

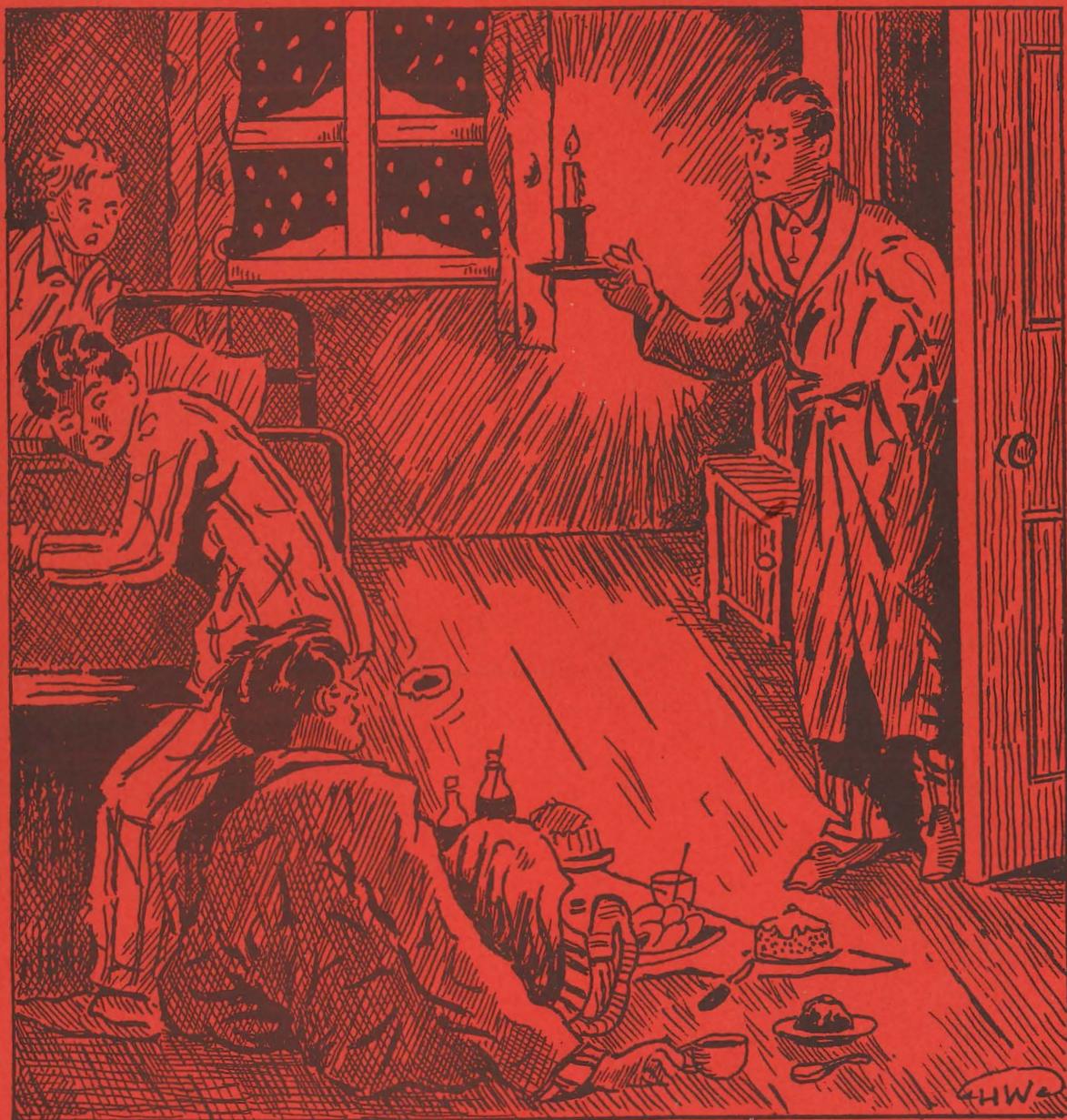
COLLECTORS'

DIGEST

1987

1987

ANNUAL



EDITOR:

46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham,
Kent. BR3 2PY.

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INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Here we are with our 1987 Annual, the first which I have edited and which I hope will meet with your approval. I have been splendidly supported by our enthusiastic band of contributors, both authors and artists, without whose labours of love, of course, this annual could not have been produced. Every one of them deserves our warm appreciation, and particular thanks are due to Mr. Henry Webb who has provided not only our attractive cover design but most of the article headings.

As a fairly new girl in the editorial chair I can, without boasting, say how remarkable it is that an amateur publication such as the Collectors' Annual has survived so long, and so exuberantly. For this we have to thank contributors past and present and, most of all, our Founder Editor Herbert Leckenby, and his successor Eric Fayne, who guided the fortunes of the C.D. for so many years.

Producing this annual has been no easy task, but an extremely satisfying one. The result, I hope and trust, will bring into your homes a restatement of the ideals embodied in our old papers, as well as the glowing spirit of the Christmas season. My thanks to you, the loyal readers of the C.D., are coupled with the time-honoured yet ever fresh wish that you will enjoy a right Merry Christmas and a Peaceful and Happy New Year.

Your sincere friend,

Cado an'

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THE CAPTAIN, THE TOMBOY, AND THE BULL.

BY ESMOND KADISH

I have often wondered how the Cliff House characters might have up in 1940, if Charles Hamilton had continued to write the stories in SCHOOLFRIEND, and, later, in the SCHOOLGIRL. Would Hamilton have developed the personalities of Barbara Redfern and Co., (or Marjorie Hazeldene and Co., perhaps!), as he had done so brilliantly with his Greyfriars characters? Would he, in fact, have modified and altered them to meet the requirements of a schoolgirl readership? It's a fascinating subject for conjecture - not very fruitful, it has to be admitted, since, as we are all aware, Mr. Hamilton never penned more than those celebrated first four or so Cliff House tales for the 1919 SCHOOLFRIEND. There were, of course, the Cliff House interludes in the MAGNET, but these don't tell us very much since they concentrate on Marjorie, Clara, and Bessie, whilst the rest of the girls seem a rather shadowy bunch. Nor does the Skilton book, BESSIE BUNTER OF CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL, which Hamilton wrote in 1949, really settle the question. It's very much a book for ex-readers of the MAGNET, and Hamilton's Cliff House girls seem hardly to have changed at all in thirty years. It was, in fact, left to Horace Phillips, L.E. Ransome, and - particularly - John Wheway, to polish and develop the marvellous characters which Hamilton had created.

In no. 3 of the SCHOOLFRIEND, for instance, Hamilton describes Stella the Captain and Head Girl of Cliff House, as "most authoritative", and suggests that she "seldom, or never, forgot what an important person she was". When invited to tea by Marjorie and Co., in Study no. 7, Stella displays an expression of "calm and disdainful amusement" on her face. Some thirty years later, in the Skilton book, Stella still appears to retain this slightly supercilious, rather cold and distant, demeanour. She is "tall and fair, marvellous at mathematics, and chock-full of Greek", whilst she walks and talks "on terms of equality with the Staff, and was known to be perfectly at her ease even with Miss Primrose". When she addresses Marjorie, it is "in a calm voice that seemed to emerge from the uttermost depths of a refrigerator", and, after taking her name, for having spoken to Bessie in detention, Stella "sailed on, lofty and stately, and forgot her existence".

But Wheway's Stella is quite the opposite to this rather distant, Olympian personage. She becomes warm, accessible, and sympathetic. In the 1932 series, (nos. 162-4), which Wheway wrote for the SCHOOLGIRL as "Hilda Richards, Stella returns to Cliff House, at the end of the summer holidays, to face re-election for the school captaincy - a favourite, if, perhaps, unlikely, plot-device at Cliff House or Morcove! There is a rival candidate for the honour in form of the unpopular prefect, Sarah Harrigan - "sharp and ferrety" in appearance, and wearing "a pair of pince-nez". Besides facing the bitter enmity of the unscrupulous Sarah, Stella has to cope with an additional problem. Her brother, Gerald, who has been unjustly accused of theft, has escaped from the custody

of the Courtfield police, and is now lying "dangerously ill" in a Friardale cottage. A further complication is that Miss Primrose has put Friardale Village out of bounds because of an epidemic. No wonder "two little furrows" appear between Stella's brown eyes, and her hands "clenching unconsciously, beat upon the arm of the chair". She breaks bounds, of course, to visit her brother, and reflects on the past, as she gazes at him, lying delirious in bed:-

"Those romps they had had when they were kiddies together; the agony of that first parting when Gerald had gone to school. Later, those merry reunions at home at holiday-times. How proud she had been of Gerald when he was at school. How she had joyed when he had been made captain; when he had left school, and gone for a brief spell to University!"

Meanwhile, at Cliff House, Stella saves little Ivy Finch of the Second Form from a wiggling by Miss Scott - "a martinet at kit inspection" - by cheerfully removing some spilt ink from her hat-band with lemon juice. Ivy, "her little heart bursting with joy", is suitably grateful and adoring. Later, Ivy is in distress again:- "the tears, big, unchecked, rolled down her cheeks, and in her arms she clasped a pathetic, limp little bundle of black fur". This is "Tweety", the kitten, and Second Form mascot, who seems to be about to depart this world. Stella, who "had more than once professed her intention to take up veterinary work when she left school", uncorks a small bottle, and administers some medicine, whereupon Tweety, looking pardonably astonished, gets up and emits a plaintive meow.



A miracle cure, indeed! Such acts of kindness on Stella's part do nothing to spoil her chances of re-election as Head Girl. Sarah is suitably vanquished and humiliated, and Gerald is "cleared" of the charge of theft. This was really Wheway's first big series in the Cliff House saga, and the first of his tales to be reprinted in the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY, in June 1935.

Stella's professed ambition to qualify as a vet, (quite a modest one for a Head Girl of Cliff House!), brings a further clash with the relentless Sarah in a 1936 series (nos. 369-372), in which Babs. and Co. are seen to be "Standing by Stella". Sarah - for reasons of her own - makes every effort to prevent Stella from swotting for the examination, and obtaining the necessary diploma. Everyone else, however, regrets

"BARBARA, I don't want you to lose the captaincy for my sake," Stella said gravely. "It's kind of you to try to help me—but please don't." Babs was silent; but more than ever was she determined to stand by Stella.

that this is to be Stella's "last term at Cliff House". She does, indeed, succeed in her ambition, and is eventually replaced as Captain by Dulcia Fairbrother, the following year. I must say that I have always felt it to be rather a waste of a perfectly satisfactory character for Wheway to have written her out of the Cliff House tales in this way - particularly as he had taken so much trouble to mould her into a dignified, but approachable Head Girl. Perhaps he thought that the Hamilton name - Stella Stone - suggested a certain coldness and inflexibility in the character; or, possibly, he simply craved his own Head Girl. Whatever the reason, it seems a pity, although the sporty Dulcia provided a good successor. Incidentally, this 1936 series, in the SCHOOLGIRL, contains the one and only - as far as I can recall - story illustration by Laidler which is printed in half-tone. It shows Stella, her hand resting on the shoulder of a seated Barbara Redfern, earnestly advising the younger girl not "to lose the junior captaincy for my sake".

Another Hamilton Cliff House character who undergoes considerable change and modification is the Tomboy, Clara Trevlyn. Hamilton portrays her as being rather hoydenish and slangy - always apeing the boys, whilst professing to be contemptuous of them. Marjorie, in contrast, is dignified and self-contained, and there's an underlying implication in Hamilton's characterisation that when it comes to the crunch, Marjorie is the one who will display the courage and fortitude. Thus in the 1924 Sahara series in the MAGNET, (no. 868), when the two girls are about to be buried alive by the villainous sheik, Mustapha ben Mohammed:-

"Marjorie Hazeldene was as pale as death, but she was calm. Clara cast startled and frightened glances on all sides", and, again, "poor Clara's quivering lips and restless glances showed the terror she could scarcely suppress".

When I read this in the SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY reprint in the thirties, I recall feeling puzzled and vaguely irritated. Could this whimpering, terrified Clara Trevlyn really be the indomitable, courageous tomboy I had read about in the SCHOOLGIRL? Never! True, even in the SCHOOLGIRL, "gentle" Marjorie had a quiet courage of her own, but it would have been left to Clara to show defiance rather than "terror", and fiercely to protect her more vulnerable chum in such dangerous situations. Not realising, of course, that it had been Hamilton, (Frank Richards), who had actually created the original Clara, I implicitly accepted Wheway's version. It is, I suppose, really a question of which writer one read first - "Frank" or "Hilda"

Clara - as depicted by Wheway - is never more attractive than when she is defending the weak or helpless. It is not a bland, do-gooding attitude, nor has she any axe to grind, but a real, passionate involvement and a hatred of bullying and injustice. Her loyalty, once given, is demonstrated automatically and ungrudgingly: to Marjorie, when she is being harassed by prefects like Sarah Harrigan or Connie Jackson; to her harum scarum brother, Jack Trevlyn, when he is in - as he nearly always is - some scrape or other; and to her beloved almsation dog, Pluto, when he is in some undeserved disgrace, or, sometimes, falling ill:-

"Clara felt something catching in her throat, seeming to strangle her. Strongminded, despising softness, she, nevertheless, felt the tears welling into her own eyes. Pluto lay there, heaving and panting, his agitated breath coming in wheezing gasps, rasping painfully in his throat.

Clara was crying now - weeping unashamedly. With a fierce intensity she hugged the dog to her".

One lucky recipient of Clara's friendship and loyalty is Oswald Musgrave, in "The Boy Clara Stood By", a 1932 two-part tale in the SCHOOLGIRL, (nos. 176-7). Oswald is a pupil at Friardale Boys' School, the school which Wheway created to take the place of Greyfriars, which he was not permitted to feature in his Cliff House tales. Oswald - rather improbably, since he has a weak heart - saves Clara from drowning, and the tomboy, never one to disregard a service rendered, determines to help him to establish himself as an artist, as he is "talented". The bullying Cattermole and Co., at Friardale School, however, despise Musgrave as a "softy", because he is unable to play games, and is "always hiding himself away in odd corners with his silly oils and his idiotic brushes". Thus, Clara has her work cut out, particularly as, at first, "Oswald's sensitive soul shrank from violence in any shape or form. His courage was of that fine order which soared above brute force, and finds its ideal in the higher battles of life". Notwithstanding his "pacifist nature", Oswald later confronts the bullying Lister Cattermole, and gets considerable satisfaction as he "fells him to the ground" with his "knuckles clenched into a bunch of steel".

Oswald turns up again in a 1933 summer series, "The Tomboy's Folly", (nos. 207-9), and once more puts Clara deeply into his debt, this time by nursing Pluto through his illness, when Clara is unable to keep her pet at school and look after him herself. The grateful tomboy, prompted by Oswald's father, Captain Musgrave, who fears that his son's health may be suffering from overwork,

calls at Friardale School to urge the junior captain, Jimmy Richmond, to give him a chance in the cricket team. Clara arrives at the school happily in time to demonstrate her own cricket prowess. Jimmy Richmond is at the wicket:-

"It was a good hit. The ball sailed swiftly into the air. It came shooting towards Clara at a truly terrific speed, and Clara, unable to resist the temptation, jumped up throwing one hand into the air.

Smack!

With a terrific force the ball hurled itself into her hand, was caught, and held there. There came a roar from the cricketers.

'My hat, well caught!'

'Gee whizz! It's a girl!'

CLIFF HOUSE CELEBRITIES

BOYISH, boisterous and blunt! Those three "B's" are the index marks to the character of Cliff House's tomboy captain of Junior School sports, and, next to Barbara Redfern, the leading light of the Fourth Form.

Passionately fond of sport, Clara is essentially an open-air girl. A fearless leader, a fiercely loyal chum, one of Babs' most staunch admirers, and the idolised heroine of half the younger girls in the Lower School, Clara can count her friends by the score.

A girl who will never admit defeat; who scoffs at clothes and, despite the fact that her greatest chum in the Junior School is gentle Marjorie Hazeldene, despises all the gentler arts.

A girl who can be led but never driven, who always plays the game and is passionately fond of all animals.

But in spite of all her virtues, Clara has many failings. She is untidy. She is obstinate. She has a temper. She is inclined to do reckless, adventurous things and is a rebel by nature. She usually acts first and thinks afterwards, and though by no means a duffer, is impatient of learning.

A great champion of the weak, however, an inveterate fighter against forms of tyranny and unfairness, with a stubborn belief in her own impulses, whether right or wrong.

She is not pretty in the same way as Babs. Her face, like her nature, is frank, open and rugged. Her clear grey eyes, her untidy wind-blown bob and her commanding height make her a conspicuously athletic figure in the school. She has rather large feet, about which she is unduly sensitive, and a clear healthy skin whose only blemish is a line of freckles across the forehead.

Clara comes of a fighting family. Her father, still so young-looking, that he has often been mistaken for her elder brother, was a V.C. in the war. Her dare-devil brother Jack, at present in Nigeria on govern-



Clara Trevlyn

ment service, has played many adventurous parts, and has travelled the whole world. Her mother, however, is a rather frail little woman, who has to take to her bed for long periods at a time.

Clara is 6 feet 4 inches tall; 14 years and 7 months old. She was born in Surrey, and lives in the rambling old mansion of Trevlyn Towers on the Surrey-Sussex border.

Her Alsatian dog, Pluto, is the apple of her eye, and it is no exaggeration to say that Clara would lay down her life for him if necessary.

Miss Bullivant is her pet aversion among the mistresses; Connie Jackson among the prefects.

Her favourite flower is the peony, her favourite author Jack London.

Fond of the cinema, she ranks Ronald Colman as her hero, though she has no particular heroine.

Position in class last term, 17.

'Clara Trevlyn!'"

That "smack" must surely have brought a thrill of excitement to every schoolgirl reader's heart, and a glow of pride to her cheeks!

Clara's belief in, and championship of, Oswald Musgrave cause the inevitable misunderstandings with her form-mates and, for a time, she loses her cherished position as junior Captain of Games. But, of course, with "her chin squared with determination", our tomboy blunders through to victory in the end!

A third character whom Hamilton introduced is Miss Bullivant - popularly dubbed, "the Bull". In the first issue of the SCHOOLFRIEND, he describes her as being "not popular among the girls of Cliff House". She has "a way of dropping in in the most inopportune places at the most inopportune moments which the girls described as prowling". At this stage, she seems to me like nothing so much as a female version of Mr. Ratcliff - an impression which is certainly not lessened when she sweeps into Miss Primrose's study complaining that she has been "treated with gross disrespect". However, by the time he wrote the 1922 "Gussy the Runaway" series in the GEM, Hamilton had abandoned such Ratty-like facets to her character, and there is no suggestion of deviousness. One regards her with a sort of affectionate awe; she may be acid-tempered, and a bit of a tartar, but you know she's straight as a die. When the hapless Arthur Augustus takes refuge in a woodshed at Cliff House, in "Gussy Among the Girls", (no. 756), "the Bull" takes charge in typically determined fashion:-

"Stand back, girls! If there is a tramp here I will deal with him!" said Miss Bullivant. 'You need not be frightened! Remember you will be women some day, and will exercise the vote! I forbid you to be frightened'.

'Ruffian' - Miss Bullivant's voice boomed through the shed - 'I know you are there'

Come forth!"

Poor Gussy finally emerges from his hiding-place, and is most indignant to be accused by the forthright Miss Bullivant of loitering with intent to "hold surreptitious communication with a girl belonging to this school". After weakly protesting, "Weally, madam!", he is summarily ejected from Cliff House, with a clip on the ear from the irate "Bull" into the bargain.

By 1937, however, Hamilton has humanised her a little. In the "Skip of the Remove" series, (MAGNET, 1545-1555), Amelia Bullivant discovers that the lad who had earned his living as a pickpocket, before joining the Greyfriars Remove, is really her long-lost brother, Richard, and reacts accordingly, if briefly:-

"Miss Bullivant, who looked like a rock for strength and rigidity, the games mistress who was at hard as nails, who had marched Barney the Binger to the police station as efficiently as any constable, tottered!

Her hard, tanned face became quite white. But that spasm of weakness lasted only a moment."

It has to be said that there appeared to be a lack of communication between "Frank", writing about Miss Bullivant in the 1937 MAGNET, and "Hilda", writing about the same lady, in a Cliff House series, (nos. 216-18), for the SCHOOLGIRL of 1933. In this earlier tale, Wheway gave the Bull's name as

Evelyn", and introduced an under brother, "Grant", who wait for it! - has escaped from prison, after being wrongfully accused of forgery. Gazing at his "boyish photograph", Miss Bullivant seems transformed:-

"Gone were the harsh lines on her face. Gone that bitter, sour expression which seemed to be her main facial characteristic. The harsh lines had softened into thin folds, the grey-green eyes were dim, and those usually cold, hard lips were trembling".

The Bull, it seems, is human after all, and Babs and Co. rally round to help her, and prove her brother's innocence. Later, in a rare moment of confidence, Miss Bullivant seeks to explain to the girls the reasons for her sometimes over-strict sense of discipline:-

CLIFF HOUSE CELEBRITIES

MISS MARY EVELYN BULLIVANT is her full name; often called "the Bull." She is senior mistress at Cliff House School, and is the school mathematics expert. Her special form—the most mistresses at Cliff House combine the duties of Form-mistress with the teaching of a special subject throughout the school—is the Lower Third.

Miss Bullivant is definitely not prepossessing in either looks or temperament. She is nearly six feet in height, exceedingly thin, with iron-grey hair, and grey eyes usually protected by pince-nez glasses.

It is safe to say that, with the possible exception of Sarah Harrigan, Miss Bullivant has not a single friend in the school. Though some insist that she is just an out-and-out tyrant, she has, in reality, a very strict, if harsh, code of justice, and will never wittingly be unfair.

Her rather sour disposition and her irritability, however, are not altogether her own fault. Though she lives to a strict diet, and runs her personal life to a schedule which is as harsh and unbending as the routine she imposes upon her girls, she is a martyr to sleeplessness and indigestion, and herein arises the causes of her ill-temper.

There is a rumour in the school that when Miss Bullivant was young she was unlucky in love, and never, from that moment, has ceased to be embittered.

All the same, Miss Bullivant is not so black as she is painted, and perhaps it is her own fault she has never made a serious effort to allow anyone to understand her that she has never received more sympathy.

A terrifically hard worker all her life, she believes in making others work, too. Subject herself from childhood to rigid discipline, she is merely passing that on in her treatment of others at Cliff House. Perhaps Babs & Co. would be



M. E. Bullivant

surprised, however, to learn that, despite her discouraging treatment of them at times, she has a very warm spot in her heart for the Co.—and especially for industrious Marjorie Hazeldene.

She has a younger brother, Brian, for whom she has a surprisingly deep affection.

Miss Bullivant is now over forty. She entered the school as assistant mathematics mistress, and for the first ten years had no Form of her own. Then, for a number of years, she was mistress of the Fourth, later being given charge of the Lower Third. As senior, she acts as headmistress on all occasions that Miss Primrose is unable to attend to her duties.

She is not fond of the films, but likes Shakespearean plays and operas, her favourites among these being "As You Like It" and "Faust."

She neither plays games nor approves of them. Favourite colour: blue. Favourite author: Einstein. Favourite flower: crocus.

Was born in York, but lives in Manchester. Her hobby, apart from mathematics, is astronomy.

"I realise that perhaps I have been rather harsh with you and your friends in the past, "Miss Bullivant went on. "I know that I am not popular. I have always endeavoured to do my duty by the school first. I have been strict. I know it may have struck you sometimes that I have been unfair. But - do you hold any of these things against me, Barbara?!"

How can any schoolgirl resist such an honest appeal? Babs' eyes grow misty", and the Co.'s resolve to aid Miss Bullivant is intensified. Later, when the stress of the situation causes the mistress to fall ill, they are even more supportive, as they gaze at her in "sanny":-

"Thin Miss Bullivant had always been, but now she seemed to have become emaciated. Gone that characteristic harshness, that fierceness of expression for which she had always been noted. She looked now just what she was - a very pitiful, frightfully helpless, utterly weak and worn-out old lady."

Which sounds a trifle exaggerated, no doubt, and perhaps it's just as well that Wheway has her revert to type after this series. Miss Primrose may be benevolent Principal, but you can't keep a crowd of high-spirited girls in order if your senior mistress is looking "helpless, worn-out and old". Mistresses may el like that, of course, but they must never show it!

Which writer paints the truer picture of these three Cliff House characters

then? Hamilton or Wheway; Ransome or Phillips? Personally, I don't think it matters too much; each version has its own validity, whatever our individual preference. They're such colourful characters anyway, that there seems a place for more than one interpretation. I'm just happy that they were created in the first place!

All Best Wishes to all members of the hobby for Xmas and The New Year.

JIM COOK

P.O. BOX 16107, SANDRINGHAM, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

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Greetings to All, especially to Eric whose efforts fired my continued interest, and to Mary who has insured that my interest is maintained.

REG MOSS, KHANDALLAH
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

=====

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Christmas Greetings to All Readers and Contributors, with Special Thanks to the Editor(s), past and present.

REG ANDREWS
LAVERSTOCK, SALISBURY

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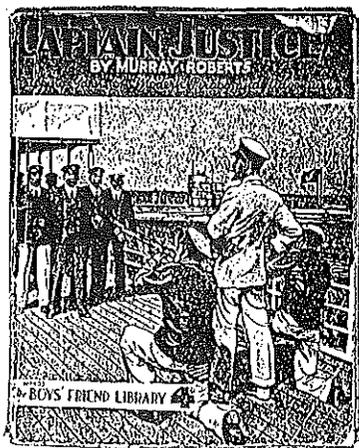
Seasonal Greetings and Good Health To All C.D. Friends.

LEN HAWKEY

=====

THE REAL CAPTAIN JUSTICE WOULD HAVE STOOD UP

BY R. HIBBERT



In the Thirties the Amalgamated Press used to publish four paper-backed books a month in THE BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY series. The BFL called itself 'The Foremost Monthly Magazine of Sporting, Mystery and Adventure Stories'. Each book contained a full length (100 page) story and cost 4d (1.67p). The action-packed yarns were reprints of serials which had appeared in the A.P.'s boys' weeklies. Usually these serials had to be abridged to fit the BFL format, but we've read one story which is longer as a BFL reprint than it was as a MODERN BOY serial.

It's the first of Murray Roberts' CAPTAIN JUSTICE stories.

The blurb to BFL no. 405 (2.XI.1933) 'CAPTAIN JUSTICE' urged us to 'Meet Captain Justice, the Modern Pirate, and sail the seas with him on the vengeance trail! Justice is out to get the men who killed his father and ruined his own life - and get 'em he will, by hook or by crook!' And, by heck and by gum, so he did. The four villains who'd wronged Justice all found watery graves; three by straightforward drowning and one by plunging into the shark infested sea.

'A splash, a fierce lashing of water, a snapping of jaws, and it was all over with Amos Brand!'

Justice's proper name wasn't Justice, but something beginning with 'Har' - the foolhardy evil-doer who started to blurt out his real name shut up when 'the muzzle of the Captain's revolver granted menacingly against the middle button of his expansive waistcoat.'

"No names," snapped Justice in that steely voice of his.

Har - had started out a simple sailor, much like Edmond Dantes, but better born, and a lot better off. Like Dantes he was treated monstrously by hidden enemies. He wasn't locked up for what must have seemed forever, but he was forced to resign his commission in the Royal Navy, was shunned by all his past friends AND expelled from all his clubs.' To a Briton of patrician stock that must have been nearly as bad as fourteen years in the dungeons of the Chateau d'If. Both Dantes and Har found untold riches on lonely islands, and the one became the vengeful Count of Monte Cristo and the other the unforgiving Captain Justice.

The first part of 'CAPTAIN JUSTICE - MODERN PIRATE' was in Modern Boy no. 146 (22.XI.1930). The serial ran for nine episodes, the last one being MB no. 154 (17.I.1931). The BFL reprint came out three years later on

2.XI.1933. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the BFL version correspond to the episode in MB no. 147. The BFL chapter 4 (2000 words) isn't in the MB version of the story and describes a depth charge attack by a U.S. Navy cruiser on Justice's submarine AVENGER.

The BFL's chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 = the MB no. 148 episode. No part of chapter 7 appears in the Modern Boy story. The extra 2000 words tell of the attempted escape of two of Justice's captives. They are Len Connor and Midg who later became Justice's most loyal assistants. The BFL's chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19 = the MB no. 151's rendering, in which Justice intervenes in South American republic Bogorova's civil war. Justice doesn't care who wins this return match between General Snargo's 'unwashed dagoes' and General Diza's 'frowsy rabble'. (In this sort of story if an Anglo-Saxon wants to insult a Latin he calls him a dago, and if a Latin wants to be rude to an Anglo-Saxon he calls him a gringo. Justice is meddling in Bogorova's little local difficulties because he's heard that Chilton Draper, one of the men on his wanted list, is a prisoner of General Snargo.

"Chilton Draper belongs to me! He's got to be rescued from Bogorova - brought here to Desolation Island to feel the weight of my revenge!"

In MB no. 151 Justice and Connor are captured by Diza ... are in danger of being shot as spies ... persuade the rebel general they're on his side ... take part in the battle in which Snargo is defeated ... and capture Draper. There's far more to it than that in the BFL version. Chapter 18 has 3230 more words than the Modern Boy's account!

Justice and Connor are first captured by Snargo, who decides to have them shot. Justice is stood against the garden wall of the Presidency and smokes a cigarette while the firing squad lines up five yards away. The order is given to fire and:-

Justice lay in a huddled heap against the wall. The soldiers grounded their rifle butts. And in that second Justice suddenly sprang to his feet, turned and leapt at the wall {and} was up and over in the twinkling of an eye.'

Then he rescues Connor and they're off to be captured by Diza's men, as in the Modern Boy. As there isn't a wall handy, Diza's soldiers stand them up against a tree and consider shooting them but take them to the general instead. Diza is glad to have Justice on his side and, as in the Modern Boy version, Draper is rescued from Snargo's firing squad (Draper's up against a wall too) and hustled on board the pirate's submarine.

The BFL's chapters 20 and 21 are the same as the episode in MB no 152 but for some obscure reason Justice's London agent (who is a traitor) is called Harrop in the MB and Dutton in the BFL.

MB no. 154 (17.I.1931) contains the last episode of 'CAPTAIN JUSTICE MODERN PIRATE' and corresponds to BFL's chapters 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29. Chapter 26 has 1500 words which aren't in the Modern Boy account. Justice and Co. have to capture a gunboat so that they can get back to Desolation Island. Their submarine's been sunk. In the Modern Boy it isn't difficult to seize the gunboat. In the BFL there's fighting between Justice's raiders and the gunboat's engineers.

Altogether the BFL version has about 5500 words more than the MB story. Possibly the 5500 words were edited out of the MB episodes to make way for 'the what has gone before' bit which was always there for new readers. (Although they weren't, all nine episodes were headed 'COMPLETE'.)

I'd like to think that the MB version was the original Murray Roberts' story and that the extra words were made up by some editor when he realised that the tale wasn't going to stretch out to the BFL 100 page length.

I'd like to think that, because the manner in which Justice avoided being shot by General Snargo's firing squad seems unlikely. Now I don't expect realism in any adventure story. I'm more than willing to accept giant submarines, giant airships, giant Sargasso Sea monsters, charabanc-sized boring machines which carried our heroes to the depths of the earth, giant robots, giant Blackpool Towers in the middle of the South Atlantic and all the other wonders Murray Roberts delighted us with in the later Captain Justice stories, but I refuse to believe (and I wouldn't have believed it when I was 12) that Justice simply ducked under the fusillade of bullets. No! So I hope Murray Roberts (my favourite boys' story writer) never said he did. Please let it be some forgotten sub-editor who cobbled together the firing squad episode (the first of THREE firing squad episodes in that part of the book) and explained it away like this:-

"Did they hit you?" asked Connor.

Justice gave a short laugh

"I never gave them the chance I've seen men shot like that before now, and I've always noticed that between the officer's order to fire and the pulling of the trigger there is an appreciable moment. I banked on that, and the fact that a firing squad always aim at the heart - never lower. When the order to fire was given I simply dropped in a heap. The bullets hit the wall above me."

No, that can't be MURRAY ROBERTS' Captain Justice. It's certainly not the Justice I knew and respected (he wasn't lovable, not even to his greatest fans). The REAL Captain Justice would have stood there bravely - smoking a cigar, not a cigarette - and died like the true blue Briton he was.

Happy Christmas everybody. Wanted Girls Own Paper Annual No. 62. Any single G.O.P.s containing W.E. Johns. Anything else with W.E. Johns Interest. Thanks.

PAUL GALVIN

2 THE LINDALES, POGMOOR, BARNESLEY, S. YORKS. SY5 2DT

=====
Annuals Wanted:- Champion 1937, Puck 1934, 1936, 1937, 1938, My Favourite 1932, 1933, 1934, 1936, Sunbeam 1937, 1939.

VIC HEARN

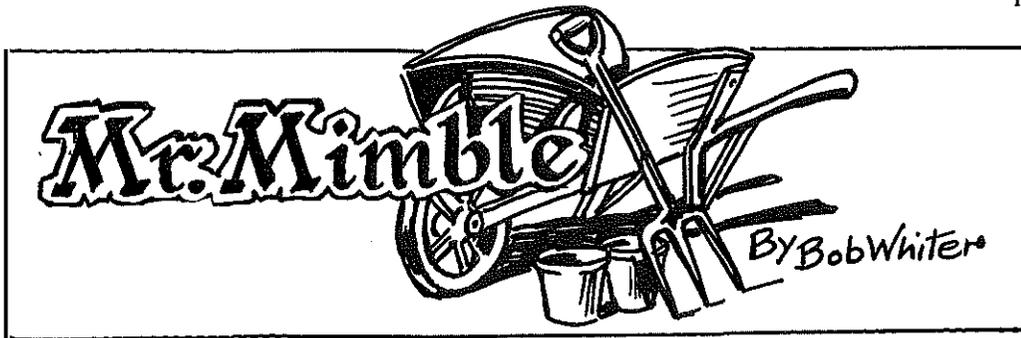
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=====
The Season's Greetings to All Hobby Friends.

DR. JOHNNY AND BETTY HOPTON

79 SCALPCLIFFE ROAD, Burton Upon Trent

=====



Among the numerous adult characters created by Charles Hamilton, there are those who can actually further the plot of the stories; on the other hand there are some who, in the main, merely help to create the right atmosphere. Mr. Mimble, I think comes into the second category. Although in early "Who's Whos" his christian name is given as Joseph, in the latter part of the Greyfriars saga he generally answers to Alfred. He is the husband of Jessie Mimble who runs the school tuckshop. They have one young son Henry Herbert George Mimble who is however most often referred to as "the small boy Mimble".

Alfred Mimble is the school gardener, with the main emphasis placed on his caring for the Head's garden.

In the Brander Headmaster series (1930) he gets several mentions. When Dr. Locke gets struck down, we read the following:

"What's happened to the Head?"

"Is he hurt?"

Wingate nodded.

"Mimble the gardener found him lying in his garden," he said. (no. 1170)

He is quite friendly with Gosling the porter, as we learn in further extracts from the same series.

"Excitement and perturbation reigned throughout Greyfriars from the Head to the smallest fag in the Second Form. Even Gosling, as he rang the rising-bell, had a look of grim disapproval and dubiety on his crusty face. Gosling confided to Mr. Mimble the gardener that these were fine goings - on. Mr. Mimble agreed that such goings - on would have been unimaginable in the time of the late 'Ead.

(Magnet No. 1172)

Later on in the same story Mr. Mimble finds himself forced to help the new head to try and subdue the Remove juniors, who have barred out against his tyranny.

"Then came Mr. Mimble the gardener, who was dragging something after him, and panting with the effort. "What the thump - "ejaculated Todd.

"Oh, my hat! Its the hose"

Mr. Brander gritted his teeth.

"Turn the water on the young rascals, Mimble!" he rapped out.

"Yessir!" Mr. Mimble blinked apologetically at the juniors. I'm sorry, you gents! Orders its orders!"

Even so he tries not to hit the boys too hard with the jets of water - so much so, that Mr. Brander, realising the position, snatches the hose from him and drenches the rebels without mercy - no, I'm not going to tell you how the defenders get out of this situation - if you haven't read this famous series beg, borrow or S - it, and read it! Believe me you have a treat in store.

In Magnet No. 1404 of January, 12th 1935, Mr. Mimble gets a mention

in the Greyfriars Herald's feature "Would You Believe It?" Greyfriars Facts
While You Wait!

Old Mimble, the Head's gardener, dislikes fags and was delighted when Dicky Nugent & Co. were commanded to help him as a punishment. Old Mimble made them dig a hole for some rubbish - and he said candidly by what he would have liked to bury them in it. A case of "too much fag"!

When Loder's cousin comes to Greyfriars in the guise of the new games master (Mr. Stephen Lagden), Loder gets on the wrong side of him. Whilst searching Lagden's rooms for some form of incriminating evidence, he falls foul of Wibley who ties the handles of the sitting-room door and the bed-room door together with rope, making the prefect a prisoner. He has to resort to escaping from the bedroom window.

Loder panted as he dragged open the bed-room window and stared out. Ten feet below there were leads. It was not a difficult drop, if he could reach the ground from that lower roof.

Only one person was in sight, at the back of the buildings. Mr. Mimble, the gardener, at work in the kitchen gardens. He was busy, plying a hoe, and his back was turned.Loder lowers himself immediately above an old water-butt, before dropping - But he had not calculated on the extremely ancient and weather-worn condition of that wooden lid!

It creaked, cracked and broke under the impact of his weight, and let him through!

Loder splashed wildly.

