



I

It was, as usual, Bundle's own fault.

Dolcot juniors were strictly and sternly forbidden ever to set foot on a Time-Tripper.

Senior men could go. In the Sixth Form they could be trusted to be circumspect. But irresponsible juniors might risk getting stranded in some far-off past age, and perhaps never succeed in getting back to the Twentieth Century again at all.

In the Head's opinion, juniors might be reckless and thoughtless. Bundle, undoubtedly, was both.

Nevertheless, Bundle was determined to go.

If he couldn't get leave, he was going without leave. He had saved up a pound for his fare. And he was going.

Bundle was not fearfully keen on history in the history-class. Often his form master, Mundy, had to call him to order, when his attention wandered. But he was quite keen, and very curious, to see history in the making, as it were. You could do that, on one of those Time Trips.

It might come in useful, too, to a fellow who was a bit of a dunce in history. A fellow might, for instance, have to do a paper on the Battle of Hastings. What an advantage it would be, actually to have seen that battle taking place!

And it cost only a pound for the trip backwards in Time, as far as 1066. That was a considerable sum for a Fourth-form junior at Dolcot, certainly: but it was very reasonable, all things considered.

Bundle of the Fourth had a leaning towards scientific things. And the Time-Tripper was one of the latest developments in scientific research. It had never been heard of as recently as 1965.

Scientific men had discovered how to split the atom: how to eliminate whole cities by merely pressing a button: how to bombard the Moon with guided missiles: even how to invade Mars and carry on war with its inhabitants. But only lately had they discovered the secret of travelling backward in Time, and seeing for themselves how much truth there was—or wasn't!—in the history-books.

The first machine, designed by the celebrated Professor Balmycrumpet, had been quite a wonder, even in an age of wonders. The newspapers had been splashed with head-lines. But since then, it had gone into mass-production, and become rather commonplace. You took a trip back to the Battle of Hastings, or even to the Battle of the Arbela, just as the old folks in the 1950's had taken trips to Southend-on-Sea or Boulogne-sur-Mer.

It was all very well for the head-master of Dolcot to fancy that juniors wouldn't be as safe as seniors on such a trip. Bundle did not agree.

He was jolly well going. It made him quite envious, when he heard Bates of the Sixth, or Frewin of the Fifth, describe how he had dropped in at ancient Rome just in time to see Julius Caesar on his way to the Senate-House on the Ides of March: or at Athens to hear Pericles making one of his epoch-making speeches: or at Carthage to give Hannibal the once-over.

Bundle settled that he was going, and he fixed on Wednesday afternoon, which was a half-holiday at Dolcot. He was going anyhow: but, with the Head's cane in mind, he decided to ask leave, hoping for the best. He wanted to get a close-up view of 1066 and all that: but he did not want to see his head-master afterwards. So he presented himself in Mr. Mundy's study, hoping to find him in one of his good tempers, which happened occasionally.

Unluckily, Mr. Mundy was not in an amiable mood. He was seated at his ether-phone, where he had some difficulty in getting through to a friend on the planet of Neptune. It was a long-distance call: sometimes liable to interruption if a wandering comet, or anything of that kind, got in the way.

He gave Bundle quite a cross glance.

"What is it, Bundle?" he rapped.

"If you please, sir—!" began Bundle, meekly.

"Be brief!" rapped Mr. Mundy.

"If you would please give me leave to take the Time-Tripper as far as 1066 this afternoon, sir—"

The Fourth-form master raised his hand.

"That will do, Bundle!" he said.

"But, sir—"

"You are a careless, thoughtless, irresponsible boy!" said Mr. Mundy, severely. "Last week you were permitted to go on your air-bicycle to Central Africa. Did you, or did you not, fall into the Limpopo?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! But—"

"You came back drenched!" said Mr. Mundy. "Only last Saturday you were allowed to see the Space Ball start on its whirl to Mars. Did you, or did you not, step on it, and narrowly escape being carried off to that planet, which would have kept you away from your lessons for several days?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! But—"

"I shall not give you leave," said Mr. Mundy. "It would be like you, Bundle, to wander away from the Time-Tripper, and get lost in the eleventh century. You are forbidden to go."

