

Author of "The Three Railway Engines" and other books.

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THE STORY is based on the scenery and population of the Author's own model railway, which was described in an illustrated article in the "Railway Modeller" for December, 1959.

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CHAPTER 1—The Tunnel Folk

ROGER BOUNCED up and down with excitement. "Look Daddy! Look!" he crowed. "I'm driving my train on your railway."

This was a special treat. Roger had his own train-set and oval of rails, but never before had Daddy allowed him to bring his engine and coaches to the garden shed, where he had his own model line. Daddy showed Roger how to work the controls. Then he sat in front while Roger stood on a box, having the time of his life!

Roger's train roared round and round, going slow or fast, stopping or starting just as he wanted. He played gloriously for a while, then stopped the train in the tunnel. "It's gone, Daddy," he announced. "Now let's play 'proper trains.'" ("Proper trains" was their name for Daddy's sequence of trains running to a timetable, as all proper trains do).

"Right," said Daddy. "We'll get your train out, then you can go in front and tell me what to do." Roger enjoyed pretending to be the Fat Controller while Daddy worked the trains.

"Daddy! Can you come please?"

"Hullo! Mummy's calling. I must go. If you stay, Roger, can I trust you?"

"Yes, Daddy." Roger knew what *that* meant. It meant he had promised not to touch. "These things are precious," Daddy had said. "Your little fingers don't understand yet, and they might break something. You wouldn't want to do that."

Roger didn't want to do it, but he had. One day he picked up a coach. "Only to look at, Mummy," he explained tearfully,

"'n it dropped 'n broke." Daddy was cross. He hadn't allowed Roger in the Railway Shed for three whole days.

So now, Roger didn't touch. He didn't even move his train. He left it in the tunnel. He sat on the chair waiting for Daddy and looked at the railway.

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He loved the hills and trees and houses, the river and gardens and stations. He liked the animals and the people who lived there. They looked real. In fact, to Roger, they were real people with real names, doing real things.

Mr. Horker was climbing the hill over the tunnel to see to his sheep. Mrs. Horker had taken her basket. She was going shopping. Ellen Horker was feeding the pigs, while Simon, her brother, strolled about with his hands in his pockets. "He's lazy," thought Roger. "Why doesn't he plant the garden as his Daddy asked him to?"

He looked at the platelayers. "'Course Bill and Bert and Jim and Ted aren't lazy. They're just resting. They've been working hard mending the line."

Roger half-closed his eyes. "They look realler like this," he thought. The room was warm and he felt sleepy.

"It's scandalous!" said a small squeaky voice. "I buy a ticket and get in the train. Do they take me to the Junction? No! they bang me, they bump me, they whirl me round and round and leave me in the tunnel. Faugh!"

"I'm going straight to the station," said another voice, "I shall demand my money back and. . ."

"So shall I."

"And I."

"And I."

Roger rubbed his eyes and stared. A crowd of little people surged out of the tunnel, all talking at once in shrill angry voices.

To be continued



FOR YOUNGER READERS

The LITTLE PEOPLE

by
the Rev. W. AWDRY

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CHAPTER 2—Tug-of-War with a Train

THE PASSENGERS STUMBLED along the sleepers, chattering angrily as they went. Their voices were so tiny and shrill that Roger had to listen hard to hear what they said.

Peter Fryer came to meet them. He was Station-Master, Porter, Ticket-Collector and everything else at the Halt. "You mustn't walk on the Line," he said. "That's trespassing. Trespassers will be prosecuted."

"If you prosecute us," said the passengers, "we'll prosecute you. You ought to be ashamed! Get our train out of the tunnel at once." They crowded on to the tiny station and pushed Peter off. "Go on," they said, "Hurry up." Peter knew it was no use arguing with angry passengers. He went away along the station path. "This would happen just when the telephone is out of order," he thought.

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The platelayers, Bill, Bert, Jim and Ted, went into the tunnel. Presently Bill, the foreman, came out. "The Driver and Fireman have vanished, so has the Guard," he said. "We can't make the engine go, but if any of you gentlemen will kindly help we might get the coaches out."

He went to the hut beyond the bridge to fetch a rope and some tools. Then he went into the tunnel again with some of the passengers.

Roger was anxious to see what would happen. He came closer. He heard a scuffling noise. The passengers came out of the tunnel one behind the other carrying a rope. The leader was

an important looking little fat man. He was giving orders. "I wonder if that's the Fat Controller," thought Roger.

"I'm going to say 'One, Two, Three, HEAVE,'" said the little fat man importantly.

"Goodness! It's like a tug-of-war," thought Roger. "I expect they've fastened the rope to a coach."

"Are you ready?" asked the little fat man. "One, Two, Three, HEAVE!"

They all pulled, but nothing happened. They tried again and again. At last the coach moved a little. Roger got so excited that he called out "One, Two, Three, HEAVE!"

This was a mistake.

Roger's voice sounded so loud to the little people that they dropped the rope and ran to the tunnel. The little fat man was the first to get there.

Bill came to the tunnel mouth to speak to him. "Why did you stop pulling, Sir?" he asked. With me and my mates pushing, and you pulling, we had her just started nicely."

"There was an explosion," said the little fat man with dignity. "It—er—exploded quite close to us. We came to take shelter."

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Bill said nothing. He'd heard something, but it had been muffled in the tunnel, and he didn't think it was an explosion. He went out and looked round. "All clear again now, Sir," he said.

They pulled again. This time Roger kept quiet. The fat man counted as usual. They pulled suddenly and hard. The rope broke and they all fell backwards in a tangled heap. The little fat man was underneath. He was making more noise than any of them.

Roger laughed. He couldn't help it. They looked so funny with their arms and legs waving wildly in the air. But not for long. At the sound of Roger's voice they picked themselves up and ran helter skelter to the tunnel again. This time Bill ran too. Roger saw him peeping from time to time out of the tunnel. "I can't understand it," he kept saying.

