

Christmas, 1883.

CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT TO The Bell News and Ringers' Record.



MR. MATTHEW ALFRED WOOD,

Member of the Ancient Society of College Youths; the St. James's Society; the Yorkshire Association, etc.

THE distinguished member of the Ringing Exercise who has been selected for portrayal in the second Christmas number of "THE BELL NEWS," cannot by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as an obscure character in the ringing world. Indeed, the assertion may safely be hazarded that nine-tenths of the ringing community who have visited the metropolis during the past thirty-five years, have formed his acquaintance in one or other of the London steeples. And when it is known that he has taken part in more peals than any other ringer of the present or of a past age, no amazement need be felt on hearing that he enjoys a popularity among country ringers second to no one among the London portion of the ringing Exercise.

It would be out of place here to relate any of the incidents or circumstances connected with Mr. Wood's birth, youth, or parentage. Concerning the latter, Mr. Snowdon has recently given us some very interesting information in his chapters on Grandsire Triples. It may just be mentioned that MATTHEW WOOD was born in the parish of St. Matthew, Bethnal Green, in the year 1826, so that he will now be in his 58th year. When quite young, in company with his brother Henry, he became a

constant attendant at the steeple of his parish church (since destroyed by fire), where, as now, the bells were rung for Divine Service; and if we mistake not, it was here, and at this period, that Mr. H. W. Haley was budding forth as a bob-caller. About the year 1837, the subject of this notice joined the society of Cumberlands, but he rang his first peal with the St. James's Society, at St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, on the 18th of February, 1846. This was a peal of Grandsire Triples, conducted by George Stockham. On April 2nd in the same year a peal of Kent Treble Bob Major (the first in the method on the bells) was rung on the heavy ring of eight at Christ Church, Spitalfields. This was a Cumberlands' peal, conducted by Mr. Haley, and in which Mr. Wood rang the treble; and another peal of Grandsire Triples, at St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green, called by Mr. Cooter, completed his performances for that year. But it is impossible in the space allotted even to allude to each of the peals in which this celebrated ringer has taken part. At the time we write, his record of performances has reached to the astonishing number of 276, and they may be summarised thus:—Grandsire: 79 of Triples, 5 of Major, 9 of Caters, 1 of Royal, 1 of Cinques; *Stedman*: 41 of Triples, 43 of Caters, 22 of Cinques; *Treble Bob*:

37 of Major, 19 of Royal, 9 of Maximus. To these may be added one of Superlative Surprise, and two of Double Norwich Court Bob Major. Out of these peals between fifty and sixty have been called by him.

To estimate at its proper value this record of performances, it would be necessary to analyse the list, and thus see the intricate characteristics some of them possess. The reader of these lines need only refer to the 1854 edition of Hubbard to find that as a ringer pure and simple, he possesses attainments considerably above the ordinary average. In the pages of that book will be found an announcement that on the 10th of February, 1854, he rang (upon handbells, retained in hand) the 7th and 8th bells in a peal of Stedman Cinques—5104 changes. Three weeks before this, in a peal of Triples in the same method, he rang the 5th and 6th; and in the following month he rang the tenors to a peal of Stedman Triples, which was rang without a bob or single being called or any signal whatever of the calls being given. Nor do these exhaust the list of handbell peals in which he has taken part.

But it is, however, in the capacity of a church bell-ringer that Matthew Wood possesses a claim to notice in this paper. And it is without the least hesitation that we say that as a performer in the steeple he is second to none. Whatever the weight of the bell may be; whatever the method, from Treble-twelve down to the much-maligned "stone," his best endeavours are actively employed in the production of what is known as "fine" striking. His abilities as a conductor—apart from his qualifications as a bob-caller—are known not only to London ringers, but to those country members of the Exercise who, on their periodical visits to the metropolis, invariably repair to his residence, which for many years has been regarded as a species of trysting-place. While possessing no small knowledge of the art and theory of composition, and having produced one or two peals, it must be conceded that his fame will rest principally upon his attainments as a change-ringer. In the peals upon twelve bells in which he has taken part, it may be mentioned that he rang St. Michael's (Cornhill) tenor in two peals of Treble-twelve (calling one of them), and also the same bell in a peal of Stedman Cinques. At St. Saviour's, Southwark, he rung the tenor to two peals of Stedman Cinques; Bow tenor to a peal of Stedman Caters; and also the tenor of St. Giles, Cripplegate, to a peal of Treble-twelve; and has rung every bell in the tower, from the treble to the tenor, in a peal upon twelve. It should also be added that another celebrated ringer—Mr. W. Cooter—and Mr. Wood rang their first peals together—the peal of Grandsire Triples before mentioned.

In the various contests that took place years ago for the supremacy in Stedman Cinques, the name of Matthew Alfred Wood will be found among the records of his company's peals which were the outcome of that honourable rivalry which culminated in the 8580 of that method at St. Michael's, Cornhill, and in which peal he rung the 9th; and in the peal of 15,840 of Treble Bob Major at St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green, rung on April 27th, 1868, we find his name in the College Youths' peal-book as having rung the 7th.

As steeplekeeper at St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green, a post which by the way he has held for forty years, he has made for himself a name which will not easily be forgotten. In this capacity he is always willing to render the greatest facilities for any company wishing to ring upon those bells.

Our engraving, executed by Messrs. Griffiths and Son, the eminent artists of Fleet Street, is taken from a photograph by Messrs. Pitt and Son, of Bethnal Green Road, London.

TURNING THE CLAPPER.

A CHRISTMAS TOUCH OF GRANDSIRE.

[BY AUDITOR TANTUM.]

I AM a firm believer in the possibility of obtaining a true and complete peal of Grandsire Triples by using common bobs only, and have spent countless hours in the attempt to find the peal, not to mention having spoilt as much paper over it as would have sufficed for printing an edition of the *Times*. This simile occurs to my mind the more readily because it is my nightly duty to assist in pulling the thousands of copies of that paper which finds their way next morning to a fair share of the breakfast-tables to be found within fifty miles of Printing-house Square.

I pursued my object the more hopefully in that there was a tradition in our family that an ancestor of my own had actually composed such a peal, although no trace of it had ever been found.

One afternoon just before Christmas, 1882, I was engaged, somewhat lazily I admit, in my favourite diversion, and trying to eliminate the inevitable singles by pricking on the margin of of an old newspaper, when my eye was caught by the following advertisement:—

"To the male lineal descendants of Malachi Scollough, sometime steeple-keeper at the church of St. Fabian-in-the-Fields, in the county of Middlesex. If any one of the above will apply to Messrs. Newman and Spink, at No. 100, Walker Street, he will hear of something to his advantage."

As the address given was less than a quarter-of-a-mile from where I was sitting, I put on my hat, and in less than ten minutes was closeted with the junior partner, Mr. Spink.

That gentleman, after learning my business, said, "I hope, Mr. Scollough, that our advertisement has not raised in your mind any very extravagant expectations: the fact is a client of ours was lately engaged in repairing an old bureau, and by accident discovered in it a secret drawer in which was concealed a packet, here it is, read what is written on it."

