

WHO IS THE MYSTERIOUS 'MAN IN BLACK'?

complete holiday-adventure story of the famous Chums of St. Frank's.

Read this week's
sensational long

A yarn that **THRILLS!**

THE NELSON LEE

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SINISTER TOWER!

Jimmy Potts' mysterious enemies unmasked. Thrills and surprises—

The MAN *in* BLACK!

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MASKS!

Concealing the identities of friend and foe. Jimmy Potts is surrounded by friends—but his foes

TRIUMPH!
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CHAPTER 1.

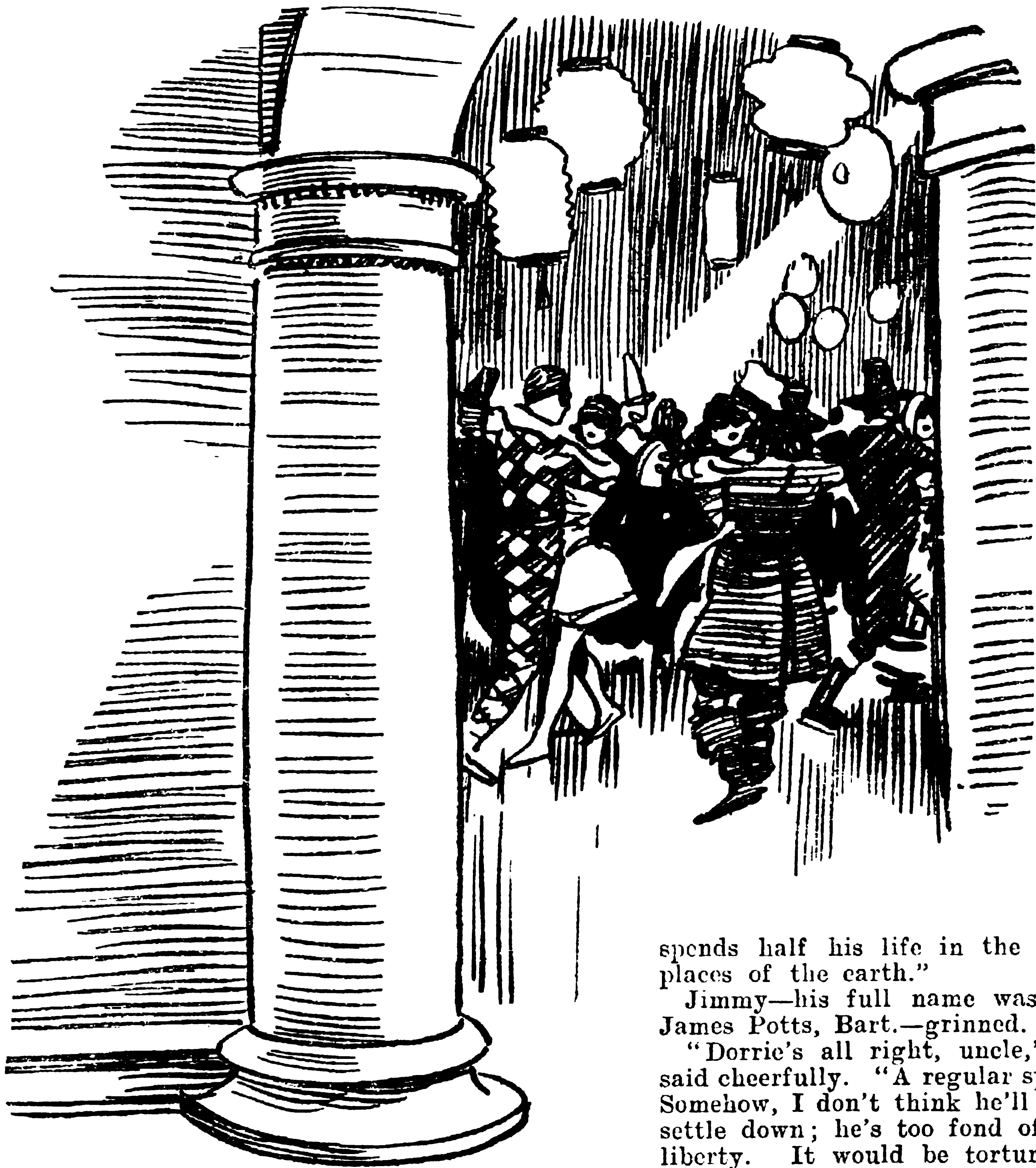
The Menace of the Yellow Men!

YES, Jimmy, lad, I'm glad we came," said Mr. Benjamin Potts heartily. "By golly! A fine old place, this Finer, in some respects, than Somerton Abbey."

"Everything seems so jolly, Uncle Ben," agreed Jimmy Potts, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's.



By
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS**



His millionaire uncle from China paused on the snow-covered drive, and he took the big cigar out of his mouth as he surveyed the rambling old pile which stood sombre and dignified against the wintry sky-line. Dorrimore Castle, in the Derbyshire hills, was indeed a magnificent reminder of England's great and noble past.

"I was half sorry that I allowed myself to be persuaded to come," went on Mr. Potts, his face crinkling into a smile. "But I'm glad now, lad. I like it here. But, darn it, it seems a shame that such a fine place as this should be owned by a bachelor—and a man, moreover, who

spends half his life in the wild places of the earth."

Jimmy—his full name was S. James Potts, Bart.—grinned.

"Dorrie's all right, uncle," he said cheerfully. "A regular sport. Somehow, I don't think he'll ever settle down; he's too fond of his liberty. It would be torture for him to be tied down to any one spot for more than a month."

Uncle Ben pursed his lips.

"I'm not saying that I haven't a fellow feeling for him," he said dryly. "I've been a bit of a wanderer myself, Jimmy, lad. But it's rare good to be back in the Old Country."

They walked on, leaving the drive behind and passing down some snowy, slippery rock steps to the sunken garden. The wintry day was drawing in, and dusk was near.

"I'll bet this looks pretty in the summer time," said Mr. Potts, as they walked along. "I like these trim hedges——"

"Look!" gasped Jimmy abruptly.

Uncle Ben, in spite of his size, jumped. There had been a note of dire alarm in the boy's tone.

"What's wrong with ye, lad?" asked the big man quickly. "Ye gave me a rare turn——"

He broke off, for at that second he saw the cause of Jimmy's shout. Three yellow-faced men, dressed in nondescript European clothing, were leaping at him—and each man held a drawn dagger in his hand.

There was no time to escape, no time to shout. It was a moment for action; and Uncle Ben, who had taken his life in his hands a hundred times in China, acted.

Crash!

He did not wait for the attack. Lunging forward, his massive right thudded against the chest of one of the villainous-looking Chinamen. The fellow reeled back, squealing. In the same second Mr. Potts jerked up the arm of another assailant, knocking the dagger out of his hand.

"Knife me, would ye?" roared Uncle Ben ferociously, as he staggered his third attacker with a terrific blow. "Ye yellow-skinned rats! By golly! And I thought I'd given ye the slip!"

Jimmy, who had been paralysed into momentary inaction by the horror of the surprise attack, suddenly became active.

"Help! Help!" he yelled frantically.

"Run, lad!" panted his uncle, with a quick glance round. "There's danger here—and there's no reason why you should be in it—Ah, would ye?"

He was fighting again—desperately. The three Chinamen were attacking once more, and Jimmy was filled with anguish. It was impossible that Uncle Ben, in spite of his size and strength, could prevail unless help came quickly.

"You devils—you murderers!" shouted Jimmy, leaping wildly to the attack.

It seemed to him that one of the Chinamen was about to plunge a dagger into Uncle Ben's side. Jimmy clawed at that sinuous arm, and he dragged it back in the nick of time.

Thud!

Something struck him with sickening force on the side of the head, and he reeled back, half stunned, tripping on the snowy pathway and falling.

Dimly, as though miles away, he heard excited shouts, and he recognised the voice of Edward Oswald Handforth, of the St. Frank's Remove; heard, too, the voices of Nipper, Travers, and Pitt.

"Help!" gasped Jimmy Potts, struggling unsteadily to his feet. He looked round dazedly; he was just in time to see Uncle Ben being dragged away. "Oh!" gasped Jimmy in horror.

The three Chinamen were frantic in their haste: they were clawing at their victim, and dragging him through a low hedge at the bottom end of the sunken garden. Mr. Potts was not resisting now; he was ominously limp. He was either unconscious—or dead.

"Uncle!" muttered Jimmy tragically.

He started running down the path.

Crack!

He saw the spurt of fire and the tiny puff of smoke. They were shooting at him. He paused uncertainly. He heard no drone of the bullet, but he was badly shaken.

The shouts were nearer, and Jimmy turned. Figures were running down the steps into the sunken garden at the further end. Lord Dorrimore himself was leading—a tall, lithe, athletic man, younger-looking than his actual years. Close behind came Nipper, the captain of the St. Frank's Remove, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Handforth, Church, Travers, and others. They were all guests under Dorrie's hospitable roof—in addition to many other St. Frank's Removites and Fourth-Formers and some Moor View girls.

"It's Jimmy Potts!" went up a yell.

"Hi, Jimmy! What's happened? Did we hear a shot just now?"

"Where's Uncle Ben?"

They came swarming up; it seemed ages to the frantic Jimmy before they reached him. And they were shocked at the change in the boy. All that day he had been happy, and towards evening he had looked his old self—after a week or two of harrowing trial. Now he was as white as a sheet.

"They've got him!" he said despairingly.

"What!"

"Didn't you see?" asked Jimmy.

"They've got Uncle Ben, I tell you!"

"Great Scott!"

"You—you mean those murderous Chinks?"

"Yes, yes! The agents of the Mandarin Fu-Li-Sing," said Jimmy hoarsely. "They've been dogging us all through the Christmas holidays—and now they've come down to Dorrimore Castle! They're here! They've taken Uncle Ben away!"

He was almost incoherent. Yet somehow he managed to explain what had happened; and his hearers became grave.

"It looks bad," said Nipper quickly. "You say you saw your uncle being dragged away?"

"Yes! They've killed him," groaned Jimmy.

"Don't you believe it," snapped Lord Dorrimore, his eyes gleaming. "If they had killed him they would have left him here. They've probably got something worse than death in store for him—or they

wouldn't have troubled to take him away. Come on! No sense in standing here talking. Which way?"

"Down there, sir—through that hedge," said Jimmy, pointing.

Lord Dorrimore ran like the wind, and the schoolboys went trailing after him. They suddenly realised that they had already wasted too much time in making inquiries which were really needless. They took the hedge in their stride, leaping over and finding themselves in a narrow, grassy enclosure—although the grass was now hidden beneath the white pall of crisp snow. There could be no mistaking the tell tale marks. A trail led across to another hedge, twenty yards away.

"Listen! What's that?" asked Handforth excitedly.

They all knew what it was—the unmistakable sound of a motor-car engine starting up with a roar. They rushed across the snow, and, jumping the further hedge, they found themselves in a narrow lane. Not fifty yards away a big open car was moving off and gathering speed, emitting clouds of blue smoke.

"There they go! Stop them!"

But even as the shouts were uttered the boys knew that they could do nothing. They could see Uncle Ben lying limply in the back of the car, and one of the Chinamen was beside him. The other two sat in the front seat.

The car roared away down the lane.

CHAPTER 2.

The Hounds of Fu-Li-Sing!

TOO late!

Even Lord Dorrimore, who could run like a champion, pulled up after he had covered fifty yards.

"It's no good, boys—they've beaten us," he sang out. "Our only chance is to dash back to the Castle and get a car and give chase——"

"Look!" yelled Jimmy Potts.

He was so excited—so frantic with new hope—that his voice was shrill. The others looked.

Uncle Ben had suddenly and unexpectedly awakened to activity. The car, by now, was three or four hundred yards away, and merging vaguely with the dusk. But there could be no mistaking the heave of Mr. Potts' heavy figure. By sheer force he threw off the man who clawed at him, and the next second he leaned over and grabbed the man at the wheel.

Lord Dorrimore and the boys watch and listened fascinatedly. This was totally unlooked-for development. They heard the screech of brakes, the squealing slither of tyres skidding on the frozen road as the wheels locked. They saw the car lurch bodily, and the next moment there came a dull crash.

"Come on!" shouted Lord Dorrimore.

"Good egg!"

"They've crashed!"

Everybody was running. None of them thought of the risk—with the exception perhaps, of Jimmy Potts. Jimmy remembered that pistol shot. But he did not hang back. He was far too excited.

The distance was farther than it had looked, and the car had actually crashed round a bend. The rescuers raced up, and as they turned the curve they saw the car half in the ditch and half on the road with a heavy list to port. One solitary figure—a bulky figure—was standing up by it, clutching at the rear of the driver's seat.

"By golly! I beat 'em!" came a triumphant gasp.

Mr. Benjamin Potts, looking not unlike an infuriated bull, was shaking both fists into the dusk.

"Good man!" shouted Dorrie, as he ran up. "Are you hurt?"

"Nothing much—a crack on the head," said Uncle Ben. "Not the first I've had either, by golly! The dirty Chink thought they'd get me, did they? But I'm tougher than they bargained for!"

"Uncle!" exclaimed Jimmy, leaping to the footboard. "Oh, uncle! I thought they'd killed you!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Mr. Potts!"

"Ye thought they'd killed me, lad," repeated Uncle Ben contemptuously. "Them skunks? Huh! Darn 'em!"

The boys were overjoyed to find Mr. Potts practically unharmed.

"Which way did they go, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly. "We've got to capture them——"

"No chance of that, I'm afraid," interrupted Mr. Potts, shaking his head. "They're slippery devils. They knew they were beaten when the car jolted into the ditch, so they bolted. No good looking for 'em—they dodged into that spinney and they're as tricky as foxes when they find cover. Might search all night and not find 'em."

Lord Dorrimore and the boys realised after one look at the frozen road and the spinney, that any search would be hopeless. Darkness was nearly upon them, and the fugitives would have all the advantage.

"You were marvellous, uncle," said Jimmy breathlessly.

"Rubbish," grunted the millionaire. "Fiddlesticks!"

"But you were," insisted Jimmy. "The way you jumped up and surprised them—just when they thought they had you, too. Three against one—and yet you won."

"If one Britisher isn't as good as three Chinks—well, I'm a piebald Zulu," retorted Uncle Ben with a snort. "Eh, Lord Dorrimore? By golly! Not so much fuss, lads! It's all over now, anyhow—there'll be no more excitement. I can only say that I'm infernally sorry it happened. I was hoping that I hadn't brought this trouble with me down to your home, Lord Dorrimore. I was half afraid of it. It's uncanny the way those yellow hounds keep up with me."

"This is the first time they've come right out into the open, though, Mr. Potts," said Handforth. "They've never attacked you like that before. They must be getting desperate."

"Ay, I daresay," admitted Uncle Ben gruffly. "Well, the sooner I can get back to London, the better. You, too, Jimmy, lad. We don't want to spoil this party as we've spoilt others during this Christmas —"

"Don't think you're spoiling anything for me, Mr. Potts," said Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "The more excitement, the better. My one grumble against my ancestral home is that it is too sedate. I hope you'll stay on indefinitely. Those yellow gentlemen may make another appearance—and, if they do, I hope I shall be somewhere handy."

"Yes, you might just as well stay, Mr. Potts," supported Handforth. "You'll be as safe here as in London. And Jimmy, too."

"It's a funny thing they didn't get me while they had the chance," remarked Jimmy. "They practically knocked me out."

"They hadn't much time to pick and choose," replied his uncle. "In any case, although they have already attempted to take your life, lad, it's me they're after principally. I'm mightily glad that no harm came to ye, Jimmy, boy."

The pair were escorted back to Dorrimore Castle by a big crowd. Lord Dorrimore and some of the other boys remained behind to rescue the car from the ditch.

IT was a big house-party at Dorrimore Castle, and it was mainly composed of young people. Lord Dorrimore revelled in such company. He had not been able to get home for Christmas, so he

had arranged this belated party—before the boys and girls went back to school. It was a sort of gathering of the clans, and Dorrie intended giving his young guests a wonderful time.

He had certainly not reckoned on any dramatic excitement of this nature; but, then, he had not known of the stirring events which had marked this unusual Christmas.

Even before the boys had left St. Frank's for the holidays, the excitement commenced when Mr. Potts had been attacked by a Chinaman. Freshly arrived from China, Mr. Potts had gone down to the school to see his nephew—having met Lady Potts in Madeira, where she had gone for her health. He had not been home to the Old Country for fifteen years, and he had planned to give Jimmy a good time in London. But Jimmy, owing to his mother's absence, had already accepted an invitation to Travis Dene, Handforth's country home in Suffolk.

At Travis Dene mysterious things had happened, in which the lives of Uncle Ben and Jimmy had been endangered. As a result, they had gone to Tregellis Castle—all the boys and girls with them. It had been the same at Sir Montie's home. There Mr. Potts and his nephew were again dogged by their enemies.

Then they had all gone on to Somerton Abbey, where they had been snowed up. Another attempt had been made on Jimmy's life and that very day they had left, only to meet Lord Dorrimore, who had gone down to Somersetshire to collect his guests. He had insisted upon them all coming straight to Dorrimore Castle.

This was their first evening under Lord Dorrimore's hospitable roof. And within the first hour Uncle Ben's enemies had shown themselves!

Mr. Potts had been reticent on the subject; he had not liked to talk about it. But it appeared that he was menaced by the agents of a powerful and unscrupulous Grand Mandarin. This man, whose name was Fu-Li-Sing, had sworn a vendetta against Uncle Ben, for Uncle Ben had beaten him in a deal with the Chinese Government over a valuable gold concession. Jimmy was of the same blood, and therefore he was also marked down as a victim.

EVERYBODY in the castle, of course, was a-flutter with excitement over this rapid move on the part of the enemy.

"Police?" said Lord Dorrimore, when it was suggested that police guards should be posted in the castle grounds. "We

don't want our party spoilt in that way. Surely there are enough of us to deal with any infernal Chinks who happen along? Of course, if you would like to have the police here, Mr. Potts, I'll ring up and —"

"No, no," interrupted Uncle Ben. "I don't want police protection. The less publicity, the better. I hate the whole wretched business. And if you and the others are willing to take the risk, Lord

"Car thieves are scarce about here," went on Dorrie. "That car had been standing outside old Colonel Gore's place about a mile away. The owner did not even know that it was missing until it happened to spot me as I was driving my bus round to the main road. You ought to have seen him tearing along, frazzled with alarm. He recognised his car at once, of course, and I handed it over. A lucky thing for him that it wasn't damaged when it went in the ditch."

"I hope I shall see the gentleman—I'd like to apologise for the trouble I gave him," said Mr. Potts. "I can't help feeling responsible. He'll tell the police, I expect."

"I don't think so," said Dorrie. "In fact, I asked him not to. We don't want any police inquiries over such a trifle."

"I am grateful to you, sir,"



Running out of Dorrimore Castle, Nipper & Co. were just in time to see the limp form of Mr. Potts being dragged through a hedge by three Chinamen.



Dorrimore, I agree with you that we are capable of looking after ourselves without help from outside."

"Just my idea," nodded his lordship cheerily. "Now, come along, everybody. Don't let this matter spoil the party. The chances are those Chinks won't make any other attempt."

They sat down to a hearty tea, and Dorrie was inclined to be amused.

"I admire the nerve of those blighters," he said dryly. "Do you know what I found out about that car?"

