

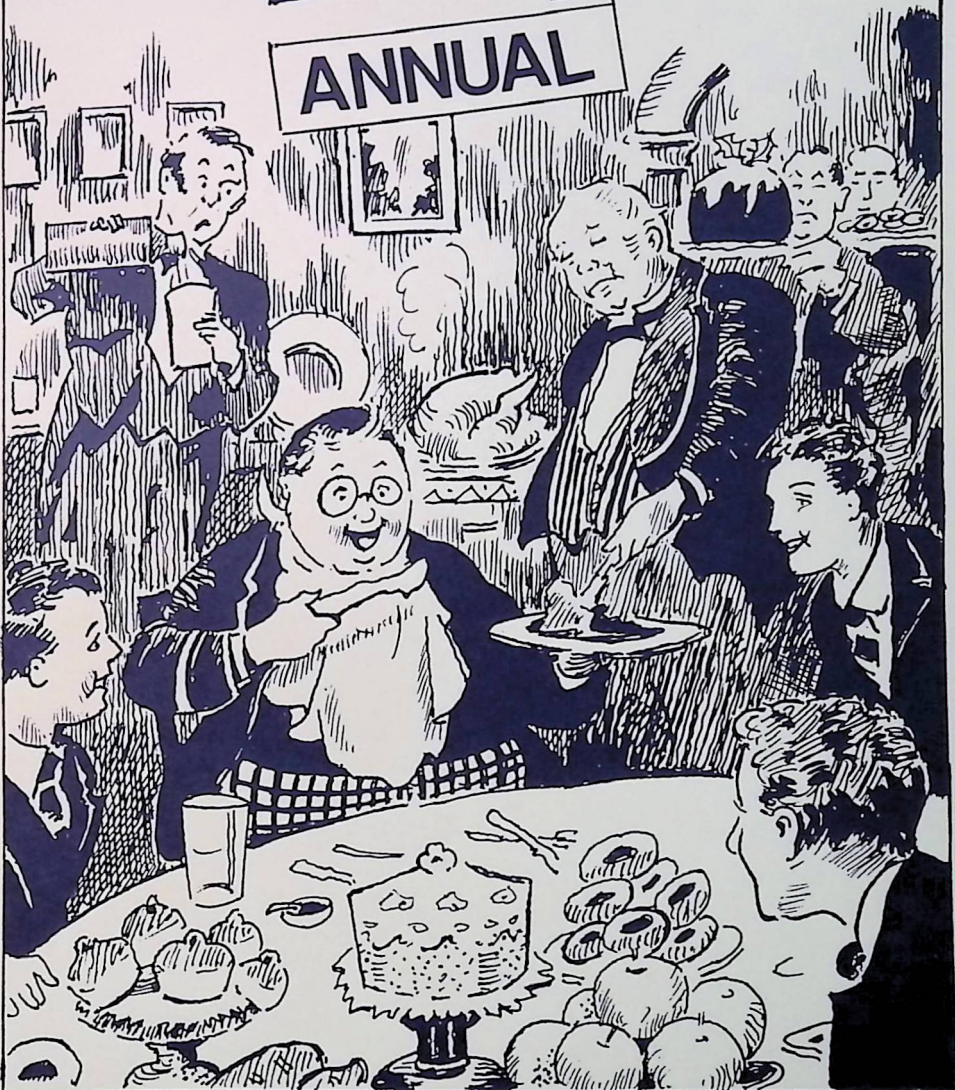
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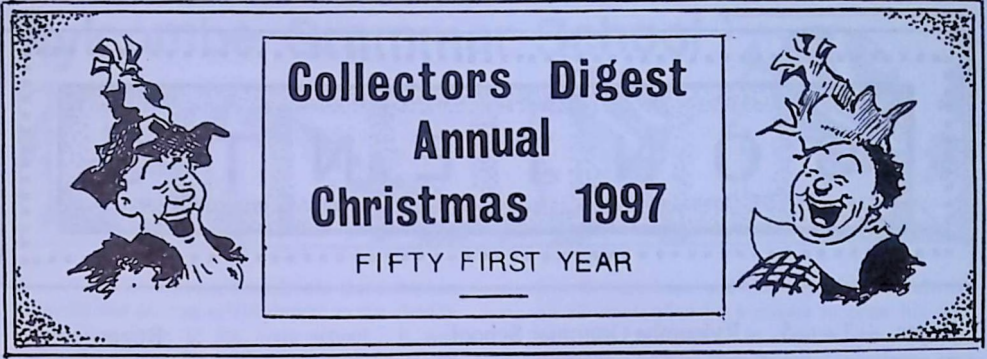
ANNUAL



YOUR EDITOR
WISHES C.D. READERS
A VERY MERRY
CHRISTMAS AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR



The Cliff House chums, drawn by T.E. Laidler



EDITOR: MARY CADOGAN, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham,
Kent. BR3 6PY

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FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

Once again I have the great pleasure of presenting to you the C.D. Annual, and saying - as I do every year - that this must be one of our best ever volumes!

As usual, our contributors have covered a wonderfully wide range of hobby interests from story-papers, books and the worlds of stage and screen. There is something here for every taste, plus plenty of seasonable atmosphere. Christmas is, of course, a time when we think especially of our old and new friends - and those who are sadly absent. This year has seen the passing of two luminaries of our hobby, Eric Fayne and Bill Lofts. Many tributes have been paid to them, and I would like to dedicate this year's Annual to their memory, in thanks and gratitude.

As always, I wish to thank the ever-willing and helpful staff of our printers, Quacks, who work so hard on our behalf throughout the year, and to see that this Annual is typed and printed in good time for Christmas. I must also thank our many contributors. We are surely blessed in having so many enthusiastic writers of stories, articles and poems. Once again our 'resident' artists Henry Webb and Bob Whiter have provided warm and glowing pictures to enhance the Annual. Our special thanks are due to them - and you will see that I have also used again two of the fine and nostalgic Christmas cards that the late, great Terry Wakefield drew for the C.D. and its Annual. We salute his memory, and happily recall the illustrations of Laurel & Hardy and others which he and his father, George Wakefield, made for *Film Fun*, as well of course as George's Rookwood pictures for the *Boys' Friend*.

It remains for me to thank all of you C.D. readers for your tremendous loyalty and continued support. As always, I send you the age-old wish, **A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!**

Mary Cadogan:

C O N T E N T S

Pages	3 - 5	Rylcombe Grammar School	Roger Jenkins
Pages	6 - 9	Christmas with Rupert	John Beck
Pages	10 - 13	John Gordon Brandon	Bill Bradford
Pages	14 - 17	Variations on a Screen	Ernest Holman
Pages	18 - 22	Christmas Gaudy	Anthony E.L. Cook
Pages	23 - 27	The Female of the Species (or Oppenheimer's other women)	Donald V. Campbell
Pages	27 - 30	A St. Jim's Story Recalled	Leslie S. Laskey
Pages	31 - 38	The Silent Three & The Christmas Imposter	Marion Waters
Pages	38 - 40	The Colour Purple: Charles Hamilton and Politics	Una Hamilton Wright
Page	41	Colin Crewe	
Page	42	St. Frank's Magazine	
Pages	43 - 44	Success by Design	Reg Hardinge
Pages	44 - 47	The Mystery of Forest House	Bernard Thorne
Pages	48 - 50	The Master Mummer	Bob Whiter
Pages	51 - 59	Bunter's Christmas Probation	Leslie Rowley
Page	60	Greyfriars, Rookwood & St. Jims Quiz	Bob Whiter
Page	61	Colin Crewe	
Pages	62 - 65	Various Parties Converging on the Sea, In Various Places	Derek Hinrich
Pages	66 - 67	Greyfriars Pictures in the Fire	Ted Baldock
Page	68	Happy Hours	
Pages	69 - 74	A Kipper in a Murder Book: or An Obsession with Words, Part Two	Brian Doyle
Pages	75 - 90	The Menace that Threatened Smithy's Christmas	Margery Woods
Pages	91 - 97	The Capers of Cutts	Peter Mahony
Pages	98 - 101	The Crystal	Dennis L. Bird
Pages	101 - 105	A Fan and a Friend	Tommy Keen
Pages	106 - 111	Gotcha, Joan Inglesant!	Ray Hopkins
Page	111	Answers to Picture Puzzle	
Pages	112 - 118	Greyfriars and the Epic Tradition: Echoes of Homer and Vergil in the Writing of Frank Richards	Andrew Miles
Pages	119 - 122	Rockfist Rogan, RAF - The Boxing Biggles	Des O'Leary
Page	124	The Greyfriars Club	

Rylcombe Grammar School



Each of Charles Hamilton's three famous schools had another establishment in the vicinity to act as rivals to the main school. It was appropriate that St. Jim's, as the oldest of the three schools, should be the first to have a rival, this being Rylcombe Grammar School. Of course, there are a number of grammar schools whose existence can be traced back through the centuries, but their main function was almost invariably to provide a similar education for day boys. This distinction seems to have been overlooked by Charles Hamilton, because Rylcombe Grammar School was intended to be a boarding school exactly like St. Jim's.

It is also clear that Rylcombe Grammar School was of very recent foundation. It was first mentioned in November 1907 in the 3d Boys' Friend Library No. 30 - "Tom Merry & Co." Tom says

"Since Dr. Monk opened the Rylcombe Grammar School we've had our hands too full. It was a foregone conclusion that we should start having rows with the Grammar School fellows." "Of course. That's in the nature of things."

"Especially as they've declared that they were going to put St. Jim's in the shade, and make us sing small, and hide our diminished heads and so forth. It was our bounden duty to go for them and put them in their place."

"Right-ho. But it hasn't worked very well. It's they who've put us in our place, instead," said Monty Lowther ruefully.

There were other references to events in the past, concerning the rivalry between the two schools, presumably to provide a convincing background, but none of the events had previously been described elsewhere. This catalogue of disasters was accounted for by the fact that the Grammarians were united, whereas Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co. were all rival groups within St. Jim's, and they found it very difficult to combine against an external danger.

Astonishingly enough, although the Grammar School had just opened, it had pupils of all ages. New schools start with an intake of the most junior age, but the Headmaster, Dr. Monk, had a complete school from the very beginning. The leader of the Fourth was the Head's son, Frank Monk, and his two particular

friends were Lane and Carbody. It is not always an advisable plan for a master to enter his own son for a school in which he teaches, something I know from my own experience as a boy and a teacher. It is a curious fact that the Grammar School trio were balanced by three trios at St. Jim's, since Digby had been removed and sent to a school in Devonshire. The book "Tom Merry & Co." had the usual 120 pages of the time, with no columns, as the printing went right across the page, but even so there was space for a very long story indeed. In this story, Frank Monk & Co. scored off all the St. Jim's trios in turn, and then D'Arcy formed his own group by offering a series of free feeds. His own idea for a raid on the Grammarians was soundly based, but his assistants, all of the calibre of Mellish and Pratt, ran away when danger threatened.

Eventually, Tom Merry managed to unite the St. Jim's juniors behind him, and they marooned Frank Monk & Co. who were having a picnic on an island in the river. The Grammarians agreed to sign a cardboard document admitting their inferiority. Unfortunately, when they got back to St. Jim's, Tom Merry had the cardboard seized by both Blake and Figgins, and it tore into three pieces. Obviously more was to be heard of this.

Two months later came "Tom Merry's Conquest" in No. 38, and this began once again with a description of past events never before mentioned: D'Arcy being captured by Frank Monk & Co. who put a donkey's collar on him and a bunch of carrots on his head (Digby later asked Gussy if he ate the carrots). It was clear that the rivalry was to continue, and the cast was enlarged by the temporary return of both Digby and Marmaduke Smythe, who arrived at the school tied to a donkey, and facing its tail, another of Frank Monk's tricks.

The St. Jim's juniors adopted the system of drawing a leader by lot, but it was not successful: Lowther led them out without any definite plan, got captured, and had to agree to return the Shell portion of the document. Figgins was equally unsuccessful, and the New House part of the document had to go back. D'Arcy was not a leader, but he could not resist the plea of "A Damsel in Distress" who wrote to him. The shy lady with a handkerchief over her face turned out to be Frank Monk, and so the

last section of the document was returned. Marmaduke was the next leader, but his plan was halted by an ice-skating accident. Needless to say, when Tom Merry's name was drawn, he master-minded the plot to get the document back. Incidentally, "Tom Merry & Co." was never reprinted, but "Tom Merry's Conquest" was reprinted in blue *Gems* and again in the reprints of the 1930s.

It was not until *Gem* (new series) No. 2 dated February 22nd 1908 that Rylcombe Grammar School made its appearance in that paper. Miss Fawcett came to see Tom Merry, but she was captured by two Grammar School seniors, Hake and Lucas, who enjoyed baiting her:

"Dr. Holmes's brother, the Bishop of Shepherd's Bush, came down to the school today," said Hake, with a perfectly serious face. "He insisted upon taking Tom back in his carriage -"

"In his carriage?" ejaculated Miss Fawcett. "But I understood that Shepherd's Bush was a suburb of London, and surely the bishop could not come all that way in his carriage?"

"Oh, he never travels without it," said Hake calmly. "It was put on a goods van in the train, you see. Well, he insisted upon Tom's going back with him to his palace to teach him to play diaboló."

The only assistant teacher to be mentioned at Rylcombe Grammar School was a Mr. Phipps, who gave the impression of being unsympathetic, to say the least. At this point it may be mentioned that the *Gem* stories must have been written some time in advance, judging by the delay in mentioning the Grammar School.

No one could deny that the cast at the Grammar School was extremely limited. Frank Monk, Lane, and Carboy seemed decent schoolboys, with no special characteristics, and the two senior bullies completed the named list. All this was due to change, however, for in the Empire Library Rylcombe Grammar School achieved an existence in its own right. It is possible that Charles Hamilton, writing under the pseudonym of Prosper Howard, was influenced by the title of this weekly paper to make sweeping changes in the centre of interest. Three Australians were introduced into the Fourth Form - Gordon Gay, Wootton major, and Frank Wootton. Although Gordon Gay was not immediately form captain, he seized the initiative from Frank Monk, who was pushed into the background. "Gay" has another meaning these days, but even then the idea of Merry versus Gay was a little too much to swallow: it is perhaps the basis for some of the names in the later St. Sam's stories in the *Magnet*, with Fearless, Merry, and Bright.

A reprint of an Empire Library series appeared in No. 235 of the 3d. *Boys' Friend*

Library, entitled "The School Under Canvas". By this time the cast list was filled out properly. We learned of Mr. Hilton, who seems to have been deputy head, Mr. Adams, master of the Fourth, Mr. Mopps the mathematics master, and Herr Hentzel, the German master. Other pupils included Delamere, school captain, and Tadpole, a Skimpole-like boy, without extreme opinions, and Potty Benson, a boy of limited intelligence. Dr. Monk's proposal was that the school should move to Netherby on the Essex coast, and live in tents - and continue their education in a special school tent. For some reason, Herr Hentzel did not wish to go to Netherby and tried to raise difficulties, all to no avail. Equally curious was the arrival of a new French boy, Gustave Blanc, who was known as Mont Blong. Gordon Gay & Co. got permission to meet him at the station because of the *Entente Cordiale*, which places the story firmly in Edwardian times, though the story was not reprinted until August 1913, when it was even more relevant. The 3d *Boys' Friends* had no dates upon them at all, and it is only by tracing contemporary advertisements for them in the *Magnet* and *Gem* that any date can be assigned at all. Anyway, Mont Blong had a lot of disguises in his trunk, which Carter opened, and Mont Blong quickly agreed with Gordon Gay's explanation that he was keen on amateur theatricals.

As might be expected, there was some skylarking when guy ropes were cut and tents collapsed in the night, but the emphasis was clearly on espionage. Lights were seen flashing on the cliffs at night, and a German ship was there to receive the signals. A party of German tourists appeared in the neighbourhood, and Mont Blong found it very significant. He told Gordon Gay that before the Franco-Prussian war, German tourists had been abundant in France, taking photographs and noting geographical details; Herr Hentzel was clearly involved, and there were all sorts of excitements including being kidnapped aboard a German trawler. Of course, there were a number of books on this theme at this time, like *The Riddle of the Sands*, but this story had more pace and varied interest as befitting a story for boys.

Rylcombe Grammar School continued to make regular appearances in the *Gem*, but the rivalry was all good-natured. Perhaps the most typical series was in *Gems* 729-32 - the Wacky Dang series. It began with Gordon Gay attaching a bloater to the tail of Gussy's new overcoat so that he was followed back to school by a pack of dogs, and then changed to mystery when insulting limericks appeared in St. Jim's studies, all composed by Grammarians. The series gained its title when Gordon Gay masqueraded as a new boy at St. Jim's, Wacky Dang, an African ruler, with two assistants (the Woottons). When the Grammarians went too far with a jape on Grundy, it involved Dr. Holmes, and Dr. Monk promised floggings.

Astonishingly enough, the St. Jim's juniors felt sorry for their rivals and devised a scheme to get them off. It all went wrong, and the floggings took place at both schools.

This series perhaps explains why Rylcombe Grammar School never provided any real bite or drama at St. Jim's. Good fun is amusing, but school stories cannot subsist on humour alone. Highcliffe, a later formation, possessed a fascinating cast of characters: the withdrawn Dr. Voysey, the snobbish Mr. Mobbs, the amusing and wryly humorous de Courcy, and the unscrupulous Ponsonby. Ponsonby displayed a wide range of characteristics: malice, spite, cruelty, under-handedness and evil plotting.

When Gordon Gay had contact with St. Jim's, inventive japing took place, whereas when Ponsonby entered the Greyfriars scene electric sparks flew in all directions. This is perhaps the reason why the St. Jim's stories on the whole never really measured up to those in the *Magnet*. To find out which school gives the other the kybosh is never as interesting as wanting to see if Ponsonby's plot to get a Greyfriars junior expelled succeeds or not. If only the cast at Rylcombe Grammar School could have been more varied and Mr. Phipps had not apparently been abandoned as a teacher, the effect would have been vastly different. As it is, we must settle for amusement, not drama.



Seasons Greetings to all. PETER McCALL, WOKINGHAM

Best wishes to Mary and all hobbyists from JACK WILSON (NOSTALGIA UNLIMITED), 19 DUNBEATH AVE., RAINHILL, PRESCOT, MERSEYSIDE L35 0QH.

Merry Xmas, Happy New Year to all hobbyists is wish of STUART WHITEHEAD, HYTHE, YEW TREE COTTAGE, SOUTHAMPTON

Season's Greetings to all friends. Always willing to exchange duplicates.

WANTED: Xmas numbers of Thomson's and Amal. Press. KEN TOWNSEND, 7 NORTH CLOSE, WILLINGTON, DERBY, DE65 6EA, Tel. 01283-703305

Warmest Greetings to all fellow enthusiasts of the "hobby" particularly to Thomson and Westerman collectors. DES AND AUDREY O'LEARY.

To Mary and Alex and all readers of C.D., A Happy Xmas and a healthy New Year. STANLEY R MASON, 37 GEORGIA RD., THORNTON HEATH, SURREY. Tel. 0181-764-9880

Compliments of the Season to all Digest readers. LESLIE KING, CHESHAM, BUCKS.

London OBBC Hamiltonian Library. Two first-class stamps brings catalogue for postal borrowing. ROGER JENKINS, 8 RUSSELL ROAD, HAVANT, HANTS. PO9 2DG

A Very Happy Christmas to hobby friends everywhere. BETTY AND JOHNNY HOPTON, "GREYFRIARS", 6 WELLFIELD ROAD, CARMARTHEN, DYFED, SA31 IDS.

CHRISTMAS WITH RUPERT

BY JOHN BECK

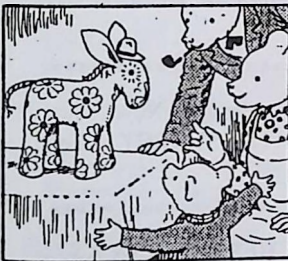


Rupert and the Reindeer—29



Landing lightly the reindeer stands quietly while the friends get down from his back. Golly stables him and then takes the others to a courtyard where Santa Claus is busy putting labels on a huge pile of parcels. At the last moment Golly's courage fails and he pushes Rupert forward to explain his troubles. "Hullo," cries Santa Claus. "Whom have we here? Why, surely it's Rupert Bear from Nutwood. But why is Golly looking so worried?" Rupert steps forward nervously to explain.

Rupert and Ninky—12

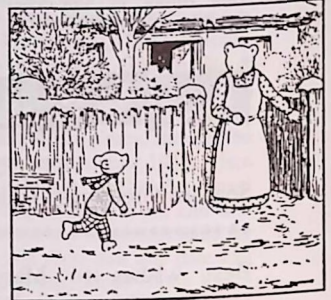


In two days the cloth donkey is finished and Rupert gazes at it in delight. "Don't you think he has a nice kind face?" smiles Mrs. Bear. "He's a fine donkey," laughs Mr. Bear, "but he doesn't look very brainy, does he? In fact, I think he looks a bit of a nincompoop!" "Oo, what a lovely word!" cries Rupert. "I don't know what it means but I shall call him Ninky, for short. I'll ask Bill to call him Ninky, too. Now for some paper and string. I must pack him up."

This article is not intended to be academic but nostalgic, and hopefully will stir happy memories from the readers' Christmas past. I will try to achieve this as much by image as by word, because Rupert and Nutwood have always been very visual, and I know from experience that many a memory is awakened on sight of a picture long thought forgotten.

I would think it to be quite a safe bet that ninety percent of children received a Rupert Annual or Rupert book in their Christmas stocking at sometime during their childhood, probably presented by relations who themselves had warm memories of Rupert being part of their Christmas in earlier years. Some of us still expect an Annual now, and broad hints to one's kith and kin can produce the same positive result as that previously achieved in childhood by letters to Santa or notes sent up the chimney.

It has been well documented in the past that Rupert first appeared in the *Daily Express* on 8th November 1920 in response to the success of Teddy Tail of the *Daily Mail* who had been wooing young readers since the First World War. Mary Tourtel, Rupert's originator, recorded him in the *Daily Express* enjoying Christmas at home after his first adventure in 1920, with a five panel story entitled "Little Bear's Christmas". This was not so much a story but featured Christmassy events in the Bear household and was soon reprinted in one of the four books published by Nelson in 1921/22 and



Rupert and King Frost—1

Says Rupert, "Mother, may I go,
And take my sledge out in the snow?"
"Why, yes," she says, so off he flies,
And Algy with a snowman spies.

Rupert and the Reindeer—30



Between them Rupert and Golly explain the unhappy events before their journey on the back of the reindeer. Santa Claus listens gravely and then the Golliwog fetches a piece of the broken rein. "Ah," says the old man. "I shouldn't have sent you out with this old harness. It's perishing. You're not to blame, Golly, but without my sledge it's going to be hard for me to get round to everybody. If some youngsters don't get much at Christmas this year I do hope they'll understand the reason why."

Rupert AND THE Snow Man : BY MARY TOURTEL

No. 7.—Off to the Party.



Then Rupert finds himself outside :
 He sees a lovely sleigh.
 "You sit in front, then Bill, then me,"
 He hears the Snow Man say.
 "They're waiting for us. Hold on!
 Are you ready? Off we go!" I light.
 The sleigh starts forward down the hill,
 And dashes o'er the snow. I thrill.

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Rupert and the Live Toys—18

That night, as Mrs. Bear is tucking Rupert up in bed, she becomes thoughtful. "I hope you've done right," she says, gently, "but are you sure you haven't let your kind heart get the better of you? Have you thought what Santa Claus may feel about it? He may not like his toys playing truant, and he may be worrying and wondering where his giraffe and hippo have got to." "Oh dear, that's awkward," says Rupert. "But, surely, if we've been kind to them it must be all right." And soon he is asleep.



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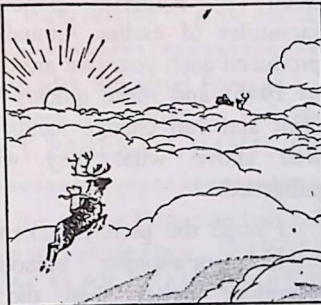
Rupert and the Live Toys—29



When the little friends are satisfied with the letter they all sign their names to it. Then, putting on their overcoats, they run out and the rabbits hoist Rupert up to post it. "I doubt if this is going to bring any result," says Edward Trunk gloomily. "It's terribly late to write to Santa Claus, isn't it? He will have finished his work by now and I expect he's gone to bed." "I do hope it brings the giraffe and the hippo," says Willie, plaintively. "Santa Claus hasn't brought me a toy this year."

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Rupert Meets Santa Claus



RUPERT AND THE CUCKOO CLOCK—18.

High over billowing clouds they fly,
 And there's a chariot standing by.
 It's Santa Claus, by fog delayed;
 He says, "I'm lost, and want your aid."

The reindeer shoots upwards, until suddenly Rupert finds he is out of the fog. Rupert's steed gallops along, and soon Rupert finds himself standing in a sledge and facing a cheery old gentleman. "Why, it's Santa Claus!" he gasps. "Yes," beams the old man, "and I'm in a difficulty. I'm looking for Nutwood and I'm days late. It's nearly impossible to find any place with all this fog beneath one. Do you think you could help me?"

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later in the 1934 Monster Rupert Book which was the early forerunner to regular Rupert Annuals. Most of Rupert's early adventures took him far away from the security of home but he was kept close to Nutwood for the festive season. In 1923 the story was entitled "Rupert's Christmas Tree" and this was followed by "Rupert and the Snowman" and "Rupert's Christmas Adventure". Other seasonal titles were to follow during Mary Tourtel's custodianship of the Rupert canon with "Christmas Thrills", "Snow Babes" and "Christmas Pudding" appearing in the titles to indicate the flavour of the content.

When Mary retired during 1935 the Rupert reins were handed over to Alfred Bestall. He had already spent the previous ten years providing illustrations for children's books, along with his adult work for *Punch* and other society magazines that were popular at that time, so had a considerable affinity with a young readership. He introduced a number of seasonal characters who were to reappear in Yuletide stories. As well as Father Christmas, who often called on Rupert to help him when there were problems over the festive season, we get to meet Jack Frost and his sister Jenny, animated Snowmen and Santa's helper, Golly. Golly's involvement was short lived as he was replaced in the 1950s with a cowboy, no doubt to avoid criticism from the political correctness movement that was making its mark on children's literature of the day. I seem to remember it was around this time that Toytown in Enid Blyton's Noddy stories was de-Gollied.

Bestall introduced Christmas stories of considerable imagination with "Lost Presents" and "Ice Flowers" to sit alongside the traditional snow and sledges.

The Rupert Annual as we now know it first appeared in 1936 and always

featured a Christmas story that had earlier appeared in the daily paper. From 1940 the story pictures were in full colour which helps to enhance one's memories of particular adventures more vividly. I can still remember first seeing the colourful pictures of the Ice Palace in the sky, and the snowman in top hat flying through the air with Rupert (surely this inspired Raymond Briggs to write and draw his classic story) as well as wishing I had a magic toy like Ninky. These are images I've included, along with others of different periods for those of you of alternative vintage. Perhaps one will remind you of a Christmas past.

The Rupert Annual still appears today in similar format to those of the past 60 years. John Harrold is the current artist who continues the Rupert saga in the traditional style. The Rupert Annual has long ago seen off the Teddy Tail Annual and others such as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred and the Arkubs, and still sells over 200,000 copies a year, a testimony to the affection earlier generations feel for the Bear, as it is often these Fathers, Mothers, Aunts and Uncles, as well as other relatives, who buy copies to enchant the children of today. The *Express* are very aware that the quality of the Annual has ensured it is a best seller every year and continue to maintain a high standard of production. Such is Rupert's popularity that facsimiles of earlier Annuals are now produced each year (we are currently up to 1945) and these quickly go out of print and can change hands for prices well above what they were when published.

I hope the pictures taken from the original newspaper episodes (they reproduce better than the coloured Annual version) which are used to illustrate this very brief summary of Rupert Christmas stories, serve to recall readers' memories of their youth. If

nothing else, these pictures might inspire you to have a peep inside the current Annual, or facsimile, next time you are visiting your favourite bookshop. Even if you are not tempted to buy a copy for yourself, if you are stuck for ideas for a

Christmas present for a young person, perhaps reading this article might have given you an answer! Rupert has already had 77 Christmasses and no doubt will have many more.

Illustrations are copyright Daily Express.

(John Beck is Secretary of "The Followers of Rupert", a society with nearly 1,000 members who remember, read and collect Rupert books and associated ephemera. For further details please contact him at 29 Mill Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 2RU.)



WANTED: Certain Magnets from 43 to 958, Condition VG. G GOOD, 147 THORNES ROAD, WAKEFIELD, WEST YORKSHIRE, WF2 8QN. Tel. 01924-378273

Seasons Greetings to all but especially members of the Friars Club from ARTHUR EDWARDS.

Happy Christmas and All Good Wishes for 1998 to our Editor and all CD readers. ANTHONY COOK.

Seasons Greetings to all hobby friends from THE BECKS OF LEWES AND PEVENSEY.

Happy Xmas and a healthy and happy 1998 to you all. BILL BRADFORD, EALING.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all. Special thanks to our Editor and everyone who helps keep the Digest going. REG ANDREWS, LAVERSTOCK, SALISBURY.

SBL's second series 695 & 707 still wanted. PLEASE try to help - we are all getting older! Blessed Christmas!! HILLIARD, 45 MOORBRIDGE LANE, STAPLEFORD, NG9 8GR. Cash offered or good exchanges.

Still wanted: SBL 5th series Fontana 1, 20, 22, 23, 27, 28, 30, 31, 38, 40. Best wishes to all CD readers for Christmas and New Year. JOSEPH ASHLEY, 46 NICHOLAS CRESCENT, FAREHAM, HANTS. PO15 5AH

Christmas Joy to our Editor and all hobby chums and readers. Still wanted: Schoolgirls Weeklies with Valerie Drew. MARGERY WOODS, HARLEQUIN COTTAGE, SOUTH STREET, SCALBY, SCARBOROUGH, YO13 0QR. Tel. 01723-365876.

Happy Xmas to all fellow collectors, especially the S.W. Club members and of course our Editor, from "MAC".

John Gordon Brandon

BY
BILL BRADFORD



This author was born in Australia in 1879 but exactly when he came to England is an unknown factor. The 1914-1918 war could be relevant: although a little old for conscription, he might have served as a volunteer and remained over here on the conclusion of hostilities. We know he had experience as a heavyweight boxer but, in view of his age, this was most likely while he was still in Australia.



A New Photo of—
JOHN G. BRANDON
and his great friend, 'K.O.' Punch

*specialy autographed by the popular
author of this week's story for his readers.*

As a writer, almost entirely of crime fiction, he was most prolific and equalled most of his peers, his output being only limited by his death, in Newbury, in 1941. Most stories were set in the West End of London, and his geographic

knowledge of the area was both accurate and comprehensive. Soho and Limehouse were prominent backgrounds and he seemed very conversant with both Italian and Chinese characters and settings.

Before dealing with the actual stories, let us look at the characters who featured in so many of them, thus giving more meaning to subsequent comments.

Detective Inspector Patrick Aloysius McCarthy

Born and bred in Soho, of an Irish father and an Italian mother. He is in his early thirties, tall, slim, good looking and debonair, with an olive skin, black hair and very white teeth. He speaks several European languages and loves a good fight. His success owes not a little to luck and inspired guesswork. We first meet him in *Red Altars* (Methuen 1928) during which book he rises in rank from Sergeant to Inspector.

Assistant Commissioner Sir William (Bill) Haynes

Probably middle-aged, he is a great personal friend of McCarthy and sometimes gets involved in an active part. The two often dine together and discuss cases at the same time.

However, in the presence of others, they maintain a very formal relationship.

Superintendent Burman

McCarthy's immediate superior, who rigidly abides by the rule book. Generally inflexible, though aware of his subordinate's abilities and sometimes looks the other way, especially if he is likely to receive credit for a successful case.

Ronald Sturgess Vereker Purvale (RSVP)

The younger son of Viscount Ebdale (Cabinet Minister) and grandson of the Dowager Duchess of Faulkside. Tall, broad-shouldered with thick brown hair, he wears a monocle in his left eye. A broken nose and cauliflower ear make him look like a prize fighter. He enjoys working on freighters and cattle boats, often in the stokehold. His first appearance is in SBL No. 365 (2nd series) *The Survivor's Secret* on 5th January 1933. In 56 issues of the SBL, by Brandon, RSVP appears in all save No. 734. Also turns up in No. 56 and No. 65 of the *Detective Weekly* and Nos. 216, 520 and 541 of the *Thriller*. This character appears to be exclusive to Amalgamated Press publications.

Arthur Stukely Pennington (ASP)

An identical character to RSVP, even to antecedents. First appears in *West End* published by Methuen in 1933, later in other books by this House, but mainly in those published by Wright and Brown.

