

COLLECTORS DIGEST

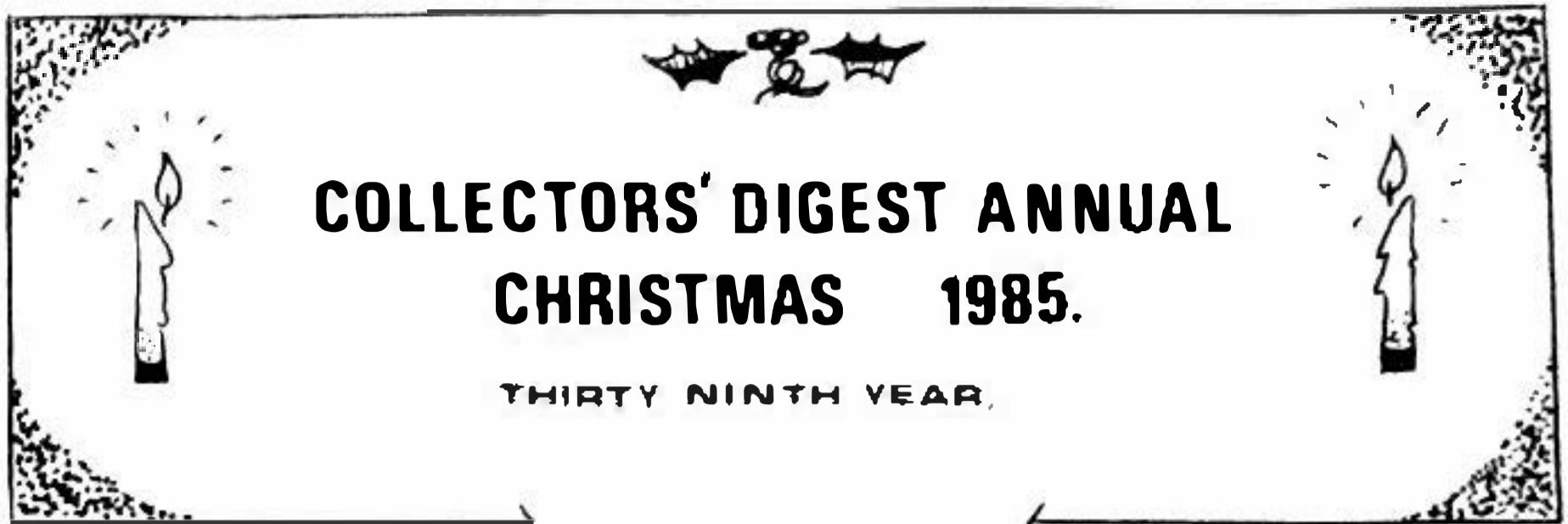
1985

1985

ANNUAL



H. Webb.



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INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

As the summer wore away and the time was ripe for starting to buckle into the Annual - if we were to have one this year - my heart quailed. I thought of the increasing weeks of toil that would be mine as November approached with Annual publishing day just over the horizon.

It's too much, I told myself in shameless self-pity. My loyal readers won't miss it for once, I told myself. But I knew that they would.

I almost decided to give it a miss this year - to take the easy way of least resistance. And then, most remarkably, I had a message from whence I know not. While I was still wrestling with my conscience, I sat down at my typewriter one morning - and there, beside it, on my desk, was a faded old leaf torn from a block calendar of some years back.

On it was printed a message: "Be strong, and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded." It was quite eerie, and my conscience was given a jolt. In italics, I was informed that the text came from 2 Chronicles 15, 7.

It came from one of the new versions of the Bible. I looked it up in my real Bible, and found: "Be ye strong, and let not your hands be weak; for your work shall be rewarded".

One seeks no material reward from the Annual. The real reward is in the loyalty of my readers and friends. But the message was clear. Where that calendar slip came from I do not know. Possibly it fell out from the back of a drawer or had been used as a bookmark. My domestic lady had found it on the floor and placed it on my desk.

So here is our 39th Annual, ringing in our Ruby Jubilee Year. I take this opportunity to thank all our stalwart contributors who work tirelessly to make the Annual and the C.D. what they are. To thank Henry Webb, who has been responsible for much of the Artwork in this volume. And to thank the proprietors and staff of York Duplicating Services for their fine work. They have served the C.D. and the Annual for the best part of 40 years.

I wish you all, my loyal readers the wide world over, a Joyful Christmas and a Peaceful and Prosperous New Year. God bless you all.

Your sincere friend,

Eric Fayne

CONTENTS

Page	1 - Foreword		
Page	2 - Contents		
Page	3- 8 - Highcliffe: A Study of a Society in Decay ..		Roger M. Jenkins
Page	9- 12 - Those Intrepid Girls on Their Flying Trapeze ..		Margery Woods
Page	13- 17 - Bunter - And Others		Harold Truscott
Page	18- 19 - An Indomitable Three		J.W.C.
Page	20- 27 - Adventures Abroad with Cliff House ..		Esmond Kadish
Page	28- 29 - I Was There - Fifty One Years Ago ..		Eric Lawrence
Page	30- 36 - Milestone to Happiness		Leslie Rowley
Page	37- 44 - Spellbinders Both - A Tribute to L. E. Ransome and John Wheway		Mary Cadogan
Page	45 - Guess these St. Jim's Characters		Bob Whiter
Page	46- 49 - Some Words from the Skipper Down the Years		Eric Fayne
Page	50 - Happy Hours Unlimited		
Page	51- 56 - Treasure Island versus Peril Island		Jack Overhill
Page	57- 69 - The Boy in the Corner		Eric Fayne
Page	70- 71 - Have St. Frank's -- Will Travel		Len Wormull
Page	72- 74 - The Riddle of "The Riddle"		W. T. Thurbon
Page	75- 76 - The Aldine Robin Hoods		Jack Doupe
Page	77- 87 - Morning Break		Leslie S. Laskey
Page	88- 89 - I Remember		Don Webster
Page	90- 98 - Mr. Buddle's Hair-Shirt		Eric Fayne
Page	99-104 - The Mystery of the Superior Intelligence ..		Ernest Holman
Page	105-110 - Blake's Beginning		John Bridgwater
Page	111-114 - Just Bunter		Edward Baldock
Page	115-128 - Time Jump	As related by Dick Russell to Maurice Hall	

HIGHCLIFFE.

A STUDY OF A SOCIETY IN DECAY

BY ROGER M. JENKINS



The proximity of Highcliffe to Greyfriars was always an improbable co-incidence, that two boys' public schools should be situated so close together. Equally unlikely was the type of accommodation provided for the masters within the school building in each case, instead of having a series of residences set about the school grounds. It is easy to understand why Charles Hamilton preferred a more compact situation: Bunter could hardly play tricks in Quelch's study and Vernon-Smith could scarcely use his telephone if the Remove master lived in a separate house with a lock on the front door. Even so, the fact that all assistant staff were bachelors suggests that Charles Hamilton was basing his schools more on the old Oxford college system than the normal public school practice. Nevertheless, we would not wish things changed in any way, however untypical they might be.

It is sometimes mistakenly thought that Highcliffe as a school was specially created for the 3d Boys' Friend Library No. 288, "The Boy Without a Name", which was published on New Year's Day 1915 (according to advertisements in the Magnet, for the Boys' Friends had no date on them). Although the First World War had started four months earlier, there were no references to the War in that story, which must therefore have been written at a much earlier date. Exactly how much earlier it is difficult to determine, but in Magnet No. 288 dated June 1913 Ponsonby & Co. were featured as "old enemies" and in No. 294 Harry Wharton & Co. went to some lengths to pay back Ponsonby for an ambush in which the Famous Five were hopelessly outnumbered. At that time, Ponsonby had a dozen friends he could call upon, which was certainly more than he could muster at a later date. There was no mention at all of any decent fellows at Highcliffe and there seemed to be no scenes set at that school until No. 311 entitled "Trouble with Highcliffe" when the Hon. Cecil Ponsonby's well-furnished study was described and the state of the school analysed in detail:

Highcliffe was ruled with a very slack hand. Old Mr. Voysey, the Headmaster, hardly knew what was going on at the school. He relegated most of his authority to the under-masters and they were not well-chosen men. Many of them were rather bent on gaining the favour of their well-connected pupils than in keeping them in order. The school was, in fact, suffering from 'rot'. The rot showed itself in everything - in the games specially and in the manners and customs of Highcliffe.

This Magnet was published in January 1914, and apart from Dr. Voysey being called 'Mr.', it was clearly laying the ground for the Boys' Friend stories, but as Courtenay and de Courcy were not mentioned, it must have been written beforehand. Mr. Mobbs came over to Greyfriars to complain to Dr. Locke about the behaviour of the Greyfriars boys towards Ponsonby, "a highly-born and delicate lad". This episode ended unsatisfactorily for the Famous Five but in July 1915 No. 389 related how, after Mr. Mobbs had made another complaint, Wibley went over to Highcliffe disguised as Mr. Mobbs to wreak vengeance on Ponsonby &

Co. In that issue, of course, de Courcy and Courtenay were on the scene, and so the whole Highcliffe cast was assembled.

It was "The Boy Without a Name" that introduced both de Courcy, the Caterpillar, and Clare who had won a scholarship to Highcliffe from a Council School, much to the disgust of Ponsonby and his friends and Mr. Mobbs as well, whose character was aptly summed up in the second chapter of the 3d volume:

Mr. Mobbs was a first-class tuft-hunter. He was a born toady. He toadies to Ponsonby & Co. without limit. None knew better than Mr. Mobbs the 'doggishness' of the Highcliffe 'nuts', who prided themselves on being 'doggish'. But Mr. Mobbs closed his eyes to the fact that they smoked in their studies, and played bridge there; and he more than suspected - but was careful never to discover - that they had dealings with bookmakers and other persons whose acquaintances could hardly be considered desirable for schoolboys.

Mr. Mobbs was quite a genius at keeping his eyes closed when it did not suit him to have them open. He did not realise that, as is the case with all toadies, he was made use of and despised as a reward.

Clare, whose parentage was unknown and who had been brought up by a sea captain, was befriended by Rupert de Courcy in a whimsical manner because he said he wanted an insight into the ways of the 'brainy' workin' classes' and also because he was amused that Ponsonby would be infuriated as a result. The Caterpillar's uncle was an earl and his brother was a baronet, which meant that his social status at Highcliffe was unchallenged, and his lazy manner, together with an independence of mind and a mocking air all combined together to form a very complex character of great fascination to the reader. His occasional tendency to relapse into smoking and card-playing with Pon and his friends - a tendency which Clare managed to correct - added yet another facet to a brilliantly conceived character, one who was rather wasted at a subsidiary school that had only two stories written about it in its own right. There can be little doubt that Cardew, who arrived at St. Jim's a year or two later, was very largely a re-run of de Courcy in a more permanent setting.

The extreme snobbery depicted in "The Boy Without a Name, though possibly not untypical of its time, certainly strikes an odd note nowadays. Boys whose parents worked for a living were regarded as pariahs. Of Smithson, Gadsby remarked, "His father's a solicitor, and that cad Benson, the son of a half-pay captain, and Yates - his father's a poverty-stricken doctor". Ponsonby might be proud of his uncle Major Courtenay but that was because of his wealth and fame. Middle-class professional people who relied upon their salaries were despised, and echoes of this persisted in the Magnet until the very end, with Bunter reminding Peter Todd that his father was only a solicitor in Bloomsbury.

If the Highcliffe stories live today - and they undoubtedly do - it is in spite of this snobbery rather than because of it. The vital force in these tales is the clash of personalities and especially the evil genius of Ponsonby, who with Gadsby and Monson worked as a inner trio, having Vavasour and Drury and Pelham on the periphery. It was Ponsonby who hatched the final plot to disgrace Clare and, as Clare was depicted as a healthy, open personality, it was obvious that it was not merely snobbery that motivated Ponsonby but a realisation that his supremacy in the Fourth Form had been successfully challenged and that his dignity had suffered from the consequent humiliations. After Clare was expelled it was discovered that he was the son of Major Courtenay, and a further examination of the affair revealed Ponsonby's guilt. He was saved from expulsion by the intercession of his victim, his new-found cousin, but relationship counted for nothing

with Ponsonby, and indeed it was not often mentioned in subsequent stories. He was still against Courtenay in "Rivals and Chums" in No. 328 of the 3d library. The war was referred to in that volume when it transpired that Ponsonby was writing criticisms of Frank Courtenay to the Major who was now at the Front ("Not bowled over by the Germans, I hope", said Ponsonby calmly). No doubt the disappointment in the hopes of inheriting the Major's fortune played a part in the hostility, for Ponsonby's mother was the Major's favourite sister, but there was also the fact that Courtenay was the Form Captain, a post from which Ponsonby was ousted.

From this time onwards, Highcliffe resumed its accustomed role as a subsidiary school in the Magnet. The Spring Double Number for 1915, No. 374, saw Ponsonby advertising (under an alias) for amateur dramatic companies to play at a private house, and this was the occasion for a mammoth gathering at Eastwood House, at which de Courcy and Courtenay were present. This seems to have been the only time they formed part of a Magnet holiday group, and in such a large gathering they had merely a few lines of speech, which must have meant a good deal to those who had read "The Boy Without a Name" but not much to those who had had no previous acquaintance with them. Incidentally, "Rivals and Chums" was not published until March 1916 and, although the Magnet editor gave it an enormous advertisement in No. 419 describing it as "The most stupendous sensation of modern times", it did not introduce any further characters to the Highcliffe stage, fascinating though the story undoubtedly was.

Though the Caterpillar was an intriguing and complex character, it was nevertheless the simple villainy of Ponsonby that motivated so many Magnet stories, and "Ponsonby's Plot" in No. 393 may be taken as a typical example. Annoyed at being deposed as Form Captain, and jealous of the standard of cricket achieved by Courtenay, Ponsonby set about trying to ruin the Greyfriars fixture permanently, and when one scheme failed he tried another. Ponsonby was still calling Courtenay a "nameless hound", and the Highcliffe cast was still the same as in "The Boy Without a Name", with the addition of Merton. Charles Hamilton was to prune it somewhat in the years to come.

Ponsonby's activities over the years seemed to vary considerably in degree. On a minor level, he would be prepared to rag a single Greyfriars junior if numbers were on his side. A more predetermined course of action would be mischief-making of the type used in No. 393 - tricks on the telephone and minor kidnappings. When he was really annoyed he became utterly vindictive and unscrupulous. A combination of methods was used in Magnet No. 798 where, as late as 1923, Ponsonby could still complain about old events:

"I dare say you remember that I was junior captain before Courtenay came", said Ponsonby. "He shifted me out of it. I don't deny he's a better player than I am - he is. But I never forget injuries." He compressed his well-cut lips. "I'm up against Courtenay all the time, as, of course, you'd guess."

He was addressing Levison who was temporarily back at Greyfriars, and it was in Ponsonby's study that the conversation took place. Ponsonby's remarks had a double edge to them, for he was asking Levison to spare his wicket when bowling for Greyfriars so that he could score a century in each innings, rather a hopeful ambition in an afternoon match. When Levison refused, a fight ensued, and Ponsonby later arrived at Greyfriars accusing Levison of having stolen a diamond pin which Ponsonby had already secreted in Levison's letter case. On this occasion Ponsonby had indeed foreseen a possible injury he could never forget, and his

revenge would have been successful had not Bunter been watching behind a screen when the pin was being hidden.

In 1928 Ponsonby was involved in another trick with his diamond pin, in No. 1067 as the tool of Captain Marker, who was hoping to ruin Wharton in order to inherit a fortune. The pin was planted in Wharton's study, but again Bunter's prying saved the day, and Mr. Quelch was apprised of the full facts before Mr. Mobbs arrived with Ponsonby to make the false accusation:

Mr. Quelch picked up the diamond pin from his table, dropped it in a drawer, and snapped the drawer shut.

"That pin, sir, remains here until a constable arrives to take official charge of it," he answered icily.

"What? What?"

"You, sir, are at liberty to depart as soon as you please; but the same does not apply to Ponsonby. I shall detain Ponsonby until a constable arrives from Courtfield Police Station to take him into custody."

Mr. Quelch was quite correct when he described Ponsonby as an unscrupulous scoundrel and a dangerous character. The interesting question that arises is why the author chose such an unmitigated villain as a permanent character in the Magnet. In 1949 Charles Hamilton wrote to me as follows: "I don't quite know how it is... unless it be my own sweet nature!... but all my bad characters have a tendency to reform, and get there sooner or later, and I always liked to see them on the right path." This might be true of Levison, Lumley-Lumley, and even Vernon-Smith at one stage of his career, but it was never even remotely true of Ponsonby, who had no parallel in any of the Hamiltonian schools. Ponsonby presumably survived because of an accident of history. The early stories, particularly the two 3d volumes, demanded a villain of this type, and when Highcliffe dropped into a subsidiary role there was no incentive or opportunity to relate a possible reformation. It was undoubtedly very useful to have a rogue like this to motivate certain plots, and because he was based at Highcliffe this left Greyfriars free of the stigma of having such a scoundrel within its own precincts.

Some sociologists attempt to explain all anti-social behaviour on the grounds of deprivation, a simplistic theory that any schoolmaster will characterise as facile nonsense. Charles Hamilton was certainly not at fault in suggesting that even someone brought up in aristocratic surroundings could end up as a bad hat. Being over-indulged may even cause more trouble than being deprived. The other main theory is that nature, not nurture, is the deciding factor, and here the possibility of inherent evil is accepted. Of course, some of Ponsonby's actions were relatively harmless, as when in Magnet No. 1048 he dressed up as Mr. Buncombe and became headmaster of High Oaks, a prank that Wibley might have perpetrated. On the other hand, the number of times he attempted to plot the expulsions of his enemies is so great that it would be impossible in real life for him ever to remain at the school, even one as run-down as Highcliffe. He was saved by the convention of the long-running school story paper to the effect that each episode is new and unique, a self-contained unit as it were, and though there were occasional references to past events the totality of crimes was never referred to. On one occasion the Caterpillar wondered if Ponsonby would eventually go to chokey. Certainly, if he were up before the court, he would have had some difficulty in recalling all the past offences he wished to have taken into account.

There were few references to the staff at Highcliffe. Dr. Voysey featured very little in the stories, but in Magnet No. 1216 he had a whole chapter to himself, and some perceptive comments were offered on his attitude:

His interests, as a matter of fact, were not in the school of which he was the head. He was a silver-haired, benevolent-looking gentleman, very imposing to the eyes of parents and governors. He looked an ideal schoolmaster, but he had no gift for that very difficult and arduous profession. He was old, he was tired, and his interests were elsewhere.

He had looked irritated, thinking of the coming visit. But his face was placid now. He had already forgotten the expected visitor.

As he sat he was looking at a picture on the study wall - a picture which the Highcliffe fellows described as a swudge, wondering what on earth the Beak saw in it to prize it so highly. But Dr. Voysey was an artistic gentleman if he was not a schoolmaster. That Rembrandt was a genuine picture.

The unwelcome visitor was Dr. Locke and this unique interview between the two Heads was indeed fascinating. Dr. Voysey took the line of least resistance, preferring to believe Ponsonby's story, and when everyone had gone he sat back gazing at the Rembrandt until he fell asleep.

Mr. Mobbs was encountered much more often, though it was not always made obvious exactly why he toadied to the well-connected. His motives were twofold: he expected benefits, both present and to come. In the same number of the Magnet the matter was made crystal clear:

"Mobby won't say anythin'", said the Caterpillar reassuringly. "If you do anythin' shady, dear men, you can rely on Mobby not to find out if he can help it. You can put your shirt on Mobby. Still, it might be safer to ask Mobby home for the week-end, Pon, to meet your uncle the Marquis. It will make all safe in that quarter. That's a tip!"

Ponsonby grinned involuntarily.

"I've already asked him", he said.

If Dr. Voysey had his Rembrandt, Mr. Mobbs had his stamp collection, which was kept in a locked glass-topped cabinet. Fellows who wanted to get round their form-master would profess an interest in philately. It was a valuable collection, and like all vulgarians Mr. Mobbs had no hesitation in letting people know its cost - over £200, a princely sum in 1933. To exact vengeance on Courtenay and the Caterpillar, Ponsonby burnt and charred some of these stamps in the grate of Study 3, in Magnet No. 1323. Fortunately, Bunter was a hidden witness again, and he moved the evidence to No. 5 study. Mr. Mobbs was so surprised that he felt sure someone else had burnt the stamps in that grate:

Dr. Voysey fixed him with a grim eye.

"Indeed, Mr. Mobbs!" His voice was like ice. "Had you made the discovery in Courtenay's study, would you have supposed any such thing?"

"Eh? Oh! No! But -"

"Then why suppose it now?"

Mobby stammered. It occurred to him that Dr. Voysey, old as he was, negligent and tired as he was, was by no means the old fool that his staff considered him. Certainly he intended to see justice done, and had no idea of entering into Mobby's pet likes and dislikes in his form. Mobby really had nothing to say. In Courtenay's study he would have proclaimed the discovery as overwhelming evidence of guilt. What else could he say now? He stammered helplessly. In his heart of hearts he knew that Pon. was capable of such an act.

Of all Charles Hamilton's subsidiary schools, only one other enjoyed an independent existence for a short time, and that was Ryicombe Grammar School, but the Grammar School's part in future Gem plots was minimal, consisting of good-natured ragging and rivalry. It had none of the 'bite' of Highcliffe and its range of characters, nor did it ever inspire Charles Hamilton to delightful irony and those trenchant verbal disputes. Highcliffe also spilled over into the holiday



stories as well, such as the Hiking Series and the cruise of the Water Lily. Ponsonby even featured at Rookwood, when he was a paying guest on Captain Muffin's yacht. Because there was only one house at Greyfriars, its conflicts had to be external for the most part, and once again Highcliffe served the purpose admirably. Some collectors feel that Magnet stories featuring Highcliffe gain an extra dimension that considerably enhances them, and certainly Highcliffe was a school full of dramatic interest. If its small cast of characters remain etched in the memory, that in itself is sufficient proof of Charles Hamilton's unerring craftsmanship. No one who has encountered Highcliffe is likely to forget the deep impression it makes. It is in fact a little masterpiece of creation.

WANTED: Jane Books (in dust jackets) by Evalne Price. John Wentley Books (in dust jackets) by J. F. C. Westerman.

D. SWIFT

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THOSE INTREPID GIRLS ON THEIR FLYING TRAPEZE.

- BY MARGERY WOODS. -

The performing arts have always provided a rich source of material for adult fiction and for the storypapers their drama, excitement and novelty proved a rewarding vein to mine. Youthful readers were treated to cliff-hanging sagas of virtuosi of keyboard or strings, vocal or terpsichorean, in short, every performing skill imaginable, not forgetting those popular pierrots and pierrettes of the seaside concert party. But of all entertainment categories one in particular seemed to exert a particular fascination for readers and, one suspects, the authors too: the Circus:

Most of the leading writers of A.P.'s girls' fiction had a go sooner or later. And why not? Circus was a heaven-sent theme, readily supplying scope for danger, drama and a positive League of Nations procession of exotic characters.

The two greats --- Cliff House and Morcove --- were not immune, and popular series characters also tended to get involved. Joan Vincent's famous Twins went to the circus in their own inimitable way, and that great little trouper, Toots from Lancashire, arriving by tandem, is literally flung into her circus debut by Adolphus, a very large elephant whose massive proverbial memory instantly recalls an act he'd done years before when he had to catch a performer on a cycle and throw him up to the trapeze. Poor Toots! Perforce obliged to carry on with Adolphus's old act, regardless of the fact she'd never been on a trapeze in her life. Incidentally, to Toots belongs the distinction of commencing her serial performance in TRY AGAIN TOOTS (SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY 1934) under the authorship of Elsie Trevor and completing it in the charge of Louise Carlton.

Joan Inglesant (Draycott M. Dell) wrote several vivid and dramatic circus serials. One of her heroines was Doreen, a circus dancer known as La Belle Helene, who appeared in SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN soon after that paper began. During the course of this serial Doreen's guardian at last found her and took her to live on his estate in South America. But not to live happily ever after!

Soon afterwards, Doreen was back in print again, this time in SCHOOL FRIEND, and fast in the cruel toils of fate when the circus visits South America. Unfortunately it also brings Doreen's old enemy, the sinister Natalia Vorska. Besides the circus there is an underground city, a treasure cave and a dam which bursts. And of course Doreen's guardian is away on business when he is needed. The tropical setting gave Inglesant full scope for her vividly depicted background colour and there was enough drama to satisfy the most avid of readers. If there was a moral to be drawn from these stories it was underlined without fail in this author's fiction; if one is a schoolgirl, never trust an adult, be it parents, relative or guardian, to help you out. They are usually a pretty useless lot!

And the League of Nations procession... Certainly the authors in the storypapers could never be accused of racial discrimination. From Morcove's royal

Naomer to the quaint M'lizi of Cliff House, dusky maids, oriental princesses and heroines of many tongues romped through the pages of the popular girls' papers.

In SILVER MIST OF THE CIRCUS Muriel Holden entwined three elements; the treasure-plan-in-two-halves ploy, the circus setting and a resourceful Indian heroine, Silver Mist, whose dialogue had a delightful lilt. Although beset by yet another of the rascally circus-owner breed, who covets the ancient Aztec treasure, Silver Mist is not the more passive, downtrodden heroine of Holden's other circus tale, CINDERELLA OF THE CIRCUS. Able to wake at any given moment, Silver Mist is instantly alert in the dark night when one of her enemies, Mrs. Grein, is searching the caravan for the other half of the map, and she has no compunction at all in smothering the cunning woman in a blanket and leaving her trussed up on the bed. Silver Mist is then able to escape from Mortons and return to Moreno's, where her arch enemy, Corvalles, who, not content with blackening her name until Moreno fired her, had also kidnapped her and delivered her to Morton.

Yes, there are two circuses in this tale; with a complicated ramification of villainy to ensure the action remains unflagging and the heroine on her toes. Silver Mist tries hard to keep one step ahead of the plotters, and in an exciting finale prepares a fake map for Corvalles and disguises herself as his daughter, Juanita, hoping to hoodwink him long enough to wrest from him the other half-map he has stolen. That a girl of Silver Mist's distinctive appearance could accomplish such an imposture for more than a few seconds of illusion would strain the credulity of even the most gullible of young readers and Holden is too skilled at the genre to allow this possibility. An accidental movement brings Silver Mist's long glossy plait falling free and Corvalles is instantly away with, as he believes, both halves of the map.

There follows a pursuit on horseback in the best wild west tradition. There is the old level crossing. The slow-moving mile-long train at the crucial moment. The spectacular jump to clear this obstacle (who needs the Royal Horse Show?) and then the unerring whirl of the lasso. In a display of the best rodeo equestrianism, Corvalles is well and truly rounded up. At last Silver Mist's dishonoured father, Chief Black Eagle, is restored to health and good name, the Aztec treasure is found, and Silver Mist and her bear, Hon-ee stay happily with the circus.

The two Louises, Essex and Carlton, also explored the circus theme. In HER CIRCUS AMITION (Carlton) we meet June and her sister Millie, both expert trapeze artistes and equestriennes since childhood, who aspire to appear at The Palladia, the acme of circus prestige. But in the opening chapter we find their circus-owner uncle informing them they are not to appear that evening; instead they are to be banished to the staff tent to clean-up and wash dishes. Although instantly reduced to tears by this blow Millie's dialogue seems a mite faint-hearted. "What does he mean, June? How nasty of him!"

What he means, the knowing little reader rapidly infers, is to promote his daughter, Roma, at the sisters' expense when the proprietor of Palladia visits their show to seek new talent. But fate steps in (as she invariably does!) when Roma's partner hurts her foot and June has to take her place in the act. During this, Roma falls from the trapeze and is brilliantly saved by June. But is Roma grateful for having her life saved? Before turning the page we know that June is going to be blamed. And once again she is demoted; this time to the hoopla stall. A cover of SCHOOLGIRL, in a suitable colour scheme of orange and purple, features the girls flying through the air, in fetching costumes with quite a cut-away thigh line that must have been rather daring for A.P. in 1930 when swimsuits

usually reached at least a couple of chaste inches down the leg!

It's sad, but no matter how loyal or devoted one may be to the much loved authors of our childhood at times it is difficult to ignore the somewhat preposterous nature of some of the plots. In Mildred Gordon's *LITTLE LADY OF THE LIONS* (SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN LIBRARY 49) Marcelle is summoned to the Head's study where a shock telegrams awaits her. She is to leave school immediately; a car will take her home to the aunt who has brought her up. Wise little noggins must have been instantly suspicious. Was the telegram a fake? But no. At home, she finds auntie about to leave for her own country. Marcelle is to go to her parents. What! She has parents she never knew existed. And why the darkened car with blinds that seemed unmovable? And this great castle with a magnificent throne room. Why were her parents masked? Oh, yes, Marcelle was in for a whole heap of very far-fetched trouble. After her masked mother embraces her --- "My arms have not nursed you since you were a tiny rosebud babe" --- Marcelle is given a sealed letter and instructed to take it to one Elmo.

Elmo turns out to be a circus lion-tamer. On her way in, Marcelle stops a runaway horse, saving a girl who turns out to be the daughter of the circus owner. She encounters a snake charmer called Hester who looks Arabian and apparently wanders around with a couple of cobras twining round her arms. "Never interfere with my pets. One sting from either of these cobras and you would never open your lips again."

However, Elmo and Mrs. Elmo vow to guard Marcelle and promptly plunk her in the lions' cage with a guitar and Nero and Cleopatra, a pair of ferocious beasts of somewhat uncertain temperament. How fortunate that she is able to play this instrument. Cue for arrival of grateful circus owner who promptly hires her and that evening Marcelle is straight into the act, nonchalantly strumming her guitar in the engaging company of Nero and his spouse. It must have seemed quite a long day since she was rescuing the matron's pet kitten at school that morning.

CINDERELLA OF THE CIRCUS could also have strained the reader's credulity. The heroine's uncle is supposedly dead after an unfortunate encounter with a lion in the African jungle. Before departing from England he has left his niece and nephew in the care of his circus manager. Ten very miserable years elapse for the two children, then, the age of miracles not yet past, he turns up in the final chapter, hale and hearty after having lost his memory for ten years.

A pity, for this unconvincing denouement spoiled an otherwise appealing story. Murie! Holden (Roland Jameson) was an excellent writer of well-paced action allied to the kind of descriptive narrative that took you there. She also brought a sincerity that must have touched quite a lot of youthful hearts, and had that ability to produce at the right moment a telling little phrase that said it all.

It has been claimed that deep down inside we all have a degree of spectator's blood lust. If this is true then Tessa of Tarrantos certainly catered for this grim little human failing. For Tessa nearly always fell, either from her trapeze (the highest one, naturally), or the little platform way up in the dizzying reaches of the Big Top, or, on one spectacular occasion, from a large sphere within which she had ascended above the ring, supposedly to vanish as it became wreathed in flames and drifted down to the tan. Billed in *SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY* as "the most celebrated girl trapezist in fiction", Tessa's exploits were enthralling enough to fulfil the wildest vicarious longing in the most circus-struck of young readers. Created by Elsie Trevor, who also wrote Cora, the Girl Animal Trainer, Tessa

must surely be the queen of all circus stars in fiction. Trevor also did "her" homework; the technique of the tricks and illusions she described were always carefully explained and her writing carried conviction.

And so the spangled, gaudy procession parades across the pages. Most of these stories presented just the right blend of the spurious glamour and the reality of the hardship of circus life without betraying too much of the tawdry side. There were spin-offs too; menageries, zoos, fairs, caravanners and assorted itinerant entertainers. And there was one other unusual and strangely poignant story of a young circus heroine.

In WAR MAID OF FLANDERS (serialised in SCHOOLGIRL 1930) John Wheway, writing under his pseudonym of Gladys Cotterill, set the circus theme against the background of World War I. Although this was one of his earlier ventures into the schoolgirl fiction genre, he was wise enough to realise the improbability of a girl toting fourteen performing dogs, a horse and an assortment of props (to say nothing of two elderly characters who form the other thread of the story) around one of the most appalling battlegrounds in martial history and simply forestalled any possible challenge by simply pointing out this fact in a line of dialogue.

There is an outrageous coincidence, though, when Pat meets a group of Tommies and discovers, surprise, surprise! that they were members of an acrobatic and juggling troupe who had actually played the same bill as her parents three years before. And yet, one must reflect, performers from all branches of the entertainment profession found their way into uniform, and those still playing joined concert groups and succeeded in reaching the most remote theatres of war, often improvising their shows under tremendous difficulties and in range of fire.

Some of the writing in WARMAID was a thin veil over the agony and horror of WWI and it is interesting to contrast it with Wheway's later writing when he donned, subsequently to hone and polish, the mantle of Hilda Richards and produce (arguably!) the finest and most successful era of the long Cliff House saga.

WARMAID was different in that it had no stereotype villains or jealous scheming female protagonists. Pat's adversary was infinitely more deadly: War. One wonders if perhaps Wheway "had" to write this story, not to utilise his war-time experience but as a writer's exorcism, for at the same time as WARMAID was appearing in SCHOOLGIRL he was also exploring the circus theme in SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY, under the same pseudonym. But this time on more conventional ground.

FOR CIRCUS FAME AND FORTUNE is set firmly on the safe, familiar A.P. schoolgirl wavelength. The canine interest is still present but on a slightly less wholesale scale --- one performing Alsatian. And here again are the clowns, the midgets, the rascally lion-tamer, the jealousies, the danger and the heartbreak.

Roll up, roll up, let the cymbals crash. The Circus is come to town...



FOR SALE: Hotspurs. S.a.e. please.

J. COOK

178 MARIA STREET, BENWELL, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, NE4 8LL





This is two articles in one. The two subjects are not connected, except insofar as they both concern Hamilton, the second only partly.

When we think of particular characters from Hamilton's "family", it is natural, I think, that Bunter should come to mind, and Coker, or any of the larger than life.

So much has been written about Bunter that any more may seem to be superfluous. Nonetheless, it has been a point of interest to me for some time to consider how much there is in him that connects him with other characters who are nominally vastly different. Bunter was a gathering together in to one (outsize, it is true) human framework, of almost every human fault, except murder and sexual depravity and, I suppose one must add, intentional theft - although his peculiar reasoning methods of stealing and yet not, to his mind, stealing, are fascinating in themselves - of which the human character is capable, with the somewhat mitigating circumstance that all his bad habits arise from one overall fact: he is the centre of his universe, and everything that happens should happen for his benefit. He rarely intends to do anyone else any harm (although the worm can turn when he considers he has been goaded enough); he merely tries to see to it that no punishment, just or unjust, comes to him. So far from wishing to do anyone else harm, he is mostly sublimely unconscious of anyone else, or, at least, of any importance they may have in the scheme of things, except as admiring satellites round himself. He is completely self-centred; or is he? I seem to remember that he was capable, on one occasion, of putting himself out of his mind when it concerned his mother being ill. Somewhere in that fat carcass there is a little good.

I frankly admit that he fascinates me. We would never, I suppose, meet anyone in real life who combines, within himself, all the ghastly traits that Bunter exhibits. And, having written that, I think of the history of this century alone, and begin to wonder if Bunter is not, after all, a rather mild character, in comparison with some who have strutted the earth. Nonetheless, in a rather horrible, reversed, way, he suggests the famous story of the painter, Turner, who, when a lady objected that one would never see such sunsets as his in reality, replied "No, but wouldn't you like to?" But if the subject were that of meeting such as Bunter, the answer would be "No, I would not". Still, with all his faults I love to read about him, although I could not live with him. He is a magnificent comedian, the more so because he is quite unconscious of it.

Coker, too, is, in a totally different way, one of whom it is better to read than to meet in the flesh. I suppose it is doubtful whether anyone not an actual lunatic could come so close and yet be at large, and yet I have met some close contenders for that crown, at least two of whom did not have Coker's saving grace of absolute and unequivocal honesty. However, honest as he is, he is, in his way, quite as self-centred as Bunter.

The masters, too, are not immune. Mr. Prout, in fact, shows quite a lot of Bunter in his makeup. He would not consciously deceive, but unconsciously he often does, or tries to: he obviously understudies Falstaff in his accounts of his adventures in the Rockies, and he must be as obtuse as Bunter, in this respect, if he can, as he obviously does, deceive himself into believing that he is not indulging in fiction. Another point that interests me about Prout, which I think Hamilton never made clear, is how and when he managed to become a school-master, having spent the earlier part of his life "big game hunting". When did he acquire the necessary qualifications?

He would not take another man's tuck, but he is quite as self-centred as Bunter. He views everything from the angle of how it affects him, especially his position, his dignity. And in many ways he is quite as stupid as Coker thinks he is, a good deal of his stupidity arising from his concern with himself. He also proves himself a tyrant when given absolute power, as he shows when allowed to act as Head. Just like Bunter, who also will be tyrant and a bully if given the opportunity.

But, ably as these are handled, I find still more subtlety in the way Hamilton shows even the so-called decent boys to be tainted with the tarbrush, so that one can be surprised into thinking "So-and-so's exactly like Bunter in that respect." Bunter, for instance, can widen a breach between two friends without taking thought; if he had to think he could not do it. So, too, can Johnny Bull, simply by being his natural, stolid, obstinate, honest self, sure that everything is either black or white, with no shades in between, sure that he knows even when he does not, and sure that all is as plain as the nose on his face. And when he is proved wrong, he is not too quick to admit it (and sometimes does not do so at all), and is quite ready to be just as sure in another direction - just like Bunter. The last time Johnny exhibited this striking gift for widening a breach and making things worse was in the post-war book Billy Bunter Butts In, which is a masterpiece of Hamilton's art in this direction.

I could enumerate many examples, but I will take just one more, a duo: Potter and Greene, Coker's "loyal" pals. Loyal they are, so long as Aunt Judy's hampers last, or Coker is paying the exes; but once the hamper is finished, or Coker is, as he sometimes was, broke, their one concern is to "slide", and get away as far as possible from Coker and his conversation, his ideas, or desire on his part, politely expressed, of course, in his inimitable way, for their assistance. Admittedly, he is difficult to deal with, but putting up with that, surely, should be their return for what they receive from him - and Coker is the reverse of stingy; he is lavish. If they are not prepared to put up with him in the lean times, or when he is being obstreperous, they should, in all honesty, avoid the good things when they are there. But they do not see it that way, and the fact that they do not is part of their character - an unpleasant part. Once the good things are exhausted they have no further use for Coker; just like Bunter, who rolls away as soon as he has extracted all he can get. Potter and Greene are born cadgers, just like Bunter. They, no doubt, regard themselves as quite decent fellows, and would see no connection between themselves and that scrubby little tick, Bunter, of whose existence they would profess to be unaware.

One thing about them particularly interests me. We have no information as to their families; their vacations are always spent with Coker, at his expense, of course. Could it be that their families cannot stand them - or that they cannot stand their families? Presumably they have some money of their own. So that by the time they leave Greyfriars (if they ever do) they should be quite wealthy,

since they do not appear to have spent anything throughout the whole of their lengthy school career; or, at any rate, since the three of them became study-mates, which is long enough ago. Presumably they are saving their money. But, then, they never will leave Greyfriars, and certainly not so long as they can batten on Coker, or put things right, when they have gone wrong, by chunks of flattery for their susceptible pal - so that they will share again in Aunt Judy's good things. Again, just like Bunter. With all his faults, Coker is worth a dozen of either of them.

They have had a number of frights, when Coker has either come close to being, or has actually been, sacked, for something he did not do - although he had done everything he could to make it appear that he was guilty. But once it was clear, or seemed to be, from the evidence, that he had done the thing he had not done and was expelled as a result, Potter and Greene did not want to know him; they resigned themselves heroically to the loss of the fleshpots and even perhaps to spending some of their own money, hard as that must have bit them. They avoided Coker as if he were a leper. Just like Bunter.

I am very far from having exhausted this subject, and readers may like to continue it for themselves, not forgetting, as I have tried not to forget, that other things beside charity begin at home. Bunter is, like any great character, a good deal of a mirror. Some day I must really have a look at myself and see how I resemble Bunter!

My other subject concerns authors, including Hamilton, and their treatment of public transport. There are novelists I love and admire who, in one respect, irritate me - in their references to public transport; notably, trams and buses, albeit the first of these has disappeared from all but two places in the United Kingdom. One who has frequently had this effect on me for this reason is Hugh Walpole, who rarely referred to an omnibus except as clumsy or as a lumbering monster. Other writers have described trams in a similar way, particularly as clumsy, and invariably have added the adjectives "noisy" or "bone-shaking", and sometimes both. Much, of course, depends upon one's point of view. If one did not like trams, then probably they were noisy and sources of irritation, and they certainly could, at times, shake one about. But I have known the motor-car to do that, even more efficiently. I have sometimes wondered if these objections to trams and buses were partly built on a form of snobbery; such transport was, and is, of the people; for, as some objectors would have put it, the common herd. (We should remember, here, too, that originally the conductor of a bus was called a cad - an abbreviation, my dictionary surprisingly tells me, of cadet - and we know what that word came to mean.) Fortunately, I am one of the common herd, and I have always been a tram- and, to a somewhat less extent, a bus-addict, and so I never minded being shaken up by a tram. Indeed, I remember once climbing up the curving stairs of an Ilford tram and, as it started off, being thrown forward so that my shins hit the next step; and, if you have ever hit your shin(s) hard you will know what it means when I say that even that did not quench my love of this vehicle. Nor did I find the tram unpleasantly noisy. In fact, I have several recordings of just such noises, recorded in different parts of the British Isles, and it is interesting to find how varied in character they were in different places.

