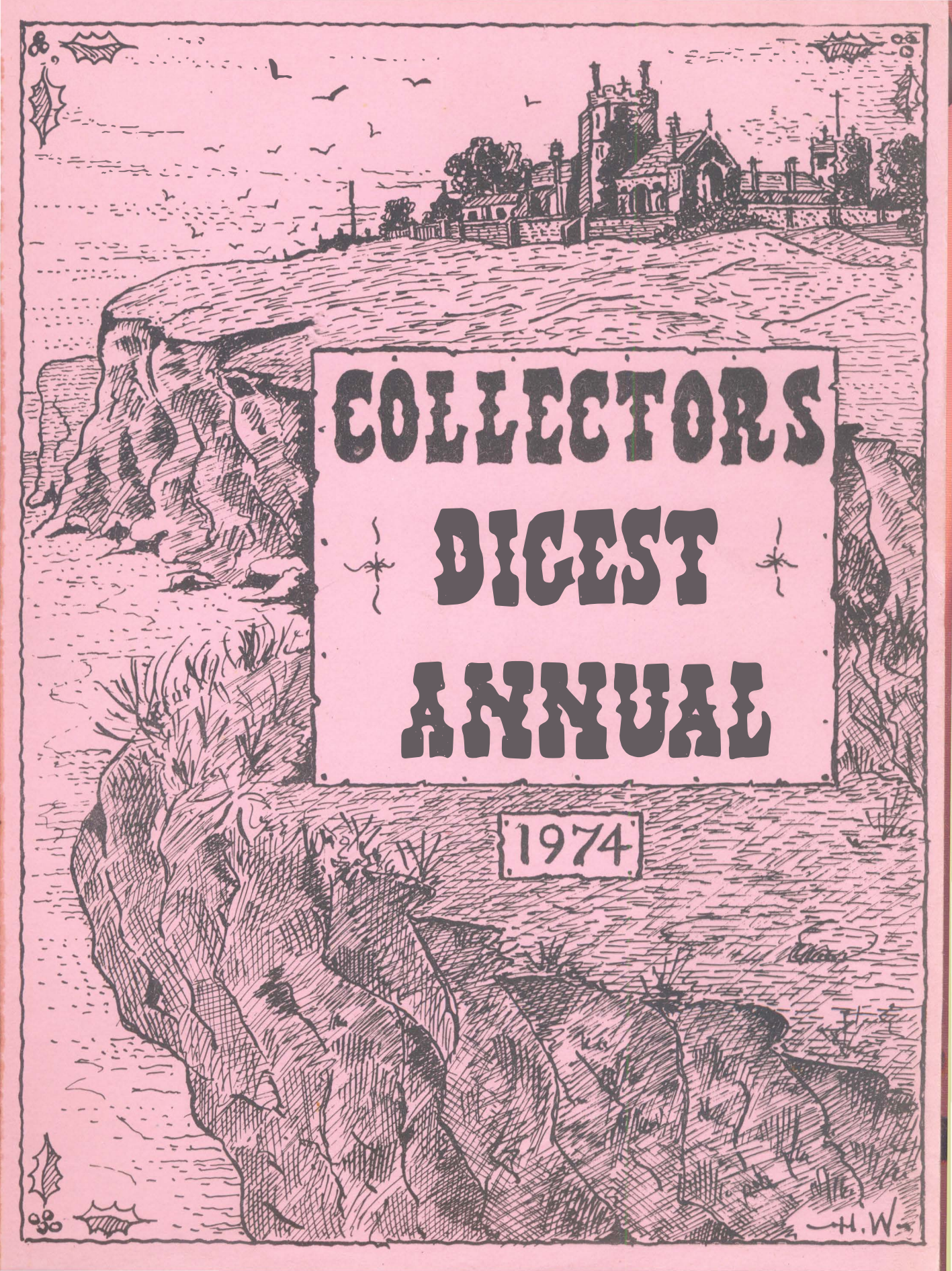

COLLECTORS
DIGEST
ANNUAL
1974
H.W.

Collectors' Digest Annual

CHRISTMAS 1974

TWENTY-EIGHTH YEAR

Editor: ERIC FAYNE, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Road, Crookham, Nr. Aldershot, Hampshire, England

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

As the distance lengthens between the present day and the times about which we write - mainly the first forty years of this century - one might expect that the interest would gradually lessen.

It doesn't, of course. Here we have the 28th edition of the Annual, which is possibly more deeply loved and more keenly anticipated today than it has ever been.

The old barn, where William and his Outlaws played, has undoubtedly been replaced with a supermarket or a skyscraper block of flats; the village of Friardale now consists of a Precinct and a Complex, whatever they may be, and the charm of the surrounding countryside has long disappeared under a motorway plus thousands of little box-like dwellings built round garages; and the holiday in a horse-drawn van or in a picturesque tub on the Thames has become a package affair concerning which we hope for the best.

Many of the things we loved have gone for ever. Yet, with a turn of a page of the Annual, we can bring them back to enjoy again. Perhaps that is why the Annual lives on so persistently.

1974 has not been an easy year for anyone planning ahead, but here we are again. My grateful thanks go to all our enthusiastic and hard-working contributors; to our gallant and loyal printers in York who never let us down; and last, but not least, to you, my splendid band of readers, without whose support none of it would be worthwhile or possible.

My best wishes to you all for a Peaceful Christmas, and a Prosperous and Healthful and Happy New Year.

Your sincere friend and editor,

Eric Fayne

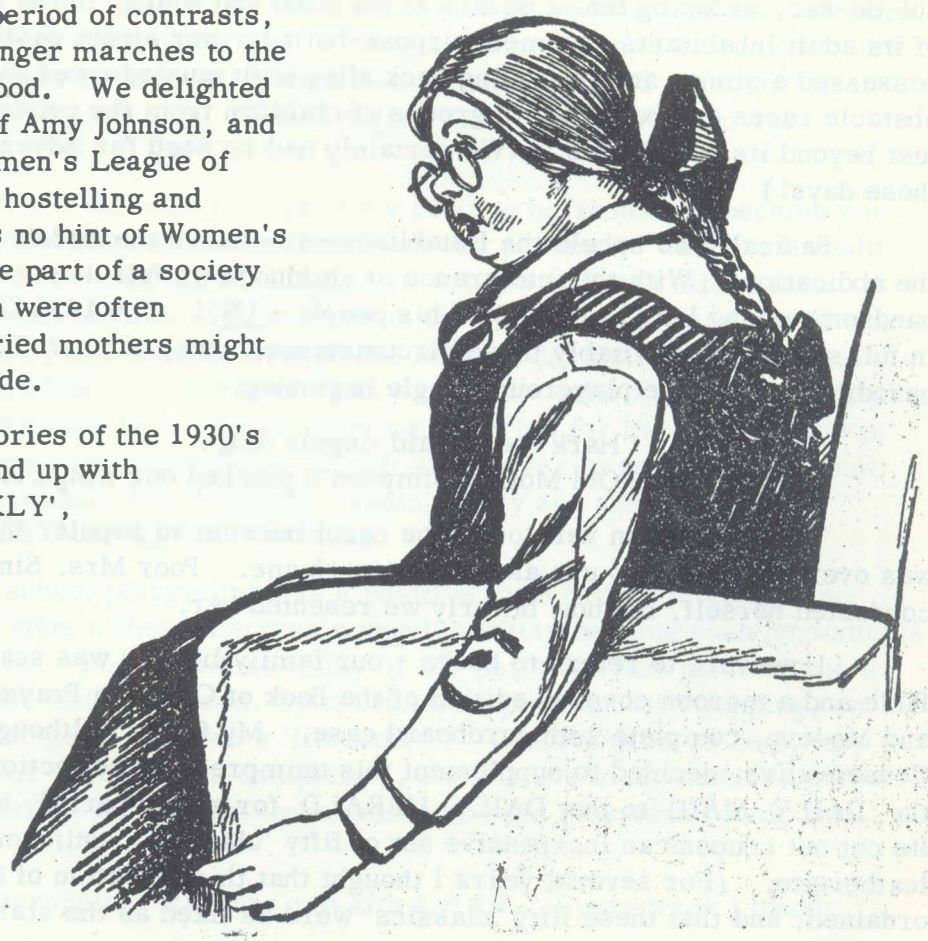
CONTENTS

HOW I BECAME A COLLECTOR

by Mary Cadogan

I am always moved by reminiscent articles in COLLECTORS' DIGEST about the first two decades of this century. In comparison, the '30's' and '40's' may seem brash and unromantic, but to me they represent the expansive years of childhood and adolescence, and it would be easy to invest them with Utopian lustre. As an almost exact contemporary of Shirley Temple, I am largely a product of the nineteen thirties - but more rooted in its wrinkled stockinged, well meaning schoolgirls than the satin-and-slinky-cut-on-the-cross-splendour of Carole Lombard, Myrna Loy and Jean Harlow who in my young days seemed the elusive epitome of that dazzling but slightly tawdry age.

Sometimes, of course, it didn't seem a particularly glamorous business to live through a decade which began with the depression's two and a half million unemployed, and ended in the disaster of total war. It was a period of contrasts, from the anguish of hunger marches to the allurements of Hollywood. We delighted in the flying exploits of Amy Johnson, and the freedom of the Women's League of Health and Beauty - of hostelling and hiking. But there was no hint of Women's Liberation and we were part of a society where divorced women were often ostracized and unmarried mothers might well be driven to suicide.



My early memories of the 1930's seem inextricably bound up with 'TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY', 'THE RAINBOW' and 'PLAYBOX'. Tiger Tim was my first literary love, and I still respond to him, unashamedly. I had a soft spot too for his sister, Tiger Tilly, and her friends the Hippo Girls,

who were of course female counterparts of the Bruin Boys. As well as the most famous and long lived characters in THE RAINBOW, I remember weeping over a serial called PIP OF THE CIRCUS, and gnashing my teeth in weekly bouts of obsessional hatred against the dastardly villain (Captain Blackbeard was his name, I think) in PAT THE PIRATE'S adventures on the comic's back page.

I was one of a generation of avid, omnivorous readers. We read at home - in the living room, in bed, on the lavatory and in the bath (more then one of my books became damaged when I absent-mindedly put them down in the water, and they had to be dried and lovingly ironed out flat, page by page). We read at school - before classes, under the desks and even on the way to school. Supreme bliss for me were long, sunny, uninterrupted, anniseed-ball sucking sessions, reading in the garden hammock. These have been replaced in adult life by putting my feet up on the sofa with sherry, shortbread and a good book.

Looking back it is difficult to see how we found time for our many other activities - card-games, ludo, snakes and ladders, painting and drawing, visits to the cinema, listening to the radio and hours of just sitting and dreaming on the garden swing. To say nothing of the recurring crazes in our street games - marbles, skipping, roller skating, whips and tops, and cycling with paper wedges inserted into our wheels to make pseudo-engine noises. These activities demanded the toughness of concrete and macadamised surfaces - and we were happily living in a traffic-less cul-de-sac, widening into a square at its blind end which, to the endless aggravation of its adult inhabitants, seemed purpose-built for our street pastimes. Our road also possessed a stoney and intriguing back alley with stunted trees and bushes - ideal for obstacle races and battles with groups of children from the council estate who lived just beyond its boundaries. (We certainly had no need for Adventure Playgrounds in those days!)

Basically we upheld the Establishment - but in the middle of the 'thirties came the abdication. With the intolerance of childhood we felt that our idolized and handsome young king had rejected his people - US!! The 1936 Christmas season was in full swing, so inevitably those circumstances which almost divided a nation were parodied in a savage playground jingle beginning:-

"Hark the Herald Angels Sing,
Old Mother Simpson's pinched our King ..."

This abdication version of the carol became so popular that when Christmas was over we put it into use as a skipping rhyme. Poor Mrs. Simpson! How well she conducted herself, but how bitterly we resented her.

However, to return to books - our family library was scanty, consisting of the Bible and a maroon covered edition of the Book of Common Prayer and Hymns, Ancient and Modern, complete with cardboard case. My father, although a passionate Conservative, decided to supplement this unimpressive collection by switching from the DAILY MAIL to the DAILY HERALD for a long period, in order to obtain with its cut out coupons an inexpensive set of fifty 'classics', uniformly bound in brown leatherette. (For several years I thought that this selection of books was God-ordained, and that these fifty 'classics' were as fixed as the stars in their courses.)

They were the pride of my father's life - and mine. He bought a book-case to fit the collection, and at the age of seven and a half I started working through them, devouring Shakespeare, Dickens, Jane Austen, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa Alcott and the Brontës with the same relish that I applied to the adventures of Tiger Tim and Tiger Tilly.

About this time my mother performed one of her occasional inspired actions. I had a few days off school with a feverish cold and, prompted by vague memories of her own girlhood reading about Bessie Bunter, mother went to the newsagent and came back triumphantly waving a copy of THE SCHOOLGIRL. Thus began my fascination with the world of Cliff House School, soon followed by delight in THE MAGNET, which my brother started buying. I discovered that the father of a school friend worked as a printer for the Amalgamated Press, and for years afterwards he used to get me half-price copies of the SCHOOL FRIEND, SCHOOLGIRLS OWN and GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUALS (though I had to wait till after Christmas, as presumably they were unsold returns from booksellers). I loved <u>everything</u> about THE SCHOOLGIRL: its stories, its pictures, its smell, its crispness. As well as Cliff House, and PATRICIA'S chatty hints pages, I adored the irrepressible heroines created by IDA MELBOURNE (Mr. L. E. Ransome): the name of this author seemed as colourful as 'her' characters. Possibly it had specially intriguing associations for me when in my eighth year I realised from family gossip that a distant relative - known as 'Auntie Ida' - was that rare being - a nudist. I shall <u>never</u> forget the thrill of anticipating her visit to our home, nor the dreadful let-down when she arrived fully and trimly clothed! I had to console myself by long contemplation of Auntie Ida's few bizarre touches - her tawny Eton crop, technicolour complexion and the three slave bangles adorning her bare upper arm. How I <u>longed</u> for some flamboyant and <u>unrespectable</u> relations!

About that time I felt the need to expand my reading horizons and became one of the public library's most regular and undiscriminating patrons. One day I would pick up a Dr. Doolittle book, next time it might be a volume of Fairy tales, then perhaps a schoolgirls' story chosen at random from the shelves. It wasn't until one wet summer holiday when I was getting through two books a day that I bitterly discovered one of our local library's inflexible rules - no book could be exchanged again on the day of issue! Hopefully facing an unrelenting librarian for the second time in one day, I was made to feel the same sense of guilt at my over-eagerness that I now experience when, impecunious, I find myself standing early and anxiously on the pavement outside the bank, waiting for it to open.

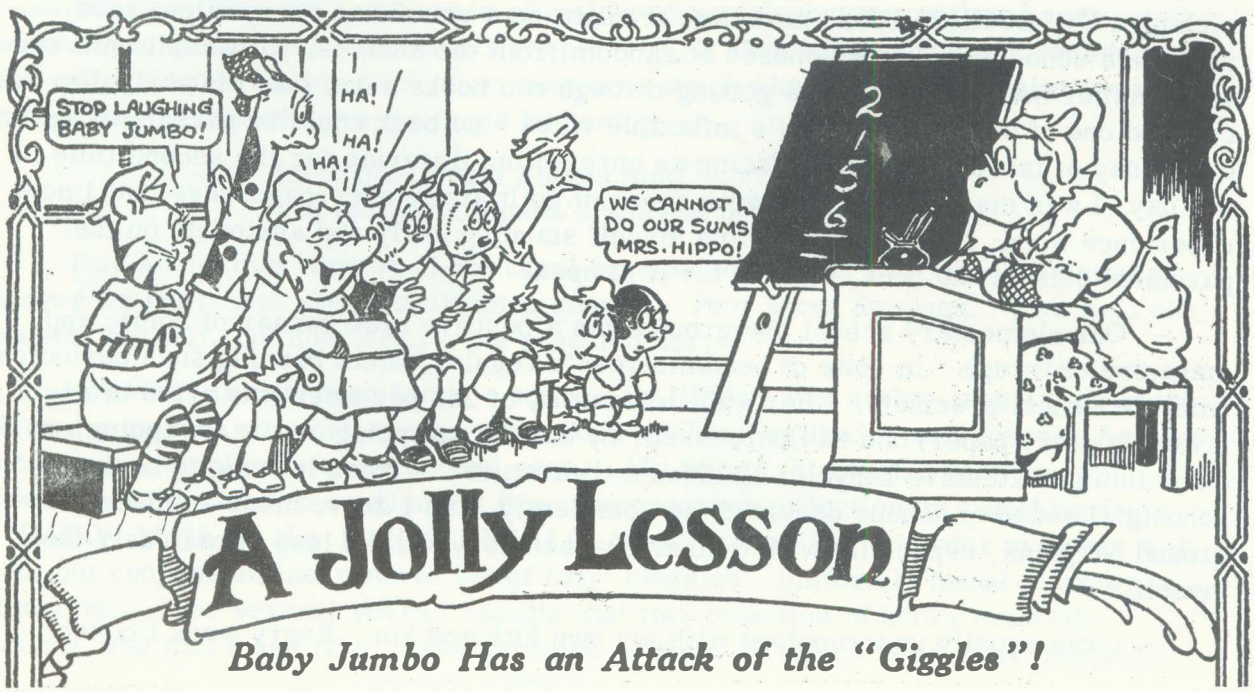
Our elementary school playground was a positive arab bazaar of comic and magazine exchange - in spite of headmistress's regular edicts banning such periodicals from the school precincts. For a modest outlay of 2d. per week (the price of one's favourite story paper) one had purchased, by careful swapping and re-swapping, an entré into an extensive range of children's 'literature'. When it came to books my schoolgirl sense of honour deserted me completely, and I drove many ruthless playground bargains, especially with weaker characters who read less voraciously than myself.

I was equally unscrupulous with my own kith and kin. Every week I bought

THE SCHOOLGIRL and my brother bought THE MAGNET: honour demanded that we each had the right to be first reader of our respective, legitimately purchased papers. However, tossing aside integrity, I discovered that as the two papers were identical in size and shape I could, by slipping the MAGNET inside the SCHOOLGIRL, read it from cover to cover, as soon as it was delivered. I would remain serenely undisturbed by my brother's desperate questioning of the whole family, 'Has anybody seen my MAGNET? Where has it got to?', etc., etc. This ruse succeeded for several weeks, until at last my self-satisfied expression gave the game away and with a whoop of fury my brother discovered his MAGNET inside the SCHOOLGIRL, and extracted vengeance.

My juvenile reading owed a lot to Sunday School. There, I remember, we participated in simple, biblical dramas, were exposed to Magic Lantern Lectures and, pinnacle of joy, given regular and substantial book prizes. These were rewards for good attendance and at least some show of enthusiastic response to the religious instruction imparted by our long-suffering teachers. The prizes were not stinted. We were promoted from simple chorus books, through hymn books to bibles - after that, presumably being unable to attain greater heights, we were given excellent, if slightly old-fashioned, school stories. (Now, ardently collecting out of print titles from charity bookshops, I continue to be impressed by the affluence of Sunday School prizes awarded in the 'twenties and 'thirties - still identifiable by the ornate presentation labels affixed to their flyleaves.)

Further fruitful sources of books were Aunts and Uncles. They were often kind enough to enquire what I wanted for Christmas, or birthdays, and quick as a cornered cowboy on the draw I would reply, 'Please may I have a book?' This answer served a dual purpose: it nearly always resulted in additions to my small library,



and at the same time it ensured that I was not given a doll.

I used to find dolls slightly embarrassing - pretty, but purposeless. However at least one of my dolls is remembered by our family to this day for her brief, butterfly hour of glory. Pennies were not over-plentiful, and one year my devoted mother had laboured long and hard to buy a most beautifully dressed Fairy Doll for me. This was eventually wrested from the top of the Christmas Tree, and publicly I expressed admiration. Privately I relegated it to the ranks of my other dolls, ageing, unused and unloved, huddled together in a heap on the floor of my wardrobe. Every time I opened the door I became increasingly irritated by the silent reproach of this tinselled beauty, and one Saturday morning I suddenly decreed that the Fairy Doll must die! My brother, enlisted as a willing ally, did the digging, and together we conducted her solemn, ritual interment - prolonged and satisfying.

A week or two later, my mother, enquiring about the doll, learned in horror that not only was she buried in our garden but my father had, unknowingly, laid a concrete path over her last resting place.

Nobody ever gave me a doll again: after that I was able to concentrate on books!

A recent exhibition of London in the Thirties emphasized the amazing amalgam of jazz-period and cosiness in the furnishings then common to many homes. Patterned chenille upholstered chairs, with aggressive tubular steel arms and legs, evoked the backcloth of my childhood. Those leaping lady lampstands (now available in reproduction at £30 a time in BIBA), and wooden wireless sets, with art deco rising sun motifs, recalled the exotic pleasures of weekend high teas at home: we used to consume kippers and pomegranates, to an accompaniment of stirring messages from the Chief Ovaltiney on Radio Luxembourg - (remember Harry Hemsley's Elsie, Johnny, Winnie and Baby Horace?) - or the astringent exuberance of Gracie Fields.

There was also the joy of radio dramatization of books - especially in CHILDREN'S HOUR, whose producers gave us exhilarating glimpses into popular, contemporary children's stories, as well as the established classics. The terror of hearing Long John Silver's heavy, uneven footsteps in a CHILDREN'S HOUR version of TREASURE ISLAND has never left me, eclipsing the thrills of subsequent film and television productions.

Halcyon delights of radio were supplemented by weekly bonanzas of Shirley Temple, Laurel and Hardy or Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers at our local Cinema Splendide. No wonder I passed over the more mundane outlets offered me by the Brownies for a few pennies a week, and elected instead to spend my pocket money on weekly tap-dancing classes given in a room over the local Pub. by Miss O'Shea. She was a toothsome charmer who must have only narrowly missed making it on the stage, and as well as 'tap' she taught us an admirable variety of precocious gestures! I still remember the zest with which we flung up our skinny thighs, high-kicking and parroting: -

'If I had one wish to make (kick, kick - SMILE! - shuffle, tap, shuffle, tap). This is the wish I would choose ...' (shuffle, tap, kick, kick - SMILE! - etc.).

I could never put my juvenile finger on what was missing, but I sensed that our performance somehow lacked the appeal of those leggy Hollywood lovelies whom we tried to imitate. This had something to do with the strange assortment of sizes and shapes in our chorus line - we ranged from the ages of 8 to 14 - from bird legs to busty splendour! Occasionally we achieved the fulfilment of taking part in a charity show, when in the heady atmosphere of grease-paint and stage lighting we one-class-a-week chorus liners practised hatred against the 'star' of our troupe. This 12 year-old privileged private lesson taker, in the borrowed glory of adult cami-knickers, would don the inevitable 'SWEET LITTLE ALICE BLUE GOWN' and sing of its tender charms till hardly a Mum in the audience remained dry-eyed.

It was, I suppose, extremely artificial and, like so many of our activities in that decade, an effort to escape from down to earth realities. Perhaps it was this very capacity to transcend the commonplace which retrospectively, or vicariously, intrigues many people today. Without the schism of the war years we could not so easily isolate the 'thirties. Their soaring spirit was soon overlaid by black-outs and bombing, food-shortages and the austerity of skimpy clothes and utility furniture. But our girlhoods teetered on into the forties, when as teenagers we prepared to defend our nineteen-thirties virtues and values against all comers.

The declaration of war in September 1939, co-incided with my entry into grammar school, after passing what in those days we called 'the scholarship'. My new school was satisfying beyond expectation: apart from the fact that it was not by the sea and there was no Greyfriars nearby, it compared favourably with Cliff House in every way - staff, students, classes, games and gym facilities, clubs and societies, etc., etc., etc.

Today's schoolgirls, in nylon tights, mascara and mini-skirts, are very different from us in the early 1940's. We wore crumpled lisle stockings and saggy, shiny serge (one gym-slip lasted me through my five years at grammar school), though

"Here's Sweepup and Polishem Express!" cried Polly.

hopefully we tried to evoke Veronica Lake's peek-a-boo-bang in our hairstyles. I am sure that by no stretch of the imagination could we ever really have resembled her, but this was our one attempt at glamour in school uniform. School authorities demanded that such coiffures should be tied back, if the hair were long enough to touch our shoulders, and constant battles raged over this between 'us' and 'them'. We were scrubbed and sent home if our faces bore traces of lipstick or powder, and if caught in the streets on our way to or from school minus the regulation velour or panama hat, we had to wear it all day in school. (Ghastly humiliation!) We were punished too if discovered eating sweets in school uniform. This rigid protection of our standards of behaviour - reminiscent of ANGELA BRAZIL'S formidable head-mistresses - continued throughout the war, contrasting strangely with the liberality of much of the school's teaching, and the drama of sometimes arriving there in the morning to find that a much loved friend had been killed in last night's air raid.

Another personal tragedy of war for me was the sudden cessation of the MAGNET and SCHOOLGIRL when in May 1940, Hitler's armies over-ran the Scandinavian countries, who had been our main suppliers of paper for 'pulp' magazines. Deprivation of the weekly exploits of Barbara Redfern, Clara Trevlyn, Bessie Bunter and Harry Wharton & Co., was an almost traumatic experience! I switched to another A. P. paper, THE GIRLS'S CRYSTAL, which survived the war, getting smaller and smaller and smaller all the time. But it was not the same - the characters were not so vividly drawn, and I moved on to the GIRLS' OWN PAPER - largely, I think, because I was intrigued with its long-running serial by Captain W. E. Johns, (creator of BIGGLES), about WORRALS OF THE W. A. A. F. Like many of my class-mates I was at that time totally in love with the Royal Air Force. Living in Kent on the German bombers' run in to London brought a terrific sense of involvement with the Battle of Britain, and an almost idolatrous admiration for the R. A. F. fighter pilots who operated from nearly Biggin Hill airfield. We were still young enough to be exhilarated by air-raids, and day-time dog fights - until early September when the whole sky seemed ablaze for days as the docks burned and several hundred bombers pounded the East End for nearly twelve hours at a stretch; these horrors were repeated in the long, savage weeks of nightly air-raids which then followed.

Clothes rationing allowed us little scope for the experimentation in personal attire which today's teenagers take for granted. But, as a change from the navy blue tunic and white blouses of school, padded-shouldered dresses and wedge-heeled shoes seemed the height of elegance. Those were impecunious days, and I responded in full to the Government's exhortations to 'MAKE DO AND MEND': I tore up my brother's old shirts and made handkerchiefs from them, and still remember with what satisfaction I found a way of improvising mascara with a damp, discarded toothbrush and my father's type-writer ribbon.

According to my mother, London was then full of iniquitous threats to the safety of schoolgirls - in the shape of young men in the uniforms of Free France, Free Poland and, most menacing of all, Free America! Until Uncle Sam entered the war, the American male to me and my friends was personified by Gary Cooper, Clark Gable and, later, Alan Ladd. It was disappointing to find that most of the friendly and ubiquitous G. I's whom we came across at dances, on trains and in the cinema - but never at library lectures, cricket matches or tennis parties - bore no resemblance

at all to our craggy, Hollywood heroes. Bland in countenance they were aptly dubbed 'Baby Faces' by many Londoners. Nevertheless their presence added vitality and zest to life, despite justifiable warnings from parents and teachers about what-happened-to-girls-who-went-to-Brighton-with-American-soldiers. (Why, I wondered, did it always have to be Brighton?)

Twice evacuated, but each time quickly returning to London, we became established in a wartime home much larger and grander than our own. Participating in the firewatching rota we learned that neighbouring families who had lived next door to each other for twenty years had literally never 'spoken' until the joint fire-watching patrols were established. The war created extra dimensions of excitement for us schoolgirls: we amassed souvenirs of shrapnel, pieces of destroyed barrage balloons and scraps of fallen aircraft. There were also salvage collecting forays and improvised concerts to raise funds for buying Spitfires. (Like Richmal Crompton's WILLIAM, our earlier efforts to raise money for good causes by arranging entertainments had been disastrous. WILLIAM was always engaging in bitter verbal battles with Arabella Simpkin and other contemptuous members of his audience, who would sit through his shows and refuse to contribute even a half-penny. We found the war changed this, and friends and neighbours would then always willingly pay up for any concert supporting the fighter funds.)

I didn't find congenial the culinary tasks demanded of their juvenile voluntary helpers by British Restaurants - nor those expected of me when I gave my after-school labours to a local nursing home: crudely dicing enormous piles of vegetables, washing up, 'vimming' the knives and sluicing bedpans, etc., were not my forte, and the flame of Florence Nightingale flickered to a rapid standstill within my breast.

"ME A SILLY LITTLE BOY?" SAID WILLIAM. "GOSH! I'VE CONQUERED HALF THE WORLD."

Far more satisfying were my efforts to help the nation's war effort as a member of the Women's Junior Air Corps. This was a twice-a-week-after-school and one-monthly-Church-parade-on-Sundays activity, into which I was originally co-erced because my mother worked for the brother of the 'commanding officer'. However, with my contemporaries, I was madly air-minded so I revelled in the aircraft recognition classes, and learning the morse code, as well as joint church parades, sports days and dances with the

boys of the Air Training Corps. (We always seemed to dance to the synthetic strains of YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE, MY MAMMA DUN TOLD ME, GETTING SENTIMENTAL OVER YOU and MOONLIGHT SERENADE.)

The saluting, drilling and uniform felt rather phoney, but I womanfully completed the first aid and home nursing courses, though I never had occasion to use the knowledge thus acquired. This was perhaps fortunate - as the Red Cross techniques were notorious for their changeability: by the time a course had been completed, the procedure for burns, for instance, had always become obsolete.

My efforts at growing vegetables ('DIG FOR VICTORY') to feed the nation never came to much, though many of my more stalwart school-mates were extremely productive, on allotments cut from our school hockey-fields, where long ago Henry the Eighth was supposed to have courted Anne Boleyn - on horse-back, of course. In retrospect I consider that my greatest contribution to the war effort was the endless amount of time I seemed to spend queueing outside shops on my mother's instructions for Kennedy's pies and sausages, dried milk, and other special items of foodstuffs in short supply.

Schooldays ended - and in the last months of the war I started work at the B. B. C. as a secretary with 'WORKERS' PLAYTIME'. Some time earlier I had got fed up with the GIRLS' OWN PAPER and so no longer read a juvenile magazine. In common with many of my generation, I had given all my comics and story papers for salvage - to my later deep regret. It was not until early in 1970 that, through an EXCHANGE & MART Howard Baker advertisement for MAGNET reprints, I discovered COLLECTORS' DIGEST and the OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB - and my collecting days began in earnest! ●

* * *

ALL THE VERY BEST FOR CHRISTMAS and the NEW YEAR

NORMAN SHAW

MERRY CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to all my wonderful friends. Still after Knockouts numbered one to ten, and any Magics, plus Filmstar Weeklies of the Thirties.

BILL WRIGHT

147 ST. HILDA'S WAY, GRAVESEND, KENT, DA12 4AZ.

STILL WANTED: Thriller 588, "Front Line Cameraman." Sexton Blake Library 171 and 723, "Crimson Conjurer". 102, "Amber Room". 470, "Sealed Room" (Stuart). 667, "Black Feather" (Gregory). 641, "Three Frightened Men" (Gray).

DEREK SMITH

14 CRESCENT LANE, CLAPHAM, LONDON SW4 9PU.

THREE 'CAPTAIN' AUTHORS

by H. Truscott

THE CAPTAIN, established in 1899, was patriotic; was there ever a boys' paper that was not, to say nothing of adult magazines? To the extent that papers like the BOYS' OWN PAPER and THE CAPTAIN took it, it was neither wholly good nor wholly bad. It taught some good principles, but also failed to show the real truth behind patriotism, which is that there is an equal amount of good in the mass of individuals that make up the "enemy", as there is an equal amount of bad in ourselves; that patriotism, in fact, is not only truly international rather than narrowly national, but that it recognises the bad in one's own country's history as well as that in others. To have admitted this would have been anathema to such papers as THE CAPTAIN or, later, THE SCOUT.

However, I am grateful to THE CAPTAIN, since it brought out some of the finest school story writers in the history of this form of literature. Among those who, if they did not all appear for the first time in its pages, were certainly sponsored by this paper in some of their best work, were Fred Swainson, R. H. Warren Bell, Gunby Hadath, Richard Bird, Hylton Cleaver, James Duncan, Stuart Wishing and, perhaps its greatest catch, P. G. Wodehouse; this is apart from such purely adventure story writers as Percy F. Westerman, W. Bourne Cook and Frederick Watson.

Gunby Hadath was a fairly prolific author of both full-length and short stories of school life. Hamilton once affected not to know of him, in his answer to Orwell ("Who is Gunby Hadath?") but I feel sure he knew and had read some of Hadath's work. Gunby Hadath was a brilliant short story writer - in this field I have no hesitation in applying to him the term 'master'. There are any number to choose from, including a fine collection called ACCORDING TO BROWN MINOR, but I have picked a little gem called AN EASY FIRST, subtitled A Story of Stories. This concerns Mr. Mellish, English master, disgusted with the crop of essays he receives, trying to stimulate a little imagination in his class by allowing, indeed, encouraging, them to write a story each, spread over most of the term, the stories to be read by him on an afternoon he will choose, and the prize a set of Waverley novels. One boy, Edgington, already has a certain literary aura around him, for he has an aunt who has published a book on bumble bees, and he has displayed a certain literary ability himself. Naturally, the other boys are disgruntled and consider that the prize is a certainty for Edgington; but he offers to help them by supplying them each with a plot for their story, since it is well known that numbers of authors, Shakespeare included, have borrowed their plots. At last all, except two, accept this offer, since none of them are able to think of a plot; the exceptions are Slater, who considers it isn't fair and goes off on his own, and little Robinson, the worst boy in the form at any sort of English, who is nonetheless determined to do this on his own. He eventually announces that he has the names of his hero and heroine, and tells Slater what they are, warning him at the same time not

to bag them. Later, Robinson has a moment of pure happiness when he thinks of his villain's name. In the meantime, Edgington has supplied the other seven boys with their plots, each pledged to keep his plot a secret from the others, while Slater haunts the school library, looking and looking at the well worn and well read books there, and scowling proportionately. At last he finds one which looks new, published five years earlier, pages uncut, obviously not read, called THE DOOM OF SACHAVELL, by Curtice Ascotte. This he gleefully plunders.

When the time comes for reading the stories, Mr. Melliship is at first rather pleased with the first result, Edgington's, but as he goes from one to another, and finds each boy writing, with slightly different wording, the same beginning, which always features a pedlar staggering up a hill in the sunset, he becomes a little suspicious. For relief, he turns to Slater's, and is agreeably surprised to find how different this is. He puts this one by, tells Slater he is disqualified, and is just announcing that there will be no prize when little Robinson reminds him that he has not read his effort. He finds the slim book, opens it and reads:

THE REDSKIN'S PREY

by Joseph Robinson

Edward Smith	..	..	..	a Hero
Ann Smith	..	..	..	a Heroine
John Smith	..	..	..	a Villain

"It was noon when Edward Smith, and Ann Smith, and John Smith came through the wood. The redskin watched them from behind a bush and sharpened his knife upon his mockasins. 'Their scalps are mine', he said. TO BE CONTINUED."

'Mr. Melliship laughed, and when he had finished laughing the Waverleys had tumbled back to the table. He motioned Robinson to come and pick them up.

"Robinson," he said, "your story is a little on the short side, and it seems somewhat deficient in finishing power. Moreover, moccasins is not spelled in that way. But the prize is yours, Robinson. You have, as it were, finished alone, and the prize is undoubtedly yours. And next term," he continued, when the winner had returned to his place, "next term, boys, we will go back to our essay writing."

"Please, no more stories!" cried Robinson, fervently.

"No; no more stories," smiled Mr. Melliship.

"Thank goodness for that!" said Robinson under his breath.

"But, sir," Slater protested that same evening, "you never said, sir, why you disqualified me."

Mr. Melliship eyed him queerly, without a smile. "It is like your nerve, Slater," he said, "to ask me. There is a book entitled THE DOOM OF SACHAVELL, which was written by an author called Curtice Ascotte."

"But, sir," cried Slater, unawares, "nobody has ever read THE DOOM OF SACHAVELL!"

"Nobody has!" said Mr. Melliship, sadly. "But somebody wrote it. A fellow who called himself Curtice Ascotte, a person you know as Mr. Melliship. Exactly, Slater - me!" '

This is a fair sample of Hadath's quality in his short stories, which have also a wide variety in their choice of subject; the one thing they have in common is their excellence, plus, of course, the fact that they all turn on some aspect of school life, and one that needs no stretch of the imagination to accept. His stories, and those of the CAPTAIN authors I have already listed, were about school, and concerned perfectly natural school events. They were, of course, rarely writing about the same characters, even when the stories concerned the same school.

In his larger stories Hadath was far more variable. His writing was as good, but the ideas put forward were at times more equivocal. THE NEW HOUSE AT OLDBOROUGH, the first story by Hadath I ever read, and, in fact, the first school story I ever read, is one that shows both his excellence and his weakness. Like all of Hadath's books, it has a strong story. It has become necessary to form a new

House, because of the increasing number of boys. To be fair, so that the new House shall not start at a disadvantage with the other Houses, the Head details a number of boys of each year from each of the other four Houses, Nation's, School, Green's and Markham's - to start off the New House. It seems reasonable, and it was probably the least unfair way to do it; but boys do not always see adults' reason to be reasonable, and naturally there are a number who bitterly resent being thus pitchforked from the House they were accustomed to into the new one that had all its traditions to build. This is what causes the trouble and the story, with Big Rudge the leading senior character and Buckingham his enemy, but acting friendly colleague. Buckingham, a popular boy but no whale on duty, is in line for the position of captain of Green's, since the present captain, Mason, is likely to accept a position out East very shortly. Since this is an established House, where, as Buckingham puts it, the job will be a 'cushy' one, he is looking forward to it. But the Head offers him the captaincy of the New House, which Buckingham, as is his right, refuses. When the transfer is made a few days later, he finds not only that Big Rudge has been given the captaincy of the New House, but that he himself is also transferred as second-captain.

Here are all the ingredients of a good yarn, with a quite natural situation, given the particular characters involved. Hadath's style is of high quality, and there is little of the sentimentality which marred the work of some of his predecessors and contemporaries; in Hadath's case, there is one exception in this matter, and this is in the concept of patriotism - a false patriotism, smacking more of sentiment than of commonsense or right thinking. It appears mainly in his earlier work, and there is a prime example in THE NEW HOUSE. The story begins with a cross country run, and a new boy, Tryon, who finds the going difficult. He sees a boy of his own House who, showing all the signs of beating the leaders, is blanketed by two or three of another House, "impeding him and throwing him out of his stride and making dashes and darts in front of his path." The feeling of injustice this engenders in Tryon causes him to cheat by taking a short cut and actually arriving home first. But the boy who is second challenges the result; he is actually one of the boys who had been harrowing the boy Tryon was watching earlier. This second boy home, Perrin, is surprised when Tryon smilingly admits his cheat, and not at all pleased when Tryon goes on to say why he did it. Tryon is taken to Big Rudge, who is in charge of all athletics in Nation's, and he teaches Tryon what he calls his 'catechism'. Tryon admits to Rudge that he did it really for a joke, but "even then I shouldn't have done it, Rudge, if those fellows of Green's hadn't interfered with the Nation's man leading." "Yes," said Big Rudge for the third time, "of course that blanketing will happen. But it's open and above board and what you expect; every man must look after himself in the scramble home." Which is exactly what Tryon did; but apparently, in this curious code, if you cheat openly your cheat is fair. So Rudge teaches Tryon his catechism: 'I'm a little tick and I've only just come, but I ought to feel fearfully braced to have got into Oldborough, because Oldborough is the finest school in the world, and Nation's is the finest House in the School; so long as I'm here I've to remember that by going dead straight, and that no single person counts a tuppeny bit compared to the good of the School and the good of the House. And that's all I need to know to be going on with.' And Rudge adds, "That's your catechism. Freeze on to it. Always." Freeze on to it; this is a favourite saying of Rudge.

All right; there is sense in this catechism. Obviously a school, like a ship, cannot be run on the personal desires of any one person. It is expressed a little sentimentally, but it makes sense, and I can accept it (apart from the curious idea of fairness, which is scarcely to be reconciled with going 'dead straight'). What I cannot accept is the false patriotism Hadath makes Rudge teach Tryon later in the book. Rudge has not liked the transfer to the New any more than anyone else, but he hides his feelings and sets to work, against certain awkward obstacles, to make a going concern of the New House. He has occasion to revise the catechism he once taught Tryon. He asks the boy which is the finest House in the School, and Tryon answers "Nation's And Nation's is the finest House, isn't it, Rudge?" Rudge answers, "It was. But - my country - right or wrong - eh? - how does that go?" "Please, I don't understand," Tryon says (and I don't blame him; it would fox me, too). "That means your catechism has got to be altered. The New House is the finest House in the School." "But it isn't," murmurs Tryon. Rudge's answer is "If I tell you it is, it is." Which smacks very much to me of one of the worst aspects of dictatorship; but worse than that is the false notion of patriotism which is pushed home here. "My country right or wrong." What a weight of evil has been caused by this pernicious doctrine, which will readily accept as right what is done by one's own country (as fallible as any other, made up, as it is, of ordinary human beings), no matter how wicked.

This attitude is the reverse of patriotic - it is, rather, jingoistic, as it is certainly inherently selfish; it is of no more real use to one's own country than is mother - or father - love which cannot bear to check a child when it is heading for disaster, and it has caused trouble throughout history; no country has been exempt from the pollution and devastation it brings in its train. Nor has it disappeared; Rudge, and others like him, are ready both to recognise that what their country does in a particular instance would be wrong in any other and to condone it because their country does it. When the Nazis did precisely the same we fought them: I wonder why? The real reason, I mean.

When I first discovered THE NEW HOUSE AT OLDBOROUGH I lapped it up. I was only seven at the time and too young to realise the falsity of this argument. Criticism came later; and with criticism I still recognised, and recognise today, the power of Hadath's writing. As he got older Hadath softened this type of approach considerably, as books like THE SWINGER, THE LOST LEGION, THE BRIDGE-HEAD and BRENT OF GATEHOUSE clearly show.

