

THE **NELSON LEE**

BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER 52 PAGES!

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**THE
GHOST
OF
TRAVIS DENE!**

Thrills galore in this magnificent long complete special Christmas yarn
of the cheery chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 188.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

December 7th, 1929.



By EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.

CHAPTER I.

The Man With the Scarred Face!

THE man with the scarred face stood in the shelter of the thick hedge, just a little beyond the main gateway of St. Frank's.

He was practically invisible in the gloom of the wintry night. He stood motionless, watching, listening. His patience was phenomenal, since he had been standing here, in exactly this same position, for at least two hours.

Now he watched the upper windows of the West House lighting up, one after the other. It was bed-time at the great school. Occasionally a murmur of voices and laughter would be heard by the lonely watcher, who seemed to be paying all his attention towards the West House.

This man who stood in the shadows of the hedge was tall, wiry, and the scar that marred his features extended from one side of his face to the other. He was well wrapped up, but in spite of this his hands and feet were numb with the cold. Occasionally he would gently stamp his feet and beat his hands together.

—FEATURING THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S!

Snowfights—games—fun—somebody kidnapped—and a ghost! The St. Frank's juniors are having the most thrilling Christmas they've ever experienced—and YOU will soon be enjoying the finest Christmas yarn ever written by popular Edwy Searles Brooks.



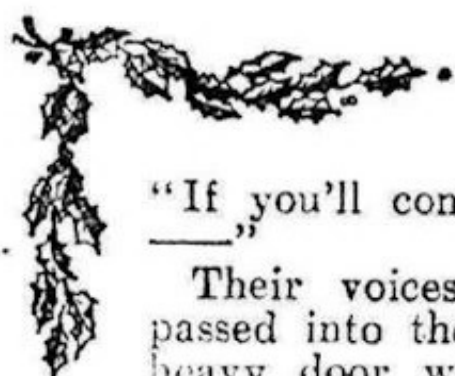
Suddenly he became still and rigid.

There were footsteps in the Triangle. Somebody came to the big main gates of St. Frank's. He was a short, stockily-built man, with bow legs—Josh Cuttle, the head porter. He set his lamp down, produced his keys and unlocked the gates. He swung them wide open. Having done this, he picked up his lamp and went into his little lodge.

FIVE minutes later a big limousine rolled along from the direction of Bellton Village. It turned into the Triangle and came to a standstill in front of the West House steps. A tall, powerfully-built man emerged.

"This is very good of you, Sir Edward," said Mr. Beverley Stokes, the West Housemaster, running down the steps. "We should not have asked you to come personally, only the matter is somewhat urgent."

"Good of me?" repeated Sir Edward Handforth, with his hearty laugh. "Nonsense! Only too glad, Mr. Stokes."



"Cuttle will tell your chauffeur where to garage the car," said the Housemaster. "If you'll come indoors, Sir Edward—"

Their voices died away as they passed into the West House, and the heavy door was closed. Josh Cuttle came up with his lamp, and the limousine moved round towards the big school garage. Within five minutes the Triangle was dark and deserted again.

And the man in the shadow of the hedge nodded grimly to himself.

"Sir Edward Handforth!" he muttered. "Promising—distinctly promising!"

He moved out from his shelter, and his progress across the road was noiseless. He was wearing rubber-soled shoes. With remarkable agility he reached the top of the wall, and dropped down into the school property.

Everything was dark and deserted. It only took the man a few seconds to nip across to the corner of the West House. There was a big gutter-pipe here, reaching from the roof down to the ground. It was a stout, strong affair.

The man with the scarred face gripped it, took a deep breath, and then he commenced ascending. There was something astoundingly acrobatic in this performance. Up he went, gripping the pipe with his rubber-soled feet and his knees.

He reached the roof, took a firm grip of the parapet, and easily hauled himself up. The building was ideal for his purpose. There was an ornamental parapet all round, and the roof itself, for the main part, was flat, with heavily-built leads. Once up there, he was invisible.

The man evidently knew his ground well, for without hesitation he padded forward to a certain chimney. Smoke was emerging from it. The man knew that this chimney led directly upwards from Mr. and Mrs. Stokes' private sitting-room.

With deft fingers, in spite of their numbness, the stranger produced a curious little object from one of his pockets. It was black and round, about the size of a tennis-ball. Attached to it there was a long line. Cautiously, he tossed the black thing into the chimney, and then he paid out the line so that the black object was lowered farther and farther down the chimney!

A SMALL quantity of soot fell into the fire in Mr. and Mrs. Stokes' sitting-room. It blazed and glowed, and some of it dropped out into the fender. But nobody noticed.

For Sir Edward Handforth had just come in, and he was busily shaking hands with Mrs. Stokes, Miss Eileen Dare and Mr. Nelson Lee.

Perhaps Nelson Lee, the famous school-master-detective, would have looked twice at the fireplace if he had seen that scrap of falling soot, but, as it happened, he had his

back towards it at the moment and saw nothing.

"I am sure I am very interested to meet such a famous person as yourself, Miss Dare," Sir Edward was saying. "Upon my word! Forgive my saying so, but I had expected to see somebody considerably older—and, if it comes to that, plainer, by George!"

Eileen Dare laughed.

"I am grateful to you for coming, Sir Edward," she said in her soft, charming voice.

Sir Edward found it rather difficult to take his gaze off the celebrated girl detective. She was, indeed, a beautiful girl. Small, dainty and graceful, it was difficult to realise that she was possessed of boundless pluck and energy, and that her brain was as keen and as quick as even that of Nelson Lee.

Eileen's eyes were brown, and they were eyes of singular charm and beauty. They looked straight at you—into you—and you could gain an impression of the resolute strength of will behind them.

"Well, what's it all about?" asked Sir Edward, sitting down in one of the easy chairs and looking round. "Quite a little conference, eh? I'll be bound there's something deep behind it, or you wouldn't be here, Mr. Lee."

"I shall leave Miss Dare to explain matters to you, Sir Edward," said Nelson Lee.

Mr. and Mrs. Stokes sat down, and Eileen Dare looked thoughtfully at the father of Edward Oswald and Willy Handforth. Anybody would have known him to be the father of the bluff, clumsy, good-natured "Handy," of the St. Frank's Remove. He was of the same sturdy build, he possessed the same aggressive jaw, and his eyes could glare in the same way.

"I'm supposed to be here with my niece, Molly, for a week's holiday," said Eileen Dare slowly. "Actually, Sir Edward, we came here to seek a haven. I need not go into many details, but Molly is in considerable danger. There are certain men who have planned to kidnap her."

"Good gad!" said Sir Edward. "What on earth for?"

"I can only tell you that her danger is very real," replied Eileen. "Unhappily there was a slight accident to the train on the evening we arrived—with the result that our names were mentioned in the morning papers."

"I remember reading about the affair," nodded Sir Edward.

"Our whole object in coming here, therefore, was rendered futile," continued the girl detective. "Our enemies knew that we were here—and it was not long before they arrived. They even attempted to kidnap Molly a night or two ago—and they were prevented from doing so by Mr. Lee."

"I find it necessary to correct you there, Eileen," put in Lee. "It was your son, Willy, who frustrated the evil designs of these men, Sir Edward."

"William?" said Sir Edward, with a grunt. "I'm not surprised! That young man is capable of anything! Absolutely anything! One of the most mischievous, impertinent——"

"It was at his suggestion, Sir Edward, that we communicated with you," interrupted Eileen. "He assured us that you would be only too willing to help."

"If there's anything that I can do, I'll do it, of course," said Handforth senior.

"I only wish that I could explain everything to you in full," said Eileen. "But I am unable to do so, Sir Edward. I am pledged to secrecy, and I can only repeat

that Molly is in grave danger. One day, perhaps, I hope to explain everything in full—and then you will understand my personal anxiety."

Another scrap of soot fell into the fireplace, blazed, and smouldered redly. And again Nelson Lee missed that trifling incident. He was in the act of lighting his pipe, and when he turned to fling the spent match into the fire, the fire was normal again.

"Your son, Willy, has told us that you are spending Christmas at your Suffolk home, Travis Dene," went on Eileen. "In fact, Willy has invited us to spend Christmas there with you. I realise, of course, that he has absolutely no authority to issue any such invitation——"

"I beg to differ, Miss Dare," interrupted Sir Edward. "Of course he has authority. He is my son, and his friends are my friends. If he has invited you to spend Christmas with us, I can only endorse his invitation—and heartily, too."

"That is very nice of you, Sir Edward," said the girl detective gratefully. "If Molly and I can spend Christmas with you at Travis Dene, a great anxiety will be off my mind. For we can get there safely—without the enemy knowing anything of our movements. Some very simple precautions will ensure that."

"You mean that you want to be there in secret?" asked Sir Edward dubiously. "I didn't quite understand that. I'm afraid it might be rather awkward. You see, I am

giving a big house-party——"

"No, no!" interrupted Eileen. "I am not even hinting at secrecy. Molly and I desire to spend Christmas at your home quite openly. Unless these men know definitely where we are going, it will be practically impossible for them to trace us. You see, there will be no publicity regarding our presence in Suffolk—and in that out-of-the-way spot, amongst the guests at such a great mansion, we shall be very effectually lost."

"I see—I see," nodded Sir Edward. "You are quite correct, Miss Dare. Travis Dene is certainly an out-of-the-way place.

And, as you say, if you can arrive there without your enemies knowing of your movements, you will be in a very secure haven. An excellent scheme. Willy, in spite of his youth, is a clever boy. A very clever boy! I would like him to be a little less cheeky and a little less noisy, but he's a clever boy, all the same."

"I only hope that you will forgive me for having dragged you down to St. Frank's in this way," said Eileen Dare earnestly. "I would not have done so only the situation is very acute, and the sooner I can get my niece away from St. Frank's, the better."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't go to

Travis Dene to-morrow—to-night, if it comes to that," said Sir Edward. "I'm going myself to-morrow, with Lady Handforth and with my married daughter and her husband."

"You have solved the difficulty, Sir Edward," said Nelson Lee. "It would be possible, of course, for Miss Eileen to seek sanctuary elsewhere, but I could not help feeling that she would be far safer under your roof. You need not anticipate that there will be any danger for your other guests. Our whole object is to put these men off the track."

"What about you, Lee?" asked Sir Edward. "You'll come to Travis Dene for Christmas, too? Now, don't say you won't, because——"



"To tell you the truth, Sir Edward, I was hoping that you would invite me," said Nelson Lee frankly. "I very gladly accept. In the remote possibility of Miss Dare's enemies tracking her to your home, I should like to be there."

"H'm! Looks as though things might be exciting over Christmas," commented Sir Edward dryly. "Not that I want these infernal men to bother us during the festivities. However, I am quite ready to take the chance—and if you are the, Mr. Lee, I shall be perfectly easy. And what about you, Mrs. Stokes? And your husband?"

"Really, this is too bad, Sir Edward," smiled "Barry" Stokes. "I cannot help feeling that you are inviting us out of politeness—"

"Rubbish!" growled Sir Edward. "I'm inviting you because I want you to come. And why not? If it comes to that, why not have a big crowd of the boys there? And their girl friends—my younger daughter's friends? The more the merrier, eh? What do you say, Lee?"

"I say, yes," replied Nelson Lee promptly.

"Good man! Excellent man!" beamed Sir Edward, looking extraordinarily like his Removite son at that moment. "Now what do you say, eh?" he went on, glaring triumphantly at Mr. and Mrs. Stokes.

"We were going to spend a quiet Christmas at St. Frank's," smiled Barry Stokes. "However, as you have so kindly—"

"If you talk about my kindness again, I shall get angry!" broke in Sir Edward wrathfully. "I'm a believer in the old-fashioned Christmas party. I was only saying to my wife yesterday that we weren't going to have enough guests. What's the good of a lot of empty rooms at Christmas time?"

"We'll come—gladly," smiled Mr. Stokes. "Won't we, Joyce?"

"I think it will be delightful," replied Mrs. Stokes. "Thank you, Sir Edward."

"Well, that's settled," said Sir Edward, rising to his feet. "Now, Lee, what about the boys? You see my point, I hope?"

"Yes, of course," said Lee. "If there are a lot of schoolboys in your party it will be better for Miss Dare and her niece."

"Exactly!" beamed Sir Edward. "Not so much likelihood of those confounded rascals getting on her track, eh? And if there's any possibility of trouble—well, these boys might make themselves useful."

"There will be less likelihood of Molly being discovered amongst a big crowd," agreed Lee. "If I were you, Sir Edward, I should have a word with your two sons.

Tell them to invite their friends—half a dozen each, perhaps."

"Half a dozen each?" repeated Sir Edward with a laugh. "What's the good of that? I'll tell them to bring just as many as they please. Travis Dene is a rambling old place, and

there are scores of bed-rooms. At least, I believe so," he added thoughtfully. "Not that it matters much. We'll find accommodation for them. The fact is, I'm hanged if I know exactly what rooms there are at Travis Dene!"

They all laughed, and Nelson Lee could see that Eileen Dare was looking intensely relieved.

"What about the child now?" asked Sir Edward suddenly. "Is she safe? I mean, is there any chance of these rogues getting hold of her now—while we're all sitting here, making our plans for Christmas?"

"Molly is quite safe, Sir Edward," said Eileen. "Mrs. Carr—the matron—is in her bed room with her, and will remain there until either Joyce or I relieve her. You see, we are guarding her very closely now."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea for us to slip away to-night?" asked Sir Edward. "We could be at Travis Dene long before the morning."

"I am afraid it would be too risky," replied Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "The enemy might be on the look-out—they might ambush us. And, believe me, Sir Edward, they are desperate men. Far better to leave it until the daytime. I haven't the slightest doubt that we shall be able to put them completely off the track."

"And to night we shall watch over Molly in turn," said Mrs. Stokes. "Eileen and myself. She won't be for a minute alone."

Sir Edward stroked his chin.

"By George!" he said. "This child must be in considerable danger!"

"She is," said Eileen quietly.

AND up on the roof, the man with the scarred face gently and carefully pulled up that line which he had lowered down the chimney.

It was really an asbestos-covered wire, and the little black object at the end of it was a miniature telephone receiver.

During that past hour he had heard everything that had been said in Mr. Stokes' sitting-room—just as clearly as though he had been standing in the room below!

This man was clever at his game. He did not spoil everything now by making a hurried retreat. He waited up on the roof—he waited until well after midnight.

Then, as silently as a shadow, he slithered down that gutter-pipe. Silently he padded across the Triangle, slipped over the school wall, and vanished into the night!

CHAPTER 2.

Invitations Galore!

"HALLO, Ted!" said Will Handforth, as he met his major in the Ancient House lobby, next morning. "Pater's here, you know!"

"Yes, I heard about it," said Edward Oswald Handforth with a frown. "What the dickens is the pater doing down at St. Frank's? We don't break up for two or three days."



"Well, he can come if he wants to, I suppose?" said Willy. "He's in a jolly good mood, too. I wangled half a quid out of him just now."

"Oh, you did, did you?" said Handforth, with a snort. "What about that five bob you wangled out of me yesterday?"

"I spent that on grub for my pets."

"And you'll spend the pater's ten bob on grub for yourself, I suppose?" said Handforth tartly. "Where is he? I could do with a bit of cash, too!"

"He's strolling about in Inner Court," grinned Willy. "Come on—we'll go together."

"You surprise me!" said his elder brother with heavy sarcasm. "I rather thought you'd be running about looking for Molly!"

He was disappointed. He expected Willy to turn as red as a beetroot, and to become confused. But there was really never any telling with Willy. He grinned more widely, and nodded with the utmost coolness.

"I've seen her already," he replied lightly. "Went into the West House to bid her good-morning—not ten minutes ago. Molly's a chum of mine, you know."

Handforth stared.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated. "I'm blowed if you're not loasting about it!"

"Well, why shouldn't I?" asked Willy. "Anything wrong in my having a girl chum?"

"I thought you always looked upon girls as useless things?"

"So did I—until Molly came along," replied the leader of the Third Form. "She's different. She's got more sense than all the Third put together."

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, who were hovering about in the background, now came forward.

"Listen to him!" said Chubby bitterly. "Can't you do anything with your minor, Handy? Ever since that Molly girl came he's been changed. Juicy and I don't get a look in! He doesn't care a rap about us now!"

Edward Oswald Handforth grinned.

"When a chap falls in love he hardly knows what he's doing," he replied blandly.

"Well, you've fallen in love enough times—so you've had the experience," replied Willy.

"Eh? What do you mean, you young ass?"

"Oh, don't stand here arguing!" said Willy impatiently. "Let's go out and find the pater."

Handforth realised that it would be just as well to change the subject. He was, indeed, very susceptible. Irene Manners, of the Moor View School, was his permanent

girl chum, but he was liable, at a moment's notice, to fall in love with any other girl. It was just a habit of his.

NIPPER was out in the Triangle, chatting with Reggie Pitt of the West House, and Vivian Travers and Archie Glenthorne and Buster Boots and Bob Christine, and a number of other juniors.

It was a sunny morning, and everybody was feeling in the best of spirits. Christmas would soon be here, and they were eagerly looking forward to the festive vacation.



Sir Edward Handforth came striding into the Triangle, brisk and cheery.

"Splendid!" he said in his most hearty voice, as he walked up to his two sons, who had stopped to have a few words with the other juniors. "I wanted to see you, Edward! And you, too, William! I've got something to say to you."

"Anything important, pater?" asked Handforth.

"I dare say it's important from your point of view, young man," replied Sir Edward. "As you may know, we are going to spend Christmas at Travis Dene. Better than London. More like the old-fashioned Yuletide, eh? Let's hope it snows!"

"I'll bet we'll have a good time," said Handforth enthusiastically.

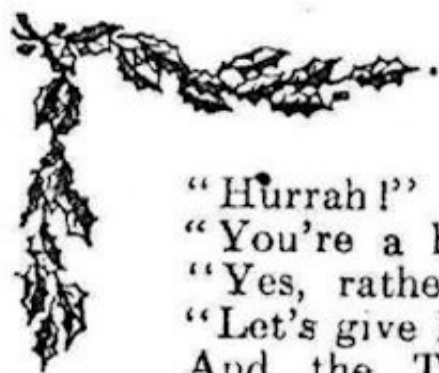
"I want you to invite as many of your friends as you like," continued Sir Edward heartily. "You, too, William! The more the merrier!"

"I say, that's awfully decent of you, pater!" said Handforth eagerly. "By George! I was wondering if I could bring Churchy and Mac—and it'll be awfully good to have a crowd of others, too. If they're not already fixed up for Christmas—"

"I'm not fixed up, Handy!" said Teddy Long, pushing forward.

"I'm not interested in whether you're fixed up or not," replied Handforth coldly. "You're not one of my friends, you young rotter! And you needn't think that you're going to be invited to Travis Dene."

"H'm! Well, I'll leave you to settle this for yourselves," said Sir Edward, coughing. "But remember, boys—that you'll be wel-



come. If my sons invite you, I'll promise you a good time for Christmas."

"Hurrah!"

"You're a brick, Sir Edward!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Let's give him a cheer, you chaps!"

And the Triangle echoed and re-echoed with the cheering for Sir Edward Handforth.

Incidentally, Sir Edward seemed to expand visibly. He loved the limelight just as much as his elder son.

WHILE the school was at breakfast, Nelson Lee's powerful sports two-seater purred round from the garage, with Lee himself at the wheel. It came to a halt in front of the West House.

Eileen Dare was ready. She looked particularly charming in her heavy winter coat with its fur collar. There was a healthy flush in her cheeks, and her eyes were sparkling happily.

"This is going to be like old times, Mr. Lee," she said as she ran down the steps.

"Jump in!" invited Lee, smiling. "Hallo! Here's Molly with Mrs. Stokes."

Molly Dare came tripping out of the West House, laughing gaily. Mrs. Stokes was with her. Molly was only about twelve, and she was a remarkably attractive little girl. It wasn't very surprising that Willy Handforth had made a chum of her.

"Oh, it's going to be so exciting!" she cried merrily. "I'm sure I shan't be able to contain myself. Aunt Eileen!"

"It won't be for long, dear," replied Eileen. "I shall soon see you again—and until then you've got to promise me that you'll do everything that you are told. It's most important."

"Yes, I know," said Molly, becoming grave. "Those horrid men! But we're going to diddle them, aren't we? We're going to spoof the bounders up to the eyes!"

"Molly!" protested Eileen.

"It's the effect of being mixed up with so many schoolboys," chuckled Nelson Lee.

"So long, auntie—and don't forget that we're going to dish those horrid men," said Molly determinedly. "My hat! Christmas is going to be just too gorgeous for words!"

Nelson Lee and Eileen Dare waited until Mrs. Stokes had taken Molly back indoors, and then the powerful two-seater drove out of the Triangle, and zoomed off down the lane.

If the enemy was on the watch, there was nothing very remarkable in this departure. Merely Nelson Lee escorting a lady away from the school.

Little did Nelson Lee guess that the enemy was already in possession of the vital plan!

IT wasn't until about an hour later that Sir Edward Handforth prepared for departure. He waited until the boys had gone into school, and then his big limousine was driven round.

He had just come from the headmaster's house, and he was looking unusually contented. Mr. Beverley Stokes was waiting to see him off.

"Well, Sir Edward, I won't keep you," said Mr. Stokes, with a twinkle in his eye. "The sooner you are off the better, I imagine."

"I rather think so," smiled Sir Edward.

He took his seat in the limousine alone, except for the chauffeur, and he looked at Barry Stokes rather more seriously.

"Do you think everything will be all right?" he asked.

"I imagine so," replied the Housemaster. "Of course, it will be better if there are no delays. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said Sir Edward. "And, understanding, I'll say good-bye to you at once, young man."

They shook hands, and Sir Edward gave the word to his chauffeur whilst the young Housemaster stood back. The big car glided noiselessly out of the Triangle.

Sir Edward sat back, lit a cigar, and opened the morning paper. Everything went well until the car was some little distance beyond Bellton.

There was a deserted stretch of road here, without any houses or cottages. And just round a bend, at the foot of a dip, the chauffeur beheld a small closed motor-car standing beside the road.

A man came forward, holding up a hand. "Hallo! Anything wrong?" asked Sir Edward, as the limousine began to slow down.

"Somebody ahead, sir, beckoning me to stop," said the chauffeur.

Sir Edward started, and laid his paper aside.

"Oh!" he said. "I'm not quite sure—H'm! All right. I suppose you'd better stop."

The limousine slowed to a standstill, and the stranger came right up to the big car and boldly opened one of the rear doors.

"Really!" said Sir Edward.

"Do you mind telling me, sir, if this is the correct road for a village called Selling?" asked the stranger politely.

"For Selling?" repeated Sir Edward. "I've never heard of the place."

"It is some distance beyond Caistowe, I think."

"Well, if you want Caistowe you can get to it through Bellton—straight ahead," replied Sir Edward.

He noted that the stranger was looking keenly into the car; and it was quite apparent that the car was empty except for Sir Edward and the chauffeur. There was not another soul there—and no space in which anybody could hide.

"I am very much obliged," said the stranger, closing the door again.

He walked back to his own car, and Sir Edward's limousine drove on.

When it was quite out of sight, the man went across to his own automobile and opened the driving-door. Another man got up from the rear, where, presumably, he

had been lying low. This man had an ugly scar running across his face.

"Anything?" he asked.

"No; just the old boy and the chauffeur," said the other man. "Don't you think it was a bit risky for us to do this?"

"Perhaps it was—but it's better done," said the man with the scar. "We want to give these people the impression that we are still on the alert.

This thing will get reported to Lee, and to the Dare girl, too. They'll assume that we are puzzled, and so they'll take it for granted that we know nothing about Travis Dene. Don't you see? Far better that we should have a clear field there."

"By gad! You're right!" said the other.

SIR EDWARD HANDFORTH

was rather thoughtful after his car had been driving on for some distance. He had little doubt that the man who had stopped him had been a spy. He had been looking for Molly Dare!

Well, he had gained no satisfaction.

The limousine drove on through Bannington and Midshott, and it did not come to a halt until it was some little distance past the town of Helmford. Here, in a secluded little by-road, it came to a stop just behind Nelson Lee's sports two-seater, which was waiting there.

"Everything all right?" called Nelson Lee.

"I think so," said Handforth senior. "A man stopped us and asked directions—but I rather fancy he was more interested in the interior of the car."

"You think he was one of the—enemy?"

"I'm sure of it," said Sir Edward. "He seemed very inquisitive—and I fancy he was slightly disappointed when he found that I

was alone. That's all. Nothing else has happened."