Mr. Mimble ceased to ply his hoe, straightened up, and looked round. His eyes almost bulged from his head at what he saw - a wet and furious face glaring over the rim of the water-butt.

"My eye!" gasped Mr. Mimble. He dropped the hoe in his astonishment, and gazed in blank amazement at Loder.....

"My eye!" repeated Mr. Mimble faintly. And for long minutes after Loder of the Smith had vanished, Mr. Mimble continued to stare - the most astonished gardener in the County of Kent.'

(Magnet No. 1495 Oct. 10th 1936)

During the "Tuckshop Rebellion" series, we get an interesting glimpse of the Mimble household. This occurs when Lord Mauleverer visits with them, and persuades Mr. & Mrs. Mimble and son to take a holiday at his expense.

"His Lordship!" ejaculated Mr. Mimble in astonishment.

"His Lordship!" repeated Mrs. Mimble.

"My eye!" said the small boy Mimble staring past his parents, at the elegant figure at the side door of the school shop.

The three were all surprised.

Mr. Mimble, the Head's gardener and Mrs. Mimble, who kept the school shop, had been sitting by their fireside, discussing the late exciting events at Greyfriars. Safe from Mr. Hacker's ears, they told one another what they thought of Mr. Hacker and his goings on especially his sending away that nice boy Mauleverer. Small Mimble had been sitting up, with a stick of toffee in one hand, and a "Holiday Annual" in the other, the latter having been given by Lord Mauleverer at the beginning of the term.

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A knock at the side door surprised the Mimble family: and Mr. Mimble came to open it, expecting to see Gosling, who sometimes came in for a chat, though seldom so late.

(Magnet No. 1512 February, 6th 1937)

Mr. Mimble is also honoured in two of "the Stately Homes of Greyfriars" features. These were purported to have been written by the Greyfriars Rhymester, generally supposed to be Dick Penfold, the cobbler's son. Thus we have in Magnet No. 1513 (Feb. 13th 1937) in the second verse of "The Head's House":

"For Mr. Mimble stands on guard
 The "Guardener" is he
 And if he catches us, it's hard
 To get away scot free,
 He takes our names, which means a row,
 For off to Quelch he'll go,
 What happens after that? Ow-wow!
 (I've been there and I know!)"

"The Head's House" was followed in June of the same year with "The Tuck shop".

Naturally the emphasis was mainly on Mrs. Mimble but Alfred is mentioned. I would like to comment on one last allusion to Mr. Mimble. Against the advice of Potter and Greene, Coker changes a "fiver" for a stranger, and then presents it to Mrs. Mimble in payment, for a large consignment of tuck.

"Mrs. Mimble looked at it. She put on her glasses and looked at it again. Then she gave it a third and very scrutinising look.....

"Oh!" said Mrs. Mimble. "Please wait a moment, Master Coker".

She took the bank-note into her back parlour, obviously to consult Mr. Mimble on the subject.....

"I'm afraid I cannot take that note, Master Coker," she said.

"And why not?" grunted Coker.

"It is not a good one! Mr. Mimble says you had better take it to the police station sir."

(Magnet 1564 February, 5th 1938)



So we see that Mr. Mimble was a man of enough experience to tell a "dud" when he saw one. May his shadow never grow less as he plies his hoe, and trundles his wheelbarrow. May he forever cultivate those beautiful English roses, that surely were used to decorate the living room of Dr. Locke's house. He is, I'm sure one of those minor characters, who nevertheless, add to the atmosphere of that grand old establishment we know as Greyfriars.

Enter Sir Robert" by Angela Thirkell - Wanted by:

IRIS HOLMAN

10 GLENBERVIE DRIVE, LEIGH ON SEA, ESSEX. SS9 3JU

WANTED S.B.L. S.O.L. Happy Christmas to All Members.

ROSEMARY KEOGH

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WANTED! Tiger Tim's Annuals 1922, 1927, 1931, 1932, 1936 and Rainbow 1940.

N. M. KADISH

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SEASONAL GREETINGS TO ALL

WANTED: Good Prices Paid. Schoolgirls, Schoolfriends, Schoolgirls Owns and G.O.L.S. also Girls' Crystal Annual 1940, Popular Book of Girls' Stories 1935, 1936, 1941 and Hardbacks 'Hit for Six' by T.H. Scott: 'Mistress Mariner' by Morita Fairlie Bruce: 'Biddy's Secret' and 'Maidlin to the Rescue' by Elsie Oxenham. Also Ovaltiney badge and Rule Book.

MARY CADOGAN

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WANTED: Bound SOLS and Dixon Hawke Case Books. Best Regards to All Hobby Friends.

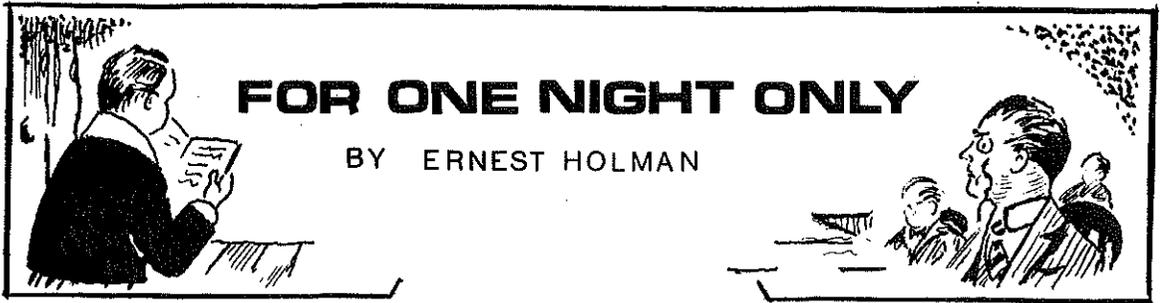
KEARNS

35 BURNISTON ROAD, HULL. HU5 4JX

Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year to All Digest Readers from:

LESLIE KING

CHESHAM, BUCKS



"Ben Battle was a soldier bold and used to war's alarms
A cannon ball took off his legs and he laid down his arms!"

Now where on earth would one expect to hear the above recital, spoken almost through clenched teeth, delivered without pause between the words, by a small, bullet-headed boy in Etons?

Well, of course - at the local Hall; in service for one performance only, in aid of a most deserving and well-meaning cause. Usually the Church Hall - the acceptable venue for that most revered of all ceremonies, the Village Concert. (Now THERE'S a new title for you, Miss Read!)

All of us, at some time or other, have attended - not without certain reservations, especially afterwards - such gatherings. None of us, however, has such an insight into this aspect of local History as P.G. Wodehouse's renowned Bertram Wooster.

Bertie has seen and endured much - even, in fact, venturing at times (although reluctantly) to actually take part. Not only at Village functions - town functions, even (e.g. Drones Annual Smoking Concert). There is literally nothing that Bertie does not know about such activities - his archives are full of them.

Mothers' Meetings - how much per head for free tea and buns - how much per mouth would be required? All this, of course, for AFTER the necessary Concert. A paucity of talent here, if ever there was - yet sat patiently through by the gathered maternal parents, licking their lips at the feed to come. ("Will three pounds, fifteen shillings and threepence be sufficient to satisfy fifty-odd hungry mothers?")

Beefy Bingham's Lads' Club in East London actually saw Bertie performing. Beefy was reading for Holy Orders and told Bertie that it was a great training ground. Another source of information informed Bertie that "It's for the local Toughs - you know the sort of things - cocoa and backgammon in the Oddfellows' Hall - all good, clean, hearty fun!" Bertie wished Beefy well - but was more than a little shattered when Aunt Dahlia told him off to sing a number at Beefy's next Concert. What was more, not an ordinary song - but the then infamous "Sonny Boy". Dahlia's nephew was horrified. "That's a song to be reserved for one's bath night - you don't think I'm going to stand up before those Tough Eggs and sing it, do you?" It appeared that Auntie did so think - and forever afterwards the memory brought the poor fellow out in cold sweats!

Bertie, in fact, rarely performed after that - but he attended many such entertainments and soon worked out a quiet but necessary procedure and philosophy about them. The main thing was not to get stranded in the middle of a row of seats, where escape was impossible. Never mind the expensive, five-bob

seats in the front - take up a standing position at the back, with a handy exit available for the quick sneak.

(I can well sympathise with him - what few local concerts I ever attended always saw me with, at least, a seat at the end of a row. This routine was to come in very handy during the War years. I am sure many an ex-Serviceman reading this will appreciate the fact of taking up a seat at the end of a row, near an exit, in any Garrison Theatre; this was essential because, as soon as the show finished, one made a rapid scoot. For it was only by beating the National Anthem that one could hope to be at the front of the Naafi queue. It was an unfortunate clash of duties - but Service life did tend to make one materialistic!)

So Bertie knew what he was about when he became a Concert Standee. He'd been there before, frequently, and was wise in his generation. Forget the fact that the Hall had the fug of centuries hovering around, together with the crisp smell of moth-balls from seldom-used or Sunday-type clothes. The main thing was positioning, for only a quick exit at the end could enable one to make it before closing time. Concert organisers always seemed to overlook the necessity of an earlier start to proceedings!

It is, however, in the Village Concert that Bertie Wooster comes out at his best as a describer of the scene. The Squire and other five-bobbers are all in the front, the three-and-sixpennies in the middle, with the shillings seated at the rear; and, behind them, the sixpenny Standees. All Village Concerts, we are assured, commence with an explanation of the reason for the Concert. So, before the curtain went up, the Vicar came to the front of the stage, fixed his eyes on the audience and told his piece. It was a sad, even moving, address, with all the inevitability of Greek tragedy. Fortunately for his readers, writer Wooster was liberal in his interpretation of the Vicar's discourse. This was the gist, he tells us.

The Church Organ was in the hell of a bad way. For years it had been going around with holes in its socks, doing the Brother-can-you-spare-a-dime stuff and now it was about to hand in its dinner pail. There had been a time, said the Vicar, when he had hoped that the pull-together spirit of the Villagers might have given the Organ a shot in the arm - but the way it looked to him at the moment, things had gone too far and he was prepared to bet his shirt on the bally contrivance going down the drain and staying there.

Not surprisingly, he left his listeners silent; in pessimistic voice, he said that the Concert in aid of the Church Organ would now commence. His attitude seemed to Bertie to be conveying the fact that suffering was good for the soul! Well, a Village Concert always relies very much throughout on the pianist - and this is always a 'toss-up'. You might get a rousing send-off by a Hockey centre-forward from Girton, who would belt out the Overture from "William Tell". Incidentally, the only tune I know that can be rhythmically played on the space bar of a manual typewriter!) On the other hand, you might have the local School Music Mistress, who would put everybody in a chastened mood by offering "In a Monastery Garden".

It is after whatever pianistic opening has been completed that the Village Concert is revealed as the playground of Vested Interests. In other words, at every such Annual presentation, there are certain powerful local Celebrities to be considered. There are, Bertie reports, various local Nibs who, having always done their bit, are going to be pretty cold and sniffy if not invited to do it again. Here, at the particular Show in question Bertie takes us through the offerings of such a family.

To a man of his wide experience, such items as "Solo Violin Recital", "Duologue (a couple of lunatics)" told their own story. The same thing applied to "Imitations of Song Birds", "Card Tricks" and "Poetry Reading". Each of these items involved a member or members of the above family - but that did not by any means exhaust the supply. A minion came on the stage carrying a table upon which he placed a framed photograph. "I knew then", confessed Bertie, "that we were for it!" Show him a table and a framed photograph and the next member of the talented family stood revealed as a "My Hero" from the Chocolate Soldier addict. Unfortunately, the front of the audience applauded rather loudly after the song had died away - which led to an encore of "Oh, who will o'er the Down with me?" The next round of applause (to use a Jeeves' description, spasmodic) was of sufficiently low gear to prevent (probably) the "Indian Love Call".

It was the youngest member of this vast family - obviously press-ganged into appearing - who offered the saga of Ben Battle being a soldier bold, etc. He raced through the 'pun in every verse' recital, only too glad to get it over. The Church Choir - led by a distant relation of the Performing Rights Menagerie - managed to get through "Glee - (Oh, Come Unto these Yellow Sands)" and then came the latest of the family in what the Programme referred to as a "Rhythmic Dance". It certainly held the interest. Miss Poppy was long, dark and supple - one of those girls who perform such dances at the drop of a hat. Her rendering had started out in life as a straight-forward "Vision of Salome" - but with persuadings from the Women's Institute, who apparently blew the whistle on certain portions of the dance, the final result was a series of slitherings and writhings. At one time, she appeared to have got herself into a clove-stitch - but it all came out correct in the end.

By the time the whole, dreadful Show came to an end - loud cheers for the imitation of cork-drawing from a bottle - much water - and probably tears - had flowed under the Concert bridge by journey's end. Perhaps the most fortunate aspect of such entertainments is the fact that they are performed once and once only. No second or third nights to endure, as with Amateur Dramatics. We were not told what the effect of the proceedings was able to have upon the Church Organ.

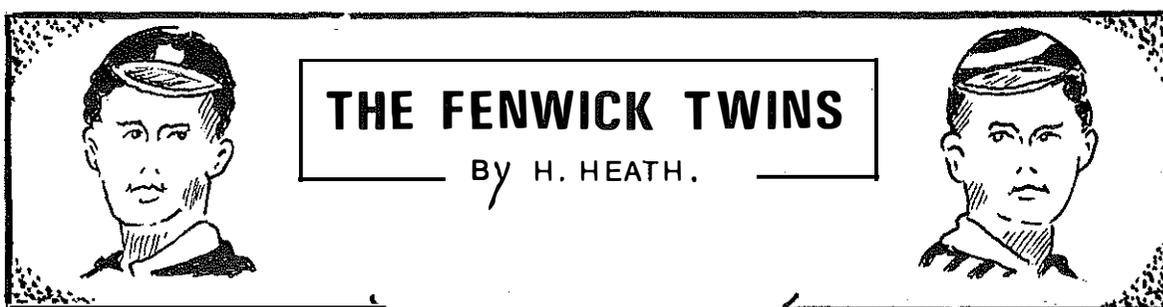
Bertie Wooster is prepared to admit that, grim as the proceedings often turn out to be, they have the advantage of being in a good cause. They help to bind together the local Community - all for one and one for all, sort of thing. Perhaps another Wodehouse item might sum it all up, really; a point of view, in fact, expressed by the Vicar of a hamlet called Rudge-in-the-Vale. He told his congregation that "we must not consider ourselves as belonging to this section or that section. Let us recollect that we are all fellow-members of one united assembly. Rudge-in-the-Vale must be looked upon as a whole. And" he said, beaming around at his listeners, "what a whole it is!"

Season's Greetings to All. Sales Gems 1487, 1488, 1615, 1616, 1617. Wanted SOL. 32, 94, 108, 191, 193, 258, 283, 296, 308. "Always A Knight", Author unknown.

MAURICE KING

27 CELTIC CRESCENT, DORCHESTER, DT1 2TG (0305) 69026

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School stories featuring identical twins or doubles were a popular theme with Charles Hamilton and he returned to it on several occasions. In this respect the Stacey Wharton series of 1935 in the Magnet is particularly memorable.

As far as I can tell, Hamilton's first use of this theme was a series in the Magnet in 1913 featuring Reggie Clavering and Tom Merry. However, Hamilton was preceded in the use of this plot by a writer who, under the name of Robert W. Comrade, wrote a story in the Dreadnought about the Fenwick twins. This began in November, 1912 and ran for 24 issues. As all Nelson Lee enthusiasts, and no doubt many others know, Robert W. Comrade was a pen-name of Edwy Charles Brooks. Incidentally, Brooks in 1927 also repeated the theme in the Nelson Lee with the Castleton twins.

The Fenwick twins attended different schools, with Leonard at St. Otwells and David at Sandcliffe. It is worth noting that this series was written 5 years before the advent of St. Frank's in 1917. The names of the Houses at Sandcliffe, Ancient and Monk, have a familiar ring to them. A brief description of a soccer match at Sandcliffe is remarkable as there is a reference to a voice in the crowd shouting "Off-side". I cannot recall in any other school story a reference to this common offence in the game.

Editor's note: I seem to remember in a very early Greyfriars story some discussion of "the off-side rule".)

The story opens with the twins on a train leaving Liverpool Street Station returning to their respective schools after the holidays. About an hour before the rail junction is reached where they would part company and go on their separate ways, David suddenly says that he has a wonderful idea. It is of course, that they should change schools, and for both of them solemnly to undertake to keep up the pretence until the end of the forthcoming term. Leonard agrees eagerly and, during the time until the rail junction is reached, there is a rapid exchange of information about the schools and pupils.

So Leonard takes David's place in the Fourth Form at Sandcliffe, and in doing so he inherits a variety of weighty problems which David has cruelly left behind. The first half of the series is devoted to Leonard's adventures at Sandcliffe where under great difficulties he succeeds in clearing his brother's name, whilst keeping up the pretence. Attention is then transferred to David in the Remove Form at St. Otwells where he had no qualms at first in carrying on in his old bad Sandcliffe ways, thereby blackening Leonard's hitherto very good name.

There is an interesting difference in the treatment of the events at the two schools. Leonard is the sole central character in the Sandcliffe half of the story as he successfully battles to win respect. David's adventures at St. Otwells

make the more powerful story as this has the benefit of a double plot. It is with the introduction of this double plot that David begins to have misgivings about himself, and the cruel trick he has played on his brother.

The same rail junction described as only 20 miles from Sandcliffe, but over 90 miles from St. Otwells, is the scene of a chance meeting between David, now reformed, and Leonard. After the reconciliation, they returned to their "wrong" schools and would revert to their correct ones at the start of the next term.

I have always found the story of the Fenwick twin to be an absorbing one. This view seems to have been shared by others as the series was repeated twice in the Boys' Friend Library, in 1917 and again in 1938. I have read only a comparatively small percentage of St. Frank's stories but fortunately this includes the "Communist School" and the "Ezra Quirke" series. To these excellent works of E.S.B. I add the lesser known story of the Fenwick twins, a story which first appeared nearly 75 years ago.

Seasonal Greetings to our Editor, To Eric Fayne, and all Collectors' Digest Contributors and Readers from:

PETER LANG,
ELLEN COURT, JARROW

=====

WANTED: Holiday Annual 1922; Schoolfriend 1919, Various Numbers between 1 and 37.

H.H. LACK
4 RUSHMERE ROAD, NORTHAMPTON

=====

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to our Editor and Eric Fayne and all C.D. Readers everywhere from:

NEIL LAMBERT

=====

Seasons Greetings to All Collectors. Thanks to Eric and Mary Cadogan.

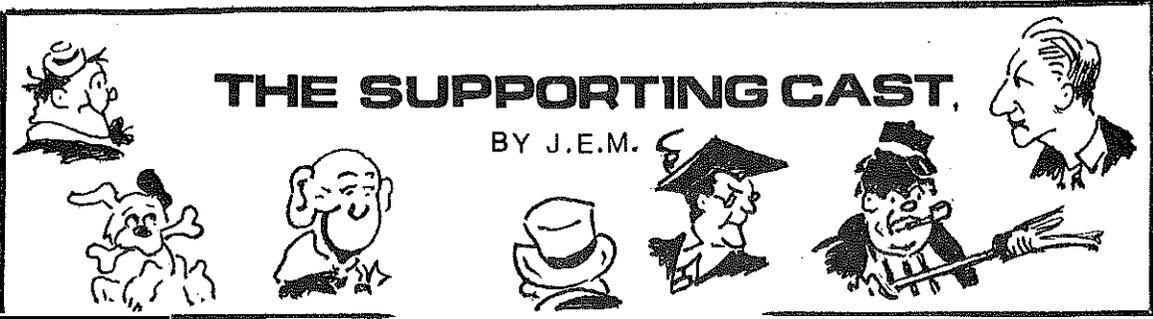
B. McCABE
DUNDEE

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Seasonable Greetings for Yuletide and New Year 1988 from:

WHITER FAMILY

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THE SUPPORTING CAST.

BY J.E.M.

Asked about his favourite reading, Harold Skinner of the Greyfriars Remove once said, "I like a story in which good little Eric gets it well and truly in the neck and the bold bad villain wins all along the line". Well, not many of us would go along with a statement as caddish as that but I suspect we did have the occasional sneaking regard for the not-so-goodies in the fiction of our youth. Skinner himself is a case in point. Sneak and coward he may have been but he also had a sharp, if malicious, wit and an enviable gift as a caricaturist. You couldn't help ... well ... being amused by the lad at times. In fact, supporting characters of every kind - the good, the bad, the ugly, the humble and the weak often got our vote over the star names.

Even among the goodies, it wasn't always the leading players we found the most attractive. In the case of the Greyfriars Famous Five, for instance, my own favourite was the least prominent of the quintet, the taciturn, and often tactless Johnny Bull. If his devotion to blunt speaking could cause pain to friend and foe alike, at least they (and the reader) knew where they stood with the tolid Yorkshire youth.

Names much lower on the cast-list than Johnny's have also had their admirers. CD contributor Tommy Keen once admitted to being intrigued by Stott, the second of Skinner's shady acolytes and a figure not often in the limelight. For me, the classic minor character in the would-be-good-if-he-could category was Hazeldene. Neither villain nor hero, he was sometimes just not equal to his better feelings. Hazel was, in short, rather like ... you and me? Well, certainly me! And this is the point about all the fictional characters that I, and so many others, warmed to: they were human, all too human. In truth, the more feeble and inadequate they seemed, the greater our sympathies often were. We surely echoed that French lady journalist, Severine, who, a century ago, said she was always on the side of the cat against the dog, the mouse against the rat, and the crust against the mouse!

Among other minor characters of the Greyfriars Remove, I had a strong affection for the theatrical Wibley. Neither the healthy sportsman type nor a dingy slacker, he belonged to that fairly small group who simply "did their own thing", as the saying goes. If his thespian ambitions and marvellous gift of disguise seemed a bit far-fetched at times, at least Wib was a refreshing individualist. And, unlike some others with unusual talents (e.g. Hoskins, the musical "genius" of the Shell) he was rarely made to seem a crank.

Of the Greyfriars "comedians", Bunter was the obvious star but a more endearing, and enduring, favourite of many (including me) was the rather less prominent Horace Coker, fool of the Fifth. Bunter was greed and cowardice incarnate; he seemed in fact to have no redeeming features at all. Horace, on

the other hand, though blundering, arrogant and stupid, at least had a warm and honest heart. Even less prominent than Coker himself, his studymates Potter and Greene were also most memorable - a couple of cheerful opportunists, ever ready to share the great man's good fortune but always elusive when trouble came. Humble "extras" in the Greyfriars story, P. and G. gave a lot of us lasting pleasure.

Beyond Greyfriars' gates, it was always a delight to meet the Highcliffians, whether the good, like Courtenay and his friends or the bad, like Ponsonby and Co. In the case of the latter group, I was greatly intrigued that Frank Richards was able to sustain a believable character in Vavasour, whose only contribution to any dialogue was "Absolutely!" I expect by now readers will be able to infer from what I have written a whole range of my Hamiltonian preferences, so I will leave Greyfriars, as well as St. Jim's and Rookwood, where very similar choices apply, and turn - briefly - to St. Frank's. Here again it is a delightful group of supporting characters that I best remember: the Moor View girls, no less. Why this should be so I am not certain. Perhaps Irene and Co. provided the lighter touch needed by a saga that could, occasionally, include some pretty hair-raising hazards and horrors.

From the groves of academe to the world of crime and mystery. In the great saga of Sexton Blake, the eponymous sleuth was, by definition, top star but, for many readers, it was the strong supporting cast that most attracted. It was not just the well-known villains like Marsden Plummer, Count Carlac, Huxton Rymer or Zenith the Albino but old stalwarts like Inspector Coutts and that ebullient newspaper man, 'Splash' Page, one of Gwyn Evans' most colourful creations. All these were indeed supporting players; Blake could hardly have survived without them. And what of the ladies? Female leads like Yvonne, Roxane, Vali Mata-Vali, Marie Galante and a number of others often threatened to outshine Blake himself. But, looking back over all the Blake periodicals, my own favourite female was a very humble starlet who made only a brief appearance in Detective Weekly. She was Elsa von Kravitch, the loyal but anguished daughter of the crooked Baron von K. As attractive as any of the leading ladies mentioned, Elsa was an innocent, vulnerable girl who roused the protective instinct in Blake (not to mention the reader). I was never totally happy that, at the end of the von Kravitch series, Elsa succumbed to the charms of 'Flash' Jim Brady. Reformed jewel thief he might have been - but could you ever be sure? The girl really needed the protection of someone more reliable; like the reader, for example...

Going back to even earlier fiction of our childhood, many of us enjoyed the D.C. Thomson story-papers at sometime or other and, for me, that period was at the end of the 1920's. Again it was the non-starring characters I recall with the most pleasure. The Wizard starred the Wolf Of Kabul (fighting the Afghan tribesmen long before the Russians!) and the wonder athlete Wilson, while the Rover's top-line names included the Black Sapper (not forgetting his underground burrowing machine) and that malevolent robot, the Smasher. My own favourites from these papers, however, were the Kentucky Twins and Dan Walker, the No-Gun Sheriff. The latter, a Western lawman who never fired a shot, bless him, and yet provided plenty of action and excitement, was to re-emerge in picture-strip form as Ragtime Cowboy Dan in the post-war period. Alas, the Kentucky Twins, a happy-go-lucky pair of hoboes, disappeared without trace around 1930. Old Thomsonians I've spoken to recall with ease the great leading characters of those days but have no memory of the cheerful twins from the blue grass State. Ah, well...

Last of all, and to return to the Amalgamated Press stable, in the same period a quick glance at one or two penny comics - the famous "penny blacks". The undisputed stars of Chips were those immortal tramps, Weary Willie and Tired Tim, with Casey Court high on the supporting cast-list, but, for many, Homeless Hector the dog often outshone the lot. Confined to a humble corner of the inside pages, H.H. might have been as famous as Felix the Cat or Mickey Mouse had he ever been transferred to the cinema screen. As it was, he remained a most durable and lovable supporting performer. Front-page knockabout stars of Larks were Dad Walker and his son, Wally, but my own unshakeable favourite strip was again an inside-pager. This was "Prairie Pranks", featuring Tom Trix, his delightful leggy girlfriend, Trixie, and a real Mexican villain, Dago Dan. A lovely little parody of the conventional Western films of those days, "Prairie Pranks" can still amuse.

Long-running stars of Funny Wonder were Charlie Chaplin (usually front page) and Pitch and Toss, those saucy sailors so beautifully drawn by Roy Wilson, but the inside strips included some unforgettable supporting figures. Among them were Marmaduke and his Ma, Nap (Napoleon) and his Bonny Bodyguard and - when will she ever fade? - Sally in our Alley. The Jester is best remembered for that comic cop, Constable Cuddlecook, but I have a warmer memory of an inside strip recording the pranks of Jessie Joy ("Just like a boy"), a mini-skirted tomboy who, almost fifty years on, seems remarkably up-to-date.

This brief look at some old cast-lists from our very long ago reading can only remind us that there remain hundreds of minor characters whom we often preferred to the stars and whom we can still recall with nostalgic pleasure. Even those we have long forgotten surely played a most essential part in that world of juvenile magic, for where would the great stars have been without their magnificent supporting players?

Our little montage of only half a dozen of the characters referred to shows (clockwise from top left): Horace Coker in irate mood; Dan Walker the No-Gun Sheriff; 'Splash' Page; a Moor View girl (Irene?) reproving a bully; Jessie Joy; Elsa von Kravitch.

The Season's Greetings from John Wernham to all our members and to the future of the Old Boys' Book Club.

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Happy Xmas and Prosperous New Year to All Readers of Collectors' especially dear Eric and Ye Editor!

STUART WHITEHEAD

4 BUTTS ASH COTTAGES, HYTHE

=====

Seasonal Greetings Readers Everywhere.

DON AND ELSIE WEBSTER

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A visitor one day noticing the large number of books on my shelves expressed the opinion that I was a little mad, when he realized the kind of books they were! Thus suddenly granting himself a degree in psychiatry, my visitor was most unfair - for he has never read our hobby papers and therefore was making the assessments of ignorance.

But I blame old Bill Shakespeare for creating the illusion that the English are mad. This stems from Hamlet, with the grave-digger's explanation of why the Danish prince had been packed off to England: '... he is mad. It will not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he is.' The popular novelist R.F. Delderfield would probably forgive the Bard of Stratford by claiming - as he did with one of his book titles - that 'God is an Englishman'.

I have always found it impossible to forget Edwy Searles Brooks' St. Frank's College. At the outbreak of World War 2, I had occasion to sell off all my collection of Nelson Lees. This produced the same feeling as when watching a missed train one has just failed to catch. But as the war years progressed, memories of incidents in the stories began to intrude on my mind, and I began to regret condemning myself to see the last of the schoolboy heroes who had comforted me and lived with the trials of my salad days.

Later I found out that many of our hobby books and papers had been saved, and that the Nelson Lee was still very much in existence. Thus life began anew for me after those dreary wartime years, and I was able to gather my favourite paper again. This says much for the lovers of the Nelson Lee Library, who had cherished and saved their copies to enable them once again to be circulated around the world. For the Lees turned up in many odd places in the English speaking countries. Places like LIMA, SINGAPORE, ACCRA, FIJI, etc., where I contacted collectors who were anxious to write about the school stories and to be my pen-pals.

I do not have the same affection for some of the books published contemporaneously with the N.L.L., or to those read to us at school - like Tom Brown's Schooldays or The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's. These other school stories never had the same effect on me as did Brooks' tales. The Nelson Lee stories were compelling reading, as is proved by the great amount of them still being read and written about today. What further proof is necessary?

It may be that many in our hobby possess only a small portion of the long running N.L.L., which comprised almost a thousand issues in all. However, collectors who are fortunate enough to have a large enough number to make a detailed appraisal may well come to the same conclusion that I did long ago - that these school and adventure yarns will always prevail, and invite us to remember the good times of long ago. Kind nature wants us to dwell chiefly on the better moments of our young days, and to cast out the nasty scenes from our memories.

Seldom did the villains in the stories of those days deeply affect us (unlike the potent and explicit visual villains which now impinge daily upon our lives). Our Nelson Lee, of course, came but once a week. What is amazing in those old St. Frank's stories is the great cast of characters, all of whom were so well defined as to become recognisable from their conversations alone.

I recall winning a prize from a "mystery story" where the characters were not named, but the reader was guided by the mode of speech or action. It was really easy, since the St. Frank's characters were so well drawn.

Unfortunately copies of the N.L.L. are thin on the ground nowadays and those that are in the market indicate the true meaning of the word "priceless" this also applies to other boys' papers of the period when the Nelson Lee was published. Some Lees I have managed to obtain bear scars healed by loving tenderness. Little tears in the pages have been faithfully sealed with tape and the copies preserved in cellophane covers.

The stranger to our old school stories could, I suppose, be forgiven for thinking we are a little mad the way we treasure these very old boys' papers perhaps in the same way as stamp-collectors or gatherers of objets d'art. But present-day literature for boys will never qualify for the Halls of Remembrance we reserve for our greatly loved papers - and for two reasons: so many of the finer attributes we knew seem now to have been overtaken by greed and win-at-any-cost ethics, and classic boys' school and adventure stories would hardly fit in with modern thinking.

Every so often I take a mental holiday from today's ever present threat of disturbance by reading those old St. Frank's yarns, and I drift back to former times when fears for the the future never bothered us like they do now. With remarkable clarity I can visualise old Mudford, the village postman, trudging up Bellton Lane to deliver mail to St. Frank's where more often than not boys live in hope of receiving those welcome tips from home: or form-room scenes which were reminiscent of our own schooldays, the fading memories of which are cheerfully being revived as I peruse the St. Frank's tales.

I had a very pleasant surprise recently; a kind friend sent me a Nelson Lee which I had never been able to obtain. Published in 1917, it was in remarkably good condition. It is in moments of exhilaration like this, when looking once again at a very old and long elusive copy, that the Nelson Lee Library makes up for life's problems.

WANTED: Footsteps of Death, by Victor Gunn. Wanted: the Crooked Staircase by Victor Gunn. Wanted: Convict, 1066, by Berkeley Gray.

MR. F. WHEELER

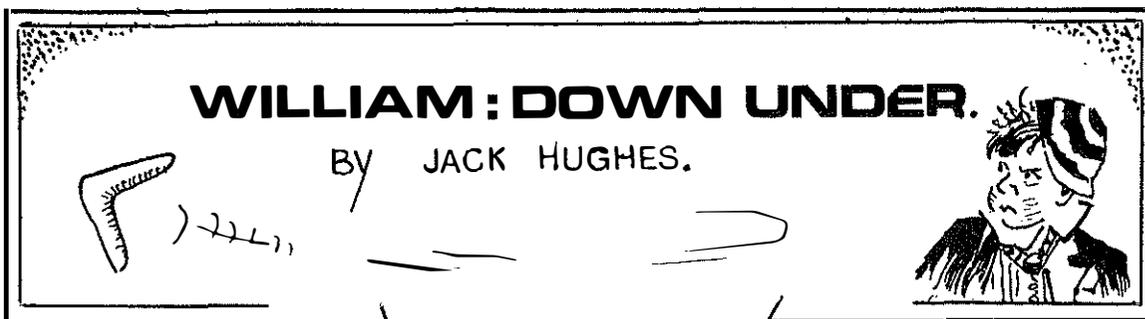
51 St. Leonards Road, Poplar E14 London, Tower Hamlets, OQY

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A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to All our Readers from:

NELSON LEE LIBRARY

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Fifty-five years is a long time for a friendship to last. Yet it was all that time ago when I first met WILLIAM. As a boy of seven years of age, it was my custom, any afternoon as soon as school finished, to catch a tram and go into the city. Double decker trams in those days, and sitting on the top deck of the rocking tram car, buffeted by the strong winds blowing up from Hobart's Derwent River, I would happily look forward to my visit to the news-agent where my weekly issues of CRACKERS and MY FAVOURITE and COMIC CUTS would be awaiting me. Then to wait to meet my dad as his work finished, and home again.

And it was on one such trip to town that WILLIAM was to enter my life. Dad and I were wending our way to the tram stop, a bundle of comics beneath my arm. We passed Hobart's Leading Bookseller. I paused to look in the display window. And there he was. A stack of copies of WILLIAM IN TROUBLE. I was mesmerised. Dad wanted me to hurry, I wanted to gaze. The outcome was that, after due pleading in the next weeks, a copy of the book was mine....a Christmas present I believe.

Fortunately I possessed kindly aunts, my mother's sisters, who loved their only nephew enough to be persuaded that WILLIAM Books would be suitable gifts; thus it was not overlong till I had a copy of each of the titles available up to that time. These dear ladies would see to it that each new title was mine, and, when it happened that we left Hobart to move north to Brisbane in Queensland at the end of '33, it was a WILLIAM Book they gave me as an advanced birthday present and which I carried lovingly in my suitcase on that long journey.

In the following years it seems that WILLIAM titles arrived on sale nearly a year after their appearance in England. At least that seems to be indicated by the dates of purchase I had noted on the fly leaf of copies bought in the early years. The Newnes thick copies continued to arrive, even through the War Years and it was not until 1948 that suddenly a change was made. JUST WILLIAM'S LUCK had arrived at the bookshop. A ghost of former years, and no longer bearing the proud name of NEWNES. Now it was certified as being published by Dymock's Book Arcade Ltd., Sydney March 1948, no longer the card quality paper of all the previous books, but now a thin, off-white paper that seemed to smack of cheapness. Cost, 7/-. From now on, titles would all come from this same publisher.. THE BOLD, THE TRAMP, MOON ROCKET and SPACE ANIMALS. Of three of these the price was 8/6, and of the last 10/6.

I assume that economics in war time did not lead to such a reprinting in Australia, but economics such as in transport charges may have helped the decision to reprint in Australia. Perhaps technology in the print industry had advanced to make this possible. But again there was a change. With T.V. SHOW it was

back to NEWNES, but the 'thick' volume was of course gone forever. From now on each new book would come to us in Australia fresh from the publisher in England, till at long last, with so many other WILLIAM fans, I would think the long series had finished at SUPERMAN.

And the years went on. Looking along the shelves of many bookshops I often wished that just once again I could stop and see a shiny new copy of WILLIAM... or perhaps a pyramid of new, never before published, copies of WILLIAM book.

It was not until some wrapping paper around a parcel from England revealed a 'BOOKS WANTED' advertisement asking for a copy of THE LAWLESS that I even dreamed that there was in all truth a WILLIAM yet to be sought. Perhaps it had never been on sale out here. Surely I would never have missed it if it had been????

And now, thanks to Darrell Swift, kindest of friends, WILLIAM THE LAWLESS adorns my bookshelf in Home Hill Queensland. My WILLIAM collection has graced many a home through the years, as I have had to move with my work. Each book brings its own memory of when and where purchased but best of all the joy of a read just whenever I like.

Must go now...I hear the Outlaws 'yah-hooing' down the street....So it's off to see what they are doing today....



"YOU LOOK IN A BIT OF A MESS," SAID WILLIAM.

The picture above on the left is from the very last William book, William the Lawless. It is drawn by Henry Ford, the artist who took over after the original William book illustrator Thomas Henry died. Ford did a good job in maintaining the traditional image of William, but was never quite able to emulate the exuberant style of Thomas Henry (whose version of William is shown in the right hand illustration, above).

WILLIAM - DOWN UNDER.

POSTSCRIPT BY DARRELL SWIFT.

The previous item by the Revd. Jack Hughes of Queensland, Australia, was sent to me as a contribution to some future WILLIAM MEETING - an event which seems to be now firmly established, assembling each year in a different part of the country.

