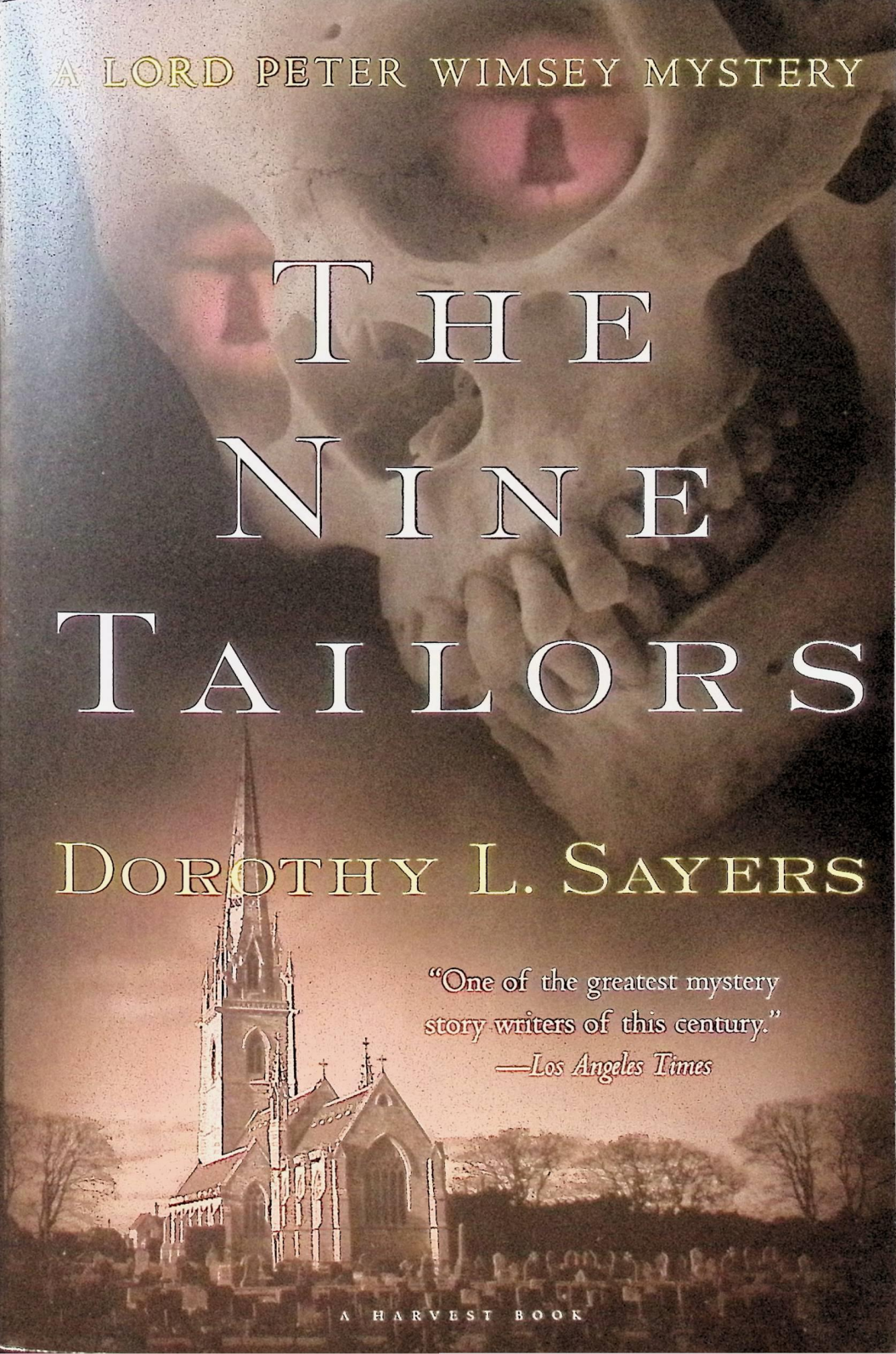
A LORD PETER WIMSEY MYSTERY

THE NINE TAILORS

DOROTHY L. SAYERS



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DOROTHY L. SAYERS is the author of many novels, short stories, essays, and the editor of many more volumes, but she will forever be remembered for creating the brilliant, idiosyncratic Lord Peter Wimsey. Sayers was widely hailed for taking the novel of detection to new heights of literary and popular achievement, but, much to the frustration of her fans, wrote only eleven books featuring Lord Peter. Sayers died in Essex, England, in 1957.

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Foreword

From time to time complaints are made about the ringing of church bells. It seems strange that a generation which tolerates the uproar of the internal combustion engine and the wailing of the jazz band should be so sensitive to the one loud noise that is made to the glory of God. England, alone in the world, has perfected the art of change-ringing and the true ringing of bells by rope and wheel, and will not lightly surrender her unique heritage.

