' and I'll get the rest, if you'll only buzz off!"

Chubby Heath stared.

"'Good King Wenceslas!'" he echoed blankly. "Why, I thought you were playing 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.' I was, anyway! No wonder we couldn't keep in tune!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I don't wish to be critical, old dears, but it sounded to me like a bally farmyard imitation, or something! I'll dashed well grab old Ferris by the ear, and get him to escort you to the cellars! I mean, we really need a few sound-proof apartments, by gad!"

"You leave our playing alone!" said Willy tartly. "I'll bet you couldn't do any better, anyway! We found these old trombones and things upstairs in a lumber-room, and we're going to use 'em! At midnight we shall go all round the house, singing carols."

"And five minutes after midnight you'll be three suitable candidates for hospital!" said Pitt grimly. "If you come howling under our window, my lads, you'll get a couple of wardrobes heaved at you!"

"And you'd better steer clear of my sister, too!" warned Church. "She's always ratty when she wakes up out of a sound sleep. She's quite liable to aim the fire-irons! The fender, as well!"

"We'll risk it!" said Willy complacently.

Handforth had a dreamy look in his eyes.

"Carols!" he murmured. "Singing outside the windows, by George! Why, it's like—it's like serenading! We can sing outside Irene's window, and—and——" He pulled himself up with a jerk, and tried to look unconcerned. "I've got an idea, you chaps!" he added hastily.

"An idea!" said Pitt. "You? Impossible!"

"It's a brain-wave!" declared Handforth. "Look here, why shouldn't we get up a carol-singing party to-night? Lanterns, a real band, and proper singing! I'll be the leader——"

"Why, you fathead, it's Willy's idea—not yours!" said Church.

"Oh, let him run on!" said Willy patiently. "He always pinches my ideas!"

But if he thinks he's going to do any carol singing——"

"Hold on!" said Pitt, with a chuckle. "After all, why shouldn't we? We'll give you the credit for it, Willy! You can call yourself the leader, if you like. But why not have some real, genuine waits?"

"A ripe and luscious scheme, laddie, but somewhat strenuous," objected Archie. "I mean to say, standing about in the good old snow, what? Without wishing to be pessimistic, I honestly believe that old Phipps will absolutely forbid the young master to participate!"

"Which only proves that Phipps is full of wisdom," said Pitt. "Don't you worry, Archie—we can get along without you. You go to bed, and we'll do our best to wake you up!"

Handforth minor didn't quite like the idea at first, but Pitt whispered soothing words in his ear, and the matter was arranged. The waits were apparently destined to be something exceptional.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHRISTMAS WAITS.



"THERE she goes!" murmured Reggie Pitt softly.

He sat up in bed, and listened to the deep, booming notes of an enormous grandfather's clock in the hall. The Manor was so quiet that the chiming could be distinctly heard.

It was eleven-thirty, and the waits had agreed to gather together down in the hall at eleven-forty-five. Nobody had been told of the impending disaster. At least, Archie regarded it as a disaster. He frankly declared that he wouldn't be answerable for the consequences.

But as Archie wasn't taking any part in the proceedings, he didn't worry so much. As a matter of fact, Archie was labouring under a bit of a misapprehension. He thought he wouldn't join the waits—but that was only what he thought. Actually, he was marked down as one of the star tenors.

Reggie Pitt nipped out of bed briskly. The great house was all quiet and still. Even the keenest billiard players among the gentlemen had retired at eleven. Colonel Glenthorne was a bluff, genial host, but he had strict ideas concerning late hours.

During the actual Christmas jollifications he would stretch a point, of course, and the festivities would probably continue into the small hours of the morning. But, strictly speaking, Christmas hadn't yet arrived.

And it was the ideal time for carol-singing.

Jack Grey sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and blinked. He shared this particular bedroom with Reggie Pitt, Tommy Watson, and

Sir Montie Tregellis-West. There were four fellows in each bed-room, on the average.

Glenthorne Manor was a huge, rambling old place, with so many bed-rooms that the schoolboy guests had frequently lost themselves in the various wings. The guests included over a dozen St. Frank's juniors.

Colonel Glenthorne frankly regarded this house-party as a gathering of young folks, and there were only a few grown-ups among the guests—close relatives of the family.

"Buck up!" said Reggie briskly. "Get a move on, my lad! You, too, Watson! And you'd better show a leg, Montie!"

Tregellis-West grimaced.

"Begad! This carol-singing isn't really necessary, is it?" he asked anxiously. "It seems to me that the weather will be frightfully cold outside—it will, really. Why not leave it till the mornin'?"

"No fear!" replied Reggie firmly. "The others will be down in the hall in ten minutes, and we mustn't disappoint them. And there's Archie to attend to. We need him badly—he's our best tenor."

"He'd rather give a tenner than turn out to-night!" grinned Watson.

"Archie's got a good voice, and we must have no mercy," said Pitt.

Five minutes later the four were dressed, and then they strolled silently downstairs to the hall. The remains of the big fire still glowed in the grate, and the picturesque old chimney-corner was still cosy and warm. Handforth and Co. had just arrived, and Ulysses Adams and Clarence Fellowes came down a moment later.

"Good!" said Pitt heartily. "All here except Archie! Tenors—baritones—and bases! I suppose you all remember your lines?"

"Of course we do!" said Handforth. "First of all, we're going to sing 'Good King Wenceslas,' then 'The First Noel,' and then——"

"I don't think we shall get past 'The First Noel'!" grinned McClure. "There's a limit to everybody's endurance, you know! But it's Christmas-time, and we might as well put the guests through it."

The juniors had practised for fully an hour before going up to bed, and although this wasn't a great amount of preparation, they knew their carols by heart, and that helped a lot. It had been decided to dispense with all musical instruments, except Jarrow's pet ukelele. It would be altogether too risky to chance the trombones and trumpets.

"Hallo! Are you chaps ready?" came a brisk voice from the stairs. "Good egg! Wonders will never cease! Even Ted's here!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "I was hoping these kids would sleep on, and forget all about the waits! It's a pity they were invited! I never knew fags could be such a nuisance!"

Willy Handforth bristled.

"Well, there's a nerve!" he said indignantly. "It's my idea to serenade the girls with carols, and you chaps not only pinch it, but try to push us off the earth! Where's your gratitude?"

"It's not a question of gratitude at all," said Pitt. "You ought to be thankful to us, my lad—we're shouldering the punishment that you'd have got! Do you think Irene and Co. are going to be grateful for the ghastly row we're preparing?"

"Well, there's nothing like being frank!" grinned Watson.

"You fellows had better tune up a bit while I dash upstairs to Archie," went on Pitt briskly. "See if you can't get that nasty rut out of your voice, Handy. It wants a steam roller, or something, to flatten it out!"

Pitt hurried off upstairs, and Archie Glen-thorne's peace was due to end.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIDNIGHT SERENADE.



ARCHIE occupied a bedroom with Fatty Little and Hubert Jarrow. When Reggie strode briskly in, Jarrow was just putting his tie on, and Fatty was snoring peacefully and contentedly. Archie himself lay in bed indulging in his usual forty.

"I thought so," said Pitt grimly. "Why the dickens didn't you rout that slacker out, Jarrow? He's our first tenor!"

Jarrow grinned.

"Well, the fact is, I tried, but it wouldn't work," he replied. "I mean, it's awfully hard work trying to arouse a fellow like Archie. He's such a slacker that he simply won't wake up. He just mumbles, and turns over, and drops off into another nap."

"I'll soon rouse him!" said Pitt relentlessly.

"Of course, you may be successful—there's no telling," said Jarrow. "I was thinking about trying a sponge—or even a handful of snow. These heavy sleepers oughtn't to be allowed. I mean, if every fellow in the Fourth was the same, we should have nothing but sleepers everywhere. We should be like a railway track, and these railways, you know, are frightfully long—"

"All right—cut it short!" interrupted Pitt. "I like you to chatter, Jarrow, old man, but there's a time for everything! Buzz down and tune up your giddy uke!"

The Fourth Form captain took Archie by the shoulder, and pulled him into a sitting position with one powerful jerk. Archie opened his eyes, looked startled, and yawned.

"Absolutely not!" he mumbled. "Desist, Phipps! Cease this wrestling with the young master! Dash it all, I absolutely won't allow such—"

"It isn't Phipps—and there's no cup of tea for you!" interrupted Pitt. "Nearly midnight, my son—time for the waits!"

"What-ho! The good old waits, what?" said Archie. "A frightfully sound scheme, but I was weighed only last week, laddie. Nearly ten stone, by gad! Somewhat bally serious, in fact!"

"I'm not talking about your silly weight, ass!"

"Oh, come! You distinctly referred to waits and measures and things!" yawned Archie. "And ten stone, you know! Why, dash it, I'm absolutely shoving on tissue at fifty-five miles an hour! This sort of thing has got to terminate! Phipps, in fact, has issued a solemn warning that I mustn't eat anything except dry toast and biscuits and all that sort of stuff! A somewhat foul and murky prospect for Christmas, what? I mean, all these dashed luxuries lurking about on sideboards and things, tempting a chappie to indulge the good old palate!"

"Blow the good old palate!" snorted Pitt. "Are you coming, or not?"

"Coming?" repeated Archie languidly. "Good gad! What a frightfully ridie suggestion, old night owl! Absolutely not! When I think of all this weight knocking about, I go absolutely dazed. Sleep, laddie, is the only cure! I mean, you may not be aware of it, but the jolly old bones are positively festooned with unnecessary chunks of solidity! Ten stone, by gad! Positively, old thing, I shudder!"

"And so you ought to shudder!" retorted Pitt sternly. "This shocking blubber of yours has all gathered in consequence of your laziness!"

"Really?" gasped Archie. "Oddslife! I mean to say—blubber! A somewhat stout word, laddie! I may be extensive, but, dash it, I'm not one of those frightful whales!"

"Unless you get out of bed quick, you'll be one long wail!" said Reggie impatiently.

"I'm getting fed-up, my son! We need you! The Christmas waits can't happen unless you come! In fact, instead of being waits, we're all waiting! Have mercy on us, Archie."

"Oh, well, of course, if you put it like that—"

"Without a tenor in the chorus, we shall be like a jazz band without a drum!" said Pitt. "I'll give you just ten more seconds, my son! There's plenty of snow on the window-sill, and it'll only take me a jiff to scoop up a couple of handfuls. How'd you like some down your back?"

Archie leapt out of bed with the agility of a grasshopper.

"Enough!" he said hastily. "Under the cires, old tyrant, I'll absolutely whizz down in a few dozen well assorted jiffs. But you'll have to excuse the jolly old vocal efforts. My voice is always somewhat dithery in the night watches!"

Pitt found it necessary to remain on guard until Archie was dressed. At the first opportunity, the dandy of the Fourth would have rolled back into bed again. But Pitt was hard-hearted. He even hauled Archie down

before the latter had straightened his neck-tie.

In the hall Hubert Jarrow was tuning up his ukele. Jarrow played the piano wonderfully—he could rattle off any tune by ear, once having heard it. And he was just as proficient with the “uke.” Jarrow had a wonderful ear for music.

“About time you came, too!” growled Handforth. “We’ve got the lanterns all ready, and it’s nearly midnight! Shove your overcoats on, and let’s buzz out! We’ll sing on the terrace first, just underneath the colonel’s window!”

“Too risky!” said Pitt, shaking his head. “We might as well have a run for our money before the crash comes. If we start with the colonel, he’ll probably empty the water jug over us, or something warlike of that sort! He’s a fiery old chap when he gets thoroughly aroused—and if our singing doesn’t arouse him, nothing will! Dervishes and Hottentots won’t be in it!”

Ulysses Spencer Adams nodded.

“You said a jugful!” he grinned. “Say, boys, we’re sure gonna give a jimdandy concert! Gee! It’ll be a crackerjack!”

“I wouldn’t go as far as that, but we’ll do our best to awaken the echoes!” said Pitt. “Come on! Let’s start the ball rolling!”

They wrapped their mufflers round their throats, buttoned up their overcoats, and made the final preparations. There were two lanterns—fixed on the tops of long poles, in the orthodox fashion of Christmas waits. Jarrow hugged his ukelele, and ran his fingers lightly over the strings.

“All ready?” said Pitt briskly. “Good! Then out we go! Bravo for the good old waits! As for the victims, sleeping so peacefully above, may heaven have mercy on their ear-drums! We shan’t have any!”

And the schoolboy waits sallied out into the crisp night.

CHAPTER X.

HARK! THE FOURTH FORM WARBLERS SING!



MOONLIGHT was streaming over the quiet, snow-covered grounds of Glen-thorne Manor. There was scarcely a breath of wind, and all trace of the snow clouds had gone.

The sky was clear and starry—with a hard, metallic brilliance that denoted a sharp frost. The scene was peaceful in the extreme, and the silence was so intense that the distant throbbing of a motor car on the main road could be distinctly heard.

“It seems a wicked shame, but it’s got to be done!” whispered Pitt, with a chuckle. “It wouldn’t matter so much on a blustery night—but to start howling amid all this peace is nothing short of a crime!”

“Howling?” repeated Handforth. “Who’s going to howl?”

“You are!” said Reggie. “At least, I hope so. We’re relying on you to make most of the noise! We want your manly voice to boom over the roof tops in great wave lengths! You’re our star loud speaker!”

“Fathead!” snorted Handforth. “If you’ve simply come out here to make a noise, I’m going in! I thought we were going to sing properly!”

“Of course, anybody’s liable to these delusions,” said Watson, with a grin. “Look out with that lantern, Clarence! You’ll hit the eaves in a minute!”

Clarence Fellowe lowered his pole a trifle. He was so tall that the lantern had been eight or ten feet in the air.

“Let’s start the singing straight away,” he said mildly. “Or we’ll be here till break of day. We’ll let our voices ring out clear, so all the folks inside can hear! Get ready, please, and—”

“That’s all right—don’t waste your poetry out here, old man!” grinned Reggie. “Tune up the old music machine, Jarrow!”

“Ah, now our ears he’ll harrow!” murmured Clarence sadly.

“Say, you guys waste too much time!” exclaimed Adams. “You need some pep, I guess. This carol singing is the bunk, but if we put some speed into it, we might make it sound good. Gee! We sure ought to jazz it up some!”

“Never!” exclaimed Jack Grey. “It’ll sound bad enough without going to that length!”

The waits had reached the terrace by this time, their footfalls making no appreciable sound on the thick carpet of feathery snow. They formed themselves into a circle, and Jarrow struck a preliminary chord.

The little circle looked very picturesque amid the snow, with the gleam of the lanterns casting yellow rays in all directions. There was something really Christmassy about the idea.

“Ready?” whispered Pitt. “All right—let her go!”

The beginning was somewhat weak and wavery. Archie completely forgot his lines, and merely opened his mouth. Church and McClure started bravely, but without much confidence. And Adams, in spite of all his boasting, merely produced a thin treble which quavered pitifully.

Handforth, on the other hand, started off like the exhaust from a motor lorry. He beat everybody. Unfortunately, he chose the wrong carol, and made the further blunder of starting on the second verse.

“They looked up and saw a star,” roared Handforth lustily, “Shining in the East beyond them far—”

“Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the feast of Stephen,” sang the others. “When the snow lay round about, Deep and crisp and even—”

“And to the earth it gave great light,” thundered Handforth defiantly. “And so it continued both day and night! No-el—No-oh-el—”

Pitt waved his arm wildly.

"Hi! Stop!" he hissed. "You're all wrong, Handy!"

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Handforth, breaking off in the middle of his finest effort. "You fathead! You've spoilt it now! And all you chaps have been singing wrong, too——"

"You dummy!" snorted Church. "You're the one who's wrong! We're singing 'Wenceslas,' not 'Noel'! You've ruined the whole thing at the start!"

Handforth gave a jump.

"My goodness! Was I singing 'Noel'?" he gasped.

"Singing it!" snorted Willy. "I never heard such an unearthly din in all my life! It sounded like a mortar-mixing machine! I thought somebody was mending the roads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you young rotter——" began Handforth wrathfully.

