

ST. FRANK'S CHRISTMAS REVELLERS SNOWBOUND!

*Read and enjoy this week's thrilling long mystery-adventure yarn
of Nipper and his cheery chums—complete inside.*

THE NELSON LEE

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**The
Ideal Xmas Gift!**

New Series No. 100.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

December 19th, 1931.

St. Frank's boy haunted by the mysterious Man in Black!

The WELL

CHAPTER 1.

The Man in the Road!

"**H**ERE we are!" said Edward Oswald Handforth contentedly.

His faithful little Morris Minor, fully loaded, had just turned into an imposing driveway off the main road. Not a great distance behind came a big luxury-coach, filled with a jolly crowd of St. Frank's boys and Moor View girls—all of them bent on spending a part of the Christmas holiday at Somerton Abbey—the ancestral home of their schoolboy chum, the youthful Duke of Somerton.



Sensational developments in this week's gripping complete yarn.

of DOOM!

By **EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS**

It was a crisp, clear, December afternoon, and the journey from Tregellis Castle—where the boys and girls had been having a high old time as Sir Montie's guests—had been accomplished without a hitch.

The little Morris had glided through the small town of Somerton seven or eight minutes ago; for Somerton Abbey itself was situated some miles beyond the town, in one of the most rugged parts of Somersetshire.

The private drive was well-kept, and the surface, except for the covering of frozen snow, was good. However, Handforth proceeded cautiously, knowing that he would get well ahead of the coach here, for that great vehicle would be obliged to take things very easily along the narrow, skiddy drive.

"Nothing's happened so far," remarked Handforth, in a satisfied voice. "I think we ought to get to Somerton, now, without any adventures."

"Such as masked miscreants chucking bombs at us from behind hedges?" suggested Church, not without sarcasm. "My dear ass, what did you expect would happen on the journey?"

"You can't tell," replied Handforth darkly.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Jimmy Potts.

He and Church and McClure were Handforth's passengers. Handforth, in fact, had insisted upon Jimmy travelling with him—as Handy liked to consider himself Jimmy's escort. Church and McClure knew, however, that the real escort was just in the rear.

There had been some very peculiar happenings at Tregellis Castle—and, before

Christmas, at Travis Dene, Handforth's own country home in Suffolk. And Sir James Potts, Bart., otherwise Jimmy, was very closely entangled in these mysterious events.

Without knowing anything definitely, the boys and girls were at least satisfied that some very crooked people were plotting against both Jimmy and his millionaire uncle from China—Mr. Benjamin Potts.

At Somerton Abbey, no doubt, everything would be peaceful, for it was hardly likely that the mysterious enemies would follow Jimmy here, particularly as Mr. Potts himself had gone to London.

"You mustn't let me forget, you chaps," said Jimmy suddenly. "We're not far from Somerton now, are we?"

"We'll be there in five or six minutes," promised Handforth.

"Well, the first thing I've got to do is to ring up Uncle Ben," said Jimmy. "He made me promise that I'd phone his hotel

the very instant that I arrived at the Abbey. I think he's anxious about me."

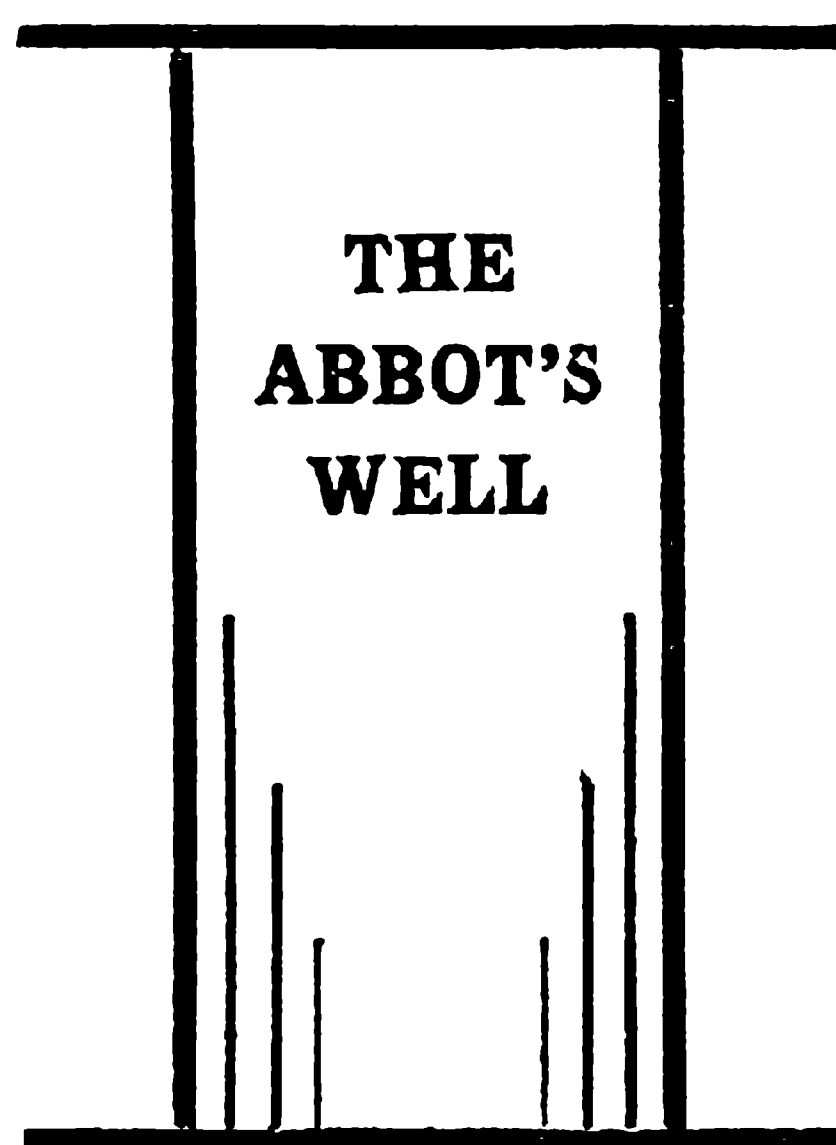
"And you're anxious about him, eh?" suggested McClure.

"Well, yes," admitted Jimmy. "And by ringing up his hotel I shall know if he is all right—and he'll be assured, too, that I've arrived safely."

The little car turned a bend in the drive, and the four boys gazed admiringly at the panorama before them. It was, indeed, a glorious scene in the wintry sunshine. In the distance Somerton Abbey stood on a rising promontory, a proud ducal castle with picturesque turrets and towers. It stood out against the skyline superbly.

JIMMY POTTS

**unconscious — a helpless victim of
THE MAN IN BLACK**



Far below: water, water

A DEATH-TRAP

"By George," said Handforth, "there's a place for you!"

They were rather awed. In the dim ages of the past Somerton had been the residence of historic Saxon kings. The schoolboy duke's ancestors themselves were descended from those old Saxon monarchs. The Somerton family was one of the most aged and honoured in the whole of England, and "Sommy" was justly proud of his line. Not that the Duchess of Somerton was particularly proud of her son, for Somerton was the most inky, most carelessly-dressed fellow in the Remove.

"Better go easy here, Handy," suggested Church, who felt a trifle nervous.

The surface was treacherous owing to the frost, and the drive, for some distance ahead, looked tricky. On one hand rose mass upon mass of rocky hill; and on the other side, with only a light wooden fence for protection, lay a slope so steep as to be almost a precipice. Gazing down into the deep valley, the boys could see that the sides of the slope were covered with dense snowdrifts.

The Minor turned a bend—a gradual bend. And here the drive narrowed and became even more picturesque; here the overhanging rocks frowned with a menacing grandeur.

"If we skid into that fence it'll be 'good-night,' I should think," remarked Church, keeping an anxious eye on Handforth. "You're a reckless beggar, Handy, and——"

"Don't talk to him, you ass," interrupted Mac. "Let him attend to his driving. You know what he's like when he starts an argument."

"Fatheads!" grinned Handforth. "There's nothing to worry about here."

At that moment a figure appeared in the road ahead. It was running like a hare—and as it ran it waved its hands wildly.

"Hallo! What the——"

"He's signalling you to stop, Handy," said Jimmy. "Perhaps there's a snow-drift ahead, or——"

He broke off, and a startled gasp sounded in his throat. For as Handforth pulled the car to a standstill, he recognised the man in the road as a Chinaman.

"I knew it!" gasped Handforth. "Look out, you chaps! It's a Chink! I've been expecting trouble——"

"It's Yen!" interrupted Jimmy Potts.

"Yen!" repeated Handforth, his jaw dropping.

He could see that Jimmy Potts was right. All Chinamen looked very much alike to him, but this man was un-

doubtedly Yen, Mr. Benjamin Potts' faithful valet. He was no longer his immobile self; his face was transfigured by strange, wild emotions.

"But—but I don't understand," said Jimmy, in amazement. "Yen went to London with Uncle Ben! What can he be doing here at Somerton Abbey?"

He was sitting next to Handforth, and he forced open the door of the car and leapt out. Yen arrived at the same second, breathless, frantic.

"Young master!" were the first words he uttered. "By the mercy of my ancestors I am in time! Come, young Excellency!"

"But, Yen, tell me——"

"No, no—come!" croaked Yen. "My master, your illustrious uncle, is in deadly peril."

"What?"

"Yes, I speak so," declared Yen. "You come, young Excellency—and alone! Your young friends—no! They must not come! You come—alone! Quick—quick!"

He ran off, and Jimmy Potts, his mind in a whirl, followed at a run. And such was the excitement of the moment that none of those boys quite realised that Yen was running back along the drive—back to the bend where the overhanging rocks rose with frowning majesty.

Handforth and Church and McClure, scrambling out of the Morris Minor, stood staring in bewildered amazement. They saw Yen and Jimmy running at top speed. And suddenly Yen halted and pointed upwards—up at the snow-covered rocks.

"Look, young master!" he hissed.

Jimmy looked up—and Yen, with a quick, deft stroke, brought a small bludgeon down upon the back of the unsuspecting boy's head.

Jimmy Potts dropped like a log.

And as Yen bolted, there came a growling boom, like an explosion. The earth trembled, and great masses of snow and earth, from far above, commenced rolling and hurtling downwards. And there in the full path of that avalanche lay Jimmy Potts—doomed, it seemed, to be buried alive under the countless tons of earth and rock.

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CHAPTER 2.

Buried Alive!

"LOOK!" yelled Handforth, in horror.

But Church and McClure needed no telling. They had seen. Yen, Uncle Ben's faithful servant, had deliberately, fiendishly, tricked Jimmy into running back into that death-trap!

The horror of it was so great that the three schoolboys were half-paralysed.

With an effort they started to run forward, and then checked. They had heard the explosion, and they saw the hill-side shattering and the avalanche come roaring down.

"Jimmy—Jimmy!" roared Handforth. "Oh, my only hat! He'll be buried alive!"

They could see that there was no time for them to reach Jimmy before the first mass of falling earth reached him. To go forward would mean going to their death—and, plucky as they were, they hesitated.

In that tense second Jimmy moved; he staggered to his feet, holding his head and reeling dazedly.

"Jimmy!" screamed Handforth. "Run—run for your life!"

Church and McClure yelled, too. They were wild with excitement and anxiety; they were still bewildered and dumb-founded by the startling unexpectedness of the whole occurrence. It seemed like some fantastic nightmare.

Yet the working of the plot had been simplicity itself. Yen, running up, had startled Jimmy into dashing back along the drive. A confederate, at the exact moment, had exploded a dynamite charge or something similarly effective. It had been easy enough to start a landslide at such a spot. The only mistake had been made by the Chinaman—for in his haste he had failed to deliver a sufficiently stunning blow.

Although Jimmy was on his feet, he was not running. And every second, to the agony of the watching boys, the earth and rocks rolled nearer, gathering speed and strength. Hundreds of tons were coming down now.

Then another unexpected factor cropped up—one that even Yen himself could not have anticipated. The motor-coach, containing the main party of boys and girls, came swinging round the bend, the driver utterly unconscious of the deadly peril into which he was running!

"Stop—stop!" shrieked Handforth & Co., in one horrified voice.

Even in that dramatic moment, Handforth remembered that Yen had been near by when he had promised Uncle Ben that he would look after Jimmy during the journey. Yen, clearly, had not known that the motor-coach would be following close behind.

It came on blithely, and at a fair speed. Jimmy, his brain still reeling under the shock of that blow, suddenly became aware of his peril. Gazing upwards with ter-

rified eyes, he saw the avalanche shooting down from the heights. It was nearly upon him. He ran madly.

In his confusion, indeed, he nearly ran headlong into the motor-coach, and the driver was compelled to apply his brakes with full force. Many shouts sounded from within the big vehicle.

Tearing at the sliding door, Jimmy pulled it open, and he stood just inside.

"Back—go back!" he croaked. "You don't know——"

Crash—crash—crash—craaaaaaash!

It came—thunderous, terrifying, awful in its immensity. The driver, too late, had realised the danger. There was small satisfaction that Jimmy had got into the coach—for now he would go to his doom with all the others.

Mercifully, the driver had swerved in order to avoid running into Jimmy—and had swerved outwards, towards the flimsy protecting fence. He had stopped so near to it, in fact, that the wheels of the coach on one side were perilously near to the edge of the steep slope.

The bulk of the falling earth and rock missed the coach and crashed upon the road with a noise like thunder. Yet it seemed to those scared boys and girls that they were overwhelmed. Loose earth, pebbles, and small rocks rained on the coach roof with such an unearthly tumult that every other sound was drowned. Several windows were cracked, but none was broken, for they were of unbreakable glass.

All along the coach, on that one side, the falling mass grew deeper and deeper, higher and higher, and the force of it was such that the great vehicle was shifted bodily nearer and nearer to the edge of the road.

"Great Scott! We're going over!" yelled somebody.

"Hold tight!"

"Nothing can save us now!"

The coach had acted as a kind of dam to the rushing avalanche. There was no devastating fall of earth and rock now, but a slow, insidious movement. The coach was being literally pushed off the road!

Desperately the driver heaved on the steering-wheel; the vehicle swerved. Then it crashed through the fence and tipped steeply as it took the plunge.

Over the edge of the slope went the coach. Fortunately it was not a sheer drop at this point. For one palpitating moment it seemed that the vehicle would overturn, but this disaster was averted mainly owing to the driver's valiant efforts. Skilfully braking and steering,

he had caused his massive charge to turn sufficiently for it to take the plunge nose first. Bumping and rocking, it carcered down the steep slope on all four wheels. The boys and girls clung desperately to the seats, expecting every moment to go to their death. Down, down——

Then darkness came—a dramatic, unlooked-for darkness. And as it came the coach slowed to a standstill, as though a mighty brake had been applied. It rocked again, heeled over, and remained perfectly still.

For one tense moment there was such a silence that it was oppressive. Then a babble of voices broke out—little, frightened screams from the girls, shouts from the boys.

"Steady—steady!" came the voice of the driver. "For Heaven's sake keep still, all of you! We may go over at any minute!"

"But—but what's happened?" gasped somebody.

"Heaven alone knows—I don't!" came the driver's voice. "The funny thing is we're not all dead! Never had anything like this happen, not in the whole of my life!"

"We're safe so far!" said Nipper, who was the first to recover himself. "The driver's right, you chaps. Where's Jimmy? Did Jimmy get in all right?"

"Yes, I—I'm here," said Jimmy Potts dazedly. "I can't see—I must be blind! I had a terrible bang on the head, and I only just got to my feet in time——"

"You're not blind—we're all in the darkness," said Nipper. "And I think I know what's happened, too. Thank Heaven for the snow."

"Snow!" went up a general shout.

"Yes! We slithered in the snow, and it has saved us," said Nipper. "We must have plunged headlong into a tremendously deep drift, and, of course, it acted as a brake. But the snow has fallen in on the top of us, and we're buried in it."

"Buried!" went up the echo. "Buried alive—in a snowdrift!"

CHAPTER 3

Digging Them Out!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH shook himself, as though he had just come out of a dream.

"They've gone!" he said hoarsely. "Gone! Jimmy, the chaps, the girls, the coach, and everything!"

"It can't be true," said Church. "Oh, my only sainted aunt. It's horrible—horrible!"

They were staring at a scene of utter desolation. They had seen everything, and it had all happened within the space of twenty or thirty seconds.

Unable to dash to Jimmy Potts' rescue, owing to the danger to themselves, they had stood transfixed. They had seen the coach turn the bend—they had seen Jimmy rush up. Then the avalanche had come, thundering down on the road alongside the vehicle. The coach had slithered over the edge of the slope, plunging down giddily for some way—finally to vanish. They had seen it plough an incredibly deep furrow in that great drift, some distance blow; they had seen the snow cave in, and collapse on the top of it. And now it had gone, leaving no trace except for the debris and the disordered snow.

The avalanche itself had ceased; for, as a landslide, it had not been anything particularly devastating. Sufficient to bury Jimmy Potts and kill him on the spot, but not sufficient to wreck that sturdy coach.

"I can't believe it," said Handforth, passing a hand over his eyes. "We were driving along so peacefully, and——Yen! It was Yen who did it! The dirty, rotten, tricky Chink!"

"I—I don't understand," faltered McClure.

"It's as clear as daylight," shouted Handforth furiously. "It was a cunning, fiendish attempt to murder Jimmy Potts!"

"Oh!"

"Don't you see the cleverness of it?" went on Handforth. "Jimmy was scared into running back. He never suspected Yen—we've always thought that Yen was faithful. But he's a traitor, and——But what are we standing here for, talking? We've got to do something! Come on—to the rescue!"

They ran madly along the road, leaping down the slope and plunging and sprawling through the snow. They noticed, as they went down the slope, that the road had collapsed, and for about a hundred feet it had completely vanished, leaving a great jagged rent. An impassable gap had been made by that landslide—after the coach had fallen.

"Look! Look at the road," said Church, his voice trembling. "A part of it has gone!"

"Never mind the road," retorted Handforth. "What about those poor chaps and girls? Perhaps they're dead. Oh, my hat, what an awful thing! Right in front of our eyes, too."

They floundered helplessly in the snow, skidding and plunging. In the hollows of this exposed slope the snow had col-

The sliding roof of the buried motor-coach shot back, and a wild cheer went up from the imprisoned boys and girls.



Handforth picked himself up, his heart thudding.

"Hallo!" he answered, his voice almost cracking. "Anybody there?"

lected in dense drifts. At times the boys thought they would never be able to extricate themselves. But somehow, by desperate efforts, they ploughed their way downwards.

Stray snowflakes were beginning to drift down from the leaden skies, and a chill wind was sighing over the countryside. There were indications that a storm was blowing up.

"This is about the spot—just below here," panted Handforth, pausing in his efforts. "Oh, what's the use? What can we three do, just by ourselves? We need dozens of men—with ropes and shovels and things!"

"One of us ought to have gone for help," groaned Church. "It's too late now; we can't possibly get back up that slope without help."

Handforth lost his hold, slipped, and plunged heavily. He went flying into the disordered snow, and it seemed to him that his feet thudded against something solid.

"Hallo!" came a vague chorus, as though from the bowels of the earth.

"Is that you, Handy?" came Nipper's voice.

"Yes!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "What's happened? I can't understand — Hallo! This must be the roof of the coach, you chaps," he went on. "Look! The giddy thing didn't turn upside down, after all."

"How much snow is there up there?" shouted the voice of the driver. "We daren't open the sliding roof for fear of letting in an avalanche. Do you think you can clear away some of it?"

"By George! They're not far down!" exclaimed Handforth, as he frantically commenced to brush away the snow with his hands. "Come on, you chaps! All hands to the pumps!"

They worked with desperate energy, shoving against the heavy masses of snow, tearing it away with hands and feet until a big portion of the coach roof was more or less clear. All the rest of the vehicle was completely buried, and although it wasn't resting on an even keel it was far from being tipped over on its side.

"You can try it now," shouted Handforth. "I think she's fairly clear."

They heard voices below. Sounds of heavy exertion came, and then, with a rush, the sliding roof went shooting back, causing a shower of loose snow to drop into the body of the vehicle. The sudden daylight dazzled the prisoners, but they were so overjoyed to see the open air—and freedom—that they cheered wildly.

"Well done, Handy!" sang out Nipper, who was bleeding from an ugly graze on the side of his face. "We thought we were in a far worse mess. By Jove! We're marvellously lucky to have come off so lightly."

"Aren't some of you killed?" asked Handforth, in amazement.

"Killed? No!"

"But aren't there any broken legs?"

"Not one."

"Or arms?"

"You sound disappointed, dear old fellow," remarked Vivian Travers, who was dabbing a cut fore-arm. "Frightfully sorry, but the worst injuries that we can report are a few cuts and grazes and a number of hefty bruises."

"Well, I'm jiggered," gasped Handforth, turning his excited eyes upon Church and McClure. "Did you hear that, you chaps? None killed or injured! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" echoed Church and McClure, joyfully.

Their relief was so heartfelt that they were almost choked for a moment. They had expected to see a terrible scene of tragedy.

"And what about Jimmy?" asked Handforth anxiously.

"I'm all right, thanks, Handy," said Jimmy Potts, standing upon one of the coach seats and showing himself. "There's a nasty bump on my head, where that treacherous Chink hit me, but that's all. The coach saved my life."

Handforth started.

