

Extra-Special Christmas Number!

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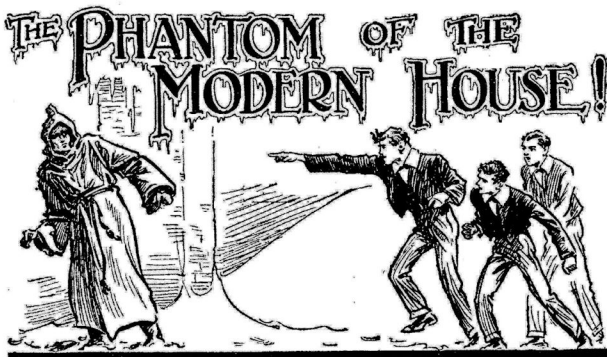
THE
PHANTOM
OF THE
MODERN
HOUSE !





Dawn of Christmas Day found the rebels all asleep in the dining-room—on the tables, under the tables, on chairs and on the floor.

Christmas with the Rebels of St. Frank's!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

In spite of the barring-out, the rebels celebrate Christmas in the usual way. And an exciting time they have, too, what with a phantom monk, mysterious ghostly music, and the mournful tolling of a death-bell! In fact, the majority of the juniors get the wind up properly, and Nipper and the other "officers" have a difficult task to keep them in order. You'll thoroughly enjoy this grand Christmas yarn, boys—and look out for a big surprise at the end.—Ed.

CHAPTER I.

Christmas Eve!

"SNOWING hard!" said Bob Christine, of the Fourth, as Nipper and Haudforth approached the end window of the Modern House at St. Frank's.

"So I've noticed," said Nipper briskly. "Looks like being a regular old-fashioned Christmas. Anything to report here?"

"Nothing," replied Bob Christine. "My dear chap, what did you expect? It's Christmas Eve, and there's not one chance in a thousand that we shall be interfered with. If you ask me, General Carfax has given us up as a bad job."

Charlie Talmadge, who had been "on guard" with Christine, nodded.

"That's what I think, too," he agreed. "In fact, there's no earthly reason why we

should keep watch like this. Why not cut it out until after Christmas?"

Nipper made no reply for a moment. He and the other three juniors stood looking out of the window across the snowy, old Triangle. It was late evening, and somewhere above the snow-laden clouds the moon was shining. There was no actual darkness, but a faint, diffused moon-glow.

The Ancient House could be plainly seen on the other side of the open space, and not a light gleamed in any window. The whole of St. Frank's, with the solitary exception of the Modern House, was dark and quiet.

But the Modern House glowed with scores of friendly lights, and hummed with talk and laughter. For the St. Frank's rebels were in full possession, and they were taking their Christmas holidays in the lightest of spirits.

It mattered little that they were virtually prisoners. This fact scarcely worried them.

The Remove and the Fourth and the Third Forms—to a man—had pledged themselves to carry on. They were holding out against all opposition. The most spectacular barring-out that St. Frank's had ever known was still going strong—right through the Christmas holidays.

The Modern House was like an armed fortress.

Every door and every window was barricaded. Every inch of the surrounding ground was watched day and night by the guards. Even now, on Christmas Eve, with snow falling thickly, the rebel guards were at their posts.

"Sorry, you fellows, but we've got to stick it," said Nipper. "We mustn't relax our vigilance for a single hour—Christmas or no Christmas. As it is, we've withdrawn the guards from the Tower, so it is imperative that the window look-outs should be maintained. General Carfax is a wily sort of chap, and we can't be too careful."

"Oh, rats!" said Handforth bluntly. "I don't often agree with these Fourth Form fatheads, but for once I've got to. There's no need to post any guards while this snow is on the ground."

"What difference does the snow make?" asked Nipper mildly.

"All the difference!" replied Handforth. "If General Carfax tries any of his tricks, and creeps up to the stronghold, we shall be able to see his footprints in the snow. It'll be just the same if he employs a lot of his men—the same as he did the other day, when he tried to collar our food supplies."

"I'm sorry, Handy, old man, but I don't follow your line of reasoning," said Nipper. "It'll be a fat lot of good seeing their footprints, after they've broken in, won't it?"

"You silly ass, there's nobody here to break in!" said Handforth gruffly. "The general has given it up. Why, we haven't seen him for two or three days. He's crept right into his shell, and won't even show himself."

"Yes, we've got him whacked," said Bob Christine complacently. "We know what a cautious chap you are, Nipper, but for once you're overdoing it. Let's forget about this giddy barring-out, and let's enjoy ourselves thoroughly."

But the Remove captain shook his head.

"No, a constant watch must be kept," he declared. "Hang it, it isn't much trouble, is it? There are only four look-out posts, with two fellows at each. And as we all take it in turns, the duty is child's play."

The others made no reply. For, to tell the truth, they realised that Nipper was right. There were only four windows that needed constant watching, and the system of sentry duty was now so machine-like that there was no real need to upset the organisation.

"Oh, well, perhaps you're right, Nipper," said Bob Christine. "I'm game to do my share, anyhow. Do you really think the general will make another move?"

"We can't tell," said Nipper thoughtfully. "He may let things slide until after Boxing Day. But I doubt it."

Edward Oswald Handforth laughed mockingly.

"Let him try to get us out!" he said, in an aggressive voice. "By George! Just let him try! He'll find that we're ready for him!"

"Exactly!" said Nipper, nodding. "But should we be ready if we neglected our sentry duty?"

"Well, perhaps not," admitted Handforth. "Not that there's any fear of an attack. The general has been quiet for days now, and we've hardly seen a sign of him."

"All the more reason to take every precaution, when you come to think of it," said Bob Christine. "It might be the calm before the storm."

"I only wish he would make some sort of move," said Handforth. "Then we should get some excitement. Let's hope he starts a battle, or something, to-morrow—on Christmas Day. By George! That would be ripping, wouldn't it?"

"I'm not so sure," grinned Nipper. "We want to enjoy ourselves thoroughly—in the usual old-fashioned Christmas way. Thanks to your pater, Handy, we've got all the necessary grub for a spanking Christmas. And, what's more, we'll have the usual Yuletide revels, too."

"Rather!" said Talmadge, with a chuckle. "We're not going to be dished out of our jollifications!"

And the juniors contentedly discussed the programme that had been outlined for the morrow. Christmas at St. Frank's, within this barricaded school building, was evidently going to be something special!



CHAPTER 2.

Teddy Long on the Prowl :

WHEN Nipper and Handforth went into the big dining hall, they found a noisy crowd there.

To be quite truthful, they had also found a noisy crowd in the Junior Common-room and in the Senior Day-room, and smaller crowds—but just as noisy—in all the studies.

The Remove and the Fourth and the Third had distributed themselves evenly over the living quarters of the Modern House. Such fellows as Boots & Co., Christine, Talmadge, Yorke and other Fourth Formers, naturally, used their own old studies. But the Removites had taken possession of the senior studies, and the Third Formers, under the leadership of Willy Handforth, had appropriated any odd apartments that had been left over.

It cannot be denied that the Modern House was packed. Indeed, it was overcrowded.

Not that the juniors regarded this as a disadvantage. The more, the merrier.

The one vital problem at the outset of the barring-out was now no problem at all. Food was plentiful. Not merely makeshift food—but genuine Christmas fare.

Handforth's impulsive father was largely responsible for this happy state of things. Sir Edward had been brought down to St. Frank's by General Carfax and the headmaster, so that he could remove his aggressive son.

But Sir Edward, to the consternation of General Carfax and the Head, had taken sides with the rebels. His support had taken

the concrete form of providing the juniors with ample Christmas supplies. Sir Edward had spent lots of money, it seemed, on supporting his son in this great barring-out. But Sir Edward didn't care. He was a man of impulse—a man of action. And, once convinced that his son was innocent of the accusation brought against him by the headmaster, he was ready to help the rebels all along the line. They were supporting his son—so he should support them!

Handy had been accused of brutally assaulting Mr. Pycraft, the master of the Fourth. Marriott and Merrell, two cads of the Fourth Form, were really responsible, but they had deliberately arranged it so that Handy should get the blame. The headmaster knew nothing of this, however, and he had sentenced Handforth

to a public flogging. Edward Oswald, feeling that he was justified in refusing to take that flogging, had defied Dr. Stafford and, together with Church and McClure, had barricaded himself in Study D.

From that small beginning this present barring-out had started, and now the whole of the Lower School was in revolt!

The fact that Marriott and Merrell were away from the school on special leave—had been for some time now—had complicated matters somewhat, otherwise the juniors would probably have forced them to confess to the Head.

"Oh, here you are, Handy!" sang out

Church, when Handforth and Nipper appeared in the dining hall. "Just a minute, old man. We want you!"

"What for?" asked Handforth. "If there's any argument that needs settling—"

"No, it's not that!" interrupted Church hastily. "We were talking about your pater, and some of the chaps are saying that he'll be down here during the vacation. We said he wouldn't, and we want to know who's right."

Edward Oswald Handforth grinned. "Well, it's no good asking me," he said promptly. "My pater is one of the most erratic chaps on earth! He may be here to-morrow, or he may not! He may be here on Boxing Day—or he may not! There's no telling with my pater. You never know what he's going to do next!"

"Like father, like son!" murmured Reggie Pitt, of the West House.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Handforth frowned.

"Rats!" he said.

"I'm not like that, thank goodness! Everybody knows that I'm level-headed, and that all my actions are guided by reasoned thought—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The juniors fairly yelled at that, for it struck them as being particularly humorous.

"All right, I won't argue," said Pitt mildly. "In any case, I haven't the time. Jack and I have to go off to the end window, to relieve the guards there."

"By jingo, yes!" said Jack Grey, "We're a minute late

glancing at his watch. already!"

They went out, and the other fellows continued their various amusements.

The dining-hall, like most of the other apartments in the Modern House, was gaily decorated. As the juniors had to spend Christmas here, at St. Frank's, they were determined that nothing should be omitted. Holly was everywhere, and there were festoons of highly-coloured carnival decorations, too. The St. Frank's juniors, in short, were determined to enjoy themselves thoroughly.

Barring-out or no barring-out, they meant to have a real Christmas. Outside, it was snowing hard, and there was a genuine Yule-



From your Editor

tide atmosphere. So why shouldn't they enter into the spirit of the thing, and forget, for the moment, that they were rebels?

"Well, I'm off to bed, you chaps!" said Teddy Long, with a yawn.

Nobody took any notice. Not that there was anything unusual in this. It was seldom, indeed, that the juniors *did* take any notice of Teddy Long. The sneak of the Remove was regarded as one of the least important fellows in the entire school. That is, of course, except in his own estimation.

"I'm off to bed!" he repeated in a louder voice, and with a still louder yawn.

"All right—go!" said Fullwood tartly. "Don't talk about it, my lad—but go! We shan't all sob with grief to see the back of you!"

Teddy Long yawned for the third time. "I'm tired!" he said wearily. "Well, good-night, you chaps! Don't trouble to come to bed yet—let me have a chance to get to sleep, for goodness' sake!"

He went out, and if the other juniors had not been otherwise engaged they might have been suspicious of Long's ostentatious yawning.

For, as a matter of fact, Teddy allowed the tiredness to die out of his eyes as soon as he had closed the door behind him. A gleam came into those cunning eyes of his, and he drew a deep breath.

"Good egg!" he muttered. "I've fooled 'em!"

And he crept off towards the kitchens—braving the darkness of that quarter with an unexpected courage.

But then, Teddy's appetite was a big one—and he remembered that the kitchen contained many piles of good things!



CHAPTER 3.

The Thing in the Kitchen!

EDDY LONG'S heart nearly missed a beat as he grasped the handle of the kitchen door. But the handle

turned in his grip, and the door opened noiselessly.

"Thank goodness!" muttered Teddy, with relief. "I thought those beasts had locked it!"

Everything was quiet in the domestic quarters of the building. Supper had been disposed of some time ago, and there was to be no further meal until the morrow. Fatty Little and his army of helpers had cleared everything up, and were with the other juniors, elsewhere.

Teddy Long had the whole domestic quarters to himself.

In a way, he resented the necessity to sneak into the kitchen like this, like a thief in the night.

They were rebels, weren't they? They were all in the same boat—they were all engaged in a free-and-easy barring-out. Then why shouldn't they be able to come to the grub stores, and help themselves as their appetites prompted?

If the barring-out had been run according to Teddy Long's scheme, it would have collapsed long since. As a matter of fact, there was a strict Council of Control, with Nipper, Handforth, Boots, and Pitt prominent on its list.

Some very strict rules and regulations had been drawn up by this Council—rules and regulations that the entire rebel force had to comply with. Without such a controlling body, the rebels would have been a mere rabble, and chaos would have reigned instead of order.

It was the most bitter grievance of General Christopher Carfax that the boys were orderly and well disciplined. The old soldier had come to St. Frank's expecting to find a mere mob of excited schoolboys, ready enough to collapse at the first hint of stern authority.

Instead, the general had found a disciplined little army, with its officers and with its smoothly-running internal control.

By this time the general had come to the conclusion that the rebels were only to be beaten by strategy, and General Carfax considered himself to be a master of strategy. He had given up the idea that violent methods would defeat these determined schoolboys.

For days now, the general had been inactive. He had taken up his quarters in the Ancient House, on the other side of the Triangle, and apparently he was lying low. Nothing had been seen of him for several days, and Nipper, at least, was beginning to get a trifle uneasy. What move was the general planning now?

It was fairly certain that the old soldier had completely abandoned the idea of driving the rebels out of their stronghold by force. Such a method was not dignified—and, indeed, it might do the school a great deal of harm, if the affair got into the newspapers. It would be far better to employ strategy.

Although the majority of the rebels thought little of the general's recent inactivity, Nipper and one or two others were greatly exercised in mind. The very inactivity of the "enemy" was significant. But the rebels were prepared, in any case. They were ready for any emergency.

Teddy Long could not see the necessity for discipline or order. He was vastly indignant because the food supplies were doled out with meticulous care. Teddy saw no reason why every junior should not help himself, just as the fancy took him. It was common knowledge in the Remove that Teddy's brains were just about equivalent to those of a rabbit—and the Remove, at all events, was certainly in a position to know.

A thrill went through Teddy's frame as he felt the kitchen door open slowly under the

pressure of his hand. He crept in noiselessly, and closed the door after him.

It would be idle to say that Teddy was not nervous. It would be paltering with the truth to state that he was not actually shivering in his shoes. He hated the dark—he loathed solitude. But the lure of the Christmas "goodies" was just a little greater than his nervousness. It wouldn't take him long to grab a few things, and then he could bunk. That was his general scheme.

The kitchen was not actually dark. Outside, the snow had ceased to fall, and the moon was now shining out from between a rift in the clouds. A few stray beams came wandering into the kitchen, spreading themselves over the floor, and giving the whole apartment an eerie aspect. The corners were as black as ink, and Teddy avoided looking into them.

"Oh, my hat!" he muttered shakily. "It's enough to give a chap the creeps!"

His little eyes gleamed as he saw a number of well-piled dishes on the central table. He advanced stealthily. His watery eyes were gleaming, and he reached out a fat, grubby hand to one of those inviting dishes on the table.

And then, at that moment, something moved on the other side of the kitchen!

Teddy only saw it out of the corner of his eye, and he wasn't actually sure that he *had* seen it. He came to a sudden halt, every muscle rigid.

It came again!

A movement—a noiseless, mysterious movement of something white. No, not white—but drab. Something indistinct, filmy—vague and intangible!



CHAPTER 4.

The Apparition!

COURAGE had never been Teddy Long's strong point. On the contrary, he was known to be the

biggest funk in the Remove.

Now, at the sight of that mysterious movement on the other side of the kitchen, he stood literally paralysed with fear.

All thought of food had gone. The lure of the Christmas "goodies" no longer held sway. He had forgotten them completely.

In a vague sort of way he knew that he was quite alone. He was separated from all the other juniors by endless dark passages and corridors. Not a sound of them came to him here, far off in the domestic quarters. He was alone, shut up in this kitchen with the uncanny Thing which moved over there in the shadows.

Teddy Long not only held his breath, but his heart almost stopped beating. He tried to tell himself that his imagination had played tricks with him. If he was capable

of any coherent thought—which was doubtful—he tried to convince himself that he had merely seen the shadow of a tiny cloud passing over the face of the moon. Perhaps this had caused some effect in the kitchen.

"Ooooh!"

It was a long, terrified gasp from Teddy, and in that second he knew that his imagination had not been playing tricks with him. For something was moving on the other side of the kitchen. A white thing—as indefinite as it was incredible!

Slowly it moved along, close to the far wall. It was a kind of white shape, with vague, indistinct outlines.

And the most startling feature of this apparition was that it did not actually reach the floor. It moved along as though by supernatural powers.

Teddy Long was fairly terrified.

He wanted to run away. His one desire was to flee—to get as far from this kitchen as possible. Yet such was his terror that he could not move. He seemed to be rooted to the spot, and his limbs were shaking as though with ague.

With a fascinated stare he watched that spectral presence.

It was still moving, still slowly and deliberately passing long the further side of the kitchen. It seemed to Teddy's fevered imagination that the phantom was about five feet in height, although it did not quite reach the floor. It was draped in a sort of flowing robe, and there were trails of the filmy material separating themselves from the main body.

"Oh!" panted Teddy Long, aloud.

It was an unconscious effort on his part. That gasp had come from his throat unbidden. Instantly the apparition stopped, and it seemed to Teddy that the Thing was staring at him, staring with two pale eyes, set at the top of that filmy whiteness.

It was menacing—horrifying!

Then all in a flash the climax came. With a sudden movement, so swift and dramatic that Teddy screamed aloud, the phantom came outwards into the room with a swift leap, and there could be no question that it was coming straight for the terrified junior.

With a wild yell of horror Teddy Long spun round and dashed blindly for the door.

He crashed against it, feeling dazedly for the handle. Somehow he found it, and turned it in his nerveless fingers. The next second the door burst open, and Teddy went flying along the dark passage, screaming at the top of his voice.

He was certain that the spectre was close behind him, chasing him, attempting to touch his shoulder. Yet he dared not look behind him. He could only run—run as he had never ran in all his life before.

"Help—help!" he shrieked despairingly. "Keep it away! Oh, help!"

Down another corridor he plunged, and he could see lights in the distance. He could hear shouts, too, and doors were opening everywhere.

"Here, steady!" came a sharp voice.

"Great Scott! What's the matter with you, Long?"

"Save me!" shrieked Teddy Long sobbingly.

He found himself firmly clutched by Nipper and Tommy Watson. The pair had just been coming along one of the corridors, and they had heard Teddy's screams before any of the others. But there were plenty of juniors now rushing up from all sides.

"Keep it away—keep it away!" panted the frightened junior.

He was shaking so much that Nipper and Watson had some difficulty in holding him still. His face was as pale as chalk, and his eyes were staring with terror.

"Pull yourself together, you young chump!" said Nipper sharply. "There's nothing here—there's nothing to be afraid of!"

"It—it was following me!" gasped Teddy feebly.

"Eh? What was following you?" demanded Handforth, pushing his way through the gathering crowd. "What's the matter here? What's happened to that fat-headed Long?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tommy Watson, with a gulp. "Nipper and I were coming along the passage when we heard him screaming. My hat, he made the most awful noises, too! Something must have frightened him—"

"There's a ghost in the kitchen!" babbled Teddy Long, crouching back and clutching at the juniors. "Don't go down those passages, you chaps! It's in the kitchen, I tell you! A horrible-looking ghost, with two staring eyes, and with hands that clutched out at me like the claws of a skeleton!"

"Rubbish!" said Nipper, with a quick glance round at the startled faces of his companions. "Don't take any notice of this young ass! You know what a funk he is. I don't suppose he's seen anything at all."