I have to ask the indulgence of all change-ringers for any errors I may have made in dealing with their ancient craft. The surnames used in these books are all such as I have myself encountered among the people of East Anglia, but every place and person described is wholly fictitious, as are also the sins and negligences of those entirely imaginary bodies, the Wale Conservancy Board, the Fen Drainage Board and the East Level Waterways Commission.

Dorothy L. Sayers

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8th the Observation.

Call her in the middle with a double, before,
wrong and home.
Repeated once.

(Troyte)

THE FIRST COURSE

The Bells Are Rung Up

The coil of rope which it is necessary to hold in the hand, before, and whilst raising a bell, always puzzles a learner; it gets into his face, and perhaps round his neck (in which case he may be hanged!).

TROYTE ON CHANGE-RINGING

That's torn it!" said Lord Peter Wimsey.

The car lay, helpless and ridiculous, her nose deep in the ditch, her back wheels cocked absurdly up on the bank, as though she were doing her best to bolt to earth and were scraping herself a burrow beneath the drifted snow. Peering through a flurry of driving flakes, Wimsey saw how the accident had come about. The narrow, hump-backed bridge, blind as an eyeless beggar, spanned the dark drain at right angles, dropping plump down upon the narrow road that crested the dyke. Coming a trifle too fast across the bridge, blinded by the bitter easterly snowstorm, he had overshot the road and

plunged down the side of the dyke into the deep ditch beyond, where the black spikes of a thorn hedge stood bleak and unwelcoming in the glare of the headlights.

Right and left, before and behind, the fen lay shrouded. It was past four o'clock and New Year's Eve; the snow that had fallen all day gave back a glimmering greyness to a sky like lead.

"I'm sorry," said Wimsey. "Whereabouts do you suppose we've got to, Bunter?"

The manservant consulted a map in the ray of an electric torch.

"I think, my lord, we must have run off the proper road at Leamholt. Unless I am much mistaken, we must be near Fenchurch St. Paul."

As he spoke, the sound of a church clock, muffled by the snow, came borne upon the wind; it chimed the first quarter.

"Thank God!" said Wimsey. "Where there is a church, there is civilization. We'll have to walk it. Never mind the suitcases; we can send somebody for them. Br'rh! it's cold. I bet that when Kingsley welcomed the wild northeaster he was sitting indoors by a good fire, eating muffins. I could do with a muffin myself. Next time I accept hospitality in the Fen-country, I'll take care that it's at midsummer, or else I'll go by train. The church lies to windward of us, I fancy. It would."

They wrapped their coats about them and turned their faces to the wind and snow. To left of them, the drain ran straight as a rule could make it, black and sullen, with a steep bank shelving down to its slow, unforgiving waters. To their right was the broken line of the sunk hedge, with, here and there, a group of poplars or wil-

lows. They tramped on in silence, the snow beating on their eyelids. At the end of a solitary mile the gaunt shape of a windmill loomed up upon the farther bank of the drain, but no bridge led to it, and no light showed.

Another half-mile, and they came to a signpost and a secondary road that turned off to the right. Bunter turned his torch upon the signpost and read upon the single arm:

"Fenchurch St. Paul."

There was no other direction; ahead, road and dyke marched on side by side into an eternity of winter.

"Fenchurch St. Paul for us," said Wimsey. He led the way into the side-road, and as he did so, they heard the clock again—nearer—chiming the third quarter.

A few hundred yards of solitude, and they came upon the first sign of life in this frozen desolation: on their left, the roofs of a farm, standing some way back from the road, and, on the right, a small, square building like a box of bricks, whose sign, creaking in the blast, proclaimed it to be the Wheatsheaf public-house. In front of it stood a small, shabby car, and from windows on the ground and first floors light shone behind red blinds.

Wimsey went up to it and tried the door. It was shut, but not locked. He called out, "Anybody about?"

A middle-aged woman emerged from an inner room.

"We're not open yet," she began, abruptly.

"I beg your pardon," said Wimsey. "Our car has come to grief. Can you direct us——?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I thought you were some of the men. Your car broke down? That's bad. Come in. I'm afraid we're all in a muddle——"

"What's the trouble, Mrs. Tebbutt?" The voice was

gentle and scholarly, and, as Wimsey followed the woman into a small parlour, he saw that the speaker was an elderly parson.

"The gentlemen have had an accident with their car."

"Oh, dear," said the clergyman. "Such a terrible day, too! Can I be of any assistance?"

Wimsey explained that the car was in the ditch, and would certainly need ropes and haulage to get it back to the road again.

