

Bumper Xmas Number — Full of Good Things!

The BOYS' FRIEND 2d

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No. 1,125. Vol. XXIII.—New Series.]

THE BEST BOYS' PAPER IN THE WORLD.

[Week Ending December 30th, 1922.

**This Week's
Grand Xmas
Programme!**

"THE PHANTOM OF THE PRIORY!" A grand Christmas yarn of Jimmy Silver & Co. By OWEN CONQUEST.

"THE WIZARD OF THE WING!" A splendid footer yarn, featuring Rollo Dayton and the Duke. By WALTER EDWARDS.

"VAL O' THE CIRCUS!" An enthralling 12,000-word story of the sawdust ring, introducing an old favourite, "Bulldog" Holdfast.

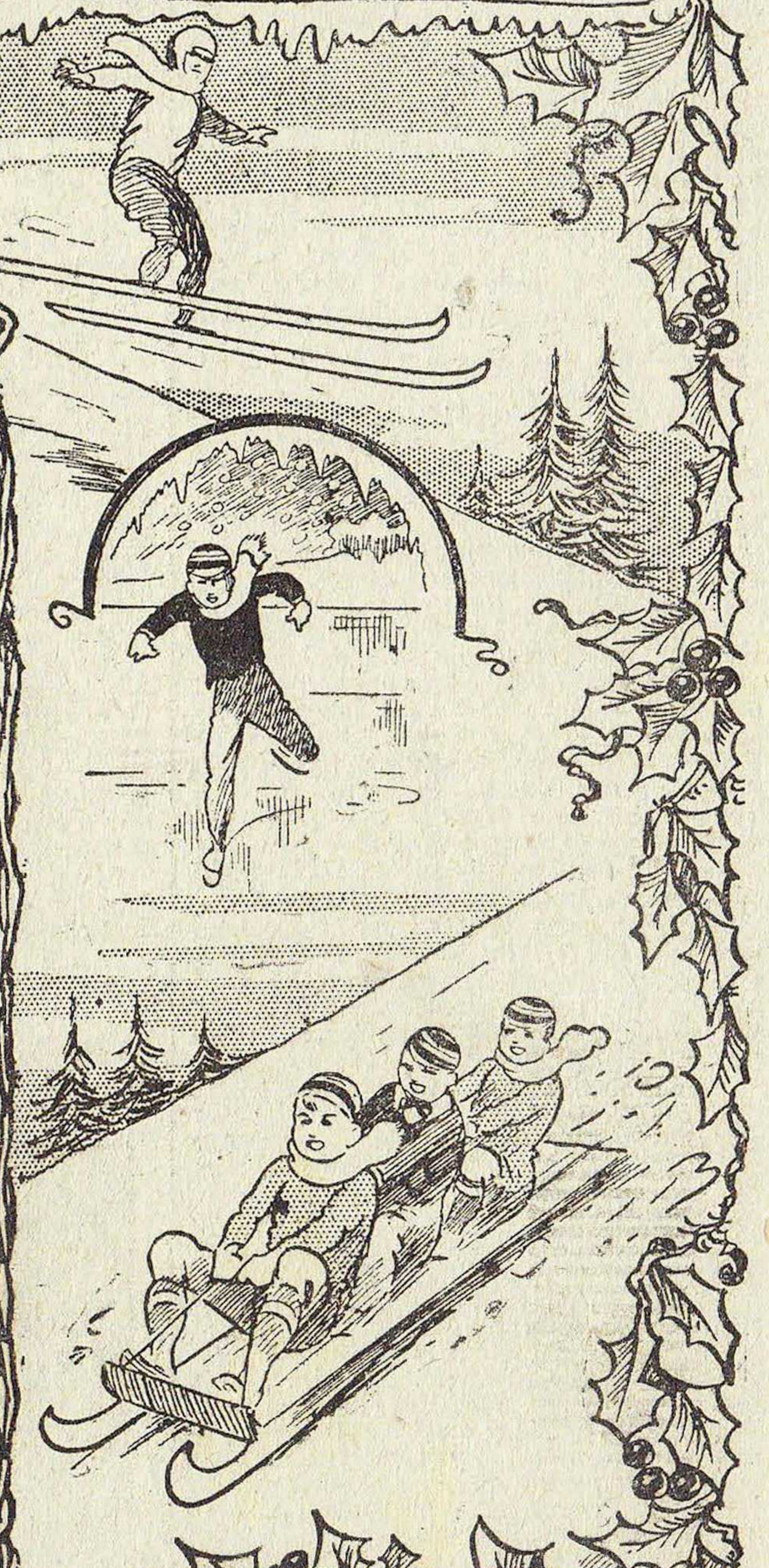
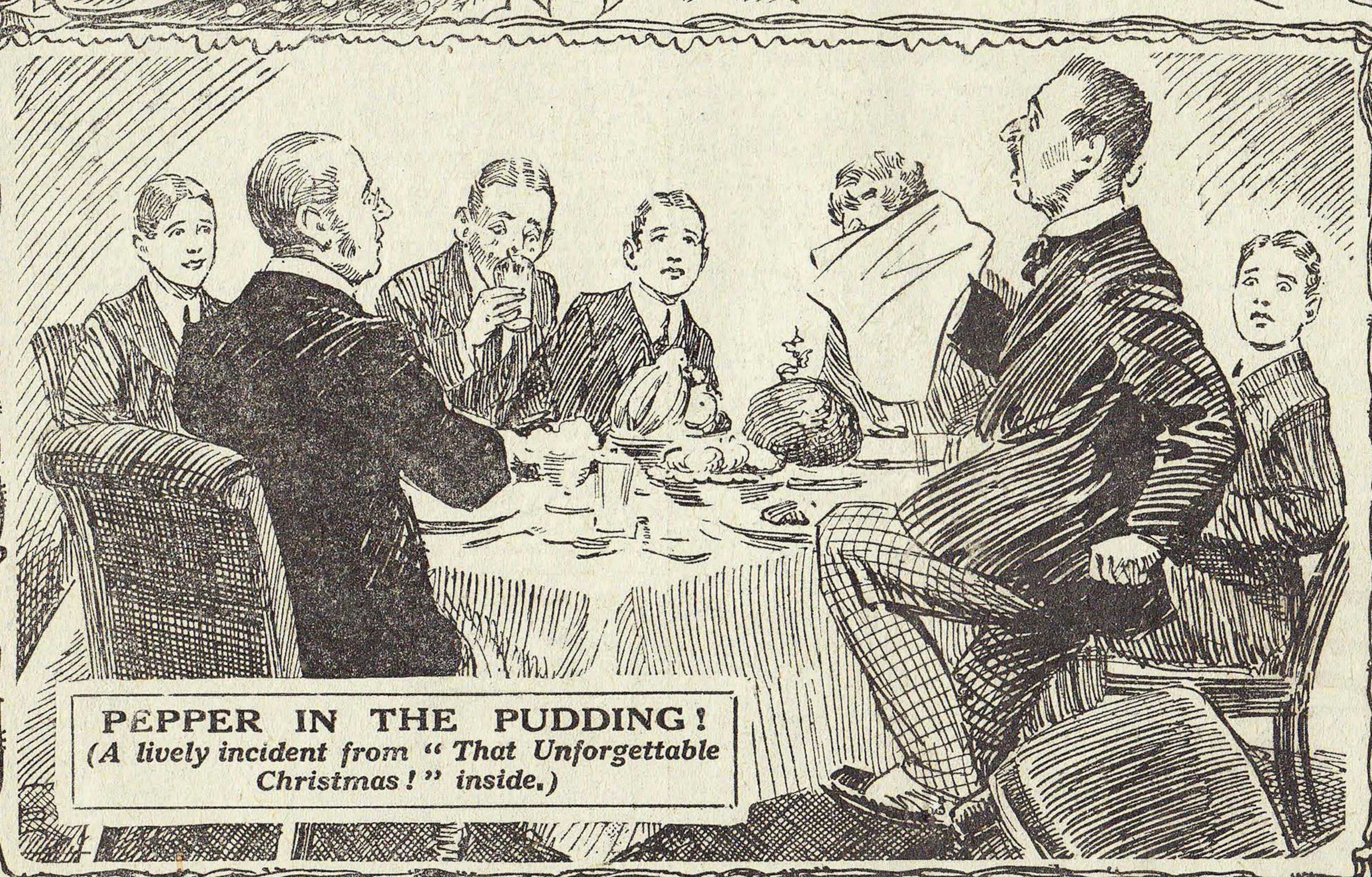
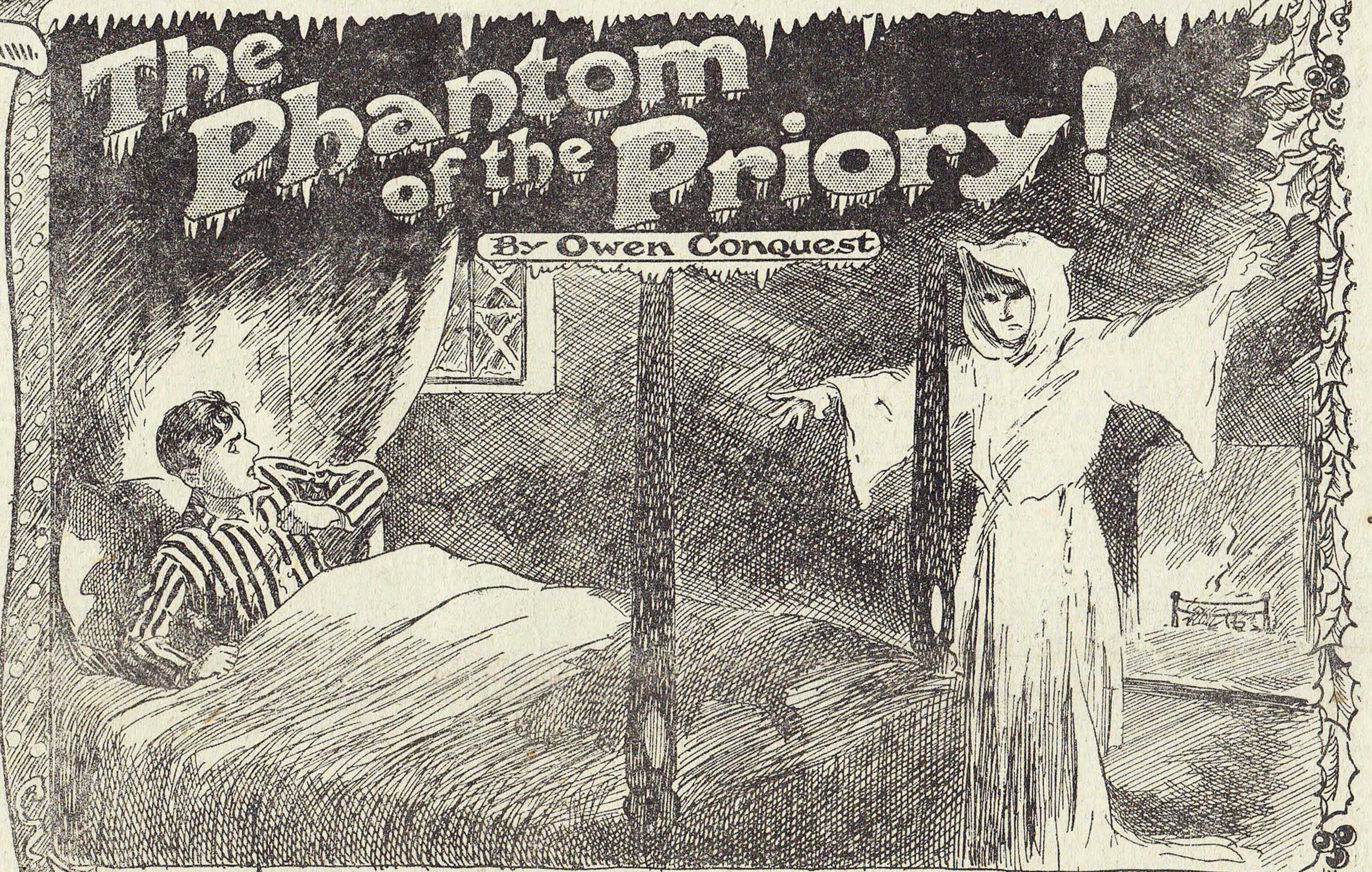
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"THE SPACE DESTROYER!" Our grand story of adventure amongst the Martians.