"What, sir?" went up a chorus.

"Why, the beggars stole it."

"My only hat!"

"What a nerve!"

said Uncle Ben quietly. "I can't help feeling that I'm a nuisance here——"

Lord Dorrimore would not hear of this. And the party settled down to enjoy its

CHAPTER 3.

Handforth is Suspicious!

LATER in the evening Mr. Potts made a suggestion.

He was thinking of the night when his Chinese enemies were most likely to be active—and he proposed a simple system of guards.

"I don't want you to think I'm nervous," he said uncomfortably, "but I'm thinking of the lad mainly. Maybe it would be better if some of you youngsters took it in turns to keep awake—on the watch. Jimmy will sleep all the more soundly——"

"That's all right, sir," interrupted Handforth. "We had already decided to post sentries round your bed-room. We're going to do the thing thoroughly, too; we're not going to let any giddy Chink get at you or Jimmy during the night. Not likely!"

There were other things to talk of during the evening—more pleasant things. The boys and girls were all thrilled by something which Mr. Potts had done—with Dorrie's permission—on the way through London. Uncle Ben, in fact, had suggested a glorious fancy-dress ball for the party, and, at his own expense, he had ordered scores of wonderful fancy-dress costumes. It was arranged that they should be sent down the next day—hundreds of costumes, so that the revellers would be enabled to make their own choice.

"I'm not saying that I like the idea much," said Lord Dorrimore. "You ought to let me foot the bill, Mr. Potts. This is my party——"

"I won't hear of it," insisted Uncle Ben, smiling. "I am your guest, Lord Dorrimore, and it is a whim of mine to hold this big masquerade. It will make me happy if you will allow me to do something to add to the young people's pleasure."

The "young people" were not at all particular who paid the bill. The masquerade ball was what they were looking forward to. There was to be a full orchestra engaged for the evening, and everything, by the look of it, would be just glorious.

After dinner, as Handforth was standing in the great hall, he noticed an old man descending the stairs. Handforth had seen him before, and had wondered who he was.

"I say, Dorrie," said Handforth, as he spotted his host. "I don't want to be inquisitive, but who's the old boy who just came downstairs?"

"Wilkinson?" asked his lordship.

"Is that his name? Is he a guest?"

"Good gad, no!" laughed Dorrie.

"Wilkinson? He's my new caretaker."

"Oh!" said Handforth darkly.

"What's wrong?"

"A caretaker—eh?" said Handforth, as Church and McClure and Nipper joined

him. "What do you want a caretaker for—now?"

"My dear kid, I think you are inquisitive," chuckled Dorrie. "Don't you understand that as soon as this party is over, I shall shut up the Castle? And I need a sound, reliable man——"

"Are you sure that he is sound and reliable?" interrupted Handforth earnestly. "My pater engaged a new butler—a chap named Rutley—and I'm as certain as I'm alive that he was a rotter in the pay of those Chinese crooks. He vanished from my home soon after we left for Tregellis Castle—and we saw him at Tregellis Castle, too. He was doing some funny business there, and he was handed over to the police. What's more, he escaped. Then there was another mysterious rotter—an old boy named Zacchi——"

"I'm not very interested in your friends, young 'un," said Dorrie patiently.

"They're not my friends," snorted Handforth, as the other juniors grinned. "But I'm wondering if Wilkinson is O.K."

"Then you'd better stop wondering right away," said Dorrie. "I'm perfectly satisfied that Wilkinson's references were good. He's only been here—— Well, as a matter of fact, he came to-day," he added bluntly.

"To-day?" gasped Handforth.

"What's the matter?"

"It's jolly suspicious—that's all I can say," muttered Handforth. "What do you other chaps think? This old boy comes in to-day—the very day that Jimmy Potts and his uncle arrive!"

"Cheese it, Handy," said Church. "You're suspicious of everybody. It's like your nerve to tell Dorrie that he can't look after his own affairs."

"Well, I'm sorry, but I'm going to keep my eye on that old boy," said Handforth firmly. "He only came in to-day, eh? Jolly funny!"

The others chuckled, and soon forgot the matter. Nipper, perhaps, was slightly impressed. For, after all, the circumstances were peculiar. But Lord Dorrimore seemed satisfied with his new caretaker, and it was none of the boys' business to interfere.

It so happened that Handforth went upstairs soon afterwards, and Church was with him. As they turned the angle of one of the wide, well-lighted upper corridors, they caught a glimpse of a sombre figure slipping quickly into a bed-room. There had been something suggestive in the way that figure vanished—so quickly, so noiselessly. And in that flash Handforth had recognised—Wilkinson.

"Great Scott!" gurgled Handforth, flushed with sudden excitement. "Did—did you see, Churchy?"

"Look here, Handy——"

"It was that man—that caretaker," hissed Handforth.

"Was it? Well, I don't see——"

"You idiot!" interrupted Handforth. "He just dodged into Uncle Ben's bedroom."

"Oh!"

"You're not going to tell me that's not suspicious?" asked Handforth quickly. "The man's a caretaker! What right has he in a guest's bed-room? Didn't I tell you, from the first, that I was suspicious? Here, buzz down—fetch some of the others! We'll settle this, once and for all."

Church buzzed down—not because he really suspected Wilkinson of being an enemy, but because he wanted to get help. Handforth needed restraining!

Meanwhile, Edward Oswald crept to the bed-room door, and he was not surprised to find it closed. He hesitated. Should he try to open the door silently—or suddenly burst it open?

His natural impetuosity got the better of the argument, and before he had given the problem a second's thought he turned the handle, flung the door open, and strode in.

Wilkinson, the caretaker, was over by the window, and in one hand he held an electric torch, and with the other hand he was skilfully unscrewing the window-catch!

CHAPTER 4.

A Shock for Nipper & Co.

WILKINSON turned swiftly — so swiftly that he betrayed himself. He was a much younger man than he appeared to be! His eyes glittered with sudden anger.

"Caught you red-handed!" roared Handforth, rushing forward. "Hi, help!"

Wilkinson rushed at him, and the attack was so swift, so effective, that Handforth was helpless. The fingers which gripped him were like tempered steel.

"Be silent, you young idiot!" muttered Wilkinson tensely. "You'll attract the whole household!"

"That's what I want to do," gasped Handforth, startled by the old man's vigour. "You crook! You're one of the mandarin's agents! You're monkeying with that window-catch—so that you can come in during the night and murder Mr. Potts!"

He struggled, but with a deft movement Wilkinson had him on his back on floor. At that instant Church burst with Nipper and McClure and Tom Watson and Tregellis-West. Fortunately Church had happened to meet the fellows in the hall, and they had all dashed up the stairs in response to his appeal.

"Great Scott!" gurgled Church. "The Handy was right!"

"On him!" yelled Mac.

They leapt forward in a body. The boy to enter the room had closed the door, and this dramatic little scene was being enacted in private.

Wilkinson, in spite of his strength, had no chance against the five sturdy movites. They dragged him away from Handforth, they sprawled over him, holding him down grimly. And in the flu of the struggle something happened. Wilkinson's grey hair shifted grotesquely, revealing itself as a wig.

"A disguise!" gasped Nipper.

"I knew it!" said Handforth exultant. "Didn't I tell you that he was a crook? Hold him tightly, you chaps. He's probably armed. Who's got some cord to bind the rotter?"

"Don't bother," said the prisoner in disgust. "Confound it! You youngsters are too sharp! One of you had better lock that door—we don't want to be interrupted."

Nipper uttered a curious gurgle in throat.

"Guv'nor!" he ejaculated, staring dazedly.

There was no mistaking that voice—the voice of Nelson Lee himself! The other boys recognised it in the same instant. The expression on Handforth's face was so eloquent of blank stupefaction that Nelson Lee lost some of his anger.

"All right, Handforth," he said dryly. "I'm not blaming you. You thought you were doing the right thing."

The great detective completely removed his wig, and at the same moment, in so subtle way, his whole facial expression changed. All those boys recognised the headmaster. Nelson Lee did not rely wholly upon make-up for his disguise. Indeed, he generally used the minimum make-up. He was a past-master in the art of altering his features—and he possessed the rare ability of holding such facial changes for hours on end.

"I—I say, sir, I'm awfully sorry," stammered Handforth feebly. "I—I thought I mean—— That is to say, I hadn't the faintest idea——"

"Well, we don't want to be found here in Mr. Potts' bed-room," interrupted

Nelson Lee crisply. "It is probable that Mr. Potts would want to know the whys and wherefores; and I see no reason for alarming him just now. Follow me!"

There was nothing schoolmasterly in his attitude; but he spoke decisively, and the boys obeyed instantly.

They were still more or less dazed by the shock of this surprise. Nelson Lee adjusted his wig, went to the door, and quietly opened it. A moment later he had crossed the corridor, and was in another bed-room. The boys followed him in, the door was closed.

"I was paying some attention to the window-catch in Mr. Potts' bed-room when you sprang in on me, Handforth," said Lee quietly. "There may be some excitement in the night—although I do not anticipate any. But forewarned is forearmed, and I want to be ready in case of trouble."

"I—I can't believe it, sir," faltered Handforth. "I mean—you! No wonder Dorrie told me not to be a young ass!"

"I suppose Dorrie knows, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"I thought it as well to take our old friend into my confidence," nodded Nelson Lee. "Yes, Dorrie knows. It would hardly be possible for me to have the run of the house otherwise. But I was hoping that you boys would refrain from interfering——"

"Honestly, sir, I didn't mean to interfere," said Handforth earnestly.

"Well, you must forget that you have made this discovery," said Nelson Lee. "You must all pledge me your solemn word that you will keep my little secret. It is very necessary. I want no harm to come to young Potts."

"Or to his uncle, either," said Handforth.

"Exactly," nodded Lee. "But Mr. Potts is far more capable of taking care of himself. It is Jimmy I am more concerned about. There is grave danger for him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Perhaps it would have been better if Uncle Ben had taken him to London, sir?" asked Watson.

"No; the boy is far safer here."

Sir Montie was looking at Nipper with a shrewd, inquiring eye.

"It strikes me, begad, that you're not so surprised as the rest of us, Nipper, old boy," he said.

"Well, that's true," admitted Nipper. "I half expected that my guv'nor would be here somewhere."

"But how could you?" demanded Handforth. "We all thought that Mr. Lee was dead."

"I didn't; I knew that he was alive."

"You knew?"

"Mr. Lee revealed himself to me ever before we left St. Frank's," said Nipper.

"Why, you—you awful swindler," ejaculated Handforth indignantly. "No wonder you told us not to worry about your guv'nor! No wonder you said that you were satisfied that he was alive and well!"

"Sorry," grinned Nipper. "It wasn't my fault. The guv'nor pledged me to silence."

"And for a very good reason, boys," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I'm not saying that I don't trust you—but a chance word, allowed to slip out by accident, might have ruined all my plans. I have not been so very far away from you since that memorable day at St. Frank's when I was supposedly murdered."

"You mean you were at Travis Dene, sir?" asked Handforth quickly.

"Yes."

"And at my place—Tregellis Castle?" asked Montie.

"Yes; and at Somerton Abbey, too," replied Lee dryly.

"Great Scott!"

"Begad!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"The guv'nor has been pretty busy, by the look of things," said Nipper.

"However busy I have been, young 'un, my efforts have been more or less wasted," said the great detective quietly. "But here, in Dorrimore Castle, I fancy I shall gain my reward. It is well said that patience is a virtue. I have been very patient—and soon I shall be in a position to lay these infamous criminals by the heels!"

CHAPTER 5.

Pledged to Silence!

THE boys were intensely thrilled. There was a note of quiet confidence in Nelson Lee's voice which heartened them.

"The rotters took you by surprise this evening, didn't they, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly. "I mean, you weren't expecting the Chinks to come out into the open and grab Mr. Potts as they did?"

Lee nodded.

"I will admit that that incident came as a surprise to me," he said. "But I cannot be everywhere at once, Handforth."



The fleeing figure tripped and fell into the snow. "He's down!" exclaimed Nipper triumphantly. "Now's our chance."

"We're here, sir," urged Edward Oswald. "We'll help you if you only say the word——"

"The best way in which you can help me is to carry on as though you know nothing," said Nelson Lee promptly. "I can assure you, boys, that I am not masquerading as an old caretaker for the mere fun of it—or because I like doing things in a melodramatic way. Far from it. This pose is necessary."

"You chaps don't know half of it," said Nipper, with a glance at the others. "It was my guv'nor who saved Jimmy at Tregellis—when Jimmy fell through the ice on the lake. Don't you remember?"

"By George!" said Handforth, with a start. "We were puzzled about that, too."

"It was Mr. Lee who saved Jimmy again at Somerton," went on Nipper. "He was watching all the time—he was ready."

"Now we're beginning to understand," said Tommy Watson eagerly. "We wondered why those Chinks had failed so often."

"And what about that crook, Rutley?" asked Handforth. "You know who I mean, don't you, sir?"

"The questionable butler your father was rash enough to engage at Travis Dene? Yes, I have full knowledge of the man, Rutley," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "An ugly-looking specimen, Handforth."

"A crook if ever I saw one, sir," agreed Handforth. "I couldn't understand what the dickens my pater was fooled by him. One look at his eyes was enough for me. I was suspicious of him from the first."

"Good lad!" said Lee approvingly. "But you needn't worry about Rutley—he'll do no harm now."

"What about that other mysterious fellow, sir—that fortune-teller chap Zacchi?" asked McClure.

"I fancy his teeth have been drawn too," smiled Nelson Lee.

"By George! You're right, sir," said Handforth. "We found his teeth in the snow, at Tregellis Castle. False teeth. I say, I'll bet he lost those false teeth when he was struggling with you in a fight," he added quickly.

"As a matter of fact, I was present during that fight," admitted Lee. "And I can safely tell you, Handforth, that Zacchi will in no way menace Mr. Potter or his nephew."

"You've got them both under arrest?" asked Handforth, nodding. "You can't kid us, sir. Just think of it, you chaps. Mr. Lee has been dodging about like a giddy Will-o'-the-Wisp, and he's been bagging these blighters right and left. I wish you'd let us help, sir. We know that the mandarin's agents have followed us——"

"I am after bigger game than the hirelings, Handforth," interrupted Lee, with a grim quietness. "I could have captured all of them long ago. But if I had done so, I should have revealed my hand. No; I am waiting until I can get Number One."

"Number One," breathed Handforth, who loved anything that sounded melodramatic. "You mean that crooked mandarin? By George! I've always suspected that he was in the game himself."

"We have talked too long," said Nelson Lee suddenly. "Now, boys, you must all go downstairs and mingle with the others. And remember—say nothing."

They went downstairs to join the others, and it must be admitted that they were not in the mood for Christmas games or dancing. The discovery that Nelson Lee was on the premises filled them with intense excitement.

But the music and the dancing and the lighthearted gaiety of the girls helped them to forget. By bed-time they were calm, and they all had a feeling of confidence which was new. The very knowledge of Nelson Lee's presence was heartening.

After the exciting events which had occurred at Somerton Abbey and Tregellis Castle and Travis Dene—mostly at night—there was a feeling of tension in the air now. Boys and girls alike wondered if the night would pass without some dramatic adventure. Jimmy Potts and his uncle provided the one topic of conversation after the boys and girls had retired to their bed-rooms.

But nothing happened.

There were too many guards. The enemy had no chance of breaking through the defences. Not only were there two boys alert and awake within Uncle Ben's bed-room, but two others patrolled the corridor. More watchers were on duty at a handy window in one of the other wings, from which point of vantage they could keep a constant eye on the lighted window of Mr Potts' bed-room.

"We don't want any giddy Scotland Yard detectives," said Handforth complacently, as he was taking his spell of duty with Church in the small hours. "Just let those Chinks try to get in now. I wish they'd come. We'd give 'em a warm reception."

"They won't come," said Church, yawning. "Don't forget that Mr. Lee's on the alert, too," he added in a low voice.

"That's just what I'm remembering all the time," said Handforth comfortably. "And don't you yawn, my lad. We've another hour to go yet."

They were relieved in due course, and when they got into their own beds they slept soundly. Morning came and the precautions of the night proved thoroughly efficient. Jimmy had had undisturbed sleep, and Uncle Ben, too, was looking fresh and vigorous this morning.

"I cannot say how grateful I am to you young people for all the good services you are rendering," he said at the breakfast table. "Ye've taken a big load off my mind. Rare youngsters, eh, Lord Dorrimore?"

"They're all right," smiled Dorrie. "Didn't I tell you that we could do without the police?"

Mr. Potts grunted.

"If only those accursed Chinks would come out into the open again," he said gruffly. "They're too slippery—they're too tricky. I'd like to see them laid by the heels, so that all this sentry-go business could be abandoned. By golly! I feel so much indebted to ye all that I shall never be able to square the account."

"That's just where you're wrong, sir," laughed Lord Dorrimore. "I know these kids, and you can ta'e it from me that they're thoroughly enjoying themselves."

"Rather, sir!" went up a hearty chorus.

"They don't like anything tame," continued Dorrie, grinning. "This Christmas has been unusual, and they've revelled in it."

"We're not going to let you out of our sight all day, sir," said Handforth heartily. "Wherever you go, wherever Jimmy goes, you'll have plenty of shadows. No more kidnappings."

Uncle Ben shrugged helplessly, and then he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Bless me, ye're a grand crowd," he declared. "Ay, I'm glad I came back to the Old Country, if only to realise once again that the stock of Old England is as fine to-day as it ever was in the past. Good lads! Splendid lads! I'm proud of ye!"

— —

CHAPTER 6.

The Lurking Menace!

THE morning was spent hilariously at winter sports.

The conditions were ideal, for the snow was thick, and the frost held. Down in Somersetshire there had been a big thaw; but here, at Dorrimore Castle, the frost was as crisp as ever. The boys and girls gave themselves up wholeheartedly to the joys of tobogganing and kindred pastimes.

Uncle Ben joined in as heartily as any of the young people, and Jimmy, of course.

was in his element. By lunch-time, when they all went trooping back to the castle, they had appetites like wolves.

They all ate so heartily that they were feeling heavy during the afternoon, and not many of them were inclined to go out again for further strenuous exercise. It was cosy and comfortable lounging in front of the great log fires indoors. So there was a good deal of yarning, Uncle Ben being persuaded to spin stories of his adventures in China. Which he did with inimitable wit, enthralling an audience which grew larger and larger.

Yarning was forgotten, however, when the news went round that several enormous baskets had arrived from the station. The fancy-dress costumes!

There was a rush. One basket was full of costumes for the girls, and Irene Manners and her chums of the Moor View School triumphantly carried the basket off to their own quarters to select their costumes.

The boys gathered round the other great baskets, and they were delighted when they opened them and saw the magnificent garments inside.

"I say, Mr. Potts, this is awfully decent of you," burst out Reggie Pitt. "It must have cost you a mint of money to hire these costumes. I've never seen any so topping."

"Yes, rather!"

"Bravo, Uncle Ben."

Mr. Potts smiled.

"If you youngsters are pleased, that is the only reward I need," he said dryly. "If you come across a particularly large fancy-dress, reserve it for me, won't you? I think I'll run along to the library and have a cigar with our genial host."

"Half a minute, uncle," said Jimmy eagerly. "What do you think of this for me?"

He held up a gorgeous affair of pink and blue silk—the dress of a dandified noble of the Middle Ages.

"Too commonplace," said Uncle Ben, shaking his head. "You need something distinctive, Jimmy, lad."