They went round to the rear of the limousine, and Eileen Dare was looking impatient and anxious. Here, at the back, there was one of those enormous built-in luggage trunks. It was really a part of the car itself. Sir Edward produced a key, and the big lid was unlocked.

"H a l l o, auntie!" said Molly, bobbing up.

"Well, she doesn't seem any the worse," chuckled Sir Edward.

"It's been lovely!" laughed Molly gaily. "It was a bit cramped, of course, and we went over some awful bumps. And towards the end it was getting a bit stuffy. Still, I enjoyed it. Such fun, Mr. Lee!"

"I'm glad you have suffered no ill effects, young lady," said Nelson Lee, smiling. "Well, from now onwards you're going to ride in a more ladylike fashion — seated next to your aunt and to Sir Edward."

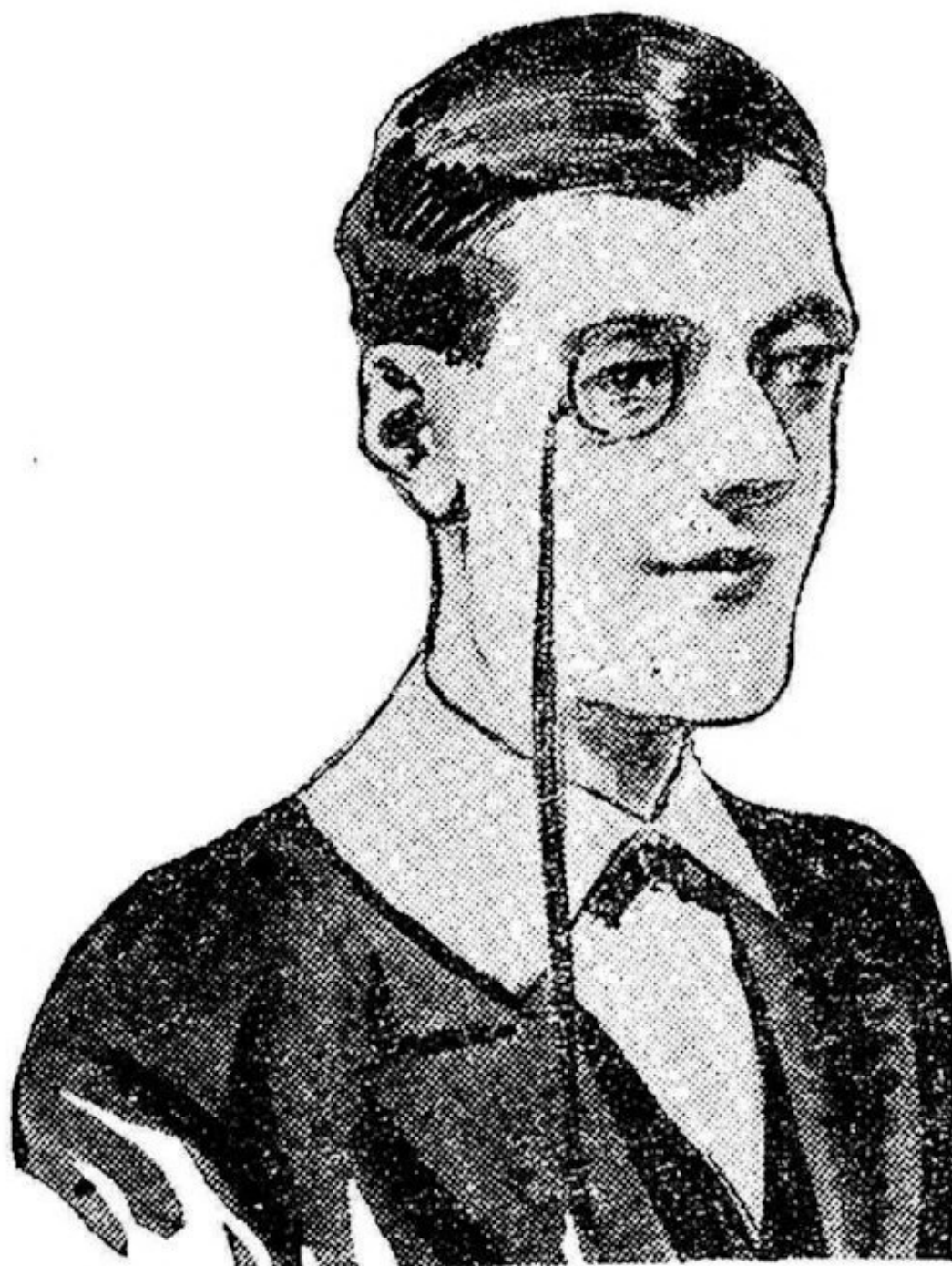
The trunk was locked again, and Molly climbed into the big limousine with Sir Edward and Eileen Dare. Eileen was looking very relieved.

"I think it was an excellent idea of yours, Mr. Lee," she declared. "We have got well beyond the reach of those men now, and it is impossible that they could have guessed anything."

"We shall go straight on to London, and after a lunch there, at my town house, we'll go straight down to Suffolk," said Sir Edward. "Lady Handforth will travel with us. You can leave these young ladies in my care with perfect confidence, Mr. Lee."

"I am sure of it, Sir Edward," replied Nelson Lee.

And very soon the limousine drove on.



ARCHIBALD WINSTON DEREK GLENTHORNE.

Known as the "genial ass" of the Remove. On the surface would seem to be a slacker, yet when required he can be as energetic as anybody. Always perfectly dressed, and one of the wealthiest boys in the school. A credit to the Remove.

Nelson Lee himself turned his sports car about, and drove back to St. Frank's. He was satisfied that by nightfall Eileen Dare and Molly would be safe at Travis Dene, with the enemy completely baffled. Unfortunately, the enemy was already making grim preparations!

CHAPTER 3.

The Legend of Travis Dene!

WILLY HANDFORTH hurried away from the School House immediately after morning lessons, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon snorted when they saw that their leader was making tracks for the West House.

"He's at it again!" groaned Chubby. "I say, this is getting a bit too thick!"

"What's the good of talking?" asked Juicy helplessly. "If we say anything to Willy, he'll biff us on the nose. Besides, we can't risk anything. He has invited us to his place for Christmas—and if we upset him he'll leave us in the lurch."

On the West House steps Willy was confronted by Nelson Lee, who was just coming out.

"You won't find Molly here," said Lee, smiling.

"She hasn't gone out, has she, sir?" asked Willy, in alarm.

"Molly has gone—right away."

"Gone! Where to, sir?" asked Willy anxiously.

"I'm afraid I cannot tell you that, young man. But you can be perfectly satisfied that Molly is in safety, and that she is being well cared for. She left earlier this morning."

"Somebody might have told me, sir," said Willy reproachfully. "I should have liked to have said 'Good-bye'."

"It was advisable, Willy, that Molly should leave without any kind of demonstration," replied Lee quietly. "I think you will understand what I mean."

Willy scratched his head.

"How did you wangle it, sir?" he asked. "She didn't go with my pater, because I watched him go from one of the windows. And she didn't go with you and Miss Dare, either."

"She has gone, nevertheless."

"Look here, sir, won't you tell me where she has gone to?" asked Willy. "I mean, I think I'm different from the other chaps. You can trust me to keep mum. There's nobody about here to overhear—"

"I'm afraid I cannot satisfy your curiosity," replied Lee.

"Look here, sir; if I make a guess, and I'm right, you'll tell me?"

"Yes, if you are right."

"Well, Molly has gone to Travis Dene—our country place in Suffolk," said Willy shrewdly.

"Upon my word!"

"Am I right, sir?"

"As it happens, you are."

"I knew that my pater hadn't come down here for nothing," said Willy sagely. "And these wholesale invitations are significant, too. You want a lot of us chaps to be there, sir, don't you—in case there's any trouble?"

"I'm afraid there's not much hope of keeping anything from you, young man," said Lee dryly. "Fortunately, I know that I can trust you to be discreet. Later, of course, when the guests arrive at your home, there will be no further need for secrecy. But until then, please remember that Molly's destination is quite unknown."

"I'll remember, sir," said Willy. "Look here, what's it all about? I mean, what's the danger, sir?"

"I am nearly as much in the dark as you are."

"Oh, come off it, sir!" protested Willy. "Won't you tell me? It isn't Miss Dare who's in danger—I know that. It's Molly. These men are after Molly. Why, sir?"

"It is advisable, Willy, that these matters should not be discussed," said Nelson Lee quietly. "One day, perhaps, you will know the reason for these precautions. I can assure you that they are entirely necessary."

Willy could see that it was useless for him to press the point further, so he took his departure. Yet he was feeling very dissatisfied. He was worried, too. If he had had his way, he would have taken the first train for home. It would be a day or two before St. Frank's broke up and before the fellows went to their various homes.

And Willy was afraid that something ugly might happen in the meantime. He had an uncomfortable "hunch" that Molly would be in danger. He felt, deeply within him, that the precautions for her safety, although elaborate, had not been sufficient.

Yet he could really do nothing; he knew that he would have to wait.

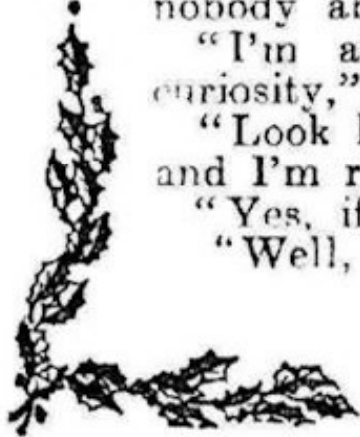
And he caught himself wondering, with a little start of surprise, if he really was worried about Molly's enemies. Wasn't it more likely that he was upset because she had gone—and that it would be two or three days before he saw her again?

"My lad, this sort of thing won't do!" muttered Willy, pulling himself together. "Great Scott! Chubby and Juicy have been saying that you're smitten—and it looks as if they're right!"

HIS major, at just about this same time, was in Study D, holding forth to Church and McClure—who dutifully listened with an air of attention.

"It's all rot!" Handforth was saying. "Just like my pater to invite a gang of silly fags! There's no telling who'll be at that party, once Willy starts giving out his invitations!"

"Well, it's as broad as it's long, isn't it?" asked McClure. "You're going to take a big crowd, aren't you?"



"That's different!" said Handforth. "Removites and Fourth-Formers aren't the same as fags. We shall be having grubby urchins like Gates and Tommy Hobbs and Owen minor with us! We don't want those young monkeys!"

"I've heard that Willy is inviting over half the Third," remarked Church casually.

"Oh, is he?" said Handforth. "By George! I've got to put a stop to this!"

And he pondered over the matter throughout afternoon lessons, much to the detriment of his work.

Directly after tea, he made his way to the Third Form Common-room, and he found a gang of fags there. It seemed to be a kind of meeting, for there were plenty of Third-Formers from the other Houses, too. It was not unnatural, perhaps, that they should be talking about the coming Christmas holidays.

"You've come to the wrong place, Handy!" sang out Owen minor. "This isn't the elephants' shed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your minor isn't here, either," put in Chubby Heath. "He's mooning about somewhere—lovesick, I believe."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth, who was on the point of getting wrathful, recovered himself in time. And that reference to Willy brought a frown to his brow.

"Lovesick, eh?" he repeated, with a snort. "The silly young chump!"

"He takes after you, I suppose," remarked Bobby Dexter innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a lot of silly young asses!" said Handforth coldly. "There's no harm in Willy having a girl chum, is there? But I've come here about something else. How many of you kids are coming to Travis Dene for Christmas?"

"Oh, lots of us," said Owen minor. "It ought to be pretty good at your pater's country place, Handy. Willy's going to invite about half the Third."

"Well, I hope you'll have a good time," said Handforth genially. "I hope you'll enjoy yourselves."

"Are you going to be there, Handy?" asked Chubby Heath.

"Of course I am, you young donkey!"

"Then it's doubtful," said Chubby, shaking his head.



Cautiously the man approached the chimney stack.

From out of his pocket he produced a long line to the end of which was attached a small black object. He tossed it down the chimney and then lowered it gently.

"What's doubtful?"

"If we shall enjoy ourselves."

"You needn't think that I shall take any notice of you," said Handforth, with a sniff. "I shall be too busy."

"Yes, I suppose you will—with Irene and the other girls," said Juicy Lemon. "My hat! You'll have a regular beanfeast under the mistletoe, won't you? I expect there'll be lots of fresh girls there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind the mistletoe!" roared Handforth, turning red. "I've just come here to tell you kids that I hope you'll enjoy yourselves."

"You don't sound very affable about it," said Owen minor.

"Eh? Oh, well, you make me wild," growled Handforth. "All the same, if

you're going to be guests under my pater's roof I suppose I'd better make you welcome. All I hope is that you don't see the ghost!"

"The ghost?" asked a dozen voices.

"That's what I said—the ghost!"

"What ghost?" asked Chubby, staring.

"My dear kid, didn't you know that we had a family ghost at Travis Dene?" asked Handforth indulgently. "My hat, rather! All I'm afraid is that some of you kids might see him and get scared."

"We didn't know there was a ghost at your place, Handy," said Bobby Dexter dubiously. "What's he like?"

"Well, I've never seen him myself," replied Handforth slowly.

"Then how do you know there really is a ghost?"

"Haven't you heard the old legend of Travis Dene?" said Handforth. "During the War of the Roses, when Napoleon was marching into Scotland——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a bit mixed, Handy, aren't you?" asked Chubby. "Napoleon didn't live at the same period as the War of the Roses; and as far as I know, he never tried to march into Scotland."

"Eh?" said Handforth hastily. "Well, never mind that. It was at the time of the Cavaliers and the Roundheads. My people—that is, my ancestors—were Cavaliers, I believe. And, according to the legend, there was an old Roundhead general—a brutal rotter who killed people like the very dickens. He'd capture the country people and chop their giddy heads off. Didn't think anything about it. Just gave them a look, and told his soldiers to behead them. Oh, a regular bloodthirsty rotter!"

"One of your ancestors, you say?" asked Juicy.

"No, you fathead!" roared Handforth. "Haven't I told you that this general was a Roundhead? My people were Cavaliers!"

"Oh, sorry!" said Juicy. "I must have got mixed."

"This Roundhead general was captured at last, and the soldiers were so jolly wild with him that they shoved him down into one of the cellars far beneath Travis Dene. And they kept him there for about ten or fifteen years—in solitary confinement, without food or water or anything."

"He must have had a pretty lean time," said Chubby. "Fifteen years, I mean! Was he still alive at the end of that time?"

"Yes, of course!"

"That's funny," said Chubby. "I should have thought he would have died at about the end of the tenth year."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, of course, they gave him something to eat, I suppose," said Handforth impatiently. "Don't quibble, my lad! Anyhow, the war finished, and everybody forgot all about it. And there was that old general, in his cellar, with whiskers about a yard long, and with hair that looked more like a cocoanut mat than anything else."

"You mean matted hair?" asked Owen minor.

"Awful stuff—festoons of it," said Handforth, nodding. "He'd gone a bit dotty, I believe, according to the legend—and one Christmas Eve he escaped. He broke his chains and bolted."

"Oh, he was chained, was he?" asked Chubby.

"His feet were chained, and his hands were chained," nodded Handforth promptly. "But his ordeal had been too much for him. Anyhow, before he could get away from Travis Dene he pegged out. And with his dying words he gasped out that he would come back and haunt the place every Christmas-time for centuries!"

"My only Sunday hat!" muttered Erio Gates, with a shiver.

"And the legend goes that the ghost appears at Christmas-time," continued Handforth solemnly. "Once—on one Christmas Eve—I heard some chains clanking, and I can tell you I felt a bit rocky. As it happened, the sound was only caused by an old horse in one of the stables. At least, that's what I was told. But how do I really know?" he added, lowering his voice. "Perhaps I *had* heard the ghost!"

"Do you only hear him?" asked one of the fags. "Don't you see him, too?"

"Some people see him, I suppose," said Handforth. "A horrible figure, with ragged clothes, matted hair, and long whiskers—going along with clanking chains. He's supposed to walk down the upper corridors past the bed-rooms, particularly in the West Wing."

"The bed-rooms?" said Dexter, looking a bit scared. "I say, you know, I didn't know that Travis Dene was such a weird place!"

"I understand," said Handforth carelessly, "that lots of visitors will be accommodated in the West Wing. You kids, probably."

"My only sainted aunt!"

"The West Wing! That's where the ghost walks!"

"You needn't bother about him, really," said Handforth, in a comforting voice. "The best way is to take no notice. If you hear the clanking of chains, just turn over and go to sleep again. Things only get a bit rotten when the ghost actually appears in the bed-rooms."

"Does he do that?" asked Dicky Jones huskily.

"All ghosts appear in bed-rooms," replied Handforth.

"Supposing we locked the door?"

"Don't be silly!" said Edward Oswald, with a sniff. "What's the good of locking a door against a ghost? You know as well as I do that ghosts walk clean through doors—and through walls, too. If the ghost of Travis Dene decides to come into your bed-rooms, he'll come, and nothing can prevent him. But, as I've said, there's nothing to worry about. Personally, I don't believe in ghosts, and if this old boy turns up this Christmas I shall simply ignore him."

And Handforth casually nodded to the fags, and walked out of the Common-room.

(Continued on page 14.)

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THE GHOST OF TRAVIS DENE!

(Continued from page 12.)

He was looking very satisfied with himself when he returned to Study D, and Church and McClure regarded him inquiringly.

"Somebody left you in their will?" asked Church politely.

"Eh?"

"You're looking pretty bucked."

"I've just been telling the Third Form kids about the legend of Travis Dene," replied Handforth calmly. "I've been warning them against the ghost. You know what those fags are. I've put the wind up them properly—and I don't suppose they'll come for Christmas at all!"

Church and McClure exchanged glances.

"Poor old Handy!" said Church, with a sigh. "What an optimist you are!"

IN the Third Form Common-room the fags were discussing the situation with bated breath. Many of them were greatly impressed by Handforth's recital of the legend.

"Well, after all, I wasn't particularly keen on going to Handforth's place," said Dicky Jones. "I think I shall enjoy myself more at home."

"But Willy invited you, didn't he?" asked Chubby Heath.

"Yes, but——"

"But nothing!" snapped Chubby. "You're not backing out, are you, because of this ghost yarn?"

"It's not a question of backing out," said Dicky uncomfortably. "I'm not really sure that my people would let me go."

"Same here," said Gates, with a shiver. "When Willy comes in I think I'll tell him that I can't accept his invitation."

"I'm not going to Travis Dene, either," said Freddy Mason.

Chubby looked at them witheringly.

"You miserable rotters!" he said, his voice full of scorn. "You weaklings! You backboneless bounders! You filleted freaks!"

"Here, steady——" began Jack Blythe.

"You're all scared because Handy has been telling us about the Travis Dene legend," said Chubby scornfully. "We're not afraid of ghosts, are we? And don't forget that Willy will be offended if you turn his invitation down. What's more, he'll never forgive you if you show fright!"

And Chubby, who was very staunch to his leader, managed to work the other fags round. In the end they promised to stand true and to risk the ghost.

NEXT day Handforth happened to run across his minor in the Triangle. He buttonholed him at once.

"I hear that you won't be taking many guests along for Christmas?" he said casually.

"Oh! Who told you that?" asked Willy.

"We get to know these things," said Handforth, with a vague wave of his hand. "I'm very pleased to hear it, my lad. We don't need many of those silly fags. It'll be

quite sufficient if you bring your own two chums along—Heath and Lemon. I'm glad that you've turned the others down."

Willy grinned.

"What a chap you are, Ted, for getting bees into your bonnet," he said. "I'm taking the biggest party of fags that ever went under one roof at Christmas. There'll be about twenty of us, all told."

"Twenty!" gasped Handforth.

"More, if they can get the O.K. from their people," said Willy, nodding. "The more the merrier, Ted. There's nothing like a big crowd to make Christmas enjoyable."

Handforth rocked on his heels.

"Enjoyable!" he groaned. "Enjoyable—with all you fags messing about? Oh, my hat! I can see that Christmas is going to be a wash-out!"

Whether Christmas would be a wash-out remained to be seen; but it was an undoubted fact that Edward Oswald Handforth's scheme to scare off the fags had been a very dismal wash-out!

CHAPTER 4.

A Merry Christmas!

"BY George! It's snowing, you chaps!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

He jumped down from the train and alighted on the snow-covered platform of Bury St. Edmunds station. Removites and Fourth-Formers and Third-Formers were pouring out of the train in dozens, by the look of it. In addition, there was a large number of Moor View School girls. Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley and Marjorie Temple were prominent; so were Mary Summers and Winnie Pitt and Betty Barlowe and Phyllis Palmer. Handforth had been lavish in his invitations.

As a matter of fact, his sister, Ena, had invited these girls. But Handforth preferred to believe that they were here at his own invitation.

It was very close upon Christmas now, and the festive holidays had commenced. The big party of schoolboys and schoolgirls had arrived at Bury St. Edmunds station, and from here they would go on to the little village of Great Travis, just outside of which stood Travis Dene, the ancestral home of the Handforths.

It was evening, and snowing hard. Christmas, apparently, was going to be of the true old-fashioned variety. And everybody was pleased—that is to say, everybody connected with this holiday party. Railway officials and transport people generally were having an anxious time of it. Exactly what they thought of the snow would probably be unprintable.

"This is glorious!" said Irene, as she stood in the snow, looking round with enthusiasm. "It was all dull and drab when we left London. Isn't this just ripping, girls?"

"Almost too good to be true!" said Doris. "I only hope it keeps on! It'll be simply glorious if we get piles and piles of snow, so that we can have some real winter sports over Christmas!"

"At Travis Dene there'll be tons of sport," said Handforth proudly. "We've got our own private lake, and if the frost's hard enough we'll have heaps of ripping skating. And there are hillsides, so that we can do some tobogganing, and the pater's arranged for a special carnival on Boxing Day, with fairy lights all over the park and a big bon-fire!"

"Oh, I hope it snows and snows and snows!" said Mary Summers breathlessly.

Nipper chuckled.

"It doesn't matter what we hope, the weather will do just as it pleases," he said. "It's snowing now, and it looks like keeping on. So we can only hope for the best."

"You're hoping yourself now," chuckled Mary.

THEY went out of the station in a big, jolly crowd. They were followed by endless porters, carrying suitcases and small trunks and packages of every description. Outside they found comfortable, closed-in, well-lighted motor coaches. They piled aboard noisily, and with many a jolly shout.

Then there was the drive through the snow-covered lanes towards the village of Great Travis.

They left Bury St. Edmunds behind after going round many twists and turns of the quaint, old-fashioned Suffolk town. They took the road that led towards Long Melford and Sudbury. After travelling for five or six miles along this main highway, they turned off and went wandering down the narrow, rural lanes. And presently one or two gleaming lights, winking through the driving snow, indicated that they had reached the village.

They went straight through, up a hill, and then turned into a big gateway and up a private drive. Travis Dene stood out boldly—a fine old Tudor mansion, with stately trees surrounding it, and with lawns and private gardens on all sides.

Edward Oswald Handforth was naturally agog; and Willy, too, was looking unusually flushed. They were both proud of their home. And they were glad to bring so many of their school friends with them. Ena Handforth, of course, was also well to the fore—for she was in charge of the girls.

The coaches pulled up on the wide, snow-smothered drive. The great main door of the mansion was standing wide open, and

there was a vision of brilliant lights and colourful decorations. A huge log fire could be seen blazing and glowing in the vast open fireplace of the great hall.

This was Christmas as it should be!

Willy was one of the first to get indoors, and it is to be feared that he hardly gave a glance at his mother and father, who were standing there in readiness to welcome their young guests. Willy, in fact, had caught sight of Molly Dare as she stood near the big fire with her aunt. Mr. and Mrs. Stokes were there, too—to say nothing of Nelson Lee.

"By jingo! I'm awfully glad to be home!" said Willy happily. "How's everything?"

He shook Molly's hand enthusiastically, and the girl looked at him merrily out of her clear blue eyes.

"We've been having a lovely time, Willy," she said. "But, of course, it'll be a lot better now that you and all the other boys have come."

"Has anything happened?" asked Willy, in a low voice.

"Of course not, you silly!" smiled Molly. "Everything's all right now—and we're going to enjoy Christmas as we've never enjoyed it before! Wasn't it absolutely ripping of your people to invite us like this? Auntie and I are the luckiest people alive!"

"You don't think that those men——"

"Oh, please don't talk about them!" interrupted Molly. "It's Christmas-time, and this is the most gorgeous party I've ever been invited to. We're not going to think about those men now!"