Richard Bird is rather variable in quality, but at his best, which is most of the time, he is a quite subtle writer and frequently comes close to the master class. I make no apology for dealing with two of his novels: THE RIPSWAYD RING, which exhibits also one or two of his rare weaknesses, and THE DIPCOTE SKIPPERS. Like Hadath's THE NEW HOUSE, both of these stories have to do with House trouble, but not in the same way, nor are they like each other. The plot of THE RIPSWAYD RING is certainly individual; it, too, concerns the formation of a new house - but of a different kind from that at Oldborough. Ripswayd has dayboys ('daybugs' to the other boys) as well as boarders. Many of the rules, particularly concerning compulsory games, which apply to boarders have not in the past applied to dayboys. A new Headmaster, Burton, decides that it is time the dayboys took as

large a part in school activities as the rest, and forms them into a House; two dayboy Sixth Formers, Best and Jacks, are given their monitor's cap, and Best is made captain of the new House. There is, as in Hadath's story, considerable opposition; it is much more difficult to run the dayboys as a House, as Best points out, and the dayboys as a whole have so far enjoyed their freedom from the restraints which bind the boarders; therefore, many do not welcome the new arrangements and resist Best's authority as captain. After a while, however, most settle down and accept the inevitable. There are two who do not - two especially, that is: Horton and Heap. The latter is a big, lazy boy and up against anything in the shape of work. But Horton is a different story. He is the son of the manager of the local theatre, and loves to swank; he thinks a great deal of himself, but is a coward, as he shows before the story is finished. He takes Best, in the interval of a Shakespeare play, to see the principal actor in the performance in his dressing-room; Best is left alone for a few minutes, and when the actor returns he misses a valuable (or so he says) ring that he claims Irving gave him. The actor accuses Best, simply because he seems to have been the only person left alone in the room - which is not quite true, because Horton was there for a minute or so before leaving the room. No-one really believes Best guilty, except the actor, but many boys dislike the captain, and so make things uncomfortable for him. On top of this valuables begin to disappear from other Houses, although it is evident that Best could not be responsible for these thefts; but it all adds fuel. Also, Best begins to receive anonymous letters of a particularly nasty kind, stating his guilt, suggesting that he give himself up, etc. Eventually Merryweather, the porter, proves to be the school thief, Horton and Heap responsible for the anonymous letters, and the actor writes to say that he has found his ring embedded in a tin of coco butter that he had been heating the evening Horton took Best to see him. It could have dropped in accidentally, but the fact that Horton dallied for a moment before leaving the room suggests that he put the ring in the tin in order to cause exactly the trouble that did ensue.

It is mainly a good story, well told, on the whole; the Ripswayd Ring, incidentally, is not the actor's lost trinket but a group of boys got together by Jacks to try to prove Best's innocence by finding the guilty party. They do not succeed, but a detective called in by the Head does, as far as the school thefts are concerned. Jacks, like one or two other characters in Bird's school stories, seems to be modelled on Wodehouse's Psmith, or is a remarkable coincidence. The one really irritating thing in the book, for me, is Best's remarks when Holinshed, the actor, suspects him, and asks him to turn out his pockets. "You cad!" said Best, losing his temper. "I'll see you in Jericho first!" This is heroics with a vengeance. What would anyone else have thought? Left alone in the room, the ring gone. After all, the actor has only just been introduced to Best. Why should he automatically believe the boy to be a model of purity? But, apparently, by this code, he should have done; and for suspecting the perfectly natural thing, Holinshed is a cad. The man obviously was no gentleman!

THE DIPCOTE SKIPPERS is a better story, better told. There are no heroics of the kind I have just described with Best, but more humour, including an even more Psmithian character in Beaton. Incidentally, seldom do we learn a boy's first name or names in a Richard Bird story. Whatt, who expected to be captain of

Chatham's House, is very disgruntled when Collier gets it instead, as well as the school captaincy, and declines to pull with Collier, preferring to nurse a grudge. This rift is helped along by a new senior, Clark, from New Zealand, who proves to be the primary cause of most of the trouble. Matters are not improved by the fact that Mr. Chatham, housemaster of the House which bears his name, is a weak, rather ineffectual man, preferring to be left in peace. Mr. Baxendale ('Bax') is second to Chatham, and the real ruler of the House; he is much respected, and it is well for the House that he is worthy of the respect. Quite a cause of trouble is an institution of Clark's, poker played for money, and this Collier has to try to stamp out. It is aggravated by the fact that Watt, as an indulgence of his fancied grievance, is one of the poker players and virtually dares Collier to do anything about it. A curious coincidence is that another of the poker-playing prefects is named Wharton.

The style here is much lighter than in THE RIPSWAYD RING, as it is also in another of Bird's finest stories, THE MORELEIGH MASCOT. In fact, as soon as Bird lightens his style and infuses into his work the humour he manages extremely well everything goes along on a very high level. These two stories are altogether nearer to the Wodehousian, although I should be unfair if I managed to convey the impression that Bird was simply copying Wodehouse. THE DIPCOTE SKIPPERS, in any case, antedates the appearance of THE LOST LAMBS, in which Psmith made his first appearance, although it is true that Psmith had premonitory twitches in earlier characters in some of Wodehouse's short stories of Wrykyn. I believe that what of Bird's work suggests the Wodehouse was, by a mere matter of date, quite independent, but even if there are elements of his style which were sparked off by some suggestion from Wodehouse, this was absorbed and the result is Richard Bird's.

Here is a sample of Bird's writing, from THE DIPCOTE SKIPPERS:

' "How did it happen, Mary?" asked Matron.

"Young Master Pettigrew," said Mary. "He held the tablecloth out level, so I thought it was part of the table. When I put the plate down on it, he let go - his hands were underneath."

"Well, Pettigrew?" demanded Mrs. Salkeld, as Mary gathered up the debris of the plate.

"I was thinking," observed Pettigrew, the brightest brain of all the Lower Study. Bright, that is, in schemes of rascality, though not at Latin prose. "My hands got under the cloth, somehow - I suppose ----"

"Report yourself to Mr. Baxendale after tea," said the judge, cutting short the plea, "and see what he thinks about it. And no meat for you tonight!"

The last punishment did not seem likely materially to affect Pettigrew's temper or girth. He explained in a loud and offensive whisper to his allies, Blythe, Duckworth and Sands, that he did not care, because:-

(1) Both tongue and ham had been bought cheap, having been kept too long.
(2) He had had two Regular Gorges before leaving home that day.
(3) He had tons of grub in his tuck-box.

"Liar!" said Sands, with genial simplicity. He was a creature whose conversation was conducted, chiefly in monosyllables. "Here, you chaps; sub up."

With kindly communism, Sands, Blythe and Duckworth divided their portions and gave a third to their comrade. This he received literally with both hands and appreciative thanks. Despite his recent assertions and the regular gorges, great and rapid progress was made.'

o O o

Warren Bell, editor of THE CAPTAIN, was simply a brilliant story-teller, and especially of school stories. He was a master, with only one drawback, that I could ever see: he did not write nearly enough. I think I have read almost every published story by him, and I do not know one which falls below a very high standard indeed. His one major school is Greenhouse, and perhaps his finest story of this

school is GREEN OF GREYHOUSE; from any point of view, this tale, of Charlie Green, Meadshire scholar, is as true as fiction can make it. That is to say, issues are not shirked, yet the tale has a bloom that attracts which does not, in my opinion, belong to Alex Waugh's LOOM OF YOUTH, for instance, although there is a certain link between the two stories on the score of material. Admittedly, Waugh does deal with the intrusion of sexual matters, though not to anything like the extent that later debunkers of the public school system have indulged their appetite for this feature; Warren Bell does not, although there may be a very slight suggestion in a short story called TWO SUNDAY NIGHTS, which concerns Sir Billy, subject of one of Bell's long stories of post-school life, and Parsnip; but, as with Frank Richards, one feels no lack of an essential in the picture because of the absence of this feature.

Most of these writers knew of the sex behaviour, and the bullying, too, because these things are not confined to public schools and they were not fools. The sex they rightly did not treat at all and they made no major issue of bullying, because in most such schools it was not a major issue. Nine out of ten boys, in such school environment, unless they are young thugs, do learn to come to terms with their fellows and work out a reasonable way of living with them - and the exceptions have a bad time, largely brought on by themselves. This is remarkably well shown by Warren Bell, who never shirked the bullying issue, but saw it in its true place and perspective. GREEN OF GREYHOUSE is a particularly fine example of his work from this point of view, in which boys are shown both indulging in and coping with bullying; in other words, learning to live.

There is much humour, as well, in the tale of Charlie Green. Humour, in any case, is a fairly large item in Bell's stock-in-trade, as I think it had to be in that of almost any writer of school stories who hoped for a continuing public, and Swainson and one other, Edwy Searles Brooks, are the only big figures I can think of in this field who were deficient in this quality. As an example of Warren Bell's humour, here is the beginning of a short story from a collection called GREYHOUSE DAYS, all of which appeared originally in THE CAPTAIN: the title of this particular tale is CAREFUL BILL'S BROTHER:

' "I say, who are you shoving?"

"Oh, sorry!" replied the boy with the fair hair. "Who am I?"

Now, Coventry, though not a bully, was hardly what you would call a very gentle gentleman. In fact, he was a rough one.

"Toby," he observed to his friend Street, "did you hear that?"

"Yes," said Street, another of the gang which was almost certainly to be found at the tuckshop counter immediately after dinner every day. "Tell him."

"I am known to my intimates," said the first speaker to the boy with the fair hair, "as Jack Johnson, on account of the terrific punch I have. When some youth errs, and needs punishment other than what is magisterial or prefectorial - you know these long words, I hope - the cry is: 'Send him to Coventry'. That, briefly, is who you are shoving. May I request your card?"

"My name's Welsh," said the fair-headed boy.

"Welsh?" replied Coventry. "The name seems familiar. Any relation to Careful Bill, of that ilk?"

"Do you mean my brother who left last term?"

"Carefully winning an eighty-pound scholarship to Cambridge before doing so. The same! Toby, do you hear this? Careful Bill has sent us a brother!"

Charles Welsh grinned awkwardly, and, not knowing what else to say, unwisely asked: "Why did you call him Careful Bill?"

For he might have known that his precise, orderly, prudent, studious elder brother, whose hair was always brushed, whose clothes were always neat, who never had a button off or a bootlace undone, who was never late, and whose study was a model of tidiness, would be sure to earn some such nickname.

"Because," said Coventry gravely, "he saved up all his crusts and sent them home once a week to

be made into bread-pudding."

Now at this insult Charles Welsh should have smitten Coventry - no matter what his self-advertised reputation - well and hard on the nose, but, being nonplussed by the glib chaff of these hardened wits, he merely grinned again as he said, "Well, I'm not careful. What'll you have?"

"This is good hearing!" cried Coventry, who was a greedy beast. "The streak doesn't run in the family. Corporal, pass down my special box." He turned to Welsh: "Does your invitation include my friend Toby?"

"Anybody," replied Charles Welsh, like a lord of the manor scattering silver among the churls.'

This extract opens what is actually a quite serious story, and the touch is exactly right. It is light, there is humour seen through a boy's mind, and there are Warren Bell's own quite different humorous comments. Also, lightly humorous though this extract is, we have been enabled very cleverly to gather a fair amount of information about these three youths; Coventry and Street are not specially bad, but they are certainly not specially good - in fact, they are average boys, Coventry with a flair for a certain kind of wit. Welsh is natural, also trying to feel his feet, and therefore inclined at present to go along with things he will not wish to alter. All this is subtly put over in the extract quoted.

Apart from the school stories as such, Warren Bell was fond of writing about ex-Greyhouse boys in their early careers: THE DUFFER was one, SIR BILLY another; and COX'S COUGHDROPS was unique in that from a beginning in a preparatory school it passed to a public school. Perhaps the best, certainly one of the most interesting, of the post-school stories, because it retained a connection with school, was SMITH'S WEEK, which concerned the efforts of Robert Smith to obtain a post, in spite of his father's opinion that his son had left Greyhouse "without, apparently, having learnt to do anything but box." He takes a post as senior master (this is his first post) at the Hill House, a private preparatory school, and the story is of his experiences there. I have picked one episode, to show the story's quality and, at the same time, some of Warren Bell's. There is evidence of a certain lack of disciplinary control in the school when Smith arrives; true, the Head, Mr. Wittering, is in bed with influenza, and has just been joined by his wife, who has the same complaint. There is a master, Mr. Williams, whose character is sufficiently indicated by the fact that he is often referred to as 'the old woman', and there is a languages master, Herr Vogelhasset, who has no great control over the boys. Corporal punishment is looked on askance, and quite forbidden in the school. Apart from these, there is Elsie, the Witterings' sixteen year old daughter, who has on her young shoulders the business of trying to keep the school together. When Smith arrives, he learns that there has been a mistake and that he is the wrong Mr. Smith; he is prepared to leave but, with her parents both on the sick list, Elsie asks him to stay for the present and really be a senior master. He agrees to try. He has trouble from many of the seniors, who are used to doing as they like, and from Mr. Williams and Herr Vogelhasset, both of whom naturally resent having a young whipper-snapper put above them. Bob manages to get a reasonable order in his classes, because he shows from the start that he is not going to stand nonsense, and that the boys are there to work. Admittedly, it is the younger boys he is dealing with. On the other hand, from the classrooms where Mr. Williams and the German officiated there comes a constant babel.

Smith's real trouble comes with the top form, the Fourth, with an age range from fourteen to sixteen. Bob's stature is deceptive; he is short, and his build gives

little or no indication of his prowess as a boxer, which is considerable; many of these seniors are taller than he. The real trouble comes when Smith finds one of them, Pearce, tall and weedy, ragging in the entrance hall and making a good deal of noise, showing little consideration for the invalids. Smith tells him to stop but the moment Smith turns away Pearce continues. Bob tells him to go to the classroom, which he does, grudgingly, only after impertinence and Bob's rather roughly pushing him towards the door. A few minutes later he is back continuing his rotting. Once more Bob dismisses Pearce towards the door with a push, and this provokes more insolence, which terminates in Bob's smacking his face hard and running him quickly into the cloakroom, where Bob administers a sound cuffing. Mr. Williams bustles in and is horrified; nothing like this has ever happened at the Hill House before. Williams puts his arm round the blubbing Pearce and takes him away. Later:

'In the interval Mr. Williams approached Smith in the playground.

"Smith, you hurt that chap," he said.

"Did I?" said Bob, carelessly.

"He complained about his head in school, and I sent him to Miss Bickley. He's lying down now."

"Must be made of pretty poor stuff if he can't stand what I gave him," said Bob.

"He is made of pretty poor stuff," said Williams warmly. "He was sent here on that account. Wasn't considered strong enough for a public school."

"He's strong enough to be deliberately insolent," snapped Bob, "and that's a thing I won't stand."

"Well," said Mr. Williams, gravely, "I should advise you to be careful, Smith. There's be no end of a row about this when the Chief comes down. You might as well, in fact, be packing your portmanteau now, as when he receives my report your job here won't be worth a shilling's purchase."

Bob gazed astounded at his colleague.

"So you include in your duties here that of an informer?" he asked.

"I shall certainly tell the Chief that you have been knocking the boys about," said Mr. Williams, a fleck of colour in his cheeks.

"Will you also tell the Chief why I found it necessary to knock them about - as you call it?" asked Bob.

"That will not be necessary. The rule is that no corporal punishment is to be employed. And, let me add, giving a boy, in a moment of temper, a smack for impertinence, is a very different thing to fighting a boy so hard that he has to go sick."

"Williams," said Bob, with feeling, "you're an old woman. If I 'fought' that boy, as you call it, he probably would have to go sick. As it is - well, I'll look him up."

And off went Bob, with his nippy step, to the upper regions of the Hill House. Not knowing which room enjoyed the doubtful honour of Pearce's occupancy, he made his way to the sanctum of Miss Bickley, the superintendent of the bedroom and wardrobe department, and just now deputising for Mors. Wittering in other spheres. She was prim and slight, with thin lips and a sharp manner.

Bob knocked, then went in.

"Oh, er ---" he said, "I want Pearce."

"You are Mr. Smith, I believe?" said Miss Bickley, her needle flashing in and out of a sheet she was repairing.

"Yes," said Bob.

"Then I don't think Pearce will want to see you, Mr. Smith," said Miss Bickley, biting off an end of cotton with a snap that had nothing friendly about it.

"That is a matter for me to decide," replied Bob, shortly. "Which is his room, please?"

"Nine," said Miss Bickley. Bob thought of the women who sat beneath the guillotine and counted the heads Robespierre chopped off. "But let me say again that I think he ought to be left to himself. If he is not better by this afternoon, I shall ask the doctor to see him. You have no right, Mr. Smith, to punish a delicate boy with such brutality."

"I am not asking for your opinions," said Bob, who felt that politeness was thrown away on this human needle. "I simply wish to find out how this boy is for myself."

"Nevertheless, I shall beg leave to express my opinions," retorted Miss Bickley, as Bob got out.

Smith did not feel too comfortable as he searched for Room 9. He knew it took very little to lay some fellows up. He experienced a considerable amount of relief, therefore, when he discovered the wounded warrior, sprawled full length on his bed, munching chocolate and perusing one of the late Mr. Henty's works.

"Well, how's the invalid?" he said, advancing briskly to the bedside.

"None the better for seeing you," said Pearce, munching his chocolate.

"And none the better for being a rotten sham," was Bob's terse retort as he left the room.'

In this succinct, tersely expressed account, Warren Bell has highlighted a very real problem. The working out is no less real and well observed. The no corporal punishment rule is all right so long as masters do not mind their classes being a shambles; but even so, there is no education, except of the wrong sort, in this set up. And such situations have by no means died out; indeed, by our improved educational system they have materially increased; and copies of Mr. Williams are still about. Bob is not a bully, but Mr. Williams is a coward, in two ways: afraid of losing his job, and afraid of the boys; between the two his life is hell, but he clings to it, since it is all he knows. The boys at the point at which I have left the quotation do not like Bob, but they respect him. They will never have the same respect for Mr. Williams, or look on him as anything but a weakling of whom they can take advantage; his protection is thrown away on them. Most of Warren Bell's stories do highlight very real problems in this way; in addition, they are first-class entertainment. ●

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A letter from St. Frank's

by Nelson Lee

I have been asked many times to write to you about St. Frank's and I have always declined since we live in worlds apart and, at heart, I am an investigator, a detective, not one given to moulding young lives for their future as becomes the duties of a teacher. Then why do I remain at St. Frank's with Nipper?

Those of you who are familiar with the chronicles of this historical old college will readily understand the reason for our stay here. I have been kept busy at both ends of my profession you might say as a schoolmaster and a crime investigator.

Violations of the law isn't perforce confined to the great cities and the large towns. Crime flourishes in the villages and hamlets in any part of the world. It need not have its origins in any particular place to fulfil its programme, but rather it can, and does, transfer criminal activities to other spheres.

Thus we get from time to time in our area visitations of law breakers who imagine this quiet corner of Sussex to be a haven of refuge from police supervision and detection. Some have even joined the staff at St. Frank's either to further their own ideals or feel secure from the outside world.

I have often wanted to write a paper on crime. At present, life is rather humdrum at the college. The juniors have no complaints; there are no new masters with strange ideas to disrupt the calm in the groves of Acadame, and Heaven knows where my old friend Lord Dorrimore has got to and who usually pays me a whirlwind visit to invite us to an odd corner of the globe.

When the Normans came to England they brought with them no written laws. William the Conquerer was quite willing that his new subjects keep their own laws. He added a few new ones. One new law he enacted was that if a Norman were found slain and the killer was not produced, a heavy fine should be paid by the people of the district where the crime was committed.

That law would hardly stand up today, but I should think it was very effective under William.

Now since I intend to remain at St. Frank's I have given much thought to education as a schoolmaster and have had many long evenings with Dr. Stafford exchanging views and ideas that hinge on the changing pattern of higher education.

I have suggested, and the Head agrees with me, that a new wing be built to be used for advanced technology. That the lecture hall in the Ancient House be used exclusively for the teaching of Asiatic languages.

We have at present only one languages master, M. Henri Leblanc, who teaches French. For some strange reason the governors have always declined the services of

a German language master although French and German are the two most widely taught languages. Up till now. The world and its people are changing. The West will need to know more about the emerging East and St. Frank's will meet this new challenge.

While this new world will open up for us I know I shall long for the old days when although there were only the Ancient House and the College House at St. Frank's there was enough to keep me occupied in my profession and for Nipper to keep him busy in his capacity as Junior captain.

But things will never be the same. Instead of Lord Dorrimore's trips to the wilds of Africa and the South Seas, we enjoyed so much, instead, I suppose, we shall be invited to the frozen lands of Siberia; perhaps the wild regions of China and even the remote areas of Antarctica.

Then there will be space exploration in the future although where Dorrie will fit in that I hesitate to guess. Sir Hobart Manners, the father of Irene Manners of the Moor View School, has entered the space race and in technology Britain has no finer scientist. Dorrie is a very close friend of Sir Hobart and they may at this very moment be planning something that will result in one of Dorrie's sudden surprises.

But crime will always flourish and I foresee a changing crime wave to run concomitant with the new discoveries and inventions of the future.

As a detective I view all this with concern. In a highly scientific and technical age the criminal will also adapt himself and match skill with skill. With the discovery of atomic power my scientific knowledge and training tells me nations need not be the sole possessor of nuclear energy but that it may be possible to contain it individually.

But all this in the future to come. St. Frank's today basks in the happy memories of yesterday. You are welcome to visit us at any time while this famous old school reflects the happiness of yesteryear. But do not leave it too late. Times are changing and life will never be the same. There will be a new breed of schoolboys and masters, police and criminals, which will make us long more than ever for those glorious old days.

Sometimes, long after the school has settled down for the night, I sit in my study and go over in my mind some of the more intricate problems that St. Frank's suffered in the past. Apart from our exciting adventures overseas which often threatened our existence, when the time comes for me to write my memoirs I shall definitely include that most vicious and insidious attempt to indoctrinate the minds of the boys of St. Frank's. In fact, the plan included all the great public schools in England. But St. Frank's was the most important in the minds of three eminent and intelligent gentlemen whom, I am pleased to state, still linger in prison.

Most of you will recall the lengths these cranks went to in their scheme to destroy the mind of Dr. Stafford with a strange drug. I feel that period in the history of the college was for me the most frightening. Our adversaries were not the ordinary run of criminals; they were highly educated men. And they were instilled in some of England's most famous schools.

The future may very well produce similar idealists who wish to carry out their ideologies by first teaching in the schools.

Looking back in a survey of the events that sometimes endangered St. Frank's as a seat of learning my greatest opponent in that field was Professor Zingrave, whose dearest wish was to destroy our alma mater. But I won't dwell over past events since they have already been chronicled and thrilled the world.

But we shall still get the characters peculiar to our way of life. While I cannot envisage another Handforth - could there be another junior like Handy? - yet we will enrol boys with traits such as we had in the past. For the masters - even the Head himself - their qualifications and not their idiosyncrasies will determine their gaining entry.

I am pleased to say Nipper is keeping a record of the history of St. Frank's which he hopes will one day be released.

Although I have peered into the future with misgivings and perhaps reasonable concern, my prognosis may not altogether be justified. I am often reminded of the agonising moments I spent with the boys of St. Frank's when death threatened us, when even Dorrie and Umlosi gave us all hope of ever staying alive. There is one such occasion I will remember to my last day. We were stranded on an Island in the South Seas where we had been shipwrecked. Later, after many exciting adventures with visiting natives, a volcanic eruption began to totally destroy the Island. It really seemed as if our last moments had come. The whole of the St. Frank's holiday party were marooned on that desert Island with hot ash and cinders falling about us.

It was Nipper who first saw a glint in the dust laden sky. The glint of an aeroplane, although at first, it was thought Nipper was demented. But we were rescued at the very last moment and I will always remember seeing the Island's destruction as we climbed above in that airplane of mercy. In the very nick of time we had been saved. The most amazing part of this adventure was to follow. We must certainly possess charmed lives in view of the many escapes from certain death that occurred to us. It is my belief we shall continue to cheat our enemies whoever they may be and wherever we may meet them.

I sometimes get amused at the way some of the juniors and seniors behave in my presence. They imagine I am totally ignorant of their little wiles and ways. They seem to forget I am a trained investigator; that it is my business to read minds. It is also my business as a schoolmaster to deal out justice whenever it is needed.

When Nipper and I first came to St. Frank's the college was in very poor shape in many ways. In those times St. Frank's was just another public school in the south of England. The Lower school did not shine at all in sports and the seniors were in no better shape.

But the moment Nipper took over the captaincy of the juniors from Fullwood things, as the Americans say, began to happen. It was not due entirely to Nipper's leadership that the juniors became more efficient in sport and healthy House rivalry that had been so sadly neglected in the past. Rather it was the vital spark that resulted from Nipper's personality and his methods that brought a shining light of improvement so that there was a general eagerness to do better in all things.

The remarkable reformation of Ralph Leslie Fullwood was one of those events

that makes the life of a schoolmaster worthwhile. Before I came to St. Frank's a happy-go-lucky existence prevailed in the Lower School due entirely to the Remove housemaster a Mr. Thorne. This negligent form-master was responsible for juniors like Fullwood acting in the manner so contrary to good sportsmanship. It proves my firm belief that a good leader will bring out dormant qualities in types of people who hitherto hid their finer values.

But it was not due to the environment at St. Frank's that Fullwood's finer points in his character surfaced. The former leader of Study A began to reform after being rescued by the Canadian junior, Clive Russell, in the Pacific during one of Lord Dorrimore's famous Holiday adventures. I feel sure it was Fullwood's association with the holiday party that began to make him realise how foolish his old ways were. As I watched him in the days that were to follow I am convinced his reforming was not entirely an easy change, but he won in the end and, today, St. Frank's honours him.

It is strange how these times we have to return to the past in many ways. Sometimes for purely nostalgic reasons, other times for guidance. Many headmasters, form-masters and even domestics have left St. Frank's at various periods only to return. They were requested to come back by the school's general accord.

It would be foolish of me to presume from that that we have to rely mainly on the original staff to run the school, but it certainly does prove so far that this new world of thinking I find in the up and coming generation has failed to usurp successfully we of the old world.

That there must come a time when we shall have to recognise this new force I have no doubt, but in the meantime St. Frank's will continue to adopt the standard of teaching based on the curriculum that made the old college world famous. New ideas will be allowed to filter gradually into the system to comply with modern educational needs.:

Our oldest members of the staff will resent the new world when it comes for they will no longer fit in. Form masters like Mr. Crowell and Mr. Stockdale who are part of St. Frank's as much as the Ancient House, are aware of the trend that is seeping into our education and recognise their inability to serve it. Likewise Mr. Goole and Mr. Pycraft who will find difficulty consolidating their positions.

Unfortunately we have to realise new ills require new remedies and while we do not appear to resist the new ills in whatever form they arrive we certainly cannot stop the flow of new ideas, new regulations and different personalities. The Arabs have a fatalistic phrase 'Insh' Allah' - If Allah wills it. We have a similar saying ... What is to be, will be. So since we cannot shape the future to our particular pattern we must needs comply with evolution.

But nothing can take away from us the tender memories of past events. They are locked within us. We shall find poor comparisons with future occurrences because the world is getting smaller by distance and distance will no longer lend enchantment. The exigencies of life will be altered to meet the demands of the people which must create a very different environment to that which we have so far enjoyed.

But we at St. Frank's will still be able to take that very pleasant walk down Bellton Lane. I can continue to call on my old friend Dr. Brett and have an occasional chat with the village tradesmen. Nothing will prevent me enjoying a cigar with Dr. Stafford or an evening with the Rev. Goodchild. For there are some things even progress cannot steal from us.

I have come to the end of my letter and trust it has engendered nostalgia. I now bid you farewell.

* *

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THE RISING BELL

by Jack Overhill

In September, 1908, I found myself living in a Cambridge cul-de-sac of four-room houses, thirteen aside, facing each other across broken flagstone paths and a narrow, cobbled roadway. Nearly one hundred years old, the houses looked the worse for wear.

Cambridge, historically notorious for its slums, had many black patches of poverty-stricken areas at the turn of the century - and for long after - but Gothic Street was close to Brookside, a picturesque place of large Victorian houses and trees bordering a stream, on the other side of which was Trumpington Road - the main one from London into the town. There, bounded on the north side by a lane leading to Coe Fen, Sheep's Green, and the River Cam - locally, the Granta - was the Leys School. Founded in 1874 by a prominent Wesleyan and built mostly of red brick, its rising bell was soon a familiar sound to me.

The Gothic Street neighbourhood swarmed with children. I ganged up with the boys and as I grew older ventured with them into the spacious grounds of the Leys School, only fifty yards away. A shallow, grassy hollow near what is now the main gateway, was a forbidden playground for us until it was built on. The Leysians chased us out. I can still hear their shouts of 'Catch the little devils' (they never harmed us) as we scattered and bolted through the shrubs and shinned over an old, slatted fence to the safety of the road.

The refuse dump was an attraction. We were frequently there, looking for 'finds'. The best was an old cap and gown. One of my mates swanked about in them. How I envied him! That came to an end when I was chased by two workmen wearing green aprons. Dodging them through undergrowth, I ran into barbed wire, ripped my trousers and gashed my left leg. The scar has always shown plainly on my thigh and when my children were young was proof of the narrow shave I'd had from a tribesman's bullet in the Khyber Pass!

In 1910, about the time of the Crippen murder, an unsightly white-brick wall was built alongside the School in Coe Fen Lane (now Fen Causeway). Much of the wall was quickly covered with graffiti about Dr. Crippen and his mistress, Ethel le Neve. I liked reading it.

Chased out of the Leys when bent on mischief, we were allowed in to watch the rugby matches. Siding with the School (after all, it was on our doorstep), we bawled our heads off:

COME ON L-E-E-E-E-YS ..... COLLAR HIM HIGH ..... COLLAR HIM LOW ..... COME ON L-E-E-E-E-YS .....

The visiting teams must have thought the Leysians had some strange supporters!

One of the highlights of the year was the Cambridge Borough Police sports, held in the Leys grounds. Something more than the usual 'hedgerow ticket' - our name for gate-crashing - was needed to get in and we schemed with the earnestness of modern crooks planning a bank raid. A governor of the Leys lived next to the school and one way was through his garden. Running across it and giving each other leg-ups and pull-ups over a wall and we were soon lost in the crowd.

The excitement of the sports taking place to the tuneful playing of the Town Silver Band!

The cycle-racing was the main attraction. A townsman, Reg Player, grass-track cycling champion of the world was there. To know his handicap, to hear spectators saying he'd never do it, and then, when the bell rang for the last lap, to see him do it to the roar of the crowd as he literally lifted his bicycle forward to race to victory - what an unforgettable thrill! Alas, that he was killed in the first world war.

The tug o' war was worth watching. How those big, beefy, red-faced men dug their heels in!

There were times when I had open access to the School. My father, a boot-maker, repaired the Headmaster's boots and I took them to his house, partly hidden by trees and shrubs in a setting in spring and summer that made me think of Robin Hood and his Merry Men.

When I was ten, I became errand-boy after school hours for one shilling a week to Bennett Bros., tailors, in nearby Trumpington Street. I took parcels to the School and got to know it inside as well as outside. I wasn't impressed by its grandeur - and it was grandeur to me who lived in a four-room cottage, my father making boots in a little kitchen-workshop, the bare boards of the floor covered with the tools of his trade and leather shreds. The School seemed cold like the inside of its chapel, which I peeped in: in short, unhomely. But I liked the stairs better than those at Peterhouse (the oldest Cambridge college). You could walk safely on them. In Peterhouse, I once slipped up on an old, narrow staircase and went down it on my bottom. I ached for days.

In 1913, we moved out of Gothic Street into a rambling old house round the corner. The back windows looked out on the little conjoining backyards of two of the three cul-de-sacs in the neighbourhood. The clang of the Leys School rising bell was just as loud and clear.

The next year, when I was eleven, I started reading the MAGNET and GEM. There, the boys of Greyfriars and St. Jim's were always hanging around the gates, staging riots and barring outs. Cads like Vernon Smith and Cardew broke bounds after lights out and crept off to pubs. There was none of that at the Leys. The nearest pub to the school was The Cross Keys - how aptly named! - only twenty yards from where I lived. No Leysians went in there after dark. I was always knocking about the streets, often till eleven at night, when pubs closed. I'd have seen them. People said the Leys was a public school. They'd only got to read the MAGNET and GEM to know it wasn't!

I had no personal contact with the Leysians after I left school - their way of life was entirely different from mine - but swimming was my sport and in the 1920's I was lured to the School's heated indoor swimming-bath (the only one in the town at the time) at five o'clock on certain afternoons during the Easter term to see Cambridge University meet the London Clubs, some of which had national champions among their members. I say lured and that is true, as although I did it with the connivance of other clerks at the place I worked, I was still risking the sack. How the events stirred me! In 1924, I saw K. G. Wilson, a Cambridge undergraduate, return 5 minutes 58 seconds for the quarter-mile. He had an Olympic trial. (World record time for the 400 metres, approximately the same distance, is now about 4 minutes.)

The Cambridge Amateur Swimming Club had an annual fixture with the Leys. I learned the crawl-stroke in 1922 - new in Cambridge then - and swam the 50 yards for the Club for several years. The Leysians always beat me - by a touch in 1926. A consoling thought was that townsmen only had the river to train in during the summer months: a disadvantage against swimmers with training facilities all the year round.

Town and Gown became closer in Cambridge after the second world war. This was also manifested in the Leys. Their swimming-bath was no longer reserved for the School and the University, it was let out to local clubs, schools, and bodies until the town - elevated to city status - belatedly built and opened in 1963, an indoor swimming-pool that cost a quarter-million pounds. Shedding its former aloofness, the School started to compete in the Cambridge schools annual sports. (This year, my fourteen-year-old grandson, Jeremy won the 66 metres breast-stroke at the swimming sports, the Leysian taking second place. Gratifying to me!) Nearer to the heart, the Leysians inaugurated a Centre for the aged near the School and undertook relief work for old people.

Change did not rest there, Mr. Alan Barker, the headmaster, and his wife Jean, playing a prominent part in Cambridge life, he as an active member of the County Council, she even more active as a member of the City Council, which led to her becoming Mayor. He soon gained a reputation for outspokenness - he once led a walkout from a meeting of the education committee - and spirited letters from both appear in the CAMBRIDGE NEWS. (Dr. Locke and Dr. Holmes and their wives would not have shouldered their burdens, I'm sure.)

In 1972, I wrote several articles for the local newspaper. One of them was about the Leys School as I remembered it as a boy. The Headmaster wrote to me:

Dear Mr. Overhill,

I much enjoyed your memories of the Leys School which appeared in the CAMBRIDGE NEWS on Tuesday, 18th April. I shall,be delighted if you would care to come and see the school as it is nowadays. Equally, I wonder whether you would mind if we published your article in our school magazine. This goes out to 1,400 old boys and I know that many of them would very much like to read your account.

Yours sincerely,

W. A. BARKER

I agreed to the publication of my article in the school magazine and I visited the school. While I was waiting in the large drawing-room of the Headmaster's house,

two Boxer dogs fussing round me, I thought of myself standing at the door of the house sixty years ago with the Headmaster's boots that my father had repaired for him.

Mr. Barker came in, followed by his wife, whose term of office as Mayor of Cambridge had just ended. They greeted me warmly and I spent a pleasant hour looking round the school and through a large volume of letters and records, including photos, going back to last century. Among the letters were some of those of J. H. Hilton's, an old boy and author of GOODBYE, MR. CHIPS. Mr. Barker talked about W. H. Balgarnie, the master at the Leys who was the main model for Mr. Chips. Apparently, Balgarnie wasn't altogether reconciled to himself as portrayed by James Hilton - something between fact and fiction. During the first world war, Balgarnie had rooms in an annex of the Leys on Brookside. So close to my home, I must often have passed him in the street.

We talked about the rebellion at the School in the 1870's. That began when the boys were refused a whole holiday to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday. They gathered outside the Headmaster's house and dared him to come out. He called the police. The rebels learnt of this and resisted the police on the school playing-fields, throwing stones at their horses which caused them to throw their riders. The rebels were starved out and their leaders expelled. (Recently, I went through the CAMBRIDGE CHRONICLE for the period at the Cambridge City Library; I found no reference to the affair.)

I left with an invitation to visit the School when I liked; and I now receive each term a copy of the Leys School Calendar of events as an inducement for me to do so.

Throughout the years, development and expansion have taken place at the Leys. From a school of 16 boys in 1875, it has now 410. New and impressive buildings within the original site have been built, more recently: Fen House, the Theatre and Music School, the Pavilion, and a Boathouse on the River Cam.

Have I ever had regrets about not going to the Leys? No. It is social history to me that I was the eleventh of a family of thirteen children, that my parents separated when I was five, that I lived on the breadline in old houses with little furniture - bare boards except for one room - that I worked out of school hours - 35 hours a week for 3/-, that I went with a handcart, usually before breakfast, all the year round, to the coalyard a mile away for $\frac{1}{2}$ cwts. of coal - 7d: a 1d. tip to the yardman for a half-pint of beer and he gave me $1\frac{1}{2}$ cwt.; but conditioned by a rough-and-ready upbringing, I wouldn't have swapped and lost the freedom of the streets - and the opportunity to marry young - to be a public schoolboy.

Loss of Education? Schooling and education are two different things. Education has been available a long while in this country for those that wanted it. I found it in books I bought and borrowed - in the beginning, those of Frank Richards. In that way, after many ups and downs, I graduated B.Sc. (Econs.) as an external student of London University (no Government grants and State aid for married working-class students then) and finished up as lecturer and examiner in Economics at the Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology.

Had I gone to a public school, I doubt whether I'd have read any of the old

papers, or Story Paper Collector, Collectors' Digest, and Collectors' Digest Annual. The obvious conclusion is that I'd have been much poorer in my youth and whatever my circumstances, in old age as well.

* *

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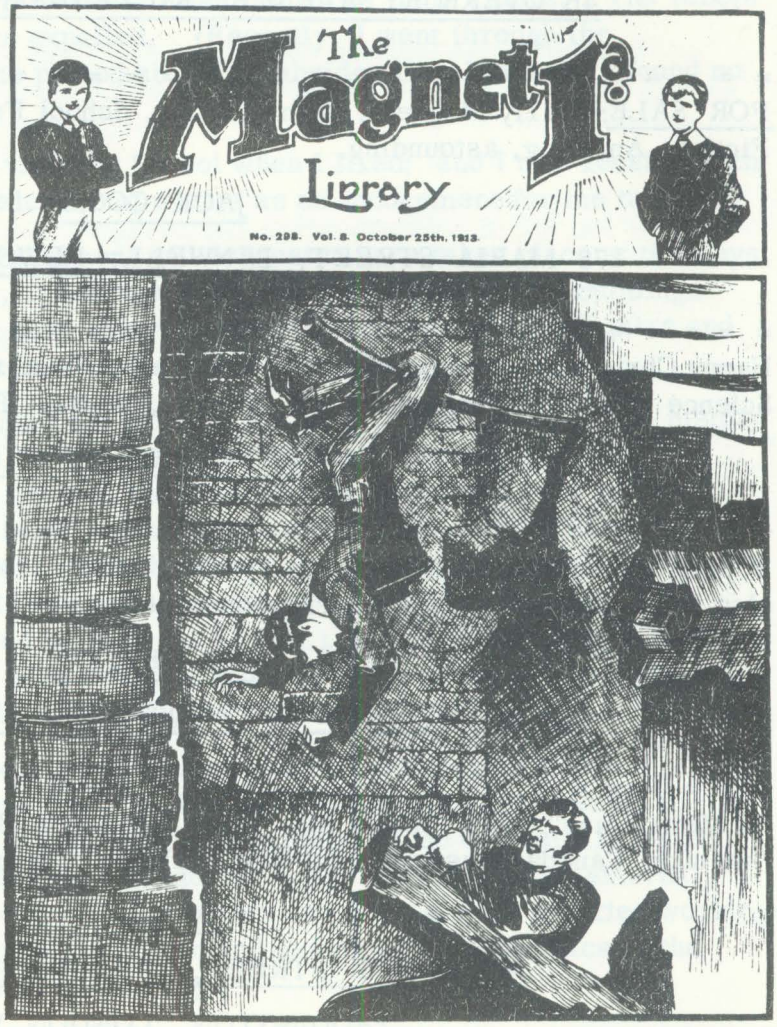
Looking in at Wharton Lodge

by Les Rowley

The wind lashed the rain against the windscreen as the headlights tried to pick out the dark way ahead. It seemed ages since we had left Reigate, but a look at my watch showed me that it was barely an hour since we had left the shelter of that town. Still it was late and we had no certain idea of our whereabouts. Roger who was driving had entrusted the map reading to me, but I had lost track of our progress, and signposts with their welcome information seemed non-existent. No other car had passed us since we had turned off the dual carriage-way on to the B road which was rapidly dwindling into something much further along the alphabet.

The outline of a building loomed in front and Roger slowed down and, as though it was taking the hint, the engine gave an asthmatic shudder and stopped altogether beneath the swinging, creaking sign of a wayside inn. Now that the engine was silenced the rain beat down on the roof of the car with an even heavier tattoo. It was after midnight and we were marooned in what appeared to be the middle of nowhere.

We unbuttoned our seat belts and turning our coat collars up, ventured out into the rain and soon were hammering on the door of the inn. To our relief the door was quickly opened and a blaze of welcoming light and warmth greeted us. The inn-keeper looked enquiringly at us, but only for a moment. Then, standing aside, he motioned



"QUICK, SIR—CLUTCH ME AND CLIMB!"

(A thrilling incident in the long, complete tale of School Life in this issue.)

toward the fireplace.

Mr. Hodge - as he introduced himself - listened patiently to our catalogue of woe ... and to our plea for rooms for the night.

"Well, gents, seems as though you are lucky. I had a gent named Smedley staying here until this evening, but there was a bit of trouble and we had to fetch P. C. Piper over from Elmdale. Smedley's gone and good riddance to bad rubbish, say I. Feller who won't open his suitcase when the constable asks has got something to hide, mark my words. So you gents are in luck 'cos that means there's a room apiece for ye. Now how about a hot drink and some cold chicken sandwiches before we all get some sleep."

I looked across at Roger as we sat at either side of the fireplace with sandwiches on our knees and steaming hot cups in our hands. The hospitality of the inn was a far cry from that of the five star hotels we usually enjoyed, but we were comfortable enough and the "Old Oak" as our shelter was called, was a welcome refuge from the dark, damp night outside.

A notice hanging on the wall just behind Roger's head caught my attention. It advertised a well-known brand of cigarettes at 11½d. for a packet of twenty. A left-over from the past, I thought. But the notice was as clean as if it had been printed that very day. Roger followed the direction of my gaze and then jerked his head toward the bar. Like three black and brass sentinels there stood a set of old fashioned pump handles - a trio of reminders of pre-war days.

The innkeeper returned and told us that our rooms were ready and with a brief exchange of 'Goodnights' we made our way upstairs. At the doorway to his room Roger paused. "There's something vaguely familiar about this place," he observed. "Something that I can't quite place. It will probably come back to me by the morning. See you for breakfast."

My own room was clean and comfortable, and the bed looked inviting. I lost no time in getting ready for a night's rest, but, as I was hanging my suit in the wardrobe, my eye caught sight of an envelope lying on the floor in a corner. I picked it up and took it over to the bedside light. The address on the envelope was type-written and read:

Lucius Teggers, Esq.,
Leggett and Teggers (Scholastic Agents) Ltd.,
147d Lower Regent Street,
London W.