"By George! This will do for me!" yelled Handforth. "A highwayman's get-up. I'll go as Dick Turpin."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just about your mark, old man," said Boots of the Fourth.

"Here we are—what's this?" asked Uncle Ben. "You see, they're all complete—every one wrapped separately, and there's even a label—Hullo! The hunchback of Notre Dame! That ought to be effective."

"Don't you think it's rather sombre, uncle?" asked Jimmy dubiously.

"Fiddlesticks!" laughed Mr. Potts. "It's only a fancy-dress carnival, isn't it? The more unusual the costume, the better. By golly! There's even a fal nose included in the outfit. This ought to do you fine, Jimmy. The hunchback of Notre Dame was a famous character in history."

"I'll have the costume if you don't want it, Jimmy," said Gresham eagerly.

"Nothing doing," grinned Jimmy. "From now onwards I'm the hunchback of Notre Dame."

"And here's one for you, Mr. Potts," grinned De Valerie. "Jolly old Falstaff."

"The very thing," said Uncle Ben promptly. "If one of you boys will be good enough to put that costume in my room I shan't need to worry any more."

He nodded, and went out, and pretended not to notice that two of the boys immediately followed. They did not leave him until they had seen him safely into the library, where he joined Lord Dorrimer. But as soon as the door had closed he laughed heartily.

"By my ancestors' ghosts!" he said picturesquely. "These lads are looking after me well. Shadowing me wherever I go, watching over me like guardian angels, eh?"

"They're not going to let you out of their sight," chuckled Dorrie. "I don't blame them, either. While you're under this roof, Mr. Potts, your worries needn't exist."

"It's a mighty nice feeling," said Uncle Ben, as he relaxed luxuriously into one of the great chairs before the fire.

DUSK had turned into night when a figure, sleek and noiseless, slid like something spectral along the frozen pathways of the sunken garden.

The Man in Black!

Overhead the stars were shining, and the air was crisp and still. Yet the mystery figure was virtually invisible. From head to foot he was clothed in close-fitting black, even to his feet and hands and his face. He was like a part of the night itself.

From the sunken gardens he mounted some steps, crossed the lower lawns, using an intersecting pathway where the snow had been trodden hard, and soon he was making his way swiftly across the park.

His journey was brief. Soon he came to a frozen stream, and standing there a nestling amongst the silent, leafless trees stood a picturesque boathouse. It was locked, as it was always locked during the winter months.

But the Man in Black was not to be hindered by a locked door. Like a shadow he moved round to the rear, where a small window could be faintly seen. He pushed it gently, and it immediately opened.

"You are here?" he whispered in sibilant Chinese.

"Yes," came a soft reply.

Snake-like, the Man in Black wormed his way through the opening. He took two or three paces forward, and then something glowed in his hand. It was a shielded electric torch, so cunningly devised that it only sent forth a tiny, concentrated ray of light. As he did this, he removed the black covering from his face, revealing a yellow, crinkled skin and narrow, slit-like eyes.

Two figures merged from the gloom, and they drew close to him. The beam from the torch revealed them as two more Chinamen.

"Take good heed of the words our Illustrious master sends," murmured the Man in Black. "We shall give all our attention to the boy this night. You will know him by his strange costume. He will be at the dance in the guise of a strange hunchback. Do you understand?"

"We understand," murmured the two others, in one voice.

"It is impossible that you shall make the mistake, for the boy will be wearing a long, sombre gown which reaches to his feet," went on the Man in Black. "He will wear a hood, and his face will be masked. But on his back there will be a great hump, and he will crouch. It is well that he should wear this dress, since he will be easy to find."

The others murmured again.

"I shall be there, and you will watch for my signal," continued the Mystery

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Man. "When you receive that signal—act! And act swiftly—or our master will visit you with his wrath. Let me see the clothes you have here."

They moved across to a corner of the boathouse; the electric torch gleamed down into an open suitcase. The Man in Black was pleased.

"It is good," he said smoothly. "Once again, do you remember all that the Illustrious master has ordered of you?"

"All," said one of the others.

Not another word was spoken. The Man in Black left as he had come. Silently he retraced his steps to the castle. And as he was passing some distance from the library window he saw a bulky figure moving across the brightly-illuminated room.

The next instant Lord Dorrimore hurried across and pulled to the heavy curtains. He had realised, perhaps, that it was unwise for Uncle Ben to be in that room so fully exposed.

Underneath the mask, the Man in Black smiled a twisted smile.

CHAPTER 7.

An Old Acquaintance!

VIVIAN TRAVERS, looking very elegant as a gaily-dressed Cavalier, stood back and surveyed Jimmy Potts without enthusiasm.

"I cannot truthfully say that I am impressed, dear old fellow," he said frankly. "You look like a cross between the Old Man of the Sea and Methuselah."

"Rats!" said the hunchback of Notre Dame. "I think this get-up is ripping."

"I sincerely trust not," said Travers, with concern. "So early in the revels

"Fathead!"

Jimmy was pleased with himself as he surveyed his reflection in the glass. True, he had a sinister look. His long, flowing gown was sombre, the hood was almost villainous. And with the heavy mask over the upper part of his face, and a wispy false beard on his chin, he was unrecognisable. The hump on his back, too, gave him a grotesque appearance.

Nipper half suspected that Uncle Ben had had an ulterior motive in choosing that strange costume for Jimmy. And so it turned out.

"Splendid!" said Mr. Potts, his eyes gleaming when Jimmy presented himself. "By golly! It's wonderful! Eh, Lord Dorrimore? What do you say?"

"I wouldn't know the young beggar from Adam," admitted his lordship, surveying Jimmy critically.

"Which is just what we want," said Mr. Potts, in a low voice. "I am all to the danger, and even in the midst of these revels the enemy may act. But I swear that the hounds, clever as they are, will never see through this disguise. Jimmy, at least, will be safe."

He had not seen the Man in Black creeping across the park—neither had anybody else!

"Good lad!" said Mr. Potts, patting Jimmy on the shoulder. "You can mingle freely with the dancers this evening, and forget everything. Enjoy yourself!"

"I'm going to have a ripping time, uncle," said Jimmy happily.

And Uncle Ben was satisfied. He himself was most gorgeously attired as Sir John Falstaff—and he really looked the part. He made a most impressive figure.

All the boys and girls were enjoying themselves hugely. This was, in a way, the best party of the Christmas holidays. Good old Dorrie was excelling himself. In the gaiety and the excitement, nearly everybody had completely forgotten the possibility of danger to Jimmy Potts and his uncle.

But there were sinister enemies at work—hidden, silent, secret.

The castle was ablaze with colour lights, and there were endless numbers of carnival balloons and other decorations. It all added to the jollity of the occasion. Mingling with the youthful guests were the servants, smiling and happy, for they, too, had been told by the genial Dorrie to join in the revelry. The band had not yet arrived—a splendid orchestra from London—and very soon the masquerade ball itself would commence.

"Isn't it too gorgeous for words?" asked Irene Manners, as she joined a group of boys.

She was dressed as a dairymaid, and she looked delightfully refreshing and sweet.

"We're going to have a great time, aren't we, girl?" said Handforth genially. "Of course, I'm having the first dance with you, aren't I?"

"And why 'of course'?" said Irene.

"Well, dash it——"

"You're late, 'Ted," said the girl sweetly.

"What!"

"Buster Boots has already asked me for the first dance, and how could I refuse?" was Irene's demure comment. "And Fanny Wood has claimed the second dance, and——"

"Here, I say!" burst out Handforth indignantly. "That's like their giddy cheek! I took it for granted that——"

"That was your mistake, Ted," said Irene. "Perhaps, if you're good, I'll give you a dance later on."

The other fellows chuckled, and Handforth nearly burst a blood vessel as Irene walked away. She did not actually mean it, but perhaps she was a little huffed.

"It's your own fault, Handy," said Nipper. "Don't you know enough by this time? Girls don't like being taken for granted. You thought you were going to have all Irene's dances, didn't you? Well, it jolly well serves you right! I took good care to fix things up with Mary Summers before any of the other fellows could chip in."

"Same here," said Reggie Pitt cheerfully. "I've got all my dances arranged with Doris."

"It isn't fair," growled Handforth. "I've been busy—I've been thinking. As a matter of fact, I've been wondering if Jimmy Potts will be in any danger this evening. And now, while my back's turned—while I'm engaged on detective work—Irene lets me down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They strolled towards the big hall, and they chuckled at Fatty Little, who looked excruciatingly funny in the garb of a gay old friar, even to a remarkably shiny bald pate, with a fringe of grey hair all the way round. Fatty was munching. He had done little else but munch throughout the Christmas holidays.

"Hallo, Friar Tuck, or whoever you are supposed to be," said Nipper, digging Fatty in the ribs. "Got your dances fixed up?"

"Dances?" repeated Fatty, staring.

"Of course, I'm sorry for any girl who gives you a dance," said Nipper. "The chances are that she will be crippled for the rest of the evening."

"The girls needn't worry," said Fatty, with a sniff. "I'm not doing any dancing, thanks. Do you think I'm idiot enough to dance while there's grub to be eaten? There's grub everywhere, my sons—on the sideboards, on the big tables in the dining-hall, and all over the shop. I'm having a fine time, thanks! Great pancakes! I just wander about, going from this room to that, and I'm sampling everything!"

"It's a wonder where you put it all," said Handforth, marvelling.

"Oh, I've thought that all out," said Fatty contentedly. "You see, I'm walking about all the time, and exercise keeps my appetite sharp."

They chuckled, and decided to go out upon the terrace to have a look at the night. There were four of them in this little group—Nipper, Handforth, Church, and McClure. They found the stars gleaming clearly in the black sky, and there was not a breath of wind. It was a perfect winter's night.

"Let's stroll to the corner," suggested Nipper. "My hat! This air is glorious."

They went to the corner, and their feet made no sound upon the dry, well-swept terrace—for they were all wearing dancing shoes. Nipper was the first to reach the corner, and as he turned he suddenly halted.

"Hallo! What's up?" asked Handforth, as he bumped into him.

"Look!" whispered Nipper. "I saw a figure dodge behind that bush just as I came round the corner."

"What!"

"Quick! It might be one of Mr. Potts' enemies!" said Nipper, all his senses immediately on the alert. "I saw him by chance, and he was a second too late. Come on!"

They ran like the wind. Curiously enough, in that exciting second, they did not think of any possible danger. Their only object was to seize this unknown man who was lurking about in the castle grounds.

They swept round the bushes, and they were just in time to see a black figure streaking down the straight, long path which led to the upper lawn.

"There he is!" gasped Handforth. "Come on!"

They raced down the path. It was any odds that the fugitive would have escaped, but by sheer misfortune he caught his foot against a rockery stone which had become displaced, and which had lain unseen in his path. He tripped, staggered, and crashed over.

"He's down!" exclaimed Nipper breathlessly. "Now's our chance."

They fairly hurled themselves upon the unknown, and got him down just as he was in the act of rising.

"Oh, no, not this time!" snapped Nipper. "We want to see who you are, my friend!"

He whipped out a tiny electric torch from his pocket—he was carrying it deliberately this evening, in case of emergencies—and he flashed the light into the prisoner's face.

The man was Rutley—the ex-butler of Travis Dene!



Helplessly bound and gagged, Jimmy Potts saw his enemies remove a slab of stone from the tomb, revealing a black, empty cavity. "There shall the accursed boy lie!" said the leader triumphantly.

CHAPTER 8.

The Prisoner's Secret!

"RUTLEY!" gurgled Handforth.

The man said no word; only his eyes spoke of his annoyance and chagrin.

"What are you doing here—at Dorri-more Castle?" demanded Nipper.

"Rutley!" repeated Handforth excitedly. "By George! What did I say from the first, you chaps? Didn't I tell you that this man was a crook? Didn't I say that his eyes were evil and villainous?"

"I can't understand it," said Church dazedly. "You seem to be right for once, Handy!"

Edward Oswald ignored the implied insult.

"Rutley, the butler," he said exultantly. "You were up to monkey business at Travis Dene, and then you were up to more money business at Tregellis Castle, when you faked that ghost. Now you're trying to work some more monkey business here!"

Rutley sighed.

"It's no good," he said resignedly. "You young beggars are altogether sharp for me this time. I shall have to let you into the secret—although I don't want to."

Nipper's brain reeled. That voice! wasn't Rutley's voice. It had completely changed.

"Guv'nor!" gurgled Nipper, like a fellow in a dream.

"Yes," said the supposed Rutley. "Your guv'nor. Handforth, Church, Clure! Be good enough to take your hands off me. Surely you are satisfied now, that I am not a crook?"

"It's—it's Mr. Lee," babbled Church.

"In the flesh," said Nelson Lee, as he was allowed to get to his feet. "Evil, villainous eyes included!"

Handforth went dizzy.

"I—I didn't mean that exactly," he faltered. "You see, I was thinking of the real Rutley——"

"There is only one Rutley—and I am he," interrupted Lee.

"What!" gasped Nipper. "Why did you thought you were impersonating the man?"

"Rutley is a purely fictitious character. I was Rutley at Travis Dene and at Tregellis Castle," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "That's given you a surprise, eh? Not the first one to-day, eh?"

"But—but it's all so puzzling, sir," said the startled Nipper. "You came here in the character of Wilkinson, the caretaker——"

"I did," agreed Lee. "But as I had certain work to do outside the castle walls this evening—I am on the watch—I thought it advisable to don a different get-up. I did not want 'Wilkinson' to be seen out of doors. Not that I expected to be collared by you young rascals."

The surprised boys hardly knew what to say. Their minds were in a whirl. They could not quite grasp the enormity of this discovery. All along they had taken Rutley for a crook.

"Great jumping corks!" ejaculated Handforth, at length. "Then—then you fooled my pater at Travis Dene, sir?"

"Not at all, Handforth; your father was aware of my identity all the time."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You don't think I would practise such a deception as that, do you, you young rascal?" asked Lee. "I knew that there was some danger, and I approached Sir

Edward frankly and openly. He at once consented to 'engage' me as his butler."

"But the pater told me that you had been at Travis Dene for two weeks!"

"I don't think he did, Handforth; but you had that impression, so your father did not disillusion you," said Lee. "I am glad to say that my little impersonation at Travis Dene proved very successful. I was able to prevent the execution of a particularly dastardly crime."

"But you couldn't lay your hands on Number One, eh, sir?" asked Nipper shrewdly.

"You have hit it on the head, young 'un," agreed Lee quietly. "I could not lay my hands on Number One. I am hoping to have that very satisfactory experience to-night."

"Oh!"

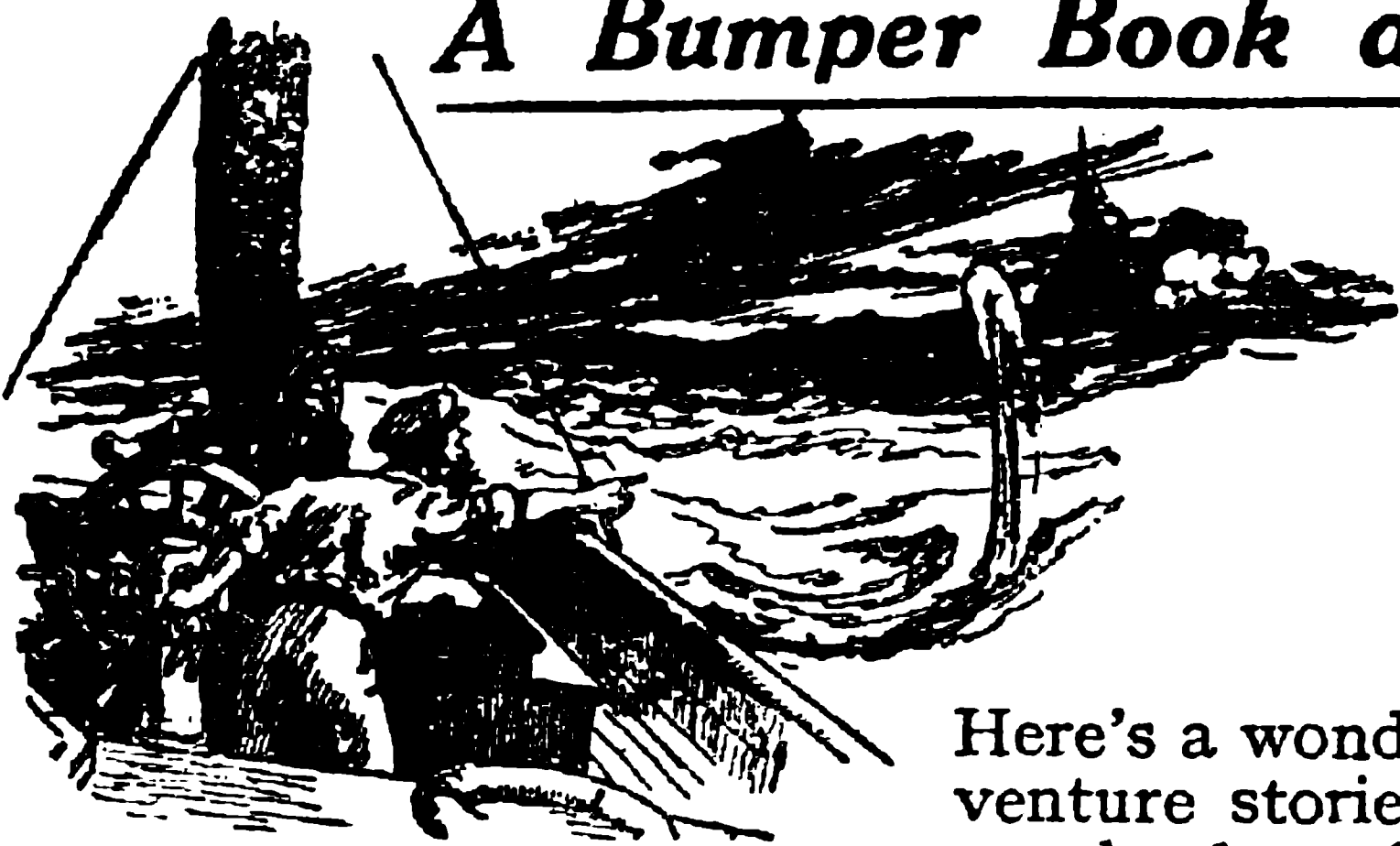
"But I shan't unless you boys return indoors and act as though you knew nothing," went on Nelson Lee warningly. "This is another little secret which you must keep. You will promise me, won't you?"

"Rather, sir," they chorused.

"The enemy is alert. We are taking risks even now by talking here," continued the great detective. "Don't tell any of the other boys, or the girls, either, but

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just between ourselves, the Rutley myth is exploded."

"I'm still terribly puzzled, sir," said McClure. "Why, at Tregellis Castle Rutley was caught redhanded with a fake ghost. Montie's uncle sent for the police, and you were arrested."

"Just a little piece of play-acting to deceive the enemy," said Lee dryly. "As a matter of fact, I had caught one of Number One's hirelings with that fake ghost; but I took no action, because I still had no evidence against the man I was after—the man I am still after."

"That wily old mandarin is slippery, sir," said Handforth breathlessly.

"Naturally, I revealed my identity to the police, after I had been arrested, and I was immediately released," continued Lee. "I might as well tell you now that it was while I was attending to my make-up the next morning that I saw Jimmy Potts' danger on the Tregellis lake."