With a hand trembling from excitement I took the parcel and read:—

The person who finds this packet is earnestly requested to take steps to have it made over unopened to some male descendant of the depositor, Malachi Scollough, steeple-keeper at St. Fabian's.—Christmas, 1872.

I will not waste time in explaining how I satisfied Mr. Spink that I was entitled to the packet, perhaps the fact that my name (which is the same as that of my ancestor) is a very uncommon one, made matters more easy; suffice it to say that on paying the amount expended on the advertisement I was permitted to depart with the precious packet in my hand.

Arrived at home, I drew up my arm-chair in front of the fire, placed my feet on the fender, and proceeded to break open the seals which my ancestor had placed on the parcel just one hundred years before. Inside I found a number of sheets of paper covered with writing, in ink faded from age, wrapped round another packet very carefully sealed up; the latter was endorsed with these words:—

"I lay it as a solemn charge on my great-great-grandson, when he receives this, that he open it only after fulfilling the conditions enjoined by me."

To learn these conditions I turned to the mss. Among them was a diary kept in rather irregular fashion, in which were notes of various sorts about ringing matters; but the paper which being more carefully written than the rest seemed to be the most probable depository of the wishes of my great-great-grandfather, was superscribed as follows:—

"MEMOIRS OF A RINGER.

"I was born in the year 1704, in the village of Quedgeley, in Gloucestershire. My family was of the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life, which has been found to be the best state in the world for happiness. In the early part of the year 1718, when I was nigh fourteen years of age, my father came to live in London, and we settled down in an alley off Fleet Street, almost at the foot of the new steeple of the church of St. Bride. Of all the wonders of the town, none affected me in an equal degree with the music of the grand ring of ten bells in 'our steeple,' as we called it. At that time the bells in London were very few compared with the numbers to be found there a score of years later, so the ringing at St. Bride's was very frequent. Hundreds of folks used to meet in Fleet Street to admire the tone of the bells and the skill of the ringers.

"Being deeply impressed with all this, I was tempted to go up and see how this marvellous music was produced, and having persuaded another boy, a year or two older than myself, and a Londoner born, to come with me, I slipped up the winding stairs one night and peeped into the belfry. Here I was truly amazed at the rapid motion of the ropes, and could not refrain from admiration of the calm manner in which the ringers did their work. One ringer, in the early prime of manhood, of powerful yet graceful form, drew my particular attention. Besides ringing his own bell with perfect ease, he was instructing now one, now another of the rest; and indeed I afterwards found that he could tell beforehand when a man was about to lose his place, and put him right before a mistake had been made. I turned to my companion and whispered: 'Tom, who is the big man on the high box?' 'Why,' says Tom, 'that is Mr. Anable, he is.'

"Hold your peace!" thundered the person thus defined, 'or I will give you a taste of my strap as soon as we come round.'

"So we stood silent, and watched the work, and a deep desire entered my mind to become a ringer.

"It was not long ere the touch ended, and Mr. Anable, who seemed to have the power of reading my thoughts, beckoned me to him and said, 'So, boy, you want to be a ringer; shall I learn you?'

"Oh! yes, Sir, if you please," said I; and my new friend measuring my height with his keen eye, took down from a nail in the wall a loop of rope, and hitched it on to the rope which he had been pulling; he placed me on the high box, and gave the end of the rope into my hand, and said, 'Now, boy, I am going to pull her off, but you need not look up after the sally' (touching it) 'for it will come down by itself.' He pulled at the rope, and the bright sally seemed to make me a courtesy, and then rose swiftly; for one-half moment I conquered a strong inclination to follow it with my eyes, then finding myself lifted upon the tips of my toes I could no longer refrain myself, but stared up to see what it all meant, and at the same time resisted the tension with all my strength.

"On this, the heavy rope came down on my up-turned face, the sally knocked stars from my eyes, I dropped the rope and fled. When I reached the shelter of the arched doorway, I turned and saw that the rope was flying round the room like the lash of a gigantic cart-whip. This carried my horror to its extent, and I again fled, and that time rested not till I had found the shelter of my home.

"Still I was attracted by the sound of the bells, that on the very next ringing night I again crept up the stairs, in no little dread lest I should be sent home with a taste of the strap. But it seemed as if Mr. Anable had taken a fancy to me, for he called me to him kindly and said, 'Boy, if you want to learn to ring, you must keep your eyes and ears open, and your mouth shut. What did I tell you when I was going to pull the bell off that night?'

"Please sir, I forget," said I.

"That's it," said he, 'you kept your ears shut instead of your mouth; I told you that you need not look up.' Again I was put on the high box, and this time all went well, and I learned how to handle a bell.

"The fact that my lesson had been on the big bell at St. Bride's filled me with so much pride that I felt above ringing any smaller bell, so I used to go about on Sundays and beg for a pull when the sermon-bell was rung, and so by degrees I came to think myself a great ringer.

"One night (it must have been about September, for the plums were so cheap, that one half-pennyworth made me feel full), I found my friend pacing the ringing-room in a state of great excitement. I was quite unable to understand what it was all about, but I kept my ears open, as I had been taught, and heard him reviling the 'Norfolk Dumplings,' and asking how they dared to ring a low sort of Gog-Magog, and then call it Grandsire Triples.

"From time to time Mr. Anable used to advise me to learn half-pull ringing, but I, like a young fool as I was, did say that I thought a deal more of knolling the tenor for a sermon, than of ringing a little bell in peal. To which Anable dryly replied, 'Well youngster, we do not want a tenor-man at present, but when we do I will let you know.' Howbeit, when I was a score or more years of age, I got more sense, and we had two more bells at St. Bride's, making twelve in all, and some wonderful peals were rung upon the ten and twelve bells; so at last I was bitten, and went to Mr. Anable and said to him, 'I mean to be a half-pull ringer,' 'Ah!' said he, 'I suppose you will find that easy.' 'I should think so,' said I, 'why, I can ring the new tenor at St. Martin's with one hand.' So presently he asked the gentlemen to oblige him by ringing a few rounds to give me some notion of compass. Then eight of us stood up, and I was told to take the 3rd bell. Anable made me pull her off, and get the rope the right length, and said, 'You will not want me to call stand under a quarter of an hour?' I said, 'I will not let go if you go for three hours.' So we started, and I began to pull my bell as if she weighed a ton and a half. I knew better than to let her bump her stay, but the task of keeping her somewhere between the second and fourth was far harder than I had expected, and in a few minutes my hands were burning. Howbeit, I would not give in, and although I was in great pain for the last three or four minutes, still I stuck to it till Mr. Anable cried 'stand.'

"Then 'What is amiss, youngster?' said he. I showed him my my hands which were covered with broken blisters. 'Three hours!' cried he; 'why in three hours your hands would have been nothing but bones.' I was much humbled by this mishap, and drew nigh the subject in a more modest manner for the future. But being in the hands of a first-rate band, and under the schooling of the best ringer in the world, I, in time, became myself a fair half-pull ringer.

