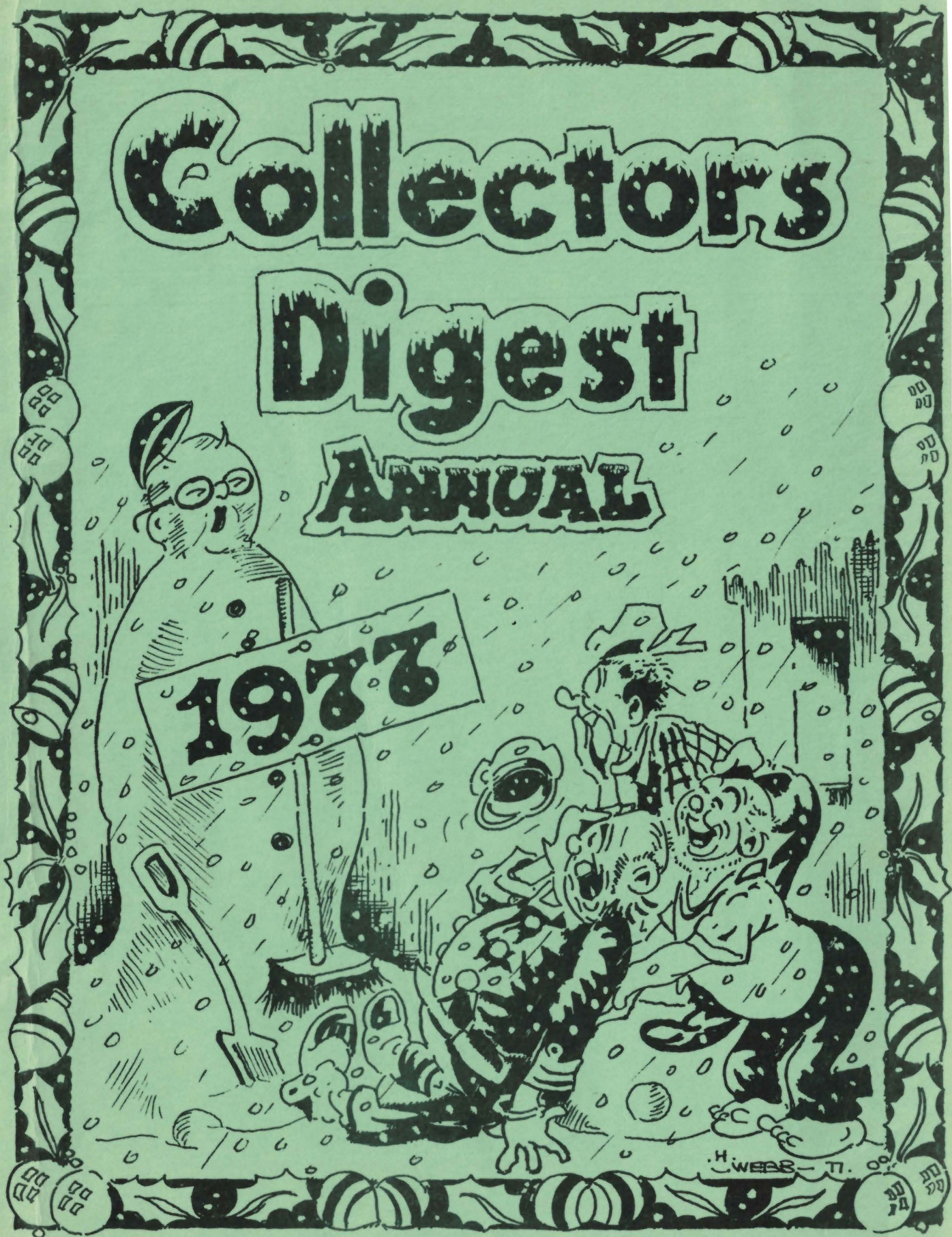
Collectors Digest Annual



COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

Christmas 1977

THIRTY-FIRST YEAR

EDITOR: ERIC FAYNE, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Road, Crookham, Hampshire, England

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

"And you, dear readers. Thank you for your support and enthusiasm in often difficult times. Whether you joined us this year or thirty years ago, you are the backbone of the Annual - and the salt of the earth. A Happy Christmas to you all, and a peaceful and worry-free New Year."

Those words were part of my Introduction to last year's Annual, and I feel that I cannot better them. My sentiments are the same. The only difference is that yet another year has gone by, and the Annual is now thirty-one years old. Thirty-one, and in this life of ours we feel, when we reach this age, that our youth is behind us and we are fast approaching middle age. Now we take the stairs one at a time instead of two, our gait is a trifle slower, our waistline is becoming more extensive, our locks are thinning and maybe have silver threads among the gold, and, perhaps, it is only our breath which comes in short pants.

In the world of the old papers and Annuals, plenty of them deteriorated as they grew older. There are, in fact, not many papers all told which lasted over thirty years, and few retained their freshness and charm in their declining years.

The C.D. Annual is different. At least, I am confident that it is. It retains all its freshness, all its charm, all its ingenuousness. and all the love of its large band of readers all over the world.

I hope that you will be able to write and tell me that the 1977 Annual - our thirty-first - is as good as any which have gone before as the years have sped by. Somebody wrote me the other day to say he wouldn't miss the Annual for all the tea in China - and, at the price of tea nowadays, that was a wonderful statement, wasn't it?

My thanks to all our contributors who always turn up trumps and never let us down; to our printers in York who have served us so loyally and so well for so long; and to you all. Your support is something tremendous, and, though it is a sheer impossibility for me to reply to every letter if the monthly is to appear regularly, it is your letters which keep me cheerful and going strong and make my task so very worth while.

This Christmas may you all be as Happy as Kings, and may the New Year be everything that you hope it will be.

Your sincere friend and editor,

Eric Fayne

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The School for Slackers

by ROGER M. JENKINS

For some reason that I was never able to fathom, the Modern Boy was the only "twopenny blood" permitted on the school premises when I was a boy. As I was a day-boy, I could read the Magnet and Gem at home with impunity, but the boarders could not avail themselves of this lucky option. I vividly recall the Second Master confiscating Magnets with glee and declaring his intention of reading the latest adventure of Billy Bunter before handing the copies over to his wife to light the fire with. (He was also a housemaster, and the boys in his house were universally pitied: he brought up his daughters to spy on them and report to him regularly on any misdeeds they had discovered.)

It was of course ironic that the Modern Boy should contain stories by the author of the forbidden Magnet. The Modern Boy was also one of the few papers where Charles Hamilton wrote under his real name. Soon after a King of the Islands series had ended, the first High Coombe story began in No. 371 dated 16th March, 1935. James McCann, a character drawn in the style of Larry Lascelles, arrived as the new headmaster of the school which was situated on the North Devon coast. The first episode was entitled "The School for Slackers" and a vivid picture was drawn of a school which was not so much vicious as lazy, where elegance and poise mattered more than anything else.

It was the Fifth form around which the stories revolved. Aubrey Compton was the best-dressed man in the form, Bob Darrell was the only one keen on sport, and Teddy Seymour was the third member of the trio, always inclining to agree with the last speaker. The tone for the whole series was set by the first episode when Compton cheeked McCann and was rewarded with six of the best in the quad, much to the horror of Dr. Chetwode, the venerable Beak who was just retiring. From then on, it was a battle of wits between Compton and McCann.

Bob Darrell was presumably the hero, torn between common sense, which made him approve of the new headmaster, and his loyalty to his friends, which made him support them in their rebellious actions. So when Aubrey Compton decided in No. 377 to break bounds to visit the theatre (in evening dress!) his two friends accompanied him. McCann caught them coming out and made them walk so many miles with him that they were absolutely dead beat on their return to High Coombe, which was typical of his unorthodox ways.

The basic contradiction underlying these stories is the fact that they were written for schoolboys but the sympathy lay with the new headmaster. Charles Hamilton tried to get round this difficulty by allowing the boys to win a round in the battle now and again, and this was usually at the end of a weekly episode, giving him the opportunity to ignore it the following week if it suited his purpose. Unfortunately some of these victories by the boys were so outrageous that the stories began to wear an unbelievable aspect: in No. 371 McCann was pushed in the river after dark; in

372 he was ejected from the Fifth-form room and missiles were thrown at him; and in 374 the fourth-formers were running into him, apparently by accident, and sending him flying. If the series had not been written by Charles Hamilton, the reader of these early episodes might have been excused for thinking that he was at the Red Circle school in the Hotspur. Certainly it would be difficult to imagine the head-master of Greyfriars or St. Jim's being treated in this way.

One of the interesting masters was Mr. Peter Chard, the Fifth-form master with a portly figure and booming voice. Disappointed at not being made headmaster when Dr. Chetwode retired, he had a ready-made grievance, aggravated even more by the fact that Aubrey Compton, the chief opponent of McCann, was in Mr. Chard's form. Chard was known as Popularity Peter because he neglected his duties, partly out of laziness and partly out of a wish to curry favour with his form: it is interesting to note that the boys despised him for it, just as they despised Capes, the master of the Fourth, who used schoolboy slang and spoke to them as if to equals. At any rate, Chard was not merely a carbon copy of Prout, but unnecessary touches were added, such as a reference to egg marks on his face after breakfast. I am prepared to credit the fact that he fell asleep in class regularly (I knew a colleague who used to do this every day after lunch - and woe betide any pupil who woke him up!) but to suppose that he would make a fool of the headmaster by merely giving flicks when ordered to cane his form in public is a little too much to accept.

As the series progressed, however, the unreality of the general situation was toned down, and the interest centred upon the plots that misfired: in 378, it was Colonel Compton, a governor of the school and father of the celebrated Aubrey, who got screwed up in the head's study and went away demanding floggings for the culprits; in 379 the carbide placed below McCann's study got moved to the area beneath the form-room of the Fifth; and in 380 the wrong victim got bagged in the dark. With that number, dated 18th May, 1935, High Coombe broke up for the holidays (a curious time for holidays, one would have thought), and the first series came to an end.

In No. 383 the editor stated, "The School for Slackers will reappear next Friday! Such a clamour has been put up by readers in all parts of the world for further stories of this super-lively school that I have persuaded Charles Hamilton to carry on with a new series featuring all the original characters." Considering that these weekly papers went to press several weeks in advance of publication, it is clearly impossible that within a period of three weeks readers' opinions could have been received and Charles Hamilton could have a story ready for publication in the next issue. There can be no doubt, however, that the first series had ended with an idea that honours were even, and no complete victory had been gained by either side.

The first episode of the new series was "The Dandy Painter". Compton painted red marks all over the walls and furnishings of the Head's study and then daubed Bob Darrell's clothes with paint in the hope that a flogging would cause him to give up his support for McCann. The Head was not taken in by this circumstantial evidence, but the affair was left in the air in a manner that was typical of the High Coombe stories. The next few weeks dealt with the incompetence of the senior cricket team, and the appointment of Ferguson of the Fourth as cricket captain.

After this Compton came to the fore again in a series of episodes in which McCann managed to make him look ridiculous until he hired a ruffian to attack the Head after dark. but Bob Darrell was the victim by mistake. and this made Compton give up his vendetta for some time.

After a gap in 391, there was a further instalment about Ferguson's career as captain of cricket, which seemed to have been published out of sequence. The second series ended with two stories about Aubrey Compton: in the first the Head rescued him from a rift in Oakham Moor, and in the second Aubrey resolved that he would not remain under an obligation to an usher, and he decided to inspire everyone else in the cricket team to win, and this is just what did happen in the very last Modern Boy story of High Coombe entitled "Jimmy McCann's Miracle" in No. 394 dated 24th August, 1935.

As Eric Fayne has pointed out, there could be no real ending to the series because, if High Coombe ceased to be the School for Slackers, there could be no more stories about it, and it is interesting to note that Aubrey Compton in No. 394 suggested that after they had won the match they would reserve the right to go back to their old ways, once the debt of gratitude had been paid. In other words, Charles Hamilton was keeping all his options open.

The Modern Boy published no more tales of High Coombe, but perhaps Charles Hamilton was wise to keep his options open. In the 1950's he sought help in obtaining the two Schoolboys' Own reprints of High Coombe (290 & 299), and in No. 77 of the Collectors' Digest he announced that the next annual would feature, among other items, "Charles Hamilton with the School for Slackers. The latter, as you doubtless know, was a feature of the Modern Boy in the dear dead days beyond recall. It was quite a pleasure to the author to meet Jimmy McCann again: I trust he will have the same effect on the readers." It is interesting to note that some of Charles Hamilton's more recent creations were not so firmly etched on his mind as the older ones, and he had to re-read the old stories to get himself acquainted with the set-up of High Coombe.

It was the first "Billy Bunter's Own", issued in 1953, which marked the renaissance of High Coombe. The story was entitled "The Slackers of High Coombe" and related how an attempt was made to tar and feather McCann, like an earlier attempt in the Modern Boy. This time it was not Monsieur Mouton but Chard himself who became the unintended victim, and it was poetic justice of a very pleasing kind because Chard had noticed the tar but pretended not to have done so. The characters were clearly defined and the story was well-integrated to the personalities involved.

"Tom Merry's Own" for 1954 included a story entitled "Who Cares for McCane?" and this curious misprint of McCann's name persisted throughout the story. Even in the days of the Modern Boy there were similar inconsistencies, the outside porter being named as both Judd and Jupp. High Coombe also had an inside porter called Liggins, who became outside porter in 1954, no doubt because of the incomplete reprinting in the Schoolboys' Own on which Charles Hamilton was relying for his information. The School for Slackers story for 1954 went with a good pace and described how Compton, Darrell and Seymour got trapped by the tide in a cave

which had just been put out of bounds: incidentally, the 1953 story had referred to the limiting of school bounds as well. The 1954 tale was, however, too short to allow for more than an anecdotal type of story, and there was no opportunity for much interplay of personalities.

Mandeville's 1955 "Billy Bunter's Own" was a very slender volume with no High Coombe story, and "Tom Merry's Own" had gone for good. Herbert Leckenby later announced that there would be no 1956 annual because Mandeville's had gone out of business, a fact which he had foreseen when he visited their premises the previous year. In 1957 Oxonhoath took over "Billy Bunter's Own" but they remained very slender productions and every year the reviewer in Collectors' Digest complained about what was lacking in the annual. Neither Mandeville's nor Oxonhoath ever dated their annuals which means that the only way to identify them is by reading the reviews in the monthly Digests.

1960 saw the last High Coombe story, a very thin offering of a mere three chapters, shorter than a Modern Boy instalment. A booby-trap for McCann was again caught by Chard, and on this very disappointing note the School for Slackers took its final bow. Only the first of the post-war stories could challenge the Modern Boy tales on its merits, the other two seeming to be little more than ghosts from the past. At any rate, High Coombe ended as it had begun, without any firm victory having been gained by either the new Head or the Slackers themselves.

When I visited Charles Hamilton in 1952 he took me somewhat aback at one stage by telling me that he thought the School for Slackers his most polished creation, presumably because he had just been re-reading the stories. Certainly I should be more inclined to rank it with Grimslade as a school where exaggerated and rather unbelievable events occurred, and "polished" would be about the last epithet that would have come to my mind. Nevertheless, the Modern Boy stories did reveal a different narrative technique: instead of commencing each instalment with a short conversation and them explaining what gave rise to this conversation, Charles Hamilton would often start with several paragraphs of descriptive and narrative material. Another innovation was ending a chapter on a note of climax and then to spend the following chapter explaining how it had come about. (None of this was observable in the post-war stories.) There was also very little in the way of literary allusion, and one cannot help suspecting that, despite the judgement of my own headmaster, Charles Hamilton regarded the Magnet and Gem readers as being a cut above those who took the Modern Boy. Perhaps the fairest way to judge the High Coombe stories is to regard them as proof of the versatility of a very prolific author. He tried to give each school its own ethos, and if we prefer to wander in the classic shades of Greyfriars and St. Jim's that does not deny the competence and originality of the stories of The School for Slackers. Once read, they are never quite forgotten.

* *

A very Happy Christmas to the Editor and all C.D. readers.

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The Best Sporting Story I know

by W. T. THURBON

To ask oneself the question as to the best sports story one has read, is to pose a very difficult choice, indeed. "Sporting story" rather limits one's field. To take one sport in which I have been keenly interested, and taken part, with very indifferent success, fencing. I would give very high place to the "duel of the Mignons" in Dumas's "Dame de Montsoreau" series, as well as other Dumas duels in "The Three Musketeers" and other stories. But these are real duels, rather than sport, as indeed, also is the duel described in the first chapter of a little known "cloak and dagger" story, "Raymond the Dangerous", by L. S. Bythell. This is a magnificent reconstruction of a seventeenth century duel in such detail that one can follow every phase of the fight, following exactly the style of fencing for the period as set out in the classic work on fencing, Castle's "Schools and Masters of Fence". Sabatini's "Scaramouche" is a fencing master, but here again there is also a duel as well as fencing lessons.

Sporting stories can be found in classical times, for example chariot racing. There is the race at the end of the Iliad*; or a later author Lew Wallace makes a chariot race the centrepiece of "Ben Hur" - a race that has been the source of so many film spectaculars. Or again "sporting" might take us back to the Roman Games, although these were not very enjoyable sports for the participants. Examples are Whyte Melville's "The Gladiators", Sinkiewicz's "Quo Vadis", or a more recent small masterpiece "Bryher's Roman Wall".

Archery is now a sport, but most stories involving archery deal with this in warfare. However there is the episode of "Locksley" (Robin Hood) at the tournament in "Ivanhoe" - a scene that is used in nearly every Robin Hood tale in some form or other from Peacock's "Maid Marian" to Jay Williams' "The Good Yeoman", not to mention films and T.V. But we can also recall the episode of the "White Company's" sports in Conan Doyle's story of that title. I suppose also we should remember that the Tournament itself was a very rough kind of sport and appears in many historical novels from "Ivanhoe" to Ronald Welch's "Knight Crusader".

To come back to more modern times there is a multitude of "soccer" stories. Sidney Horler's tales of the late 1920's, e.g. "McPhee". The many stories that appeared in the A.P. papers, especially the "Boys' Realm", and later in the B.F.L. Charles Hamilton, on occasions, wrote football stories for the "Marvel". Nelson Lee appeared in "The Football Detective", while Arthur S. Hardy, apart from his Tom Sayers Boxing series in the Marvel, contributed many football stories to the "Boys' Realm" and other papers, including his famous "Blue Crusader" stories. A frequent custom of the publishers was to use the name of a famous sportsman as co-author of a story. For example "Last in the League" by Steve Bloomer and Ambrose Earle. It is strange how the names of some of the teams appearing in the stories have lingered in my memory for nearly sixty years or more. "Thornley

* Book XXIII

Swifts" of "The Football Detective", "Midland United" of "Last in the League"; "Bramchurch Excelsior" of "Fred Reckless, Amateur". But in what tales did "Bridgeport County" and "Midhampton Crusaders" appear? And who wrote the stories of "The Black Buccaneers" in the "Boys' Realm"?

Rowing, running, cycle and motor racing stories raise faint echoes in my memory; in "The Boys' Realm", "The Scout" and other papers. The "Boys' Journal" first published John Finnemore's Rowing-rugger-running story "The Outlaw of the Shell", and I recall several good rowing yarns in "The Captain".

Again there are very many cricket stories, both long and short yarns. We have the description of cricket matches in McDonnell's "England, their England" or in Dorothy Sayers "Murder must Advertise". We have Pentelow's many cricket yarns under various pen-names, "Smith of Rocklandshire" and many others. There were cricket stories in "The Captain", "Chums" and other papers, and there are the many stories by Charles Hamilton and his sub-writers and imitators, including the cricket matches in the much maligned Gem sports series. P. G. Wodehouse wrote cricket stories in "The Captain", two serials being later published as one tale in "Mike", introducing the immortal "P. Smith".

Wodehouse also wrote a good rugger tale, which first appeared in "The Captain", was reprinted in "The Boys' Friend" in the 1930's, and is still in print, "The Gold Bat". Nor should we forget that Charles Hamilton first introduced "Inky" in a rugger tale in the Marvel, a year or more before "Frank Richards" brought him to Greyfriars, or that the very first story in the B. O. P. was a rugger tale "My first match" by "an old boy" (in fact Talbot Baines Reed). There is also the immortal match in "Tom Brown's Schooldays". In the 1920's both the "Boys' Realm" and the B. F. L. published rugby league (then Northern Union) stories.

There have been many horse racing stories in a variety of publications, both for boys and for adults. Here, particularly there was Nat Gould, who was as prolific a writer of racing stories in the thirty years from 1890 to 1920 as was later Edgar Wallace. Nat Gould's plots were terrible, penny-noveletteish, but he had a marvellous gift of describing a horse race, in such stories as "Running it Off", in an Australian setting, "Left in the Lurch", a steeplechasing story, and "In Royal Colours", the opening chapters of which gave an account of Edward VII's winning the Derby. Gould's stories even appeared in the "Boys' Realm". It was said that he could double the circulation of the popular Sunday Papers of his day by writing a serial for them! Of course, Sexton Blake found himself busily engaged with more than one racing mystery. Edgar Wallace included a number of racing tales in his immense output, including "The Flying Fifty Five", "The Island of Galloping Gold" and the novel of his racing play "The Calendar".

I have read many good shooting stories, whether "B. B's" wildfowling yarns, J. K. Stanford's shooting tales, e.g. "Guns Wanted", the Scottish setting of the S. B. L. "Case of the Stag at Bay", or the big game hunting stories ranging from Rider Haggard and Steward Edward White through Hemingway to Robert Ruark's "Uhuru" and "Something of Value". There is, too, target shooting. This interests me as one who has been in his time a very poor shot. There are not a great number of stories of target shooting. Most stories involving shooting (such as the James

Bond or "Western") deal with shooting "for real". But I recall faintly stories of target shooting in the "Boys' Journal" and "The Captain". I have seen, in a full-page advertisement in an early Marvel, the cover of an early "Empire Library" which contained a story of a shooting match between the Hamilton Schools. This dates back to about 1910 when Northcliffe was promoting the Cadet Movement in his boys' papers, and may not have been by C.H. There is a shooting contest in one of Clarence Mulford's "Hopalong Cassidy" tales, and much of the plot of John Edson's "Gun Wizard" turns on a shooting match in Tombstone, Arizona, in which the Ysabel Kid wins a "One of One thousand Winchester".

We can turn to hunting stories, including those of Surtees, which recall the 19th century hunting men, and the immortal "Jorrocks", or his more satirically drawn "Soapy Sponge" and "Facey Romford", with vivid portraits of the Shires in mid Victorian England. There is also the fine stag hunting episode in Whyte Melville's "Katerfelto". There are also sporting stories in verse. Adam Lyndsay Gordon's "How we beat the Favourite", or Masefield's long narrative poems on racing "Right Royal" and hunting "Reynard the Fox".

To turn to something quieter; a sport or a game? Chess. Martin Clifford frequently referred to chess, and Charles Hamilton himself wrote a chess story in the Gem sports series. There are a number of good stories on a chess theme; A. Glyn in "The Dragon Variation" deals with the world of professional chess and J. W. Elleson's "Master Prin" with an imaginary American championship match. The Strand Magazine at one time ran a series of short stories based on chess problems, and there are innumerable references in stories, for example the reference to Mongol chess in Cecilia Holland's novel about the successors of Ghengis Khan, "Until the Sun Fall". There is also the deadly game of living chess which forms the climax to "Pawn in Frankinsence" the fourth of Dorothy Dunnitt's six fine "Lymond of Crawford" novels, set in the 16th century, each with a title drawn from chess. Or there are various science fiction chess tales; for example the Martian Chess game, "Jetan", in Edgar Rice Burrough's "Chessmen of Mars".

In lighter vein we can recall P. G. Wodehouse's humorous golf tales, e.g. "The Clicking of Cuthbert" and "The coming of Gowf". Even GO has produced a story translated from the Japanese "The Master of Go".

Can we choose one outstanding story from such a wealth. I think we can. Old Omar Khayam could write of chess:

"But helpless pieces in the game he plays,
Upon this chequer board of nights and days.
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays."

But he could also write of another game, an eastern game, that came from Persia and India, via the British Army to England and America.

"The ball no question makes of ayes or noes
But here or there, as strikes the player, goes.
And he who threw you down into the field.
He knows about it all, he knows, he knows."

The game is Polo; the story I choose is Kipling's masterly short story, "The

Maltese Cat".

Kipling was a master of the short story; in some of the best of these the action is seen through the thoughts and eyes of an animal as in the Jungle Book or even an inanimate object as in "The Ship that found herself". "The Maltese Cat" is a Polo pony. The story is of a polo match in India in the heyday of the British Raj during the "nineties". It is the Final of the All India Cup, and a native regiment, "The Skidars" have won through to face a wealthy English Regiment, "The Archangels" in the final. The Archangels can afford six ponies apiece, but the Skidars have to play each of their ponies in two chukkas, as against the Archangels use of a fresh pony in each chukka.

There is a magnificent account of the game as seen through the eyes of both players and ponies alternately, the players engaged in the game, the ponies alternately playing and watching, discussing the game and its tactics while they wait. The climax comes when the Skidar's captain is hurt in a fall and plays on with a broken collar bone, and there is a thrilling finale as the Maltese Cat takes charge of game and rider as they score the winning goal.

Of all sporting stories, and I have read very many, this is the one that stands out to me as the greatest.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all my friends in the London O. B. B. C.
WANTED: Historical stories, B. F. L's, also Francis Gerard Sanders of the River Stories.

SAM THURBON

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Seasonal greetings to all collectors, special thanks to Josie Packman, Darrell Swift, for help given.

Tune in at the same time next week.....

In which BRIAN DOYLE takes a nostalgic look-back at some of the most popular and memorable heroes and detectives of yesteryear's BBC Radio ....

Paul Temple, Inspector Hornleigh, Doctor Morelle, Mr. Penny, Old Ebenezer, Syd Walker, Philip Odell, 'The Rev.', P.C.49, 'The Man in Black', Dick Barton ....

To anyone into their 'forties and after, most if not all these names will strike a warm, nostalgic note and bring back happy memories of listening to the heroes of BBC radio during the late-1930's and throughout the 1940's. Mystery and adventure and detection were the keynotes of the old radio serials and series, with now and again a touch of chaste romance thrown in for good measure. Everyone in those days (if they weren't away at the war) was, to coin Ernest Dudley's familiar phrase, an 'armchair detective'. All you had to do was turn a knob, close your eyes, relax - and listen. There were no distracting television pictures - it all came to vivid life in your head.

Here is a nostalgic glance back at those much-loved radio characters of yesteryear. Not all of them. Just a few personal favourites of my own - and perhaps of yours too ....

As early as 1924, BBC radio's first storyteller, A. J. Alan, had won fame for his conversational, lightly-told yarns, often mysteries with a twist or two in their tails. Something of a mystery man, 'A. J. Alan' was actually a civil servant named Leslie Harrison Lambert and went to extraordinary lengths to preserve the illusion that he was just chatting 'off the cuff' to listeners. He pasted the pages of his script on to sheets of card so that there would be no tell-tale rustling, and wrote in his own little notes such as 'cough here', 'chuckle', 'sigh', and so on. He also insisted upon having matches and a candle at his side, in case the studio lights failed! Many of his highly-entertaining stories were later published in two books: "Good Evening, Everyone" and "A. J. Alan's Second Book", with a later anthology drawing on these titled "The Best of A. J. Alan".

In 1934, popular detective story writer Freeman Wills Crofts contributed a radio series titled "Meet the Detective" and followed it with many short detective plays and a later series of 'problem playlets' included in the wartime radio series "Here's Wishing You Well Again". There were many other detective radio plays in the 'thirties too.

But it wasn't until 1938 that BBC radio introduced its first-ever regular and original detective. He was Inspector Hornleigh of Scotland Yard and he made his bow in a regular spot in the weekly "Monday Night at Seven" (later to become "Monday Night at Eight"). In a ten-minute playlet, "Inspector Hornleigh Investigates", listeners were invited to spot the criminal's one mistake, which was revealed at the end of the programme. The playlets were written by Ernest Dudley and Inspector Hornleigh was played by S. J. Warmington, later tragically killed in a London air-raid.

A Hornleigh book was subsequently published, written by H. W. Priwin, and there was a film which starred Gordon Harker as the Inspector. Hornleigh never had a full-length series of his own. It might well have been that, when Warmington was killed, it was decided to let the series in "Monday Night ..." die with him.

Two other very popular BBC radio characters who appeared around this period were Syd Walker and 'Old Ebenezer'. Syd Walker - a fruity-voiced character actor who had made his radio bow back in 1926 - played an old Cockney junk man (named Syd Walker!) in a ten-minute playlet in radio's first true regular variety series "Bandwagon", which starred Arthur Askey and Richard Murdoch, in 1938. Syd would announce himself by singing his signature tune, which went "Day after day, I'm on me way, Singin' 'Rags, bottles and bones' ". Then he would tell, in dramatised form, about an incident which had happened to him that week, and which posed a problem. He would finish by asking "Well, what would you do, chums?" and invite listeners to drop him a postcard letting him know what their solution or action would have been. This no doubt gave the scriptwriter (the busy Ernest Dudley) scope to write the solution after he had read the postcards and chosen the most popular. "Mr. Walker Wants To Know" was extremely successful and introduced one of radio's first catch-phrases, "What would you do, chums?", which is still occasionally heard today. A book, "Mr. Walker Wants To Know", by Ernest Dudley, was published in 1940, and Dudley also featured Syd Walker in two Sexton Blake stories in "Detective Weekly" in 1939.

'Old Ebenezer', the night-watchman (played by Richard Goolden, still happily with us at 81 and still appearing as 'Mole' in "Toad of Toad Hall" on the London stage every Christmas), appeared in a playlet-spot in the BBC variety series "The Old Town Hall", hosted by fast-talking Canadian compere Clay Keyes (whose musical quiz-spot 'Penny on the Drum' was also popular) in the early 'forties. Old Ebenezer would recount a dramatised experience to listeners, beginning with the invariable words "One day as I was sitting by my old fire-bucket ..." There would usually be a 'surprise guest' playing the leading role, which would cause Ebenezer to gasp, in the final few moments, "Why, I think I've just recognised you, Sir (or Miss) - isn't it Mr. Jack Hulbert (or whoever)?" Ebenezer's last words in each story were always "Well I'll be jiggered!" (another popular catch-phrase which the populace quickly fastened on to).

Richard Goolden also immortalised another popular radio character in the late 'thirties - that of 'Mr. Penny', who was also introduced in "Monday Night at Seven". "The Strange Adventures of Mr. Penny" was another ten-minute playlet spot, featuring mild-mannered, but shrewd and kindly, Mr. Penny, a character who 'caught on' so successfully with the public that he was promoted to his own regular radio series and later appeared in a stage play, a film, and a book, as well as a record. Richard Goolden went on to create another popular radio character, Mr. Meek (of 'Meek's Antiques'), as well as being radio's first 'Mr. Chips' (in a radio version of James Hilton's classic "Goodbye, Mr. Chips") and broadcasting in countless other radio plays and series.

In 1938 was born a character who was to become BBC radio's most famous and popular detective, the one and only Paul Temple. His creator was Francis

Durbridge and the title of that very first series was "Send For Paul Temple", broadcast during April and May, 1938, with Hugh Morton as the debonair detective story-writer-cum-amateur detective, Bernadette Hodgson as Steve, his attractive young wife, and Lester Midditt as Sir Graham Forbes, the top Scotland Yard man. The signature-music was a stirring passage from Rimsky-Korakov's "Sheherazade" and the producer (who was to remain as the Paul Temple producer for thirty years) was Martyn C. Webster. The tradition of the mysterious villain's dramatic un-masking right at the end of the serial was established when Temple revealed to a stunned Sir Graham that his own right-hand man, Chief-Inspector Dale, was in reality 'The Knave' - an identity puzzle which had had radio listeners on tenterhooks throughout the serial.

This first Paul Temple serial created a new fan-mail record for a BBC programme and established Durbridge as a top-flight radio writer, and he also became the first radio-playwright to turn his own serial into a novel, which had the same title and was published later in 1938. There were ten Paul Temple radio serials, spread sparingly over thirty years (plus occasional repeats), including "Paul Temple and the Front-Page Men" (1939), "News of Paul Temple" (1940), "Paul Temple Intervenes" (1942 and also, I believe, a new production in 1945), "Send for Paul Temple Again" (1943), and "A Case for Paul Temple" (1946). I don't possess records of all the later ones, but they did include "Paul Temple and the Valentine Affair" and, the last of all, "Paul Temple and the Alex Affair" in 1968 (repeated in 1969).

Paul Temple was played, successively, by Hugh Morton, Carl Bernard, Howard Marion-Crawford, Barry Morse, Kim Peacock and Peter Coke. Marjorie Westbury took over as Steve in 1945 and stayed to the end. Lester Mudditt played Sir Graham Forbes until the mid-sixties, when his role was taken over by James Thomason. Other BBC Radio Drama Repertory Company members who continually cropped up in different serials as suspects were Richard Williams, Ralph Truman, Grizelda Hervey, Cyril Gardiner and Olaf Olssen (who was always a heavily-accented European and was forever saying "But Mistair Temple, I hope you don't think that I ...."). In the late-forties the original theme-music was replaced by Vivian Ellis's tuneful "Coronation Scot".

Looking back on the Paul Temple serials gives one a warm glow of nostalgia. For one thing, they were so marvellously predictable. Nearly every story contained slight variations on recurring incidents. Temple and Steve would return late at night to their flat and Temple would discover a dead body inside. "No, no, Steve, don't look," he'd tell her. But, curious woman that she was, she always did - and always said "Oh no, Paul - it's horrible - horrible ...." Or Mr. and Mrs. T. (as they were called by their Cockney 'house-boy', Charlie, who came into later stories) would be driving home, when Steve would notice that they were being followed by a car. "Hold tight, darling," Temple would say as he increased speed. Then the pursuing car would try to force them off the road, Steve would be heard screaming "Oh no, Paul, I think we're going to ....", followed by the sound of the best car-crash the effects department could muster. Silence. Then Temple would recover consciousness and say urgently "Steve - Steve - are you all right?" Agonising pause. Then: "Yes - yes, I think so, Paul - are you all right?" Another recurring trick was to have a villain impersonating Temple's voice on the telephone to Steve. "But, darling, he sounded just like you," she'd say later. "Oh yes, he was clever all right,"

he'd reply grimly. You could almost hear him squeezing her hand reassuringly.

The most famous tradition, as I've already mentioned, was for Temple to un-mask the mysterious master-crook in the final five minutes of the serial. The listener's reaction would either be an incredulous "Well, that's amazing - whoever would have thought it!" or a smug "There, I told you so all along." Perhaps the most incredible (and hilarious) un-masking occurred in "News of Paul Temple", when Temple revealed a motherly, buxom, apple-cheeked middle-aged lady who ran a hotel in Scotland, as the villain, with the words: "Permit me to introduce you to the leader of the greatest espionage organisation in Europe - Z. 4!" Chief Commissioner Sir Graham Forbes was again 'stunned' (his usual reaction to Temple's revelations when he wasn't expressing testy irritation at Temple's theories). Another classic un-masking was that of the elusive 'Marquis' in "Paul Temple Intervenes". The villain turned out to be a pleasant, cheerful and well-off young man named Roger Storey - but he eluded final justice by jumping to his death through a plate-glass window several floors up.

Francis Durbridge (who wrote all the Paul Temple radio serials) wrote five Temple novels and, later, several thrillers 'by Paul Temple', a pseudonym which covered the identities of Durbridge and Douglas Rutherford. There were also three Temple films: "Calling Paul Temple" (1948), "Paul Temple's Triumph" (1951) and "Paul Temple Returns" (1952), which starred John Bentley as Temple and Joy Shelton as Steve. "The Adventures of Paul Temple" also appeared for a time as a newspaper picture-strip.

Francis Durbridge subsequently turned to television and wrote BBC TV's very first thriller serial, "The Broken Horseshoe" in 1952. Later came many more first-class serials, including "Portrait of Alison", "The Scarf", "Melissa" and "Tim Frazer". In 1969 Paul Temple came to television, with Francis Matthews as Temple and Ros Drinkwater as Steve. A further series appeared during 1970-71. But the TV episodes weren't actually written by Durbridge and it wasn't the Paul Temple we knew and loved. "By Timothy!" you could almost hear Temple saying to himself (his favourite expression), "Let's get back into steam radio - at least we know where we are there. We're meant to be listened to, not looked at ...."

Before leaving the 1930's we mustn't overlook our old friend Sexton Blake. From January 1939 to April 1939, a programme called "Lucky Dip" featured a serial play "Enter Sexton Blake", which was adapted from a story by Edwy Searles Brooks which subsequently ran as a serial in "Detective Weekly" from April to July 1939. The radio version was by Ernest Dudley and the twelve episodes featured George Curzon as Blake and Brian Lawrence as Tinker. Blake later made a radio come-back in 1967 in a series called "Sexton Blake" and written by Donald Stuart. Blake was played by William Franklyn, Tinker by David Gregory and Blake's secretary, Paula Dane (yes, this was the 'modern era' Blake) by Heather Chasen. Blake also made his TV bow around the same time - but that's another story ....

Prolific radio writer and author Ernest Dudley (who has already been mentioned) created his own unique series on BBC radio early in the war years. This was "The Armchair Detective", in which Dudley discussed recently-published

detective and crime stories, with the help of dramatised excerpts. It ran for several years and led to 'request-lists' at local public libraries the day following each broadcast, such was its influence. No small measure of its success was due to Dudley's personable voice, full of sinister menace but as smooth as whipped cream.

As well as being concerned with this series and with "Inspector Hornleigh" and "Mr. Walker Wants To Know", Ernest Dudley also created another famous BBC radio character in Dr. Morelle. "Meet Dr. Morelle" was yet another series of playlets in "Monday Night at Eight" in the early-1940's, but who was later, I believe, promoted to his own series. Dr. Morelle was both medical doctor and psychiatrist and had a particular interest, both professional and personal, in criminology, writing books and papers and also lecturing on the subject. His address was 221B Harley Street, London, a neat combination of fictional detection and factual medicine. Dr. M. was apat to be short-tempered, acid, brilliantly-deductive and (almost) infallible. His patient secretary was one Miss Frayle, who he had once saved from a suicide attempt on the Thames Embankment. Miss Frayle was a young fluttering, vague, short-sighted lady who, though often helpful in an innocent sort of way, was a constant source of irritation to her Chief (as well as to, it must be confessed, her listeners). Dr. Morelle went around solving much the same kind of problems and mysteries as Hornleigh, Temple, and the rest, but his icy intolerance made him an unlikely and fascinating hero. It was as though your hated mathematics master had brilliantly discovered who had stolen your favourite cricket-bat at school. You still disliked him but had to confess to a reluctant admiration too.