"Of course he hasn't!" said Handforth.

"I have—I have!" sobbed Teddy Long. "Oh, keep it away from me—keep it away! There's a ghost there, I tell you—a horrible ghost! Keep it away from me!"

And, still babbling, he fell into a convulsive sobbing. There was no question whatever that he had been badly frightened. Was his imagination solely responsible, or had he actually seen some spectral presence?

That was the question that all the juniors were asking themselves.



CHAPTER 5.

The Investigation Committee:

NIPPER quickly took command of the situation.

A single glance had told him that a good many of the juniors were quite ready to become nervous. There were certainly

many dark corners in the Modern House, and, after all, it was Christmas Eve.

In some peculiar way one's thoughts automatically turned to ghosts and apparitions at this season of the year. And, in a vague kind of way, Nipper seemed to remember that the Modern House had some legend attached to it. He had not reminded any of his companions of this fact, but an incident of this sort would certainly cause somebody to incautiously raise the subject.

"Look here, you fellows, there's no need for anybody to get the wind up," said Nipper steadily. "Better go back to the common-rooms and the studies. You know what a coward Teddy is. I don't believe for a minute that he saw anything unusual."

"I did—I did!" insisted Teddy Long. "A ghost, you know! A great thing, nearly six feet high, with claws and with horrible fangs, and staring eyes—"

"That'll be enough!" interrupted Handforth. "You didn't say anything about the fangs before. Just thought of them, I suppose. What's the idea, you silly young idiot?"

He gave Teddy a shake, and it served to bring the scared junior to himself.

"Don't!" he panted. "You're hurting me, Handforth!"

"I meant to hurt you!" growled Edward Oswald. "You deserve to be hurt! And there's a question I want to ask you, my lad!" he added significantly. "You say you saw this apparition in the kitchen?"

"Yes," whispered Teddy Long.

"Oh! And what were you doing in the kitchen?" demanded Handforth.

"Eh?"

"You heard me!"

"Yes, I—I know, but—but—"

Teddy Long broke off, startled. It hadn't occurred to him that he might be called upon to give an explanation of his presence in the kitchen. He sought for some plausible excuse, but his brain was in no fit condition to invent his usual lies. The delay was fatal.

"All right, don't trouble!" said Handforth contemptuously. "You went to the kitchen to pilfer some of the pastries, eh?"

"I—I didn't!" roared Teddy, in alarm.

"Yes, you did!" said Handforth. "And you're such a beastly funk that you must have seen some shadow or other, and it's put the wind up you. I'll bet you've been gorging yourself on the Christmas cake and the mince-pies and—"

"I haven't touched a thing!" howled Long. "That—that thing appeared before I could even get near the grub— I—I mean— That is to say, I didn't mean to take any food at all," he went on hastily. "I—I thought I heard a noise from the kitchen, so I went there to have a look round."

Nipper smiled.

"I'm sorry, Long, but we can't accept a story like that," he said. "If you heard a mysterious noise in a dark passage, you'd bolt. So don't try to tell us any more fibs. As for the rest of you, get back to your quarters, and

forget this affair. You know what a funk Long is. There's nothing in it. He didn't see any apparition at all."

"Well, it looks a bit rummy, doesn't it?" asked Hubbard nervously. "Even Long couldn't invent an apparition like that! He says he saw the Thing's eyes, and——"

"Teddy could see anything when he's frightened!" put in Fullwood. "Personally, I don't believe a word of it. There's no ghost in the Modern House."

"Isn't there?" said Buster Boots quickly. "That reminds me, you fellows! There is a kind of legend attached to this House, you know."

"Shut up!" growled Nipper, giving Buster a sharp glance.

practically. "That's the best thing to be done. No sense in messing about here, talking. Let's go to the kitchen and have a look round."

"Hear, hear!"

There was a surging rush towards the domestic quarters, but Nipper barred the way.

"Steady, you cuckoos!" he sang out. "Here, Handy! You, too, Reggie! Lend a hand here! Keep these idiots back!"

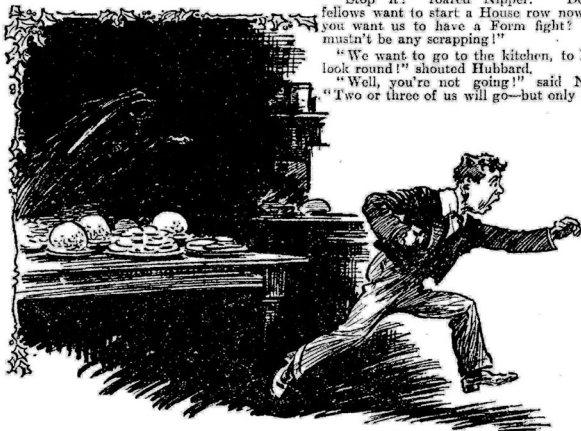
"Rather!" said Handforth, with enthusiasm. "Now, then, you Fourth Form chumps! Don't get so excited!"

"You mind your own business, you Remove ass!" shouted Clapson, of the Fourth.

"Stop it!" roared Nipper. "Do you fellows want to start a House row now? Do you want us to have a Form fight? There mustn't be any scrapping!"

"We want to go to the kitchen, to have a look round!" shouted Hubbard.

"Well, you're not going!" said Nipper. "Two or three of us will go—but only two or



With a sudden movement the apparition made a leap towards the frightened Teddy Long, and the junior, yelling wildly in his terror, dashed blindly for the door.

"Eh?" said Boots. "Oh, sorry!"

"What's that you were saying about a legend?" demanded two or three voices.

"Nothing!" said Boots. "It doesn't matter."

"There you are!" shouted Teddy Long excitedly. "They're trying to keep it from us, you fellows! These Modern House chaps know that the place is haunted! They've admitted it, but they won't give us any details. Well, I've seen the ghost——"

"Rats!" interrupted Buster Boots, vexed with himself for having raised the subject. "You've seen no ghost, Long."

"Well, anyhow, let's go along to the kitchen and investigate," said Handforth

three. You, Handy, and you, Boots, and you, Reggie. Come along. We'll go and have a look at the kitchen, and then make our report. The rest of you had better get back to the Common-rooms and studies."

"That's a good idea!" nodded Boots. "There'll only be confusion if we all go rushing about the place. The investigation committee has been appointed, you chaps. Leave it to us."

The juniors were very disappointed, but so excellent was the discipline in the rebel force that there were only one or two grumbles, and the majority went off to the Common-rooms and studies at once. The Investigation Committee turned towards the kitchen.



CHAPTER 6.

Very Simple!

"JUST a minute!" said Nipper quickly. The Investigation Committee had reached the wide-open door of the kitchen, and Handforth was about to switch on the electric light. But he paused as Nipper's voice sounded.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "What have we got to wait for?" "Don't turn the light on," said Nipper. "Let's go into the kitchen, and see it just as Teddy Long saw it. It might help us." "That's a good idea!" agreed Reggie Pitt. "Perhaps there's some sort of shadow, or something, which won't be apparent in the electric light. We can't do better than see the kitchen in the same conditions as Long saw it."

It certainly was a good idea. Nipper, Handforth and Reggie Pitt and Buster Boots walked into the large room, alert and keen.

They were not nervous, but it cannot be denied that each felt a little thrill as he crossed the threshold. Never for a moment did they believe that they would see a phantom, but, at the same time, there was a certain eeriness in the atmosphere.

Perhaps it was caused by the moonbeams which came streaming through the windows. If a fellow like Fullwood had told of a ghostly presence, the Investigation Committee might have felt different. But they knew Teddy Long of old. They knew his funky nature, and they were well acquainted with his propensity for falsehood.

"H'm!" grunted Handforth, after a few tense moments. "There's nothing here!"

"Perhaps the ghost is hiding in one of the cupboards?" suggested Reggie Pitt lightly. "All hail, Mister Ghost! We prithee come forth, and—"

"What was that?" yelled Boots, with a sudden jump.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth.

"Oh, my goodness!" said Buster. "I—I saw something up in the corner just now. It slithered along the floor, and— Yes, there it is! Look!"

"I can't see anything," said Nipper evenly.

"Yes, by George, there's something there!" ejaculated Handforth. "But I'm jiggered if I can see— Hallo! What the—"

Nipper had suddenly switched the electric light on, deeming that this farce had gone far enough. Even the Investigation Committee was getting an attack of nerves!

"There's your ghost!" said Nipper, as he pointed.

There was a touch of irony in his voice. John Bunterfield Boots looked rather sheepish as he followed the direction of Nipper's pointing finger.

The kitchen was now brilliantly illuminated, dispelling the eerie atmosphere that seemed to have pervaded the room previously. And over by the wainscoting, on the other side of the big apartment, crouched a big tabby cat!

"Why, it's only old Rufus, the House cat!" said Boots, in a disgusted voice.

"Well, I'm blowed!"

"And so you ought to be blowed, too!" said Handforth. "Fancy giving a yell like that!"

"Well, dash it, the thing looked so rummy in the moonlight," said Boots, in an attempt to justify himself. "Not that I was really scared, you ass!"

"Of course you weren't!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "It was only the atmosphere of Christmas, coupled with Teddy Long's imaginative yarn. Don't forget that this is the time of the year for apparitions and spectral presences—"

"Oh, chuck it, Reggie!" protested Nipper. "There's only one thing I can't quite understand. Even Teddy Long couldn't stretch his imagination to the point of describing a tabby cat as a ghost six feet high! I believe there's something else— Ycs, by Jove!" he added suddenly. "Here's the true explanation!"

He walked across the kitchen, and picked up a long piece of white cheese cloth. It had been lying there in a heap, hidden from the juniors by the table.

"What's that—muslin?" asked Handforth. "It's that cheese cloth we used to cover up the pastries," said Nipper. "It's a kind of muslin, I believe. Here's Teddy's precious ghost!"

"You mean that somebody was playing a trick of him?" asked Handforth.

"The cat was!" said Nipper. "Rufus was the ghost!"

"Oh, hang it!" protested Buster Boots. "Do talk sense, Nipper! Rufus is credited with all sorts of clever tricks, but he can't very well stretch himself to a height of six feet, and then—"

"Wait a minute!" interjected Nipper, chuckling. "It isn't so mysterious as you think, Buster. Look here!"

He went across to the other wall, where there were a number of shelves. Most of these shelves were covered with plates of pastries, bowls of milk, and various other items of food stuff. Nipper went straight to the milk bowls, and he chuckled afresh.

"Do you understand now?" he asked, as the other joined him. "Old Rufus must have felt thirsty, so he came along here for a drink of milk. The bowls were covered with this cheese-cloth, and—"

"Yes, by jingo, I can see it now!" grinned Reggie. "Old Rufus wasn't to be diddled by a piece of cheese-cloth, eh? So he wormed his way underneath it, and had a good old go at the milk."

"Exactly!" said Nipper. "And Teddy Long then barged in. Naturally, Rufus was annoyed—not to say startled. He probably

made a move along the shelf, and he dragged this muslin with him. The end of it probably dropped down—do you see? And as this shelf is nearly five feet from the floor, it seemed to Teddy, in the gloom, that a five-foot object was moving along the wall."

"Simple as A B C!" said Reggie Pitt, nodding. "And then old Rufus made up his mind to jump to the floor, and Teddy bolted, thinking that the ghost was making for him. Well, I'm blessed!"

Undoubtedly, the true explanation had been reached, and it was childishly simple.

The Investigation Committee felt greatly relieved. Not one of them was superstitious, but, at the same time, it was all to the good to have this little mystery so satisfactorily explained.



CHAPTER 7.

Bedtime.

ELL, that's that!" remarked Reggie Pitt, as he glanced at the others. "There's nothing more for us to look into, you fellows. Better go back to the others, and tell them, eh?"

"Yes," said Nipper. "And the sooner the better. We don't want the chaps to get any silly ideas into their heads. The less they talk about ghosts the better. We want to enjoy ourselves thoroughly this Christmas, and although a good many of us can stand ghost stories without getting windy, there are plenty of fellows who can't."

"Just a minute," said Handforth thoughtfully. "Why give any explanation at all? Why not let the chaps think that Teddy Long actually saw an apparition?"

"But, my dear ass, I've just explained—" began Nipper.

"I know that!" said Handforth. "But it has just occurred to me that it might be a jolly good idea to keep up the yarn."

"But, in the name of all that's silly, why?"

"Because, my son, it'll keep all our Christmas grub safe," replied Handforth brilliantly. "See the wheeze? Nobody will dare to come down here pilfering. Teddy Long wanted to help himself to some mince-pies and things, but he was scared away by that fake ghost. If we don't say anything, the rest of the chaps will believe that the kitchen is haunted. They won't dare to come down here after dark, and bone the supplies!"

"Something in the idea!" agreed Buster Boots, with a chuckle. "Lots of chaps have been making secret plans to dodge down into the kitchen for a snack. I know that for a fact, and I've been trying to shove discipline into 'em. But this is all special Christmas fare, and you might just

as well try to keep wasps away from a jam-pot."

"Yes, it's a good wheeze!" said Reggie Pitt. "I've had the same trouble with some of my chaps. And if we let this yarn continue, none of the would-be pilferers will dare to come within a hundred yards of the kitchen."

But Nipper shook his head.

"Better to let a few of the things be taken," he said. "Whenever a ghost story goes the rounds, the best thing is to quash it at once."

"Yes, but——"

"Up till now our barring-out has been an unqualified success," went on Nipper. "And it has been a success because we are united. There hasn't been a single chink in our armour. But there'll be a very different story to tell if half the chaps get nervous and frightened over this ridiculous ghost story."

Nipper had the right idea. As commander-in-chief of the rebel forces, his main thoughts were connected with the barring-out. He had set his mind on leading his men to victory—to holding the fort until the enemy agreed to the rebels' terms.

Unfortunately, Handforth laboured under the impression that he was the commander-in-chief, and so he expressed himself with his usual bluntness.

"Rot!" he growled. "There's no connection at all! If that old buffer of a general attacks us, all the chaps'll be ready to rush to the defences. Even if they're a bit nervy about this supposed ghost, they won't be nervy of the general."

"That's true enough!" said Boots, nodding. "Don't you see Handy's point, Nipper?"

"Yes, I do; but it doesn't make any difference," replied Nipper. "We don't want any of our fellows to be unsettled. We came here to investigate this silly ghost story, and we have found a perfectly logical explanation. It's our duty to go back to the rest of the chaps and to tell them the exact truth."

"And have all our grub pinched?" said Handforth. "As soon as they know that the kitchen is safe, they'll come down in dozens! They'll be at it all night, I expect—on and off. And you know jolly well that none of this stuff is to be touched until tomorrow."

"Yes, but——"

"But rats!" said Handforth. "There are four of us here, and I suggest that we put it to the vote. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," said Nipper, rather exasperated.

He knew how the voting would go, of course. Handforth and Buster Boots and Reggie Pitt grinningly decided that the rest of the garrison should be left in ignorance of the true explanation. Nipper's vote was useless against those three

"Well, that's settled, then," said Handforth triumphantly. "Come on, you chaps. We'll tell all the others that we haven't found any ghost at all. We'll just leave it at that—without giving any explanation. And I'll bet there won't be any of our Christmas grub scoffed during the night!"

They went out of the kitchen, switching off the light, after hustling Rufus out ahead of them. When they reached the big dining-hall, they found nearly all the rebels congregated there, waiting for the verdict.

"Well, did you find any ghost?" went up a general shout.

"No ghost at all!" replied Handforth. "Long must have been dotty!"

"I wasn't!" shouted Teddy Long. "I saw a ghost there, I tell you! It was a horrible thing with great fangs, and with horns sticking out of its head! There were two enormous eyes, glowing like coals, and the ghost had claws, too. Yes, and bony feet—"

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Handforth staring.

Knowing the exact truth of that "ghost," he was rather startled at Teddy Long's imaginative effort.

Nipper stood by, saying nothing, but feeling uncomfortable. He could see the looks of uneasiness that were passing round the rank and file. None of the fellows liked to admit nervousness, and they were all loudly declaring that they didn't believe in ghosts, and that the whole thing was a lot of rot. But, at the same time, they betrayed themselves in their expressions.

A kind of nervousness was insidiously passing through the rebel garrison. The juniors felt unsettled, and although it was bed-time nobody wanted to go to bed!



CHAPTER 8.

The Legend of the Modern House!

"LISTEN!" said Nipper, holding up a hand.

"Eh?"

"What?"

A number of startled ejaculations broke out, and many fellows glanced hastily over their shoulders.

"You silly asses!" said Nipper, with a frown. "I was only telling you to listen to the school clock! It's just striking ten, and it's high time that we were in bed."

"Why, you ass, we thought you meant something else!" said De Valerie, with an awkward flush. "What was the idea of shouting 'Listen' like that?"

"I didn't shout," replied Nipper. "The fact is, you're all on edge—and you're a lot of chumps."

To tell the truth, Nipper had really spoken sharply with a purpose. He wanted to see what effect it would have—and he had seen.

His fears were realised. The majority of the juniors were still unsettled and "nervy."

"No need to go to bed yet," said Handforth, as he moved towards the fire. "It's jolly cheerful down here—cosy, too. It's Christmas Eve, and there aren't any rules and regulations now. Why shouldn't we stay up a bit later?"

"Yes, rather!" agreed many of the others. "That's all rot, of course," said Reggie Pitt. "I agree with Nipper. We ought to go to bed—so that we shall be fresh for to-morrow. It's Christmas Day to-morrow, and we want to enjoy ourselves thoroughly."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, nodding. "I must remark, old darling, that I agree with the resolution. In fact, dash it, I second the good old resolution, and pass it unanimously. Bed, what? The good old sheets, and large doses of the dreamless! Kindly lead me to the blanket department."

And Archie toddled off, having come to the sensible conclusion that his bed was the best place for him. He didn't worry about the ghost in the least.

"Of course, when you come to think of it, Christmas is really the time for phantoms and that sort of thing," remarked De Valerie. "Who knows a jolly good ghost story?"

"I read one in a magazine once," said Bob Christine. "It was a pretty eerie sort of tale, too. All about a chap who went to an old Manor House, and there was a skeleton that came down the staircase—"

"Let's have it!" said Boots, with a grin. "That's the kind of story I like!"

"You're a lot of idiots!" said Nipper, somewhat angrily. "It won't do any good to sit up here, telling ghost stories!"

"Rats!" said Bob Christine. "We're not a lot of nervous kids!"

"Of course we're not!"

"Let's have the yarn!"

Most of the fellows were only doing this out of bravado. They wanted to prove to their companions how indifferent they were to the effects of ghost stories. Moreover, there was a certain reluctance to go to bed at all. For the upstairs passages were dark and gloomy, and it was so cheery down here.

"Why borrow a ghost story from the magazines?" asked Oldfield, of the Modern House. "Now I come to remember it, there's a legend connected with this very building. Lots of our chaps know about it."

"Why, what is it?" asked Fullwood, with interest. "We've never heard anything about it before."

"Well, as a matter of fact, Mr. Stockdale was telling us one day, three or four weeks ago," said Oldfield. "I think he's been reading up the records of St. Frank's, or something, and he had the whole thing pat."

"There are all sorts of legends connected with St. Frank's," said Nipper gruffly. "Everybody knows that there used to be a

monastery on this spot. There were monks, and—

"That's it—a monk!" said Oldfield, nodding. "There's supposed to be a ghostly monk in this house, you know—particularly at Christmas time."

"What!"

"Oh, I say—draw it mild!" said Church. "You're not telling us that the Modern House is haunted, are you?"

"Yes, rather—haunted!" said Oldfield mischievously.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Let's have the yarn, Oldfield, my lad!"