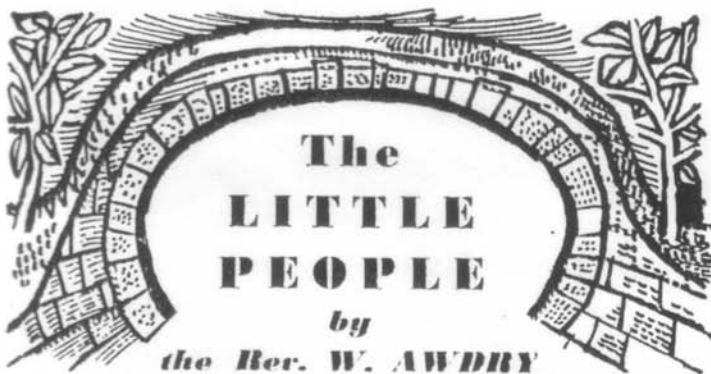
Roger waited and waited, but they didn't come out. At last he gave it up and looked to see what was happening to Peter Fryer.

To be continued.



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CHAPTER 4—Policemen and Prickles

ROGER watched Peter Fryer ride away. "He's not going very fast," he thought.

Peter was really doing very well. He wasn't used to the Postman's heavy bicycle. He saw a policeman coming, but took no notice.

Constable Pover pushed his bicycle up the hill. "This is a dull place," he thought. "I've been here two years and haven't arrested one criminal. I'll never be a sergeant at this rate. They're all too well behaved here. That's what's wrong with them." He watched Peter Fryer moodily: then a thought struck him. "That's a Red Bicycle," he said to himself. "That's Post Office, that is. He's no postman. He must be a criminal. Hoy! Stop! D'you hear me?"

Peter didn't hear him. If he had heard, he couldn't have stopped. The bicycle had no brakes. When Roger's Daddy had made it, he hadn't put any on. He thought they didn't matter. But they did matter to Peter Fryer. He whizzed down the hill like a rocket. Constable Pover mounted, and rode in pursuit.

Roger, watching the chase, jumped up and down with excitement.

At the bottom, the road turned sharp left over the Level-Crossing. Peter didn't turn sharp left. He couldn't! His front wheel hit the curb. He flew over the handlebars, and landed in the hedge. Prickles stuck into him from all directions. He found this uncomfortable, and had begun to wriggle off when a hand gripped his arm. "Got you!" said a voice in triumph.

"Let go," said Peter.

But Constable Pover didn't let go. Peter wriggled and squirmed. He fell on the other side of the hedge. The policeman's arm went with him. Constable Pover was most uncomfortable. He lay across the hedge with his head on one side and his legs on the other. He felt like a pincushion, but he wouldn't let go. Here was his first criminal in two years. He was going to hold on like a bull-dog.

The Railway and the Signalbox were on Peter's side of the hedge. The Signaller's name was John Pullem. He came to see what was happening.

"Help me detain this man," panted the Constable. "He's in possession of stolen property, to wit, one Post Office Red Bicycle."

"For goodness' sake, John," exclaimed Peter, "tell him who I am."

So John Pullem told the policeman that Peter was Station-master at Hackenbeck, and Peter explained that he had borrowed the bicycle to get help for the passengers.

The policeman unscrambled himself from the hedge, and mournfully pulled prickles from his uniform. "Do you mean to say," he said in a disappointed voice, "that you're on An Errand of Mercy, and not a criminal at all?"

"Of course," smiled Peter.

"So," said the policeman indignantly, "I've had the trouble of chasing you and turning myself into a blooming pincushion all for nothing!"

"We're afraid so," said Peter and John gravely.

"Cor!" said Constable Povey. "What a place! No criminals anywhere. What is a policeman to do?"

"I should try Hackenbeck Halt," said Peter. "The passengers will be raising a riot by this time."

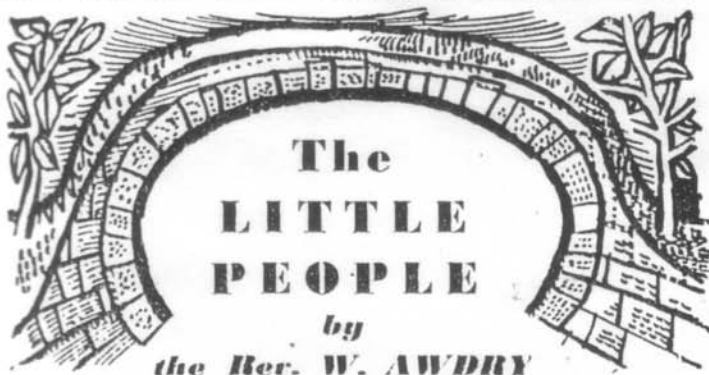
Constable Povey brightened. "Good idea!" he said, "I might make an arrest there. He rode away whistling."

"Whew!" said Peter. He and John went to telephone a man about an engine.

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CHAPTER 5—John Pullem's Wireless

PETER FRYER and John Pullem stood by the Signal box. They were talking. Roger listened.

"Will you telephone for an engine, please, John?"

"Telephone? I can't telephone."

"Of course you can. You've a telephone in there."

"That thing!" said John. "It won't work. It's got no wires."

"No wires?" said Peter. "Neither has mine. I thought perhaps it was a 'Wireless' telephone. No wonder I couldn't make it work. What do we do now?"

"Wireless!" said John, thoughtfully. "I've got an idea." He disappeared into his cabin.

"There!" said Roger. "I asked Daddy to put wires on the poles, but he said it was too fiddly, and it wouldn't matter. Now poor Peter can't telephone."

"Hoy Peter!" John stood on the balcony of his cabin. He had two flags. "Here's my Wireless," he said.

"What in the world...?"

"Semaphore," said John. "That's what this is. Come on up."

Some trees were in the way and they couldn't see the Engine Shed. "Help me up, Peter, please." John climbed on Peter's shoulders. He crept up the slates till he was astride the ridge. He waved his flags. "Someone's seen me!" he called. "Send engine," he signalled. "Train stuck in tunnel." "It's worked, Peter," he said excitedly. "He's gone to the shed," and he began to creep down the slates.

