

THRILLING YARN OF CHRISTMAS ADVENTURE & FOOTER!

THE BOYS' REALISM

OF SPORT & ADVENTURE



THE PHANTOM OF BANNINGTON GRANGE!

by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

A powerful extra-long complete story of Yuletide thrills and football, introducing Fatty Fowkes and his pals of the Blue Crusaders.

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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STRANGE YULETIDE EXPERIENCES OF FAMOUS SOCCER PLAYERS!

Sports Pic

By The Pieman



The Haunted House!

Strange experiences pop into the lives of our football friends, and often some of the strangest come in the Christmas season. It was then that a famous English goalkeeper had an experience of a very strange nature. He was the goalkeeper of a great League club. He was and still is interested in ghosts. He has a scientific mind, as well as a goalie's keen eye and cute pair of hands, and he applies his brain to matters occult, and to anything and everything connected with psychic phenomena.

Well, on this particular Christmas season there was a tale abroad in the city, the tale of a haunted house—a house, untenanted, lying in a rather lonely quarter on the outskirts, and remote from the busy thoroughfares—a situation very suitable for a ghost to make its appearance. This particular ghost was, according to the yarn, seen by passers-by moving from room to room, clad in a long, enveloping garment of white—a garment like a shroud—and bearing in its hand a lighted candle. Weird, uncanny, unearthly noises were said to be heard coming from the house in the dead of night. A tale was told of a long-ago murder having been committed in one of the attics—a crime which had never been expiated by the murderer, and the ghost was believed to be the ghost of the victim, who wouldn't rest till the perpetrator had been discovered.

A Goalie and a Ghost!

Be that as it may, the haunted house tickled my goalkeeping friend, who one dark and stormy night set out to solve, if possible, the mystery. This was a job after his own heart. Towards the midnight hour he entered the gate leading to the grounds in which the house stood. All was dark. The wind moaned and wailed among the trees. He groped his way along. The house loomed up in the night like a great crouching beast. A light flashed, and swept slowly, like a lighthouse beam, round one of the rooms. Then all was dark for a minute. The goalkeeper chuckled. Another flash in a room higher up, and the same slow sweep round the apartment.

These signs, ghostly and unnerving as they might have been, rejoiced the heart of the goalkeeper. He pushed on as quickly as the dark night would permit, confident that he was on the verge of solving a mystery. Up four steps to the front door, and the bell was

THE BOYS' REALM.—No. 75.

A Goalie Interested in Ghosts—Investigating a Mystery—Light at Last—Cunningham's Christmas Adventure—Halliday the Hero—Hugh Hits 'Em—Blair's Debut for Boscombe.

pulled sharply. Through the deserted house a jangle of sound swept. Then all was silent, save for the noise of the wind in the trees—silent for a minute—while the goalkeeper waited. A minute passed, and he was just on the point of moving round to the back door, when on his attuned ear fell the sound of footsteps, heavy and muffled. They were coming in his direction—coming from the room above, in which he had seen the searching light. Slowly they came, till they reached the front door, at the back of which they stopped. All was still again. Then suddenly the door swung open, and the goalkeeper was covered—no, not with a revolver, but with the glaring bullseye of a policeman. And before he had time to utter a word, my friend was drawn inside and the door closed and locked.

The Mystery Solved.

This was the end of the mystery. The police were keeping an eye on the deserted house. They were aware of the tales concerning it. The goalie had chanced to make his midnight visit while a policeman was "going his round." Perhaps it was fortunate that the man in blue was a warm admirer of my friend, whom he knew very well. Together they went through the bare, cold rooms, up the uncarpeted stair, and into the very attic in which it was said by the credulous a murder had been committed. The policeman searched every nook and corner with his bullseye. Not a trace of a ghost! Not a sound, not the scratch or scurry of a mouse. And outside just the moaning and wailing of the wind in the trees. My guardian-of-the-goal friend told me that it was a most pleasant Christmas adventure. I should say that it was a very weird and thrilling experience, even for a big goalkeeper—eh?

Snowed Up!

When the renowned Andy Cunningham first became a Glasgow Ranger, he lived in Kilmarnock, some thirty miles from Glasgow, and travelled to Ibrox Park for the home matches. One Christmas-time, when a severe snowstorm was raging, he caught the first train from home, determined to give himself every chance of not being late for the encounter, for there were rumours of big snowdrifts on the railway.

All went fairly well till half the journey had been completed, when, in a remote part and in a deep cutting, the engine plunged into a monstrous snowdrift. A sweeping wind had enfiladed the cutting and piled up the snow many feet high. Well, into it the engine sank, and the whole train seemed to give a long, deep sob as it settled

down. And there was Andy in one of the compartments, unable to proceed or to turn back. The hours went by, till at last all hope of his being able to reach Ibrox Park in time vanished. Late in the afternoon the train was dug out of its white grave, but there was nothing left for the famous Ranger except to make for home. Luckily, play was impossible in Glasgow. Ibrox Park was snowbound. That was the coldest Christmas this noted player had ever experienced.

The Fickleness of Form.

David Halliday's first Boxing Day in England will never be forgotten by him. He was the hero of Sunderland's side in a fierce encounter with Huddersfield Town, at Leeds Road ground. The game was drawn 1-1, thanks to David, whose brilliant dribbling and shooting were the features. None who saw it will forget his magnificent individual effort which resulted in the equalising goal. He dodged half a dozen opponents, wound up the finest bit of individual work ever seen on the ground by literally walking the ball into the net. Nor will David forget in a hurry his first New Year's Day game in England. It was against Birmingham, at the St. Andrew's enclosure. David could do little right. He suffered a complete eclipse. He could make nothing of the opposing pivot. No one knows better than Dave Halliday the fickleness of football form.

Gallacher's Goals.

Hugh Gallacher brought great joy to Newcastle United and much glory to himself on Boxing Day, 1925. He was the hero of a rattling match in which Liverpool provided the opposition. Hugh scored all the goals—three. Six days later, on New Year's Day, 1926, he was again a hero, bagging four out of Newcastle United's five goals scored against Bolton Wanderers, who had to be content with only one.

Surprise for Boscombe Supporters.

I recollect a fine Christmas Day surprise for the supporters of Bournemouth and Boscombe United. One Christmas Eve the directors met and signed a player, who was chosen to play next day against Newport County, at Newport. They kept the signing secret. The next day, the many supporters who had come from Bournemouth to see the struggle, were treated to a great surprise. For James Blair, the Scottish International back and ex-captain of Cardiff City, ran into the arena in United's colours. He gave a remarkably polished display, and helped not a little to win the match for his new club. Cheerio!

THE PIEMAN.

LIVELY EXTRA-LONG COMPLETE YARN OF FOOTER THRILLS AND ADVENTURE!



What is the secret of Bannington Grange, the old house where the famous Blue Crusaders are spending their Christmas? Fatty Fowkes, the heavy-weight goalie, has seen the figure of a monk—a spectre whose face is a skull and whose skeleton form can be seen through his robe! And that's not all, for the form of the Blues on the field has gone to pieces. It seems as if the famous team is haunted! Get going right away on this week's gripping complete story!

Something Wrong With the Blues!

"PASS the pepper, Fatty, old son," said Ben Gillingham.

Fatty Fowkes, the sixteen-stone goalie of the Blue Crusaders, reached out and passed the cruet along the table.

"I think we all need some pepper!" he said gloomily. "After our awful failure on Saturday we need some ginger, too—and a little dose of dynamite wouldn't do any harm."

"You mustn't keep on harping on Saturday's game, Fowkes," said Mr. Ulysses Piccombe, the manager, from the head of the long table. "It is a bad thing to look—er—backwards. We must look forward, boys—always ahead!"

"Hear, hear, sir!" said Dave Moran, nodding. "And we shall have some consolation to-morrow, when we get our revenge on Brampton Albion."

"Revenge!" said Fatty Fowkes scornfully. "They'll whack us again. We shall never win another match until we've cleared out of this haunted house!"

Some of the Blues were silent, but others

chuckled, regarding Fatty's words in the light of a joke. Ben Gillingham, the bow-legged, rugged right-back of the team, was looking unusually aggressive. From the very first he had been sceptical; and now he was more sceptical than ever before.

It was Christmas Eve, and the Blue Crusaders were at breakfast in the big dining-hall of Bannington Grange.

It was a splendid room, well furnished, and a great log fire blazed and crackled in the open grate. Fine oak beams were overhead, and there was a general air of old-world quaintness and charm. Through the windows streamed the wintry sunshine, and, upon the whole the atmosphere was one of cheeriness.

Mr. Ulysses Piccombe sat at one end of the table, and Lionel Corcoran, the St. Frank's schoolboy, who owned the club, sat at the other.

All down the sides of the table were the Crusaders—the League team and the reserves. John Smart, the trainer,

was there, too—to say nothing of a cheery party of Fourth Form juniors from St. Frank's. These latter were Corcoran's special school friends, and they had been invited to spend Christmas at the Grange with the Blues.

But a few of them were wondering if it would not have been better to have gone home.

The festive season had not started well for the celebrated footballers. Ever since they had entered into possession of Bannington Grange strange, unaccountable things had been happening.

Corcoran had bought the Grange for the use of the Blues; he had spent many thousands of pounds on improvements and renovations. For years the old place had been empty, but it was a splendid mansion, perched on the top of the hill that overlooked the Stronghold—the Blues' ground.

It was so handy, in fact, that "Corky" had decided that it would make an ideal permanent home for the club. And so he had given Mr. Ulysses Piccombe full powers to have the place got ready as



quickly as possible. And now, with Christmas upon them, they were in possession.

Some of the players did not quite like the idea of this sort of life. Curly Hankin & Co., the rotters of the reserves, were the chief malcontents. Curly maintained that it would be better for the players to live in lodgings—to live separately, just where they pleased. But it was Mr. Piccombe's ideal to have the whole club together, under one roof. And Corcoran, having given the manager a free hand, approved of this scheme.

It might have worked well if everything had been normal. Unfortunately, this was not the case. On their first night in the old place the Blues had experienced many startling adventures. At least, Fatty Fowkes had experienced most of them. Doors had opened and shut of their own accord; fires had gone out mysteriously, only to blaze up again a moment later; the spectral figure of a monk had appeared in the hall; and, to cap all, uncanny whispers had been heard in many quarters of the old house.

Yet Fatty Fowkes was really the only player who had heard and witnessed these manifestations. Curly Hankin and Maurice Brewer and Roger Parr had seen the phantom, and they heard the whispers; but none of the other players took much notice of these three rascally reserves. Fatty was a different proposition—he was, perhaps, the most popular fellow in the club.

At the same time Fatty was known to be superstitious—and so a great deal of his talk was not believed. When he told the others of what he had seen, of what he had heard, they laughed at him. On one or two occasions there had been a mild sort of alarm, but it had always died down.

However, it could not be denied that all the servants had fled. Corcoran had offered them double wages if they would only stay over Christmas; but they had gone, nevertheless. They had heard the mysterious whispers, and they had been terrified.

But the Blues were getting on very nicely—mainly owing to the staunch help of the St. Frank's boys. Everything was going along smoothly, and the servants were not missed much.

There had been another unaccountable event, too.

On the Saturday the Blue Crusaders had played against Brampton Albion. And although the Blues had secured a three-goal lead in the first half they had left the field, at the end of the game, the losers. For in that fateful second half the Albion had scored no less than five times! It was the end of the Crusaders' winning streak.

And Fatty Fowkes, excited and alarmed, had declared that the curse of the old Grange was upon the club. He declared that the team would never win another game until they all cleared out of the house. The other players laughed at him, and told him that it was sheer nonsense to talk like that.

Yet they could not explain that phenomenal reverse. During the first half of the game they had played brilliantly—they had scintillated. And in the second half they had fallen to pieces; they had played atrociously. Uncannily, unaccountably, every one of them had suffered from some unknown and inexplicable malady. A great tiredness had come over them—a stiffening of the limbs, a paralysing of the muscles.

This same effect had been noticed on the day prior to the game—and

it had been noticed on other days, since the game. Nobody could suggest any possible explanation. Fatty's theory was discounted. Nobody really believed that the Grange—haunted or not—could exert such a material influence on those who lived within its walls.

This morning—the morning of Christmas Eve—the players were feeling brisk and active, as usual. It was always the same. They generally awoke heartily refreshed, energetic, full of "beans."

"There's no need to worry, boys!" said Ben Gillingham boisterously, as he got up from the table. "We're going to win to-morrow. It's Christmas Day, and we're going to make those Albion players sing small!"

"We're playing away, don't forget, Ben," said Penniworth.

"That doesn't make any difference," said Ben. "We shall have a tremendous crowd of our own supporters there. Brampton is only about twenty miles away, and there'll be excursion trains and motor-coaches galore. We've got to win, boys—there's nothing else to think!"

"Hear, hear!" echoed the other Blues.

But Fatty Fowkes shook his head dolefully.

"We shall never win!" he said in a forlorn voice. "As long as we live in this haunted house we shall lose every match! The curse of the place is on us!"

The Mysterious Malady.

MR. PIECOMBE frowned. "You must not speak like that, Fowkes!" he said sharply. "If you go on the field to-morrow with such ideas in your head, there will be a poor chance of success! Indeed, I shall have to seriously consider the possibility of playing a reserve man in your place."

"I'm ready, sir!" said Shields, the reserve goalie.

Fatty Fowkes glared.

"I'm fit!" he said warmly. "And while I'm fit, I'll play!"

"You will not play, Fowkes, if you continue to talk in this ridiculous strain!" retorted Mr. Piccombe. "I do not want a player of mine to take the field—and a goalkeeper above all others—with such a spirit of hopelessness in him. How can you expect to play well if you have already made up your mind that the team will lose?"

"Yes, you'll have to change your tone, Fatty!" said Corky quietly.

"You don't understand," said the big goalie. "I shall play my best, and I shall have the will to win. But what's the good of it. Fate will be against us—against the whole team! It doesn't matter what we do, we shall lose! There's an evil spirit in this place—"

"That's enough, Baby!" grinned Ben Gillingham. "Take no notice of him, boys! He's got a bee in his bonnet. As soon as the game starts he'll forget all these crazy ideas, and he'll play as well as ever."

"If I did not think so, I would not allow him to remain in the team," said Mr. Piccombe tartly.

When they went out, they found that snow was commencing to fall. There had been a considerable fall in the district during the previous week, but it had thawed away a few hours afterwards.

This time, however, it looked as though a large amount of genuine, "Christmasy" snow was to fall. The temperature was near freezing point, and overhead the clouds were massing ominously—dense, thickly-packed clouds,

which moved slowly and purposefully over the sky. Flakes were falling here and there.

"I don't like it!" said Mr. Piccombe anxiously, after he and the players had reached the enclosure. "It will be a bad look-out for the game to-morrow if there is a genuine snowfall."

"We shall be all right, sir," said Rex Carrington. "You've arranged about a motor-coach for us, haven't you?"

"Yes; but if the roads are blocked, we shall be in a fix," said the manager. "I don't think there'll be as much snow as all that, sir," said Rex, glancing at the sky.

"At this time of the year we can never be certain," replied Mr. Piccombe.

He went into the office, and lost no time in ringing up the Brampton Albion management.

"No need to worry, Mr. Piccombe," said the Albion manager cheerfully. "We've got all ready for snow if it comes. If there's any fall, the ground will be cleared long before opening time. So you can rest easy."

"I am very glad to hear this," said Mr. Piccombe. "I don't want you to imagine that I lack faith in your capabilities—"

"Not at all!" laughed the Albion manager. "There's nothing like making sure, is there?"

And when Mr. Piccombe rang off, he was feeling more comfortable. He went out, and looked up into the sky again. Snow was falling rather more heavily now, although it was not likely to interfere with the practice.

The Blues were going at it energetically—enthusiastically. They were bubbling over with high spirits and with vigour. It seemed impossible that these players could ever be sluggish in their movements.

Yet, not an hour later, there came a dramatic change in the appearance of these footballers. Abruptly, unexpectedly, they grew tired. Their energy left them—their vigour had gone. And, at the same time, a feeling of hopeless depression brooded over them, like some mysterious blight.

"It's just the same, boys!" said Fatty dully. "How can we expect to play to-morrow? The Albion will be all over us again. Until we leave the Grange, and—"

"Dry up about the Grange!" interrupted Ben Gillingham, in a fierce voice. "I'll admit it's a mystery, but I don't want to hear any more twaddle about curses. There must be a natural explanation of this."

"What is it then?" asked Dave Moran wearily.

"It's no good asking me that," grunted Ben. "How should I know? But I do know that there's nothing supernatural about it."

"How do you know?" demanded Fatty.

"Because I've got common sense in my head!" retorted Ben. "You can say what you darned well like, but you'll never get me to believe that our condition is caused by supernatural influence!"

John Smart came up, dragging his feet somewhat.

"Now then, boys—put some pep into it!" he said gruffly. "You mustn't stand about like this in the cold."

"You don't look particularly peppy yourself, Grouser," said Tich.

"I'm not!" muttered the trainer. "Can't understand it! I'd give a month's wages to know what it can all mean. I can't help having a suspicion that somebody is monkeying with our grub."

"That's impossible," said Rex, shaking his head. "For one thing, we're

cooking it ourselves. Besides, if we were suffering from food-poisoning, or drugs, or anything like that, we should have pains inside us."

"Not necessarily," said Grouser, frowning. "I've been thinking about the drains, too. I wonder if there's some bad gas or something in that old house?"

"Yes, by Jove!" said Dave. "That's a suggestion!"

"Bad gas might do it," went on the trainer. "The funny thing is, we don't feel any effects while we are indoors."

"It's not gas!" said Fatty grimly. "The place is haunted!"

"Haunted or not, we're going back to it!" said Grouser. "No good staying out here any longer this morning. Besides, it's nearly lunch-time."

Tich Harborough. "All our muscles have gone stiff, and we're as tired as dogs—"

"Hold on!" put in Armstrong, staring. "What about us? We've felt nothing this morning! We've been as busy as bees—and we're as full of vim as an electric hare!"

"Gosh!" ejaculated Ben Gillingham. "There you are, boys! What about it now?"

"What about what?"

"What about this rot about the Grange being haunted?" said Ben.

"And what about that poison-gas theory, Grouser? We've been out in the open air for hours—and we're as limp as a lot of wet socks on the clothes-line! And yet these youngsters have

"And it also proves that there's nothing wrong with this house!" said Ben promptly.

"Hear, hear!"

"The Grange is all right, Fatty."

"Right as rain!"

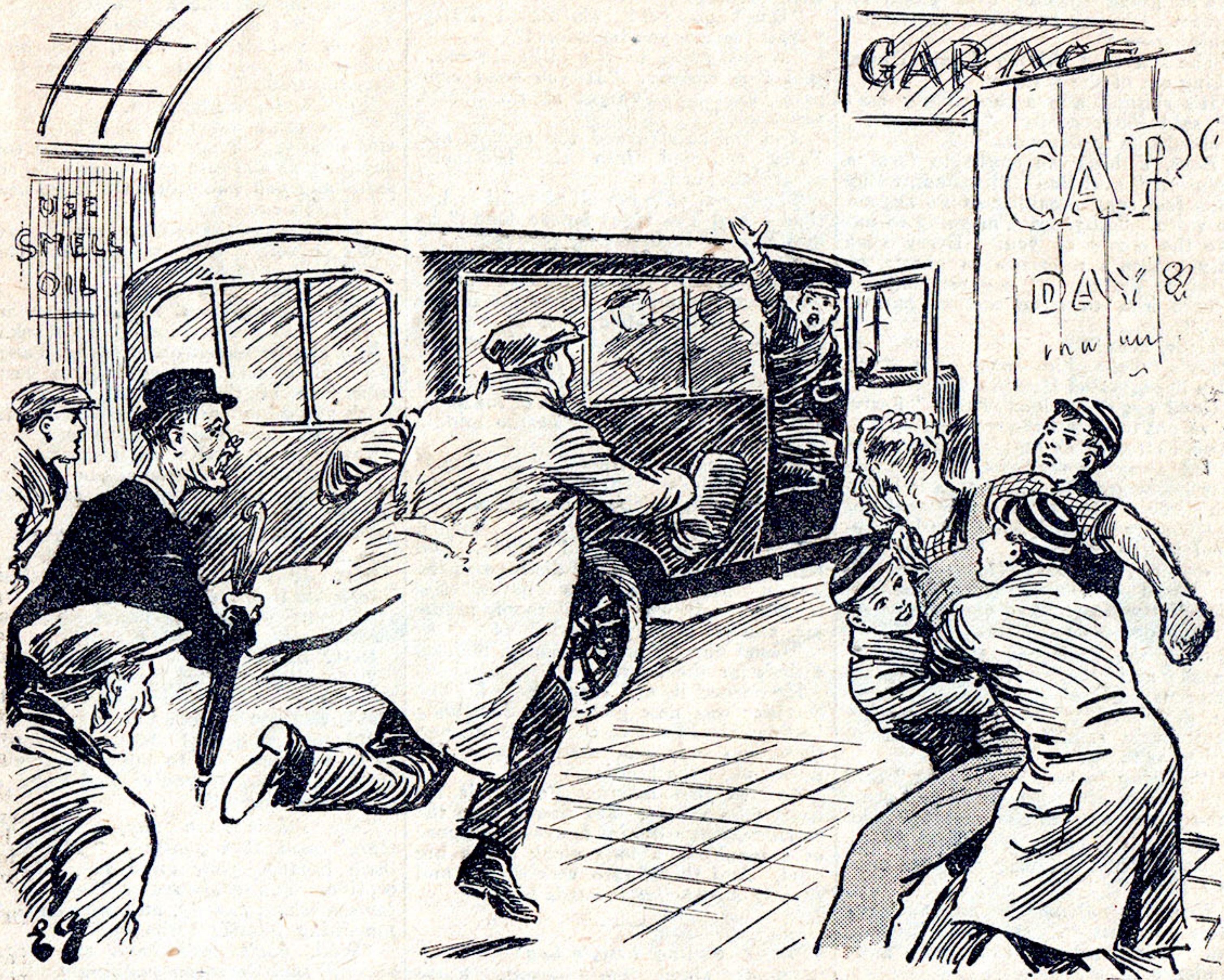
"I'm not saying anything about the house!" growled Fatty. "It's—it's the influence that's at work! We can't explain this affair because it's not capable of explanation. It's—it's occult!"

"It's what?"

"Occult—psychical—supernatural!" said Fatty impressively. "And when you're up against anything supernatural you can't use ordinary laws. We're in the grip of some mysterious power—"

Hi! Leggo, you kids! What the—"

"And now you're in the grip of a power that isn't mysterious in the



CORKY TO THE RESCUE! Whilst the juniors held the amazed mechanic, Corky leapt into the driver's seat. "Come on, the Blues!" he yelled. "Jump in!" Before the proprietor realised what was happening Fatty and the other Crusaders were dashing towards the charabanc.

"And we're all hungry," said Rex. "That's another rummy thing. If we were poisoned by gas, we shouldn't be hungry, should we? I'm jiggered if I can understand what it means."

Wearily, they dragged themselves back to the Grange, and when they arrived, they found that Lionel Corcoran and the St. Frank's boys had been very busy. Since all the staff had bolted, Corky & Co. had been doing the work of the house. They had prepared an excellent meal and, what was more to the point, they were full of energy and as lively as crickets.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you all?" asked Corky, as the players came in. "You look as if you've been out for a hundred-mile run!"

"It's the same old thing!" muttered

been indoors the whole morning, and look at 'em!"

The Blues looked—and the Blues marvelled.

The Mystery of the Grange!

"I can't be poison-gas!" said Fatty Fowkes firmly. "That's an idiotic suggestion!"

"Thanks!" said the trainer, glaring fiercely.

"No offence, Grouser—but you know what I mean!" said Fatty. "If there was any gas coming up from the drains, as you suggested, these boys would be in a worse condition than we are. Hang it, we've been out in the open air, as Ben says. And that proves that the trouble is inexplicable."

least!" said Corcoran genially. "Hang on to him, you fellows! Force him upstairs, and make him change his togs! Lunch is practically ready!"

Fatty was hustled away, and the other Blues changed, too. They were all very puzzled—very bewildered. The fact that these St. Frank's fellows were quite normal, proved, beyond question, that the Grange itself was not affected by any bad drains, or anything of that nature.

Indeed, by the time the midday meal was over all the players were feeling brisk again. They completely recovered their normal spirits, too. Their depression left them, and they found themselves capable of laughing, joking, and scoffing at their recent indisposition.

"It only seems to come in spasms," said Rex Carrington, grinning. "And I believe it's imagination more than anything else."

"I do not agree with you, Carrington," said Mr. Piccombe, shaking his head. "There was nothing imaginary about our strange lassitude this morning. And yet, at the same time, there appears to be no tangible explanation. I will confess that I am concerned about to-morrow's game."

"You think we might strike a bad patch in the middle of a game, sir—the same as on Saturday?" asked Dave.

"That is what I am afraid of," nodded the manager.

Fatty Fowkes laughed bitterly.

"It's no good trying to guard against a thing that is inevitable," he said. "We're going to lose that game to-morrow. It's just as certain as the sun is shining—"

"The sun isn't shining!" said Hales, looking out of the window.

"It's shining above the clouds, isn't it?" said Fatty coldly. "If it wasn't, we should be in darkness."

"Boys, I think we ought to form a resolution!" said Ben Gillingham, rising to his feet, and speaking in an aggressive voice. "Anyhow, I'm going to put it to the crowd of you. Every time Fatty makes a reference to ghosts, or anything like that, I suggest that we sentence him to some sort of punishment."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's make him wash the dirty dishes!" suggested Rex promptly.

"Good egg!" grinned Tich. "Fatty, you've got to do all the washing-up!"