"Perhaps you'll believe me now?" said Teddy Long excitedly. "I knew the place was haunted! I've seen the ghost, and now I come to think of it, he did look a bit like a monk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So he did!" roared Teddy. "He had a kind of cowl over his head, and—"

"This is the first we've heard about the cowl," interrupted Handforth. "Not long ago you were saying that the ghost had horns!"

"Yes, the horns came through the cowl!" explained Teddy Long.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, about this legend," said Oldfield. "Of course, as you all know, this house used to be called the College House in the old days. Right on this very site there was once a monastery—and there are still a few ruins behind the shrubbery, to this very day. But the main building was here, right where we're standing."

"Why don't you tell us something new?" asked Handforth. "If you think we don't know the history of St. Frank's, you chump, you'd better think again!"

"Yes, but this is different," said Oldfield. "There's a ghostly monk supposed to haunt the Modern House, and he only appears at Christmas time, particularly on Christmas night."

"That's a blessing!" said Reggie Pitt complacently. "We've got twenty-four hours' grace."

"Don't you be too sure of that," said Oldfield. "Mr. Stockdale told us that this ghost had sometimes manifested itself on Christmas Eve—and for two or three nights after Christmas, too. And he only comes at Christmas time. All the rest of the year—"

"Look here, stop this!" said Nipper sharply. "Hang it, you chaps, we don't want to have any quarrels now, but I shall have a pretty big row with some of you unless you stop this nonsense!"

They looked at Nipper quickly, impressed by his tone. It wasn't usual for him to speak so forcefully.

"You'll have a row—with me?" asked Oldfield, glaring.

"Yes, I will!" retorted Nipper. "If you haven't enough sense to keep those ghost stories to yourself, then I shall have to drive some sense into you—with my fist!"

"But this is a true story!" shouted Oldfield.

"Rot!" retorted Nipper. "Go to bed! If you must tell ghost stories, wait until to-morrow!"



CHAPTER 9.

"Happy Christmas!"

ELDOM had Nipper felt so annoyed.

If there was one thing he hated more than another, it was

being dictatorial. But unless somebody spoke sharply to these thoughtless juniors they would be telling ghost stories round the fire until well after midnight, and by that time they would all be in a thoroughly nervous condition.

Nipper could stand any amount of ghost stories, and they would have no effect on him whatever. There were other fellows similarly immune—such as Handforth, and Fullwood, Reggie Pitt and Buster Boots.

But there were plenty of others who would be very seriously affected by these tales of spectres and weird apparitions.

Most of the fellows scoffed at the idea of ghosts. They pretended to be superior to that sort of thing. They took it almost as an insult, indeed, if anybody suggested that they would be nervous because of a few ghost stories. Yet these very same fellows, in their own hearts, were already feeling a certain nervousness. It was in the atmosphere—it was growing stronger as the clock ticked the minutes away.

Reggie Pitt felt that it was necessary for him to support his leader, and even Handforth, by one of those swift changes for which he was famous, came to the conclusion that Nipper was right.

"Yes, by George!" he said, looking up at the clock. "It's well past our usual bedtime, and unless we keep up the discipline there'll be chaos. Now then, you chaps—upstairs!"

"Look here—"

"I second the proposition," said Reggie Pitt. "We've had enough about ghosts for to-night. Nipper's quite right—leave these stories until to-morrow."

"But we want to hear about the Modern House legend!" protested De Valeric. "I'm frightfully keen on ghost stories, you know—particularly when I'm in the actual house where the ghost is supposed to walk. Let's have it, before we go to bed. What about this spectral monk?"

"It won't take me a tick," said Oldfield, with a grin. "There isn't actually a spectral monk—"

"Dry up!" shouted Nipper.

"What, are you getting nervous?" asked Oldfield facetiously.

"No, I'm not!" retorted the rebel leader. "But I'm getting angry! And I warn you,

Oldfield, that if you trot out any more of those ghost stories, I'll go for you bald-headed!"

"Why, you ass, I haven't trotted out one ghost story yet!" protested Oldfield. "You haven't allowed me to begin—"

"So much the better!" said Nipper grimly. "Now, do be sensible, all of you. Let's get up to bed. It's time the guards were changed, too, and we want to see everything shipshape for the night."

There was a general movement towards the door, with a good few grumbles from the disappointed rank and file.

Nipper came to the conclusion that it was a thankless task, being leader. No sooner did he open his mouth to insist on discipline than he was accused of preaching. No sooner did he remind the juniors of their pledges, than he was set down as a prig. Yet all these fellows had solemnly agreed to accept his leadership, and to obey the disciplinary orders that had been generally issued. Yes, it was a thankless task.

It was particularly thankless in this instance, because the majority of the rebels had an idea that Nipper himself was getting nervous. Exactly the opposite, of course, was the case.

Nipper, as commander-in-chief of the garrison, knew the importance of maintaining a high standard of morale. There were grim possibilities in the mere telling of ghost stories—possibilities that the unthinking fellows never suspected.

The Modern House was their fortress—their haven of refuge. Hitherto, they had been comfortable there. But what if this story that it was haunted got about, and was taken for granted, as an actual fact? Inevitably, the juniors would be highly nervous, would be anxious to get out of the place. And if, indeed, a panic set in, there would be no holding them.

Nipper had been a leader too long to ignore the signs. It was easy enough for the others, with absolutely no responsibilities, to criticise and to laugh.

They forgot that they had placed themselves in Nipper's care, that they relied upon him for guidance. He was a fine fellow, so long as he led them successfully. But he would be the first to receive condemnation if anything went wrong. The blame would all be placed on his shoulders if the barring-out failed. He was the leader, and he was responsible. Nine rebels out of every ten were thoroughly content to let others do the thinking for them.

"Well, thank goodness they've gone to bed!" muttered Nipper, at length. "It's a perfectly crazy thing to start telling ghost stories on Christmas Eve—when the hour is approaching midnight."

He was talking to Handforth, and they were on their way upstairs, after seeing most of the lights out. One or two lamps were left gleaming, here and there, so that the ever-changing guards would be able to find their way about with ease.

"Of course, I don't believe in ghosts—never did," said Handforth. "You can tell me the most weird things, and it'll be like pouring water on a duck's back."

"Unfortunately, Handy, every back isn't like yours," said Nipper. "Most of these chaps pretend to be jolly bold, but they're not. And we can't be too careful. It was a silly game to pretend that we didn't find any explanation of that ghost in the kitchen!"

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Handforth grudgingly. "I rather think we ought to go round, and tell the fellows about that cat, you know."

"We'll tell them to-morrow," said Nipper. "They've gone to bed now, so we won't disturb them. Well, good-night, Handy, old son. Happy Christmas!"

"The same to you, with knobs on!" grinned Handforth, as he went into his own dormitory.



CHAPTER 10.

Mysterious Music!

CHURCH and McClure were undressing, and they were making quick work of these operations. For the bed-room, after the warmth of the big dining hall, felt decidedly chilly.

"Buck up, Handy!" said Church, as he reached for his pyjamas. "We want to get to sleep. There's a big programme for to-morrow."

"Plenty of time," said Handforth, as he peeled off his jacket. "What the dickens are you shivering about? It's not cold in here!"

"Opinions differ," put in McClure. "Give me our old dormy in the Ancient House! Better than this giddy hutch!"

"I'm ready to admit that this old barn of a place is a poor substitution for our own House," said Handforth. "But what else can we expect?"

It was the custom at St. Frank's for the juniors of each House to belittle the other Houses. Actually, there was very little to choose between any of the fine old buildings at the great school. But, to the Ancient House fellows, the Ancient House was the only pile worth mentioning.

In these exceptional circumstances, most of the dormitories of the rebel fortress were occupied by double their normal number of fellows. There really wasn't the accommodation for them all, and junior schoolboys are not very particular.

However, Handforth was such an aggressive sort of fellow, and, incidentally, he snored so loudly during the night, that he and his celebrated chums were allowed to have a small dormitory all to themselves. True, Church and McClure slept in one bed.

but Handforth had one entirely to himself. Woe betide any fellow who attempted to sleep with him! He would be lucky, indeed, if he still found himself in the bed in the morning!

The rebels were lucky in every sense. They were holding a barring-out—a do-or-die affair—and yet they were still able to go to bed in the normal way. Every night the garrison was quiet, with only the guards on duty, constantly watching. In the event of a sudden alarm, the defenders could quickly be at their posts.

It was the custom for one of the guards to leave his post to come and call the relief. Otherwise, there would never be any relief at all.

"By the way," said Handforth, as he unfastened his shoes. "What time do I go on duty to-night?"

"Two o'clock," said Church. "Fullwood is coming along to lug us out at two o'clock, Handy. McClure takes the next spell—from three until four—with Gresham."

"That's all right, then," said Handforth, nodding. "Not that it will be necessary for anybody to come and call me. If I make up my mind to wake up at two o'clock, I shall wake up."

Church and McClure made no comment. What was the use of starting an argument?

Two or three minutes later the light was put out, and the three chums of Study D settled themselves down to sleep. The blind was up, and a few moonbeams were peering coyly into the room. Outside, everything was perfectly still, and there was a sharp frost.

It might as well be stated at once that Church and McClure were slightly unsettled.

They were not nervous youths, by any means—but they did not possess Handforth's notoriously thick skin.

The unexplained mystery of the kitchen rather weighed upon their minds. Their leader had not said anything to them about the affair. He had not told them that Teddy Long's ghost had merely been Rufus the cat, with a piece of muslin round him. Consequently, Church and McClure were very much in the dark.

And all that talk about the Modern House being haunted, too. That sort of thing did not tend to settle their minds. Now, while they listened to Handforth's steadily increasing snores, they lay awake, wooing sleep unsuccessfully.

But Church did not know that McClure was awake, and McClure had no idea that Church was staring at the ceiling. Each imagined that the other two occupants of the dormitory had dropped off into slumber.

Except for an occasional thud, sounding through one of the walls—and occasioned, no doubt, by some horse-play on the part of a few mischievous juniors—everything seemed silent. Faintly, at intervals, a voice might have been heard—a sudden shout, or a cackle of laughter.

But even these sounds soon died away, and the utter silence was only broken by the regular chiming of the school clock.

The half-hour had just struck—half-past eleven, in fact—and Church was still awake. He felt exasperated—angry with himself. He wanted to go to sleep, but, somehow, he couldn't doze off.

The throbbing of the bell still hovered in the air, and Church listened to it in a detached kind of way. That throbbing was rather peculiar. It died away, and then seemed to come back again, in a sort of cycle. And, strangely enough, the throbbing had now taken on a kind of melody.

Church had never noticed it before. He rather wondered. How on earth could the school clock play a melody? He could even hear the notes, and—

Then Church started. He raised his head from the pillow, straining his ears to listen. It was music!

Somehow, it had become merged with the lingering echo of the school clock, but it was now distinctive in itself. The school clock was silent, the last echoes having died away completely. But this other music was increasing, and it seemed to fill the entire room.

Church suddenly sat up in bed—and, at the same moment, McClure sat up.

"Great Scott!" gasped Mac. "You awake?"

"Yes, I've been awake all the time!" said Church, staring at McClure, who was close beside him. "My hat! I thought you were asleep!"

"And I thought you were, too!" said McClure. "I just heard something—some music!"

"Thank goodness!" breathed Church, with relief. "I was beginning to think that there was something wrong with my ears!"



CHAPTER 11.

A Mystery of the Night!

"RUMMY!" said McClure, after a short pause.

"I'm blessed if I can understand it!"

said the other junior. "Handy's fast asleep right enough—his snores are a bit quieter than usual, though. Listen! What the dickens is it?"

They both became silent, and the faint strains of music continued. They throbbed in the very atmosphere of the little dormitory—passing from wall to wall.

"It's music right enough!" whispered Church, rather shakily. "But—but I can't understand it, Mac! Who on earth would be playing music at this time of night?"

"I don't know!" said McClure. "There's nobody got any musical instruments, either. What is it?"

"Sounds a bit like a piano, doesn't it?"

They listened again, and, sure enough, the music did bear some slight resemblance to that of a piano. And yet it was different. There was a mournful note in it—a kind of wail which sounded inexpressibly eerie.

"It's in this room!" said McClure nervously.

"It can't be!" said Church breathlessly.

"But it is! Listen!"

And it certainly was!

The strains of music were coming through the atmosphere, and although Church and McClure tried to determine their source it was impossible to do so. The notes throbbled on the air; at one moment the juniors thought the sounds were coming from the doorway, and the next moment they seemed to be coming from the window—from the ceiling above—from the floor. In a word, they filled the room in every nook and cranny.

"It's not a piano!" whispered McClure, after another pause. "It's one of those rummy things—those things they used to have hundreds of years ago. A harpsichord, isn't it?"

"Harpsichord?" repeated Church. "I expect you mean a clavichord?"

"Yes, that's it—a clavichord!" nodded McClure. "But you know as well as I do that there isn't a clavichord at St. Frank's! Besides, this music is so—so weird!"

They fell silent again, and the strains of the music became louder and louder—only to die away suddenly and mysteriously.

"I can't stand this!" said Church, at last. "It's—it's so ghostly."

"Don't use that word, for goodness' sake!" said McClure. "We've had enough talk of ghosts to-night. Besides, it's nearly midnight, and—"

Handforth turned over in bed, and then sat up.

"What the dickens are you fellows talking about?" he demanded sleepily. "I haven't been able to get a wink! Can't you dry up?"

In any other circumstances, Church and McClure would have challenged that statement of Handforth's. Considering that he had been snoring for well over half an hour, he had no justification for making such a remark. But Handforth's chums had something else on their minds.

"I'm glad you're awake, Handy!" whispered Church, getting out of bed, and going across the room to Handforth's bed. "There's something funny happening."

"Funny?" repeated Handforth, rubbing his eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Listen!" said Church.

Handforth could see his chum, standing there in his pyjamas, clearly visible in the moonbeams. Handy opened his mouth to speak, then he checked himself. There was something impressive in Church's attitude.

And those strains of music came to his ears now. He started, and his eyes opened wider.

"What is it?" he asked breathlessly.

"It sounds like a clavichord!" replied Church softly. "You know—one of those old-fashioned spinet affairs—"

"I know what a clavichord is, you ass!" interrupted Handforth, in a cold voice. "It's a musical instrument they used hundreds of years ago. Something like a flute, only made of metal, with a turned-up end."

"You're thinking of a saxophone, you fat-head!" said Church. "They didn't have saxophones in those days."

"They were lucky!" said Handforth.

"Besides, a clavichord is something like a little piano—only it sounds more tinkly," went on Church. "Listen! Why argue at a time like this? That music's in this very room, Handy! Mac and I can't understand it. We've been listening for a long time!"

Handforth got out of bed, and went towards the door.

"Some fathead having a game, I expect," he whispered. "We'll soon see."

He tore the door open, and found himself looking down a deserted corridor. But no sound of the music came from out there.

"That's rummy!" he said, coming back into the room, closing the door. "There's nobody there."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nothing," replied Edward Oswald. "I don't believe— Yes, by George, it's still here, though!—It's still in this room!"

Church had gone to the window, and, opening it, he leaned out. The night was very quiet. Overhead, the moon was sailing serenely in the clear sky, and the ground was covered with freshly-fallen snow. The Ancient House could be seen clearly across the expanse of the Triangle. No lights shone from anywhere, excepting one or two further along in the Modern House.

"There's nothing out here!" whispered Church, turning his head. "Not a sound!"

He closed the window again and stood quite still. Again that mysterious music came to his ears. Without any question whatever, it was in that room—and it seemed to be in that room only!

Cheerful music might have been understandable. But this music was eerie—mysteriously phantom-like—and the chums of Study D stood there, with strained ears, utterly and absolutely mystified.



CHAPTER 12.

No Explanation!

LICK!

Handforth had switched on the electric light, and was now looking about the room with keen, eager eyes. But there was nothing unusual to be seen.



Nipper, Watson and Tregellis-West dashed into the dining-room. They found everybody standing perfectly still, tense and alert. Almost every eye was expressive of a sudden dread.

"Oh, it's all rot!" he said gruffly. "There's nothing here. How could there be anything? You can't have music unless somebody makes it! It must be some silly ass in the bedroom next door."

"Hadn't we better go and see?" asked Church. "We can't go to sleep with this wailing noise going on."

"It's not a noise," replied Handforth argumentatively. "I can hardly hear it."

"It sounds louder when the lights are out—and when you're trying to get to sleep," remarked McClure. "It throbs in your ears, you know. By Jove, it's stopped now! Listen!"

They all kept perfectly still, and strained their ears afresh. But now there was no sound of that uncanny music. It had ceased automatically as the switch had been turned on.

"Wait a minute!" said Handforth.

He went back to the switch, and turned it off. Then, tensely, they waited. At first there was nothing—only the tense stillness of the winter's night.

Nearly a minute passed in this way, and Handforth was about to speak when he caught his breath in.

For, merging from the utter silence, came those mournful notes. At first they were so low that the juniors wondered if their ears were playing them false. But then, with an almost savage burst of wailing melody, the music increased. It rose, crescendo, and then died away into a wailing mutter.

"Oh, my goodness!" said Handforth, switching the light on once more.

"What—what can it mean?" whispered Church, swallowing something. "I don't like it, Handy! The—the room's haunted, or something!"

"Rats!" said the practical Handforth. "Whoever heard of a ghost playing a Jew's harp, or whatever the giddy instrument is!"

He stalked out, and went into the next dormitory. But one glance was sufficient. There were about six fellows in there, altogether, and they were all soundly asleep. No sound came from them, except their regular breathing. In no circumstances could these juniors be accused of playing tricks.

So Handforth went out, and retraced his steps. He went to the dormitory on the other side, and peered into this one.

All was dark, and no sound came to his ears. But after a moment there was a slight movement, and a voice called.

"Who's that?" it rasped.

"Only me," said Handforth. "That you, Nipper?"

"Yes," replied Nipper. "What's the idea, Handy? Anything wrong?"

"I don't know," replied Handforth awkwardly. "I suppose you fellows haven't been playing about in here?"

"Of course we haven't," replied Nipper. "What do you mean—playing about?"

"Well, we can hear music in our dormy," said Handforth.

"Music!"

"Yes—a kind of rummy sort of mysterious music," replied Edward Oswald. "Come along with me and listen to it. We can't make it out. I suppose you haven't heard anything unusual in here?"

"Nothing," replied Nipper, as he slipped out of bed. "I think you must have been dreaming, old son. How on earth could there be any music at this time of night? It's nearly twelve o'clock, and most of the chaps are sound asleep!"

Handforth made no reply. But he led the way back to his own dormitory, Nipper following. They went in, and closed the door. The light was still on, and Church and McClure were sitting on their bed, looking thoroughly alarmed.

"Well?" asked Church. "Is anybody playing a trick?"

"I don't think so," said Nipper. "They're all asleep. Did you chaps hear the music, too?"

"We heard it first," replied Church. "It only sounds when the light's out, and—"

He broke off as Nipper switched off the electric light. A minute passed—two minutes. Nothing disturbed the stillness whatever.

"You must have been dreaming!" repeated Nipper.

"Listen!" urged Handforth. "It may not come— There you are! Can you hear it? It's here—right against my ear! It's in the room—in the middle of the room!"

"By Jove!" whispered Nipper, his voice full of wonder.

For now he could hear those mournful strains. They came into the atmosphere in that same phantom-like way. They rose throbbingly, and then died away with a shuddering kind of wail. It was, indeed, the most uncanny music that any of the juniors had ever heard.

It is truly said that music can be eloquent, and this music was exceptionally so. It conjured up everything mournful and morbid in the minds of those listeners. It seemed to breathe of ghostliness and mystery.

"What does it mean, Nipper?" asked Church, in a strained voice. "I can't stand this, you know. It's getting on my nerves!"

"I don't know what to say," replied Nipper. "It's in this room, but yet— Where can it come from? Is there anybody out of doors—?"