"But, sir—!"

"That will do!" said Mr. Mundy. He gave Bundle a very sharp look, "If you should go without leave, Bundle, you will be sent up to your head-master. That is a warning. Now leave my study."

"But, sir—!" mumbled Bundle.

Mr. Mundy gave him no further heed. He was through to Neptune at last, and chatting with his friend on that planet. Bundle left the study.

"Blow!" said Bundle, as he went down the passage.

He hadn't made matters better by asking leave. In fact he had made them worse, for Mundy was evidently suspicious: and if Bundle did not turn up for calling over, he would guess. He wouldn't suppose that Bundle had merely gone off on his air-bike to China or Peru, or any little thing like that: he would guess that he had gone on that Time Trip. That meant going up to the Head: and only too well Bundle knew how the Head could whop!

He hesitated.

But it is well said that he who hesitates is lost. Bundle's hesitation was brief. He had his pound in his pocket, and he had only to walk as far as Bamford to take the Time-Tripper. It was due back at five, which gave him ample time to get in at Dolcot for calling-over—if nothing went wrong—though it was true that things did often go wrong with Bundle of the Fourth. Anyhow his mind was made up, and he went.

II

"TAKE your places for 1066!" said the conductor.

Bundle took his place with a dozen other time-passengers.

It was rather an exciting experience to Bundle: it was his first Time Trip. He was quite surprised to see the conductor yawn, just as if he had been conducting nothing more exciting than a bus.

But it was, in fact, only one of the short cheap trips. Trips back to ancient Rome, or Athens, or Persepolis, lasted longer and cost more: it was three or four pounds to get a close-up of the glory that was Greece or the grandeur that was Rome. It was very small beer to the conductor, who took a party every day as far as 1066, and was quite bored with Normans and Saxons.

"Tickets!" said the conductor, with another yawn. "Keep your seats! One hour in 1066, with a view of the Battle of 'Astings and death of King 'Arold. 'Old your breath when we start—it's a bit of a jerk! 'Ere goes."

He touched a button.

Bundle, with his keen interest in things scientific, would have been glad to know how the machine worked. It seemed easy and simple enough, though no doubt it was really more or less complicated. The spherical car whirled when the conductor touched the button, and it whirled faster and faster, and made him a little giddy at first: though he soon got used to it. After a time, he was able to catch glimpses from the windows: and those glimpses surprised him, as they naturally would any fellow on his first Time Trip. Strange scenes flashed past the windows: quite puzzling, till he realized that it was history that was unrolling, and Time that was slipping by.

The conductor could yawn, if he liked: but Bundle did not feel in the least like yawning, when he caught a glimpse of the Spanish Armada, with Drake drumming them up the Channel as he drummed them long ago.

Later—or rather, earlier, as he was going backwards through Time—he had a momentary view of a royal barge on the Thames, in which a fat unwieldy man sat, who everyone else on the barge seemed to be treating with great respect and fear. The fat important man reminded him of a character in fiction called Billy Bunter: and he realized with quite a thrill that he was staring at Henry the Eighth.

Henry the Eighth disappeared like a dissolving view. Then Bundle found himself staring at a horseman in armour, brandishing a sword, surrounded by fighting men-at-arms. Even as he looked, the rider was unhorsed, his steed slain. He was on his feet in a moment, waving his sword, and shouting: so loudly and fiercely that his voice penetrated the Time-Tripper:

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

And Bundle knew that it was Richard the Third at the Battle of Bosworth. But Time raced by, and Richard Crookback vanished.

After that, the speed of the whirling Time-Tripper blurred the scenes, and

Bundle saw nothing more distinctly, till there was a sudden stop. The conductor's yawning voice came to his ears:

"Ere you are, gents! Battle of 'Astings going on yonder! You can get out if you like, but look out for the arrers: and don't get near them Normans—they're a narsty lot. Mind you don't miss the 'bus back—can't wait for nobody when we're working to schedule."

He threw open the door.

