



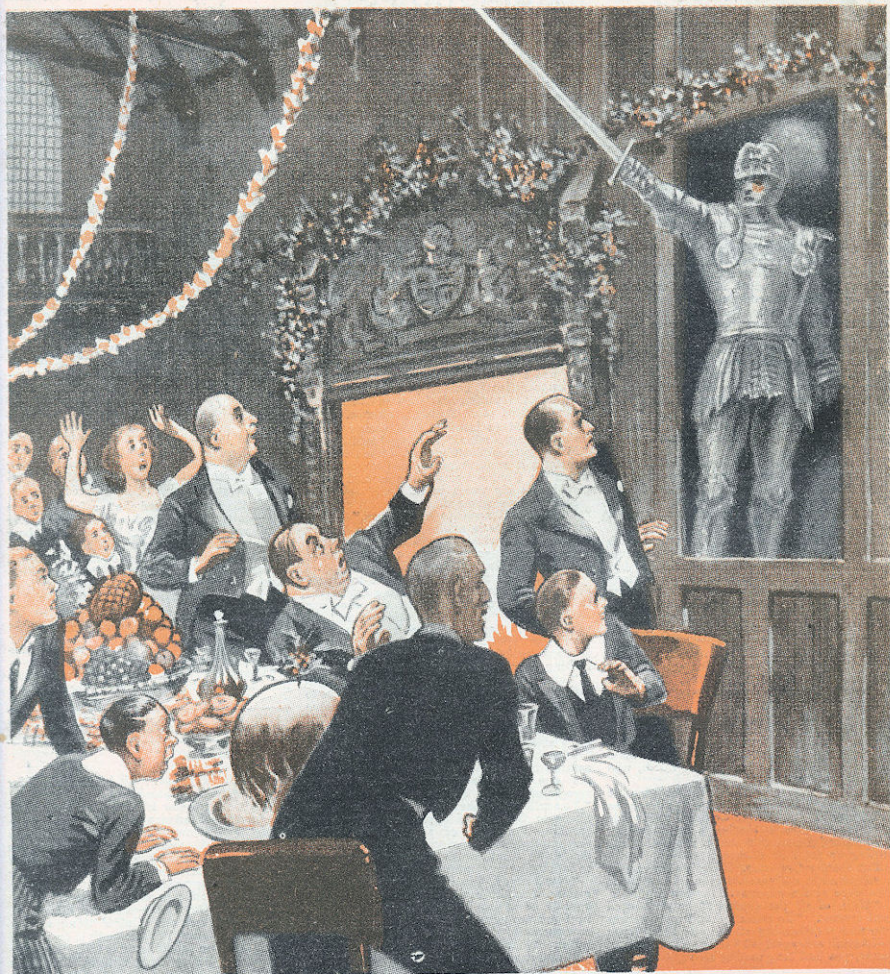
YOUR Christmas Gift—Now on Sale

# MODERN BOY

No. 44

EVERY SATURDAY—PRICE 2c.

December 17th, 1938



The Picture Comes to Life!—THRILLING INCIDENT FROM THE GHOST OF GOOD SIR GERVAIS

# Christopher Pine Riot!

"You must demonstrate your amazing robot in my stores," said Sir Gordon Stenson.  
"It will create a sensation." And, gosh, he was right!

## The Mysterious Voice

**G**OOD KING WENCESLAS looked out, on the Feast of Stephen. Scarily and enthusiastically young Midge murdered the tune of the old Christmas carol, as he tramped through the woods that led to Marney Grange. Midge was happy. Marney Grange, where Captain Justice and his fellow-adventurers were spending the Christmas holidays, was in every way an ideal spot for enjoying to the full the pleasures of the English winter countryside.

This morning Midge had been putting in a couple of hours with a shot-gun among the rabbit-warrens on the fringe of the woods, and half a dozen limp, furry droopings from his gun testified to a successful morning's sport.

And now Midge was beginning to feel the pangs of hunger, despite the very substantial breakfast he had put away only two hours earlier, so that he quickened his stride as he continued on his way, still bawling the chronicles of King Wenceslas.

Apart from the racket Midge himself was creating, the mist-anrouted woods were utterly quiet. It came, therefore, as a double shock to the red-headed youngster when, without warning, a voice that completely drowned his own cracked notes boomed amid the trees.

"For Heaven's sake stop that ghastly row, Midge!"

Midge stopped dead in his tracks, completely at a loss to understand whence that deafening about had come.

"Suffering kippers!" he muttered, glancing about him uneasily. "Who the thump was that?"

It was certainly an eerie experience. Although Midge was still in the heart of the wood, he could see for some considerable distance around him, and the trees were all devoid of leaves, affording only scanty cover for anyone hiding from sight.

But it was the volume of the voice which had spoken that had most amazed the youngster. Even now, echoes were only just dying away. And then to complete Midge's discomfiture, there came the spine-tingling sound of a husky chuckle—only a chuckle so deafening that Midge instinctively glanced up into the sky, as if expecting to see a giant figure towering there.

Midge felt his hair rising on the back of his neck. This gigantic voice that echoed from nowhere among the trees, and, moreover, addressed him by name, was decidedly scaring.

When he had got over the first shock, however, Midge was intrigued by the mystery. And if he did grip the shotgun he was carrying a little more grimly, as he continued cautiously on his way through the woods, who shall blame him?

There was no repetition of that gigantic voice as he strode on. He was beginning to wonder if he could have dreamed the whole thing by the time he reached a little clearing where stood a shed that had a wisp of smoke curling up from its chimney.

But then, all at once, Midge's ears caught a soft chuckle, and something in its tone made him stare at the window of the toolshed.

"Well, of all the chumps!" he announced next instant. "To think I didn't guess it was you who was bawling out to me, Flazzy, you whiskered old spoofer! Gosh, though, professor, you had me guessing all right!"

## By MURRAY ROBERTS

(Illustrated by E. Ibbotson)

Midge grinned as he spoke, and the clever, white-bearded father that looked out at him from the window of the toolshed beamed back. Professor Flaznagel's chuckles were of normal volume now, and not the great booming sounds that Midge had heard, but the youngster could detect the resemblance, and knew that, somehow, the world-famous scientist had been addressing him through an amplifier of some description.

"I trust I didn't give you a scare, my boy," said the professor, leaving the window and appearing at the door of the shed. "Want to see how it was done? Come in and have a look at my latest little addition to Christopher Christmas, as you have christened my robot."

The shed had been fitted up with all sorts of equipment since the professor's arrival, and was now a remarkably well-equipped laboratory where Flaznagel could carry out his scientific investigations.

But the most arresting object inside the shed was a life-size, and very realistic, figure in the traditional Father Christmas costume. This was the professor's latest invention—a radio-operated robot Father Christmas.

"I decided to install a loudspeaker device inside my automaton," Flaznagel told Midge. "Not a very difficult matter, of course, and I thought it would improve the demonstration which Sir Gordon Stenson has invited me to give in his big stores, in London."

Midge's eyes widened. "This is all news to me, Flazzy," he remarked. "What's made you decide to turn showman? Starting to earn an honest penny to keep you in your old age, or something?" Professor Flaznagel frowned reprovingly.

"Sir Gordon Stenson invited me to give a demonstration at his stores on the grounds that it might afford pleasure to the shopping crowds visiting London at this season," he said stily, "and the thousand-pound fee is worth to him as an advertisement, he is making over to the hospitals at my request."

"All serene!" Midge could not help smiling at the way the professor had risen to his bait. "So Christopher Christmas is the guy who didn't like my singing, is it? Bloomin' sauce, I call it—I'll bet he himself can't sing a note!"

"On the contrary, my dear boy," Flaznagel assured him. He picked up a vulcanite box, the size of an attache-case, which Midge recognised as the control-box of the robot. "You will notice that I have added a microphone to this control apparatus. Any voice speaking into that—or singing into it, for that matter—is reproduced by the amplifier inside the robot, which consequently appears to be singing and talking."

"Naturally, if I had spent more time on the matter, I might have found some less clumsy method of giving the robot a voice. As it is, I am not altogether satisfied with the lip movements of the figure as it is talking."

But, to Midge's way of thinking, the professor was being over-critical of his work,

for when he demonstrated a few moments later, it was as much as Midge could do to believe that Flaznagel's voice, relayed from the control-box, was coming from the moving lips of the automaton, and was not the latter speaking for itself.

"Golly! It's almost unbelievable!" he said. "Have the skipper and the others seen this new stunt yet?"

Professor Flaznagel smiled at the youngster's enthusiasm.

"Not yet. Justice, O'Mally, and Len Cooney have gone to London to do some Christmas shopping," he explained. "They are meeting me at Stenson's Stores in time for the demonstration this afternoon, however. Justice suggested you might like to drive up with me in the van in which I am taking my robot; then we will all meet at Stenson's."

"Suita me," replied Midge—"Int not if you're driving the van, Flazzy! Last time I went motoring with you, you started day-dreaming, and by the time I came to you were pulling a couple of cows out of your whiskers and I was trying to find my way through a thorny hedge without appearing in public in my birthday suit!"

"I have already—huh!—arranged for a driver to arrive with the van," the professor assured him. "I think, as a matter of fact, that's the driver hooting now. Just give me a hand, will you? I'll walk. Christopher through the wood with the aid of my control-box, while you bring that spare costume I've made for him, in case anything happens to the one he's wearing. Right! Are you ready?"

Midge picked up the spare fur-fringed red cloak and pointed that the professor indicated, and winked solemnly at the jovial papier-mâché features of the robot.

"Lead on, Macduff!" he ordered.

And thus it happened that, a few moments later—to the utter astonishment of the driver of the van—there emerged from the shrubbery adjoining Marney Grange the figure of a stiff-legged, purposeful-looking Father Christmas, followed by a solemn-faced Professor Flaznagel carrying a black vulcanite box from which protruded knobs and switches, and a diminutive youngster almost hidden in the voluminous folds of the long red cloak he was carrying.

A voice like thunder smote upon the van-driver's ears as the robot's lips moved.

"Merry Christmas, driver! I want you to take me to Stenson's Stores, London!"

## Flazzy's Brain-wave

**A**MAZING!" "Incredible!" "Professor—this is unique! Your robot is absolutely life-like!"

Professor Flaznagel boomed under the torrent of admiration. He was in the basement of Stenson's Stores, and Sir Gordon Stenson himself, together with a party of his departmental managers, were clustered around Christopher Christmas, giving voice to their incredulous approval.

"You wait till you see it working!" Midge told them. "Old Flazzy, Professor Flaznagel, I mean—has got the blinkin' thing so hot that it could even clean its false teeth if he wanted it to. And you should hear it talk. The chap who drove us up here still thinks there's



one inside. The professor can make it in the merest whisper, or boost it up till it shatters your eardrums!"

"—quite!" Sir Gordon Stenson blinked feebly apprehensively at the impassive robot. "There is just one point, professor. I see there is no chance of this—hem!—apparatus running amuck, as it were? It is a great deal of valuable merchandise in its place, and—"

"Cut, tut!" Professor Flaznagel cut in. "There is no such risk whatever. I assure that I have perfect control. Pray allow me to demonstrate it to you, so that your fears that score may be set at rest. You see, I merely to move this main switch, then, revolving this dial, I am able to start the robot walking, at speeds which can be varied by the rotation of the control. There! Bless my soul! Something appears to be wrong!"

"Midge smothered an instinctive chuckle. Although the professor had suited the words to his words when explaining his role of the robot, Christopher Christmas stood immobile, staring glassily into space.

"A purely minor defect!" the professor hurriedly. He hustled round to the back of the robot, and began fiddling underneath his coat with the apparatus concealed there. "Probably the jolting on the journey has porarily deranged the more delicate parts. I shall no doubt have it right in a second." Midge could not help smiling at the old



Christopher charged full-tilt into the staircase, wrenching it from its fastenings and bringing the hold-up men tumbling down.

and then he held a muttered conversation with the others.

Midge, who could not help overhearing, heard the discussion growing more and more agitated. He could also hear now the growing murmur of the crowds assembled in the stores above; there must have been thousands there, and presently they could be heard in a good-natured chant:

"Where's Christopher Christmas? We want the professor's robot!"

"Something must be done!" exclaimed the store owner. "All those people—they mustn't be disappointed! This is an absolute tragedy! Ah, there you are, professor! How long before the valve will arrive?"

"About half an hour, I'm afraid. They are sending it by their fastest van right away."

"Half an hour!" exploded Sir Gordon. "And that crowd of customers kept waiting! This is terrible! We must make an announcement apologizing for the delay! But I'm afraid a large number of them will refuse to wait."

He glanced helplessly at the professor as he spoke, and Midge was surprised to see an abstracted expression appear on Flaznagel's face as he listened. And then, all at once, the professor's bearded lips parted in a smile.

"If I may make a suggestion, my dear Sir Gordon," he murmured, "how would it be if a normal Father Christmas figure put in an appearance upstairs, and explained what had happened? Unless you have someone else in mind, I myself am prepared to play the role. I have a spare costume for my robot here which I could dress in, and it may relieve you to know that I have made a study of ventriloquism which might serve to help me amuse the crowds. At least, it will fill in the time until this new valve I have ordered arrives."

Midge gave a delighted laugh. "Good old Flaz! That's really turning up trumps! What about it, Sir Gordon? Don't you think it's a brain-wave?"

Sir Gordon seized on Professor Flaznagel's suggestion delightedly, and he himself was the first to help the professor into the spare costume, while he dispatched a messenger to

obtain the professor's planation was undoubtedly the right one, and the robot had been working perfectly fore being loaded on to the van. But the Sir Gordon and his fellow business men just have been very galling to Flaznagel's side.

"It's all right," Midge said mischievously. "The professor always puts these delays right a couple of jiffies!"

The professor's flushed face came swiftly to view.

"Nothing of the sort!" he snapped. "You know perfectly well that this is the first time such a delay has ever occurred. It is only one trivial defect, of course, but—aaah!"

That last exclamation came from the professor as his groping fingers closed upon a broken piece of mechanism, and pulled it into view. A cylindrical glass object—evidently a valve of some kind—was revealed, and a pitter-patter crack was visible down its side.

"As I thought," the professor explained. "This valve has been broken in transit. Fortunately, another valve can easily be

obtained from the makers. They have a depot somewhere in North London; I have their address in my pocket."

But the relief which had come into Sir Gordon Stenson's face at sight of the broken valve died immediately he heard the professor's words.

"North London, professor?" he echoed. "But that means it'll take time to replace the valve, and I have billed your demonstration to take place within five minutes from now. Hark at the crowd in the stores above us! There are thousands of customers there already, waiting to see your show!"

"Most regrettable—very!" Professor Flaznagel blinked unhappily. "It cannot be helped, however, Sir Gordon. The valve must be replaced before the robot can be operated. Now, if you will let me use your telephone for a moment, I will get through to the firm concerned and have them send me a replacement by the fastest possible route."

The store owner made a gesture of despair. Nevertheless, he signed to one of his colleagues to show the professor to the nearest phone.

## CHRISTOPHER RUNS RIOT!

the make-up department of his store for grease-paints with which to daub the professor's beaming features.

It was a strange though kindly figure that the professor made a few moments later when, in company with Sir Gordon, he left the basement office for the stores above. Midge, left behind to look after the robot, chuckled delightedly.

"A few moments' later his curiosity as to the professor's reception was whetted still further as he heard muffled yells of laughter flooding through the ceiling heralding the waiting crowd's reception of the world-famous scientist in the most unusual role he had ever played."

## Robot's Round-up

**S**OUNDING as if the show's started!" "Faith, and it's going down like a hot iron from the sky!" "Captain Justice, Dr. O'Mally, and Len Connor had just arrived by taxi at the main entrance to Stenson's Stores. From there they could advance no farther. A great crowd jammed the pavement; people in the doorway of the shop were squeezed into a solid mass as they craned their heads to get a glimpse of what was happening in the packed space inside.

"There must be a hundred thousand people here!" said Len Connor, at Justice's side, as he scanned the crowds filling the street. "Just look at 'em! It's as if half London's turned up to watch the professor's trial! The police can't do anything with them!"

Inside the stores, Professor Flazmagel's unrehearsed act was going over like wildfire. The professor's ventriloquism really was first-class, and the good-natured old fellow already had the cheery audience in roars of laughter.

Some of that laughter drifted to young Midge, waiting in the basement below. A passing cashier who came through the basement was able to inform the youngster of the professor's success, and Midge was the most disappointed person in London that he could not be upstairs to witness it.

He was still listening to the roars of laughter and observing from above when a man was shown into the basement.

"I'm from Coggin's, the electrical firm," the newcomer announced. "They told me to bring this valve to Professor Flazmagel immediately!"

Midge jumped up instantly.

"When he had hurriedly signed a delivery receipt for the parcel which the messenger handed him, Midge ripped off its covering and disclosed the shining glass valve within.

"Buck up, Flazy!" he muttered. "And then a thought struck him: 'Wonder if anyone's told her the valve has arrived!'"

But a full minute went by, and still there was no sign of the professor. Midge glanced at the stationary robot speculatively. The robe that covered it was still drawn aside, to reveal the cavity where the valve fitted, and the socket for the valve was clearly visible.

"Save a jiffy, anyway if I fit the valve myself!" Midge decided. "Then Christopher'll be ready for his job as soon as Flazy comes back."

The thought no sooner struck him than he moved across to the robot. There was a click as the valve went into the clips which held it in place—and then, without warning, came another sound.

*Clunk! Whirr—drum!*  
Midge jumped as if he had been stung. Those rumbling sounds had come from within the robot, and before he had time to snatch the valve out of place again, the stiff-legged figure came into motion!

Frantically Midge glanced around him for the control-box Professor Flazmagel had left behind. Next instant he was flying forward on to his face as the advancing robot cannoned into his back and sent him spinning.

Midge scrambled to his feet dazedly. The

explanation had already dawned on him—that the professor had not switched off the controls for the robot, failed to work—but that knowledge was of little help now.

The heavy figure of Christopher Christmas was stalking through the basement at a rapid pace, kicking aside everything in its path as it made for the closed wooden doors at the end of the room.

"Suffering sea-lions!" Midge moaned. "What's that chap do?"

With a terrific crash, the automaton reached the closed doors, was held up for a few seconds while its swinging legs and arms battered against the woodwork, and then, as an enormous hole appeared in the panelling, went stalking on.

As if sounding a wild croak of alarm. He could hear more terrific splinterings going on behind the shattered door, and one or two yells. Then a gleaming black object on a nearby table caught his eye, and with a whoop he pounced on it.

It was the missing control-box.

But although Midge had watched the professor demonstrating his robot on several occasions, he had always been far more interested in the movements of the robot itself than in the professor's use of the controls. So that now, as he stared at the bewildering array of knobs, switches, and dials scattered on the control-box, he was completely at a loss which one switched off the power.

"Peanuts preserve us! What does a chap do?"

Midge muttered these words unconsciously. Next instant, a stentorian voice echoed throughout the stores and penetrated even to the streets outside, as the microphone on the control-box picked up Midge's voice and passed it on to the amplifier inside the robot, which was on full power.

Midge gulped desperately. There was no need to guess what had happened. He knew already—only too well! And there was only one solution to his problem now: he must find the professor and get him to operate the controls.

Midge picked up his heels and went racing straight at the hole in the door through which the robot had passed. There a scene of utter desolation met his gaze. The robot was still in full career, nothing seeming capable of halting its wild progress, and showcases, piled boxes and bales, that crammed this section of the basement into which it had stormed, were flying in all directions under its assault.