"Nobody!" said Church. "We listened at the window, but we couldn't hear it out there. It's only here—in the room itself!"

"Perhaps there's somebody messing about upstairs?" suggested Handforth. "Perhaps there's—"

"That's impossible," put in Nipper. "Nobody is sleeping up there, and all the doors are locked, too. But we'll go up and have a look, if you like, just to make certain. And underneath, of course, there's nothing but the empty studies."

"Let's go and make a thorough examination," said Handforth grimly. "We want to

get to the bottom of this mystery. I've heard of ghosts appearing, and I've heard of mysterious thuds and crashes. But it's the first time I knew that a ghost could play music!"

They all hurried out, after slipping into some stouter clothing, and went upstairs to the attics, where they made a thorough search—Nipper being armed with an electric-torch. But there was nothing there to arouse their suspicions.

All the rooms were empty and deserted. It was the same downstairs. Not a soul was about, except for two of the guards who were just coming off duty when the searchers were about to return to the dormitory passage.

"Hallo!" said De Valerie, who was one of the guards. "What on earth are you chaps doing here?"



CHAPTER 13.

The Phantom Voice!

NIPPER would have preferred to make some evasive reply, for with midnight about to strike this was no time for discussions on the supernatural.

But Handforth, as usual, was frankness itself.

"We've been looking for a ghost," he replied briefly.

"A ghost!" said the guards, in one voice.

They were De Valerie and Somerton, of Study G in the Ancient House. They were not the kind of fellows to be frightened by any ghost-talk. But at the same time, Handforth's bald statement rather startled them.

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" said Nipper quickly. "There's no ghost—"

"I didn't say there was," replied Handforth. "I said that we're looking for one. Not that we shall ever find the beggar. I don't believe in ghosts, and I'm pretty sure that somebody has been playing a game. And when I find him I'm going to knock him sideways!"

"Well, I don't believe it," said Church. "Goodness knows, I'm not superstitious, but there's something—something uncanny about that music. It isn't natural at all!"

"Music?" repeated Somerton. "What music? I thought you said you were looking for a ghost? What the dickens are you chaps talking about?"

Nipper thought it just as well to explain what had happened, and he did so. De Valerie and Somerton listened with sceptical expressions on their faces.

"There's nothing in that," said Cecil de Valerie, at length. "I expect you fellows heard something creaking in the wind, and it sounded a bit like music. It's easy enough

to make those mistakes in the middle of the night, you know."

"If there was any wind, I might agree with you," said Nipper. "But, as it happens, Val, there's no wind to-night."

"Oh!" said De Valerie.

"Besides, how the dickens could we mistake a creaking for music?" demanded Handforth. "Do talk sense! I suppose you fellows are just going off to bed?"

"Yes," said Somerton, nodding. "We've done our spell, and Levi and Goodwin are due to take our places."

"All right—don't let us stop you," said Nipper. "We're going back to bed, too. There doesn't seem to be any explanation of this rummy business, so we'll leave it until to-morrow. Better not tell the others, if you see anybody," he added casually.

De Valerie laughed.

"We've got to hear that music first," he said calmly. "Anyhow, we're not scared. Are we, Sommy?"

"Not a bit," replied the genial Duke of Somerton. "As long as the ghosts only provide us with music, we can't grumble."

They went off, obviously discrediting the strange story that they had just heard. This was all to the good, although Handforth didn't see it at the moment.

"Disbelieving rotters!" he said indignantly. "I believe they were chipping us. They think we imagined that music!"

"Let them," said Nipper. "All the better. We don't want any alarm in the middle of the night—"

"By jingo!" interrupted Church, glancing round. "What's that?"

A sudden commotion had sounded upstairs, and after a moment of hesitation they all rushed up to the dormitory passage. There they found O'Grady and Vandyke, of the Fourth, excitedly talking with Crowe and Webb, also of the Fourth. The two former juniors were looking very pale.

"What's the matter here?" asked Nipper quickly, as he hurried up.

"Faith, it's glad I am to see you, Nipper!" said the Irish junior. "There's something funny happening in our bed-room—"

"Have you heard the music, too?" asked Handforth.

"Music?" repeated Terence O'Grady. "No, we've heard no music. But there's a bell tolling in there—a horrible sort of bell, and—"

"We didn't hear it," interrupted Webb. "These chaps dragged us out, and we think they've been dreaming or something."

"We haven't!" said Vandyke, the South African junior. "Terry woke me up, and I heard the bell as clearly as anything. It was just like a death knell!"

"Let's go into your room!" said Nipper.

They went in, and after the light had been switched off, they stood perfectly still, listening. This particular dormitory was some little distance from Handforth & Co.'s room, so it was hardly possible that there could

be any trickery. For a full minute the juniors waited, crowding there in a clump in the darkness. But the only sounds that came to their ears were caused by their own breathing.

"There you are!" whispered Crowe. "There's nothing."

"Wait!" breathed O'Grady.

Almost as he spoke the bell sounded, mournfully, seemingly far away, and yet throbbing in the atmosphere of the room. It had an uncanny sound, an unreal sound. It stopped for a moment, then came again.

"My goodness!" whispered Church. "That's no ordinary bell! Why, there isn't a bell like it at St. Frank's, not with that tone. And it's here, in this room! Oh, what can it mean?"

"Listen!" urged Nipper. "Let's try to locate exactly where it comes from."

They all remained perfectly still again, straining their ears, and trying to remain steady. And then out of the darkness came a voice.

"List ye well, O youths of folly!" came the voice, in deep, throbbing tones. "'Tis the bell! The bell of death! List ye well to its note, and take heed. Go hence from this accursed place, if ye would live!"

And the bell came again, tolling mournfully!



CHAPTER 14.

The Christmas Haunting

"LIGHTS!" muttered Church hoarsely. "Switch on the lights somebody!"

Snap!

One of the juniors obliged, and the little dormitory became flooded with light. The juniors found themselves looking at one another with startled eyes. Their faces were pale, and they were not afraid to admit that they were shaky.

"Did—did you hear it?" asked Vandyke, with a gulp.

"Yes!" said Handforth. "There was somebody speaking in here—and—and—"

"And that bell, too!" said McClure. "Oh, my hat! Did you ever hear anything so eerie? But what can it mean? How can we hear that bell—when there isn't any bell? And how did that voice come? There's nobody here—there's nobody playing any tricks—"

"Steady!" interrupted Nipper. "It's a mysterious business, I'll admit, but we needn't get windy."

Nipper was puzzled and troubled. He did not want any of this story to get about. Some of the fellows might get panicky, and then the fat would be in the fire.

"That's two haunted rooms!" said Church

unsteadily. "Our dormitory is just as bad—because we can hear rummy music in there. But this is worse, and—"

"Oh, crumbs!" interrupted McClure. "There's somebody else yelling out now."

They crowded to the door, and, true enough, loud voices were sounding right down the corridor from the far end. The next moment an excited group of Third-Formers appeared. Button and Hoskins and Mason were prominent, and Willy Handforth was arguing with them.

"I tell you we heard it!" Hoskins was saying in a shrill, frightened voice. "There was a voice in our dormitory, Willy! An awful kind of voice, too! He was telling us to clear out—he was saying that it'll mean death if we remain!"

"Yes, we heard it, too!" said Button.

The Removites and the Fourth-Formers looked at one another queerly.

"There you are!" said Church. "They've heard the voice right down there—at the other end of the corridor. They must have heard it almost at the same time as us. How do you account for it? There can't be any trickery, Nipper! Only a ghost could make itself heard in two places at once! The place is haunted!"

"It must be!" said Vandyke. "What on earth are we to do?"

Nipper was wondering the same thing. For all these voices had aroused many of the other juniors, and the corridor was now becoming quite crowded. There was a lot of excited talk, and the juniors were grouping themselves together, discussing the strange events with bated breath.

"It's the ghost of the Modern House!" Talmadge was saying. "We've heard the legend, and we know that it must be true. We can't stay here, you fellows! We can't—"

"Here, chuck it!" interrupted Handforth, striding forward. "There's no need for you chaps to get excited."

"We're not going to stay in a haunted house!" wailed Button, of the Third.

"Let's get out—now!" babbled Teddy Long. "Didn't I tell you all along that the place was haunted? I saw the ghost down in the kitchen—"

"You dry up about that ghost!" interrupted Nipper sharply. "That was only Rufus the cat, entangled in a piece of muslin."

Nipper now thought it wise to explain the few details concerning that "apparition." Not that it had much effect. The rebels were now thoroughly disturbed, for the mystery of the strange music and the tolling bell and the spectral voice had gripped them.

"I tell you it must be the old monk," said Talmadge excitedly. "You all know the legend—"

"Yes!" interrupted Handforth. "Oldfield was saying something about a silly legend,

but surely you don't expect us to believe a lot of bunkum like that?"

"It's not bunkum, Handy!" said Bob Christine quietly. "Mr. Stockdale, our Housemaster, was telling us all about it a few weeks ago."

"And does Mr. Stockdale believe that the Modern House is haunted?" inquired Nipper.

"Well, he didn't say," replied Bob. "He only told us the legend—and he left us to draw our own conclusions."

"It was very silly of him to tell you anything!" growled Handforth.

"No, it wasn't," put in Talmadge. "Mr. Stockdale didn't know that we would be here at Christmas time—and, according to him, the ghost only manifests itself at Christmas time—especially on Christmas night."

"What!" went up a general apprehensive shout from the Removites.

Nipper bit his lip. He did not like the way things were going. Only a few of the Modern House juniors knew of that legend—and the Removites and the Third-Formers had hardly ever heard of it before Oldfield had mentioned the matter that same night.

"There's nothing much in it," said Bob Christine. "Hundreds of years ago, when the old monastery stood on this ground, a particularly virtuous old monk was murdered by somebody while he was sitting at a clavichord."

"A what?" asked Church thickly.

"A clavichord—one of those old-fashioned affairs," replied Bob.

"But—but we've been hearing a clavichord to-night—in our dormitory!" said Handforth, in amazement. "And we know jolly well that there isn't a clavichord in this House, or, if it comes to that, in the whole school!"

"Then it must be a phantom clavichord," said Bob Christine. "Yes, and that tolling bell was the bell of the monastery. According to that old legend, the monk is likely to appear on Christmas night."

"Why on Christmas night?" demanded Nipper.

"Because he was murdered on that night," said Christine.

"Then he must have come a day before his time," said Handforth facetiously. "Rot! I don't believe a word of this! Somebody has been playing some tricks—"

But nobody listened to Edward Oswald. For, as far as the other juniors could see, trickery was ruled out. None of the rebels were responsible for the mysterious music, and the still more mysterious voice. There was no earthly reason why anybody else should get up to any tricks. Indeed, how could anybody else play the ghost in that way? The rebels had the Modern House entirely to themselves, and every window and door was barricaded against outsiders!



CHAPTER 15.

The Second Warning!

NOBODY had previously paid any attention to the legend of the Modern House, because the "ghost" was only supposed to appear at Christmas time. And, of course, at that period of the year the school was normally shut up and empty.

The few juniors who had heard the story had merely laughed at it. What did it matter to them? At Christmas time they would be at home enjoying all the jollifications of Yuletide.

But now, owing to the unusual circumstances of the barring-out, they were actually at St. Frank's—in the very building that was supposed to be haunted on Christmas night! True, it was still practically Christmas Eve, but that made very little difference. The ghostly clavichord had made itself heard, and the phantom old monk had spoken.

A mild kind of panic was spreading through the weaker rebels. They were too frightened to go back to bed. There was a lot of talk about deserting the Modern House and seizing one of the other buildings.

"All this talk is a mere waste of time," said Nipper grimly. "We can't leave the fortress."

"Why not?" demanded Hubbard. "We can't stay here—in this haunted place—"

"If you had any sense, you would realise that our only course is to stick it out," said Nipper. "It took days—weeks, almost—to prepare this fortress. What about all our barricades? What about our carefully-planned preparations for defence? If we run out of this place, like rats leaving a sinking ship, we shall all be lost."

"Can't we go into the East House?" asked Armstrong. "It's a better House than this, any day!"

"You dry up, you East House rotter!" shouted Buster Boots angrily.

"For goodness' sake don't start any squabbles!" urged Nipper. "We can't go into the East House—or any other House—because no preparations have been made. There aren't any fires there, the water is cut off and there are a hundred other reasons why we can't move. Besides, if this ghost can appear in the Modern House, it can just as easily appear in any other part of the school. But why on earth are you fellows getting the wind-up like this? There's nothing to be frightened of. Go back to bed, all of you!"

"Not likely!" said Hubbard. "I'm not going back to bed to-night!"

"Same here!" said two or three shaky voices.

Handforth looked at Nipper, and Nipper looked at Handforth. They both considered

themselves to be the leader of this rebellion, and they hardly knew what to do. Handforth, of course, was labouring under a delusion. He couldn't lead anything. And, although he was entirely unconscious of the fact, he always looked to Nipper at a time of crisis.

"Well, here's a go!" he remarked blankly.

"We've got to do something!" said Nipper. "If the fellows desert the garrison it'll be all up with this barring-out."

"But we've got to stick it!" said Handforth, in alarm. "Great Scott! There can't be any backing out now! On Christmas Eve, too—just when we're going to have such a ripping time! Why, we're going to stick it out until the new term begins, and until General Carfax admits that he's whacked!"

"General Carfax will be laughing up his sleeve when he finds out that the rebels are a disorganised force," said Nipper grimly. "Why, we shall be playing right into his hands if we desert the Modern House."

"By George, so we shall!" said Handforth. "We'd better get the fellows back to bed."

It was a difficult task, but Handforth and Nipper succeeded, helped by such stalwarts as Reggie Pitt, Buster Boots, Fullwood and Bob Christine. Group by group, the rebels were hustled off to their various dormitories.

"Keep the lights burning, if you like—but go to bed!" said Nipper briskly. "My dear chaps, you're surely not going to admit that you're scared? You're not a lot of frightened babies!"

By dint of tactics such as these, the leaders succeeded in getting the rank and file to obey. Many, of course, scoffed at the idea of ghosts—these were the ones who had not heard any of the strange sounds—and they declared that they were going to put their lights out, as usual.

Teddy Long was, perhaps, the most frightened fellow of all, and he was positively ill with fear; Hubbard, who usually shared Study B with him, in the Ancient House, was not much better. At the present moment they were sleeping in a small dormitory, together with Page and Harron, of the East House Fourth.

"How the dickens can we sleep?" asked Hubbard, sitting on his bed and hunching his knees up. "This House is haunted, and it's no good sayin' anything else! Why, Teddy even saw the ghost in the kitchen—"

"Rats!" said Harron. "Nipper explained about that ghost. It was only the cat."

"I don't believe it!" said Hubbard obstinately. "I think we all ought to clear out. It'll drive us dotty if we stay here over to-morrow night. That's the fatal night, remember!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Page. "Let's get to sleep."

Gradually the conversation died away in that particular dormitory, and soon all was quiet in the other parts of the House, too.



A long stream of waiters passed continuously from the kitchen into the dining-room, carrying turkeys, hams, and other Christmas fare. Everybody looked merry and was cheering happily. In spite of the barring-out, the rebels were going to celebrate Christmas in the usual way!

At last the rebels had settled themselves down again.

Suddenly Teddy Long started up with a gasp. He stared round the room in panic.

"Did—did you hear that?" he panted huskily.

"Hear what?" asked Hubbard, with a gulp. "You silly ass! What's the idea of—"

"A bell—a bell!" whispered Teddy Long. "I tell you I heard a bell—"

"Hold still!" muttered Page, lifting a finger. "Listen!"

And then it came—despite the fact that the electric light was gleaming in the room.

Toll—toll!

Vaguely, mysteriously, the tolling of the ghostly bell sounded in the dormitory.

"Foolish youths!" came a voice, seemingly from somewhere in the room. "Ye heed not the warning of—"

But the ghostly voice was drowned by a wild, terrified scream from Teddy Long. It was a blood-curdling sound, and Teddy went tearing out through the doorway, still screaming at the top of his voice!



CHAPTER 16.

The Phantom!

WITHIN a minute the entire rebel stronghold

was in an uproar again.

Fellows came running out of every dormitory, and there were hundreds of shouts and inquiries.

Teddy Long was seized by two or three fellows, and he was so incoherent with fright that it was some moments before he could speak. Not that it was necessary for him to speak, for Hubbard and Page and Harron were ready enough with their story.

"It was the ghost again!" shouted Harron. "It was right in our room, although the light was on! We heard the bell tolling, and then that mysterious voice came to us."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What did he say?"

"I can't remember—something about warning us!" said Page. "But it couldn't have been a trick. Nobody would be fool enough to attempt a dodge like that. Besides, who could do it? It was a real ghost—a spectral voice! The whole place is haunted! It

doesn't matter which room we go in, we shall hear that tolling bell!"

"Somebody heard the music, too!" went up another shout. "And that was right over in the other part of the House—at the very back."

"I'm the chap who heard it!" sang out Holroyd, of the Fourth. "I was trying to get to sleep when I heard the music—a slow sort of wailing note in it. It fairly gave me the creeps, I can tell you!"



A long stream of juniors passed continuously from the kitchen into the dining hall. Everybody looked merry and was cheering happily. In spite of the

"Let's all clear out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We've had enough of this!"

It almost seemed that a rush would begin—a rush for the exits. Many of the juniors were in such a state of nervousness that they would cheerfully go outside into the snow, and remain there, shivering, until the dawn.

But Nipper and his generals went round grimly, and succeeded in putting a stop to the rot.

"If you want to go anywhere, go down into the dining-hall, where the fires are still going!" said Nipper. "You can't be nervous there—in a crowd. Plenty of lights, and with the fires glowing—"

"Yes, that's a great idea!"

"Good egg!"

"Let's all go downstairs!"

There was an immediate rush. Within five minutes the dining-hall was packed to suffocation. Everybody was talking at once, and

dormitories. He insisted upon getting fully dressed—instead of going down ruffled and untidy, as the others had done.

Alf Brent was with him, not because he wanted to be, but because Alf was Archie's best chum.

"For goodness' sake, Archie, get a move on!" urged Brent. "Everybody else has gone down. Do you realise that we're upstairs here absolutely by ourselves?"

"I'm frightfully sorry to keep you waiting, old cheese, but this blessed tie absolutely refuses to behave itself."

"Bother the tie!" said Brent. "Can't you finish your dressing downstairs?"

"Downstairs?" repeated Archie in amazement. "Oh, I see what you mean! You mean downstairs?"

"Yes, I mean downstairs!" said Alf grimly.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "Good gad! You're not suggesting, you frightful fright, that I should conclude my toilet in public?"

Brent made a hopeless gesture. "Oh, get on with it!" he said resignedly. "But do be quick, Archie!"

"Since you put it like that, old dear, I'll dash about like anything!" said the Genial Ass of the Remove. "A final brush to the good old thatch, and all is ready."

Alf waited, half expecting to hear the tolling of that mysterious bell. But no sounds came to his ears, and the little dormitory was, to all intents and purposes, just the same as it had always been. It was difficult to believe that there could be any "haunting" here.

At last Archie was ready, and the two juniors switched off the light, then went out into the corridor.

It was in darkness.

"Oh, yes, of course!" grumbled Brent. "Some brainy fathead has switched off the lights in the passage!"

"A detail, laddie—a detail!" said Archie. "In fact, if you ask my opinion, the whole dashed business is dashed ridic. I mean to say, why stagger down at the hour of one o'clock in the morning? It's such a frightful fag—and so confoundedly id.!"

"So confoundedly what?" asked Brent.

"Id., dear chappie," replied Archie. "That is to say, idiotic. I mean, how can we obtain our beauty sleep if we—"

"You don't want any beauty sleep, Archie—you're beautiful enough already!" interrupted Brent. "Come along—get a move on!"