"Be careful," whispered Roger.

John stopped. He'd thought a thought. "Peter," he asked, "how many L's and N's are there in tunnel?"

"Two N's and one L. Why?"

"Bother! I put in two L's and one N. I think there was a C which crept in somewhere too. It would be awkward if they sent us a ton of coal instead of an engine." He scratched his head. That was fatal. He lost his balance and slid down the roof. "Help!" he called.

Roger caught him as he slid over the edge. "You silly little man," he said, and put him gently on the ground.

John sat down. He wiped his face with one of his flags.

"Was that thunder?" asked Peter. "Did I dream that something pink caught you?"

"I don't know," said John. "All I remember is thinking that I was going to bump hard and not bumping at all, like having a bad dream. I'm all of a dither."

"Things are queer to-day," said Peter. "That train's queer with its black engine and red coaches. It whizzed round and round. No proper train behaves like that."

"All proper trains," said John, "pay attention to Signals. This one didn't. It was most upsetting for a signalman."

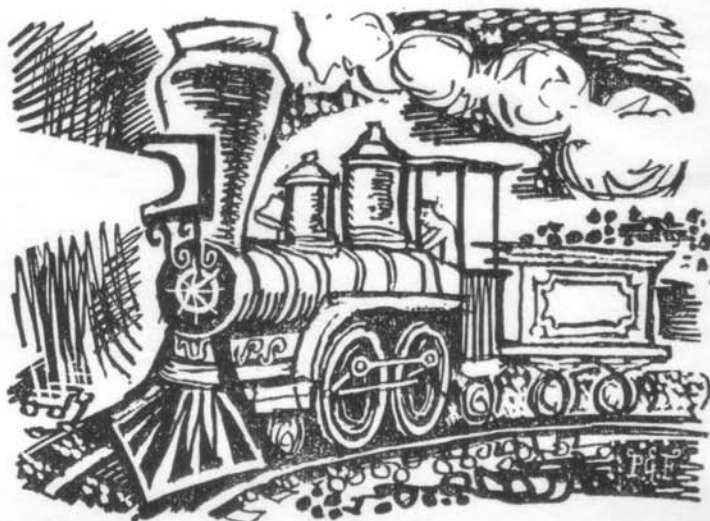
"O dear!" thought Roger. "That was my train upsetting them. I must try and drive it proper next time. Now Peter wants an engine and Daddy's aren't there. Mine's the only one. Daddy wouldn't mind me working it to help the Little People." Roger was just going to the controls when . . .

"Here she comes," said Peter.

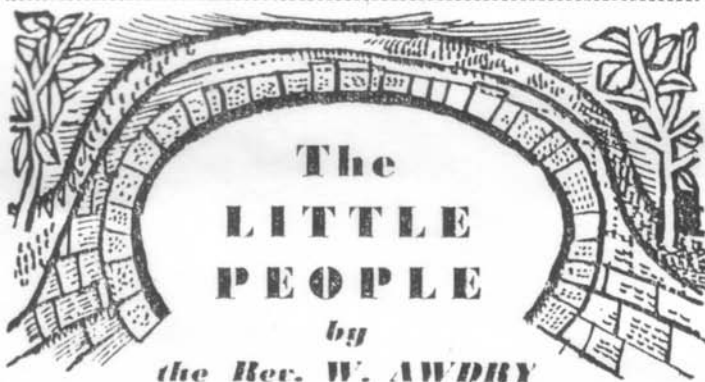
"Luvaduck!" said John.

Rumbling ponderously towards them was the queerest engine that Roger had ever seen.

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ROGER had never seen anything like that engine before. It had a queer funnel, shaped like an upside-down bell. Its boiler was black with two shiny, crinkly brass domes and a bell which clanged as the engine moved along. A cowcatcher was in front instead of buffers, and the cab, which looked like a garden shed, was bright red. Wheels and cylinders were lined out in gold.

The engine stopped at the signal box. John Pullem put his head out of the window. "What've you got there, Joe Bloggs?" he asked.

The Driver grinned. "This," he said, "is 'General.' How do you like him?"

"Looks like an old American," said John. "I've seen 'em at the Pictures. Is he safe?"

"Dunno," answered Joe. "I've never seen him before; but there was nought else in the Shed, and your message was urgent. So I says to Sid, 'Let's take that old tea kettle out,' and he says 'I'm with you Joe' so here we are."

Roger remembered then. Daddy had shown him a box of parts. "They're for making an old American engine," Daddy had said. "So this is it," said Roger to himself.

Peter climbed into the cab. "I hope it doesn't blow up," he thought nervously as they chugged away.

They clattered over the level-crossing, rumbled through the cutting, whisked past the Platelayer's hut, hooshed under the bridge, and stopped at the Halt.

Constable Pover spoke to Peter. "You and your riots!" he grumbled. "False pretences, that's what you've made me come here on. I can't arrest one of 'em" he continued gloomily. "I can't move

'em on neither. There's nowhere to move 'em on to. It's disheartening to a policeman, that's what it is."

The passengers surged forward when they saw Peter, but he and the engine moved on hastily! They gently buffeted the coaches in the tunnel. While Sidney Shuvvel, the Fireman, fastened the couplings, Peter looked at the engine standing forlorn and deserted.

"No Driver, Fireman, or Guard; wher've they got to?" he wondered. Everything in the van seemed in order, so he whistled, giving Joe the signal to start.

At the Halt, the passengers surged round him again. "We want our money back," they demanded.

"All in good time," answered Peter wearily.

Constable Pover shepherded them into the coaches while Peter talked to Joe about the missing train crew. "I can't understand it," he told them. "We've got to come back for the engine, so I'll look round then."

"We'll help too, won't we Joe?" said Sidney, and so it was agreed.

Peter told the policeman about it. The news cheered him up. "Goodoh! A mystery," he exclaimed happily. "I'll look into that"—and he almost ran towards the tunnel.