And Fatty, much to his disgust, was hustled away to the kitchen, and the other Blues and the schoolboys fed him with dirty dishes until he was weary of it. Hardly any of the Crusaders believed in the "ghost." For they had not seen anything mysterious; they had not heard the uncanny whisperings which Fatty himself had experienced on so many occasions.

During the afternoon the snow increased and the wind grew more boisterous. Indeed by the time darkness descended the gale was roaring tumultuously round the old building, perched as it was on the hill-top.

"It's going to be a wild night," said Dave Moran, after tea, as he and some of the others were in the smoking-room.

"Piecan is anxious, too," said Wally Simpson. "He's worrying about to-morrow's game."

"Worrying about it won't make things any better," said Ben Gillingham. "It's a pity he can't have more confidence in us!"

"After Saturday, can you blame him?" said Dave. "We made an awful mess of that game, boys, and it's up to us to get our revenge on the Albion. But Piecan is worried about the snow. He thinks it might cause a lot of trouble."

"Well, snow and fog are about the only two things that badly affect professional football," said Rex. "Fog's the worst, because you can't clear it away. But there's no need to worry about snow."

During the early evening the Blues took one or two looks outside, and they were gratified to notice that the snow was only coming down in tiny flakes. So far there wasn't an inch of it, so there was very little prospect of the Albion ground being unplayable on the morrow.

Fatty Fowkes went upstairs to his bed-room to get ready for dinner—having made sure that Ben Gillingham and

Rex Carrington had gone up in advance. Fatty was plucky enough when it came to fighting mortal enemies; but he was scared stiff of anything ghostly.

Rather to his dismay, Ben and Rex cleared off as he was in the middle of changing. He had removed his shirt, and at this point he found himself alone—Ben and Rex having slipped out while Fatty's face was hidden in the folds of his shirt.

"I'll admit there's nothing funny about the place now," Fatty was saying. "We haven't heard any whispers, or—Hullo! Why, what the—"

He stared round, and then dashed for the door. Ben and Rex were just vanishing down the corridor.

"Hi!" roared Fatty.

"What's the matter now?" asked Ben, turning.

"Don't go yet!" ejaculated Fatty. "Wait for me, you bounders!"

"We're going to the billiard-room," said Ben sweetly. "If you need company, Fatty, you've got all the ghosts, you know."

And the pair turned the corner, and Fatty returned into the bed-room, breathing hard.

"They can chip me all they like; but they'll find I'm right before long!" he muttered. "Disbelieving rotters!"

He finished his toilet rapidly—so rapidly, indeed, that he failed to fasten his collar at the back, and he put his tie on backwards. Then, just as he was about to leave the bed-room, he caught his breath in.

A whispered voice had sounded behind him—within a few feet of his head, and yet he was standing in the middle of that room!

He twirled round, his skin tingling. "Who—who's that?" he asked hoarsely. "Is anybody playing a trick in here?"

The whisper sounded again, and although Fatty could not distinguish the words, the voice was nevertheless tangible. It was in the room, in the air, and yet nobody was visible!

"Good glory!" panted Fatty, making a dash for the door.

He opened it, and then checked. The corridor was now gloomy. Somebody had switched most of the lights off, and there was only one shaded lamp, far down, near the landing.

And at that moment Fatty felt his heart miss a beat. For there, down the corridor, was a quaint figure—the figure of a monk, in a long cloak and a big cowl. And this figure was slowly and silently advancing towards him!

Pulling Fatty's Leg!

FOR about ten seconds Fatty Fowkes felt as though his feet had been bolted to the floor.

Then, with a sudden yell of fright, the power of movement returned to him. He dashed madly across the corridor, and burst into one of the other bed-rooms.

"The ghost!" he gasped frantically.

Dave Moran and Penniworth had just finished dressing, and they gazed at Fatty in wonder.

"Steady, old man!" said Dave. "No need to get so excited—"

"The ghost—the monk!" panted Fatty. "He's outside, in the corridor!"

With one accord the Blues skipper and Penniworth dashed for the door, and they looked up and down the corridor. But there was nothing unusual to be seen now.

"You're crazy, Fatty!" said Dave. "There's nobody here. The lights aren't on, but that's somebody's carelessness, I expect. You must have been fooled by a shadow—"

"But—but he was here!" said Fatty, staring dazedly. "I saw him distinctly—"

"Rot!" growled Penniworth. "Your nerves are all in rags, Fatty. You're seeing things that don't exist."

They seized him, and marched him down to the billiard-room, and the other Blues listened sceptically as they heard of this latest incident.

"It's a pity you didn't go for the ghost while you were about it!" said Ben Gillingham tartly. "That would prove whether it was genuine or not. Instead of running away, Fatty, why didn't you have a go at the thing?"

"He was too jolly scared!" said one of the St. Frank's fellows.

Fatty started.

"Well, what's the good of bluffing?" he said uncomfortably. "I was scared! And I don't mind admitting it, either! Any of you fellows would have been scared if you had seen that—that horrible thing!"

Rex Carrington laughed.

"You can't convince us, Fatty," he said lightly. "I don't suppose you saw anything at all; and even if you did see something you wouldn't dare to go near it! That's the trouble!"

"It—it wasn't anything real!" said Fatty huskily. "I could see right through it, you know—"

"Rot!" said Ben bluntly.

"The imagination is a marvellous thing!" said Rex, with a chuckle. "You can be fooled quite easily, Fatty. Why, if somebody happened to come down one of the corridors wearing a cloak you'd immediately mistake him for the ghost. You need a nerve tonic."

Fatty turned red with indignation.

"Do you think I don't know the difference between a ghost and somebody solid?" he demanded hotly. "My nerves are all right. If they weren't, I wouldn't be any good in the field. It's—it's only when I'm facing something intangible that I get the wind up!"

"Facing something imaginary, you mean!" said Ben, with a snort.

Fatty flared up.

"It's all very well for you to jeer!" he shouted. "But you haven't seen the ghost, and you haven't heard any of the mysterious whispers! It's easy enough to be sceptical, and to call me a frightened baby, when you've had none of these experiences!"

"We shan't have any, either, old man," said Rex gently. "You have them because your mind is—well, receptive. You're always on the look-out for something ghostly, and, sure enough, something ghostly turns up!"

"Well, don't let's have any arguments," said Corcoran soothingly. "It's Christmas Eve, and we're going to have a busy time. Tons of things to do, you fellows. We want to be all ready for to-morrow."

"There's going to be a jollification, isn't there?" asked Tich.

"You bet there is!" said Corky. "After the game, when we get back, we'll have a merry evening!"

"Very merry!" said Fatty coldly. "There'll be no merriness in this house, mark my words! It's a house of tragedy—of doom! I'm a cheerful chap, as a rule, but this house is under the influence of some evil—"

"Gag him, somebody!" said Andy Tait.

"Come and have a game of billiards, Fatty," said Dave Moran, slapping the bulky, sixteen-stone goalie on the back. "Take your mind off those other matters. I'll play you a hundred up."

Fatty agreed, and before long he was really enjoying the game. But he was rather off form, and Dave won easily.

Just as they were preparing to start again, one of the schoolboys put his head in the doorway.

"Fatty!" he sang out. "Mr. Piccombe wants you in the gym!"

"Oh, does he?" said Fatty, with a frown. "What for?"

"I don't know; but he says it's urgent!"

And the junior vanished, leaving Fatty rather startled. The gymnasium was down one of those long passages, some little distance from the central part of the old house. He looked round the billiard-room carelessly.

"Anybody else coming to the gym?" he asked, in a casual voice.

"Not just now, Fatty!" grinned Penniworth. "Afraid to go alone?"

"No, I'm not!" snorted Fatty, stamping out.

When he got to the hall he found him-

There, on the stairs, was the crouching, indistinct figure of the monk!

Fatty gripped himself. He had seen the monk there on one other occasion, and he had seen that mysterious figure gliding down the stairs, only to vanish, apparently, into thin air, just as it reached the bottom.

And Fatty remembered the taunting words of his fellow-players. Even as he was on the point of bolting, he pulled himself together. There was something, too, in the appearance of the monk which seemed different. He was more solid this time—more tangible. On the previous occasion the figure had been indistinct, illusive, vague. But now he not only seemed more solid, but Fatty actually heard a stair creak.

"By glory!" he panted. "They say I'm scared, do they?"

With a tremendous effort he fought

More Manifestations.

CRASH! Thud! Biff! Fatty Fowkes was working hard. He was on his knees, and the "ghost" was sprawling beneath him, yelling with muffled alarm and pain. And Fatty Fowkes' fists beat down upon him like sledge-hammers.

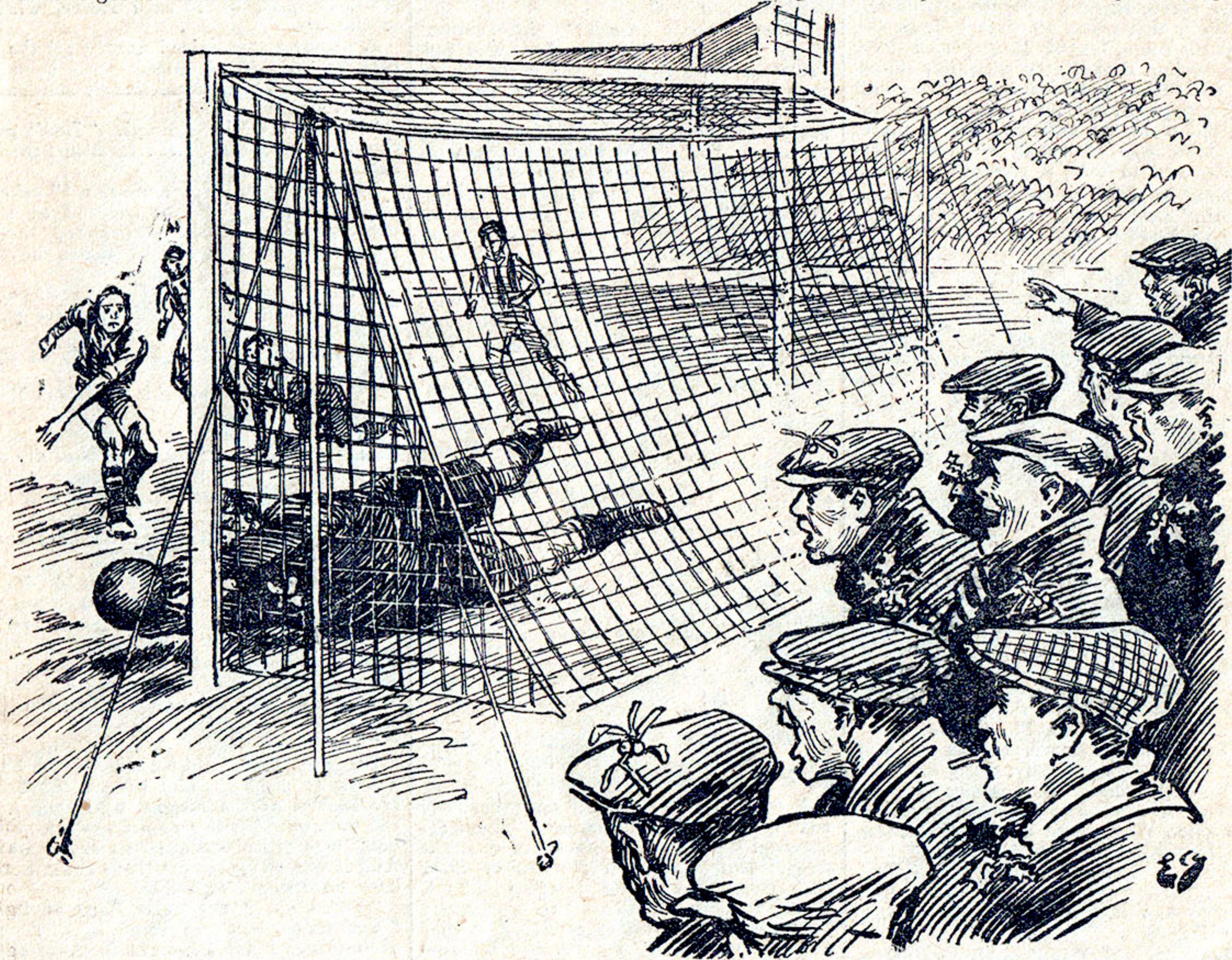
"Hallo! What's the matter here?" came a shout.

Corky came running in, and, at the same moment, Ben Gillingham appeared, with Tich and others. Somebody switched the full lights on, and the hall became flooded with radiance.

"I've got him!" panted Fatty. "He's not a ghost at all!"

"Didn't we tell you so?" roared Ben. "There aren't such things as ghosts! Some tricky crook has been trying to fool you!"

"Help!" moaned the spectral figure.



FATTY IN FORM! As the leather sped through the air, Fatty threw himself full length across the goalmouth. Yells and cheers went up from the spectators as the goalie got the tips of his fingers to the ball and flicked it round the post.

self in sole possession; furthermore, there were hardly any lights burning.

"They're doing it on purpose!" he muttered. "Why can't they have the place well lit up?"

The Grange had been thoroughly renovated from cellars to roof, and there were electric lights everywhere. It made Fatty angry when he saw only one small shaded lamp glowing in this great hall, with its wide staircase and with its gallery running right along the back.

It was necessary to cross the hall in order to reach the gymnasium, and Fatty decided to pause on his way. He would switch all the other lights on, so that the hall would be cheery. And then, suddenly, he pulled himself to a halt.

down the feeling of panic. And, before he could weaken, he ran forward, and went charging up the stairs like a human elephant. The figure of the monk half turned, as though about to flee. But Fatty had taken him by surprise, and the next moment the big goalie reached out, and caught at that drab cloak.

He felt it in his fingers—tangible, real. And all his nervousness went.

"Got you!" he roared triumphantly.

"Hi, boys! Lights! Lights!"

"Ugh!" grunted the ghost, in alarm.

Fatty had closed with him, and they struggled desperately on the stairs for a moment. Then they lost their footing, and went tumbling down, thudding and crashing, to land in a mixed-up heap in the hall below.

"Oh crumbs! Drag him off, you fellows!"

"That's Rex's voice!" ejaculated Dave blankly.

"What?" gasped Fatty.

He pulled the cowl from his victim's head, and a chorus of exclamations went up. In spite of numerous injuries, Rex Carrington's features were easily recognised. Blood was streaming from his nose, his left eye was puffy and rapidly turning black. His under-lip was badly swollen.

"Help!" he mumbled. "I'm whacked! Beaten to the wide!"

"Rex!" ejaculated Fatty aghast.

"Good glory! I—I didn't know—"

"I should hope you didn't!" moaned Rex.

"You wouldn't willingly smash

one of your pals about like this, would you?"

"I—I thought you were a ghost!" said Fatty, with deep concern. "I say, Rex, old man, I believe I've hurt you!"

"I believe you have!" said Rex feelingly.

He was helped to his feet, and many handkerchiefs were offered to him. "Grouser" came along, full of concern.

"This is what comes of playing silly tricks!" he said tartly. "You'll look a fine sight on the field to-morrow, won't you?"

"Oh, cut it out!" said Rex, dabbing his nose. "I shall be able to play all right—so you needn't worry yourself, Grouser. Great Scott! No more tricks for me—not on Fatty, anyhow! He hits too hard!"

"But what on earth did you do?" asked Dave, smiling in spite of himself.

"Well, there was all that talk in the billiards-room," said Rex, "and Ben was saying that Fatty wouldn't know the difference between a phantom and a fake apparition. So I thought I'd put this old cloak on and give him a scare. My idea was to laugh at him afterwards, and to take a rise out of him."

"That scheme seems to have sprung a leak," said Corky, with a chuckle.

Fatty Fowkes snorted.

"You can't fool me like that!" he said disdainfully. "Do you think I don't know the difference between a fake ghost and a real one? The—the thing that is haunting this house is semi-transparent. It's a real ghost, I tell you! But I heard the stairs creak with Rex, and I knew that he was a trickster. So I went for him."

"Hey!" shouted Curly Hankin, in alarm, as he came running into the hall from one of the corridors. "Quick, boys! The fire in the billiards-room has suddenly gone out!"

"That's nothing new!" said Fatty. "I've seen the fire go out—and come alight again, too—without a soul touching it."

"It's the strangest thing I ever saw!" panted Curly, who was looking pale and frightened. "Brewer and Parr saw it, too. Suddenly, without warning, the flames died down, and the next moment the fire was right out!"

"Let's go and have a look at it!" said Corcoran promptly.

They all went rushing along, leaving Grouser to attend to the unhappy Rex. And when they got to the billiards-room they found the fire utterly dead.

"This is funny!" said Dave, frowning. "When we were in here four minutes ago it was blazing as brightly as—"

"Look!" said Penniworth, pointing.

Flames were beginning to lick round the logs, and then, as all the Blue Crusaders were watching the fire, it came to life before their eyes, the flames growing in intensity, leaping with vigour and life.

"It went out just the same!" panted Curly huskily. "I—I say, there's something uncanny about this! Fires can't go out and come to life again by any natural means! I believe Fatty's right about—"

"Chuck it!" interrupted Ben. "You fellows have been up to some tricks!"

Everybody looked at Curly & Co. with deep suspicion.

"It's not true!" shouted Parr. "We've done nothing!"

"Of course we haven't!" said Curly Hankin desperately. "How do you think we could make a fire go out like that? And even supposing we could, how about making it come to life again?"

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"Well, there must be some explanation—" began Dave.

And just then one of the windows flew open with a crash, and the snowflakes came whirling blindingly into the room. An icy wind shot across, and the door slammed violently.

"It's the ghost!" said Fatty Fowkes. "That window was opened by supernatural means—"

"You hulking, great lubber!" said Ben. "The catch came unfastened, I expect!"

"That's about the size of it!" said Tich Harborough.

Two or three of them went over, closed the window, and made sure that the catch was fixed securely in position.

"It won't come open again, I'll warrant!" said Ben confidently. "As for the fire, there may have been a sudden down draught. There's a gale to-night, and—"

"That won't wash!" interrupted Curly Hankin. "If the fire was put out by a down draught the room would have been filled with smoke by now."

"Ugh!" shivered Penniworth suddenly. "There's an icy wind coming from— Eh? The door and the windows are closed! Yet I felt—"

"I felt it, too!" said Keane, looking round. "An icy draught cutting across— And there's something rummy in the air, too! It's—it's sort of earthy!"

"Like a graveyard!" said Fatty, nodding. "It was just the same one day last week, and you all laughed at me!"

"Look!" yelled Andy Tait, pointing. The very window that had recently been closed was opening—slowly, deliberately. Even Ben Gillingham allowed his jaw to drop as he stared in dumbfounded amazement.

"But—but we fastened the catch!" he muttered.

"It makes no difference!" said Fatty hoarsely. "Haven't I experienced it? Doors lock themselves in this house—and then become unlocked! And it's the same with the windows, I expect! Invisible fingers are doing it—ghostly hands!"

"Rot!" thundered Ben. "I won't believe it! It's altogether too ridiculous—"

He broke off, staring at the door. For this, too, was opening—in that same slow, deliberate manner.

A complete silence fell on everybody within the billiards-room. They all watched the door. A powerful draught was blowing through the room now, and snowflakes were floating about, driven in from outside. This was really the extraordinary part of it. For that draught was blowing from the window towards the door—and it should, by all rational laws, have sent that door slamming to.

But, instead, the door was continuing to open—and there was not a soul outside in the corridor.

Beyond Understanding!

FATTY FOWKES was scared—but, at the same time, he was flushed with triumph.

Hitherto, the other Blues had laughed at him. Now they were witnessing these extraordinary manifestations with their own eyes. And their very presence made Fatty more constant—more sure of himself.

"Look!" he whispered. "There's nobody at the door—and yet it's opening—against the draught!"

Ben Gillingham shook himself.

"There's some jiggery-pokery about this!" he declared darkly.

He strode forward, grasped the door,

and pulled at it. To his stupefaction it resisted his efforts for a moment—just as though an invisible hand was on the other knob, pulling against him.

Everybody else was tensely silent, and then, sounding in the very air about their heads, came a thin, eerie, elusive sound of mocking laughter. At the same second the door came towards Ben with a rush, and nearly hit him in the face. It was exactly as though the unseen hand had suddenly released its grip.

"Gosh!" said Ben dazedly.

And the air became filled with whispers—near the fireplace—near the windows—against the door. In every corner of the room the whispers were sounding—unintelligible, hissing, uncanny.

"Fatty's right!" babbled Parr. "The place is haunted!"

"Let's clear out!" said Hales, white to the lips.

A minor panic seized nearly all those players, and there might have been a rush if Ben Gillingham hadn't suddenly let out a roar.

"Steady on!" he shouted. "Don't get the wind up, boys! Let's take this thing calmly."

"Perhaps you believe me now?" asked Fatty fiercely. "You sneered at me before, when I told you about those whispers! Did you hear them, boys? Did you hear—"

"Yes!" muttered George Scott. "Honour bright, you fellows, have you been playing tricks with us?"

"No, no!" chorused everybody in the room.

"What about the kids?" asked Ben suddenly. "They're not all here—"

"But I can answer for them," said Lionel Corcoran. "Some of them are in the kitchen, getting dinner ready—and the gong will sound within a minute or two. They wouldn't play any tricks."

"What about this door?" asked Dave. "How did it open like that?"

"Hanged if I know!" said Ben, scratching his head. "And when I pulled at it, it wouldn't budge at first."

"The ghost was hanging on to the other handle!" said Fatty, with a kind of frightened air of triumph. "A visible ghost is bad enough, but when he can make himself invisible—"

"There's no ghost!" roared Ben.

He examined the door closely—he had a look at the lock, and turned the key. He looked at the hinges, and thumped the panels. But it was all useless. The door was quite ordinary in every way. And it was obvious that there could have been no controlling wires.

"Beats me!" muttered Ben, at last. "Yet there must be some sort of explanation. I don't believe in these silly ghosts—"

"What about the window?" asked Penniworth. "You fastened it, didn't you?"

"There's nothing wrong with the window!" said Tich. "We've just been examining it. The catch is quite an ordinary one, and it locks home securely."

Boom, boom!

It was the gong for dinner, and the Blues were glad enough to hear it. They went crowding out of the billiards-room, feeling uneasy and unsettled. Mr. Piccombe, who had been attending to Rex Carrington, looked very concerned when he heard what had happened.

"Singular—very singular!" he commented. "I can offer no explanation of this—er—grotesque occurrence. I sincerely trust, however, that you will not allow your nerves to become affected. It is necessary that you should obtain sound sleep to-night."

"Sleep!" said Fatty, in a hollow voice. "How can we sleep in this house?"

They went in to dinner, and, under the influence of the food, they recovered some of their spirits. And there were no further manifestations during the meal—much to the relief of everybody.

Naturally, the conversation had been running in one direction, but nobody could offer any logical explanation of the strange happenings.

"I'm beginning to wonder if there really is something rummy about this house," said Lionel Corcoran thoughtfully, after the meal was over, and the players had lighted their pipes and cigarettes. "It's a certainty, anyhow, that we've done Fatty an injustice."

"I'm glad to hear you say it," remarked Fatty Fowkes, with a snort.

"We thought you were imagining things, old man, when you told us about those whispers, and about the fire going

green. I wonder if that's a sign of some kind?"

"A sign of what?" asked Dave Moran.

"We don't know, but it seems funny that that mysterious man should be hanging about in the grounds," went on Corcoran. "It may have been a coincidence, or it may not. As far as I know, there's not a soul on earth who wishes the club any harm. And why should anybody try to drive us out of the Grange?"

"Nobody's trying to drive us out—except the ghost," said Fatty. "When will you fellows settle your minds to the fact that the house is haunted by some evil presence? It's here all the time—it's with us even now. At any moment we might hear the whisper of phantom voices, and—"

"Fowkes, you mustn't let your mind

morning. It will be here at eleven-thirty."