So far I have written of matters of opinion. But clumsiness - that is a delusion, fostered by dislike. Buses may look lumbering or cumbersome, because of their size, but if you have ever watched a London bus being manoeuvred in thick traffic, or been on one at such a time, you will know that clumsy and cumbersome

are the last adjectives to be applied to it. As for trams, the Feltham car or the double bogey LCC trams were to me like lean greyhounds quivering as they moved. Ian Yearsley, in his fascinating book, The Manchester Tram, has a passage very much to the point, about an incident which occurred during a visit to London. Discussing the use of rheostatic brakes, he writes: "If you signalled a Manchester tram at a request stop the driver would start pulling on the handbrake while the car was still two or three pole-lengths away, but when I tried to board a tram at a request stop in Charlton I thought it was not going to stop at all, for it kept right on at full speed until the front of the car was nearly level with the stop-sign. Then with a sharp movement the driver's lefthand went right round the clock, and four magnetic brake shoes clamped themselves to the rail. There was a tremendous whining noise, descending the scale, as the car hauled itself to a standstill, and we blinked in surprise as the rear platform stopped right opposite us. At first, I couldn't believe it; I thought that the driver must have noticed us only at the last moment and then made an emergency stop for us, but no; at the next stop the very same thing happened, he made as if to go bowling past the waiting crowd and then almost stood the tram on end to bring it to a standstill." Whatever one may think of the "tremendous whining noise", a vehicle that could do what Mr. Yearsley has so graphically described can scarcely, with justice, be called either clumsy or cumberson. True, the wear and tear on those brake shoes must have been immense.

I once boarded a tram, a No. 54, at Forest Hill, in London, late on Sunday night, to go to New Cross Gate station, and the distance was covered in just under ten minutes; this I know, for I had to keep an eye on the time. I expected to miss my train by some minutes and, to my surprise, managed to catch it. Admittedly, there was only one stop on the way. There was nothing clumsy about that tram, bless its heart. Of course, it was on its way to the New Cross depot, so perhaps, like a horse, it knew when it was going home.

Incidentally, the parallel with an animal is not so far-fetched. Mr. Yearsley also recounts the story of a policeman in South London, early one morning, spotting a tram moving along very slowly. To his amazement, there was no driver; indeed, no one at all visible on the vehicle. Walking round the near side he found the driver walking beside his tram, clapping his arms to keep warm, exactly as though he were taking a pet for a walk.

One further point: the tram was the cleanest transport vehicle that has ever used our roads. It left no stink of petrol fumes to fill the air; indeed, no fumes of any kind, unless it might be the fumes of beer from certain passengers, or from the fuming of those who got shaken up and did not like it.

Two novelists who have shown awareness and appreciation of the tram are Arnold Bennett and, to a slightly less degree, J. B. Priestley. No one who has read The Good Companions will forget Jess Oakroyd, at the outset, leaving the football match in a rather miserable frame of mind - the result partly of a poor match and partly of his missing his daughter, Lily - and riding on top of a tram next to a neighbour. "I call this two pennorth o' misery, missis", he says to her - a reflection of his mood. Trams were always far more part of the character of the North than of the South, and reflected a good deal of the character and moods of the people who used them. It is significant that Birkenhead and Liverpool had the first passenger tramways in these islands, and that Huddersfield was the first municipal tramway operator. Also, in the Yorkshire flashbacks in Priestley's superb novel, Bright Day, there are a number of affectionate and understanding references to trams. And in the panoramic English Journey he writes:

"The trams, groaning desperately, go mountaineering; and at night they look like luminous beetles swarming up and down a black wall". This about Halifax, which had the reputation of having the hilliest tramway system in the United Kingdom.

But, even more than Priestley, Arnold Bennett was essentially the novelist who understood the tram. The sound of them as they travel along Trafalgar Road to Bleakridge, in Clayhanger, or The Old Wives' Tale, or Helen with the High Hand, or The Price of Love, or any number of other tales, becomes part of the atmosphere of the story, which is unimaginable without them. In fact, in a book like Clayhanger they virtually become characters in themselves. The poet of the tram; it's an unusual distinction, but, so far as I am concerned, it belongs unreservedly to Bennett.

Trains were in a different category. For one thing, they pandered. You would never find a first class section, with a few elite passengers scattered about, on a bus or tram, and many used the train who would have shuddered at the idea of travelling on one of its plebeian colleagues.

By a coincidence, my final part concerns trains. Charles Hamilton's stories, in Magnet and Gem, strongly feature trains: end of term, beginning of term, visits to other schools for away matches: trains figure in all them. And Hamilton had a curious delusion about trains. This has struck me at various times, even when I was a boy, but I was recently reminded of it by re-reading The Shadow of the Sack. As in this one, many Magnet stories began with the fellows returning from vacation, waiting at Courtfield for the local to Friardale. The compartments are crowded, other boys try to get in and are moved on. In nearly all of them there is information such as this, from Magnet 1683: "The railway company had provided accommodation for eight passengers in that carriage. It contained a dozen." By "carriage", of course, Hamilton meant compartment. Now, where did he get this notion, of only eight seats in a compartment? This is true of compartments in a corridor train, where the corridor is on one side of the coach. But Hamilton is rarely writing of corridor trains. The boys trying to get in are on the platform, and move along the platform to find another compartment. In the non-corridor train, the kind of which Hamilton was writing so often, there was room for six seats a side, a total of twelve to each compartment - unless the passengers were of Bunter's size. And there are even some stories where Hamilton only allows six seats for the whole compartment. This is one of the most curious delusions I have encountered in an author's work.

Seasonal Greetings and Best Health to all "C.D." Friends.

LEN HAWKEY

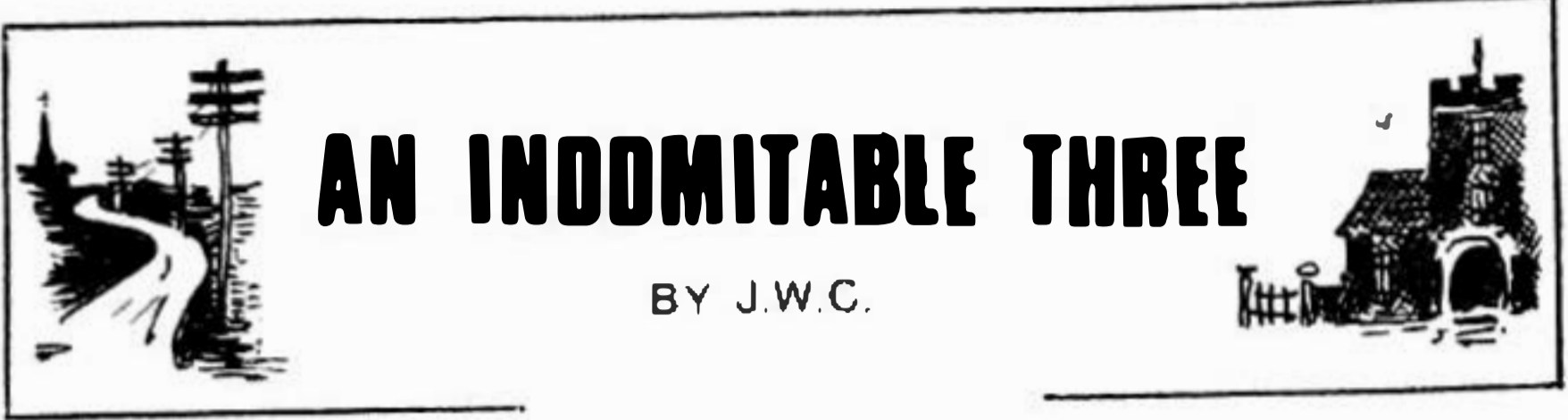
3 SEAVIEW ROAD, LEIGH-ON-SEA, ESSEX

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Best Wishes to all Friends and many thanks to The Editor and all contributors.

REG ANDREWS

LAVERSTOCK SALISBURY



Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi... brains, wealth and strength. Just the requisite factor when penetrating the Unknown or fighting lost causes. When such a trio is at the helm victory is always possible. And when you have a determined party of the boys from St. Frank's the outcome of a conquest is assured.

Ventures that spring to mind are the Holiday Party's rescue attempt in the Sahara Desert; the escape from a South Sea Island minutes before it was destroyed by volcanic eruption; the subsequent journey to the South Pole and discovering a lost people. Of treasure hunting in North Africa, and another rescue in the South American jungles and finding El Dorado.

Following an airship mishap and the dirigible's landing in the Adriatic Sea, the holiday party enter the forbidden land of Mordania where banditry is rife and the people suppressed. But with the help of the party the regime is crushed and the peace of the kingdom is restored.

But this adventure had an aftermath that could have had serious consequences. The Mordanian terrorists came to London to exact a terrible revenge. All kinds of contrivances were sent to the boys that when opened would cause death. Nelson Lee and Nipper had a miraculous escape when Nipper was trussed and a bomb fixed to the door that when Nelson Lee entered the room the explosion would kill them both.

Fatty Little was sent poisoned chocolates. Another junior was warned in time about a parcel that contained boxing gloves that contained a swift-acting poison in a needle inside the gloves.

But these attempts were all thwarted and the terrorists were finally rounded up.

With the Indomitable three went the holiday party into the remote regions of the Congo Forest when some of Umlosi's people were being captured for slaves. After many exciting and dangerous moments the Saviours of St. Frank's end the cruel tyranny of a Greek trader.

In some of these amazing adventures the Moor View Schoolgirls took part and gave a good account of themselves.

Other holiday adventures saw the St. Frank's juniors and the Indomitable Three in China following another trip to the South Seas hunting for pearls. Then came visits to Australia and New Zealand. It would be foolish of me to omit the time the party went to Northestria by submarine to the Pole as this was a very thrilling episode and will never be forgotten. Nor will the extraordinary imprisonment that occurred when the party went to India to rescue Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn of the Remove, who was the younger son of the Maharajah of Kurpana. The anti-British Ameer's palace at the top of a thousand-foot crag held the St. Frank's party where escape seemed hopeless. But escape was achieved and will go down

as one of the most strange of holiday adventures.

Reading of these exploits in retrospect from the safety of an armchair one yearns for the old days when the world still offered exploration of unknown lands and lost cities.

When we followed the Indomitable Three and the boys of St. Franks not forgetting the Moor View girls. Although their spirits live on the opportunities have faded for there isn't much left of the world to explore and rascally despots and the usurpation of kingdoms is now left to the history books.

It isn't surprising to find the Holiday Party in Canada in a Wild West adventure. This Montana Mystery with Redskins, rustlers and a Valley of gold and cowboys make this period as exciting as any.

But if this Indomitable Three were around today think of the possibilities they could get involved in. And with the St. Frank's stalwarts and those valiant girls we could be regaled to hours of intense stimulation. All it needs is for someone to record the activities and desperate trials as the famous Trio head for another grand rescue somewhere in the hinterlands of little known places.

But as we grow grey perhaps we should give a thought to what the future might bring. There is the vast limitless areas of Outer Space and the mysterious Universe. What sort of adventures might the St. Frank's party find in those unknown depths and what kind of enemy.

Perhaps as I sit writing these notes in the comfort of peace and tranquility those St. Frank's heroes are already in dire straits waiting to be rescued by Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi. Or perhaps embarking on another flight to rescue some unfortunate or to enthrone a lost king. Or they may even right a wrong in their own environment. Distress needn't occur only abroad; it can be in our very midst.

I cannot escape the feeling that each time I read of the St. Frank's Holiday adventures that there is something to be learned. There are no nugatory incidents that can be inadmissible to records for each occurrence has its place worthy of note.

It has often been noted that if we wish to look forward to the future we should study the past.

Imitation, it is said, is the sincerest form of flattery.

Today as many try to emulate the Indomitable Three in fictitious entertainment the imitators cannot match the spirit and the vivacity of a St. Frank's Holiday Party as our heroes wage war against all that is wrong and evil.

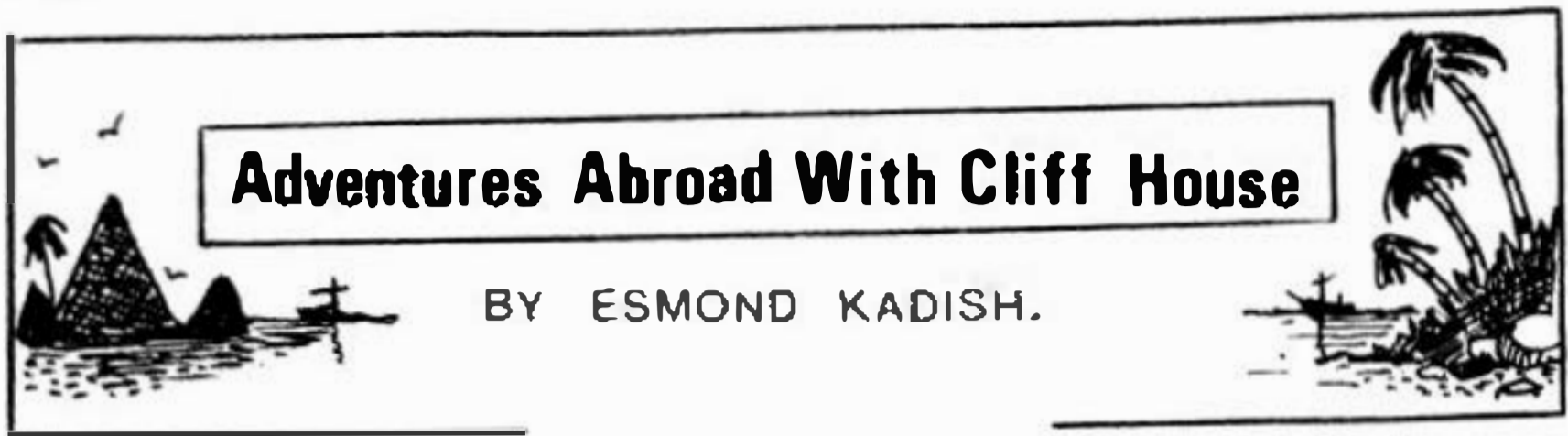


A Happy Yuletide to One and All, be ye at Wharton Lodge, or Linton Hall! - and Happy Fortieth Year to the "Digest" in 1986.

ESMOND KADISH

18 GROVE GARDENS, HENDON, NW4





Adventures Abroad With Cliff House

BY ESMOND KADISH.

In these restless times, when a trip to the Continent is commonplace, and folk think little of flying off to Florida, or sailing away to the Seychelles at the drop of the first snowflake, the kind of seaside holiday that some of us were lucky enough to enjoy in the thirties must seem quite tame by comparison. But these summer holidays had their own peculiar delights, less sophisticated, no doubt, than those enjoyed by present-day youth, but just as pleasurable - racing shorewards, over the mud-flats of Thorpe Bay, just a few perilous inches ahead of the incoming tide; or, leaning on the promenade railings, chin cupped in hands, watching - gratis! - one of the two concert parties which performed on the sands by Bournemouth Pier, in the early years of the decade, (or "Danemouth" as it was known to Miss Marple in a recent film for T.V.!) are two of my own fond memories.

For exotic locations, and the thrill of foreign travel, our pre-war generation had to make do with the vicarious excitement of joining Greyfriars or Cliff House on their frequent and privileged trips to various parts of the world in the summer vacation. In one respect, the Cliff House tales of summer adventure were even more appealing than the boys', since schoolgirl readers could not easily be fobbed off with a simple adventure yarn - however rousing - but demanded plenty of local colour, interesting new personalities, and a proper description of the "sights" visited. Quite rightly, of course - after all, what is the point of having the Cliff House chums go abroad, if you don't make full use of the novel settings?

Thus, John Wheway's three summer holiday series in the SCHOOLGIRL, in 1932, 33 and 34, fitted the bill perfectly - made to order for youngsters who never seemed likely to venture further than the familiar British seaside resorts. Mr. Wheway had inherited the pen-name of "Hilda Richards" with No. 140, in the spring of 1932, and made an excellent job of bringing Cliff House and its schoolgirls to life again. The long, complete Cliff House story, written by L. E. Ransome for the SCHOOL FRIEND, had been dropped for nearly three years, so it was something of an achievement for Wheway to take up the saga again, and stamp it with his own individual style of writing and flair for characterisation. By the summer of '32, he had overcome some initial uncertainties, and corrected a few pardonable "fluffs". Bab's hair, for instance, had been described variously as "brown", "dark", and - finally - "chestnut"; Marjorie Hazeldene's eyes were "blue" as, with quiet courage, she faced the bullying prefect, Sarah Harrigan, in No. 143, but later became "brown"; Mab's were "grey" in No. 151, but ended up as "blue" - to set off her golden curls no doubt. A case of "Don't it make my brown eyes blue", perhaps, and mere details, of course, but I suspect that some of those early schoolgirl readers must have noticed the discrepancies!

The characters themselves were also subjected to some manipulation - inevitable, I suppose, when a new writer takes over. In fact, Wheway made fewer changes than might have been predicted. It is true that Dolly Jobling and Augusta

Anstruther-Broune were both dropped, to be replaced by Leila Carroll, the American junior, Marcelle Biquet, (very French!) and Janet Jordan, whilst such characters as Peggy Preston, Phyllis Howell and Philippa Derwent ("Flip and Flap") were retained, but relegated to the background. However, Babs, Mabs, Clara and Marjorie - characters originally created by Charles Hamilton - continued to fill the leading roles, their personalities sharpened and livened by Wheway's sympathetic writing; Bessie became a lovable duffer instead of a fat buffoon; Jemima (Ransome's creation) was reintroduced in No. 156 even more successfully than in the SCHOOL FRIEND. The "baddies" consisted of the Form's snob, Lydia Crossendale, (created by Wheway) and the three toadies: Freda Ferriers, Marcia Loftus, and Nancy Bell (the last two were inherited from the SCHOOL FRIEND, and later expelled from Cliff House). Another sneak - appropriately named Aima Crooke - was introduced in No. 142, and hastily disposed of, in the same way, in No. 155. Wheway also created a "wayward" type in Rosa Rodworth, a counterpart of the Greyfriars Bounder, until much of her thunder was stolen by the flamboyant Diana Royston - Clarke in the following year. Stella Stone continued to reign - for a time - as Head Girl, and Connie Jackson and Sarah Harrigan were Cliff House's equivalent of Loder and Walker. As for the mistresses, Miss Primrose remained as the school's kindly but firm Principal, and the acid-tempered and authoritarian Miss Bullivant was at first made mistress of the Fourth, but wisely replaced, after the summer holiday, by Miss Jane Matthews, (a Ransome character) and later, in 1934, by Miss Valerie Charent. Both the young mistresses were charming and sympathetic characters, and just what the readers wanted. It is a tribute to Wheway's skill - and to the excellent illustrations of Tommy Laidler, who had such rapport with him - that he established his mark so quickly and firmly on Cliff House, breathing new life into the characters, and giving fresh popularity to a series which appeared to have had its day.

By the summer of 1932, then, he had ironed out most of the early problems, and Barbara Redfern and Co. were ready to go on their first summer holiday adventure - a Mediterranean cruise on the liner "Plathian" - in a series of six complete stories (156 to 161). The Cliff House party consists of Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Clara, Marjorie, Leila, Marcelle, and Janet, and it is in this opening story, "The Cliff House Holiday Cruise", that the monocled Jemima Carstairs is reintroduced "dressed in an immaculate suit cut on the smartest masculine lines". There is a quick tour of the cabins and, while the Cliff House girls hold their breath in "rapturous excitement", the liner puts to sea, "engines throbbing, deck gently heaving with scarce perceptible motion". At their first shipboard meal, they find "soft-footed stewards" waiting upon them, "unostentatiously replenishing dishes and glasses as the lunchers talked". To keep the girls otherwise occupied, during the first few days, there is a damsel-in-distress to rescue. She has, of course, "lost her memory", and been abducted for ransom by an unscrupulous couple. The Cliff House party soon puts paid to this little scheme!

When the girls go ashore at Barcelona in "In Spain with Babs. and Co.", the wail needing assistance this time is Dolores, the flower-girl, who is being victimised by the rascally Tonlo. The girls find this pre-Civil War Catalan city a picturesque place, with "broad flower-filled gardens and majestic statues, palm-fringed streets and flat-roofed houses", and the party is pursued by a crowd of children demanding "pennies". Jemima, however, has been in Barcelona before and, clearly, knows the ropes! Her advice is: "Cut out the charity, old things! No jolly old Pied Piper stunt, you know. Remember the old British motto, 'Save your pennies. Spend 'em on ices for poor old Bessie'".

Back on board ship in "Shunned on the Liner" (No. 158), Mabel Lynn has written a play, "My Fair Lady", for performance at a forthcoming ship's concert. (I can find no record of Mab's having sold the title rights to Messrs. Lerner and Loewe in later years; nor of these gentlemen having read the SCHOOLGIRL in their youth!) Marjorie is given a part, and this arouses the jealousy of one Maud Deighton, who unjustly accuses her of stealing her handbag. Poor Marjorie is, therefore "shunned" by her fellow-passengers; one man even buttons up the coat of the white drill suit he is wearing "very ostentatiously", as she approaches. The liner subsequently calls at Naples, and a visit to Vesuvius is arranged. Marjorie saves Maud's life, when a "huge lump of grey laval" falls, by pulling "at the edge of Maud's dress with fierce, frenzied strength". Maud is properly grateful, and makes amends.

Venice, in No. 159, a city of "radiant roofs, smiling balconies, prominent campaniles, and dignified domes", is the next to be graced by the presence of our Cliff House chums. The girl needing their assistance this time is named Rosa, and she operates a gondola (what else?) and is beset by enemies. Having sorted out this problem, the girls are next off to French-ruled Algiers where, in "The Tomboy's Holiday Trial", Clara Trevlyn stumbles across her brother Jack who, in true "Beau Geste" tradition, is in hiding, after having deserted from the Foreign Legion. Instead of a young man with a "smiling twinkle" in his blue eyes, Clara sees "a haunting fear - a grim, grown-up, almost savage look in his haggard face". The loyal Tomboy is not the girl to abandon her brother to his fate, and she contrives to smuggle him aboard the "Plathian". Meanwhile, a little light relief is provided by Bessie Bunter who is surrounded by a crowd of grinning urchins, and wags a reproving finger at them. "Don't you laugh at me!" she admonishes them. "In my own country I'm a great lady." This causes further hysterics amongst the natives!

The series is rounded off with "Homeward Bound with Babs. and Co." (16!) in which the return voyage is marred by the "heartless pranks" of two boys whose idea of amusement is to fire water-pistols loaded with ink at the girls, tie poor Bessie's plait to a hook attached to a deckpost, and break her glasses. Bessie retaliates with a spot of ventriloquism - a talent she apparently shares with brother Billy - and Marjorie's gentle influence helps to reform at least one of the playful youths.

In the thirties, Hollywood and the film-world was a popular and frequent topic in the girls' papers, and in the boys' too, come to that. The "stars" had charm and style, the studio system was in full swing, and the Hollywood producers were in control and "knew what they were doing" - as the late James Mason once put it. The SCHOOLGIRL had regularly featured short film articles in its pages, and no doubt the A.P. was hoping that readers would be encouraged to buy its film journals, PICTURE SHOW and FILM PICTORIAL, when they had finished with the SCHOOLGIRL. Stars and films, from both America and Britain, were discussed: it might be the "new stars of 1932", such as Bette Davis, Ginger Rogers, and Joan Blondell, or current films like "Cavalcade" or "Tarzan, the Ape Man". Incidentally, these little film features were eventually replaced by THE CLIFF HOUSE ENCYCLOPEDIA, which started in No. 203, and ran for several months, giving two or three pages of information each week about the school and its pupils. These pages were intended to be cut out and pasted in a scrapbook, and perhaps this is one reason why copies of the SCHOOLGIRL for 1933-34 are in such short supply!

So it seemed inevitable that the Cliff House girls would eventually visit the

"CLIFF HOUSE AMONG THE FILM STARS!"

Grand Story of Barbara Redfern & Co.—within.

THE SCHOOLGIRL

EVERY 2^D SATURDAY

WITH WEICK IS INCORPORATED "SCHOOL-DAYS"



BESSIE IS NOT WANTED ON THE FILMS.

An appealing incident from the colourful story, by Hilda Richards —inside.

film capital, as they did in the summer of 1933, although I must admit to a few reservations about tales with a film theme. Hollywood was such a fantasy world anyway, and the stars so removed from reality, that it seemed superfluous to invent fresh personalities like "Dawn O'Day", an actress whom Wheway describes as "radiantly beautiful" (like a sunrise, perhaps?). Still, Wheway's Hollywood was delightful, and he could hardly include real film stars in his plots, although he does mention a few in passing, such as when, at the Brown Derby, the Cliff House girls' spy "Constance Bennett in one corner --- at another table, Joan Crawford".

Wheway had prepared the way for the Hollywood trip with an earlier series (194-196) in which Bessie "crashes" into films, when her little Pekingese dog, Ting-a-ling, takes it into his shaggy head to invade the local Enterprise Film Studios (situated somewhere "east of Friardale"), and dog and pursuing mistress cause chaos on the set. The director, Mr. Pontifex (no relation to Mr. Prout!) heartily approves of Bessie and Ting's flair for knockabout comedy, and a contract is offered, with a Hollywood trip to come. Thus, in No. 210, the girls are "Off to Hollywood", this time on the "Westania", and they are met in the U.S. by Leila's father, who is a "celebrated director at M.C.M.". His full name is impressive - Todfoster Templegate Carroll - and sounds to me as though Wheway obtained it from a London Underground map! As in the previous year, this 1933 series consists of six complete tales (210 to 215) and in the first two, the girls are involved in foiling the schemes of an impostor. The second story is described as "the 'Rome Express' of Cliff House stories", a reference to a British film of the time, and is set on the "Southern Pacific Express" en route for Los Angeles. Lots of local colour, of course:- "the subtle perfumes of grapes and tobacco" float through the open train window, and a Virginian town is described as "a bowl of winking diamonds and rubies glistening in the night".

But Bessie's promising career as a slapstick comedienne is nearly finished before it begins in "Cliff House Among the Film Stars" (212), when she reaches the studio where she is to be filmed, "Superstar Productions". (Mr. Wheway goes down every-so-slightly in my estimation for having invented this unnecessary word!) The girls are introduced to Eric Wainwright, who is a protege of Miss O'Day's. Eric is outwardly polite and well-mannered, but, in fact, is two-faced and malicious. Tomboy Clara, who "loves a boy to be a boy" is not fooled by his pretences. She could "even find it in her heart to admire a really bad boy" but cannot stand "this combination of deceit and sweetness". Eric craftily turns on a wind machine in the studio, and Bessie is blamed for the resulting havoc, and banned from the set. She stands outside the studio gates:-

"fat, forlorn, a tragic picture of misery, her head bowed on one arm - sobbing! Ting-a-ling, at the end of his lead, looked utterly dejected, too, with his floppy ears almost trailing the ground, and his bushy tail between his legs."

A pathetic sight! Meanwhile, Clara sees a "red-costumed nymph" riding a surf-board towed by a motorboat, and is enthusiastic: "My giddy aunt! I'd like to try that!". She does, too!

After Eric has been exposed, and Bessie reinstated at the studio, there are further thrills for the girls when Leila is kidnapped (213), and a ransom for a million dollars" (which seems rather excessive!) demanded for her return. There is some nifty detective work done by Barbara Redfern before she is rescued. In "Queen of the Silver Hills" (214), the girls are "on location" in Nevada. Marjorie (who seems to be having an exciting time, in spite of her gentle and

retiring nature) is carried off by bears, and rescued by the "legendary Daughter of Manitou", a strange girl who lives in the hills. She turns out to be (yes, you've guessed it, readers!), the long-lost daughter of the director, Mr. Pontifex, who had been carried off by the bears thirteen years previously, and was believed dead.

Finally, in "Bessie Bunter's Greatest Triumph", Bessie's film, "Queen of the Ring" is pronounced a "decided hit". Bessie decides, however, to sacrifice the glory and glamour of a film career in Hollywood in favour of her film "double", Sally York, who is "longing for a chance":-

"And, after all", she drew closer to the girl she really loved better than anyone else on earth - 'it would have been awful, Bib-Babs, wouldn't it, being all alone in America? I couldn't really get on without you and dear old Cliff House, you know!'"

To which, all one can say is "A-a-ah!", and reflect on how much nicer Wheway's Bessie is compared to earlier versions. Billy, on holiday with the Famous Five, may sometimes prove a pain in the neck; Bessie, in the SCHOOLGIRL, never is!

There is more than a touch of Hollywood romanticism about the girls' trip to Egypt in August 1934 (262-264). One half expects to see Rudolph Valentino or, at the very least, Harry Wharton as "The Schoolboy Sheik", pop out from behind the nearest sand dune! The girls, this time accompanied by three boys from Friardale School, and their madcap chum, Celeste Margesson - in whose "luxurious yacht", the "Gloriana", they have sailed from England - are the guests of Andros Bey and his daughter, Naida, with whom they had enjoyed a magic Christmas at Luxor Hall, two years before. Wheway is very much at home in this Egyptian setting, having already written a serial, "Naida of the Mystic Nile", for the SCHOOLGIRL of 1929, as "Heather Granger" (Nos. 16-28). He seems to revel in describing "tall-masted feluccas" and "bent-masted dehabiyas, looking like a row of fishing-rods rising out of the boats", as they float past on the Nile. When the party finally reaches its destination, "The Palace of Palms", they find it an Arabian Nights wonderland "fragrant with the scent of lotus and roses", with "Nubian servants lined up to receive them", and "dancing girls strewing rose petals upon the ground". No wonder the chums laugh "in sheet excitement", and Bessie awards it the final accolade when she admits that "even Bunter Court isn't much better than this!".

This dreamlike mood soon changes when the chums learn that Princess Naida's brother, Ben Alci, is in trouble. He must find a peculiar ring, which is the key to open the tomb of "Set-aru", an ancient and evil king of Egypt, if he is to establish his claim to be ruler over a desert tribe, "the fierce and warlike Senefari. "Some of the girls and boys journey into the desert to meet Ben Alci, and experience a "khamsin" - the hot desert wind which brings a sandstorm:-

"Strange sighings of a gigantic army on the march. A puff of hot wind — a sudden whirlwind of sand, rising in an inverted pyramid with a shrill whistling sound --- then a strange unvarying silence."

And this is only the prelude to the storm! When it comes, it is a whirlwind "magnifying monstrously in front of their eyes", and sounding "as though a million bullets whizzed in the air above and about them".

After surviving the sandstorm, the party is pursued by Ben Alci's bedouin enemies, and there follows some ghostly goings-on in the tomb of Set-aru, where the mummified figure appears to move. In the final yarn, Clara exposes the plotting of Lota, the "Spy in the Palace of Palms". Altogether, this Egyptian

series is an excellent one, as fast-moving and readable today as it was when it first appeared over fifty years ago.

After their desert adventures, Cliff House has barely time to catch its breath before the party is off to the "unexplored Umbali Jungle of Central Africa", in quest of "the secret city of Shest". Jemima's beloved "guv'nor", Colonel Carstairs, who is under "secret orders", turns up so unexpectedly at the Palace of Palms, that the normally ice-cool "Jimmy" allows her monocle to drop from her eye, but recovers sufficiently to shake hands with her father. The colonel charters an air-liner, the "White Empress" and the girls and boys land on the "plain of Papipi".

Wheway seems to have managed to cram nearly everything into this jungle series (265-267) - a little too much, maybe - although the Lost City theme is so fantastic anyway, that it seems practically impossible to overdo it. In "Mabs - Queen of the Jungle", Mabel Lynn's golden hair so awes the local warriors that they crown her "queen of the Ingombi". At this point, a native girl, M'lizi, turns up, and adopts the Cliff House party. M'lizi is shrewd, crafty, and ingenious, and invaluable for getting them out of difficult situations. She also has royal ambitions of her own!

In "Babs and Co. in the Secret City" (266), M'lizi guides the expedition, through a subterranean cavern, into the Secret City itself, where a crowd of "curious white-robed natives" surrounds them. Marjorie discovers - incredibly! - her long-lost Uncle Ben, who had disappeared when a previous expedition came to grief years ago. Shest, it seems, is ruled by a white woman, Zola, who is not well-disposed to Cliff House (any resemblance to Rider Haggard's "She" is, of course, purely coincidental!).

In the final tale, "The Rival Queens", Zola sentences the chums to be "sacrificed in the sacred fire". Imprisoned, and awaiting their inevitable fate, the Cliff House girls are in a nostalgic mood:-

"'Wonder how Pluto is?' Clara Trevlyn mused, referring to her Alsatian dog. 'I've been worried about old Pluto. Daddy's a frightful old duffer at times, you know. I do hope he's remembered to get Pluto his pound of fresh meat a day. Pluto doesn't like going without his evening meal.'"

(Well, you wouldn't, would you?) As the girls are dragged out towards the sacrificial fire, they face the prospect of death stoically: "'It's the end!" Clara said grimly. 'Chin up, old things!'"

Surely not, we think, as, cheeks blanching, we search frantically through the pages of the SCHOOLGIRL for the trailer announcing next week's Cliff House tale. A sigh of relief - yes, there it is, on page twenty-two! Of course, we knew all the time that "Miss Richards" would never have the heart to kill off our favourite schoolgirl characters. In fact, the enterprising M'lizi turns up - like Tarzan - in the nick of time, with "hundreds" of lions and elephants, and Cliff House is rescued. (Pluto is happy, too; he's sure of his supper now!)

For me, the holiday adventures of 1932, 33, and 34 show Wheway at his most inventive, and the Cliff House characters at their freshest. In succeeding years, the girls do go abroad again: to the Riviera in 1937, and Africa once more in 1938, but some of the old magic and enthusiasm has gone. There is a caravan tour through the English countryside in 1935, and a stay in a Cornish castle the following year. The final holiday series in 1939 is set in "Pinebay Holiday Camp". It's nothing like "Maplins", of course, but, nevertheless, it's a far cry from the

luxury of the "Plathian". Still, Wheway's Cliff House tales are always worth reading.

Meanwhile, back in 1934, the girls return to Cliff House for the new term and learn that their young Form-mistress, Miss Matthews, is leaving to become Headmistress of Whitechester, a neighbouring girls' school.

I had no idea that promotion could be so swift in the teaching profession! --- I wonder whether Miss Primrose might consider appointing a Form-master in Miss Matthew's place? Surely it would be nice to be in charge of Babs, Mabs, Clara, and the rest - although girls like Diana Royston-Clarke might prove difficult to handle. Suppose she tosses her blonde head, flares her nostrils, and utters "Yoicks!" in class?

But alas for my pipe-dreams - it seems that Miss Prim has already appointed Valerie Charmant as mistress of the Fourth. She sounds rather nice!

* * * * *

Merry Christmas and many Happy Hobby Hours throughout the coming year to everyone.

D. BLAKE

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Christmas and New Year Greetings to everyone. Especial thanks to the Editor and Co.

GEOFFREY CRANG

INDIAN QUEENS, CORNWALL

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P. GALVIN

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Season's Greetings to all friends.

Various O.B.B.s and Annuals for sale, or would exchange for pre 1946 "Sexton Blake" publications.

KEN TOWNSEND

7 NORTH CLOSE, WILLINGTON, DERBY, DE6 6EA

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I Was There -

Fifty One Years Ago

BY ERIC LAWRENCE.



In the 1920s I went to my first school in Winchester Road, Swiss Cottage, London, N.W., where the headmaster was Mr. Walker - disrespectfully nicknamed Johnnie after the famous whisky. He was very fond of cricket and I have always been grateful to him for instilling in me a lifelong love of the game. From time to time, he would take a party of his pupils to Lord's and instruct us in the finer points of play.

It was on one of these visits that I watched with delight, an innings by the diminutive Andy Sandham whose cutting both square and late convinced me that these are the most beautiful shots in the game, somehow even more satisfying to see than the thunderous majesty of Walter Hammond's off and extra-cover drives.

In 1934 at the age of eleven, I was at a different school but my home was an easy walk across Primrose Hill - where we used to play cricket under Mr. Walker's tuition - and along Prince Albert Road to Lords. One Saturday in May found me in position near the Mound stand waiting for the start of play in the M.C.C. versus Australia match. First innings was by the M.C.C. and the main features of the day were a solid, workmanlike 72 by Wyatt and a very fine 135 by Patsy Hendren, playing on his home ground. Patsy was the only professional in the M.C.C. side and his tremendous hooking of Wall's bowling remains clear in my memory. This was a really great knock against bowlers of the calibre of Grimmett, O'Reilly, Fleetwood-Smith and Wall - who commenced his run-up from the boundary and must have run a few miles that day.

On the Monday I was in my position again, but the M.C.C. added only twenty or so to their Saturday score and were all out for 362 with Chapman not out 46.

When Australia batted, there were two quick sensations when Woodfull and Bradman were out cheaply in successive overs by F. R. Brown, with Bradman mistiming his stroke to give a simple caught and bowled. The roar which went up at this moment could probably have been heard at Madame Tussaud's. However, the M.C.C.'s success was finished for that day, as Ponsford and McCabe proceeded to put up an amazing stand which lasted into the third day and totalled 375 runs.

Of course, I had to go again on the Tuesday to see the end of that partnership. McCabe was out, bowled by Peebles for 192 made in about four and a half hours but Ponsford went on inexorably till Woodfull declared at 559 for 6. His final score was 281 not out but somehow the details of his innings have faded. In retrospect, I suppose that there was nothing exciting enough about his batting to impress my youthful brain - only a memory of a rather ponderous inevitability, which is unfair to a great batsman. On the other hand, the magnificent strokeplay of Stan McCabe is clear to this day, as is the curious fact that he scored exactly half his runs in sixes and fours. His swing was effortless and his timing so perfect, that the ball travelled to the ropes as if propelled by a gun; yet there

was no explosive crack as contact was made. Indeed, one could imagine that his bat was equipped with a silencer to mute the charge therein.

In the M.C.C. second innings, Wyatt again played splendidly for 102 not out, thus achieving a match total of 174 for once out. Apart from Wyatt, the batting was very poor and with 8 wickets down for 182 at close of play, the M.C.C. might easily have lost the match. They still needed another 15 runs to make Australia bat again.

My memories of this game revolve around the superb batting of McCabe and Hendren. Incidentally, Patsy scored another century later in the same month, in the Middlesex versus Australia match at Lord's. Again the Australian attack was Grimmett, O'Reilly and Wall. He made 115 in the first innings and top-scored with 35 in the second. All this at the age of forty five.

The marvellous variety of strokes displayed by Stan McCabe made his innings one of the greatest I have ever seen and the passage of fifty odd years has not dimmed my recollection. His boundaries sprinkled all parts of the ground and in addition he hit two big sixes on the leg side, one into the grandstand and the other when he was at the Nursery end, which landed quite close to where I was sitting.

There was one other curious, possibly unique fact about this game. Both wicketkeepers had the same name, Oldfield. The M.C.C. keeper had played for one of the Universities but he appeared in very few first class matches.

So in three days play I had seen scored a century, a not-out century, a near double century and a huge not-out double century, in a total for the match of over 1100 runs. Is it any wonder that I can still recall those wonderful days at Lord's?

There is one thing I have forgotten though. What excuse did I give at school for my absence on the Monday and Tuesday?

NOTE:
Most of the text of this article was printed in The Journal of The Cricket Society, Volume 12 No. 2 for Spring 1985.

* * * * *

Before Xmas we all feel glad - after Xmas we all feel sad. Lotza before and no afters everyone.

JOHN BURSLEM

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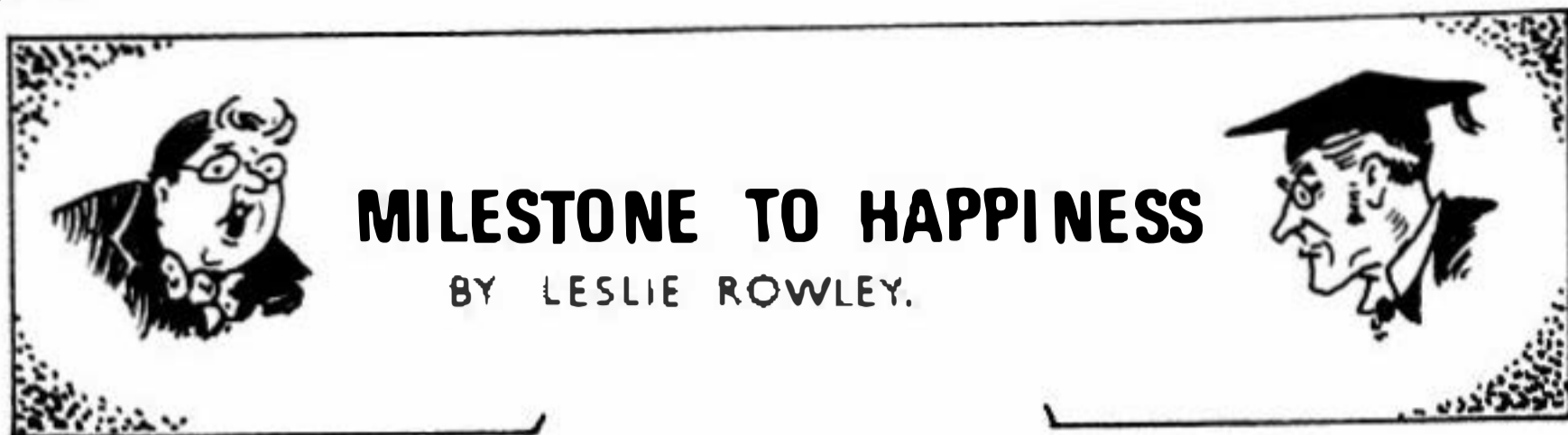
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Greetings to Thelma and Bill, Eric, Ben, Roger, Brian Doyle and all Members of O.B.B.C.