Peter stepped into the van to get his flag and whistle. "What the Dickens is happening?" he exclaimed.

The van was in complete disorder.

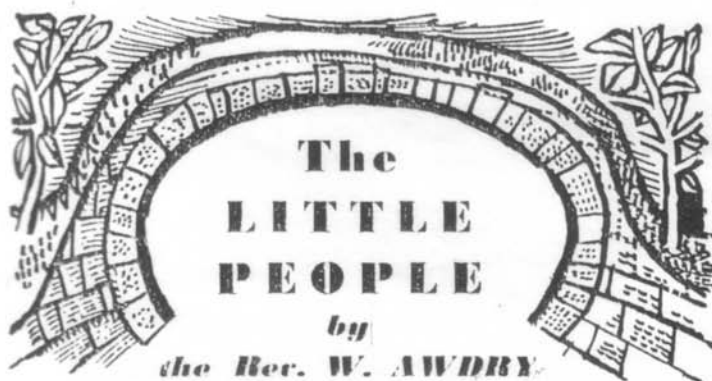
Burrowing in a pile of luggage, like a dog in a rabbit-hole, was the Little Fat Passenger.

"I can't find my box," he wailed. "It's stolen."

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CHAPTER 7—Mystery in the Tunnel

"I CAN'T find my box," wailed the little fat passenger. "It's been stolen."

Peter Fryer called the policeman, and the little man told them all about it. "My name's Settem," he said. "I'm a jeweller. I was taking some valuables to a customer at Emford. They were in a small steel-lined box. I saw it locked up in the van myself. It must be here somewhere."

Peter and the Policeman searched the whole train. The other passengers were very cross. "We're not thieves," they said. "We want to go home."

"It's no good," said Peter at last. "The box isn't here." He waved his green flag and the train pulled away, leaving Constable Pover and the little jeweller on the platform.

The little man was almost frantic. "Where are my jewels? Where are my jewels?" he cried.

"You come along with me, sir," said the policeman comfortingly. "They're not in the train, so they must be in the tunnel. We'd best go along and see."

"I like a good mystery," Pover went on, as they walked along the sleepers. "This here seems a real puzzler, and no mistake."

"I don't like it," said Settem grumpily.

"Just so, sir," said the constable. "They do say as how there's another mystery attached to this here tunnel. When they were building the railway, they cut through the workings of an old mine. They kept seeing ghosteses."

"G-G-G-Ghosts!"

"Yes sir, ghosteses. The ghosteses of dead and gone miners so they say. The workmen were quite upset about it."

"I-I don't believe in ghosts," quavered Mr. Settem.

"No more don't I, sir. If you asked me I'd say they was two-legged ghosteses, and up to no good."

They had reached the tunnel. Mr. Settem lagged behind. He seemed nervous. The constable went on talking cheerfully about ghosts.

Roger heard his voice rumbling hollowly in the darkness. He came as close as he could, and peered in.

The two little men had reached the pool of light thrown down by the smoke shaft. Roger's black tank engine stood there, cold and forlorn.

Constable Pover pointed to it. "She looks kind of ghosty herself, sir. It fair gives me the creeps."

"You're r-r-right it d-d-does."

Crash—Bang—Clang. Fire-irons fell in the cab.

Both men jumped.

The policeman recovered first. "Quick, sir," he whispered. "Someone's there. You go that way, I'll go this. We'll nab him. See?"

On each side of the engine, they both crept cautiously forward.

Constable Pover reached the front. He saw a dim figure and pounced. "Got you!" he crowed.

"Leggo, it's me!" squeaked Settem.

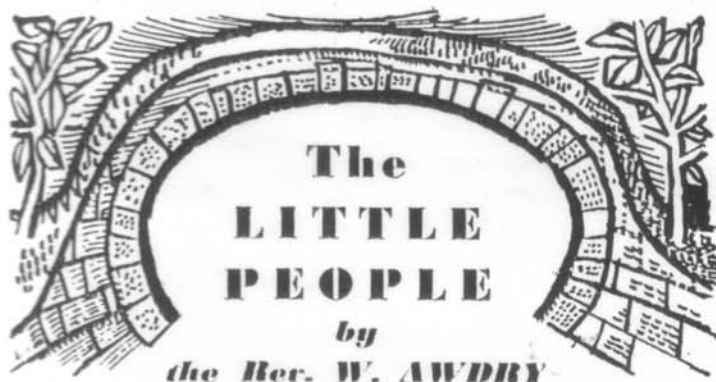
"How very convenient!" said another voice out of the darkness.

Before the two little men could untangle themselves, bags were pulled over their heads, and their arms held firmly to their sides.

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CHAPTER 8—Roger takes a hand

ROGER watched Constable Pover and Mr. Settem disappear into the tunnel. Their voices echoed in the darkness. Clang. Bang. Crash.

Roger held his breath. He heard shouts, bumps, and thumps. "They're fighting," he thought. "I must tell the platelayers.

Bother! I can't; my voice frightens them. What can I do to make it smaller?"

Then he remembered the School Sports. Daddy had announced the races. He'd used a thing to make his voice louder. He had shown it to Roger afterwards. If you spoke into the small end, it made your voice bigger. But if you used the large end, your voice seemed to come out smaller. "P'raps," said Roger to himself, "if I had Daddy's Megaphone, I could make my voice smaller for the little people."

He looked for it, but could only find the funnel Daddy used for filling oil stoves. "P'raps this'll do," he said hopefully. "I'll try and see."

He hurried back to the railway. The "General" and the black tank engine stood at the Halt, while Peter Fryer, Joe Bloggs, and Sidney Shuvvel talked to Bill, Bert, Jim, and Ted, the platelayers.

"Now they've vanished like the others," complained Peter. "We shouted and shouted, but they never answered. You'd think a policeman would have more sense."

"We found this badge though," said Sidney.

Bill took it. "Roodshire Constabulary," he read slowly. "That's Pover's. It's scratched like there's been a struggle."

"There was," said Roger into the large end of his funnel. "I heard it."