William Brown, that lovable character created by Miss Richmal Crompton Lamburn, obviously had a great following "down under": evidence shows that he was popular in New Zealand, too. Australia and New Zealand have, over the years, taken in vast quantities of British literature - comics, story papers, magazines and all manner of examples of the printed word - including William and his friends. Australasia still takes in a terrific amount of literature from our fair shores, but perhaps not in the same quantities as years gone by.

Jack Hughes' fond and nostalgic memories of the William books appearing in the bookshops, prompted me to do a little investigation. A number of years ago, when I first started to collect the William books in a serious vein, someone - a dealer, I believe - presented me with a copy that had the name Dymock's on the spine of the dust-wrapper and the cloth back of the book. Further investigation indicated to me that this was a rather intriguing issue, being printed in Australia - as the book history indicated "this edition wholly set up and printed in Australia". Naturally, I was only too keen to have this particular copy; at the same time it gave me the "bug" to try and find more. I had very little to go on. Most of the other collectors I knew, were not aware of Australian editions, never mind seeing or possessing one. Not only was I then looking for copies for myself, but for other collectors' too! Fortunately, good contacts in Australia have, over the years, unearthed a number of copies for me so perhaps, with eleven titles, I have the largest collection of Dymock's editions in Great Britain.

Jack Hughes has indicated in his article that JUST WILLIAM'S LUCK started the Dymock's run, ending at WILLIAM AND THE SPACE ANIMAL - the remainder of the series, reverting to the English editions from Newnes. JUST WILLIAM'S LUCK was first published in 1948, but it would seem that Dymock's actually commenced to re-print at least one title from the Newnes imprint prior to the publication of that book. MORE - WILLIAM came into the Australian bookshops under the Dymock's banner in 1947, and for all I know, others could have come before then.

Dymock's is still very much in evidence in Sydney, and my letter to them asking for some details about the publishing history of the Australian editions brought a prompt and courteous reply by return. However, no help could be given. Over the years, changes of staff and the clearance of old records and file copies meant that they could tell me nothing - indeed, I probably knew more than they did!

Trying to establish, therefore, the precise number of titles that Dymock's produced, and the exact number of re-prints they issued in Australia of the earlier books, is open to conjecture. I have seven of the earlier titles before JUST WILLIAM'S LUCK that Dymock's published - and until I come across more of them, I just do not know the exact number. It may only be a minor point, and uninteresting to some, but I find the puzzle rather intriguing.

Jack does mention that the paper in the Dymock's copies was inferior, generally. The pre-war copies on the thick cartridge-type paper, as published by Newnes, gave way in England to thinner paper in the books published after

the war. The books from Dymock's which I possess, vary in their quality of paper from an acceptable white smooth finish to a rather cheap (although of thicker substance) type newsprint which appears to go quite brown as the years go by. Perhaps the climate in Australia - especially in the north - may have affected some of my books, even though the dust-wrappers are in good condition.

Understandably, the Australian editions are not easy to come by over here. From what I can gather, they are not easy to find in the land in which they were produced, even though many thousands of them must have been sold in the bookshops. Shades of the WILLIAM books in Great Britain - they are not easy to find now in good condition, with dust-wrappers.

Just how many titles Dymock's produced for the Australian market may remain a mystery - unless anyone in Australia can give the answer. The only other way would be for everyone with Dymock's copies to pool their information. Only then, may we find all the titles and editions which appeared under the Australian publisher's imprint.

As a matter of interest, William had no following in Canada or the United States of America, but the stories have been translated into many languages and are still available in various countries, today.

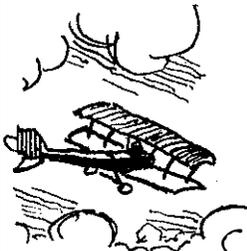


**FROM
ALL
BOOKSELLERS**

HOW MANY

WILLIAM

BOOKS *have you?*



THE 'STEELEY' STORIES OF W.E. JOHNS.

BY NORMAN WRIGHT.



By 1936 W.E. Johns had established himself in several markets. Firstly as a painter of aviation subjects. Many of his watercolours had been used in books published by John Hamilton and several issues of "Modern Boy" bore his covers. Secondly he was author of half a dozen factual books on aeronautical matters. "The Air V.C's", "Some Milestones of Aviation" and "Fighting Planes and Aces" being three of them. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly for those of us interested in old boys' books and the stories in them, he was developing his famous character "Biggles". By 1936 he had had seven "Biggles" books published in hardback, together with two further collections issued as "Boys Friend Libraries", culled from the pages of "Modern Boy". In all, nearly eighty short stories and four novels all featuring Biggles. He was in all probability getting a little fed up with the character. In published interviews he often complained of the restraints imposed on him by his publishers due to the popularity of Biggles amongst boys. Originally Johns had created the character for an adult market. At the continual demand for more stories to appear in "Modern Boy" and novels from Oxford University Press was providing a lucrative market for his work that would have found difficult to turn down. Consequently the character of his hero had to be toned down for juvenile readers - no expletives and no alcohol. He needed a new character to develop for an adult readership.

His first novel, "Mossyface", an elusive pre-war paperback published by Dellifont in 1932, had been a flying thriller. Similar aviation adventures had appeared in "Wings" magazine and had been popular enough to be reprinted in book form under the title of "The Raid" in 1935. It was not surprising therefore that Johns should decide to try and develop a strong character for a series of adult flying thrillers. The first instalment of his first 'Steeley' novel appeared in January 1936 in volume 2 number 1 of "Air Stories", a fairly short lived British pulp magazine published by George Newnes. Johns entitled the story "Aerial Enemy Number One". Unlike Biggles the hero of Aerial Enemy was not above helping himself to other people's wealth. He was very much the anti-hero.

Deeley Montford Delaroy, known to his friends as 'Steeley', was introduced to readers with the following blurb at the start of the first instalment.

"Back from the war scarred skies of Flanders came Deeley Delaroy, air ace and aristocrat, to find a country that no longer had need of its heroes. The war bird disappeared and in its place arose a bird of prey, an elusive Robin Hood of the air defying the forces of law and order with reckless abandon, and amassing wealth from strange sources and for stranger purposes."

Aerial Enemy ran in three issues of "Air Stories". In February 1936 it was published in book form by Newnes under the title "Sky High". In August of the same year it was sliced in two and published in "The Thriller" as "Calling All Aces", a most idiotic title for the first half of the book, and "Steeley Muscles

In". The story was fast paced and full of action with a fairly tight plot concerning foreign powers intent on causing mischief. Like all of the Steeley stories it was written in the first person, ostensibly by Steeley's friend Tubby Wilde, a rather 'Bunny' like character.

The second novel, "Steeley Flies Again" followed swiftly on the heels of the first in June 1936. It was serialised in "The Thriller" in October as "The Kidnapping of Virginia Marven" and "Steeley in the Gangsters Stronghold". It was, in my opinion, the best of the Steeley novels. It moved at a breathtaking pace and was full of action. The American gangsters Steeley encountered in the stories were ruthless characters. They were dealt with in an equally ruthless manner. There was certainly no restraint on blood letting in any of Johns thrillers intended for adult readers. Next time I read through the series of novels I intend keeping a tally of the bodies!!! At the end of the story the hero is married off to the book's heroine, Virginia Marven. It is difficult to see why the author opted for that ending. Perhaps he originally intended to make them husband and wife team along the lines of the Myrna Loy/William Powell partnership in the "Thin Man" films, then at the height of their popularity. Whatever the intention it was short lived and Mrs. Delaroy was absent from the rest of the adventures. Usually there was a passing mention of her visiting some convenient relative or other. That usually gave Steeley the excuse to launch off into a new adventure.

The tone of the stories changed with the third title, "Murder By Air", published in "The Thriller" as "Prisoners of the Dope Ring" and "The Dope Smugglers" in January 1937, in book form in August and then serialised again early in 1938 in "Flying" magazine. In "Murder By Air" Steeley accepts a request to work on the side of law and order. His old enemies, Inspector Wayne C.I.D. and Colonel Raymond, become his allies. W.E. Johns used the character of

FLYING

April 2, 1938



First Instalment of a full length air-thriller

By CAPT. W. E. JOHNS

Col. Raymond in both the Biggles books and the Steeley tales. Had Steeley continued after the war both characters could have ended up being together as members of Col. Raymonds Air Police unit! At the start of "Murder By Air" Raymond commented that he hoped Steeley would have as much success in his efforts on the side of law and order as he had done whilst opposed to it!

The fourth novel in the series, "Murder at Castle Deeping" was published by John Hamilton a year later in May 1938, having appeared in "The Thriller" during June and July 1937. The exciting title was the best thing about the book. After a promising start in which Steeley agreed to look into an apparent accidental drowning in a castle moat, the tale wandered rather aimlessly. It reminded me a little of a school essay that seems about to come to a conclusion and then tumbles on, almost with an "and then". One can only assume that the story was rather short and had to be extended. Its variable quality could have been the reason why it was not published by Newnes, publishers of all the other Steeley novels. It must be said at this point that W.E. Johns did not always work out his plots very thoroughly. It is perhaps easy to imagine a prolific writer using the barest of outlines around which to construct his stories. Unusually Johns managed competent yarns, but some were obviously under plotted. His worst such novel was "Biggles Defies the Swastika", a promising and exciting title. The book itself has about three near endings before finally coming to an end on page 249, still half a dozen pages less than other Biggles books of the time.

The final book length story in the series was entitled "Wings of Romance", a title not likely to appeal to detective/crime fiction readers, sounding more like a "Mills and Boon" than a "Wright and Brown" - or, in this case a Newnes. It was serialised at the back of the "Thriller" in late 1937, and then again in "Flying" during 1938 as "Wings of Rebellion", a far better title. It finally appeared in book form early in 1939. The plot concerned Steeley and Co. joining the air force of a central American 'banana republic'. After a spot of bother with the insane president they change sides and fight with the gauchos under their leader, Don Antonio. If the plot sounds familiar to those of you who have read Biggles but not Steeley, don't look puzzled. In fact the plot was very similar to that used in "Biggles Goes to War", published in book form by Oxford only the year before in 1938! The Steeley book however has a different ending. The 'romance' of the title developing between Anita, the beautiful daughter of Don Antonio, and Steeley's sidekick and chronicler, Tubby Wilde. Thus the second member of the team looked set to be married off!

While "Wings of Romance" was being serialised in the back of "The Thriller", another Steeley story "The Missing Page" appeared as the main offering in issue 54 dated October 16th 1937. "The Missing Page" obviously took place chronologically before "Wings of Romance". It had Steeley and Tubby working for Scotland Yard. The story opened with a rather weak conversation between a man in the condemned cell and his wife. He had been 'framed' and could only be saved from the gallows by the evidence contained in a diary entry made by the boss of the gang of crooks of which he was a member. The wife approached Steeley in the hope that he could secure the book. When it was located, the vital page was missing, having been removed by a friend of the convicted man who took it in the hope that he could use it to prove his friend's innocence. Unfortunately he was killed by the gangleader before he could reveal its hiding place to Steeley! He does manage to gasp out a few cryptic clues as to the whereabouts of the vital page. Steeley and Tubby managed to find the page at the nick of time, and the condemned man was reprieved. The story was not particularly good and never appeared in book form in this country, though a

translation was published in Norway in 1939. In fact, John's books were very popular abroad and were translated into many languages.

The final Steeley story, "Nazis in the New Forest" appeared in "Thriller" no. 586 in April 1940. Steeley and Tubby were working for the Air Ministry. The adventure got off to a speedy start with the pair motoring through the New Forest at night. They narrowly avoid running down a young woman who was being pursued by some unsavory characters. The plot concerned fifth columnists being brought into the country by glider. Though the story was never republished in book form as a Steeley story, it was very slightly rewritten and published as the first half of "Sinister Service" (O.U.P. 1942). The characters' names were changed to Lance Lovell and Rodney Lovell, but the story was virtually a word for word reprint of "Nazis in the New Forest".

It is a great pity that W.E. Johns did not continue the Steeley stories after 1940. He probably found that his commitment to the war effort, the Biggles, Worrals and Gimlet stories, took up too much of his time. He later wrote a few more adult thrillers, but by the time they appeared in the bookshops he was regarded by most readers as a writer for boys, and those later non-juvenile books did not sell well. In 1951 all five of the Steeley novels were republished by Latimer House, a small firm that seems to have specialised in reprinting books originally issued by other publishers.

Whatever the shortcomings of the Steeley books they are entertaining, fast moving thrillers. Copies of the original Newnes and Hamilton editions are difficult to find, but the Latimer House reprints turn up fairly frequently and if sought out will give the reader many hours of exciting reading.

Very Special Christmas Greetings to Eric, and Seasonal Joy to our Editor and all Hobby Friends.

MARGERY WOODS

HARLEQUIN COTTAGE, SOUTH STREET, SCALBY, SCARBOROUGH

STILL WANTED: Schoolgirls Own Libraries; Cliff House, SOL's or Schoolgirls.

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Christmas Greetings to All. Wanted: Schoolgirl's Weekly with Valerie Drew 1st Series Schoolgirl's Own Library.

MRS. M. WINTERBOTTOM

143 CHEETHAM HILL ROAD, DUKINFIELD, CHESHIRE

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STILL WANTED: Sexton Blake Second Series No. 453 On The Midnight Beat by John G. Brandon. YOUR PRICE PAID.

J. ASHLEY

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TELEPHONE Fareham 234489

Best Wishes to Norman Shaw, Eric Fayne, The Editor and all fellow collectors

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THE CADS OF ST. FRANKS

BY C.H. CHURCHILL.



Every Fictional school featured in papers we read when young contained cads of every description. St. Frank's, of course, was no exception. We were introduced to the number one of this ilk, namely Ralph Leslie Fullwood, in the first St. Frank's story in N.L.L. No. 112 dated 28/7/17. Together with his pals of Study A in the Remove passage, Gulliver and Bell, he was really the limit. He was the only one to have occasional twinges of finer feelings was Gulliver, but these were few and far between.

Fullwood, naturally, was the main instigator of any ill-natured activities indulged in by this trio. They were often helped and backed up by another three from Study B. Merrell, Marriot and Noys. After St. Frank's was altered to four houses in 1925 Noys seemed to disappear from the scene as he was never mentioned again. Merrell and Marriot turned up in Study No. 15 in the East house.

Ralph Leslie played quite leading parts in many series over the years, too many to mention. I would require the whole of this annual if I tried to discuss them all, so I will just deal with three.

In N.L. No. 129 (November 1917) he was particularly vindictive towards Farman. The latter had incurred his enmity by refusing to join

TWO FINE STORIES OF NELSON LEE AND NIPPER!

The
Nelson Lee
Library 2^d

FULLWOOD'S FORTUNE,
 Or, **THE EMERALD PENDANT.**
 This Week's Grand Long Complete Story of St. Frank's College.
 No. 381. EVERY WEDNESDAY. SEPT. 23, 1924

a Study A card party, and came to blows with him. Fullwood tried to get revenge by tying Handforth up and leaving him in the snow and scheming to get Farman blamed for it. This resulted only in Handy nearly dying from the extreme cold.

In nos. 381/382 (September 1923) "Fullwood's Fortune" and "The Price of Folly" Fullwood found a valuable pendant in the lane and used the reward to "buy" votes in the election for the Remove captaincy, which was to be held as Nipper was away. He succeeded in this but just then the reward money was proved to be counterfeit. He had been "conned" by two crooks who made off with the pendant. Fullwood still needed cash to keep his supporters happy so he raided the Football Club money and used it to back horses. Naturally he soon lost the lot and, fearful of expulsion when it all came out, threw himself into the river Stowe on the way back to the school. Fortunately, Archie Glenthorpe was passing by and managed to pull him out. In his distress, Fullwood blurted everything out to Archie saying he would be expelled and his father would turn him out when everything came out. The noble Archie, with his generous kindly nature, quietly reimbursed Ralph Leslie with the £18 and the rascally leader of Study A was saved. He expressed remorse but, as the story said, how long would it last? Had he learned his lesson?

It did not last long, as a short while afterwards we had the Alf Huggins series. Alf (really Alf Brent, the son of the Chairman of the Governors) masquerading as a cockney lad came in for a dose of snobbery on the part of the "Nuts" led by Fullwood. They led him a dog's life until his identity was revealed. Then they were mad with themselves when it was too late.

In view of his caddish behaviour over the years I have never been able really to accept the fact of his reformation in 1925. I know he was influenced by Clive Russell and Winnie Pitt, but for eight years the stories had depicted Fullwood as such a liar, cheat, bully etc., that it seemed impossible for anyone to alter so much. His behaviour and language just did not ring true to me.

Several other Removites were reformed characters, of course. De Valerie was known as "The Rotter" for some time after his arrival but he slowly settled down and became a leading member of the form. Reggie Pitt was another. On his arrival he was a really vicious little rotter. This lasted, however, for the series of eight stories. In the following series (about the coming of Jack Grey) he was gradually a changed being with only occasional lapses into his old ways.

There were other cads in the Remove. First Claude Gore-Pearse, who arrived at the time of Fullwood's changed ways. However, he was only a pale shadow of Fullwood at his evil best and was soon superceded by Bernard Forrest, who moved into Study A with Gulliver and Bell. He turned out to be just as bad as Fullwood ever was, but to me the real bad eggs was always Ralph Leslie and no other successor.

Bernard Forrest was quite a complete rascal and was expelled, but managed to return to St. Frank's after a time. I cannot remember how this came to pass as I have not now the relevant Lees, Nos. 179 to 182 in the second new series.

The worst villain of all was Titus Alexis who came in No. 221 old series and left in the next number. He set fire to the College House which was completely destroyed. He was a Greek and entirely out of his element at St. Frank's as events showed. He had a terrible temper and almost stabbed Somerton, and subjected Nipper to a terrible beating.

Fullerton of the Third was a little rascal and always keen to join the Nuts in any of their wild schemes. With the advent of Willy Handforth, however, he soon had to toe the line.

In the senior school we had a few bullies and cads. The leader of these in the early days was Walter Starke. He tried to organise the bullies against the lower forms, and tried to "fag" the Remove, but Nipper was responsible for stopping this plot. Starke never forgave him and eventually managed to get him expelled by giving lying evidence. Nelson Lee in the end discovered the truth and Starke was expelled in his turn in No. 211 dated 21/6/19, and Nipper was reinstated in the Remove.

The mantle of chief bully then fell on Simon Kenmore but he was never as bad as Starke. Jesson of the College House was another unpopular prefect. After his involvement with Mr. Martin in the Barring out series of 1919 he seemed to fade from the scene. In fact Mr. Brooks once, when quizzed at a club meeting in London after the war about Jesson, could not recollect the character, which seemed rather strange.

Other cads were Graystone and Shaw of the Fifth, who were merely bullies and followed the lead of Starke and Kenmore.

I think I have covered the main bad characters of St. Frank's but can only touch lightly on them in such a short article. However, I do really think that they can compare quite favourably with other similar characters in order boys school stories in other papers, and by other authors.

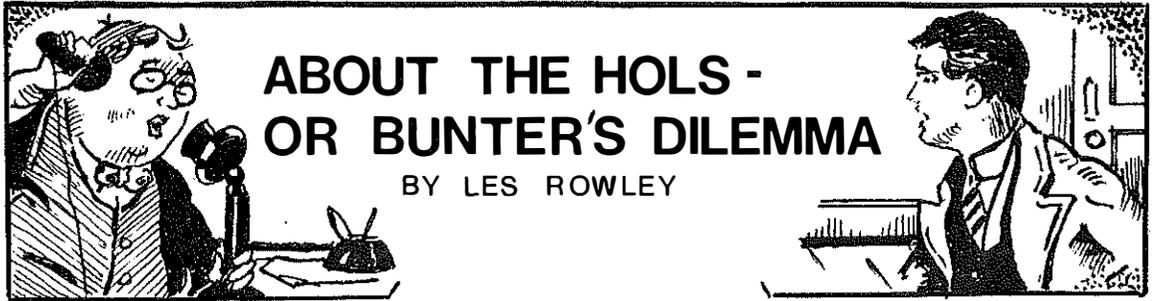
GRAND CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY NUMBER!

*The Nelson Lee 2nd
Library & St. Frank's Magazine*



It was there, at the top of the staircase, and slowly, with a strange, uncanny motion, it commenced to float down the stairs.
(An exciting incident from this week's story.)

No. 447. EVERY WEDNESDAY. December 25, 1923.



1. The Problem

Greyfriars lay under a blanket of crystalline white. It was a white that made an artistic filigree of the wrought iron of the great gates. It shrouded the Sixth Form Green and the stone flags of the Cloisters alike. It made an etching of broken arch and crumbled masonry that had been left long ago by the cruel hand of the Dissolution. Branches of trees, made leafless by the demanding claims of Autumn, now acquired a different beauty as tired flakes, weary with their wandering, found a resting place on twig and bough. Every window ledge and buttress carried its seasonal burden. Even where the caress of snow had faltered, a fellow-conspirator with the icy finger of frost had made good the omission! Rime sparkled on the many casements, closed tight against the penetrating cold, leaving a tracery of silver to catch the faltering rays of enfeebled sun or pallid moon.

Beyond the limits of the School, the laden hedgerows gave but rough guidance to road and lane covered by the drifting snowfall. For those who braved a stumble as they made their way, Friardale village with its thatched roof and Saxon church revealed a beauty of which artists only dream. But I must not stray from the scene of my deliberations.

Greyfriars men, in general, appreciated the beauty that winter had thrust upon them. What they appreciated, even more, was the opportunity of making slides and engaging in snow-balling! The former were banned and the latter discouraged, as they had been for decades past. But the philosophy of youth decided that rules were made only to be broken! More than one path had been cleared as an enclave into the surrounding snow, and its icy surface polished to a mirrored danger. Youthful figures, with mufflers flowing in the bitter wind, sped along the slide of their choice! In more obscure places, battles were joined with ample ammunition as quickly made as young hands could mould the balls of frozen white. It was a scene worthy of the gifted pen of Dickens, who would have found much in common between the inhabitants of the School and his own creation of Dingley Dell.

Not everyone at Greyfriars approved or participated in these wintry revels, of course. Doubtless, in the dear dead days beyond recall, Prout, Quelch, Hacker, and the other members of the Staff, having been schoolboys themselves, had enjoyed a slide or snow ball combat. There is, however, a great gulf fixed between the ages of fifteen and fifty and in Masters' Commons, wiser and more sober counsels prevailed. The prefectorial body had been instructed to seek out and deter the offenders and dissuade them from their enterprise. To this body of opposition could be added the illustrious names of William Gosling and William George Bunter.



Gosling had, that morning, stepped outside the door of his lodge with the intention of having a word with Mr. Mimble. He expected his ancient feet to take him in the direction of the tuck shop, where Mr. Mimble mostly resided. But those expectations were not realised. Gosling's intentions lay in one direction but, once his feet had found themselves on a slide, they took him in another! The crusty visage of the school porter creased itself into an expression of horrific anticipation as its owner careered onwards. That anticipation was duly realised as the accelerating Gosling came suddenly to the end of that slide, and unable to stop, was precipitated into a convenient and considerable heap of snow. It took some moments for Gosling to gather enough wind to be able to give voice but, when he did, his words owed more to robust Anglo-Saxon origins than to those of classical Latin or Greek. His language was 'Fearful, frantic, and free' and would have merited more than disapproval had it been received by the academic ear of the Headmaster.

Like the prophet of old, Gosling was angry and felt that he did well to be angry! He was shaken, and shocked, and bruised, the only consolation left to him being the intention of reporting the young rips responsible. Unfortunately, the young rips had vanished almost as spectacularly as the Boojum, and Gosling was left to vent his wrath on the far from desert air!

William George Bunter doubtless knew of the slides and the snow fights, but cared for none of these things. He had more important deliberations on his mind. His fat brow, corrugated in unaccustomed deep thought, gave full evidence of the serious import of those deliberations! A visitor to Greyfriars would have been excused for thinking that the manifest troubles of this imperfect universe were the subject of Bunter's concern. Really, it was not as bad as that! The origins of the fat Removite's anxiety lay nearer at hand! Bunter was wondering whom he could stick for the Christmas holidays. The end of term was in sight and it was as well to get such an important matter settled without delay! For several days it had been his intention to mention the matter, casually of course, to Harry Wharton, to Lord Mauleverer, or to anyone else who was prepared to listen! Unfortunately no one seemed prepared to listen. As soon as Bunter's considerable outline was spotted on the horizon, fellows would discover they had business elsewhere! The fat Owl had made it his business to call at Study No. 1, only to find the door bolted and barred. He had applied a fat ear

to the keyhole, in the fascinating method he had of gaining information, only to be rewarded with a jet of ink from a syringe on the other side. He had called at Study No. 4, only to find it vacant. Bunter had decided to wait for the Bounder's return, and to utilise the interim by sampling some of the good things he had discovered in the study cupboard. It was unfortunate, to say the least, that Smithy returned just as Bunter was sampling a delicious fruit pie. What had followed had been positively horrific for the Falstaff of the Remove. How many kicks he sustained before he escaped Smithy's boot, Bunter could not have computed without going into high figures. Even Bunter, as he fled yelling down the Remove passage, realised that this was not the opportune moment affably to put the question of the hols to the irate Vernon-Smith.

He had called on Lord Mauleverer, only to find his elegant lordship absent. But, if Mauly wasn't there, and these days Mauly never seemed to be there, how could a fellow put the question of the holidays to a chap who was inconsiderately absent? He had been driven, in desperation to approach his study-mate, Todd, on the pressing matter and, for once, he had a captive audience, so to speak. Peter Todd had given his answer, but it had been in action rather than words, and in that action a cricket stump had featured prominently and painfully for Bunter. Really, it seemed that none of his school-fellows wished to avail themselves of Bunter's company for the festive season. Which was incredible to Bunter's way of thinking, when one realised what an enchanting person he was. Perhaps this was a form of reasoning that Bunter had all to himself. Bunter pictured himself as a fine fellow of distinguished appearance, whose polished manners and dignified carriage were the envy of all whom he chose to honour with his presence! In the eyes of those who had had the misfortune to have had him as an uninvited guest Bunter presented a very different picture. His manners at meal times were more suited to the trough than the table; his fatuous and fat appearance made more incongruous in the clothes that he had borrowed from other fellows' wardrobes; and his 'engaging' conversation a lot of hot air. It was not surprising, therefore, that the fellows showed a marked - a very marked - reluctance to take Bunter home with them.

As with the case of the Lord High Executioner, Bunter felt that a victim must be found! Bunter felt that it should be Wharton for a number reasons. He had stayed at Wharton Lodge before and could vouch for the grub being good and plentiful - which, to Bunter, outweighed all other considerations. A further point was that Aunt Amy was a gentle old soul, behind whose skirts he could shelter if the others cut up rough. Finally, he had learned - again through the medium of the keyhole - that Marjorie and Clara from Cliff House were to join the house-party on Boxing Day. True, Bunter's absence was always likely to make the heart grow fonder, but that was an opinion to which Bunter did not subscribe... How to work the oracle? That was his problem, and it took Bunter a half an hour of concentrated thought and a bag of bullseyes purloined from Ogilvy's study before he found the solution.

2. The Solution.

B-ring! B-ring! B-ring!

Henry Samuel Quelch stifled a snort, and reached for the telephone. He had just completed a most exasperating half an hour on that rather doubtful gift of modern science! In a mood of optimism he had endeavoured to reach a certain department in Chunkley's Stores in Courtfield, and had succeeded in being put through - one after the other - to every other department than the one he required. In a mixture of anger and disappointment he had finally slammed the

receiver back on its cradle. Now the wretched instrument was, or so it seemed, answering him back and he was tempted to ignore its summons. But the call of the telephone, like the call of the tide, "was a wild call, a clear call, a call that may not be denied".

"Well?" he almost barked into the mouthpiece.

"Is that my dear friend Quelch?" enquired a voice from the earpiece. A voice that Mr. Quelch recognised, or thought he recognised, as the voice of Colonel Wharton, the uncle and guardian of his Head Boy. Mr. Quelch moderated his transports, so to speak. Colonel Wharton also happened to be a member of the school's Board of Governors, and the note of irritation in Mr. Quelch's voice was immediately subdued.

"My Dear Colonel Wharton, what an unexpected pleasure," replied the Remove master with less veracity than he would have chosen to admit. "I hope that you and Miss Wharton are enjoying good health. Can I be of any assistance?"

"My sister and I are both quite well, thank you," came the gruff reply. "I wish to speak to my nephew on a rather urgent matter, Mr. Quelch. Perhaps you would kindly call him to the 'phone."

Mr. Quelch did not feel kindly at all about calling one of his form to a telephone that he almost regarded as his own property, and he was just about to indicate this when he remembered who was on the other end of the line.

"Certainly, Colonel Wharton. If you will hold on for a few minutes I will endeavour to contact Wharton." As he spoke, the Remove master was facing the study window through which he had a distant view of Wharton and his friends whizzing down a particularly dangerous slide. A moment later, a handy Dicky Murgent had been sent on his way to summon the Remove captain to his form master's study.

"You sent for me, sir?" enquired Wharton on his arrival. His impression was that Quelch had seen him on the marvellous slide and had sent for him to give him one of those royal and imperial jaws or, worse still, a whopping!

"Your uncle is on the telephone and has asked to speak to you," explained Mr. Quelch. "You may speak to him, Wharton, whilst I am with Mr. Prout." Mr. Quelch was a tactful gentleman and was making an opportunity for the boy to speak freely to his uncle.

"Thank you, sir," said Wharton grateful, not only for the chance to speak with his uncle, but for the fact that Quelch had made no comment about the slide. He took up the telephone.

"Hello, uncle! Harry here!"

"Hello Harry, I am ringing to mention a matter of some concern to your aunt and myself. I refer to the list you have sent giving the names of your friends who are coming home with you for the holidays...."

"But uncle, it's the usual crowd. Of course, if I've asked too many, I will have to tell some of the fellows. But it is rather late for them to make other arrangements."

"All your friends are welcome, Harry, but it is not the names actually on the list that give cause for our concern. Rather, it is the absence of a name. I am speaking now of Bunter and I can only assume that you have not yet invited him!"

"No fear!"

"Bunter has been here on previous occasions and your aunt and I would miss his company should he not be among your guests this Christmas. In fact---

"Great Scot!" Wharton could hardly believe his ears. The absence of Bunter's company was something devoutly to be wished. Certainly Colonel Wharton had never previously stated a longing for the company of that fat frog Bunter. Even Aunt Amy had been heard to give a sigh of relief when he had departed from Wharton Lodge.

"In fact," went on the voice at the end of the line, "both of us were looking forward to seeing Bunter again."

"Eh?"

"I am sure that the omission of Bunter's name from your list was unintentional. In any case, to please your aunt and myself, you will make it clear to Bunter that he would be most welcome at Wharton Lodge."

What the Colonel said had, for the moment, taken Wharton's breath away and there was an interval which an author would have termed 'a pregnant pause' before he could reply.

"But uncle, that fat cormorant, that unspeakable ---"

"Harry!" The voice now had more than a touch of asperity. "I trust that you consider the wishes of your aunt and myself paramount in this matter. Of course if Bunter, whom I gather is a popular lad, has other invitations - why are you laughing? - we shall understand. Otherwise we shall expect him at Wharton Lodge."

There came a sudden and dramatic interruption.

3. The Reward

On leaving his study, Mr. Quelch had headed for that of Mr. Prout, where he spotted the master of the Fifth in conversation with Mr. Hacker at the corner of Master's Passage. The Remove master waited patiently for Prout to finish with Hacker. He had some minutes to wait for brevity of speech did not feature in Mr. Prout's programme, but - much to the undoubted relief of Hacker-Prout noticed Quelch, and majestically rolled in the direction of his own study, where the Remove master was waiting. The two exchanged courteous nods, as the master of the Fifth turned the handle and pushed open the door.

"In any case, to please your aunt and myself, you will make it clear to Bunter that he would be most welcome at Wharton Lodge."

For a long moment the two masters stood speechless. The voice they heard was one that was familiar to both of them. The precise, almost curt, words were those of a respected member of the Governing Board or, at least, so similar that they would have been convinced, but for one thing. The figure that uttered those words, and others that followed, was not the upright figure of a man who had retired from a distinguished military career. Nevertheless that figure was immediately recognisable to both Prout and Quelch. There was no mistaking that rotund form clad in a tight-fitting jacket and a pair of check trousers. Although it was the voice of Colonel Wharton, the hand that held the telephone was that of William George Bunter!

"Bunter! How dare you!" Mr. Quelch was the first to give voice, but Prout was a close second.



"How dare he, indeed, Mr. Quelch? This boy of your form - this Remove boy - has the effrontery to enter my study, he has the -"

"O lor!" Bunter swung round from the telephone, almost dropping that instrument at the dread appearance of Quelch and Prout. The master of the Fifth, his features purple with indignation like that of a turkey having discovered it was intended for the festive board, struggled for words that wouldn't come. Indeed, 'Unprecedented' and 'unparalleled', firm favourites though these were, seemed inadequate in the present circumstances. But, if Prout for once was speechless, Quelch had not lost his tongue. He fixed Bunter with a glare that the fabled Basilisk would have envied as he turned his gimlet eyes on the fat ornament of his form.

"Bunter! What trickery is this? How dare you impersonate a member of the Board of Governors? Is it possible that you have resorted to subterfuge to gain some advantage from Wharton by pretending to be the boy's uncle?"

The fat Removite gazed in dismay at his form master.

"It---it---was only a j-j-joke," he stammered. "I was just pulling Wharton's leg, sir. It was nothing to do with going home with him for the hols. J-j-just a j-joke!"

"A joke!" thundered Mr. Quelch. If he accepted that explanation, he looked far from amused by it. "You have invented this trickery; you have attempted to delude Wharton; and worst of all, Bunter, you have deceived your form master, in order to try to go home with Wharton for the holidays. I shall consider whether the matter should be placed before the Head for a sentence of flogging, or whether I shall deal with you myself." Quelch turned toward his colleague. "Mr. Prout, this boy of my form has had the audacity to enter your study and use your telephone. For that particular offence I feel it right and proper that you should punish the boy yourself. Perhaps you would kindly do so now and in my presence!"

Mr. Prout nodded. Kindly or not, the suggestion met with his full approval. The cane was seldom, if ever, used in Prout's study, but he managed to find one! The next moment both Prout and cane were experiencing some unaccustomed exercise.

"Yar-oop! Yaroo! Yow-wow wow!"

Prout contented himself with a six, although if he could have seen his forthcoming telephone bill, he might have made it sixty! Still, in view of what lay before Bunter, perhaps Prout considered that six was enough, though - by the noise he made - Bunter indicated that he considered it not only enough, but more than enough!

Mr. Quelch returned to his study with a very woe-begone Bunter in tow. There, he explained to a startled Wharton all that he knew of the fat Owl's solution to the holiday problem!

Wharton listened politely to what his form master had to say, but there was a glint in his eye that Bunter took as a hint of a high old time to follow. At a sign of dismissal, the captain of the Remove left the study. Bunter would have liked to have left also, but Mr. Quelch had not finished with him yet.

"On reflection, Bunter, I shall not trouble the Head with this matter. Instead, I shall punish you myself and I shall trust that this leniency will be rewarded by an improvement in your conduct. I shall now make it clear to you that deceit and falsehood have no reward. You will bend over that chair!"

What followed was truly harrowing. Quelch had spoken of leniency but, if he exercised any in the whopping that followed, it was completely lost on William George Bunter! When he left Quelch's study he was giving another kind of impersonation. This time it was the old man of Hythe who used to wriggle and writhe. At the end of the corridor he came across Wharton who had been lying in wait for him. One look at Bunter and Wharton nodded. "You've had enough, leave it at that".

The Captain of the Remove entertained his friends with an account of Bunter's Problem, Solution, and Reward as they tucked into a spread in Study No. 1. that tea-time.

"No Bunter for Christmas!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he proceeded to pass-round glasses, mugs and beakers foaming with ginger pop. "Well, I for one, felt that I can withstand the sad loss!"

"The sadness of the loss of the ludicrous Bunter will not be terrific," observed the dusky Nabob from the window seat.

"Where will Bunter go for the vac!, I wonder?" enquired Frank Nugent.

"Anywhere but Wharton Lodge," answered Harry Wharton. "I believe he is still shadowing poor old Mauly. I might have wangled it for the silly ass to come to Wharton Lodge, but for his strange manners and customs as a guest. I've persuaded Quelch not to mention the matter to my uncle, but that's as far as I'm prepared to go."

"No Bunter for Christmas!" came the stolid voice of Johnny Bull, "it seems to good to be true!"

"I say, you fellows!" came a familiar squeak from the doorway, "make room for a fellow. I'm surprised at you Wharton, not telling a fellow there was to be a spread. Pass the sosses, Bull, I'm famished." There were six sausages on the plate. Bunter helped himself to six, and then reached for the pile of toast. "I'm glad I've found you fellows all together," he continued, his mouth full to capacity. "I'm looking forward to spending the hols with my old pals. We've had our little differences, Wharton, but I'm not a fellow to bear grudges. You can count on me being at Wharton Lodge on break-up day. Rely on me, my dear chap!"

"No Bunter for Christmas!" Johnny Bull repeated, "I told you men that it seemed too good to be true!"



And, as they will tell you themselves, Yorkshire folk are seldom wrong!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all with special Greetings and thanks to Mary Cadogan, Eric Fayne and Norman Shaw.