"Dear, dear," said the clergyman again. "That would be coming over Frog's Bridge, I expect. A most dangerous place, especially in the dark. We must see what can be done about it. Let me give you a lift into the village."

"It's very good of you, sir."

"Not at all, not at all. I am just getting back to my tea. I am sure you must be wanting something to warm you up. I trust you are not in a hurry to reach your destination. We should be delighted to put you up for the night."

Wimsey thanked him very much, but said he did not want to trespass upon his hospitality.

"It will be a great pleasure," said the clergyman, courteously. "We see so little company here that I assure you you will be doing my wife and myself a great favour."

"In that case——" said Wimsey.

"Excellent, excellent."

"I'm really most grateful. Even if we could get the car out tonight, I'm afraid the axle may be bent, and that means a blacksmith's job. But couldn't we get rooms at an inn or something? I'm really ashamed——"

"My dear sir, pray don't think twice about it. Not

but what I am sure Mrs. Tebbutt here would be delighted to take you in and would make you very comfortable —very comfortable indeed; but her husband is laid up with this dreadful influenza—we are suffering from quite an epidemic of it, I am sorry to say—and I fear it would not be altogether convenient, would it, Mrs. Tebbutt?"

"Well, sir, I don't know as how we could manage very well, under the circumstances, and the Red Cow has only one room——"

"Oh, no," said the clergyman, quickly, "not the Red Cow; Mrs. Donnington has visitors already. Indeed, I will take no denial. You must positively come along to the Rectory. We have ample accomodation—too much, indeed, too much. My name, by the way, is Venables—I should have mentioned it earlier. I am, as you will have gathered, rector of the parish."

"It's extremely good of you, Mr. Venables. If we're really not putting you out, we will accept your invitation with pleasure. My name is Wimsey—here is my card—and this is my man, Bunter."

The Rector fumbled for his glasses, which, after disentangling the cord, he perched very much askew on his long nose, in order to peer at Wimsey's card.

"Lord Peter Wimsey—just so. Dear me! The name seems familiar. Have I not heard of it in connection with—ah! I have it! *Notes on the Collection of Incunabula*, of course. A very scholarly little monograph, if I may say so. Yes. Dear me. It will be charming to exchange impressions with another book-collector. My library is, I fear, limited, but I have an edition of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* that may interest you. Dear me! Yes. Delightful to have met you like this. Bless my heart, there's five o'clock striking. We must be off, or I shall

get a scolding from my wife. Good afternoon, Mrs. Tebbutt. I hope your good man will be much improved by tomorrow; I really think he is looking better already."

"Thank you, sir; Tom's always so pleased to see you. I'm sure you do him a lot of good."

"Tell him to keep his spirits up. Such a nasty, depressing complaint. But he's over the worst now. I will send a little bottle of port wine as soon as he is able to take it. Tuke Holdsworth '08," added the Rector, in an aside to Wimsey; "couldn't harm a fly, you know. Yes. Dear me! Well! We really must be going. I'm afraid my car is not much to boast of, but there's more room in it than one would think. Many's the christening party we've managed to squeeze into it, eh, Mrs. Tebbutt? Will you sit beside me, Lord Peter? Your man and your—dear me! have you any luggage? . . . Ah! down at Frog's Bridge? I will send my gardener to fetch it. It will be quite safe where it is; we're all honest people about here, aren't we, Mrs. Tebbutt? That's right. You must have this rug about your legs—yes, I insist. No, no, thank you. I can start her up quite well. I am so well accustomed to do it. There, you see! A few good pulls and she comes up as brisk as a bell. All right behind, my man? Good. Excellent. *Good* afternoon, Mrs. Tebbutt!"

The ancient car, shuddering to her marrow-bones, lurched away down the straight and narrow road. They passed a cottage, and then, quite suddenly, on their right, there loomed out of the whirling snow a grey, gigantic bulk.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Wimsey, "is that your church?"

"Yes, indeed," said the Rector, with pride. "You find it impressive?"

"Impressive!" said Wimsey. "Why, it's like a young cathedral. I'd no idea. How big is your parish, then?"

"You'll be surprised when I tell you," said the Rector, with a chuckle. "Three hundred and forty souls—no more. Astonishing, is it not? But you find the same thing all over the Fens. East Anglia is famous for the size and splendour of its parish churches. Still, we flatter ourselves we are almost unique, even in this part of the world. It was an abbey foundation, and in the old days Fenchurch St. Paul must have been quite an important place. How high should you say our tower was?"

Wimsey gazed up at the great pile.

"It's difficult to tell in this darkness. Not less than a hundred and thirty feet, surely."