The little men jumped. "Was that thunder?" asked Joe. "Tweren't no thunder," said Bert. "Sounded like words to me. Very loud they was."

"I'm going in," said Bill firmly. "Come on." They crowded into the little Waiting Room, slamming the door.

"I'm sorry I spoke too loudly," whispered Roger. "I didn't mean to frighten you."

There was no answer except muffled thumps as they pushed a bench against the door.

"Please come out," pleaded Roger. "It's important. About the policeman and Mr. Settem."

Peter Fryer opened the door cautiously, and poked his head out. "Have you got them?" he asked.

"No, silly! They're prisoners in the tunnel. I'm too big to save them, so you must."

Peter consulted the others. Roger waited impatiently. At last the seven little men came out. They stood nervously in a group with the open door behind them. Roger whispered into his funnel, telling them what he knew.

"So there was shouts, and bumps, and thumps," said Bill. "I told you as how there'd been fighting."

"No wonder Pover lost his badge. Where did you find it Sid?"

"In the dark, Joe, just beyond the shaft."

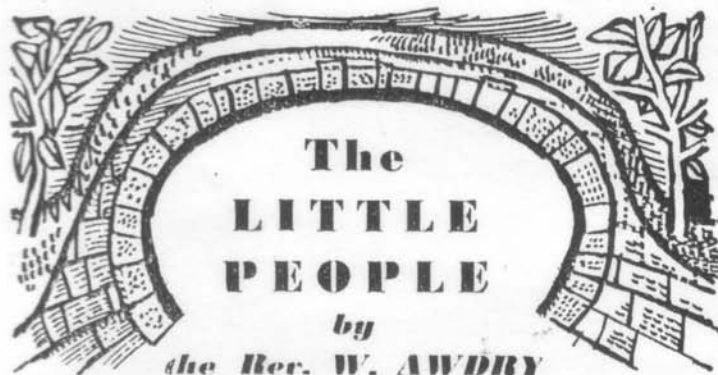
"Could anyone get down that shaft?" asked Peter.

"Not likely," said Bill. "They'd have to climb that high old wall first."

Roger looked at the shaft on the hill over the tunnel. The wall certainly was high. Thick bushes grew round it at the bottom. Roger rubbed his eyes and looked again. A little man had poked his head from the bushes. He was looking round furtively.

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CHAPTER 9—Prisoners in the Tunnel

"LOOK!" whispered Roger through his funnel. "Someone's in the bushes."

"Where?" asked Bill.

"Up there, by the shaft."

Bill and Peter clambered up and stood on the waiting room roof. "Yes," they said. "We can see him."

"Sh!" said Roger severely. "He's come out. Look, he's got a parcel."

The little furtive man peered right and left. Then he ran behind the shaft, and slithered under the fence into the next field.

"Bother those trees," said Roger. "I can't see him now." The sheep bleated and ran about restlessly, but soon they began to graze quietly again. "He's gone," announced Roger. "No! There he is! Where's his parcel?" The little man crawled into the bush, and was gone.

Peter and the platelayers went and spoke to Mr. Horker the sheep-farmer. He was cross. "So someone's disturbing my sheep," he fumed. "I'll soon settle him." And he strode up the hill with his dog. He carried a thick stick.

The others followed. They searched all over both fields. They lifted stones and poked hollows trying to find where the parcel might be. Mr. Horker's dog kept sniffing round a patch of boggy ground so they tried that too, but found no trace. They cut sticks and beat the bushes all round the shaft but no one was there.

"That's a rum 'un," said Bill. "I saw him go in there with me own eyes."

At last they gave up. "We'd best have another look in the tunnel," said Peter. He and Bill waited in Horker's garden for the others to catch up. They then made their plans.

But some while before this, while Roger was looking for the "megathing" to make his voice "small," P.C. Pover and Mr. Settem were being driven by their captors along a rocky passage leading upwards from the tunnel. They were roped together. Their heads were in bags and their hands fastened behind their backs. They felt very angry indeed. At last a key grated in a lock.

"This way, gentlemen," said the smooth, suave voice. "I apologise for the rough accommodation, but you will overlook it I trust."

"Confound you," spluttered Pover. He lunged, head down, towards the voice. He stumbled, and sprawled on the floor dragging Settem with him. The lock clicked behind them and a mocking laugh came in from the passage.

"Well I'll be ding dong danged!" said someone in the room. "His Lordship has bagged a policeman this time and another fellow too. He's making quite a collection. Come on chaps, let's get their blinkers off."

"Much obliged to you." Pover and Settem sat up and looked around. They were in a small room lit by a candle. Shelves and cupboards hung on the rocky walls. "Some kind of a store for the old mine," thought Pover. Three men were in the room beside themselves. All had railway uniform. Two wore overalls. The third was the lively little man who had done most of the talking. Mr. Settem recognised him at once. "You're the Guard," he said fiercely. "You had my box in your van. Where is it?"

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CHAPTER 10 - LOCKED IN!

"WHERE'S my box?" demanded Mr. Settem. He clenched his fists and advanced on the Guard.

"Here! Here!" interposed Pover majestically. "None of that, sir, if you please. Now, let's sort out this here mystery. Did you lock the box up in your van?"

"I did," said the Guard. "What's more, as he was so persistent, I let him have the key of the locker, though I didn't ought to have. Now, sir, I want it back, please."

Mr. Settem grudgingly handed the key over.

"Now," went on the Constable, "the lock wasn't forced, so someone must have used a skellington key."

"That's right," said the Guard, "and if I haven't got the box, and you, sir, haven't got it, then I reckon his Lordship must've got it. You say there was jewels in it. Cor! I reckon that was what his Lordship must've stopped our train for."

"Ah!" said Pover. "Maybe you're right there. What happened when the train was stopped?"

"Well, we stopped so sudden like that I bumped my head something chronic. I got down to tell Victor off proper about that, and to see what was wrong. Then, blow me if a chap didn't slip up behind me in the dark, and put a whacking great sack over my head. It gave me quite a turn. Specially after what Sam told me about the ghostesses in this tunnel."