"Trembling turkeys!" thought Midge. "The bloomin' thing'll wreck the whole store if it's not stopped!"

Happlessly he fumbled at the controls on the box in his hand, seeking the master-switch. But every knob or dial that he operated seemed only to increase the robot's mechanical frenzy, so that it leaped about, flung its arms wildly around it, and went racing round the basement in a series

of circles, scattering the panic-stricken attendants.

"Take that thing out of here, you stony hooligan!" A figure in overalls came skidding up to Midge, rod in the face and breath less from his rushes before the robot's wild career. "You'll—whoops!"

He leaped away with a yell as a terrific crash close behind him warned that the uncontrolled robot was approaching again. Midge saw the danger-signals, ran, and ducked aside as the robot came charging towards him.

He glimpsed a flight of stairs leading up to the stores above. They reminded him that the professor was somewhere in the building and Flazmagel was now the only one who could stop the robot's trail of destruction.

Midge went up those stairs three at a time yelling for the professor as he ran.

But one effect of the robot's amplifier picking up his despairing words Midge had over looked. That stentorian shout had reached the ears of those waiting at the stairs and Captain Justice, Len Connor, and Dr O'Mally glanced at one another quickly.

"Come on!" snapped Justice. "There's something wrong here! That was Midge's voice!"

It was obviously no good trying to force a way through the crowds blocking the main entrance to the stores. Justice did not even attempt to do so. A quick glance showed him that they were near a side turning, which ran past the stores, and it was towards this that he sprinted, shouldering his way through the amazed bystanders, and cleaving a path through the ranks of Len and O'Mally followed close at his heels.

There was an entrance into the stores from the side turning. It was, apparently, the means by which the goods were taken into the basement, for a sloping ramp led past opened doors into the vaults beneath the building.

Justice plunged down the slope at full speed.

He could hear the crashing distinctly now and within a few yards, as he reached the foot of the ramp, he found himself in an underground garage, filled by vans and cars.

There were attendants running wildly in all directions, but Justice decided that if none could give him a coherent answer, so he went running on towards the open door whence came a terrific crashing.

On its threshold he pulled up in astonishment.

The professor's robot was in full view lurching through stacked bales and cases and boxes. Sometimes its impact against these turned it aside, but more often it just smashed its way through.

As if he had suddenly caught sight of Justice in the doorway, the robot gave a lurch coming off a heavy box, so that it altered its direction and made straight for the wide eyed captain.

Justice drew a deep breath. It was obvious that the robot had somehow got out of control, and that, left to its own devices it might create still more damage. Although he knew that it possessed tremendous mechanical strength, he decided to make a desperate attempt to check its uncontrolled career.

Bunching himself, he braced every muscle in his lean, hard body. Then, straight from the toes, he launched himself in a flying tackle at the robot's legs, arms flung wide to grip the machine around its jointed knees.

The tackle was perfectly executed. For a brief moment, as Justice felt his grip lock around the robot's legs, he thought it was going to topple. Then, kept upright by the gyroscope apparatus installed inside, the robot's own legs forced themselves apart and Justice felt his arms opened with strength that threatened to dislocate his shoulder joints. He was sent spinning away across the floor, and, scarcely checked, the robot stalked on.

"Faith, 'n' where's the professor?" O'Mally yelled. "And Midge—what's happened to him?" Ouch! Get out, you brutes!" The last was addressed to the robot, as it barged past him, sweeping both himself and Len aside.

## HERE'S THE BOOK YOU WANT FOR CHRISTMAS!

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ustice scrambled to his feet. Go and look for the professor and Ige, O'Mally!" he ordered. "The control is the only thing to stop Christopher." It all that confusion within the confined ce of the basement garage and warehouse, re was shouting on all sides. The stores ndants were helpless as they watched the ot stride on; they stared at it helplessly, n spin round eagerly as feet clattered on spiral iron staircase leading down from a e in the roof.

ho last sight they expected was the one h met their bewildered gaze. For there were four men racing down the rra—four men who wore scarves pped round the lower parts of their es, and who brandished blue-steel autoics as they appeared.

"Stand still—the lot of you! The first guy o moves gets a slug through him!" The thrifty command rang through the coned space. It sounded even above the metal hubbub, and the clang of the robot-iking against the stationary vans and cars. "Come on; boys—over to the car!" The ideo of the gunman gestured towards a big loon which stood facing on to the ramp; was then that his beady eyes caught the ight of the instant figure, emerging on behind a half-wrecked van: "Hey, you, ere, the Father Christmas guy! Keep still!" Captain Justice took in the intruders' elled guns, and the attache-cases which ch man carried in his iron hand.

"By thunder—a hold-up!" he exclaimed. "You did it!" The answer was snarled him. "We've cleaned up the jewellery artment of this dump, and we're not going o be stopped now. So keep still, the lot of u! The old fool in the red coat don't seem o understand plain English, so give him the ricks, boys!"

The man's eyes gleamed above the silk arf wound around his face as he swung und his gun, aiming for the robot that he uld just glimpse among the parked vans. Orack!

That was the signal for a regular fusillade: shot as the rest of the gang opened fire, ad Len and the doctor, saw the robot stagger nder the impact of bullets.

But the automatics had as much effect as ashotters aimed at a charging lion. They ad the identical effect in fact, for it seemed e if they infuriated the mechanical creature. Iomentarily, the robot hesitated, then from itchin it there came the whine of accelerating achinery, and it seemed fairly to leap forard in its stride.

A yell of panic came from the group on a spt as the robot advanced. The impotence of their allets had been awe-inspiring in itself; this ew charge of the red-cloaked figure comleted their panic.

Turning, they tried to race back the way hey had come. They got in each other's ay, cursing and shouting. Again and again a automatic blazed as the terrified crooks ried the effects of more shots; the bullets nely went whining through space as they ouchetted from the steel figure.

Crash! The robot charged against the ron staircase in full stride, as if the solid eyer he was designed to take such an impact. Amid the rasp of breaking steel, there came a fresh outburst of wild cries from the hold-up gang as they felt their foothold tottering nder them; then, with a new crash, the robot struck again, automatically gripping the sup-ports of the spiral with its metal hands, and the whole staircase, torn adrift, toppled side-ways and smashed to the ground.

Captain Justice gave an excited yell. "Now we've got 'em, Len!"

He was charging forward as he spoke, dodg-ing aside as the staircase slammed through the air. It missed him narrowly, but the robot had no thinking brain to warn it to dodge also!

Thump! In a jerking heap, the robot went down, pinned to the floor by the weight of the structure it had dislodged, and a final clank came from it as its machinery was wrecked by the impact.

Nor did the hold-up gang fare much better. Two were knocked out by the fall; another struggled to his knees moaning with the pain of a dislocated leg. The fourth saw Len



# THE EDITOR TALKS

Address your letters to:  
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London, E.C.4.

**K**EEPING the pot boiling, I have arranged another excellent programme of Christmas fun and adventure stories for next week. And to add a dash of spice, so to speak, I have scoured a mystery story as well.

G. L. Dalton, author of those fine Ocean Jones stories, supplies the mystery. Picture to yourselves the tramp steamer Bulldog nosing slowly through the icefields with Dick Shaw at the wheel. Suddenly a plane dives down, the pilot waves, then zooms up again and goes careering on over two gigantic icebergs. "Christmas greetings, modern style!" laughs Dick. But the laugh is wiped from his face as there comes the sound of an explosion, and, through the gap between the bergs, the plane is seen falling into the sea. Then it's full speed ahead for the Bulldog into the CHRISTMAS MALL MYSTERY!

"I've got a surprise coming to you too," Stropkinster, Will Hay of Merry-in-the-Green tells his staff, old Jeremiah and borsnited Albert. "I've written to the company asking them to show some appreciation of our work here. Maybe they'll send us a Christmas hamper." But it's Will who gets the surprise—Jeremiah and Albert see to that—and suddenly the sleepy old station becomes VERY MERRY-IN-THE-GREEN! And you'll be merry, too, when you read of this startling transformation. Britain's No. 1 film star is at his laughable best.

Midge, too, helps to keep the fun going at a lively pace in JUMP TO IT, CHRISTOPHER! Professor Flazmagel, seated to the right of the disarming presence of a brother scientist, challenges the man to produce a robot equal to, or better than, Christopher. The challenge is accepted, but on the day of the test Christopher is missing, taken away if saved from disgrace—a last-minute hectic dash through crowded streets brings Midge and Christopher to the scene of the contest

in time to prove who is champion of robot-land.

Why the Black Eagles, long recognised as the best squadron in France, have suddenly become the worst, is no longer a mystery. Scotty has discovered that German spies are at work on the aerodrome. He thinks that, by issuing false flying orders and placing a guard over the ammunition he has scouted the spies. But in the midst of a dog fight, he suddenly discovers that the enemy have discovered bids fair to cost him his life! You will read of it in next week's great air-fighting yarn, TAILS UP.

High-speed battles with other cars are the breath of life to Lee Venning and the Owl, drivers of the Compton racers. Suddenly they are called upon to cut their driving skills against stop-at-nothing enemies—and to make things worse the battle of speed is fought out in a raging TYPHOON! You'll be thrilled as never before by this breathless Barry Joyson yarn.

Bill, our Winged Wanderer, wishes you all a happy Christmas and says farewell for the time being to this week. To replace his story has always proved popular—a new Picture Story. It deals with the adventures of the MEN OF THE MOUNTED, the famous Canadian police, and it starts next week.

Did you manage to solve the Old Boy's "Poem in a Picture" problem? The answer is: "Little drops of water, Little grains of sand, by Julia Caray."

Before I leave you to carry on with that Christmas leaving, there's one more thing I have to tell you, and that is that you'll be able to get next week's issue one day earlier. It will be on sale on Friday instead of Saturday. Don't forget.

Your sincere friend,

**THE EDITOR**

Conhor leaping at him, raised his gun-hand—and went reeling back before he could fire under the weight of the fist which clipped expertly beneath his chin.

"One yip from you." Justice told the gunman with the injured leg, "and you get the same!"

His fist waved threateningly a few inches from the man's nose, and the crook's gun clattered submissively to the floor.

A sudden silence, that seemed all the more startling because of the uproar which had preceded it, fell upon the basement.

It was broken by an awed exclamation from the manhole in the ceiling to which the wrecked stairway had led.

"Suffering sealing-wax!" Midge, with Professor Flazmagel on one side of him and O'Mally on the other, was staring down from the ceiling. "What's been going on? Looks as if an elephant's been chucking his weight about a bit!"

"Not an elephant!" chuckled the captain. "Come and have a look at the huge Christopher's picked up! By James, professor, the fellow's really a detective in disguise!"

It was a very puzzled group that joined the captain a few moments later for his explanation. Sir Gordon Stenson, arriving in a state of agitation bordering on frenzy, and then changing to a picture of jubilation, was able to supply the details which Justice could not give.

"Not another word"—he cut across Professor Flazmagel's abject apologies for Christopher Christmas' wild career and the damage it had caused—"if your robot hadn't been here, and if it hadn't got loose, I'd have lost the thousands of pounds' worth of gems these four criminals had stolen from my jewellery department. They must have thought it was a golden opportunity to stage a hold-up, while everyone was watching the demonstration of your robot.

"And they'd have got away with it, too, if it hadn't been for your robot. Send me the bill for any repairs that you have to do to your robot, professor—I'll be only too happy to pay them. By the way, have you discovered yet what started it off?"

Professor Flazmagel's mouth opened to speak. Instead, a strangled squawk came from him as Midge's toes rapped against his shin.

"Didn't I tell you the professor's a marvel, sir!" he grinned. "He made Christopher so clever, that it knew there was a hold-up arranged, and started off on its own to stop it. And if Flazzy tries to give you any other explanation, old bean, don't you jolly well believe it!"

Next Friday:  
**JUMP TO IT, CHRISTOPHER!**

Suddenly there was a click, the picture swung aside, and there stood the—

# Ghost of Good Sir Gervais

"It's Got to Go!"

A Christmas Told-in-the-Tuckshop Tale

By JOHN BERESFORD

**S**NOW was falling heavily, but it was warm and cosy inside the tuckshop at Graystones.

"It looks as though we're in for a real old-fashioned Christmas," said Dawson of the Fifth, standing with his back to the glowing stove. "Personally, I like it. The fun always seems to go more merrily when the snow lies thick outside."

"That's true," agreed Russell. "I think snowy Christmases are always the best, especially when everybody sits round the fire telling ghost stories."

"Which are all a lot of piffle!" put in Fox. "Not all, Fox!" interposed Goffin. "Not all, by any means. In fact," he went on, "here's a really remarkable ghost story which happens to be perfectly true."

My young cousin Ogden's parents happened to be abroad (said Goffin), so when school broke up for Christmas, Ogden went to spend the holidays with Uncle George, who is one of those sensible, jovial men who realise that a fellow likes to go to pantomimes and circuses and pictures and things, instead of being dragged round stuffy old museums and listening to stupid lectures.

On arriving at uncle's place, Ogden found uncle had received an invitation from a pal of his named Sir Peter Cardale to spend Christmas at Cardale Manor and to bring Ogden with him.

Cardale Manor is a grand old place, one of the oldest houses in the country, and Sir Peter always entertains a really jolly party," said uncle. "We'll enjoy ourselves no end!"

"Is there a ghost there?" demanded Ogden eagerly, because ghost stories always give him a terrific thrill, and Cardale Manor sounded like the very place for a ghost.

"I don't know about a ghost," replied Uncle George, with a smile. "But there's a very strange story connected with the manor. However, you can get Sir Peter to tell you all about it himself."

Snow had been falling steadily. Uncle George and Ogden travelled down by train, arriving at the manor on the morning of Christmas Eve.

Cherry fires blazed and crackled merrily on wide, old-fashioned hearths; the vast, oak-paneled rooms, hung with antique weapons and trophies of the chase, were decorated with holly and mistletoe, and the freight glinted warmly on old suits of armour, on dark, polished furniture, and on paintings of Cardales of preceding generations.

Sir Peter himself had the lean, clean-cut features and level grey eyes of the Cardales, and Ogden liked him immensely from the moment he met him, inwardly vowing him a jolly chap.

Sir Peter's guests looked a very jolly bunch. But there were two rather puzzling exceptions—a fat, bald-headed, hook-nosed, vulgar-looking man named Rosenbaum and his son Solly, an over-fed youth about a year or two older than Ogden.

The way Rosenbaum senior strutted about blowing his cigar smoke into people's faces, butting into their conversations, and dropping his cigar-ash all over the place and generally acting as though the place belonged to him, gave Ogden a pain in the neck.

Rosenbaum junior's behaviour was just as unpleasant. He kept sneaking slyly about listening to what people were saying. And when they shut up because he was there, he'd just give a sort of grin and go sneaking off somewhere else.

He looked to Ogden the sort of cad who

would pull flies' wings off and twist cats' tails and things like that when nobody was looking, and right from the start Ogden simply itched to give him a good hard kick on the pants or a punch on the nose.

Uncle George was also wondering what on earth had induced Sir Peter to invite two such blisters as the Rosenbaums to Cardale Manor for Christmas, and he put the question to Sir Peter the moment the latter carried him off to his comfy little den for a chat.

"It's no business of mine, of course, Peter," said Uncle George, "but who are these Rosenbaums?"

Sir Peter's eyes clouded, and he looked very sad. "Rosenbaum's buying Cardale Manor from me," he said. "At least, I'm hoping he will. That's why I'm entertaining him and his son over Christmas."

"Buying—buying the manor from you?" gasped Uncle George. "But you're not selling it, surely, Peter?"

"I must. To tell you the truth, George, I can't afford to keep the old place going any longer."

"But, Peter, I—I never dreamt of anything like this!" stammered uncle. "If I can be of any assistance—"

"No!" cut in Sir Peter firmly. "I've never borrowed a ha'penny in my life, George, and I'm not going to start now—not even from my closest friends. I'm selling the manor!"

"To think of the grand old place passing out of your family after all these years!" groaned Uncle George. "It's—it's a tragedy, Peter!"

"It is indeed," agreed Sir Peter solemnly. "It was a Cardale who built the manor, and we've lived here since fourteen hundred. But it can't be helped, George—it's got to go!" He squared his shoulders and his face brightened. "However, don't let's make ourselves miserable talking of that. I want you to do something for me, George."

"Anything you like, old fellow," replied uncle.

"I'm giving a party here to-night for the village children and all the children in the neighbourhood," explained Sir Peter, "and as it'll be the last party of that sort, I'll ever give in the old place I want it to be a real good one. There'll be a tea and games and a Christmas-tree, and all that sort of thing, and I want to finish off the evening with Santa Claus coming down the chimney with a sackful of presents and distributing 'em among the kids. Now, George, will you be Santa Claus?"

"You bet I will!" cried Uncle George heartily. "There's nothing I'd like better. But—with a respectful glance at his somewhat plump form, "about this chimney business, Peter? D'you think I can manage to squeeze down?"

"You'll get down the dining-hall chimney all right," replied Sir Peter. "It's very wide, and I've had it thoroughly swept. No fire is being lighted in there to-day, so I've had a big electric fire placed at the front of the hearth. Come and have a look at it."

He and Uncle George set off for the oak-paneled dining-hall. On the way they picked up Ogden, whom Uncle George led into the secret, because he fancied he might need some assistance that evening.

"Here you are," said Sir Peter, showing Uncle George and Ogden the big electric fire in the dining-hall. "We've got an ordinary fire already laid behind it with a Yule log and everything. That'll be lighted after the children's party is over."

"Well, the chimney certainly looks wide enough," said Uncle George, peering up it. "I suppose the best thing to do is to fix a rope so that it dangles down inside the chimney from the roof. When I've climbed into the chimney up on the roof, I'll grip the rope and slide down it."

"Yes, that's the idea," agreed Sir Peter. "Right-ho!" said Uncle George. "Ogden and I'll put on some old clothes and fix the rope. Then we'll lock the dining-hall door and have a rehearsal. We don't want anything to go wrong with the show."

Having changed into some old clothes, he and Ogden found it a comparatively simple job to fix a long, strong rope so that it dangled down inside the chimney. Then Ogden clambered into the chimney-pot, gripped the rope, and went sliding down, his electric pocket torch dispelling the inky darkness.

After what seemed a long time to Uncle George, there came a couple of tugs at the rope, signal that Ogden had landed safely down in the dining-hall.

Climbing into the chimney, Uncle George went sliding down into the darkness to land safely in the dining-hall hearth.

"What is it as simple as ABC," he chuckled.

"Yes, I know it is!" cut in Ogden excitedly.

"But, I say, did you see that door up there?"

"Door?" repeated Uncle George blankly.

"Up where?"

"Up there in the back of the chimney!" cried Ogden. "It's a little iron door not far up. Come on, I'll show you!"

## Solly's Present

It goes without saying (continued Goffin) that the children's party was a riotous success right from the word go.

The only fly in the ointment of everybody's enjoyment was Solly Rosenbaum, who kept prowling about sneering at everything.

"No, thanks, I don't play silly kids' games," he said nastily, when Sir Peter suggested to him that he might join in the fun. "I'm not a baby!"

"When you see you push off then, if you don't like it," put in Ogden.

"You mind your own business!" retorted Solly. "If you knew how soft you look in that paper hat," he went on with a sneer, "you'd take it off. But that's what you are—just a softy!"

Had it been any other time and place, Ogden would have endeavoured to correct the impression in a swift and no uncertain manner, but with a mental reservation to attend to Mr. Rosenbaum junior at some later date, he skipped away to plunge anew into the fun.