"Rats!" shouted Willy. "Your voice is rotten! This is what comes of letting you Fourth Form fatheads into the game!"

"Are we singing carols, or having a free fight?" demanded Pitt tartly. "Here's a fine kind of serenade for the girls! They'll never speak to any of us again if we keep on like this! Let's start properly this time—all together! And tone your voice down a bit, Handy! I felt the ground shake when you were singing just now!"

The second effort was better.

The waits were at least rendering the same carol, and Handforth managed to keep his voice slightly in hand. Now and again it got the better of him and boomed out like the roar of a rough sea, but on the whole the singing wasn't so bad.

The echoes, at all events, were fully awakened—to say nothing of the inmates of the Manor. Windows were thrust open all the way along the front of the terrace, and heads appeared by the dozen.

Irene and Co. were in evidence—well wrapped up in blankets or dressing-gowns, leaning gleefully out of the windows. The girls seemed to be enjoying the joke.

"Splendid!" cried Irene, when the first carol came to an end. "Oh, let's have another!"

"Rather!" shouted Doris. "Sing 'Good King Wenceslas'!"

"We've just sung it!" said Handforth indignantly.

"Oh, sorry!" laughed Doris. "I thought it was 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And at this moment, before the schoolboy waits could start up another dreadful discord, a piercing scream rent the air from the direction of the lodge. It was startling

in its suddenness—terrifying in its note of utter horror.

"Good heavens!" muttered Pitt, twirling round. "What the——"

He broke off, staring.

A slim figure, clad in white, was running, panic-stricken, up the snow-swept drive. It faltered, swayed dizzily, and then collapsed into the white smother!

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERY AT THE LODGE.



REGGIE PITT started forward.

"Quick, you chaps!" he shouted.

"I believe it's Lucy Minns! Something must have happened—let's find out!"

There was a rush at once. And from the windows, the Moor View girls looked on with startled eyes. All the hilarity of the last minute had gone, and smiling faces had become grave.

Pitt and Handforth and Archie were the first to reach the motionless figure in the snow. As Reggie had guessed, it was Lucy Minns, the lodgekeeper's pretty daughter.

She was lying there, huddled up, and deathly still. The unfortunate girl was dressed in a thick woollen wrap—a kind of dressing-gown—and her feet were bare. Her dark hair lay in a disordered mass about her head.

"My goodness!" muttered Handforth huskily. "She's dead!"

"Imposs, dear old soul!" panted Archie. "Good gad! Our singing wasn't as bad as all that! I mean to say——"

"It wasn't our singing, Archie—something else happened," interrupted Pitt tensely. "Quick! Lend a hand here! We'll carry her indoors! Some of you rush in first and get the housekeeper out—or Mrs. Glenthorne! Anybody will do! The poor girl's fainted!"

Pitt was on his knees in the snow, and one glance at Lucy's face had told him that something serious was the matter. Every vestige of colour had fled from her cheeks, leaving them ashen. And her face was drawn into an expression of sheer fear, horrifying to behold.

All the juniors were rather shaken. This dramatic incident had come so unexpectedly. On the top of their light-hearted foolery, it seemed to be all the more tragic.

Four of them eagerly raised the girl from the snow and carried her indoors. The big hall was blazing with lights when they entered, and Mrs. Glenthorne was anxiously waiting, with the housekeeper and several other members of the domestic staff. Irene and Co. hovered at the turn of the stairs, looking down concernedly. They had offered to help, but their hostess had begged them to return to bed.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

"Why, the poor girl must have had a dreadful fright!" said Mrs. Glenthorne, as she tenderly took one of Lucy's hands and rubbed it. "We must bring her round at once. And perhaps we'd better send for the doctor——"

"I don't think it'll be necessary to have the doctor, Mrs. Glenthorne!" said Pitt. "She'll be all right soon. A drop of brandy wouldn't do her any harm—and some smelling-salts, or something."

The juniors hung back while Lucy Minns was restored. She had been placed on the big, comfortable lounge, and under the influence of Mrs. Glenthorne's ministrations, the unfortunate girl recovered.

And at length she opened her eyes and appreciated her surroundings. The colour

was now rapidly returning to her cheeks.

"There, Lucy, don't try to speak now," said Mrs. Glenthorne softly. "We're going to put you straight to bed——"

"Oh, I'm sorry, madam!" whispered Lucy. "I—I fainted, didn't I? I seem to remember running through the snow, and then—and then——"

"You fell all in a heap!" put in Handforth. "What was wrong, Lucy? What the dickens made you dash out of the lodge screaming?"

The girl shivered.

"Oh, that room! That bed-room!" she muttered. "I can't sleep there! I can't! Oh, I've tried to—but it's too dreadful! The room's haunted! I know it is! I shall go mad if I try to sleep there again!"

Mrs. Glenthorne was astonished and alarmed.

"But, Lucy, whatever do you mean?" she asked. "What room? Do you mean your bed-room at the lodge?"

"Yes, ma'am. It's—it's haunted!"

"Come, Lucy, you're dreaming!" said Archie's mother firmly. "I never heard of such a thing! There have been some silly stories that the east wing of the house is haunted, but I've never believed them. But the lodge! Why, my dear girl, it's ridiculous! Nobody has ever breathed a suggestion that the lodge is haunted!"



The Fourth Form captain took Archie by the shoulder and pulled him into a sitting position with one powerful jerk. Archie opened his eyes, looked startled, and yawned.

"But it is, madam—it is!" insisted Lucy, with a vehemence that was almost fierce. "Last night—the night before—and now to-night, I've heard strange, ghostly creaks! And knockings—yes, slow, deliberate knockings. Even the furniture shakes, and all the old panels groan and whisper! I'm terrified to think of it! Oh, that room is dreadful—dreadful!"

Mrs. Glenthorne shook her head.

"I am afraid your nerves are in a bad state, Lucy," she said concernedly. "I am sure you only imagined these things. What caused you to run shrieking from the lodge as you did?"

"I'd been lying awake for nearly two hours," whispered Lucy, her voice weak and trembling. "I listened to all the terrifying sounds until I was nearly crazy with fear. But I was foolish—I didn't like to tell father. I thought he would laugh. Father sleeps on the other side of the lodge, and never hears anything."

"Doesn't he know what fear you have been in?"

"I told him a little to-day, madam, but he only scoffed at me, and told me not to be silly," faltered Lucy. "Oh, please forgive me for causing all this trouble——"

"But even now you haven't told us——"

"Please, please!" sobbed the girl. "[

don't know—oh, I don't know! But those sounds—those whispers and——”

“Lucy, Lucy! You mustn't get hysterical!” interrupted Mrs. Glenthorne gently. “Come, we will put you to bed. You can sleep with two of the other maids, so that you will not be lonely.”

And Lucy Minns, still shaky and overwrought, was helped tenderly upstairs. And the schoolboy waits looked at one another, and unanimously decided that carol-singing had better be abandoned for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

REGGIE HAS A PLAN.



HANDFORTH scoffed contemptuously.

“It's all rot—the whole giddy story!” he declared. “You can't kid me, my sons! Ghosts don't exist—they're only the pigments of a chap's imagination.”

“I suppose you mean figments?” asked Church politely.

“I said figments!” roared Handforth, turning red. “Do you think I don't know the English language, you fathead? And I tell you that Lucy's story is a lot of bunkum!”

Handforth and Co. were dressing. It was morning, and the juniors had slept soundly after the curious adventure of the previous night. And it was only natural that they should discuss the affair while dressing.

“It's all very well to be superior, and to know everything, but I'm not so jolly certain!” exclaimed McClure. “Lucy strikes me as being a sensible girl. She's over twenty—old enough to be as bold as brass in the dark. She wouldn't say the room was haunted if it wasn't.”

“But it can't be haunted!” persisted Edward Oswald.

“Why can't it?”

“Because no room can be haunted,” said Handforth triumphantly. “There's no such place as a haunted house. Ghosts are only rumours—just things that people think they see, but don't see at all! I'm a practical chap, and you can't get me to believe in any supernatural twaddle!”

Handforth was always firm in his convictions, and he was never afraid to state his opinion openly and boldly. Church and McClure were by no means superstitious, but they were more open to conviction than their pig-headed leader.

When the famous trio of Study D got downstairs, they found the other fellows discussing Lucy and the mysterious haunted room she had referred to. Reggie Pitt had already ascertained that old Minns, the lodgekeeper, had heard nothing unusual in his little dwelling.

“There you are!” said Handforth, when

this report reached his ears. “What did I tell you? It was just the girl's imagination. If she heard things, why didn't her father hear 'em?”

“Because he's as deaf as a post—that's a fairly decent reason,” replied Pitt. “Besides, the old chap never goes into his daughter's bed-room. I can't think she just imagined everything.”

“Girls are all the same—full of fancies and dotty ideas!” said Handforth obstinately. “It's no good trying to drive sense into a girl! You might as well try to run tin-tacks into a steel plate! All girls are nervous, hysterical and imaginative!”

“Thanks awfully, Ted—that's very sweet of you!” said Irene laughingly, as she came downstairs.

Handforth opened his mouth and twirled round.

“Oh, I say!” he gasped. “I didn't exactly mean——”

“It's no good now, Ted—you've done it!” chuckled Doris, who accompanied her girl chum. “All girls are full of dotty ideas, and it's no good trying to drive sense into 'em! So now we know!”

Handforth felt terribly helpless. He stood there, almost pale with dismay, and the other juniors grinned happily. It was always entertaining to see Handforth in a fix like this.

“I—I was talking about servant girls!” he burst out, trying to wriggle free from his own words. “Servant girls, you know! Naturally, I didn't mean you, Irene! Not likely!”

“It's no good—you can't get out of it like that!” laughed Irene. “We've got your opinion, Ted, and we shall know what to do in future. By the way, has anybody seen Lucy this morning?”

“I don't think she's down yet,” said Church. “We want to know what she saw—or what she heard. Of course, I don't suppose the bed-room is really haunted. Lucy must be a bit nervous, and in the dead of night all sorts of tiny creaks are heard in these old houses. They seem ten times as bad in the darkness——”

“What-no! The dear girl herself!” put in Archie amiably. “Good! In fact, ripping! Greetings, Lucy, old sparrow! What about it? How goes it in the good old daylight?”

Lucy had just come into the hall on her way up the main stairs. She was dressed in her maid's uniform, and was apparently attending to her normal duties, as usual. Except for her pale cheeks, and a little heaviness beneath the eyes, she looked herself.

“I'm much better, thank you, Master Archie,” she replied quietly, “and I'd like to thank all you young gentleman for everything you did last night——”

“Oh, come off it, Lucy!” growled Watson. “We didn't do anything!”

"Begad, no!" said Sir Montie. "Just carried you indoors, you know!"

"I was so frightened that I hardly knew what I was doing," said the girl. "I had been in bed for over an hour and I couldn't sleep. Those awful sounds nearly drove me mad!"

"What kind of sounds?" asked Pitt curiously.

"I can't explain them—oh, but they are dreadful!" said Lucy. "I've heard them night after night. The room becomes full of strange, unearthly whispers. And last night I got up and put on my dressing-gown so that I could go and speak to my father. Then I thought I saw something in one of the dark corners of the room, and I was so terrified that I ran out screaming."

"You're not going to sleep there any more, are you?" asked Pitt.

"No, I couldn't!" said Lucy. "I should go mad!"

She soon went off about her work, and the juniors discussed the subject animatedly. And Reggie Pitt was wearing a thoughtful expression. There was a little gleam in his eye.

"Penay for 'em!" said Jack Grey laughingly.

Reggie came to himself.

"You can have 'em for nothing!" he replied. "I've been thinking about that haunted room at the lodge. Lucy won't be there to-night, and we shall have the coast clear."

"What are you talking about?" asked Jack, staring.

"I'm jolly curious about those ghostly manifestations," replied Pitt grimly. "Look here, why shouldn't we keep a vigil in Lucy's bed-room to-night—five or six of us? We'll hunt the ghost down, and lay it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GHOST-HUNTERS.



JACK GREY looked rather dubious.

"Is it worth while?" he asked doubtfully.

"I mean, it'll be a bit of an ordeal, after what we've heard about that room. But I'm game, if you think it'll do any good."

"Good man!" said Pitt. "It's bound to do some good, anyhow; we'll satisfy our own curiosity. And a careful investigation may prove that the manifestations are only caused by a natural reason. I am jolly curious to find out."

"Well, so am I, if it comes to that," agreed Jack. "But do you think we shall be able to get permission—"

"We don't need it," replied the Fourth Form skipper. "We'll keep it dark, you know. No need to let the whole house-

party into the secret. I'll have a word with old Minns later on and work him round. He's the only chap we need to square. And he ought to be glad of our help; I don't suppose he likes his spare bed-room being haunted."

The matter was discussed again after breakfast, and this time Handforth & Co. and Archie were admitted into the plan. Even Ulysses Adams agreed to join the ghost-hunters. But this was manly because he accidentally overheard a few words, incautiously spoken by Handforth. So it was necessary to take the American boy into the scheme so that he would keep the secret.

"Say, it's a dandy proposition!" he declared. "Gee! You guys have got more pep than I thought! We're gonna lay this ghost to-night, you betcha! Over in the States—"

"Exactly!" interrupted Pitt. "But we don't happen to be in the States just now, old man. We're holding a secret conclave in the armoury at Glenthorne Manor. Look here, all you fellows have got to pledge your word that you won't breathe a sound to anybody else."

"Why, what does it matter?" asked Handforth.

"It matters a lot," said Reggie. "If the whole house gets talking about this ghost hunt there'll be no interest in it; and we shall have too much of a crowd, too. Willy and his pals will want to join in, and perhaps some of the men. We want to keep it dark."

So it was arranged on the spot.

The ghost-hunters agreed to meet at eleven-thirty in the big hall, practically the same as they had met on the previous night. But this time they would creep quietly out, go down to the lodge, and take up their positions in the haunted room, arriving well before midnight.

The vigil was to last two hours. If nothing happened by two o'clock the juniors would return to their beds and get to sleep. There was something rather mysterious and attractive in the plan.

But for the rest of the day it was put aside.

In the afternoon most of the juniors paid a visit to the river with the girls, intent on skating. Unfortunately the ice was not thick enough yet, although it promised to be safe and sturdy by the morrow, if the frost held. A long stretch of the river adjoined the Manor grounds, and there was plenty of wonderful sport in store for the colonel's guests.

By the evening the Christmas party was full of life. Everybody was beginning to wake up, and there was dancing and singing and general lightheartedness.

So when bedtime came the juniors were quite ready for it.

The ghost-hunters, however, were as keen

as ever to carry out their programme, and at eleven-thirty to the minute the seven bold spirits collected together in the hall.

"Well, here we are, as it were!" said Archie softly. "I must confess, dash it, that I'm frightfully bucked. I mean to say, this ghost hunting business, you know. It send a few trickles down the good old spine, and all that sort of stuff!"

"Aw, gee, that's the bunk!" said Ulysses. "I don't believe in any of this superstitious dope. No, sir! But I guess I'm as keen as a Gillette blade to sit around that haunted chamber."

"Well, let's go and sit!" said Pitt crisply.

They passed outside, and were soon down at the quaint, old-fashioned little lodge. It was a squat structure, stoutly built, and of the bungalow type, similar to many such lodges.

Reggie Pitt opened the door and walked in. Mr. Minns was deaf, and Reggie had previously arranged that he and his chums should not worry about the formality of knocking.

There was a tiny hall, which ran from one end of the house to the other. And the various rooms opened off on either side. There were about six, all told. Minns himself was in the sitting-room.

The juniors crowded in, and found the old lodge-keeper dozing in front of the fire. The room was cosy, and there was no suggestion of eeriness about the place. On the contrary, the lodge-keeper struck the juniors as being very cheerful indeed.

Minns generally lived alone, although he had a kind of housekeeper to come in during the hours of the day to clean up and do the necessary housework. Lucy was only staying with him for the holidays.

