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POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
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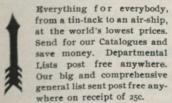
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FROM THE

## **OLD COUNTRY**



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GAMAGES
HOLBORN, LONDON, E.C., ENGLAND

It struck the floor with a blow below that echoed from hollow stones. It was long enough—there was a full inch to spare. Suddenly it was wrenched from his hand. He heard it strike against the side of the tower. Then he heard a noise—a soft footfall.

The effect was ghostly, uncanny.
Why not have lured him to descend, and then—he would have been a helpless victim? He reasoned quickly, clearly; he could not understand. He resigned himself to a night in the tower. He replaced the covering and lay down across it. Secure from attack, he would wait in such patience as he could command. He lay there, his injured foot throbbing, his arms clasped under his head, his eyes staring straight overhead at the pallid hand high above him; but he did not even think of it. Percy Marshall's nerves had been too well trained in the school of danger to be upset by death above and barred-out enemies below. His thought was Margaret Lee, waiting for him, needing him, wondering why he did not keep his promise. Summer nights were short, the dawn would come, and with it light to see what lay below. Percy Marshall feared no foe whom he could see.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet and drew in a deep breath. Smoke! He could smell it. He flung aside the trap door. An invisible cloud puffed up and choked him, but no flame nor light; the fire must be in the church itself; and the staircase acted as a chimney. He lighted a match. A black stream curled up page him.

light; the hre must be in the church itself; and the staircase acted as a chimney. He lighted a match. A black stream curled up past him.

Now he understood why his retreat had been cut off. He was to burn alive! And more—the gruesome evidence above, the body of the victim, that, too, was to be destroyed. No common criminals these, who, with such daring and relentless imagination, stopped at nothing in their career of villainy.

He peered out into the darkness No.

career of villainy.

He peered out into the darkness. No help from there now. If some wanderer heard he would not understand. When the blaze flared, when people knew and came, it would be too late. He could not get down then. His only escape was from the outside. The lightning-rod? He leaned out, grasped, and shook it with all his power. It was firm.

grasped, and shook it with all his power. It was firm.

He hastily unlaced and removed one of his boots; but in attempting to do the same with the other he found his ankle so swollen that he could not get the lace unfastened. He ripped out his knife, cut the lace, and dragged off the boot, unconscious of pain. Then, throwing off his coat, he grasped the rod, and swung himself out. Fortunate for him was the darkness; he could not see his peril. The hundred feet that lay between him and safety—or death—were mercifully shrouded. With feet catching here and there in the bolts that fastened the rod to the slates, sometimes hanging full weight on his hands, he made his slow way downwards. Often there was not space enough for his fingers between the rod and the slates, and he jammed them in, not heeding, not knowing, indeed, that the jagged points were

enough for his fingers between the rod and the slates, and he jammed them in, not heeding, not knowing, indeed, that the jagged points were cutting the flesh into ribbons.

At last—the top of the tower—a resting-place. He leaned back against the sloping spire. He worked his way inch by inch half-way along the spire. There was no opening. He must go on his perilous way—infinitely more perilous for the next few feet, for he must go hand over hand. He clenched his teeth and grasped the rod and gently rested his weight on his arms alone. Inch by inch he followed the incurving rod, until at last he found his feet supported by a gargoyle. How

welcome was the rest.

The smell of smoke came to him as he drew in deep, gasping breaths.



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