They reached the end of the long corridor, and at this point the staircase led downwards to the hall. But there was a smaller staircase, too, which led upwards, towards the attics. And, just as they were passing



carrying turkeys, hams, and other Christmas fare. They were going to celebrate Christmas in the usual way!

it was impossible to feel any ghostly influence here.

Consequently, a great deal of the nervousness had died down. But an unhealthy excitement had taken its place. Nobody would dream of going back to bed now. They wanted to cling together—to remain in one big body. Many of the juniors wouldn't have gone upstairs alone for a ten-pound note.

It was not surprising, perhaps, that Archie Glenthorne was the last fellow to leave the

this spot, Brent came to a sudden halt, his heart nearly jumping into his mouth.

Some little distance up those stairs, there was a half landing, with a small window close by. The moonlight was streaming in through this window, and a figure was standing there.

Brent only saw it out of the corner of his eye at first, and then he turned his head sharply. He gulped, and stood transfixed. He gripped Archie's arm fiercely—so fiercely that the elegant junior winced.

"Really, old boy, I hardly see the necessity— Good gad!"

Archie broke off, and his monocle dropped from his eye.

"Can—can you see it, too?" breathed Alf Brent huskily.

"Absolutely!" whispered Archie. "Odds visions and apparitions! I mean to say, the ghost, what?"

Still they found it impossible to move. They were held there as though by some sinister influence. And they were staring at the grey-cloaked figure of a monk—complete with his cowl.



CHAPTER 17.

The Breaking Point I

THE figure of the spectral monk was as unexpected as it was startling.

Not a sound did it just stood there—the apparition utter. motionless, intangible.

Just then a cloud passed over the face of the moon, and, for a moment, the landing became enshrouded in darkness. Before Archie Glenthorne and Alf Brent could recover the use of their limbs, the cloud passed, and the moonlight streamed out again.

"Look!" whispered Brent. "It's gone!"

"Gone?" said Archie dazedly. "Oh, rather! You mean, it's gone, what? The good old monk! Odds mysteries! Absolutely!"

It was certainly staggering. A few seconds earlier, that monk had been standing there, clearly, distinctly. But now there was no sign of him—nothing but the blank landing, with the moonbeams streaming through the window.

"Come on!" panted Brent huskily.

He dragged at Archie, and the pair of them went tearing down the main stairs. A

few moments later, they burst into the big dining-hall, to find the room crowded to suffocation with noisily chattering juniors. The lights were gleaming, the fires were blazing merrily. It was very cheerful in there.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" asked Boots, turning to the newcomers.

"We've seen him!" shouted Brent hoarsely. "We've seen the phantom monk!"

"What!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"They've seen the ghost!"

A perfect babble of shouts arose, and Nipper pushed his way through the crowd; he grasped hold of Alf Brent's arm.

"Look here, Brent, you ass!" he said sharply. "What's the idea of frightening the chaps like this?"

"I wasn't frightening them!" protested Brent. "I only said—"

"Absolutely!" put in Archie. "Dear old lad, it's a fact. I mean, we saw the good old monk standing on the staircase, and the next dashed moment he had gone. A really juicy sort of experience, if you know what I mean. In fact, dashed odd!"

"Where did you see him?" asked Handforth, barging up.

"On the landing of the small staircase which leads up to the attics," replied Brent. "He was standing there, and the moon was shining—"

"Are you game to come up with me, Handy?" broke in Nipper. "We'd better investigate this at once!"

"Of course I'm game!" replied Handforth promptly. "I'm not frightened of any ghosts! I don't believe in ghosts—never did! Who else is coming?"

"I will!" said Reggie Pitt.

"Same here!" declared Boots.

A little group of them went hurrying off, guided by Brent.

But when they reached the half landing there was nothing whatever to be seen. The ghost had left no trace behind him. Nipper searched carefully, but the result was nil. They even went upstairs, right to the attics, and examined the corridors and the windows. But nothing suspicious came to light.

Nipper had believed that some trickster was at work—perhaps one of the Fourth Formers. But, later, all the boys in the garrison were accounted for. Nobody had been playing any games. And it stood to reason that there could be no intruders in the Modern House. The place was barricaded like a fortress, and entry was well nigh impossible.

"Did you find anything?" went up a general shout, as the searchers returned to the big dining-hall.

"No, nothing," replied Nipper, frowning. "I don't believe that Archie and Brent saw anything at all. They must have imagined—"

"We didn't!" insisted Brent indignantly. "We saw that monk as plainly as we can see you, Nipper. Didn't we, Archie?"

"Well, not absolutely, dear old boy," re-

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plied Archie guardedly. "I mean to say, we can gaze on Nipper with absolute distinctness, if you gather the trend. But the good old monk was rather vague. There he stood, I mean, and the next dashed moment, there he didn't stand. Zing! The good old phantom had gone!"

"That's true enough," admitted Brent. "But we saw him clearly. We weren't deceived by a shadow, or anything like that."

"Well, this is good enough for me!" said Armstrong. "The place is haunted! It's clear enough now—we don't want any more evidence. Lots of chaps have heard that ghostly music, and they've heard the tolling of the bell—and that monk's voice, too. Now two of the chaps have seen the monk himself! There's a ghost about the place, and we ought to clear out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's go into the East House!" shouted Griffith.

"No fear!" shouted Hubbard. "What's the matter with the Ancient House? Let's go there."

"But General Carfax is living in the Ancient House!" protested somebody.

"All the better!" said Hubbard. "The water will be on, and fires alight, and all that sort of thing. Aren't there enough of us? We can pitch him out, and take possession of the Ancient House for ourselves!"

"Hear, hear!"

"By Jove! That's a good idea!"

Hubbard glowed with pride. It wasn't often that he arose to such prominence as this. The bulk of the fellows were enthusiastically in favour of his suggestion.

"Keep cool, you idiots!" roared Handforth aggressively. "What the dickens are you talking about? We mustn't pinch the Ancient House!"

"Why not?" went up a yell.

"Because we're comfortable enough here—with all our barricades, and everything shipshape and running smoothly," replied Handforth. "Besides, haven't we decided that we shan't take the offensive?"

"But things are different now," argued Griffith.

"They're no different!" said Handforth. "Right from the very start, we've been on the defensive, and there's no reason why we should alter now."

"Handy's right!" said Nipper urgently. "We mustn't do a thing like that—it would be the death knell of our barring-out. As long as we remain here, and keep on the defensive, we shall be safe. If the general chooses to attack us, we're perfectly justified in resisting. But that's a very different thing to pitching General Carfax out of his own quarters."

"Well, we're not going to stay here!" said many juniors.

But stay they did.

The breaking point had been reached, but Nipper and Handforth and the other "strong men" of the Junior School managed to get

things in hand. It was finally decided that they should all sit up until dawn.

But when dawn came half the juniors were sound asleep. They were curled up on the floor, in the corners, they were sleeping on the chairs, and on the tables.

Even when the first light of dawn came, nothing would induce the wakeful juniors to go back to their bed-rooms. They wanted to remain here, in the warmth and cheer of the big dining hall, with its crowded company.



CHAPTER 18.

Christmas Day!

N astonishing change had come over the rebels by mid-morning.

It was Christmas Day, and the sun was shining gloriously out of a clear sky. Outside, the snow was thick, and it sparkled with healthy frost. It was a perfect Christmas Day in every sense, and it was impossible to feel depressed or nervous.

The majority of the fellows were laughing at their fears of the previous night. It all seemed so different now. Even the weaklings were looking a bit sheepish.

"Of course, it's dotty to talk about deserting our stronghold," said Hubbard. "We're dug in here—we're firmly entrenched. If we went into one of the other Houses, we should have to do the work all over again, and that would take days. Far better to stay here."

"And blow the ghost, eh?" grinned Doyle. "We were a lot of fatheads last night. I don't believe anybody heard any music, or a tolling bell, or anything. It was just imagination."

"That's all!" said one of the others.

The sunlight made all the difference! The boys were bold now—carefree and ready enough to brave a hundred ghosts.

Besides, it was Christmas Day, and Fatty Little and about a third of the rebels were busy down in the kitchen, preparing the most gorgeous Christmas dinner that had ever been thought of.

Everybody, of course, wanted to take part in that work. It was a labour of love. But Fatty Little, who was in sole command of the food department, had been very firm. He only wanted picked men, fellows he knew from experience.

Since the barring-out had begun, Fatty had taken the juniors in turn to help him in the preparation of the meals, and by now he knew who were the best and most reliable. These valiants had now been selected for the vital work of preparing the Christmas dinner.

Somebody suggested a snowball fight in the East Square. It seemed such a pity to remain indoors, and there was practically no prospect of any trouble from General Carfax on Christmas morning.

Nipper, as leader, was approached, and he at once agreed to the plan.

"After all, we shall be safe enough," he said; "and these chaps need to let off some steam. There's nothing like healthy exercise to drive the cobwebs from the brain. Perhaps they'll be in a fitter condition to-night," he added confidentially to Handforth.

"Yes, rather!" said Edward Oswald. "We don't want a repetition of what happened last night, do we? A snowfight is just the thing, too. I know! Let's have a regular battle between the Fourth and the Remove, eh?"

"Good idea!" nodded Nipper.

Before long the battle was in full progress. Just by way of precaution, a number of the Third-Formers had been pressed into service to act as scouts. These were placed by the East Arch, and at the open end of the Square. They kept guard, ready to shout a warning at the slightest sign of a move from General Carfax.

But no such move came.

The general kept strictly to his own quarters, and did not even show himself. So far as the rebels were concerned, they had St. Frank's entirely to themselves.

That snowball fight was a glorious affair.

The tide of battle ebbed and flowed for a considerable time, and it was difficult to say which side was winning. The East Square

was filled with flying snowballs, and the Christmas morning was noisy with the shouts and laughter of the rebels.

The Remove was certainly winning, when somebody shouted out that dinner was ready. That put an end to the fight on the spot. There was an immediate rush for the windows of the Modern House, and the combatants went tearing through, smothered in snow and laughing gaily.

"By jingo!" shouted De Valerie. "I've got an appetite like a horse! I could eat half a dozen turkeys all on my own!"

"Same here!" grinned Fullwood. "Never mind the snowfight! We can resume that after dinner. Let's hope that Fatty has excelled himself!"

The scene in the dining-hall shortly afterwards was one that the juniors were destined long to remember.

This was no ordinary Yuletide dinner. It was the most extraordinary one, in fact, that any of those fellows had ever indulged in.

Naturally, there wasn't room for everybody at the tables. But smaller tables had been dragged in, and every available inch of the space was occupied. Indeed, the diners overflowed out into the hall, but nobody cared as long as the food was forthcoming.

There were waiters galore. Everybody wanted to help, and everybody, in fact, did

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help. Naturally, there was a great deal of confusion, owing to this. But, sooner or later, each fellow got his own well-filled plate.

There were constant streams of juniors running to and fro between the kitchen and the dining-hall, and as the food came along so the cheers arose. And everybody was thoroughly agreed that Fatty Little had indeed bettered his previous best.

He had always been famous as a chef, but this Christmas dinner was a real triumph. The turkeys had been cooked to a turn, and there was ample for everybody. Certainly, the stuffing was rather open to doubt. It contained all sorts of ingredients that no self-respecting chef would usually put into turkey stuffing. But the rebels were not particular, and in their opinion Fatty had improved upon the conventional type of cooking.

His gravy, for example, was enriched by a perfect medley of sauces. That gravy was unlike any other gravy on earth, but it tasted good, and nobody asked any questions.

As for the Christmas puddings, they were supreme.

It must be admitted that they contained an extraordinary amount of shelled walnuts and peanuts, in addition to the customary almonds, but in Fatty's opinion this was a great improvement. In the fruit line, too, he had added figs and dates to the conventional plums.

Anyhow, the puddings disappeared with extraordinary rapidity, and when the dinner was finally over, brought to a triumphant conclusion by the liberal eating of fruit, everybody felt excessively lazy.

There was no further desire for snow-fighting, and the afternoon was passed mainly in reading or in lolling about, doing nothing.

In fact, it was very lucky for the rebels that no attack came during those vital hours. For it took them practically until tea-time to recover, and even then the majority of them were still feeling languid and unenergetic.

And now the joys of Christmas Night lay ahead of them—Christmas Night, with all its jollifications, its games, and its noisy delights!

accordance with the true Christmas tradition.

Although nobody actually said anything, it was generally felt that the lack of feminine company was a bit of a damper on the party. Many of the fellows secretly deplored the absence of Irene & Co., of the Moor View School. A few girls would have bucked things up.

Parlour games are all very well at a big party, but girls are needed to make them successful. However, nobody was rash enough to open the subject, and the rebels were determined to make the best of things.

They ignored that old legend of the phantom of the Modern House, too. The subject was completely taboo.

But, try as they would, they could not help thinking of, could not help remembering, the previous night's adventures. During daylight they had laughed, and they had dismissed the subject with a careless word. But now darkness had come again—and it was remembered that this was the fatal night, too!

Christmas Night!

And, according to the legend, this was the night when tragedy would occur—if any human beings were rash enough to remain within the walls of the haunted building. It was on this night, centuries ago, that the hapless old monk had been murdered, while playing his quaint musical instrument.

The juniors tried to forget it. They entered into the spirit of the games with enthusiasm. But whenever there was a lull it could be seen that many of the fellows were thoughtful. Many of them cast glances out into the passages and halls, and it was easy enough to guess what they had in their minds.

The "strong men" of the garrison—that is to say, Nipper, Handforth & Co., Pitt and Boots, etc.—had previously held a little conference, and had come to a fixed decision. They had all agreed to do their utmost to speed up the revels at the slightest sign of any flagging.

The general idea was to get the juniors so thoroughly tired by the end of the evening that they would sleep like logs, ghost or no ghost. It was a good scheme, too, and it would undoubtedly have succeeded if the phantom presence had remained inactive until late.

Unfortunately for the plan, a manifestation occurred quite early in the evening, before any of the juniors had grown tired.

The first sign of it was noticed by a group of Third Formers, who, sitting over by the big log fire, were employed in the pleasant task of roasting chestnuts, and devouring them. They were Ryder and Hook and two or three other fags of the East House gang.

It was young Billy Hook who suddenly let out a yell, and urged the others to be quiet.

"What's the matter with you, you silly young ass?" demanded the bullying Fullerton.

"Listen!" shouted Hook. "I—I heard music just then!"

"What!"

CHAPTER 19.

The Interruption!

VERY elaborate programme had been prepared for Christmas Night.



The rebels saw no reason why they should not indulge in all the happy games and joys that they usually had in their own homes. In fact, things would be a lot better here, for at such a party the rule is—"the more the merrier."

The great dining-hall had been completely cleared, and now it was like a vast ball-room. The decorations were elaborate, and every available light was switched on.

The big fireplace was blazing merrily, and there were even great logs burning, in

"I tell you I did!" yelled Hook. "A sort of wailing sound—"

"Be quiet, everybody!" shouted Fullerton nervously.

Miraculously, everybody in that great apartment became stilled. At any other time, Fullerton wouldn't have been even noticed. But now he was obeyed unquestioningly, by fags, Fourth Formers, and Removites alike. For they had all been waiting for that signal.

And now they were hushed—their ears were straining to listen.

Nipper who had been out in the hall, with Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, noticed the change at once. He came hurrying in, and looked round sharply.

The scene was rather impressive.

Everybody in the great dining-hall was standing perfectly still, tense and alert. Almost every eye was expressive of a sudden dread.

"What's wrong here?" demanded Nipper, to whom the only noticeable sound was that of the fire, crackling merrily.

"Dry up!" hissed Hubbard. "Some of those Third Formers have heard the mysterious music again!"

"Rubbish!" said Nipper sharply. "Let's go on with the game! Come on, you chaps! We haven't tried—"

"Shut up, Nipper!"

"Be quiet, you idiot!"

It was impossible to make the juniors noisy again. They were on edge, and although, actually, they didn't want to hear that ghostly music, something they could not control made them listen.

And, sure enough, the mournful strains were soon heard.

"There!" breathed De Valeric. "I can hear it now! Can't you?" he added, looking round at the others.

"Hush!" came several voices.

The strains of that quaint instrument rose throbbingly on the air, and now they were louder than they had ever been before. They seemed to come, more particularly, from one end of the room. Nipper hurried across, and looked searchingly in every corner—at the ceiling, at the floor. But he could not determine from which direction the music actually emanated. He only knew that it was there—in the room, filling the air.

"The phantom music!" shouted Hubbard, in a frightened voice. "This is Christmas night, you chaps! That means that there's going to be a death!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Let's clear out now—while we're safe!"

"Yes, yes!"

And there was an immediate rush for the doors—a panic-stricken flight.

In a second, Nipper realised that unless something was done over half the rebels would bolt out of the Modern House, and then the garrison would be completely disorganised.

"Hi, you fellows!" he roared. "Handy—

Boots—Reggie! Come on, all of you! It's got to be a fight!"

"You bet it has!" thundered Handforth. "We're not going to have any deserters! Anybody who tried to get out of this House will have to settle with me! Come on! They've asked for a scrap, and we'll let 'em have it!"

The jollifications of Christmas night had degenerated into a free fight!



CHAPTER 20.

What Happened to Gulliver!

IT was touch and go for the first few minutes.

The majority of the rebels, terrified by the phantom music—and by the possibility of what might follow—were fighting madly to smash down the barricades, so that they could rush out into the snow-covered grounds.

This delay was fortunate, for Nipper & Co., assisted by Handforth, Boots, Reggie Pitt, and others, were able to get in some good work. The rebel force was disorganised, and they were fighting amongst themselves.

But it had to be done.

Many of Nipper's lieutenants were rather scared themselves, but they were faithful to their promise. They kept their wits about them sufficiently to realise that any kind of mass desertion would mean the collapse of the great barring-out, and that would mean that, after all, Edward Oswald Handforth would have to suffer the extreme punishment to which he had been sentenced. He had been expelled, and never would he be allowed to enter St. Frank's again.

So Handforth and Nipper, and their staunch supporters, were fighting a grim battle as they went headlong into this scrap.

"You'd mutiny, would you?" roared Handforth aggressively. "By George! Take that, you rotter! Yes, and you can take this!"

Biff! Crash!

Handforth was fighting with all his usual force, and, incidentally, he was thoroughly enjoying himself. This kind of recreation, on Christmas night, suited him down to the ground. It is doubtful if it suited his victims.

"Keep your heads, you chaps!" shouted Nipper. "Don't forget that it's for Handy's sake!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Reggie Pitt. "Now then, West House! Show the others that you're not afraid of a silly ghost! Let's put a stop to this panic now! There's nothing to be afraid of!"

"Let's get outside—let's get outside!"

"Yes, yes!"

"Open the doors!"



The panic-stricken rebels fought desperately to get out of their haunted stronghold, and Nipper, Handforth, Pitt, Boots and a few others fought more desperately still to keep them back. Ghost or no ghost, these rebels had got to be prevented from leaving the Modern House.

The shouts were continuous, and the fighting went on in grim earnest

"If we desert the stronghold now, it'll mean that Handy will be expelled!" shouted Nipper urgently. "Pull yourselves together, you fatheads! There's no need to bunk like this! Keep it up, Handy! That's the way, Buster! Let them have it! We'll show them!"

"You bet we will!" thundered Buster Boots. "We're the officers, and these rotters have got to obey orders!"

And then, in the middle of all the excitement, a wild screaming was heard. It was so strange, so terrifying, that many of the combatants ceased activities.

Gulliver, of the Remove, came staggering along from one of the other corridors. He was as pale as a sheet, and it was evident that he had uttered those wild screams.

"What's the matter with you?" shouted Fullwood, running up to him and steadying him.

"I've seen it—I've seen the ghost!" panted Gulliver sobbingly

Then, to the consternation of the juniors near him, he sank down, and fell to the floor in a limp heap.