"Yes, by George," he said, as he lowered himself down into the body of the vehicle. "Well, I'm blessed! Not a great deal of damage in here, either! But what does it matter if the old bus never takes the road again? It saved your life, Potts, my son! For if the coach hadn't come along, you would have been caught by those tons of falling earth."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorpe, who had not even troubled to get out of his seat. "I mean to say, what's one dashed coach? There are plenty of the bally things knocking about the country-

side, what? One more or less won't make any difference."

"It's all very well for you to talk. young gents, but what about my bus?" asked the driver, in alarm. "I expect the chassis is all twisted and warped. It'll cost hundreds of pounds——"

"Bother the cost," said Nipper. "Your coach saved a life, and Jimmy's life is worth dozens of coaches! Don't you worry; you won't be blamed for what happened. We've got to worry about getting out of here—particularly the girls."

"Why particularly the girls?" asked Mary Summers promptly.

"Well, you're a bit frightened, and——"

"We're not!" cried Irene Manners indignantly. "We're taking it just as calmly as you boys."

"Sorry!" grinned Nipper. "I apologise, ladies! By Jove, you girls have behaved like giddy heroines."

Doris Berkeley grimaced.

"Thanks all the same, but we don't want to be heroines," she said tartly. "Nobody's hurt much, and we shall soon get out of the snowdrift, so what is there to be frightened about?"

Now that the dangers were all over, everybody was accepting the position very calmly. But they all knew that they were lucky to escape so lightly.

Then, to their joy, they heard voices hailing them from somewhere up above—and they knew that rescue had come.

CHAPTER 4.

At Somerton Abbey!

THE alarming mishap to the motor-coach had been witnessed by two of the gardeners in the grounds of Somerton Abbey.

Their attention, it seemed, had been attracted by the sudden movement of the rocks and earth on the steep hillside, and they had watched fascinatedly. And after that, of course, they had raised the alarm.

The Duchess of Somerton—Sommy's mother—knew at once that it was her expected young guests who had met with this disaster, and without a minute's delay she consulted with her brother, Lord Norbery, who was staying at the Abbey for the holiday. And Somerton's uncle had lost no time in dashing out personally, collecting grooms and gardeners and under-gardeners and footmen, and hurrying off to the scene of the accident. They brought ladders and ropes with them—to say nothing of a substantial first-aid case. For they were expecting the worst.

Lord Norbery, who was a bluff, genial man, looking like a prosperous country farmer, was deeply concerned.

"An appalling affair!" he said, as he stood on the drive, watching his men scrambling down the snowy slope with the ropes and ladders. "Good heavens! Look at the road—it's collapsed!"

"That's very bad, my lord," said the head gardener, who was with him. "We're cut right off now. No hope of getting into the town at all."

"But, man alive, what if some of these young people are badly injured?" protested Lord Norbery. "We shall have to get them to hospital——"

"We can't do anything until this road is repaired—and that'll take days by the look of it, my lord."

"What about the farm lane, down at the bottom?"

"It's absolutely impassable, my lord—snowdrifts four or five feet high," said the head gardener. "Of course, I dare say we can fight a way through if we get enough men on the job. In fact, we shall have to. There'll be nothing else for it. Can't go this way."

But, as it turned out—much to their relief—there were no hospital cases. Somerton's uncle was amazed, relieved, and overjoyed when he learned that there were no serious injuries.

The rescue-party worked hard. The girls came up first, helped by the ladders and ropes. Then, after them, the boys. They were really none the worse, except for their bruises, and now they were all inclined to regard the whole incident as an exciting adventure.

The threatening snowstorm broke just when the rescue operations had been completed. It was lucky, indeed, that they were all out by then, for the storm was of astonishing violence.

The skies darkened, the wind increased to gale velocity, and the snowflakes whirled down in such myriads, and with such force, that the boys and girls were almost blinded as they fought their way on foot to the Abbey.

"Phew! This looks as though it has set in for the night!" yelled Handforth, above the roar of the wind. "I saw it coming an hour ago!"

"We shall be all right once we get indoors," cried Irene, who had her arm in his.

"Shan't belong now," yelled Handforth.

He had been rather startled to find that his Morris Minor had gone by the time he reached the road, but he was reassured when he was told that it had been used to take four of the girls, who were rather more bruised than the others, to the Abbey.

So thick was the snowfall that nothing could be seen twenty yards away; the snowflakes, tiny and cutting, formed a sort of fog. As the boys and girls trudged onwards, they became smothered—coated thickly with the white pall.

"Something like Christmas, eh?" yelled one of the boys. "I'm all for snow at this time of the year; but, dash it, we can have too much of a good thing, can't we?"

At last the great mansion loomed up in front of them. The warm lights looked enticing, and the boys' and girls' troubles

were over when they found themselves stamping inside the great hall, shaking the snow from their overcoats, and removing their smothered headgear.

As at Tregellis Castle, an enormous log-fire was burning

in the hall, and it was a welcome enough sight. Somerton's mother, a surprisingly young-looking lady, was kindness itself.

Everybody, of course, had to tell their own stories about the accident, and it was quite a while before the bluff Lord Norbery could get at the truth of it. He did so after he had taken Nipper and Handforth and Jimmy Potts aside.

"It wasn't an accident at all, sir," said Handforth. "It was a deliberate attempt to murder poor old Jimmy."

"And it was Yen who played the part of a traitor," said Jimmy unhappily.

"Yen?" repeated Somerton's uncle.

"Yen is a Chinaman, sir—my uncle's valet," explained Jimmy. "My uncle has always trusted Yen—for over ten years. He has often told me that he would place his life in Yen's hands. It's so—so astounding. It was Yen who stopped Handforth's car, and tricked me into going back—and then he hit me over the head."

"H'm! An ugly affair altogether," said Lord Norbery, rubbing his chin. "A charge of high explosive, I understand? Well, we can't do anything at the moment, although I shall certainly inform the police."

"I believe my uncle had half an idea that something like this might happen,"

PLEASE NOTE!



Owing to Christmas arrangements, readers should note that next week's issue of the NELSON LEE will be on sale **Monday, 21st. December.**

said Jimmy thoughtfully. "He was awfully anxious about me. He made me promise to ring up as soon as I got here — By Jove! And I'd forgotten, too! You have a telephone, haven't you, sir?"

"Yes, certainly—in the library," said Lord Norbery. "Hubert, my boy—here."

Somerton came up—his family name was Hubert Arthur Aleric Cavendish—and at home he generally answered to "Hubert."

"A pretty fine old affair, this, by what I can hear of it," he remarked. "Dirty work, eh?"

"Take this lad to the telephone, Hubert," said Somerton's uncle. "He wants to use it—an important call to London."

Jimmy went off with Somerton, looking very troubled.

"And we came here because we thought Jimmy would be absolutely safe," said Nipper. "I'm terribly afraid, sir, that we're only bringing trouble upon your home."

"What, exactly, is this trouble?" asked Lord Norbery wonderingly.

"Well, as far as we can judge, sir, Mr. Potts is in danger of his life," replied Nipper. "He's a millionaire—made his fortune in China. This is his first visit home for fifteen years. He owns all sorts of concessions out there."

"I know the type of man," nodded Somerton's uncle. "I've met plenty of them out East."

"It seems that he made an enemy of a powerful Grand Mandarin," went on Nipper. "Fu-Li-Sing—the Mandarin of Shan-Si. Ever heard of him, sir?"

"Not that I can remember at the moment, but there are any amount of mandarins in China."

"This old boy got wild with Mr. Potts because Mr. Potts fixed things up with the Chinese Government about a certain gold concession," said Nipper. "Mr. Potts has never said so, but I have half an idea—now—that he came home to England because there had been attempts on his life in China. But these Chinks seem to have tracked him all the way. They dogged him to St. Frank's, and then to Travis Dene, Handforth's country home, and after that to Tregellis Castle. Now they have appeared here—even before we arrived!"

"H'm! They don't believe in losing any time apparently," commented the other. "But I must confess that I am still muddled. Didn't you say that Mr. Potts' life was in danger? But Mr. Potts isn't here."

"That's the funny part of it, sir," put in Handforth eagerly. "They're just as

keen on going for Jimmy as they are for his uncle."

"I don't know that that is mysterious," said Lord Norbery slowly. "The Chinese see things differently from us. If they have a grudge against a man, they bear that same grudge against his whole family. The Chinese can be extraordinarily faithful, or extraordinarily treacherous. And when they are treacherous they are deadly. Personally, I have had a good deal to do with Chinamen, particularly of the better class, and I have always found them charming and honourable to a degree. However, there are plenty of the other sort, I have no doubt."

"We're all upset about this, sir," said Nipper. "We thought we should be peaceful here. I know it'll have a bad effect upon Jimmy. All sorts of queer things happened at Travis Dene and Tregellis Castle. There was a man named Rutley, and another man named Zacchi. One had got a job at Travis Dene as butler, and Zacchi made out that he was a starving fortune-teller. But we all know, now, that they were hand in glove—probably paid agents of the mandarin."

"Quite likely," nodded Lord Norbery. "Well, we'll talk about this later. And don't be too upset about it. We're strongly fortified here, at Somerton," he added dryly. "I fancy we shall be able to withstand the attacks of the Mysterious Mandarin's agents. Somerton has lived through many a siege before to-day!"

CHAPTER 5.

Astonishing News!

NIPPER drifted towards the library in a thoughtful mood.

He was remembering the recent events at Tregellis—and his most vivid memory was the secret appearance of Nelson Lee, the famous schoolmaster-detective. Lee had revealed himself only to Nipper. And Lee, it seemed, had been lurking about during the whole of the Christmas, keeping a watchful eye on things in general. Nipper knew for a fact that he had saved Jimmy Potts' life on one occasion—when Jimmy had fallen through the ice.

Nelson Lee had been the first victim of the mandarin's agents; they had carried him away from St. Frank's, and had apparently flung him to his doom over the cliffs from Shingle Head. It was generally believed, even now, that Lee had perished. Only Nipper knew that he was alive and active.



In the ruined guard tower of Somerton Abbey sat four Chinamen. "The white boy must die!" announced the man wearing the rich Oriental robes.

For some reason, best known to himself, Lee desired to remain "dead." He had appeared at Tregellis, and he had definitely instructed Nipper that Jimmy Potts should be brought to Somerton Abbey, together with the other boys and girls, as Sommy's guests. Lee had told Nipper that there would be much greater danger for the lad in London.

Now Nipper wondered if Nelson Lee had been right. What greater danger could there have been in London? For even before reaching the Abbey, Jimmy had escaped death by a hair's breadth.

Peeping into the library, Nipper found Jimmy sitting at the desk, and Somerton was standing on the hearthrug. Jimmy had the telephone receiver to his ear.

"Getting through now, I think," he muttered, looking up.

"About time, too," commented Somerton. "They're beastly slow, aren't they?"

"They say that there's an important line down somewhere, and I've had to be switched through goodness knows where," replied Jimmy. "But as long as I get in touch with London—— Hallo, hallo!

Yes? Hallo! Is Mr. Benjamin Potts staying at your hotel?"

"Yes," came a voice, fairly clear.

"I want you to put me through to him immediately, please," said Jimmy. "Tell him it's a trunk call—and very important."

"Hold the line," came the voice of the clerk.

"I've got through," whispered Jimmy, looking up. "By jingo, I was beginning to think that the storm—— Hallo!"

"That you, Jimmy?" came the familiar voice of Uncle Ben.

"Yes, uncle," said Jimmy, giving Nipper a triumphant glance.

"By golly! I was beginning to get worried, lad," said Uncle Ben, in far off London. "You told me that you would arrive in mid-afternoon. What has delayed you?"

"Are you all right, uncle?" asked Jimmy eagerly. "I mean, has anything happened——"

"Bless ye, no!" laughed Uncle Ben. "But I'm on the safe side. I have a couple of Scotland Yard men here, although this is strictly between ourselves. Jimmy, and I don't want you to

tell anybody. I hate to admit that I need detectives hanging around me."

"I think you're jolly sensible, uncle," said Jimmy. "Well, something did happen here."

"What!" came a shout. "By golly! Tell me! What do ye mean, lad? Tell me!"

There was deep concern in Mr. Potts' voice, and Jimmy, without further ado, gave a brief account of what had happened—with occasional grunts and exclamations coming to him across the long-distance wire.

"Hey? What's that? Hold on, lad!" interrupted Uncle Ben suddenly. "What did ye say? It was Yen who ran up to your young friend's car?"

"Yes, uncle; and Yen tricked me into getting out and running back——"

"Lad, ye're crazy!" came the interruption. "Yen has never been out of my sight since we left Tregellis."

"What!" shouted Jimmy.

"Lad, lad, what's come over ye?" asked Uncle Ben, his voice expressing his amazement. "Haven't I always told ye that Yen would lay down his life for me? He's the most faithful servant a man could wish to have. And ye're telling me that he tricked you into a death-trap?"

"But, uncle, I could have sworn——"

"Fiddlesticks!" came Mr. Potts' gruff tone. "Why, Yen is with me here—unpacking at this very moment. I tell ye he hasn't left my side all day. A curse on Fu-Li-Sing! This is one of his infernal tricks!"

"I'm glad, uncle—terribly glad!" said Jimmy eagerly. "I hated to think that Yen could have done such a thing."

"Ay, old Fu is clever," said Uncle Ben grimly. "He knew he couldn't fool me by a trick like that, but it was easy enough with you youngsters. One Chinaman looks very much like another to ye, eh?"

"Why, yes, uncle——"

"But Chinamen are as different as white men—when ye're used to them," said the millionaire. "They must have got a man of the same height and build as Yen—perhaps looking a bit like him, too. They dressed him the same, and you, in your excitement, made a very natural mistake. But it looks ugly, lad. They nearly had ye. This fellow escaped, of course?"

"Yes, uncle; we didn't see him again."

"I'm coming straight down to Somersetshire," declared Uncle Ben, in a determined voice. "What's more, I'll bring half a dozen Scotland Yard men with me. I'll have no more of this hanky-panky business. I'll have ye safe this time,

Jimmy, lad. I suppose you've seen nothing of that queer creature, Zacchi?"

"Not a thing, uncle," replied Jimmy. "But you can't come down to-night. There's a terrible storm raging here——"

"I'll take more than a storm to stop me!"

"But, uncle! When that landslide took place, a big part of the drive fell away, and it's impossible to get to the Abbey," said Jimmy. "You couldn't do it in the darkness. It would be terribly dangerous. Please wait until to-morrow, anyhow."

"Who is the host there?"

"Lord Norbery—Somerton's uncle."

"I'd like to speak to him," said Uncle Ben.

Lord Norbery was brought to the 'phone, and he reassured Mr. Potts, declaring that Somerton Abbey was impregnable. There wasn't one chance in a thousand that anything dramatic would happen during the night.

"Be quite easy in mind, my dear sir," said Somerton's uncle. "Your nephew will be safe here, surrounded by so many friends. But I'll get Jimmy to ring up again in the morning, and report. Then, of course, you can please yourself as to what you do. We should be most happy and delighted to have you here with us."

And Uncle Ben was satisfied at that. He would wait until the morning—when Jimmy would ring up again. So after a cordial "good-bye" Lord Norbery hung up the receiver.

Jimmy was brimming over with his astonishing news.

"It wasn't Yen!" he burst out excitedly.

"We gathered something of that sort," said Nipper. "But it's unbelievable, Jimmy! You and Handforth and Church and McClure—you all recognised him."

"We thought we did, but it was a trick," said Jimmy. "Oh, I'm glad! It was awful to think that Yen could be such a traitor. Uncle Ben says that Yen has been with him ever since he left Tregellis Castle."

"Well, of course, that settles it," said Nipper. "That makes everything a lot better. Come along, Jimmy; put all these thoughts out of your head. We're all safe, we're snug in this sturdy pile, and we're going to have a jolly time."

And Jimmy thought so, too, a little later.

For when dinner was served, everybody was happy and smiling. The boys and girls were making light of their bruises—joking about them—and Somerton, of

course, was delighted to have so many of his school friends under his roof.

It was a big party now, comprising at least two dozen Removites and Fourth-Formers, and a dozen merry-eyed Moor View girls.

There had been three parties at first, when they had set out from St. Frank's—one for Travis Dene, another for Tregellis Castle, and a third for Somerton Abbey. Now they had all joined forces, and the young duke, at least, was determined that his guests should have a right royal time at Somerton.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Old Guard Tower!

HALF a mile from Somerton Abbey, standing gaunt and stark on a wind-swept hilltop, was a half-ruined guard tower. It had stood the stress of hundreds of winters, and it had braved many a howling tempest.

It was a relic of Saxon days, when Somerton Abbey had been the scene of many a grim siege and battle. But now it was just a picturesque landmark, a ruin, in no way connected with the Abbey itself.

To-night it stood up bravely against the yelling storm.

The wind had increased to hurricane violence, and it was howling and shouting like a thousand demons. The snow, drifting against the north-east face of the tower, was piling up in dense masses.

It seemed incredible that there could be any human beings in that tower on such an evening as this. Yet, down below, in the deep recesses of an ancient vault, a curious scene was being enacted.

The vault, usually, was dank and cold; but now a charcoal fire was burning, giving forth such a ruddy glow that lights were unnecessary. The brazier stood almost in the centre of the vault, and from it rose a thin curl of pungent smoke. All about it there was a grateful warmth.

And squatting in the glow were four Chinamen. Three of them were dressed in nondescript European clothing, wearing heavy winter overcoats with the collars turned up. And one man was the fellow who had stopped Handforth's car, and who had nearly succeeded in sending Jimmy Potts to his death.

The fourth figure was different. He was sitting upon a little stool, and he was a heavily-built man, and, unlike the others, he was attired in rich Oriental robes. His face was almost completely masked, for even to his subordinates, it seemed, he did not wish to show his features. His eyes, cruel and relentless,

gleamed in the reflected glow from the brazier.

"Fools, blunderers, men of insect brains!" said the man in the rich robes witheringly, in a soft, sibilant, Chinese dialect. "I give you child's work to do, and you fail!"

"Excellency, we did obey, and it was no fault of ours that failure attended our efforts. By now the young white devil should be sleeping on the Terraces of the Night."

"Silence!" commanded the master. "Had you not wits enough to cause some delay of the big motor-car? Had you but taken that precaution, success would have rewarded your efforts."

The others were silent.

"There must be no further blundering," continued the man in the robes, his voice impassive in its cruelty. "The white boy, of the blood of he whom we know as the Gold Man, must die!"

"What the Illustrious speaks shall, and will, be done," murmured the Chinaman who bore such a close resemblance to Yen.

"On the Amur, life is cheap," continued the master. "Life shall be cheap here, on this snow-bound English countryside, ere another moon rises. For here we shall plan and decide upon the means which shall be employed. Let your wits work, so that you may tell me of your thoughts."

They talked. They talked far into the night, round that glowing brazier. And they planned the death of Jimmy Potts because he was of the blood of Benjamin Potts—he whom they called "The Gold Man."

Outside the storm howled and moaned, and in Somerton Abbey Jimmy Potts slept peacefully. With him were Vivian Travers and Skeets Bellton, his dormitory chums of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 7.

Snowed Up!

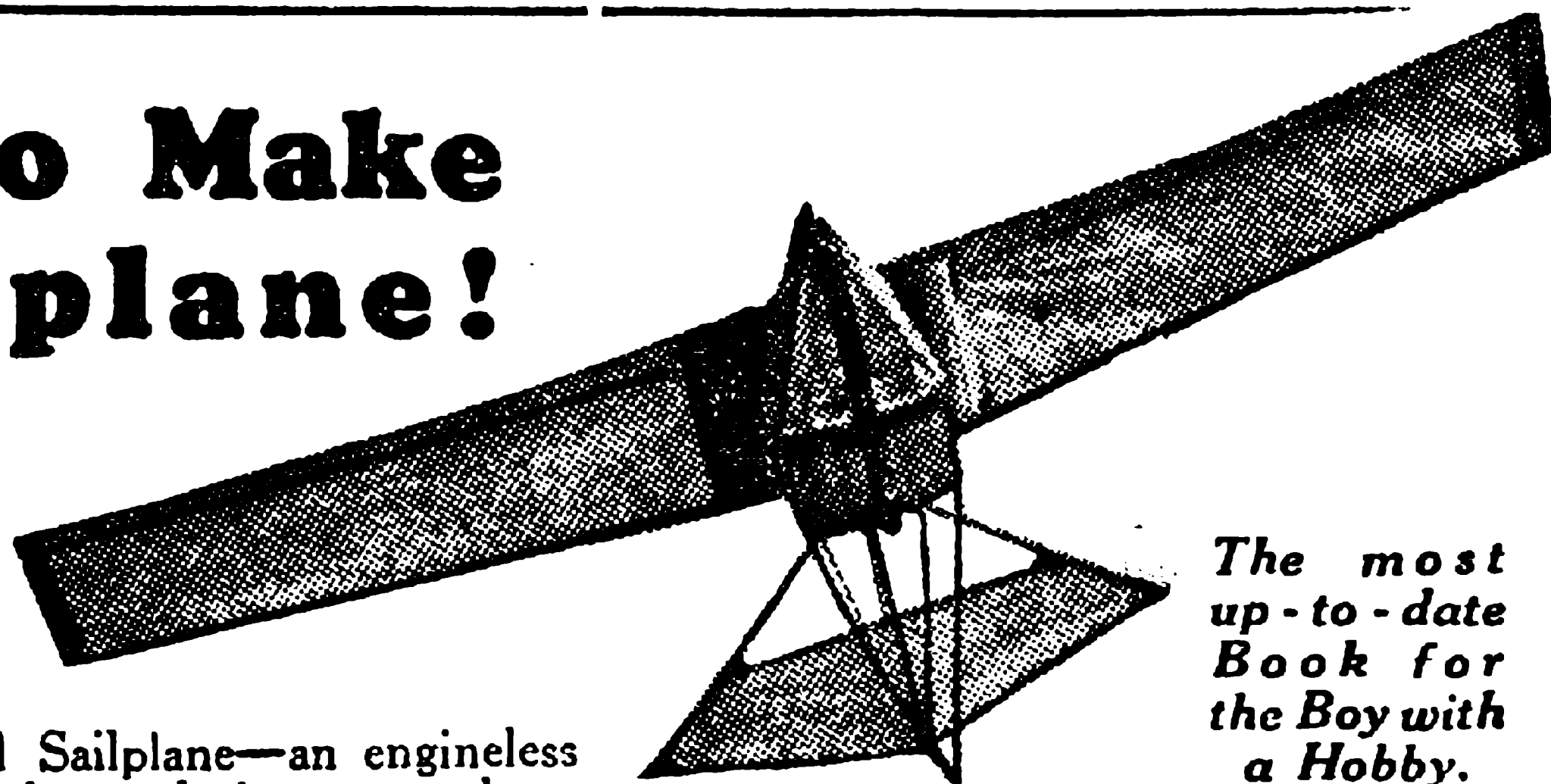
THE night passed peacefully enough—within the walls of Somerton Abbey. But there was no peace outside, for without a break the storm raged, and the snow which fell during those hours of darkness broke all records for the district.