LARRY MORLEY

= = = = =



It had been early when I had left the little village inn behind, for the birds had risen later than myself and the first, coy, rays of the sun had not then shown their promise. Now Apollo had appeared slowly from a fold in the green hills, making a silvery outline of the fleece of the clouds that meandered like a flock of leisurely sheep across a pasture of blue. On the horizon, distant trees raised artistic branches as though in supplication to the heavens. For the present, shady woods and thickets had been left behind in favour to the gorse and bramble of common land. That I had been walking for hours was clear upon the face of nature, if not on the face of my wristwatch for it had halted the passage of its hands some hour or so ago.

The rucksack on my back had, during the journey, made its weight increasingly known and small beads of perspiration crawled their sluggish journey down my cheeks and into the open neck of my shirt. It was past the time for breakfast, and I looked around for a suitable place in which to unpack my sandwiches and flask from their haven in the pack on my shoulders. Nearby, stood an age-worn and weather-beaten milestone, giving instruction to the wayfarer on the narrow country road that wandered across the common. It would make an excellent seat on which to rest as I partook of my meal, and my eyes appraised it with gratitude for the authorities of long ago who had thoughtfully installed this wayside amenity. I bent closer to read the legend inscribed deeply on its face, but the passage of time had done its share of obliteration and I had to regard the inscription from a point of vantage where the sun slanted the shadow away from the indented characters. I expected to see the well-known names of London and Canterbury, or possibly Ashford or Dover. Instead, the milestone informed me that Courtfield lay three miles to my left and Friardale two miles to my right. It was an unexpected and exciting discovery, and I wished that I had brought my camera with me so that the discovery could have been blessed with a more permanent record.

I sat and consumed my breakfast thoughtfully. Of course, I reasoned, as the last crumb disappeared into the great unknown, it's just a trick of the light. Take another look, and the names will have changed. As I drained the tea from my cup, I gave another glance at the watch on my wrist. The hands still hadn't moved and the little square window intended to show the date was blank. Time, it seemed, was at a standstill!

The names on the milestone proved to be the name after breakfast as they had been before I had eaten. They were names, so familiar, that they were engraved on my memory - if not for as many years that they had been engraved on that stone - at least for the decades by which my life was measured. Years in which the seasons had come and passed, bringing with them the sunshine that blessed the green swards of cricket, or the rain that made mud of the football

field. Not far from where I sat, the grass was greener where it marked the edges of a stream that twisted and turned beyond the limit of the eye as it journeyed on to join the invisible river that was its parent. In autumn or in spring that stream would have carried its full measure of water; in winter, the rime would have caressed the blades of green that survived on the frozen edge of ice. Today, the flow and the ice had gone and the stream had been reduced to an almost stagnant mixture of slime and mud of just the right constituency to receive a bullying schoolboy, a threatening footpad, or a scheming legal adviser! How many times, I asked myself, had I read of the rough justice meted out on the edge of such a sluggish stream, or of a wayside ditch in which nettles stung and thrived?

For long moments I luxuriated in speculation. My time was my own and it seemed that I had discovered some elusive value in my surroundings. Like wayward prodigals of old, I had the feeling that I had re-discovered the joy and comfort of coming home. The cares of yesterday had receded into some limbo of the mind, as though forbidden to intrude upon a reverie as frail as the gossamer from which memories are made. Streams of minute typeset on the yellowing backcloth of its paper, tempted and taunted the moment of recall as I thought of the magic their stories and of the man who had enchanted myself and countless others with his tales of Greyfriars School. If that milestone be true and Courtfield was only three miles to my left and Friardale only two miles to my right, then the friends I had made at that author's creation were near at hand and straight ahead.

I roused myself and repacked my rucksack, surprised at its newly acquired lightness. The trees of a distant wood were encouraging my curiosity as to what lay beyond and it was time to say goodbye to my silent friend the milestone. It was familiar ground that I was treading and I moved forward with hope and expectancy in every step. I was anxious to encounter those friends of many years; and I was anxious to encounter them without delay.

The shade of the trees embraced me. From their branches, high above, the birds sang a chorus of welcome. All around me, creatures of fur and feather stirred inquisitively and then scurried about their lawful occasions, only the snapping of a twig or the rustle of leaves betraying their existence. If that milestone had told the truth, it was possible that I was venturing into Friardale Wood. Yes, that was the more probable for the trees were unenclosed as would have been the case of the mortgaged preserves of Popper Court or the more visible acreage of Hogben Park.

Ahead of me came the distant sound of some heavy body thrusting its way through the undergrowth, and a rather strident voice, increasing in volume as its owner approached. Perhaps this was some pleasant soul who would be only too courteous to help a stranger find his bearings by giving explicit directions to help one on his way. The sounds grew nearer and the shouting more distant.

"Potter! Greene! I distinctly told you two duffers to follow me. Now you've gone and got lost, just when I need you. I've a jolly good mind to bang your silly heads together. How d'you think I can manage to bag Prout on my own?"

A burly youth of some sixteen or seventeen years came into view through a gap in the trees. There was an angry glint in the eyes that looked out upon the world from beneath a shock of unruly hair. I knew him at a glance, and

the names that he had shouted only served to confirm what my eyes had recognised. He gave me a look of almost belligerent enquiry.

"Have you seen them?" he demanded.

"If you refer to your study-mates, Potter and Green, then I am afraid that I am unable to help you, Master Coker", I replied. "Perhaps ---"

"And who might you be, knowing a man's name? I don't remember meeting you before, unless you are some friend of Aunt Judy's. Is that it? If so, how is the old dear?"

"I have indeed met you and Miss Judith Coker, on a number of occasions. In fact, your attachment to your aunt is a matter for much esteem among my friends and myself....."

"You seem to know a great deal, perhaps you can tell me where I can find my friends. I told them to follow me and now the blithering fatheads have gone and got lost. If you are a friend of Aunt Judy's you can jolly well make yourself useful and help me look for them. If they don't turn up soon we shall miss Prout, and all my grand strategy will have been wasted."

I looked hard at the fool of the Fifth Form of Greyfriars School. He was carrying something under one of his arms. It looked like a dirty and dusty sack such as is used for carrying coal. A dread suspicion began to form in my mind.

"I trust, Master Coker, that you intend nothing untoward regarding your form master. Perhaps you entertain some hare-brained scheme - some foolhardy....."

"What me, hare-brained and foolhardy? You'd better watch out, whoever you are. Old Pompous has asked for what he is going to get, and perhaps he will think twice before he gives a fellow a book for not paying attention in form. He doesn't seem to realise that I have something better to do than listen to him spouting Roman History for hours on end. That kind of stuff is all right for men like Potter and Greene, but not me. Besides I was only writing a note to Wingate telling him he was a fool to leave me out of the cricket....."

"Let me earnestly counsel you, Master Coker, to abandon what mad scheme you have for Mr. Prout's behest. I am not surprised that Potter and Greene have disassociated themselves from any such plan. There is no doubt in my mind that they are not lost as you suppose, but miles away, thanking their lucky stars that they are not involved....."

"I'll spiflicate them when I do find them but, as they are not here, you can make yourself helpful. Prout is on his way, and taking a short cut so that he can catch up with Capper on their way to some silly lecture in Courtfield. All you have to do is engage old Prout in conversation under that oak, whilst I drop this sack on him from above. Then we tie him up and turn him loose to find his way as best he can. There's nothing to it at all, even an idiot like you should be able to play your part....."

It seemed that Horace Coker had his own diplomatic way of asking for help, but had he couched his request in terms of which Chesterfield was so fond of addressing to his son, it would have made little difference. Coker might be possessed of such crass stupidity as to invite a passing stranger to assist in a jape against his form master, but this particular stranger knew better than to comply. I turned on my heel and left Coker breathing vengeance.

I picked my way through the trees and located a well-trodden path, but I was not to be alone for long, however, for there once more came the sound of footsteps. Footsteps, hurried in their impatience, though still ponderous in their weight. Before I set eyes upon the gentleman, I felt that this must surely be Prout. As he came into view, I realised how apt the description that he was 'imposing sideways' suited him. To compare him with the "great earth-shaking beast of Macaulay" was, perhaps, a trifle unfair, though I could well imagine the effect that weighty tread would make in the corridors of my favourite school!

The master of the Fifth paused to remove his hat so that he could dab at his perspiring brow. A ray of sunshine, picking its way cautiously through the branches above, fell momentarily on a glistening bald patch as it received attention from a handkerchief clutched in a plump paw. Prout had bellows to mend due, no doubt, to his preference to strong cigars as well as to his excess avoirdupois. When his eye fell upon me, it did not light up with recognition as did my own.

"Good day to you, Mr. Prout!" I ventured, as civilly as I could.

"And good day to you sir, though I must admit to your having the advantage of knowing my name, whereas I cannot recall yours."

This was the man who, in his youth, was reputed - like Nimrod - to be a mighty hunter. It might be politic, I considered, to ingratiate myself.

"You are, though, the Paul Pontifex Prout, whose adventures in the last years of the previous century resulted in the demise of countless grizzlies in the Rockies?" I stated rather than enquired. "If so, how unfortunate for me that I have been unable to attend the talks you have given from time to time....."

Mr. Prout surveyed me with new and more genial interest. A smile suffused his generous cheeks and, putting away his handkerchief, he extended a podgy fist.

"You are too kind, my dear sir, but I can claim - with all modesty - to be the self-same Paul Prout you are pleased to remember. If there is any way in which I may be of service to such a perceptive gentleman as yourself, you have only to ask. It will be a pleasure, I might say an unprecedented pleasure, sir, you have, I repeat, only to ask."

"Mr. Prout, you cannot realise what good fortune, I might say unparalleled good fortune", my tongue was in my cheek with a vengeance, "for me to make your acquaintance so unexpectedly this morning ---"

"Afternoon, my dear sir", corrected Prout. "This afternoon I am leisure from form room, for it is a half-day at Greyfriars. I am, in fact, on my way to join a colleague and we then intend to take in a lecture at the Assembly Hall in Courtfield. Perhaps you would care to accompany me, my dear sir..... I would esteem it a favour, sir....."

"I fear Mr. Prout, that my business is in Friardale, and I had hoped that you could direct me to my destination. What a pity it is that my way lies in the opposite direction to yours. Alas! I must deny myself the opportunity of listening to your accounts of perilous adventures in '89 or was it '98. I believe you still have your faithful Winchester that was your sole protection from more than one terrible threat of death. Regrettably, our acquaintance must be so brief."

The expression on Mr. Prout's face could be likened to that of a hungry

tiger watching the tethered kid slip the noose. There could not have been many - if any - occasions when such a potential audience had expressed regret at missing one of Prout's "jaws". It had been quite on the programme, that afternoon, that he would have seized the opportunity to inflict his boring reminiscences on Capper. But Capper was not on the scene, I was. It was almost a classical case of a bird in the hand being worth two in the bush. Besides, there would be plenty of other occasions when he could pop in on Capper. I could almost read the thoughts going through his fat head.

"My dear sir, my colleague is familiar with this district, you are not!" He little knew just how familiar I was with that particular district, but I let him continue. In any case, he had paused for breath not for reply.

"Capper can easily await me at the Assembly Hall. I am sure that he will readily excuse my affording my company to someone else, this afternoon. Have I said something amusing?" He had, but I did not enlighten him. Capper would be grateful to an unknown stranger that had rid him of Prout's hot air. I tried to look grateful.

Prout urged me along with a comradely palm at my elbow. He had seemed short of breath a few minutes before, but there was no evidence of such a deficiency now! His jaw seemed to have discovered the secret of perpetual motion, and I soon realised that Tennyson's brook was a mere trickle compared to the flood of speech that the Fifth Form master now released upon anyone unfortunate enough to be within extensive earshot. I could, of course, here record some of the many intrepid adventures of Prout the Younger. I could, but I won't, for I have more than a faint suspicion that our dear friend, the Editor, would not welcome some sixty pages of closely typewritten manuscript on the demise of the bear population in the late nineteenth century Rockies. Lest the reader regret the omission, I would add that - long before we emerged onto the Friardale road - I was wishing that it had been the grizzlies that had got Prout, rather than the other way around!

I did not speak, lest any word I uttered might have been interpreted as encouragement. Experience should have told me that Old Pompous required no encouragement. No comment was invited, and there was no need to talk. Prout could do enough talking for two. In fact, his colleagues who suffered him at tea in Master's Commons, would have told me that interrupting Prout would have been like emulating Canute and the ocean.

As we progressed through the wood, much of what Prout uttered travelled, unheeded and unmourned into one of my ears and out through the other.

"Thank goodness." Never has relief found such fervent expression as those two words involuntarily escaped my lips as we emerged into Friardale Lane. Prout looked askance at the interruption.

"I beg your pardon?" His narration on the massacre of countless innocent bears was halted at last. I took full advantage of the lapse.

"I was observing, Mr. Prout, my relief at reaching the highway and thus avoiding the necessity of trespassing on both your time and your good nature any longer, now that we have left the wood behind us. I am sure that you are only too anxious to catch up with your colleague, Capper. If you will kindly indicate the direction of the village, I will take my leave of you....." But Prout was paying no heed. He was looking over my should at something or someone or something in the distance.

"Bless my soul! W-w-what can that possibly be?"

I turned and looked in the direction that his fat forefinger was pointing. There had emerged from wood, some two hundred yards distant, a most peculiar figure! What, at first, appeared to be a large sack with two legs was walking erratically out into the road. Since sacks are not normally equipped with legs, it could only mean that some unfortunate had had the sack thrust upon him. I thought that I could name the man who had done the thrusting. But, since the victim could not be Prout, who on earth had Coker bagged in error. With Prout at my side we hastened to the aid of the unknown unfortunate. As we arrived, strange gurgles could be heard coming from the sack's contents.

"Lemme out! Gurgggh!" Some of the coal dust from the sack had apparently gone down the wrong way. I hastened to untie the cord that held the sack in place, but the knots were many and complicated and I was forced to cut them with my penknife. There came a startled yell as the blade slipped on a group of knots and penetrated the sack. From the sound of that yell, it seemed evident that the contents had been penetrated as well!

The cord dropped free at last, and I lifted off the sack to reveal one of the most infuriated men I have ever seen. Coal dust cloaked him as would a garment. It covered his hair, his face, his neck. He was of the coal, coally!

After more spluttering, the gibberish graduated into speech.

"Prout! Assist me! I have been the subject of an outrage - a most diabolical outrage! I have been assaulted! I have been...."

"The poor fellow appears to know me", exclaimed Prout ponderously "his voice is certainly familiar, but I cannot admit to knowing anyone who would indulge in such horseplay, unless they are unhinged, mad, insane! His voice adopted a soothing note. "You seem to know me my poor fellow. Calm yourself. Kind friends will look after you...."

"Idiot!"

"W-w-what! How dare you!"

"Can't you see, Prout? It is me, that is, it is I, Capper! Are you so dense that you do not recognise me?"

"Really control yourself, Capper - if it is indeed Capper. What is the meaning of this, this preposterous jest. It is beyond all ---"

"Will you, or will you not assist me, Prout? I have been the subject of an attack, and you have impudence to suggest that I am party to such a happening! Pah!"

"My poor fellow". Now that the message had penetrated, Prout was all sympathy. "We must get you to a place where you can wash, and then enquiry, full and thorough enquiry, must be made and the culprit discovered!" He gingerly extended a hesitant hand to assist the unfortunate Capper. Prout appeared anxious not to share any of the coaldust. He turned to me.

"I must assist Mr. Capper to the School without delay. The authorities, the police, they must be informed!"

I nodded, wondering if such intensive enquiries would involve Coker. Prout was still giving Capper the benefit of his advice.

"The perpetrators of this outrage will be brought to book. Only the most condign punishment will be sufficient for such an unprecedented, such an unparalleled outrage. Carry that sack as evidence, Capper. It is very similiary to the ones Gosling stores in his woodshed. I shall see Gosling about that sack - it is probably a most important clue."

The monologue faded as the two masters disappeared round a bend in the road. I continued on my way, idly wondering if that clue would eventually lead to Coker.

It had seemed a long time since I had left that little village inn, and the shadows were now lengthening. Another turn in the road, and the lane suddenly gave way to commonland that seemed vaguely familiar. I crossed the road to where a milestone stood, and read the legend on its face. It informed me that Courtfield lay three miles to my left and Friardale two miles to my right. I turned my back on that milestone and started to retrace the journey I had made so early that morning. It was getting late and I did not want to be on the common on my own when night fell. Two hours later, I was talking to mine host over a friendly glass. He enquired where I had been that day, and I mentioned Courtfield and Friardale.

"Never heard of 'em", he said emphatically, "and I've known Kent man and boy. Sure you've got the names right?"

I mentioned that I did know Courtfield and Friardale, but I did not disclose the source of my knowledge, other than to mention the milestone.

"Milestone?" he queried, more emphatically. "Now I know that you've been mistaken - or dreaming maybe. Milestones were all gathered in at the outset of World War Two so that they wouldn't help the enemy. Gathered in for the same reason as signposts were. Only when peace came the signposts went back but not the milestones."

I did not argue for he was one of those lovely landlords under whose roof it was a pleasure to sleep. Next day, however, I enquired from the nearest authority and, much to my surprise, they confirmed what he said. They didn't know Courtfield and Friardale either. Which I considered to be their loss. My loss that I would no longer be able to locate that milestone to lead me to happiness. But, if the milestones are gone, the memories remain, bringing their happiness - a happiness that even milestones couldn't measure.



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SPELLBINDERS BOTH

A TRIBUTE TO L.E. RANSOME AND JOHN WHEWAY.

FROM MARY CADOGAN.



(From right to left:
John Wheway, L. E. Ransome,
Ronald Fleming - A. P. authors at
the old Fleetway House.)

It is easy to give a great deal of well-deserved attention to the giants of our hobby, like Charles Hamilton, E. S. Brooks and certain Sexton Blake authors, but to neglect other splendid writers for juveniles whose work was spread over a number of stories and series. L. E. Ransome and John Wheway influenced my childhood through their stories as strongly as Charles Hamilton did - but until I started to read the C.D. (fifteen years ago) I had no idea of their real identities, or for which tales and characters they were responsible. Their considerable talents were used in various weeklies, and for the entertainment of both boys and girls. It is my conviction that had they written for 'hard-back publishers' instead of the Amalgamated Press, and stuck to one name each instead of writing under many pseudonyms, they would have established lasting literary reputations. I know that a lot of C.D.'s readers appreciate the works of Ransome and Wheway as much as I do, and I hope that this article will possibly remind them of stories which they have forgotten. Possibly too it may tempt other readers to dip into their wonderfully diverse and truly gripping tales.

Both Ransome and Wheway were inspired by the works of Charles Hamilton, which they read as boys, and there is little doubt that his Magnet and Gem writings laid the basis of their feeling for the school story. (Ransome was later to contribute 'substitute' Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories to these two papers, and, of course, both he and Wheway were to become 'Hilda Richards' - each for a long spell, thus further following in Hamilton's footsteps.) Ransome began to work on the A.P. papers in 1916 and Wheway in 1922; each of them has produced some forty million words of published fiction on a tremendous range of themes including school, sport, exploration, the supernatural, Western adventure, fantasy and highly inventive humorous incident. With these achievements in mind, it seemed strange and sad when in 1972, in answer to a letter of appreciation that I had sent him, Ransome wrote these words to me:

'How very kind of you to write that letter! There are times when, looking back over the years, one wonders whether one has drifted through a wasted lifetime without leaving a solitary footprint. One thinks of all those stories and characters, and wonders if they were only as writing on water, obliterated completely... and then, your letter arrives, and one is cheered and re-assured. Thank you!'

And when I first met John Wheway, some years after his compulsory retirement from the A.P. - in accordance with the firm's policy of retirement at 65 - he was unhappy and dispirited at not being able to place his stories any more, particularly as he still felt full of creative energy and ideas. He wrote a poignant article for a 1963 edition of the A.P.'s house journal, The Record, under the heading 'Retirement - Curse or Blessing?'. This clearly conveyed his sense of disappointment and frustration, and ended sadly with the sentence 'Will nobody give me a job?'. Wheway was of course also suffering from the effects of the all picture-papers. As pictures began steadily to take over from stories in boys' and girls' papers from 1950, authors found it increasingly difficult to find markets for their work. Both Ransome and Wheway had, for a period, written storylines for picture stories; these were produced with their customary skill and inventiveness, but, to those of us who appreciate the superb narrative skill of these authors, such work seemed a waste of their talents. As Wheway commented to me, 'You can't get under readers' hearts with this picture stuff!'

There was some consolation for Wheway after his official retirement, when he began to write about an updated Bessie Bunter type of character (Tilly Tuffin) for several long series in Princess, and edited some Pets Annuals. Ransome too continued to produce stories for publication until the end of the 1960s and beyond this, with no apparent lessening of his flair for conveying both humorous and dramatic situations. Details of his and Wheway's contributions to many of our favourite magazines would fill a whole C.D. Annual, so I would like to concentrate in this article on some of their own comments on the background of their work, and on the most celebrated of their fictional creations for girls. (The C.D. Annual of 1965, incidentally, included a detailed account, by F. Vernon Lay, of Wheway's career and of his boys' writings.)

For a time in the mid-nineteen-thirties, these two authors - who were then both free-lancing - shared an office in the Strand. Each admired the other's work: Wheway told me that in his view Ransome's comic stories were in the same class as those of P. G. Wodehouse, while Ransome generously and wholeheartedly stated that he felt Wheway's Cliff House stories were superior to his own tales of that famous school.

Ransome, of course, was responsible for the adventures of Barbara Redfern & Co. in The School Friend from the mid-'twenties until the end of its run in 1929. Wheway assumed the Hilda Richards' mantle in the early nineteen-thirties in The Schoolgirl, and it is fascinating to see how each author developed Charles Hamilton's original characters, and others of their own invention. (Horace Phillips and Reginald Kirkham had also, as is well known, added their contributions to the Cliff House saga in the years between Hamilton's coming off The School Friend and Ransome becoming the regular Hilda Richards.)

Ransome was able to inject into the stories both his sense of the dramatic and his wonderful flair for comic inventiveness. While remaining faithful to the traditional images of Barbara Redfern, Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn, for example, he fleshed them out more fully, made Barbara more interesting than

she had been in her early days, maintained Marjorie's quiet strength, and slightly softened Clara without in any way taking away her credibility as a tomboy. Above all he made the friendships between the various girls believable and engaging. As he was, in his own words, 'a boys' writer by choice, but a girls' writer by opportunity' (being at first persuaded into the latter field by his editors), he soon introduced boy characters into the orbit of Cliff House. Knowing that girls particularly enjoyed those stories in The Magnet that brought boys (from Greyfriars) and girls (from Cliff House) together, he decided to create a boys' school (Lanchester College) in the vicinity of Cliff House, so that Barbara Redfern & Co. could make relationships with boy chums. Jack Tothurst was the Lanchester junior who became Babs's special friend, and her rather weak-willed cousin Raymond Bannister (shades of Marjorie and Peter Hazeldene here!) attended the same school.

The undoubted star in Ransome's Cliff House galaxy, however, was the character whom he created from scratch - the enigmatic, elegant, eton-cropped and be-monoed Jemima Carstairs. (She first turned up at Morcove School, into which Ransome introduced her when he wrote a few stories whilst deputizing for 'Marjorie Stanton' (Horace Phillips) who was away on holiday. Having brought Jemima to vivid and sparkling life, Ransome realized she was far too good a character to give up. She was therefore smartly shifted from Morcove to Cliff House towards the end of 1925, when Ransome had finished his short stint of stories for The Schoolgirls' Own.)

When Wheway took up the Cliff House adventures he was quick to exploit Jemima's potential. It is difficult to say which of these two authors was the more skilled in handling this complex and intriguing character, who continued to baffle and bewitch her chums, enemies, teachers and fans until the very end of the saga in 1940. Wheway felt that he made her more mysterious than she had been originally, but his main interest was in the new characters that he created for Cliff House. To the disappointment of readers of The School Friend, he dropped certain stalwarts like Augusta Anstruther-Browne, Dolly Jobling and (eventually) the villainous Marcia Loftus in order to make room for new and, in his view, more up to date personalities like Janet Jordan, who took over Dolly's place as study-mate to Marjorie and Clara; Leila Carroll, who added a glossy note as the daughter of a high-powered and immensely successful Hollywood film-producer; and Leila's special chum, Marcelle Biquet, the 'diminutive' and, of course, 'chic' junior from 'La Belle France'!

Wheway's most glamorous new character, however, was the girl who was his absolute favourite - Diana Royston-Clarke, the platinum-haired, violet-eyed, silk-stockinged and utterly charismatic 'boulderess' who was occasionally Babs's rival for leadership of the form (shades of Wharton and Vernon-Smith), as well as being her own worst enemy. Known as 'The Firebrand of the Fourth' Diana more than lived up to her sizzling reputation. Like her go-getting millionaire father, she was not above trying to buy her way to power and influence. If she was unable to get her way by exercising her considerable personal magnetism. Like Herbert Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars, with whom she shared many character traits, Diana had a quietly determined and somewhat long suffering chum, whom she sometimes goaded beyond endurance, so that the friendship (like the Smithy-Redwing relationship) occasionally broke beneath the strain of Diana's bitchy behaviour. Inevitably one sees Diana as a schoolgirl evocation of Hollywood's smouldering and slightly sulky Jean Harlow, especially when she tosses her 'glorious mane of billowy platinum blond hair' haughtily at reprimands from Cliff

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House staff or prefects; or when she announces to all and sundry that she will only play in the school hockey team if she is captain! Apropos of Diana and his affection for her, Wheway, who was a small, slight and rather shy man, told me that he had a special interest in colourful females who were larger than life!

Other vivid characters whom Wheway created for the Cliff House stories were Lydia Crossendale, the sneak of the Fourth who, unlike previously unpleasant personalities in the saga, had very occasional good, or at any rate not wholly villainous, attributes: Rosa Rodworth, the form's 'Stormy Petrel' (a phrase which always sounded particularly thrilling to me as a child reader because I associated it with motor-fuel and therefore linked the rebellious Rosa in my imagination with fast-running cars!), and Dulcia Fairbrother, an attractive senior who was eventually to take over Stella Stone's role as school captain, when Stella - who was Hamilton's original head-girl, left to take up veterinary studies.

But of course contributions from both L. E. Ransome and John Wheway to the Cliff House papers were not only stories about this celebrated school. They wrote shorts and serials about other characters - mill-girls making good in 'posh' private schools; intrepid Girl Guides; adolescents undertaking dangerous escapades in India, Africa or the South Sea Islands; young girls driving racing cars, speed-boats and aeroplanes, or pursuing careers in films, broadcasting and the theatre; poor little rich girls and little rich poor girls; teenage sleuths; and girls from 'bygone days' in atmospheric historical

adventures. In the late nineteen-thirties Ransome and Wheway between them were often totally responsible for all the fiction in The Schoolgirl (and interestingly Wheway's wife, Isobel Winchester, was at the same time writing its chatty hints columns known as 'Patricia's Pages'). Ransome's first work for The School Friend, however, dated back to 4th June, 1921, when his dramatic serial called 'The Minstrel Girl' began. However none of his later pen-names was used for this, as authorship was attributed to Peggy Preston, the popular and pretty scholarship girl at Cliff House, who had been created by the then Hilda Richards (Horace Phillips). As the heroine of 'The Minstrel Girl' was, like Peggy herself, poor but highly talented and full of charm, it seemed appropriate to readers that her adventures should be chronicled by Peggy. This story about Nina, the girl violinist, and her dog, Tiny, showed Ransome in his more serious, tear-jerking style. He soon became convinced that this was not the type of tale in which he wished to specialize; he remarked once that Horace Phillips, whose penchant was dramatic and serious tales, tended to take a gloomy view of life in general; this put the young Ransome off what he called the 'sob' story; he decided he'd like to create breezy and happy adventures, which would encourage readers to feel that life was expansive, and that girls could lead as exciting lives as their brothers expected to do. (This was also, of course, the general policy of the A.P. girls' papers

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My dear niece
I am coming to Vore
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I trust, Hilda, that I
shall not find that you
are one of those modern
types of girls, with loud
laughs, slangy ways, and
lobbed or shingled hair

Bobbed!

A Delightful
School Story

Complete in this issue
by
Ida Melbourne

for which R. T. Eves, as Managing Editor, was responsible.) Ransome succeeded in creating hundreds of truly sparkling and funny stories, and many charismatic and iconoclastic heroines. Using the pen-name of Ida Melbourne he produced, amongst many other attractive heroines, Hilda Manners of Vere Abbey School (with her languid, aristocratic and monocled chum Theresa Travers, who seemed a fore-runner of Jemima Carstairs); Joan and Kit Fortune (the Flying Sisters); Her Harum-Scarum Highness the Princess Tcherina ('Cherry' for short); Happy-go-Lucky Lulu (the 'Live-Wire' of St. Winifred's); Gipsy Joy (the Rich Girl Romany); and Hetty Sonning ('the Imp', who constantly got the better of her bossy, pompous, elder cousin George). Ransome's comic stories were usually

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written in the Ida Melbourne pseudonym, and these are on a par with the 'William' stories of Richmal Crompton for sheer zest, and the expertise with which he could pile one farcical event upon another, and in the end successfully unravel these. For his more dramatic short stories and serials he most often used the name of Elizabeth Chester; other much used pen-names of his were Stella Stirling and Evelyn Day (the latter, he says, was possibly inspired by his admiration for the actress Evelyn Laye; he had, apparently, an interest in theatrical ladies, because he said Jemima's creation owed something to two other famous stars - Bea Lillie and Heather Thatcher).

Wheway's non-Cliff House characters were produced in the names of Hazel Armitage, Heather Granger, Gladys Cotterell, Audrey Nicholls, Diana Martin, Anne Gilmore, and others. His stories stand out, not so much, like Ransome's, for memorable characters, as for believable friendships and rivalries between girls, and for authentic, exciting atmosphere. As well as being a school story writer par excellence, he produced spell-binding holiday and travel stories. He was always meticulous about researching his tales, whether they were set on desert islands, on historical situations, or film and broadcasting studios. A colourful Cliff House holiday series in the South of France, which took place during the 1930s was directly inspired by his own very happy holiday trip to the Riviera, but all the other adventures which he set in exotic foreign locations were drawn from research and his own rich imagination. As he told me, he created his Egyptian and jungle settings whilst holidaying in Cornwall - sitting in a boat in his bathing costume, 'and punching our Cliff House stories on a portable typewriter'. This conjures up a vivid image, and of course both Wheway and Ransome, with other prolific A.P. writers, were hard pressed to dream up and write out their copy in time for the printers' deadlines. Ransome told me that he often used to write all through the night; looking through one of my copies of The Schoolgirl he picked out one of his Elizabeth Chester serials, 'Guests of the Shareen', and recounted how he fell asleep writing this and cracked his head on the typewriter; thinking he'd better lie down, he then burned his foot on a hot water bottle, because he was so dead tired. Such are the pains of literary creation! Ransome also recalled that, after working through the night on one or more stories, he would then start putting his papers together and parcelling them for the post. At this point his pet dachshund, Tosca, who slept in her basket in his study, used to recognize the packing up movements and 'like a stage arrived at in a drama, rise and stretch and yawn ready for her lead, and the dash for the post'. (Both Ransome and Wheway were dog-owners and animal-lovers; their stories of pets were superb. John Wheway had a Peke, who inspired the creation of Bessie Bunter's Pekinese, Ting-a-ling, in the 1930s. At this time Wheway wrote a regular article for the paper, as Hilda Richards, answering readers' queries; he often mentioned his wonderful Alsatian pet, 'Juno', and the image of our beloved author Hilda, complete with dashing Alsatian, was bright and indelible for me then. It came as something of a shock in adult life to realize that 'Hilda' was actually a man, and that 'Juno' was a fluffy Peke and not a fearful Alsatian!)

The memories and anecdotes that have sprung from Ransome and Wheway about the old Fleetway Press days, and their artist, editor and author colleagues, are legion. Both had great admiration for R. T. Eves, for artists Leonard Shields and T. E. Laidler, and Wheway was particularly fulsome in his praise for 'that grand chap', John Nix Pentelow.

So many memories; so many achievements. I personally owe an undying debt to these two writers for the many hours of happiness that their work gave

me in childhood, and continues to give me as an adult. They also gave me values and standards. I wish there was space to say more of them, and to thank them once again for their unforgettable and skilful stories.

* * * * *

Compliments of the Season to all readers of Collectors' Digest.

LESLIE KING

CHESHAM, RUCKS.

= = = = =

WANTED: Any pre-War 1st Editions by GEORGETTE HEYER, and particularly The Black Moth (Constable, 1921), The Great Roxhythe (Hutchinson, 1922), Instead of the Thorn (Hutchinson, 1923), Those Old Shades (Heinemann, 1926), Powder And Patch (Heinemann, 1930), The Convenient Marriage (Heinemann, 1934), Devil's Cub (Heinemann, 1934), Regency Buck (Heinemann, 1935), The Talisman Ring (Heinemann, 1936), Royal Escape (Heinemann, 1938). Please quote any post-War lists of her Historical novels if in clean dust-jacket.

Also any of Heyer's pre-War Detective fiction in 1st Edition, and particularly Footsteps in the Dark (1932), Why Shoot A Butler? (1933), The Unfinished Clue (1934), and Death in the Stocks (1935), all published by Longmans.

CHRISTOPHER LOWDER

CLEMATIS COTTAGE, CRADLEY, NEAR MALVERN, WORCS., WR13 5LQ

= = = = =

A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to The London O.B.B.C., all friends, and loyal readers of the Nelson Lee Library.

BILL AND THELMA

BRADFORD

= = = = =

"The Newest Greyfriars Story." Set within a fortnight of the last Magnet this story, 'De Mortuis Nel Nisi Bonum' by Arthur Edwards, tells how Vernon Smith led a party to Dunkirk and what befell them. Fully illustrated by Norman Kadish. (60 pages. Price £2.75, including P & P.)

THE FRIARS LIBRARY

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The best news of the month is the arrival of the latest issue of Collectors' Digest. Regards to all readers and to those who contribute to my monthly enjoyment. The Annual is a bonus.

REG MOSS

KHANDALLAH, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

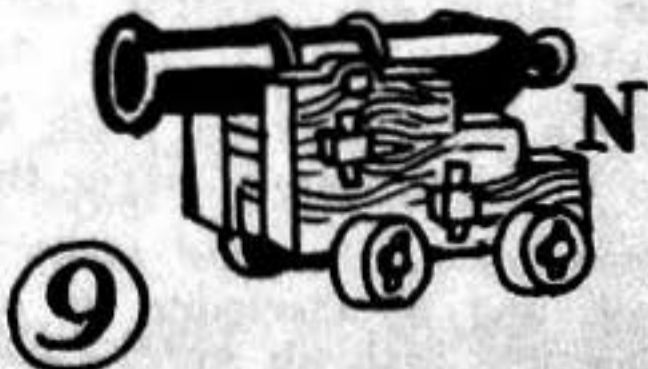
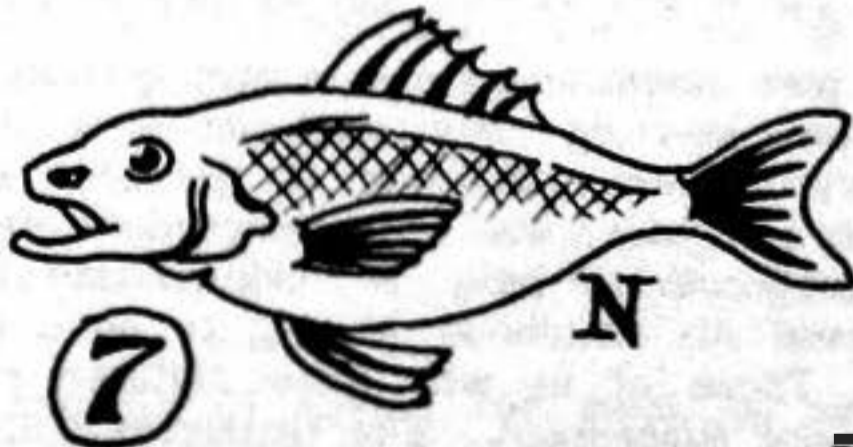
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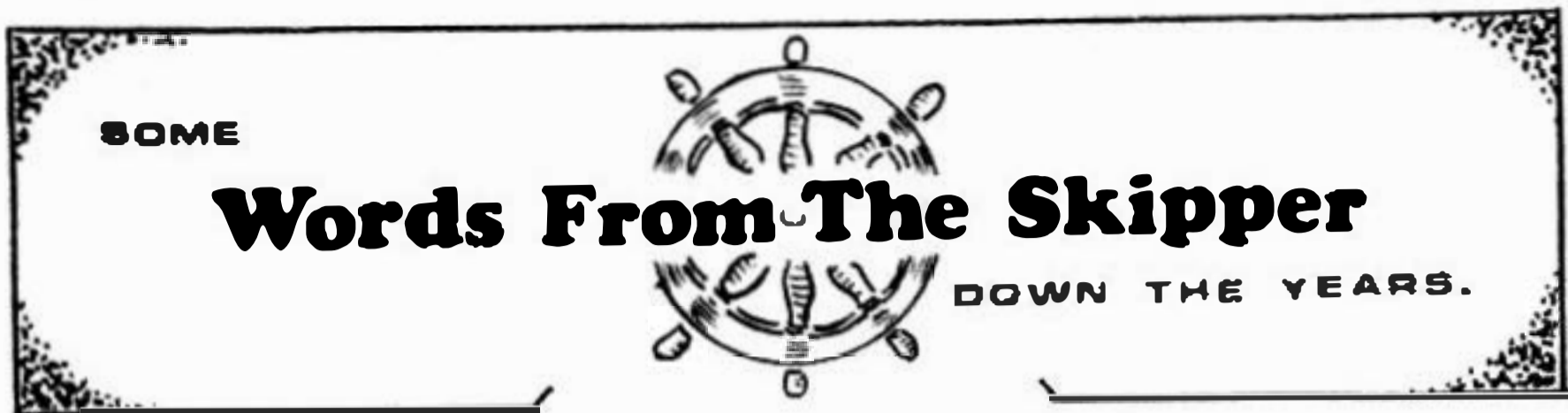
Guess these St. Jim's Characters

by Bob Whiter



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20 years ago the "Children's Newspaper", after a long life, put up the shutters for the last time. This is what the C.D. had to say about it at the time.

THE CHILDREN'S NEWSPAPER

Few of us, probably, will have experienced anything but a mild regret at the passing of the Children's Newspaper. It did, however, receive a good deal of attention in the national press, and the Daily Mail devoted its leader column to it on Easter Saturday. The Daily Mail saw the passing of the Children's Newspaper as a sign of the times. IT IS NOTHING OF THE SORT.

Arthur Mee, who did some wonderful things for children, sponsored something of an "also ran" when he founded the Children's Newspaper. It was stodgy and uninspiring all the days of its life. The children of the nineteen-twenties liked it no more and no less than the children of 1965. I would be surprised if more than a handful of youngsters ever bought it for themselves.

When I was a boy at school, free copies were handed out from time to time by the school authorities. It was a "nice" little paper, but "niceness" was never enough for boys and girls of any period.

Our mild regret is occasioned by the breaking of yet another link with the old days. The Children's Newspaper is apparently to be amalgamated with Look & Learn. In spite of its dullness, it deserved a better fate. Better far for it to have died a death which was as dull and as nice as the life it had lived.

The Daily Mail sees something more in the passing of a stodgy little periodical. It sees children asserting themselves at long last. The child (according to the Mail, obviously meaning the child of the heyday of the Children's Newspaper, if it ever had a heyday) was not expected to speak unless spoken to, and even then was not supposed to have any views that could conceivably interest an adult, naturally spent his childhood waiting to be a grown-up. The implication is quite inaccurate. Those of us who were children in the years following the first world war were not suppressed. The restrictions applied to Victorian children had long passed away. We had some discipline at home and at school, but most of us spent our childhood in happy and carefree fashion, doing very much what appealed to us.

Where have all the children gone? asks the Mail, and answers its own question: "They have simply decided to turn into people sooner than we were allowed to."

Utter rot! Most children are handicapped today by having too much money, too little discipline at school, and no discipline at all at home. But that they are any happier or more responsible than we were, I just do not believe.

The great puzzle is how and why the Children's Newspaper managed to keep

going for 46 years. It was a memorial to the great Arthur Mee, but nothing else. Better by far to have kept the Magnet going. But probably the amount of paper devoured by the C.N. was negligible.

A SMEAR ON "THE BOYS' FRIEND"

Not long ago I commented on a solitary Christmas Treble Number, the brain child of that illustrious Edwardian editor, Hamilton Edwards. It is interesting to look for a moment at another little event of Edwards' career, of about the same period.

In December 1905, a youngster named Nesbit broke open and rifled a safe in Newcastle-on-Tyne. He went on a spending spree, and hid the rest of his guilty gold. The police, however, caught up with the youthful burglar, and he appeared in a magistrate's court in January 1906.

The boy excused himself by saying that he had seen a picture of a boy opening and robbing a safe, in "The Boys' Friend". A policeman gave evidence that the paper in question was in the boy's pocket when he was arrested. The boy's father stated that he had always kept a strict supervision on what his son read, and was unaware that he had sunk to reading a paper like the Boys' Friend. The magistrate, a Mr. Hugh Morton, was a Newcastle alderman, and was also the head of a successful clothier's business in that city, so it seems likely that he was very nearly as important as he thought he was. From the bench, Alderman Morton launched an attack on the Boys' Friend, and expressed the opinion that it was scandalous that such unwholesome literature should be on sale in the shops to corrupt impressionable boys.

Northern newspapers went to town on the magistrate's comments, and some London paper, perhaps not reluctant to have a dig at the Harmsworth publications, also gave publicity to the matter.