"I'd like to know who they are, and why



they tried to kidnap you the other day," said Willy, his eyes becoming hard.

"I don't know," replied the girl simply. "Auntie hasn't told me. Won't you promise not to mention them again?"

"If you want me to," agreed Willy.

He had his own theory regarding Molly's peril. She was the niece of Eileen Dare, the celebrated girl detective. Wasn't it likely that these men were attempting to hit at Eileen by capturing the little girl?

However, there was nothing to worry about now. The precautions taken by Nelson Lee and Eileen Dare had assured that Molly was now quite safe from any further attacks. She was completely lost in this out-of-the-way, rural part of Suffolk.

So, before long, Willy found himself entering heart and soul into the festivities. It was good to be home, and to have so many of his own school chums with him. He and Edward Oswald had spent all their childhood at Travis Dene, and they felt that they were going to revel in showing the other fellows all the interesting features of the house and grounds.

"WHAT time does the ghost walk, Handy?" grinned Harry Gresham, later on.

Handforth frowned.

"Bother the ghost!" he replied. "I only told those fags about it so that they wouldn't come. But, on the whole, I'm glad they have come. They might as well have a good time for Christmas—and it looks as though they'll have it here."

"It's a cert, dear old fellow," said Vivian Travers. "Congratters on the ancestral pile. By Samson! This is what I call a real home!"

"It's not so bad," admitted Handforth.

"Everybody's been talking about the ghost," said Gresham. "It'll be rather a swindle if we don't see it—this ghost with matted hair, long whiskers, chains, and everything!"

"How did you know?" asked Handforth uncomfortably. "I only told the fags."

Gresham chuckled.

"Why, the fags spread the yarn everywhere before we left St. Frank's," he said. "I even heard it down in Bellton."

"Pity I ever told 'em!" said Handforth, with a grunt. "I shouldn't jaw about it any more if I were you, Gresham. Blow the ghost! I don't suppose he'll appear, anyhow."

"Too bad if he doesn't," murmured Travers. "What's Christmas without a ghost?"

Dinner was the merriest meal imaginable. The great banquet hall at Travis Dene was practically filled, and the air was soon ringing with laughter and talk. There were brilliant lights, gay decorations—and plenty to eat. Sir Edward and Lady Handforth entered into the spirit of the party, and they made themselves wholeheartedly loved.

It mattered not what the weather was like outside. Indoors, with the great blazing

fires and the brilliant lights, everything was cheery. As a matter of fact, snow was coming down outside, and the night was a wild one, with the wind howling and whistling round the gables and angles of the old mansion.



Bed time came all too soon, but as this was only the first evening it didn't much matter. There was the prospect of several happy days to come. And the more snow, the merrier. The schoolboys and the schoolgirls were looking eagerly forward to the sports that would fill the daylight hours. And in the evening there would be dances, party games, amateur theatricals, and so on.

"Well, Handy, it seems as though your people are going to give us the best Christmas party we've ever had," remarked Nipper, as he undressed. "It's started off with a bang, anyhow."

"This is nothing," grinned Handforth. "Wait until to-morrow. Christmas Day, my lads! And wait until Boxing Day! You haven't seen anything yet!"

"Turkey and plum-pudding and mincepies!" murmured Church dreamily.

There were six juniors in this particular bed-room—Handforth & Co., and Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson. There were three beds, and they looked extremely comfortable. Most of the other fellows were accommodated in the same way. There were plenty of great bed-rooms in this wing, and they had been especially prepared for the schoolboy guests.

Sir Edward Handforth was up-to-date. There were radiators in the bed-rooms, so that they were warm and comfortable. There was electric light, which very effectually destroyed any ghostly atmosphere that might have surrounded the old house.

However, it was different when the boys were in bed, and when the lights were switched off.

Outside the night was cloudy. Occasionally the moon would shine down upon the countryside, and at fitful intervals the moonbeams would stray into the bed-rooms.

Snow was descending almost continuously, and the wind was boisterous, whistling and moaning eerily.

"What's that rummy thudding?" asked Church, in an uneasy voice, some little time after the lights had been extinguished.

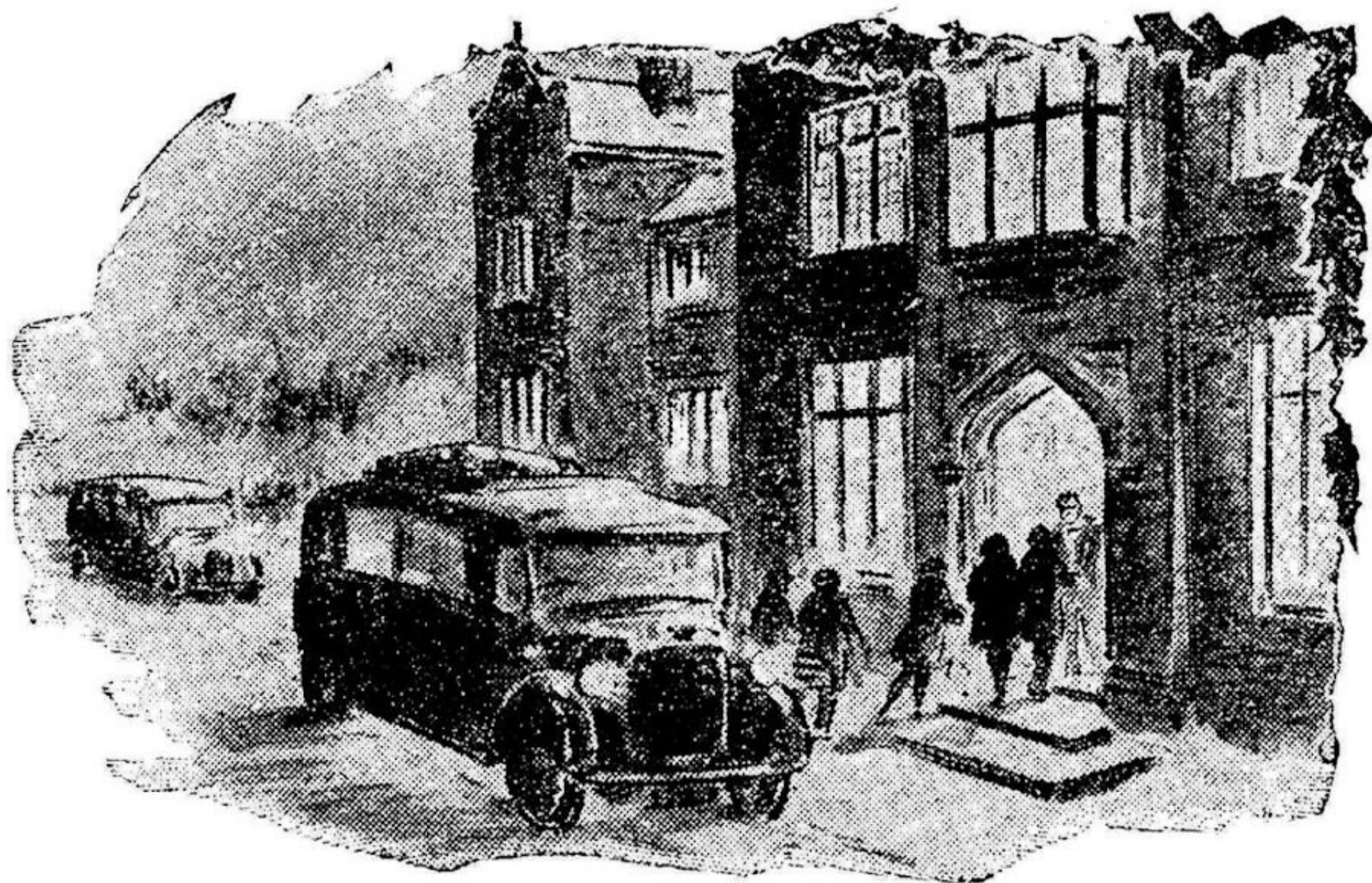
"I've heard it, too," said McClure. "It seems to be coming from underneath us somewhere."

Thud-thud-thud!

It came again, whilst they were speaking. And, although they had not noticed it while the lights had been on, it obtruded itself upon their hearing now. It was the difference in atmosphere. In the gloom, with only the fitful moonbeams streaming through the windows, that mysterious thudding was disturbing.

"It's nothing," said Nipper, with a laugh. "A loose window, or something like that, in the room below. Don't take any notice of it."

He turned over and went to sleep. The others were not quite so calm-minded, and it was some little time before they dropped off.



The big coaches came to a stop outside the main doors of Travis Dene, which was a vision of brilliant light and colourful decorations, and disgorged their youthful occupants. The St. Frank's Christmas-party had arrived!

IT seemed to Nipper that only a minute had elapsed before he became aware of something moving in the room, not far from his bed.

He opened his eyes, blinked, and raised his head from the pillow. There was a figure standing between his bed and the window—a vague, white figure!

Freshly awakened as he was, Nipper felt his heart give a jump. He wasn't quite sure whether he was really seeing this object, or whether he was dreaming. He sat up, and the figure turned.

"Who is it?" asked Nipper, in a low voice.

"Dry up, you ass!" said the white figure.

"I didn't want to wake any of you up!"

"Handy!"

"Who did you think I was, then?" asked Handforth, as he moved nearer. "Do I look like a ghost?"

He was in his pyjamas, and Nipper chuckled as Handforth's figure took more recognisable shape. The moon had come out—and Nipper could see, from the different positions of the beams, that an hour or two must have elapsed. Travis Dene was wrapped in slumber.

"Do you always do this?" asked Nipper politely. "Is it a habit of yours, Handy, to get up in the middle of the night, and to wander about the bed-room?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Handforth, frowning. "It's that rotten window downstairs. It keeps thudding, and it's right under my bed. I can't sleep because of it."

"Are you sure it's the window?" asked Nipper dryly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you had an enormous amount to eat before coming to bed," replied the Remove captain, "and a lot of rich stuff is liable to give you indigestion."

"By George! Now you come to mention it, I do feel a bit heavy inside," said Handforth, with a start. "I keep dropping off to sleep, and having bits of nightmares. Then I wake up suddenly, and I hear that giddy window thudding."

"Indigestion," said Nipper firmly. "Let this be a stern warning, old man. Don't forget that to-morrow is Christmas Day, and that there'll be plum-pudding——"

"Don't!" interrupted Handforth hastily, groaning. "The very thought of plum-pudding turns me up!"

"You'll be all right by the morning," chuckled Nipper.

"I fancied I heard footsteps out in the corridor, too!" went on Handforth, quickly changing the subject, and suddenly becoming very mysterious. "About ten minutes ago I woke up, and I heard a board creak outside. And I'll swear I heard footsteps, too—stealthy and cautious. I believe somebody's prowling about the house!"

"Don't be a chump!" said Nipper. "Get back to bed——"

"No fear!" broke in Handforth. "I'm going to put my dressing-gown on, and I'm going downstairs to find out the meaning of that beastly thudding. It's disturbing my

whole night's rest. It won't take me more than three or four minutes."

Church sat up, looking startled.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" he asked in alarm. "What's the time? What's happening?"

"Oh, go to sleep!" growled Handforth. "Who told you to wake up?"

McClure woke up, too—and, incidentally, so did Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. Handforth's voice, after all, was not conducive to sound slumber.

"We're all awake now, Handy," grinned Nipper. "It's all right, you chaps—Handy's got indigestion."

"I thought there was something wrong," said Church, with a sniff.

"It's a pity you can't mind your own business," said Handforth tartly. "I can have indigestion if I like, can't I? I'm going downstairs to wedge that rotten window—it's keeping me awake all night!"

"You wouldn't be disturbed unless you were rocky in the tummy," said Tommy Watson. "You shouldn't have wolfed all those pastries and rich cakes! You had a ripping dinner, and that wasn't good enough for you. You had to go to the sideboard—"

"This is my home, and I can talk what I like from the sideboard!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "How was I to know that that stuff would upset me? I'll have a word with the mater in the morning, and I'll ask her what's wrong with the cook!"

He put his dressing-gown on, got into his slippers, and moved towards the door. The others lay back on their pillows, and prepared to go to sleep again. They weren't particularly interested in Handforth's nocturnal movements.

Thud-thud-thud!

That strange noise was still coming from below—and it seemed louder and more obtrusive now. This was only because every other sound in the great house had ceased.

"It's either a window or a banging door," said Handforth. "I'm going to put it right."

He opened the bed-room door, and looked out into the corridor. It was very dark and gloomy. At the far end, however, there was a window, through which the moonlight was streaming. There was an acute bend in the corridor just there, and Handforth would have to go that way. The main staircase was round the bend.

Handforth suddenly gave a start. He blinked. He felt his heart beating more rapidly. Something had just appeared in that patch of moonlight at the far end of the corridor—something silent and almost shapeless. And it seemed to Handforth's excited imagination that this thing had long matted hair and straggling whiskers.

"Great Scott!" he breathed hoarsely.

He was still half in the doorway, and the other boys heard his words. Nipper sat up in bed again.

"What's the matter, Handy?" he asked.

With an effort, Edward Oswald pulled himself together. He drew back into the room and when he turned his face was a shade paler than usual. He stood there, clearly visible in the moonlight.

"There's—there's something up the corridor!" he breathed. "An awful-looking figure! It—it looks like a ghost!"

"Ass!" said Nipper, jumping out of bed. "You must have seen a shadow, or—"

"I didn't!" protested Handforth. "I'm not an imaginative chap like that! I tell you there's something there—something awful!"

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

"Eh? I didn't hear—"

Handforth broke off, and it seemed to him that his hair was beginning to stand on end.

For, vague and mysterious, came the sound of clanking chains!

CHAPTER 5.

The Ghost of Travis Denel

CLANK! Clank! Clank!

It was unmistakable. From far down the corridor came that eerie, ghostly sound. All the Removites in the bed room heard it, and the others quickly jumped out of bed. They were filled with a strange alarm.

"It must be a window or something," said Nipper, keeping a grip on himself. "For goodness' sake, you chaps, don't get the wind up! It's so easy to imagine things in the dead of night—"

"Look!" gasped Handforth, who was at the door again.

The others crowded up, and they received a shock. One or two of them uttered startled ejaculations. They crowded into the corridor, staring with fascinated horror.

Nipper had been trying to convince himself that there was some simple explanation of that clanking sound—perhaps the metal catch of a badly-fastened window, or something equally trivial. Yet, at the same time, Nipper had to confess to himself that the sound was significantly akin to the rattle of heavy chains. Now he stared with the others. Down that corridor there was something to be seen—something which was certainly not normal.

"It's the ghost!" breathed Tommy Watson shakily.

"But—but it can't be!" gasped Handforth, his voice filled with amazement and incredulity. "What rot! I don't believe it, you chaps!"

"Look!" panted McClure. "Just the same as you told us, Handy! An old man with chains— My only hat! He's coming this way, too!"

The Scottish junior was plucky enough, but he was also inclined to be a bit superstitious. He wasn't so sure about the non-

existence of ghosts. And with this apparition coming slowly towards him, he felt cold shudders running down his spine.

There was indeed something weird and mysterious about this figure. It came onwards, with a slow, deliberate tread. Yet there was no sound of footfalls. Nothing but that dreadful, ominous clanking of heavy iron chains. And in the gloom of the corridor the figure was shapeless and indefinable. It seemed to be clothed in a long, flowing robe, which almost touched the ground.

"Let's get inside the bed-room and shut the door!" whispered Watson nervously.

"Not likely!" retorted Handforth. "We're not scared, are we?"

Just then one of the other doors opened further down the corridor. A figure half-appeared, and a startled ejaculation came to the ears of the boys. Then another door opened. The clanking, no doubt, had aroused a few of the other schoolboy sleepers.

"The ghost!" came a hoarse cry.

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Odds visions and spectres!"

The figure paused, and then, with the same slow, deliberate movement, it commenced going back on its own tracks. It was as though the opening of those other doors had driven it back.

"Half a jiffy!" came the voice of Vivian Travers. "This looks most frightfully interesting, dear old fellows!"

A beam of light from an electric torch stabbed the gloom. It hovered for a moment, and then rested on the figure of the ghost. In the same second the figure turned.

"Oh!" breathed Watson. "It's—it's awful!"

He was undoubtedly right. For a fleeting moment the ghostly figure was revealed in that flash of light, and the startled boys could see a drably-clothed old man, with rusted iron chains hanging from his wrists. His hair was coarse and matted, and his beard, in a similar condition, reached almost to his knees. The face itself was white—white with the pallor of death. It was an awful, terrifying face!

Then it turned away, so that the light no longer played upon it. And with clanking chains the figure went off towards the far end of the corridor.

"Upon my Samson!" came a murmur from Travers, who was holding the torch.

"Help—help!" yelled one of the startled juniors.

"The ghost! Handy was right about the place being haunted!" ejaculated somebody else.

Handforth seemed to come out of a trance.

"Rot!" he shouted hoarsely. "Come on, you chaps! Up, the Remove! There must

be some foolery about this! Let's grab that ghost and see who he is!"

Handforth started racing down the corridor, and only for a moment did the other boys hesitate. Nipper was the first to follow, and then came Church and McClure and Tregellis-West and Watson. Others joined in—Travers and Archie Glenthorne and Reggie Pitt and Stanley Waldo and Jimmy Potts.

There was a regular stampede down the corridor. By this time the apparition had reached the bend. It was in full view of the moonlight which streamed in through the window, and now the figure looked more ghostly and more terrifying than ever. Even Handforth felt inclined to hesitate. But he gripped himself harder than ever and raced on.

Clank! Clank! Clank!

The sound of the phantom's chains came to the ears of the boys after the phantom itself had vanished round the corner. Handforth was excited.

"We've got him, whoever he is!" he panted. "There's no staircase down that passage—no exit of any kind. Only one bed-room, and I don't believe that's occupied, either! Quick, you chaps—we've got him properly!"

They arrived at the corner in a rush, and then Handforth pulled up short, staring with startled eyes.

"It's gone!" breathed Church.

"But—but I can't understand it!" gasped Handforth. "Where could it have gone?"

He was amazed. The apparition had completely disappeared—during those last few seconds. They had seen it go round this corner, but now it was no more.

The passage itself was quite brightly illuminated, compared with the gloom of the big corridor. There was the window at this end, at the junction, and there was another window at the further end. The passage was short. The

walls were bare, except for one door, midway. And there was now nothing to be seen—no sign whatever of that weird figure which had turned into the passage only a moment or so earlier.

Handforth passed a hand over his brow.

"This beats me!" he said, with a gulp. "Where's it gone?"

"There's a door there!" said Nipper quickly. "The figure—whatever he was—must have gone into that room!"

"Let's break in!" said Handforth.

"Hold on, Ted!" came Willy's calm voice. "You can't go into that bed-room, you ass!"

Handforth turned, frowning. He had not known that his minor was on the scene. And it was rather strange that Willy should



be half-dressed, with a dressing-down over his other clothes.

"Why can't we go in there?" demanded Edward Oswald.

"Because it's a girl's bed-room—that's why," replied Willy.

"Oh! I didn't know——"

"Then you ought to have known," said Willy sternly. "There's a maidservant in that room—Ellen, I think her name is. It would be a bit thick if you chaps went blundering in——"

He broke off, for at that second there came a terrified scream from the bed-room in question. There was something utterly frantic in that sound—a scream of horror, piercing and panic-stricken.

"On, my hat!" muttered Church.

"The ghost's in there—in Ellen's bed room!" said Handforth, staring. "What are we going to do, you chaps?"

"Help—help!" came a gurgling, frantic cry in a girl's voice.

"We'd better go in!" said Nipper grimly. "No sense in sticking out here like this while that girl is calling for help! Come on!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean, no time for beating about the dashed bush, what?"

Handforth needed no urging. He fairly hurled himself at the bed-room door. He and Nipper went charging through together, with the others crowding behind. They hardly knew what they expected to see. Handforth had a suspicion that he would find the unfortunate maidservant being strangled in her bed, the ghostly apparition bending over her with its bony talons at the girl's throat.

But then, Handforth could always be relied upon to think of something highly imaginative!

AS a matter of fact, the bed was empty. The clothes were pushed back and in a heap towards the foot of the bed. At first the girl herself was nowhere to be seen. The schoolboys thought that she was not in the bed-room at all. Then Nipper switched on the electric light, and the room became flooded with radiance. It was only a small light, but it seemed a blaze of brilliance after the darkness of the corridor.

"Look!" breathed Handforth, pointing.

There was a figure in one corner—crouching down.

It was the figure of the maidservant. She was in her dressing-gown, and she appeared to be in the last stages of exhaustion. She stared at the boys wildly, unseeingly. Then she laughed with hysterical shrillness, and the laugh immediately changed to a sob.

"Here, I say!" said Handforth, walking forward hesitatingly. "It's all right, Ellen. That's your name, isn't it? There's no need to be scared."

"Keep it away from me—keep it away!" whispered the girl, her voice throbbing with terror.

"But there's nothing here," said Handforth. "There's nothing to keep away!"

She looked up with fear in her eyes.

"The old man—he was here, in this room!" she whispered tensely. "I saw him! He came through the door—and—and—— Oh, I'm frightened, Master Edward!"

"My only hat!" said Church, looking round in a scared sort of way. "Where did the ghost go? He came into this room! The window's fastened——"

"He must be in here still!" exclaimed Handforth, with a start.

"Never mind the ghost!" put in Nipper. "Let's help this girl! Come along, Ellen. You'd better get up from that corner, you know. Come and sit down on the bed for a bit. Tommy, old man, get some water from that jug."

They gently lifted the girl and led her towards the bed. It was surprising that she should be in her dressing-gown and slippers, but she soon explained this point. A sip or two of water had a magical effect, for she was soon looking at the boys more calmly, and the terror had died out of her eyes.

"I heard the clanking at first," she explained in a low voice. "It woke me up, Master Edward."

"I don't wonder," said Handforth, nodding.

"I wasn't frightened—then," continued the maidservant. "But I was puzzled, and perhaps I was just a wee bit scared, now I come to think of it. I quietly got out of bed and put on this dressing-gown."

"And then—and then——"

"Oh, it was horrible!"

She covered her face with her hands and seemed hysterical for a moment. But she controlled herself and smiled wanly.

"It's foolish of me to behave like this," she said. "Now that all you young gentlemen are here, I know that I am safe."

"As safe as houses!" smiled Nipper.

"I hadn't switched on the light," continued Ellen. "I was just moving towards the door. And then—although you won't believe me—that awful thing came *through* the door. It came right at me, and I remember screaming and leaping back into the corner."

"And what happened to the—the thing?" asked Handforth.

"I don't know!" said Ellen, shivering. "I was too terrified to see anything. I only know that it came for me and that I backed away!"

"You say it came through the door?" asked Nipper. "You mean through the doorway?"

"No, no—through the door itself!" insisted the girl quickly. "The door didn't open at all! The ghost came right *through*! Don't you understand?"



Jimmy Potts ran to the landing and was just in time to see a figure vanishing down the stairs. It was impossible for the junior to recognise the figure, but he could see that it was carrying a big bundle which looked like a lot of blankets. "Hi!" shouted Jimmy. "Who's that? What are you doing?"

"But it's impossible!" protested Handforth. "The door's made of solid wood! How could it come right through it?"

"I don't know—but it did!" murmured the frightened girl. "I'll swear it did!"

The juniors looked at her uncomfortably. And it was impossible for them to forget that the apparition had now completely vanished. There was nowhere in this room where it could hide. The window was fastened, so it could not have escaped by that means. There was a cupboard in one corner, and one or two of the fellows had looked towards it in a scared way once or twice.

Ellen was a superior sort of servant girl. She was not one of the country bumpkins. She was quite pretty in a way, her beauty being rather of the bold type. Her dark eyes were big and round, and she was breathing heavily still.

"I think you must be mistaken about the ghost coming right through the door," said Nipper gently.

"I'm not—I'm not!" she insisted. "Oh, I know it sounds silly—I know it sounds impossible—but I saw it with my own eyes. That's why I was so frightened!"

"We'd better have a look round," said Nipper practically.

"Just what I was going to suggest, dear old fellow," nodded Travers. "Handy,

examine the window, will you? Any objection to us looking in the cupboard, miss?"

"No, no—look everywhere, please!" said the girl. "Oh, I want you to look! I shan't be able to sleep a wink after this unless I'm certain that there's nothing in the room!"

THEY searched.