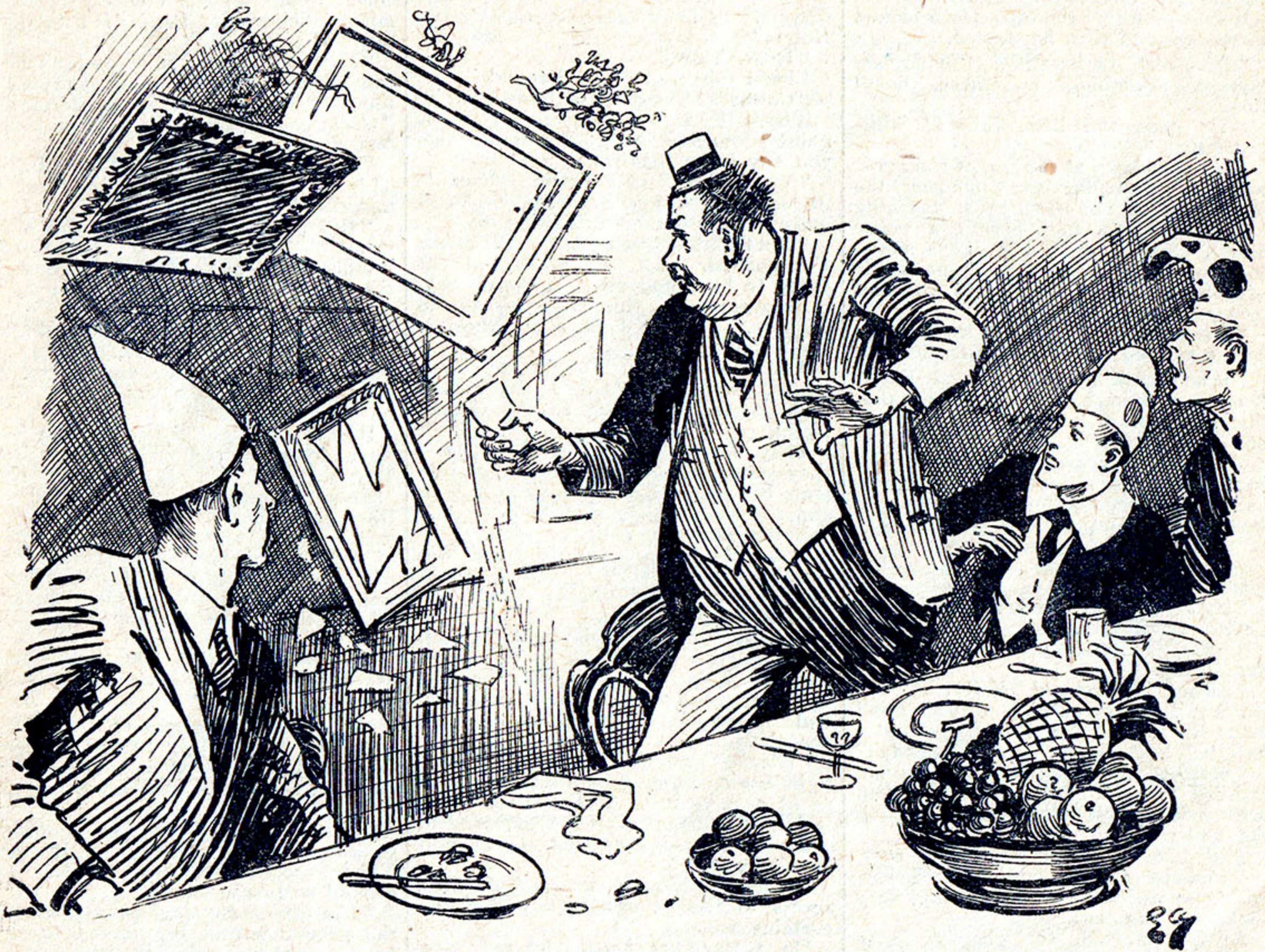
"Isn't that a bit too early, sir?" asked Dave Moran, in surprise. "The game doesn't start until half-past two, and that gives us three hours. It's only twenty miles to Brampton, and we shall get there in an hour—"

"There may be snow during the night," interrupted Mr. Piccombe. "We must allow for any possible delays."

"You're right about the snow, sir," said Corky. "By Jove! Just listen to the wind howling now! And there's a good bit of snow coming down, too. A regular, old-fashioned Christmas, eh?"

"Ghosts included!" grinned Ben Gillingham.

Nobody seemed inclined to make a move towards the bed-rooms, but Mr. Piccombe was insistent. And so, at last,



SCARING THE BLUES! Glass in hand, Fatty spun round as there came a succession of thuds and crashes. For no apparent reason all the pictures in the room had suddenly crashed to the floor!

out," continued Corky. "But we've seen these things with our own eyes now—and heard them with our own ears."

"Are you suggesting that this house is haunted?" asked Mr. Piccombe sharply.

"Not exactly, sir," replied Corky. "I'm thinking about that mysterious man who was hanging about the grounds on Saturday evening. You remember, Fatty saw him, and had a bit of a struggle with him."

"A tramp—that's all!" commented Ben Gillingham.

"A tramp be blowed!" said Fatty. "He had horrible eyes—luminous eyes, like an animal's!"

"And there was that little metal thing you picked up, Fatty," went on Corcoran. "A kind of badge, with a triangle in the middle of it, enamelled

dwelling on such matters!" interrupted Mr. Piccombe testily. "There is a hard game for to-morrow, and your nerves will be in rags if you go on like this. Pull yourself together!"

"I'm all right, sir," said Fatty gruffly. "I'm getting used to it now."

"We had better go to bed as soon as possible," continued the manager. "We have a hard day to-morrow, and another hard day on Boxing Day. I understand that there are to be some—er—jollifications after the game to-morrow evening?"

"Christmas night, sir—eh?" said Corky. "Rather! We've got a big programme planned!"

"Then it is very essential that you should all obtain an extra-sound sleep to-night," said Mr. Piccombe, rising. "I have arranged for a saloon motor-coach to take the team to Brampton in the

the players and the schoolboys drifted out of the dining-room, and made tracks for bed.

An Unexpected Shock!

FATTY FOWKES, Corky, Ben Gillingham, and Dave Moran were the first to enter the hall.

The others came streaming behind, talking animatedly. Rex Carington was now looking more himself, although one of his eyes was puffy and discoloured.

"Who turned these lights out?" asked Corky impatiently.

The hall was nearly in darkness, only a single light glowed, with another light upstairs on the balcony. This, too, was heavily shaded.

"I suppose Blackwood has been

round," said Dave. "He's an economical old boy, I believe. Doesn't see the fun of burning scores of electric lights for nothing."

Blackwood was the butler, the chief of staff. Unfortunately, the staff had gone on strike, but Blackwood remained staunch. There was no suspicion against this kindly, faithful old man. Corcoran was perfectly satisfied that Blackwood was loyal, and absolutely above suspicion.

Before anybody could reach the electric light switches, Fatty Fowkes suddenly drew his breath in sharply. He came to a halt, and his huge bulk stood there, just inside the hall, as motionless as a statue.

"What's the matter, Fatty?" asked Dave curiously.

Fatty made no reply. He remained rigid. He was staring fixedly at the staircase—towards the top. Dave looked there, too, and then he started.

"By Jove!" he breathed. "There's—there's something up there, boys! Look!"

"Ye gods and little fishes!" whispered Rex.

It was shadowy at the top of the great staircase, and for the moment the players could not distinguish anything tangible. Then they beheld a vague figure, dressed something like a monk, standing there at the top of the stairs, as though looking down into the hall in a contemplative fashion.

"It's somebody trying the same dodge as you worked, Rex!" said Ben fiercely.

"It's not—it's not!" panted Fatty. "Are you blind? Can't you see that this—this thing isn't solid? It's not human at all!"

The others, crowding into the hall from the well-lit corridor, came to a halt just inside, realising that something was "on." And as they caught sight of that shadowy figure on the stairs they felt their hearts leaping within them.

"He's coming down!" whispered Corky breathlessly.

Slowly, deliberately, the figure was descending.

"Listen!" muttered Fatty. "The stairs are not creaking! Ghosts don't make stairs creak! Here, let's get out—let's bolt! Open the door, somebody!"

"Steady!" growled Ben. "I'm not satisfied yet. A ghost, eh? Don't you believe it, Fatty! Somebody's playing the fool with us!"

And Ben, with an aggressive roar, ran forward over the wide hall. Everybody else stood stock-still, staring, very shaky and nervous.

As Ben started, the ghostly figure had nearly got to the bottom of the stairs, and Ben never took his eyes off that spectral figure. And now, as he ran, Ben received an extraordinary impression. It seemed to him that he could see right through that monk-like form—and, moreover, he could see a skeleton shape underneath the folds of the cloak! And the face of a skull was within the cowl!

There were the long, bony arms, the gaunt ribs, the staring skull with its great eye-sockets, the grinning teeth—

"Great gosh!" gasped Ben hoarsely.

For as he leapt across the hall, as he stared at that apparition, it vanished. There was no flourish, no sudden scuffle. The thing simply disappeared within the space of a split second. It was there one moment, and it had gone the next.

Ben reached the foot of the stairs, and then he pulled up—helpless, baffled, bewildered.

"Where—where is it?" he asked in amazement.

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There was a rush. Dave and Rex and some of the others came up. For as the phantom had vanished they recovered some of their nerve. They crowded round the bottom of the stairs, and somebody else had switched all the lights on.

"It's gone!" said Corky, staring round.

"But—but I don't understand!" ejaculated Ben in a dazed voice.

"It was the ghost!" said Fatty, panting hard. "You've seen it now, boys! I saw it before, and you didn't believe me! No human being could have vanished like that into thin air in a fraction of a second! I tell you the Grange is haunted! Let's get out! Let's go to the Grapes, where we can get some decent sleep and where we can be free of this curse!"

"Yes, yes!" echoed one of the other players. "Let's get to the Grapes Hotel!"

"Hear, hear!" Lionel Corcoran glanced round.

"Cowards!" he said witheringly. "What's the matter with you all? This ghost—even if it is a ghost—hasn't done you any harm, has it?"

"Yes, it has!" said Fatty. "It made us lose the game on Saturday—and it'll make us lose to-morrow's game, too!"

"Rot!" interrupted Ben. "I'll admit I'm puzzled. But, by gosh, I'm not going to be scared out! If there's anything wrong with this house, it's due to trickery. I don't believe in ghosts—and never will!"

And the others, brought to their senses, made no further suggestions with regard to going to the Grapes Hotel.

They went upstairs hurriedly, and they were glad after they had got into their bed-rooms that they were in twos and threes. Nobody slept alone. And this was very comforting.

Strangely enough—and in direct contradiction of everything that Fatty Fowkes predicted—there were no further manifestations.

Nobody awoke until daylight—in fact, until nearly eight o'clock in the morning. And Fatty Fowkes was the first one to arouse himself. He sat up in bed, and found Ben and Rex snoring peacefully.

"Glory!" mumbled Fatty. "Daylight again, thank goodness! And I'm as fit as a fiddle! This rummy house is full of contradictions! I expected to wake up as heavy as lead and as dull as ditchwater!"

He heaved himself out of bed, went across to the window and pulled the curtains aside.

He yawned as he looked out, and then his yawn was cut off half-way. His eyes bulged in his head, and a gasp escaped him.

He stared incredulously—and with eyes that were filled with consternation.

The vista was limited, for snow was descending thickly, driven by the fierce gale.

But the thing that startled Fatty Fowkes so much was that the snow was on a level with the windows—and this was an upper room!

Snowed Up!

"BEN!" shouted Fatty Fowkes, turning. "Rex! Hi! Wake up, boys! Come and look at this! We're snowed up!"

Ben Gillingham and Rex Carrington awoke, and they leapt out of bed in alarm as they heard Fatty's frantic shouts. Still sleepy, they staggered to the window and stared out upon that white vista.

"I don't believe it!" said Ben dazedly.

"You're like the woman who went to the Zoo and saw the giraffe for the first time!" retorted Fatty Fowkes. "You've got to believe it, Ben! It's here, in front of your eyes!"

"But—but all this snow couldn't have come down during the night!" protested the bow-legged back in consternation. "Great gosh! This drift must be twelve foot deep!"

"If not more," nodded Rex. "Phew! This is a bit like Christmas, and no mistake!"

"But what about the game this afternoon?" asked Fatty frantically. "Where's Piecan? Here, let's rouse all the others! Something will have to be done about this!"

They scrambled into a few clothes, and then went out, shouting and arousing all the other Blues and the school-boys. Mr. Piecombe was aghast when he learned the truth.

During the night the snow must have come down in tremendous quantities. Two sides of the Grange were completely obliterated by gigantic drifts. Downstairs there was scarcely any light in the rooms, owing to the deep banks of snow which completely covered the windows. The other side of the house was clearer, but only a short distance from the windows the snow was piled in dense masses.

"We're half buried, boys!" said Dave Moran breathlessly. "In fact, I doubt if we can get out!"

"What about the game?" asked Mr. Piecombe frantically. "Good heavens! There'll be a riot at Brampton if we don't turn up. It's a holiday game, and I—"

"But I expect Brampton is just as snowbound as we are, sir," put in Dave. "There won't be any game. The ground will be unplayable."

"The Albion manager assured me that the ground would be cleared in time for the match," said Mr. Piecombe, in a worried voice. "We must get there, boys! We can't leave a thing like this to chance. At all costs our engagements must be kept."

He rushed off to the telephone so that he could learn how Brampton had fared. Although only twenty miles away it was quite possible that Brampton had escaped the heavy snowfall. But Mr. Piecombe was disappointed, for the telephone was dead.

"The wires are down, sir," said Corky, as the manager turned helplessly away from the instrument. "I was half afraid of it. With all this snow I don't suppose there are any telephones in Bannington fit to be used."

"We are helpless!" groaned Mr. Piecombe. "We ought to have gone to Brampton last night. But how was I to guess that such an extraordinary—er—situation would arise?"

"Cheer up, sir!" roared Fatty Fowkes boisterously. "Are we downhearted, boys?"

"No!" shouted all the others.

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"But—but you don't realise the difficulties of the position," said Mr. Piccombe. "The situation is appalling."

"Don't you believe it, sir!" grinned Fatty. "There are plenty of us here, and we'll soon dig ourselves out. I don't suppose the main roads will be so bad. And, in any case, there's the railway. We'll get to Brampton in good time for the match."

"Rather!" said a number of others.

"Let's have a spot of breakfast to start with, and then we'll dash into the work!" said Fatty briskly. "Come on, ye cripples! Breakfast! Ham and eggs. I'll do the frying, and some of you other fellows can cut the bread and make the coffee. Buck up!"

It was Christmas morning, and the Blues were not going to be downhearted.

Even Mr. Ulysses Piccombe recovered his spirits when everybody started bustling about with a tremendous show of vigour.

In fact, all the players and all the schoolboys were bubbling with energy. It seemed that their night's sleep had done them a world of good. Seldom, indeed, had they felt so refreshed. Not only were they abundantly strong, but their spirits were soaring with a kind of effervescent exhilaration.

In fact, it was so marked that they could not help commenting upon it. It was a form of mild intoxication, and they put it down to the crispness of the air.

"Let's hope that we don't go into one of those general fits of depression," said Rex Carrington, as he helped with the breakfast.

"Fits of depression!" shouted Fatty gaily. "Don't you believe it, my son!"

"Think we shall win this afternoon, Fatty?" asked Corky, grinning.

Fatty Fowkes' expression changed.

"No; we shan't win!" he replied promptly. "There's a curse on this house, and we shan't win any more matches until we shift into new quarters. But we'll get to the ground, and we'll play the match."

"Well, you're a funny kind of optimist," said Ben, glaring.

"I can't help it," retorted Fatty. "I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle, and I've never been happier. But as I've told you before this house is under the influence of some evil—"

"Shut up!" roared a dozen voices.

Nobody would hear of defeat. In fact, it was utterly ridiculous to even consider such a thing. The mere fact that they were snowed up was a trifle. All problems and difficulties seemed trivial to-day.

And after a hurried breakfast they sallied out. Some shovels had been found, and all sorts of other articles were brought into use. Odd planks of wood, a spade or two, and anything else that was likely to prove of service in clearing away the snow.

Every member of the party started with enthusiasm. The players and the boys laughed light-heartedly as they began. And they soon found that their task was a strenuous one.

The snow was banked up in great masses round the house, and the drive was smothered in a great drift over twelve feet deep. There was not much chance of getting through in that direction.

So they concentrated their efforts towards the rear. The idea was to get through to the Stronghold. From there they would soon reach the streets of Bannington, and then they would be able to find out the full truth about the condition of the roads and the railway. And surely they would be able to find some sort of conveyance to take them to Brampton.

EXCLUSIVE TO THE "REALM," WONDERFUL ANDY WILSON DESCRIBES THE WORK OF A WINGER IN THIS ARTICLE.



Half-Minute Hint
that will Help a
Heap.

No. 15.—WINGERS.

The outside wing men may, in a way, be described as the curiosities of a football team. In my view, the outside-right and the outside-left have the easiest jobs in the whole side, and yet so much depends on the way they do their job they are at least as important as any members of the attack.

SPEED.

The place is comparatively easy to fill because the outside wing man works along what might be called the line of least resistance. There is nobody constantly shadowing him. Often he is able to make quite a lot of headway before encountering real opposition. He is the player who, in modern football, carries the war into the camp of the enemy. But the manner in which he does this may determine the success or failure of the whole of the attack.

Generally speaking, what is needed first and foremost in an outside wing man is speed. If there is a quick little player in your side, put him in one of the outside wing positions. There his lack of inches won't be a handicap and his pace will be an asset. Fanny Walden, who used to play for the Spurs, could never touch the beam beyond five feet two-and-a-half inches. But he wasn't too little to play for England at outside-right, because he

was a bundle of tricks and could move at top speed.

ALSO BALL CONTROL.

Combined with speed, though, there must be brain and ability to control the ball. Some men go so fast down the wing that they can't stop to think where to put the ball; they run away with themselves. You get the real idea of the value of pace on the wing, however, by watching a player like "Joe" Hulme, of the Arsenal. But he doesn't hug the touchline all the time, and no good wing man should, as the game is played to-day.

Above all things, however, the outside winger must be direct in his play. Some very clever wing men don't seem able to resist the temptation to beat the same opponent twice. Don't do this. Once is enough. Remember, you wing men, while you are dribbling about beating the same opponent twice other opponents are gathering in front of goal and making it really hard for your colleagues to get through, if and when you do put the ball across.

Andy Wilson.

(Next week: HOW TO CENTRE.)

Twenty minutes after they had started work the clouds broke, and the sun shone through. And soon afterwards the sky completely cleared, and the morning turned out brilliant, with a rapid dying down of the wind. The snow sparkled, and it was just like powder, for the temperature was below freezing-point. It was a morning for hard work—a morning when one could labour without feeling the effort.

Mr. Piccombe himself was just as vigorous as any of the players. Yet after about an hour of continuous effort, during which they had hardly felt the slightest effect, there suddenly came an abrupt change.

They had nearly cleared a way through to the Stronghold, piling the snow up on either side of a great trench. One or two of the workers abruptly found themselves without strength. And then like magic the blight spread. It affected them all. Instead of being energetic they were stiff, languid, weak.

And with this sudden loss of strength came an awful despondency. Their high spirits left them, and an atmosphere of brooding hopelessness spread over them like a grim pall.

What could it mean? What could be

the explanation of this extraordinary change?

Sticking It!

THERE was no logical reason for the phenomenon.

The weather was excellent, the air was full of vigour, and, after all, these footballers and schoolboys were strong and healthy. The work they had done was as nothing. Normally, they would not have been affected in this unaccountable way.

"It's just the same as on Saturday," said Fatty dismally. "Only it's hit us earlier to-day. On Saturday we were washed out in the middle of the game when—"

"Yes, and after the game we were ourselves again," said Ben shrewdly. "Gosh, boys, it's a good sign! Very likely we shall recover before the game starts, and then we shall be fit."

"I hope so," said Dave Moran wearily.

But his tone indicated that he had no faith in this suggestion of Ben's. Everybody was depressed and miserable.

But they battled on, and at last they

got through to the Stronghold. The playing pitch was covered with ten or twelve inches of snow, but there were no drifts here. At least, no drifts that prevented them from making their way out into the Bannington streets.

The town was almost deserted; for it was Christmas morning, and even in the ordinary course of things scarcely any traffic would have been about. But to-day, owing to the snow, practically all the inhabitants kept indoors.

Yet there were many signs of activity. Even while the Blues were leaving the Stronghold, a big gang of men arrived in order to clear the ground. Mr. Piecombe had made these arrangements the previous day. There was a reserve match during the afternoon, and, snow or no snow, Mr. Piecombe was going to see that the fixture was kept.

"It is a very good thing I made my plans carefully," said the manager. "I did not anticipate such a snowfall as this; but I do not think there will be any hitch this afternoon. I only hope that the Albion management has been as—er—enterprising."

"Who cares?" said Fatty, in a weary voice.

And certainly none of the Blues cared. They were in that mood when they felt like giving up. What was the good of continuing? Why try to get to Brampton at all? Far better to abandon the match, go back home, and have an afternoon's rest. All they wanted was to rest—to loll about, idle and indolent. They felt that they did not possess the strength of mice.

And Corky and the St. Frank's boys were just the same. When they learned that the roads were blocked they felt rather relieved. Anything to prevent them from getting to Brampton!

Yet this spirit of despair had a very brief life. Rapidly the Blue Crusaders were getting over that period of hopelessness. And once they started recovering they changed their views. Indeed, within half an hour their old briskness had returned, and they were mildly astonished.

"It's the rummiest thing I ever experienced!" said Rex Carrington. "I can feel the energy coming into my muscles—into my sinews!"

"Same here!" said Ben, nodding. "Not half an hour ago I was so weak that I couldn't have pushed over a blade of grass. Now I'm as strong as a horse again. I can feel the strength running through me, like—like an electric current."

It was undoubtedly remarkable. Never before had the Blue Crusaders experienced these rapidly changing sensations. With their returned strength came a returned confidence. No longer did they desire to go back to the Grange, and idle away the afternoon. Their one desire—their one determination—was to get to Brampton and to play the Albion.

They found that no trains were running. There were impassable drifts in the cuttings between Bannington and Helmford, and gangs of men were working in relays. There was a chance that the line would be cleared by the evening, but even this was remote.

As for the roads, these appeared to be blocked, too.

"Then we're done!" said Mr. Piecombe helplessly. "No trains, and the roads impossible! Boys, we can't get to Brampton."

"Hallo!" shouted Corcoran. "What's this coming? Stop him, you fellows!"

They were all standing in the High Street, over ankle-deep in snow, and their surroundings were exceedingly

THE BOYS' REALM.—No. 75.

picturesque. The pavements were piled up with deep drifts, and here and there tunnels had been made from the residents' front doors. Every roof was a picture, and all the chimneys to windward were coated with snow.

Along the High Street came a big saloon car, ploughing its way through the snow with some difficulty.

"If this car has come into the town, then it proves that the roads aren't completely blocked!" said Corky. "We'll stop them, and ask how far they've come."

The motorists were quite cheery, and they obligingly volunteered the information that they had driven into Bannington from Salthaven.

"Salthaven!" echoed Corky. "Why, that's a seaside town only four or five miles from Brampton."

"That's right," said the motorist. "We've had the deuce of a job to get through—drifts everywhere. But the old bus did it."

"If you can do it, others can do it, then," said Corky briskly. "Thanks awfully!"

He turned to the players. "Boys, we've got to get to Brampton!"

"I think we shall succeed," said Mr. Piecombe. "It is only a little after ten-thirty, and the best thing we can do will be to go to the garage and get the coach at once."

But when they arrived the garage owner wouldn't hear of the coach being taken out.

"But I paid you a deposit!" protested Mr. Piecombe. "The whole thing was arranged—"

"Can't help that, sir," said the garage man. "I'll return your deposit. I'm not going to let my bus go out over these roads. She's insured, but I don't get any compensation for the time she's laid up and idle. It's too much of a risk, sir."

In vain Mr. Piecombe argued—and, in the meantime, Lionel Corcoran gathered his fellow-schoolboys round him.

"This is a case where drastic measures will be justified," he said coolly. "Are you chaps ready to help me in a little wheeze?"

"Say the word, Corky!" grinned Armstrong.

"We're ready!" declared Freeman.

"You bet!" said all the others.

And a minute later, while Mr. Piecombe and the players were still collected round the garage proprietor, Corky & Co. descended upon the saloon motor-coach, which stood well back beyond the petrol-pumps, under cover. A mechanic had been tuning her up, apparently, for the engine was running.

"Is she all right?" asked Corky, indicating the coach.

"Yes; ready for the road," replied the man. "But the boss won't let her go out. Afraid she'll skid, and get smashed up. Don't blame him, either—not with the roads as they are."

"Come on, St. Frank's!" yelled Corcoran.

He leapt into the bus, and half a dozen of the juniors held the mechanic, whilst the others stood ready to deal with any other emergency that might arise.

Corcoran engaged the gears, slipped in the clutch, and the bus glided out into the road.

"Come on, the Blues!" roared the schoolboy club-owner. "Here's the bus! Jump in! We've got to get to Brampton, and the sooner we can start, the better!"

More Trouble!

"HURRAH!"

"Come on, boys!" Fatty Fowkes, roaring at the top of his voice, led the way into the coach. Mr. Piecombe, after a start of surprise, leapt on board. Nobody was left in the road except the reserve players. All the schoolboys, all the members of the League team, and Mr. Piecombe and Grouser, jumped on the coach before the garage proprietor could grasp the situation.

"Hi, come back!" he shouted furiously. "I tell you, I'm not going to let that coach out—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Frank's juniors yelled with laughter. For the coach was out, and purring its way down the High Street. And Corcoran stuck to the wheel until the end of the town was reached, when he gave it over to Grouser, who was an expert driver.

"I am not altogether sure that this—er—measure was justified, but I will make it right with the garage man when we return," said Mr. Piecombe. "It was exceedingly smart of you, Corcoran."

"We've got to get to Brampton, sir," said Corky coolly.

And get to Brampton they did—after many minor adventures. They skidded here and there; they stuck in the snow on more than one occasion; but they won through. More than once everybody had been obliged to tumble out and to put their shoulders to the coach to get her started again out of a drift. Just before one o'clock they rolled into Brampton, to find that this big seaport was not so snow-smothered as Bannington.

However, another shock awaited them there.

For when they pulled up at the Brampton Albion ground they found everything at sixes and sevens. Mr. Russell, the manager, was frantic. A few men were doing their best to clear the snow from the pitch, but the work had only just commenced.

"But you promised me that the ground would be cleared!" said Mr. Piecombe, in dismay.

"The contractors have disappointed me," said the Albion manager. "I was snowed up in my own house, and I couldn't get here until an hour ago. Then I found the ground in this—this condition!"

"We can't play on it!" said Dave Moran, inspecting the field critically. "Not as it is, anyhow."

"These men can't get it done in time," said Mr. Russell angrily. "It's an outrage! I made all arrangements—I received a definite promise. Yet those contractors have failed—and now they make the feeble excuse that they cannot get into touch with their men."

"Are there no other men?" asked Mr. Piecombe quickly.

"Only these few I have been able to get hold of," replied the other manager. "I'm hoping that others will come presently. Many of our supporters would willingly give a hand if they knew of the situation—"

"In the meantime, what about piling in?" suggested Fatty Fowkes, looking round. "We've done some snow clearing this morning, boys, and we're used to it."