"A year or two after this, our company had a letter from Cambridge, asking us to go and ring a peal on their new bells. Accordingly ten of us fixed to go and ring a peal of Grandsire Caters at Cambridge. Most of the ten took their places in the stage-waggon, but I, and Will Gill, and Dick Quick, agreed to start in good time and walk over. We set out one fine morning, and soon were clear of the town and among the

pleasant fields of merry Islington; and so through Edmonton and Waltham, and Hoddesdon, to the town of Ware. Here we lay that night, and next morning made a shift to walk once up and down the town to view the place. Then, turning our faces again to the north, we made for Braughing, where we broke our fast, and dined at Buntingford. We lay one night at Royston, and being afoot betimes we arrived very easy and safe at Cambridge by noon. At even the stage came in with our comrades, and we supped merrily with the worthy ringers of Cambridge, at the sign of "The Lion" in Petty Cury, so they call it. We had the honour of the company of the Rev. Dr. Mason, a fellow of Trinity College, and of Mr. Robert Hesketh, a scholar of Christ's College. Next day we started for our peal in the morning, and got it all safe before noon; and after dinner Dr. Mason shewed us the buildings of Trinity College, and the Chapel of King's College, which is fine enough inside, but when seen from afar is like a table with legs uppermost. Nothing in Cambridge amazed me more than the butter, which is sold by the inch.

"In the next year they hung a new ring of twelve in the steeple of S. Michael's church, on Cornhill, and most of us said the founder had made them the best set of bells in all England, and indeed, I have never heard their match. At one time it looked as if there were more bells than ringers, for besides our own bells and the twelve at S. Martin's, we had S. Magnus, hard by London Bridge, and S. Giles's by the City Wall, and St. Dionis, Backchurch Street, for Caters and Royal; not to speak of S. Pulchre's on Snow Hill, where I could never ring the tenor without a shudder, for I knew every blow would chill the souls of the wretches in the condemned cell hard by. As for Triples and Major, we could ring them in more steeples than I could count on the fingers of both hands.

"As years rolled on, the bands of friendship which knit me to Rare Ben Anable grew closer and stronger; my hero, for so I esteemed him, spent much of his time in pricking peals of divers sorts, but most he sought after a peal of Grandsire Triples with no call but bobs in the third place. No other call would he allow, and nought so raised his ire as to hear men give the name of Grandsire Triples to Gog-Magog. When Anable was near three-score, John Holt brought him a peal pricked out at great length. My master and friend glanced at the top sheet, at first with little interest, but soon grew eager and closely scanned page after page, till nearly half had been mastered, then with a sigh, he turned to the last page and cried, 'Ah! I thought so. What do you call this, John?' 'Grandsire Triples,' said Holt. 'Aroint thee, rapsallion,' shouted Ben, and gathering the sheets together, he thrust them into Holt's hand, and drove him from the house.

"When I told him a few days later how Holt had called the peal at Westminster, sitting on a chair with the sheets of paper in his hand, and how the Union Scholars would not enter the peal in their book, He said, 'Good lads! good lads!' then turning to me, 'Malachi, tell John Holt that he come not hither again: Ben Anable will never, if he knows it, speak with a man who has called a peal of Gog-Magog from a paper.'

"After this, Anable gave more and more of his time to find the real peal, and his health suffered from the toil. He knew no rest by night or day, and in vain I tried to wean him from his task. About two years after Holt's first peal was rung, a broadsheet was printed with other peals by Holt, which they called Grandsire Triples. I believe the sight of that broadsheet and of the names of the subscribers thereto, broke the heart of the old man, for whereas he lived over two years more, yet he never again joined in our mirth.

"The bitter winter of the year 1755 seemed to make him shrivel up; he could not resist the cold, and soon after Christmastide he took to his bed. One day near the end of January, he called me to his bedside, and said, 'Malachi, I have lived an honest life, and to my knowledge have never wronged man, woman, or child. I do not fear to die, for I trust in my Saviour; my chief pain in leaving this world is that I am called before I have found my peal of Grandsire Triples. I know there is a true peal, would that I had been permitted to find it. Howbeit, it is late to talk of that now; so Malachi, I leave it to you, my dear scholar and friend, to follow up the clue. I give you all my papers, and I am happy in the strong belief that what has been hidden from me will be revealed to you. One charge I give, never to your dying day agree to give the name of Grandsire Triples to any peal till the real peal has been found.'

"So saying he gave me a large bundle of papers, and I in return gave him my promise true that I would obey him. Three days later Ben Anable died, and we buried him under the steeple of S. Bride's, to the muffled sound of the bells he loved so well. After this I pushed on my researches, and gave myself up more and more to hunting after the true peal.

"I call to mind that soon after the death of Anable our company was called to go to Oxford to ring a peal at the college of S. Mary Magdalene, in that city. I bethought me how, many years ago, I had trudged to Cambridge, and was fain to go with my comrades to far-famed Oxford. Some of the boys started to walk as I had walked

when I was a boy; but we elders paid down our money, and took our places in the stage waggon that started every Monday morning at daylight, from the 'White Horse' in Piccadilly. We broke our fast at Brentford, and dined at Colnebrooke, and supped and lay that night at Reading. For a shoulder of mutton and gherkins they charged us six shillings, and I asked my landlord what countryman he was. 'Full north,' says he. 'Aye,' quoth I, 'and you verily have put the Yorkshire most handsomely upon us.'

"Next day we crossed the Thames, and broke our fast at old Mother Cleanly's at Nettlebed, and tasted her bottled ale and plum-cake.

"We dined at Dorchester, and the day and our journey ended together at Oxford. The worthy ringers of Oxford gave us a hearty welcome, and next day we passed with much delight in walking through the colleges of that noble city. In the evening we ascended the tower at Magdalene College (called Maudlin), and in honour of the place did ring 5000 changes of Oxford Treble Bob Royal. Methinks Oxford is a finer place than Cambridge, but I saw there no butter sold by the inch.

"Among the number of my friends, was young Will Chapman, nephew of Mr. Lester, of Whitechapel, bell-founder; this young man had been bound apprentice to his uncle, and in time became so expert in the casting of bells, that in the year 1762 he was sent down to the city of Canterbury to recast the big bell of the Cathedral church.

"Will made me his companion to go down with him to see the bell run, and as his business was pressing, we set off one afternoon on the Dover coach. As we hardly crept up Shooter's Hill in the twilight, we were all scared on hearing the thundering of a horse's hoofs coming up the hill behind us. One called out, 'Tis Jim Bissick the highwayman.' On this, the travellers seemed to me to lose their wits, and took to putting their purses and watches down their boots, while our guard cocked his blunderbuss and horse-pistols. I, having little to lose, did turn my eyes towards the horseman who was holding out a letter, and in truth seemed more afraid than any one of all of us. Our guard walked back pointing his blunderbuss at the horseman till the latter had given up the letter and turned his horse town-ward. It was said that he had come after us with a weighty despatch for a worthy banker who had a place inside the coach.