Marcus Joseph Gilliver

An international jewel thief with a pleasant and attractive personality. His nickname, the 'Wallflower', could derive from a habit of leaning against a wall while contemplating potential victims, or because a 'gilliver' is a rural name for a

wallflower. He and McCarthy share a mutual respect and liking, as far as circumstances permit. He appears in 20 *Thriller* stories and numerous McCarthy books from Wright and Brown.

M'selle Osaki Du Chane

The 'Wallflower's' companion and invaluable ally. A beautiful Oriental, she usually carries a pistol and never hesitates to use it. Her sister, Madame De Sorais, a Chan princess, is sometimes featured.

'Big' Bill Withers

A London taxi driver who appears in most Brandon stories. He is particularly devoted to McCarthy, who gave him a fresh start and helped to acquire his first cab. He is quite a tough character and is rarely without his heavy spanner, which he puts to good use.

'Flash' George Wibley

A reformed ex-cracksman, who can open any safe. A loyal manservant to RSVP or ASP according to which story. Eyed with suspicion by Superintendent Burman, who does not think a leopard can change its spots.

Let us now look at Brandon's contributions in our field of interest.

Detective Weekly. Just 4 stories. 2 are RSVP.

Thriller. 51 full length stories. Of these, 50 feature McCarthy, 2 include RSVP. Also 5 short stories and 1 serial.

Sexton Blake Library. A total of 56 issues. All RSVP save No. 734.

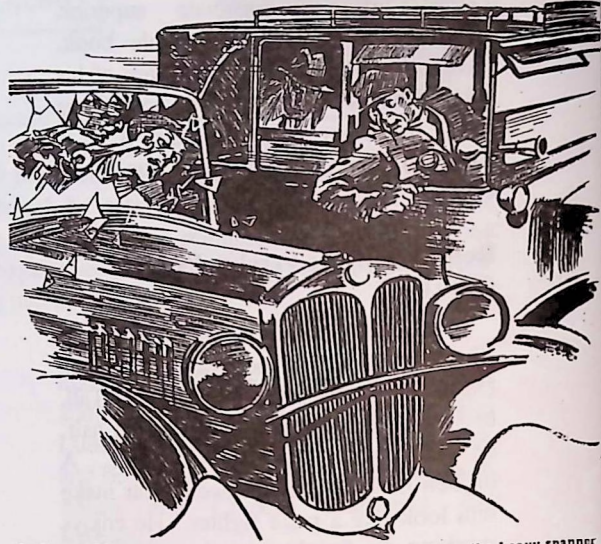
Sexton Blake Annuals. Only that of 1938, "The Unwritten Law" (RSVP).

Greyfriars Holiday Annual (1935) "The Call of the Sea".

Cherry Tree Paperbacks. There were 14 of these (including 2 repeats), all McCarthy.



... the Wallflower turned slowly. "Ah," he said slyly, "our dear little friends waiting the nod from their good, kind master to open fire and rub me out. Well, well!"



As the crook's car drew level with the taxi, Jim Withers flung the heavy spanner clean through the windscreen, so that it caught Vechl on the side of the head.



"Dope-peddlin', by gad!" hissed R.S.V.P., clutching the waiter by the wrist. "This is your finish at that game!"

TIGER-WOMAN!

Mate of a man who lives on danger, fighting like a tigress to protect her lover. Beautiful, mysterious, passionate... fatal! Daughter of the East in the venter of the West
—Osaki du Channe, tiger-woman.
Meet her in JOHN G. BRANDON'S new masterpiece novel:

"TO ACCOUNT RENDERED"

the latest adventure of the Wallflower and Osaki versus McCarthy of Scotland Yard.

"MURDER WILL OUT!" By Roy Vickers

An enthralling new serial, to be published in extra-long instalments, starting next week. The story of a secret agent's lone battle against a sinister arch-crook and his gang of jewel-thieves.

IN "THE THRILLER" NEXT WEEK



Dixon Hawke Library. He is believed to have written for this, but I find no evidence.

Union Jack. I can find no trace herein, rather surprisingly!

Hardback Novels. Of 63 titles, 6 were published in 1942/43, following his death in 1941, and might be from manuscripts in hand. Between 1945 - 1958, a further 10 titles were published by Wright and Brown and attributed to John G. His nephew, Gordon Brandon, had 8 books credited to him between 1947 - 1960, all from W and B, 2 featuring McCarthy & A.S. Pennington. The style was similar to that of his uncle, so could he have written some of the 10 between 1945 - 1958, or were these reprints or rewrites?

Now for a few notable dates in published work.

1924	<i>The Big Heart</i>	Methuen	Humorous adventure (reprinted 3 times in 1924)
1925	<i>Young Love</i>	Methuen	Romance plus.
1927	<i>The Joy Ride</i>	Methuen	Humorous adventure.
1928	<i>Red Altars</i>	Cassells	First appearance of McCarthy C.I.D.
1928	<i>The Silent House</i>	Cassells	Novelization of play written with George Pickett.
1929	<i>Thriller</i>	A/P	Between No. 46 & No. 541 (1939) there were 51 feature stories, only 1 minus McCarthy.
1929	<i>Nighthawks</i>	Methuen	A thriller, with McCarthy.
1931	<i>The Black Joss</i>	Methuen	First appeared as a serial in the <i>Thriller</i> in 1929.
1931	<i>The Big City</i>	Methuen	McCarthy.
1933	<i>West End</i>	Methuen	McCarthy meets A.S. Pennington.
1933	<i>SBL No. 365</i>	A/P	"The Survivor's Secret" introducing R.S.V. Purvale.
1934	<i>Murder in Mayfair</i>	Methuen	McCarthy and A.S.P.
1934	<i>One Minute Murder</i>	Methuen	McCarthy and A.S.P. Also published by Dial Press (USA) 1935.
1935	<i>Detective Weekly</i>	A/P	Nos. 135 and 151, only contributions to D/W. New heroes.
1935	<i>The Riverside Mystery</i>	M	McCarthy and A.S.P.
1935	<i>The Pawnshop Murder</i>	Methuen	McCarthy and A.S.P. Last Brandon story from Methuen.
1936	<i>McCarthy C.I.D.</i>	Wright & Brown	Sole hardback publisher hereafter (50 in all)
1941			Death of J.G. Brandon.

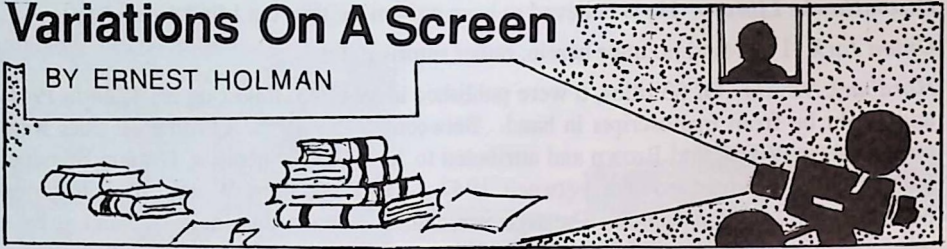
Over the years his stories in the *Thriller* were mainly illustrated by Arthur Jones, noted for his eerie characters, usually in deep shadows with slouch hats and lengthy overcoats. I think all the S.B.L. covers were by Eric Parker (enough said) and many W. and B. dustjackets by P.Micklewright, on whom I am unacquainted.

What can I say of the author and his stories? Perhaps little of interest to connoisseurs of profound crime fiction or those requiring a thrill per page. I am, alas, a very unsophisticated reader and, to me, his stories make for a good read. I first discovered Brandon in the Cherry Tree paperbacks during the war and my interest was rekindled by the late Vernon Lay. If I want a relaxed and easy read at bedtime, I often take a Brandon from a shelf. His style is very consistent, so if you try a couple of stories and don't enjoy them, call it a day! I have complete listings of his output and, if anyone is sufficiently interested, I will gladly send them copies, but I will not take up too much of our Editor's space herein.



Variations On A Screen

BY ERNEST HOLMAN



'From a story by' 'based on a story by' 'adapted from a story by' ... etc. etc.

Familiar words from the opening moments of most films. Adaptations were, probably, the nearest to the truth - but those adaptations were indeed many and varied.

This will be a brief trot through SOME of the published books that reached the Silver Screen. As with anything of this nature, there are bound to be omissions - the list at the side of my typewriter is far too long as it is, and several will hit the 'cutting room floor'.

However, in some form or other, I will take a roam through those 'yarns' that found their way to the cinemas. Throughout this 'work' there will be diversions and side issues, if only to prevent it from turning into a mere list of titles.

Very occasionally did one see 'From THE Story by' ... (my capitals) and perhaps this gives a lead into the first offering. I refer to the Margaret Mitchell epic story and the epic film of *Gone With the Wind*.. (Screen adaptation by Sidney Howard, we were informed!)

I have to walk carefully here, because I have to confess that I was never able to plough through the 1037 pages of the 1939 tome. However, it is still on our shelves, read more than once by my wife - who assures me that the film was, indeed, a very creditable version of this story of the Old South. We saw it three times in the early Forties, but have never been able to sit through the long TV presentations that crop up at times. I suppose GWTW

must be given the distinction of being THE film of all time. (Well, wasn't it?)

Not an easy act to follow, but let us have a short look at one or two versions of Dickens. There were several of these, including repeats (and re-repeats) but for myself I can pick out a couple (there, you see, I am about to exclude poor old Oliver!) '*Copperfield*', even with W.C. Fields playing W.C. Fields, was a good version and a good film. John Mills' '*Expectations*' came not far behind. Others, including several goes at '*Christmas Carol*', never to me 'took off' sufficiently well.

Perhaps Dickens was not an easy writer to lend himself to adaptation - but if that is said, then how do we deal with the Bard of Avon? Not many of Shakespeare's plays got to the big screen. My own favourite, even if throughout it had the appearance of 'tongue in the cheek', will always be *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Olivier's *Hamlet* was very good but a little too woeful at times for me. *Julius Caesar* I did find very interesting. When it was shown on TV some years ago I tried to follow it through with the play in front of me. Not easy to do, as there were many 'left-outs', but in actual fact the adapters did a marvellous job. (Even today, after seeing and hearing many versions of this play, I still lie in ignorance of the correct pronunciation of 'Philippi'.) Perhaps a mention should be made of the attempt at *Romeo and Juliet*. Strange casting in most of the parts, I felt - what on earth were Leslie Howard and John Barrymore doing there? As William S. himself might have thought, 'This is indeed a . . .



Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes

... business."

Sherlock Holmes, probably more than any other character of fiction, certainly hit the screens for many years. My own memory goes back to those far-away days of the silent versions with Eille Norwood. (Clients from Baker Street Station always entered the screen from the right; Lestrade, Gregson and others from the left. So what? - just this,

it proves my contention I have always held, that 221b was NOT on the right-hand side from Oxford Street!) Far too many actors portrayed Holmes without coming anywhere near the real character - perhaps Basil Rathbone was the most successful. Though, apart from the 'Hound', all the others were concoctions.

One or two other Doyle stories came along, but were far removed from their origin. *Lost World*, a splendid adventure story with its own good story, badly suffered not just from adaptation but very much alteration.

Jane Austen was never well served by the screen - the Olivier/Garson version of '*P. and P.*' was spoiled, I thought, by a too-skittish performance of Mrs. Bennet by Mary Boland.

Picked out at random, many books did come off fairly well, even with quite a few amendments. *The Scarlet Pimpernel* with Leslie Howard; *King Solomon's Mines* with Roland Young and Cedric Hardwicke; *Sanders of the River* with Leslie Banks - and a few



Sidney Paget illustration for The Strand Magazine

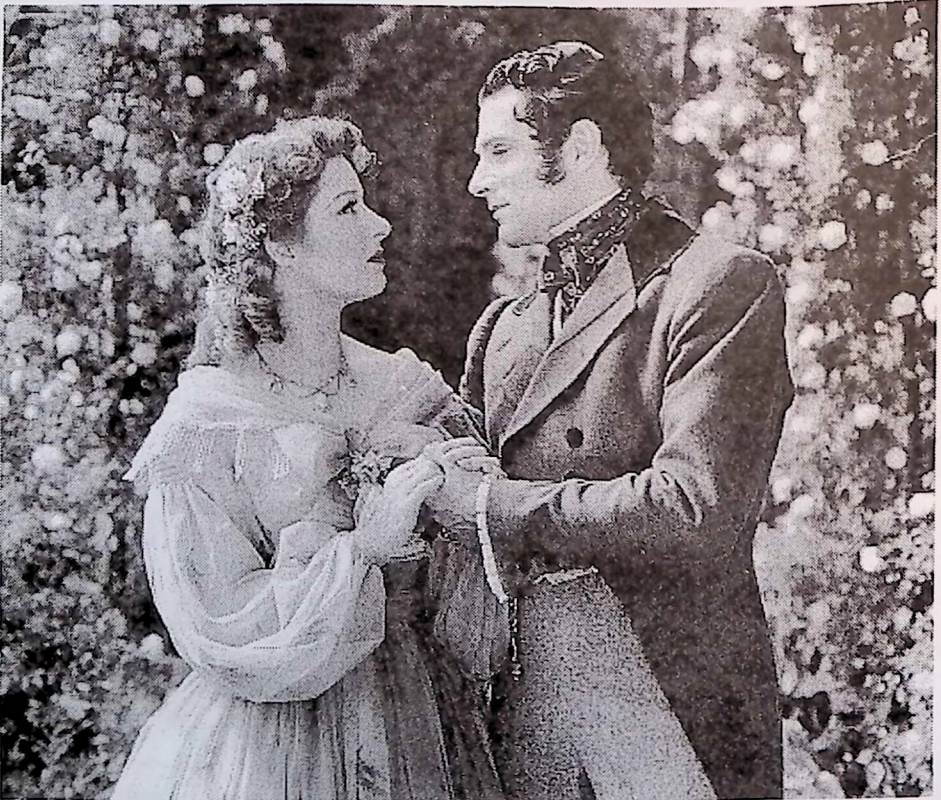
others that came and went.

J.B. Priestley's stories must have taken a lot of hard work before they reached the screen. Always a long-winded writer - a far better playwright than author - *The Good Companions* did evolve into a creditable film, with a splendid performance from Edmund Gwenn and introducing a very young John Gielgud. For me, one of his lesser-known stories, *Benighted*, came off very well after MUCH alteration. With Douglas, Massey, Laughton, Karloff etc. *The Old Dark House* was no end of a good thriller.

Coming to the stories of Edgar Wallace requires much thought. Most of the best books by E.W. were his own stories from plays written by himself such as *The Calendar*, *Frightened Lady*, etc. Most of these were enlivened by a typical cockney part for that great actor,

Gordon Harker. Wallace was also credited with 'having a hand in' the mammoth *King Kong* - although I hope it wasn't he who penned the final line, when Kong had hit the ground. A policeman said to the Impresario "Well, the planes got him in the end", to receive in reply the corniest film line of all time, "Naw, it was Beauty killed the Beast!"

Now I am turning from books to some plays that eventually made it to the big screen. These were mostly successful when some of the original stage cast recreated the role for the cinema. One such would be the splendid version of Noel Coward's *Cavalcade*. Many, of course, did not always do justice to the original theatre performance and I do not intend to give any long list here. There is one I do recall very well, however, perhaps because of the circumstances in which I



Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier in the Hollywood version of *Pride and Prejudice*

first saw the film. In, I believe, the early 20s, a play appeared under the title of *White Cargo*. It recounted the life of a British Colonial Officer in Africa (a 'Sanders' type, in a way). The point of the story was the cracking of the White Man's Burden when he 'fell' for a very nondescript native girl. It could not have been an easy job to find such an actress for the part. Hollywood, however, had no qualms. With Walter Pidgeon playing the British official, the part of the native girl was handed to a 'clothed somewhat' Hedy Lamarr.

The circumstances mentioned under which I saw this film were unusual, though perhaps typical of the times. The film was shown in an Army Camp to all serving members - and to follow the story and conversation was quite impossible. Catcalls, etc. (particularly 'etc.') greeted every exit and entry of Hedy. I know, this sounds very pompous, but there it was. I did finally catch up with the film on TV some years ago. Still, whatever memories of any adaptation from the play may occur, one thing will always now remain - Hedy's Tondelayo!

What other plays or films have I missed? Well, as soon as this is posted to our good Editor, I shall immediately

recall many. Still, there's a good excuse - lack of magazine space, and dimming memory.

One thing I shall always remember about my cinema-going days, is the fact that, whenever possible, I tried to see the main film from the beginning. Sometimes this was not possible, and there was always an unsatisfied air about one after seeing part two before part one and then having to leave, as one often did.

My stroll has now reached more or less the end of its road. I am left with one thought in my mind. Amongst all this film adaptation business, is there a story in itself to be written? How a script came to be written, the 'ins' and 'outs' of the various writers. What then, though - would it be good enough to be turned into a film in its own 'write' or would it merely appear as a 'second-rater' with the opening credits saying 'based on a book by', 'from a book by' or 'adapted from'?

Hold on!

Isn't this where we came in?

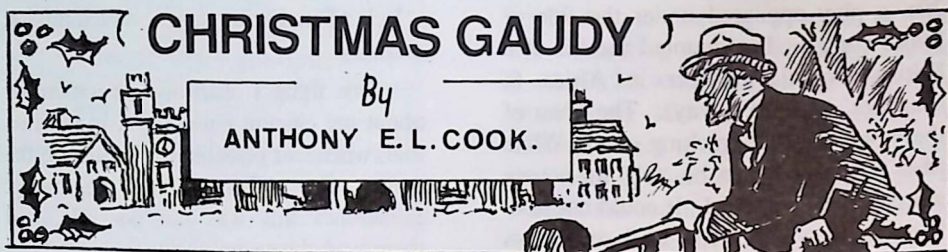
Right!

Time to go!



Greetings to all readers. Still looking for "Under Wolfe's Flag". Thanks to Ray Hopkins I now know it was published by Partridge 1913, author Rowland Walker. ERIC BAINES, 22 HETLEY ROAD, BEESTON, NOTTINGHAM, NG9 2QL

Season's Greetings to all hobby friends. Wanted to purchase: "The Who's Who of Children's Literature" (compiled by Brian Doyle) and any "Boys Friend" Library (2nd series) containing Rio Kid stories. Condition must be good. Please contact NAVEED HAQUE, 215 WYNFORD DRIVE, APT. 1102, NORTH YORK, ONTARIO M3C 2P5, CANADA.



It was a bitterly cold day. As Dickens might have put it 'The weather was cold withal', although on this particular occasion this would have almost been an understatement. As Henry Quelch made his way along the narrow confines of Turl Street in Oxford, the fog thickened as late afternoon turned into early evening. The hurrying figures who passed him were no more than muffled silhouettes against the dimly lit shops, they appeared like midget dragons as the cold air and their warm breath sent jets of vapour ahead of them. It was the 22nd of December 1941 that found the master of the Remove making his way towards Broad Street and Blackwells bookshop. The last half an hour had been spent at Shepherd & Woodward where he had purchased a new academic gown. Not only had he needed a replacement but tonight was going to be a rather special occasion. Mr Quelch was bound for a Christmas Gaudy at his old college. The invitation had included a rather more interesting comment from the Master of College which read 'It will present an ideal opportunity to ask your professional help with an important matter in which both the fellows and myself have agreed that we cannot disregard your standing and knowledge.'

This was perhaps slightly cryptic, but an immediate reply was despatched accepting. The invitation was a great surprise for it was only just over a year ago that Mr Quelch had refused an invitation to join the college staff and, politics being what they were in such circles, the import of the letter was, to say the least, most intriguing. As it happened, the timing of the visit was ideal in every respect. School had broken up for the Christmas vacation and there would be more than enough time to make his unhurried way to Wharton Lodge where he was to be the guest of Colonel Wharton over the festive season. Unhurried was perhaps the operative word, for he had entrained early that morning encumbered with suitcase, briefcase and gas-mask to arrive in Oxford with only just time to avail himself of a late lunch. Having arrived at the Randolph Hotel he had unpacked what was necessary for an overnight stay and, after making a swift toilet, went to seek a light lunch.

The restaurant was crowded, mostly with people in uniform: he therefore decided on a quick walk to one of his old haunts, the Mitre

Hotel in the High. As he left the hotel he noted that the blackboard in the foyer informed guests that blackout time was 5.25: it also gave information about the availability of hotel air-raid shelters if the need arose. To his immense pleasure he discovered that The Mitre was not overcrowded, and, finding himself a table in a secluded corner, he ordered a pre-lunch sherry and proceeded to peruse the menu. It appeared that there was still a reasonable choice of food. Having ordered, he settled down, took a slim volume from his pocket and began to read in the comparative peace of the dining room. It was a rarity for the master of the Remove to have the chance to travel and relax, and at such times he liked to indulge himself. Diners were still coming and going, despite the fact that it was now early afternoon. Half way through his main course Mr Quelch paused to take stock of his fellow diners when his attention was attracted to two smartly dressed women at a table across the room. They were talking and laughing together and as the one with her back to him signalled to a passing waiter, recognition came.

"Well I never" he murmured softly.

The person in question was none other than Lady Elizabeth Carstairs, whose acquaintance he had made at Wharton Lodge the previous Christmas. As he continued his lunch, wondering what had brought Lady Carstairs to Oxford, his attention was switched to the latest newcomer who, having looked around the dining room, seated himself in the opposite corner but whose attention seemed to be centred very much on the two women.

Mr. Quelch was surprised to realise that the newcomer was none other than Dr Erich Schnabel, a Professor of Mathematics who had been a contemporary of his in college. In a contemplative mood Mr Quelch ordered his sweet and coffee, abandoning his book in favour of taking an interest in the movements of Schnabel and Elizabeth Carstairs. He was more surprised to see Schnabel abroad in Oxford, for he knew that at this particular time the authorities had some rather strong views on persons of German origin. As his coffee was served the two women rose and made their exit. Although the master of the Remove would have liked to make his presence known, his annoyance was stemmed by

the fact that Dr Schnabel also rose from his table, thrusting a note into the hands of a waiter and hurrying after Lady Carstairs and her companion. Before Mr Quelch could make up his mind whether he was making too much out of a simple situation, another figure suddenly appeared in an equal hurry, dashing out from what he presumed was the kitchen area with hat and coat in hand. As he turned to speak to the waiter Mr Quelch saw him full face and recognised him as none other than James Soames.

This improbable state of affairs took his breath away. Perhaps, he told himself, it was all coincidence, yet he felt that something strange was being enacted. It was a perplexed and slightly shaken Henry Quelch who left the Mitre and made his way down the High that afternoon. And so having done his shopping and browsed in a number of second-hand bookshops, he found himself in the murk of early evening making for Blackwells. The Master had said in his letter 'Come late afternoon and join me for tea about an hour or so before dinner'.

By the time Mr Quelch presented himself at the porter's lodge he had convinced himself that because of the added pressures of work at school and the sudden relaxation of the vacation his imagination had run riot; his newly acquired aptitudes for seeing and analysing strange happenings were merging to create a situation that did not exist. As he made his way to the Master's room he began to feel more relaxed, more at ease with himself, feeling both solace and pleasure walking through the corridors he remembered so well which brought back so many happy memories. Reaching the Master's study he knocked and was bid to enter. The Master, Professor Rowland Harris, rose from behind his desk, a broad smile on his face, hand extended in welcome.

"Henry, how good to see you again my dear fellow. It has been a long time, far too long."

The two men shook hands and were soon reminiscing in front of a welcome fire. Having spent their years in Oxford together there was enough to keep the conversation going for some time. As a college servant entered, bearing a tray containing tea and hot buttered crumpets, the Master was saying: "You know, Henry, I always thought of you in my position here, after all you were one of the workers. I also had the distinct idea that you thought a good few of us to be a lot of unruly pranksters".

Mr Quelch replied with a smile, "I think it is all a matter of make-up, Rowland. After all, similar criticism was levelled at Buchan at Brasenose, he survived".

"Ah, tea. I thought I would revive another memory of yours, for Preston here managed to get some crumpets, no questions asked. Thank you Preston, well done".

The servant acknowledged the Master with a secretive smile and a nod of welcome to his visitor. When tea had been served the two men sat comfortably, savouring the hot crumpets. The Master of the Remove's thoughts went back to his early days; this kind of fare was a special treat, even then. Many was the time on cold winter afternoons when he had sat with friends, enjoying a companionable tea, sometimes when funds permitted with crumpets, at other times with whatever was at hand.

"Now Henry," the Master began, "I must apologise for not having been able to put you up in college for the night".

At this a half eaten crumpet was waved in the air. "Please Rowland, think nothing of it. I do realise how difficult such arrangements must be in these trying times."

Rowland Harris nodded his acknowledgement. "Thank you. Now we are up to date with each other's progress, let me tell you about the project I have in hand. Oxford University Press have asked me to consider a new series of classics. They feel that an update is necessary. That is, an updated version annotated by authoritative people. Such volumes will include amongst others the works of Aeschylus, Vergil and Horace." There was a sudden gleam of interest in his companion's eyes. "The general idea is that they will be issued as they are completed, but limited to two in any one year until such time as the paper shortage allows for more. The college will have its name as the foundation to the series with due acknowledgements to those who are annotating them. All profits, of course, will come to the college. You, Henry, were one of the first people who came to mind, and I am offering you first choice to start the ball rolling. The question is, have you the time and inclination to tackle such a daunting task?"

Again a half crumpet waved in the air. "My dear fellow, this is indeed a surprise, a most pleasant surprise. Of course I shall be delighted to undertake such a task. Indeed my time has been taken up with matters beyond my academic work, but I feel that I would be able to fit something along the lines you suggest into what will be my relaxing periods." Rowland Harris sighed. "Good, I was hoping that you might agree. Your reputation goes before you in this field. Now perhaps you will give the matter some immediate thought and fit in a short meeting here tomorrow morning before your departure. Gwyn Thomas will be here, I think you know him. Oh, and there will be a representative from OUP coming round."

"I look forward to meeting Thomas. He is one of your own I believe?"

"Yes, he has been with us for the last ten years or so. I feel certain that he is desirous of meeting you. Now shall we leave the matter for the

moment. I must quickly explain the Gaudy dinner. As there are so many restrictions at the moment, it has been impossible to hold our annual Gaudy for a number of reasons. Ethical considerations, food, staff and the fact that the numbers both at college and university in general are so depleted. We therefore, the Fellows and the students, have agreed on a Christmas dinner with a get-together and dance in the great hall afterwards. It has also been agreed that we should invite past and present students from Somerville. Miss Darlington, the Principal, thought it a good idea for she too has put off any idea of any celebrations this year. You, Henry, will join me on high table for dinner and I shall quite understand if you wish to leave after the meal, for we shall meet again in the morning, at, say, ten o'clock."

"I shall be honoured Rowland, thank you for your kind consideration."

"Now my friend, I have a few items to attend to before dinner. The food, by the way, was begged and augmented. Some from our own supplies, some from Somerville and some by courtesy of our college suppliers. There should be ample to go round."

Both men rose from their seats by the fire. "By the way, I am quite sure I saw Erich Schnabel over my lunch. Is that possible?"

"Why yes indeed, very possible. Poor old lad, due to his background he has to report to the local constabulary each month and we have to inform them of any special visits he makes outside the city. A very sad state of affairs. You knew him of course."

Mr Quelch nodded. "Yes, a very capable man in his field."

"Quite so. Now you must really excuse me, Henry," Rowland Harris said briskly. "Feel free to stay here until it is time for dinner; academic robes will be worn of course."

"I have brought mine. I could hardly conceive that you would not adhere to tradition." As the Master made to leave he smiled broadly. "No, we were always sticklers for tradition. Oh! On my desk is a list of visitors, with the top-table plan also. Feel free to look over it." With that he departed.

Mr Quelch availed himself of the list and proceeded to go through the names. His interest was suddenly quickened as he scanned the list headed "Somerville", making him exclaim to himself, "Well I never". He read the entry - Lady Elizabeth Carstairs (née Throgmorton) M.A. (Oxon) Hons. There was no denying that he thought highly of the lady in question but up to that moment he had had no idea how highly qualified she was in the academic field, and he felt pleased at this revelation. At the same time, however, knowing that she was now engaged on something secret and of national importance, he

had renewed misgivings when he recalled what he had seen over his lunch. The introduction of Dr Schnabel in particular worried him, let alone the sight of James Soames. The college servant returned to clear away the tea things. That was the last thing the master remembered, for he dozed in front of the fire. When he awoke he realised that he would have to hurry his toilet and make his way over to the dining hall quickly. The age-old tradition was that those who sat at high table processed to it, the rest of the company standing until the college chaplain had pronounced grace.

Seated at last, having observed the ritual, Mr Quelch found himself sitting on the right of the Master while to his left, slightly to his discomfort, he was flanked by a charming member of staff from Somerville. It was a consolation, therefore, to find that she was a classics lecturer and that they had a great deal in common. In between some stimulating conversation from either side of him he found time to take stock of the tables below him. He spotted Lady Carstairs and her companion from lunch chatting animatedly while he knew that Dr Schnabel was sitting quite near him on the high table. The meal proved to be first class; this and a combination of good wine (no doubt hoarded in the college cellars) and equally good conversation made any immediate worries fade into the background.

The meal drawing to its close, silence was called while the Master announced that the college gates would close at eleven, and instructed the assembled company concerning the whereabouts of air raid shelters, should the need arise. He also asked that they should respect the blackout precautions. As he resumed his seat Mr Quelch saw Elizabeth Carstairs leave hers, making for the main entrance. Almost at the same time the figure of Dr Schnabel rose from his seat a few yards from the form master and appeared to follow suit. Immediately an alarm bell rang in his mind. Making hurried excuses Mr Quelch followed as fast as decorum allowed. Once down the steps and outside he turned into the cloistered walk which surrounded the quadrangle, seeing two dim shapes ahead of him. The fog had lifted but the atmosphere was colder still. The moon shone out of a sky interspersed with fast-moving cloud but allowing him still to make out the shapes he had seen. Neither was from the company he had just left, for he could make out quite clearly that they were wearing hats. As quickly as the mystery men appeared they were swallowed up in the darkness.

Mr Quelch came to the main entrance; walking silently, he made his way along the dimly lit corridor. Coming to the Master's study he was surprised to hear voices. He paused to listen and from the study, whose door was slightly ajar, he heard the voice of Dr Schnabel: "My dear lady, do you really think that Germany can be beaten?"

Quelch did not wait to hear a reply but made to go in. As he did so he felt a hand grip his arm. "I think it would be better if you did not enter that room, sir."

Turning he came face to face with a now familiar figure. "I think," said Mr Quelch, "that Lady Carstairs may be in trouble, Mr Soames. It would appear that Dr Schnabel is with her."

"Indeed he is, sir, but I repeat, I think it far better if you leave well alone."

"And what about the other two?" asked Mr Quelch. Soames came a step nearer, his voice still low. "You have me at a disadvantage, which other two? No doubt you saw two of tonight's guests."

"They were both wearing hats, they were certainly not from the hall" the master countered. There was a sharp intake of breath from Soames. "Very well."

Soames knocked at the door and entered. "I want Mr Quelch to stay here with you for the moment. I suggest that you lock the door when I have gone." To Mr Quelch's surprise Lady Carstairs did not hesitate with her reply. "Very well, Soames. Please let me know if anything is amiss." With that James Soames left, closing the door behind him. It was locked immediately by Lady Carstairs, who, it appeared, seemed to be in complete charge of the situation. Turning to her visitor she said with a charming smile: "Do come and sit down Henry, it looks as though I have a bevy of minders tonight. You know Dr Schnabel I think?" A rather bewildered Mr Quelch nodded, and shook hands with an equally bewildered old friend. "Indeed I do" he said.

"Ah! yes, we were students together a long time ago, were we not, Henry?"

When the master of the Remove had seated himself Elizabeth Carstairs chuckled: "It seems that you are now involved with this affair, Henry. It is only fair to offer you an explanation. You see I am involved in a very secret project, the substance of which must remain under wraps. It does however bring me to Oxford to request the help of Dr Schnabel here. He is, as you know, involved in higher mathematics and is also a master of his native language, German. I have been sent here to ask him to help our government."

"And I", interrupted the doctor, "have agreed to help." Mr Quelch removed his spectacles, a sure sign that he was embarrassed. "In that case, my dear Schnabel, I owe you an apology."

"Why an apology?" the doctor asked with a puzzled look.

"Because Henry thought the worst, I think," said Lady Carstairs. "You see, he saw the little charade at lunchtime. Oh yes, I did see you, Henry, but it was neither the time nor the place to acknowledge you. It was an arranged meeting to

set tonight's assignation. That is the way things work."