"Great Scott!" said Fullwood, glancing round in alarm. "He's fainted!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Fetch some water, somebody—quick!"

"Water—water!"

The diversion was welcome to Nipper, for the panic-stricken rebels were not fighting so desperately to get out now. Nipper pressed his way through, and arrived at Gulliver's side.

"I expect he's only shamming!" said Christine breathlessly.

But it was evident, from the pallor of Gulliver's face, that he had fainted in real earnest. Not that this was very surprising. Albert Gulliver had never been possessed of much courage. He was, indeed, one of the worst cads of the Ancient House, and he had never been heart and soul in this rebellion. But, like a few of the other rotters, he had been more or less compelled to stand in with all the rest. For the Junior School had gone solidly into this barring-out.

"It's all right, he's coming round!" said Nipper, as he heaved Gulliver's shoulders from the floor, and rested them against his knee. "Now then, Gully; pull yourself together!"

Gulliver opened his eyes, and looked round wildly.

"Keep it away!" he whispered. "Oh, keep it away!"

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said Nipper gently. "There's nothing here, Gulliver. What did you see, anyhow?"

"I—I was trying to get out by one of the back windows," panted Gulliver desperately.

"I couldn't get the barricades down, though. They were too strong for me. But I happened to look outside, and there, on the top-most corner of the roof, I saw the monk!"

"On the roof!" echoed several of the juniors.

• "Yes—right on the corner!"

"Which roof?" asked Nipper sharply

"This roof, of course—on the wing!" said the frightened junior. "He was right in the moonlight, and I could see his grey robe, and

the hood over his head. Yes, and I could see through him! Clean through him, you know, just as though he were transparent!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And his eyes were awful!" went on Gulliver. "He was right up there, and yet I could see his eyes glowing—glowing redly, just like a cat's, you know. And then suddenly he vanished. He's coming—he's coming this way. I tell you we've got to clear out! This place is haunted, and——"

"The ghost's here!" came a shout from the staircase. "Somebody's just heard him in the upper corridor. He's up there—warning us all to clear out!"

One of the Fourth-Formers came running up, thoroughly scared. So that phantom voice had made itself heard again—was actually here, in the building once more!

The panic, which had momentarily died down, broke out again with greater intensity than ever!



CHAPTER 21.

The Fight in the Triangle!

NIPPER ran round, shouting to his main supporters. "Don't let them get out!" he roared anxiously. "Fight as hard as you can!"

"Leave it to us!" thundered Handforth. "Now, then, Mac! Come on, Churchy! Let 'em have it!"

"This is a fine kind of Christmas jollification—I don't think!" panted Church, as he obeyed to obey his leader's injunction.

"What more do you want?" demanded Handforth, as he biffed to right and left.

He apparently considered that this was the greatest form of enjoyment that anybody could possibly wish for. He was standing with his back to one of the barricaded doors, and Church and McClure were on either side of him—a sort of modern edition of Horatius holding the bridge.

Nipper was busy at one of the windows, assisted by Tregellis-West and Watson. Fullwood & Co. and Buster Boots were hard at it some little distance away, while Reggie Pitt was trying to get his West House contingent into order.

"We've got to put a stop to this panic!" Reggie was roaring. "It'll be no good rushing out into the Triangle in the snow. Once we're disbanded the game will be up! It's just what General Carfax is waiting for!"

The air was thick with shouts and angry cries. The rank and file were determined to break free—to get out into the open air. The atmosphere of this haunted place was depriving them of all their natural strength and courage.

"The bell—the tolling bell!" went up a shout. "We can hear it in the hall!"

"Let's get out!"

There was a mad rush, and Handforth & Co., at their own barricade, were nearly swept off their feet. Near by, Nipper failed to withstand the rush. There was a sound of smashing and crashing, and the window was partially opened.

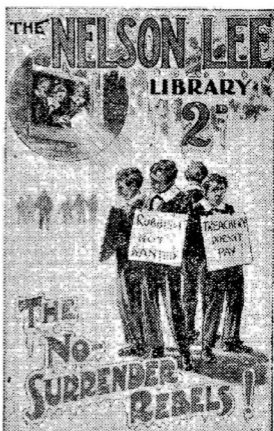
"Hurrah! We're out!"

"Not yet!" roared Nipper angrily.

Biff! Thud!

He was fighting with all his strength—knowing only too well that everything depended upon keeping the rebel force intact. Ghost or no ghost, they all had to remain within the Modern House. Some instinct seemed to tell Nipper that it would be absolutely fatal if the rebels broke free.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



At that moment, as a kind of relief, a wild scream broke out from the Triangle. It was different from the sound that Gulliver had made, and Nipper, turning, stared out through the opening in the window.

The moonlight was streaming full over the Triangle, and he could see a figure there. It was a perfect winter's evening, without a cloud in the sky, and in the clear atmosphere Nipper could easily recognise the figure of General Christopher Carfax.

There he was, in the very middle of the Triangle, not far from the Fountain. And he appeared to be insane!

"Look!" went up a shout. "Look at the general!"

"What's he doing?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tommy Watson. "He seems to be fighting!"

This was a fact. Surprise gripped the rebels, and the scrap in the Modern House ceased. Everybody crowded to the windows, and stared out into the moonlight.

There was General Carfax, fighting desperately—fighting against nothing! He was trying to drag himself away, but it seemed that he could not get free.

"Help—help!" he shouted wildly. "It's got me—it's got me!"

"The ghost!" went up a horrified chorus.

Nipper seized his advantage in a flash.

"And you all want to go out there, do

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you?" he yelled. "If you're in peril of the ghost here, you're just as much in peril out there. So you might as well stay where you are!"

"That's right enough!" panted Hubbard, pale with fright. "What's the good of going out there, you chaps? Look! The ghost has got hold of the general, and it's beating him down!"

Nipper's words had had remarkable effect. It certainly did seem useless for the rebels to break out of the Modern House like this if they were to run into fresh peril. There seemed to be just as much danger out there in the open Triangle.

"Help—help!"

The shouts from the general were growing more feeble, although he was still fighting desperately. The snow was flying in all directions, and he whirled round, beating his hands into the air, just as though he were trying to stave something off.

It was fascinating to watch him.

As the seconds passed he sank lower and lower, until he was on his knees in the snow. And still he fought—still he tried to keep off the invisible foe.

A silence had fallen upon the juniors now. They watched, breathless. They were horrified by it all—bewildered. They did not know what to think. But their mad desire to get out of their stronghold had now suffered a relapse. Apparently they were safer within these walls!

"Help—help!" came the general's shouts, still more feeble. "I can't keep it up—it's got me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a wild shout of laughter—in a strained, high-pitched voice—and it came from the Triangle, too; came from the spot where the general was fighting! And, as it rang out, the old soldier fell back, his hands to his face.

"No, no!" he screamed. "Don't mock at me! Don't—Aaaaah!"

A sobbing, wailing cry broke from him, and he fell prone—to remain motionless in the snow, his figure hunched, his voice silent!



CHAPTER 22.

The Rescue!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH came to himself with a start. He pushed the other juniors to right and to left, and then leapt out through a breach in the barricades.

"Where are you going, Handy?" asked Church, in a frightened voice.

"I'm going to help the general, of course!" roared Handforth. "Come on, you fellows! What's the matter with us? Why didn't we go to his rescue? He shouted for help, didn't he? Come on—unless you're funky!"

At that taunt about half a dozen of the rebels broke through, and accompanied Handforth. Nipper was foremost—for he had needed no taunting. In another moment the juniors arrived at the spot where General Carfax had been struggling.

The snow was strewn everywhere, and there lay the general, breathing heavily, a pitiful figure in his dishevelled state, with the snow smothering him.

"He's still alive!" said Handforth, with relief.

"What about that—that Thing he was fighting with?" asked Church, as he looked round. "I wonder—"

"Don't wonder—lend a hand here!" interrupted Nipper briskly. "Come on, all of you! We'll lift him up and carry him into the Modern House."

"But why?" asked Pitt, in surprise. "Wouldn't it be better to take him back to his own quarters?"

"No—we'll take him into our own stronghold," replied Nipper. "We don't want to leave that place for longer than we can help. We've had enough trouble with the chaps already!"

"By Jove, so we have!" agreed Reggie. "Yes, we'd better take him there."

The general was gently raised and carried through the snow to the Modern House, where the rebels were gathered at every window, looking out. There were signs that the general was coming to his senses now, and after they had got him inside and the barricades had been roughly put back into place, he opened his eyes.

"What—what are you doing to me?" he muttered dazedly.

He tried to sit up, and he looked round with a frightened expression in his eyes.

"What is this place?" he panted. "Where am I? By crackey! So you've got me, have you, you young rascals? You insubordinate young good-for-nothings!"

"Hang it, sir, we brought you in here out of danger!" protested Handforth.

"Eh? Danger?" said the general. "Ah, yes! That—that horrible phantom! Good heavens! What happened? I—I don't seem to remember."

He broke off, and stared round him with utter fear.

"Is—is this the Modern House?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Yes, sir," replied Nipper. "You're quite safe—"

"Safe!" shouted the general, struggling to his feet, in spite of the hands that tried to hold him down. "You young idiots! There is danger—terrible danger! You shouldn't have brought me here! You shouldn't stay here yourselves! Don't I keep telling you—"

"Steady, sir!" said Nipper. "Don't get excited. You say that something attacked you in the Triangle?"

"I was fighting!" muttered the general huskily. "Something intangible—something shadowy and horrible."

"It was so intangible, sir, that we couldn't see it," pointed out Nipper dryly.

The general gave him a sharp glance.

"No, no!" he said. "I don't suppose you could see it. I could hardly see it myself. But I was gripped, I tell you, and it held me."

He turned round, looking at all the faces that encircled him, and there was something indescribably fearful in his expression.

"The Phantom Monk!" he muttered. "Yes, that was it! Haven't you heard of the Phantom Monk, my boys? It is haunting this House! Every Christmas the Phantom Monk appears, and if any of you have heard the tolling of the death bell, then it is an awful sign."

"We've all heard it, sir!" shouted somebody.

"Then go—go from this place!" panted the general. "Good heavens! You mustn't remain here for another moment! The ghost is abroad. It will be fatal for some of us if we stay."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Let's get out—quick!"

"Hold on—hold on!" shouted Nipper urgently. "There's no need for you fellows to be frightened."

"You young fool!" shouted the general, swinging round on Nipper. "Do you dare to know better than I? I tell you that this House is dangerous on Christmas night! The Phantom Monk—"

"Just a minute, sir," interrupted Nipper grimly. "It would suit your purpose very well, wouldn't it, if all these fellows ran panic-stricken out into the open?"

The general started.

"What do you mean?" he asked angrily.

"Just what I say, sir," replied Nipper. "It would suit you splendidly if we deserted our stronghold. Do you assure us, sir, on your word of honour, that you were really fighting with some shadowy object out in the Triangle? Will you give us your word, as an officer and a gentleman, sir?"

"This is nonsense!" the general blustered.

"Boy, how dare you?"

"You haven't answered my question yet, sir," said Nipper, with just a trace of irony in his voice. "Shall I suggest that you were fighting nothing out there in the snow? You figured that we would bring you in, didn't you? And then you thought you would complete your scheme by frightening and sending all the fellows rushing out, so that you could seize the garrison for yourself!"

General Christopher Carfax pursed his lips with fury.

"This is nonsense!" he shouted. "Boy, I will see that you, too, are expelled with this other young reprobate! You do not realise what you are talking about! There is danger here. You must all go at once."

But the other juniors were beginning to get suspicious, and there was something in Nipper's deadly calmness that held them in control.



CHAPTER 23.

The Phantom Monk!

GENERAL CARFAX waved an imperious hand.

"You have heard my warning—and you have seen what occurred to me out in the Triangle!" he said tensely. "If you boys value your lives, you will leave this accursed House at once—"

"But we didn't see any danger in the Triangle, sir," interrupted Nipper. "You

say that you were fighting with some intangible thing. But we couldn't see it."

"Boy," thundered the general, "are you daring to question the truth of my story?"

"I'm not saying that you are telling us any falsehoods, sir, but I am saying that you're a great master of strategy. It would be a very great triumph for you if we all poured out of our fortress and left it deserted."

In spite of himself, General Carfax started.

"Nonsense!" he shouted, in order to cover his momentary confusion. "There are other things! Have you not heard the tolling of the bell? Have you not heard the voice of the Phantom Monk?"

"Yes, sir!" went up a chorus.

"And have you not heard the mysterious music?" continued the general. "All these are signs—"

"How did you know that we've heard any music, sir?" asked Nipper quickly.

"Eh? How did I know? Why, I—I—"

"Nobody has told you, sir," went on Nipper shrewdly. "There hasn't been a mention of the ghostly music until now, and you're not going to tell us that you heard it on the other side of the Triangle. How did you know that there has been any music?"

General Carfax gulped.

"It—it is customary!" he blustered. "Every Christmas— That is to say, you know the legend. You know that an old monk was murdered while playing a clavichord, and—"

"I'm very sorry, general, but I believe that you have been organising the whole thing," said Nipper daringly. "Your object was to get the fellows into a panic, so that they would run from the Modern House in fear. And then you would be victorious. For without any stronghold we should be a routed mob. And you've always wanted to squash this barring-out, haven't you, sir?"

"This is outrageous!" shouted General Carfax. "You don't know what you're talking about, boy! You don't understand—"

"The monk—the monk!"

It was a dramatic interruption. Armstrong, of the East House, came running up, and his face was alight with excitement and fear. Everybody in that crowded hall turned, and stared at him in the full glare of the electric light.

"I've just seen the monk again!" shouted Armstrong. "I saw him on the roof, as Gulliver told us, and—"

"On the roof!" shouted Nipper. "Come on, Handy—you, too, Buster!"

"What the dickens—" began Handforth.

"About six of you!" went on Nipper tensely. "Come on, Tommy—you, too, Montie! We'll grab this monk now! And then we shall be at the bottom of this mystery!"

"The tolling bell!" shouted one of the fellows, from the rear.

"Listen!" went up a general chorus.

Sure enough, the tolling of the mystic bell

could be heard plainly. The general raised a hand, and his eyes were blazing.

"Don't you hear?" he shouted, in his enormous voice. "The tolling bell means danger! It is the sign—"

"Keep your heads, you fellows!" roared Nipper. "Don't take any notice of General Carfax! The monk is on the roof, and the bell is tolling! There's a connection there—if only we can find it. And our job is to grab that monk while the grabbing's good!"

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth. "Come on!"

"You'd better stay here, Buster," went on Nipper. "On second thoughts, you'll be more useful here than on the roof. See after the chaps, and be careful that they don't get into another panic and bolt. We're going to have this thing explained—now!"

The feeling of fear which had gripped the juniors previously was now turning to excitement. Everybody felt that they were on the verge of a great discovery. There was something in Nipper's attitude—something in his calmness—that steadied the rank and file of the rebels. There was no danger of another panic.

General Carfax stood facing all those juniors, and on his face there was an expression of baffled anger. But he tried hard to hide it, and he talked loudly of the dire peril of remaining. But to his evident chagrin, the rebels took no notice of him.

Up the stairs went Nipper and his little army of helpers. They tore up three at a time, and at last they arrived at the door at the top of the attic stairs which led out upon the roof. They burst it open, and no sooner had Nipper stepped out than he pointed.

"Look!" he said. "There's your Phantom Monk! Look at these footprints! What kind of a ghost is it that leaves a trail of this sort?"

"By George!" roared Handforth. "Somebody's been walking about up here!"

"It's a pity we abandoned the look-outs in the Tower!" said Nipper. "But we didn't think it was necessary over Christmas, and in this freezing weather, too. It just shows you how important it is to take every precaution. The general's men have had the roof to themselves, and they've made plenty of trouble, too. But we'll put a finish to all that now."

Rapidly the juniors spread themselves over the roof, which in many places was quite flat. There was no danger, since there were high parapets all round, so that none of the juniors could topple over.

"There he is!" yelled Handforth suddenly. "Look! The monk!"

And sure enough a figure could be seen against one of the chimneys. It was the figure of a man; he was enveloped in a long cloak, and had a cowl over his head.

He turned away from the chimney and started to make off. But with one accord Nipper and the others rushed at him!

CHAPTER 24.

The Truth!



OT him!"

It was a triumphant yell from Edward Oswald Handforth. A second earlier the

figure of the monk had slipped on the snow, and he had rolled upon the leads. Now the juniors were sprawling all over him, holding him down.

"Good!" said Nipper, as he pulled back the monk's hood. "Good-evening, old chap! Sorry to handle you so roughly, but it couldn't be helped."

The Phantom Monk struggled into a sitting posture, and grinned feebly.

"Oh, well, you've got me!" he said. "How did you find out? We thought we had you all scared into fits."

"Not this time!" chuckled Nipper. "We've got no quarrel with you, old fellow, so you can go off as soon as you like, after you've given us a few words of explanation. It might interest you to know that the general is downstairs, and he'll be awfully pleased when he knows that we've collared you red-handed."

In no circumstances could this man be looked upon as a rascal. He was a smiling young chap of about twenty-five, and his good-natured expression disarmed the juniors at once. He was allowed to get to his feet, and he shook some of the snow from his long cloak.

"Tommy, old man," said Nipper, turning to Watson. "Just dash down, will you, and tell all the chaps that we've collared the monk? Tell them that he's real flesh and blood, and that we'll soon come down with the details. And kindly see that the general is shown safely off the premises!"

"You bet!" said Tommy Watson cheerfully.

He went off, and Nipper turned to the stranger again.

"At a rough guess," he said, "I take you to be an electrician."

"Well, you're not far wrong," replied the man. "I'm a wireless expert, as a matter of fact."

"Wireless!" echoed Handforth, with a start.

"Yes; it was a simple enough dodge, really," said the man. "This isn't my affair at all, and I don't pretend to have any interest in it. But it's failed, so I might as well tell you how we worked it."

"That's what we want to know," said Nipper.

"Well, I rigged up a kind of miniature broadcasting set in the general's quarters, over the other side of the way," said the electrician, jerking his thumb towards the Ancient House. "There's one of those clavi-chord things there, too, and a big bell."

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"It was the general who broadcast the phantom voice," went on the wireless expert. "Up here, as you'll see, I've got a kind of pocket receiving set, with a loud speaker attached to it, and the loud speaker is on the end of a long line of wire."

"But—but—"

"You see, I've been operating up here," grinned the man. "I've been shoving that loud speaker down the chimneys, one after the other."

"Just as I thought!" nodded Nipper, turning to the others. "Don't you see? The tolling of the bell, the mysterious music, the phantom voice—all came from that loud speaker suspended on a wire down the chimney. We couldn't locate it as coming from the chimney, naturally, and it seemed to fill the whole room with sound—any room that the loud speaker happened to be in. That was why the mysterious things happened so quickly, in all parts of the House, one after the other."

"Then—then there's been no ghost at all?" asked Church.

"Of course there hasn't!" said Nipper. "I was suspicious of trickery from the very start, but I couldn't lay my finger on the explanation. But when I heard that Gulliver had seen the monk on the roof—well, I suspected things."

"That was the general's idea," said the wireless man. "I told him that it wouldn't be wise for me to show myself, but he thought that you were so scared that it would be a good dodge. I even came indoors once, and stood on the stairs."

"Oh, well, you're excused!" chuckled Nipper. "We've got no quarrel with you, so you can clear out as soon as you like. Give our compliments to the general, and tell him that he'll have to use some more of his famous strategy if he wants to drive us out."

Five minutes later Nipper and the others were downstairs, discussing the affair with the crowd.

Gulliver was feeling particularly sheepish, for he had stated, quite plainly, that he had seen clean through the phantom, and now the phantom had turned out to be solid flesh and blood. Gulliver came in for a great deal of chipping.