Hamilton Edwards, understandably, was annoyed by the Alderman's remarks, and by the "garbled accounts" of the affair which appeared in various newspapers. Over a number of weeks he devoted a large section of his editorial page to defending himself and the Boys' Friend, and stated that he had searched through the past four years of the paper, satisfying himself that no such picture, as described in court, had ever featured therein. He claimed that he had been put to considerable expense in following up the case, that the circulation of the Friend had been adversely affected by it, and he hinted, rather wildly, at an action for libel. Nothing seems to have come of the latter. Magistrates are probably privileged people.

Edwards made the mistake of having too much to say on the matter, and sympathy may have changed to boredom if it occurred to readers that sometimes "qui s'excuse s'accuse".

I feel quite sure that plenty of the muck available to the large purses of boys today can corrupt the young. The Boys' Friend, in Edwards' day, had plenty of crime stories and tales of violence, but the moral standard was high and generally very wholesome. Any Boys' Friend reader who went wrong would have gone wrong in any case.

Edwards may have been right in thinking that the case could affect his circulation. Plenty of parents in those far-off days were conscientious concerning

what their children read. But, one suspects the bit of sensationalism could well bring in others, anxious to find out what it was all about.

THE TRAM

Beside me, as I write, I have a picture, in full colour, of a street in a quiet Kentish town. Today, of course, there is no such thing as a quiet Kentish town. So, clearly, it is a very old card, though the colours are splendid.

In the centre of the picture is a tram. It is an open-topped tram, a Dick Kerr car, for those who know anything about such things, with reversed stairs leading to the top deck. The livery is dark red and cream. The number 14, in gold leaf, with loving shading to make the figures stand out, gleams on the dash. The hand-brake control is of polished brass. There are no garish advertisements on the car to disfigure it.

The driver, his hands on the controls, looks magnificent in uniform - peaked cap with shining brass badge - the badge is a wheel in a magnet - coat and trousers in blue serge; the coat is double-breasted with brass buttons.

The conductor, on the top deck, wears uniform only slightly less fine. He has a whistle round his neck, for use when he is on the top deck. (It must be countless years ago that tram conductors blew whistles on top decks. In fact, in most areas we have almost forgotten what a conductor looks like.)

There is a watering-cart in the picture, the trees are in full leaf. So it must be summer. Let's call it June. Two ladies walking along the pavement are wearing long, narrow skirts and frilly blouses, with hair heaped high on their heads, and look surprisingly lovely. In the distance there is one solitary motor-car, a 4-seater, built rather high, with a spare wheel at the side. I guess the year to be - let's say 1912.

Many years ago we had a story in which the inventor of a Time Machine claimed to Mr. Buddle that every age is still in existence but on a different plane. With the aid of the machine, the owner could go back or - heaven forbid - forward. "Yesterday I had lunch at the Hotel Cecil in the Strand in the year 1920", the inventor told Mr. Buddle. And added: "Next year we are going to spend our holidays in the days of Queen Anne."

Wouldn't it be nice if we could go back, for a holiday, to that June day in 1912 which we have conjured up from the old picture? For everything in that picture is fixed for ever - nothing will grow old, or littered, or faded, or scruffy. We could board that tram and travel for a while. We could go in the newsagent's on the right-hand side.

On the counter we should find the Gem - "The Limit", perhaps, where a Miss Ponsonby (they called her Miss Pon) took charge of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's; the Magnet - "The Stolen Schoolboys", possibly, with the Famous Five shanghaied by Capt. Hobbs and taken off on the steamship Pomerania; the Union Jack, of course; "The Brotherhood of Twelve", maybe; a Plummer story; they had any amount of Plummer stories in the U.J. of 1912.

Also on the counter, two new papers: The Dreadnought, just out as a sister paper to "Fun & Fiction", which would also be on display. Also another new one - "Cheer, Boys, Cheer" - which is really Hamilton Edwards' old "Boys' Herald" in disguise under the new quaint name, and cut down from Boys' Friend size

to Gem size. "Cheer, Boys, Cheer" wouldn't last long. In fact, Edwards' reign as editor was running out, in 1912.

We might drop in at the local theatre, for every self-respecting town of any size had its own theatre in 1912. Who was on the bill? Well, what about Gertie Gitana, Little Tich, Tom Costello, Victoria Monks?

There would be at least one cinema, too; possibly more. Who would be on the bill? Bronco Billy Anderson, Flora Finch, Florence Turner, John Bunny, Max Linder, Helen Holmes, Asta Neilsen, the Pathe Gazette, with Latest Paris Fashions in pathecolor, and a Keystone comedy - Ford Sterling, Mabel Normand, and Fatty Arbuckle.

While I think of it, you might pop back to that newsagents and get a copy of "Police Gazette". It contains an account of the Sidney Street siege. But make sure you don't miss the Time Machine back.

* * * * *

Kindest regards and Xmas Wishes to all my friends.

NORMAN SHAW

84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, SE19 2HZ

Yuletide Greetings from the WHITER FAMILY. Happy and prosperous New Year. Good reading and happy meetings of the London O.B.B.C.

Happy Christmas, Prosperous New Year, ".C.D." readers. Many mint O.O.P. Howard Baker facsimiles available.

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Congratulations Eric Fayne

FOR SALE: Howard Baker Greyfriar's Holiday Annuals, 1973, 1977; Magnet Facsimile Nos. 3, 8, 29; Gem Facsimile No. 7. "Yaroo". All mint condition. Offers or exchange for Nelson Lees.

ELLIS

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Yuletide Greetings to our Editor, Norman Shaw, and all fellow collectors and Collectors' Digest readers.

PETER LANG

ELLEN COURT, JARROW

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HAPPY HOURS UNLIMITED

Keith Smith and Darrell Swift

at Happy Hours Unlimited, send Best Wishes for Christmas 1985 and the hope for a Happy New Year, to all readers of the C.D. Annual.

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Dobbie Loker's 'paper' shop was three-quarters of a mile from where I lived, but though there were newsagents in the neighbourhood of my home, his was the place to go to. The shop was stacked from floor to ceiling with weeklies and monthlies of all sorts and sometimes when I went in he would lug out a pile of old ones, dump them on the counter, and say: 'Have a look through them'. Eagerly, I would have a look, hoping to find old Magnets and Gems. I once found a Magnet that had come out in 1911 - four years ago! - and to me - twelve years old - that seemed farther away than fifty years does now.

Sometimes, Dobbie must have hunted round the shop himself, for among the current issues of the Magnet, Gem, Boys' Friend, Penny Popular, Marvel, Union Jack, and other weeklies displayed in the window there were strung on a line across it old copies of the Diamond Nugget, Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, and Buffalo Bill Libraries. Buffalo Bill didn't appeal to me, but I liked reading about Robin Hood and Dick Turpin; so I did about Kettle and Co., schoolboy heroes in the Diamond Library and Tufty and Co., in the Nugget Library.

Indeed, Dobbie's shop was the place to go. There was always an element of surprise, the hope of a 'find' there. Only once did it bring dismay. On a cold, wet morning in the spring of 1915 I went with a handcart to the gasworks for coke. The way led past Dobbie's and I went in the shop and bought the current number of the Gem. The story was called 'For Another's Sake'. The cover picture showed the Head of St. Jim's and Talbot standing on the college steps: it bore the caption The Midnight Expulsion. Talbot sacked! The world turned turtle. For Talbot's destiny was bound up with my own. Unhappily, I got between the shafts of the handcart, trying as I pulled to read of the harrowing circumstances that had arisen in Talbot's life to bring about his downfall.

One afternoon, looking in Dobbie's window, I saw clipped to the line across it a Big Budget Threepenny Library called Peril Island. I had heard of Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island, a book I had never read as I thought it was a story for little children, but this looked different and worth buying, as the cover picture showed an old pirate in seaman's dark-red dress, three-cornered hat, cutlass at hip, pistol in belt, climbing a rope-ladder. On a lifebuoy was the author's name: Sidney Drew - and that name was a magnet. Sidney Drew wrote marvellous stories about Ferrers Lord (he had a beautiful ocean-going submarine, Lord of the Deep), Ching Lung, a Chinese Prince, and Gan Waga, an Eskimo who was always saying and doing funny things ('Hots Chingy', he would say to the Prince and go and cool off in a bathful of cold water in cold weather). I went in the shop and bought the book.

Peril Island was $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. It contained 96 two-column pages and about 100,000 words, so, in quantity it was good value for money.

I started reading the story, found the heroes setting out for the Arctic, and packed it up. I barred cold regions. When I read of foreign parts I wanted sweltering heat - the South Seas, the Amazon, the Congo - not ice and snow.

Well, all that was dormant for many years. Peril Island, half the cover gone, but otherwise intact, I kept in a drawer with a few other favourites of long ago. Middle-aged, I read Treasure Island. After another lapse of years that went on fleeting wings, I had an urge to read both books and compare them.

TREASURE ISLAND

An old sea-dog - one-time first mate to Captain Flint, a notorious pirate now dead - arrives with his sea-chest at the Admiral Benbow Inn down in the West Country some time in the 18th century. He often breaks into song:

Fifteen men on the dead man's chest -
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest -
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!

An old shipmate of his, The Black Dog, turns up and scares him. They fight with cutlasses and The Black Dog flees. The old sea-dog, called 'The Captain' by the villagers, has a stroke after the fight and when a blind man visits him he dies from 'thundering apoplexy'. Jim Hawkins is the innkeeper's son; his father dying about the same time, Jim and his mother rifle the captain's sea-chest for the money he owes them. While doing so, Jim comes across an oilskin package which he takes.

They flee the inn to avoid strange men that arrive and carry out a search there for the oilskin package. Jim takes the package to Squire Trelawney and Dr. Livesay. The package contains a map of an island where Captain Flint's treasure is buried. This leads to Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesay, and Jim Hawkins setting out in the Hispaniola in quest of the treasure on Skeleton Island. There is a mixed crew - honest men and rascals. One of the crew, Long John Silver, whose left leg is cut off at the hip, proves to be an unscrupulous scoundrel, out for the treasure himself. There are adventures during the voyage, and arriving at Skeleton Island honest men and rascals fight it out. Seventeen of them lose their lives.

Helped by Ben Gunn, one of Captain Flint's men who had been marooned on the island, the honest men triumph and come into possession of most of the treasure, which, after treacherous Long John Silver has escaped with three or four hundred guineas of it, is faithfully shared according to merit and distinction.

PERIL ISLAND

The period is round about 1900 and the story opens with Clive Drayton, a handsome young man of twenty-three or four, sitting in the stuffy cabin of a barge on the Thames, brooding about himself and his prospects. The nephew of a baronet, he is shabbily dressed, collarless and nearly penniless, but he has invented a submarine and feels he is knocking at fortune's door as Fuller Lanwith, a millionaire, has shown interest in his invention and they are to meet the next day. Clive is disturbed by a song being sung in the dark outside, where rain is dismally falling:

Dead men, live men, drink and gold,
Yo-heave-ho, and they call it piracy,
With the Roger at the truck, yo-ho, my comrades bold,

There's lots of gold at sea.
 A merry life, a short life, a noose for you and me,
 And Davy Jones must have their bones, if they call it Piracy.

A horrible dwarf (Monkey Swayne) comes aboard with a companion (the Honourable Santley) to ask the way to Lucknan's Wharfe. When they leave they maliciously break a window and cut Clive's rowing-boat adrift. Clive tries out his submarine, Nanty, the kitten, acting as captain and crew. An old man with long white hair gives him a lift ashore. On the wharf, the cloak the old man is wearing falls open and reveals buckled shoes, knee breeches, and a coat with wide lapels and laced cuffs. A sword hangs at his hip and he has two old-fashioned pistols stuck in his belt. He puts on a three-cornered hat and warns Clive to look out for the press-gangs. Clive is 'staggered'.

'Did ye ever to to sea?' asks the old man.

'Yes, I've been round the world.'

'Ah!' The old man grips Clive's hand. 'Did ye ever meet Dick Swayne?'

'Never.'

'Then, ye were in luck. If you meet him, run him through.'

He tells Clive about the deadly five: Monkey Swayne, the Honourable Santley, the Frenchie Guerin, Lake, and Vanderlet, the Dutchman. They are after the old man's blood, for he is none other than Black Juan Gaskara, the notorious pirate of nearly one hundred years ago (he is one hundred and twelve years old, maybe more). The men dogging his footsteps are the grandsons of five of his crew, whom he had done to death to have their share of booty got by pillage and plunder.

Monkey Swayne and Co. turn up on the wharf. Singing their song, Dead men, live men, drink and gold, they attack. They are driven off with sword and pistol by Clive and Black Juan, who takes Clive to his hideout - a room over warehouses, which they reach, not by stairs or ladder, but by ratlines. The five attack several times during the night but are driven off. The old man spills his tale in between fighting and dozing.

The next day, Clive is interviewed by Fuller Lanwith who, after hearing all about the model submarine, sends two men to the barge to steal it. In the meantime, a faithful negro servant (Ruby) turns up and resolutely refuses to leave Massa Clive though he cannot afford to employ him.

Clive returns to Black Juan as promised. Feeling he is dying during the night, Black Juan gives Clive a map of his buried treasure. He puts a 'false' map in his pocket for the five to find when he is dead. They attack again, the old pirate rallies and he and Clive put up a sterling fight in which Black Juan is killed and Clive laid out. Clive wakes up in hospital. He decides to keep his tale to himself. (Who will believe it!) He gets his clothes and steals away from the hospital, only to find the barge and his precious model submarine have disappeared.

The shock stuns him back into hospital 'muttering and raving wildly'. When he comes to himself there is a merry throng around his bed - doctor, pretty nurses, Ruby, and a dozen other patients - and Nanty, the cat. And no wonder! His uncle has died, he is now 'Sir Clive', the eighth baronet, and he has inherited one of the noblest estates in England and £80,000 a year.

His brougham is outside to take him home. Sir Clive beckons the doctor and says, 'Old chap, I appoint you my private physician at once'. He then reprimands Ruby for grinning, saying he will frighten the cat. Ruby expresses delight by yo-ho-ho-ing and standing on his head.

Among those waiting to greet Sir Clive at Drayton Hall is his old friend Hector Dane, who is a good shot, a straight bat, a clean oar - 'but long-distance running and hurdling had won him his greatest laurels'. 'Sir Peter' has died and left Hector all his money and the Silver Star, a big yacht. Clive tells Hector about Black Juan and shows him the old pirate's roll of parchment. A map and cryptograms tell where the treasure is buried.

Monkey Swayne and Co. turn up at Drayton Hall. Their leader is Vanderlet, the fat, oily Dutchman who talks 'Ach, no der honour would be doo greadt, I gould not bermid it'. Unlike the Honourable Santley, a dandy who talks like Arthur Augustus D'Arcy one moment and like any Tom, Dick, or Harry the next. Vanderlet has discovered that the map on Black Juan's body is a false one. He is out for vengeance but is thwarted.

Lord Leckburn, V.C., a bearded giant, arrives at Drayton Hall. Sir Clive and Lord Leckburn were chums at Eton. Leckburn is the kind that coolly strikes matches on a keg of gunpowder. He is contemptuous of all black men - to him they are 'niggers'. He loves war, yawns in the face of danger and is happiest when guns are chattering in grim and deadly earnest. His war-cry is Vivat Etona.

After Sir Clive has turned the tables on Lanwith, the millionaire, at a select club by exposing him as a scoundrel, and produced an even better model of his submarine, the opposing forces set out for Peril Island, the three heroes in the Silver Star, manned by stouthearted sailors, the five desperadoes in the Antoinette, manned by cut-throats and rogues. Monkey Swayne and Co. kidnap Fuller Lanwith and take him with them to ill-use and abuse him. There are sea-battles between the rival parties and after a voyage fraught with many dangers, the Silver Star arrives at the island which, though in the Arctic turns out to be a paradise like one in the South Seas...

Slowly the land of mystery began to show itself. A pillar of dull black rose to the east and jutting crags began to make themselves apparent. And then all at once a ball of vivid flame leapt into view, flooding sea and land with silver light, and they saw Peril Island. She had a sun of her own. The whole extent of her southern shore was visible in the clear atmosphere. To breathe the atmosphere was like drinking wine...

The island was probably between thirty and forty miles long. The great craggy headland was the Hind Hoof and the islands lying near it enclosed the 'Cauldron'. The pillar was the dusky smoke of the volcano lying in the extreme east of the island. More to the east still the Hoof jutted out into the sparkling waters, a great brown strip topped with softest green...

They headed for Shrapnel Bay... The sandy shore was whiter than carded wool and the bottom loomed white under the yacht's keel. Scents such as no human beings, except the long dead pirates, had ever smelled, poured seaward from the Fairy Isle. Great masses of ferns and flowers grew in wild luxuriance beyond the pearly sand and turtles basked near the water. A streak of shining gold showing over the green of the Hoof marked the sandhills...

Ashes of a fire on the island suggest savages, but a few savages more or

less make no difference to the mighty Leckburn, though 'around with a rifle he took uneasy glances round him.'

Monkey Swayne and Co. arrive on the island. Some of the crew of the Silver Star change character; they covet the treasure and desert to get it themselves. So, there are pitch battles all round.

Then, the heroes receive a mysterious message signed The Unknown. He turns out to be Graydon Garth, lord of the world, who lives in seclusion on the island paradise with his wife Vanessa. He is the only man in the world to whom Leckburn pays homage. Leckburn addresses him as 'Your Majesty', 'My Lord', and later plain Garth - though that may be a slip on the author's part rather than Leckburn's. The first meeting with Graydon Garth is described:

A canoe darted across the stream and a man sprang out. The man stooped and came up the sloping green bank with the carcass of a small deer swinging from his shoulders. It was Graydon Garth. He wore his usual grey tweed suit and a slouch hat with an eagle's feather drooping back over the brim. The grey eyes twinkled as he held out his thin white hand. Hector Dane felt a thrill of disappointment. Was this the conqueror, the saviour of the Empire? Was this Graydon Garth?

But Graydon Garth is a man of iron:

His right arm leapt forward and struck away the knife. Monkey Swayne had met his match at last. One of those thin white hands had closed upon his throat and the second was clinched round his twisted ankle. His eyes bulged from their sockets, swollen and livid with blood, his blackened tongue lolled from his mouth. In vain he kicked and clawed and writhed. Holding the writhing body above his head, Graydon Garth strode to the brink of the river. He shortened his arms and bent. Then he shot erect, hurling the dwarf headlong into the middle of the stream.

Graydon Garth never walks - he glides. He is always bored and tired. He has an airship, The Winged Terror, that brings supplies to him. He acts as his own judge to prisoners, usually marooning them on desert islands.

After much desperate fighting, aided by Graydon Garth, the three heroes triumph and gain the treasure - valued at a little more than £800,000. The last battle is fought during a volcanic eruption. By then, all the bad men (including Fuller Landwith, the scoundrel millionaire), with the exception of Monkey Swayne, are dead - a possible line to another story.

When the Silver Star docks at Southampton, each of the crew has a cheque in his pocket and needs to work no longer. Nanty, the cat, gets a gold collar. Sir Clive, Hector Dane, and Lord Leckburn benefit hospitals with their share of the treasure.

TO COMPARE TREASURE ISLAND AND PERIL ISLAND

Both are pirate stories, but the resemblance, except for bits and pieces, ends there. Robert Louis Stevenson's story, told by the main character, Jim Hawkins, is a straightforward one; it is never involved, never hard to read, always interesting. The youthful reader is able to identify himself with Jim Hawkins, whose simple narrative makes the incredible credible.

Sidney Drew never pulls it off. From first to last there is a Gothic touch about Peric Island; it is make-believe - and reads like it. The main characters

often talk like fourth-formers ('Honest Injun', 'Like a bird!'), but the story is too heavy-footed for boys and because of such talk and impossible situations it is too juvenile for men - unless men in 1900 were less critical and more easily satisfied than they are now. (Possibly, the book was aimed at those a bit older than boys but not old enough to be called men.)

Coincidence, nick of time, just deserts, honour to the brave, are all too much in evidence - and deference to wealth and privilege laid on a bit too thick. The farce might make a boy laugh, but it would make a man wince. Incidents are often jumpy - maybe, the typesetter lost the place! - and that makes the story hard to follow. And it is rather bewildering to the reader when he finds Hector answering himself in a conversation with Sir Oliver!

The book contains many excellent descriptions of natural phenomena. Sidney Drew wrote with a full pen when describing Nature, and how much at home he was when writing about the sea and ships!

Features of Peril island are three full-page pictures in black and white, a detailed map of the island, three cryptograms in hieroglyphics (deciphering these is described at great length), and the rhymes that head some of the chapters:

To sleep a pauper, to wake a king
Could ever dreams a stranger picture bring?
Gold and death are linked together
Like sunshine and gold and stormy weather.
'Stand and deliver' is my cry,
To merchant, bishop, or king,
A merry knight of the road am I,
So tremble all when my hoofbeats ring,
Under the moonlit sky.

There are also extracts from Coleridge and Byron.

Footnote 1

Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850-1894. Educated at private schools and University of Edinburgh. Wrote Treasure Island in 1882, first published in James Henderson's YOUNG FOLKS as The Sea Cook.

Footnote 2

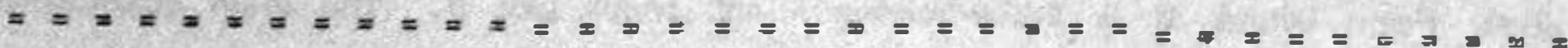
Sidney Drew (Edgar Joyce Murray. b. 1878) contributed to many boys' papers. Perhaps, best known for his stories of Ferrers Lord, Prince Ching Lung, and Lord of the Deep. He also wrote the Calcroft School stories.

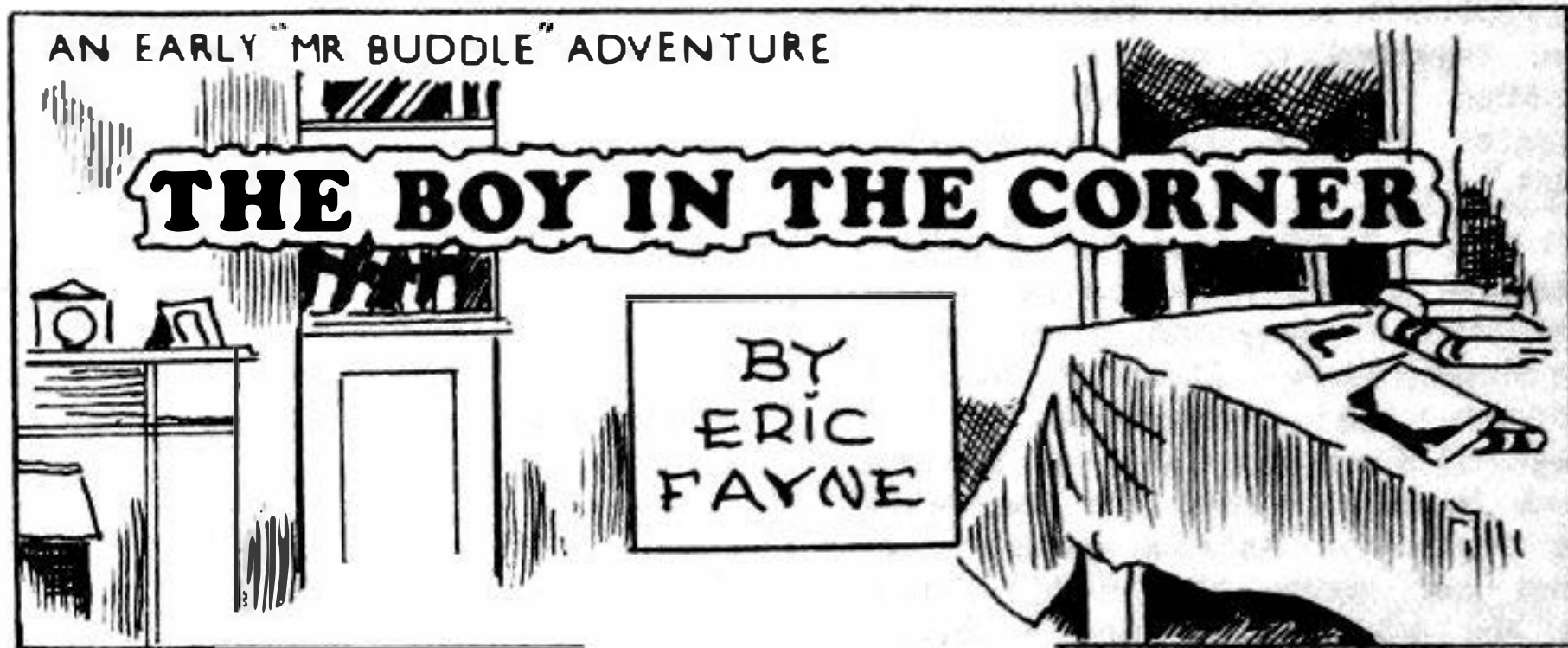
Craydon Garth and Ferrers Lord were identical twins. Probably, Garth, Leckburn, and Vanessa - Queen of the Hill Country - had played leading roles in another story of Sidney Drew's.



Best Wishes to all Hobby Friends from

ERIC AND BERYL WAFER
NEWCASTLE, AUSTRALIA





Somewhere a telephone bell was ringing.

Mr. Buddle stood for a moment, his fingers still gripping the handle of his study door. For a moment he thought that the bell was ringing in the study which he had just left, but he realised almost at once that the sound came from further along Masters' Corridor.

He glanced up and down the corridor. Nobody else was in sight. By that time in the evening all the resident members of the Slade staff were either in the staff lounge or enjoying a light meal in the staff dining room.

The ringing of the bell was coming from one of the studies further on towards the green baize door which led to the Headmaster's private quarters.

Frowning a little, Mr. Buddle moved slowly along the corridor. He stopped at the last study in the line, the study of the Headmaster of Slade. From within, the telephone was sending out its urgent call for attention.

Mr. Buddle stood in uncertainty. Normally at this time in the evening the Headmaster's telephone was switched through to the extension in his own flat. The usual procedure

had been neglected on this particular Wednesday evening, for Mr. and Mrs. Scarlet had gone to Exeter to meet some old friends and were not expected to return to the school until the next day.

The shrill ringing of the telephone ceased for a moment, and then resumed with seemingly increased vigour.

Mr. Buddle grunted, sniffed, looked down the deserted corridor, and shrugged his shoulders. He opened the door of the Headmaster's study, switched on the light, and crossed to the telephone which stood on Mr. Scarlet's desk. Mr. Buddle lifted the instrument.

"Slade College!" he said.

"Thank heavens!" It was a female voice, dithery, and with the suggestion of a whine. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Scarlet --"

Mr. Buddle interrupted.

"The Headmaster is away from the college this evening. Can you ring him tomorrow?"

"How vexing!" The lady sounded cross. "Who is speaking? Who are you?"

"My name is Buddle. I am a master here. Can I help you?"

"Oh, it's Mr. Buddle! The voice reverted to its whine. "This is Miss Honeycomb, Mr. Buddle. I regret that I have to make a report."

Mr. Buddle said something expressive under his breath. He knew Miss Honeycomb. Everybody at Slade knew Miss Honeycomb. She was the postmistress in the village of Everslade, and she mistook for a sense of duty the mentality of a busybody. As soon as she mentioned her name Mr. Buddle knew that she would be making a report. She made a report, which was another name for a complaint, to the Headmaster of Slade at least once every week of term. Some boy had been rude to her in the post-office; some boy had nearly knocked her down with a bicycle; some boy had slouched round Everslade with his hands in his pockets; some boy had been seen with a cigarette in his mouth. Miss Honeycomb's reports were many and varied.

"What is the trouble, Miss Honeycomb?" demanded Mr. Buddle.

"I regret to say", came the dithery voice, "that I have seen two boys enter the Palais de Danse in Everslade. That place, Mr. Buddle, should be closed. It is a sink of iniquity. It is a hot-bed of immorality. Two boys from Slade have gone into that den. I am sure of it. I saw them with my own eyes. With my own eyes, Mr. Buddle, as I was on my way home to my bungalow after working late at the post-office. A half-an-hour ago, before it was quite dark. Brazenly, impudently, the two boys entered that so-called Palais de Danse."

Mr. Buddle breathed hard.

"How can you be sure they were Slade boys, Miss Honeycomb? Were they wearing school caps, the Slade blazers?"

Something like a snort came over the line.

"They were not! Would they be likely to go in that den of vice wearing school uniforms? Be your age, Mr. Buddle! But I can sense Slade boys when I see them. I am sure they were Slade boys. Big boys, too. Not children. Boys who should know better."

Mr. Buddle made a grimace.

"Thank you for letting us know, madam."

"You will institute enquiries, Mr. Buddle? You will go into the matter at once? Do you promise me that?"

"I will conduct an enquiry at once", promised Mr. Buddle. He would have promised anything to be rid of that unpleasant, self-righteous voice.

After he had rung off, Mr. Buddle stood gnawing his lower lip for a few moments. He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was twenty minutes to ten.

Mr. Buddle had been on his way to enjoy a light supper in the staff dining-room before retiring. He wished he had set off on that mission a few minutes earlier. Then he would have been beyond earshot when the Headmaster's telephone commenced to ring.

Mr. Buddle was a conscientious schoolmaster. If Slade boys had actually gone into the Palais de Danse in Everslade at that time of night it was a serious matter. Mr. Buddle did not believe that the dance hall, so euphemistically named, was a sink of iniquity as Miss Honeycomb had described it. But it was certainly out of bounds for all Slade boys. It was undesirable for schoolboys to attend dance halls. It was strictly forbidden for boys to leave the school premises

after the main gates were locked. Any boy caught in the commission of such a breach of the school regulations would be certain to be dealt with severely. Mr. Scarlet would be unlikely to take a lenient view of anything of the sort.

All the same, it was not really Mr. Buddle's responsibility. In the absence of the Headmaster, decisions were made by the Housemaster. But Mr. Fromo, the Housemaster, was a married man, and it was almost a certainty that by this time he would have gone to his own quarters in another part of the school buildings. He would not welcome Mr. Buddle dropping in his lap a report which might put him to a good deal of bother and inconvenience, and, possibly, send him out on a wild goose chase.

Mr. Buddle was tempted to ask Antrobus, the captain of Slade, to run into Everslade on his motorcycle, and make enquiries at the dance hall. But Mr. Buddle shook his head as the thought occurred to him. It was too much to ask of any prefect.

After a few moments' further thought Mr. Buddle lifted the telephone again and rang up Everslade railways station. With luck there might be a taxi waiting there on the offchance of picking up a fare from one of the late trains. A taxi was available, and Mr. Buddle asked the driver to come to the side gate of the college as fast as he could.

Then, realising that he would inevitably miss his supper in the staff dining-room, he put a call through to the housekeeper to request that cocoa and a sandwich should be left in his study in readiness for his return.

Five minutes later, Mr. Buddle, wearing a light raincoat and a trilby

hat, was standing in the starry gloom of the July evening, waiting for the arrival of his taxi in the lane outside the college grounds.

Mr. Buddle's lips were compressed. Everslade was nearly two miles from the school. A pleasant enough walk through the winding Devonshire lanes in daylight, but not a nice prospect for a middle-aged gentleman after dark. Mr. Buddle was glad that he had been able to secure a taxi.

A few minutes more and a glow of light dancing in the leafy trees announced the approach of the taxi. Mr. Buddle stepped into the lane and raised his arm.

"Mr. Buddle?" enquired the driver.

"Quite!" said Mr. Buddle. "I wish you to drive me to the Palais de Danse in Everslade."

He climbed into the vehicle. If the driver was surprised to learn the destination of the middle-aged little schoolmaster it was too dark for Mr. Buddle to see the expression on his face. The taxi reversed, and set off on its journey.

Everslade was little more than a village, but it prided itself on being progressive as well as picturesque. Years ago it had been a dead spot after darkness fell, but nowadays, with electricity provided by the grid system, it succeeded fairly well in turning night into day. The Palais de Danse in the High Street - it had once been known as the Corn Exchange, though Mr. Buddle had never learned what activities went on in a Corn Exchange - was a blaze of light when the taxi drew up outside. A number of young people stood in the doorway chatting in the warm evening.

"Wait for me!" said Mr. Buddle to the taxi-driver. "I shall want

you to drive me back to Slade."

He alighted. The young men and women stared curiously at the slightly self-conscious little man as he made his way into the vestibule. Somewhere a band was playing a lively tune. The clatter of drum and cymbal filled the hot air.

It was well after ten-thirty. Mr. Buddle was seated by the open window in his study, staring out into the darkness. A troubled frown corrugated his brow.

Ten minutes or more had elapsed since Mr. Buddle returned from his brief visit to the Palais de Danse in Everslade. Back in his study he had consumed his cocoa and a beef sandwich. Now he was waiting for the boy to whom he had spoken in the dance hall. He had left the boy to return to the school on his bicycle. Mr. Buddle had come on ahead in his taxi.

A few more minutes slipped by. The hands of the clock were creeping towards eleven.

There was a tap at the door, and Mr. Buddle called out:

"Come in."

The boy who entered was a sixth-former. He was tall, with a shock of tow-coloured hair. His features were rugged but not unprepossessing. He wore the Slade blazer of mauve, piped with white, over an open-necked shirt.

"Close the door!" said Mr. Buddle.

The tall boy closed the door, then moved a few paces into the room. He stood staring at the form-master.

Mr. Buddle rose to his feet.

"You have changed your attire since I saw you in that dance palace,

Vanderlyn", he observed drily.

The boy looked self-conscious.

"Yes, sir."

"When I found you there you were wearing a sports jacket and a somewhat gaudy necktie", said Mr. Buddle. "You looked considerably older than when in your school attire. You cut quite a dashing figure, which was no doubt your intention."

The boy gave just the slightest shrug of his shoulders.

"Did you have any pass to permit you to be out of gates after lock-up?"

"You know I didn't!"

"You are well aware that a dance hall is strictly out of bounds for all Slade boys."

Vanderlyn slipped a hand into his trousers pocket. He looked over Mr. Buddle's head.

"Of course."

"Vanderlyn", said Mr. Buddle sternly, "you are not a prefect, but are a sixth-form boy - a senior. You are old enough to have a sense of responsibility. What on earth induced you to visit such a place?"

Vanderlyn lowered his eyes and stared at Mr. Buddle.

"I get bored at school. I'm seventeen, sir. I'm too old to be here. I'm wasting my time. I want to get out into the world - doing things."

"That is for your parents to decide", retorted Mr. Buddle.

"I've had dancing lessons. I'm a good dancer. When I'm home I go dancing, and my parents know about it. I'm no good at games. I'm third-rate at class work. I shall never pass any exams. But I'm a good dancer - it's the one thing I can do well."

Mr. Buddle spoke curtly.

"That is all beside the point, Vanderlyn, and you know it. In going to a dance palace you have been guilty of a serious breach of school regulations. It is certain that Mr. Scarlet will take a serious view of the matter when I inform him tomorrow."

Vanderlyn nodded dismally.

"I knew the risk I was running, sir. I've no kick coming."

"It astounds me that a boy of your intelligence should run such a risk", said Mr. Buddle. "You had better get to bed now."

The boy turned away.

"Vanderlyn!"

The boy looked back with his hand on the door.

"Sir?"

Mr. Buddle regarded him thoughtfully.

"You had your bicycle with you. It has not been unknown for boys to scale the school walls after the gates are locked, but you can scarcely have taken your bicycle over the school wall."

Vanderlyn paused perceptibly before replying. Then he said:

"I went through the door in the wall."

"You mean", said Mr. Buddle, "that you used the gate to which only the masters and the prefects have keys."

"Yes, sir. Someone had left the gate unfastened."

Mr. Buddle stared hard at him, and Vanderlyn did not meet his gaze.

"It was an odd circumstance, Vanderlyn, that the gate should be left unfastened on the very evening when you were to break bounds."

"Very odd, sir."

"Where is your bicycle now, Vanderlyn?"

Mr. Buddle's stare was penetrating. The boy shifted uneasily.

"In the cycle racks, sir."

"I thought it might be", said Mr. Buddle. "Good-night, Vanderlyn."

After the door had closed behind the sixth-former, Mr. Buddle meditated. The clock on the mantelpiece chimed eleven, and Mr. Buddle stirred. But he did not go into the bedroom which adjoined his study. He sat down again in the chair against the window. He leaned back. It was as though Mr. Buddle was waiting for something to happen.

A minute or two more ticked by, and then Mr. Buddle rose to his feet. He moved across to the bust of Shakespeare which stood on his mantelpiece.

"I wonder, William", said Mr. Buddle, "whether I have made a psychological error."

There was a tap on the door. Mr. Buddle patted Shakespeare affectionately, and turned round.

"Come in", he called.

The door opened and a senior boy came into the study. He was followed by Vanderlyn.

The senior boy who entered first was dark. A good-looking boy who normally had a friendly face and a wide, agreeable smile. There was no smile on his face now. He looked worried and ashamed. He was Michael Scarlet, the son of the Headmaster of Slade. Owing to that relationship, Scarlet of the Sixth was known to all and sundry at Slade by the nickname of Pinky-Mi.

Pinky-Mi was wearing a sports jacket and grey slacks.

Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows in elaborate surprise.

"What is it, Scarlet?"

Pinky-Mi drew a deep breath. Colour flooded his face. He spoke in a low voice.

"You didn't see me, sir, but I was with Vanderlyn at the Palais de Danse tonight."

"You, Scarlet? You were at that dance hall?"

Mr. Buddle sounded incredulous.

Vanderlyn broke in. His distress was very obvious.

"The stupid fool! He would come to you, sir. It wasn't Pinky-Mi's fault, sir. I ragged him into going with me. I fairly bullied him into it. He didn't want to go. He doesn't dance. He was bored stiff."

Pinky-Mi smiled faintly.

"Clear off, Van, there's a good chap", he said.

"He only went to keep an eye on me", persisted Vanderlyn. "Sir, don't let the Head know about it. He'll skin Pinky-Mi alive."

Mr. Buddle shook his head and raised a hand.

"You must not speak of the Headmaster in those terms, Vanderlyn. Please go to bed now. Remain for a few moments, Scarlet."

Vanderlyn shrugged his shoulders despairingly. After a quick, lugubrious glance in Pinky-Mi's direction, he left the room, closing the door quietly as he went.

"Sit down, Scarlet", said Mr. Buddle.

Pinky-Mi seated himself on a chair against the table. Mr. Buddle shut the lower sash of the window, drew the curtains, and sat down

in his armchair. He regarded the boy's troubled face.

"Scarlet", said Mr. Buddle, "I would have thought you the last boy at Slade who would break bounds to visit a dance hall, and I would rather have known that any boy at Slade went there than you."

Pinky-Mi did not speak.

"It was an incredible act on your part", muttered Mr. Buddle. "Why, Scarlet, in heaven's name did you do such a thing?"

The boy pressed the palm of his right hand against his forehead and slowly moved his fingers up into his dark hair.

"Ennui, I suppose," he said indifferently.

Mr. Buddle knitted his brows with annoyance.

"Just exactly what do you mean by that contemptible and stupid remark, Scarlet?" he said sharply.

Pinky-Mi was silent, and Mr. Buddle's expression softened.

"Vanderlyn said that he ragged you into going with him. Is that the truth?"

"I suppose it is, sir. I didn't want to go. I don't dance - dancing isn't much in my line. It's no excuse for me, of course. I'm not making any excuse."

"No, there is no excuse", said Mr. Buddle. "I dread to think of your father's distress and anger. I cannot imagine what steps he will take. On the face of it, your conduct is all the worse because your parents are away from Slade. You knew the Headmaster would be away from the school tonight?"

"Yes, I knew", admitted Pinky-Mi. "I might have gone in any case, but my father will think I was taking advantage of his absence."

"You can hardly blame him for thinking so", said Mr. Buddle. "You are a prefect. Vanderlyn is not. Even though he may have been the instigator of this mad act, you are the most culpable."

"I know", said Pinky-Mi miserably.

He was very pale now; he looked blotchy under his sun tan. Mr. Buddle gazed hard into the pale face. An impatient anger at Pinky-Mi's folly fought a losing battle with the natural kindness of Mr. Buddle's heart. Mr. Buddle had known Pinky-Mi a long time. Once he had been a pupil in Mr. Buddle's own form, and Mr. Buddle had always felt sorry for Pinky-Mi. It was far from honey to be the son of the Headmaster of Slade. Mr. Scarlet had always expected so much of the boy, yet had seemed to give so little in the way of affection or encouragement. Mr. Scarlet, perhaps inevitably, had always been the schoolmaster first and the father second.

It had been clear to Mr. Buddle for years that Pinky-Mi would have done better at another school where he would have progressed scholastically and socially as the result of his own natural gifts, and would not have been handicapped by having his father as his Headmaster. Possibly it was understandable that Mr. Scarlet could not conceive of his son having a better Headmaster than himself.

"You may wonder how I came to visit that place tonight, Scarlet", said Mr. Buddle. "A report was made to me by the Everslade post-mistress. She claimed she saw two Slade boys enter the Palais de Danse, which she described as a sink of Iniquity."

"It's not that, sir. Miss Honeycomb was never young herself. She sees evil in everything, sir."

Mr. Buddle noted the stiff

lip, the sad, resigned eyes.

"From the little I saw of that hall it seems reasonably well run, but that is immaterial, Scarlet. You, a prefect, trusted, and with privileges, have flouted the school regulations in the company of a boy to whom you should have displayed a better example."

"I know, sir."

"What puzzles me, Scarlet", said Mr. Buddle slowly, "is why you were in the company of Vanderlyn at all. You figure in all the school games and sporting activities. Vanderlyn does not. He is a strange fellow in some ways - almost a misfit in school life. One who will possibly be more successful when he gets out into the world."

"Van is a good chap, sir", said Pinky-Mi gruffly. "I like him a lot."