Dr. Morelle was played by Dennis Arundel and Miss Frayle by Jane Grahame (who, in private life, was married to Ernest Dudley!). Dudley (who was an ex-actor and ex-crime reporter, as well as a contributor to "The Thriller") later wrote 13 Dr. Morelle novels, the first in 1944, being "Meet Dr. Morelle". Later titles included "Dr. Morelle Again", "Menace for Dr. Morelle", "Confess to Dr. Morelle" and "Alibi for Dr. Morelle". In 1949 came a film "Meet Dr. Morelle", starring Valentine Dyall as the Doctor and Julia Lang as Miss Frayle. It was adapted by Roy Plomley from the stage play by William Burr.

Mention of Valentine Dyall brings us inevitably to the well-remembered "Appointment With Fear". This was a series of spine-tingling, 'grand-guignol' suspense plays, running for half-an-hour and introduced by the deep-voiced, sinister narrator 'The Man in Black', played by Valentine Dyall, who won National fame for his portrayal. Each play began with his classic words "Good evening - this is your story-teller - The Man in Black ...." The series was created and mainly written by John Dickson Carr and ran from 1943 until the late 'forties. The inevitable film came along in 1950, titled "The Man in Black" and featuring Dyall as 'The Storyteller'.

Detective story writer John Dickson Carr (who also wrote books under the pseudonym 'Carter Dickson') created another popular crime series (with Walter Rilla) titled "Corner in Crime" in 1945. This was a sort of magazine programme specially designed for thriller addicts, containing fictional playlets, dramatised reconstructions of famous actual crimes, crime quizzes and interviews with authors and Scotland Yard experts. Victory year also saw an excellent radio serial based on Peter Cheyney's book "The Adventures of Julia", also published the same year.

The following year introduced another gripping serial, Sax Rohmer's "The Shadow of Sumuru", featuring the dreaded Dr. Fu Manchu, as well as an outstanding series of serialisations of thrillers by Edgar Wallace.

Long before television's "Dixon of Dock Green" was born, BBC radio had its own favourite policeman. He was, of course, Police Constable Archibald Berkeley-Willoughby - better-known to all and sundry as P.C.49, of the London Metropolitan Police. "The Adventures of P.C.49" was first broadcast in 1947 and ran in regular series until the early 1950's, being written by Alan Stranks. P.C.49 was a good copper and if he often made foolish mistakes in the early stages of a case, he always managed to come out on top at the end. "P.C.49" was a thoroughly enjoyable, warmly-humorous and homely series and its success owed much to the expert playing of its four regulars - 'Fortynine' himself (Brian Reece), his girl-friend (and later wife) Joan Carr (Joy Shelton), and his two Chiefs, Chief Detective-Inspector Wilson (Leslie Perrins) and Detective-Sergeant Wright (Eric Phillips). The latter also instigated the show's 'catch-phrases' - "In you go, Fortynine," (when propelling a reluctant Berkeley-Willoughby into the Chief Detective-Inspector's office) and, at the end of each episode, "Out you go, Fortynine." Also familiar was P.C.49's "Evening, all", or "Morning, all," as the case warranted. Two children's books (in 'annual' format) were published around 1949-50: "The Adventures of P.C.49" and "On Duty With P.C.49". Two films were also released: "The Adventures of P.C.49" in 1950, with Hugh Latimer as the P.C. and Patricia Cutts as Joan, and "A Case for P.C.49" in 1951, with Brian Reece and Joy Shelton appearing in their original radio roles.

Keen moviegoers may remember that Alfred Hitchcock's British thriller "The Lady Vanishes" (1938) was almost 'stolen' by the hilarious performances of Nauton Wayne and Basil Radford as Charters and Caldicot, a pair of very British railway-travellers whose chief concern throughout the murder and mayhem which surrounded them, was the state of play in the current Test Match back home in England. So popular were these characters that Wayne and Radford continued to play variations of them for several years, though the actual names of the characters varied. There was at least one film "Crooks' Tour" (1940) and several successful BBC radio serials in which, I believe, Wayne and Radford played very English innocents-at-large-in-the-criminal-world, Bulstrode and Berkeley. Titles included "Crime, Gentlement, Please", "Fools' Paradise" and "Double Bedlam". These comedy-thrillers were usually in eight action-packed episodes, often written by Max Kester and produced by Vernon Harris, and broadcast during the 1940's. Curiously enough, when "The Lady Vanishes" was heard in a special radio adaptation in 1949, those original roles of Charters and Caldicot were played by Norman Shelley and Alastair Duncan.

At 6.45 p.m., on Monday, 7th October, 1946, to the strains of "The Devil's Gallop" by Charles Williams, a brand-new series took to the air: "Dick Barton - Special Agent". Within weeks it was the most popular, widely-discussed and controversial series on BBC radio. It was accused of keeping children from their homework, of violence, sadism and bad language. It led to attacks in the Press, letters to "The Times" (even, indeed, a Leader in that august newspaper), letters (both for and against) to the BBC, cartoons, comedian's jokes and learned articles in magazines. It would take several pages to do justice to this programme, which is now part of BBC history. In fact, "Dick Barton" was a perfectly harmless daily

(Monday to Friday with an 'omnibus' on Saturday mornings) 15 minutes of thrilling, action-packed adventure, with a 'cliff-hanger' ending to each episode. Noel Johnson played Dick Barton with enormous, fast-talking panache, and his assistants, Snowy and Jock, were portrayed by John Mann and Alex McCrindle. The show made Johnson a top radio star overnight and his fan-mail arrived literally by the sackful. After $2\frac{1}{4}$ years Noel Johnson decided he had had enough of Barton and, on 1st January, 1949, gave up the role, which was taken over by actor-explorer, Duncan Carse who, after a year or so, relinquished it to Gordon Davies. The series finally came to an end in 1950, its daily 6.45 p.m. slot being taken over by "The Archers" who, after a run of over 25 years, are, of course, still with us. Summer replacements for "Dick Barton" included a circus serial "The Daring Dexters" and a thriller-adventure serial "Adventure Unlimited", but neither caught the public imagination as "Dick Barton" had done.

I had the pleasure of lunching with Noel Johnson a few years ago and he was pleasantly talkative about his Barton days. He told me there were two main reasons for his giving the role up. One was money, and the other that he was reluctant to become too 'type-cast' and over-identified with the role. "What did you do after 'Dick Barton'? I asked. Johnson gave a wry smile. "I played Dan Dare on Radio Luxenbourg for three years," he said. Later, of course, he finally shook the Barton mantle off and is today a busy stage, radio and television actor. But to anyone who was a regular BBC radio listener twenty-five or so years ago, the sound of his voice always rings a mental memory bell. And the name of the bell is "Dick Barton - Special Agent".

There were three "Dick Barton" films, by the way: "Dick Barton - Special Agent" (1948), "Dick Barton Strikes Back" (1950), and "Dick Barton at Bay" (1950). Barton was played by Don Stannard in all three.

Another radio detective, who was a personal favourite of mine incidentally, was Philip Odell, created by Lester Powell and played with charm and masculinity by Canadian-born actor Robert Beatty. He arrived on the BBC radio scene around 1948 in the serial "Lady in the Fog" (later filmed in 1952 with the unlikely Cesar Romero as Odell) and later Odell serials included "The Odd Story of Simon Ode" in 1948 and "Spot the Lady" in 1949. Odell's assistant-cum-girl-friend, the delectable Heather McMara, was played sometimes by Brenda Bruce, sometimes by Joy Shelton (with P.C.49 lurking nearby around the corner, no doubt!). Lester Powell wrote several Philip Odell novels too, including "A Count of Six", "Shadow Play", "Spot the Lady", and "The Black Casket".

An unusual character who won wide popularity in the mid-to-late 1940's was the Reverend Simon Cherry, D.S.O. - probably radio's first clerical sleuth - in the series "Meet the Rev." 'The Rev.' was a lively sporting parson whose 'beat' was the East End of London Thameside area and who liked helping people in trouble. He could hold his own in a scrap and was an ex-padre in the Eighth Army. He took snuff, whistled 'Funiculi Funicula' when hot on the trail, and his favourite exclamation was 'By Hector!' He made his bow in thirty playlets in the wartime radio show "Here's Wishing You Well Again" and was eventually 'promoted' to his own regular evening series. 'The Rev.' was played by Hugh Morton (radio's first 'Paul Temple')

and his assistant and former-batman, Charlie Banks, by Roy Plomley. Gale Pedrick wrote the series.

No retrospective survey of BBC radio detectives and adventurers of the '30s and '40s would be complete without a mention of Carleton Hobbs and Norman Shelley, who made their bows as Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, in 1947. Over the next 25 years they appeared in radio versions of every Sherlock Holmes story written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, many of them being repeated, ending their 'run' in 1972. They were radio's perfect portrayers of Holmes and 'the good doctor', in my opinion, only being challenged by Sir John Gielgud and Sir Ralph Richardson, who played the same roles in a classic Radio Luxembourg series (and also heard on American radio) in the 1950's (two episodes were issued on a now-rare long-playing record album, also featuring Orson Welles as Professor Moriarty).

Well, there they are. Just a few of the well-remembered heroes of BBC radio of thirty or more years ago. There were many others. The ex-boxer Gus Millett in "The Old One-Two" and "The Young Sullivans", both playlet-series in the prolific "Monday Night at Eight". Cockney actor Jerry Verno as Shorty, the taxi-driver who was for ever encountering strange characters and adventures in the series "Taxi!", written by Cyril Campion (father of Gerald Campion, TV's 'Billy Bunter'). The weekly "Mystery Playhouse" mid-week series of memorable thrillers and detective plays, often adapted from successful stage productions and novels. Charles Chilton's exciting "Journey into Space" with hero Jet Morgan played by Andrew Faulds, now a prominent Labour M. P., and David Kossoff as comic relief. The always-entertaining and superby-performed "Saturday Night Theatre", which offered plays of all types and is still with us after 33 years. In a wider field, the brilliant BBC radio serialisations of such classics as "The Three Musketeers", "The Count of Monte Cristo", "The Prisoner of Zenda" and "The Scarlet Pimpernel". The memorable Sunday-evening serials based on novels by Galsworthy, Dickens, Seton Merriman, Thackeray, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. And the truly moving and outstanding "The Man Born To Be King", by Dorothy L. Sayers.

And let us not forget all those wonderful members of the BBC Radio Drama Repertory Company who brought so many memorable characters vividly to life. Well-remembered names like Gladys Young, James McKechnie, Grizelda Hervey, Richard Williams, Ralph Truman, Cyril Gardiner, Bell Crystal, Rita Vale, Cecile Chevreau, Charles Leno, Carleton Hobbs, Norman Shelley, Howard Marion-Crawford, Arthur Ridley, Anthony Jacobs, Marjorie Westbury, Preston Lockwood, Beryl Calder, Laidman Browne, and Lewis Stringer. Golden names, all of them.

Producers too, like Harry S. Pepper, Howard Rose, Martyn C. Webster, Ayton Whitaker, Archie Campbell, David H. Godfrey, Neil Tuson, Hugh Stewart and Vernon Harris.

Writers, producers, actor and actresses - they all played their valuable parts in bringing to regular BBC radio listeners of the 'thirties, 'forties and 'fifties, their favourite characters and series, just a few of whom I have touched on here. If I've struck an occasional nostalgic and pleasurable chord here and there among readers, I'll be well content. Preparing this feature has certainly brought back a

host of happy radio memories for me. Radio isn't what it was and television isn't the same somehow. Or maybe it's me who's changed ....!

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Greetings to the Editor, all concerned with "C.D." and "Annual" and all contributors and readers. "Nick Carter Weekly" earnestly sought. Numbers 1-7. Multi-coloured covers, year 1911, large format. Also "Nugget Library" (pocket), No. 268, "Whispering Mummy".

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CHRISTOPHER LOWDER

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The Story of WALDO the WONDERMAN

by JOSIE PACKMAN

This well-known Union Jack character was created by Edwy Searles Brooks in 1918. There are 37 stories featuring him in the Union Jack Library, a few in the Sexton Blake Library and the Detective Weekly, but it is those in the old Union Jack about which I am writing this article.

I should think it must be at least 20 years ago that I obtained a copy of the first Waldo story. This appeared in the Union Jack No. 794. It was a Christmas tale simply entitled "Waldo the Wonderman". On re-reading this story recently, with the aid of a large magnifying glass as the print in the 1918 issues was very poor, I am really surprised that Waldo became such a popular character and remained so till the last story written about him. Mr. Brooks first introduced him as an escaped convict who proceeded to murder a man who was blackmailing him. Now, I could forgive a man for killing a loathesome blackmailer but not when he allowed suspicion of murder to fall on an innocent man. I wondered whether Mr. Brooks had really intended to continue with Waldo as a regular character. On the evidence of the first story I should say no. Evidently though, the readers of that time thought otherwise, they seemed to like Waldo. At that time there was no Editor's Chat or replies to readers' letters in the Union Jack, a war time economy of paper, so there was no possibility of knowing how many letters about Waldo were received in the Editorial Office. The one interesting thing which came to our knowledge from that first story, in which Waldo was described as being a strong man and unable to feel any sense of pain, was the real name of the disease causing this condition. It is called Morvan's disease or Syringomelia and causes the loss of sense of touch in certain nerve endings. This was explained in the C.D. issue No. 338 for February 1975. This lack of sense of pain thus enabled Waldo to escape from a burning caravan and although caught by two detectives and the police, eventually escaped to turn up in the next tale.

This first tale is related throughout by Tinker in a somewhat humorous fashion and included a visit to St. Frank's where Nelson Lee and Nipper were roped in to help catch Waldo. The same theme and method of telling the tale was continued for quite a number of Waldo adventures. The second was in U. J. No. 798, dated January 1919. I give the full date as there is a rather curious aspect to the story. The plot concerns the theft of £5,000 from a safe in a house in Catford S. E. London. The odd fact is that this sum was in gold sovereigns ... I am rather perplexed about it. What was a man doing with 5,000 golden sovereigns in 1919 when, according to the reference books gold coinage was withdrawn from general use in late 1914 after the Great War began. No one was supposed to have gold coinage in their possession although it was of course still legal tender. Apparently Waldo had escaped at the end of the story with a small amount of the gold, but how he was going to use it without coming under suspicion was not explained. After all, no shopkeeper at that time would be likely to accept a gold coin for goods, etc., it would have been

against the law. I am also puzzled as to how Waldo was able to shift such a large amount of gold. Even for such a strong man as he the weight would have been considerable, moreover, even Sexton Blake was able to move it around in one canvas bag. It is odd that Mr. Brooks should have forgotten these facts or possibly not even known about them. However, at this late stage I think we can credit him with "Authors Licence". (Since I read out this treatise at one of our London meetings I have been informed that 5,000 sovereigns would not be likely to weigh more than a hundredweight. J. P.)

It was during this episode that Sexton Blake began to appreciate that Waldo could be a worthy foe and that Inspector Lennard entered the Waldo Saga as Mr. Brooks' main detective from Scotland Yard. He did appear briefly in the first Waldo tale but only as a secondary policeman.

From then on Waldo stories appeared from time to time, quite good plots, sometimes involving Nelson Lee and Nipper and related by Tinker. A long gap between June 1919 and May 1920 occurred without any Waldo tales but when one did appear in No. 865 in May 1920, the story was still related by Tinker as was also No. 888 in October 1920. No further murders were committed by Waldo after the first tale and all concerned in his exploits were beginning to have a great respect for his clever stunts and schemes.

The next story of Waldo was in Union Jack No. 892 dated 13 November, 1920, which chronicled various feats performed by Waldo in his efforts to obtain some valuable emeralds. The cover picture of this Union Jack is rather unique. A drawing depicting Waldo escaping from an open top bus just as it is passing under a railway bridge. It is a number 14 bus running from Charing Cross to Hampstead according to the indicator board. A wonderful drawing of a bus by E. E. Briscoe, a type of bus which no longer exists except as a museum piece in the Omnibus Museum which used to be in Clapham London. I believe it has now been transferred to Birmingham or some such place, why, I really do not know. However back to our picture. There are posters on the brick wall under the railway bridge depicting the latest in ladies fashionable wear of the period, i.e. 1920.

We had to wait for nearly a year before the next Waldo adventure appeared in Union Jack No. 942, dated October 1921, followed by No. 948 in December 1921, which records, so far as I am aware, the first bank hold-up of its kind in the Union Jack. Waldo decided he needed £20,000 so just went to a bank in Fleet Street and took it. No guns were required, he just pushed aside the bank clerks and a couple of customers, vaulted the counter and helped himself from the till. Once again gold coins come into a story as the bank apparently kept a couple of bags of them in the same till. I should have thought that even in 1921 such a thing was still impossible, no matter, Waldo got away with both gold and other cash. The story from then on is just one exciting stunt after another even to riding a horse down the Strand. (Shades of Marshall McCloud riding in Central Park, New York.) Waldo had simply pinched the horse from a mounted policeman. From the horse he leapt to a parapet of Australia House and after clambering over the roof top came to ground and borrowed a car merely by lifting out the driver and jumping in. The car was off and so was Waldo the Wonderman. Such are the sort of stunts Waldo

indulged in. The method of having Tinker relate the stories had stopped by now and this enabled Mr. Brooks to use his fertile imagination to better purpose.

It would take too long to tell you about all the adventures but just take that one in Union Jack, No. 1118, The Affair of the Roman Relics. Once again gold coins come into the plot. A considerable quantity of ancient Roman gold coins were the next target for Waldo's activities. He did manage to escape with a sufficient number to be of use. However, he must have had some difficulty in disposing of them as ancient coins like that would have been called Treasure Trove and as such belonged to the Crown, even in 1925. Not easily disposed of but I expect Waldo with his ability and ingenuity would no doubt find a Fence to sell the coins to and that gentleman would know of someone who could melt them down. Yes, fantastic though these Waldo adventures were they were possible and I must hand it to Mr. Brooks for writing such entertaining tales.

Over the years Waldo mellowed into quite a decent chap and on occasion assisted Blake when they had a common enemy, in fact he did save the life of our favourite detective on more than one occasion. Three more tales of Waldo appeared in 1925 and then there was a long gap until February 1927 before another series was written for our delectation. The explanation given was that Waldo had been abroad during this period. Commencing with No. 1219 there were four tales of Waldo which were really excellent adventures equal to many others recorded in the Union Jack by other authors. The first tale begins with Waldo in the act of acquiring some diamonds during which he meets a very worried gentleman by the name of Sir Rodney Drummond. Sir Rodney had been under the impression that in the past he had some rather shady dealings concerning oil wells in Persia but this having been proved incorrect and the three men who had been blackmailing him had been sent to prison, they were now free and threatening to have their revenge, so Sir Rodney gets Waldo to help him dispose of these rogues. The four stories in question relate how Waldo does just this with many hair-raising stunts and battles with Sexton Blake who is brought into the fray as a result of being asked to find the diamonds afore-mentioned. The whole affair ends amicably with Waldo deciding to stay on the right side of the law, much to Blake's satisfaction.

January 1928 is the next time we hear of Waldo's further adventures. During the previous months he had been running straight as promised but as he needed some kind of excitement he had set up as a "Peril Expert". Under that title he advertised in the newspapers as follows: "If it's dangerous get it done by Waldo". The more risky the undertaking the more Waldo likes it. Bring your troubles to me, etc., etc. Blake is amused and tells Waldo he is setting up against him, but wishes him luck. Waldo calls on Blake and bemoans the fact that no clients have called on him, but that state of affairs did not last long. The clients turned up and both Sexton Blake and Tinker were involved in Waldo's adventures. There were three of these in Union Jacks No. 1266, 1267 and 1268. The last two adventures took them all to the Congo with once again diamonds as booty.

Another year passed before Waldo was again heard of. We had the Case of the Shrivelled Man early in 1929, then in No. 1322 a story called The Captive of the Crag and not until No. 1358 The Death Snare, did a further adventure appear. Mr.

Brooks had fallen from favour (mine) by introducing another character, one Eustace Cavendish. I never liked that man because he not only superseded Waldo but Tinker as well. There were most likely, many requests for a return of Waldo and he re-appeared in a story called The Red Hot Racketeers in No. 1422. This was at the time when the Editor was insisting on the tales becoming more modern and of the gangster type. No. 1433 was the same. Not very successful in my opinion. But Mr. Brooks comes up with a fine tale of Waldo in the last of the Proud Tram series in U.J. No. 1490. We are getting very near to the end of the Union Jack run but we still have six more Waldo tales to come out of the remaining 41 Union Jacks. These are 1499, 1501, 1507, 1516, 1528 and 1530. So the long period of years stretching from 1918 to February 1933 came to an end. In these last stories Waldo appears to have reverted in some ways to his original life as a crook but is still decent enough to help Sexton Blake when they meet, still what was known as a gentleman crook. It was no doubt his restless nature that made him embark on some of these exploits but it certainly made extremely entertaining reading.

Most of these Union Jacks are in my Sexton Blake section of the London O.B.B.C. Lending Library. Anyone interested in Mr. Brooks famous character is welcome to borrow these Union Jacks and enjoy a good read.

I am sorry to have harped on the "Gold" theme but in spite of the incongruities in the tales Gold is the magnet which attracts man. Always has and no doubt always will.

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A letter from ST. FRANK'S

by JIM COOK

My last letter told of my arrival at St. Frank's and finding it closed for the summer recess. I had gone down to take part in the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the known history of the old College and had expected to find the entire school in joyful mood. However, a note had been left for me explaining everything and that everybody connected with St. Frank's were arriving later that day. It was to be an event the like of which St. Frank's had never experienced.

This letter is a record of that remarkable celebration.

As the afternoon wore on sundry visitors entered the Triangle among whom were juniors and seniors accompanied by their parents and guardians. The Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi arrived after landing from an helicopter on Big Side.

Nelson Lee and Nipper, together with Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard of Scotland Yard, had driven down from London in a Yard car and picked up Dr. Brett in Bellton. Nipper's study chums were also there.

I won't list all who are associated with St. Frank's who were to be seen, but I can mention several who were not expected. Because it was a time for rejoicing and mutual involvement, this may have been the reason why such characters, who at one time made themselves unwelcome at the school, came to take part in the celebrations. I saw Walter Starke, ex-6th Form; Ezra Quirke, one-time East House mystic; Arthur Lambert ex-6th ... all had been expelled long ago but who still had their Alma Mater in their thoughts. But the most unexpected to appear was Professor Zingrave with his step-daughter, Vera! Crime, too, had taken a holiday it seemed for I saw Sexton Blake and Tinker making their way to the Ancient House.

All the girls from the Moor View School were conspicuous in their school uniforms - a condition laid down by Miss Bond for the girls to attend the celebrations. Evidently, Miss Charlotte Bond, the headmistress, was determined her school would share in the reflected glory that was St. Frank's!

With the coming of dusk, every window in the five Houses at St. Frank's was ablaze with light. Coloured lights were also strung across the Squares from House to House, and balloons festoons decorated every available space. I learned later that a small army of volunteers from Bellton and Bannington had put up the multi-coloured embellishments that had been paid for by none other than the irascible Farmer Holt! Presumably he had been caught up in the hysteria of the moment.

The roads leading up from Bannington and Bellton were crowded, and traffic was at a standstill. Coinciding with the Silver Jubilee of the reigning Monarch, St. Frank's was experiencing a Double Event, and this resulted in the great swell of visitors and tourists to the world famous old college.

It was a lovely evening; warm and soft. The lingering twilight in the west faded into night to leave the reflection from the myriads of lights that lit up Bellton and surrounding districts. It was a night to remember as the crowds surged through St. Frank's, meeting old friends and finding new ones.

And it was a chance for me to mention juniors and seniors who rarely found the limelight in the chronicles. I spoke to Sessue Yakama, the lone occupant of Study 4 in the Modern House, who was very prominent when he came to St. Frank's, but like many another junior and senior, faded into obscurity as events brought other boys into eminence. Yakama, who was with Clive Russell, introduced Russell to me although the Japanese boy's rendering of 'Russell' defies repeating since the Japanese have great difficulty with the English "R".

A catering firm was employed for the day which gave the domestics chance to mingle with everybody. Even so, I noticed Mrs. Poulter and Mary Jane Potter, did not stray far from the kitchens.

Nelson Lee's study was full to overcrowding. Sexton Blake and Tinker, Dr. Stafford and his staff, Nipper and Mr. Lennard to say nothing of Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi were there to toast the occasion. I would have liked to have seen Mr. Lee's housekeeper, Mrs. Jones, but probably she preferred to stay in Gray's Inn Road.

Then there were the well-known business names we got to know who had flocked to the school. P.C. Sparrow, Jeremiah Mudford, the village postman, Mr. Sharpe, Bellton's ironmonger, Farmer Holt, who came with some of his farm labourers; Binks, who owned the village tuckshop, Wiggins, porter at Bellton railway station; oh and so many more who belonged to the St. Frank's montage.

Later I was to see the Rev. Goodchild, Mr. Fielding, Dr. Brett and Col. Glenthorne in the Head's study. Space doesn't permit describing all I saw and all whom I met. But the presence of the one-time arch criminal, Professor Cyrus Zingrave, was very surprising! And still more extraordinary were Jake Sharkey, Kennedy Hunter, William K. Smith, Martin Horley, whose dictatorial reign as headmaster at St. Frank's caused a Barring Out, Hugh Trenton, the Comte de Plessigny making an appearance from out of the dim past.

It was an amazing sight to see these infamous characters assembled in Big Hall and hobnobbing with the famous. There were many other figures who, at one time or another, had created disturbance at St. Frank's in that vast assembly, but to name them all would be boring.

I saw Stanley Waldo with his famous father, the Peril Expert, who had crossed swords with Nelson Lee a number of times. And Colonel Clinton - obviously sanity regained - brought back many memories of old St. Frank's.

It was all one big happy family. The Board of Governors, in full attendance, gave the occasion authority. I had the feeling that Sussex was the most peaceful place on Earth, and Bellton its centre.

The visitors explored the class rooms, the studies and everything connected with the school. It was Open House for everybody. The lovely July weather had

given this great mass of people a beautiful day to be followed by a warm, soft evening. The giant firework display on Little Side will be remembered by all for many a day.

When I did get a chance to speak to Nelson Lee about the unexpected and undesirable visitors he told me their reasons why they had come to St. Frank's for this special event.

Those of you who are familiar with the history of St. Frank's will be interested with the reasons given by such names that once highlighted the news items of long ago.

Hugh Trenton, who as headmaster, belonged to a political sect that wanted to change the Curriculum, stated his ideas were a little too early, but the future would prove him right.

William K. Smith, the German-American millionaire, just said ... 'I told you so', and 'look at your countryside now'.

Professor Zingrave, still a striking figure, was a reformed character these days. His past exploits in crime had not lessened Nelson Lee's desire to put the professor 'out of business', but perhaps Zingrave would join forces with Lee and Waldo in trying to fight crime today.

If superlatives will suffice to describe this very extraordinary event at St. Frank's then one word is enough ... Fantastic! For many old friends - and enemies - came to celebrate the sixty years that has passed since St. Frank's became known to the world, and by general request, this famous old College will remain in the hearts of all who love it.

A few juniors who hailed from overseas were represented by their parents or guardians. I saw Yung Li Chang, Yung Ching's father well in evidence. The parents of Herbert Vandyke, the South African junior, and Alec Duncan's father, together with Jerry Dodd's parents from Australia were seen together along with Terrance O'Grady, the Irish junior, who it may be remembered we first met outside a cinema at Marble Arch, London, where these three juniors attended a film showing at the cinema about St. Frank's.

I should add that Alec Duncan comes from New Zealand but wasn't represented by a Maori Haka!

The celebrations went on far into the night and continued the next day. How can I describe that wonderful picture of harmony and jollity. How can I justify in words the many cameos that came to my notice as I wandered among the throngs. To see Eileen Dare in company with Nelson Lee; Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi with Captain Burton ... oh how the memories flooded back. Dear old Dr. Stafford with Mr. Crowell and Mr. Stockdale. Barry Stokes and his wife, aunt to Mary Summers of the Moor View School.

Howard Ridgeway, and his wife, who used to reside at the Mount - afterwards the Moor View School, had travelled from South Africa to visit old friends among whom were some of the juniors.

But there was just one person missing. The most important, the most known and the most loved. Our dear old Edwy Searles Brooks who gave us all those wonderful characters was absent. But I feel sure he was there in spirit.

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FOR SALE: Vol. Christmas Annuals contains "Ally Sloper" and "Judy" items:- "Book Of Comicalities" and "Judy's High Jinks" and Routledges Christmas Annual (1867). Offers to:-

W. WESTWATER

4 BUCKLEY STREET, GLASGOW, G22 6DU.

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Christmas Greetings to Josie Packman, Skipper Eric, Cobber Bert Vernon, Norman Shaw and all Hobbyists. Still wanted: D.W. 221, Bullseye 15, 16, 24, 28, 39, 40, 72, 85, 100, 101; Boys' Mag. 177, 278, 279, 284, 285, 317, 318; U.J. 1052, 1478; S.B.L. third series, 4, 29, 43, 85, 102. Can anyone help?

JOHN BRIDGWATER

20 BAY CRESCENT, SWANAGE, DORSET.

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Each year now I get nostalgic,
Friends name it "geriatric pal" kick,
"Charlie Hamilton" told a tale quick,
Can't help it if I get nostalgic.

Happy Xmas Everyone.

JOHN BURSLEM

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SEASONAL GREETINGS to all fellow hobbyists everywhere. Many thanks to the Officials and Members of Northern O.B.B.C. for another year's interesting programme. Over the year, through the "Collectors' Digest", I have become acquainted with a number of fellow collectors, some of whom I have been privileged to meet. Best Wishes to Miss M. E. G. Harlow, Bert Holmes, John Kirkham, Maurice Hall, Clifford Lettey, Norman Shaw, Laurie Young, Simon Garrett; and, in Australia, John Bartholomew and Eric Wafer.

D. SWIFT, 22 WOODNOOK CLOSE, LEEDS LS16 6PQ.

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Wishing fellow collectors much gentle pleasure from their hobby.

ERIC WAFER

NEWCASTLE, AUSTRALIA.

MRS. BARDELL — AUTHORESS

Some reminiscences as told to John Bridgwater

"I well remember," said Mrs. Bardell, "when in me younger days I was so aspirated to be an authoress. I am quite certain that if Mr. Blake 'ad not been so deep in 'is defections at the time 'e would 'ave seen my novel was a work of geenyus and I might now be livin' the life of a Ruby Mares. But it was not to be and 'oo would 'ave thought that the internment of fate would 'ave been that dear lad Tinker? 'e was such a young varmint in them days, up to all sorts of devilment. I am sure to this day ole Bellzebub 'ad a 'and in it or 'ow would it 'ave come about that Mr. Blake was so unlike 'isself bein' rude and hinsultin' and me 'ittin' 'im over the 'eead with my gamp and knockin' 'im orf 'is chair? Breakin' me brolly over young Tinker arterwards too. A course I didn't know it was them at the time with Mr. Blake despised as Mr. 'udson and Tinker as the orfice boy. I was only a givin' 'em wot for arter the hinsults 'eaped on the 'ead of a poor widder-woman. Mr. Blake sayin' I orter get six munce 'ard labour for writin' me book, when I only arsted for three 'undred pounds, and sayin' a lot o' silly things about brides 'oo won't go 'ome, and girls 'oo drink with duchesses out o' doors, a mockin' me book and sneerin' at a work o' geenyus. Ho yus. 'e reserved every swipe I gived 'im. When I thinks of it I still gets so embossed that I goes 'ot an' cold all over even now.

It was Pedro what started it all, though wy that salacious 'ound should 'owl so every time I read allowed the parrygraphs I 'ad just a written I never will fathom. If 'e 'ad'nt 'owled so loud Tinker wouldn't 'ave 'eard 'im and come to the kitchen door and listened to me a readin' of my latest parrygraphs. I did try to 'ide 'em be'ind me but 'e wormed 'em out. When 'e read some of me book 'e seemed so infected with it, actorly a cryin' over the sad bits I thought, I never suspected 'e would play such a trick on 'is master an' me. Tellin' me to go to Mr. 'udson and take no notice when 'e tried to make me go away but to go on an' read me parrygraphs to 'im whether 'e seemed to like it or not. Young Tinker richly preserved the boxin' of 'is ears 'e got from Mr. Blake arterwards.

'Owever it is very ratifyin' to 'ave me book rekonised for what it is at last and 'ave it dismayed in the glymlight of "The Tory Paper Delectors Digressed". Though I'm quite impolitic meself, I 'ave great pleasure in givin' me intermission to print the best parrygraphs. I'm only sorry the Old Boys won't 'ave the benefit of the deplete work of geenyus."

A reading by Mrs. Bardell from her novel

FROM KITCHEN TO CASTLE

or

The Cook's Crime

by

Martha Bardell

"I begin with the painful interview between the Marquis of Brockletops and the lovely Lady Ermintruder, the marquis bein' the speaker after 'e 'as stuck 'is winder in 'is eye. 'E is leanin' against a marble statyer, 'oldin' a cigar in 'is white and dainty fingers, which 'e manicures after each meal:

'We part to-night, proud lady,' says 'e. "You've been the idol of me 'appy dreams, in which I was basely deceived, knowin' as I do that the butler seen you kissin' and paressin' Lord Vere de Ventimore in the limpid light of the preservatory, beside the great bloomin' horchid. Alas, why was I born? Why did I not germinate this blighted life in hinfancy ere I 'ad come to this carkerin' sorrow? Me 'eart is cracked from top to bottom, bleedin' with pangs of 'orrible anguish. To-night I depart for the wild land of Afrika, there to seek a welcome death by rushin' 'eadlong upon the spears of the Red Injuns, or the bullets of the Turks, and be buried in the shade of an apple-tree.'

And then the beautiful Lady Ermintruder, 'oldin' out 'er arms speaks thus:

'Go not, my noble and 'andsome lover, I deplore you!' she begs. 'Forgive an' forget! Crush me proud spirit if you will, starve me to a skelington, drown me in yon castle moat, 'url me in a frenzy from the 'ighest batterments of me father's incestral abode, but leave - oh, leave me not, else I shall pine like a moultin' bird!'

There should be a picter of Lady Ermintruder just 'ere a showin' 'er gropellin' on 'er knees at the feet of 'er beloved, and a tearin' of 'er craven 'air with one 'and, while with the other she tries to force back the tears that are drippin' like the gurgle of a water-pipe in a tempest.

And thus it was that 'e turned from the 'ome of 'is beloved with an ache at 'is 'eart which 'urt 'im far more than did the pangs of starvation in 'is 'ungry stomach. With 'is eyes as venomous as the eyes of a snake, repraidin' the proud earl's daughter in langwidge that was somethin' awful, 'e waded through the snow, and splashed 'is feet in mud and rain, while the pale dish of the moon looked in pity on 'im, and the torpid rays of the sun scorched the very 'airs on the top of 'is poor 'ead. Sneers curled 'is lips, and in words up 'eaved from the dregs of 'is soul 'e vowed that 'e would never return.

There comes next the part where the 'aughty and stingy Lord of Mongparnassus gives the bad sixpence to the poor and ragged flower-girl at Oxford Circus, from which 'e is in the 'abit of a buyin' 'is mornin' button'ole, a perthetic scene, the man what wouldn't be moved to tears by that 'arrowin' defliction would 'ave a 'eart of stone.

Now we comes to the scene between Liza Jane, the scullery maid, and ole Lord Marmalade Fitzjenaby:

''Ave pity on a poor lone orphan,' Liza says to 'is lordship, on the terrace back of the kitchen, 'and remember what I am! A gulf devides us, deep as the mighty sea! Yet if 'tis true that you love me, my lord, give me your 'authy name, and put a wedding-ring on me finger, and bear me away on a gallopin' steed, like young Lockinbar! Either marry me, or leave me to my lowly duties, of which I'm just as proud as you are of your cornet!'

With that Liza weeps and ole Lord Marmalade laughs, and wears a sneer on 'is lips as 'e turns on 'is 'eel.

Now we comes to the young Duke of Margit, who was 'Enry 'Awkins - a coster - before 'e married the lovely Lady Gingervere, daughter of the ole duke, which was pow 'Enry 'Awkins became the duke 'imself after 'is father-in-law died. Lady Gingervere is sneerin' at 'er 'usband because 'e used to sell winkles in the Whitechapel Road, and the duke is talkin' back with 'is arms folded in 'is manly bosom and a light o' scorn in 'is 'ard blue eyes:

'Is it degradin' ' says 'e, 'to 'ave sold winkles to relieve the pangs of a 'ungry public? No, my Lady Gingervere, far from it. I was a good man then, and as worthy of your love and respect, as I was after I found that mountain of diamonds in Epping Forest, and was benighted at Buckingham Palace, and was sought after by the cream of the upper crust, among which was your noble father, who borrowed ten shillings from me in one breath, and in the next begged me, with tears of sufflication, to be 'is son-in-law and redeem 'is depoverished and morkaged estates from the iron grip of the - ' "

But here the good lady broke off reading.

"I'm sorry" she said, "but I must not over-divulge meself. The children of me brain reach too 'igh a pitch of frenzy in the next parrygraphs. The movin' langwidge o' refined sediments and the true literachoor o' 'uman natur causes the 'eart to bleed and stirs the emulsions to the deepest core. It's not good for the delekit restitutions of the ole Tory Delectors to be deposed for too long to sich severe attacks of litchery talent. Better to cut an' come again than crack the pitcher in the well as the sayin' goes."

Freely adapted from Union Jack No. 432 (Jan. 1912) pages 13 to 16, "The Publisher's Secret" by W. M. Graydon.

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Train of Thought.
by Les. Rowley.

The train, its ancient engine spitting a last sibilant sneer of farewell, clanked its noisy way into whatever nocturnal oblivion awaited it. As with the elegist of old the world was left to darkness and to me. No ticket collector or porter from out the mysterious velvet of the night proclaimed the station's title. Only the cold and silvery fingers of the moon gave me guidance as my footsteps echoed eerily along the wooden platform to where a wicket gate gave sullen access to an outside world.

I had only myself to blame. The Christmas party at my office had been a pleasant affair as it had brought me in touch with friends who were both loved and valued. With each fresh reminiscence the hours had passed unnoticed and, by the time I had made my farewells, the hour was late indeed. At Charing Cross I had hastily made my way through the barrier to board the train that was bound for the Kent coast. As the train trundelled across the bridge and past a darkened Festival Hall, I settled deeper into my corner thankful that the compartment was empty and that I could rest at my ease.

With a start, I had awakened from a doze and looked at my watch. I had slept for over two hours and that meant that Ashford, my destination, had been left far behind. I must get off at the next stop and trust to luck - and a friendly motorist - to carry me to the right address. My choice was a quick but not very intelligent one; a fact on which I soberly reflected as I left the station.

'Station' did I say? It seemed an extravagant title for such a place. By the light of a flashlamp I looked up at the noticeboard by the wicket gate. The paint work had long given up the effort of peeling and most of the lettering was obliterated by the passage of time and the rough hand of nature. What remained read more like 'Southern Railway' than 'Southern Region' but I could not be sure and this was followed by the even more enigmatic legend of "-r-a-d--e". None the wiser from the scrutiny, I turned, and striding on to the road, looked for the comforting sign of headlights.