"By Jove! Now I understand," said Nipper keenly. "You dashed out just as you were, guv'nor?"

"Yes, only half-dressed, and with insufficient make-up to disguise my real identity," said Lee. "So I was forced to conceal my face with a muffler. I managed to pull Jimmy out of the water, and I left him there when I saw you boys coming up. Had I remained, you would have recognised me, and that would have been fatal. For the enemy, too, would have got to know that I was at Tregellis. And from the very first I have been striving to fool Number One into believing that he killed me that night at St. Frank's. So that's another little mystery cleared up," he added dryly. "They'll all be cleared up sooner or later, if you'll have patience."

"What's going to happen to-night, sir?" asked Handforth tensely.

"I do not know exactly," replied Nelson Lee, his tone changing. "But whatever happens, you may be quite certain that I shall be on the watch, and alert. No harm will come to anybody. At least, to none of our friends. But I am distinctly hoping that harm will come to the enemy. Now, boys, no more questions. Off you go back indoors, or your absence will be noted and commented upon. Leave everything to me."

There was something in his tone which forbade the boys remaining any longer. Even Nipper went away with the others, and Nelson Lee slipped off into the darkness.

"By George! He's a marvel—a giddy marvel!" said Handforth admiringly. "What a surprise! What a shock! You

could have knocked me down with a peaholder!"

They got back indoors, and fortunately nobody had noticed their absence. And they mingled with the other revellers, keeping this fresh little secret to themselves.

CHAPTER 9.

The Unbidden Guests!

THE great ball-room of Dorrimore Castle was a scene of glorious colour and life.

This ball-room was one of the most magnificent in England. At present, with the brilliant lights and the carnival novelties and the gay dresses of the dancers, it presented a dazzling spectacle.

At the end of the vast apartment, where the orchestra, all the members of which were attired in gay Tyrolean costume, a lively fox-trot was being played, and the dancers were whirling round.

Not everybody was dancing. A number of the guests sat out or stood in groups, chatting and looking on. There were a great amount of guests here in addition to the St. Frank's boys and the Moor View girls. The genial Lord Dorrimore had invited practically everybody in the district.

"A magnificent success, sir," said Uncle Ben, as he stood beside Lord Dorrimore. "What a ball! It was worth coming home to England, all the way from China, for this one evening."

Dorrie laughed.

"I fancy everybody is having a good time," he said contentedly. "Thanks to your generosity, Mr. Potts, the boys and girls—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Uncle Ben gruffly. "My generosity, indeed! What have I done? Hired a few costumes. You are the host, Lord Dorrimore, and, golly, the best host I've ever known!"

"I don't think there'll be any 'fun business' to-night, Mr. Potts," said Lord Dorrimore in a low voice. "Too many lights—too many people about."

"I am easy in mind, too," smiled Uncle Ben.

"Look at Jimmy," smiled Lord Dorrimore, as he nodded across the gay ball-room. "Your enemies will have all the work cut out to twig him, eh? That queer-looking hunchback is the very last person in the room I should think of as young Jimmy."

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Potts. "I put myself upon my selection. We'll have 'em properly fooled this time."

They could see the figure of the hunchback of Notre Dame, grotesque, incongruous. Yet there were other figures

amongst the dancers equally incongruous. Mephistopheles in two or three editions, Guy Fawkes, Dick Turpin, and similar sinister characters. And everybody, of course, was masked.

The ladies did not have everything their own way just now, for a number of the boys and men were just as gaily and as frivolously attired. There were pierrots and pierrettes in plenty, of all colours and all kinds.

"This is what I call doing the thing properly," said Dick Turpin, who was really Handforth. "Good old Dorrie! He's the real goods."

"Don't forget Uncle Ben," came Jimmy Potts' voice.

Handforth turned, and found the hunchback of Notre Dame beside him.

"I say, Jimmy, you look pretty awful in that get-up," said Handforth with a grin. "But who cares? You're as safe as houses."

"Rather!" chuckled Jimmy, as he moved off.

"And we mustn't forget that Mr. Lee is hovering about somewhere," whispered Handforth, as he bent closer to Church's ear. "That's comforting, my son."

"Well, don't talk about it," growled Church. "You remember what Mr. Lee said"

"Don't you worry, I shan't talk—Hullo! What's happened to the lights?" asked Handforth abruptly. "Great Scott! All the lights have gone off!"

He was alarmed. He remembered what had happened at Travis Dene. The lights had failed there.

"Keep your hair on," said Church. "The lights have been turned off on purpose. The next dance is a spotlight dance."

"Oh!" ejaculated Handforth, relieved.

The band commenced playing a dreamy waltz, and the dancers moved gracefully round the ball-room, the swishing of their feet on the glassy floor sounding rhythmically.

Only the faint gleam of light near the orchestra could be seen, and two coloured spotlights winked down from somewhere above. The narrow beams of orange and mauve twinkled from pair to pair, and little gurgles of laughter mingled with the music. All the rest of the dancers were in complete gloom. It was great fun.

But little did those gay revellers realise what was taking place under the cloak of this darkness.

At one end of the banqueting hall there were great arches, and through one of these, three figures stole in unseen. They were three pierrots, one in scarlet, one in green, and the other in blue. The cos-

tumes were commonplace enough, although of rich silk. And each man wore a mask, rather larger masks than usual.

When the lights went up the three had mingled with the merry throng, and nobody took any notice of them. Yet from three different parts of the great ball-room these uninvited guests concentrated their attention upon one figure—the figure of the hunchback of Notre Dame.

It was clever, cunning. Who was there in that lighthearted crowd to suspect? The faces of those three unbidden guests were yellow, but they did not show yellow. Their chins and the lower parts of their faces had been very carefully made up with paint and powder. These newcomers looked as genuine as any of the real guests.

Yet, if anybody had been taking particular notice, they said no word to a soul. During the next dance, which was a tango, they strolled about near the open terrace windows, smoking. It was so warm in the ball-room, and the night was so calm, that more than one window had been opened. There was a covered veranda over the terrace just here, which guarded the ball-room from the freezing night air.

Then came another spotlight dance, amid much clapping and enthusiasm. Such dances were popular. The three pierrots in red, green and blue clapped with the rest. For they had been awaiting the next spotlight dance, awaiting with hidden uneasiness. But now they were relieved. The critical period had passed, and they had not been challenged.

Out snapped the lights and the dance began. From three different parts of the ball-room the pierrots wended their way through the dancers, and they were making for the hunchback of Notre Dame.

Jimmy, it seemed, had been unlucky in this dance. He had no partner, and thus he was compelled to stand out. Unconsciously he was playing into the hands of the enemy. As though to further their sinister designs, he was actually standing near one of the open terrace windows.

"Aren't you dancing, Jimmy?" murmured Travers, as he passed with Phyllis Palmer.

"No luck this time," was the rueful laugh. "All the girls were bagged before I looked round."

"Hard luck, Jimmy!" laughed Travers, as he danced on.

"Ass!" muttered the hunchback of Notre Dame. "He was warned not to call me Jimmy—Hullo! What's the idea?"

His voice was suddenly charged with alarm. The spotlights had turned to the far end of the room, and he was standing

(Continued on page 24.)

Take your seat for this week's laughable Special Pantomime Number



HANDFORTH'S Weekly

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EDITORIAL

By the
CHIEF COMEDIAN.

EDITORIAL STAFF.

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

December 26th, 1931.

PANTO CHESTNUTS

By
Professor Nap. Browne.

LET me see, there was something I wanted to say to you very particularly. What was it now? Tut, tut! That's funny! I had it on the tip of my tongue just now, and it's clean gone. I know it was something about—I know! I've got it. I wanted to wish you, one and all,

A MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Fancy forgetting that!

Well, you chaps, special numbers seem to come thick and fast at Christmas-time. A fortnight ago was our Christmas number, now our Pantomime number, and next week—

By George, you mustn't miss our New Year's number. I think it's as good as anything we've done, and I thoroughly agree with myself. Start 1932 in the right way by ordering the "NELSON LEE." In addition to my famous WEEKLY, Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks writes a long story every week, and, if you have time, it's rather worth reading. (The nerve of this merchant is amazing. Does Handy really think "NELSON LEE" readers buy the book on account of his WEEKLY?—Ed., "N.L.L.")

As regards the pantos., I hope all you fellows and girls will enjoy them. They will be better than ever this year, I am told. Christmas doesn't seem complete without going to a pantomime; but whether I shall be lucky enough this year, I can't say. I am writing this weeks before Christmas, and I may be miles away.

Here's hoping that you will all have a good time, anyhow.

Your old pal,

E. O. H.

THIS week, brothers and sisters, we will spend a moment in considering the harmless and necessary fruit, the CHESTNUT.

The Chestnut is at its best this time of the year. It flourishes exceedingly well in queer places called pantomimes. You can't mistal a chestnut. Everybody knows it.

This is a chestnut that grows very well in the panto called "Cinderella":

"My sister can't get her foot into the crystal slipper."

"No; she couldn't get her foot into the Crystal Palace."

This chestnut is very old, but it grows as fresh and new every year, and old men with beards still laugh at it, no doubt remembering how they nearly fell out of their nurse's arms when they first heard it.

The special "Dick Whittington" brand chestnut is a little different.

"That cat can't catch mice. I could catch it better by sitting down and making a noise like a mouse-trap."

Another honoured chestnut makes its appearance yearly in "Robinson Crusoe."

"I didn't meet a soul on that desert island until I came across a heavy swell on the ocean and a sandy little cove running in the cliffs."

And another, from "Sinbad":

"The boat was cutting patterns on the sea's blue surges."

"I thought you were a sailor—not a tailor."

All these old chestnuts have flourished well for years; but one sometimes thinks that they are now nearly ripe.

During the NEW YEAR,
NEW MOON,
NEW RALGIA read
HANDFORTH'S WEEKLY.

Nipper, our Puzzle King, presents his latest brain worrier!

PAN

CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME PUZZLE

OUR respected but fatheaded editor suggested to me that I should evolve some really good puzzle for your Christmas parties this year. I have therefore undergone violent eruptions of the brain, calmed by large chunks of ice, and have produced the little puzzle set out below.

This puzzle, or game, can be played by any number of you. Copy out the design, and give it to each player. Or, better still, buy enough copies of the WEEKLY to give round.

What you have to do is this: Starting at any square you please, you have to make up the name of a pantomime, or a character in the pantomime, by moving on to the adjoining squares. You can move vertically, horizontally or diagonally—that is to say, you can go into any square which touches your square, whether at the corners or at the sides. But you must not jump over any squares to get at your letter.

For instance, suppose you want to make the name SINBAD. You will start, say, at square 11. You can go on to squares 12 and 20 to make SIN, but you mustn't jump square 28 to get at your 'B' in square 37. The other rules are as follows:

The player is not allowed to move into the same square TWICE during one word. (Even if the name of your pantomime consists of two or three words, this rule still applies.)

The names of the pantomime characters must be put together in their

proper order. (You can make the name SINBAD from square 36, in this fashion—A.B.D.N.I.S.—but this is NOT allowed. To make SINBAD you must start at "S," and carry on to "I," etc.)

When you have completed a pantomime, write it down, together with the number of the starting square. Then try to find another one, and so on. For your next pantomime you may use the letters you used in the first one. In fact, you'll have to, of course. There are only 40 letters in the whole lot. You may not think that there are many names concealed in these forty letters, but keep pegging away, and you'll be surprised.

If you play this game at a party you can offer a small prize to the one who gets the most names. You will find it quite good fun. If you want to see if you have discovered all the names, the solution is printed elsewhere. But don't look at it until you have done your best.

Cheerio, and a merry Christmas.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
D	O	C	D	B	O	A	E
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
N	O	S	I	I	R	R	B
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
C	S	H	N	D	E	E	U
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
O	R	U	G	D	A	L	L
33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
E	B	L	A	B	B	I	A

FOR THE FATHEADS

FELLOWS like Enoch Snipe, who cannot see the point of any joke until it is driven into their silly heads with a French nail and a tack hammer, will not be able to understand the jokes, etc., in this magazine. So here is a corner conducted for their especial benefit.

First of all, dear fatheads, a little riddle for you.

Why are birds in the early morning like men in debt?—Because their "bills" are all over-"dew."

You see, the joke is really on the words "bill" and "dew." Each of these words has two meanings. A bird's bill, of course, is its beak, and early in the morning it is likely enough to have some dew on its beak, isn't it?

But the bills of a man in debt are quite different. The bill means the account—the sum of money that he owes. And when he has owed it for a long time, it becomes what is called "overdue." You see? Over dew—overdue!

So that the answer to the riddle is:

Because their bills (accounts) are all over dew (overdue).

Simple, really, isn't it—when it has been explained.

NO TIPS

Aunt Bessie,
Aunt Sue,
Aunt Tessie,
Aunt Prue
Aren't Generous
(Worse Luck!)

(T.W.)

WHEN a val masto name of t

Our an that prin the same the reason usually a

The gen does not way of a the audie comedian. red nose,

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PARS

Our Special Interviewer talks with

DICK WHITTINGTON

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I FOUND Dick Whittington (thrice
Lord Mayor of London) in the
dressing-room of the Palaseum,
refreshing himself with a cold
sausage.

"Come right in," he invited cordially.
"How are you, Mr. Whittington?"
"Not too good," said Dick seriously.
"You see, this theatre is right near
the Bow Bells, and every time they start
ringing I have to turn and turn again
until I'm absolutely dizzy."

At this moment there was a loud
clanging outside. Dick Whittington
groaned.

"Turn again, Whittington!" he mut-
tered. "Excuse me!"

He turned round and round for about
ten minutes. When the bells stopped he
sank exhausted into his seat.

"They're doing that all day long," he
said dismally. "By the way, allow me
to introduce you to my deputy-cat,
Felix."

I shook the hand of a "moggy" about
the size of a small elephant, and then
went on:

"Your deputy-cat, Mr. Whittington?
What do you mean by that?"

"My regular cat is away, you see.
This monster is acting as vice-cat at an
increased salary."

"Dear me! I hope your famous cat
isn't ill?"

"Ill, my foot!" snorted Whittington.
"She's got ambitions, that's what's the
matter with her. Wanted to be a star.
Wasn't satisfied with playing with me.
And when an American film magnate
offered her the title rôle of 'Puss in
Boots,' the unfeline feline simply walked
off and left me flat. She's out in Holly-
wood now, and I hope it chokes her!"



"Was she really such a good
catcher, Mr. Whittington?"

"Good! Ha, ha, ha! It would be
mighty good rat who could catch her.
When she saw a rat she simply turned
lemon-colour and streaked for her life."

"How was it that the rats were
killed, then?"

"Shush! When they saw her they
died of laughing. But don't let on.
don't want rumours to get about, or
shan't become Lord Mayor of London
for a record number of times."

"And now, Mr. Whittington," I said
rising, "will you kindly tell the folks
of England to what you owe your great
rise in life. Wasn't it to dogged pluck
and determination?"

"No, it wasn't."

"To perseverance in the face
difficulty?"

"No; nor that."

"To self-reliance and assiduity?"

"Nix!"

"Then to what was it?"

"Rats!" said Dick cordially.

SONG OF THE PANTO

O H, come to the land of the Panto-
mime,
It's a wonderful, wonderful
land!

Strange are the sights one sees in there,
And yet one feels at ease in there;
The moon is made of cheese in there

And the "stars" are simply grand.
How they flutter in the glitter of the
Pantomime!

What things they can achieve
When the witches will endeavour
To make everybody clever

In the Land of Make-believe!

What a time in the clime of the Panto-
mime,

The end comes far too soon.
There's slaughtered thieves in kegs in
there,

And four-league boots for legs in there;

The goose lays golden eggs in there,
And the cow jumps over the moon.
How they glimmer in the shimmer
the Pantomime!

How we dread the time to leave!
Oh, who wouldn't sing a canto

To the glory of the Panto
And the Land of Make-believe?

(C. de V.)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE

For CINDERELLA start at square 3;
ALADDIN, square 40; for ALI BABA
square 40; for ROBIN HOOD, squares
or 15; for ROBINSON CRUSOE, square
14 or 15; for BLUE BEARD, square 38;
RED RIDING HOOD, square 15 (move
to 22); for BLUNDERBORE, square
(P.S.) SINBAD is a snare and a delusion.
You can't make him without jumping
squares.

THE MAN IN BLACK

(Continued from page 20.)

in deep gloom. Three men, dressed as pierrots, had closed round him, and instantly he realised the significance of the move. Yet it was hardly possible that three of the guests——

"Here, I say— What the—— Gurrerrrrrh!"

A gloved hand was thrust forcibly over the hunchback's bewhiskered mouth. In the same second the other two pierrots seized that twisted, distorted figure. The prisoner was whirled outside on to the terrace, and in another moment all four figures had been swallowed up in the darkness of the wintry night.

CHAPTER 10.

In the Hands of the Enemy!

THE whole thing had been done with clever cunning.

When the lights went up a minute later not a soul in that great ball-room had a single suspicion that anything was wrong. Even Jimmy Potts' disappearance was not regarded with any significance. Indeed, not many of the St. Frank's fellows noticed that he had gone. Those who did thought that he had strolled away into the dining-hall for a snack from the sideboard. The boys and girls were doing this frequently, for the sandwiches and other delicacies were extremely tempting.

But Jimmy was outside, a heavy muffler round his mouth, cruel ropes about his legs and body.

He was being carried swiftly by his three captors. Practically under the eyes of all the guests they had kidnapped the boy, doing it openly, daringly. It had been a master-stroke, defying all the elaborate precautions.

The figures did not move towards the boat-house this time; they took another direction. They were making, in fact, for the Dorrimore family tomb.

And soon another figure joined them out of the darkness, a figure who was dressed as Sir John Falstaff. If he should be seen, by any chance, people would mistake him for Mr. Benjamin Potts himself. Again the enemy had used cunning.

"You have the boy?" he whispered in Chinese.

"Illustrious master, the young white devil is here," murmured one of the pierrots.

"You have done well," replied Number One unemotionally. "Your reward shall be rich."

They went on in silence, across the snowy parkland under the twinkling stars. And presently they came upon an imposing little hill. On the top of this stood a squat, dignified stone building, many centuries old. The family tomb of the Dorrimores.

There were wrought-iron gates protecting it, but these gates had already been forced open, and although they appeared closed and secured, they gave way at the first touch.

Even the massive studded door of the tomb itself immediately opened. Captors and captive entered, passing down a number of stone steps. There was a different coldness in the air here; it was the coldness of the grave.

"Lay the boy down," commanded the figure of Falstaff.

The huddled shape was thrown against the stone floor and a whimper came from it. These preparations were all too significant, and there was not the slightest doubt that the Chinese avengers were now about to perform that dread deed which had been so long delayed.

"The tomb!" said Number One softly, as he pointed.

There were many smaller tombs within this great tomb. But the men in pierrot dress understood. A light had been switched on, and it revealed a great stone slab, close at hand. It was the covering of an ornamental casket—reserved, no doubt, for the remains of Lord Dorrimore when his own day came.

The men heaved, and the great stone slab was lifted aside, revealing a black, empty cavity.

"It is good!" whispered Number One, in that same sibilant tongue, a note of exultation in his voice. It was the first time he had been betrayed out of his immobility. "There shall the accursed boy lie. Here, in the burial-place of the Dorrimores, shall he rest! And who shall say how he came by his end?"

He retreated to the door, and he took a long, searching look out into the starry night. In the distance he could see the gleaming windows of the Castle, but all around there was no sign of any living creature.