When dawn came the skies were still as leaden as ever, the wind was whistling its strongest, and the snow was whirling down like a great white pall.

Jimmy Potts had slept well, but more than once he had awakened in the night. He was nervous and jumpy—he had been
(Continued on page 15.)

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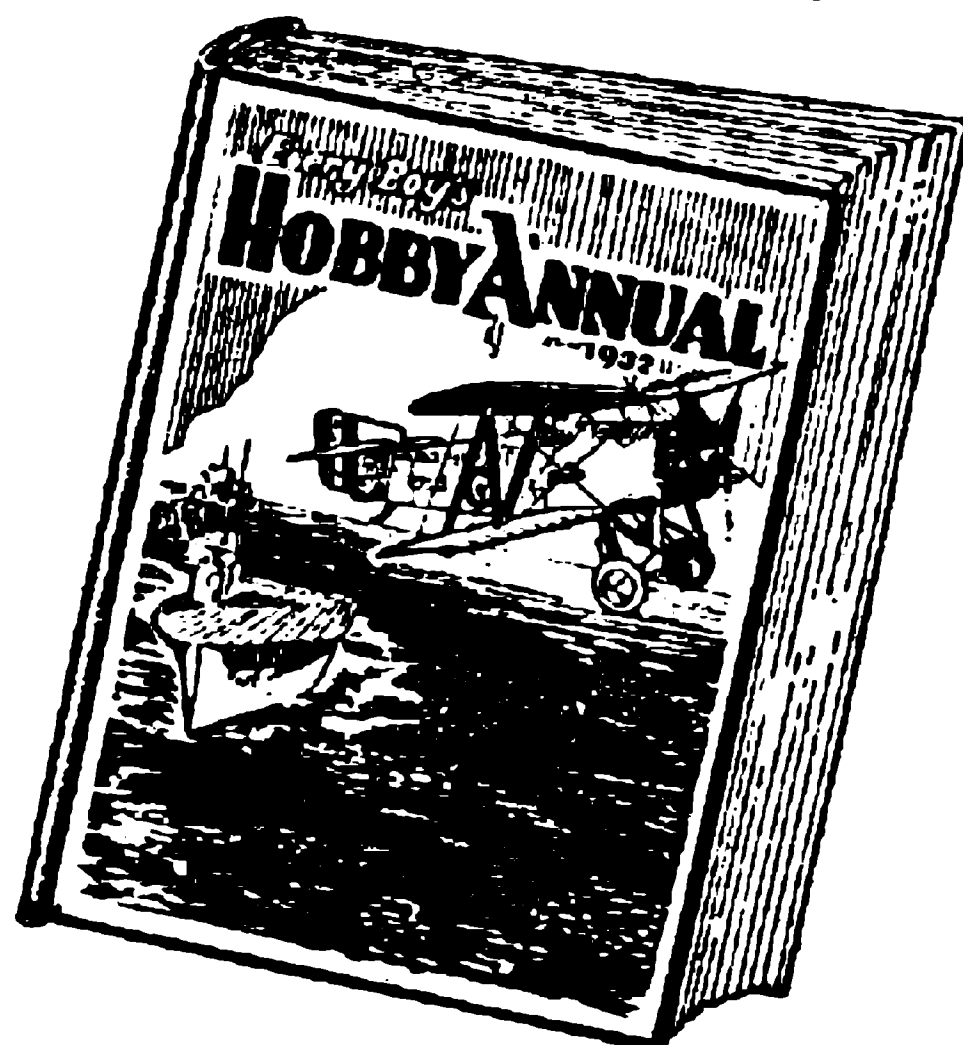


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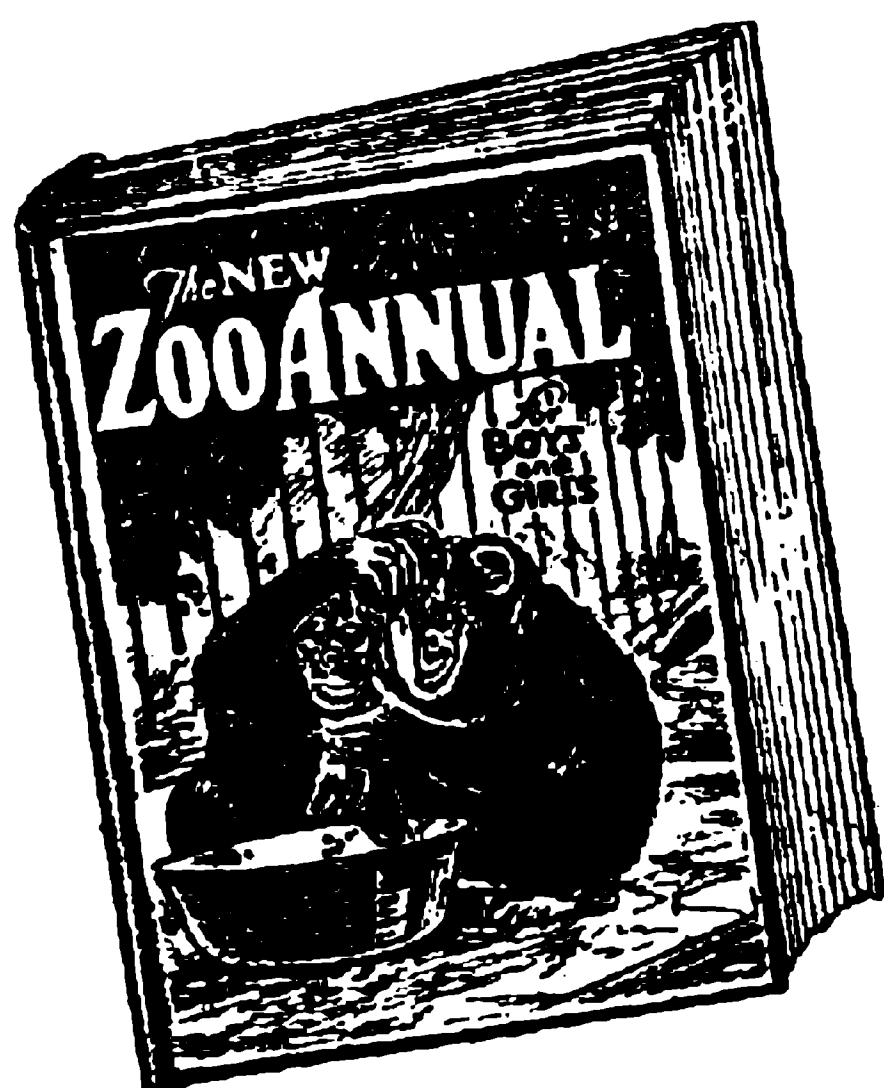
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THE WELL OF DOOM!

(Continued from page 13.)

so ever since these new and startling events had come into his life. He had grown to fear the nights of late. But now, after daylight had come, he was feeling drowsily contented. There could be no danger; all was well, and at Somerton Abbey, it seemed, he was secure.

There was warmth here—grateful warmth. There was an elaborate system of central heating at the Abbey, and the bed-room, far from being chilly and unfriendly, was just the opposite.

Getting out of bed, Jimmy went to the window and tried to peer out. He was puzzled for a moment, for it seemed to him that the glass was glazed, or frosted. Then he suddenly jumped to the truth. The window, on the outer side, was smothered with snow. And now he knew the reason why the light in the bed-room was so poor. The lower half of the window was choked with dense masses of snow.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" murmured Jimmy, startled. "There must have been a pretty hefty fall during the night. This is Christmas with a vengeance!"

After a considerable struggle he forced one of the windows open, and he had all his work cut out to prevent a heavy load of snow tumbling into the room. With a dressing-gown wrapped about him, he stared out upon a scene of desolation which fairly took away his breath.

"I say, you chaps!" he shouted excitedly. "Quick! Come and look here!"

Travers and Skeets, stirring in their sleep, looked up.

"Hallo! You awake?" asked Skeets drowsily. "I guess it's pretty early, isn't it?"

"Not so very," said Jimmy. "We ought to be getting dressed if we're to be down in time for breakfast. But come and look here. I never saw anything like it in my life!"

"Snow?" yawned Skeets. "Shucks! I'm from Canada—and snow is nothing new to me."

"I'll bet you never saw anything quite like this," declared Jimmy.

As Skeets and Travers were climbing out of their beds the door burst open and Handforth dashed in—in his pyjamas and dressing-gown. Church and McClure were just behind him.

"Have you seen it, you chaps?" shouted Handforth.

"They're too lazy to get out of bed," said Jimmy.

"Anybody might think we'd never seen snow before," murmured Travers, with a yawn. "For the love of Samson! What's all the excitement about?"

But even he gave a little jump when he went to the open window and stared out. The wind was roaring, blowing flurries of snowflakes into the room.

"Jolly glad to see that you're all right, Jimmy," said Handforth approvingly.

"Oh, chuck it!" protested Jimmy. "I hate to think that I'm such a nuisance to everybody."

"Sorry, old man; didn't mean to hurt your feelings," said Handforth. "You're a bit touchy on the subject, aren't you? Well, I don't blame you."

"Well, well," said Travers, as he looked out of the window. "At a rough guess, dear old fellows, I should say that we are slightly snowed up."

The scene outside the window was indeed remarkable. It was difficult to tell what exactly lay below—whether gardens or lawns or courtyard. The snow lay many feet deep, and in places it was piled up fantastically in great drifts. The visibility was poor, owing to the still-falling snow, but as far as the boys could see the picture was the same—snow everywhere, lying like a vast enveloping blanket over everything.

Leaning out, they could not tell where the wall ended and where the ground began. Doorways were choked; lower windows were more or less obliterated.

"Looks like a day indoors to me," said Church. "We shall be practically prisoners."

"What rot!" said Handforth, with a start. "You don't think we're going to stick indoors all day, you fathead? What about tobogganing and skating?"

"You'll do a fat lot of skating—with every foot of ice covered by yards of snow," retorted Church. "As for tobogganing, this snow is so thick that it'll be as much as we can do to fight our way ten yards!"

"I say!" said Handforth suddenly. "What about that road?"

"You mean the drive?" asked Travers. "Yes, it looks pretty bad. They can't possibly do any repairing in this weather, and with so much snow on the ground."

"Let's get dressed and go downstairs," said Jimmy eagerly. "Perhaps we shall hear some news."

They dressed and washed in record time. And they heard plenty of news when they arrived downstairs.

Lord Norbery was standing in the great hall, talking to three sturdy-looking men,

who were standing with snow clinging to their heavy top-boots. They looked like gamekeepers.

Some of the girls were coming downstairs at the same time, and Somerton's uncle turned to them with a rueful smile.

"Well, you young people, here's a pretty kettle of fish," he exclaimed. "We're completely snowed up."

"That's what we thought, sir," said Handforth. "Is it very thick?"

"The thickest any of us can remember," replied his lordship. "To put it bluntly, we are absolutely isolated."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Cut off from the world, by Jove!"

"It's thrilling," said Irene, her eyes dancing.

"The drive is completely snowbound, to say nothing of that gap that was caused by the landslide," continued Lord Norbery. "There's another road, down in the hollow, but that is under twelve feet of snow in places, and it would take several days to cut a way through. No, boys, we shall just have to wait until a thaw comes. It might be three or four days—it might be a week. We're just bottled up."

"I say, what a lark, uncle," said Somerton, grinning.

"Let's hope that it will be only a lark," commented his uncle. "Fortunately, we have ample supplies of food in the Abbey—enough to last us two or three weeks, if necessary. We're in fit condition for a siege. Still, it isn't very pleasant to know that we are virtually cut off from the rest of the world."

"I'm not so sure of that, either," murmured Travers, with a significant glance towards Jimmy Potts.

"You mean that he'll be safe?" asked Nipper, who was near him. "Yes, Travers, you're right there. Those beastly enemies of his can't get near the Abbey while it is snowbound like this. So the storm may turn out to be a blessing in disguise. It'll give Jimmy a chance to recover his nerve."

"Rather a pity about Mr. Potts, though," said Handforth. "He promised to come down to-day—with half a dozen Scotland Yard men. Can't do that now."

"We don't need Scotland Yard men," replied Nipper. "If the detectives can't get here, it stands to reason that the crooks can't get here, either."

When Jimmy Potts tried to telephone, in accordance with his promise to Uncle Ben, he received a bit of a shock. For as

soon as he put the receiver to his ear he found that the line was dead.

"There's something wrong with the telephone, Travers," he said anxiously.

"It doesn't surprise me in the least, dear old fellow," replied Travers. "I was expecting it. Since we're cut off in every other way, we might just as well be cut off by telephone. That storm has pretty well blown itself out, but it put in some hefty work while it lasted. Amongst other things, it must have blown down the telephone wires."

"Then—then I can't get in touch with Uncle Ben at all," protested Jimmy.

"Not until the wires are restored, and that might take days."

"Oh, my hat!" said Potts. "That's awful! What the dickens will Uncle Ben think? I promised to telephone him, and he'll hear nothing, and he'll imagine that all sorts of terrible things have happened——"

"Don't you believe it," interrupted Nipper, who had also come into the library. "Mr. Potts will learn that the telephone wires are down, and I don't suppose he'll worry. Anyhow, we can't do anything. We shall have to make the best of a bad job."

Jimmy was anxious. He had been particularly keen upon ringing up Uncle Ben, so that he could assure him that everything was perfectly all right at Somerton Abbey. Also, he wanted to save Mr. Potts from making a useless journey. Even if Mr. Potts got as far as Somerton town, he could not reach the Abbey.

Most of the boys and girls regarded the whole thing as a glorious lark. They thoroughly enjoyed the novelty of being snowed up. And during the morning they set themselves the task of forcing a way out into one of the courtyards and digging a way through the snow. It was great fun—at first. When they found they couldn't dig very far, they retired indoors and amused themselves by reading, or sitting round the log fire, yarning. After all, it was Christmas-time, and they had been longing for snow, and plenty of it. It was unreasonable to grumble now that the snow had really and truly come.

Jimmy tried to be cheerful, but in spite of himself his heart was heavy. Continually he found himself wondering if anything dreadful had happened to his uncle; and the knowledge that Somerton Abbey was so cut off affected him more and more. He could not explain why, but he had, deep within him, an insistent foreboding of evil.



Sobbing with terror, a footman stumbled into the dining-hall. "The ghost—the Somerton ghost!" he shrieked wildly. "Help! Save me!"

CHAPTER 8.

Drama at Dinner!

BY evening the skies had completely cleared, and the wind had dropped to a gentle murmur. The storm had passed, leaving peace in its wake. The sun went down in a blaze of golden light, and there was every promise that the night would be frosty, starry, and moonlight.

By this time the young guests were not feeling quite so jolly about this abundance of snow. Nature had rather overdone the thing. They wanted to be out and about—they wanted to enjoy the many thrills of winter sports.

"I dare say it'll be all right to-morrow," said Somerton hopefully. "We get some ripping sports here, you know—plenty of slopes for tobogganing. If only this frost lasts, everything will be all serene."

"It looks like lasting for a month," said Handforth. "Anyway, dozens of men have been pretty busy all day. They've cleared practically all the courtyards and pathways round the front of the Abbey. So, at least, we can get about a bit. Do

you know if they've done anything about the road?"

"Absolutely impossible, old man," said Somerton, shaking his head. "It might be a week before we can get in touch with the town—or even with the people who live in the isolated cottages. It's going to be rather rough on them unless we can get through within a day or two."

"Perhaps we can help to-morrow, in some way," said Handforth. "I must say, Sommy, old man, that your ancestors chose a pretty bleak spot when they built their giddy castle!"

"They knew what they were doing," replied Somerton calmly. "It would take a pretty strong army to get through to us just now, eh? And while we're on the subject, the same applies to Jimmy Potts. If he had a thousand enemies after him, they couldn't get at him now."

"That's a comfort, anyway," agreed Handforth, with a nod.

With the coming of evening, and the complete dropping of the wind, things brightened considerably. This fine old ducal mansion was full of good cheer—fires blazing everywhere, lights glowing with a friendly warmth. The elaborate

Christmas decorations, and the high spirits of the party in general, made everybody happy.

Indeed, with so many young people, it was impossible to feel depressed. Jimmy himself lost that foreboding of evil as the evening advanced. There was plenty of music, singing, dancing, and the party grew jollier and jollier.

Dinner was a brilliant meal, with everybody chattering about the snow, the prospects for the morrow, and the planning of some charades—which were to take place immediately after dinner.

Then, with the appearance of Bristowe, came a shock.

Bristowe was a footman, and it wasn't one of his duties to dash headlong into the dining-hall in the middle of dinner. He appeared dramatically; for he fell, rather than ran, into the room. Sobbing with terror, he stumbled through the doorway. Everybody ceased talking, and turned and stared.

"The ghost—the Somerton ghost!" shrieked Bristowe wildly. "Help! Save me!"

He fell to the floor and lay like a creature half-demented. Lord Norbery rose heavily to his feet, his kindly face expressive of concern and amazement.

"Good gracious me! What's all this?" he asked sternly. "It's all right, my dear," he added, with a glance at his sister. "Leave this to me. Who is this man?"

"Bristowe, my lord," said the butler, who was greatly agitated and shocked. "He is one of the under-footmen——"

"All right," interrupted Somerton's uncle. "Come, my man. This won't do. What on earth is the matter with you?"

The footman looked up, his white face full of terror.

"I saw it, my lord!" he panted. "The ghost! In the Abbot's Close! I saw it as plainly——"

His voice trailed away, and he fell sideways in a dead faint.

"This is extraordinary," muttered Lord Norbery. "The man has swooned—he is terrified. It is impossible that he could have seen a ghost in the Abbot's Close. Here, some of you boys. Quick! Lend me a hand. The poor fellow needs brandy."

Under the stimulating influence of the fiery spirit, Bristowe partially recovered.

"I saw it—I saw it!" he whispered hoarsely. "An awful thing with a skull and staring eyes. They always told me that the Abbey was haunted! And now I've seen the ghost——"

"Come, come," interrupted Lord Norbery sharply. "This won't do, my man. If you cannot tell a lucid story——"

"I can, my lord—I can," interrupted the under-footman. "I was in the Abbot's Close. I—I thought I heard a sound, and I went to look. And there was the Somerton ghost! I can see it now—a greyish-white, filmy thing, half-floating in the air, coming towards me, and the eyes——"

He shuddered, and covered his face with his hands.

"You'd better take him away," interrupted Lord Norbery, turning to the butler. "It's no good questioning him now. We can only assume that his imagination got the better of him."

The whole incident was unfortunate. It left the jolly party uneasy and jumpy. Jimmy Potts, whose nerves had already been jarred during the Christmas holidays, was particularly affected, although he tried to appear unconcerned.

Lord Norbery, with one or two other gentlemen—for there was a considerable number of grown-ups in the house-party—went to the Abbot's Close to have a look round. They found nothing whatever to account for Bristowe's strange story. The footman had been half-carried up to his bed-room, assisted by two or three other servants. The unfortunate man was in a condition bordering upon collapse.

"It's nothing—nothing at all," growled the bluff Lord Norbery, when he returned to the dining-hall. "Confound the fellow! Nerves, of course—sheer imagination."

"He spoke of the Somerton ghost, sir," said Handforth half-inquiringly. "Is there a Somerton ghost?"

"Of course not," growled his lordship. "There's no real ghost at Somerton. Naturally, all sorts of fantastic stories get about. Every old mansion has its ghost stories."

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glen-thorne, dropping his fork with a clatter.

"What's the matter, Archie?" asked Nipper.

"Odds gadzooks!"

"My dear ass——"

"Frightfully sorry, and all that sort of thing," said Archie uncomfortably, as he jammed his monocle into his eye and looked up and down the great table, "but the fact is, a kind of recollection has just come sliding briskly into the memory department."

"About the Somerton ghost?" asked somebody.

"Absolutely!"

"Now, look here, Archie——" began Nipper.

"I seem to remember a story about a secret room. The apartment, in fact, where the good old family skeleton has been parked for innumerable centuries."