I found myself standing at the beginning of a village street, a small cluster of tiny shops on either side, the square, squat tower of a Saxon church silently watching like some fond parent over a family of small children. I passed the shuttered windows of dwelling houses and shops as I made my way along the solitary street to where a granite cross gave silent testimony of departed sons. The creaking sign-board of a village inn brought fleeting hope that help or advice might be at hand and I moved closer looking for a tell-tale chink of light behind its mullioned windows. The wind had risen and I gave an involuntary shudder as I made my inspection.

The icy gust had penetrated further than my shiver had proclaimed and now it trespassed through some crack or crevice to disturb the curtain at a lattice causing

a momentary shaft of illumination to pierce the world outside. Whatever the local licensing laws may be, this hostelry enjoyed extensive hours indeed for as I approached the window there came the sound of clicking billiard balls and muffled voices.

Within, the shaded lamps focused their glare on the green baize below. At one end of the table were grouped three youths, one of whom was positioning the cue in his hand ready for his shot whilst his two companions looked on, the purple haze from their cigarettes drifting lazily to the ceiling. In the background a red faced marker was chalking a cue, the shadowy stubble on his jowls outdone only by the deeper shadows round his beery eyes. I lifted my hand and lightly tapped the window pane.

This was not, of course, the first time in my life that I had lightly tapped upon a window although I do not recall tapping on one at such a late hour as this. That tap, soft though it had been, made a startling impact upon the tableaux within! The youth with the cue dropped it with a clatter and, stepping back from the billiard table in surprise, trod on the foot of his friend behind him. From the mouth of the third youth dropped the lighted cigarette he had been smoking, as he stood agape at the interruption. The beery looking marker replaced the cue he had been chalking in its rack and made his way across to my window.

"Who is it? And what do you want at this hour?" The questions came through the now opened window accompanied with the smell of ale and stale tobacco.

"I am a traveller who is anxious to reach Ashford," I replied. "Perhaps you could kindly direct me on my way."

The face before me regarded me with suspicion.

"Sure you are not from the school?" Beyond him I could see the three youths gathering their jackets from where they had been hanging behind the door.

"No. I'm not from the school. Now perhaps you will be civil enough to tell me ---"

"I've had enough of nosey-parkers wasting a feller's time and asking questions just because the young sprigs come here for a spot of fun. Now, look 'ere ---"

"Now you look here," it was my turn to interrupt. "Either you answer me civilly or else I will enquire elsewhere and, at the same time, mention that your premises are being used by persons who appear to be under age. Take your choice!"

"Take your choice 'e says!" The words were addressed to the youths who had been playing but who were now rapidly disappearing through the doorway behind him. "Well, I says to you, you take your 'ook. Threatening a man in his own pub. And if you don't take your 'ook I'll 'elp you on your way."

It was obvious that no help was forthcoming from that gentleman and I did not wait for any. I hurried back to the road just in time to see three shadowy figures jump from the back fence of the inn and skurry away into the dark. In the hope of gaining assistance from them I hastened after them. As I did so, something wet touched my cheek. It was a flake of snow and was followed by several others.

With the possibility of a heavier fall ahead the need for me to reach my destination became more pressing than before.

The painful cobbles of the village street gave way to the smoother, earthier, surface of a country road. Overhead, the leafless branches of the towering trees on either side gave scant shelter from the wintry elements that were becoming even more wintry with each passing moment. Ahead, the footsteps of the three young men were fading into the uncertain sounds of whispering wind and murmuring hedgerow.

I put on what speed I could but there is a great gulf fixed between the ages of seventeen and fifty-seven! The distance between us had lengthened and disconsolately I slackened my pace as my lungs warned me that my temporary burst of speed had to be very temporary indeed. Better to retrace my steps and find help or sanctuary in the village than to proceed further into the dark and unknown! I paused, about to turn on my heel, when in front came the sound, muffled and indistinct, of a cry of pain and of scurrying footsteps. Such a cry, heard on such a lonely road, at such an hour of night, could not be ignored! I took a deep breath and urged myself on to the point from when it had come.

Rounding a bend in the road which was little more than a country lane I spotted a distant beam of light, its rays pointing skywards as though in a vain effort to penetrate the darkness of the heavens. A moment or two later I was kneeling by the side of a moaning figure in the uniform of a police constable, an ugly bruise forming on his forehead as I examined him by the light of his bullseye lantern that I had recovered from where it had fallen. Gradually the moaning was replaced by sounds of a more coherent nature.

"Villains! Turning on a chap what's only doing his duty! Ow! My aching 'ead. Three of 'em there was, but I'd have had 'em if I could have got 'old of my truncheon! Ow! Wow!"

I helped him, still complaining, to his feet although his 'plaints were now more of anger than of pain I imagined. I fielded his helmet which had fallen some distance away and he gingerly tried to replace it on his swollen head. The effect was to render him a slightly tipsy looking figure that I felt I had seen somewhere before.

He was steadier after a while and asked me if I had seen three men on the road before he had been attacked. I told him of the three youths whom I had followed from the village inn and he listened with increasing interest to my description of them.

"Them's three young rascals from the School," he exclaimed with conviction. "Well known to visit the Cross Keys they are, but no-one's ever caught them afore this. I reckon our next stop is at the School, so if you'll just come with me -----"

"But I have to reach Ashford," i protested. "I shall be missed and people will be worried. Can't you just take my address and -----"

"Now, come on, sir. It won't take you long and its best you see the young varmints whilst your memory is still fresh. It's only half mile to the School -----"

He had a point, of course, but I wasn't too free in admitting it. The snow, that had begun gently falling earlier, had now increased in persistence and density and was already beginning to lay a blanket of white on field and furrow. Reluctantly I followed in the footsteps of his regulation boots as they crunched their way onward.

The constable at my side told me that his name was Tozer and that he had been making his way home from the preserves of the Popper Court estate where he had been on the watch for poachers. I gathered that the owner of that estate was a local magistrate and, though not held in esteem, held rather in awe by this particular representative of the law.

It was obvious that some of the pain and shock of the recent attack was fading but anger against his attackers was not. The penalties that Mr. Tozer wished upon his assailants were certainly not those that would be prescribed by any present day court unless boiling in oil or flogging with the cat had been re-introduced into the penal system. Doubtless his outpourings brought him some relief for it was in a more cheerful voice that he proclaimed that we had reached the School ... and before me lay huge wrought iron gates supported on either side by pillars of stone.

P.C. Tozer gave an energetic tug at the ancient bell-pull set into one of those silent sentinels of grey as I shook the snow from the collar of my coat before it could find a watery way down the back of my neck. The moments passed and my companion repeated his assault on the bell-pull before there was any response, and the flickering light from a storm lantern heralded the approach of a rudely awakened school porter.

He was crusty of visage and fixed us with a far from friendly eye. The gnarled hand that held the lantern aloft, the wrinkled face that glared at us, indicated that the bloom of youth had departed long ago.

"Fine time of night to fetch a man from his bed. 'Aven't you no bed to go to, Tozer?" he complained.

"You open up, Bill Gosling, I want to see the 'ead, immejiate. I been attacked by some young rascals from the School and this gent 'ere is my witness, and we don't want to stand 'ere arguing all night, so get a move on."

Opening the massive gate, his hoary voice still complaining in chorus with the creaking hinges, Gosling waved us in with his lantern, and muttering led us onward into the gloom. I could make out the dim outline of a grey mass of building and here and there the shape of buttress and arch was etched with a lining of snow. The porter paused before a porch of a building set well away from the rest.

"You sure you want to disturb the 'Ead?" he enquired.

"Just you get on with it and not keep a feller waiting." P.C. Tozer was displaying an impatience that I felt justified in sharing as we waited for the Headmaster to put in his appearance. The cold was penetrating to the bone and I certainly did not want to spend the rest of the night listening to an extended Tozer/Gosling dialogue ..."

At last the front door opened and we were confronted by a figure that looked dignified even in the dressing gown that shrouded the Headmaster's elderly frame. It was obvious that he was most perturbed at being disturbed at such an hour and, as

he listened to Tozer's catalogue of woes, the expression on Dr. Locke's face became more concerned than ever.

We were invited indoors and installed in a well appointed and comfortable sitting room. The good Doctor excused himself for a few moments and soon returned bearing a bowl of water, a towel and a soothing antiseptic with which he dressed the constable's damaged brow. Once the bruised Tozer was attended to the Headmaster courteously asked after my well-being, and kindly allowed me to telephone my friends at Ashford.

"I understand, Mr. Tozer," said the Doctor, "that you did not actually see one of my boys throw the stone at you; and I understand, sir," he continued, turning to me, "that you were not present at the precise moment the attack was made."

I nodded assent. Mr. Tozer contented himself with a rather indignant grunt.

"In that case I find it difficult to accept that any Greyfriars boy was involved in the attack on you constable. Perhaps you should widen your area of enquiries. At this time of night, however -----"

"Exactly, Dr. Locke," I interposed, "there will be very few persons abroad at this time of the night, and the only three that were abroad were seen by PC Tozer and myself. He is convinced that they came from the School and I, too, think that very probable. I am also in a position to identify them as being present at the "Cross Keys" an establishment that I am sure does not have your approval."

"Most assuredly not!"

"Then would it not be a simple thing for Tozer and I to see the School in Hall tomorrow morning after prayers. The constable must be as much in need of sleep as I am so there is no reason for us to presume on your time any longer."

The Headmaster agreed but insisted that the constable should be sent home in his car.

"And you, sir, will allow me to offer you a bed for what remains of the night. No, I insist ... absolutely no trouble at all. Now, a nightcap before we all retire."

Long after Dr. Locke had shown me to my room and I had sunk into the comfort of blanket and pillow I turned over in my mind the events of the last few hours. Three young rascals somewhere within the school precincts were probably doing the same. I wondered who they would turn out to be; but deep within me I fancied I already knew!

Wintry sunshine, reflected by the covering snow, greeted me when I awoke. As I looked from the bedroom window I could see the tall, grey school buildings beyond the avenue of stately elms. Rising bell, if it had sounded had done so long ago and unheard by me. I hastily completed what I could of my improvised toilet and presented myself at the breakfast table.

"This is the last day of term," Dr. Locke advised me when we had reached the coffee and toast, "and there will be a term-end assembly in Hall at eleven. Mr. Tozer will join us shortly beforehand and I would be grateful if you would both

take up a vantage point near the Hall doors."

This meant that I had nearly two hours to kill and I could think of no better way of murdering time than to looking round the School. The Headmaster thought that, as there were no lessons that day, one of the masters would agree to giving me a kind of conducted tour. He excused himself from this chore as he would be busy on other matters but he arranged for the Fifth Form master - a Mr. Prout - to do the honours, and that gentleman duly arrived at the Head's house to take me in tow as it were.

Mr. Prout turned out to be a rather portly pedant with an extensive vocabulary of polysyllabic words and he put me in mind of an over-dignified version of Dicken's Mr. Pickwick. He rolled rather than walked, yet there was a certain majesty in that roll and no Caesar had ever progressed in his official toga and laurel wreath as Mr. Prout now did in mortar board and gown! He was verbose and revelled in his verbosity and there were few pauses in the flow and those were for him to regain his breath rather than for me to reply. This gentleman obviously preferred monologue to dialogue when he was taking active part. Let me hasten to add - lest the reader consider me ungrateful - that Mr. Prout was a kindly man. He could not have been more solicitous in his enquiring if I had ever visited the Rocky Mountains, even before I had realised the sudden turn his conversation had taken. He had in younger days, he assured me, been responsible for the sudden demise of many a grizzly bear.

The Fifth Form master and his obsession with bygone bears of happy memory was rapidly becoming something of a bore when there came a sudden and - from my point of view - welcome interruption. A group of boys nearby were engaged in the harmless pursuit of snowballing each other and it was pleasing to observe that a senior boy was joining in. Mr. Prout, who had also become aware of this pleasant scene, paused in mid-speech as he saw that the juniors had now playfully tripped their elder in the snow and were now spiritedly rolling him in it.

I smiled an understanding smile for I had been young myself once - in those dear, dead, days beyond recall. There was no such reaction on Mr. Prout's part; no gentle smile found expression on his rotund visage! The wrath of Achilles, to Greece the direful spring of woes unnumbered was nothing to that which now found expression on the Proutian countenance! The master approached the little group, his brow darkened in a cloud of thunder.

"Cave you fellows, it's Prout!"

"The Proutfullness is terrific!"

At this warning the juniors, like the guests in Macbeth, vanished with no order in their going. Left behind was the senior boy, half buried in snow. It was to this unfortunate that Mr. Prout now addressed himself.

"Upon my word! Is it possible that this is Coker of my form? Are you so lost to the sense of dignity of a senior boy, Coker, so removed from propriety as to engage in horseplay with junior boys? Answer me, Coker ---"

Yurrggh!! Grooogh! G-g-g-glugg!

Apparently some of the snow had gone down the wrong way, but if Coker was

bereft of speech Mr. Prout wasn't! He continued unabated, indeed for a while it seemed that he would emulate Tennyson's brook and go on for ever.

"Unprecedented in my career of a schoolmaster, Coker! Even from you I would have expected some modicum of decorum; some regard for the rightness of things. Had this been other than the last day of term, Coker, I would have awarded you a Georgic. I am displeased, extremely displeased. I warn you, Coker, that I shall have my eye upon you! Any repetition next term of such unseemly conduct will call upon you the most severe, the most condign, of punishment. Go and tidy yourself, sir. You are a disgraceful state! Go, I say!"

"Look here, sir," the burly Fifth former had resumed the perpendicular and stood indignantly facing Mr. Prout. "Look here, sir," he repeated, "I was only teaching those cheeky young fags -----"

"Not a word, Coker! Return to the House this instant lest I be tempted - against all allowance for your cross stupidity - to take you to the Form room and cane you. Now go!"

For a moment I thought that Coker would defy his form master, but something in the latter's expression warned him that Prout might just be as good as his word. With a snort, Coker deprived us of his company; but long after he had disappeared from sight it was clear that he had caused the master of the Fifth much displeasure - in fact almost as much displeasure as he had granted me welcome relief!

We resumed our promenade but it was some minutes before the grizzly bears of North American featured in the booming and fruity tones of Mr. Prout. Fortunately, another interruption was not long delayed.

"----- there I lay, wounded and bleeding, in what I can only call a sub-zero temperature. My faithful Winchester, its barrel half buried in the drifting snow, was well beyond my reach. I opened my mouth to cry ---"

Whiz!

"Why? W-w-what? Upon my word!"

Every bullet has its billet, and the snowball despatched with unerring aim from sources unknown found its target, knocking the mortar board from Prout's head leaving his bald patch glistening in the wintry sun. A splatter of snow drifted down the fat features and lodged in the top of his gown. There came the sound of hurriedly departing footsteps as the master of the Fifth struggled to regain his composure.

"Did you see that, sir? An unprovoked attack on a member - a senior member - of the Staff! He must be discovered - flogged - expelled. Last day of term though it be, that rascal, that that miscreant must be discovered. Can you by any chance describe him?"

"I am sorry, sir, but I was too engrossed in your interesting account to observe much else. There is, however, another gentleman - a master like yourself - walking this way who may be able to help you."

The gentleman in question was as lean in his appearance as Prout was fat;

sharp of feature as Prout was flabby! He did not look a happy man, and spared me the briefest, the iciest, of nods as the suffering Prout addressed him.

"Hacker! I have, as you see, been subjected to an outrageous attack - a dastardly and outrageous attack. Possibly you observed the boy responsible, if so please give me his name!"

"With pleasure, my dear Prout," a fleeting smile came to Mr. Hacker's mean features but it was not a nice smile. "I caught a glimpse of him as he ran from the cover of the cloisters. His name is Vernon-Smith!"

"Vernon-Smith?"

"Precisely, sir! And I may add that the act is very much in keeping with his character - in keeping with his flouting of the School rules - in keeping with ---"

"Vernon-Smith! A Remove boy! A member of Quelch's form! A boy from a form the master of which has refused, not once, but many times the advice and counsel of a senior master and more experienced colleague. Very well! Very well, indeed! Let us see what he now has to say regarding this unprecedented outrage!"

"Quelch does not encourage complaints regarding the boys of his form," interjected Hacker bitterly.

"I think, Hacker, I think that he will have no alternative - no alternative at all - but to take notice in this instance. I shall see him at once, and I ask that you, Hacker, will accompany me to bear witness." Prout turned toward me.

"You will excuse me, my dear sir! I will have a prefect show you to the Masters' Commons where I will join you so that we may resume our interesting, most interesting discourse." The Fifth form master looked beyond me and called out to someone passing behind me.

"Loder! Loder, pray oblige me by escorting this gentleman to the Staff Common Room. Mr. Hacker and I have urgent business with Mr. Quelch. I will see you again, sir." With a nod Prout turned and, in company with Hacker, made his way in the direction of the House. I turned to face Loder and, as I did so, there came recognition that was both mutual and instant. Here was one of the youths that I had observed the previous night. One of the three that Tozer and I were later to identify. Loder's face blanched.

"I see you remember me, Master Loder," I said coldly. "Doubtless P. C. Tozer, the unfortunate subject of your brutal attack, will remember you in his turn. I am sure that ---"

Loder looked at me in terror.

"For heaven's sake listen to me. We never meant to hurt Tozer, just to knock his lantern from his hand so that he could not see us. My aim was wild - wild, I tell you. I give you my word of honour ---"

"Tell me, Master Loder, how am I to assess the word of honour of someone who disgraces his school by visiting a disreputable tavern at dead of night and then

injures a policeman to avoid detection?"

"Think what you like about a chap and his friends having a little game at an inn after lights out. Have you never kicked over the traces? Have you never ---"

"I have certainly never attacked a police constable on a lonely road and left him stunned and bruised," I retorted. "I will tell you this, though, Master Loder! Although I have never done such a cowardly thing I know what to expect if I had. The police take a serious view of attacks on their colleagues - a view that is fully shared by magistrates and others. A view that will consider Borstal a better environment for you than Greyfriars!"

"But, I tell you I didn't intend to hurt Tozer. Ask my friends -----"

The Sixth former's voice was almost frenzied in its entreaty as, almost automatically, we made our way toward the House. I found myself contemplating the reasons why Dr. Locke had appointed such an unsavoury specimen to the responsible status of prefect; there didn't seem many to contemplate!

"Please think of the disgrace - my family will suffer too! My future will be in shreds; my life in ruins -- I ask you to remain silent! Give me a chance!"

I looked at him without pity. I had not witnessed the incident in which Tozer had been stunned so could not offer evidence on that point. I could only aver that I had seen him and his two cronies at the "Cross Keys" shortly before-hand and, whilst I could not condone the breaking of bounds, it was really no concern of mine. Loder did not know what was passing through my mind, of course! I decided to let him stew a little longer in the juice that was of his own concoction. He had, at least convinced me that he had not intended to hurt Tozer. Intended or not, Tozer had been hurt which he would not have been if Loder had not been playing the blackguard.

We had reached the House and Loder guided me to the Masters' Common Room. I settled myself in a deep and comfortable armchair and turned gratefully to the fire burning brightly in the grate. I looked up at Loder as he was about to appeal to me again.

"Save your breath, Loder," I advised. "It was a rotten thing that you did but I am inclined to accept what you have said about the attack. I shall consider the matter further and will, therefore, promise nothing now. Get out of my sight! You make me rather sick!"

With a last appealing look, Loder left me to my thoughts and the cosy fireside.

Tap!

It was some moments later when that tap came upon the old oaken door. I did not answer for I felt that it was not up to me to bid anyone enter. I remained in my high backed chair as the door quietly opened.

"Oh! Good!" The utterance was more in a squeak than a voice and was followed by stealthy footsteps crossing the carpeted room to where the telephone stood on a little table. I raised myself and looked over the back of the chair prepared to announce my presence before the visitor started speaking on the 'phone.

My gaze beheld an extensive pair of large checked trousers, an equally extensive jacket covering the extensive form of a very fat boy. As he lifted the telephone he gave a peculiar cough and began speaking in an entirely different way to the one he had used when he had entered the room.

"Get me Wimford double three two," he requested in the tones of a boy but these were stronger, more developed than his own.

"Hello. Is that Wells? Master Harry here, Wells! Please tell my uncle and aunt that one of my friends will be arriving earlier than myself and the rest of us! Yes, that's right. It's my special guest, Bunter, and he will need looking after. Inky and I come on from Bob Cherry's place in a day or two. What d'you mean Wells? Of course my uncle doesn't know, that's why I'm asking you to tell him, fathead. By the way, Bunter will be pretty famished after his journey so see that there is a good meal waiting - say a chicken or two, a cake - a large one, some fruit -----"

There came a slight sound and turning my head I could see another figure in the doorway. This time it was a master, tall and wiry of form, whose eyes and pince-nez glittered in the direction of the fat youth at the 'phone. This gentleman came slowly into the room and, as he did so, removed the cane which he carried under his arm down into hand. The look on his face was rather less than encouraging! Meanwhile, the fat youth prattled on.

"--- a box of Turkish Delight, some chocs, maybe a date or two ---"

"Bunter!" The voice this time was deep but not loud. It was not without effect!

"Oh lor'!" Bunter spun round with all the speed and elegance of a galvanised outsize teetotum, the earpiece of the telephone dropping from his hand. The master leaned forward and recovered it, at the same time speaking into the mouthpiece.

"Who is that? Oh! Wells! Quite so! I have to inform you, Wells, that you have been subjected to trickery. No! It was not Wharton on the telephone! Yes, this is Mr. Quelch --- As I was saying, Wells, the last caller was not Wharton at all. Another boy had the effrontery to impersonate Wharton - an escapade that I venture to predict he will not attempt to repeat! Pray give my compliments to Colonel and Miss Wharton and tell them that I shall attend to the matter. Goodbye!"

Master and pupil faced each other and as it seemed certain that something painful - extremely painful - was about to follow I gave a cough to indicate my presence.

Mr. Quelch turned in surprise, the cane - half raised - was slowly lowered. I introduced myself and explained how I came to be in the Common Room. Mr. Quelch smiled and graciously shook me by the hand.

"Dr. Locke has spoken to me about you, sir, and has told me to let you know that Police Constable Tozer has arrived and it would be appropriate if you would join him in the main doorway to the Hall."

I nodded and left the room. As I did so ----

"M-m-may I go now, sir?"

"No Bunter, you may not go. You may bend over and touch your toes. I am going to punish you severely, Bunter, not only for improper use of the telephone - for which your father will be duly billed -----"

"Oh! lor' "

"--- but also for perpetrating such a hoax for personal gain. I shall inform Wharton of this deception and shall counsel him to ensure that you do not resort to similar subterfuge. Now bend over that chair!"

As I made my way down the passage there came the sound like the beating of a carpet to the accompaniment of a series of fiendish yells that were harrowing in the extreme!

I left the side of the House and made my way round the Quadrangle in the direction of Hall, the main doors of which were at some distance. I gazed around me with interest, looking up at the clock tower, its dome covered with snow like some gigantic Christmas cake. Further away, the broken line of the ruined cloisters and in the distance the crumbling masonry of the priory tower. To my left, beyond the frozen fountain and the founder's statue that was its centre piece, rose the taller buildings of the Chapel and the Gymnasium. The School tuck shop, with its bow window of mullioned glass, seemed to slumber in the frosty morning sun. It was a picture that would have enhanced any Christmas card. I took a pace or two forward to get a better view, my eyes still on the distant prospect.

At that moment the earth seemed to slip from beneath my feet. I had stepped inadvertantly on one of those 'slides' at which schoolboys are past masters in the art of the making. I tried vainly to regain my balance and my efforts seemed only to add to the impetus at which I was travelling. The Greyfriars scene rushed by at umpteen miles per hour as I travelled on that slide, until suddenly one of my feet met an obstacle and I found myself describing a very imperfect summersault. For one fleeting moment the sky, the buildings and the ground whirled together in one conflicting circle.

There came a bump and oblivion!

"He is stirring. Can you raise his head a little?"

"Take it easy, old chap, and have a sip of this."

Dimly the voices came to me, trying to register themselves over the pain of an excruciating headache.

I tried to struggle to my feet but my knees gave way. Two gentlemen, one on either side, gave me support by holding me firmly under the arms. Around us the snow lay in abundance and a multitude of flakes were lazily drifting downward to thicken the carpet on which I had fallen. Light from the headlamps of a car shone on our little group but, beyond the rays, the dark of night reached in.

"You've had quite a knock, sir," one of my companions observed. "The ground is quite treacherous now that the snow has hidden the ice beneath. It was lucky that we saw you, but have another sip of brandy and we'll try and get you in the

car."

The spirit warmed and fortified me against the cold that seemed to saturate my clothing, but my head was simply swimming in pain as I tried to re-assemble my reeling thoughts.

"For where were you making? I'm sure that my son will drive you to your destination. Most certainly you are in no state to walk and there are no buses at this time of day. Of course, in the old days, there was always the late train ..."

Recollection came dimly to my aid.

"That's how I came - by train!"

"But, my dear sir, that's just not possible!"

"I don't understand." I passed my hand over my burning forehead. "I came on the midnight train from Charing Cross. I'm on my way to Ashford but, dozing in the train, I must have found that I had left that station behind and tried to alight at this one. Perhaps I lost my balance and fell."

Father and son exchanged curious looks.

"I think that we had better run you into the local cottage hospital and get them to have a look at you. That bump may have caused more harm than we know. In any case, it won't do any harm to make sure and then they can contact any relatives or friends for you."

It was but a short run to the hospital and my newly made friends waited until I had been examined and X-rayed. The doctor was coolly re-assuring. I had had a bad knock but they would keep me in for the night - or what remained of it - to make certain.

The next day my friends from Ashford called to collect me, at my request, bringing with them a bottle of brandy which I wished to give to my Samaritans of the night before. They had left their address and I wished to call and thank them appropriately for coming to my aid.

On the way we had to pass the spot at which I had been found and we stopped the car to take a brief look round. We were not alone: a solitary figure leaned against the parapet of the railway bridge and turned as we came up. We stood by his side and, looking over, saw at a short distance the small buildings of a country station - which was just what I expected to find! True, even at that distance, the atmosphere of neglect came reaching out to us from rotting wood and rusted railings; from sightless windows and boarded doorways: but it was what was <u>not</u> there that registered most.

Between the platforms, where once had gleamed the metals of polished steel held fast in their serried ranks of wooden sleepers, lay nothing but tangled weed and foliage. Unbelievingly, I turned away.

"To look at it now," a voice said by my side, "you wouldn't think that this was once one of the most beautiful stretches of railway line in the county, would you?"

It was the chap who had been leaning on the bridge when we arrived. My friends were already moving back to the car but it would have been rude to have ignored the remarks of a friendly stranger.

"What do they call this place?" I enquired.

"Briardene," he replied.

I thanked him and went to join my friends. There was relief in my heart and eagerness in my stride. Friardale must be further up the line - not this one, but a real one. One where the tracks still carried the local train from Courtfield, the happy chatter of schoolboys echoing from its third class carriages as they returned from vacation or left for their homes at end of term. To Friardale where laughter and adventure began and where School reigned supreme.

It had been silly of me to suppose that Briardale station had received me the night before. It must have been Friardale. When my head was clearer I would be able to reason things out. Meanwhile, home with my friends for Christmas.

The snow had begun to fall again.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

AFTER 45 YEARS COLLECTING certain comics still elude me! Your price: "Lilley & Skinner"; "Merry Moments"; "Up-to-Date"; All Ranson comics; "Frolix"; "Film Picture Stories"; "Flash" (Camden); "Okay"; "Wags"; " 'Arry's Budget"; "Extra Fun"; "Christmas"; Tabloid Soloways; "Merry Miniatures"; "Wizard Midget"; also pre-war newspaper supplements - "Oojah Sketch"; "Bristol Evening World"; and Free gifts.

DENIS GIFFORD

80 SILVERSALE, LONDON, S.E.26.

= =

WANTED: Howard Baker Volumes, "Billy Bunter's Christmas" and "The Joker of Greyfriars". Also Howard Baker Special Number Three "The Making Of Harry Wharton".

MRS. C. R. BRETTELL

53 ROSS HEIGHTS, ROWLEY REGIS, WARLEY, WEST MIDLANDS.

= =

WANTED: Bunter hardbacks, Billy Bunter and Blue Mauritus, Bunter's Bolt, Bunter's Out of Bounds, Bunter To Rescue, Bunter's Beanfeast, Bessie Bunter Of Cliffe House School, also A Strange Secret (Museum Press).

ATKINSON, 20 CARLISLE TERRACE, BRADFORD.

Telephone 493845.

THE MAYNARD SERIES

by G. W. MASON

The smalliest and perhaps costliest - at today's prices - of Greyfriars series is the Maynard issue of 12 trade cards, in colour, which were probably produced by Teofaric & Co., the suppliers to Maynards of this type of material before the last war.

As I recall no mention of these items, at least in the Collectors' Digest, I quote them as listed in a Cartophilic reference book:

1. "Billy Bunter Scores"
2. "Billy Bunter Spoofs Gosling"
3. "Bob Cherry annoyed with Snoop"
4. "The Bounder astonished his Clubmates"
5. "Bunter Bumped"
6. "Bunter receives a Postal Order"
7. "Fish at last makes good"
8. "Harry Wharton surprises the Head"
9. "Initiation of the new boy"
10. "Penfold the Poet makes a rhyme"
11. "Raiding the Locker"
12. "Wharton's great finish in the Marathon"

Item No. 10, the only card of this series in my possession, depicts an eton-clad Dick Penfold seated at a study table, illustrative of the 1920's or even earlier, in accordance with the earlier Chapman style, emulated from his predecessor in the Magnet. The heavy metal inkwell on Penfold's table is reminiscent of the type I first used when I started as a Junior Clerk in 1920 at William Cubitt's City office in Abchurch Lane, E. C.

WHAT DID THEY DO IN THE WARS, DADDY?

by MARY CADOGAN

'Let them do as they like! They sha'n't see
us show the white feather.'

(Tom Merry, Gem 349)

Today's nostalgic interest in the two World Wars is not difficult to understand. Each of these seemed to mark a schism between the accepted way of life that preceded it and the challenge of a dramatically changing social structure which grew in its aftermath. In hundreds of thousands of 'ordinary' people wartime experiences brought out remarkable expressions of courage and self-sacrifice, as well as a wry and dogged sense of humour. These qualities, however, developed at the cost of the disappearance of a certain kind of personal and collective innocence; and a great deal of war nostalgia probably arises from our desire to recapture this. Surely we could do so in no better way than by considering how the characters in our favourite old papers acquitted themselves during these two major wars.

There is not sufficient space to write about the fictional boy heroes of Chums, the Captain and the Boys' Own Paper, many of whom were inspired by their O.T.C. activities to leave school prematurely in order to get into the trenches without delay during the 1914-1918 war. Neither is it possible to deal adequately with the aviation epics of Captain W. E. Johns and G. E. Rochester. The exploits of flying aces - of both sexes - in juvenile fiction would demand at least an article to themselves. Both Johns and Rochester, of course, made colourful contributions to the Modern Boy in the 1930's, and the Northcliffe boys' papers in fact produced an enormous variety of stories with war settings. These ranged from tussels of a psychological nature between Sexton Blake and the Kaiser to topical buffooning by Bunter and Coker, and ironically entertaining patriotic endeavours by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was also plenty of youthful heroism.

Northcliffe's early conviction that Britain's security was threatened by Germany gave his writers lavish scope for stories of espionage and intrigue long before the Great War began. They took their cue from Erskine Children's THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS (1903) and William Le Queux's THE INVASION OF 1910 (in which, of course, Germany invaded Britain through the pages of the 'Daily Mail' in gripping serialization). British unpreparedness was always the horrifying theme invasion stories appeared between 1906 and 1914 in the "Boys' Friend", "Boys' Herald", 'Magnet' and 'Gem'.

However the most intriguing pre-war stories about Britain's vulnerability to German attack were one or two Union Jack stories featuring Sexton Blake. Conflicts of will between super-sleuth and German Emperor make satisfying reading. Blake during his long career had sometimes to help out British Intelligence:

'Time after time had he been called upon by his country
to perform some deed of necessity, and time after time

A 40,000-Word Novel for Readers of All Ages.

Vol. XI. No. 271 New Series.] [Every Friday

THE KAISER'S MISTAKE.

A STIRRING STORY OF

SEXTON BLAKE, DETECTIVE,

AND A GREAT POLITICAL CRISIS.

SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR THIS ISSUE.

Photo] H.I.M. THE KAISER [Voigt.

had he braved death in order to accomplish his mission'.

Such missions were likely to take him as far afield as Paris, Vienna, Moscow, Constantinople, and of course to various locations in Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm is portrayed as being shrewd and competent, but happily no match for Sexton Blake. My favourite of their encounters is THE CASE OF THE NAVAL MANOEUVRES by Norman Goddard, in 1908. Blake spots the Kaiser, in a German airship, observing British North Sea naval exercises; realizing that the Emperor's presence and spying activities might spark off a war between Britain and Germany, Blake removes the Kaiser from the scene, and conveys him to London. Imperial majesty suffers some nasty knocks. The Kaiser manages to elude Blake and to scramble on to the roof of the train, where the detective finds him in an undignified position, and has to overcome him in physical combat. And, before he eventually admits the horrors of personal ambition that might 'throw a nation into bloody strife', the Kaiser undergoes kidnapping by anarchists who - but for Blake's intervention - would have killed him. By the end of the adventure the Emperor is somewhat subdued. Not for the first time he offers Blake the position of Head of the German Secret Service, which Blake of course spiritedly declines. Regrettably the Kaiser doesn't stick to his undertaking to the detective to behave more pacifically in the future, and Blake has to be called in to deal again with his lust for international power only a few months later in THE KAISER'S MISTAKE.

In this story by D. H. Parry, who was notable for his historical children's adventures, Kaiser Wilhelm has embarked on a daring scheme of annexing Turkey and other Balkan states, and marching on Paris. Sexton Blake traces the Emperor to the hunting lodge hideout of the Baron Schnitzel-Kammer in the Black Forest. He is cordially received, and the Kaiser is represented as engagingly wholehearted:

> '"We have done very well" said the Emperor in his brusque, good-humoured way. "Thirteen wild boar and eleven stags. Not so bad, my friend - eh?" '

But of course the Kaiser cannot annexe countries as lightly as he bags wild game. Once more he is on the brink of plunging Europe into war! He acknowledges his mistake, and despatches Blake to put it right. There is a lovely vignette in this story of Blake, Tinker and Pedro setting off by the Orient Express on their extremely diplomatic Balkan mission.

Pedro and Tinker, in their different ways, were as patriotic as Sexton Blake. In THE REFUGEE, a G. H. Teed story which appeared in the Union Jack soon after the outbreak of war, Tinker is temporarily commissioned, and leads an impressive cavalry charge against a German firing squad that is just about to execute Blake. A little earlier Pedro, limping and bleeding, has broken through the German lines carrying some documents which will be of tremendous value to the Allies.

Nelson Lee and Nipper too could put down German opponents with conviction. The wartime setting of E. S. Brooks's TWENTY FATHOMS DEEP (1915) enhanced the atmosphere of adventure and suspense at which he excelled. Nipper and Lee are trying to retrieve secret plans for a new British weapon from a sunken launch: so too are some ruthless enemy agents, who capture Nipper, drug him and put him in the

path of an express train. (Happily he revives for a few seconds - long enough to emit the whistled-code-danger-signal that brings Lee to his rescue in the nick of time.) There is a nice touch of British fair play in this story. When the Germans are preparing to dive Lee would like to prevent them by fist-to-fist combat - but distance prevents this. As he explains to Nipper, '"Of course we could level our revolvers this very minute, and drop the scoundrels where they stand, but that isn't the British way. It's too cold-blooded ..."'

Fair play - as well as a sense of proportion - is evident in many of Charles Hamilton's stories. He was, of course, extremely patriotic, but in a climate of anti-German fanaticism that even persuaded some people to have their pet daschunds destroyed, he maintained a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' Germans. Herr Gans, the rather pathetic Greyfriars German master, is persecuted on more than one occasion by some of the meaner spirits of the Remove, and Skinner is particularly obnoxious in this respect. Herr Gans is devastated when he finds a drawing of himself dressed as a German soldier, and impaling a baby on a bayonet: '"I veep mit shame tat men of Cherman blood shall do tose tings."' However he is allowed to demonstrate his almost British decency by intervening on behalf of his persecutors to save them from a Head's flogging, and also to prevent the much deserved expulsion of Skinner.

In several intensely patriotic wartime stories Hamilton sent embezzlers, petty criminals and other 'weedy, frowsting rotters' to the front where they obliterated past misdemeanours by uncharacteristically covering themselves in glory. Leading Greyfriars and St. Jim's juniors, too, proved their courage on numerous occasions when they skirmished with the enemy. Early in the war Harry Wharton, as well as Peter Todd and Herbert Vernon Smith, are LOOKING FOR ALONZO, who has managed to get stranded in Europe. This is really rather a gruesome episode: the juniors, with their usual resourcefulness, have little difficulty in getting behind the German lines. The Bounder and Toddy are captured, and almost executed. When they are saved by the intervention of French troops they witness a great deal of shooting and bayoneting of German soldiers. The juniors also meet another depressing sight of war - the long trail of dispirited refugees, 'peasants with laden hand-carts and heavy bundles'. In LOOKING FOR ALONZO there are some cynical appraisals by Hamilton of Britain's allies, as well as some neutrals. The French civilians are always only too ready to make easy money out of the British - overcharging them shamelessly for food, transport, etc. Vernon Smith tells Toddy confidently that the Germans 'can smash up the French, but it's a rather tougher job to smash up Tommy Atkins'. These disillusioned reflections, it should be remembered, take place very early on in the war; and when eventually the Greyfriars juniors manage to get to Switzerland they are once again exploited, this time by smug neutrals.

Hamilton's irony found more acceptable expression later, in stories which debunked the hypocrisy of politicians and other non-combatants who spent a lot of energy and fervour in exhorting other people to be prepared to lay down their lives for their country. It is, in fact, in stories of St. Jim's rather than Greyfriars that Hamilton so adeptly tackles the theme of vicarious recruitment. THE ST. JIM'S RECRUIT (1915) is one of his most intriguing wartime stories, as it combines

sincere patriotism with ironic dismissal of heroic humbug. There is a sparkling scene in which Mr. Railton decides to deliver a recruiting speech to the crowd at a local football match. (Such speeches were common practice in the First World War before the introduction of conscription.) Of course Railton is eloquent, but so also is Benny, a saucy young artisan. They indulge in a lively exchange, in which Benny persuades the St. Jim's master to practise what he is preaching. Mr. Railton's doubts - '"I have no training. If I should apply for a Commission I should be refused"' - are firmly dealt with by Benny: '"Was you recommending me to apply for an officer's job, Sir? ... And can't you go as a private if I does?"' Of course schoolmaster and carpenter leave the football ground together to enlist, to everyone's satisfaction.