There was a sudden rush of feet outside and a loud knocking at the door. Elizabeth Carstairs signed to the two men to remain seated. Going over to the door she called out: "Is that the wine waiter?" To which the reply came: "No madam, we are out of wine."

The door was unlocked to admit a large and very capable-looking man in the white coat of a waiter. He was introduced. "This is Sergeant Lofthouse, gentlemen."

"Mr Soames asked me to tell you that the two men have been located and they have been apprehended. They will cause you no harm now."

"May one ask who they were?" Mr Quelch ventured.

"We are not sure yet, sir, but if they were innocent they put up quite a fight when we cornered them."

The sergeant left, and Lady Carstairs turned to Mr Quelch. "You seem to have done it again, Henry. I fear partly for the wrong reasons, but it seems that a nasty confrontation has been avoided. Heaven only knows what might have been their objective." As she passed, she laid a hand lightly on Henry Quelch's shoulder. "At least I know that I shall have someone with my safety at heart over Christmas."

"You will be at Wharton Lodge over the festive period then?" he asked somewhat superfluously.

"All things being equal," came the reply.

Mr Quelch appraised the striking figure of Lady Carstairs sitting there in her academic robes, her eyes sparkling, and thought how much had been crammed into his visit to Oxford. It had been full of surprises and he felt very content with the outcome on all fronts. The three of them sat and talked about things in general until they were joined by the Master, who did not show the least surprise at seeing his old friend. "I see that you managed to get yourself involved in this affair, Henry?" Before Mr Quelch could reply he continued: "It's all right, I know something of your sleuth-like escapades. You see Elizabeth and I and her husband are old friends."

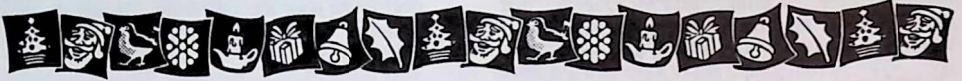
After further conversation, and after a welcome nightcap, the four of them went their various ways. Not, however, before Soames had reappeared to accompany Lady Carstairs back to her hotel. As he escorted his charge away Mr Quelch noticed that his left eye was bruised badly; uncharacteristically, perhaps, the master only just managed to stifle a chuckle with a cough. For a moment his thoughts went to certain of his pupils, wondering how they would react to Soames' involvement in the situation.

The meeting arranged by the Master took place the following morning and it was a more than happy and satisfied Henry Quelch who then made his way from Oxford to spend Christmas at

the place where he always most enjoyed it and above all to make a start on the pleasurable task which lay ahead. As the Master had commented when they parted company: "There may be no financial reward, Henry, but your reputation will

be enhanced and, between ourselves, a Fellowship would not be out of the question."

Wharton Lodge was to welcome a very happy guest for Christmas.



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Dunno wot would 'appen she said with a smile
If I didn't read Bunter once in a while.
Really I said does it matter that much?
I'm ninety she answered an' don' need a crutch.
OK I'm fat, and gobble like Billy,
Cackle, tell lies, scorn folks willy nilly,
But them stories give 'eart, a lot to be said.
If I didn't read Billy I'd be ruddy dead.

Happy Xmas, JOHNNY BURSLEM.

Very Best Wishes for a Happy Christmas and New Year to Mary, Bill, Chris, Laurie, Les and Mac and all hobbyists. JOHN BRIDGWATER, 5A SAULFLAND PLACE, HIGHCLIFFE, CHRISTCHURCH, DORSET, BH23 4QP.

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The Female Of The Species

(or OPPENHEIMER'S OTHER WOMEN)

By

DONALD V. CAMPBELL.



There has always been that odd notion going around that our forebears did not know about sex. The same hoary old saw comes up with each succeeding generation. But we all know differently, don't we? Nevertheless it was with

some surprise that I discovered - about fifteen years ago - that my hero, E. Phillips Oppenheimer, was noted in his day as a womaniser! Shock, horror, and crikey! But it is not his extra-curricular escapades that will concern us here. We

will look at his other women.

The experience of Oppenheimer (more correctly: experiences) should have given him some insight into the world of women, but it has been suggested that, as a writer, he demonstrated little understanding of the opposite sex. Well, I'm not so sure. We should bear in mind that he was writing thrillers and thrilling romances and detective stories from 1887 until 1942, and that he lived through times of great change for womankind (and mankind, come to think of it). He married his American wife in 1889 and (probably) began or continued a long chapter of affaires from that time onwards. He was still, apparently, "active" in the 1940s (aged 74) - quite close in time to his escape from France with, we fondly imagine, the Nazis in hot pursuit.



His escape - with his septuagenarian wife - if the story were fully told - was more fantastical than any of his narratives.

Anyway, back to his other women. Surely Oppenheim's manner of living and loving (even if his mind was rooted in a Victorian/Edwardian past) must have given him entree into understanding the female mind - as much, that is, as we can understand any other person's mind and attitudes.

He can, I would suggest, be credited with an enlightened approach to his stories about women. He does not use them as the prop for adventures (as Sapper does with the eventually 'vanished' Phyllis). Even Buchan, with Hannay's Mary, might be accused of the same misuse of the female.



Jeanne of the Marshes (1909) has a particular resonance. The story is elevated immediately by the superior frontispiece - in the American Edition (full colour) by J V M Fall. The interior pictures retain the original British artist (the outstanding, and long-lived, Henry Matthew Brock, more usually known as H M Brock). The character of Jeanne is both firm and strong but with the necessary femininity required of the times.

Anna the Adventuress is one of those "twin-sister" (or twin-brother) stories much liked at the beginning of the century. One is naughty, the other is "good". (Not too "prissy" I am pleased to report.) Will the role-switching be detected, will it all come right in the end? And so on. Although a kind of "formula" story, the contrast between the sisters is well handled even if the male protagonists are, as mentioned below, somewhat weak if not silly. Anna is a particularly strong character with the guts to take on her sister's unenviable character and her stage persona - to great theatrical applause in the end.

The economy that has often epitomised publishers may be seen in the re-use of an early frontispiece (1904) as the dust-wrapper for a later cheap edition (c. 1918). In the latter incarnation the dress style has been modified but girl and background remain the same. If you have a winning formula why change it?

Judy of Bunter's Buildings is a much later character (1936) and demonstrates that Oppy was losing his touch - overall that is, not just with female characters. This character is significantly too silly for words. The awkward characterisation is compounded by the author managing to find a combination that places Judy (the silly character) into an even sillier plot. It would perhaps be unfair to use this slip of the pen as justification for vilifying the author and his depiction of women.

Miss Mott (*Ask Miss Mott* - also 1936) gives us a better glimpse of the Oppenheim woman. Can we assume that the particularly successful female characters came not from his pen or muse but from experience? Generally his women - particularly the eponymous heroines - are strong in character yet fully rounded and feminine.

Back to Miss Mott. She runs not so much a detective agency as a kind of advice bureau rather like that seen in *Advice Ltd.* Strangely the weakest character in the book is the reformed thief 'Violet Joe' who drifts in and out of the collection of short stories until he makes his declaration on bended knee on the final pages. Trite? Well, these were not in any way 'pushing back boundaries'.

In the - supposedly - autobiographical *Simple Peter Cradd* 1931, Oppenheim tells a fanciful story of escape from the world to an idyllic seashore existence. Cradd doesn't quite see what is going on with the heroine - who bobs in and out of the story - until he recognises the immense power of true love. Yes, it is a sentimentalised tale but the girl is a strong and determined character. Peter Cradd, on the other hand, is a touch weak. How the suggestion could ever be made that this is an autobiographical story defeats this writer. It is Oppenheim at his most awkwardly convoluted. It was written before his sanctimonious, name-dropping and self-deluding autobiography but shares some of the purple-prosed faults of that book.

Although we are looking at Oppy's women it is worth mentioning that the strong woman, or even the balanced woman, is often set by Oppenheim against a weak male character. This might be in order to intensify the differences. Even when this happens we feel that the woman is a character of strength in her own right rather than as a foil to an indecisive man.

My favourite Oppenheim story, and his acknowledged best novel, *The Great Awakening* (1920), has a crazy (and I do not mean crazy as in "should be committed to an asylum") heroine. She stabs the hero - her husband, or is it really he? - within a chapter or so of the start.

The story has three women fluttering like moths around the hero - Sir Everard Dominie, fresh returned from exile in Africa. They are: the Princess, the Duchess and Lady Dominie herself (gradually awakening from her madness and with love burning afresh for the 'new' Everard Dominie). My 'second favourite' quotation from Oppenheim is in this tale. The Princess believes Everard Dominie to be her German lover of years ago. She makes him kiss her on the lips (rather fast stuff this for 1920). After a pause she cries: "At last. Now I know!" and dashes off to attempt to expose him - or at least that is what we infer.

The Duchess admits to having had a love affair with Dominie years before (her cousin or not!) but now says: "You won't want an old woman like me . . . you will have your pick" or words to that effect. (A thought: is Dominie actually Phillips Oppenheim in disguise - another kind of Great Impersonation?) Meanwhile the mad young Lady Dominie is gradually coming to her senses, but continues to insist that he is not the man he was before he fled the country for Africa. There is a risque element in this story in the uncertainty over the hero's identity. Is he the husband or is he an impostor? If he is an impostor how can Lady Dominie come to love him? If he is genuinely the mad woman's husband is she not loving a stranger? And so on. This is Oppenheim at his closest to woman as sex object. If the husband and wife fall into each other's arms in the end we feel that it is (and was) only right.

Tension arises from the story's ambiguity, yet the ambiguity is almost a



'Ah, but you will not scold me?' she begged. "It is the storm which terrifies me."

creation of the reader rather than an inherent 'stage direction' of the author.

The American edition of the book (Brown, Little, 1925) has illustrations by Nana French Bickford. The Frontispiece shows the 'fey-like' Lady Dominic confronting her 'husband' in his bedroom. (She has popped in via a useful secret-passage!) The wonderful apparition that is Lady Dominic - looking not much more than nineteen years old - is counterbalanced by what appears to be a rather raddled and mustachioed hero of surely more than the 'not yet forty' suggested in the text. She must have been a child bride of amazing youth - after all, he has been in Africa for eleven years.

The villainess of the piece - already mentioned - is the Princess - she of the haughty aristocratic Austro-Hungarian background. She is rather more experienced than the other females in the cast. It is true to say that this book has not only an excellent 'spy/mystery' story-

line but also what amounts to suppressed yet seething sexual overtones. Almost nothing happens between the hero and these women but the temperature more than warms now and then.

You might well ask: "If that was your second favourite, what is your favourite quotation?" It sounds best when viewing the rather odd frontispiece to *The Great Awakening* where a somewhat weedy and bowler-hatted chap towers a foot below the bruiser of a heroine and declares: "Kiss me and I will do even as Ulric would have done".

To use a much misused and overused term - the mind boggles!

Advice Limited (1936) has an aristocratic heroine in the Baroness Linz. If there is a tiresome side to Oppenheim it is his predilection for the titled, both foreign and British. We must excuse him to some extent, for other writers (then and later) suffer from a similar handicap



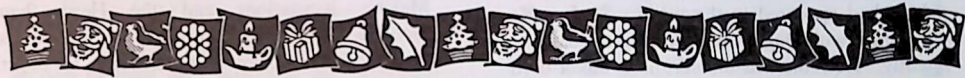
" ' Kiss me,' he said, ' and I will do even as Ulric would have done.' "

The Great Awakening

(Ethel M. Dell, Louis Tracy, Wallace and Wheatley, Horler and Buchan). The Baroness is the main character yet is unsatisfactory both in her supposed social position and in the day-to-day notion of her running a detective agency. She is most awkwardly balanced by a tame poodle of a 'hero' - one Roderigo, who rather fawns on her and becomes a weak assistant in her organisation. As with Miss Mott (written in the same year) the 'hero' declares for her in the denouement to another set of rather unsatisfactory short stories. We must recognise that those days demanded a happy ending, and his final chapters would not allow him too much deviation from the popular norm.

On balance, though, Oppy gives the (then) weaker sex a more than fair crack of the whip. Capable and strong, romantic and attractive, he balances all

the characteristics that make a rounded person. Even if the young Lady Dominie swings between 'knife-in-hand' asylum-fodder to loving mate to the hero, she still catches the imagination in a book that is given over to a spy-melodrama that belongs, mainly, to the male characters. He also gives the female of the species their own opportunities as main characters. The times though were against him. Females 'in their own right' were not welcomed until after the halfway mark in the century. And was Modesty Blaise, for example, typical? I think not. But, after all, she was a cartoon strip character not much more advanced than Peter O'Donnell's 'Jane' before being turned into book form. With all his, and their, faults I think Oppenheim's women offered more than O'Donnell's eponymous heroine.



Recently I read a St. Jim's story that appeared in 1938 in GEM No. 1575 entitled "THE PRICE OF SILENCE". This was a tale that I had found particularly absorbing when I read it then. I do not recall reading it again since, and, even after an interval of almost sixty years, I remembered the basic plot fairly clearly.

The three chief characters in this story were Cutts and St. Leger of the Fifth Form and Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. St. Leger met a shady acquaintance, a young man named Griggs, on a summer half-holiday. Their aim was cards and cigarettes in some quiet spot. They chose a grassy bank in the woods bordering the River Rhyl which turned out to be an unfortunate choice. As they sat playing cards for money, Tom Merry and Co. suddenly came

upon them. St. Leger was startled and annoyed by this interruption. However, the Terrible Three simply passed on their way in search of a pleasant spot in which to have a picnic. They were not interested in a senior's dinky pursuits. Shortly afterwards they passed Major Stringer, a governor of St. Jim's, who was walking through the wood in the opposite direction. They wondered uneasily whether he would see St. Leger. However, there was nothing that they could do about it. They decided to press on for some distance now. They had no wish to become involved with St. Leger as possible witnesses if the Major spotted him.

A few minutes later Major Stringer came suddenly upon the two card-players. He halted and stared at St. Leger, observing his school

badge. The panic-stricken St. Leger refused to give his name but the Major went on his way, noting that the time was just four o'clock and feeling quite satisfied that he could easily identify this boy, obviously a senior, in due course.

The shocked St. Leger made his way back to the school as quickly as possible. On the towpath he encountered Baggy Trimble who spoke to him. St. Leger irritably pushed Baggy out of his way and the fat Fourth-Former stumbled off the bank and rolled into the muddy edge of the river. Back at the school St. Leger waited in a state of gnawing anxiety for his crony, Cutts, to return. He had a desperate hope that the sharp and cunning Cutts might be able to suggest some way out of this scrape which threatened him with expulsion.

Gerald Cutts duly listened to his study-mate's tale of woe. After some thought, he questioned St. Leger closely about the time of the encounter with Major Stringer and what happened afterwards. Had St. Leger seen anybody he knew on his way back to the school? St. Leger said that he remembered hearing four o'clock striking in the village just before the Major had appeared in the wood. St. Leger's encounter with Baggy Trimble interested Cutts greatly. He remarked that Trimble was a born liar and sponger who would swear to anything. Cutts said that he would get a message to Griggs and prime him in case he was questioned. Then he outlined a plan that would make it look as though St. Leger had been somewhere else just before four o'clock. He told St. Leger to go up to the dormitory and soak some of his clothes with water to make it appear that he had been in the river that afternoon.

Cutts then made his way to Baggy Trimble's study in the Fourth. Baggy was alone there and he stared in surprise when Cutts appeared. His surprise turned to astonishment when Cutts proceeded to congratulate him on making a gallant rescue that afternoon at the deep part of the river known as the Pool. Cutts told Baggy how St. Leger had fallen into the river there and got into difficulties and how, apparently, Trimble had bravely gone into the water and held St. Leger up until he had been able to grasp a willow and haul himself out. Cutts then shook hands with Baggy, assuring him that he would now have two friends in the Fifth Form, following this courageous act.

The artful Cutts had sized up Baggy Trimble very accurately. Baggy began to swell with pride. He often boasted when he had nothing whatever to boast about. Now it appeared that he really did have something to

boast about. He had apparently rescued a senior from the river and he already intended to make the most of this. Cutts casually mentioned that he believed that the river rescue had occurred at about a quarter to four, and Baggy, readily agreed that it would have been about that time and added that he heard the three-quarters chime just before St. Leger fell into the water.

Not very hopefully, Baggy asked Cutts whether he would lend him five bob. He felt that he deserved it after he had rescued St. Leger from the river. Rather to his surprise Cutts readily handed over five shillings.

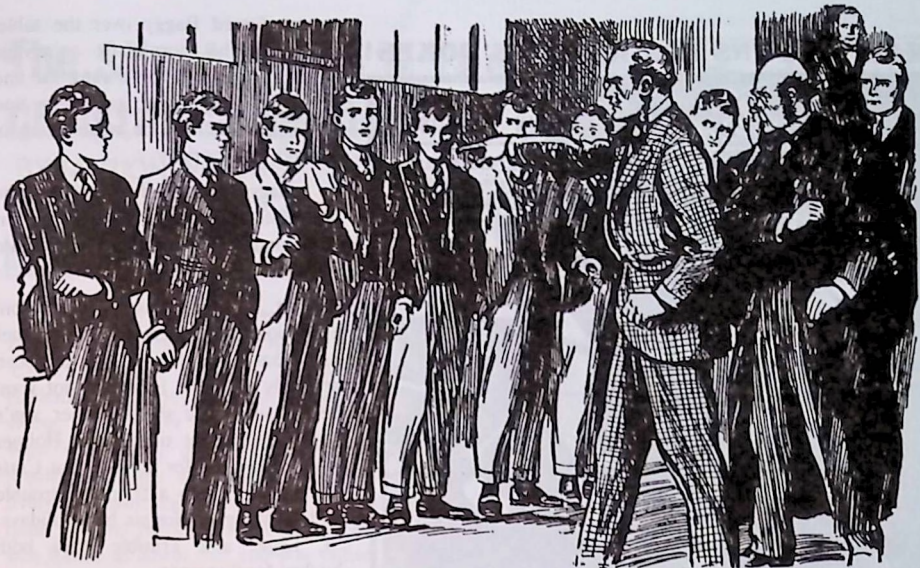
A satisfied Cutts left Trimble's study. St. Leger's alibi was now established.

News of Trimble's "heroic rescue" soon spread round St. Jim's. Few believed it until St. Leger and Cutts confirmed it. Baggy preened himself and talked of it incessantly.

On the following day Major Stringer arrived to make his report to Dr. Holmes. As a result all the seniors were assembled for the Major's inspection and he duly identified St. Leger as the boy he had seen smoking and gambling in the wood. St. Leger denied the Major's accusations and the Head then proceeded to question him closely about his movements on the previous afternoon. St. Leger related how he had gone for a walk on his own along the river bank, some time after three o'clock. When he was asked where he was at four o'clock he replied that he was near the Pool, below the bridge. Major Stringer stated that this was not the locality. He had seen this boy in the wood; above the bridge, at least a mile from the Pool, at four o'clock.

The Head asked St. Leger whether anyone saw him near the Pool and the Fifth Former replied that he had encountered a junior, Trimble of the Fourth. Dr. Holmes instructed Kildare of the Sixth to fetch Trimble. In the meantime Mr. Railton suggested to St. Leger that he relate the circumstances in which he had met Trimble, mentioning to Dr. Holmes that there had already been a good deal of publicity over the matter. St. Leger then proceeded to tell the assembly that he had been carrying a book with him along the river bank. He was looking at the book when he stumbled and fell into the water at the Pool. He then described how Trimble had gone into the river to help him. Kildare came back with Baggy Trimble and Baggy eagerly told his audience how he had rescued St. Leger. When questioned about the time of the occurrence, Baggy stated that he had heard four o'clock strike soon afterwards.

Dr. Holmes felt satisfied now that the



"Let me see your face, please!" rapped out Major Stringer. "I thought so!" said the major satirically. St. Leger started and removed the handkerchief. "It was you I saw gambling!"

Major had made a mistake. For his part, Major Stringer stated that he was far from satisfied but, in the circumstances, there was nothing more that he could do, and he departed.

Cutts and St. Leger were delighted by the success of their deception, and the latter was immensely relieved. Baggy Trimble soon sought out his "new friends" in the Fifth and he was taken aback when he was told tersely to "cut off". Cutts and St. Leger had no further use for Trimble now. Baggy had other ideas. He wanted some money from St. Leger to pay for his trousers which had been ruined by their immersion in the river. St. Leger refused, but Cutts advised him to let Baggy have it, saying that it was worth it. Reluctantly St. Leger handed over the sum of one pound. He was now feeling less pleased and relieved. It began to dawn on him that he was under Trimble's thumb now. He feared that his troubles were not over, after all.

He was right. They weren't.

Baggy turned up in St. Leger's study that evening asking for a loan. He got it after hinting that he might let authority know what really happened on the river bank. St. Leger replied that Baggy would also be in trouble if he did that. Baggy retorted that it would be much worse for St. Leger. He was soon pursuing St. Leger for more loans. The hapless Fifth-Former was obliged to borrow money to keep Trimble quiet. Many eyes saw Baggy speaking to a harassed-looking St. Leger and apparently accepting something from him. Baggy was

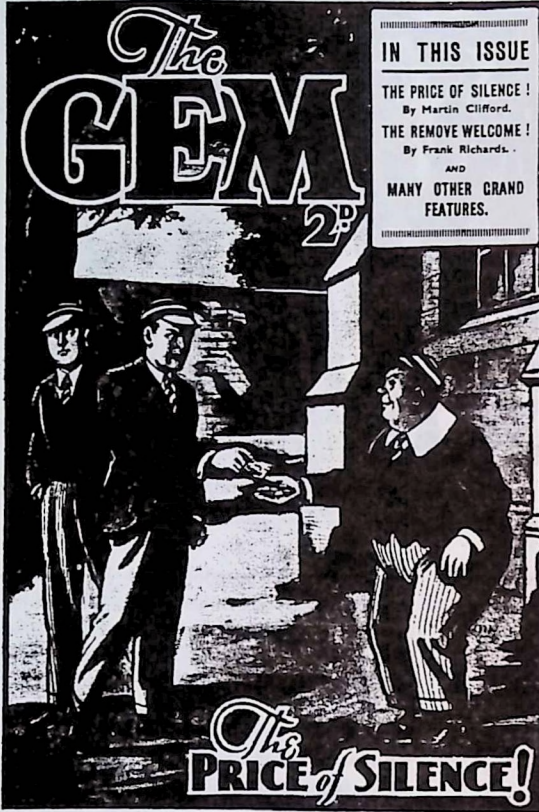
observed to be spending very freely in the tuckshop and suspicions spread that Trimble had some sort of a hold over the Fifth-Former. By now Tom Merry and Co. were certain of it. They had been very puzzled by certain aspects of the affair. They had encountered Baggy themselves around four o'clock that afternoon on the river bank, a good mile away from the Pool. Baggy had been in a wet and muddy state and he had complained that St. Leger had shoved him into the river. He had said nothing about the rescue then. When asked, Baggy told Tom Merry and Co. that he rescued St. Leger at a quarter or ten to four. They remembered seeing St. Leger in the wood at four o'clock and he wasn't wet then. It was all very puzzling.

It was Monty Lowther who suddenly saw daylight. Of course - Major Stringer must have caught St. Leger and this rescue story was St. Leger's alibi to save him from the sack. There never was any rescue.

One morning Tom Merry waylaid Baggy Trimble who was on his way to the tuckshop after visiting St. Leger's study. He was led to a quiet spot under the elms where Manners and Lowther and Jack Blake and Co. were waiting. Tom told Baggy that what he was doing amounted to blackmail. Baggy was bumped vigorously and told that he would get more of the same if he was known to have squeezed any more money out of St. Leger.

Events moved swiftly now, however. Before Trimble could reach the tuckshop, Mellish of the Fourth stopped him and

HALF-CROWNS FOR READERS' JOKES!



No. 1,575. Vol. LIII.

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demanded half of the money that St. Leger had just given him. If he didn't get it Mellish would have something to tell Kildare. It was a case of the blackmailer being blackmailed in his turn! Half of St. Leger's "loan" disappeared into Percy Mellish's pocket. Piggott of the Third then sidled up to Baggy and relieved him of the other half in exactly the same way.

A furious Baggy Trimble went straight to St. Leger's study and asked him for another loan. When he heard what had happened to the previous one St. Leger knew that the game was up. The truth must soon come out now. In a sudden fit of rage he grabbed up a cricket

stump, forced Baggy over the table, and gave his tormentor a savage beating. Baggy's howls rang far and wide and very soon an angry and astonished Mr. Railton was staring in through the doorway.

Baggy proceeded to blurt out the whole story. In due course St. Leger, Cutts and Trimble were marched into the Head's study.

St. Leger was saved from expulsion only because Dr. Holmes knew that his mother had recently been seriously ill. The Head did not want her to suffer the shock of her son's expulsion at that time. Dr. Holmes made allowance for the fact that Cutts had acted to help a friend in trouble and he was gated for six half-holidays. St. Leger and Trimble were both booked for floggings.

This story provided excellent character studies of the three chief participants. There was the weak-natured St. Leger who liked to imitate Gerald Cutts's black-guardedly ways but who lacked the moral fibre to face up to trouble when it happened.

Then there was the shrewd and cunning Cutts, a much stronger character altogether. However, in this instance, even the sharp Cutts had underestimated the degree of Trimble's greed and stupidity.

Lastly there was Baggy. What can one say about Baggy Trimble? He was lazy, slovenly, greedy, stupid and untruthful. He appeared to have no redeeming features whatsoever; if he had, then Martin Clifford never revealed them to us.

This particular trio of boys could hardly be described as being a great credit to St. Jim's, but their actions in "THE PRICE OF SILENCE" made for an intriguing school tale.

This story had originally been published in GEM No. 441, in the year 1916, under the title of "TOO CLEVER BY HALF".



The Silent Three & The Christmas Imposter

BY MARION WATERS

(ILLUSTRATED BY DAPHNE WINSOR)



It was the evening of the 23rd December, 1953, at a large country house named the 'Cedars' on the outskirts of the town of Haslemere in Surrey; a lavish party was in full swing. In a quiet corner of the room Peggy West was sitting quietly trying to avoid the limelight. Peggy was fourteen years of age, a lively girl with dark curly hair; normally she quite enjoyed parties, but on this occasion she was forced to admit that she was rather bored. She glanced across the room to where her chum Betty Roland was sitting, and to Peggy's experienced eye it was obvious that Betty was not really enjoying herself either.

In company with their friend Joan Derwent, who shared their study at Island School, they were guests of Mr. George Derwent and his family. Mr. Derwent was Joan's uncle and her father's business partner. Joan had dreaded the prospect of spending Christmas with her uncle and his family, and she had begged her mother to arrange for Betty and Peggy to be included in the invitation so that she

might have some sensible company in what might prove to be a rather irksome holiday. George Derwent and his wife Ethel were kind, generous people, but they were also snobbish and rather patronising. Joan had long formed the impression that her uncle was quite content to allow her father to carry out the lion's share of running the business while he (George) raked off a generous share of the profits.

Peggy amused herself by attempting to study some of the other guests. Apart from Betty, Joan and Peggy, there were only two other teenage girls. George Derwent's daughter, Clarissa, who was of course Joan's cousin, was a most attractive girl with long fair hair, and bore a strong resemblance to Joan. In fact some years older than her cousin, she was in the sixth form at her very expensive school. Despite her years, Clarissa seemed very immature to the rugged Peggy and gave the impression of being thoroughly spoiled. The other girl was Grace Frensham, a distant relative of the Derwent family: tall, thin and



plain looking, she had long dark hair and wore spectacles. She seemed a twin sister of 'Dilly Dream', the cartoon character, with a similar level of intelligence. Grace was most polite to the other girls, but not very talkative.

"What a dump!" said Peggy to herself as she thought about her parents' terrace house in the industrial town of Horwich in Lancashire, beneath the outcrop of the Pennines known as Rivington Pike.

After a lavish supper, the girls were glad to retire to bed. As Peggy washed and changed into her pyjamas, she glanced at Betty, who was combing her hair in front of the dressing table. "What do you think of it?" asked Peggy grimly.

"Not much," replied Betty quietly. "I would much rather be back at my uncle's farm in the Yorkshire Dales, even though it would mean having to milk the cows on Christmas Day."

"I feel the same", replied Peggy.

"Never mind, we did promise to support Joan, she did warn us that her relatives were rather a pompous lot", added Betty as they climbed into their beds in the room they shared.

Peggy had difficulty in settling to sleep. The Derwents did not skimp their hospitality and the refreshments were extravagant; in consequence she had a mild dose of indigestion. Suddenly wide awake, she could hear footsteps in the corridor beyond the bedroom door. There was probably a logical explanation, but a large house with numerous wealthy guests would be a good target for burglars. Hastily Peggy put on her dressing gown and slippers and stealthily made her way along the corridor. A girl or a small woman was making her way down the stairs to the ground floor of the house. The girl had long fair hair, and at first Peggy thought it was her friend Joan. However, as the girl crossed a patch of moonlight in the main hall, Peggy saw that it was Joan's cousin, Clarissa Derwent.

"Now just what is she up to?" said Peggy to herself. She lost sight of the girl, but could hear her high heels tapping on the floors as she made her way to the service entrance at the rear of the house.

Peggy was not clad suitably to venture out of doors, so she slowly made her way back to bed. She was puzzled; what was Joan's cousin up to? Why should she leave the house secretly while everyone else was asleep? There was a mystery here. Instinctively Peggy glanced towards her wardrobe. Concealed among her clothes was a long hooded robe made of green silk; Betty and Joan possessed similar robes.

The girls were members of a secret society known as the 'Silent Three' which they had formed some time ago at their school to combat an overbearing prefect. Over the years the three friends had enjoyed a number of adventures with their identities safely concealed by their robes, hoods and masks. Peggy had a feeling that they might be needing their robes before too long.

The following day was Christmas Eve and the household was busy with last minute preparations. At the first opportunity Peggy related the night's adventures to Betty and Joan. Betty was intrigued. "A mystery at last!" she exclaimed happily, then Joan deflated her.

"Clarissa is no mystery," she explained. "She would be going out to meet a boy of some sort."

"But there are boys of her own age among the other guests," replied Betty.

"They don't seem very exciting, and they certainly wouldn't appeal to someone like Clarissa", explained Joan.

"I assume that your cousin has a rather good opinion of herself in romantic circles", chuckled Peggy whose sense of humour was irrepressible.

"My mother has been known to refer to the young lady as a 'trollop'", explained Joan with mock seriousness.

Just in time for Christmas it had begun to snow heavily. The housekeeper had planned to carry out some last minute shopping in preparation for the festive season, but she was reluctant to use a car while the roads were covered with snow. Betty and Peggy were only too pleased to offer to help the housekeeper carry her purchases while she visited the shops on foot. While Peggy, laden with well filled shopping bags, was coming out of a shop, Clarissa happened to walk past heading into town. Joan's cousin was dressed to the very height of fashion and she sniffed at the sight of Peggy clad in her brown school raincoat, a headscarf and her winter footwear. Peggy had little interest in clothes, but she did like to keep warm in the cold weather. Clarissa was so busy swaggering along the pavement that she missed her footing on a patch of ice and almost tripped over her high heels, much to Peggy's amusement.

Betty and Peggy escorted the housekeeper back to the 'Cedars', then the girls returned to the town to collect further parcels. On their way they spotted Clarissa in conversation with a rather rough looking young man. It was obvious that Clarissa was very fond of the shabby looking youth; she gazed at him in rapture.

"No accounting for taste", muttered Peggy.

"I'm sure she could find someone better than that", added Betty with a grim tone.

That afternoon Betty and Peggy related their observations to Joan. Their fair-haired chum was not in the least surprised. "Clarissa seems to like rather unsuitable young men, I think she does it to defy her parents." Betty and Peggy raised their eyebrows in mock dismay. Their own guardians were kind but fairly strict in the manner of the time, but they certainly had no wish deliberately to annoy them.



"I think that we should teach Clarissa a lesson", chucked Peggy.

"Let us follow her when she breaks out tonight", said Joan.

"I think that a large snowball down the back of her neck will cool her passions in a very effective manner", laughed Betty.

That night, when the rest of the house was asleep, Clarissa quietly left her room, put on her outer garments and made her way down the stairs. Unknown to the girl, masked eyes were watching her every move. The robed and hooded figures of the Silent Three quickly followed Clarissa through the kitchen and out through the service entrance. The night air was bitterly cold but the girls had plenty of warm air beneath their robes, which because of the snow had been pinned up to just below their knees. The trio wore long rubber-soled boots which provided warmth and silent movement.

There was no difficulty in following Joan's cousin as her stiletto heels made most distinctive marks in the snow. However, Betty's sharp eyes had spotted other freshly made footprints leading from the house.

"Not another moonlight prowler?" gasped Joan from beneath her mask. Betty carefully examined the new footprints.

"Rubber soles with a distinctive ribbed pattern, almost certainly a woman's winter boots", she exclaimed.