"Never mind the ghostesses," said Pover impatiently. "What happened next?"

"I couldn't see nothing then," said the Guard. "You'd best ask Sam and Victor."

The Driver and Fireman had said little up to now.

"Aye," said Sam the Fireman. "They bagged us too. We saw a red light ahead in the tunnel. Waving frantic it was. Victor, he says we'd best stop. So we jammed on the brakes, and I nipped down to see what the matter was. Well, before I got to the front of the engine, someone crept up behind and whipped a bag over my head just like they did to Gilbert here. They did the same to you, didn't they, Victor?"

"Aye," said Victor the Driver. "They did and all."

"They bagged us too," said Pover grimly. "Drat them! Now I think that his Lordship, as you call him, has taken Mr. Settem's jewels. What we've got to do is to get out of here and catch him."

"That's easier said than done, mate," said Victor.

"Why?" said Pover. "Look at that door. The lock's on the inside. We can easily unscrew it."

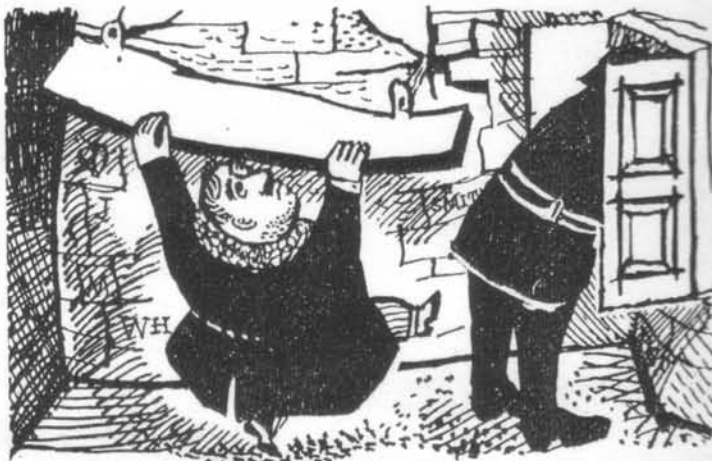
"We thought so too," said Victor gloomily. "Long before you came we tried that, and look at it now. The bally screws are rusted. We split the heads trying to turn them, and broke our knife-blades into the bargain."

"Right," said Pover. "Then we'll wrench it off. Let's look in those cupboards on the walls for something to use as a tool." So they set to work.

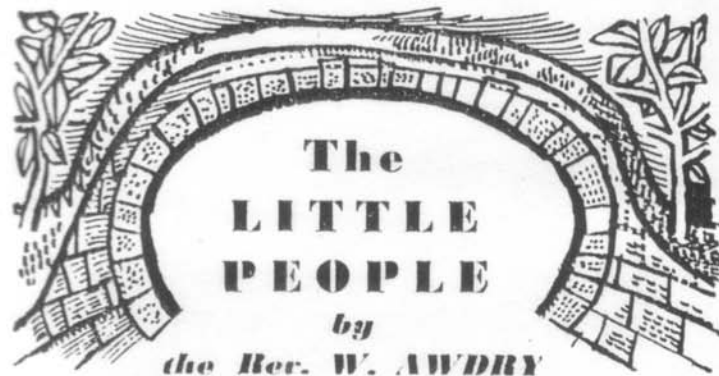
Mr. Settem was short and stout. He could not reach a high shelf, so he stood on a stool. He lost his balance and grabbed the shelf. For a moment he hung by his hands, then the shelf gave way and crashed to the floor on top of him. Something else fell with a tinkle.

Pover pounced on it with glee. It was a stout wall-nail shaped like a wedge. "This'll do for a start," he said. "Pull down the other fittings, and collect some more."

To be continued



FOR YOUNGER READERS



Author of "The Three Railway Engines" and other books.

* * *

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CHAPTER II — SLY SCHEMERS

THEY wrenched down the remaining shelves and cupboards. More nails were found. Most were badly rusted, but a few could be used. Constable Pover forced them like wedges between the lock and the door. It was slow work and they had to be quiet, so they borrowed Mr. Settem's shoes as hammers. No-one else had rubber heels.

At last the lock fell away with a rending crack, and the door swung open. Mr. Settem looked at his shoes. "You've ruined them, Pover," he complained. The rubber heels were cut to pieces; the leather was torn.

"I'm sorry Sir, but we couldn't help it. Look here, Sir, you want your jewels back, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, Sir, please don't make difficulties. We've lost too much time already." The Constable crept into the passage followed by the others. Settem hobbled behind, grumbling. His shoes were out of shape, and causing pain.

The passage climbed, twisting and turning. At last they reached a level gallery, wide and long. Passages opened out on either side. They tried these one after another, only to find they led nowhere.

"I reckon we're lost," said Victor gloomily. "I'll never get back to my engine at this rate."

"Cheer up, Cock!" said Gilbert. "Just hold that candle steady a moment. There's something yonder, see?"

They saw the base of a ladder in an opening at the far end of the gallery. It climbed a roughly circular shaft. Light shone from an open trapdoor at the top.

A door slammed. "Sh sh sh sh!" ordered Pover.

They heard footsteps, creaking noises as rickety chairs were sat in, then voices talking.

"His Lordship's gone at last. Good riddance. I say."

"Sime 'ere. I can't stand 'is lah-di-dah talk. Wot's 'is orders?"

"Wait an hour. Then we tikes the prisoners dahn and leaves 'em blindfold in the tunnel. Then we clears off, and meets 'im at the Old Oak at midnight."

"Well, Tinker, you can meet 'im; but I shan't."

"Wot, 'n miss your share of the lolly?"

"I shan't miss my share, but 'e will. 'Cos why? 'Cos there's none in that box, that's why. Cor lumme! I'd like ter see 'is fice when he opens it!" Bud laughed. "Bits 'o gravel and such," he went on, "that's all ther is, mate, all nicely drolled up in cotton wool, same as the sparklers was."