"I should have assumed, from general observation, that Antrobus, the school captain, was your closest friend at Slade."

"Oh, he is, sir - but Antrobus was digging tonight."

"You mean he was studying."

"Yes, sir. If Antrobus hadn't been digging, this would never have happened. I was at a loose end, so I went with Van. I let him call the tune."

"I presume that Antrobus had no knowledge of this escapade?"

"Good lord, no, sir!" Pinky-Mi grinned wryly. "He'll have a pink fit when he hears about it."

Mr. Buddle almost writhed with impatience.

"Because Antrobus is studying hard for an imminent examination, you turn to a boy with whom you have nothing at all in common. You let Vanderlyn call the tune,

Scarlet, but you will have to pay the pipe. You have displayed a deplorable weakness, and your father will not regard weakness as any excuse."

"No, sir." Pinky-Mi spoke with a trace of bitterness. "The Head could never make allowance for weakness of any sort, especially in his son."

"Be silent, Scarlet", said Mr. Buddle angrily. "It is unmanly to adopt such an attitude. Your father is a fine man. He will be utterly distressed."

"He will be more angry than distressed", said Pinky-Mi.

Mr. Buddle rose to his feet and paced the room. Pinky-Mi stood up, staring straight ahead.

Mr. Buddle came to a standstill at last before the senior. He cleared his throat uneasily.

"You let Vanderlyn take his cycle out through the door to which you, as a prefect, have a key. When I apprehended Vanderlyn in the dance hall I intended to bring him home with me in my taxi. He said that he had his cycle with him and would follow me at once. Naturally I reached the school ahead of him. I locked the door in the wall, leaving him to re-enter the school precincts by the same method he had used in leaving. Presumably you, too, had your cycle with you, and you admitted him with your key."

"Yes, sir."

"What an abysmal piece of folly!" burst out Mr. Buddle, his anger getting the better of him. "It is beyond belief, Scarlet, that you, with so much to lose, could act in this way. Inevitably you will forfeit your prefectship, at the very least."

Colour flooded into Pinky-Mi's

face.

"These things happen", he muttered.

"Yes - these things happen - to people who have jelly where their backbone ought to be." Mr. Buddle glared at him resentfully. "You don't know it, perhaps, but both Antrobus and I fought with the Head two terms ago to gain you your prefectship. I hoped for so much from you, Scarlet. I hoped, one day, to see you captain of Slade when Antrobus goes. I shall never see that now."

Pinky-Mi caught his breath. He spoke in a muffled voice:

"You can't think any worse of me than I think of myself."

He turned and walked to the door. He turned round again.

"Is there anything else, sir?"

"Wait, Scarlet!" Mr. Buddle stood in painful thought. It was as though he were struggling to come to a decision.

"The Headmaster must know, Scarlet. It is my duty to see that he knows."

"Of course", said Pinky-Mi wearily.

"He does not return to Slade till noon tomorrow. Nobody in the school knows that I was called to that dance hall tonight."

Mr. Buddle seemed to be musing aloud. The boy waited.

"If I say nothing - If you and Vanderlyn go to him when he returns, and tell him what has happened -- He would assume that you were making a confession of your own free will. A visit to a dance - it is reprehensible but not heinous - he might well take a lenient view. You must not, of course, tell him any falsehood --"

Pinky-Mi's lips quivered. He drew a deep breath.

"Do you think that Vanderlyn will have told any other person that I apprehended him at the dance hall, Scarlet?"

Pinky-Mi's face was a little brighter.

"I'm sure he won't sir." Pinky-Mi spoke quickly. "All the Sixth are in bed by this time. Van has his own bed sitting-room. I'll drop in and speak to him on my way to bed."

Suddenly Mr. Buddle felt very tired. He wanted to be alone, to puzzle out the problem in his own way.

"I'm not quite sure yet what I feel, Scarlet", he said gravely. "I wish to spare your father what pain I can, yet it is clearly my duty to make the report to him. If Vanderlyn had been alone, I should have made such a report. I am not justified in acting differently just because the Headmaster's son was also a partner in this dreary escapade. I may withhold my report, on the understanding that you and Vanderlyn make your confessions to the Headmaster tomorrow. Come to me after breakfast in the morning, and I will give you my decision then."

Pinky-Mi stood in silence for a moment. He opened his lips to speak, and then changed his mind.

"Go to bed", snapped Mr. Buddle.

Ten minutes later, Mr. Buddle performed his ablutions, and rolled into his own bed in his adjoining room. He was far from happy. Exasperation with and compassion for Pinky-Mi alternated in his mind. He dreaded to think of the scene in the Headmaster's study the next

day when the schoolboy approached his father. Mr. Scarlet might show mercy to any other boy in the school. On principle, he would have no mercy to show to his own son.

Normally Mr. Buddle read the current issue of the Gem in bed on Wednesday evenings. It was his weekly relaxation. The latest Gem had been delivered to him that morning by his newsagent, but Mr. Buddle did not feel inclined for it tonight.

All the same, Mr. Buddle took a Gem to bed with him. It was an old copy, one published many years earlier. Mr. Buddle had confiscated that old Gem from Meredith of his form. Meredith was a lad with a penchant for reading the Gem when he should have been doing other things.

Meredith's father was a collector of Gems, a connoisseur of Gems. Because he believed that the Gem was good for boys, he frequently sent some early copies to his hopeful son at Slade with the strict injunction that the hopeful son was to take great care of them.

That was where Mr. Buddle came in. When Mr. Buddle caught Meredith reading the Gem in class or when he should have been doing his evening preparation, that Gem was confiscated. Mr. Buddle then read that Gem with great enjoyment, and in due course it was returned to Meredith. It was a fairly regular happening in the cycle of events. Whether Meredith knew that Mr. Buddle had a weakness for the Gem, Mr. Buddle was no sure. He suspected that Meredith guessed.

Mr. Buddle adjusted his bedside lamp and lay back on his pillow. This Gem was entitled "Cast Out From The School" and it told of the misadventures of a new boy named Talbot. Mr. Buddle had read it before, a few weeks earlier, and

greatly enjoyed it. He regarded it as a fine dramatic story, and he now turned to the closing chapter which fitted in with his mood tonight.

Mr. Buddle read.

"Talbot!" It was the Head. He swept towards the white-faced junior, his brows contracted, his eyes flashing. Never had the St. Jim's fellows seen their headmaster look so angry and indignant. "Wretched boy!"

Mr. Buddle wriggled uneasily between his sheets. Talbot was suspected of theft, which was far more serious than the thoughtless escapade of Scarlet of the Sixth. But Pinky-Mi was a prefect, and his escapade was all too serious. When Pinky-Mi faced his father the next morning, Mr. Scarlet would not have flashing eyes. He would be utterly bitter and cold in his condemnation.

Mr. Buddle resumed reading.

There was a shout on the stairs. Tom Merry had been in his study. He came tearing down the staircase, his face lighting up.

"Talbot, old man. You've come back. I knew you would."

"Merry!" thundered the Head. "Stand back!"

"But - but, sir --"

"Silence! Do not dare to approach that wretched boy. I forbid you to touch him - to speak to him."

Mr. Buddle raised his eyes from the printed page, and stared for a few moments at the black patch of the window. The sash was wide open at the top, admitting the cool night air.

Mr. Buddle meditated. The Head of St. Jim's in the story had forbidden Talbot's closest friend to speak to him. Would Mr. Scarlet exclude from his son the friendship of anyone like Antrobus who had passed through Slade with him? It seemed only too likely to Mr.

Buddle just then.

Again Mr. Buddle turned to the story.

"Have you no shame - no sense of decency?" thundered the Head. "Do not tell me falsehoods, boy. You cannot deceive me now. I am not to be imposed upon a second time. You have taken advantage of my trust, and betrayed it. You have disgraced your school. You will go at once."

Almost stunned by the torrent of words that struck him like the lashes of a whip, the unhappy boy turned blindly and obeyed. He was condemned - condemned past hope. The great door swung to, and closed, and shut off the light behind him - and with the light, hope!

It was melodrama, and Mr. Buddle loved it. When he first read the story, he had enjoyed it immensely, as he always enjoyed the Gem. Now it filled him with a sense of foreboding.

Was it possible that Mr. Scarlet would expel his own son for visiting the Palais de Danse in Everslade? It was possible. "Pour encourager les autres" as a French cynic once said in connection with the shooting of Admiral Byng.

As a conscientious man and a strict disciplinarian, Mr. Buddle knew that Pinky-Mi deserved punishment. But did he deserve an exceptionally severe punishment - "pour encourager les autres" - because fate had made him the son of the Headmaster of Slade?

Mr. Buddle felt that life had been a little unfair to Pinky-Mi. It was long before Mr. Buddle slept that night.

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It was the next morning after breakfast. It still wanted thirty minutes before morning classes.

Mr. Buddle was standing in his study with his back to the fireplace.

"Close the door, Scarlet", he said. "Sit down."

Pinky-Mi did as he was bid. He crossed one long leg over the other and leaned forward a little.

Mr. Buddle scanned the boy's face thoughtfully. Somehow it looked older this morning - lined and harassed with care and embarrassment.

Mr. Buddle picked his words, speaking slowly.

"Scarlet, please answer me frankly. Had you ever been to that dance hall before last night?"

"Never, sir."

"Are you acquainted with any person, outside the school, who is a patron of the Palais de Danse at Everslade?"

Pinky-Mi shook his head.

"Nobody, sir." He shrugged his shoulders wretchedly. "I haven't really any friends or acquaintances outside the school."

"I accept your assurance on that point, Scarlet. What about Vanderlyn?"

Pinky-Mi paused. Then he said in a low voice:

"I can't speak for Vanderlyn, sir."

Mr. Buddle sighed. He walked over to the window and stood looking out into the summer sunshine. He turned round.

"I am not sure, Scarlet", he said heavily, "whether I am doing right or wrong. I have decided that this matter shall end here. No report will be made to the Headmaster."

Pinky-Mi caught his breath. His eyes opened wide.

"Gosh, sir!" he muttered.

Mr. Buddle smiled very faintly.

"I do not disguise my opinion, Scarlet, that your action last evening was shocking. You deserve punishment, but, because you are the son of the Headmaster and he is a man of very high principles, I think that your punishment might be a little greater than you deserve, if the matter came to his notice. Furthermore, I should be sad indeed to be the instrument to bring pain and - and upset - into the life of your father and mother whom I respect highly."

Pinky-Mi stared at his feet. His lips trembled. He swallowed.

"From the look on your face this morning, I wonder whether you may not have been punished sufficiently already, Scarlet", Mr. Buddle said gently.

Pinky-Mi looked up.

"I have, sir!" he said, almost inaudibly.

Mr. Buddle clasped his hands behind his back.

"Before you go to your class, Scarlet, I have time to tell you something."

Pinky-Mi stood up, and Mr. Buddle went on.

"When I arrived at the Palais last evening I took a ticket, and from behind the velvet curtains which were drawn across the doorway, I scanned the dance hall. There were a number of couples dancing, and a band was playing on the stage. In a corner, near the stage, I saw a Slade boy seated at a small table. He did not look particularly happy. He looked, in fact, worried and bored. He was watching the drummer, and his feet were tapping to the rhythm of the music."

Pinky-Mi's look was incredulous.

"You saw me, sir?"

"I saw you, Scarlet. Then I saw Vanderlyn dancing with a young person. I passed into the dance hall, and intercepted Vanderlyn. I ordered him back to school, and told him to report to me as soon as he arrived."

Colour was flooding into Pinky-Mi's face.

"Vanderlyn reported to me as I had instructed him. He did not implicate you. I waited for you to come to me of your own accord, though you did not know that I had seen you."

There was almost affection in the look which Pinky-Mi gave Mr. Buddle.

"You expected me to come to you and make a clean breast of it, sir?"

"Under the circumstances I felt sure that you would come, Scarlet. The fact that you did - well, never mind. That is one of the reasons why no report will be made to the Headmaster."

Pinky-Mi seemed almost at a loss for words.

"You're a - grand chap, sir", he said impetuously.

Mr. Buddle shook his head.

"You did me - shall we call it a good turn - once, Scarlet", he said.

"Did I, sir? I don't remember.

"No, I don't suppose you would remember", observed Mr. Buddle, "but there was an occasion when you helped me a good deal - by introducing your father to the periodical called the Gem."

Pinky-Mi chuckled awkwardly.

"Oh, that! It was nothing, sir."

Mr. Buddle shrugged his shoulders.

"You will give me your assurance that you will never visit that dance hall again while you are a pupil at Slade", he said stiffly.

"I wouldn't go again for a fortune", ejaculated Pinky-Mi.

"Quite so. I am more concerned about Vanderlyn. As a prefect, you will keep an eye on him, Scarlet. You will inform him that the matter is closed, but you might add a warning as to the narrow escape he has had."

"I'll do that all right, sir", said Pinky-Mi sturdily.

"Finally", went on Mr. Buddle, "I hope you will both understand that my decision has not been an easy one to make. If your father should ever learn of my action, he will not be grateful to me. He will regard it as a breach of my duty. He will be intensely angry with me. It may cost me my post at Slade. I hope that you and Vanderlyn will remember that, if you are ever tempted to boast. Fortunately we are very near the end of term."

Mr. Buddle walked across the study and opened the door.

"Get ready for your morning class, Scarlet", he said. He lowered his voice a tone. "It may be that on this occasion I have not acted in a manner worthy of - shall we say - Mr. Railton."

He gave a sour little smile.

Pinky-Mi stood in the doorway. He wanted to say something but mere words meant so little, and they did not come easily.

He said at last, huskily:

"No, sir, not like Mr. Railton. More like - Tom Merry - maybe."

After Pinky-Mi had gone Mr. Buddle went across to his beloved

bust of Shakespeare on the mantel-piece. Abstractedly he moved his fingers over the bard's cold head.

"I wonder, William", he mused, "whether that boy realises we are not out of the wood yet. That woman might decide to ask awkward questions. Let's hope she doesn't."

Mr. Buddle stood for a while lost in thought.

At last he said, a little wistfully:

"If the good Lord had seen fit to bless me with a son like that, I would, I think, have made sure that he never went in fear of his father."

The clock chimed.

"Calamity!" yapped Mr. Buddle. "I'm late for class."

* * * * *

Very Best Wishes for a Happy Christms and New Year to Skipper Eric, Norman, Laurie, Les and all "Old Boys". Especially Good Wishes and Thanks to Bill Lofts and Chris Lowder whose kind action completed the Iron Army for me. Can anyone supply Union Jack 177, "Salvation Army Blake" or Penny Popular 31, "Sexton Blake's Mission" in original or copy?

JOHN BRIDGWATER

5A SAULFLAND PLACE, HIGHCLIFFE, CHRISTCHURCH, DORSET, BH23 4QP

St. Frank's wishes you all a Joyous Christmas and a Happy New Year.

JIM COOK

NEW ZEALAND

WANTS: Beau Peep No. 1; Andy Capp No. 46; Fred Bassett Nos. 3, 31. Greetings to all.

JACK HUGHES

P.O. BOX 92, HOME HILL, QUEENSLAND

WANTED: "School Cap" 6 to 10. Any issues "Junior News".

ERIC CAUSER

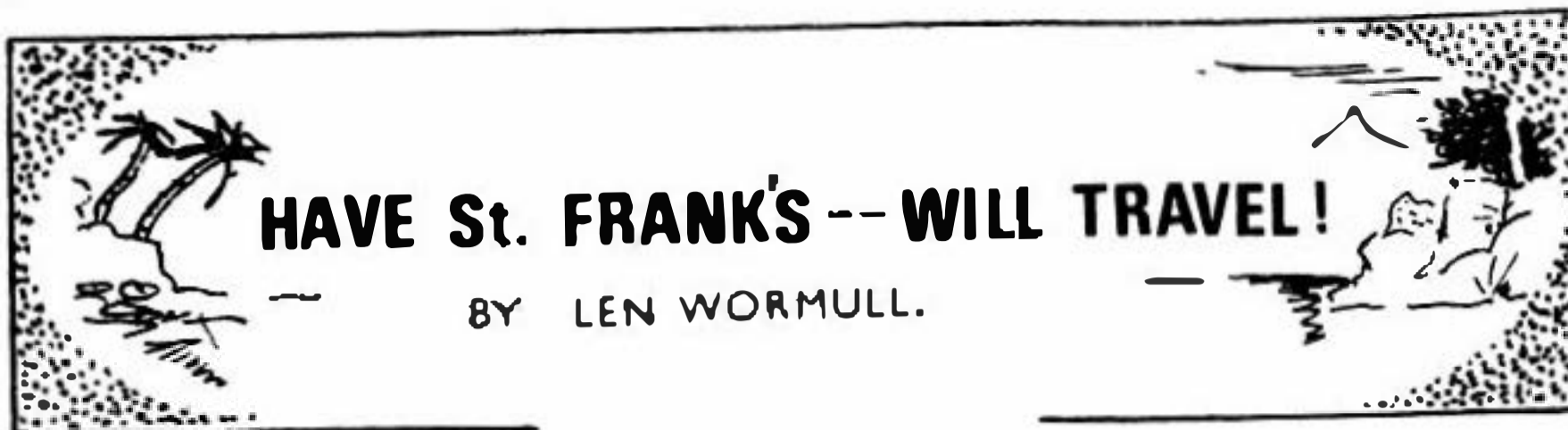
8 WESTROYD, PUDSEY, WEST YORKS., LS28 8HZ

As always Warmest Greetings and Thanks to Eric Fayne. Still wanted: Girls' Crystal Annual 1940, Popular Book of Girls' Stories 1935, 1936, 1941. Also Mistress Mariner and Sally's Summer Term by Dorita Bruce, Bidy's Secret, Maidlin to the Rescue, Guardlans of the Abbey by Elsie Oxenham.

MARY CADOGAN

46 OVERBURY AVENUE, BECKENHAM, KENT. TEL. 01-650-1458

* * * * *



If you have come here expecting Bellton and St. Frank's, then I am sorry to disappoint you; we're going travelling on this visit. Not the school holiday travel we came to expect, but travel every bit as exciting nonetheless. You could call it geography on the move, though the posh name for it was 'Geographical Education'. You could also call it a clever ploy on the part of E. S. Brooks, for it gave him licence to pinch a term or two whenever the wanderlust took him. And why not? If travel can broaden the mind, it seemed only reasonable to broaden the canvas. Into this category came the innovative and popular School Tours series, and, allowing that it could only happen in fiction, there was a lot to be said for this kind of geography! Appearances had to be kept up, of course, but even the best intentions can go awry. More by design than accident it would seem, 'education' always lost out to ADVENTURE. Would we have wished it otherwise?

In any real-life travel plans the cost has to be reckoned. In the world of St. Frank's, the problem is easily resolved. Hence the fabulously rich Lord Dorri-more, the "open sesame" to travel unlimited. What an astute piece of casting he was, and how well he fitted into the picture. Dorrie became 'one of the boys', a confidante and helpmate. Anywhere holidays? Send for Dorrie. Term-time blues and desperate for a break? Dorrie will whisk you away on his magic carpet, as regular as clockwork and no questions asked. How they, and we, took it all for granted... 'He's a giddy millionaire', remarked Handy, thanklessly. The peak in travel came in 1929 with three series, two of which were school tours. St. Frank's always travelled in style, yet it was not until this late stage that it was given its own special ship and train. Come the Depression and what may, the Saints would see out the twenties in the manner to which they were accustomed.

How did you fare for educational trips at school? Mine were little more than visits to the National Gallery and British Museum. St. Frank's would have scoffed, nay laughed, at such impoverishment. Remember their "educational" to Australia and New Zealand? Now that was really something to boast about. Just in time for Test Cricket too, lucky beggars! Lucky for some, that is. The school ship "St. Francis" could only take half the school - Ancient and Modern Houses. (Hard lines East and West, you always were the Cinderellas.) Any Ideas of slacking en route were quickly scotched by acting head, Nelson Lee: 'This is school time not holiday time', he tells Nipper, 'School comes first'. And lessons it was to begin with, a mystery master named Mr. Norton taking the Remove Form. But readers were not fooled, they knew it couldn't last. How could it, with Umlosi aboard! Stopping at Capetown, the chums are given three days' holiday in Durban. Anyone for adventure?

The call soon comes when Dorrie, attempting a non-stop flight from the

Cape to Cairo, is reported missing. Umlosi's Instinct, or "snake" as it was called, tells him not only where to search, but that he is safe and well; an instinct that proves uncannily accurate. Trapped by Bushrangers, Archie is kidnapped and held to ransom. The chappie is in a dithering state Lost in the Bush, but all comes well. Then on to Australia, where England are playing in the Test. As to be expected, cricket becomes the main theme and topic throughout.

A sensation hits Adelaide when William Napoleon Browne, aided by the City's newspaper, pulls off a fantastic cricket spoof. Some lad, our Nap. Still in Adelaide, the chums meet up with Ned Kelly and his gang. Not THE Ned Kelly, the fellow was hanged long ago. Another hoax, of course. Cads being what they are, Gore-Pearce & Co. prevent Nipper and his friends seeing the Test Match in Melbourne, so they organise one of their own with young Aussies. Later they manage to see the real thing. In New Zealand, Handy causes a stir and a laugh when a geyser gushes him aloft. Can such things happen, I wonder? To mark the occasion, there were free gifts of metal badges of English Test cricketers. A good, topical series this.

The School Train all clear came after a short spell of school stories, and as another of Dorrie's ideas. The lads having travelled the world, he thought it was time they saw their own country. Restricted to 24 from each form, the lucky ones have first to pass an exam to qualify. But with Edwy Brooks marking the papers, how could they fail? All the regulars pass muster, cads and all. Watch out for it Down Your Way, we were told. Painful memories of the Midlands visit, alas. I was down with mumps that week. In Blackpool, Archie goes over-board for a Lancashire lass in an amusing tale. Not that I blame him. He liked the girls on the quiet, and this one was "ripping". Over the border, Handy is game for a laugh in a kilt, but not so funny torturing the bagpipes. The poor things suffer enough, methinks.

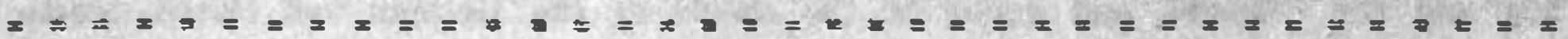
Reading it now, I thought the home tour less attractive than the one abroad, but then I am no longer an 11-year-old waiting impatiently for Wednesday to come round. What was on the plate we ate, unconditionally. Interesting new features were the Portraits Gallery and the St. Frank's Questionnaire, especially welcome to this new boy. The tour ended at Brighton, sowing the seeds for yet another adventure. A sailorman named Hookey Webb tells a tale of hidden gold in Arizona. A word in Dorrie's ear is enough for a small party, including Irene & Co., to set off in search. Apaches on the warpath hold no terrors for Handy, who meets them fists-on. The odds are overcome, the gold is found, and Hookey becomes a millionaire. Call it jealousy, but me heap no like this one.

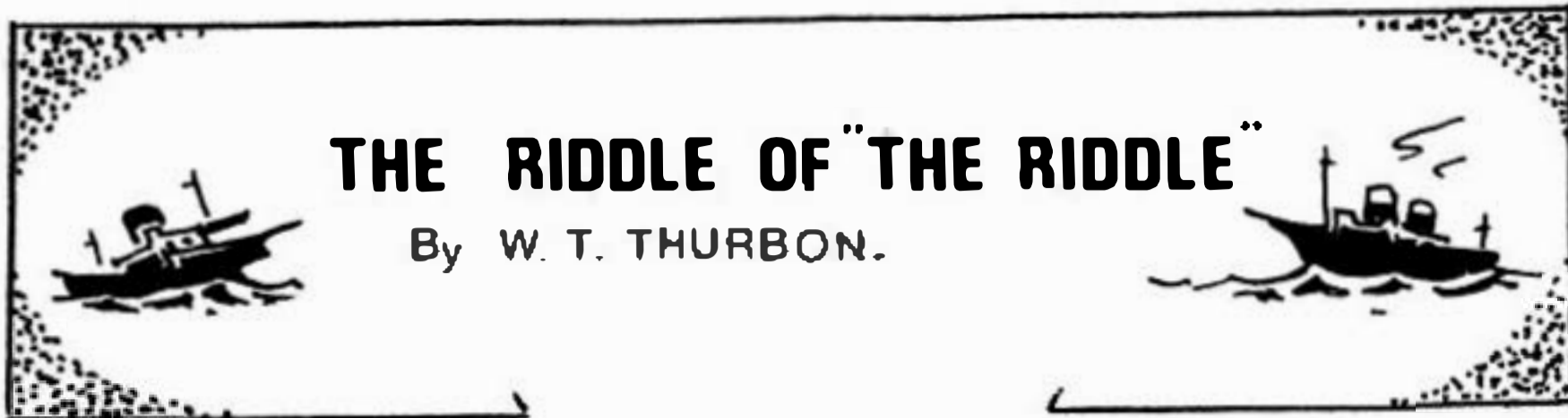
Then it was back to school in earnest, with Waldo, the Wonder Boy; the return of Bernard Forrest; another Tong war with Fu Chang; and, finally, a tale about Edgar Fenton and a rascally uncle. Thus ended a decade and the excellent First New Series. The Twenties had been good to the Nelson Lee, giving it nearly all the best tunes. Only towards the end did it begin to look jaded. But then, after long months of action-packed adventure and travel, who wasn't feeling run-down and tired.



Seasonal Greetings to Friars Worldwide.

LEN BERG, WEMBLEY





In a swift war in 1871 the German army had smashed the French power in a rapid conquest, to the surprise of all Europe, and the King of Prussia was crowned Emperor of Germany in the Palace of Versailles, and signed the armistice that ended the war on 28 January 1871.

Eleven days later a distinguished Royal Engineer officer sent to John Blackwood, Editor of the then famous "Blackwoods Magazine", the outline of a short story. Colonel Sir George Chesney had chosen his moment well. Britain was both surprised and uneasy at the rapid conquest of France, and 1871 was a year of foreboding. Chesney in "The Battle of Dorking" told a story of a sudden German invasion of Britain. With her small army mainly abroad dealing with troubles in India and America, and her navy destroyed as being lured into mine-fields, the defence of Britain, left to untrained volunteer forces crumbled into disaster. Chesney used the device of a veteran of this was telling the story of the fall of Britain to his grandchildren. Wisely he did not weaken the story by any anticlimax of a British revival.

The story was an immediate success. It was widely read in the magazine, and then published as a pamphlet. It alarmed the nation, angered the Prime Minister, Gladstone, who begrudged spending money on defence, and amazed a continent. It set a fashion for such stories - from 1871 until 1914 they came in a continual stream, that ended only with a 1914 story "Danger" by Conan Doyle that uncannily foretold the danger of submarines to Britain. The Northcliffe papers took up the theme enthusiastically, and a series of war and invasion stories ran in his boys' papers: "Britain Invaded", "Britain at Bay", "Britains Revenge" ran first as a serial in the "Boys Friend", and then reappeared as "end serials" first, in the blue Gem, and then in the "Marvel".

But of that great flood of stories only one has survived until today, and still raises questions and arguments; this was Erskine Childers great story, "The Riddle of the Sands". There were good writers before 1914, there have been good writers since. No other writer, however, has so cleverly weaved a classic sea story with a spy and invasion theme. Since its first publication in 1903 "The Riddle of the Sands" has never been out of print. At least three books have been written about it in the last ten years, one only recently. "The Riddle of the Sands" is one of those books that draw to themselves a special kind of devotion" says one recent author. It is a great sea story; it has raised many questions, and discussion of it will not go away.

Who was Erskine Childers? Robert Erskine Childers was born in 1870 of Anglo Irish descent. He was education at Halleybury school and Trinity College, Cambridge, and from 1895 until 1910 was a Clerk in the House of Commons. He was a keen yachtsman and spent part of his holidays sailing in the North Sea and the Channel, and exploring the shoals of the German and Dutch coasts.

He served with the C.I.V. in the South African War; he wrote a book about this, "In the ranks of the C.I.V.'s", and later wrote about cavalry training, criticising the use of shock tactics, in "War and the Arm Blanche": a book that English Cavalry leaders ignored to their great loss. In 1910 he resigned his post in the House of Commons to be free to work for the Irish cause, advocating Home Rule for Ireland. In World War I he served in the R.N.A.S. and the R.N.V.R. and was awarded the D.S.C. After the Great War he settled in Ireland to work and write for it's complete Independence. When the Free State was established he rejoined the Irish Republican Army, which opposed the division of Ireland. He was shot by the Free State in the tragic fighting that followed the establishment of Eire. John Buchan wrote of him "no revolution ever produced a nobler or purer spirit."

Now to the genesis of the "Riddle". In 1897 Childers owned a yacht named "Vixen". In September of that year Childers, with his brother and a friend, made a cruise through the Frisian Islands and the shoals of the German, Dutch and German coasts and a trip through the Keil Canal. Here chance came in. Childers had intended to sail through the French Canals to the Mediterranean sea, but the wind was foul, so he "turned Hollandwards" and sailed to fame. Childers wrote a full account of his voyage for a yachting magazine and it is clear from this that the "Riddle of the Sands" was based on this article.

Childers wrote "The Riddle of the Sands" between 1901 and 1903. The story of the Riddle begins with an introduction by Childers, telling how he had been visited by his friend "Carruthers", who under a pledge of secrecy had told him the story.

Carruthers, a rather bored clerk in the Foreign Office, whose annual leave had been delayed, is at a loose end when he is invited by an acquaintance, Davies, to join him on a yachting trip. Expecting a gleaming, white yacht, Carruthers is at first shocked by the small, dingy seven-tonner, sailed by Davies alone. "Dulcibella" - Childers named the yacht after one of his sisters - was no beauty. Gradually, as they sail through the coastal waters and through the Keil Canal to the Baltic and back, Carruthers learns to appreciate both the enjoyment of the voyage and the abilities of Davies; gradually, also, he learns Davies' adventures, near shipwreck, and of the secrets of the sands. The thrill of the story, the dangers of tides and shoals (based on Childers own experience) as they search for the secret and navigate their small boat among the shoals and islands is tense and exciting. The answer to "The Riddle" is fiction (with a large F), but all the sailing directions are taken from the log of the "Vixen" (with one exception) and this cruise was made at a time when the British Navy seemed quite indifferent to the development of the German seaboard. The climax of the story is reached when "Carruthers" finds himself on a German tug, which is carrying out strange manouvers, with a lighter in tow. Then he realises the answer to the riddle:

"The course he had set was about West, with Norderney Light about a couple of Points off the port bow. The course for Memmert? Possibly; but I cared not, for my thoughts were far from Memmert tonight. It was the course for England, too. Yes, I understood at last. I was assisting in an experimental rehearsal of a great scene to be enacted perhaps in the near future. A scene when multitudes of sea-going lighters --- carrying full loads of soldiers --- should issue forth from seven shallow outlets, and under escort of the imperial navy, traverse the North Sea and throw themselves boldly on the English shore".

Thus the book. Nowhere in the log of the Vixen is there any hint of the future book. It is tantalising to think that perhaps the Vixen might have been

doing some official or unofficial spying.

Childers was a University of Cambridge man. Some years ago I was asked if a former Cambridge Zoologist, who was also a keen yachtsman, but not at the same College as Childers, could have been "Davies" - he had denied this, but said that "He knew Davies", when he had earlier been challenged with the same question.

So we are left with riddles about this fine story; were "Davies" and "Carruthers" based on Childers and one of his crew; does the Cambridge Zoologist come into the picture as Mr. Bowker thinks; was he a mysterious Cambridge man who was killed in the Great War? What happened to the "Vixen" after Childers sold her? The questions are unending; new books come out. Apart from Mr. Bowker's book two others have since appeared - one very recently.

But still no satisfactory answer to the riddle within the "Riddle": who was "Davies?". But as long as a thirst for sea adventure remains "The Riddle of the Sands" will rank among the great Sea stories of all times.

To London and South-West Clubs all - Seasonal Greetings. Nelson Lee's, etc., still for sale.

VALE AND JOYCE

33 IVY HOUSE, PARK HENLADE, TAUNTON, SOMERSET, TA3 5HR

Yuletide Greetings and Grateful Thanks for all your efforts in 1985.

JOAN GOLEN

STREETLY

WANTED: Detective Weekly with Sexton Blake; and Boys' Friend Libraries.

PERRY

10 THE WALDENS, KINGSWOOD, MAIDSTONE, KENT

STILL wanted Sexton Blake Second Series Numbers 453 'On The Midnight Beat', and 572 'The Crime In The Kiosk'. Both by John G. Brandon. Name your price. Best Wishes to The Editor, Bob Wilson, Norman Shaw and all O.B.B.C. members.

J. ASHLEY

46 NICHOLAS CRESCENT, FAREHAM, HANTS., PO15 5AN

FOR SALE: Large quantity of early Nelson Lees, Magnets, Gems, Union Jacks, Sexton Blakes, Monster Libraries.

MURTAGH

509 WINDSOR AVENUE, HASTINGS NEW ZEALAND



THE ALOINE ROBIN HOODS

(Contributed by JACK DOUPE)



1.	Sweet Liberty or Death	Alfred S. Burrage
2.	Robin Hood and the Tyrant of Nottingham	"
3.	The Fighting Friary of Sherwood Forest	"
4.	Robin Hood to the Rescue	"
5.	Will Scarlet the Brave	"
6.	The Battle of the Giants	"
7.	Tristram and Freedom	"
8.	Robin Hood's Great Shot	"
9.	The Tyrant of Blackmoor Castle	"
10.	Robin Hood's Call to Arms	"
11.	The Great Fight in Sherwood Forest	Charles E. Brand
12.	The Dungeons of Despair	Roderick Dare
13.	The Red Fox of Tirlstone	Charles E. Brand
14.	From the Jaws of Death	Alfred S. Burrage
15.	For Richard and the Right	Charles E. Brand
16.	In Desperate Flight	Roderick Dare
17.	The Demon of the Forest	Alfred S. Burrage
18.	Sons of the Brave	Alfred S. Burrage
19.	Robin Hood and Bede the Wrestler	H. Philpott Wright
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21.	In the Lions Mouth	Charles E. Brand
22.	The Witch of Epping Forest	"
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24.	The Outlaw of the Fens	H. Philpott Wright
25.	Friar Tuck's Bold Foray	"
26.	The Lord of the Wolves	Singleton Pound
27.	The Wizard's Tower	Charles E. Brand
28.	Against Norman Steel	Escott Lynn
29.	Outlaw and King	"
30.	The Prentice Bowmen of Nottingham	Singleton Pound
31.	A Mighty Foe	H. P. Wright
32.	The Jester's Secret	Singleton Pound
33.	The Grey Wolf of Windsor	Charles E. Brand
34.	The Scourge of the Forest	Escott Lynn
35.	The Black-Cross Knight	H. Philpott Wright
36.	A Life for a Ransom	Singleton Pound
37.	Beset by Foes	Escott Lynn
38.	The Peril of the King	"
39.	With Lionheart the Brave	"
40.	Sherwood Ho	"
41.	Little-John the Dauntless	A. W. Bradley
42.	Through Foam to Freedom	"
43.	To the King's Rescue	"
44.	Brave Hal of Harding	G. C. Glover
45.	The Bowmen of England	"
46.	A Felon Stroke	"
47.	The Perjured Knight	"
48.	The King's Treasure	"

49.	Scar-Eye the Giant	G. C. Glover
50.	Robin Hood and the Sallee Rovers	"
51.	The Dragon worshippers	"
52.	The Price of Treachery	"
53.	The Black Knight of Avalon	Escott Lynn
54.	For the King	"
55.	Saxon to the Core	Ogilvie Mitchell
56.	The King's Archers	"
57.	Facing the Foe	"
58.	True to his Trust	"
59.	Under the Standard	"
60.	The King's Jester	"
61.	A Knight Errant	"
62.	The Abbot of Amfield	"
63.	A Traitor Knave	"
64.	For England's Sake	"
65.	A King in Disguise	"
66.	A Royal Fool	"
67.	The Sea Vulture	"
68.	The Sea-Earl's Secret	"
69.	The King of the Castle	"
70.	Victory	"
71.	The Lion of England	"
72.	A Briton Born	"
73.	The Wolf of Paynwood	Escott Lynn
74.	Guy of Alverstone	"
75.	The Green Company	"
76.	Brave Hearts and True	"
77.	The Red Messenger	Richard Mant
78.	The Biter Bit	"
79.	The Flower of Sherwood	"
80.	A Fourfold Reckoning	"
81.	The Snake in the Grass	"
82.	The Black Lances	"
83.	A Traitor Thane	"
84.	The Rival Kings	No author given
85.	Through Traitors Gate	H. Philpott Wright
86.	The Prisoner of Ongar	"
87.	The Wolf of the Woods	"
88.	the Terror of Torton Bridge	"

Merry Xmas and Happy New Year to all fellow collectors.

HARRY MARRIOTT

27 GREEN VIEW DRIVE, LINKS VIEW, NORTHAMPTON

=====

Warmest Seasonal Greetings to our esteemed Editor, God bless him,
 To Tom and all Midland Club Friends.
 To Uncle Benjamin and all the London Club.
 To Cyril Rowe and all world-wide who love our hobby.
 And especially to my dear friend Henry Webb and Family.

STAN KNIGHT, CHELTENHAM

=====



Did you have your morning tea or coffee break today?

I hope that you did.

If you didn't, then you have been guilty of breaking with that most traditional of British customs.

My own coffee break always receives a high degree of priority.

I never, ever, miss that.

For we adults the morning break is a brief rest between spells of labour.

When we were at school the morning break was rather different.

Then it was a quarter of an hour of frenetic activity, sandwiched in between the morning's lessons.

School "break" always seemed to pass so incredibly swiftly. It was the shortest quarter of an hour in the entire day. We sometimes suspected that some unsporting member of authority somehow accelerated the school clock at 10.45, and then slowed it down again after eleven o'clock. The obvious suspect was the rather disagreeable old school porter, who was our very own version of William Gosling, of Greyfriars.

Talking of Greyfriars, it always struck me that much more always happened during "break" at Greyfriars than ever happened at my school.

All sorts of exciting and amusing things were happening every day at Greyfriars.

Let's drop everything that we're doing today and take a run down into Kent, right away, and call at Greyfriars, as "Old Boys", and find out for ourselves what happened there during break this morning...

* * * * *

William Gosling gave a grunt and knocked out his pipe against the gate-pillar.

The ancient porter at Greyfriars School had been quite enjoying life until now.

It was a bright and sunny morning, after a rainy night, and it was really quite mild for early December. The sunshine had tempted Gosling to fetch out a chair from his lodge. He had sat by the gates, enjoying the sunshine and puffing at his pipe.

Now came the sound of many voices and the tramping of many feet.

Second school had just ended.

It was morning break.

"Ere they orl come!" Gosling grunted to himself.

Gosling loved peace and quite. Now he was about to lose, temporarily, those two precious qualities of life.

Now there would be swarms of boys about the place.

That prospect didn't please Gosling. Boys were often noisy. Boys were often cheeky. Boys would come and worry a man.

Gosling hauled himself up on to his ancient feet and trudged into the lodge. He could watch the gateway quite easily from his window. He would be able to spot any young rip who attempted to dodge out of the gateway during break. He would also see any visitor who arrived. The gates stood wide open, for Sir Hilton Popper was expected shortly, on a visit to Dr. Locke.

Once inside his lodge, Gosling sorted out a glass and poured himself his usual mid-morningdose of medicine. He never, ever, missed that.

Gosling's medicine was not prescribed for him by a doctor. Gosling prescribed it for himself. Whether it did him any good was probably open to question. There was no doubt, however, that he liked it.

"Aaaaaah!" he murmured.

He sat down by the window and watched the open gateway.

* * * * *

"Caught you, by gum!" ejaculated Herbert Vernon-Smith as he stared in through the doorway of Study No. 4 in the Remove passage.

Billy Bunter's plump hand was hastily withdrawn from the catch on the door of the study cupboard.

"Oh, 'er, hallo Smithy, old fellow!" gasped Bunter. "I 'er, just looked in to speak to Redwing, you know."

"Oh, did you!" snapped the Bounder. "Well, why didn't you look out again when you found that he wasn't here?"

"Oh, er, I mean that I didn't look in to speak to Redwing. That's what I really meant to say" mumbled the Owl uneasily. "I, 'er thought I heard a strange noise in your study, old chap. I though there might be a burglar here."

"Oh, yes, there's a burglar all right" agreed the Bounder. "A fat burglar who pinches tuck from other fellows' studies."

"Oh, really, Smithy."

Vernon-Smith grabbed Bunter by his collar and propelled him into the passage with a shove from his foot. Picking up a brand new football the Bounder emerged from his study and sprinted down the stairs.

* * * * *

"I might be able to dodge out" said Dicky Nugent, stealthily approaching the gateway with Gatty and Myers.

The three Second-formers kept a way eye on the door of Gosling's lodge.

Dicky Nugent was very keen to slip out of the school precincts that

breaktime.

This was the result of a "dare". Gatty had previously stuffed an initialled handkerchief of his own into a gap at the foot of the school boathouse wall. He had dared Dicky to get out during morning-break and retrieve the handkerchief without being spotted by authority. Dicky had immediately accepted the challenge. He had made for the Cloisters, as soon as second lesson was over, hoping to climb out at the spot where the old wall was partly broken down. Unfortunately he had encountered Wingate of the Sixth there, and had retreated quickly. Dicky was unaware that the prefects were keeping a watchful eye on the Cloisters. Certain juniors were suspected of retreating there to smoke cigarettes in break.

Dicky Nugent, accompanied by Gatty and Myers, had then approached the garage gates. There they had been noticed by Mr. Mible, the Head's gardener, who had eyed them suspiciously.