"We have no family skeleton," smiled Somerton's mother. "There is a secret room—yes, but it is purely a family tradition. It is said that every Christmas a ghost walks out of that secret room, in the North Wing."

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's cheerful!"

"Crumbs!"

"However, there is no reason for anybody to be alarmed," continued the duchess placidly. "Christmas itself is actually over, and there is no reason to believe that our family ghost will make history this particular year. In any case, the ghost has never been seen except in the North Wing, and that wing is not being used now."

"What about the Abbot's Close, ma'am?" asked Handforth.

"The Abbot's Close is merely a picturesque name for one of the rear halls," smiled the duchess. "As far as I know, the ghost has never been seen there. To be quite truthful, the only ghost that really has been seen turned out to be an unfortunate fellow, an ex-servant of the Abbey, who had escaped from prison. But that was some years ago. I dislike saying so, but it occurs to me that Bristowe may have been drinking. He has been reported to me, on more than one occasion, for that offence."

So the incident was dismissed, and the party made a valiant effort to get lively again. But it was a superficial liveliness. Long before bed-time everybody was aware of a strange, brooding sense of mystery.

Perhaps it was the knowledge that Somerton Abbey was isolated from the outer world—cut off as though the place had become a desert island. There was no possible way of communicating with the outer world. They were alone—hemmed in by the impenetrable barrier of snow. And this talk of ghosts, too, had set everybody thinking—and whispering.

Bed-time found Jimmy Potts nervous and uneasy. More than any of the others, he felt a sense of impending danger. Yet he could not explain this feeling—even to himself. The other boys said nothing to him, but they could see that he was very much on edge.

"He'll be all right," murmured Nipper when Somerton asked about him. "We're taking precautions—although he doesn't know it."

"What sort of precautions?" asked Somerton wonderingly.

"Well, to begin with, he's sleeping with Montie and Tommy and me," replied Nipper. "Waldo has promised to sleep in our bed-room, too—and his ears are like microphones. We've also arranged to keep watch in turns throughout the night. Jimmy won't know this—we shouldn't like him to know—but we're going to take good care that nothing happens to him while he is at Somerton Abbey."

"By Jove! I'm glad to hear you say that," said the young duke. "We shouldn't like anything to happen to him here."

But when Nipper saw the bed-room which had been prepared for them, he changed his mind.

CHAPTER 9.

The Somerton Ghost!

NIPPER had seen that bed-room before, of course, and it had seemed all right to him then. He did not change his mind until they had all undressed and were actually in bed.

Then he discovered something. When the lights were put out, it was seen that the moonlight was streaming eerily through the windows. And this alone, with Jimmy's nerves on edge, was ghostly and mysterious.

"I'll tell you what, you chaps," said Nipper, suddenly sitting up in bed. "Handforth's room, on the other side of the corridor, is a lot more cheerful than this. Why don't you go over and sleep with those chaps, Jimmy? Handy's snores may make you a bit restless, but, at least, they'll be comforting, and they'll drown every other sound."

"It doesn't matter," said Jimmy, forcing a laugh.

Nipper insisted. In spite of Jimmy's protests, he was hustled across the corridor, and Handforth was delighted when he learned of the change in the programme.

"Yes, rather!" he said heartily. "Come along in, Jimmy, old son! We'll keep watch just the same— Eh? Here, what the——"

Nipper had nudged him, and Handforth suddenly started.

"By George! I'd forgotten!" he whispered. "He doesn't know anything about it, does he?"

"He'll know pretty soon," said Church bitterly.

Perhaps Jimmy did guess that his schoolfellows had arranged to keep watch; if so, he said nothing. He was relieved—comforted. At all events, he made no

objections, and he dropped off into a peaceful sleep almost at once.

By midnight everything was quiet. Most of the guests were sleeping soundly. Nipper & Co. and Waldo had curled down comfortably. Nipper had arranged that he would relieve Handforth at one o'clock, and Handforth had definitely promised that he would keep awake until then.

But something aroused Nipper at midnight. He awoke in time to hear the last solemn strokes of the great clock down in the hall. He found himself alert—and he did not quite know why.

Sir Montie was asleep; Tommy Watson and Waldo were slumbering just as peacefully. Outside, the night was still, and the moonlight was streaming with almost dazzling brilliance into the room, leaving the corners in black shadow.

"Funny!" murmured Nipper. "It couldn't have been the clock that woke me up."

A little quiver suddenly ran down his spine, and he could almost feel the roots of his hair stirring. With a tremendous effort he gripped himself—hard. Was it imagination, or could he hear low, sibilant whispers?

Whispers!

He remembered how Jimmy Potts had spoken of whispers at Travis Dene—and, again, at Tregellis Castle. They seemed to be coming from one of the darkest corners of the bed-room. Nipper stared intently into the blackness.

Then he heard another sound—the soft moving of bedclothes. He glanced round and saw Stanley Waldo sitting up. Waldo's ears had not failed at the critical moment. The whispering had awakened him, too!

"Jimmy—Jimmy—Jimmy—Jimmy!"

The whispers had become a little louder, and now they had lost their incoherency. That one word—"Jimmy"—was being repeated. There was something maddening, something frightening, in the sound.

"Jimmy—Jimmy Potts—Jimmy—Jimmy Potts!" came the whisper, as though from nowhere. "Do you hear me, Jimmy Potts? Jimmy—Jimmy Potts! Can you hear me, Jimmy Potts?"

Nipper took another quick look at Waldo; he saw that Waldo was sitting tense and alert. And a quick, illuminating thought had come to Nipper.

The ghost—if ghost it was—had made a bad blunder! It was calling to Jimmy Potts—and Jimmy was not in this bed-room at all, but on the other side of the corridor, sleeping with Handforth & Co.!

"By Jove!" breathed Nipper.

It was that last-minute change which had brought about this error. Jimmy Potts was to have slept in this room, and the ghost, curiously enough, had not been informed of the alteration. A queer sort of ghost, indeed, to make such a mistake! Nipper was convinced that there was nothing supernatural going on here, but plain, downright trickery.

"I say, Wal——"

The words choked in Nipper's throat. He had only whispered them. He had been about to urge Waldo to leap for that dark corner with him. But even as he was speaking, a curious halo of light showed amid the shadows. They seemed to flicker and hover; and as they did so they assumed a human shape. They came nearer and nearer, and the whispers grew more pronounced. The thing took more definite shape—a vile-looking human figure, with trailing arms and a face which was skull-like and ghastly.

Even Nipper—prepared for trickery as he was—felt his heart thudding painfully.

"Waldo, jump on him!" yelled Nipper abruptly.

He leapt as the words escaped his lips. Waldo acted at the same second. They both dashed across the bed-room to that dark corner, and it was any odds that they would have grabbed the apparition. Unfortunately Waldo, in leaping, had dragged the quilt with him, and he half-stumbled, colliding violently against Nipper. They both went rolling headlong across the floor.

"Hi! What's that?" gasped Watson, sitting up like a Jack-in-the-box.

Nipper was already on his feet, but by now the thing had vanished.

"Lights! Turn on the lights!" gasped Nipper.

He leapt for the switch, and as he did so he fancied that a cold draught of air wafted across his face. He believed that the door had suddenly opened and had closed again.

Snap!

He pressed down the switch, and the bed-room was flooded with electric light. There was nothing to be seen—except Waldo in his pyjamas, and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie sitting up in their beds, both of them utterly bewildered—and just a bit scared.

"Begad! What's wrong?" gurgled Montie.

Nipper did not wait to answer him. He tore open the door and dashed out. The corridor was in darkness. Before Nipper had run half a dozen yards he checked, and by now Waldo was with him.

(Continued on page 24.)

“ Happy days are here ” when you read this mirthmaking issue of—



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

No. 35. Vol. 2.

EDITORIAL STAFF.

December 19th, 1931.

THE EDITOR IN LUCK

Editor-in-Chief E. O. Handforth
Editor E. O. Handforth
Chief Sub-Editor E. O. Handforth
Literary Editor E. O. Handforth
Art Editor E. O. Handforth
Rest of Staff E. O. Handforth

A MERRY CHRISTMAS By NIPPER.

HOORAY! !yyouch apsthepater has
Turn&rn'd up tr UmPs // & gGived
mE aTTPEwritei f or AchRRistmas
pre seNT " "——

(NOTE by EDITOR, N.L.L.—Having read this far, I telephoned to St. Frank's and asked Handy what the thump he thought he was doing. He was indignant.

"It's plain enough, sir, isn't it?" he snorted. "The pater has given me a typewriter for a Christmas present, so I'm going to type my Editorial in future. That'll save you a lot of trouble, won't it?"

"Mm—yes!" I said doubtfully. "I mean, there's nothing wrong with my writing, of course," went on the champion chump. "But still, typing is more businesslike. It looks more like a real magazine."

"Oh! Well, that's something. If it looks like a real magazine, that's all we want."

"You know jolly well it is a real magazine. By George! I bet you've never printed a magazine like mine before."

"You win that bet, Handy."
"Good!" said the ass, in satisfied tones. "I thought you'd be glad to know that I shall type my chinwag in future."

"Hold on!" I exclaimed hurriedly. "I don't think I'd type my copy, if I were you. Your writing is quite good enough. Your writing, as a rule, looks like Arabic—but your typing looks like a Chinaman with the stutters. If you're going to typewrite your chat, I shall have to publish it as a competition, with a prize for any reader who can find out what you mean. Good-bye!" And I rang off before Handy had time to make any remarks.

Handy must wait until he is a little more expert before using that typewriter. If I have any more stuff like that printed above—well, my waste-paper basket is a nice large one.—Ed. NELSON LEE.)

THIS is not so much a puzzle as a game. It is very easy, but it is equally easy to go wrong. This is a variation of an old picture-puzzle idea, original, I believe.

The idea is this: Take one letter at a time from the title of this puzzle—A MERRY CHRISTMAS—and put them into the blank spaces of the words below, in order to complete the words. For instance, by taking the letter R you would make the first word DREARY, or by taking the letter M, you would make it DREAMY. And so on, until all the letters have been used up. You will know when you have done the puzzle correctly, because all the letters will fit in.

If you can't make them fit in first go, keep changing them round until you hit on the correct order. You must not use the same letter twice, unless it occurs twice (or more) in the words above. When you have used each letter, cross it out so that you don't use it again.

For those who can't manage to get the game straight, the solution is printed elsewhere. These are the puzzle words:

- | | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. DREA..Y | 6. P..ETTY | 11. ..EARLY |
| 2. HE..DED | 7. R..NGER | 12. HÚ..OUR |
| 3. SHA..KS | 8. HU..BLE | 13. T..NDER |
| 4. B..IGHT | 9. PE..LED | 14. ..EEMED |
| 5. ..ANGLE | 10. SWITC.. | 15. RE..ENT |

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Deer Sir,

As a good many of yore reeders will be going owt to Chrissmas partees and leaving there ouses with noboddy in 'em, perraps I mite be abel to give you a tip for keaping burgerlars away. It's a mistake to farsten all the winders, becos that makes the burgerlar think at wunce that there ain't noboddy in. The best thing to do is to leeve the winders partly open and delood the retch into thinking that the peeples are all in.

Hoaping that yore reeders will take this tipp and leeve there winders open this Christmas,
Yores verry humbley and trooly,
WILLIAM SIKES.

GEOGRAPHY NOTE

The principal export of Iceland is Depressions.

TOMMY WATSON relates the

HISTORY OF A SUIT

A CERTAIN blue serge suit was made in the year 1895 for a wealthy young nobleman residing in London. He wore this suit for three months, and then gave it to his valet, who sold it to a Mr. Ebenezer Nebb for ten shillings.

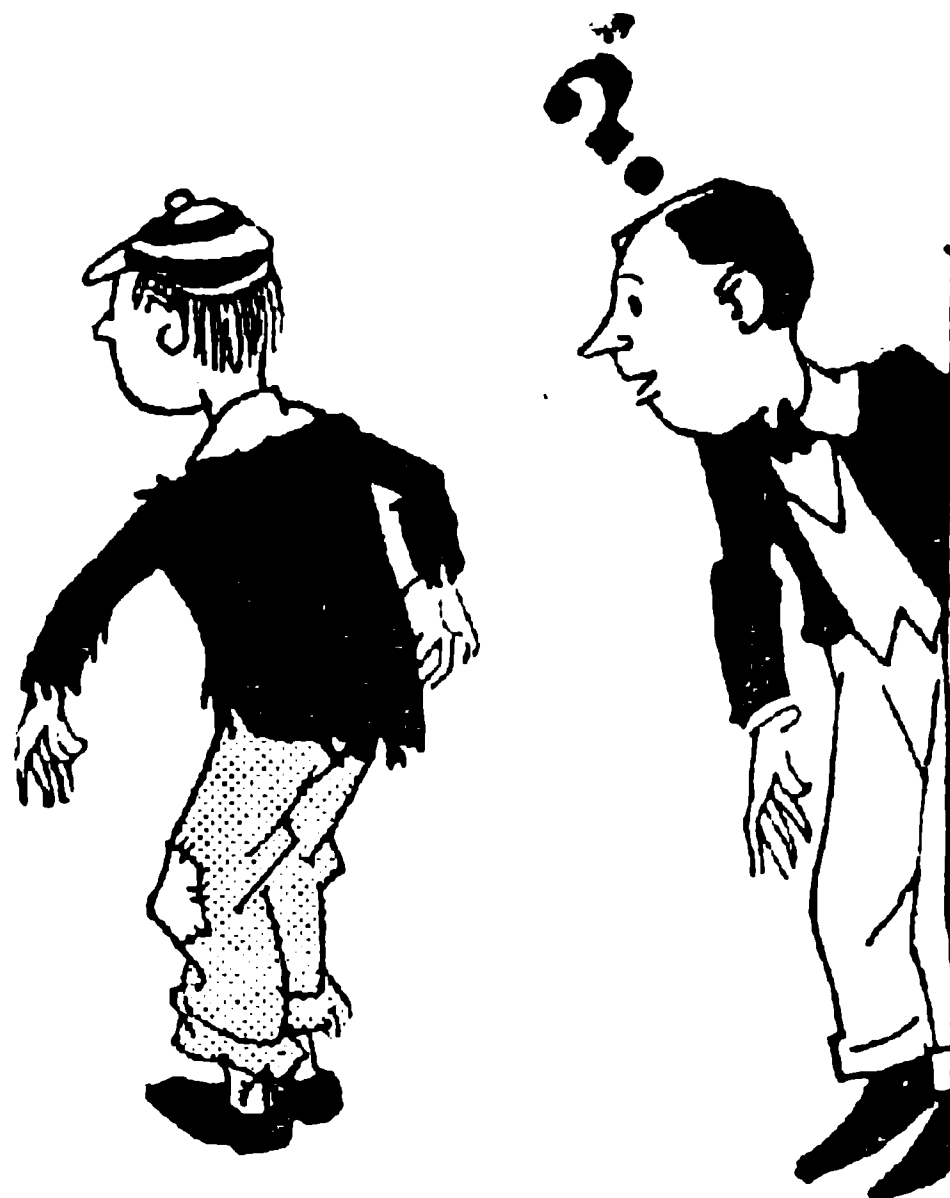
Mr. Nebb, who was a plumber by trade, wore the suit for best, until it began to become sadly frayed, when he gave it to his assistant, Joe Bates, to wear while working.

When the suit became so bespattered by red lead and solder that it was not recognisable as a suit at all, Joe Bates exchanged it with an old clothes man for a fern in a pot. This was in 1906.

The old clothes man had the suit cleaned up and put it outside his shop in Aldgate, marked "Nice Suit. Bargain 10/6d." It was purchased by a sailor named Didger, and with him it went for three voyages to the West Indies and back. On the fourth voyage, the ship was wrecked and Didger, wearing the suit, was adrift on a raft for thirty days. At the end of this time the suit looked more like a torn rag than anything else.

Arrived at Plymouth, Didger cast the suit into a dustbin, where it was found by a child named Cringle, and used to adorn a Fifth of November guy. As this guy was in process of being burnt on the public highway, the police intervened, and the guy was thrown on a rubbish heap.

A wandering tramp named Cadgit rescued the suit and wore it until the



A St. Frank's Puzzle.
Is this the Duke of Somerton—or a Scarecrow?

outbreak of the Great War, when he joined the army, and the suit was used to clean the stoves in the barracks.

Here it remained until 1920, when a thief broke in, stole some sports trophies and used the suit to wrap them up in.

The thief was arrested, the suit was produced as evidence, and afterwards was locked in a cupboard in the police station until three years ago, when, during spring-cleaning operations, it was thrown away.

A tailor's assistant living in Bannington found the suit, repaired it slightly and offered it for sale again.

It was bought by an aristocrat named the Duke of Somerton, who still wears it at St. Frank's school.

If this isn't the history of that awful old blue suit that Somerton wears, I bet it's not far out.

M E—By Reggie Pitt.

I SEE that the Editor is now giving pen pictures of the principal St. Frank's characters in his Round Table feature.

Being rather uneasy upon the subject of what he will say about me, may I beg leave to write my own pen picture? Thanks. This is it:

REGGIE PITT: Captain of the West House. A strong, able, good-looking fellow with the initiative of a born leader and the courage of a warrior. Pitt, besides being the most handsome junior at St. Frank's, is also generally admitted to be the best athlete, and he is universally looked up to by the juniors of all Houses. Superb at footer, magnificent at cricket, a flier on the cinder-track and a champion in the boxing ring, Reggie Pitt probably has no equal among the St. Frank's juniors. But it must not be thought that athletics is his only achievement. In the Form-room he is just as prominent as on the sports field, and even the masters themselves occasionally come to him for

advice on knotty points of syntax. When we add that he possesses a sterling character, a warm-hearted disposition and a sense of humour—(By George! My readers will want a sense of humour to read this rot. Judging by the above, Reggie Pitt's most striking trait is his terrific modesty. I suppose, when he gets sacked, he will describe himself as "one of the best men St. Frank's ever turned out."—E. O. H.)

A N-ICE HINT.

How To Avoid Bruises from Ice-Skating
Tie a balloon to your shoulders with rope, so that, if you slip, you will float to the ice. Also, secure with a strap several large cushions to the part of your anatomy which usually suffers from contact with the ice. Also, make sure that your skates are screwed firmly to your feet. Skating is awkward if you leave your skates. Also, get a friend (or two friends) to hold you.

After you've done all this—stay at home.
M. T. W., Remove.

VIRGIL WRI

By VIVIAN

O H, my father,
Lo, this with
thy shore
Borne on t

Railway,
Great God of Speed,
And with me, my
companions:

The circle
Hath brought to Bri
The old thrice-welco
Christmas. By Jove
We voyage home fr
eyes

Shall shortly' Zeus.

Juno wh

Methinks we shall en

And no presiding, e

Shall Castor blot on

Great Holli, Misselto

Twin gods of Christm

A great burnt offering

Burnt in the fire, c

sausages,

A gallant Turki, the

That trod sequestere

And gobbled grub.

Meanwhil

I pray thee for a s

A sacrifice to those

And clip the railway

And now farewell.

Thy pra

But save my pæan to

My pœna.

Yours res

NO LUCK F

(Letter from Albert

Aunt J

Dear Aunt,—Just c

Merry Christmas. I

and having a fine ti

times I wish I had a

to buy some good book

at a shop in the villa

like. It's all about

costs 1/- Your affec

B

(Letter from Aunt

Gulliv

Dear Albert,—I

this morning, and

wishes for a Merry C

sorry that you have

book you would like

you a parcel for

"Decline and Fall of

nine volumes. Your

J

(Letter from Albert

School

Dear Sir,—I am re

of nine volumes of

them.

TES HOME RAVERS.

good tidings to
e iron wings of

I voyage home,
Pallas, friends,

ng year
ian fields
ne spirit,
by Jupiter,
m College. Your

joy this Vac,
il, brooding fate
he festivities.
to thee
as revelry,
has been designed
and stuffed with

fairest e'er,
i paths

nall Remittance,
who print
tickets.

I sing,
I've done

pectful son,
P. V. MARO:

OR GULLY

Gulliver to his
ane.)

line to wish you a
am still at school,
me; though some-
little more money
k. There is a book
ge which I should
Ancient Rome and
tionate nephew,
A. GULLIVER.

Jane to Albert
er.)

ceived your letter
reciprocate your
Christmas. I am so
money to buy the
but I am sending
aining Gibbons'
Ancient Rome," in
affectionate aunt,
ONE GULLIVER.

Gulliver to the
arian).

nding you a parcel
ik. You can keep
A.G.

CHRISTMAS JOKES—By Harry Gresham

HERE are one or two little Christmas stories to tell after dinner on Christmas Day. Be ready to dodge, if anything is thrown at you.

A man was trying to buy a turkey; but the turkeys were all so thin and scraggy, that he soon became fed up.

"Take a couple, then," suggested the poultry man, putting another bird on the scales.

"No," said the man wearily. "I'll tell you what. Throw on another six or seven, and make it an even pound."

Some turkeys!

A fellow was walking home with a pair of skates in his hand when he met another chap, with a ditto ditto.

"Ah," said the other chap—call him Tompkins. "I wonder if you can tell me where there's some ice to skate on?"

"Yes," said Simpkins. "Straight down this lane. I've just been on it myself."

Ten minutes later they met again. This time Tompkins was wet through.

"Look here!" he bawled. "That ice was so thin that directly I stepped on it, I fell through."

"That's funny," said Simpkins. "So did I."