"D'yer mean as 'ow you swiped 'em, mate? 'Ow d'yer do it?"

Bud chuckled. "'E tells me ter stop and keep an eye on the blokes in the store, see, while you and 'e was nabbing the Copper in the tunnel. I knew 'e'd locked the box up here, see, so after e'd gone I nips back up and gets to work with an 'airpin. Then I slips out and 'ides 'em, and got back just afore you and 'e arrived."

"Where d'yer put 'em?"

"Ah! that'd be telling, that would. Nah nah, Tinker, don't get me wrong. We'll share fair, don't you fret. We'll collect 'em together, see, and get clear away before 'is Lordship knows what's 'appened."

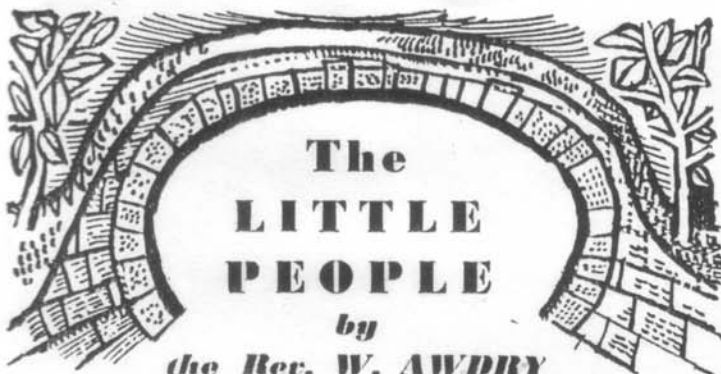
"All right, Bud; but mind it is fair do's. Fifty-fifty."

"O.K., it's a deal. We'll go and let loose those blokes like 'e said, then we'll pick up the sparklers and scam."

To be continued



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CHAPTER 12—"THERE'S MANY A SLIP..."

IN the room above, the two crooks made their plans. Below, in the shaft, P.C. Pover and his companions listened and made their plans too.

"You stay here with me Mr. Settem please," said the Constable. "You others go into the passage, and take them as they come through. We'll stay here and catch them if they run back."

There was a movement overhead. "Are you ready?" whispered Pover, "Here they come."

But they didn't.

"Nah then, Tinker; what yer whyting for?"

"Yew can see to them blokes, I ain't. I'm staying 'ere. That passage fair gives me the creeps it does. Never mind them prisoners Bud. Let 'em stop there."

"Well I won't then. They've done no 'arm to us, and anyway even if they 'ad I wouldn't let them stop and starve in a plice where no-one ever comes. 'Ow would yew loike it if yew was shut up there. I'm letting 'em out see? And you're coming with me. I don't some'ow trust yew up 'ere all on your own."

He urged the protesting Tinker across the room to the trap-door. There was a sharp scuffle when Tinker realised he was expected to go down first, but Bud got his way and Tinker slowly and unwillingly began to climb down.

Five men waited in the shadows below.

Mr. Settem was excited. "At last," he thought, "we've tracked

down my jewels. Just wait till I get hold of the fellow who's got them."

Constable Pover was excited too. "My first two criminals," he said to himself. "They're going to drop into my hands just like that. It's dead easy."

And it would have been easy if Tinker had climbed down willingly. But he didn't. There was a scuffle at the top which raised the dust. Clouds of it floated down the shaft. Constable Pover held his nose. Mr. Settem didn't think of that, and the dust tickled his nose dreadfully. He wanted to sneeze. He wanted to sneeze all the more because he knew he mustn't. However he did his best and held back as long as he could, but it burst out at last like an explosion.

"ERASHOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

Tinker jumped and nearly fell off the ladder. "Steady Bud!" he protested indignantly. "You scared the daylight out of me."

"I never," said Bud. Then a thought struck him. "If it wasn't you sneezed, Tinker, who was it?"

"Scram!" yelled Tinker. "Ow! Leggo!"

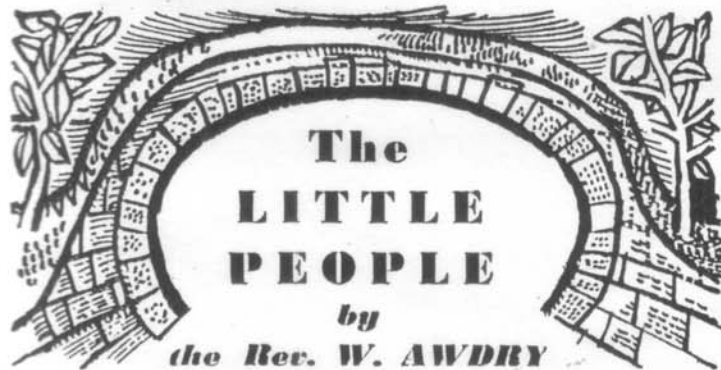
But Pover and Settem wouldn't let go. They hauled him down and handed him to the Driver and Fireman. "Take charge of this one," said Pover. "I'm going after the other." He leapt to the ladder and began climbing. Mr. Settem followed him eagerly.

To be continued



P.G.F.

FOR YOUNGER READERS



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CHAPTER 13—BUD'S UNLUCKY DAY

THEY climbed as fast as they could, but were too late. They were barely half-way up when Bud scrambled through the trap-door, shut it with a crash, and dragged a box over it.

Pover paused to wipe his face. "That's torn it," he said. "You and your sneezes!" he added reproachfully.

Constable Pover looked at Mr. Settem hanging below him on the ladder. "We shall have to force that trap-door open now," he said.

Scuffling sounds came from below. Pover looked down. He could see nothing. "Is that Tinker safe?" he called. "Yes," chorused three voices.

"Good!" approved Pover. "Don't bring him this way. He might escape. Sam and Victor, you'd best take him out through the railway tunnel. Gilbert, please wait here till I've opened this door. Then come and help catch Bud."

Gilbert the guard cheerfully agreed, while the driver and fireman took their prisoner away.

Pover climbed again. He reached the top. "Mr. Settem," he said. "Come close behind me, Sir. I'll need both hands free to open this door. Please help me keep my balance. I'd get a nasty bump if I slipped and fell."