"Next day we came to Canterbury, and so ended my first and last journey on a coach; for I care not to fall a prey to Jim Bissick or to any of his crew.

"Will had before this built his furnace and his core and fixed the cope and the crown: nought remained but to fuse the metal and run the bell. While this work was a-doing, we saw in the crowd a young man very intent on all, and Will said to him, 'And pray, young man, what would you be?' He said, 'Sir, I would be a founder of bells.' 'What is your name, young man?' said Will, 'My name,' replied the stranger, 'is William Mears.' 'Well then, name-sake,' said Will, 'if you will come to London with me, I will make a bell-founder of you.' And forsooth so he did.

"Meantime the metal was ready, and at last they let it run. When the mould was full, Will heaved a sigh of relief and said, 'I trust all's well, but so big a bell will be long a-cooling.'

"When the bell was dug out, she was found a good casting, 70 inches across the mouth, and 70 cwt. in the scales, and a good tone.

"Now I did purpose to walk back to town for the following cause: I had met in London a worthy ringer from Leeds in Kent, by name James Barham. This James Barham had said to me when we parted, 'Friend, if ever you be near Leeds, I shall take it as kind of you if you will give me your company.' So on my way back, I lay one night in Charing, and about noon I knocked at Barham's door. He made much of me, and when we had dined, he called his comrades, and with him and them I did ring till supper. Next day James Barham commended me to the care of a friend of his, who was to drive a waggon to London, and so my way home was made easy. James Barham did vaunt himself much about the long peals his company had rung. But I called to mind how my old master would sooner bring the bells home than let a rope change hands: and I could not think so highly of these long peals as did honest James Barham.

"About this time they made me steeple-keeper at the church of St. Fabian-in-the-Fields, and for many years I kept order there: but as old age came on and would not be denied, I had to leave the heavy end and go to the treble, and a new race arose that had not known Ben Anable. When I try to tell them what Grandsire Triples really are, they smile and turn away, and I have heard them whispering about 'Gog-Magog' and 'hobby-horse.' Meanwhile my labours have brought me nearer and nearer to the goal which my master pointed out to me, but I cannot quite reach it.

"I am an old man now, and begin to fear that death will lay his hand on me before I succeed in what has been for some years past the chief aim of my life. All my old friends who stood out with me have gone before, and I am left alone. The new race of ringers look at me as a troublesome old ass, and some of them, I believe, think me fit for Bedlam. I am barely able now to turn the heavy clapper of

our tenor, and to-night I shall perform that duty for the last time: for I have given up my office of steeple-keeper, and to-morrow they will elect my successor.

* * * * *

"Yes! it is true!! my peal without a single!!!

"And now let me jot down the doings of this eventful night.

"After our own company met, we set to work to raise the bells, and then I groped my way up to turn the tenor's clapper for the last time. I crept past the fifth and seventh bells and leaned over the wheel of the tenor, and with difficulty raised up the heavy clapper till it was perpendicular: then I threw it over, and as the bell gave her noble note, as if by inspiration I saw how to be rid of the last single. This was the most joyful moment of my life, and no doubt my feelings were reflected in my face when I came down into the ringing-room; for young Sims, a saucy youngster who had just joined the band, looked at me and said, 'Hallo! old common-bob, have you found your peal, eh?' I might have been able to treat his impertinence with the contempt which it merited; but one or two of the men laughed out and the others grinned, and I left the tower in a rage. I am determined that no man living at the present time shall ring a peal of Grandsire Triples, and for that purpose I will hide the peal in my oaken bureau; it will not be found till the bureau falls to pieces and that will not be for the next hundred years.

* * * * *

"An old man may have his fancies, and I have mine. I desire that the person into whose hands my peal may fall, will make it over, if it may so be, to one of my male descendants, and that before the fortunate inheritor breaks the seals he shall go (as I did this night), and in the darkness turn the clapper of St. Fabian's tenor, then, and not till then, let him examine the peal.

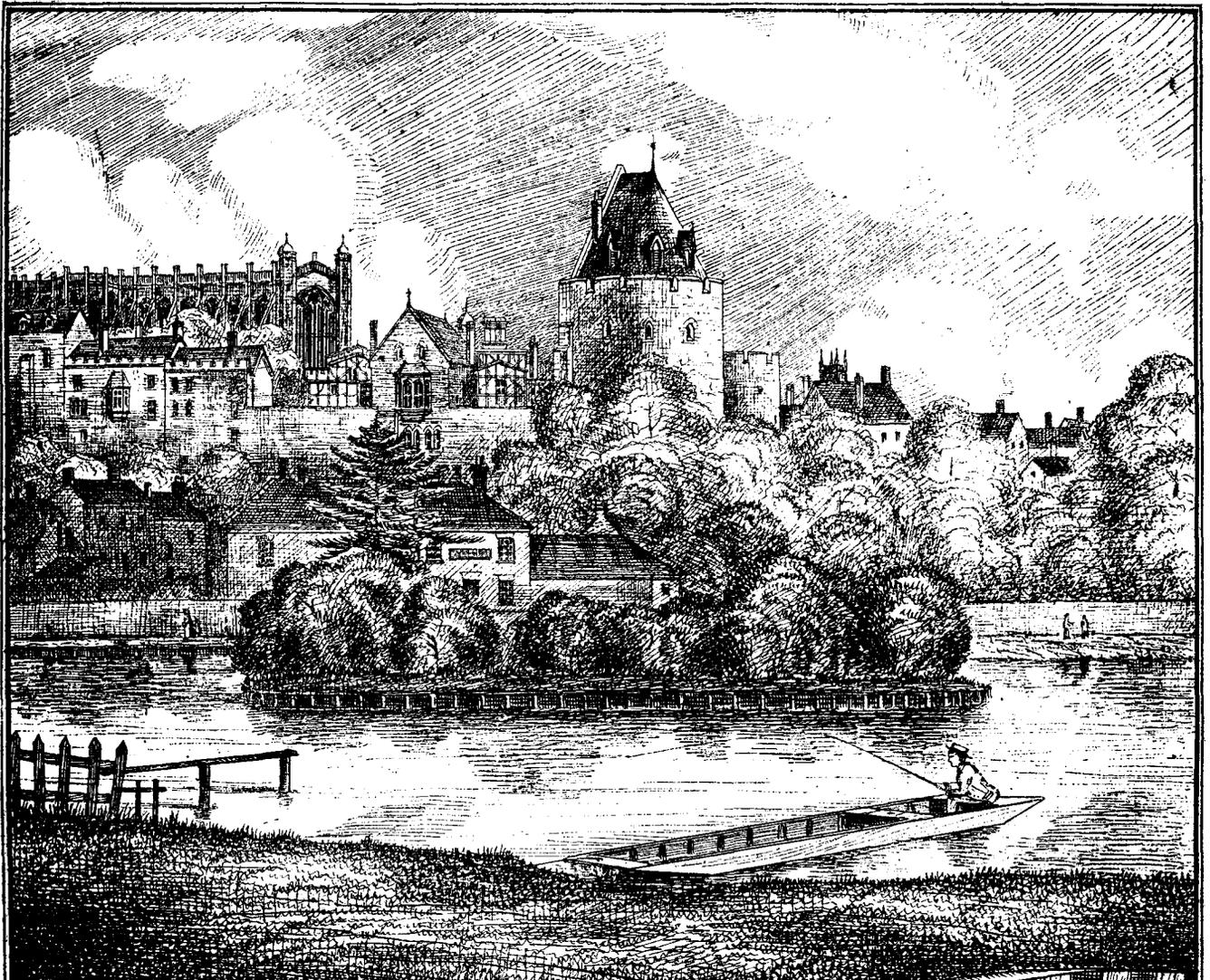
"Signed by MALACHI SCOLLOUGH."