Bundle stared out.

It was really exciting. Indeed he could hardly believe that he was back in the eleventh century already. But it seemed that he was. 1066 and all that were all round him. From a little distance came the sound of shouting, of clashing arms and thudding horses, and yells and groans. Masses of fighting-men, armed with swords and spears, were engaged in furious combat. Archers plied their bows and the air was thick with arrows. Bundle jumped out. The other time-passengers kept their seats, preferring the shelter of the Time-Tripper, with so many arrows flying.

But Bundle wanted to catch a glimpse of King Harold, if he could. He ran downhill, nearer to the raging battle. An arrow whizzed by his ear. He did not heed it. He glimpsed a fine-looking man in Saxon armour, with flashing blue eyes, and flaxen hair showing under his steel cap, leading on his men sword in hand, and knew that it was Harold, the last of the Saxon Kings: and then, right under his horrified eyes, the fatal arrow flew, and King Harold went down. Of course Bundle knew that it was nine hundred years ago, but it gave him a pang all the same, and he stood staring—and then he was suddenly caught in a rush of retreating Saxons, and swept nearly off his feet.

He was rushed on headlong in their midst.

By the time he got out of the throng, he hardly knew where he was. He had had a summer holiday at Hastings, and fancied that he knew the country: but it all seemed different in 1066. Fighting was still going on, in spots, at a distance. Bundle climbed a tree and looked round for the Time-Tripper. He realized that time was nearly up: and he remembered Mr. Mundy, and the Head's cane if he should miss the machine back. That would mean hanging on in the eleventh century until—and unless—he could get a lift home in another Time-Tripper: with an awful row at Dolcot to follow. And he mightn't spot another Time-Tripper, which would mean that he would be stranded for good in that long-past century, under the rule of Duke William of Normandy! The thought of it made Bundle feel quite desperate.

From the tree-top, however, he spotted the Time-Tripper on the hillside at a considerable distance. He made out the conductor in the doorway, looking out—no doubt for Bundle. He knew that the man wouldn't wait. As he had said, they worked to schedule on these Time Trips. There was just time, Bundle thought, to do it, if he ran his very hardest.

He slithered down the tree and ran.

It was uphill, and hard going, Bundle panted as he flew. Suddenly there was a crash of hoofs behind him. He gave a hurried glance back: to see a Norman knight, with lance in rest, charging after him.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bundle.

The knight shouted to him, in Norman-French. Bundle did not heed. He raced on. His feet hardly touched the ground as he flew. After him galloped the Norman. Bundle hardly knew how he escaped. He just did it! With a last effort, almost at his last breath, he reached the open doorway of the Time-Tripper, which the conductor was about to slam. A final bound landed him inside. The conductor slammed the door, and touched the starting-button.

The Norman reined in his steed. Bundle stared from the window. The Norman knight, with an amazed expression on his face—natural enough as he could never before have seen anything like a Time-Tripper from the Twentieth Century—lifted his lance to thrust it at the slammed door. Bundle shivered. One crash of that heavy lance would have crippled the frail machine, and probably wrecked it in the eleventh century.

But even as the thrust came, the Time-Tripper was on the whirl, spinning through Time: and as the thrusting lance reached the spot where the door had been, Bundle and his time-travelling companions were already well on into the twelfth century: 1066 and all that left far behind.

But, Bundle was rather serious, as the Time-Trimmer spun on through the centuries, back to the century he knew. He realized that he had had a very narrow escape: and perhaps it even dawned on him that the Head was quite right to prohibit these Time Trips for juniors. He did not feel quite at ease till he was safe back in the Twentieth Century, and jumped out of the Time-Tripper at Bamford in the year 1970.

"ADSUM!" chuckled Bundle, when Mr. Mundy called his name in hall at Dolcot.

He noted that Mundy's eye singled him out. But it was all right: he was back on time from 1066, and there he was in hall, answering "adsum" to his name at calling-over: as coolly as if he had merely been on an afternoon's run to Timbuctoo or Tasmania. But it had certainly been a near thing for Bundle!

THE END