You meet fellows like that sometimes, don't you? He reminds me of another

fellow who went to a Christmas party. The night was a soaker—raining, and very windy—and this chap had only thin fancy shoes and a light coat with him, so the host invited him to stay the night.

"We'll make you up a bed in the spare room," said the host. "Then you need not get wet and muddy going home."

"Thanks," said the guest, and shortly afterwards he vanished. About two hours later he returned—drenched with rain and covered with mud.

"Why," said the host, "wherever have you been?"

"I've been home—to get my pyjamas," replied the poor mutt.

Christmas is the time for pantomimes. Some of them are good and some aren't. At a performance of "Dick Whittington," a lady was wearing a very large hat, and a little man seated behind her tapped her on the shoulder.

"Pardon me, madam," he said politely, "would you mind removing your hat?"

"Not at all," said the lady, doing so.

The little man watched the pantomime in silence for some time, and then once again he tapped the lady on the shoulder.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, "but would you mind putting your hat on again?"

WITH THE TROOPS

By OUR WAR CORRESPONDENT.

THE St. Frank's Cadets carried out a successful evacuation of a battalion of turkeys recently. The turkeys had to be collected from Bannington Parish Hall and delivered to the poor of the village.

Lt.-Com. Hamilton surprised the Turks in ambush about 3.30 p.m. The 1st and 3rd battalions were concealed outside the hall, and at the word of command, they surrounded the place and flung themselves on the surprised turkeys. A sharp battle resulted in the whole force of turkeys being made prisoners, and marched off, under escort, to the cottages near Bannington Green.

The turkeys were conveyed without loss to these internment camps, and were imprisoned with a number of poor people, who will guard them securely until Christmas Day, when things will be made rather hot for them.

The 2nd battalion, under command of Captain Corcoran, had

meanwhile assailed an army of Christmas puddings, which were entrenched in a strong position at the rear of the Bellton Stores. A sharp encounter broke down the opposition of the puddings, and they were penned in the China Basin. They surrendered meekly to the St. Frank's troops, and were placed in an armoured trek-cart, and conveyed to the internment camp on Bannington Green, with the turkeys.

Corporal Dodd has been awarded the Order of the Boot for dropping a pudding, and Sergeant Waldo is mentioned in despatches for carrying thirty turkeys on his shoulders. Private Yung Ching is also to be highly recommended for balancing seven puddings on his nose.

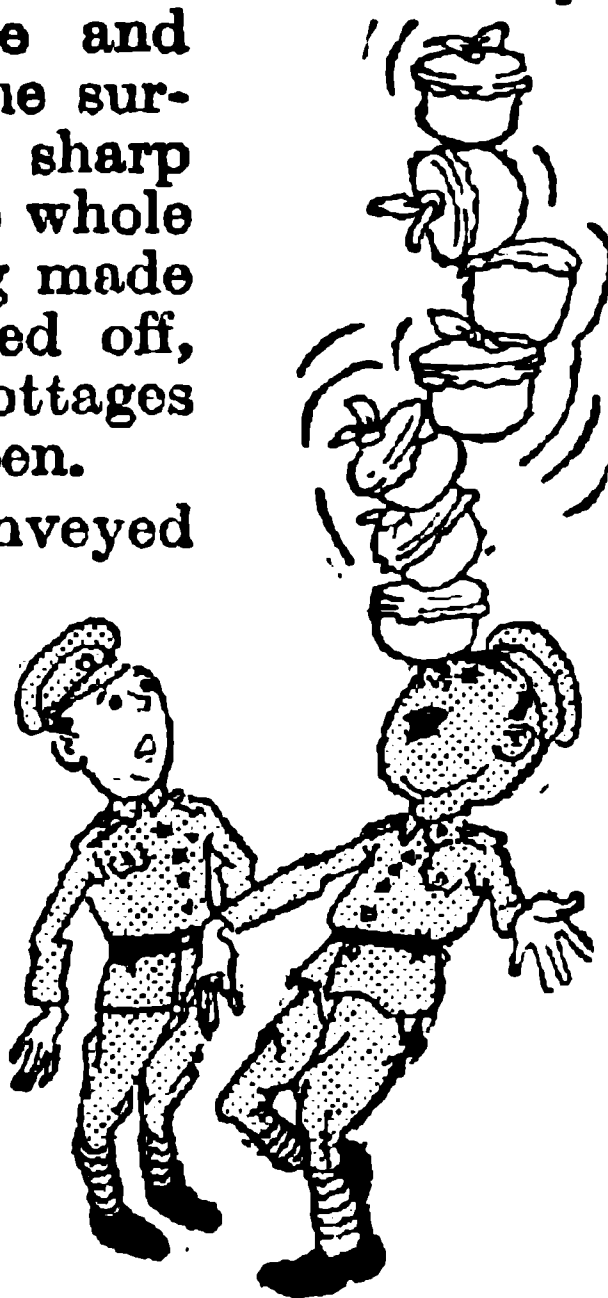
SOLUTION TO PUZZLE.

DREARY, HEADED, SHACKS, BRIGHT, TANGLE, PRETTY, RANGER, HUMBLE, PEELED, SWITCH, YEARLY, HUMOUR, TINDER, SEEMED, RESENT.

NEXT WEEK.

Your Christmas won't be complete without a copy of my celebrated WEEKLY. All the fun of the Panto in my special PANTOMIME NUMBER next week.

Buy Yours, By George
NEXT WEDNESDAY.



THE WELL OF DOOM!

(Continued from page 20.)

"It's no good!" grunted Nipper, breathing hard. "The beggar has escaped!"

"Did—did you see anything?" gasped Waldo.

"I saw a kind of ghost," replied Nipper cautiously. "Did you see anything?"

"Yes—over in that dark corner—just before we leapt."

"That was it," said Nipper. "But the blighter took advantage of our fall, and he got to the door first—before we could switch on the light. He's gone now. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack, going through all these corridors and passages."

A door opened somewhere, and figures appeared. They turned out to be Handforth & Co., all of them jumpy and excited.

"What's happening out here?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "We thought we heard a terrific thud—"

"So you did," growled Nipper. "Waldo and I fell over in our bed-room."

And they quickly explained what had happened. Handforth and Church and McClure listened uneasily.

"It was a trick, of course," said Nipper, at length. "Goodness only knows who played it, but the trickster made a mistake. He came to our bed-room, Handy, instead of yours. No real ghost would have blundered like that."

"By George, you're right," agreed Handforth. "Well, thank goodness Jimmy didn't see anything! He's sleeping peacefully—"

"By the way," interrupted Nipper suddenly. "Who's with Jimmy now?"

"Eh? With him?" stammered Handforth. "Why, he was asleep when we came out."

"You didn't leave him alone?" shouted Nipper.

"We didn't think there was any danger —" began Handforth.

Nipper did not wait. He was dashing to a door some yards down the corridor. He ran in, switched on the lights, and then checked.

All the beds were empty! Jimmy Potts had gone!

CHAPTER 10.

The Man in Black!

LESS than twenty seconds after Handforth & Co. had run out of their bed-room, to join the other fellows down the corridor, the Man in Black acted.

He had been lurking in a deeply-recessed doorway, and the absolute blackness of his costume rendered him invisible in the gloom. From head to foot he was dressed in black—tight, close-fitting garments which made no sound as he moved; even his hands and his face were covered; the soles of his black shoes were of felt.

When he moved out of the recessed doorway he was actually in full sight of the boys; he could see them vaguely in the darkness, he could hear what they were saying. He himself was invisible. Like a shadow of the night he slipped into the bed-room where Jimmy Potts slept. He knew that the boys might be back at any second, and that he would have to work fast.

He bent across the bed, and a little hiss sounded as he pressed the bulb of a curious little object in his hand. A fine spray of vapour was projected into the sleeping boy's face. The Man in Black held his own head back, but even so he caught a whiff of that vapour, and his head momentarily swam.

Seizing the quilt, he dragged Jimmy out of bed, wrapped the quilt round him, and the next moment he was at the door. The boys were still talking; they were standing in the flood of light which came out from the open bed-room door, farther down the passage. There was an alarmed note in Nipper's voice; he was asking urgently about Jimmy. There was not a second to be lost.

The Man in Black padded down the corridor in silence; he whisked round a bend, and it was only the work of a moment for him to open a narrow panel—where no door seemed to exist. Quickly he bundled Jimmy Potts through, and then followed. He closed the panel with a soft click.

He could vaguely hear urgent shouts, but he only smiled with vicious triumph. He touched a tiny switch in his costume, and an electric lamp, fitted into the forehead section of his black headdress, flashed on. The beam of light was small, but quite sufficient for the unknown's purpose.

It revealed a dusty, dank-smelling secret passage.

"And now, sleeping youth, you go to join your ancestors!" whispered the Man in Black, in a sibilant Chinese dialect.

He lifted the unconscious Jimmy again, and now his movements were leisurely. The passage was narrow, and it was necessary that he should go with caution.

Presently, he came to some steep steps. They led downwards into mysterious blackness. Even that light from the unknown's lamp failed to penetrate the

intense gloom for any great distance. But he knew the route, and he went downwards with confident steps.

He reached another level passage which turned off at right angles. Along this, and then down some more steps—stone steps this time, cold and slimy. The air was becoming foul, and there was an odour, earthy and unpleasant.

There could be no doubt that the Man in Black was carrying his victim down to the long-forgotten dungeons of Somerton Abbey.

Another passage—this time an earthy tunnel with a domed roof and slimy stone walls. In places it was so low that the unknown was compelled to crouch. Jimmy Potts still remained unconscious, suffering from the effects of that vapour which had been sprayed into his face.

More steps, leading downwards, and then finally captor and captive were in a low stone chamber, where the air struck chill. There was a black opening on the far side, indicating another passage. But the Man in Black did not take this passage. He laid down his burden.

Almost in the centre of the floor of this chamber was a yawning aperture. Close by lay a great square stone slab, with a rusty ring attached to it in the centre. It was clear that the slab had been removed from this opening—in preparation for the reception of Sir Jimmy Potts!

"The Abbot's Well," murmured the Man in Black—this time in English.

Those who had read the history of Somerton Abbey could scarcely repress a shudder when they remembered the hideous stories of the Abbot's Well. In the bad old days, centuries earlier, many a man had vanished for all time, and far below, beneath the slimy waters at the bottom of the well, perhaps there were bones to be found. Even history did not record the full story of this terrible well.

The Man in Black crouched at the edge of the square hole. The beam of light from the torch on his forehead flashed downwards.

Far, far below the light was reflected dully in the scummy surface of the water. The well itself was square in section, and very much larger than it appeared to be from the stone slab at the top. It was like a great square shaft leading down into the bowels of the earth, the stone sides covered with foul-looking slime, greenish and hideous in the electric light. Down one side there were wet, rusty, crumbling iron supports.

A low chuckle escaped the unknown. He seemed to be pleased with what he saw. And now he lost no time.

Turning back to his victim, he lifted him bodily and forced him over the edge of the well. Jimmy was just beginning to show some signs of returning consciousness; but he was still so dazed that he did not know where he was, and he offered no resistance.

For one dreadful second he hung there. The Man in Black seemed to hesitate, perhaps horrified by the awful deed he was about to do. Then he suddenly muttered under his breath, and at the same second he released his grip.

Jimmy Potts fell. Down he went—down—down! The Man in Black watched in fascinated horror. It seemed an eternity before the boy's falling body reached that scummy water.

Splash!

It came at last—the dull splash. With a hoarse cry the Man in Black staggered away from the gaping well. With one strenuous movement he dragged the stone slab across, and it thudded down into position.

CHAPTER 11.

The Unknown Rescuer!

"GONE!" said Nipper hoarsely.

"But how?" gasped Handforth.

"How? If anybody had come in here we should have seen or heard

"Somebody has been here," interrupted Nipper, his voice suddenly grim.

He bent over the bed, his action impelled by the hope that he might find some sort of clue. Then he put his head closer to the pillow and sniffed.

"What are you doing?" asked Watson, staring.

"There's a peculiar smell—like chemicals," muttered Nipper. "Great Scott! I believe Jimmy was drugged before he was taken away!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ghosts don't use drugs," went on Nipper, as he felt the pillow and the bed itself. "Feel here, you chaps. It's warm. Jimmy can't have been gone for more than a minute!"

"But—but what are we going to do?" asked Handforth, in anguish. "Oh, it's all my fault! I never realised—I mean, it didn't occur to me that—"

"I'm not blaming you, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "Quick, you other chaps! Sound the alarm! We've got to arouse the entire household; we're wasting precious moments."

Some of the other fellows were already running up and down the corridor, shouting.

Doors were opening, people were appearing. Servants, Lord Norbery himself, many of the girls, hastily pulling kimonos or wraps over their pyjamas. Everybody was asking questions.

"Did that spook make a mistake, or was it a deliberate trick?" muttered Nipper. "We thought he had come to our bed-room in error, but it may have been deliberate, so that Handforth and his chums would be lured away. Anyhow, in spite of all our precautions, Jimmy has gone!"

"It's horrible!" said Travers, who was unusually grave. "How could it have been done? And by whom? We're snowed up here—none of the mandarin's agents could have got into the Abbey."

"Not since the snowstorm," agreed Nipper. "But how do we know that they weren't here already? They tried to kill Jimmy even before we arrived at the Abbey, which proves that they were active and on the alert."

"But where are they now?" asked Handforth, in bewilderment. "We didn't see a soul—we didn't hear a sound! How could Jimmy have been taken? The windows are still locked, and we weren't ten yards away from the open doorway!"

FAR, far below, in the black dungeons, Jimmy Potts was plunging down to what seemed certain death.

He did not remember his fall. His wits only returned to him after he had taken the cold plunge. The shock of it brought him to his senses with a jar. He remembered falling asleep in that comfortable, well-lighted bed-room, with Handforth & Co. near at hand. Now he had awakened, and he was fighting for his life in icy-cold water, and in some horrible way his limbs refused to function.

As he came to the surface after his first plunge, he saw for an instant a winking point of light far above. He thought he heard a hoarse cry, but he could not be certain. There came to his ears the unmistakable sound of a heavy thud, and then complete and absolute darkness enveloped him.

The water was deep—so deep that when he had taken his plunge he had not felt bottom. He was struggling helplessly on the surface now, and that numbness in his limbs was not imaginary. The effect of the drug had cleared from his brain, but his limbs were semi-paralysed. Full well the Man in Black had known that there would be this effect, and it was for this reason that he had not troubled to bind his victim.

"Help!" panted Jimmy, his jaw scarcely moving, the word itself only half-articulated.

His voice echoed mockingly back to him from the slimy walls. What help could come to him here at the bottom of this long-forgotten well? And then the miracle happened.

"Steady, lad!" came the quiet voice out of the absolute blackness. "I dared not speak before, for your enemy might have heard, and then we should both have been doomed."

Jimmy thought that he was going mad. A voice down here! He knew that he was at the bottom of a well, that he was fighting a losing battle in icy water which chilled him to the very marrow. He had read of people suffering from strange hallucinations just before death—

Click!

A beam of light shot across the well, and at the same instant a hand reached out and caught Jimmy Potts by the shoulder just as he was sinking. Strong fingers held him, drew him towards one of the slimy walls. The light, after the pitchy blackness, was dazzling.

"I would have spared you this ordeal, lad, but I was a shade too late," whispered the unknown rescuer. "My only chance of helping you was to get here first—to be at the bottom of the well, ready. I did not wish to act until I knew for certain that your enemy really intended murder. Now I know."

"Who are you?" gasped Jimmy.

There was no answer. The man was dragging Jimmy out of the water—dragging him into a quaint little cubby-hole in the side of the well, which was only two or three inches above the level of the water.

From the top of the well that cubby-hole was invisible. Indeed, it was invisible until one descended to the very water-line. It was a long, narrow opening in the very earth, four or five feet deep, and no more than three feet high.

Jimmy saw all this by the light of the electric torch, which was propped in a crevice of the damp stonework. He also saw his rescuer. A queer-looking man, a stranger, dressed in sombre black, although it was not a close-fitting garb like that worn by Jimmy's would-be murderer. His hair was grey and untidy, his face was half-concealed by a ragged beard.

"I—I thought it was all up with me," muttered Jimmy, with difficulty.

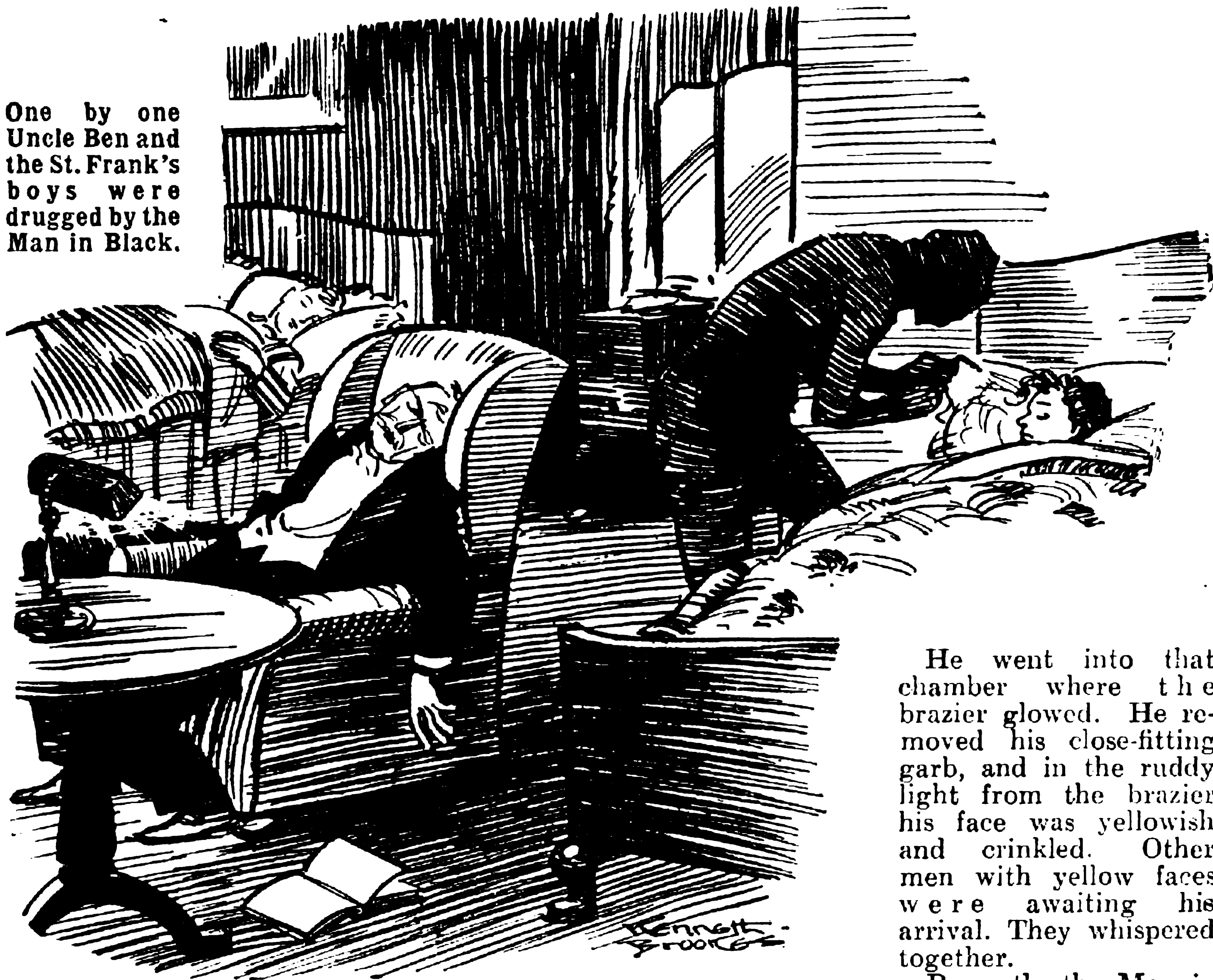
"Don't talk, my boy," whispered the other. "Your nerves and muscles are numbed, eh? I thought so! The devils—the fiends! You'll be all right, Jimmy Potts. The shock was not so great—you were half-unconscious when you fell, and you knew that you were safe before the full horror of your position dawned upon you."

"Yes, that's true," muttered Jimmy, with chattering teeth. "There wasn't time for me to be scared."

"Then I am satisfied," said the other quietly. "If you had known what was happening to you, the shock would have been appalling, and I should never have forgiven myself for delaying action. As it is, everything is all right."

As he was speaking he worked deftly. In spite of the cramped space, he had Jimmy out of his wet pyjamas in next to no time. From the back of the deep recess he took a thick, warm blanket, which he wrapped round Jimmy. The rescuer himself was not wet—he had not been in the water at all.

One by one
Uncle Ben and
the St. Frank's
boys were
drugged by the
Man in Black.



He went into that chamber where the brazier glowed. He removed his close-fitting garb, and in the ruddy light from the brazier his face was yellowish and crinkled. Other men with yellow faces were awaiting his arrival. They whispered together.

"That's better, young 'un," he said kindly. "Comfy, eh?"

"I am warm now—thanks!" whispered Jimmy, more and more amazed. "But I don't understand. Who are you? How did you get down here? How did you know? It's—it's all so bewildering."

"Quite a number of questions," murmured the other dryly. "Don't bother your head, lad. Just relax—and leave everything to me."

And Jimmy Potts, although he knew that all this was really happening, had an absurd feeling that he was in the middle of a fantastic dream.

CHAPTER 12.

Spirited Away!