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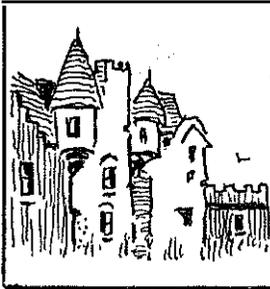
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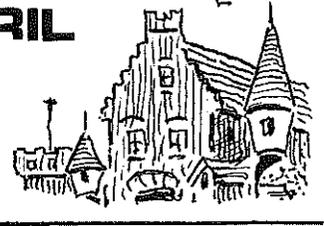
BRIAN DOYLE

=====



MORCOVE IN PERIL

BY RAY HOPKINS,



Morcove's fourth and final visit to the home country of Zora, Jack Somerfield's wife (brother to their headmistress) finds them in more dire straits than ever before. And this time they are minus the support and backup of Jack Linton and Co. of Grangemoor and the parents who usually accompany them as chaperones. The Study 12 coterie (Betty, Polly, Paula, Tess, Madge, Pam, Naomer, Judy Cardew, Helen Craig and Bunny Trevor) arrive in Turania at quite the wrong time: the people are in the throes of a revolution lead by a faction calling itself the Black Sashes.

Betty Barton & Co. realise their perilous situation en route to Klosters Station from the capital, Suva Pesth, when the train is boarded by revolutionaries who tell them the railway line has been cut and they will have to walk the rest of the way into Klosters.

The chief revolutionary, Bruno Corbusci, commandeers Zora's house to use as his HQ. Tess Trelawney, in true Britisher fashion, immediately paints a Union Jack on a bed sheet and hangs it from an upstairs window. Zora, meanwhile, is marooned in Suva Pesth where she had gone to shop for Morcove's visit.

With the exception of Tess and Judy Cardew, Betty and the rest of the Co. are locked in the kitchen. Bruno uses Tess and Judy as hostages to insure good behaviour on the part of the rest of the girls. Tess and Judy have as a guard Bruno's daughter, Elise Corbusci. She is a "handsome girl, every drop of blood in her veins being of the Southern richness which makes for a hot temper." Elise's actions are rather less than handsome. She snatches a dog whip from a nail on the wall and threatens them with it if they don't show her instant obedience. She is also a thief!

During the night, believing the hostages to be asleep, she rifles Zora's jewelry box. Tess has seen her but keeps the knowledge to herself.

Bruno is now calling himself Kommandant but shows himself to be rather less than a fearless leader when large shells begin to explode nearby and tells Betty to leave the Union Jack on display so the loyalists who are doing the bombing will see the flag and not shell the house. A plane flies over Klosters and all the revolutionaries flee the building. The house receives a direct hit from a bomb but Betty and Co. are unharmed as they are on the way to the cellars where Elise has incarcerated Tess and Judy in a deep dungeon.

Elise screams with rage when they rush in but Betty and Co. over-power her and lock her in the dungeon after setting free the hostages.

The brave Kommandant Corbusci and his valiant men return to the house but race to the safety of the cellars when the rumbling of falling masonry is heard following a loud crash. This is a little comedy manufactured by Morcove

to scare the revolutionaries: they had merely pushed over a chimney stack damaged by the first shell. The men release Elise from the dungeon which gives her the opportunity at dead of night to bury a "tiny cloth bundle" in the garden, but she is seen by Betty and Polly who retrieve the bundle and find it contains Zora's jewels.

A soft knock at the door momentarily startles them but they are overjoyed to find it is Zora who has walked all the way from Suva Pesth accompanied by Sonia, the Crown Princess of Turania. Though Turania has been a Republic for several years, the former Royal Family were allowed to live in Suva Pesth, but ugly demonstrations outside the Royal house caused her to flee the capital.

In the morning Zora accuses Elise in front of her father of stealing her jewels and says she will hold them both to account unless Bruno provides her with a conveyance so that she can take the British girls out of danger. "Instead of trying to reform Turania, try reforming your daughter," Zora pointedly tells Bruno.

All the girls leave in a horse drawn cart provided by Bruno, and Polly manages to unfurl the home-made Union Jack so that it hides Sonia from the mauling eyes of Elise.

Elated, the refugees now feel they are safe from further harm from the Corbuscis but, as they approach a bridge they see Elise trapped in a dark cloak on the other side. She is set on a final act of revenge as she raises her arm and hurls something and - before their very eyes - the bridge is blown sky high!

"Then to their utter horror, they saw a boiling flood finding its way out on to the road... It had only needed the dropping back of all the blown-up masonry into the water for a dam to form that completely stopped the channel. Across a patch of the low bank the water was surging now, drowning all the lovely ferns and wild flowers, and even bearing down sapling trees."

Zora decides the cart must be abandoned and the horse set adrift, and they take to the trees, following the example of agile Naomer, and just in time to avoid being attacked by a wild boar.

An approaching man on horseback turns out to be the heir to the Cosetti estate, "Black Rupert", the scoundrel who had been prevented from marrying Zora during the Morcovians second visit to Turania. Zora is dismayed to hear from him that her Uncle Nicholai Brancovar, her guardian before her marriage to Jack Somerfield, is supporting the Black Sashes and hopes to obtain a post



The chums cheered loudly and Polly waved the Union Jack wildly, then cleverly let it fall in such a way that it hid the royal refugee from view. Polly did not mean Sonia to be recognised by the rebels.

in the new cabinet. A sinister smile crosses Rupert's face as he recognises Sonia and he tells Zora that unless the Princess accompanies him to Castle Brancover the girls will be forcibly prevented from reaching the frontier. Sonia agrees to go with Rupert, bidding her friends farewell by saying, "I pray you will reach your own dear country in safety at last. We had the wild boar; now it is the wolf. Goodbye!" The girls are horror stricken, believing that the Cosettis will send Sonia to her death to curry favour with the Black Sashes.

After Rupert has left with his prisoner, Betty says, "Not a yard farther do I go towards the frontier without Sonia".

Zora agrees to let them make the attempt to rescue Sonia.

"The old team spirit, cultivated at famous Morcove - never had it been stronger within them than it was at this critical time. Nor had they ever stood in greater need of it. For what, now, stood between Princess Sonia and the terrible fate with which she was threatened, unless it was the readiness of these chums - only a handful of British schoolgirls though they were - to dare all in her behalf."

At Castle Brancover, Rupert Cosetti is disturbed by the fact that guns are still booming and explosions rumbling, giving the lie to the Black Sashes' revolution having been a "walk over". Evidently there was still considerable resistance to them from the loyalists. Rupert's sister, Ettel, joins him and nervously lights a cigarette saying she intends to sit up and watch the door leading to the tower room in which Princess Sonia is locked.

"Like her brother, she was a soulless creature - had been the worst type of provincial aristocrat up till now, treating the peasantry as serfs. But, again, like her brother, she was intending now to show 'sympathy' for would-be reformers."

Sonia, standing in front of the window in her tower room late at night, is seen by Zora and the girls as they make their way silently up the slopes towards the Castle. They reach the Castle wall and Polly climbs on Betty's back to get through the bars of a ground floor window. There is wire netting behind the bars, but she is able to remove enough to allow her to squeeze through into the room which is a "cool store-place... for pickles, jams, and other commodities".

Raising the wooden latch of the door at the top of the steps, Polly finds herself in the kitchens. She goes further and discovers the door leading to the tower stairs. But Ettel is lying awake on a couch in front of the door and Polly realises it is impossible for her to release Sonia with Ettel on guard.

Polly discovers a gun-room and passes cartridges and guns to Betty and Co. through the bars of the window by which she entered the Castle. She gives them six guns and tells them to fire them in front of the Castle. She hopes to be able to rescue Sonia, and will leave the Castle with her by means of a french window opening on to the terrace, which Polly has already opened in readiness. If the diversion caused by the guns does



Polly handed out the weapons to her eagerly waiting chums. Morcove was certain that, with them, it could create the necessary diversion to enable Polly to get to the prince in safety.

not succeed, the rest of the Co. are to enter the Castle through the french window.

Hearing guns firing at the front of the Castle and windows smashing, Ettel in terror runs to her brother and begs him to save her. Polly, hiding behind a screen in the hall, watches them as they race towards the cellars to safety.

She sprints up the main staircase, then up the winding stairs of the tower, turns the key in the lock of the room at the top and releases Sonia. Together, they run below, into the room with the open french window, into the terrace garden and then over the ornamental railings where Zora and the rest of the girls are waiting for them.

They wonder how long it will be before Ettel and her brother discover their prisoner has been whisked away in the night.

"That (Rupert) was a born coward did not mean either, that he would be disinclined to pursue them. He had his horse, and it would require no courage to set off, armed, to overtake the fugitives who were quite defenceless, and not a man amongst them."

They reach the same river which, because they were unable to cross it, had enabled Rupert to take Sonia prisoner. Polly suggests they try to use a fallen tree to cross. A giant larch is close by and with much awkward levering they manage to get it in the river, retaining their hold on one end and hoping the current will swing the other end to the opposite bank where it will hopefully lodge against some impediment. They are in luck and each makes her way across, nervous Paula having to crawl across with Madge holding her.

Zora and Betty are the last to cross and as they step on to the opposite bank, they hear the sound of someone on horseback. It is Black Rupert! He instantly dismounts and, revolver in hand, starts to cross the tree after them.

"But Rupert Cosetti never reached that other side. Suddenly there was that booming sound again from the river, and they saw the tree-trunk cast about by the raging waters, so that instantly the man himself was gone from sight; gone down into the furious flood, perhaps to perish there!"

Safe at the frontier station of Bukajero the next morning, the girls sleep all day and, by late afternoon, Zora comes to wake them to tell them that there is peace in Turania and in power "is a government of the best men from all parties".

Betty and Co. demur when Sonia says she must return to Suva Pesth to do her bit. "It does not mean that you have not done me a great service. You saved my life - and in my prayers I shall always ask a blessing for you all. It was War when you were standing by me. Peace now - and so I would like to turn back. For the same reason that you turned back - for me. Because there are times when one hears - a call. You understand, I think?"

Betty and Co. do understand - "being built that way themselves".

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The fourth Turania series appeared in the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN Nos. 760 to 763 (Aug/Sept. 1935), illustrated by Evelyn Flinders, relieving Leonard Shields, the regular Morcove artist.

In the first Turania series, SO's 76 to 81 (Jul/Aug. 1922) the name of the Crown Princess was Inez, and at the end she and her mother decide to make their home in London.

This raises the interesting question: have we here another series not written by Horace Phillips? Or was this Editorial blundering in not reviewing past files of the SO to make sure the names were correct?



Wrought of such stuff as dreams are; and as baseless
As the fantastic visions of the evening.

(N. Cotton. Tomorrow)

There must be few among us, I imagine, who have not at one time or another in idle moments been transported back to those 'best days of our lives' - our schooldays. Few will dispute the fact that they were indeed good times. It is the happy ability of the young to see and remember the pleasant incidents and the jolly occasions rather than the less congenial moments.

Memories often arise in Summer, from the depths of one's deck-chair located in a shady corner of the garden. But even more in Winter - from the equally comfortable depths of a favourite armchair by a quietly burning fire which, constantly falling in upon itself, stirs and shifts the train of thought of the watcher, snugly ensconced by its warmth. It is at such times that, with a willing and pliable imagination, one sees in the glowing coals castles and visions such as the grand old pile of Greyfriars School, which is as integral a part of boyhood as one's own Alma Mater. On a closer look the illusion broadens and grows clearer, becoming peopled with a host of well-known figures. The academic gown swirls as Mr. Quelch or Mr. Prout rustles by; the satisfying sound of boot meeting ball comes faintly from the distant spaces of Big-side; a lawn-mower whirrs in the Head's garden; the immemorial chiming of the ancient bell in the clock tower marks the passage of the hours, and the progression from lesson to leisure time.

The drowsy watcher is certain, sooner or later, to see the sun striking through the branches of the old elms in the quad, in the shadows of which sits a fat figure who, ever and anon, reaches into the recesses of a large paper bag and extracts something which keeps his podgy jaws in regular motion. Not perhaps edifying or an ideal picture to conjure in the embers, but to the muses by the fire, as essential a part of the whole as are the venerable features of Dr. Locke, or, indeed, those of the marble bust of Sophocles which gazes down from the Head's bookcase. All have their place. All will materialize in the glowing coals to the eye and mind that are willing to detect them: 'On scenes like these the eye delights to dwell.'

Such figures and scenes have played no small part in the directing of our lives. Deeply versed in their traditions, as boys we strove to emulate their high standards and characteristics.

Also, looming large at the back of our quietly burning fire, we may glimpse a portrait of the founder of this world within a world, wearing his familiar smoking-cap, with his pipe and dressing-gown. When the instigator of this enduring magic set the ball rolling so long ago, did he, one wonders, have any inkling of how persistently and how far his characters' influence would circulate

and expand? The embers may collapse and fall away to ash, but that which is left is abiding; the vision of a world of school to which surely no other writer could have given such eloquent expression.

Our pictures cover all the seasons - from Spring and Summer to Autumn and Winter.

It is a glorious day, with a blue sky and wisps of white cloud here and there. King Cricket is in the ascendant. The old school buildings are quiet and deserted. The fellows are scattered far and wide on such a day, some to playing fields, many disporting themselves on, and in, that classic stream, the park, while a few energetic chaps are rambling over the breezy expanses of Courtfield Common. It is early afternoon and a 'half'. The Remove passage is empty and quiet, the studies are silent. There is one figure present however, grossly fat and corpulent junior with large spectacles and an overall avaricious aspect. William George Bunter, one of the less decorative ornaments of the Remove is feeling a trifle peckish - is it not almost two hours since dinner? Not unnaturally the pangs are beginning to make themselves apparent. Hence Bunter commences a careful and systematic exploration of the study cupboards along the passage in search of sustenance...

From the open window of Mr. Quelch's study comes the rhythmic tapping of a typewriter. The famous history of Greyfriars is proceeding apace. Bending sharp glances ever and anon towards the telephone on the desk at his elbow he mentally wills it to remain silent during this sacred hour of leisure. His mind and imagination must wander uninterrupted among the vast collection of it must be said - dusty and somewhat musty documents piled beside him and waiting his scrutiny. From these he will, in due course, extract priceless facts and detailed information relating to bygone eras in Greyfriars' history. All of which will, in due time, having been re-shaped by his keen intellect, appear in his magnum opus. At such moments as these it may be said that Mr. Quelch is 'In nubibus', entering as nearly as possibly his personal 'seventh heaven'. Mundane matters of everyday existence quickly fade into the background of his mind as he becomes more deeply immersed. At such moments, William George Bunter (his especial bane) might never have existed. A stray fly, droning tirelessly around Mr. Quelch's head, and doubtless attracted by the aroma of musty documents, might have found more productive fields of exploration for all the attention he received. A summer day, silence (save for the occasional subdued ticking of the Remington), leisure, peace, calm, all conducive to the tranquillity of quiet study. In these cumulative circumstances one may observe a contented and happy master of the Remove. Thus let us leave him, his crusty features composed and relaxed, lost in a haze of dust, musty vellum, old English script, ancient friars, monks and all things monastic appertaining to Greyfriars School. In moments such as these it is highly possible that overtures from Dr. Locke himself would have been received, though with courtesy, with less than cordiality. And should Mr. Prout have the temerity to intrude, it is quite certain that he would receive very short shrift indeed, nothing less than a dismissal of an unprecedented nature...

Prout's least favourite pupil, Horace Coker, has time to sit in the shade outside Uncle Clegg's little store, and sustain himself with sundry ices before proceeding to deal (in his time-honoured 'short way with fags') with Harry Wharton & Co., who have had the audacity to sit at an adjacent table and converse loudly in the lordly presence. It is probable that nothing more exciting than the ensuing fracas will stir the peaceful calm of Friardale High Street

this summer afternoon. Potter and Greene, the long-suffering lieutenants of the great Horace, with experience born of a long (and bitter) apprenticeship, have slipped discreetly into the shady recesses of Uncle Clegg's shop, there to remain until the inevitable uproar is over, whereupon they will emerge and gather up the scruffy and well-ragged remnants of their leader and set him to some semblance of rights; the while, I fear, suffering the keener edges of his eloquence for their base betrayal...

Fog has played a not insignificant role in the unfolding of the Greyfriars story. Rolling in from the Northern sea, up the Channel and submerging the Southern countries; enshrouding Greyfriars in an impenetrable mist, blotting out the old elms in the quad and rendering the school buildings a mass of indetermined shapes. From the direction of the Lodge Gosling may be heard hoarsely clearing his ancient throat of the enveloping element. Fellows, those few who have ventured out, are groping their way about in search of their various destinations. It is an ideal occasion for the settling of old scores, and for perpetrating rather doubtful 'japes' and 'rags'. In the past under these circumstances Mr. Hacker, a far from popular figure in the school, has had the painful experience of being 'hacked', the weather conditions rendering such an outrage fairly safe. Such fogs have often served ulterior purposes through the years. Deeds perpetrated in the enshrouding mist; mistaken identities; all have played their part and added to our continuing pleasure as we have followed them over the years, acquiring for ourselves in the process a type of perpetual youth through these ever-fresh adventures of our fictional heroes...

We see Harry Wharton, standing at the Remove landing window, and looking at the whirling snowflakes being driven by a keen east wind. The old quad is almost obliterated in the growing dusk; the elms over by the tuckshop sway and creak mournfully, while lights are beginning to appear in various study windows. It is going to be a wild though not unseasonable mid-December night. In a day or so, term will be ending and the fellows will scatter to the four corners of the kingdom, and beyond. Again we shall have snow and a bitter east wind, two essentials to the success and well-being of the end of term atmosphere at Greyfriars. Hurree Singh will then join Harry at Wharton Lodge for the first part of the vac. Later, in time for the Christmas celebrations, they will be augmented by the other members of the Co. and, although uninvited, Bunter will also be present (paradoxically ensuring the success of the holiday), having by devious means 'worked the oracle' once again. These are all the things we have come to expect in the Magnet festive season, pictures in the fire which we would not willingly forego...

The mellow chimes from the ancient clock tower record the passage of time as they have done for centuries. The quad grows grey with shadows - including Gosling's shadow, goblin-like as it jerks along in his wake, while he proceeds about his lawful business in the vicinity of the gate. He has never been known to fail by so much as a minute or so in being sharply 'on the nail' in locking the gates upon the official chime. Nothing, it would seem, delights the old reprobate so much as locking fellows out and reporting them. Such is his crabbed and unchanging humour! Yet there is a redeeming feature even in his stark character landscape, a feature which is usually evident at the end of term, when certain extra duties - and extra remuneration - become the order of the day. It is then that Gosling's horny palm extends to receive various silver coins and notes for services rendered, generally connected with the carrying of cases and trunks. It has been recorded than upon these occasions certain muscles on his crusty features have been known to twitch and jerk into what

could possibly be translated as the ghost of a smile!...

In the lordly atmosphere of the Sixth Form quarters, Wingate sinks down into the armchair at his fireside. This chair is an old and faithful companion, having accompanied him upwards through the school from his junior days. It is rather worn and a little woebegone now, inclined to sag in places, and not without a burst or so here and there; yet it is still eminently comfortable and beloved. Reaching forward, Wingate stirs the fire into a blaze, selects a book from the shelf at his elbow and is soon immersed, oblivious to the world at large. Noises in the corridor, a faint uproar from the distance Fifth Form games room, all fade into insignificance for a pleasant half-hour. The Captain's study is an exceedingly snug little sanctum, as befits the retreat of such an Olympian character...

Here is the complete security of the world of Greyfriars. Wingate is Captain of the school, affairs are running smoothly (why should they not when in such capable hands - what could possibly go wrong?). Gerald Loder and his cronies, Walker and Carne, will probably kick over the traces from time to time, as becomes 'bad hats', but is this not expected of them? Mr. Prout will continue to boom and pontificate in the Fifth Form-room and Masters' Common Room in his usual unprecedented way. Mr. Quelch will snap, and Hacker will hoot, and little Mr. Twigg, the Second Form master, will expostulate mildly. Everything will proceed along its predestined course under the benign eye of the venerable Dr. Locke, just as the sun will continue to sink down behind the chapel in varying hues of colour and cloudscape, according to the season. Lights will spring up in the study windows and life will go on in its immemorial way. Semper idem. May the harsh winds of reality never so much as stir the fringes of this little world of school, this small oasis of sanity in a hurrying and mercenary world.

As we end our cavalcade of Greyfriars pictures in the fire, let us quote Henry Newbolt, who struck a very resonant chord when he declared:

We'll honour yet the school we knew, the best school of all:
We'll honour yet the rule we knew till the last bell call.
For, working days or holidays, and glad or melancholy days,
They were great and jolly days at the best school of all.

* * * * *

Yuletide Greetings to all Friars and other Collectors.

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Guess these St. Frank's characters

by Bob White.



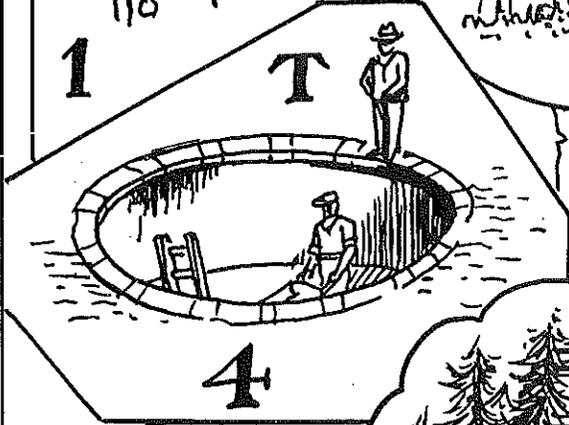
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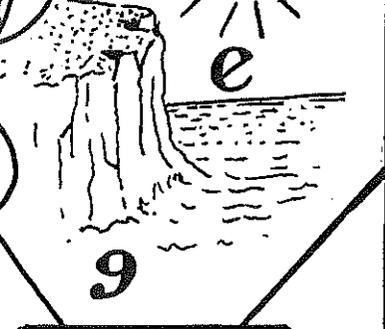
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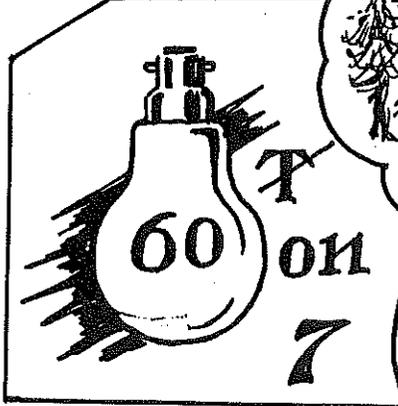
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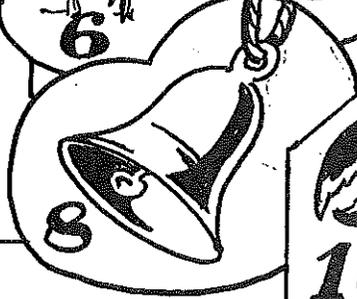
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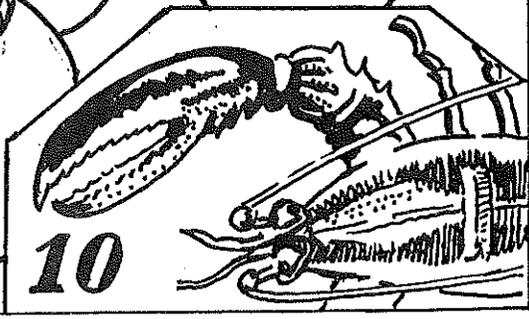
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IF---

by Rudyard Kipling

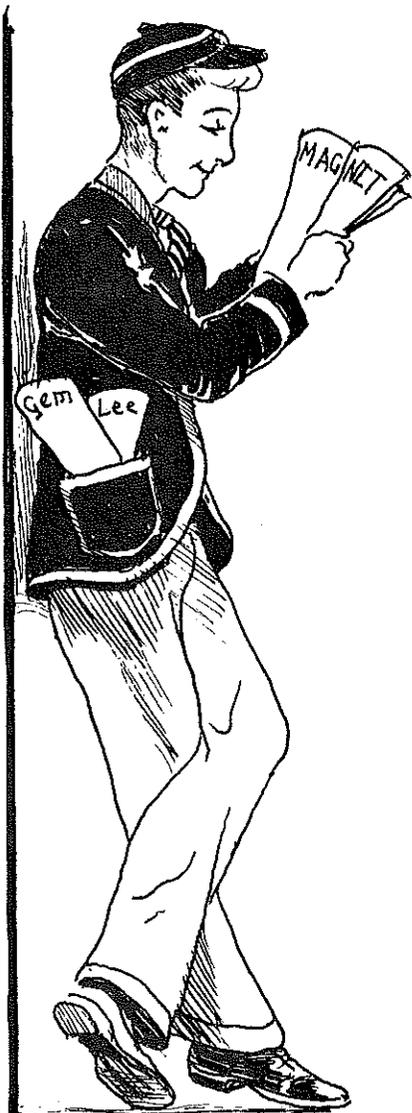
IF YOU can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream---and not make dreams your
master;
If you can think---and not make thoughts your
aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out
tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss
And Lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold
on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings---nor lose the common
touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And---which is more---you'll be a Man, my son!

* * * *



AN 'IF'-- FOR GIRLS

by Elizabeth Lincoln Otis

If you can dress to make yourself attractive,
 Yet not make puffs and curls your chief delight:
 If you can swim and row, be strong and active,
 But of the gentler graces lose not sight:
 If you can dance without a craze for dancing,
 Play without giving play too strong a hold,
 Enjoy the love of friends without romancing,
 Care for the weak, the friendless and the old;

If you can master French and Greek and Latin,
 And not acquire, as well, a priggish mien:
 If you can feel the touch of silk and satin
 Without despising calico and jean;
 If you can ply a saw and use a hammer,
 Can do a man's work when the need occurs,
 Can sing, when asked, without excuse or stammer,
 Can rise above unfriendly snubs and slurs;

If you can make good bread as well as fudges,
 Can sew with skill, and have an eye for dust;
 If you can be a friend and hold no grudges,
 A girl whom all will love because they must;

If at sometime you should meet and love another
 And make a home with faith and peace enshrined,
 And you its soul - a loyal wife and mother -
 You'll work out pretty nearly to my mind
 The plan that's been developed through the ages,
 And win the best that life can have in store.
 You'll be, my girl, a model for the sages ---
 A woman whom the world will bow before.

* * * *





(Author's Note: This is an abridged version of a story I sent to Frank Richards many years ago. His comments were - "I liked your cricket yarn - in spite of split infinitives - wish I had thought of the plot - and ending". I think he used part of this in later years.)

Harry Wharton was annoyed!

He had reason to be.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was annoyed!

He had no reason to be.

It was all Dicky Nugent's fault! He was being pursued by Vernon-Smith and crashed into a crowd of Removeites with the result that George Bulstrode was sent spinning to the ground and unfortunately suffered a dislocated elbow. This was a blow to the Junior Cricket team, due to play St. Jim's the next day (Saturday), for Bulstrode was the Remove wicket-keeper.

"You idiot, Smithy" exclaimed Frank Nugent, "why don't you leave my minor alone?"

"What your minor wants is some discipline" retorted The Bounder. "When I want your advice I'll ask for it" said Nugent, "shut up - don't speak to me!". "Alright, I won't" replied Smithy, "come on Reddy", and he and Redwing left the group.

"Now somebody else will have to keep wicket" said Harry Wharton, "bother Smithy! How about you, Johnny?" "Yes, I'll do my best" replied Johnny Bull and they went indoors.

Prep was over! Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent entered The Rag. Harry walked over to the Notice-Board upon which a piece of paper was affixed with details of the Junior Cricket XI versus St. Jim's. He took a pencil from his pocket and crossed out G. BULSTRODE and wrote in F. NUGENT. It was the prerogative of the Junior Captain to select and amend the Cricket and Football teams.

A buzz of conversation followed his action - from which his choice seemed to meet with approval. But there was one dissentient, however. "Nugent!" shouted Vernon-Smith, "Why Redwing's the man, surely. In my opinion he's the better player. I suppose you must play your pals!" "The team is selected on merit - you know that" said Wharton, "and in my opinion Nugent is a better fielder - it was a toss-up, and I've put Reddy down as 12th man". The Bounder bit his lip, but checked a sullen reply. As he turned to walk away, Frank Nugent caught his arm, "I'm sorry, Smithy, I was a bit hasty this morning".

Vernon-Smith gave him a fixed stare, shook off his arm, turned on his heel and walked away without a word. "Oh dear" remarked Bob Cherry, "it looks as if Smithy's on his high horse - he's not speaking to you Franky". "Let's change the subject" said Nugent.

It was Saturday, the day of the St. Jim's match. The weather was bright and sunny and a large crowd gathered on Little Side. The visitors won the toss and elected to bat. They were all out for 177 of which Tom Merry scored 50 before being brilliantly caught at long-on by Frank Nugent.

Greyfriars made a good start, Harry Wharton and Vernon-Smith putting on 61, Harry's share being 35. With the score at 150-7, Fatty Wynn, the St. Jim's fast bowler, took 2 wickets with successive deliveries - much to the chagrin of Vernon-Smith who was still batting and was 64 not out. Frank Nugent, the last man in, had to face a possible 'hat-trick'. As he reached the wicket, The Bouncer called to him "For goodness sake stop this one - and try and keep your end up!" "Oh, found your tongue have you - don't worry" retorted Nugent. Fatty Wynn put all he could into his next ball, but it was met with a perfectly straight bat. "Looks as if we've had it" remarked Cecil Reginald Temple "Wharton could do with a couple of men from the Fourth".

"The Shell, you mean!" added James Hobson. "Better if I'd skippered the side."

Greyfriars wanted 27 to win, and Smithy was in form. He scored nine off the next over, and Nugent snicked a boundary through the slips, followed by a hit for 2. Twelve wanted! Smithy scored 4 from Talbot's over, then Nugent hit two singles. The next over yielded a leg bye, followed by two more singles from Nugent. Tension was mounting as the Friars' score was approaching the Saints' total. Three wanted to win now! The Bouncer was well set and crashed the ball to the boundary with a shot worthy of Hammond at his majestic best. I doubt if cover-point even saw it! GREYFRIARS HAD WON by 1 wicket.

"Good Old Smithy!"

"Well played Nugent!"

Vernon-Smith had scored 81 not out - Nugent was 10 not out.

In the pavilion The Bouncer walked over to Frank Nugent. "I owe you an apology," he said, "I've been an ass." "Apology accepted" replied Frank, "you can't help being an ass occasionally." "I asked for that" grinned Smithy ruefully.

"As jolly old Shakespeare wrote," remarked Bob Cherry "All's well that ends well!"

GREYFRIARS JUNIOR XI V ST. JIM'S JUNIOR XI
Saturday, 10th June - Little Side

St. JIM'S JUNIOR XI		
T. MERRY	c. Nugent b. Field	58
G. FIGGINS	b. Singh	24
R. TALBOT	c. Wharton b. Singh	25
H. NOBLE	run out	20
A. A. D'ARCY	c. and b. Brown	15
J. BLAKE	b. Field	12
R. REDFFERN	c. Cherry b. Singh	4
E. LEVISON	lbw Singh	2
G. KERR	c Linley b. Brown	3
M. LOWTHER	not out	2
D. WYNN	b. Singh	0
Extras		6
	Total	<u>177</u>

	GREYFRIARS JUNIOR XI	
H. WHARTON	c. Merry b. Wynn	35
H. VERNON-SMITH	not out	81
R. CHERRY	c. Blake b. Talbot	20
S. FIELD	lbw Talbot	11
M. LINLEY	b. Wynn	8
T. BROWN	c. D'Arch b. Wynn	7
P. TODD	c. & b. Talbot	1
R. PENFOLD	st. Lowther b. Noble	2
J. BULL	b. Wynn	0
H. SINGH	b. Wynn	0
F. NUGENT	not out	10
Extras		3
	Total	<u>178</u> (for 9 wkts)

WANTED: The following books in 1st Edition only: BARONESS ORCZY: The League and the Scarlet Pimpernel (Cassell, 1919) and The Adventures of the Scarlet Pimpernel (Hutchinson, with 1929 Catalogue at rear); HENRY WADE: Policeman's Lot (Constable, 1933); LESLIE CHARTERIS: The Holy Terror (Hodders, MCMXXXII) and Once More The Saint (Hodders, MCMXXXIII); DORNFORD YATES: As Other Men Are (Ward Lock, dated 1925 title-page).

Also 1st Editions by the following authors: E.H. CLEMENTS, J. ALLAN DUNN, EDMUND SNELL, H. BEDFORD JONES, DOUGLAS NEWTON.

JACK ADRIAN
CLEMATIS COTTAGE, CRADLEY. Near MALVERN.
WORCESTERSHIRE. WR13 5LQ.

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 All Best Wishes for Christmas and a Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous New Year to our New Editor Mary, and our Old Editor Eric, and all the Staff, Contributors, and Readers who make our Story Paper Collectors Digest possible. Bless you all from:

JOSEPH P. FITZGERALD
OF MANCHESTER

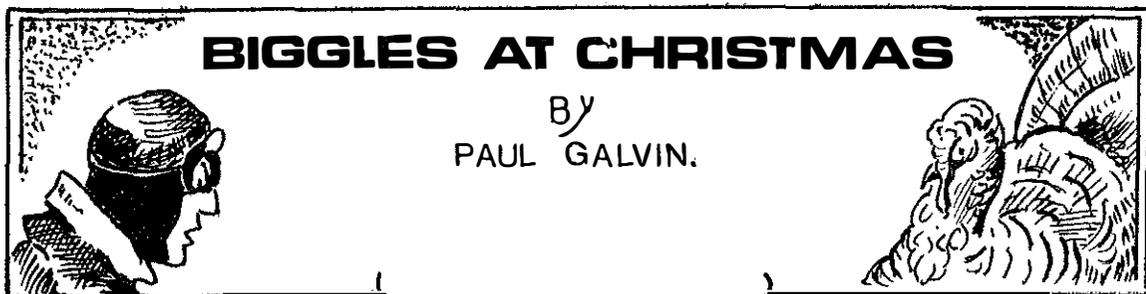
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=====
 Merry Xmas to all Readers especially the South West Club.

C.H. CHURCHILL
TOPSHAM

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W.E. Johns wrote books and articles on a host of different topics ranging from aviation, boy's fiction, adult thrillers, and romances to gardening. Of all his works I believe that his most effective were his early short stories following the exploits of his best known character, 'Biggles'. These stories were set mainly in France during the First World War where Biggles was a pilot in the R.F.C. It is hardly surprising that these were among Johns' best as he could draw upon his own experiences as a pilot in the latter stages of the war.

The early Biggles stories were first published in 'Popular Flying'. They were then collected and published in book form by John Hamilton, who specialised in aviation books. The titles of these collections were 'The Camels Are Coming' 1932, and 'Biggles Of The Camel Squadron' 1934. In 1933 'The Modern Boy' obtained the rights to these stories and began to print them, albeit watered down a little to suit a juvenile readership. Following this Johns wrote other short Biggles stories especially for 'The Modern Boy', and, later on, full length Biggles books were serialised in the story paper.

At Christmas time we know that many of our favourite story paper characters were written into stories with a Christmas flavour. Maybe 'The Famous Five' were involved in a ghostly caper at Wharton Lodge, or Sexton Blake and Tinker were investigating 'The Crime Of The Christmas Tree' or 'Mrs. Bardell's Christmas Pudding'. It is not quite as well known that Johns wrote three short Biggles stories with a Christmas setting. These were named "Biggles' Xmas Box", "Biggles' Christmas Tree" and "Biggles Carves The Turkey". They appeared in 'The Modern Boy' for 3 consecutive weeks, 15/12/34, 22/12/34 and 29/12/34. "Biggles Carves a Turkey" can still be found in the bookshops today under the changed title "The Turkey" in the compilation of early Biggles short stories, "Biggles of 266". For some unknown reason "Xmas Box" and "Christmas Tree" were never included in any of the Biggles compilations that have been published over the last fifty or so years. They can only be found in those issues of 'The Modern Boy'. This has made them much sought after by collectors of the Biggles lore.

The question must be asked, why were they forgotten? Were they in some way different from the other Biggles stories? The Biggles stories of this period were essentially war stories, the main plots woven around aerial 'dog fights' and confrontation with the enemy. With this in mind it must have been a little more difficult to introduce the festive spirit into the stories whilst retaining the conflict which the readers enjoyed. It may be that the only reason that the Christmas Biggles stories were written in the first place was because 1934 happened to be the one year when Johns was writing a series of short Biggles stories for 'The Modern Boy' round about Christmas time, and like many other authors was expected to write stories for the Christmas editions with a seasonable theme.

In all three stories the prominent story line is 'peace and goodwill to all men'. Biggles is determined to celebrate Christmas as normally as possible and for a short time to forget the war. Of course everything does not go according to plan. In "Biggles' Xmas Box" our hero decides to send the Germans a Christmas box. Rumour has it that they are short of food so he decides to fly over a nearby enemy aerodrome and drop them ten pounds of sausages. On his way over he is intercepted by a German aircraft and is soon engaged in a 'dogfight' by an enemy unsuspecting of Biggles' humanitarian mission. Needless to say the outcome of the engagement is decided by Biggles hurling the sausages and rendering the unfortunate German unconscious. Happily the German survives the crash but Biggles remarks, "Fancy having to admit that you were shot down with a packet of dead pig!" True festive spirit is shown when Biggles orders a tender to "fetch the poor blighter...if he managed to save the sausages we could give them to him for lunch just to show there's no ill will - only goodwill".

In "Biggles' Christmas Tree" nearly all of the action takes place in the mess rooms of 266 Squadron and 287 Squadron. Biggles, who belongs to the

THE AIR-FIGHTERS' PARTY GOES WITH A BANG!



In dead silence Wilke opened the parcel which the major had just taken from the tree—then let it fall with a crash, and a roar of laughter went up.

Biggles' Christmas Tree!