"Not a bad guess. A hundred and twenty-eight, to be exact, to the top of the pinnacles, but it looks more, because of the comparative lowness of the clerestory roof. There aren't many to beat us. St. Peter Mancroft, of course—but that's a town church. And St. Michael's, Coventry, is one hundred and thirty feet without the spire. But I would venture to back Fenchurch St. Paul against them all for beauty of proportion. You will see that better when we turn the corner. Here we are. I always blow my horn here; the wall and the trees make it so very dangerous. I sometimes think we ought to have the churchyard wall set back a little, in the public interest. Ah! now you get a little idea. Very fine, is it not, the piling of the aisle and clerestory? You will be able to judge better in daylight. Here is the Rectory—just opposite the church. I always blow my horn at the

gate for fear anybody should be about. The bushes make it so very dark. Ah! safely negotiated. I'm sure you will be glad to get into the warm and have a cup of tea—or possibly something stronger. I always blow my horn at the door, so as to tell my wife I am back. She gets nervous when I am out after lighting-up time; the dykes and drains make these roads so very awkward, and I am not as young as I was. I fear I am already a little late. Ah! here is my wife. Agnes, my dear, I am sorry to be a little behind time, but I have brought a guest back with me. He has had an accident with his car and will stay the night with us. The rug! Allow me! I fear that seat is something of a *res angusta*. Pray be careful of your head. Ah! all is well. My dear—Lord Peter Wimsey."

Mrs. Venables, a plump and placid figure in the lamplight from the open door, received the invasion with competent tranquility.

"How fortunate that my husband should have met you. An accident? I do hope you are not hurt. I always say these roads are perfect death-traps."

"Thank you," said Wimsey. "There is no harm done. We stupidly ran off the road—at Frog's Bridge, I understand."

"A very nasty place—quite a mercy you didn't go into the Thirty-foot Drain. Do come in and sit down and get yourselves warm. Your man? Yes, of course. Emily! Take this gentleman's manservant into the kitchen and make him comfortable."

"And tell Hinkins to take the car and go down to Frog's Bridge for the luggage," added the Rector. "He will find Lord Peter's car there. He had better go at once, before the weather gets worse. And, Emily! tell

him to send over to Wilderspin and arrange to get the car out of the dyke."

"Tomorrow morning will do for that," said Wimsey.

"To be sure. First thing tomorrow morning. Wilderspin is the blacksmith—an excellent fellow. He will see to the matter most competently. Dear me, yes! And now, come in, come in! We want our tea. Agnes, my dear, have you explained to Emily that Lord Peter will be staying the night?"

"That will be all right," said Mrs. Venables, soothingly. "I do hope, Theodore, you have not caught cold."

"No, no, my dear. I have been well wrapped up. Dear me, yes! Ha! What do I see? Muffins?"

"I was just wishing for muffins," said Wimsey.

"Sit down, sit down and make a good meal. I'm sure you must be famished. I have seldom known such bitter weather. Would you prefer a whisky-and-soda, perhaps?"

"Tea for me," said Wimsey. "How jolly all this looks! Really, Mrs. Venables, it's tremendously good of you to take pity upon us."

"I'm only so glad to be able to help," said Mrs. Venables, smiling cheerfully. "Really, I don't think there's anything to equal the dreariness of these fen roads in winter. It's most fortunate your accident landed you comparatively close to the village."

"It is indeed." Wimsey gratefully took in the cosy sitting-room, with its little tables crowded with ornaments, its fire roaring behind a chaste canopy of velvet overmantel, and the silver tea-vessel winking upon the polished tray. "I feel like Ulysses, come to port after much storm and peril."

He bit gratefully into a large and buttery muffin.

"Tom Tebbutt seems a good deal better today," observed the Rector. "Very unfortunate that he should be laid up just now, but we must be thankful that it is no worse. I only hope there are no further casualties. Young Pratt will manage very well, I think; he went through two long touches this morning without a single mistake, and he is extremely keen. By the way, we ought, perhaps, to warn our visitor——"

"I'm sure we ought," said Mrs. Venables. "My husband has asked you to stay the night, Lord Peter, but he ought to have mentioned that you will probably get very little sleep, being so close to the church. But perhaps you do not mind the sound of bells."

"Not at all," said Wimsey.

"My husband is a very keen change-ringer," pursued Mrs. Venables, "and, as this is New Year's Eve——"

The Rector, who seldom allowed anybody else to finish a sentence, broke in eagerly.

"We hope to accomplish a real feat tonight," he said, "or rather, I should say, tomorrow morning. We intend to ring the New Year in with—you are not, perhaps, aware that we possess here one of the finest rings in the country?"