"SOUTH SEAS TREASURE!" MAURICE EVERARD'S greatest and latest story of the sea.

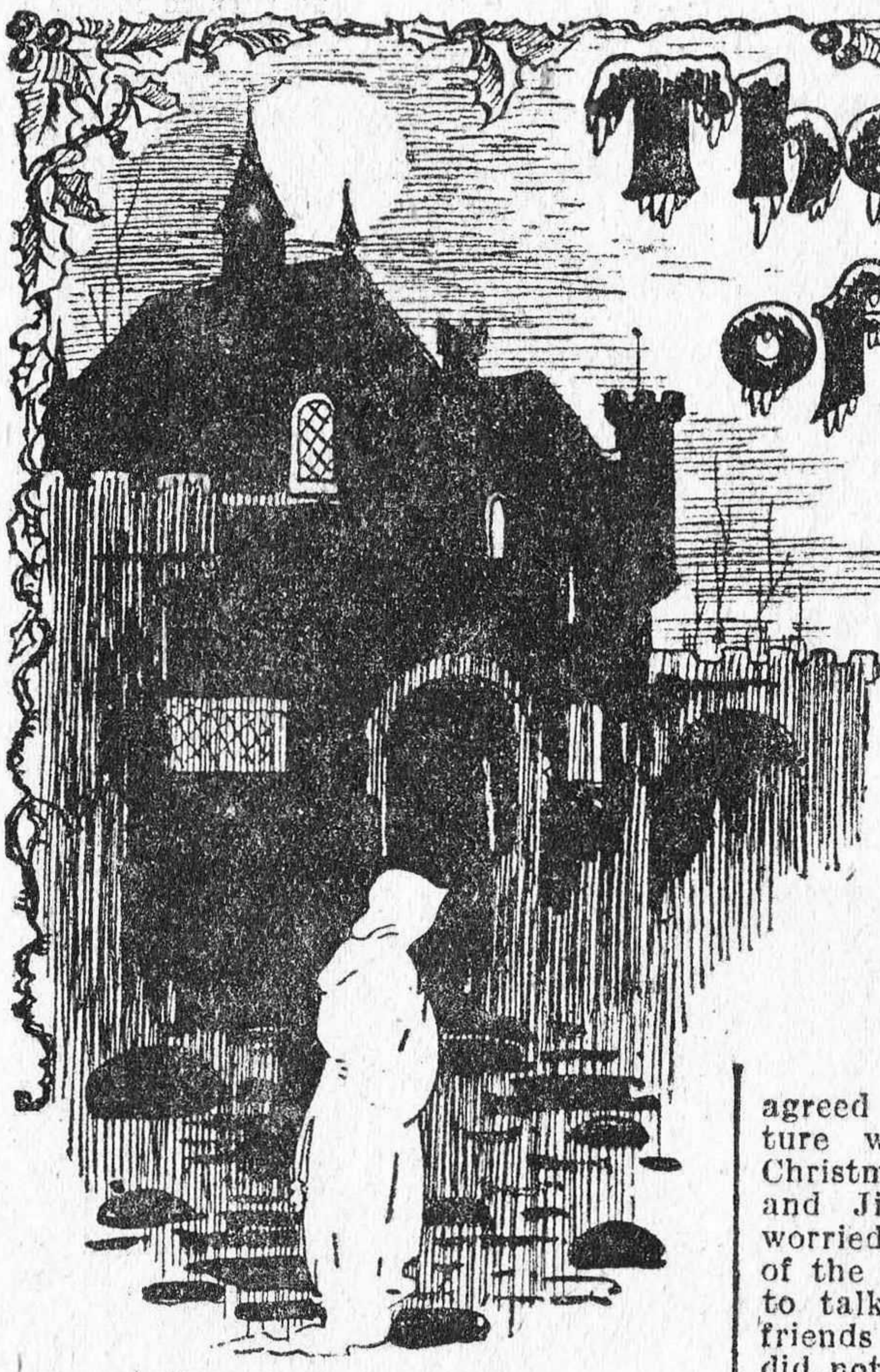
Special Christmas Features—Articles on Football, Health and Sport, etc. A Simple Footer Competition.

£10 IN PRIZES—EVERY WEEK!



SPECIAL IN THIS ISSUE—

"VAL O' THE CIRCUS!" A MAGNIFICENT 12,000-WORD STORY FEATURING "BULLDOG" HOLDFAST.



The Phantom of the Priory!

By Owen Conquest.

(Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular.")

An enthralling story of the strange Christmas adventures that befall Jimmy Silver & Co. and Valentine Mornington!

The 1st Chapter. Startling News!

"Two thousand quid!" Jimmy Silver, the captain of the Rookwood Fourth, uttered those words in tones of the deepest dismay.

"Two thousand quid! Oh, my hat!"

The end study in the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood looked very bright and merry. It was the day before break-up, and the Fistical Four had gathered for the last tea of the term.

There was a cheerful fire in the grate, there was holly on the walls, and there was an unusually excellent spread on the study table. Lovell, with a ruddy face, was making toast, Newcome was opening a new pot of jam, George Raby was buttering toast as fast as Arthur Edward Lovell made it. And Jimmy Silver was reading a letter from home.

His chums looked round at him.

"Two thousand quid!" repeated Lovell. Jimmy nodded.

"Somebody sent you that for a Christmas present?" inquired Arthur Edward, humorously.

"No, ass!"

"Lost it?" asked Raby, also humorously. "Let it slip through a hole in your pocket? Careless!"

"Fathead!" said Jimmy politely.

"Won it in a raffle?" asked Newcome.

"Oh, don't rot!" said Jimmy Silver.

"This is jolly serious. This letter is from my pater."

The Co became serious at once. On the morrow the four juniors were to leave Rookwood together for Jimmy Silver's home, in company with Mornington of the Fourth. They had been looking forward keenly to the Christmas holidays and news from Jimmy's home came rather as a damper.

"You fellows remember a giddy picture at my place, hanging in the library?" asked Jimmy. "It hung over my pater's desk. Looked like a sort of smudge with all the colours of the rainbow bunged in?"

"I noticed it once," said Lovell. "What about it?"

"It's been pinched!"

"Pincher must have wanted something to occupy his time, then," said Lovell, with a stare. "It wasn't worth anything, was it?"

"Only two thousand pounds!" answered Jimmy Silver, slightly satirically. Lovell jumped.

"That blessed smudge worth two thousand pounds!" he yelled.

"Just that! An American collector offered the pater that sum for it once," said Jimmy. "You see, it was a giddy Rembrandt. Now somebody has stolen it. The poor old pater is no end cut up, though, he doesn't say much; that smudge was the apple of his eye. By Jove! I'd like to get within hitting distance of the blighter that pinched it!"

"Not likely to, if it's worth two thousand pounds," said Raby. "I say, will this make any difference about the vac? Your pater mayn't want to be bothered by even a nice set of boys like us, in the circus."

Jimmy shook his head.

"No; that's all right. The pater expects us to-morrow, and he says specially he'll be very glad to see Mornington."

"Good!" said a voice in the doorway. "That shows excellent taste on the part of your pater, Jimmy."

And Valentine Mornington lounged into the end study.

"Just in time, old bean," said Lovell, rising from the glowing fire with a face like a beetroot. "That's enough toast, Raby. I say, Jimmy, I'm awfully sorry about the smudge. Perhaps it will cheer your pater up to see us, though."

"Perhaps!" murmured Newcome.

"Bad news?" asked Morny.

Jimmy Silver explained. The five juniors sat down to tea. Bad news was bad news, but tea was tea; and the chums of the Rookwood Fourth were hungry. It was simply rotten that such a misfortune should happen on the eve of the Christmas vacation; the juniors

agreed on that. Unless the stolen picture was recovered, Mr. Silver's own Christmas was likely to be a worried one, and Jimmy could scarcely help being worried in sympathy. But the captain of the Fourth tried to clear his face and to talk cheerfully. He was taking his friends home for the holidays, and he did not want to be a wet blanket at his own party.

"I dare say they'll get it back," said Mornington. "I suppose the police are on the job?"

"Yes, that's so."

"I should think a stolen picture would be traced easily enough," said Lovell. "It's value is in being a Rembrandt, not in being a smudge. Chap who bagged it will have to sell it as a Rembrandt, not as a smudge. Well, all the Rembrandt pictures are known and catalogued. I don't see how the rotter will be able to sell it at all. No dealer would touch it."

"Some collectors will touch it though," said Jimmy, ruefully. "Some giddy collectors aren't particular how they lay hands on what they collect. Once it's smuggled to a foreign country, it will find a sale quickly enough; in fact, most likely it's been stolen to fill an order from some unscrupulous art-collector—the pater thinks so. When the rotter gets it, he'll keep it dark, and gloat over it in secret."

"Must be an ass!" commented Lovell. "When did it happen?" asked Mornington.

"It was missing from the frame when my pater came down yesterday morning," said Jimmy. "Cut out of the frame, you know. The police found that a window had been forced; no other clue that's known, so far."

"Then the thief's far enough away by this time," remarked Newcome.

"Looks like it!"

"It's rotten!"

Mornington looked very thoughtful.

"But with a thing of that value in the room, surely your pater took some sort of precaution, Jimmy," he said. "Wasn't there a burglar-alarm, or anything?"

"Yes; electric. It didn't work as it happens."

"Why not?"