THE Man in Black, after his dread deed, took that other passage out of the underground dungeon. He went through dank, moist tunnels, and finally mounted some worn, slippery steps which led him up into the old Guard Tower.

That ancient ruin was not so isolated, after all! It was cut off from the Abbey by the impenetrable drifts of snow, but there was this hidden means of entry.

The Man in Black was shaken by what he had done, but he was also jubilant.

steps, and peered out through a slit-like window of the tower. The night was calm, the moon shining with a tranquil brilliance. Snow, snow everywhere. And not far away the great bulk of Somerton Abbey, with almost every window blazing with lights. Somerton Abbey was awake from basement to roof.

"Let them search," whispered the Man in Black, in Chinese. "Already the boy whose blood is of the blood of the gold man sleeps on the Terraces of the Night!"

But he was wrong. For Jimmy Potts was cosily and warmly wrapped in a blanket, and watching over him was a man of iron purpose.

In the Abbey the hunt was barren. Host, guests, and servants joined in that search, but their efforts were of no avail. Sir Jimmy Potts, the schoolboy baronet, had vanished as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up—which was very near to the actual truth!

And while the search continued, Jimmy's mysterious rescuer quietly and placidly prepared to complete his great task. He did not wait long before he recommenced his activities.

"All you've got to do, my boy, is to trust in me," he whispered. "Ask no questions. Everything will come all right—and soon."

"It's all so rummy," muttered Jimmy. "I can't help thinking that I'm dreaming."

"Continue to dream," said the other. "It is better that you should regard it as a dream."

He was now tying the blanket securely round the boy, until Jimmy was trussed up like an Esquimo baby. Finally, he placed two powerful straps round Jimmy in the form of a cradle. Attached to these straps was a long, thin but strong cord, the other end of which he proceeded to fasten round his own body.

"I am going now," whispered the Unknown. "But do not be alarmed."

"Going!" echoed Jimmy, startled. "You don't mean that you're going to leave me!"

"Have no fear," murmured the other. "I must get you out of this foul and dank hole, and there is only one way in which that can be accomplished. Trust me, lad. You will not be alone for long."

"Oh, I see—I understand," whispered Jimmy. "The ropes—the straps—the cord! You're going to haul me up, eh? By Jingo, I shall never be able to thank you enough for —"

"Save your breath, young 'un," broke in the other kindly.

He wormed his way out of the crevice in the well, and very gingerly he gripped the first of these rusty iron supports. With infinite care he mounted. He knew full well that those supports were treacherous. They had sustained his weight during his descent, but he had felt more than one ugly quiver. Now, as he mounted, he did so with infinite care.

Half-way up he felt one of the crumbling iron supports sag beneath his weight. It was a tense second, for if the support he gripped with his hand should prove insecure, then nothing could save him from hurtling down.

He gripped hard, and the rusty iron, although flaking in his fingers, held securely. There came a crack from below, and the foot-rest crumbled away, splashing into the water beneath. In that second the climber hung by one hand. He pulled himself up, found the next foot-rest, and after that the supports sustained him well.

He reached the top.

Just above him, within easy reach, was the square flagstone. And now came a ticklish task. The Unknown had taken careful stock before descending and he found foothold amid the damp stones of two angles of the walls. He heaved his back against that stone slab and exerted his strength. Any slip here would mean an inevitable plunge to the bottom of the well.

At first nothing happened; the slab remained immovable. For an instant the Unknown feared that the Man in Black had jammed the flagstone in some way, or perhaps he had placed a heavy object on the top of it. Then, indeed, the situation would have been critical!

Shifting his position slightly, and getting a better leverage, the Unknown heaved again. This time the square flag shifted; it moved upwards. At last, by a Herculean

effort, the rescuer succeeded in lifting the slab completely out of its setting. It swerved, struck the flooring above, and slewed round. The Unknown gripped the stone edge of the hole, and then hoisted himself up. By now he was streaming with perspiration, and he breathed a prayer of thankfulness.

"By James!" he murmured. "For a moment I thought we were both trapped."

He flashed his light round cautiously. He listened. But no sound came to his ears. The Man in Black had gone, fondly imagining that his dread work had been successfully accomplished.

The next task for the man with the grey hair and the untidy beard was simple. Pushing the square flagstone well aside, he heaved on the cord. He braced himself as Jimmy, far below, was pulled clear of the crevice. Then, hand over hand, the schoolboy was pulled up to safety. No old man could have manipulated that cord as the Unknown did. His strength was remarkable; he performed the feat with apparent ease. At last Jimmy was clear of the well, and he, too, breathed a prayer of thankfulness.

"I don't know how you did it," he said wonderingly. "Oh, why can't you tell me who you are? What is all this mystery?"

"Wait," said the other briefly.

Very carefully he replaced the slab. Then he lifted Jimmy Potts in his arms and he made his way up the steps, along passages, round corners, up further steps, down more passages, until the dampness and the slime had been left behind. Up here everything was dry, and Jimmy judged that they were now on one of the upper floors of the Abbey. Once or twice he fancied that he heard familiar voices, but he could not be quite sure, owing to the deadening effect of the blanket which half-enveloped his head.

Then came another surprise. There was a sudden click, and a panel opened. Jimmy found himself carried into a cosy little room, where a fire was blazing comfortingly. There were lights here, too—cheerful, welcome lights. And a comfortable-looking bed. Jimmy found himself placed upon that bed, with warm blankets tucked round him, and his head sinking into a deep, downy pillow.

"Sleep!" whispered the Unknown gently. "Sleep well, Jimmy—you have nothing to fear. I will watch over you until morning."

"But, please—"

"You have nothing whatever to fear—there will be no interruptions," said the Unknown kindly. "Trust me, young 'un. I have watched over you, and I will continue to watch over you. No harm will come to you."

"And—and Uncle Ben?" whispered Jimmy dreamily. "Is Uncle Ben safe, too?"

"Have no fear for Uncle Ben—he is perfectly safe," said the other. "Now—sleep! And in the morning you must remember nothing. You can have had a dream—yes, but otherwise you will remember nothing. Sleep, young 'un!"

And Jimmy Potts, with a luxurious sense of comfort and security, slept. His terrify-

ing experience—thanks to the Unknown—had left no mark. He was feeling safer than he had felt for many a long day.

His rescuer, carefully filling a pipe and lighting it, sat by the fire, watchful and alert.

CHAPTER 13.

The Unexpected Arrival!

"A N appalling affair," said Lord Norbery, his ruddy face unusually grave. "The unfortunate boy is certainly no longer in the Abbey. We have searched every wing, every floor, every room. He has simply vanished."

"But—but it's unbelievable, sir," protested Handforth. "He must be *somewhere* within the Abbey."

"My dear boy——"

"There's no method of getting away, sir," went on Handforth. "We're snowed up, aren't we? That means that Jimmy couldn't have been taken away by any of his enemies. And if he's here, where is he?"

"That sounds too much like a riddle, dear old fellow," said Travers wearily.

"The whole infernal business is a riddle," growled his lordship. "Didn't some of you boys say you saw a ghost or something? I haven't been able to get the hang of that yarn yet."

"The more I think of it, sir, the more I'm convinced that the enemy knew that Jimmy had been transferred at the last moment into Handforth's room," said Nipper. "That ghost dodge was worked so that there would be a diversion, during which the trickster escaped. Handforth and the other fellows were bamboozled into leaving their bedroom."

"Oh, I say——" began Handforth.

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" growled Church. "What's the good of getting indignant, Handy? We were trusted to look after Jimmy Potts—and we left him alone."

"Yes, by George, you're right!" admitted Handforth miserably. "We're to blame."

"Well, boys, it's no good crying over spilt milk," said Lord Norbery philosophically. "We've done the best we can, and I should advise you youngsters to get back to bed and have some sleep. Meanwhile, we'll carry on with the search."

It was in the small hours of the morning, and everybody was tired and despondent. Jimmy's disappearance had cast an ugly gloom over the house-party.

Most of the fellows managed to get some fitful sleep before breakfast, and when they came down there was no fresh news. The girls were just as concerned as the boys; they had helped valiantly in the search for the missing Jimmy.

The difficulties were exaggerated by the fact that Somerton Abbey was still helplessly snowbound. At the first streak of daylight Lord Norbery had put every available man to work. They were doing their utmost to clear the drive, to force a way—if only a narrow way—through to the main road.

"It'll take them days," said Nipper, as he watched the operation. "Two days, at least. We can't hope to be in communication with the outside world until to-morrow night."

"Unless there's a thaw," said Watson. "That might help matters a bit."

"It would have to be a rapid thaw," said Nipper gruffly. "Did you ever feel so helpless, Tommy? We can't even communicate with the police to give information about Jimmy's disappearance. We're just bottled up."

Breakfast was an unhappy meal. All the conversation, of course, turned upon Jimmy Potts' extraordinary case; but nobody could offer a logical explanation.

"Dash it, I've never been so baffled. Of all the rummy mysteries, this is the rummiest," commented Handforth for the fiftieth time. "We were out of that bed-room for about two minutes, and it was during that time that Jimmy vanished. How? He didn't make a sound! We didn't hear a thing! We didn't see anybody, either. It's—it's uncanny!"

"Don't you think there might be a secret panel or something in your bed-room, Ted?" asked Irene, who was sitting next to him.

"We've tried, old girl," replied Handforth wearily. "We've tapped all the walls, but there's nothing except solid stonework."

"The fireplace might——"

"There's hardly room in the chimney for a cat to squeeze up," interrupted Handforth. "We looked there. And the windows were not only fastened, but there was a foot of snow on the sills undisturbed. Jimmy could only have been taken out through the doorway."

"But you boys were all in full sight of the doorway, weren't you?" asked the girl.

"Yes; and that's what makes it so mysterious," replied Handforth. "Poor old Jimmy must have been bagged right in front of our eyes—within earshot of us. And we knew nothing!"

After breakfast Nipper made a suggestion.

"We'll have another good look through the Abbey," he said briskly. "We'll do it thoroughly—systematically. We'll form into parties, and each party will take a certain section."

"Perhaps we shall find something in the North Wing," suggested Handforth eagerly. "It's the one wing which isn't occupied——"

"Listen!" interrupted Nipper, with a sudden alert look on his face.

"Eh? What the dickens——"

"Isn't that the sound of an aeroplane engine?" asked Nipper sharply.

"What!"

Everybody was excited. They listened intently. And, sure enough, they could hear the low, familiar droning of an aero-engine. There was an immediate rush outside. The snow had been cleared away from the main steps, and the open space in front of the Abbey was more or less clear, too. In the distance scores of men were at work with shovels. At least, they had been at work

until a minute ago. Now they were staring up into the sky, and some were pointing excitedly.

"Look!" yelled Handforth.

The aeroplane was fairly low down, and as the boys and girls looked, it was banking round, encircling the Abbey. It was one of the latest type saloon-enclosed passenger models. Lord Norbery had come out now with several other gentlemen, and Somerton's mother stood in the great doorway.

"I'll bet that 'plane was sent by Uncle Ben!" said Handforth excitedly. "The pilot's going to drop a message or something. Perhaps he's going to ask us to make a signal—something to tell him whether Jimmy is safe or not. Oh, my hat!"

It seemed probable that Handforth's theory was correct. With the telephones broken down, this was about the only possible way in which Uncle Ben could obtain news of his nephew.

All those watchers were expecting to see a little parachute drop as the 'plane circled again—a miniature parachute carrying a letter. But something else happened—something startling.

As the pilot came round this time he set his machine into a graceful glide, and he throttled the engine right down. He had evidently taken his bearings, and he seemed to be making for the level snow just near the spot where all the workmen were busy clearing the drive.

"Great Scott! He's going to land!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"He'll crash!"

It was a tense, exciting moment. Quite obviously the pilot intended bringing the aeroplane down—and any ordinary kind of landing was out of the question in that thick snow.

Down came the machine; all the watchers held their breath. The 'plane was only a foot or two above the snow now, and still dropping. The landing-wheels struck the snow, and the machine "pancaked" perfectly. It was a tribute to the pilot's skill that hardly any damage had been done to the machine. She lay there, her landing-gear completely buried in the snow, one blade of the propeller half-hidden, too.

"By Jove, that was well done!" said Nipper breathlessly.

"Look!" went up a shout.

For the door of the saloon had opened, and there, framed in the opening, was the bluff, burly figure of Mr. Benjamin Potts.

CHAPTER 14.

A Shock for Nipper!

"UNCLE BEN himself!"

"He must have flown down from London!"

"Begad!"

The onlookers did not know whether to be pleased or sorry. Uncle Ben's arrival was, perhaps, unfortunate, considering the nature



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets and penknives are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

REDUCING.

"How is your father getting on with his reducing exercises?"

"Oh, fine! The battleship he had tattooed on his chest is only a rowing-boat now."

(J. Seago, 80, Alma Street, Marine Town, Sheerness, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

WHAT HE WANTED.

Bald-headed Manager (to office boy, who is reading): "Would that book interest me?"

Office Boy: "Yes, sir; it's all about hair-raising stories."

(H. Knights, 9, Molyneux Street, London, W.1, has been awarded a penknife.)

IN AND OUT.

Mistress: "Why have you only cleaned the inside of the windows, Mabel?"

Mabel: "So that you could see out, madam."

Mistress: "But why not the outside?"

Mabel: "So that people outside cannot look in, ma'am."

(T. White, 72, The Drive, Tonbridge, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

NOT A WINNER.

The boxer had just entered the ring. When he saw the size and weight of his opponent he had immediate "wind-up."

"It's all right, Bill," said his second comfortingly. "Just say to yourself, 'I'm going to beat him,' and you will win."

"That's no good, mate," replied Bill; "I know what a liar I am."

(J. Kindred, 46, Landscape Road, Mt. Eden, New Zealand, has been awarded a useful prize.)

AN AIRY STORY.

It was his first flight in an aeroplane. When they reached about 10,000 feet he leaned over and tapped the pilot on the shoulder.

"I say, old chap," he shouted, pointing to the propeller, "don't you think it's cold enough without the fan?"

of the news which would have to be given to him.

Yet it was easy enough to understand why he had come. Finding the telephone out of action, and being worried, he had chartered an aeroplane. He had even induced the pilot to land in the snow, for this was the only possible way in which he could reach Somerton Abbey.

The pilot had judged his distance to a nicety, and the machine had "pancaked" not ten yards from a spot where the drive was cleared. Men rushed forward with their shovels, and a pathway through the snow was quickly hacked. Uncle Ben could not wait until it was completely cleared; he plunged in, and floundered through the snow. The pilot followed more leisurely.

"Hallo, Mr. Potts!" shouted the boys, rushing round.

"Jolly glad you've come, sir!"

"There's bad news for you, Mr. Potts."

"Absolutely!"

"By golly! It's good to be back amongst you young people!" chuckled Uncle Ben, who apparently had not heard some of the shouts. "Where's Jimmy? Where's that young nephew of mine?" He looked round. "Here's a fine thing! I can't see him anywhere."

There was a silence. The millionaire from China was a big, genial, happy-looking man—very much of a rough diamond, but extremely popular. He scented that some-

thing was wrong now, for his expression suddenly become anxious.

"Hey, what's this?" he asked abruptly.

"Has something happened to Jimmy?"

"He's gone, sir!" Handforth blurted out.

"Gone! Gone where?"

"Well, you see, Mr. Potts—"

"How could he be gone?" interrupted Uncle Ben. "What about the big storm? I couldn't get in touch with you by 'phone, and I was told that it was quite impossible to get anywhere near the Abbey. That's why I came by 'plane—and I had a fine old job inducing the pilot to bring me here. How do ye mean—Jimmy's gone? He can't be gone."

Lord Norbery had arrived by now, and he quickly introduced himself.

"I am very sorry to tell you, Mr. Potts, that your nephew vanished during the night," he said with quiet bluntness. "We don't know how it happened. It is an absolute mystery. But the unfortunate boy has disappeared."

A grey, bleak look came into Mr. Benjamin Potts' face.

"Jimmy—gone!" he said hoarsely. "By my ancestors! It is that accursed Fu-Li-Sing! I never dreamed that the boy would be in any danger here. But how?" he added, suddenly becoming frantic. "You must know how it happened?"

They took him indoors, and in the great lounge hall, where the log-fire blazed cheer-

(A. Bruton, 49, Brookwood Road, Southfields, London, has been awarded a penknife.)

SOMETHING BIG.

Circus Proprietor: "Wake up there, my lad. Idling about again, I see."

Ambitious Boy: "No, I'm not, sir; I'm studying. I want to do something big in the world."

Circus Proprietor: "Well, you can do that here. Go and wash down the elephants."

(T. Allsopp, 25, Baton Road, Canning Town, London, E.16, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

WHEN A FOOT'S NOT A FOOT.

Museum Attendant (pointing to statue): "Yes, this hand is eleven and three-quarter inches across."

Visitor: "I wonder why they didn't make it a round twelve?"

Museum Attendant: "Why, because then it would have been a foot."

(A. Burridge, 14, Palm Court Flats, London Road, Cape Town, S. Africa, has been awarded a useful prize.)

JUST A LICK.

The boy had gazed longingly at a big sugar walking-stick in

the shop window. At last he plucked up courage and went inside.

"How much for that sugar walking-stick?" he asked.

"One shilling," replied the shopkeeper.

Disappointment flitted across the boy's face.

"Then how long will you let me lick it for a ha'penny?" he inquired hopefully.

(B. Crane, West Lodge, Hothfield, near Ashford, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TALL AND SHORT.

Office Boy: "A man called just now and asked to see you."

Boss: "What was he like—tall or short?"

Office Boy: "Both, sir. He was tall, and wanted to borrow ten shillings."

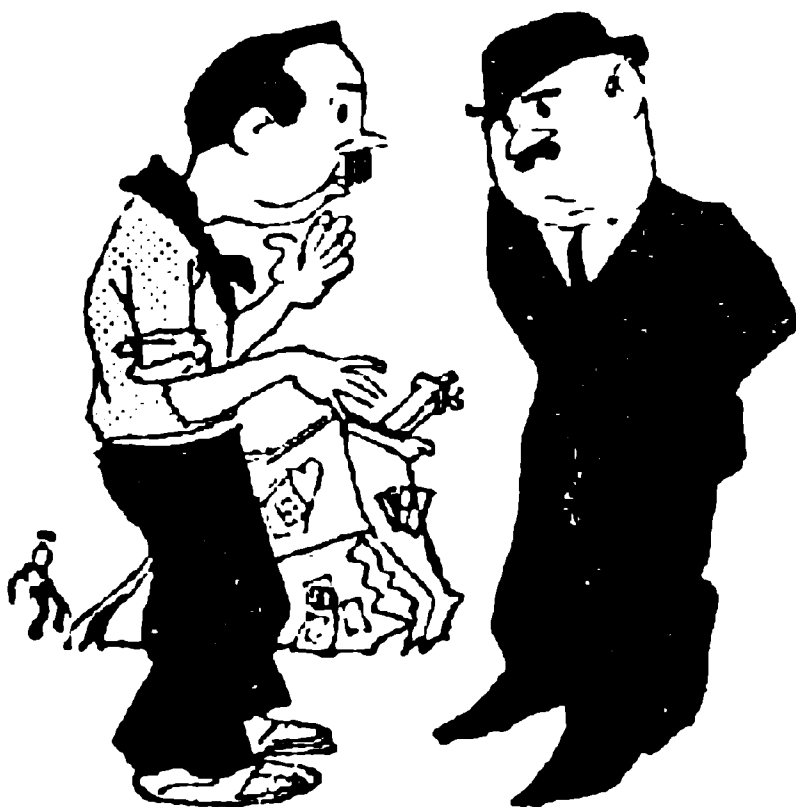
(R. Hatto, 51, Alton Avenue, Lenton Abbey, Nottingham, has been awarded a penknife.)

SUPPORT NEEDED.

Labourer: "As soon as we took the scaffolding away, the house fell down."

Foreman: "Haven't I told you before to put the wallpaper up before you take away the scaffolding?"

(D. Redding, 25, Balfour Road, Edmonton, London, N.9, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)



fully, Uncle Ben was put in possession of the facts. He listened like a man in a daze, his normal jollity conspicuous by its absence.

"Poor Jimmy—poor Jimmy!" he muttered brokenly. "Ay, this is shocking news ye tell me. The fiends! They know that I'm a wily old bird—I'm not so easy to catch. But Jimmy is a boy, and he is of my blood." He broke off, half-choking, and there was a terrible light in his eyes. "I swear that the law shall be avenged!" he said tensely.

"My dear sir, you speak as though your nephew will never come back," said Lord Norbery quietly. "He has disappeared, but there is no evidence that he has met with foul play. That is just our difficulty. There is no evidence of any kind."

"Those curs are not in the habit of leaving evidence," said Mr. Potts bitterly. "I am under no delusions, sir. They've got poor Jimmy—and they've finished the lad."

"Finished him?" echoed Travers, aghast. "You—you mean that they've killed him, sir? You don't think that?"

"No, I don't think it," said Uncle Ben tragically. "I know it."

"Oh!"

It was a general exclamation of consternation. Jimmy had been very popular.

"This is dreadful," said the duchess in distress. "My dear Mr. Potts, I cannot believe that such a tragedy could have happened at Somerton Abbey. At the very worst we believed that the boy had been kidnapped. But when you say that he has been killed—"

"My enemies do not waste time—neither do they take unnecessary risks," said Mr. Potts, with a sigh. "I know them too well, lady. In China, before I got away, there were no less than four attempts. But I needn't go into that now. If those yellow devils got hold of the boy—and that seems certain—there is no sense in our hoping. He was of my blood, and that was his only offence."