"Indeed?" said Wimsey. "Yes, I believe I have heard of the Fenchurch bells."

"There are, perhaps, a few heavier rings," said the Rector, "but I hardly know where you would rival us for fullness and sweetness of tone. Number seven, in particular, is a most noble old bell, and so is the tenor, and the John and Jericho bells are also remarkably fine—in fact, the whole ring is most 'tuneable and sound,' as the old motto has it."

"It is a full ring of eight?"

"Oh, yes. If you are interested, I should like to show you a very charming little book, written by my predecessor, giving the whole history of the bells. The tenor, Tailor Paul, was actually cast in a field next the churchyard in the year 1614. You can still see the depression in the earth where the mould was made, and the field itself is called the bell-field to this day."

"And have you a good set of ringers?" inquired Wimsey, politely.

"Very good indeed. Excellent fellows and most enthusiastic. That reminds me. I was about to say that we have arranged to ring the New Year in tonight with no less," said the Rector, emphatically, "no less than fifteen thousand, eight hundred and forty Kent Treble Bob Majors. What do you think of that? Not bad, eh?"

"Bless my heart!" said Wimsey. "Fifteen thousand——"

"Eight hundred and forty," said the Rector.

Wimsey made a rapid calculation.

"A good many hours' work there."

"Nine hours," said the Rector, with relish.

"Well done, sir," said Wimsey. "Why, that's equal to the great performance of the College Youths in eighteen hundred and something."

"In 1868," agreed the Rector. "That is what we aim to emulate. And, what's more, but for the little help I can give, we shall be obliged to do as well as they did, and ring the whole peal with eight ringers only. We had hoped to have twelve, but unhappily, four of our best men have been laid low by this terrible influenza, and we can get no help from Fenchurch St. Stephen (which has a ring of bells, though not equal to ours) because

there they have no Treble Bob ringers and confine themselves to Grandsire Triples."

Wimsey shook his head, and helped himself to his fourth muffin.

"Grandsire Triples are most venerable," he said solemnly, "but you can never get the same music——"

"That's what I say," crowed the Rector. "You never can get the same music when the tenor is rung behind—not even with Stedman's, though we are very fond here of Stedman's and ring them, I venture to say, very well. But for interest and variety and for sweetness in the peal, give me Kent Treble Bob every time."

"Quite right, sir," said Wimsey.

"You will never beat it," said Mr. Venables, soaring away happily to the heights of the belfry, and waving his muffin in the air, so that the butter ran down his cuff. "Take even Grandsire Major—I cannot help feeling it as a defect that the blows come behind so monotonously at the bobs and singles—particularly at the singles, and the fact that the treble and second are confined to a plain hunting course——"

The rest of the Rector's observations on the Grandsire method of change-ringing were unhappily lost, for at that moment Emily made her appearance at the door, with the ominous words:

"If you please, sir, could James Thoday speak to you for a moment?"

"*James* Thoday?" said the Rector. "Why, certainly, of course. Put him in the study, Emily, and I will come in a moment."

The Rector was not long gone, and when he returned his face was as long as a fiddle. He let himself drop into his chair in an attitude of utter discouragement.

"This," he ejaculated, dramatically, "is an irreparable disaster!"

"Good gracious, Theodore! What in the world is the matter?"

"William Thoday! Of all nights in the year! Poor fellow, I ought not to think of myself, but it is a bitter disappointment—a bitter disappointment."

"Why, what has happened to Thoday?"

"Struck down," said the Rector, "struck down by this wretched scourge of influenza. Quite helpless. Delirious. They have sent for Dr. Baines."

"T'chk, t'chk," said Mrs. Venables.

"It appears," went on the Rector, "that he felt unwell this morning, but insisted—most unwisely, poor man—on driving in to Walbeach on some business or other. Foolish fellow! I thought he looked seedy when he came in to see me last night. Most fortunately, George Ashton met him in the town and saw how bad he was and insisted on coming back with him. Poor Thoday must have taken a violent chill in all this bitter cold. He was quite collapsed when they got home and they had to put him to bed instantly, and now he is in a high fever and worrying all the time because he cannot get to the church tonight. I told his brother to make every effort to calm his mind, but I fear it will be difficult. He is so enthusiastic, and the thought that he has been incapacitated at this crisis seems to be preying on his mind."

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Venables, "but I expect Dr. Baines will give him something to quiet him down."

"I hope so, sincerely. It *is* a disaster, of course, but it is distressing that he should take it so to heart. Well, well. What can't be cured must be endured. This is our last hope gone. We shall be reduced to ringing minors."

"Is this man one of your ringers, then, padre?"