Hamilton's wartime stories are unusually discerning, especially when compared with some other popular fiction - both adult and juvenile - of the period. Many Magnet adventures were amusing, but less subtle than those of the Gem. Bunter of course behaves characteristically throughout. He talks sometimes in inflated terms about British soldiers' heroism: 'Through Mud and Blood' is the title of a short story which he writes for a competition, and this sums up his assessment of the war. Bunter is not anxious to make any sacrifices for the war effort when tuck is involved, and he is taken to task for unpatriotic gorging by indignant Removites in BUNTER'S ANTI-TUCK CAMPAIGN (1915). He is paraded uncermoniously around the quad,

" You want me to be bombed, and gassed, and blown to bits, you beast ! " howled Bunter. " If you kick me again, I'll—yaroop ! " Half-dressed, the fat junior rolled out into the gallery, with the help of Harry Wharton's foot.

bearing a placard which invites all and sundry to throw something at him for being a 'prize hog'. The Fat Owl's revenge is a pretended fast, in which nearly all his form-mates feel compelled to join; but Bunter, of course, has no intention of going hungry, and has access to secret supplies of food, which his fellow-fasters only discover when they are almost famished.

Coker enlivens the nation's war effort in various ways. In COKER THE JOKER he has the dreadful inspiration of becoming a comedian, to alleviate people's irritation at food shortages, etc. His facetious jokes certainly do not go down well at Greyfriars; and when he decides to cheer up the villages in the 'margarine and bacon queues' the outcome is even less successful. His smug reassurances, and well-fed, well-clothed appearance infuriate his hard-up captive audience, and 'a big bargee' knocks Coker down and hurls him into a water trough.

This story, by the way, includes an entertaining reference to Mr. Prout, who is badly hit by food restrictions:

> 'Like many warlike gentlemen, he had always thought of war as an affair of flashing sabres, busting shells, pride, pomp and circumstance. He found out that war really meant bread which took no end of chewing, and no butter therewith, and the glory departed from the war in his eyes ...'

On the whole, however, Hamilton's schoolmasters behaved with suitable patriotism and self-sacrifice. Regrettably we know little about the wartime activities of the Cliff House teachers. A 1920 School Friend mentions that Miss Penlope Primrose 'worked strenuously for the amusement and care of wounded soldiers during the Great War'. As far as I know the patriotic efforts which Miss Bellew and Miss Locke would certainly have made have not been recorded in either the Magnet or the School Friend.

Neither has there been any chronicling of the war service of the determined but daunting Miss Bullivant. She, like other militant Suffragettes, would presumably have abandoned the women's cause for the duration, and thrown her considerable energies into the war effort. It is difficult to imagine 'the Bull' looking after wounded soldiers or, indeed, doing any kind of nursing. More probably she patrolled the coves and beaches around Cliff House and Greyfriars hoping to come upon a few hapless invading 'Huns'. She must have longed to go into action against them with her redoubtable hockey stick and golf club - especially as she was then temporarily denied the satisfaction of using them to threaten cabinet ministers who resisted the idea of Votes for Women.

Of course Cliff House, like Greyfriars, survived into the beginning of the Second World War. Miss Bullivant might then have come into her own as an intrepid but fearfully officious air-raid warden; indeed it would be easy to imagine her as the Head of Friardale's Civil Defence, stomping from one warden's post to another, to keep less energetic characters up to scratch. Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevlyn and their chums are depicted in a 1940 Schoolgirl as entertaining refugees. Marjorie had a penchant for nursing so there is little doubt that she would have been a pillar of the Red Cross once the air-raids began. Bessie Bunter's response to the war would probably have been very different. She would have been as frustrated as her brother

Billy by food shortages and rationing, and she was not the stuff that heroines are made of. In one 1940 Magnet episode Bessie is caught away from Cliff House during an air-raid alert; she panics, and starts to scream her head off as she tries to get into a nearby shelter. (Actually this is the improvised prison in which Mr. Quelch is temporarily incarcerated by the ruthless Mr. Lamb.)

There is a special nostalgia about the Gestapo-foiling activities of the Greyfriars juniors in the stories which immediately followed the Lamb series. The 'phoney war' was ending - but so too, unsuspected by readers, was the Magnet, which survived the Eastcliff Lodge series by only one issue. Wibley plays his part in the war effort in this lively series. He impersonates Sir William Bird, a British Secret Service agent who is away at the time somewhere 'deep in Hunland'. To hoodwink the Gestapo about Sir William's true whereabouts the disguised Wibley spends the Easter holiday at Eastcliff Lodge. Wharton & Co. are there too - and of course the ubiquitous W. G. B. There are some air-raid sequences - presages of the Battle of Britain which was soon to begin. In one of these Wharton has to get the over-gorged, snoring, dead-to-the-world Fat Owl out of bed and down to the cellars. Bunter is totally disorganized: '"Where's my specs - ... Can you see my trousers? Help me on with my gas-mask ... I ain't going to be gassed and slaughtered and murdered just to please you ..."' He has mislaid his respirator: it transpires that the gas-mask case which accompanies him everywhere is simply his receptacle for toffees!

Wharton discovers the hideout of Braun, the Nazi spy, in an old smugglers' cave underneath Eastcliff Lodge, but he is caught there by the German who decides that he will have to kill him. It is Soames, the villainous adversary of the Greyfriars juniors in several previous adventures, who rescues Wharton and overcomes the 'base and treacherous spy of the German Gestapo'. Soames is motivated as much by wanting to steal the German's money (his pay-roll for other spies) as by the needs of his country. But - as Wharton reflects - '"I suppose even that rogue has a spot of patriotism in his own way!"' And there is plenty of patriotism - both reluctant and heroic - in the Amalgamated Press boys' papers of both the world wars....

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Best Wishes for a Merry Xmas and a glorious New Year to all chums. From:-

JOHN McMAHON

HOZIER CRES., TANNOCHSIDE, UDDINGSTON.

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Season's Greetings to all our friends - always interested in Hamiltonia to buy or swop.

VALE AND JOYCE

3 MAIDA AVENUE, LONDON, W2 1TF.

LOVELAND

by JACK OVERHILL

'Edie!'

The shrill call came from the back garden of a house that abutted on Masters, a piece of waste ground next to St. Philip's School in Cambridge.

Edie and I, both five years old, were making mud pies and startled we looked up. Fifty yards away was Edie's mother. She called again in a voice that heralded trouble. I scented danger, scrambled to my feet and ran. Heading for the iron-spiked railings that bordered the street, I climbed to the top, balanced myself and jumped on to the pavement. Standing up, I saw a blue-smocked butcher-boy sitting on his bicycle, one foot on the kerb, grinning at me and guiltily I scuttled home. Passing him in the street a few days later, he grinned in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. I had reason to. I'd ventured into Loveland and he knew it.

Shortly afterwards, I found myself living near the town centre, yet close to Coe Fen and Sheep's Green, meadowland through which the River Granta slowly wended its way to the Great Ouse and the sea.

I attended an infants' school and dreamed the time away in a little back room with other children until I was moved into the big room to mingle with boys and girls of six and seven.

How pretty were some of the girls! I blossomed out by chasing Cissie up the street. After running two hundred yards full pelt she stopped and so suddenly I nearly ran into her. Turning, she said breathlessly: 'I'll tell my mother.'

Tell her mother! I bolted.

A newcomer, named Edna, joined the class. She had big blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and golden hair.

I'd got to prove my worth. Edna watching with other boys and girls, I climbed the iron gates onto the ledge above the main door of the school and jumped to the ground. She wasn't impressed.

I sank into my shell. I was brought out by my brother Perce asking me to take sweets to a girl because he was too shy to do it himself. I took the sweets and captivated by her looks I claimed her.

'She's mine,' I said.

'She's mine,' he said angrily.

We got heated about her. She settled it by being somebody else's.

May came into the neighbourhood. She was country-bred, had fair hair and a pretty face. And the way she said 'in't' for 'ain't'! I went dotty on her.

Unfortunately, she was ethereal and vanished whenever I appeared.

I consoled myself by falling in love with a young married woman. She had a baby and I gave her up for the baker's wife. She was full-bosomed and jolly and always welcomed me in the shop. To hide my shyness while we talked, I kept on looking at R. Caton Woodville's SAVING THE GUNS AT COLENSO that hung on the wall. Fickle, I suddenly forsook her.

On the way to school I saw a pretty, black-haired girl of my own age - ten. I soon found out who she was and where she lived. That was in a street, a cut above the cul-de-sac that I lived in, and her name was Maggie; she attended a convent school, had a twelve-year-old brother named Hector, and her father was the manager of a local cinema. That left me dazed but not daunted and I sought her out. She was aloofly disdainful of my presence; happily Hector wasn't and one Saturday morning while I lingered near their house, he came out with a pair of rapiers, which he told me rather proudly were family heirlooms, and got me to fight a duel with him. The combat over, he showed me an old-fashioned horse-pistol. Friendship developed and Maggie was brought into it. She had a friend named Ida, and Hector showing as much interest in her as I did his sister, we went blackberrying together.

On Sunday afternoon, after seeing a horse pulled out of a ditch on Coe Fen, we walked to Sheep's Green and sat on a fallen willow. The fragrant air and summery setting added to the pleasing sense of nearness that Maggie's presence always gave me and I was filled with a strange yearning that made the day really holy. On the way home, Ida suggested we went for a walk in the evening. 'It'll be dark and nobody will know,' she said. That made the evening as rosy in anticipation as the afternoon was in retrospect. I went home in a dream.

We met and the walk on Coe Fen was such an emotional experience that it seemed a timeless event in fairyland. Hector and Ida drawing ahead, I found myself alone with Maggie. We fell silent and I was overconscious of the scintillating brilliance of the night sky.

A large form loomed out of the dark. She drew close to me.

'What is it?' she said fearfully.

'Only a cow,' I said.

She was still afraid and making a little detour to avoid the cow, we caught up Hector and Ida. We stopped to listen to the raucous croak of a frog. The sound was intensified by the stillness and made us giggle. With startling suddenness a sing-song voice said: 'Hark at that ol' frog a croak'n,' and two shadowy figures appearing in a field on the other side of the ditch, we hurried off.

Lingeringly, we parted, Ida going home with Hector and Maggie. I stood watching them. A short distance away they stopped. Ida was speaking to Maggie. She came running towards me, drew close and I felt her lips on mine. Before I realized the overwhelming truth that she had kissed me, she had run back and they walked on.

The incident did not repeat itself. A week later, Maggie's parents

unexpectedly moved out of the town. I was desolated.

There was another side to my life. I was one of a gang that 'cased' courting couples. It was a bit of sport to creep on them in lonely places and spoil their fun by heaving clods of earth to make the young men chase us. Vowing vengeance, they did so. None of us was ever caught and that added to our delight in doing it.

Talk of an unsavoury sort took place during those affairs, but it had little effect on me. Neither did my newspaper reading. My father couldn't read and from the age of seven, I read REYNOLDS NEWS to him every week. He favoured politics, but liked to hear the divorce cases and they were reported pretty fully.

Eleven years old, realistic and romantic, looking for something to read and finding it in the MAGNET, GEM, DREADNOUGHT, PENNY POPULAR, BOYS' FRIEND and CHUCKLES, I came across adolescent love. Discussing it with a member of our Circle, I was surprised when he said Charles Hamilton had only written of love to ridicule it to make young readers laugh. I hadn't found it so and I began mentally raking over the past. Stories I had read quickly came to mind, some of them in detail, which shows how deeply they impressed me over sixty years ago.

I began making notes.

Bob Cherry, worried about his tie being crooked, got huffy with Frank Nugent for chipping him and compared Harry Wharton's handsome features to the detriment of his own when Marjorie Hazeldene came on the scene. Harry told him not to be an ass, it would end his friendship with Marjorie if she found out. Bob resolved - not very successfully - to control his feelings. A chance remark of Nugent's to do with Harry's helping Marjorie's brother Peter made him blush hotly - an indication that Harry wasn't altogether free from Bob's complaint. That showed stalwarts like them had chinks in their armour where girls were concerned - highly satisfying to me.

Billy Bunter went nuts over Cora Quelch. Under her influence he became a changed chap - even had courage enough to rescue her from a bull. They loved cooking and eating, so had much in common. She departed and Billy lapsed into his former ways, but while it lasted the going was good for both of them - and the reader.

Lord Mauleverer fell in love with Bella Bunbury. In order to see her, he went to the shop her father owned, bought tuck and had it sent anonymously to his friends in the Remove. Skinner and Co., jeered him when his infatuation became known - bound to as they hadn't received parcels of tuck! - but in spite of it, Mauly tried to be worthy of Bella by taking up sport. The affair ended when he learned she was engaged to a soldier. Heart-whole again, he drifted back to his study couch. An illustration showed Bella's fiance in uniform. I wished he hadn't had an ugly black moustache!

There was a similar story in the GEM. To make personal contact with Clara Chunn, daughter of the Rylcombe tobacconist, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kept on going to the shop to buy smokes. His chums found them on him. That led to a breach between them. Levison and Co., wangled some of the smokes out of him and made themselves sick in smoking them. It got winded in the school what Gussy was up to

and he was ragged without mercy. Kerr disguised himself as Miss Chunn and guyed Gussy during a football match. That made him give her up - about time as she was twenty-five! A likeable story but lacking the atmosphere and charm of the Mauly one.

Gussy also fell in love with a girl porter who called at the school. There was a lot of practical joking to cure him. Kerr again did the trick. He disguised himself as a male porter, pretended Gussy was after his girl and chased him with a horsewhip. Finding he'd been spoofed, Gussy was shamed into sanity.

Monty Lowther, stage struck, got mixed up with a sleazy touring company and milked into becoming a trainee actor. He wasn't actually in love with the leading lady - all paint and powder and old enough to be his mother - but he was filled with admiration for her ability as an actress and was thrilled when they danced together on the stage. Dr. Holmes yanked him back to St. Jim's - wiser and poorer.

Aglow with ardour, Monty fell in love with Herr Schneider's pretty niece. At the time, he was rehearsing the leading role in a school play that pilloried the German master. He had the choice: ridicule him in the part and hurt the feelings of his niece, or soft pedal so that she didn't recognize his caricature was that of her uncle. On the day, the actor came uppermost and he brought down the house. That destroyed their friendship. A memorable story - one my son vividly remembers reading as a reprint.

Other recollections were vague, but there was the close friendship of Reginald Talbot (the Toff) and Marie Rivers and Figgins' warm regard for Miss Cleveland, always skilfully pictured by their creator. And I seemed to remember a story of Gussy falling in love with a woman who called him a putty-faced tailor's dummy - shattering to his love and self-esteem. Who wrote the story or whether I dreamt it remained a puzzle.

It was then that Eric, our editor, reminded me of Harry Wharton and Co's Pantomime, the Christmas double number of 1915. The Co., took part in a pantomime to enable them to send comforts to the soldiers in France - a topical theme. Frank Nugent fell in love with Conchita, the Fairy Queen. She was so gracious and charming that I fell in love with her myself. When she told him she was thirty-seven - not seventeen as he - and I! - had thought - and engaged to the stage manager, I shared his distress. The story was as serious as the serial Peg O' My Heart, in REYNOLDS NEWS. Odd, that it had slipped my memory.

I turned to Roger Jenkins, the librarian of the London Old Boys' Book Club. Maybe, he could supply me with copies of the MAGNET and GEM on the subject that I hadn't read. He obligingly did so.

I picked one out.

D'Arcy is in love with Miss Ethel Courtney, the niece of Dr. Holmes. The usual symptons: moody, moony, absent-minded; writing verse, indifference to work, refusal to play footer. Intent on sending her a bouquet, he buys one in Rylcombe. Figgins and Co., nab the box, find it doesn't contain tuck and return it. Gussy climbs up the ivy with the box in the dark and rain of a November evening to her room in the Head's house, where she is staying. He places the box on the

window-sill with the bouquet in it and a note from A Humble Friend. He receives a note saying, 'I shall be in the garden at eight o' clock near the fountain. Many thanks for the flowers.' He dresses up and goes to the Head's garden. A female figure comes along. He thinks it is Miss Courtney and trembles with happiness as he clasps the hand that is offered him. It is the hand of Kerr in disguise. He is seized by Figgins and Co., and they smear his face with green paint. Finally, he asks Tom Merry to take a note to Miss Courtney. He good-naturedly takes it and waits for her reply. The note says Gussy worships the ground she walks on and will she wait for him until he leaves Oxford, when he can speak to her respected governor on the subject. Astonished, she hands the note to Captain Lorraine, whom she thought sent the flowers and to whom she is engaged. He nods, smiles sympathetically and says, 'Poor little chap, you must let him down lightly.' She asks Tom to tell Gussy to come to her. Highly nervous, he does so and gets a frosty reception. Her manner in telling him to dismiss such foolish ideas out of his head is like that of an aloof maiden aunt. She thaws a little at the finish and heartbroken, Gussy promises to try to forget her.

Three years later, in an almost identical story, Gussy is smitten with Miss Clara O'Neil, the twenty-four-year-old daughter of the vicar. He is intent on proposing to her (after all, a gal can wait for a fellah!), but he needs moral support. Only Wally, his minor, will give it - at the price of a feed for him and his pals! Gussy agrees and they go to the vicar's house. Wally waits outside the garden while he goes in it and meets Miss O'Neil. They are well-known to each other - she calls him 'Arthur' - but her bright blue eyes and Irish brogue make him tongue-tied and with the excuse that he's got a friend waiting, he goes back to Wally, who brashly takes over. He explains the position to Miss O'Neil, rather badly at the beginning and he gets his ears boxed - she puts that right by offering to kiss him when his meaning becomes clear. He urges her to pretend to become engaged to Gussy, for then he will come to his senses. Reluctantly, she agrees and Wally goes back to Gussy and tells him to go in and win. He does so and becomes engaged to her. In the seventh heaven he asks his friends to 'congwatulate' him. They go into hysterics. There's japeing over a hat he buys Miss O'Neil. It's an old and battered bowler when the box is opened and Mellish has jokingly picked his pocket, so that the expensive engagement ring he has bought has mysteriously disappeared when he goes to her with it. She thinks things have gone far enough and charmed by his obvious sincerity and admiration, she gently reasons with him about taking on the responsibility of a long engagement. What would Lord and Lady Eastwood say? And Cousin Ethel! Gussy shudders at the thought. Tactfully, she tells him she hadn't meant to be serious and alarmed at letting his feelings run away with him and seeing the affair in a proper light, he is glad of it. A naval officer comes on the scene as Gussy departs - eager to go! He brings with him the ring Miss O'Neil has been waiting for. All ends happily with Gussy standing treat in the tuckshop.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is the perfect vehicle for humorous love stories, but at the height of his folly as in this one, he shows how fine and honourable he is.

Skimpole, all brain and no body, descends from the clouds by idealizing Cousin Ethel. Ways and means are adopted by the juniors to cure him. Undaunted,

he talks of his 'yearning after the ineffability of the inexplicable' and writes sonnets, one of which he sends her anonymously. She gives it to D'Arcy and asks him to tell the writer not to be silly. He recognizes the handwriting as Skimpole's and outraged at the liberty he has taken, resolves to give him a 'feahful thwashing'. For all his frailness, Skimpole pluckily fights back. He receives an unsigned letter, which he assumes is from Cousin Ethel, asking him to meet one who is also 'yearning after the ineffability of the inexplicable' at eleven o' clock at night in the woodshed. He gets Tom Merry and Co. to lower him from the dormitory window to keep the appointment. He is captured by Blake and Co., who threaten to tar and feather him if he doesn't stop his yearning for Cousin Ethel. He refuses; D'Arcy tars his face; he yields and promises honour bright to do so. He is released and pulled up into the dormitory by The Terrible Three - in the plot and waiting for him. An hour later, he is still at his washstand, scrubbing away - with cold water! - to remove the tar from his face.

From start to finish the story is incredible. Even Skimpole, in his simplicity, wouldn't believe in Cousin Ethel's suggesting a meeting in the woodshed at eleven o' clock at night in the chaperonic days of 1908. As for the two Co's treating a weakling so cruelly - it was quite out of character with them. Charles Hamilton must have been in a splenetic mood when he devized a cure for love in that drastic fashion.

Figgy's Folly: To the dismay of her friends at St. Jim's, Cousin Ethel, chaperoned by Aunt Adelina, is going to Paris for a year to finish her education. Figgins is particularly upset. She visits the school to say goodbye. D'Arcy obtains permission as her cousin to go to London to see her off. He may take a friend and members of the different Co's clamour to be the lucky one. As D'Arcy is in the School House she adroitly suggests someone from the New House. Figgins emerges triumphant and the pair accompany her and Aunt Adelina to Charing Cross. Overwrought at the parting, Figgins jumps in the guard's van as the train leaves for Folkestone. On the way, as he has the money to pay the fares, he decides to make the journey to Paris. Unaware of his folly, Aunt Adelina and Ethel board the boat for Boulogne. Keeping out of sight, he follows them and while Aunt Adelina is suffering from the effects of the crossing, makes known his presence and assists her. Although worried about his irrational behaviour, Ethel welcomes him. Their friendship is deep and sincere and their hands touch in a way that hints of reciprocated love without either being aware of it.

An elderly 'made up' Frenchman shares the carriage with them on the train journey to Paris. He takes more than a passing interest in Ethel and Figgins becomes jealous. A victim of self-torment (common in young lovers) he falls out with Ethel and leaves the carriage to moon about in the corridor with dreadful thoughts of the sinister intentions of the elderly 'flaneur of the boulevards'.

The train heels over on a steep embankment, carriages on fire light up the night sky and panic prevails among the passengers. The elderly flaneur proves himself a coward. Figgins thinks only of the safety of Aunt Adelina and Cousin Ethel, trapped in the overturned carriage, and aided by a horsy Englishman, rescues both, Aunt Adelina slightly injured, Ethel unhurt. The scene is vividly written but nothing stands out so much as the love Figgins and Ethel have for each other. In danger and

distress mutual expressions of endearment escape them: '"Ethel, my darling" - he didn't know what he was saying. She caught his hand and pressed it to her lips. "Dearest," he whispered.' Sentiment and drama are well balanced and the emotional tangle of two adolescent lovers is unravelled with insight and understanding.

Back at St. Jim's, Figgins is the hero of the hour. Instead of a thrashing, the Head congratulates him before the whole school and shakes him by the hand.

Cousin Ethel stays in England to look after her aunt and doesn't go to Paris. All ends well.

It is impossible to write of love affairs, serious or derisive, at Greyfriars without bringing in Arthur Courtney, who died A Very Gallant Gentleman at the hands of John Nix Pentelow. The stories were always the same: a little about Violet Valence and a lot about her rascally brother Rupert, with Courtney set on saving him from expulsion or worse. Courtney was a fine character, so was Vi, charmingly girlish, waiting and watching in the wings. Pity such a pair of young lovers came to a sad - and over-dramatized - end.

To me, George Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, had been the personification of rugged manliness. Him fall in love? Not likely! And there he was doing it in the far-off days of 1911 without my knowing it. Paula Bell - Red Riding Hood in a pantomime - was the girl that snared him. They had met before and seeing her in the pantomime, he seeks her out and they become close friends. Infatuated, Wingate lets his school duties slide, fails his team in a football match, falls out with Courtney, his best friend, and behaves generally out of character. Vernon Tracey, a portly stage-door johnny, pesters Paula. Wingate knocks him down on the stage and thrashes him with his own malacca cane in the street. Paula, nineteen, worldly wise because of the raffish company she is with, tells him of the impossibility of continuing their friendship. He declares that he cannot give it up. Dr. Locke calls him over the coals for his erratic behaviour. He straightforwardly confesses to him his love for Paula. To his surprise, the Head adopts the role of a sympathetic and understanding father, and discussses the matter so tactfully that Wingate is made aware of his folly. Paula receives an offer from a London theatre manager that augurs well for her future. Solaced by the thought, with touching goodbyes, the couple part. The dialogue is rather stilted, but the story is conceivable without a murmur of ridicule in it.

No, I don't think Charles Hamilton only wrote of love to ridicule it to make young readers laugh. Nearer the mark: he aimed at different age groups to help increase the circulation of the stories we still like to discuss.

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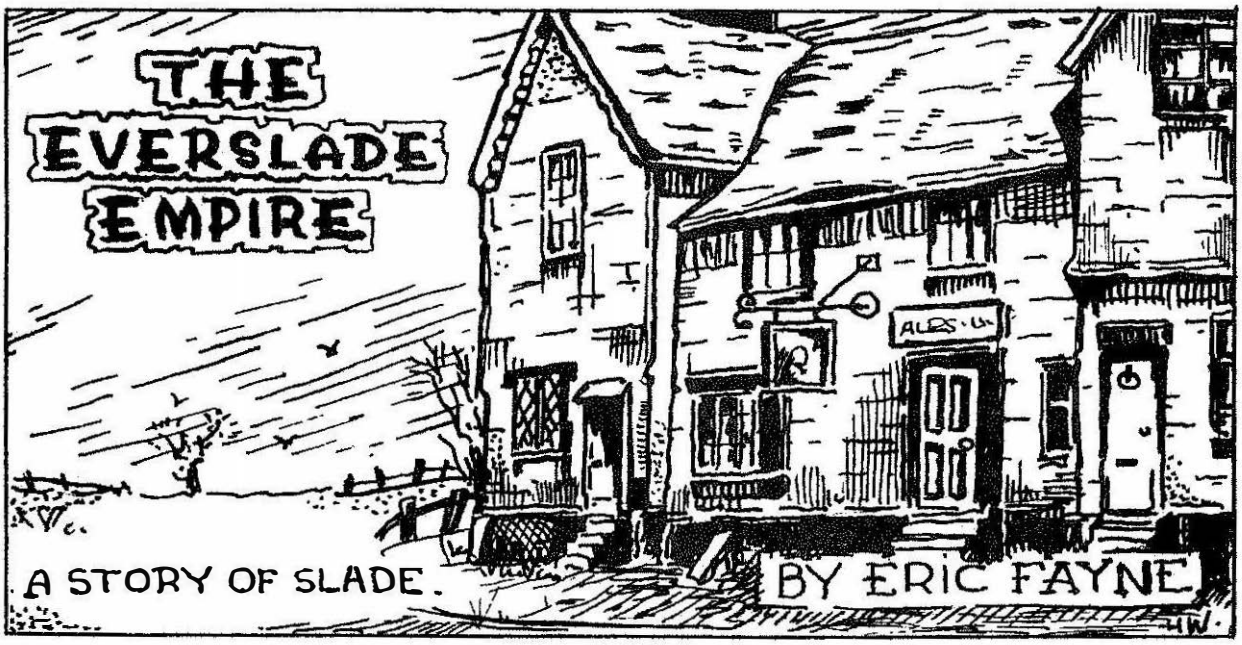

Mr. Buddle turned up his collar with his gloved hands, and strode vigorously along the street from the Vicarage. He had enjoyed an ample tea, followed by a lively chat with the Vicar of St. Mary's, Everslade. The Rev. Hatch and Mr. Buddle were old friends, and, twice a term at least, Mr. Buddle passed an hour or two in argument and discussion at the Vicarage.

It was a cold Friday evening, early in December. A mist, which had persisted all day, had now cleared, and there seemed to be a threat of snow in the offing. Mr. Buddle walked briskly in order to keep himself warm, and not because he was in any particular hurry to get back to the school.

He passed from Church Lane into the High Street of Everslade, and paused now and then to glance into an illuminated window of the small shopping centre. At seven o'clock in the evening most of the shops were closed for business, but many of them left their lights burning in the windows to attract the attention of passers-by.

The streets of the little town were not well lit, but the lights of the shops enlivened the High Street, especially as those shops were now decorated for Christmas which was only a few weeks distant.

Mr. Buddle stopped before the window of Mr. Troke, the Everslade newsagent and stationer. Mr. Buddle's eye roved over the window display, and he was about to pass on when his attention was taken by a poster hanging behind the glass in the door. Printed in red and blue ink on white paper, it had quite a patriotic effect. Without his glasses the schoolmaster was unable to read the smaller print on the poster, but he noted the main details with mild interest.

The following is what Mr. Buddle read:

THE EVERSLADE EMPIRE

All-Star Variety.
Every Thursday, Friday and Saturday.
THIS WEEK. Twice Nightly at 6 p.m. and 8.15 p.m.

SAM COSTELLO
The Great Cockney Comedian. (Direct from Holbom Empire)

Jack and Jill Verlain (Entertainers) — Mystificomposo (World famous Magician)

Jolly Jack Johnson (The Cheeky Dancer) — Freda Grant (Soubrette)

AND ALL-STAR SUPPORTING PROGRAMME

The Empire Band, under the leadership of Harry Passenger

Circle 2/6. Front Stalls 2/6. Pit Stalls 1/6. Pit 9d.

Mr. Buddle wondered idly where the Everslade Empire might be. He had never heard of it before. It must be something new in the district. He knew that Everslade boasted a small moving-picture theatre, rather extravagantly named the Coliseum. Possibly the Coliseum management was exploring fresh fields, mused Mr. Buddle.

He turned away, and in the gloom he collided with a passer-by. He was about to apologize for his carelessness, when a female voice exclaimed:

"Mr. Buddle, to be sure! The very man I had on my mind."

Mr. Buddle raised his hat, and peered at the lady in the subdued light from the street lamps and the glow from Mr. Troke's window. He recognised her at once.

"Miss Honeycomb!" he murmured politely.

Miss Honeycomb was the Everslade postmistress. Well-upholstered, tall and forbidding, she had a long and arrogant nose and greying hair which always reminded Mr. Buddle of a bird's nest.

At the moment, the tall form was well-coated against the cold, and the bird's nest was covered with a scarf.

"I thought of ringing up the Headmaster of Slade, but I prefer to speak to you," said Miss Honeycomb. "I recall that on one occasion when I made a report to you, Mr. Buddle, you dealt with the matter very satisfactorily."

Mr. Buddle suppressed a sigh. Miss Honeycomb disliked all boys on principle and Slade boys in particular. Many a time and oft had she carried complaints by telephone to the school authorities.

"What is the trouble, Miss Honeycomb? It is very cold. You must not allow me to keep you standing about," hinted Mr. Buddle.

"Last evening," said Miss Honeycomb impressively, "I thought I saw a Slade boy enter the 'Plough & Sail'."

Mr. Buddle jumped. Slade boys were capable of many things, but he hardly thought it likely that one would enter a public house. Yet it had to be admitted that, in the school stories which Mr. Buddle enjoyed reading now and then, certain characters were not above popping into the 'Cross Keys' for a game of billiards or into the 'Green Man' for a hand of nap. Still, that was fiction - and Slade was Slade.

"Surely not!" ejaculated Mr. Buddle.

"Surely yes!" retorted Miss Honeycomb. "You are acquainted with the 'Plough & Sail', I take it?"

Mr. Buddle answered patiently.

"As it stands back from the road which runs from Slade College to Everslade, I see it every time I walk from the school to the town. I am not a customer there, if that is what you mean."

"Last evening - Thursday - I was walking home to my bungalow at about half past seven. I saw this boy come down the lane from the direction of Slade. I was approaching from this side. When he reached the forecourt of the 'Plough & Sail' he turned and entered. When I reached the spot, I saw him walking across the forecourt towards the hostelry."

"I presume it was very dark," observed Mr. Buddle. There was scepticism in his voice.

"It was dark, certainly, but I saw the youth clearly in the blaze of light in the forecourt. I must add, in all fairness, that I was not absolutely certain, and that was why I did not telephone to the Headmaster of the school. But I am glad to see you, Mr. Buddle, and to tell you that I strongly believe that I saw a Slade boy enter the precincts of that public house last evening."

"You saw him enter the 'Plough & Sail'?"

"No. Once again I must be fair. I saw him walking across the forecourt, and there were a number of other people there at the same time. I watched him go down at the side of the inn. There is a large barn at the back where they have some type of entertainment for the class of people who patronise the place."

"What sort of entertainment?" asked Mr. Buddle.

"I know for a fact," said Miss Honeycomb in hushed tones, "that they have had prize-fighting and wrestling in that converted barn."

Mr. Buddle frowned. The theme of one of the stories which he had read in the Gem shot suddenly into his mind.

He said: "You believe this youth you saw was a Slade pupil. What made you decide that? Was he in uniform?"

Miss Honeycomb smiled in the light thrown out from Mr. Troke's shop.

"He was not wearing school uniform. He was bareheaded, and he wore an overcoat."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Buddle, with meaning.

"But," continued Miss Honeycomb triumphantly, "he was wearing the Slade school uniform when he came into my post-office on Wednesday afternoon to cash a withdrawal warrant for £30 from his Savings Bank book."

Mr. Buddle looked worried.

"You know his name, Madam?"

"His name is Larner - Dickon Larner," said Miss Honeycomb. "I took particular note of him owing to the unusual christian name."

"Larner!" echoed Mr. Buddle. He stared doubtfully at the angular postmistress. "There is a boy at Slade named Larner - a senior boy in the Upper Fifth form, to be exact. I

am unaware of his christian name. You say he withdrew £30 from a post office bankbook?"

"It seemd a large sum for a schoolboy - even a big senior boy - to be withdrawing," suggested Miss Honeycomb.

Privately, Mr. Buddle agreed with her, though he did not see that it was any business of Miss Honeycomb's.

He said: "Larner is about seventeen years of age, and should have a sense of responsibility. I should think his family is well-to-do. I have always understood that his parents are famous on the operatic stage overseas, and they may be over-generous to their son. It is nearing Christmas - maybe he is buying presents on a too lavish scale --" Mr. Buddle broke off. He added: "I have seen announcements that post-office transactions are strictly private. Should you really be giving me this information?"

"Perhaps not." Miss Honeycomb tossed her scarf-covered bird's nest, and sniffed. "I should not mention it to anyone but you, Mr. Buddle. You are such a reliable person. One can speak to you in the strictest confidence." Clearly some of Miss Honeycomb's words were underlined once if not twice.

Mr. Buddle thawed.

"You think you may have seen Larner enter the 'Plough & Sail' last evening. It really is most unlikely, Miss Honeycomb."

Miss Honeycomb was an obstinate lady.

She said: "In my own mind I am certain that the boy I saw crossing the forecourt of that place, last evening, was the same boy, Larner, who was in my post-office on Wednesday afternoon. I feel that I am doing the correct thing in mentioning my suspicions to you, sir."

Mr. Buddle nodded his head in agreement.

"I am glad that you have told me your suspicions," he said. "I will make definite but discreet enquiries, I promise you."

"Thank you, Mr. Buddle. You have relieved my mind. I believe," went on Miss Honeycomb delicately, "that there is gambling on the result of prize-fights and the like. That could be the reason the boy withdrew money from his bank account --."

"We must not jump to conclusions," said Mr. Buddle.

After a few more brief exchanges, the two parted. Miss Honeycomb went on her way, and Mr. Buddle headed for the Plymouth Road. He left the lights of the small town behind him as he progressed, but it was not too dark. Somewhere above the clouds a full moon was doing its best to penetrate the gloom of an English winter evening.

As he walked, Mr. Buddle was thinking of Larner of the Upper Fifth. A boy of above average intelligence, good at sport, and generally popular, so far as Mr. Buddle knew. Mr. Buddle taught English to Larner, though his duties did not bring the master closely into contact with Fifth Form boys. Somehow he could not believe that Larner was a young fellow who would be likely to break school rules irresponsibly.

When he met with problems in real life, Mr. Buddle would often seek a parallel in the school stories which

he read occasionally for relaxation. In his own form, the Lower Fourth, Mr. Buddle had a certain pupil whose father was a keen collector and reader of a periodical named the Gem. And somehow - Mr. Buddle hardly knew how it had happened - he, too, had become a Gem enthusiast, and the said parent lent to Mr. Buddle beautifully bound volumes of Gems ancient and modern.

This business of Larner, and the suggestion that Miss Honeycomb had made against the youth, brought to Mr. Buddle's mind a Gem story. Entitled "The Prefect's Plot", it was one of his favourites. In it a certain prefect had stolen away from his school at night, and had attended prizefights - or was it wrestling matches? - held, so far as Mr. Buddle could remember, in a barn at the rear of a public house. The prefect was named Bingham, and he caused a great deal of trouble for Tom Merry, the hero of the story.

Only the outline of it remained in Mr. Buddle's memory now, but he was quick to see a possible link between Bingham, who went to prize-fights held behind some village inn, and Larner, who might be attending prizefights behind the 'Plough & Sail'.

Mr. Buddle, walking on through the cold evening, was nearing the 'Plough & Sail', which was only about half a mile out of Everslade. The inn was set well back from the road, but the forecourt was always well-lit at night during business hours. Reaching that forecourt now, Mr. Buddle gave the inn a steady appraising glance. It looked picturesque, flood-lit against the night sky. His eyes wandered over the surroundings. A number of cars were parked on the left of the forecourt. Away on the right was the large barn to which Miss Honeycomb had referred. In front of the barn was a small shed which might be in use as a paybox, for there was a queue of people before it. As he watched, a few more people, men and women, came in from the Everslade road and joined the queue. Mr. Buddle took a dozen steps into the forecourt, and then stopped again, regarding the queue thoughtfully. He was wondering whether there might be another prize-fight - or wrestling match - about to take place this evening.

As his eyes moved along the line of people, his gaze was arrested. He gave a start of surprise. Some young fellow was standing there, not actually in the queue, but talking to somebody near the shed which Mr. Buddle had observed earlier.

Mr. Buddle could see that it was a lad in his middle teens, bare-headed and wearing a warm overcoat turned up at the collar. It struck Mr. Buddle that the youngster was very much like Larner of the Upper Fifth at Slade. As Mr. Buddle stood, in uncertainty, watching him, the boy turned his face in the direction of the schoolmaster. The light shone on his dark hair and forehead for a moment, and Mr. Buddle almost decided that it was actually Larner. It must, at any rate, be the same youth whom Miss Honeycomb had noticed the day before.

Mr. Buddle was unsure, just as Miss Honeycomb had been unsure. There was only one way to free his mind from doubt, and that was to see the lad closer.

But, as Mr. Buddle moved forward, a stream of people emerged

from the barn at the side of the inn, and the schoolmaster was forced to weave his way among those people. He lost sight of the boy he had been watching, and, when Mr. Buddle got near to the small queue before the little shed, he found that the boy had disappeared.

With a murmur of annoyance, Mr. Buddle halted. It was impossible for him now to find out definitely whether the bareheaded youth in the overcoat was Larner of the Fifth or just someone very like Larner of the Fifth.

A sudden thought came to Mr. Buddle. If Larner was in the vicinity of the 'Plough & Sail', he clearly could not be at the school. The one way to get his doubts put at rest would be for Mr. Buddle to hurry back to Slade, and ascertain whether Larner was actually in the school. If he was there, he could not be the young person whom Mr. Buddle had just seen in the forecourt of the public house.