"Here we are, Minns!" said Pitt crisply. "All ready to hunt the ghost down. Sorry if we've kept you up!"

The lodge-keeper opened his eyes and rose hastily to his feet.

"Beggin' your pardon, Master Archibald—beggin' your pardon, young gents!" he said respectfully, as he touched his forelock. "I was just dozin'—the fire bein' warm an' cosy like. I'm right glad ye came. Mebbe you'll be able to find out what's been skeerin' my Lucy."

And the old chap, without further comment, led the way down the hall and into the room of mysterious manifestations.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE HOUR OF MIDNIGHT.



HANDFORTH looked round, and gave an eloquent sniff.

"Just what I thought!" he said tartly.

"There's nothing wrong with this room—nothing ghostly about it. Just Lucy's imagination.

Didn't I say these girls get scared over nothing?"

"It isn't midnight yet," remarked Church.

"Blow midnight!" scoffed Handforth. "That's only a silly superstition! And if you're getting supersitious, my lad, I'll punch your head. I don't allow any rot of that kind in Study D—"

"If you fatheads are going to scrap, you'd better go out in the snow!" interrupted Pitt severely. "We're here on a ghost-hunt, not a free-fight. No phantoms appear if the conditions are noisy. These old family spectres are a bit particular."

There was certainly something to be said for Handforth's scepticism. Lucy's bedroom was not the kind of room the juniors had expected to see. There was nothing grim or uncanny about it.

The furniture was simple—a plain single bedstead occupied one side of the apartment, and the other furniture was old-fashioned, solid, but by no means suggestive of eeriness. The walls were panelled, and oak beams crossed the ceiling.

The room was quite warm, for Minns had thoughtfully had a fire burning for the better part of the evening, although Pitt had warned him that they couldn't have the fire during the actual investigation. The glow from the grate would destroy the effect, and the crackle of the embers might drown any other ghostly sounds.

So Minns had allowed the fire to go right out, leaving, however, the bed-room in a pleasing state of warmth.

Minns himself didn't stop. He was a stolid old customer, and although he seemed a bit worried about his daughter, he didn't really believe her nervous condition was due to anything in the lodge. Being very deaf, he himself had heard nothing.

"Well, here we are, and it's only twenty minutes to midnight," murmured Pitt, as he finished his preliminary inspection. "There's nothing much to look at here—nothing to make us feel nervous, anyhow."

"The girl must have been frightened by something else," said Watson.

"Don't be in such a hurry," went on Reggie. "Remember, Lucy was in here alone, and she's a girl who's been used to living in London for the last few years. There are seven of us here now, and that makes all the difference. Sit down, you chaps, and get ready."

"Get ready for what?" asked Handforth.

"My dear chap, we can't hunt ghosts if you keep talking," replied Pitt. "Ghosts are queer things; they've got to be humoured. First of all, we'll all sit down, and make ourselves thoroughly comfortable. Then we'll put the light out and sit here in absolute darkness."

"By gad!" said Archie. "That'll be frightfully thrilling, old dear."

"Yes; you'll probably go to sleep," said Handforth tartly. "All the better if you do; I want to discuss a Trackett Grim plot——"

"My land! That'll be worse than the ghost!" said Ulysses blankly. "Say, cutie, nix on the Trackett Grim. For the love of Mike, we can't stand——"

"All right, Adams, don't worry," interrupted Pitt. "We shan't be bothered by Trackett Grim. Nobody's got to speak at all—not even a sound. That's the whole secret of the investigation. Whatever happens, don't move or speak. Just sit tight and keep all your senses on the alert."

"Absolutely!" said Archie dreamily.

He was already lolling back in the one easy chair, and appeared to be quite content. The other juniors settled themselves on the bed and in other convenient places, and then Pitt extinguished the candle. But he kept his electric-torch handy, in case of emergency.

The darkness was now intense. At least, it seemed to be so at first. But after a few minutes the eyes of the watchers grew more accustomed to the new conditions. And the window-blind allowed a few stray beams of moonlight to enter. Although most corners of the room were pitchy black, there were one or two spots which gradually became hazily visible.

The juniors obeyed their leader's instructions and kept as still as mice. Nobody spoke. Even Handforth was tense and alert, peering searchingly into the darkness and listening with acute care.

Outside a wind was gradually springing up, and as it came blustering round the low eaves of the old lodge a curious moaning was caused, rising and falling according to the force of the breeze.

The haunted room now had a totally different feeling.

The sense of comfort and security had gone. Reggie Pitt and the others were beginning to realise some of Lucy's feelings. Knowing this room to be haunted—or to have such a reputation—she had naturally remained awake, all her senses on the alert, and her nerves on the stretch. Under such conditions, the imagination could easily play tricks.

Rap, rap, rap!

Dim, faint, and apparently from nowhere, came a slow, rhythmic knocking. The very sound itself was weird, for it was not proceeding from within the room, although it seemed to be actually there. It was uncanny and elusive.

"Can—can you hear something?" whispered Church huskily.

"Yes. Shsssh!" breathed Pitt.

Quite near him there sounded a creak, as though a floorboard had moved, as though somebody walked near the skirting. Yet Reggie knew well enough that no living soul was there.

This room was not so commonplace, after all. Every junior within it was now held in the grip of the unseen, mysterious "something" which invaded it, yet remained intangible!

CHAPTER XV.

THE PHANTOM.



MIDNIGHT!

The strokes sounded solemnly in the lodge. There was a clock somewhere—probably in the sitting-room—and the beat of the hammer on the gong came into the haunted room with strange clearness.

And that sound, denoting the witching hour, had due effect upon the juniors. They felt jumpy and uneasy. There was a sensation that something uncanny was about to happen.

Nobody spoke, for the slightest whisper was like a shout in that silent room. Most of the watchers, in fact, were half-afraid to breathe. They held their breath, and felt a curious tingling sensation in their scalps. It was partly imagination, but not wholly.

And then a peculiar luminosity made itself apparent in mid-air—practically on the other side of the bed-room, well clear of any of the juniors. The patch was extraordinary in its appearance.

Handforth felt McClure's hand on his sleeve, and McClure was gripping tightly. Edward Oswald himself had forgotten all about his scoffing. There was something very strange about this room.

As the juniors watched, the luminous patch increased. Before their very eyes it grew—hazy, indistinct, but nevertheless visible. And suddenly the patch took shape.

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Watson, in an involuntary gasp.

The thing had assumed an upright position, and now nearly reached the floor. It was a long, wraith-like figure, with a hooded cowl over its head. And the spectral presence moved slowly and ominously towards the tense watchers.

"Look out!" panted Church fearfully.

And then, just as Reggie Pitt was getting ready to press the button of his electric-torch, the apparition vanished. With one instantaneous sweep it ceased to exist. The beam of white light from Pitt's torch stabbed through the darkness, and the spell was broken.

"It's gone—it disappeared a second ago!" muttered McClure.

Pitt, with set teeth, looked round. He flashed his light into every corner. After the previous intense gloom, the light from the torch seemed dazzling in its brilliance. Not a square inch of the bed-room escaped that searching beam.

"There's nothing here now," said Pitt steadily. "By Jove! That was queer, you know. It was here—right in the middle of the room. Nothing could have escaped by the door or window——"

"I say, what about old Minns?" asked Handforth abruptly. "Do you think he played a trick on us?"

"Never!" said Reggie. "He's sound asleep by this time. We needn't consider Minns at all—he's out of it. I've fully satisfied myself that the old chap is harmless—and above any treachery. Besides, what possible object could he have in scaring his own daughter?"

"That—that figure looked like a monk to me," said Tommy Watson huskily. "I noticed the cowl over its head——"

"Rats! It was a woman!" interrupted Handforth. "It was the ghost of a woman dressed in white. There must have been murder here hundreds of years ago. The thing we saw was the spirit of the victim!"

"I thought you weren't superstitious?" asked Church gruffly. "I say, Pitt, don't switch that light off again. We—we've had enough of this! Let's get back to the house——"

"Not yet," interrupted Pitt. "I've got to be satisfied before I leave this room. I thought we were all genuine ghost-hunters—and not tricksters. That thing we saw wasn't a ghost at all!"

"Wasn't a ghost at all?" repeated Handforth quickly.

"No!" said Pitt, with a grim note. "Adams, you're looking a bit self-satisfied! What's the idea? And what have you got that stick for? I'm a bit suspicious of you."

Ulysses Adams suddenly burst into a roar of laughter.

"Suffering cats!" he yelled. "Say, you guys sure make me smile! Gee! I fooled you good and proper with that line of dope! That ghost of mine was some dandy frame-up, I'll tell the world!"

"A frame-up?" roared Handforth. "A—spoof?"

"Sure! You said it!" grinned Ulysses.

"Pardon me—I said it first!" put in Pitt. "Look here, Adams, I don't want to be unpleasant, but this investigation was supposed to be serious. It's like your nerve to play these idiotic tricks——"

"Aw, that's the bunk!" interrupted the American boy. "Say, you poor fish, I figured on providing you with a real dandy ghost. And you don't seem to appreciate it any. I guess you guys——"

He was interrupted by half a dozen indignant and angry shouts. Even Archie aroused himself sufficiently to register a strong protest. The juniors felt incensed. They had come here for a genuine investigation, and this disclosure was by no means pleasant.

"You giddy rotter!" snorted Handforth at length. "I knew it wasn't a real ghost all the time."

Ulysses grinned, and produced a long length of ordinary-looking gauze. But when the light was extinguished the gauze glowed luminously. Adams had utilised an old trick familiar to fake spiritualistic seances.

In the darkness he had fixed the gauze in a tightly-packed ball to the end of his stick. Then, by a gentle, continuous motion, he had shaken the gauze out without his companions being in the least aware of his movements, their gaze being fixed upon the alleged ghost.

And it had seemed to grow before their eyes—until the gauze was completely shaken out. It had been easy enough for the trickster to whisk his "phantom" back with one movement, so causing it to disappear.

Adams was threatened with violent expulsion, but in the middle of the discussion Reggie Pitt called for silence. And, faint and mysterious, came the sounds of those mysterious knocks again.

"Well, I'm blessed!" muttered Watson, staring.

At the same second a picture dropped from its hook on the other side of the room and fell with a crash to the floor!

CHAPTER XVI.

REGGIE PITT'S RESOLVE.



SILENCE reigned for a few tense seconds.

Nobody had been near that picture—the wall was several paces from the nearest junior. Trickery was not responsible for the unexpected mishap. And Ulysses Spencer Adams, for all his former coolness, turned pale, and looked shaky.

"For the love of Mike!" he muttered. "I guess there's something queer about this room, after all. Say, I'm sorry! I didn't quite get the hang of——"

"All right, Adams—don't worry!" interrupted Pitt. "It wasn't a bad jape, but you chose the wrong moment, that's all. Do you remember those uncanny knocks? Did you cause them somehow?"

"Nope! Not on your life!" replied the New York boy.

"Or the creaks—or the picture?"

"Say, what's the big idea?" growled Ulysses. "The only thing I did was to unfold this piece of gauze. Get me? Say, this room ain't healthy. I'm quitting——"

"Wait a minute——"

"Right now!" added Ulysses hurriedly.

He was as good as his word, for he went to the door, wrenched it open, and passed out. Without a doubt, Adams was scared.

The trickster who had fooled his companions was the first to run! But it must be confessed that Watson and Church and one or two others were only saved from panic-stricken flight by Pitt's sharp command.

"Hold on! Don't show the white feather!" rapped out the Form skipper. "This room's full of weird things, but if we keep our heads we'll get to the bottom of the mystery. We'll let Adams go—he won't say anything to the others, because

"Nothing to prove a ghostly presence. The nail's worked its way out of the wall."

"But how could it?" asked Grey.

Pitt didn't know, and he said so. And after the others had calmed themselves, they all took their seats again, and the light was extinguished. And in the darkness the supernatural "atmosphere" seemed to return with intensified force.

The whole room appeared to be charged with a weird, unseen presence. Creaks



She was lying there, huddled up and deathly still. The unfortunate girl was dressed in a thick woollen wrap—a kind of dressing-gown—and her feet were bare. Her dark hair lay in a disordered mass about her head.

we're all pledged to secrecy. We can rely on his word. We'll stay here for another half-hour."

"Good gad!" breathed Archie, sinking back into his chair.

"I'm game, if the other chaps are!" said Handforth, pulling himself together. "But what's the idea?"

"We want to be certain about those knocks and creaks," replied Pitt. "H'm! See this?" he added, picking up the picture.

sounded from the walls, from the skirting, and from the floor. Extraordinary whisperings, impossible to define, were heard. And that dull, unaccountable rapping made itself audible at times.

And yet there was no feasible explanation of all this manifestation. The lodge was quiet and peaceful. Old Minns was sleeping, and not a living soul was otherwise near.

"I—I'm tired of this!" muttered Handforth at last. "It's awful! I—I believe

the room's haunted, after all. No wonder Lucy ran out of the place screaming. My nerves are all on edge!" he added frankly.

Pitt switched his light on.

"So are mine," he said with a steady voice. "But there must be some natural explanation of all this mystery. I don't believe in ghosts—and never will!"

He dropped to the floor, and placed his ear to the boards. The others remained still while Pitt listened. Several of them followed his example soon afterwards, and listened, too.

But they could detect nothing unusual, except for a mysterious thudding sound.

"It seems to me that these noises are coming from the earth itself," said Pitt at length. "If it wasn't impossible, I'd say there was an old tunnel under the lodge, and——"

"Oddslife!" ejaculated Archie, with a great start. "A tunnel, what? I mean to say, that's dashed queer, old bean! As a

matter of fact, there absolutely and positively is a tunnel."

"There is!" ejaculated Pitt, with a quick breath.

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie. "I hadn't thought of it before, you know. I've never explored the frightful thing, but it's there. Absolutely! An underground passage, and all that sort of thing, running from the Manor to the lodge. I think it was built by those robust chappies in Cromwell's time."

Reggie Pitt's eyes gleamed.

"That settles it!" he said grimly. "There's no ghost at all, but there's still a mystery. Our vigil has led to some definite result. We've laid the ghost, and proved that there's something fishy going on in that disused tunnel. To-morrow, my sons, we're going to explore!"

Handforth and the rest eagerly agreed. And the morrow—which would be Christmas Eve—promised to have its full share of thrills!

THE END.

By Your Editor:



My dear Readers,

Owing to the great popularity of our Christmas Number every Yuletide, I am presenting you this year with two special numbers for the festive season, of which this is the first. The other will be on sale on Tuesday, December 23rd. Thus you will be able to enjoy with the other good things that Christmas provides what is virtually a Double Christmas Number of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY in two parts. Both in the long stories and in the St. Frank's Magazine our contributors have given of their best work that it may add a little more to your enjoyment of

A Merry Christmas

which they join me in wishing you all.

THE SECRET OF THE PANEL!

To return to the little world of our own, peopled by our dear old companions, the Boys of St. Frank's, next week's story,

"THE SECRET OF THE PANEL!" will be a further account of the Christmas Party at Glenthorne Manor. How the juniors investigate ghostly manifestations at the lodge to the Manor, the surprising discoveries they make, their adventures in an underground tunnel, are just a few of the exciting incidents in the story.

GOODWIN'S ARTICLES IN THE MAG.

The simple conjuring tricks and puzzles contained in the Mag. this week will, I hope, prove useful to many of my readers who delight to entertain their friends at Christmas. Next week, Goodwin is describing how you can construct a Living Marionette show, and I hope to include a short monologue which might be used by the performer. It would be better, of course, for the actor to select his own character and invent the dialogue or patter, to suit his particular audience and the occasion.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



DR. NICHOLSON'S STRANGE FEAR!

□○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○□
 } *A Gripping Detective* }
 } *Story of Nelson Lee* }
 □ and Nipper, introducing □
 } *the Famous Girl De-* }
 } *TECTIVE, Eileen Dare.* }
 □○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○□

CHAPTER I.

EILEEN DARE GETS TO WORK.