"Who on earth can it be?" asked Joan

"I intend to find out", replied Betty. "You two follow 'Nell Gwynne' and try and put a spoke in her wheel, I will follow up the second trail".

The hooded figures of Joan and Peggy vanished into the darkness while Betty very carefully followed the second line of footprints. Soon the robed girl became aware of a dark figure walking slowly in front of her. It was a tall, thin woman dressed in a dark overcoat and headscarf. Betty soon realised that it was Grace Frensham. She followed her until she reached the road just outside the grounds. A middle aged man was waiting at the cross-roads. He was dressed in a raincoat and a trilby hat; his manner was shifty, and the hooded watcher was instinctively placed on her guard.

Grace and the mystery stranger immediately began a conversation. Betty crept closer, hoping to overhear what they were saying, and making each step with care, anxious

not to tread on any twigs or similar hazards. She learned that the two plotters were discussing the business affair of Joan's father and his partner. Many of the terms used were foreign to Betty but she heard the expression 'the Camberley Portfolio' mentioned more than once. She crept slowly forward, hoping to gather more information. Suddenly the night air was rent by an ear-piercing scream, followed by a string of very colourful oaths. Grace and her companion almost jumped out of their skins.

"What the devil was that?" exclaimed the man.

"I think that Clarissa is having problems with her boyfriend" replied Grace quietly. "I saw the little tart sneaking out just before I left the house. It would appear that she has fallen out with her beloved."

"You had better hurry back", replied the man. Grace bade him goodbye and quickly retraced her steps back to the house, unknowing that a robed and hooded figure was following her. Betty watched as Grace re-entered the house by the back door, then she heard an 'owl hoot' signal and the robed figures of Joan and Peggy emerged out of the darkness.

"I trust that you have been having some fun?" enquired Betty.

"I dropped a huge snowball right down the back of Clarissa's neck", chuckled Peggy, smiling broadly beneath her mask.

"The language was dreadful", added Joan. Peggy continued in a serious tone.

"I'm almost certain that she didn't see us in our robes", she explained, "so hopefully no-one is yet aware of the existence of the 'Silent Three'."

"Come on, back to bed!" ordered Betty. "I will tell you what I have discovered later."

The following day was Christmas Day. The Silent Three enjoyed opening their presents and the girls enjoyed some very substantial meals. However, they watched Grace Frensham very closely indeed. At the first opportunity Joan took her father aside and asked him about the 'Camberley Portfolio'. Mr. Derwent's face was grim. "How did you learn about this?" he asked. Joan knew that it was best to tell the whole truth. She explained that the girls had followed Clarissa on her 'moonlight rambles' and that Betty had observed Grace talking to an unknown man beyond the grounds of the house. Her father then explained the importance of the matter.

"The 'Camberley Portfolio' is owned by a most important client of my firm. The family have very substantial investments in the Far East. These investments are extremely profitable, but

in view of all the trouble in Malaya, Indo-China, Burma, etc., they are not as secure as they used to be. My firm has always believed in a diversification of investments for safety reasons, therefore the owners of the portfolio have entrusted my firm with the sale of their investments in the East and the re-investment of their funds closer to home. It is agreed that they will have a much reduced income, but hopefully their investments will be safer."

"I assume that someone is trying to wreck your business deal."

"It would appear so", replied her father grimly. "More important, my long term business interests would be severely damaged; the Camberley assignment is a very prestigious one. If it is a success it will attract a lot of similar business in the future."

For the rest of the day the Silent Three watched Grace like hawks. Betty and Peggy were not socially minded and they found the festivities rather boring, so keeping observation on the plain-looking, rather dull young woman helped to pass the time.

That night secret activity was taking place in the house. Grace Frensham quietly left her bedroom and made her way to the study used by Mr. George Derwent. In their bedrooms the Silent Three were slipping on their robes ready for action. Joan's father was also alert and watchful. As might be expected Clarissa was also leaving the house on clandestine nocturnal activity, but for the moment no-one paid her any attention.

Grace Frensham made her way to the study and proceeded to search the desk. She wore her outdoor clothes, so it appeared that she planned to meet with her confederate when she had completed her task. Unknown to the treacherous woman, she was being watched by the Silent Three. The study door was ajar and Betty and her pals could observe all that was happening within the room. Suddenly there was a gasp of triumph as Grace examined the contents of a bulky envelope. "Got it!" she exclaimed. Picking up the envelope in her gloved hands, she adjusted her headscarf and prepared to leave the house. Evidently it was her intention to carry the precious documents to her colleague who would be waiting outside the grounds. The woman crook made her way across the hall toward the rear door of the house.

"Not so fast!" ordered Betty in a firm tone as the three robed girls emerged from the darkness. Grace almost jumped out of her skin at the sight of them. She uttered most unladylike language

and then bolted. Peggy attempted to bring the woman down in a rugby tackle, but she was hampered by her robe and fell over, colliding with Joan. Betty grabbed the fleeing figure, but to her surprise Grace's dark hair was a wig, which came away in Betty's hands as the woman fled from the room. Betty and Peggy raced after her. By this time Joan had been joined by her father, who had been expecting trouble. Quickly Joan explained what had happened. "She has got away with the envelope", the girl explained anxiously.

"There was nothing of value in the study", her father replied. "The files are all 'dummies', I placed them there myself." Quickly Joan removed and concealed her robe, before the rest of the household appeared.

Meanwhile Betty and Peggy had pursued the fleeing Grace across the front lawn of the house and then through the gardens towards the main gate of the premises. The girls were thankful that they had pinned up the hems of their robes to avoid soiling them in the snow. This precaution facilitated swift movement. Grace had a long start, but Peggy and Betty were swift runners. Grace tripped, fell and scrambled to her feet, but the hooded girls were now only a few paces behind her. Grace ran through the main gates and there a car was waiting for her. Quickly she scrambled into the front passenger seat; savagely fighting off an attempt by Peggy to grab her as she climbed into the car. The vehicle raced away before the door was even closed, narrowly missing Betty.

"Damn and blast!" uttered Peggy, nursing her bruises.

"The car was driven by the man I saw last night", replied Betty. "He must be Grace's confederate."

"We had better remove our robes before the rest of the family arrive", said Peggy feeling rather downcast.

Betty and Peggy removed their precious robes and concealed them beneath their pullovers. The two girls made their way back to the house to find the place in uproar. Mr. George Derwent was in a purple fury at the attempted burglary and was vowing vengeance in no uncertain terms; his rather silly wife was having hysterics. Joan's father carefully explained that no harm had been done and that nothing of value had been stolen. Mr. Derwent strongly advised against summoning the police as the resultant publicity might harm the reputation of their firm. Gradually order was restored. It was lucky that no-one had realised Clarissa was missing. Betty and Peggy had

noticed that Joan was nowhere to be seen, but guessed their shrewd study mate had 'something up her sleeve'.

As they prepared to get into bed, they discussed their puzzlement at the fact that Grace had been wearing a wig. She had lost her spectacles in the fight, but this fact had not hindered her escape; it was obvious that she did not need to wear them. "I wonder if she is an impostor?" suggested Peggy anxiously.

"In that case where is the real Grace Frensham?" asked Betty. Just then there was a quiet knock on the door and Joan entered, looking rather pleased with herself.

"What have you been up to, Joanie?" asked Betty. Joan smiled. "While the rest of the household were having hysterics, I searched Grace's bedroom" she explained. "I found a number of interesting things. Most of Grace's clothes and possessions are as drab and dull as she usually appears, but some of her underwear is very fancy indeed. She also has a taste for rather 'risqué' romantic novels, not quite the 'plain Jane' image she likes to foster." Betty and Peggy listened intently while their chum continued. "I also searched for any possible addresses that might give a clue to Grace's real identity, or to where her confederate might be staying. I have found the address of a cottage about five miles from here, which possibly is their secret hideout."

"We should go there at once", urged Peggy.

"There would be little point," replied Betty calmly, "you can be sure that they will have fled by now, and that they will have destroyed any evidence at the cottage by now."

"We will go there first thing in the morning" said Joan.

The following morning the household was once again in uproar. Clarissa was found to be missing, and it was obvious that her bed had not been slept in. The girl's mother was having fits, assuming that all sorts of horrible fates had befallen her precious child. Clarissa's father was rather more down to earth in his attitude. He obviously had some knowledge of his daughter's true character and was of the opinion that she had spent the night in dubious company. While her aunt and uncle argued as to the best course of action, Joan quietly informed her father of her discoveries in Grace's bedroom and described her theory that the would-be burglar was in fact an impostor. Joan persuaded her father of the need to visit the nearby cottage, which might be the crooks' hideout. Mr. Derwent was thoughtful. "You must have an adult escort", he said, "but I must

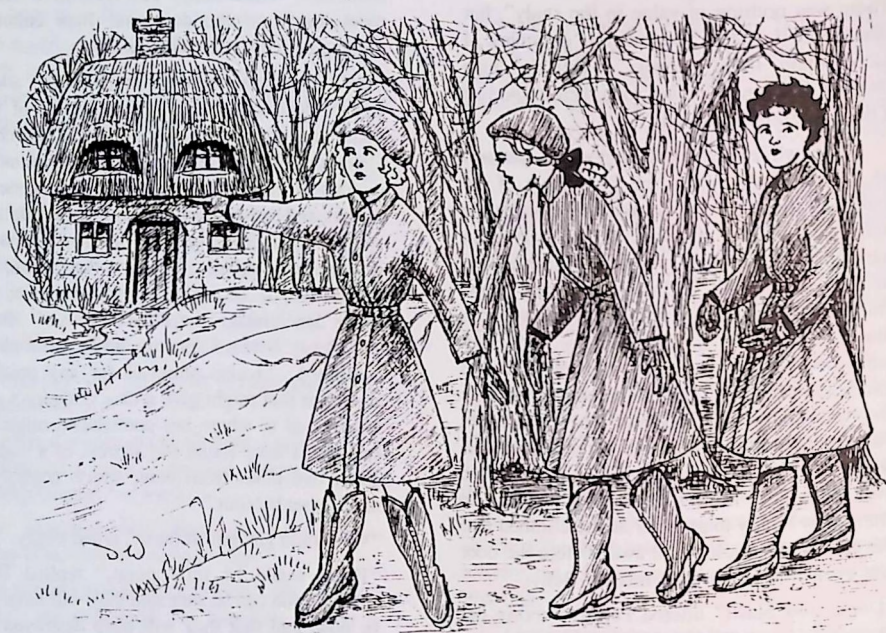
stay here and try and keep things calm. I think it best if your mother drove you out there."

A few minutes later the Silent Three were heading towards the mystery cottage in a car driven by Mrs. Derwent. No-one else was aware of their absence; there was far too much fuss being made over the missing Clarissa. Joan's mother was not only a very large woman in a physical sense, but was also a lady of very strong character. Woe betide any crook or trickster who might happen to get in their way. She was well aware of the existence of the girls'

of the woods" replied Betty as she led the way up the stairs.

They soon discovered the source of the 'grunts'. In one of the bedrooms a young woman was lying on the bed, bound and gagged in a very professional manner. Swiftly Peggy's old Girl Guide knife cut her bonds, while Joan carefully removed the gag from her mouth. She was tall, thin and plain-looking, with a striking likeness to 'Dilly Dream'.

"You must be Grace Frensham, the real Grace



secret society, and normally she loved to hear of their exploits, but today she was in a more sombre mood.

"I just wonder if your precious cousin Clarissa is mixed up in this affair", she said. "The girl is badly spoilt and mixes with doubtful company; I shall not be at all surprised if, when this affair is sorted out, she is found to be involved in the attempted burglary."

Mrs. Derwent parked her car a short distance from the cottage and the Silent Three approached the isolated dwelling through the rear garden. The house appeared deserted and the girls were soon inside it. The lower floor was empty, with all the signs of a hurried departure. However, from the upper floor there came the occasional grunting sound.

"Do you think they keep pigs in the bedroom?" asked Peggy, trying to make a rather feeble joke.

"I don't think they are that primitive in this part

Frensham!" exclaimed Betty.

"That's right", gasped the prisoner as she was released. "Goodness, sweet fresh air; it will take months to get the taste of that gag out of my mouth."

"How did you come to be here?" asked Joan.

"I was on my way to spend Christmas at the home of Mr. George Derwent", explained Grace as she rubbed some life back into her wrists and ankles. "I was collected from the station by car, by a man I thought was one of Mr. Derwent's staff. Instead I was brought here, dragged into the house and trussed up like a chicken while that other girl who looks like me took my place at the hall."

Joan's mother prepared some very hot, sweet tea in the kitchen, and this helped to revive the prisoner. Grace could relate little of her ordeal, there had been three crooks - the girl who had taken her place, the man who fitted the

description of the night prowler in the grounds, and a woman, probably his wife, who had acted as 'gaoler'. Grace had not been harmed in any way, but being kept bound and gagged for several days was an extremely unpleasant experience.

"I think there may have been another girl kept prisoner in the house", explained Grace. "Last night I heard screams, and someone apparently being tied up in the room below my bedroom." Betty and company exchanged anxious glances. While Mrs. Derwent escorted the still shaky Grace to her car, the girls searched the house once again. There was no trace of a prisoner in the other bedrooms or in any of the ground floor rooms, but closer examination revealed a cellar beneath the house which was entered by an outer door.

Cautiously the girls made their way down the steps to the cellar. Sure enough, a second girl lay on the floor bound and gagged; it was Joan's missing cousin, Clarissa. As soon as she was released from the cords which had bound her, she became violently hysterical. She shouted and screamed, and, attempting to beat Peggy who was trying to untie her legs, complained of assault, rape, attempted murder and every crime in the book. She did not cease her tirade until Joan's mother threatened to slap her face. The contrast between her and the calm and reserved Grace who had been held prisoner for several days was noteworthy. To the shrewd and rather worldly-wise Betty, the 'acting' was perhaps a little too convincing. There was more to this than met the eye.

At first Joan's cousin refused to explain how she had come to be held prisoner in the cottage. Then she said she had taken a walk in the garden because she could not sleep, and had been seized from behind and dragged there.

"A likely story" replied the stern Mrs. Derwent. "I want the truth girl, or we shall take you straight to the police station." Clarissa then burst into tears and admitted that she had been secretly meeting a young man after dark. They had assumed that the cottage was empty and had planned to use it for 'passion'. However the lovers had blundered into the crooks, Clarissa's 'fiancé' had fled, leaving the girl at their mercy. Mrs. Derwent gave the girl a look of blistering contempt. "Think yourself lucky, young lady", she said harshly. "You have spent a few hours bound and gagged, but you could have been sexually assaulted or infected with a social disease. I think you have had a very lucky escape." Once more there were floods of tears from Joan's cousin.

Even as she was being taken home, she continued to act the 'spoilt brat'. She had lost her shoes during the abduction and complained bitterly at having to walk to the car barefoot. She had no coat and continued to complain about being cold. Peggy could not resist the opportunity. Swiftly she removed her brown school raincoat and handed it to Clarissa, who put it on. "You aren't laughing at my old-fashioned clothes now", muttered Peggy.

The two prisoners were taken back to the home of Joan's uncle and slowly the pieces of the puzzle were put into place. A business rival of Joan's father had learned of the precious portfolio and planned to steal it. Grace had been abducted and an impostor put in her place. More by luck than judgement the Silent Three had foiled the schemers.

The tearful Clarissa was soon the heroine of the hour; her mother fussed over her as if she had returned from the edge of the grave. Very scant attention was paid to Grace, who had suffered a much more serious ordeal. Clarissa's mother soon invented her own version of the story. It was Clarissa who had discovered the plotters, she had tracked them to their cottage, she had confronted them in a heroic manner but had been overpowered and held prisoner. "How the poor girl must have suffered", wailed Joan's aunt. Joan and her mother exchanged looks of disgust at this version of events.

The following day the Silent Three were glad to return to Joan's home in Guildford. Mr. Derwent drove the car, with his wife beside him and the three girls in the back seat.

"Well, it could have been worse", said Joan's father. "Christmas with my brother's family turned out to be more exciting than I had expected, thanks to the girls."

"At least your precious portfolio wasn't stolen", replied Mrs. Derwent with mild sarcasm. "You should be truly thankful for that."

"The portfolio has been in my office safe all the time", replied her husband. "I would never leave anything valuable in my brother's keeping."

"I still think that Clarissa was involved in the plot somehow", said Mrs Derwent.

"I would agree with you mother", replied Joan. Mrs. Derwent continued: "Just think of the hysterics when we untied her. You would have thought that she had been held captive for months. I think the girl rather overdid her 'acting'."

"I was also surprised at how soon she became her old self once more" added Peggy. "A person

who had been kidnapped and held prisoner would be so pleased to be released that she wouldn't make a big fuss over her lack of a coat and shoes."

"Her boyfriend could have been one of the gang", added Joan.

"If Clarissa was one of the gang why go to the trouble of kidnapping Grace and putting an impostor in her place?" asked Mr. Derwent.

"Would you trust a blockhead like Clarissa to

search through important documents and to steal the right ones?" asked his wife.

All this time Betty had been looking thoughtful; then she spoke. "While everyone was making a fuss over Clarissa, I slipped into my robe and searched her room. Her correspondence was very interesting. The girl has gambling debts and agreed to help the crooks steal her father's papers in return for her debts being paid." Mr. Derwent whistled softly and Joan's mother gasped in amazement!



THE COLOUR PURPLE: CHARLES HAMILTON AND POLITICS

BY UNA HAMILTON WRIGHT

Was Charles Hamilton red or blue in his politics? Was he even a political animal? With a General Election recently finished I thought it would be appropriate to examine his political leanings. In fact, did he lean? Or did he sway from side to side? Was he a floating voter? In later years he did not vote at all - he had become a recluse and would not go out for anything and certainly not to vote. I think this tells us something about his political attitudes.

When I once asked him which party he wanted to win he said he thought the best government for this country was a Conservative one with a *very small* majority to keep them from going to extremes. After the 1945 General Election he wrote to console my mother after the Labour landslide victory, "After all," he wrote, "a General Election is only two rival gangs after the taxes - if there were no taxes there would be no politicians!" In the 1950s during a Labour administration he wrote to her, "Yes, I think the Tories intend to give the bastards the winter in which to ruin themselves and almost ruin the country. A General Election now might be doubtful - next year it will be a certainty. Everything is going from bad to worse, and by February everybody will be in a state of desperation, and willing to make any change, even for the worse ..."

There can be no doubt his sympathies were with the underdogs - so many little asides in his writing illustrate this - but he saw a wider range

of people as underdogs than did the typical Labour voter or Trade Unionist. His sympathy extended beyond the confines of T.U. membership. Sometimes he saw the strikers' victims as the underdogs and needing sympathy - his last poem PRICELESS EDUCATION illustrates this:

1. The Teachers struck. The schools were closed: each little fellow grew
From youth to age in ignorance, and never,
never knew,
How many wives King Henry had, and
which of them he slew...
6. O give us back our teachers: let us pay them
what they will,
Give their scholastic fingers freest access to
the till,
Let aching heads be crammed again, and
never mind the bill!

He did not see the unionised teachers as the downtrodden masses and he condemned their irresponsibility. But it was a different story in the Great War which he was very much against, regarding it as a piece of humbug from beginning to end. There are four poems where he let himself go: EXODUS I: verse 3,

- 'They have rounded up the slackers!' said the
Belted Earl, with glee,
'They have collared every army-dodging funk
excepting me!'
While the blasted lower classes in the trenches
bear the brunt,

I will do my bit with chin-wag on the diplomatic front!

Similarly when there was talk of relinquishing the Empire his poems IMPERIAL HERITAGE I AND II revealed a very realistic approach to the situation:

My fleets ride the Orient seas,
Where the Ganges' superb waters roll,
Keeping guard on my borders,
Obeying my orders,
The while I am drawing the dole!

And the last verse of IMPERIAL HERITAGE II sums up what must have been the opinion of a vast number of the unemployed:

In fact, if I should have to choose,
Between my weekly dough,
And my Imperial heritage,
I'd let my Empire go.
For thirty-five-and-six a week,
Seems to be more to me,
Than holding with Imperial hand
The gorgeous East in fee!

In the 1930s the League of Nations was the target of his accusations of hypocrisy: Germany had walked into the Ruhr, Austria and Czechoslovakia and Japan had invaded China and Italy had invaded Abyssinia. The League should have imposed sanctions on all three invaders but Italy was the only aggressor to be sanctioned. Charles wrote to Percy his brother-in-law, "The whole thing, to my mind, is that Italy is being bullied because Abyssinia covers the sources of the Nile - and Japan doesn't! Not that the sources of the Nile matter a two-penny damn to anybody in this country; but our governing geniuses fancy they do." The end result was a comic song entitled "Passing Economic Sanctions for the League". One verse will serve as an example:

A statesman great was overjoyed,
Passing economic sanctions for the League,
He forgot a million unemployed.

As he passed his solemn sanctions for the League!

For England isn't in Africah,
So it doesn't matter at Genevah!
He could not bother with things like that,
As he talked out of his solemn hat,
Passing economic sanctions for the League,
Economic, Astronomic, Gastronomic,
agronomic,
Sanctions for the League!

My uncle frequently found fault with intellectual socialists for being full of humbug - a favourite word of his. He lambasted the poet Shelley after having read one of my student essays on him. "That he was a fool leaps to the eye: but a poet is bound to be rather a fool in mundane matters: the stream of genius flows through a thick head, ...His humbug, which was considerable, was probably quite unconscious. He tells the down-trodden masses to rise 'in

unvanquishable number': but apparently did not reflect that, had they taken his advice, he would have had nothing to live upon: it never seems to have occurred to him that he was one of the parasites living on these hapless masses."

Strikes provided frequent targets for criticism. On the Printers' strike of 1950 he wrote to his friend George Foster, a novelist, "It is a great relief that the printers' strike is coming to an end. It has done damage enough. One of the periodicals from which I draw a moderate supply of bread-and-marger had to close down temporarily... And I just hear from Glyn Protheroe that CAGED BIRDS stopped for the same reason, giving him an unnecessary jolt. Why can't people settle their differences without upsetting other people of whom they have never even heard? But it is really too bad that it has kept the PROFESSOR out of the Christmas market. I don't know what the strike was about, except that both sides no doubt had selfish motives."

In the summer of 1957 my Uncle wrote to my mother "The bus strike is paralysing everything. ...I think it will not last long, about ten days, I should think, and then the gang will be given about half what they demand, and it will fizzle out in chatter. In the meantime their wives will be giving them toco. It could not last much longer than a week, or the H.P. people would begin taking back their T.V. sets".

My uncle had kept up a correspondence with Grace Hancock, my mother's best friend. I quote from two letters he wrote to her on politics: "Socialism has introduced a kind of creeping paralysis into the national system, and matters will be worse before they are better. ...I do not think that the present Government will last... a year longer." And in the second letter: "You will have noted the result of the council elections: boot for Socialism. This ...a fore-taste of the wrath to come. Not that Socialism, in itself, is much worse than any other ism: but the bunch of cranks who are trying it on are practically dangerous maniacs. ...These incompetent nincompoops have signed their own death-warrant. A baby could have told them that their first job was to get up coal, and that nothing else mattered in comparison - but they had to give all their time to jangle and wangle, and leave the coal in the ground. Old King Coal will be the death of them. They are suffocating the whole country like an immense wet blanket. The present Government could not possibly last the full term, because the country would cease to exist before the time was up. ...But there is an awful winter to come, before we get rid of the incubus (1947). The consolation is that the cold and hunger of the winter will give them the coup-de-grace. I don't think much of the Tories, who are a stupid, selfish, and unscrupulous bunch; but the Devil and his angels would be a happy change after

the present lot.”

Political comment was slipped into the stories, we hope with a stimulating effect on the youthful readers. In BUNTER'S £100 BOATER there is Mr. Hinks who “was one of those born with a natural disinclination to work. Under happier auspices he might have been a Cabinet Minister or an ornament of the Diplomatic Service. But, as a matter of sad fact, he was a tramp.”

The Bunter family made a good vehicle for the author's comments. In PERIL FROM THE EAST in the China Series (1930) Mr. Bunter “had read in the morning paper of a wonderful new system of roads that had been built in Palestine - and the previous day his Ford had nearly come to grief on a Surrey road that badly needed repair. This annoyed Mr. Bunter; he was even so unreasonable as to suppose that a British Government ought to repair British roads before they built new roads in Asia Minor; especially as they taxed Mr. Bunter to raise the money.”

Descriptions of Billy Bunter are a rich hunting ground for the author's opinions; “Bunter was an imaginative fellow... This gift of imagination might have made him, with a little more brains, a poet, an author, a journalist, or a politician - in fact, any kind of dealer in fiction.” Also “Had Bunter been accused of anything, in fact, he was ready to deal with the matter with a disregard for veracity as complete as if he had been specially trained for the diplomatic service.”

In a much later story, BILLY BUNTER IN BRAZIL, neither Bunter nor his author had changed their attitudes: “Bunter chewed toffee while the other fellows paddled. That suited Bunter. Bunter liked toffee, and he did not like work. The dignity of labour, about which so many people who have never done any often wax enthusiastic, did not impress Billy Bunter at all.”

Finally, in the BUNTER COURT series of 1925, the author shows his understanding of the problems besetting the owners and staff of

stately homes resulting from the high taxes that followed the Great War. Bunter was considering leasing Combermere Lodge: “Combermere Lodge, in fact, had been hanging on Mr. Pilkins' hands, its noble owner had to let it owing to the general shortage of cash resulting from high taxes, and for the same reason other distinguished persons were unable to take it.

“Bunter seemed to Mr. Walsingham (the butler) a fat, self-important, purse-proud young bounder; but the way he exuded money was grateful and comforting after a long experience of the penuriousness of the best families.

“So Mr. Walsingham and his many assistants all hoped that this young Croesus would take the Lodge for the summer - all the more because if the place was not soon let, they would have to seek other situations; and the unemployment problem was as serious for menservants as for more useful members of society.”

Having heard so many representative opinions of Charles Hamilton are we any the wiser? Were Charles Hamilton's politics both blue and red, Right and Left? Were they the colour purple like his ties and his socks and dressing-gowns? He cherished a half hope that I might enter politics and stand for Parliament, and the following is from one of his letters to me on the subject, written on Christmas Eve 1954: “There is one thing you might keep in mind, that is that politics now offer a good opening for women: and the initials M.P. now stand for More Pay. I believe politics is a very interesting and exciting game, and there is undoubtedly money in it these days: and a respectable person getting into the House of Commons would give it a tone.”

Throughout all his political comment he never attempted to persuade. In fact I believe that his political opinions could have been summed up in a quotation from Shakespeare, “A plague on both your houses!”.

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THE FOLLY OF CHRISTMAS!

A Word of Warning
 By TIMOTHY TUCKER

FRIENDS, I am writing this article in a spirit of grave apprehension. Pause, I say, and look at the wreckage and ruin which is yearly caused by the awful extravagances of Christmas.

You—you who sit down to a luxurious Christmas dinner, and afterwards pull expensive crackers (a shameful and wicked waste)—you, I repeat, do not realise what these reckless customs are leading to.

Let me tell you!

They are leading to ruin—stark, horrible ruin. While the idle rich loll about at their pleasures, while they ride about in Rolls Royce cars, while they spend money like water on needless luxuries, what is happening to the working classes? (Probably having a high old time of their own.—Ed.)

Let me tell you, friends, that the working classes are the backbone of the country—the backbone of the Empire. Cause this backbone to break under the strain of pitiless oppression, and the whole structure of the civilised world—and also the British Empire—will crumble to pieces like a house that has been struck by a tornado.

And this backbone is suffering—suffering horribly while the ruling classes drink their wine and eat their plum pudding and play their foolish Christmas games! The working classes are held down like slaves of old. Their faces are ground into the dust! And what happens to these faces which are ground into the dust? What happens to them? (Our contributor's idea of writing an article seems to be to ask all sorts of questions that he can't answer. However, I'll do my best to oblige. The faces he mentions would probably be somewhat scratched and spongy.—Ed.)

Christmas as a religious festival is to be honoured and respected. And why is it not confined to this splendid purpose? Is it necessary to make such an occasion an excuse for unnecessary gorging and wanton extravagance? No, it is not! I repeat, it is not!

Think! If you are capable of doing so,

think! Reckon up the countless thousands of pounds which are spent on Christmas presents which nobody wants! Think of the fortunes which are poured into the gutter on food that nobody needs! Ponder over the wealth that is wasted on parlour fireworks and bad cigars and poisonous cigarettes! Money that goes up in smoke!

And, having weighed these facts carefully, I now urge you to think in another channel. Place all this wealth together—count it up! It will aggregate millions! And what could be done with this money? What could be done with it all? (We'll show you if you hand some to us.—Ed.)

This vast array of wasted money, my friends, could be spent on the poor! It could be used for providing the poor with the bare necessities of life! It could be used for giving these starving creatures a chance in life!

Christmas time is the great wasting time! And I make this serious and appalling statement with due thought and consideration. Do you ever see the working classes enjoying themselves on Christmas Day? (Yes! We hear them occasionally.—Ed.) Is it not a fact that the working classes are held down by bonds of misery and oppression?

How much do these poor, deluded people spend at Christmas? (Judging by the slate clubs, they spend a tidy bit, we imagine! Ed.) And the paltry sums they do spend? What of it? What is that money used for? Just the meagre necessities of the moment! Do they spend this money on beer? The very idea is preposterous! (Our contributor is now, not mild, but bitter.—Ed.)

Let me repeat that Christmas is a time of wilful waste—a folly to our great civilisation! Civilisation? Pause, and think! Is there any civilisation while such oppression is permitted—

(Sorry, old man. No more space. But the rest of your article proved very useful for lighting the Editorial fire. By the way, didn't you spend a sumptuous Christmas at your uncle's town house in Belgrave Square? Oh, these Uplifters!—Ed.)

My Christmas Waits

By Willy Handforth

(In an interview).

YOU want to know about the waits? Jealous, I suppose? Well, it was my idea in the first place. I got fed up with things. These parties are all very well, but there's always a couple of dead hours between tea and dinner! Everybody's taking a nap, or dressing, or some silly piffle like that.

So I got hold of Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon and Owen minor and Dicky Jones, and off we went. They didn't think much of the wheeze at first, but I soon put that right. Juicy's car is nearly well again now, and you wouldn't know that Chubby had had a black eye. Anyhow, off we went.

Couldn't do anything at the Manor, of course—we're known too well. So we went all round the best streets of Bannington, and the way we yelled carols nearly brought the fire brigade out. In fact, in one street a policeman came up and asked who was injured! He thought we were howling for help. We really couldn't blame the chap, because Dicky Jones did yell a bit. The fathead started singing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," and all the rest of us were in the middle of "Good King Wenceslas." Naturally, I was obliged to buff the young fathead.

What's that? Did we get anything beyond old boots? I should say we did! At one house an old jesser came out and distributed brand-new tanners! He thought we were shun kids! As soon as he found out that we'd come from the Manor, he got a bit fussy, and said he'd been tricked. In fact, he got quite nasty. Not that we cared. We half-filled his giddy hall with snowballs—and the old chump was underneath the lot!

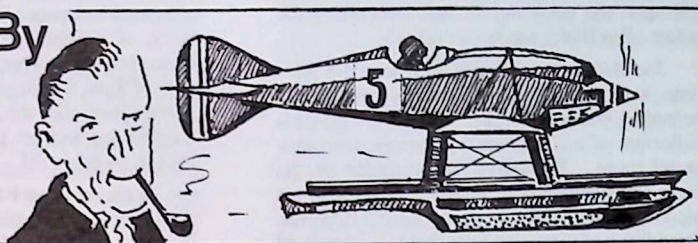
On the whole, though, we did pretty well. We covered miles of ground, and sang till we were hoarse. But it gave us a fine appetite for dinner, and we got twenty-eight bob. Eight bob for Chubby and the rest, and a quid for me.

What's that? An unfair division? Rats! Wasn't it my idea to go out in the first place? Besides, those greedy young asses only wanted the money to squander on tuck! Just as if they didn't get enough at the party! I decided that two bob each was quite liberal.

My quid? Did I want it for tuck? Not likely! I've got that stowed away in a special pocket—so that I can buy a ripping little monkey at the pet shop in Bannington. That was the whole idea of the waits!