Suddenly Sir Peter called for silence. "I've got some jolly exciting news for you all," he announced. "We've just heard that Santa Claus has been seen coming along in his aeroplane. He'll be coming down the chimney in a few moments now, so let's all gather round the hearth and give him a real, rouser welcome when he appears."

Solly gave the cracker a vicious pull. The result was amazing. He and his father let out frenzied howls and sprang into the air.



"Piffle," sneered Solly, but all the same he took up a position by the side of the hearth on which the electric fire was glowing just like a real fire, with the most life-like imitation flames leaping up from it.

"Listen!" whispered Sir Peter in a thrilling voice.

From somewhere high up in the chimney were coming faint scuffling sounds.

"He's coming now!" breathed Sir Peter. Tiny boys and girls stared round-eyed at the chimney. Not so young Solly Rosenbaum.

With a crafty smile, he bent forward as though to peer up the chimney. One of his hands was hidden from view behind the electric fire, and there came a faint click as he pressed the spring of a petrol-lighter.

Next instant, as he applied the tiny flame to the paper and sticks of the fire which was laid on the hearth, a tongue of crackling flame leapt upwards, accompanied by a billowing cloud of smoke which swept up the chimney.

"My hat, the fire's aight!" cried Ogden, darting forward.

Sir Peter whirled, to stare in petrified dismay at the fire from which great volumes of smoke were rolling up the chimney to the fierce crackle of rapidly mounting flames.

"We must put it out—another it somehow!" cried Sir Peter, recovering himself and leaping forward.

But in that same instant there came a muffled, choking bellow from the chimney, and the red-cloaked and bearded figure of Santa Claus shot into view, to thud in a sitting posture on to the Yule log, which careered off the hearth with him, bearing him rapidly forward into the room and overturning the electric fire with a crash.

"Ho, he, ho, he-ee!" squealed Solly, doubling up in a paroxysm of helpless mirth. "Ee-ee, ho, he, he-ee!"

"Haw, haw, haw, haw!" guffawed Rosenbaum senior, slapping his fat knee in glee.

"A-w-w, haw, haw, haw! Yet a joke." The little guests, frightened at first by the sudden and extraordinary nature of Santa

Claus' arrival, row began to think that it must all be part of the fun, so they laughed and clapped their hands and gave him a cheer.

"Are you hurt, old fellow?" asked Sir Peter anxiously, assisting Uncle George to rise.

"No!" gasped Uncle George, blinking his watering eyes. "But who—who lit the confounded fire?"

"I don't know, but I have my suspicions," muttered Sir Peter, shooting an angry glance at Solly, who was leaning weakly against the wall, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. "If it was him, I'll give him a thundering good hiding, whether his father likes it or not!"

"No, never mind," said Uncle George, who was still hanging on to his bulging sack. "Let's get on with the distribution of the presents!"

As Uncle George distributed the presents, Solly pushed himself forward and kept saying, in a voice which grew shriller and more indignant every moment:

"What about me? Where's my present?"

Uncle George took not the slightest notice of him until the sack was empty, then he looked at Solly, and, stroking his sooty beard, he said:

"None for naughty boys!" Rosenbaum senior bowed his way roughly forward.

"Yet d'you mean, none for naughty boys?" he demanded angrily. "My Solly ain't a naughty boy. He's a good boy, ain't it. You give him a present, you whiskered old fraud, you!"

"Santa Claus has no presents for naughty boys," repeated Uncle George. "Perhaps I might bring him one next year if he's good. I'll ask the fairies if he's been good!"

"Don't talk that drivelling rot to me!" roared Rosenbaum senior, shaking his fist furiously in Uncle George's face. "There ain't no such things as fairies and never was. You give my Solly a present or there'll be a row, so I'm telling you!"

Ogden had edged his way forward and unobtrusively slipped something into Uncle George's sack.

"I think there's still one present left in your sack, Santa Claus," he said. "I think I saw one there."

"Did you, my boy?" said Uncle George, looking at him hard.

"Yes, I think so," said Ogden. "If there is one left in your sack won't you please give it to poor Solly, Santa Claus?"

"Well, we'll see, my little man—we'll see!" said Uncle George, diving into the sack and bringing to light a Christmas cracker which Ogden had placed there. "Ah, there is one left, so if Solly promises to try to be a good boy throughout the coming year he may have it! Here you are, Solly, my boy!"

"I don't want a rotten cracker!" said Solly furiously. "I want a proper present!"

"Suppose you take the cracker and pull it, and see what's inside," suggested Ogden. "I bet Santa Claus wouldn't have given it if there wasn't a surprise inside."

"That's quite right, my little man—quite right!" beamed Uncle George, who had tumbled to it that Ogden was up to something, though he didn't know what. "Of course there's a surprise in the cracker. Here you are, Solly, my boy! Take it and pull it!"

It was Rosenbaum senior who took the cracker, snatching it from Uncle George's hand, and crying:

"Here you are, Solly! You pull 'em end and I'll pull the other, and we'll see vot's inside it!"

Gripping one end of the cracker, Solly gave a vicious pull. As he did so, a most remarkable thing happened, for simultaneously he and his parent let out a frenzied howl and sprang violently into the air.

Next instant, still gripping the cracker between them, and letting out the most awful howls and yells, the pair of them began to prance frenziedly about the room, leaping and bounding and executing the most weird contortions imaginable.

Under the impression that the exhibition was being staged specially for their benefit and was all part of the fun, the little guests



## GHOST OF GOOD SIR GERVAIS

laughed and applauded with glee, whilst Solly and his father continued to bound frantically about, still gripping the cracker between them.

"What on earth's the wheeze, Ogdin?" whispered Uncle George.

"It's a trick cracker!" chuckled Ogdin. "There's a powerful electric battery inside it, and when you pull it you get the dickens of a shock. You can't leave go of the thing until you stop pulling. It serves 'em jolly well right for being so greedy!"

Not knowing the reason for the trick cracker, Solly and his anguished parent were each trying to wrench their hand away from it, with the result that they were getting one long, sustained electric shock, which caused them to continue their wild dance up and down the floor accompanying the performance with yells and howls which would have done credit to a couple of maddened savages.

At last, when the perspiration was simply pouring off Rosenbaum senior, and he looked about at his last gasp, Ogdin skipped forward and grabbed the cracker in the centre.

"Stop pulling!" he yelled. "Stop pulling!" Rosenbaum senior stopped, for the simple reason that he hadn't the strength left to pull any longer, and, as the current was cut off, he tottered weakly to a chair.

"Oh, my!" he groaned. "Oh, goodness! Oh, I do feel bad! Oh, vot a shock I've ad!" Sir Peter rang for the butler.

"I think Mr. Rosenbaum would like to lie down for a while," he said dryly. "He and his son have just been entertaining us with a dance. Perhaps you will assist him to his room."

"Very good, sir!" said the butler, and led the tottering Rosenbaum away.

Solly, having recovered somewhat from his involuntary but frenzied exertions, rushed up to Uncle George.

"What the dickens do you call that beastly thing you gave me?" he panted furiously. "A present for a naughty boy, my little man!" replied Uncle George sweetly.

## Three Answering Taps

**M**R ROSENBAUM was sufficiently recovered to come down to dinner that night.

Although Ogdin and some of the other youngsters staying at the manor had been packed off to bed, Rosenbaum brought Solly down with him.

"There ain't no need for 'im to go to bed," he said to Sir Peter. "My Solly ain't a baby, and after that nasty, low-down trick that Santa Claus feiler played on 'im and me, 'e's going to 'ave a bit of extra fun, ain't you, Solly?"

"Yes, I am!" said Solly, greedily eyeing the long dining-room table, which gave promise of a perfectly ripping spread to come.

"Very well; you can easily set an extra place for him," said Sir Peter.

Dinner that night not only came up to Solly's expectations, but far exceeded anything he'd ever imagined. It was a real old-fashioned Christmas spread with roast turkeys, roas goose, a huge boar's head which was borne in on triumph, plum puddings, mince pies, and everything that Solly could think of or wish for.

He and his parent gorged themselves until they could eat no more, and eventually, when the coffee was reached, Rosenbaum senior, full to repletion, leaned back in his chair, produced a toothpick, and said smugly: "So that's the last Christmas dinner you'll ever eat in Cardale Manor, Sir Peter. Next year it'll be me vot'll be sitting 'ere as owner of the place."

Sir Peter was silent, but there came a startled outcry from his guests:

"You're not selling the manor, Peter? Surely you're not giving the manor up?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I am," said Sir Peter sadly. "I had not intended the news to become public property just yet; but, as Mr. Rosenbaum has now announced the fact, you may as well know that I'm selling the manor to him."

That, of course, put an absolute damper on the party, of course, because everybody liked Sir Peter very much, and they were very distressed at the thought of him having to sell the historic old manor, which had been in the Cardale family for more than five hundred years.

"It is, I know unnecessary for me to tell you that I am parting with the manor only because I can afford to keep it no longer," said Sir Peter. "There is no other reason which would persuade me to sell."

Talking of that, Peter, put in Uncle George, "I didn't one of your ancestors vanish under very mysterious circumstances, one Christmas Eve with practically the whole of the Cardale fortune?"

"Yes," assented Sir Peter. "He pinched it, I suppose!" sneered Rosenbaum.

Sir Peter's face darkened with anger. "No, sir; he did not!" he retorted sharply. "The ancestor to whom Mr. Goffin has just referred was so kind! and so honourable a man that he was known throughout the countryside as Sir Gervais the Good!"

Then how did 'e come to vanish with the family fortune? demanded Rosenbaum suspiciously.

Sir Peter hesitated, but there came an immediates outcry from his guests:

"Tell us, Peter! Give us the story, Peter!" "Very well; I will," said Sir Peter. "It happened about three hundred years ago, when Sir Peter Cardale was owner of the manor."

Sir Gervais was a devout and a man of knight, and his sword was always ready to shield the poor and the oppressed. He was the very soul of chivalry and honour, loved and respected by all who knew him. As he grew older however, his thoughts turned from battles, and he decided to become a monk, first distributing his treasure amongst the poor and needy.

"Silly fool!" put in Rosenbaum audibly. "It was a Christmas Eve such as this," continued Sir Peter, ignoring the interruption, but there was no company present. Sir Gervais was alone in this very room with the Cardale treasure chest in front of him. He was waiting to distribute its contents amongst the poor who, for miles around, would very soon be craving admittance. As he sat here, there came a sudden commotion outside, and a servant rushed in to tell him that a band of armed robbers were trying to force admittance. Sir Gervais had the man return to the aid of his fellow-servants. The man returned, but in spite of a stubborn resistance, the robbers succeeded in breaking in and rushed into this room.

"So it was them vot pinched the treasure, was it?" grunted Rosenbaum.

"No," said Sir Peter, "it wasn't. For when they rushed in here they found that both Sir Gervais and the treasure chest had vanished. And from that day to this not a sign of either Sir Gervais or the treasure has ever been found."

"But where could 'e 'ave gone?" demanded Rosenbaum.

"That is the mystery," replied Sir Peter. "He and the treasure chest simply vanished into thin air. Since then," he added quietly, "there has been a legend in our family that some Christmas Eve Sir Gervais will return."

"Vot, as a ghost?" guffawed Rosenbaum. "Haw, haw, that's good, that is! Well, I only hope he comes when you've gone and brings the treasure with 'im. Haw, haw, haw, ignoring this boorish outburst, Uncle George said to Sir Peter:

"You know, Peter, I've a theory about how Sir Gervais vanished that Christmas Eve. In my opinion he never actually left this room: What I think he did was to hide himself somewhere, taking the treasure chest with him. For all we know, his ghost might even now be lurking in that secret hiding-place watching us, and perhaps awaiting to communicate with us in some way!"

Several of the guests stirred uneasily. Not so Rosenbaum, who said vulgarly:

"Don't talk boloney! There ain't no such things as ghosts!"

"That's what you think, but other people know differently," said Uncle George. Rising

from his chair, he crossed slowly to a large oil painting hanging on the wall. "This is a painting of Sir Gervais, isn't it, Peter?" he asked, tapping the canvas with his finger.

"Yes," said Sir Peter, then froze rigid in his chair, for faintly to the ears of everyone in the room had come a ghostly sort of tap as though in answer to Uncle George's.

"Was that you who tapped the second time, Peter?" asked Sir Peter hoarsely. "No, I'll swear it wasn't," answered Uncle George, stepping quickly back from the picture.

"But someone tapped," said one of the party unsteadily. "I heard it distinctly!"

There was a moment of tense, uneasy silence. Then, watched by every eye, Uncle George moved towards the picture and tapped on it again.

This time there could be no mistake. In response there came an answering tap, faint, ghostly, and elusive.

"There's someone here to-night who doesn't belong to our party," said Uncle George, in a low, hoarse voice.

The company looked at each other white-faced and askance. But no one moved, no one stirred. It was as though, held in thrall by fear, they were waiting for something to happen. Then Rosenbaum spoke.

"Stop messing about and come and sit down," he said roughly to Uncle George. "Or better still, let's get out of here now!"

Uncle George paid no heed to him. Raising his hand, he knocked three times on the picture with a deliberate pause between each knock. And in response there came three faint and ghostly taps with a pause between each.

"Whoever it is, he is trying to communicate with us," whispered Uncle George. "Chuck it, will you?" shouted Rosenbaum violently, thrusting back his chair and rising. "I've 'ad enough of this nonsense!"

His face was white and wet with cold perspiration. But no one took any notice of him. They were watching Uncle George, who was moving his hand slowly down the old oak panelling by the side of the picture.

Suddenly there came a click, picture and panel slid silently to one side, and there, in the dark square aperture revealed, stood the armoured and knightly figure of the long-dead Sir Gervais exactly as he appeared in the picture.

For a long moment he stood there motionless, watched in petrified horror by the company. Then, with a howl, the terrified Rosenbaum bounded from the room, followed by Solly, who was blubbering in panic.

Meanwhile, back in the room, the armoured, ghostly figure had swung back its visor with a shout of laughter, revealing the beaming, cheery face of young Ogdin.

"It's all right, Peter," said Uncle George hastily. "Just a little joke of mine. We've solved the mystery of what happened to Sir Gervais that Christmas Eve. He dodged up to the picture and hid himself behind the chimney. Ogdin and I found the door this morning in the chimney there. This is another secret entrance to it behind the picture. Peter, the treasure chest's in there!"

"What?" shouted Sir Peter.

"Yes, and full to the lid with Sir Gervais' treasure," cried Uncle George triumphantly. "There's a letter as well saying 'he was going to leave it there and come back from his monastery to share it out amongst the poor some day. He must never have been able to come back. But you won't have to sell the manor now, Peter, old fellow. There's a fortune in that chest!"

"And that," said Goffin, sliding off his stool by the lutehook counter, "is the story of how Cardale Manor is still in the possession of the Cardale family. As you can guess, that particular Christmas was one of the happiest Sir Peter had and his guests had ever spent. Well, 'ere!"

"And a Merry Christmas!" said Dawson, as the door closed on Goffin's retreating form.

Next Friday: OCEAN JONES  
IN CHRISTMAS MAIL MYSTERY

# THE LONE EAGLE

Scotty, leader of the Worst Squadron in France, lays a trap for the aerodrome spies!

## Scotty's First Move

**M**AJOR SCOTT to see you, sir!" General Fitz-Owen, officer commanding brigade headquarters at Louban, looked up from the table at which he was seated, writing. "Show him in!" he said to the khaki-clad orderly standing rigidly at attention in the doorway.

The orderly stepped back a pace into the corridor, to usher into the general's presence Major John Scott—Scotty—the newly appointed leader of the Black Eagles, once the most dreaded air fighters on the Western Front, now contemptuously called the White Chickens—the worst squadron in France.

Laying down his pen, General Fitz-Owen leaned back in his chair, looked keenly at the grim but clean-cut features of the youngster standing before him and said:

"I want you to tell me exactly what happened this morning when you led the Black Eagles over the lines for the first time."

"We were annihilated, sir," said Scotty curtly. "Half-way to Metz we encountered and engaged two German squadrons of Fokker D 7's numbering twenty-four machines all told. We numbered ten Camels. I was the only member of the squadron to return, being forced to pull out of the fight with a jammed gun."

"How many of your machines were down when you pulled out of the fight?"

"All of them, sir!" The general nodded, and was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"Was it absolutely necessary for you to engage such a superior force as these twenty-four Fokkers?"

Scotty flushed. "Was I to run, sir?" he demanded.

It was the general's turn to flush, a tinge of colour showing on his tanned features.

"No, I'm not advocating that at all," he said. "You were in command of the squadron and the decision rested with you. How many Fokkers did your squadron get before they went under?"

"Eight, sir," said Scotty.

"Eight Fokkers to nine Camels," said the general slowly. "That's bad, Scotty—very bad indeed. You should have accounted for more of the enemy than that."

The roar of an aero engine breaking the silence of the dawn brought the men of the Secret Squadron running from their huts . . . Scotty had returned.

## By GEORGE E. ROCHESTER

(Illustrated by G. W. Blow)

"I know, sir," said Scotty, "but it wasn't our fault."

"Why not?" "Because our gun-belts had been tampered with," said Scotty.

The general started, staring at him in astonishment.

"What on earth do you mean by that statement?" he demanded.

"Exactly what I say," returned Scotty. "When I got back to the aerodrome the sergeant who stripped my gun showed me the cartridge which had jammed it. The cartridge looked to me to be slightly larger than regulation size. I measured it and found it was larger. I then examined the gun-belt and found three more similar cartridges, each of them sufficiently large to jam the gun."

"But you used the words 'tampered with,'" protested the general. "Are you suggesting that these cartridges were deliberately inserted into the gun-belts?"

"Yes, sir, I am," said Scotty resolutely. "You know the absolutely fool-proof system under which cartridges are made. Not one in a million—not one in ten million—can possibly be larger than regulation size. Yet I found four in one gun-belt—and if they were in my gun-belt there was nothing to stop others being in the gun-belts of the squadron. That would account not only for the wretched

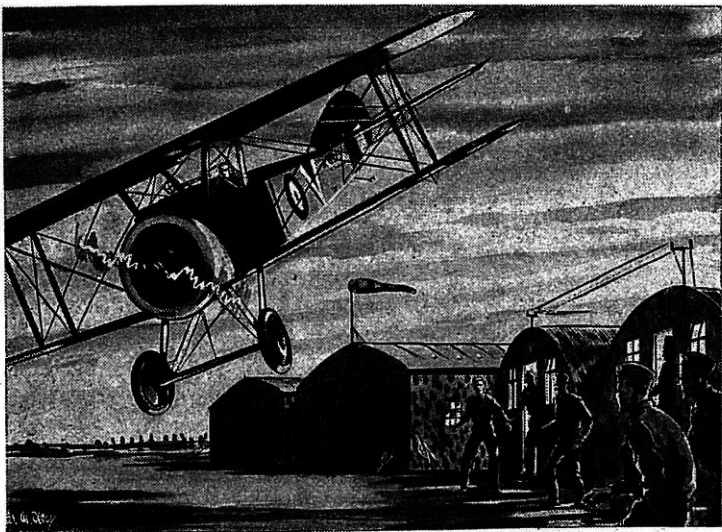
show we saw this morning, but for other disastrous shows put up by the squadron before I took over command."

"Yes, by Jove, it would!" ejaculated the general. "With their guns jamming in a fight no squadron would stand an earthly chance. But if your assumption that large cartridges have been deliberately inserted into gun-belts is correct, it must be the work of enemy agents."