"I suppose the thief must have managed to disconnect it somehow. It ought to have rung when the window was opened, but it didn't."

"That's odd."

"Well, such things do happen," said Jimmy. "Electric bells don't always ring when they ought."

"That's different," said Morny. "Electric bells are often run on a wet battery that peters out at the wrong moment and wants shaking up. But a burglar-alarm would be on the house current. The electric light hadn't petered out, had they?"

"I suppose not."

"Then the current was all right, and the alarm ought to have rung," said Mornington. "A thief from outside couldn't have got at it without opening the window—which would have set it off. Is there anybody inside the house who might have had a hand in it?"

Jimmy Silver started.

"The pater doesn't seem to have thought of that," he said. "The police may have, of course. But—"

"Good man, Morny!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "I'll tell you what, Jimmy—we'll take the matter in hand when we get there to-morrow. If there's anything in Morny's idea, we'll spot the

man at once. I could do that on my head."

"How?" demanded Jimmy.

Lovell smiled.

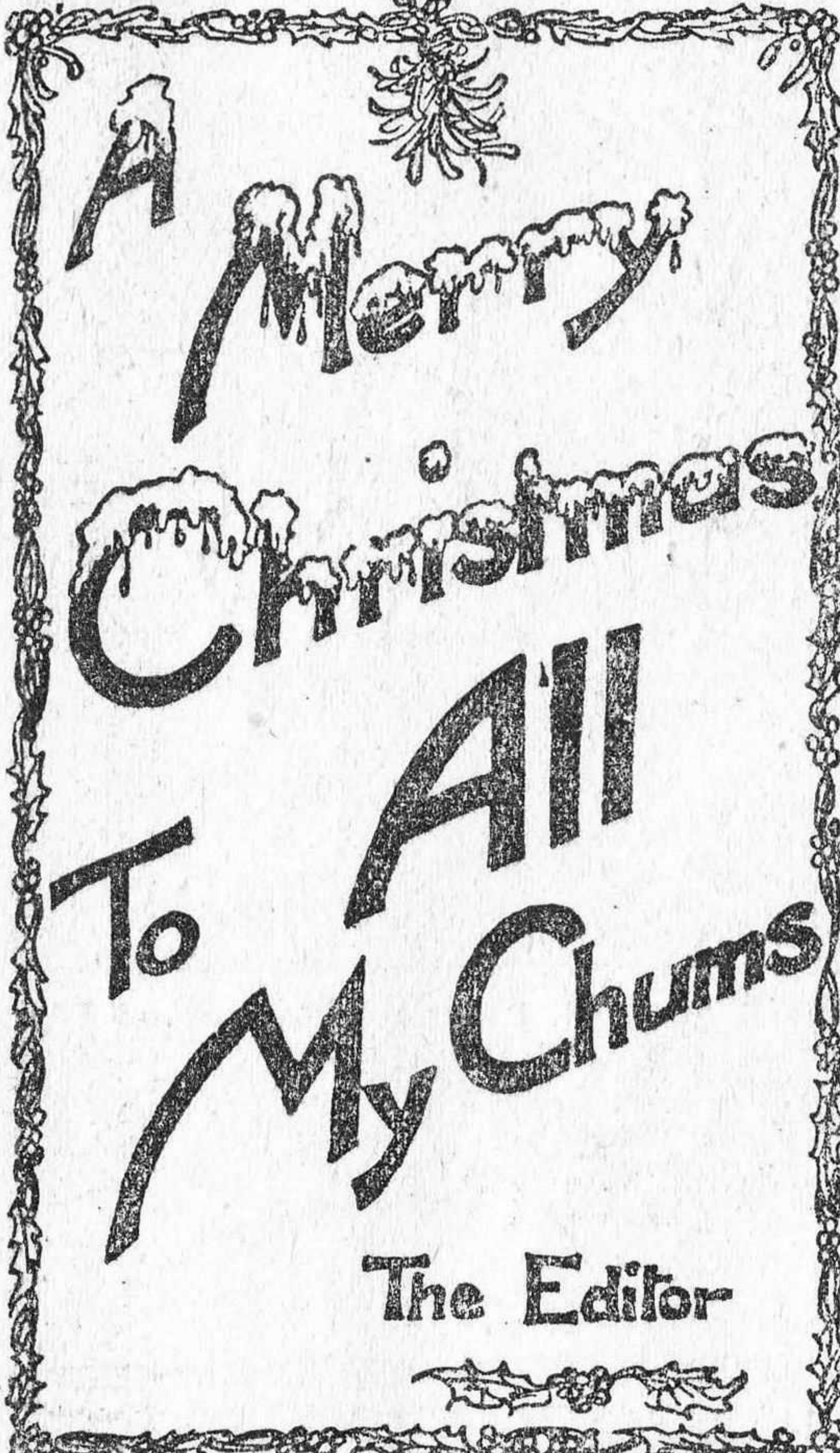
"Why, if a servant or anything has bagged that picture, of course he's bolted with it," he said. "If we find that somebody has cleared off suddenly, that's the man! What!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Morny.

Lovell stared at Mornington.

"Where does the cackle come in?" he demanded.

"Well if some servant bolted the same time that the picture disappeared, I fancy the police would have been on his track long before this," chuckled Morny.



"The police don't think of everything," said Lovell. "You can see that from reading any detective story."

"I fancy they'd think of something as obvious as that," said Morny. "If the thief's in the house, about the last thing he would do would be to bolt, unless he wants to feel the handcuffs on his wrists."

"Um!" said Lovell.

"That's where we come in, though," said Mornington. "We'll jolly well look into the matter, Jimmy, when we get there."

Jimmy Silver smiled and nodded. He was already thinking, himself, of looking into the matter. But he could not help thinking that a party of Rookwood juniors were not likely to have much luck in seeking for the purloiner of the missing Rembrandt.

The 2nd Chapter. Home for the Holidays.

Rookwood School broke up next day. Crowded brakes bore the crowds of fellows to the station. For hours the old quad rang with footsteps and cheery voices, gradually to fall into silence and solitude.

At Latcham Junction the Fistical Four and Mornington parted from a crowd of their friends, and took their own train. The winter afternoon was growing dusky when they alighted at Hadley Priors, the village close by Jimmy Silver's home, the Priory. Jimmy Silver's face was rather grave and thoughtful as he led his flock into the house. But his father met the Rookwood guests with a calm and cheerful face. Whatever he was feeling about his loss, the old gentleman locked in his own breast, and did not allow it to cast a shadow over the Christmas festivities. And his cheerful, smiling look relieved his son and his son's comrades.

Mrs. Silver presided at the tea-table with a smiling face also; and cousin Phyllis, who was there for Christmas,



JIMMY SILVER.

was very bright. Valentine Mornington found a warm welcome in the household, and it touched him. The recent very peculiar adventures of Valentine Mornington were known to Jimmy's relations—in part, at least. They knew that he had been expelled from the school, and that it was only by good fortune that he had been able to return to his old place at Rookwood. But the manner of both Mr. Silver and Mrs. Silver was kindness itself; and Morny felt it deeply.

"Your pater is a brick," Morny said to Jimmy Silver in a low voice, "and your maffer is another brick; and your cousin is a giddy angel!"

Jimmy smiled.