I sat on my bed, my head in a whirl as I tried to reason with this most peculiar circumstance. Hodge, the innkeeper, had told us that there had been trouble with a guest named Smedley and in my hand was an envelope addressed to a person named Teggers. Just a coincidence, of course. But such a coincidence, I felt sure, would stagger Roger when I explained it to him over the bacon and eggs at breakfast.

I completed my undressing, crawled thankfully into bed, and was soon asleep.

I awoke to find the sun streaming through the casements of my room.

Anxiously I felt beneath my pillow for the mysterious envelope, half expecting to find that it no longer existed, having been but a figment of my dreams. But it was there and I hastened my toilet and had soon joined Roger who was already waiting at the breakfast table. Appetising as they were the bacon and eggs were ignored whilst I babbled on to Roger about my find. He examined the envelope closely and passing it back to me observed "You noticed that the stamp was a penny-halfpenny one and that it bore the head of King George V?"

In my excitement I hadn't noticed the stamp or the cancellation and time stamp which bore the date '2. VI. 34'. Roger regarded me with a smile of the kind with which Holmes would favour an obtuse Dr. Watson. "Plenty of Leggetts and plenty of Teggers about," he pointed out, "I suppose the envelope has lain in that wardrobe all these years and as for ---," he stopped in mid-sentence, the smile disappearing from his lips, then he added softly the one word 'Smedley'.

"Yes, Smedley," I echoed. "The name of the chap who left this place yesterday after a bit of trouble. The chap who occupied the room in which I slept last night. But you know and I know of a Lucious Teggers who impersonated a Eustace Smedley, and you and I know that the impersonation took place in 1934 as part of a plan --."

"To disinherit Herbert Vernon-Smith of his father's millions," completed Roger. We exchanged an uneasy glance.

The inn-keeper's wife had entered with a fresh pot of coffee. She placed it upon the table and was about to turn and go, when I felt myself saying "Can you direct us to the home of a local magistrate - a Colonel Wharton of Wharton Lodge near Wimford, please?"

"Colonel Wharton? Of course, sir. Everyone around here knows the Colonel." Mrs. Hodge replied. "After all, the Lodge is only a half a mile away. Just carry on up the road to Elmdale, but turn left just before you enter the village. Not a very good road, I'm afraid, but it saves you going all the way round by Wimford. Look out for a high wooden fence which borders the Lodge grounds and follow your nose until you come to the drive gates."

I went outside to tell Roger, who was looking into the innards of the car. He had managed to clear the trouble and readily agreed to a drive in the direction of Wharton Lodge before coming back to the "Old Oak" for lunch. I told Mr. Hodge of our plans and we drove off with that gentleman waving us goodbye. It was a lovely day and the Surrey lanes and meadows were at their best. As we travelled we talked once more about the bogus Smedley and the fact that we knew - or thought we knew - of the designs that gentleman had in mind.

"Don't you think that we should call and warn the Bounder of the danger ahead," I asked Roger.

"What, barge in in the middle of a series." he replied. "We'd probably spoil everything. Besides, what proof have we got? I don't fancy our chances of convincing the Colonel, and after all we're not a couple of Bunters to go gate-crashing." Roger showed down as we approached a fork in the road. "This is where we turn, I think."

Our turning led us down a narrowing road through an avenue of trees, the

branches of which reached overhead. We had not gone far before we espied the tall lean frame of a gentleman striding ahead of us, and Roger again slowed down, lowered the window on his side. "I'll ask him if we are on the right track," he said as we drew level and stopped the car ... and then ...

"Good heavens, Mr. Quelch!" we said in unison.

Quelch indeed it was. No mistaking those gimlet eyes as they turned to us in puzzled enquiry.

"Good morning, Mr. Quelch," we said in our meekest tones.

"Good morning," he returned, "but I fear that you have the advantage of me, gentlemen."

"Well-er, well, you see," I floundered. Fortunately Roger rose to the occasion.

"As a member of the same profession as yourself, Mr. Quelch," Roger replied smoothly, "may I say that I have read with increasing interest the articles appearing above your name in the 'Public School Review'."

The frosty visage before us melted into what was the nearest approach to a grin - and a smug one at that - that its features had ever shown. When Quelch next spoke it sounded like the parent welcoming the prodigal back to the fold.

"My dear sir, if you are to be a guest at 'Wharton Lodge' it will be a pleasure, a real pleasure, to discuss with you - at some length I trust - those matters which we must both be deeply concerned. For now I shall leave you to complete your journey - no thank you, I prefer to walk myself - with the earnest hope of our furthering the acquaintance in an hour or so."

We left Quelch to continue his grind and bowled on our way. Roger seemed rather pleased with himself and I felt a little bit put in the shade. "Blowed if I'd care for one of those imperial jaws from Quelch," I remarked somewhat sulkily.

"Oh, I don't know," Roger said, "with a bit of luck I'll get him to talk about his form or, failing that, his 'History of Greyfriars'. Make jolly good material for an article in the 'Digest' next month."

"Do you realise that if this is really 1934 there won't be a 'Digest' next month. We can't have it both ways. The 'Digest' wasn't published until 1946 at the earliest. Any way, what are we doing here if its 1934 and we should be in 1974? And there are some other points that need answering too!"

"Perhaps we shall get some of the answers now," answered Roger as he turned the car into a well-kept drive, the gravel spurting from under the wheels until we pulled up at the front porch of Wharton Lodge. "I hope you are as successful with Wells as I was with Quelch. I had better stay in the car in case we are sent about our business. Good luck!"

I made my way on to the terraced porch with some trepidation. I felt very much the intruder and Wells, of course, had a lot of experience with intruders - take

that hardy annual, William George Bunter, for one. Perhaps W.G.B. had never bothered about the trifling (to him) formality of an invitation, but then his skin was a good deal thicker than my own.

Pulling the bell handle I could hear the jangle in the distance, probably in the butler's pantry. A minute or two elapsed before the oak door opened smoothly and silently to reveal Wells in all his glory. He was just as I had pictured him, stately and dignified, a portly figure and a dignified countenance - the rosy colour of which owed more, perhaps, to his master's port than it did to nature. I was duly impressed and I hoped that, in his turn, Wells would be duly impressed too with the reason for my call.

"Ah! Wells," I began (and I had achieved my object of surprise by showing that I knew his name), ah, Wells, if the Colonel is at home I would be obliged if he would kindly spare me a few moments. Here is my card. I have written on the reverse the nature of my business."

"Please come in sir. I will enquire if the master is able to see you." I followed the portly back into a handsome room, the walls of which were lined with shelves of books. Wells gave a little bow and left me ... to look around with interest. Was this, I wondered, where it all began? Was it within these four walls that Colonel Wharton had uttered that simple sentence that had started it all. It seemed to me that I could hear an echo of the words "Send Master Harry to me." A moment later I turned to face their originator.

As you would expect, the Colonel was a man of military aspect. Even without a uniform this was apparent. Erect of carriage, the squaring of the shoulders, the expression in the steel grey eyes, all these spoke of a man born to command and for those commands to be obeyed. He came across to me, his hand outstretched, a smile of welcome on his face.

"Delighted to meet anyone who shares an interest in my old regiment, the 24th Loamshires, and I am only too happy to supply any information and advice within my power. I have sent Wells to bring in your friend and perhaps you will both join me in a glass of Madeira, and later some lunch."

There was the sound of voices at the door and Roger entered, accompanied by Mr. Quelch - the latter obviously anxious to get going on the promised 'discussion'. We raised our glasses and, amid the usual small talk for such occasions, savoured the bouquet of the golden liquid within them.

The four of us had moved toward the French windows, through which we could see out over the terrace to the lawns and flower beds beyond. In the distance, making its way toward the house, was a small group of schoolboys. 'Inky', was of course recognisable even at that distance and I fancied I could pick our Vernon-Smith, Cherry and Wharton. William George Bunter was not in sight but, as the other boys drew nearer, we heard the unmistakeable squeak of his voice come clearly through the open window. Bunter was obviously taking his ease further along the terrace.

"I say you fellows!" came the time-honoured phrase, "it really is too thick, you know. Old Quelch is bad enough but what with Smedley sticking his nose in

yesterday and yet another beak barging in where he isn't wanted today, I think its time that silly old uncle of Wharton's was told he had reached the limit. Really, one would think it was raining beaks. Not quite the style we're used to at Bunter Court, I can tell you. My pater would soon send a gang of cadging schoolmasters about their ... oh Lor'."

Bunter's oration stopped in mid-stream as it were and it probably stopped because he espied the furious features of the Colonel who had reached the French windows and thrown them open.

"You-you--you disrespectful young villain," stuttered Colonel Wharton, "come here Bunter, come here Bunter, I say. I am desirous of boxing your ears!"

We stood, our mouths agape, our sherry glasses suspended like Mahomet's coffin in mid-air. But if we waited in anticipation, Bunter apparently did not. One defiant word "Beasts!" carried itself on the wind as Bunter found other space on which to vent his opinion.

Red faced, Colonel Wharton called his nephew to him and Wharton and the others came running up.

"Harry," his voice was stern and reproachful, "normally all your school fellows are welcome to stay here but respect is due to other guests and Bunter's insolence cannot be tolerated. Find him at once, see that he packs his case - what are you smiling at? - and that he is gone within the hour."

Roger and I exchanged glances. We knew that if all was to go according to plan it was very necessary that Bunter should be in on the next act in this particular drama.

"May I ask a favour, Colonel Wharton, on behalf of my friend and myself," Roger interceded hastily, "we would both be uneasy if our being here was the cause of the lad leaving. If Mr. Quelch can also see his way clear and overlook the matter it would be greatly appreciated."

Mr. Quelch nodded his head; he nodded it reluctantly, but he nodded it nevertheless. "I assure you, gentlemen, that I shall endeavour to instruct Bunter in good manners and proper behaviour once the new term commences and he is under my control once more." His right hand gave an almost convulsive clasp on an imaginary cane, "Meanwhile, Wharton, I would suggest that you counsel that foolish boy to use more respect when he refers to Colonel Wharton's guests, especially these two gentlemen who have generously forgiven him."

"Certainly, sir!"

"The counselling of the ridiculous Bunter is the esteemed sine qua non," muttered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh as the group of schoolfellows turned away. A few moments later sounds of terror were heard from afar; obviously Wharton and his friends had lost little time in the 'counselling' of the fatuous William George. As I passed Mr. Quelch I noticed a slight twitching of that gentleman's lips. Of course I could not suspect the form master of approving the booting that Bunter was receiving and yet I could not help wondering.

I followed the Colonel to his study, leaving Roger and Quelch already engaged in discussion. Wells had been asked to contact Mr. Hodge and let the innkeeper know that we would not be back for lunch, so there was plenty of time for Colonel Wharton and I to talk about the 24th Loamshires. The Colonel had a fund of interesting stories and he told them well. When he had finished I thanked him and asked him if Harry would follow in his footsteps.

"Harry must, of course, choose for himself," came the reply. "I have sent him to my old school and would, indeed, like to see him eventually gazetted to my old regiment. My old comrade, Major Cherry, whose son is staying here, would also like to see his boy in the 24th and the two lads would make promising officers. But they must choose for themselves. After all, the 24th itself may not be in existence much longer with all these new-fangled mergers ending many a famous regiment. But I must not bore you, sir. Perhaps you would like to look round the house and gardens before we go into lunch. Please feel free to take your ease, but, if you will excuse me, I must have a few words with my sister about lunch."

I took the Colonel at his word and wandered freely. I opened the first door that came to hand and found that it not only gave on to the dining room but that I had surprised a fat figure stuffing its capacious mouth with the contents of a silver biscuit box from the sideboard.

"Urrrrgh! Waruggh!!" came in stifled tones from the largest mouth at Greyfriars. Obviously some biscuit had gone down the wrong way. I felt quite concerned and, walking across to Bunter, gave the fat Removite a sound slap on the back.

"What you want to do that for you beast. Can't a fellow have a biscuit or two without some interfering old fogey poking his nose in?"

I gazed at Bunter as Mr. Quelch must often have gazed at him. He really took the biscuit in more ways than one. Whatever the duties and responsibilities the Remove form master had and whatever remuneration he received for them it could not be enough so long as Bunter was included.

"I must say that Colonel Wharton is playing host to a most peculiar guest when he entertains you in his house, Master Bunter," I observed. "It must cost him a small fortune in foodstuffs and a terrific amount of patience to stand you."

"I say, don't you go complaining to Wharton's uncle. He's waxy enough as it is. Not that I think much of this pokey little place. Now, you should see Bunter Court. We do things in style there, I can tell you. Why even ... beast." Bunter flung the last word at the door as I closed it.

In the hall I found Wells and enquired the way to Master Harry's den, but the butler informed me that Master Harry was out of the house and would I please await his return.

I nodded and looked around the spacious hall with its double staircase and the wide fireplace in front of which the family and guests would gather during the winter holidays and over which hung a painting in oils of a long dead ancestor in Cavalier

dress. Doubtless this was the same bygone Wharton whose ghost still haunted the Lodge on many a cold December night.

The next moment my attention was diverted by a click that came from the telephone cabinet that was half hidden in a corner of the hall. I turned and found myself looking at Vernon-Smith who returned my look with a sulky and defiant glare. So this was the 'Bounder', the bad-hat of the Remove whose kicking over of the traces was the cause for the recent estrangement from his father - a breach that even now stood a frail chance of reconciliation. A word of friendly advice might not be amiss.

"Who was it on the 'phone, Master Vernon-Smith? Not Joey Banks or Bill Lodgey I trust ....."

"What bizney is it of yours?" sneered Smithy. "Who are you to barge in where you are not wanted. Probably a friend of the Creeper and Crawler spying on me for some reason or other."

"Perhaps it is no bizney of mine, as you put it," I answered, "but neither my friend nor I are associates of Mr. Smedley, and neither my friend nor I would like to see you sacked from Greyfriars. But if you are as astute as I believe you to be then heed a word of warning. Have nothing to do with your past associates from the 'Three Fishers' or the 'Cross Keys' especially now that you are under Colonel Wharton's roof. I am sorry if I have intruded into your personal affairs but my advice is well meant even if it's given in the sure knowledge that you will disregard it." I strode from the hall leaving the Bounder gazing after me with an expression that I could not place. Perhaps it was just as well.

Out on the terrace I rejoined Roger and Mr. Quelch, the latter now in full spate on the subject of maintaining discipline in one's form. I winked knowingly at space and thought of my two recent encounters with members of the Remove form ... Quelch's discipline had its weak points, I pondered. The next moment my musings were disturbed by the sound of the gong for lunch, and we made our way to the dining room.

Before we took our seats the Colonel introduced us to his sister. Miss Amy Wharton was a sweet lady of charm and gentleness although the pleasant smile on her face clouded a little at the sight of Bunter, biscuit crumbs still on his waistcoat and a smear of some freshly pilfered jam around his podgy cheeks. A moment later the voice of the Colonel was heard.

"Bunter, I am assured by Wells that an adequate supply of soap is available in all the bedrooms and bathrooms. You will now go to your room and put that commodity to the use for which it is intended. Lunch will only be served to you," added the Colonel, "after you have removed the traces of your breakfast."

Luncheon proceeded without the fascinating presence of William George Bunter and was probably more enjoyable for that reason. I had been seated between Harry Wharton and his Aunt Amy and their mutual affection for each other was very evident. Every now and then the jargon of the Junior Common Room crept into the conversation which covered many aspects of School life. Occasionally a perplexed expression would cross Wharton's handsome face as some of my questions displayed a familiarity

with Greyfriars that seemed remarkable for a stranger. It was inevitable that Wharton's curiosity would get the better of him and eventually he enquired.

"May I ask when you were last at Greyfriars, sir?"

This was a poser! Fortunately I was extricated from the difficult problem of answering by the re-appearance of the fat Owl of the Remove. There must be few - very few - occasions when the presence of Bunter had been welcome, but this was one of the few!

With an impatient grunt Bunter took his place at table and as though by silent assent everyone else rose and left theirs. There was a marked lack of enthusiasm to remain and watch the fat Removite plough his way through the menu like some bloated porker at the trough. We had finished our meal, and coffee was to be served in the drawing room and on the way there I found myself flanked by Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent. Nugent seemed to read my thoughts.

"You mustn't mind Bunter, sir, he's a bit of an ass, but apart from that --"

"And a strong disinclination to wash," put in Johnny "together with the manners of a blundering hog. All he needs is bursting like a fat frog. Why Wharton hasn't booted him from here to Wimford station I don't know. I'm sure that Quelch wishes he had a cane handy so that he could administer a well deserved six or even sixty."

I looked round the room and spotted Roger in conversation with Wharton, Inky and Smithy. I learnt later that they were interested in Roger's car - as they were not likely to see another one like it for another forty years, it was not surprising. My eyes fell for the moment on Mr. Quelch, sitting quietly, his constant companion Thucydides open on his lap. I had a momentary feeling of compunction for I knew that on the morrow this quiet, scholarly, figure would be struck down by a cowardly blow. Yet there was nothing that I could do without risk of being thought a charlatan or worse. The future was predestined and I was powerless to intervene.

The Famous Five left the room to get dressed for a country walk, it seemed they were to be blessed neither with the fatuous presence of Bunter nor with the sulky moods of Vernon-Smith as both those members of Quelch's Form did not appear with them. Wharton and his friends came up to Roger and I to say "goodbye". They were in good spirits, although as I looked into the dusky countenance of Hurree Singh the nabob's eyes held mine for a moment as though there was something which had disturbed him. But the clasp of his hand was firm enough, and then he and his friends were gone.

It was time that we were moving too, as Roger agreed. We had to return to the "Old Oak", collect our belongings and settle with Mr. Hodge. After that many miles and about forty years had to be covered before we safely reached our homes.

We said our farewells to Colonel and Miss Wharton. Mr. Quelch, complete with the every faithful Thucydides, came out to the car with us and for a moment we stood talking to that gentleman. As we finally shook hands he offered us an invitation to visit him at Greyfriars once the new term got under way. We both thanked him and expressed the hope that when we did so we would find him in good health. It was

the nearest we felt we could get to voicing our concern for him. A moment later the car was bowling down the drive and Wharton Lodge disappeared from sight.

"I suppose we did barge into the middle of a series," I remarked to Roger after we had spent some time in silence. "But did we do right to say nothing of what we knew of Smedley?"

"I see what you mean," replied Roger. "I suppose we could have told the Colonel or Quelch that Mr. Smedley was in reality Lucius Teggers a cousin of Vernon-Smith and a partner of Leggett and Teggers who had wangled himself a job at Greyfriars to ensure that Smithy got the sack and was disinherited by his father in favour of Teggers himself. I don't know if we would have been believed; I very much doubt it. You're worried about the forthcoming attack Smedley is going to make on Quelch. One can't interfere with the past or future you know. It is more that we can manage to deal with the present."

I nodded absently for my attention had been drawn to the sight of a magnificent beech tree standing on the edge of a footpath leading deep into a shady wood. Beneath its spreading branches stood Vernon-Smith confronting a 'horsey' looking man dressed in a loud check suit and a bowler hat that was pushed back from a forehead glistening in the afternoon sun.

Roger had spotted them too. "The Bounder meets Joey Banks," he breathed, "and it doesn't appear to be a happy occasion for the beery gent!" Even as he spoke the Bounder's voice rose in anger. The next moment came the sound of a blow and Banks staggered and fell. Vernon-Smith looked down at him; this time his words came clearly as our car slowed, stopped, and we prepared to leave it.

"Get going!" Smithy shouted. "By gum, I'll kick you back to the road! Do you think I'm afraid of a boozy waster of your sort? By gad, I'll give you a sample of what you'll get if you don't leave me alone."

Banks scrambled up only to be nearly sent flying again with a crashing right hander. The next moment he was running for dear life up the footpath and further into the wood. The Bounder glared after him then came down the path into the road and turned in the direction of Wharton Lodge. Hardly was he lost to sight than the hawthorns at the side of the footpath parted and a youngish man stepped out. On his face was a smile, but it was not a nice smile. Smedley, for we guessed it was he, came out on to the road and took the same direction as Smithy. He was losing no time in getting to Wharton Lodge and making an accusation against the Removite that he hoped would result not only in the latter's expulsion from the School, but in disinheritance to his own profit. We looked grimly after him and perhaps the urge was within us to raise our boots and help the rogue upon his way. We resisted the temptation, remembering that we were grown men - not schoolboys on holiday.

A fat cachination came from the turning into the wood and a fat figure appeared travelling with all the speed of a tired and weary snail. We got back into the car and drove off, safe in the knowledge that whilst Smedley had been spying on the Bounder, Bunter, in his turn, had been spying on both of them. For once we felt sure that Bunter would retail sufficient of the truth to put the incident in its proper perspective.

Smedley was due for a bigger surprise than he had bargained for when the confrontation at Wharton Lodge took place.

We drove on to the "Old Oak" in silence. The Summer afternoon was coming to an end and gathering clouds foretold rain before very long. Mr. Hodge was waiting for us and we hurried to our rooms to pack our bags. When I came downstairs Roger was already settling with the innkeeper who had agreed to accept a cheque. Mr. Hodge looked at the cheque and exclaimed "There's some mistake here sir. Bed and breakfast for two gents at seven and six each is fifteen bob. Surely you wasn't thinking Harry Hodge would charge you fifteen bob apiece. Never mind, sir. I've got some silver handy, so here is fifteen bob back."

Roger pocketed the silver and we both thanked him for his honesty, put our bags in the car and were soon on our way. The last I saw of Mr. Hodge was his stalwart figure under the swinging inn sign, a brawny arm raised in a farewell wave.

As the car gained speed the clouds thickened, the first drops of rain changing into a downpour. Over the trees ahead forks of lightning appeared and disappeared in the deepening sky accompanied by the roll of thunder.

The road was narrow and tall hedgerows on either side, flanked by even taller trees, seemed to close out the countryside surrounding us.

Roger, intent on avoiding potholes worn deeper by the force of the rain, was silent. Our intention was to get off this particular unbeaten track and back on to some properly sign-posted road. We had passed several weed-scattered paths that doubtless led to remote farmhouses, but other signs of habitation had been scant.

As suddenly as it began, the torrent gave way to the splatter of fewer drops against the windscreen. Above, the leafy branches of the trees grew wider apart and once more we were beneath the open sky in which defiant stars had begun to shine.

It seemed ages since we had left Reigate. Stop. I seem to have said somewhere before - and so I have, six thousand words or so ago. Yes, I was feeling sleepy and the road map I had been reading had slipped to the floor of the car. Had I dreamt of what I have just written? That, is of course, the orthodox explanation and it saves me the problem of having to tidy up one or two little things that have puzzled the two of us ever since. I'll put them in later just so that the record is complete.

With the passing of the storm came the discovery of a major road ahead of us. Not much of a major road it is true, but major enough to lead us on to the A 286 near Haslemere and a few minutes later we pulled up outside the lighted facade of the Georgian Hotel.

Roger yawned. "I feel as though I've been driving for days. Do you mind if we put up here for the rest of the night and carry on in the morning?"

I did not need much persuasion. It was now after midnight. A cup of something warm to drink, a bite to eat, and a spot of slumber was what I felt was needed. In less than no time we had registered and been shown to our rooms. Before turning in I went along to Roger's room to join him in the pot of tea and sandwiches

that the hotel had sent up. He pointed to a little heap of silver on his dressing table. Six half-crowns met my gaze. I went over and picked them up; they were all in mint condition, bore the head of King George V and were dated 1934. Just six half-crowns that are no longer legal tender, but Roger who is something of a numismatist is glad of them for his collection. If this account should meet the eyes of a Mr. H. Hodge, one-time keeper of the "Old Oak" inn (or any heirs and successors) and if he or they get in touch with Roger or myself some adjustment on the old cheque might be made.

And if any of you care to make an offer to me for one envelope, found in a suit just returned from the cleaners, which bears in fading typescript an address beginning 'Lucius Teggers, Esq.' and a cancelled one penny George V stamp ... well I might just consider a suitable swop.

Meanwhile, would anyone care for a book of road maps published by the Amalgamated Press, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street? They are just a little bit out of date ... forty years or so in fact.

* *

SALE: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, Magnets, Gems, Bunters, Howard Baker Reprints, S. O. L's, Wodehouse Books, Eagle Annuals, B. B's Own, Merry Annuals.
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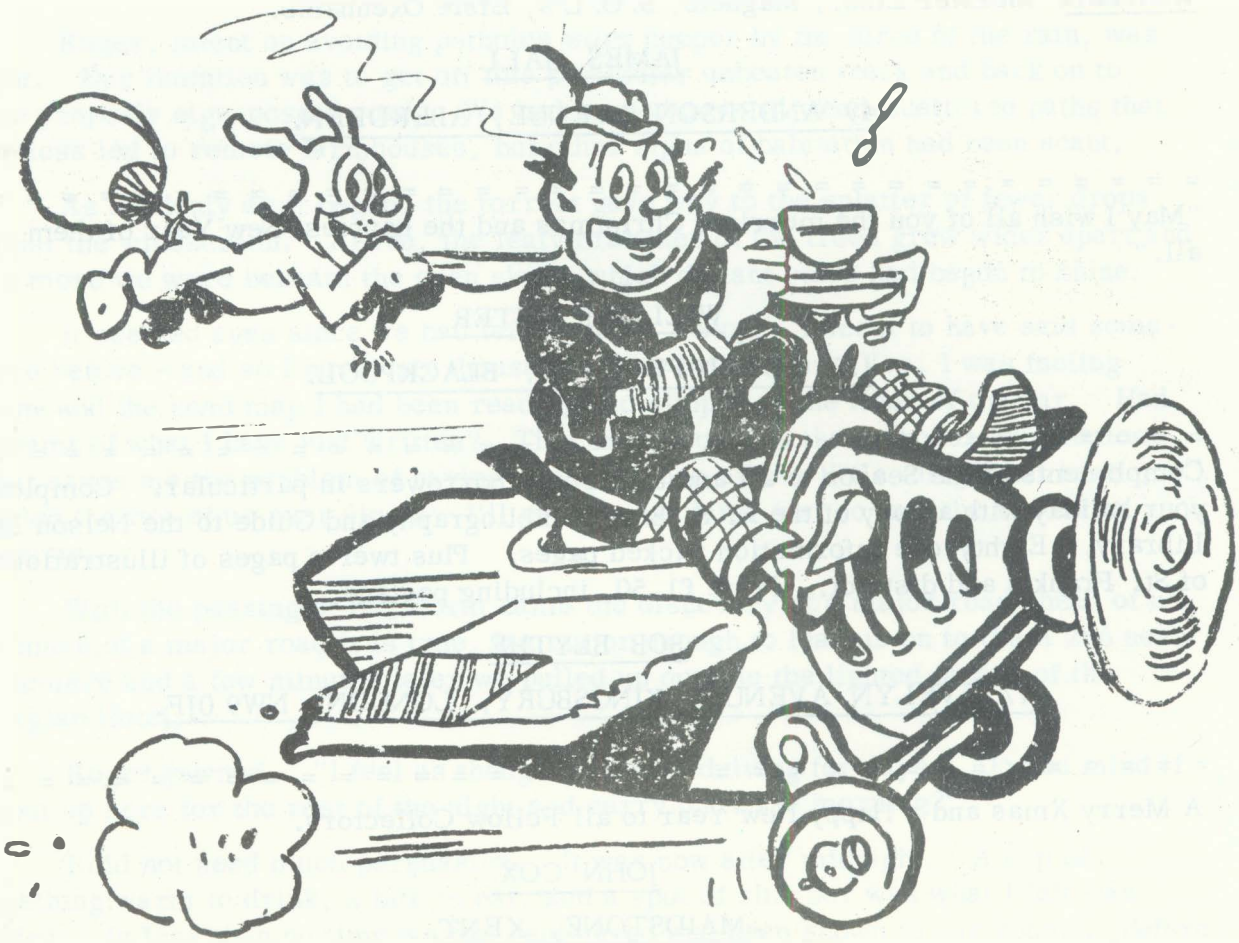
An Artist's Views on other Artists

by W. O. G. Lofts

John L. Jukes, the comic artist, died on 31st October, 1972, at Looe, Cornwall, aged 72 years. These are the bare cold facts as recorded, but John was more than just an artist to me, but a personal friend. He had been so since around 1954, and was also a great enthusiast in our hobby.

Apart from many meetings at his various homes in Hampshire, John had over the years written me hundreds of fascinating letters, many containing inside information on pre-war Amalgamated Press papers as well as his personal views on various artists. Perusing through his folder of correspondence recently, it seemed a shame that most of his comments should be kept in my archives gathering dust, buried, and



SPECIMEN OF THE WORK OF JOHN JUKES

fading into oblivion. So I have decided to publish some of the most interesting extracts from his letters. Probably some readers may not agree with his views and comments, but, at the same time, I'm sure that they will find his expert knowledge as an artist most interesting.

John Leslie Jukes was born in Birmingham. As a schoolboy he was an avid reader of The Magnet & Gem, so much so that in this period he led a party of schoolboys to London where they visited Fleetway House, where they met the Magnet editor. He also remembers meeting Mr. C. H. Chapman who had at that time sandy hair! A little later he submitted cartoon jokes to the black and white papers, and was paid 5/- a time. These progressed until he was drawing full-page comic strips. His most famous character was Alfie, the Air-Tramp, in The Joker, though he did not create the character. Later, he worked on Radio Fun drawing several of the famous radio stars in the post-war period. With the gradual closing down of the old-time comic papers, he went into Government Service as a War Office artist. Eventually retiring from this occupation, and also from Bournemouth, to live at Looe in Cornwall ....

"I admire your intention to eventually get a complete list of comic characters, and state who created them. But a word of warning! More often or not, it was the editor who thought up the idea, and you will also find that eventually it would be some other artist than the first who really makes the character famous.

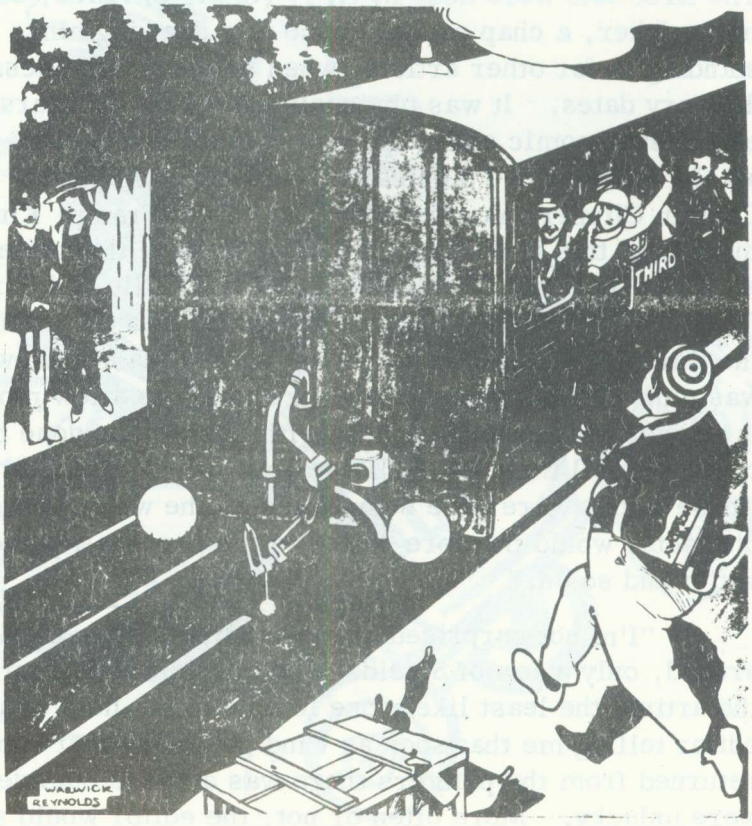
I am usually referred to as Alfie the Air-Tramp artist, but I didn't create him. The first sets were done by A.T. (Charlie) Peace, and when I eventually took him over in the Joker, a chap named Payne was drawing him. It was really quite common standing in for other artists, when holidays or illness interfered with an artist's delivery dates. It was obviously necessary of course. I can safely say that every established comic artist did this sort of chore in his time. I cannot think off hand all the characters I duplicated, but Spot and Speedy: Big Ben & Little Len, Daft Dan, Captain Clipper, Young Scamp the Happy Tramp, King Ooola, are probably amongst them, and this is only in Chips. Whilst on the subject of Chips, you stated somewhere, that Percy Cocking drew Weary Willie and Tired Tim consecutively for over forty years. Simply not true though he was the main artist. I drew a few sets in the thirties, whilst another artist named Martin drew quite a lot, and jolly good he was too. I think you will find in time quite a few more names. In general retrospect, it amazes me how one ends up with characters done by someone else, and running counter to all this, you will see your own brain child activated by some other artist. These things were done sometimes on the whim of the editor, he thinking a certain character would be more suited to the personality and humorous outlook of another artist and so on."

"I'm not surprised at there being hundreds of original Chapman drawings around, only a few of Shields, and absolutely none of Warwick Reynolds. The better the artist, the least likely one is able to get hold of any. I can well remember an editor telling me that soon as wind got round that some Reynolds drawings were to be returned from the printers there was a queue outside the editor's door, and then they were unlucky. More often or not, the editor would take them home himself. Syd Pride the artist had an original Tom Merry portrait which his son, later a top editor,

displayed in his office. A King's ransom would not make him part with it. As regards Warwick Reynolds himself, I recall seeing a photo of him some years ago. He had a long lean face and a rather sad expression. He had not the bohemian rotundity of Bert Thomas or Arthur Ferrier, who were his contempories. But why an artist of his brilliant talent was drawing for such a low market is one of life's mysteries. He was head and shoulders above the rest, and I do say this in respect to all the other A. P. artists, who freely admitted it.

"C. H. Chapman's work never appealed to me, even in my early days, though his interpretation of Billy Bunter will be nigh well immortal. In later years when anybody wants to know what Bunter looked like, they will fork out a Chapman drawing. I always had the strong impression that some of the delineations of the Frank Richards characters were on rubber stamps, and that the figures were constructed with set squares. Some of his drawings were to say the least abysmal in the matter of errors. Ships, boats, (just look at the cover of Magnet 517, 1918!) suits of armour, and all sorts of things that had to be introduced into the ordinary run of the mill pictures of the school. To say nothing of the gross misinterpretation of a situation in a story. One such tale was the illustration dealing with the kidnapping of Hurree Singh at dead of night from the school dormitory. I note recently that Chapman stated that Leonard Shields could not draw horses - maybe he couldn't, but at least he did the right thing in going to text books for reference. A pity that a few more of the A. P. illustrators did not do the same thing. But let's be fair to Chapman, even though in my opinion his Bunter only will be remembered. Some of his sketches in the lighter mood are quite good indeed, once he got away from the regimentation of Greyfriars..."

"J. Louis Smythe was also one of the favourite artists. Some of his work was really clever in FUN AND FICTION. I can well remember a cover drawing of his of a fire-engine crashing into the front of a large plate glass window. Tremendously dramatic. I was most interested in your



SPECIMEN OF THE WORK OF WARWICK REYNOLDS

revealations that he was a small Irish-American who was always singing amusing songs. Obviously quite a jolly chap, though I was sorry to hear of his sad end. They just don't breed personalities and artists like that these days, and it's a pity that so few of them are around. His work could be described as masterpieces of composition with the minimum of detail ..."

"One of the most evocative and mystery making illustrators of the lot was Arthur Jones who, for me, in my boyhood was a fascinating artist. So much so, that during the First World War, I wrote to the editor congratulating him on having such a one as Jones on call. In return - as the friendly custom of those days - I got a very nice letter from the editor, plus an ORIGINAL DRAWING of George Marsden Plummer being confronted by Sexton Blake no less! Plummer had an immaculate lounge suit on complete with bowler hat (only cads or golfers wore caps) while our hero was in dramatic stance coming out of those Jonesy shadows with the inevitable belted raincoat and slouch hat (Borsalino I wonder?) all ready and keenly eager to dish it out to Plummer if he tried anything on. Arthur Jones had one fault. He couldn't draw revolvers, at least not to my liking, for I was very friendly at that time with the son of a Birmingham gunsmith and, by reason of the fact that we had the run of the factory during the holidays, I came to consider myself as a bit of an expert on firearms for, believe me, I had plenty of opportunity to do so. In consequence I used to be outraged at the careless treatment of these things in the illustrations.

I have to report that even I myself came under fire from some youthful critics of an A. P. Annual I illustrated during the early days of the last war. I can remember in my haste, drawing what I later came to know as a Spitfire dropping a hefty blockbuster over some enemy city. The youthful but knowledgeable readers wrote to the editor in their scores to pour scorn on the poor chump you call an artist. Stan Gooch the editor called me up to Fleetway House, and showed me the huge pile of letters. The one I liked best was from a chap that came from Oldham who quite frankly told the editor 'that the artist's brains were nothing but treacle, and they should be spread all over his picture and eaten by the office cat!" ...

I always regarded Eric Parker as one of the most vigorous artists the A. P. ever had. I admired his line and attack. There was no nonsense about his style, and no mucking about as if drawing on a cherrystone. Eric strived to get away from the old delicate corny treatment, and to my mind marvellously succeeded. I notice that some people say his work seemed to be mostly outline in parts. Yes, I do agree, but let us also remember the early line artists like Tom Browne and Phil May just to quote a couple who made marvellous work with such economy of line, that the artist today is trying to copy. Of course we have to remember Phil May's famous remark 'It ain't what you put in, it's what you leave out that tells'.

"I was much amused at the story of how G. W. Wakefield got the Rookwood job in the Boys' Friend. By all accounts Wakefield was a giant of a man, and looked like a bruiser on a fairground - being once a heavy-weight boxer. Because he pushed his way in front of Chapman, I suspect that the latter always had some sort of slight grudge against him which is natural. However, I don't see how Chapman's criticism of Wakefield's drawings, that all his boys had girlish faces, is quite justified when you look closely at some of his own work. In any case, you would never have found

any better artist to draw Laurel & Hardy in Film Fun."

J. S. Baker, whether he originated Tiger Tim and The Bruin boys or not, was the creator of Casey's Court, and in the early days of the century he seemed to specialise in the "gang" type of cartoons and in those days they were mostly "nigger" boys with little pig-tales with bows, etc. I've also seen a lot of his work in Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday too. Richard (Dick) Chance was the principal editor of Chips: Comic Cuts: and Joker. He was a friendly type of man, and he always reminded me of some ebullient schoolboy always ready for a laugh. Possibly both he and his son John Newton-Chance (John Drummond) the Sexton Blake writer wrote between them Dane the dog detective series in Chips. I can well remember having his leg pulled about it in a Fleet Street pub. Back to our old friend Billy Bunter again. Perhaps some day someone will write a full length article on all the artists who drew him through the years. There is no doubt that the most unusual start of any artist was Frank Minnitt who drew him in picture-strip form in the early Knockout. Frank used to sweep the roads round Farringdon Street way, and popped into Fleetway House with his sketches from time to time in the hope they would be accepted. One day he called just at the right time, and got the job, also drawing Blake as well I believe. Frank lived at Westcliff-on-Sea and was quite a good amateur athletic, and I was sorry to hear that he had now passed on. Bill Fisher was editor of the Rainbow for many, many years, and must have been almost from the beginning. He lived at Sutton in Surrey, and was a friendly sort of cove. An artist whom you may not know about who also drew Tiger Tim for a time was Walter Bell. I never met him, but his work has always interested me a great deal. He was doing a set called Mike, Spike and Greta in the old Pilot edited by Hedley O'Mant, when suddenly to my surprise I was handed the job. I continued doing this strip even into Wild West Weekly until its demise. Why Bell never caught on with any series is one of life's mysteries.

Did you see today's Daily Mail and notice the death of Harry Folkard? He was the creator of Teddy Tail. The funny thing about this is that they reproduced a picture of Teddy drawn by H. Foxwell!

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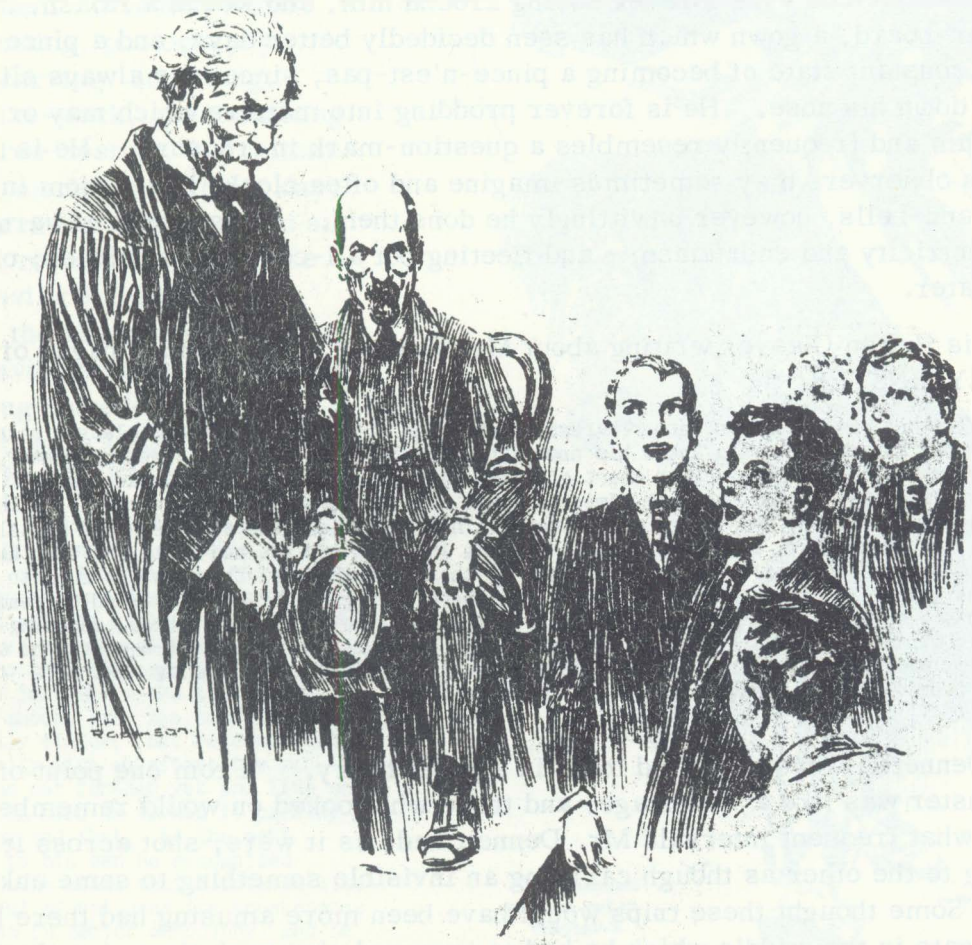
Portrait of a Schoolmaster

by Brian Doyle

When the late Hylton Cleaver wrote about Mr. Dennett, Housemaster of Dennett's House, at Greyminster, he created, in my opinion, the most memorable and hilarious schoolmaster in fiction.