Success By Design

BY
REG HARDINGE



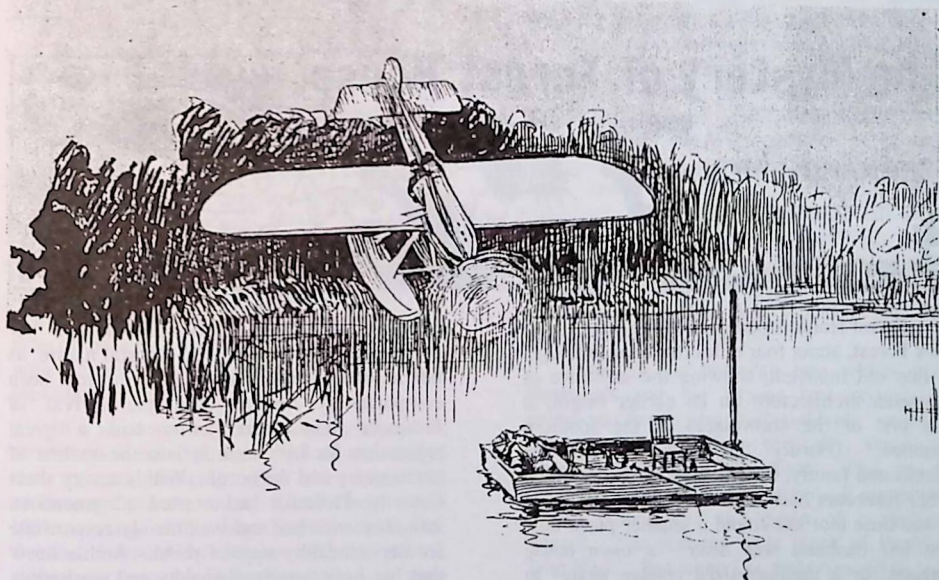
The hand of Hungermere (UJ No. 1351 September 7th 1929) was a tale about a house and the protection and guardianship that it afford to its incumbents, which so influenced events that it enabled Sexton Blake to solve a brutal murder. Hungermere in Norfolk, ancestral home of the Streddicks, and mentioned in the Domesday Book, dated back to Saxon times. Other abodes that have dominated situations come to mind like Manderley in Daphne du Maurier's gothic novel Rebecca; or Tara in *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell. (Scarlett O'Hara's priorities in life were (1) Tara, (2) herself and (3) Rhett Butler.)

Blake and Tinker were on a fortnight's yachting holiday in the Norfolk Broads, aboard the hired *Restless* on the river Bure. This East Anglian County was not unfamiliar to them. Indeed, their very first encounter with an Albino named Zenith, took place in a hotel at Caister,

the trail leading to Buckenham and other places.

The *Restless* was moored in the vicinity of Hungermere, and soon Blake and Tinker were acquainted with the present master of the house, John Streddick. Not long afterwards Blake was investigating Streddick's death from a shot through the head while he was practising on his putting - green in the grounds of the house. Capt. Roderick Fairchild, the central character in Tremelin's story, was the favourite to win a forthcoming seaplane race (inspired by the real-life Schneider Trophy contest) in a part-rocket-propelled aircraft called *The Silver Hornet*. Fairchild and an antiques dealer named Thurgrove, who was staying at Hungermere, were suitors for the hand of John Streddick's daughter, Pamela. Streddick, angry at having been buzzed by Fairchild's plane while fishing in the river on a punt, had forbidden him from having anything more to do with Pamela, and

FAIRCHILD BUZZING JOHN STREDDICK



When Sexton Blake tracks down a criminal, the work is usually—Sexton Blake's. This strange affair of the murdered master of Hungermere is the first case in which Blake has been helped by a house. From peaceful holidaying on the Norfolk Broads to the weird and uncanny, and the thrills of the world's fastest race, this yarn ranges.

when he was found dead, suspicion immediately fell upon the pilot and he was arrested by the police. But Blake was not so sure.

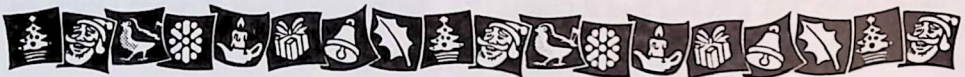
Joe Badger, an odd-job man who did part-time work at Hungermere had systematically helped himself to the Streddick family's collection of old masters and stored them in a secret room. Thurgrove had stumbled on the theft, and planned with Badger to dispose of his pictures and share the proceeds. However, Streddick had discovered the shabby scheme and Thurgrove had killed the old man. Tinker, exploring the grounds, had come across a well, where he received a blow to the head which rendered him unconscious. When he recovered, he was bound hand and foot and in Badger's store-house - the secret room, access to which was through a passage leading from the bottom of the well. (In 'The Case of the Secret Report' UJ No. 517 a well featured in the attempt by the scorpion and his wife, Judith, to drown Sexton Blake.) It was Badger's intention to dispose of Tinker by placing his body in an old oak chest into which he had emptied two bags of cement, to provide a shroud of concrete for him! But Tinker turned the tables on Badger, knocking him out and trussing him up, then he made his exit by the same route that he had been brought to his prison.

Meanwhile Thurgrove was reacting badly to the crime he had committed. Night had come

and the old house with its strange noises had affected his nerves. He drank copiously from a bottle of whisky. But the hostile atmosphere emanating from Hungermere, and the blazing eyes of Tom, the ginger cat, drove him outdoors. As he approached the garage he was set upon by a collie dog and her pup. Then stumbling into his car, he drove off.

In the morning Blake and Tinker found that the lawn had been disturbed by moles. A hole in the turf revealed the hiding place of a revolver - the weapon that had killed John Streddick. When Thurgrove returned he was confronted by Blake who told him that he had been betrayed by Hungermere. Breaking down, he confessed to having murdered Streddick. Both Thurgrove and Badger were handed over to the police. Captain Roderick Fairchild was released from custody in time to take part in the race, which he won. The actual winner of the 1929 Schneider Trophy Competition was Flying Officer H.R. Waghorn in a super marine S.6. machine, at an average speed of 328.63 mph.

It is generally assumed that the following three Sexton Blake stories were penned by Wilfred Tremelin, but using different names: *The Lightning Murders* (UJ 1502) and *The Ringside Racketeers* (Detective Weekly No. 90) both by Stanford Webber, and *The Motor Show Mystery* (UJ 1514) by D.W. Pile.



The Mystery of Forest House

BY
BERNARD THORNE



Forest House stood deep in the heart of the New Forest, about four miles from Falconbridge. A fine old mansion, showing the influence of Georgian architecture on its earlier origin, it was one of the showplaces of the southern counties. Hardly the spot, thought the Glenthorne family, for old Aunt Eustacia. Even if her forebears had lived and died there, surely it was time that she found a smaller place now that her husband was dead - a town house perhaps; or a medium-sized cottage nearer to civilisation. But remembering her eccentric ways and her dabbling in spiritualism, the family shrugged their shoulders and gave her up as hopeless.

But Lady Eustacia Bowers, despite her eccentricities, had a kind and cheerful nature, as her nephew Archie knew well. She had been comparatively normal until the arrival of Professor Ivan Nerki, who had a great reputation for his research into the realms of necromancy and the occult. Within a very short time the Professor had exerted a tremendous influence over her and was mainly responsible for her unhealthy state of mind. Archie knew that his Aunt was very wealthy and susceptible to fortune hunters, and his suspicions of the Professor would not have pleased that worthy, had he known. So the Pride of the Glenthornes, in an attempt to dispel some of the gloom and

superstition that cloaked Forest House, invited a crowd of his fellow schoolboys and several Moor View girls to spend Christmas there.

At first he had met considerable opposition from Lady Bowers, as she feared that harm might befall guests at her home. She was somewhat vague as to what harm could come to the young people, but Archie understood that it had something to do with elementals and other materialised spirits which, Nerki insisted, haunted the old house at Christmas. However, Archie finally got his way, and Christmas Day, 1932, found Forest House ringing with the laughter and chatter of the St. Frank's juniors and Irene Manners and Co.

Aunt Eustacia proved to be a perfect hostess. Many extra servants had been engaged; electricians and other workmen had been summoned to install additional lighting throughout the house and the grounds; and Yule-tide decorations were in evidence everywhere.

And yet Archie saw that his aunt was ill at ease beneath her cheerful exterior. The juniors and girls openly scoffed at the idea of Forest House being haunted; but it was noticeable that they congregated in small groups in the brightly-lighted drawing room and avoided the corridors and other rooms as much as possible.

Christmas Eve had passed without any unusual incidents and Christmas Day was spent in snowballing, skating and tobogganing. Then occurred the first of many strange happenings that made that Christmas one that the young people were to remember for a long time to come.

The guests had just sat down to dinner when a strange dimming of the lights was observed. Gradually the electric candles in the huge candelabra and the wall sconces faded until the guests could hardly see each other across the table. It was noticed, too, that the leaping flames in the fireplace had died away. Suddenly, before the eyes of all, the cutlery seemed to rise into the air above the table-cloth and then, as if joined by invisible threads, hurtled through the air and crashed into the wall with an appalling din. Almost before the last echo of that crash had sounded, the lights shone with full brilliance and the log fire again burst into life.

In a moment there was pandemonium. A terrific crash sounded from the hall and one of the servants, flinging open the door, ran screaming from the room. Chairs were thrust back as many of the boys leapt to their feet. Archie, followed by Nipper and Handforth, rushed out into the hall, then halted in their tracks with cries of amazement.

In the centre of the hall a heavy oak table was rising towards the timbered ceiling. No one was within yards of it, yet this solid piece of

furniture swayed five feet above the floor before hurtling with tremendous force into the wall where it disintegrated into a thousand flying fragments.

Doris Berkeley screamed and pointed across the hall. A chair was rising silently into the air. Without warning it was propelled by some unseen force against a great picture. At the same time a leg of the chair ricocheted across the hall and struck Lady Bowers on the head. With a moan of pain she fell senseless to the carpet.

Immediately there was a panic-stricken rush for the front door. Many of the boys and girls, beside themselves with terror, ran out onto the terrace. Nipper and one or two of the others stood firm, however, and the rest, rather shamefaced, returned. Lady Bowers was carried tenderly upstairs to her bedroom, where some of the girls put her to bed and staunched the blood that was flowing freely from a jagged cut in her head.

All was now quiet in the house; the lights still blazed, but the servants had fled and it was clear that, even if they could be found, nothing would induce them to return to Forest House. So the youngsters sat down to their interrupted meal with senses alert for the slightest sound. But the hours passed and the guests began to regain their composure. In the drawing room the radio was switched on and soon the strains of dance music put everyone completely at ease. Upstairs, Travers and Archie took turns in standing guard outside Lady Bowers' room.

Later that evening Nelson Lee arrived. When he had gleaned all the facts from Nipper, he carried out a systematic search of the house. Almost to challenge the great detective's investigations further manifestations took place. The lights faded and the heavy oak door of the drawing room began to splinter as if some gigantic presence was endeavouring to gain an entry from the hall. The lights failed completely; voices seemed to come out of the air; and something grabbed Handforth by the ankle and threw him top the floor with stunning force. Nelson Lee again examined the panelled walls for some clue that would explain the mystery. He found nothing.

Later, in the bedroom into which Willy Handforth and his chums had retired, the enormous four-poster bed suddenly began to move and then, rising vertically, threw the Third-Formers onto the floor. Out on the landing a strange shape appeared. It was garbed in the conical hat and gown of a medieval wizard. The features were those of Professor Ivan Nerki. But when Lee endeavoured to come to grips with the figure, it leapt backwards over the balustrade and vanished into the blackness below.

For a moment the youngsters were again

overwhelmed with panic, but Nelson Lee calmed them. He switched on every light in the big kitchen and they gathered there, consuming hot drinks and sandwiches. Gradually the night passed, while they kept a weary vigil. When dawn came many of them had fallen into an uneasy sleep.

The next day everyone was out tobogganing and skating. Somehow the weird events of the night seemed ridiculous in the wintry sunlight. Even Lady Bowers left her bed, for the wound she had received proved superficial, and she had made a swift recovery under the nursing administrations of the girls.

Nelson Lee spent the day in making a number of preparations. He left the house for a while and despatched a telegram to Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, the African Chieftain, asking them to join him immediately. He knew that, alone, he could do little to solve the riddle of the mansion, but with the millionaire sportsman and the Kutaland chief present, his position would be greatly strengthened. He returned to the house and spent the afternoon conducting an extensive survey of the corridors and walls of the house. But it became clear that there were no secret panels or hidden passages, in fact, there seemed no solution to the mystery. Nipper noticed, however, that the famous detective seemed more cheerful; he had an air of quiet confidence that was reassuring to the junior captain when they went in to tea.

It was a pleasant meal. The presence of Nelson Lee did much to remove the fears of the young guests, and, when later, Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi arrived, a feeling of optimism prevailed generally. Thus the evening passed in delightful fashion, unmarred by any uncanny incidents.

At midnight, the guests retired while the three men began a ceaseless patrol of the house. It was one o'clock when Umlosi noticed that the lights in one corridor were out. He moved forward to investigate, then halted in surprise. A vague shape barred his way - a shape that seemed monstrous even in the near-blackness of the corridor. With a grunt the powerful African leapt forward; the next moment a terrific struggle occurred. And then an amazing thing happened: Umlosi found himself picked up like a babe! For the first time the mighty king of Kutaland had been bested in physical strength. He shouted with rage as he felt himself lifted high in the air and hurled with awful force to the floor, almost at the feet of Lee and Dorrimore who had raced up on hearing the struggle. Umlosi was hurt - badly bruised by the fall and the incredible grip of his assailant of whom there was no sign.

The juniors and girls, awakened, rushed from their rooms; and as they stood grouped around the groaning chief, a shrill scream

sounded from the bend in the corridor. It came from Irene Manners! Lee raced to her bedroom, but it was empty. A feverish search of the bedrooms, and then the whole house, proved that Irene had vanished. Lanterns were obtained and a systematic search of the grounds was made. And it was, on mustering in the hall, that Church and McClure missed their study-mate, Handforth, who, like his girl chum, had vanished without trace.

And now the guests were beside themselves with panic and terror. Lady Bowers was overcome with remorse. She felt that she was to blame for the chain of unhappy events by allowing the young people to come to Forest House. Obviously, Professor Nerki had been right and, in ignoring his warning, she had signed the death warrant of her nephew's friends. She insisted that Nelson Lee and the others leave at once, and the party had to bow to the inevitable. With Umlosi leading the way, the youngsters started to talk to Fordingbridge. But although Lee and Lord Dorrimore were supposed to follow on behind, they did not go far. Halfway down the drive they halted behind the bulk of a big holly tree.

"And now we are going into action," said Lee grimly. "Upon my word, it's time, too! It is more than distressing to see such a charming lady so completely duped. Lady Bowers actually thinks that young Irene and Handforth are dead. She believes that Forest House is haunted, and that in Nerki lies her only salvation."

"It will be a shock when her eyes are opened."

"The bigger the shock the better, Dorrie. Before daylight comes, we are going to expose Nerki completely and provide Lady Bowers with such proof that even she will know this occult business to be fake. What about the boys and girls?"

"They are on their way according to plan. They understand your instructions and won't go far. You're a cunning old fox, Lee. Nerki must be convinced that he is rid of us at last. But I am still puzzled. How did he perform those tricks in the house?"

"Come with me and I will show you," Lee replied.

They walked back to the terrace and halted outside the windows of the drawing room. Lee had deliberately left those unfastened, and it was the work of a moment to enter.

Everything was dark and silent. Lady Bowers had retired and, apart from her, the house was empty. Lee switched on his torch and led the way to the hall and the grandfather's clock that ticked loudly in the corner. And then, to the amazement of the sporting peer, Lee explained. The clock itself was genuine, but the case had been cunningly constructed so that the

front and part of the sides folded back, allowing ample room for the passage of a large man. Even the weights and chains could be hooked back out of the way. The detective reached inside and pressed a switch. The base inside the clock slid silently out of sight to reveal a deep shaft; a ladder vanished into the gloom below.

"Here we have the secret of the 'hauntings', old man," explained Lee. "The 'ghost' came up the shaft, entered the clock, opened the front of the case, and walked out into the hall."

"Where does this lead to?"

"That we must find out. Somewhere at the other end of this shaft is Nerki, his accomplices, and the missing youngsters."

Nelson Lee led the way into the clock and descended the ladder. At the bottom they found themselves in a tunnel. A dim glow came from the far end and they could hear the murmur of voices. Silently they travelled to the end of the tunnel.

Nelson Lee proved to be correct with his deductions. The tunnel led to Nerki's house, and there they found Irene Manners and Ted Handforth safe and sound. They were being held in captivity by a Russian - a giant of a man fully seven feet in height. It was he who had overpowered Umlosi in the corridor. He was inoffensive and mentally childlike, and gave no trouble to Lee and Dorrie. Nerki and another accomplice were captured by the waiting boys and girls as they attempted to flee from the house. Umlosi and his young charges, far from leaving for Fordingbridge, were hiding at the rear of Nerki's house.

Nerki knew that the game was up. He and his two henchmen were marched back to Forest House in triumph, where they faced a stunned Lady Bowers, aroused from her bed by the girls. Then to the satisfaction of the party, Nelson Lee explained.

Professor Nerki, it appeared, was actually Rod Davenby of Springfield, Illinois in the

U.S.A. One of the greatest of all so-called spirit mediums, he had for many years used his skill with stage magic and illusion in duping impressionable people of means. On hearing of Lady Bowers' interest in the occult, he had moved to the New Forest a year previously. During her absence for some weeks, he had installed apparatus that had been the means of convincing her, and later her guests, of the existence in Forest House of malevolent spirits.

His ultimate aim was to obtain a considerable sum of money to found a spiritualist institute. Actually the cash would have got no further than his own pockets. Archie's plan to spend Christmas at Forest House, coupled with Nelson Lee's astuteness, had foiled what might have been a colossal fraud.

Thus ended Christmas series numbers 152-4 of the Second New Series, NELSON LEE LIBRARY, published December 1933. It was the last Christmas series that Edwy Searles Brooks was to write for the "Lee", and there is some evidence that his old genius was once more active. In places the story contains much of the suspense found in the Dr. Karnak and Ezra Quirke series. Unfortunately, the tale still falls short of Mr. Brooks' finest work. The gathering up of the threads - the explanations for many of the uncanny incidents, were sketchy and unconvincing. At least two glaring errors were made which, although not apparent at first glance, are obvious to the careful reader. Nevertheless, coming at a time when the NELSON LEE was obviously fading out, the Professor Nerki series brought a touch of the old and nearly forgotten Brooks to those staunch readers who remained faithful to the end.

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By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



BY BOB WHITER

The Master Mummer

The young boy sat in the bay window of the front room, looking out into the street.

His father stood by his side, hidden by the curtain. The parent rapped on the window as a passer-by came into sight. The man lifted his eyes and dropped them again before doing a double-take. To see a Chinaman, replete in mandarin cap and robe, in the window of a suburban London house, must have created quite a surprise.

The boy made up to look like an Oriental was "yours truly" indulging in one of his many hobbies. Later on as a member of various dramatic and operatic societies, he was still carrying on his love for making up, acting and, of course, music. Even later on still, he would take part as an extra in movies.

This must be one of the reasons why I have always enjoyed the stories that featured Monty Lowther and George Francis Kerr of St. Jim's, "Putty" Grace of Rookwood and of course the master mummer of Greyfriars, William Wibley. However improbable some of them undoubtedly were, I always thought they made pretty good yarns, whether as single tales or series.

We first hear of Wibley in *Magnet* No. 322 in the story entitled "Wibley's Wheeze". He arrives at a rehearsal of the Remove's dramatic society, mistaking it for the real thing.

When he tells them he could show them a thing or two, they throw him out. Later on the Removites realise that, on the subject of dramatics, Wibley really knows what he is talking about, and Wharton is only too glad to relinquish his leadership to the tallow-haired junior. Over the years Wibley carried out many impersonations of both boys and adults. *Magnet* No. 438 saw his first attempt to masquerade as Mossoo, the French teacher, who was embroiled with Joey Banks, the bookie. It is obvious that one cannot record all of Wibley's appearances throughout the history of the *Magnet* in an article of this length. We will therefore try to

give a brief representation. I hope the examples used are among your favourites.

Magnet No. 1341 "The Ace of Jokers" is a case in point of a very funny single story. It has Wibley pretending to be a new master, a Mr Spofford, having learned that the real master instead of coming to Greyfriars had gone to Rookwood. It happened during Mr Quelch's absence due to a cold. (This was a little reminiscent of *Magnet* 1190, when Wibley, because of Mr Prout's indisposition from a black eye, made up as a temporary master. "Mr Moon" proceeded to hand out punishments to the Fifth, the Remove getting their own back for past setbacks suffered at the hands of Blundell & Co. Although Wibley didn't actually feature in the Franz Kranz series (in my opinion a very underrated one) I always love the following excerpt from *Magnet* 1358 "The Slackers' Awakening". Mauly has been telling the Famous Five his reasons for thinking that Franz Kranz is the kidnapper.

"There's one thing you seem to have overlooked, Mr Sherlock Holmes" said Johnny Bull, with a grin.

"Lots of things, very likely; but what's the particular point?"

"The kidnapper's been seen - and he's a man with a beard and a nose like a big tomato. Kranz hasn't a beard, and his nose is a little knob."

"Dear man!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Well, what do you mean?" demanded Johnny warmly. "Think Kranz can alter the shape of his nose whenever he likes?"

"Yaas!"

"You howling ass -"

"Know a fellow named Wibley?"

"Eh? Do you mean Wibley of the Remove?"

"Yaas!"

"Of course I know him, fathead! What about Wib, ass?"

"Member he does theatrical stunts?"

"Yes, you duffer! What about it?"

"Ever seen him with a different nose on?"

"Lots of times! Oh!" ejaculated Johnny.

"You mean that the kidnapper may be got up in a false nose?"

Magnets 1434 - 1439, the "Portercliffe Hall" series, was one of the few holiday series which included our young thespian. In an amusing excerpt, Billy Bunter pretends to be ill, hence the following.

"This is the room, sir," said Kipps' voice at the door, "the patient is in bed. Step in here."

"Thank you!" said a deep, rather husky voice. A slim figure in a black frock coat stepped into Bunter's room. Billy Bunter blinked at him. The Famous Five stared at him. Had they not been aware that it was a jape, certainly they would not have dreamed of recognising Wibley. He wore horn-rimmed glasses, and a short grey beard, and had lifelike wrinkles on his brow and looked about sixty. "Here you are, Bunter," said Bob.

"Dr. Diddle to see you."

Wibley was to appear briefly in the "Loder's Convict Cousin" series, *Magnets* 1493-1496. While returning to the school from a visit to Mr. Lazarus's shop, (he'd picked up a convict suit for a part in a play) he was accosted by the convict who was looking for a change of clothes. The convict's feelings may well be imagined when he opened the parcel and found only a broad arrow suit!

Wibley later uses the suit, making up as the convict to frighten Loder. It is while he is rehearsing the part in the box room, that Bunter, seeking a quiet spot to consume a pot of purloined jam, gets the scare of his life. This actual episode takes place in *Magnet* 1493, entitled "His Convict Cousin".

In a single story, *Magnet* No. 1498 "Harry Wharton's Amazing Relation", Monty Newland enlists Wibley's aid. The schoolboy actor makes up as a stage like character to humiliate the Remove Captain. Newland had taken umbrage over an intentional remark made by Wharton.

Here we are treated to a description of Wibley making up. After had has donned a suit of clothes on top of his own to add to his bulk we are told the following:-

Then he proceeded to make-up at the mirror. Newland helped him, handing him things, and watching him, in wonder at his skill, and with many chuckles.

Wib's complexion became dark and shiny. A black moustache was gummed on his upper lip. A blue-ish shade on his chin hinted that he was in need of a shave. His eyebrows, which were naturally light, became black as the raven's wing; his hair followed suit. But his nose was the triumph of his peculiar art. Newland, who saw him fix it on over his genuine proboscis, could hardly believe that it did not grow there when all was finished. It was a tremendous beak of a nose, hooked with a reddish tip.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Newland.

"Some Coko - what?" grinned Wibley.

Let us now go to *Magnet* No. 1536 for the start of a series in which Wibley was to play the leading part. Caught out impersonating Monsieur Charpentier, he gets expelled, but contrives to return as Sir Hilton Popper's nephew Archibald Popper. It is interesting to compare the cover of this first of the series "Spoofing the School" with that of a later series, namely *Magnet* No. 1676 "Sir William's Double". On both covers, Wibley is being confronted by the person he is made up to resemble. But to return to the first series, Wibley as in the past is helped in his masquerade by Mr. Lazarus, when he visits that gentleman in his shop.

Wibley changed his clothes for a second-hand suit in good condition a little too large for him, with a little skilful padding here and there. This made him look a size larger than he really was. Elevators in his shoes added to the effect.

His figure, when he had finished looked nothing like Wib's own slim and, in fact, rather bony figure.

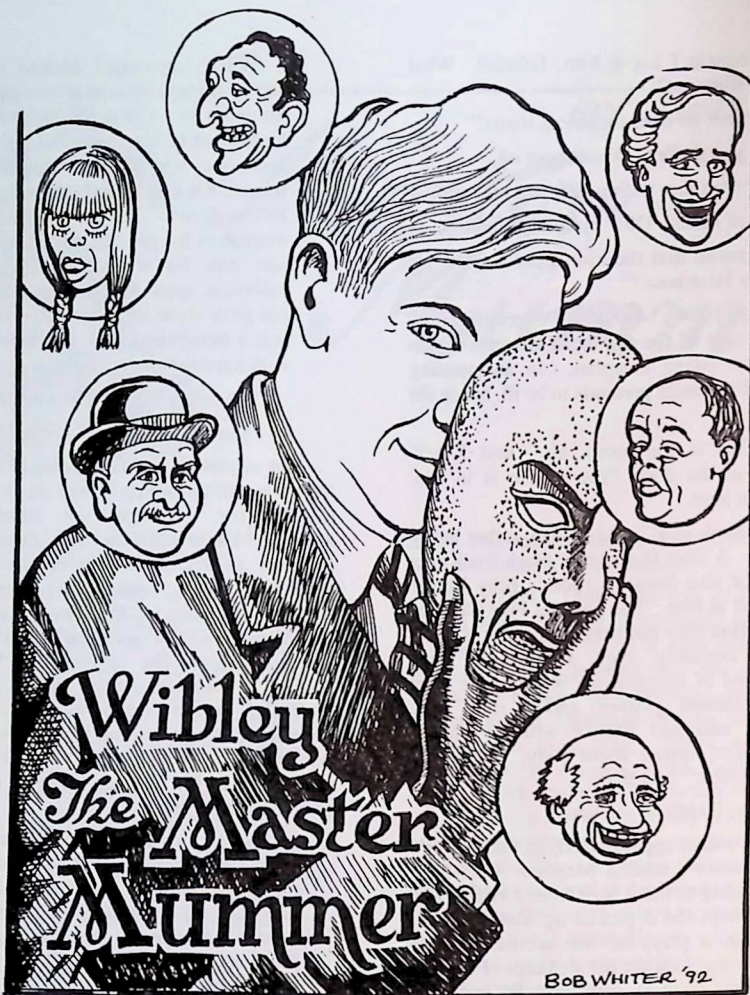
His hair, which was rather tallowy in hue, was cropped close, and over it, Wibley fitted a dark brown wig, the hair a little longer than his own. Wib's skill in these matters was wonderful. When he had finished adjusting that wig, it looked as if it grew there...

"Now my rosy complexion's got to go!" remarked Wibley.

Mr. Lazarus opened an extensive make-up box ...

He had a magic hand at make-up

In a few minutes he had a rather pasty complexion, quite unlike his own. Then his eyelashes and eyebrows were darkened; and by that time there was little that was recognisable about William Wibley. With all the nerve in the world he proceeds to the school via taxi and becomes a "new" member of the Remove! After many disappointing set backs, the last *Magnet* in the series No. 1540 "Wibley Wins Through" finds him disguising Bolsover as Bill Huggins, a



"mendicant" who has sworn revenge on the French Master. The idea being that Wibley (without his disguise) will go to Mossoo's rescue when the tramp (Bolsover) presents to attack him.

As with so many of Wibley's *Wonderful Wheezes* this one goes wrong and Wibley finds himself battling the genuine article. Although badly knocked about he finally succeeds in knocking out the tramp and thereby winning the French master's eternal gratitude and pardon. As a result he returns to the school as Wibley and not as Popper!

William Wibley had the honour to star in the last completed series of the *Magnet*. This series also re-introduced a character who, after his introduction in the first South Sea Islands series, was to reappear several times - I'm referring to James Soames the "Sea Lawyer". This last Easter vacation had Sir William Bird on secret service work in Europe. It was imperative that the enemy believed him still to

be in the U.K. so Wibley was pressed into service. In the guise of Sir William he invites the Famous Five to "his audience" at Eastcliffe Lodge. Bunter, with his usual eavesdropping propensity, learns of the scheme and is allowed to attend - to keep his mouth shut. It contains many amusing sequences, among which is the one when Wibley loses his wig and is forced to try and steal a hat to conceal the fact. These stories were in *Magnets* Nos. 1676 - 1682. I wonder how many of us in that far off month of May in the year 1940, as we read the last story in the series "The Nazi Spy's Secret", realised it was the penultimate *Magnet*? I for one didn't, and after reading the following week's "The Shadow of the Sack" couldn't understand when the newsagent told me "That's the last of 'em!" Be that as it may, I hope our brief sojourn in the world of William Wibley has awakened pleasant memories. If there are any collectors who haven't read these stories I can only say - "Read 'em without further delay!"



Bunter's Christmas Probation

By

LESLIE ROWLEY



"What's going to be done?" demanded Bunter of Harry Wharton & Co. Tea was in progress in Study No. 1, and Wharton and Nugent had invited the rest of the Famous Five to discuss the forthcoming hols over the cup that cheers and a dishful of appetising sausages. Bunter had not been invited, but the lack of such a formality had never deterred him on previous occasions. Now, as he reached a podgy paw towards the plate of succulent sosses, he repeated his enquiry with added emphasis as Johnny Bull deftly recovered the sausages and replaced the plate beyond Bunter's grasp.

"What Bunter means, you fellows, is not what but whom" observed Johnny. "Any offers of free board and lodging with the freedom of the kitchen and pantry thrown in ...?"

"No takers," observed Nugent, "and as I don't remember inviting Bunter here in the first place, I think it's time he was on his way. You are nearest the door, Bob, would you do the necessary ...?"

"Pleased to oblige." The reluctant and protesting Owl made a sudden exit from the study, assisted through the doorway by one of the largest boots in the Remove. Yells of anguished wrath floated back but Bunter did not float back with them. One hefty kick had proved sufficient and Bunter did not wish for an encore. The attention of the chums returned to the remainder of the sausages, and discussion on the approaching vac. resumed as the early twilight faded into the purple of evening. Gentle flakes of snow drifted against the window as the growing wind stirred the old trees in Elm Walk and the cold fingers of Nature traced patterns of rime on frozen glass.

Later, in dorm that night, Wharton was reminded of Bunter and the problem that the Falstaff of the Remove faced regarding the hols. It appeared that Bunter had offered to take the Bounder up and introduce him to those social graces of which Smithy very sadly stood in ignorance. To cinch the deal, as Fishy would have expressed it, Bunter was prepared to 'stand' Redwing as a fellow guest at the Vernon-Smith home in Courtman Square so long as Redwing knew his proper place as 'a poor sailor's son'.

The Remove waited in a kind of expectant hush for the explosion. They did not wait long, neither did Bunter who waited patiently for the words of appreciation to fall from the grateful lips of the Bounder. It was Bunter who was the disappointed one. For some reason that Bunter could not foresee, predict or conjecture, Vernon-Smith expressed his gratitude by smiting Bunter hip and thigh with a bolster. It was only the arrival of Wingate to see lights out that rescued Bunter from possible serious injury. It would be a long time, a long time indeed, before Bunter would repeat his kind offer of taking up Smithy.

When the excitement of this impromptu entertainment had subsided and Wharton's head found the softness of his pillow, he found himself considering Bunter's predicament. He could not recall ever extending an invitation to Bunter for the Christmas or any other holidays. Bunter just seemed to materialise like the monster from the black lagoon. There had been some bad reaction from Colonel Wharton to the presence of such a slovenly and ill-mannered guest under his roof. There had been complaints from the kitchen about missing food, and the constant summoning of Thomas bringing refreshment to Bunter's room. There had been the embarrassment of Bunter trying to borrow money from Wells. In all it was a disturbing chronicle.

Further along the dorm, Bunter stirred uneasily in his sleep. Some of the swipes that Smithy had landed with his pillow had hit home, and the usual stentorian snore was punctuated by an occasional yelp of pain. It was fortuitous that Wingate had interceded when he had and doubtless Bunter was grateful. The burning question of where Bunter should spend the hols was still not settled. What was settled was that Bunter would not be gracing Courtman Square with his illustrious presence unless his fat carcass would be called upon to endure something far more painful than pillow swiping.

The new day dawned, but there had been a heavy fall of snow during the night and the quad lay pristine under its cover of white. From the great gateway, to the clock tower and the neighbouring roofs of the House, the Chapel, and the gymnasium, the rays of a wintry sun found a crisp and silvery sparkle.