A startling thought came to Handforth.

"Hadn't you better get away as quickly as you can, sir?" he asked breathlessly. "I mean, you've come right into the hornets' nest!"

Uncle Ben snorted.

"I'm not afraid of the hornets!" he said fiercely. "They may have got their sting into poor Jimmy, but my hide is like leather. Run away, say ye? Not me, lad!"

"I—I didn't mean run away, sir——" began Handforth.

"I'm staying—with my lady's permission," went on Uncle Ben, glancing at Sommy's mother. "The poor lad is here somewhere, and he must be found. That's more important than anything else. Unless he is found, we shall have no evidence."

And nothing would shift him from his purpose. The duchess was fearful lest there should be a second tragedy at Somerton Abbey, but she hadn't the heart to tell Mr. Potts to go. Indeed, in broad daylight, with the bright winter sunshine flooding the Abbey, it was fantastic to suppose that there

could be any real danger. All this talk of Chinese enemies sounded absurd. Yet nothing could alter the fact that dread things had happened during the night.

Quick preparations were made. There was to be another widespread search—and Uncle Ben was determined to be in the forefront.

There was talk of secret passages; some of the servants, it appeared, knew of long-forgotten passages which even the family had overlooked. Bristowe, the under-footman—the man who had been so badly scared, but who was now much steadier—had been muttering to one of the other footmen, and this other footman had spoken to the butler. So the talk had been going on.

Nipper ran upstairs to fetch an electric torch from his bed-room, and as he was passing down the wide corridor a door opened—the door of a bed-room which was not occupied by any of the guests.

"Just a moment, young 'un—the very person I wanted to see!" said a brisk voice. "Quickly—hop in here!"

Nipper halted in his tracks, staring, his heart thudding.

"Guv'nor!" he gasped.

To his absolute amazement he was face to face with Nelson Lee!

CHAPTER 15.

Found!

NELSON LEE chuckled amusedly as he drew Nipper into the bed-room and softly closed the door. There had been no mistaking the voice, although Nipper scarcely recognised the face and the figure of the man who confronted him.

"My dear young ass, why the intense surprise?" asked Lee dryly. "You knew that I was dodging about somewhere, didn't you?"

"I say, guv'nor, you do give a chap a start!" said Nipper, clutching joyously at the famous detective. "I knew you were at Tregellis Castle, of course, but I hadn't any idea that you were at Somerton."

"Yes, I'm here—and I'm busy," said Lee, his voice changing its note. "I shall need some sleep soon, young 'un, because I've had a very energetic night."

"But—but I don't understand, sir," protested Nipper. "We haven't seen a sign of you, or——"

"You don't need to understand just now," broke in Lee. "As for not seeing any sign of me—well, just at the moment I am dodging in and out of the picture like a will o' the wisp. But don't think I am doing this to amuse myself. I have a very excellent reason. Furthermore, it is highly necessary that you should keep a very still tongue in your head. Mr. Potts has just arrived, hasn't he?"

"Yes, guv'nor."

"And I daresay he's dreadfully upset to learn that Jimmy has disappeared?"

"He's distracted, sir——"

Mechanically, as though in a trance, Jimmy Potts walked to the edge of the battlements. One foot stepped into the air, the boy staggered forward . . .



"Then you'd better put him at his ease," interrupted Lee smoothly. "No harm has come to Jimmy. He is, at this moment, sleeping very peacefully in his own bed."

"What!" gurgled Nipper. "You—you mean that you—"

"If I cannot dodge in and out of the picture to some good effect, I might as well not dodge at all," said Lee amusedly. "Oh, yes, Nipper, I told you that I had had an energetic night. That's all. Go down and impart the good news. And listen. Like the woman who puts the gist of her letter in the postscript, I am now going to tell you exactly why I grabbed hold of you just now."

"You want me to help, gov'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"I may—and I may not," replied Lee. "But keep this in mind, young 'un—make a point of wandering down this particular passage at exactly eleven-thirty, to the minute, to-night."

"And then, sir?"

"Nothing may happen, but, on the other hand, I may need you," replied Lee. "If you don't see me, don't worry. But walk down the corridor at eleven-thirty, alone, and there may be something for you to do."

Without another word Nelson Lee cautiously opened the door, saw that the passage was empty, and he pushed Nipper out. Nipper walked away like a fellow in a dream. He was overjoyed; he was filled with admiration and confidence. It was splendid to know that Nelson Lee was not only on the spot, but on the job!

Nipper looked into Jimmy Potts' bedroom, not because he disbelieved Lee, but because he wanted to satisfy himself that he had not been dreaming.

"Great Scott!" murmured Nipper.

For there was Jimmy, snugly in bed, looking happier and healthier than he had looked all through the Christmas holidays! Nipper tiptoed up to him, and saw that his sleep was healthy and normal. Then he dashed out, ran down the corridor, and arrived at the top of the great staircase.

The hall was filled with people—Uncle Ben and Lord Norbery, and a number of other gentlemen getting ready to make an extensive search. The boys and girls, thoroughly excited, were also gathered round, for they had no intention of being left behind.

"I say!" shouted Nipper. "Just a minute, everybody! I've got news!"

There was a tense hush.

"News?" called up Uncle Ben. "Of Jimmy?"

"Yes, sir! He's safe!"

"Safe!" went up a roar.

"You'll have a fit when I tell you!" shouted Nipper. "Jimmy's in his own bed—sound asleep! He looks as though nothing had happened to him at all——"

The rest of his words were drowned in the uproar. There was a wild rush upstairs, and Uncle Ben was as excited and as eager as any of the young people. He was one of the first to reach Jimmy's bed-room, and he ran in heavily. On his face was an expression of incredulous amazement—for he had, in all truth, given up Jimmy as dead. Mr. Potts had good reason to know the relentless determination of those Chinese enemies.

"Jimmy!" he muttered, his voice crackling. "Jimmy lad! By golly, I—I—I—Jimmy lad!"

He blundered forward to the bed, and the others, crowding in, were in time to see Jimmy Potts sitting up, looking bewildered and sleepy.

"What's—what's the matter?" he asked, in blank amazement. "What are you all doing in my bed-room? Girls, too! Has anything happened? Is anything wrong?"

"But—but don't you know?" yelled Handforth.

"Know what?" asked Jimmy indignantly. "What's the time? What's the idea of this invasion? Hallo, uncle! I'm awfully glad to see you, although I must say you look a bit winded!"

Mr. Potts, indeed, was looking stunned, and now an expression of overwhelming relief came into his lined, old face.

"Thank heaven, Jimmy!" he said quietly.

Jimmy was looking at his uncle, at the boys and the girls, at everybody in general, in complete wonder.

"Why are you all staring at me as though I were a ghost?" he blurted out.

"We can hardly believe that you're not a ghost," said Handforth. "We thought you were dead."

"Dead!" yelled Jimmy. "Me? Why, I've never felt better in my life! I haven't slept so well for weeks."

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"Haven't I slept well?"

"You ought to know," said Nipper, looking at him curiously. "Something happened to you in the night, Jimmy. Don't you remember? We came in here—after a bit of an alarm—and we found you gone."

"How could you find me if I was gone?" asked Jimmy.

"For the love of Samson! He's trying to be funny," murmured Travers in wonder.

"I seem to have had a dream," said Jimmy slowly. "In fact, it was a sort of nightmare. I have a faint impression that I was collared by somebody, and taken down a lot of horrible passages. Then I seem to have an impression of water—icily-cold water. But after that it all sort of fades. I woke up in bed here. Of course it was a dream. Is it breakfast-time yet?"

Everybody was astounded—and very light-hearted, too. They went crowding out of Jimmy's bed-room, talking excitedly. The weight had been lifted; the whole house-party was restored to its former jollity. Jimmy Potts was all right!

Later, after he had dressed and had come downstairs to a hearty breakfast, the mystery remained as baffling as ever. Something had certainly happened to Jimmy, for he had unquestionably vanished. But he knew nothing; he thought he had had a dream, and nobody else could offer any explanation.

But Uncle Ben, at all events, came to a definite, clear-cut decision.

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



CHAPTER 16.

The Drugged Needle

MR. POTTS was looking very anxious and concerned as he had a quiet word with his host and hostess. Lord Norbery and the Duchess of Somerton were in agreement that Mr. Potts was a rough diamond, but they liked him. Somerton Abbey was open to him for as long as he liked to stay.

"It's mighty kind of ye," said Uncle Ben, looking from the duchess to her brother. "But ye'll remember that strange things happened here last night. Poor Jimmy talks of a dream, but I know better."

"Do you think the boy might have been drugged in some way?" asked the duchess.

"He seems healthy enough this morning. In fact, he looks very much better than he did yesterday."

"The Chinese have drugs—yes," said Mr. Potts slowly. "Queer drugs—drugs that have strange effect at the time, but do no actual damage. I'm thinking of your home, lady. Heaven alone knows how the boy escaped, but a thing like that can't happen twice. And I'm here now. I'm telling ye that I'm a menace—far more so than poor Jimmy. We must get out. We must leave at once."

"My dear sir—" began Lord Norbery.

"I want to take the lad back to London, and there we'll have police protection," said

Captain Walton, the keen-eyed young pilot, who had accepted the hospitality of Somerton Abbey, was fetched in. He immediately shook his head.

"Sorry, Mr. Potts, but we can't possibly take off," he said. "It was fairly easy to land in that snow, but taking off is different from landing. There's no chance of a run. Must have a run, you know. The old bus will have to stay where she is until the snow melts."

Mr. Potts looked helpless.

"Then ye're right, sir," he said, glancing at Lord Norbery. "I'm bottled up, like the rest of ye."

He was thoughtful for the rest of the morning; and later he was relieved, when Lord Norbery, after a trip out with some of the boys, come back to report unexpectedly that progress with the drive had been better than anybody had dared to hope for.

"There's no chance of getting away to-night, of course," said Lord Norbery, "but the wind's changed, and a thaw has already set in. Looks like becoming rapid to-night, too. The men are saying that they'll be through—and that they'll have repaired the road, too—by eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, at the latest. So if you're still of a mind to go then, Mr. Potts, the way will be clear."

The thaw was unexpected—and for once the young people welcomed it. Being snowed up like this was not half the fun they had expected it to be. Snow, like everything else, is only enjoyable in moderation.

It would not be truthful to say that the party was bright and cheery that evening. Uncle Ben, bluff and hearty man though he was, cast a gloom over the party. It was not his personality which had this effect—but the fear, present in everybody's thoughts, that further mysterious happenings would take place during the night.

"I'm mighty uncomfortable about all this," said Uncle Ben gruffly, after dinner. "I want ye to forget that I'm here after ye've all gone to bed. I won't sleep—I'll sit up by the fire and watch."

"We can all help, sir," said Handforth eagerly.

"That's just what I don't want," replied Mr. Potts, troubled. "By golly! I'm big enough and strong enough, aren't I? But look here, I'll tell ye what might be good. Let Jimmy sleep in his own bed—and let some of the other boys sleep in the room with him, just the same as last night. I'll be in a big chair by the fire, reading and smoking."

"That sounds all right, sir," said Church.

"Personally, I don't think anything will happen," continued Uncle Ben. "These mysterious beggars have failed once—and they're hardly likely to make another attempt with me about the place."

So it was arranged in that way. It was Mr. Potts' express wish that there should be no great fuss. When everybody went to bed, therefore, Handforth, Church and McClure

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Uncle Ben quietly. "I'll have Scotland Yard men on guard—a couple of dozen of the sturdy fellows, if necessary."

"I entirely agree that it is a good plan," said his lordship, "but how do you propose to leave the Abbey?"

"Eh?"

"You appear to have forgotten, sir, that we are completely snowed up," said Lord Norbery. "We have every available man working at high pressure, clearing the drive, but unless a very rapid thaw comes we can't be in communication with the town until to-morrow evening, at the earliest."

"Have ye forgotten the aeroplane?" asked Uncle Ben, raising his bushy eyebrows.

"No, but I think that you have overlooked the difficulties," replied Lord Norbery. "Captain Walton is here."

slept in Jimmy's room. A big easy-chair was placed in front of the fire for Mr. Potts, and he declared that he would be perfectly happy and comfortable with his pipe and with a book.

"Do you think they'll be all right, dear old boys?" asked Sir Montie, as he and Nipper and Tommy Watson undressed.

"I fancy so," replied Nipper lightly.

"Hadn't we better keep a watch—without Mr. Potts' knowing?" suggested Watson.

"Rats! Uncle Ben seems to be thoroughly satisfied that everything is all right, so why should we be deprived of our night's sleep?"

And Nipper calmly jumped into bed. He could not tell the others—but he knew that Nelson Lee would be somewhere about, keeping a watchful eye open. Although Nipper disliked being left out in the cold, he had ample confidence in his beloved gov'nor. He had not forgotten that arrangement about eleven-thirty, either. Perhaps there would be something for him to do, after all—and it was all the better that the rest of the chaps should be asleep.

The party had retired at an early hour, and it was only just eleven when Uncle Ben settled himself comfortably for the night in the big easy-chair. The boys, who had had a tiring day—tiring because they had done practically nothing—were soon asleep. Jimmy dropped off because he was easy in mind.

Eleven-fifteen struck, and Nipper, fully alert, heard the steady breathing of the other fellows in his room. He decided that he would slip out of bed at twenty-five minutes past the hour.

It was barely twenty minutes past when a figure slid noiselessly along the dark corridor. The Man in Black!

He reached the door of the room occupied by Uncle Ben and the boys. Without a sound he turned the handle, and inch by inch the door opened. The only light in the room was cast by the reading-lamp on the table beside the big easy-chair. It was a high chair, with a thickly cushioned back, and with comfortable side extensions. Uncle Ben was evidently reading, for as the Man in Black stood in the doorway, there came the sound of a turning page, and a curl of blue smoke was rising from above the top of the chair.

Without a sound, the Man in Black slid across the soft carpet. In his hand he held a curious little bulb, with a spray attached. He reached the chair, bent over it—

In the same noiseless way, he went to the beds occupied by Church, McClure and Handforth. The little spray came into operation, and the three boys slept on without stirring. Jimmy Potts did not receive a puff from that spray. A tiny needle was suddenly plunged into his arm, and he started violently, awakening with a little cry. But the sound had no effect upon Uncle Ben or the other boys.

"Look into my eyes!" whispered the Man in Black, holding Jimmy firmly by the shoulders. "Look! And heed what I say!"

Jimmy Potts seemed changed; and the change was unquestionably brought about by the drug which had been injected into his arm. He obeyed instantly; he stared into those black, hypnotic eyes.

CHAPTER 17.

The Figure on the Battlements!

ELEVEN-THIRTY!

Nipper was already out of bed, and he was creeping along the corridor—in readiness for his secret appointment with Nelson Lee.

He reached that same doorway, and his heart was beating quickly. Sure enough, the door was half ajar, and a hand reached out and seized him by the sleeve.

"Hush!" whispered a vague voice.

For half a second Nipper had an impression that the speaker was not Nelson Lee; that he had fallen into the hands of the enemy. But he was soon reassured.

"They've acted sooner than I expected, young 'un!" came Lee's familiar whisper.

"The devils! They're at their dirty work!"

"What!" gasped Nipper.

"I gave them until midnight, but they have started earlier," went on Lee. "I cannot wait now—Jimmy is in danger."

"What about Mr. Potts?"

"It is the boy they are after," snapped Lee, unable to disguise his chagrin. "All this time, Nipper, I have been waiting to catch Number One red-handed—but so far he has eluded me. The others don't count—they are mere hirelings. It is Number One I must have!"

"Number One?" repeated Nipper. "But—but—" He broke off, and nodded quickly. "You mean the Mandarin? But it isn't possible that he could be here, at Somerton!"

"Many things are possible," muttered Lee grimly. "Go at once! Go into Mr. Potts' bed-room and give the alarm. Something has happened there. The more noise you can make, the better. Arouse the entire house."

Nipper was fairly pushed out of the room, and he knew by the urgency of Lee's tone that the matter was vital. He ran into that fateful bed-room, and at the first glance he was startled. Jimmy Potts had gone again! Handforth and Church and McClure were still sleeping.

"Hi!" yelled Nipper, remembering Lee's advice.

At the same second he saw, out of the corner of his eye, Uncle Ben in the big chair before the fire. The book had slipped to his lap, and his pipe was on the floor. The millionaire started forward. His eyes were heavy, his whole expression blank and muddled.

"Wass matter?" he mumbled, staggering to his feet. "By golly! My head feels dizzy—I can't stand straight, or— Jimmy!" he

added, with a bellow. "Where's the lad? What's happened?"

He stared round in horror, and then Nipper saw that Handforth was sitting up in bed, and Handforth was looking decidedly "squiffy." At that moment realisation came to Nipper. Mr. Potts and the boys had been gassed or drugged!

"Jimmy's gone!" yelled Nipper, racing out of the room. "Hi! Help!"

He had not the faintest idea what Nelson Lee's scheme was. In fact, it seemed mad to arouse the house like this, and thus assist the enemy. In Nipper's opinion it would have been far better to go after the kidnappers. But he knew that Lee must have had a good reason, and he obeyed instructions.

The alarm was general. Boys and girls came tumbling out of their bed-rooms; servants appeared; Lord Norbery, flustered and anxious, arrived on the scene.

The confusion was at its highest when Uncle Ben's voice sounded—charged with horror. They ran towards him from all quarters, and found him standing at the great bay window on the landing—a fairly modern innovation, this. The moonbeams were streaming in brilliantly, and from this point of vantage it was possible to see the entire North Wing. It was flooded with moonlight.

"What is it, Mr. Potts?" shouted Lord Norbery, as he ran up.

"Look! Jimmy—on the battlements!" panted Uncle Ben.

"What!"

"Poor boy! He seems to be walking in his sleep!" went on the millionaire frantically. "I don't know what happened! Fool—fool! I believe I fell asleep, and yet I can't think that I should— But what's the good? The harm is done now! The poor lad will kill himself!"

Nipper, Travers, Irene and many others pressed out on an upper balcony, where a few seconds later they were joined by Mr. Potts. Up on the battlements of the North wing they saw Jimmy Potts.

"Jimmy—Jimmy!" shouted Skeets.

"For heaven's sake, keep quiet;" urged Nipper. "Don't you understand? He's walking in his sleep—or drugged, or something! If you awaken him now, he'll fall!"

Uncle Ben covered his face with his hands.

"Don't you see?" he asked hoarsely. "He'll fall, anyway! He's striding straight towards the corner— Three more steps and he'll be down!"

Uncle Ben's dread words were only too true. Jimmy, walking deliberately, and keeping to the very edge of the treacherous stone work, was nearly at the danger spot. To shout would mean death for the boy—and if they refrained from shouting, it would come to exactly the same thing.

"Jimmy, lad—Jimmy!" bellowed Uncle Ben, absolutely beside himself.

But Jimmy Potts took not the slightest notice. He continued to walk on. And then

suddenly something happened—it was impossible to tell what. Before the boy reached the corner of the tower he staggered, hesitated; then, losing his balance, he hurtled over the parapet.

Down—down—

CHAPTER 18.

An Old Friend!

"O H!"

It was a shout of consternation—and horror

Jimmy Potts had plunged down, and it was an ugly distance from that towering parapet to the ground. Such a fall, indeed, would mean almost certain death, for immediately beneath there was nothing but a concrete path.

And then Nipper felt his heart leap. He was the first one to remember. The snow! Packed against the wall there was a deep drift—seven or eight feet deep. Soft, thawing snow!

In that same second Nipper realised something else—something which none of the others could possibly guess. This was Nelson Lee's work!



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Lee had deliberately caused Jimmy to lose his balance before reaching the corner of the tower. For on the ground below that particular point the snow had been swept away, leaving the hard concrete exposed. Perhaps Lee had thrown something, or flung a coiled rope from one of the near-by windows at the other angle of the main building which was not visible to the watchers.

Everybody rushed downstairs now to the spot where Jimmy had fallen. Men, boys and girls were plunging through the snow.

Lord Norbery and Uncle Ben and Nipper were three of the first to reach the spot. They found Jimmy Potts lying in the thick snow. He had made a vast hole in it, and he was evidently sleeping. The boy was uninjured, and even the shock of falling had not awakened him.

JIMMY was carried indoors, and the news of his safety was received with relief and joy. He was taken straight to bed; and, strangely enough, when he awoke an hour or two later he knew nothing. Nobody told him of his hair-raising adventure.

But in the morning, after everybody had spent a thoroughly restless night, it was impossible to keep the truth from Jimmy. He heard some of the fellows talking, and he was amazed when he learned the details.

"I can't understand it," he muttered. "I'm feeling heavy this morning, I know, but I don't remember anything at all. How is it I got out of bed and walked in my sleep like that? Why didn't somebody stop me?"

"That's the mystery of it," growled Handforth. "We were all drugged, or something. But who by? That's another mystery!"

"The sooner we get out of this place, the better," remarked Church, with a shiver. "It's hard lines on poor old Sommy—he can't help it—but the Abbey is getting on my nerves."

Uncle Ben was firm. He insisted upon taking Jimmy straight to London. The drive had been cleared by mid-morning—and a temporary pathway had been made round the broken sections of road.

There was a general exodus. Everybody was anxious to leave, and it would not be truthful to state that the Duchess of Somerton was displeased. Both she and her brother, whilst expressing polite regrets that the young guests were all going, were at heart mightily relieved. Now, perhaps, they would be able to resume their normal lives!