HOLLOWDENE MANOR was a forbidding, eerie place.

Situated within a comparatively few yards of the main London and St. Albans road, and within a very short distance of Watford, it seemed queer that such a dwelling should have such an out-of-the-way aspect.

At night the Manor was almost completely hidden from sight owing to the dense mass of trees and evergreens which grew in front of the weed-grown drive, and a stranger might pass along the road without being in the least aware that he was anywhere near a human habitation.

The residence was the home of a somewhat mysterious individual known as Dr. Jeremy Nicholson.

At the present moment he was impatiently waiting in the dismal lounge-hall—a great barn of a place which was lit by a smoky oil-lamp. Every now and again Dr. Nicholson would glance irritably up the dark staircase, and it almost seemed as if he were eager to ascend to the upper floor.

But with a scowling countenance he remained in the hall, and took to pacing to and fro upon the carpet, meanwhile stroking his untidy beard, and listening for any sound which might indicate the arrival of those whom he was expecting.

At last they came; and, strangely enough, it was by the servants' entrance that the newcomers were admitted by Mason, the butler. Within a few moments, however, he conducted two young women into the presence of his master, and then retired once more.

Dr. Nicholson ceased his pacing, and turned to the two girls—addressing one of

them in a voice which was testy and impatient.

"I have been waiting here a considerable time for you, Betty," he said, "and I am greatly annoyed that you have been so long in coming. My work has suffered abominably; but I preferred to wait rather than to be disturbed later. So this is your sister, eh?"

He turned slightly, and transferred his attentions to the other young woman—looking at her with a searching glance, and apparently obtaining a good impression.

She was an extremely neat little person, with roguish brown eyes and a dainty figure. She met Dr. Nicholson's gaze with unflinching steadiness, and then gave a delightful little curtsy.

"Good-evening, sir!" she exclaimed respectfully. "I hope you won't blame Betty for our late arrival, as I am afraid it was my fault. You see, sir, I was scarcely prepared to leave London at a moment's notice—"

"Quite so!" cut in Dr. Nicholson. "Your name, I believe, is Mary?"

The girl gave another little curtsy in lieu of reply.

"Very well," went on Dr. Nicholson, with a nod. "Since you are the sister of a maid in whom I have the greatest confidence, it is unnecessary for me to ask you for references. She, of course, will instruct you in your duties, and will show you to your room."

"Yes, sir," murmured the girl. "Thank you, sir!"

"I want you to fully understand, Mary," continued Dr. Nicholson, "that you will be required to carry out your domestic work,

and to take no interest in my affairs. I am at present engaged in executing an extremely intricate scientific experiment, and my work necessitates the strictest privacy. Therefore, I do not wish to be disturbed more than is absolutely essential, and I forbid you to make any attempt to enter my private apartments. That is all I wish to say to you now—except that I hope you will be comfortable here, and will soon settle down.”

“Thank you, sir—you are very kind,” replied the maid.

Dr. Jeremy Nicholson turned on his heel, and made his way up the stairs without saying anything further, and the two girls left the hall and passed through to the domestic quarters.

The elder of them turned to her companion.

“That was splendid!” she exclaimed. “The master has no suspicion that you are not my sister, Miss—”

“Mary, please!” cut in the other girl quickly. “You must remember, Betty, to always refer to me as Mary, and to talk to me—and about me—as your sister! It is vitally important that you do not overlook these things! If you do, you will ruin everything!”

Dr. Nicholson would probably have been surprised if he could have heard this little conversation; but he would have been still more surprised if he could have known that “Mary Aldridge” was no less a person than Miss Eileen Dare—Nelson Lee’s famous lady assistant!

But it was a fact, nevertheless.

Eileen Dare had been sent down to Hollowdene Manor for the express purpose of keeping a strict watch upon the mysterious occupant of the building.

For Nelson Lee, the celebrated detective of Gray’s Inn Road, had good cause to suspect Dr. Nicholson of having caused the death of Ellen Bennett—a maidservant who had until recently been employed in his household.

Nelson Lee, as it happened, had stumbled upon the facts by pure accident.

A few days previously, he and Nipper, his assistant, had been returning to London from St. Albans in their motor-car. A tremendous storm had been raging at the time, and it was owing to this storm that a tree had been blown across the main road—thus barring the progress of the detective’s car.

Just as Lee had brought the vehicle to a standstill, they had heard a piercing feminine scream, and at the same second a flash of lightning had revealed the figure of a girl rushing out of the front door of Hollowdene Manor.

A second later she had collapsed upon the drive, and Lee had discovered that she had died from fright. Dr. Nicholson, however, had stated that the girl had been scared by the storm, and had succumbed to a weak heart.

Nelson Lee believed that Ellen Bennett had been killed by sheer terror—in spite of the fact that a coroner’s jury had brought in a verdict of “natural causes” at the inquest. And he had resolved to make investigations.

And then Betty Aldridge—a fellow-servant of the dead girl’s—had called upon the detective at Gray’s Inn Road, and had confirmed Lee’s suspicions by saying that she, also, thought that Ellen had been killed by fright. Betty Aldridge intended to take her sister back to the Manor with her, and Nelson Lee, learning this, had prevailed upon her to allow Eileen Dare to travel down to Watford in the personality of “Mary Aldridge”—so that the lady detective could make investigations from within the house.

And so Eileen Dare had arrived.

Her task was to discover, if possible, what ghastly object had been the cause of sending the unfortunate Ellen Bennett out into the stormy night, screaming with fright, to meet her death owing to terror and fear.

The lady detective, of course, had learned all the details from Nelson Lee, and she was fully determined to do her utmost to solve the mystery which confronted her.

As “Mary Aldridge” she would have ample opportunities, and she intended to make the most of them.

Eileen Dare was introduced to Mason, the butler, and also to his wife—who acted as cook and housekeeper. And she found them to be a very quiet, respectable couple, quite above suspicion.

A very few hours under Dr. Nicholson’s roof convinced Eileen that, but for Dr. Nicholson himself, the occupants of the building were quite normal people.

It was the owner of the Manor who was so much out of the ordinary, and there could be no doubt that Dr. Nicholson was abnormal. In spite of his absorbing occupation in his own apartments, Eileen saw him once or twice during the evening, and he appeared to be nervous and jumpy, and invariably irritable.

The Manor itself was a rambling old house, full of dark shadows and musty furniture. The lighting arrangements were atrocious, and consisted of a few old-fashioned oil-lamps, placed in odd corners. They were so few and far between, in fact, that it almost seemed as if the bearded old recluse preferred the darkness.

Eileen Dare—whose real identity was only known to Betty Aldridge—could do very little in the way of investigating until after supper was over. But then, when the butler and his wife were safely in bed, she crept from her bed-room, bent upon justifying her presence there.

Nelson Lee was relying upon her to discover what had caused Ellen Bennett’s mysterious death, and she meant to do her best to succeed.

And so the lady detective set out upon her first tour of investigation, padding softly

down the stairs and peering into the great lounge-hall.

Everything was silent and still, and Eileen was just about to go forward once more when she gave a little start of surprise, and drew back.

For, a few yards away from her, she caught sight of Dr. Jeremy Nicholson—dimly outlined by the faint starlight which filtered through the window. In his hand he held a heavy revolver, and he seemed to be intently on the look-out for something or other.

And Eileen Dare, as she watched, found herself seeking the answer to an obvious question:

What did Dr. Nicholson fear?

CHAPTER II.

LEE AND NIPPER TAKE A HAND.



NELSON LEE looked at his watch. "H'm! Half-past nine!" he muttered thoughtfully. "What do you say, Nipper, to a little run in the car as far as Hollowdene

Manor?"

Nipper jumped from his chair with alacrity.

"Good idea, guv'nor!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you're getting a trifle uneasy about Miss Dare, eh?"

The great detective nodded.

"To tell you the truth, my lad, I am," he confessed. "I cannot help feeling that there is something really sinister about that place, and I think we ought to run down and see how things are. I should never forgive myself if anything happened to Miss Dare—"

"Oh, you needn't worry about her, guv'nor!" interposed Nipper. "She's not like ordinary girls, and she knows how to take care of herself right enough! But I'll admit that the Manor struck me as being a pretty awful sort of place, and it's a bit thick to leave Miss Dare alone."

"Exactly, Nipper—that is how I regard the matter," agreed Lee. "I did not expect to conclude the Connington case quite so early as this—but as we have now disposed of it, we'll hurry down to Watford at once. Possibly, we shall be wasting our time, but, in any case, we shall feel more easy in mind regarding Miss Dare."

Both Nelson Lee and Nipper, since Eileen Dare had left Gray's Inn Road with Betty Aldridge to take up her new position as maid to Dr. Jeremy Nicholson, had been exceedingly busy. But now that they had concluded their work, they decided to hurry down to the sinister old Manor with all speed.

Accordingly, Lee's racing-car was brought from the garage, and the pair quickly climbed aboard the splendid vehicle.

On this occasion their journey was quite a pleasant one, for the weather, instead of being stormy, was dry and cold, with just a touch of frost in the air. The run, to such a fast car as Lee's racer, seemed to be executed in a very short time, and the detective drove straight to the village of Little Barling, and made arrangements to put up at the King George Inn.

After garaging the car, Lee and Nipper set out on foot in the direction of Hollowdene Manor, which was situated within an easy walk of the village.

They had no cut-and-dried plan in their minds to-night; they were simply bent upon taking a general survey of the exterior of the Manor, and upon investigating the grounds.

In all probability, as they realised well enough, they would discover nothing whatever. It was not even on the cards that they would so much as see the detective's lady assistant. For she, most likely, was by this time safely tucked up in bed.

Nevertheless, Nelson Lee felt impelled to do everything possible to safeguard Eileen Dare.

He did not in the least anticipate that any real danger lay in store for the girl, for she, unlike the unfortunate Ellen Bennett, would be upon her guard for anything that might transpire. Eileen was possessed of an exceedingly strong set of nerves, and it would take a good deal more to frighten her than it had done to scare her predecessor into an untimely grave.

Lee and Nipper, upon arrival at their destination, quietly slipped into the grounds of the old mansion, and made their way to the rear premises.

These, by all appearances, had once been set out into beautiful gardens and lawns. But they were now a wilderness of tangled weeds and grass—completely given over to Nature. The vegetation was dense and rank, and large quantities of dead leaves lay in thick masses everywhere.

As regards the house, there was not a glimmer of light showing from any of the windows, and the whole place seemed to be wrapped in slumber.

Nipper was disgusted.

"It's a swindle, guv'nor!" he muttered. "We've come all the way from London just to stare at the back view of this old shanty. There's nothing doing—What the—"

"Sssssssh!" breathed Nelson Lee suddenly into Nipper's ear. "I thought I saw the figure of a man just a little way ahead, and he seemed to be making for the house. Be quiet, my lad, and we'll try to discover what his game is!"

Nipper was surprised. He had seen or heard nothing whatever—but Lee's keen sight and hearing had evidently been better employed.

Peering in the direction indicated by the detective, Nipper, after a few seconds, caught a glimpse of the prowler whom Lee

had referred to. He was just visible among the undergrowth near the house, and even as the pair watched, they saw the man deliberately climb to the sill of one of the lower windows, and commence to force an entrance.

The ease with which he accomplished his task seemed to point to the fact that he was by no means a stranger to this sort of work. For he had the window open almost in no time. Then, softly raising the sash, he disappeared from view.

Nipper looked at his master excitedly.

"A burglar, guv'nor!" he exclaimed. "An expert cracksman. I should think, by the ease with which he got into the house. What are you going to do—collar him?"

The detective shook his head.

"No, Nipper; I think we will just stay here and watch," he said. "In all probability the man is connected with this mystery, and is merely going to have a secret meeting with Dr. Nicholson. Our best policy is to stay where we are—particularly as there is a second man watching the house from a point about a hundred yards to our left."

Nipper looked round in surprise, and saw that a second man was standing in the gloomy garden, just as Lee had said. His gaze was directed towards the window through which the first man had vanished.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed the lad. "What the dickens is the game, I wonder?"

"I don't know, my boy—but I mean to find out sooner or later," murmured the detective. "For the moment we can do nothing better than remain here and watch developments."

Nipper could see that Lee was right. For by remaining stationary, they could keep their presence a secret, whereas by moving they would probably make some slight noise, and so draw the attention of the solitary watcher.

They had not long to wait.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE DEMAND.



MEANWHILE, Eileen Dare, was undergoing a few thrills within the Manor.

After watching the restless Dr. Nicholson for some little time from her position at the foot of the stairs, she saw him cross the hall and enter a corridor which led to the back portion of the building—a sort of wing which, so far as the girl knew, was never used.

Eileen softly followed in his wake, her keenest curiosity aroused.

It was becoming obvious to her that Dr. Nicholson was patrolling the house on account of the fact that he was afraid of intruders. There could be no other explanation of his conduct.

But if that was the case, why did he not communicate with the police and seek their protection?

Was it because he possessed some guilty secret—a secret which made it impossible to communicate his fears to those upon the side of law and order?

Eileen could not tell, but the circumstances certainly appeared to be suspicious.

What she had seen could only mean that Dr. Nicholson was in very real fear of somebody or something—otherwise, he would surely not prowl about the Manor with a loaded revolver in his hand.

It was a queer state of affairs, and Eileen Dare wondered where it would lead. Possibly this sort of thing was habitual with the old man—perhaps he acted in this fashion every night—obsessed with the idea that he was in some sort of danger?

However this might be, the fact remained that Eileen Dare was shortly to witness a somewhat startling occurrence.

She saw Dr. Nicholson vanish round an angle of the passage, and she was just hurrying after him, when she heard a slight sound ahead—a soft, scraping sound like the opening of a window.

And, quickly, the girl darted towards the angle, and peered round into the continuation of the corridor beyond.

She was just in time to see a man's form slip through the window and drop to the floor—just at the very moment when Dr. Nicholson was passing the spot.

She heard him give vent to a quick gasp of surprise, but before he could so much as think of levelling his revolver, the newcomer raised his own weapon, and held it within a few inches of his victim's body.

"Hands up!" ordered the stranger quickly. "That's right; now we can talk nice and comfortable! I seem to be lucky to-night, Dr. Nicholson—for I didn't expect to find you here, just where I wanted you!"

The owner of the Manor stared at the speaker in surprise.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" he demanded sternly. "A burglar, I suppose, bent upon robbery——"

"You're wrong!" cut in the other. "I came here to tell you that that little secret of yours is known to me, Dr. Nicholson. And if you want it to remain a secret, I'm very much afraid that you'll have to be separated from a certain amount of your cash!"

Dr. Nicholson stared.

"What do you mean, you scoundrel?" he asked angrily. "How dare you attempt to blackmail me!"

The stranger gave an ugly grin.

"Perhaps you'll listen to reason a little more readily, guv'nor, when I mention that I happened to be here the other night—the night of the storm?" he suggested, with a leer. "The night when that servant o' yours died out in the front of the house!"

"What do you mean?" asked Dr. Nicholson again.

"I mean that, in spite of what you said at the inquest, that Miss Bennett was frightened by something more than the thunderstorm!" was the reply. "As a matter of fact, I saw what it was that frightened her so badly——"

"You—you saw what frightened her?" gasped Dr. Nicholson, in a startled tone. "Nonsense—— You are entirely mistaken,

for I'll 'blow the gaff' myself! Then where will you be, eh? Not here, but in a place they've got a nasty name for—quod! It's up to you, I reckon—— Great guns!"

The stranger's suddenly uttered exclamation had been caused by his accidental discovery that Eileen Dare was peeping round the angle of the wall. In all probability he mistook her dimly outlined features for those of a man, and he very



"Hands up!" ordered the stranger quickly. "That's right, now we can talk nice and comfortable! I seem to be lucky to-night, Dr. Nicholson, for I didn't expect to find you here, just where I wanted you!"

and I refuse to discuss the matter further! If you have got it into your head that I have been guilty of anything of a criminal nature, you are doomed to disappointment. Your attempt at blackmail is ridiculous, and I would certainly hand you over to the police if an opportunity offered."