The Young Air-Ace of the Great War is a demon for Merriment—when he can find it or provide it!

By FLYING-OFFICER
W. E. JOHNS

former, manages to get hold of a Christmas tree to brighten up the mess room. Wilkinson from 287, however, takes delivery of the tree before it reaches 266 much to the dismay of Biggles and his fellow officers. 'Wilks' then rubs salt into the wounds by inviting 266 to a Christmas tree party the next night. Wilks fixes the presents to be given out at the end of the party so that 266 squadron receive silly presents such as rusty nuts and bolts and wads of old engine-cleaning rags. Biggles finds out, and the night before the party flies over and changes all the wrappers, so that on the night Biggles is given a fine silver wrist watch intended for Wilks. The practical joking is quickly ended when the party is informed that the enemy has just bombed 266 aerodrome, and it is realised that it is only due to members of the squadron being invited to the party that there were no casualties. Biggles ends the story by calling Wilks over and saying "Here you are laddie, here's your watch. You deserve it".

In the last of the Christmas stories Biggles decides that the officers of 266 must have a turkey for Christmas dinner, hence the title "Biggles' Carves the Turkey". He recalls that he has seen a turkey farm nearby but over the enemy lines. However, he is determined to provide one for the pot so he sets off in his Sopwith Camel. He eventually finds the farm and catches a turkey but before he can kill the bird he is disturbed by German soldiers. What follows is that Biggles has to take off and fly the aircraft while wrestling with a 20 pound turkey! This problem is compounded when he meets an enemy aircraft intent on shooting him down. The battle commences as each pilot manouvers for the kill. The German, helped by the turkey in Biggles' cockpit finally gets into position behind Biggles and shoots to kill. Biggles knows the end has come. He sees blood on his glove, but no, he realises the turkey has stopped struggling, it has in fact stopped the bullets intended for him. The bird is dead and it is its blood on his clothes. He then quickly despatches the enemy aircraft and returns home for Christmas dinner.

W.E. Johns never wrote any other Biggles short Christmas stories. They are, however, well worth looking through your collection of 'The Modern Boy' for, and re-reading this Christmas. So, as Biggles would say: "Soft landings and no dud engines!"

42 Sexton Blakes 3rd Series G.C. Intermittent from 286 to 510 £25, The lot O.N.O. including P.& P. No splitting.

COLIN PARTIS

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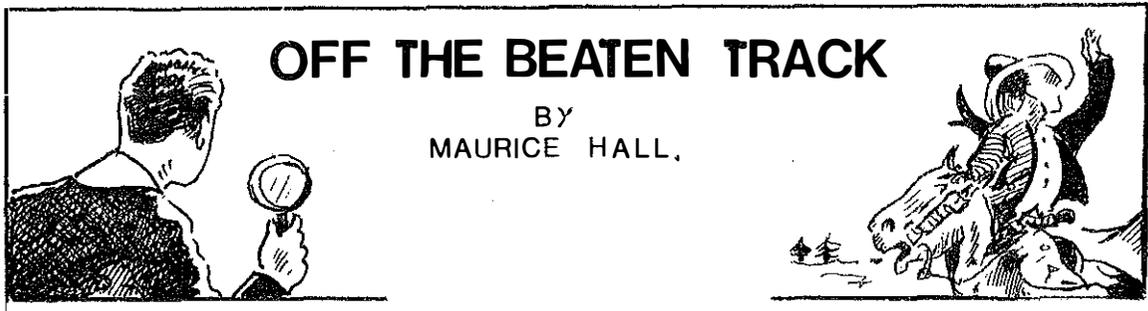
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For Sale "On the Road" (Motor Mags) 140 parts. Penguin Book of Comics £2.50. T.V. Book of Sexton Blake £2.50. Golden Annual for Girls 1931 £3.50. S.B.L 5th Series (45). **WANTED:** First issue of EVERGREEN Quarterly.

M.R. THOMPSON

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Charles Hamilton was well known for a remark he made many years ago. He was asked how he separated Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood, when he wrote so many stories hot on the heels of each other. His reply had a good deal of sense about it: "I just created a different name for the author to identify each school. When I wrote as Richards, Greyfriars was the school, Clifford related to the Gem and St. Jim's, and Owen Conquest could only mean the Popular and Rookwood. That way I found no trouble in identity between the three locations".

All very reasonable but later he did not adhere to this principle. Hamilton produced some fine stories, away from his main schools, in the Modern Boy. He must have written a large part of the content of this boys paper over its thirteen year run, from 1928 to 1940. He had a unique ability to write about places he had visited, giving the reader a real sense of being there, as well as writing about places where he had not been as convincingly if he were an inhabitant of the area.

In Modern Boy No. 1, he created 'Ken King of the Islands', though the authors were listed as Sir Alan Cobham and Charles Hamilton. I wonder if Alan Cobham even suggested the basic plot? One thing is certain; Alan Cobham's name vanished from the stories after No. 20, leaving Hamilton as the only author. For the South Seas stories of Ken King and his Ketch, the Dawn, Hamilton created a feel of the south seas trade winds, the burning heat of the day and the boom of the Atlantic rollers striking the reef that surrounded the sheltered lagoon. Today, IF I could go to the south sea islands, I would expect to be in exactly the conditions as described in these stories, and I think I would be. Yet, Hamilton had never been there, any more than he had visited China or India or even America, though he was able to write of them in such a convincing manner. Without much difficulty he produced wonderful pen-portraits of great character, and applied them to members of his cast in a short series. Hassan, the dragoman, for example or Kikolobo the Kikuyu chief of the African series in the Magnet. These characters, and many others, were cast aside at the end of a story and not used again, except on rare occasions. (Jim Valentine was one and perhaps would have been better not used again in the Brazil story.)

I wonder once or twice if the South Sea English, spoken by Ken King to the natives, was more or less correct. I feel that it might have been in the 1920's, even if times have changed a lot since then. Probably outside of Greyfriars these stories that ran for many weeks at a stretch in the Modern Boy, (later re-printed in the Boy's Friend Library and appearing as late as the Bunter books and Annuals in the 1950's and 1960's) were much loved by both the reader and the author. I certainly enjoyed them.

Also tucked away in the Modern Boy was a series about 'Bunny' Hare, a

schoolboy on holiday near Margate in Kent. As it happens, Hamilton was living at Kingsgate only a few miles away in Percy Avenue, and could have walked from his house to the home of Bunny's Uncle and Aunt, if it had actually existed! It is, therefore, no surprise that the description of the area was very accurate, and later, when in the twelve part series Bunny found himself in a balloon being carried into France, the Casino featured prominently in the tale. Hamilton had travelled to France on many an occasion; he had also played roulette and lost money; he knew all about the green of the tables and the red of the wine. The descriptions were perfect. (It is interesting to think that one could not easily note the difference between the places he knew and the places that he only read about. Both kinds of stories had an air of authenticity about them.) For this series Hamilton used his own name. A short series, about a Magnet and-a-half long.

Yet another school created by Hamilton was the School for Slackers, properly called High Coombe. It was a novel plot, though not untried before, but the very small number of boys actually mentioned in the stories tended to tighten up the episodes. Each week Jimmy McCann (the new Headmaster), tried to encourage the boys actually to do some work in class and put some effort into cricket, particularly against Okeham, the rival school. It had been said by the Prefects of High Coombe: "If Okeham beat High Coombe at cricket, they (the High Coombe boys) at least, wore infinitely better-cut trousers than any man at Okeham, and High Coombe was perfectly well satisfied with itself".

Well the boys may have been satisfied, but Jimmy McCann definitely was not, and his task was to change the tenor of the school, in spite of the opposition of Aubrey Compton of the Fifth.

For many years the school had slumbered under the easy hand of Dr. Chetwode, whose sole desire in life had been to cause no ripples in the running of the school. The assistant Head, Mr. Chard, master of the Fifth, believed in the maxim that calling his boys by their christian names would not harm discipline. To some extent he was right, on the grounds that he never made them do anything that they didn't want to do anyway. Compton was one of a trio of assorted characters in the Fifth Form. He was the rebel, Bob Darrell his exact opposite, keen on sport, willing to learn in class. Lastly, Teddy Seymour was the peacemaker, who would tend to side with whoever spoke last. These three, and Ferguson of the Fourth, were the main contenders in the battle to come.

For such a small stage with few players, it brought out some of the best of Hamilton's humour and rates at the top of the list. Not only because of the individual episodes but because each offering was as good as the last. Two series were run, Modern Boy Nos. 371 to 380, and, by popular request, Nos. 384 to 394, showing that the readers obviously enjoyed the stories. The two series were re-printed in Schoolboys Own Library, Nos. 290 and 299, abridged, and of course lacking many of the fine inside illustrations of the original copies. I won't tell you how Jimmy McCann got on at High Coombe but I will promise you a very enjoyable read with lots of fun. The High Coombe stories were penned under the name of Charles Hamilton.

Modern Boy No. 452 saw the start of another school, namely Oakshott. In the list of schoolboys and masters, two names stood out. One was Peter Porrhinge of the Fifth, more familiarly known as 'Pie', and Len Lex, who had, for his pains, an uncle Bill who was a Detective-Inspector at Scotland Yard. Len Lex had definite associations with Jack Drake of Greyfriars School. The

fact was that Uncle Bill did not mind his nephew playing the amateur detective, while Ferrers Locke was similarly not adverse to sending Jack to act as undercover man, or even as decoy! Oakshott was another small school with just a few boys mentioned in some of the Forms. The action was carried out in the Fifth, like High Coombe, and not the Remove or Fourth Forms. Did this mean that Hamilton thought he was writing for an older reader?

The series was named 'The Sussex Man', and had a lot in common with the more well known, 'Courtfield Cracksman' in the Magnet (Nos. 1138 to 1151). However many times Hamilton wrote similar tales, they always contained new elements. Not only was the cast changed, but the whole atmosphere altered. It ran for 10 issues and then, somewhat surprisingly, continued straight into another Len Lex adventure, 'The Mystery of Moat House' (Four issues Modern Boy Nos. 462 to 465). The 'Sussex Man' was re-printed in S.O.L. 353, 'The School-boy Tec'. Oakshott, Len Lex and Pie Porringe, appeared again in Modern Boy Nos. 479 to 488. Another short run, part of which was reprinted in the S.O.L. 371. The S.O.L. title 'Asking for the Sack', gives most of the plot away. Why was Eric Tunstall trying to get himself bunked? Who was Eric?. When Pie seemed to think Eric wasn't Eric at all? Read on, and enjoy! The last four copies of the series contained the 'Hold-Up Man', involving a robbery in the district, which Len Lex rapidly linked to the school. In four issues he did a good job, but the series was too short and flimsy. Not reprinted.

So far, all these different 'off the track' series by Hamilton were penned in his own name. However, one more character (new to the Modern Boy) was introduced as written by Ralph Redway, as the paper faded towards an end still over two years away. This was the re-appearance of the 'Rio Kid', last heard of in the Popular and re-printed (mainly) in the Boy's Friend Library.

The first story was called 'The Rio Kid Rides Again!' and he rode for 21 issues, to complete the first series of the Modern Boy which ended at No. 523.

The stories did not quite match the original Popular yarns, but any one coming to them fresh for the first time, would, I suspect, have enjoyed reading about this good-looking young cowboy, with his quick-on-the-draw hands. Framed for a crime he didn't commit, the 'Kid' had set out on his black-mizzled grey mustang, Side-Kicker, to quit the Frio country and the 'Double-Bar' Ranch, knowing full well that the law, in the shape of Mule-Kick Hall, Captain of the Texas Rangers, was still on his track.

One adventure followed another; the crooked handsome Harris of the Lazy Ranch was the first problem the 'Kid' met. The rest of the cow-punchers were fine, and the Rio Kid got on well with them, eventually becoming the new foreman.

But Mule-Kick Hall was never far away, catching him at last and intending to take him back for trial. The 'Rio Kid', obviously, did not trust the verdict to come out on his side, so gave his captor the slip and headed off to Hollywood. I am sure you all remember the 'Hollywood' series in the Magnet, and how Harry Wharton rode the Arab horse down the 'Hair-Trigger' because Myron Polk, the film-star, was afraid. Well, the 'Rio Kid' did a similar death-defying in the last but one episode in the Modern Boy. This time, it was Pedro's Ride that featured in the film, and the Handsome Hombre, of the Gorgeous Picture Studio, whose nerve failed at the last moment. Although the plots were alike, I feel that the Rio Kid would be more likely to be able to ride down the waterfall than Wharton.

The Rio Kid had ceased in the Modern Boy, but the Ken King stories continued, on and off, until No. 54 of the last series. Apart from the Popular, the Modern Boy had presented the longest run of this very popular character, set in the South Seas. I think it is true to say, that the Modern Boy was a veritable gold-mine of off-the-beaten track items by Charles Hamilton, made even more attractive because of the illustrators' interesting pictures which added an extra spark of life to those many excellent stories.

Christmas Greetings to W. Howard Baker, Norman Shaw, Darrell Swift, Keith Smith, Eric Fayne, - a fond thought for Madam - A Warm Welcome to the Editor's Chair to Mary Cadogan - Best Wishes to all in our Hobby. Peace and Contentment through the New Year.

PHIL HARRIS

5542 DECELLES AVENUE, Apt. 4, MONTREAL, QUEBEC, CANADA





Sexton Blake and the Case of the Languid Disciple.

BY NICK GODFREY.



Well, so what is the best beginner's guide to Sexton Blake? With Greyfriars and St. Jims, it was a volume entitled 'The Best of Magnet & Gem' which was issued back in 1967 - a slender edition which launched me fully onto the causeway of all things Hamilton. As an entree into Captain W.E. Johns, I would recommend 'Comrades In Arms'. Dating from 1947, this book includes short stories of Biggles, Worrals and Gimlet amongst others. But as for Sexton Blake.....?

As far as I can remember, my introduction to Sexton Blake was the 1960s television series wherein Blake was portrayed by Laurence Payne, and Tinker by Roger Foss. The first episode was broadcast on September 25th, 1967, gosh, twenty years ago, back when I was eleven. I can still recall some of the scenes now. Still picture my brother and myself avidly awaiting each successive instalment. My first term at my new school and the delights of Charles Hamilton and Sexton Blake came creeping.

From January, 1968, Sexton Blake appeared weekly in 'The Valiant'. There were Sexton Blake bubble-gum cards - I still retain my Batman, Monkees and Tarzan cards, but no Blake. And then there was the 'Valiant Book of T.V.'s Sexton Blake' which Fleetway brought out to tie things in. My new-found school-friends and I eagerly snapped it all up.

At some point I also acquired some of the Howard Baker edited 5th Series S.B.L.s. I think it was in my favourite second-hand bookshop (long since disappeared) which was also a wonderful source for the Biggles and Bunter books. Although designated as far, far too racy by many stout Blakians, this 5th Series served me well and I bought up as many as I could find and afford. Actually, I probably skipped over the various sources of contention. Too young to tell me the flak from the archie, so to speak. Over the years I've collected the complete 5th Series, and though I can well appreciate their flaws (some as large as snow-drifts), they still manage to touch a nerve or two.

So the 1970s came, and with them the two Howard Baker 'Union Jack' volumes which I greatly enjoyed. Oh, but this is getting to sound like the narrative version of a yule log in a blaze... Oh, all the rest - a few 3rd Series S.B.L.s came my way. Some of these I found enthralling - others seemed to be little more than the worst excuses for fiction I've ever laboured over: Walter Tyrer's "The Case of The Naval Stores Racket" (No. 287), which despite Gerry Allison's 1953 C.D. review which rates it as 'a good readable yarn', must actually score 10 out of 10 for sheer tedium. I much preferred W. Howard Baker's 'Murder Most Intimate' (No. 402), which, with its Brigitte Bardot/Francis Mathews cover, always seemed to ring through most saliently.

There was also the occasion in the mid '70s when Mary Cadogan introduced me to the venerable Josie Packman, but that's another story. As is the case of the Sexton Blake busts...

Last summer, whilst routing through one of my regular haunts in Dublin, I came across 'Union Jack' Nos. 511 and 609 (1913 and 1915). And only £1 each (80p per copy in English currency). My first encounter with Professor Francis Kew, and with George Marsden Plummer. Persistence must always lend itself to reward. There have been so many occasions when in second-hand bookshops I've enquired if they have perchance any Magnets or Gems or Nelson Lees, etc. etc. in stock... and at last I struck gold. Only two copies it's true, but this is a marked improvement on my usual success rate.

So what does 1987 bring to a sometimes eager if sometimes over-languid Blakian. It actually brings 1986's Jack Adrian edited volume 'Sexton Blake Wins' whizzing through my letterbox, all the way from Happy Hours Unlimited, wherever it is that they're based up there in Northern England. It turns this half-hearted Rash-the-Rover into an imbider of dreams. I nestle up here every day with a brand new Sexton Blake story in my hands.

Last night I chanced at last upon Zenith the Albino - who reminded me in many ways of the albino guitarist, Johnny Winter. Tomorrow, who knows... For relaxation I browse through a few old C.D. monthlies or annuals, but this week is definitely a Blake week. Last week belonged to the 1927 South Seas series in the Magnet - with occasional interludes of The Saint. The week before was pretty much tied up with and devoted to Jerry Lee Lewis - but then so are most weeks.... Next week there may not even be time to read, but who cares for next week.

'Sexton Blake Wins' is as fine an introduction to the Baker Street chronicles as I've ever found. Sexton Blake is 94 years old. May his presence forever haunt 23a Baker Street.

Season's Greetings To All Friends. Always interested in exchanging Pre-war Boy's papers. Contacts Welcome.

KEN TOWNSEND

7 NORTH CLOSE, WILLINGTON, DERBY. DE6 6EA.

TEL. BURTON ON TRENT. 703305

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Never Say Christmas Alone,
It's Not Such A Thrill On Your Own,
But To Friends It's A Definite Cheers,
That's Why I Am Saying It Here.

JOHN BURSLEM

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Greetings and Best Wishes To Everyone.

BARRIE STARK

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As a professional musician I have always wondered about the extent of Hamilton's knowledge of music. That he enjoyed the classical composers and quite a lot of nineteenth century music I know; that he enjoyed playing and singing Schubert songs I know. But how much did he really know about music?

The musical focus in his work, of course, is one of his comedy standbys: Claude Hoskins, and his effect, musically, on others, especially his pal and study-mate, Hobson; when Hoskins is in the mood to play to his pal, Hobson has very little choice. But certain things that Hamilton writes about Hoskins make me wonder. For instance, when Claude is playing anything apart from his own masterpieces, they are usually by someone with a name like Caskowski, which indicates that Hamilton had the impression that all music contemporary with the time at which he was writing came from Russia - which is not all the case. Some did, a great deal more did not. In fact, very little of the contemporary music by Soviet composers was exported to the West. And even what did come through would not have provided the ear-splitting noises that Hamilton describes so graphically. The Soviet hard line had clamped down on such excesses, so that their composers, willy-nilly, had to produce music that would appeal to the people or it was condemned.

One would like to know, too, from where Hoskins acquired his knowledge. We are told that he had lessons with Mr. Flatt, but what lessons? What did they contain? Piano lessons? And, if so, what was he set to learn? It would hardly be the kind of music he is always playing. Much more likely it would be Mozart, or Beethoven, or one of the romantics. I get the impression, also, that Hoskins and Mr. Flatt did not see eye to eye. Regrettably, the music teacher is not given character, and it is a pity that we are not allowed to look in on at least one of Hoskins' lessons. That would have been both interesting and informative.

We learn at different times that various boys played an instrument; Nugent is said to play the violin in The Haunted Island, Magnet No. 149, although in later times no mention is made of this fact. In white cover days it is stated that Wynne of the Sixth played the 'cello, but this plays no later part in the stories. Cussy's tenor voice is often mentioned, humorously, but the only song he seems to know is "O Star of Eve" from Wagner's Tannhauser. In a blue Gem Manners was described as playing the piano, but little more was heard of this, and, once his camera took over, nothing at all. Instead, it was Monty Lowther who could play light, frothy music dexterously on the piano. In Magnet No. 580, Hoskins's chance, we learn that Wally Bunter plays the flute, and there is an interesting scene in which Hoskins inveigles Wally into playing through a flute part he has written. According to Hamilton, Wally stopped playing and put his fingers over his ears because of the cacophony Hoskins was asking him to play. But, if cacophony here means cacophonous harmonies, as it should, this will not work.

A flute cannot produce harmonies of any sort, since it cannot play more than a single note at a time. It cannot double-stop.

Hoskins, of course, is always grumbling about Dr. Locke because he has not the gumption to provide a full set of orchestral instruments for his, Hoskins's, use. But composers do not as a rule have a full set at their command. Even Haydn, who did have the Esterhazy orchestra to call upon to try what he had written, did not use it when he was composing. That would have been rather difficult, and would seriously have hampered the production of the huge amount of music Haydn did actually produce.

Another point is that, when Hoskins is composing, a matter of self-satisfaction with him is often that he is writing numbers of consecutive fifths, in flat defiance of Mr. Flatt. But, unless he was writing strict counterpoint of the type written by the choral composers of the sixteenth century, for instance, which he manifestly was not, there was no embargo on consecutive fifths for him to break. In any case, consecutive fifths running riot would make for a very dull result, and would certainly not produce the cacophony Hamilton describes. Apart from that, the use of consecutive fifths on a large scale, with other matter, had already happened, with the music of Debussy. And there were not wanting plenty of earlier composers who made use of them, not in the same way; even Bach, the great contrapuntist himself, was not above using them in the early eighteenth century.

Similarly, another Hoskins gambit is the unrelieved use of diminished sevenths and ninths - again producing a very uninteresting result. But diminished sevenths in themselves are not cacophonous and minor ninths only mildly so, and plenty of previous composers had made use of them. Probably the most famous minor ninth in the history of music occurs at the final climax of Beethoven's Overture *Léonore No. 3* - hardly new in Hamilton's time.

So, what did Hamilton know about music? Quite a bit more, I suspect, than



"Look here, you cheeky fags!" shouted Hoskins. "Oh, my hat! Mind my music! Oh, crumbs!" Five pairs of hands jerked the musical genius of the Shell off the music-stool. He sprawled on the floor in a gasping heap.

allowed to show. Maybe I am taking too seriously what was only meant in fun. But even fun can be based on fact, and is usually the funnier because of fact. And a musician is bound to ask questions. Now they cannot be answered.

WANTED: 1st Editions by RAFAEL SABATINI. The following particularly wanted: The Tavern Knight (Grant Richards, 1904), Bardelys the Magnificent (Eveleigh Ash, 1906), The Justice of the Duke (Stanley Paul, 1912), The Banner of the Bull (Becker, 1915), Captain Blood (Hutchinson, with 1922 Catalogue at rear), The Black Swan (Hutchinson, with 1932 Catalogue at rear), The Historical Nights' Entertainment: 3rd Series (Hutchinson, 1938), Columbus (Hutchinson, in DJ only) but please quote other 1sts, and 1sts in DJ (usually with 7/6d price).

Also: 1st Editions by GEORGETTE HEYER: The Black Moth (Constable, 1921), The Great Roxhythe (Hutchinson, with 1922 Catalogue at rear), Instead of the Horn (Hutchinson, with 1923 Catalogue at rear), Helen (Longmans, 1928), Pastel (Longmans, 1929), Barren Corn (Longmans, 1930).

JACK ADRIAN

CLEMATIS COTTAGE, CRADLEY, Near MALVERN, WORCESTERSHIRE WR13 5LQ

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LAURENCE S. ELLIOTT

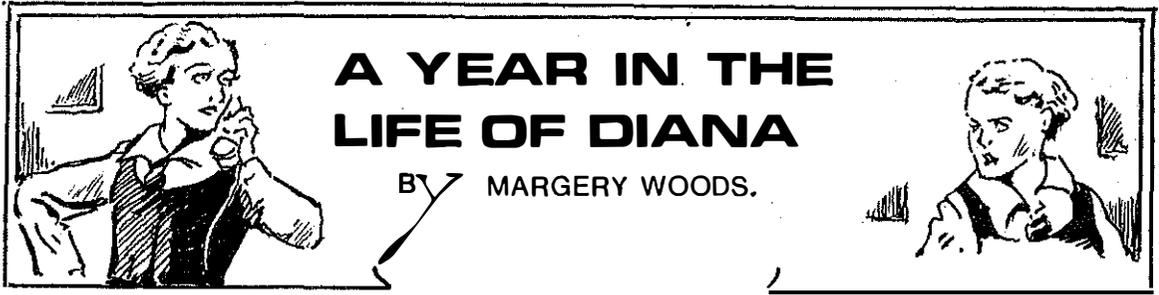
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Greetings and Best Wishes To All Members of the Old Boys Book Club everywhere.

LARRY MORLEY

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1937 was a good year for Diana Royston-Clarke, the Firebrand of the Fourth Form at Cliff House.

She kicked off---over the traces as usual---on January 9th by discovering a future opera star in the person of young Lily Walters of humble background, whose father had saved Mr. Royston-Clarke's life, and who, since being orphaned, had been unofficially adopted by Diana. It is Diana's idea that Lily should be sent to Cliff House, where, unfortunately, Lydia Crossendale and her toadies discover that Lily came from a slum and set about a systematic programme of ragging of the timid girl. Lily, with her own sense of fair play, unwittingly breaks the stern schoolgirl code by that heinous offence of sneaking when she springs to the defence of her beloved Diana and lets a mistress know that Lydia, not Diana, has been responsible for a misdeed.

Diana, naturally, is not going to stand for Lydia's nonsense, but her efforts to protect Lily only land her in more trouble with authority, and Babs and Co., whose kindness to Lily leads to a conflict of loyalties in the girl from the slums, who already has enough to cope with in her new environment. For Diana's temper lives on a short fuse at the best of times, and after her quarrel with Babs, she loses her temper with the hapless Lily, then, characteristically, hates herself. Alone in her study she berates herself for her own faults:

"A bad-tempered, mean-natured spiteful beast! That's what you are, Diana Royston-Clarke" Diana said fiercely, and to express what she thought of herself, violently caught up a cushion, hurled it across the room and watched with a sort of malicious joy as it swept her priceless Sevres vase off the sideboard and crashed it on the floor in a hundred pieces. "You don't know how to control yourself! Why do you always allow yourself to fly off the handle like that?"

Why indeed! After a few more moments of similar self-denigration, Diana scowls: She supposes she must now don the sackcloth and ashes again.

Which aptly sums up two facets of Diana's complex character. Though why a girl of Diana's undoubted intelligence should bring a priceless Sevres vase into the hurly-burly of school life is difficult to understand.

In the second story of this series, Diana's efforts on Lily's behalf result in heartbreak for the girl who is a misfit at Cliff House. There is the inevitable clash of interests. Clara wants to try Lily out at hockey practice; Diana has arranged a course of lessons for Lily with Professor Larkin at the Courtfield Opera House---that afternoon. There isn't much doubt who will win. Lily meets the Professor, who after hearing her sing prophesies a great future for her. This is all that is needed to redouble Diana's determination to create a lady and a star from her protege.

The disasters arrive thick and fast, not least when four of Lily's old friends from Scrub Alley (whom Diana has invited to tea sometimes in that carelessly grandiloquent way of hers) turn up at Cliff House, to the malicious joy of Lydia and Co., (class differences are underlined with a sledgehammer in this story, although snobbishness is constantly condemned) at the same time as Celeste Margesson of the yacht *Gloriana* fame and her friend Lady Laura. Disaster is perhaps too mild a description of that tea party in Study 4, at least for Lady Laura who has a cup of tea tipped over her dress and then loses her handbag.

Fate takes its hand in the concluding story of the series, when a much greater musical celebrity than Professor Larkin arrives on the scene, and to balance this factor another talent is discovered in the person of Chrissie Smithson, a dresser at the theatre. It is then that Diana's cruellest instinct comes uppermost. Miss Primrose having taken over Lily's management, so to speak, Diana decides to set up Chrissie in competition. She sets out to undermine Lily's confidence while promoting Chrissie for the diploma contest. But Diana's proteges also have their own problems and Chrissie is no exception. Her mother has had an accident and there is no-one but Chrissie to look after the home.

Diana has always fancied herself in many roles, from Svengali to Good Samaritan and she doesn't hesitate. But even Diana's colossal self-confidence does not prepare her for what it means to run a home and look after an invalid. Money buys the way out of many problems, something that Diana takes for granted, but money can't buy Diana the time away from school to keep her promise. Late back and reported by Piper, (the school porter) she is gated for a week, which means breaking bounds to play her Good Samaritan act. Even this does not propitiate the fates, for young Bobbie, Chrissie's little brother, accidentally sets the curtains on fire while trying to light the gas. Diana, coming from the doctor's, is just in time to rescue Chrissie's sick mother, then rush back to Cliff House and try to get in without being seen.



"I'M sorry," Diana answered Miss Primrose. "You wouldn't let me play when I wanted to—so I must refuse now!" Miss Primrose nodded. "Very well!" she said. "Then Lily's entry is cancelled!"

But Diana faces expulsion, and a burnt hand. Chrissie will be unable to sing at the special competition, all is clear for Lily to triumph, and Diana is forbidden to attend. This of course makes no difference to Diana and she is there in the audience when Lily receives her award.

This is the strange Diana: when she has done something truly heroic without thought of herself, she keeps it secret, then when someone has recognised her and she is called out in public to receive an award for bravery she is unconcerned. All the kudos, the recognition, the praise mean nothing to her. She had wanted the glory of being a Svengali, basking in the success of her protegee---first Lily, then Chrissie. The sentence of expulsion is rescinded---Miss Primrose could do little else after the public extolling of Diana's high qualities by two men of standing in the town!

But the presentation casket goes into the wastepaper-bin--- no doubt to keep the remains of the Sevres vase company.

Diana lay low for a while, just to allay any doubts about her new leaf! But the new leaf was soon turned. By April Diana was playing another role, that of the martyr!

Diana longs for the bright lights of society---the more aristocratic, the better. When a Coronation party is to be held in London, at which all the top people will be seen, Cliff House is invited to send fifteen girls to help entertain a hundred poor children from a convalescent hospital. It is decided to draw the name from a hat. When it comes to the last name it is that of the Hon. Beatrice Beverley---drawn by herself. Diana instantly accuses her of cheating, by substituting another slip of paper. Enmity sparks between the two girls.

Meanwhile, Diana has another lame duck in tow, Tilly, one of Lily's friends from Scrubb Alley, who works as a programme seller at the theatre. We find the same situation as in the earlier series; the mother in hospital, the girl in fear of losing her job if she is missing from work. So Diana promptly volunteers to take Tilly's place; selling programmes doesn't worry Diana in the least, and she is jubilant when she is given a four-shilling tip and has no scruples about pocketing it; it is Tilly's. she is less jubilant when the Hon. Beatrice and her distinguished father, the fifth Baron Trentshire, appear. But for some reason Beatrice seems very perturbed and almost drags her father out of the theatre.

But the reason for Beatrice's hurried departure becomes clear when Diana returns late that evening, to walk into the noisy trap Beatrice has left in wait for her. There seems to be some deeper root behind Beatrice's behaviour, when she begins a deliberate campaign aimed at getting so many black marks for the fourth that their London visit will be cancelled. Diana is determined that Beatrice shall not succeed, and as she is in so much hot water already a bit more makes little difference. Diana's carefully laid plan succeeds, and, believing that Miss Primrose has relented before being called away to her sick sister, the girls set off joyously for London. Diana, martyred in truth by being put on trial by the Fourth, so well has Beatrice discredited her, makes her own way to London and keeps her own counsel.

And at the party a shock awaits them. For they discover what Diana has known for sometime, that Beatrice's father is dreadfully poor and works as a butler in order to pay his daughter's school fees! Beatrice is ashamed of this, and shows her feelings in a way that appals the girls. Not content with refusing to acknowledge him, she insults him publicly.

"I tell you he isn't my father." Beatrice almost shrieked. "Do you think I've got a common twopenny-ha'penny butler for a father?"

Shock succeeds shock when Miss Primrose walks in. Diana decides to own up to her misdeeds---and also tell the rest of the story. Beatrice's despicable behaviour has already confirmed much of it, and Miss Primrose says she will not expel Diana, after all. So Diana, still in disgrace to an extent, returns to Cliff House as the Fourth Form's heroine.

Diana and Beatrice both suffer delusions of grandeur. Beatrice's however, hold a very mean vindictive streak, as shown by her attitude towards her father. Diana, whatever her faults, is no snob. Vanity is her downfall, allied to her volatile nature. Basically, she is kind and generous, and some waif has only to come along with a hard luck story and in no time Diana is spending money like water and risking her school reputation in order to help the latest lame duck.

We next meet Diana a couple of months later, and this time she is in head-long conflict with Dulcia Fairbrother, the popular Head Girl, not guaranteed to increase Diana's popularity. However, this story---ends on a very happy note with Diana and Dulcia resolving their differences---or rather Diana's differences, and on this occasion Diana admits she was wrong!

August brings the summer hols and a cruise for the Chums. It also brings Diana in a new role, that of grown-up. One which she discovers not to be as much as fun as she had expected. She is also a working girl, as companion to the charming Elvira, who can, however, be slightly sharp if Diana misbehaves. Diana's motive is slightly ulterior, though: Elvira's father is a film producer, and Diana has always yearned for stardom and the glamour of the movies. But



it wouldn't be a Diana story without a waif (Jessie), who is not a very good sailor, and is also hoping to find work on the films. So Diana cheerfully takes on her job of cleaning the cabins, and is unable to resist boasting that she may be able to influence the producer to consider Jessie for a role. Diana of course never learns, and it is the little stewardess who gets the plum part...

There are two more autumn stories featuring Diana. The first with a sporting background which brings her into conflict with Clara Trevlyn, whose temper is touchy if her judgement as sports captain is challenged. At Dulcia's suggestion, Diana is given a place in the B team, after Mabs crocks her ankle. Diana has been having coaching from a top England professional and she surprises them all with her brilliant play. But an injured puppy, a toadying prefect and a vacancy in the first side all involve the leading characters. As usual, Diana manages to work things out to suit that strange conscience of hers---which is usually right.

In Diana's final fling of 1937 she takes to riding. As always, she longs to shine, and is determined to carry off the honours at the Hunter Trials. The fact that her friend Margot Lantham is expected to do very well at the trials matters not a wit to Diana as that ruthless streak comes to the surface again. We see her, kitted out:

A girl had come cantering into the paddock... From the crown of her new hat to the tips of her shinningly shod feet Diana was a picture. She sat with an air of conscious pride, of majestic grace, astride the hunter, a brand new crop clasped between gloved fingers. A smart, immaculately cut hacking jacket which simply screamed expense encased her slim body. On her legs were a pair of brand-new riding breeches, and on her feet a pair of glistening, gleaming riding boots. If Diana had just stepped out of a fashion plate she could not have looked more dazzling.

Alas, a brief while later Diana was looking anything but immaculate when she squelched and dragged herself out of the ditch in which Tartar had flung her. For Diana, pride certainly goes before a fall.

Diana's riding ambitions are not helped when Miss Primrose receives a bill from an irate farmer for damages caused when Miss Royston-Clarke rode all over his potato field. Nor does her reputation improve when she throws a glass of wine into Margot's face. Jemima sums up:

"Sweet child!" murmured Jemima. "So docile and gentle! Always such a complete little lady, our darling old Spartan, Di!"

But the horse called Tartar alters everything in the sentimental climax to the story. For Tartar is ill, and it is Diana who breaks bounds at night to travel a distance to bring a top vet to treat him, and Diana who stays up all night to give him the essential medication every three hours. Somehow it all seems worthwhile to sit in the detention room under the unsympathetic eye of Sara Harrigan while Margot and Tartar set forth to ride in the trials---and bring back the silver and gold cup.

There are many qualities to admire in Diana, her courage, determination, generosity and her unflinching readiness to help someone not as fortunate as herself. Yes, she is rebellious, ruthless, often selfish in pursuit of her latest desire, and far too vain for her own good. But the good outweigh the bad, and most of us can find something in which to identify with Diana. For haven't we all at some time wanted to tell someone in authority to stuff it, so to speak? And haven't we all known great desire for some particular thing but perhaps lacked Diana's outrageous ways of realising that desire? Diana is Cliff House's most

complex character, by most accounts her creator's favourite, and it is not difficult to see why, for Diana is very real, and belonging as she does to an era and a genre where stock characters frequently lacked that certain touch of magic to bring them to life on the page, where there had to be a character to appeal to each reader, it's rather wonderful to find the facets in one character to have appeal to so many. All things to all readers is not easily achieved: I believe John Wheway came as close as any other writer in succeeding when he dreamed up Diana, the Firebrand of the Fourth.

January 1937

From Council School to Cliff House.

Defiant to the Finish.

Diana Undefeated.

Just the Firebrand's Way.

Not the Firebrand's Fault.

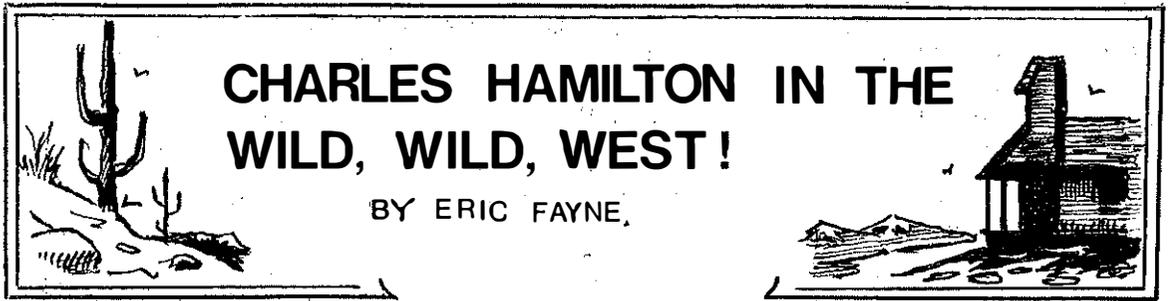
The Firebrand Grows Up!