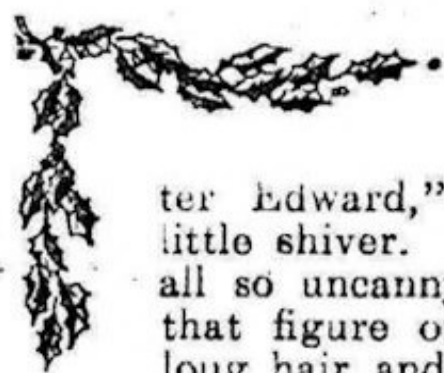
They examined the window, they looked under the bed, they explored the cupboard. There was nothing in this except a small suitcase, belonging to the girl, and some dresses hanging from some frames. The wardrobe was equally devoid of discoveries. There wasn't a crack or crevice through which the apparition could have vanished. Yet the fact remained it *had* vanished!

"Well, it beats me!" said Handforth, at last, standing in the middle of the room and scratching his head.

"It's rummy!" agreed Nipper. "The ghost must have come into this room, because there was nowhere else for it to go. But how did it escape? That's the puzzling point!"

Ellen looked at Nipper steadily.

"I'm not superstitious," she said. "I'm not frightened of ghosts, as a rule. I didn't believe in ghosts until to-night."



"And now you do?" asked Handforth bluntly.

"I'm not sure, Master Edward," said the girl, with a little shiver. "I think I do! Oh, it's all so uncanny—so mysterious. I saw that figure of the old man with the long hair and the straggling whiskers. He came right in, and I don't know where he went. Where could he go?"

"Did you notice him making for any particular direction in the room?" asked Nipper.

"No, he just seemed to vanish!"

"Do you mean that you saw him fade away?"

"He was here one instant, and gone the next!" replied the girl, looking round uneasily. "That was where I saw him—in the middle of the room!" she added, pointing. "It was in the moonlight! And when I looked again, about a second later, he had gone!"

"Well, he couldn't have gone out through the doorway—because we were in the passage by then," said Travers slowly. "That proves he must have vanished somewhere in this room. Are there any secret passages in your house, Handy?"

"I've heard there are some old tunnels and things somewhere about," replied Handforth. "In fact, Willy and I have explored some during holidays and at other times. But there aren't any in this part of the house."

"Well, it's a mystery," said Nipper. "Anyhow, the ghost isn't here now, and it's not a bit of good our stopping."

"I'm very glad you came," said the girl gratefully. "You've calmed me down, and now I think I shall be all right. And, if you please, young gentlemen, don't tell the mistress!"

"But why not?" asked Handforth. "Why shouldn't we tell my mater?"

"She might not understand, sir," said the maid. "She might think I was foolish and frightened without reason, and that might get me dismissed. Please don't say anything to Lady Handforth, sir!"

"Oh, well, of course, if you put it like that," said Handforth. "There's no reason why we should make a song about the affair. In fact, the quieter we are, the better. We don't want to scare the girls!"

THEY all went out, after Ellen had assured them that she was now all right. She declared that she would keep the electric light on, and she did not think there was much possibility of her becoming frightened again.

In the main corridor, outside their own bed-rooms, the juniors held a whispered discussion.

"Well, the household hasn't been disturbed, anyhow," said Handforth. "That's a good

thing. But where the dickens did that ghost vanish to?"

"Do you think it really was a ghost?" asked Gresham.

"It must have been," said Church. "If not, how could it have vanished into thin air like that?"

"Besides, isn't it exactly in keeping with the legend?" asked Reggie Pitt. "An old man, with long whiskers and matted hair—and chains. And he's supposed to haunt Travis Dene at Christmas-time, isn't he?"

Willy Handforth gave an expressive snort.

"Legend?" he repeated. "I'm going to ask you something about that, Ted. I didn't think it was worth while, but after what's happened it's obvious that something's fishy. Now, what about this precious legend?"

Handforth breathed hard.

"That's just it," he said, looking bewildered. "I was going to tell the chaps earlier. That legend isn't anything!"

"What do you mean—it isn't anything?" asked Nipper.

"Well, I invented it!" replied Edward Oswald. "There never has been a ghost at Travis Dene—and all that stuff about an old Roundhead with matted hair and long whiskers and clanking chains being bottled up in Travis Dene was an idea of my own!"

CHAPTER 6.

An Unexpected Development!

VIVIAN TRAVERS whistled softly.

"Well, well!" he murmured. "This throws a rather different light on the case, dear old fellows!"

"It certainly does," agreed Nipper grimly. "So the legend of Travis Dene is all a spoof, Handy? In fact, it's not founded on—"

"It's not founded on anything," interrupted Handforth. "I only invented the yarn because I thought some of the fags would be choked off from coming here for Christmas. We didn't want all our peace destroyed, did we? That's the funny part of it! On the spur of the moment I invent a yarn about an old man with whiskers and things, and as soon as we get to Travis Dene we see the apparition! And it never existed until I thought of it, at St. Frank's, a few days ago!"

"Good gad!" said Archie, looking blank. "I may be frightfully dense, old tulip, but I'm dashed if I can gather the trend. If this ghost was a mere idea of your own, how does it appear to-night? I mean, who's at the bottom of the dashed business?"

"It's trickery!" said Nipper keenly. "I've suspected it all along. And this proves, pretty conclusively, that one of the fellows is the culprit. That ghost yarn was fairly going the rounds at St. Frank's—and lots of chaps knew about it. Here, at Travis Dene nobody knew anything—because Handy only invented the yarn at St. Frank's. And that proves that one of the chaps must be responsible."

"The rotter!" said Handforth indignantly. "Who is he? That's a nice way for a guest to behave!"

"I dare say he thinks he's being clever," said Nipper. "I'd like to trap him, so that we can give him a lesson. It's a rotten business to play tricks like that, and scare a maidservant into hysterics!"

"I'll bet it was one of the fags!" said Handforth, looking accusingly at his minor.

"Rats!" said Willy. "Chubby and Juicy and the others wouldn't have the nerve to play a trick like that. Besides, I know where they are, and you can take it from me that the Third is not guilty."

"Huh!" grunted Handforth.

"I thought there was something squiffy about this whiskered ghost," continued Willy, with a sniff. "The legend of Travis Dene, eh? Well, what do you think we'd better do?"

"Go back to bed," said Travers promptly. "I'm interested enough in real ghosts, but I'm hanged if I'm willing to lose my sleep for the sake of a fake!"

"But this fake ought to be collared," said Nipper. "And it's my belief that he'll have another shot before an hour has gone. You'll generally find that a practical joker never knows when to stop. So I suggest that we hide ourselves, and wait for a bit. When he starts his operations again, we'll spring out and collar him!"

"Good idea!" said Handforth.

"But if he's a fake, how did he get out of that girl's bed-room?" asked Harry Gresham, in a puzzled voice.

"Easily enough," replied Nipper. "She was so scared that she couldn't tell exactly what was happening. And that's another point. We've got to scrag the rotter for daring to enter the maid's bed-room."

"But how did he get out?" argued Gresham. "He couldn't have gone back through the door because we were in the passage a moment later, and we saw no sign of him!"

"H'm! There is that to be remembered," admitted Nipper, looking puzzled for a moment. Then: "Still, I expect there's a perfectly simple explanation—and we'll find it out. Look here! How many of you are going to help in this?"

Several volunteered, including Willy.

"All right, then," said Nipper. "The rest of you can go to bed. We'll keep a vigil. There are plenty of odd corners and recesses where we can hide—and we'd better put on some more clothes, and then take up our positions. I'll bet we shan't have to wait for more than an hour at the outside."

Ten minutes later the watchers were in their positions.

As Nipper had said, there were plenty of dark recesses in these old-fashioned corridors. And the boys distributed themselves up and down, hiding in various out-of-the-way corners.

They were all convinced that the "ghost" was a fake, and they were anxious to expose the trickster.

The rest of the household had not been disturbed by the recent incident. The boys were glad of this, for they did not want Sir Edward, or any of the men, to come along and disturb them. They felt that this was a personal affair, since it was practically certain that a St. Frank's fellow was the guilty party.

THREE a.m. boomed out solemnly from the great old grandfather's clock in the hall.

Travis Dene slumbered, except for these alert young watchers. The wind was moaning and whistling round the walls, and the moonlight was as fitful as ever. Sometimes it would gleam brightly in through the windows, and at other times it would fade out, being replaced by a dull, inconclusive drabness, caused by the passing of heavy clouds in front of the moon.

When the half-hour had struck, and nothing had happened, some of the boys were beginning to get tired and cramped. Perhaps there was nothing in this vigil after all! The trickster, having played his joke, was satisfied for the night.

It seemed ages before four o'clock struck, and still nothing had happened.

Handforth, impatient as usual, had hardly been able to contain himself during the past fifteen or twenty minutes. Now he was getting ready to steal out of his recess, and to confer with the others. It seemed to him that this was a silly waste of time. They might just as well be in bed, getting some sleep.

There was the morrow to think of. Where was the sense in staying up all the night and ruining the enjoyment of Christmas Day? They would be good for nothing on the morrow unless they got some sleep. And Christmas Day was the one day of the year when they needed to be bright and alert and fresh.

However, before Handforth could quite make up his mind to take action, there came the sound of a creaking board from some distance down the corridor!

Nipper was on the alert in a second—and so was Willy. Handforth heard that creak, too, and he pricked up his ears. It seemed to him that the sound came from the direction of the maidservant's bed-room—the very spot where the ghost had disappeared.

"My only hat!" he breathed. "Is he really coming again, after all?"

Handforth's were not the only eyes that watched the angle of the corridor. And then, abruptly, something moved out from the side passage—something vague and mysterious and silent.

The watching juniors caught sight of a mass of straggly hair and unkempt whiskers!



The ghost!

It had been previously arranged that if the spectral presence came down this big corridor the boys were to allow it to pass, so that they could obtain a near view without revealing their own presence. It was with the greatest difficulty that Handforth held himself in check. His main impulse was to rush out and to grapple with this mystery figure.

It came down the corridor, as before.

There was certainly something eerie and uncanny about it. There was hardly a sound as it moved—just the faint creak of an old board now and again.

The figure passed within a couple of feet of Willy, who was squeezed into a narrow crevice. He heard the faint rustle of garments. He heard, too, the breathing of the unknown.

This was no ghost—but a human presence!

It passed on, as silent as before, and right along to the further end of the big corridor, turning off across the landing. And now Handforth could contain himself no longer. He had already emerged from his hiding-place, and he was staring after the apparition.

"Did you see it, you chaps?" he hissed, in a voice that was intended to be a faint whisper but which was really loud enough to be heard downstairs.

"Come on!" urged Travers. "After him, old fellows!"

Clank—clank—clank!

The rattle of chains now sounded—just as before. But the boys were too excited to notice. They went like the wind down the corridor, springing from their lurking-places. Willy was amongst the first, with Nipper and Handforth in close attendance. They swept round on to the landing, and just caught a glimpse of the ghostly figure as it vanished up some stairs which led to a number of disused attics.

"We've got him now!" said Handforth excitedly. "There's no escape from those attics—and they're all empty! Come on, Remove!"

They went charging up, and the ghost, when nearly at the top, tripped on its flowing clothing and went sprawling helplessly.

Before it could rise the juniors had seized it and were handling it roughly. There was a skylight overhead, and the moonlight was shining directly down upon the grotesque figure.

A scream sounded—faint and frightened. It came from the ghost. Some of the boys backed away as though their captive had become red-hot. In the same second Nipper tore off the wig and whiskers. A pale, frightened face was revealed.

"Ellen!" gasped Handforth incredulously.

The ghost was the maidservant!

ELLEN sobbed convulsively.

She sat there, a forlorn figure in her tattered garment—which proved to be an old overcoat, worn over her own things. The wig and beard were on the floor, and she now covered her face with her hands and cried unrestrainedly, but in an almost inaudible way.

"Come, Ellen—this won't do!" said Nipper grimly.

He was thoroughly suspicious of the girl now. He did not believe in these tears.

"Oh, young gentlemen, whatever will you think of me?" sobbed the girl. "I—I feel so ashamed of myself!"

"And so you ought!" said Handforth indignantly. "Great Scott! I never dreamed that you were the ghost! What's your idea? What the dickens do you mean by this?"

"Oh, I've been so foolish!" murmured Ellen. "I—I thought it would be a good joke to play a trick on you boys. I'm ever so sorry, Master Edward. Please, please, don't tell the master or the mistress!"

"I'm not sure that I shall agree to that," replied Handforth judicially. "A thing like this ought to be reported! You're not safe about the place! I've never heard of such a thing in all my life!"

"Please, Master Edward!" sobbed the maidservant. "Please don't give me away! I heard some of you young gentlemen talking, and I thought it would be such a good Christmas joke!"

Handforth softened.

"Well, perhaps we oughtn't to be too hard on you," he said as he looked at the girl's pale face and wide-open, frightened eyes. "Anyhow, I'm jolly glad to know that the mystery is solved."

"Yes, it's a relief," said Willy.

"No wonder we couldn't find the ghost in your bed-room!" remarked Nipper dryly. "That was all a spoof, then?"

"Of course it was," murmured Ellen. "I heard you coming down the passage, and I felt sure that you would knock at my door, so I thought it better to pretend that the ghost had come into my bed-room."

"A fat lot of chance we stood of finding the apparition!" grinned Travers. "And we were thinking about secret doors, and mysterious panels, and all that sort of thing! I'll bet you hid the whiskers and beard and things in your trunks, or perhaps in that suitcase. Naturally, we didn't look in there."

"No, sir; I hid them under the bed-clothes," said the girl. "Don't you remember they were all in a heap? I knew that you wouldn't look there."

"Oh, well, I suppose we'd better go to bed," said Handforth gruffly. "We've wasted enough time already, and we shall be as heavy as lead in the morning after this. I should think you ought to feel pretty pleased with yourself!" he added sternly.

"I'm not, Master Edward—I'm not!" whispered the wretched girl. "I'm ashamed now. It seemed such a good joke at first, but I think I frightened myself more than I

THE ST. FRANK'S QUESTIONNAIRE!

Here are twelve testers for you chums—questions which refer to St. Frank's and its members. Give them the "once-over," jot down the answers to those which you know, and then compare them with the correct list which will be given, together with another set of questions, next week.

1. When was the first St. Frank's story published, and what was it called?
2. Who are the occupants of Study No. 2 in the Modern House?
3. What causes the toll which is sometimes heard at St. Frank's on a still night?
4. Who is the most popular master at the River House School?
5. What is the name of the Modern House pageboy?
6. How many up and down trains are there at Bellton every day?
7. Who is the deaf junior in the Remove?
8. Is the Bannington Palladium open on Sundays?
9. How many Remove studies are there in the West House?

10. What are the colours of the River House School?

11. Who is Nelson Lee's greatest enemy?

12. Where is the Fountain pool at St. Frank's?

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S QUESTIONS:

1. Raithmere Castle, near Market Donning.
2. Lord Pippinton, Alan Castleton, and Tom Burton.
3. Bessie Grover and Hilda Smith.
4. Ten.
5. No, although Etons are customary in the Junior School.
6. Magenta and Green.
7. Douglas James Sutcliffe, alias "Jim the Penman."
8. On a branch line.
9. Grosvenor Avenue, W.
10. Septimus.
11. To distinguish them from "The Honourables"—no other reason.
12. Nicodemus Trotwood.

frightened you. Please, please don't tell the mistress, or she'll dismiss me at a moment's notice!"

"Well, there's not much doubt about that," agreed Handforth. "My mater wouldn't give you much of a chance if she heard about this! But we'll only keep mum if you'll promise, on your oath, that you won't try any more of this nonsense!"

"I promise, Master Edward!" said the girl earnestly.

SO she was allowed to go back to bed, taking her precious "props" with her. And Handforth & Co. and Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson went back to their bed-room. The other fellows, chuckling over the tame ending to the affair, sought their own beds.

Willy Handforth was the only one who seemed reluctant to get some sleep. He accompanied his major and the others into their own room.

"What are you doing here, you young ass?" asked Edward Oswald. "This isn't your bed-room!"

"I know it isn't," said Willy. "But there's something fishy about this affair—and you fellows don't seem to have noticed it."

"I've noticed it," said Nipper. "Well, of course, you would," agreed Willy. "But these others—"

"What do you mean—something fishy?" broke in Handforth. "Why, the whole thing has been explained. Ellen was the ghost, and she was doing it to spoof us."

"That's what she says," nodded Willy. "Don't you believe her? What other reason could she have?"

"That's what we've got to find out," said Willy grimly. "In the first place, Ted, how did she know of that yarn about the whiskered old fellow with the matted hair and the chains?"

"She told us, didn't she?" asked Edward, staring. "She said that she heard some of the fellows talking."

"I'm willing to bet that none of the chaps have referred to that silly ghost yarn of yours since they got to Travis Deno," replied Willy. "That proves that Ellen must have heard the story from some other source—from St. Frank's, perhaps."

"But she's never been at St. Frank's!" "She's a new servant—an extra girl," said Willy shrewdly. "You know as well as I do, Ted, that the house is full of special maids and other servants for this party. Ellen is one of 'em. She's only been here a few days."

"By George! I'd forgotten that!"

"There's another point," put in Nipper. "She told us that she was impersonating the ghost so that she could give us a scare. Doesn't it strike you as significant, Handy, that when she came along the corridor just now she did so as silently as possible?"

"That's the point I've been thinking of," said Willy.

"Silently?" repeated Handforth. "What about it?"

"Ghosts are generally silent, aren't they?" asked Tregellis-West. "At least, so I imagine."

"That's not the point," said Nipper. "Ellen told us that she was playing the trick so that she should give us a scare, and yet she didn't rattle her chains as she came along the corridor—proving, to my mind,

The "ghost" ran up the stairs, tripped over its long flowing robe and sprawled helplessly. With a whoop of joy the St. Frank's juniors pounced upon it. In a few minutes now the mystery of the ghost of Travis Dene would be explained.



that she had no desire to attract any attention."

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, scratching his head. "I hadn't looked at it like that! But what the dickens does it mean? Why should she do all this? You're not suggesting that she's a thief, are you?"

"It might be that," said Nipper. "But it's certain, anyhow, that she was only wearing that ghost's make-up as a kind of safeguard. In the case of her being spotted she was ready, you see—ready to frighten anybody off so that she should have a chance of getting back to her bed-room."

"Well I'm blessed!" murmured Tommy Watson. "I believe you're right, Nipper!"

"She was going towards Molly's bed-room," said Willy quietly.

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said, Ted. There's no actual proof that she was making for Molly's bed-room, but she was certainly going in that direction."

"How do you know which is Molly's bed-room?" asked Handforth, staring.

"I do know—I made it my business to know," replied Willy. "It's all very well to say that Miss Eileen Dare and Molly are safe here—that they've escaped their enemies—but I'm not so sure. I think we ought to keep guard outside Molly's door until daylight comes."

"What rot!" said Handforth. "I'll bet that Ellen is merely a sneak-thief, and she was prowling about to see what she could lay her hands on!"

Nipper shook his head.

"I believe that Willy is right," he said grimly. "This girl is somehow associated with the people who are trying to get hold of that little girl. She's an accomplice of the enemy!"

"Oh, my aunt!" breathed Handforth.

"She could easily have heard of that ghost yarn," proceeded Nipper. "It was the talk of St. Frank's before the school broke up—and lots of people in the village knew it, too."

"It's a certainty," said Willy impatiently. "Don't be an ass, Ted! These mysterious people, the girl included, thought that the legend was authentic. So they planted this girl in the house, and prepared her with the ghost's outfit. They hadn't the faintest idea that the whole yarn was an invention of yours, and that the ghost would be an obvious fake. Don't you see?"

"We'd better go to that girl's bed-room and ask her for an explanation," said Handforth excitedly. "And, if necessary, we'll hand her over to the police—"

The "ghost" ran up the stairs, tripped over its long flowing robe and sprawled helplessly. With a whoop of joy the St. Frank's juniors pounced upon it. In a few minutes now the mystery of the ghost of Travis Dene would be explained.



"Oh, cheese it!" interrupted Willy, with a sigh. "Why show our hand like that? She thinks that she's fooled us—that we're satisfied. Let her continue to think so. And to-morrow we'll watch her, and we'll take good care that she doesn't do any harm to Molly."

"That's the best idea," said Nipper. "As long as we're on our guard, the girl can't do much harm. It would certainly be better to watch her, and to make sure of things before taking any definite action."

"Well, I think you're all wrong," said Church bluntly. "Miss Dare and Molly came here in secret—nobody knew about it



except us, and all the members of the house party. Those men who tried to kidnap her at St. Frank's were diddled. They didn't know where Miss Dare and Molly went to. I believe that this maidservant was just playing a joke for the fun of the thing."

"Well, it looks like it," said Watson.

"You can keep your opinion, and we'll keep ours," said Willy agreeably. "Now, what about sitting up for the rest of the night?"

"Sitting up?" repeated his major. "What for?"

"To keep guard over Molly."

"My dear kid, there's no need for you to be so scared about the girl," said Handforth indulgently. "Of course, you're a bit soft on her, so I suppose we can't be surprised at anything you say or do."

"I'm not smitten," said Willy coldly. "But I know jolly well that she's in danger, and it's our duty to protect her."

"Really, old son, there's practically no chance of anything else happening to-night," put in Nipper. "We needn't sit up. It's getting on for five o'clock, and there are only two or three hours of darkness left. This girl wouldn't dare to take any action to-night."

"Well, I'm not so sure," said Willy. "And if you chaps won't keep guard, I'll do it myself."

And he walked out of the bedroom without another word.

"Perhaps we ought to help?" said Nipper thoughtfully.

"Don't take any notice of my minor!" growled Handforth. "He's only gassing. He won't stay on guard—not for longer than an hour, anyway."

And so the Removites, feeling that they now deserved some sleep, turned into bed.

The little mystery was solved, and they could sleep easily. The ghost of Travis Dene, in fact, had been effectually laid.

CHAPTER 7.

Christmas Day!

WILLY was very much in earnest.

He did not take it for granted that the enemy would take no further action to-night. He admitted that there was scarcely one chance in a thousand that any danger would befall Molly; but there *was* that one chance, and Willy had no intention of giving the enemy the slightest loophole.

It would be a mistake to warn either Eileen Dare or Molly. They felt themselves to be secure in the Handforth mansion; it would be unkind to destroy that sense of security. Besides, there was absolutely no direct evidence that Ellen, the maidservant, was an accomplice of the enemy. It was only a suspicion.

Far better for the juniors to keep this thing to themselves, and to remain on the alert. During the whole of to-morrow Willy would keep close to Molly—and he would get some of the other fags to help him. They would form themselves into a bodyguard, and woe betide anybody who attempted to interfere with the girl!

For the rest of to-night, Willy would keep guard on his own. So he crept silently to the door of Molly's bed-room, and here he settled himself comfortably on the mat, sit-



ting with his back towards the doorpost. He was something like a faithful dog keeping guard over the one he loved. It was cold in the corridor. There were no radiators—or, if there were, they had been turned off overnight. There was a draught whistling along the floor, and before long Willy's limbs were numbed, but he thought nothing of this. He did not move. He sat there motionless, absolutely invisible in the darkness.

He could, of course, have got up and walked about, but he decided that this would be a mistake, for if any further action was taken to-night—by Ellen or by anybody else—they might see him as they approached. But so long as he remained silent and invisible in the actual doorway of Molly's bedroom, he would have all the advantage.

Five o'clock boomed out from the clock in the great hall. And except for the faithful Willy, Travis Dene slumbered.

Willy himself was finding it a hard task to keep awake. Being a healthy youngster, he was naturally sleepy. Already he had lost several valuable hours, and he found himself nodding again and again. He was becoming numbed all over, too. But he doggedly set his teeth, and told himself that it was his duty to remain here.

He thought a great deal of that little girl. She was such a sport. Willy had never before met any member of the fair sex whom he liked in this way. He had always scorned girls, and had chipped Edward Oswald unmercifully for the latter's susceptibilities. Now he was finding out for himself that there can be one girl, at least, different from the others.

It was his regard for his new girl chum that caused him to sit here, chilled and numbed, watching, ready to protect her against any danger. There was something splendid in the fag's devotion.

GOOD gracious!" Eileen Dare, pretty, dainty and fresh, stood in the doorway of Molly's bedroom. She was wearing a cosy, woolly robe, beneath the hem of which peeped her feet, encased in velvet slippers. There was a boudoir cap on her head, and altogether Eileen was looking very charming, considering the early hour of the morning. The clock in the bedroom had just struck eight.

Molly was still asleep, and Eileen, who had insisted upon sharing the same bed, was now bent upon taking her morning bath. Upon her opening the door, she found a figure coiled up on the mat.