Then Dicky had spotted that the main gates were open and that Gosling was not to be seen.

"I bet Gosling's in there" said Myers.

"He's probably asleep" said Gatty. "Tubb of the Third says he drinks whisky in there."

"How does he know that?" demanded Dicky.

"Don't ask me" replied Gatty. "Tubb says that Gosling drinks gallons of the stuff. Then he falls asleep."

"You get a red nose through drinking whisky" said Myers. "Gosling does always have a red nose, doesn't he?"

"Any beaks or prefects in sight, you men?" whispered Dicky anxiously.

Gatty and Myers stared round behind them. As they did so, they heard Gosling's voice.

"Thinkin' 'o gettin' out, eh? Is that it?"

Gosling emerged from his lodge and stared at the three fags.

"Oh no, Gossy, of course not" replied Dicky Nugent. "Just looking out to see who was coming along the road, that's all."

"Ho, h'indeed," said Gosling. "And 'oo might yer be expectin' to see comin' along the road - eh?"

"The Prime Minister" replied Dicky cheekily.

"Christopher Columbus" said Myers.

"Doctor Who" suggested Gatty.

"Ho, h'indeed. Hi see" said Gosling, in a sarcastic tone. "And h'orf three of 'em comin' marchin' along the road tergether, eh? Arm in arm, I s'pose! Ho, yes, that's every likely, that is! Now then - that's enough 'o your sauce. You get away from them gates afore I goes a'reportin' o' you ter Mr. Twigg."

"Keep your hair on, Gossy" said Gatty. "We were never going out - honestly."

"Which you cert'n'ly ain't!" snorted Gosling. "You be h'orf, now."

"You're not very nice to us, are you, Gossy?" said Dicky reproachfully. "We shan't come to your hundredth birthday party next week if you aren't nicer to us."

"Be h'orf!" roared Gosling, his face turning purple.

"Oh, come on" whispered Myers, tugging at Dicky's sleeve. "Let's bunk before the old buffer blows a fuse or something."

Dicky Nugent nodded, and the three fags scampered away.

"I'll try the Cloisters again" said Dicky breathlessly. "Wingate may have gone by now."

Gosling stumped back into his lodge and closed the door behind him with a bang.

"I dunno what things are comin' to 'ere" he growled to himself. "These kids get cheekier every bloomin' term!"

* * * * *

"Oh dear!" murmured Mr. Wiggins, as the sound of a rich and fruity voice came to his ears.

Clutching his copy of "The Times" in his hand, the Third Form master peered round the doorway of Masters' Common Room.

He had a back view of Mr. Prout, who was in conversation with Mr. Capper in the passage.

Quietly, Mr. Wiggins stole out through the doorway and slipped round the nearest corner.

Mr. Prout wanted to see him.

Mr. Wiggins didn't want to be seen.

Prout had lately been giving him advice on the management of the unruly Third Form. A little bit of advice from Prout soon became rather overpowering.

Mr. Wiggins had had enough.

He made his way to the Library. There was nobody there apart from the part-time librarian, a girl who gave the Third Form master a sweet smile as he came in.

Mr. Wiggins sat down in the corner of the Library and opened "The Times".

* * * * *

Dicky Nugent and Co. did not find George Wingate in the Cloisters this time.

They found Gerald Loder there instead.

Loder stared at the fags who halted, looking dismayed.

"What are you kids up to here?" demanded the bully of the Sixth.

"Nothing, Loder" replied Dicky Nugent. "We're just walking about."

"Turn your pockets out" rapped Loder.

"What for, Loder?" asked Gatty.

"Never mind what for. Just turn them out" ordered Loder.

The three boys turned out their pockets.

An extraordinary collection of more or less useful odds and ends came into view.

However, no cigarettes were to be seen.

Loder looked rather disappointed.

"Have you cleaned my football boots this morning, young Nugent?" he demanded.

"Yes, Loder" said Dicky meekly.

Dicky Nugent had the misfortune to be fagging for Loder that week while Tubb of the Third was in "Sanny", suffering from influenza.

"Have you laid my study grate?"

"Yes, Loder."

"Oh" said Loder, somewhat mollified. "Well, all right, you can cut off now. But don't come hanging about here any more."

The three fags drifted away.

"Oh blow" said Dicky Nugent. "That's torn it. I can't get out now. There won't be enough time left. I'll do it tomorrow, though."

"Yes, O.K." replied Gatty.

"I say, look, Loder's going in now" said Dicky. "Just my luck. The coast's clear now but there's no time left. I say, I wonder whether Loder's going to his study now."

"Who cares where the brute's going?" grunted Myers.

"Well, I do" said Dicky. "He may light his study fire now. As it's a half-holiday today he may light it early."

"Well, so what!" said Gatty, staring.

"I'll tell you what" continued Dicky, lowering his voice. "Listen, I'll tell you two - but for goodness' sake keep it dark."

"But what - " began Gatty.

"Listen. I've bunged Loder's chimney up" whispered Dicky.

"You've done what?" ejaculated Myers.

"Bunged his chimney up" repeated Dicky. "I smuggled in an old bird's nest I found in the wood. I put it in a paper bag and hid it in my desk in the form-room. It's up Loder's chimney now. You just wait till Loder lights that fire. The beast'll be smoked out of his study."

"Why, you mad idiot!" gasped Gatty. "Loder will skin you for that."

"He jolly well won't!" retorted Dicky. "He could never prove that I did it. If he goes for me I shall appeal to Twigg. Birds' nests sometimes fall down chimneys, you know. Birds build them up in the chimney pots in the summer when the fires are out. Then sometimes the nests fall down the chimneys later. We had one come down a chimney at home once. This one fell down Loder's

chimney, see!"

"Golly!" said Myers.

"I say", said Gatty slowly, "Dicky's got something there, you know. They couldn't prove that he shoved the nest up there. It's really rather a good wheeze."

Gatty and Myers chortled gleefully.

"Oh well", replied Dicky complacently, "It takes a chap with brains to think up a really good stunt, you know. Let's keep watch on Loder's window. We can see it from here. I say, I hope he's gone there to light that fire now."

The three fags, with bated breath, eagerly watched the window of Loder's study.

* * * * *

"Thud!"

The wet and muddy football smote Coker of the Fifth in the chest.

Coker slipped and sat down on the quadrangle.

He had been striding across the quad. It had never occurred to him to circumnavigate the bunch of Remove boys who were punting Vernon-Smith's new football.

Coker simply marched through the group of footballers as though they weren't there at all. He had proceeded on a perfectly straight course until that hefty shot from Bob Cherry's foot had stopped him in his tracks.

Coker scrambled up, muddy and angry.

"Who kicked that ball?" he roared.

"Guilty, my lord" said out Bob Cherry cheerfully. "If you will come barging in without looking where you're going, Coker."

"Barging in! Why, you cheeky little Remove tick!" bellowed Coker. "You shouldn't be playing your silly fag games in the middle of the quad."

He picked up the football.

"This ball is confiscated" he announced.

"Confiscated!" shouted Vernon-Smith. "That ball is my property, Coker."

"Don't be such an ass, Coker" said Harry Wharton.

"Give that ball back!" shouted Johnny Bull.

"You can have it back on the last day of term" said Coker.

The Bounder sprang at Coker in an effort to grab the football.

A huge hand thumped him in the chest and he went sprawling.

He jumped up furiously and was about to leap at Coker again when Harry Wharton grabbed his arm.

"Hold on, Smithy" said the captain of the Remove. "Keep your cool. We'll tackle this together."

Wharton signalled to the other footballers.

"Back up, Remove!" he rapped. "Ready - now - over with him!"

A human tidal wave swept over Horace Coker.

Moments later the puntabout was in full swing again.

A muddy and battered Coker sat up dizzily in the middle of a large puddle.

* * * * *

"Oh dear!" murmured little Mr. Wiggins.

Elephantine footsteps were approaching the door of the Library.

There was only one person at Greyfriars who could produce footsteps like those.

Mr. Wiggins shrank down behind "The Times" until only his hands were visible.

Prout was going to find him!

The footsteps suddenly stopped.

Mr. Prout stared down into the quadrangle from the window in the corridor.

A rather startling sight met his gaze.

"Upon my word," he breathed. "Coker!"

Mr. Wiggins could hardly believe his luck as elephantine footsteps faded away into the distance.

The Third-form master emerged slowly from behind "The Times" and stared at the Library door with a smile of relief dawning on his face.

The librarian eyed him uneasily.

She was wondering whether Mr. Wiggins was always like this.

* * * * *

"You, a senior, scuffling in public with a crowd of Lower School boys!" boomed Mr. Prout.

"I keep telling you, the whole lot of them barged me over!" said Coker indignantly.

"Coker. You have already admitted to me that you confiscated their ball. You had no right to do any such thing. You are not a prefect, Coker. You will take two hundred lines."

"Look here, Sir" began Coker.

"Go indoors and clean yourself up" snapped Prout. "Your appearance is disgraceful - scandalous. You resemble a - a - 'er beatnik, or some such person."

"But I tell you - "

"Coker. If you utter one more word I shall cane you, senior boy though you are."

"What!" gasped Coker, gazing at his form-master in sheer astonishment.

A plump forefinger was wagged just under Coker's nose.

"Just one more word, Coker."

Horace Coker opened his mouth.

Then he closed it again.

Prout meant it. He really meant it! Coker would be whopped like some unruly kid in a junior form.

Really, it was futile to attempt to reason with this man Prout.

Coker turned round slowly and tramped away towards the House.

"Pah!" snorted Mr. Prout.

There came a ripple of laughter from behind him, and he spun round.

A large crowd had gathered, at a safe distance, to watch what Hobson of the Shell had humorously dubbed the "Prout and Coker Show" and which, in Hobson's stated opinion, would be much more entertaining than any of the current TV comedy shows.

"What do all you boys want?" snapped Prout. "Kindly disperse."

All those boys apparently wanted nothing, for they kindly dispersed.

There was nothing else for them to wait for now. The show was over.

Frowning, Mr. Prout walked ponderously into the House just as the bell rang.

* * * * *

"I say, the bell's gone" said Myers. "Everybody's gone in."

"Blow the bell!" grunted Dicky Nugent. "This is more important than the bell."

"Old Twigg will be wild if we're late" said Gatty. "We were late yesterday."

"Never mind about old Twigg" said Dicky impatiently. "You leave old Twigg to me. I know how to handle old Twigg. Let's wait just another minute. We can't miss this."

"Oh, all right, then" replied Gatty in a tone of resignation. "It had better happen pretty soon, though."

"Stop narking and just watch" said Dicky. "Any moment now Loder may - oh, look - look!"

Dicky Nugent gave a gasp of excitement and pointed towards the windows of the Sixth Form studies.

One window had suddenly been hurled up. Loder was seen to lean out, a cloud of smoke billowing out past him. Then Loder, holding a handkerchief over his nose and mouth, disappeared from view.

An alarmed and furious Loder had groped his way through the smoke and escaped into the Sixth Form passage.

"Just look at all that smoke!" said Dicky excitedly. "It's worked. This is just great!"

"Fabulous" chuckled Gatty.

The three fags doubled up with mirth.

"Cave!" hissed Myers suddenly. "Watch it. Here comes the Head - and Quelch!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Dicky. "Here - keep back - behind that tree!"

The three boys made themselves as inconspicuous as possible.

Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch came walking along the path, deep in conversation. They would pass within a few yards of Dicky and Co.

Mr. Quelch had been partaking of morning coffee with Dr. Locke and Mrs. Locke. He was free in third school, when the Remove had maths with Mr. Lascelles.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. "There is a fire in the House. Those are the Sixth Form studies."

The two masters gazed at the cloud of smoke pouring from Loder's window.

"I will go and investigate" said the Remove master. "Excuse me."

"Yes, please do, Quelch, please do" Dr. Locke replied. "I will follow you."

Mr. Quelch fairly sprinted across to the door of the House.

Dr. Locke followed, pausing for a moment to call to Gosling who had just emerged from his lodge and was staring, with his mouth open, at the cloud of smoke.

"Please come at once, Gosling" called the Head. "There appears to be a fire. We shall need your help with the fire extinguishers."

"Yessir, cert'n'ly, Sir" said Gosling.

Gosling came plodding across the Close behind Dr. Locke.

His progress was not very rapid.

Gosling was not a believer in rapid motion.

"Be as quick as you can, Gosling" called the Head, with some asperity, as he glanced round. "This is an emergency. We may have to sound the fire alarm."

"Yessir, cert'n'ly, Sir."

Gosling accelerated and passed Dr. Locke. He clambered breathlessly up the steps of the House, and disappeared through the doorway.

Dr. Locke came bustling up behind him, looking agitated.

As soon as the Head had entered the House, Dicky Nugent and Co. slipped in quickly and made their way to their classroom.

* * * * *

"You three boys are late for class again" said Mr. Twigg sternly, as Dicky Nugent and Gatty and Myers trailed into the Second Form room. "Why are you late?"

"We're really frightfully sorry we're late, Sir" said Dicky contritely.

"Awfully sorry, Sir" piped up Gatty and Myers in unison.

"It's all this fagging for Loder, you see, Sir" explained Dicky.

"Nugent mi. has such a lot of fagging to do for Loder, Sir" said Gatty.

"Loder blows his top if things havn't been done, Sir" said Dicky.

"We stayed with Nugent mi. till he'd finished, you see, Sir" added Myers.

"I waited to make sure that Loder was quite satisfied with everything I'd done, you see, Sir" continued Dicky.

"We didn't want to leave Nugent mi. on his own, Sir" said Gatty.

"Gatty and Myers wouldn't leave me, Sir."

"We're awfully sorry, Sir."

"Yes, yes, yes - all right. That's enough" said Mr. Twigg. "Nugent Minor - you must complete your fagging duties in your own time, not in classroom time."

"Yes, Sir. Very sorry, Sir" replied Dicky.

"If you three boys are late again you will all go into detention. Now go and sit down."

Dicky Nugent and Co. went to their desks and the Second's geography lesson was resumed.

Mr. Twigg proceeded to impart many useful and interesting geographical facts to the Second.

Some of them lodged in Second Form minds.

A few of them remained there after the end of the lesson.

* * * * *

Gosling sat down on his chair by the gates.

He pulled out his pipe and his tobacco pouch from his pocket.

He had just returned from Loder's study.

Smoke no longer rolled from Loder's window. Gosling had inserted a poker into the chimney, and the bird's nest had dropped into the grate. Then the fire had burned up brightly, bird's nest and all.

It was a funny thing about that bird's nest, Gosling reflected. He had never known one to fall down a school chimney and lodge just above the fireplace, like that. A chimney obstruction, when loosened, generally dropped right down into the grate. It occurred to Gosling that some junior boy might have wedged that nest in the chimney for a prank.

Gosling was well aware that Loder was highly unpopular with the Lower School.

He was also unpopular with Gosling.

Gosling's opinion of Loder of the Sixth was that he was a surly and disagreeable young fellow who never gave a man a tip - not even at Christmas time.

If some junior had smoked Loder out of his study, then that particular young rip had earned Gosling's approval.

The memory of Loder's red and angry face, outside the smoky study, caused a grin to spread slowly over Gosling's gnarled countenance.

He chuckled.

There came the sound of a vehicle outside.

Sir Hilton Popper's car entered the gateway and sped across to the House.

Gosling heaved himself up to give the customary salute. By the time he had attained a perpendicular position, Sir Hilton's car had already pulled up by the steps of the School House.

Gosling grunted and sat down again. He struck a match and attended to his pipe.

The sunshine was really warm now.

Peace and quiet reigned once more at Greyfriars. Gosling puffed contentedly at his pipe.

Morning break was over.

Best Wishes and Xmas Greetings to all my friends.

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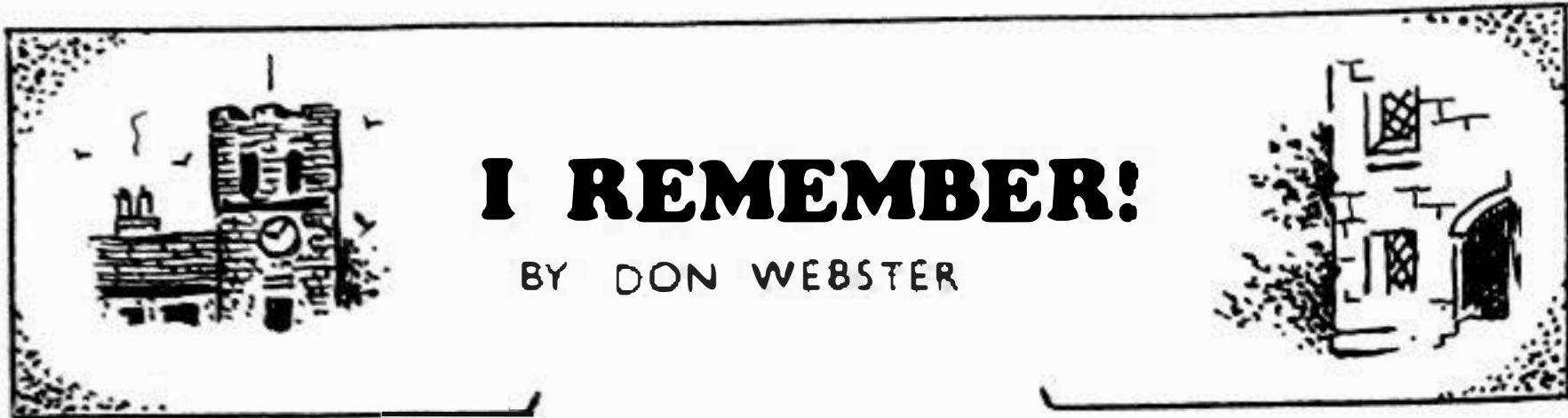
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"Remembrance wakes with all her busy train" - Goldsmith

Just recently our Editor referred to pleasures of a past era, halcyon days, never to return. This set me reminiscing, so I have endeavoured to add to his nostalgic memories. I could have called this article 'Don's Diary', but I'm afraid it is not in chronological order.

Let us start with the years 1912/14, when I can remember the loss of the "Titanic", the sad news of Scott's journey to the South Pole. The last of the horse buses. There were trams, hansom cabs and lovely steam engines. To see a locomotive all lit up at night, with sparks flying, was indeed a thrill. (I could have used an axe on Lord Beeching.) In those days there were long luggage racks on the trains and there was a leather strap to open and shut the window.

I can remember the sweets I used to buy - aniseed balls 24 for a penny, a strip or stick of liquorice, sherbert or lemonade powder. Frys "Five Boys" cream chocolate or Sharps Toffee or Cadburys REAL milk chocolate. Sweets were 4 ozs. for a penny. We played marbles - glass ones sometimes - and "conkers", collected cigarette cards - what a mine of information these were, certainly aided my education. There were hoops and peg tops. In those days we all walked to school - today, a car drops the pupils outside the door. Teachers were respected, and there was such a thing as discipline - regretfully absent today.

With the advent of the first world war, we said goodbye to The Red Magnet and The Blue Gem. I can remember my first Gem. Magnet and Comic Cuts were passed on to me when I was about 8 - 9 years old, by an older boy who lived two doors away, and who later was unfortunately killed on the Somme. At school, I swapped the Gem or Magnet for the Boys' Realm, because it ran a cricket serial by Charles Hamilton, entitled "King Cricket", and most of the leading players of the day were included in the story. Talking of cricket, I am reminded of a long chat I once had with Hedley Verity - (Yorks. and England) - on his return from Australia, following the "Body Line" tour. He insisted it was "leg theory", used to prevent Don Bradman scoring so many runs on the off-side of the wicket.

I wonder how many readers remember the advertisement for Bovril (prevents that sinking feeling), or Pears Soap (Bubbles). The milk churns - no bottles or cartons, you took your own jug. The gas lamps and the lamp lighter with his long pole. The Muffin Man, and butter that was "patted", not ready wrapped. I remember the two world wars - air raids - rationing, blackouts and gas masks.

I remember 'Bus tickets were clipped, and had the various destinations printed on them - the dearest fare was 11d. Doughnuts were 1d each. The "Bobby"

walked his beat - today he rides in a panda car. Gramophone records were 2/6 each. You could go from Paddington to Torquay for 10/- weekend return. Even Kew Gardens only charged 1d in those days, now it is 25 pence. We certainly live in an age of inflation for I remember attending the first Wembley Cup Final for 1/6 and visiting Lords or The Oval at a cost of 1/- entrance fee. Fares and charges are astronomical these days.

I remember eagerly awaiting the first Holiday Annual (1920), and how I spoke on the telephone to Frank Richards and H. A. Hinton, and how excited I was to see my name in print as one of the prize winners in Chums and The Scout. Also, the pleasure, when receiving my first letter from Frank Richards. What a joy it was to watch Jack Hobbs or Frank Woolley, playing in County or Test cricket. Today it all seems to be one day games and Ian Botham. In "soccer" it was a delight to watch Matthews or Finney - no such skilful players today in my opinion. There was no crowd trouble at a local "Derby" or Cup Tie, even with a gate of 50,000.

I remember my visits to the cinema (prices 3d, 6d, 9d), to see Mary Pickford or Blanche Sweet - (I fell for Her), and Stewart Rome, a real Adonis, who lived near me. I could hardly wait for next weeks instalment of Pearl White in the "Exploits of Elaine", or Houdini in the "Hidden Hand", and of course, Charlie Chaplin.

I must not forget the Variety Theatre, where I saw G. H. Elliott - The Chocolate Coloured Coon - Marie Lloyd, George Robey and other notable performers. The cinema organ, particularly Joseph Muscant at the Kensington Cinema in Hammersmith.

How fortunate it was to discover the O.B.B.C. and the C.D. and to re-read "The Toff" and the "Stacey" series, which made such an impact when I first read them. How I looked forward to the Christmas Double Numbers, and how upset I was when there wasn't one for the Gem in 1918. Respect seems to be a forgotten word. I recently visited my old Scout H.Q. - Long trousers have replaced shorts and the scout master was addressed as "Jack" - signs of the times, familiarity breeds contempt.

One thing I miss are the small shopkeepers, with their personal attention and civility. How different it is today with the advent of the supermarket, with its couldn't care less attitude. When unlike today, prices were stable.

Finally, I remember a leisurely world without radio or T.V., when holidays were spent at the seaside, in the British Isles, with entertainment, provided by "The Pierrots" on the pier. The "Do gooders" and the Beurocrats are ruling our lives; even our Counties now have different names on our maps. Maybe we have more money these days, but I doubt if the present generation are as happy, or get as much fun out of life than we did.

The "Good Old Days?" What do you think?

Gone are the days of our youth too soon (The Kerry Dance).

N.B. If I have omitted any of your recollections, I crave you indulgence.



There was a tap at the study door.

Mr. Buddle, seated at his desk near the window, looked up and sighed. Mr. Buddle had had a busy day, and he was tired. It was prize-giving day at Slade, and most of the afternoon he had spent seated on an uncomfortable chair in Big Hall, where a number of Slade boys had presented an entertainment of sorts for the edification of the rest of the school and a couple of hundred visiting parents.

Mr. Buddle's own form had performed excerpts from "Julius Caesar", but Meredith, who played Casca, had completely spoiled the effect by treading on Mark Antony's toga and ripping it from that gentleman's back. So the excerpts, to the rehearsal of which Mr. Buddle had devoted many hours of his spare time, were changed from tragedy to rollicking farce. As a tragedy, Mr. Buddle's production might have just got by. As a farce, it was terrific.

The seniors had presented a Greek play, and during its presentation Mr. Buddle found his chair grow harder and harder.

The entertainment had taken two hours, and the following forty

minutes were devoted to the prize-giving, with Mr. Buddle and the rest of the staff seated on hard chairs on the stage. Mr. Scarlet, Headmaster of Slade, had made a speech which seemed unending, and then the prizes and certificates had been presented by a governor of the school.

At long last it was over, and Mr. Buddle had fled, in the cool of the evening, to the solitude of his study, dodging many dotting parents en route.

Only two more days to go and then the term would be over. How nice it would be, thought Mr. Buddle, if he could spend his vacation on an island where all boys were drowned at birth.

The tap on the door was repeated, a little louder this time.

"Come in", snapped Mr. Buddle.

The lady who entered was about forty. She was plumpish, had beautifully waved golden hair, and wore a becoming frock in pale blue material. A white Dutch collar threw her striking hair into vivid relief.

Mr. Buddle rose to his feet, stifling a grunt.

"Mr. Buddle?"

"Yes, madam! Can I help you?"

The pink cheeks of the newcomer creased into a smile.

"Mr. Buddle, you must drive me away if I am a nuisance. The last thing I wish to be is a nuisance. You must be busy, so near to the end of term. But could I speak to you for one minute - for one minute only - about Cedric?"

"Cedric!" echoed Mr. Buddle mechanically. The name rang a bell. He had heard it before. With a sinking at his heart he feared that he had a Cedric in his own form.

"I am Mrs. Meredith", said the lady in blue material.

Mr. Buddle's worst fears were realised.

"Please be seated, Mrs. Meredith. As you say, I am very busy but ---"

"Of course you are busy. Aren't we all?" agreed Mrs. Meredith. She closed the door, and sank down gratefully into Mr. Buddle's armchair. "But if you can spare me one minute only ---"

She talked solidly for fifteen minutes. She spoke of herself, of her husband who had been unable to accompany her to the prize-giving, and of her son. Most of all, of her son. She clearly overlooked the fact that Mr. Buddle had other boys in his class beside her son.

"We do not spoil Cedric, of course", insisted Mrs. Meredith. "Certainly not. But he is very precious to us - very precious indeed. I confess that he is precious to us. Of course, it is certain that we shall never have another son ---"

Mr. Buddle was about to express

his congratulations but checked himself in time.

"It is practically impossible to spoil a boy like Cedric", explained Mrs. Meredith. "He is a remarkable character. To a large extent he has my personality and his father's brain. I know that some of our relatives consider that we indulge Cedric. Perhaps we do, Mr. Buddle - perhaps we do."

"Surely not!" murmured Mr. Buddle, glad to get a word in.

Mrs. Meredith smiled, opened the dainty handbag which was hanging at her wrist, and drew out a folded sheet of paper.

"The point is this, Mr. Buddle. In two days Slade closes for the summer vacation. My brother has promised to take Cedric touring on the continent for a month, including a week's visit to Paris. The holiday will be immensely enjoyable for Cedric, and, of course, educational. Our boy is thrilled with the idea."

"No doubt" said Mr. Buddle.

Mrs. Meredith shook her head sadly.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Buddle, my brother imposed a condition. It is that Cedric shall have a reasonably good report at this term-end. His reports have not been very good since he has been at Slade, I regret to say. I think, perhaps, that he is not fully understood here, though he loves Slade. He did so well at his prep school. I saw the Principal of his prep school only recently and the good man assured me that his school really seemed a different place after Cedric left."

"I am sure of that!" breathed Mr. Buddle.

"However, the main thing is that Cedric is happy here. His father

and I do not bother so much about his scholastic progress. But my brother, Mr. Buddle, is an obstinate man - almost pig-headed, I might say. He will not take Cedric on this prolonged holiday abroad unless the boy has a good report. I begged my brother to be reasonable, and he relented so far as to say that he would take Cedric providing there is one - just one - redeeming item on his report." Mrs. Meredith unfolded the sheet of paper which she had taken from her bag. "I have here Cedric's report for this term - Mr. Scarlet would normally dispatch it at term-end, but he allowed me to have it this afternoon. Mr. Buddle - " Mrs. Meredith looked reproachful. "Mr. Buddle, there is not one - not one redeeming item on this term's report."

"Your son, with a fine holiday dependent on a good report, should have worked harder", said Mr. Buddle grimly.

"Well, yes, of course he should - but boys will be boys", sighed Mrs. Meredith. "Listen to these items, Mr. Buddle. They are so discouraging for a lad who has done his best. Religious Knowledge: 'This boy takes but little interest. He has no spiritual yearning'. Initialled J.B."

"My own initials." observed Mr. Buddle.

"The next item also bears your initials, Mr. Buddle. English Language: 'Spelling careless. Composition indifferent. This boy has an excellent brain which he refuses to use.' English Literature: 'This boy is disinclined to concentrate'. Attention to Study: 'This boy is lousy.'"

"What!"

"Lazy!" corrected Mrs. Meredith. She coughed. "It's your appalling writing, Mr. Buddle. Doctors and

schoolmasters are notorious for their dreadful writing, aren't they?"

Mr. Buddle grunted.

"The report is the same all the way through", went on Mrs. Meredith. "Chemistry: 'This boy is irresponsible. His experiments put the entire school in peril'. Initialled P.C."

"That is Mr. Crathie, the chemistry master", muttered Mr. Buddle.

"Mathematics: 'This boy has no head for figures. His conduct at times leads one to suspect that he has no head at all'. Initialled B.C. The Classics master has been positively facetious, Mr. Buddle. He has written 'This boy prefers to be at the bottom of the class as it is near the radiator in winter and the window in summer'. The French master has written 'Sans esperance.'"

Mr. Buddle stirred uneasily on his chair.

"I suggest, madam, that you and his father should have a serious talk with Cambric --"

"Cedric!"

"Cedric!" agreed Mr. Buddle. "I am sorry that the lad should be disappointed over his holiday, but the fault is his own. Even so, Mrs. Meredith, surely the report is not all bad. At sports, for instance, I should have thought, your son is above average --"

Mrs. Meredith shook her head, and glanced down again at the report form.

She read out: "Sports and Athletics: 'Slack. This boy needs to develop latent sporting instincts'. Initialled R.C."

Mr. Buddle sat very still for a few moments. He regarded Mrs. Meredith thoughtfully, and then leaned

forward and took the report form. He read it through. His brows knitted as his eyes lingered on the comments of the Games Master: 'Slack. This boy needs to develop latent sporting instincts'. Then the initial R.C.

Until this moment Mr. Buddle would have thought it quite impossible for any master to be unjust to Meredith of Slade. Meredith was a lazy, harum-scarum scholar; his general conduct left very much to be desired. But Mr. Buddle did not believe that Meredith was ever slack or lacking sporting instincts on the playing fields. True, Mr. Buddle did not take any interest in school games, but rumours of Meredith's prowess on the cricket ground had reached even Mr. Buddle.

Mr. Buddle did not like Meredith. The boy was far too troublesome in every way. But Mr. Buddle was kind at heart, and he had a strong sense of justice.

He rose to his feet.

"Mrs. Meredith", he said, "I think that possibly there has been a slight error in one of these items. I hope so. I will go into the matter." He paused, and then added: "The reports are, of course, carefully reconsidered by Mr. Scarlet before they are sent out. I think I can promise you that there will be at least one redeeming feature on the report when it reaches you. Please leave it with me now."

Mrs. Meredith rose, and held out her hand. Happiness was shining in her bright blue eyes.

"Mr. Buddle", she said impulsively, "you are an understanding man. You know, of course, that your boys call you 'The Gump'".

"The Gump!" ejaculated Mr. Buddle.

"It is a term of affection", said Mrs. Meredith. "I can only

add that you are a very kind and understanding 'Gump'."

Mr. Buddle was speechless as she took her departure.

Thirty minutes later Mr. Buddle made his way to the Sixth Form Passage. He paused outside the Head Boy's study - the largest on the long corridor. There was a murmur of conversation from within.

Mr. Buddle tapped on the door and entered.

Antrobus, Captain of Slade, was sprawling in an armchair with his feet resting inelegantly on a bottom-up wastepaper basket. Also in the study and industriously oiling a cricket bat was Scarlet, who, owing to his relationship to the Headmaster of Slade, was known to all and sundry by the nickname of Pinky-Mi.

At the unexpected appearance of Mr. Buddle, Antrobus hastily removed his feet from the wastepaper basket, and hoisted his big muscular frame from the armchair. Both seniors looked with surprise at the master of the Lower Fourth.

"I am glad to find you here, Antrobus, and you too, Scarlet", said Mr. Buddle. "I would like just a word with you both concerning a boy in my form - Meredith."

"Yes, sir?"

Antrobus raised his eyebrows in polite enquiry. Pinky-Mi placed his cricket bat on the table, and wiped his fingers on a piece of rag.

"As Head Prefect", Antrobus, you will be aware that Meredith is rather a troublesome boy", continued Mr. Buddle.

"Very troublesome, sir", agreed the Captain of Slade. "A cheeky young devil, sir, though he has his good points. Is he in trouble?"

"Not at all!" said Mr. Buddle. He pursed his lips, while Antrobus and Pinky-Mi regarded him curiously. He went on:

"Though Meredith is a lazy boy in class, and troublesome to a degree, I have always had the impression that he is sound and keen at his games. As Head Games Prefect, Antrobus, you will be able to correct me if I am wrong."

Antrobus answered without hesitation.

"Meredith is an excellent young sportsman, sir, and keen as mustard", he said. "He is one of our most promising juniors at cricket, and a good winger on the soccer field."

Mr. Buddle nodded.

"I thought so. You are, to some extent, responsible for the junior games, so you know what you are talking about."

"I'm responsible to the Games Master, and I have plenty of contact with junior sports." Antrobus refrained from saying that the Games Master of Slade was lazy, and left as much as he possibly could to the Head Games Prefect. "I can assure you, sir, that Meredith is a fine young sportsman, whatever he may be like at his lessons."

"Quite so!" said Mr. Buddle with satisfaction. "You would say the same thing, Scarlet?"

"Certainly, sir. Meredith is a grand kid on the playing fields", said Pinky-Mi at once.

"Thank you, boys, you have been most helpful", said Mr. Buddle. "That is all I wanted to know. Good-night to you both."

The two seniors stared at one another as the door closed behind Mr. Buddle.

"What's in the wind?" demanded Antrobus.

"Dust!" replied Pinky-Mi.

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Mr. Ronnie Crayford, Games Master of Slade, sauntered up Masters' Corridor, swinging in his hand a pair of wet swimming-trunks. After the prizegiving Mr. Crayford had gone to the school swimming pool where he had been giving an elaborate display of diving before a group of admiring seniors. Mr. Crayford enjoyed being the centre of an admiring group.

A tall, slim young man, athletic and sun-tanned, Mr. Crayford was quite nice-looking, and knew it. In the nearby village of Everslade he was accustomed to making feminine hearts flutter, and he enjoyed that accomplishment. At Slade he was generally detested by junior school. The seniors he made a point of meeting on their own level, chatting with them man to man, with a wealth of their slang and the frequent dubious innuendo. Some seniors regarded him as a jolly good fellow; others instinctively disliked him.

Mr. Crayford opened his study door, and was surprised to find his light switched on, and Mr. Buddle seated on a chair.

"Ah, the good old Gump!" said Mr. Crayford. "How remiss of me to forget inviting you to make free with my study!"

He tossed the wet swimming-trunks into a corner - they narrowly missed Mr. Buddle's nose - and perched himself on the side of the table.

"Can I offer you a glass of luke-warm beer?" he enquired.

"Thank you, no!" said Mr. Buddle.

"A glass of Eto's, perhaps?"

Mr. Buddle rose to his feet. He held two sheets of paper in his

hand.

"I have come to you concerning Meredith's report", he said calmly. "You seem to have made an error."

Crayford lit a cigarette.

"Meredith? Who's Meredith?"

"Meredith", said Mr. Buddle, "is a boy in my form. You coach him at sports, so presumably he has not escaped your attention entirely."

"Oh, that smelly little nit! Hasn't he been turfed out of Slade yet?"

"If you will kindly be serious", said Mr. Buddle, "I shall be glad if you will glance at your entry on Meredith's report."

Crayford chuckled, blew a stream of smoke in Mr. Buddle's direction, and took the report. He glanced at it.

"Let's see! Sports - sports - yes, here we are. What have I written? 'Slack. This boy needs to develop latent sporting instincts.' Yes, that's right. What about it?"

"I think you have made a mistake", said Mr. Buddle

"A mistake? A spelling mistake, do you mean? Good lord!"

"I do not mean a spelling mistake", said Mr. Buddle. "I suggest that your comment is neither fair nor accurate."

Crayford laughed pleasantly.

"Buddle, you can take your suggestion out of my study - and yourself along with it."

He held out the report form, but Mr. Buddle did not take it.

"I require you to alter that entry", said Mr. Buddle.

"What?" Crayford spun his cigarette into the grate, slid from

the table, and towered over Mr. Buddle. "You require it! You REQUIRE it! You damned old fool, what do you know about the games? You don't know a goal post from a cricket stump. Get to blazes out of here."

"You would not swear in the Headmaster's presence, so kindly don't do so in mine", said Mr. Buddle imperturbably. "As I have just stated, I wish you to alter your entry on this report."

Crayford stared at him.

"If you think you can dictate to me what I put in my reports you've got another think coming", he said. "What's it matter to you what I put about Meredith? The little beast is your hair shirt - you've often neighed about it in Master's Common Room. You hate the sight of him."

"You exaggerate, Crayford", said Mr. Buddle. "Meredith is a troublesome boy, but I should never allow my personal feelings to colour the justice I mete to any lad in my form."

"Where's your wings, you pious old fraud?"

"Let me finish, please. I know for a fact that a special holiday for this boy is dependent on his receiving a moderate report."

"Do you mean that I've blued his chances of a holiday?" queried Crayford. "That's good news, old man. It's made my day."

"I daresay!" said Mr. Buddle. "You have not given him the credit he deserves, for I know that he is above average on the sports field. I beg you to change your entry on his report."

"I shall do nothing of the sort", snapped Crayford.

"I think you will", said Mr.

Buddle.

Crayford was breathing hard.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" he demanded. "Meredith may be in your form, but I am in charge of games. Old Pink would never allow you to interfere in my province, and you know it."

Mr. Buddle smiled sourly.

"I think you are malicious, Crayford", he said. He went on softly: What has Meredith done recently to annoy you? Bowled you out at the nets, or expressed his opinion of you in your hearing?"

A bright flush suffused the Games Master's face.

"Clear out!" he said loudly. "Do you want me to complain to old Pink?"

"By all means." agreed Mr. Buddle.

It was a clash of wills. Mr. Crayford was young, tall and strongly-built. Mr. Buddle was middle-aged and rather a little man. But Mr. Buddle was not afraid of Mr. Crayford.

"By all means!" repeated Mr. Buddle. "In fact, unless you alter your entry on this report I am going at once to the Chief to place the matter in his hands. I shall tell him that Meredith is a sound boy at sports and that, in my opinion, your entry is false and malicious."

Crayford was white with anger now.

"Old Pink would tell you to mind your own damn business", he shouted.

"Perhaps, but I think not. I am willing to put it to the test. I shall also take with me Antrobus, the Head Games Prefect, and Scarlet of the Sixth. Both these seniors will speak in high terms of

Meredith's record on the sports field."

There were at least fifteen seconds of dead silence, while Crayford glared at Mr. Buddle, and Mr. Buddle stared back urbanely.

At last Crayford said:

"I don't want to bother the Old Man. He wouldn't be pleased - so near to the end of term --"

"Naturally!"

Crayford clenched his fists convulsively.

"Let it go, Buddle. You've no brief for Meredith. You loathe the little blighter. Parents take no notice of reports, anyway. Clear out, and forget it."

"I have brought", said Mr. Buddle, "a fresh report form. You will fill in your entry, and I will have the form completed later. You may borrow my fountain pen, if you take care with the nib."

Crayford forced a laugh.

"Have it your own way, you obstinate old cuss. What do you want me to put? 'The Gump's little pet is a good boy at games'?"

"You will merely write 'Very satisfactory' - and initial it", said Mr. Buddle.

Crayford took the pen which Mr. Buddle extended, and bent over the blank report form on the table. He wrote 'Very Satisfactory' against the printed words Sports and Athletics. He initialled the entry, and flung down the pen.

"Thank you, Crayford", said Mr. Buddle.

He took up the pen, and screwed on the cap. Then, with the new report form in his hand, he turned to the door.

"I shall remember this, Buddle", said Mr. Crayford viciously.

Mr. Buddle looked back.

"I am glad to hear it. The memory of this occasion may help you to act less unscrupulously in the future."

Crayford forced another laugh.

"You stupid old dodderer!" he said satirically. "No wonder the kids in your form call you the Gump!"

From the doorway, Mr. Buddle looked at him.

"Crayford", he said with dignity, "I am indifferent to the fact that I have earned the nickname of the Gump in this school. No doubt you are equally indifferent to the fact that a number of boys refer to you as the Slug."

Mr. Buddle walked away, leaving the door wide open. There was a crash which rang down the corridor as Mr. Crayford slammed it.

Late that evening Mr. Buddle sat down in his study to put the finishing touches to Meredith's report. The other masters, who had the doubtful pleasure of instructing Meredith in various subjects, had filled in their remarks in the respective spaces on the form. It had caused no comment. It often happened that, for some reason or another, a report had to be re-written.

Mr. Buddle took up his pen. In all but one of the spaces for which he was responsible Mr. Buddle filled in the same remark as he had written on the first report.

At the space allotted to English literature, however, Mr. Buddle paused and meditated. He scratched his balding head with the end of his pen.

Then he smiled sourly, and wrote: "Gives promise". He added his initials - J.B.

He rose to his feet, yawned, and addressed the bust of Shakespeare on his mantelpiece.

"I hope", he informed the bard, "that Heaven will forgive me when the time comes."

It was breaking-up day. Slade was dispersing for the summer vacation. Many boys had gone already in private cars which had collected them, and several motor-coaches stood in the Close, waiting to take a number to Everslade railway station.

Mr. Buddle was strolling under the trees when a boy ran up to him. He was a soulful-looking boy, with golden hair and bright blue eyes. He wore the Slade blazer of mauve and white, and he snatched off his mauve and white cap as he spoke to Mr. Buddle.

"Good-bye, sir. I'm going now, sir. I hope you have a grand holiday, sir."