Cleaver - a superlative school story writer in any company - originally introduced Mr. Dennett in the pages of CHUMS in a serial titled CARSON THE SECOND in 1927 (later reprinted in book-form as THE GREYMINSTER MYSTERY). His subsequent major appearances came in TO LEAVE GREYMINSTER (CHUMS 1929/30) (later in book-form as THE SHORT TERM AT GREYMINSTER), A HOUSE DIVIDED (CHUMS 1929/30) (same title in book-form), THE GREYMINSTER MYSTERY (CHUMS 1930/31) (later in book-form as THE GHOST OF GREYMINSTER),



His was the best house in the school.

and, finally, in CAPTAIN FOR A DAY (published by Collins in 1942). These five stories contain the quintessence of Dennett and should be read by anyone who appreciates superb character-drawing, warm humour and hilarious comic set-pieces which have me, at any rate, almost weeping with laughter every time I read them.

If you haven't already met Mr. Dennett allow me to introduce him - but first a brief word about his real-life origin. Hylton Cleaver once told me that Mr. Dennett was based loosely upon an old schoolmaster who used to teach him at St. Paul's School - the Reverend Elam who, though untidy and highly-eccentric, was a brilliant teacher in his own unusual way. The late Sir Compton Mackenzie and novelist Ernest Raymond were also taught by Elam at St. Paul's and both helped to immortalise him in print as well as Cleaver: Mackenzie in the early part of "Sinister Street" and Raymond in "Mr. Olim" (Raymond also devoted a chapter to Elam and his teaching methods in his book "Through Literature to Life" in 1928). One gathers that the real Rev. Elam wasn't particularly loveable, or even likeable. Hylton Cleaver's Mr. Dennett is.

Mr. Dennett (we never learn his Christian name) is a sort of Mr. Chips with everything. He's elderly and the longest-serving master at Greyminster. He's thin and lanky, has a wispy grey moustache, a mop of untidy grey hair to match, a pair of every-suspicious eyes forever roving around him, and wears a rakish, mis-shapen mortar-board, a gown which has seen decidedly better days, and a pince-nez which is in a constant state of becoming a pince-n'est-pas, since it is always slipping precariously down his nose. He is forever prodding into matters which may or may not concern him and frequently resembles a question-mark in trousers. He is not such a fool as observers may sometimes imagine and often cloaks his wisdom in a jester's cap-and-bells, however unwittingly he dons them. He is a man of warmth, vitality, eccentricity and enthusiasm - and fleeting but all-consuming hobbies, of which more later.

Here is Hylton Cleaver writing about Mr. Dennett in the opening pages of TO LEAVE GREYMINSTER:

"When visitors saw a certain rather harassed gentleman with a moustache and glasses passing energetically across their front, and asked his name, they never failed to get a cheerful answer. It was always Mr. Dennett and no-one was ever short of tales to tell about him. Mr. Dennett was occasionally introduced to people; at such times he would come forward at a lunging stride, talk feverishly for several minutes, and leave, motioning with his hat. Half the time he would be talking to parents about the wrong boy; sometimes about a boy who in point of fact had left, and at others about one who had not yet arrived. He was indeed one of those men who feel they have so much to do that it is no use trying to do anything; he never knew where to begin. If he were asked to read a letter, the prospect appalled him, and he would go off with it, like a dog with a bone, carrying it about and hiding it, obsessed by the belief that he had not the time to read it. Frequently he would stand alone, unoccupied, but even then he would deny himself the opportunity, saying inwardly: 'Another time ... another time ... Yes, yes, it shall have my attention.' "

Mr. Dennett always appeared to be in a great hurry. "From one point of view Greyminster was like a vast stage, and those who looked on would remember all their days at what frequent intervals Mr. Dennett had, as it were, shot across it from one wing to the other as though carrying an invisible something to some unknown destination. Some thought these trips would have been more amusing had there been, say, a small gate in the middle which he had to open and shut each time, but the fact remained that he was always hurrying across and never getting anywhere particular."

Again: "Even when on his way to prayers in chapel, Mr. Dennett always walked excitedly. His rather sharp nose showed like an arrow following the dotted line towards the sanitorium; his coat, unbuttoned, hung out behind him like a flag. It always seemed to Mr. Dennett that whenever he was bound for some place on important business, boys chose to step across his path and ask him questions. Twice now, the same occurred. The second boy was doomed; he ran alongside the master trying to get out a fatuous inquiry and Mr. Dennett simply cuffed his head. No explanation of the action was forthcoming, and when the boy recovered Mr. Dennett was already getting smaller in the distance, elbows jerking as he fought for greater speed."

Mr. Dennett was a man of hobbies. "It was a favourite faith of Mr. Dennett's that a hobby was a recreation for the mind. And people used to get as much amusement out of visualising Mr. Dennett's mind at innocent play. Every term he would return to school with a new scheme, only to discard it when enthusiasm was at its height and success within his reach, in favour of another suddenly suggested. Window-boxes, tobogganning, photography, wood-carving, conjuring, detective-work, ghost-hunting and birds-nesting, had within recent memory had their day. This term he had appeared at school resolved to introduce life-saving and first-aid."
It was the latter useful hobby that gave rise to a memorably amusing episode in the Dennett saga (from TO LEAVE GREYMINSTER):

(Whilst in bed at dead of night, Mr. Dennett is awoken by a distant cry of 'Help!'): "He found his slippers and sped across the room in skating style. He flung the window up and thrust his head out. Rain instantly dripped from the creeper just above and gave him a severe shock, like the cold touch of a ghostly finger; but recovering his equanimity with an effort, he put his head out farther yet and like an inquiring bird he turned it perkily this way and that. At the next window to his own he recognised amongst the heads that clustered like a handful of balloons the countenance of Bason (a senior schoolboy) and he shouted at him. What he shouted Bason had not the foggiest idea, and

Mr. Dennett started out in vengeance.

even Mr. Dennett was surprised at the incoherent sounds he made. His accents were those of a man with no roof to his mouth and Bason asked him to repeat himself. Mr. Dennett made a careful and exciting effort but in vain. Indeed, if you say, 'Bason, what was that?' without allowing the tongue to touch the teeth and, furthermore, attempt to shout in the open air, you will get some idea of what Mr. Dennett sounded like. Bason could only stare. Mr. Dennett noticed his expression and the explanation struck him. He cried, 'One moment, then!', even though that did not sound like the mother-tongue at all, and disappeared from view. Plucking his false teeth from a tumbler, he thrust them into his mouth like a handful of hard sweets, closed his jaws about them like a steel trap, and came again at a gallop to the window. 'Bason,' he now repeated, speaking very fast to make up still more time, 'what was that shout?' At the same moment it was pleadingly repeated for his special benefit, and no-one but a fool could have had much doubt. Mr. Dennett therefore answered his own question. 'It is a cry for help! Jump to it, Bason!' For one unhappy moment Bason thought he had to dive from the window, and he looked in distaste at the gravel path below; then he perceived that Mr. Dennett had withdrawn his head and was no doubt already thrusting his arms into a dressing-gown ... Mr. Dennett running like a half-mile specialist, and only pausing to snatch the girdle of his dressing-gown hysterically from between his feet each time he stumbled over it, was leading his house down the main stairs, through the hall, and after a lot of struggling with bolts, into the open, where he splashed through a pool and lost a shoe.

"McFee, behind him, gathered this in his stride, and sprinting alongside, handed it back to Mr. Dennett, who could then be seen in the dark hopping whilst he tried to get it on again without losing speed. Finally, he was obliged to stop, was heavily bumped into from behind whilst in a leap-frog position and nearly fell on his face ... another cry soared into the night to guide them and the course now lay across the First XI cricket ground ... rounding the final bend, Mr. Dennett, who had resumed the lead and who intended in the event of any further mishap to carry his slippers in his hands like running corks, could be seen leaning over like a yacht to maintain his speed on the curve, his dressing-gown flying behind him like a pennant and a spray of water splashing to either side when he struck a place where the rain had settled.

(Mr. Dennett and his boys find a boy named Long Layne blindfolded and tied to the pavilion railings. After releasing him, Mr. Dennett realises there here is a heaven-sent opportunity to both practise and demonstrate his proficiency in life-saving):

"He poised himself before the boy as will one who essays to jump a ditch, then with each arm in turn, he waved the boys back. 'Leave this to me!' His tone implied that anyone who tried to help would find himself tomorrow writing lines by the hundred, and in the silence that ensued he swooped towards Layne and landed on one knee; he hoisted Layne ... across one shoulder. Precariously swaying, Mr. Dennett stood in a strained bent attitude, balancing his burden with grim satisfaction. 'I am employing,' he said in such breathless tones that it seemed likely he would not be able to employ it for long, 'the Fireman's Lift. See how easy are my actions!' On that he took one tottering forward step, like a hunchback, and staggered to one side, being only saved from capsizing by the helpful hand of Bason. Layne was now looking like a load of hay, practically concealing Mr. Dennett; from him the rain, squeezed out by the pressure, trickled down Mr. Dennett's neck, but he was undismayed. He reeled upon the long trail back to school, with bent knees, curving spine, and slippered feet heroically slithering across soaked grass; his face grew more red and his glasses slid; he handed them to some boy near him as though they would be his last legacy should he collapse before he got there, but he could not speak ... His girdle got between and around his feet again, and in a sudden burst of fury he lifted the loose end and gave it to another boy to carry, so that as the procession neared the house it looked exactly as though he were Leading in the Winner, Mr. Dennett being the horse and Long Layne the exhausted jockey. Round them trailed the interested and approving crowd, whilst from windows here and there a few wan faces of boys left behind looked out. This then was Mr. Dennett's hour of abject triumph ... Once or twice he looked out from beneath his load as Sinbad must have looked out from beneath the Old Man of the Sea ... He cannoned into the dormitory, crashed Long Layne twice against the wall, staggered across the room, pitched back, and finally perceived a bed; pausing, he arched his spine like a spitting cat and raised his hinder parts so suddenly and with such heartfelt zeal that he flung Layne head-over-heels across a wide space; fortunately he came to rest upon the bed, and having satisfied himself that Layne had not gone through the window, Mr. Dennett simply fell backwards on to the next bed, and lay there outstretched like a corpse, his arms extended to each side, mouth open, moustache adroop and tangled, and eyes closed. His plight at first really looked worse than Layne's. (Later) ... he wandered feebly to the door. And then it was that his eyes fell upon a certain shelf and there seemed hypnotised. For the last half-hour he had wondered what it was he needed, now he knew. He lunged forward and his trembling hand delightedly secured a tumbler and a jug of water; he could hardly fill the former quickly enough. The water splashed out but he raised his glass and drank it in three loud gulps, draining it dry. Without a pause he instantly re-filled and consumed a second glass; in the course of emptying what was left in the jug he turned to look suspiciously behind him; pairs of eyes from every bed were watching him, and Galleon and Bason still stood deferentially at his side. He was dubious for a moment only; he determinedly raised the glass and drank once more, his lips protruding so that they might the better suck and his moustache a-sparkle with drips left upon it, eyes bulbous as he felt the water passing down his throat. Then he put down that empty tumbler with a sigh ... and self-consciously walked out."

Another of Mr. Dennett's short-lived enthusiasms was cinematography (in A HOUSE DIVIDED) and, by forming a Cinema Club among his boys, to make a documentary film about life at Greyminster - and about himself out and about that great public school: "He had already created in his own mind a rough outline of the sort of playlets they would produce. There was to be one of himself crossing the playing-fields and being greeted rapturously by his lads. He would trot down the steps of his house with an armful of books, one of which he would drop; a boy would run to pick it up, raising his hat as he did so, and Mr. Dennett would thank him with a perfunctory salute of two fingers to the corner of his mortar-board. Other boys would be posted at intervals who would bare their heads and bow as he passed and he would acknowledge their respect reaching out to pat them on the head. Knowing the human boy as he did, he guessed that one or two would duck this pat, anticipating that it was actually to be a smack on the head for some past disobedience. Certain of the boys would be allowed to step up and ask him the way somewhere ... the profound inanity of any boy asking the way about his own school had not as yet struck him."

Again: "Immediately following afternoon school, the cinema club met; the members were to be observed advancing to the site selected, and the way Mr. Dennett walked in front with his camera was suggestive of some out-of-work conjurer who intended to give an entertainment in the street and was being followed to his pitch by the idle of the district ... 'We will set about a few short camera studies; Bason, Cartridge, kindly step forward. Now, from opposite directions, advance and meet. Shake hands. The sub-title is, you understand, 'One member of Dennett's house congratulates another on a recent success in form.'' Bason and Cartridge went self-consciously to their positions and there might have been observed upon the faces of the others of the company a certain lively interest, induced by a great deal of doubt as to how a member of the house did congratulate another on a recent success in form."

Mr. Dennett is prone to the common cold - only, when he gets it, it becomes rather the uncommon cold. Bason has knocked at Mr. Dennett's door: "'Cub id.' Bason went in. A surprising spectacle awaited him. Mr. Dennett looked like a Pasha. His head was wrapped in a towel. His trousers were rolled up to his knees, and his feet were immersed in a bowl of water into which he was shaking, with the dainty air of a connoisseur, mustard out of a tin. At any moment Bason expected him to add likewise salt and pepper to taste and stir with a wooden spoon. By his side stood a sort of witch's cauldron. Bason seemed to have remembered seeing this in use until now as a coal-scuttle, but it was at present filled with further hot-water strongly flavoured with eucalyptus and the fumes from this filled the room. Mr. Dennett had evidently been bending over it and inhaling. On the mantelpiece stood cordials and bottles of medicine like a regiment of comic opera soldiers, all in different uniform. The fire was finely stoked. Indeed, had Mr. Dennett changed his towel for a black conical hat, fitted with a long grey wig, the illusion of witchcraft would have been complete ... Bason sensed that he had intruded upon some private rites. He had never till now supposed that Mr. Dennett belonged to any secret society or dabbled in the unknown ... Mr. Dennett elected to reach for a kettle which was singing on the fire and add some more hot water to that which already

lapped his feet. As it happened it was boiling, and Mr. Dennett had poured in a fair mount with the high action of a man trying to put a head on it before, with an irritated squeal, he quickly raised one foot in pain. A second later he had to raise the other, and there he sat, in suspended animation, completely off his balance, looking at Bason with a face like a rotten apple; and finally, toppling back, to keep his bare feet kicking, he inadvertently toppled forward and, in trying to save himself, one foot struck the edge of the basin. That basin tilted sharply; the water slopped out, and Mr. Dennett sprang for safety with a nasal scream."

Mr. Dennett was certainly accident-prone and was always suffering falls of one kind or another. "Like a man who suddenly decides that he will turn the bath on and leap gaily out of bed to do so, Mr. Dennett tried to hurl himself exuberantly from his chair and stand upright in one acrobatic movement. He coiled himself, then sprang. Unhappily, he had forgotten that his feet were not upon the floor, but on a pile of books, and the result was that as he flung himself into action he remained for one exciting fraction of an instant half-balanced on the edge of them, whirling his arms in circles and with his head nearly falling off at the back; then the books shot from under him and he crashed backwards, hitting the floor with his shoulder blades and then with the small of his back, whilst arms and legs stayed upward flung." Or, on another occasion: "Mr. Dennett folded his arms and briskly sat down on the kitchen table - in fact he sat immediately on the edge - there was no warning, pause or preparation. One moment he sat down, the next the table had shot up behind him and he was like a correct right-angle on the stone floor; his hind parts felt absolutely numb and flat; his spine was jarred right up to his neck, and his hands with which he had tried to save himself were palms downward and flat on the floor to either side of him, stinging like anything. Besides this, he felt sick. Slatter had struck the pose of one acrobat supposed to catch another who is about to cross the stage in flying somersaults; that is to say he stood left foot first, he had crouched, his left hand extended and his right was drawn back. He held this pose for about five seconds, then bounded into life and bundled forward; he stooped and got his hands under Mr. Dennett's arms and hoisted. Mr. Dennett came very stickily; one somehow suspected some practical joke had been played and that a layer of stickphast had been spread between Mr. Dennett and the floor. Yet at last he was on his feet."

Mr. Dennett occasionally liked to dress up for the odd dinner invitation or special event. Here he is about to dine out: "Upon his head was set a silk hat. This was so furry that it was almost impossible to say whether it was a topper or a busby, and his dress tie was stiff and oblong. It had been touch and go whether his white waistcoat would reach to the top of his trousers, and as for his patent shoes they appeared to have been 'thrown together' by some hustled needlewoman out of old sou'westers. In evening clothes Mr. Dennett's personal bearing was debonair and the impression left on strangers was that here was the original man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo, but that he had since fallen upon evil days and would probably borrow a shilling." And here, though confined to bed with a cold, he hastily dresses to charge out of his house to apprehend some schoolboy wrongdoers: "He hastily attired himself as follows. He donned his teeth, a dressing-gown, and fur-lined slippers; round his neck he wore a muffler and round his shoulders a sweater. On his head was perched a felt hat, so that he really looked rather like one who has risen from the dead and is by no means certain of the costume of the period."

Whilst on the edge of the school cricket-field he was an enthusiastic looker-on: "He followed the ball from the moment it left the bowler's hand until either the batsman struck it, or it was returned; and he moved his head as though he were drawing in the air, with his nose, a chart or graph of its flight. As the bowler ran to the wicket, Mr. Dennett turned his head well to one side; as the bowling arm rose, his nose rose with it; then the ball was delivered and Mr. Dennett's head travelled in a quick course to his other side where it stopped as the ball pitched. If the batsman really hit out Mr. Dennett's head shot back as though his nose itself had been smitten; and if he hit a catch, that nose rose into the air with the ball, and followed it into a fielder's cupped hands, where it stopped with a quick jerk as though to mark a full stop on the chart. Indeed, some people would rather watch Mr. Dennett looking on than watch the cricket itself, and he was really at his best when a carpet drive was sent directly to him; his nose picked the ball off the bat, as it were, and his chin swiftly

sunk on his chest, until his nose could not point down any more, no matter how he bent and wrinkled it; whilst if the ball was driven past him, he followed it as though drawing a quick, straight line, and if it hit a tree or chair, Mr. Dennett seemed to feel real pain."

In THE GREYMINSTER MYSTERY, Mr. Dennett (for reasons too complex to go into here) decided to dress himself as a ghost to frighten some of his boys at night. Armed with a white sheet and a bicycle he sets off: "It was some time since he had ridden a bicycle but he knew the general procedure. What he did not know was what to do with his sheet. He had collected this on the way out and now had it under one arm, together with some other accessiries, whilst in his pocket he had some musical instruments of the sort found in Christmas crackers. He tightened his grip on his sheet, set his teetch, then, placing his left foot on the pedal and gripping the handlebars firmly, he pushed off some six or seven times from the ground. At first it looked any odds against him getting his leg across, but at the eighth or ninth attempt he somehow managed it and proceeded to steer in a wobbly fashion for the gate. At the first corner some silly force of habit caused him to ring the bell. Exactly why he did this he never knew, but it is a fact that people who are nervous on bicycles do ring the bell a good deal, though whether this is merely to warn themselves, no-one ever seems to know. Mr. Dennett who was nearly off more than once as he manoeuvred the corner, rang nervously, and a second later he realised what he had done. He, a man endeavouring to get out unobserved, had deliberately given himself away ... he realised he could only do one thing - ride for his life. Had anyone perceived him they would have thought he was the laundry boy arriving very late indeed, but no-one did. The moment he was inside the school he started to don his sheet, much as one would a boiled shirt. Soon he was busy straightening the set of his sheet and safety-pin, and tying round his face a mask cut out of brown paper so that his eyes looked fiercely through two apertures. Next he was donning black gloves and finally he was arranging round him all his comical little squeakers and hooters - he was, in fact, reminiscent of the man out of sight who makes the Punch and Judy noises." Needless to say, his plans come to a chaotic ending.

Mr. Dennett's implacable enemy in his house at Greyminster is the cat. It is forever getting into his room and going to sleep in his favourite chair. And as soon as he ejects it, it creeps in again when the maid enters with a meal or with the mail, or when a boy arrives on some errand or other. One day Mr. Dennett happens upon a boy with a water-pistol, he doesn't confiscate it, but buys it from the astonished lad for a shilling. He has formed a plan: "He raised his pistol and took two tiptoe strides towards his armchair, then, closing one eye he fired point-blank into it. Out of that chair there sprang his hated and persistent enemy as though stabbed by a pin; the house cat hit the floor with all four feet; keeping low to the ground and looking strangely elongated, it went madly for the door. Mr. Dennett was prepared. He flung the door open and as the cat shot out, emptied the pistol after it with a snarl of triumph." A little later, his pistol re-charged, the maid enters: "Mr. Dennett waved her aside and stood with a superior expression. He thus secured a perfect view of the doorway and half-closed one eye. His target daintily appeared. The house cat had a particular mannequin-like walk and now, with tail at half-mast and eyes looking straight in front of it, it marched across the doorway, marked time, then smartly turned in and, stepping out with the left foot, made at the same pace

towards the fire. It was a sitter. Mr. Dennett's hand curled from behind his back, the pistol suddenly presented itself and Mr. Dennett fired. The whole thing was, if possible, an even more remarkable success than on the first occasion. That cat shot backwards, falling over itself and turning at the same time as the blast of water met its face, it spun right round, and in the same swift movement took the corner as before, hugging the door-post and with its neck stretched like a telescope. Mr. Dennett tossed the emptied weapon into the air and caught it as it spun. With a fine air he laid it on the table within reach and looked up, rubbing his hands delightedly. 'Annie. Bring in a bowl of water, please, and all tomorrow, kindly keep it beside my chair here filled.' (It was the next day that he found that incorrigible domestic nuisance calmly drinking from the bowl; but that is another story ...)"

Towards the end of his literary career, Mr. Dennett appears, in a slightly more subdued mood, in CAPTAIN FOR A DAY, published in 1942. He is still in charge of Dennett's House at Greyminster, but now under a newer, younger Headmaster, who invites him, rather ominously, to dinner, during which he tactfully requests Dennett's resignation, due to the fact that one of his boys has been found bound and gagged and with half his hair shaved off. The boy's father is an influential figure who demands satisfaction. Mr. Dennett is taken aback and answers: "There has been trouble in my house ever since I remember. A house in which nothing ever happens is a dead house. Nobody remembers it or wants to send his son there after him. Mine is the most famous house at Greyminster and always has been. There has never been a vacant bed in it. Always a waiting list. The history of Greyminster is bound up with the history of Dennett's. No old boys ever meet without asking for news of me ... and of my house. So, when you speak of recent trouble, you mean that history repeats itself. All the best stories of Greyminster begin and end in Dennett's." The trouble is eventually and satisfactorily cleared up, of course, when it turns out that boys from another house have been responsible for the dark deed, and Dennett remains at Greyminster. What would it be without him ...?

Curiously, schoolmasters closely resembling Mr. Dennett - but never quite achieving his stature - appeared in many other school stories written by Hylton Cleaver. There were Mr. Mott of Duke's, Mr. Godwin of Harley, Mr. Loftus of Abbot's, Mr. Leach of Waring, Mr. Bannister of Gainsborough, Mr. Flood of Cloister, Mr. Wilding of Frailsham, and Mr. Fortescue, who featured in a series of short stories Cleaver wrote for BOYS' OWN PAPER in the 1950's.

I met and corresponded with Hylton Cleaver during the year before his death (in 1961) and he once attended a meeting of the London Old Boys' Book Club at my home, then near Clapham Common, early in 1961. He once wrote to me: "I am glad your favourite character was Mr. Dennett. He was mine too. I thoroughly enjoyed those books. There is a framed incident in which he figured in CHUMS hanging in my son's room now." His son, Peter Hylton Cleaver, was also educated at St. Paul's School. But there was no Rev. Elam to teach him in his time there.

Mr. Dennett is still in charge of his house at Greyminster, though, as we can discover whenever we open the appropriate book or volume of CHUMS. Like all our favourite fictional characters he can be summoned, as if by magic, at the turn of a page.

Let's take our last glimpse of him, for the time being, on the final page of A HOUSE DIVIDED. Mr. Dennett has just shown the film he has made (much of which, needless to say, didn't come out) with his Cinema Club: "At the end Mr. Lewin raised his voice. 'Dennett, there seems to be no picture of yourself.' Mr. Dennett paused; the lights went up. He looked at Mr. Lewin gratefully. He had been hoping somebody would notice that. 'Of me?' he laughed. 'Why ... who am I ... only an eccentric master at a public school ... an old fool ... who should I appear?' There was an awkward silence. Mr. Lewin looked unable to reply. But somebody else thought of the proper answer. McFee stood up. It required no call. He simply started singing. Everybody joined in. With hands folded, tummy stuck out, eyes looking over pince-nez and a smile, he listened as they sang his praise. He was a jolly good fellow and they meant it. His was the best house in the school."

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON HYLTON CLEAVER

Hylton Cleaver was born in London in 1891 and educated at St. Paul's School, London. As a boy his favourite magazine was THE CAPTAIN and he especially admired the school stories by P. G. Wodehouse, which appeared therein. When Wodehouse retired from the school story field, Cleaver thought there might be a chance for someone to step into 'The Master's' shoes and so, at 22, he sent a school story called "The Red Rag" to THE CAPTAIN and it was at once accepted, appearing in 1913. He rapidly became one of the most popular school story writers in Britain, with 5 serials for THE CAPTAIN, 7 serials for CHUMS, plus numerous short stories for these papers and also for BOYS OWN PAPER. All his serials and some short stories were later published in book-form. Most of his tales were about Greyminster, Harley or Duke's. He published close on 60 books including, as well as school stories, humorous, adventure and sporting tales, plus several adult novels, non-fiction books on sport, and two volumes of autobiography ("Sporting Rhapsody", 1951, and "Before I Forget", 1961). His first adult novel was "The Tempting Thought" (1916). His first boys' story to appear in book-form was ROSCOE MAKES GOOD (1921), which originally appeared as a serial called "Who Cares?" in THE CAPTAIN. His stories in THE CAPTAIN and CHUMS were usually illustrated by H. M. Brock and T. H. Robinson. He served with the 'Sportsman's Battalion' during World War One, was wounded and received the M.C. He was later a sports writer for the London EVENING STANDARD for over 20 years, covering maily rugby, riding and rowing. Under his only pseudonym 'Reginald Crunden' he wrote a series of homorous stories titled "The Happy Company" for CHUMS; also a series about a young boxer named Norman Conquest. He died in London, on 9 September, 1961, aged 70.

* *

WANTED TO BUY: Puck Annuals, 1922, 1925, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, Tiger Tim 1923, 1926, 1928, Bubbles 1924, 1925, 1929, Crackers 1936, 1938, 1940, 1941.

J. HUGHES

160 CHARTERS TOWERS ROAD, HERMIT PARK

TOWNSVILLE, AUSTRALIA.

= =

WANTED: Wizard, Hotspur, Adventure, Champion, Triumph, Film Fun, 1928 - 1934. Also Books, Pictures, etc., re Sydenham, London, same period or earlier.

H. G. MARTIN

3 SOMERSET ROAD, ORPINGTON, KENT

(Orpington 33564)

= =

PRECIOUS GEM

by LAURIE SUTTON

For any boy of fair abilities
St. Francis school had scant facilities.
For woodwork, and for other handicraft
The school authorities were forced to draft
All of the boys to work in neighbouring school;
Starting at age eleven, as a rule.

Woodwork, right from the start, I did detest,
And every week grew more and more depressed.
I came to dread each Wednesday afternoon -
Which always seemed to come a week too soon.
My boyhood skills lay not in this direction,
And would have tested Sherlock Holmes' detection.

I added scars to lined and furrowed bench,
In workshop prison reeking with the stench
Of woodshavings, and glue, and lubricant -
My finished products far from elegant!
The woodcraft had a tyrant at the helm;
In bullying tones he ruled his little realm.

One day my steps reluctantly I dragged
Towards the tyrant's school; but as I lagged,
Impersonating old and ailing snail,
Temptation did my worried thoughts assail.
Debating whether truant I should play,
But wondering what excuse I'd give next day.

In shame, I then decided I would choose
My withered leg, exploiting in abuse
By feigning that it troubled me, and ached;
Though, even as I thought of it, I quaked
At prospect of so obvious a lie,
That mother - or a master - might decry.

Departing from the straight and narrow path,
Deciding now to risk the aftermath,
I wandered round the block, and turned my feet
In opposite direction to the street
Where stood that most atrocious of all schools -
With tyrant master, wood, and clumsy tools.

Yet, still with worry heavy on my mind,
I deviated further still, to find
Myself outside a shop where, neatly stacked,
Papers and periodicals were racked.
My roving eye quite naturally did poise
On cover pictures that appealed to boys.

Exciting, thrilling scenes did there abound,
But one scene of contentment then I found;
Some schoolboys on an island picnic feed,
With frying sausages that did, indeed,
Seem to waft out their sizzling, savoury scent -
Tempted, I fell, and in the shop I went.

Those boys had made me long to join with them
Inside the magic pages of the "Gem."
Of course, no money was in my possession -
My finance in its regular recession.
But, though I had no money for the till,
The twopence could appear on mother's bill!

cont'd ...

Arriving home, in some slight trepidation,
No trouble met by falsehood explanation.
I very soon was stretched upon my bed,
With chin in hands, as avidly I read
About a different school from that I'd fled -
All care and trouble now completely shed.

My lonely heart made new and lifelong friends;
For fiction friendship thrives, and never ends.
I left the Peckham dirt and grime, to drift
Into the Sussex countryside, and sniffed
The crisp clear air and scented meadow lands -
In those sweet hours my life was in my hands.

Now, to the river, sparkling in the sun,
To join St. Jim's schoolboys in youthful fun;
To gaze on wooded banks, and live my dream,
As straining arms pulled slowly up the stream;
On green and rushy bank the boat would bump,
When laughing boys would clutch a branch, and jump ...

The sun on Peckham also shone, 'tis true,
But fields were sparsely spread, and trees were few.
No placid river flowed there, peacefully;
Though, walking just a short way, I could see
Some water, that in straight and stagnant strip,
Took barges on a dull commercial trip.

From that day I was never quite alone -
The seeds of lifetime friendships had been sown.
Each Wednesday I would purchase eagerly
The Gem, and soon in Sussex I would be;
Walking in leafy lane, or shady wood,
In company with D'Arcy - life was good!

Resulting from my truant escapade,
Another dividend was later paid;
Next week from woodwork tasks I was withdrawn -
My last rough chunk of wood had now been sawn.
Each Wednesday now brought pleasure undiminished;
A visit to St. Jim's - and woodwork finished!

* *

WANTED: Union Jacks, 1054, 1055, 1056, 1059, 1064, 1070, 1082, 1083, 1086, 1094, 1095, 1099, 1109, 1112, 1113, 1119, 1120, 1135. Must be complete.

H. W. VERNON

5 GILLMAN STREET, CHELTENHAM, VIC., AUSTRALIA.

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A Dangerous Partnership

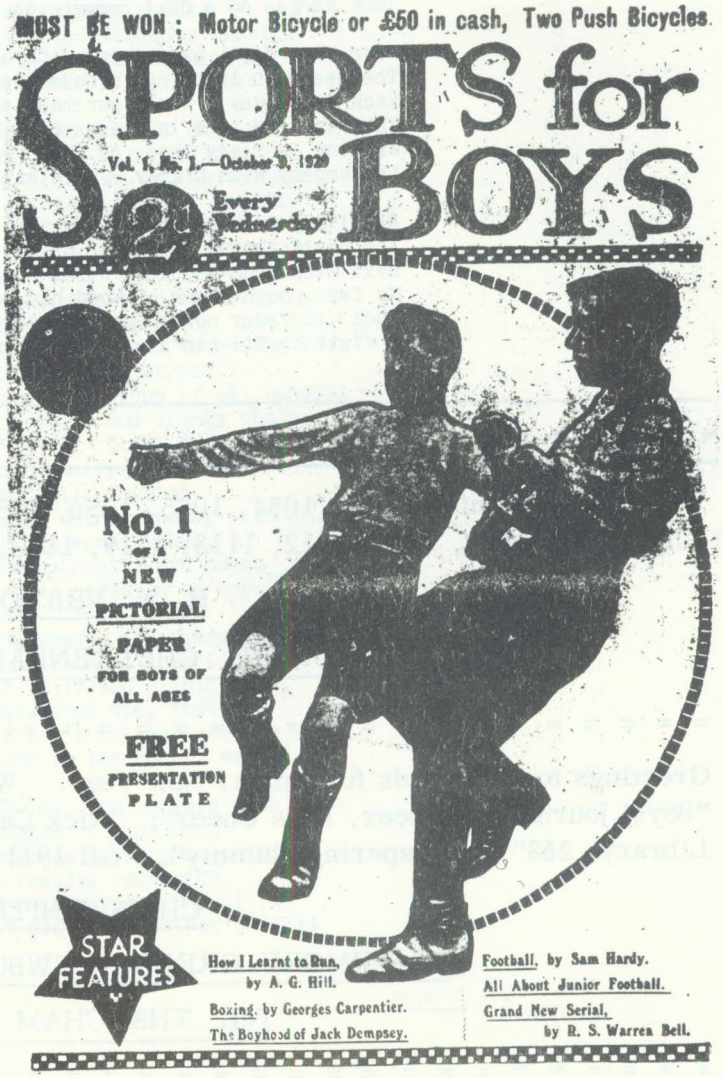
by S. Gordon Swan

Certain of the subsidiary characters in the Sexton Blake Saga had such outstanding personalities and gained so much popularity that their adventures appeared in other papers than the UNION JACK and the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. In these additional exploits they were the central characters, inasmuch as Sexton Blake was not opposed to them.

Two names that spring to mind in this connection are those of George Marsden Plummer and Dr. Huxton Rymer. Plummer appeared in about seven different periodicals and enjoyed the distinction of being portrayed on the screen. In the stories about him which were published in PLUCK - save for one or two which also featured Sexton Blake - he frequently got away with the loot, which raises some doubt regarding the truth of the slogan, "Crime Does Not Pay."

So far as I know, that redoubtable character, Dr. Huxton Rymer, was not seen in any films, but his popularity may be gauged by the fact that he starred in the UNION JACK, the BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY, the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY, PLUCK, the BOYS' REALM and the PRAIRIE LIBRARY.

Josie Packman, in her admirable article in the C. D. Annual for 1973, has comprehensively covered the career of the criminal doctor in the Sexton Blake Saga. What may not be so well-known is that Rymer was opposed to Nelson Lee in three serials which were published in the PRAIRIE LIBRARY in 1920.



The purpose of printing a Nelson Lee serial in a Western magazine was probably an attempt to boost the circulation, for the PRAIRIE LIBRARY survived little more than a year - 57 issues in all.

The origin of the Nelson Lee serials is obscure. In the first place, they appeared during a period when G. H. Teed was not writing - at least, not for the Amalgamated Press. They were not converted Blake tales because of the presence in two of them of Mdlle. Miton, better known as The Black Wolf, a crooked adventuress who had pitted her wits against Nelson Lee in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. She could not have been substituted for Yvonne in these particular stories, as Yvonne was motivated by revenge, whereas The Black Wolf was an out-and-out criminal. The opinion of the present writer is that they were intended originally for the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, but were crowded out by the policy of publishing St. Frank's tales exclusively. Thus they were held over until a suitable opportunity occurred to print them.

As to the stories themselves, the first appeared in PRAIRIE LIBRARY No. 31, dated 10th January, 1920. It was entitled "The Black Pearl - a grand new tale of Nelson Lee, Nipper, Dr. Huxton Rymer and Ah Wah, the Chinaman." The action was laid in Hong Kong and Honolulu, and instead of the Buffalo Bill story being depicted on the cover, an incident from the serial was shown. The story concluded in No. 35, and altogether it was approximately the length of a tale in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. Ah Wah left Hong Kong hurriedly on the eve of his arrest for practising a racket which involved an illegal tax on coolies, and proceeded to Honolulu with Lee on his track. There he joined forces with Rymer and another adventurer in an attempt to steal a valuable black pearl, a scheme which Nelson Lee brought to naught. At the end Ah Wah was captured - one wonders why his name was mentioned under the title heading, as he did not appear again - but Huxton Rymer escaped.

The next serial began in No. 36 and was called "A Dangerous Partnership", an apt title, as in this narrative Mddlle. Miton, The Black Wolf - a formidable adversary of Nelson Lee - teamed up with one of Sexton Blake's most notorious antagonists. Once more an illustration from this story was given pride of place on the cover.

Mdlle. Miton met Huxton Rymer in the South Seas when he was down and out - a not infrequent condition for that unscrupulous adventurer - and found in him the man she needed to consummate her latest daring scheme. This was no less than to establish a bank in the South American republic of Colombia, where banking facilities were primitive, and eventually to abscond with a considerable amount in bullion - £162,000, to be exact. Needless to say, Nelson Lee turned up in that quarter of the world and was able to frustrate the criminals; also, needless to say, Rymer and The Black Wolf got away. The story ended in No. 41.

The next two serials, which do not concern us, as Huxton Rymer was not involved, ran from No. 42 to No. 50. The last serial, "The Missing Professor," commenced in No. 51 and once more brought Rymer and The Black Wolf in opposition to Nelson Lee in the case of a professor who alleged he had discovered a method of making diamonds. This threatened the financial security of a certain diamond merchant who had invested all his money - some borrowed on credit - in anticipation

of a big rise in the price of diamonds, an event which would not occur if the professor's discovery proved authentic.

This speculator hired Mdlle. Miton to prevent or nullify the professor's demonstration. The professor was kidnapped and Huxton Rymer impersonated him and ensured that the test for manufacturing diamonds was a failure. Eventually Nelson Lee came into the picture and foiled their scheme. Both Huxton Rymer and The Black Wolf were captured, but Rymer got away and The Black Wolf received an inadequate sentence of twelve months' imprisonment. The serial finished in No. 57, which was also the last issue of the PRAIRIE LIBRARY. One wonders if there were any other unpublished Nelson Lee-Huxton Rymer stories by G. H. Teed. Whose idea it was to bring these two into conflict remains a mystery, as Nelson Lee had a similar foe in Dr. Mortimer Crane, but the stories throw a light on another phase of Huxton Rymer's nefarious career. ●

* *

A Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year to collectors everywhere, especially ye good old Editor of Collectors' Digest, your friend and mine, is the wish of

STUART WHITEHEAD

12 WELLS ROAD, FAKENHAM, NORFOLK.

Still interested in early Hamiltonia.

= =

St. Frank's wishes you all the very best for 1975.

= =

SEASONAL GREETINGS to our Editor. Also to my great friend Howard Sharpe, Vernon Lay, Bert Vernon, "Sir James Swan", Ern Darcy, Jim Cook, Mr. and Mrs. Colby, Mrs. Packman, Bob Blythe, Bill Lofts, Syd Smyth, John de Freitas, and collector members of whom I have forgotten. May the next year be our best.

A. GEORGE DAVIDSON

193 RAE STREET, FITZROY NORTH

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA.

= =

A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all Hobbyists, especially our Editor, Frank and Jim.

WILLIAM GRIBBEN

28 HILLMOUNT GARDENS, FINAGHY,

BELFAST, BT10 0ES, N. IRELAND.

Morcove Abroad : North Africa

by Ray Hopkins

Between 1921 and 1935, Betty Barton and Co. of the Fourth Form at Morcove School, made several trips to North Africa. In some cases they went by invitation; in others, they were taken forcibly and had to be rescued.

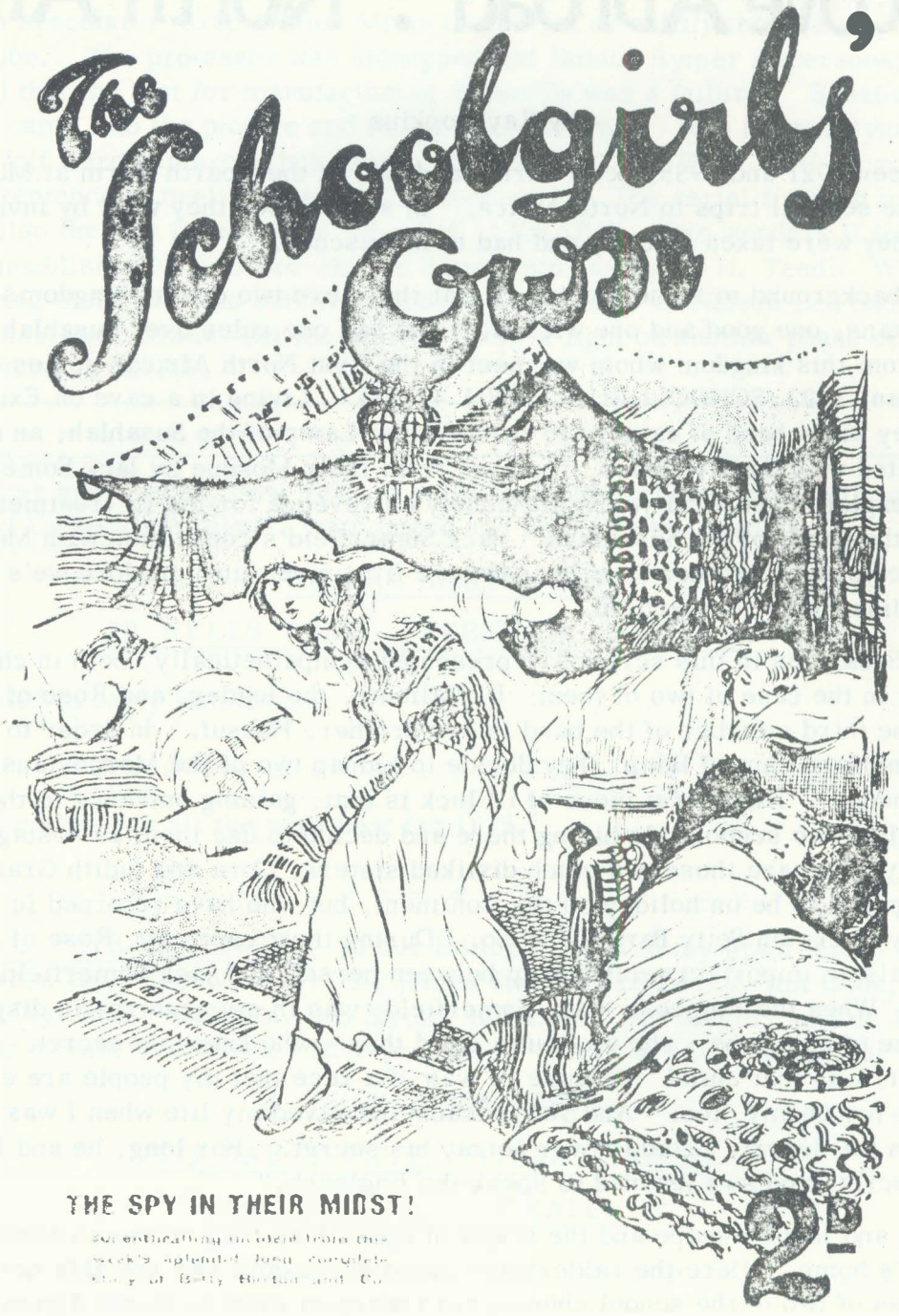
The background to these stories is that there are two desert kingdoms, both rules by Sultans, one good and one wicked. The bad one rules over Susahlah, and it is natives from this kingdom whom we meet in the first North African series of Dec. 1921/Jan. 1922 (SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 47-51). Living in a cave on Exmoor in England, they are a band of raiders to retrieve the Lamp of the Susahlah, an ancient relic connected with their worship, removed from their Mosque by Jack Somerfield, the famous explorer, several years previously as revenge for the ill treatment he received at the hands of the Susahlans. Jack Somerfield's connection with Morcove is that he is the younger brother (age 28, when we first meet him) of Morcove's head-mistress, Miss Esther Somerfield.