The girl detective was very surprised. At first, she hardly knew what to think. The figure was that of a junior schoolboy, clothed in a dressing-gown. Bending down, Eileen could see that his face was rather white and drawn. His hands were blue with cold.

"Why, it's Willy!" murmured Eileen. She shook Willy gently by the shoulder, and the leader of the fags stirred, sighed heavily, and then groaned.

"Willy!" said Eileen. "Oh, Willy, what have you been doing? You're as cold as ice!"

Willy opened his eyes, and then, in a second, he became alert. He sat up, his face screwed up with pain, caused by the sudden movement. He was cramped in every limb. He looked at Eileen wildly, his mind in a state of complete bewilderment.

"What is it?" he asked dully. "Great Scott! What am I doing out here on the floor?"

"You were asleep on my mat, Willy," said Eileen gently. "Whatever could have possessed you? It is as cold as ice in this corridor——"

"Your bedroom!" broke in Willy, his quick brain grasping the truth. "But—but I thought that Molly——"

"It is Molly's bedroom, too."

"Oh! What time is it?" asked Willy dazedly.

"Just eight o'clock."

"Is she all right? Is Molly safe?" asked the fag, his voice hoarse.

"You silly boy! Of course she is all right," smiled Eileen. "Come, try to get to your feet. You must be dreadfully cramped."

"She's all right, then?" whispered Willy, his voice charged with remorse. "Oh, I'm no good, Miss Eileen! I'm a failure—I'm a rotten fraud! I went to sleep on duty. Anything might have happened. I deserve to be kicked from here to Timbuctoo!"

His voice was bitter, and Eileen understood.

"You were on guard?" she asked softly. "Are you telling me, Willy, that you have spent the night on this mat—just so that you could be certain that nothing happened to us?"

Willy was distressed.

"I—I didn't mean you to know anything, Miss Eileen," he muttered. "I meant to clear off before you came out—or before anybody saw me. I didn't know that you were with Molly in her bedroom."

"You thought that she was alone and unguarded—and so you stationed yourself at the door to be ready in case of need?" asked the girl. "It was splendid of you, Willy—but it was very, very foolish."

Willy was angry with himself. He tried to get to his feet, but his limbs were so cramped that he could hardly stand. His legs and feet were numbed with cold, and his whole body felt chilled through and through.

While Eileen was helping him Nelson Lee came along, also en route for one of the bathrooms, and he looked at Willy with deep concern.

"Is anything wrong, Eileen?" he asked. "Is this boy ill?"

"I am afraid he is," said Eileen.

"I'm not—I'm not!" insisted Willy. "I'm all right, sir! Oh, my hat! The pater will

come along next—and Mr. Stokes, and Irene and Ena and everybody else! Please let me go, sir! I didn't want anybody to know."

"What has he been doing?" asked Lee, glancing at Eileen.

"He has been doing something very wonderful," replied the girl detective, her eyes full of tenderness. "He has been keeping guard outside Molly's door, so that no harm should come to her during the black hours of the night."

"And I failed, sir," muttered Willy remorsefully. "I fell asleep on duty. I remember six o'clock striking, but after that I must have dropped off to sleep."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"It wasn't sleep which overcame you, Willy—it was sheer numbness," he said. "The cold took you in its grip, and you were unable to stand the strain. You mustn't ever do anything like this again, young man."

"I ought to be shot, sir," growled Willy.

"You had better come with me and get into a hot bath," continued Nelson Lee, with a glance at Eileen. "I rather think we'll keep this little affair to ourselves, eh?"

"Yes, of course," said the girl.

"Thank's awfully, sir," muttered Willy gratefully.

SURPRISINGLY enough—and much to Nelson Lee's relief—a hot bath worked wonders with the youngster. He had a splendid constitution, and he seemed to suffer no ill-effects from his ordeal. It was more than likely that he would develop a severe cold, but it seemed that this would be the worst that would happen to him.

During breakfast Willy was quite himself, except for a hard, stubborn light in his eyes—a light of fierce self-condemnation. He had failed, and he was thoroughly ashamed of himself. As it happened, everything was all right—Molly was safe. But what if the enemy had come along whilst he slept at his post?

He had said nothing to Eileen or Molly regarding the events of the night—and the other fellows kept that little secret to themselves, too. They saw Ellen once or twice, but she avoided their gaze. And she appeared to be doing her duties admirably.

"We'll keep an eye on her during the day, of course," said Nipper, after breakfast, when he and the others stood together in a group in the great hall. "We won't give the girl away—unless she tries any tricks."

"She'll do nothing else," declared Handforth. "She's had her lesson, and she'll keep quiet. What's wrong with you this morning, Willy?" he added, turning to his minor. "You're looking pretty groggy."

"I'm all right," said Willy shortly.

"I suppose you kept guard all night, eh?" grinned Handforth. "Well, that was your

own funeral—and you jolly well deserve to be sleepy all day. Molly's safe enough—"

"Dry up, Ted!" urged Willy. "Here come some of the girls, and we don't want that business to be spread all over the place."

Willy did not intentionally pass any slight upon Irene & Co.—hinting, as he did, that if they heard the story they would immediately spread it. The other young guests—the schoolboys—were just as liable to talk. Far better to keep this little secret to themselves.

IT was Christmas Day, and there was plenty to be done.

The rough night had been succeeded by a morning of glorious sunshine, and the whole countryside was covered in a thick mantle of snow.

For the most part, Sir Edward Handforth's young guests gave themselves up to a day of glorious winter sports. This was Christmas after the old style—Christmas as it really ought to be.

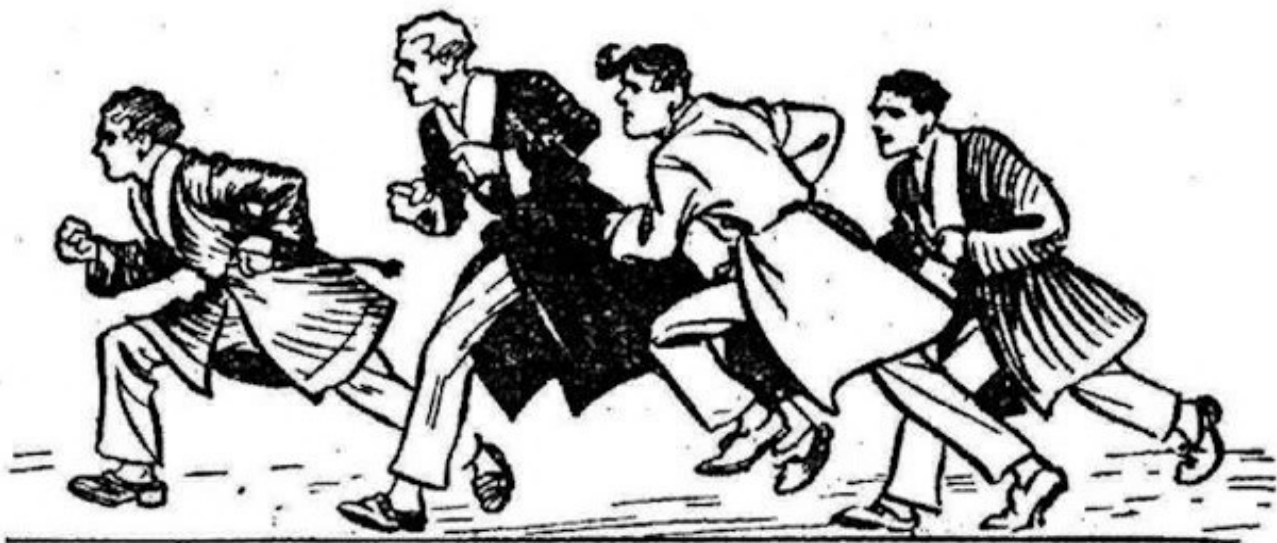
The morning was devoted to tobogganing and similar joys. The schoolgirls entered into the fun as heartily as the schoolboys, and they proved themselves to be every bit as daring and adventurous. What the boys did, the girls did. And when, in the afternoon, one cheery spirit suggested a snow-fight, the girls were all in favour.

"Let's make it a girls versus boys fight!" said Irene Manners gaily. "What do you say, Doris?"

"I say yes—and we'll beat 'em!" replied Doris promptly.

"Don't you believe it!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Why, you girls would be absolutely wiped up! You can't aim for toffee!"

"Can't we?" cried Mary Summers. "Just try us! It's a challenge, girls!"



"And we're not going to let these boys crow over us, either!" said Doris. "Come on—let's choose our side. An equal number of girls against an equal number of boys. Then they can't crow if we win!"

"My poor little innocents, you'll be wiped out of existence during the first five minutes," said Handforth pityingly. "To make this fight fair, there ought to be two girls for each boy."

"Oh, listen to him!" cried Irene. "We'll make you eat those words, Ted!"

And the snow-fight commenced forthwith.

It took place in the open parkland, some distance from the mansion. Here there were great open spaces, all gloriously covered with thick, soft snow. It was an ideal battleground.

The fight started in earnest, the girls successfully getting in the first fusillade. And over on the terrace Sir Edward Handforth, Nelson Lee, Eileen Dare and the other guests were watching with much amusement.

"Gad! I feel like joining in myself!" chuckled Sir Edward. "It's good to see these youngsters enjoying themselves so much."

Much to the consternation of the boys, Irene & Co kept up the pace, and their aim turned out to be deadly accurate. It was really too bad. Everybody knew that girls couldn't aim straight—and yet the snowballs from these Moor View girls kept striking their objectives with deadly accuracy. And the St. Frank's fellows found that they could make little or no progress.

Perhaps this was because they started the fight in an easy-going spirit. They meant to be gentle with the girls. But they soon found that they had met their equals, and if they were to win the battle they would need to go all out.

And they went all out, too—much to the glee and delight of Irene & Co.

It became a fast, hectic affair, and the snowballs whizzed through the air in tremendous numbers, both sides fighting their hardest.

And then, when the battle was in its hottest phase, there came a sudden anguished cry from one of the schoolboy fighters, and he fell headlong, blood streaming from his forehead!

CHAPTER 8.

A Midnight Skirmish!

THE fallen junior lay in the snow. The blood trickled down his face and on to the snow itself, looking startlingly red against the dead whiteness.

"Oh!" shouted Gresham, who was nearest. "Stop, you chaps! Jimmy's hurt!"

The fallen boy was Sir James Potts, the schoolboy baronet. In an instant, the other juniors collected round him. The girls, sensing something was wrong, came running over "no-man's land," and there were shouts of alarm and consternation.

Jimmy Potts was quickly picked up. He was quite unconscious, there was an ugly cut on his forehead, and a bruise was beginning to show itself.

"I don't know how it happened," said Irene breathlessly. "Oh, this is terrible!"

"We'll get him indoors," said Nipper. "I don't think he's badly winged, although it's a nasty cut."

"But how did it happen?" put in Ena Handforth. "Did he trip and fall?"

"I think one of you girls must have thrown a stone," said Nipper gently.

"Oh, but we didn't" protested Doris, her voice ringing with indignation.

"Not intentionally, of course!" Nipper hastened to say. "One of you must have picked it up in the snow—without knowing anything about it. There's no other possible explanation."

And this, of course, was right. It was a pure accident, and nobody was to blame.

Anyhow, the snowfight was over, brought to an unconvulsive finish.

And after Jimmy Potts had been carried indoors, he quickly recovered. His head was bathed, and it was found that no stitches would be necessary. He appeared, later, with

COMING NEXT WEEK! *****



a strip of plaster across his forehead, and looking a bit shaky.

"For goodness' sake, don't make such a fuss," he said, as the girls and boys gathered round him. "I'm all right. Mr. Lee wanted me to go to bed—but what a hope! This is Christmas Day, and I'm going to enjoy myself."

He did his utmost, but it was seen by the others that his enjoyment was marred by the pain of his throbbing head.

The rest of the day passed off uneventfully. At least, there were no indications of any sort that Molly's enemies were active. Willy had his eyes open all the time, and Nipper and Handforth were equally on the alert. Willy had maintained his bodyguard of fags for Molly, and scarcely once during

the day had the girl been without her protectors.

The maidservant, Ellen, too, had been watched—and she seemed to know this. Her behaviour was exemplary. She seemed to be doing her utmost to put herself right in the eyes of the schoolboys.

IN the evening there was a lively Christmas party, with all manner of amusements suitable to the festive occasion.

And when, at last, bed-time came, all the young guests were ready enough for sleep. They had had a full, tiring day, and now they were gloriously sleepy—with the prospect

“THE PERIL OF THE HAUNTED ROOM!”

Night in the library of Travis Dene—with Vivian Travers on the watch. The sounds of mysterious noises from behind the panelling; a thud as part of it slides open—and into the room appears a hand in which is held a revolver!

What happens? And what is the explanation of this mystery; of all those mysterious things which have been happening at Travis Dene?

Next week's stunning long St. Frank's yarn is packed with thrills. You'll vote it one of the most sensational, most exciting you've ever read. Look out for this treat next Wednesday, chums!

“THE FOUR-LEGGED EAGLE!”

Don't miss reading the next enthralling instalment of this amazingly popular detective serial, chums.

***** ORDER IN ADVANCE!

of another gorgeous day on the morrow.

Just before bed-time, Nelson Lee took Willy Handforth aside.

“Now, young man, you're going to bed to-night,” he said sternly.

“Of course, sir,” said Willy, in a demure voice.

“No repetition of last night's nonsense,” continued Lee. “You need have no fear about Molly's safety. Miss Dare is sleeping in the same bed-room, and Miss Dare is a very capable young lady.”

“All right, sir,” said Willy. “I didn't know that she was sleeping with Molly, or perhaps I wouldn't have kept guard last night.”

“Do you promise me that you won't repeat that rash performance?”

“Well, sir—”

“I want you to promise, Willy.”

“But supposing something happens to her?” asked Willy earnestly.

“Nothing will happen—at least, I hope not,” said Nelson Lee. “And you must give me your word, young man.”

Willy did so.

After all, there wasn't much danger, he told himself. If Eileen Dare was sleeping with Molly, all well and good. And Willy decided that it would be better, on the whole, not to mention anything about the previous night's adventures. Perhaps that theory considering the maidservant was wrong—and it wouldn't be fair to drag her into the limelight for nothing.

FOR once Nelson Lee proved to be wrong. Something did happen during that Christmas night. Once more Molly's mysterious enemies made another move in their grim game.

Even Nipper shared Willy's sense of security. He knew that Eileen Dare was with Molly, and she—as Nelson Lee had said—was a very capable young lady. So Nipper's fears for the safety of Molly had been dispelled.

It was Jimmy Potts who discovered that something alarming was happening at Travis Dene. Midnight had just boomed out when Jimmy got out of bed, donned his dressing-gown, and made off towards the bath-room. His head was throbbing agonisingly. The wound had been dressed again, but it seemed to be more inflamed than ever. The skin all round the plaster was hot and puffy.

Jimmy hated the idea of awakening anybody, so he decided to slip into one of the bath-rooms, and to bathe the wound with hot water. He would get that plaster off, and the hot water, perhaps, would act as a kind of poultice. It might get the inflammation down.

Everything was dark and quiet in the corridor. Travis Dene was asleep. It was much calmer to-night, for there was no wild wind hooting round the mansion. And outside the moonlight was uninterrupted, for the winter's sky was cloudless.

Jimmy had nearly reached the bath-room when he paused. He thought he heard a movement near the landing, and he stood there, in the darkness, startled. Then he caught in his breath.

A figure had rapidly crossed the end of the corridor—a figure bearing a heavy burden.

At least, so it seemed to Jimmy.

He forgot his pain, and ran quickly towards the landing. He was just in time to see the figure as it vanished downstairs. Leaning over the balustrade, he caught a glimpse of it as it passed through a patch of moonlight towards a small door which led out upon the terrace.

“Great Scott!” gasped the schoolboy baronet.

It was impossible for him to tell who that figure belonged to—whether it was male or female—but he was certain, at all events, that it was bearing a clumsy burden—a big bundle which looked like a lot of blankets.

Molly!

"Hi!" shouted Jimmy. "Who's that, down there? What are you doing?"

There came a startled ejaculation. The side door was flung open, and the figure vanished. Only for an instant did Jimmy hesitate. He realised that he could do nothing singlehanded, so he dashed back along the corridor, and went bursting into the bedroom occupied by Handforth & Co. and Nipper & Co.

"Quick, you chaps!" he shouted. "Up, the Remove!"

In an instant the juniors were awake; they stared at Jimmy in dazed astonishment.

"Somebody's just gone outside—carrying a bundle!" gasped Jimmy Potts. "I believe they've got that little girl! For goodness' sake, be quick!"

"What!" gasped Handforth. "Oh, my hat. Come on, you chaps!"

They hardly knew how they got into their dressing-gowns and slippers. Then they all went tearing down, a crowd of other fellows joining them in the passage—for the alarm had spread. Handforth's voice was loud enough to awaken the whole corridor.

Outside it was plain to see that Jimmy Potts had not given a false alarm. There were the footprints in the snow—leading from that side door. The path itself, just outside the door, had been swept—but the mysterious figure had made off across the lawns, which for the most part were undisturbed.

"We shall be too late!" panted Willy, who was well in the lead. "Oh, what fools we were not to keep guard. It's all Mr. Lee's fault! He made me promise——"

"Dry up, and don't be so pessimistic!" interrupted Handforth. "The rotter can't have gone far! By George! Look there!"

They caught sight of a figure some distance ahead—disappearing round a little spinney. On the other side there was a by-road. It was evident that Molly was being taken towards that road. Perhaps a car was waiting, in readiness.

The boys ran like the wind, some of them losing their slippers and continuing in their bare feet. But they were too excited to notice. Then, suddenly, the leaders halted.

They had come across a big bundle. No doubt it had been dropped by the fugitive; and at the same moment there came the

sound of an engine being started up, and an unseen car went speeding off into the night!

"Jimmy was right!" ejaculated Nipper, as he examined the bundle. "Molly's here—unconscious! Thank Heaven we were in time!"

IT was impossible to give chase to the fugitives.

The car had gone.

Molly was tenderly carried back to the house by the boys, and Nelson Lee was soon aroused—and Sir Edward Handforth, too, to say nothing of Mr. and Mrs. Stokes.

It was soon found that Eileen Dare was quietly asleep in bed. Molly was still sleeping, too, although she had been carried along so roughly.

"Drugged!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "Both of them! The same drug as these scoundrels used once before. Perfectly harmless, but very effective. How did these people get into the house?"

"Ellen, the maid!" ejaculated Willy.

And, rapidly, they told Nelson Lee of the previous night's adventures—and Lee was very angry because the boys had not informed him earlier.

An immediate search was made for Ellen, and, as Lee expected, the girl had gone. It had been she, no doubt, who had been seen by Jimmy Potts—she who had carried Molly away. But, finding the crowd of juniors on her trail, she had been unable to complete her task, for if she had kept Molly in her grasp she would have been overtaken. Rather than suffer that disaster, she had abandoned the child and had escaped.

VERY soon afterwards, both Molly and Eileen recovered, and Molly never knew what had happened. Once again she had been spared from that dramatic knowledge.

Eileen herself was startled and worried. Ellen must have crept silently into the bedroom, and she had probably drugged the two sleepers during the first few moments.

At all events, it was now certain that Molly's enemies were active—that they knew of her new whereabouts, and that they were grimly determined to get her!

What was this Christmas mystery? Who were these mysterious enemies?

It seemed very unlikely that the rest of the Christmas holidays would pass without further dramatic excitement!

THE END.

Another Grand Yarn in this Amazing Series Next Week.

"THE PERIL OF THE HAUNTED ROOM!"

Gloriously Exciting—Wonderfully Thrilling—Don't miss it!



Handforth undertakes to answer, in his own unique fashion, any question "N.L." readers care to submit to him. But, although of a certainty the results will be amusing and entertaining, the Editor takes no responsibility for their veracity. Write to Handforth, c/o the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, to-day.

THE Editor of the Old Paper, in his fat-headed wisdom, has informed me that this week's issue of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY is the special Christmas number, and so he has asked me to open up with a few appropriate words. And, seeing that Christmas is the time of good-will and all that sort of thing, I'll overlook the fact that the cheeky bounder told me not to do this greetings business in my usual "potty, drivelling" fashion. So here goes:

I wish all my millions of admirers a real happy Christmas. May you have the jolliest time imaginable, may you eat all the grub you want and then some—and I hope you don't have the tummy-ache the day afterwards—Edward Oswald.

M. N. M. (Warragul, Australia). Thanks for your very charming letter. I'm always pleased to hear from girl readers. So your "best boy" wears purple knitted ties with yellow stripes, and white collars with blue spots, does he? And you want me to tell you whether this is the latest fashion? I shouldn't like to say yes or no, but I do know that such a colour scheme must have its uses. Why, you must be able to see the lad when he's about two miles away. Here's another idea he may care to adopt. How about a bright red tie, dotted with large green spots, to be worn with a yellow shirt? And by the way, if you receive a letter from Archie Glenthorne calling me a "silly idiot, etc., etc., etc.," don't you take any notice of it, but just deposit it in the wastepaper-basket. That chump knows no more about clothes, and what to wear and how to wear 'em than a bleary-eyed codfish.

"CHARLIE" (Basingstoke) tells me that he's holding a party this Christmas, and would like me to make a few suggestions to ensure the party being a success. Nothing easier! I take it you are inviting a number of fellows? Right, then line an equal number

of them on either side of the room and at the word "Go," they have to charge forward and see how many black eyes and thick ears and swollen noses they can distribute. There's nothing like a good, honest, bare-fist scrap to liven up things, you know. And don't let such minor details as knocking over the piano and breaking a few chairs deter the combatants. Here's another stunt you can arrange—a real thriller. How about a race between a tortoise and a snail? Hope your party's a great success, "Charlie."

JACK WESTON (London) offers me "a tanner" for my Austin Seven. That's too generous of you, old man. Why, I almost feel like giving it to you—and a "tanner," together with a tanning as well.

"DAPHNE" (Whetstone). Sorry I didn't answer your previous letter. I really must have overlooked it, for how could I hope to resist replying to such a charming girl as yourself? (Handy, Handy, don't you realise that Irene may be reading this?—ED.) You ask who is the best tennis player and dancer at St. Frank's, not including myself. You've put a spoke in the wheel by adding that last bit, Daphne. How can I in the circumstances tell you who is the best tennis player and dancer?

"SCOTSMAN" (Thurso) kindly tells me that as a detective I would make a good chimney sweep. Here's my answer to that. As a chump you *make* an excellent fathead.

ROY (Sydney, Australia) asks me how many times I have biffed Church and McClure! By George! You must think I'm a handy fellow with my fists. Nothing is further from the truth. Why, I don't suppose I've biffed Churchy and Mac more than ten thousand—ahem! Sorry, but I'm not going to tell you, Roy. Happy Christmas, everybody!

EDWARD OSWALD.



This "spooky" article will make your hair stand on end—but don't let that deter you from reading it, chums.

Ghosts at Christmas—Why?

TAP! Tap! Rub-a-dub-dub! The shrilling of fifes—then the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching soldiers. And never a drum or drummer, nor fifers, nor soldiers that any man can set eyes upon! It's the opening chorus of the ghostly "play" that has been repeated time and time again in lonely Cortachy Castle, way up in Forfarshire.

The Earl of Airlie has his ancestral home there, and we doubt very much that he cares greatly for the spectral performers, especially as the sounds of that invisible bit of army remind all and sundry of a chapter of mediæval life that Cortachy would most like to forget!

For it is said that the reason of the restlessness of the noisy drummer—not to mention his escort—is to celebrate the occasion when, in some distant year of the musty past, the master of that old castle had the drummer-boy crammed into his own drum and then pitched headfirst from the highest turrets, for some small misdemeanour. The boy crashed to destruction far below—and still he is having the last word!

Wonder why it is that ghosts of all brands become most restless just before and at Christmas—the one season of the 365 days when every living creature is at least *wanting* to show Peace on Earth, Good Will to All? There are scores of castles and other old houses up and down this little island of ours that "get the creeps" at Christmas, just because some fidgety phantom will start rampaging on the warpath then.

Some people are finding it jolly expensive, too, this ghost business. All very well to boast in midsummer that you have a ghost

in the family, but what about when you come to sell the estate, perhaps, in the dark days of winter—when you have to confess about that headless highwayman or decapitated soldier that might come tramping in to dinner just as the Christmas pudding is dished up?

This Will Give You the Creeps!

THEY'VE got a headless soldier at Dumbarton Castle. Every now and again someone runs into him doing sentry-go on the moonlit castle terrace—accoutrements all complete, and smart as you please, but without a head!