Mr. Buddle smiled a frosty smile. He held out his hand, and the boy gripped it for a moment.

"Good-bye, Meredith. Have an enjoyable time, and don't forget all you've learned."

"I won't sir." Meredith ran his fingers through his golden hair. "I'm going abroad, I think, sir. Going to Paris."

"Good!" said Mr. Buddle. "Travel is good for us. It broadens the mind. There is plenty to be learned in Paris. You must visit the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, the Champs Elysees, the site of the Bastille --"

"Oh, yes, sir, I shall see all those", said Meredith earnestly. "There's another place, too, that I wouldn't miss for anything, in Paris."

"Ah!" said Mr. Buddle, "And

which place is that, Meredith?"

"The Folies Bergeres, sir!" said Meredith innocently. "They tell me it's very instructive. Well, good-bye sir. I mustn't miss the bus."

Mr. Buddle watched the speeding figure running for the bus, cap clutched in hand, and golden hair swept wild in the breeze.

"That boy", murmured Mr. Buddle, "is no Tom Merry."

He squared his shoulders. Term was over. The hair shirt was no longer torturing his flesh. It was good to be alive.

Mr. Buddle strode briskly away.

* * * * *

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THE MYSTERY OF THE SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE

An Unfinished Adventure Recounted by Ernest Holman.



CHAPTER I

The Science of Deduction

I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes on the Tuesday following the first Sunday after the full moon which had happened on, or next after, the 21st day of March, to discover if he had had a pleasant Easter Monday. I found him gazing thoughtfully at a bowler hat hanging from the corner of a chair. In answer to my greeting, he offered the belief that someone, certainly, had enjoyed the day.

"In the late hours of last night, Watson" he said, "I was awakened by much shouting and singing outside the front door. This morning, the good Mrs. Hudson found this object on the doorstep."

I looked at the hat on the chair, which he then proceeded to hand to me. I sat upon the latter and took the former in my hand. Obviously, Holmes wanted me to make some observations; knowing his methods, I gave it a close scrutiny.

"An ordinary type, Holmes; nothing special that I can see. No indication of ownership. Possibly expensive - quite well made. Lost, presumably, in the drunken brawl that awakened you."

"Well done, my friend, well done! How typically you construct matters. Missing all points of interest, of course."

I bridled, if such a performance can be achieved from the depths

of a chair. Perhaps, I requested my companion, he would be kind enough to indicate the relevant items.

"Well, Watson, you were quite correct when you described the article as of an expensive nature. Well made, too, as you say. This hat was manufactured by none other than the Royal Hatter, B. Spoke - ha, you did not notice the trade insignia of the Head Pimple! Now, I ask you, would a person who purchases such an item of wear be likely to frequent Baker Street in the late hours, taking part in a fracas?"

"Probably not! Pray, what else have I failed to notice?"

"The size, Watson, the size! Man, a person wearing such a hat would have the cranium the equal of Professor Moriarty. Moriarty, now - think of him. The possessor of an intelligence only exceeded by one man!"

Holmes bowed his head as he made that remark.

"Are you saying, Holmes, that the owner of this hat is another Moriarty?"

"Either that or the Professor is still with us!"

"But he died in the Reichenbach Falls. He could not have returned from there, now, could he?"

"Why not, Watson, I did!"

"True, Holmes; but then you were always a most remarkable man!"

He appeared gratified by my

statement.

"Quite so, although it was stated that I was never the same man again. However, if Moriarty - or, I grant you, another such - is at work, then it must be my own superior intelligence that will again prove his undoing."

"Yes, but surely you are not suggesting such an event because a large-sized hat is left on your doorstep?"

"My friend, for some time now I have sensed, felt, been aware of a Presence in my affairs. As you know, so successful have I been that there are now no criminals left in London - in fact, Scotland Yard has become extinct. Nowadays, my life is spent in solving the lesser problems of life - domestic, social, and so on. I may say that I have had no little success in this new field - my name is now as well-known in Suburbia as it was in the World's Capitals. I am the Ultimate Solver - or was!"

"Was?" I echoed, in disbelief.

"From quite small beginnings, increasing with time, it was becoming obvious that there existed a rival - a rival who, himself, had a consulting practice of no small dimensions. Gradually, I am being usurped, as an adviser and helper of the People."

"You think this Moriarty person is the rival, then?"

"I do, indeed; but now, I feel, I am a step nearer to reaching him."

"Because of this hat left on your doorstep?"

"Exactly. The drunken episode was especially staged for my benefit - my rival wished to draw me from my quarters and have me held for a while by his operatives; during which time he would search my rooms to discover just how much I may

or may not know about him. He miscalculated, though - he thought I would be easily drawn. When I was awakened, I was dreaming of Irene Adler - I had no intention of abandoning the lady and promptly returned from whence I had been disturbed."

"But how came the hat upon the step?"

"Porlock. You remember Porlock?"

"Ah, yes; the Birlstone Manor House business in Sussex. He was your informant, I believe?"

"He was not such a sound link in Moriarty's chain as the Professor had imagined. I suspect that this new Metropolitan Menace has a Porlock in his entourage. I have once or twice received anonymous help in trying to trace my rival. That hat belongs to this Moriarty and his Porlock has sent it to me as a clue!"

"Will not the hat be missed?"

"My helper will no doubt contrive a 'lost' explanation."

"Then what happens now? You can't go round London asking everyone to try on a bowler hat!"

"The good Watson is facetious!" chided Holmes. "The man will come to me - or he may send a henchman."

"Why should he?"

"Because of my advertisement in every one of London's ninety-nine evening newspapers, explaining that a bowler hat, size given, maker stressed, has come into the possession of the occupant of 221b Baker Street - and may be collected in person."

"When do you expect such a caller, then? Can I be present?"

"You ARE present, Watson" cried Holmes, springing to his feet as a discreet knock sounded on the door. "This, if I mistake not, is

our client now"

CHAPTER II

The Illustrious Client

The client who came into the room was a tall, distinguished - one might almost say, illustrious - man of indeterminate age. He bowed towards us.

"I have called in answer to your advertisement", he stated quietly.

"You wish to collect your bowler hat?" asked the detective. "Would that be the article in question?"

The illustrious-looking visitor took up the hat, looked inside, studied it and nodded gravely.

"I am very glad indeed, sir, to recover this hat. It has been very unpleasant venturing out of doors without it."

"You have no other?"

"Of inferior quality, sir. I could not be seen in London in any other but this article of wear."

"Could you not have purchased a similar one?"

"Far too expensive, sir. This was a special gift from Mr. Bertram Wooster, my employer. I rendered him a signal service, when I was able to prevent him from continuing to wear an Alpine hat in civilised society!"

"What is the nature of your employment?"

"I am a Gentleman's Personal Gentleman, sir", was the dignified reply. "My name is Jeeves - Reginald Jeeves. I am a member of an exclusive Club in Curzon Street for Gentlemen's Personal Gentlemen."

"A valet's Club?" I asked, incredulously.

"Mere valets are not admitted,

sir, except as occasional guests."

Holmes was showing signs of edginess. I could see he had suffered a disappointment. He made an attempt to retain his carefully thought-out theory.

"How did your hat come to be discovered on my doorstep. This is surely worthy of an explanation?"

"No doubt, sir. I cannot, however, offer you any aspect of enlightenment. I was passing through Portman Square late last night when some inebriated persons snatched my head wear from me and made off with it."

"You did not pursue them?"

"Oh, no, sir. That would have been far too undignified. I am, indeed, thankful that I have recovered the hat. Perhaps I may recompense you for your trouble in restoring the article to me?"

"Certainly not!" said Holmes and added, between his teeth, "My profession is sufficient reward for me."

"Ah, yes sir, you are a much sought-after consultant."

"You know of me, then?"

"Indeed, sir. You were the means of aiding a fellow member of my Club who had fallen before the machinations of Mr. Wooster's Aunt, the former Mrs. Spencer-Gregson."

"Of Pont Street", I said. "The lady in question, as I am sure you recall, Holmes, was notorious during her London residence."

Holmes nodded briefly; then, turning to the visitor, wished him a good day. The visitor paused at the door.

"I shall be repairing to the Curzon Street Establishment now, sir, and will be there during the rest of

today. If you should be in that direction, perhaps you would accept my invitation to partake of refreshment with me therein?"

"Thank you", I answered. Ignoring the obvious fact that Holmes had now lost all interest in the man, I added "We would be glad to do so. Good day to you."

When the visitor had departed, Holmes threw himself into a chair.

"A set-back, Watson - an undoubted set-back. I had really believed that I was on the right track; but - a member of a Club for Gentlemen Valets - how wrong can I be?"

"The size of the hat is surprising in such a person, Holmes?"

"Pooh, Watson - did you study his head? It stuck out at the back."

"What of that?"

"No intelligent cranium does so. The man is a fish-eater. He believes that such consumption strengthens his mental processes. Pah!"

"A set-back, as you say, Holmes. Yet we have been through many a temporary rebuff and triumphed in the end. We have sought, pursued, disappeared, returned, retired, restarted; we have experienced national disasters, including War. Here we still are, older and wiser, but surely with a good heart to meet a new challenge?"

"It is good of you to associate yourself so much with my triumphs, Watson. We have, indeed, weathered many storms. We have experienced, one or the other of us, many lives, so to speak - I may say, even, wives, Watson."

"Really, Holmes, you go too far!"

"The privilege of an old friend, surely?"

"What do you intend to do now?" I asked, rather gruffly.

"Seek afresh, of course. This new Moriarty will bite the dust, assuredly he will. I cannot conceive of my superior intelligence being beaten."

"You are convinced that within the streets of London and its surrounds there does, in fact, exist a very considerable intelligence. One who is, if I may say so, stealing your thunder?"

"Quite convinced. Somewhere, some day, we shall meet."

"And then?"

"Then his fall will be just as spectacular as Reichenbach!"

CHAPTER III

A Case of Identity

We both sat in silence for a while. Then I rose to my feet.

"May I ask you to grant me the use of your writing table, Holmes?"

"Of course, my good friend. You wish to make notes of this case for future use, no doubt?"

"More than that. Nowadays, as you know, my writing has not been very frequent. This present affair does seem worthy of mention and I intend to start the chronicle right away. I find that today I need to begin a case history immediately."

"But what of the ending, Watson?"

"That will come, Holmes - your cases always follow a set and successful pattern."

"Thank you, Watson. Then please go ahead and start your epistle."

I did so; I had just folded up the sheets and placed them in my pocket when Holmes took down his outdoor coat.

"I think that a walk in the good London air will be of help. As your wife is away, perhaps you will accompany me?"

"How did you know?" I began; he laughed.

"The doorman in the building opposite is Lestrade, formerly of the now-defunct Scotland Yard; he has been one of your patients recently. He tells me that you have not visited him, however, for some days. It is only when Mrs. Watson is absent that you allow the interests of your very absorbing practice to escape your notice. Come, let us be afoot."

We were about to descend the stairs leading to the front door when Holmes pulled me back. He pointed downwards.

"Do you see that mark on the second stair?"

"Why, yes, now you indicate it; and, look, there is a second stain near it. What is it?"

"Some kind of corrosive or wood-destroying agent, Watson; stay here whilst I get the antidote."

Within a few seconds he was pouring some foul-smelling liquid on to the stains.

"That will arrest the rot", he said. "Before long, the stuff would have quickly spread and the stairs would have soon disintegrated when walked upon; a narrow escape!"

"But who - and how?"

"My opponent, of course. Whilst he knew we were engaged with a client, he managed to make an entry and perform his deadly work. No matter - let us proceed upon our

outing."

It was pleasant in the open air; we walked through Manchester Square and had just crossed Marylebone Lane to the corner of Bentick Street when a two-horse van, driven at an alarming rate, almost ran into us. Holmes dragged me by the shoulder and we were able to move back; by then, the van had disappeared onwards. A little later we turned into Vere Street, to take us across Oxford Street to Bond Street. Half way along, a brick came down from the roof of one of the houses and shattered to pieces in front of us.

Shortly afterwards, we were attacked by a ruffian as we turned westwards out of Bond Street but Holmes knocked him down and he ran quickly away.

"We really must give this chap credit for trying, Watson" Holmes stated. "Let us make tracks for Baker Street, I think."

As we turned into Hay Hill, Holmes looked back and pointed across the road to a building in Dover Street.

"The Drones Club" he said. "Once upon a time, my clientele came in large numbers from there. Nowadays, I never see any of them."

"This new fellow - you think they have taken their problems to him?"

"Sure of it. One day, though - "

We continued onwards, by somewhat circuitous routes, mainly because Holmes was in a deep study and I had to divert him from time to time back to our intended direction. After a while, I realised we were in Curzon Street. I pointed this out to Holmes and reminded him that this was where Mr. Jeeves' exclusive Club was situated. I

suggested we partook of our late visitor's offer to call in and share a drink with him. Holmes was not keen but on my pressing him - the walk had rather warmed me and I was somewhat parched - he assented.

We could not have been more pleasantly greeted in any other West End Establishment. Mr. Jeeves was a charming Host and we chatted with him during drinks. He was very interested to know that I was engaged upon a new chronicle. He showed me to the writing room where I was able to continue my narrative to date. On returning, I observed signs of impatience in Holmes, so decided it was time to depart. Mr. Jeeves gallantly helped us on with our coats and escorted us to the exit. We stood for a while in Curzon Street.

There were several people passing to and fro and we had to step back once or twice to avoid obstructing anybody. One quick-walking individual knocked into Holmes briefly, murmured "Good night, Mr. Sherlock Holmes" and vanished into the crowd.

"I am knoweverywhere", Holmes was remarking, then paused.

He had placed his left hand into his coat pocket; he now withdrew it, holding a slip of paper. He looked at it and then, silently, handed it to me. I read: "Dear me, Mr. Holmes! Dear Me!"

"Good heavens!" I cried. "The very words Moriarty once sent you, in that affair I had called The Valley of Fear."

"Moriarty has one thing in common with me, Watson. We both escaped from those Falls!"

"He's here, in London, masquerading as - "

"Yes, Watson, masquerading as - what?"

"Holmes, we must get back to Baker Street. Let us take a cab - we are not safe in the streets."

"Quite; we shall do that. The cabs move slowly in this traffic, which will suit us both. I wish to think, you wish to add to your narrative. No, not that cab, Watson. It has been standing there some little time. Nor this second one that is approaching. We will proceed to the corner and hail one."

As we moved off, I looked into the large window of the Club we had just left; Mr. Jeeves was standing there and he inclined his head as we passed. I bowed in return and drew Holmes' attention - he, curtly, nodded.

"An interesting fellow", I remarked.

"My dear Watson, how easily you are diverted by trivia. Come, my friend, we have an enemy somewhere in London. Find him I must! Find him I will!"

He signalled a cab, which slowly approached.

"I'll have him, Watson", he said, as he and I stepped into the vehicle. "I'll have him." As the cab moved off, he turned to me.

"I shall provide you with the finish to your chronicle, Watson. Nothing shall prevent that. There can be no other result with one of my superior intelligence."





A reading of Harry Blyth's Blake stories today gives a feeling of near amazement that from such a beginning grew the vast saga of later years. In the early stories he plays no more important a part than his clients and the successful outcome of his cases is due more to coincidence than detection. Yet in these very early tales are to be found the themes which recur throughout the saga. Seeds which grew into such popular series as the Criminals Confederation, the Kestrel gang, the various femmes fatale and lesser but also recurring themes such as the search for eternal youth by aged doctors and Blake in love.

Harry Blyth, writing under the pseudonym of Hal Meredith, created Blake within a month or so of Conan Doyle consigning Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty to the Reichenbach Falls. He was part of the Harmsworth campaign for "good, clean and healthy" literature for the working classes. Possibly it was thought to try to fill the vacuum left by the departure of Holmes though the first attempt does not seem to have been particularly well received. The ½d Union Jack, which offered its readers stories of all types in those days, organised a competition in which readers were invited to criticise the first six stories which had been published in that weekly. Sexton Blake came in third place in popularity, the first place being taken by a story about the Ashanti war in Africa and second a South American tale about indians. Blake's name did not appear in the title of a story until No. 2 of the ½d Union Jack. This was his fourth appearance in print, the first three being in ½d Marvel Nos. 6, 7, and 11.

Blake's early character differs somewhat to that depicted in later times. He tended to be over optimistic and make rash promises to clients. Quoting from ½d Marvel No. 22: "With all his success, and the handsome fittings of his office, (in New Inn Chambers) our old friend was far too astute a detective to hamper himself with clerks and assistants." He was much of a lone wolf, very different to the Baker Street and Berkely Square days. Further, he did not like to be bested in any way by an opponent, in fact he went to considerable lengths to "get his own back", even if it did not lead to the apprehension of the crook. In one respect, however, he was then as he was always to be - never intimidated by any odds against him no matter how great. In appearance he was illustrated as looking something like what is now thought would be the appearance of a gentleman farmer at the turn of the century. Blake had rather less regard for the law in those far off days. He would allow wanted criminals to go free if they gave him information he wanted. He was, on the whole, contemptuous of Scotland Yard though on friendly terms with one or two individual officers.

A striking thing about these early stories is the way the criminals get their deserts. They are never brought to trial, they either kill one another off or suffer some fatal accident. Some of the accidents are wildly implausible. For instance in ½d Union Jack No. 15 one of the conspirators, who is also a murderer

and deserves a bad end, is gored and trampled to death by a savage bull which happens to escape from its tether at the time the criminal is trying to escape after being unmasked. It seems that anything to do with court proceedings and giving evidence will stigmatise the whole family of the victim of a crime and must be avoided at all costs.

Blake may not have favoured assistants or clerks but he did have a partner. He was a Frenchman named Jules Gervaise. Jules is very much the equal and very good friend of Blake whom he addresses as "Sexton". He seems to be an older man and in one story in which Blake is only briefly mentioned at the beginning, $\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel No. 48, it is implied that he has retired from regular practice. Jules is almost the complete opposite of Sexton. Where Blake literally bubbles with enthusiasm and zeal, making light of risks and dangers, Jules counsils caution and pessimistically advises the rejection of a case when he considers the dangers to Blake's life too great. This he does in $\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel No. 33. The story is aptly called "Sexton Blake's Peril" and the threat to Blake's life comes from a trio of international criminals called The Terrible Three. (A rather different trio to another threesome of greater fame, also known as The Terrible Three, who appeared in the Gem a number of years later.)

Turning to the stories themselves it is found that the first three of them are very much more complex than the remainder. These stories have both main plot and sub-plot woven together to form a very complex pattern. So much detail is included that any attempt to summarise the stories in detail virtually results in a rewrite in different words. As a consequence only a very brief treatment will be given.

The first story is "The Missing Millionaire" ($\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel No. 6 of 13, 12, 1893). This is basically a kidnapping story. Gold prospector Frank Ellaby strikes it rich in Australia but is robbed by his partners Calder Dulk and Dulk's wife. They also kidnap a small girl, Rose, who has been left in Ellaby's care. Years later after Ellaby has amassed another fortune he comes to England and engages Blake to find the Dulks. They are now members of a "a new and formidable society of professional law breakers of every class" known as the Red Lights of London. Their leader is an accomplished female impersonator named Leon Polti (one wonders if he is the forerunner of Leon Kestrel the Master Mummer?). The Dulks kidnap Ellaby himself and hold him to ransom but he manages to escape unaided before Blake and Gervaise can find where he is held. In a quarrel between members of the Red Lights Dulk is thrown from a moving railway train and killed. Rose is now grown up and about to be married. As a child she has been left in the care of a clergyman when Madame Dulk is sent to prison and all trace of her lost. After Dulk is killed Madame sees Rose in London and kidnaps her again. Rose is the long lost niece of a Duke and Madame Dulk hopes for a rich reward if she can restore Rose to her family. Unfortunately the Duke's son dies suddenly and the grief stricken father commits suicide. Blake rescues Rose and Madame Dulk is betrayed to the police by a confederate, Belus, whom she has disfigured in a fury by throwing a lighted lamp at him. Madame has destroyed the papers proving Rose's noble birth before trying to escape so any obstacle to her marriage is removed.

Several of the same characters appear in the second story "The Christmas Crime" ($\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel No. 7 of 12.12.1893). Rose is to be married at Christmas but on the previous night Frank Ellaby is attacked, robbed and left for dead by a near-do-well friend from Rose's schooldays, Jonas Finch. The bridegroom, Ernest Truelove, sees the attack, fights with Jonas but is clubbed into insensibility.

When he recovers Ellaby has disappeared. Later it is found that he has been taken and cared for by a Dr. Valdji who proposes to use him for rejuvenation experiments. Madame Dulk is Valdji's assistant. She had escaped from the police in a railway accident. Blake was to attend the wedding and escort a young woman, Lillie Ray, at Ellaby's request, Jules Gervaise is commissioned by Dillford Nutt to find his daughter who has contracted a runaway marriage with Jonas Finch against his wishes. Gervaise falls in with a gang called "The Assassins of the Seine" when pursuing his enquiries in Paris. He disappears and Blake goes to Paris to find him. Gervaise is lying low and on joining forces with Blake they round up the Assassin's gang. Blake discovers that Lillie Ray is Nutt's daughter. By this time he has fallen in love with her. In the mean time Lillie Ray has discovered that Ellaby is held by Dr. Valdji in "The Black Grange", a house near the scene of the crime. Jonas Finch is also staying with Valdji. On seeing him Lillie Ray runs away. Blake and Gervaise raid the Black Grange. In the confusion Belus finds Madame Dulk and strangles her. In the struggle Madame accidentally presses the button which connects the doctor's batteries to his store of explosives and the Grange is blown up killing Belus. Valdji perishes in the fire which follows. Jones escapes in a balloon which the doctor kept for experiments. Blake leaps into the basket just as the balloon rises from the ground. It drifts out to sea as Jonas and Blake struggle for mastery. Blake shoots a hole in the balloon, it comes down in the sea and Jonas is drowned. Blake is picked up by the ship in which Lillie Ray is leaving England. Dillford Nutt dies before his daughter returns and Rose marries Ernest. Blake is left with something "more than a half promise that she (Lillie Ray) will some day reward his devotion to her in the way he most desires."

These very briefest of outlines can give but little idea of the two stories which, even with all the improbabilities, stretching coincidence to extreme limits and having characters behave in an unlikely manner, can be read today with considerable enjoyment.

The same can be said of the 3d Marvel No. 11 of 17.1.1894, a story called "A Golden Ghost". The main theme concerns a very valuable jewel known as the "Wharseeki". Colonel Etheridge has been commissioned to obtain this jewel for a royal personage by taking it from the forehead of the god of the Zeefri people in Malaya. This he does and puts it in a safe hiding place. Returning to London he is pursued by the Zeefri and is lured into their hands by the phantom of a golden haired woman. His nephew, Wallace, has to go to Burma to bring the jewel from its hiding place. After many adventures he succeeds. These adventures include trecking through jungle on an elephant, capture by pirates and a sleepwalking interlude in which he hides the jewel himself and thinks it has been stolen when he wakes. Blake is a friend of Wallace and is working on a case which requires him to recover some papers stolen from a financier's yacht by a crook called "The Thames Pirate". Wallace is in love with a girl named Ada who is involved with the Pirate. The stolen papers concern a large sum of money which Ada's father had placed with the financier who had used it for his own purposes allowing Ada to be brought up in poverty. The Pirate calls on the financier and demands ransom for the papers but Blake has laid a trap for him. He manages to escape but is killed in a street accident before he has gone far. Col. Etheridge is released from his prison by a providential explosion. The Wharseeki is handed over to the financier who is the agent of the royal personage and he makes restitution to Ada, who marries Wallace. The Zeefri make one final attempt to kill the colonel by sending him a boa constrictor in a hamper. Blake saves the colonel at the last minute by killing the snake

with a knife.

This third story falls very much in the "far fetched" category and provides much less satisfactory explanations where they are given at all. However, if one can suspend disbelief just that little bit more it can still be entertaining. (Christopher Lowder has pointed out that this story owes a debt to Wilkie Collins famous story "The Moonstone", the sleepwalking episode being lifted straight from that book.)

The rest of the stories are comparatively straightforward. "Sexton Blake: Detective" appeared in *1/2d Union Jack* No. 2 of 2.5.1894. In this story Harry Armytage, a naval officer, brought up by his uncle, Fenton Joyce, and engaged to his cousin Ninian Joyce, goes away on a two year voyage. Suddenly all correspondence from home ceases. On his return he finds his uncle apparently dead, Ninian gone without trace and all his uncle's money withdrawn from his investments and also missing. Harry consults Blake. They trace Fenton Joyce to a lonely house in Essex, break into it and discover evidence of what may have been a murder. They are trapped by a servant called Joe Tax but he lets them go when Blake says they are from Scotland Yard. Later they see Fenton Joyce and Ninian in a carriage being driven by Joe Tax. On seeing Harry they fly in obvious fear. Blake sends Harry to visit Gaspard Sellars the new owner of the house in Essex. He lives in Cornwall. Joe Tax is found to be Sellars' servant and Harry sees Fenton Joyce at the window of a tower near Sellars' house. The tower is blown up before Harry can get in and Fenton Joyce is taken to a ship by Tax for transport to Bristol. The captain of the ship is Blake in disguise. Joyce tells Blake he killed a man at a gambling party held in his house in Essex and Gaspard Sellars is saving him from justice. Blake proves it was all engineered by Sellars to get his hands on the Joyce fortune. Sellars kills Tax when he finds out that Tax unwittingly handed Joyce over to Blake. Later Sellars is himself killed by falling through a glass roof when trying to escape from the police.

The next story, "Sexton Blake's Peril" (*1/2d Marvel* No. 33 of 20.6.1894) introduces the Terrible Three mentioned earlier. They are a doctor, a discredited prince and an ex galley slave. They carry out a daring robbery at a society ball and also attempt to poison Blake. Failing in this they kidnap him and a wealthy young society woman called Lady Lena Linton. The Three are trying to obtain possession of Lady Lena's fortune by means of the hypnotic power the prince has over her and by forgery. Blake escapes by forcing his way through the wooden floor of the room where he is imprisoned using his penknife. He descends through the ceiling of the room in which Lady Lena is a prisoner. Whilst getting away Blake discovers that one of the Three wears a rubber mask which completely alters his features. They are pursued by the galley slave on horseback but both horse and rider fall into a disused mine shaft. A young artist engaged to Lady Lena is accused of murdering the prince. Blake proves the body is not that of the prince as it does not have any gold teeth. The doctor is trapped by Blake using the rubber mask and deluding the doctor into thinking he is the prince in his disguise. The doctor tries to kill Blake with poison gas. However, Gervaise arrives just in time to save him and the doctor poisons himself. The prince tries to escape on horseback but the horse takes fright and throws the prince under the wheels of a railway train.

"Sexton Blake's Triumph" (*1/2d Union Jack* No. 15 of 1.8.1894) contains a "locked room" type of problem though in this instance it is a locked house. An old school fellow of Hector Hurlford named William Rennie visits Hector on

his return to England after many years in Australia. The following morning he has disappeared from his bedroom leaving no trace as to how he left, the whole house being locked on the inside. Later a body which appears to be Rennie is found in the Thames. Rennie had left home under a cloud being suspected of robbing his father. Hector consults his friend Blake who sends him to see Rennie's sister Laura. Blake finds that Rennie had been taken from Hector's house through a skylight in the roof, the whole frame being removed from its fitting and replaced afterwards. A few doors away he comes across a criminal known as the Slaughterer who had been involved in Rennie's disappearance. Later Blake deduces that a lawyer Jabez Forge and his son Justin were responsible for robbing Rennie's father and his recent disappearance. They try to get Hector arrested for Rennie's murder. Blake follows the Slaughterer to the Forge's house. Justin tries to kill the Slaughterer but he lives long enough to confess the whole plot. The body turns out to be that of a fortune hunter impersonating Rennie hoping to come into possession of the family fortune. The real Rennie arrives in time to frighten Justin into running away and Jabez goes mad. Justin is gored and trampled to death by a savage bull.

Judged by present day standards "Sexton Blake's Triumph" is probably the best of Blyth's stories with "Sexton Blake: Detective" coming second. Both have disappearances which pose problems seemingly insoluble at the outset. In each Blake sends his client into the enemy's camp: Harry Armytage is sent to Gaspard Seilar's house and Hector Hurlford is sent to William Rennie's old home near the Forge house, while he himself works elsewhere. In both the criminals are trying to possess themselves of another family's fortune. In both stories Blake makes use of the lesser member of the conspiracy to clinch the case: in the former he uses the Slaughterer to lead him to the Forges and then gets his confession, in the latter he dupes Joe Tax into handing over the missing Fenton Joyce. Both, incidentally, appeared in the 1st Union Jack. The 1st Marvel stories are cast in a different mould. These are of the adventure type with detection taking second place. All have Blake opposed to a criminal organisation and their machinations. In general these stories are rather less satisfactory being less credible and tending to be overloaded with detail. Such things are, however, very much a matter of personal taste. It is interesting to note that Blake steadily gains ground with each successive story becoming more and more important a character.

The next story only briefly mentions Blake, Jules Grevaize dealing with the whole case himself. This story is "The Accusing Shadow" (1st Marvel No. 48 of 3.10.1894). Jules, it seems has now retired, "... now I say gladly, let my good partner, Sexton Blake, take the rewards and honours, while I sit peacefully under my vine, and cultivate my garden". Thus says Jules Gervaise at the beginning of the story but it does not stop him giving his services unasked when he feels it to be necessary in the cause of Justice. George Roach, creditor of Saul Lyon and affianced to his daughter Daisy, disappears on a business trip. Search of the home he has prepared for Daisy reveals a scrapbook of the doings of a female criminal named Julia Barretti. Jules finds that she had bigamously married Roach sixteen years before. In a strong room the body of Roach is discovered. Julia Barretti is organising a big swindle among influential people in Paris. Jules exposes her and she is handed over to him by the French police to take out of the country. She tells him she had visited Roach on the night of his murder in the hope of getting money out of him and saw the shadow of the murderer on a blind. The murderer turns out to be Roach's cashier who had been embezzling the firm's funds. In a dash for freedom he falls into a cauldron of boiling pitch.

This story embodies both the detection of the 1/2d Union Jack and the adventure of the 1/2d Marvel and shows Jules as a resourceful and shrewd, as well as a likeable, character very much the equal of Sexton Blake.

The final story is "Twixt Gallows and Gold" (1/2d Union Jack No. 194 of 6.8.1896). There is some doubt as to whether Blyth did write this story. However, as it is by no means certain that he did not it is included here. A railway accident (it will be noted that Blyth liberally sprinkled his work with railway accidents) at the bottom of the garden of a villa Blake is renting introduces him to Count Arno. Blake has an assistant Nipperty Chris (quite against the philosophy of the detective expressed earlier). Frank Swale from the Klondyke is a gold prospector who has been robbed by a trusted friend when he falls ill. (A similar idea to that used in "The Missing Millionaire".) He thought he was dying and entrusted his gold to Jack Hatchett to take to the girl he loves, Lily May. (Note similarity with Frank Ellaby and Lillie Ray in the earlier story "The Christmas Crime".) Frank recovers but Hatchett disappears with the gold. Frank comes home and consults Blake hoping he can find Hatchett. Blake realises Hatchett is masquerading as Count Arno. They confront him but he escapes. Frank gives chase and disappears. Blake tries to trace Lily May, is attacked and chases his attacker but a rope stretched across the road wrecks his cab. In a nearby public house he learns that a bruiser named Tony Quelch (no relation to the Greyfriars master it is hoped) was driving the coach in which Lily May was taken away. Blake interviews Quelch who tricks him into entering a warehouse where he tries to hold Blake prisoner. Blake foils the attempt by climbing down a chain hanging from an upper floor. Both he and Quelch fall from the chain and Quelch is injured. From Quelch's confederate Blake learns of the Black House by the river. Here Blake runs Hatchett to earth but he gets away taking Lily May with him. Frank is a prisoner here and he accompanies Blake on a river chase after Hatchett's steam yacht. Hatchett threatens to kill Lily May when Blake's launch catches up with the yacht but Blake swims to the yacht unobserved and saves Lily May. Hatchett jumps into the river and reaches the bank. Later his body is found on a railway line run down by a train.

From the similarities note above one wonders whether this is an initial sketch for earlier stories or merely a "pot boiler" written by someone else using earlier ideas just to keep the Blake stories going. Whichever it may be it is not of the quality of the other 1/2d Union Jack stories.

It seems quite certain that Harry Blyth did not recognise the potential of his creation, in fact it could be said on the evidence of the stories dealt with above that in his hands Blake did not have that potential and it was not until he had passed on to other authors that it was fully realised. This is not meant to belittle the achievement of Harry Blyth in any way. Had it not been for him Sexton Blake would not have been heard of at all. His stories are good examples of the type being written at that time and it is quite wrong to compare them with Union Jack stories of thirty or so years later written for a quite different readership. However one views these stories full credit for creating Sexton Blake belongs to Harry Blyth for if he had not done so very many splendid Blake stories would never have come to be written.

* * * * *



As a topic of interest I imagine there have been more articles, letters and critical essays penned concerning the less than heroic figure of William George Bunter than one would care to compute. Yet has everything been said? Will a point be reached at some future date when it may be decided that enough has been poured forth upon the subject and some brave soul will stand up and cry 'Quantum sufficit' 'Enough of this fatuous character'. I wonder. In fact I have doubts that Bunter will ever cease to command the attention of at least a certain section, a discerning few, of the reading public. In this context a few observations and opinions appertaining to the 'sticking' or one might say the adhesive propensities of Bunter may not be inappropriate.

'It matters not where, but how you live.' So runs an old maxim. No doubt there is more than a modicum of wisdom embedded here. Consider for example, Diogenes, the Babylonian cynic and his self-imposed domicile, a barrel - or was it a jar? Surely a classic case of mind over matter. Not that in any minute way one might remotely associate William George Bunter with the stoic Diogenes; their lines of thought may be assumed to have been on very different levels. Diogenes was no doubt acting upon a well reasoned principle when he chose his barrel as an abode. One suspects that it is nothing more than pure selfishness which prompts the fat Owl of Greyfriars in his constant seeking after the fleshpots - other fellows' fleshpots.

A modest semi-detached villa in a suburban avenue, home of the legendary Bunters. Here is the nucleus of Bunter Court with its host of menials, its gardens and orangerie, its vast park with all the amenities and status of county opulence. What matter though it exists purely in the imagination of one fat member of the family. Have not we all read of the magnificence and spacious luxury and the gracious living attendant thereto? Furthermore perhaps we half believe in it - wherein lies the harm? Are there any among us who have not at some time in our lives indulged in equally extravagant dreams and comforted ourselves with similar illusory phantasies?

To seek fresh fields funds must be raised. Unfortunately when one desires to travel on public transport of any description one is confronted with the dreary necessity of having to pay for the privilege. It is a tedious and depressing fact of life. A ticket must be purchased if one is to be allowed access to the railway platform and the train. Both civilised behaviour and the Company are adamant in insisting upon it. Similarly there are other petty annoyances. Taxi drivers can become quite truculent if payment is not forthcoming. Bus conductors whose sole aim in life appears to be to extract fares in exchange for their travelling amenities. All of which, time and again Bunter has found highly frustrating, specially when a fellow is short of cash - even though the arrival of an expected Postal Order is perpetually in the offing. Thus other tactics must be resorted

to. Whatever failings the fat owl of the Remove possesses, and they are almost numberless, there is at least one asset to which he may lay legitimate claim, that of resourcefulness under pressure of necessity; and shortage of cash seems to concentrate his mind wonderfully.

'I say Bessie old thing'

'No'

'But, I say...'

'NO'

'Look here...'

'Buzz'

'Cat'

Bessie knows her Billy from long experience. Following this decidedly unpromising exchange he perforce has to try elsewhere, usually with similar negative results. So what is a fellow to do? There seems nothing for it but to resort to his wit which, with varying success he proceeds to do. Yet Bunter's mother, fond parent, with an even longer experience of that aspiring offspring, never fails to help him along the way with small loans, anything in fact within her means, and Bunter in his curious and toruous way is very fond of her for reasons other than those purely pecuniary. Mr. Bunter it must be said is quite a different proposition. Extracting tips from him is rather similar to attempting to obtain moisture from a stone. Always maintaining that he has to plough a very difficult and far from lucrative furrow in the city where he is 'something' - a bull one day, a bear the next, never may it be added causing too much stir in that most exclusive area of capital accumulation and the reverse. An exacting parent always, he is exceedingly reticent in any display of munificence. 'Your school fees are quite enough William' is more or less the theme song in answer to any advances on Bunter's part for financial aid.

From the grey old quadrangle and green playing fields of Greyfriars to the busy, clamorous thoroughfare in suburbia is a considerable step. An open breezy situation in a delightful countryside is exchanged for a bustling commercial main street teeming day-long with roaring traffic to say nothing of the noxious fumes exuding therefrom and a hurrying populace all intent upon some seemingly important appointment somewhere ahead, looking neither to left nor right, but staring anxiously and intently at some point in the less than charming horizon. Against such a background it is not difficult to understand the magnetic attractions of Wharton Lodge or Mauleverer Towers. Under similar circumstances I suspect that many of us would feel the same as the Owl of the Remove and be as happy and eager as he to shake off the dust of a modest, yet eminently respectable suburban home and opt for migration to more palatial surroundings.

But a loan must be raised for train and taxi fares. As a pedestrian Bunter has more or less severe limitations, not to mention an inbred slackness and horror of exercise. Yet if one studies the Bunter saga, even in a superficial way, one would have difficulty in finding a single occasion when he has not by some dévious method managed not only to 'raise the wind' but succeed also in wedging (perhaps a suitable term in this context) himself in at one or other of his schoolfellows' homes. Possibly it has involved spending an uncomfortable night en route and less than pleasing confrontations with ticket collectors, railway porters and irate taxi-drivers who do not, or will not, recognise the fact that they are dealing with a Public School 'man' and a gentleman in little matters relating to payment. Such being one of Bunter's idiosyncrasies, that of viewing all public transport as legitimate 'fair game'. This had led to endless embarrassment on so many

occasions. But our Owl is nothing if not resourceful even be it in an unfortunate way, he usually manages to 'work the oracle'.

Once established, shall we say at Wharton Lodge, even the stern bearing of Colonel Wharton himself will quite fail to have any effect upon the impenetrable feelings of Bunter, while less polite hints even with threats of physical violence from Harry Wharton and Co. have no effect whatsoever. Even Wells the butler, that epitome of calm decorum, whose restraint at times has been quite Herculean is not equal to the situation. It would, I am sure, prove enlightening in no small degree to hear his 'below stairs' or 'off parade' opinions of Master Harry's stout young guest. Above stairs of course Wells is far too dignified and disciplined to display any emotion or the slightest feeling regarding Bunter. Only Wharton's Aunt Amy - one of Charles Hamilton's lesser characters - a somewhat shadowy figure, gentle, understanding, and even prepared to tolerate with old world grace the less than attractive manners of Bunter, who is perhaps the only person at Wharton Lodge who extends anything nearly approaching a welcome to him and, sadly, it is very possible that he is blissfully unaware of the kindness.

Redemption, however, is never too far away. Situations develop and events occur which enable the Owl, with his phenomenal luck to be in the right place at the right time, usually in the dead of night in some draughty corridor or landing when he is instrumental in thwarting the machinations of some intruder or less than honourable guest. There follows a roar for help in the stillness of the night, flashing lights, calling voices and a gathering of dressing-gowned figures armed with a variety of weapons. And lo, Bunter is the hero of the hour - albeit an ungodly one, with the inevitable result: he is forgiven (for the time being) all his iniquities and persuaded (!) to prolong his stay over the holidays. 'What would you fellows have done without me to watch over you?'

It is all so familiar. It has happened so many times. Yet it is ever new and never fails in its perennial attraction. The villains thus thwarted by William George Bunter must be legion. It is very remarkable how little the stature of Bunter as a decent fellow has developed over the years. Perhaps it is better so. A 'good' Owl would be quite intolerable and quite unacceptable. We will take our hero without dilution of any kind and be duly thankful.

Whether he is bending over under the castigatory administrations of Mr. Quelch - a not infrequent occurrence, lounging in Mr. Bunter's favourite armchair in the modest sitting-room at Bunter Villa, or issuing lordly instructions to a footman at Wharton Lodge, or indeed, as so often happens, being kicked by a member of the Co., our Bunter remains the same, an irritating, annoying enigma, nine tenths quite unforgivable and the remaining tenth - by far the most important - an indispensable addition to the story of Greyfriars.

The late George Orwell stated nothing less than the truth when he grudgingly admitted in his critical essay 'Boys' Weeklies' that Bunter was a 'first-rate character'. This was praise indeed from such a source, for Orwell was far from being an admirer of Charles Hamilton's work. Thus has this scion of the Bunter family transcended the barriers of prejudice and marched - or rather rolled - on into posterity.

It will be a sad day if those spectacles cease to flash back the rays of the setting sun, if the familiar squeak is heard no more, if that mythical - almost mystic Postal Order has at last fluttered into oblivion. May those days be far enough off. May those loud checked trousers trundle on into the unforeseeable future, and may we, who were in spirit with him at Greyfriars, never fall to

carry the torch on his behalf.

WANTED: Mystery fiction in 1st Edition only, by the following authors: HAMMOND INNES: The Doppelganger (1937), Air Disaster (1937), Sabotage Broadcast (1938), All Roads Lead To Friday (1939), all published by Herbert Jenkins; and Wreckers Must Breathe (1940), The Trojan Horse (1940), and Attack Alarm (1941), published by Collins.

LESLIE CHARTERIS: Knight Templar (1930), She Was A Lady (1931), The Holy Terror (1932) and Once More the Saint (1933), all published by Hodders.