The stranger laughed unpleasantly.

"All right, Dr. Nicholson," he replied. "Unless you can produce a hundred pounds pretty quickly, I'll save you the trouble—

promptly decided that it would be safer for him to depart than to run the risk of being shot at from the darkness!

At all events, the blackmailer disappeared through the window with extraordinary rapidity, and Dr. Nicholson—swiftly turning to see what had so scared him, perceived Eileen Dare standing in the passage.

He turned to her with a brow as black as thunder.

"What are you doing here, Mary—prying

into matters that don't concern you?" he demanded angrily. "Didn't I tell you not to interfere in my affairs—"

"I—I thought I heard burglars, sir!" faltered Eileen, keeping up her character of "Mary Aldridge" to perfection. "I—I'm sorry if I've upset you, sir, but the house seemed so strange that I didn't feel like sleeping. I suppose that's why I happened to hear that horrid man get in the window."

Dr. Nicholson, somewhat appeased by this explanation, nodded.

"Well, you were right, as it happens," he said. "You did hear a burglar, and your sudden appearance in the passage had the effect of scaring him off. You had better get back to bed at once, girl—at once!"

It was evident that Dr. Nicholson had gained the impression that Eileen's arrival had coincided with the blackmailer's sudden scare. He therefore did not suspect that she had overheard the conversation which had taken place between them.

And Eileen Dare was glad.

For she had gained a striking confirmation of Nelson Lee's suspicions; she knew that Ellen Bennett had really been frightened by something within the Manor!

She bade Dr. Nicholson "Good-night!"—but she had no intention of going to bed yet.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO IS THE FOREIGNER?



OUTSIDE in the grounds, Nelson Lee and Nipper were still waiting patiently.

Only a short time had elapsed since they had seen the burglar enter the window, but the time seemed to pass slowly. They both felt as if they wanted to take a more active part in the proceedings, but such a thing would have been unwise at the present stage.

If, for instance, they had approached the window, they would have been seen by the second man, who was still on the watch. This would have given the criminals the certain knowledge that somebody was interested in Hollowdene Manor and its occupants in addition to themselves, and possibly have spoiled Nelson Lee's chance of getting at the mystery which he was so anxious to solve.

And so the pair remained where they were, and they were soon rewarded by seeing the burglar emerge from the window—very hurriedly. He jumped to the ground at once, and ran across the garden to the spot where the second man was waiting, and joined him, with a grunt.

"I got interrupted just when things were going beautifully!" Lee and Nipper heard him say, in a disgusted voice. "The old man happened to come along the passage just as I got in, and I tackled him at

once. I fancy that I've thrown a pretty good scare into him—"

"Who interrupted you?" asked his companion.

"Don't know—couldn't see plainly," was the reply. "But somebody came along the passage just now, and so I cleared out. It might have been the new girl they've got there, but I wasn't taking any chances! We ain't in a hurry, anyway!"

Nipper looked at his master keenly.

"That means that Miss Dare is very much on the alert, sir," he breathed. "I'll bet it was her who upset this chap's plans!"

Lee nodded.

"It looks like it, young 'un," he agreed. "But I don't like the look of things. There seem to be too many crooks connected with this affair for Miss Dare to deal with, and I think we shall have to devote a little time to the investigation ourselves."

"Good!" said Nipper. "It looks like developing into an interesting case."

The two crooks had now commenced walking off, and Lee and Nipper stole after them like a couple of shadows. They were talking still, and their conversation was plainly audible.

"What about that money you were goin' to get from the old man?" asked the burglar's companion.

"He'll pay up all right—don't worry!" said the other. "I've got him in the hollow of my hand, and if he gets shirty, I'll give him away to the police, as I told him! But it won't come to that—Nicholson is too eager to keep his secret!"

Lee and Nipper heard no more, for by now they were clear of the Manor grounds, and were consequently obliged to separate a little farther from the two crooks. But they had heard enough to convince them that there was a very real mystery connected with Hollowdene Manor.

The detective decided that it would be their best policy to follow the two men to their destination—and they did so, finally discovering that they were staying at the King George Inn, where Lee and Nipper had also booked rooms. This was very satisfactory, for it indicated that the two men intended staying in the neighbourhood.

So Nelson Lee and Nipper retraced their steps, and returned to the Manor grounds, hoping, by doing so, that they would be able to have a few words with Eileen Dare. She, of course, was at present unaware of their presence at the Manor, but as she was so obviously on the alert, she would probably see them.

She did—far more quickly than the pair had anticipated.

Almost as soon as they had entered the garden Eileen came running up to them, her pretty features depicting the joy she evidently felt at the unexpected meeting.

"Oh! Mr. Lee and Nipper!" she exclaimed joyfully. "How splendid! I'm so thankful that you've come, because all sorts of things have been happening here to-night! I was just looking for a black-

mailing burglar who attempted to extort money from Dr. Nicholson! I saw him a few seconds ago—"

"What?" asked Lee. "You must be mistaken, Miss Dare!"

"No, no—I saw him distinctly!" persisted the girl. "He spoke English perfectly when I heard him talking, but when I saw him just now he seemed like a foreigner!"

"A foreigner?" queried Lee. "That is interesting! But the burglar whom Nipper and I saw leaving the Manor by the window did not look like a foreigner, Miss Dare. Moreover, he is at present at the King George Inn at Little Barling!"

Eileen Dare seemed bewildered.

"Then—then the man I just saw must be another one entirely," she said. "Oh, dear! This is getting mysterious, isn't it?"

They compared notes, Lee telling Eileen of what he and Nipper had seen and heard, and the lady detective relating her experience within the Manor.

When they had finished it was apparent to all of them that Dr. Nicholson was not only a mystery man himself, but that a vast amount of mystery also surrounded him.

What was the secret which he appeared to be guarding so jealously?

On the face of it, it appeared to be something of a nature which permitted of blackmailing tactics—otherwise the two crooks whom Lee and Nipper had seen would not be interested.

And, finally, who was the foreigner who had so mysteriously entered into the matter, and who had just been seen by Eileen Dare?

These questions seemed to be very difficult of solution at the present stage of the proceedings.

CHAPTER V.

THE CRY FOR HELP.



NELSON LEE glanced at Eileen Dare keenly.

"You're sure that the man you refer to was a foreigner?" he asked.

The lady detective nodded.

"Certain, Mr. Lee," she declared. "I only caught a glimpse of him in the gloomy garden, but I am certain that he was not an Englishman."

"H'm! Queer!" muttered the detective. "I think it would be as well if we made a search of the grounds— Good gracious me!"

Suddenly from the house of mystery there came a hoarse, urgent cry for help—a cry which made Eileen shiver, and Lee and Nipper look at one another with startled glances.

Then the trio, without wasting words in conjectures, rushed towards the building, entering by the front door, which Eileen had left unlatched.

And in the hall they soon discovered that the cry had emanated from Dr. Jeremy Nicholson—for they found him lying stretched upon the carpet, still and unconscious.

Nelson Lee bent over him quickly, and then looked at his two companions.

"The mystery seems to be getting deeper and deeper!" he exclaimed, pointing to the unconscious man. "Just look at the marks on Nicholson's throat! He has been attacked by a man who attempted to strangle him, by all appearances!"

Eileen and Nipper looked, and they could see the impressions which Lee had indicated with great distinctness. The girl shuddered involuntarily, and Nipper gave a disgusted grunt.

"This business is getting terrible!" he muttered. "First that poor girl was frightened to death on the night of the storm, and now Dr. Nicholson is the attempted victim! In addition, we seem to be up against blackmailers and burglars, and, finally, a foreigner! What the dickens does it all mean?"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet, and touched Eileen Dare's arm.

"I think you had better remain here with Dr. Nicholson," he said, in a low voice. "He is not very badly hurt, and when he recovers consciousness there is no need to tell him anything about Nipper and myself being here. I fancy we can do more good by working in the background, Miss Dare—in a similar manner to yourself. You understand?"

Eileen nodded.

"Oh, yes, perfectly, Mr. Lee!" she exclaimed. "I do hope that Dr. Nicholson is not hurt much—"

"You needn't worry about him," cut in Lee. "I am quite certain that he will soon be himself again. Nipper and I will make another search of the grounds for the foreigner, for this attempt at strangling is probably his doing!"

And the pair again went out into the grounds, and recommenced their hunt for the unknown foreigner. There seemed to be very little hope of finding him, however, for it was scarcely likely that he would remain in the vicinity after what he had done—or, rather, what Lee suspected him of doing.

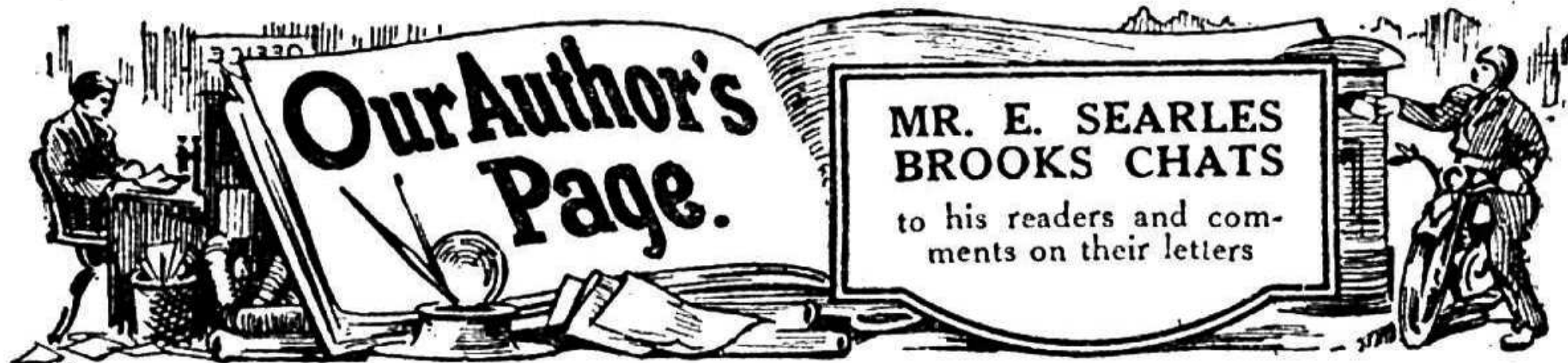
After half an hour Lee and Nipper gave up the search as useless.

The case certainly appeared to be getting more complicated and intricate, and so far there was not a single ray of daylight to illuminate the position.

Apart from any other consideration, who was the foreigner who had attacked Dr. Nicholson so brutally? And why had he done so?

Nelson Lee determined—with the combined help of Eileen Dare and Nipper—to unravel the tangled skein of mystery which surrounded Hollowdene Manor, and to make the situation clear.

THE END.



(NOTE.—If any readers care to write to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon any remarks that are likely to interest the majority. If you have any grumbles—make them to me. If you have any suggestions—send them along! Remember, my aim is to please as many of you as I possibly can. All letters should be addressed to me personally, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, the Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. —E.S.B.).

Letters received: G. L. McIntyre (Edinburgh), John Alcock (Newton Hyde), Harry Rayment (Kilburn), A French Reader (Bourg-la-Reine), E. A. Jowsey (Scarborough), I. C. D. (Harrow), "A Bobbed Haired Tomboy" (Luton), Harry W. Smith (Nottingham), "E. O. Handforth" (Beverley), Arthur Bell Jnr. (Homerton), A. T. Delderfield (West Croydon), Sidney McGann (Barking), "Jim the Penman" (E.2), "A Staunch Supporter of the Finest Paper in Great Britain" (Blackpool), W. A. J. Jones (Kingston-by-Sea), "N.L.L. Enthusiast" (Leyton), Cissie Doust (Plymouth), Edward R. Tipple (Cardiff), Robert T. Shepherd (Stoke Newington), Albert Charles Shepherd (Forest Hill).

Judging from the majority of your letters, Nelson Lee and Nipper seem to be more popular in the St. Frank's stories than out of them. About ninety per cent of you urge me to bring the famous pair back to the Old School. One or two of you, in fact, threaten me with all sorts of dire consequences if I don't do it.

Well, of course, it's for you to decide. There'll be a strong new series starting in a week or two's time, and, naturally, it's too late for me to introduce Nelson Lee and Nipper into these particular yarns—for most of them are not only planned out, but already written. However, as you are all so keen upon Nelson Lee and Nipper returning to St. Frank's, I have half a mind to plan the Spring series accordingly.

I am hoping that you will like this New Year series of mine as well as any I have turned out. If you do, then the period of waiting won't seem so long, will it? I'll promise you one thing. If you really and truly want Nelson Lee and Nipper back at St. Frank's, you shall have them.

And there's another thing you are asking for—longer school stories. You shall have these, too, after the New Year series has run its course. In fact, just in private, I can hint that all sorts of Big Things are going to happen in the Spring. But remember—in order to have a longer school story, the Editor will have to cut out the short detective yarn. But you won't mind that, of course, as you'll be having school and detection combined in one long story.

A good many readers don't seem to care much for the Magazine. They like the Portrait Gallery, and In Reply to Yours, and one or two other items; but quite a number of these schoolboy contributions are regularly skipped. The Editor has already whispered to me that the Mag may be shortened. All the features you like most will be retained, and the other things cut out. This will mean an even longer school story—longer than you ever had before.

So, on the whole, I think you can look forward to a few changes that will be universally popular. But don't be impatient—don't be in a hurry. Rome wasn't built in a day, and, as I have already said, the next month or two are already mapped out. But after that—Well, in the words of the celebrated Mr. Asquith, "Wait and see!"

I mentioned last week that I might hand this page over to the Editor. But I've taken pity on him. He's got as much work as he can do already. Besides, you all write me such nice letters that I should feel lost without them! I'm a wee bit selfish, too, because I really take a keen enjoyment in writing these brief weekly notes.

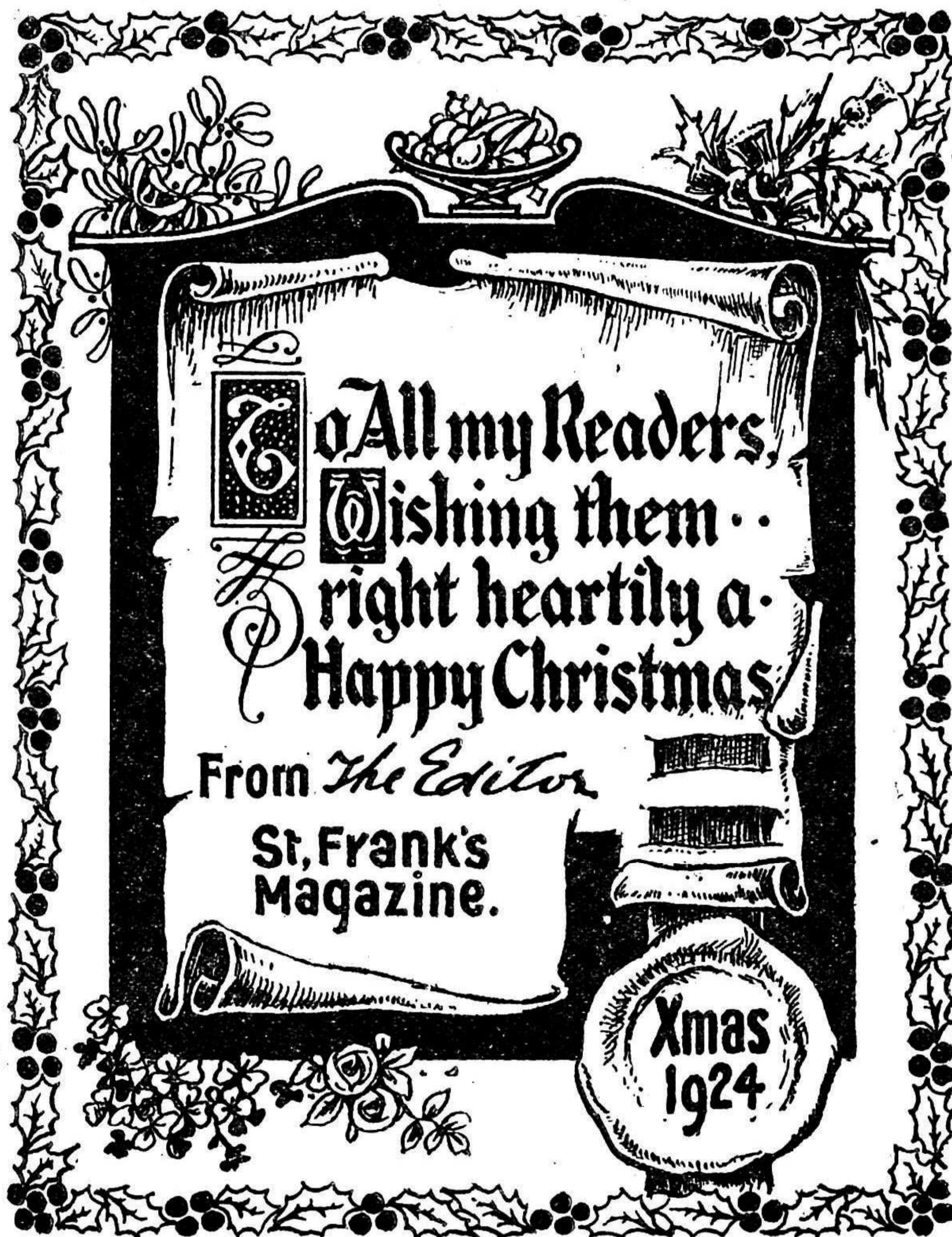


St. Frank's Magazine.