The Susahlans in this series are presented sympathetically, both in character and by name in the case of two of them: El Valiente, the leader, and Rose of the Desert. The third member of the band is her brother, Hussuf. In order to gain repossession of the sacred lamp, they decide to kidnap two of the Morcovians and hold them for ransom. Their first piece of ill luck is that, gaining entrance to the Morcove attics, they find two schoolgirls hiding there and decide to use them as hostages. Unfortunately, they are those two much disliked sisters, Cora and Judith Grandways, who are supposed to be on holiday on the Continent, but who have returned in secret in order to play tricks on Betty Barton and Co. During their captivity, Rose of the Desert reveals an important relationship between herself and Jack Somerfield. In her own words: "When the Engleesh man, Somerfield, was in my country, in disguise, there was one of our tribe - she was but a child then - who knew his secret. I, Rose of the Desert, was that child. Because he was of a race that my people are enemies with, he was my enemy, too. And yet, because he saved my life when I was but a child, lost in the desert, I could never betray his secret. For long, he and I were friends in secret, and so I learned to speak the Engleesh."

Cora and Judith escape and the scene of operations then moves to Linton Hall, Polly Linton's home. Here the raiders are more successful and are able not only to make captives of two of the school chums, but transport them to North Africa. It is two of the lesser members of Study 12 who fall into the hands of the Susahlans: Tess Trelawney, the schoolgirl artist, and Madge Minden, the Fourth Form pianist.

Betty Barton & Co. together with Polly's brother, Jack Linton, go off to Morocco to rescue the two captives. However, before that happens, Jack Somerfield corroborates Rose of the Desert's statement. He had managed to escape from the Sultan's Palace when there was a mutiny amongst the jailers. He had found himself in

THE PAPER EVERY SCHOOLGIRL LOVES!



PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY Week Ending January 26th, 1924.

SHULAMA - the girl-spy of MORCOVE

the Mosque and stole the lamp because they prized it so highly. While he had been in jail, Rose of the Desert, though only a child, had become his friend, and he concludes, "She used to run all sorts of risks to get a talk with me. And I remember how the tears used to come to her bright, dark eyes, because she wanted to arrange my escape, and couldn't."

That night, Hussuf and Rose of the Desert are upstairs looking for the lamp which Jack Somerfield has brought with him to Linton Hall. They find it, but are discovered and chased out of doors by Somerfield. He almost falls over Rose of the Desert and recognizes her, though she is now grown up. Hussuf attempts to stun Jack with the lamp, but Jack snatches it from him and inadvertently drops it, where it smashes to pieces on the frosty road. "The splintering crash was not without a distressing effect upon Somerfield. Even while he was still at grips with Hussuf, he was aware of a strange sentimental regret that the lamp was no more." Hussuf knocks Jack out, retrieves the pieces of the smashed lamp and returns to the cave on Exmoor. But he has left one piece of the lamp behind! El Valiente says, "Be it so. They shall go back with us, two of these English girls, and they shall never see their friends again until the last fragment of the lamp has been restored to us." And so, during a fancy-dress party on the ice where they are dressed as Moorish maids, Madge and Tess are kidnapped and spirited away from Linton Hall and England. The girls are taken before the Sultan of Susahlah who decrees that Somerfield return the missing portion of the Lamp of Susahlah. The girls will be set free but he will remain a prisoner in Susahlah forever.

There are some interesting romantic touches in this series. While the captive Morcovians are travelling across the desert by camel, Madge Minden is handed a paper flower which had been carried between the lips of the deaf mute, imbecile son of an aged native man on whom El Valiente had taken pity and given food and drink. All the way through, the villains are continuously shown in a good light and so one regrets that they, and not Somerfield, are on the wrong side. Madge recognizes the paper flower as one she had obtained from a bon-bon at Linton Hall and given to Jack Linton, so this romantic gesture is really to let the captives know that their rescuers are close by. Later, Madge tosses a lead monkey from their prison window which Jack Linton had given her in exchange for the paper flower, so that their rescuers will know where they can be found. The aged native man is, of course, the disguised Jack Somerfield. Madge and Tess unconsciously wound the Moroccan girl when she overhears them comment that Somerfield was glad to get away from Susahlah and never wants to see it again. Rose of the Desert, almost in tears, cries, "He said that to you, the man Somerfield? There is nothing in this land of mine - nothing and nobody he would ever wish to see again?"

The first series closes with an exciting and rather moving climax. When the two girls have been rescued and all are ready to leave in Jack's aeroplane, Rose of the Desert appears before them. She says sadly, "I do not blame you for snatching them from my house. To whatever race we belong, under whatever sky we may live, it is the way of every heart never to rest until it has set free from captivity those whom it loves." She tells them she is in deep disgrace for having allowed them to escape. "With the Susahlah," she says, "there is no excuse for failure." She will

lose herself in the desert and thus die. Jack Somerfield cannot allow this to happen and says he will save her life by giving her the remaining piece of the lamp. There is an almost operatic quality about this final scene as the native girl, joyous, cried, "With this - oh, Rose of the Desert need fear nothing. And so, once again, I owe my life to thee, grave Englishman.. Once again you have saved me - me, your little friend of the former days - from death in the desert."

All of these little touches make this particular series much wider in scope than the type of holiday adventures one would expect to find connected with girls' school stories. As the plane becomes airborne in Jan. 1922:

"One lonely figure in white raiment was visible, amongst the mountain rocks. It was Rose of the Desert. They saw here, as she stood there, waving again and again -- waving her last farewell."

One surmises that this first North African series flooded the editorial offices with enthusiastic letters and the author was told to reintroduce Rose of the Desert for, three months later (SO 62-65, April 1922) she is once again in England, forced by the Sultan of Susahlah to accompany his agents, Pearl Hartry and her father, Stephen, who are to steal from Jack Somerfield a native map which shows where a "wonderful El Dorado of buried gold" is to be found in the Susahlah desert. Somerfield, who is on another exploration trip, has left the map in Polly's father's safe at Linton Hall. Pearl tells Rose of the Desert that she must not attempt to communicate with her old Morcove acquaintances. "Your very life may pay for any disobedience," she says. She then proceeds to make overtures to Polly who, impressed by the charm of the older girl (Pearl is 18), invites her to Linton Hall for Easter. Rose of the Desert, knowing the Hartry's are planning to steal property belonging to Jack Somerfield, determines to forestall them. Both girls are within earshot when Mr. Linton carelessly says out loud the combination of his safe and it is Rose of the Desert who reaches the safe first, but the Hartrys track her down and pounce on her in a deserted country road. Betty and Polly have observed the Hartry's shadowing tactics and go to the aid of Rose of the Desert. Pearl and her father are almost too much for them and only the approaching headlights of a car force the Hartrys to run, minus the map. It is Jack Somerfield who jumps from the car.

In April 1923 (SO 116-120), Morcove goes to Nakara, home of the good Sultan, mentioned earlier, whom the author describes as "an infirm, aged man with a long white beard," who is grandfather to the orphaned Naomer. This series marks the debut of this very popular Morcove character and she is described as "a very pretty girl and a great chatterbox."

Two new English characters, who also turn up in later series, are Hugh and Norah Hamilton, a married couple who reside in Nakara, in the author's words, "doing a great pioneer work for the Union Jack", and they travel to the Coast to escort the Morcove party to Nakara. Monitoring their progress and uttering such cryptic remarks as, "Poor Fools! If they knew what each stage of the journey may be taking them to!" are Fuan Ben Jezrel and his wife, Nassina, who are employed as spies for the Sultan of Susahlah. Nassina disguises herself as an old beggar woman and, complaining that she has been robbed in Susahlah, she is allowed to stay in the Palace women's quarters in Nakara, from whence she emerges daily to pass secrets to her husband who is masquerading as a blind beggar in Nakara. Paula, running

away from one of the Palace's tame leopards, hides in a room and is even more frightened to find herself confronting Nassina, forgetting momentarily to act her role of the beggar woman. Nassina knocks Paula senseless to the floor and then imprisons her in one of the Palace dungeons. Rose of the Desert follows them and is overpowered by Nassina and locked in with Paula. Later, after they are rescued and Nassina and Fuan have vanished, the Hamiltons take the Morcovians and Naomer on a trip to the mountains which can be seen from the Palace windows. Mr. Hamilton informs them that they are leaving that night for England. The safety of Naomer demands that the Sultan of Susahlah must not know she is crossing the desert to go to England. But the secrecy is to no avail because Fuan and Nassina are spying on them and have signalled to Susahlah. All the Morcove girls are made slaves of the Sultan and are forced to carry water pots to and fro on their heads in native fashion, humiliated in front of the other Palace slaves. Rose of the Desert manages at last to overpower Nassina and steal her keys, and leads the Morcove party to safety under cover of a false fire at the Palace. Back in Nakara, Polly Linton says, "Hurrah then, for England, home and beauty! And if ever there's talk of another trip to this part of the world - well, just count me out!"

So much for Polly's determination! The next North African series is the longest thus far (SO 155-163, Jan-March 1924). Naomer's grandfather, the good Sultan of Nakara, is dead and emissaries from Nakara come to take Naomer back with them to make her Queen. But Naomer refuses to leave Morcove! But, hovering again in the background is the evil star of the previous series, Nassina Ben Jezrel, who says to her husband, Fuan, "Yea, better death than to live to see Naomer Nakara with the crown upon her head! Our own daughter, the beautiful one, shall yet reign as queen of Nakara - in Naomer's name!" Shulama, the daughter, is to be presented to the Nakarans as Naomer, grown older and changed by her schooling in England. And so Naomer is captured and commanded to teach Shulama English speech and English ways. Naomer, hating Shulama on sight, refuses to co-operate, and so Shulama tells Naomer she was forced to come to England to become involved in the kidnap plot. She says she will help Naomer to escape from her captors if Naomer will allow her to stay in safety at Morcove. This is a clever move because it immediately makes Naomer sympathetic to Shulama and, "In a very apt manner, she picked up the girls' ways as well as their speech." Shulama secretes her parents in the Morcove attics but is suspected and revealed as a thief and a liar when Polly, playing detective, after suspicions aroused by missing food, shows the Form she is aiding and abetting those she said she had been forced to help in the plot against Naomer. All three plotters flee from Morcove! Morcove believes Naomer is now safe but, the spies plan was not to switch Shulama for Naomer in England, but in Africa!

Six Morcovians are invited to the Coronation. Miss Redgrave and Rose of the Desert accompany the girls. They leave after the departure from Morcove of Naomer and the emissaries. Naomer and all her retinue are attacked by 100 men in the desert and carried off in triumph to the Sultan of Susahlah. Heavily disguised in the black rags of a widowed beggar woman, Nassina, with Shulama, arrives in Nakara, in heavy mourning for the death of their young queen, saying she has brought their Queen, saved from the desert. The elders of the Court are deceived, as are

Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton. That which Shulama has learned at Morcove fools everybody. When the Morcove party arrive at Nakara, having had a couple of escapes from capture by the Sultan's men, the false Naomer refuses to see them, knowing she will be recognized. She also keeps herself hidden from her own people who think she has become ill. The Morcovians are hurt and puzzled that their little friend will not see them, and Rose of the Desert is told by the "woman in black" (Nassina in disguise again), that Rose must lead all the Morcove party out of Nakara because the superstitious Nakarans believe their coming has made the Queen ill.

Naomer, meanwhile, is being ill-treated in the Susahlah dungeons by a juvenile version of Nassina, called Yulaka. Naomer keeps her dignith through all her trials, but breaks down when Betty & Co. enter, and cries, "It is for this you have left your free and happy country!" Rose of the Desert is not with them. She had left on a mission before the Morcove party was captured and had in fact returned to Nakara in the guise of a poor native girl who has lost her memory. She is determined to see what is causing Naomer to act in so peculiar a fashion toward her friends. She is brought before the false Naomer, and cries, "Impostor. This then is why the English girls have been served so treacherously." Eluding the vengeful Nassina, Rose of the Desert escapes from Nakara and heads for El Karah over which three flags fly: British, French and Spanish. Incredulously, she recognizes an old friend upon her arrival, but, worn out by the strain of her long journey, falls unconscious with shock. But fortunately, it is Jack Somerfield whom she has again encountered in an hour of need!

Meanwhile, back in Susahlah, Betty, Naomer and Co. are brought before the Sultan. Polly says bravely, "Let's show the wretch we are not afraid!" But Naomer haltingly says, "If I can look as brave as you! But I am different. You English ..." However, when confronted by the jeering Sultan, she stands up to him bravely. She tells him, "They have long known what a monster rules in Susahlah! Ye do not know, perhaps, what courage it means to be English born." The wicked Sultan, impressed perhaps by her strength of character, offers to release Naomer to reign in Nakara, if she will do as he does in Susahlah, with cruelty to all. Naomer proudly refuses and the Sultan condemns her to spend the rest of her life in a tiny cell where the light of day will never penetrate. Again, surprisingly, the Sultan gives her a week to make up her mind.

A week later finds the Morcovians without any hope that Rose of the Desert can save them. Yulaka enters their cell to take Naomer away and the girls decide this to be the best moment to put into action a plan devised by Polly. Regretting it, because it goes against all their earlier training, five of them overpower Yulaka, who faints when her head strikes the floor (perhaps a retribution for her having bitten Betty's hand to the bone), and with Naomer dressed in their jailer's outer garment, and impersonating Yulaka's swaggering manner and harsh tone of voice, she leads them past the sentry outside and into an empty minaret where Naomer says they can lock themselves in. Those who have followed them from the Palace dungeons shout up that they will be left to starve to death, but the next morning an aeroplane swoops down at sight of the girls on the minaret balcony and inside they are thrilled to see Jack Somerfield and Rose of the Desert who have brought an ultimatum to the Sultan of

Susahlah from the three powers to release all prisoners immediately. A white flag of surrender is fluttered from a tall pole by order of the cowardly Sultan and all inhabitants os Susahlah are commanded to stay within their own mud walls while the prisoners leave. The Morcove party have a grand reunion with Jack and Rose of the Desert at an Oasis a mile outside the city walls.

Nassina and Shulama escape from Nakara and are seen no more, and Naomer's Coronation takes place at last. "The queen was crowned, and would reign in the Palace. But there was a sense in which she would still reign amongst her schoolgirl chums of Morcove - enthroned in all those loving hearts that knew her so well." Betty prophetically remarks, "Someday at Morcove, Naomer will be in our midst again."

And indeed she is two months later (SO 174-179/May-July 1924) when, home-sick for Morcove, she runs away from Nakara. "The country was at peace and prospered greatly," and at the end of this series, which is not a holiday series, Mr. Hamilton writes to Morcove to say that "all is well in Nakara and Naomer is to enjoy her holiday in Morcove."

Apparently, her holiday is extended indefinitely because in SO 285-288 (July-August 1926), Naomer, Betty, Polly & Co. are on holiday in Sandcliffe with the Linton family. At this seaside resort there is a "dark-skinned, beautiful Eastern girl in flowing garments, heavily veiled" named Shirami who advertises herself as a "professional reader of character from the hand." When the Morcovians approach Shirami's tent, they are astounded when she refuses to read their palms and runs inside. Polly follows and tells her she knows she is Rose of the Desert.

Rose of the Desert goes into hiding in a cliff cave and sends an imploring note to the Hotel where the Linton party are staying. The note says, "Enemies have found me. Food, disguise, where I hide in fear of a lifelong bondage. The cliffs toward the setting sun. Let none know." When Mr. Linton finds her hiding place, Rose tells him that there is a secret society which wants to capture her in order to use her as a hostage, in her own words, "so that my brave and loving brother can be forced to betray his trust and thus place great power in their hands." Representatives of the Secret Society are in fact staying in the same hotel as the Linton party and keeping a close watch on the comings and goings of Polly and Co. They are Yassara and her husband, Akma, who dress in British clothes and look proud and wealthy. Mr. Linton devises a plan whereby the entire party will take Rose of the Desert, aboard a sailing boat called the "Saucy Sal", and go to sea. There she will be transferred to a motor boat to be driven out to meet the Saucy Sal by Dave Lawder, Jack Linton's school friend. Unfortunately, by rendezvous time, Dave has been overpowered and drugged by Yassara and Akma; Mr. Linton is without a revolver and realizes he can do nothing as Akma points out that the steam yacht bearing down upon them will make prisoners of them all. The ultimate destination is Felahlah, another North African Sultanate.

Three weeks later, they are in the desert and stop at the pool of the Lepers. Rose of the Desert is aware of a friendly tribe who live nearby in a place called El Buscando. There is a legend among these people that some day, a white person

will come to them who is a descendant of a former white ruler of the tribe, and be their Queen. Betty agrees with Rose's suggestion that she pretend to be the descendant, and the two girls escape from the Felahlah caravan. The El Buscandons, believing their old legend has at last come true, welcome Betty and Rose tells them their Queen has friends to be rescued from enemies in the desert. The El Buscandons race off joyfully to serve their new Queen and the Linton family and all the girls are escorted to the dwelling place in safety. After four days, however, the friendly tribe make it quite clear that they want the Queen to themselves and wish her friends to leave. Betty and Rose of the Desert remain at the Palace while all the rest go for a picnic in the shady slopes of the hills near El Buscando, intending they shall all make a getaway as soon as they can locate their camels for transport. But Yassara enacts the part of an old crone in order to get into the Palace. Confronting Rose of the Desert, she casts off her disguise and tells Rose she is aware that the rest of the party have left El Buscando and that Rose must accompany her to Felahlah immediately after she exposes Betty. Rose agrees to go with her if Yassara will let Betty go free. Yassara cries, "I will not spare this girl, no! Now, therefore, is the time for my revenge to make this girl my own slave in our city!" Poor Betty, and poor Mr. Linton, too, wondering what on earth has happened when he observes through his spyglasses a procession leaving El Buscando with Betty and Rose of the Desert in fetters in their midst. The El Buscandons cry for "Death!" but Yassara tells them the prisoners' sufferings will be much greater if they will allow her to take them to Felahlah. The tribe allows two men to accompany Yassara and her victims to the hills as guards. The two have feelings of friendship toward the Linton party due to the kindly way they were treated by Jack Linton and Dave Lawder when they went lame on the way to El Buscando. When Mr. Linton approaches Yassara and she observes the guards do nothing to protect her, she reaches for a concealed weapon, but is disarmed and ordered off by Mr. Linton. And so they are free to make their way across the desert on the camels.

At the end of this series the author tells us, "Mr. and Mrs. Linton have seen to it that never again can Rose fall into danger from those who had hoped to make her captivity serve their wicked purpose. The band of plotters had been dispersed by means of combined action on the part of the Great Powers, and faithful Rose is by no means the only one whose days of dread are ended."

Two years later (SO 389-396, July/Sept. 1928), it's off to the desert for the hols. as Naomer is presented with a necklace of gold and huge emeralds from the school children of Nakara by a deputation from her desert kingdom. She feels she can do no less than make her thanks in person. Miss Somerfield, Morcove's Headmistress, also wants to go so that she can "study the educational methods that have been introduced in Nakara since Naomer became Queen," and to meet her brother Jack. But one of the emissaries who had delivered the gift of the Nakaran children to their Queen steals the necklace and word reaches Nakara that Naomer's English education has made her "despise the gift, because she has learned to despise the very country that she rules!" This ploy, involving Zeloa, the thief, has been devised by three adventurers who are, as one of them says, "in the process of instituting a new regime in Nakara without violence." Having stolen the necklace on the way to Nakara, Zeloa also sets fire to the vehicle being used as the Royal Saloon. Masquerading as a water-divining old crone, she persuades the

Morcovians to go underground in the ruins of an old Temple in the desrt and then proceeds to seal them up, bragging that she will return to retrieve the gold and emerald necklace (which has been torn from her neck by plucky Pam as the last block is slid into place) after they are all dead. But they are found in time by Somerfield's divers.

SO's 529-534 (March-May 1931) see the return of that super-spy Nassina and her daughter Shulama, still working as paid secret agents of the Sultan of Susahlah. Hearing that Naomer is making a trip to her own country, he sends his two hirelings to England to devise a plan to cause Naomer to appear to offend her own people. Mrs. Hamilton, the British Resident's wife, is accompanied by Rose of the Desert to act as native attendant on the Queen. Naomer finds two warning notices stuck into her pillow by "dagger-like pins". The second one says, "Those who go to Nakara this time may go to their deaths." A dark-skinned woman is spotted by Polly leaving Morcove and the girls chase and capture her. Rose of the Desert recognizes her instantly: "Now does my soul rejoice again! She is only Nassina, the spy of Susahlah! A serpent whose fangs were drawn - yes, long ago!" Nassina is detained by the Police in London, and Naomer and Co. feel there is nothing to fear. But they don't know that Nassina wasn't alone!

Morcove's transportation to Africa has moved with the times. This time, they are flying there in a "monster bi-plane", called the Silver Swift, and it is to be accompanied by a "smaller bi-plane", commissioned to act as escort, loaded with luggage. The girls do not know that the sly Shulama has secreted herself behind the luggage in the smaller plane.

They land outside Nakara's walls the next day. Shulama manages to insinuate herself into the Palace and carries on her mother's plot to discredit Naomer in the eyes of her people. Discovering a bouquet presented to the Queen by the children at the Native School, she tosses it out of the window where it lies, "battered and ruined - as if tossed away in impatient contempt." She also steals a page from Tess' sketch book and draws on it a cruel caricature of the children and their venerable teacher. This is found in the street and the Nakarans are convinced that Naomer is being nice to their faces and making fun of them behind their backs. Betty & Co. are blamed for this and the State Councillors decree that the Queen's friends must depart instantly. The plane is due to return for them all in a week's time and cannot be summoned earlier because Nakara has no telephonic link with the outside world. So the Morcove party have to leave on camels, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton. Shulama, having discredited them all in Nakara, now tacks herself on to the caravan in the role of an orphan girl lost in the desert. They stop at the Pool of Ziskara and here there are fifty men from Susahlah encamped on the other side. During the night, Shulama sidles over to the other camp and tells them the Nakaran caravan is a wealthy one. After the attack: "Gone was most of the valuable merchandise; gone were the camels, all of them! And the men who had fared forth from Nakara - they had been captured." And so they are stranded in the desert with no means of moving from the vicinity of the Pool of Ziskara. The men from Susahlah had not kept their promise to take Shulama back to Susahlah with them and she is found by Betty, acting like one demented.

When they had been banished from Nakara, Rose of the Desert had given a small, linen-covered bundle to Betty containing a carrier-pigeon in a basket, saying, "When ye are well on the way, ye may send a loving, comforting message to the Queen. So shall she dry her eyes and smile again." But the message that Rose retrieves from the carrier pigeon is, "Attacked in night and robbed of everything. We are stranded in desert. S. O. S. Betty."

At the Pool of Ziskara, the hapless Morcovians and the Hamiltons have to endure a sand storm which snaps off three palm trees and buries the oasis. Shulama has disappeared. But as the following night falls, Rose of the Desert and Naomer arrive on two camels, with four camels in tow to carry the rest of the party back to Nakara.

After they have left, a weak, weary figure comes to quench her thirst at the Pool which Mr. Hamilton had dug out of the sand. It is Shulama who has resolved to die in the middle of the desert rather than endure life imprisonment in Nakara. And here she is found by her mother, travelling by camel from El Karah to Susahlah and in need of water. Nassina praises Shulama for the trouble she has caused in Nakara and at the Pool after her daughter relates what had befallen the Morcovians. She also sneers at the English for having been so lenient to her in England. If only, the evil couple muse, they could cause disaster to come upon the travellers to Nakara while they are still in the desrt. And, as if in answer to their wicked wishes, a band of riders from the direction of Susahlah appear on the horizon and, urged on by the spy and her daughter, they follow in hot pursuit of Naomer and Co. But their tired mounts cannot catch up to the fugitives and the latter find themselves in the night safely within the walls of Nakara. The Susahlans turn their mounths back toward their own territory but desert Nassina and Shulama near the city walls. They are arrested and brought to the Palace. Mrs. Hamilton tells Naomer she need not fear her people will not be cordial to Betty and Co. because, after her arrest, Nassina has boastingly confessed, and her daughter has done the same. "All the people know at last that no friends of yours ever did those insulting things that gave them offence." And so a joyous party occurs in the courtyard, leaving the Palace almost empty. Nassina, seizing the chance to overpower Rose of the Desert when she takes food to the prisoners, makes her way to the Queen's apartment and finding Naomer alone, overcomes her, and approaching a window, lifts her high into the air. But the despairing Rose is able to attract the attention of Betty & Co. who are able to reach Naomer's room and save her from being flung to her death. And so Nassina and Shulama are expelled from Nakara.

SO 755-759 (July-August 1935) mark the final sortie of Morcove to Nakara. In this last series, international villains, the Lessards, are after a Trade Agreement between Nakara and Britain which Pam Willoughby's father is carrying from England. Pam is kidnapped in an attempt to make her father give up the Agreement. Mr. Willoughby contacts Jack Somerfield by wireless to help. During this adventure, Betty and Polly become prisoners in the dungeons of the Sultan of Susahlah and at one point they are shackled together and paraded through the streets of Susahlah. In this series, too, we meet for the last time Rose of the Desert, masquerading as the servant of the Lessards. It is she who engineers the escape of Betty and Polly when

they are sold as slaves. What music to their ears it must have been to hear from their rescuer, "Welcome, dear ones. You are safe with me for I am Rose of the Desert." At the end, all old friends are reunited and they all rejoice in the "peace, prosperity and happiness" of Nakara.

It is interesting to ponder Horace Phillips' (Marjorie Stanton) use of this part of the world for holiday series. Had he been influenced by the popularity of the exotic romances of E. M. Hull and Ruby M. Ayres? Was Morocco very much a place of mystery in those days of the early 1920's? Whatever the reason, these North African adventures of the Morcove girls had such a long run that one suspects they must have been a very popular item in the small blue and orange periodical.

* *

MERRY XMAS to all. Thanks for the memories!

LESLIE FARROW, 13 FYDELL STREET, BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE.

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WANTED: Marvels 925, 926, 929, 930, 940, 942, 943; BFL 745, 753, 757, 761. Also School and Sport, Blue Crusader by Arthur S. Hardy.
FOR SALE: BOP - Annual, No. 11 (1888).

HARRY BROSTER, KINVER, STOURBRIDGE, DY7 6EA.

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WANTED: American 'pulp' magazines of the 1920's and 1930's, with stories by ROBERT E. HOWARD (particularly: ARGOSY, FIGHT STORIES, ORIENTAL STORIES, MAGIC CARPET, ACTION STORIES, TOP NOTCH, THRILLING MYSTERY, GOLDEN FLEECE, JACK DEMPSEY'S FIGHT MAGAZINE). Also American science fiction magazines of the 1930's to 1950's, with stories and articles by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP (particularly: SUPER SCIENCE NOVELS, UNKNOWN, ASTOUNDING, ASTONISHING, UNKNOWN WORLDS, THRILLING WONDER, FANTASY MAGAZINE, IMAGINATION, OTHER WORLDS, FANTASY FICTION). All letters answered by,

and

SEASON'S GREETINGS

from

CHRIS LOWDER

"EYETHERMES", CRADLEY, Near MALVERN, WORCESTERSHIRE.

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WANTED: Good copies Howard Baker reprints, Magnets, Gems, Lees.

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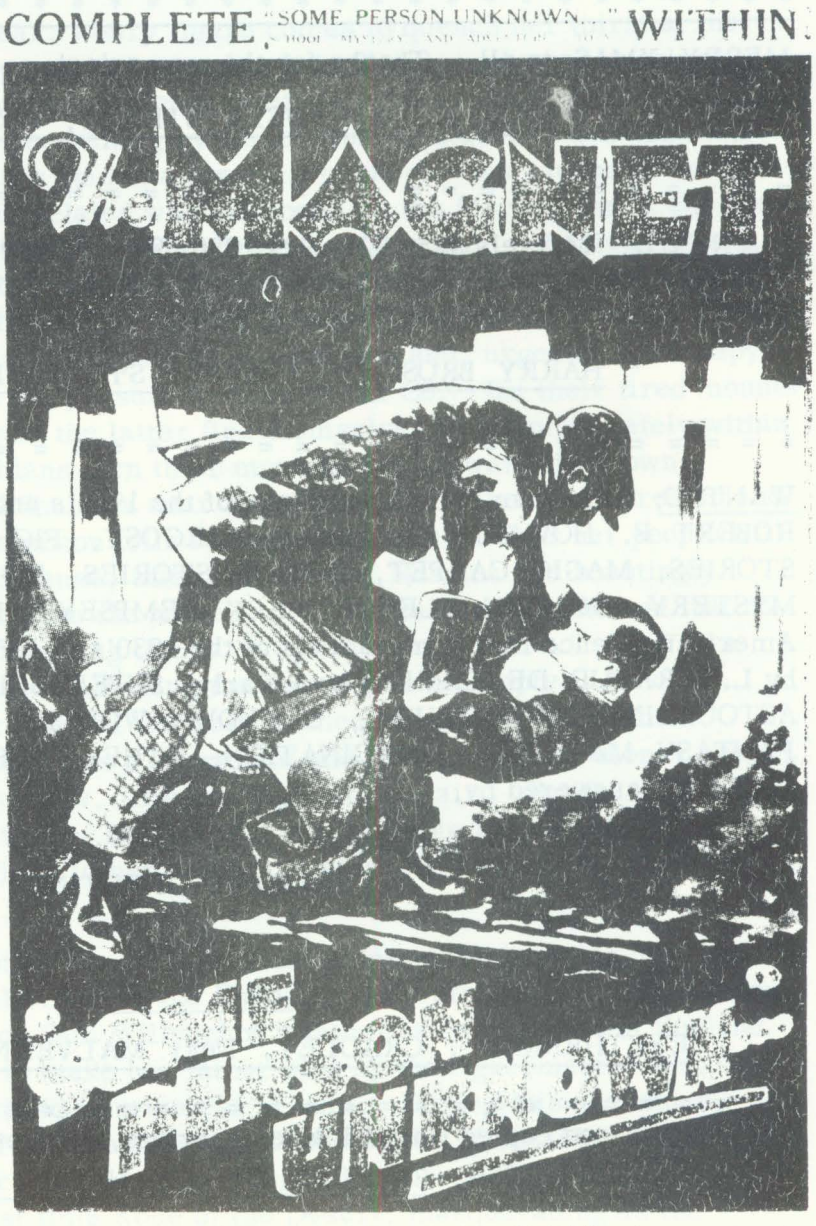
THE COMING OF BOB

by Ernest Holman

Readers of both CD monthlies and Annuals will need no reminding of the many excellent articles that recall past Greyfriars stories and glories from the pages of the Magnet. "Do You Remember" and "Let's Be Controversial" alone must have brought many combined hours of delight in views and recollections. The possession of all the past papers, the opportunity to refer to them whenever desired, the happy memories retained by the writers together make up a truly magnificent picture of the stories of the past.



This is also a remembrance - but written from a somewhat different angle than that of experts such as Eric Fayne and Roger Jenkins. For one thing, I couldn't even begin to approach their standard and style - for another, I haven't a large collection of original Magnets. I did not, in any case, start my reading of this weekly until the second half of the twenties. To a great extent, therefore, my own memory, reference and knowledge has many limitations.

Nevertheless, this article is inspired by the fact that, two-thirds of a century after its first publication, I

have just read Magnet No. 2. For the very first time, thanks to the splended service provided by Roger Jenkins from his numerous Hamilton library. So I am writing of a story (from which I have made very copious notes indeed) that has come to me as something entirely new.

Magnet No. 2 was entitled "The Taming of Harry". It is in this story that Bob Cherry arrives at Greyfriars - and knowing Bob from later stories, I was set wondering just how much (or how little) Charles Hamilton then realised what a sterling character he had just created.

Readers similar to myself, who were at one time ignorant of the early stories, probably bought the facsimile of the first Magnet when it was published sometime in the later sixties - and now, of course, it is part of the current Greyfriars Holiday Annual from Howard Baker.

Magnet No. 1 ("The Making of Harry Wharton") does not, therefore, need recounting - but even when I first read the story some years ago I was fascinated by an item at the end of the yarn. This referred to the following week's issue, when Bob Cherry and Vaseline were to be featured. I was then unaware of Hazeldene's early nickname - so was a reviewer of the sixties in a National newspaper, when he hazarded a guess that Vaseline was a dog!

Despite being based on the continuing story of Harry Wharton's early days, I am writing mainly about Bob Cherry. Bob is just himself from the very start of entering Greyfriars. Other characters over the years obviously underwent changes - but not Bob! Bob Cherry, in No. 2, is the Bob we have always known.

Wharton has been at Greyfriars some short time when No. 2 opens; he immediately falls foul of prefect Carberry, when a scene of strife is interrupted by the arrival of Wingate. The School Captain tells Carberry that he has no right to fag Wharton merely because his own fag, Hazeldene, is not available. Wharton, however, does not feel gracious at this support from Wingate and states that he will be killed first before he fags for anybody. Wingate tells him:

> "If this is the line you intend to take, you are booked for a rough time at Greyfriars."

Some short while afterwards, Wharton has a brush with Peter (Vaseline) Hazeldene and punches the latter's nose. He later tells Frank Nugent, his only chum at the school, that his word had been doubted, so he hit out. Nugent reminds Wharton that he ought to be a little less handy with his fists until he has learned to box.

In the meantime, Hazeldene is found rubbing his nose and muttering aloud about Wharton; this is the scene on which Chapter 3 (BOB CHERRY ARRIVES AT GREYFRIARS) opens. As Hazeldene is wailing to the world in general, a voice says:

> "Hallo, kid, anything gone wrong with the boko?"

Vaseline looks round to see that:

> A lad of about his own age had just walked in at the open gates of Greyfriars. In nothing but his age, however, did the newcomer bear any resemblance to Hazeldene. He was a finely-built, nimble lad, with shoulders well set back, and head well poised. His hair was thick and

> curly, and he wore his cap stuck on the back of it. His face would not be called exactly handsome, but it was so pleasant and cheerful that it did you good to look at it.

Bob Cherry has arrived.

He asks Hazeldene the way to the Head's study and that worthy takes him along to the door of Carberry's study. Bob remarks that it doesn't seem to be much of a place for the Head and is informed that the Headmaster resides amongst the sixth-formers in order to keep his eye on the drunken seniors, who would be tipsy all night long otherwise. Hazeldene tells Bob:

> "If the Head isn't there, wait for him. If you find a fellow there, tell him that Wharton wants him, and that he's to buck up and come to the gym."

Bob goes ahead and does, in fact, pass such a message on, when he finds only Carberry in what he supposes to be the Head's study. After some lively verbal exchanges with the prefect, Bob manages to escape from the room just in time to avoid being hit by a flying Greek lexicon.

Outside, Bob meets Bulstrode. From Bob's story, Bulstrode believes that Wharton is the cause of the 'joke' and tells the new boy that "Wharton is an absolute rotter!".

By now, Hazeldene has managed to get Bob's box moved from the gate to the junior common-room, where many Remove and Fourth-Form boys are gathered. After breaking the box open - thereby doing a fair bit of damage to much of the contents - Vaseline starts to investigate the 'prog' in Bob's belongings.

Egged on by Hazeldene:

> The juniors were all soon feasting gleefully. It seemed a ripping joke on the new boy, though probably no-one but Hazeldene, in the first place, would have ventured to open another fellow's box.

Bulstrode arrives and enters into the spirit of the affair, pointing out that although Cherry doesn't actually know it, he is standing the spread, for - says Bulstrode - "he must pay his footing."

Today's readers would have a little difficulty in believing that Billy Bunter (called the Owl in the Remove, we are told, on account of his big spectacles) does not immediately join in the feed. Bunter actually protests about the act of robbery for a while, until - tempted by the offer of a tart from Bulstrode - he states: "Well, I don't mind if I do." Such is the situation when Bob Cherry walks in:

> For a moment the sunny good-temper vanished from his face, and a blaze came into his blue eyes.

After Hazeldene has stated that the box had broken open and Bunter has added the information that the former had caused the breakage by pushing it over, we see the anger fading from Bob's face:

> He looked the kind of lad who could never be angry for long.

Bob then tells the others that they are all welcome to the food but expresses

the view that the person responsible for the 'breaking open' will receive the hiding of his life. He sees Hazeldene (Wharton, as he thinks) sneaking from the room. When Bob leaves the common-room himself, he meets Nugent and learns that Wharton is in Study No. 1.

Bob enters that study, sees the back of a fellow sitting at a desk, tip-toes quiety up behind him and picks up an inkpot. Harry Wharton looks up in time to receive the entire contents.

Too late, Bob realises his mistake, but Wharton, perhaps not surprisingly, is in no mood to be reasonable. Bob's natural humour comes through and he starts to smile. Eventually, Bob's apology not proving acceptable, a struggle ensues, but Wharton finds that he has 'caught a tartar' and ends up by being knocked clean off his feet. Nugent comes in; Bob explains the misunderstanding and expresses his regret. Wharton refuses Bob's offered hand. When Bob leaves, Wharton is taken to task by Nugent for refusing the handshake.

Wharton, however, wishes to get even with Bob and asks his chum to take him in hand and help him with boxing. Harry Wharton's stated intention of fighting Bob Cherry makes Nugent realise that being Harry's friend is turning out harder than reckoned.

Bob has now found Hazeldene and gives chase down a staircase. Behaving then as only Bob could ever behave, he seeks to overtake the other by way of the banisters - but only succeeds in knocking over Mr. Quelch with one of his long flying legs. Quelch, unaware that Bob is the cause of the upset, asks him if he saw the person who crashed into him. Bob pleads "No sneaking', which Quelch accepts - but, being Bob, that junior then confesses. Quelch agrees to overlook the matter this time. Wingate, curious as to why Quelch did not take drastic action, asks Cherry the reason for his 'escape'. Bob admits he owned up and that Quelch seems to be an old sport. Wingate laughs as he tells Bob that he had better not let Quelch hear such a remark.

Bob asks 'little' Billy Bunter the name of the chap who passed himself off as Wharton and learns Hazeldene's name and nickname. He discovers Vaseline in the Cloisters and again gives chase. Hazeldene drops something from his pocket in a stumble, which Bob picks up. He sees that it is a photograph:

> He gazed in amazement and admiration at the fair face and laughing eyes that looked at him from the frame.
>
> "My hat!" ejaculated Bob. "What a stunning face! What on earth is a rotter like that doing with this?"

Bob catches up with Hazeldene, undecided whether or not to wipe up the ground with him and is astonished when Hazeldene demands the return of his sister's photograph:

> "I didn't know it was your sister" (Bob states). "Blessed if I know how a worm like you came to have a sister like that."

Bob returns the photograph and decides to take no further action. He goes

back to the school in a thoughtful mood, not thinking of Hazelden's trick, or the quarrel with Wharton:

> Somehow it was the laughing face of the photograph that was haunting his mind.

Later on, at Bulstrode's suggestion, Bob makes a goodly selection from Mrs. Mimble's shop. Bulstrode and Bob proceed to the former's study - No. 1 - where further friction occurs. Wharton objects strongly to Bob's presence and the new boy decides to leave the study; Bulstrode, in his own study, will have none of this, however - he tells Bob that it would be an insult for his, Bulstrode's, guest to walk out. So Bob remains, much to the growing annoyance of Harry Wharton. An exchange of blows is only prevented by the intervention of Nugent - who, for his pains, is taunted by Wharton. Harry leaves the study himself, followed shortly afterwards by his uncomfortable chum.

The spread is carried on by Bulstrode, Bob and Bunter - the latter now beginning to take 'future shape' by telling the new boy that he'll stand him a feed in return, when he is in funds again. He is, explains Bunter, expecting to receive a postal order!

Nugent has now caught up with Wharton but makes no mention of the recent incident - the two then proceed to the gym for boxing lessons, Wharton still insisting that he is going to fight Cherry. In the gym several of the juniors gather round to watch the boxing lesson. A considerable amount of banter antagonises Wharton, who eventually turns to Hazeldene and offers to fight him - and anyone else in the Remove! There are several 'takers' (including Herbert Trevor and another junior named Owen). Nugent points out that Wharton already has a fight on his hands with Bob Cherry.

Bob and Bulstrode arrive at this moment and the former learns, somewhat to his surprise, that he is booked to fight Wharton. Bob, however, is not keen to take it up, saying that he is not going to pick a quarrel with anyone. Then, realising the way things are going, he remarks that it is a different matter if someone picks a quarrel with him.

At this point Carberry enters, takes in the situation and decides at once to take charge of the fight himself. Without, he adds, the use of gloves - but as the next arrival is Wingate, this idea is soon 'put down'. When Harry says he doesn't want the gloves to be used, Wingate reminds him:

> "You're here to do as you're told. There is such a thing as discipline here, Wharton, as I hope you will learn in time. And I fancy that before you are finished with Cherry, you will be glad you have the gloves on."

Bob makes a last attempt to patch matters up, but Wharton is not amenable and the fight commences, with gloves, under Wingate's supervision:

> Ere a couple of minutes had passed, Harry realised quite clearly that had the contest been with the bare knuckles, it would not have lasted long for him.

The support from the ringside is all for Bob and none for Harry; Wharton gets angrier as the contest proceeds, but Bob remains cool. Both the combatants give and

take punishment; eventually, between rounds, Nugent suggests to Wharton that he 'chucks it' before he is finished. Needless to say, his advice is ignored and the inevitable happens:

> The blows came home upon Harry's face like hammer thuds, blinding in their force and terrible swiftness. He staggered back, and fell helplessly to the ground, and lay there upon his back, too utterly dazed and exhausted to move.

Wingate tells him it is over, but Wharton remarks that he has not been counted out yet and that he can still stand up. Wingate sternly states:

> "You have had as thorough a licking, Wharton, as I've ever seen a fellow have."

Nugent assists Wharton from the gymn, followed by many curious glances and more than one hiss.

Wharton is left realising, not for the first time, the sense of his wrong-headedness. He sees his adversary surrounded by most of the Remove, all on the best of terms:

> Harry Wharton had yet to learn that pluck must be allied with chivalry.

So ends Magnet No. 2.

Some characters changed as the stories went on throughout the years - Bunter was to go through several phases of character before finally settling down as the 'fat ass' we all know. Wharton, in his turn, was to mature and become an acknowledged leader - even though he retained certain facets of 'that' temper from time to time. Carberry was to be replaced by Loder; Quelch to develop into a splendid study of a schoolmaster; Nugent, a somewhat 'toughish' junior in Magnet No. 1, was already by No. 2 becoming the 'later' Nugent; Bulstrode was to have his moments of fading 'glory'; but Bob - well, Bob was always Bob.