Walking fast, Mr. Buddle set off for Slade. It was well over a mile from the 'Plough & Sail' to the school, but Mr. Buddle was an excellent walker, and he covered the distance in good time. At last the high walls of Slade loomed up in the cold night, and, using his key, he let himself in at the door in the wall which masters and prefects used after the main gates were closed at dusk.

He strode across the quadrangle, went up the stone steps, and entered the main hall. Pausing only to hang his coat and hat on one of a nest of pegs, the schoolmaster mounted the main staircase. It took him a minute or two to reach the Fifth Form corridor, and he paused outside the Fifth Form Day Room. A number of seniors were in the Day Room, but Mr. Buddle spoke to two big fellows who were just coming out. They were Carslake of the Lower Fifth and Shannon of the Sixth. Both seniors gave him polite attention as he addressed them.

"Do you happen to know whether Larner is in the Day Room?" asked Mr. Buddle.

It was Carslake who answered.

"He isn't, sir. I haven't seen him this evening. Probably in his study, sir."

"And what is the number of his study, Carslake?"

"Number 3, sir. He's one of the lucky ones with a bed-sitter" answered Carslake.

Mr. Buddle nodded, and passed on.

Walking down the corridor, past the dark and deserted Fifth-Form classroom, Mr. Buddle entered the passage where the Fifth-Form studies were situated.

Upper Fifth men all had individual studies with alcoves in which their beds were placed, giving them the privacy which was so much valued as the boys got older.

He paused before the door of Number 3, tapped, and was relieved to hear a voice calling out to him to enter. So Larner was at home after all. He could not have been the youth whom Mr. Buddle had seen at the 'Plough & Sail' and who resembled the senior so much from a distance.

Mr. Buddle opened the door and looked in.

It was not a large room, but it

was more than adequate for one student. It had a radiator, and was plainly furnished by the school authorities with a built-in cupboard, a wash-basin with a cold water tap, a table, and two chairs. If any senior wanted more comfort - and most of them did - he had to supply it for himself. Apparently Larner had generous parents, for he had a good carpet on the floor, an elaborate cloth on the table, and two nice armchairs. There was a pink-shaded electric light, and the study was warm and looked cosy. The room was L-shaped, the alcove being occupied by a bed, curtained off completely.

Larner of the Upper Fifth was bending over an electric kettle attached to a power-plug near the radiator as Mr. Buddle looked in. He straightened up at the sight of the form-master. Mr. Buddle noted that there was no sign of uneasiness in his demeanour. Just slight surprise and mild enquiry.

"Mr. Buddle!" he ejaculated.

Larner was a handsome youth. Tall, slim, and neat in his Slade blazer and grey trousers, with dark, curly hair, he had an air of good breeding about him which impressed those who met him, and, added to a skill on the sports field, made him generally popular with his companions.

"Please come in, sir," said Larner.

Mr. Buddle entered, and closed the door. Larner moved and drew out a chair from the table, and Mr. Buddle sat down.

"I am glad to find you here, Larner," remarked Mr. Buddle.

"Yes, sir?" Still that note of polite enquiry. Nothing more.

"Have you been out this evening?" asked Mr. Buddle.

"Out? No, sir." Larner shook his head. "I had a pass from Antrobus to attend a lecture at the public library in the town, but I changed my mind. I have to do a translation from Daudet for the French master, so I decided to get on with it." Larner indicated an open text-book and an exercise-book lying on the table before the second chair, with a pen placed across the open exercise book. "Does it matter, sir?" ventured Larner.

"In a way it does," admitted Mr. Buddle. "As I walked back to the school from the town, I thought I saw you in the forecourt of that inn which they call the 'Plough & Sail'."

"Good lord!" exclaimed Larner. "Excuse me, sir." He smiled. "You startled me. You saw someone going into the 'Plough & Sail', and thought it was I? It certainly wasn't. I don't go to places like that."

"Actually he wasn't going into the inn. He was in the forecourt. He was very much like you, Larner, though I could not credit that it could be you. I thought it better to assure myself that you were not out of the school this evening."

"I hope you didn't think, sir --"

"I didn't really think anything, Larner, but I am happy to be convinced that it was not you."

"I seem to have a dangerous double, sir," said Larner, a little ruefully.

Mr. Buddle started. He

thought he saw it all now. Larner's ingenuous remark had made it clear. It was not "The Prefect's Plot" which linked Larner of Slade with Mr. Buddle's beloved Gem. It was another Gem story, "A Dangerous Double", in which a boy named Clavering had been the splitting image of Tom Merry of St. Jim's and had caused much trouble for that young hero.

"You must excuse me, Larner," said Mr. Buddle genially. "As a sensible boy, you will realise that I had to make sure."

"Of course, sir," responded the senior, with equal geniality. "I'm glad that you did."

"Your kettle is boiling," said Mr. Buddle, indicating the steam which was rising behind Larner, and the senior swung round.

"I was just going to make myself some coffee, sir." Larner spoke hesitantly. "Would you join me in a cup, sir? It won't take a couple of jiffs."

"That will be very nice," assented Mr. Buddle.

"It's only cafe-au-lait, sir, from a tin," apologised Larner. "Will that be all right?"

"It will be just to my liking," Mr. Buddle assured him.

Larner turned away to switch off the kettle and to take a couple of cups and saucers from the cupboard. He wiped the cups carefully with a cloth.

As Larner went about preparing to entertain his English master, Mr. Buddle leaned forward idly and took up the text-book which was lying open before the other chair at the table. He inspected the cover. "Lettres de Mon Moulin" by Alphonse Daudet, he read. Mr. Buddle turned over the pages, and looked at the fly-leaf. The owner's name was written at the top - Dickon Larner.

"You have an uncommon christian name," commented Mr. Buddle.

Larner smiled as he spooned cafe-au-lait from a tin.

"'The Secret Garden.'" he remarked.

"Ah!" Mr. Buddle nodded. "I recall it. A lovely little tale. They don't write them like that any more. So your name is derived from literature. A favourite story from your mother's girlhood, possibly?"

Larner was pouring hot water into the cups, and stirring away with a spoon.

"I expect my mother read it, but I think I was given the name because my father's first role on the stage was Dickon, in a dramatisation of the book. Just sentimentality, I suppose. My father soon climbed to be one of the great names in the theatre."

"So I have heard." Mr. Buddle nodded. "You must be proud of your father, Larner."

"Oh, I am, sir. Of course, both my father and mother have been in Grand Opera for many years now - Covent Garden, the Met in New York, the Scala in Milan --" He placed a steaming cup of coffee before Mr. Buddle, and a sugar-bowl near by. "There's sugar if you want it, sir, but cafe-au-lait is pretty sweet already."

He offered a biscuit barrel to

the form-master, but Mr. Buddle shook his head.

"Your parents are away from this country a good deal, I believe," said Mr. Buddle, making conversation. "I remember meeting Colonel Larner a term or two back, on a Speech Day, I think - but that would not be your father, of course."

"My grandfather," explained Larner. "Most of my time, while I'm being educated, I make my home with him. My parents' London home is seldom in use, these days - we just keep a small staff there for when they come back to England for a quick visit."

Mr. Buddle sipped at his cup.

"Very nice coffee," he said appreciatively. He went on: "I read your description of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. It was in the most recent issue of the school magazine, wasn't it? Very interesting, and well-written, too, Larner. I congratulate you."

"Thank you, sir. I'm glad you liked it."

"You must have had first-hand experience of that theatre to be able to write of it so comprehensively. Did you spend a holiday in New York while your parents were performing in that city?"

"I had a short time there with them, some time ago. Actually, it was my father who supplied me with the details. He knows the 'Met.' so well."

"Naturally!" said Mr. Buddle.

"My parents love the life, and I'm proud to have world-famous parents. But they are abroad so much, and my grandfather is my guardian. He is very good to me - spoils me, I suppose - but I like being spoiled. Who wouldn't?"

"You are a lucky fellow, Larner."

"Yes, I expect I am, sir." Larner smiled. "In some ways I am closer to my grandfather than I am to my parents. I have lived with him for a long time. Colonel Larner is a wonderful grandfather. My mother was his favourite child - his only daughter, in fact. I reckon that's why he banks on me so much."

"It makes a difference, of course." Mr. Buddle rose to his feet. "I have enjoyed this little chat with you, Larner. Are your people abroad still?"

"They're always abroad, sir. Just now they're doing a long opera season in the south of France."

Mr. Buddle's eyes twinkled.

"And you yourself, Larner. What of your future? Have you hopes of a stage career? Will you follow in the footsteps of your illustrious parents?"

The reply came instantly, and with a vehemence which surprised Mr. Buddle.

"Not for a million pounds! I hate stage life."

Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows. Something in the raised voice warned him that the denial was too vehement, that its very insistence was suspect.

He contented himself with saying: "You seem to have made up your own mind. Well, you have

plenty of time. You still have to give all your mind to your education." He turned to the door.

Larner's calmness had returned. He spoke quietly:

"Thank you for coming in, sir. I hope I shall have no trouble over that dangerous double of mine."

"I'm sure you won't, Larner. Probably, in daylight, the resemblance is not striking. Good night, Larner."

Mr. Buddle went out through the door, and had just closed it behind him when he remembered that he had not thanked the senior for the coffee. He opened the door and looked in again.

"Oh, Larner, I forgot --"

Mr. Buddle broke off suddenly. Larner was still standing on the far side of the table, and the form-master's return was unexpected. Mr. Buddle was struck by the sneering, enigmatic smile on the handsome senior's face. A contemptuous smile. A self-satisfied smile. Mr. Buddle was oddly disconcerted.

The smile was wiped away instantly. It was replaced by a look of mildly surprised enquiry.

"Is there something else, sir?"

Mr. Buddle, still startled by the change of expression, spoke almost mechanically.

"I just wished to thank you for the coffee."

Larner smiled again, but this time it was merely ingenuous.

"My pleasure, sir," he said.

. . . .

Mr. Buddle was busy for the remainder of that evening, but after he retired to bed, he lay, with his bedside light on, staring up at his ceiling in deep thought. And it was this really very minor matter of Larner of the Fifth which was the basis for that deep thought.

At the beginning, Mr. Buddle had seen a similarity with the Gem story "The Prefect's Plot". He had been reassured when he found Larner at the school. In his mind, he had changed "The Prefect's Plot" for "A Dangerous Double". But now his views changed again.

That crafty smile - the smile of a boy who has just bested his schoolmaster - which he had surprised on the senior's face, had caused the change.

Mr. Buddle had been satisfied, when he found Larner in his study at Slade, that the senior could not have been the youth whom he had seen in the forecourt of the 'Plough & Sail'.

But he could have been, of course. The young fellow had turned his face in the master's direction. He could have observed Mr. Buddle then. If he was Larner, he would have realised his danger and made his exit from the forecourt while Mr. Buddle was looking around among the people who were in the forecourt. He would have reached the road ahead of Mr. Buddle, and he would have covered the distance back to Slade much quicker than Mr. Buddle did.

Assuming that the youth was Larner, he would have known that his best plan was to get back to Slade in case Mr. Buddle hastened back to the school and sought him out in his Fifth

Form study.

It would have taken him but a few moments to discard his overcoat and to replace the damp outdoor shoes with slippers, throwing the overcoat and the damp shoes behind the curtain drawn across the bed recess. Then to open the exercise book with the innocent Daudet placed beside it on the table, with the pen nearby. A few moments more to fill the kettle, if it was not filled already, and plug it into the power socket in the study. It had taken some minutes after Mr. Buddle's arrival for that kettle to boil, as he had noted at the time.

Odd had been the vehemence of the boy's denial of any wish to make a career on the stage. And surely there was something else which Larner had said which had registered in Mr. Buddle's mind as being a little strange. Mr. Buddle could not bring to mind exactly what that other comment had been, but there had been something which he had noted as being not right.

As he turned off his light, and settled down to sleep, Mr. Buddle had discarded any possible connection of this Larner episode with "A Dangerous Double". Very definitely he was back with "The Prefect's Plot", and the senior, Bingham, who had gone to some public-house to see a prizefight - or something of the sort.

. . . .

Saturday was a half-holiday at Slade. Mr. Buddle's last teaching period that morning was in English with his own form, the Lower Fourth. After the class was dismissed, three members of his form lingered and approached Mr. Buddle's desk.

They were Pilgrim, Meredith, and Garmansway, three youths who shared a study on the Lower Fourth corridor, and who usually went about together.

"We want to ask a favour, please, sir," said Pilgrim, speaking for the three of them.

Mr. Buddle eyed them in enquiry, noting a gleam of fun in Meredith's blue eyes.

Pilgrim went on: "We're playing soccer in Everslade this afternoon, sir. At least, Meredith and I are playing, and Garmansway is coming to watch the game --"

"I hope your team wins," said Mr. Buddle.

"Thank you, sir. We thought we'd have tea in Everslade, just the three of us, at a cafe there, and then we'd like to go to the first house at the Everslade Empire. It would mean we wouldn't get back to school till half-past eight. We'd like your permission, sir."

Mr. Buddle said sternly: "I cannot give you leave to attend cinema performances at night. If you wish to visit picture shows, you must go to matinees on days when you have no sporting fixtures."

"Oh, it's not a cinema show," explained Pilgrim. "It's all-star variety, and it's only on in the evenings at week-ends. They say it's very good, sir."

"And who are they, who say it is very good?" enquired Mr. Buddle.

"The postman, sir. He was telling us about it this morning."

"A kind of concert, I suppose,"

said Mr. Buddle, his sternness relaxing. "Well, I suppose there would be no objection to you three boys seeing the performance."

Meredith produced a handbill, printed in red and blue on white paper. He handed it to his form-master. Mr. Buddle gazed at it. He had seen a larger version of the same advertisement, hanging in the door of Mr. Troke's shop the evening before.

"The Everslade Empire", read out Mr. Buddle. He transferred his gaze to his three hopeful pupils. "So they have changed the cinema in Everslade into a music hall. Perhaps films are not so attractive to the public as they seemed to be at one time."

"It's not the cinema," said Meredith. "The cinema is still going strong. This is something new."

Mr. Buddle was out of touch with the news of local entertainment.

"Where is this Empire, then?" he asked.

"You know the 'Plough & Sail', sir," said Meredith. "Well, the Empire is a barn behind the 'Plough & Sail'."

Mr. Buddle really jumped. He stared at the handbill for a moment. Then he stared in silence at the boys.

"They've added an extension to it, sir, so the postman says," ventured Meredith. His voice trailed away as the storm-clouds gathered on Mr. Buddle's brow.

"Can I believe my ears?" asked Mr. Buddle, presumably for rhetoric effect. "You are asking my permission to attend a music hall performance in a - in a public house?"

All three boys started to speak at once, but Mr. Buddle raised a hand, and Pilgrim took on the explanation.

"It's not in a public-house, sir. It's in the barn at the side, which has been adapted and enlarged. The postman says they've made a good job of it. It's a kind of hobby with several people. Mr. and Mrs. West, who run the pub - I mean, the public-house - used to be on the stage, and they got the idea of providing live entertainment in Everslade as a change from the pictutes. The postman says --"

"Say no more," said Mr. Buddle. "You know perfectly well that you cannot be allowed to attend any entertainment run at a public-house."

"It says all-star variety, sir," protested Meredith. If they are stars they must be good acts."

Mr. Buddle waved an impatient hand.

"It is not likely that a star would accept an engagement for three nights to perform in a barn behind a public-house," he said acidly.

The three boys looked crestfallen, though the mirthful gleam was still present in Meredith's eyes.

"One of them is direct from the West End of London," said Meredith. "It says so on the bill."

Mr. Buddle smiled slightly, in spite of himself.

"You must not believe everything you read in advertisements, boys. Only a very gullible person would be taken in by such an announcement. Years ago, I have heard, there were music halls attached to certain drinking houses, but they were places

of ill repute. Under no circumstances would a Slade boy be allowed to attend any such establishment."

"The postman said --" began Meredith.

"It is immaterial what the postman said. You cannot have permission to attend a concert at a public-house annexe. You may, if you wish, ask the Headmaster for permission," Mr. Buddle added, fiendishly. "He will probably regard the request as gross impertinence, and sentence you to corporal punishment."

"No, thank you, sir," said Pilgrim hastily. "Come on, you men. We'll be late for tiffin."

"It's stew for lunch to-day," murmured Garmansway dreamily.

"Stew for lunch. I wonder if it's anybody we know!" remarked Meredith brightly.

The three boys left the form-room chuckling.

Mr. Buddle watched them go. He looked again at the handbill advertising the Everslade Empire.

So that was the secret of the barn behind the 'Plough & Sail'. The people whom he had seen in queue, the previous evening, in the forecourt of the inn, were waiting to go into a music-hall entertainment. It was not a prize-fight, or a wrestling match, or an illegal gambling den. It was a common or garden music hall, perhaps more common than garden. It was harmless enough in its own way, though it would be out of bounds for Slade boys.

It was, then, to a theatrical entertainment that Larner - or possibly his 'dangerous double' - had been going. Mr. Buddle now had little doubt that the youth in the forecourt of the inn had been Larner. He had thrown out the idea of the 'dangerous double', and now, it seemed, he also had to throw out the prizefight of "The Prefect's Plot".

Thinking it over again now, Mr. Buddle felt it unlikely that a senior, on the verge of the Sixth Form, with possibly a prefectship available to him in the near future, would risk attending a show at a barn beside the 'Plough & Sail'. Least of all, the immaculate Larner who seemed far from being the type of senior who would flout school rules for the sake of witnessing a performance which must, of very necessity, be third rate.

Yet, apparently, Larner had gone there two nights running. Miss Honeycomb had seen him there on the Thursday evening, and Mr. Buddle had seen him there on the Friday evening. If, indeed, that boy had been Larner, why, Mr. Buddle asked himself, should he wish to see again on the Friday evening a show which he had already seen the previous evening?

Mr. Buddle had considered two Gems in connection with this curious mystery of Larner of the Upper Fifth. Now a third Gem came into Mr. Buddle's mind - a story entitled "Stage Struck". Monty Lowther had been stage struck in that tale. He had made friends with an actor - a Mr. Horatio Curll - who played a leading part in a touring theatrical company. Lowther had gone to the theatre, night after night, and eventually had run away from school to join Mr. Curll in that company.

Mr. Buddle stood, his eyes fixed on the handbill for the Everslade Empire, wondering whether Larner might also be stage struck after the

manner of Monty Lowther.

Larner's parents were both in the entertainment world, though on a far different plane. They would be horrified at the very idea of their son contemplating a stage career on the lines of those artists who performed short engagements at places like the Everslade Empire. So reasoned Mr. Buddle. Yet it might be natural for a boy who had famous parents - grease-paint in his blood, as it were - to be unable to resist the lure of the footlights.

The schoolmaster's thoughts drifted to Larner's remark the previous evening: "I wouldn't go on the stage for a million pounds. I should hate stage life."

Too stressed to be genuine? Had the boy been putting on an act? Mr. Buddle asked himself. Had Larner been strenuously denying something that was really a fact - that he was stage struck?

Mr. Buddle glanced at his watch. It was getting on for one o'clock, and lunch was at half-past twelve on all half-holidays.

He was late in the dining hall. Many boys had eaten their lunch quickly, and had already left. There were a number of football fixtures to be played.

As he took his seat beside Mr. Crathie at the staff table, Mr. Buddle glanced across at the Fifth-form table. Larner was not there, but plenty of other Fifth-formers had already finished their meal and gone. Only a few Sixth-formers were still sitting chatting at their own table.

As Mr. Buddle's soup was placed before him, he turned to Mr. Crathie, who had reached the coffee stage.

"Our First Eleven is playing away this afternoon, I believe?" he said conversationally.

"At Plymouth!" assented Mr. Crathie, dropping three lumps of sugar in his coffee.

Mr. Buddle nodded. He started on his soup.

"Are any Fifth-form boys in the First Eleven to-day, Mr. Crathie?"

"Sure to be!" replied Mr. Crathie.

"Larner, perhaps?"

"Yes. Larner, and Carslake are regulars. Lorch, too, I expect. Why? Are you going over to watch the game?" Mr. Crathie looked at him with interest. "Mr. Crayford has gone with the team, of course. Plenty seniors are going over in the coach to cheer. They've got a big coach, but I expect it's pretty full. They might be able to squeeze you in, if you hurry."

"I'll think about it," said Mr. Buddle.

* * * *

Mr. Buddle did not think about it. He had no intention of spending a cold afternoon watching the First Eleven play football. He had almost decided to dismiss Larner and his doings from his mind. He told himself that he had been linking fiction too much with real life.

"My trouble is too much reading of the Gem," the little master said to himself down in the main hall after lunch.

There was little sign of life now. The First Eleven had left with a coach full of players and spectators for Plymouth. The Second Eleven would be playing on Big Side that afternoon, and the Third Eleven had left to fulfil a fixture in Everslade.

Finding himself against the notice board, Mr. Buddle glanced at the team lists which had been pinned up there by the games master. He ran his eye over the First Eleven team, selected to play for Slade at Plymouth that afternoon.

Suddenly his gaze became fixed. There was something a little odd here. The name Larner was included in the list, but that name had been crossed out and that of Tomms substituted.

Mr. Buddle's brows creased in a worried frown. He spoke casually to Vanderlyn, a Sixth-former, who was coming down the stairs.

"Ah, Vanderlyn," said Mr. Buddle. "I see that Larner's name has been erased from the team playing over at Plymouth to-day. Why would that be?"

Vanderlyn paused politely, and looked curiously at Mr. Buddle.

"I heard him asking Antrobus to replace him," he said. "He was a bit under the weather, and didn't feel up to the game. He said he would lie down in his room this afternoon if the skipper could fill his place."

With a nod, Vanderlyn went on his way, leaving Mr. Buddle with more food for thought. It might be just a coincidence that Larner should have dropped out of the team that afternoon, and Mr. Buddle felt reluctant to investigate. The last thing he wanted to do was to spy on the senior. Yet if Larner was really acting recklessly, it was Mr. Buddle's duty to look a little further into the matter.

Without haste, he made his way up the staircase, and headed for the Fifth-form quarters. The corridors were deserted on a Saturday afternoon. All the studies were silent. The Day Room was empty.

He paused before the door of Larner's study. If Larner was there, lying down, Mr. Buddle was ready with an excuse concerning an English paper which had been set for preparation.

The excuse was not necessary. Larner was not there.

Mr. Buddle tapped on the door and looked in. The room was empty. The curtains which divided the bed alcove from the rest of the room were drawn back. The bed was neat and tidy. Nobody had lain on that bed since one of the domestic staff made it up during the morning.

There were two pegs behind the door. A blazer was hanging on one of them. Nothing else. It looked as though the senior had taken his overcoat and scarf and gone out-doors somewhere.

Mr. Buddle pursed his lips. There was really nothing suspicious in a Fifth-form boy being absent from the school on a half-holiday afternoon, but it certainly looked as though he had made some excuse to his skipper to avoid playing in the match that afternoon.

There was an open newspaper lying on the table, and, from where Mr. Buddle stood, he could see that a piece had been cut out from the centre of one page. A coupon of some sort,

perhaps.

Mr. Buddle moved across, his curiosity getting the better of him. He picked up the paper and scanned it. The missing section, four or five inches deep, had been cut from a column headed "Local News Items of Everslade."

The paper was the Plymouth Bugle, which published a special edition for Everslade. He noted that it was the current issue, published that very Saturday. A copy of that issue of the Plymouth Bugle, delivered to him that morning by the local newsagent, was, in fact, lying in Mr. Buddle's own study at that exact moment. He memorised the positioning of the cut-out piece - page two of the newspaper, in the centre, the second item under the heading "Everslade News Items".

Mr. Buddle replaced the paper as he had found it, and left the room. Back in his own study, he sorted out his copy of the paper, turned to page 2, and put his finger on the paragraph which had been cut out from Larner's copy. The schoolmaster was not surprised at what he saw. It was an account of the current attractions at the Everslade Empire.

Mr. Buddle read:

> Everslade Empire, inaugurated by Mr. and Mrs. West, popular proprietors of the 'Plough & Sail' Hotel, has brought stage variety to add to the amenities of the district. This week's artists are highly attractive, and include Sam Costello, the world-famous comedian; the Verlaines who entertain with music and song; and Mystificomposo, a stage magician whose feats have to be seen to be believed. There is a strong supporting bill. This evening (Saturday) sees the last two performances of the current bill, with Houses starting at 6 and 8.15. Mr. and Mrs. West are to be congratulated on their enterprise.

Mr. Buddle stood in indecision. This brief newspaper report, which Larner had seen fit to cut from his newspaper, was an unmistakable link between the Fifth-former and the establishment which was known as the Everslade Empire. The old Gem story "Stage Struck" came back into the form-master's mind. It seemed to him that the only explanation for Larner's conduct was that, like Monty Lowther of St. Jim's, he was fascinated by the stage.

Possibly Larner would not act so rashly as Lowther had done in that old tale - after all, Larner was older than Lowther - but if the Slade senior had become acquainted with some professional entertainer, it was always possible that he might decide to leave school in an endeavour to make a career on the stage.

Mr. Buddle gnawed his lower lip uneasily. For the moment he found it difficult to know quite what to do for the best.

. . . .

Mr. Buddle passed his afternoon quietly. He did some marking of exercises, prepared a test paper for one of his English classes, and then read for a while.

At four o'clock his tea was brought to him on a tray by Mrs. Cleverton, the housekeeper. At half-past four he made his way down to the main hall. The coach which had conveyed the First Eleven and some of its supporters to Plymouth would soon be returning, and Mr. Buddle wanted to be there when the players came in.

There was plenty of bustle in the hall now. The home games were

over, and the players had come in for their tea. Boys were coming in from the town as well, and Mr. Buddle exchanged a few words with some of them. But there was no sign of Larner of the Fifth so far.

Within ten minutes the motor coach from Plymouth turned in at the gates of Slade, after those gates had been opened to admit it by Parmint, the lodge keeper. The early December darkness had fallen.

A crowd of seniors alighted from the coach, and, from their cheerfulness, Mr. Buddle assumed that Slade had won the match. They came into the hall, many of them in lively mood while others were staid and dignified as became their age and position in the school. All were, no doubt, anxious to get to their studies and a good tea.

The last to enter was Antrobus, the captain of Slade, and Mr. Buddle detained him for a few moments.

"You won, Antrobus?"

The captain turned a happy smile on the English master.

"Yes, sir, we won. Three nil. We were a bit over their weight, but it was a good game."

"Is Larner with you?" asked Mr. Buddle. "I haven't noticed him come in."

"Larner?" said Antrobus. "Did you want him, sir? He wasn't in the team to-day."

"Oh?" Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows. "I thought he played for the First Eleven."

"He does, sir," agreed Antrobus. "I had him down for the game, but he cried off this morning. He had a headache after class, and asked me to replace him in the side. Tomms took his place, and did well."

After a few words more, Antrobus hurried away. Mr. Buddle looked at his watch. It was after five now. His warm study was attractive to him on a cold, misty evening. All the same, when he reached that warm study, he donned his overcoat, took his hat from the peg, and set off.

A few minutes later he was striding down the Devonshire lane which led to Everslade. It took him the best part of thirty minutes to reach the forecourt of the 'Plough & Sail'. As on the previous evening, there were a number of cars parked on the left. The inn itself was not yet open for normal trade, but the small queue of people were waiting in front of the little hut at the side, waiting, as Mr. Buddle now knew, for admission to a music hall show in the large barn situated at the side of the main building.

Mr. Buddle moved forward and cast an eye over the people in the queue. There was no sign of anyone remotely resembling Larner of the Upper Fifth.

The queue was moving forward now, as people took their tickets at a window of the small shed. In fifteen minutes or so, the first house at the makeshift "Empire" would be commencing.

Mr. Buddle made up his mind at last. Music hall entertainment was rather outside his province, but his curiosity got the better of him. He joined the queue. It was moving briskly now, under the floodlighting

of the forecourt, and within a few minutes he reached the window through which tickets were being issued. Pinned beside the window as a list of admission charges, and Mr. Buddle looked over it.

A plump gentleman at the receipt of custom was vaguely known to Mr. Buddle. He was Mr. West, the proprietor of the 'Plough & Sail', who was a member of the Bowls Club in Everslade to which Mr. Buddle also belonged. Mr. Buddle had had very little contact with the publican in the past, and hoped that he might not be recognised now.

"A circle seat, please," said Mr. Buddle, putting down his coin on the narrow counter before the window.

The plump Mr. West tore a ticket from a roll, and passed it through the window. Then he gave an exclamation of pleasure.

"Why, it's Mr. Buddle, isn't it? It's nice to see you, sir. I hope you enjoy our little entertainment. Good for the town, what?"

"Very good, I'm sure," replied Mr. Buddle, wishing now that he had not been moved to attend the First House at the Empire. He glanced back over the orderly crowd, hoping that there was nobody else there who might recognise him.

"Didn't know you like this sort of thing," said Mr. West. "Just a moment, sir."

He left his seat, opened the door of the shed, and bawled: "Chris!"

A young man, who had been standing at the entrance to the barn, hurried up to him.

"Special visitor, Chris," explained Mr. West. "Take Mr. Buddle to my seat upstairs. I shan't be using it this house." He smiled at Mr. Buddle. "Welcome to the Everslade Empire, Mr. Buddle. Chris will look after you."

His face red, under the brim of his trilby hat, Mr. Buddle expressed a word of thanks to the jovial proprietor, and followed Chris.

The erstwhile barn attached to the 'Plough & Sail' did not much resemble a barn now. There was coconut matting on the floor, and a few faded velvet curtains gave a mild - a very mild - sense of mock-luxury. The main stream of people was going in through open double doors to the ground floor of the place, but Chris led the way up a fairly narrow staircase leading to what, in days long gone by, had no doubt been the hayloft of the barn.

That loft now contained a half-dozen rows of well-worn but still serviceable tip-up seats, probably bought up from some defunct theatre or cinema.

There was seating accommodation for about sixty people in the "circle", and it was about half-full now. Chris took Mr. Buddle to the front row, and indicated a seat on the gangway.

"The guvnor's seat, sir," he murmured.

"Thank you," said Mr. Buddle. He sat down. A moment later he was exchanging twopence for a programme offered to him by a buxom young lady.

From his seat in the front row of the "circle", Mr. Buddle was able to get a good view of the lower floor of

the improvised theatre. A number of pink-shaded lights, swinging gently at the end of long strings of flex, lit up the auditorium. Plenty of the seats downstairs were unoccupied, and business did not seem as brisk as the proprietors might have hoped, though people were still drifting in.

Mr. Buddle looked keenly over the audience downstairs, and then looked around him in the "circle". There was no sign of Larner of the Fifth. It had been a long shot, in any case. In all likelihood, Larner was back at Slade enjoying himself on some normal Saturday evening recreation at the school.

Mr. Buddle settled back in his seat. Now that he was here, he might as well try to enjoy the show.

Mr. Buddle suddenly became aware that a middle-aged, florid man seated on his immediate left was speaking to him.

"They've made a good effort, haven't they? It's a hobby, of course. Must have cost a packet. Could catch on in the town, for the winter months."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Buddle.

"It's the host's missis, I reckon," volunteered his talkative neighbour. "Used to be on the stage - with Cochran, I think. They've got everything second-hand and cheap, but it still sums up to a good lot. Some of the turns are professionals, with two or three amateurs who are glad to appear for nothing."

"Is that so?" murmured Mr. Buddle, his eye roving over the auditorium. The stage was screened with a big drop-cloth, covered with advertisements.

"That's my ad - right in the middle of that blind," explained Mr. Buddle's neighbour. "Fresh vegetables in season, straight from the ground. Farming equipment on hire. Farmer Vyse - that's me - of the Grove Farm."

"I've heard of you, Mr. Vyse. It is good of you to support the venture," remarked Mr. Buddle.

"The ads help them," confided Mr. Vyse. "A good many people are giving their services for nix. All helps. The Wests give the professional acts free accommodation in the pub for three or four nights. Part of their salary. All helps. Their bedrooms are filled with holiday-makers in the summer, but this music-hall business will fill them in the winter as well. The band's coming in now."

Four men had ducked under the curtains which surrounded a narrow area in front of the stage. Mr. Buddle recognised one of them - Mr. Passenger, who kept a second-hand shop in the town.

"All amateurs," whispered Farmer Vyse.

The overture began. Mr. Passenger played the piano, and occasionally waved a hand in the air as befitted the conductor. There was a drummer, a violinist, and a fourth man who played a wind instrument of some type.

They played a short extract from "Light Cavalry", and they performed surprisingly well. Mr. Buddle found himself tapping his feet.

A number 2 came up in a box at the side of the stage, and Mr. Buddle glanced at his programme. He read: No. 2. The Four Moon-

beams - acrobatic dancers.

The auditorium lights went out, the footlights came on. A limelight at the end of Mr. Buddle's row of seats crackled and spat, and a whiskery young man in shirt sleeves directed a beam of light at the stage. The advertisement blind rolled up, disclosing the stage. Four ladies, attired in frilly dresses, came dancing on in a line. The ladies were of uncertain ages, of varying heights, and of indifferent talent. But they worked hard. They tap-danced, turned cartwheels, and high-kicked, accompanied by Mr. Passenger's small band.

Then they bowed, to very slight applause, and the advertisement blind ran down with a bump.

"The Tiller Girls will have to look to their laurels," hissed Mr. Vyse, with what Mr. Buddle took to be irony.

A number 3 came up beside the stage. In the dim light, Mr. Buddle referred to his programme. Freddie Hone - the favourite comedian, he read.

Mr. Hone sang a saucy song, and cracked a few jokes before a well-worn backcloth of a street scene.

"Local man - does plumbing!" continued the running commentary from Mr. Vyse.

Number 4 was Freda Grant - soubrette. Mr. Buddle wondered what on earth a soubrette was. It turned out to be a vivacious young lady who sang "How'd you like to spoon with me?" and then produced a hand-mirror with which she reflected the beam from the limelight on to a number of male members of the audience, who seemed coyly embarrassed by her attentions. Mr. Buddle squirmed down in his seat. He did not want the lively soubrette to focus the beam of light on his own blushing face. Luckily, she missed him.

Number 5 was a trick cyclist, who was given the whole stage to perform on, though there was no very considerable space, with red curtains drawn across the back. He was clever, and performed some excellent balancing tricks.

It was while the cyclist was performing that Mr. Buddle suddenly spotted Larner of the Fifth. The boy was on the ground floor, standing against an exit door near the left front of the auditorium. He was watching the act in progress. His face showed up clearly in the light reflected from the stage.

As Mr. Buddle watched him, Larner slumped down into a vacant stall seat on the left-hand gangway, crossed his legs, and went on watching the act.

The drop-cloth ran down to slight applause. Either the audiences of Everslade were used to receiving cinema shows in silence, or, possibly, the atmosphere was not right at this contrived music-hall. Mr. Buddle felt sorry for the artists.

Uncertain whether to go down and confront Larner, Mr. Buddle looked behind him. The 'circle' was not full, but he would attract unwelcome attention if he made an exit just as a new act was commencing.

He looked at his programme in the dim light. No. 6 - The Verlaines - entertainers. The front blind rolled up. An upright piano had been brought on, and the feminine half of the act was seated at it. She wore a striking evening gown in bright red. The man,

in evening clothes, stood behind the piano. They kicked off with a duet, in which the gentleman asked the lady whether she would walk and talk with him, and, in a contralto voice, she declined the invitation. The duet ended in silence.

"Are you all sitting on your hands?" enquired Mr. Verlaine.

There was a ripple of self-conscious applause in response. The man sang "Roses in Picardy", and left the stage. The lady played a piano solo.

Mr. Buddle looked over the front of the 'circle', down into the stalls. Larner was still in his seat, watching the act on the stage.

To end their turn, the couple sang "Land of Hope and Glory", joined by Mr. Passenger's band, and they all did justice to the splendid tune and the stirring lyric.

The front drop-cloth ran down, and then was hauled up to give a final view of the bowing Verlaines. Then it came down, and the auditorium lights were switched on. The footlights went out, and the man who had been operating the single lime took his departure, no doubt to seek refreshment before the second half of the show.

People were moving in the audience.

"Interval!" said Mr. Vyse. "A pretty long interval, while most of the audience goes to the pub bars. Some of them won't come back for the second half, I reckon."

Mr. Buddle smiled. He glanced down again into the stalls. Larner was no longer there in his seat.

"Will you join me in a pint, sir?" enquired the cordial Mr. Vyse. "They ring a bell before the curtain goes up again."

"Thank you, no," said Mr. Buddle. "You are most kind."

The florid farmer shuffled past Mr. Buddle, and joined the small throng which was heading for the staircase, and, eventually, for one of the bars in the 'Plough & Sail'.

After Mr. Vyse had gone, Mr. Buddle stood up and scanned the stalls. There was no sign of Larner. He must be found, Mr. Buddle told himself.

The staircase was now clear, and Mr. Buddle hurried down, and out into the open air. There were loud sounds of animation and good humour coming from the bars of the inn, which were obviously crowded while the interval was on in the stage performance.

Mr. Buddle did not linger in the front of the inn, however, but made his way down the dimly-lit alley between the inn and the barn. Near the end of the alley was a door in the barn; the door, no doubt, against which Mr. Buddle had seen Larner standing while the trick cyclist was performing. A few yards further on was another door in the barn, this one, in all likelihood, being used for access to the stage by the performers.

On the opposite side of the alley was a door marked 'Private' leading into the inn.

A young fellow was handling crates of empty bottles against the latter door, and Mr. Buddle recognised him as the one who had been called Chris.

Mr. Buddle spoke to him

quietly: "A young friend of mine - a lad - came out through one of those doors" - he indicated the barn - "a few minutes ago. Did you happen to notice him and see where he went?"

Chris straightened himself, and removed a cigarette from his mouth.

"Young chap about seventeen? Yes, sir, I saw him. Proper stage mad, he must be. He was with the Verlaines on the first night, and again last night. Proper stage mad, I reckon."

Mr. Buddle felt a surge of interest. Monty Lowther, who had been "Stage Struck", had had his Mr. Horatio Curll to help him break into the life behind the footlights. It looked as though Larner of Slade had enlisted one or both of the Verlaines to be his real-life version of the fictitious Mr. Curll.

"Did he go with the Verlaines to-night?" asked Mr. Buddle.

"He did, sir," answered Chris at once. "Soon as they came out after their act, he was with them. Might be friends of his. He went up to their room with them. All the pros are given free accommodation in the hotel."

"Where can I find the Verlaines?" enquired Mr. Buddle grimly.

Chris was an obliging young man. He opened the door at the side of the inn - the door marked 'Private'.

"Through here, sir. Up the stairs on the right. The Verlaines have got our best room - Number One. You'll find them there. That young chap went with them."

"Many thanks!" said Mr. Buddle. He pressed a coin into the ready palm of Chris.