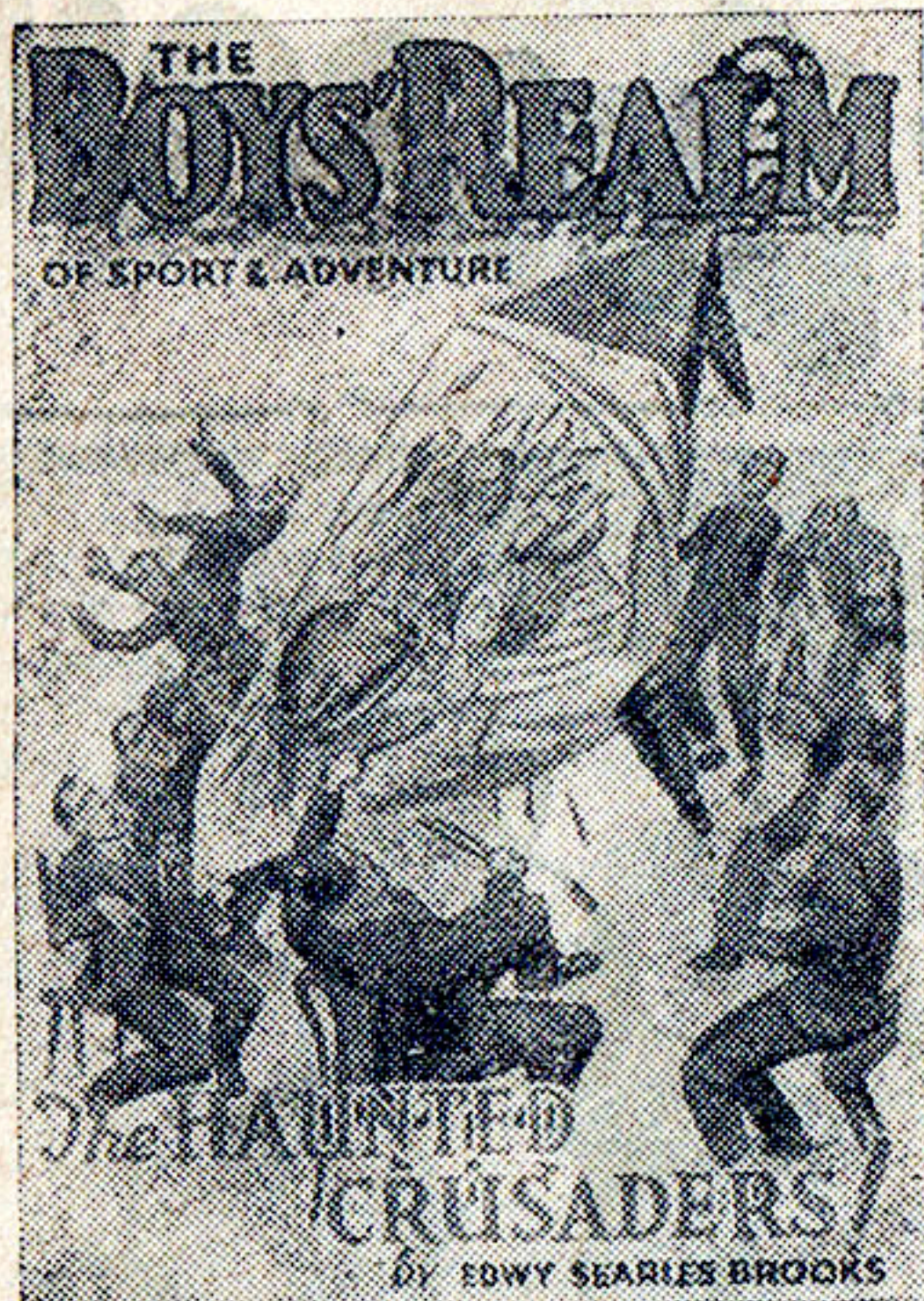
"Good egg!" said Corky. "Come on, you chaps! There's no rest for the wicked!"

"I really think we had better postpone the game," said Mr. Russell dubiously.

"Then you'd better think again, sir!" retorted Lionel Corcoran.

And within five minutes the Blues and

Next Week's Features!



The above much-reduced reproduction of next Wednesday's cover shows an amazing incident from the grand extra-long complete yarn of the Blue Crusaders. **OUT ON WEDNESDAY!**

the schoolboys were hard at it. They were soon supported by crowds of other Brampton men who had heard of the club's predicament. And, indeed, long before two o'clock the ground was practically cleared. The snow was piled up in great masses all round the field—but the pitch itself was playable.

The Blues had completely lost their blues by now. They were feeling invigorated, refreshed—and eager for the game. The work had not tired them; on the contrary, it had revived their muscles, and had restored their tissues. They felt strong and vigorous. The crowds were beginning to pour into the enclosure now. It was Christmas Day—sunny and crisp. These Brampton crowds were not going to be kept away because of some snow! They rolled up in their thousands, and by twenty-five past two—five minutes before the kick-off—the ground was packed.

Unfortunately there were scarcely any Blues' supporters. The good people of Bannington had been unable to get to Brampton, for none of the excursion trains had run, and the motor-coaches that had been advertised to start had not started. So the Crusaders were greeted by no familiar shouts as they turned out.

True, the Brampton crowds gave them a hearty welcome—but this was not quite the same. Every football team likes to have the encouragement of its own supporters. However, the Crusaders were not downhearted; and they came on to the pitch determined to get their revenge.

At home, on the Saturday, Brampton Albion had beaten them by five goals to three. Now they would return the compliment.

The Brampton players, of course, were certain of an easy victory. And the crowds were convinced that they would now see the famous Blues literally wiped up. If the Albion could beat them away, what could the Albion do at home?

Both teams were precisely the same, and it was only natural, perhaps, that the homesters should be full of confidence. They had gained the impression

that the Blues were not a team of stayers. In the first half, no doubt, they would play well—but in the second half they would crack up, just as they had cracked up on their own ground.

"Come on, the Albion!"

"Another two points to-day, boys!"

"Don't forget it's Christmas!"

"Poor old Blues!"

The home team received plenty of encouragement from the holiday crowd. And the game started with a brisk rush by the Albion. Remembering how easily they had knocked the Blues defence off its feet on Saturday, the Albion forwards now attacked with vigour and determination.

But to-day it wasn't quite so easy.

"THE HAUNTED CRUSADERS!"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

A rousing, book-length complete yarn of the mysterious and eerie events that befall the Blue Crusaders in their weird old mansion.

"THE SCHOOLBOY RANKER!"

By WALTER EDWARDS.

More stunning chapters of life in the Army and spy intrigue.

"SOCCER MADE SIMPLE!"

By ANDY WILSON.

Chelsea's famous International passes on another very helpful hint to young footballers.

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By swinging the ball about, the home forwards succeeded, at first, in confusing the Blues' defence, and very soon Fatty Fowkes found himself hotly attacked.

But Fatty, although he felt in his heart that this game was as good as lost, played with all his usual forcefulness and resource. A tricky shot came his way, and he dealt with it effectively. But George Scott, in making a further clearance, skidded on the snow-covered, treacherous ground. He was down, and one of the Albion forwards swooped on the leather, and the shot that resulted was a snorter of the most vicious type.

The leather simply hurtled towards the corner of the goal, and it looked a certain score. But Fatty, with an anticipation that was uncanny, flung himself full length across the goal-mouth, and in the nick of time got the tips of his fingers to the ball—just as it was going in.

He flicked it outside the post, and a yell of disappointment went up.

"Well sa'ed, goalie!"

"Hard luck, the Albion!"

The corner-kick was barren, for Fatty, punching out, sent the ball almost half-way up the field. Dave Moran pounced on it, and he was soon

away, passing out with a swinging shot to Tich.

And Tich, with the ball at his feet, was streaking over the treacherous turf—for the snow that remained was being trodden in, and it was rapidly becoming as slippery as ice.

Tich swerved inwards at the last moment, completely tricking the Albion back. And then finding himself well placed and with no other Blues' forward handy, Tich took a shot himself.

The goalie wasn't ready for it. Probably he thought that Tich was not a dangerous man. He was so small—so absurdly insignificant. Yet the shot that left Tich's foot was like a bullet from a gun.

Whiz!

It came at the goal, low, deadly, and even as the goalie leapt, the ball collided with the side netting and rolled to the back.

Tich Harborough had scored. It was first blood to the Blues!

Their Old Form!

WELL done, Tich!" Tich Harborough flushed as he heard that shout—uttered by Mr. Ulysses Piccombe from the stand. And Corcoran and the St. Frank's juniors were yelling themselves hoarse, too. The local crowds were silent. They had received a shock.

After that goal the Albion made greater efforts than ever; but they were held. The Blues' defence was on its mettle. Both Ben Gillingham and George Scott were as solid as rocks. If the home forwards got through it was by luck—and not because the defence was weak.

Once, for example, Ben slithered on the treacherous surface just as he was making a good clearance. The Albion centre-forward was on the ball in a flash, but he, too, skidded. Before Scott could come up to the rescue of his fellow-back, however, another of the Albion players tore up and delivered a shot on the run.

It was an excellent effort, and the ball went straight for the goal. But Fatty Fowkes laughed loudly, leapt sideways, and caught the leather deftly. The next second he kicked it far up the field again.

And so it went on, with the game entirely in the Crusaders' grasp. At half-time the score remained the same—one—nil. And all the Blues were feeling confident and happy.

"We've got to win, boys!" said Dave, as they collected in the dressing-room. "We're a goal up, and I think we're good for another goal in the second half."

"We've got to win—just to prove that old Fatty is an ass!" said Tich, grinning. "If we do win, he can't say that we're cursed by the Grange, can he?"

"The game isn't over yet!" said Fatty, shaking his head. "The more I think about the Grange, the more I get the wind up. There's going to be some awful thing happen in the second half, and—"

"Gag him!" roared Ben.

"All right—all right!" said Fatty hastily. "I won't say any more. But just you wait, boys! The curse of Bannington Grange is—"

A combined yell drowned the rest of his sentence, and Fatty gave it up.

The Albion players were looking more confident when they came out for the second half. They remembered how

(Continued on page 16.)

LAUGHS!



Do you know a good joke? If you do send it along to The Joke Editor, THE BOYS' REALM, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4. The Editor awards a prize of 2s. 6d. for the best joke, and an Indoor Sports Game for all other jokes used in this feature.

Impossible.

A short-sighted old gent saw a small child crying outside the gates of a school, and being tender-hearted, he tried to comfort the infant.

"Now, be a good little boy and don't cry any more," he said.

"I—I can't be a good little boy!" sobbed the child.

"But why?" asked the short-sighted gent.

"Because I—I can't!"

"There, there—here's a penny for you. Now tell me why you can't be a good little boy."

"Cos I'm a little girl!"

F. Beekingham, Glyncoerwg, S. Wales. (Prize of 2s. 6d.)

Scotch!

Employee: "I've been here for ten years, sir, doing three men's work for one man's money, and I think I'm entitled to a rise."

Scotch Employer: "I couldna' gie ye a rise, but if ye tell me the names o' the other two men I'll sack 'em!"

H. Hardstaff, Luton. (Indoor Sports Game.)

Work-Shy.

Tramp (wearing an expression of utter despair): "Madam, I've come out of the wilderness to locate work."

Lady: "Well, my man, I can give you something to do. There's a heap of wood ready for chopping at the back, and when—"

Tramp: "Begging your pardon, madam, I came to locate work. Now that I know it exists I shall return to the wilderness."

T. Wilson, Belfast. (Indoor Sports Game.)

The Limit.

Angus (whose friend has given him a gold cigarette-case filled with cigarettes): "Ay, it's a grand present indeed, and words fail to express ma thanks—but should there no' ha' been a cigarette card?"

T. Thorpe, Wednesfield. (Indoor Sports Game.)

Safety First.

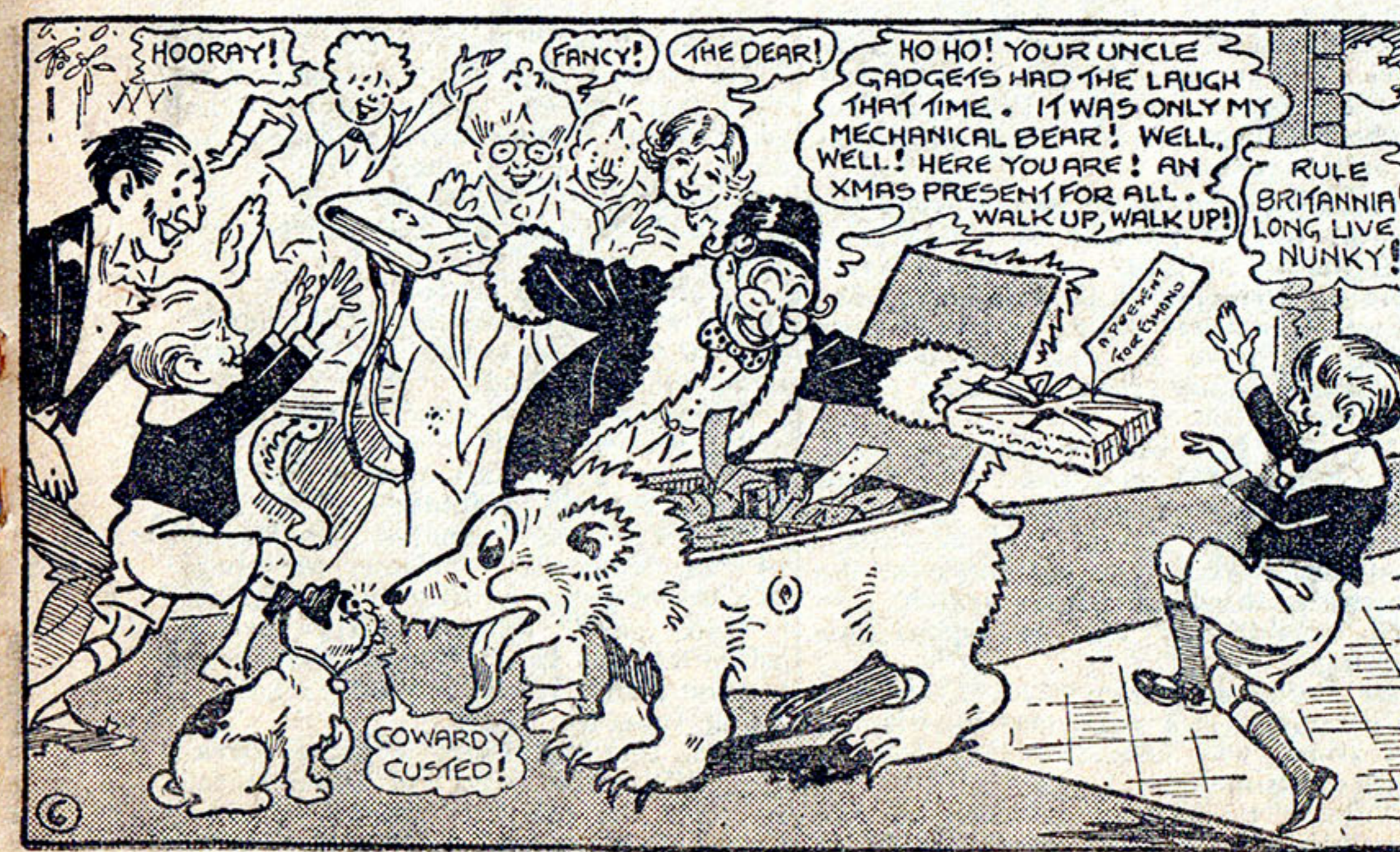
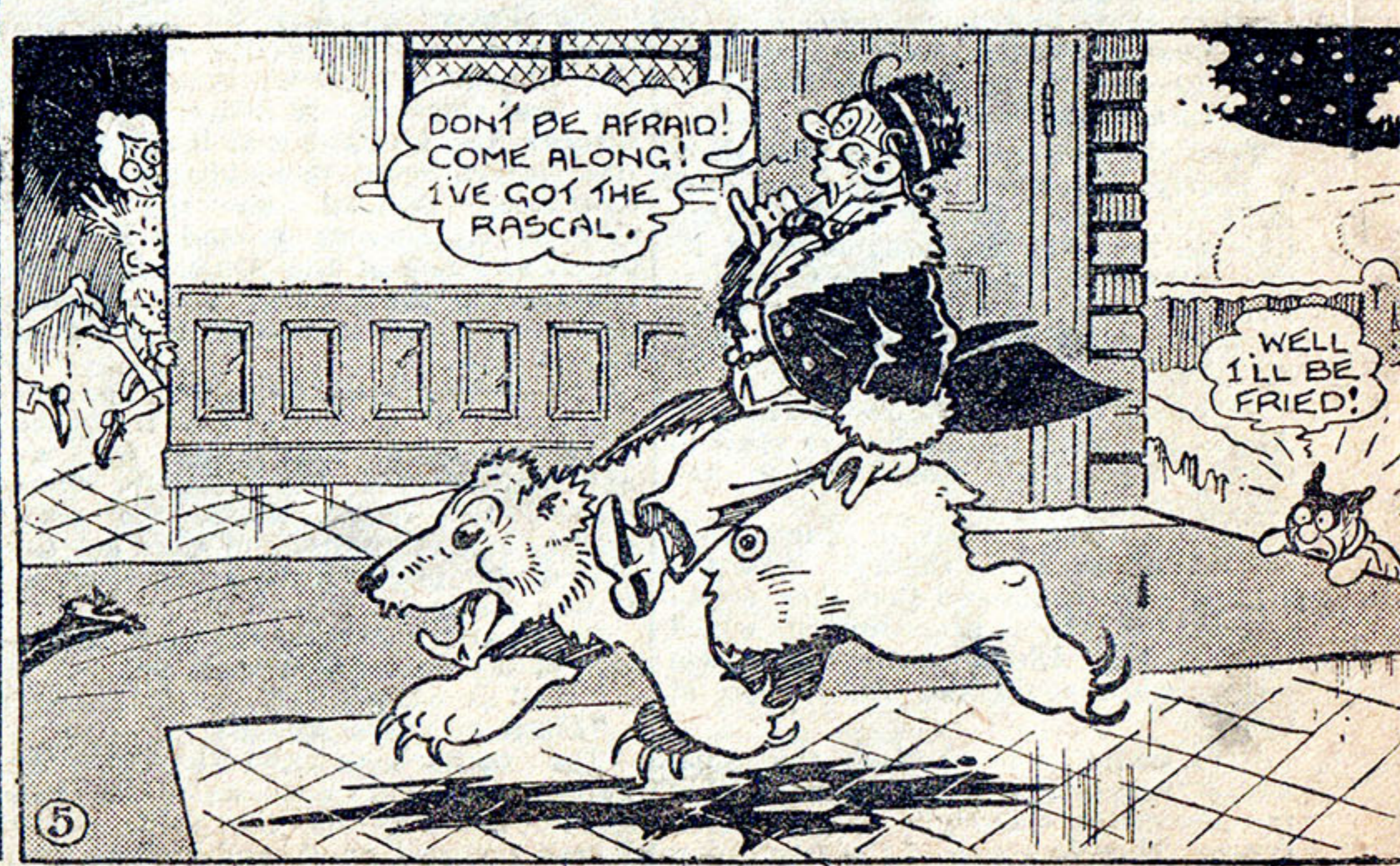
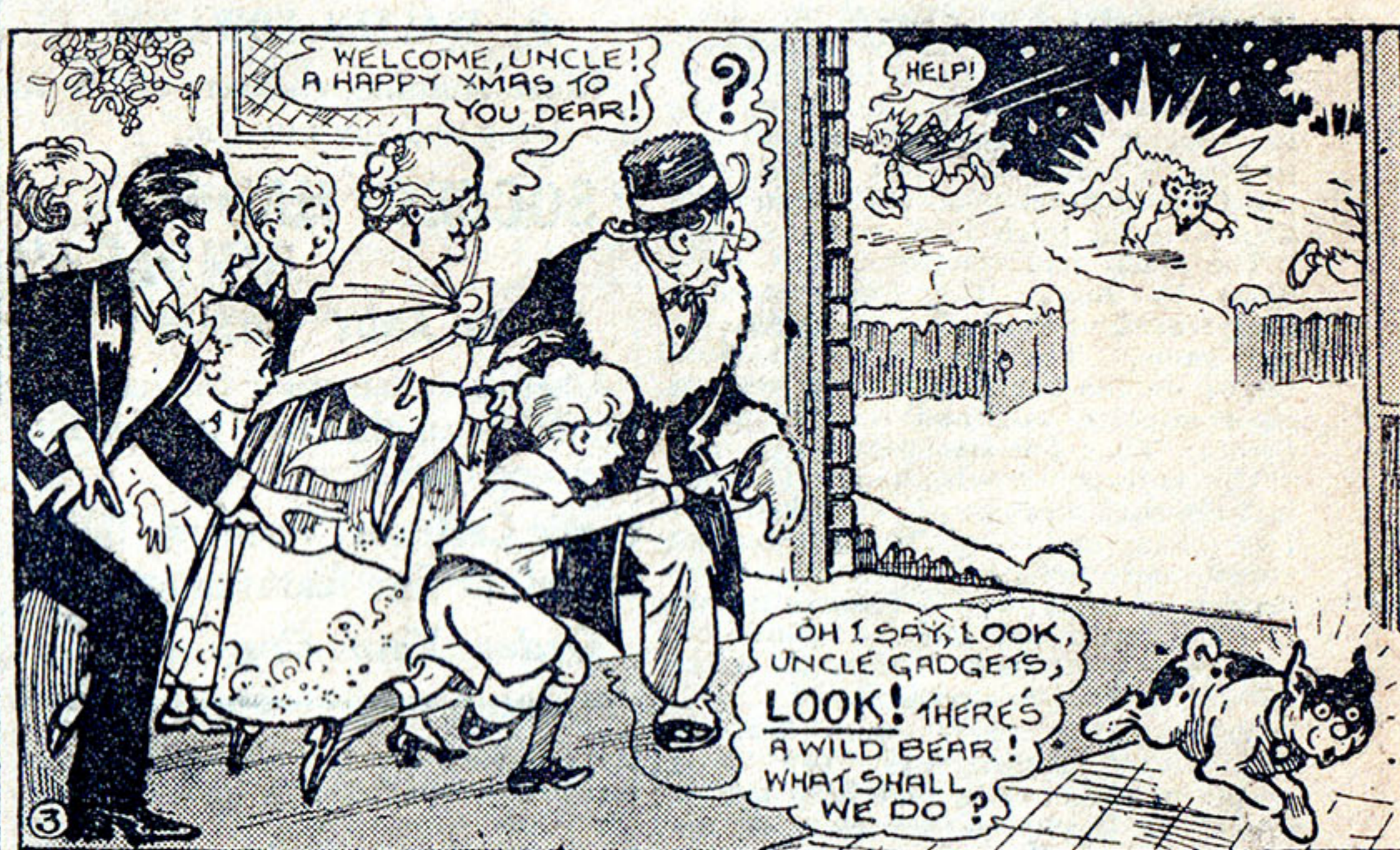
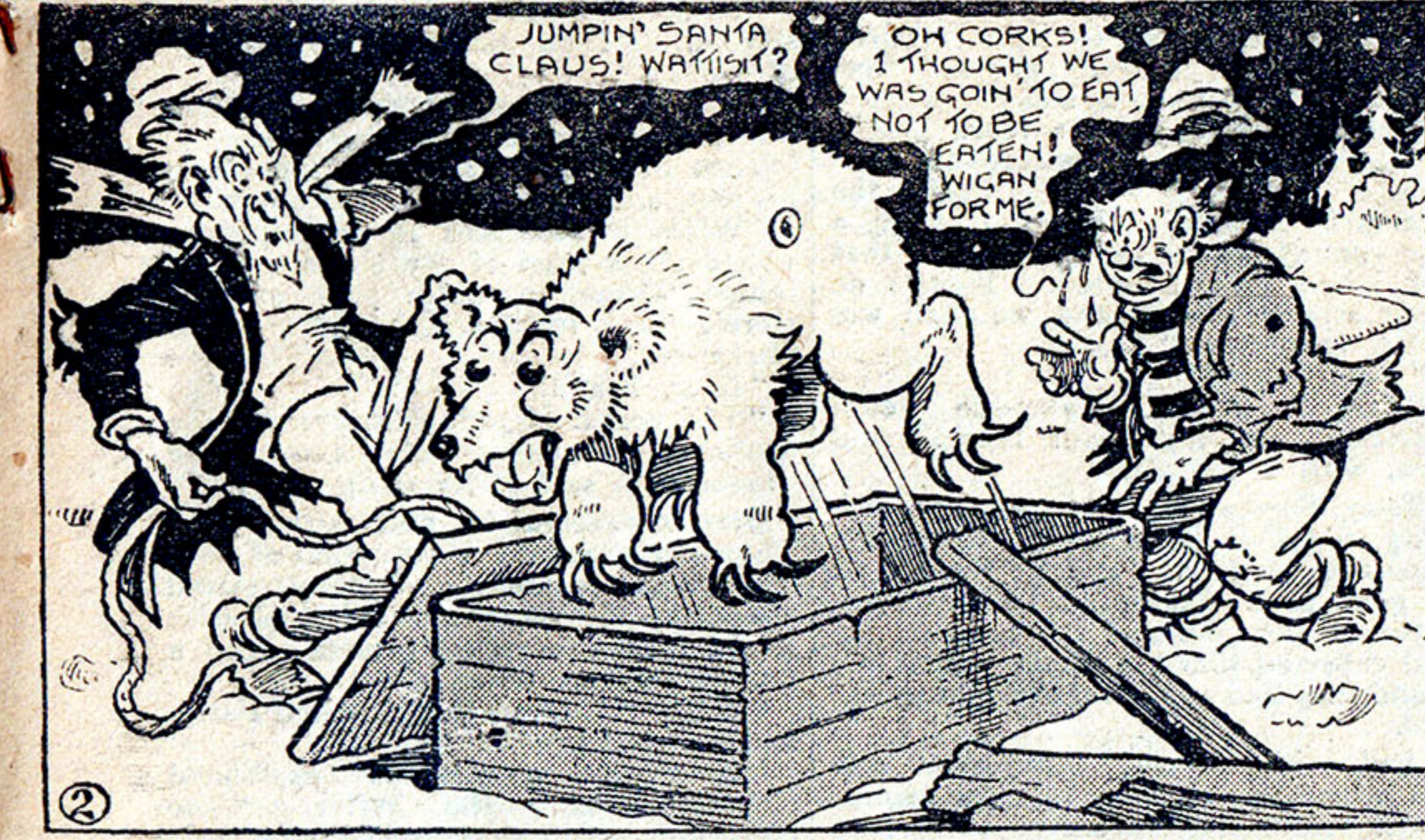
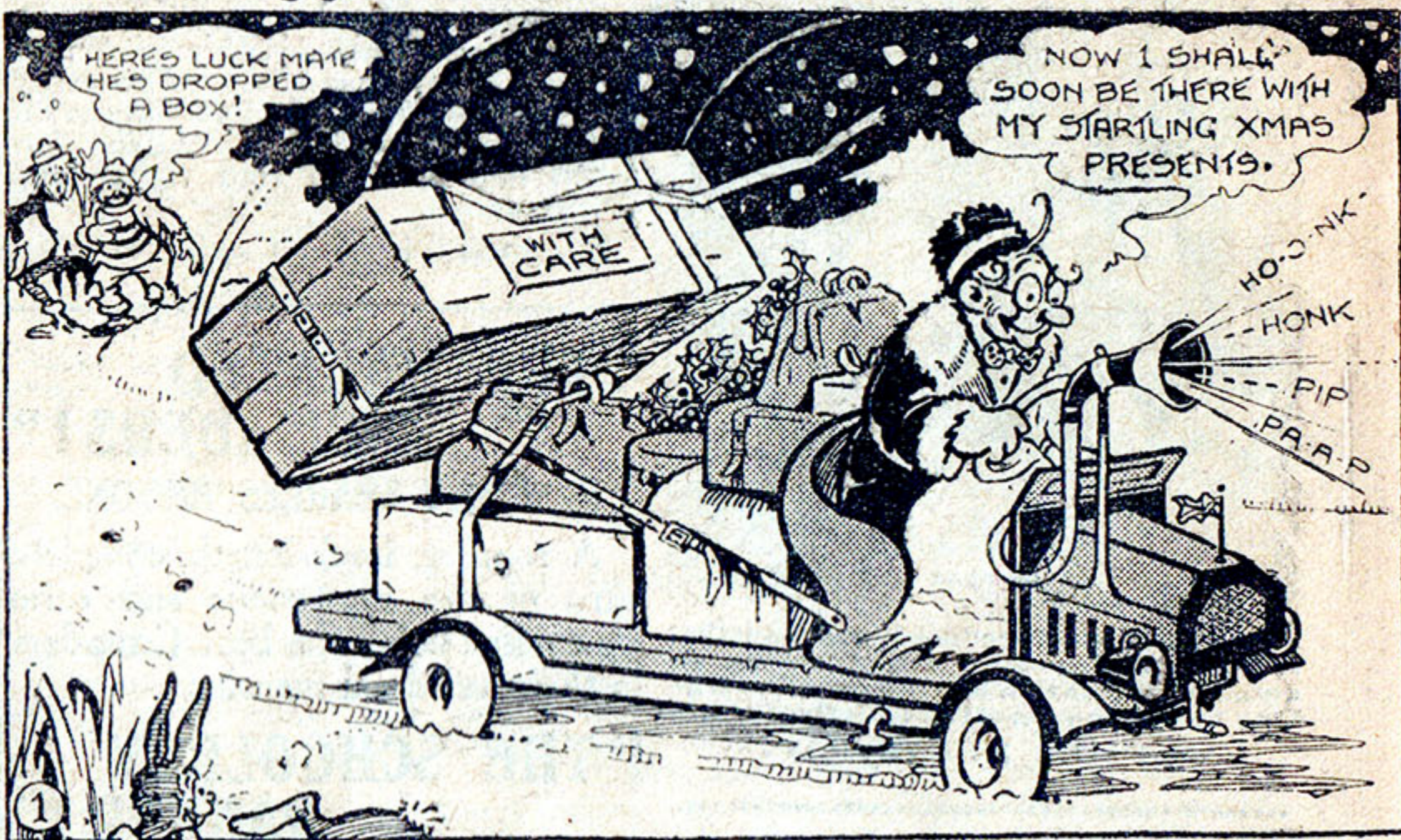
Uncle: "It was very kind of you to lend your ice-skates to your cousin first."