"Yes, sir, and on our aerodrome," assented Scotty grimly. "Gun-belts are boxed at the munition factories and are not unpacked until they reach their destination. I've examined our boxes of gun-belts and they are quite intact with the seals unbroken. I'm absolutely certain that these large cartridges were inserted into the belts by someone on the aerodrome. And if German agents really are at work on the aerodrome, it might account for the mysterious failures of the squadron during the past months."

"Indeed it might!" ejaculated the general, jumping to his feet and commencing to pace the floor. "The Black Eagles were second to none, and the German squadrons were scared stiff of them. It's more than likely that being unable to defeat them by fair means, they've turned to foul!"

"That's my view, sir," put in Scotty quickly. "Another thing I may be wrong, but I believe we were deliberately ambushed this morning by those Fokkers. I had pinned flying orders up in the mess. If German spies are at work on the aerodrome, what was to stop them learning those orders and transmitting them across the line into Germany, with the result that the Fokkers were sent up to intercept us, knowing our guns would jam in the first few minutes of the fight?"



## THE LONE EAGLE.

"This grows worse and worse!" exclaimed the general, halting. "Scott, we've got to know if you're right or wrong—and quickly at that. Any suggestions?"

"Yes, sir," answered Scotty, and went on to outline a plan.

Dusk had deepened into night by the time a car dropped Scotty back at the aerodrome of the Black Eagles at Le Couray.

After a wash and brush up in his hut, the boy crossed to the sergeants' mess. As he appeared in the doorway, a sudden hush fell on the room, and every man sprang to attention.

"All right, carry on!" said Scotty, then as the men returned to their reading, letter-writing, and talking, he turned to Anstruther, the senior flight-sergeant, and said: "I want my bus ready at dawn, Anstruther. I'm going up an offensive patrol towards Briey!"

"You're going over the lines alone, sir?"

"Yes, certainly," said Scotty, then added grimly: "Who do you think there is to accompany me now that the squadron's been wiped out?"

"Why, no one, sir," replied the sergeant unthinkably.

"New machines will be ferried up from the base to-morrow," Scotty informed him, "and a new batch of pilots will report for duty some time during the day. Well, have my bus ready at dawn!"

With that he bade the mess good-night and crossed to the officers' quarters where Captain Benson, the squadron adjutant, was sitting in the mess ante-room puffing at his pipe and reading a magazine.

"Well, how did the interview go off?" demanded Benson with interest, laying down his magazine. "Are you to be court-martialled and cashiered for losing the squadron, or merely sent home to England in disgrace?"

"Neither," replied Scotty. "There's not even going to be a court of inquiry. General Fitz-Owen is perfectly satisfied with my explanation as to how the squadron was lost, and that's the end of it. I told him, of course, of those infernal cartridges I found in my gun-belt!"

"You did, eh?" exclaimed Benson, refilling his well-smoked briar. "And what did he say about that?"

"He agreed with me that it looks as though it's the work of enemy spies," said Scotty.

"It is that of a brave old jolt," Bill bet, to think that German spies are at work here!" remarked Benson. "What's he going to do about it?"

"Nothing. He's left everything to me," replied Scotty. "And I'll get these German swabs sooner or later, Benson. I've made my first move to-night."

"You have?"

"Yes. I've given orders for my bus to be ready at dawn for a lone offensive patrol towards Briey," explained Scotty. "There's nothing hush-hush about the orders. The whole aerodrome 'will know within the hour that I'm going up alone at dawn, and it won't surprise me in the slightest if I find another ambush of Hun machines waiting for me somewhere on the way to Briey!"

"You mean you think a report of your movements will be flashed across the lines into Germany either by wireless or by some other means?" demanded Benson.

"No," said Scotty. "I'm convinced that we were deliberately ambushed this morning, and if I'm ambushed again to-morrow morning I'll know for an absolute fact that spies are at work on this aerodrome!"

"Yes, but the knowledge won't help you much if the ambushing machines happen to get you," pointed out Benson dryly. "With all due respect to you, I think it's suicidal madness to go up alone like that!"

"I'm going, all the same," returned Scotty doggedly.

He and Benson sat talking until after midnight, for Benson had been adjutant of the squadron since its early days in France and he was well acquainted with every member of the personnel. In spite of that, however, he

could think of no one who could possibly be filling the role of enemy spy.

"If it was anyone but you who had these suspicions, I'd say at once that the whole thing was perfectly ridiculous," he told Scotty as they sat earnestly discussing the matter. "I know every man on the aerodrome."

I've censored their letters so often that I know every domestic history of practically every one of 'em from flight-sergeants to mess orderlies—and I'll bet a thousand pounds to a penny that there's not a man on the drome who isn't as loyal and as patriotic as ourselves. The spies are not amongst the personnel, sir."

"Well, they're somewhere around, and sooner or later we'll get 'em!" said Scotty grimly.

He rose at length, and bidding Benson good-night, visited the various sentries, accompanied by Sergeant Crayshaw who was in charge of the guard.

To no one but General Fitz-Owen and Captain Benson had Scotty mentioned a word of his suspicions, but as he strolled through the darkness with Crayshaw, he said casually:

"How long have you been with the squadron, sergeant?"

"Ever since they mobilised, sir," answered Crayshaw promptly. "I came out from England with them."

"Would you know every member of the personnel?"

"Yes, sir, every one."

"Would you say we've any shirkers or slackers amongst them?" asked Scotty. "Or anyone you wouldn't care to trust too much?"

He was conscious of Crayshaw's astonished stare in the darkness.

"No, sir, we've got none of that sort here," answered the sergeant emphatically. "Of course, they've been a bit disheartened lately—all of us have, sir—at the way things have been going, but they're all true-blue, sir, every blinkin' one of 'em. They're real good lads, sir."

Thus he echoed the adjutant's words, and it was a prey to puzzled thought that Scotty eventually sought his hut and turned in. For in spite of Benson's and Crayshaw's faith in the loyalty of the personnel, Scotty was still unshaken in his conviction that the secret and sinister hand of the enemy was at work somewhere on the aerodrome.

## Twelve to One!

SCOTTY was awake with the dawn, and after a cold splash and a brisk scrub he donned his oil-stained khaki and walked in the direction of the mess.

The morning was calm and fine with a cloudless sky which gave promise of a glorious day to come. Dew sparkled on the grass, but marring the serenity of that lovely dawn, there came from eastwards, where the trenches were, the sullen rumble of heavy gunfire.

Gulping down a cup of steaming hot coffee in the mess and pocketing a biscuit, Scotty strode towards the hangars outside of which his black-winged Camel Scout was standing with engine ticking over.

As he approached he saw Armourer Sergeant Hawkins coming towards him. It was Hawkins who had stripped Scotty's gun after the disastrous fight the previous morning and freed the jammed cartridge.

"About your gun-belts, sir," said Hawkins, saluting. "I've had to give you belts from existing stock. I've had a look at them, sir, and they seem all right, but after yesterday I don't want to take the responsibility of passing them."

"That's all right, Hawkins, we'll chance it this morning," said Scotty.

Walking on with Hawkins, he reached the machine where Flight-Sergeant Anstruther reported that he'd run the engine up on test and was giving it his ears.

"Right-ho, then I'll get off!" said Scotty.

Swinging himself up into the snug little cockpit, he settled himself down in the seat, snapped down his goggles, and signalled to the waiting mechanics to pull the checks away from in front of the under-carriage wheels.

Next moment, under opening throttle, the drone of the quietly running engine rose to a thunderous pulsating roar and the silent fighting scout swept across the aerodrome and took off.

Back on the aerodrome, Sergeants Hawkins and Anstruther, together with a group of mechanics, stood staring after the little machine heading swiftly in the direction of the lines, disingeringly and fearlessly and unsteady, for the unspoken thought in the mind of every one of them was whether the lone Camel and its pilot would ever live to return.

"Well, good luck to him!" muttered Hawkins, and turned away towards the hangars as the machine was swallowed up in the distance.

Unknown to them, however, it was not Scotty's intention to make a direct crossing of the lines. When out of sight of the aerodrome, he swung southwards down the line, heading for the hangars of the Secret Squadron of which he had been a member until he was sent to command the Black Eagles.

Reaching the hangars, he glided down to land and a few minutes later was closeted with Major Lester, his late commander, in the latter's hut.

Major Lester, still in his pyjamas, listened in astonishment while Scotty had to say. Then, when he had concluded, said abruptly:

"Yes, certainly, Scott, I'll do that most willingly!"

Ten minutes later, having exchanged his gun-belts for belts provided by Major Lester, and having had his fuel tank replenished, Scotty was in the air again, heading back up the line, his engine chugging at a thundering one hundred and fifty horse-power Bentley engine would take him.

When east of Le Couray and the hangars of the Black Eagles, he swung across the lines, heading over enemy territory in the direction of Briey at a height of seventeen thousand feet.

On the ground far below him long columns of grey-clad German soldiers, ambulances, lorries, guns, and all the grim paraphernalia of war were moving slowly up towards the line, but the reporting of all such movements was a job for Allied machines out on observation or reconnaissance work.

Scotty's self-imposed job that morning was to find and engage enemy aircraft; and, if his suspicions were correct, somewhere between him and Briey a force of German machines was lying in wait to shoot him down.

If information concerning his movements really had been flashed across the lines into Germany, as Scotty suspected, in consequence, a force of Hun machines had been sent up to intercept him, the pilots must be thinking him pretty late in coming along. He was confident that they'd wait for him, however, for there were a dozen reasons which might have delayed his start from Le Couray.

On he thundered, his goggle-protected eyes continually searching the sky to port and starboard and ahead for signs of the German aircraft he expected to encounter.

Suddenly he tensed, his eyes narrowing. He'd been right, after all. Heading towards him from a point to starboard, and coming up at terrific speed, was a German Jagdstaffel—or squadron—of twelve Fokker D.V's flying in their usual formation of four V-shaped groups of three machines each.

As they approached, three of the Fokker formations swung wide, whilst the fourth held its course, their object obviously being to attack Scotty from the front, both flanks, and the rear. That they intended to make certain of getting him was very evident.

Waiting until they were almost on him, Scotty whirled his black-winged Camel round in a steep bank, and turned as though to run. For a few moments he thrundered back the way he had come, then forward and into the control-stick, and he took the Camel tearing earthwards in a screaming dive.

Exultantly the German pilots whipped forward their sticks and roared down in pursuit; but next instant Scotty had jerked back his stick, and was soaring up and up in an almost perpendicular zoom.

(Continued on page 14)



# Letters of a Knee-hance Pilot to His Young Brother

## Pringed Wonders



*hello Jim*

Rio Negro,  
Brazil.

By the time this reaches you I suppose you'll be home for the Christmas holidays and looking for a present from me. Sorry, but you'll be disappointed—I've been far too busy lately to ink of Christmas presents. However, I've no doubt you'll manage to have a pretty good time, absent or not present, and I'm glad of that, because I also have been enjoying a regular beanfeast lately. As to the future— But you can form your own opinion about that after I've told you what's been happening.

It all began when old Professor Savager burst upon my quiet life one morning. You remember me, of course? He's the huge, bearded and whiskered bloke who specialises in the study of pliances, and who fetched me a fearful crack in the jaw in certain because I refused to fly in over a certain poisonous crater known as the Mountain of Breathing Death.

After that spot of bother, of course, we parted wildly and I never expected to clap eyes on him again. In fact, I'd heard that he and another lode had departed on some crack-brained expedition into the interior, and the odds are against them ever coming back. You can imagine, therefore, what a surprise I got when he suddenly reappeared in a most blood-curdling manner.

I was back on the head-waters of the Amazon at the time, ferrying electrical gear, and whisking real spots of wire up to a new power plant near Barcelos. On the day of the professor's return, however, Aerobus hadn't been running so well, so I came down on the Rio Negro, hooked out a couple of anchors, and got busy etting the works.

The job was just done, and I was sitting on the 'ing enjoying a pipe, when the peace of the day was shattered by a terrific hullabaloo among the cane-brakes which bordered the banks. First there came a shuddering snarl, then a strident squeaking and the crashing of breaking reeds, whereupon a tapir plunged into the water and swam wildly out into the stream.

Well, of course, there wasn't anything very remarkable about that—just an ordinary matter of a tapir being pounced on by a jaguar and asking to die the river as his only chance of escape. I watched him without any particular interest at first, as he was borne downstream towards me, but suddenly dived into the cabin for my rifle. You wonder why I proposed to shoot the poor beast? I'll tell you.

Have you ever heard of piranhas? Probably not. They're quite well known out here, though, and the Indians fear them more than all the squares in the jungle. Yet they are not much larger than small fishes, scarcely larger than trout; only these same small fishes are the most ferocious and most deadly flesh-eaters in the world. They hunt in shoals of thousands, and once they attack not even an elephant would stand a chance; they simply and literally tear the living flesh off his bones.

When, therefore, the water around the tapir began being churned into foam, and his squeals started making the echoes ring, I know that a deadly bullet was the best way of ending a thoroughly nasty business.

The creek of the shot was still ringing in my ears when a voice spoke.

"I am glad you did that," said the voice. "They are devilish creatures, these piranhas."

I looked down and found myself staring into a familiar pair of blue eyes, which peered up at me out of the copper-coloured tangle which

completely covers the rest of Professor Savager's countenance. He was by himself in a canoe, standing up and hanging on to one of the struts.

"Gosh!" I gasped.  
"Good afternoon," said he, and tried to step from the canoe on to the float.

Then it happened.  
I heard a hoarse bellow and a splash, and the next thing I saw was the canoe floating away, bottom upwards, while Savager threshed madly about in the water and drifted steadily downstream. After that first bellow he only uttered one word, but it was a word which turned me cold.

"Piranhas!" he shrieked.  
If it hadn't been for the cable to the bow anchor I would never have been able to lug him back against the current, and the fishes would have enjoyed a rare old blow-out; as it was we were streaming blood from the bites of the brutes by the time that we'd hauled ourselves up into the cabin of Aerobus. We lay there on the floor for a minute or so, getting our wind back, then we got busy with iodine and bandages and a change into dry kit, after which Savager fixed me with his bleak, blue glare and came straight to the point.

"I thought you'd," he began, "in order to apologise for my conduct when last I saw for your passenger. It was outrageous and inexcusable."

### Starting Next Week

## MEN OF THE MOUNTED!

### Stirring Picture Story

Well, there didn't seem to be anything to say about that, so I merely told him he needn't have worried. He brooded over this for a while, and then continued slowly:

"And now," he muttered, "now I also have to thank you for saving my life. It puts me very busy in your debt."

"In that case," I said, "we'd better both forget all about it. Have a cigarette."

He took it, lit it, fumbled in one of the pockets of his discarded clothes, and produced what looked like a handful of yellowish pebbles.

"Look at these," he grunted.  
I looked and got a queer sort of electric shock for I was looking at a fistful of diamonds. He noticed how I goggled and chuckled grimly.

"Quite so," he rumbled. "Make you blink, don't they? And yet these, my young friend, are nothing compared to what might have been mine had I not been double-crossed."  
After that the story came out. It amounted to this. The professor and a blighter called Schwab had gone up country together, and had discovered an extinct volcanic vent where diamonds were as thick as sillitans in a Christmas pudding. Schwab had sneaked off one night taking all their equipment and leaving the professor to almost certain death, but the tough old bird had somehow fought his way back.

"By now," he ended, "the swineblood will have staked out a claim in his name alone, believing me to be dead. He will then return by air and establish himself on the spot. When I sought you out it was not only for the purpose of apologising—it was also because I hoped to hire your machine and beat Schwab in the race back to our discovery. Now that you have saved my life, however, I have no more than hiring terms—I offer you a half share."

There was only one possible response to that.

"When do we start?" I asked.  
"At once."

I looked around the cabin, which was stacked with bits of electrical gear and a mighty drum of wire.

"Can't we dump this stuff first?" I asked.  
"No," was the reply. "Every hour counts. If we go at five we go now."

"O.K.," I said, and we went. That is to say, we were off the water as soon as I'd filled up the tanks from the tins I always carried in the back. And I didn't take long about that, either!

All these events had happened so suddenly that I was really a bit slow on the uptake as we thundered along on the compass course which the professor had worked out. That was why I never saw the nippy little two-seater until it had overhauled us, and was flying along by our side scarcely a hundred yards away. When Savager spotted it he bounded to his feet with a strangled shout.

"Schwab!" he shouted. "I know that machine. It is flown by a rascal as criminal as himself!"

"In that case you'd better not be seen," I began. But it was too late. Already that copper-bearded lunatic was standing on his seat, his head protruding through the open roof hatch, his whippers streaming in the wind, and his mouth opening and shutting soundlessly as he hurled pithy comments at the astonished occupants of the two-seater.

It was funny while it lasted, but it didn't last long because suddenly the bloke at the back whipped a rifle to his shoulder and neatly parted the professor's hair for him. A very pretty shot.

Do you ever act first and think afterwards? I do quite often, and that's what I did then. You see, the two-seater was much faster and nippier, and it was absolutely certain that sooner or later Schwab would put a bullet just where he wanted it, and that would be the end of us. So I switched on George—the automatic pilot, you know—hared back into the main cabin, slammed open the floor hatch, and turned loose the copper wire with a piece of gear weighing ten pounds firmly fixed to the end of it. After that I grabbed the controls again and started making Aerobus perform tricks that would have turned her designer's hair white.

You get the idea, of course? Exactly. A machine stunting about all over the sky, whirling a weight at the end of several hundred feet of wire, is by no means safe to approach. That's what Schwab and his pal discovered when the lashing cable wrapped itself round their propeller and yanked it out by the roots before the other end of the cable ripped itself free from the drum.

They didn't break their necks, those two, but they had the Dickens of a long trek home. Most satisfactory.

Not quite so satisfactory, though, as good old Savager's hothead of diamonds. I can't tell you what my share will amount to yet, but it's something pretty staggering.

So I'm coming home to buy a really super-machine and plan some flights worth talking about. Maybe there'll be room for you. Who knows?

Meanwhile, give my regards to all the folks, and wish them a Merry Christmas for me. And don't forget that lashing of turkey, and things, are bad for a fellow who fancies himself fit for the Schools Boxing Championships. I'll be seeing you soon.



*Bill*



# A Right Merry Christmas to All! JUST MY FOOLIN'

By  
**THE OLD BOY**

**A** BOY stuffed away enough Christmas dinner to support the entire Army for seven months, and then hurried round to the chemist, and told his tale of woe. The chemist made him up a tonic.

"Here you are, sonny!" he said cheerily. "Take this, and if it doesn't do you any good, come back to me, and I'll give you something that will."

"That's what I want," replied the boy. "Can't you give it to me now?"  
Collapse of chemist, who couldn't think of anything foolish enough to reply.

Speaking about this column, the Ed asked me if I was going to have any special features for Christmas.

I said no; I should wear the same features as usual.

He has asked me to reconsider my decision, in the public interest.

Late the other night, I was passing an empty house in the country, which has a name for being haunted. Something black sprang out and came for me. I shrieked, "Oh-oh! I do hope it isn't a ghost!"

It wasn't! It was a tramp, who was sleeping in the house. He went away with my watch, a gold collar-stud, and two pun five-and-ninsepence—my life savings.

He left me shrieking: "Oh-oh! I do wish it had been a ghost!"

"Twas always thus!

Modern Christmas will never be really merry until we find some way of stuffing a Yule Log into a gas-fire!