"Unfortunately, he is, and there is no one now to take his place. Our grand scheme will have to be abandoned. Even if I were to take a bell myself, I could not possibly ring for nine hours. I am not getting younger, and besides, I have an Early Service at 8 o'clock, in addition to the New Year service which will not release me till after midnight. Ah, well! Man proposes and God disposes—unless"—the Rector turned suddenly and looked at his guest—"you were speaking just now with a good deal of feeling about Treble Bob—you are not, yourself, by any chance, a ringer?"

"Well," said Wimsey, "I used at one time to pull quite a pretty rope. But whether, at this time of day——"

"Treble Bob?" inquired the Rector, eagerly.

"Treble Bob, certainly. But it's some time since——"

"It will come back to you," cried the Rector, feverishly. "It will come back. Half an hour with the handbells——"

"My dear!" said Mrs. Venables.

"Isn't it wonderful?" cried the Rector. "Is it not really providential? That just at this moment we should be sent a guest who is actually a ringer and accustomed to ringing Kent Treble Bob?" He rang for the maid. "Hinkins must go round at once and call the lads together for a practice ring on the handbells. My dear, I am afraid we shall have to monopolize the dining-room, if you don't mind. Emily, tell Hinkins that I have here a gentleman who can ring the peal with us and I want him to go round immediately——"

"One moment, Emily. Theodore, is it quite fair to ask Lord Peter Wimsey, after a motor accident, and at the end of a tiring day, to stay up ringing bells from

midnight to nine o'clock? A short peal, perhaps, if he really does not mind, but even so, are we not demanding rather a lot of his good nature?"

The Rector's mouth drooped like the mouth of a hurt child, and Wimsey hastened to his support.

"Not in the least, Mrs. Venables. Nothing would please me more than to ring bells all day and all night. I am not tired at all. I really don't need rest. I would far rather ring bells. The only thing that worries me is whether I shall be able to get through the peal without making stupid mistakes."

"Of course you will, of course you will," said the Rector, hurriedly. "But as my wife says—really, I am afraid I am being very thoughtless. Nine hours is too much. We ought to confine ourselves to five thousand changes or so——"

"Not a bit of it," said Wimsey. "Nine hours or nothing. I insist upon it. Probably, once you have heard my efforts, it will be nothing."

"Pooh! nonsense!" cried the Rector. "Emily, tell Hinkins to get the ringers together here by—shall we say half-past six? I think they can all be here by then, except possibly Pratt, who lives up at Tupper's End, but I can make the eighth myself. How delightful this is! Positively, I cannot get over the amazing coincidence of your arrival. It shows the wonderful way in which Heaven provides even for our pleasures, if they be innocent. I hope, Lord Peter, you will not mind if I make a little reference to it in my sermon tonight? At least, it will hardly be a sermon—only a few thoughts appropriate to the New Year and its opportunities. May I ask where you usually ring?"

"Nowhere, nowadays; but when I was a boy I used

to ring at Duke's Denver, and when I go home at Christmas and so on, I occasionally lay hand to a rope even now."

"Duke's Denver? Of course—St. John ad-Portam-Latinam—a beautiful little church; I know it quite well. But I think you will admit that our bells are finer. Well, now, if you will excuse me, I will just run and put the dining-room in readiness for our practice."

He bustled away.

"It is very good of you to indulge my husband's hobby," said Mrs. Venables; "this occasion has meant so much to him, and he has had so many disappointments about it. But it seems dreadful to offer you hospitality and then keep you hard at work all night."

Wimsey again assured her that the pleasure was entirely his.

"I shall insist on your getting a few hours' rest at least," was all Mrs. Venables could say. "Will you come up now and see your room? You will like a wash and brush-up at any rate. We will have supper at 7.30, if we can get my husband to release you by then, and after that, you really must go and lie down for a nap. I have put you in here—I see your man has everything ready for you."

"Well, Bunter," said Wimsey, when Mrs. Venables had departed, leaving him to make himself presentable by the inadequate light of a small oil-lamp and a candle, "that looks a nice bed—but I am not fated to sleep in it."

"So I understand from the young woman, my lord."

"It's a pity you can't relieve me at the rope, Bunter."

"I assure your lordship that for the first time in my existence I regret that I have made no practical study of campanology."

"I am always so delighted to find that there are things you cannot do. Did you ever try?"

"Once only, my lord, and on that occasion an accident was only narrowly averted. Owing to my unfortunate lack of manual dexterity I was very nearly hanged in the rope, my lord."

"That's enough about hanging," said Wimsey, peevishly. "We're not detecting now, and I don't want to talk shop."

"Certainly not, my lord. Does your lordship desire to be shaved?"

"Yes—let's start the New Year with a clean face."