It was not possible to take any motor-cars along that temporary path, so everybody walked. Thus the crowds arrived at the main road, and in this way they reached the little town of Somerton. It was good to be in the outer world again—a wet, mushy, thawing world, but good for all that.

But when they reached the station they came in for an unexpected surprise. A train from London had just arrived—their own

train was not due for another half an hour. And who should come striding boisterously up but Lord Dorrimore!

"Dorrie!" went up a delighted yell from all the boys and girls.

The famous sporting peer was grinning. He looked as young as ever, and he was nearly bowled off his feet as the young people crowded and swarmed round him.

"Here, I say, dash it!" he protested. "What's all the excitement about? I came along to fetch you—that's all."

"To fetch us, Dorrie?" asked Nipper.

"By the Lord Harry!" roared Lord Dorrimore. "You don't mean to say that you've forgotten? Didn't I invite all you lads and lasses to a house-warming at Dorrimore Castle, in Derbyshire? There's no thaw there, let me tell you. The snow is solid—and there's heaps of winter sports going on."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

In all the excitement, most of the boys and girls had forgotten. But now they remembered. Before leaving school for the Christmas holidays, they had received a general invitation from Lord Dorrimore to spend a happy week at his ancestral home.

"You must come, too, sir," said his lordship, after he had been introduced to Mr. Potts. "You and your nephew. I can promise you a lively time——"

"That's just the trouble, sir," interrupted Mr. Potts significantly. "I'm afraid it might be too lively! Thank you all the same—no! I'm going to London with my nephew. It'll be safer there."

"May I ask what the deuce you mean—exactly?" asked Dorrie politely.

Lord Dorrimore listened in astonishment as he heard a few of the details; but he would not hear of a refusal.

"No, Mr. Potts," he said, in that firm, masterful way of his. "Nothing doing! Jimmy is my invited guest—and you must come, too. If you want Scotland Yard detectives at the castle, you shall have them. Anything you like! Anyway, you must come. You're all here, ready for the train—and you'll allow me to take charge from this minute."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Dorrie!"

And even Mr. Benjamin Potts found it impossible to shift the breezy Lord Dorrimore. After all, it might be just as well. At Dorrimore Castle, perhaps, there would be a climax to all this mystery.

And so it was destined to turn out—and perhaps the one and only Dorrie was secretly hoping that there would be some of that hectic excitement which, so far, he had missed!

THE END.

(Sensations and surprises in next week's thrilling long complete yarn of the Chums of St. Frank's, which is entitled: "The Man in Black!" Order your copy now.)

The Editor replies to letters from his readers.



A breezy chat with readers conducted by the EDITOR. All letters should be addressed to The Editor,

NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

YOUR note—L. Kard (Melbourne)—was all too short. I was very pleased to hear of your interest in the Old Paper, and your resolve to take it so that your boy should have a ready means of perfecting his grammar and purity of speech—in addition to entertaining reading matter. It is interesting to learn that he is now a man, and still attracted by the stories. You yourself are one of the real Old-Timers, and no mistake! Over 60 years old and can still enter into the adventures and fun of the St. Frank's boys. Please write again.

* * *

Here are pen-sketches of three more Fifth-Formers at St. Frank's; **STEPHEN PARRY**. Has the distinction—if it can be so called—of being at the bottom of the Form. No effort on the part of Mr. Pagett can shift him; and he is, incidentally, the bane of Mr. Pagett's existence. Apart from his indolence, he is a thoroughly good sort. **ARTHUR PHILLIPS**. One of those fellows who gets on well with everybody, and never makes an enemy. Very sound at all sports, and the particular chum of Cuthbert Chambers. **HOWARD ROWE**. Known in the Fifth as the "Library Haunter." One of the Fifth's intellectuals. Has the record of being unbeatable in a debate, and is hot stuff at lecturing. Spends practically all his spare time in the school library poring over weighty books.

* * *

All the copies of the Old Paper you mention—Robert J. Wareing (Erdington)—are out of print; also the other periodicals you mention.

* * *

You will get a very good idea of when St. Frank's "breaks up" for the Christmas holidays, and when the boys return—V. A. H. Jones (Catford)—by noticing these details in the stories. The back number you require, I regret to say, is out of print.

The distance from St. Frank's to Bellton—William M. Parsons (Hetton)—is, roughly, one mile; but less than a mile if you reckon from the end of the school property to the first cottage in the village.

* * *

Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the former headmaster of St. Frank's, did not appear in the stories after No. 152, 1st New Series—March 30th, 1929—E. Bone (London). The first story in which Umlosi appeared was called "The Ivory Seekers," No. 105 Old Series, June 9th, 1917. Quite a few years ago a story was published called "Nipper at St. Ninian's," but it is now unobtainable.

* * *

Willy's favourite pet—John T. Kerr (Detroit, U.S.A.)—is probably Lightning—notwithstanding the fact that Lightning was acquired much later than many of the other pets. Lightning, as you probably know, is a greyhound. There is a story of the Chums of St. Frank's in this year's Holiday Annual.

* * *

Here are the titles you require—Lionel Langord (Melbourne): Old Series: 493—"Archie's Awful Ancestor"; 494—"The Secret of the Old Mill"; 495—"Willy Handforth's Windfall"; 496—"The Twins' Terrible Tangle"; 497—"The Mystery Goalkeeper"; 498—"The Ghosts of Glen-thorne Manor"; 499—"The Secret of the Panel"; 500—"The Schoolboys' Pantomime"; 501—"The School of Hidden Dread"; 512—"Freed from Bondage"; 516—"Fenton's Cricket Sensation." Enoch Snipe still shares Study 15 in the East House with Merrell and Marriott, and he is just as much a "worm" as ever.

* * *

The St. Frank's boys do not wear Etons because the authorities have decided—and quite rightly—that ordinary clothes are very much more comfortable—Martin F. O'Callahan (North Richmond, South Australia).

The captain who washed in coffee—meet him below!

Outlawed!

A stirring serial of old-time
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By
**DAVID
GOODWIN**

The Mystery of Basing Hall!

THE chaise jerked to a halt, and Ralph jumped out, just as the dignified old headmaster came up.

"Good-day to you, doctor," greeted Dick. "Here's an old pupil come back to you!"

Dr. Trelawney halted in amazement, then, hurrying forward, he shook hands heartily with Dick and Ralph.

"I've heard of your misfortune, Dick," he said, "and plaguey sorry I am for you. I thought your troubles were over when Vane Forrester died, but it seems this knave of a son of his has ousted you. I fear you have not managed things too well at Fernhall."

"And so say I," cried Turpin; "but the young rascal would take no advice, sir.

If he'd done as I told him, and sent a bullet——"

"Gently, gently, comrade," said Dick, laughing; and Turpin stopped short, for the doctor was regarding him curiously and with suspicion. "I begin to think you're right, Dr. Trelawney; but the time is not far off when I shall make good my mistakes. In the meantime, I shall be glad to see Ralph in such safe hands as yours, for he has been, and is still, in no small danger."

"How?" exclaimed the doctor. "I thought he, at least, was safe. His title to Huntercombe is secure."

"Ay, while he lives," said Dick dryly; "but should he die the estates will pass on to Hector, since I can inherit nothing as an outlaw."

"Good heavens! Do you mean—"

"I mean that already Hector has been scheming against Ralph. Hunterco: be is left in good hands, and there is no place in the kingdom where I can so well see to my brother's safety as here."

"True!" cried the doctor. "And right glad I am to have him back, though I won't deny he was the most troublesome young rascal in the school, and the pluckiest at that! I'll wager there are some floggings in store for you, Ralph!"

"I hope you are no stronger in the arm, sir!" laughed Ralph.

"The scholarship Ralph won put him under your care, and Hector cannot take him from you by law," said Dick.

"I'll see to that!" retorted the doctor fiercely. "I trust you'll be rid of Hector as you were of his father, Dick; but I fear you have a still more dangerous rogue to deal with. Ralph Forrester, you know the way into the school. Go and take up your quarters."

"Meet me to-night at the old place in the plantation," whispered Dick to his brother as they parted.

Ralph nodded, and after bidding farewell to Turpin, he went through into the quadrangle. Immediately his old school chums recognised him; there was a rush, a cheer, and when the two highwayman rode off after taking leave of Dr. Trelawney, Ralph was being chaired round the quad. by a cheering multitude.

"The young rascal seems mighty popular there," remarked Turpin. "Well, Dick, we're back in our old haunts here. Where shall we quarter ourselves to-night?"

"I was thinking old Sir Henry Stanhope, of Basing Hall, who is one of the governors of the school, might put us up," replied Dick. "He was our best friend in the old days."

"Ay, I remember him," nodded Turpin; "he rode back with us to Fernhall after Vane's death. A jolly old boy, and keeps a rare good table. He is a magistrate, too, and can do as he likes. An excellent idea of yours, Dick!"

"Yonder's the house, not half a mile away," remarked Dick. "But one matter worries me, Turpin. Your name, comrade, is rather apt to scare people, and should Sir Henry have guests 'twould cause a panic—perhaps leading to trouble for him as well as for us."

Turpin nodded. He realised the truth of his young companion's words.

"What do you suggest, then?" he asked.

"I shall take the liberty of introducing you as Mr. Smith," replied Dick. "And, mark you, you will have to forget that you're an outlaw. None of your lawless tricks, such as whipping out pistols at the dinner-table and stripping the company of their purses."

"I shall comport myself like a gentleman," assured Turpin, grinning. "Observe how prettily Mr. Smith will behave."

"Mind you stick to that," laughed Dick.

The two comrades rode on and soon reached Basing Hall. Dick eyed it critically. He noted, with a puzzled frown, that the former splendour of Sir Henry Stanhope's residence was missing. There was now a dingy, ill-kept appearance about the place.

"Od's fish!" exclaimed the young outlaw. "How neglected the Hall looks. 'Tis not like it used to be by a long stretch. This is mighty strange, in all truth. I wonder if anything is amiss with Sir Henry. Come, Turpin, let us look into this. I feel it in my bones that all is not well!"

A Change for the Worst!

THE two highwaymen dismounted, and Dick knocked on the big, iron-bound doors of Basing Hall. After some delay, a serving-man appeared.

"Is Sir Henry within?" asked Dick.

"Sir Henry?" repeated the man, staring. "If you mean Sir Henry Stanhope you are well behind the times. But perhaps you are a stranger in these

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

DICK FORRESTER, formerly a young highwayman, has been deprived of his fortune and estate at Fernhall by the trickery of

HECTOR FORRESTER. This is only the beginning of Dick's troubles, for he next falls foul of **CAPTAIN SWEENEY**, the notorious leader of a gang of footpads, and is also wanted by the King's Riders for assisting his former comrade of the road,

RICHARD TURPIN, the famous highwayman, to escape capture. Dick is forced to become an outlaw, and he and Turpin ride off together. They are pursued by Riders but make their escape after a fierce fight. Turpin goes off on a mission, arranging to meet Dick three days later. Sweeney makes numerous attempts on Dick's life, but every time the young outlaw eludes him. The two comrades come together again and, learning that Hector is disgracing the name of Forrester by his meanness and tyranny, they travel to Fernhall, where Dick teaches his rascally cousin a well-deserved lesson. Later they frustrate a plot arranged by Hector to kill Dick's young brother, Ralph. Dick decides to send the boy to St. Austell's school, the headmaster of which is Dr. Trelawney, an old friend. The two highwaymen escort Ralph to the school.

(Now Read On.)

parts. Sir Henry is dead a month since. He broke his neck in the hunting-field. His nephew, Sir Cecil, is master here now."

"Worse luck!" came a muttered voice inside the hall.

"Bad news, Dick," said Turpin; "the county is the poorer by a fine old gentleman, who was not so full of narrow prejudices as some. We had better go on our way."

"Nay," said Dick, who was much grieved at the news, "we must at least offer our condolences to his nephew."

"Much condolences he needs," grunted Turpin, "since he comes into an estate and a title, and a fat rent-roll. Methinks this nephew will be worth meeting on the highway. My purse is getting low."

"Announce us to Sir Cecil," said Dick impatiently. "Mr. Richard Forrester and Mr. Smith."

"I doubt you will need little announcing, sir," said the serving-man, leading the way to the morning-room. "The house is open these days."

Wondering what the fellow meant, Turpin and Dick entered the great morning-room as the servant shouted their names, and a strange sight met them.

Although it was nearly midday, breakfast, or the remains of it, served in rich plate and fine crockery, still lay on the tables. In the room were seven or eight seedy-looking bucks, who looked decidedly more knaves than fools, laughing, talking, eating, and drinking. One of them, a dirty-faced but showily dressed man, with a long sword at his side, stared intently at the two strangers.

The room was slatternly and unkempt. Hats hung on chair-backs, hunting-crops lay among the breakfast things, and everything was in a state of disorder. The company lolled or sat on the chairs and sofas, and from among them came a tall, pale youth of about twenty-one, with a foolish laugh and a weak chin.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in!" he bade. "Glad to see you! Have some wine? Yes, I'm Sir Cecil Stanhope."

"I am deeply grieved to hear—" began Dick.

"Plague take th' grief, man! Wine's the best cure for that. Have you breakfasted yet?"

"Since you are so hospitable, sir, breakfast would be very welcome," put in Turpin, who was hungry.

"Here, you rogues!" roared Sir Cecil to the two servants at the door. "Bring in breakfast for my two friends—quick! Clear away this rubbish!"

He made a clean sweep of the table with

his hunting-crop, brushing all the china, plate, soiled dishes and glasses on to the floor with a crash. The other men in the room laughed, and the servants quickly brought in a sumptuous breakfast.

"Sorry I can't stop," said Sir Cecil. "Going hunting. Back soon. Help yourself to anything you want."

He whirled out of the room. The rest of the men followed, several of the seedy ones scowling suspiciously at the newcomers.

"Let us get on the road again," whispered Dick, in disgust. "This place turns my stomach."

"Nay, man, let us make the most of a good breakfast," said Turpin, seating himself.

Dick made a wry face, but he followed Turpin's example, and in a few moments they were left to themselves.

"Open house with a vengeance," chuckled Turpin, eating gaily.

"It's plain enough," remarked Dick, "that this young fool, Sir Cecil, is a weakling and a waster. He has opened his house to that crew of seedy bucks and gamblers, who are making the most of their time."

"I warrant they pluck him well," said Turpin, cutting into a large ham. "However, he is rich enough, doubtless."

"Ah, sir, these are different times to when you were here before," said a mournful voice, and Dick saw beside him the old butler, who had served Sir Henry in days past.

"There seems a difference," agreed Dick.

"It can't last much longer, sir. All these riff-raff are stripping Sir Cecil hand over fist, and he lets 'em. The estate isn't rich. He's lost thousands already, and throws money away right and left. The bailiffs have been in twice. I wish there was a gentleman here to stop it, so I do. That there Captain Spott—which he's no more a captain than I am—is the worst—a sponger and a scoundrel."

A Captain Takes a Wash!

DICK made no reply, for he did not wish to discuss his host's affairs with the butler; but he thought the more. The old servant departed gloomily.

"Pah!" exclaimed Dick. "I wish I could do something to save the young fool; but it's not my business, and he would resent it. Who's this?"

The dirty-faced, showily-dressed man, whom Dick had noticed before, came into the room. Swaggering up to the table, he leaned his elbows on it and leered menacingly into the young outlaw's face.

"My name is Captain Spott," he said, "and I have come to warn you gentlemen to get out of Basing Hall as quickly as you please. Button your belts over your breakfasts, for it's all you'll get here, and then take the road again and look for fresh game!"

"At your bidding?" inquired Dick coolly.

"Yes, sir, at my bidding! There are enough of us plucking the pigeon already, and we're not going to share out the plunder to any more. We found the game, my buck, and we'll cook it to our own liking."

"Ah!" said Dick. "You refer to our hospitable young host?"

"Enough talking!" snapped the captain. "Get out—or be thrown out!"

Dick leaped to his feet, flushing crimson, and his sword flashed from its sheath. Captain Spott turned as pale as his unwashed face would let him, and retreated hastily.

"Come, draw!" cried Dick. "I suppose you put this affront on me to force a fight; is it not so? Out with your steel, and we shall soon settle the matter!"

Captain Spott eyed the determined young outlaw uneasily. Then he gave what he meant to be a jovial laugh.

"I did not wish to ruffle you," he said, swaggering, "still less to fight you. My skill with the sword is so great that I dislike to draw. I always have the hanged ill-luck to kill my man, which is troublesome now that the law is strict

against duelling. There is plenty for all, sir, so let us be friends."

"If we are to be friends," said Dick, "you must first wash your face. My friends all have clean faces. Come, I will add you to the number!"

He made a quick dart forward, and, throwing one arm round the rascal's body, dragged him to the table. Captain Spott bellowed and struggled lustily, but Dick held him tight. With his free hand he proceeded to empty the contents of the coffee ewer into a bowl.

"Mr. Smith," quoth he, glancing very solemnly at Turpin, "we will now give this gentleman a well-deserved wash."

Turpin's eyes twinkled. He saw some good sport here. Rising from the table, he picked up the bowl and, holding it over the struggling captain, allowed the hot coffee to pour over that unfortunate man's dirty face.

At the same time Dick, seizing a napkin from the table, began to scrub vigorously at his victim's face. The fellow kicked and spluttered frantically, but Dick only scrubbed the harder. Then, having given the captain a thorough good wash, he flung him aside.

The captain sat down on the floor with a heavy bump. Purple with rage, he leaped to his feet, and shook his fist furiously at Dick.

"You shall pay for this assault!" cried Captain Spott, trembling with anger

(Dick has made a new enemy in Captain Spott. Don't miss reading next Wednesday's exciting instalment, chums!)

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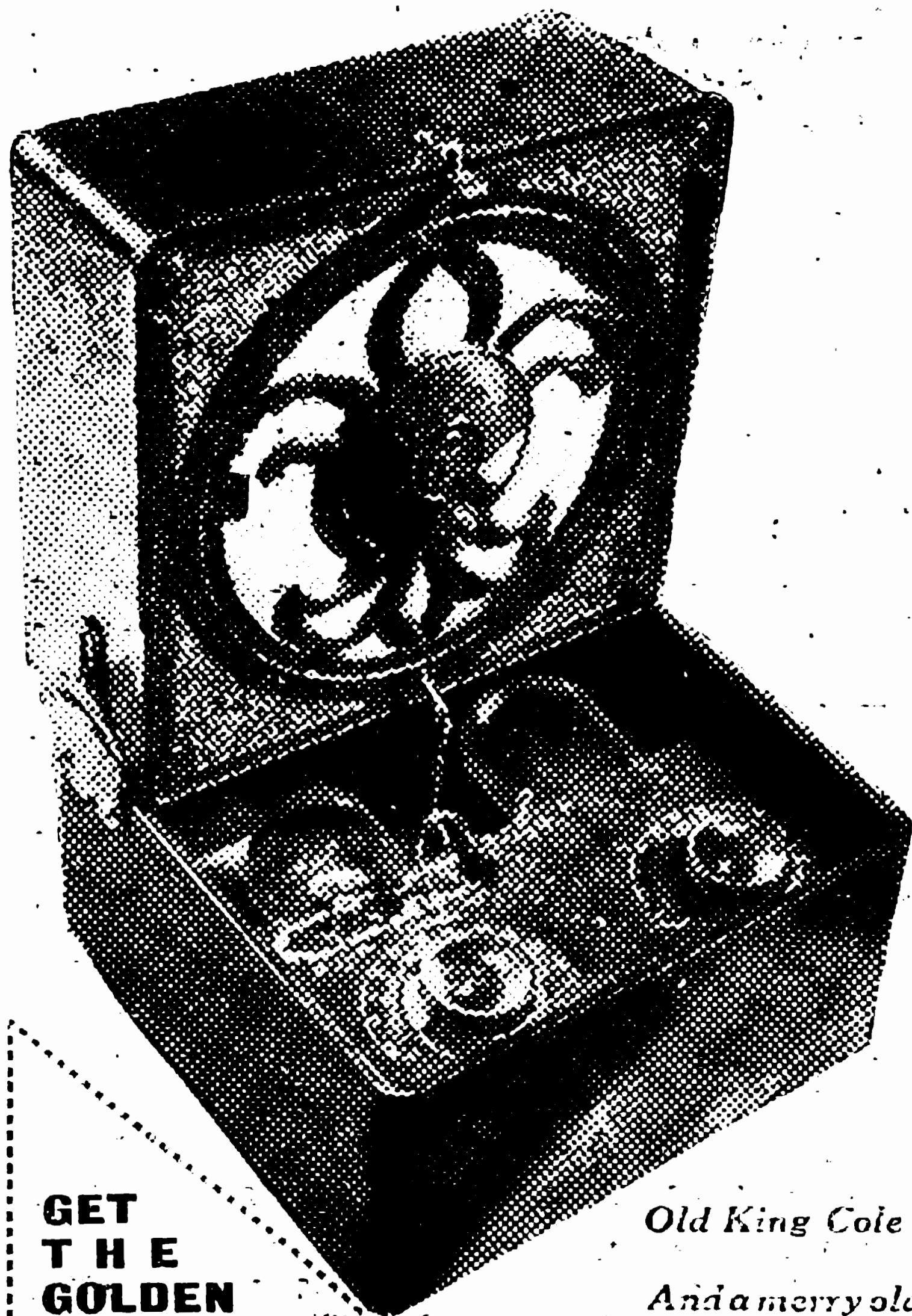
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