General Christopher Carfax had gone—thoroughly chagrined.

His idea had nearly succeeded, too. Only at the last minute had it failed. But for the valiant efforts of the rebel "officers" the whole force would have swept out, and then the game would have been up. For it came out afterwards that the general had had a number of men, all ready waiting, so that they could pounce into the Modern House and hold it, thus shutting the rebels out in the snow.

The scheme had certainly been an excellent one. The "haunting" had been planned

carefully, and the general had reckoned upon the boys getting panic-stricken.

"And on Christmas night, too!" said Handforth indignantly. "What do you think of him, you chaps? If it hadn't been for me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nipper, you mean!" chuckled Reggie Pitt. "Nipper's the chap who's saved the situation. Good old Nipper!"

"Hear, hear!"

And while the general, over in the Ancient House, gritted his teeth with helpless rage

and mortification, the rebels went ahead with their Christmas night festivities.

And now they enjoyed themselves to the full, for there was no longer any fear of a phantom, and the great barring-out continued with complete success.

THE END.

(Look out for next week's stirring long complete yarn entitled: "The No-Surrender Rebels!" How they live up to that motto in spite of tremendous difficulties is brilliantly told by Edwy Searles Brooks. Mind you order your copy in advance!)

FULL OF CHRISTMAS FARE!

Ever met William George Bunter?

No?

Jove! Then you have missed a treat!

He's the fattest and funniest schoolboy in the world!

All readers of the "Nelson Lee" are strongly urged to make the acquaintance of this famous schoolboy character. He's to be found in this week's BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF

THE MAGNET LIBRARY

In addition to the novel long complete story dealing with Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, there's a screamingly funny yarn by Dickie Nugent, one of the world's youngest "orthers," a rousing adventure tale of the Frozen North, an interesting and informative football feature, and a special article of topical interest entitled: "When the Ghost Walks."

TRY THIS WEEK'S

MAGNET

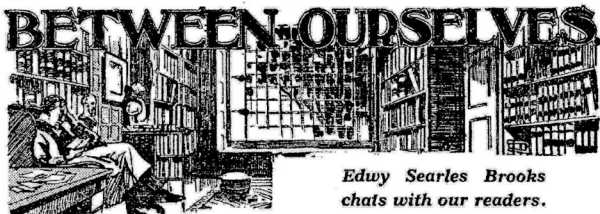
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BOYS! YOU'LL FIND IT AN AMAZING VALUE-FOR-MONEY PAPER.

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Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with our readers.

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.A. Every letter will have my personal attention. Letters of very special merit will be distinguished by a star (*) against the sender's name. My photo exchange offer is still open; my autographed photo for yours—but yours first, please.—E.S.B.

BEFORE starting to acknowledge this week's batch of letters, I want to wish all readers of "The Nelson Lee Library" a very merry and enjoyable Christmas. May they have plenty of presents, turkey, Christmas pudding—in fact, everything that they want.

My only hope is that they will all be sufficiently recovered by next Wednesday to stagger round to their newsagents to buy their copy of the Old Paper!

* * *

A. O. Clifford (Epsom), Ralph Herbert (Bowes Park), T. Knights (Hastings), Alexander Fowler* (Aberdeen), "A Gugnunc Reader" (Stoke Pound), Thomas Harry Pashley (Hull), C. N. Smith (Oshawa, Ont.), J. E. Francis (Dalston), "Western King" (Toronto), L. Buffa (London, W.1), "Aussie-En-Route" (London, W.C.2), Patrick Joseph Roche (Melbourne), P. Graham* (Sheffield), C. W. Pearce* (Lewisham), P. Pooley* (Sydney), Ruth Whittingham (Derby), Phil Coles** (Port Adelaide), J. Hunter (Nelson), Charles Bedo (Westcliff-on-Sea), "Sally From Our Alley" (Coonamble, N.S.W.).

* * *

That's the style, "Gugnunc Reader." The more readers of your sort we can have, the better it will be for the Old Paper. I feel I must quote a few words from your letter, as they set such a fine example. You say: "We buy two 'N.L.L.'s' every week; one is sent to my brother in India, who is 18, and the other to my brother Jack in Germany, who is just 15. My eldest brother has read the 'Nelson Lee' since it first began. I am nearly 14, and my grandmother, who is 65, reads them. My two brothers are in the army. The one in India used to lend his 'N. L.' to other boys, but now some of them get them sent from home also. I've also got a boy friend who used to borrow mine, but he buys it for himself now." That's fine, "Gugnunc Reader"! Because it's a "Library," that doesn't say Our Paper

should be regularly lent out in the same direction, does it? Of course, it would be a great idea for readers to lend out their copies every week in a different direction, and so stand a chance of constantly gathering in new readers, who will buy the Old Paper for themselves. Then, if they, in their turn, go and do likewise, the ball will keep rolling merrily. And the larger the circulation, the more constant the improvements, and the better the value. That's what we all want, isn't it? So come along, all you other chaps! If you love the Old Paper as much as you tell me you do, here's a chance to prove it in a practical way. If it's really as good as you think it is, others may form the same opinion, once Our Paper has been introduced to them.

* * *

Here's a letter I feel I must quote in full, as it may be helpful to those of my younger readers whose parents are prejudiced against the St. Frank's stories. It is addressed from "11, Fulney Road, Nether Green, SHEFFIELD," and signed "P. GRAHAM." This is what Mr. Graham says: "Dear Sir, I am writing to tell you what I think about the 'Nelson Lee Library.' About a month ago I picked up the 'Nelson Lee'—which my son bought weekly. Before this I always called your paper a rubbishy 'blood.' But, as soon as I began to read it, I found out that I was greatly mistaken. It is full of clean, wholesome reading—which I didn't expect, because of the boys and girls mixing. It is fit for any boy to read, and from now on I will always buy a copy of the 'Nelson Lee Library' on Wednesday morning. Hoping you will publish this in the 'Nelson Lee' as soon as possible, so as to show other fathers what the Old Paper is really like, I am, yours sincerely, P. GRAHAM." Many thanks, Mr. Graham, for your outspoken opinion, and also for your permission to reproduce it here. Let us hope that it may be the means of the ban being lifted from Our Paper in many directions.

Here, this won't do, C. W. Pearce! Just pitch into that brother of yours next time he pays you a visit! Ask him why the dickens he doesn't buy his own copies of the Old Paper, instead of waiting till he comes to visit you, and then reading up your back numbers! You persuade him to buy his own—and pass 'em along to non-readers when he's done with 'em. That's the kind of practical help we need, from as many readers as possible. Your letter was beautifully written and extraordinarily interesting. Hurry up, and let me say, "Good! Another from C. W. P.!" You can be very sure it won't be, "More rot! What a fag reading this!"

That's a very good idea of yours, Phil Coles, about producing, piece by piece, a chart of the entire interior of St. Frank's. Perhaps a floor plan of each House could be given, and then the various rooms depicted? If there should be any general desire for something of this kind, I'll certainly see what can be done about it. As to another "St. Frank's Magazine," to appear in the centre of the Old Paper—"a paper within a paper," as you put it—it also remains to be seen whether that would meet with universal approval. Changes of these kinds must have a majority in favour of them to be certain of success. You didn't give your League number, or mention if you were a member, to enable me to pass on to the C. O. your advertisement for the "Correspondents Wanted" column.

The last remark reminds me that it would be just as well if all my correspondents who are League members would quote their League numbers when writing to me. Naturally it is in their best interests to do this, as it is only fair that those who have given extra proof of their loyalty to Our Paper by joining the League, should have special consideration on that account. And it simplifies matters for me when they want something passed on to the C. O. for publication—though it is, of course, always far more desirable that League members should communicate direct with the Chief Officer on League matters.

You say you took a bet from a boy friend, "Sally From Our Alley," that your letter would be acknowledged before his. Very unwise of you—unless you made certain that your letter would reach me first. Then you would be bound to win, because without exception of any kind I always acknowledge letters in order of receipt. First come, first served—and no favours. As to your doubt whether I'd send my photograph "right out to Coonamble," you needn't doubt any longer. Send your photo along, "Sally From Our Alley," and you shall have mine right enough—autographed and everything. And this applies to readers all over the world. Any reader who wants my autographed photograph can have it with pleasure, pro-

vided only my hard and fast condition is complied with—I must have the exchange photograph from the reader first. Any old snap will do, but, naturally, the nicer the photograph, the better I shall like it.

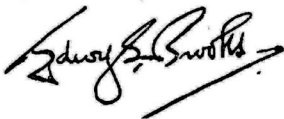
I'm all behind with my acknowledgments, and some of you readers who have written me are beginning to think you'll never see your names, I expect. Either my answers have been too long, or I haven't had enough space to make them in. Anyhow, something's got to be done about it. To begin with, I shall have to give short, snappy replies from now on—making this feature look like a mere collection of names, and even then, as new letters keep rolling in, it'll take many weeks for me to catch up to date. There are only two other ways out—I could acknowledge a number of your letters by post, and make a fresh start upon those just received, or I could try to persuade the Editor to give me more space for "Between Ourselves." Can any of you help me to decide which of the three ways is the best?

"Advocate of Christine" (Durban), Maisie Walker* (Townsville, Queensland), Julian Walker* (Townsville, Queensland), F. Brown (Jersey), "Dynamite" (Rathgar), Harry McMahon* (West Broken Hill, N.S.W.), "E.A.C." (Tisbury), "Hopeful" (Adelaide), Charles Vincent Brereton* (Congleton), E. Lecky-Thompson (Rangoon), C. Beilby (Guildford, W. Aus.), George Foster (Locds), Kitty Allen (Hackney), Mary Beckwith* (Coggleshall), Rita McEnteggart (Kells), Ronald E. Mabbett (Fairford), William Kitchen* (Buxton), J. D. Hosking* (Johannesburg), L. McKeown (Maritzburg), F. Saward (Braintree).

You had enough of Bob Christine in the Feud Series, didn't you, "Advocate of Christine"? So perhaps you and I are pals again now, eh?

I must think about a holiday series in Burma, E. Lecky-Thompson. So you want my photo without first sending me yours because you're afraid your picture will hurt my eyes, eh? Nothing doing! I'm quite willing to risk my eyesight.

How the dickens can I send you my photo, Kitty Allen, when the only address you give me is "Hackney, N.I."? So it's waiting till I hear from you again. Thanks for yours.



Christmas Forbidden!



A special, topical article which will interest all readers.

MERRIE England without Christmas! Yet it was once so, incredible as the idea seems. Cromwell and his Roundheads absolutely "stopped" Christmas for ten long years. If you dared so much as to wish a pal a "Merry Christmas" during that killjoy term of years you were "for it." In so doing you were celebrating Christmas. And that, in the eyes of the Roundhead Parliament, was a deep and deadly crime—like keeping the Whitsun and Easter holidays, both of which also came under the ban of the strong and morose Cromwell, who "bossed" England at that time.

Cromwell went—and Christmas and the other national holidays were once more legalised (by King Charles the Second). Now that killjoy is chiefly remembered merely on account of the large wart which decorated his nose!

Until quite recent years Christmas has always been a troublesome season. The house-to-house searches by Cromwell's soldiers during Christmas week—their quarry was Christmas pudding, mince pies, and other "fauna" of larders, which would be evidence that the owner of the house was daring to be of good Christmas cheer—was anticipated by some hundreds of years, by a ruler named Diocletian.

Beware of Christmas Boxes!

He embarked on his career of Christmas-spoiling in the year 284 A.D. He absolutely and entirely forbade any thought even of Christmas. And when one daring band of would-be Christmas observers went to church, in his city of Nicomedia, he made a bonfire of the lot—church, worshippers, and all!

We do things less viciously in these days. While everyone has free and unfettered right to enjoy Christmas as he or she pleases—so long as the celebrations do not interfere with the peace and comfort or safety of fellow-citizens—there are one or two items which every good citizen must still observe.

Christmas boxes is one of them. You can give your postman, or newsagent, or dustman a Christmas tip (in coin of the realm or mince pies). But beware of the arm of the law if your kindly action can possibly be translated as an attempt at bribery and corruption! Twenty-one years ago the Prevention of Corruption Act came into force, purposely to prevent secret payments—thinly disguised as mere Christmas boxes—whose real object is the securing of custom or some other favour.

This used to be a common form of "business" at Christmas; but now, wherever it is practised, it has to be done in the dark. And if a policeman gets wind of it, there are legal ructions, both for the giver and the receiver.

Christmas Cracker Crimes!

Carolling with the waits has also given rise to much unpleasantness—in and out of the law courts. At one time there was a sort of official business manager of each local band of midnight carollers. He paid the Christmas songsters on a commission basis. And to prevent undue competition, it was an offence against the law of England for any unauthorised waits to make themselves heard. That held good up to little more than a century ago.

Now you can go carolling to your heart's content—until, in fact, your voice comes under the notice of the police as being so discordant as to constitute a public nuisance!

Another way in which one can lay oneself open to legal proceedings without intending in the least to be criminal concerns Christmas crackers. These come under the Postmaster-General's ban. He hates his mail-vans and postmen to be concerned in the handling and transportation of explosives—under which heading come our Christmas crackers. So if you are contemplating sending by post a Christmas present of this nature, think again. The second thought will work out considerably cheaper!

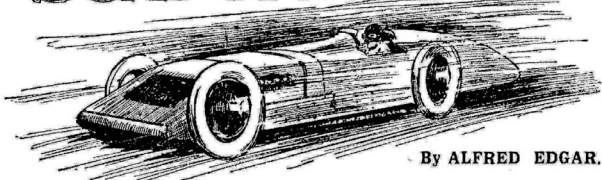
No Christmas—by Choice!

Of course, there is nothing to prevent anyone not keeping Christmas nowadays, though the last general and more or less voluntary foregoing of the holiday on anything like a large scale occurred just over four hundred years ago, in sympathy for King Henry the Eighth. On Christmas Day, in the year 1525, he was in the grip of a very severe illness. In token of sympathy and sorrow, England gave up that Christmas holiday!

So far as the general law of England is concerned, there is now little difference between Christmas Day and a Sunday. Game shooting, and going after game with dogs, and netting or otherwise trapping it, is forbidden, as on Sundays. Fish, however, are outside the scope of this prohibition. You may, with full sanction and approval of the law, try your luck with the funny tribe with hook and line on Christmas Day—though can you possibly picture anyone wanting to go fishing then?

THE RIVAL RECORD-BREAKERS! Ince Eights take their monster record-breaking machine up to Seacombe Sands, and Big Bill Barry, not to be outdone, takes the Kent Flyer there, too! And then the fur begins to fly!

SONS OF SPEED!



By ALFRED EDGAR.

HOW THE STORY STARTED:

DICK BARRY is a cheery, iron-nerved boy, whose great ambition is to drive racing cars. He acts as mechanic for his brother—

BILL BARRY, one of the most daring speedmen that ever handled a high-powered car, and who is the star driver for Kent racing machines. Bill is also to drive a record-breaking monster, which is being built by—

"PROFESSOR" KENT, who is the designer and owner of Kent cars. This racer is expected to do two hundred and fifty miles an hour, and while waiting for it to be completed, Bill takes a team of three racing machines to a big race in Italy, where his great rival—

MARK LYNCH is competing with speed cars known as Ince Eights. Bill and Lynch have always been deadly rivals. When the race starts, two of the Kent cars crack up, leaving only Bill in the race. Bill, however, collapses at three-quarters distance owing to the strain of holding his car at terrific speed, and Dick then takes the wheel. Dick snatches the lead from Lynch, but he is only a boy and cannot stick the pace. Eventually, after a terrific effort to hold out, his strength fails; the car gets out of control, and, although he instinctively stands on the brake pedal, the machine charges a fence near the grand-stands. Broken woodwork flies, and Dick feels the car canting over. Then something hits him on the head and blackness follows!

(Now read on.)

Out of the Race!

SHATTERED woodwork showered from the lurching car as it smashed through the fence. Spectators jumped madly from the spot, and for a moment the machine tilted on one side as though it were about to crash over.

A bump in the ground righted it, as the battered, dust-covered tail smashed down another section of fence. A lump of timber stabbed clean through the mesh of the radiator guard, and the front of the machine became blotted out in a choking cloud of hissing steam.

With dust spurring from the slithering tyres, the car bucked to a stop, a dozen yards of smashed fencing on one side of it. In the narrow, smoking cockpit Dick's figure sagged limply, his brain spinning in a maze of blackness; out on to the track bounced the billet of wood which had caught his head and had knocked him all but unconscious.

The moment that the car stopped, a score of men leaped for it. They dived through the cloud of smoke and dust and steam, ready hands reaching to lift Dick out.

Down the track, by the replenishment pits, Bill stared aghast as he saw the car leave the speedway, then he came running madly for the spot, all his own hurts forgotten. And, as he came, Lynch's roaring machine smashed past. It was in the lead now, and on the lean, dark face of its driver was a smile of sneering triumph.

Excited Italians were gently lifting Dick from the car as Bill thrust through the crowd. He pushed the men aside and slid a thick arm about his brother's shoulder.

"Dick—are you hurt? Dick!"

Dick's eyes were open, and he stared dazedly around him; comprehension came as he recognised his brother. Dick said nothing, but he kicked a little with his feet until the men holding his legs lowered them, so that he could stand.

He shook his head vigorously to clear it, and he still said nothing as he stared around. He saw the bulk of the race-worn machine near, with the tail all battered from where it had struck the fence.

Broken bits of wood strewed the narrow cockpit, and the tiny windscreen was all smashed. Steam was waivering up from the broken radiator, and on the ground there was a growing pool of

water, which had dribbled out of the smashed tubes.

With Bill holding him up, Dick staggered to the front of the machine.

"Steady, young 'un!" Bill growled. "Take it easy for— He broke off as Dick paused, staring at the tangled wire and broken tubes of the radiator. The balk of timber which had caused the damage still stuck from the breach it had made, and it was only too plain that the car was out of the race.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Bill!" Dick gasped. "I kind of conked out, and the car ran away—with me!" "Don't worry about the car," grunted Bill. "She knocked me up, and you did darned well to hold her so long."

"Yes; but I ought—to have come in before I—"

"That's all right, young 'un. You showed you were game. Nobody could have done more than you did!" And as he spoke, Bill reached out for a chair which someone had brought, and he pressed Dick down on to it.

An Italian carabinieri lifted the mouthpiece of his water-bottle to Dick's lips, then an ambulance man came up and looked at the bump which was swelling on the side of Dick's head. Other officials and police and spectators crowded round, staring from the boy to the wrecked car.

They'd admired the way Bill had fought and won the lead from Lynch, and they admired still more the way young Dick had held it.

Bill still carried the marks of his terrific fight with the car. His face was still blackened from the smoke, and the palms of his hands were skinned from the scrape and snatch of the kicking steering-wheel.

Dick's own hands were quivering yet from the stress of the fierce pace at which he had hurled the machine around the giant Italian speedway. His cheeks were flecked with little scratches and cuts, made by grit and stones flung from the spinning wheels of cars which he had overtaken and passed in the race.

But his appearance didn't show all the stress and strain that he had been through. Only Bill knew what it was like to try and hold the Kent machine at the limit of its speed for circuit after circuit, and there was something akin to admiration in his eyes as he looked down at Dick.

If there was one thing which Big Bill Barry admired more than anything else, it was luck. Dick had shown that he'd got plenty of it, and plenty of nerve, too. Bill wanted to get hold of the boy's hand and shake it again and again—only he knew that it would have hurt Dick as well as himself, because the ever-shifting steering-wheel hadn't left much skin on either of their palms.

As he sat there, feeling the strength steal back into his weakened muscles, Dick stared dolefully at the steaming broken radiator of the Kent car.