**A QUESTION OF CONDUCT.**—Suppose you met a man who asked you, as a great favour, to do a simple little task which wouldn't take ten seconds, and which even a baby could manage? Would you do it, or would you kick him downstairs? Was it bad manners of me to kick him downstairs?  
Oh, it was, eh?

Well, all right! I'll tell Professor Clodpole to come and see you about it. All you have to do is to put your hand into a small wicker hamper he has with him. I don't even know what's inside it. All I know is that he's not quite certain whether his new cure for Death Aider bite will work or not.  
And I hope, for your sake, that whatever is inside that hamper is a vegetarian!

When I showed the Ed the drawing which disfigures the head of this column he asked me whether the man on the right was supposed to be Father Sikes or Bill Christmas.

He's quite witty at times—you'd be surprised!

**PRESENTS FOR ENEMIES.**—Christmas is the time to forget old injuries, but some people were obviously born to be hated, and it's no good pretending they weren't. You can now combine Christmas forgiveness with Getting-Your-Own-Back by giving them a Christmas Present from my giant catalogue of ENEMY PRESENT BARGAINS.

Like these—  
**ALMANACK FOR 1932.**—Handsomely engraved and printed. Shows all the wrong dates. They'll never stop it until they've made the most hopeless muddle of their engagements. Price 6s. 6d.

**WRITING COMPENDIUM.**—Hand-woven newspaper and envelopes. No matter how the paper is folded, they can't get it into the envelopes. Guaranteed to cause the utmost fury. Price 7s. 6d. per set.

**ROLLER-SKATES.**—Wheels set slightly on a slant. Their legs fly apart whenever they try to skate. Absolutely impossible to skate without falling over. Great bargain. One Guinea.

**HANDSOME SILVER WATCH.**—Never keeps the right time. Fully guaranteed to be always fast or slow, and no saying which. Will drive anyone to distraction. From 27.  
Send for yours now!

**CHRISTMAS QUERIES** from readers.

**"GAY DOG"** (Bristol): "I want to imitate the smart set and give a Cocktail Party this Christmas. Can you tell me how you mix a cocktail?" Yes. Take two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen, mix thoroughly, and serve in a tumbler. You can, of course, get the same thing by turning the kitchen tap.

**EARNEST STUDENT** (Bloombury): "Can you tell me why holly is called holly?" No, but I can tell you why it isn't called Squilleberry—because that's not its name.

**A. J. T.** (Nottingham): "I shall have a Chemistry Set for Christmas, and would like to make some explosives. What is the best thing to make first?" Your will.

**INFANT READER** (Frome): "I suppose all children have wondered whether or not Santa Claus is really only father?" No, Santa Claus' children know jolly well it's only father.

**POEMS IN PICTURES.**—This is a good game for the Christmas fireside. Dish out paper and pencils to your guests and tell them they have to draw a picture to illustrate a line from a poem or song. Then the drawings are passed round the circle and each guest must try to guess the line in question, writing their guesses on the paper. These are read out afterwards, and are often very funny. Guests obtain one point for every correct guess, and the one with the most points is the winner.

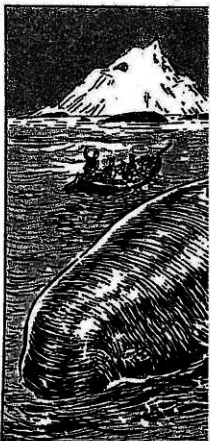
It doesn't matter if you can't draw, since bad drawings add to the fun of the game and make it harder to guess what they represent. If you can, try to illustrate your chosen line in a "catchy" sort of manner.

This picture shows you how. It represents two lines from a well-known poem. Can you guess them? If not, ask the Editor in his "Talk" this week.

## POEMS IN PICTURES



It's Ha



Dead whales to carry short-idea of German whalers. The backs after they have been b and unless the first "run" is located by the automatic

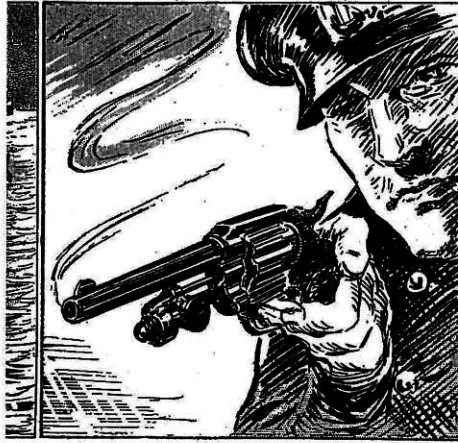
Let's Look Around

**600 M.P.H.**

**D**O you collect stamps? I people collect them at other during their lives. thought in my head was a just read about the great exhibition recently held in Rio South America. I believe the worth a colossal sum; after all, many of the big collections to money. King George V was, as know, an enthusiastic collector. I now owned by his son, our present to be worth £200,000. Presider collection is worth nearly as muc of the stamp depends, of course, so since not many were issued, stamps, most of them printed durc century, are already fetching pounds. Of greatest value are the to the envelopes which bear a r particular fight, so if you spot a ments try to get hold of them. there is a society which specialis stamps. I believe Mr. Lindsay E I often see at the Royal Aero Clu the most valuable collections in Well, it's a nice hobby—and an ir

A day or two ago I went to tl of an air film which I have hear about during the past eighteen title is "Men With Wings." The amount of soft-stuff, but there e flying shots that are worth going see. One sequence, of a dog-l colours, is particularly fine; the brightly painted Fokkers against of rolling white clouds, with the bl were so real that shivers ran do Don't miss this.

Talking of flying, a thing a fellows must wonder when they has been done in aviation durc twenty years, is what flying wil



Cops may shoot, but crooks may also get away. So the American authorities have perfected this queer-looking gun, which has a midget camera built in just under the barrel. The trigger fires the shot and works the shutter; or the cop can merely use the camera alone.



Here's the way to get a snow-covered road cleared quickly. Machine is like a giant vacuum cleaner. Special rollers gather up the snow and it is passed into a big chute where it is blown up through a curved shaft and deposited by the roadside. Much the same idea has been tried on the railway.

By Flying-Officer Johns

RE COMING!

fifty years—which they might well at the first air meeting at Rheims, speed of forty-seven m.p.h. was and those who watched this performance gave their opinions of a speed of one hundred m.p.h. reached. Nevertheless, many people are forecast as fantastic. Yet within of many of those same men speeds nearly five hundred m.p.h. And, you, six hundred is already in sight. member that the ordinary air-liner he air behind it at a speed double not long ago was forecast for racing hell, we might well wonder where it thirty years ago it was a common lie down to see if a machine was ng—to see if its wheels were really and. Now monsters weighing more tons roar up to 20,000 feet and ug of it. Is it straining the imagination to prophesy that men will one day soon? I'll leave you to work that selves.

ndley, of Tottenham, writes to me ull-fighting still goes on in Spain. it is true that bull-fighting goes on And what do I think about bull-fy? k, I don't know about Spain; I these later, so I don't know what But I should think that they have l-fighting for the time being, since ity of another sort of fighting to get but when the war is over I think o back to bull-fighting, one of the g that the breeding of bulls especia arena is a big industry. Yes, it is in France, but only in the south, ct known as Provence. Actually, it France, but the government have to stop it. The people of Provence non in the same way as the people France, or Paris. They have

nothing in common, the people of the south being the descendants of all sorts of nations who conquered the Mediterranean seaboard in the old days—Greeks, Romans, Saracens, Moors, Goths, Visigoths, Lombards, and goodness knows what other weird tribes. As to what I, myself, think of bull-fighting—well, what other countries do is no concern of mine. I certainly object violently to horses being used. Discussing bull-fighting one day with a Spaniard, in Spain, he put the matter to me like this:

"If you were a bull, which would you prefer: to be dragged to a slaughter-house and there pole-axed, or would you rather die fighting in the open with a chance of killing your attacker?"

Looked at like this it becomes rather a difficult question to answer. Personally, I'd hate to die in a slaughter-house. If the bull has got to be killed, anyway, I don't suppose it matters much to the poor brute which way it dies. Nearly all bull-fighters, or matadors as they are called, are killed sooner or later—usually sooner. That must be some comfort to the bovine world. They earn big money while they live, so I suppose that is the attraction. There is not a riskier job in the world than that of professional bull-fighter.

See you again next week.

W. E. JOHNS



AUSSIES' STAMP ZOO

WELL, the Aussies have completed their stamp zoo at last—with the new stamp illustrated here. Its subject, of course, is that amazing oddity of Nature, the duck-billed platypus, which is a mixture of most of the characteristics of both birds and animals.

Though the first Commonwealth stamp portrait, this is not the platypus' first postal appearance. Actually, Tasmania drew world attention to him on her four postal fiscals of 1880. Like most of the stamps of this island state, these are in considerable demand among collectors, and are well worth looking for.

The same remark applies to the upper values of Tasmania's pictorials of 1900. These were issued with the frank object of attracting visitors to the island, and were introduced on the suggestion of the Southern Tourists' Association of Tasmania. If the stamps didn't attract visitors there, they certainly did attract collectors, for, for many years they held pride of place as the Empire's most popular pictorials.

Remember that there are at least two distinct types in the lowest values of these specimens. When first issued, they were printed in London, by the line-engraving process. Subsequently, they were produced locally in Tasmania by the far coarser lithography and typography. Tasmania's first stamps bore the name her Dutch discoverer, Tasman, gave her, Van Diemen's Land, and though the colony had even then decided to change her name to Tasmania, her first two issues bore the old title.

Years afterwards, hosts of collectors were hoaxed by a bogus stamp, which was a skit on Van Diemen's Land. It bore the title "Van Diemen's Land," had for subject a portrait of Satan, armed with a fork, and spiked tail, and had its value marked in "souls." Continental collectors, who could read little or no English, fell for the "leg-pull" stamp by the hundreds, and even now copies of the "Devil's stamp" turn up in old European collections.

We have dealt with Tasmania's first stamps, now let's close with her last one. These were two values of the "views" of 1900, but printed on special paper, watermarked by a crown-surmounted letter "A." They appeared in December, 1912, one month before the familiar "kangaroo and map" stamps of the Antipalial Commonwealth were introduced.



## THE LONE EAGLE (Continued)

Flinging his machine over at the very top of the zoom, he rolled. Then forward went his control-stick, and he screamed down on the nearest Fokker formation, the vicious snarl of his synchronised guns audible above the thunder of high-powered engines.

Bullets from his blazing guns smashed into the cockpit of the nearest Fokker. The German pilot half-staggered to his feet, then collapsed lifelessly across the controls, and the Fokker dropped its nose and went hurtling to its doom on the ground far below.

Still holding his screaming dive, Scotty nudged his foot on the rudder-bar, swinging the nose of the Camel so that his synchronised guns raked another of the Fokkers from tail plane to engine cowling.

A wisp of flame licked back from the German's riven petrol tank; then, as Scotty flashed past, the Fokker plunged out of the sky to spin in erratic flames, leaving in its wake a long trail of eddying black smoke.

Two Fokkers down in the first few moments of the fight!

With such swift and unexpected savagery had he launched his attack that the Fokker pilots had been taken completely by surprise. But, recovering from their preliminary setback, and grimly determined to avenge their two fallen comrades and get this audacious Englander, they now came tearing in at Scotty from every angle, their guns ablaze.

By their own actions, however, they impeded their own efforts; for, concentrating on one target as they were, they had to be careful lest the bullets from their guns should find a billet in the Fokker of some comrade.

And what an elusive target the black-winged Camel proved to be! It was here, there, and everywhere, looping, rolling, diving, zooming, now screaming down with guns aflame, now hurtling up and up, with half a dozen Fokkers clinging to its tail, striving desperately to send a burst of bullets whanging into its vitals.

Two more Fokkers were down, one spinning eastwards out of control, the other diving steeply down, its mortally wounded pilot slumped in his seat, his glazing eyes fixed unseeing on the blur of ground far below.

But Scotty had not escaped scathless. His fuelage and wings were riddled with bullets, one of his rudder-control wires was banging by a single strand, and a bullet from perilously close quarters had shorn deeply through his forward starboard strut, the white and splintered wood showing ominously against the varnish.

What was more, the Fokker pilots were now beginning to use their wits. At first it had seemed to them a ridiculously simple matter to tear in at this solitary Englander and shoot him to pieces with the ease of a dozen bloodthirsty hawks destroying a helpless and badgered sparrow.

But the sparrow had turned out to be the veritable eagle which he really was, and so far the hawks had not got much the worst of the encounter. Added to that, this madman of an Englander was displaying not the slightest inclination to draw off, but was looping, rolling, diving, spinning as though he intended to stay with the Fokkers until either he or they were wiped out.

Well, if that was his game, the sooner the rash fool was finished off the better. But to stay to be no more rushing, tearing, let-along-at-him tactics. No; what was wanted was method, so the Fokker pilots proceeded to manoeuvre for position in order to launch a concerted but methodical attack.

There were now five Fokkers left in the air, and whilst four of them engaged Scotty, driving in at him from every angle, the other four climbed swiftly for height until they were a good five hundred feet above the savage fight. Then forward went their control-sticks, and three-hundred down on the black-winged Camel, each pilot holding his fire until he should be close enough to make a miss impossible.

But Scotty saw them coming, for their intention had been perfectly clear to him from the moment they started to climb. So, hemmed in as he was by the other four Fokkers, he did the only thing possible. Whipping forward

his control-stick, he flung the Camel into a screaming nose-dive, hurtling earthwards, with engine thundering at full revolutions.

And now he was easy meat for the Fokkers. True, he had eluded them for the moment, but joyously they reared down on his tail—the whole eight of them—the vicious snarl of their guns audible above the deafening thunder of their Mercedes engines and the shriek of wind through quivering wings and struts.

A lightning-like swing to port, with nose still down, took Scotty momentarily out of the line of fire; then back came his control-stick and he swooped out of his dive, to go up and up in a soaring zoom.

Back came the Fokker sticks as they drove in to intercept him; and in that same instant they got the shock of their lives, for thundering down on them from above, a solid wedge of blazing guns came forth white-winged Camels led by Beefy Bates, of the Secret Squadron.

Taken completely unawares, so intent had they been on their prey, the Fokkers presented an absolutely sitting target to Beefy and his pals, and three of them fell away out of the fight, to go plunging earthwards in a death dive.

The remaining five, now unpleasantly aware that the odds had been evened, made a frantic effort to draw off and leave the honours of the fight with the Englanders.

It proved to be a fatal move. Zooming up from their dive, the four white-winged Camels of the Secret Squadron took the Fokkers from below and in the rear, bullets from their guns tearing up through the Germans' fuelage and cockpit floors.

Two more Fokkers reeled out of the fight and went spinning earthwards, their pilots lying on their backs across the controls. Scotty, hurtling down from above, accounted for another, whilst the remaining two, realising that escape was impossible, turned desperately at bay.

Had the positions been reversed, those two Germans would have given no quarter, nor did they receive any. Twelve of them had set out to shoot down one lone eagle, and they paid the price in full, for not one of them lived to tell the tale.

## No More Bad Ammunition

**H**ALF an hour later the five Camels came gliding down to land at the hangars of the Secret Squadron.

"Well, we got 'em, old boss!" boomed Beefy heartily, swinging himself from his cockpit and shaking hands with Scotty. "We did what you wanted, fellows, ten minutes behind you. How many were there to start with?"

"Twelve," said Scotty. "Then you got five of 'em yourself!" cried Beefy. "A nice bag, old boss—a nice bag. But come and have some breakfast."

"No; I'll get back to my own aerodrome, Beefy," said Scotty. "I just want Major Lester's reports on the gun-belts I left here."

He received the report from Major Lester in the flight office of the squadron.

"The first ten cartridges in each of your belts were of regulation size," said the major grimly, "then followed four cartridges large enough to have jammed your guns."

"Thank you," said Scotty. "I expected something like that!"

Having put through a telephone call to General Fitz-Owen, at brigade headquarters, he lost no time in taking-off, and it was a group of vastly relieved and eager mechanics waiting for the start of the Black Bagler who watched his bullet-riddled, black-winged Camel come gliding down to land there some thirty minutes later.

"Thank goodness you're back, sir!" exclaimed Sergeant Anstruther fervently, as Scotty swung himself from the cockpit. "We were bound to think you must be down somewhere." He glanced quickly at the ripped wings and fuselage and damaged strut.

"You've been in a fight, sir?"

"Yes; I fell in with a dozen Fokkers half-way to Brierly," replied Scotty. "Thanks to the timely assistance of four Camels which happened along, we got the lot."

"Wot, all the 'ole blinking dozen of the

perishors, sir?" ejaculated an awe-stricken voice from amongst the group of mechanics.

"Yes," nodded Scotty, with a faint smile, then, leaving his machine to be thoroughly overhauled by the jubilant mechanics, strode off in the direction of his hut for much-needed wash and brush-up before breakfast. But before he reached it he was met by Benson, who came hurrying from the flight office.

"Well, what happened?" demanded adjutant eagerly.

"Exactly what I anticipated would happen," replied Scotty grimly. "I met a do Fokker D7a waiting for me half-way Brierly."

Briefly and tersely he put Benson in possession of the facts.

"I guessed they'd have a pretty strong force waiting for me," concluded. "That's why I asked Major Lester to send four of squadron along behind me. I think you agree now, Benson, that the Germans' kit what flying orders are posted on this aerodrome."

"By gosh, it looks like it!" assented Benson, turning and walking with Scotty towards the latter's hut. "But who di'kens can be sending the information at the lines?"

"Some member—or members—of the personnel," replied Scotty.

"Yes, but we got to find him," rapped Benson. "Dash it all, it shouldn't be difficult if we keep our eyes open!"

"Yes; keep our eyes open and give plenty of rope," assented Scotty, halting the entrance to his hut. "The fellow will be himself sooner or later."

"You can't be about in the meantime," demanded Benson.

"You can leave all that to me," replied Scotty. "My first move, made this morning, hasn't turned out too badly. My second move will be made before midday."

"It will," he exclaimed, Benson, a quiet interest. "What is it?"

"You'll soon see," grinned Scotty.

Benson did see, for before midday an A lorry, escorted by eight guards and two geants, arrived, bringing a fresh supply of gun-belts and ammunition.

"I'm clearing all the old ammunition out of Scotty's hangar," Benson said. The two sergeants and the guards are picked men—they're staying on here, and from now onwards ammunition dump will be guarded night day. He'll be a jolly smart spy who interferes with the ammunition in future."

"That's one very sound step in the right direction, anyway," assented Scotty. "But about flying orders in future? You're not going to stick 'em up in the mess these confounded spies to read?"

"I'm not," replied Scotty. "In future, flying orders will be given verbally, and at last minute, to my pilots. I'll still put 'em up in the mess, though, but they'll be for the benefit of our friends, the Boches."

"To send 'em on a wild-goose chase, mean?" said Benson.

"Yes; but wild-goose chases from which lot of 'em will never return," replied Scotty grimly.

During the day new Camels arrived at the base, and Scotty's new contingent pilots reported for duty. They were and enthusiastic youngsters, fresh out of England, the majority of them with school-days but recently behind them.

"They're a fine crowd," said Scotty Benson, after he'd inspected them and machines drawn up in front of the hangar. "We'll see how they shape first thing morning. I'll take them up on a patrol, and see if we can pick up a Hun."

"But you won't take them far over lines on their first flight, will you?" demanded Benson anxiously.

"Just far enough to give them their taste of a real scrap," answered Scotty. "Properly handled, Benson, these boys put the Black Eagle right back at the where they belong!"