Mr. Buddle went into a passage, illuminated by shaded wall-lights. The door closed on a spring behind him. He went up the carpeted staircase on the right, and found himself on a corridor on which were a number of doors which probably gave access to the rooms reserved for residents at the place.

The corridor was deserted. Mr. Buddle moved forward. The first door he reached had the number One painted on it in dingy white. He paused. Here the noise from the distant bars was muted, but he could hear the sound of ordinary conversation behind the door of Room No. 1.

He caught the tail end of a remark in a voice he knew.

"-- I'll try to get to the Hippodrome --"

It was the voice of Larner of the Fifth, Mr. Buddle was certain. He did not want to be guilty of eavesdropping.

He raised his hand and knocked sharply on the door.

"Come in," called out a feminine voice this time.

Mr. Buddle opened the door and went in.

It was a fairly large room, low-ceilinged. There was a well-worn carpet on the floor, twin beds, a dressing table, and several plain chairs. On one of the beds, clad in a dressing gown, sprawled the male half of the Verlaine act. Mr. Verlaine had a newspaper in his hand, which he lowered as the newcomer

entered.

The feminine half of the act was seated before the dressing-table, dabbing her face with a powder-puff.

And lounging in a chair was Larner of the Fifth. He jumped up at the sight of Mr. Buddle. Every vestige of colour drained from the face of the Slade senior.

The lady turned at the dressing-table.

She said: "I thought it was the waiter with our coffee and sandwiches. What do you want?"

Her tones were curt. She was an attractive woman, pretty in a faded kind of way. She looked much older than she had seemed on the stage from the circle of the Everslade Empire.

Mr. Buddle cleared his throat. He said firmly:

"Forgive my intrusion. It is very necessary that I speak to you about this boy."

Larner turned away. The man rose from the bed. He was nearing middle age, with suspiciously black, thinning hair. He had been very handsome in his time. He said, in a deep musical voice:

"What about this boy? What has he done? Who are you?"

"His name is Larner. You may not be aware that he is a schoolboy. I fear that he may be planning to leave school and seek a stage career. He is very much a minor. If he has persuaded you to assist him in any way towards a career on the stage --"

Mr. Buddle broke off. He could see surprise on the faces of the man and woman, but, unexpectedly, there was also surprise in the pallid face of Larner of the Fifth. More than surprise, in fact. Larner was staring at Mr. Buddle aghast.

The woman spoke.

"Who is this gentleman, Dickon?"

Larner replied in a low voice. A little colour came back into his cheeks as he spoke.

"This is Mr. Buddle. He is my English master at Slade."

"Oh!" The lady raised her eyebrows. She eyed Mr. Buddle, and he sensed the chill of her gaze. "Perhaps you will explain."

Mr. Buddle said quietly: "Slade boys are not permitted to come to public houses, or to places of entertainment which may be attached to them." He addressed Larner: "You will apologise to this lady and gentleman, and come back to the school, Larner. I shall consider whether it is necessary to report your conduct to the Headmaster."

"Wait a minute! Not so fast!" It was the man who spoke now. "Do you mean that Dickon is here without permission? In any case, it's not so serious, surely."

"It is very serious," said Mr. Buddle sternly.

"Serious - for a boy to visit his parents?" rapped out Mr. Verlaine. "I would have thought it natural for a boy to wish to visit us."

Mr. Buddle flushed with anger.

"His parents?" He spoke heatedly. "How dare you make such

a claim? You are not the boy's parents. Mr. and Mrs. Larner are very famous performers in the operatic world. They would --"

He broke off. With startling suddenness it came to Mr. Buddle that he was making a fool of himself. All at once he knew what it was that Larner had said the previous evening which had seemed wrong, but which had eluded him later.

There was a brief silence in the room. The two Verlaines were watching Mr. Buddle. Larner spoke.

"My father and mother, sir. I had to come to see them, of course. I have a pass out from school until ten. Mr. Fromo gave it me."

"Mr. Fromo?" Mr. Buddle looked at him hard. "Did Mr. Fromo know that you were coming to the 'Plough & Sail' to see your parents?"

"He thought I was going to a lecture. He didn't know I was coming to the - Everslade Empire." There was an irony in the boy's voice which Mr. Buddle did not like.

"I see." Mr. Buddle felt deeply embarrassed. He hardly knew what to say. "I'm so sorry, Mrs. Verlaine. I did not understand the position -"

Mrs. Verlaine gave a rather sad little smile.

"I assure you that we are Dickon's parents. Our name is Mario. Our real name, I mean. We call ourselves the Verlaines when we appear in variety."

"I'm so sorry," repeated Mr. Buddle. "Naturally your son wanted to see you. I will leave you with your son."

Without another word, he left the room, and the door closed after him.

Mr. Buddle did not return for the second half of the performance at the Everslade Empire.

. . . .

It was not much after nine when a tap came on the door of Mr. Buddle's study, and Larner of the Fifth entered in response to the English master's "Come in."

Mr. Buddle was seated beside his electric fire. The senior was still wearing his overcoat, his face was flushed, and he had obviously been hurrying. He took a deep breath, and said:

"Have you reported me to the Head, sir?"

Mr. Buddle regarded the senior thoughtfully.

"No, Larner. Sit down, please. I think you owe me an explanation."

Larner dropped into a chair opposite Mr. Buddle, on the other side of the fire. Carefully he unfastened the buttons of his overcoat. Suddenly he spoke:

"I'm not ashamed of my parents."

"Why should you be?" remarked Mr. Buddle drily.

"I had the idea you might think so."

"That was your guilty conscience." Mr. Buddle looked stern. "Your conduct has been difficult to understand and impossible to excuse. A place like the 'Plough

& Sail' is strictly out of bounds for any Slade boy, senior or junior, as you well know. All the same, the Headmaster would freely have given his permission for you to visit that hotel had you informed him that your parents were temporary residents there. You never sought such permission. You obtained late passes from a prefect or a master - a different one each evening. You pretended, it seems, that you were attending lectures in the town, while each evening you visited the 'Plough & Sail'. Yet you could have had a pass to visit the hotel had it been known that your parents were there."

"I was not proud that my parents were there." Larner's voice sounded strained. "I would hate anybody here to know where they are and what they are."

Mr. Buddle was shocked at the bitterness of the boy's tone. Before he could reply, Larner went on. It came in a rush, as though he were glad to unburden himself:

"My mother left home to marry my father. He was in opera then. My mother was in love with him, and in love with stage life. My grandfather was very angry. They had only been married a year when I was born. By the time I was ten, they had fallen on hard times. They weren't getting any younger, and good operatic parts were not so easy to come by. I don't know that they were ever all that good --"

He paused. Mr. Buddle sat in silence, and Larner resumed his tale:

"My grandfather is wealthy, but he refused to help unless my mother left the stage. She couldn't or wouldn't do that. Then I went to live with Colonel Larner, and he became my legal guardian. He has been more to me than either of my parents. They just live for one another - and for the stage. I hate it."

"So you took your gradfather's name?"

"That was part of the agreement."

Mr. Buddle sighed.

He said: "If your mother is your grandfather's daughter, her name would not be Larner after she married." Mr. Buddle picked his words carefully: "Perhaps it was a little unfortunate that your parents accepted an engagement so near to your school, but --"

Larner shrugged his shoulders.

"Their agent fixed a fill-up few days while they were resting."

"Resting? You mean while they are on holiday?"

There was a sneer on Larner's handsome face.

"Resting, sir, is a stage euphemism for unemployed."

"Oh, I see."

"They'll be all right for a time. They are booked for a pantomime season at the Brighton Hippodrome, with a short tour to follow. Next week they start rehearsing for that."

Mr. Buddle shook his head. He rose to his feet, and Larner did the same.

"Your grandfather doesn't mind you seeing your parents?"

"He has never forbidden it. When they're short of funds, I help them out. There isn't a lot of money

in cheap variety. I think now that they will always be in cheap variety. My grandfather is more than generous to me - and, after all, they are my parents."

"So you pass on, to your parents, money which your grandfather has given to you. Does he know?"

"I think he guesses. It could be that, privately, he is glad."

Mr. Buddle rubbed his chin in perplexity.

"Your story saddens me a little, Larner. And your article about that Opera House in New York --?"

Larner gave a hard smile.

"Copied from an American magazine. The tales of the big operatic stars who capture huge audiences in Rome and Monte Carlo are just out of my head. In real life, they shrink to the Verlaines at the Everslade Empire. If you don't keep my secret, sir, I must ask my grandfather to take me away from Slade."

"I shall tell nobody, Larner. Your family secrets are your own. But remember what Hamlet said - we were studying the play in class only yesterday. Hamlet comments 'There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.' You have no right to criticise your mother and father, and it is a mistake to tell lies the way you have done. Apart from the moral issue, they trap you in time. It is wrong to be pretentious. A pretentious man is called an upstart." Mr. Buddle paused for a moment. He went on dreamily: "Vavasour was an upstart --"

Vavasour! Another Gem character. The upstart of St. Jim's in another old Gem story. What was it called? "Ashamed of His Name". Something like that. But four Gem stories were at least three too many in seeking a comparison with Larner of Slade. At long last, Mr. Buddle had landed upon the appropriate one. He jerked himself from fiction to fact.

"Who is Vavasour?" Larner was asking.

"An obscure character in Aeschylus," Mr. Buddle said with unblushing mendacity. He opened the door, and Larner stood in the doorway. Mr. Buddle added: "He was an upstart."

"Thank you, sir. I know you will keep my secret. I shall go on being a Vavasour. I'm built that way."

Mr. Buddle said nothing more. Perhaps he felt that there was nothing more to say.

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"Between Ourselves"

E. S. BROOKS AND HIS READERS

by ROBERT BLYTHE

One aspect of Brooks' career which has never, to my knowledge, been enlarged upon, and this is his relationship with his readers as shown in the 'Between Ourselves' column in the Nelson Lee Library.

There is no doubt in my mind, that 'Between Ourselves' was a unique feature, not only in boys' fiction but in that of adults as well. Never before or since, has an author, averaging a 25,000 word story a week, communicated in so frank a style with his readers, establishing meanwhile a rapport that lasted to the end of the Lee, and beyond. How this was achieved I hope to show later, but, first let us go back to the probable origins.

Until 1923, the only author permitted to have his name above the main story was Maxwell Scott. Possibly this was because Scott was the creator of Nelson Lee and Nipper and the editor felt it was owed to him. After all the A. P. had only given him £50.00 for the copyright of his characters, and it may have been in his contract. Who knows? Anyway, no authors name was ever permitted to appear, and so it was not until Bill Lofts and others had researched the files that we discovered that Edwy, together with G. H. Teed, had written the majority of the detective stories prior to O.S.112. Even with the advent of St. Frank's (who's Jubilee we celebrate this year) and a continuous weekly contribution for over six years, the stories remained anonymous.

It is a well-known fact that Edwy was essentially a shy man who shunned overmuch publicity, which was why he did not belong to any club. Neither did he frequent the places where A.P. authors were wont to gather. Nevertheless I feel that it must have rankled with him that he was never given credit for his own stories. After all, everything else that he had had published, whether for the A.P. or other publishers, was credited either to his own name or a pseudonym. We do know that he cared enough to want his own name spelt correctly as shown in his letters to the editor of 'Cycling' when he complained that they had given his name as E. S. Brodie!

Therefore, when in November 1923, it was announced in the editorial for O.S.442 "Next week I shall be publishing an account of a personal interview I had with the popular author of the famous St. Frank's stories on his recent return from an extensive tour of America. So interesting have been his experiences that I have induced him to write a special series of American impressions for the Nelson Lee Library. He has also consented to having his real name published with the interview and has promised to let me have a photo of himself to appear in the paper later on."

Again, in the introduction to the story "The Sign of 13" on the following week it is given, "of particular interest this week to old readers of this paper is the interview with the author of our famous St. Frank's stories, who, after years of unsuccessful persuasion, has, at last been induced to make known his real identity

to the hosts of admirers who read his stories every week."

Be that as it may, I feel that it was not Brooks who needed persuading but the powers that be (or should it be 'were'?) knowing as we do now, that it was Brooks who was beginning, at this time, to guide the editor. It does not take much imagination to come to the conclusion that Brooks insisted upon it. After all, Hamilton was given the credit for his stories, albeit under pseudonyms and had done for many years, therefore Brooks must have argued, why not he?

In the promised interview, allegedly written by the editor, but possibly by Edwy himself, he is considering publishing the interview. "Indeed" (says E. S. B.) "if you do that you will be revealing my name - which hitherto has been shrouded in mystery." And later "I am something of a mystery man so far as our readers are concerned ... they do not know my name, my age and they have no idea of my appearance."

Anyway, all this leads up to the editor asking his readers if they would like to see a portrait of their author.

This was in December 1923, and either the readers were slow in coming forward or Edwy was too shy to have his photo taken because it was not until May of 1924 that the editor announced that a studio portrait had been received. Even so, it was not until September 1924 that a rather unflattering picture appeared together with another (fictitious?) interview. By this time, the credit "The narrative by Nipper" had been changed to "the narrative related by Nipper and set down by E. Searles Brooks". Later, it read "By E. Searles Brooks".

The "Between Ourselves" column had not yet been mooted, but a correspondence column of sorts had been running since the March of that year. This was supposedly conducted by E. O. Handforth and was composed of replies to readers letters. The early ones were, of course, fictitious, but later, readers were invited to write to "Uncle Edward". Whether they appreciated the replies sometimes, is open to doubt. Nearly all letters were answered in a slangy schoolboy manner, but I wonder what the recipients thought of the following:-

> A Reader (Hampstead N. W.). All I've got to say to you is - go and eat coke!
>
> R. Briggs (Cambridge). I'm surprised at you being so extravagant with your writing paper. Your letter measures at least four inches by three. You'll go broke if you buy paper at this rate, old son.
>
> Charles J. Ryan (Peckham S. E.). It's a good job you dried up when you did, because I got the pip long before I got to the end of your letter. Talk about swank!
>
> Gone West (Liverpool). You're a hopeless ass to expect me to answer all those dotty questions in this little space. I'm a detective, not a magician.

The following week, that is 27th September, 1924, saw the first of the regular author's chats. Originally called "Our Authors Page", our author stated his aims and hopes, and in doing so reveals, I think, something of the determination to please - and to learn, as well as something of his character. This was apparent in his early letters to editors when he was struggling very hard to scratch a living as

a writer. Here is what he had to say in that very first chat:-

"Your welcome and enthusiastic letters have, in fact, proved nothing less than a fount of insistent inspiration to me.

At the same time, too much praise is not good for anybody, and a grumble is invariably more helpful than a eulogy. So, my dear boys and girls - yes, and all you adults of all ages and both sexes - I cordially invite your grumbles. Tell me where I have failed to please you, and I will try to avoid those pitfalls in future. My dearest wish is to give you of the best that is in me, and you yourselves can give me the most valuable guidance of all. And you can especially help me by pointing out your dislikes. Now, don't be afraid - let me have it straight from the shoulder. I can assure you I shall heartily appreciate your censure, which will act as a kind of "Trespassers will be Prosecuted" board, cautioning me where not to wander.

It is my hope that this little weekly chat together will bring me into closer touch with you than my stories alone could ever hope to do. I would like it to be a medium of cheery intercourse between us. It will be my aim to talk to you all on matters likely to be of universal interest, confining myself whenever possible to points brought to my notice by yourselves. And when letters are scarce, I propose to interest you, if I can on any topical matters which I think have a good chance of holding your attention for the moments which my page will take to read."

One of the first topics he grappled with, and continued to grapple with at various times, as I, and others like me do to this very day, was to convince people that his stories should be read, then, and only then, were people entitled to criticise. In E.S.B's day it was parents and guardians who were the stumbling block. This is what Brooks asked, not unreasonably -

"To all parents and guardians who disapprove of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY. As the author of the St. Franks' stories I'd like you to do me a personal favour. Take this copy of our little journal, and read it word-for-word from cover to cover. That's all. I'm perfectly content to abide by your decision. I'm not saying this in any spirit of self-praise, but because I KNOW that not one word of my work can offend any fair-minded man or woman on this earth - neither can it offend any healthy boy or girl. Please be sporting, and CAREFULLY READ this one issue - or any other issue that you like. I don't mind a bit which copy you choose. In common fairness, please DO read my stories before you ban them from your household. If there is the slightest word or phrase that gives offence, PLEASE WRITE TO ME, and I will instantly do my utmost to rectify the fault. But I pride myself that your decision will be entirely favourable. That's all."

By paraphrasing that appeal, it could be applied to-day.

In an effort to please the majority it was not unusual for Brooks to ask for suggestion. This he certainly got. For example, some correspondents got quite acrimonious over whether or not the stories should introduce girls. Needless to say, those in favour and that included Brooks, won hands down. I can only assume that there must have been a good many "William" characters about.

The Detective Story Supplement, which had been running for a long time was eventually scrapped as a result of readers opinions. Fullwoods reformation and Edwy's idea to add two more houses to the school were also themes encouraged by the readers. These, and many more ideas were suggested and acted upon during the course of the years, but sometime the suggestions came so thick and fast, and were so contradictory, that poor old Edwy had to put his foot down, as in this excerpt:

"During the week I've come to a decision. Or, to be more exact, the Editor and I have come to a decision. From now onwards we're going to plan stories and arrange such items as the Portrait Gallery General Map. League Magazine, etc., entirely ourselves. In other words all you readers are left out in the cold - you won't have any voice at all.

That sounds a bit grim, doesn't it? And it's meant to be grim too. The Editor and I are so jolly grim that our only course is to come out with a bold statement. Naturally, he's left it to me, but you can take it from me that he's just as determined as I am. In a nutshell, we're both fed up with the present state of affairs. We're confused too, - absolutely bewildered. You may not believe it, but am I the kind of chap to spoof you?

And why this thusness? I can hear all asking that question, so it's distinctly up to me to explain things. Well, for many months - ever since this "Between Ourselves" of mine started - you readers have been suggesting things. You've wanted longer stories - no Magazine - no serial - a big Magazine - two serials - no Portrait gallery - a bigger Portrait gallery, all school story, and no detective interest - all detective story, and no school interest, etc., etc., and then a few more etcs.

Now you can understand, perhaps, why we're fed up. You can appreciate our grimness. You can sympathise with us in our bewilderment. With so many conflicting and contradictory suggestions - made to the Editor as well as myself - we've juggled with them during these months, and the stories have been written according to the majority vote. Well, what's happened? Jealousy! Rank, green jealousy! In fact, the green-eyed monster has fairly haunted us. We've pleased lots of readers, but we've displeased lots of others. And these others have been jealous because THEIR suggestions weren't carried out. The discontented ones wouldn't have said a thing if the Editor and I had been solely responsible for the minor changes. But it's a different thing when these minor changes were brought about by fellow-readers. And I can tell you it's a pretty tough job to keep the whole family of readers from squabbling among themselves.

Still, we've hit upon a solution. And I've got a kind of idea that most of you will be as pleased as Punch. From now onwards I'm not asking for any suggestion with regard to the forthcoming stories and the Editor isn't asking for any suggestions about maps and Portrait Galleries and things. We want you to write to us as often as you please, and you can grumble to your heart's content if you've got anything to grumble about. But no suggestions! It isn't that we do not want suggestions, it's purely for the sake of peace. You can trust us to give you the stories and other stuff that you'll like can't you? My most successful yarns were those I wrote without any suggestions from readers. And I'm going back to that policy. Trust me, and I won't let you down. That's all I ask. Not so very much is it? And let me repeat that I shall be awfully pleased to get letters."

Sometimes Brooks stories were criticised. He never dodged the issue but answered fully and frankly. The question of his 'fantastic' plots is one such issue. This is what he said to one youthful critic:-

"It seems that J. A. Randall's main complaint is that I depart from the ordinary hum-drum round of everyday life in my plots, and in my stories generally. J. A. Randall takes exception to Moat Hollow School, to Mr. Grimesby Creepe, to Dr. Kamak, to the Moor View girls, to Mr. Travers Earle's land yacht, to the White Giants, and to the New Anglians - and to everything in fact, that has a bit of an imaginative touch. J. A. Randall wants my stories to be confined to everyday happenings.

Well, here's the point - and this is why I am still smiling - my critical reader does not characterise my work as "utter rot" on account of the actual writing, but because the situation don't suit him. But do we really want to read about the hum-drum daily round? Supposing I wrote my stories in that way? Somehow, I fancy they would lack interest. At all events, nothing gives me greater pleasure when I want to enjoy an hour's reading, than to pick up a highly imaginative story - such as the works of Rider Haggard, or Conan Doyle or H. G. Wells. If these celebrated gentlemen had clung to the happenings of everyday life, I

doubt if they would have become celebrated. In my small, humble way, I strive to make my yams as interesting as possible - even atthe expense, sometimes, of strict probability. And I've got an idea that the majority of you are hand in glove with me. When it comes to a little bit of imagination, we're as thick as thieves, aren't we? So let's tell J. A. Randall to go and eat coke, eh?"

Nevertheless, Brooks would sometimes take exception to some of the comments expressed perhaps a little too freely. For example from O. S. 517:-

"In your postscript, M. Revelman, you ask me to let you know what I think of your letter. Well, I think you have adopted the wrong tone with me. Perhaps you had the idea that you were writing to the office-boy. But even he isn't under your orders you know!"

And again,

"First of all, just a word with you, F. G. N. W. I think there are two of you really, but I can't quite be certain. In any case, please have a look at that note at the beginning of these pages. You will see that I ask for suggestions and grumbles. But you are quite mistaken if you think you can dictate to me and give me your orders with impunity. You say that you have influence over a good few readers, and use this as a kind of threat. I'm always ready to give careful consideration to all thoughtful suggestions, and if you have any faults to find with my stories, I'd like to know what they are. But don't give me your orders."

Sometimes readers would ask for advice and where Edwy could help if he would. He was particularly helpful when asked how to become an author. Knowing what we know now, we realise he was speaking from bitter experience.

"I am not sure whether I ought to give you any advice, Cyril. It's always a risky thing to do. Your ambition is to become an author and you ask me if publishers will accept a story written in longhand. Well I can answer that. Certainly they would - if the story was a good one. But I'd better warn you that you'll probably have a heart-breaking struggle before achieving any success. It's quite likely that you'll write stories for months, or even years, and have every one sent back. When I first started writing I was sixteen, and it was not until I had put in two solid years of work that I met with any encouragement. Then an editor paid me thirty shillings for a three thousand word story! Even after that I worked for another two years before gaining any kind of market for my stories. I can tell you, it's about the hardest thing in the world to gain a footing as a story writer, and the best qualification is DETERMINATION."

Again,

"I've read your short story, "Old Friend", and if you want it back I'll return it. As you are only thirteen, I have made allowances.

The story shows a slight amount of promise, but the central idea is crudely developed. If you ever become an author, you'll need to put in a few years of practice. As I mentioned in one of my other chats an apprenticeship is always hard to serve - and I think the apprenticeship for story writing is the hardest of all. It is a path that is strewn with disappointments and sorrows. If you win through, all well and good - but if you fail, the most precious years have gone, and you find yourself without a vocation, and it's too late to start all over again. You ought to think twice before launching out."

Although Brooks always treated his correspondents with respect and answered considerately the most elementary enquiries, there is a vein of humour running through the entire existence of "Between Ourselves", (which I forgot to mention was so called from O. S. 502 in 1925) with which Edwy was liable to indulge himself when

the occasion demanded. Here is a typical example:

> "You've heard about author's licence, haven't you? I've got one of course, but I try not to use it too much. You can't buy these licences at the post-office, or at the town hall. They're invisible sort of things, and we only trot them out when we've tied ourselves into knots, and can't undo them. That's when an author's licence comes in jolly handy. Well, there's such a thing as an artist's licence too.
>
> You see, an incident in the yarn will sometimes be jolly good for picturing, but perhaps I describe it as happening on a dark night. Well, if the artist faithfully portrays that incident, all you'll get is a black square on the page. So, you see, he can't be as exact as all that, and out comes his licence. He consults it and finds that he can shove a moon in somewhere in order to throw some light on the subject. And then some of you will probably write to me and say that the artist has made a mistake."

Sometimes it was schoolboy humour, understood by his audience, and although today we might consider it corny, I don't doubt that it raised a chuckle amongst his readers, even when the laugh was directed at a particular letter writer. But the resulting laughter would never hurt. Brooks was too fond of his readers to do that. I'm sure that most readers laughed with the writer and not at him.

One of Edwy's most endearing traits was his love of England, and he had no hesitation in saying so. Would that there were more like him today in this respect. As W. S. Gilbert said in Ko-Ko's little list "the idiot who praises with enthusiastic tone, all centuries but this, and every country but his own." There are many of those today, but in the 20's and 30's children were actually encouraged to be proud of being British and of belonging to the greatest Empire the world had ever known. Brooks was proud of it, and lost no opportunity of encouraging his readers to think likewise.

> "With regard to your hint that I "plug" everything British, I would remind you that I don't run down other nationalities while doing so. But so many British people make a general habit of running down everything British (including the weather, which is the best in the world) that I may sometimes be extra emphatic in the other direction. Other nationalities may beat us in certain ways; but taking Britain and the British altogether, I think they easily come out on top. And when I say "British" I naturally include all our Dominions and the whole Empire. And I believe I should say the very same even if I wasn't British myself. Don't forget O.M.P., that the British Empire is the greatest in the world's history."

and again:-

> "You needn't be afraid of me "hitting the trail for New York", (W.J. Aldous, Norwich), this country is the best in the world and I'd rather live in it than anywhere else."

One thing that used to annoy Brooks more than anything was the suggestion made on many occasions that his replies were not genuine. Whether he succeeded or not I cannot tell, but there are several of us today who remember with affection the replies, typed in green, they received from him. These include myself, Jim Cook (who had his photo included in "Between Ourselves" in 1st N.S. 134 in November 1928), L. S. Elliott (who is a subscriber to the C.D.), A. J. Southway (who used to be a subscriber to the C.D. and was very keen on the compilation of lists on everything connected with the school), Clive Simpson (he once came to a

Wood Green meeting), is he still a subscriber I wonder? Also names like Terence Sullivan (I met him once when I lived in Tufnell Park), Reg. T. Staples and 'Prairie Maid' who wrote week-in and week-out for years.

I don't think that there could have been many authors who could inspire such loyalty among his readers.

Talking of the genuineness of this replies reminds me of one of the most amazing co-incidences that I've ever experienced. Not long after the club was formed the late Norman Pragnell, (who was a great Lee fan and who favoured the 2nd N.S. above all others), was visiting me at Carleton Road, where one of the earliest meetings was held. Anyway we were chatting of this and that and looking through some of the 2nd N.S. when Norman handed me a copy and said in effect, "have a look at the second paragraph in "Between Ourselves" ". What he had pointed out was a reply to a letter I had written. When I'd finished reading it, I had very great pleasure in handing it back to him with the request that he read the next paragraph, for this was a reply to a letter from him!! Amazing!

At this period, halfway through the 1st N.S., things were not going so well for the paper, for the varying changes of style and editorial policy was reflected in Edwy's column.

In 1929 after Alfred Edgar's takeover, the column was called "Gossip about St. Franks" which struck a false note, inasmuch as readers queries about St. Frank's were answered as though Edwy had gone to St. Franks itself for the answer, thereby removing the school and its characters from its Peter Pan existence to the hard world of fact. Brooks himself was not happy about this I'm sure, although he co-operated to the full in persuance of this new concept.

However, with the advent of the 2nd N.S., the column was dropped for over a year before "Between Ourselves" was back again, but only for eleven weeks, when it was replaced by "Our Round Table Talk" which was conducted by the editor. In effect, Brooks' close contact with his readers had been broken and never again during the run of the Lee did Edwy have anything to say, publicly, at least, to his readers. For the first few weeks readers were invited to write to the editor, and special questions could be asked of Edwy, but very soon even this outlet was denied him. One gets a sense of antagonism if one reads between the lines of some of the Editor's comments. For instance in 2nd N.S. 81, we get this passage -

> "Most of the letters, acknowledged above, were addressed to Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks. Many readers appear to think that Mr. Brooks is the editor of the Old Paper. He is not. Therefore to save confusion, it is important that all future letters for discussion on this page must be addressed to - The Editor, NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London E. C. 4. Any points in these letters requiring Mr. Brooks attention will be placed before him by the Editor."

My article should really end here, but I cannot resist one final quote. This is from the last Nelson Lee of all - 3rd N.S. 25, when the editor in 'Our Round Table Talk', having presided over the demise of one of the most popular boys' papers of the 20's had this to say:-

> "Now for the magnificent story programme of next week's bumper number of the Gem.

Firstly, there is the splendid St. Jim's story, "Gussy's Star Turn!" by Martin Clifford. As the title suggests, the elegant aristocratic Arthur Augustus D'Arcy plays the leading role - and what an amazing one it is. Gussy becomes a circus performer - the star turn of Signor Tomsonio's world-famous circus! Gussy's a star turn in himself, but as the cowboy trick rider of the circus, he takes the bun! You'll thoroughly enjoy his humorous and exciting adventures in this tip-top tale of Tom Merry & Co.

Next there is the further thrilling experiences of the St. Frank's chums in China. The title of this grand yarn is "St. Frank's Versus Foo Chow!" Having escaped from Foo Chow's stronghold, Handy and his chums make the most of their freedom. In what way you will discover when you read of their adventures next week.

"See" you in next week's "Gem". Cheerio!"

Truly, the Old Paper had died not with a bang, as they say in science fiction stories, but with a whimper.

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SEXTON BLAKE'S PAST

by S. GORDON SWAN

Faithful followers of the Sexton Blake Saga will recall the tales of his boyhood days which first appeared as serials and then in book form in The Boys' Friend Library (First Series). These were respectively No. 102, "Sexton Blake at School", No. 105, "Sexton Blake in the Sixth" and No. 107, "Sexton Blake at Oxford".

In the first of these narratives Blake was introduced as a boy living in a martello tower with a certain Dr. Lanchester, who taught him many things, including independence and self-reliance. One day the doctor sent his ward out to shoot teal, and when the boy returned to the tower he found Dr. Lanchester dead -- murdered. A letter of instruction informed the boy that he must go to an address in London, a journey for which money had been provided.

At the house in London two middle-aged men heard of the death of Dr. Lanchester and decided that the boy must go to school. "We will call him Sexton Blake," said one, and the other replied: "Sexton Blake; it gives a clue to the truth, yet conceals it."

How Blake went to St. Anne's in "a plain carriage drawn by a pair of magnificent bays" and met Spots Losely, who was to become a lifelong friend, is ancient history. Blake's true identity was never revealed, however, although he did say in the second story that the house he went to in London was "a certain Embassy".

When these stories by Cecil Hayter were reprinted in the B. F. L. (Second Series) in 1933 -- under the name of John Andrews -- Blake was provided with a father, Dr. Berkeley Blake, which was consistent with the revelations about his family contained in No. 1 of The Detective Weekly, "Sexton Blake's Secret", by Jack Lewis.

What may not be so well-known is that there was another version of the detective's juvenile career which ran serially in The Pilot in 1937, entitled "Sexton Blake at School". The Pilot specialised in the fictionalised schooldays of various notabilities, from Guy Fawkes and Buffalo Bill to Harry Houdini. The present writer does not possess the opening instalments of this particular story, but it probably began in No. 73 or No. 74, and definitely finished in No. 91.

Judging by the synopsis in No. 75, the tale began in exactly the same way as Cecil Hayter's account, with Blake living in a martello tower with Dr. Lanchester and being sent out on a shooting expedition to get him out of the way. (Blake adopted precisely the same tactics with Tinker in the story "Tinker Abroad", it may be noted.) When the boy returns to the tower, a variation from the original appears -- he discovers that Dr. Lanchester has been carried away in a boat by three men.

As in the first episode, Blake finds a letter giving him an address in London, where he finds two other guardians, Sir Charles Durex and a man named Burton. These two decide to send the boy to Claverdon Abbey School, and Blake's arrival here

is in contrast to his appearance at St. Anne's -- he is driven up in a sleekly magnificent Rolls Royce. As this story was written in 1937 and Blake's schooldays must have been approximately 25 years before, one would imagine cars of this description were a rarity and possibly an anachronism.

Blake cannot get anyone to tell him his real identity: his guardians plead secrecy, and the headmaster of Claverdon Abbey is no more confidential on the subject. The boy possesses an antique ring, however, which is found to be the royal ring of the Duchy of Karenberg -- a symbol of authority in that country. At school the boy soon tangles with a burly scholar known as Bull Bristow and has a fight with him, after which they become friends. Bristow takes the place filled by Sir Richard Losely in the original version, and appears in an adult role in another Blake serial in The Pilot called "The Flaming Frontier".

There are attempts on Blake's life and the boy does not trust his two guardians, Sir Charles Durex and the man Burton. Nor does he trust Bristow when he finds out that Burton is Bristow's uncle, and for a time there is a rift between the two friends. Blake's main enemy, however, is a man known as "His Excellency", otherwise The Margrave of Julian-Schwartzheim, who had been Finance Minister to the Duchy of Karenberg. This man, a malevolent hunchback, is keeping prisoner a boy who is the exact double of Sexton Blake.

Numerous adventures and narrow escapes follow, and on one occasion Blake leaves the school in an effort to solve the mystery surrounding him. He is followed by Bull Bristow, who comes to Blake's rescue at a desperate moment, thus restoring their old friendship.

The two proceed to Hawksbay Manor, which His Excellency has made his headquarters and where Blake's double is imprisoned. Blake succeeds in rescuing this boy and finds out that he is known as Prince Rupert of Karenberg. The truants return to Claverdon Abbey in apparently repentant mood and Blake smuggles his double into the school. The two culprits are to be expelled, but Blake bluffs his guardian, Sir Charles Durex, into believing that his ward knows more about his schemes than he actually does, and the order for explusion is rescinded. Instead, the two are publicly flogged.

The climax comes at Hawksbay Manor, where Sir Charles and Burton have a showdown with His Excellency. In this house Blake finds his old guardian, Dr. Lanchester, who has been kept a prisoner and was the best of the three guardians. It appears that, years before, when His Excellency was Finance Minister of Karenberg -- and out of favour with the Duke -- Sir Charles, an international financier, had made a treaty with him to exploit the vast, untapped wealth of Karenberg. Then the Duke and his English wife were killed in an avalanche and His Excellency constituted himself guardian of their son, Prince Rupert and announced that the boy was mentally defective so that His Excellency could control the country. He also hoped to doublecross Sir Charles and the two became enemies, plotting against each other for years.

It transpires that, when the Duke and his wife were killed, they were accompanied by the latter's twin sister, Lady Ann Blakeney, and her husband, Sir

Ronald Blakeney, who were also killed. They left behind a son, Ronald, who was the image of Prince Rupert. Sir Charles conceived the idea of rearing a puppet Duke in opposition to His Excellency's ward, but Dr. Lanchester brought up the boy too well for the furtherance of Sir Charles's schemes.

In the end, His Excellency blows up Hawksbay Manor and all the conspirators, including Dr. Lanchester, are killed, but Blake and his friends escape. So from this narrative we find that Sexton Blake's real name is Ronald Blakeney.

It seems strange that, while in 1933 the Amalgamated Press devised a plausible parentage for Blake, some four years later they published this story which provided Blake with an alternative identity.

One also wonders what Cecil Hayter had in mind when he left Blake's origin in obscurity and what was meant by the reference to the house in London which was "a certain Embassy". This phrase may have given rise to the new story in The Pilot, which was by an anonymous author, but whom I suspect to have been the writer known as John Brearley -- real name, John Garbutt.

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The sixth and Christmas meeting of Friars, Connoisseurs and Saints will be held at Courtfield in December, and the seventh at Dollis Hill and the actual dates will be announced in the very next issue of the COURTFIELD Greyfriars Herald newsletter.

If you have not already received any of the previous copies of the circles meetings then write now for this three page 5,000 word documentary complete with photographs and pictures enclosing foolscap S.A.E. A few copies of number four still remain left over from the second reprint, at the time of going to press and feature among other nostalgia, and reports, the visit of Howard Baker himself to COURTFIELD, to meet some of his keenest and most enthusiastic supporters, and to discuss with them, new titles, ideas, and publications for his beautiful reproductions. Also featured are a large number of readers' letters.

Your Courtfield correspondent and hostess extend Christmas Greetings to Friars and Saints everywhere, particularly to all those enthusiasts who have done so much to make our hobby the enjoyable pastime it is. All enquiries to:-

R. F. (BOB) ACRAMAN

"COURTFIELD", 49 KINGSEND, RUISLIP, MIDDX., HA4 7DD.

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Xmas Greetings and Happy Memories to the Editor, Eric Fayne, W. Howard Baker, Norman Shaw, Derek Adley and all Members of O.B.B.C's everywhere and your best New Year yet. PHIL HARRIS

MONTREAL, CANADA

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Happy Days to all Club Friends at home and abroad from

HARRY and RAY HOPKINS

'The Game is Afoot'

by ERNEST HOLMAN

One hundred years ago a medical student named John H. Watson was approaching the conclusion of his studies at University College in Gower Street, London. In 1878 he was awarded his M.D. and proceeded to enter the Army as a surgeon - necessitating a Course at Netley, near Southampton, before being attached as Assistant Surgeon to the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers. His Regiment was then stationed in India and on his way to take up his duties, John Watson learned that the 2nd Afghan War had begun. Upon his arrival at Bombay, the newcomer was informed that the Corps containing his Regiment was deep in enemy country. He eventually joined them in Kandahar. Some time afterwards, he was attached to the Berkshires, with whom he was serving when the battle of Maiwand took place.

During the fighting he was hit in the shoulder by a Jezail bullet and it was only due to the courage and devotion to duty of his orderly, Murray, that he escaped falling into the hands of Ayab Khan's murderous Ghazis. Murray threw the Doctor across a pack mule and managed to convey him safely to the British lines. In considerable distress, John Watson was taken to the hospital at the Peshawur base. After a gradual recovery, he then became a victim of enteric fever. For months his life was in jeopardy; when he finally became convalescent, a Medical Board shipped him back to England. After a month at sea, the ship Orontes reached Portsmouth.

In due course, he found himself in London, with a half-pay income of 11s.6d. per day. He lived a sparse, uninteresting existence, spending his limited means rather above a sensible level. He decided one day to leave his private Strand hotel and go in search of less expensive and simpler accommodation. It was the year following his discharge that he met, for the first time, a gentleman of the name of Holmes - the meeting taking place in the Pathological Laboratoryof St. Bartholomew's Hospital. This meeting led to an agreement to 'pair up' as lodgers in a set of rooms at No. 221B in Baker Street. The first case in which Holmes and Watson were associated began on 4th March.

Sherlockians all over the World have accepted the fact that 1881 was the year in which these two gentlemen first became acquainted. To cement this fact, a plaque at St. Bartholomew's Hospital commemorates this meeting with the following inscription:

> At this place New Year's Day 1881 were spoken these deathless words: "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive." by Mr. Sherlock Holmes in greeting to John H. Watson, M.D., at their first meeting.