"Passed unanimously," he answered. "Your pater knows I was sacked from Rookwood," said Morny. "He knows it was for a rotten trick I played on you, Jimmy, out of beastly temper—"

Jimmy Silver held up his hand.

"That's dead and buried," he answered. "Let it rest."

"I can't help thinkin' of it when they're so dashed decent to me," muttered Mornington. "I—I suppose they know I'm sorry?"

"Of course, old chap. Don't worry." "I wish I could make it up to them somehow, though," said Mornington. "I don't deserve this."

For a moment the face of Valentine Mornington was dark with emotion; but as Phyllis addressed a remark to him, he turned to the girl with a cheery smile and answered lightly. Morny was not a fellow to wear his heart on his sleeve, but there was no doubt that, for once at least, the wayward heart of the scapegrace of Rookwood was deeply touched.

After tea, Mr. Silver retired to the library; and Jimmy Silver & Co. went out for a tramp in the frosty grounds round the Priory. But they did not stay out long. All the juniors were keen to know the precise details of the robbery at the Priory; and all of them had a vague hope that they might be able to do something. How Mr. Silver was likely to accept an offer of assistance in the affair from a party of schoolboys was rather a question; but anyhow, the Rookwooders were going to help if they could.

"We'll put it to your pater, Jimmy," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "We'll make him tell us just what happened and all the clues, and so on; then we'll go on to it."

"Hem!" murmured Jimmy. "It won't do any harm, if it doesn't do any good," remarked Raby.

"Something in that!" assented Jimmy. And having made up their minds, the Rookwood party made their way to the library. Mr. Silver was not alone there. A plump young man in spectacles was seated at a desk, pen in hand, apparently busy; while Mr. Silver, in an armchair by the blazing log fire, had his eyes fixed on an empty frame that hung on the wall. It was the frame from which the missing Rembrandt had been cut, and fragments of the gashed canvas still adhered to the wood. The expression on the old gentleman's face was extremely mournful; but it changed as the juniors appeared, and he smiled and nodded.

The fat young man glanced up from his papers for a moment, and then rose to his feet. Jimmy glanced at him.

"Come in, my boys!" said Mr. Silver cordially. "You have not met Mr. Spencer before, I think, Jimmy. My secretary."

Mr. Spencer made the juniors a bow with a good-humoured smile on his fat face, blinking at them through his big spectacles in a rather owlish way.

"I am very pleased to meet Master Jimmy," he said in a rich, fruity voice. "Perhaps you would prefer, sir, to leave these accounts till later?"

"Busy, dad?" asked Jimmy.

"We are going through some of the estate accounts," said Mr. Silver, with a smile. I wish to get everything in order before Mr. Spencer leaves for his Christmas holiday, and he goes on Christmas Eve. But we can spare a few minutes."

He looked inquiringly at the juniors, evidently in expectation of some explanation of the call.

"Go it, Lovell!" murmured Raby. Arthur Edward hesitated.

"Pile in, old chap!" said Newcome. Mr. Silver looked puzzled.

"The—the fact is, sir—" stammered Lovell.

"Yes?"

"About the robbery, sir—"

"Oh," said Mr. Silver, "Jimmy has told you, I suppose! There is no news from the police, so far."

"That isn't all," said Lovell. "The fact is, we want to help."

"Help?" repeated Mr. Silver in astonishment; while the secretary blinked curiously at the junior through his big spectacles.

Lovell reddened. But he stuck to his guns.

"You see, we're Boy Scouts, sir," he said. "I don't see why we can't help. It would make it no end of a jolly Christmas if we could bag that smudge." "That what?"

"That picture, I mean—the giddy Rembrandt," said Lovell hastily.

"Oh!"

"We've talked it over," continued Lovell, a little disconcerted by Mr. Silver's amazement, and by the secretary's half-concealed grin. "We've got an idea on the subject."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Silver. "If—if you can—can help, the police will be under a deep obligation to you. What is the idea?"

Lovell went on.

"Why, sir, we think the burglar-alarm ought to have rung, and so we've a suspicion that there was somebody inside the house who had a hand in it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir; and if somebody has suddenly left since the robbery, we want to get on his track."

"Less my soul! But nobody has left."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"As for this idea of yours in connection with the burglar-alarm, the same thought, naturally, occurred to Inspector Stenson, of Denewood, who has taken up the case."

"Oh!" said Lovell. "The police thought of it?"

"Naturally!"

"Ahem!"

"Every member of the household has been questioned," said Mr. Silver, with a slightly amused smile. "If any person had left, undoubtedly the police would have made a very strict examination of that person. On Mr. Spencer's suggestion, too, a search was made of all the rooms, in order to clear everybody in the household of possible suspicion. Not that I suspected for a moment that any member of the household could have been guilty of complicity in the robbery. As for the alarm not working, that is easily explained."

"How is it explained, sir?" asked Mornington.

"The burglar cut a piece of glass from the window, reached through, and cut the wire. That placed the alarm out of action."

Morny glanced towards the library window.

"The damage was repaired, after the police had finished here," said Mr. Silver, with a faint smile. "I am afraid there is nothing left for amateur investigation."

The juniors looked at one another. Mr. Spencer lowered his face over his business papers, to conceal his grin.

Mr. Silver tried not to smile, but did not quite succeed. The Rookwooders looked, as they felt, sheepish.

"So there's nothing doing, remarked Jimmy."

"I fear not."

Jimmy Silver & Co. retired from the library. Two smiling faces were bent over the accounts when they had gone. The offer of the Rookwooders to supplement the action of the police had at least had the effect of cheering up Mr. James Silver.

The 3rd Chapter. Lovell Has His Way.

"Rubbish, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver unasily.

"Bosh!" retorted Lovell. "But you can't—"

"I can!"

"But—"

"It's settled!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, in a tone of finality.

And cousin Phyllis, coming along to the firelight where the Rookwooders sat talking, asked what the argument was about.

"Lovell's keen on playing the goat," explained Jimmy Silver.

"As per usual!" remarked Raby.

Phyllis laughed.

"I'm going to sleep in the haunted room to-night," Lovell explained. "Jimmy promised that I should, if I wanted to, and I'm keeping him to it. I've said I would, and I'm going to."

Phyllis' eyes opened wide.

"But—" she said.

"Why, if I backed out, these chaps would make out that I'd got cold feet," said Lovell indignantly. "I've said all the term that I'm going to do it, and I'm jolly well going to. I hold Jimmy to it."

"But the haunted room is never used," said Phyllis. "I believe it's very cold and draughty."

"I'm not soft," said Lovell.

"Lovell's an ass," said Jimmy, with a sigh. "I said I'd let him if he wanted to; but he doesn't really want to. In the middle of the night there will be yells for help."

"There won't!" roared Lovell. "I jolly well sha'n't turn out to go for the ghost," declared Raby. "If you wake up the ghost, Lovell, you can deal with him."

Lovell snorted.

"You jolly well know there's no such thing as a ghost," he said. "The haunted room is all rot, and I'm going to prove it by sleeping in the blessed room. The ghost always walks at Christmas time, according to the yarn Jimmy spun us. Well I'm going to prove that he jolly well doesn't walk."

"But—" said Jimmy.

"Uncle James' giddy word is his bond," chuckled Lovell. "You've told me I can



ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL.

camp in the haunted room while I'm here, if I like. Well, I do like! The haunted room for me!"

Jimmy Silver looked thoughtful, and a little worried.