Next Friday :  
TAILS UP

lain's Leading

ighter-  
ker in—

# WILL HAY'S LOCO!

Bursting with pride, Stationmaster Will waited for the engine the company had promised him . . . and then it arrived, the last word in antiques!

## Prehistoric Tin Kettle!"

STATIONMASTER WILL HAY smiled—the smile of a man well satisfied with life in general and the prospect of even more pleasurable things to come.

Albert and Jeremiah, his two men-week at Merry-in-the-Green, scowled. Will had arrived at this forgotten station, which was situated "some-where in Hampshire," Albert and Jeremiah had to work. Both disliked work in any form. In fact, the mere mention of work sent horrified shudders down old man's spine and tremors of righteous indignation flowing through young Albert's figure.

Now, only one train a month stopped Merry-in-the-Green. That, of course, had worried Albert or Jeremiah. But now, services rendered to the company, Will had promised a train of his very own, and an engine and four coaches was due to arrive at Merry-in-the-Green at any spot now. And Will had full permission of the railway company to make use of his in any way he saw fit. That was why he looked so full of beans. That was why Albert and Jeremiah looked so lugubrious, was why thirty or forty villagers, of all ages and sizes, both old and young had

By

## HEDLEY OWEN

forgathered at the derelict station to witness the great occasion.

Bunting and coloured streamers fluttered idly in the breeze—so did a pair of patched pants belonging to old Jeremiah, which he had hung on the signal-arm to dry.

"Hi!" Will nearly swallowed his tonsils as his questing gaze alighted on those offending pants. "Jumping mackerel! What the dickens are those pants doing up there? Albert! Jeremiah! Whose are they?"

"Mine!" granted Jeremiah. Will's right eyebrow lifted in an alarming arch until it seemed in danger of disappearing entirely under his scalp. His nose-nippers trembled as a surge of indignation ran through his frame.

"Fank!—pants on my signal! Jeremiah, my man, take them off—and put them on—at once!" he added authoritatively.

The ancient, bewhiskered Jeremiah blinked

"Take them off—and put them on!" he croaked. "Whayvermean?"

"What I say!" snapped Will, pursing his lips. "Jump to it!"

Old Jeremiah shook his head in bewilderment and shambled off. With irritating slowness, he proceeded to carry out Will's instructions very literally. He took off the offending pants, grinned sourly at Will, put them back again, then climbed down from the signal.

Will nearly jumped out of his brand-new stationmaster's suit when he turned again and still saw those patched pants dangling from the signal.

"Didn't I tell you to take them off?"

"No, you didn't!" protested Jeremiah sourly. "You told me to take 'em off and put 'em on! And that's what I done, and why, you alone knows! Berry, I reckon!"

Will frowned, adjusted his nose-nippers, and wagged an admonishing finger at the stolid Jeremiah.

"I meant take them off the signal-arm and put them on your skinny legs!" he exclaimed witheringly. "The signal-arm is not the proper place for pants!"

"Why not?" grumbled Jeremiah. "They gotta dry somewhere, haven't they? Anyway, I've gotta pair of pants on my legs already. I don't want another pair."

Will gulped, and a ferocious expression crossed his face. Really, it was difficult trying to be an efficient stationmaster with a staff like Jeremiah and Albert.

"Take them down!" he exploded. "And put them—put them in the dustbin, for all I care! But take them off my signal! Jump to it! My train is due to arrive at any moment now!"

He turned, and, with hands clasped behind his back, strutted up and down the platform. Suddenly the genial smile which had returned to his face made its exit. Albert was the cause of this transformation. Albert was born tired; he could go to sleep at any time, in any circumstances, in any place. Like a horse, Albert was now fast asleep standing up.

"This is too much!" roared Will. "The moment my eye is off that young lazy good-for-nothing he's snoring!"

His lips pursed into a grim, determined line. He took careful aim over the top of his nose-nippers, and swung a heavy boot at that part of Albert's anatomy which offered the most tempting target.

At the identical moment Will's boot swung forward, Albert not only blinked into wakefulness, but he moved a pace to the right. That was

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Pedalling furiously, Will drew alongside the runaway and launched himself desperately at Disraeli's footplate.



## WILL HAY'S LOCO!

unfortunate for Will Hay. He had put a lot of force into that plunging foot. His aim at the target was accurate and accurate—until the target moved. Then that plunging foot, meeting with no more solid resistance than the air, swung Stationmaster Will Hay completely off his balance.

Thump! That was Will hitting the deck, as he were, on the flat of his back.

"Oooooo! A-woooooop!" That was the hapless Will's verbal, though unintelligible, contribution to the incident.

"He, he, he!" Albert's face wreathed in smiles. "Ha, ha, ha!" The assembled villagers were applauding. "Jolly good! Do it again, mister!"

Will collected his nose-nippers which had jumped their moorings, perched them on his nose, and looked severely at Albert.

"You lazy, good-for-nothing young scamp!" he exclaimed reprovingly. "I've a good mind to fire you! Get that burnisher, and carry on polishing the metals!"

Slowly Albert turned away, a steel burnisher in his puggy hands. Really, there seemed to be no sensible reason for polishing the rusty metal tracks which ran through the tumble-down station of Merry-in-the-Green. For that matter, it seemed to be no sensible reason for Albert's existence, either. Grumblingly, he knelt down between the weed-covered track and made a pretence of burnishing.

Will glanced at his watch. According to the company's letter, his engine and four coaches were scheduled to arrive at ten-thirty prompt. It was now ten-forty.

"This railway wants waking up!" snorted Will petulantly. "Skidding skyscrapers, everyone seems to do as he likes in this company! Disgraceful! But I'll show 'em!"

Then he brightened up, and the genial smile returned to his face. As drifting cloud of smoke was appearing in the far distance. A rumbling sound came plainly to his ears. His train was approaching.

"Stand by, my men!" roared Will. "She's coming in! She's—!" He broke off, with a gasp of dismay. "Hi, you! Take that cow off the line!"

His startled gaze beheld the unhappy sight of a local cowhand vainly urging his four-footed charge across the level crossing. The cow, however, once stationed in the centre of the track, seemed disinclined to move another inch. By rights, of course, the closed gates of a crossing should have made such a circumstance impossible. But like so many other things at Merry-in-the-Green, the level-crossing gates did not work; they were merely ornamental—and not very ornamental at that.

The smoke was looming nearer now. The rumbling of the approaching train was filling the station. Definitely Will charged forward.

"Shoo!" he bleated, glaring furiously at the sleepy-eyed cowhand and the still more sleepy-eyed cow. "Gerr off the line, you brute!"

Frantically he waved his flags, red and green before the obstinate animal. Maybe it was the offensive red flag which stirred the cow into action. For suddenly it snorted, lowered its head, and charged.

Only just in time Will leaped clear. Then he breathed his relief. The cow was off the line.

"That's a new one on me," he muttered. "I always thought that red flag was annoying to a bull—not a cow!" He arched an eyebrow at the animal, which had come to a standstill again. "Perhaps it is a bull! Ah!"

His eyes gleamed. A train was rounding the bend. His train. Then he blinked—and blinked again with such violence that his nose-nippers nearly fell off. His train was arriving all right. But what a train—what an engine! Never in all Will's experience of railway matters had he ever set eyes on such an engine.

It might have been Stephenson's original Rocket for all its likeness to a modern engine. The tall chimney stack zoomed skywards to a height of five feet. From its wide, trumpet-like summit belched clouds of black smoke and a cascade of sparks. Its huge, clumsy-looking driving-wheels clanked and

clanged; its ungainly, out-of-date pistons plunged and hissed noisily; its ancient boiler, patched and riveted, leaked and threatened to blow itself asunder.

"My only elastic-sided boots!" gasped Will, arching his eyebrow with very genuine astonishment. "Is this a museum piece?"

Noisily, clumsily, the engine steamed into Merry-in-the-Green. Behind it, not so ancient in design, rumbled the four coaches.

A yell of laughter went up from the assembled spectators. But Will didn't feel like laughing. Red of face, he approached the grinning driver and fireman as they brought the ancient locomotive to a grinding standstill.

"What's the idea?" demanded Will. "What's this?" His disapproving eyes were running critically over the loco. On a large brass nameplate he read DISRAELI.

"Disraeli? Jumping kangaroos! Disraeli, why, he's been dead and forgotten these umpteen years!"

"So 'as this bloomin' kettle!" chuckled the driver, with a wink at his fireman. "Proper museum piece!"

"But—but—but I don't understand—" began Will angrily.

"Oh, you'll learn!" said the driver, wiping his nose with a piece of cotton waste. "Come on, Bill, time we were moving!"

Both men climbed down from the cab of the ancient loco, and started for the tumble-down station exit.

"Hi, wharrer you doing?" bellowed Will. "Where are you going? You can't leave this here! Who's going to drive it?"

"You, I reckon!" growled the driver. "We've left her with steam up! Our orders was to deliver this engine-and-four, and take the rest of the day off. Come on, Bill!"

Will Hay spluttered and gasped and gasped and spluttered, but he could do nothing. There was his train—to do with as he liked. "Albert-Jeremiah!" he bawled lustily. "Come here!"

Grinning like a couple of Cheshire cats, Albert and Jeremiah came forward.

"Get the train off the line," said Will airily. "The ten-fifty-three non-stop is due in a moment or so! Put it—put it—!" he gulped—"put it—!"

"In the dustbin!" suggested Jeremiah.

"Er—yes! I mean, no, you fool!" gasped Will, glancing at his watch. "Put it in the siding!"

He blinked, started violently, and gazed towards the horizon. A waiting trail of smoke betokened the approach of the ten-fifty-three non-stop. What would happen if the non-stop smashed into his ancient, loco-and-four he shuddered to think of.

Blowing his whistle and waving his red flag Will chased down the line. Meanwhile, Jeremiah and Albert slowly approached Disraeli, and amused themselves twiddling the various levers and controls. Albert occasionally consulted a handbook which he had pinched from his young brother, entitled, "How to run a miniature railway."

"It says, pull this lever," said Albert, glancing at Jeremiah, "to release the brakes. H'm—after trying it—somehow it doesn't seem to apply to this engine." The driver of an engine he named Jeremiah. "This ain't an engine. It's a prehistoric tin kettle!"

## Free Trip to the Sea!

THE ten-fifty-three was blaring its approach now. The steam whistle made merry music. The assembled villagers rubbed their hands in anticipation. There would be something worth seeing when the non-stop crashed into the back of the stationary loco-and-four!

That's what Will Hay was thinking. He gazed about him desperately. It was useless to see the signal at distance. The driver of the ten-fifty-three, knowing Will's funny ways, wouldn't take any notice of it. He'd charge through under full steam.

"Hi!" Will, almost swallowing his whistle, beckoned to the sleepy-eyed cowhand, who was leaning against a post seemingly indifferent as to whether he moved from that spot to-day, to-morrow, or never. "Hi! Bring that cow here, will you?"

The cowhand blinked, stopped sucking his

wisp of straw, and grinned amiably at frantic stationmaster.

"I can't move Bessie, meester. The putter 'er foot down firm, she means it. Try!"

A desperate idea was taking birth in mind. Somewhere he had read of a cow pulling a train. Well, this cow, maybe, serve his purpose. In any case, his train to be saved from destruction, apart from small matter of the passengers' safety, ten-fifty-three. If the signal wouldn't the train, perhaps the cow would.

"Bringing his red flag into view, St master Will Hay approached the cow.

"Come on, my beauty!" he invited, holding the red flag before the animal's eyes. "Come along, you—you cross-eyed of catsmeat!"

The cow stopped chewing the cud and a slight interest in the waving flag.

The ten-fifty-three was just rounding bend now.

Will waved the flag again, and the snorted, looked wickedly, at it, still wickedly at the prancing stationmaster, lowered its head. Then it charged.

Will backed away nimbly, still waving red flag. Angrily the cow followed the both the up and the down line. Will hurried up his red flag, and proffered the

The lazy anger of the cow underwent sudden change. Perhaps the colour green reminded her of fresh pastures, and an apt that was not to be denied. She snatched the green flag, and he jaws clamped her. "Suits me!" grinned Will, releasing hold of the green flag. "You chew out for a bit!"

He set his stationmaster's cap at a dignified angle and waited for the ten-threes to pull up. And pull up it did. All, a cow on the line was a much t method of stopping a non-stoppable train a more signal.

"Sorry to have to halt you, driver!" bellowed above the hiss of the released air. "But you've run into my train if I thought of this cow."

"Meantersay you stopped this train posely!" yelled the driver, red glo beneath the coal-grimo on his face. "I stopped this train with a cow!"

"Alone I did it!" announced Will, assu a dramatic attitude. "Emergency meas you know."

"But why?" howled the infuriated driver. "What's the idea?"

Will smiled toothily and adjusted his nippers to an authoritative angle.

"It was either that or a smash," he explained breezily. "My train is on your nose."

"What you talking about, you idi bawled the driver, quizzing up at "There's nothing on the line! What tr whoset train—where?"

Will Hay blinked and followed the dri line of vision. There was no sign of his and-four now. All he saw was Albert Jeremiah leaning slowly towards him. "Where's my train?" he yelled. "I have you done with it?"

Jeremiah grinned and shrugged shoulders.

"Dunno!" he volunteered. "I pulled lover as Albert told me, and the old st tooked Albert to move, so Albert an started to move, too."

"What?" roared Will, red in the "You set the train going and then des her? My only Aunt Matilda's canary, yc dons a fine thing!"

"She's only moving at four miles an hc getting Albert to move, you'll catel with her. Come on, Jeremiah, it's knoel off time—and I'm tired!"

Leaving the infuriated driver and his to remove Bessie, the cow, from the line, flew off like the wind. He remembered there was an ancient bicycle in the s there was a chance he could overtake a lone loco, and put some things about.

Unaware and oblivious of the appl which came from the assembled villagers, scrambled into the saddle of the anc bicycle and started to pedal frantically



arted train. It was going along  
maneuvering way, but Will got his teeth  
y. He'd got to stop that train and  
off the line, into a siding, before some  
damage was done. His breath was  
and going in short gasps when the  
each of the runaway came in sight.  
Will was a stickler. He reached the  
g, empty wagons, drew alongside  
ravelled and, shutting his eyes, leaped  
to saddle as he'd seen certain Western  
ars do. On the films the hero chasing  
way train always made a perfect land-  
to speak. Will's landing wasn't  
perfect. It's true. He reached the  
plate of old Disraeli, but it was  
he'd landed first. Still, that was a  
matter.  
ing a swabby piece of cotton waste  
s face. Will busied himself with it  
a. He pulled this lever and that lever  
ped for the best. Nothing happened.  
He chanced across Albert's handbook.  
g over his nose-sippers he tried to read  
structions, but his foothold was rocky  
e print danced before his eyes. Still,  
ever or other had to be pulled, so Will  
ally pulled the lot. And no one was  
surprised that he when the engine  
y clanked to a standstill.  
new I'd do it!" he told himself. "It  
men's job—and I was the man. Now,  
see!" He stroked his chin thought-  
arched his eyebrows, and gazed out  
the line. "Better run her into a siding  
the ten-fifty-three has run clear."  
climbed down from the cab, heaved his  
t on the nearest points lever, and bent  
to old Disraeli to fuss around with  
new.  
ancient loco began to move, and to  
immense relief it turned into the siding  
e or so of yards away. As it did so,  
the bend of the track came the ten-  
ree, going all out. The cow had been  
ed, and the driver of the non-stop was  
determined to make up for lost time.  
-long!" yelled Will, as the train  
ed past. "Be seen! You—sometimes!"  
didn't catch what the driver threw back  
—but he caught what the fireman threw  
at him. It was a chunk of coal. Will  
it with both hands, little realizing that  
furiated fireman had intended him to  
it with his head.  
"I'm sure!" mumbled Will,  
ing the firebox and thrusting the chunk  
g inside the furnace. "Every little  
"

"alk up, ladies and gents!" Will Hay  
going to run as a showman. "Walk  
astronome house industries! Who's for  
asant excursion down to the sea? Five-  
ix return! Cheapest excursion you've  
known! Bring your wives—bring your  
bring your pets, if you like!"  
crowd outside Merry-in-the-Green  
n looked at one another dubiously.  
days had passed since the arrival of  
all, and during that time Will had been  
g in overtime, mastering the intricacies  
a ancient loco's controls. Now he could  
to Disraeli—after a fashion. The next  
of course, was to get passengers.  
it wasn't so easy. The villagers and  
hoarding folk hadn't much time for rail-  
and Will's bright idea of running an  
sion hadn't met with the response he'd  
epected. The idea of paying good money  
trip to the sea did not appeal to the  
g of Merry-in-the-Green.  
a crowd outside the station listened  
ntly enough to Will's exhortations. They  
d some amusement in watching his eye-  
s arching up and down and listening to  
hin-wag. Some of them even speculated  
long it would be before he talked himself  
possibility, but now much longer his  
nippers would stick on their perch.  
e pay for a ticket—very definitely no!  
Vell," gasped Will, somewhat breathless,  
must say, my good friends, you're a trifle  
d at the times. This is the twentieth cen-  
e. Everyone goes down to the sea, for a  
and a smell of the ozone, and all that.

Come along! You won't get another chance  
like this, at five-and-six return!"  
Farmer Wontby shook his head.  
"That's a lot of money, meester. What's  
the matter with walking?"  
"Ay, he's right!" came a chorus.  
"But this is a railway—not a hiking club,"  
Will explained patiently. Then a sudden idea  
struck him. "Tell 'em what I'll do. As this  
is the first excursion from Merry-in-the-  
Green, I'll take all of you down to the sea-  
free! Now, how does that strike you?"  
Anything free made, instantaneous appeal to  
the people of Merry-in-the-Green.  
"No, you're talking, meester!" Farmer  
Wontby spoke for the whole assembly.  
"Reckons we'll all be a party to that there  
trip. When do you propose to start?"  
"To-morrow morning, nine-thirty!" beamed  
Will. "I'll fix it with the company to give  
us a non-stop run through to Merehaven.  
That'll give us time for lunch, a few hours  
on the old briny, and a pleasant return  
journey. Leave it to me!"  
Thus came into being the first excursion  
ever run from Merry-in-the-Green. Will  
stated his case to the management at head-  
quarters over the telephone, little dreaming  
of the excitement it caused. While he hung  
on the telephone frantically messengers were seek-  
ing Mr. Trimbleton, the managing director.  
It wasn't Mr. Trimbleton's fault that he  
owned to Will Hay as a relation through  
marriage ties. Quite cheerfully Mr. Trimble-  
ton would have attended this troublesome  
relation's funeral. But while Will was alive  
and connected with the railway, of which Mr.  
Trimbleton was the managing director, this  
troublesome relation had to be endured.  
They broke the news gently to Mr.  
Trimbleton. Will Hay wanted to run an  
excursion—he wanted the line clear for his  
excursion to Merehaven, and so on.  
Mr. Trimbleton breathed hard and deep,  
then he began to smile.  
"Tell Stationmaster Hay that will be all  
right," he remarked. "I'll have the line  
cleared all right—by gosh I will!"  
The news brightened up Will considerably.  
"Things are waking up," Albert said, smil-  
ing tenderly. "Jeremiah, smarten your-  
self up for to-morrow's excursion. You'll  
have to be guard, You, Albert—I shall want  
you on the footplate!"  
"Eh? Who's going to look after the  
station while we're gone?" mumbled Albert.  
That was a poser, but Will disposed of it  
with his usual good humour and facility for  
overcoming difficulties.  
"We'll look after it, Albert. No one will walk  
off with it while we're gone. Better get the  
tickets ready," he added, as an afterthought.  
"Tickets!" blinked Albert. "But as it's a  
free excursion wharver you want tickets for!"  
Will winked expressively and tapped the  
side of his nose.  
"You do as you're told, young feller-me-  
lad! Get the tickets ready!"  
"Barmy!" muttered Albert as he shuffled  
off.  
But Stationmaster Will Hay wasn't as  
barmy as his staff thought.