"I have taken a risk, but it is worth it!" murmured the big man. "Now I shall know—for certain. For with my own eyes I shall see the end of this young rat!"

He took a step forward, and his tone changed.

"Strike!" he said sharply. "Strike truly, my children!"

"Your order shall be obeyed, Illustrious master," said one of the others

He withdrew from a fold of his costume a long, wicked-looking dagger with a gleaming blade. As he did so the other two men lifted the Hunchback of Notre Dame from the floor.

"Strike!" snarled Number One again.

The dagger rose and flashed in the light, and it seemed that the end of Jimmy Potts had come. And then something bewildering happened.

The hunchback, with a clean, lithe leap, jerked himself upright. A hoarse cry came from Number One—for he had believed, until that second, that the boy was tightly bound. Yet, in some miraculous way, he had got free from his bonds.

Crash!

A fist, as hard as iron, struck the jaw of the man with the dagger. His arm jerked up, the dagger went flying and clattered across to the other side of the tomb.

The hunchback was not concerned, however, with the three pierrots. He took a flying leap at Falstaff, but Falstaff, with a low cry of fear, wrenched open the door and stumbled through.

Slam!

The door crashed, and before the hunchback could attempt to open it, the three disguised Chinamen were on him. In defence of his life, he was compelled to turn like lightning and face them.

His mask and beard had fallen off, and the Chinamen fell back, uttering whimpering cries. For the figure of the hunchback had grown suddenly tall, and the face they looked upon in that weak electric light was not the face of Jimmy Potts, but the face of Nelson Lee!

"I'm quite ready, my friends!" snapped Lee.

He leapt. One of the men had slithered at him with a knife, but the fellow shrieked as Lee's foot came up, and the knife was kicked out of his grip.

Crash!

Lee's right hammered out like a steel piston, and another man went over. It was quick work, and Nelson Lee thoroughly enjoyed himself. He made a brief task of the three yellow men. He was furious, for once again he had lost Number One. But this time he was not prepared to let the hirelings go. The moment had arrived when they could very profitably be captured.

The surprise had been absolute; and it was all the more astounding because of the big discrepancy in the height of Jimmy Potts and the height of Nelson Lee. Yet it had been easily managed.

For that hunchback costume was voluminous, with a gown which reached to the

very floor. In the early part of the evening Jimmy Potts had worn the costume, and he had stood at his full height. Lee, on the other hand, had walked with bent knees, reducing his height so that it corresponded with that of Jimmy; and the folds of the gown had effectually concealed this.

Even these enemies, who knew Jimmy so well, had never dreamed that they had captured the wrong prisoner—and a prisoner, moreover, who was so capable of turning the tables at the critical moment.

It was a master-stroke, and the detective's only regret was that Number One had escaped.

One of the Chinamen was down—knocked senseless by a straight right; a second was groggy; and a third, reeling under a body punch, now took the full force of a left hook, and he collapsed into a senseless heap.

"And that is that, my children," said Nelson Lee mockingly. "You have served your Illustrious master for the last time."

CHAPTER 11.

Two in One!

NELSON LEE made sure that the Chinamen were definitely "out," and then he went to the door of the tomb, forced it open, and stood looking out into the starry night.

He whistled softly. Figures suddenly appeared from a neighbouring coppice. They came at the run. There were four of them, and the leading man—a burly individual in a heavy overcoat and a bowler hat—was puffing.

"You all right, Lee?" were his first breathless words.

"Quite all right, thanks," replied Nelson Lee.

"Darn you, I got quite a scare!" grunted the big man. "We saw somebody sneaking away, but he had gone before we could decide what to do."

"Rather a pity you didn't nab him, Lennard," said Nelson Lee slowly. "That man was the chief cook and bottle-washer of the murder outfit."

Chief Detective-inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, removed his bowler hat and scratched his head.

"You do things in a funny way, Lee," he grumbled. "We've been hanging about here ever since it was dark, and even now we don't seem to have got very far."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"You must let me finish this case in my own way, Lennard," he said dryly. "You haven't drawn a complete blank; there are three interesting prisoners for you inside this tomb."

The Yard man shivered.

"They choose funny places for their dirty work," he said. "We followed you, as you directed us, but we never thought we'd come to a place like this."

"My dear fellow, could there be a more appropriate place?" asked Lee. "A tomb! And they believed that they had the boy—and they were on the point of murder."

Lennard's assistants flashed on their electric torches, and within a minute the battered Chinamen were securely handcuffed.

"What next?" asked the chief inspector.

"The sooner you get those men to the nearest lock-up, the better," replied Nelson Lee crisply. "They are desperate characters, Lennard."

"Oh, yeah?" retorted the chief inspector ironically. "Forgive the expression—I'm rather partial to the talkies. Think I'm scared of three dirty Chinks?"

Lee chuckled.

"I fancy your men can look after those prisoners," he said. "You had better stay here, Lennard. I shall probably be grateful for your help later on."

The chief inspector brightened.

"Thinking of getting your precious Number One?" he asked.

"I shall get him—to-night," replied Nelson Lee.

Ten minutes later the hunchback of Notre Dame appeared in the great hall. He had come in unobtrusively, but it was only a moment before Dick Turpin and a Cavalier and a musical comedy nigger bore down upon him.

"Where the dickens have you been, Jimmy?" asked Handforth. "We missed you and got a fright."

"Oh, draw it mild!" protested Nelson Lee, impersonating Jimmy's voice so uncannily that the boys were completely deceived. "You know jolly well there's no danger this evening, Handy. Cheese it!"

"Well, you shouldn't dodge off like that," growled Handforth. "Where are you going now?"

"Upstairs—I shan't be long," came Jimmy's voice. "No need to come up with me."

"You'd better be quick," warned one of the others. "It'll be time for unmasking soon."

"I'll be there," promised the hunchback.

He went upstairs, and Handforth and the others returned to the ball-room, relieved. Nobody in that gay apartment had the slightest inkling of what had happened. The ball was still going strong, and everybody was having a great time. Jimmy's disappearance had only been noticed by a few—and they were now thoroughly reassured.

Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Potts were laughing and smoking with two or three other gentlemen. Uncle Ben was evidently satisfied that no harm could come to Jimmy.

Upstairs, Lee went quietly into one of the bed-rooms, and he closed and locked the door. Jimmy Potts, sitting in a big chair near the fire, jumped eagerly to his feet.

"What's happened, sir?" he asked breathlessly.

"Something very interesting, young 'un," replied Lee, as he quickly divested himself of the hunchback costume. "You have been all right here? No interruptions?"

"No, sir," said Jimmy. "You locked the door, and this isn't one of the bed-rooms that is ordinarily used. Nobody has been."

He did not know—and Nelson Lee did not think it necessary to tell him—that there was a balcony outside the locked and curtained window—and on that balcony stood an alert Scotland Yard officer. Nelson Lee had made sure that no harm should come to Jimmy while he was left alone in this bed-room.

"But you, Mr. Lee?" asked Jimmy, his heart thudding. "What happened to you?"

"I was captured, according to programme," replied the detective coolly. "There was a very picturesque attempt to murder me—the rascals being under the impression, of course, that you were their victim. I am glad to tell you, Jimmy, that I came off on top—with only a few bruises and grazes on my knuckles."

"And—and the Mandarin, sir?" asked Jimmy. "Did you get him?"

A hard light came into Nelson Lee's eyes.

"I shall be able to give you a better answer to that question later on to-night," he said smoothly. "For the moment, my boy, I can only assure you that there is no longer any danger. Hurry into these things, and then go down and mingle with the revellers. And don't forget that you were absent for a bit. Nobody else need know that we have practised this innocent little deception."

"Innocent!" breathed Jimmy. "If it hadn't been for you, sir, those Chinese devils would have captured me—and killed me! You saved my life."

He was soon ready. When he went downstairs he looked exactly the same as Lee had looked.

Nelson Lee stood for some moments in deep thought. Then he switched off the light, went to the curtains, and pulled them aside. He opened the window and spoke a few words to the Yard man. That individual was glad enough to come inside and warm himself at the fire.

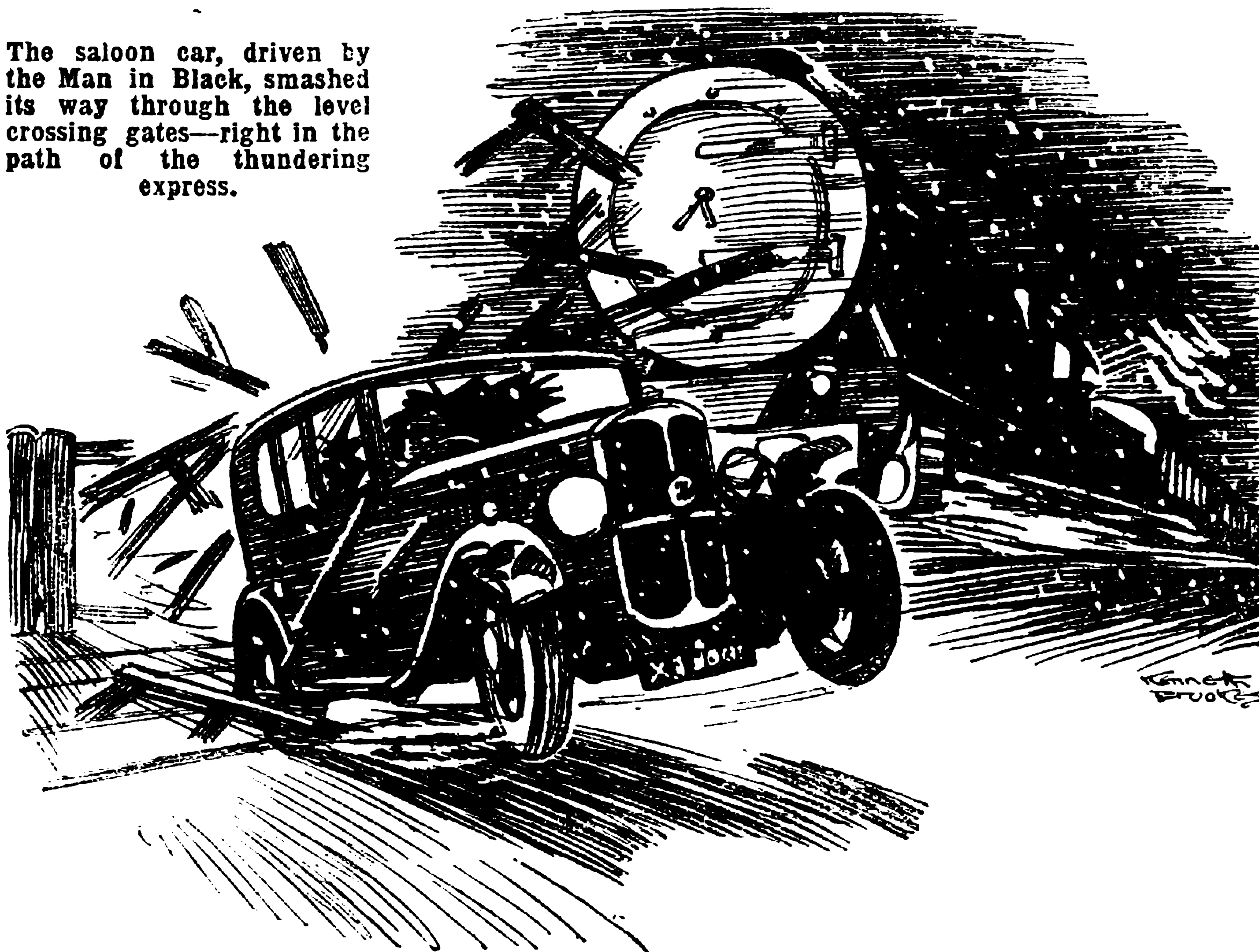
Nelson Lee dressed at once. There was other work for him to do. He was taking no part in the revels—but he was enjoying himself far more than any of the dancers.

He smiled as he remembered Jimmy Potts' stupefied surprise earlier. Lee had considered it necessary to reveal himself to the boy; and he had done so, pledging him to secrecy. Jimmy was now in a whirl of confusion, but with it all had come a great sense of comfort and security. The very knowledge that Nelson Lee was so near at hand, and actively engaged on the job, gave Jimmy Potts a hope that he had never before experienced. He felt that the whole wretched business was nearing a climax.

"Hallo, Jimmy!" sang out a group of Fourth-Formers, as they clustered round Jimmy Potts. "Nearly time for unmasking."

"Yes, rather," said Jimmy. "I shall be glad enough to get this beastly costume off."

The saloon car, driven by the Man in Black, smashed its way through the level crossing gates—right in the path of the thundering express.



"Not the whole costume," said Corcoran. "Can't allow that, you know. Only the mask."

"Rats! I'm going to take off this beard and hood, too," said Jimmy. "And I'm going to get rid of the hump, as well."

"Don't tell us you've really got the hump?" said Bob Christine solemnly. "Nobody ought to have the hump this evening."

Laughing gaily, they went on their way. Jimmy looked around him. Everybody was shouting and laughing happily, and the whole scene was one of irresponsible gaiety. It was a brilliantly successful party.

But Jimmy, who was "in the know," did not share that happiness. For he knew only too well that his mysterious enemies were lurking in the vicinity of Dorrimore Castle—ready to pounce if they got the opportunity!

CHAPTER 12.

The Man in Black!

THE unmasking was a signal for much hilarity and shouting, although by now, of course, nearly all the guests were known one to another, masks or not.

Jimmy was glad enough to be rid of his beard and mask and hood—and he removed that hump, too.

Falstaff, now revealed as Mr. Potts, was genial and happy. Yet now and again, when he thought that he was not observed,

an anxious little look crept into his eyes. There seemed to be a doubt—an expression of puzzlement.

"Well, Mr. Potts, our party is going top pingly, eh?" laughed Dorrie.

"Your party, you mean, sir," corrected Uncle Ben, beaming. "My own contribution to it has been precious little."

"By the Lord Harry! I'll bet these youngsters will sleep like tops after this," chuckled Dorrie. "It's amazing to me how they can keep it up so long—and not show the slightest sign of fatigue."

He was looking at Falstaff curiously—so curiously, in fact, that Uncle Ben was forced to put a question.

"Is there anything wrong with my—er—get-up?"

"Good gad, no!" said Dorrie, with a start. "But I was just wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"Have you been indoors all this evening Mr. Potts?" asked Dorrie bluntly.

"Yes. Why?"

"That's funny!" said his lordship, scratching his chin. "When I went upstairs a little while ago I had a look out at the night from an upper balcony. And I can swear I saw you crossing the sunken garden."

Mr. Potts started violently.

"No, I wasn't there," he said in a strange voice.

"Then there must be another Falstaff among the guests."

"I don't think so—I haven't seen one," said Mr. Potts.

"Then it's very extraordinary," remarked Dorrie. "I didn't mean to upset you——"

"You haven't," interrupted Uncle Ben. "By golly! Ye can't upset me in that way, Lord Dorrimore. But I was thinking. It's strange that you should mention a second Falstaff. For I also thought I saw a figure, exactly identical with myself, in the grounds."

"The deuce you did! When?"

"About twenty minutes ago."

"The same time as I spotted it," nodded Dorrie.

"There is somebody here using a costume identical with mine," said Mr. Potts in a worried voice. "I don't like it, Lord Dorrimore. It cannot be one of the guests, or we should have seen him. Who can he be? Why does he not show himself indoors?"

Dorrie whistled.

"You don't think——" he began.

"I fancy we have both the same idea in mind," said Mr. Potts, as Dorrie hesitated. "Yes, that is exactly what I do think."

"Gad!"

"These accursed enemies of mine are ready for any trickery," continued Mr. Potts. "And don't you see how such a dodge would help them? If somebody approached Jimmy dressed as Falstaff he would naturally mistake the man for me."

"But Jimmy is quite all right," said Dorrie gently. "Look at him. He seems to be getting on famously with those girls over there."

Mr. Potts looked, and nodded.

"I can only conclude that the plan failed," he said with relief. "It is too late now, anyhow. The only chance the hound had was before the unmasking. He has lost his opportunity."

"Then we needn't worry our heads——"

"It's nice of ye, Lord Dorrimore, but I am worrying," growled Mr. Potts. "I'd take it as a favour if ye'd come round with me. Maybe we had better make a search. I don't like the idea of somebody doubling me, for ye can be certain that he's up to no good."

Lord Dorrimore humoured him. They went round. They walked along the terrace. They even went as far as the sunken garden. But they saw no signs of any unauthorised stranger. Even Uncle Ben was compelled to admit that the search was hopeless.

Coming indoors, Uncle Ben happened to meet Jimmy, and he took the lad by the shoulder.

"What is it, uncle?" asked Jimmy. "You seem upset."

"I'm not upset," growled Mr. Potts. "But tell me, lad. Have ye been in the ball-room all the evening?"

"No; I went away for a while."

"Not—not outside?" asked the big man with alarm in his voice.

"Of course not, uncle. I didn't go outside," replied Jimmy. "I wouldn't do a silly thing like that. There's plenty of gaiety in the castle, but you and I know that our enemies are still active."

Mr. Potts took a long breath.

"There's something funny going on," he muttered, as though to himself. "I'd give a mint of money to know—— Well, never mind."

"It'll be all right, uncle," said Jimmy confidently. "We're being well protected."

"The lads, ye mean?"

Jimmy did not reply. He did not mean "the lads"; he meant Nelson Lee. But he was pledged to silence regarding Nelson Lee's presence, so he could say nothing.

All good things come to an end in time, and at last the masquerade ball was over. It was midnight by the time the last of the boys and girls had retired. The guests who had come for the evening had all departed, and now Dorrimore Castle was settling down quietly for the night.

Mr. Potts made a point of going upstairs with Jimmy before any of the other boys. He seemed nervous. Now that the revelry was over, he was jumpy and unsettled.

"Why have we come upstairs first, uncle?" asked Jimmy curiously. "Handforth and Travers and the others are coming soon; they're having a final snack, you know."

"Yes, I know," agreed Uncle Ben. "But I wanted a word with ye alone, lad. Ye'd better be getting undressed; I'll talk to ye after I've been to the bath-room. I'm an old-fashioned man, and I like to put my head under the cold-water tap. I won't be long."

He went off, and Jimmy shook himself. What was it that his uncle wanted to say to him that the other boys should not hear? Clearly Mr. Potts was not himself. But Jimmy knew nothing of that little chat which Uncle Ben had had with Dorrie.

He looked round the big bed-room, and was reassured by the bright lights. The other fellows would be up at any moment. What a fool he was to imagine that anything could happen to him in these few minutes. Nelson Lee was somewhere; Uncle Ben would only be a few seconds, and the chaps——

The door suddenly opened, and Jimmy stood as one frozen. For framed in the doorway was the Man in Black!

CHAPTER 13.

Drama On the Battlements!

BLACK from head to foot—black in every inch, except for the tiny slits in front of the eyes. And those eyes gleamed and burned with a malignant hatred which sent a shudder down Jimmy Potts' spine.

"Help!" shouted Jimmy hoarsely.

He meant to shout, but scarcely a sound came. His voice choked in his throat. The next second the menacing figure leapt upon him. A steel grip fastened round his body, pinioning his arms to his sides. A hand was clapped over his mouth. Struggling, he was helpless in the grip of this relentless enemy.