"Gosh, I've let old Bill down," he told himself, "all because I wasn't strong enough to stick it. I was a silly ass to think I could do anything. Fancy conking out like that! I bet Lynch will win by a street now. Bill must be wild about it, but he's a good sport not to show it!"

He could hear cars storming past on the track, with the Italian crowd yelling every time that a Fiat rocked by, because the red cars were built in Italy, and the spectators wanted to see them win. But the Fiats had no chance of snatching the lead from Lynch.

Presently Dick stood up.

"I'm all right now," he said, when Bill reached out a hand to steady him. Dick wasn't all right. For a moment or so, everything swam before his eyes, then he steadied and moved with his brother towards the track again.

The crowd parted to let them through, after Dick had done his best to thank the Italian

officials who had helped him out of the car; he couldn't speak Italian, but they seemed to understand what he was trying to say.

He stepped over scattered wood from the smashed fence, and then reached the edge of the track. With Bill behind him, he walked towards the replenishment pits. At the far end, by the finishing line, he saw a small group of officials gathering. One of whom held a black-and-white check flag, which he was carefully unfurling. It was the winner's flag, and would be waved when the winning machine crossed the line.

As Dick reached the pits, mechanics started clapping. He passed the pit belonging to a team of British machines, and men there leaned across the plank to thump at his bruised shoulders.

"Well driven, young 'un!"

"You know how to keep your foot down, kid!"

"Hard lines, Dick—but that's the way to show 'em!"

Dick stared at them, then grinned a little. Evidently they thought that he hadn't done so badly.

The Cablegram.

IT was just as Dick came in sight of the Kent pit that a sudden roar from the crowd announced the appearance of Lynch's machine, completing its final lap. Off the banking the car roared, leaping into the straight and then tearing down towards the group of officials and the checkered winner's flag.

The wheels of the mighty Ince Eight stamped whorls of dust from the race-worn track. Dick could see Lynch grinning behind the wheel, one arm raised as he waved in response to the plaudits of the crowd. An instant after and his car smashed over the line, with the flag fluttering down—Bill's rival had won!

Lynch trod on the brake-pedal, the car skidded a little, and then pulled into the side of the track. The crowd swarmed over the fencing, with carabinieri trying to hold them back; but the Italian police were smothered and the crowd surged on.

Dick could see them throwing flowers at the victorious machine. Mechanics from Lynch's pit ran past, plunging into the crowd to grab the driver and hoist him on to their shoulders. A minute or so afterwards they came by with him.

Lynch had the victor's laurel wreath around his neck, and he was smiling at the cheers of the following crowd. As he went past, he glanced down at Dick and Bill. His eyes lit up as he saw them, and his smile became an exultant, triumphant grin; he knew that Bill had started out to whip him in the race. Instead, Lynch had won, and all three of the Kent cars were wrecks.

"The rotter!" growled Dick, as he saw Lynch's jeering grin. Then, to his surprise, Big Bill began clapping with the crowd around, thumping his skinned palms together, regardless of how much it hurt.

"He's a darned good driver, even if he is a rotter, young 'un—give him credit for that!" he growled.

Dick realised that Bill was right. There was no doubt about Lynch being a good driver. He might be a cunning, crafty, scheming rotter, who'd bring off any dirty trick, but he had won the race and had squarely beaten the world's best cars.

Lynch and the crowd passed on, and as folk swarmed past the pit, Dick heard a mechanic call out to Bill and hand him a blue-tinted envelope, which bore the name of a cable office. Bill slit the covering without a word, and drew out the sheet within. He scanned the pasted strips, and then passed the cablegram to Dick.

It was from Professor Kent, and the message read:

"Big car now all ready. Hurry back."

That was all, but it meant that the two-hundred-and-fifty-miles-an-hour machine was finished and ready to make the big attempt to smash all world's records for land speed.

"Good!" grunted Bill, as Dick handed the cablegram back to him. "Now we'll see!" His rugged jaw squared as he glanced to where Lynch was still acknowledging the cheers of the excited Italian crowd. "If we couldn't beat Lynch here, I'll beat him with the old professor's big bus. I'll do two hundred and fifty miles an hour with it, or I'll crash!"

The Kent Flyer!

FOUR days later, Dick and Bill drove into the Kent works, back in England, and behind their car came lorries carrying the machines which had run in the Italian race. Apparently, they were expected, because

big enough to hold the car. He would have waited for you, only he heard that the Ince people are taking their record-breaker up there to-day."

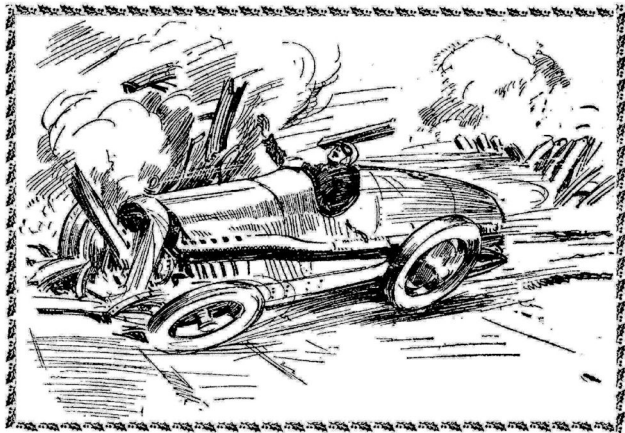
"What!" exclaimed Bill; and the man repeated his statement, while Dick stood by, listening.

Professor Kent had raced off with the new monster car that morning, because the Ince Eight firm had their giant speedster ready, and had announced that they were going to make preliminary runs before attempting to break records.

The professor didn't want them to get a start, and, if they did begin breaking records, he wanted to have his own machine ready to attack the Ince's new records as soon as they were made.

"We'll get up there almost at once," Bill grunted. "But there's some things I've got to do first. Come on, Dick!" Together they moved to the racing stable, where Bill found the foreman mechanic. He spent half an hour with the man, and at the end of that time he and Dick left the works, heading out on the long run to Seacombe Sands.

"We shan't get there until after dark," Bill told him. "But that doesn't matter, because I don't



The racing car slithered and crashed against the fence. A lump of wood stabbed clean through the mesh of the radiator guard, while a flying baulk of timber caught Dick on the side of the head, knocking him all but unconscious.

almost all the men in the works were grouped about the main gate, and they raised a cheer as Dick and Bill drove in.

They had heard about the way the Kent machines had cracked up in the race, and of Bill and Dick's fierce effort to keep the lead with the only machine left running. It was some little time before the two got away and went to look for the professor.

"He's gone with the big bus," a works clerk told them. "He left a message, asking you to go up there as soon as you could."

"But where has he gone?" asked Bill.

"Seacombe Sands," the man answered. "It's up by the Wash. He said Pendine Sands isn't

feel like doing anything on the big bus until to-morrow. I've just been giving the foreman some instructions for the Targa Florio race—that's our next scrap, and we'll have to pretty well rebuild those cars for it. By the way, they allow mechanics to ride in that race, Dick, so you'll travel in it with me."

Bill spoke quite casually, but his words made Dick's heart quicken. He'd heard of the Targa Florio. It took place in the wild Sicilian mountains, and it was the maddest, toughest, most hazardous speed-struggle of all European motor-races.

And he was to race in it, as Bill's mechanic! Well, he'd go into training for it. He'd get him-

self fighting fit, and he'd start the very next morning. By the time that the big race came off, he ought to be as fit as a prize-fighter, and, from what he had heard of things, he would need to be just about as tough.

But, before all that, there was the professor's giant record-smasher to be put through its paces, and, late that night, Dick saw the completed machine for the first time; previous to this, he had seen only its engine.

The mighty car was housed in a barn which stood a few yards from Seacombe Inn, where the professor was staying, and where Dick and Bill were also to stop the night.

The machine was painted red, and on either side of the cockpit she bore her name—"Kent Flyer." She was very long, although her tail was short and rounded off, ending close to the ground. The engine cover tapered to the front, where the radiator was cowed to the merest, slanting slit; that, and her streamlined, cased dumbirons gave the machine a queer, vicious appearance.

Dick saw her in the light of clustered electric lights hastily rigged up in the barn. The glow shone on her smooth bodywork and on her strange lines, making the car look weird and menacing and—waspish; that was it!

The car looked as though it was ready to shoot maddly forward, as it crouched there between its spayed-out wheels. The whole of the body was thin and narrow, almost ugly. The power of a thousand horses was locked up under her slender bonnet. To-morrow, Dick thought, he'd hear the car loose its one-thousand horse-power. Old Bill would make it go!

The Rival Record-breaker!

DICK turned in after that, and he was up early the next morning. He did fifteen minutes of physical exercises in his room, then he did a two-mile trot along the empty, sweeping Seacombe sands, and finished up with a bathe. That was the start of his training, just in case he should be needed in some emergency when the terrible Targa Florio race was run.

When he got back, he found Big Bill already at work on the engine of the Kent Flyer. He was going over it with the professor, and so absorbed were they that neither came in to breakfast. Dick ate a leisurely meal, and left the inn for the barn, but as he reached the open air, he stopped dead.

The sands which had been so deserted that morning were now thick with people. Cars by the hundred were parked near the sand dunes, and spectators stood everywhere. Even as Dick saw them, a section of the crowd parted at the head of a slipway near some buildings a little distance off, and as the people broke clear, Dick saw a machine pushed down the slipway.

"It's the Ince Eight record-breaker!" he gasped to himself. "Of course, they're going to try her out this morning!"

Obviously, news of the tests of the great rival machines had got about, and the crowd had come in the expectation of thrills.

Dick went running forward over the firm, yellow sand, and to his ears came the thunderous roar of the car's engine as it was rolled on to boards which had been placed at what was to be the starting point of the test runs. The machine was placed on boards to prevent the wheels sinking into the sand; they would sink while the car stood still, but the sand was firm enough to hold the record-breaker when it started moving.

The car looked nearly twice as big as the Kent Flyer. It had been painted blue—the same colour as Malcolm Campbell's record-breaking Blue-Bird. Exhaust pipes, moulded into the body, streamed

back to the sloping, pointed tail; both pipes were belching tongues of flame and roaring madly.

There was gargantuan power about the machine, sheer smashing strength. They had got two thousand horse-power out of the engine on the test-bed, and it was the biggest thing on four wheels. The monster had been named. Giant Ince Eight, according to the letters painted on the engine-cover.

The machine looked big enough to make Professor Kent's car seem ridiculously small for the dangerous work it had to do. The Giant Ince had the strength of an elephant, possessing all an elephant's ponderous speed.

But Dick knew that the Kent Flyer had good stuff in her. She might be small, but it was the clever, planned slenderness of a racing greyhound—and a greyhound could travel along a sight quicker than any elephant!

He saw Mark Lynch come striding down the slipway towards the waiting car. People watching lifted a sudden cheer as he showed, but their voices were almost drowned by the thunder of the car. The speedman wore a heavy crash helmet and thick gauntlets, the cuffs coming almost up to his elbows. His white overalls were buttoned high and tightly about his throat, and his legs were wound about with tape right up to the thighs.

This was to prevent the wind getting under his clothing, because air becomes like something solid at high speeds, and Lynch was certainly going to travel at high speed that morning, even though he was only testing the machine. Dick heard an Ince mechanic talking to another one near him.

"Goin' to touch two hundred miles an hour, Lynch is," the man said. "The boss told him not to drive her above that. If she runs all right, he'll drive her for the actual record the day after to-morrow. He's going to do over three miles a minute this morning—shifting, ain't it!"

Lynch had to pass near where Dick was standing, and as the speedman came almost level, a voice said:

"Good luck, Lynch!"

Dick wheeled round. It was Big Bill who had spoken, and he was standing just behind. Lynch stopped, pulling his gauntlets home.

"Hallo, Barry! Got over your hicking in Italy?" And his thin lips twisted down at the corners as he sneered. "Thanks for the good wishes, but I don't need 'em!"

Then he strode on.

Bill stood looking after him, his eyes narrowed a little. He knew—if nobody else did—what Lynch was about to risk; he'd just wished him luck, and, in return, had been sneered at. Dick stood glaring after the dark-faced man, and then he glanced at Bill. How much longer would it be before Bill realised what an out-and-out rotter Lynch was?


Dick watched Lynch climb into the machine, and settle down in his seat. Only the top of his head showed above the high sides of the cockpit, and a long metal wind-scoop in front of his windshield was designed to throw the rushing air clear of his head.

The shattering blast of the exhaust pipes lifted to a smashing, crashing bellow as he trod on the accelerator pedal. He lifted his hand, and mechanics standing around jumped clear of the Giant Ince.

"He'll run up the sands about three miles, then turn her round, and they'll time him along the straight mile right in front of us," shouted Bill to Dick. "You'll see— There he goes!"

With a sudden lurch, the mammoth car shot off the planks on which she stood, threshing wheels spinning and hissing as they struck the sand. Three planks whirled high into the air from the

(Continued on back page.)



Our Weekly Now=Now!

By THE EDITOR

A Toast!

HERE we are again, chums, with Christmas right on the doorstep, so to speak. How we've all looked forward to the great occasion; how we've had to possess our souls in patience during the last few weeks, for Christmas is one of those things we can't hasten. It's got to take its time. But now we're on the threshold of it we can expand a little.

The turkeys and the Christmas puddings are in the kitchens, as it were, ready to play their respective parts on the twenty-fifth, and if appetites are not too sharp set, on the twenty-sixth also. My! I'm looking forward to it all just as much as you fellows; I'm just as boyish at heart as you are.

And why shouldn't I be? Why, a chap who has such a host of good young friends as I have ought never to grow old. And I'm not growing old, take it from me. Like the gentleman who figures in a well-known advertisement, I can leap a five-bar gate with the best of 'em. I wonder if I shall be able to accomplish that feat on the twenty-fifth? What matters if I can't. Anyway, the turkey won't turn up its nose in disdain and say "I don't think much of that chap's appetite." And after the great feed, the bon-hons, the games, and the happy lapses.

But I'm forgetting something here that I shall certainly not forget on the great day, and that is a toast. No matter how many are my helpings of Christmas pudding, I shall rise when toasts are the order of the hour and propose "the health of my NELSON LEE LIBRARY chums all over the world." Remember that, won't you? Meantime, here's wishing you all the merriest of merry Christmases!

Every Dog Has His Day!

That's what we are told, and there is a lot of truth in the saying. One can picture the dog, who has been waiting donkeys' years for his special big day, sitting down to a respectable plate of bones feeling that his time had come at last. But a pal who writes a wail from Shrewsbury is not thinking of mutton bones. He is intensely exasperated—and I don't blame him—at the treatment he gets from some of his seniors.

"It's just as though the whole crowd imagined I didn't know a single thing," he writes. "I am not a dud. Here have I swotted at a jolly old mob of subjects, but if ever I give an opinion I get passed over with a patronising snigger. I am supposed to be too young to understand what's what."

That's been the lot of the junior who does

know for umpteens ages. It is my opinion that my Salopian chum is one of a dwindling crowd of victims. This is the day for the young man. He can bite on that. It is far less the thing now to decry the ideas of the fellow who is coming on. Of course, the swanking clevershakes is sat upon at times, and it does him good, but not so with the earnest chap with grit who waits his time to put in his word.

Why He is a Slacker!

Billy of Romford is a square peg in a round hole, or vice versa. I have no wish to turn this column into a complaint catalogue with every grouse that reaches me marked up in plain figures. But my Romford correspondent has a grievance which should be aired.

He has been pitchforked into a job for which he is not suited—all desk work, and his mind is on mechanics. For the life of him he can't concentrate on his work. He is set on a berth in an engineering shop, and he gets absentminded and slack dotting up rows of figures.

It is hard cheese, but it is up to him to make an eight h.p. effort to get through his present duty with credit so that he can leave with the band playing, so to speak. That engineering job will come along. His very keenness will bring about this result. I refuse to regard this fellow as a slacker. One knows the real slacker. He is a moon-faced mutt without any good goal in view.

Visibility Good!

A Belfast chum asks how to make invisible ink. Great snakes! If he had to read a mass of letters he would rue the day when invisible ink was invented, for some of the so-called ordinary ink has a nasty trick of fading out as if it had been treated like the geranium in the window and generously watered.

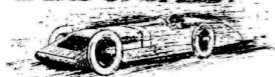
My correspondent, who is keen to be a journalist, asks about ink which is invisible. I have sent him the recipe, but I would not advise him to write his copy in this fluid. No editor would stand it. Invisible writing may please the crouching sleuth at the cinema, but everybody else hates it like poison.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Lennard Wingrove, Woodbine, Platform Street, Lidcombe, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants to buy NELSON LEE LIBRARY No. 71, new series.

(Continued overleaf.)

SONS OF SPEED!



(Continued from page 42.)

tyres, then a mighty cloud of sand was slung backwards and through it, Dick saw the gargantuan car streak off.

The monster picked up speed as it went, sand spraying wide from the wheels. The air shuddered in the roar of the flame-spitting exhausts as Lynch opened out. Soon the car was a swift-moving blotch, then they saw it turning at the three miles mark, swinging round on the flat sands in a wide circle, straight on and then come hurtling back.

"Now we'll see what he can do!" exclaimed Bill. The car roared down with her two thousand horse-power mule-od, sand lifted like a mighty tail behind, flying high. From the wheels, water sprayed where it lay on the sands in the car's path. The fierce thunder of the hurtling monster lifted into a shrieking roar.

The Giant race moved like a blue comet, travelling at amazing speed. In the fraction of a second she had passed the mile mark and was flashing over the measured distance. She came almost level with Dick and Bill; they saw the car leap from a bump in the sand, hit the ground in a snorter of far-flung spray—then her nose barrel round and she skidded!

The machine turned head-aside on to its former course, wheels churning the sand. It came on at a slant, skidding in dizzying circles at remarkable speed—straight for where Dick and Bill stood.

The Giant Incessant on them ere they could move. Dick saw a black, enormous, leaping monster with a black tyre flapping madly on one wheel. Sand sprayed in mighty snows as the giant car smashed down.

Dick tried to jump away, but the machine was at him even as he moved.

Hurling sand high in the air, he was knocked off his feet, caught in a madly rushing eddy. He landed by the side of the monster, with the gigantic hurtling car parting down at him!

(Look out for more thrilling adventures in the forthcoming instalment, boys, and don't forget to tell your pals about this stirring read!)

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(Continued from previous page.)

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Harry Clark, 15, Harrison Street, Carlisle, wishes to hear from readers in England. Also from readers in India, South America, Canada and the East of West Indies.

Wilfred Thomas, 7, St. Nicholas Street, Hereford, would be pleased to correspond with all readers, especially those in the Colonies. Hobbies: woodwork and reading.

Jim Langford, 2, Sudford Road, Fulham, South Australia, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere. Hobby: collecting war picture cards.

John M. Gray, 25, Avoca Street, South Yarra, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from readers anywhere.

W. E. Jones, St. Ives, Liskeard, Cornwall, has back numbers of the N.L.L. to sell. Miss Dorothy E. Isaac, 31, Hillside Street, Edinburgh, wishes to hear from girl readers only in Australia, New Zealand or the Continent.

Milton J. Jenkin, c/o G.P.O., Stratford, Taranaki, New Zealand, would like to hear from readers interested in stamp collecting and photography. All letters answered.

A. L. Maxon, 58, Manor Drive, Leeds, would like to hear from readers who have early numbers of the N.L.L. for sale.

W. H. Holmes Gardner, "Australynne," Bancroft Avenue, Roseville, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to hear from readers in New South Wales and elsewhere.

H. P. Woodbury, Box 67, Waihi, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; keen on stamp collecting. All letters answered.

R. E. Davies, Iron Lodge, Penyall, Holywell, North Wales wishes to hear from readers who are interested in his amateur magazine, "The Excelsior."



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