### The Takings Vanish!

LD Disraeli was travelling at full  
speed. That Disraeli's top speed was  
fifteen miles an hour did not perturb  
Stationmaster Will Hay. He was  
happy. His free excursion to Mere-  
haven was a success.  
The four coaches behind old Disraeli were  
packed. Husbands and wives, sons and  
daughters, aunts and uncles—even cats and  
dogs, and a parrot or two, had accepted Will's  
generous offer for a free ride to Merehaven-  
by-Sea.  
Merehaven-by-Sea, however, seemed a long  
way off. According to Will's reckoning, old  
puffing Disraeli should reach there by lunch-  
time. But one o'clock came round, and still  
there was no sign of the rolling sea. Two  
o'clock arrived, and still no Merehaven-by-  
Sea.  
"Looks to me as if we've passed the  
bloomin' place!" grumbled Albert, stifling  
a yawn. Then, gazing out of the lurching cab

at the wilderness ahead, he nearly lost his  
balance. "Brako on—quick! This is a  
terminus we're running into!"  
Will Hay blew his nose violently and  
jumped for the controls. Only just in time  
he applied the ancient braking system. The  
line his "excursion special" was traversing  
ended abruptly against two giant buffers.  
The remains of a station sorted themselves  
out in Will's startled vision. In a weather-  
beaten signpost he read "Cuddington."  
"Cuddington!" he muttered, tapping the  
side of his nose and arching his brow thought-  
fully. "Cuddington? Never heard of it!  
But where's Merehaven? Must be some mis-  
take somewhere!"  
Albert grinned and pointed south-west.  
"Well, there it is!" he exclaimed.  
"What the hump does it matter if it isn't  
Merehaven?"  
"Exactly!" murmured Will. Then, adopt-  
ing his best professional smile, he climbed  
down and blew his whistle.  
"Merehaven?" he yelled, without a blush  
of shame. "All clear!"  
The passengers, and pets, alighted. A Old  
Farmer Wontby immediately spotted the  
signboard.  
"This isn't Merehaven!" he hooted.  
"Oh, yes, it is!" breezed back Will, smiling  
affably. "They've changed the name from  
Cuddington to Merehaven." The new sign-  
boards haven't arrived yet. Go down to the  
beach and enjoy yourselves. Don't forget,  
everybody, the train leaves here sharp at  
six-thirty. Mind you're back on time—and  
don't," he added very deliberately, "spend  
all your money."  
Having seen the passengers off, Will  
wandered round Disraeli, doing a spot of  
oiling. Albert and Jeremiah went fast  
asleep. They were still snoring when the  
weary passengers returned.  
Tired, hot and thirsty, the trippers swarmed  
into the station and found their further  
progress barred by a closed barrier. At the  
barrier, a bundle of tickets in his hand, stood  
the Stationmaster Will Hay.  
"Had a good day, my friends? Ah, I'm  
glad! Now, before we make our non-stop  
return, there is the little matter of the fare  
and—"  
A howl greeted his words.  
"Don't get excited, ladies and gentlemen,"  
beamed Will, holding up his hand pacifically.  
"This is business. In the name of the company  
I undertook to carry you to Merehaven  
free. There was no offer made to bring you  
back without charge. So, you see—"  
He arched an eyebrow and winked, well  
satisfied with his master stroke. For a  
moment it seemed that the crowd would fall  
on him and rend him. But after Farmer  
Wontby had drawn the crowd away from the  
barrier and mumbled something to them  
they returned, scowling, but apparently  
willing to pay.  
"Five and a penny!" he announced Will  
brightly. "That's fivepence cheaper than the  
last excursion rate. We know how to do  
things on this railway!"  
They paid up, grumbling and murmuring  
among themselves, but that didn't worry Will.  
It was his duty to show a profit for the com-  
pany—and Will was a whale on duty.  
"All aboard!" he yelled, striding along the  
rickety platform. "Sit back and rest, the  
we're homebound." "Bit for Merry-in-the-  
Green, non-stop."  
He blew his whistle, waved his flag  
violently for young Albert's benefit, then  
climbed up on to the footplate. Once again  
old Disraeli, creaking and clanking, gouting  
smoke and sparks to the darkening heavens,  
rolled into action.  
It was a non-stop journey back to Merry-in-  
the-Green, all right. A keen-eyed signman,  
with special instructions from head-quarters,  
saw to that. That Disraeli and her excursion  
passengers had never touched the ground fifty  
miles of Merehaven was a small point. The  
Stationmaster had been very averse to letting  
Will Hay tear along his railroad leading to  
Merehaven. It was a busy track—and Will  
on a busy track would not be unlike a Will  
heading non-stop into a china shop. So Mr.  
Trimbleton had designed a route for the

(Continued on page 21)





# Invisible Enemy

**T**HE detective moved swiftly down the room past the row of beds where men were sleeping, and finally his torch came to rest on the face for which he was searching. He shook the man by the shoulder.

"Come on, Clavering—come on!"

The man on the bed, who, like all the others in this room in the London St. Giles' Mission, looked as though he were going through bad times, sat up and frowned.

"What do you mean, waking me up like this?" he demanded, and, seeing the uniforms of two policemen in the background, he went on with a chuckle: "I shall call the police!"

"This isn't the time for joking, Clavering. You're wanted! Come along; we've got a car outside."

Clavering yawned, got up and dressed himself, murmuring:

"Is it cool or exile this time? Scotland Yard should make up its mind about me."

He smiled in amusement as they left the building and got into the car. Amusement changed to wonder as the car pulled up at a block of flats, and he was escorted to one of them. A butler opened the door, and when they were inside the detective introduced Clavering.

"This is Bassett. He'll take care of you. I'll return in an hour."

A hot bath, a shave, the donning of new clothes, and Clavering was a man transformed, and still mystified.

"You don't know what this is all about, do you?" he asked Bassett.

Bassett didn't, and when the detective arrived back a little later there seemed to be no time for questioning. The car drove off; left the West End for the quiet streets of the City, and pulled up outside a big building carrying the name plate, "Great Eastern Oil Company, Limited."

The offices themselves were empty, but the board-room glowed with light. Clavering was introduced to a rather distinguished-looking gentleman, Sir Herbert Donbridge, managing director. Another he recognised as Sir Joshua Longstreet, of the Foreign Office. Then they and the other directors of the company got to business. Sir Herbert could see the mystification on Clavering's face, and smiled.

"We took it upon ourselves to ask Scotland Yard to find you, Clavering. Our business is too vital to stand on ceremony, and I should like to tell my colleagues here all about you. After the War you entered the military intelligence service. In that capacity you served well. Then you were detailed to an assignment in Paris, and that was where you—er—spoiled your fine career. You not only squandered all your own money, but funds entrusted to you. You may remember that in Paris you were friendly with a girl named Sandra. You were going to marry her. She

is now the wife of Nicolai Kamarov, probably one of the richest and one of the most unscrupulous men on the continent.

"The Great Eastern Oilfields belong to us by treaty—in exchange for our keeping the peace in the country where they are situated. Recently Kamarov sent his agents to the concession; he has incited riot and unrest. You know what that means. The oil concessions will be sold to certain foreign nations for military purposes, and mean a threat of war to us."

"But what can I do in this business?" demanded Clavering.

"Kamarov is meeting with a group of foreign representatives. We must know the time and the place of that meeting. You are in an exceptional position to find out," replied Sir Herbert.

Clavering's eyes glittered.

"You won't get me trying to persuade Sandra to give me her husband's secrets," he said angrily. The argument went on for half an hour, and it boiled down to the fact that Clavering was being asked to get information that might save Europe from war. But he wasn't having anything to do with it. "Fifty thousand pounds is my price for doing what you ask," he said. "Ah, I didn't think you'd be interested! Good-evening, gentlemen!"

"We accept your terms," said Sir Herbert. "There's a boat train leaving in half an hour. Bassett has instructions to be ready, and you will go at once."

**I**N Paris there was a little hat shop kept by Princess Stephani, and Clavering lost no time in going there. She was an old friend of his and Sandra's, and might help.

Stephani was pleased to see the "funny English Jeff" again, but couldn't help him. She hadn't seen Sandra for two years. Clavering wondered just how he was going about his until he went to a little cocktail bar known to Sandra. He did finally meet her. The old friendly smile was good to see, but Clavering couldn't help thinking that somehow she looked frightened.

"Tell me about your husband," he said. "Is he tall, handsome, rich?"

"He's too powerful and too rich," said Sandra. "And suspicious that everyone is likely to harm him in some way—even me."

"Do you live—near here?" asked Clavering carelessly; but Sandra smiled and shook her head.

"My husband wants no visitors," she said. "Now I must go. My car is waiting—in the alley. Paul is still my chauffeur. Remember him?"

Clavering did, and went out to the alleyway. That was lucky! Old Paul would talk, and give Sandra's present address. The Chateau, Fontainebleau. Easy!

But in his anxiety Clavering failed to notice

that he was being watched by a man later that night in the chateau, in report to Kamarov himself.

He is the same man who was taken police one night to the Great Eastern fields offices, and I saw him talk madame in Paris. His name is Clavering."

"Former member British Intell dropped from service. Now assigned to me, eh?" muttered Kamarov. "That man interests me, Alex. From now have but one duty—you know what that Alex knew, and fingered the gun pocket."

Right from the moment that Clavering Bassett, his valet, arrived in Paris, they had been on the alert in case Kamarov, by their moves, should strike first. But it happened until the night after Clavering met Sandra. The two men were leaving flat, when suddenly they heard a noise the other side of the bed-room door. looked at each other significantly.

Clavering said:

"Right—ho, Bassett; we'll be off now!"

They opened the hall door, switched lights, then closed the door again and backed towards the bed-room. Clavering was out now, and quietly he opened the room door. By the light of a torch was going through the papers in the drawer. The man heard them, switched torch, fired in the darkness, and then wards the fire-escape window. Clavering saw that something had happened Bassett, then stumbled over the form of the valet on the floor. Bassett had been h

Kamarov received the news of the to kill Clavering, and called his secretary Michael.

"I think I'll give a little dinner-party week-end, as a prelude to the conference wife has been lonely, and I think it is wise to invite some of her old friends, Clavering would be amusing, and P. Stephani. Invite them, and others that occur to you."

Kamarov was smiling a little grimly he broke the news to Sandra about the party.

"But I thought you wanted to be hidden. So many people will find out you're living. Isn't it dangerous?" she asked.

"I'm touched by your concern, my dear, but I shan't be here very much longer, and having extra guards put around the place."

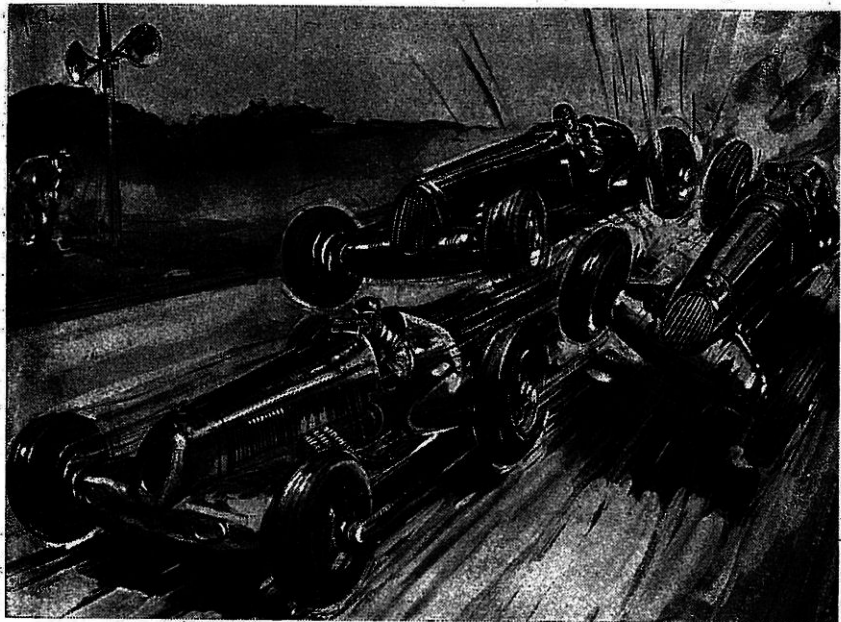
Jeffrey Clavering coming here by invitation! One look at her husband's face enough to tell what lay behind Clavering's death-warrant was in invitation.

Alone, she hurriedly scribbled a note Clavering, warning him—next day for



# THE HAUNTED SPEEDIERS

Nobody could say what was wrong with it. It looked all right, was all right till it got going at high speed, and then . . .



## "That Car's a Killer!"

**T**HE man leaning over the hedge that bordered the Helinford Road Circuit, in Denmark, looked tired. He was a big man, broad of shoulder, but lean. He didn't move as he leaned there, but now and again his eyes would shift up the road as if he was waiting for something. They were very clear, those blue eyes, clear and somehow calculating—the sort of eyes a man gets in the game of high speed.

Suddenly a faint, high-pitched note grew steadily on the still air, swelling rapidly in volume till it throbbled and vibrated like some monster humble-bee. Nearer and nearer it came, rising in intensity till it was no longer a single sound, but a clamouring medley of explosions, a crazy cacophony that threatened to numb the watcher's ear-drums. Then, from where the road was hidden by a curve, a car leapt into view. Howling over the ground like a green meteorite, it burst on to the level stretch of road in front of the low-clipped hedge.

For a moment it stood out in relief—a low, power-bulked speed-iron, set on wide, straddling wheels, and painted in the green of England's racing colour. Then it was gone, rearing into the next bend, tyres scrambling on the loose surfaces of the road as the stubby tail snaked round wickedly before it vanished, leaving only the reek of burnt fuel behind it.

For a moment the man behind the hedge stayed where he was, his eyes shining. Then he dropped from his vantage point and began

## By BARRY JOYNSON

(Illustrated by Roland Davies)

to trudge in the direction the car had taken. It was standing stationary outside its pit when the man saw it again, with the driver leaning against the counter, talking to someone out of sight. Lifting his eyes to the white board nailed to the front of the pit roof, the stranger read the words:

"COMPTON—No. 5

Entrant: D. O. Venning.  
Drivers: L. O. Venning, G. Washington."

The "G. Washington" referred to the Owl, the Vennings' Red Indian driver. He had adopted an American name for ordinary purposes.

Lee Venning was reaching out for a glass of iced grape-fruit squash and talking over his shoulder to the man with iron-grey hair who was working at the back of the pit when the stranger came up.

"Hallo, Venning!" he said.

Doug Venning, ex-speedman and designer of the Compton, looked up. Just for a moment he hesitated, then in a stride he was at the counter, swinging over.

"Mike Grant, by all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed, hand outstretched towards the

travel-weary man who confronted "Where the dickens've you been these few years, Mike? I thought you'd reti-

raise chickens or something!"

"No, Doug; I've not retired." The other shook his head wryly. "Does it look like

And he glanced down at his clothes, and

"I'm sorry!" the elder Venning quipped. Then he added: "What's the Mike? Come back to try your luck—game again!"

"I hope so!" Mike Grant nodded. "My luck'll turn; it's about time it did!"

Doug Venning took in the worn and clothes of his old friend, with whom I driven many races years ago. He not

drawn a look about the other's eyes at hollowness of the tanned face.

"Well, I guess you'd better come at me about the last five years or so while some food. Maybe you could tear a bit

two yourself!"

The ex-speedman had had his lunch half an hour ago, but he didn't mention fact. He knew the pride that belated Mike Grant, and he guessed that the on-

to make the down-and-out driver see meal was to eat one with him. He turned

Lee.

"You coming, Leo?" he asked. "I Mike Grant, a team-mate of mine in 5 days. Mike, this is my boy; he's the that bus out there now. I've got a youngster driving with him."

The introductions over, they made the to the near-by restaurant, where Grant told them of himself as he ate.

"It's the same old story," he said shortly. "I had to give up the game for nearly a year. When I was fit again my firm had officially given up racing, so my job had to wait. After that I tried a dozen different ones. Most of them had already got teamsters fixed up, and I hadn't the money to my own car. Things went from bad to worse until I was glad to get hold of a job under mechanic at a big garage. Then the car went broke, and the place was closed. Since then I've just had to do odd jobs. I got a job as cook on board a timber barge coming out here, and I left at Copenhagen. That was a week ago. I thought I, seeing I was in Denmark, I might as well see the Grand Prix, so here I am. Rotten luck!" Doug Venning nodded in sympathy. "How did you get out here—?"

"A good deal of the way," admitted Mike. "I managed to get one or two lifts, but it's so easy when you don't know the language. I've looked you up before, Doug, but you've been in America."

"I see!" The elder Venning lit a cigarette thoughtfully. "Well, Mike, you're welcome to do as a mechanic, if you don't mind—" he broke off awkwardly, not liking to offer oceanian's job to a man who had been a driver in his time.

"Gosh, you know I don't mind!" Grant said forward eagerly. "And thanks a lot, too." He paused. "I suppose—there's no need of driving, is there?" "Mean—?" "Sorry, Mike!" Venning shook his head. "You've got my drivers, and apart from that, cry much doubt if you could go and handle any of the buses in this race straight off. I've been out of the game some time, and you've had gone up with a bang." "I know," the other nodded. "Well, I just might try to drive in a race again, if it's all right." He stiffened suddenly, and leaned forward in his chair. "Say, Doug," he said, "he's that sitting over by the door?" "The ex-speedman turned his head and

looked at the short, dark-haired man who was intently studying the menu.

"That's Rene Vaux," he answered shortly. "He's always run a pretty big stable, though he doesn't often drive himself. Can't stick the fellow, personally!" "Yes, he's a pretty poisonous blighter, I know," agreed Grant; "but that doesn't alter the fact that—"

He broke off as the Frenchman looked up and saw him, recognition dawning on his hard face. Then he rose and came over to the Venning's table.

"Parbleu! So it is Mike Grant back from the dead!" he laughed throatily. "I'm pleased to see you, Mike! You drive, perhaps?"

"I haven't a car, Monsieur Vaux," Mike said briefly.

"No car?" Vaux raised his eyebrows. "Surely our friend here would help you?"

"Mr. Venning hasn't got a car to spare," Mike said. "Do you want a driver, monsieur?"

"You like the Comptons—yes?"

"Why, yes!" Grant nodded readily.

"C'est bien!" the Frenchman nodded quickly. "I have a car entered, and my drivers have gone sick. It is a Compton, and you can drive it for me. I shall pay you well."

"Why, thanks—" Mike Grant began; but

"Don't drive it, Mr. Grant!" he clipped.

"That car's a killer!"

### The Owl's Sporting Offer.

FOR a moment nobody spoke round the table. Then Rene Vaux looked at Lee.

"If you say the car is a killer, I believe you, my friend," he said softly.

"You should know—your father made it!"

Lee turned to Grant.

"Listen, Mr. Grant," he said. "Monsieur Vaux bought a Compton Grand Prix job from

us over a year ago. It's been modified so much that it isn't a Compton at all, really—it's a mongrel. But that's not the point—the car is classed as a Compton."