Let us look at this date: New Year's Day 1881. I say to you now, that - it couldn't have been so! Consider the evidence, my friend.

The battle of Maiwand occurred in mid-summer 1880. Watson was taken to the base hospital, eventually rallied, was then hit by enteric fever; for months his

life was in danger, then upon recovery he was sent to England in a ship that took one month to complete the journey. The Authorities awarded Watson his discharge, he gravitated to London and lived for some time at a private hotel. He finally decided to seek cheaper accommodation and found it when he met Sherlock Holmes on 1st January.

Watson suffered considerably during that time, physically and mentally. It MUST have been a long period of time before he eventually took root in Baker Street. Yet - if 1st January, 1881, is to be believed - the time between the battle of Maiwand and his meeting with Holmes covered only five months. No, Watson, surely it is elementary that, even if New Year's Day is accepted, the year must have been 1882.

Much writing on what is called the 'Holmes Canon' (including the theories of, for instance, Christopher Morley, Dorothy L. Sayers, our own Bill Lofts) covers pretty well every aspect of the life of Holmes and Watson. Disagreements there obviously have been - long treatises have been presented on major and minor incidents of the many cases. Yet nowhere, to the best of my studying, has there ever been any disputing of the year 1881. History tells us that Maiwand happened in the mid-summer of 1880 - Watson himself is the authority ("A Study in Scarlet") for the date of 4th March as the start of his first case-association with the Detective. So - how on earth could that first meeting have been 1881?

Whilst we are in this Sherlockian field, it would hardly come amiss to mention the most debated theme of all - the location of 221B Baker Street. Probably more reams have been churned out on this matter than on any other in the Holmes Saga. One more churning will now occur; again with a complete disagreement with most of the investigators - people who have nearly all accepted that the 'Holmes Home' was on the WEST side of Baker Street. Well, you know - it wasn't!

In the eighteen-eighties, Baker Street was a shorter thoroughfare. It ran on the East side from No. 1 (at the corner of Lower Berkeley Street - now called Fitzhardinge Street) northwards to No. 42 (on the corner of Paddington Street). On the West side, the numbers ran from No. 44 (at the corner of Crawford Street, opposite Paddington Street) southwards to No. 85. (For some reason, Baker Street never possessed a No. 43.) No. 85 was the last house before a large Georgian mansion at the corner of the North side of Portman Square (opposite the then Lower Berkeley Street).

Many numbers on the West side of Baker Street have been suggested for 221B by numerous writers - if there is any common ground for location, it has been generally agreed that 221B was somewhere between Dorset Street (which crosses Baker Street) and King Street, opposite to Blandford Street. (Today, Blandford Street crosses Baker Street and the name of King Street has disappeared.)

There is a group of Sherlockians who have settled on No. 61 on the West side as the likely place for 221B. This would place the famous quarters at half-way down the old Baker Street and also about half-way between Dorset Street and King Street. I would agree with this - but with one important variation.

221B Baker Street should be placed at such a spot but - on the other (East)

side of the street. In fact, OPPOSITE No. 61 - half-way down between Dorset Street and Blandford Street. The number in question in those days? No. 22 of course. Holmes and Watson occupied rooms on the first floor, which was in reality called 1B. Hence the derivation of 221B. (Mr. Sherlock Holmes, Room 1B, 22 Baker Street.) What could, in fact, be more elementary? (No. 22 today is at a different location and at the time of writing is a trading organisation known as Motherhood House!)

Yes, but is there any EVIDENCE to support this assertion? There is, indeed. One instance comes, admittedly, from memory - not always a reliable source after the passage of the years. All the same, I can recall the many short films which I saw when a boy in the 1920's, with Eille Norwood as Holmes. Clients coming from Baker Street station, to my memory, always arrived at 221B from the left of the screen - which they could only have managed to do if Holmes' rooms were on the East side. (Probably Lestrade and Gregson, coming from the Yard, would have entered from the right - but this is only speculation.)

"The Empty House" was named Camden House and was stated to be opposite 221B. Well, there WAS a Camden House on the West side of Baker Street in those days. The surest indication, however, of the East side as the correct location can be found in 'The Cardboard Box'. Watson tells us:

> "It was a blazing hot day in August. Baker Street was like an oven, and the glare of the sunlight upon the yellow brickwork of the house across the road was painful to the eye."

This leads to the famous mind-reading scene, when Holmes astonishes Watson by an accurate assessment of the latter's thoughts. After this incident, they both proceed on a case to Croydon, thence to Wallington. After leaving a house at the latter place, Holmes asks the waiting cabby to take them to a decent hotel for lunch. So the sunshine on the house in Baker Street must have been the morning sun - and the morning sun could only have fallen on the WEST side of Baker Street - opposite 221B, as the narrative informs us.

The year 1881 and No. 221B are merely two incidents from the vast Holmes Saga - selected because they happen to be the main points on which I dare to disagree with the Sherlockian Experts. This 'scholarship' of delving into the Sherlock Holmes stories and extracting items and facts of interest has occupied many keen readers and writers for a considerable number of years. 'Images' was the description of a somewhat disbelieving Newspaper Correspondent at one time, intended to convey his thinly-veiled contempt for such pursuits. Well, of course, unless one enters into the 'spirit of the thing' it probably does seem to come under the heading of 'chasing rainbows'. Not, however, to the true Sherlockian - which, I hope, includes the present reader. If you are not, then why not set about becoming one?

It is a fascinating procedure - get down your S. H. volumes from the shelf and start delving. You will be surprised at the revelations - and ramifications also in many other directions, some not connected with Holmes in any direct manner. From both the writings of others and my own interpretations, I have discovered several interesting items - for instance:

Mrs. Hudson's real name was Martha Turner.

Martha Turner was also the name of the first victim of Jack the Ripper - startling news for Watson to read in his newspaper, whilst enjoying his August honeymoon that year.

Holmes often used the word 'elementary' - and frequently addressed Watson as 'my dear Watson'. He NEVER, however, used the expression 'elementary, my dear Watson'.

Watson's short stories of Holmes did not appear in the Strand Magazine until after Holmes' descent over the Reichenbach Falls - in the time following the death of his wife, the former Mary Morstan.

During the eighteen-eighties, there was a constable stationed at a West London Division named Destrale (re-arrange that name into Lestrade!). There was also a London Inspector named George Tobin (Tobias Gregson?).

'Images' perhaps - but again going into anagrams, rearrange those six letters and you come up with - 'game is'. How often does Holmes start off eagerly on an adventure by including these two words in his promptings to Watson?

Have a go! You, too, will make discoveries - and when you have done so, the 'spirit of the thing' will take you, making you exclaim 'Come now, the game is afoot!'

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The Supernatural

by R. J. GODSAVE

There is little doubt that E. S. Brooks was in his element in writing of the supernatural in the Nelson Lee Library. If stories of the occult are described as "the horror that walked by night" Brooks also gave his readers "the horror that walked by day". Such was the atmosphere that he created that a reader was fully entitled to believe that "Black Magic" was really being enacted. Many of the incidents in his stories could not on the face of it have a natural solution, and shows his skill in being able to give a plausible explanation at the end of the series.

It is generally thought that the Dr. Karnak and the Ezra Quirke series are his best in this particular field. As one of the leading authorities on Egyptology Dr. Karnak had been appointed curator and librarian of the museum at St. Frank's. Many valuable relics from Egypt were on exhibition including a splendidly preserved mummy, complete with sarcophagus. Hitherto, the museum has been just a private collection and hobby of Dr. Stafford.

Dr. Karnak's desire was that the juniors of St. Frank's should become students of Egyptology and delve into the subtle depths of ancient Egyptian magic and sorcery. He explained that the corpse was actually the reincarnation of the moon god - Baal of Harran - and was possessed of such powers as were not dreamt of.

Like many who had been in close contact with Dr. Karnak they were struck by his gripping personality, and such juniors mainly of the studious type quickly came under his influence. It was DeValerie's suggestion that a Sorcery Club be formed which would endeavour with Dr. Karnak's assistance to try to get in touch with the spirit of Baal. The first meeting of the Club was held in the museum and from the casket which lay on the table a grisly hand appeared with a piece of paper in its grasp with a message purporting to come from the spirit world.

On another occasion the sarcophagus was discovered by Nipper to be empty. When he went to speak to Dr. Karnak of the empty mummy case and both returned to the museum the mummy was in its usual place. Such happenings soon caused the health of the juniors to suffer and it was noticeable that DeValerie would drift off into a deep and silent reverie. Dr. Karnak's power over this junior was such that in effect he was a literal slave to his will.

Such happening soon reached the ears of authority, and Nelson Lee forbade Dr. Karnak to hold any more meetings. Such was Dr. Karnak's rage that he willed DeValerie to enter Lee's bedroom and prick his housemaster in the neck with a needle coated with deadly poison. At the vital moment Dr. Karnak's attention was distracted by a scratching on the window and his powerful concentration left DeValerie who collapsed on the floor having flung the needle away, the spell being broken. This extract of the Dr. Karnak series was very much above the heads of the reader age for which the Nelson Lee Library catered.

The Ezra Quirke series was very different from the Dr. Karnak series. In

a sense he was more in line with spiritualism and his seances were held in a cellar below the school. Like Dr. Karnak, he soon gathered a following who came under his influence. Here again the more level headed juniors were as much mystified as were the faithful followers. Levitation was performed in front of the juniors who attended these seances. Many of the manifestations were so uncanny that many of the juniors were forced to believe that he possessed strange occult powers.

Quirke soon became a power in the school and anyone who crossed him soon suffered in some form or other. Kenmore at one occasion believed he had gone blind. There is little doubt that the owl which perched on Quirke's shoulder gave emphasis to the mystery that surrounded Quirke. Brooks who liked to have one mystery inside another ended this series in a remarkable way.

First, in order to expose Quirke for a trickster he had William Napoleon Brown perform many of the manifestations which Quirke had performed in his seances. His performance was in the nature of a Maskelyn Magic Show and did much to lessen the awe with which Quirke was regarded. Secondly, he made use of the previous series in which St. Frank's was rebuilt with the New Houses. It was not difficult for Quirke's uncle Jim Roach to obtain a job with the contractors and privately concentrate on the building of a cellar which was divided into two and had only one sliding door. In one cellar was all the mechanical devices which assisted Quirke in his manifestations and the other was left bare with the exception of the heavy black curtains and subdued lighting which was the same in the cellar with the equipment. When Nipper made arrangements to search the cellar with Quirke the sliding door was put into use to let the juniors into the bare cellar for their search.

The whole of Quirke's activities were really to get the Hon. Douglas Singleton to become one of his ardent followers in order to obtain money from him for an invention which was a marvellous cure for flesh hurts. Professor Tucker's identity was borrowed for this purpose, and his disguised double was for the sole purpose of inducing Singleton to believe the invention was genuine.

It is Brooks handling of the supernatural part of these stories which so gripped his readers. Even to a hard-headed realist it is not easy to dismiss strange happenings as poppycock. I once attended a private seance at which a table was made to raise and lower in answer to questions put to the so-called spirit world. I wish such happenings could be explained.

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Warmest Seasonal Greetings to our esteemed Editor, bless him. To Tom and all Midland Club Members, Uncle Ben and all the London Club. To Cyril Rowe - Albert Watkins of New Zealand and especially to Henry Webb and family.

STAN KNIGHT

CHELTENHAM

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BONZO

by W. O. G. LOFTS

Mr. G. E. Studdy, creator of Bonzo.

While on a recent visit to a farm in Devon, the farmer informed me that he had affectionately named his dog Bonzo - after the famous cartoon dog that he remembered in the old weekly magazine The Sketch. Bonzo is probably remembered by most people over the thirty age group, as the antics of this small bull-terrier type of puppy won the hearts of millions of people old and young alike.

His impish mischievous adventures each week started as a one page coloured portrait in the old glossy highbrow paper The Sketch around 1920, though at this time he was not named. It was not until the issue dated November 8th, 1922, that he was named for the first time, when a caption under his picture explained as follows ....

> A large number of readers have shown themselves curious as to the name of the famous Studdy dog. To satisfy them, we announce that his name is Bonzo.

Whether this name was supplied editorially or by the creator - artist George Ernest Studdy is not known, as his actual creation is still something of a mystery. In January 1926, and when he was preparing Bonzo for the first time in comic strip form for Titbits, he wrote a short article about his then famous creation. "It all started", he said "When I was asked by the editor of The Sketch, to draw some dog robots, and he added on the dalek figures funny arms and legs. He gradually went on from there, and eventually created the comical Bonzo.

A perusal through the available back numbers of that paper, has so far failed to locate these robot figures, but certainly long before Bonzo was actually named,

Studdy was drawing dogs in a one page coloured item entitled "This Week's Studdy", and predominate amongst them was the then un-named Bonzo. Indeed, it seems obvious that this was his favourite breed, as an artist friend of mine has an original painting used for an advertisement of an identical looking Bonzo. This dates back roughly to about the First World War.

But whatever his actual origin, there is no doubt that soon after his creation was named in November 1922, Bonzo quickly became a household name, and his antics were greatly loved each week, and he won the hearts of almost everyone. When one thinks of it, the name of Bonzo is in itself a curiosity, as certainly no indication has ever been given why he was named thus, though the same could be said for the name of Fido. Bonzo is actually the name for a Japanese priest, and there was once a Bishop Bonzo of a European City. Since 1922, probably hundreds of dogs were named after Bonzo, or indeed thousands without the owners knowing the actual meaning of the name.

The weekly Studdy Dog adventures had eventually been collected and made into a Portfolio costing two shillings. With the naming of Bonzo the third was named The Bonzo portfolio and they are quite expensive to buy today being collectors' items. Then there came the spate of Bonzo pocket story books, painting books, and Bonzo Annuals. Commercialisation brough the Bonzo films, a stage Bonzo with a dwarf playing the part, and trained by the famous Lupino Lane. Bonzo card games, crackers, calendars, teasets, and a salt and pepper set. There was even a Bonzo fox-trot, and his name was obviously given to many other products as well. His strip and pictures were syndicated into many overseas publications including America, as well as appearing in the Daily Sketch, and having a long run in The Sunday Graphic.

The late thirties, and the coming of the Second World War, saw the gradual decline of Bonzo, though suprisingly some publications did appear during the war years, and two Annuals after his death on the 25th July, 1948.* George Ernest Studdy was then aged 70, having been born at Stoke, Dameral, near Plymouth, Devon, in 1878. He actually started out to be an engineer, but found the pay of eight shillings a week far too low for his needs. An accident to his foot caused by a pitch-fork (which suggests he may have lived on a farm) when a boy laid him up for some time. To amuse himself he sketched almost anything whilst a prisoner indoors. Later he attended Dulwich College, and started to study art at evening classes at Heatherley's Art School. At the turn of the century, and shortly after his work can be traced in some of the comic papers, especially The Big Budget and Boys' Leader group. (Funny Pips). Later he drew for several boys' papers before going on to the glossy magazines.

Curiously, G. E. Studdy who lived at Earls Court, London, did not make his fortune out of Bonzo, or if he did he certainly did not die a prosperous man. But he did leave behind something far more lasting than money. Memories of a delightful mischievous puppy who appeared in a series of excruciatingly funny portraits and cartoons. These are now preserved for all time in the history of famous cartoon characters.

Probably other visitors to that farm in Devon, who hear the name of Bonzo,

will likewise be instantly reminded of the one and only Bonzo - the one that everyone dearly wanted to own and love.

* Bonzo Annuals 1950 and 1951. Published by Dean at 6/6d.

Stories and verse were by Christine E. Bradley. It is also certain that the illustrations in these two Annuals were not by G. E. Studdy. Apart from the style, the pictures fit in with the stories and verse which were original.

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WANTED TO PURCHASE: Boys' Friend 4d. No. 12, "Hal Read, The Running Man", No. 30, "The Web Of The Spider".

ROBERT W. STORY

34 ABERDEEN CRESCENT, BRAMALEA, ONTARIO

CANADA L6T 2P9

= =

SALE: Bound volume Nelson Lee, o.s. 140/151, £10. Various Schoolgirl, years 1934/1935, 60p each.

GIBSON, 261 FOURTH ST., WONTHELLA,

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= =

Christmas Greetings to all Collectors. Have you good copy of Magnet 1206? Will buy or exchange.

Ring MAURICE HALL, WALTON 24848.

= =

Best wishes for Xmas and New Year to Ben, Eric, Roger and all fellow collectors.

EDWARD THOMSON, 6 RITCHIE PLACE, EDINBURGH.

= =

WANTED Scoops Nos. 5, 10, 11, 12, 16 & 18 onwards and Bullseyes.

DALTON, 70 NORTH LANE, LEEDS 8.

= =

Mr. CLEGG, 6 CROFT END, LETCOMBE REGIS, WANTAGE, OXON., wishes to buy the following SOL's, good prices for reasonable copies: 151, 167, 169, 170, 196, 198, 204, 206, 214, 218, 220, 249.

= =

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J. de FREITAS

648 STUD RD., SCORESBY, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3179.

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Haunted Niches

by TONY GLYNN

If you heard Benny Green talking about the writings of Frank Richards one Sunday morning in late summer, you will probably remember that he said the Greyfriars stories were a kind of personal time machine. Just by reading them, he is carried back to his childhood, with World War II on the horizon.

I know the feeling and so, I'm sure, do almost all the readers of the C. D. Marcel Proust, who was carried away to his childhood by the aroma of a certain type of French cake, has nothing on me when it comes to being whirled away on the time-machine. In my case, it's a journey for which a motley variety of old boys' books and comics provide the launching pad.

For instance, there are certain issues of "Chips" from 1938 which carry me right back to days charged with speculation as to whether Chamberlain would persuade Hitler not to make war. There are wartime issues of the Thomson papers, such as the "Wizard" containing stories like "The Truth About Wilson" and "The Secret of Dr. Cobros", which whisk me into the hard days of life on the "home front". I'm just beginning secondary school again, I can taste the Spam sandwiches, I can hear Tommy Handley on the wireless and I can see my mother, making a "utility" wedding cake for our neighbour's daughter, about to marry a sailor on his brief leave.

I can go even further back. Early issues of "Mickey Mouse Weekly" take me to 1936. I am very young, but I see, beyond the comic strip, adventures of Bobby and Chip and Mickey Mouse and Horace Horsecollar in the wild west, the figure of old Mr. Dexter. He kept a greengrocery shop across the street from my aunt's house, where I stayed at holiday times and where I first devoured "Mickey Mouse". Curiously, Mr. Dexter sold sweets at his shop - boiled sweets, made in the shape of fish. I devoured those, too.

I have a million memories of magazines, strips and stories tucked away in whatever niches are within my head - and some of those niches have been haunted for years by persistant memories of stories which I haven't glimpsed since childhood.

In most cases, I can place the circumstances under which I read them which usually means I can give them an approximate date, but things like titles and characters are lost.

Take, for instance, the story I read in an odd copy of what I'm sure was the "Skipper". I read it about 1938 and it dealt with some crusaders who were prisoners in Byzantium. I can vividly see an illustration in a style which I now know was that of Dudley Watkins and I have distinct memories of the heroes escaping from a dungeon through some kind of drain. I think this was already an old issue of the magazine and I wanted more of that particular serial. All these years, it has been an unfulfilled wish. Does anyone know the details of this story, when and where it appeared, etc.?

Again, somewhere about 1938 or 1939, I encountered a serial in one of the

comic papers which so caught my imagination that I made a point of taking the paper regularly for a time. I believe I deserted my regular "Chips" to do so because, though I'm talking about a commodity which cost only one penny, it was a time when pennies were hard to find.

I have a feeling that the comic in question was either "Comic Cuts" or "Larks", but the story concerned a group of boys who were sent to a reformatory for the terrible crime of playing football in the street. It was a school story with a difference and I really lived the adventures of those boys in their grim surroundings. The reformatory was a Victorian type of place the like of which had surely been swept away by the 1930's.

In due course, I found that the secondary school to which I won a place had started life as a Victorian reformatory - more properly, an industrial school. It still had a yard entirely enclosed by a high, prison-like wall. When I arrived there in 1941, that haunted niche became active and I felt an immediate affinity with the boys in that story. The title of the yarn and the names of the characters have entirely fled. Can anyone help?

Back to Thomson again and another niche is haunted by memories of a story about boys in New York City. I have a feeling that there was an English boy among them and mature consideration makes me think it was inspired by the Dead End Kids, whose first film, "Dead End", was released in 1937. The Thomson paper it appeared in and the name of the story are now forgotten, but I have a distinct memory of first encountering it, sitting on the path outside the home of yet another aunt in the bright sunshine of some thirties summer. The "blood" I was reading belonged to a cousin older than myself and perhaps I should explain that, in my Manchester social circle, the Thomson papers were always called "bloods", an obvious carry-over from Victorian "penny blood" days. This term was never used of the "Magnet", "Gem", "Triumph", "Champion" or "Modern Boy", though. They seemed slightly more refined and a little nearer real life than the vigorous Thomson "Big Five".

All I can remember of that story of the sidewalks of New York was that one of the characters was a negro boy who couldn't speak because he once fell from a skyscraper and landed on the top of his head. Many a year passed before I walked the crowded and fascinating streets of New York myself but, when I did, I often thought of the extreme unlikelihood of anyone falling from one of those great buildings, landing on his head and surviving.

But what was the title of that story and where did it appear?

I do remember the title of one Thomson serial which haunts the niches of my memory, "The Sons of the Dirk", one of those Jacobite tales beloved of the Dundee school. I fancy it was in the "Wizard" but can't be sure and, again, it must have been about 1938 or 1939, a period when I was beginning to read story papers like mad.

I remember it because I was one of a group of schoolfellows who had developed a following of the story and our playtimes were given over to acting out elaborate scenarios in which we were the kilted heroes of the heather. Once more, I'd like to know when and where "The Sons of the Dirk" appeared.

Noel Coward once had a character remark on the strange potency of cheap music. He could equally have referred to cheap literature. Was it Agatha Christie or Margery Allingham who for years had a haunted niche about someone in a train glimpsing a murder when speeding past the rear windows of some houses? At all events, she developed a story of her own out of this incident remembered from a comic paper tale read in childhood.

Probably, we all suffer from such haunted niches of memory, but I find it a quite bearable ailment and, after all, it is probably one of the elements which draw us together in the collecting fellowship.

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OBB's, Comics, s.a.e. for lists.

GUY SMITH

THE WAIN HOUSE, BLACK HILL, CLUNTON

CRAVEN ARMS, SHROPSHIRE.

= =

Seasonal Greetings to Editor, Staff, all OBBC hobbyists, everywhere, also to Darrell Swift, George Hardiman, Guy Smith, Dick Jackson, James Gall, Laurie Sutton, Len Wormull.

From BERT HOLMES

= =

WANTED: Chums Annuals. FOR SALE: third series Sexton Blake's, No. 200 onwards, as new, 20p each.

S. PERRY, 2 HEATH RD., LANGLEY, Near MAIDSTONE, KENT.

= =

SALE: Collectors' Digest 40-360. Numbers missing are 100, 145, 222-225. Offers for years only.

WOOD, WHEELWRIGHTS, SWEFLING, SAXMUNDHAM, SUFFOLK.

= =

HOWARD BAKER, of HOWARD BAKER BOOKS, extends Christmas Greetings to Eric Fayne, to his Customers, and to all readers of The Collectors' Digest. May you all enjoy a very happy christmas, and we hope that The Greyfriars Press plays a modest part in the season's pleasures for many of you. And may the New Year bring better days for us all. God bless.

= =

Best wishes to all my customers/friends for Xmas and the New Year.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE RD., LONDON SE19 2HZ.

North and South

by R. HIBBERT

Speaking ...

No, if you don't mind, I'll do it in my native patois.

Speakin' as a lad who were browt up inna Northern mill town - factory chimneys, tripe shops, clogs an' shawls, the lot - Ah couldn't 'elp but notice that schoo's in't' Magnet an' Gem an' Nelson Lee were o' down South.

"Thur i' places like Kent an' Sussex an' 'Ampshire," said Tom Hallas. "Thur different tha' schoo's round 'ere."

They were too, and, so we suspected, were the school boys. With the coming of the talkies and the radio we'd found out that not everybody in Britain talked the way they do around Manchester.

"Thi talk posh," said Tom Hallas. "La-di-da. Cut glass."

So there it was; Harry Wharton, Tom Merry, Nipper and the rest didn't just lead totally different lives from ours they even talked differently.

"Thi say, 'Jolly decent' ...," said Tom Hallas.

"Aye, Ah know thi do," I told him.

"When thi mean 'O reet'."

"Thi do an' all," I agreed.

And we marvelled at the great gulf between us and the heroes of the Remove.

"If tha wanted te go te St. Frank's, an' if thi dad could afford te send thi, tha'd never get through th'interview wi't' th'eadmaster. Not wi'out an interpreter, ony road."

Tom was being a bit vindictive; it wasn't my fault I was cleverer than he was; all Standard IV recognised the fact.

"Ah'll settle fer Manchester Grammar School" I promised him. And I did and I didn't go further South than Llandudno until I joined the Navy in 1942.

Now, you might be thinking how provincial we were. But if Tom and I didn't know much about the South I don't think Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks knew much about the North.

It wasn't often their heroes went further North than Oxford; not in Great Britain anyway. North America, yes; the North Pole, I wouldn't be surprised; North of the Ouse seldom. Terra Incognita up there; 'Here be Blast Furnaces and Dark Satanic Mills' was what was written across their maps.

And most of the pupils and staffs of their schools came from the deep South.

There were a few regional oddities - Irishmen who didn't do much more than a lot of bejabering, careful Scots and the occasional blunt "Ah call a spade a bliddy shovel" Northerner. But I don't count Johnny Bull as a Northerner. He's no different than the rest of the Anglo Saxon members of the Famous Five either in speech or outlook. He has an irritating, self-satisfied pigheadedness which is supposed to be Yorkshire dourness, but is really a Frank Richards' device for making a series half as long again. So long as Johnny's feeling self righteousness misunderstandings can go on indefinitely.

Regional types tended to be lumped in with wild colonial boys, Heathen Chinee and far from reliable half breeds. The boys from the furthest corners of the Far Flung came in with a certain amount of style - riding ostriches or rickshaws if Edwy Searles Brooks created them - held the stage for a series, and then, if they stayed on at school - and half breeds didn't; not even reformed half breeds - became more or less anonymous members of the Fourth, Remove or Shell. They had walking on parts from then on. Our home grown provincials followed the same pattern.

'Lads from Lancashire' as they were always tagged - no such thing as a Lancashire boy - always came from an industrial background. In popular fiction Lancashire hasn't got any countryside; it's chockablock with mill chimneys from Warrington to Coniston. These lads, mild mannered, but able to stand up for themselves, might have been rough of speech, but they had hearts of gold. Charles Hamilton's 'Lad from Lancashire', Mark Linley, doesn't seem to have been looked down upon because of any uncouth way of speaking, but because he was poor and a scholarship boy. Perhaps Charles Hamilton, although ready to have a stab at a stage Irish brogue, or Babu English wasn't sure how to render phonetically the subtle nuances and cadences of South Lancashire speech.

Edwy Searles Brooks had a go. His Dick Goodwin - who met up with such a lot of trouble in the Autumn of 1920 - says Ah and Ay and By Gum and Champion and Gradely in the manner of George Formby Junior and Albert Tatlock, but it's not overdone. 'Gradely' to my way of thinking is more of a Yorkshire expression than a Lancashire one, but as Dick comes from Hollinwood, which is only a spit away from the Yorkshire boundary, he might well have said 'Gradely'. Thur a mixed up lot there, tha knows. Ah'll bet a bob thurs a few o' them as are 'alf breeds.

All in all, Tom Hallas and I didn't have much to complain about with regard to the Amalgamated Press portrayals of our kith and kin. Outlandish in speech perhaps, but of sterling worth and modest with it. Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks might not know much about the North, but they had the right idea about the people.

"Reet?" as Tom Hallas would have said.

"Reet!" as I would have replied.

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MODERN BOY REVIEW

by MAURICE HALL

On 11th February, 1928, the Modern Boy appeared. "No. 1 of the Book Every Boy Has Been Waiting For." the banner headline screamed.

The inside cover of No. 1 had a picture of the State Opening of Parliament under the heading, "This week's Royal Procession". On page 3 was the Modern Boys' World by Pen and Picture, conducted by "Wayfarer" dealing with Schoolboy Cooks, Cross Country Runs for Schoolboys, Tomahawks to - Niblick (an account of the Redskins taking up golf). This week's birthday was Thomas Edison the inventor, From Fresher to Blue (all about the boatrace), Dinner for One was a cautionary tale of Lions, "Trick Shees" told the boys how to ski, and last but not least, a statistic, Three Million Dogs in 1928. How many I wonder now in 1977?

There was an article on the "King George V" locomotive that had just returned from a show at Baltimore, America.

A surprise here for the fans of Charles Hamilton, for the first story of Ken King of the Islands was, supposedly, written by Sir Alan Cobham and Charles Hamilton. The style and story line was typically Hamilton and I suspect the Sir Alan Cobham's name was used to attract readers to the Modern Boy; not wishing to be unkind I wonder if the idea was suggested by him, leaving Hamilton to write the story?

Page 11 had an article entitled "A Pageant of Empire a thousand years of history review in a remarkable State Ceremony" which I should think might take the biscuit for the longest winded title.

On page 12 was the life story of a young "Rolling Stone" (nothing to do with Mick Jagger) in serial form called "Round the World on Half-a-Crown" by Tom Rogers, half fact, half fiction I fancy.

Page 14 revealed the secrets of the Modern Car - this week, the Carburetter shown in diagram form and, on page 15: Gunby Hadath's first episode about a schoolboy nicknamed "Sparrow" and his adventures at Castlegate School.

Careers in the Making on page 16 talked about being a Journalist, written by J. A. Hammerton, Editor of "The World's Great Books". This series continued in the following weeks covering a vast range of jobs, no doubt many young readers were encouraged by the detailed analysis to enter one of the suggested careers.

The centre page spread was called "Our Pictorial News Page" with seven pictures and seven short accounts of new ideas and current events. Page 21 advertised a competition to win a "James" motor-cycle plus many other prizes!

A serial was by Alfred Edgar, a motor racing story about two young boys working with racing cars, the first title was the "Skid Merchant". Page 25 recounted "A day in the life of a Racing Motorist", page 26 featured drawings of motor car radiators - this week the Riley 12 h. p., Bentley, Herbert Engineering 16 h. p., and

the 11.9 h.p. Aston Martin. An article for the wireless enthusiast, "New Loud speakers for old" was on page 28.

All this you're saying, and still not the end, for tucked away at the foot of page 30, was the Employer Machine! Job seekers Must Pass a Machine test! Shades of things to come indeed!

Page 32/33's article was "Try making these". Information was given to enable the reader to make a pair of adjustable Stilts, or a magazine camera, or a Ping-Pong table, or put your coal-bucket on castors, plus, for amateur Snapshotters, all about improving your prints. The Editor Talks was on page 35.

All that plus a fine coloured Metal Model of the King Georve V locomotive for 2d. What a bargain!!!

After 20 issues Ken King of the Islands finished one series, only to start a new tale written only by Charles Hamilton which continued until No. 80. During these 80 weeks Hamilton built Ken King into a substantial character.

At the end of the first year the Modern Boy seemed set for a long run and no wonder, for there was no other magazine with the same mixture of excellent stories by first-class writers, plus articles of current interest and many helpful pages of information on diverse subjects.

The great Test cricketer Wally Hammond was given as the writer of the new cricket serial "Cloyne of Claverhouse" starting in No. 69 and running to No. 80. It was a pleasant story of a young schoolboy gaining recognition slowly as a first-class bowler, who, when he replaced Scaife (what a lovely name) in the school team, rather naturally earned his enmity as a reward. In the last episode Cloyne is picked to play for England against South Africa. He is bowling the last ever - 10 runs for South Africa to win, 2 wickets left. Seven runs later and down goes a wicket to Cloyne's bowling, last man in and 3 runs required. The Oval crowd is hushed as Cloyne runs in and bowls, no run and no wicket. Another ball is bowled without result, still both sides could win, then the last run up started, Cloyne hurls down the ball to skittle the last batsman out. England had won, assisted by Cloyne of Claverhouse and the crowd pour onto the pitch to carry him shoulder high to the pavilion in triumph.

A sequel to this story appeared in No. 124 under the title "Captain of Claverhouse", a lively tale of cricket, house-rivalry and how Drummond Cloyne was falsely accused of assaulting a house-master. This series in particular, seemed to be written by Gunby Hadath, it certainly has a close resemblance to his style.

A rousing new story by George E. Rochester, "The Black Squadron" commenced in No. 81. The Black Squadron was the name of a group of renegade pilots, who had banded together forming a pack of modern air-pilots, threatening air and sea travellers alike. Their doom came 12 copies later. Many of these Rochester stories were printed in hard-back and at one time I think I had almost all of them.

A new writer for the Modern Boy was A. M. Burrage, who, in No. 103 started an amusing series called "The Escapades of Esme". The story of Esme appears to

have remained strongly in the readers' memories, for a mention of the title brought back instant recollection of these tales.

Alfred Edgar reached his zenith for me in copy No. 117, when he wrote the first of eight stories starting with "When Time Took Charge". This was another science fiction story set in a class-room at Haleydown School, where four unhappy schoolboys were undergoing a private science test to pick up knowledge they had missed in the laboratory. The four boys and their science master are caught in a time warp created by the people of the year 5000, who are fighting for their lives against the Krooms, man's enemy in this future time. How the boys, their master and two Knights brought from the 15th century, help the inhabitants of the year 5000 defeat the Krooms, makes compelling reading with excellent illustrations.

Enter Jack Hare called "Bunny" by his friends. This was the only appearance of "Bunny" in the Modern Boy in this eight part serial. Written by Charles Hamilton the location was set in the Margate, Broadstairs area, each story more or less complete with a central theme to tie each week together. In 1930 Hamilton was living in Kingsgate and he used his local knowledge in this tale as he also did, when "Bunny" was spirited away to France ending up in Boulogne. A visit to the gaming tables was, of course, a must with the usual sad result!

The first appearance of Captain Justice in No. 146, heralded a great and original character created by Murray Roberts. The illustrations were by E. Ibbetson, a superb artist who improved even more as the stories developed a scientific background.

Enter "Biggles", the brain-child of W. E. Johns. He first appeared in Modern Boy No. 257 with "Biggles and the White Fokker" the start of a long association which lasted right up to the last copy. The breaks that came in between the many great series, only tended to increase the readers interest. Other series following the first set of individual tales were - a first world-war set of stories, Nos 285 - 299, a step back in time with "Biggles Learns to Fly", Nos 323 - 339, a serial called "Winged Menace" in Nos. 366, running to No. 375, started the practice of a "Biggles" story running for several weeks under the same title.

Charles Hamilton was always prepared to create another school and I think that the "School for Slackers" (Nos. 371 - 380) was one of the best new schools that his impish brain had ever created, after the acknowledged big three.

"The Hidden World of Everest" was the only Edwy Searles Brooks story to be within the pages of the Modern Boy. Only four copies covered the whole story starting in No. 432 and although the theme of the lost civilisation tucked away deep in the North or South pole has been used many times before, it was used by Brooks with splendid effect in the St. Frank's stories and now again on the slopes of Everest. The story was published later in hard-back, the writer was Berkeley Gray.

Another Hamilton story was "The Schoolboy Detective" featuring Len Lex the schoolboy detective who was helping his uncle, Detective-Inspector Nixon of Scotland Yard to hunt down the Sussex Man. After this adventure ended (Nos. 452 - 461), a four part story followed on with the "Mystery of the Moat House" in which Len Lex

helped to solve the puzzle of what had happened to Sir Lucian Jerningham, who had vanished from his house just before Christmas! "The Ghost Hunters", "The Vanished Host" and "Lost Sir Lucian" completed this typical Hamilton Christmas tale.

A prize had been offered to the readers of the Modern Boy for the best story written in the competition. Sure enough in No. 459, the prize of £250 was paid to John Mackworth for his entry called "The Menace of the Terribore". This was a good exciting story that ran until No. 471, all about two young lads who get mixed up with a mad inventor of a super boring machine capable of great speed above and below the ground. Funny though, hardly anything is said about the author!

The Rio Kid by Ralph Redway (another of Charles Hamilton's pen-names) came into the Modern Boy in No. 503 and continued until No. 523. This story took me back to the Harry Wharton in Hollywood series, where Harry made the hair-raising ride down the ravine, with the Rio Kid doing the honours in the Modern Boy tale. The same basic tale, both with a cowardly film star, but I must admit I enjoyed them all the more as a glimmer of light seemed to indicate that perhaps Ralph Redway knew Charles Hamilton, or was it Frank Richards who knew them both?

The end of an era came with No. 523, "Big News For You!" screamed the headline "NEXT WEEK 19th FEBRUARY 1938 THE BIG NEW MODERN BOY WILL APPEAR 15" x 10½", 24 PAGES, EIGHT STORIES, PLUS ALL THE USUAL FEATURES." Look out, said the editor for the black and orange cover with the free 48-page film star album introductory gift inside!

It really was a giant failure for just 24 copies later, the format was changed yet again to a smaller size, though still larger than the original Modern Boy (rather like the A4 paper size of today). Perhaps I shouldn't be too hard on this new size, but really it was too big and although all the old writers were still turning out excellent stories (like "Captain Justice and the Siege of Station A") it never really clicked with the old readers.

No. 25 in the smaller size lasted only until No. 77, though once again many good stories were within the covers, but we were now at the point of no continuation in the present form. The death knell was just round the corner for the Magnet and Gem and the Modern Boy was also close to extinction. No. 78 made one last change, back to the original size and changed the cover to a mustard yellow shade similiar to the Gem. Six very short stories were crammed into the 28 pages and in No. 87 it was announced that the Modern Boy was to be transferred into the Boys' Cinema, for the issue dated the 14th October, 1939.

In 1939, I mourned the loss of this super little magazine from the newsagents' counter but I felt that since the first alteration in February 1938, that the writing had been on the wall for the Modern Boy. With the changing fashions in the boys' comic world, the cartoon papers were sweeping the market channelling the young readers attention from words to pictures.

Happily, the Modern Boy is an under collected paper and can still be obtained in good condition and at a reasonable price against the much more difficult to collect Magnet and Gem.

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Happy Christmas, New Year, members, readers, collectors, also Tolkien Society members. I can supply all U.S.A. Tolkien publications, also U.S.A. S.F./Fantasy, comics, juvenilia.

ELLIOTT, 01 - 472 - 6310

= =

WANTED: G.B.C. The Making of Harry Wharton. Good price paid - but please write first with offers.

KEARNS, 35 BURNISTON RD., HULL, NORTH HUMBERSIDE, HU5 4JX.

= =

Greetings and good wishes to all but especially Mr. Whiter, Mr. Fayne, Mr. Lofts and Mr. Norman Shaw. From -

JAMES HODGE, LONG ASHTON, BRISTOL.