At the time of writing there is a ghost hunt on in a certain district in the South of England. Apparently the spook is practising specially for Christmas, and people are congregating there in scores—motorists included—to see him do his stunt. His strong point is a peculiarly blood-curdling and penetrating shriek.

The stories behind some of the most famous and best authenticated phantoms are enough to make anyone's flesh creep at Christmas. There is, for instance, the spook who returns at intervals to carouse with similar choice spirits at Hermitage Castle, in Scotland. They kick up the dickens of a shindy, apparently enjoying their midnight revels and bearing no man malice—not even the ringleader of the castle ghosts seems to be vindictive.

And certainly he has enough to be vicious about, according to all accounts. At one time, as a real live man, he owned that castle, and his great hobby was dabbling in Black Magic. It got on the nerves of his neighbours, and when they could stand it

no longer they hauled him out of his castle lair and jammed him into a tank of boiling lead.

Naturally, there wasn't much left of him when the seething lead cooled, and now he's making merry at the scene of his former Black Magicing!

Can you imagine the icy, creepy feeling that would slither up your back—like phantom fingers counting the "knobs" in your backbone—if you met on the dark and winding stairs of Ballechin House, in Perthshire, on Christmas Eve, the phantom hunchback dwarf and his equally ghostly companion—a spaniel that you could see through?

That old house is reputed to have other attractions also—ghostly voices raised in quarrelling, and footsteps that shuffle under your nose, but give no other earthly sign of the existence of things that shouldn't be there.

Ghosts of Glamis!

OTHER castles in plenty boast ownerless voices, chief among them being Glamis Castle. Not only voices, but other ghostly phenomena are there. In one part of the castle is a room whose secret has never been made known. Only the owner of the castle, his heir, and the steward of the estate know what the secret of that mystery room is.

The phantom secret is handed down from generation to generation, and so grim is it apparently, that the world at large is allowed to know nothing whatever of it. But that doesn't end the "attractions" of Glamis Castle.

They say an armoured giant occasionally takes the air on the castle stairs. He has been both seen and heard, according to tradition, as often as the spook face of someone unknown has been observed pressed to one of the castle windows.

And, to add to the general jollity of these spooks at Glamis, there is reputed to be heard in the great courtyard at dead o' night the noises of a body of men—only the men are never there—building a scaffold! What a jolly entertainment for Christmas Eve!

At another big castle—that at Fyvie—much the same sort of thing goes on, the haunted room in this instance being kept closely sealed, for the tradition is that should anyone enter the chamber and discover the mystery penned up there, some terrible disaster would visit the castle's owner.

There is a phantom lady in the case of the haunting of an old abbey in Berkshire, where it is declared the said lady is frequently seen rubbing her hands frenziedly in desperate effort to free them of bloodstains incurred four hundred years ago. This spook differs from most others, in that it wears a black face and hands—which makes it all the more terrifying in the dark.

A Playful Spook!

A BLACK friar and a white lady share the haunting horrors, so records declare, at Newstead Abbey. The black friar does not appear to have other eccentricities than that of being a

ghost, but the lady in white has a habit of walking slap through any wall she happens to come to, and then returning in the same way.

There is a playful ghost reputed to live at Kimbolton Castle, in Huntingdonshire, whose favourite way of spending the midnight hours is to perch himself astride one of the castle walls and there lie in wait for passers-by. It isn't on record that he has actually snatched anyone's scalp yet, but one never knows!

It would be interesting to know if the spook of the murdered drummer-boy who was pitched from the battlements of that castle in Forfarshire has ever met the phantom of the stable-boy of ruined Hilton Castle. Their beats are far enough apart, for the latter ruins are in Sunderland, but perhaps there is a sort of brotherhood among ghosts—a kind of Spooky Association—that keeps them all in touch.

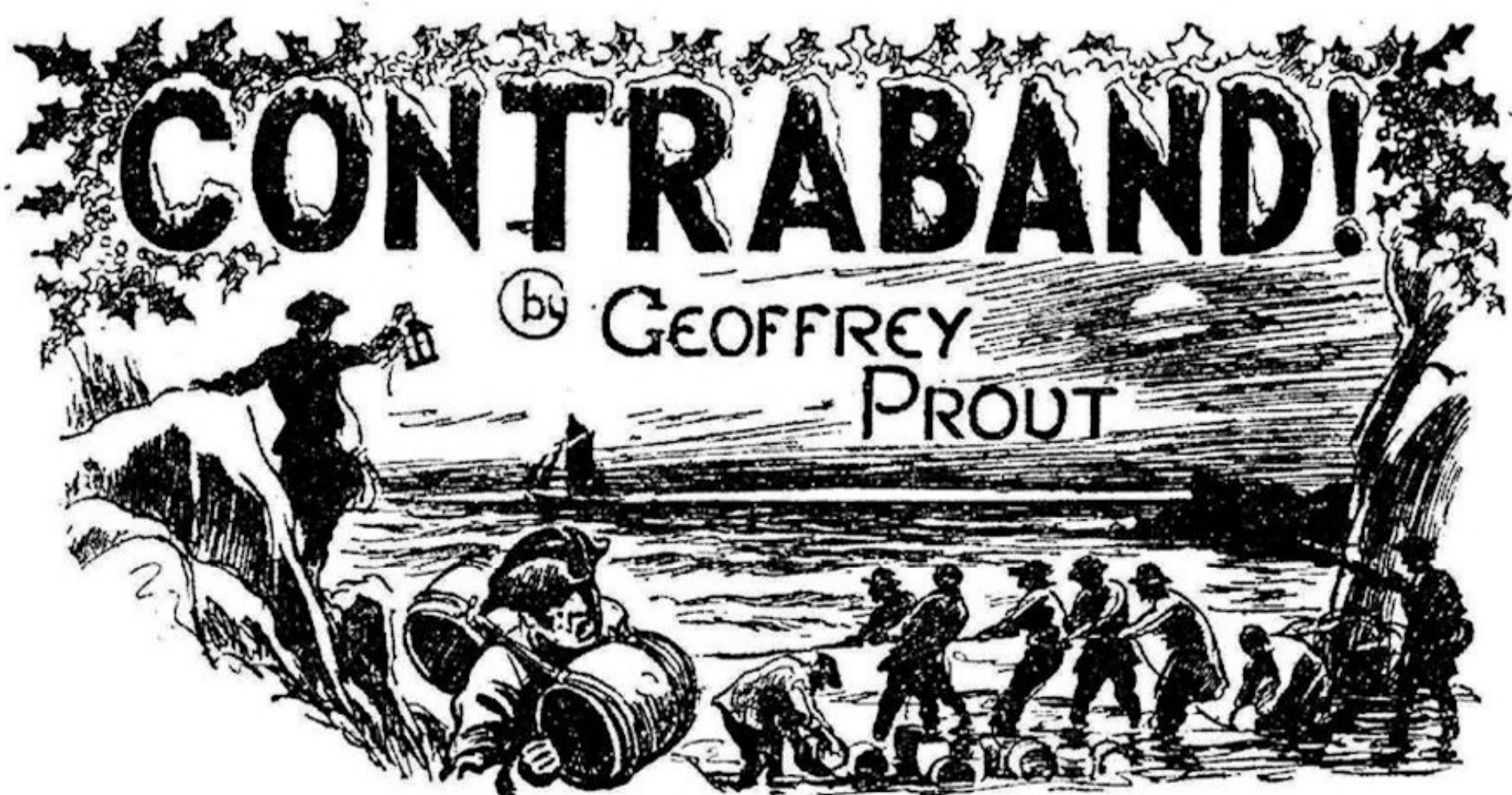


This is the phantom hunchback dwarf of Ballechin House. Would you like to meet him?

More than three hundred years ago that stable-boy became a ghost—consequent upon his master, the owner of the castle, pitching him into a pond one day, and leaving him there to die. Later on the stable-boy's phantom used to amuse itself indoors in all sorts of queer ways—tidying up the castle kitchen, or banging things about into wildest disorder, just how the fancy took him.

Spooks of kings and queens and knights and courtiers are reckoned to swarm thick in Windsor Castle and the Tower of London. Both places have enough gory history wrapped around them to make the idea feasible, certainly!

One of the most famous ghosts of the ancient Tower of London is that of Anne Boleyn, escorted by other ladies that can be seen through and by equally transparent armed knights. Every now and again they are said to parade in St. John's Chapel there—around the actual grave of Anne Boleyn herself.



The First Chapter.

Dangerous Adventure!

THERE was an atmosphere of perfect peace this winter evening in Dale's Farm, on the snow-covered southern slopes of the Purbeck Hills, in Dorsetshire.

Aunt Martha was sewing, and Uncle Silas was going through a file of dusty bills. Peter Coombe was as industrious as his uncle and aunt, being busy with awl and wax-ends mending some of the harness of the splendid team of horses which were his own particular care.

The burning candles threw their mellow glow over the objects in the room—reflecting their light in the burnished copper kettle on the hearth, and flickering along the china plates on the rack like a flight of ghostly elves.

Uncle Silas looked up.

"Oliver will be kicking his toe an' his heel at the dance over at Kingston, Oi allow," he said, beaming at his wife over the top of his spectacles.

But his observation was rudely interrupted. And the three seated so peacefully and industriously in that little living-room rose to their feet in alarm, Peter and Aunt Martha spilling their work on the floor. For the door latch had clicked upwards and the door

had banged wide open, allowing a flurry of fine snowflakes to be blown in. And there was the sound of a heavy step on the flagged porch—the step of a man staggering.

With startled eyes on the porch, the three saw the newcomer enter as he clawed at the jamb of the opening, and, thus supported, reeled into the room.

It was Oliver, who, it was supposed, had been at Kingston, attending a dance at a friend's house. And Aunt Martha uttered a swift cry as she saw her son's face, a horrid gash across the left cheek, and a steady drip-drip of blood descending on to the floor from the tip of his chin.

"Oliver, Oliver, what has happened?" cried Aunt Martha.

"Here, come to the couch, boy!" gasped Uncle Silas, assisting Peter in helping his son across the room.

Oliver lurched on to the couch, his capless head falling back on the cushion his mother had deftly placed in position.

The young man was panting for breath. He had been running—running hard, and his exhausted condition was due to over-exertion rather than to any hurt he had received.

Peter lifted his cousin's feet up on to the couch, while Aunt Martha, almost beside herself with fear, prepared water and clean linen strips, and then attended to her son's hurts.

Oliver lay there with his eyes closed, his

Peter and Oliver were the very best of pals. On one thing only did they disagree. Oliver upheld smuggling—was a smuggler himself—whereas Peter was all against it. This vivid yarn, full of the romance and glamour of the days when smuggling was rife, will enthral all readers.

breathing now becoming easier. When his mother had at last finished bandaging his face, he moved his head and opened tired eyes, regarding his parents rather vacantly for a few seconds.

"What has happened? What's the trouble, Olly?" demanded Uncle Silas.

Oliver regarded his father wearily for a second or two. Then:

"I—I fell over the steep part o' the Swyre Barrow, father," he said.

"The Swyre Barrow? What was 'e doing at the Swyre Barrow? That be not the way to Kingston!"

"I know," replied Oliver slowly. And he looked away, turning his face to the wall. "But I went there with—with friends—two of them. We thought we'd have a turn across the hills before the—the dance. We—we had a dance all right!" Oliver laughed shakily. "I fell down the steep part an' gashed my cheek——"

"There, there, laddy!" said Aunt Martha soothingly, placing her hand over her son's brow. "You always were wild an' full of adventure. 'Tis just like you, Oliver, wi' some o' they wild friends o' yours. But 'e haven't been hurt bad, lad. 'Tis your hurry makes 'e feel faint. For why did 'e run home like a young colt o' breed that will burst it's heart before 'twill slow down?"

Peter, chin in hand, was regarding his cousin thoughtfully. And Oliver's hesitation in thinking out an excuse was not lost on the boy.

"I—I was afraid I was bleeding bad, mother," said Oliver. "'Twas a bad thought, the chance o' falling down helpless in the snow before reaching the farm——"

"And lyin' out all night in the cold without bein' discovered—ch?" broke in Peter.

Oliver looked sharply at his cousin.

"Why do ye stare like an owl, Peter?" he said. "Give me a hand like a true cousin and comrade, and I'll soon be between the sheets."

Up in his little room Oliver laughed softly as he unlaced his shoes. Peter Coombe remained silent, and was so for some time.

"You be powerful quiet, Peter," said Oliver at last. "What be 'e thinking about?"

"I was wondering," said Peter, "how, by a fall down the steep part o' the Swyre Barrow, and cutting your cheek, you got the black marks o' burnt powder on either side o' the gash. And how 'tis ye've got the slate-coloured mud o' the cliffs around Chapman's Pool on your shoes. The discharge o' that pistol-shot, Olly, must ha' near deafened you! Ye've been out smuggling again——"

"Ho, ye guess I've been out to earn a dishonest crown by runnin' a couple o' kegs inland, do ye?"

Peter nodded.

"Ay, that's my guess," he said. "I'm afraid for you, Olly. I've been puttin' two an' two together for a while now——"

Oliver laughed light-heartedly as he sat on the side of his bed. He and Peter were good friends, and always had been.

"Ye were always quick at guessin' the answers to riddles, Peter," he said. "But that's not saying you always got the right answers."

And the young man, with another careless laugh, swung himself on to his bed and drew up the sheets.

The Second Chapter.

The Phantoms of the Hills!

PETER was up betimes the next morning, for the quarry team had to be fed, watered and harnessed ready for their hard day's work pulling the great blocks of Purbeck marble from the quarry mouth to the place of shipment.

While the great horses were munching their feed, Peter sallied forth outside. It was cold—bitterly cold. More snow had fallen during the night, and everywhere was covered with a thick mantle of white.

The boy found Oliver outside the stable. He was whistling cheerily, the while he stamped his feet and swung his arms to and fro in an endeavour to keep himself warm.

Oliver greeted his young cousin with a cheery grin. His face was protected by sticking-plaster, the wound having been dressed with a herbal salve, a speciality of Aunt Martha's.

"I wish 'e'd give up the smuggling, Olly," said Peter. "If 'tis adventure ye want, let us both——"

"If so be ye want adventure like me," answered Olly quickly, "I can let 'e have it—let ye have your fill. Ay, an' be paid for it, too!"

"A crown for running the risk of a pistol-ball through the spine be not good pay, Olly——"

"Odds, Peter, if ye want adventure ye must take risks! Now, I have an idea——"

"If 'tis to draw me into the smuggling, Olly, I'll hear none of it. I like adventure, but I be not prepared to risk payin' for it with my life. I'll warrant me the Revenue cutter was spying out off Swanage last night——"

Oliver frowned.

"The furies take them!" he said darkly. "There be enough for them to do down off the Cornish coast wi'out bothering about our bit of seaboard."

"And last night the cutter landed a party an' waylaid our band? I have it all now, Olly. Was anyone caught?"

Olly's brow cleared at the glorious memory of last night's affair.

"No," he said. "I was the only one who got real trouble. But we scattered. Harry Gurd and Dan'l Broom told me this morning that the whole band got clear. And, luckily, the lugger hauled back her cargo, got it aboard, and, by the favours, picking up a

breeze the cutter did not feel, got clear away, too. But if ye won't listen to a real bit o' good business, Peter, 'tis no use talking. Ye'd better get your team off, hadn't ye? Ye'll be late at the quarry mouth else."

Peter turned away. The adventure of smuggling appealed to him greatly. But he was, also, a keen believer in law and discipline.

Some days passed, and Oliver's presence in the farm at night told Peter that no cargoes were being run for the time. But within a week of Oliver's nasty experience with the Revenue men, Peter woke with a start. He had heard the sounds of movement outside in the yard.

Peter rose swiftly, and tiptoed across to the window.

"Rouse up, Olly!" he heard from below.

"I'll be down, Mark," Oliver replied. "Wait for me."

Peter's heart beat heavily. So Olly was off on another run? That was Mark Derry below, and Mark was well known as a runner of smuggled goods. Where did they take their goods? How was it all managed? And had they altered their methods now that the Revenue cutter was watching the coast?

Peter returned to his bed again, and he slept fitfully for a while. But he could not compose himself for sound sleep. And at last he got up. After all, why should he not go adventuring, too? He could not join in with the smugglers, but he could go down to Chapman's Pool and watch the running in of the cargo. He knew of a dozen hiding-places there when he could lie concealed and watch.

Peter's intention was not to inform against the smugglers. Nothing was further from his mind. Such action—even the thought of it—would have filled him with horror. For the smugglers, he knew, were all hale, likeable fellows, like Olly and Mark Derryn and Harry Gurd and Dan'l Broom. Besides, smuggling was not considered in that district as a crime. And the people of Dorset unconnected with the Preventive Service would, to a man, have shielded rather than have betrayed the smugglers.

Peter, his mind made up, rose and dressed swiftly. Then he let himself out of the dwelling-house, and set off across the white fields to the heights above Chapman's Pool.

The pathway to the pool, though narrow and dangerous at parts—especially at this time of the year, owing to the snow and ice—had no terrors for Peter, for he knew every inch of the way. And soon he was down in the valley that runs to the beach.

Peter at once espied movement on the beach. A vessel rode to anchor off-shore, and a shimmering bluish-white in the water denoted where the contraband was travelling to land. A long string of men hauled and tugged at the stout rope on the beach, and the kegs came ashore one by one, two men

standing in the water and throwing loose each keg as it came to hand.

A light flashed from the beach when the last keg had been hauled up, and it was answered from the lugger anchored in the bay. Then the rope was hauled back, squirming like a glowing snake as the phosphorus in the water was stirred.

With a light gasp at the thrill of it, Peter turned and ran swiftly back along the pathway. For the smugglers were now getting the kegs up off the beach. And it would go ill with anyone who might be found spying on their movements.

When near the farm, Peter suddenly dived aside to the shelter of some bushes. For he had heard a blowing and snorting in the darkness behind him—a sound the boy knew well, the labouring of straining horses.

He had no sooner concealed himself than he saw them—a ghostly team of hard-driven horses, foam flecking their chests, manes flying, wild men running alongside, cracking of whips and the swishing sound of lashes curling about the horses' legs.

Peter shuddered back into his cover. For he was superstitious, as were most of the country dwellers in Purbeck of that day. But he started up afresh as one of the horses, with tossing mane and a fierce snort of anger, broke from the team and came plunging and crashing towards the bush, his driver shouting wildly at him and plying his whip-lash with ever greater energy.

Quite losing his head at the awesomeness of it all, Peter sprang from his cover and ran.

The Third Chapter.

Smugglers' Fee!

PANTING, the boy reached the farm. He thankfully entered the dwelling-house, and, in his stockings feet, mounted softly to his room.

After his fright and hard run, Peter slept like a log. He did not awaken next morning until Uncle Silas thumped angrily on his door, quite a quarter of an hour after his usual time of rising.

Peter dressed quickly and went down to the stables, where his horses were kept. Uncle Silas had the contract of supplying the quarry team—horses, harness and driver. And he did pretty well out of it, largely due to the honest work of his young nephew.

When Peter entered the stables he fell back with a swift cry. There was no welcoming whinney from his great horses, no tossing of heads and stamping of great hoofs in the clean straw. Instead, his charges stood or lay there, everyone asleep, one of them breathing so heavily that the expiration of his breath sounded like the booming of surf on a beach. The horses were splashed with mud and wet with sweat. And as a realisation of the true state of affairs came to Peter his heart raged.

Oliver plied his whip furiously, but Goliath would not be subdued. The stallion suddenly made a wild dash, and it went galloping away in the direction whence had come that mysterious call.



So the smugglers had used the quarry team for running their cargo inland! And they had left the horses in this condition!

Turning, with a sharp cry, Peter dashed back to the farmhouse.

"Uncle Silas! Uncle Silas!" he cried. "Come to the stables! The quarry team has been used during the night, and the horses are exhausted. We can't get them out on th' road to-day—not till noon. They be main worn out!"

Uncle Silas, after his first look of surprise, roared like an angry bull and dashed across to the stables, Peter in his wake.

In the doorway the man halted. Then, on seeing the condition of the horses, he again uttered an angry cry, and strode into the gloom of the stable.

"It be they smugglers!" gritted Uncle Silas, clenching his fists as he regarded the sleeping horses. "This be ruination for the quarry team. 'I—I'll inform against them!"

While Uncle Silas was raving, Peter had crossed the stable to where he saw a bulge in the straw. He raked off the top covering with his fingers. And his face was white as he turned it towards his uncle

"What have 'e there, boy?" demanded the man.

"It—it's a keg," said Peter. "A keg o' rum, I don't doubt."

A slow smile overspread the rugged face of Uncle Silas.

"Hey, a keg o' rum? So it be! H'm, a keg o' rum! Now, that be rather handsome o' them——"

"But—but the horses——" he began. Then, Surely you don't place the value of a keg of rum as an equaliser in the scales against the malusage o' the quarry team——"

"Well, Oi don't know. It be main useful, that French rum. An' worth a tidy penny, too. If they leaves a keg o' rum every time, I be not so sure as I'd say aught about it at all, Peter——"

Peter listened, aghast.

"But—but the horses——" he began. Then realising it would be useless to plead his cause on behalf of the horses, he suddenly decided to look at the matter from the point of view of the farmer's banking account. "You—you'll lose the contract at th' quarries if I be late startin' wi' the team some mornings——"

"An' who said 'e would be late? Come, lad, rouse up these lazy animals and get ye to your work. And mark what I say—not a word to anyone about this."

Uncle Silas thereupon swung out of the stable, after covering up the keg once more with straw so that it might rest invisible to the eye till a safe opportunity should occur to remove it to his cellar.

That day Peter trudged beside his tired horses in sullen and rebellious mood. At midday he unharnessed the animals and gave them a thorough rest for nearly two hours. And he told himself that he would put a stop to the malpractice of the smugglers somehow. He'd think out a scheme during the afternoon. With this thought, Peter sprang up to utter the curious, weird cry which he had taught his team to recognise as his call to them to come over to him. But, with the cry on the tip of his tongue, he suddenly held back. And his eyes shone as he realised that he had solved the problem—that he knew how to outwit the smugglers, and make them drop this malpractice of using the quarry team at night for their carrying work up from Chapman's Pool.

Peter then uttered his cry—sharply, trailing it off with a weird wail. The horses recognised it, lifted their heads and pricked up their ears, and then came trotting over, one after another.

Peter soon had them harnessed, and he carried on with his afternoon's work with many a chuckle as he reviewed in his mind again and again the general working of his scheme.

* * *

Three weeks had passed, during which time Peter's horses had been used by the smugglers no less than four times. But Peter was patient. The time for him to say tit for tat had not yet arrived.

Oliver, of late, had become dull and morose. Peter had chaffed him about it, in an effort to draw his big cousin into confiding in him, but Oliver had drawn into himself, like a snail drawing into its shell. He talked no more to Peter about the joys of smuggling. And, somehow, he had got on rather bad terms with some of his wild companions.

He still went on with the smuggling, but Peter noticed that he was always back early—back with the horses, in fact. And in the morning the boy found the horses properly rubbed down and in better condition than they had been when they were first used. And Uncle Silas was happy in the goodly number of kegs of rum he was collecting—the fee left by the smugglers for the use of the horses.

"Well, he won't have any more," said Peter grimly. "I'll soon put a stop to this misuse of the quarry team."

Peter's plans were now complete. And he remained awake night after night so that he would not miss the next running in of a cargo.

One night—he had, in spite of his great

effort of will, sunk into a light doze—he was awakened by the crashing of hoofs out near the farm gate.

Within a few minutes Peter was following the team of horses on the narrow little pathway that led down the magnificent slopes to the gap in the cliffs below which is Chapman's Pool.

But half-way down Peter halted, aghast, and slipped into cover. He lay there panting, staring out into the darkness, his brain afire. For, on the passing of the horses, he had seen the form of a Revenue man rise from a bush and sound a very low whistle which he muffled on his lips with his hand.

An officer now joined the man.

"Ay, sir, to-night, right enough," said the man. "The hosses hev gone down—"

"Good! Get you the men to their cover, then, at the top. We'll catch this nest of contraband runners this time—"

The officer and the man moved off as the former spoke. And Peter was left alone in the darkness with his turmoil of thought.

The Fourth Chapter.

"Surrender—In The King's Name!"

OLLY tramped along towards the pool with Mark Derryn, the halter of the big stallion Goliath in the crook of his arm.

"I tell 'e, Mark," said Olly, "I won't stand much longer for this. I reckoned father would put on a couple o' fresh horses for the quarry work, in exchange for the keg o' rum. 'Tis good pay. But no, not he! I wish I hadn't suggested this usin' the quarry team to our captain. Bad cess to him, I've had two fights already over it!"