"Very good, my lord."

Descending, clean and shaven, to the dining-room, Wimsey found the table moved aside and eight chairs set in a circle. On seven of the chairs sat seven men, varying in age from a gnarled old gnome with a long beard to an embarrassed youth with his hair plastered into a cow-lick; in the centre, the Rector stood twittering like an amiable magician.

"Ah! there you are! Splendid! excellent! Now, lads, this is Lord Peter Wimsey, who has been providentially sent to assist us out of our difficulty. He tells me he is a little out of practice, so I am sure you will not mind putting in a little time to enable him to get his hand in again. Now I must introduce you all. Lord Peter, this is Hezekiah Lavender, who has pulled the Tenor for sixty years and means to pull it for twenty years longer, don't you, Hezekiah?"

The little gnarled man grinned toothlessly and extended a knobby hand.

"Proud to meet you, my lord. Yes, I've pulled old

Tailor Paul a mort o' times now. Her and me's well acquainted, and I means to go on a-pulling of her till she rings the nine tailors for me, that I do."

"I hope you will long be spared to do it, Mr. Lavender."

"Ezra Wilderspin," went on the Rector. "He's our biggest man, and he pulls the smallest bell. That's often the way of things, isn't it? He is our blacksmith, by the way, and has promised to get your car put right for you in the morning."

The blacksmith laughed sheepishly, engulfed Wimsey's fingers in an enormous hand and retired to his chair in some confusion.

"Jack Godfrey," continued the Rector. "Number Seven. How's Batty Thomas going now, Jack?"

"Going fine, thank you, sir, since we had them new gudgeons put in."

"Jack has the honour of ringing the oldest bell we have," added the Rector. "Batty Thomas was cast in 1338 by Thomas Belleyetere of Lynn; but she gets her name from Abbot Thomas who re-cast her in 1380—doesn't she, Jack?"

"So she do, sir," agreed Mr. Godfrey. Bells, it may be noted, like ships and kittens, have a way of being female, whatever names they are given.

"Mr. Donnington, the landlord of the Red Cow, our churchwarden," went on the Rector, bringing forward a long, thin man with a squint. "I ought to have mentioned him first of all, by right of his office, but then, you see, though he himself is very distinguished, his bell is not so ancient as Tailor Paul or Batty Thomas. He takes charge of Number Six—Dimity, we call her—a

comparative newcomer in her present shape, though her metal is old."

"And a sweeter bell we haven't got in the ring," averred Mr. Donnington, stoutly. "Pleased to meet you, my lord."

"Joe Hinkins, my gardener. You have already met, I think. He pulls Number Five. Harry Gotobed, Number Four; our sexton, and what better name could a sexton have? And Walter Pratt—our youngest recruit, who is going to ring Number Three and do it very well indeed. So glad you were able to get here in time, Walter. That's all of us. You, Lord Peter, will take poor William Thoday's bell, Number Two. She and Number Five were recast in the same year as Dimity—the year of the old Queen's Jubilee; her name is Sabaoth. Now, let's get to work. Here is your handbell; come and sit next to Walter Pratt. Our good old friend Hezekiah will be the conductor, and you'll find he can sing out his calls as loud and clear as the bells, for all he's seventy-five years past. Can't you, Grand-dad?"

"Ay, that I can," cried the old man, cheerfully. "Now, boys, if you be ready, we'll ring a little touch of 96, just to put this gentleman in the way of it, like. You'll remember, my lord, that you starts by making the first snapping lead with the treble and after that you goes into the slow hunt till she comes down to snap with you again."

"Right you are," said Wimsey. "And after that I make the thirds and fourths."

"That's so, my lord. And then it's three steps forward and one step back till you lay the blows behind."

"Carry on, sergeant major."

The old man nodded, adding: "And you, Wally Pratt, mind what you're about, and don't go a-follerin' your course bell beyond thirds place. I've telled yew about that time and again. Now, are you ready, lads—go!"

The art of change-ringing is peculiar to the English, and, like most English peculiarities, unintelligible to the rest of the world. To the musical Belgian, for example, it appears that the proper thing to do with a carefully-tuned ring of bells is to play a tune upon it. By the English campanologist, the playing of tunes is considered to be a childish game, only fit for foreigners; the proper use of bells is to work out mathematical permutations and combinations. When he speaks of the music of his bells, he does not mean musicians' music—still less what the ordinary man calls music. To the ordinary man, in fact, the pealing of bells is a monotonous jangle and a nuisance, tolerable only when mitigated by remote distance and sentimental association. The change-ringer does, indeed, distinguish musical differences between one method of producing his permutations and another; he avers, for instance, that where the hinder bells run 7, 5, 6, or 5, 6, 7, or 5, 7, 6, the music is always prettier, and can detect and approve, where they occur, the consecutive fifths of Tittums and the cascading thirds of the Queen's change. But what he really means is, that by the English method of ringing with rope and wheel, each several bell gives forth her fullest and her noblest note. His passion—and it is a passion—finds its satisfaction in mathematical completeness and mechanical perfection, and as his bell weaves her way rhythmically up from lead to hinder place and down again, he is filled with the solemn intoxication that comes of intricate ritual