With swift footsteps the Man in Black ran out of the bed-room. He padded up the carpeted corridor, turned a corner, and sped up some narrow stairs leading to the next storey. And Jimmy knew, in spite of his dazed condition, that none of the rooms on this upper floor was occupied.

In spite of all precautions—even in spite of Nelson Lee—the mandarin had got him!

For Jimmy felt in his heart that this Man in Black was the person whom Nelson Lee referred to as "Number One." Jimmy was convinced that he was Fu-Li-Sing, the Grand Mandarin of Shan-Si! His underlings had failed, so he was attending to the work himself.

Certainly there was something to justify Jimmy's wild theory. This Man in Black was different. He was a man of bulk; in no circumstances could he have wormed through that little window at the back of the boat-house, as that other figure had done.

As Jimmy reached the top of the stairs struggling gamely in the arms of his captor, he fancied he heard the bath-room door open in the corridor below. Uncle Ben had come out. He would give the alarm. Perhaps even now—

"This time, boy, you shall die!" hissed a voice in his ear in English. "If you know any prayers, say them! You have less than a minute!"

The unfortunate Jimmy felt suddenly dizzy. He was plucky enough, but he knew that he was utterly helpless in this man's grasp. It was no ordinary strength—it was like that of a gorilla. With apparently no effort the man held Jimmy and prevented him from executing more than a wriggle.

They went up another flight of steps in pitch blackness. This man knew his way about. Once Jimmy thought he heard a slight movement below on the stairs, but he could not be sure. Then unexpectedly he found himself out in the starry night. Fresh horror assailed him. He knew that he was on the battlements.

He dimly remembered another such occasion—when he had nearly met his death on the battlements of Somerton Abbey. But it had been different then. Jimmy had walked in his sleep, being drugged into a trance by his enemies. He scarcely remembered. This time it was vivid, horrible. And these battlements were higher—

The Man in Black did not hesitate. With a quick run he padded across the leads. With every ounce of his strength he prepared to hurl his burden far out into the open, so that it would crash down, down to the paved pathway below.

UP those stairs leading to the roof a figure moved immediately in the wake of the Man in Black. Jimmy had not been mistaken when he fancied that he had heard a sound.

It was a queer figure—a bent, misshapen wretch in rags and tatters. If there had been sufficient light it would have been seen that his face was so deeply tanned that it

was almost mahogany coloured. There were endless wrinkles and lines, and the great bushy eyebrows mingled with the lank straggly hair which escaped from beneath the rough cap. On his chin there was a wispy untidy beard, and some ugly yellow fang protruded from his twisted mouth.

Zacchi, the fortune-teller!

Something clicked beneath his foot as he was nearly at the top of the stairs, and there came a sudden flash of yellow light, to be instantly extinguished. The man had trodden on a little automatic lighter, and had touched the catch. That lighter had dropped out of Jimmy Potts' pocket a moment or two earlier, but the faint sound of its falling upon the carpeted stair had not been noticed by the Man in Black.

But the flash was seen by others.

Nipper, Handforth and two or three more had come upstairs at last. They found Jimmy's bed-room empty, and they were puzzled and concerned. Then as they moved down the corridor they saw the sudden flash from upstairs. It was brief, mysterious, but it was sufficient to cause the boys to run up helter-skelter. They were not quite in time to witness the dramatic incident which took place on the battlements.

The Man in Black, in the act of hurling Jimmy over the parapet, felt a steel grip fastened upon him. He was swung round and the next second Jimmy was in Zacchi's arms.

"Help! Help! Help!" shouted the boys desperately, almost incoherent with terror.

The would-be murderer panted heavily, but he did not lose his head. In a flash he ran off—not the way he had come, but farther along the leads, disappearing behind a gaunt chimney-stack.

Zacchi bent down with his burden.

"Wait here!" he whispered. "Do not move—I will come back."

And at that second, as he was about to race after the Man in Black, the boys came tearing out upon the battlements. Torch lights flashed; they revealed the tattered figure of Zacchi with Jimmy Potts in his arms.

The boys could be excused for jumping to a very obvious conclusion. It seemed to them that Jimmy had been kidnapped by Zacchi and they rushed up and fell upon the man.

"Great Scott!" yelled Handforth. "Quick! Grab him! He was just going to chuck Jimmy off the roof!"

Zacchi fought like a demon to get away but the boys were too strong for him. He went down under their combined weight.

"Look! It's that crook Zacchi!" gasped Church. "Don't you remember? That queer old beggar we saw at Tregellis!"

"We've got him now!" said Handforth exultantly. "You rotter! You'd try to kill Jimmy, would you?"

"Boys—boys!" came a despairing voice from the prisoner. "You don't know what

you've done! I had him—he was within my grasp! And you prevented me from giving chase."

Nipper nearly fell over backwards.

"It—it's not possible!" he gurgled in utter bewilderment. "That's the gov'nor's voice, you chaps! Oh, my hat!"

"Yes, Nipper—it's me again!" said the exasperated, furious voice of Nelson Lee. "For heaven's sake get off me! Let me get to my feet."

Handforth felt that he was going mad.

"Mr. Lee!" he said shrilly. "But—but —"

Here was another stupendous surprise. First Wilkinson had turned out to be Nelson Lee—then Rutley—and now Zacchi! It was bewildering.

"You boys are too infernally keen!" growled the great detective as he tore off his disguise. "I was very angry with you, but perhaps that was unfair. You were doing your best."

"Oh, Mr. Lee," came Jimmy's breathless voice, "I—I thought you had failed me!"

"No, young 'un," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I was close on your heels the whole time. I had no intention of allowing any harm to come to you. I am afraid you have had a big shock, but it was vitally necessary that I should obtain the evidence against Number One. I have obtained it. I caught him red-handed in a vile attempt to murder you. He cannot escape me now."

"You—you mean that he's on the roof here somewhere, sir?" asked Nipper. "Hadn't we better search——"

"He is not on the roof now," interrupted Nelson Lee. "He has got down indoors. But don't worry. I think I can put my hand on him without much trouble."

"You chaps had better come with me down to Uncle Ben," said Jimmy wearily. "He'll be worrying about me."

"Yes, rather, old chap; we'll help you," said Handforth kindly.

"But you, gov'nor!" said Nipper, staring. "You—Zacchi! This is almost too much. I suppose you have been Zacchi all the time?"

"Yes, I adopted the disguise as a means of prowling about Tregellis Castle without arousing suspicion," said Nelson Lee. "I wanted to appear as a quaint old local character—one who would be allowed to wander about without being suspected. But you boys beat me again. You surprised me in suspicious circumstances, and after that the character of Zacchi was not much good. I only adopted the make-up to-night because—well, perhaps it was a whim. Yet I was anxious to seize the chief criminal without his being aware of my real identity. Perhaps I can still do so. We shall find him below."

But just then a sound came to the great detective's ears, and he started.

"Listen!" he ejaculated sharply.

It was the sound of a motor-car engine starting up.



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.

STRANGE BUT TRUE.

Teacher: "Now, Tommy, give me an example of an uncommon noun."

Johnny: "Trousers."

Teacher: "Why?"

Johnny: "'Cos they're singular at the top and plural at the bottom."

(J. Forbes, 156, Hewitt Avenue, Wood Green, London, N.22, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

AFTER EFFECTS.

Doctor: "Influenza in itself is not dangerous, but it can have serious consequences."

Patient: "So I notice from your bill."

(B. Dominy, 17, Hunt Road, St. Denis, Southampton, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

FULL UP.

"Won't you have some more cake, Billy?" asked his hostess.

"I think I'm full, thank you," replied Billy.

"Well, put some in your pockets."

"I can't. They're full, too."

(S. Bowles, [38, Poynings Road, London, N.19, has been awarded a penknife.)

A WASH-OUT.

First office boy: "I told the boss to look at the dark circles under my eye and see if I didn't need a half-day off."

Second office boy: "What did he say?"

First office boy: "He said I needed a bar of soap."

(D. McFarlane, 403, Church Street, Maritzburg, S. Africa, has been awarded a useful prize.)

SAVED.

Scotsman: "What would you do if I gave you a pound?"

Tramp: "Die of shock."

Scotsman (walking quickly away): "Then I'll save your life."

(P. Lewis, 10, Nelson Road South, Yarmouth, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

FORECASTING.

Sailor (discussing the latest luxury liner): "Mark my words, Joe, the luxury ship business

CHAPTER 14.**A Chase Through the Night!**

NELSON LEE gave an exclamation of annoyance.

"He has taken flight! He is bolting!" he snapped.

"You—you mean the mandarin, sir?" gasped Handforth.

Nelson Lee was already hurrying down the stairs, and the boys dashed after him. Even Jimmy, notwithstanding his terrifying experience, had almost recovered his nerve. He was a strong, healthy youngster, and the knowledge that they were in pursuit of his mysterious enemy added zest to his enthusiasm for the chase.

He and Nipper and Handforth and the others went tumbling down the stairs after Nelson Lee. As they all ran into the main corridor they came face to face with Travers and Skeets, and the two juniors were looking pale.

"Jimmy!" shouted Travers. "You're all right, then?"

"Yes, yes!" said Jimmy. "Where's Uncle Ben? Have you seen—"

"We don't know," said Travers, all his customary coolness gone. "We went into the bath-room just now, and we found Mr. Potts' coat and waistcoat on the floor and the window wide open."

"What!"

It was a yell of consternation. Other boys came running up. The girls looked out of

their bed-rooms, alarmed and excited. Lord Dorrimore appeared on the scene.

"What's happened?" he asked urgently.

"Those brutes nearly got Jimmy—and they have got Uncle Ben!" shouted Handforth.

"Steady!" said Lee grimly. "There may be some mistake—"

"But there's not, sir," urged Jimmy Potts filled with alarm. "Uncle Ben told me that he was going to the bath-room, and he asked me to wait, and it was soon afterwards that the Man in Black came and grabbed me. After he escaped from you he must have swarmed down somehow and got into the bath-room by the balcony. He's taken my uncle with him. He's kidnapped him just as he did once before!"

"By George, you're right!" gasped Handforth. "The car! That rotten Chink has carried Uncle Ben off in the car!"

"Come on—let's stop him!"

There was a rush, and Nelson Lee made no attempt to stop it. He turned to Dorrimore.

"Your racer, old man?" he asked. "Is it in good trim?"

"Ready to start up at a second's notice," said his lordship promptly.

"Then come—we haven't a second to lose. They hurried away, accompanied by the boys and girls. Uncle Ben's disappearance was appallingly significant. Everything seemed to indicate that he had been kidnapped by the mysterious Number One.

"Snowing!" snapped Dorrie, as he and Nelson Lee ran for the garage.

will come to this: In a few years you won't get any passengers to sail in a ship that hasn't got its own dirt-track."

(*H. Lewis, 58, Nordley Hill, Wednesfield, Staffs, has been awarded a penknife.*)

AN EYE TO BUSINESS.

Tommy: "Pa, that sixpence you gave me slipped through a small hole in my pocket."

Pa: "Well, never mind. Here's another one, but don't lose this, too."

Tommy: "But, pa, don't you think half-a-crown would be safer?"

(*N. Moore, 111, Henderson Avenue, Belfast, has been awarded a useful prize.*)

DOUBTFUL.

"I say, sonny, do you know if I have to have a permit to fish in this stream?" asked the gentleman of little Jimmy, who was sitting there fishing with his home-made line.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," replied Jimmy. "I always use a worm myself."

(*W. Shilton, 4, Willdays Terrace, Atherstone, Warwickshire, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

A QUESTION OF DISTANCE.

Very stout gentleman (who has been knocked down): "Couldn't you have gone round me?"



Motorist: "Sorry! I didn't know whether I had enough petrol."

(*K. Knowles, 41, Brougham Street, Burnley, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

MISSING.

Teacher (to boy who has drawn a camp scene): "Well, Tommy, you've drawn the tent, but where are the campers?"

Tommy (quite innocently): "Oh, they've just gone for a swim, sir."

(*C. White, 22a, Paul Nel Street, Johannesburg, S. Africa, has been awarded a useful prize.*)

A NEED FOR SPEED.

Jones saw Smith, his neighbour, running for a bus as he was worth towards the railway station.

"Where are you going?" asked Jones.

"To catch the 2.30 express," replied Smith without stopping.

"My word," said Jones, "you will have a hurry—I've just missed it."

(*E. Edwards, 48, Benlee Street, Liverpool, has been awarded a penknife.*)

A BAD CASE.

Mike: "What's the matter, Pat? Forgotten something?"

Pat: "Oi have, and Oi've forgotten what Oi've forgotten."

(*N. Inglis, 2, Spanish Battery, Tynemouth, North Shields, has been awarded a penknife.*)

Lee had noticed it before. The boys had noticed it, too, but in all the excitement nobody had commented upon the fact. The snow was very fine and powdery, and it was coming down from fleecy, intermittent clouds—for overhead the stars could still be seen twinkling here and there.

"This snow is a godsend, Dorrie," said Lee suddenly.

"Eh? How do you mean?"

"The roads are as hard as rock—and that fugitive car would have left no trace," replied Lee. "As it is, we shall be able to distinguish the marks quite easily in the snow."

"Gad, you're right there!" said Dorrie, with a start.

On the air could be heard the throbbing of the powerful car which had just departed. Judging by the sound, it had already reached the end of the drive and was on the main road—speeding away along the deserted highway, tearing off into the night, a desperate man at the wheel.

"He didn't get Jimmy—but he got Uncle Ben," breathed Handforth. "Oh, we've got to overtake him! We must!"

They had all arrived at the garage together. Dorrie leapt for the lights, and switched them on. In the first flood they saw that Mr. Potts' big saloon had gone.

"I expected as much," said Lee, nodding.

"The rotters have pinched your uncle's car, Jimmy," shouted Skeets.

Zurrrrrh—zoom!

Lord Dorrimore's powerful racer had started up with a terrific roar. There was an exultant, defiant note in the sound. Lee himself had leapt to the wheel, and the headlights were switched on fully.

A bulky man came running into the garage.

"Great Scott!" yelled Nipper excitedly.

"It's Mr. Lennard, of the Yard!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Mr. Lennard!"

"How many more surprises to-night?"

The chief inspector took no notice of the schoolboys' shouts; he ran straight up to the car.

"Something wrong, eh?" he rapped out.

"We saw that saloon dash down the drive, and we tried to stop it—but the hound nearly killed us. Drove straight on, and we had to leap for our lives."

"I'm not surprised, Lennard," said Lee. "He's desperate. Jump in. We're going after him."

"Good business!" said the Yard man heartily, leaping aboard.

Lord Dorrimore was already sitting beside Nelson Lee. There was more room behind, and Nipper and Jimmy Potts jumped in. Handforth was nearly pushed off by Inspector Lennard, but he squashed his way aboard. There was no room for any of the others. And already the car was gliding away.

"Lucky beggars!" yelled Travers. "Can't you make room for us?"

"So-long!" grinned Handforth, waving his hand. "We're going to be in at the death, my lads!"

"Don't say that," muttered Jimmy. "It might be Uncle Ben's death."

"Sorry!" said Handforth. "I was only speaking—what-do-you-call-it?—figuratively."

"You kids had better hold tight," warned the inspector. "It's like your infernal nerve to get aboard at all. I'd throw you off if there wasn't a danger of hurting you. Hold tight!"

"Cheese it, Mr. Lennard!" said Nipper, grabbing the inspector's arm and giving it a friendly grip. "It's great to see you again! We won't be in your way."

The Yard man was mollified.

"All right," he growled. "An exciting finish this, Nipper, eh? Let's hope that Lee gets his man."

"My guv'nor always gets his man," said Nipper confidently. "You ought to know that, Mr. Lennard!"

CHAPTER 15.

Car v. Train!

THE powerful racer reached the end of the drive in a very few minutes, and the gates were standing wide open.

Beyond the road showed filmy white—and there, clearly defined in the glare of the powerful headlamps of Dorrie's car, were the wheel-marks of the fugitive saloon.

"Left!" said Dorrie briefly. "I thought, somehow, he'd take this direction. Making for London, I'll bet."

Out on the open road Nelson Lee "trode on the gas." The car leapt forward like something alive.

Lord Dorrimore was a famous racer—one of the most skilful and the most daring living—but Nelson Lee was every bit as clever, although his feats seldom found mention in the newspapers. Lee did not race at Brooklands, as Dorrie did; neither did he go in for any of the spectacular Continental road races. But when it came to the point, the famous detective was second to none.

Lee experienced a sensation of exhilaration, of exultation, as he felt the great engine answering to his touch. There was power here—unlimited power.

This car was a racing machine of the roadster type. There was ample room in the rear—not merely a cramped "dickey." Chief Inspector Lennard and the boys were packed pretty tightly, but this, perhaps, was all to the good. It lessened the chance of their being tossed off at a hump-backed bridge!

"We'll get him, Lee!" shouted Dorrie confidently. "This bus can do a hundred and twenty!"

"Even so, Dorrie, we daren't put her up to that speed—on this surface," shouted back Lee. "And that fellow obtained a good start. That saloon can do between eighty and ninety with ease, and we can be quite certain that he'll go all out. My one fear was that he would have tampered with this car—

A figure staggered out of the ditched car—the Man in Black. Nelson Lee leapt forward. "Get the bracelets ready!" he snapped to Inspector Lennard.



knowing that we should give chase—but he hadn't time."

The road lay straight and white ahead. It was wide, and the film of powdery snow had settled like a hoar frost. The marks left by the fugitive car were clearly and sharply defined. That snow was an immense help—particularly as it increased the brilliance of the headlamps. The beam stretched dazzlingly for three or four hundred yards ahead. Speed was safe on this deserted highway.

On they thundered, touching ninety, taking curves at such terrific speed that the passengers clung helplessly—their lives in Nelson Lee's hands. But they could not have been in safer hands. Lee was as steady as a rock.

Uphill, downhill, roaring through wooded valleys, tearing along bleak hillsides. There came a long level stretch, where the road could be seen ahead in an unbroken line for miles.

Lee stepped harder on the throttle-control. Up went the speedometer needle—up—up.

Eight-five — ninety — ninety-five — one hundred!

Conversation was impossible. Those behind could scarcely breathe. The air shrieked and bellowed past them. Already their ears and their noses were numb with the bitter cold of the piercing wind. But they didn't care.

They were in a fever of wild excitement. There was something extraordinarily hilarating in this desperate chase.

On—on!

Mile after mile flashed by. The great car roared through sleeping villages, sometimes staggering a wildly-waving police-constable. That first car had roared through at full speed, too, and the police were getting acquainted. Nelson Lee ignored all signals.

Another town, another village flashed by. On again upon the open road. And always there were those tell-tale tracks ahead. They had passed one or two cars coming in the opposite direction, and there were new tracks now to add to Lee's difficulties, but he had not much trouble in distinguishing the marks which had been left by the fugitive car.

"How much longer—how much longer?" asked Jimmy despairingly. "I'm thinking of my uncle!"

"We'll save him," said Handforth. "Don't worry! Leave everything to Mr. Lee."

They were entering upon another long straight stretch now. There were no towns or villages here. Lee opened out the great car again, and she roared magnificently. The throb of the engine, the shriek of the wind on the road all seemed to sing a wild

of triumph. She was catching up! She was accomplishing her task! It was almost as though the car herself knew that she was creeping nearer and nearer.

They went roaring round another bend, and Lee's teeth clicked. Lord Dorrimore, staring ahead through the windscreen, yelled. In the far distance ahead a red light was winking, and ahead of it there was a halo of white.