Rivals For First Team Honours.

No Holding the Firebrand!

April " "
August " "
October " "
November " "





(FOREWORD: Our article "The Roamings of the Rio Kid" appeared in Collector's Digest Annual well over 30 years ago. In a letter from Charles Hamilton, dated December, 20th 1952, the author wrote as follows to Eric Fayne:

"I cannot let another hour go by without writing to tell you how greatly I have enjoyed your article on the "Roamings of the Rio Kid." It is the very best article I have ever read in my life.

Thank you, my dear boy, for giving so much pleasure to an old man."

So the article delighted Charles Hamilton. We thought you might like to renew your acquaintance with the article. Or, more likely than not, it may come completely fresh to you. So here it is.)

The Rio Kid joined the "POPULAR" in the first month of the year 1928. The stories of the Boy Outlaw of the Rio Grande were the only ones which were new in the whole history of this paper whose pages were always devoted to the re-prints of past successes.

Not only was the Kid a new character - he was unique. Western yarns or western films probably do not enjoy a great popularity in this country. The main thing to be said in their favour is that they are clean, - sex never rears its ugly head in the Wild West, apparently.

But I think that many hardened anti-Westerners must have been converted by the Kid. Not that there have ever been, - either before or since, - any Western yarns of the same tingling quality as those of the Boy Outlaw, or any Western character of the same subtle charm as the Rio Kid.

For these stories rang true. They were geographically exact to the last detail; the characters lived; there was never a false moment with the dialogue; the lazy Spanish atmosphere of Texas was blended right into the heart of the stories. Every single story in the entire series had an original plot which was skilfully developed under the hot Western sunshine. A reader felt that they were written by some cowboy who had wandered away from the ranges, - some puncher who had dropped his lariat and taken up the pen.

RALPH REDWAY

It is rather remarkable that there were so many readers who did not realise that Martin Clifford was Frank Richards, and that Frank Richards was Owen Conquest, and that all were Charles Hamilton who had written the early St. Jim's tales in PLUCK.

But the Rio Kid was a character apart. The stories were gems without parallel.

The Cedar Creek tales, delightful though they were, had an English flavour. Even some of the plots had their counterparts at St. Jim's and Greyfriars. When Tommy Silver, or Tom Merry, or the Bounder went to the Wild West the English flavour was always there. The scene was like that set on an English theatre stage; the dialogue seemed to be an Englishman's idea of how cowboys would talk.

But the Rio Kid was real. The dialogue was real. The rolling prairies and the wide rivers were real.

When I learned that Ralph Redway was none other than our old friend, Charles Hamilton, I had the surprise of my life, and my admiration for this amazing writer reached its zenith. Much less has been written of the genius of Charles Hamilton. His greatest genius is to be found in the Rio Kid stories, which not even a keen student of his work could trace to the pen of an Englishman who has never visited America.

THE BEGINNING THAT WASN'T

The Rio Kid first appeared in the POPULAR dated January 21st 1928, and numbered 469. The Kid was then an outlaw. He had been kicked out of the Double Bar Ranch at Frio by Rancher Dawney for some crime which he denied. What he was supposed to have done we were never really told. But he was innocent. We were assured of that. Something seemed to be missing here. It was as if a few stories had been omitted at the commencement of a series.

We were never told his actual age. He was called the "Boy" outlaw, but the term "boy" can cover a multitude of sins and an assortment of ages. From a close study of the stories, it can be assumed that he was something just under twenty.

His name? We never really knew. As the series went on, he called himself Red Carfax, but as the Kid himself often said, people call themselves by many names in the Wild West.

His grey mustang, - as brave as the Kid himself, - was Sidekicker. The Kid was something of a dandy in his dress. He always wore a band of silver gages round his hat, and the neck scarf was of pure silk. But he carried two walnut-butted guns in low holsters at his side, and we knew of the little Derringer pistol which he always had in his pocket.

Dark and desperate were the tales told of the Rio Kid, through all the Cattle Country along the Rio Grande and the Pecos. Boy in years, hard-bitten man in else, cool and daring and desperate, quicker on the draw than any puncher on the ranges, or any gunman of the river camps, the Kid's life had been a tale of danger and hazard ever since the day when he had pulled out from the Double Bar and become an outcast.

That was how Ralph Redway introduced us to his new character who was to grace the pages of the POPULAR for several years to come.

SOUTH TEXAS

The series opened in South Texas, and we met Jake Watson, the Sheriff of Rio, the town near the Double Bar Ranch. He appeared from time to time in the series, on occasions when the Kid's travels took him towards his old home.

THE TRAIL OF THE KID

The Kid's wanderings took him from Texas to Mexico; thence to Arizona; to Nevada; into Wyoming; through the foothills of the Rockies; to New Mexico.

He came trailing back to Texas, visited Mexico again, and finally reached Hollywood. Some of the stories, four-chapter affairs, blended together into one series; others were single stories, and many of them were delightful. Of the single stories, in which the plot was complete in one issue, one of the best was "The Bully of Salt Lick", in which the Kid took on Jeff Blake, gunman and bully and saved the life of a plucky youngster who was no match for the brute.

LLANO ESTACADO

Some of the early yarns were set on the Llano Estacado. A strange name for a strange land, explained Ralph Redway, geographically accurate as always. In the old days, when the Spaniards held all the wild South West, a trail had run across the high table-land, from Texas to Santa Fe in New Mexico, but sand and dust blotted out the track, and whitened bones in the desert told where travellers had lost their way. And then great wooden stakes had been set up at regular intervals to mark the trail. Long since had the stakes rotted away, - vanished, like the Spanish conquerors who had set them up. But the name remained. The Staked Plain, or Llano Estacado, in the musical tongue of the old conquerors.

GOLD

In May 1928 came the most brilliant stories in a brilliant series. The Kid became possessor of a gold-mine in Arizona. He tried to work the Gambusino mine at Los Pinos, but found himself in conflict with the big mining company, the Arizona Consolidated, who tried every underhand device to make him give up his mine. Finally, the Kid blew up his own mine, with the aid of Rainy Face, the Apache Indian.

But, with the aid of Rainy Face, the Kid captured Eli Robinson, the president of the Consolidated, and, under the threat of being left to the tender mercies of the Apaches, Robinson paid one hundred thousand dollars for the wreck of the mine. This series ran to eight stories, and it was the very best of all the tales of the Kid, which is saying a mouthful, as the Kid himself would have said. In passing, this series was re-published in the Boys' Friend Library under the title "The Rio Kid's Gold Mine".

NEVADA

The Kid, with his wealth in his pocket, went north of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, heading for Nevada. Here, he fell in love, and even thought of settling down with a wife. Fortunately for readers, Miss Janet's fiance turned up, and the Kid turned out on the trail once again.

THE SPARSHOTTS

By mid-July 1928, the Kid was in Montana with the intention of hitting the sheep country. The Kid, like every true cowman, hated sheep, and all they stood for - the barbed-wire fences and the eaten-up range. In his own country of Texas he had seen many a wide Llano, once a sea of tossing horns, turned into an ocean of wolly backs. But here, in Wyoming, it was not his country, and if they raised sheep it was no business of his. But the Kid soon found himself mixed up in a dispute between cowmen and sheepmen, with the Starbuck bunch. A thrilling series which ran through August.

TRAILING BACK

Meeting thrilling adventures all the way, the Kid came trailing back, through the Rockies and New Mexico, into Texas.

The shining waters of the Rio Frio and the green rolling plains of Texas called to the Rio Kid -- and although there were countless enemies waiting him there, the Kid trailed back to his own country. There, in Frio, the Kid found that there was a Thousand Dollars reward for his capture, dead or alive.

Now came a brilliant set of stories, in which Chief Many Ponies featured. There had been a time when the old Apache's name had accorded with his estate. A chief, the son of a chief, he had owned many ponies, many buffalo robes, and many braves had followed him on the war trail. The old hunting-grounds of Chief Many Ponies were ranch lands now. Where his braves had ridden in war-point and feathers, the cowboy punchers rode the range; long-horned cows grazed where countless buffaloes had roamed. Chief Many Ponies, now a vagrant outcast fell foul of Sheriff Watson of Frio, and, in revenge, bound the Sheriff, like Mazeppa, to the back of a horse which he turned adrift in the desert. The Kid went after the Sheriff, and after many breathless adventures, rescued his enemy. A magnificent Western series.

THE RIO KID'S CHRISTMAS

There was rain in the Huecas - winter rain - and bitter wind. On that stormy eve of Christmas the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande was a hard case. The Kid came on a "nester's" shack, - a nester being a settler, apparently, - and the Kid rode forty miles to Cow Crossing, by the wildest and hardest trail in the West of Texas, to fetch Doc Pigeon to the Nester's sick wife. He left the Doc at the shack on Christmas morning, with 500 dollars as a gift for the sick women.

That night, in a far canyon of the lonely Huecas, as the dusk of Christmas faded into night, the stars came out of a velvety sky, and glimmered down on the Rio Kid, rolled in his blankets, sleeping peacefully as a child.

THE KID AT SEA

The Kid had now been in the POPULAR for exactly a year, and he began his second year as a puncher on the Sampson ranch in the San Pedro country, a hundred miles from Frio and Sheriff Watson. From here, the Kid was shanghaied, became a sailor, was seasick, and had a hard time from the rope's end, before he eventually turned the tables on the villainous Captain Shack.

TRAILING ON

Through the spring and early summer of 1929, masterpiece followed masterpiece, as the Kid, back in Mexico, starred in adventure after adventure. By mid-summer he was back in Texas, and we found him, once again befriended by Chief Many Ponies, actually joining the Apache band, to escape from Mule Kick Hall of the Texas Rangers. What a superb film this great story would have made, with its cowboys and Injuns and Texas Rangers.

THE LAZY "O"

In the autumn, the Kid bought the Lazy "O" ranch, and in nine powerful stories we were told how he tried to lead the peaceful and law-abiding life of a rancher. And when the Kid at last had to take the trail again, owing to the persistence of the Texas Rangers, the boss gave the ranch to his "bunch". Far away from the Lazy O, a rider in goatskin chaps, with a band of silver nuggets round his Stetson and two long-barrelled walnut-butted guns in his holsters, rode a trail in the chaparral. The Rio Kid, rancher no longer, once more the outlaw of the Rio Grande.

CHRISTMAS AGAIN

It was bitter winter weather -- in many a drift on the ranges cattle froze, and up in the rugged Huecas the snow was stacked in every gully, and gulch, and arroyo. It was going to be a hard Christmas in the uplands of the cow country, - and it was here that the Rio Kid saved the life of an old enemy, Mike Jadwin. This story, "The Trail in the Snow", was re-printed in a Holiday Annual.

A fortnight later came "The Rio Kid's Christmas Gift", a story in which the Kid played Santa Claus. A novel and fascinating story which also appeared in a Holiday Annual.

BLACK GEORGE

At the beginning of January, 1930, exactly two years after the Kid had first appeared in the POPULAR, came the "Black George" series, of a negro bandit. He was found afterwards to be a white man in disguise, and six yarns passed before the bandit was brought to justice. This fine tale appeared in the Boys' Friend Library.

YUBA DICK

In Mid-February, "The Rio Kid's New Pal" was Yuba Dick, an inveterate gambler. It was an expensive friendship for the Kid, but entertaining for the reader.

MARCH 1930

"The Man from Montana" told of Colonel Sanderson and the sacrifice of the Kid, who took on his own shoulders the blame for the crime of the old man's wayward son.

APRIL 1930

By this time, the POPULAR was in deep waters, but the Kid was going strong in a fine series of a white boy who had been brought up among the Apache Indians. The Kid was now carrying the POPULAR on his own shoulders, for the western story was now the only item worth reading left in the paper. But, with "The Rio Kid's Quest", which appeared at the end of April, the Kid left the POPULAR, and one felt that the end was in sight for that fine paper.

THE KID'S RETURN

But, at the end of July 1930, the Kid came back in a series which lasted 13 weeks, in which he became Sheriff of Plug Hat, and had many adventures before he was driven back to the outlaw trail.

Far away from Plug Hat, by a lonely trail, the Rio Kid rode the grey mustang. Sheriff no longer. It had been a good game while it lasted, but it was over. But the Kid still had his guns and his mustang, and a high heart, and the world was before him. With these words, Ralph Redway said good-bye to the Popular.

So, for three years, from early 1928 till the autumn of 1930, the Rio Kid rode the ranges in the POPULAR. During that time there was not one weak story in the entire series, and the majority of them were brilliant. The success of the Kid was due to his carefree outlook on life, plus his deep humanity. Not to mention the musical quality of the words used to tell the stories, - the lilting phrases which had the same appeal as the lyrics of a song.

THE KID IN "MODERN BOY"

But that was not quite the end. Exactly seven years later, when the Modern Boy was losing the race in the popularity stakes, the Editor announced that "The Rio Kid Rides Again" was to appear in that famous paper. So the Boy Outlaw made his appearance once again, and his brand new adventures were told week by week by Ralph Redway from September 1937 until February 1938 in "Modern Boy".

Although I have never considered that this latest series was of the same very high quality which had marked the Kid stories in the POPULAR, - and reading them again in preparation for this article, I still feel the same about them, - they were, nevertheless, excellent yarns, and nothing better ever appeared in "Modern Boy", at least.

GOOD-BYE TO THE KID

In September 18th 1937, in No. 502 of that paper, the Kid made his bow in Modern Boy. The first series, a long one of 13 stories, told of how he became foreman of the Lazy S ranch at Lariat, and much excitement prevailed before he was fleeing again from Mule Kick Hall of the Rangers.

A second series, "The Rio Kid in Hollywood" started in No. 515, and ran for 9 stories. The Kid was out of his element here. Judged by the standard of the rest of the series, it was disappointing. So, on February 12th, 1938, the Kid departed, - for good this time, though not for our good. Modern Boy, already in deep waters, announced a complete change of policy which may be commented upon when that paper is analysed some time.

WE MISS THE KID

With the passing of the Rio Kid, a gap was left which has never been filled. Of their type, nothing better than these stories appeared in any paper. Because he played the lead in every story, and his character was so consistently maintained by the unflinching skill of a great writer, the Kid endeared himself to the reader.

He became a personal friend. When we lost the Kid, I felt that I should never again meet a character who could charm the passing hours as he could.

And I never have!

THE RIO KID IN THE "BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY"

Large numbers of the Rio Kid stories from the Popular were reprinted in the splendid little volumes of the B.F.L. And many of the great series appeared twice in the B.F.L., indicating the obvious great popularity of the character.

Boys' Friend Library, 2nd Series:- 266, The Rio Kid; 275, The Rio Kid's Gold Mine; 283, The Rio Kid's Revenge; 306, The Rio Kid at Bay; 317, The Rio Kid's Enemy; 335, The Six-Gun Outlaw; 356, The Rio Kid's Return; 370, The Rio Kid, Sheriff; 403, The Kid from Texas; 471, The Outlaw Kid; 487, The Rio Kid in Mexico; 566, The Rio Kid; 569, The Rio Kid's Gold Mine; 578, The Outlaw Ranger; 585, The Rio Kid at Bay; 590, The Rio Kid's Enemy; 593, The Six-Gun Outlaw; 601, The Rio Kid's Revenge; 606, The Rio Kid, Sheriff; 609, The Kid from Texas; 693, The Outlaw Kid.

It will be seen that from No. 566 the stories were reprints of the earlier ones.

And to complete our re-living of Charles Hamilton's main stories of the Wild, Wild West, there is "GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS" which featured, many years later, in our "Let's Be Controversial" series:-

GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS!

Talent will out. The gifted will rise to the top. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that luck does play its part in making a star in any walk of life.

One wonders whether Charles Hamilton would ever have become famous, had he not, by some stroke of fortune which may have come from his own or somebody else's initiative, struck on the formula of the Peter Pan schoolboys with his series of St. Jim's in the paper named Pluck.

We know that he started as a writer of tales of adventure. Whether those early tales of adventure were good I cannot say, for, though I possess some of them, I have never been moved to read them. So far as I know, and it is only a guess, his first in the direction of the Wild West came in the early blue Gem, When Tom Merry, and a rather oddly-assorted little band of friends, went to North America. They were strikingly good yarns of their type, but they only formed a trailer of what was to come.

Hamilton wrote three main series of Westerns:-

1. The Cedar Creek stories which ran for four years, from 1917 till 1921, with the genuine Martin Clifford writing all but one of them.
2. The series of the Rookwood Fistical Four in the West of Canada, which ran for the best part of a year - so long that readers wondered whether Rookwood had been abandoned for ever.
3. The stories of the Rio Kid.

Without any question, the Rio Kid tales were the best Western adventures which Hamilton wrote. These were set in the States, and the movements of the Kid were against a geographically accurate kaleidoscope. In addition, the atmosphere of the tales was utterly convincing, and the musical prose of the stories of the first three years was a delight. The prose became harsher towards the end of the Kid's life in the Popular, but the quality was high throughout.

Without any question, too, the Cedar Creek tales were the most popular. Plenty of readers, no doubt, fondly imagined that they were reading of the school life of their favourite author, and that helped. But, in their own right, the tales were delightful, and it seems likely that they held their popularity right till the end. If so, the question might feasibly be asked, why did they stop when they did? Probably the answer is that Hamilton had decided, or had been persuaded, to give more attention once again to St. Jim's and, later on, to Greyfriars.

Whether the background of Cedar Creek was authentic is problematical. Certainly, with the advent of Hillcrest, the private school, the tales became more like St. Jim's transferred to a theatrical western backdrop. Most important, the tales were all well-written and delighted the readers. They were convincing for the simple reason that readers were easy to convince.

The "Windy River" stories concerning the Rookwood chums were so good that some readers may have been sorry when they came to a rather abrupt end, and the Fistical Four returned to Rookwood.

In addition to these three main series of Westerns, Hamilton strayed on a few other occasions into the West for brief periods which it is reasonable to believe he enjoyed.

The Dirk Power series of 1920 was saved from mediocrity by a couple of exceedingly well-written tales set in the Canadian North-West. In 1927, the Gem offered an 8-story series in which Tom Merry and Co. went to Canada as the guests of Wildrake. It was a series which had its moments, even though it never seems to have quite rung the bell. Perhaps it is little known owing to the fact that it appeared among a glut of sub tales which had caused the old faithfuls among readers to be less than faithful.

Few people ever speak very highly of the Magnet's Texas series of 1938. Characterisation seemed harsh, and the schoolboys unbelievable in their western setting. The Rio Kid was an anachronism in this series with the Greyfriars boys, and his introduction makes one doubt whether the author really ever understood the true nature of his own creation.

The Kid was also an anachronism when he returned in 1937, to Modern Boy in stories concerning talking pictures and Hollywood. Outlaws of the Kid's type could not possibly have existed long beyond the turn of the century. The spread of the telegraph, better communications and roads, and greatly advanced law enforcement techniques ended the careers of those old outlaws like the Kid.

The Rio Kid stories were by far the best of the Hamilton westerns, but today they are almost certainly less popular than the others. Hamilton followers are mainly school story

...s, who still enjoy the Cedar Creek school yarns, or those of the English schoolboys trans-
ferred temporarily to the wild west. But to enjoy the Kid, you have to be a lover of westerns.
...d there are not so many of those in our own tightly-knit little clan.

Among the general reading public, however, westerns have always been enormously popular,
any librarian can tell us. It has long amazed me why some enterprising publisher has not
...t out the Rio Kid stories in book form. I am certain they would win a following all their
...s.

In post-war years, Hamilton wrote quite a number of short Kid tales for various Annuals
...d for some obscure types of comic papers which appeared mushroom-like. All were indifferent.
...e author also had a shot at a full-length western "The Lone Texan," which was hackneyed stuff,
...eaply printed.

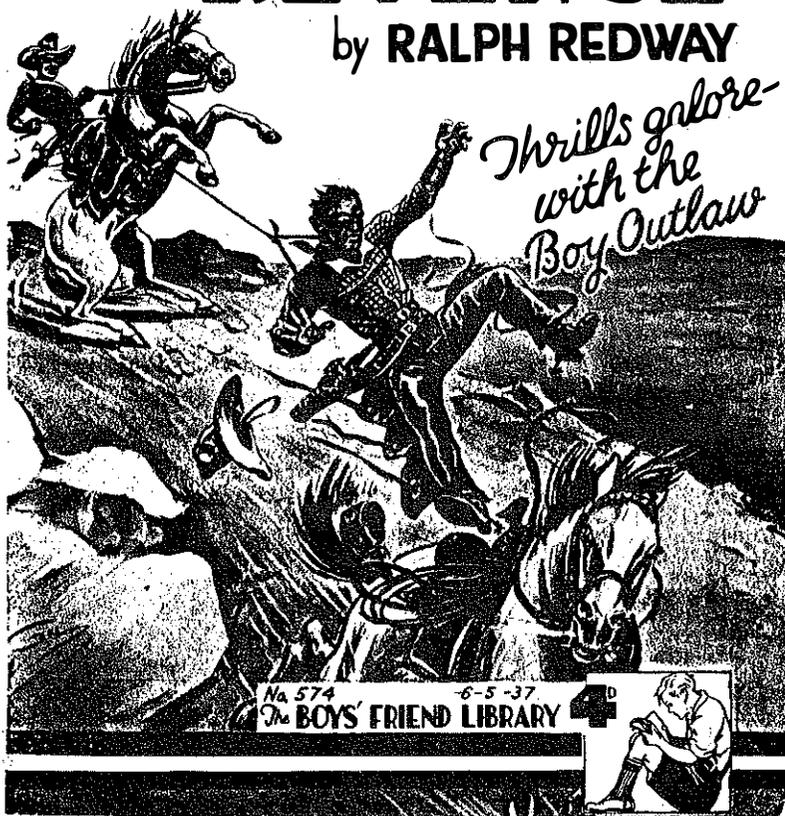
Actually, his great western era ended when the Rio Kid left the Popular in 1930. It had
...en a more than worth while era. The wonder is how Hamilton ever found the time to soak
...nself in western lore and atmosphere, without which he could never have produced the Kid.

That there was some hidden story behind the Rio Kid, I have always believed. But that
...ilton deeply loved the Kid, I have never doubted. His letters to me on the subject were
...le proof of that.

The RIO KID'S REVENGE

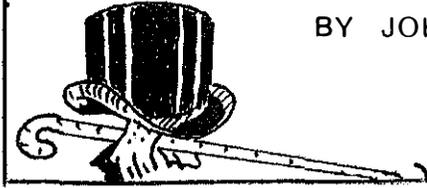
by RALPH REDWAY

*Thrills galore-
with the
Boy Outlaw*



THE OTHER MASTER MUMMER

BY JOHN BRIDGWATER.



All Blakians are familiar with Leon Kestrel, the Master Mummer, but how many know about the other Master Mummer?

He is the eponymous character in E. Phillips Oppenheim's novel "The Master Mummer". At the beginning of the story this mysterious man is called Mr. Grooten. He shoots the odious Major Delahaye with an ingenious silenced air-gun which fires cylindrical bullets tapered down to a needle point. This act involves the storyteller, Arnold Greatson, in the mystery surrounding a young girl, Isobel, who had been in the custody of the Major. Isobel is a princess of Waldenburg, a poor Ruritanian-type kingdom, and has spent most of her sixteen years in a convent, ignorant of her royal birth. Her aunt, the Archduchess, is anxious to prevent Isobel from returning to her grandfather, the king, by any means possible. If Isobel claimed her inheritance it would mean that insufficient money would be available to make a large enough dowery for the daughter of the Archduchess to marry a neighbouring king, as the Archduchess desired.

Freed from the Major and saved from the unspecified fate to which he had been taking her on the orders of the Archduchess, Isobel comes under the protection of Greatson and his two friends. Mr. Grooten flits mysteriously in and out of the story whilst the Archduchess' minions make various attempts to spirit Isobel away. Eventually Mr. Grooten reveals himself to be Fuégeres, the great actor. Years before he had eloped with Isobel's mother, now dead, leaving a blackguard husband, for which she was disgraced at the Waldenburg court. Since then Fuégeres had kept watch over Isobel without her knowing it. Soon after this Isobel is kidnapped. Fuégeres and Greatson follow the kidnappers to France where Greatson manages to strike a bargain with the Archduchess whereby Isobel is returned to her grandfather. After some years Isobel renounces her position and returns to marry Greatson when he had thought he had lost her forever.

The first Kestrel story "The Case of the Cateleptic" appeared in Union Jack 620 in 1915. I have not yet found a dated copy of "The Master Mummer" but judging by the illustrations, which have an Edwardian flavour, it would seem that it pre-dates the Great War. Oppenheim started writing novels before 1890 so it looks as if "The Master Mummer" pre-dates the first Kestrel story. Did Jack Lewis get the idea for Kestrel from Oppenheim?

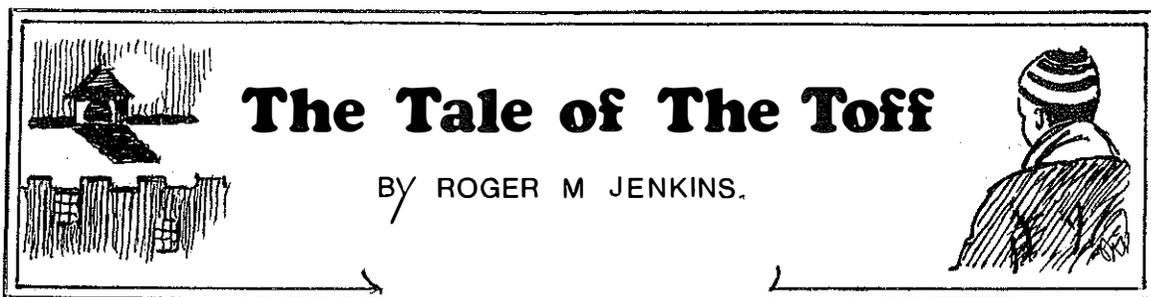
* * * * *

Christmas Greetings To All My Good Friends from:

CHARLES VAN RENEN

SOUTH AFRICA

= = = = =



Reginald Talbot was one of Charles Hamilton's most impressive creations among the new boys at his various schools. He made his first appearance in the Gem in July 1914, just before the outbreak of the first World War in the series 334-7, when he prevented Gussy from being robbed of his twenty-five guinea gold watch:

He was a youth of Darcy's own age, well dressed, with a diamond pin in his tie, and a cigarette between his lips. His form was active, athletic; his face was handsome, with clear-cut features and dark flashing eyes.

Later, he saved Dr. Holmes from being waylaid by the same gang, and was taken to St. Jim's. His story seemed strange but plausible: his parents being dead, he was brought up by an uncle who took him to Australia and eventually they returned to England. They stayed at a hotel in Luxford until his uncle left and wrote a letter saying his fortune was gone and Talbot must now fend for himself. The Head agreed that Talbot should enter St. Jim's as a pupil, though the more cautious Mr. Railton insisted on checking up by visiting Luxford, but the story appeared watertight. Talbot entered the school and soon won many friends, especially as he was an expert cricketer, but in truth he was a very cunning cracksman, the son of the infamous Captain Crow, who had taught him his art and had educated him to take his place in good society; indeed, Charles Hamilton referred to him as a Raffles at one stage.

Magnet readers will readily see the resemblance between Lancaster and Talbot. The Magnet version was perhaps more credible in that the cracksman was a sixth-former, and at the end of the series he left and was never heard of again. The Gem series, however, gained immeasurably by relating the impact made upon Talbot by the friendship offered by the juniors, and the story was written at a time when Charles Hamilton was not afraid to pluck the heartstrings. Equally fascinating was the handling of Joe Frayne, who knew the Toff of old, in Angel Alley days; at first, he was persuaded that Talbot had reformed and later, when he knew better, his mouth was closed by the knowledge that Talbot had saved the life of his best friend, Wally D'Arcy. So, with a delicacy of feeling somewhat strange in a waif from the slums, he left St. Jim's rather than remain with his silent knowledge of the crimes.

There is in this series a glimpse of a forgotten world, where a form-master like Mr. Selby could amass a numismatic collection worth £500 (stolen); where Mr. Glyn could run a cricket week and find bedroom accommodation for two teams (his safe was cracked); and where the Grammar School could put on an al fresco performance of a Shakespeare play (while Dr. Monk's Leonardo da Vinci was stolen).

In Shakespearean tragedies the hero is in conflict both with himself and with society. Talbot was often in conflict with himself and began to regret

the life he was leading. He was even incautious enough to mutter such things as "If only they wouldn't be so decent to me" when Levison was spying on him behind a screen. Talbot was, of course, in conflict with society in general, in that he robbed where he was a guest, and in conflict with Levison in particular who began to ferret out the truth. Levison suffered from the inveterate drawback of a liar in that no one would believe him, and this situation led to a fascinating duel of wits in which Talbot was wily enough to ensure that Levison could prove nothing - it was a classic case of diamond cut diamond.

Talbot told the gang that he would crack no more safes, but Hookey Walker and the others decided to rob St. Jim's without his assistance. Talbot heard them and interrupted them, knowing that this would entail his own downfall:

Levison - the cad and spy Levison - had been right, and Tom Merry and his friends had been wrong. It was a bitter discovery. The fellow he had liked and trusted and chummed with was a liar and a thief - a Professional criminal! Tom Merry groaned in anguish of spirit.

At the end of the series it was stated that Talbot was never seen again at St. Jim's and it is interesting to wonder whether this was just a form of word for ending the series or whether Charles Hamilton did in fact intend to write nothing more about him, but succumbed to pressure from the editor, possibly based on readers' reactions. The editorial column in the Gem was not very informative on matters like this, but certainly Talbot did re-appear.

The war had broken out by the time of the next series - a disconnected one in Gems 351-3 and 353. Mr. Foxe of Scotland Yard arrived with the news that Talbot had been seen in the district, and he asked the juniors if they had been in contact with him. There was general denial coupled with indignation on all sides at the thought that they would betray Talbot, apart from Levison who offered his services as a spy. Talbot was working on a farm but, by saving a troop train from being blown up by a German spy, he earned "The King's Pardon" as the first story was called. The following story was something of an anti-climax, as Talbot took on the vacant post of boot-boy in the New House but two important events occurred: Levison apologised to Talbot for his behavior in the past, and (on the recommendation of Dr. Holmes and Lord Eastwood) the Toff was awarded a Founders' Scholarship which included three years' free tuition and an allowance of money as well. Talbot was now established as a permanent member of St. Jim's. J.N. Pentelow said in the St. Jim's Gallery:

Let it be said here that from this moment Talbot always ran an absolutely straight course. But the shadow of the past was over him, and he had enemies. Again and again the past was raked up to prove him guilty of crimes of which he was totally innocent.

Occasionally, in some of these earlier Gem series, there would be little inconsistencies from week to week. In No. 353 Levison, in desperate need of £5 to pay a debt, asked the Terrible Three for money. They had no resources, and Levison in his anger turned upon Talbot who happened to be there, and reviled him for his past, the apology in the previous issue having been forgotten. Talbot did, however, come to his aid and Levison was genuinely grateful. When Tresham of the Fifth, who had embezzled the funds of the former Football Club, attempted to put the blame on Talbot and plant incriminating evidence, it was Levison who was clever and devious enough to turn the tables on Tresham in a most unscrupulous manner:

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING

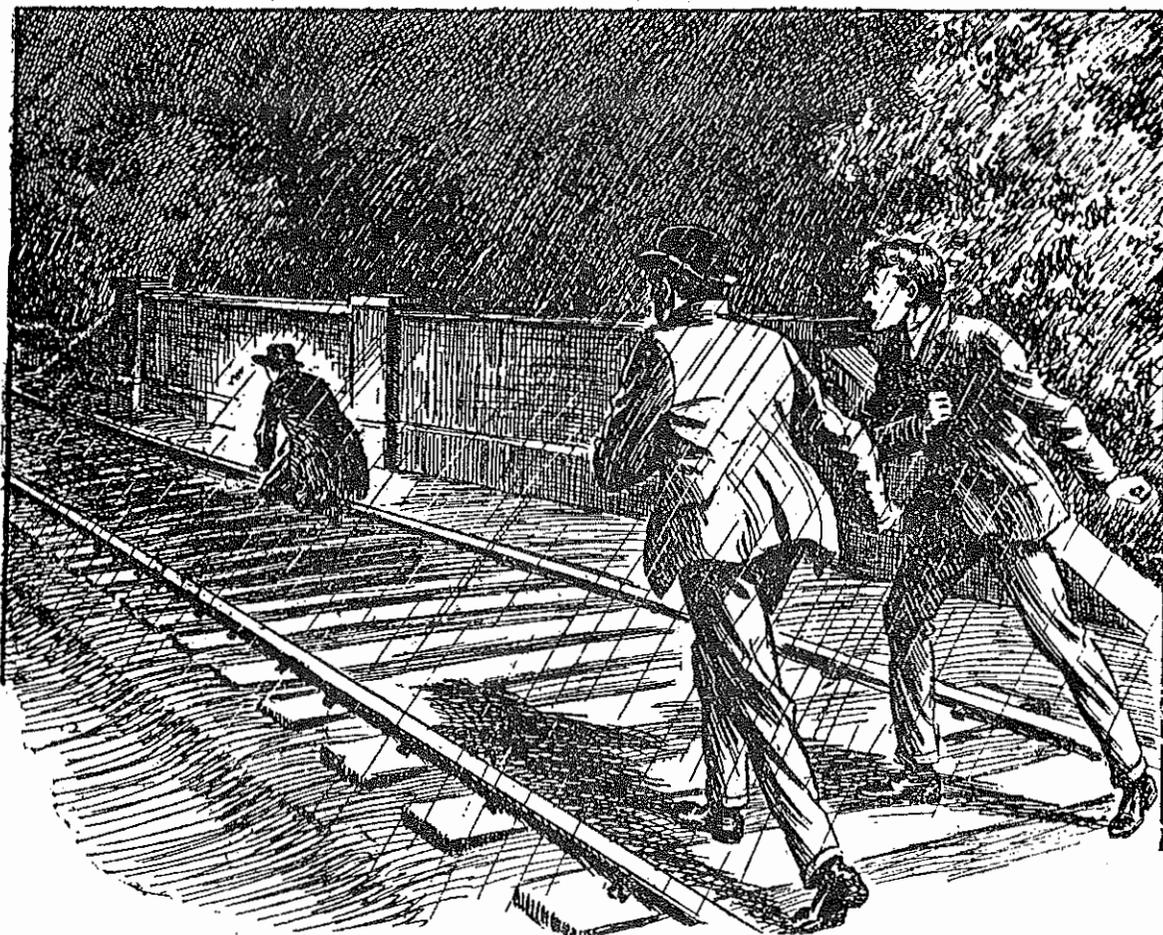


COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

THE KING'S PARDON!

A Grand Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. and their chum
Talbot of the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



The detective and the Toff crept along the lines, cautiously and silently, behind the German as he crouched over the track. He was fixing some object to the rails. "It's a bomb!" muttered Talbot.

"I don't know that I'd quite like to be a match for him in that particular line," said Monty Lowther.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"No; but if I hadn't been, where would Talbot be now?"

"True enough!" said Tom Merry.

Here may be seen two important points: one is the beginning of Levison's reformation, with a sense of gratitude and a desire to repay; and the other is that Tom Merry seems to rate Talbot more highly than Monty Lowther does.

In the final number of the series, Gem 355, Tom Merry was fiercely defensive of Talbot whereas Monty Lowther appeared to be dubious. Hookey Walker had escaped from prison and was chalking cipher messages on the front door of the School House. Levison seemed very interested, and his searches for clues became so unconventional that he was sent to Coventry, yet in the end it was he who solved the cipher and saved Talbot, and manipulated the capture of Hookey Walker. It was an imaginative ending to the second series, and Levison was even more deeply entrenched as a friend of the Toff.

It was a long time before Talbot was able to forget his past. In Gem 358 entitled "Talbot's Triumph" a new science master arrived at St. Jim's who turned out to be the Professor, a member of the old gang who was determined to crack a few safes in the neighbourhood. He was so well disguised that the the Toff did not recognise his old associate, but when he did John Rivers, alias the Professor, was arrested. His last words were "The lock was never made that can hold me." By way of a change, "Talbot's Christmas" in Gem 359 relates how the juniors captured a German spy near Laurel Villa.

The third Talbot series was probably the greatest of them all, mainly because he was once again facing a dilemma. The Professor, having escaped from prison, arrived in the neighbourhood again, in yet another disguise, and his daughter Marie Rivers came to the school as a nurse to help in the sanatorium. They hoped to enlist Talbot's services as a cracksman and, though the Toff was willing to denounce the Professor, he had a regard for Marie that made him wish not to implicate her as well. Marie was also in a dilemma, her duty to her father conflicting with her regard for Talbot. Around



With his eyes turned upwards, Levison climbed on. To save Talbot, he had to get into the Shell dormitory unknown. It rested upon his shoulders to save the boy who had saved him, and he was striving to do it!

s conflict of loyalties, a splendid battle of wits ensued. A major climax came when Talbot, the victim of the Professor's plotting, was turned out of the school at the end of the second number, with Tom Merry in tears at the gate.