Here the manuscript ended, and for a moment I was tempted to disregard the wishes of the old man, and at once to open the sealed packet, but I suddenly remembered that a perfect stranger had granted the request made, and that it would be shameful indeed if I, who was so nearly related to him, should prove disobedient. As luck would have it, there was no serious difficulty in my carrying out almost immediately the wishes of my ancestor. Although I was not myself a member of the St. Fabian's company, still I was well known to several men in the society, and felt sure of that hearty welcome which change-ringers always give to their visitors. Indeed, there would be ringing at St. Fabian's that very night, and so great was my anxiety to open the seals and get at the peal, that without bit or sup I set out and found myself outside the church a full hour before the time of meeting. As the minutes crept slowly away, my excitement increased, and as each quarter rang out from the old tower, my heart beat with greater violence and rapidity. During the last quarter I made sure that the clock had stopped, that the meeting had been put off, and so on.

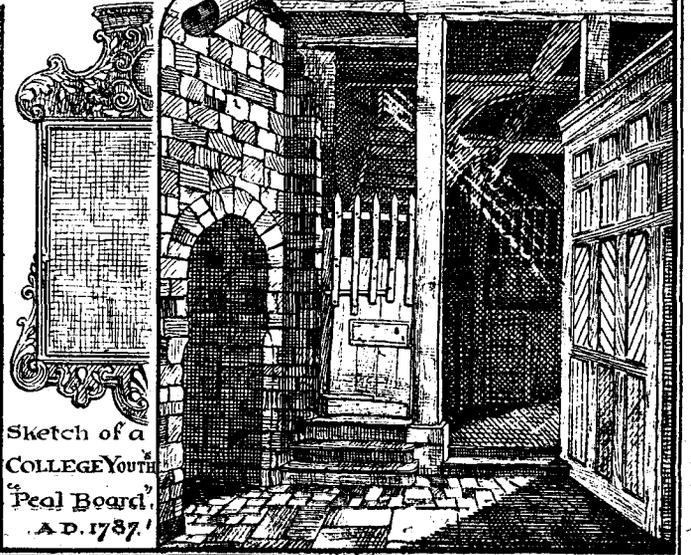
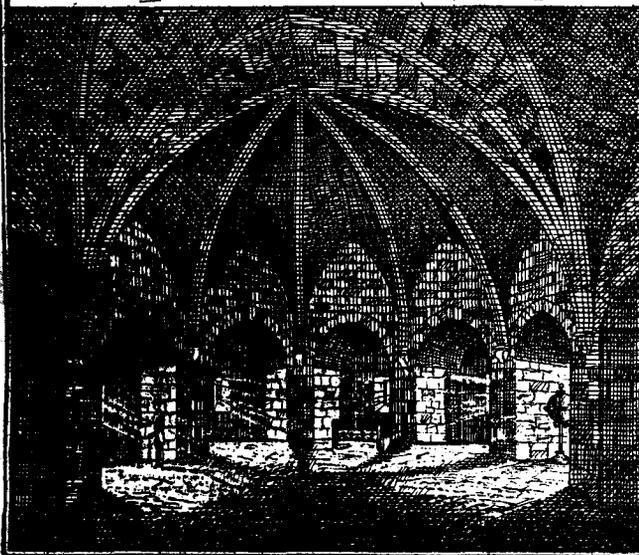
At last the respected tenant of my ancestor's old post came slowly along, with a straw in the corner of his mouth, as cool as a cucumber. I ran to meet him, and said, "Oh! Mr. Goffe, will there be ringing here to-night?" Mr. Goffe replied, "Well, I have come to open the door, but it is doubtful whether there will be enough to ring." At this answer my heart sunk low, but I ascended the tower with the steeple-keeper, and as soon as he had lighted the gas in the ringing-room I caught hold of the tenor-rope.

"You won't get her up by yourself," said Goffe; "and I don't mean to help you till I see some more men in the room."

By this time I was almost in a fever; two or three came in, then another; after a while we were seven, and I thought we should not get beyond that number; at last I heard a step on the stairs and an eighth man appeared. Then we got to work. Just as had happened one hundred years before, the bells were raised one by one; then I volunteered to go up and turn the tenor's clapper. I too, groped my way up, squeezed past the 5th and 7th, and then (like the old man) I leaned over the wheel of the tenor to grasp the clapper. I thought of my poor old great-great-grandfather standing as I was standing, and my brain was hot as if my head were close to a fire—I pulled the clapper upright, and sent it over, and it fell with the most awful crash! harsh and unmusical, and quite unlike any sound ever given out by a bell—I jumped upright! and found that instead of turning the clapper of St. Fabian's tenor, I had turned a very heavy pair of tongs that lay in the fender in my sitting-room, and—alas!—that the peal of Grandsire Triples, true and complete without a single or fifths-place bob, was but A DREAM!



1. VIEW OF THE CURFEW TOWER, 2 THE INTERIOR | 3 ENTRANCE TO THE
FROM THE RIVER THAMES. | OF THE DUNGEON | RINGING ROOM.



Sketch of a
COLLEGE YOUTH
'Peal Board'
A.D. 1787.

WINDSOR CASTLE.

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THORNWOOD.

THORNWOOD is a prosperous village, aspiring to the dignity of a small town, in one of the West Midland Counties, about the proverbial one hundred miles from London, and within twenty of one or two manufacturing towns and a Cathedral City, each of which boasts the possession of those inestimable treasures, in the eyes of all true lovers of the string, one or more peals of eight, ten or twelve bells.

* Now as the church of St. Barbara, Thornwood, was famous in the land for its splendid peal of ten, maintained by the ringers of the bell-ringingest (!?) county in England to be the finest peal of ten existing, not even excepting St. Dunstan's, Stepney, which most of them had heard when visiting the metropolis, it will not surprise the reader, who, it may be assumed, knows somewhat of the manners and customs of that peculiar individual, the change-ringer, to learn that frequent visits were interchanged between the various companies of Brassingham, Lilkester (the Cathedral City) and Thornwood, for the purpose of "having a pull" on the bells of their respective towers, and that the usual amount of friendly rivalry should exist among them as to which company or band should ring the longest and most intricate peals.