He leaped forward eagerly. "You know how cars turn out," he said. "Sometimes, every once in a while, a car is made that's wrong all its life. Nobody can say just what's the matter with it, but the fact remains. In its first race this car threw a con rod. Bad luck, you say. The next race a tyre blew out at one hundred and fifty miles an hour. Jack Tario, who was driving, had only changed them on the last lap, so they couldn't have been worn out. Jack was killed instantly, but the car escaped with hardly a scratch!"

Lee paused a moment, then went on: "The next race that car was in was the German Grand Prix. The steering went to pieces on the last lap—nobody knows why. It was perfect at the check-up a lap before. Tony Carr was in hospital for over six months through that crash—but the car was only slightly bent. Then at Tripoli—"

"That's enough!" Grant said. "I see what you mean. The car's haunted or something."

"That's right," the elder Venning said. "It's one of those things that you just can't explain. The car's never won a race—it's always cracked up—usually badly for the driver. You'd think the stewards would ban it from the tracks, but they can't find grounds for it. The car looks all right. It is all right till it starts moving—and then— I've asked Vaux to sell me the car back so that I can break it up, but he won't."

"Mais non!" The Frenchman shook his head. "It is just bad luck. Now, with Mr. Grant, the luck will change!"

Doug Venning looked grim. He knew the existence of the old Compton was a danger to everyone till it was scrapped. It might be superstition, but there was no getting over the car's bad record. Moreover, it was a

(Continued on next page)

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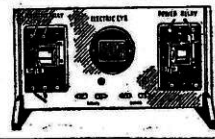
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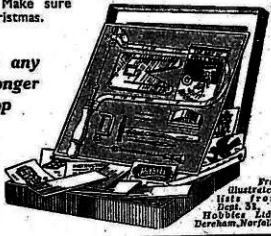
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## THE HAUNTED SPEEDIRON

very bad advertisement for Compton cars—ho wondered if Vaux was being paid by a rival firm to hang on to the haunted speediron.

"Perhaps you're right," Mike Grant said. "Anyhow, I'll give it a chance. I'll drive it, Mr. Vaux!"

"Don't be a fool!" Venning snapped. "Let's the car alone, Mike. Nobody else will touch it!"

Grant shrugged his shoulders. "This is my chance to get back to the racing game, and I'm going to take it," he said. "I can't have any worse luck than I've had for the last few months, anyhow."

"Listen, Mr. Venning," he said. "Then it is arranged. The car is at the circuit, if you would care to take her round a few times."

"Thanks," said Mike. "I'd like to get the feel of her while the light lasts. Who's driving with me?"

"That I have not decided," replied Vaux. "But you shall have a partner, never fear."

The Owl looked across at Doug Venning. "Listen, Mr. Venning," he said tersely, "get another driver for our Compton, and let me partner Grant. I know how Comptons handle, and I might be able to keep that car going while another man would not."

"Then I'll release you to drive for him. I'll get somebody else to drive with Lee."

"But yes!" Vaux agreed promptly. "I should be happy for you to drive my car."

"All right, then, it's settled," Venning said. "You'd better go with Grant of the Compton. You'd look at the Compton. I've got to look up our reserve driver for Lee."

They parted then, Lee and his father going to find Mayhew, their reserve driver, and the Owl, Mike Grant, and Vaux going down to the garages built near the grand stand where he kept the haunted speediron.

"It didn't look much different from the model Lee was driving, when they came to it. It was painted green, and it was not till the bonnet cover was lifted that the Owl could see that the engine had been modified a lot, as had the springing. He looked it over carefully, then turned to Grant.

"Well, there she is, Grant," he said. "We might as well take her out. Will you drive her first, or shall I?"

"You try her first," Mike Grant said. "You know how she should feel."

The Owl nodded and turned to Vaux. "That's all right, moonsteer?"

"Certainly!" the Frenchman smiled. "I leave the race in your hands. No, I own the car, it is you and Grant who drive it for me!"

When they had the speediron out on the tarmac, the Owl slid behind the wheel, glancing swiftly over the controls. The tanks were full, and it was the work of a moment to harness up the portable starter motor and turn over the big engine.

The Owl felt the car quiver and throbb as the mixture fired, sending a blue haze wafting back from the wide exhaust port. Then he eased his foot on the clutch, shoving down hard on the throttle, to send the haunted speediron away.

The two Vennings, talking to Mayhew behind the pits, watched the green car leap forward with a shattering blast of sound, heard it die away for a moment, then boom out again as the Owl snicked into top, accelerating away down the straight. They watched the car grow rapidly smaller, then vanish round a curve in the road.

"That's his hope," said Grant again. "The old Venning said 'get back again!'"

They waited, hardly speaking. The Helfind circuit was roughly ten miles round, ten miles of good roads that wound and turned through pinewoods, breaking out here and there into the open country again.

Lee reckoned that it would take the Owl

about ten minutes to get round to the stands again, as he wasn't likely to drive fast the first time round. That ten minutes passed slowly—so slowly that at the end of it they were all stealing glances at the chronometer. Then, quite suddenly, the high engine note of the Compton rose on the air, growing rapidly.

Lee gave a grunt of relief as he saw the car approach in the distance, travelling like a bullet from a gun. Jumping out of the pit, he waited on the road for the car to pull up.

"How does she go?" Lee called, as he ran up to the killer car.

"There's nothing to complain of," said the Owl. "The car's fast, and seems stable enough. Perhaps it's turned over a new leaf and decided to reform. Anyhow, I'm going to drive her!"

## Out of Control!

THE portable starter-motors were whirring as they turned over the big engine out on the grid as the Owl made for the squat green shape of the haunted speediron. It was placed in the rank behind that of the Compton, that Lee and the reserve driver, Mayhew, were to drive, and even the impassive Owl felt a momentary twinge of disquiet as he thought of the grim record of the car he had undertaken to handle.

Mayhew, taking the other Compton for the first half of the race, was already in his cockpit, talking to the white-overalled mechanics who were grouped around the sleek speediron. He was to handle the car for the last lap, just as Mike Grant was to take over the outstaid Compton when the Owl's spell of driving was over.

The Helfind circuit was almost exactly ten miles round. That meant fifty laps for each car—twenty-five for each driver. A gruelling race for man and machine—five minutes of non-stop to be done at an average of over eighty miles an hour!

The Owl wondered if the haunted speediron would be able to stand up to the strain. If its previous record was anything to go by, it looked as if things were going to happen!

All right, Bill! The Owl slung a leg over the cockpit side and dropped down behind the low raised seat.

The big mechanic to whom he had spoken waved to the man who was crouched in front of the cowed radiator. There was the sudden note of the starter-motor, then the quick jerk of the Compton drawing mixture into her twelve cylinders. Then the engine fired with a bang, the gun going bang, bang, then picked up with a shattering roar.

The Owl kept the engine revving in short, sharp bursts, keeping the plugs free from oil, and glanced round to see who was placed nearest to him.

On his right was Caracciola's Mercedes, with Lang and Seaman in similar machines on the same edge of the track. In front of him he could just see through the drifting blue cloud of exhaust fumes Wimille's Darracq and Nuvolari with a German Auto-Union.

The Compton No. 5 was ranged alongside two black American Lindens, driven by Dolf Horch and French Lafarge—a formidable and fast machine, a scrupulous combination.

Behind, in the last ranks, there was a medley of red Maseratis, Alfa-Romeos, and a big orange Duesenberg driven by Lanco Chase.

The mechanics had left the road now, and only the cars and their drivers were left. Exhaust notes rose shatteringly, rising and falling as their drivers waited, tense, for the moment when the signal lights would switch to green.

The Owl saw the red light change suddenly to amber, and he trod his foot down harder than ever on the throttle till the engine in front of him shuddered with the power that was spinning its shaft. He counted up to ten, and slowly, then fast, the Owl risked a false start, slid his left foot off the clutch pedal, and gave the Compton the gun just as the amber changed to green, and the whole pack went screaming down the first straight.

A gap opened up in the throng before the Owl. He aimed the Compton at it and the

haunted speediron slung forward, rip through between the two cars ahead slamming into the van. There was more among the leaders; and he saw that consisted of Mayhew's Compton, Sean Mercedes, and Chase's Duesenberg.

Close packed, the four leaders snarled the first bend, the low white Mercedes, a orange shape, then two green ones in a succession.

The Red Indian changed down, feet hands moving together with crisp precision Tyres scurrying on the loose earth, at side of the road, he let the outstaid Com slide, letting the car's momentum take place of engine power. Then, as the low white Mercedes turned towards the bend, he killed the skid with a touch of the brake and dropped his foot down on the thr again, sending the Compton howling down slight incline that led to the two-mile str ahead.

That bend gained the Owl six yards on Collins driven by Mayhew, and the way thunder. The cars' engines boomed out they accelerated away down the straight where a wicked hairpin bend masked entrance to a thick pinewood.

Before they had covered a quarter of a the works Compton dropped back, let the Owl through.

The aged old Compton's rev cou was flickering up into the region of thousand. That meant something like t and a half miles a minute—and on a r Foot by foot the Duesenberg came back t Compton, then the pinewoods loomed ah and the Owl stamped on the brakes, chan down, swinging his car out into the mile a minute road for the turn. And he glanced in his mirror.

Two black Lindens were on his tail, a couple of cars' lengths behind him! didn't know where they had come from, he decided that he wanted to be as far s possible from Horch and Lafarge who was taking a corner at the top of the light; he wanted to see the methods of a crowing opponent used by the American team before he settled down to keep ahead of the Lind

The leaders stayed as they were, then, the next twelve laps—Seaman leading—field, then Chase's Duesenberg, almost inn stely followed by the Owl's outstaid. I-black and purple came the American Lin keeping close together, about half a mil front of Mayhew's Compton.

Then the Owl pulled in to refuel, so to get Grant away as quickly as possibl the change-over, and when he got away a the two Lindens had taken his place. It him two laps to catch the American—but did it, and through the pinewoods his f wheels were almost brushing the black tails. Up into the low-hills that frin Helfind, across the low-lying pasture l back to the slightly uphill slope to the g stands the three cars battled. Then, a two miles from the pits, the Owl sav

chance.

The Lindens had drawn slightly ah leaving a ten-foot gap, and the Owl leapt the opening! Forearms braced against cord-bound wheel, he hung on, saw the co radiator of the ahead draw level with the

of the Lindens.

Three abreast, the battling speedi rocketed down the straight, leaving a swir tornado behind them. Then the two Lin on either side of the Compton began to d together, sandwiching the Owl between th

In that instant the Owl saw the whole t of the Compton to face him, then, as he between them to draw together, forcing to drop back. Obviously, Horch and Laf had the idea that when the Owl br

frantically trying to avoid a collision, he w smash his car up. If the Owl had br

nothing could have saved him at the s of the Compton as travelling—but as he

He smacked his foot down flat, pressing throttle to the last fraction of its travel, s ing the Compton forging ahead!

The machine seemed to gather itself fi spring, then rocketed ahead like a shot i a gun. Grim-faced the Owl hung on, hol the car on its path till the road flattened

(Continued on page 24)

# THE HAUNTED SPEEDION

(Continued).

and he saw the grand stands ahead. Then, from behind, came the dreadful racket of a crash!

The two Lindens, drawing together to make the Owl brake, were going fast. Their drivers, expecting the Compton to drop behind, held to their course for a fraction of a second too long, and in that moment of time the gap between them vanished and the two cars tumbled.

There was a sound like a thousand metal drums being beaten all at once; then the two Lindens bounced apart. There was a shriek of an over-revved engine as Horch's left the road, out of control, plunging his way to the right, smashing a tree flat, and rocketing, battered and wrecked, into the field beyond. Lafargo, fighting his car like a madman, managed to keep it on the road, sliding and skidding as if it were on ice. The strain was too much. With a rending crunch the front axle assembly gave way, tipping the car on to its side, rolling it over and over, a tattered ruin of a car with hot flames beginning to lick from the ripped coachwork.

The Owl saw little of that—he was intent on keeping the Compton steady, as he signaled towards the pits, eyes straining for his righted car, on to the side, rolling it over and over, a tattered ruin of a car with hot flames beginning to lick from the ripped coachwork.

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One moment the haunted speed-ion was steady on its course, the next something began to vibrate in the steering, the reins in his hands go suddenly slack, kick savagely, then respond again. But the damage was done—the car was bucking out of control, sweeping across the road in front of the stands in a terrific power skid!

## Won and Lost!

WHEN the Owl opened his eyes again he wished he hadn't. His head felt as if it was going to explode any moment, and even the cold water with which Lee was bathing his head couldn't stop an invisible drip of pain dripping regularly somewhere behind his eyes.

## WILL HAY'S LOCO!

(Continued).

excursion special" that would cause every one in authority as little trouble as possible. A averaging never any more than fifteen miles an hour, old Disraeli plugged forward. The heavens were darkened and the stars were twinkling when Merry-in-the-Green eventually dove in sight.

Will Hay was so jubilant with the success of his first excursion that he overshot the station by a hundred yards. That meant stopping and reversing. This time the line of coaches and old Disraeli plugged backward, past the station platform again by something like sixty yards. Backwards and forwards went old Disraeli until Will had performed this little trick a dozen times. But the thirteenth time was lucky. He pulled up and stood at the requisite spot, climbed down, and strode along the darkened platform. The carriage doors opened, no passengers alighted—for the very simple reason that the whole crowd of them had grown sick and tired

He saw the elder Venning, Mike Grant; the course doctor, then the indescribable chaos on the track.

Compton No. 6 was on its side, and one glance was enough to tell the Owl that nothing on earth could make that car go again that day. Its off-side sub-axle wheel, brain-drum-in fact, the whole assembly, had been cut away as if with a knife, and the bonnet cover had disappeared, revealing the big engine beneath, and he could see that that was damaged as well.

"Anybody hurt?" he managed to mutter. "No," Lee's voice came from behind him—"only yourself, and you've only got a bang on the head."

The Owl managed to stagger to his feet, and caught sight of his own car, the cause of all the trouble, standing a little to one side. The tail was dented and the paint-work scuffed, but otherwise it looked all right.

The elder Venning looked at the car, then turned to the others with a queer look. "Remember the tale!" he asked grimly. "That car always crashes, but never gets smashed up itself." He turned to the Owl. "What happened?" he asked. "The Red Indian struggle for the shoulders," Lee said. "The steering seemed to stop working for a moment. I must have skidded in a patch of oil."

Mike Grant ran over to the stationary car, and yanked hard on the steering wheel, forcing the front wheels to move. "Look at this!" he said. "The steering's all right. It must have been a skid. I'm going on!" "No!" Doug Venning shook his head. "I'm not going to let anybody risk their necks in that car again!"

The mechanics had started up the old Compton to see the show, and now they were to see the end of it. Grant turned to the counter, grabbed a pair of goggles, and took a flying leap into the haunted speed-ion!

"Stop him!" the elder Venning yelled, but it was too late. With a shattering roar, the bad-luck car got away with a rush and went streaking down the straight after the leaders.

"Tell the stewards to flag him in!" Lee barked at his father, shaking his head, watching the fast-disappearing car.

"It seems to be handling all right," he said. "No, let him drive—it's up to him now!" Meanwhile, Mike Grant was charging down for the first corner. Twenty-six laps to go when there were still two cars in front. He knew that Lang and Garacicia were close behind him, but the one thing that really stood out was the fact that Seaman and Chase were still in front.

The crash at the pits had taken only a very few moments, and the field had not altered in the time.

It took twenty laps before Grant felt he could really trust the Compton, and then he really put his foot down! Lee, standing in the pits, scribbled the time down for the last lap and looked up with a start.

"He did that lap at 83.6 m.p.h.," he said. "That's three seconds off the record!"

Will's shouting exploits and jumped from the train on the second lap. "Don't do it," murmured Will, scratching the back of his head. "Very strange! They must have got out without my seeing them. Still, it's been a very pleasant day. He jingled the green bag which contained the fares he had squeezed out of his unwilling passengers. "And the company shows a profit."

The company did not show a profit for long, however. When Will had put the fare money in a ramshackle cupboard and turned in for the night, Albert waited long enough for him to start snoring, then he crossed to the office and raised a red lamp before it. Footsteps, soft and cautious, began to approach. A shadow loomed up against the window. In the daylight that shadow would have answered to the name of Farmer Wonby.

"Who's he put the money, Albert?" whispered Farmer Wonby. "In the cupboard," whispered back Albert. "Come in and help yourself. He won't wake up."

But Mike Grant didn't know that. As came round the forty-fifth lap, he saw a glimpse of orange amid the trees. It was the Duesenberg—stationary beside the row with Chase standing beside it, waving!

It was at the end of the forty-fifth lap that the Duesenberg started, and it was slowing, firing back savagely. "I've got him!" Grant spoke the words aloud, and staking everything on a last day he ground his foot down to the oil-slippery floorboards, sending the haunted speed-ion to its limit.

Here was only a hundred yards behind. Mercedes when the white car seemed to over its trouble and surge forward, again mounting to terrific speed like a rocket. Even that burst of acceleration couldn't kick the Compton back. Inch by inch, foot by foot, the battered green nose crept on, sliding on the German on till the warring tones of the two cars blended to an ear-splitting racket of sound. They touched two hundred miles an hour on the long incline toward the woods, but the green car was still gaining. Amid the trees, out on to the open, they hung together. Mike Grant caught white in the grand stands ahead, and the white car was rising, lifting the Compton greater effort.

Stones banged back from Seaman's wire rattling like hail about Grant's ears, but hardly noticed them. Seaman, like the spoman he was, pulled over, giving the other room to get by.

Well, that was the two cars ripped down the long finishing straight, and the cross rose to them, cheering them on.

Grant saw the black-and-white flag upraised ahead, but the only thought he had was keep the Compton going. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the white Mercedes begin to drop back—at first only a foot, then yard, and at the black-and-white flag slung down the Compton was half a car's length ahead; the first race the haunted speed-ion had ever finished!

The elder Venning, Lee, and the sprinter to where the Compton was slow. They saw Mike Grant pull up, begin to climb out, then a long orange tongue of flame leapt up from the front of the green car. The haunted speed-ion was on fire!

"Get extinguishers!" Lee yelled, but knew it was no use. Even as Grant stumpled clear, the petrol tank of the winning exploded with a dull thump, and the machine was enveloped in seething, flaming fire.

"I don't know how it happened!" Grant came up to them, bewildered on his face. "Why worry, Mike? You'll be O again," Doug Venning said. "You've got plenty of cars to drive now, after win!" He looked at the blazing car. "The first race she ever won," he said. "That she goes up all of a sudden like that. Fur isn't it?"

## Next Friday: TYPHOON!

Farmer Wonby lost no time. He tipped in, opened the cupboard and took out green bag. Then he murmured thank the obliging Albert, he lifted out again was lost in the darkness of the deeper shadows. A few moments later excursionists were getting their money back. "He can laugh that one off in the morning," he said. "I was nearly as good as he was mighty smart, catching us on the 1 did he? Well, maybe he won't think he'd dared snort when he wakes up."

Will Hay didn't. He saw the open cupboard, noticed the absence of the green bag, and roared like a warhorse.

The noise woke Albert and Joramiah. "The takings—the fares!" he roared nearly swallowing his Adam's apple. "They're gone! Who took them?" "Mike!" grunted Albert, and closed eyes again.

## Next Friday: VERY MERRY-IN-THE-GREEN!