In the cheery firelight, amid his cheery companions, Arthur Edward Lovell was full of cheery confidence. But Jimmy could not help thinking that in the dead of night Lovell would feel quite differently. The haunted room at the Priory was at a little distance from the inhabited part of the rambling old building. It was seldom or never entered; and though Jimmy did not believe, of course, that the phantom of the murdered Prior haunted the scene of his unhappy despatch, he himself would not have cared to pass a night alone in the room.

There was nothing to be afraid of, certainly. But a lonely midnight, with the winter wind howling round the old roofs, the solitude of the haunted room was quite likely to get on a fellow's nerves.

But Lovell was not much given to reflection; he seldom looked ahead. He had said that he was going to put up in the haunted room, and he was quite determined on it. Jimmy's half-forgotten promise had to be kept if Lovell insisted—and Lovell did insist, most emphatically.

Phyllis looked grave, too. She could not help thinking that Lovell would repent of his rashness, when he found himself alone in the haunted room in the dark still hours.

"Suppose we go and look at the room," she suggested. "I have not seen it for ages. It is a very interesting room, at least. The furniture has not been changed for a hundred years or more."

"Let's!" said Jimmy at once.

He divined Phyllis' thought, that after seeing the lonely old room Lovell would probably change his mind.

"Come on, then," said Lovell cheerily. "We shall want a light," remarked Jimmy Silver. "There's no electric light in the room. I'll get a bike lantern."

"And I've got a torch," said Lovell.

In a few minutes the five juniors and cousin Phyllis were in the old oak-walled corridor that led to the haunted room. The windows in the corridor looked on the grounds, dim with the December mist. There were four rooms on the corridor, but none of them in use. Three were in a dismantled state; but the haunted room was still in order—it was cared for on account of its historical associations.

Once upon a time, according to the legend, there had been a Prior, who was murdered when the estate was taken possession of by a favourite of Henry VIII. The ghost of the slain Prior haunted the scene of the crime—walking when the snow was on the ground, so the legend declared. And the grounds about the Priory were now white with snow; so it was time for the ghost to walk, if there was any truth in the story.

The heavy old oak door was pushed open, and the lights gleamed into the room.

It was a large room, with oak-paneled walls, and a heavy old bedstead with a canopy occupied a large portion of one wall. The furniture was ancient and heavy—of dark oak.

Jimmy held up the bike lantern, and two or three electric-torches were turned on. The room was cold, though not damp. It struck rather a chill to the juniors, though Lovell would not admit as much, even to himself. He laughed as he stepped into the room, and his laugh rang in a rather hollow way, with a dull echo.

"Shivery, isn't it?" said Raby. "Not at all," answered Lovell. "The original bloodstains are here, or supposed to be here," said Jimmy. "Look!"

He turned the light upon the dark oak planks of the floor. Certainly the old wood was discoloured in several places.

"That's where the old Prior fell, with a sword through him," said Jimmy, indicating the centre of the room. "I don't think!" said Lovell, derisively.

"The murderer slept in the room the same night," continued Jimmy, impressively. "In the morning he was found a gibbering maniac."

"Bow-wow!"

"Now, look here, Lovell—"

"I'm sticking to it," said Lovell. "That old bedstead looks jolly comfy. I can camp here first-rate."

"And we'll find you a gibbering lunatic in the morning," remarked Newcome. "We sha'n't notice much difference."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!" said Lovell.

"Well, if you really mean it, old chap, I'll speak to the mater, and we'll get the room fixed up," said Jimmy.

"Bosh! Leave it as it is," said Lovell. "I don't want to give a lot of trouble; only to sleep in the haunted room."

"You're not going to catch a cold for Christmas, ass."

The view of the haunted room had evidently not changed Lovell's determination. If there was any change, he was more determined than ever. As a matter of fact, it was too late for Lovell to retreat; for unwilling as his chums were to let him have his reckless way, there was no doubt that Arthur Edward would have been considerably chipped, if he had retreated from his declared intention.

That was more than enough to make Lovell obstinate. If he felt any inward doubts, he gave no sign of them.

So Jimmy Silver approached his mater diplomatically on the subject, and when the good lady found that a promise was involved, she ceased to object to the idea. As Mrs. Silver had resided at the Priory for twenty years without seeing or hearing anything of the ghost, she did not take the phantom Prior very seriously. She only thought that Master Lovell was a foolish young fellow, in which, no doubt, she was quite right.

So a huge log fire was built on the ancient hearth of the haunted room, and a new bed was arranged on the ancient oaken bedstead, and Arthur Edward's baggage was transferred to the room.

A large lamp was placed on the table, illuminating the room. By that time the old apartment looked very cosy and



VALENTINE MORNINGTON.

passed a night in this room, out of bravado," said Spencer. "At midnight he ran out of the room shrieking in fright. This is known to Mr. Silver, who was here at the time."

"Bosh!" repeated Lovell, rather un- easily however. "I dare say the chap had been keeping up Christmas a bit too merrily."

"Possibly," assented the secretary. "I thought it my duty to warn you. It would be a severe test for your nerves, alone here, in the dead of night—"

"My nerves are all right," said Lovell carelessly. "Thanks all the same."

And he turned to his unpacking, and Spencer quitted the room. Arthur Edward Lovell came down cheerily for dinner. He

"Thank you, sir!" said Lovell. And Lovell had his way. It was one of the weaknesses of Arthur Edward Lovell that he always knew best and consequently considered it always judicious to have his own way, and sometimes that little failing had landed Arthur Edward into trouble.

The 4th Chapter: The Ghost Walks.

"Well, good-night, old chap!" Lovell smiled serenely. Jimmy Silver & Co. escorted Arthur Edward as far as the haunted room, when bed-time came. They felt rather reluctant to leave him there.

The logs still blazed on the wide old hearth, the flames reflected on the massive oak furniture and the bed canopy. The lamp burned steadily, casting a subdued light through the room. Certainly it looked very cosy and comfortable. But Lovell, though he smiled, was not feeling so cheery as his smile would have indicated. During the evening, Mr. Spencer had filled up a thrilling half-hour by relating the history of the ghost of the murdered Prior, and Mr. Eustace Spencer had an effective way of telling a story.

Christmas, certainly, was the time for ghost stories, and the Priory party had quite enjoyed the thrilling narrative. But now that he was in the haunted room, Lovell rather wished that Spencer had found some more exhilarating topic. But nothing would have induced Lovell to betray a hint of uneasiness.

"Good-night, you fellows," he said carelessly.

"Sure you won't change your mind, old fellow?" asked Mornington.

he was getting more and more nervous, and he wisely resolved to turn in and forget the ghost story in slumber. He was sleepy, fortunately.

He hesitated whether to turn off the lamp. Undoubtedly he would have preferred a light if he had wakened. But leaving the lamp alight was a confession of nerves; there was nothing to be afraid of. With a firm hand Lovell turned out the lamp.

The room was lighted now only by the flickering of the fire that cast ghostly lights and shadows on the glimmering old walls. Lovell felt his heart beating uncomfortably. He realised that this was quite different from what he had anticipated. The solitude and silence seemed oppressive in themselves. He told himself angrily that there was nothing to fear, but he could not ignore the fact that his nerves were getting jumpy. He plunged into bed and had to exert his will-power to refrain from pulling the bed-clothes over his face.