The leading spirit among the Thornwood ringers was Mr. William Somers, or as he was spoken of by his friends and cronies, old Will Somers, who filled the ancient and honourable offices of Parish-clerk and Sexton. He was a composer of considerable merit, and had called nearly every peal that had been rung by the band for many years past.

Old Will, whose forefathers had resided in the parish for many generations, was pretty well to do in the world, owning some few acres of garden and orchard ground which returned him a modest income in the form of rent, while he lived in his own pretty cottage, with a good-sized garden, separated only from the orchard by a low hedge of sweet-briar. The tenant of the orchard and garden was a young man named Robert Warden, who did a thriving business with Brassingham, Thursbury, and one or two other grimy towns in the district, the said grimy towns being at all times ready to swallow up as much garden-stuff and fruit, and feast their smoke-bedimmed eyes upon as many flowers as ever their country neighbours could conveniently supply them with.

Now as old Will was Robert's landlord, and the father of Mabel Somers, the prettiest girl in Thornwood, and being an only child, likely to be by no means the poorest one, what more likely than that Robert, who lived just at the end of the lane with his widowed mother, and Mabel, should be very good friends, as indeed they were, for they had quarrelled and made it up again from six to ten times a day regularly for a considerable number of years. When Robert was a sturdy urchin of some eight or nine years, and Mabel just old enough to toddle to school, which was situated at the other end of the village, Robert had quite naturally taken his place as her guide and protector to and from the seat of learning, and this arrangement obtained until Miss had grown quite too big and independent to be beholden to any boy whatever, except at odd times when any stray cattle or big dogs happened to be roaming at large, then the damsel would be seen keeping very close indeed to her big boy friend, or enemy, whichever he happened for the moment to be. But this was many years ago, for Mabel was now nearly out of her teens, and had been, since her mother's death some two or three years since, sole mistress of the pretty cottage and garden, and Empress-Queen over the Parish-clerk and Sexton, and his subordinate official, Dick Delver, the grave-digger and steeple-keeper—a queer old fellow who had been grave-digger and general factotum to the parish for about one hundred and fifty years, if all Dick's reminiscences of parish matters that had occurred within his own recollection were to be accepted as the unvarnished truth.

Dick had rung the tenor behind so many years, not only at practice and for service, but to a considerable number of five thousands, together with a fair sprinkling of longer lengths, that he had got to look upon the bell in a manner as his own; he had also made several attempts in former years to ring inside, but as each succeeding attempt had been a more dismal failure than its predecessor, Dick had given up all hopes of ever attaining to the proud position of an inside man, and settled down into the less brilliant, but still useful position of big-drummer.

But he had got the notion so firmly jammed into his head that he, and he alone, had a sort of presumptive right to the tenor, that he would get very grumpy when, as sometimes happened on practice nights, a few visitors would be present from the neighbouring steeples, and a touch of Treble or Plain Bob indulged in; at such times he would walk off to the "Ten Bells," and have an extra mug of beer to drown his disgust, and would criticise the striking in a disparaging manner to the assembled company; and as to the ear of the uninitiated any even-bell method at all times seems to be more or less of a jumble, his cronies would mete him out such a full measure of sympathy, combined with a large measure of praise, as to how the bells sounded when he, Dick, was ringing the tenor, that he would become mollified, and forgive his enemy, the man that rung the tenor "in," so far as to hob-nob with him, and discuss the "go" of his favorite. But there was one offence that Dick could never be brought to look upon with a lenient eye, and that was, for another tenor-man to ring his bell behind in a peal. His themes for frustrating this, to him, outrage, were many and various. His favourite dodge was to screw up some of the bolts, and slacken others, in the old oak bell-frame in such a manner, that about half an hour's ringing would knock up the strongest of men; he would then volunteer to "try her himself" sooner than the visitors should go back without their peal, which kind offer being accepted, he would go up to "give her a bit of grease," when a few rapid touches with the nut wrench would make things so different with the tenor that a child could ring her, and Master Dick would triumphantly score another peal.

This trick had failed, however, the last time the Lilkester company had come over to St. Barbara's for a peal, for their tenor-man, equally as artful an old dodger as Dick, had had his suspicions aroused upon a former occasion, and laid his plans accordingly; after ringing for about ten minutes he had, without warning, set his bell, declaring his inability to ring the peal owing to a sudden weakness that had seized upon him; the usual discussion as to whether they should try again or not ended by accepting Dick's offer to "try what he could do." That worthy having gone up to give her a bit of grease, was rather taken aback when he returned to the ringing-room, to find the Lilkester man again in possession of the tenor-box, having, as he assured Dick with a very deliberate and most impressive wink that spoke volumes, as suddenly recovered from his fit of weakness, and the peal, a six thousand too, was rung in good style, the tenor being especially well-struck.

Another time, at one of the summer holidays, a band had come over from Laventry for a peal of Stedman Caters, and being a very hot day they had felt rather fatigued with their journey. While discussing a substantial luncheon of cold round of beef at the "Ten Bells," Dick, as was of course but natural, had taken the Laventry tenor man under his own particular wing, and during the temporary absence from the room of that gentleman, Mr. Delver, with unexampled treachery, poured into his, the Laventry man's modest mug of ale, about half-a-pint of the strongest whiskey; the consequence of this mingling of potent liquids was that the visitor fell into a remarkably sound slumber from which it was impossible to arouse him, so putting it down to the strange effects of too much fresh air—he was a silk weaver who spent the greater part of his existence in an apartment with a very low ceiling, and of the area of about twelve feet by eight—his comrades were glad to accept of Dick's disinterested offer to ring the tenor for them, and the poor silk weaver was not only cheated out of his peal, but he didn't even hear a blow of it, and returned to Laventry with a splitting head-ache into the bargain.

It will have been noticed that Mr. Will Somers had called nearly all the peals that had been rung at Thornwood for several years; the only exceptions had been two—one of Grandsire Triples, and one of Major in the same method, rung on the back eight, called and claimed to have been composed by one of the band, a Mr. Stephen Beckton, or as he preferred to call himself, Stephen Beckton, Esq., for being clerk to the village lawyer, he was under a sort of foggy impression that as his employer was entitled to sign himself "gentleman" by law, he also had a right or title to tack esq. on to the name of Stephen Beckton at every possible opportunity. This youth then was the coming man; not only had he composed and called the two peals before mentioned, but was pretty far advanced

into ten-bell composition, in which he had received all the assistance it was in the power of Mr. Will Somers to give him. Owing to the young man's proficiency in Will's much-loved pastime, he was quite a favourite of the older man, who was never tired of sounding his praises at all times and seasons; it could not be said, however, that the man of parchment was much liked by the other members of the band, for he was one of those youths who have a most exalted opinion of themselves, and was in the habit of assuming a very patronising manner when he chanced to encounter any of the other of the ringers in his private capacity, and moreover, upon the strength of his two peals was beginning to put in rather authoritative airs in the belfry. And although he was at all times exceedingly civil to Old Will to his face, as if for a purpose, yet in his absence he had been heard to speak of him, as indeed he did of most people behind their backs, in a very disparaging manner.