"There he is!" roared Dorrie. "We're on his tail!"

A gasping cheer went up from those behind. Inspector Lennard was by no means happy. He liked motoring, but he didn't like this particular kind of motoring. He was a peaceful, home-loving man, and in London he had a wife and family. More than once during this wild ride he had wondered if he would ever see them again.

The road was straight and wide, and now Nelson Lee gave Dorrie's car a chance of showing what she could really do. Up leapt the speedometer needle—past the hundred. One hundred and five—one hundred and ten! She tore along like a meteor.

Now she was fairly leaping up to the fugitive. The red light was growing bigger and bigger; the marks left by the tyres were clear-cut and fresh.

At the wheel of the runaway car crouched the sinister figure of the Man in Black. He had had no chance to remove his grotesque get-up. Even his face was still covered. And he was glad of it, for there had been no chance of his being recognised as he had rushed through the towns at reduced speed.

Despair was in his heart now, however. At first he had believed that he had got free; but then, glancing back, he had seen the twin points of light in the far, far distance. Since then they had grown ever nearer. Now they were coming up rapidly. The chase was nearly over.

It was at this crucial moment that a fresh peril arose.

So preoccupied was the Man in Black with the pursuing car that he did not see, until it was too late, a warning red light immediately ahead of him. If he had seen it, he took it for the tail-lamp of a lorry. Then, away to his right, he saw a low, yellow line of twinkling lights. He was puzzled for a second, and then recognised them. A train! A roaring express train, for just then the fire-box door was opened, and the ruddy reflection was revealed upon the trailing steam and smoke.

And then the Man in Black knew! That red light ahead was not the tail-lamp of a lorry, but the warning light affixed to level-crossing gates!

A gurgling cry escaped the man's throat. Instinctively he applied the brake and the great saloon skidded horribly. Only by a miracle did he correct that skid.

In the same instant he knew that nothing on earth could enable him to pull the car up in time. He was caught between two fires.

Ahead the level-crossing—behind the pursuing car!

It was a moment for a desperate decision, and the Man in Black took it. Down went his foot, and the throttle was opened to its widest. He was charging those gates at full speed. It was a race between him and the train.

Behind, Lee was already applying his brakes. He had seen the warning red light; he had seen the approaching train. And he knew the condition of the road.

"What's up?" yelled Dorrie. "Why are you slowing?"

"Because I don't want to commit murder

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY



and suicide all in one go!" retorted Lee. "Look at that train, Dorrie! By heaven, the car ahead! The fool is keeping straight on!"

"By the Lord Harry!" gasped Dorrie, fascinated.

The fugitive saloon charged.

Cra-a-a-sh!

With a splintering, roaring crash the saloon went clean through the level-crossing gates. The thundering train, reaching the spot at almost the same second, nearly grazed the rear mud-guard of the car as it just scraped past in the nick of time. There was another crash as the saloon roared through the opposite gate—and then on.

The Man in Black had done it. In his desperation he had gone hurtling through!

CHAPTER 16.

Unmasked!

ONLY by super-brilliant handling of the powerful racer did Nelson Lee bring her to a stop without putting her into a deadly skid.

She came to rest at last, just as the express was tearing past with a roar and shriek of jammed-on brakes. For the driver of the train had seen; great sections of the smashed gates had flown all over his engine. The engine itself had leapt and rocked as it struck some of the debris. Only by a miracle, indeed, did the express keep to the rails.

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"Guv'nor!" gurgled Nipper. "Phew! That was a narrow shave!"

"We were safe enough," said Lee.

But the cold perspiration was streaming from his forehead. There was no time for further talk. The train had gone; it could not pull up within half a mile, so great had been its speed. Lee was not inclined to wait to give explanations. He took no notice of the level-crossing man, who was shouting frantically.

The saloon car had got through and had gained another start. That was the only thought in Nelson Lee's mind. The racer lurched forward, rocked over the debris-strewn rails, and prepared to continue the chase.

But the chase was over.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, in the same second, saw the fugitive car. It was some distance beyond the gates, and it was half on its side in the ditch, crumpled and battered. At that very moment the driver's door was being forced open, and a man dressed in black from head to foot was staggering out.

"Got a gun, Lennard?" snapped Lee.

"Not me!" said the Yard man. "I don't carry guns."

"Well, get the bracelets ready," said the great detective, leaping out. "Come on, Dorrie! You boys keep back. There may be trouble."

There was!

The Man in Black seemed to half-recover as he found himself standing in the dazzling brilliance of the racer's headlamps. He was injured, for he limped as he staggered away from the car. But, even so, he fumbled round to an inner pocket, and something gleamed in his hand.

"Keep back!" he snarled in perfect English. "You won't take me!"

Crack—crack!

He fired twice. A bullet sang past Nelson Lee's ear and past the ears of Nipper and Handforth just behind like the drone of an angry hornet. Another bullet went wild into the air.

Crack!

It was Lee's automatic this time, and the Man in Black uttered a wild scream as the bullet struck his gun, sending it hurtling from his grip, breaking two of his fingers. Nelson Lee and the chief inspector closed in. They ran towards their man, grabbed him. He fought like an entrapped animal of the forest. But when Lord Dorrimore and Nipper and Handforth joined in, the struggle was soon over. Kicking and cursing, the prisoner was held.

Snap—snap!

"That's got him!" panted Lennard. "Gosh! He's a strong blighter!"

"Oh, thank goodness!" shouted Jimmy Potts breathlessly. "Uncle! Uncle Ben!"

Lee looked at the lad rather sadly as he dashed for the saloon and wrenched open one of the rear doors. Jimmy looked inside and then started back, bewildered. For the rear of the car was empty. So was the front. Mr. Benjamin Potts was not there.

"But—but I thought that Uncle Ben was here!" stammered Jimmy, in dazed bewilderment.

"The man you know as Uncle Ben is here!" snapped Nelson Lee, his voice harsh and cold. "I'm sorry to give you a shock, young 'un—but it might as well come now as later."

And with one swing of his hand Nelson Lee tore away the black covering from the prisoner's head and face. He stood revealed—as Mr. Benjamin Potts!

Every other surprise of this amazing day was dwarfed by the staggering shock of the revelation. Even Nipper was so bewildered that he thought he was dreaming. Han-

forth's jaw just sagged, and his eyes bulged. Jimmy Potts stood like one paralysed.

"Uncle Ben!" he breathed.

"But—but the Mandarin," muttered Handforth. "I—I thought——"

"There is no Mandarin, and never has been any Mandarin," said Nelson Lee. "This man is Number One—and I have been after him ever since he tried to murder me at St. Frank's."

Mr. Benjamin Potts seemed to recover from a trance; he shook himself. All his bluff geniality had gone; he stood revealed for the man he actually was. Baleful malevolence glared from his eyes; his features were distorted by the fury and hatred which possessed him. He did not look at Nelson Lee—but at Jimmy.

"You young fool!" he snarled. "I nearly had you—and I meant to have you! If it hadn't been for this—this——"

He choked with the very force of his passionate fury. And every ounce of respect and liking that Jimmy Potts had ever felt for his uncle evaporated in that second. He even felt no regrets. This man was a scoundrel—and a would-be murderer.

"You treacherous hound!" he said tensely. "All the time I have trusted you—I have believed in you! And all the time you were trying to kill me!"

"There, young 'un, don't let it 'get' you," said the chief inspector kindly. "As for you, Benjamin Potts, alias Robert Westover, alias Howard Haynes, I arrest you on a charge of conspiracy and attempted murder, and it is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used as evidence against you. You'll come with me."

CHAPTER 17.

The Mystery Revealed!

IT was comfortable in the library at Dorrimore Castle.

The room was crowded, notwithstanding the hour—which was between three and four o'clock in the morning. Nelson Lee was there, neat, tidy, and himself once again, also Lord Dorrimore and Nipper and Jimmy Potts and a crowd of other St. Frank's boys.

It seemed ages since that scene at the level-crossing. The boys had almost forgotten the talk with the railway officials, the journey back to the nearest town, the handing over of the prisoner—or, rather, the chief inspector's exit from the picture with his man. They had both gone into the police station, and Dorrie's car had driven back to the castle. The case was over.

"I don't want to weary you with all sorts of details," said Nelson Lee, amidst a general hush, "but I think it just as well that you should have a few points cleared up."

"Yes, rather, sir," went up a chorus.

"I'll be brief," said Lee. "In the first place, Jimmy, the man you knew as Benjamin Potts was not your uncle at all."

"What!" gasped Jimmy, a glad light shining in his eyes.

"Ye gods and little fishes," murmured Nipper. "Another surprise!"

"Oh, I'm so thankful—so glad," said Jimmy. "It was the one thing which had been hurting me so much. To think that my uncle could have tried to murder me!"

"His real name is Howard Haynes," continued Lee quietly. "I have been making inquiries. Uncle Ben—we will continue to refer to him as Uncle Ben, since it will save confusion—was truthful when he said that he had arrived in England from China after a fifteen years' absence. He was your real uncle's partner in China—but your uncle died. It was owing to this partnership that the man knew so much about your family. He was a scoundrel—a confidence trickster of the most colossal ingenuity and cunning. His kindly appearance of bluff heartiness was one of his greatest assets. His very appearance gave people confidence."

"It took me in, sir," said Jimmy.

"Your real uncle was a man of very much the same build," said Nelson Lee. "I need hardly mention that this crook was no millionaire. He arrived in England with only a thousand or two—and that money he had raked mostly from passengers on the homeward-bound liner. It was by chance that he met your mother in Madeira, but previous to that he had already posed as a millionaire."

"Your mother had never met her brother-in-law, and he immediately took advantage of the situation. Your father is dead—you are the baronet. The man saw an opportunity of coming into a great deal of money, although, at first, he did not intend murder. As Uncle Ben, he knew that he was the next-of-kin, after you, Jimmy. He readily fell in with Lady Potts' suggestion that he should come and see you at St. Frank's and give you a good time during the Christmas holidays. He saw his opportunity—he made his plans."

"His future was precarious, but if he could get hold of your money and estates he was assured of ease for the rest of his life. I am quite certain that he did not mean to kill you when he first started on his campaign; his plan was to frighten you, and to administer certain Chinese drugs which would affect your brain. In a word, his scheme was to put you away in a lunatic asylum."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy, with a shudder. "He nearly succeeded, too. More than once I thought I was going mad."

"As next-of-kin he would have had control of the estate—he would have bluffed your mother easily enough," went on Nelson Lee. "Later, he decided that it would be better to kill you. That was after he thought he had killed me. Once a man has committed a murder, he does not hesitate at a second."

He goes by the principle that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb."

"But—but all these Chinamen, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly. "Where do they come in?"

"Yen was Uncle Ben's personal servant, and the other Chinamen, I believe, were hired from London, for the occasion," said the great detective. "You see, Uncle Ben received the shock of his life when he got to St. Frank's. He faked a simple little attack upon himself—Yen was the attacker—and he made some vague references to the Mandarin Fu-Li-Sing, making you boys believe that he had incurred the enmity of this mythical Mandarin. Having once started that story, he had to stick to it—and, as is commonplace with such stories, it grew and grew. The shock Uncle Ben received was when he met me.

"I do not easily forget faces, young 'un. I recognised the man as Haynes; I had been instrumental in securing him a stretch of five years penal servitude twenty years ago, when I was quite a beginner in the detective business, added Lee dryly.

"Uncle Ben had done nothing criminal then, and I asked him, bluntly, what his game was. He appeared to be scared, and he begged of me to let him remain at St. Frank's until the morning, when he would depart. I will confess that I didn't quite realise the man's fiendish character then. For, that same night, he and Yen attacked me. They bludgeoned me, took me to my own car, bound me to it, and sent me to what seemed certain death over the cliffs."

"Phew!" went up a general whistle.

"I escaped," pursued Lee quietly, "and I decided to remain 'dead.' I wanted to find out exactly what Haynes' plot was—furthermore, I wanted to get first-hand evidence against him. All the rest you can easily imagine. I was at Travis Dene, at Tregellis Castle, and at Somerton Abbey. I have been waiting patiently, and it was not until to-night that I caught the hound red-handed. Until then he had used his underlings, and he had done it so cleverly that even if those wretches were caught, no proof could be brought against the real culprit."

"What about those whispers at Travis Dene?" asked Jimmy, with a shiver.

"They were the beginning of Uncle Ben's plot," replied Lee. "It was an insidious process—careful, cunning preparation on the man's part. He wanted to get you into a highly-strung state. You remember awakening one night at Travis Dene, and finding a hideous yellow man bending over you? That was Yen, suitably and grotesquely made up for the occasion. It was very easy for Yen to escape—for he had Uncle Ben to help him. You trusted Uncle Ben, and it never occurred to you that all those things could be very easily managed. For the very man who was watching over you was the man who worked the trickery against you.

"On the occasion when you thought you saw a phantom figure—Yen again—you did see it. Your supposed uncle saw it, too—but he denied doing so. That was to make you think you were going out of your mind. I am certain, too, that he injected a drug—which acted drastically upon your nerves. You remember the doctor coming and saying that you were in a terrible state. It was for that reason that you all left Travis Dene and went to Tregellis Castle—for a complete change of scene. You thought to escape your enemies. But how could you escape your enemies when they went openly with you—Uncle Ben and Yen?

"When you got to Tregellis Castle you accidentally spotted me climbing the wall—I was disguised as the mythical Zacchi," said Nelson Lee, with a smile. "My object then was to inspect Uncle Ben's quarters in secret, but you spoilt my little game by your enthusiasm."

"I say, sir," burst out Nipper. "There's a little mystery about that that wants clearing up. Do you remember that you broke away from the police?"

"Yes," murmured Lee. "That was carefully arranged, I might as well tell you."

"I'd already guessed that, guv'nor," said Nipper. "But when we chased you we suddenly came to an end of your footprints in the snow. It—it was uncanny! How did you get away?"

"I had no intention of giving the impression that I was supernatural," answered Lee, with a chuckle. "As a matter of fact, I had left a rope hanging down from a high bough—a bough that overhung the path. When I ran, I grabbed that rope and swung clean over the hedge and into a hayrick—in which I crouched until you boys had given up the search. You see, I put that rope there before the snow commenced falling, and it did not occur to me until later that the absence of footprints would look uncanny."

"Simple as ABC," grunted Handforth, with disgust. "And we never guessed it."

"You will recall, Jimmy, that the Cloaked Cavalier appeared while you were at Tre-

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gellis," said Lee gravely. "That was another trick of Uncle Ben's. It was he who assisted Yen—the ghost—to get out at the crucial moment. Thus, when you all searched for the ghost, your search was barren. Uncle Ben made it appear that you, and you alone, saw the ghost.

"Later, it was Yen who flew that box-kite arrangement; but I came across him, in my character of Rutley, and I knocked him out. But before I could escape some of you boys seized me, and the only thing to do was to hand me over to the police—and the police, of course, let me go later. I took no action because it was no earthly use arresting Yen. I wanted Number One—and there was no evidence against him that could be used in a court of justice."

"I remember that incident when I fell in the lake, sir," said Jimmy. "It was Uncle Ben who persuaded me to skate across the lake and back—he said he'd time me."

"Of course," put in Lord Dorrimore, "that blighter Yen—a useful merchant, by the way!—must have weakened the ice at the far end of the lake, eh?"

"That is exactly what happened," agreed Nelson Lee. "While you were still at Tregellis Castle, boys, Uncle Ben got Yen to throw a dagger at him through the window, and he caught it as though by a miracle. But, you see, he knew the dagger was coming—and that dagger-catching is an old trick of his. But it looked very effective."

"It's all so clear now," muttered Jimmy. "And yet, at the time, it was a hopeless puzzle."

"By now, of course, the man was desperate—he meant to kill you," said the detective. "He had abandoned his first idea of sending you insane. When you arrived at Somerton Abbey he had planned something particularly dreadful. He pretended to go to London, taking Yen with him. Actually, he got to Somerton long before you—and arranged that picturesque landslide."

"By the way, the Chinaman who tricked you into running back along the drive was Yen. Yet when you rang up your uncle, supposedly in London, he informed you that Yen was with him. That man who answered your call was a confederate—of the same breed as Uncle Ben himself—who had been told exactly what to say. A clever actor, he easily imitated Uncle Ben's voice, and the telephone, in itself, would account for any discrepancy. It was another subtle dodge to establish a cast-iron alibi."

"The manservant, Bristowe, was under notice to leave Somerton, for theft. Somehow Uncle Ben got in touch with him, and paid him handsomely to run into the dining-hall, during dinner, and gasp out that he had seen the Somerton Ghost. That was all he did—but it was enough. It paved the way for Uncle Ben's real work."

"Uncle Ben made arrangements with his Chinese confederates that same night at the Abbey, and he succeeded in getting away before the Abbey was snowed-up and cut off. The Man in Black was, of course, Yen. It was he who seized you and dropped you into

that well. But I was on the alert, and I got you safely away. I forgot to mention that Uncle Ben learned of the secret passages from Bristowe, who was a spying, inquisitive sort of fellow. Of course, Uncle Ben meant to lead a search-party to that well—just to establish the fact that you were really dead. If that had happened, he could never have been charged with the crime.

"When he arrived by 'plane, he expected to hear that you were missing, and that would have been his cue to start the search-party. When he learned that you were alive and well he was stunned, but he immediately set his wits to work again. With the aid of Yen, he gassed the boys who were on guard—Yen had pretended to gas him, too, just to be on the safe side. And Yen gave you, Jimmy, a 'shot' of drug which induced sleep-walking. Had you walked to the end of the parapet you would have crashed down upon the rocky path, and would have been killed. It was I who caused you to fall into the snow."

"You seem to have been everywhere—like a guardian angel," said Jimmy gratefully.

"Why did Uncle Ben fake that attack upon himself here, at Dorrimore Castle, sir?" asked Nipper.

"That was another of the man's cunning dodges," said Lee. "It was done in order to give colour to the story that he was in danger. Then later, when Jimmy was killed, he would have made out that the Mandarin's agents had satisfied themselves with killing the nephew, and they had then taken fright and fled, giving up all further attempts upon Uncle Ben. The Man in Black—the man who did most of the work here—was Yen. But we captured Yen in the Dorrimore tomb, with the other two Chinamen, and after that Uncle Ben became the Man in Black and had to rely upon his own devices. It was then that I knew I should capture him—red-handed. But again you boys foiled me by your smartness. Still, we had a good run in the car," he added dryly, "and we had plenty of excitement."

"And now we'd better forget it, and get some sleep," said Lord Dorrimore. "And tomorrow—more revelry."

"Good old Dorrie!"

"Jimmy can thoroughly enjoy himself now," said Nipper, giving Jimmy Potts a hearty slap on the back. "Cheer up, old son! We shall be going back to St. Frank's jolly soon—and then everything will be peaceful and quiet and humdrum."

Never had Nipper made a greater mistake, for the new term at St. Frank's was destined to be as packed full of thrills as the Christmas holidays had been!

THE END.

(A brilliant new series of school and mystery stories starting next Wednesday. More thrilling adventures befall Nipper & Co., and on no account should you miss the first grand yarn, entitled: "The House of Secrets." Order your copy now.)



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.

SORRY to hear that you are in hospital, Douglas Cliff (Fulham), and hope that you have by now fully recovered. Willy Handforth does not enter his greyhound, Lightning, for any races. Yes, St. Frank's boasts of a very fine swimming-bath. Handforth does not draw the illustrations for his precious weekly—which is just as well for that celebrated journal.