Willie: "That's all right, uncle. I only wanted to see if the ice would bear him."

G. Paterson, Leadhills. (Indoor Sports Game.)

MR. EDISON GADGETS

SUPPLIES SOME SURPRISING SPORTING INVENTIONS



LAUGHS!



Plenty of Time.

As usual, the train crawled along at ten miles an hour, and then at the same time and same place it came to a stop with a grinding of brakes.

"Guard," shouted a passenger, poking his head out of the window, "may I get out to pick some flowers?"

"Afraid you won't find many here," returned the guard.

"Oh, that doesn't matter!" replied the passenger. "I've brought a packet of seeds."

D. Mount, Greenock. (Indoor Sports Game.)

Time Signals.

New Vicar: "Many people coughed during the latter part of my sermon this morning. Why was it?"

Old Verger: "They weren't coughs, sir, they were time signals!"

L. Norris, Hendon, N.W.4. (Indoor Sports Game.)

In and Out!

Walking through an Aberdeen street one day an Englishman was astonished to find there wasn't a soul about. Being somewhat curious, he approached a policeman.

"Where are all the people to-day?" he asked.

"Well, sir," returned the policeman, "it is a flag day."

The next day things were quite the reverse. The streets were packed with people; so the Englishman stopped a passer-by and asked him the reason.

"Oh, there's a house-to-house collection to-day!"

G. A. Murfin, Rotherham. (Indoor Sports Game.)

The Excuse.

"I don't think there's anything unreasonable in my asking for an increase in salary," said the clerk. "You promised me a rise after I'd been here a year."

"I know I did," said the Jewish employer. "But if you remember I made it conditional on you giving me every satisfaction."

"In what way haven't I given you satisfaction, sir?"

"Why, you don't call bothering me for more money giving me satisfaction, do you?"

A. N. Steele, Smethwick. (Indoor Sports Game.)

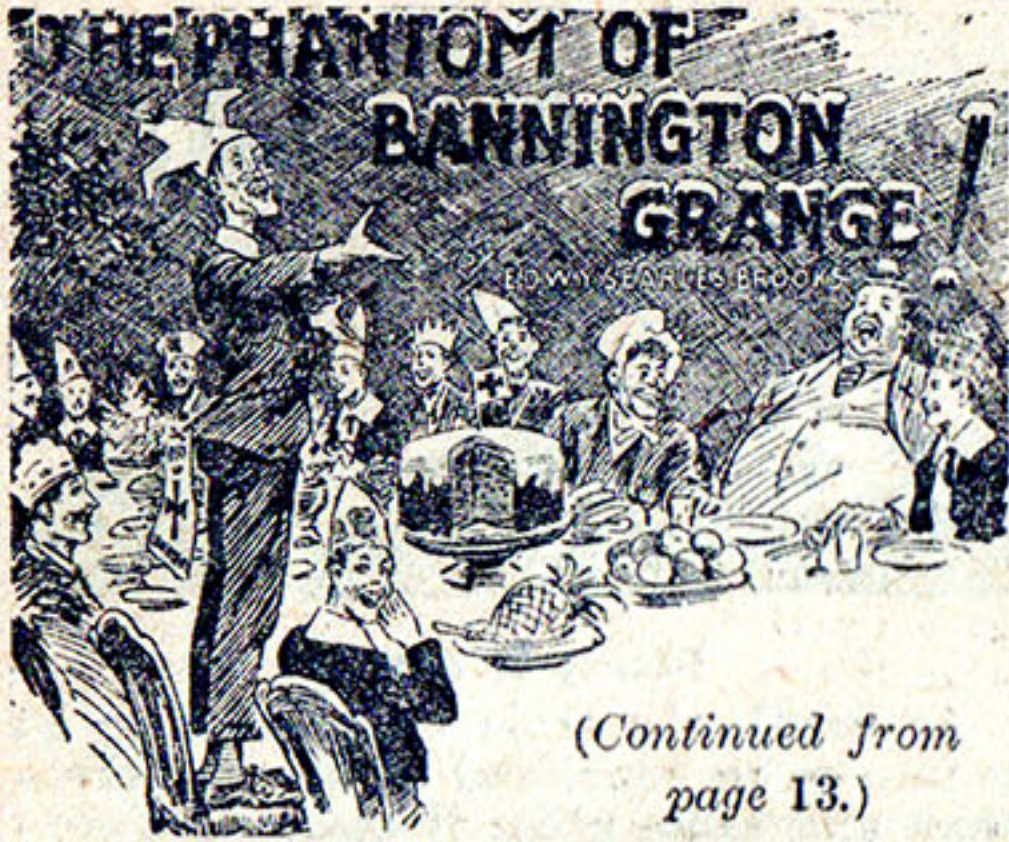
Telling the Truth.

"I say," remarked a lad to his companions, "let's find out who can tell the biggest lie."

"All right," said one. "I'll start. I'm the biggest fool in England."

"I said a lie," exclaimed the first, "and you begin by telling the truth!"

P. G. Warren, Hanwell, W.7. (Indoor Sports Game.)



(Continued from page 13.)

the game had gone at Bannington on the Saturday. The Blues had got three goals in the first half, and then they had gone all to pieces. To-day they had only gained one goal—so there was no need to worry. In this half, the Albion players told themselves, they would knock the Blues into a cocked-hat.

Unfortunately, it wasn't such an easy matter!

The Blues, absurdly enough, refused to collapse!

This was perfectly ridiculous—from the Albion's point of view. Why couldn't the Blues remain true to form? Why should they crack up on Saturday and not to-day? The Albion players felt that they were being swindled. For, in this second half, the Crusaders played more keenly, and more energetically, than in the first half. They had gained their second wind, it seemed, and their attacks were devastating.

Again and again they bombarded the Albion goal, and it was only by desperate efforts that they were kept out. Then Rex Carrington, with one of his famous first-timers, added to the score.

The ball came across, rather unexpectedly, from Wally Simpson. And Rex, the opportunist, dashed in, and his foot got to the leather a mere split second before the Albion's right-back's. Thud!

The ball left Rex's foot, and it whizzed into the goal before the keeper even knew that a shot was being taken.

"Good man, Rex!" said Dave, as he ran up and gave the centre-forward a clap on the back. "That's the stuff!"

"It was easy!" grinned Rex. "A gift, if ever there was one!"

And after that it was the Albion that went to pieces—not the Blues. Finding their visitors so hot, they lost their confidence. They became erratic, and started kicking wildly.

And the Blue Crusaders, who played their usual game—clean, cool, and scientific—had no difficulty in making absolutely sure of the result.

From a perfect centre from Tich, ten minutes before the end, Rex scored again, and this put the result of the game beyond any doubt. During the closing minutes, the Albion concentrated on defence, and although the Blues tried hard to add a fourth goal to the score, they were kept out. Fatty Fowkes, in this second half, scarcely had anything to do.

And the final whistle went at last, the crowds silent and disappointed. They had expected so much from the Albion—and the Albion had failed.

"Well done, boys—well done!" said Mr. Piccombe boisterously, as the players came in. "Three—nil is very good. You have wiped out the—er—stain of Saturday."

"No injuries, either, sir," said Dave Moran. "We can play the same team exactly to-morrow."

"Splendid!" beamed the manager. "Well, Fowkes, what have you to say?"

THE BOYS' REALM.—No. 75.

"It was a jolly good game, sir!" replied Fatty Fowkes promptly.

"I am well aware of that," said the manager. "But what have you to say with regard to your previous—er—premonitions? What about your gloomy forebodings?"

Fatty scratched his head. "I'm jiggered if I can understand it!" he said. "With this curse on us, we ought to have lost!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "The curse seems to have misfired this afternoon, Fatty," grinned Corcoran. "It's sprung a leak!"

Ben Gillingham gave a roar. "Boys, this proves conclusively that there's nothing wrong with the Grange!" he said. "There may be a few rummy things going on—but that old house isn't haunted. There's no curse attached to it—and we shall win again to-morrow."

"Yes, rather!" "You're dished, Fatty—so you'd better go and hide your head!" said Rex, with a chuckle.

Fatty Fowkes was chipped unmercifully—not that he minded. He was a good-natured fellow, and he took it all in good part. Moreover, he was overjoyed at the result of the match. He had expected that the Blues would lose—and they had won. So everything was fine.

And, without delay, the players and the schoolboys climbed into the motor-coach again, and started on the return journey to Bannington. The roads were in better condition now, for there had been more traffic during the afternoon. And Bannington was reached without any mishaps, although there had been one or two alarming skids on the way.

It was a jolly crowd that tumbled out of the saloon coach. It was Christmas night, and the Blues and the schoolboys were determined to enjoy themselves to the full.

Round the Festive Board.

DAVE MORAN rose to his feet, glass in hand.

"Here's a toast, boys!" he said, with sparkling eyes.

"First Division next season!"

And all the Blue Crusaders sprang to their feet, glasses aloft.

"First Division next season!" they chorused gaily.

The scene was a very festive one. The big dining-hall at the Grange was full. The log fire was blazing merrily, the electric lights were gleaming down upon the snowy-white table. And all around were seated the players and the schoolboys. There was not one turkey, but two or three, and Mr. Piccombe had regarded these birds with a somewhat jaundiced eye.

Indeed, the manager had ordered the players not to partake of any of this rich food. But, for once, the players were on strike, and they ignored him. It was Christmas night, and they were going to have a real, old-fashioned Christmas dinner—even including plum pudding.

The day had been a strenuous one, but a successful one, too. The Blues had won away from home, they had wiped out the "stain" of Saturday. And they were full of optimism for the morrow's third Christmas match. So why should they not be joyous this evening?

As Corky had remarked, Christmas only came once a year, and so, when it did come, why shouldn't they have a high old time?

Nobody made any mention of the "haunting." If Fatty even started so

much as two words on the subject, he was promptly shouted down.

Corcoran got on his feet after Dave had sat down, and raised his foaming glass. It contained ginger-ale, but it looked very much like the real thing.

"Let's drink the health of Mr. Piccombe, our manager!" he sang out. "Now then, boys—all together! Mr. Piccombe has done much for the club, and during the forthcoming year—"

"Really!" said Mr. Piccombe, startled. "I do not see the necessity of—"

But his health was drunk, and there was a good deal more enthusiasm.

Then Fatty Fowkes heaved himself to his feet, and he grinned round happily.

"While we're about it we might as well drink a toast of my choosing!" he said. "Come on, raise your glasses! Here's to the health of young Corky—"

"Hear, hear!"

"The health of young Corky, and the continued success of the Blue Crusaders!" said Fatty gaily.

Glasses were raised, and at that very moment there came a succession of dull, splintering crashes. Everybody started violently; the table was splashed with liquid from the raised glasses. And a complete silence fell.

"What—what was that?" asked Fatty, looking round.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" exclaimed old Blackwood, the butler. "The pictures! All the pictures have fallen!"

Everybody at the table spun round. And then they saw the explanation of those dull thuds. Every picture in the room now lay on the floor, the frames smashed, the glasses splintered. But before anybody could make a move the great door suddenly flew open. Out in the corridor, some distance away, stood a dim, indistinct figure.

"The monk!" croaked Fatty.

Crash!

His glass fell to smithereens on the table. Everybody else stood stock still, startled. Out there, in the corridor, the light was dim, and the figure of the monk could only be seen very indistinctly.

"Fools, fools!" came a sepulchral voice. "Know you not what dangers surround you? Go! Leave this house before there is a tragedy!"

Nobody spoke. That voice was unnatural—horrible to listen to.

"On Christmas night, many years ago, a man died by violence within these walls!" continued the spectre. "That tragedy will be repeated if you dare to remain—"

"It's a trick!" shouted Ben furiously.

He made a dash for the door and the spell was broken. Chairs were pushed back, more glasses were smashed, and then the door slammed with a tremendous crash. When Ben got to it it was locked, and all his efforts were useless.

"Help me!" he panted.

Rex and Dave wrenched at the handle, and to their amazement the door came open on the instant.

"It wasn't locked at all!" said Rex.

"It was—it was!" declared Ben Gillingham. "I couldn't open it just now! There's something funny—"

"Let's get out!" shouted Sam Russell, of the reserves. "Come on, boys! We're not going to stop in this house!"

"No fear!" gasped Curly Hankin, white to the lips. "That—that figure was no man! It was a ghost—a horrible thing from the grave!"

And, like lightning, a panic spread. Ben Gillingham, who was about to rush out into the corridor, paused. He had seen that there was now no sign of the

apparition, and he realised that it would be a waste of time to search.

Spectral or mortal, the figure had had time to get away while that door had been locked.

So Ben slammed it again, and put his back to it.

"Steady, boys!" he shouted. "Keep your heads!"

"Open that door!" gasped Fatty frantically. "One of us may be struck down at any moment!"

"Yes, yes!" shouted Keane. "Open the door, Ben!"

"Let's get out of the windows!"

There was a rush for the windows, and Ben's voice became more thunderous.

"Cowards!" he roared. "What's the matter with you? Even these school kids are keeping their heads better! It's all trickery, I tell you! Are you a lot of babies? Are you a crowd of frightened children?"

The players were jarred into a sudden coolness by Ben's scornful words.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" bellowed the aggressive back. "We're not going to bolt now, are we? I tell you there's trickery in this house, and I'm not going to believe anything else! Let's ignore that ghost! Let's start some Christmas fun! Where's the radio? And what about the gramophone? Let's have some music!"

Ben's boisterous noise had a good effect on all the others. His boldness and confidence set them a fine example. Even Fatty Fowkes looked a little shamefaced.

"It's madness!" he muttered. "We ought to clear out!"

"On Christmas night?" shouted Corcoran. "Not likely! As for that apparition, I'm inclined to agree with Ben! Somebody is having a game with us! It's probably a practical joke, and the best way to make it look silly is to ignore it."

And so within five minutes reason had come back, and the panic was over.

But, although Ben Gillingham had triumphed for the moment, that panic was still dangerously near the surface! There was a tension in the air, and at any moment there might be another outburst of terror.

Having a Good Time!

"LISTEN! What's that music?" said Rex Carrington, half an hour later.

They were in the big reception-hall—a great apartment, just as large as the dining-room. Somebody was changing a record on the gramophone, and in the brief interval the strains of music could be heard floating in from outside.

"Christmas waits!" said Armstrong, as he turned away from the window. "There's a whole crowd outside here with lanterns. They're singing carols."

"Let's invite them in!" suggested Corcoran promptly.

"Lots of girls, too!" said Tich.

"All the better!" shouted Rex. "Girls, by Jove! You bet we'll invite them in!"

A minute later all the Blues were hurrying out through the front door. And there, on the drive, stood a big crowd of carol singers, the majority of them being girls. The drive, by the way, had been cleared of snow during the afternoon by Mr. Piccombe's orders.

"Merry Christmas, everybody!" shouted the waits.

"Same to you, and many of 'em!" chorused the Blues.

"Leave this to me, boys!" said Corky coolly. "Who's the treasurer here?" he added, going towards the waits. "How about a couple of quid—from the Crusaders?"

The waits considered that this contribution was handsome.

"Somebody told us it wouldn't be any good coming to the Grange!" chuckled one of the young men. "But I'm glad we came now. This is our last call, too."

"You'll come in before you go away, won't you?" asked Corky.

"That's very nice of you—"

"And as this is your last call, what about staying for an hour or two?" suggested Corky. "There's a good crowd of us here, plenty of dance records on the gramophone—and no young ladies!"

"An excellent suggestion!" said Mr. Piccombe promptly. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am the—er—manager of the Crusaders. I should deem it a great favour if you would come in and help with the—er—festivities."

The waits were enthusiastic in their acceptance. Mr. Piccombe considered that this wheeze of Corcoran's was brainy. The Blues were doing their utmost to throw off that feeling of panic, and some jolly dancing, with some light-hearted young ladies, would act as a very effective restorer.

Mr. Piccombe had his eye on the morrow's game.

Indeed, within ten minutes the recent panic was completely forgotten. Ben Gillingham and Corky and one or two others had held a brief consultation, and they had decided to make a thorough search of the Grange later on. They were by no means convinced that that "ghost" had been a genuine apparition. But they were sensible in taking no action now. There wasn't one chance in a thousand that they would meet with any success if they investigated.

Later on, however, they might be able to make some discoveries. And

if, indeed, there was some trickery afoot, the tricksters would be baffled by this calm indifference to their machinations.

There were at least twenty girls in that party of Yuletide waits, and although they weren't equipped with dancing-shoes and dance-frocks, they, nevertheless, threw themselves wholeheartedly into the jollification.

The girls were well escorted, too, for most of them had their brothers or their fiancés with them, or their sisters. There were more girls than men. And this was all to the good.

The reception-hall was cleared, Corky appointed himself master of the ceremonies at the gramophone, and fox-trots and waltzes were the order of the hour.

Dancing was soon in full swing, and this Christmas night, which promised to start so badly, was turning out far better than any of the Blues had expected.

Quite a number of the players had wanted to go to a big dance in the town that night, but Mr. Piccombe had banned it. There was to be another hard day to-morrow, and if the Blues wanted to dance they could wait until after these Christmas games were over.

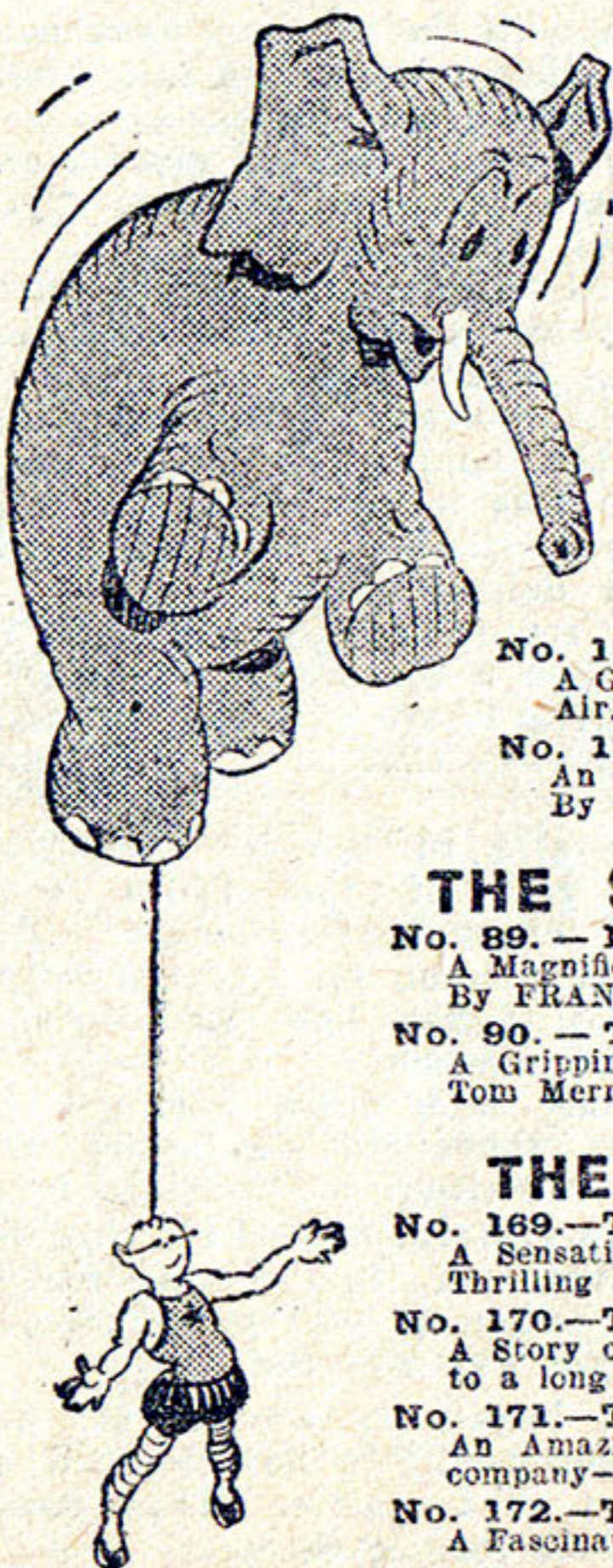
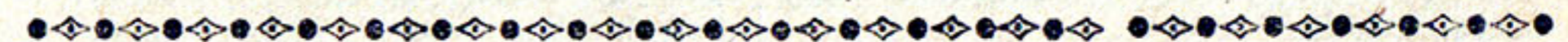
However, a little merriment at home was a different matter. This jolly party of waits had come along at the right moment.

In the middle of a fox-trot two or three of the lights suddenly went out. They flickered for a moment, and then died altogether. For a tense moment or two the Blues believed that there were to be some more manifestations. But nothing further happened.

"A fuse has gone, I expect," remarked Ben Gillingham. "We'd better see about it."

"Do you know where the fuses are?" asked Dave Moran.

"Yes, down in the cellar," replied Ben. "I had a look at them when I was going over the place last week. I'll pop down and shove a new fuse in."