Jolly, from the moment of his arrival through the gates; angry only for a short time, as in the scene when he found his box rifled; thoughtless, as in the inkpot sequence; clumsy, as discovered by the floored Quelch; thoughtful, as instanced by his very first glimpse of the (then) unnamed Marjorie; generous, as in the provision of goodies from the tuckshop; and, of course, a most competent boxer - as Wharton soon ascertained.

Bob Cherry - then and always - the typical Bob!

It is believed that after No. 2, the Greyfriars stories fell away from the high start of the opening pair. Exactly when they again reached the level of No. 2, I cannot say - my next earliest recollection is that very fine story "The Only Way". Whatever view readers in 1908 may have formed of Magnet No. 2, I know that (sixty-six years later) I found it one of the most enthralling stories of any of the Greyfriars yarns.

So enthralling, in fact, that I am prompted to make a request. The early story mentioned above ("The Only Way") was the last Greyfriars story to be

serialised in CD; I cannot help feeling that, especially following on the current republication of Magnet No. 1, space given in future CD issues would amply justify the inclusion of "The Taming of Harry".

Aptly as that title sums up the story - to me, it must always be:- "The Coming of Bob!"

* *

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to my dear friends of the London Book Club. WANTED: "The King Liveth" and "The Lonely Road", both by Jeffrey Farnol. Robin Hood Stories, comics and Annuals. Any Historical stories in Boys' Friend Library.

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"Villains come in all Shapes and Sizes"

by Raymond Cure

Sexton Blake stands supreme. Tall, lithe, agile, cool, calm, and collected. In most situations he is prepared for all eventualities. In some situations unprepared, but with the "know-how" to overcome difficulties.

It is different with the criminal fraternity with which he holds combat. Huxton Rymer, Roxane, Waldo and Zenith, each with his or her own little quirks and fancies.

For illustration, let me take six tales of Sexton Blake, recorded in the "Union Jack" and which I have to hand. Each tale, no doubt, will contain a number of criminals headed by a master-mind. We shall ignore the small fry and consider the leaders.

We find our first sample of "bad lads" in "The Brute of Saigon", G. H. Teed, 1930. So come with me to Saigon.

Two villains, two fat villains, are here to entertain you. Digby Farren, smooth and naked as an oily porpoise. Despite the heat, he was dry of body for such a fat lump of flesh. Now, nasty as Digby turns out to be there is still a nastier piece of work to appear. No less than "The Brute of Saigon" (no applause please). The name? Otto Bruner, half-caste. His outward appearance gave little indication of the evil that was in him. He was monstrously fat, with little twinkling eyes that could beam with benignancy. No sign of the devil that lurked beneath, never slumbering, always watching.

There you are, two great lumps of evil, in other words - fat-shaped villains.

"The Sniper" by Anthony Skene, U.J., 1930, stars the fifth man, or, as Sexton Blake dubs him, the "Sniper". Every time someone could reveal the name of the fifth man - Bang! the sniper got him. Not till the last chapter do we find out it is none other than company director, Silvio Pladner, the top brains of the Bunda Colliery Company. So villain number two appears to be not fat and brutish, but a suave, two-faced business man.

Shall we try a Gilbert Chester-type villain? "Buried Deep" produces a "corker" of Russian descent, but guess what? Yes! crippled from the waist down. It appears, even with that affliction, you can still be a double-dyed villain, as the following quote shows:

"Oh, if I had my limbs!" Lavrinoff whispered hoarsely. "What would I not do!" He dragged himself towards the bank, his useless legs trailing helplessly behind him. "Well, the goal shall be mine, even if I have to drive those cowards to their death with this gun. What are the lives of those dogs, or of the worthless pigs that serve me?" Nasty? Very!

Gwyn Evans holds the fort with the next two stories "Black Brotherhood" and

"Drums of Hate", U.J., 1930. Black Brotherhood consists of a group of coloured men sheltering under the cloak of religion, meeting at the Brotherhood Hall. Not all bad, but under the leadership of the black Rev. Sephiniah Lincoln and the Rev. Roscoe Lincoln, it spawned such evil creatures as Simon De Montfort, black mortician. Let me give you a peep into his horrible little undertaker's parlour.

"The door opened to reveal a strange and bizarre spectacle. Round the walls of the room cast-off garments of long-dead men hung starkly. In the corner the red glow of the fire cast weird and evil shadows on the slimy, cobwebbed room as it burned beneath the cauldron with its horrible contents. The fox-cub in its wire-netted cage, whimpered. De Montfort flung back the lid of the trunk, revealing the body of a woolly-haired, brown-faced negro, arms folded across his chest in the conventional attitude of death." Well what do you think of that? I'm off, while the going's good, leaving the two black villainous vicars, and the black villainous undertaker, to Sexton Blake.

Our last story features a double set of law-breakers. First our Black Brotherhood villains and then the better type of law-breaker. By that I mean the Roxane-Zenith-Waldo type. I refer to the six men of the Shadow Club. Six men with terrible facial injuries received during 1914-1918, banded together, mutilated and injured, so that they could never venture openly among men. They returned to the world as the shrinking, hooded, grey-garbed figures of the "Shadow Club". Outlawing war by frustrating the schemes of financiers and of others that would lead to war. Even if they broke the law themselves. Hence the clash between them and the Black Brotherhood, and hence the coming of Sexton Blake to sort them out.

Sexton Blake not only sorted them out, but also those villains who went before them, and those that came after.

Villains come in all shapes and sizes or ... hadn't you noticed it?

●

* *

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Tales of Tyranny

by Roger M. Jenkins

Some of the most stirring and exciting of Charles Hamilton's school stories were the barring-out series, and it seems quite clear that these were inspired in the first place by actual events that took place at public schools in the nineteenth century. In Magnet 172 he referred to the famous rebellion at Rugby when soldiers with fixed bayonets guarded the Head's study at Rugby and drovers with their heavy whips forced the rebels from their last stronghold. Mr. Lothrop, the first temporary headmaster at Greyfriars, realised that soldiers were no longer available for such duties in 1911, and in order to drive the juniors from the gymnasium (having found P.C. Tozer a broken reed), he fell back on the local bruisers. Much the same sort of thing happened to Mr. Carnforth in Magnets 743-5, and to Mr. Brander in Nos. 1169-74.

It is interesting to compare the ways in which the tyrants became installed. In the Lothrop series, Dr. Locke was granted a special holiday to take his daughter to the seaside, Rosie having become unwell. Mr. Lothrop was acting purely as a locum tenens, and Dr. Locke's premature return robbed him of all power. In the Carnforth series, it was Sir Hilton who persuaded Dr. Locke to resign. The majority of the Board of Governors supported the Head, but he was too sensitive to remain in an atmosphere of dissension, and so Sir Hilton had his way. By the time of the Brander series, Dr. Locke had become less sensitive, and although Sir Hilton had already introduced Mr. Brander to all the other members of the Board of Governors, he failed to persuade the Head that he should step down and accept a generous pension to make way for a more energetic person that the changing times demanded, and it was left to Mr. Brander's nephew, Van Tromp, to remove Dr. Locke by more violent means.

Similarly, there were marked resemblances in the ways in which the school came to learn the background to the change of headmasters. In the Lothrop series, Bob Cherry had gone into the Head's study to retrieve a cap, and had taken refuge behind a screen when Dr. Locke entered with Mr. Quelch. In the Carnforth series Bunter thought the Head's study was a good place to elude his pursuers, and with his mouth full of coconut ice he squeezed behind a book cabinet in the corner. When he made choking noises later on, Mr. Quelch took a poker to remove the stray animal from the Head's study, and the seriousness of the scene moved to light comedy in a typical Hamiltonian transition:

> Dr. Locke eyed him sternly, while Mr. Quelch's gimlet-eyes fairly glittered at him.
>
> "What are you doing here, Bunter?" said the Head.
>
> "N-n-nothing, sir!"
>
> "Eavesdropping, I fear!" said Mr. Quelch.
>
> "Oh, no, sir!" exclaimed the fat junior. "I-I don't know that Dr. Locke is sacked -"
>
> "What?"
>
> "I-I mean, sir-"
>
> "Leave my study at once, Bunter!" said the Head, a pained look crossing his pale, grave face.

Bunter's later accounts of the scene (in which the Head was supposed to have confided in Bunter that the game was up and that he was for the long jump) are sufficient indication of the development of Charles Hamilton's style in the eleven years since the Lothrop series. Bunter was also the eavesdropper under a railway carriage seat when Mr. Brander spoke confidentially about his hopes to Van Tromp, but on this occasion his story was not so readily believed.

Exciting though the events of the barrings-out were, there is perhaps more interest to be found in the reactions of the permanent characters of Greyfriars at these times. In Mr. Carnforth's time, it was the Sixth form who rebelled, and Charles Hamilton did not fail to point out that the juniors were then no longer prepared to take orders from the prefects, much to Wingate's dismay, but quite clearly once he had refused to accept the new Head's authority he could no longer expect to exercise a power derived from the Head. Even more interesting was Mr. Quelch's attitude to the tyrant Heads: there always came a point where he refused to support the harsh measures inflicted on his form, and in each of the series he was dismissed, but only in the Brander series did he claim his right under the statutes of the school to remain on the premises pending an appeal to the governors, an incident which owes more than a little to Bradby's famous "Lanchester Tradition", a school story for adults which had a place in Charles Hamilton's own library.

Rookwood had a temporary headmaster in its early days, soon after Mornington had arrived. At that time he was arrogant and demanding, a spoilt child in every sense of the word. He was flogged by Dr. Chisholm, and he persuaded his uncle, Sir Rupert Stacpoole, to use his influence on the Board of Governors to get the Head replaced by a Mr. Scroop. There was an air of unreality about this series, mainly because Mr. Scroop seemed to be solely concerned with advancing Mornington's interests. It is true that Mr. Brander favoured his nephew, Van Tromp, but the Brander series in the Magnet had many other points of interest, whereas the Scroop series in the Boys' Friend, lacked this three-dimensional touch. The main novelty about it was that it was not a barring-out but a barring-in: Mr. Scroop was imprisoned in the Hall by Jimmy Silver & Co.

No newcomer was ever installed as headmaster at St. Jim's, and it is interesting to reflect on the reasons for this. The late Tom Hopperton once argued convincingly that St. Jim's was more self-contained than Greyfriars. Because the Sussex school had two houses, it contained within itself all the seeds of conflict that were needed. I am inclined to agree. Certainly the Gem had fewer temporary characters of any kind, and local figures like Mr. Lazarus and Sir Hilton Popper were not required. Similarly, the parents and guardians of the juniors were much more strongly featured in the Magnet than in the Gem, and the local schools near Greyfriars (Cliff House and Highcliffe) assumed a greater importance than Rylcombe Grammar School ever did for St. Jim's. What was unique to St. Jim's was the presence of two tyrant masters on the permanent staff.

The master of the Third form was well described by Charles Hamilton in Gem 807:-

> Mr. Selby ought never, as a matter of fact, to have been a schoolmaster at all. Patience and a good constitution were required to see a man through the arduous duties of a fag form-master. The Third form at St. Jim's would have tried the patience of an

Archangel, and undermined the constitution of a Samson. And Mr. Selby was not patient, he had a nervous temperament, and he did not like boys. He was altogether in the wrong place for him - which led to discomfort for himself and much more discomfort for his form.

There is no doubt that Mr. Selby was a thoroughly unpleasant master; you have only to turn to the story of Joe Frayne's early days to read a description of the worst kind of tyrant master. For example, in Gem 162 he embarked upon a course of regular canings to continue until Frayne had told him who had kicked a football at the form master. Dr. Holmes was not pleased to learn about this: "I must ask you," went on the Head quietly, but significantly, "to modify your methods - to keep order in your form with fewer punishments. If we cannot agree in principle it will be impossible for us to work together." But despite the grim picture that was so often painted in the early days, the reader was left with a residual impression that there was, perhaps, a little to be said in Mr. Selby's favour. This, at any rate, was the case in Gem 229, in which the Third form master recognised the new cricket coach as a criminal, and he donounced him only to find that nobody believed him. This was a novel presentation, which for the first time, showed Mr. Selby in a not wholly discreditable light. As time went on, his character was to be rounded off even more.

Mr. Selby's temper, we learn, depended a good deal upon the state of his digestion - and neither was good. When he arrived in the classroom in a bad temper he would search round for a victim, and the fags were stated to feel "a good deal like Ulysses & Co. in the cave of the Cyclops, when the eye of Polyphemus was seeking out the next one to devour". Sometimes Mr. Selby would even go so far as to listen at the form-room door in order to overhear what the fags were saying, and on one celebrated occasion, in Gem 807, Manners took a snapshot of him with his ear to the keyhole. Despite the almost farcical theme of this story, the plot was nevertheless developed in a most convincing fashion, and Manners was led to realise that, no matter how badly Mr. Selby had behaved, he could not bring himself to go on black-mailing the Third form master with the threat of showing Dr. Holmes the photograph he had taken.

Another revealing light was shed on Mr. Selby's character in the series in Nos. 906-909, which concerned the loss of his French banknote for ten thousand francs. In those happier times, it was the pound that was stable and the franc that kept fluctuating, and Mr. Selby was engaged in the questionable pursuit of gambling on the exchange rates, and was hoping to make a profit, though so far the exchange rate had moved against him. It seemed to him that Levison minor had purloined the banknote, and it galled him that he should have to explain the whole matter to Dr. Holmes. The Head was quite sympathetic at first, but he was also firm in his insistence that the matter of speculation was something that no member of his staff ought to have contemplated, and no publicity about it could be contemplated:-

"His father will be bound to make the loss good!" exclaimed Mr. Selby passionately.
"That is a matter you must decide and settle with Mr. Levison personally," said the Head. "Whether an action at law would be practicable, I cannot say. I am no lawyer. If such an action is entered upon you will, of course, no longer have any connection with this school, as I have said."

Unpleasant as he was throughout this series, Mr. Selby was never presented wholly without sympathy. There was no villain or hero in this series, but just a collection of imperfect human beings. Martin Clifford wrote few series indeed which excelled this one for dramatic and convincing presentation of character.

One of the most hilarious episodes in which Mr. Selby featured was the story in Gem 797, which related the story of his birthday present. Manners minor had read that even the most abandoned ruffians had some redeeming traits in their characters, and so the Third form raised a collection to buy their form-master a birthday present in order to tame him with kindness. Trimble thoughtfully suggested a birthday cake, which would undoubtedly be given back to the fags to eat, and when they had acted upon his suggestions he even more thoughtfully consumed the cake himself and filled the box with old newspapers and a brick. Mr. Selby regarded this remarkable present as a piece of calculated impudence, and caned the whole form, with the result that they gave up being kind to him, and returned to their old methods:-

> That night, when the Third formaster sought his room, a bag of flour descended from the top of the door upon his weary head, and the terrific yell that rang out from Mr. Selby brought comfort and solace to listening ears in the Third Form dormitory.

Odious as Mr. Selby was, one could find excuses for him - his form was troublesome and his health was poor. And in addition there were a few occasions when the Third form master showed some signs of humanity. But Mr. Ratcliff, the detestable housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's, was never presented as anything but an unreasonable tyrant from beginning to end. He was to a large extent nothing but a cardboard figure, over-drawn and unbelievable, and Eric Fayne has with much justification. pointed out that it is surprising that such a man could ever have retained his position at a famous public school.

Despite this defect of characterisation, however, there were many entertaining tales about Mr. Ratcliff. As early as the series in Gems 28 - 32, when the school was spending the summer holidays aboard the S.S. Condor, there was a very readable account of how his temporary headmastership led to serious trouble with the boys. He was, unluckily, the senior housemaster at St. Jim's, and was always called upon when Dr. Holmes was absent. He had further trouble in No. 212, the first barring-out story in the Gem: Kerr touched Mr. Ratcliff's nose with a red-hot poker, and the housemaster had to go on holiday until it had ceased to look unsightly.

There were numerous other stories relating how the juniors paid out Mr. Ratcliff for his severity, and these have been examined in the 1968 Annual. Gem 721 sheds much illumination on his characters: Figgins & Co. were pardoned by the Head for an offence, but when Mr. Ratcliff became temporary headmaster he made it his business to punish them for the same misdeed. The trouble with all stories of this nature was that they failed to present Mr. Ratcliff as a convincing and understandable human being, and none of them were among the first-rate tales in the Gem.

In addition to being housemaster of the New House, Mr. Ratcliff was also master of the Fifth Form. The Fifth were seniors and were not supposed to be caned, much to the annoyance of their form-master, but it is on record that he more than once rapped Cutts' knuckles with a pointer:

> Cutts' feelings, when he had had his knuckles rapped like a fag in the Third form, could not have been expressed in words. But Mr. Ratcliffe cared nothing for his feelings. Indeed, having found solace in rapping Cutts' knuckles, he had proceeded to rap St. Leger's and Gilmore's. The Fifth form had been on the verge of mutiny when classes fortunately came to an end. Since then Mr. Ratcliff had lunched, and indigestion had followed. His nose was red and his eyes had an unpleasant glitter in them.

This inimitable pen-picture of Mr. Ratcliff in Gem 858 is a perfect portrait in miniature.

But if the Fifth were relatively immune from the wrath of Mr. Ratcliff, the juniors in the New House felt the full force of it, and the series in Gems 586-9 provides a full-length picture of the housemaster which is more than adequate. Mr. Ratcliff's nephew, Bartholomew, arrived at St. Jim's, and he proceeded to make himself hated and despised throughout the school by acting as tale-bearer. Mr. Ratcliff's desire to show consideration to his nephew provided a sound foundation on which the story could proceed, and there were a number of satisfying touches that helped to bring the housemaster to life now and again in this series. But what with Mr. Ratcliff's persistent bad temper on the one hand and Bartholomew Ratcliff's utter detestability, on the other hand, it was difficult to remain convinced for any length of time.

It may be that here lies the real reason for the failure in presenting Mr. Ratcliff as a convincing character - the motivation for his actions was seldom as clearly explained as it was once or twice in the series about his nephew. He was always bad tempered, and there were rarely any occasions when Martin Clifford went out of his way to provide any particular reason for this irritableness. The only successful use of Mr. Ratcliff was in stories of the middle 'twenties, when his character was kept within bounds. This may have been the key to the proper use of the housemaster as a character, but if so it was discovered too late in the history of the Gem for it to have been of much use. The extreme of characterisation, as in Nos. 720-2, when Mr. Railton grasped Mr. Ratcliff by the shoulder and swung him away, is what remains firmly etched in the mind of the reader, and it inevitably reduces the St. Jim's scene to a lower level than Greyfriars in the mind of the reader.

The only master at Greyfriars who could be classified as a tyrant was Mr. Hacker, and even this is a matter of doubt, since he did not play a conspicuous part in the Magnet. J. N. Pentelow wrote of him in the Greyfriars Gallery, "It cannot be pretended that Mr. Horace Hacker is a person who really matters much to the Greyfriars stories. We should not miss him if he dropped out; and no-one ever writes to suggest that a story about Mr. Hacker would be welcome."

In 1918, when this was written, there is no doubt that this appraisal was correct. Apart from Magnet 416, in which he showed scant sympathy for the Shell team's desire to compete for the Colonel Wharton Cup, he did not feature greatly in the stories - indeed it was not until 1928 and Magnet 1086 entitled "The Form-Masters' Feud" that he played any notable part at all. On this occasion Bunter ventriloquised, leading Mr. Hacker to think that Mr. Quelch had insulted him. The story provided a delightful portrait of the staff at Greyfriars, written with the especial charm that is to be found only in a Magnet of the Golden Age.

A good description of the Shell master is to be found in Magnet 1617:-

> Horace Hacker was not a bad-hearted man, by any means. He was, according to his lights, a dutiful man. But doubt and distrust seemed to be parts of his nature. He did not trust boys and did not, in fact, trust anybody, and he was rather proud of it than otherwise. Mr. Capper, the master of the Fourth, could have his leg pulled to almost any extent by the boys. Hacker felt a deep contempt for Capper. But Hacker probably made more mistakes from distrust than Capper ever did from trustfulness.

This is not exactly the stuff of which tyrants are made, and in that particular number Mr. Hacker set out to prove that the Famous Five were a set of young blackguards. (It was not for nothing that he was called the Acid Drop by his form.) This was an entertaining story, though even the most avid reader could scarcely have termed it anything but an average tale. Similarly the Tuckshop Rebellion series in 1510-15 was a most popular set of stories, but readers who were mindful of past glories could not help deprecating the indignities Mr. Hacker underwent on that occasion. The regrettable element of sheer farce seemed quite out of place when dealing with a regular member of staff like Mr. Hacker.

In point of fact, Mr. Hacker was the least objectionable of all the unpleasant masters at the three main schools. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that he should have featured in only one memorable series - the one about his nephew, Eric Wilmot, which began in Magnet 1457. Wilmot had been obliged to leave his old school under suspicion of theft, and Mr. Hacker managed to get him a second chance at Greyfriars. The Shell master did his best to believe in his nephew's innocence, and tactlessly intervened on his behalf many times, usually making matters much worse than before. This was a repetition of the Cleeve series in the Gem, and though it lacked the powerful impact of the St. Jim's version, there is nevertheless something very satisfying about the Wilmot series in which everyone acted, as he hoped, for the best, but in which everyone was, in point of fact, completely mistaken.

The Wilmot series was the last of Charles Hamilton's great character studies. If it was not among the very best, it was at least much superior to any Greyfriars tales that were published subsequently, and it did leave the reader with the satisfying thought that Mr. Hacker was at heart a human being, a man not utterly devoid of kind feelings, and very far from being an unreasonable tyrant.

The last, and most finely drawn of all the unpleasant masters at Hamiltonian schools, was Roger Manders, the housemaster of the Modern House at Rookwood. Mr. Manders specialised in chemistry, and, we were told, "His ideal schoolboy was a fellow with a bumpy forehead, a pair of spectacles, an absent-minded manner, peering into pots in the school lab.; which was not the Rookwood ideal at all. If a fellow could have thought in geometry and talked in algebra, Mr. Manders would have been almost kind to him."

Mr. Manders was far from being a cardboard figure of fun. We were told so much about him that his personality seemed very real and believable - in fact, too real at times. He had sharp features and he wore elastic-sided boots. He was never able to let well alone, but would always be peeping and prying like the busy-body he was. One of his favourite habits was to prowl round the junior studies on the off-chance that he might find something amiss. It was unfortunate on one such occasion that Jimmy Silver decided that it would be a happy surprise for the

occupants of Tommy Dodd's study if a snowball came through their open window and landed on their tea table. It came through the open window all right, but it reached Mr. Manders before it could reach the table.

Mr. Manders was disliked not only by the boys but also by his colleagues as well. When the masters remonstrated with the Head about Mr. Bootles' dismissal in Boys' Friends 920-4, Mr. Manders was the only blackleg on the staff, and he also attempted to dissuade Mr. Flinders, another Modern master, from joining in. Again, when he became headmaster during Dr. Chisholm's illness in Nos. 1076-82, he incensed the staff by sitting-in on their lessons and then criticising them in front of their forms. His disagreement with Mr. Dalton was so serious that he almost succeeded in manoeuvring him into a false position at the very moment that Dr. Chisholm was expected back. Of all the tyrant masters, Mr. Manders was the only one who actively schemed and plotted. He would go out of his way to look for trouble, and then there were times when he could not cope with the situation he had provoked:

> Force, and more force, was the only remedy Mr. Manders could think of. Like many gentlemen who have a very tender regard for the safety of their own skins, he was of the militaristic turn of mind, and believed in the strong hand, and plenty of it. Conciliation did not enter his mind at all. Force was the only remedy, and the only difficulty was to command it and apply it.

All the tyrant masters had scant regard for games, but Mr. Manders would at times deliberately interfere in order to ruin the juniors' hopes. In "Morny's Master-Stroke", a story specially written for the 1924 Holiday Annual, there was a delightful example of such interference, Mr. Manders affecting to be unaware that the detention of a star player was a matter of any importance at all. But it was the penultimate series in the Boys' Friend (Nos. 1275-79) that featured Mr. Manders in a most memorable role, that of uncle of Marcus Manders, the unpopular sneak of the Modern House. There was little to choose between this series and the earlier Gem series about Bartholomew Ratcliff, though the Rookwood series was undoubtedly much better written. Marcus was every bit as detestable as Bartholomew, and Mr. Manders was even more disposed to pursue his nephew's grievances than was Mr. Ratcliff. Both nephews turned out to be blackguards as well as sneaks, and both were sent home in disgrace. This contrived to remove them from their respective schools, but it was something of an artistic flaw to mix the character of a sneak with that of a blackguard.

Although the regular Rookwood series in the Boys' Friend finished in 1926, there was a pleasing epilogue in the Gems of the late 'thirties which showed that Owen Conquest had not lost touch with the Hampshire school over the previous decade. One serial was reprinted in No. 362 of the Schoolboys' Own Library, under the title "Manders on the Spot" and related how a tramp stole Dr. Chisholm's wallet and hid it in the lining of Mr. Manders' overcoat. The housemaster's life then became plagued by assaults from a tramp who attempted to steal the overcoat. There were many fine little descriptive touches which all helped to build up a comprehensive portrait of Mr. Manders in many moods and situations. Perhaps the most amusing of all was when he intercepted Lovell en route for the Head's house and made him hand over the wallet he had found. Mr. Manders never lost an opportunity for ingratiating himself with the headmaster, and was anxious to lay the wallet before

Dr. Chisholm himself. Unfortunately, it was not the missing wallet: it contained not money but a piece of paper bearing the word "Fathead". Not for the first time Mr. Manders' plans went awry.

Although Mr. Manders was the most finely drawn of all the tyrant masters at the Hamiltonian schools, he never featured largely in any of the first-rate stories as Mr. Selby so often did at St. Jim's. Most of the outstanding Rookwood stories revolved around the Classical side, and Mr. Manders was left, like Mr. Ratcliff, to act a part at a distance, as it were. But though Mr. Manders never seemed to star in a really memorable series, he was undoubtedly a really memorable character, the last and most successful of all the tyrants created by Charles Hamilton as permanent masters in his three main schools.

It is said that there used to be a proverb at Fleetway House to the effect that if there was any doubt about the next series, the author should have a rebellion, and certainly there were many rebellions apart from those caused by tyrants: one has only to consider the Christmas Barring-out series in the Gem or the High Oaks series in the Magnet to realise that there might be a grain of truth in the legend. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that it was the tyrants themselves who provided the cause of so many exciting stories.

The pleasant masters like Railton and Lascelles and Dalton, could be rather colourless at times; the more subtle characterisations like Prout and Quelch and Greely could be used to develop fascinating stories; but it was the simple tyrants like Selby and Ratcliff and Manders who furnished the easiest opportunity for a clash between the boys and a particular master: it might be a simple matter of the juniors getting their own back for some minor act of injustice, or it might be the signal for a full-scale rebellion, but whatever it was it was something which could never come about had there been no masters of this kind to act as catalysts. These stories were seldom masterpieces of characterisation, but they were always immensely readable, playing as they did upon the elementary emotions of the readers - the eternal struggle between good and evil, between justice and tyranny. The reader does not always wish for a subtle story, and it is these challenging tales of spirited resistance that make us acknowledge the debt owed by the old papers to the force of personality displayed in these tales of tyranny.

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All Work and no Play

by R. Hibbert

Edwy Searles Brooks didn't waste his action-loving readers' time on classroom scenes; unless the master in charge was going to go mad halfway down column 2, or the ceiling was going to fall, or the red indian new boy was going to scalp the chap in the desk in front. No, E. S. B. seldom used the classroom for the humdrum routine of school work. In fact, school work was seldom mentioned.

Readers of Charles Hamilton might have a fair idea of how good or bad his heroes were at their classwork, but you'd have to be a very diligent reader of E. S. B's St. Frank's stories to know much about his characters' scholastic abilities. Nipper would be well above average - but Nipper was well above the age of his form mates - and you could be reasonably certain that Teddy Long (Sneak and Toady) would be pretty much of a dunce. But what about the rest of the Remove? How do you think the Duke of Somerton, Tubby Little or Owen Major, would fare in the end of term exams? You don't know and you don't care? Neither did E. S. B. - nor his schoolboy readers.

They didn't feel deprived because they weren't getting a blow by blow account of, say, a typical St. Frank's maths lesson. They could get the real thing at their own school. What they wanted at St. Frank's were the things that couldn't possibly happen at their own school. (Although I note that falling classroom ceilings aren't uncommon any more.) Such things as 14 year olds who were good enough to play First Division football, bandit packed autogiros touching down in the old Triangle and cowled fiends in the Abbey ruins.

But school work did rear its ugly head in a story about Jack Grey. Nelson Lee Library (Old Series) No. 396, January 6th, 1923, is entitled 'Jack Grey's Temptation.' Or the Torment of Conscience and it's a horrid warning of what too much study can do to a lad. Jack had to obtain the Lytton Trust Scholarship or leave St. Frank's at Easter. His father, Sir Crawford Grey, who always was careless - he lost Jack for twelve or thirteen years - had been speculating and had now lost his riches. But if Jack could only win the scholarship he could stay on at St. Frank's - all fees paid - for another two years.

"It's a plucky idea," said Sir Crawford.

Unfortunately, Jack couldn't tell anyone at school why he was going in for the scholarship; he couldn't bear the idea of Fullwood and the other rotters sneering at him and gloating over the downfall of his father. So he was a very misunderstood boy. His friends told him that the football team needed him and he told them he '" wouldn't be able to join the Eleven this term. I'm going to work hard. Sports are all very well, but they take up a lot of time, you know."'

Mr. Crowell, his Form Master, was delighted when Jack told him of his

intentions and House Master Nelson Lee was exceedingly pleased, but thought it a pity that Jack wouldn't have much time for sport.

From then on every morning, every dinner time, every evening, every half holiday, Jack swotted. The Junior Team lost matches because he wasn't in the forward line, but Jack worked on - 'swotting without a single breathing space'. Soon he was 'looking far from himself. His cheeks were rather haggard, and he looked generally pale. Hard work is all very well, but too much of it is liable to make a fellow show the effects pretty plainly'.

He tried to work after everyone else had gone to bed, and his study mate, Pitt, found him - by the dawn's early light - flopped across the table 'his pale, drawn face resting on the crook of his arm.'

'... Jack had made a grave blunder. He had not improved his chances by working so hard and burning the midnight oil. He had undermined his health'.

He had too. He was four days in the sanatorium and, in Dr. Brett's opinion, "Another day of this kind of thing and the hospital would have been the place for him. Not only is his brain fagged, but his whole system is weakened. And that night in the study could only lead to pneumonia."

Even when he was better physically, mentally he was a completely different boy. We all know what happened to Henry Jekyll when he got over enthusiastic about his studies. Something similar happened to Jack Grey. Before he went in for all this cramming he was as honourable and upright as that lad Edwin Russell - the one who died of a surfeit of goodness in 'Eric, or Little by Little' - but afterwards! Accidentally coming across a set of the Scholarship exam papers he didn't scruple to study them. 'Knowledge is power' he told himself - to what depths of cynicism had he descended - and he hesitated for only a second before mastering the questions and memorising the answers. '... With this forbidden knowledge in his possession there would be absolutely no question as to his ultimate success'.

Luckily for Jack the exam papers he'd learnt by heart were an old set and when he sat the exam the papers were ones he'd never seen before. He won the scholarship honourably, his father got his riches back, so all ended happily.

But it'd been a near thing - Jack came close to ruin - and the whole story confirmed what healthy schoolboys have always known: -
School is all very well, but it mustn't be taken seriously.

That was Edwy Searles Brooks' attitude to school too.

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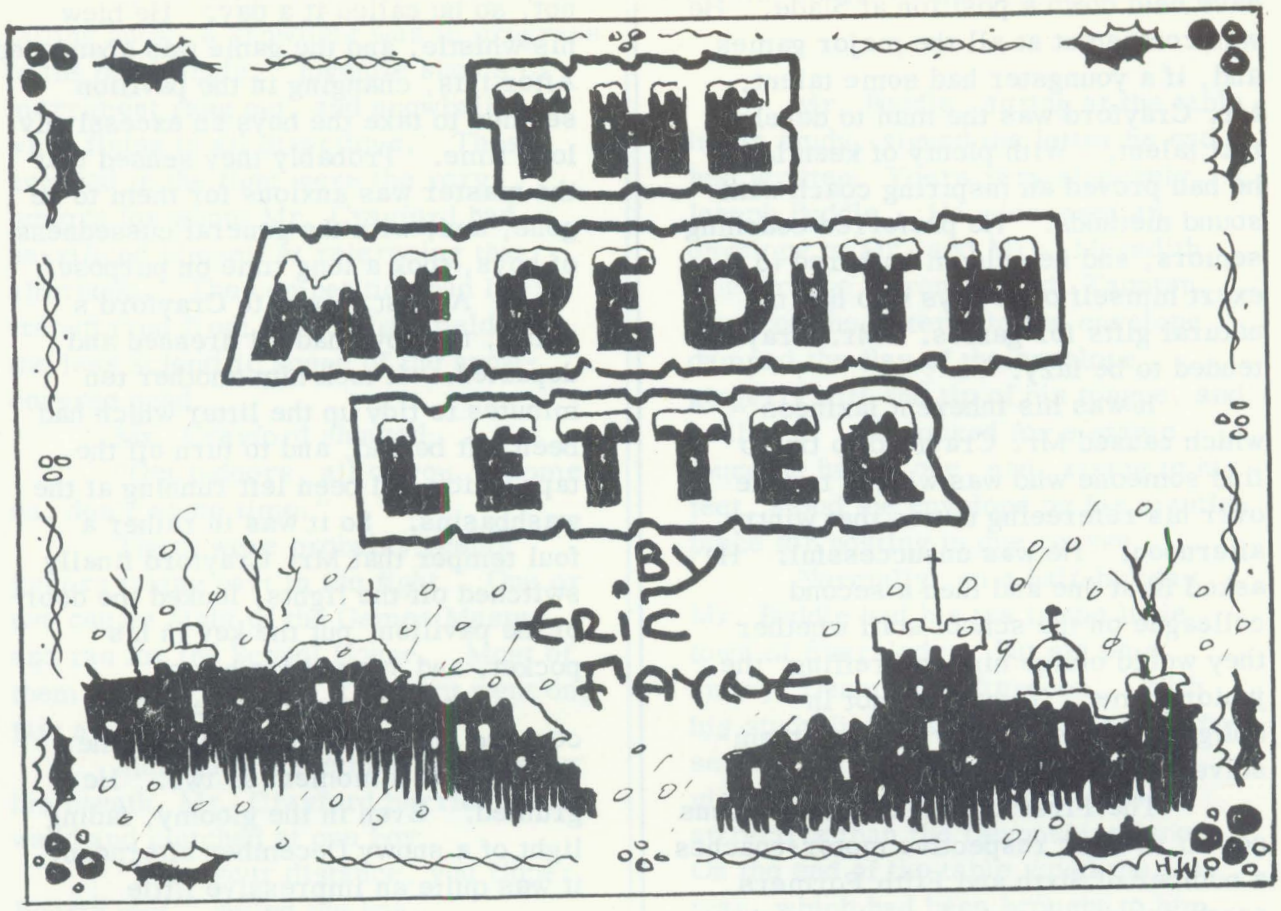


Mr. Crayford, the Games Master at Slade, was not in the best of tempers as he waited for the last boy to collect up his items of discarded football gear and stow them away in the appropriate locker in the Junior Sports Pavilion.

The morning had been bitterly cold, and a few flakes of snow had come floating down occasionally. It was one of those days when a spot near a roaring fire or a hot radiator is decidedly preferable to outdoor activities. Unluckily for Mr. Crayford it was a Saturday, and Saturday was one day in the week when the various Slade elevens had football fixtures. Both the First Eleven and the Second Eleven were playing away from home, which took them off Mr. Crayford's hands, but on Junior Side the Upper Fourth was to play the Lower Fourth, and it was Mr. Crayford's unwelcome duty - unwelcome in such weather, at any rate - to referee the match.

After lunch, Mr. Crayford had stood in the great doorway of the School House and peered across the quadrangle and up at the sky which looked leaden. There was a slight layer of snow on the quadrangle. Not enough to warrant calling off a game, but more than enough to make conditions unpleasant for the reluctant ref. It would be much more pleasant, sprawling in the armchair in his bed-sitting room adjoining the gymnasium, with a detective thriller, than charging about in the snowy cold.

Mr. Crayford, broadly speaking, was a good Games Master and sportsman. Had he been otherwise, he would **not**

have held down a position at Slade. He was competent at all the major games, and, if a youngster had some talent, Mr. Crayford was the man to develop that talent. With plenty of keen lads he had proved an inspiring coach with sound methods. He preferred coaching seniors, and he seldom bothered to exert himself over boys who had no natural gifts for games. Mr. Crayford tended to be lazy.

It was his inherent laziness which caused Mr. Crayford to try to find someone who was willing to take over his refereeing duties that wintry afternoon. He was unsuccessful. He asked first one and then a second colleague on the school staff whether they would oblige him by "reffing" the junior game. They were not in obliging moods. They excused themselves.

The First and the Second Elevens set off in their respective motor-coaches, a number of Sixth and Fifth Formers accompanying each side in the coaches to watch the games and cheer the teams.

Without luck, Mr. Crayford sought out one or two seniors who had not gone out. Restarick would have liked to oblige Mr. Crayford, but had an appointment in Everslade later in the afternoon, or so he said. Lorch would have loved to referee the kids, but he had a headache, or so he said.

After one or two more abortive attempts to find a substitute ref, Mr. Crayford decided that he was landed with the job of refereeing a game which he considered not worthy of his presence in such weather.

During the first half, it came on to snow in earnest. Soon after half-time it was falling thickly, and the game was becoming a farce, and, though the boys were enjoying it, Mr. Crayford, who had fallen down three times, was not, so he called it a day. He blew his whistle, and the game was abandoned. After this, changing in the pavilion seemed to take the boys an excessively long time. Probably they sensed that the master was anxious for them to be gone, and, with the general cussedness of boys, took a long time on purpose.

At last, much to Crayford's relief, the boys had all dressed and departed. It took him another ten minutes to tidy up the litter which had been left behind, and to turn off the taps which had been left running at the washbasins. So it was in rather a foul temper that Mr. Crayford finally switched off the lights, locked the door of the pavilion, put the key in his pocket, and started for home.

At the bottom of the snow-covered steps he looked back at the pavilion for a moment or two. He grunted. Even in the gloomy, fading light of a snowy December afternoon, it was quite an impressive little structure, but Mr. Crayford was not in a mood to appreciate it. Quite the reverse. That pavilion had been presented to the school by two Slade parents as a mark of appreciation and gratitude to their sons' form-master, Mr. Joseph Buddle. Most people called it "The Buddle Pavilion". Not Mr. Crayford, however. He had no great love for Mr. Buddle, and never referred to the new structure as anything but the Junior Pavilion.

Mr. Crayford had got very warm charging around on the playing field before the game was abandoned, but now he was cold under his mackintosh though he had changed into dry clothing in the Buddle Pavilion. He hurried across the ground to the gate on the lane, crossed the lane, and entered the school quadrangle on the opposite side of that lane.

In the gathering dusk, under the falling snow, a snowfight was in progress in the quadrangle. Juvenile shouts of merriment rang out, and snowballs were flying in all directions. Those engaged in the fight were the very juniors for whom Mr. Crayford had sacrificed himself at refereeing that afternoon. The competition had been transferred from the football field to the less scientific scene of the snow-covered quad.

Mr. Crayford shouted:

"Get indoors, all of you. Come on, don't waste time."

There were probably twenty juniors taking part in the fight. One or two caught sight of the Games Master, and ran for the School House. Most of them took no notice. The fight went on, fast and furious.

Muttering something lurid under his breath, Mr. Crayford hurried forward and clutched at one boy.

"Keep your distance, you Upper Fourth lout," yelled the boy.

He twisted away, and ducked under Mr. Crayford's clutching hand. Half turning, the Games Master slipped. He hit the snowy quadrangle hard, as his feet slid away from him, and his cheek bumped painfully on the surface.

Rubbing his grazed cheek with his hand, Mr. Crayford staggered to his feet. There was noise and there was confusion all around him. Whether by accident or design, a snowball hit Mr. Crayford in the ear as someone shouted: "Down with the Upper Fourth."

A boy was running past, and Mr. Crayford grabbed him by his mop of unruly golden hair.

The boy yelled at the top of his voice.

"Meredith, you little wretch," hissed Mr. Crayford. "You knocked me over, and pelted me. You're coming to the Housemaster."

. . . .

Mr. Buddle, sitting at the table in his study, signed the letter he had just written: Yours very sincerely, Joseph Buddle. He addressed an envelope to Mr. and Mrs. Meredith, The Grange, Frome Road, Taunton, inserted the letter into the envelope, damped the flap of the envelope gingerly with the tip of his tongue, and sealed it. He looked for a stamp, found he hadn't one, and, rising to his feet, stood the envelope on his mantle-piece for posting in due course.

Normally, on a half-holiday, Mr. Buddle had his tea in the little town of Everslade. But not on a snowy, December afternoon. With his study light on, and the electric fire sending out a warm and comforting glow, he found the study far more attractive than the Devonshire lanes. On the end of the table stood the tea-tray, which had been brought to him by the housekeeper a half-hour earlier and was now awaiting collection. He had enjoyed two cups of strong tea, some well-buttered muffins piping hot, and a slice of delightful home-made cake.

Then Mr. Buddle had written his letter to the Merediths, accepting their kind invitation to him to spend a few days with them over Christmas. Mr. Buddle liked the Merediths, he liked their hospitable home, and he was looking forward to the holiday.

The study was bright, warm, and cosy, and the tea, prepared for him by Mrs. Cleverton's own fair hands, had been excellent. Under such circumstances Mr. Buddle was feeling that life had been good to him and was well worth living.

And then Mr. Crayford and

Meredith happened.

There was a sharp knock on the door, and, before Mr. Buddle could invite the knocker to enter, it was opened and Mr. Crayford entered, pushing Meredith in front of him.

Mr. Crayford looked damp and bedraggled, and still wore his mackintosh, plus a muffler which was wound round his neck. Meredith also looked damp and bedraggled, and his golden hair was in an entangled mass over his head.

Mr. Crayford's face was set and angry, and Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows in polite and disapproving enquiry.

"What is it, Mr. Crayford?"

Mr. Crayford spoke heatedly.

"It's this boy. He caused me to fall in the quadrangle and graze my face. Then he threw a snowball at me, and hit me on the side of the head." Mr. Buddle noted the dark red mark on the Games Master's cheekbone. Mr. Crayford went on: "I took him to the Housemaster, and Mr. Fromo told me to bring him to you as he is in your unruly form."

Mr. Buddle compressed his lips.