It is possible at this stage to pinpoint a certain misjudgement on the part of Charles Hamilton. Certainly the episode was handled very carefully, but there is no doubt that Tom Merry's concern for the fate of Talbot began to threaten the status quo of the Terrible Three. Manners and Lowther went along with Tom Merry in his support for Talbot, but it seemed quite clear that their loyalty was founded in their sympathy for Tom, not in their belief in Talbot. Tom Merry, on the other hand, believed whole-heartedly in Talbot's innocence. He was right to do so, but at the same time he was isolating himself from his old friends. Tom even hit Gussy when that noble youth expressed his regret that Talbot had reverted to his old ways. Eventually the truth came to light, and Talbot was found among the down-and-outs on the Embankment. Later the Professor joined the army (at the same time as Mr. Railton), and in the famous Double Number 5 "Winning His Spurs" Talbot helped a much changed Hookey Walker to emigrate with his wife and child to America. Tom Merry thought Talbot should have reported him to the police, and an estrangement followed. It was even possible to sympathise with Levison, who said:

"You see, Mr. Talbot's chums left him in the lurch, it was up to me, and as I owed him the tin, I made an effort and got it for him. I'd have done it if I hadn't owed it to him, as a matter of fact, if he'd have taken it. We don't all turn our backs on a fellow when he's hard hit."

The story was complicated by the capture of yet another German spy, but of course all misunderstandings were cleared away in the end.

"Winning His Spurs" was never reprinted by the Amalgamated Press, possibly because of the war-time background, and the same may be said of the other recently celebrated Double Number in 393, "The Housemaster's Homecoming". This is in effect the real end of the long Talbot saga. Mr. Railton came home wounded from the front in company with Colonel Lyndon, the uncle of Crooke, and a recently elected member of the Governing Board. Crooke poisoned his mind with tales of Talbot's past and Colonel Lyndon was quite convinced that he had seen Talbot before, probably in a court where he was a magistrate, and persuaded the Governors to rescind the award of the scholarship, whereupon Mr. Holmes resigned. In the end it was proved that Talbot and Crooke were cousins, and so Colonel Lyndon adopted his nephew Talbot. The complicated web of Talbot's past had now been drawn to a conclusion and it would have been final if the matter had rested there, but of course it did not.

From time to time, figures from Talbot's past continued to return to plague him, some of these stories being written by Charles Hamilton but most by substitute writers. In 1931, in that odd twilight of the Gem, when the juniors gave up eton jackets and very few genuine stories appeared, No. 1197 "The Man from Angel Alley" produced Rogue Rawdon, yet another member of the gang who had escaped from prison. He masqueraded as Mr. Linton's nephew from Australia until Talbot recognised him and arranged for his arrest. It is odd that at a time when Charles Hamilton wrote so few Gem stories, he should have chosen to resurrect yet another figure from Talbot's past. Nevertheless, it was the end of the line for the Toff.

Talbot played a different role in a number of stories that were self-contained, so to speak, without any new outside characters, when he was suspected

because of his past and not because anyone had arrived from Angel Alley. (In a similar way, Levison was sometimes wrongly suspected after his reformation.) The first series of this type had appeared earlier in Nos. 376-8, and its dramatic qualities bear ample testimony to the the argument that outside characters were not needed. Gore took money from the Head's safe, which had been left ajar, in order to pay a gambling debt to Tickey Tapp. Talbot met trouble when he opened the safe in order to replace the money. Many years later, in Gems 988-991, a similar series featured Crooke instead of Gore. Crooke owed £50 to Bill Lodgey and found the key to Mr. Railton's money drawer; so he helped himself. Although some similar episodes were used, the series was impressive, especially in the way in which Colonel Lyndon arrived at the the truth after Talbot had left the school. If the first series was more emotional, the second series was more sophisticated and more finely developed, as might be expected after an interval of twelve years.

So ends the Tale of the Toff. His attractive personality is undeniable, and the vicissitudes of his career make splendid reading even after the passing of over seventy years. The stories are an excellent example of the difference between the Magnet and Gem modes of writing. The Talbot stories touch emotions which one seldom encounters in a Greyfriars story. The description of life in the slums, the account of the change of heart of the former young cracksman occasioned by his new environment, his acceptance at the school, his quarrels with Tom Merry over points of right and wrong, his trails and tribulations when falsely accused by reason of his past career - these are all episodes one does not expect to find within the pages of the Magnet. But that does not make them one whit the less absorbing to read nor one jot the less important among the writings of their author. For whether one likes emotional stories or not, one cannot but admire the craftsmanship with which these Talbot stories were written, and one cannot refuse to admit that, however much sentiment one can find in the St. Jim's stories, it never degenerates into mere sentimentality. The Toff was undeniably one of the most popular characters in the Gem, and although he was a comparative latecomer he attained an eminence in the St. Jim's stories which he never lost. Perhaps the most fitting conclusion comes from J.N. Pentelow:

As for the right sort they think a heap of Talbot. He is not quite like them. His early experiences have left him more serious and thoughtful than most of the fellows among whom his lot is cast. But he is cheerful enough; and he does everything so well - better than everyone else except Tom Merry, and as well as Tom - that one sometimes suspects that he might go ahead of Tom if he cared to. And he never swanks. To Reginald Talbot there is one fellow at St. Jim's who will always come first - Tom Merry. Others are his friends; but none other means to him what Tom means. For Tom he would cheerfully lay down his life.

The Best Yuletide ever To All Readers of "Collectors' Digest'.

BILL LISTER

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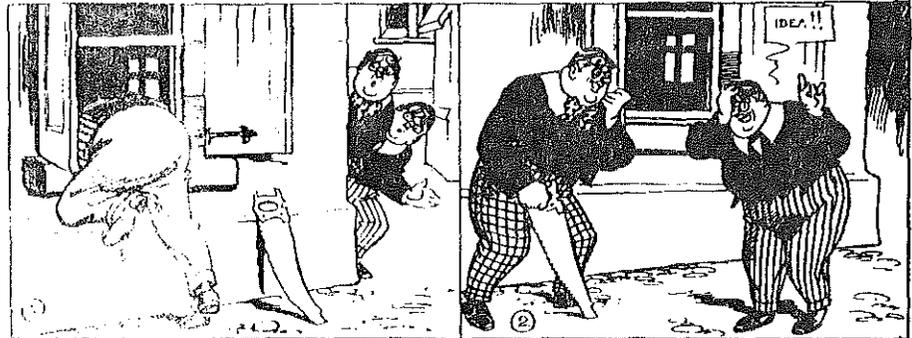


1928



The BUNTER BROTHERS
Merry Mirthmakers.

CATCHING A "BURGLAR" NAPPING.



...he and his brother Sammy
 of the corner. Then he glibly
 from the ledge. The merry
 at two huge lugs over the sill.

"What's to be did?" said Billy, when the two large
 legs disappeared. And then he spotted the sack. He saw the
 saw, and saw a way out of the difficulty. "See saw,
 Sammy?" said he. "Some scheme!"



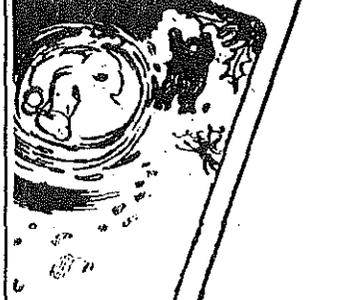
...Billy manipulated the jolly
 of the wooden
 on the stage, Billy," said
 He, he, he!"

Then the Bunter Brothers hid themselves on each side
 of the shutters, just as fairy footsteps were heard inside the
 room. The intruder was approaching his doom. "Wonder
 what I've done with that there saw!" muttered the intruder,



Billy saw the intruder's face in a picture frame. "Might
 be a good idea," he said, and he gave the signal
 to Sammy. "That's all the intruder was about
 Crash!" "Wow! What I saw is this 'ere! Yoo-hoo!"
 came a well-known voice. "Oh, corks!" said the Bunters,
 as they surveyed the picture of "Man's Head Looking Through
 Shutters." "Why, it's only old Gosling, the porter!"

"What shall we do about it?"
 "We
 under run away with the family
 like him," said Sammy. "What
 re. I should think so," answered
 the that light-fingered gent was
 ther away.



the valley when
 and wild yells
 great snowball,
 light at him.

2

1939

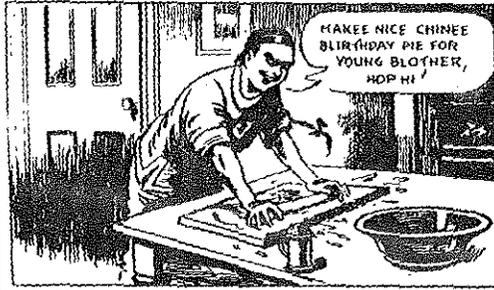
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THE KNOCK-OUT COMIC



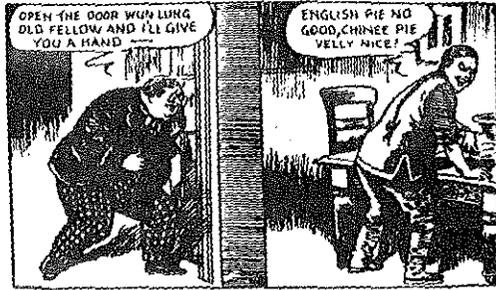
BILLY BUNTER

The FATTEST SCHOOLBOY ON EARTH!



MAKE NICE CHINEE BIRTHDAY PIE FOR YOUNG BLOTHER, HOP HI!

1. Wun Lung, the Chinese junior at Greyfriars, decided to make a special birthday pie for his young blother, Hop Hi. These two boys quite liked the grub at the British school, but sometimes they thought of the pies that mother used to make for them in faraway China. "Me make special Chinese pie for my young blother," lisped Wun Lung cheerily as he rolled out the dough.



OPEN THE DOOR WUN LUNG OLD FELLOW AND I'LL GIVE YOU A HAND

ENGLISH PIE NO GOOD, CHINEE PIE VELLY NICE!

2. But Wun Lung's rolling-pin was not the only thing that was rolling, for Billy Bunter, the world's fattest schoolboy, was calling down the passage outside the Chinese boy's study. Bunter stopped to peep through the keyhole. He saw Wun Lung making his pie. "Let me in and I'll give you a hand, old fellow," called out Bunter, hoping to get a slice of the pie when it was cooked.



DON'T BE A MEAN PIG, YOU BEASTLY CHINEE! I KNOW YOU'RE MAKING A RABBIT PIE. I CAN SEE YOU DOING IT!

GO AWAY YOU FAT FLOG! ME VELLY BUSY!

3. But Wun Lung knew all about Billy Bunter's little ways. "Go away, you fat flog!" he shouted. "Me velly busy!" And was Bunter annoyed at the thought of what he might be missing! "Don't be a mean pig, you beastly Chinese!" he roared from the other side of the door. "I know you're making a rabbit pie, I can see you doing it!" So saying, he bent down again and peered through the keyhole.



ATCHOO - BEAST ATCHOO - ROTTER I'LL MAKE YOU SORRY FOR THIS - YOU HEATHEN CHINEE!

ME VELLY SOLLY YOU GOT A NASSY COLD BUNTEL!

4. Wun Lung wasn't at all pleased at being spied on. Like most of the juniors at Greyfriars he disliked Billy Bunter's habit of peeping through keyholes. "I'll teach fat Buntel a lesson!" thought he, and picking up an icing squirt, he filled it with pepper and papped it into the keyhole. Woosh! Bunter got a big and unpleasant surprise. He sneezed, and sneezed, and sneezed!



I TEACHEE BILLY YOU SPY ON ME BUNTEL!

OOOON - YOOO - VAROOP - HELP! MURDER - - YAROOP!!

5. Then Wun Lung unlocked the door and dashed out, armed with a rolling-pin. The unhappy Owl of Greyfriars took one look at the Chinese junior and fled for his life. "Help! Yaroop! Murder!" bawled Bunter as he scuttled along the passage with Wun Lung in hot pursuit. "I teachee you to spy on me, Buntel!" roared the yellow boy, thoroughly enjoying the joke.



WHAT - - - WHOOOPI!

6. Unfortunately for Billy Bunter, Mr. Quelch, his Form-master, was coming up the stairs to see what the row was about. Mr. Quelch was going to say: "What is all this unseemly noise?" But he didn't get a chance. With a crash that would have shaken a battleship, Bunter sent him flying backward down the stairs. "Oh crumbs! Oh crickey!" groaned Bunter, as he fled on his way, hoping he hadn't been recognised.

3

1956

Billy Bunter says: "Eat not to live—but live to eat!"

BILLY BUNTER of Greyfriars



IT WAS A HALF-HOLIDAY, AND HARRY WHARTON, THE CAPTAIN OF THE REMOVE FORM AT GREYFRIARS SCHOOL, HAD RECEIVED A FOOD HAMPER THAT MORNING. WITH HIS CHUMS, BOB CHERRY, FRANK NUGENT, JOHNNY BULL AND THE INDIAN BOY HURREE SINGH, HE SET OUT FOR FRIARDALE WOODS.



IT'S A PERFECT DAY FOR A PICNIC AND THERE'S ENOUGH TUCK IN THIS HAMPER FOR ALL OF US!

THREE CHEERS FOR YOUR UNCLE, HARRY.

MMM! I CAN HARDLY WAIT.



A MINUTE OR TWO LATER, A FAT FIGURE EMERGED FROM THE SCHOOL GATES AND FOLLOWED IN THE WAKE OF THE FAMOUS FIVE. IT WAS THE EVER-HUNGRY BILLY BUNTER.

THOSE GREY BEASTS BEG WHITE ME TO PICNIC. MAY I FOLLOW THEM? THEY'LL GIVE THEM

1923



Bob Cherry took careful aim at the phantom figure on the face of the water. Whiz! The fragments of rock sailed through the air. A loud cry rang through the cavern, and the phantom figure collapsed suddenly. So much for the jolly ghost, chuckled Bob.

6

5

1957



The boys caught their breath as they followed Vivian's pointer, for above the surface of the dark waters ahead of them shimmered in an eerie light, loomed the strange and awe-inspiring figure dressed as a Spanish sea-captain of olden times.



THE G-GHOST!

IT'S A TRICK... AND I'LL PROVE IT!

Bob Cherry seized a pebble from the beach and hurled it unerringly at the phantom figure on the waters. A loud cry rang through the hollow cavern—a cry of pain, and the phantom figure suddenly collapsed.



AAAH!

THAT'S NO GHOST... OR HE WOULDN'T HAVE YELLED LIKE THAT!

YOU'RE RIGHT, BOB. IT'S SOMEONE IN A BOAT TRYING TO SCARE US!

As the eerie figure disappeared from sight, through the darkness and silence behind the boys came the sound of an echoing door. The juniors started, the same thought in each boy's mind.



THE DOOR! THE DOOR HAS SHUT!

QUICKLY!

C. H. CHAPMAN'S COMIC STYLE.

by Norman Wright

C.H. Chapman's drawings always bring a smile to my face. He nearly always managed to see the humour in a situation and could convey it to his audience. His work was far from technically perfect. A perusal of much of his later work reveals figures in grotesque postures with arms and legs protruding in a fashion that even an Olympic gymnast could not match! His early work in the "Magnet" was rather stiff with angular, bony figures. But as the 1920's progressed it became more free, particularly in depicting the knockabout humour found in the 'Greyfriars Herald' section of the "Magnet" and in the countless pages he drew for the early "Holiday Annuals". That work had a fluidity and sense of movement that did not fully develop in his main work for the "Magnet" until the 1930's. He obviously enjoyed drawing Bunter, and those "Holiday Annual" pages crammed with the Owl's antics almost move before one's eyes.

His sense of movement and his familiarity with the Greyfriars characters made him the obvious choice to draw "The Bunter Brothers", a six frame comic strip which began to appear in the "Popular" in June 1928.

During the 1930s Chapman contributed non Bunter strips to several Amalgamated Press comics including "The Happy Hikers" in "Merry and Bright" and "The Secret of Starcliffe" (a school adventure strip) in "Sparkler". He also drew a few 'one off' strips for some of the A.P. comic annuals.

His next Greyfriars strip appeared in the first issue of "Knockout Comic" on 4th March 1939. The figures were well drawn and kept very much in the mood of the "Magnet". Unfortunately after two months or so Chapman was replaced by Frank Minnitt, whose Greyfriars scene was very different from that depicted in the "Magnet". It was seventeen years before C.H. Chapman drew another Greyfriars strip. "Comet" had revived text stories of Greyfriars early in 1950. Two years later in February 1952 the comic changed to a Greyfriars picture story. At first several rather unsatisfactory artists worked on the series. Then in September 1956 the series was taken over by C.H. Chapman. His first strip for "Comet" was based on the "Mick the Gipsy" series from the "Magnet". Chapman continued drawing the strips until 1958. Most were based on old "Magnet" stories and it is interesting to compare the similarities between some of the comic frames and Chapman's illustrations for the original "Magnets".

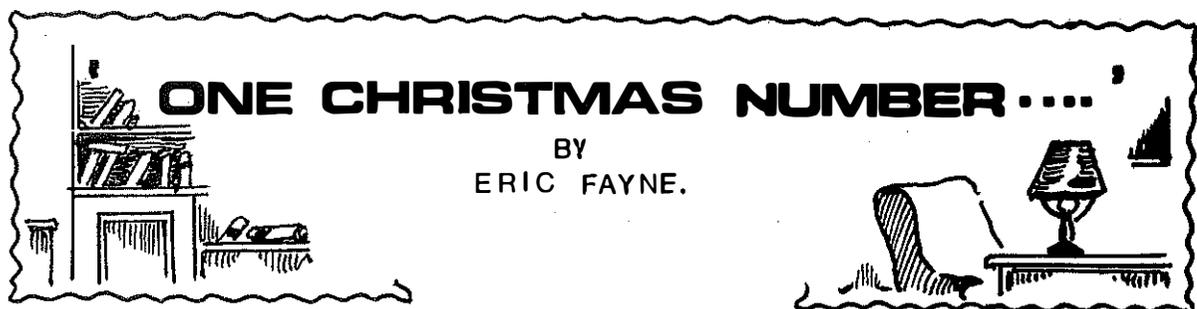
Though Bunter strips thrived after 1958 as far as I am aware none was drawn by C.H. Chapman, with the exception of a couple of "Comet" reprints in "The Billy Bunter Holiday Annual" 1967.

Many collectors have openly, and with some justification criticised the comic Bunter strips drawn by Minnitt. But Chapman's strip work retains the essence of the Greyfriars spirit. Looking over his "Comet" strips today gives me the same sort of feeling as I get looking through the illustrations in the "Magnet".

KEY TO ILLUSTRATIONS

-) "The Bunter Brothers" from "Popular", 9th June, 1928. (1st of series).
-) "The Bunter Brothers" from "Popular", 22nd December, 1928.
-) "Billy Bunter" from "The Knock-Out Comic", 4th March, 1939. (1st of series).
-) "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars" from "Comet", 15th September, 1956. (First Contribution to series by C.H. Chapman).
-) "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars" from "Comet", 24th August 1957. (Part of Pergarth Series).
-) "Magnet", 1st September 1923. Illustration from "Pengarth" series.





The Editress has suggested that I write on one Christmas Number of the Gem, and by that she obviously means my own favourite Christmas Number of the Gem. A bitter-sweet task, for, though it is always pleasant to browse over Christmas Numbers, it is also sad to reflect that the first Great War killed the Christmas Double Number while the second Great War killed every kind of Christmas Number - as we knew them, at any rate.

I choose as my theme the Xmas Number of 1912. This issue of the Gem contained no less than 60 pages. Publication date was November 23rd. In those times, the Gem Xmas issue seems always to have been published in November, while the Magnet's sister issue came several weeks nearer to Christmas. Maybe readers of that day had to save up their cash for those double size, double price issues - 2d.

There was no special coloured cover in 1912, but the usual blue cover was flecked with snow, and R.J. Macdonald drew a picture showing a schoolboy, with a lighted candle, staring in horror into an empty room.

The St. Jim's story was "NOBODY'S STUDY" - a 50,000 word story, which today, more than seventy years later, still stands as one of the finest school stories ever written. Though the plot was laid at St. Jim's, the Christmas atmosphere was impeccable, - snow, blazing log-fires, ghosts, and gas-lights which played weird tricks. It was, incidentally, the first story to introduce "Nobody's Study", the punishment room of St. Jim's.

"Dark and gloomy appeared the haunted room. It was in an isolated position, in a recess in the rambling old School House. At the end of the Fourth Form passage was a deep recess in the old stone walls, dimly-lighted in the daytime by a high and narrow window."

According to tradition, when St. Jim's had been a monastery a monk had vanished into thin air in that very room, leaving all his clothes in a heap behind him.

And, hundreds of years later -- "There's a yarn of a fellow who used that room, too," said Manners. "I heard it when I first came to St. Jim's. It happened long before any of us were here - before any of the Sixth were here for that matter. A chap was put to sleep in there - and when they found him in the morning, he was raving mad."

"Nobody's Study" was a thrilling tale to read by the fireside, while Mum made the Christmas puddings and sister conned over her list of Christmas presents. Old favourites starred in this grand Xmas story - Tom Merry, Levison, Lumley-Lumley, Skimpole, Kildare, Joe Frayne, - a veritable Yuletide dish to set before the Gem enthusiast.

The plot? Very eerie and chill-provoking indeed! Levison, engaged in snowballing, put a stone in his snowball. He received rough justice from Tom Merry

Co. The chums were preparing the "grand Xmas issue" of "Tom Merry's Weekly". Levison contributed a seasonable poem, and Tom Merry printed it in the "Weekly" without detecting the hidden insult which it contained. Here is the poem. The Yuletide flavour is obvious. No doubt you will detect the insult, od.

"The Christmas snow was falling
On hill and dale and moor;
Murky and dim, the winter night,
Murky the lonely shore.
Eerie and shadowy trees
Rose by the river's brim,
Rearing their leafless branches--
Yellow, and damp, and dim.
In the deep midnight silence
Sounded the stroke of one,
And straight from the haunted chamber
Strode forth the ghost, alone.
In awful and spectral silence
Like a shadow it glided by;
Leaving no trace of footsteps,
Yet seen by each startled eye!
And thus in the silent night,
Still by a spectral light,
St. Jim's sees the gliding sprite."

Tom Merry elected to spend a night in the haunted room. Alone in Nobody's Study! At midnight, the gas-light faded and died, a ghastly groan sounded and an icy finger touched the boy's brow. Tom Merry flung open the door in the darkness, and rushed for his dormitory.

The next day, Levison openly derided Tom Merry for cowardice. That night, Levison himself stayed alone in Nobody's Study. The juniors locked the door on him, and fastened it firmly with rope on the outside. The following morning Levison had completely disappeared, but the clothes he had been wearing were in a heap on the floor of the room. The story of the ancient monk had repeated itself. And, after many exciting chapters, Lumley-Lumley solved the mystery.

But, in this wonderful Christmas Number, the 50,000-word St. Jim's story had a "full, supporting programme". A second long complete story was "THE HOUND OF THE MOOR", a thrilling yarn of Frank Kingston, Detective, by Robert W. Comrade. (The latter was, I believe I am right in saying, our old friend, E.S. Brooks.)

Yet a third "long, complete story" was "THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL'S TRIUMPH" by that rather mysterious individual, Prosper Howard. This was a story of Rylcombe Grammar School, with Tom Merry & Co. much in evidence.

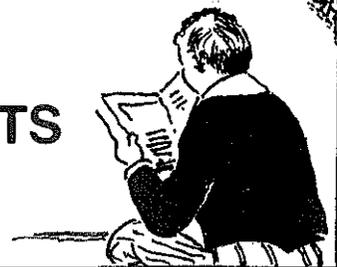
On that seasonable blue cover of Christmas, 1912, were the words "GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER. OUR BEST NUMBER". And, as the Rio Kid, forty years later, would say, - "The Editor said a mouthful!"

* * * * *



NEVER - FAILING ANNUAL DELIGHTS

BY MARY CADOGAN.



Christmas just wouldn't have been Christmas for us as children without our beautiful, bumper and brightly coloured Annuals. There was something particularly fascinating about seeing our favourite storypaper or comic characters in this more glowing and permanent setting; visits to the newsagent in the weeks leading up to Christmas were peeps into veritable treasure troves, as we feasted our eyes on annual after annual, whose covers were resplendent with shiny red, yellow, blue and green illustrations.

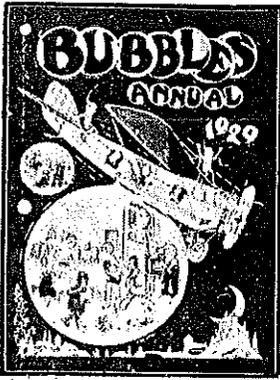
Nursery characters smiled reassuringly at us from annuals like Tiny Tots and Chicks' Own. Anthropomorphic animal heroes like Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys, Pip Squeak and Wilfred, Teddy Tail or Bobby Bear celebrated their annual appearances in 'technicolour' by greeting us from rather special settings such as swings and roundabouts, or ships, speeding cars and aeroplanes.

This Annual feeling of expansiveness was carried on into volumes starring our schoolboy and schoolgirl favourites. Whereas on the covers of our weekly papers Harry Wharton, Tom Merry, Nipper, Barbara Redfern, Betty Barton and their various Cos. might be depicted in dramatic situations, they generally graced the covers of their annuals in exuberant, laughing mood. Girls were shown relaxing with their pets; chatting in the tuckshop; dressed in party garb, or applauding happily at school concerts and prize-givings. For boys, sledging, sliding and snowballing were popular annual-cover occupations, as well, of course, as some atmospheric sporting incidents.

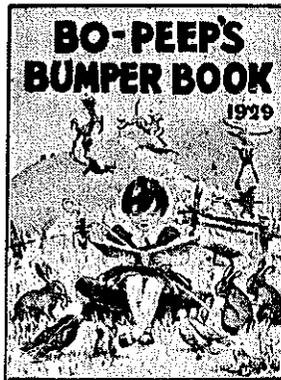
The covers of 'adventure' annuals naturally invited us to sample their contents by using excitement and derring do. I particularly relished some of the Champion Annual covers showing horsebacked characters on the edges of ravines, or in stirring maritime moments. Then of course, there were the 'funnies' - comic annuals like Film Fun, Dandy, Beano, etc. These retained the lively anarchic mood of their associated comics but - engagingly - many of their scruffy anti-heroes seemed to have been best-bib-and-tuckered for their Annual appearances!

Everyone, from tots and fairies to chums and heroes beckoned us from these glowing annual covers. And once we opened them, we were seldom disappointed. There were some glorious illustrated endpapers featuring especially Tiger Tim, Teddy Tail and (happily still running in 1937) Rupert Bear. And throughout the text pages there was always a wealth of black and white or coloured pictures.

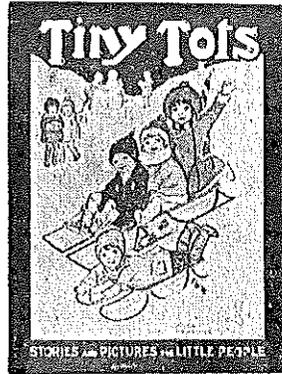
Then there were the stories and features and poems and puzzles! Lots of lovely things to savour on Christmas and Boxing days while our mums, dads, aunts and uncles were snoozing off the effects of turkey, plum-pudding and mince-pies, preparatory to the beginning of party games. And after Christmas, what wonderful adornments the annuals were to our cherished book collections!



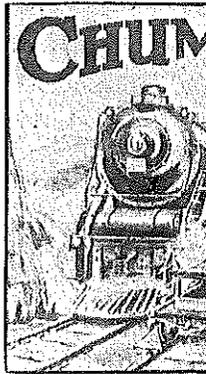
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* * * * *

ANSWERS TO:

Guess these St. Frank's Characters

1. Edward Oswald Handforth Study D.
2. Walter Church, Study D.
3. Mr. Crowell.
4. Reggie Pitt, Junior Captain, West House.
5. "Juicy" Lemon.
6. Bernard Forrest, Remove.
7. Tommy Watson, Ancient House, Study C.
8. George Bell, Study A.
9. Mr. Austin Suncliffe, Master of the 3rd Form.
10. Nipper (Dick Hamilton) Ancient House, Study C.



One of the remaining mysteries in the Hamilton field is the authorship of the two long series of short Rookwood stories that appeared in the Gem. For the record they were as follows: Nos. 1206 to 1257, 28th March 1931 to 19th March, 1932. (51 stories). (No story in issues 1242 and 1254, due to extra long St. Jim's tales). Nos. 1449 to 1469, 23rd November 1935 to 11th March 1936. (21 stories). (No story in issue 1252, due to extra long Christmas number.)

Over the years I have received many letters about these stories, many expressing the view that Charles Hamilton, the creator, had written at least some of them. When questioned during his lifetime on the subject, he most strongly denied ever having penned the series. Possibly Mr. Hamilton may have seen some sub-stories, or could not remember his own efforts in this field and therefore concluded that he had written none. On the other hand, the original 'Owen Conquest' once made a statement that all the Rookwood stories in the Boys' Friend were from his pen. Early researchers into Rookwood, including Bill Gander and Eric Fayne, spotted many sub-tales, and later from official records I was not only able to confirm their theories, but to name the writers in question. One story was by Bill Pike who edited the paper in later years.

Gleanings from official records some years ago indicated that Charles Hamilton did start off the Gem series with the first few stories, but I can now after further search reveal that actually he penned the first fifteen, starting with Lovell's Lucky Day and ending at No. 1220.

The next five were written by Stanley Austin, then quite a run by W. Catchpole. Much later series were by Kenneth Newman, who told me when interviewed him many years ago now that he remembered writing some short Rookwood tales in the Gem. 1255 was one of his stories.

It is interesting that Charles Hamilton ceased to write the stories when the reprints started, when the honorarium received may have made him think it was then not worth continuing the series - but this, of course, is only conjecture.

Somebody wrote years ago that it was far easier to write a short substitute story in the Rookwood saga without being detected (except by the experts in our field!) than, say, a long one of Greyfriars or St. Jim's. Because the stories of Rookwood were so short, Charles Hamilton was never able to expand on the brilliant characterisation which was his trade-mark in much longer tales. Maybe this really is the explanation of why the stories in question have puzzled many readers about their exact authorship. They were similar to the short one-page stories of Greyfriars in the comic Chuckles.

This is probably why, astonishing as it may seem, that in over forty years of the C.D. and Annuals no-one so far has been able to write an article about

my own favourite schoolboy character - Jimmy Silver. (Editor's note: If that is so, how about doing this yourself, Bill? 'Uncle Jimmy' is popular with many readers, I know.) As one enthusiast put it, the lack of complete characterisation makes it very difficult indeed.

Although this article is about the Rookwood stories in the Gem, we felt that readers might like to have it illustrated by the Boys' Friend traditional Rookwood artist, G.W. Wakefield. Terry Wakefield, who has provided an illustration for my article Never Failing Annual Delights in this C.D. Annual, and whose work often appears in the monthly C.D., is of course the son of George Wakefield. (Ed.)

Bumper Christmas Number!

The BOYS' FRIEND 1½d

No. 1,020. Vol. XX. New Series. THREE HALFPENCE. [Week Ending December 25th, 1920.]

The Phantom Abbot of Rookwood!

By Owen Conquest

1910.

NEBBY CHRISTMAS!
Jimmy Silver.

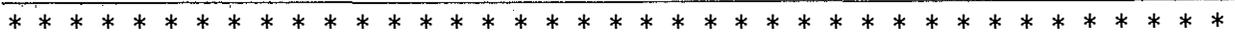
ALL THE BEST!
Dan Howard.

GOOD FOOTER!
Jack Leman.

A BOLLY HOLIDAY!
Frank Richards.

THE GHOST WALKS! The juniors stood rooted to the spot, whilst the Phantom Abbot of Rookwood slowly approached them.

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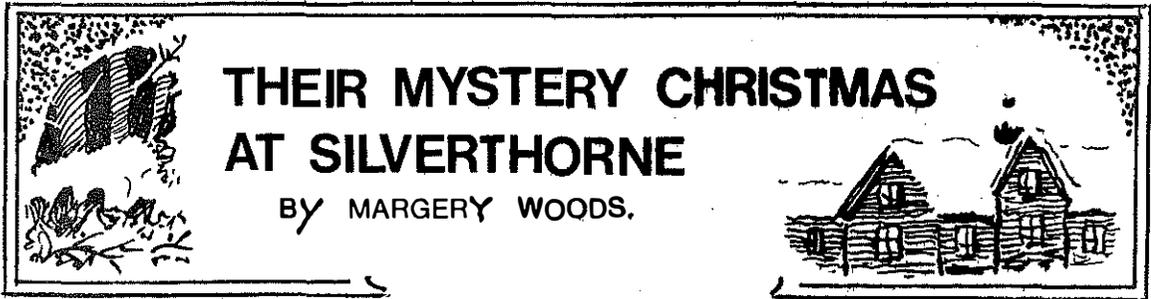
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* * * * *



Chapter 1.

"Oh dud-dear!" groaned Bessie. "Aren't we nearly there?"

"Cheer up, Bessikins. It can't be much farther." Blue-eyed Barbara Redfern of the Fourth Form at Cliff House tried to reassure her plump chum.

"Only another twenty miles, old fat one," laughed boisterous tomboy Clara Trevlyn, pausing to look back at the wearily plodding figure of Bessie Bunter. "Just think what a splendid appetite you'll have worked up by time we reach Silverthorne."

Bessie stopped breathlessly, her fat face indignant. "I'm starving now. And I'm tired. And I kik-can't see--"

"Because you've got snow all over your glasses, you chump," retorted Clara. "Now let's get a move on, girls, it'll be dark soon."

But Marjorie Hazeldine, always sympathetic, took a clean handkerchief from her handbag and began to brush the melting snowflakes from Bessie's big spectacles. The chums gathered round, not sorry to take advantage of a few moments respite from the toil against the elements. It was snowing quite heavily now, soft and clinging, making a silent world and coating their outer garments with an additional layer of thick white felting.

Babs was beginning to wish they had waited back at the station for the car which was to meet them, but owing to an unforeseen change in plans they had caught a slightly earlier train and arrived an hour earlier than expected. Clara and Jemima and Leila had voted persuasively to push on the mile to Silverthorne Hall, their Christmas destination where they were to be guests at a house-warming given by their form-mate Diana Royston-Clarke and her

father, who had bought and converted Silverthorne into a luxurious conference centre. But now, looking at the lowering skies, ominous with the promise of more snow, and darkness pressing in from the eastern horizon, Babs felt doubt, despite Jemima's sage pointing out that another fall of snow might prevent the car getting through to them. Far better to keep going.

With Babs and Marjorie on either side, offering supporting arms, the disgruntled Bessie suffered herself to be propelled into motion again. Leila Carroll produced a bar of chocolate, and golden-haired Mabs a toffee, which stifled Bessie's grumbles for a little while, and the girls ploughed on into the snowfilled darkness of a seemingly endless country lane.

"Surely this lane must come to an end soon," muttered Clara, pausing to kick off the platforms of snow that had caked on her boots. "I hope we haven't missed a turning."

"And now she says it!" taunted Mabs.

"'Tis a long long lane that has no silver turning, old Spartans," chirruped Jemima. "fast feet forward and all the--"

"S-sh!" exclaimed Babs. "What was that?"

"Something's coming!"

"The car--oh goodie!"

They strained to peer through the flurries of white, then gasped aloud. A great looming, rushing thing came out of nowhere, scattering the little group. Bessie screamed and stumbled back, falling heavily as she plunged into a concealed ditch at the side of the lane. A voice yelled at them, there was a rearing, a

great snort, flying hooves and a swirl of black cloak. Showers of kicked up snow spattered the chums, and then it was over, only a roar of coarse, sardonic laughter echoing on the air.

"Save me!" shrieked Bessie. "It's coming for me! It's---"

"What the---?"

Marjorie clutched Babs' arm. "Whatever---?"

"That!" cried the Tomboy furiously, "was an arrogant great hooligan on horseback. He ought to be shot! The stupid moron!"

"He nearly ran us down." Trembling herself, Babs was trying to get the terrified fat duffer of the fourth to her feet. No easy task while Bessie lay screaming and fending off all comers with flailing arms. With a concerted effort they heaved poor Bessie out of the ditch and upright once more on terra firma. Then came a triumphant shout from Clara.

"I think we're here, girls! Come on!"

"Tally-ho, what-ho!" cheered Jemima

Fright and weariness magically forgotten, the chums surged forward, to discover they had indeed reached a turn in the lane and were facing big scrolled iron gates set in high boundary walls of ancient brick. Clara was rubbing the snow off a carved plaque at one side, and sure enough, there was the worn legend: Silverthorne. There was laughter now, joy and relief, and welcoming lights ahead in the darkness. Even Bessie forgot her fright and bruises at the prospect of food and warmth to come. And then, as they rushed into the shelter of the portico and the impetuous Clara yanked at the old bell pull, another sound came out of the night to still their voices.

They all heard it: the unearthly howl, whining to a crescendo and dying, a sound to freeze the blood in their veins. White-faced, they looked at each other, eyes darkening with fear as it came again, and was suddenly stilled. Once Jemima remained cool and unruffled. She fixed her monocle firmly in place and shook her head sadly. "Methinks we are beleagued. Tut tut! Horrible horseman, lots of that wet white stuff. And now the jolly old hound of

the Baskerville himself. What next, I wonder."

What next, indeed!

Almost frantically, Babs reached for the bell pull, and gave a sigh of thankfulness as the great door creaked back. Warm golden light streamed forth, framing their hostess to be, Diana Royston-Clarke. But a strange Diana. Not the elegantly gowned, made-up and glamorously coiffured Firebrand they expected to see once she was free of the restrictions and rules of Cliff House, but a distraught Diana, clad in dusty slacks, a man's faded old blue shirt carelessly knotted at her midriff, a smudge on one cheek, and her glorious platinum blonde hair tousled where it escaped from a blue chiffon scarf that tied it back from her face. Despite this workaday appearance she was as beautiful and magnetic as ever, and there was no doubt at all about the warmth of her welcome as she held out her hands to the chums.