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TALES FOR ALL TASTES!

THE BOYS' REALM.—No. 75.

He went off alone, refusing the company of Rex. As Ben said, there was no reason why two of them should go on such a simple errand.

So Ben made his way to the domestic quarters, and then penetrated down a staircase to the basement. Everything was very modern down here. The basement had been entirely renovated of late, and in one of the cellars there was a self-contained generating set. There was a small motor and a powerful generator—the electric light for the house being all on the premises.

Lionel Corcoran had made up his mind that everything would be done properly. The town cables did not extend to the top of this hill, and as Corcoran insisted upon electric light the plant had been installed. Ben Gillingham knew that the fuses were housed in a box down in the passage, just outside the cellar, where the generator was gently humming.

Ben reached this passage, opened the door of the fuse-box, and had a close look. A whispered voice sounded behind him, and he turned sharply.

But the passage was empty! Only the concrete walls stared at him!

"That's funny!" muttered Ben, with a start.

The whisper came again, apparently within an inch or two of the back of his head. He spun round, thoroughly startled this time.

"Who's that?" he asked sharply.

But it was an absurd question, as he knew. For nobody was there. There was a light right against his head, there, in the passage, and he could see for yards with complete distinctness. And there wasn't a human soul within sight.

"Gosh!" breathed Ben, passing a hand over his brow. "I—I wonder if there's anything in Fatty's— Eh? Why, what—"

He broke off, for another whisper had come—from behind him again. He twirled round, half backing away, for that whisper had been menacing, horrid. Yet he could not distinguish any actual words.

And then he noticed that he was shaking. As he looked at his hands he could see them trembling. And this was an extraordinary surprise for the sturdy Ben. As far as he knew he had never trembled in his life before.

"There's—there's something wrong!" he muttered huskily.

An extraordinary, indefinable sensation had gripped him. For the life of him he could not understand what it was, or how it was caused. He only knew that his brain was throbbing, and he felt that a weakness was sweeping over him. Yet there was nothing to cause it; whatever this weakness was it came from within himself.

"Nerves—nothing but nerves!" muttered Ben fiercely. "Pull yourself together, you fool idiot! You're as bad as Fatty!"

He shook himself, reached up to the fuse-box, and commenced feeling the fuse-holders. Then suddenly the light behind him went out, and he took his hand away.

"That's done it!" he muttered. "Yet I didn't touch—"

He broke off. He fancied that he had heard a movement down that bare passage, in the direction of the staircase. There was no light there, and the only illumination came from the open doorway of the dynamo-room. But this light was reflected—a mere subdued glow. And Ben was now feeling so shaky that he had to hold on to the wall for support.

And there, down the passage, between

him and the stairs, something had appeared!

The Man with the Luminous Eyes!

BEN GILLINGHAM stared and his heart nearly stopped beating.

The figure was that of a man—a smallish, crouching figure. But Ben hardly gave a glance at this man's frame, or at his clothing. He was convinced that he was facing no ghost. The man was solid enough—but his eyes—

His eyes seemed to be luminous! They glowed there in the gloom—greenish, ghastly. For the first time in his life Ben Gillingham felt frightened. Yet when he tried to move he was helpless. Some dreadful influence gripped him, rendering his muscles useless.

And that figure was advancing and those eyes were looking at him balefully, menacingly. Nearer he came, and as he did so he raised both his hands, and Ben saw the claw-like fingers. At the same second Ben's knees gave way under him. He fell to the floor—weak, powerless.

It was this dreadful weakness which drove the mighty Ben Gillingham into a panic. He—the sceptic, the fellow who had laughed scornfully at Fatty—he was panic-stricken! Had he been able to keep his strength he would have charged at this mystic figure. But he was as helpless as a kitten—far more helpless, indeed. When he tried to move his limbs he found it impossible to do so. The strength was oozing out of his pores, and he slumped limply on the floor—and that strange figure came nearer and nearer!

"Who are you?" croaked Ben. "What are you doing here? You fiend! You've done something to me—"

He broke off, his very jaw refusing to function. His tongue was so sluggish that he could not formulate the words that were in his mind. And he was startled to hear his own voice in his ears—a mere croaking whisper, as though his vocal chord were half paralysed.

The man with the uncanny eyes came nearer, bending down, and a soft, mocking laugh came from him.

"So, my friend," he said gently, and with strange silkiness of tone, "you are terrified, eh—at last!"

Ben heard those words, and he hated that silky voice—a voice which contained a menacing hideousness.

Ben's helplessness rendered him craven. His bold spirit had become weak. He was a man of action, and yet he was stricken, and could do nothing to defend himself.

His very senses deserted him, and he seemed to see a black pall descending over that grim figure with the luminous eyes. And after that he did not know what happened.

And upstairs, in the big reception hall, the rest of the Blues were thoroughly enjoying themselves. The lights had not come on yet, indicating that Ben Gillingham had not been successful in his mission.

But nobody took much notice. The girls were thoroughly enjoying the novelty of the situation; and the footballers were grateful indeed for this unexpected diversion. It had come at the right time—when it was most needed. Their morale was restored.

They all began to wonder at that recent experience. It now seemed so remote and so fantastic. They could laugh at their former fears.

A new fox-trot had just been started when a series of frightened screams interrupted the laughter and jollity.

They sounded above the music, above the sounds of dancing feet. Terrified screams, loud, startling.

And then two girls came running in, their faces white, their eyes dilated. They had gone out into the hall after a dance, and there, on the stairs, they had seen the spectral monk!

This came out gradually, as the girls tried to explain. They insisted upon going at once, and so pitiful was their terror that it spread amongst the other girls. A panic seized them. Hats and coats were fetched, escorts called for.

In vain Mr. Piecombe and Corky tried to calm the young ladies. Yet there was much sincerity in their efforts, for they felt in their hearts that their reassurances did not ring true. They knew perfectly well that those girls must have seen something horrifying.

Within five minutes the Christmas waits had gone—the girls and their escorts. And once again the Blue Crusaders were left alone, with only a handful of schoolboys, in that grim, old mansion.

And now the situation was even worse than before. For once again the players were on tenterhooks.

"I knew it—I knew it!" said Fatty Fowkes gloomily. "Anybody who comes into this house will be frightened away! It's a house of doom!"

"A house of trickery, more likely!" said Corcoran. "Look here, boys! I call for volunteers! We've got to explore this place from roof to cellar! Somebody is up to some monkey business!"

"Gentlemen, I am beginning to think that the servants were right," said old Blackwood, the butler, in a quavering tone. "Never before have I believed this house haunted. But now my opinion is changing. I'm getting frightened, gentlemen—frightened! And I have lived here for more years than I care to remember in peace, with never a thought of anything ghostly. But now it's different. There's something strange in the air!"

"Where's Ben?" asked Fatty suddenly. "Hasn't Ben come back from attending to that fuse?"

"We haven't seen him for half an hour!" said Rex, looking round.

"Something's happened to him!" shouted Fatty, in alarm. "Quick! Which way did he go? Who was with him?"

"Steady, Fowkes!" said Mr. Piecombe, his face haggard with anxiety. "To the best of my belief Gillingham went to the basement alone. We must make an immediate search for him. Good heavens! I trust nothing serious has happened!"

They found Ben Gillingham on the floor of that passage—lying huddled-up, unconscious. Mr. Piecombe bent over him and felt his heart. Then he was gently lifted, carried upstairs, and taken to the smoking-room.

And now every face was filled with a haunting fear.

One and all, they kept looking over their shoulders; they were ready to start at the slightest sound.

"This is most singular," said Mr. Piecombe, after he had examined Ben Gillingham with the help of Smart, the trainer. "There is nothing the matter with him! Not a bruise—not a sign of any injury."

"Perhaps he had a knock on the head, sir?" suggested somebody.

"Don't you believe it!" said Grouser. "His head's sound enough; he hasn't been hit by anything. Looks to me as if he fainted."

"Fainted?" echoed Fatty, aghast. "Ben!"



BAD FOR BEN! They found Ben Gillingham lying on the floor of the underground passage—unconscious. While one of the juniors raised his head, Mr. Piccombe knelt down to make an examination.

"Impossible!" said two or three voices.

"His face is all set!" muttered Grouser uncomfortably. "Look, boss!" he added, in a low voice, to Mr. Piccombe. "Rummy, ain't it? Look at his muscles, all drawn up."

"Do you think he was frightened into unconsciousness?" breathed Piccombe.

"I wouldn't like to say, sir; but it looks darned funny to me!" said the trainer. "What could have happened to him down in that passage?"

But the manager could offer no explanation. Brandy had been given to Ben, and now he was showing signs of returning to consciousness. Suddenly he opened his eyes, and sat up, staring about him wildly.

"Take them away!" he panted hoarsely. "Those eyes! Take them away—"

"It's all right, Ben, old man!" panted Fatty. "We're all here! You're safe enough now!"

"Fatty!" said Ben dazedly. "I—I don't seem to remember— Yes, yes! That passage—the figure! The man with the horrible eyes! Gosh! I'll never forget them—never!"

And there was a world of fear in Ben Gillingham's voice, and his face was expressive of an even greater fear!

The Panic!

BEN GILLINGHAM suddenly looked round.

"Where is he?" he asked tensely. "I—I don't remember much. I was helpless, down in that

passage—all my muscles went flabby. That—that fiend got me down without even touching me—without coming near! I'm scared, boys!"

"You!" shouted Dave Moran, in amazement. "Pull yourself together, Ben! Do you realise what you're saying?"

"Yes!" said Ben hoarsely. "Let's get out of here! This house is under some curse! I'm frightened, I tell you! Let's get out!"

Ben, the sceptic—Ben, the bold!

The others could hardly believe their ears as they heard him talking like this. And their morale was shattered. Ben Gillingham's startling collapse reacted instantaneously on the others. Whilst he had remained firm they had had a certain amount of stability. But now they were ready enough to make a swift bolt for it.

Everybody was collected there in the smoking-room—all the players, the schoolboys, Mr. Piccombe, and Grouser. Even Blackwood, the butler, was in that room. This meant that the rest of the house was utterly and absolutely deserted.

Yet the smoking-room door suddenly gave a click, and then it commenced to gradually open!

"The door—the door!" panted somebody.

They stood there, rigid—their flesh tingling. And they could see the door opening in that insidious fashion they had seen before. And there was nobody near it—nobody on the other side of it.

Without human agency the door was opening!

"It must be trickery!" shouted Corcoran.

He made a sudden rush, hoping to seize the door and expose the means by which this dodge was worked.

But, with a sudden rush of air, the door swung to, slamming hard. And they heard the click of the lock—and yet the key was here, inside!

"Let's run for it!" shouted Curly Hankin madly. "We'll be killed if we stay here!"

"Run—run!"

"Open the windows, some of you!"

There was a mad, panic-stricken rush. Curly Hankin led it, and it was very significant that Ben Gillingham was as frightened and as white-faced as any of the others.

The windows were burst open, and the players went out in a flood, leaping into the snow and running helter-skelter away from the house. Nearly all the St. Frank's juniors went, too, having caught the scare. But not one of them had shown the white feather until the footballers set them the example. In spite of their forebodings, in spite of their fears, they had kept a stiff upper lip. Now, however, they could hold themselves back no longer.

Only Lionel Corcoran remained in the smoking-room, with Dave Moran. Mr. Piccombe had not fled because he was frightened, but because he wanted to prevent the footballers from scattering. Outside, he was shouting at the top of

his voice, gathering them together. And this was a comparatively easy task for him, for none of them wanted to be alone in the darkness in the grounds of that grim old place.

"This is ridiculous!" shouted Mr. Piecombe. "Boys—boys! Have you all gone mad? There is no need to act like a crowd of frightened sheep!"

"We're all right now, sir!" panted Penniworth. "We're out of that house—and we'll never go into it again!"

"Never!" vowed Andy Tait. "It's—it's haunted!"

"Didn't I tell you so from the start?" asked Fatty Fowkes, with a gulp. "We ought to have got out days ago! Good glory! We're lucky to escape alive! There's some supernatural agency at work—"

"Fowkes, I shall get really angry with you if you talk such nonsense!" boomed Mr. Piecombe. "There have been some very—er—remarkable happenings, but never for a moment do I believe this rubbish about supernatural agency! It's too fantastic—too grotesque!"

"We all thought so at first, sir—but we know differently now!" said George Scott. "Even Ben is unnerved!"

"I am!" muttered Ben. "But not because of any ghosts. Gosh! Don't think that, boys! It's what happened down there in that passage! That man—that horrible man with the eyes! He wasn't a ghost—he was solid enough. But he beat me—without weapons—without even touching me! And that's a thing I can't get over!"

"Come, come!" said Mr. Piecombe. "We had better pull ourselves together. We are all here?"

"Dave isn't here, sir!" said Rex, looking round. "And young Corky—By Jove, I believe they are still in the smoking-room!"

"I will fetch them out!" said Mr. Piecombe. "We will go to the Grapes Hotel at once."

"Thank goodness!"

"We shall be safe there!"

"Rather!"

"I only trust that the management will be able to find accommodation for us," continued Mr. Piecombe. "It is

very doubtful, for at this season the hotel is bound to be nearly full—"

"We'll sleep anywhere, sir!" interrupted Wally Simpson. "On the billiards-tables—in the lounge. Anywhere, in fact!"

And Mr. Piecombe, with his eye on the morrow's game, said nothing to shift the players from their purpose.

Mr. Piecombe was an excellent football manager. He knew that all these players had received a shock, and a sound, undisturbed sleep was necessary in order to restore them. He did not want his players to take the field to-morrow with their nerves in rags. If they did, they would assuredly make a mess of the game.

And so, although this flight went against the grain, Mr. Piecombe was prepared to lead it. All of them should go to the Grapes Hotel, and there they would not be in any fear—they would feel safe and comfortable. And in the morning, perhaps, they would be themselves again.

It would be time enough then to discuss the immediate future.

The Blues' Decision.

"NOTHING—absolutely nothing!" said Dave Moran, in a puzzled voice.

He and Lionel Corcoran had been examining the smoking-room door. Even before they started they knew that this examination would be futile. For had they not examined the door after—and other doors?

After that panic-stricken rush through the windows, Corky had tried the door, and, as he had half expected, it came open at once. It was not locked now—and it seemed impossible that it could ever have been locked.

"It beats me hollow!" said the St. Frank's boy, scratching his head. "Just an ordinary door—made of ordinary wood. An ordinary lock, made of ordinary iron."

He thumped it, and swung it open again.

"Just common or garden hinges," he went on, examining them closely.

"Jove, Dave, what can it mean? There's nothing—utterly nothing to account for the mystery."

"Unless the place really is haunted!" muttered Dave.

"You don't believe that, do you?" asked Corky sharply.

"Hang it, I don't know what to believe!" confessed the Blues' skipper. "At first I was ready to laugh at any theory of the house being haunted. But—but what else can we think?"

"I'm not satisfied!" insisted Corcoran stubbornly. "I'm a pig-headed chap, Dave, and nothing can make me believe that doors can be locked and unlocked, opened and slammed, by invisible hands. There must be some logical explanation. There aren't any wires, I know, but isn't there some other method that could be employed?"

"I can't think of one!"

"Neither can I," confessed Corky, biting his lip. "Then, again, I hate the idea of running away. It's—it's cowardly! Bolting, like a lot of funks! It isn't cricket, Dave! Dash it, we're not going to be driven out of the place like this!"

He set his jaw more stubbornly than ever, and walked out into the corridor. Dave accompanied him. They went along to the hall, switched on all the lights, and looked round. Everything was normal. They opened the front door, and found all the Blues, and the other schoolboys, outside in the snow. The majority of them were shivering, for they had no overcoats and no caps.

"Come indoors, all of you!" said Dave Moran gruffly. "You'll catch cold out there!"

"We're not coming in that house again!" shouted Fatty Fowkes. "We've had enough of it!"

Corky and Dave walked down the steps, and Mr. Piecombe advanced to meet them.

"I have decided that we shall all go to the Grapes Hotel!" said the manager.

"And I have decided, sir, that we shall stay here!" said Corcoran grimly.

"Really, Corcoran, this is absurd!" protested Mr. Piecombe. "I am the manager of this club, and I insist—"

"I am the owner, sir—and I insist, too!"

"I am—er—startled!" said Mr. Piecombe excitedly. "You have more than once told me, Corcoran, that I am to have a free hand. Either I manage this club or I do not manage it! I am not going to be played with in this fashion!"

"I'm not trying to play with you, sir," said Corky, with deadly quietness. "I'm just going to call for volunteers, that's all. I'm going to remain at the Grange, and if anybody else cares to stay with me, I shall be glad of their company."

"Nobody will stay!" shouted Curly Hankin.

"Then I'll stay here alone!" replied Corcoran. "Not alone, though. There's Blackwood—he won't desert me. He won't leave me in the lurch!"

Everybody was silent, and an uncomfortable feeling spread throughout the players and schoolboys.

"Corcoran, this is preposterous!" said Mr. Piecombe earnestly. "Let me tell you that I shall hand in my resignation if you insist upon taking the management of the club out of my hands—"

"Keep your hair on, sir!" growled Corky. "I'm not trying to interfere with your management. And we're not going to quarrel, are we?"

"I sincerely hope not!" boomed the manager.

"Then let's talk this thing over calmly," said Corcoran. "You want

**BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL LEAGUE
PLAYERS' REGISTRATION FORM.**

I,.....wish to be registered as a
(Player's Name—Block capitals.)

player for the.....FOOTBALL CLUB for the
(Name of Club.)

season 1928-29, and to play in the.....SECTION
(Name of Section.)
of the BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL LEAGUE, in accordance with the Rules of the
said Club and Section.

Date.....

Player's Signature.....

Address

Club Secretary's Signature

When completed this Form should be sent to the Section Secretary, who will note the registration. The Section Secretary is responsible for these Registration Forms being sent to the Sports Editor for the issue of Certificates. Club Secretaries are asked to send a stamped addressed envelope for return of the Certificates. Section Secretaries should send in a batch of Forms together if possible and enclose a three-halfpenny stamp to cover postage on the Certificates.

NO PLAYER IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART IN BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL LEAGUE GAMES UNLESS HE SIGNS THIS FORM AND RECEIVES HIS REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE.

the players to go to the Grapes, and I'm asking for volunteers. If I'm game to stay on here, surely there are a few more of you who will be game to keep me company?"

"Gosh, I'm with you!" shouted Ben Gillingham suddenly. "Boys, we can't go now! If Corky stays, we all stay!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty, taking a grip on himself. "We're not going to be shown up by a schoolboy!"

Mr. Piecombe shrugged his shoulders. "Very well!" he said, tightening his lips. "Do as you please! But, under the circumstances, I shall not hold myself responsible for the game to-morrow against Tylmouth Rovers."

A minute later there was a general movement indoors. Ben and Fatty headed it, and none of the others could hold back. Even Curly Hankin & Co., terrified as they were, were forced to return into the Grange. They would never hear the last of it if they alone bolted.

"I'm convinced that there's some trickery here!" said Corcoran, after they were all in the hall and the door had closed. "Ben, tell me about this experience that you had in the basement."

Ben Gillingham shivered, and he related the circumstances.

"It's the same man I saw out in the grounds!" said Fatty. "Luminous eyes—a smallish man. That's him! I—I

believe he's the ghost—a materialised spirit!"

"Let me think!" said Corcoran, with a sudden gleam in his eyes. "Do you remember that curious charm thing you picked up, Fatty? Made of gold, wasn't it, with an enamelled triangle in the middle of it?"

"Yes—a green triangle!" said Fatty, nodding.

"I wonder!" breathed Corky. "Only a week or two ago I was talking to Nipper, of St. Frank's—"

"Nipper?" repeated Mr. Piecombe, staring.

"Hamilton, sir—or Nipper, as he is known," said Lionel. "Sometimes he acts as Mr. Nelson Lee's assistant. Don't you remember? It's a good bit ago now, but at one time Mr. Nelson Lee and Nipper were engaged in a tremendous battle against the League of the Green Triangle—a criminal organisation of tremendous power. Mr. Lee smashed it up."

"Yes, I seem to remember something about it," said Mr. Piecombe, nodding.

"The chief of the League was a man named Zingrave—Professor Cyrus Zingrave," went on Corcoran. "And he was a strange man—a scientist of extraordinary ability and will power. He was a small man, and I'm wondering if—"

"You—you mean," shouted Ben, staring—"you mean that that man was

Professor Zingrave? That we're up against the Green Triangle?"

"I don't know—but it's very significant," said Corcoran. "If that man is Professor Zingrave, then any explanation might be possible."

"It is only a fantastic theory!" said Mr. Piecombe impatiently. "There is not one iota of evidence, Corcoran! As for that little gold charm, there is nothing in it at all. What, indeed, do you propose?"

"That we should make a thorough investigation, sir," replied Lionel Corcoran grimly. "I am convinced that some mysterious enemy is trying to drive us out—and why shouldn't that mysterious enemy be Professor Zingrave himself? Anyhow, I'm all in favour of staying on—sticking it out!"

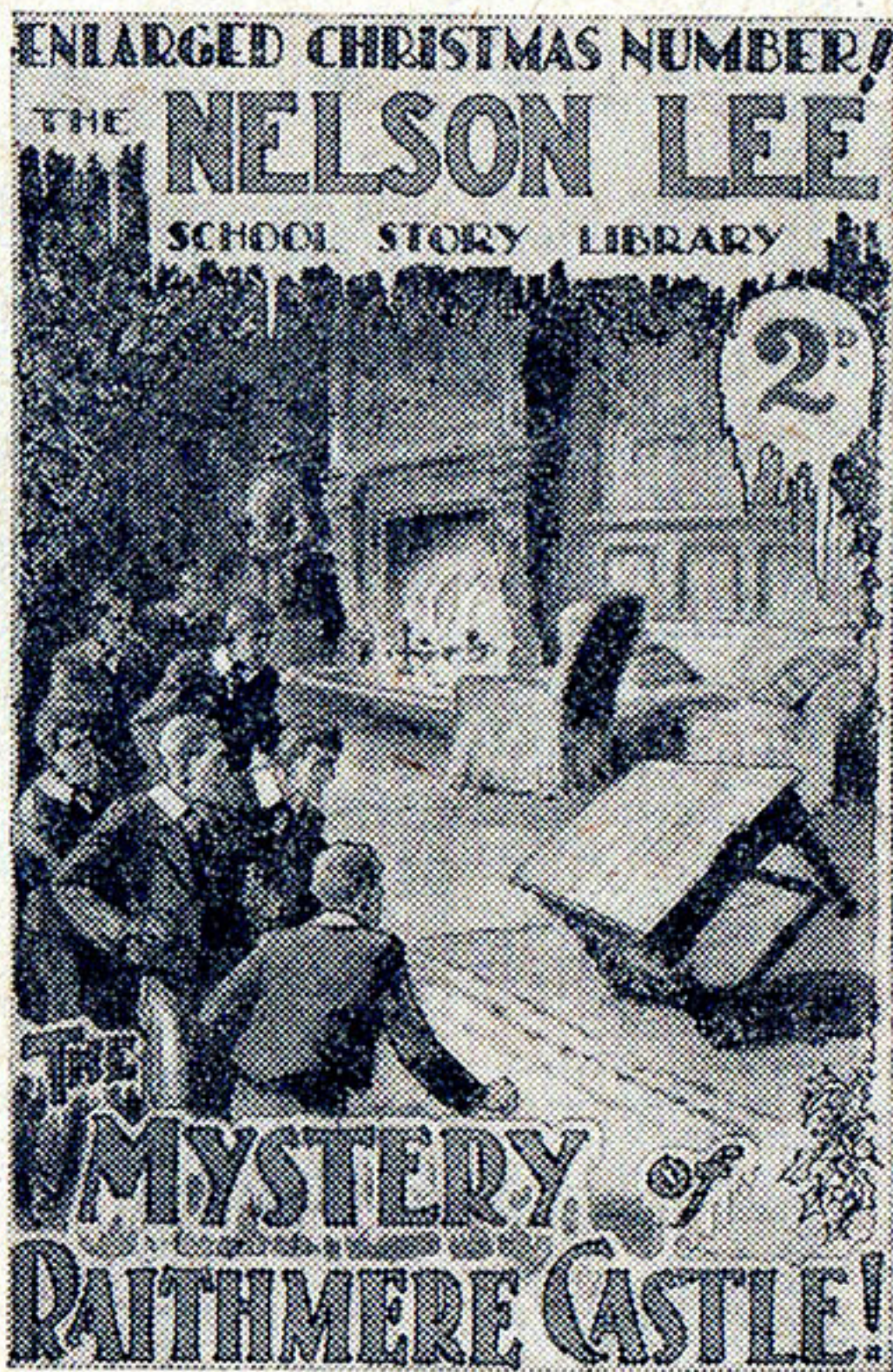
"And we're with you, Corky!" went up a chorus. "Boys, we'll stick it out!"

And even those players who were not agreeable to this plan echoed the words of the others. They did not want to appear funky, and so they all stuck together.

(What is the astounding mystery attached to Bannington Grange? There are many more startling adventures in next week's issue of the REALM. Don't fail to order your copy; and, at the same time, get a copy of the "NELSON LEE School Story Library." Same day—same price!)