"You should have brought him to me in the first place," he said coldly.

Mr. Crayford gave a pronounced sniff.

"Well, I've brought him to you now. He must be punished, unless your boys are to be allowed to get away with this hooliganism."

Mr. Buddle transferred his gaze to the scowling Meredith.

He said: "I am ashamed of you, Meredith."

"May I say something, sir?" asked Meredith.

"Certainly you may speak."

Meredith brushed back his fair hair in a defiant gesture.

He said sulkily: "I didn't throw any snowball at Mr. Crayford. I didn't make him fall. I saw him sprawling on the ground - I think he slipped on the slide which some fellow had made. I saw a snowball hit him, but I don't know who threw it, and I don't care. I only know I didn't. Suddenly he grabbed me by the hair. He almost scalped me. I thought he'd gone mad or had one over the eight."

Mr. Crayford gave the indignant, golden-haired youth a hard shove.

"You repulsive little liar!" he said angrily.

"Liar yourself!" retorted Meredith.

Mr. Buddle uttered an exclamation of annoyance. He glared at Meredith.

"Silence, Meredith. Silence, I say. How dare you talk to a Slade master in those terms?"

"This boy thinks he can get away with anything with you," said Mr. Crayford bitterly. "That's why I took him to Mr. Fromo, who would be unlikely to spoil him."

Mr. Buddle flushed with anger.

"That is an uncalled for remark, Mr. Crayford. Meredith knows perfectly well that he will suffer for any misdoing or impertinence."

"I've done nothing," exclaimed Meredith.

With an effort, Mr. Buddle controlled his exasperation. He said quietly: "You are certain that Meredith was the guilty boy, Mr. Crayford?"

"Certain! Of course I'm certain!"

Meredith spoke up shrilly.

"There were a couple of dozen fellows out there snowballing, sir. It was getting dark. With all the racket going on, it wasn't easy to see who was

who."

"That is true," ejaculated Mr. Buddle. He looked dubiously at the Games Master. "I looked out of my window some twenty minutes ago, and watched the boys enjoying themselves in the snow. The light was certainly far from good."

"Mr. Buddle," said Mr. Crayford sulphurously, "I tell you that it was this boy who made me fall, and who hit me with a snowball. You can see the wound on my cheek --"

"You actually saw him, Mr. Crayford?"

"Saw him?" hooted Crayford. "Of course I saw him. I saw him as plainly as I see him now."

Meredith glared at the Games Master, and opened his mouth wide in exaggerated amazement.

"Ooh, sir!"

"Silence, Meredith!" said Mr. Buddle in a deep voice. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Crayford. As you saw the boy, that ends the matter. Meredith, you will be detained for three hours in the form-room next Wednesday half-holiday, and I will set you a number of exercises in English --"

There was a tap on the door.

"Who is it?" demanded Mr. Buddle.

The door opened, and a tall, dark-haired youngster entered.

"What is it, Shovel?" asked Mr. Buddle irritably.

Mervyn Shovel looked sheepish. He gazed at Mr. Buddle's carpet.

"I did it, sir," he said.

Mr. Buddle regarded him in astonishment.

"You did it, Shovel? You did what?"

Shovel raised his eyes mournfully.

"I threw the snowball at Mr. Crayford, sir."

Mr. Buddle was visibly startled. Mr. Crayford looked thunderstruck. Meredith scowled.

"You threw the snowball at Mr. Crayford," said Mr. Buddle, with a stressed pause between each word and the next. He cast an unfriendly glance in Mr. Crayford's direction.

"I told you I didn't do it," said Meredith. "It's awful when a fellow's word isn't taken."

"Silence, Meredith. Explain yourself, Shovel," snapped Mr. Buddle.

Miserably, Shovel explained himself.

"Mr. Crayford grabbed Meredith. Mr. Crayford thought Merry was to blame. I saw Mr. Crayford bring Meredith to you, sir. So I had to confess. It was the right thing to do," he concluded piously.

Mr. Crayford broke in angrily:

"You cunning little wretch. I don't believe a word of it. It was Meredith."

Shovel shook his head.

"No, sir. I suppose you thought it was Meredith, as you grabbed him and yanked him off. But I did it, sir." He addressed Mr. Buddle. "Mr. Crayford slipped on a slide, sir. He came a purler. I saw him sprawling there, and I chucked a snowball at him as he scrambled up. I thought he would be amused, sir, and join in the fun. But I knew he wasn't amused when he grabbed Meredith."

There were a few moments of silence in the study. Mr. Buddle looked worried. Mr. Crayford looked red and angry. Meredith held his head high in calm dignity, and looked straight ahead. Shovel looked demure. Altogether they were uncomfortable moments.

Mr. Buddle spoke at last.

"You did quite right to come to me, Shovel. Your act was thoughtless and disrespectful. You will be detained for three hours next Wednesday afternoon. I shall set you an English paper which will fully occupy your time. You will now express your regret to Mr. Crayford."

"Yes, sir." Shovel looked suitably penitent. He addressed Mr. Crayford. "I'm sorry, sir, for throwing a snowball at you. I did it on the spur of the moment."

Mr. Crayford spoke at last, in a voice which was trembling with anger.

"I don't believe you, Shovel. You didn't throw the snowball. You have come forward like this just to embarrass me."

"Oh, sir." Shovel's face expressed consternation. "Of course I did it, sir. I just came because you copped Meredith. I didn't want Meredith blamed for something I did."

Mr. Buddle interposed before the Games Master could speak again.

"I believe you, Shovel. You may go. You are detained for the next half-holiday."

Shovel took his departure. The door closed behind him.

Mr. Buddle turned to Meredith.

"You, too, may go, Meredith. It is obvious that Mr. Crayford made a natural mistake. We are sorry that an error was made."

Mr. Crayford did not look sorry. He looked very annoyed indeed.

Meredith did not leave. He said:

"Mr. Crayford said he saw me do it. He wasn't telling the truth. He couldn't have seen me do it, because I didn't do it."

"I have said that you may go, Meredith", exclaimed Mr. Buddle, his voice rising a little.

Meredith spoke obstinately.

"Mr. Crayford has called me a liar, sir. It's not cricket. I've been humiliated, sir."

Mr. Buddle's lips twitched. There was just the slightest glint of mirth in his eyes. He said:

"Mr. Crayford regrets that a mistake was made, Meredith."

"Then let him say so, sir. I suppose he thought I did it, but he made up tales about me. He owes me an apology."

Mr. Crayford had reddened.

He burst out: "You impudent little beast, I'll box your ears."

He took a step forward, and Mr. Buddle intervened quickly.

"Be calm, please, Mr. Crayford. Meredith, you must keep a sense of proportion. We all make mistakes at times. No harm has been done by Mr. Crayford's error, and the guilty boy has confessed. Leave my study at once."

"It's not fair, sir," muttered Meredith.

"Leave my study. Go and get your tea, or you will be too late and the dining-hall will be cleared." As Meredith opened his lips to say something, Mr. Buddle went on, hastily and firmly: "It will soon be preparation time. You may remind Pilgrim that he is to collect the Lower Fourth essays at seven o'clock precisely, and bring them here to my study. Tell him he may enter and place them on my table."

Meredith regarded Mr. Crayford inimically for a moment or two, and then turned slowly - very slowly - away. Mr. Buddle took him by the arm, propelled him forward, opened the study door, and pushed him through. Mr. Buddle closed the door on the retreating Meredith, and swung round.

Mr. Crayford had turned his

back. He was gazing at the envelope, addressed to the Merediths at Taunton, which Mr. Buddle had placed on the mantelpiece, in view of anyone who cared to look at it. Mr. Buddle wished that he had not left that envelope in view, but he had not been expecting Mr. Crayford to drop in.

Mr. Buddle asked dryly: "Is there anything else, Mr. Crayford?"

Mr. Crayford turned round and faced him.

"This is all your fault, Mr. Buddle."

Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows in pained surprise.

"My fault? How do you make that out, Crayford? You jumped to a hasty conclusion over Meredith. You believed him guilty, but you did not see him throw a snowball at you as you claimed. I have dealt with the matter as best I could, under the circumstances which you created. I fail to see how anything that happened can remotely be classed as my fault."

"The boy was lying," snapped Crayford.

Mr. Buddle sighed.

"Mr. Crayford, you are being stupid," he said, in a depressed voice.

"I didn't actually see the young lout throw the snowball," admitted Crayford, "but I know he did. Meredith and Shovel have planned this confession business to make me look a fool."

Mr. Buddle started. He stood in silent thought for a few seconds. He knew that any little plot, by which they could make Crayford look a fool, might well appeal to two such worthies as Meredith and Shovel. The Games Master, though he got on well with the seniors, was not popular with the juniors of Slade. But Mr. Buddle shook his head.

"It's impossible, Crayford. It's at least unlikely that Shovel would take on an undeserved punishment. In any case, I gather that you brought Meredith straight in from the quadrangle. The boys had no opportunity to devise such a plan, even if they were devious enough to think it out. You must accept that Meredith was blameless on this occasion."

"He was impertinent," said Crayford.

Mr. Buddle couldn't think of a reply to that one.

"It's you who are to blame," went on Crayford viciously. "You go to spend holidays with his parents. It encourages the young villain to take advantage of you and of everybody else. He thinks he can get away with murder."

"Nonsense!" yapped Mr. Buddle.

Mr. Crayford moved across to the door. He swung round, his fingers on the handle. His gaze passed Mr. Buddle and rested on the addressed envelope on the mantlepiece.

He said: "I suppose you're going to the Merediths for Christmas, like you did last year. It's bad for discipline. This scene with Meredith, and his impudence, are the result of it."

Mr. Buddle said, wearily: "Mr. Crayford, will you please go. I have no further time to waste on you. I am dining to-night with Mr. and Mrs. Fromo, and I have several things to do first." He added tartly: "If you feel that you have just cause, you can always carry your complaint to the Headmaster."

"Fat lot of good that would do! You know that Old Pink disapproves of your visiting parents of Slade boys. You get away with it because the Merediths gave the school that lousy pavilion. If anyone else but you

accepted hospitality from parents, he would be hauled on the carpet pretty quickly."

"Have you finished? I have already mentioned that I have an appointment.--"

Crayford opened the door. He passed a hand gently over his bruised cheek as he stood in the doorway.

He said, venomously: "I suppose this means that you are going to the Merediths again for Christmas. Does it, Mr. Buddle?"

"That," said Mr. Buddle, "is no business of yours, Mr. Crayford. Please go."

And Mr. Crayford went at last, closing the door behind him with a slam which caused Mr. Buddle's trilby hat, on a peg behind the door, to fly off and fall to the floor.

Thoughtfully Mr. Buddle picked up the hat and replaced it on its peg. He had a troubled expression on his face. He moved across to the window, and looked out. It was pitch dark now, and still snowing. He could see the flakes falling in the lights which gleamed from the windows of the School House.

Mr. Buddle was sorry that the clash with Crayford had occurred. There had been a time, not so long ago, when these two members of Mr. Scarlet's staff frequently clashed. They had nothing in common, except a mutual dislike for one another. Some of the encounters had been quite bitter in flavour. Crayford could be spiteful and malicious with anyone he disliked, and Mr. Buddle had a sharp tongue and a ready wit.

But there had come an occasion when, unobtrusively, Mr. Buddle did Mr. Crayford a good turn, and, though there had never been a formal burying of the hatchet, the relationship between the two men had become far more cordial. Though Mr. Buddle knew he would never like the much younger man, it was pleasant to be on friendly terms with all colleagues, and Mr. Buddle had welcomed the change of attitude on the part of Crayford.

Now, apparently, all that newly-found good-will was gone. Somehow, Mr. Buddle did not entirely blame Crayford. Meredith could be an intensely irritating youngster at times, and even Mr. Buddle sometimes regarded the golden-haired youth as his hair shirt. And Mr. Crayford's bruised face showed that there might be some excuse for his petulance.

Mr. Buddle sighed, and hoped for the best. He drew his curtains, and prepared to keep his evening's appointment.

. . . .

It was about nine o'clock that evening when Mr. Buddle returned to his study. He had dined well with Mr. and Mrs. Fromo in the House-master's private house adjoining the college, and it had been a pleasant evening. Mr. Fromo was pedantic and self-opinionated and inclined to be a bore, but Mrs. Fromo was a tactful and rather clever little woman, and she made sure that Mr. Buddle did not have to do all the listening. So the English master had quite enjoyed himself.

Mr. Buddle entered his study, switched on the light, and closed the door. The first thing that caught his eye was the pile of exercise books placed on his table. Evidently Pilgrim, the Head Boy of the Lower Fourth Form, had carried out his duties and collected up the evening's work from his fellow sufferers, and brought them along to Mr. Buddle's study during the master's absence.

It was cold in the study. Mr. Buddle switched on both bars of his electric fire, and then sat down and removed his goloshes and shoes. He had had to cross the snowy quadrangle and negotiate the Mulberry Walk to reach Mr. Fromo's house, and he had gone forth prepared. Now he divested himself of overcoat and muffler. He slid his feet into comfortable carpet slippers, held out his palms to the welcome heat from the fire for a while, and then seated himself at his table in order to attack the pile of exercise books. Mr. Buddle was a conscientious marker.

The Lower Fourth had been given the task of writing an essay on "The Discovery or Invention which has brought the most Benefit to Mankind - with reasons for choice."

Mr. Buddle's red-ink pen was in action constantly as he read essay after essay. Occasionally he gave a grunt; now and then he emitted a rusty chuckle. Often he shook his head in protest.

Pilgrim had written in his rather cramped hand:

"The greatest invention of all was the wheel, for it gave rise to many of the mighty things of modern times. Without the wheel there would have been no travelling from place to place, no intermingling, and, consequently, no progress ---"

And so on, for several pages. Mr. Buddle was not impressed.

Brazenbean had written:

"In my personal and private view, to which I am entitled, the greatest of all discoveries was wireless by the great statesman Macaroni, an Italian, to whom we owe much. If we had not had wireless, many a great man and a great ship would have been lost, and the loss to mankind would have been great. Wireless provides great entertainment by broadcasting the great dance bands which are great. The police are pleased with wireless as it helps them to capture great criminals like Crippen, who ---"

And so on. Mr. Buddle frowned and clicked his tongue. He wrote a caustic comment at the end of the essay.

He drew his red-ink pen through several pages of Rainbow's work, and wrote against the end of it: "I refuse to mark scribble. Repeat this exercise."

Mr. Buddle went on from essay to essay, finding some good, some fair, some bad. Garmansway had written:

"There can be no question that the invention which has blessed us most of all is the aeroplane. It has enabled wealthy people to travel from country to country, and, every time we hear the deafening din of a plane passing overhead, we should be reminded what a lot we owe to the inventor, and give thanks. Without the aeroplane nobody would have known fast travel, and there would have been nothing from which to drop bombs ..."

And so on. Mr. Buddle ploughed through Garmansway's eulogy of the aeroplane.

And now he arrived at Meredith's essay. It was neat enough, but Mr. Buddle disapproved of Meredith's handwriting. At some pre-preparatory school Meredith had started his writing life on script. At his prep school he had learned to join his script characters together, and by the time he reached Mr. Buddle it was too late to do anything about it. Mr. Buddle detested the modern method of teaching children to write by means of script. In his opinion, there was never any character in the caligraphy of those who had developed their hand from a script beginning. Mr. Buddle knew one or two people who were capable of beautiful copperplate writing, but none of them was young.

Mr. Buddle, of course, was really an old-fashioned gentleman. He had a sneaking belief that there was something to be said for the old method of teaching small children to write by means of copy-books - "Speech is Silvern, Silence is Golden" - with

sweeping capital letters and carefully-formed smaller letters. He saw no sense in the modern practice of scrapping something good simply because it was old. Probably Mr. Buddle was a traditionalist.

He read the first page of Meredith's essay:

"There have been hundreds of useful inventions and plenty of discoveries which have benefited mankind. There is much to be said for vaccination, the Davy lamp, the telephone, the gramophone, the talking pictures, the aeroplane, the motor car, and the wireless. They are all right, in their way, and we would not be without them. But, if you had to have your leg amputated or your appendix removed, you would swop every car, every wireless, every talking picture, and every one of the rest, for an anaesthetic. So I say that the very greatest benefit to mankind has come in the discovery of anaesthetics. I think, too, that ----"

Mr. Buddle turned the page. He came on two loose sheets of paper. He moved the sheets and noted that each was headed with the Slade College crest and Latin motto. They were, in fact, sheets of school notepaper, issued by the school authorities, and obtainable, free of charge, by every Slade boy.

This was obviously a letter. It started "Dear Mum". Mr. Buddle frowned at the pencilled, script-writing which covered the two sheets. To him it was the height of slovenliness to write a letter in lead-pencil. Evidently Meredith had written the letter, slipped it into his exercise book, and forgotten to remove it when the book was collected by Pilgrim.

Mr. Buddle was not interested in what Meredith might have written to his "Mum". In any case, Mr. Buddle was a gentleman who observed the little niceties of life.

It was when he picked up the two sheets of notepaper with the intention of slipping them into the back of the exercise-book, for Meredith to find on Monday morning, when the book was returned to him, that Mr. Buddle's eye was caught by four words at the foot of the first sheet. The four words were "As for Mr. Buddle ---"

He paused. He was only human, and he could not help wondering what his troublesome pupil had had to say to his "Mum" about his form-master. Mr. Buddle read, a pleasant smile playing over his lips:

Dear Mum,

Thank you for the tip and for the scarf. Did you knit it yourself? You've got our colours fine, and the tip is always useful. It has been a good term, and I am sorry, in some ways, that it's ending. Time goes so fast at school, there is so much to do all the time, and they make us work like navvies. Seems no time since we were at Scarborough.

I hope you and Dad are coming for Speech Day, but of course you both are. The Lower Fourth is putting on the best item in the show, and you can put up with the speeches.

It will be nice to be back with you and Dad and Debbie and Charley and Pumpkin, and I'm looking forward to the vac. As for Mr. Buddle ---"

It was the end of the first sheet. Mr. Buddle put it on one side, and turned to the second sheet. The pleasant little smile faded from his lips as he read on:

"... it's alright with me, of course, if you and Dad want him to come to us for Christmas again. Still, I must say that it's a bit thick for a chap to get landed with his schoolmaster every vac, and especially at Christmas. After all, we did give the school the pavilion, and it cost a lot. Still, if you and Dad can put up with him, I reckon I can too ---"

There were only a few lines more, concluding with "Your Loving Son, Ceddie", but Mr. Buddle read no further. He sat staring at the two sheets of notepaper and at the pencilled script. At last he spoke aloud:

"It's all wrong!" he muttered. "It's all very wrong!"

He felt stunned. He felt horribly disappointed. Somehow, he felt a sense of loss. For a good many holidays past he had visited the Merediths in their home at Taunton. At the start of those visits he had

hesitated, feeling that it might not be fair to the boy to have his schoolmaster landed on him in vacation time. But Meredith had seemed to like to have his master in his home, and, apart from one special occasion, Mr. Buddle had never stopped more than a couple of nights.

Mr. Buddle's face was flushed as he rose from the table. He was embarrassed, but, more than that, reasonably or not, he felt betrayed. A sense of resentment struggled with his embarrassment. He moved across to his mantelpiece. The study was uncomfortably warm now, and he bent down and switched off one bar of the electric fire.

He stood staring at the bust of Shakespeare which stood on his mantelpiece. He was thinking of how the Merediths had always pressed him to accept their invitations - how they professed to wish that we would prolong his visits - how they always seemed to enjoy them. He asked himself whether Meredith would have written to his mother, in the terms of the letter, had he not believed that he would receive sympathy in that quarter. Mr. Buddle blamed the Merediths for hypocrisy; but he blamed himself more than he blamed them. Taking down from his mantelpiece the envelope addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Meredith, he tore it and the letter contained in it across and across again. He dropped the pieces into his wastepaper basket.

He spoke softly to Shakespeare: "The trouble with me, William, is that I have been too thick-skinned."

He sat down in his armchair, his face clouded and sad. He gave a deep sigh. For a while, he looked at the glowing bar of the fire. As the minutes ticked away his mood changed. No less sad, he became more resigned. After all, the boy was very young. The letter had never been written for Mr. Buddle's eyes. The boy would surely be ashamed and grieved if he ever knew that Mr. Buddle had seen the letter. It was a private letter, inwardly argued Mr. Buddle. He had no business to have seen it.

Reaching out, he took a volume from the nest of shelves by the side of his chair. He had been reading it during the afternoon. He turned the pages listlessly and a little ruefully. The volume had come from Mr. Meredith, the father of the writer of the letter which had so disturbed him. Beautifully bound, it contained a sequence of Gems, and it was one of a number of similar books which Mr. Meredith had loaned him from time to time. Mr. Meredith was always enthusiastic over that old school-story paper, and he had transferred to Mr. Buddle a good deal of his enthusiasm. Mr. Buddle felt that it was the last volume of Gems which he would accept on loan from Mr. Meredith.

He had read all the stories in that book during the term, and as he turned the pages he recalled the plots of the tales. "Levison Minor's Luck" - that had been a good one. Levison Minor was the type of well-mannered lad who appealed to any schoolmaster. "For His Brother's Sake", another tale of the Levisons. "Grundy's Guilt" - quite an entertaining story, but showing no respect at all for so-called "handwriting experts". "The Wisdom of Gussy", yet another one about the Levisons. That volume contained just a trifle too much about the Levisons, Mr. Buddle thought. They were good characters, but one could have too much of even good characters.

Mr. Buddle paused in his progress through the book. Then,

thoughtfully, he turned back the pages to "Grundy's Guilt". Yes, a very good story, mused Mr. Buddle. Somebody had written an insulting message to a master. It seemed to be in Grundy's writing, but he denied that he had written it. Mr. Spother, a hand-writing expert, had been called in, and he pronounced, with all the assurance of an expert, that the letter had been written by Grundy. Later, it was proved that Grundy was not guilty - the writing was a forgery - somebody attempting to make trouble for the not very lovable Grundy.

Mr. Buddle stared straight ahead, a faraway look in his eyes, and disturbing thoughts stirring in his mind. After a while he closed the book, rose to his feet, and placed it on the table. He bent forward, opened Meredith's exercise-book, extracted the two sheets of that fateful letter, and scanned them side by side. The minutes ticked by. Mr. Buddle turned again to Meredith's essay, and read it through. From habit, he took up his red-ink pen, and marked in a correction. He replaced the letter in the exercise-book. Methodically, he made a neat heap of the exercise-books, and placed them on the corner of his table.

He sat down again against the fire. Time slipped by as he pondered, a deep groove in his brow. At last he rose again. This time he opened the door beneath his sideboard, and extracted a score of little booklets. They were copies of the school magazine, edited in the past few terms by Peter-Roy Shannon of the Sixth Form. Twice each term Shannon produced a new issue of "The Sladeian", and it was accepted that he did it well. He was a keen and hard-working editor.

Mr. Buddle sat down again in his armchair, and placed the school magazines on the floor beside him. One after another he searched through them, but he was not looking at the editorial comments and ramblings of Peter-Roy. Mr. Buddle was reading the articles contributed by Mr. Ronald Crayford, the Slade Games Master. In every issue the Games Master offered his views on the sporting activities of the school in the half-term which had passed, assessing what had been done, what had been left undone, and what might have been done. Many of those articles dated long before the time of Shannon's editorship, but Mr. Buddle read through them all. It was, however, in the most recent edition, published half-way through the present term, that Mr. Buddle found what he was seeking.

In the issue which claimed Mr. Buddle's close attention, Mr. Crayford had ended his sporting thoughts as follows:

> "So the opening matches of the term have promised well for this winter season. The First Eleven has had its successes, and, where failure has occurred, that failure has been due to complacency. One goal up - and the team concentrates on defence instead of maintaining attack. The idea seems to be that, once the ball has been in the net, and a slender lead obtained, it's alright to consider the game as won, and to defend that single goal to the death. Too much defence spoils sport, and it is to be hoped that Antrobus will drive that message well and truly home to all his men."

Mr. Buddle nodded. His face was grim. He placed the most recent issue of the magazine on his table, and packed the other copies back in his sideboard.

One weight had been lifted from his mind, but it had been replaced by another. He would sleep on it, and, tomorrow, he would decide what he had to do.

He turned out his light, entered his adjoining bedroom, and went to bed.

. . . .

The next morning Mr. Buddle found himself very disturbed indeed in his mind. Which was no doubt the reason for what happened when he went down to the staff dining-room for his breakfast.

While he was waiting for his scrambled eggs, toast, marmalade, and coffee, to be placed on the table for him to attack, he sat down in an armchair against a radiator. He hitched up his trouser legs carefully before crossing one leg comfortably over the other.

Mr. Crathie, the science master, came over to him, and, bending down, said in a low voice:

"I don't wish to interfere, Mr. Buddle, but I think you may not realise that you are wearing odd socks."

Mr. Buddle looked down at his socks. What Mr. Crathie said was correct. Mr. Buddle was wearing one navy blue sock and one dark green sock, a colour clash which had almost certainly been caused by his worry and preoccupation that morning.

"Calamity!" ejaculated Mr. Buddle. He rose to his feet hastily, only pausing to say "Thank you very much, Mr. Crathie" as he fled from the room.

That was how it was that Mr. Buddle arrived back at his study not more than ten minutes after leaving it, and at least thirty minutes before he would have been expected to return in the normal course of events.

That was how it was that Mr. Buddle, entering his study in a rush, was astounded to find that the study was not unoccupied as he had left it. It was only by braking sharply that he avoided colliding head on with Mr. Crayford, the Games Master, who was just on the point of leaving.

Both men were startled. Mr. Crayford moved back suddenly, and Mr. Buddle uttered a loud gasp.

The two stood staring at one another. Mr. Crayford opened his mouth as though to speak, but no word came. A sudden look of comprehension shot into Mr. Buddle's face. He entered the study, closed the door, and stood with his back to it.

"I should like to know what you want in my study when I am absent," he said.

"I came here --" began Crayford. He broke off. If he was struggling to think of something to say, he was, for once, evidently at a loss.

"I can see that you are here," said Mr. Buddle. "I should like to know why you are here, unless you prefer to answer in the presence of the Headmaster."

Mr. Crayford was pale. The bruise on his face looked black against his pallor. He found his voice at last, though he was inarticulate.

"I hope you don't think -- I wanted to see you about --"

"About what?"

"About --" Crayford broke off lamely. Normally a very self-assured young man, he was the very reverse of that at the moment.

Mr. Buddle said gravely:

"It is a pity that you did not manufacture a lie in advance. But, of course, you could not foresee that, quite inadvertently, I should go down to breakfast wearing odd socks."

"Odd socks?" echoed Crayford in astonishment.

"Quite! I could hardly take my breakfast wearing odd socks, so I hurried back to my study, just in time

to find you here."

Crayford said, with an attempt at jocularity:

"If you've got odd socks on, you'd better leave them as they are. It's unlucky to change them."

Mr. Buddle did not stir. There was a granite gleam in his green eyes as he watched the younger man.

He said: "Had I thought about the matter, I might have guessed that you would want to come here while I was absent. It was obvious that you could not allow me to return his exercise book to Meredith with a letter in it which you forged. You had to find an opportunity of removing that letter."

Crayford was visibly startled. He said huskily:

"You think ---"

"I think that Meredith would have many questions to ask if he had found in his exercise book a letter which he was supposed to have written, but about which he knew nothing. That would not have suited your horrible plan, would it, Mr. Crayford?"

Crayford looked almost haggard.

"What letter? You're talking through your hat."

Mr. Buddle smiled grimly.

"I'm saying," said Mr. Buddle deliberately, "that you wrote a letter, copying Meredith's handwriting, and that you brought it last evening to my study, where you knew his exercise would be. You heard me tell Meredith to remind Pilgrim that the Lower Fourth work was to be brought here at seven o'clock. You came here, when you knew this room would be unoccupied, and placed your forged letter in Meredith's book for me to find and read. You came here this morning to remove the letter, when you thought I was safely away having breakfast."

Crayford did not answer for a moment or two. He passed a hand tenderly over his bruised cheek. He broke the brief silence.

"Supposing I say that I have no idea what you are talking about?"

"You can hardly say that when the letter is now in your own pocket," said Mr. Buddle contemptuously. "I shall ask Mr. Scarlet to order you to turn out your pockets."

Crayford drew out a cigarette case. He lit a cigarette, and spun the dead match into Mr. Buddle's wastepaper basket.

He said: "Look in Meredith's exercise book, Mr. Buddle."

Mr. Buddle said: "Do not prevaricate, Crayford. When I move from this door, we go together to Mr. Scarlet."

Mr. Crayford shrugged his shoulders. He turned, picked up an exercise book from the top of the pile on the table, and held it out to the English master.

"Meredith's exercise book," he said. "Look in it."

Mr. Buddle stared hard at the Games Master. He took the book, and opened it. Two sheets of Slade notepaper, covered with writing in pencil, dropped out on to the floor, and Mr. Buddle picked them up. He was taken aback.

"So you have not removed it," he said.

"Look at those sheets."

"I have already looked at them - last night - as you knew I would. I don't need to look at them again."

"Look at them," insisted Mr. Crayford.

Mr. Buddle looked at them. He separated the sheets. The first one, starting "Dear Mum" was the same as he had seen it the previous evening, ending with the words "As for Mr.

Buddle --"

But, as the schoolmaster saw at once, the second sheet was now different. It continued from the first sheet as follows:

".... I'm glad that he's coming to us for Christmas. The vac wouldn't seem right, nowadays, if he wasn't with us for a few days, would it? He's a jolly good sort. A tough old boy with us in class, but he must be the most popular beak at Slade. I reckon that Dad is looking forward to a long gossip with him ....."

Mr. Buddle read no further. With a curious expression on his face, he looked up at Crayford.

"You've changed the second sheet this morning. You've taken away the sheet you forged, and you've replaced it with the genuine one ---"

"That's right," agreed Crayford.

Mr. Buddle said slowly: "You did not dare to let the forged sheet fall into Meredith's hands ---"

"He would have been startled, wouldn't he? Of course I had to get hold of it. I might have destroyed the whole letter, real and unreal parts, or I might have put the real parts back where I found them - on the table in Meredith's study. I went there last evening to find an excuse for clouting him. It would have relieved my pent-up feelings. But the study was empty, though the letter was there. I took it away. If he finds his letter in his exercise book when you give him that back tomorrow morning, he will only think that he put it there himself or that Pilgrim collected it up."

Mr. Buddle said, in wonder:

"Probably so. But why leave it at all? It does not make sense."

"No, it doesn't make sense." There was a mocking inflection in Crayford's voice. "It makes even less sense to me than it does to you. I left it for you to find."

"Why?" demanded Mr. Buddle. "Why do this wicked thing, and then leave the genuine letter for me to find?"

"A good question." Crayford laughed self-consciously. "The answer is a melodramatic one. I was hopping mad last night. This morning - well, I felt differently. I changed my mind. Like the scoundrel in the Lyceum drama, I repented."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"I don't care a brass farthing whether you believe it or not," said Mr. Crayford. "It just wasn't good enough."

Mr. Buddle looked doubtful. He moved away from the door, and sat down on one of the chairs against the table.

"You mean that the forged sheet was not good enough?"

Crayford laughed again, while Mr. Buddle gazed at him in complete incredulity.

"Actually I didn't mean that. I thought the actual forgery was good. It took me quite a while." As Mr. Buddle sat in silence, Crayford went on: "Was it a very palpable counterfeit, Mr. Buddle? I thought nobody could ever detect the difference --"

Mr. Buddle said: "It was a good counterfeit, if 'good' is a word anyone can apply to anything so dreadful."

Crayford nodded.

"I thought it was good. Yet you detected it. How?"

Mr. Buddle glanced at the two sheets which he was still holding. He rose to his feet again, crossed to the window, and gazed out into the misty, snowy quadrangle, bordered with the leafless trees. He said, without turning round:

"I knew as soon as I looked at the second sheet that it was wrong somewhere. The first sheet is Meredith's own, of course - he

mentions matters with which you could not possibly be acquainted. Nobody but an expert could have detected that the second sheet was forged, so far as the writing went - at a first glance."

"And you are an expert?"

Mr. Buddle turned round.

"I am not an expert. The forgery, as such, would have passed muster. You were able to do it because Meredith writes in a script-like hand which contains no character at all. Anybody with a little patience could successfully imitate it. You were helped by the fact that the letter was written in pencil. Had it been in pen-and-ink, it would have been far more difficult. But in pencil --"

Mr. Crayford nodded appreciatively. He threw his half-smoked cigarette behind Mr. Buddle's electric fire.

"You're right. I couldn't have done it with a nib. The good old HB school pencil made it easy, along with his kindergarten scrawl. So it was a good copy - good enough to take anybody in. Yet you detected it. How?"

Mr. Buddle removed his spectacles, and abstractedly polished the lenses with his handkerchief.

He said: "The forgery was workmanlike. Yet there was something wrong. For a while I could not decide what that something was. And then, it came to me."

Mr. Crayford slumped into a chair at the table. With his chin resting in his cupped hand, he stared at the little English master.

Mr. Buddle went on: "It was simple, really. This is what appeared in the part of the letter which I was supposed to believe that Meredith had written." He took up a pencil, and, bringing his blotting-pad in front of him, wrote on it: "It's alright with me."

He turned the pad towards the Games Master, and Mr. Crayford gazed at it. Crayford raised his eyes from the pad.

"Is there anything wrong with that?"

"Nothing wrong, probably. But you wrote 'all right' as one word with only one letter 'l'."

"Everybody writes it like that," said Crayford. "A-L-R-I-G-H-T."

"You are wrong, Crayford. Everybody does not write it like that. The boys in my form do not write it like that. 'Alright', a single word without the second 'l', is an abbreviation, possibly originating in America, where they like to save time by taking short cuts. I believe they write 'specialty' for 'speciality' and 'aluminum' for 'aluminium'. Some schools of thought do it in this country, but I regard it as slipshod. My boys are taught never to do it. Meredith, purely from habit, would not step aside from what he had been taught. Therefore, as soon as I saw 'alright' as a single word in that letter, it struck me that something was wrong, even though it took a while for the piece of the jigsaw to fall into place."

Crayford leaned back in his chair. He passed his tongue over his lips, but did not speak.

Mr. Buddle went on: "By a coincidence, Meredith used the term 'all right', written as two separate words, in the essay which he did for me last evening. It was unlikely that he would write it as two words in an essay, and, at the same time, express it differently in a letter. It made me wonder who had copied the boy's hand in order to try to discredit him in my eyes." Mr. Buddle's voice deepened a little. "I thought of you, and of how extreme was your annoyance with him

yesterday. I looked through your sports reports in the school magazine, and I came across the same writing of 'all right' as a single word. It satisfied me of your guilt."

Mr. Crayford nodded. He rose to his feet. His rather handsome face was still very pale.

He said: "Quite clever, aren't you? I always write 'all right' as a single word. You are a fussy old cuss."

There was a moment of silence.

Crayford said: "Are you reporting this to the Head?"

Mr. Buddle did not answer.

"I should deny it, of course. It would be your word against mine."

"I think that Mr. Scarlet would accept my word against yours," said Mr. Buddle mildly.

"I think he might, but there would be no proof."

Mr. Buddle glanced at his watch.

He said: "I think I shall be too late for my breakfast, but I don't regard my time as wasted." He paused, and Crayford moved over to the door. Mr. Buddle went on, almost conversationally: "It is incredible to me that a man in your position should stoop to manufacturing something to discredit a schoolboy in my eyes. I find it still more incredible that, having acted as you did, you should come to my study and replace the forged sheet with the genuine one."

Mr. Crayford bit at his finger nail. He thrust one hand into a trouser pocket. He said slowly:

"That young scoundrel made me raving mad yesterday. All the same, I admit that what I did was not good enough. My quarrel was with the kid; not with you. I tried to undo it this morning --"

"Suppose," said Mr. Buddle, "I had not looked at the letter again. Your belated efforts to undo what you had done would have failed."

"Than that would have been just too bad," remarked Crayford. "Replacing the letter was as far as I was prepared to go. If you missed it ---" He shrugged his shoulders.

"I see," murmured Mr. Buddle.

Crayford moved across to the door. He turned.

"Am I to expect a call to Old Pink's study before Chapel time?" he asked.

Mr. Buddle shook his head.

"The matter is closed so far as I am concerned, Crayford. The whole thing has been a passing shock for me, but no harm has been done. We will leave it at that."

Crayford stood in thought against the door, his fingers resting on the handle. His unusually light blue eyes flickered beneath his heavy brows.

He said, in a low voice: "We don't like one another much, Buddle. That won't change. But you did me a good turn once - the time when that fool Shannon put the picture of the donkey on the cover of the school mag. I should have got the sack then, if you hadn't put in a word for me with Old Pink. I didn't think of it last night, but I remembered it this morning. What I did was a pretty cheap return for what you did for me." He paused, and Mr. Buddle made no comment. Crayford went on, uncomfortably: "It goes against the grain with me to say it, but I'm sorry."

"I see." Mr. Buddle nodded wisely. He said: "You seem to go out of your way, Crayford, to make people think you are an unpleasant young man. I begin to think that you are not nearly as unpleasant as you often make out. Perhaps your main weakness is that you are rather young."

Crayford opened the door. He said:

"Time is a demon for taking care of a weakness like that."

The next moment he was gone.

. . . .

And so ended the episode. It is uncertain whether Meredith ever wondered what had become of his pencilled letter. If so, it can never have occurred to him that it ended its brief life, torn in fragments, in Mr. Buddle's wastepaper basket..

Probably Meredith wrote a replacement letter. Mr. Buddle assuredly did - to Mr. and Mrs. Meredith to accept their kind invitation for Christmas.

It should be recorded, in conclusion, that Mr. Buddle did not trouble to change his socks that morning before going off to Chapel to "sit among his boys." He did not want to change his luck.

* *

HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN

A SURVEY OF FOUR POST WAR COMICS (1946 - 1948)

by Larry Morley

Although both the European and Japanese wars ended in 1945, it wasn't until June of the following year that Victory parades were arranged. There were celebrations all over the country. Comic papers of the period put out special numbers for this special occasion; "FILM FUN", No. 1337, dated 8th June, 1946, was headed "Grand Victory Holiday Number".

This long-running paper contained all the old favourites - "Laurel & Hardy, "Old Mother Riley", George Formby, "Joe E. Brown", Max Miller (still featured although he hadn't made a picture for years); and two comparative newcomers, "Frank Randle" and "Abbot & Costello".

It is obvious that Laurel & Hardy and George Formby were the favourites, for they were afforded two pages each; Laurel & Hardy on the front and back pages; Formby had the centre spread.

The stories featured were "Jack Keen, Tec", "Sylvia Starr" (The Star Reporter of the Daily Wire); and "Bill Boyd on the Danger Trail". All our comic friends in this number by various misadventures, managed to get front seats for the victory parade, complete with a huge pile of tuck and bottles of "pop"; some even had joints of beef - "What's that Daddy?" asked my daughter - she may well ask. The sight of these tempting dishes must have been very mouth-watering to the young readers of the period - still on food rationing.

Number 400 of "RADIO FUN", 8th June, was headed "Whitsun and Victory Number" with an announcement at the foot of the page - "As the men of the air helped to win the war, so will our stars of the air help you to laugh your way into peace!"

Like "FILM FUN" it consisted of sixteen pages, the covers printed in black and orange; our old friend "Tommy Handley" had place of honour on the front page. Other stars featured were Arthur Askey, Petula Clark (Radio's Merry Mimic), Jimmy Durante, Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon, Revnell and West, Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna; (why not Bob Hope and Bing Crosby? I wonder. Maybe Crosby was too much of a romantic figure at the time).

The list was completed by Flanagan and Allen and Tommy Trinder, quite a galaxy of stars.

On the back page there is a rather nostalgic cartoon feature entitled "In Town This Week" - Mr. and Mrs. Britain at the Victory Day mike. It is about a family attending the victory parade; Dad in his demob suit and sporting war medals; they cheer the passing troops and a chubby looking Winston Churchill. The last frame pictures a young-looking King George the Sixth and his Queen.

There are references to the black-out, shelters and air-raids; even in the pages of these three-penny comics one can sense a feeling of pride and achievement;

qualities lacking today.

The story contents are Big Bill Campbell (Howdy neighbours!) - in "The Lamp Light's Glow"; "A Scrapbook of Memories" by C. Wilson Drake (whoever he might be), "Inspector Stanley", "The Man with a Thousand Secrets", pictured in a bowler hat , double breasted suit, pipe clenched between tight lips and staring into the middle distance. The list is completed with "Jane X" (famous international radio scout), and Will Hay in "Merry Moments at St. Michael's"; there are a couple of columns by "Goofy The Ghost" and 'Jerry Myer the office boy. As far as I can gather the "Knockout Comic" didn't publish a celebration number; the front cover was in colour and featured Deed-A-Day Danny; other comic strips are "The Gremlins", "Billy Bunter", "Handy Andy", "Sexton Blake and The Atom Eggs", "Our Ernie" and a wonderfully drawn picture serial of 'Ballantyne's "Coral Island".

The story content is very sparse, consisting of "That Tough Guy Ling"; "The Smuggler's Secret"; "Happy Go Luck Mike" and a serial by Geo. E. Rochester called "Here Comes A Sailor".

"PLAYBOX" the fourth comic, is perhaps the most charming of the bunch with many pages in colour. It was by this time the size of the other three, but I seem to remember it as a child as a full-sized paper, the same as "RAINBOW". They must have changed the format in the middle 1940's.

Some of the characters must have remained the same for years; "Wendy", "Tales of Skipper Dan", "Sonny Bear and Mickey", "The Woolly Boys", and "Brighteyes"; there is no mention or indication of the recent war, but it was aimed at a much younger age group.

The stories within are very short efforts with such titles as "Pets of Mine", "Tommy Twinkle", and "Wonderful Island". Readers may wonder why I have reviewed but four comics, the reason is I recently purchased three volumes of papers under the titles of "Monster Christmas Comics". It would appear that some enterprising publisher, purchased back consecutive numbers of the four comics and binding twenty-five issues together in a thin brown paper cover, sold them as a Christmas annual. At the beginning of 1947, "FILM FUN" was reduced to a mere twelve pages; just half the size of its pre-war self. Many of the old favourites were missing, and a new series, or should I say - a reprint from an earlier periodical, commenced; it was called "The House of Thrills". "RADIO FUN" suffered the same fate and in No. 444, 12th April, was the announcement, "Fuel cuts may come and fuel cuts may go, but Radio Fun goes on forever."

Fuel cuts - that has a familiar ring - "Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose"; as for "RADIO FUN" lasting forever, that was wishful thinking, it lasted until TV saturated the land.

By this time new faces appeared in "RADIO FUN"; Wilfred Pickles, Cheerful Charlie Chester, Sally Rogers and Jimmy Jewell and Ben Warriss; on the back page was a most unlikely hero, Felix Mendelssohn (and his Hawaiian Serenaders) in an epic entitled "The White Queen of The Islands".