Now Stephen Beckton, Esq., like most limbs of the law, had a very keen eye to the main chance, and was also as quick as most youths to find out a pretty face, and as he had often heard Old Will declare that "none but a ringer should marry his girl," he had arrived at the conclusion that he had but to hint to Mabel Somers that he was ready to marry her, and that damsel would be only too ready to jump at the honour, as he conceived it to be, of becoming Mrs. Stephen Beckton. During the many evenings spent under their roof, while struggling with the mysteries of composition with her father, he had flattered himself, with characteristic conceit, that he had made a deep impression on the young girl, putting on his best airs with his best clothes, both airs and clothes being of a rather gaudy fashion, by-the-bye; and so he had, but by no means the kind of impression that he anticipated, it being quite the reverse in fact, for Mabel had conceived a thorough contempt for him, and had made up her mind to give Stephen Beckton, Esq. a very severe snubbing should the opportunity arise.

Robert Warden and Mabel had come to a complete understanding some time ago, across that sweet-briar hedge, which has been remarked in the early part of this veracious history was a low edge; in fact no higher than a tall, active young fellow could easily leap over, and the only reason that kept Robert from going at once to old Will and demanding Mabel of him in marriage, was his inability to ring, for Mabel knowing so well her father's determination that she should wed with none but a ringer, had dissuaded Robert from speaking to her father upon the subject, until he was master of, in this case, that necessary art. So taking Dick Delver into their confidence, who would have hung himself with his own bell-rope to please Mabel, Robert set himself at once to work to acquire the art of change-ringing, and as it was Mabel's ardent wish that her lover should attain to efficiency without putting himself to the humiliation of receiving any assistance from his rival, this became a rather difficult matter.

But ways and means can be found out of most difficulties, and this one proved no more obdurate than many another when fairly faced. Dick being steeple-keeper held the key of the belfry, and as when not engaged in his parochial duties he followed his trade of a gardener and worked for Robert, nothing was easier than to slip over the churchyard wall which abutted on the orchard on one side, and into the belfry unperceived; then with the clapper tied of one of the bells, a few afternoon lessons from Dick soon made Robert expert in the mere handling of a bell. So far so good, but the learning to ring inside was a very much larger affair. Robert's business as a market gardener led him to attend three markets a week, at as many different towns, Brassingham, Lilkester, and Thursbury, and it happened that at each of these places there was a meeting for ringing practice at one or the other of the several churches in each town, on the evening immediately preceding the market morning. Taking advantage of this, for him, fortunate circumstance, Robert, whose uncle, Mr. Judson, was the oldest ringer in Brassingham, soon made the acquaintance of the ringers at the two other towns, and being a hearty, genial sort of young fellow, and as every body could see, very anxious to learn, with such plentiful opportunities of practice, and by diligently studying some of the best works on the subject, he, in the course of a few months was able to ring an inside bell in Grandsire Triples, and was making rapid advances into the ringing of Caters, of which indeed he had rung in two or three long touches with considerable credit, at the time of our story.

Meantime, Stephen Beckton, Esq. had convinced himself that he was deeper than ever in the good graces of old Will Somers, by the production of his two peals of Grandsire, and in a very lawyer-like, but exceedingly un-lover-like manner had taken advantage of this feeling to propose to the father for his daughter's hand, without first ascertaining the sentiments of the young lady upon the subject; but old Will had of late began to have some misgiving that all was not fair and above-board with Mr. Beckton, the two peals that he claimed to be his own composition seemed to Will Somers to be like old friends, but he could not for the life of him call to mind when or where he had met with them before. However, Beckton had been talking loudly of late of a wonderful peal he had then in hand, full of the most admirable qualities, and old Will had been led in a weak moment to promise him that if he succeeded in composing and calling this peal upon the ensuing Christmas-Eve, upon which anniversary the Thornwood ringers had now for some years rung a peal, he should have full permission to press his suit with Mabel.

But it is time to show how, or from whence, Stephen Beckton had fetched these peals, for stolen they undoubtedly were. It had chanced some time before that a client of his employers, who had resided at Brassingham, had died intestate, and it had fallen to Beckton's lot as attorney's clerk to take an inventory of the household effects of the deceased; while employed in this matter, he had found in the library, a thin manuscript book, marked on its leather covers in old English characters, "Peal Book," which he found upon examination to contain a number of original peals by one Edward Nokes, a well-known ringer and composer who had been dead some thirty years. This he had kept possession of (omitting at the same time to enter it in the inventory) without the least compunction, and this was the rich mine he was working in secret, publishing to the ringing world with unblushing effrontery the peals as his own, under the firm conviction that all trace of their real author had been lost by the lapse of time.

In this, however, he had reckoned without his host, for Mr. Judson, of Brassingham, the uncle of Robert Warden, a hale and hearty veteran ringer in his seventieth year, had an intimate knowledge of the production of every composer for the last half century, had been a personal friend of Edward Nokes, the author of the stolen book, and indeed knew the book as well almost as its author; he had shortly after that person's death applied to his widow for the book for the purpose of depositing it among the archives of the St. Justin's Society, but it had mysteriously disappeared, and was no more seen until picked up for a few pence at a second-hand book stall by the gentleman in whose library it had been found by the lawyer's clerk.

Now when Mr. Judson saw the peal of Triples that Beckton claimed, he at once recognised it, but said nothing about it, thinking it likely to be one of the instances in which two composers have both hit upon the same peal; but when the peal of Major appeared over the same name he was forced to the conclusion that a fraud was being perpetrated, and mentioned the subject to his nephew Robert Warden. They two considered the matter, and taking Dick Delver into their confidence, came to the determination to expose the cheat in the presence of the Thornwood ringers.

Mr. Judson was Mabel's godfather, and he had for some time held the opinion that Robert would make a decidedly better husband for his pretty god-daughter than the conceited and arrogant lawyer's clerk, and now that he had discovered the latter individual in a bare faced-imposture, he was anxious that his ancient crony, Will Somers, should have his eyes opened to that youth's real merits as speedily as possible.

* * * * *

The Christmas-Eve peal at Thornwood had been an established institution for many years; two or three young fellows, after leaving their various businesses in the old village, and who had been members of the church and ringing company, had wandered away from the rest and were now doing well in London. These were now members of either the Cumberlands or College Youths, and in regular communication with their old ringing friends at home. It was for them that the peal was got up, as they liked to "take a peal back with them" from their Christmas visit to the old folks at home. They had of course heard of Stephen Beckton's sudden blossoming forth as a composer, and had felt not a little proud among the London ringers, of their

townsman's fame; they had in fact rather enlarged on one or two occasions upon that gentleman's attainments. Having received due notice to prepare themselves for the new peal of Grandsire Royal that was to be attempted on Christmas-Eve, they had met with some difficulty in getting a little practice in so uncommon a method, but by perseverance they had managed two or three touches at various of the London ten-bell towers, and felt quite confident of getting triumphantly through their share of the peal.