The night work went on. The horses were laden with the kegs, four apiece, lashed across their backs, pack animal fashion. And the trying and wearying climb up the steep pathway at speed commenced. Lashing of whips, crashing of hoofs, snorts of anger and distress from the horses. Cries of alternate threats and encouragement from the wild smugglers running along beside the animals.

When about half-way up the steep slope, the smugglers redoubling their efforts with cries and whip-lashes as the horses began to flag, a low, weird call sounded from the right. Olly, who was tearing along beside Goliath, the great leader of the team, saw the animal prick up his ears. His nostrils distended in a snort, and the animals behind began to plunge and rear, some lashing out with their hoofs.

"Hold them, lads!"

"Keep the halters!"

"Steady—you!"

Swish, swish, swish!—The whip-lashes whistled as they curled round the flanks and legs of the horses. And again that low, weird cry sounded. It was like the cry of an owl.

"To-whit—to-whoo-o-o!"

Oliver found himself fighting desperately with two of the Revenue men, but at last he was felled with the butt end of a musket. Uttering a groan, he crumpled up at the feet of his attackers.



Goliath now snatched at his halter, but Olly held it firm. He was jerked almost off his feet by the pull.

Red-eyed and wicked-looking, Goliath reared and then crashed his hoofs on the ground. Again he snorted, and again he leapt sideways with a jerk of his mighty head to try to pull his halter away.

"Whoa, Goliath!" cried Olly. "Steady, ye fiend in horse-hide——" And for the first time he used the whip.

"To-whit—to-who-o-o-o!" More shrilly now.

With a furious snort of rage, red eyes like live coals, mane flying, ears back, Goliath caracoled about, bringing the whole team to a standstill. Swish-swish-swish went Olly's whip, but he could not subdue Goliath. Rearing and plunging, then suddenly breaking off with a wild whinny, the stallion was free and his hoofs went thudding away in a mad gallop towards the call.

The other horses, seeing their leader off, would not be held. And two smugglers went crashing and rolling down the steep slope, the others lurching and snatching at halters or dodging and ducking to miss flying hoofs.

Away went the horses, galloping and whinneying into the darkness, lured on by that weird, long-drawn-out call, which again sounded as the furiously-angry smugglers picked themselves up from the ground.

"'Tis Peter Coombe!" roared Olly. "'Tis his work, this! He has trained the horses to obey that call—to break away from whatever be holding them and answer the call."

"He will suffer for this!"

"Purbeck won't hold he now!"

"Let's get on to the farm and ketch him takin' in the team!"

Off they set, a wild band of angry, anxious men. And at the top of the hill the captain of the smugglers halted dead as a commanding voice rang out:

"Surrender in the King's name!"

The band scattered. Musket and pistol-shots rang out. Two smugglers crashed to ground with sudden cries. And the Revenue men swarmed in, rounding up the men in perfect discipline.

Fist-fights were in progress here and there. Olly found himself fighting desperately with two Revenue men. But at last he was felled with the butt end of a musket, and he groaned as he crumpled up at the feet of his attackers.

The band crowded together, surrounded by the Revenue men. The officer, with drawn sword, spoke sharply to the captain of the smuggling band.

"Where is your contraband?"

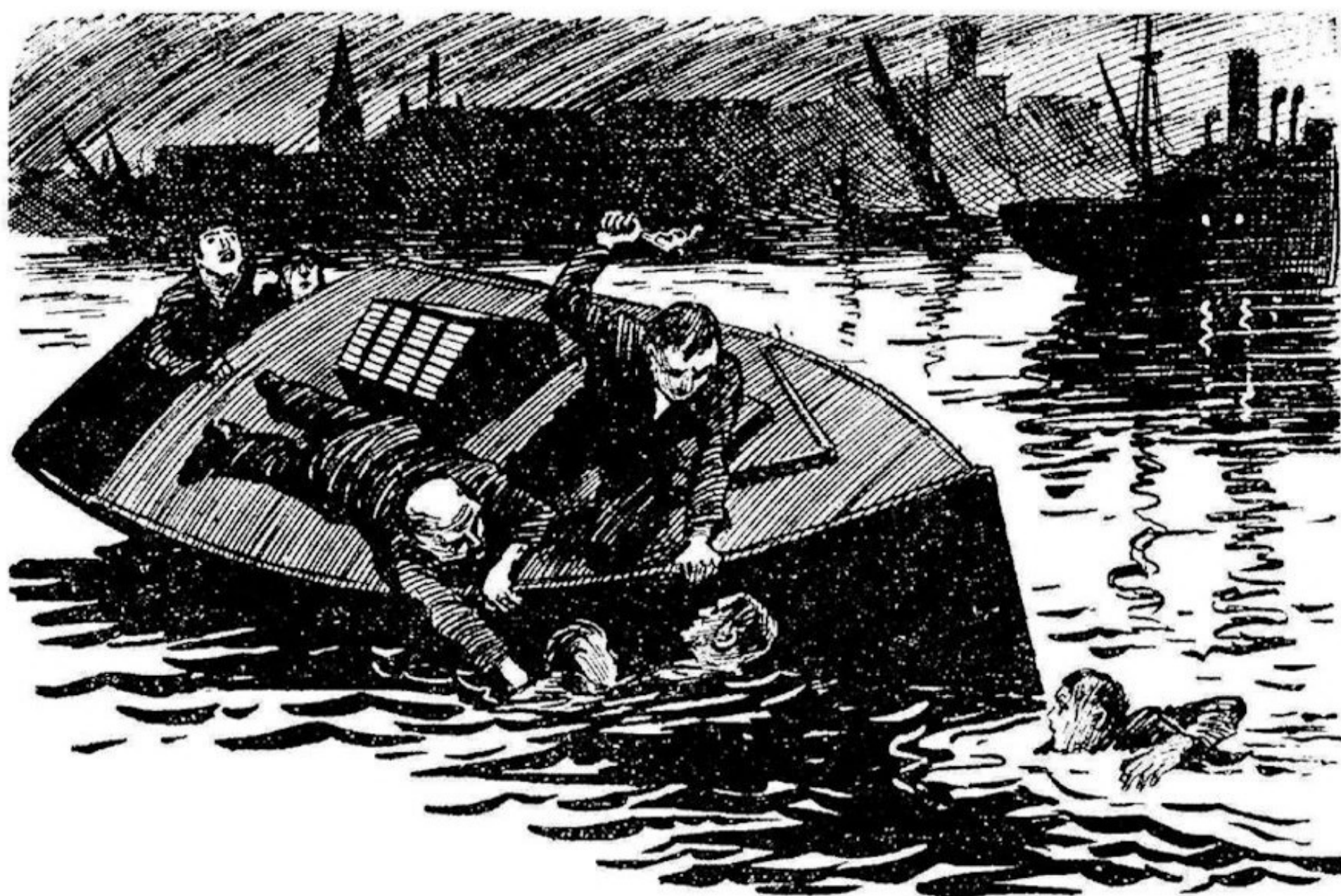
The smuggler scowled.

"We have none. We be not smugglers!"

(Concluded on page 52.)

MORE THRILLING CHAPTERS OF OUR POPULAR DETECTIVE SERIAL.

THE FOUR-LEGGED EAGLE!



A Struggle Against Odds!

IF Ferrers Locke felt any surprise at being so dramatically confronted by the man with the sword, he did not show it.

"The Grand Seigneur of Perilla," said the detective grimly, "you are wanted for murder!"

The man in the doorway sneered openly.

"Come and take me, then!" he taunted.

Locke's hand came from his hip-pocket, and he levelled a revolver at the other's heart.

Perilla laughed mockingly.

"Surely," he said, "m'sieur's ammunition must be wet!"

Locke knew it. He eyed his gun for a moment, rather savagely, and just then the laughter faded from Perilla's face and in its place came hate. He lunged forward with his gleaming sword, but the detective sensed the action. He stepped backwards, just enough to let the point of the sword scrape his sodden jacket.

And then Jack Drake hurtled past Locke. He swept beneath the steel blade of the sword and grappled with the foreigner round

the knees. It was a perfect Rugby tackle, and Perilla was taken by surprise.

"En garde!" he yelled. "A moi!"

Locke grinned and grabbed his sword arm, twisted it sharply, and the weapon fell clanging to the floor. Mossman bellowed with rage, while the false queen screamed. Jack disentangled himself from the fallen Perilla. He reckoned Locke could deal with that

danger. He saw that Mossman had seized the heavy iron poker from the fireplace, and Jack stood between him and Ferrers Locke.

"Out of ze way!" snarled Mossman, but Jack picked up Perilla's sword.

"It's hardly likely," he said grimly. "Get back!"

The point of the sword described a dangerous arc in the air very close to Mossman's bulging waistcoat, and the man stopped back hastily. The "queen" was very pale, but suddenly her eyes gleamed. Jack saw that meaning smile on her face, and he swiftly glanced over his shoulder to where Locke was struggling with Perilla in the doorway.

Coming into the room with a rush was a number of men.

Victory would seem to be within Ferrers Locke's grasp when he rescues King Ferdinand of Abronia from his captors. And then comes the unexpected—turning success into failure.

"Guv'nor!" yelled Jack warningly.

Locke released Perilla. No longer was it a case of capturing the murderer, but a matter of saving himself and Jack. That thick-set, military-looking man—the one they had encountered in Hinton Terrace—was among those coming into the room, and from the description given him by General Morina, Locke was able to recognise the others.

There was Major Patens of the Cavalry, and behind him came the Duke of Silene. In the rear, snapping out curt orders, was Prince Carlos, who hoped some day to be the King of Abronia.

"Hold him!" snapped the prince, indicating the detective. "Hold them both! Do not kill—not here!"

Major Patens beckoned to someone, and the foreign footman arrived on the scene. He scowled ferociously at Locke, and then hurled himself forward. He was a hefty brute, but the detective knew just how to manage him. His fist flashed out and connected with the footman's jaw. The man went down like a log, groaning, but he had done all that was required of him. Before Locke could fairly recover himself, Patens and the Duke of Silene were on him.

Locke fought fiercely, and his two assailants had all their work cut out to hold him. Mossman tried to get at him from the rear but Jack stood there with the sword uncomfortably close to his fancy waistcoat.

"Cub!" hissed the man, but he backed away hurriedly.

The false queen forgot all her stately dignity. She seemed to be falling. She did fall—on Jack! She grabbed him round the neck, and they both fell to the floor in a heap.

"Gosh!" gasped Jack, surprised at this unlooked-for development.

By now Mossman had torn the sword from his grasp, while Jack wriggled frantically. Even though the woman had shown herself to be treacherous, he could not bring himself to strike her. He squirmed like an eel, managed to get free of her clawing clutches, and struggled to his feet just as Mossman aimed a blow at him with the poker and missed.

Jack could see that things had reached a critical stage now. Locke was slowly but

surely being overwhelmed by Patens and the Duke, while the footman had recovered and was struggling to his feet. Prince Carlos handed the man a heavy candlestick, but before the latter could reach Ferrers Locke Jack had leapt on to the shoulders of the footman, and they both crashed to the floor. With a snarl of rage, Prince Carlos strode forward and kicked out savagely. The toe of his boot crashed against Jack's ribs, and knocked him off the footman; and a moment later Mossman charged to the attack, a poker in his hand. Jack just managed to escape injury by rolling himself along the floor.

Over by the table he scrambled to his feet. He saw then that Prince Carlos had the candlestick. He saw the prince reach over Major Paten's shoulder and strike a fierce blow at Locke's head.

After his rough-and-tumble, Jack could not be sure whether he were seeing things straight or not, but he could have sworn that blow caught Locke's arm and not his head. Yet the detective suddenly sagged, and his legs seemed to give way beneath him. Major Patens and the Duke of Silene simply stepped back, and Ferrers Locke rolled on to the floor in a motionless heap.

Not that Jack had much time in which to do a lot of thinking. Enraged at Prince Carlos' cowardly action, he leaped towards that worthy with a furious bellow of anger, but before he could do any damage Mossman intervened. In his hand was the glass paper-weight he had picked up from the floor. He flung this; the missile struck Jack on the temple, and without a sound the boy fell senseless!

For the King!

WHEN Jack came to his senses he found himself in pitch darkness. He began to wriggle about, as was his wont in such circumstances, and he quickly discovered that his ankles were secured and that his wrists were tied together behind his back. But his movements communicated his return to consciousness to Ferrers Locke, who lay beside him similarly trussed up.

"All right, Jack?" asked Locke quietly.

"Depends what you mean by all right," retorted Jack, rather put out. "I'm done up

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous London detective, and his boy assistant,

JACK DRAKE, are travelling on the Underground when they witness the murder of a foreigner. Following investigations, they discover that the deed was committed by the Grand Seigner, or Count, of Perilla, working on the instructions of

PRINCE CARLOS OF ABRONIA. Carlos' ambition is to become king of Abronia, and already he has kidnapped the reigning monarch, King Ferdinand, and brought him over to England. The murdered man was an emissary of Queen Zita of Abronia, who has followed to rescue her husband; hence the man's removal. The queen asks Locke to help her restore King Ferdinand to his country. The detective's investigations lead him to Thames Ditton, where he interviews a Mr. Isaac Mossman, who is in the pay of Prince Carlos. Mossman denies this, and attempts to prove his words by calling in—Queen Zita! Locke realises that she is an impostor, however. He leaps towards the door of the room, opens it—and outside is the Grand Seigner of Perilla; and in his hand is a naked sword!

(Now read on.)

like a chicken for dinner, and my head's knocking like a fourth-hand Ford on Shooter's Hill. How long have we been here, and where are we, anyway, and what happens next? But then, I don't suppose you know any more than I do. They put you to sleep, too, didn't they, *guv'nor*?"

"Oh, no, they didn't," said Locke, and if only Jack could have seen the detective at that moment—which he couldn't, owing to the impenetrable darkness—he would have seen that Locke was smiling, if a trifle grimly. "But don't talk so loudly, Jack. They left the footman outside to guard us. He's snoring at the moment, and we don't want to wake him up."

Jack was sorely puzzled.

"Do you mean to say," he argued, in a hoarse whisper, "that those ginks never bashed you senseless?"

"That's right," replied Locke.

"But I saw you drop. I saw the prince biff you on the head with the candlestick. I saw your knees wobble."

"I don't dispute the fact," answered Locke. "But that was only a little stunt of my own. What was the use of going on against that crowd? We were hopelessly outnumbered and were bound to be beaten in the end, in spite of the fact that I had a revolver."

"You're pulling my leg," said Jack. "That sarsaparilla bloke——"

"You mean the Grand Seigneur of Perilla——"

"Same thing!" grinned Jack. "He said your ammunition was wet."

"Do I usually allow my revolver cartridges to get wet?" asked Locke, with irony.

"You never have, as far as I know," agreed Jack. "I know you keep 'em in a waterproof pocket, and I saw you load your gun before we entered the house. That's where I got all puzzled. Why didn't you shoot him? He's a murderer!"

"Two wrongs never make a right!" said Locke grimly. "Again, I wanted to make sure they were all there. They were! So King Ferdinand of Abronia can't be far away. If it had been a case of saving our lives I would have used my revolver, but Prince Carlos said 'hold them!' That meant he did not want us killed off there. So, at the moment, at any rate, I'm not unduly perturbed because we have been captured by the prince."

"Besides, Carlos is already holding one prisoner. Now he has three, and I shouldn't be surprised if he doesn't put his two latest prisoners along with the first one. You understand?"

"Meaning the king!" replied Jack. "I see daylight. When the two escape, the first prisoner goes with 'em!"

"That's the idea," agreed Locke. "But listen!"

Their whispering died away, and they listened intently. They heard footsteps along the corridor, but the footsteps stopped as if

whoever it was had entered another room. Silence reigned once more until Jack broke it with a whisper:

"*Guv'nor*, where are we?"

"In an attic," said Locke. "When I was feigning unconsciousness I heard some of their plans. I gathered something about a motor-boat and Limehouse, so we may have a fairly long trip on the river very shortly."

"I'm not keen," grumbled Jack. "Solid ground for this child all the time! I say, *guv'nor*, how did you know that queen was a fake? I guessed it, but I couldn't have been sure like you were."

Locke replied in low whispers:

"Jack," he said, "we're up against brains. Don't forget that. These fellows aren't ordinary criminals who'd rob and murder for mere gain. This case goes deeper than that. It's a crown and a fortune at stake. Prince Carlos is the prime mover, and he has brains. But the whole business boils down to a matter of diplomacy and statesmanship."

"And Carlos never loses sight of Queen Zita. Somehow he knew that she had been to see me at Baker Street. That fake was foisted on me to divert my attention from Mossman, but it failed for this reason. Queen Zita might have reached that house before me, but it was doubtful, if not impossible. Then again, when she held out her left hand I saw that she did not wear that ring."

"What ring?" asked Jack.

"I am surprised at Prince Carlos for forgetting the obvious," said Locke. "His fake queen wore no wedding ring, nor the ring emblazoned with the figure of the four-legged eagle. That oversight gave the trick away completely."

"It sure did," agreed Jack. "But——"

His voice trailed away into silence, as Locke's hissed a caution. Once more they heard footsteps. Men were coming along the passage. The prisoners remained silent, listening. They heard the sound of exclamations, of a blow, the startled yelp of the sleeping footman as he suddenly awakened. Then the key creaked in the lock, and a light dazzled the prisoners.

Major Patens, a gleaming dagger in one hand, entered, followed by the footman who was holding an electric torch. Patens cut the ropes that bound the ankles of the two detectives, and then ordered them to stand up. He warned them, in excellent English:

"I shall have to gag you both. I shouldn't make too much trouble if I were you. We don't want to kill you until it is necessary."

"Quite all right," murmured Jack. "Don't let us bother you."

"Quiet, cub!" hissed the major, striking the boy on the mouth.

Locke said not a word, but allowed himself to be gagged. Jack was gagged, too, and then they were led out into the passage. They were hustled downstairs and out of the house by way of the back door, across

the sloping lawns to a boat-house on the river-bank, where a motor-boat lay moored.

Locke's eyes missed little. It was dark, but he could see enough to be quite sure that that boat was designed for long journeys, and would be as safe at sea as on the river. It was broad of beam, with a curved splash deck over the fore half, beneath which was a cabin of ample dimensions. The motor was situated in the centre of the craft.

Locke and Jack were ordered aboard and bundled into the cabin. The sliding door was closed, and they were in total darkness once more. The rest of the men came aboard, the motor purred, and the boat moved off into the night.

After a while Major Patens slid back the cabin door and entered. He had a length of rope with him, and by the light of his torch he proceeded to tie the ankles of both Jack and Ferrers Locke. The two detectives did not resist, for they realised that to do so would avail them little. Then, without a word, the major went out again, carefully closing the sliding door after him.

How long that boat travelled it was difficult to say, but obviously it passed through several locks. Jack busied himself struggling with his bonds, but all he succeeded in accomplishing was slipping his gag out of his mouth. He located Locke in the darkness and managed to wriggle close to him and to whisper in his ear:

"Any chance o' chewing string, gov'nor?"

Locke rolled over. Jack squirmed about until he found the detective's bound hands close to his mouth, and then he attacked the cords with his strong teeth.

It was a painful process for Jack, and a long ordeal for Locke. At intervals Jack's teeth rasped on Locke's flesh, and the detective squirmed. The men out on deck did not worry about the prisoners in the cabin. But how were they to know that this was not the first time that Jack's strong teeth had got Ferrers Locke out of an awkward situation?

From the way the boat was tossing about Locke reckoned they had arrived somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Tower Bridge. He recalled how he had heard the plotters mention Limehouse, and no one knew better than Ferrers Locke how easy it was to hide people and even to kill them in that part of the world.

Suddenly Locke jerked his wrists apart. The cord snapped, and he was free. He tore the gag from his mouth; he untied his ankles, and then released Jack. Next, he felt with his hands around the dark cabin—and found the third prisoner! Locke took the gag from the man's mouth and untied his bonds.

"No noise, your Majesty!" he whispered.

"Who are you?" asked the third prisoner.

"Ferrers Locke, detective, requested by Queen Zita to help you, sir. Can you swim?"

"Fairly well. But tell me. Is she—the queen—"

"In good health, sir, but anxious for your safety. We must make a dash for it. There is a bung in the floor-boards, Jack. I saw it when we were tossed in here. Pull it up!"

It was a case of quick action now. Jack felt about for the bung and found it. He pulled it out and the water came rushing in. The three stood erect and chafed their numb limbs. The water flowed over their feet.

"Ready?" hissed Locke, one hand on the door.

"Tell me exactly what to do," suggested King Ferdinand of Abronia.

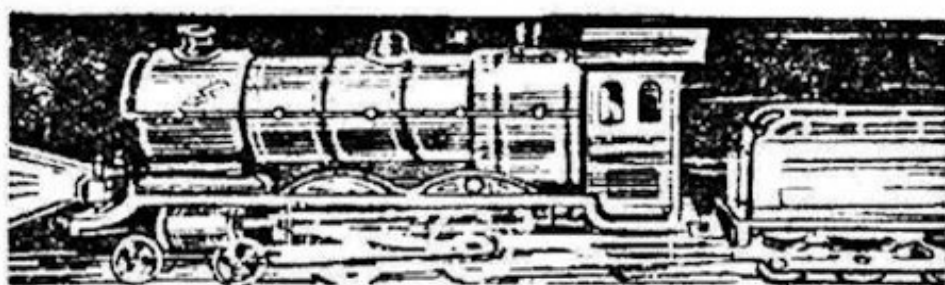
"Rush out and dive overboard!" snapped Locke crisply. "I shall be as near you as possible. Leave the rest to me, sir."

"Mr. Locke," said the king, "I am trusting you. Some day I hope to be able to thank you. I am ready."

"Right! Look out! You first, Jack. His Majesty next. Now!"

The water was up to their ankles. They could hear startled exclamations from the men in the well deck. They had noticed the water that now came pouring from under the cabin door. Then, with a quick motion, Ferrers Locke jerked the door open.

Jack went through the doorway like a bullet shot from the gun. His head butted Major Patens in the body and sent that worthy down gasping for breath. His fist crashed



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in the face of the Duke of Silene. The next moment he had leapt over the stern sheets into the black, cold water.

Down he went into the depths, then came up. He shook the water from his hair and eyes. He saw a dark body fall from the motor-boat. Then another dark form was poised on the gunwale. A man tried to grab that form, but a fist shot out, and Jack heard the smack of hard knuckles on a face, and chuckled as Ferrers Locke came diving in.

And then all three were swimming for dear life.

"This way!" hissed Locke. "Head for that jetty!"

Next moment all three of them were swimming towards the mysterious unknown, and behind them the motor-boat was slowly sinking!

Out of Luck!

THE water was cold—icy cold—and numbing. The tide ran strongly, carrying them away from their destination, so that they had to fight against it grimly, with the wavelets, whipped to foam by the sharp, freshening breeze, flinging spray in their faces that stung like hail.

King Ferdinand of Abronia had pluck enough, but already he was weakening. Jack was swimming on one side of him, and Locke struck out strongly on the other side. And Locke was worried; he noticed how erratic was the king's stroke.

"Not much farther!" he said encouragingly.

The black bulk, which they took to be a jetty, loomed up before them. Jack spurred to reach it. His idea was to clamber up and help King Ferdinand out of the water, but the nearer he approached the jetty the more puzzled he became. He suddenly turned, uttering a cry of alarm.

"Guv'nor!" he called. "It isn't a jetty!"

Locke's face was grim and tense as he swam beside the king. He stared at that black, bulky mass ahead, and realised in a flash that what Jack said was true. It was not a jetty! It was a barge, moored some yards off a wharf.

And, suddenly, the king gasped and threw up his arms. Locke was beside him in a flash, holding him up.

"I can't—can't go on!" gasped the king.

"Cramp!" said Locke tensely. "May be it was too much to expect of you, sir, after being trussed up so long. Can you keep up a few seconds longer? I'll get you on to that barge! Hold on——"

Then came Jack's voice, shouting hoarsely:

"Behind you, guv'nor! Look out!"

They heard the throbbing of a motor-boat. Out of the blackness behind them came the dark shape of a familiar craft. It was low in the water, but there was no mistaking it. The enemy were still afloat and in pursuit!

Jack saw the danger as quickly as Locke

himself, and he came swimming back to the rescue, cleaving his way through the water like a human torpedo.