* * *

The museum at St. Frank's, Jack Godden (Hilton, South Australia), is situated in the Ancient House, the entrance being through the library. All the Houses have their own stores, and these are usually situated somewhere at the back, in the basement. Most of the trees in the shrubbery are elm and chestnut.

* * *

The Moor View school, although very select, is a private school, John R. Bacon (Nuncaton), and there are no definite Forms, as at St. Frank's. The tallest boy in the Remove is Clarence Fellowe. The densest boy—and this is a more difficult question to answer—is probably Teddy Long.

* * *

Here are three titles you ask for, D. W. H. (Shepherd's Bush). Old Series, No. 118: "The Verdict of the School"; No. 120: "The Messages of Mystery"; No. 121: "The Circle's Great Coup." It would hardly be fair to other readers to make a practice of giving long strings of titles, for these are only of interest to the one reader concerned.

* * *

Handforth's hair is medium chestnut in colour, Alan Sparks (Dorking). Archie Glen-thorne's hair is fair—in fact, flaxen. The River House School is about two miles from St. Frank's by road, but scarcely more than a mile across the meadows. William Napoleon Browne first came to St. Frank's in a story called "Fooling the School" (Old Series, No. 513, April 4th, 1925).

This week's pen-sketches of three more

Fifth-Formers at St. Frank's: FREDERICK SHAW. An elegant fellow in every way but deceptive because of this. People who only know him slightly think he is thoroughly decent; but those who know him well also know him to be mean and unscrupulous, and very much of a bully. He is the special pa of Harold Grayson. WILLIAM SIMMS Not much of a fellow. Unpopular in the Fifth because his disposition is touchy and surly. Discontented with life in general, and is always grumbling at something or other. HORACE STEVENS. A great chap. Stevens. Genial, easy-going, with heaps of patience. The cleverest actor in the Senior School; so brilliant, in fact, that he could secure a part on the West End stage any day he liked. The personal and bosom chum of William Napoleon Browne.

* * *

The Moor View girls are every bit as keen on japes as the St. Frank's boys, G. O'Connell (East London). This was surely evident in the recent Fifth of November story, when the girls were responsible for one of the biggest and brainiest japes on record. Moor View is very much smaller than St. Frank's and, naturally, the number of pupils is proportionately smaller.

* * *

This is Christmas week, and I have already wished you a jolly time in our Special Christmas Number, which appeared a fortnight ago. However, I feel I must take this opportunity of again hoping that all my reader-chums enjoy a really merry festive season. By the time another issue of the Old Paper is in your hands, 1932 will be with us, and so to my Christmas greetings I add: "And a Happy New Year." May the bad times we have all experienced in 1931 vanish—and a new era of prosperity come our way. Make sure of starting 1932 in the right way by giving your newsagent a regular order for the "Nelson Lee." There's not a better weekly tonic than a copy of the Old Paper.

A notorious highwayman plays the role of "Sleeping Beauty"!

Outlawed!

Dick's Peril!

"**B**Y gad, you scoundrel, you shall pay for this assault!" repeated Captain Spott, trembling with rage.

Dick took a couple of steps forward, whereat the infuriated captain's valour immediately oozed away, and he fled from the room. Turpin threw himself into a chair, and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"An unpleasant knave, if ever there was one," remarked Dick. "He was not even grateful to me for the trouble I took to wash him. Egad, Turpin, the sooner we are out of this place the better. There is nothing to be gained by staying, and it sickens me to see a gentleman's house, and an old friend at that, turned into a thieves' kitchen."

But Turpin shook his head. He had not the finer feelings of his young comrade.

"There's nothing to be feared by staying here," he pointed out; "and there is everything we want. You're too fastidious,

Dick. Besides, you have to see Ralph to-night—isn't it so?"

"Yes; I must hear the news of St. Austell's," said Dick. "Well, for one night I might stay. But I shall ride out and learn what is to be learnt, until I meet Ralph. I could not remain in this den of wasters and spongers all day! Faugh!"

"For myself, I've had a deal of riding lately," said

Turpin, stretching himself out in the best arm-chair. "I will take my ease till you return, Dick. Have a care how you go and what you do. Ecod, 'twould be a pity to fall upon trouble when we are sitting so pretty here."

Dick left the house, and shortly afterwards passed out through the park gates on Black Satan. Having nowhere in particular to go, he decided to pay a



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GOODWIN**

visit to a friend of his former outlaw days. Old John Miller lived nearby, and the jovial farmer would be glad to see Dick, to whom he owed a great service.

The young outlaw rode leisurely in the direction of the farm, and within half an hour or so was being greeted warmly by Old John. Together they went into the cosy sitting-room, where buxom Mrs. Miller became all flustered when she recognised the visitor.

Having made himself comfortable, Dick passed a cheery hour with the old couple, telling them of his experiences on the highway. Then, just as he was preparing to depart, there came the thud of horses' hoofs in the roadway outside, the jingle of harness, and finally a thunderous knock on the door.

Dick was immediately on the alert.

"Don't answer until I tell you, John," he whispered to the startled old farmer, and then bounded up the stairs to the room above which looked out upon the road.

The young highwayman saw that his worst fears were realised. Outside were three of the king's men. One of them was holding an unmounted horse, whose rider was evidently the man knocking at the door. Again sounded a thunderous banging on the portal.

Dick's wits worked like lightning. He had stabled Black Satan at the back of the house. Swiftly he strode into another room at the rear, and saw that he could easily leap out of the window on to the roof of an outbuilding. It would be the work of a moment for him to mount his horse and make good his escape.

Running downstairs lightly, he whispered his intentions to the farmer.

"I do not think they know I am here," he told Old John. "I looked in every direction before I came, and I am certain I was not followed. Therefore no trouble will befall you. Probably they have come on some other matter. And now, my

friends, I must away. Good-bye, and good luck."

Even as Dick sped up the stairs and climbed through the window of the back room, there came another impatient banging on the door. The farmer went and opened the door. But by that time Dick was on the back of Black Satan and cantering away, unnoticed by the king's riders at the front of the house.

"Ecod, that was a narrow shave!" mused Dick, and when out of earshot of the king's men sent his horse galloping across the fields, putting as large a distance between himself and the soldiers as possible.

The Plotters!

MEANWHILE, back at Basing Hall Turpin had made himself thoroughly comfortable.

During the afternoon he explored the house and grounds, and learned a good deal about Sir Cecil Stanhope's rascally guests from the serving men and the garrulous old butler. All of which matters he stored up in his mind.

At four o'clock—being now on the best of terms with all the household—he ordered the best repast the house could afford, and fared very well indeed. The guests were all away, ostensibly hunting but mostly visiting wayside hostelries and Turpin had the place to himself. After a sumptuous feast he retired to an alcove in the morning-room, partly shrouded by a curtain, where he had noticed a well-padded armchair. And there he composed himself for a quiet sleep.

Turpin was ever the lightest of sleepers and his hand was always within easy reach of a weapon, as many who had tried to catch him napping knew to their cost. Had he been a heavy slumberer, however, he must have been awakened by the noisy return of the hunters, and their entry into the dining-hall.

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 encounter many stirring adventures, during which Sweeney makes numerous unsuccessful attempts on Dick's life. The two comrades frustrate a plot arranged by Hector to kill Dick's young brother Ralph, and the young outlaw sends the boy to St. Austell's School. The highwaymen pay a visit to an old friend, Sir Henry Stanhope, only to discover that he has died. His son has succeeded to the title, and Sir Cecil, weak and extravagant, is mixed up with a number of sponging "friends." In one of these, a Captain Spott, Dick makes an enemy.

(Now Read On.)

Then the door of the morning-room opened and in came the revellers.

"We shall be quieter here, and can discuss the matter," said the grating voice of Captain Spott. "'Tis best your serving-men should hear nothing of it, Cecil, so do not speak too loudly. Both our visitors are away, it seems. I am told that the impudent knave who assaulted me has gone riding, but he will return later. S'death, but I'll wipe out my grudge with him to-night, besides earning a good store of guineas!"

"But who is he, Spott?" said a voice.

"I tell you 'tis none other than Galloping Dick, the highwayman! Burn me, if I'd known that this morning I would have tackled him mighty differently."

"And then you might not have had your face washed—eh?" said another voice.

"Another word from that mighty long tongue of yours and I call you out!" snarled Spott, fingering his rapier significantly. "If Galloping Dick is too much for me, be assured I can spit you through the ribs with the greatest ease, Shedlock!"

"Gently," said the first voice. "Go on, Spott, what's the plan? We didn't know we had such highfliers among us."

"I knew it this morning," said Sir Cecil. "He told me he was Richard Forrester. He was a friend of my uncle's. Of course he's a highwayman. What about it?"

"What about it? Why, there's five hundred guineas reward for him, and we'll have it before to-morrow. I've got the stuff here that'll make it as easy as wink your eye. You fellows will have to help."

"Rely on us!" came a chorus.

"No, I'm hanged if I will allow this," said Sir Cecil. "What harm's he done us, Spott?"

"Harm? That's not the point. It's the good he'll do us. Five hundred golden guineas! As for harm, I swore to have his life, and I mean it. The brute insulted me—laid hands on me. Don't be a fool, Cecil; you're not going to let this chance slip by."

"It's my house," declared Cecil obstinately. "He was a jolly good fellow, too. My guest. I won't have him trapped."

"Nonsense, man! You're not going to give up five hundred guineas. You shall have it all. You want it badly enough. The bailiffs will be in to-morrow, and you're at the end of your tether. The money will just save you." Captain Spott winked to the others.

"Yes, that's true. But don't like it, all the same," muttered the weak young baronet.

"Oh, don't be a fool!" snapped the cap-

tain impatiently. "Agree to this, and we'll pull you out of your difficulties."

Sir Cecil crumpled up before the other's vehemence.

"Oh, all right, then. A jolly good fellow, even if he is a highwayman. But still, I leave it to you."

"Good!" said Spott, and triumph glittered in his narrow eyes. "Now, here's the plan. You see this packet of powder? A pinch of it in the young scoundrel's wine will put him asleep as sound as a bell within two minutes, and it'll be twenty-four hours before he recovers."

"He'll sup here to-night—he and his friend, Smith. I'll see he takes the stuff. You fellows will have to be extra civil, and not put him out, for he's none too fond of our company. When he's unconscious, I send for the Riders, and then the five hundred guineas are mine."

"Ours, you mean," corrected one of the others suspiciously.

"Ay, ours, of course," agreed Captain Spott in haste. "No trouble, no danger—certain success! It's better than violence, for I warn you, few folk meddle with Galloping Dick when he's awake. He would put at least six of us beyond need of anything but a coffin before we secured him. As it is, we shall take him with no more trouble than a slaughtered bullock."

"True enough," remarked Shedlock. "Now to arrange the details—S'death! Did something move behind that curtain?"

The company started up. They gathered round the curtain, each man frowning suspiciously, hands seeking the hilts of swords or pistol-butts. Captain Spott threw the curtain back.

Before them, snoring gently, was the form of "Mr. Smith," apparently fast asleep.

The Cunning of Turpin!

FOR some seconds the guests stared at the sleeping highwayman, surprise and alarm showing on their faces. Turpin continued to snore peacefully, his head fallen forward on his chest.

"S'death!" muttered the man on Captain Spott's right. "He has heard all we said, for certain. We are undone!"

"Pish!" murmured another, drawing his rapier very gently from his sheath, so as to make no noise. "That is a matter, comrade, which is easily mended. He need never open his eyes again."

"Nay, hold!" whispered Captain Spott, catching the man's wrist, as he poised his rapier. "That will do us no good, and perhaps lead to the spoiling of the plan. What should we do with the body?"

"Ay, we are not in the woods now, but in Basing Hall," muttered the first speaker. "It will be a ticklish matter to call in the Riders to take Dick Forrester if we have already a corpse to answer for."

"Dead men tell no tales!" grumbled he of the rapier. "This is the highwayman's comrade—another dangerous man, also wanted by the king's men, for all we know. If he has heard the plot he will warn his comrade——"

He broke off, for Turpin stirred. Opening his eyes, he yawned, stretched, and then stared in sleepy surprise at the guests who stood around him, most of them with their hands on rapier hilts.

There was a pause of indecision, and for a moment it seemed as though the bystanders were going to attack him, after all. Then Captain Spott laughed awkwardly, and took out his snuff-box with a flourish.

"Well slept, comrade!" he said to Turpin. "We have been laying a small wager as to how long you would slumber if we started a fencing-match in front of you. This gentleman and I"—he waved his hands to the man with the drawn sword—"were about to essay it, when you awoke. I trust you will forgive our intrusion. No offence was meant."

"I am very slow to take offence," said Turpin, blinking amiably at the company. "It seems I came here after dinner, and fell asleep."

"Odso!" exclaimed the captain, with a laugh. "You must be a sound sleeper, for I confess we have been none too quiet."

"I was in the land of dreams," said Turpin, who had no scruples about these little matters, as Dick was wont to have. "I heard nothing."

"Not even what we said?" put in one of the others.

"I thought myself alone," returned Turpin.

"Nay, it suits us to be more sure of that!" growled the man with the sword, gripping his weapon threateningly. "'Tis a matter we will prove for ourselves."

Turpin glanced round and saw that he was hemmed in. He had sword and double pistols, and had no fear for himself if it came to a fight with these young bucks. Yet the quarters were close, and the odds long. He saw their suspicions were aroused, and an open fracas was the last thing he desired, for his brains had been busy with a plan that tickled his fancy mightily, and which he did not wish to spoil. He saw that in another moment the company would attack him.

"I had a curious dream," he said, gaz-

ing calmly at Spott. "I dreamed of very pretty plan for making a round sum of guineas by the capture of somebody something, for whom a good reward would be paid."

"Ah!" exclaimed Spott; and the man with the sword gave vent to an oath.

"And then," continued Turpin dreaming, "methought a small, still voice whispered in my ear, 'Tur——' h'm!"—realising that he had nearly slipped up, Turpin made a noise in his throat and corrected himself hastily—"whispered in my ear, 'Smith, my boy, you are very hard upon me. There is but a beggarly shilling or two in your purse. What will you do for more?' And then, in my dream, it seemed to me that somehow I had a hand in the most profitable affair, and was able to give some help towards it, and so a small share of the guineas in that reward came to me. A very small share, gentlemen, but enough to make it worth my while."

"Extraordinarily enough," continued Turpin coolly, "the amiable Captain Spott here, with the same noble features and expansive smile, was paying those beautiful bright guineas into my hand, the affair having ended satisfactorily. So you see, gentlemen, you awoke me from a very pleasant dream indeed, for which you owe me some reparation."

"Do you hear that, Barnard?" exclaimed Captain Spott, turning to the man with the sword. "Pink me! I know I was right. This is far the better way. I understand you, sir," he added to Turpin. "You mean that our little plot was not lost on you, and that you would be glad to join in it?"

"It is the one thing I desire," said Turpin. And he meant it!

"I presume you bear some ill-will towards this highwayman, and would be glad to see him hanged?" questioned Spott.

"Do not let us lose sight of the desirable guineas," countered Turpin. "What will my share amount to?"

"Mighty little, if Spott has the handling of it," muttered someone beneath his breath.

"Mr. Smith," said the captain to Turpin, bowing low, "you shall have a share you like to name up to one-half, for your help will be invaluable. Septimus Spott's word is his bond."

"Very good!" Turpin nodded his satisfaction. "I shall hold you to that. No matter as to the ways of capturing this ruffian and altogether villainous fellow, Dick Forrester. I may tell you he is a perilous knave—my word, yes!—and will thin nothing of making butcher's meat of him."

a dozen of us if we are not cautious. You had some scheme, I think, for drugging his wine?"

"You heard a plaguey deal in that dream of yours," growled the man with the sword, who had reluctantly sheathed his weapon.

"Hold your tongue, Barnard!" snapped the captain. "You are right, Mr. Smith," he continued, addressing Turpin; "it is the only safe way of dealing with the rascal, and I have the stuff here." He tapped his side-pocket knowingly. "We shall press this Dick Forrester to dine with us this evening, and while we are at table, I shall slip this into his goblet, and call on him for a toast. The stuff is potent, and within a couple of minutes the fellow will be helpless, nor wake till he finds himself in gaol, with the irons on him."

"Very pretty, if you can arrange it," approved Turpin. "But do you think you will get the chance? He has no great love for your company, and may refuse to sit at meat with us all."

"Why, that is true," nodded Spott gloomily. "What do you suggest? Can you not persuade him to dine with us, in your company?"

"I think I might," replied Turpin; "but you had best leave the drugging of the wine to me, who will sit beside him."

Captain Spott shot a glance at Turpin.

"I am willing enough," he said, by no means sorry to be relieved of the task. "I will give you the paper of powder

before we go in to dinner. But, mark you, Mr. Smith," added the captain with sudden harshness, "the game was of my starting, and I am to deliver him up and take the reward, which I shall divide amongst us. See that you are loyal to the cause, and play no tricks with the booty."

"You may rely on me," said Turpin. "And when we have the fellow soundly drugged, what will you do with him?"

"I suppose there is nothing for it but to call in the king's riders, and hand the highwayman over to them," said Spott gloomily.

"Nay, I think that is a poor way," declared Turpin. "They will want their finger in the pie, and perhaps try to cheat us out of the reward. I propose that we call in a magistrate of good standing. Sir Adam Vincent lives at Stourton Hall, close by. We can deliver this Dick Forrester to him and his men, and he will certify us the reward."

"Agreed!" cried the guests, much pleased at "Mr. Smith's" advice—all save Barnard, who stood in the background, whispering to some of his companions.

Turpin winked at the company as he left the room.

"I go now to bring our quarry to bay. See that a goodly meal is prepared, and shortly you shall come to deal with Galloping Dick!"

(The trap is set—but will Dick fall a victim to it? Look out for another topping instalment of this splendid serial next week.)

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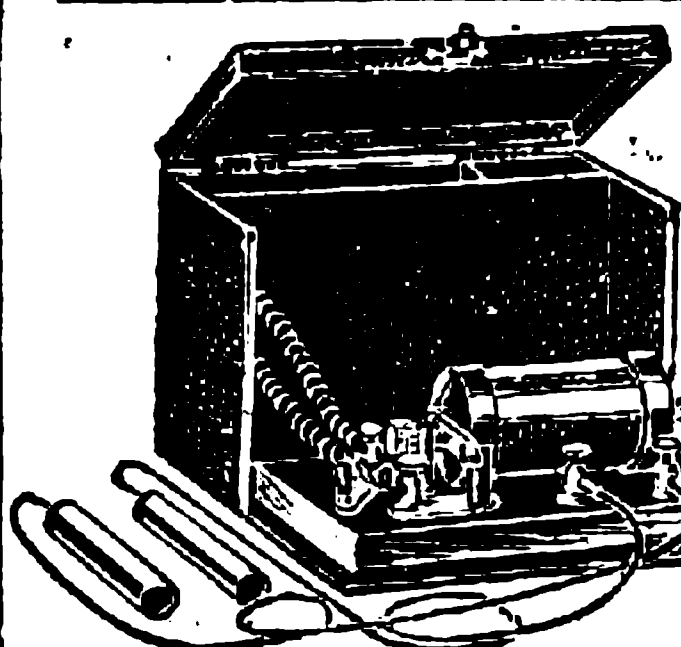
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