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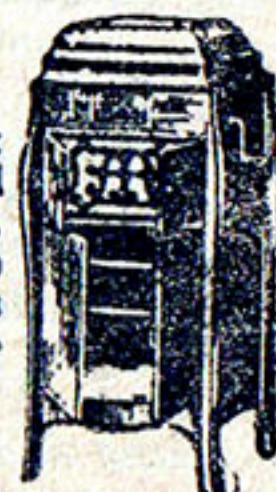


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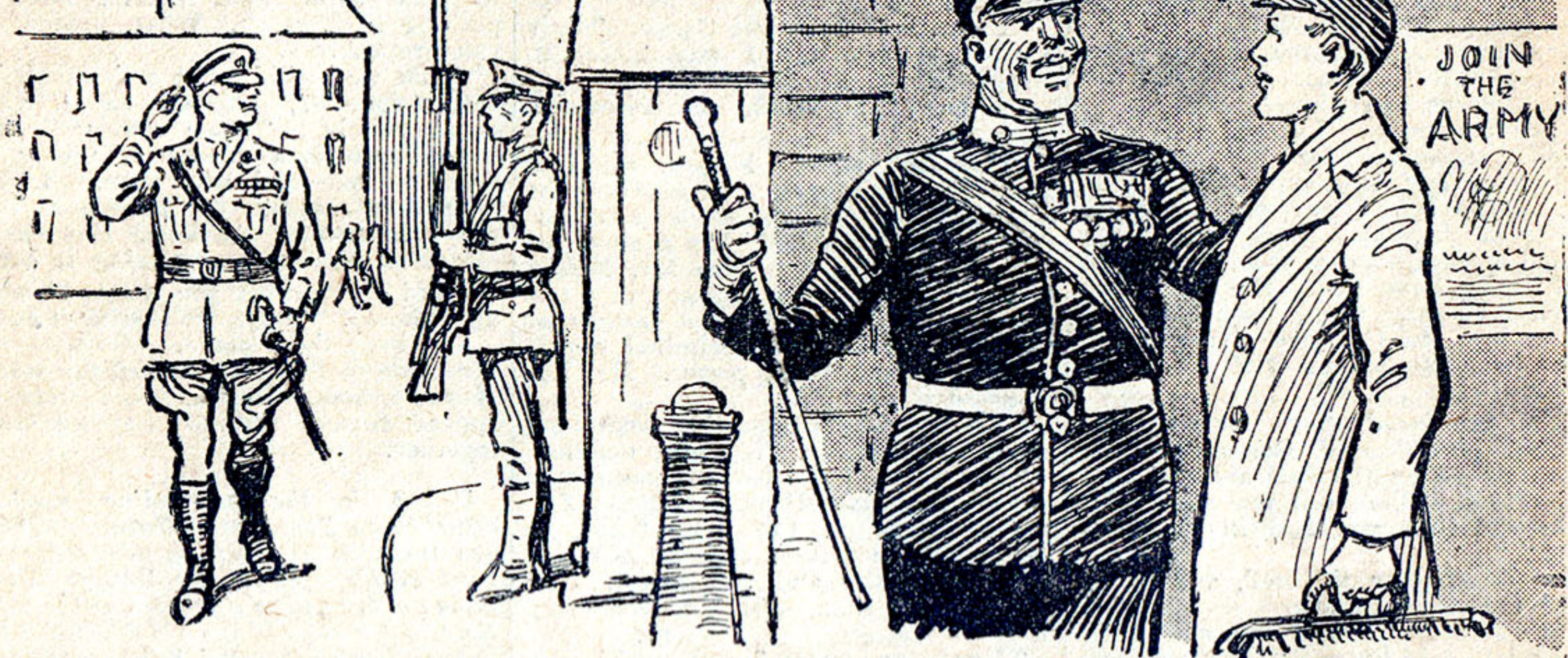
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The Cunning Spy!

THE cool announcement was followed by a tense silence, and Jack stared in wide-eyed amazement as he stood stone-still and met the mocking gaze of the one-armed man in the doorway.

"You!" he gasped.

Mr. Wykeham Smith nodded his fine head.

"Your eyes do not deceive you," he said smilingly. "You are surprised to see me, perhaps?"

"Surprised!" Jack echoed the word sharply; and then ran on, his grey eyes flashing, a fierce note in his voice: "You know quite well that I'm surprised to see you, you dirty, murderous hound! You tried to shoot me down in cold blood last night; yet this morning you've got nerve enough to come here and try to brazen the thing out! But you're too late this time, for I've told Colonel Masterson everything!"

"You've told him everything, my young friend?"

"Yes," flashed the pale-faced youngster, "everything!"

"I am very glad to hear it," returned Wykeham Smith; "for it will save me the unpleasant task of having to unmask you! It is good to know that you have made a complete confession!"

The quietly spoken words took all the wind out of Jack's sails, and it was in open-mouthed bewilderment that he swung round and faced his father.

"Listen, sir—" he began eagerly.

"Silence, sir!" rasped the martinet.

"Mr. Wykeham Smith," he continued, "will you please come inside and sit down? Sergeant-major, close and lock the door!"

He stood quite still until his orders were carried out; then—

"You entered my orderly-room of your own free will, Mr. Smith," he said; "so perhaps you will be good enough to answer certain questions that I wish to put to you!"

"I am at your service, sir," answered the master of Starkleigh Grange, with

perfect self-possession. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"I do, sir!" snapped the martinet decisively. "You have met Private Masters before?" he asked.

"Private who?"

"This man," returned Colonel Masterson, indicating his son with a brief nod.

"Oh, yes, I've seen him before!" smiled Wykeham Smith. "But I didn't know whether he was a private, a sergeant, or even a colonel! You see, I am a scientist, something of a recluse; so I know nothing about the Services. Incidentally, I am a pacifist, to whom

JOIN UP WITH—**JACK MASTER-**

SON, who is expelled from school for a crime of which he is innocent. Because of this he is turned out of home by his father,

COLONEL MAS-

TERSON, commanding officer of the Loyal Bams-shire Regiment. Jack knows the culprit of the crime is his cousin,

MERVYN VANE,

who is now a second-lieutenant in the Bams-shires, and in which regiment Jack enlists under the name of Masters. He gets into the bad books of

SERGEANT-MAJOR BLACKSTAFFE when he gives a corporal a hiding for bullying

"BABY" BUNTING, a new recruit.

Later, the Bams-shires are ordered to a lonely moor to guard a mystery airship. While there, Mervyn Vane gets into the clutches of

WYKEHAM SMITH, a one-armed spy, who lives in a grange on the moor. Jack is suspicious of Smith and follows him one night. There is a struggle between them, and although the spy gets away, he leaves his artificial arm and a camera behind. Following this, Smith kidnaps Jack, but he escapes. When he gets back to camp he is arrested as a deserter. While on trial before his father, Wykeham Smith suddenly enters the orderly-room!

NOW START RIGHT AWAY!

the mere thought of warfare is abhorrent—"

"I have neither the time nor the wish to listen to your personal views, sir!" cut in Colonel Masterson testily. "So perhaps you will be good enough to stick to the point. You say you have met Private Masters before?"

"Yes."

"Under what circumstances?"

"Under most peculiar circumstances!" Mr. Wykeham Smith smiled across at Jack Masterson as he said the words. "But why do you question me about the meeting, seeing that our young friend has made a statement—a complete confession of his wrongdoing? Why he should have approached me about this new aeroplane of yours is a complete mystery; and why he should have been in civilian clothes is equally baffling, seeing that he is a private soldier. Of course, I guessed that he'd got something to do with the military; otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to photograph the new aeroplane—would he? It is an aeroplane, isn't it? Or did he say it was an airship? I really forget!"

Jack's face was ashen as he turned to his father.

"Don't believe a single word he's saying, sir!" he cried, in a state of panic. "He's trying to bluff you—"

"I am the best judge of that!" broke in Colonel Masterson harshly. "Remain silent!"

"But—"

"Keep quiet when you're told!" barked the regimental sergeant-major fiercely.

"Mr. Smith," said the martinet, fixing his steely gaze upon the one-armed man, "I shall be glad if you will let me have the whole story. It is quite true that Private Masters has made a statement, but your respective stories appear to have nothing in common."

"There is very little to tell, colonel," smiled Wykeham Smith; "for I did not press Masters to stay in my house once I knew the nature of his business. For



JOIN
THE
ARMY

WYKEHAM SMITH

WYKEHAM SMITH

WYKEHAM SMITH

WYKEHAM SMITH

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WYKEHAM SMITH

—THESE STARTLING CHAPTERS WILL GRIP YOU!

even I, a pacifist, know that one is running a grave risk in having dealings with a person who wishes to dispose of his country's closely-guarded secrets. That person is a traitor, is he not? Well, Masters offered to sell me a photograph of the new—"

"That's a lie—a dirty, foul lie!" cried Jack, in a sudden fury; and he was about to leap at Smith's throat, when his escort threw themselves upon him and twisted his arms behind his back.

"Control yourself, Masters!" snapped Colonel Masterson, as Jack stood white-faced and trembling, his blazing eyes fixed upon the handsome master-spy. "Go on, Mr. Smith."

"It was about nine o'clock last night when my manservant announced that a strange young man wished to speak to me," said Wykeham Smith; "and I, thinking that some unfortunate had lost

was going to do with so much money; and he said he wished to get out of the country, as he was fed-up with England. He mentioned something about the Army being a dog's life; and it was then that I began to suspect that he might not be so mad as he seemed. So I had a short consultation with two eminent scientists who are staying with me—Professor Emil Loder and Captain Morton Steele—and they advised me to get rid of the young man with all possible haste. Captain Steele, by the way, wounded himself while cleaning a revolver; otherwise, he would have come along with me this morning.

"Well, sir, I told Masters that his precious photograph would be of no more value to me than the paper it was printed on; and, after a certain amount of gentle persuasion, I managed to convince him and get him out of the house.

officers," explained the colonel, "and Masters, in his statement, said that you and Vane are known to each other."

"Then things are more complicated than ever," smiled the master of Starkleigh Grange, "for I have never known anyone named Vane. However, I am perfectly willing to meet the gentleman in question, and so clear up, at least, one point in this puzzle."

Taken for a Traitor.

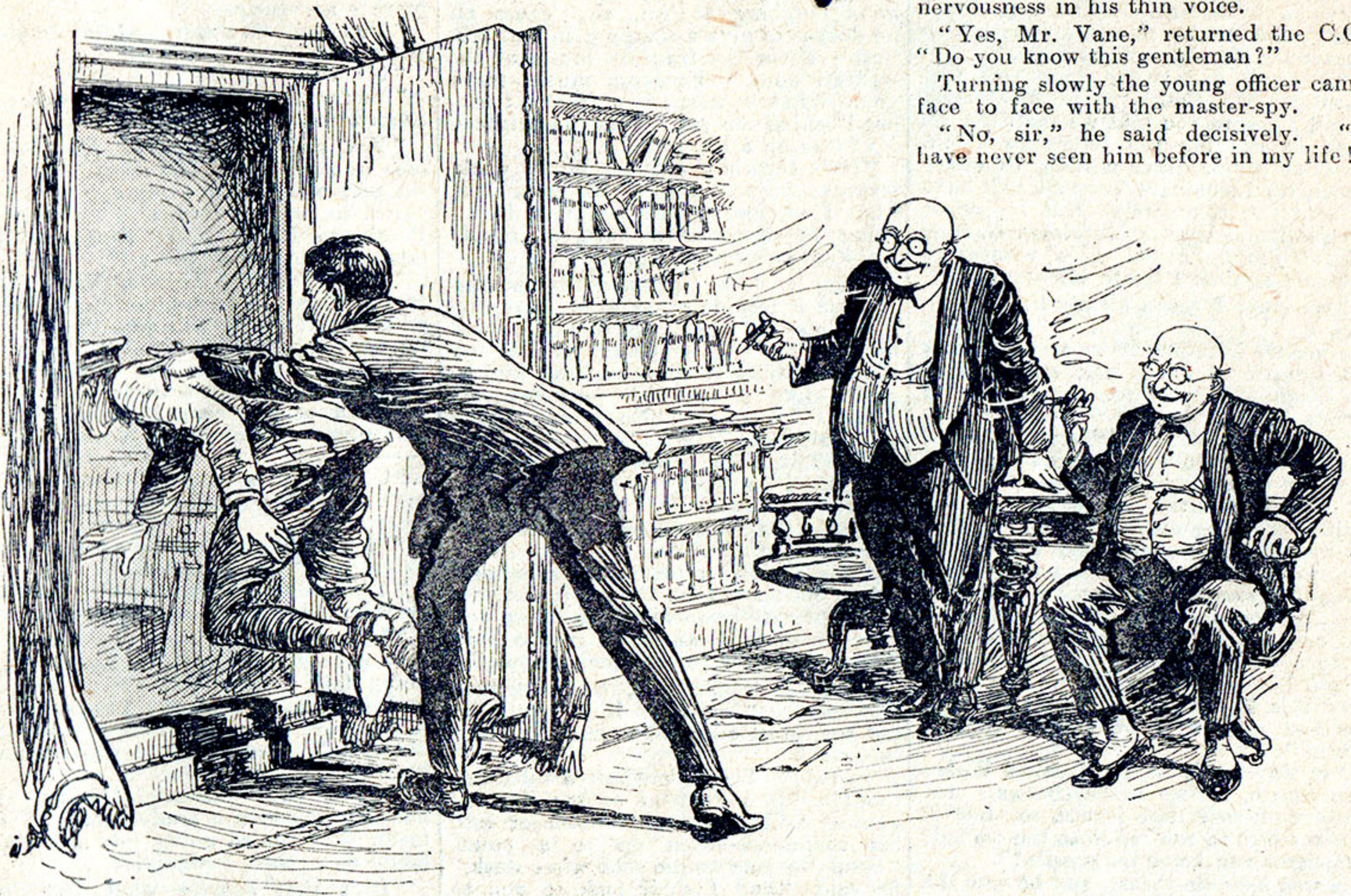
COLONEL MASTERSON gave a sharp order, and within a matter of seconds the regimental sergeant-major reappeared with Second-Lieutenant Vane.

"You sent for me, sir?" asked the yellow-haired subaltern. And there was not the slightest trace of guilt or nervousness in his thin voice.

"Yes, Mr. Vane," returned the C.O. "Do you know this gentleman?"

Turning slowly the young officer came face to face with the master-spy.

"No, sir," he said decisively. "I have never seen him before in my life!"



SHOVED INTO THE SAFE!

The parrot-faced professors grinned as Mervyn Vane, anxious to see inside the massive steel safe, was sent headlong into the interior by a hefty push from Wykeham Smith.

his way, told the servant to show him into my dining-hall. My caller was Private Masters. He opened the conversation by saying that we had met before, but I was perfectly certain that he was a complete stranger to me. Then he positively startled me by declaring that on one occasion we had struggled and fought on the heath; and I, thinking I was dealing with a madman, nodded and told him to go on. Well, he went one better after that, saying that he had an artificial arm of mine—a limb that had come unfixed in our struggle on the heath! That amazing statement convinced me that I was in the presence of a lunatic, so I determined to humour him.

"He then started to talk about your new aeroplane—no; it was an airship; I remember now—saying that I could have a certain photograph and camera for a thousand pounds! Still thinking to humour him, I asked him what he

Needed to say, I gave a great deal of thought to the matter, and at breakfast-time I came to the conclusion that it was my duty to report to the authorities. And here I am!"

Colonel Masterson nodded.

"Have you at any time lost an artificial arm, Mr. Smith?" he asked.

Smith showed his strong, white teeth in a smile.

"I have never possessed an artificial limb in my life, colonel," he said. "I wouldn't be bothered with the thing! There's a colossal, fantastic mistake somewhere—"

"What about Mervyn Vane?" demanded Jack fiercely. "I suppose you will say that you don't know him?"

"Vane?" queried the smiling spy. He looked from Jack to Colonel Masterson; shrugged his broad shoulders. "What does he mean?" he asked, a pitying note in his mellow voice.

"Lieutenant Vane is one of my junior

"That's a lie!" cried Jack, hoarse with anger and indignation. "You played cards together one night—"

"Be quiet!" growled the R.S.M., his dark eyes goggling in unpleasant fashion.

A light laugh broke from Mervyn Vane.

"Masters is making a genuine mistake, sir," he said, turning to Colonel Masterson, "for he is thinking of a certain occasion when I was officer of the guard. A stranger, who had lost his way in the mist, came to my hut and asked me if I could give him a cigarette, and in the end we had a long chat and a few hands of piquet."

"And had this stranger only one arm?"

"Yes, sir," answered Vane. "But this is not the gentleman."

He lied brazenly, convincingly, without the flicker of an eyelid.

THE BOYS' REALM.—No. 75.

"Thank goodness that point is cleared up!" smiled Mr. Wykeham Smith. "For now I shall be able to breathe again. Incidentally, sir," he ran on, "what Mr. Vane has told us proves conclusively that there is another one-armed individual in the neighbourhood. From what one can gather he appears to be a dangerous customer, and he is undoubtedly the fellow with whom Masters fought on the moor. The mystery that has baffled us seems to hinge upon a case of mistaken identity."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Mr. Smith," said Colonel Masterson, with a change of tone. "And I apologise if my manner seemed somewhat brusque and suspicious a little while ago."

The smiling master-spy waved the words away with a charming gesture.

"Your task was most difficult, colonel," he declared. "And you have been courtesy itself. As to this other one-armed individual, I shan't be happy until he is under lock and key, for I don't wish to be mixed up with this unsavoury, foreign spy business."

"I quite understand how you feel about it, Mr. Smith," said Masterson. "And I assure you that we shall lose no time in running the fellow to earth. You, of course, have nothing to worry about, for Lieutenant Vane's words have cleared you completely. But I suppose we shall find you at Starkleigh Grange should you be called as a witness in the case against Private Masters?"

"Oh, yes; I spend all my time at the Grange!" smiled Smith. "I suppose the matter is serious?" he asked, with a side glance at Jack, who appeared to be stunned by the unexpected turn of events.

"Most serious," declared Colonel Masterson, the old steely note creeping into his voice. "For I know of no act so dastardly as the one of which he is guilty. Getting on the track of a spy, he had the chance of doing a real service to his country, yet, instead of seizing the chance like a decent British soldier, he thought only of personal gain. He asked for a thousand pounds as a price of his treachery. He was willing to sell his country's secret for red gold. And this is a man who comes of good stock—a man who went to a famous school."

"Is that really so, sir?" asked Wykeham Smith, lifting his eyebrows. He knew full well that it was so, but it pleased him to rub salt into the wound. "Perhaps you know his people?"

It was a subtle thrust, and he saw the granite-faced martinet wince.

"Sergeant-major," said Masterson, ignoring the question, "take the prisoner back to the guard-room, and keep him under close arrest."

"Very good, sir!"

Barking his words of command the R.S.M. made the room echo as he marched prisoner and escort away to a staccato "Lep, right—lep, right!" And Colonel Masterson, standing by the table, remained tight-lipped and statue-like long after the door had closed behind the party.

"This is a bad business, sir," said Captain Nash, breaking the silence.

"Eh—what?" The C.O. started almost violently; pulled himself together. "Yes, a very bad business!" he snapped, with a return of his usual testy manner.

"I look upon it as a tragedy, my dear colonel," said Mr. Wykeham Smith emotionally. "For this Masters is no more than a boy."

"He is a traitor, sir!" rasped Colonel Masterson, his grey eyes flashing.

"But he's somebody's son!"

A bitter little smile flitted across the

martinet's hard countenance, but he said never a word.

Mervyn Vane's Mission.

"SERGEANT-MAJOR!"

"Sir!"

"Who is the biggest idiot in 'C' Company?"

"Bunting, sir, of Ten Platoon!"

"Quite!" Second-Lieutenant Vane nodded his sleek head, and caressed the few yellow hairs that sprouted upon his narrow upper-lip. "In my opinion 'Baby' Bunting is the world's prize ass—bar none!"

"You're right, sir," agreed Sergeant-Major Blackstaffe, with a toothy grin. "D'you know, sir, that 'e spends his spare time reading poetry when other fellows are 'aving a sing-song or a 'and of cards? He's real potty about poems, and you'll often find him deep in 'An Ode to a Kipper's Eyebrows,' or something mushy like that. And it's no good laughing at 'im, sir, 'cause all he does is to give a sloppy grin and talk limply about the fragrant music of the written word. Fragrant music, mark you. What 'e wants is a fragrant fish-head behind the ear. That 'ud brighten his ideas up a bit, sir."

"He's certainly a queer bit of work, sergeant-major," smiled the subaltern, "but I suppose there's no harm in his being of a romantic turn of mind! Anyway, he's quite harmless!"

"You bet 'e is," grinned Blackstaffe; "'cause it wouldn't pay him to be anything else! He's just like a blessed hermit—'im and 'is poetry books—and if anyone tries to chum up with him he smiles like a love-sick porpoise and simpers 'Yes,' or 'No'; and that's about all there is to it!"

"Well, well, I suppose he's happy," murmured Vane tolerantly.

"That's right, sir," nodded Blackstaffe; "silly but 'appy! Were you wanting him, sir?"

"Yes, major," returned the subaltern. "As a matter of fact, I'm going out on a bit of private business this evening, and I want to take an orderly who isn't likely to chatter to the other fellows."

"Bunting won't talk, sir," declared Blackstaffe, "specially if you tell 'im not to. Most obedient animal, is Bunting, sir!"

"Good!" The yellow-haired subaltern thought for a moment or so; decided against taking the sergeant-major into his confidence—even up to a point. "Send Bunting to me soon after dusk," he said, "and I shall look to you to make things right with the tent corporal if we're not back by 'Lights Out!' And there's no need to broadcast the fact that I have gone out or that Bunting is with me."

"Very good, sir; I understand, sir," Sergeant-Major Blackstaffe creased his bucolic countenance into a crafty grin. "You know that I am always ready to do you a good turn, sir," he said meaningly.

"Yes, I know that, major," nodded the subaltern. "I have not forgotten your promise. Some day, perhaps—"

"Very well, sir!"

"I wonder how much that red-nosed rotter knows or suspects," mused Second-Lieutenant Vane, as he strode away from the company orderly-room. "I wouldn't trust him no farther than I could see him, but he may prove useful in the long run!"

Sergeant-Major Blackstaffe, meanwhile, was gazing reflectively out of the orderly-room window.

"What's the mustard-coloured pup up to this time?" he asked himself. "There's some funny business going on somewhere, and I'm going to find out

what it is before I'm much older, by Henry!"

The usual mist was creeping up over the moor when Vane and Private Bunting skirted the camp and set out in the direction of Bleakstowe, and no word was said until the township of tents was left well in the rear. Then it was the subaltern broke the silence, and in making a commonplace remark about the weather he took the opportunity of studying his companion's bovine countenance. Private "Baby" Bunting was a well-fed, chubby-faced young man with a vacant expression and clear blue eyes, and there was something about him which suggested child-like innocence of a most pronounced type.

"A born dreamer," was Mervyn Vane's contemptuous summing up, "and a bit of a fool as well!" They carried on for another half a mile, then: "Do you know this part of the country, Bunting?" asked the subaltern.

"Er—no, sir, I don't," stammered the private nervously.

"You don't do much rambling in your spare time?"

"No, sir."

"You prefer reading, perhaps; poetry, and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes, sir," said Bunting, his chubby face lighting up. "The magic words of the poet wing me to every corner of the earth, sir, so that I am able to flit from Persia to Egypt, from Egypt to the temples of Ancient Greece!"

"Quite!" agreed Mervyn Vane; and to himself: "The fat ass ought to be in a home! Still, he's just the 'mug' for my purpose!"

"Are you fond of the Muse, sir?" asked Bunting, after a while.

"Fond of the mews?" asked Vane, frowning. "Why the blazes should I—"

"Oh, I don't mean stables, sir," broke in Bunting, in a shocked voice. "I mean—"

"Shut up!" snapped the subaltern impatiently. "You're a fool!"

"Y-yes, sir," murmured Bunting meekly; and retired into his shell.

"Look here, Bunting," said Vane, as they neared Starkleigh Grange, "I am going into a certain house on private and important business, business that has nothing whatever to do with anyone but myself. Got that into your wooden head?"

"Y-yes, sir," answered the private, nodding in a vacant kind of way. "You mean that you're going into a certain house on private business?"

"Isn't that exactly what I've just said?" snapped Vane, glaring into his companion's china-blue eyes. "What I'm trying to impress upon you is the fact that I don't wish you to mention to-night's business to a soul! Understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Bunting brightly. "I assume that you do not wish me to mention the matter when I get back to the camp?"

"Exactly!"

"Have no fear, sir," said Bunting, with a touch of dignity; "I would not dream of discussing a gentleman's private affairs with a lot of common soldiers!"

"Good!" grinned Mervyn Vane. "Now listen to orders, and see that you obey them to the letter!"

It was a cloudless night, with a bright moon bathing the moor in mellow radiance, and Starkleigh Grange looked almost beautiful as it loomed up through the thin curtain of white mist.

"This is our destination," said Mervyn Vane, as they passed along the gravel drive and approached the grey-stone mansion; "but you're not coming inside! Your job is to stand right in

the middle of the path, so that anyone looking out of the big window on the ground floor cannot fail to see you. You must keep full in the moonlight, and don't forget to stamp about a bit if the curtains are pulled aside and somebody looks out. Are those orders quite clear, or would you like me to gargle them for you?"

The gentle sarcasm was completely lost upon the poetic private.

"I understand perfectly, sir," he declared, taking up his position and looking towards the silent mansion. "Indeed, sir, one might almost suppose that it is your intention to prove to your host that you are not unaccompanied upon this nocturnal mission! I presume, sir, that I am an accessory in some kind of a practical joke?"

"Boy, you've said a mouthful!" grinned Vane, giving his companion a hearty slap upon the shoulder. Then his playful mood changed, and there was a threat in his tone, and he glared into the private's china-blue eyes. "I don't suppose I shall be back under the hour," he said, "but desert your post for a second and I'll burn all your poetry books in the incinerator!"

"Oh, sir!" cried Bunting, aghast; and his chubby countenance became a tragic mask of horror in the white light of the moon.

Trapped!