It was some time before Lovell slept. The thought came into his mind of the burglary of a few nights before when the Rembrandt had been stolen, but he did not mind thinking of that. The haunted room, safely locked, was secure from burglars at least. Lovell tried in fact to think of the burglars in order to keep from his mind Eustace Spencer's shuddery narrative of the phantom Prior. But, somehow or other, the ghost story would recur to his mind.

The old house was full of strange sounds in the bitter December wind that whistled and sang about it. Even the old oak wainscot creaked. Lovell shut his eyes hard, determined to sleep.

He slept at last.

But the ghost story was still in his mind, and it recurred in his dreams. In his troubled sleep he lived through the scene that had been enacted in that very room hundreds of years before; the murdered man sinking on the old oak planks, which were drenched with his blood—and the murderer starting out of slumber, in that very bed to see the ghostly figure gliding in the dimness, with an accusing finger raised to point—

Lovell stirred and turned and mumbled in his troubled sleep. And suddenly he awoke, with his heart throbbing and a sense of nameless fear upon him. He lay quite still, trying to collect himself.

The fire had died almost out; only a faint rosy glow from the ember on the hearth pervaded the room.

Lovell lay and stared into the dimness, his heart beating in painful throbs, his very flesh creeping. For he knew that he was not alone in the room.

It was not nerves merely; he knew that.

There was no sound—save the faint fall of an ember in the grate. Faint as it was, it sounded almost like thunder in Lovell's throbbing ears. And—was that a sound that followed it?

A faint, swishing sound—a sound as of a dragging robe on wood. Lovell heard it, and his heart almost ceased to beat.

For some moments he remained still, motionless paralysed. Then, with a hoarse cry, he sprang up in bed.

With staring eyes he gazed out from under the old canopy.

What was it he saw?

With reeling brain, he stared at it. A figure in trailing robes of white—a dead white face with staring eyes—a hand that was raised to point—that fearful figure stood by the bedside, and the junior's horrified eyes fixed upon it in utter terror.

Another ember fell, and for an instant a flame shot up and the room was bright. In the red light Lovell saw the figure distinctly—the white trailing robes—the white, dead, awful face—the glittering eyes that held his own with mesmeric intensity. Then the light died as suddenly as it had arisen and all was dark.

Lovell sank back in the bed, almost fainting. Something touched him—and at that touch the unhappy junior hurled himself from the bed, screaming and striking out with clenched fists. But his hands sawed only the empty air.

There was a faint rustle as of trailing garments. Then silence—save for Lovell's frantic cries.

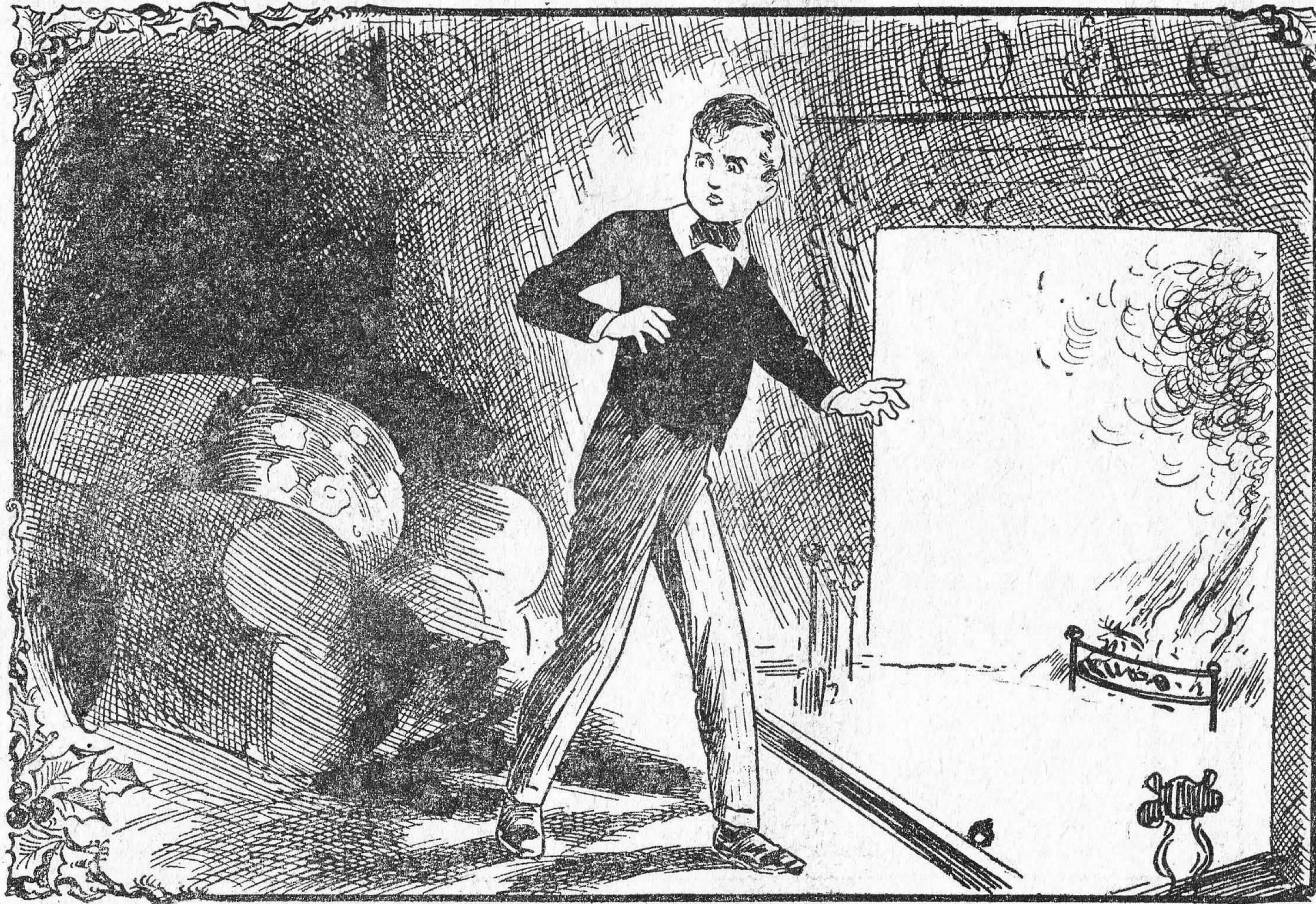
"Help! help! help!"

Loud and clear, in tones of fearful terror, the cries rang through the sleeping house from the haunted room.

"Help! help! help!"

THE END.

(Is the Rookwood junior's ghostly visitor supernatural, or is Lovell suffering from nerves? On no account must you miss "Trailing the Spectre!" next Monday's long, complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co.!)



THE HAUNTED ROOM! Something touched him—and at that touch Lovell leaped up, screaming and striking the empty air with clenched fists. There was a faint rustle of trailing garments, then silence—save for the scared junior's cries!

cheery, and Lovell was confirmed in his resolve.

He was unpacking his bags in the room, to dress for dinner, when there were footsteps in the echoing corridor, and a tap came at the door.

"Trot in!" called out Lovell.

To his surprise, it was Mr. Spencer who entered.

Lovell looked inquiringly at the fat young man. What Mr. Silver's secretary could want with him was a puzzle.