No. 56. Vol. 3.

Edited by Pitt.

December 20, 1924.



To All my Readers,
Wishing them..
right heartily a.
Happy Christmas

From *The Editor*

St. Frank's
Magazine.



THE CHRISTMAS TURKEY

With Apologies to
"WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?"

By Clarence Fellowe

"Who'll carve the turkey?
 Who'll carve the turkey?"
 "I," said the Host,
 "It's the job I like most—
 I'll carve the turkey."

"Who'll have a wing?
 Who'll have a wing?"
 "I," said Sir Montie,
 "That's just what I wantie—
 I'll have a wing."

"Who'd like a leg?
 Who'd like a leg?"
 "I," said old Handy,
 "But not if it's bandy—
 I'd like a leg."

"Who wants some breast?
 Who wants some breast?"
 "I," said McClure,
 "But please mind the skewer—
 I want some breast."

"Who'll have some stuffing?
 Who'll have some stuffing?"
 "I," said old Fatty,
 "When I've done this patty—
 I'll have some stuffing."

"Who'll try a rib?
 Who'll try a rib?"
 "I," said Jack Grey,
 "I'll not say you nay—
 I'll try a rib."

"Who's next for gravy?
 Who's next for gravy?"
 "I," said young Willy,
 "Tho' it does look like skilly—
 I'm next for gravy."

"Who wants the fat?
 Who wants the fat?"
 "I," said Reg Pitt,
 "I'd like pints of it—
 I want the fat."

"Who'll risk some giblets?
 Who'll risk some giblets?"
 "I," said Guy Pepys,
 "Please give me heaps—
 I'll risk some giblets."

"Who'll have the skin?
 Who'll have the skin?"
 "I," said old Buster,
 "Tho' it's tough as a duster—
 I'll have the skin."



A Christmas Adventure at Grey Towers.
By JACK GREY.

PART I.

"GHOSTS?" I said thoughtfully. "Well, I had a queer experience at home last Christmas, now you come to remind me—"

"Let's have it!" interrupted Reggie Pitt, settling himself more comfortably in his chair. "You've told me the yarn before, Jack, but these others haven't heard it at all. It's well worth re-telling."

We were sitting round the fire in the big lounge at Glenthorne Manor. It was Christmas time, and it seemed natural that some of us should turn the conversation on to the subject of ghosts.

"Go ahead!" said Handforth briskly. "If the yarn's all right, you can write it up for the Mag."

"Thanks!" I grinned. "But it's up to Reggie to decide that. Well, you've asked for it, so don't blame me if I make a hash of the thing. I'm not much good at spinning yarns. Here goes!"

"Good!" said the others.

It happened some little time before Christmas (I began), when I was home for the holidays. Grey Towers was practically empty. Dad and I had the place to ourselves, except for the servants. We were expecting whole troops of guests to arrive in a day or two's time.

But until then things were dull. My father, I remember, was telling me all about the family ghost. Every old country mansion, I suppose, has got a spectre of some kind—it's really part of the place. An historic mansion without a ghost is unheard of.

Well, we'd been sitting in the library, and my pater had told me the full story of the famous Grey Cavalier. There's no

need for me to go into that now—you wouldn't be interested, anyhow. But I can tell you I was feeling pretty nervy when I went to bed.

There's one thing I've got to say, though—about the Phantom Cavalier, I mean. In the Grey family he's always supposed to appear just before the death of a close relative. Any Grey who sees him is warned,



I stood there spellbound, and my heart nearly stopped beating.

and so, naturally, the ghost isn't exactly a popular figure at any time.

I went to bed feeling restless. Some of you fellows have been to Grey Towers, and you know what the bedrooms are like—big and stately, with great four-poster beds and panelled walls. I couldn't sleep for the life of me, although I tried hard enough.

Being alone had something to do with it, I dare say. After spending months in the Ancient House dormitory, it was a bit of a change to have a great room all to myself. And there was that yarn the pater had told me, too. It was the first time I had heard the full story of the Cavalier.

I'm not a nervous chap—and I don't believe in ghosts, anyway. I kept telling myself that I was a silly idiot—that I should look washed out in the morning, and that I didn't deserve anything better. But it made no difference. I kept turning over in bed, and listening to every little sound.

A board would creak now and again, and a rustling sound would come from the fireplace, as the wind whistled over the chimney-pots. And a piece of creeper would slither across the window. Every sound brought me up in bed, sitting forward, startled. I don't mind admitting I was scared. I expected to see the ghost any minute.

I heard two o'clock strike in the hall, and I was just as wakeful as ever. I decided to go downstairs into the pater's library, where I knew it would be warm and cosy. Besides, he'd just installed a glorious five-valve wireless set, and I knew how to work it. Instead of tossing about in bed, I decided to try and tune in America. Two o'clock in the morning here means nine o'clock in the evening in New York or Pittsburg. I thought it would be rather a good idea to catch the KDKA evening concert.

I jumped out of bed, quite enthusiastic at this new idea, and I forgot all about ghosts and nerves. Tuning in America seemed the very thing. I dressed, shoved on some slippers, and slipped out into the corridor.

"Now for the elusive KDKA," I murmured softly. "I shall have a surprise for dad in the morning if I manage to—"

I broke off, starting. For at that moment a figure had appeared at the end of the corridor. It made no sound—in fact, I didn't know it was there until a movement caught my eye. I stood there, spellbound, and my heart nearly stopped beating.

The Phantom Cavalier!

Yes, I saw it as clearly as I can see you chaps. He was a grim, indistinct figure in grey, and before I could make any outcry, or move an inch from the spot, the apparition turned aside and vanished.

And as he did so the spell seemed to break. I stood there shivering, and I could feel a clammy sort of perspiration on my forehead. But I wasn't frightened—I didn't get into a panic, or anything like that.

In fact, I rushed forward, hoping to find out where the figure had gone. But there was no sign of it left. All the corridors were empty and silent. I went back to my

bed-room in an uneasy, alarmed state of mind. I didn't care about wireless any more.

I didn't get to sleep for a long time. I couldn't help remembering that the appearance of the Phantom indicated a death in the family. Superstition, perhaps, but at the same time I was deeply concerned.

I went to sleep somehow, but I was up well before breakfast. My father hadn't appeared, so I went out for a stroll in the snow—hoping to get a little peace of mind. I wanted to kill the absurd fears that were gripping me.

It was snowing hard, and I trudged down the drive, and into the lane. But I had hardly gone another hundred yards before I ran forward with an exclamation of astonishment. There was a figure lying in the snow—half-buried, in fact.

I bent down curiously, and then I turned as pale as chalk, and the memory of the Phantom Cavalier flooded into my mind. The still, half-buried figure in the snow was my own father! And the appearance of the Cavalier was a sign of death!



The memory of the Phantom Cavalier flooded into my mind. The still, half-buried figure in the snow was my own father! And the appearance of the Cavalier was a sign of death!

(The second part of this dramatic little episode will appear in our Extra Special Second Christmas Number next week.)

GAMES—AND ALL THAT SORT OF THING

By ARCHIE GLENTHORNE

WELL, here we are again! Christmas, what? I mean to say, the good old festive season, and all that sort of thing. I feel a frightful ass, writing this piss, but when a chappie is asked to contribute a few well-thought-out words of wisdom, he can't let the old rag down. Absolutely not! I mean, that sort of thing isn't done.

There was a kind of notion that I should chat about games, and so forth. I mean, I'd dash into it straight away if I was an expert on the old sub. But, well, I mean—Games, what? Good gad! Now I come to think of it, the old gear-box commences to function slightly.

Blind Man's Buff, as it were. Musical Chairs, and all that sort of rot. These games, just between ourselves, are a dashed strenuous sort of business. When it comes to Hunt the Thimble, I'm absolutely on the spot. I mean, Hunt the Thimble is a priceless sort of game for Christmas. One chappie is left alone in a room, and all the other

chappies take the girls out, and leave the first chappie to himself.

I mean, what could be absolutely nicer? There he is, in peace and quietness, amid all the good things, and all he has to do is to shove the old thimble on the gas-bracket, or among the fire-irons, or in the good old corner what-not, or something. So dashed simple, if you grasp the old trend.

And then, when the populace is admitted, he just lounges about, taking things frightfully easy, as amused as the dickens because the good old crowd can't locate the old finger-tip protector.

But as for Blind Man's Buff, Musical Chairs, Postman's Knock, Charades, Hunt the Slipper, and so forth—well, I mean! A cove needs considerable bracing before he can dash into frightful ordeals of that kind or order. Personally, when these games are pushed on the programme, I generally slide silently out, and seek forty of the best until the riot is absolutely over.

HOW TO AVOID COLLY-WOBBLES

By FATTY LITTLE

ONE of the worst dangers of Christmas-time can be avoided by a few simple, well-thought-out precautions. At any decent Christmas party there's bound to be heaps and heaps of good things to eat, and a fellow is always in peril of getting colly-wobbles unless he goes to work carefully.

Roast turkey and goose, plum pudding, trifle, mince pies, and things of that sort are jolly indigestible. Appetising, of course, and any healthy chap feels like eating until there's no more left. That's just where he makes a mistake.

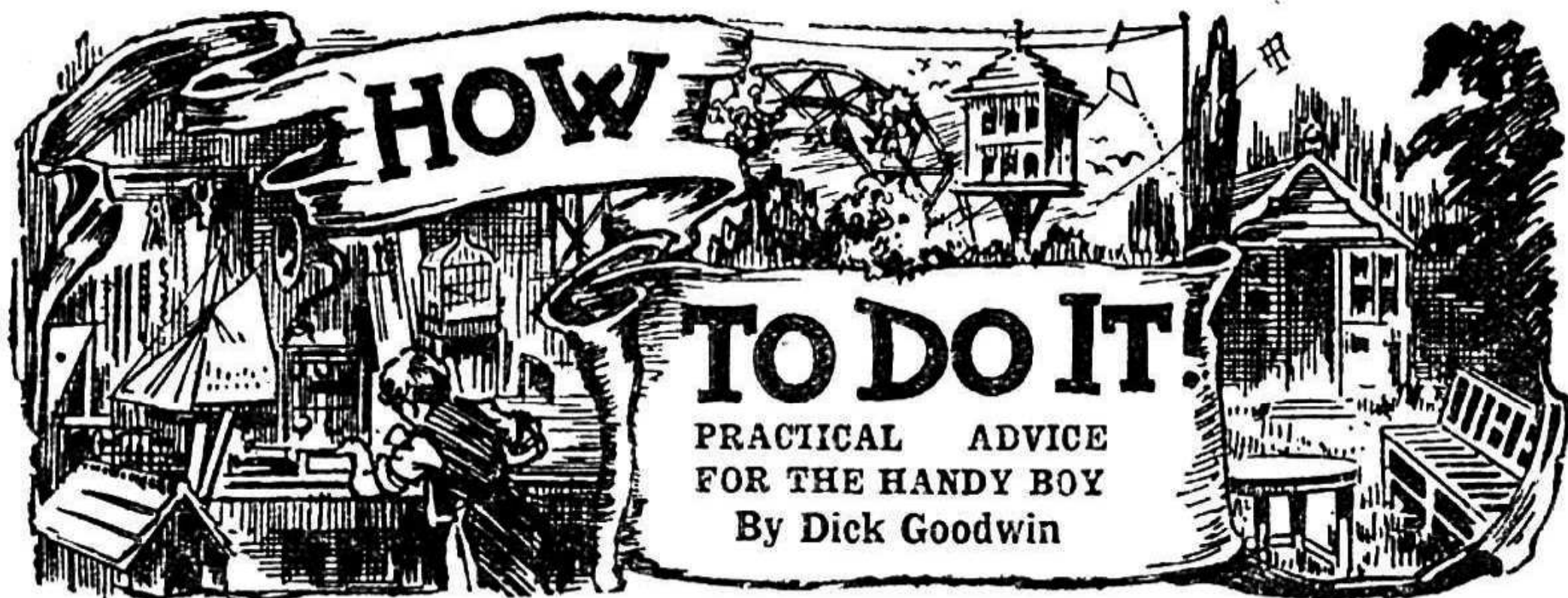
Don't misunderstand me. I'm not hinting that you should eat less this Christmas-time. My advice is—eat more! Eat until you cause people to stare at you in wonder. They'll expect you to go green, and collapse. And if you eat in the old way, you WILL go green and collapse. But take these tips from me, and everything will be O.K.

First of all, train yourself for a few days

beforehand. The most common mistake is to go hungry, so that Christmas Day will find you with a huge appetite. But this is all rot. If you starve yourself you begin to find that you don't want food at all, and instead of getting a whacking great appetite on Christmas Day, you don't care a toss for anything.

My system is infallible. Begin a week before Christmas, and eat more every day. Make it a gradual process, and your tummy will slowly, but surely, work itself into a rousing condition of activity. When the time for the big feast arrives, start eating in the early morning—and keep on eating without a stop. Don't eat too much at once, but let the grub supply be continuous. You'll be amazed to find how you enjoy the good things, and you won't even have a single trace of colly-wobbles.

(Don't take the slightest notice of this humorous advice.—ED.)



CONJURING.

THE amateur conjurer must not only be quick with his fingers, but he must have a ready flow of patter: this is necessary to interest the audience and detract their attention from the actual sleight of hand movement. Most of my tricks I have practised dozens of times

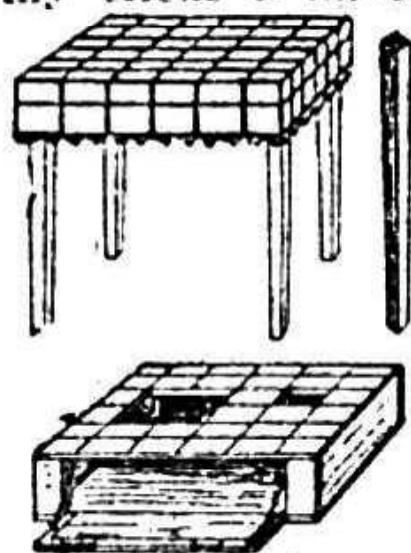


Figure 1.

in front of a mirror, so that I can judge of the effect from the front: in doing this I look at the mirror instead of my hands in order to acquire sureness of movements, and at the same time I rehearse my patter. I make up my table from a shallow box 18 in. square and 6 in. deep inside; the legs fit into a casing made at the corners. Fig. 1 shows the table complete, one of the tapered legs 2 ft. 6 in. by 1½ in. square at the top, and 1 in. at the bottom, and the top previous to covering.