= =

WANTED: C.D. Annuals, 1947, 1948, 1949. Seasonal Greetings to Hobby Friends.

SIMON GARRETT, BATHWICK HOUSE

BATH, AVON, BA2 6NX.

= =

Wishing a Jolly Merry Christmas to all fellow Friars and Saints of the First London Chapter. From -

BRIAN and JUNE SIMMONDS

= =

Greetings to all fellow collectors from Cambridge Club. Still seeking Halfpenny Marvel, 385, Eagle Of Death, Boys' Friend Library Nos 231 and 233.

BILL THURBON, 5 ALL SAINTS' PASSAGE, CAMBRIDGE.

= =

WANTED: Anything Sherlock Holmes (including imitations and humorous versions in comics, etc.).

FATHER HERTZBERG, SHALMARSH, BEBINGTON, WIRRAL.

= =

WANTED: School Friend, 1-37, 174, 196, 203, 259-268. Holiday Annual 1922.

LACK, 4 RUSHMERE ROAD, NORTHAMPTON.

= =

Seasonal Greetings to all Friends and Correspondents from -

BENJAMIN WHITER and PATHFINDER.

The Furry Wanderer

(Editorial Feature)

Quite a number of kindly readers seem to have found enjoyment in the little articles on our cats which have featured in recent C. D. Annuals. "Let's have another cat article," many have written to say.

Of course, it isn't every reader who is a cat lover, but many of our readers seem to be, and, for that reason, I hope I shall not be too sharply criticised for devoting a page or two of our precious space to another memory from a lifetime with cats.

When I was a youngster, I spent almost every Saturday for quite a few years helping with collections for the National Institute for the Blind, which included St. Dunstan's. In fact I earned my pocket-money in that way - a half-crown, plus a lunch, plus my travelling expenses. It was surprising how far a half-crown went in those days, even though I bought many papers each week, and also was a regular patron at the cinemas or, occasionally, a music hall.

My employer was a blind man named Ekins, who lived with his wife and daughter in Upton Road, Bexleyheath. He had his own guide, of course, and though we all collected in the same roads, I had my separate collecting-box. Pamphlets concerning the charity were distributed the previous day to the roads which we visited on the Saturday.

We covered a surprisingly large area in the course of a year, ranging over Woolwich, Eltham, Lewisham, Lee, Catford, Erith, Penge, Blackheath, Dartford, Gravesend, Chatham, Gillingham, Sittingbourne, and Faversham. It was as a result of my years of Saturday work of this kind as a boy, that I came to know all those North Kent towns so very well.

One day, when we were working in Dartford, it was at a house in Anne of Cleves Road (this is a cul-de-sac which runs down to the railway near Dartford station - you can see it quite clearly from the train) when I first met Moggie.

The lady who opened the door in answer to my ring was carrying a delightful kitten about six weeks old. She had her envelope ready for my box, but I was thrilled to death with the kitten. A beautifully-marked Persian - brown and gold and white and altogether gorgeous - I was nearly speechless with admiration.

Suddenly she said to me: "Would you like him?"

"Like him? I'd love him!" I said.

"You can have him if you like," she said.

I couldn't take him then, of course. I had many more hours of work to do, but I said that I would go back for him after my work was done.

About five o'clock, back I went to Anne of Cleves Road, and collected the furry

morsel. I hadn't even considered what my mother might say, for we had one cat at home already.

I carried the little one in my arms to Dartford station.

As I passed the barrier at the station, the ticket-collector gave me a tip: "You'd better put that kitten under your coat. If it's seen they may make you pay a fare for it."

When I got home, I announced that I had brought a present for my sister. But the whole family fell in love with the newcomer.

I called him Moggie. A silly, undignified name, of course - I have a feeling that there may have been a "Moonlight Moggie" character in some comic paper.

We had another cat at the time - Tiny. Tiny was not too keen on the addition to the family at first, but they soon settled down together.

Moggie grew up into a real beauty. Large of frame, with glorious long and thick fur, and an immense tail. He was an asset to any household. Always very gentle and affectionate, he was almost timid.

Many years later, when Mr. Tail became part of my home, he reminded me constantly, and chiefly on account of his marking and genuine beauty, of Moggie.

In the evening, when we sat round the fire, reading or listening to the wireless, Moggie would jump up on to the back of my chair, carefully drape his huge furry frame all round my neck, purr for a while, and then go to sleep. It became a nightly ritual in the winter months.

I think we had had Moggie for a year or a little less when, one day, he was no longer there. Suddenly he disappeared. We searched for him all round the neighbourhood - we lived on the outskirts of the town, fringing the open country - but without any success. Then, after three days, he just strolled in. He looked as immaculate and well-fed as usual, and clearly had not been roughing it. He carried on as though he had never been away, so we just wondered and were happy again.

Perhaps a fortnight went by, and we ceased to wonder where he had been, when, without the slightest warning, he disappeared again. Once again we searched diligently, and made our loss known to all our immediate acquaintances, but in vain. This time a week elapsed, and then Moggie came sauntering in. He made a fuss of us and we made a mighty fuss of him, and he resumed his old life as though he had never been away. This time, however, we were alert, and tried to keep an eye on him outside the house. Maybe a month went by, and then he went again. A longer time passed - a fortnight or more - and then he came back.

He stayed a week or two, and then he disappeared again. And this time he did not come back. We never saw him again, and, worst of all, we never knew why he had gone, where he had gone, or what had happened to him.

It is, of course, obvious that he had found a second home. My mother always believed that his departure was due to a big black cat owned by our immediate neighbours in the road. The black cat was certainly fierce and unfriendly with other

animals, and, as I have said, Moggie was timid, despite his size.

But my personal belief is that Moggie was a bit of a bird of passage, to use an odd metaphor. Just now and then, I believe, one comes across a cat which is a natural wanderer. It is almost certain that somebody must have fed him and fussed over him. Nobody should feed a strange cat which is obviously well cared for, but Moggie was so lovely that anyone could be forgiven for making a fuss of him.

Moggie might have made himself at home in his new surroundings, until he felt the urge to return to his old home. He went backwards and forwards for a time. Until finally he stayed away for good.

I cannot think that he could have found a new home anywhere very close, for I feel sure that I should have seen him eventually had it been anywhere nearby. So the mystery of Moggie was never solved. I suppose he must have found a home which suited him better, but he could never have found people who loved him more than we did.

Just a short story about Tiny, the other cat, a delightful little lady. In our garden we had a high flagpole (my father was a sailor) and we used to run up a flag on all patriotic occasions. One day, to my horror, I saw Tiny seated on the block at the top of the pole.

To this day, I have never understood how the cat climbed to the top of that high pole, and how she negotiated the spread of the block to seat herself on the top.

Scared stiff, I ran in and told my mother. She went into the garden to see for herself. Then she went into the kitchen, got out the big carving knives, and started to sharpen them. For a long time Tiny had always come scampering up when the knives were sharpened, but I could not see how she could do so on this occasion. I felt sure she must fall. I did not dare to look. I begged my mother to stop.

But in a minute or so, Tiny came running in at the back door. How she got down - over the block and down that high pole - did she come down head first or tail first? - I have never known or even been able to guess.

I know one thing. If Mr. Softee got himself up anywhere at that height, I would never try to tempt him down. I'm sure I should send for the fire-brigade.

And now, many years on, let me wind up with a bit about Mr. Softee.

The other evening there was a ring at the front door. I answered it. Two young men (or it may have been one young man and one young woman in man's clothes - it's hard to tell these days, when girls abandon their natural charms and like to look like men) stood in the porch.

"Have you a cat?" the definite young man asked.

"We have a cat," I admitted, beginning to feel cold all over.

"A cat has been run over in the road. We have moved the body so that it will not be mutilated by passing traffic, and now we are trying to find the owner --"

"A white cat. An all-white cat," I managed to say. "We have a white cat --" It was a terrible suspense.

"It's not yours then," that splendid young man told me. "This one is black and white."

Only a cat-lover can guess at the awful few moments I went through, followed by the great, great relief. At that moment, Mr. Softee came strolling into the hall from the back somewhere.

How nice to find young people these days who will go out of their way to move the poor body and then search for the owner, as they did. It is the sort of thing, of course, that you or I would do. But one does not take for granted those little acts of thoughtfulness among younger people in these brash days.

It made my evening.

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Rediscovering The Magnet

by LESLIE HOLLAND

For most of the years during which I have scanned the contents of the "Financial Times" each morning, I would not have regarded that dignified daily as a possible and eventual link with my boyhood delight, "The Magnet". So, however, it proved to be.

I was an avid reader of "The Magnet" from the age of 8 at the beginning of 1930 until the final publication "Shadow of the Sack" in May 1940. I began to read the paper just as its great golden age was fully maturing, though that is a fact which I have not appreciated until recently. I came in early in the Courtfield Cracksman series, which I thought, and still think, wonderful, though, missing the first few stories, I waited more than 40 years to discover how Harry Wharton came to be returning from Folkestone with Bunter in the small hours, when he caught his first mysterious glimpse of Mr. Steele, who was to become temporary master of the Remove.

Being so young then, I had not seen the Magnet before, but I was immediately hooked. Each succeeding Saturday carried a special delight as the welcome blue and orange cover appeared through the letter box. Naturally I enjoyed some stories better than others, but by and large I was thoroughly captivated. I read "The Gem" for a while too, and enjoyed the St. Jim's adventures, but when my father came out of work in 1933, one of the two had, regretfully, to be given up as an economy measure, and I had no doubts at to which it had to be.

In 1935 I left school and became a 14 year old office boy. The Magnet still retained much interest for me, but as teenage years advanced, I must reluctantly admit that it was as much by the ties of old habit as for any other reason. A series here and there still stood out, and I never thought of giving up the old paper, until finally, as the Germans broke through into France and the Low Countries, it gave up me!

War service came and went. The years passed, and I suppose I largely forgot Greyfriars. In 1952 the television series appeared, and we had the pleasure of Gerald Campion's magnificent portrayal of Bunter. I used to find the programme pleasant and amusing, but once the novetly had worn off, that was it; just a happy piece of children's television. For me, it was the same, somehow, with the Bunter books. I read one or two when my son eventually borrowed them from the library, but they seemed to be a pale shadow of the splendour I had known as a schoolboy. I decided I had long outgrown Greyfriars, though I did buy the souvenir copy of Magnet No. 1 when it appeared on the market. I had never seen a red Magnet before, and whilst the original spoiled and obstinate Harry Wharton was no surprise to one who remembered the second "Rebel" series, Frank Nugent seemed very different, and the first reference to Bunter carried no hint of the glories to come.

Then one Christmas my wife presented our son with an "Armada" book

containing a Greyfriars story. I read it and immediately noticed the difference. "Why," I remarked, "this is an original Magnet story - Christmas at Mauleverer Towers - 1931 if memory does not fail me." (It didn't.) Somehow, for me the magic was there again.

Then one summer morning in 1969 I was in the office, taking my usual quick look at the Financial Times. I turned the pages towards the stock exchange quotations, not intending to read the book reviews, when my eye was caught by the heading "Gyppo Japes". There I saw a drawing of Bunter, introducing the first eight Magnets of the Howard Baker reprint series, the Egyptian holiday series of 1932. I remembered the Golden Scarab, although I could not have told you the name of the Greek merchant who was after it. I was due for a holiday in London a few weeks later, and I resolved to look out for this nostalgic attraction.

Sure enough, there in a bookshop in Oxford Street I saw again for the first time in more than 30 years that much loved blue and orange cover. The money changed hands, and for the second time in my life I became Charles Hamilton's willing captive.

The second "Rebel" series followed. (I didn't know until then that there had been a first one in 1924/25) and I became a regular subscriber to the Howard Baker library. How superior these Magnets seemed to other Greyfriars publications.

And how does one react to them, warts and all, in middle age? To deal first with the warts as I see them, I must admit that here and there an occurrence seems frankly improbable. It is a very rare feat indeed for the same player to accomplish a hat-trick in both innings of a cricket match, but the likes of Lancaster and Stacey seemed to do such things as a matter of course. Similarly, too many Magnet football matches are won by the odd goal on the stroke of time, as George Orwell points out. By the nineteen-thirties the Magnet was read mainly by the more discerning section of the younger population, and many would no doubt have settled for more realism in these matters.

Study raggings and similar occurrences are sometimes carried to such lengths as to become outright vandalism, and we older ones get really hot under the collar about such things today. In the Secret Seven series of 1934 Peter Todd is shown daubing white paint over everything in Mr. Prout's study, and managing to do it, incidentally, without collecting the slightest trace on his hands or clothing. Such a feat would certainly be beyond me! It seems heretical to think of dear old Charles Hamilton encouraging vandalism. Fortunately, most of the generation for whom he wrote found property and possessions too hard to come by to have anything other than a healthy respect for them, and those who indulge themselves today need no encouragement.

The character of Loder seems to owe much to Flashman of Tom Brown's Schooldays fame, and not the other way round as I though at the age of ten. All the seventeen year old seniors at Greyfriars are much bigger and heavier than the fifteen year old juniors, and seem able to bully them at will if they so choose. I remember finding to my cost that this was not always so in real life.

There are, then, a few things in the Magnet which I would like to have seen amended. In the main, though, it has been a delight to read the stories again. Many of the verbal exchanges, particularly where adults are involved are greatly entertaining. Charles Hamilton has been accused of tautology, but who would want to omit any of those delightful musing passages concerning Bunter or Coker? As has so often been said before, the characters of the boys and masters and their relationships with, and reactions to, each other, all combine to provide an adult flavour. Several characters are exaggerated of course, but then so were some of the characters of Dickens, where a man became simply his greatest virtue or his worst vice. Charles Dickens was a genius, and so, too, was our dear Charles, in his own particular field.

It always seemed to me that somewhere in the history of the Magnet there would be a holiday series in India. With an Indian prince a member of the Famous Five it was unlikely that such an opportunity would have been missed. Only in recent months, however, have I read the 1926 series, and the thing which interested me most was the contrast drawn between Hurree Singh as the good natured Inky of the Remove, and as Nabob of Bhanipur with power over life and death and with an unfamiliar Eastern outlook on these matters. "You're a Greyfriars man, Inky, as well as an Indian nabob," says Harry Wharton, "and you can't have people's heads chopped off in the Eastern style at a moment's warning."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh turned a rather strange look on the captain of the Remove.

"At Greyfriars I am a Greyfriars man" he said, "here in Bhanipur I am an Indian prince."

Wharton looked a little startled. "But Inky old man ----"

Inky old man indeed. This series makes fascinating reading.

Oddly, I still tend to identify with the boys, although I am now approximately the age of Messrs. Quelch, Prout, and the other senior masters, and can sympathise more readily with their autumnal twinges! Also, knowing more about life than I did forty years ago I can understand Mr. Bunter's irascibility when he has nothing but stock exchange losses and income tax demands from which to pay school fees and maintain the modest domestic staff at Bunter Villa. One presumes he would not have been troubled too often by capital gains tax!

With an adult's experience it is possible to appreciate much more of the mental struggles of such characters as Arthur Da Costa and Dick Lancaster, both of whom were sent to Greyfriars with wicked intent, and both of whom ended up being influenced for good by the Greyfriars way of life. Vernon-Smith, the Bounder, is now seen to have a cynical attitude sometimes more suited to fifty than fifteen, but he is a most interesting and pleasing character, none the less.

I was always a little uneasy about Fisher T. Fish, even in the old days, and I wondered what American readers made of him. Charles Hamilton seemed to find a vent for a little prejudice here, though it was pleasant to read sometimes about much more pleasing American characters, such as Putnam Van Duck, and Poker Pike,

or in a different context, the Rio Kid. Even Fishy himself was a much more sympathetic character in the 1911 story about Bob Cherry being accused of the theft of a postal order. Similarly, one wonders whether Hamilton was subsequently sorry he had endowed Wun Lung with a Chinese coolie dialect, which was not needed in the magnificent Chinese holiday series and other such later depictions.

In my boyhood I used to become most exasperated with Bunter. He always used to seem to be getting in the way of the Famous Five and Lord Mauleverer, especially on holiday, and I was heretical enough to think sometimes that the stories would improve without him. I don't now. Indeed, the weird and wonderful reasonings of the fat owl provide some of Charles Hamilton's most amusing passages, and his propensity for helping the story-line can now be fully appreciated. Even so, I am still included to grunt, along with the blunt Johnny Bull, "Boot him".

It has been wonderful to read the Magnet again. Thanks to Eric Fayne and Roger Jenkins I now have it all in perspective, and I know what I did not then know, that I was a "golden age" reader as a boy. Some of the series round about that time were truly marvellous and remain so to this day.

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Merry Xmas, Happy New Year - to Ern, Bertie, George, Jim Cook and all in the Hobby.

JIM SWAN, 108 MARNE STREET

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DICK JACKSON

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Once to Everyman - Comes the moment to decide

by WILLIAM LISTER

How does a man choose his reading? Suppose he had six copies of the Union Jack delivered at his door, suppose that he had to choose from six interesting titles by authors such as Rex Hardinge, Gwyn Evans, R. L. Hadfield, Antony Skene and Edwy Searles Brooks, how does he choose?

The answer to that is - it depends on the man! This is how I go about it. First I look at the cover illustrations and the author's names and then the titles (occasionally a good cover illustration will interest me), I then view the interior pictures. Finally I come back to the authors. Is my favourite author amongst them? In this case - yes. Mr. E. S. Brooks is responsible for two of these titles. "The Frozen Man Mystery", U.J. No. 1364, dated December 1929 and "Quivering Steel", U.J. 1384, dated April 1930. Now for a closer look at these Union Jacks and Snap - what do you know. Both illustrations depict an exhumation scene, both taking place at the midnight hour, one by the light of lanterns and one by the light of the moon. Of one of these scenes the author says "It was an eerie scene in the gloom of a murky night. The only light was provided by lanterns and every scrap of fresh earth was removed".

Well that's done it. I must needs start with these two stories. The other four must take their place in the queue, for if anything is likely to warm the cockles of my heart it is a nice exhumation tale. Not that I have ever witnessed one. But isn't it awful? I didn't think I was that sort of chap. Even my four year old granddaughter must be taking after me. "Draw me a skeleton Grandad" she said. I drew one. A skeleton dancing on a grave. "That's not right Grandad" she complained. I enquired why. "Skeletons don't dance - skeletons live in big holes and they are dead" she replied. There's no answer to that. Before many years have passed it looks like someone else will be interested in body-exhuming stories.

Of course some wit will say (having in mind that I am writing about stories dated 1929 and 1930) this chap is exhuming tales long since buried. They would be wrong. These tales are far from dead. For plot, thrills and surprise endings they leave some of today's fictional efforts standing.

Both these tales co-star with Sexton Blake none other than Eustace Cavendish. I used to think Eustace was a grown-up edition of Archie Glenthorne of St. Frank's School fame, but somehow I don't feel Archie would ever have developed the "old grey matter" to the extent needed to co-operate with Sexton Blake. I think I must place Archie as the Bertie Wooster of P. G. Wodehouse fame and Eustace as Lord Peter Wimsey of Dorothy Sayers renown. Of course they are all birds of a feather, all of the same species, but some of them develop a little more brain power, though in each case they speak the same language and have their own valet. However that may be Eustace is up to Lord Peter's standard and is able to be more than a help in the two mystery cases in question. I find both tales good but of the two "The Frozen

Man Mystery" has the edge.

It may have been the snow that did it. Not that I am enthusiastic about huge snowfalls but I can still remember when I was. The first chapter thrust me into a heavy snow storm, with deep snow drifts and all the trimmings that Mr. Brooks can provide when he gets down to one of his midwinter scenes.

Eustace, car stuck in a snowdrift, enters a way out country mansion. As the butler closes the door on the howling gale and driving snow Eustace faces a blazing fire and welcome electric lights. From there on you are in the hands of E. S. B. Far be it from me to attempt to tell one of his stories. By the third chapter the snow is disappearing but by then Mr. Brooks so has your interest that you have forgotten the delightful little snowstorm and plump for the plot.

"Quivering Steel" also brings to you its quota of mystery and thrills of the Brooks vintage. Quivering Steel!!! I am offering no prizes but I am prepared to say that not one in a hundred would guess just what that is. Once again Eustace Cavendish hogs the limelight with Blake.

So, how does a man choose his reading? This is how one man does it. The other four tales are still in the pipe-line. They may be as good, they may not, but I have the feeling they won't be better.

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pink furniture

by H. TRUSCOTT

A certain amount of preliminary to the subject of this article is necessary, and I hope that readers will bear with this. A few years ago ITV televised one of the finest series of programmes ever shown on television; it was called Country Matters, and was devoted to short stories by two masters of this medium, A. E. Coppard and H. E. Bates. English literature has produced quite a crop of masterly short story writers, but Coppard, I think, was unique in his field, with only four close rivals among writers of the last hundred years or so: Stacy Aumonier, Arnold Bennett, Eden Phillpotts and Bates himself. (I do not include either Conrad or Henry James here for, although each wrote a few genuine short stories, such as Conrad's magnificent Il Conde and James' Collaboration, their shorter works were mainly of the nouvelle type - too long for a short story and too short for a novel.)

Alfred Edgar Coppard was born in Folkestone in 1878. His father was a tailor, with plenty of work but very little pay, his mother an erstwhile housemaid. Alfred was the eldest child, and there were eventually two younger sisters. In Folkestone he lived until he was six; during the last year he had his first education, at a tiny school in the back room of a sweet-shop run by an old woman; the lessons were punctuated by the ringing of the shop bell and the sale of sweets. After a few months his mother transferred him to a school conducted by nuns, but to this his father, a free-thinking radical, objected, and so he went to a Board School. Later in that year, 1883, his father suddenly left them without a word. His mother heard nothing for over a year, when equally suddenly she heard from him. He had a new job in Brighton, and they were all to join him there. Another Board School, where A. E. did reasonably well, except at figures, which would not go in. He quotes in his autobiography, It's Me, O Lord:

> Multiplication is vexation,
> Division's just as bad,
> The rule-of-three, it puzzles me,
> And Practice drives me mad.

Strangely, in after years he had office posts, which he held for long periods, and in which he was the accountant, and good at it. Which probably proves - something; I am not sure what. Not long afterwards his father died, his mother went to work in a laundry, and Alfred, nine years old, was sent to an uncle and aunt who lived in Hackney, so that he could work as an errand boy in a Whitechapel tailor's establishment. The master tailor was Mr. Alabaster, who is enshrined under his own name, along with many of Coppard's experiences during this period, in a magnificent story, The Presser. This lasted a year or two and without warning he went off home to Brighton and begged to be allowed to stay. So stay he did, and a succession of posts as office boy followed in Brighton.

He was gradually teaching himself by reading, poetry mainly, occasionally

novels, which on the whole he did not like. Sport of all kinds, except fishing, attracted him. He loved cross-country running, but admits that he was really a sprinter, and that he dissipated his energy in cross-country because he loved it. Nonetheless, he became a noted sprinter in the south of England, and this ability he uses as a link with his short stories:

> "I hold that all the best stories in the world are short ones and that they are the best because they are short. Who knows any better ones than The Prodigal Son or The Good Samaritan? One time I was very fond of running and delighted to run all sorts of distances, especially cross-country, but I excelled only as a sprinter. I used this instance as an analogy when pressed by publishers to write a novel - with their assurances that it would quadruple my sales! I cringed from the awful job of hacking out mere episodes into epic stature, draping the holes in them with bogus mysticism, factitious psychology, and the backchat of a paperhanger. Within my limitations there was no need for me to do any such thing, no point in stretching or inventing. I had but to select and clothe, and display my tale in its own clothes and - voilá!"

In 1905 Coppard married, in 1907 he moved to Oxford, where he was for some years a clerk and eventually became accountant in an ironworks. In Oxford he remained for twelve years, with many friends among the undergraduates, most of them younger than himself, some already writing and achieving publication; over a period of years, this determined him to do something himself. However, he had so many other interests that his writing was continually put off; I think, too, that he was afraid, knowing that if he really went in for writing and had any success he would have to give up his job, and the financial uncertainty that would be sure to follow frightened him. Also, at this time he had the idea that if he wrote at all it would be as a poet; he was wrong in this, so far as actual verse goes, although his stories are spattered with remarkable verses. Nonetheless, he was a poet, in a very much wider sense, although he dealt mainly with what is loosely called prose; his prose is shot through with a poetical vision which seemed mostly to desert him when he tackled actual verse.

He took a long time to find himself, but gradually he began to write stories, some of which were returned, some of which were accepted for various magazines. One of these was called Weep not, my wanton, which was published by The Saturday Westminster in 1918. But it had first been rejected by Squire of The London Mercury, who returned it with the comment: "This has a very nice title". Coppard writes: "I had intended to call it The Pigs and Sixpence, but refrained on hearing that Somebody Else had already hogged half of that title".

In 1921 his first collection of stories, Adam and Eve and Pinch Me, was published by the Golden Cockerel Press, and was succeeded by eleven other collections at intervals up to 1947. His last collection, Lucy in Her Pink Jacket, appeared in 1954. After that, until his death in 1957, he was occupied with the first volume of his autobiography, which closes in 1922. The rest, unfortunately, he did not live to write.

He has been compared, for quality, certainly not for manner, with the American short story writer known as O. Henry. This is, I suppose, intended as a compliment to Coppard, but I think the comparison is not apt. O. Henry, for instance, frequently lapses into the sentimental, which Coppard never does, even in

the one or two weaker stories in his output; but there is a greater difference. I will not deny that O. Henry wrote some fine stories, but a large number, and these include most of the best-known, depend too much on the gimmick (which Henry may not have seen in this light) of a surprise ending, often in the last line of the story. Effective at first, the drawback to this method is that it takes the sting out of re-reading such stories, for the surprise is no surprise the second time round; and one of the great qualities of outstanding short stories is their re-readability, so to speak. But if the point of your story has nothing to do with a sudden surprise but is still a real point, it can be re-read and re-read with constant renewal of pleasure. Coppard's stories are in this category.

An excellent example is Purl and Plain, from Silver Circus. This has a last line, or last remark, which certainly has about it a touch of delighted fulfilment of expectation, but everything in the story has led to it, and the element of delight, in my experience, clings to it with every re-reading. Moriarty, a young Catholic, is married to Milly, a Protestant. They have agreed that any boys they may have shall be Catholics, any girls Protestants. When the time of birth draws near, Moriarty summons Father Corkery and Mr. Caspin, to whom he has explained matters. After a good deal of entertaining chat between the two ministers of religion, during which the priest, to the Protestant clergyman's horror, tries to induce Mr. Caspin to bet that the baby will be a girl, it at last turns out that it is a girl. Father Corkery prepares to leave, but Moriarty explains that Milly has changed her mind, saying that it would be wrong for brothers and sisters to be brought up in different religions. Mr. Caspin, somewhat exasperated, goes off, muttering, and Moriarty says "The divil himself, saving your presence, don't know where he is with the creatures". "No", says Father Corkery, "God alone knows". Coppard, incidentally, was not a Catholic - in fact, he held no organised religion, so that was not the springboard for this fine story.

Coppard had the born story-teller's way of taking the reader, with his opening paragraph, into a world that one knew instinctively one was going to enjoy. Here, for instance, is the opening paragraph of Tanil, from the collection called The Black Dog:

> "A great while ago a man in a striped jacket went travelling to the verge of the world, and there he came upon a region of green fertility, quiet sounds, and sharp colour; save for one tiny green mound it was all smooth and even, as level as the moon's face, so flat that you could see the sky rising up out of the end of everything like a blue dim cliff. He passed into a city very populous and powerful, and entered the shop of a man who sold birds in traps of wicker, birds of rare kinds, the flame-winged antillomeneus and kriffs with green eyes."

The accent in "stripéd", incidentally, is Coppard's. Now, this paragraph alone tells us a great deal about Coppard the writer. A first impression might be that of a vivid image, conveyed with a great many adjectives. But examine it and you will find that these adjectives have not been chosen carelessly nor thrown in to make a purple patch. Instead, they are structural: note, for instance, the spaced out use of "green" three times, and the effect this has on one's mental picture: each adjective helps the next, the effect is cumulative, and their order is exactly right. Disturb them, inter-change them, and the paragraph is spoiled. Although we know nothing else of this

man, nothing that he was wearing except a striped jacket, nothing as yet of what he looked like, this one word conjures him up and we can see him. The passage, written apparently spontaneously, is a tribute to carefully applied but unobtrusive art, and nowhere is this shown more clearly than in the placing of the description of the city - and the two words chosen to describe it: "populous and powerful". There is a whole history of that city in those two words, made the more potent by the one use of alliteration in the paragraph.

I have come at last to the real point of this article. But this much was, I think, necessary to a consideration of this particular story. Coppard had a writing mind made of all sorts of things, picked up and assimilated largely by his own efforts. This is important. What appealed to him he took, what did not, he rejected. Sometimes I feel that he lost a lot because he rejected too quickly, but nonetheless that was the man. He remained like this to the end of his life. He was opinionated, and I personally would have loved to argue with him on many things. But the point here is that these qualities are all of them those that can be found in children. He has, too, and his stories, varied as they are, also have the candour of a child, who will blurt out the truth at the most embarrasing moment. He has an engaging honesty rare among autobiographers:

> "This book is not to be taken as my authentic history: memory is coy and clarity fails me, charity too - though there must be some inhibitions which happily conceal some shames, so I am not to be trusted all the way. What is truth, after all? To put it unprofoundly, it is more reliable than fiction, but fiction is the better known, is much more palatable, and therefore much more used and regarded; besides this pure truth is apt to grow improper - as perhaps it must ... There ought to be a general interest in occasions I remember strongly, for around such tenacities an agreeable air often accrues and clings, but that they will present the actuality of any recalled occasion I cannot take oath, a fiction-monger being by nature a glozing decorator, a plausible perverter, which gifts of nature have come to be used in no pinch-penny fashion."

With such a conglomeration of qualities, combined with the ability to write and use the English language superbly, in both simple and, when needed, complex fashion, the real subject of this article should come as no surprise. In spite of his aversion to novel-writing, in spite of his commentators' persistent estimate of his output as consisting only of poems and short stories, he did once write a story of novel length; and it is in keeping with the nature of the man that he did this, that he stuck to his guns and carried through the largest fictional structure he ever attempted, in a story for children: he would never have done it for adults. He called it Pink Furniture, and subtitled it "A tale for lovely children with noble natures". It has all the qualities to be found in his short stories, which, after all, are about children of all ages either side of fifty, and it bears this rather pathetic Author's Note:

> "Some of the characters in this book are almost fictitious, but most are merely true. If anyone should want the law of me for this, I should not care to go to prison as I do not think I could put up with it."

I have read many books designed primarily to be read by children, and most I have enjoyed, although not all; I do not include school stories, nor masterpieces such as The Wind in the Willows, which treat of animals endowed with human characteristics, and in which their natural habitats are thought of from a human angle.

I have loved Kenneth Grahame's fine story from the first time I read it, so many years ago, and it is in no sense of disparagement that I say that, given Grahame's tremendous imagination and writing ability, he was on a winner from the moment he set the scene for this book. But of books written for children about children being children, the majority, in my experience, are written from an adult's idea of what a child will like - an adult's-eye view of a child's world. Coppard's book is rare (I do not say unique) in that it is a child's-eye view of a child's world. This is evident from the beginning of the first chapter:

> "Once there was a boy called Toby Tottel. This little boy was sometimes bad, of course, certainly; but once people start being very good it is hard to keep them from becoming too good. He was called Toby Tottel because that was his right name, and he lived with his aunt and uncle, whose name was Notright, on a nice verdant common where it was bright as a looking-glass all day long and warm as a new loaf. The birds sang, but often you could not hear the birds very well, because some people would come beating their common carpets there; and sometimes you could not see what an uncommon common it was, because people hung their common washing there, too."

The story is of Toby's search for the Book of Wisdom (the "Open and Ask Me") and some furniture mystically coloured pink. The search involves many adventures, some weird, certainly, all strange, but none of them outside the kind an imaginative boy might daydream for himself; the story has a certain unreal quality at times, but it is no nightmare, but rather a waking dream - a daydream. And the characters are sufficient and diverse enough to people half-a-dozen novels. There is the Widow Twice, who is romantically attached to Mr. Adhemar, Toby's schoolmaster; Mr. Adhemar is addicted to giving Toby something he calls "what for with the chill off", or what, at Greyfriars, would be anything from "two" to "six". There are the Baldheaded Woman and her son Stinker, "a lanky man, with long black gloves and a very high beaver hat, who always walked backwards and never saw anybody coming"; Pedgell Cobbs Cobbs, the sinful miller, sighing over his iniquities, and Barty Crow, who bent his shotgun so that it would shoot round a large bush after a white yoffle bird, and only succeeded in catching the pellets in his own seat. There are the awful Flying Klacken, the owl with the spyglass under its wing, and the fox who drew the glass yawl and, when Toby thanked him for his help, answered " 'The trouble is mine', gnashing his teeth pleasantly". The list seems endless, and yet the book never gets out of control; with the lightest touch on the rein, Coppard keeps all in place.

One of the most fascinating episodes concerns Toby in the island of Purganda, where everyone reads constantly, no matter what else he or she may be doing, but where the Prime Minister has banned every book containing the letter "X". In a very unusual museum "what attracted him most was a picture on the wall, entitled 'The Pink Chair', painted by the Master who designed those stripes on postmen's trousers. Truly beautiful, and rather like a chair; quite certainly a chair - but pink!" Toby looks over the Prince's shoulder to see what he is reading, and finds the page headed:

APPLIED ARITHMETIC

"The grey-lag goose has two feet,
The buffalo twice as many,
A yard has only three feet,
A football has not any:

cont'd...

If two forefeet make eight feet
And two behind two more,
Why are there never eight feet
Behind the two before?"

It is in Purganda that Toby solves a mystery, in one of the most delicious and perfectly rounded short detective stories I have ever read. It concerns the loss, or disappearance, of the Prince's prized blood-alley. He loves playing marbles, with Soapy Barnacle, the Prime Minister's son, and other children around the Palace. The Prince is broken-hearted at his loss, and welcomes the Unknown Person Come To Find Blood-Alley, as Toby is labelled on a card hung round his neck. Toby's solution concerns a ginger-beer bottle and a kettle.

When the Prime Minister, Snooping Barnacle, bans all books with the letter "X", he encounters difficulties, for the offending letter is found to appear in every printed book except one, which contains state reports on " 'Backwash from Canal Barges', 'The Origin and Function of Clothes Lines', and a few cognate subjects". The awful letter was in the most unlikely places, in books by infant prophets, incredulous deans, and even simple bishops. But Purganda was notorious for bishops of all sorts, even one like this:

"We had a crooked bishop once,
With geometric views,
His texts were perpendicular,
His sermons quite obtuse;
And tho' the hymns were High Church
The blessed tunes were Low,
So we had to sing them sideways
In acute fortissimo".

When Snooping Barnacle found that it was impossible to ban the letter "X", he found something else to satisfy the law. It was brought to his notice that the Book of Bandogs had for many years had its capital letters printed in blue instead of green, and he proclaimed his intention to abolish them. Immediately, of course, the people found that they adored blue capital letters, and could not live without them. Civil war was barely averted.

Toby has a young girl friend, Bridget, and it is she who first asks why the furniture in Toby's house is pink. He is not aware that it is, and denies it, and a dialogue ensues that could easily have originated in the minds of two actual children:

"One day as Bridget was going past the Notrights' door she asked Toby Tottel: 'Why do you have pink furniture in your house?'

And Toby said: 'Our furniture is not pink'.

'Oh, but it is!' retored Miss Bridget. 'I think you will find it so.' Her other name was Balaclava, but she must not be blamed for that.

Toby said: 'It is not pink at all.'

'Well,' continued Bridget, 'it looks pink. Why is that, then?'

'Listen. I will tell you,' replied Toby.

'Please explain it to me,' said Miss Balaclava, 'because I should rather very much like to know the displanation of this pinkness.'

Toby's explanation wanders all round the point, and Bridget is quick to note this:

"'But you have not told me,' said Bridget angrily, 'why the furniture in your house is so pink!'

'I did,' Toby cried; 'but you didn't listen to me. You are very rude.'

'No, but you did not tell me,' Bridget protested.

'Isn't it rude not to listen?' Toby sternly asked.

'I did listen. I harked hard, but you did not tell me.'

'And besides that,' said Toby, 'our furniture is not a bit pink, and it is not pink at all.'

'Oh, but it is,' Bridget declared; 'it is very pink.'

So he began to despise her, and he would not speak to her about any more furniture then, but they walked all over the common together, and he gave her a bouquet made of furze bloom. It smelt very precious, like the inside of a cokernut, but Bridget pricked her nose in it and was annoyed again."

Coppard does not use the same style in all his short stories; it varies according to subject matter, but there are always links, and telltale marks of the same personality. If we compare the extract just quoted, or the opening paragraph of the book, quoted earlier, with the beginning of the story called Tanil, also quoted earlier, we shall find, in spite of the fact that Tanil is very much an adult story, that the two quotations from Pink Furniture read, as to style, almost like continuations of it. Again, one of the most telling characteristics of the dialogue between Toby and Bridget is the inconsequent logic displayed, which is so like the workings of a child's mind. Perhaps the key phrase is "So he began to despise her". Toby did this, whatever it is, and Coppard says it. What did he mean by it? Obviously not what we duller adults mean by "despise". For, although Toby would not speak to her about any more furniture then, he walked all over the common with Bridget, and gave her a bouquet of furze bloom. So - what did "despise" mean in his - and, in this connection - Coppard's vocabulary? A nice point. Obviously, it was a child's meaning and very precise in its application.

One of the truest things about this book is that, in the dialogue but also in the telling of the story, Coppard uses words in this inconsequently logical child's meaning, as a child will use words, because of the lovely sound, which he has heard or seen, but the meaning of which he does not know, or knows only in a distorted manner. A final quotation will show this even more strikingly. Toby offers to tell Bridget a poem he has invented, called The Serpent. Bridget asks him why he called it The Serpent:

"Toby coughed and gnawed the end of his pencil for some moments.

'Because,' he said at last, 'a serpent is a snake that repents.'

Bridget asked him: 'Repents what?'

'Beg your pardon?' said Toby.

'Repents what?' repeated Bridget.

'Oh,' he laughed, 'you can't repent what. You can repent something, or you can repent, but you can't repent what; it is very silly.'

Bridget eyed him with suspicion. 'What does it repent something?' she asked.

'Oh dear! Oh dear!' exclaimed the young poet, 'you do not seem to understand the plain language.'

'I beg you to excuse me,' retorted Miss Balaclava, 'but I understand very exorbitant.'

So do I; as Marjorie Fleming would say, "I can understand perfectly well so long as you don't explain." And with that exorbitant understanding, I will beg you to excuse me also, and leave Bridget and Toby to understand each other, which they do eventually, without any outside assistance.

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