The water in Founder's Fountain was frozen and the statue of that gentleman was edged with a piping of white, as was every lattice and window, every lintel and buttress. The scene was greeted by the fellows with unrestrained enthusiasm. During the break, Third Form fags created a credible snowman of portly proportions to which additional aids to identity were given in the form of a discarded mortarboard and a notice informing the general public "THIS IS OLD PROUT".

Forbidden slides were quickly brought into being and, almost as quickly, buried beneath fresh falls of snow, only to be re-discovered by the unwary, including Loder of the Sixth and Coker of the Fifth, much to the amusement of everybody else.

"But how about a doughnut, old fat man?" Wharton was reminded of Bunter during break. Like a fat peri at the gates of paradise gazing sorrowfully at the good things therein, the fat ornament favoured his form captain with an indignant and reproachful glare.

"If you've come to invite me to your home for the hols, Wharton, I'm prepared to give the matter some consideration. After all, that invitation is rightly mine by precedent and common usage. If you are prepared to do the decent thing and discuss things over some refreshment, then I'm your man - those doughnuts look spiffing."

"A doughnut it is," Wharton replied, stressing the singular at the same time as Bunter intended the plural and looked belligerently at a solitary doughnut that was placed in front of him.

"What's this? You treat a fellow to one measly doughnut and expect him to honour your poor home with his presence. This won't do, won't do at all." Measly or not, his fat jaws were already making short work of the despised comestible. "Get a bagful - a dozen or, better still, two dozen. I've often found that a good feed helps making decisions easy."

"Buy all the doughnuts you want," suggested Wharton, "I only bought the one in order to let you know that there will be no invitation to Wharton Lodge this year - not for you at any rate. My uncle doesn't like guests who try to sponge from Wells, or who plunder the kitchen and larder. Perhaps some of your nobby friends will be more accommodating, but I doubt it."

"Yah!" There being no invitation to Wharton Lodge, Bunter saw no point in wasting any further politeness on the Captain of the Remove. Instead he favoured Wharton with a glare of contempt that travelled from foot to head and back again. "Yah", he repeated scornfully, "d'you think I'd be found dead in such a poky little place as Wharton Lodge?"

"If you're found there at all, that's how you are likely to be found," advised Wharton.

"And as to that old fossil of an uncle of yours making a fuss because I touched Wells for a fiver, what does he think menials are there for if it's not to come to the aid of their betters? Besides, I'd have paid back such a piffling amount out of the postal order I'm expecting. I can't see Mauly's uncle making such a fuss when I'm invited to Mauleverer Towers. Sir Reginald Brooke recognises a fellow gentleman when he sees one and will be sending one of the Rolls to fetch me and Mauly while you will have to make do with your uncle's ramshackle old Ford."

Something Bunter had said seemed to have annoyed Wharton, for he suddenly grasped his detractor by the scruff of an unwashed neck and thrust Bunter's face into a convenient pile of snow, after which Wharton felt decidedly better. Judging from the yells that followed, Bunter felt decidedly worse.

The Remove Captain went off to seek his friends. Bunter went off in search of Mauleverer. Like the famed Lord High Executioner, Bunter appeared to have a little list from which a victim had to be found. So far, the project was enjoying little success. The Bunder and then that beast Wharton had proved dismal failures and it seemed that the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed Mauly up. Bunter made three visits to Study No. 12, drawing a blank each time. But, if the schoolboy Earl was not present, his study-mate Sir Jimmy Vivian was. Sir Jimmy had observed those three visits with growing suspicion. On the third occasion, Sir Jimmy reasoned that mere suspicion had become established fact. Bunter was on a grub pilfering mission, and Bunter had to be deterred. Once again yells of anguish arose from Bunter's being. For one rare performance only, Bunter was innocent of the charge made, but having one's head banged against the study wall was no consolation. Probably Mauly felt some consolation later, but then, it was not his head that had been banged.

Toddy had prepared the study table for tea when a rather disconsolate Bunter hove into view. The table was not exactly groaning under the festive board thus displayed. Peter Todd was apportioning a small tin of sardines and three slices of toast between the three occupants. Bunter, who had already taken the precaution of having tea in hall, glared at this meagre offering with an expression that threatened to crack his fat spectacles.

"Is that all you've got for tea, Toddy?"

"Well, it will have to do, old fat man, but if you've got a contribution to make, it will be very welcome unless you've raided a hamper of Coker's or a cupboard of Smithy's, in which case, you'd better take it back before they find

out."

"Three mouldy sardines and three pieces of toast are no good to me" began Bunter.

"All the more for Dutton and me." Toddy did not wait for Bunter to change his mind, neither did he hesitate about splitting what had been Bunter's share and adding it to the plates intended for Dutton and himself. Bunter regarded this operation with dismay.

"What about me?" he demanded.

"You said your share was no good to you. There's plenty of tea in the pot, you can guzzle some of that and leave Dutton and myself to enjoy our tea in peace."

The good-natured Dutton poured a cup of tea and passed it to Bunter. As Dutton was so engaged, a grinning Bunter reached across and snaffled the deaf junior's tea. There came the sound of urgent champing. Hasty mastication of the purloined foodstuff followed the downward path but, unfortunately for Bunter, it did not disappear fast enough. Peter Todd thumped the plunderer's plump back causing a horrible choking sound. No doubt Dutton regretted the loss of his tea, but not as much as Bunter. Toddy and Dutton left the study to find that Nugent and Wharton had jam tarts and fruit cake to offer them. A few moments later a fat face showed itself in the doorway of No. 1 study, but welcome there was none.

"One of you fellows got a cricket stump I can borrow?" enquired Peter.

Bunter did not stay to find out. In the course of a chequered career, stumps had featured prominently in his fat life. He retreated hurriedly to his own study and plumped himself into the armchair he had always claimed as his own. His plans for a comfortable Christmas had made no progress at all. He would welcome an invite to Mauleverer Towers but Mauly did not seem much in evidence to issue the invitation. In fact, it seemed possible that Mauly was deliberately avoiding Bunter, though Bunter couldn't see any reason why. The grub was good and plentiful and afternoon naps with crystallised fruits and other sweet and sticky substances in handy abundance would pass the hours between lunch and dinner pleasantly enough. True, the Towers tended to be overpowering with all its magnificence, but Bunter felt sure that a chap with his dignified and aristocratic mien would blend into the splendour and give the Towers the final hallmark of acceptance.

What passed as a brain in Bunter's logic was the fact that he could just make do with Wharton Lodge, Colonel and Miss Wharton and the other fellows. Bunter was used to the Lodge. He had spent many Christmases there under differing auspices but his cardinal rule had been to get in first, then it would be an

almost impossible task for his hosts to remove him. On one occasion he had hidden in an unused bedroom and had to raid the kitchen at dead of night until some officious beast had put a lock on the door. Bed without board did not fit in with Bunter's grand strategy. A bed was all right in its way, for Bunter was good at sleeping, but he was better still, far better, at eating. A supply of grub had to be plentiful and available and, of course, appetising. All these essentials passed through his fat mind as he tried to cope with the problem of gaining egress to a house where Christmas would be celebrated in the time-honoured way.

Had Bunter paid the slightest attention in class he might have recalled the deathless words from Shakespeare:

'diseases, desperate grown,
By desperate appliances are reliev'd.
Or not at all'

Whether gatecrashing someone's home for the vac. could be likened to a desperate disease might be open to misinterpretation, but there was no doubt, no doubt at all, that a 'desperate appliance' was required if Bunter was to 'do' someone for Christmas. Now, aided by a bag of bullseyes snaffled from Ogilvy's study earlier, what thought processes Bunter had were working overtime. Those processes, like the bullseyes, were almost exhausted, when the great idea occurred to the ornament of the Remove.

Mr Prout glared portentously at William George Bunter of the Remove. It was the afternoon of the following day, and Prout had become increasingly aware that he had been under observation. He had caught sight of fat features adorned by fat spectacles, peering at him round corners and out of doorways, on several occasions and he made a mental resolve to bring this intrusion to Quelch's notice later.

That 'Old Pompous' was going out was obvious to all. His portly form was enshrouded in an overcoat, buttoned to the collar as protection from the bitter wind and penetrating snow. He carried a briefcase, and carried it with care as though it contained documents of tremendous importance. In fact all those documents amounted to was a lengthy discourse he was making to a meeting of the Courtfield and Friardale Natural History Society. The subject was 'The future of the Grizzly Bear in the Dominion of Canada' - a subject close to Prout's plump heart, and encapsulated in seventy-five closely written pages, and calculated (or so Prout hoped) to set the members of the audience of the Courtfield and Friardale Natural History Society by the ears.

Bunter knew all about Prout's programme for the afternoon. Bunter knew a lot about things that did not concern him - they were always more interesting than those that did. He

calculated that an experienced bore such as Prout would be safely occupied for some time to come. He looked this way and then that and saw no man. A minute later, he rolled into the study that the Master of the Fifth had so recently vacated, and reached for the telephone . . .

Mr Quelch rose to his feet and greeted Colonel Wharton warmly. The Colonel, who was a member of the Board of Governors, had been attending a meeting of that august body that morning before lunching with the Head, and now the two of them were free to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Colonel Wharton was anxious to have news of his nephew's progress during the term that was now ending, and Quelch was as anxious to reassure him. Harry's sometimes headstrong nature had occasioned some trouble in the past, but he had kept himself in check and had thrown himself into class and games with enthusiasm. A difficult phase of money-lending had been put down without necessitating too much concern on Quelch's part, but involving Fisher T Fish in a lot of concern, a lot of very painful concern indeed. Idleness had been discouraged and there was no doubt that the Form Master was pleased with the way his Head Boy had properly influenced the form as a whole. The Colonel's face became more and more suffused with happy satisfaction as the catalogue continued.

"Your opinion of my nephew has given me much comfort, my dear Quelch. Comfort that will be shared by my sister. I offer you my thanks for the kindness, patience, and understanding that have brought so much of the good that is in Harry to the fore. But it is another boy of your form about whom I wish to ask your opinion. In a few days' time, Harry and Hurree Singh will be joined at the Lodge by their friends. Both my sister and I have always told Harry that he has freedom of choice as far as guests are concerned, and we are pleased to make Christmas the happy and joyous occasion it should be. This year, we noticed that he has not included Bunter on his list, nor has he offered any explanation for the omission. Bunter has not always been the happiest of choices of house guest, and I remember, with gratitude, when you encouraged him to wash, and the cook put the kitchen under lock and key. Perhaps Harry has decided that enough is enough, and that the household should have a rest from Bunter's eccentric behaviour. The thought has occurred to me that you may have something to add that would explain Harry's decision. Perhaps you could . . ."

There came a sudden interruption as the telephone bell leapt into sound. With an expression regretting the disturbance, the master of the Remove crossed to the telephone on his desk and barked into the mouthpiece, and an extraordinary expression came over Mr

Quelch's face. He was no stranger to surprise and, as master of a form like the Remove, he had probably had more than his fair share of startling events. Quite a number had been connected with that telephone, like the occasion when Vernon-Smith had been caught making bets with Bill Lodgey. But nothing had been as strange as what Quelch was feeling when he took the present call. Over by the fireplace sat Colonel Wharton, to whom he had been talking. Now, in some unnatural manner, that same voice reached the ears of the bewildered form master. The instrument prattled happily on:

"I will be grateful, Mr Quelch, if you would reassure Bunter that my sister and I will welcome him to the Lodge for Christmas. Perhaps you would kindly inform Harry that I expect him to conform to my wishes in this matter . . . oh lor!" The voice at the end of the line suddenly lapsed into the more familiar yelp of W.G. Bunter. From Masters' Corridor came a sound like that of a reluctant pig being led to the slaughter. Mr Quelch's study door flew open, and Bunter's ear entered, being propelled by the fierce grip of Hacker, master of the Shell. Hacker got going without delay. Not for nothing was he known as the Acid Drop, as was evident from the story that now unfolded.

"It is felicitous that Colonel Wharton is present this afternoon. This boy of your form, Quelch, this Bunter, was acting suspiciously early today, so much so that Mr Prout thought the boy had designs on his study, and asked me kindly to keep watch. As you know, as doubtless the whole school knows, Prout was due to give a talk in Courtfield this afternoon and, when the Fifth Form master had left the school, I observed this very boy, this Bunter, enter the study. A few moments later, I entered the study myself only to find that he was using the telephone without permission. In addition to the flouting of the regulation, Bunter was in the act of committing a deception, a serious deception, for he was apparently talking to you, Quelch, not in his own voice, but in the voice of Colonel Wharton. I put these facts before you, Mr Quelch, with the strong recommendation that you lay them before the Headmaster. A flogging, a severe flogging, or even an expulsion, may warn others that the flagrant and wanton misuse of masters' telephones is a practice not to be encouraged. As I said in Masters' Commons, only the other day . . ."

"Quite so, Hacker, I have noted your remarks, as I have noted the deception practised by this miserable boy. I need not detain you longer." Nevertheless, Horace Hacker seemed reluctant to depart, for Hacker did not want to pass up the chance to see his colleague's discomfort in front of a governor of the school. Mr Quelch held the study door open as a hint to the reluctant master of the Fifth. Mr Hacker might be reluctant to go. Bunter, on the other

hand, was reluctant to stay, very reluctant indeed. Mr Hacker had mentioned the possibility of an expulsion or a severe flogging. Bunter had no wish to experience either of these rewards - especially the latter.

The door closed upon Hacker, and Quelch turned his attention to Bunter with a look that was far from encouraging.

"Bunter, you will explain immediately, and truthfully, the purpose behind this unscrupulous deception on both Colonel Wharton and myself. Let me warn you that you are in serious enough trouble and, regardless of whatever punishment the Head may impose, I will not hesitate to use the cane to get at the truth."

Usually the threat of a caning would galvanise Bunter into more intensive lying, but Quelch's hand reached towards the cane, and Bunter had a sudden conversion to the truth.

"I - i - it's that rotter Wharton's fault", he babbled, "he told me that it wasn't on for me to touch Wells for a small loan until one of my postal orders arrived. He accused me of snaffling tuck from the kitchen, just because some cold chicken, a cake and a mere dozen mince pies were missing. I thought that if I rang you up as Colonel Wharton and let on that he and Miss Wharton would miss me if I didn't come for the vac., that you would tell Wharton his uncle and aunt wanted me, and that he either had to invite me or offend them. It was all going well, when that beast Hacker interfered and I found that Colonel Wharton was here."

Quelch looked at that specimen of his form as though he could have eaten him.

"Bunter, you have involved Colonel Wharton, who is not only a much respected member of the school governing board, but a kind and hospitable gentleman under whose roof you have stayed as a guest and during which time your behaviour has left much to be desired. By your own statement, it is clear that you tried to borrow money from the servants and pilfered food from the kitchen. Both actions are unpardonable, and are further compounded by the deception you have attempted this afternoon." Mr Quelch touched a bell and summoned Trotter to request the presence of Wingate.

"Wingate, Colonel Wharton and I wish to speak together on a matter of some importance, and it is possible that we will be seeing the Head late when Bunter will be required. I shall be grateful if you will kindly keep him under observation until I send for him."

If George Wingate felt reluctant at playing nursemaid to a grubby fag, he did not show it. If Bunter was booked for a visit to the Head, it was more than likely that it would not be a pleasant experience, a possibility that did not fill Wingate's thoughts for long as he escorted the

Remove along to the Sixth Form corridor.

The Colonel favoured Mr Quelch with a look of profound sympathy.

"You must find Bunter a severe trial, my dear Quelch . . . I still cannot fully comprehend the young idiot's intentions."

"The boy's crass stupidity is beyond belief," replied Mr Quelch, "and one can only estimate the damage he has done. He has had the effrontery to involve a school Governor and a school master in an occurrence that would normally merit the direst of punishments, and for what? Because an invitation was not issued, in my view quite reasonably, because your nephew felt that Bunter's behaviour could not be tolerated any longer. From what Wharton has indicated to me it seems that Bunter has arrived at Wharton Lodge on other occasions without the formality of an invitation. Apparently the boy is immune to any lack of welcome . . ."

"That is true," agreed the Colonel, "I can recall instances when Bunter has occupied unused bedrooms and would have gone undiscovered had not the considerable inroads into food been found out and questioned. There was also the occasion when the boy's presence inadvertently prevented a robbery. I was grateful, very grateful, for his presence then, otherwise I would have suffered a considerable loss. A short while ago, Hacker was predicting a flogging or even an expulsion . . ."

"Merely wishful thinking on Hacker's part, I would say," came the Remove master's answer. "Nevertheless, impersonating a Governor and an attempt at deceiving a master would not be regarded as trivial matters. I have often wondered what life would be like without Bunter as my responsibility." An expression of ecstatic tranquillity briefly lit Mr Quelch's face and then was gone.

"We shall be seeing Dr Locke shortly," said Mr Quelch, after a moment's deep thought, "he is leaving for Majorca tomorrow with his family. As you probably know, Mrs Locke has not been well recently and Dr Pilsbury recommended that she should benefit from change as soon as possible. There will be a few matters that the Head will ask me to deal with on his behalf, and I will not be surprised if he leaves the matter of Bunter in my hands as well."

"I am prepared to explain things to Harry and see if he would agree to change his mind about Bunter coming to the Lodge for part of the vacation and giving the boy a last chance of redeeming himself from his previous behaviour. I could, perhaps, ask him and his friends to counsel Bunter about improving his performance as a guest. I am pleased, very pleased, that you are also going to join us, and Amy and I are looking forward to your stay . . ."

"I am sure that Wharton and his friends will encourage Bunter to improve on his previous behaviour." Mr Quelch spoke from former experience, having observed members of his form 'counselling' Bunter on the evils of snaffling other fellows' tuck. "If, however, that form of 'counselling' proves to be unsatisfactory, and you agree, I will be happy to introduce further persuasion of my own."

"My dear Quelch, you are very kind. If it is possible to convince Bunter that he is embarking on a period of probation during which his behaviour will be monitored, assessed, and corrected so that he meets with our approbation"

"We must not be too ambitious or over-optimistic," cautioned Mr Quelch. "Bad habits sometimes die hard, especially when they have been practised for a long time, as they have with Bunter."

George Wingate was pleased to be relieved of his charge. There were plenty of fellows whose company would have been welcome to the Captain of the School; Bunter was not among them. The fat fag's chatter had proved neither grateful nor comforting, and Wingate's hand had strayed towards his ash on more than one occasion.

* * * * *

Dr Locke had been busy that day; suitcases had to be packed, passports and tickets checked; notes and instructions left for staff who would be at the school for the remaining days and, first and foremost, he was concerned for his wife and hoped that a warmer climate would hasten her recovery. His kind face lightened with the appearance of his dear friend Quelch, on whom he could place so much reliance, but then darkened at the sight of Bunter.

"Why have you brought Bunter to me, Mr Quelch?"

"Bunter has used Mr Prout's telephone without permission, and Hacker, who witnessed the happening, has laid a complaint on Prout's behalf and they are bound to expect me to acquaint you of the fact."

"Please inform the two masters that commonsense would clearly dictate to them that they should lock their study doors when quitting. As for Bunter, I leave that matter in your safe hands, Quelch. Before you go do allow me to wish you both the very best of wishes for Christmas and the New Year, and to thank you for the cards that you have sent wishing Mrs Locke a speedy return to good health." No mention was made about the improper use of Prout's telephone. It seemed that any punishment would be left to Quelch, and Bunter knew of old that Quelch did not usually err on the 'spare the rod, spoil the child' principle.

As they quit the Head's study, Mr Quelch turned to the despair of his teaching career, and when he spoke there was little of the season's goodwill apparent.

"Bunter, you will go to Wharton's study and inform him that I wish to see him in my study. Your presence will also be required. Waste no time - your attempt at deception has already exceeded my patience and, I imagine, Colonel Wharton's also. In your own interests, I would advise you that any further transgression will have painful results."

Bunter's movements had been likened, many a time and oft, to those of a tired and weary snail. However, there was more than a hint of warning in what the beast said, and Bunter lost no time in collecting Wharton and returning to the study. The Captain of the Remove wondered what the row, if there was one, was all about, and was relieved when his form master indicated that he could sit down.

"You will remain standing, Bunter, you have much to answer for. Wharton, you may remember telling Bunter that he would not be welcome at Wharton Lodge this Christmas. I must tell you that you have my full understanding and sympathy for that decision. This afternoon, your uncle was talking to me in my study when Bunter used another master's telephone in an attempt to deceive me into thinking it was Colonel Wharton telling me that Bunter was very welcome at Wharton Lodge. My boy, you will recognise that Bunter's scandalous behaviour could have resulted in expulsion or a flogging. Dr Locke has kindly left the matter in my hands, and Colonel Wharton, as the most injured party, has told me that he would wish to intercede on Bunter's behalf. Although I may question the wisdom of the Colonel's so generously pardoning such an action by this wretched boy, your uncle has suggested a method whereby Bunter can be brought to realise the proper order of things. A kind of discipline whereby he can be taught how to accept the responsibilities of a guest whilst enjoying the comforts of the home of his host."

"The idea, Harry," explained Colonel Wharton, "is to give Bunter a last opportunity to redeem himself. If you still feel that Bunter is likely to annoy ourselves and other guests, I will honour your wishes and Bunter will not be invited to the Lodge. I know that you and your friends are dedicated to fair play, and that their dedication, in this instance, may be stretched to the limit, so be careful in making your decision."

"I would be happy to give it a try and so, I feel sure, will the other fellows, but we would like to know what would happen if Bunter fails to respond."

"As far as I am concerned, Bunter will be invited as usual. The festivities at the Lodge

will be observed in the usual way. If Bunter responds in a positive way he will be free to join those festivities. If he does not respond, he will cease to stay on a guest; I will inform Mr Bunter and tell him that his son will be arriving by the earliest possible train, or by my car, if no train is available."

"Bunter," urged Mr Quelch in his most serious tones, "I trust that you have assimilated what Colonel Wharton has just said. Beside Wharton and his friends, I myself will be present as your fellow-guest - and I will, happily, direct my own endeavours to ensure that you behave as a graceful and well-conducted guest is expected. Signs of gluttony and slovenliness will not be tolerated - they reflect on your school and your form master. There is, however, another factor that you should bear in mind. The Head has left the question of the punishment for your recent deception in my hands. If you fail to improve, I will consider that I have failed also. In which case I will notify the Head and ask him to decide on your punishment himself. As Colonel Wharton has indicated that he would wish to intercede in the case of expulsion, the Head, in his leniency, may decide that a severe flogging will suffice."

A bead of perspiration made its sluggish course down Bunter's anxious countenance. At long last, an invite for the vac. was almost within his fat grasp, but the conditions, like the small print in the back of an insurance policy, were a bit off-putting, to say the least. From past experience, Bunter knew that all the good things he liked most would be readily available. Already he could visualise a vast procession of sticky confections: mince pies; luscious fruitcakes crowned with marzipan or white icing; glacé fruits; chocs and toffees . . . his mouth watered in anticipation as Mr Quelch concluded his recital of pitfalls ahead if Bunter did not respond.

The prospect of a flogging was one which Bunter did not anticipate with great joy. He had been there before, so to speak, and like others he had wondered where the Head managed to pack all the muscle. However, the possibility of the flogging was in the distant future, whereas Wharton Lodge and the grub were near at hand. Besides, Bunter reckoned that he could easily pull the wool over the eyes of Quelch and the Colonel, and convince them that his response was genuine.

"I say, sir, it's a go. You can rely on me. You won't find me letting the side down, besides the Head might have forgotten -"

"- and if he has, I shall remind him" Mr Quelch warned Bunter. "Now is the time for repentance and rehabilitation and I advise you to seize the opportunity and reform , Bunter, for the way of the transgressor is hard."

But Bunter's mind was already made up. In fairness to him, he really did intend to do what was expected of him. He also intended to stuff as much provender as he could lay his fat paws on. It was possible that a conflict of interests would arise. Even Bunter had his doubts, but decided to confront such a contingency when he was ensconced within the walls of Harry Wharton's home.

"I'm grateful to Colonel Wharton for his kindness, and will do my best to merit his approval and that of my form-master. Harry and the other fellows will enjoy my company, and if I can perform any small service for Miss Wharton, she has only to ask." If any stuffing was to be done, it wouldn't hurt to start now and increase the dose later, when it might be politic for Bunter to lay it on further with a trowel.

It was the custom for the other fellows including Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull to spend a few days at their own homes before coming on to Wharton Lodge. As he said goodbye, the Colonel thought that it would be appropriate if Bunter, too, spent a few days with his family, in fact Colonel Wharton made a point of it. In the past, he had always wondered why Bunter did not spend more time with the other members of that aristocratic line. Now that Bunter would not arrive until the others did on Christmas Eve, the Colonel's curiosity might be satisfied.

* * * * *

"Prime!" Bunter gave a happy grin of satisfaction as he gazed around him. The hall at Wharton Lodge looked very festive indeed. A huge Christmas tree stood in the corner of the room, decked with silvery tinsel and baubles of various coloured glass; miniature electric lanterns gave intermittent flashes of blues, reds and golds from their resting places on twig and branch. The flicker of flames from the great fireplace reached out to draw dancing shadows on the painted likenesses of long departed Whartons, each gilded frame embellished with the green leaves and red berries of seasonable holly.

Beyond the green baize of the doors lay the magic of culinary art. The dark of puddings with their subtle aroma of brandy; a huge turkey awaiting its turn in the pot, as stuffing and sausages stood by. There was a mountain of mince pies with their sprinkle of caster sugar, and more stately cakes, majestic in their marzipan and icing.

In his pantry, Wells held a glass of port to the light so that the rich ruby of the liquid suffused the butler's cheeks with a glow of comfort. Thomas paused, and put some more fuel on the fire before passing to the young master's den to enquire about tea. Cherry, Nugent, and Bull had already washed and unpacked from their journey, and Wharton

wondered whether Bunter had sufficiently 'reformed' to have followed suit, as he explained to his pals the plan to encourage Bunter into better ways. They rallied, as one, to their captain's plea for assistance in guiding those fat feet onto ways that were strait and narrow. The exuberant Bob offered cross-country walks, Johnny undertook to see that Bunter washed himself, Frank promised to read Bunter literature of an uplifting kind, and Inky and Wharton promised to supervise skating on the lake. In fact, everyone was keen to ensure that Bunter played up as far as strenuous exercise or moral uplift was required.

All these novelties were promised with the best of good intentions but, somehow, alternative and more tempting attractions seemed suddenly to present themselves with the arrival of the girls from Cliff House. Bob Cherry suddenly found that Marjorie was a more, a far more, attractive companion for a walk than W.G Bunter. Wharton and the others found that the girls performed more elegantly on the frozen lake and the dance floor than Bunter. The fat and fatuous Owl, complete with a sprig of mistletoe, attracted the attention of Mr Quelch who removed him from the gathering. The six mile walk that followed was not at the usual brisk pace to which the Remove master was accustomed but, by way of compensation, Mr Quelch gave an off the cuff account of the Gallic Wars. A tired and weary Bunter morosely concluded that the life of a would-be reformed character was beset by pitfalls and hazards. Time had distanced and dimmed the prospect of the flogging. Bunter could be as brave as a lion when no flogging was nigh. The miles he had walked with that beast Quelch had temporarily denied him access to refreshment and, just as the opportunity for food presented itself, Bull had led him off to the bathroom for some belated ablutions.

Wharton and his friends cornered Bunter after breakfast one morning and he prepared himself for one of those forced visits to the bathroom that had become all too frequent of late. There were, it was true, some traces of bacon and egg together with marmalade on the fat visage, but the traces were not as plentiful as they had been in the past.

"The Colonel and Miss Wharton are taking the girls for a run in the car," Bob explained, "and the rest of us are going to do a trot up past the old windmill, over the hills and vales to Elmdale and back. It'll help work up an appetite for lunch and it'll do you good . . ."

Bunter had never felt a need to work up an appetite in his fat life. His appetite was an automatic one - it did not need a walk of several miles to activate.

"You fellows carry on, I'm not stopping you; in fact I'm getting fed up with you

bothering a fellow".

"Bunter, I fully approve the efforts of these boys in encouraging you to take exercise. It is so much better for you than frowsting before the fire. You will go with them, but you need a wash before you do. I am sure the boys will help get you ready." Mr Quelch gave Wharton and the others a friendly nod, and left them to render whatever assistance Bunter was in need of - and a bit over.

Left to his own devices, Quelch settled himself comfortably into one of the armchairs in the library. He had advised Bunter a few moments previously that exercise was preferable to frowsting before a fire. A twinge of conscience might have told him that he should follow his own advice. He had taken from his pocket one of those classical works - a friendly companion of many a happy hour. For some reason, the usual enchantment of deathless verse failed to captivate, and he found his thoughts turning to Bunter and realised that he and Colonel Wharton had soon to come to a judgement regarding that not so promising member of the Remove.

Quelch was well aware that Bunter had called him a 'beast' on more than one occasion. He also knew (for Quelch knew, or thought he knew, all things about his form) that most of his form referred to him as a 'just beast'. It made all the difference. The warmth of the fire reached out to him and, embraced in its gentle comfort, Quelch slipped quietly into slumber.

Sometime later, very much later, the door of the library opened and a group of grinning faces looked in. There was no smile on Bunter's face however. The exertion of that long walk had been nothing amusing as far as Bunter was concerned. It seemed that every bone and muscle in that fat carcass ached beyond the limits of painful endurance. The boys quietly closed the door on the sleeping beauty. Then the river of Bunter's wrath broke its banks.

"Did you see that?" the words came shrill and indignantly. "That's the man who ragged me about frowsting in front of a fire, and made me wash myself before I went out. Who's frowsting now, I'd like to know?"

"Better keep your voice down, old fat man. Quelch could walk the feet off any of us", warned Wharton. "Quelch might bear your words in mind when he has you in class next term."

Gobble, gobble, gobble. Bunter had discovered a box of Turkish delight on the sideboard in the dining room. It was a large box of that tasty confection and the contents were disappearing at a terrific rate.

Like Mr Fagin in 'Oliver Twist', Bunter was reviewing the situation. He felt something

different in the ambience of Wharton Lodge from what he had experienced on previous occasions. It was true that the grub was good and plentiful enough. However, the continuing programme of ablutions that he had to undergo after each meal and the strenuous exercise that followed were the trouble. The chaps, like the beasts they were, had followed the instructions of those other two beasts, the Colonel and Quelch, to the letter. His neck and cheeks seemed as though they had been rubbed down by emery cloth. Smears of jam and other preserves had been eliminated by a thorough application of soap and water. Cherry and Bull and immersed Bunter in a steaming bath on more than one occasion. A midnight excursion to the kitchen had revealed that entrancing area as being under lock and key.

Bunter continued to review the situation during his relationship with the Turkish delight. He found himself thinking of home. Mr Bunter continually holding forth on the iniquitous rate of income tax; of sister Bessie and brother Sammy constantly embroiled in arguing about food. It was not often that Billy thought of home but, when he did, it was of his mother for whom he had a fondness that did not exactly flower between himself and others of his kin. Bunter thought of his mother. The telephone cabinet was in the hall, and no one else was

present as he asked to be connected to the telephone at his home. It was his mother who answered, and she responded as he had known she would, with all the warmth and affection she had for her eldest son.

"Billy, did you have a marvellous Christmas? Did you have lots of dances with the Cliff House girls? Are you coming home soon?"

"Yes Mums", he told her, for his reviewing of the situation was now complete. "Some of the girls are leaving tomorrow, so I won't be in such demand as a dancing partner. They can probably give me a lift. I've missed you Mums, it will be so good to see you . . ."

"I shall be waiting for you . . . and Billy, how about your favourite steak and kidney pie?"

"Don't let on to the others", he cautioned.

Bunter told the Colonel, Aunt Amy, Quelch, Wharton and all the others. The Colonel and Mr Quelch told him that he had passed that probation period and could return to school next term without any fear of repercussions. The celebrations carried on a little longer that night.

Tomorrow there would be steak and kidney pie - made by his favourite cook.