MERVYN VANE looked very pleased with himself as he passed beneath the frowning portico of Starkleigh Grange and tugged at the old-fashioned bell-rope. A faint clanging sound came from within, and a few seconds later the massive door was opened by Karl, the hunchback janitor.

"Been to sleep?" snapped the subaltern, with a change of manner.

"No, master!"

"Then why keep me waiting about on the doorstep, you ugly toad?" demanded Vane, glaring down into the bearded countenance. "Get a move on next time I call or I'll cut you to ribbons! Where's Smith?"

"Master is in the library!"

Vane nodded shortly and set off along the oak-panelled hall, but he had not taken more than three or four steps before the hunchback gripped him by the arm.

"I will find out if master will see you—"

"You'll mind your own confounded business!" snarled the subaltern, swinging round and sending the hunchback reeling with a vicious punch between the eyes. "You'll take orders from me in future, you rat, and so will two or three other people I could mention! Understand?"

"Y-yes, master!" whimpered Karl, nodding his enormous head.

Vane appeared to be ripe for trouble as he strode away, and there was an ugly glitter in his pale eyes as he flung open the door of the library and strode into the comfortable, book-lined apartment. Three persons were seated round the big, open fireplace, and three heads turned simultaneously as the door was thrust open with such scant ceremony.

Mr. Wykeham Smith muttered something in a foreign tongue, and he looked a terrible figure of cold fury as he stood upright and fixed the yellow-haired subaltern with a venomous glare.

"How dare you intrude in this manner!" he demanded, husky with passion. "How dare you, I say!"

"How dare I?" echoed Mervyn Vane, caressing his wisp of moustache. "Oh, I intend to dare quite a lot in future, my dear Smith!"

Professor Loder and Captain Steele exchanged a swift glance; Wykeham Smith stood statue-like, looking deep into the young man's pale eyes.

"So?" murmured the master of Starkleigh Grange, lifting his eyebrows.

"Just so!" mocked Mervyn Vane. "Oh, you can't put the wind up me with that sinister pose, Smith; the day when you could scare me stiff is past! From this moment, my friend, we are equals, and there will be occasions when I shall call the tune! Do I make myself quite clear?"

Wykeham Smith nodded — slowly, thoughtfully.

"Yes, you make yourself quite clear, Mr. Vane," he said, with a pleasant smile, "crystal clear!" He paused for a moment, studying his visitor. Then:

"How much do you want, my young friend?" he asked, his tone and manner paternal.

"Oh, a thousand will do," came the drawing answer.

Wykeham Smith nodded slowly, but bestowed no sign of surprise.

"A thousand pounds is a lot of money," he remarked quietly.

"I know it is," grinned Mervyn Vane. "That's why I'm asking for it!"

"And what if I tell you to whistle for that sum?" asked Wykeham Smith, still in that quiet voice. "What if I refuse to be bled and black-mailed by an officer and a gentleman? What will happen if I take you by the scruff of the neck and throw you through that window?"

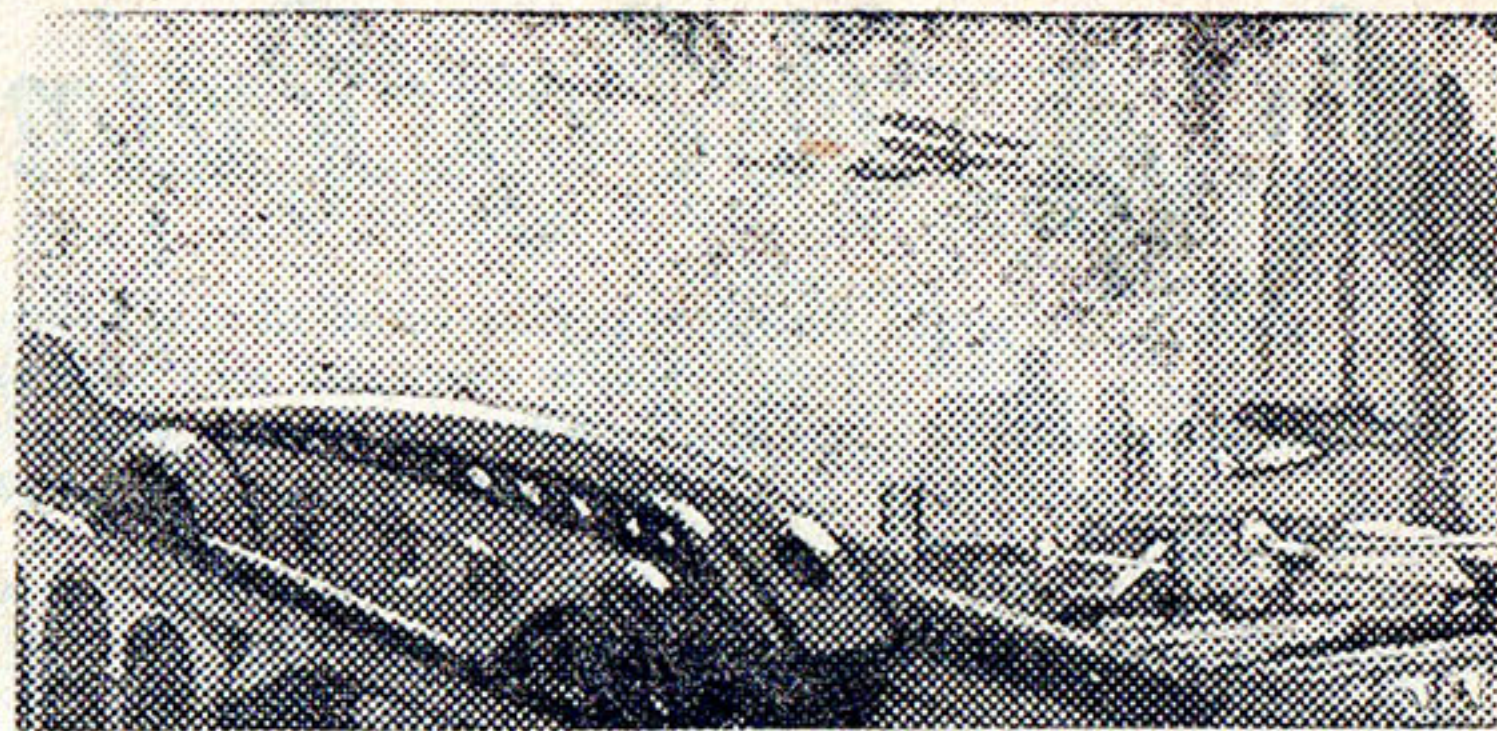
Second-Lieutenant Vane shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"Ask yourself, my dear fellow," he drawled, with elaborate nonchalance.

"You mean that you will turn informer, my dear friend?"

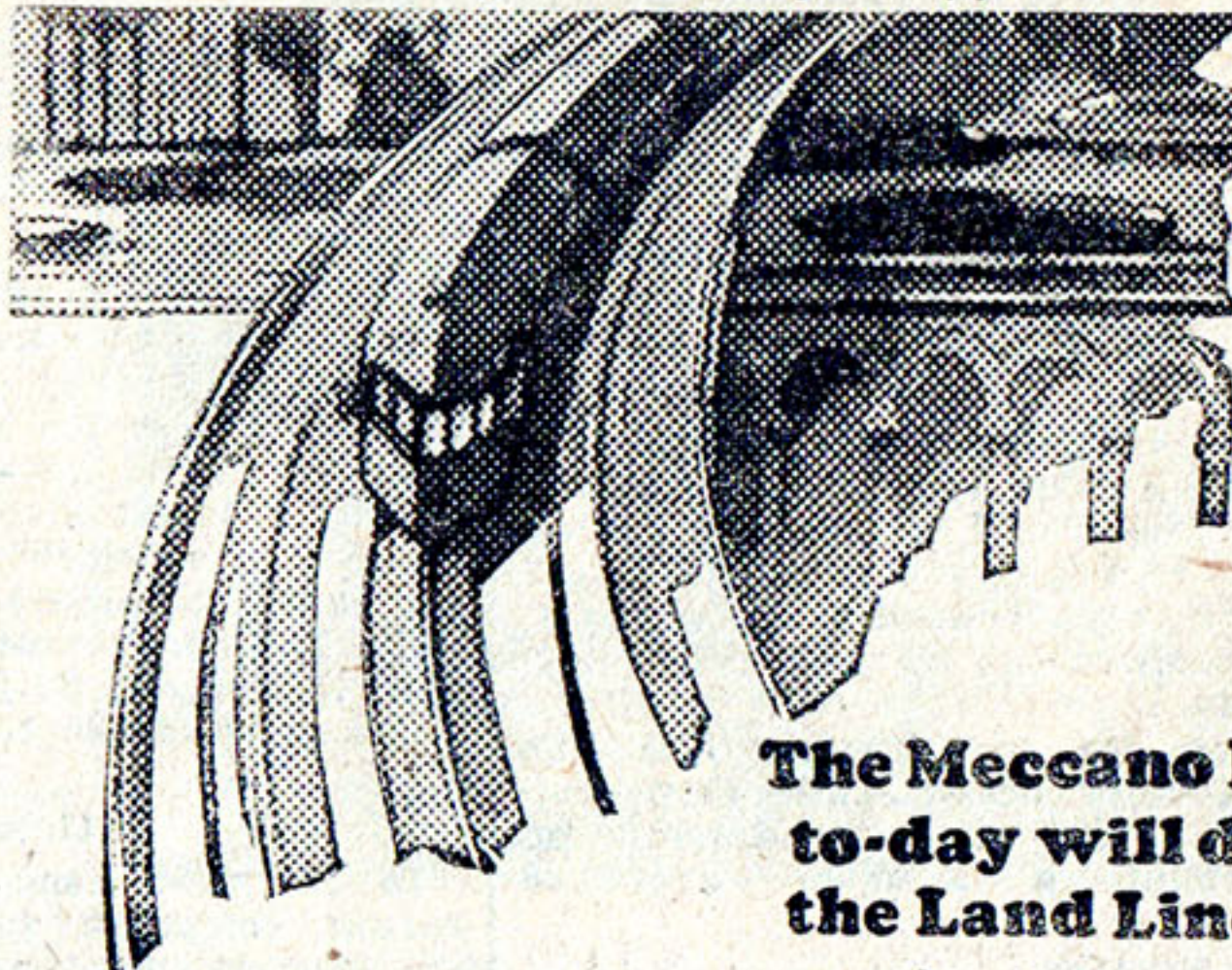
It was the soft, silky voice of Professor Emil Loder that put the question.

(Continued on page 27.)



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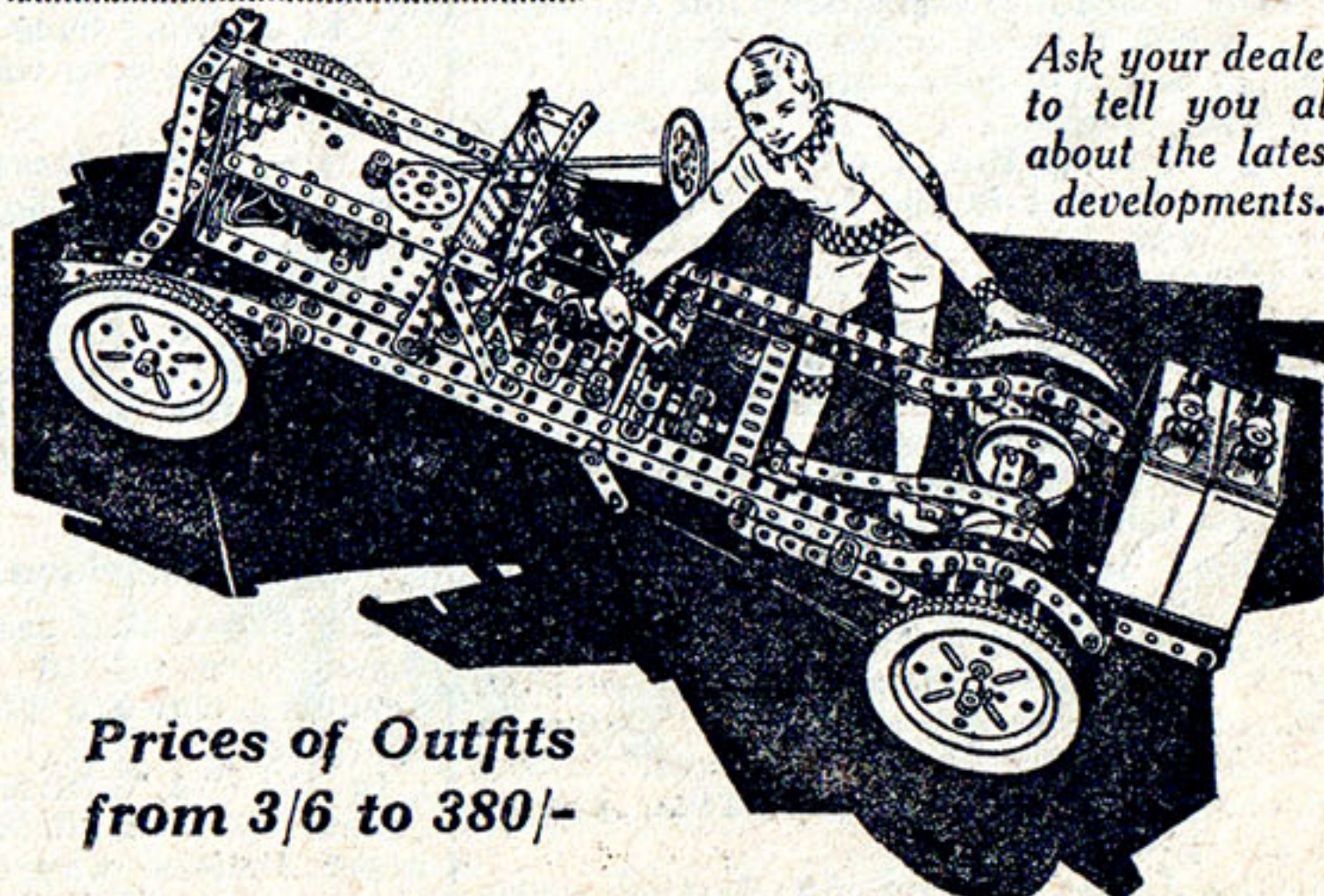
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GREETINGS!

Unfortunately, owing to pressure of space, I wasn't able to wish the many members of the League greetings in the Christmas Number. However, I now take this opportunity of extending most hearty greetings to all section secretaries, officials, and players connected with the many sections of the **BOYS' REALM Football League.**—SPORTS EDITOR.

Players Wanted.

It is not very often that I hear from a reader to the effect that he is forming a club. It is usually the other way about—the club has been formed and want to join this League.

However, an exception to the general rule is contained in a letter which I have received from Mr. R. Mulholland, 10, Gayfield Street, Glasgow, C.4, who is very keen on forming a club for lads of ages between 16 and 18 years, and who come from the Maryhill and Springburn districts.

So if there are any Glasgow lads who would like further details, will they communicate with him at the address given above, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

Willenhall Secretary Resigns.

I am sorry to state that Mr. J. Leek, who so ably managed the affairs of the Willenhall Section last season, has given up these duties and gone in for a more active part of the game, having qualified as a referee. I feel sure that all clubs who had anything to do with him will wish him success in his new venture. In a future issue I hope to be able to tell you his successor.

International as Vice-President.

I hinted a week or two back that there was the possibility of my being able to give you some interesting news regarding the Blackburn Section. This I am now able to do, and I give below the names of the gentlemen who are undertaking various duties in connection with this section.

They are: Mr. J. T. Cherry, President; Messrs. Bleasdale and H. Healless, Vice-Presidents; Mr. J. J. Grogan, Chairman; Mr. G. Crawshaw, Registration Secretary; Mr. R. Isherwood, Referees' Secretary; and Mr. T. Donald, Treasurer.

Probably the best known of these is Mr. H. Healless, who is none other than the famous International left half-back of Blackburn Rovers.

"Saints'" Splendid Sides.

As for Blackburn's activities on the field, there is not a great change in League positions since I last mentioned them here.

In both divisions the St. Bartholomew's lads are having things all their own way, and are following in the footsteps of Milton Rovers, who set up such a splendid record last season.

In the Senior Division, the "Saints" have collected 13 points for 7 games, and have the splendid average of 42 goals against 11. Close upon their heels come Queen's Park Rangers, a point behind, and Milton Rovers 2 points behind. Milton are not quite so convincing this season, and recently had to struggle very hard on their own ground to gain the odd goal verdict against Northrop Sports. The latter club, although without a win to their credit at present, ought to do better as the season advances. These remarks also apply to Darwen Villa, who so far are pointless.

In the Junlor Division, St. Bartholomew's Reserves had the fright of their lives recently when East End Juniors ran them to a draw of 5 goals all on their own ground. Griffin Celtic are close upon the "Saints"

THE BOYS' REALM.—No. 75.

heels, and I foresee a grim struggle between these two clubs before the season ends. It is pleasing to know that Albion Rovers have registered their first win, and it is to be hoped that this will spur them on to greater efforts.

By the way, many clubs in this section would like the chance of playing friendly matches with clubs in other Lancashire sections.

Interested clubs should communicate with Mr. R. W. Cunliffe, 58, Oswald Street, Blackburn, in the first place.

Clubs Wanted.

The names and addresses of two readers appear below who want to join a club, but unfortunately they live in places where there is no section of this League. This, however, should not be a drawback to their joining a junior club, so should this catch the eyes of enterprising secretaries, will they get in touch with them? They are W. E. Hall, 2, Church Cottages, Church Alkham, near Dover, and F. Roe, 65, Princes Street, Northam, Southampton.

Unbeaten.

In the East London Section, which this season comprises fourteen clubs, matters are progressing favourably, and I am pleased to say that Mr. L. H. Clarke, who was responsible for the formation of this section, has once again joined the executive committee. This time he is acting as assistant secretary, as it has been found that the work of this section is far too much for Mr. Edmonson. I feel sure that all clubs will welcome Mr. Clarke back again.

At the present moment, Hazeldene United and Reading are the only unbeaten sides in this competition, the former having a lead of one point for the same number of games played. Chalgrove, last season's champions, come next in the table with the same number of points as Reading, but they, although being but one point behind the leaders, have played one more game. After these three, there is a decided drop in the matter of points gained by other clubs, Canrobert, St. Michael's, Belle, and Cayley each claiming about fifty per cent of the possible points.

Honerton Albion, Foreland, Weymouth Argyle, Bijou, Brownlow, Rednoc, and Mansfield are the other clubs who appear in the League table in the order named. Mansfield are the only club who have yet to record a win, but I hope the time is not far distant when both this club and Rednoc are able to give a better account of themselves.

To Chalgrove, with 12 goals against Mansfield, and Reading, with 10 goals against Bijou, lies the honour of being hefty scorers. So far, Reading have the best record, having scored 40 goals to their opponents' 10.

Temporary Secretary.

The Walworth Section secretary is unfortunately indisposed at the moment—in fact, he is seriously ill—and a temporary secretary in Mr. W. G. Rose, 22, Alsace Street, Walworth, S.E.17, has been appointed.

I feel sure that all clubs in this section will wish Mr. Redding a complete and speedy recovery.

Sunderland Settle Down.

The Sunderland Section, with its two divisions, have settled down nicely, and the League games are producing some very fine sport.

In the "A" Division, there is little to choose between Silksworth Rovers and Silksworth Juniors, who occupy first and second places respectively. These are followed by Ryhope Celtic, St. Andrews, Southwick Rovers, Hollyear Juniors, and Toll Bar in the order named. Mowbray are the only side in this division who have yet to register a point.

Thompson M.H. Scouts and Hendon Villa are also pointless so far in the "B" Division. In this division Prospect Juniors hold pride of place, having won six of the seven games yet played, and they are followed by D'Arcy Rovers, which team, if I remember rightly, did very well last season. Havelock Star have two games in hand of the leaders, and if they win these they will be level with Prospect on points.

Belfast News.

The Belfast Section have been very quiet for a long while, but I have received news from them at last.

In Section "A," there is a very lively situation, for Heatherview, Wilton, Yorkville, and Earlose have little, if anything, to choose between each other. It is true that the two first-named have two more points than the others, but they have also played one more game. Unfortunately, West End Second Team, Victoria, and Myrtlefield have withdrawn since the playing season commenced, and this robs this section of some of its interest; but Mr. Scott is not without hopes of other clubs joining to take their places.

In Section "C," Crumlin Star have established a long lead on points over their nearest rivals—Hearts—there being as many as seven points between them. Queen's Island Wanderers are running the Hearts very close, and have two games in hand with but one point to make up.

Dunmurry, Old Lodge United, Snugville, North End, and Prospect are the other clubs, and appear in the table in the order named.

In Section "D," the only pointless club is Parkview United. Hillcrest are leading the field, having dropped but one point in seven games. Next, in order, come Highfield Juniors, B.R. Coy, Danubeville, Bangor United, Granby, Crimea Thistle, Franklin, and Parkview.

New Sections.

I understand that the Ebbw Vale Section has ceased to function owing to the death of Mr. T. H. King, the late secretary. I feel sure that all clubs will be very sorry to hear this. However, it will interest clubs near Tredegar to know that Mr. C. J. Wareing, 7, The Crescent, Ashvale, Nantybwehm, near Tredegar, is forming a new section, and inquiries will be welcomed by Mr. Wareing.

There is a distinct possibility of a new section springing up in Derby, so will any interested clubs please get in touch with Mr. A. Porter, 33, Crompton Street, Derby.

Close Rivals.

There is a very interesting position in the Jump Section at present, and if the three clubs who are concerned keep up their form, they should provide a thrilling finish at the end of the season.

Hoyland Queen's and Jump Red Lion have each played seven games, winning six and losing the other. Their goal averages are 24 against nine and 23 against 9 respectively.

Although they claim the same number of points, Darfield Victorias have played and lost two more games than each of the above-named, and, curiously enough, they have lost the last three games in succession.

Wombwell United, who made a very indifferent start, have strengthened their side to such an extent that much is now expected of them.

Platts Common, of this section, are the only club who have yet to taste the sweets of victory.

Sports Editor.

THE SCHOOLBOY RANKER!

(Continued from page 25.)

"That's what it amounts to," returned Vane, scowling as he met the old gentleman's benevolent smile. "You people went out of your way to compromise me—to get me into your clutches—and now you've got to pay for having been a shade too clever! I'm hard up at the moment, desperately in need of ready cash, and unless you cough up a nimble thousand I shall go straight to old Masterson and tell him everything!"

"And what of you, Mr. Vane?" asked Wykeham Smith, his air one of polite interest. "Have you considered your own position in this matter?"

"You bet I have," returned the subaltern, with a knowing leer. "You don't think I'd be such a fool as to put my own head in a noose, do you? I've given a great deal of thought to this informer business, my dear Smith, and I've got my story cut-and-dried—hall-marked on every link! I shall say that I suspected you from the very first and that I played up to you in order to make you give yourself away! It will be the old, old wheeze of giving the other fellow enough rope with which to make himself a neck-tie! I assure you that there are no flies on little Mervyn, gentlemen!"

"This, my dear Wykeham," purred Professor Loder, "is what comes of underrating one's subordinates!"

"Thought I was a 'mug,' did you?" grinned Vane, a trifle flushed.

"We thought," confessed Emil Loder, "that you were just a simpleton, the ordinary brainless type of young British officer, but now we know that you are an exceedingly astute young man, with an intellectual cunning which amounts to positive genius! I take my hat off to a master-mind, Mr. Vane!"

Vane flushed and grinned, for he failed to detect the note of irony in the softly-spoken words.

"I certainly know how many beans make five," he bragged.

"No one doubts that, Mr. Vane," said Wykeham Smith, "but haven't you overlooked just one thing?"

"What's that?"

"You said just now that in the event of my refusing to give you a thousand pounds you would go straight to Colonel Masterson and tell him everything."

"Well?"

"What will be your first step?"

"When I leave here—"

"Exactly!" There was a wealth of sinister meaning in the mellow voice. "You seem to forget that the four walls of Starkleigh Grange separate you and the outer world—the world of Colonel Masterson and the Army authorities! Incidentally, I would mention that every door in the house is barred and bolted, including the door of this very room! You see, Mr. Vane, Karl had already received his instructions when you entered the place!"

Mervyn Vane grinned.

"You're suggesting that I'm a prisoner?"

"You are a prisoner!" snapped Wykeham Smith, badly nettled.

"Then go across to the window and look down the drive," said the subaltern. "You will see a man standing

there, a soldier who has received explicit orders, and should I fail to appear within a certain time he will know exactly what to do! And your own intelligence will tell you that he's not alone on this job!"

There was an expression of grudging admiration in Wykeham Smith's dark eyes as he turned away from the window and looked from Captain Steele to the bird-faced professor.

"We pay," he announced laconically.

"Youthful genius gets its just reward," murmured Emil Loder.

Striding to the far end of the room, Wykeham Smith pulled some heavy plush curtains aside and revealed a massive steel door. Stooping, he manipulated a dial and certain levers, and no word was said as the door swung open slowly, smoothly, upon its hinges. The safe was as big as a box-room, and Vane, who had followed close upon Wykeham Smith's heel, took a step forward and peered into its shadowy interior.

"I'll bet that safe could tell a fine tale, Smith!" he said, his pale eyes bright with avarice as he stared at the stacks of banknotes on the middle shelf.

"Yes, and there's another tale to be added to its repertoire!" answered the master of Starkleigh Grange.

Then swiftly and without warning he swung his arm and sent the subaltern flying headlong into the interior of the safe.

Clang!

The door closed, and Second-Lieutenant Vane was a prisoner!

(Vane's in a sorry plight. What will "Baby" Bunting do when he fails to appear again? Don't miss next week's ripping instalment. Order your REALM without delay.)

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