DORNFORD YATES: The Courts of Idleness (Ward Lock, red cloth, 1920 on title-page), Berry & Co. (Ward Lock, 1920 on title-page), As Other Men Are (Ward Lock, 1925 on title-page).

EDMUND SNELL: Any, and particularly: The Yellow Seven (Fisher Unwin, 1923), The Yu-Chi Stone (Unwin, 1925), The Purple Shadow (Unwin, 1927), The 'Z' Ray (Skeffington, 1932), The Sound Machine (Skeffington, 1932), And Then... One Dark Night (Skeffington, 1933), Crooks Limited (Skeffington, 1934) -- plus any paperbacks by this writer.

CHRISTOPHER LOWDER

CLEMATIS COTTAGE, CRADLEY, NEAR MALVERN, WORCS., WR13 5LQ

=====

Warmest Regards all club members especially Stan Knight, Ben, Bill Lofts, Bill Lofts, Bill and Thelma Bradford, Eric. Happiness friends everywhere.

CYRIL ROWE

=====

Merry Xmas and Happy New Year 1986, to all Hobby Friends.

JOHN BARTHOLOMEW

NORTH ROCKHAMPTON, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

=====

WANTED: Nelson Lee O/S 27 - 31, Captains volumes 37, 41, Gem 936, Union Jack 1054, Carter 3/41.

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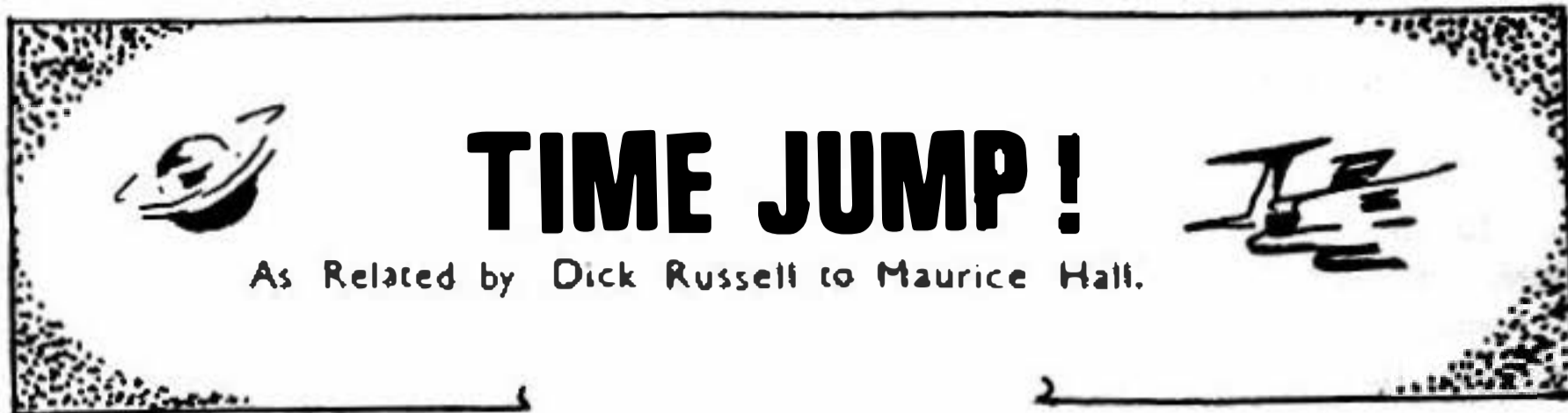
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SEASON'S GREETINGS to all Hobby Friends!
Have For Sale or Exchange Boys' Friends; School and Sport; Rivals and Chums. Require William Books (firsts in dust-wrappers) and early Rupert Annuals, etc., Good prices paid.

JOHN BECK

29 MILL ROAD, LEWES, SUSSEX, BN7 2RN

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It was the mad desire to possess a copy of No. 1 Magnet, that caused me to become involved. I mean, wouldn't you risk life and limb if the prize was a mint copy of the 'Making of Harry Wharton'?

Well I, like most of the Magnet collectors, had always coveted a copy of No. 1 and No. 2 and No. 3, etc., so when I saw the advert tucked away in the small columns of the Times, I read it, and read it again.

WANTED GENTLEMAN

To assist Inventor with Time Displacement Unit. Write, giving personal details to...
Professor Sparkinson, 14 Fetter Court, London.
Must be single and an old Greyfriars scholar

Two factors made me think. One the reference to being an old Greyfriars man and second the name Professor Sparkinson. Could this be he of the magic elixir, that had clothed Todd and Bunter in abnormal strength?

I wrote, avoiding a direct statement that I had actually attended that immortal greystone school, merely proving by my remarks that I was on 'speaking' terms with all the scholars. I signed the letter Dick Russell and sat back and waited...

Four days later the reply arrived. It stated that I was required to attend a meeting to decide whether I got the job, so there were obviously other applicants.

I travelled in a state of excitement and duly arrived at a 3-story house in Fetter Court and knocked at the door. Remembering the doormat and the electrified knocker that had so surprised the Famous Five, I took care to avoid trouble. I was not unduly amazed when the door swung open and a mechanical voice bid me enter and take a seat in the hall.

Others were already there. A burly fellow, who sat in a big armchair, was glowering at a thin, sharp-nosed lad and a fat character, whom I recognised straight away.

"Bunter" I breathed to myself, unable to believe my eyes as I gazed at the vast body I had thought I would only see in the Magnet Illustrations.

"I say you fellows", squeaked Bunter, "I don't know why you are bothering to hang around. I mean to say, when Sparkinson sees me, you haven't a chance, though I say it and shouldn't --"

"Shut up Bunter!" growled the burly fellow. "You'll get a thick ear from me and so will you, Skinner, if you don't buzz off before that old idiot Sparkinson appears..."

"Don't you tell me to shut up, Bunter" snapped Skinner. "Sparkinson may

not be such an old fool as you think... oh!"

Skinner stopped speaking and spun round to face the door behind them, as a dry cough came from the silver-haired small gentleman who had just come into the room.

Bolsover rose to his feet, having the grace to blush and the three of us stood leaving Bunter still stretched out on the sofa.

"Bolsover", barked Professor Sparkinson, "I suppose I am addressing Percy Bolsover, late of the Greyfriars Remove?"

A rather shamed nod came from Percy, as the Professor waved an imperious finger at him, "You are not required here, Bolsover - go!"

"Really, sir" gasped Bolsover, "I don't think that's fair. After all, you shouldn't listen to things you hear by accident..."

"Well that maybe so but what I don't need is a head-strong fellow like you, who will argue with me all the time. I thought that you may have changed since your Greyfriars days but I see now I was wrong. Now go - before I remove you!"

"I demand that you give me the job!" shrieked Bolsover as the Professor advanced on him in a cat-like way.

Professor Sparkinson wasted no more time and in a moment Bolsover had been picked up by his collar and the seat of his trousers and carried to the door. With no effort at all, the diminutive scientist propelled him through the doorway, closing it as he returned to the three of us.

"Skinner", barked the Professor to the erstwhile humorist of the Greyfriars Remove "The task you have applied for requires courage, no fear for your life, which you may lose! However the rewards could be tremendous - you could be the first person to travel in time..."

"I say, sir" gasped Skinner, his face going white as the implications dawned on him. "How successful have your experiments been?"

"Well my boy" answered the Professor warming to his subject. "I have sent three mice, two rabbits and a toad into the past..."

"And-?" queried Skinner.

"Well, I couldn't bring them back again..."

"What. None of them?" Skinner's face became quite ashen.

"None, but on the last attempt to retrieve the subject, I brought back an insect... in place of the rabbit. I have since corrected the fault and it is time to send a human. Do you wish to go, Skinner?"

"Well - I'd rather not sir - I mean, how do I know that you didn't turn the rabbit into an insect? I don't fancy coming back as a rabbit - or not at all." With that remark Skinner walked hastily out of the house.

Professor Sparkinson did not seem surprised. He turned to Bunter,

"Bunter", he rapped.

"Oh yes sir", replied the fat owl, who had not really been listening to what had been said. "I'll do it sir, whatever it is. I say sir, do you remember that

elixir that gave a chap strength - not that I really needed it?"

"Of course - Bunter! I remember, they called you Bunter the Bully when you stole the phial from that boy Todd!" exclaimed Sparkinson a light of remembrance dawning in his eyes.

"Well - not really sir - those beasts were just jealous when I could whop them all with one hand tied behind my back! He He He!!" The unmusical cachination of old rang out and ceased suddenly when Bunter saw the Professor frowning at him.

"You misused my elixir and the resultant strength that it gave you..."

"I didn't", shrieked Bunter, "I just found it - finders' keepers you know and Alonzo was becoming a reforming beast -"

"Quite right, Bunter. That example proved to me that few boys could accept great strength and not become a bully - particularly you. I was therefore very glad when Bull broke the phial thereby removing all temptation."

"Oh, please sir - I'm starving. Could I have something to eat while you are making your mind up?"

"Very well Bunter, go through that door into the kitchen - there is some food on the table", answered the Professor as he pointed to a door leading off the hall.

Bunter needed no second bidding. In a flash he had got up and vanished through the door heading for the plate of sticky buns that I caught sight of on the table.

"Now Russell", said the Professor turning to me.

"Yes Professor Sparkinson" I replied, sitting up and looking attentive. As a reader of the Magnet, I was a sort of scholar of Greyfriars School but in case that wasn't good enough I had borrowed Dick Russell's name on the grounds that he wasn't a well known junior. A member of the also rans, so to speak.

"You heard what I said to Skinner - What do you think? A lad like yourself who never featured greatly in the Magnet stories, would make a name for himself."

I drew a deep breath, Professor Sparkinson had invented that marvellous elixir, so why not a time travel machine? "I'll do it, sir - but I'd like to pick the period I'll be going back to - if you don't mind?"

"Yes, I think I can manage that, Russell. Shall we start now?"

"Yaroooooh!" A sudden howl broke forth from beyond the kitchen door. "Ow! Wow! - Beast!" roared Bunter, "I've been electrocuted - ow! lemme out you rotter!"

"What's happened to Bunter, sir?" I asked as several further yells floated through the walls. There was one final shriek followed by the crashing of a door closing and then sudden silence.

"Yes Bunter", chuckled the Professor. "As soon as he ate the last comestible on that plate, the whole kitchen, apart from the door leading to the back entrance, became electrified. This gave a sharp but not fatal shock to the recipient until he, or she, opens that unelectrified back door and departs. Further to that, both the front and back door knockers are also electrified and the mat will assist the unwanted guest to go away..."

There was another howl from the direction of the front door. The knocker was dropped as a fat hand let go and I had a vision of Bunter stepping back onto the mat, only to find it rising beneath his feet and propelling him towards the gate.

"Beasts." came a final roar and then Bunter departed and silence reigned.

"This way Russell", said the Professor leading the way through a door and down into a cellar which was brightly lit with tube lighting. The lights threw into stark relief some grey cabinets that were dotted with dials and these exuded smells and a mass of wires that led to a tall glass cabin, large enough to contain a man.

"Now my boy. The idea is quite simple. I have made it absolutely fool-proof - even Bunter could have travelled safely! The only thing you have to do is to make sure you do not remove these bracelets..." As he spoke Professor Sparkinson clipped a gold bracelet round each of my wrists.

"If you should lose one of these bracelets you should still be able to get back to this time, with the one remaining. If you should lose both my boy, I could not recall you..."

I gulped - I couldn't help it. Was it however, a great hoax and suddenly the Famous Five would appear and Sparkinson would remove his disguise and become Wibley? No matter I thought, in for a penny, in for two Magnets!

"I understand", I replied.

"Very well. What year have you chosen?" asked Sparkinson.

"1908 - February the 15th please" I answered.

"Um!", he grunted, as he set some dials and threw some switches. A low hum started as a dynamo commenced building up a charge, as lights flashed. "1908 - February - 15th -. Is this date significant?"

"First issue of the Magnet' I'd rather like one, sir", I said.

"So would many others, Russell. I don't know what happens when you try to bring something forward in time. Well, we shall see - now step into the glass cabinet!"

He held the door open and I stepped inside. Seen from the inside, the thick glass distorted the view out and I could only see indistinct shapes and colours. "Last things my boy. On each bracelet there is a white button. When you are ready to return, press it. I will then, activate the recall procedure. Remember, that time means nothing while you are away. At most, I expect to see the recall light within 5 minutes of your departure, while you may experience several hours passing, while only occupying minutes here. I have yet to establish time zone differences...! I see you have selected clothes close enough to the early 1900's but let me have your wrist-watch and take this instead."

Sparkinson handed me a gold fob watch and indicated a small extra button in the side of the case.

"Push this in when you arrive and I can then calculate how long you have spent away. Good luck, my boy!" The professor grasped my hand and gave me a firm handshake before he closed the door and became a moving shadow crossing to a control unit. It was at this point that I nearly decided to give up the whole idea and admit that I was in a state of panic.

Second thoughts came to my aid and I stood waiting, my mind going over my preparations for the trip. I felt in my pocket for the old pennies dated 1902 and 1904 that I had purchased in reasonable condition from the local coin dealer. The old style suit and the flat cap that I associated in my mind with the working class, should not make me too noticeable to those living in 1908.

My hair was long and I had side boards which was in fashion today and had in my pocket an 'Old Bill' walrus moustache, which I rapidly fixed into place as I heard the dynamo suddenly reach a peak and shut down!

I was conscious of cool air on my face and that I was in the open - but where and when, I had yet to find out.

It was a cold day, sunny but brisk and I buttoned my jacket, glad of the extra warmth from my waistcoat.

Sounds started to come to my attention - the clip-clop of a horse's hooves brought my attention to the road, where I saw an open carriage sweep by containing an elegantly dressed lady and gentleman. A neatly uniformed driver was in control of the horse.

It was then I remembered Professor Sparkinson's instruction about the watch and taking it from my pocket I pressed in the button. I then looked around to get my bearings.

I found I was standing outside 14 Fetter Court and was immediately struck by the changes due to be wrought over the next 80 years.

No. 14 was obviously much newer. There were small trees and bushes outside the entrance and a boot scraper stood by the door, with dried mud caught between the blades.

The house had the front garden almost all cemented over with just a few bushes left.

Turning away, I looked down the road towards the main throughfare and decided to walk to the corner.

Reaching the corner, I found I was in Fetter Lane. Looking to my right I saw a parade of small shops, one of which was a newsagents. Here I thought was the big test for me! I hurried to the shop, my heart skipping a few beats as I saw an advert outside, showing a picture of the Magnet, No. 1 copy, priced $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

Plucking up courage, I entered the newsagents. The ringing of the small bell attached to the door made me jump. At the same time I remembered the same sort of bell was attached to my local newsagent's door and the jingle of the bell came as a re-assuring sound as I entered the shop.

It was darkish inside and it took a few moments to adjust my eyes. Before me, lying on the counter, were pristine copies of magazines, papers, comics. I saw Union Jacks, some Boys' Friend 3d Libraries and a Penny Pictorial but no sign of the red cover of the Magnet. An inner door behind the counter opened and for a brief moment I saw into the proprietor's sitting room. In there curled up in an armchair I saw a youngster reading a bluish coloured boys' paper that I thought might be the Gem.

"Good afternoon, sir. What can I get for you?"

The proprietor was a round-faced fellow of about 50, dressed neatly in a

suit with a waistcoat. The jacket sleeves were protected with leather patches on cuffs and elbows. I saw him looking closely at me, a faint air of puzzlement on his face, as if to say 'you look alright but something seems strange!'

"A copy of the Magnet, please" I said, my voice sounding rather high-pitched.

"Ah! That's the new nippers! weekly you mean?" he replied. "We've had quite a run on it - I don't think I have a copy left..." The newsagent started turning over a bundle of odds and ends and ran his fingers across some papers lying on the counter.

I could see plainly that the much loved red Magnet cover was not there and my heart sank. To be so close and yet so far, I felt was understudying Peri at the gates of Paradise.

"It is the 15th of February -?" I nearly added 1908 and just stopped myself in time.

"That's right sir - but the Magnet came out a little ahead of time and it sold very well indeed. Might I put you down for a regular order sir?"

He paused, opened his order book, raised his pencil and looked me in the eyes.

But what could I say? I had no address, I didn't live in his time. Professor Sparkinson still had many years to go before he would move into Fetter Court, even supposing that he was born yet!

"Thomas - I heard you telling the gentleman that there wasn't a copy of the Magnet left, but Jack - he's our son sir - has finished reading his copy and he's been very careful reading it - it's still like new sir. If you like, I'll get it for you...?"

I was saved by Thomas's wife. I nodded a 'yes' to her and she went back into the sitting room, reappearing in a few moments with a red Magnet in her hand.

"Thank you" I gasped, feeling in my pocket for one of those precious pennies I had so thoughtfully brought along. I pulled out one penny and handed it to Thomas, taking my copy of the 'Making of Harry Wharton' - hardly able to believe my luck!

"Perhaps you would like a copy next week, sir" he said handing me a ½d change. "The next issue will be out on the 20th sir."

"I'll see how my - son likes it - perhaps I'll call in next week, or perhaps later this week, say Saturday?" I queried. The proprietor nodded and I turned and left the shop, clutching my Magnet and ½d change in my hand.

A sudden feeling of panic assailed me, supposing I couldn't return to my own time? Well, now to find out..."

I pressed the white button on my right bracelet. What seemed like a few seconds passed then I found myself back in the glass cabin in the Professor's laboratory.

The next thing I heard, was the dying whine of the dynamo - the second was the clatter of Professor Sparkinson rushing across to me and opening the door. I nearly fell into his arms with the relief of being home safely.

Sparkinson with a display of his tremendous strength, gently helped me out

and carried me to a couch where he put me down.

"How did the trip go, Russell" he asked anxiously as he took the fob watch out of my pocket and pressed the button again.

Marvellous, sir - absolutely marvellous..." I held up my prize, the copy of the No. 1 Magnet and the $\frac{1}{2}$ change still clutched in my hand. "Both these are from 1908 - it's incredible but we've done it and I'm the first time traveller."

"Now facts Russell, facts my boy. You were away for 27 minutes in the year 1908 but here I set my chronometer at zero when you transmitted and stopped it immediately you re-appeared..."

Professor Sparkinson pointed at the clock on the wall above the control desk. I looked and looked again. Only 6 seconds had elapsed between my transmitting out to my return back. I'm sure my jaw must have dropped in amazement.

"Those 6 seconds my boy, proves my theory of time displacement. You could not re-enter this time at the same second that you had left, so time automatically displaced you a few seconds later to compensate. It may prove with further trips, that you could spend longer away in time and still only use up 6 seconds."

"That's amazing, to think that I was away for nearly half-an-hour..." I was fast recovering from my experience and my eyes kept looking at the red cover of the Magnet held tight in my hand.

"When you arrived in 1908, did you appear inside this building?"

"No sir, I found myself outside on the pavement", I replied.

"Good - that was the effect of my circuit. This stops the time traveller appearing within the molecular structure of a building. It wouldn't be good to be re-assembled within the confines of a wall, as an example..." the Professor gave a dry chuckle, unaware that for a moment my blood had nearly frozen in my veins. Even now the mere thought of what might have happened... !!

"I would like you to make another trip, Russell. This time to stay longer, say 2 or 3 hours. It should only cost you another 6 seconds..." I nodded agreement as the Professor continued, "You must notice if you appear in the same place, as your first trip. Whether the time of day is the same as now - 11 o'clock of the morning. Start your fob watch as you did last time on arrival. I would also like a newspaper brought back - the Daily Mail will do!" He gave me two old pennies and I added them to my remaining penny-half-penny. "Now", he said "What date this time?"

"December the 20th, 1908 please", I replied.

"Very well", Sparkinson reset the dials. "I should have supplied you with a coat for your February trip but for your December visit, it will be definitely required."

Professor Sparkinson crossed to a cupboard and took out an old fashioned heavy overcoat. I tried it on and found it was rather a tight fit and a little short on the sleeve length. It was however, the largest he had and I had to make do.

Boldly I stepped into the glass cabin, giving the Professor a confident smile and in a few seconds I was on my way again.

I tried to 'feel' what time travelling felt like but apart from that dizzy feeling and a moments loss of balance, there was nothing remarkable.

"Look out where you're going mate!" a rough voice shouted in my ear. I had a brief vision of a large gentleman, for I had appeared in his path as he had been walking along. "Where did you spring from?" he continued in amazed tones.

"I'm very sorry to have startled you, sir" I said. "Please accept my apologies", mentaling thinking the Professor's circuit worked very well on inanimate objects but didn't take account of moving objects quite so well.

The large gentleman continued on his way, muttering about blokes jumping out in front of fellows like they appeared from nowhere... "like a blooming jack-in-the-box!"

This set me thinking how many times we have all looked and thought we were alone, only to suddenly see a person who we hadn't noticed before. More time travellers, I wondered?

I set the fob watch button going and took some mental notes for Professor Sparkinson.

Near enough, I was in the same spot outside 14 Fetter Court. It was light and from the position of the hazy sun, probably in the morning. As there was no clock around, I hastened to the corner and from there to the newsagent's shop. There was snow underfoot.

The bell rang as I opened the shop door and entered into the warmth of the interior. A youngster passed me going out with a copy of both the Magnet and Gem clutched in his hand. Thomas, the newsagent, looked up from behind the counter obviously recognising me from my visit of some months earlier.

"Morning, sir - how did your son like the Magnet then?"

"Oh - he liked it very well, thank you" I replied. "By the way, what's the time please, I would like to check my watch?"

"That's the time, sir" he said, pointing to a clock on the right-hand wall, "11 minutes pass 11 o'clock. And what would you like today?"

"I'll take a copy of the Magnet and the Gem, please." I breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of a small pile of Magnets and Gems on his counter. This time there would be no trouble I thought.

"Ah - nice Christmas numbers these. We got a few extra in for the kids. It would be a shame sir, if they didn't get a Christmas copy. Funny thing sir, when you were last here, I happened to be standing at the shop door and saw you stop for a moment like you was puzzled. Then me wife asked me something and I turned my head for just a moment to answer her and blow me down, when I looked again, I couldn't see you anywhere. Where did you go sir, for it been fair puzzling me ever since, cause there's no doorways or alleyways on that stretch -?" He stood looking at me.

Little did Thomas know but he had almost seen me disappearing - it was just lucky for me he hadn't.

"Well, you know how easy it is to think you turn your head for a few seconds, when it's really quite a bit longer. If I remember correctly, I must have noticed the time and ran round the corner in a great hurry just at the

moment you spoke to your wife - "

Thomas nodded and I breathed a sigh of relief as he picked up a Gem and a Magnet from the pile on the counter.

"I'd also like a copy of the 'Daily Mail' please."

He added the Daily Mail to the Gem and Magnet saying "That will be 2½d please."

Now this presented me with a problem, for although I had actually got 3½d, I had further plans for the balance of the cash and now was the time to try and use a silver 3d bit which I had bought. I took it out of my pocket and apparently noticed for the first time, something unusual about it.

"That's strange, it looks like the mint has let an error slip out. See, it says the date is 1920, when anyone can see it should have been 1902. You can see it's had a fair amount of wear and tear." I held the coin in my hand for him to look at and he took it and looked at it closely.

"Well I never - you're quite right, sir - must be a bit of a rarity, they don't often let mistakes get into the hands of the working man!"

"Suppose I'd better drop it into the bank and change it for another one" I said, putting my hand out to take it back.

"Don't you bother to do that sir, I'll keep it for the papers and give you a ½d change. "He hastily gave me a ½d but didn't put my 3d silver bit in the till but just stood there, holding it in his hand.

"Oh, by the way" I exclaimed, as I started towards the door, "Is there a second-hand shop, a bookshop nearby, where I might get some back numbers of the Magnet for my boy?"

Thomas came round from behind the counter and led me outside and pointed to the right. "Go along there sir, take the second turning left and then turn first right. About 50 yards along, you'll find old Frank's shop. It's in a bit of a mess but he does often keep some old copies for sale. How he makes a living there, I shall never know!"

I shook hands with him and in doing so, the time bangle on my right wrist came into view and sparkled in the weak sun-light.

"Best you didn't let that be seen, sir" said Thomas with a shake of his head. "There are a few thieves around who'd have that off you in a trice. Pretty sort of thing sir?" There was a sort of unasked question in his tone:

"Helps with rheumatism", I fibbed and bidding him good-bye, I went on my way.

It didn't take me long to reach Frank's shop which was exactly as Thomas had said - run down, badly in need of paint and in a mess - what a mess!"

When I entered, I had to pick my way round piles of musty books, many of which had fallen into what little was left of a gangway. One room led to another and it was from this back room, that I heard a shuffling of feet coming towards me.

"Watch-er-want?", came a croak. The voice came from one of the most ancient persons that I could remember meeting. Frank, I assumed it must be him, could have been anything from 80 to 90. Unshaven, wearing really worn-

out clothes held together with safety pins.

"Thomas, the newsagent, said you might have some old, out of date, copies of the Magnet for sale. I'd like to buy some", I replied.

"Might 'ave" he grunted, moving slowly behind a counter on which was piled hoards of unsorted books. He bent down and fumbled around under the counter, finally coming up with a pile of copies covered in a fine film of dust.

"Jacks any good?" he said.

"Pardon?" I replied

"Jacks - Union Jacks!" he reiterated, offering me the pile.

"No thank you. Magnets are what I would like please" I insisted.

The ancient back was bent again. Another pile was brought up - they were red Magnets.

"How much?" I asked, not wanting to appear too eager, but holding myself back from grasping the pile and sorting through with a show of abandon.

"3 a penny-!" As Frank spoke, his eyes were watching me intently. I suspected he normally sold them at perhaps 4 or 5 a penny.

"Oh - I see", I managed to put considerable disappointment in my voice and even forced myself to half turn away.

"Jest a moment, sir." Frank's voice became very persuasive. "If you spend 3d I'll let you 'ave 10 - no 11 copies. Ow about that?"

"Right-ho, that will do." I said and immediately set to looking through the stack. Quite a number of copies had items cut out, like the order form for the newsagent, others were dirty or torn but there were enough clean, complete issues for me to find the 11 that I needed. Those 11 precious copies would account for my last 3d for I had no other money and nothing to barter with. I did consider leaving the Professor's fob watch in exchange for as many as I could get but in the end I handed my money over, thanked him and walked out into the street.

I was so intent of the successful purchase of the Magnets, that I failed to notice two young men leaning on the wall, one on each side of Frank's shop. As I came out and turned left to get back to the main road, the fellow ahead of me stopped leaning on the wall and started walking ahead of me. He didn't hurry and it took me only a few steps to catch him up. As I started to pass him he suddenly swung round into my path and collided with me. At the same time, his accomplice came up from behind and put his arms round me trapping and holding me tightly.

Well, I'm not a weak chap and once I had realised what was happening, I pushed back hard and drove the fellow behind me into the wall. He collapsed with a gasp as his head hit the wall, as, at that same moment, his partner endeavoured to wrench the time bracelet off my wrist.

I was handicapped by my left hand holding onto the Magnets and a chill thought crossed my mind. Suppose - just suppose, I was robbed of the bracelet, maybe both, I would be doomed for ever to spend my time in the past. The struggle became more desperate as my assailant brought his other hand to bear on my wrist and I felt he was going to succeed in spite of all my efforts to

stop him. My heart sank as his fingers felt for the catch...!

As we struggled I heard a groan from behind me as the second of my attackers started to recover. My grasp was slipping from his arm as my main adversary shifted his fingers to obtain a new purchase on my time bracelet, however, in doing this, he must have pressed the recall button. He must have been the most surprised and startled thief in all London when I vanished before his eyes.

My arrival back to the laboratory was much more spectacular than previously. I was still in the act of pushing my attacker away from me as my outstretched hands came in contact with the glass door of the cabin and I stumbled through the door. With a crash I knocked into a stool.

"Russell, my dear boy - what has happened" asked Professor Sparkinson, springing to my aid and assisting me to a chair.

"Attacked - I was attacked by a ruffian in London - some fellow tried to steal my bracelets." I gasped. "Fortunately, he pressed the recall button - "

"You have certainly been in a struggle, my boy. You have lost a button from your coat, your tie is awry and your hair tousled - tell me what happened?" The professor drew up a chair and took notes of my story after he had stopped the fob watch. He told me that I had been away for 1 hour and 35 minutes and that 6 seconds had passed on the laboratory clock. Professor Sparkinson finished taking notes and looked wisely at me.

"You were very lucky, Russell. Chance brought you safely back when I might have lost you! No more trips today but accept my thanks for being prepared to risk the experiment, a very rewarding first time travel by a human. I see you managed to get quite a few copies of the Magnet - most interesting!! I must look into the effect of time continuence on physical matter."

"Here is the copy of the Dally Mail that you asked for" I said, handing him the copy, which he took in an absent-minded fashion.

"Now that I have completed my automatic recall device, I can travel into the past and come back without an operator here at all, now I have connected it!" Sparkinson made some adjustment to his control panel plugging in a new circuit before he turned back to me.

"Right my boy, off you go - come back tomorrow and we'll have another go, eh? Oh, let me have the bracelets and the overcoat please." He unclipped them from my wrists and slipped the overcoat off me, putting it away in the cupboard.

"Goodbye, sir" I said as I walked to the door but Professor Sparkinson was already absorbed in some scientific problem and hardly seemed to notice me go.

I let myself out into modern day London, quite a difference to Christmas 1908.

On my return home I looked through my purchases and marvelled that I should have been so lucky to have seen that advert.

After lunch I went out to the coin dealer again and purchased 2 shillings, 1 sixpence, 4 pennies and 3 half-pennies, all prior to 1908. Thus prepared, I waited anxiously for tomorrow to arrive.

I was up early in the morning checking that the pile of red Magnets really were there and that I hadn't just dreamed the whole affair. They were there

and I hadn't dreamed the adventure and the only thought then, was how soon could I arrive at the Professors? Perhaps 11 o'clock? Or even earlier, well make it 10.30 and chance it.

As I travelled to Fetter Court, I made a series of new plans. I would ask the Professor to set me down in the summer of 1914, just before the 1st World War. I would arrive before the newspapers and magazines were called in for salvage. I would visit Franks, or a similar shop, and probably buy up a considerable number of copies for my 2 shillings and 1½d. I might offer so much for an uncounted pile of them. My thoughts took on an avaricious slant - there must be a market for any surplus copies I should get. And - I could find out Bunter, Skinner and Bolsover's addresses and go and visit them as an old reader.

At last I arrived at 14 Fetter Court, only to find the front door was shut and there was no answer to my knocks and ringing of the bell. I walked round to the back door and found that it was open, so I entered and called out.

"Professor Sparkinson - it is me, Russell!"

I could hear the hum of the dynamo from the cellar, so it seemed likely that the Professor had not heard me arrive. When I got down the stairs the cellar was empty apart from the usual electrical equipment, which seemed to be operating. Otherwise the laboratory was deserted.

I moved across to the control desk and saw a note lying there -

Dear Russell,

I am testing out my automatic recall device. I should, if all goes well, be back long before you arrive. Remember my boy, 6 seconds constitutes an average trip!

However, if I am not back, please operate the manual recall switch."

My eyes looked up to the clock recording the current time away duration and saw the second hand click to 5 seconds. I drew a breath of relief. He must have only left a second before I arrived. But then 6 seconds came and passed, then 10, then 20 and finally the minute was up and no sign of Sparkinson.

It was then it dawned on me, that the clock had been round at least once and that Sparkinson had been away for one hour, if not more. Possibly, he may have thought he had explained the automatic recall procedure to me, but in point of fact, he hadn't.

I stood there looking at the switches and dials, only to find them all unmarked and therefore completely unhelpful. Remembering the part of the desk he had adjusted when he set the time dial, I thought to locate that and work from there.

In moving forward, I caught my knee a crack on a small stool, pitching myself forward with my hands thrust out before me. My left hand found the time setting control, as at the same moment, my right hand pushed a pair of switches, this action causing a series of unexpected results.

There was a sudden flash from the desk and some smoke, followed by a jet of flame. The glass cabin suddenly became brilliantly illuminated and then the glass panes shattered as a dull boom echoed through the room.

I must admit that I lost my head, completely and absolutely. I looked wildly around for a fire extinguisher but there was nothing in sight that I could see. The control panel was now furiously ablaze and all I could see through the smoke, was the year 1933 displayed on the time setting dial. All the while the few

remaining lights on the control panel were flickering on and off.

The fumes were now making me cough. I put my handkerchief across my face and made my way up the stairs to find a phone and call the fire brigade. Then I found Sparkinson didn't have a phone...!

Precious moments wasted, I opened the door and finding a call box a short distance away, I called for a fire engine... When asked for my name, I merely said I had noticed smoke coming from the basement area and put the phone down.

A few minutes passed before I heard the siren of the fire engine, moments before it swept round the corner and pulled up outside No. 14. It disgorged a crowd of firemen who entered the Professor's house, unreeling hoses as they went. Within a short space of time, the fire had been put out and, as a small crowd of sightseers had formed, I walked up and stood at the back.

The fire officer in charge was asking questions about who lived there. The next door neighbour said it was an old chap who must have rented it from the local estate agent and that he had only been there for a few weeks.

In answer to another question from a bystander, the fire officer said that nobody was in the house and that the fire had been due to an electrical fault. The crowd broke up and I returned home. What else could I have done?

During that evening however, while I looked through my newly acquired Magnets and Gems, I thought the matter over.

By reason of my accidental movement of the controls, I may have transported Sparkinson from the time period he had already selected, into the year 1933. I had already checked up and found that, that was the year Professor Sparkinson had made his only appearance in the Greyfriars saga. It is, I suppose possible, that poor Sparkinson may now be in a recurring time-loop, jumping between the 1980's and the 1930's. The story in 1933 did say 'he (Sparkinson) had suddenly appeared in the old house called the 'Willows' and just as suddenly disappeared again.'

On the matter of bringing Magnets back from the past to the current time, I remembered what the Professor had said. "One must look into the effect of time contnuence on physical matter." Well, I now know what does happen!

About 6 or 7 weeks after the fire at Fetter Court, I was attending a club meeting and overheard two members talking together. The conversation went onto the very subject, that I had been pondering on.

"Quite incredible it was - I couldn't believe my eyes - just as if it had never existed -" said the first collector.

I stopped, like Bunter, and listened.

"You actually mean, that the copy in your volume of red Magnets had disappeared completely, not even disturbing the binding?" queried his friend.

"I'm telling you, the copy was gone. The stitching was unbroken, the glue undamaged. It doesn't make sense old man. Why take out No. 20 and not steal the whole volume? Though I don't look through these coples every day, I can't imagine when any body could have had the chance to remove that copy." The collector nodded his head sadly and the coversation went onto another subject.

I suppose I should have owned up. I had a copy of No. 20 - perhaps his copy of No. 20, but I'm afraid I didn't, mainly because I couldn't imagine him

believing me.

To sum up the 'time continuence on physical matter' problem. As I have worked it out, this is what I think happens.

If any one of the copies I brought back from 1908 had been destroyed before the 1980's, nobody in this time would be affected. However, if any one of the copies I brought back still existed today, then that copy would vanish from it's current owner, when I crossed the time zone from 1908 to now.

Well, I've got the story off my conscience at last and I'll apologise to any one affected by my time trip. Hopefully, nobody else has discovered a missing copy, but have you recently checked your 1908 Magnets and the Christmas number of the Gem?



The GREYFRIARS CLUB 50th GRAND MEETING and bargain Greyfriars Book Sale will be held on Sunday, 24th November once again by popular request at COURTFIELD Home of the FRANK RICHARDS' MUSEUM AND LIBRARY (see C.D. March 1980 page 24, and CDA 1982 page 72) and once again your COURTFIELD hosts take this opportunity to extend the HEARTIEST CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to all hobby connoisseurs of goodwill and integrity, and such members are warinly invited to this WINTER meeting subject to the usual telephoned confirmation (Ruislip 31025) of attendance, in this 9th year of the 50th meeting of the club.

Your COURTFIELD hosts also take this opportunity to thank all those club members who have responded to my announcement of the sale of the late John Lock's collection which to date has raised over £1,400, and which sum I have duly placed to the account of John's dear wife who wishes me to add her thanks to club members. All remaining items of this collection of original MAGNETS, GEMS, POPULARS and kindred books will then be sold off at BARGAIN PRICES to clear, along with some remaining mint G.B.C.'s and H.B. 'Bond' issues of his, at the meeting above. All enquiries to R. F. (Bob) Acraman, Hon. Chairman/Sec./Treas. of the Club, and Curator and Chairman of MUSEUM TRUSTEES, COURTFIELD, 49 KINGSEND, RUISLIP, MIDDLESEX, HA4 7DD.



WANTED: S.B.L.: 1st series 1979; 2nd series 151, 214, 221, 266, 433, 453, 737, also others.

OWEN

28 NARCISSUS ROAD, LONDON N.W.6



Seasons Greetings to Hobby Friends from

RON AND KIT BECK (LEWES)

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Seasons Greetings to our Editor and Hobbyists everywhere.

R. McCABE, DUNDEE



A Happy Xmas and Good Health in the New Year to our Editor and all C.O. readers from

NEIL LAMBERT

= = = = =

Xmas Greeting to Eric Fayne and Norman Shaw.

H. HEATH

55 HEMWOOD ROAD, WINDSOR

= = = = =

'You are a visitor to this World, enjoy it while you're here'. A Merry Xmas to you all.

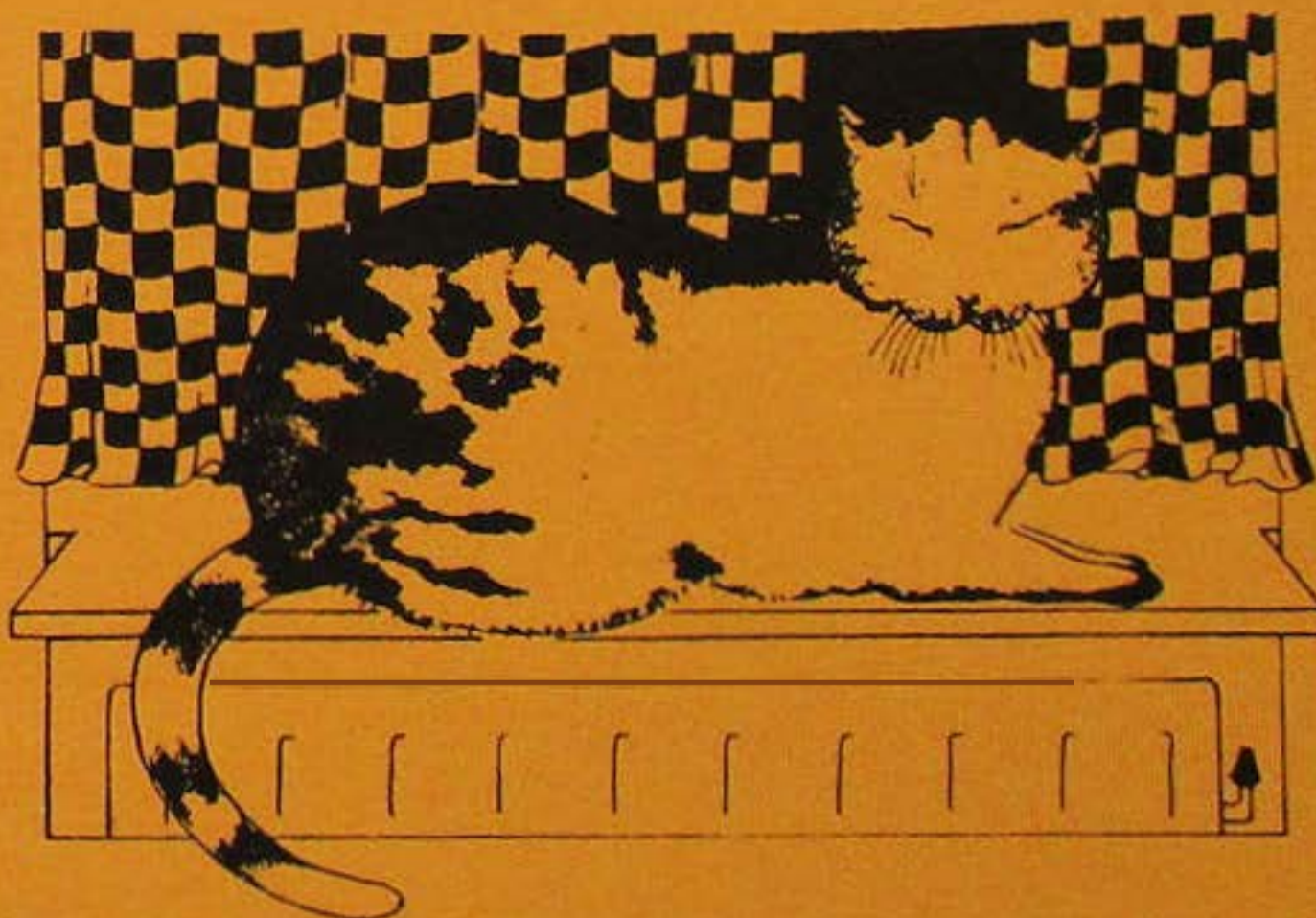
WILLIAM LISTER

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SOLUTION TO THE PUZZLE PICTURE
on page 45

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Chowle (New House) | 6. Darrell (School House prefect) |
| 2. Webb (New House prefect) | 7. Buck Finn (Shell) |
| 3. Baker (School House prefect) | 8. Dane (Shell) |
| 4. Clampe (Shell) | 9. Gunn (Shell) |
| 5. Scrope (Shell) | 10. Manners (Shell) |

* * * * *



Here am I, in my favourite spot, this December weather - on top of the radiator in the Editor's Den.

I hope to make the fur fly this coming Christmas. I hope to have a purrfect Christmas with some really amewsing times - and I hope that all readers of the C.O. Annual have the same.