THE SERVANTE.

There is a hinged flap in two pieces, so that it can open out to 12 in. if necessary; this is known as a servante. The two holes in the top are square, one 6 in. side and the other 3 in., the position is found by marking the top into 3 in. squares. The pieces cut out are hinged nearest the front to fall downwards, and held in place by a catch connected with a string just inside the back. Another string is fitted so that each flap can be fastened and unfastened. The top and sides are covered with black velveteen, the openings are cut out, and the lines forming the 3 in. squares covered with thin gold braid. The bottom edge has a finish of fringe. The bottom of the box is covered with a pad to deaden the sound of article allowed to fall.

TEARING AND RESTORING TISSUE PAPER.

Obtain two narrow strips of tissue paper, leave one plain as at A, Fig. 2, pleat the other concertina fashion as at B, and join up with gum as at C. In presenting the trick, hold the pleated portion in the palm of the right, and pull the straight length out with the left hand. Proceed to tear it up, keeping the pleated piece hidden. Crumple the torn leaves up, and

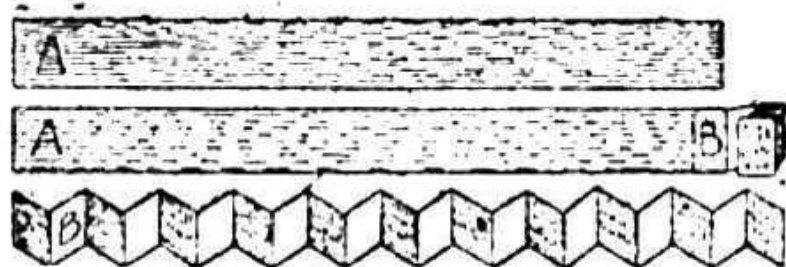


Figure 2.

pretend to place them in the right hand, but leave in left. Move the right hand so that the fingers are rubbing the palm, and while this is being done place the torn pieces out of sight, and then pick up the end of the packed paper and draw out to full length.

THE DISAPPEARING COIN.

This trick as shown in Fig. 3 consists in borrowing a half-crown, holding it between the fingers and thumb as at D, have in the palm a piece of glass as at E, pour some water into a wineglass F, place the coin under a handkerchief, but drop it through the hole in the table and substitute the glass disc. Place the hand-



Figure 3.

kerchief over the glass as at G, and drop the disc, asking the audience to listen carefully. Make a few passes with a "magic rod," remove the handkerchief, and note that the coin is not in the glass. Return the money in change, and apologise for losing the coin.

THE LOST CARD.

This trick is performed with a pack of cards, the audience being asked to select one. Place this underneath and show. Pretending to take

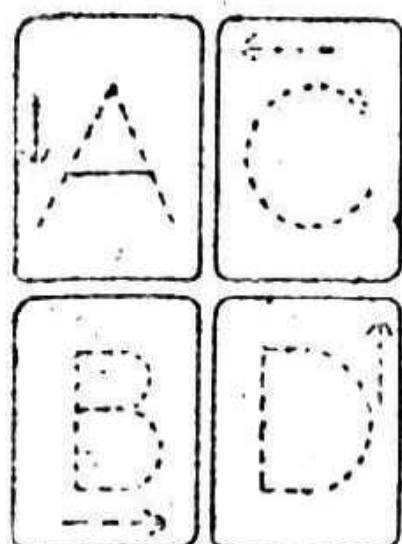


Figure 4.

this but really the one preceding and place at A. Next place the correct card at B, and 2 more at C and D. Ask a member of the audience to say where the correct card is after watching four or five deliberate movements as shown by the arrows, he will naturally watch the card A, but the performer knows it is B, and he will note the change himself.

SOME HOME-MADE CONJURING APPARATUS

THE MYSTERIOUS CARD FRAME.

THIS simple piece of apparatus, at A, Fig. 5, is $\frac{1}{4}$ in. each way larger than a playing-card, and comprises, a cardboard back B, a piece of cardboard C, to which a playing card is glued together with cardboard strips E in front, a little

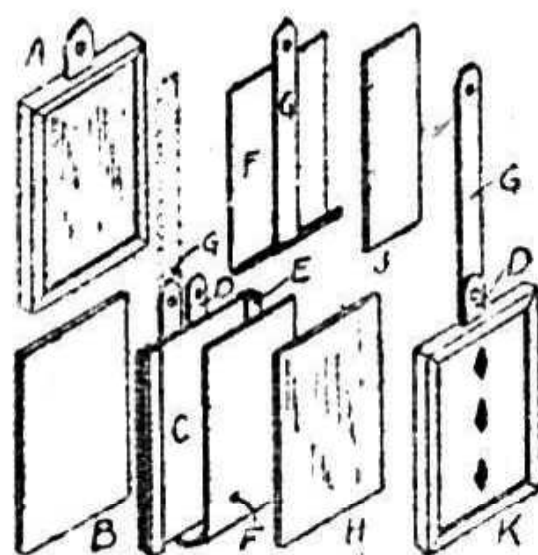


Figure 5.

thicker than the card, and strips at the back of thin cardboard, as well as a length of tape D. Cut a piece of brown paper F, wide enough to fit between the strips, and long enough to cover the card, and pass under $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Glue on a length of tape about 4 in. longer than the paper, as at G. Provide a piece of

glass to match the back, as at H, and bind together with narrow strips of gummed paper J, in the position shown at B, C, D, E, and H. The two tapes are gummed together just before the performance. The trick is presented with a pack of cards all alike and similar to the one in the frame. A member of the audience is asked to cut the pack and show the card, the frame is now exhibited, then covered or locked in a mystic box. When withdrawing or if preferred at the start, the black tape is pulled out; this will draw the brown paper from the card and expose it, as at K. The frame can be exhibited closely together before the trick and after.

THE DISAPPEARING PICTURE.

Although not so simple as the frame at Fig. 5, this trick picture frame forms an attractive piece of apparatus. Although shown oblong, the beginner will find a square frame better to manipulate. The sides should be of yellow deal or pine, and measure about $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide, 1 in. on the outside, and $\frac{3}{4}$ in. inside. Plane up a length to this section, and then make a rebate in the usual way to leave a space $\frac{1}{8}$ in. each way. Mitre the corners, glue, and nail up the frame as at L, Fig. 6, and when dry cut out the whole of the inside of the lower portion as shown at M, and in the enlarged section N. The rebate should be extended, and an extra rebate made at the bottom to take a strawboard back, and allow it to lie flush with the back of the frame. A piece of glass is now glued to the rebate, narrow strips of cardboard are glued on top and a second piece of glass glued on the strips. A suitable picture is pasted on a piece of cardboard and placed on

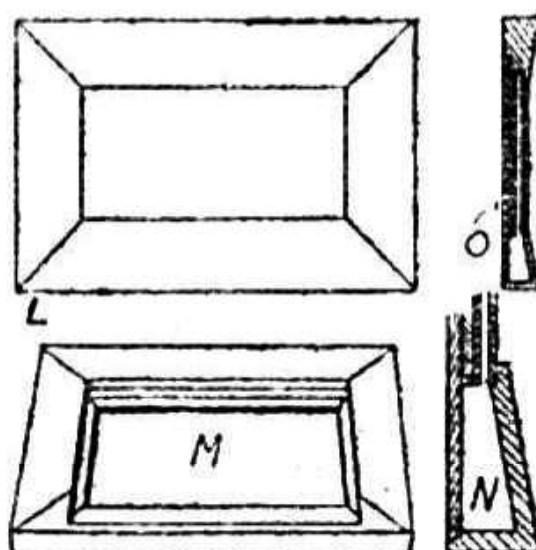


Figure 6.

the glass, and the back filled in with more card, so that no space is left when the back is fitted in. The hollow space is filled with finely sifted and thoroughly washed sand, the back is glued on as at O, and covered to the edge of the wood with brown paper pasted on. The frame is presented with

picture exposed, a member of the audience is asked to cover it with a cloth and place it in a box or on the table. Passes are made and the performer lifts it up in full view, and gradually exposes it, but is sure that it is now upside down to enable the sand to fill the space between the two pieces of glass.

THE MARVELLOUS PLANT.

This is a most effective trick, and requires two cone-shaped covers as at P and Q, Fig. 7. One is of cardboard, and the other of tin, to fit accurately inside the cardboard one; they should be large enough to fit over a fair-sized flower-pot. The cardboard should be covered with decorated wallpaper, but the tin should be coated with dull black. Two small pins are soldered to the inside of the tin as at Q, to hold some string S, to which is attached a piece of thin cork P, provided with holes in which the flowers or branches of foliage are placed. In presenting the trick, provide a screen draped with black velveteen or painted a dull black, a block of wood covered on top in the same way, a small bag of sand, and the flower pot. Arrange the screen U at the back of the table with the wooden block V in front, and place the blackened tin Q containing the flowers on top. All this being quite black will not be seen by the audience. Next arrange the cardboard cover P, the pot T, the bag of sand W, and some seeds or stained peas. Call attention to the cardboard

cover, tap it, and pass the magic wand through it, and then place it at the back out of the way, while you prepare the pot; really you place it carefully on the top of the tin cover, Q. Spend some time on the pouring of the sand into the pot and on placing the seeds in position, then grip the cover tightly so that both are lifted together, place on the pot, cover with the cloth, and at the same time lift up the string and allow the cork to drop in the pot. After a few passes with the wand, remove the cloth, then the cover. This can be held up and the wand passed through it again.

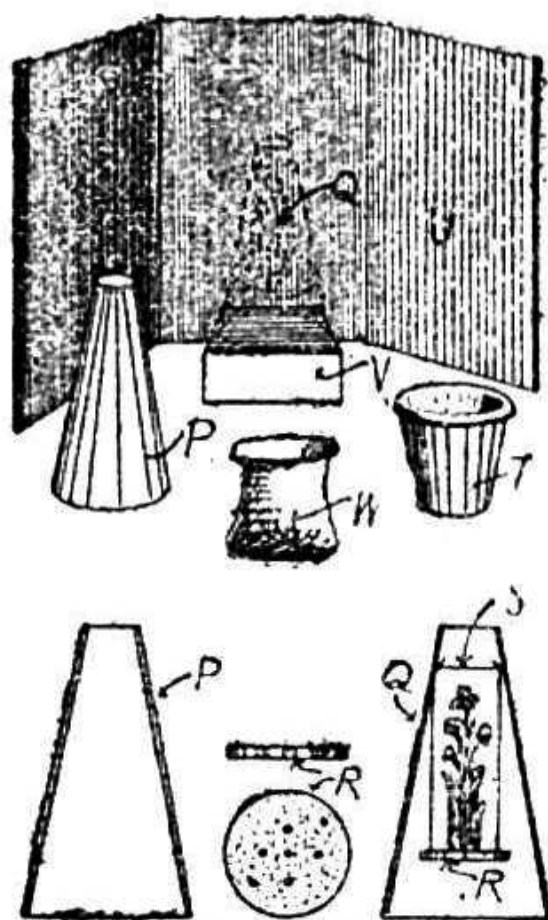


Figure 7.

centre groove of the same width as the wood, and half the depth, and on the other side two grooves of half the width and depth. D is similar to B and E is quite plain. It is fitted

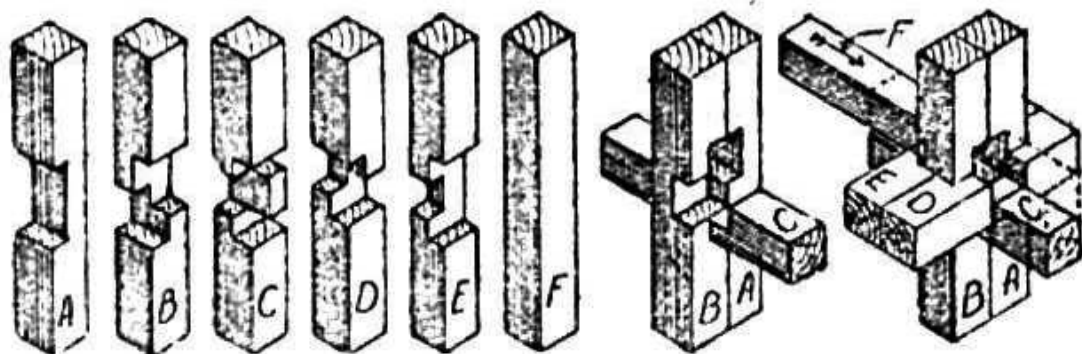


Figure 9.

together by placing A and B together, and then fitting C piece across. D and E are now placed in position, leaving a square hole for the last piece.

THE MORTISE PUZZLE.

Fig. 10.

This is a puzzle joint made from three pieces $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 4 in. All plain mortised $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{1}{2}$ in. One piece A is plain, the piece B has a slot on one side $\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide. The third piece C has a slot $\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide on one side, and a recess of $\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{1}{2}$ in. on the opposite side. The method of fitting consists in slipping B through A to within $\frac{1}{8}$ in. of the opening, C is now slipped on top, and will pass into the slot in B, the latter being pushed along to lock the joint and complete the puzzle.

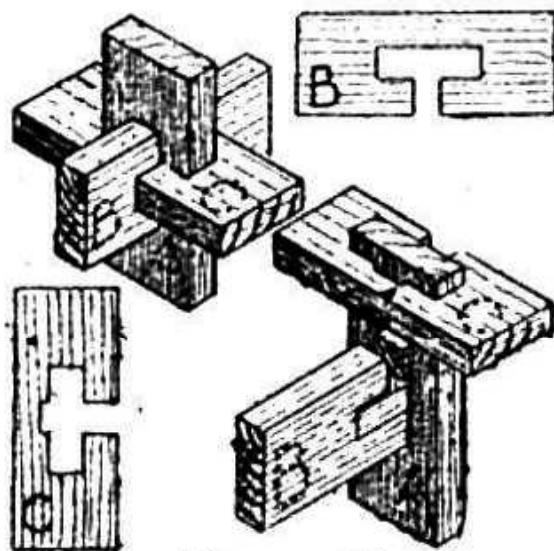


Figure 10.

into the slot in B, the latter being pushed along to lock the joint and complete the puzzle.

WIRE PUZZLES.

Fig. 11.

The puzzle at A is made with small curtain rings and wire, and the solution is to remove loop from rings without detaching wires or bar. No. 1 is slipped along off the loop and slipped through it. No. 3 is now dropped, and No. 1 put back to drop No. 2. Drop Nos. 1 and 2 and No. 4. With No. 3 off No. 5 can be dropped. To remove the ring at B, pass it along to the end of the spiral, and loop it over so that it rests on one loop of the spiral. The puzzle at C is solved by folding the two large portions together, passing the ring over

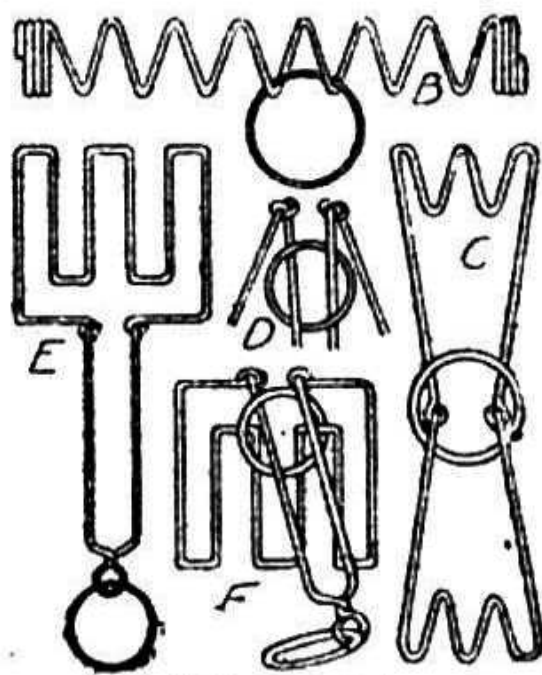
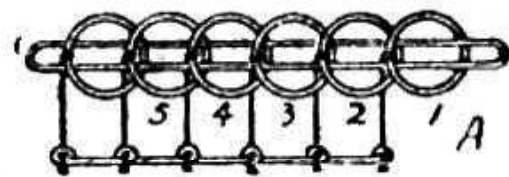


Figure 11

PUZZLES TO MAKE

THE BLOCK PUZZLE.