Going down in the train together they had wondered among themselves who would be at the tenor, and how Dick Delver would like it, for that worthy's notion as to his *rights* to ring the tenor was a standing joke among his friends.

* * * * *

It is just getting dusk, and the young girls who have been busy putting the finishing touches to the holly and evergreen decorations in the old church are muffling themselves in warm wraps and shawls, as the ringers pass the porch, making for the belfry door; Christmas greetings and good wishes are exchanged, and some very warm hand-shakings ensue between the three young gentlemen from London and a similar number of the prettiest of the girls, who happen curiously enough to be three of the rosiest too, although it is possible that their special rosiness may be accounted for by the hand-shaking having brought on palpitation of the heart, to which dire malady it is well-known that young ladies are peculiarly liable on small provocation. Mabel is one of the bevy, and while speaking to her father studiously avoids looking towards where Stephen Beckton, Esq. is vainly trying to bestow a languishing glance upon her.

All the Thornwood ringers are assembled in the ringing-room, some twelve or fourteen, eight of whom are in the peal and are preparing for the start; Mr. Judson has written from Brassingham some days ago expressing a wish to be in it, and that a friend of his would, if they pleased, ring the tenor. The veteran was so well liked and respected, that his wish had been readily acceded to, even Dick Delver (who it will be remembered was in the secret) being quite alert at making things comfortable for the expected visitors. Some of the party were rallying Dick upon this notable change in his manners when steps were heard ascending the old winding stairs, and Mr. Judson, followed by Robert Warden, stepped into the ringing-room. After the usual seasonable greetings had been passed and enquiries as to the welfare of absent friends made and answered, Robert was introduced by his uncle as the new tenor-man, much to the surprise of the party, for although he was well-known to them all, not one except Dick Delver had the least notion that he was a ringer, for he had never been known to enter the belfry of St. Barbara's, although a regular attendant of the church, to which he regularly escorted his widowed mother.

"Well, we are all here now," said Stephen Beckton rather petulantly; for he was by no means pleased to discover his rival in his new character of a ringer, "and had better make a start."

The rest of the band began to take off their coats, but Mr. Judson, advancing to the centre of the room, said, "I understand, Mr. Beckton, that you claim the peal we are to try for to-night as being of your own composition?" "Yes," replied the lawyer's clerk boldly, although there was something in Mr. Judson's manner of asking the question that made him feel rather uncomfortable; "I have shown it to Mr. Somers, who is satisfied as to its truth, and considers it a very good peal;" turning towards Old Will as though appealing to him to endorse the statement.

Will Somers was about to offer some reply, but Mr. Judson again spoke. Addressing Beckton, "If you have it on paper I should like to glance over it before we start," said he; and the men all closed up round the speaker under the light, with a feeling, as they afterwards said, that "there was something in the wind;" while Stephen Beckton walked slowly towards his coat, and very reluctantly drew forth from an inner pocket of that garment a pocket-book, from which he extracted a paper, which he handed to Mr. Judson with a mingled air of bravado and confusion. Very deliberately arranging his spectacles upon his nose, the veteran ringer proceeded to scan the sheet amid a profound silence; a glance satisfied him that his suspicions were correct, and not deigning to further notice the detected cheat, he addressed himself to the expectant company generally. He said, "Gentlemen, this peal of Grandsire Royal, that this young man claims for his own, as well as the other two peals that

have been published by him within the last year, were composed upwards of thirty years ago by the late Edward Nokes, as I can prove to you by documentary evidence," and with this he drew from his pocket a thick note-book of large size, fastened with a brass clasp. "This book," continued he, "I have had in my possession upwards of forty years, and it contains not only the particulars of peals in which I have rung, many of them of my own composition, but a large number of peals composed by friends some of whom are now dead, from whose books I, with their permission, copied them into this, and have in each case the signature of the composer to his own peals; this you can see for yourselves, and compare notes," handing as he spoke the book and sheet of paper to the man who stood next him, "and it will of course be necessary before we go any further to have an explanation of the matter;" and he looked in an inquiring manner towards Stephen Beckton as he finished speaking.

But that gentleman finding that his knavery was brought to light, resolved to carry off matters with a high hand; assuming his most insolent airs he very deliberately donned his coat, and remarking coolly that he "should not stop there to be insulted by an old dotard," walked out of the room and was down the stairs before any of the company had time to recover from their astonishment at his effrontery.

Then of course the torrent broke loose, and all were talking at once; many were the wise shakes of the head, and opinions expressed that "they had their suspicions for a long time past," by all and sundry of the assemblage; for what is easier than prophesying after the event, or showing to the multitude your superior wisdom in having so long ago foreseen an event that is now an accomplished fact; and it says much for the general loving-kindness of human nature that no one even dreams of breathing these suspicions to his neighbour until after the catastrophe.

After some little time had been expended in this ever popular recreation, one of the young gentlemen from London suggested they should start for the same peal if Mr. Judson was prepared to call it, and that gentleman having come prepared for such a contingency, another man was pressed, nothing loth, into the service to make up for Beckton's defection, and the bells being raised and a few rounds rung, the supernumeraries, with Dick Delver bringing up the rear, left the room, and before the last man had reached the bottom of the stairs, the bells were off and into changes.

The peal was rung in splendid style, the striking throughout being simply perfect! Directly the bells were set, old Will Somers walked across to the tenor box to shake hands heartily with Robert, and compliment him upon the manner in which he had rung his bell; thereupon it was seen that Robert, with a very red face, seemed to be begging some favour from his old friend, and the conference ended by old Will giving him a very hearty slap on the back, with a most emphatic "certainly my boy," in his cheeriest voice.

Before the New Year was one month old, a wedding took place at St. Barbara's, and the bells were rung the same day not only at Thornwood, but at Brassingham, Lilkester, Thursbury, and Laventry, although sad to relate, after the touch upon the conclusion of the ceremony at St. Barbara's, another tenor-man had to take Dick Delver's place, poor Dick being so overcome with *emotion* (warm, with sugar, the day being very cold) that he could not ring no more that day.

And about a week before the next Christmas, a new treble was heard in Robert Warden's house, which in Dick Delver's opinion was quite as fine as his beloved tenor, and he and Grandfather Will Somers, with Grandmother Widow Warden as well as Robert and Mabel, were all strongly of opinion that it was the sweetest treble that any of them had ever heard.

Stephen Beckton, Esq. did not stop long in Thornwood after the exposure of his knavery; the village was not large enough to permit him to avoid those who were aware of his disgrace, neither was there scope sufficient for the exercise of his peculiar talent for chicanery. He made his way to London and obtained service with a firm of attorneys who have a large *clientele* among the oppressed victims of the metropolitan police.

He is sometimes seen at night, between the hours of eight and ten, loitering in the vicinity of a steeple where ringing is going on, but carefully avoids contact with the ringers, most of whom have heard of his misdoings.