Obviously, Prince Carlos and his followers had managed to stay the leak somewhat. The motor-boat was dangerously low in the water, and would become water-logged, but they still had a sporting chance of recapturing their victims, and they seized it with alacrity. The motor spluttered and roared by turns, but the boat forged ahead towards the more or less helpless fugitives in the water.

The tall figure of Major Patens stood on the splash deck of the motor-boat. His keen eyes picked out the form of Locke, struggling to keep King Ferdinand afloat. The major called back to the men in the well, and directed them to steer to the spot. On came the motor-boat through the water. By now the Duke of Silene had joined Patens on the splash deck. The major knelt down and leant over the side.

"Swim!" yelled Locke.

But the king was past swimming. His eyes were glassy with agony, and he could not move a limb. He was a dead weight on Locke's arm.

The duke was lying full length on the splash deck. The cold, black water hissed and gurgled as the motor-boat slid alongside the struggling men. The Duke of Silene reached down and grabbed the king by the shoulder. Locke tried to hit out at him with his one free arm, but he was badly handicapped, and he missed. Major Patens had a clubbed revolver in one hand. He had the advantage of Locke and he was grinning diabolically as he struck downwards fiercely.

A cry of mingled pain and despair escaped Locke as he fell backwards and disappeared under the surface. Jack saw it, and his blood ran cold. Hardly conscious of what he did, he seemed to hurl himself at the side of the motor-boat, and clutched upwards, grabbing Patens' arms, nearly hauling him off the sloping splash deck. The Duke of Silene was hauling the king aboard, which was easy enough, seeing that King Ferdinand was senseless now.

Another figure came up from the well. It was Perilla, the assassin, and he brandished an oar. The long, unwieldy weapon hovered in the night air for a fraction of a second, then it came sweeping down viciously. If that blade had struck Jack's skull fairly, it would have finished his career there and then, but, as the blow fell, the haft of the oar grazed the side of the boat, thereby deflecting the blow.

Even then, Jack caught the oar on the side of his head, and for a few moments he was stunned. He slid back into the water, to sink like a stone, the water hissing and gurgling over his head. This must have had the effect of restoring him to consciousness, for when he came to the surface again the mists had cleared away from his brain, and he saw a bright light coming towards him. Below that light was the dark shape

of a boat, and he could hear the chug-chug of a motor. Instantly his mind went back to the incidents of a few minutes previous. The boat must contain Prince Carlos. And Locke—Locke had been knocked unconscious, had disappeared under the surface of the Thames. Where was Locke now?

Jack became frantic. Just then the boat slid alongside, a man was leaning over the gunwale, and he stretched down an arm and grabbed Jack. The boy fought fiercely, furiously. He wasn't going to be recaptured by Prince Carlos without a struggle—At that moment a hoarse voice sounded in his ear:

"What's the matter with you, you idiot! Keep still, for the love o' Mike, or I'll let you drown."

And it dawned on Jack that that voice did not belong to Carlos or any of his followers. It was too English for that. The boy stared up into the weather-beaten face beneath the peaked cap. Strong hands grasped him and lifted him bodily into the boat. He was laid down beneath the thwarts. Something hot and burning was poured down his throat, and Jack came to his full senses with a start.

"River police!" he cried, trying to sit up.

The sergeant in charge forced him down again.

"Steady, son. Don't forget you're half-drowned! What's the racket? How did you come to be floating out to sea?"

It didn't worry Jack just then that Queen Zita of Abronia did not want the police to be drawn into this affair. He knew that Locke was needing help badly, and even Queen Zita came a bad second.

"Locke!" he gasped. "Mr. Locke; you know him?"

"What? You mean Ferrers Locke? What about him?"

"He's been knocked on the bean! He's floating about—"

"Who are you, anyway?"

"My name's Drake—Jack Drake."

An electric torch flashed in his face, and the sergeant nodded.

"I remember," he said. "What's happened?"

"Never mind what happened, now. Find Mr. Locke!" cried Jack frantically.

The police realised the urgency of the matter; and, realising it, they got to work quickly. The engine was set racing, and the motor-boat went surging through the murky water.

Jack, with several coats wrapped around him to prevent his catching cold, sat in the stern-sheets. Eagerly, keenly, he and the police sought to pierce the blackness of the night for any signs of the missing Ferrers Locke.

What had happened to Ferrers Locke?

(Next week's instalment of this grand serial is as exciting as ever—more so, indeed! Make sure you read it, chums!)

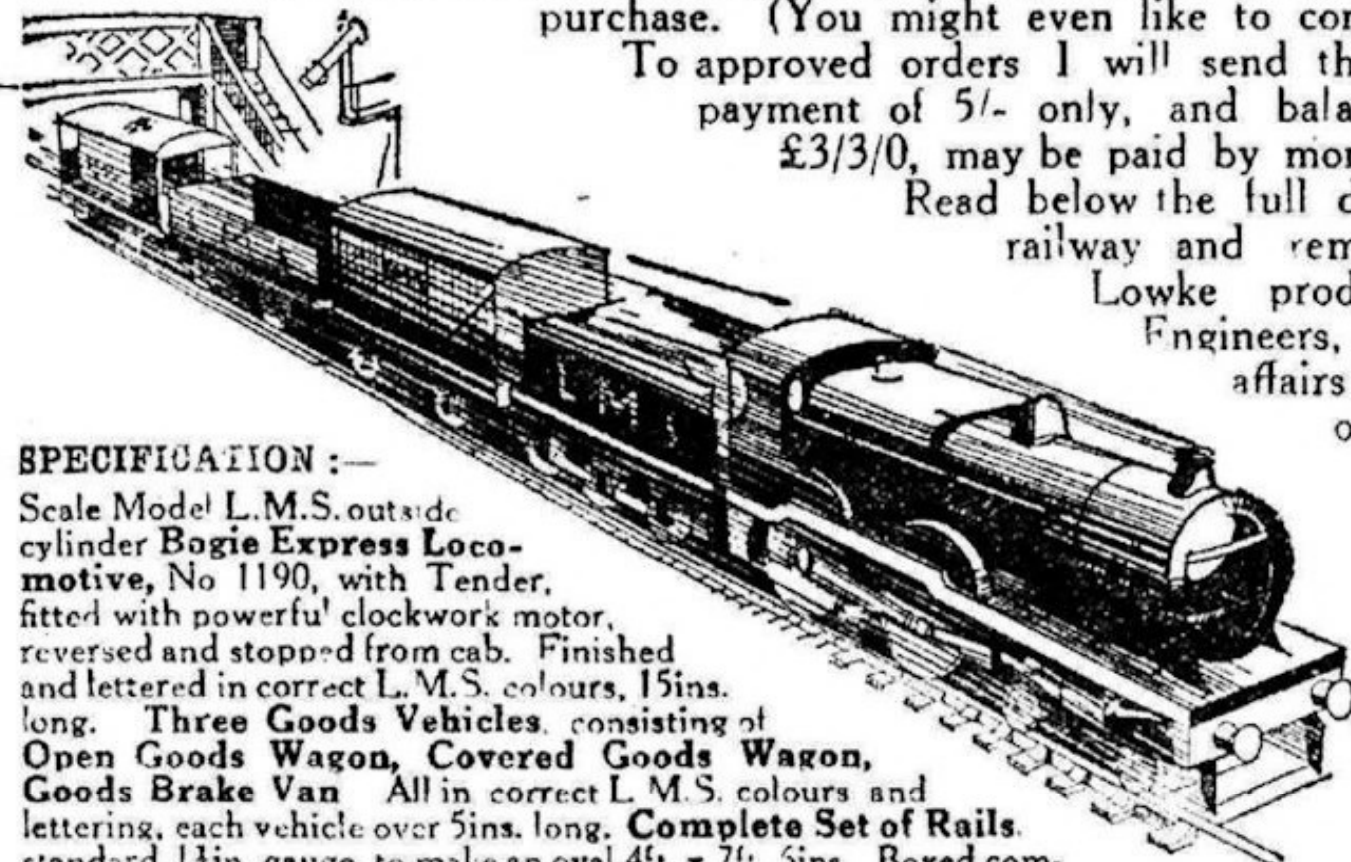
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Things Heard and Seen By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

THE correct thing for me to do this week is to wish all our readers a Happy and Hearty Christmas.

Before doing so, however, I just want to make one point clear. I shall probably use up a considerable amount of this week's space with these Christmas greetings to the exclusion of any interesting information about St. Frank's and its occupants. If such is the case, I hope you will forgive me. But, after all, this week is an exception, isn't it?

* * *

SO here's wishing a jolly and enjoyable Yuletide to our ever-increasing circle of readers in Huddersfield and Halifax, in London and Liverpool, in Macclesfield and Melbourne, in Toronto and Taunton, in Sydney and Smethwick, in Glasgow and Guiana, in Johannesburg and Jarrow, in Singapore and Stafford, in Vancouver and Vauxhall, in New York and New Zealand, in Wellington and Wellingborough, in Brisbane and Bristol, in Durban and Durham, in Cardiff and C-r-shalton, in Dublin and Dumfries, in Belfast and Birmingham, in Swansea and Samoa, in Paris and Palestine, in Philadelphia and Philips-town, in Zanzibar and Zurich—in fact, in every town and village where our readers are to be found.

* * *

THIS greeting will be a trifle early for home readers, but I hope it will lose none of its sincerity on that account. It will arrive just in time for certain overseas readers, and a trifle late for others. But whether it's early or late, it's just as genuine. And I hope that I shall be able to send these same greetings to exactly the

same readers, with many additional ones, next Christmas and for many other Christmases.

* * *

WE in England may have snow to make our Christmas old-fashioned. On the other hand, we may not. It's a risky business to foretell the weather, and I shan't even attempt it. All I know is that we ought to have snow at Christmas-time, and if we don't have it the atmosphere of Yuletide won't be so com-

plete. To many of our readers in overseas climes, Christmas means blazing hot weather. And it may be hard for them to picture us at home, sitting round the cheery, blazing log. We don't all have logs, of course—you can't very well put a log on a gas-fire, or an electric heater, or a radiator—but the spirit is the same, nevertheless. Progress cannot be stopped, and I'm afraid that the good old Yule log is rather out of fashion, except in a few cases.

* * *

OUR READERS' PORTRAIT GALLERY



Peggy V. Oxley

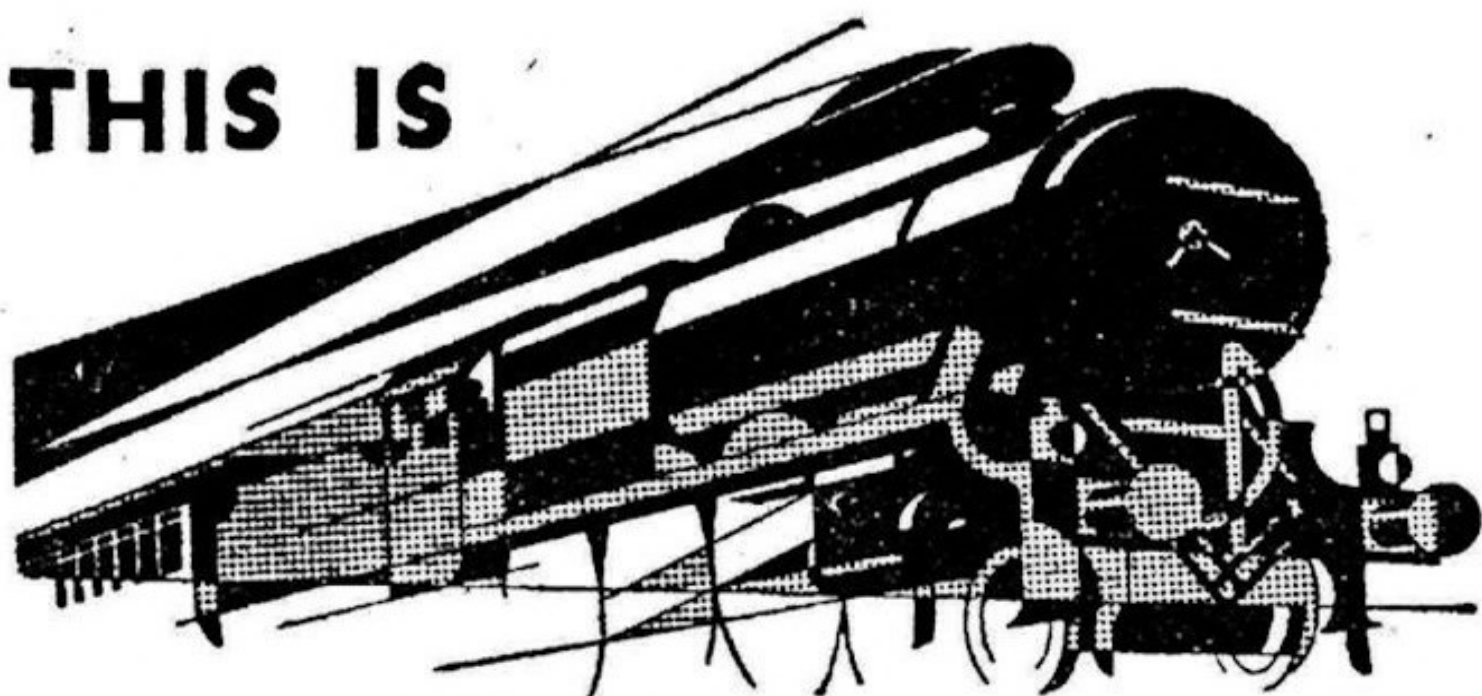
OUR photograph this week is of Peggy Vivien Oxley, of Chaddesden, near Derby. She asks me if it is true that Nelson Lee was ever a detective, or is it only a school rumour? I think Peggy will cease to have any doubts on this point before very many weeks have elapsed.

* * *

IHAVE been asked by Murray Pattulo, of Toronto, to name the Chinese boy at St. Frank's. Yung Ching is the junior in question, and he shares Study R in the West House, with Harold Doyle and Larry Scott.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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with his Chums.*

*Here's his address if you want to
write to him: The Chief Officer "The
Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.*

Xmas Greetings!

HAPPY Christmas to all League-ites!

As Editor of the Old Paper I have already sent my Christmas greetings to *all* readers elsewhere, yet in spite of that I feel that, as the Chief Officer of the St. Frank's League, I should take this opportunity of wishing the compliments of the season to those many thousands of you who have rallied under the League banner so splendidly.

Christmas! How we all look forward to it! Christmas is the time when relatives and friends congregate; when joy and happiness reign, when games and fun are the order of the day. Eat, drink and be merry—that is the slogan for Christmas, and what an excellent slogan it is, too! The time of peace and goodwill on earth—that is Christmas. No wonder we look forward to it; no wonder we couldn't do without Christmas!

And this year I sincerely hope that all you League-ites will have the jolliest, the happiest, the most enjoyable Xmas you've ever spent. Once more I repeat: A happy Christmas to you all, chums!

For Stamp Enthusiasts!

THE Peterborough Stamp Exchange Club is going great guns at the moment, thank you, but, being in the hands of a very capable and enter-

prising secretary, it desires more members, especially members abroad. So writes Fred E. Pyman, the aforementioned capable and enterprising hon. secretary of this well-organised club. Fred tells me in his cheery letter that the Peterborough Stamp Exchange Club will welcome representatives and members from all countries, especially the smaller colonies of the British Empire and the United States of America. Readers interested should write to Fred at 10, St. Mark's Street, Peterborough.

THIS WEEK'S WINNING LETTER

DEAR CHIEF OFFICER,—I was very pleased to receive my St. Frank's League certificate and badge, with which I was very well satisfied. Now, of course, I shall go all out to get my bronze and silver medals. I think the motto of the St. Frank's League is excellent. Honesty, unity, and courage—you could not possibly have found a better one to suit the ideals of the League.

A splendid feature about the League is that it has been the means of forming numerous Correspondence Clubs in different parts of the world. Readers are able to join these clubs; they correspond with fellow-readers in all four corners of the globe, with the result that their knowledge is vastly improved.

May success, luck, and prosperity attend the NELSON LEE LIBRARY and the League throughout their existence, which I hope will be a long one.

Your sincere Leagueite,

(Signed) CHAS. A. WEBB

(S.F.L. No. 10,194).

(For this interesting letter Chas. A. Webb, of Walthamstow, London, has been awarded a useful pocket-knife.)

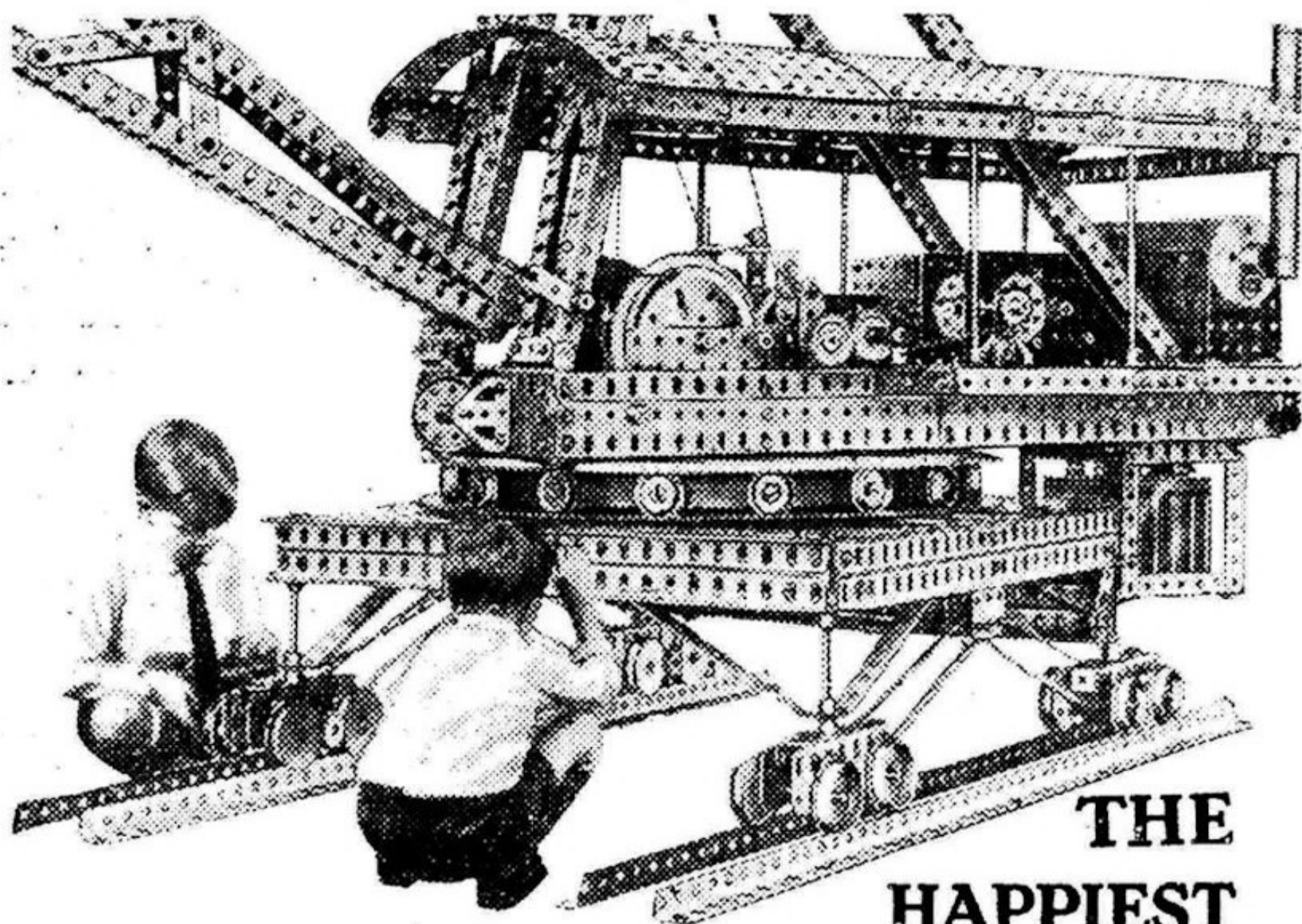
Good Luck!

ROB CURRIE, whose address is Bell Street, Featherston, New Zealand, informs me that there is the distinct possibility of a cycling club being formed in his district, thanks to the good old NELSON LEE LIBRARY. Pleased to hear it, Rob. Accept my best wishes towards the success of your venture, and don't forget to write and let me know how things go.

Rare Stamps!

A. E.S., of Walsall, sends me some specimens of stamps which he assures me are rare ones, and asks if I can give him any idea of their value. Sorry, but I'm afraid I can't help you, "A.E.S." I suggest that you go to a reliable stamp dealer in your town and ask his advice.

THE CHIEF OFFICER.



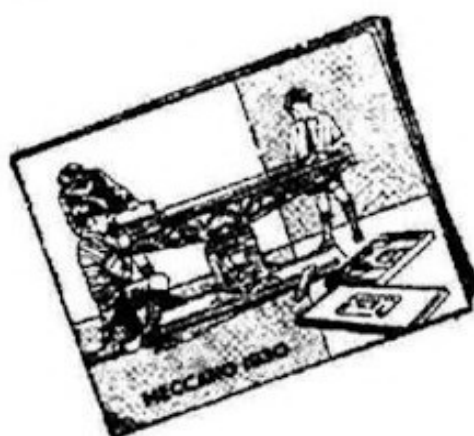
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OLD SWAN,

LIVERPOOL.

"CONTRABAND!"

(Continued from page 41.)

"Not so! Then why did ye resist a king's officer in the course of his duty—?"

"How were we to know ye were king's men? There be many thieves an' runagates hereabouts who make sad misuse o' the king's name. Did we not think ye were that pesty smuggler band? Ye ha' found no contraband. Ye ha' wounded two peaceful farm-workers. King's men or no, ye cannot do such things!"

The officer looked discomfited. True, he knew that these men formed the smuggling band, but it was necessary to capture them actually with the contraband. There was no evidence, as it was. It was serious.

"Where are your horses?" he rasped.

The captain of the smugglers gaped. But Olly stepped swiftly forward.

"So ye ha' seen the phantom team, too?" he said breathlessly. "My faith, those horses gave us all a main scare! We saw them a while ago. They galloped off to the right. So that be how the land lies, be it? I reckon that there be your contraband, sir!" Olly stopped speaking, breathless, and flung his arm out to indicate the blackness on the right.

The whips, which the smugglers had in their hands, made the officer smile. He pointed to them.

"We found 'em lyin' on the ground," said the captain quickly. "An' good whips they be. 'Twas then we reckoned that they horses was no phantom team. I reckon those smugglers you were after were warned of your ambush, stampeded their horses and threw the whips down. How was we to know?"

The end of it was that Oliver and his companions were allowed to go free. The

contraband was found by the Revenue officers, the kegs tumbled in the corner of a field. And this in itself seemed evidence in favour of the captured smugglers. They, at least, had not done that.

And when Olly got back to the farm that night, he looked into the quarry team's stable. The horses were there, all properly rubbed down, and sleeping soundly.

Olly crept up to bed, and the next day a small deputation waited on Peter at the entrance to the quarry team's stable.

"On behalf o' the band, we thank you, Peter," said Olly. "Though Devon born ye ha' behaved like a true son o' Parbeck—"

Peter grinned.

"I take no vain-glory over it," he said. "I went out to put a spoke in your wheel, and found the Revenue men lying in wait. So my scheme to stop you from using the quarry team was used to keep you from being captured actually wi' the contraband in your possession—"

"All the same, us thank 'e," said Mark Derryn. "It removed the only evidence those Revenue sharks could arrest us on—the actual contraband in our hands."

"The press-gangs always work on information," laughed Olly, "so they'll be round hereabouts after last night's little affair. We be all giving up the smuggling. Too dangerous, now, and we'll have all the adventure we need dodgin' the press-gang—"

"You, too, Peter," said Mark. "You be a fine grown fellow now."

Peter laughed.

"So I'll have my spice o' adventure after all," he said. "And without the misuse o' the quarry team—eh?"

They all laughed at that. And Peter went off to his work whistling gaily.

THE END.

A MAN'S CHANCE FOR A BOY IN CANADA.

BOYS (ages 14 to 19) WANTED for farm work. Training, outfit, and assisted passages may be obtained through The Salvation Army. Work guaranteed. Overseas Officers keep in touch with boys after arrival until satisfactorily settled. Boys also wanted for AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND. Write or call The Branch Manager: 3, Upper Thames Street, LONDON, E.C.4; 12, Pembroke Place, LIVERPOOL; 203, Hope Street, GLASGOW; 5, Garfield Chambers, 44 Royal Avenue, BELFAST. DOMESTICATED WOMEN wanted. Work guaranteed.

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