faultlessly performed. To any disinterested spectator, peeping in upon the rehearsal, there might have been something a little absurd about the eight absorbed faces; the eight tense bodies poised in a spell-bound circle on the edges of eight dining-room chairs; the eight upraised right hands, decorously wagging the handbells upward and downward; but to the performers, everything was serious and important as an afternoon with the Australians at Lord's.

Mr. Hezekiah Lavender having called three successive bobs, the bells came back into rounds without mishap.

"Excellent," said the Rector. "You made no mistake about that."

"All right, so far," said Wimsey.

"The gentleman will do well enough," agreed Mr. Lavender. "Now, boys, once again. What 'ull we make it this time, sir?"

"Make it a 704," said the Rector, consulting his watch. "Call her in the middle with a double, before, wrong and home, and repeat."

"Right you are, sir. And you, Wally Pratt, keep your ears open for the treble and your eyes on your course bell, and don't go gapin' about or you'll have us all imbrangled."

The unfortunate Pratt wiped his forehead, curled his boots tightly round the legs of his chair, and took a firm hold of his bell. Whether out of nervousness or for some other cause, he found himself in trouble at the beginning of the seventh lead, "imbrangled" himself and his neighbors very successfully and broke into a severe perspiration.

"Stand!" growled Mr. Lavender, in a disgusted tone. "If that's the way you mean to set about it, Wally Pratt,

we may just so well give up the ringing of this here peal. Surely you know by this time what to do at a bob?"

"Come, come," said the Rector. "You mustn't be disheartened, Wally. Try again. You forgot to make the double dodge in 7, 8, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Forgot!" exclaimed Mr. Lavender, waggling his beard. "Now, just yew take example by his lordship here. *He* didn't go forgettin' things, none the more for bein' out o' practice."

"Come, come, Hezekiah," cried the Rector again. "You mustn't be hard on Wally. We haven't all had sixty years' experience."

Mr. Lavender grunted, and started the whole touch again from the beginning. This time Mr. Pratt kept his head and his place and the ringing went successfully through to its conclusion.

"Well rung all," cried the Rector. "Our new recruit will do us credit, I think, Hezekiah?"

"I almost fell down in the second lead, though," said Wimsey, laughing. "I as nearly as possible forgot to lay the four blows in fourths place at the bob. However, nearly isn't quite."

"You'll keep your place all right, my lord," said Mr. Lavender. "As for you, Wally Pratt——"

"I think," said the Rector, hastily, "we'd better run across to the church now and let Lord Peter get the feel of his bell. You may as well all come over and ring the bells up for service. And, Jack, see to it that Lord Peter's rope is made comfortable for him. Jack Godfrey takes charge of the bells and ropes," he added in explanation, "and keeps them in apple-pie order for us."

Mr. Godfrey smiled.

"We'll need to let the tuckings down a goodish bit for his lordship," he observed, measuring Wimsey with his eye; "he's none so tall as Will Thoday, not by a long chalk."

"Never you mind," said Wimsey. "In the words of the old bell-motto: I'd have it to be understood that though I'm little, yet I'm good."

"Of course," said the Rector, "Jack didn't mean anything else. But Will Thoday is a very tall man indeed. Now where did I put my hat? Agnes, my dear! Agnes! I can't find my hat. Oh, here, to be sure. And my muffler—I'm so much obliged to you. Now, let me just get the key of the belfry and we—dear me, now! When did I have that key last?"

"It's all right, sir," said Mr. Godfrey. "I have all the keys here, sir."

"The church-key as well?"

"Yes, sir, and the key of the bell-chamber."

"Oh, good, good—excellent. Lord Peter will like to go up into the bell-chamber. To my mind, Lord Peter, the sight of a ring of good bells—I beg your pardon, my dear?"

"I said, Do remember dinner-time, and don't keep poor Lord Peter too long."

"No, no, my dear, certainly not. But he will like to look at the bells. And the church itself is worth seeing, Lord Peter. We have a very interesting twelfth-century font, and the roof is considered to be one of the finest specimens—yes, yes, my dear, we're just going."

The hall-door was opened upon a glimmering world. The snow was still falling fast; even the footprints made