Mr. Settem peered into the darkness below. He shuddered. "I'm starting now," said Pover. "Are you ready, Sir?"

* * *

Meanwhile, Bill and the platelayers had returned to work. Mr. Horker and Simon were busy planting their garden, while Ellen fed her pigs and cleaned out their sty. Peter Fryer was tidying his

Station, and Joe and Sidney raised steam on "General," but Roger still watched the shaft on the hill.

Presently, Joe whistled. He was ready to start away.

"Stop!" called Roger through his 'megaphone.' "Please don't go. The little man's come out."

"What again?" grumbled Joe and Sydney. "We've had enough of that caper." But Peter climbed to the Station roof. "He's there right enough," he said. "I'll warn the Horkers."

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Bud felt pleased. "That trap-door's settled them," he chuckled. "Now I'll collect those sparklers." He left the shaft, and knelt on a stone at the edge of the bog. He found the string he was looking for, and pulled. Soon a parcel appeared. He pulled off the waterproof bag, made sure that the jewels were safe, and put them in his pocket. "I'll hide somewhere till dark," he thought. "This empty field's a likely place." He climbed the fence.

The field was not empty. Mr. Horker's prize bull was lying down in the shade. An unusually friendly animal, it rose and went across to inspect his visitor. Bud turned and fled. The bull, puzzled, cantered behind him. Bud jumped the fence and went on running. The bull bellowed loudly. It was very disappointed with Bud!

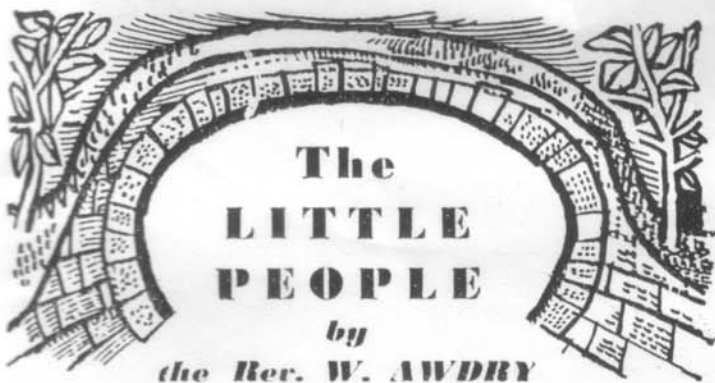
Mr. Horker heard the noise. "Someone's annoying my bull," he growled. He climbed the path, loudly proclaiming what he would do to whoever it was, when he caught him.

Bud heard him coming. He turned back towards the tunnel shaft, only to see three men crawl from the opening. One was a policeman. Bud didn't like policemen, they asked awkward questions! He ran down the hillside. It was steep. Bud slipped and tumbled head-over-heels down the slope.

There was a splintering crash, followed by a series of shrill squeals. "Drat that fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Horker. "Not content with tormenting my bull, he must needs torture Ellen's pigs."

To be concluded





Author of "The Three Railway Engines" and other books

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CHAPTER 14—The End of the Affair

MR. HORKER was mistaken. The pigs were happy in the garden. Bud was suffering in the sty. He had landed in the pig trough, and was covered from head to foot in mash. He crawled into the pigs' hut to recover.

Mr. Horker stormed into the garden, bellowing threats. "Father," said Ellen, "give over blathering, do; and help catch the pigs."

"You leave 'em be, my gal. Beat their dinner pail when you want 'em. They'll come running. Where's that villain, that pig torturer?" He reached the sty. He saw the empty trough, and a trail of mash leading to the pig house. "He's in that hovel, certain sure," he announced. "Ellen my lass, go get my pitch-fork. I'll soon hoik him out."

By this time a small crowd had collected round the sty. They had come to see what all the noise was about. Constable Pover, Mr. Settem, and Gilbert had arrived, too.

Ellen brought the pitchfork, and her father unlocked the back door of the pig-shed. "Come on out," he ordered, and jabbed at the straw. Bud, looking very dishevelled, crawled out of the front. "O.K. you win," he said sullenly.

"Constable," said Mr. Horker, "I charge this man with Trespassing. Torturing animals, and Damaging Property."

"He is also," said Constable Pover, "concerned with stealing Mr. Settem's jewels. I shall take him to the Police Station for questioning."

Bud tried to pretend that he knew nothing about the jewels, but it was no good. They were easily found under some straw in the pig-shed, and he was marched away under guard to the Railway Station. Soon afterwards, Sam and Victor arrived with their prisoner. They were very glad to find their engine safe, and wanted to raise steam; but Pover was in a hurry and couldn't wait for that,

so "General" pulled the black tank engine away.

"General's" cab was big and there was room for Joe, Sidney, Pover, Settem, and the two prisoners.

Mr. Settem was very pleased to get his jewels back, and P.C. Pover was delighted, too. "A good day's work, Mr. Settem," he said. "Your jewels recovered, and two crooks arrested. Think of that. You know, Sir," he went on, "I was mistaken about this village. Things do happen here. It's not such a bad place after all."

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The door opened, and Daddy came in. "Sorry I've been so long, Roger," he said, "but Mummy says you can have half an hour longer before bed-time to make up."

Roger hugged his Daddy as high as he could reach. "Thank you!" he said happily. "Then we really can have proper trains. D'you know Daddy? The little people are alive, and it upsets them when there aren't Proper Trains. They said so. I had 'citing 'dventures with them, Daddy, while you weren't here."

Daddy ruffled Roger's hair and smiled. "I think you must have had an exciting dream," he said. "Tell me."

Roger was dying to tell Daddy all about it; but he remembered the Little People. "Daddy," he asked anxiously, "d'you mind awfully much if I don't tell you now? The Little People need their Proper Trains. They're dreadfully upset."

"Right, Boy," smiled Daddy as he arranged the engines and coaches. "Proper trains it is. Now the first train is"

In next to no time they were both absorbed.

THE END