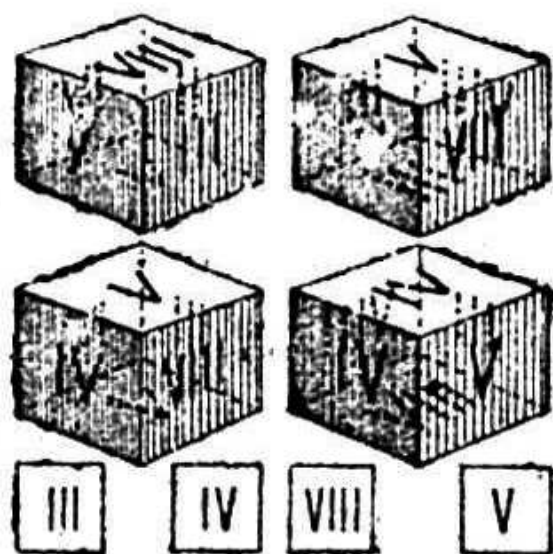


Figure 8.

for turning in and then glued up. The numbers shown should be marked on the sides, and the solution is to place the cubes together in line with all sides giving a total of 20.

THE EASTERN JOINT PUZZLE.

Fig. 9.

This is composed of six pieces of hard wood, square in section, from $\frac{1}{4}$ in. to $\frac{1}{2}$ in., and from 2 in. to 3 in. in length. Its construction depends on accurate marking out and sawing. The piece A has a groove equal to $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the width, and half the thickness; the piece B has a groove equal to the width and half the thickness on two sides. C has on one side a

one joint as at D, and then working it round to the other side. The puzzle at E is similarly worked as at F, the small ring has to pass over all the bars of the gridiron. All these puzzles can be made with brass wire and pliers.

THE PUZZLE PEN BOX.

(Fig. 12.)

This is a most effective puzzle, but it calls for neat workmanship. The back A, $2\frac{5}{8}$ in. by $13/16$ th in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in., is tongued into two sides B together with the pieces C and D, $2\frac{5}{8}$ in. $9/16$ in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in. The sides B have four grooves, one $\frac{1}{8}$ in. wide and deep at the end A; another B, $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long; a third E, $\frac{1}{8}$ in. from the other end; and the fourth F, half-way between the first and second. A and E are both $\frac{1}{8}$ in. wide, B and F are $\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide. A groove is also made along the top edge $\frac{1}{8}$ in. wide and deep, as at G. These parts are now glued together,

and glued to a base H. The back J is formed with two pieces, one being on the inside as at K, $\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide and $2\frac{5}{8}$ in. long, made to fit in the grooves E. A piece L is fitted in the top grooves

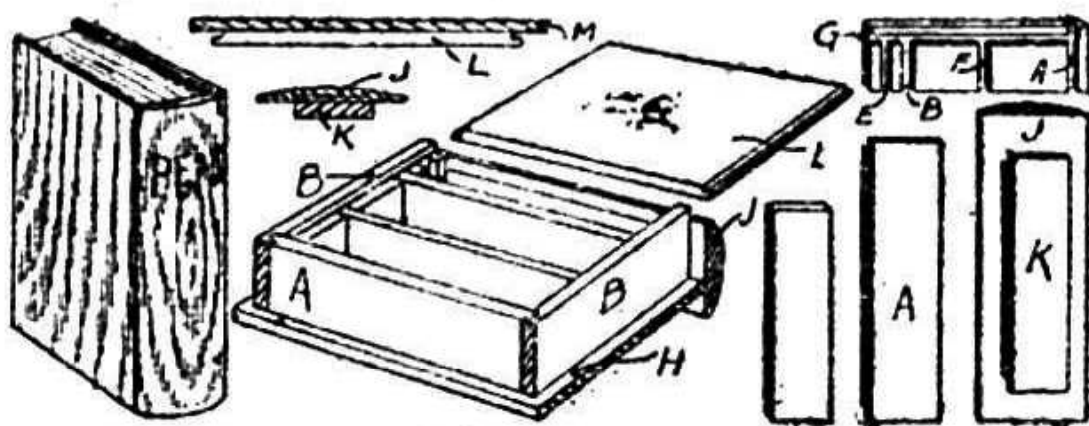


Figure 12.

G, and a similar piece to H is glued to it. The action of the box can now be seen, for the top L with its covering M can only be removed when the back JK has been pushed down.



Editorial Office,
Study E.
St. Frank's.

My dear Chums,

I have had so many things to publish this week—sketches and articles that have been specially commissioned for the Christmas Number and cannot be held over—that I must for once in a way find for myself an odd corner on this page and be thankful for it.

DON'T BE ALARMED

You will notice that I have left out many of the regular features in this number. Do not be alarmed, my chums, for they will be resumed early in the New Year. Handy is getting somewhat uppish again because I have had to hold up his "In Reply to Yours." Letters still continue to roll in by the ton, but every one of them will be answered in due course.

MORE GOOD WISHES.

Let me add to my greeting on the Christmas card on the cover (quite a bright idea, what?) by wishing you a jolly good time this Christmas. I am only sorry all of you cannot come along to Glenthorne Manor and join us fellows at Archie's party. But though you cannot go there in person, you will be able to read all about it in THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY.

A REAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

I have tried to make this number of the Mag. a real Christmas Number, and, in particular, I hope that the articles by Goodwin on conjuring tricks and puzzles will provide plenty of entertainment for your friends after the Christmas dinner.

All of the best,
Yours till next week,

REGGIE PITT.



IN QUEST OF GOLD!

A Marvellous New Serial of Breathless Adventure in the Klondyke and Alaska.

By the Celebrated Author
Edward Oswald Handforth

MEMORIES REFRESHED HERE!

This is a tale of daring deeds and hair-raising adventures in the goldfields of Alaska. Bob Brave and Claude Courage, having staked out their claim, are besieged in their shack by hordes of Flatfoot Indians. One arrow whizzes through a bullet hole in the wall and buries itself in Bob's manly chest. He sinks to the floor with a groan.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTURED BY INDIANS!

BOB BRAVE lay still and cold, and the arrow quivered in his chest like a twig in the gale. Claude Courage sped to his chum's side, and sank to the floor, forgetting about the shrieking Indians outside.

"Bob—Bob!" he cried desperately. "Oh, speak to me, Bob!"

"Fathead!" said Bob, sitting up. "It's only stuck in my ribs! We can't stop for such trifles as that! Quick! Load the machine-gun!"

Bob pulled the arrow out with one jerk, and flung it contemptuously aside. Blood spurted out as though he had just unbunged a cask of beer, but Bob cared nothing. He had plenty of blood to spare, anyhow.

"Too late!" he shouted in despair. "Look! The Indians are on us! There's no time to beat them back! This means that we shall be scalped!"

"Great pip!" gasped Claude. "Then we shall be bald all our lives!"

Before they could say anything further, the shack burst into a million flames. The Indians had been throwing arrows with lighted ends, and the woodwork had caught fire. There was only one way of escape!

And this way of escape meant capture! They escaped death, but they were forced to run into the arms of the waiting Indians. They were fierce, gaunt-looking fellows—decked out with feathers and paint. Some

of them were wearing gowns and turbans. Lots of Indians wear turbans—especially the Hindus. These redskins were awful brutes.

Our heroes were captured before they could run a yard, and this disaster was truly awful, for Bob Brave just remembered that it was Christmas Eve!

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHRISTMAS PRISONERS!

BOUND hand and foot, Bob Brave and Claude Courage were marched across the vast plains into the Indian settlement. Their claim was left behind, and they knew that all their gold was lost.

"Christmas Eve!" murmured Bob Brave brokenly. "To-morrow is Christmas Day! And here we are, in the hands of these redskins. It means death, Claude—we shall be shoved into a teepee and scalped!"

"Don't!" muttered Claude. "We shan't even get any turkey! Not a taste of Christmas pudding! Oh, why did we ever come to the Klondike?"

They were thrust into a teepee, and the door was slammed and barred. Even the window was covered with great iron rods. The Indians held a dance of triumph in the middle of the camp. Squaws and papooses raced about in wild excitement. A huge fire blazed, and a great cauldron was fixed up on a tripod.

Within the teepee our heroes clasped hands.

"Have courage, Claude!" urged Bob.

"Be brave, Bob!" murmured Claude. "The end is near! Within a few minutes it will be midnight—and then Christmas Day! They are preparing to boil us alive! But are we down-hearted?"

(Don't miss next week's amazing instalment in our Second Christmas Number!)

A Sure Guide to a Jolly Christmas!

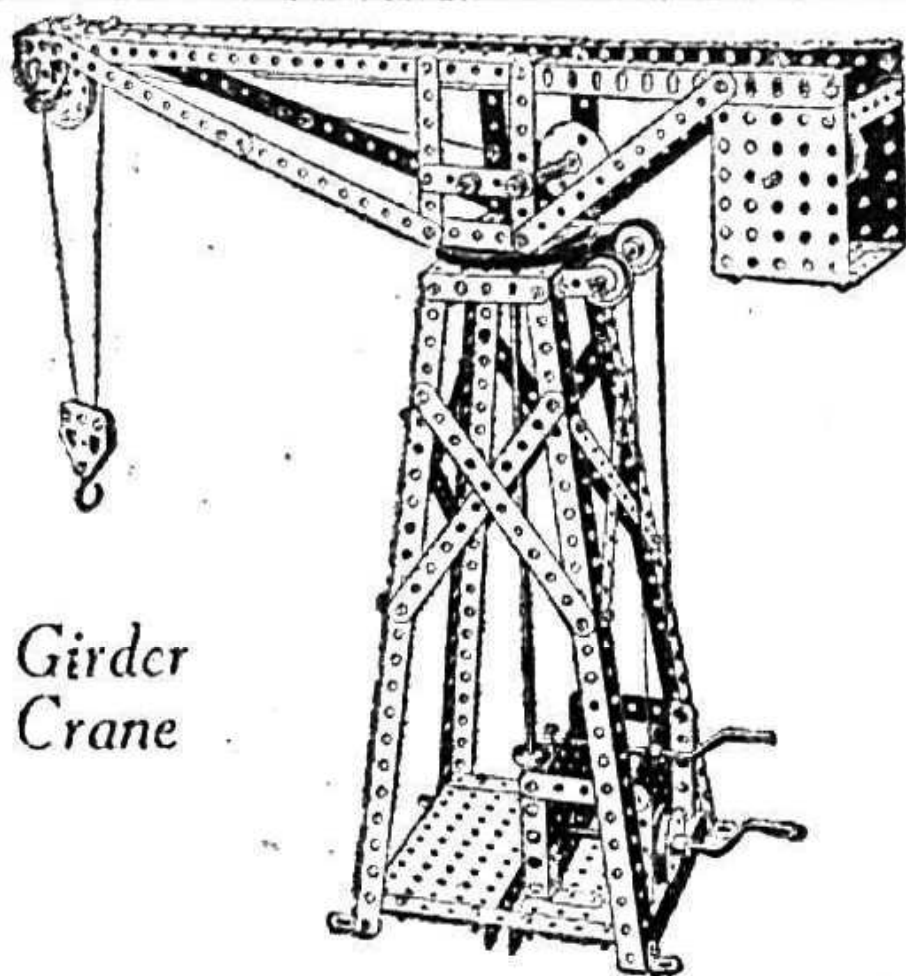
This wonderful 20-Page
Book Given **FREE** in



*The Grand Bumper
Xmas Number of the
Boys' Friend.*

Out on Saturday Dec. 20

**Don't be Without It
Whatever You Do!**



*Girder
Crane*

You can build this beautiful model of a Girder Crane and hundreds of others with Meccano. In fact, you can build a new model every day if you wish.

A Meccano Outfit contains shining steel Strips, Rods, Pulley-Wheels, Gear-Wheels, and other engineering parts. All are made to scale and are part of the Meccano system. No study is required to build with Meccano and the youngest boy can commence to build at once. Full instructions with every outfit.

MECCANO

ENGINEERING FOR BOYS

Outfits from 3/6 to 370/-



FREE TO BOYS

A new and splendidly illustrated book, telling of all the good things that come from Meccanoland, will be sent post free to those boys who show this advertisement to three chums. Send us their names and addresses together with your own. Put No. 12 after your own name for reference.
MECCANO LIMITED,
Binns Road, Liverpool.

HORNBY CLOCK WORK TRAINS

THE TRAINS WITH THE GUARANTEE

Modelled on the latest type British locomotives and carriages, and beautifully enamelled in colours, the Hornby train is the finest clockwork train made. A most valuable feature of the Hornby loco is that all the parts are standardised, and any lost or damaged part may be replaced with a new one. A Hornby Train lasts for ever!



Free to Boys

This is a splendid new book that tells all about Hornby Trains and all the other Meccano Products. A copy will be sent post free to those boys who show this advertisement to three chums. Send us their names and addresses with your own. Address your letter to Dept. S.



HORNBY TRAIN PRICES

No. 1.	Goods Set		22/6
No. 1.	Passenger Set		30/-
No. 1.	Tank Loco		12/6
No. 2.	Goods Set		37/6
No. 2.	Pullman Set		60/-
No. 2.	Tank Loco		30/-

MECCANO LIMITED Binns Rd. Liverpool.

HOME CINEMATOGRAPHS FILMS AND ACCESSORIES.

Send p.c. for New Illustrated List, post free. Machines from 7/6. Films from 1/- 100 feet, post free.



ACETYLENE
LIGHTING
SETS.

No. 1.	25 c.p.	..	3/3
No. 2.	50 c.p.	..	4/3
No. 3.	100 c.p.	..	5/6
No. 4.	500 c.p.	..	12/6



Reflector with
Nos.
2, 3, 4.

FORD'S (Dept. A.P.), 13, Red Lion Square,
LONDON, W.C.1. Entrance Dane Street.
Enquiries promptly attended to.



HEIGHT COUNTS

in winning success. Let the Girvan System increase your height. Send P.C. for particulars and our £100 guarantee to Enquiry Dept. A.M.P., 17, Stroud Green Rd., London, N.4.

FREE FUN! Ventriloquists' Instruments given FREE to all sending 7d. (P.O.) for Sample Trick and Lists.—P. FEARING, Travancore, Colwyn Bay.

Be sure to mention "The Nelson Lee Library" when communicating with advertisers.

2/6 Weekly

buys a No. 300A Mead Gramophone with giant horn, loud sound-box, massive oak case and 40 tunes. Carriage paid. 10 Days' Trial. 300 model 37/6 cash to record buyers. Table Grams and Cabinet models at WHOLE SALE Prices. Write for Lists.

Mead Company (Dept. G2), BIRMINGHAM.



MAKE YOUR OWN ELECTRIC LIGHT

These wonderful Dynamos light brilliantly 4-6 volt lamps and are very easy to work, 5/-.

GREENS Dept. AL, 85, New Oxford St., London.



CUT THIS OUT

Nelson Lee Library PEN COUPON VALUE 2d.
Send 7 of these coupons with only 2/9 direct to the Fleet Pen Co., 119, Fleet St., E.C.4. You will receive by return a splendid British-Made 14ct. Gold Nibbed Fleet Fountain Pen, Value 10/6 (fine, medium, or broad nib). If only 1 coupon is sent the price is 3/9, 2d. being allowed for each extra coupon up to 6. (Pocket Clip, 4d.). Satisfaction guaranteed or cash returned. **Special New Offer—Your own name in gilt letters on either pen for 1/- extra.**
Lever Self-Filling Model with Safety Cap, 2/- extra.