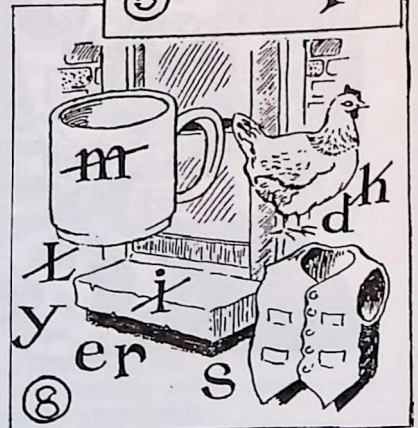
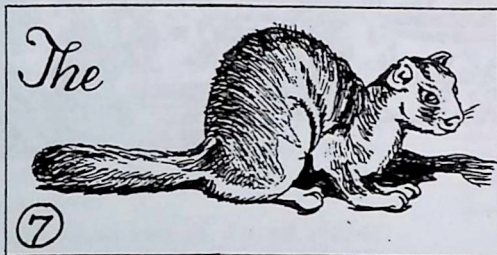
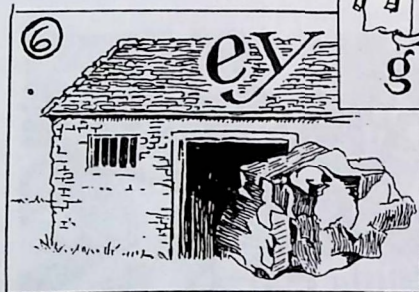
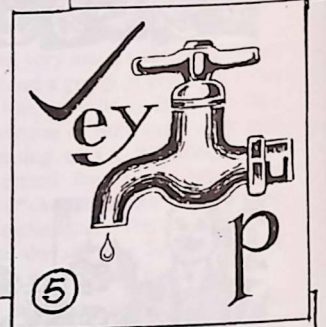
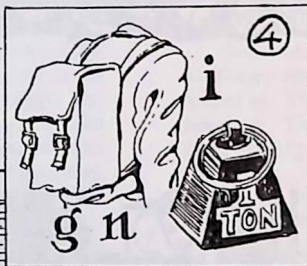
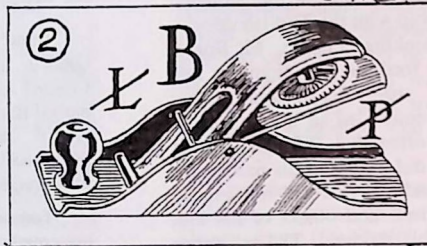




Greyfriars

"See if you can guess these Hamilton Villains!"

Rookwood & St. Jims.



Bob Whiter

Answers on page 111

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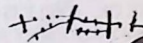
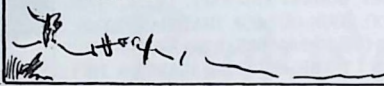


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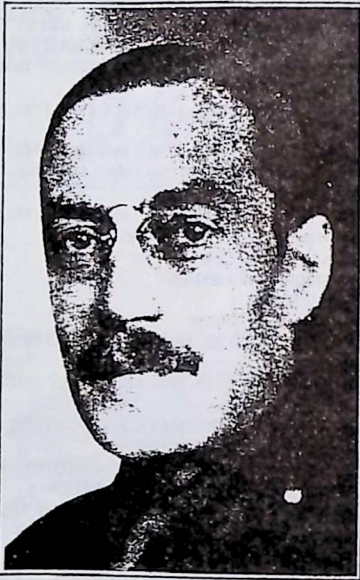
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Various Parties Converging On The Sea, In Various Places

BY DEREK HINRICH



As the international crisis following upon the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary drew to its tragic culmination, Captain Kell, the head of the fledgling Secret Service Bureau (the forerunner of MI5) since its creation in 1909, took, in the last days of July 1914, to sleeping in his office to ensure instant readiness. On the 3rd August, 1914, having received authority, he ordered the arrest of all known German espionage agents in the country. Twenty-one out of twenty-two known spies were duly taken into custody - the twenty-second was found to have gone abroad and, wisely, did not return.



Captain (later Major General) Vernon Kell,
the first head of MI5

In the event only one of the twenty-one was brought to trial. This was the Pentonville barber, Karl Ernst, who acted as the "post office" of the ring by passing instructions from Germany to its various members and, in turn, forwarding their reports thither. He was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. The German agents thus interned were considered to be of poor quality and only to have provided their masters with information of little value. Nevertheless it was a notable coup to have been

able to put them all "in the bag" at the very outbreak of hostilities. One interesting fact, however, is that Steinhauer, the controller of this network, on informing the Chief of the German Naval Staff some time before, that he feared his agents were compromised, was told "Let them (the British) go on thinking we know nothing about it".

The conclusion from this statement is surely inescapable. These poor quality spies, who had been under surveillance for three years before they were rounded up, were to be left as sacrificial lambs to divert attention from the activities of other, more dangerous, German agents. The British Government had, however, been conscious that at least one other network was active and Captain Kell's satisfaction was no doubt heightened by the knowledge that Mr Sherlock Holmes had seized its leader, together with his most secret papers, the day before Kell's own coup was sanctioned. Indeed, the signal to act may well have been given to Kell once the Cabinet was sure that the most dangerous of our secret enemies were secured for, besides von Bork, another group had already been neutralised.

In 1915 John Buchan (later Lord Tweedsmuir) published, at first anonymously, an edited account of some experiences of Mr Richard (later Major-General Sir Richard) Hannay in the spring and early summer of the previous year. These concerned the activities of an organisation referred to as the Black Stone which was alleged to have been guilty of various acts of murder and espionage in the United Kingdom. It is difficult at this distance of time to distinguish what in this account is true and what is false, apart from certain obvious fabrications.

For instance, it is said that the Black Stone, to create an international crisis, assassinated Constantine Karolides, the Greek Prime Minister, on the 13th June, 1914, but the Prime Minister of Greece, then and later, was Eleutherios Venizelos. It also alleges that this same organisation succeeded in securing details of the plans for the mobilisation and disposition of the Royal Navy in the event of war with Germany by the impersonation by one of their members of the First Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenburg (here, however, called "Lord Alloa"), at a conference with a representative of

the French General Staff. The narrative concludes with the arrest of three agents of the Black Stone at a villa outside Broadstairs (called "Bradgate" in the book) with its own private staircase of thirty-nine steps to the beach.

This latter part of Hannay's memoir has the ring of truth for two reasons. Firstly, at the time of the events described, Hannay's editor was convalescent at Broadstairs and must have gained some local knowledge of the events described. Secondly it should be remembered that Buchan, on regaining his health, served in one branch or another of the British intelligence services until he was appointed Permanent Secretary of the Department of Information in 1917. Thus he was in a first-rate position to know what happened at "Bradgate".

Following from this, the murder of the American journalist, Scudder, on 23rd May 1914, which precipitated Hannay's adventures, may be accepted as authentic, since the deciphering of Scudder's notebook, with its reference to high tide at the thirty-nine steps at 10.17 pm, provided the essential clue to discovering the lair of the Black Stone. But between these two events certain parts of the narrative may, as I have indicated, have been adapted to the needs of the hour.

The events at "Bradgate", however, provide an interesting comparison with those in von Bork's case. Here Britain's enemies had established themselves in deep cover and disguise and it was their adversary who approached them openly as an accuser.

Von Bork had been living in England since at least 1910. (He tells von Herling that the contents of his safe represented four years' work - strange to retain all that information himself and not to pass any of it to the *Marineamt* where it might be useful - but we do not know how long it took him to establish himself before he became operational.) He lived openly as a country gentleman of independent means and sporting habits (considered "quite a decent fellow for a German" as von Herling ironically observes). Well, "junker" means "squire" as near as anything and one should expect European gentry to share common pursuits. A German sportsman would not have appeared as odd in 1910-14 as he did in 1917 in the third year of the War when *His Last Bow* was published. Otto Krepelstein, for example, the head of the *Nachrichtendienst* at the turn of the century, had hunted in the shires, and A C von Ernsthausen was in the Oxford XI for the three years 1902-4 (though perhaps his family had been anglicised for a few generations by then, like the Hinriches).

And yet after von Bork had been at work for only two years, the British authorities had become aware of his activities, though they had not identified him, and had assessed their

seriousness sufficiently for Mr Asquith and Sir Edward Grey to make such personal representations for assistance to Sherlock Holmes, as their predecessors, Lord Bellenger and Mr Trelawney Hope, had done nearly thirty years before, which, despite his retirement, he could not gainsay.



John Buchan as Lt. Colonel whilst employed on intelligence duties on Haig's staff

Von Bork "hid in the open", as it were, much as the Minister D hid the purloined letter. Against von Bork's openness Holmes matched his most consummate powers of disguise. But this was not a case for one of his quick studies of a drunken groom or a guileless parson. He was two years on the trail and much of that time must have been spent in creating the character of the Irish-American Altamont, not least in the study and assimilation of the accent and vernacular, until he was sufficiently proficient to begin his quest, to the point where he was able, like "Birdy" Edwards with the Scowlers or Thomas Billis Beach, alias Major Henri Le Caron, with an earlier generation of Fenians, to

penetrate an Irish secret society in Buffalo (the Clan-na-Gael, or the Irish Republican Brotherhood, perhaps?). While we know that Holmes in his professional career encountered a number of American citizens, we have no knowledge of him previously personating one, nor of his actually visiting the USA before 1912, whatever may be surmised about cases - mentioned but not related - on Long Island or involving one of the Vanderbilts. We all know from the cinema how excruciating some American attempts at British accents can be,

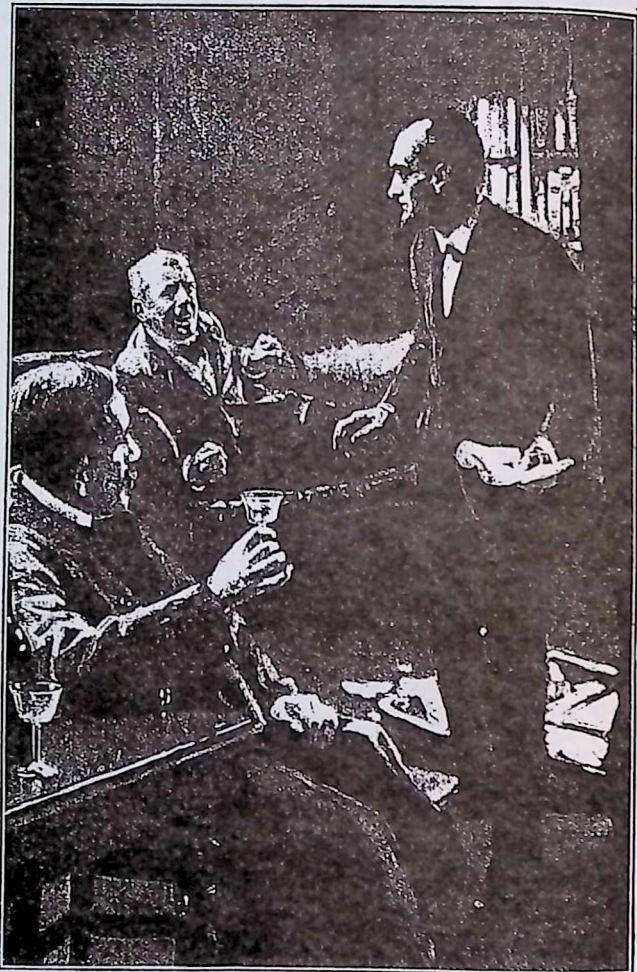
and they were arrested on June 15th 1914. Then something curious happened. The authorities apparently emulated the dog in the night-time and did nothing. We were then still at peace. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand was not shot until June 28th and we did not declare war on Germany until August 4th and Hannay enlisted at once. Meanwhile, what of the prisoners? A murder was involved, or if that could not in fact be brought home to them, charges under the Official Secrets Act surely could have been preferred - or at the very least

one of criminal damage, for blowing up the staircase of thirty-nine steps. Remand or committal proceedings would be required, even if *in camera* (and the courts moved faster in criminal cases then than now). Hannay certainly should have been needed to have given evidence on the murder of Scudder, or of the arrest. Nothing of the sort apparently happened before he went off to war. Odd.

Some three years later he recognised one of the "Bradgate Three" - to use a modern idiom - in the person of Mr Moxon Ivery, a wealthy philosophic pacifist living in a garden suburb, and, once again, at the heart of an insidious German plot (for details of this see *Mr Standfast*, the third section of General Hannay's memoirs edited by Lord Tweedsmuir). He later finds that this protean enemy, in reality the Graf von Schwabing, had escaped our clutches before he could be brought to trial.

But what of the other two, and what of the Black Stone? Let us deal with the latter first. Its coup, if successful, would in the event have achieved little. The Admiralty had already decided in March to hold a trial mobilisation of the fleet in July. This took place. On 26th July the fleet was instructed not to disperse and two days later was ordered to its war-stations.

But what was the Black Stone? The name suggests a secret society rather than a secret service. There have been a number of organisations or societies - some official, some secret - recorded in German history before now, from the *Vehmgericht* to the *Freikorps*, which



Holmes and Watson toast the capture of Von Bork

and the reverse must equally apply - and in 1912 the cinema was silent so that aid to a quick study did not exist. It would seem then that at least half of Holmes' two years must have been spent in the task of establishing himself as Altamont and seeking the attention of von Bork.

It was otherwise with Richard Hannay. The bluff of the agents of the Black Stone was called

are curious to British eyes. One such was the *Tugendbund* ("the League of Virtue") to which that noted Napoleonic soldier, *General de Brigade Gerard*, makes reference in his delightful reminiscences. Might not the Black Stone be another? An unofficial body may well have official links. A contemporary example may be seen in the irredentist Serbian secret society involved in the assassination of the Archduke. The leader of this organisation, called by its members "Union of Death", but by others "The Black Hand", used the codename "Apis". And who was this busy bee? Why, Colonel Dragutin Dimitriyevitch, chief of the intelligence section of the Serbian General Staff (who, as a captain, took part in the assassination in 1903 - a more than usually barbarous atrocity, even by Balkan standards - of Alexander I, the last Obrenovitch King of Serbia, and his consort, Queen Draga).

As to the Bradgate Three - the youngest, Franz, initially escapes down the thirty-nine steps, though they are blown up perilously close behind him by his ringleader (they were not in fact destroyed: I have seen them, but the staircase is actually of 78 steps - they must all have taken them two at a time), and he is presumably arrested when he reaches the yacht *Ariadne* which the navy had seized already.

The second we have already discussed.

There remains the third, the brains of the group according to Hannay. He appears to be a much older man than his confederates, but appearances can be deceptive and, like von Schwabing, whom Hannay was surprised to find was younger than himself, he was a master of disguise. Indeed Hannay only recognised him on their second encounter when he gave himself away by the manner in which he drummed with the fingers of one hand. With all the uncertainty about the disposal of the members of this group indicated above, I cannot but wonder if he, too, did not on this occasion escape his just deserts and reappear after the war, still no friend to this country, under a variety of aliases

(the Comte de Guy, Carl Peterson, the Reverend Theodosius Longmore, Edward Blackton, William Robinson, John Wilmot), and still drumming with his fingers, to enliven the world for a demobilised ex-officer who found peace incredibly tedious, Captain Hugh Drummond DSO, MC, late of the Royal Loamshires.

A Note on Sources

I have consulted the following works while writing this paper:

- His Last Bow* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
- The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Mr Standfast* by John Buchan
- Secrets of the Foreign Office* by William Le Queux
- Bulldog Drummond, The Black Gang, The Third Round, and The Final Count* by "Sapper" (Lt-Col H.C. McNeile)
- Secret Service* by Christopher Andrew
- English History 1914 - 1945* by A.J.P. Taylor
- Black Lamb & Grey Falcon* by Rebecca West but not necessarily in that order.

I have also read with great interest and pleasure Mr J. Randolph Cox's paper, "Thwarting At The Channel" in *The Baker Street Journal* (Volume 15, No. 4 of December 1965), in which I found he had ploughed the same furrow before me. I would only question his conclusions on two points: firstly on the identification of "Lord Alloa", the First Sea Lord in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, with Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, as "Jackie" Fisher did not resume the post of First Sea Lord until October 1914, when anti-German hysteria obliged Prince Louis of Battenburg, despite a lifetime of devoted service in the Royal Navy, to resign. My other caveat concerns the fate of the leader of the Black Stone and I don't think we need cavil over that!

(This article by Derek Hinrich appeared originally in the Sherlock Holmes Society of London publication, *An East Wind*, 1997.)



Christmas Greetings to all readers.

WANTED: Gems 494, 495, 496.

PATRICIA FAHEY, 6 SUMMERFIELD AVENUE, WEST BROMWICH B70 8SS.

Greyfriars Pictures in the Fire

By
TED BALDOCK



Greyfriars School was a very extensive and rather rambling ancient place. There were disused attics, and passages that seemed to lead nowhere in particular; all sorts of holes and corners and remote recesses.

(Frank Richards: *Billy Bunter's Postal Order.*)

Old buildings, especially castles, monasteries and Manor Houses, tend to accrue, through time, legends and stories handed down to be told round the fire on winter's evenings. Ghosts lend themselves with seeming willingness to the general atmosphere of these ancient foundations. No self-respecting old house should be without its tale containing an element of the supernatural.

Is it really of much consequence if, in the mythical world of Greyfriars, the River Sark runs here for one person and there for another? Is it not enough to know that it flows tranquilly in the vicinity of the school?

We all have our individual pictures of Greyfriars. We each have our own mind images of Gosling's lodge, together with the old gate and quadrangle. The passage-ways and studies are as familiar to us as our own homes. So many years have been spent with them under the guidance of a master hand.

We are aware that at the end of the Remove passage there is a stairway leading up to the boxrooms. In the individual imagination, details may differ but that does not matter. The pictures are there, they have always been there, playing at times a not inconsiderable part in the ongoing story of the school. There is a box-room window, with a sloping roof and an easy descent to the ground via a substantial drainpipe. All are integral details of a large and fascinating whole.

We know with certainty that Chunkleys in the high street at Courtfield continues to live up to its splendid reputation. We are aware that Uncle Clegg is, on warm summer afternoons, dispensing cooling ginger-beer at his little store in Friardale, and that Police Constable Tozer is not far away. The old grey buildings of the school are permanently fixed in our imagination - what matter should they tend to move around a little in the minds of different readers.

The important aspect for us is the knowledge that, at will, we may enter this enchanting world and savour again something

of our own early boyhood

There is hidden in the bosky depths of Friardale Wood a small cottage wherein dwells Joyce, the wood-cutter. A character well known to Harry Wharton and Co. This worthy has on numerous occasions proved helpful to the Greyfriars fellows during the pursuit of their adventurous careers.

On one of the broader stretches of the River Sark lies Popper Island, so-called having been appropriated by Sir Hilton Popper (probably quite illegally). In the centre of this woody retreat stands a magnificent oak tree, said to be centuries old. The branches of this have many times concealed fellows bent upon exploration, while the peppery Sir Hilton and several fuming keepers have searched the undergrowth beneath. The precise locations of Joyce's cottage, Popper's Island and the Oak may differ in the minds of readers - yet there they are

Sir Hilton Popper, a fiery old baronet, irascible to a degree, a far from popular Governor of Greyfriars school, was in more or less constant conflict with its pupils, and constantly complaining to Dr Locke concerning trivial matters of supposed trespass. The baronial home, Popper Court, far too close to Greyfriars in the opinion of Masters and boys alike, was not exactly a mecca of pleasure. Greyfriars 'men' quite naturally gave its precincts a wide berth. Irascibility can occasionally be an almost lovable characteristic when it is leavened by a sense of humour and justice. Unhappily this did not apply to Sir Hilton Popper!

Many leading scenes in the Greyfriars stories are enacted in the Remove Master's study. To the guilty, an awesome place, yet an exceedingly comfortable sanctum. A large bookcase fills practically the whole of one wall and is surmounted by a white marble bust of Sophocles. He gazes stonily across the study to a similar bookcase which provides an admirable vantage point for P. Vergilius Maro, author of the deathless Aeneid, so beloved by Mr Quelch.

These two old giants of classical lore and literature survey one another with unwinking vigilance over the busy desk beneath. Whether or not they fully approve of Mr Quelch's

concentration upon the task of compiling a history of Greyfriars, rather than upon their own particular works, is debatable. Elderly classical gentlemen - not excluding Mr Quelch - are apt to be remarkably 'touchy' upon such little points of procedure.

It is a comfortable study, a happy retreat befitting a gentleman of uncertain years and a schoolmaster. It has a fireplace, a comfortable-looking though rather sagging armchair, a reading-lamp and literally hundreds of books piled everywhere: these are a constant source of irritation to the maid whose duty it is to maintain some degree of order and cleanliness in Masters' passage!

Then there is a window with a view of the old quadrangle and its timeless elms which continually murmur and sing to every passing breeze. A pleasant view indeed - except when the Remove master sees his pupils' high spirits spill over into horse-play in the quad on certain occasions . . .

The scene: a little cottage at Hawkscliff sheltering under the mighty Shoulder. Home, when ashore, of Tom Redwing's father, and often a rendezvous with Tom and Vernon-Smith on summer 'halfers'.

It is a pleasant picture to conjure in the mind. Tom and Smithy relaxed together: the latter devoid of his jacket, sitting down in his fancy waistcoat, planning their simple meal to be prepared under scout-like conditions in the tiny cabin-like kitchen, and both thoroughly enjoying the occasion. Here we see Smithy in one of his better moments, which cancels out in our minds a host of less worthy occasions.

Outside, the grey mass of the Shoulder looms over the blue waters of the Channel. Inside the two industrious juniors are happily clearing up after their meal, and preparing for the tramp back to Greyfriars. Tom Redwing is in his element, and a rather surprised Smithy is discovering that he has spent a topping afternoon.

It has been said that opposites are attracted to each other. So it would appear with Tom Redwing and Vernon-Smith. Tom with his simple, decent attitudes, and Smithy with his doubtful background of indulgence, and leanings towards a 'doggish' mode of life which includes among its many 'delights', smoking, backing horses (of doubtful pedigree) and haunting the precincts of a certain dingy riverside house of refreshment and entertainment known as the 'Three Fishers'.

Yet, when under Tom Redwing's influence, he becomes a different fellow and, while half condemning himself for going 'soft', is satisfied and thankful when his 'better side' is in the ascendant. His is an intriguing character with

its warring factions. Tom Redwing is the one fellow to whom he will always turn when rough weather is looming ahead, and Smithy is always confident that 'Reddy' will see him through any crisis.

"Reddy, old chap, you are a brick . . ."

"Smithy, old man, you are a complete ass - sometimes."

Which brief exchange would seem to sum up the situation admirably.

Will the literary firmament throw up another Charles Hamilton? Someone who will have as great an impact on the next century as he has done on ours?

It is problematical. One feels that Harry Wharton and Co., Billy Bunter, Horace Coker and the entire gallery of Greyfriars characters were in a very special way of their time. Charles Hamilton has been described as a phenomenon! Such talents do not occur too frequently. Characters of the calibre of Billy Bunter are indeed rare.

Already the ambience of Greyfriars stories is proving to be of considerable interest to social and literary historians.

Long may we be pleasantly haunted by the youthful and vivid world which Hamilton created. Long may the old form-rooms, quadrangle and the surrounding playing fields re-echo to the laughter and other sounds indicative of a splendid old school performing its task of producing Greyfriars 'men'.

Byron speaks of "a schoolboy's tale, the wonder of an hour". I would, with respect, suggest that it lasts far longer than that.

THE OLD, OLD WISH

Here's greetings from the Greyfriars boys,
Even Coker's voice is here,
A strident, horn-like, fearful noise,
Its message though is clear.
We may not be at Greyfriars now,
No gimlet eye gleams sharp,
So let us show the fellows how,
Let celebrations start.
May toothsome pies and tarts abound
This jolly yuletide season.
May bells ring out with joyful sound,
And all men think with reason.
Raise your glasses all you chaps,
And here's a toast for you.
'Down the hatch' and no 'heel-taps'
We're old boys ever 'new'.
Smoky rotters we despise,
'Bounders' raise our scorn,
We're 'true blue' and we don't disguise
Fair play for all, we're sworn.



Christmas Greetings

and All Best Wishes

for 1998

Some recommended books for your Yuletide reading

Tales of Wrykyn and Elsewhere by P.G. Wodehouse

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A Kipper In A Murder Book: or An Obsession With Words, Part Two.

BY BRIAN DOYLE



(For Part One, see last year's Annual . . .)

"Why don't you keep all the good books in one place?" The question was directed at me, aggressively and querulously, by a large, over-made-up lady in a cheap fur coat and silly hat, when I was working in the Woolwich Central Public Library. "We do," I tried to explain as patiently as I could, "they're all in the building, in this library - they're all over the place". She snorted and walked away, leaving behind a scent of Californian Poppy mixed with Palmolive soap. The Pekinese dog she had left tethered outside in the entrance porch began yapping loudly and insistently.

This was me, and my work, in my early-20s, book-mad, ace-assistant librarian (well, it sounded better than library assistant), font of all literary knowledge (or so I thought), show business fanatic, and a bit of a Romeo (or so I thought again) with some of the more attractive young-lady borrowers. But I'm slightly ahead of myself - let me back-track a few years . . .

Fifty years, in fact - to yesterday, when I was young - fifty years ago!

'Nineteen-forty-seven/Wasn't Heaven/But I'm glad/It wasn't so bad.'

So wrote a forgotten poet at the end of the year in question, 1947. And I might well have echoed those sentiments. For 1947 was quite an important year for me. I was still busy with my 'Obsession With Words', reading everything I could lay my hands on, and busy with other things too, as were many people in Britain, after having come through World War Two and all that it entailed. I'm mainly concerned here, at the beginning of my reminiscence, with April 1947, so what, exactly, was occupying the minds of the British people at that time?

A packet of 20 cigarettes had just gone up from 2s 4d (12p) to 3s 4d (17p); Henry Ford died at 83; Charlton Athletic won the F.A. Cup Final by beating Burnley 1-0; Bruce Woodcock lost to American Joe Baksi in an important Heavyweight boxing match; Princess Elizabeth married Prince Philip. The country had just recovered from 'the Big Freeze', the worst winter weather for many years, with heavy snow and massive power cuts; the most popular BBC radio shows were 'Radio Forfeits' (with Michael

Miles), 'Dick Barton - Special Agent' and 'Woman's Hour'; James Mason and Margaret Lockwood were voted the most popular British movie stars; the top three box-office film hits were 'The Courtneys of Curzon Street' (with Anna Neagle and Michael Wilding), 'The Jolson Story' and 'Great Expectations' - other pictures that did well were 'A Matter of Life and Death', 'Holiday Camp', 'Odd Man Out', 'Brighton Rock' and 'It Always Rains on Sunday'; the great Wally Hammond had just retired from Test cricket; Denis Compton and Bill Edrich were about to make it a golden summer for English cricket.

These highlights might evoke a few memories for those who were around in those days. I was just about around, being a boy of 16 about to leave the relatively sheltered world of school for the hurly-burly of working life and all that that entailed.

I left Shooters Hill Grammar School, in Woolwich, South-East London, both on the crest and the dashing of a wave. A few days before I walked out of the school gates for the last time, being waved at (at least I think he was waving) by the sneering, club-footed school porter, Mr Moody ('Moody by name, moody by nature', as we used to say), I had achieved a tiny measure of fame (especially among my schoolmates) by broadcasting 'live' in a popular BBC radio programme of the time called 'The March of the Movies' (every Tuesday at 6.30 pm). I had applied to be a 'Film-Fan on the Spot', in which the 'victim' was quizzed with half-a-dozen questions about the movies, listening to sound-track excerpts, music, and so on. Being an avid radio listener, I was thrilled to sign a contract agreeing to accept 3 guineas (a princely sum in those days) for my services.

As I sat awaiting the producer in the entrance hall of Broadcasting House in London, I was chatted to by a large man with an American accent, who addressed me as 'sir'. Me, a schoolboy of 16! He asked me what I was broadcasting about and told me he was taking part in a political programme. When I left to go to the studio, he saluted me and wished me luck. I later learned that my new friend was none other than Henry Wallace, the Vice-President of the United States and deputy to Roosevelt! It

was the first - and last - time I had been saluted by a Vice-President of America.

That, I suppose, was a small crest. The dashing had been my leaving school without even sitting for an exam, let alone passing one. I was very good at three subjects (English, French and History) but bad at all the others. I didn't have much hope of passing what was then the School Certificate Examination in 'all the others'. Then my mother happened to see an advertisement in the local paper, stating that there were vacancies for Junior Library Assistants at various public libraries within the Woolwich Borough. The salary offered was about £2.20 per week in today's money.

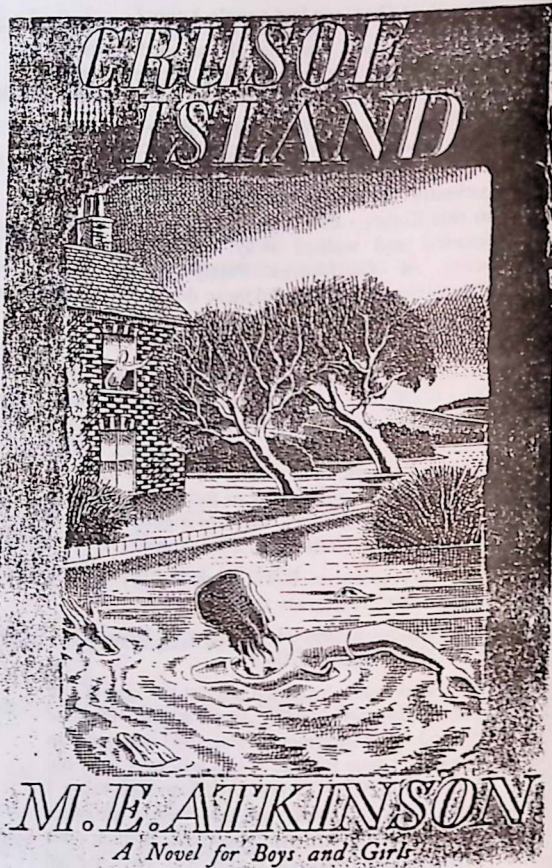
I was summoned to an interview before the entire Library Committee of about 15 people. I sat at one end of an enormous table and was stared at by a crowd of apparently unfriendly and large people. I felt like the subject of one of those H.M. Bateman cartoons: 'The Schoolboy Who Dared to Apply for a Job in the Public Library'. They asked questions: Do you like books? Why do you like books? Do you like meeting people? Why? I seem to remember answering that I liked reading books because they're usually about people - and I like meeting people because a lot of them are in books. I was later told that it was this answer (and my 'smart' appearance - I wore my school blazer and tie and combed my hair) that clinched it for the Committee. I got the job.

I should perhaps make it clear that I have had, from my earliest years, a soft spot for public libraries. Plumstead Public Library, a branch of Woolwich Libraries, had been a sort of 'second home' to me for years before I worked in the H.Q. establishment in Woolwich. It was about 15 minutes walk (or 5 minutes cycle ride) from my home in Abbey Wood, where I lived (as an only child) with my parents.

I had been a keen and voracious reader ever since I was a mixed infant at the local Bostall Lane (State) school. I read the simple picture books supplied there, from 'the cat sat on the mat' to 'Babar the Little Elephant' and 'Orlando the Marmalade Cat', plus various story-books and annuals. Then, when I was 8, a family friend took me to join the Junior Section of Plumstead Library. I was like Bunter in a cake shop! All those books! The very first book I took out was 'The Four Brothers'; I don't recall who wrote it and can't remember the story (except that some of it was rather sentimental and sad), so it can't have been all that riveting. But I had been launched on the seas (and the Ds and Es and Fs, etc.) of the ocean of reading available from the library, and was very happy about it.

I returned a day or two later and borrowed other books and from then on I was a regular visitor to the library. For the next few years

(and they were sometimes hazardous years, since World War Two was now raging) I worked my way through literally hundreds of books (all fiction - for some reason I wasn't especially interested in factual books then). I recall, in no particular order, that my favourites included E. Nesbit, M.E. Atkinson, Pamela Brown, Noel Streatfield, Garry Hogg, Arthur Ransome, Kit Higson, Olwen Bowen, Barbara Euphan Todd, M. Pardoe, Richmal Crompton, Malcolm Saville, W.E. Johns, David Severn, Mark Twain, Ballantyne and Stevenson and



Kitty Barne.

There was a large section headed 'Boys' School Stories' (appropriately, right next to the one headed 'Girls' School Stories') and I must have read the entire stock of those, my favourites including Hylton Cleaver, Gunby Hadath, Harold Avery, Talbot Baines Reed, R.A.H. Goodyear, R.S. Warren Bell, Jeffrey Haviton, Michael Poole, Eden Phillpotts, Richard Bird and Michael Poole. No 'Frank Richards' or 'Martin Clifford' because Charles Hamilton was not then in hardback (and I had my stock of 'Magnets' to read at home anyway!)

I also read and re-read a series of 'Wind in

the Willows' - type books (featuring talking animals in a forest) beginning with 'Into the Happy Glade' and 'By a Silver Stream' and written by Trevor Dudley-Smith (later 'unmasked' as Elleston Trevor, who became a best-selling adult author). Other favourite books, which nobody seemed to have read or even heard of but me (then as now) included 'The Dawn Child' by Beryl Irving, and 'Whirlaway' by H.C.F. Morant (about a girl who goes back into prehistoric times to meet the dinosaurs)!

