

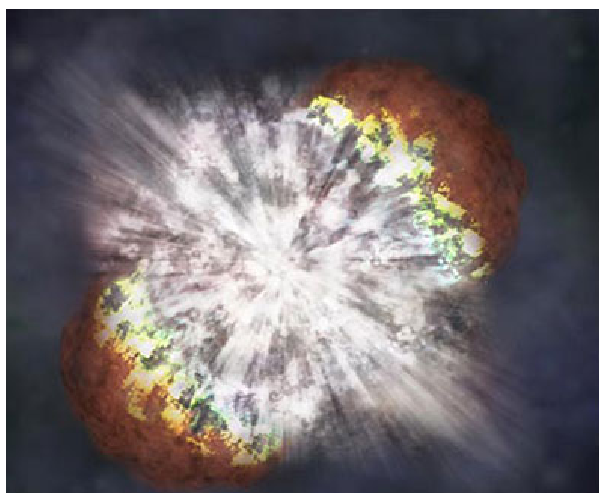
The boy who predicted earthquakes

"Of course, you don't believe it," Wellman said. "You're a scientist, Mr Reed. When our studio put this boy Herbert into the programme, I didn't
5 believe it either. And I never thought a show like that would be good television. But it is."

"How does this programme work?"
10 Reed asked. "You mean, how does Herbert do it? Well, Mr Reed, that's something for you scientists to find out. The kid has shows twice a week, Mondays and Fridays. Most of the time he just
15 talks, and tells the viewers what he's been doing in school, the books he's been reading, and so on. But he always makes one or two *predictions*¹. They are always things that will happen in the next forty-
20 eight hours. Herbert says that he can't see any further than that." - "And do they happen?" - "They do," Wellman said. "He's made 206 predictions so far and every one of them has come true. Shall
25 we go and watch his show? It's almost time for him to go on."

Herbert Pinner looked like a nice, quiet boy. He was about 15, tall for his
30 age, with a *pleasant*², intelligent, slightly worried face. "... I've been reading a very interesting book," Herbert said to the TV viewers. "Its name is 'The *Count*³ of Monte Cristo'. I think almost anybody
35 might enjoy it." He held up the book for the viewers to see. "There will be an *earthquake*⁴, not a bad one, in the north Atlantic states tonight. Tomorrow they will find Gwendolyn Fox, who has been
40 lost in the mountains since last Thursday. Her leg is broken but she will be alive. I have also begun a book on astronomy. Reading that book has made me very interested in the stars."

At the end of the programme Reed was *introduced*⁵ to Herbert Pinner. He found the boy polite and helpful, but rather shy. "I don't really know how I do
50 it, Mr Reed," Herbert said. "It just comes into my head. One thing I've noticed is that I can't predict anything if I don't know what it is. I could predict the



earthquake because everybody knows what an
55 earthquake is. But I couldn't have predicted about Miss Fox if I hadn't known that she was missing. That's the reason why I read so many books. The more I know the more I can predict."

60 The earthquake arrived at 9:15 the next day. And Reed saw from the newspaper headlines that they had found Miss Fox as Herbert had predicted.

65 On Friday Reed went to the studio to watch Herbert's programme go on. He found the boy nervously sitting on a chair saying, "No, no, I can't," again and again.

70 Nevertheless, the first part of his show was much like the others had been. After about five minutes, Herbert put down the books he had been showing and began to speak
75 *seriously*⁶. "I want to tell you about tomorrow," he said. "Tomorrow ... is going to be different. Tomorrow is going to be the beginning of a better world for all of us."

80 Reed listened and felt a feeling of excitement run through him. "In the past," Herbert said, "we've had a bad time. We've had wars and people have died of hunger and diseases. From tomorrow all that is going to
85 change. There won't be any more wars. The hungry will have enough to eat and the sick will get better. People will live happily and nobody will be afraid any more. Tomorrow is going to be the beginning of all that.

90 Goodnight."

For a moment no one moved or spoke. Then everybody began to talk excitedly. As

95 they drove back to the Pinner's hotel,
 people were already filling the streets.
 They could hear the newsboys screaming
 on the corners. "NEW WORLD
 COMING!" - "HOPE FOR THE
 WORLD!"

100 Reed and Herbert were alone in the
 room. "Herbert," Reed said, "I thought
 you couldn't see into the future more than
 forty-eight hours ahead." - "That's right"

105 - "Then how could you see all the things
 you predicted tonight?" Herbert went
 over to the window. "I wouldn't have
 known if I hadn't read the astronomy
 book." He pointed to the west, where the

110 sun was going down. "Tomorrow it won't
 be like this."

"What do you mean?" Reed said,
 suddenly afraid. "What are you trying to
 say?"

115 "That ... tomorrow the sun will be different.
 Maybe it's better this way. I wanted them to
 be happy. That's why I lied to them."

"What is it?" Reed cried. "What's
 going to happen tomorrow? You've must tell
 me!"

"Well, tomorrow the sun - I've forgotten the
 word. What do they call it when a star
 suddenly becomes a billion times hotter than
 it was before?"

125 "A nova?" Reed cried. "That's it.
 Tomorrow ... the sun is going to explode!"

Margaret St Clair (abridged)

Words and what they mean

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|---|
| 1 | <i>prediction</i> | when you say what will happen in the future |
| 2 | <i>pleasant</i> | nice, attractive, friendly |
| 3 | <i>count</i> | title of a person, e.g. Count Dracula |
| 4 | <i>earthquake</i> | a sudden heavy movement of the ground, sometimes causing great damage |
| 5 | <i>to introduce</i> | to tell someone another person's name when they meet for the first time |
| 6 | <i>serious</i> | someone who does not joke is serious |
| 7 | <i>nova</i> | an exploding star |

Task

1. What did Herbert Pinner usually do in his shows?
2. What happened to his predictions?
3. What kind of boy was Herbert?
4. What was different when Herbert was about to start his show one Friday?
5. What did he predict in this show?
6. How did people react to Herbert's prediction?
7. What did Herbert's last prediction really mean?

Notes