"Pray excuse me, Master Lovell," said the young man, blinking at the junior in his owlish way through his big spectacles. "I hear that you are going to pass the night in this room."

"That's correct," said Lovell.

"You are aware that it is haunted?" Lovell laughed.

"I've heard the yarn," he said. "That's why I'm going to sleep in the room. Do you believe in ghosts then?"

The secretary blinked at him curiously. "You have a great deal of nerve for a schoolboy," he said. "Perhaps I am taking a liberty, as I know you so little, Master Lovell, but I should like to advise you strongly not to pass the night in this room."

"Why not?"

"Its associations—"

"What rot!" said Lovell. "I'm going to stay in this room all the while I stay at the Priory. I've said I would. I'm not nervous, I can tell you. And I don't believe a word of that yarn about the murdered Prior."

"That is a mistake," said Mr. Spencer quietly. "Since I have been in Mr. Silver's service, I have examined a good many old records in the library. There is no doubt that Prior Aylmer was murdered in this very room, and the body was buried at night in the fields, in unconsecrated ground. And there are records of the phantom having been seen."

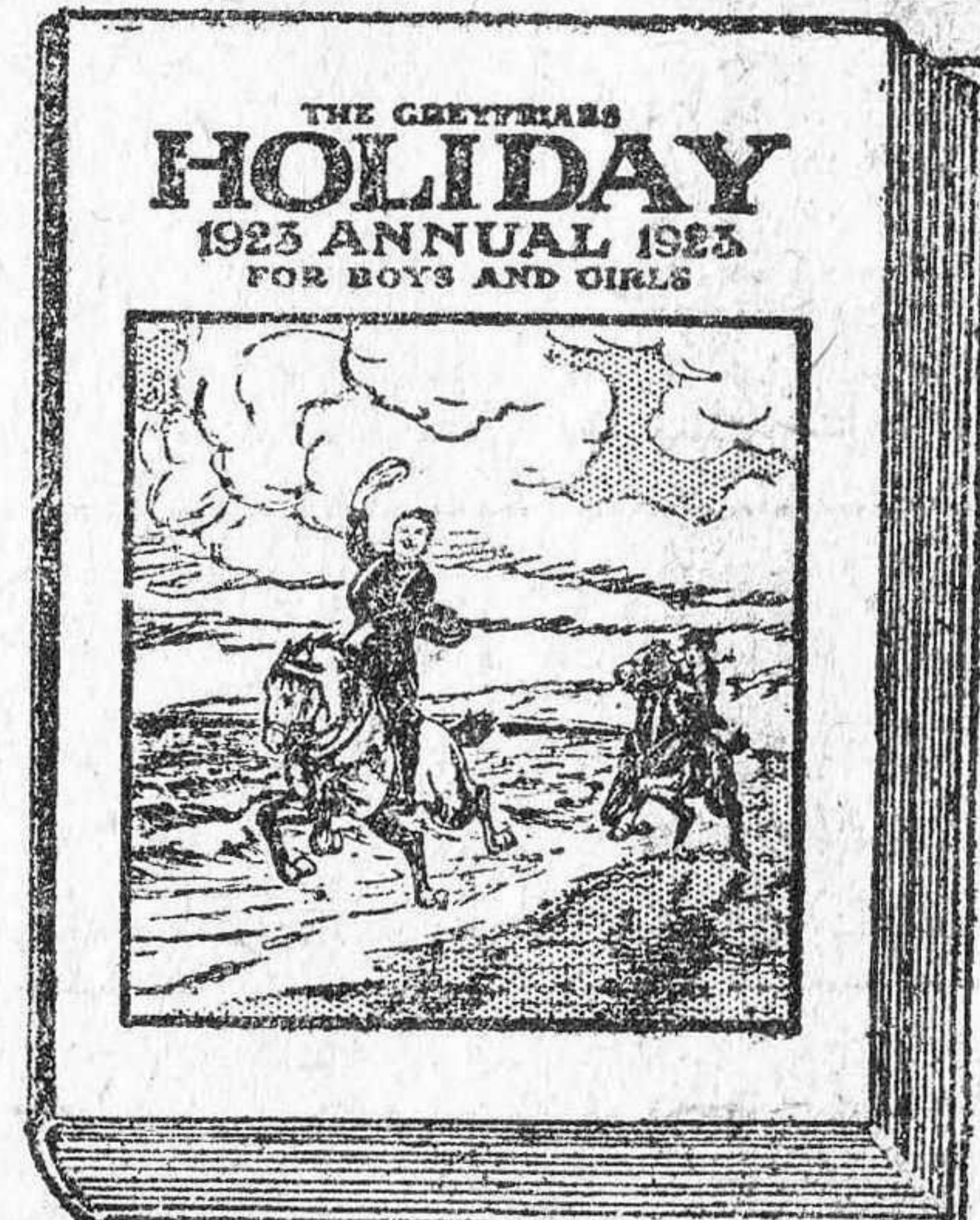
"Bosh!" said Lovell. "It is quite certain that on a Christmas twenty-five years ago a guest in the house

found Mr. Silver looking grave. The old gentleman tapped Lovell on the shoulder.

"I think you would be wise not to sleep in the haunted room, Lovell," he said kindly. "Jimmy tells me it is a promise, or I should be strongly inclined to forbid you to do so. At least, it would be wise to have one of your friends with you."

He paused a moment, then, as Lovell did not speak, he added, "Of course, the ghost story is all moonshine; if I thought otherwise, I could not allow this. I shall, of course, let you have your way."

Don't miss this treat, Boys!



6/- Here you are, Boys! "The Holiday Annual" is the jolliest present you can have. It is packed with school and adventure stories, pictures, and coloured plates, and you will enjoy every line of it. Just drop the hint that the present you want this year is "The Holiday Annual."

"No fear."

"Look here, one of us had better peg in with you," said Jimmy.

"Rats! Nothing to be afraid of, is there?"

"No. But—"

"Dear old man, my nerves are all right," said Lovell. "Wouldn't you jolly well cackle if I changed my mind?"

"Well, you are an ass, all the same," said Raby.

"Bow-wow!"

The juniors had parted at last. Lovell closed the door of the oak room and walked across to the fire.

The blazing fire was a comfort. The leaping flames banished the eeriness of the haunted room.

"It's rot!" said Lovell. "Utter rot!"

He was in no hurry to turn in, however. He stood and watched the flickering flames for some time; and then he gave a sudden start as a faint creak sounded from somewhere.

Lovell spun round, looking about him with startled eyes. The blood rushed to his heart. He realised at that moment that his friends were the length of a long corridor away from him, and that there was no help at hand—if anything happened.

Then he burst into a laugh. What could happen?

"I'm getting nervous," he muttered. "All because of that secretary ass and his silly ghost stories. B-r-r-r!"

He crossed to the door to lock it. Somehow, the thought of the long, dark, deserted corridor without and the empty rooms made him desirous of securing the door. He felt a sense of relief as he turned the big, old-fashioned key in the lock.

Then—though he would not have let his chums see him so occupied—Lovell explored the room, looking into the deep, old wardrobe in the wall, and even under the bed. By that time the rest of the household had gone to bed, and it was close on midnight. Lovell realised that



ARTHUR NEWCOME.



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Jimmy Silver & Co. appear in the BOYS' FRIEND every week. Don't miss "Trailing the Spectre!" next week's yarn!