In the "KNOCKOUT" a picture serial was running, "Westward Ho!" by

C. Kingsley, and if I am not mistaken the artist is Eric Parker, of Blake fame. "PLAYBOX" for some reason still had sixteen pages, carrying on with the same old favourites. The readership of this comic must have been loyal - and somewhat conservative. As the year got older one can detect a marked decline in "RADIO FUN", "FILM FUN", and "KNOCKOUT"; new features were tried out. In "RADIO FUN" a character called the Falcon was introduced. Tommy Handley was relegated to page seven; and Arthur Askey held pride of place on the front page. A fellow named "Charles Cole" (and his magic chalks) adorned page nine. Can anyone remember him as a radio star?

Contents in "FILM FUN" remained the same; but "KNOCKOUT" tried out a picture-serial, "The Phantom Sheriff". This character formerly appeared in story form in the pre-war "WILD WEST WEEKLY".

The year 1948 saw a great deal of chopping and changing in "RADIO FUN" and "KNOCKOUT", in the former Tommy Handley once again adorned the front page; inside Pet Clark was promoted from comic strip to story form - "Pet Clark's School-days"; Derek Roy and Issy Bonn were introduced in cartoon form and the "FALCON" was now a picture serial; Vera Lynn introduced a weekly story, and Arthur Askey shared the back page with Wilfred Pickles; readers apparently had had enough of Felix Mendelsson (and who can blame them?).

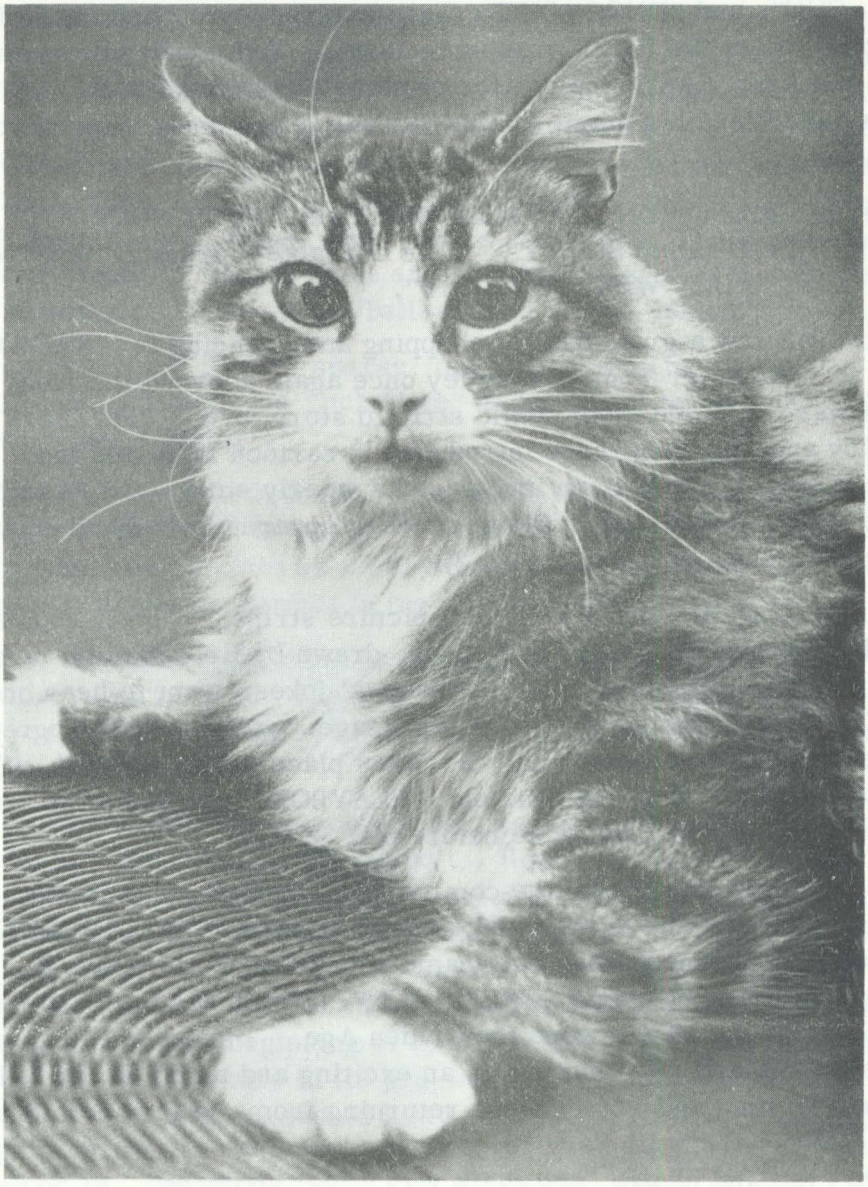
In the "KNOCKOUT" there were new picture strips; "Tough Todd and Happy Annie", "The Black Arrow" by R. L. Stevenson, drawn by Eric Parker; and the "Chuckle Club", the back page dedicated to readers' jokes; want to hear one? "Waiter there's a piece of rubber tyre in this sausage." "Yes isn't progress wonderful sir, everywhere the motor car has taken place of the horse." (Serves you right for reading on!) Only the dear old "PLAYBOX" remained the same, not one item changed in all the issues I have before me.

Readers must appreciate that the comics under review were in their declining days although I suppose they were the middle years as far as "RADIO FUN" and "KNOCKOUT" were concerned; they only came out just prior to the war. There are two schools of thought regarding "FILM FUN". Some say the 1920's were the great days; for myself the 1930's were the Golden Age. I suppose it depends on one's age. The middle and late 1940's was an exciting and turbulent period of history; thousands of men and women were returning from the forces to face civvy street again; the National Health Service was introduced; things were being nationalised right, left and centre, and there was a fuel shortage. At home the main source of entertainment was the radio; it was the golden age of comedy; "I. T. M. A.", "Ray's A Laugh", "Take It From Here"; you could still hear good dance music; Geraldo, Lew Stone, and plenty more; this was before the idiotic disc jockeys pervaded the air with their mindless prattle; (Sam Costa and H. Gregg excepted). At the cinemas Hollywood was king, although British films were demanding a new respect; nearer to our hearts Len Packman and Bob Blythe founded the London branch of the O. B. B. C., making this article possible.

Finally, if I have jogged one or two readers' memories with my ramblings; then it has made my research worthwhile; happy reading folks - and as dear old Mrs. Mopp used to say - "Ta, ta, for now".

(Editorial Feature)

The Other "Misters"



MR. CHIPS

"Undoubtedly the greatest 'character' of all the Misters." The picture was professionally taken, about a year before we said "Good-bye, Mr. Chips." He was very annoyed at being disturbed, on the table in the garden, as his expression shows, and the photographer had the time of his life.

Perhaps you, like us, have said, on the odd occasion: "We will never have another cat. The pain is too great when the time comes for him or her to pass on." And, perhaps, like us, you have changed your mind, for the simple reason that you are "a cat person" and you feel that life is empty without a lovable Moggy. Maybe then you say, like us: "We'll have another one, just like dear old So-and-So, and it may seem as though we never lost him."

It never works out, of course. The newcomer may have a superficial likeness to the lost loved one, but that is all. In everything else he or she is entirely different - a pussycat with its own characteristics, habits, manners, and customs - not a bit like "old So-and-So" - and a good thing, too. As people are all persons in their own right, so every lovable Puss is different from his furry fellow, and has a personality all his own.

In last year's Annual I wrote a trifling piece on "Mister Softee", our latest bundle of mischief in the editorial environment. "Mister Softee", that great chunk of fluffy whiter-than-whiteness, brought in such a huge mail from kindly folk who enjoyed the item, that I am venturing, this year, to give a little more precious space to our furry mascots, and muse for a few pages on the "other Misters" - Mr. Softee's predecessors at Excelsior House. If you are not a cat person, I can only hope that, as you turn to something more in your own line in this Annual, you will smile indulgently and murmur: "Let those weirdies who love cats have their heads if it pleases them."

Some twelve years ago I wrote for the C.D. Annual a short Sexton Blake story under the title "Face Value." Annual old-timers, who bothered to read it, may recall that it concerned a young fellow who arrived at an hotel one night, signing the register with a stagey-sounding name and claiming that he had just travelled from the western United States. His only luggage was a coat-hanger, a tawdry china ornament, and a newspaper. The hotel manager was suspicious of the new arrival, and asked the advice of Sexton Blake, who happened to be staying at the same hotel.

That story was completely true. It all actually happened. All the detective work was done, as related in that little tale, though, fictitiously, I credited it to Sexton Blake.

The young fellow - we called him "Vernon" in the story - was possessed of a considerable charm, but one instinctively distrusted him, not entirely without reason, though that is beside the point.

One day, some time after the mystery related in "Face Value" had been solved, Vernon came in, late in the afternoon.

"I have something for you," he said.

He fumbled in his jacket and brought out a beautiful little tabby kitten - a heartwarming little bundle of fluff, about six weeks old. Vernon put it on the floor, and it scampered around.

We had not planned to have a cat, but nobody in the world could have resisted the beautiful little newcomer. At first we called him Bingo, but as he grew and

grew with the passing months, he developed the most glorious tail - such a tail as I have never seen on any other animal - long and thick and a mass of silky fur. Inevitably, in a short time, he became Mister Tail.

Vernon handed him over, and then bothered no more about him - an attitude so typical of that happy-go-lucky young man. We asked him where he had obtained the kitten. He replied vaguely that it had been given him in some cafe. It may have been true, but, knowing Vernon, we rather doubted it.

Mr. Tail was so perfect, so obviously a thoroughbred, that we were always certain he was a pedigree puss. It was our belief that Vernon had collected that furry little gem while its owner was not looking, but it was the one reason that we have happy memories of that strange young man. Soon, Vernon was to pass out of our ken, but Mr. Tail remained.

Mr. Tail was magnificent, and knew it. An aristocrat from his pink nose to the tip of his mighty tail, he was yet always gentle and affectionate. If anyone stroked him and petted him, as almost everybody did, he would accept it all as his due, but immediately the stroking ended he would wash himself all over.

So thick and deep was his soft fur that, despite the attention which he himself gave to it, and despite the combing and brushing which we ourselves bestowed upon him, there would come, very occasionally, a time when his fur would cake into tangles. If neglected, these could have caused him discomfort. So, on at least two isolated occasions, Mr. Tail went to the vet to be disentangled and groomed under an anaesthetic. It was the only way. When we collected him from the vet, he would be his old pristine self.

We might easily have called this lovely aristocrat Arthur Augustus D'Arcy or Lord Mauleverer, for he had all their gentlemanly and gentle qualities - but he was just Mister Tail.

One of my ladies had a budgie in a very large cage, and Mr. Tail loved it. He would go to sleep spread right over the top of the cage and lie there for hours, while the budgie would gently pick away strands of his fur. He would put his pink nose up against the bars and the budgie would rub his beak up against the pink nose. Whether they would have been as friendly without the cage between them it is impossible to say. We thought they might - but we never risked it.

In the evening he would come and tap on the window for admission. We would open the window, and he would come majestically in; we would talk to him in our version of cat language, we would stroke and fondle him - and then he would wash himself all over.

Occasionally he would return in the middle of the night. My bedroom was on the ground floor, and I would wake to his plaintive cry. There would be Mr. Tail, seated on the top sash of the open window. Goodness knows how he ever got there. I would rise from my slumbers. Mr. Tail being seated on the top sash, would be beyond my reach. Carefully, in order not to unseat him, I would lower the top sash with Mr. Tail on it. When he came within reach, I would lift him down as he purred joyfully.

When I had restored the window to its original position and turned again to my bed I would find Mr. Tail there already. I would go to sleep with myself down the centre of the bed and Mr. Tail carefully "sideways on" at my feet. But when I awoke at daylight, I would find myself right over on the edge, while Mr. Tail's great bulk sprawled over the major portion of the bed. Mr. Tail knew his rights and demanded them. Slowly, but surely, he took them.

Only once did we ever see this fastidious monarch dishevelled. He had been missing since early morning. We had not seen him for over twelve hours and we were desperately worried. Late that night I stood in his Mum's room talking to her. Our topic: "What had become of Mr. Tail? Had he been stolen? Was he lying somewhere, hurt and helpless?"

There was a sudden bump followed by another. The first bump was Mr. Tail springing on to the upper frame of her window; the second was him landing at her feet. For once in his life, he was dirty and unkempt and covered with bits of straw. We assumed that, somehow or other (for cats are sometimes inquisitive) he had got himself locked in somebody's garage or outhouse, and had been there until that somebody returned late that evening and let him out.

Normally he had wonderfully good health, but there was one occasion when there was snow on the ground, and he went down with pneumonia. And his Mum tended him with loving care and nursed him back to good health.

Then came that dreadful day when we lost him for good. I was sitting at my typewriter working on C.D. Mr. Tail came to me for his lunch, as he often did. He cried and rubbed round my legs. He always ate English pigs' liver, and normally I would have gone to get it for him at once. But this time I was busy, and I said: "You must wait a little while, Mr. Tail."

My typewriter was at the end of a long desk which ran right up to the window. Mr. Tail sprang up on to my desk, and walked across to the window, through which I could see his Mum working in the garden in the front of the house. He scratched at the window.

And then I did something which has been inexplicable to me ever since, for we were always insistent that Mr. Tail should be sternly discouraged from ever going in the front of the house - and, in fact, he hardly ever went there. I said "Go and see your Mum," and opened the window. He went out gratefully.

Mine was one of those selfish, thoughtless actions which, normally, would have had no regrettable result. On this occasion my action cost our lovely Mr. Tail his life.

Only a minute later his Mum was calling: "Mr. Tail has been run over." Presumably, as he went through the window, he caught sight of something - maybe another cat - on the other side of the road, and darted out.

His Mum saw him lying on his back in the road. Thinking he was showing off, as he would sometimes, she said: "Get up, you silly old thing, you'll get run over out there."

She went out to him. A lady came running up.

"I've done it," said the lady.

"You've done what?"

"I've run him over - with my car."

I was out there a moment or two later. Mr. Tail was cradled in his Mum's arms. His glorious tail was hanging straight down in pathetic lifelessness. His lovely tabby coat was unmarked. There was just a minute spot of blood on the tip of his nose.

The ladies were weeping, and tears were running down my own face. Stupid, of course, but there you are.

"Let's rush him to the vet," said the unknown lady.

We did not speak.

"Please - please let us take him to the vet - just in case something can be done," sobbed the lady. We never learned her name, but what a sweet soul she was.

So they took Mr. Tail to the vet in her car. They came back alone.

Mr. Tail was four years old when he died. I have never ceased blaming myself for what happened.

We said we would never have another. But, four or five days later, a young woman called. She had a basket containing four kittens. The vet, she said, had told her we might like one of them.

Almost at once we saw there could be no doubt which one we would have. He decided it for himself. Three of them scrambled hastily back into their basket, and were obviously anxious to be on their way. The fourth just made himself at home, and adopted us at once. We didn't select him. He selected us. He became Mr. Chips.

Mr. Chips was the wildest and naughtiest kitten I ever knew. He would tear about the room, jump up on to the curtains, dash up and down on the top of the piano, leap from chair to chair. He would crash into things. I have sometimes wondered whether his later history might have been partly the result of his wild kittenhood.

In appearance he was not unlike Mr. Tail. He was a tabby, with plenty of Persian fluffiness, but his tail was nothing like the magnificent appendage which had been the glory of his predecessor. In fact, I used to insult him sometimes by referring to "Mr. Chips's little bit of string." Actually it was quite a nice tail as tails go.

Mister Chips was, without any question, the greatest character of all the "Misters". He was very much an individual. This was probably due to the circumstance that he needed much care and cosseting as he grew older and became delicate.

One of my ladies gave him a black rag kitten, and all his life he was

amazingly attached to it. He would carry it about all over the house and in the garden. If he couldn't find it he would be mightily distressed and mournful. Unfortunately, he would take it into the garden and forget where he had left it. In consequence it was necessary to watch him in the garden in order to keep tabs on that black rag kitten which meant so much to him. He would lose it, and then sit on the piano top, wailing mournfully, while we staged a full-scale operation to find it.

He was, perhaps, about three years old when something happened which was to cause a big change in Mr. Chips. One morning he went to get down from his chair, and he just fell, hindquarters over head. He got up and staggered about, and was clearly ill.

We called in the vet at once. He said that Chippy had had a blow on the head, and wondered whether boys, who had been playing with a football in the lane at the back of the house, might have kicked a football hard at him. It might have been that he fell or jumped from too great a height. Or it might have been a stroke. Of course, we never knew, and Chippy couldn't tell us. He slowly recovered, though it left him with a slight twist in one corner of his little mouth, and though he was able to move with considerable speed again, when he felt like it, he always ran lopsidedly from now on. I said that he ran like a lorry with a swaying trailer in tow.

Mr. Chips kept us all on our toes. When I went in the garden to fetch him in, in the evenings, he would hide from me, to the great delight of onlookers. When I was on the point of giving up, he would stroll out from some bushes or walk along the wall, and eye me with his "Were you looking for me, guv'nor?" expression on his face.

He was choosy with his TV programmes. He slept through the kitchen sink rubbish if it was on, but his favourite programmes were golf and cricket which he watched keenly. Mr. Chips was musical. As soon as I started to play the piano, he would march out of the room in disgust. Invariably!

Any account of Mr. Chips would be incomplete without a small reference to the delightful white cat which we called "Diana Dors", though we learned later that he was a gentleman. He was devoted to Chippy, and it was partly through our happy memories of "Diana" that Mr. Softee came to take charge of Excelsior House, quite a few years later. Diana was nervous, but not too nervous to take advantage of Chippy's cat-door and come visiting His Royal Highness. Lovely Diana fell a victim to the scourge of the roads - traffic, all going too fast.

Normally, we made sure that Mr. Chips was in by dusk, but just occasionally he would insist on another stroll round his estate. One evening, after eleven o'clock, not long before Christmas, he was out, and his Mum, armed with a torch, went out to the garden to call him in. I went on watching a TV programme, until it suddenly occurred to me that she had been gone a long time. I made my way into the garden. It was very dark, and I soon found that his Mum was not there. Then I heard her calling from the next garden.

Those who visited us at Excelsior House at Surbiton, may recall that we had a high wall round the garden - at least eight feet high. His Mum had gone up a light ladder, and, with the aid of her torch, she spotted Mr. Chips in the adjoining garden.

Just what happened I have never clearly understood, but I fancy that Chippy ignored her call, and her idea may have been to stand on the top of the wall, draw up the ladder and lower it on the other side, and go down and fetch him. It was raining and windy, and slippery on the top of the wall. When she stepped on that slippery surface, her feet slid away from her, and she plunged down on the other side. There, unable to move, she had to wait until I went looking for her.

I got assistance, we had to force open the gate of the adjoining garden, and eventually carried Chippy's Mum back into our house. I rang for an ambulance, and went with his Mum to Kingston Hospital. We were there until four o'clock the next morning, and it was an uncomfortable night for us. Mr. Chips, during that time, I have no doubt, went home and was warm and dry and happy. His Mum was helpless in a chair for a fortnight, and on crutches for a further six weeks, during which time, with that fortitude so typical of all Mums, she continued her household duties and directions from her chair or crutches.

In the next year or two, Chippy's health gave us cause for concern from time to time. His Mum nursed him through several bad illnesses, but he always rallied.

Just after Christmas 1970, he had pleurisy, and was fighting for life. We kept him in the same temperature all the time. His Mum would not leave him at night, but made up a bed on the floor for herself so that she could stay with him. We bought a special air purifier and kept it burning all the time to aid his breathing.

"Well," said the vet one day, "he's better. We've managed to pull him through - this time." He went on, a little sadly we thought: "You must realise that you will not have him so very much longer."

Unfortunately, our removal from Surrey to Hampshire was near. We were worried that Chippy might be distressed by his change of surroundings. On the morning we moved, the vet came in to give him a tranquilising injection, so that he might not be too much aware of the journey.

Mister Chips lived for ten weeks after we went to Hampshire. He died of the same form of tumour which carried off that lovely young athlete, Lillian Board. Mr. Chips was just seven years old when we said "Good-bye, Mr. Chips." We were almost too sad for tears.

The day he died, the kindly soul who lived in the next property came to us with her own cat - a lovely golden puss which they called Moosh - in her arms. "I thought perhaps you might feel less sad if you had Moosh with you," she said.

Bless her for her kindness, even though, when we were grieving for Chippy, the last thing that could possibly cheer us up was the presence of someone else's puss. Moosh himself was run over a short time after. He was not killed, though his jaw was broken, and their vet operated, fighting hard, but unsuccessfully, to save his life.

Just a final word about Mr. Chips's vet at Surbiton. You may even know him. His name is Keywood, and he appeared in a fascinating series "Vets & Pets" on B. B. C. 2. A wonderful man.

Mister Softee is a year older since I wrote about him in last year's Annual. He has not taken the place of Mister Tail and Mister Chips, of course. He has a niche all of his own.

Mister Softee is the most independent of all the "Misters", possibly because he was a year old when he came to us, and, before that happened, he had to face one or two upheavals.

In spite of his independence, Mr. Softee is, in some ways, the most affectionate of them all, and the biggest baby. Oddly enough, in spite of his independence, he is unique among the Misters in that he always comes along when he is called.

I think he loves a lot, and he loves to be loved.

Such, then, is the story of all the Misters - the two that are gone and the one that gets softier and softier.

All Wonders, all Champions, all Gems.

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* *

"Jock Of The Scots Brigade". Does anyone know Annual in which this story appeared? (Believed early 1920's)

UNDERHILL, 40 CHIPPINGFIELD, HARLOW, ESSEX.

= =

Seasonal Greetings from HARRY BLOWERS to all Members of the O. B. B. C., especially to his friends of the Northern Section - "HAPPY CHRISTMAS".

= =

WANTED: Silver Jackets, Junior News, Thriller, Comics, Library.

E. CAUSER, 66 INTAKE ROAD, PUDSEY, YORKS.

= =

Best Wishes to fellow collectors everywhere. Good Hunting!

JACK PARKHOUSE, 74 THE OVAL, BATH.

= =

Happy Yuletide to all Hobby chums. May you all have a hale and hearty Hogmanay and glorious New Year.

McMAHON, TANNOCHSIDE

= =

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A JOYFUL NEW YEAR

Richard Starr and Young Britain

by Thomas Arnold Johnson

A comparatively short-lived magazine entitled YOUNG BRITAIN has been, I feel, one of the most neglected of boys' weeklies. Magnet, Gem, Sexton Blake, Adventure, etc., have all attracted the attention of the collector, but not so Young Britain. I aim to rectify this deficiency by talking a little about it and its most famous contributor - namely Richard Starr.

How does one start to write about such an old friend? Should we take the stories themselves, and give them precedence over their authors or give a general survey of the magazine as a whole? It is wrong to say that Young Britain's contents were written by a varied selection of authors for this would not be quite accurate. This magazine had, during its heyday, mainly ONE author, that person being Richard Starr, writing under a number of pen names, the chief of which were FRANK GODWIN and RICHARD ESSEX, names selected for him (and not BY him) incidentally, a procedure which I understand did not worry Mr. Starr as long as he received sufficient reward for his efforts. YOUNG BRITAIN actually was Richard Starr right from Number One and throughout the entire life of the magazine. He was a real STAR indeed, and one whose brightness and sparkle gave joy to the boys who read his stories. The sparkle has been partially dimmed by the neglect of readers and the passing of time.

I was fortunate to correspond with Mr. Starr for a short time only before his death in 1968. I treasure the few letters he wrote to me, few in number, but precious in content. In Number 252 of Collectors' Digest, dated December 1967, Mr. Elliott, one of our members, wrote a lengthy article on this author, for he too, had corresponded with Mr. Starr for a time, and indeed I am greatly indebted to Mr. Elliott for his kind introduction to Mr. Starr for it was he who suggested I should contact him, and forwarded my address to the author whereupon Mr. Starr contacted me without delay. Readers who possess this issue of the Digest would I feel sure, be interested to re-read the article, but for those who do not possess such a copy I give a few biographical facts about Mr. Starr gleaned from the letters he wrote to me.

He was born in April 1878, and died shortly before his 90th birthday in 1968. I have been unable to ascertain the exact date of his passing, but in his letters to me during January and February of that year he knew that his time was limited and he felt that his illness would not allow him to reach that venerable age of 90 years.

Young Britain was actually started for Mr. Starr on his return from France after three years in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War. Number One was dated 14th June, 1919, the first series ending with issue number 233, dated 17th November, 1923. This was followed by a short lived SECOND Series, 24th November, 1923 (issue number 234) and finishing with the issue dated 16th August, 1924, comprising only 39 issues.

Mr. Starr contributed to a great many periodicals for both boys and girls, also adults:- Chips, Jester, Kinema Komic, Film Fun, Picture Show, The Thriller, Sunday Companion, Modern Boy, Girls and Boys Cinema, Joy, Dundee Courier, Poppy's Paper, Family Journal, Woman's Way, Red Letter, Weekly Welcome, Woman's World, Home Companion, Violet Magazine, to name but a few.

His pen names were many, the most prominent of them being Richard and Lewis Essex, Frank Godwin for Boys' stories and Stella Richards for Girls' stories. His sister, also a writer, used the name Vera Lovell and she too contributed to Young Britain.

As Lewis Essex he wrote the fine series entitled Spartacus. These appeared in the early issues of YB. As RICHARD Essex he produced the Detective character, MARCUS BULLER. Young Britain also contained the very long running series KERRY & Co., and the Kerry & Co. Gazette, similar in style to the Greyfriars Herald, in which all the articles were written by the various characters themselves.

For CHIPS Mr. Starr wrote SLADE OF THE YARD and SLADE SCORES AGAIN. These were later serialised in Film Fun, and also published in hard backed Editions by Herbert Jenkins in England and by McBride in USA. They were later serialised again in The Thriller. I understand that the firm of Herbert Jenkins was responsible for at least nine hard backed novels featuring the character Slade. Mr. Starr himself presented to me a copy of the series THE GIRL IN BLACK published by Tallis Press, the original title being SLADE SCORES AGAIN. It is autographed by the writer and remains one of my most treasured possessions together with a number of Young Britain copies, each story autographed near the title heading. Mr. Starr said in one letter that he had not seen a copy of YB for many, many years, especially one containing his favourite serial, Spartacus. I sent him three copies and they were returned with gratitude and duly autographed. For Picture Show he continued a serial FREE YET A FELON which had been started by another author, Herbert Allingham, who, for some reason or other, was unable to continue. He wrote during his career, apart from magazine stories, at least sixty hard cover novels published by H. Jenkins & Thompson & Low at 7/6 each! I wonder if any of these are obtainable anywhere today. In addition he wrote about 1,000 short stories during his lifetime.

Mr. Starr had reached the age of 22 before his first novel was accepted for publication. He stated "It was terrible, but it achieved publication and in two or three weeks I found myself in Fleet Street as a reporter for the Daily Mail. For ten years Mr. Starr was a reporter and crime writer. Then he commenced to write stories for comic papers and other weeklies.

Mr. Starr's second letter to me expressed his desire to reach his 90th birthday on the 5th of April that year, but in his own words "I am a very ill man and have been for a very long time. There is no hope of my ever being any better, and at my age I cannot reasonably expect it, I do not know that I really want it though just for the hell of it I think I would like to reach my 90th although I am not counting on that at all, and the betting is dead against any such probability."

Those are the words of a courageous man. I am not sure if he actually

accomplished his wish, but I would dearly like to think so. His last letter to me was dated 11th February, and after that - complete silence.

Richard told me that he enjoyed writing for Young Britain, his first serial being in number ONE with Marcus Buller the detective. This continued for twenty-five weeks after which SPARTACUS commenced. This was based on authentic Roman History and it is a wonder that the story has not been made available in book form. Can we hope that one day some enterprising publisher will issue some of these fine stories for the younger generation to enjoy as we old boys did.?

Bold Robin Hood followed, and this ran for about a year. It is worthy of being reprinted in book form. It was also a great favourite of the author. He told me that he was quite unacquainted with the standard stories of that brave bold man and his Maid Marian, so that his own version owes nothing to anybody. Being a mere legend Starr felt that anyone could do anything to such a legend, but that history was a different matter, and so the author just used his own imagination and made up the story as he went along. He had no time to read any of the Robin Hood Legends on account of his writing three or four other serials at the same time.

MAXIM LAW was always my own particular favourite character as a boy, and I must say that I fell head over heels in love with his charming, but capable lady assistant, Della Railton. This character was apparently also one of Mr. Starr's pet names for a girl. For this story Garrish the publisher gave him the pen name of Frank Godwin.

After a few years Starr ceased writing serials, and concentrated on Girls' Papers, as he felt it was a more lucrative field, and they paid better than the boys' papers. He continued writing short stories, however, for Young Britain for as long as it lasted. His last complete story for Young Britain was "THE GREAT LALLAPALOOZA NUGGET."

It is a pity that Mr. Starr did not retain copies of his work. The only one which he possessed was Bold Robin Hood which he had extracted from the magazine, and made into book form himself.

When he moved house at one time all his carbon copies were given to the bin men to take away. The pile reached to the roof he told me.

The Amalgamated Press wanted Mr. Starr to join the staff, but he told me he much preferred to work as a free lance writer.

Richard Starr practically ceased writing in 1949, but what a rich heritage he left us.

It is interesting to note that for Boys' Cinema, Mr. Starr wrote the serial THE TERRIBLE THREE, and for Girls' Cinema A GAY TIME WITH A MISER. ●

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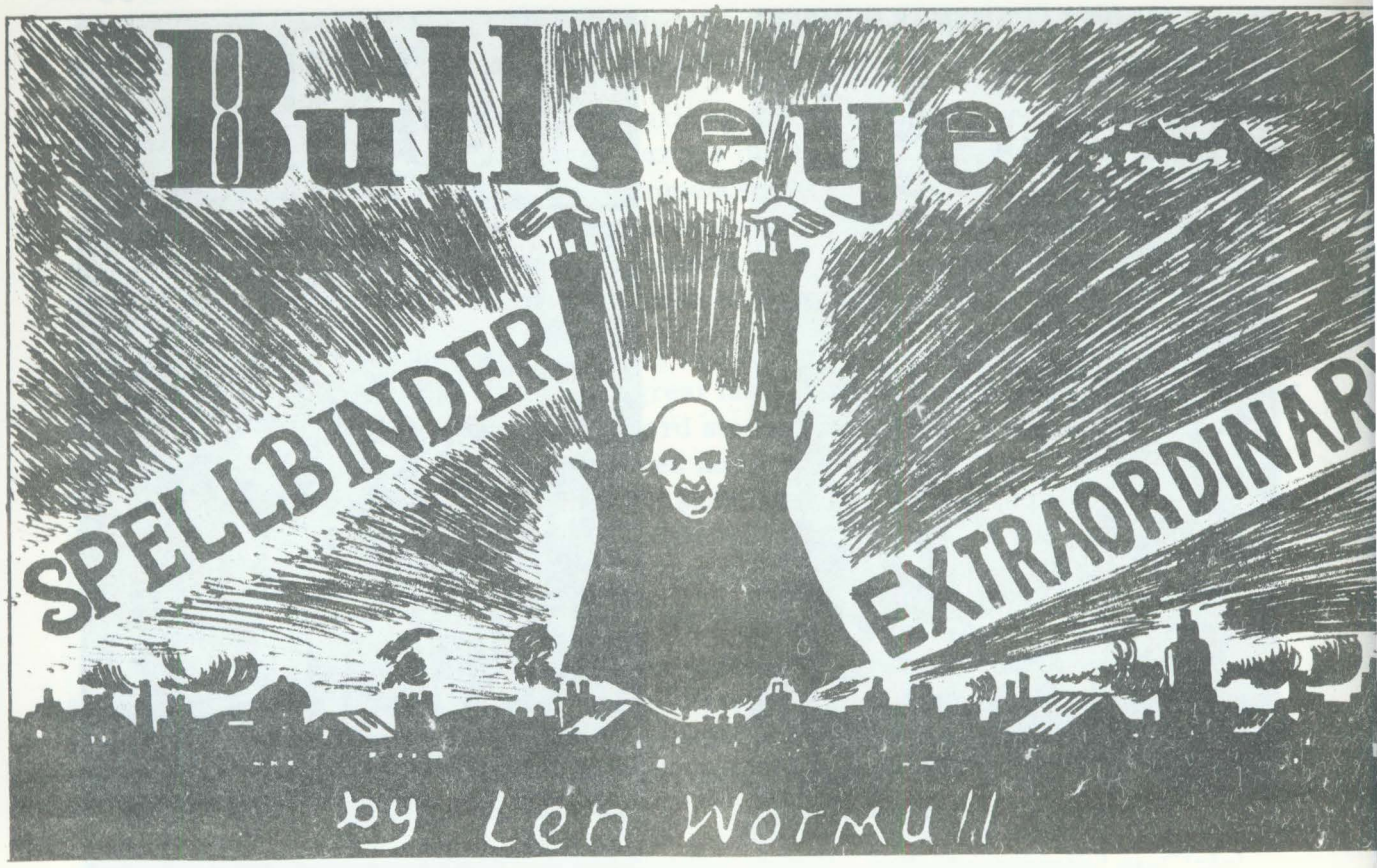

By the dawn of the Thirties it seemed that publishers of boys' weeklies had little more to offer in the way of new-style presentations. With just about everything to cover our needs, we were cosily settled into a regular pattern of weekly events, selecting and rejecting as we went. Then, early in 1931, came BULLSEYE to change the face of things. How excitingly original I thought at the time - the one and only paper specialising in horror-type fiction. Why didn't they think of it before! Soon it was to rank second only to the Magnet in my reading, and how refreshing it was to return to the green pastures of Kent after a night out with Bullseye, always at its best nocturnally. With its atmosphere of brooding evil and way-out thrill stories, it had truly hit the target.

Long after Bullseye had retured to its crypt - when it didn't matter, anyway - we discovered that it owed not a little of its success to a much earlier publication called FUN AND FICTION, a family-type paper linking strip cartoons and humorous cross-chat with a strong programme of mother love, wicked women, prison life, detective thrillers, and perilous adventure. Many of the ideas used were cleverly exploited and absorbed into the more juvenile Bullseye, not to mention the distinctive blue cover and a few pictorial cribs. Two long-running series, in particular, provided happy hunting ground for Bullseye writers. Most fictional detectives had their quirks, and ADAM DAUNT was no exception. A big name in detectives and a millionaire to boot, Daunt would only interview clients who had first advertised for

his services. His adventures turned up in various guises for Bullseye. Incidentally, when FIREFLY took over from Fun and Fiction we find poor Adam had been killed on a flying mission to make way for his nephew, ABEL DAUNT, the new look detective. WOMAN WITH A BLACK HEART was another rich seam of inspiration. This nameless and beautiful lady of mystery was known only by the mystic black heart tattooed upon her brow. The perils that beset this dazzling heroine rivalled the cliff-hanging exploits of filmland's famous Pauline. From one of these stories, Fun and Fiction No. 12, was chosen the illustration to adorn the first cover of Bullseye, now a scene from the first story in the House of Thrills.

After which introduction I find a strangely familiar and compulsive urge coming on ... the kind experienced long ago when lured to my favourite "haunting" ground. So be warned, folks. Bullseye is back!

GAUNT HOUSE was as grim and forbidding as its name implied. Derelict, untenanted, and said to be haunted by the "ghost" of old miser Burch. Its massive front door was in itself a portal of gloom, with a rusted iron knocker in the shape of a grinning, evil mask which seemed to grimace and leer at all who passed, following them with empty eyes. Even dogs were said to bare their teeth as they scampered by. Enough, you'll agree, to scare anyone off. Anyone, that is, but "Fearless" John Pentonville, world famous thrill-hunter and now immobilized through a leg wound. Just right, thinks John, to pursue his favourite pastime. Let the mountain come to Mahommet! Advertise £100 reward for the best thrill story, that'll bring the customers in. It did, swarms of 'em. In this bizarre setting John would await his callers, immaculately attired in evening dress with diamonds a-glittering, a gold-knobbed cane for support. And what weird and wonderful tales came out of this HOUSE OF THRILLS.

A novelty of the series was the stunts used by callers to gain a hearing. One came disguised as a gorilla - 'to create a bit of atmosphere' - a man-ape from a travelling menagerie. Another as the "ghost" of miser Burch, this time an actor. John disturbs a burglar who by chance has a tale to unfold. He leaves richer than anticipated! Odd characters and winners all in this strangest of contests.

Remember how brain-washed we were down Limehouse way? Why go to the Mysterious East when we already have a chunk on our own doorstep? writers must have mused, dipping fiendishly into their Yellow ink. The tang of the Orient, the evil of Dr. Fu Manchu, it was all there in this small Chinese quarter, or so they would have us believe.

Keeping up the pretence was a thriller called THE NIGHT PATROL, a weekly encounter between Nick Kennedy and his River Police and the notorious Red Shadow Tong, headed by Fang Wu. Here's a typical Bullseye "warm-up" ...

> "Chinatown sprawls like some squatting monster close against the Thames. Narrow-chested orientals pad softly down its narrow streets; lascars and mulattoes slink through, vanishing abruptly into doorless houses, seeking opium dens ... the tentacles of the Tong spread up and down the Thames. Soft-footed Chinese flit like ghosts amongst the black wharves, menacing the warehouses and pilfering stores, demanding toll from all who use the river."

Fang Wu is finally driven from London's river only to declare war on all white men back in China. In NIGHT PATROL IN CHINA we next see Nick and his men fighting it out with Wu up the Yangtse-Kiang river.

Notable contenders at this time were: MORTIMER HOOD, millionaire detective with supernatural powers. MAN WITH A THOUSAND FACES, owned by Phil Flash of Bailey's Mammoth Circus. SCARBRAND, respectable barber by day and criminal by night. SIGN OF THE CRIMSON DAGGER, a Secret Society with good intentions. Cast in similar mould to F & F's long-running Sign Of The Twisted Tooth. BRANDED FOR LIFE was the first of three prison-life serials to span its career, my personal choice going to SECRETS OF STONEMOOR. The other was CONFESSIONS OF WARDER BLAKE.

One I liked was Harry Dangerfield, star of DANGER & CO. The trouble with Harry was that, like John before him, he was mad about thrills. Listen to this ad he put in the Times:

> "WELCOME - DANGER. Ex-officer, utterly bored with peace-time existence will undertake missions anywhere, at any time, provided that the element of danger is present. Will deputise for any man threatened by blackmailer or others. Money no object. Payment according to means, to go to children of ex-servicemen."

Reaction was swift and exciting, the reader blissfully unaware of Harry's secret past. Twenty years earlier he had been going strong in Fun and Fiction as Harry Dangerfield - Cinematograph Actor!

After a short run Harry made way, in No. 14, for what quickly became the paper's star attraction: THE PHANTOM OF CURSITOR FIELDS. To put the record straight, this should read "Phantoms" as the idea gave birth to a second series with a different identity. A gruesome twosome, in fact. I have a feeling the idea may have been taken from a film of the period called London After Midnight, in which Lon Chaney as a phantom appears beneath doors and through keyholes in fog-bound London.

Over now to our own star making its visitation ... 'It comes in the night, when mists drift from the river. It comes as a crooked and misshapen form, shining in its own light, babbling as it haunts the streets hard by Old Cheapside.' Bob Bryan is the young policeman in charge of the exorcism, yet strangely the reader gloats along with the Phantom in its Houdini-like escapades and mockery of the law. A highlight of the series came when the army was called in with machine gun at the ready, the Phantom cornered at last. Get out of that! Uncannily, the gun jams at the crucial moment yet works perfectly after the quarry has disappeared. How does he do it?

All is revealed in No. 41. It turned out to be Mr. Jolly, Warden of the Fields, who was trying to give back stolen land to the poor. Guess what? He was also Bob's future father-in-law, so what could the poor chap do but hush it up. Swizz!

Bullseye was now riding high and celebrated its first birthday with free art photos of famous film stars. Included were Carol Lombard, Bob Steele (Western hero later turned heavy), and the vivacious Fifi D 'Orsay.

GREEN FACES followed next in No. 42, a tale of three criminals waging war

against a super-scientist trying to free a man condemned to life imprisonment, while the sinister three battle to keep him there. A vapid effort after the Phantom.

A Continental flavour was added in No. 64 with the BLACK MOON series, a famous Cafe by this name on the Paris Boulevard. Unlike the House of Thrills, visitors came not to relate their experiences, but to listen to the strange tales of Emil Lupin, once the most famous and mysterious figure in all France. Its strange owner was Madame Zola, zealous patriot and astute business-woman. How she dealt with those who would bring disrepute on her beloved France made for good reading.

Much to readers' delight, No. 72 brought the RETURN OF THE PHANTOM, a carbon copy of the first except that this one was a bit of no good. Not Mr. Jolly again as he had since been certified dead. Young Bob is again the hunter in an equally long and suspenseful series, which seemed to centre around Solomon Eley's barber shop in Cursitor Fields. There is a dramatic twist at the end in No. 104. "The Capture Of The Phantom." If you lack this vital copy I'm afraid you'll have to look up C. D. Annual, 1968, for the climax to this one. The series ended with Bob's promotion and these words: "The Phantom has gone - but its memory would remain." I'll second that.

Earlier in No. 92 we visited a lonely moor for the Red Fox Inn, better known as the INN OF A THOUSAND SECRETS. The main attraction for visitors was the beautifully carved chair in the lounge. To look at, that is, but not to sit in! For it was said that 'He who sits within that chair never again walks the free ways of men. Never again is his voice heard or his face seen.' And to leave you in no doubt as to the story's origin, we have one Jasper Todd playing the "Sweeney" role, with a black-mailed assistant named Sailor Bill pulling the lever. Special customers were first drugged with wine and then catapaulted into the cellar beneath the chair. Fiendishly, Todd goes through his weekly ritual until his slave of the lever revolts and over-powers his captor. The cellar opens up to reveal chained prisoners made to work for the evil Jasper.

TWELVE EVIL MEN filled the vacuum left by the Phantom, each of whom is brought to justice by strong-man, Paul Power. Soon it became apparent that Bullseye was losing its markmanship, or it could have been that the novelty was wearing off. Among the winners in its fourth and final year were stories like The Withered Hand, Meet O ' Kay, Who, Why, Where, When?, Night Rider Of London Fields, Secrets Of The Eerietania, The Black Vulture, Red Scorpion. Not forgetting that other fabulously rich detective named Martin Holt, a left-over from the now defunct SURPRISE. Lest it be forgotten, Holt's claim to fame was as the tramp who became the Man With 1,000 Millions. Sotto voce: How impoverished Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee must have felt against these wealth-laden contemporaries! John Pentonville kept the limelight and money flowing to the end, and when Gaunt House finally went up in smoke it somehow seemed a fitting end to this house of dread- and to the paper itself.

Compared to the drenched-in-blood horror comics of post-war years, Bullseye was almost refined. Sinister rather than sadistic, it stood out among the thrill papers

of its day as a spellbinder extraordinary.

Pardon me while I take down a few Magnets to clear the air ...

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