"Yoicks! Am I glad to see you lot! Come in!"

"But Diana! Did you hear---what's happening?"



Diana Royston-Clarke

In a flash Diana's fingers went to her lips, and a warning gleamed sharply in her blue eyes. "Not now," she whispered, "later." Then in a normal voice that carried. "You're in good time---we were just coming to meet you."

Puzzled, uncertain, and aware of undercurrents, the girls crossed the threshold

into the warmth and glow from a huge log fire. The dancing flames reflected in the mellow old panelling of the great hall in which they now stood, and caught in soft gleams on the ghostly armoured shapes that guarded the foot of the broad carved staircase where it climbed to dimly seen regions above. But the girls were not taking in anything except the haziest impressions of their surroundings. Their attention was held by the girl who rose nonchalantly from a deep brocade wing chair by the fireside. She was tall, graceful, assured, in a sleek black cocktail frock with a shower of diamante cascading over one shoulder, the sheerest of silk stockings and daintily strapped evening sandals. A jade cigarette holder between scarlet-tipped fingers trailed wisps of blue smoke, and the flames of the blazing logs were matched in fiery glory by her auburn tresses. She looked languidly towards the girls and nodded carelessly as Diana said in haughty tones the girls knew only too well:

"Girls, this is Chloe---my father's new secretary. Ask her for anything you want."

Chloe gave a slight shake of her head. "Not my department. And it's personal assistant, darling. Oh, and Di---I do hope you'll keep your juvenile cronies out of mischief. See you."

With a supercilious smile Chloe walked from the hall.

"Round one to dear Chloe!" murmured Jemima under her breath.

Chapter 2.

"But Diana---shouldn't you contact your father?"

Diana shook her head. "Curmudge was called away urgently to the City two days ago. He said everything was under control and he'd be back today. But he hasn't arrived or called. And he left Chloe in charge of the business side." Diana's lip curled. "She's an absolute cat! And about as much use as a furnace in the Sahara. Everything's falling apart. The new staff haven't turned up. No supplies. And if she isn't responsible, who is? Why Curmudge picked her is beyond my comprehension," Diana ended disgustedly.

It was later that evening. Dinner was over, an excellent meal prepared by

by the Firebrand herself, and now the chums were gathered in the cosy, tastefully appointed bedroom shared by Babs and her golden-haired lieutenant, Mabel Lynn. There was a silence. The chums were still grasping the implications of Diana's account of disaster. Mr. Royston-Clarke had invested heavily in the launch of his new conference centre where businessmen could meet in conditions of five-star comfort and perfectly security. Silverthorne was already booked as far ahead as the following May, and the first conference of industrial designers and their backers was due to begin on January 4th. But it seemed that Mr. Royston-Clarke and Diana had an unseen enemy. Mysterious phone calls and letters had cancelled supplies and various arrangements, and now the staff to run the centre, expected the previous day, had failed to turn up. Diana's frantic calls to the agency and suppliers concerned had elicited the startling response that Mr. Royston-Clarke had cancelled everything. Already the staff had been re-allocated to last minute Christmas bookings elsewhere and would not be available again before January 4th at the soonest.

Jemima polished her monocle thoughtfully. "I deduce that glamorous Chloe isn't exactly a friendly chum to have around the house. What sayest thou, old Spartans?"

"She treated us tonight as though we were a bunch of stupid third-formers," Clara cried angrily. "Did you notice her taking the mickey out of poor old Bess?"

Babs nodded, her blue eyes concerned. She too had not felt at all drawn towards the arrogant red-haired girl, but, always fair, Babs hesitated to make judgements which might prove to be unfounded. She said slowly: "These things that have happened... Can you think of anyone else who might be responsible?"

Diana gestured impatiently. "All the details have been kept as confidential as possible. Who else could know which agency we'd got the staff from? Whoever it was knew all the details." She stood up and paced restlessly round the room, her brow furrowed and her mouth set angrily. "So now we've no staff, and forty-five businessmen arriving next week."

"Could you get staff anywhere else? Or help from the village?" Mabs asked.

"I rang every agency in the book"

ana said flatly. "It's hopeless,

There was another small silence. The
 ums looked at each other.

"Well," said Leila at last, "I guess
 's roll up the old sleeves time. We can
 ways roll old Bessie around as a polisher!"

"Ha ha!"

Bessie, snoozing in the most comfortable
 air by the fire glowered.

"But seriously," broke in Babs, and
 e laughter subsided, "we'll do whatever
 can. Just tell us how we can help?"

"I really feel awful about this after
 viting you," Diana said ruefully. "We'd
 nanned such a lovely Christmas housewarming
 fore the business side got going.
 avens!" suddenly she clapped a hand to
 r head. "Margaret Lantham's coming on
 king Day and she phoned the other day
 see if she could bring Lady Pamela with
 r. I hope we can lay on a better reception
 an you've all had." A change came into
 r expression and she looked directly at
 os. "You really mean you'd turn to and
 aft? After some of the things we've said
 d done in the past?"

"You know you don't need to say that,
 ," Babs said quietly. "Just let's get
 ganised for tomorrow."

"Forty-five beds to make up for a
 art," laughed Marjorie.

"And about five crates of china and
 oleware to unpack and wash," warned Diana.
 hank goodness it got here."

"So first thing in the morning we'll
 and collect the luggage," said Clara,
 ming a damp sponge at Bessie, and scoring
 direct hit. "Start thinking about a menu,
 ttikins. You'll have to be head cook
 d bottle-washer." Clara sounded quite
 cited at the prospect of a battle in the
 fing. "And if our Chloe tries to throw
 y spanners in the works, we'll settle
 r, won't we?"

"I sus-say," Bessie hurled the sponge
 ck at Clara, missing the grinning Tomboy
 d hitting Jemima, who was at the other
 de of the room, "it's Christmas Eve
 tomorrow, you know. Have you got plenty
 grub in, Di?"

"No----but we'll remedy that tomorrow.
 icks!" laughed the Firebrand, "I'm

beginning to feel better already."

The chums began to make preparations
 for bed. Very soon, in warm cosy beds,
 sleep overtook them and silence settled
 over the great house. Only Jemima was a
 little restless. At midnight she peered
 for the second time at her little travelling
 clock, wondering if she'd dreamed or really
 heard what sounded like a stealthy footfall
 outside her door. She glanced across at
 the other bed but Leila had not stirred.

Creak!

Jemima sat up sharply. Silence. Then
 another faint rustle. Something was abroad!

Jemima was not of a particularly
 nervous disposition. Logic always told
 her that mysterious sounds usually had a
 quite mundane cause, invariably human, in
 which case the causers had their own reasons
 for wishing to avoid discovery. And of
 course, old houses, especially if they had
 been rudely awakened from centuries of peace-
 ful slumber, as had this one, tended to
 protest noisily at the infliction of such
 new-fangled things as central heating and
 miles of new plumbing and electricity.
 Clad in her topcoat and outdoor shoes, and
 armed with a powerful torch, Jemima stole
 from the room and silently let herself into
 the next door bedroom. There she managed
 to rouse Clara without disturbing Marjorie.

"Shouldn't we wake the others?" hissed
 the Tomboy.

"No---too many detectives spoil the
 crime," returned the irrepressible Jimmy.
 "Get your torch?" Clara nodded, and the
 two girls tiptoed along the broad corridor,
 noiseless on the thick new carpet. But
 quiet as they were, someone else had wakened.
 Diana emerged from her bedroom near the
 head of the main staircase.

"Did something wake you two as well?"

"Yes, come on, let's see who's prowling
 about."

"I heard that beastly howling about
 half an hour ago," grumbled Diana, as they
 descended to the ground floor. "It started
 the day Curmudge left."

"Well you can hardly blame Chloe for
 that," giggled Clara under her breath.
 Diana's response was a grunt, which plainly
 expressed her doubt on that score. Nothing
 impeded their progress through the silent
 rooms and after a hesitation Diana moved

to the front door and drew back the massive bolts. Slowly she opened the door. Icy cold air rushed in, and Clara whispered, "Aren't we gluttons for punishment? We must be---"

Her words were never completed. A scream rent the air, then a second one, and a desperate cry:

"Help! Help!"

The girls ran, stumbling over the uneven snow, towards the side of the house, from whence the terrified cries seemed to have come. Just beside the dark protruding shape of the outer kitchen lobby they saw something outlined against the snow. It was the dark huddled shape of a girl, unmoving in the circles of torch-light.

"My hat!" gasped Clara, "it's Chloe!"

Diana bent over the fallen girl and touched her shoulder. Chloe stirred, then tried to sit up, brushing her hand across her brow.

"What happened?" cried Diana. "Are you all right? Did---?"

"I--I think so." Chloe began to struggle to her feet, seeming to wince with pain. "I--I heard noises, and that dreadful banshee or whatever it is---I came downstairs to see who was prowling about." She held her hand to her head and gave a little moan, then looked reproachfully at Diana. "The side door of the lobby wasn't locked, and the kitchen door was open. You must have forgotten to lock up."

"But I did!" protested Diana. "I checked every door in the house."

"Well someone was trying to break in," said Chloe, her voice sharpening. "And whoever it was rushed up behind me out of the darkness and---and---Goodness knows what would have happened if you hadn't come," she added shakily.

"Yes, well let's get you back into the house." Diana did not sound in the least sympathetic. "Tomorrow morning we'll have a look round in daylight."

Neither of the girls noticed Jemima probing around nearby with her torch beam, closely examining a certain patch of ground. Nor did they hear the small exclamation she gave as she picked up

something from the snow near where Chloe had lain. Jemima weighed the dullish metallic object in the palm of her hand and shook her head. "Strange. Very strange." She dropped the object into her pocket and ambled after the others back into the house.

Jemima seemed to have quite a lot to think about.

Chapter 3.

There were further shocks awaiting the chums next morning when they wandered somewhat sleepily downstairs in search of breakfast and to discuss the previous night's events. Babs wrinkled her nose at a certain familiar aroma that hung in the air but wisely decided to say nothing.

Diana was brewing coffee and feeding the toaster. "Sorry, kidlets, but I've burnt the porridge. It'll have to be corn-flakes. And the phone's dead, if you please." The storm signals were flying in the Firebrand's cheeks, and even Clara managed to choke back a tactless observation on the pong of burnt breakfast. Babs said tactfully, "Cornflakes and toast will be fine. We can report the telephone fault when we go to the village."

"How is Chloe?" enquired Jemima, stifling a yawn. "No ill effects, I trust?"

"I don't know, and I don't particularly care," said Diana viciously. "Did you notice last night, when we came in to the light? There wasn't a mark on her! I don't believe anybody attacked her at all."

"You could be right, old chum Sherlock," said Jemima. "I too noticed that there wasn't as much as a ladder in those bits of Cobweb she wears for stockings."

The girls looked at one another, then expectantly at Jemima. But the enigmatic member of the Fourth was not prepared to be any more forthcoming.

"Well I vote that half of us go to the village and the rest stay here and make a start on the jobs. Okay?" asked Babs.

There was tacit assent, and it was decided that Jemima, Mabs, Marjorie, Leila and Bessie should remain at the house, while Babs and Clara accompanied Diana

o the village.

"I'm not slogging through that beastly now," Diana said shortly, "Chloe will have o drive us in."

But Chloe had other ideas. She walked into the kitchen, glanced disdainfully at the simple fare of which the girls were partaking, and announced that she had to o into Dorgate, the nearest town, to do ome personal shopping. She added sweetly hat she was sorry her small sports car ouldn't take passengers. Coolly she poured herself some coffee, helped herself to some oast, and carried it on a tray, presumably o some haunt of her own. By the time the hums had finished their meal, persuaded essie to get up, and finalised their plans, t was after ten. They saw Chloe get into er snappy little M.G. and snort out of the entre's car park amid flurries of snow, nd then Diana announced she was going to rive the big luxurious saloon which was o be used to ohauffer clients to and from he station. Babs and Clara stared at her n horror,

"You can't drive that great machine!" hey exclaimed in unison.

"I had some lessons during the summer ols," Diana retorted, "I think I can manage o propel it for one short mile down the ane."

They watched in dismay as she climbed into the sleek shining limousine, and witched on the ignition. She pressed the tarter, frowned, and tried again. "Don't ay that this d---"

The chums hid grins at the choked off ord not supposed to be in the vocabulary f any Cliff House girl. Diana tried again. o response.

"Try this, my old trump," suggested he calm voice of Jemima, who had ambled ut to watch the fun. She held out her hand, n the palm of which reposed the metallic bject she had found in the snow the night efore.

"What is it?" frowned Babs.

"This is a rotor arm," Jemima informed hem blandly, in the manner of a learned rofessor delivering a lecture to a class f not very bright students. "It is a vital omponent of the internal combustion---"

"Jimmy! Stow it! We haven't got all ay."

"I remember," said Diana, "you can immobi- lise a car by removing the rotor. But where did you get that?"

"Found it, in the snow," said Jemima smugly. "Open the jolly old bonnet."

Jemima, plainly wise in subjects not in the Cliff House curriculum, fitted the rotor arm and added a conjuror's flourish.

"Hey presto!"

It was magic. The powerful engine purred sweetly into life and then, the triumphant Firebrand at the wheel, the car wobbled somewhat unsteadily out of the garage.

"In you get!" she cried gaily.

In they got, not quite so gaily, and the wheels crackled over the crisp snow as Diana steered over the forecourt and out on to the drive. For a few moments it seemed she would indeed drive them successfully to the village. Unfortunately, a snowdrift and an unseen gully on the nearside proved Diana's undoing. The car lurched, skidded, lurched again and promptly stalled, and all Diana's attempts to free the vehicle ended with failure. Clara was first out of the car.

"It's quicker by shank's pony, I think. Come on!"

Babs paused as they set off, after Diana had locked the car. "Take that rotor thing out again, Diana, just to be on the safe side." Diana nodded, "Good idea, Babs mine." She did so, and the chums set off for the village.

Chapter 4.

"Come on, Bessie, get your menu worked out."

The girls had had a long session of bedmaking. Now they were feeling competent to take on any hotel, having whittled the first bedmaking time of eleven minutes down to three by the time they reached the forty-fifth. Now Jemima was seeking a progress report from Bessie the Chef, and did not appear satisfied with the sum total of Bessie's session in the kitchen.

"Is this all we're going to get for lunch: chips?"

"Nun-no," fretted Bessie, "but there aren't any lemons. I kik-can't make lemon mousse without lemons."

"Lemon mousse and chips! Lovely!" cried Mabs.

"I kik-can't make trifle---there's no cream."

"Trifle and chips! Oh, yes, Bessie. Look! there's some tinned cream here."

"Get out of my kitchen," fumed a suddenly imperious Bessie. "I can't concentrate." She looked short-sightedly round the big kitchen. "I want some notepaper. Who's got a sheet of notepaper?" she demanded.

"I have, Bessie. Help yourself," offered Leila.

"Where is it?" asked the unsuspecting Bessie.

"In my luggage at the station," grinned Leila.

Bessie would have withered her with a glance, but unfortunately her spectacles slid down her snub little nose and ruined the effect. Marjorie, more gently, said: "There should be some in reception."

"Or in Chloe's office." Jemima threw in the suggestion, then added briskly: "We're wasting time, my hearties. We'd better start unpacking the china."

Jemima and her hearties proceeded china-wards, and Bessie departed in search of notepaper. The reception desk was locked, no doubt by Diana, and Bessie opened various doors, hoping to find a writing room, but none of the rooms yielded as much as a post-card. Then she found herself in the light, airy room appropriated by Chloe for her office. There was a desk, a table, a filing cabinet, and the usual typewriter and accessories. But the desk drawers were locked, and the top excessively tidy except for an overfull box of carbon paper. Bessie shifted it aside disgustedly, and then discovered a single sheet of quarto under the box. Failing to heed that the box slid over the end of the desk and opened to allow its slippery contents to spread themselves over the carpet, Bessie seized the paper.

It was written on one side but it would do.

She returned to the kitchen and began laboriously to work out the menu for the

day and the things she would need. That Babs and Diana and Clara had already departed did not quite sink into Bessie's intellect. She was the chef; it was up to them to see that she was provided with the ingredients she required!

Meanwhile, Diana and Babs and Clara had reached the village. Diana had succeeded in getting through to her London office and had left a comprehensive and urgent message with the senior secretary, whom she knew quite well. That done, she rang the telephone engineer to report the fault and persuaded him that it was imperative that someone repaired the line that day. While Diana was ensconced in the phone booth, Babs was placing food orders for everything she could think of that would be needed in the food line at grocer and butcher, Clara had found her way to a certain Alfie at the village hardware store who could be prevailed upon to supply transport.

Alfie was rather garrulous and while the details were being taken down Clara leaned against the counter and idly watched a couple of youths engaged in a snow scuffle outside the Star and Garter across the green.

"So there be three of you, in abaht 'alf an hour. Plus some boxes to be collected from Mrs. 'ugget's. An' you said you'd be wanting a tree. Left it a bit late, 'aven't you, miss? Altho'," he scratched his head, "Bill Giles at Peartrees might 'ave some."

But Clara was not listening. The scuffle in the snow was over, and a girl was coming out of the inn, accompanied by a big man with a dark bearded countenance. The two stood in the inn porchway for a moment, and Clara said sharply: "Who are they?"

"Who's who?" Alfie tore a docket free and impaled it on a wicked looking spike. "Oh---over there. That's Mr. Hortensby from Grigg House and that's his lass Winnie."

"Winnie! But her name's not Winnie! It's---" Suddenly the Tomboy saw the puzzled stare of Alfie, and she shook her head. "No---I was thinking of someone else." She returned her attention to the couple opposite who were now walking down the street, where they stopped again, in deep conversation, at the entrance to the inn's carpark. The man patted the red-haired

...ri's shoulder, and gave a great guffaw
 ... laughter. Clara's mouth tightened with
 anger. She had heard that laugh before,
 only once, but once was enough to identify
 the arrogant idiot who had almost run them
 down in the lane just after the girls arrival.
 Clara could scarcely wait to rejoin the
 others. And I bet he's got a great hound
 called Baskerville, she muttered to herself.
 But strangely, in this surmise, for once
 Clara was wrong.

It was a jolly return to Silverthorne.
 Diana and Babs and Clara had achieved all
 their objectives, and Alfie's taxi was weighed
 down with luggage and hampers of food, various
 other items of last minute Christmas shopping,
 and an enormous tree whose top branches stuck
 alternately out of the side window and down
 Clara's neck---or so she said. The smiling
 faces of Jemima and Co. greeted them and
 Diana was overjoyed at the amount of work
 they had accomplished. Bessie had sorted
 out things in the kitchen, and an
 appetising aroma of steak and kidney pie
 wafted forth to tease the nostrils of the
 angry.

Chloe arrived back as they were
 finishing dessert, a trifle with real cream
 which the shoppers had brought back with
 them, greatly to Bessie's delight. Bessie
 was on her way back from the sideboard with
 her third helping when Chloe entered. Her
 expression was not friendly.



"I might have known," she snapped, "not
 even the manners to wait until everyone was
 at the table."

Clara looked up. "We thought you'd
 be eating out---with your bearded wonder
 friend---at the inn," she said coldly.

"What do you mean?" Chloe's brows
 furrowed, but she hid her surprise almost

instantly. "I don't know what---Oh!
 You fat fool!" she screamed. "Look what
 you've done!"

No one had noticed Diana slyly stick
 one foot out just as Bessie approached
 the table with her third plate of trifle.
 It was quite a gentle nudge and did not
 hurt Bessie in the least: it did, however,
 make the fat one stumble slightly, and
 it did send the quivering plateful of
 jelly and custard and luscious cream
 flying. Chloe was just in the right place.
 She got the whole helping of trifle, alas,
 not down the route one would expect the
 best trifle to take, but a shorter one,
 all over her cream mohair sweater and
 expensive cashmere tailored skirt.

"You pig!" she screamed. "You did
 that on purpose! You---"

"Bessie---what a waste of trifle!"

"Ha ha!"

"Bessie---you're perfect!"

"Lul-look what you mum-made me do!
 Who tripped me up?"

"Bessie---have your second helping-
 ---" Diana got up.

"Third, you mean!"

"Have the rest, Bessie." Diana
 escorted Bessie to her place at the table
 and tenderly placed the big bowl of trifle
 before her. "It's marvellous trifle.
 Such a waste on Chloe, though."

The chums were clutching each other,
 weak with mirth, and with another angry
 cry Chloe stormed from the room for a
 much needed wash and change of clothing.
 In high humour, they cleared the table
 and washed up, then set about unpacking
 the goods they had bought at the village.
 Then there was the tree to set up and
 decorate, the holly to festoon the hall
 and streamers to deck the big sitting
 room. A party of local children arrived
 to sing carols and were welcomed with
 sweets and silver, and equally welcome
 was the arrival of Harrods' van with a
 load of goodies.

"Curmudge must have got my message
 and got through to them about the
 cancelled order," exulted Diana. "No
 problems about grub, now!"

Bessie's face shone.

But not quite so pleasurable was the verdict of the telephone engineer who broke the news to them that the outside lead-in had been deliberately cut. This, with Clara's evidence and Chloe's own venomous attitude seemed to confirm Diana's accusations and suspicion concerning the red-haired girl.

"I wish I could get into her room," muttered Diana. "I bet we'd find a pair of wire-cutters there."

"Maybe that's what she was up to last night," said Clara, "and then draped herself in snow to try to kid us she'd been attacked."

It seemed a plausible theory, But the question still remained: Why? And where did the bearded man fit into it all, if indeed it had been Chloe in the village that morning.

"Let's go and have a snowball fight," Clara suggested. "Bessie can be the target."

"Yes, come on!" Eyes alight with sheer youthful high spirits, they rushed to don coats and scarves and make for the garden, which now looked like a winter fairyland with the snow traceries of trees against the deepening blue of evening sky, and the film of amber light from the strategically placed flood lamps outside which Diana switched on. Happily they tore around, scuffling and scraping, making a huge snowman, and teasing Bessie until finally she retreated into the safety of the house. At last they followed her indoors, breathless and rose-cheeked, and stamped the snow off their feet.

"Who's for tea?"

"Me!"

"And me! Oh girls' cried Babs, "it's nearly Christmas."

"And it's all going to turn out all---"

The door from the office flew open and a furious Chloe confronted them.

"Who's been messing about in my office?" she shouted.

"Ahem, have you been messing about in Chloe's office?" Jemima asked Babs.

"No, of course not." Babs face was blank, as well it might be. "I've not even been near her office."

"My office!" snapped Diana.

"Somebody has, and I demand to know who!" Chloe was almost beside herself with rage.

Jemima tut-tutted disapprovingly. "You, Mabs? Leila? Marjorie?"

"Not guilty!" they chorussed.

"No---not guilty---Winnie!"

"What did you say?" Chloe spun round and glared at Clara.

"You heard." The Tomboy stood her ground.

Jemima's expression remained enigmatic. "Convinced, Chloe? None of my friends has been messing about in your---ahem---Diana's office."

"That remains to be seen." Chloe's red mouth tightened with temper, "Don't kid yourself it's over, you little brats. I'm going to get to the bottom of this, and then you'd better look out!" And with that quite explicit threat, she marched from the room.

There was a silence after the door slammed. Then Babs said doubtfully: "Could we be jumping to the wrong conclusions?"

"Never," said Diana and Clara almost simultaneously.

Babs shook her head. "Are you sure---this is such a vast place---could anyone else have got in? Unknown to us?"

"Impossible." The Firebrand stood firm. "Curmudge had all the latest security locks fitted. No-one could get in."

"But they could if a door was left unlocked," persisted Babs, "as Chloe said last night."

"If a door was left unlocked," Diana snapped, "then Chloe deliberately left---"

A terrified scream struck silence in all of them.

Babs startled violently, then cried: "Bessie! Come on!"

They rushed, to meet a palpitating, white-faced plump duffer staggering across the hall, to virtually collapse in their outstretched arms.

"There---there was a f-face---at the window!" she faltered, a white face--- with staring eyes---and and lul-listen' It's the thing we heard! It's kik-coming to gig-get me! It's---"

They heard it then. The eerie howling sound out in the night. Frightening, mysterious, reducing the already badly scared Bessie to a quivering jelly of a fat girl, with her face buried in Babs' shoulder.

"It's probably just somebody's old guard dog, shut up on some farm," said Mabs, trying to be practical and reassuring.

"More likely that you ate too much din-din," suggested Clara, further reducing matters to a mundane level. "It was the second helping of pie that did it."

"Or maybe the mince-pies---five if I counted right," grinned Diana.

"Or the famous trifle you shared with Chloe," put in Leila.

"Or maybe all of 'em together," suggested Jemima dryly.

"Yes, you fell asleep and dreamed it all, fattikins."

Bessie was not convinced, and they piloted her still shaking form through to the cosy little snug behind reception. There they plied her with ginger wine and biscuits, and lots of consoling. Gradually the colour crept back into her fat cheeks, and she managed a ghost of a smile. "Th-thanks, girls, I feel a bit better now. Bib-but I didn't go to sleep, you know."

"No, you didn't go to sleep, old Fatima. And you didn't dream it all. It happened."

"What?"

They turned and stared at Jemima, who had entered silently, clad in her outdoor things. None of them had noticed her departure some twenty minutes earlier, busy as they had been reviving Bessie.

"If thou wiltst gird thyself against the elements---and the descendants of the jolly old hound of the Baskerville---and follow me," invited Jemima, "all will be revealed. Two very important pieces of the jigsaw have now fallen into place. Unless I'm mistaken, only one remains to be found."

"What is she burbling about now?" exclaimed Mabs, echoing the puzzlement of them all, with the possible exception of

Clara, who was beginning to suspect glimmers of light in dark places.

Curious and excited, they followed Jemima through the kitchen and lobby and out of the side door. Confidently Jemima strode across the cobbled side yard, past the old coach house, and into a somewhat tumbledown looking building that appeared to be an old stable with hayloft above. Jemima turned and beckoned.

There was a light inside, a hurricane lamp which stood on an ancient kitchen table, and there was a stifled exclamation. Jemima touched Diana's arm. "I promised that you wouldn't be furious. I wanted to keep the tableau."

Slowly the girls went forward, and saw the two children, a boy and a girl, curled up on an old blanket on some straw. Their faces were shadowed, but very strained, and neither of them moved, except for the protective tightening of the boy's arm about his young sister's shoulder. And then there was a low, ominous growl, and the awful whine that had sounded so scary during the night.

The boy said, "Quiet, Jinny, it's going to be all right."

And then Clara saw the basket near the young couple, and the big shadowy outline of an alsation. Softly and gently she went forward, holding out her hand. "Oh, you darlings!" she breathed. "Oh, look at them, girls!"

There was seven new-born puppies curled up in the basket, tiny replicas of Jinny herself, and the girls murmured their admiration as they crowded round.

"So you were our spookey hound," said Diana ruefully, "and we were scared silly."

"How long have you been here?" asked Babs.

"Two days," said the boy, who looked about twelve. "You see, we ran away---we're trying to get to Gran's in London and---"

"Explanations can wait," ordered the Firebrand, in her most bossy way. "Let's get you into the house and a hot bath. How long since you ate?"

"Oh, we're all right," he said proudly, "we had a big pack of sand-

wiches and stuff we brought from home."

"I'm hungry. I'd love some tea." The girl spoke for the first time. "I'm so thirsty---we finished the lemonade yesterday."

"Lemonade! In this weather!" Babs looked despairing. "Come on. Will you carry the basket, Clara?"

The little procession made its way back into the house. There, after hot baths and a good meal, Tim and Sally curled up blissfully by the fire and told their story. It wasn't a new one. Their parents had quarrelled: their father had threatened to sell Jinny, and there were no prospects of anything but a very bleak Christmas. So the children had decided to make their way as best they could from Salisbury to London, where they heoped to persuade their grandmother to let them stay with her until things were sorted out more happily at home.

"But we couldn't leave Jinny, you see," explained Tim, "and we didn't realise she was going to have her puppies so soon. We had to stay somewhere, and when we found your old stable, which didn't seem to be used at all, we thought if we could stay for two or three days, just till Jinny had the pups."

"And how did you think you were going to transport Jinny and seven new puppies, in this bitter weather?" said Babs, her eyes tender.

The children shook their heads. Obviously this problem had not occurred to them, and they seemed only too relieved that for a while, anyway, matters had been taken out of their hands.

"We're sorry Jinny disturbed you," said the little girl, anxiously. "We tried to keep her quiet but she didn't understand, and---"

"We were terrified that man would find us," Tim added.

"What man?" demanded Diana.

"The bearded one---he doesn't live here, does he?" asked Sally in a small anxious voice.

"Of course he doesn't," exclaimed Tim scornfully, "not the way he seemed to be messing about with that cable. They were up to something, all right, but we

daren't risk trying to warn you," he sighed. "in case you told us to move on."

"You poor mites," whispered Marjorie.

Clara looked up from where she knelt beside Jinny, stroking the big dog's head as it lay in blissful warmth before the blazing fire. "So," she said on a note of satisfaction, "that proves the link. The brute who nearly ran us down is Chloe's father. He cut our phone cable, according to young Tim here, but we still don't know why. Come on, Jimmy, you said you'd got all the pieces, except one."

"Yes, stop looking so mysterious," Babs exclaimed.

"Well, like Diana, I instinctively felt Chloe was involved in some devious business of her own, but apart from the fact she is a very bad-tempered girl, which didn't prove a thing, I'd nothing in the way of concrete evidence." Jemima paused for once too serious for nonsensical burbling. "Then this morning, thanks to pure chance and dear old Bessikins raiding Chloe's office for---"

"So someone did upset old Ginger!"

"For writing paper," went on Jemima, "on which to work out the jolly old ways and means of feeding the ravening Cliff House horde, and which she happened to drop, and which I, being of a polite and tidy nature, dutifully picked up. I couldn't help seeing, on the reverse of our Fatima's hieroglyphics, a somewhat puzzling communication, apparently a draft of a letter purporting to come from your jolly old pater, Di."

"Let me see that!" Diana sprang up and seized the paper Jemima had taken from her pocket. Her expression changed from shock to white-faced fury as she scanned the typewritten lines.

"So I was right!" she cried. "O all the scheming, rotten---"

"But what is it?" the chums cried.

"It's a draft of a letter to these businessmen who've booked in for this conference. Saying it's cancelled here and transferred to---" Diana stood up. "She's trying to ruin my father. She's--- Where is she? I'll---!"

Diana stormed across the hall, virtually screaming Chloe's name. Almost

though she were expecting the summons, Chloe appeared from the room she used as her office. Her voice was light but her eyes were wary as she asked: "Hello---where's the fire?"

"I'll tell you where the fire is!" raged Diana. "It's right here! I'm firing you! Get out!"

The girls watched breathlessly as Chloe fell back a step before the force of the Firebrand's tirade. Then she recovered herself and smiled scornfully. "You can't do that. You're not my employer."

"You can count me as that in my father's presence!" Diana stamped her foot. "Now get out!" she gritted.

A twisted little smile curved Chloe's red mouth. "You silly little fool. What do you think your father will say?"

"Exactly what my daughter is saying," said a deep voice from the front doorway.

Mr. Rupert Royston-Clarke stood there, brushing flecks of snow from his heavy Crombie overcoat. "I've heard enough. And I know now that you're the niece of one of my bitterest business enemies, and the daughter of his brother who lives a few miles from here and badly wanted to buy Silverthorne. So, Miss Winifred Hortensby," he said calmly, "you'd better leave---unless, of course, you'd prefer to hear that from the police."

Chloe decided not to argue. After a venomous glance at the chums, she flung herself stumbly from the room. Mr. Royston-Clarke embraced his daughter and then held out one hand towards the chums.

"How can I thank you all? Without your help and support of Diana this whole venture would have been ruined. As it was, your message reached me in time."

Babs came forward rather shyly. "Mr. Royston-Clarke, would you help us to sort out this problem, and let them stay for a little while?" Her arms encircled the shoulders of Tim and Sally as she added, "And Jinny---who scared us more than Chloe did."

Diana's father smiled down on them. "I think I can promise that---I'll certainly try."

They were all scarcely aware of the ignominious departure of Chloe a short while later: they were starting a dream of a Christmas with everything the heart could desire.

As promised, Diana's father made a phone call to the two runaways' grandmother, explaining the situation and gaining her reassurances of understanding and her promise to look after the youngsters' welfare until the parents' domestic troubles were settled. Meanwhile, they were to stay for Christmas Day at Silverthorne, and then Mr. Royston-Clarke was going to drive them to London to their grandmother.

Babs and Co. were due to journey up to Yorkshire the day after Boxing Day to complete the hols and see the New Year in with Jemima and Colonel Carstairs at Delma Castle.

When the time of parting arrived it was quite a poignant moment. Diana seemed to have something on her mind. Suddenly she grasped Babs' hands. In a voice distinctly subdued for the Firebrand, she said awkwardly: "Babs---I know we've had our differences in the past, and I know you wouldn't wish me to be anything but honest. We've fought and clashed, and I've loved it. But somehow this Christmas has been different." She smiled, a strangely wistful smile from the wilful, tempestuous Diana Royston-Clarke. "Will you remember this---and try not to hate me too much when I forget, my enemy-friend?"

"I'll remember," Babs said softly, and impulsively she hugged that strange, stormy girl. "If you will promise not to forget."

"I promise," said Diana.

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THE GREYFRIARS CLUB first established in February 1977 to give more personal direct encouragement and feedback to the publishers of the beautiful reproductions of the **MAGNET & GEM** (and allied magazines) by means of club meetings at which members could personally meet the publisher and discuss further new reproductions, and which club is now in its **11th YEAR OF QUARTERLY MEETINGS** many of which have been attended by our Hon. President Howard (Bill) Baker, and Miss Edith Hood (Hon. President of **FRANK RICHARDS MUSEUM & LIBRARY** trustees); - have great pleasure in extending **THE HEARTIEST CHRISTMAS GREETINGS** to our Presidents and to all hobby connoisseurs of goodwill and integrity everywhere, not forgetting our editors of the C.D./A.'s. As always membership of the club **IS COMPLETELY FREE** - see announcements C.D.A. 1986/6, pages 112/128.C.D. March 1980 page 24 etc.

The next meeting of the club will take place on Sunday, 27th March 1988 at 2.00 p.m. at **KINGSGATE CASTLE** Kent, near the home that our Frank Richards and Miss Edith Hood his housekeeper and secretary loved so well, and where after eight years of club and public viewing at **COURTFIELD** the **FRANK RICHARDS MUSEUM & LIBRARY** consisting of our Frank's full size writing desk, his faithful old **REMINGTON** typewriters and small typing desk and stool, his carved wooden tobacco jar, movie camera and projector, his entire reference library and maps, his collection of **GRAMOPHONE RECORDS OF GREYFRIARS SONGS** and manuscripts, volumes of **GREYFRIARS STORIES** in Braille for the blind, indeed 100's of relics - will be moved to **KINGSGATE CASTLE** for private viewing by appointment by club members making the usual telephoned confirmation of attendance to club meetings, to your elected Chairman R.F. (Bob) Acraman, Secretary & Treasurer of the Club and **CURATOR** of the **FRANK RICHARDS MUSEUM & LIBRARY** and Director **KINGSGATE CASTLE LTD.** Tel. (COURTFIELD) 08956 31025 or (KINGSGATE CASTLE) 0843 6446, (Please write for a copy of the article **THE GREYFRIARS CLUB**, for further information etc.)

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Merry Xmas and Happy New Year for 1988 to all Hobby Friends.

JOHN BARTHOLOMEW

NORTH ROCKHAMPTON, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

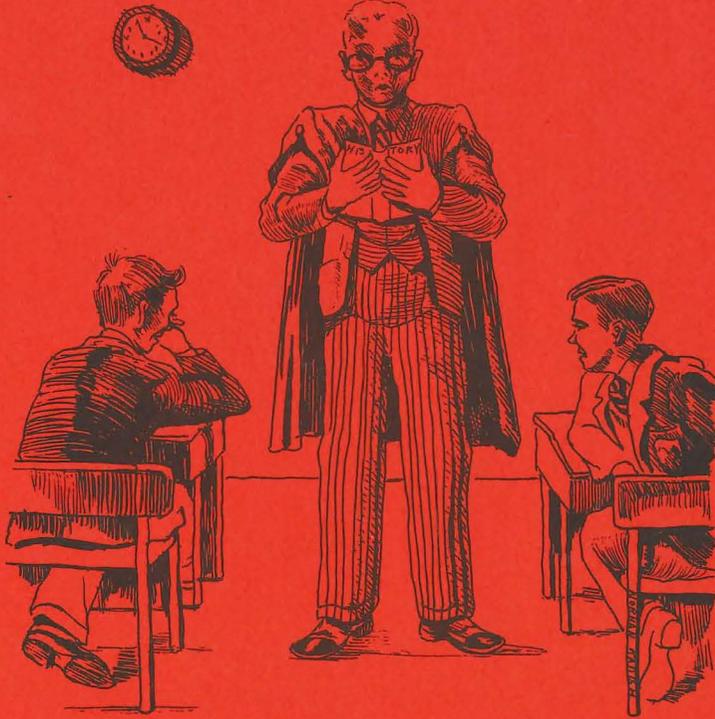


SCHOOL MASTERS REMEMBERED

By Norman Kadish

1. Mr. Moody, the history master and his shiny boots.
2. The revered pedagogue and his religious lessons, flicking each nape of the neck with his gown down the row of pupils.

1.



2.