I was a keen and regular listener to BBC Radio's 'Children's Hour' and was introduced to many books by drama versions in that wonderful programme, including John Masfield's marvellous 'The Box of Delights' and 'The Midnight Folk', 'The Wind in the Willows', 'The Prisoner of Zenda', 'The Scarlet Pimpernel' and 'Treasure Island'. I especially recall, too, the serial of 'The Enchanted Castle', the best book by my own favourite children's writer, E. Nesbit, which used Debussy's ravishing 'Images' suite as incidental music.

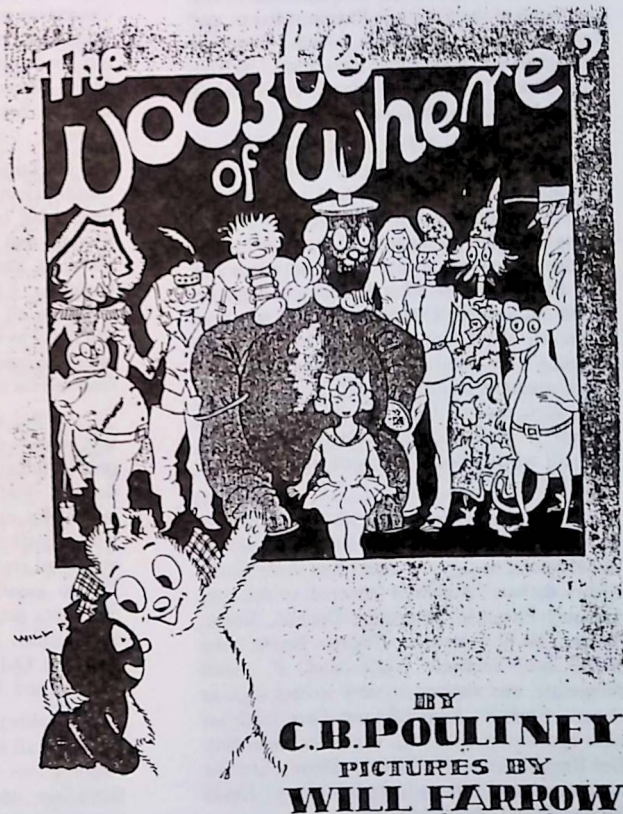
Another favourite was introduced to me by my Aunt Florrie, who was a dog-lover and not only read, but cut out and kept, the humorous little pieces about his dogs, by C.B. Poultney, which appeared daily in the 'Daily Sketch' newspaper (the only reason she bought the paper). They were all published in book form over the years, and I read and enjoyed (and still have) these dozen or so volumes, starting with 'My Dog Pompey' (who sadly died) and continuing with 'Mr. Roddie Dhu'; they still make pleasant and often very funny reading. Poultney also published a wonderful and amusing children's fantasy novel, 'The Woozle of Where', in 1939, in which the hero was Peter the Puppy; this, too, had been serialised in the 'Daily Sketch' and was graphically illustrated by Will Farrow. Poultney's almost forgotten today, undeservedly, I feel . . .

I was still devouring the boys' papers and comics of the time, but this I wrote about in last year's Annual, so I won't repeat myself here . . .

From the age of 13 (and usually after school) I spent many an hour in Plumstead Library's Reference Department, a large room next to the Museum upstairs, where I avidly read all the current film, theatre and book reviews in such magazines as 'John o' London's

Weekly' (my favourite magazine), 'Illustrated London News', 'Sphere', 'Tatler', 'Times Literary Supplement' and others. I can still smell that indefinable scent of those brand-new, glossy-paged magazines as I sat there in that silent, cosy room, lined with books, losing myself in the world of new movies (and little knowing that in another few years I would be part of it all for nearly 40 years) and in the world of the West End theatre and of new books. I steeped myself in all this knowledge of the 'arts' and could tell anyone who asked everything about the new films, plays, shows and books. But sadly no-one ever asked me . . .

I was quick to follow up a new interest as it came along. I listened to BBC radio all the time (and was largely educated by it); one evening I was fascinated by a full-length radio play called 'The King's Tryall', all about King Charles I (played superbly, I recall, by Peter Creswell) and rushed off next day, after school, to the Plumstead 'Ref' to read books about the reign of Charles the First, a subject on which I became



something of an expert! (A pity we weren't 'doing' him at school, as I would have passed all the exams!) The same thing happened when I heard a play about Guy Fawkes. And another about Scott of the Antarctic. After hearing a programme about astronomy, and reading a thick tome called 'The Story of the Heavens', I

became so well versed in that subject, that I actually gave a talk to my form at school, complete with blackboard diagrams ('A pity you don't take a similar interest in algebra, Doyle' remarked my maths master acidly.)

When I went to the West End especially to see David Lean's masterly film version of Charles Dickens' 'Great Expectations' (which remains to this day my favourite film of all time and which I know virtually by heart), I not only rushed off to read the novel, but, though it took time, read most of Dickens' other novels too. If a topic aroused my interest in those days, I usually jumped in head-first

When I reached 14, I was able to join the adult library and soon discovered many authors new to me, including Berkley Gray and his entertaining 'Norman Conquest' crime novels. I knew nothing about his also being Edwy Searles Brooks or Victor Gunn in those days, of course, but I loved Gray's breezy style and his devil-may-care Conquest (and naturally I fell in love with his lovely 'Pixie', Joy Everard!). My best friend of the time, one Raymond Roots, and I used to almost fight over a 'new' Conquest book when we spotted it at the library. He also liked Simeon's 'Maigret' novels, but I wasn't keen so I let him grab those.

I also liked Cecil Freeman Gregg's mystery novels, featuring 'Inspector Higgins' of Scotland Yard - slightly off-beat yarns with a touch of humour about them. Gregg is another largely 'forgotten' author (I hate the word, because someone's always bound to remember him, but you know what I mean), though he turned out around 50 books. Nothing seems to be known about him either. I once wrote to Methuen's, his publishers throughout his career, for information, and they said they couldn't help since their records had been destroyed during the war. A lame excuse, I thought, since Gregg was still writing books for them right up to the mid-1950s.

As with my 'new interests', as soon as I discovered an author I liked, I devoured all his or her books, as fast as I could find them on the library shelves. Authors I 'covered' in this way included Priestley, Maugham, Buchan, Verne, Wells, W.W. Jacobs, Conan Doyle, the Americans Thomas Wolfe and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and various mystery writers such as Sayers, Christie, John Dickson Carr (and his alter ego Carter Dickson), Chandler, Hammett, Der Biggers (creator of Charlie Chan!), and the underrated and almost-forgotten (sorry) Kevin Fitzgerald and Michael Cronin.

Plumstead Public Library (it's still there, by the way) was a mecca for me, a Shangri-La, a second home and a place of enchantment (and also warm in the winter - not many people had central heating in those days!). So it was with a mixture of excitement, apprehension and

nervousness that I walked into the much-bigger Woolwich Central Library, in Calderwood Street, in the centre of Woolwich (a few doors up from the Woolwich Polytechnic, now, rather ludicrously, titled Greenwich University), as a boy of 16½, in April 1947, at 8.45 in the morning. "Sorry, sir, we're not open just yet", said a small, wiry man in a blue boiler suit, looking like British movie actor Sam Kydd (it was the first and only time he was to address me as 'sir'). "I'm due to start work here this morning - my name's Doyle", I volunteered. "Oh, right, see that lady over there," he grinned, indicating an efficient-looking woman of about 30, sorting out newspapers at the library counter. She looked rather like a bespectacled Ida Lupino.

(I should explain that then, as now, I had a habit of finding resemblances between people I met and saw to well-known actors and actresses, or even comedians and singers. It irritates some people and amuses others. I tend to get the bug most strongly when I'm watching an orchestral concert on television - I notice that Leo McKern is on the French horn, and that the attractive red-headed girl fingering the flute so expertly is Moira Shearer. My postman used to be Les Dawson, but he didn't seem to know it. But I digress)

Ida Lupino (who went by the name of Miss Smith) chatted and then introduced me to a formidable lady (Martita Hunt) who was quite friendly and gave me a brief guided tour of the premises, almost like an estate agent touting for business. I felt like saying "I'll take it, if you throw in all the books". Soon I found myself 'on duty' at the counter, stamping out books on one side, and accepting books in as they were returned on the other.

As the weeks went by, I discovered there was more - much more - to the job than most people imagine. But I won't go into all the details. And remember, I'm talking about the late 1940s and early 1950s here and I'm sure it's all quite different now, what with computers and word processors and 'CD-Roms' and so on. Not to mention the somewhat scruffy library assistants these days, who seem to wear jeans and T-shirts for much of the time. In my day (said the Old Codger) it was suits and ties for the men and dresses or 'costumes' for the ladies.

The library was a good place for meeting people of all kinds and I met and chatted with a hundred or so every day, especially on Saturdays, which was our busy day. We were open from 9am until 8pm and the staff worked two days a week on those hours with variable schedules on other days; we were sure each week of one whole day off and one day off from 1pm. It was busy, sometimes hectic, but enjoyable and rarely dull. Not many people had television in those days, so they relied largely upon radio and reading, with an occasional

cinema visit, for their recreation. We had an enormous turnover of books, going out and coming in, and there were sometimes queues to enter the building.

I became used to the vagueness and eccentricities of some people. A child would come in and say: "Mum says can she have three love books, please, but they're not to be 'I' books or ones with brown covers 'cause they're the boring ones", or it might be: "Can Granny please have two Denise Robins and two Ruby M. Ayres love books, but not ones that take place in hist'ry". Or an elderly man might wheeze: "Could you kindly sort me out a couple o' cowboys and a murder, son?" Hospital romances were popular, but only 'happy' ones. "I'd like a good hospital romance, but not one of them when the nurse dies at the end - they're too sad." In those days, books were issued without their dust-jackets, or in library bindings of different hues. The colour of the books seemed to loom importantly in some borrowers' minds. "No, I don't want that one, dear, it's got a red cover - I don't like stories in red covers . . ."

One lady used to ask for books of "sunset morn" which might - or might not - have amused the distinguished author of 'Of Human Bondage'

I would occasionally discover strange 'bookmarks' inside the books when they were returned. Letters were common, postcards were commonplace, £1 or 10s. (50p) notes occasional. On one memorable occasion I actually found a kipper within the pages of a murder mystery! "I always said there was something fishy about that book" I remarked to a colleague, but only got a groan in reply. "The kipper did it" I added, but nobody laughed. It should probably have been a red herring

I regret to recall, in retrospect, that, though I got along well with the majority of my library colleagues, one or two regarded me as a bit of a 'know-all' when it came to books and authors. Many of the staff looked upon their jobs as just that - jobs. They might as well have been handling tins of corned beef, or toilet rolls, as books, and appeared to know little about literature and seemed reluctant to help people with their queries. I, on the other hand, was quite dedicated! If, when on duty at the counter, I heard a borrower ask a colleague if they knew who wrote a certain book, only to receive an unhelpful shake of the head and a muttered "Sorry, never heard of it", then I would throw myself into the fray. I not only provided the correct information, but also a potted biography of the author in question, quotes from recent press reviews, and an amiable dissertation on the relative merits of the writer's various books, and also perhaps if any of the books had been, or were going to be, filmed, and who was likely to star in them. The borrowers in question were usually impressed and interested (and I made

many a friend in this way) but my fellow library assistants looked daggers at me.

When a new novel became a much talked-about best-seller, we took 'reservations' for it and I remember that when, say, 'The Cruel Sea' came out we had 150 people patiently waiting to borrow one of our 12 copies. The same with such novels as 'HMS Ulysses', 'Lucky Jim' and 'Room at the Top'. It was much the same story when a book was serialised on television, or on radio. We didn't reserve books for the junior borrowers; just as well, since the waiting lists for Miss Blyton's many books would have run into thousands! The 'Billy Bunter' books had started to appear and I always recommended them when I could; they were very popular, as were the 'William' books, of course. And, again, if a children's story was being broadcast in 'Children's Hour' it was always in hot demand.

I recall that two books, scarcely remembered today, were 'Top of the Pops' in the Junior Library for two or three years because they were broadcast as serials, and also because of good old 'word of mouth'. These were both by Kathleen Fidler (also well-known for her stories about 'The Brydons' and 'The Deans'): 'The Borrowed Garden' and 'St. Jonathan's in the Country', sequels to one another and lovely stories both. I still have my own copies to this day.

My very favourite task in the library came when I returned from my two years' National Service in the R.A.F. in 1951, and was one that I had always coveted. When the lady who had done it for years left, I asked if I could take it over, and so it came to pass.

The job was called 'jacketing' and briefly it was this: I would collect a pile of brand-new books and sit down with them at a table. I would then browse leisurely through each one (say it was a novel) and decide what kind of story it was. Then I would select from a box of specially printed labels, one which might say 'Romantic Adventure' or 'Detective Story' or 'Thriller' or 'Romance' and paste it neatly onto the title page. There was a wealth of difference between a 'thriller' and a 'detective story' and I would sometimes feel called upon to read a book almost right through before coming to a momentous decision. One label which covered a multitude of sins said simply 'Modern Novel' and there was even one, which I never used (since it was surely an admission of failure) that stated baldly: 'Novel'.

After I had done this, the fun really began. I would cut an excerpt from the dust-jacket 'blurb' and stick that on the title page; then I would cut out a suitable illustration from the jacket's front to paste on the page opposite the title page. And so on. The book became an illustrated one (or at least with a frontispiece) as

I worked away enthusiastically. I took great pride in my work. All this, of course, would make present-day collectors of First Editions throw up their hands in horror (and quite rightly), since a First with dust-jacket is worth double its value without one. Nowadays all books are fitted with a protective transparent covering and put straight onto the library shelves. But it was nice work while it lasted (and it lasted for years) and gave me a chance to read virtually all the new books . . . !

One day, Miss White, the Deputy Borough Librarian, a rather fierce, elderly lady with an abrupt manner (Margaret Hamilton, the Wicked Witch in 'The Wizard of Oz') handed me a letter, asking "Do you know anything about this sort of thing, Doyle?" "This sort of thing" was old boys' papers and magazines - stacks of them, apparently, from 'Magnets', 'Gems' and 'Nelson Lees' to 'Boys Own Papers' and 'Chums', not to mention lots of 'penny bloods' of an earlier era. A schoolmaster at a private and somewhat exclusive local boys' school wanted to sell his collection and sought advice on where to go to effect a sale. Did the library know of anyone who might be interested?

This was some years before I even knew of the Old Boys' Book Club and the 'Collectors' Digest', so, though I knew of some of the papers listed, I didn't really know their values. She said she would write back and decline with thanks. But I had made a mental note of the master's name and knew where the school was, so I later telephoned him and made an appointment to view his collection with a view to making an offer. The collection wasn't a big one but it was impressive and fascinating. I had no money, but thought I might be able to rustle up £15 (nearly three weeks' salary to me in those days). He thanked me and said he would let me know. He did, but said he had found a dealer who had made him a very good offer. A missed opportunity for me!

As I've already said, the public library was a great place for meeting people. Especially, so far as I was concerned and in my late teens, girls! I met my first girlfriend there, who came in to borrow historical novels. Her name was Primrose and she was a Colonel's daughter (no jokes, please!). He was in charge of something or other in the famous Royal Arsenal, in Woolwich, and the family lived in a large and luxurious apartment in Dial Square therein (that was where the Arsenal Football Club was originally formed, way back in, I think, the 1890s - my paternal grandfather, as it happens, was a founder-player for the team in those days).

Liking to do things in style (when I could afford it) I asked Primrose if she would like to

go to the ballet at Covent Garden with me that weekend. She said she would, but would have to ask her parents for their permission. She was nearly 18. That afternoon, I was told I was wanted on the telephone in the office. "Is that Doyle?" a voice barked. I said it was. "I understand you've asked my daughter out to the ballet - you'd better come to tea this afternoon, so that I can take a look at you." I managed to leave an hour early (I said I wasn't feeling too good - and that was an understatement) and 'took tea' with the Colonel and his Lady (not forgetting Primrose). I apparently passed muster and was allowed to take their only daughter to the ballet, and we had an enjoyable evening (supper at Lyon's Corner House, and a walk in St. James's Park afterwards). We went out, off and on, quite innocently, for a couple of years.

After further such encounters with library borrowers (and also, indeed, colleagues on the staff) I met a lovely girl named Jo, who came in one day and asked me for a book on breeding ducks, as her brother had just taken up the activity. She eventually became my wife.

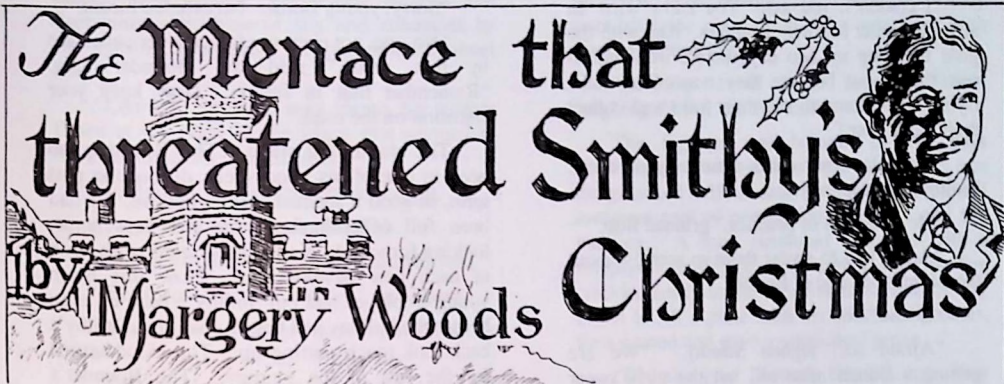
I came to know a few people who, in later years, became celebrities. One was a Royal Artillery (the R.A. were stationed just up the road) bandsman, who chatted about music and said he wanted to play the guitar for a career. He did. His name was Julian Bream. A promising young artist came in regularly and we talked about art. He had three private shows and exhibited at the Royal Academy. He became quite famous for a while, then seemed to disappear. His name was Alan Reynolds. Others included children's author Ross Salmon, thriller writer Harry Edmonds, and the handsome leading man at the local 'Rep', the Royal Artillery Theatre, James Sharkey. He later became, indeed still is, a leading London theatrical agent, representing many top stars.

I finally left Woolwich Central Library in 1957, after being there for ten years (minus two years in the R.A.F.) to enter the film business. But that's another story! I called into the library two or three years ago, for old times' sake, but it was a different place, a different world, with different people. What was it L.P. Hartley said in the opening of his great novel 'The Go-Between'? "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there."

I'm glad I was part of Woolwich Library's history during 1947 - 1957. It was a different place in those days - and a nicer, cosier, friendlier place too. I remember it with much warmth and affection. And it certainly helped me catch up with my reading . . . !



The Menace that threatened Smithy's Christmas

The title is written in a large, stylized, blackletter-style font. To the left of the text is a sketch of a castle with a central tower and crenellations. To the right is a sketch of a man's face, smiling, wearing a suit and tie. The background of the sketches is filled with holly leaves and berries.

Chapter 1

THE FETTLING OF BUNTER

"I can't believe it!"

"Come on, Bob. What's the hold up?"

The chums of the Remove at Greyfriars, shepherded by Herbert Vernon-Smith, were piling merrily into the roomy Galaxy Ultima which was to carry them off to a Christmas house party at the Bounder's new country home.

But Bob Cherry remained, his brow knitted with disbelief. He shaded his eyes with one hand, looking to left and right across the quad as though emulating a matelot of old about to launch into a hornpipe. "I can't believe it," he repeated. "It's not--Oh!"

A long arm reached out and yanked Bob sharply. He collapsed back through the open door of the Galaxy and sprawled amid a collection of feet and knees.

Bob yelled and the chums roared.

"Who did that? Whose big feet are kicking my ribs?" Bob gasped.

"Mine," chuckled Smithy. "I presume you are coming with us?"

"Urffgh! Let me up, you ass. I'm stuck!"

Willing hands hoisted Bob up and settled him into a seat between the mischievous Bounder and Harry Wharton. "What was all that about?" demanded Harry.

Bob straightened his collar and tie. "I was looking for somebody."

"Who, you chump? We're all here."

"No," Bob gave a great sigh, "we're bereft."

"The bereftfulness of what, my esteemed Bob?" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"How are we going to face it?" wailed Bob. "Christmas without Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Idiot!"

"Smithy ---however did you work it?"

The Bounder grinned. "Elementary, my dear friends. Bunter has been fettled, for the first Christmas in his fatheaded life here."

"Yes, but how?"

"Well, you know that Reddy's father has a few days home over Christmas and naturally Tom wants to be with him---but he'll be joining us the day after Boxing Day. This morning I dispatched Tom in the Roller and ushered Bunter in as well. I'd worn Tom to secrecy and spun Fatso a convincing tale about collecting another very important guest on the way. Dad's chauffeur has his instructions. He---" Smithy paused and leaned forward. "We're ready to go, Jed."

The young driver, casual in jeans and a well-worn leather jacket, nodded and put the Galaxy into motion. Smithy settled back and gave the Famous Five a smug grin. "Bunter is fettled!"

Harry Wharton frowned. "Smithy---you haven't told the chauffeur to dump the fat idiot in the middle of nowhere, have you?"

The Bounder assumed a hurt expression. "Would I do a thing like that?"

"Yes," said Johnny Bully.

"Don't fret" drawled Smithy. "Bunter is being delivered to Uncle George in Folkestone, who, no doubt, will find some work for his useless nephew."

Harry relaxed, wanting to believe Smithy, even though he knew him of old. The Galaxy passed through the gates of Greyfriars and the crusty old face of Gosling glowered through the lodge window. No doubt he was glad to see the back of all youths for a few peaceful weeks. Suddenly Bob turned anxiously. "You did finalise the arrangements with the girls?"

"All according to plan," said the Bounder. "I went over to Cliff House on Monday and---"

"You never told us!" cried Bob.

"I couldn't, you ass. You know what an affinity Bunter has with keyholes. And with the girls breaking up two days before us I had to sort things out because they wanted to make flying visits home to see their folks and collect their party gear."

"You play your cards close to your chest, Smithy," said Johnny.

"He's had lots of practice," grinned Bob.

"And I had to swear them to secrecy about the address because of Bessie."

"Bessie?"

"Afraid so," sighed Smithy. "We are getting a Bunter after all, but the girls swear that Cliff House has mellowed her. Clara says she's quite human now, and Marjorie says she's become a loveable old duffer these days."

"If you believe that you'll believe anything," grunted Johnny.

"Well, it was that or no girls," said Smithy, flatly. "She goes with them everywhere now."

The chums fell silent, looking forward immensely to seeing the girls again, and also with a natural curiosity to see the ancient abbey at Thorne-le-Cross that Smithy's father had bought the previous year with the intention of restoring it, heedless of cost. According to Smithy, his father had come near to regretting his impulsive purchase, so great had been the problems over planning permission and endless delays. But much of the work had been done and Thorne Abbey was to be the jewel in the residential crown of the multi-millionaire financier.

Suddenly the young driver spoke. "You'd better not tell your girl friends about the chanting monk. Might scare them off," he giggled.

The Bounder's face hardened. "What monk?"

"The ghost, of course." Jed giggled again.

"Rubbish!" the Bounder snapped. "How long have you worked for my father?"

"Nearly all year, with one of the companies on the site. They're laid off now for the holidays, and your dad asked me to stay on in the house to help old Larkin."

Had the callow youth known the son of his employer he might have recognised the danger signs. Harry Wharton recognised them instantly; the hardening in the Bounder's features; the darkening scowl.

"Our butler is *Mr. Larkin*, and my father is *Mr. Vernon-Smith* to you," said Smithy in dangerously quiet tones. "And if you dare to mention one stupid word about ghosts to my guests you'll have me to deal with. Understood?"

"Sorry, young Bertie. No offence meant."

"No-one, not even my father, ever called me by that name," said the Bounder icily. "Remember that in future. Now keep your attention on the road."

The chums fell silent. The Bounder had been in one of his good spells during the past term, so good it seemed hard to believe. He had been full of enthusiasm for his new home, looking forward to his father's letters with news of each new development. Now this brash young employee had put Smithy's back up even before the holiday had begun. Not that Smithy's back took much putting up! The cloud settled for the rest of the journey. The Bounder's morose scowl of suppressed anger seemed set permanently to black. Then suddenly:

"Hey! Are you lot all right back there?"

Smithy, apparently, had gone deaf. After a moment Harry said: "Yes, we're fine."

A pause, then: "I thought you'd all be getting excited about seeing the treasure."

"Will you shut up!" snapped the Bounder.

"Okay, okay." Jed seemed unperturbed by Smithy's temper. "I was the one who found it, you know, while I was working on some panelling. You were jolly lucky it was me. Some of those workmen weren't above slipping the odd find into their pocket and not letting on."

The chums were agog. Smithy had told them that there had been a discovery during the restoration work but information as to its nature had been rather vague. Now they restrained their impatience. They knew that nothing in the world would induce the Bounder to ask for information, certainly not from this informant.

"We're nearly there," said Smithy, in slightly less frigid tones. "This is Thorne-le-Cross. The abbey is about a mile farther on."

Thorne-le-Cross appeared much like many other small country market towns with its long High Street, now bright with Christmas lights. There was a mingling of attractive period houses, each with its window-framed Christmas tree giving out a welcoming glow through the gathering dusk, then the old inn blessedly free of the modern developer's idea of period features, and lastly the parish church. Then the houses petered out into a country road.

"There it is!" Smithy pointed. "Slow down, Jed."

The car slowed atop the rise and the chums had their first glimpse of Thorne Abbey, perhaps half a mile ahead, nestling amid woodlands beyond a broad stretch of open ground. It was brilliantly floodlit, showing its great arched entrance and Tudor Gothic facade of arched windows quite clearly across the distance. But it was the colour of it, the golden

amber stone shape silhouetted against the deepening night-blue of sky and enhanced by the lighting, that lent it an impression of sheet magic.

"Like it?" Smithy's eyes shone, his temper flown at the sight of the place that seemed to have captured his imagination.

"Fabulous!" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"A jolly old gem," enthused Bob.

"The gemfulness is terrific," said Hurree.

"Bet it could tell some tales," said Harry.

"Bet it costs a mint to heat," opined Johnny Bull.

"Do you know anything of its history?" asked Harry.

"A bit, not much," said Smithy. "But we're going to research it properly when Dad has time. We know it was founded as a priory in seven hundred and something. Then the Danes put paid to it. The Normans rebuilt it, then Henry provided its encore of barbarism. Apparently Henry had a habit of bestowing abbey lands, and whatever was left after the depredations of his vandals, upon his favourite pals. So it came into the possession of the de Verveine family. They let the old church ruins go to pot and converted the Abbot's house into a new stately home, raiding the old church and priory ruins for the stone. The descendants kept adding their own touches. There's even a Victorian kitchen where the last owner, and last of the family, lived in dire poverty. Death duties ruined the family. A father and two sons killed in the Great War, then two grandsons in the Hitler shenanigans. The old lady lived on in the Victorian kitchen while the place fell apart around her. But apparently she showed the boot to all comers from bureaucracy."

"So what happened to her?" asked Harry.

"Oh, she's still alive, eighty-odd," said Smithy, "tucked up in a luxury old folks home in Devon with the last of the old retainers to keep her company."

"Seems rather sad," said Harry.

"Oh, she's okay," said Smithy, carelessly. "Probably better looked after than she's been for years. Dad made it his business to see that she was going to be properly cared for, for the rest of her life, and the money invested wisely."

"Good," said Harry, his opinion of the Bounder's father going up several gears. For the financier had not always been noted for a gentle caring nature.

But they were there now, and Mr. Vernon-Smith was coming out to greet them. Harry greeted him respectfully and thanked him for his invitation.

"Not at all," said the Bounder's father genially. "My son's friends are always

welcome, even though," he chuckled heartily over his large cigar, "you see a very poor man standing before you."

"Looking at all this," returned Harry, laughing, "I can believe that!"

The luggage was brought in, the boys shown to their rooms, then back downstairs into the great old hall beneath its newly restored and awesome roof of perpendicular tracery and fan vaulting. A long sideboard was laid with a sumptuous buffet of food, and a vast log fire crackled rosily in the broad hearth. Bob Cherry began to fill a plate with his choice of goodies, then paused and gave a sepulchral groan.

"Oh, alas poor Bunter! Oh, Smithy! How can you be so cruel?"

"How long are you going to keep up this nonsense," demanded Johnny.

"We'll send for him if it'll make you happy," offered Smithy, grinning.

Hasty protests met this helpful suggestion and Bob subsided. Adult friends and colleagues of Mr. Vernon-Smith kept arriving and the spirit of seasonable jollity became infectious. Late in the evening their host asked if anyone would like to see the discovery. An enthusiastic procession followed Mr. Vernon-Smith into the book-lined Georgian library. He said, "I have to tell you that this room and the case there have had to be heavily alarmed. It is switched off now, of course!"

There was laughter, then the silence of awe as they crowded round the large glass case on the central table. Within lay an age-darkened casket with tarnished strapping and heavy hasp. Beside it was folded pieces of brownish linen, and a book. A solidly bound book much worn and fragile with age. Mr. Vernon-Smith lifted it out almost reverently and opened it with the greatest of care. Revealed were vellum pages, closely inscribed in painstakingly penned Latin script. The initials and the margins glowed with gilded colour illumination: soft warm red, tranquil blue, sepia brown and clear green, in exquisite traceries of leaves and scrolled decorative detail.

"Well," Bob nudged Harry Wharton, "you're the Latin clever-clogs. What does it say?"

"It's out of my league, I'm afraid. This could be from the Greek."

"Evangelium... that's Gospel," said Smithy.

Everyone had gone silent, obviously hoping for further translation.

"I think it's part of the gospel of the Nativity," said Harry at last. "But you'll need teams of experts on this."

"But you're absolutely right!" Mr. Vernon-Smith clapped Harry on his shoulder. "It is part of the Gospel of St. Matthew referring to the

Nativity. Some experts have had a preliminary look at it. It's taken a lot of persuading to get their agreement to my keeping it here. And the claims for possession have started already."

"What do you mean, Dad? Claims?" cried Smithy.

"Because it could be from Lindisfarne. Brought here by a young novice who was studying illumination, after the Danes sacked Lindisfarne. It's going up to the British Museum in January. Cambridge is very interested. So is the Church. And the Treasury is sniffing around," Mr. Vernon-Smith added dryly. "Well, I'd better lock it up again. If anything happens to this I'll end up in the Tower!"

"Hung, drawn and quartered!" laughed Smithy, drawing a dramatic hand across his throat.

"And what's left thrown to the fishes, eh, Samuel?" said a tall silver-haired man. He sighed. "To think that the novice who penned these pages may have worshipped with Bishop Eadfrith."

"I think it's terribly romantic," breathed a wistful girl in a clinging silver dress. "It seems so right, here at Christmastime."

Perhaps it was indeed a portent, Harry mused as he prepared for bed that night. A portent for peace and warmth and a blessing on this historic old place of worship that was being brought back to vibrant life.

But portents could warn off evil as well...

Chapter 2

THE UNFETTLING OF BUNTER

Harry seemed to have closed his eyes only for moments when he was wide awake, bolt upright in the four-poster bed. He listened, certain some strange sound had roused him. Yet he could hear nothing, only the silence that came to press in his ears.

Then there was a tap. A light tap at the door.

"Who's there?" Harry reached for the switch of the bedside lamp.

The door opened and Smithy's head peered round. "Sorry to wake you, old chap, but did you hear anything?"

"I'm not sure." Harry frowned. "I did wake, but..."

"Same here. I've had a look along the corridor but saw nothing."

"Maybe some of the guests are still up. Maybe playing a cassette or---Why did I think of that?"

"Because you heard it, too, in your sleep." exclaimed Smithy triumphantly. "Game for a bit of a tour?"

"You bet!" Harry shrugged into his dressing gown and with the Bounder crept quietly into the corridor. Pilot lights were fitted every few yards along all the passageways of the abbey. They would burn all night for the safety of nocturnal guests. The boys prowled the length of their wing, then stole downstairs, going from room to room, giving only the library a wide berth lest they set the entire abbey alive with alarm bells. But nothing, no-one, until they reached a passage that ended at a green baize door. Suddenly it gaped open.

The two boys clutched at each other in sheer shock.

"Master Herbert!" exclaimed Larkin. "Is something wrong?"

"Whew! No --- nothing." The Bounder recovered his equilibrium. "We thought we heard somebody creeping about."

"Everyone has returned now. We had a crate of extra glassware to unpack and wash. Now, if there is anything...?"

"No, Larkin. It's time you turned in as well," said Smithy.

A second figure appeared behind Larkin. "Did the chanting monk wake you up then?" Jed smirked cheekily at the boys.

Larkin turned sharply. "Have you stacked those glasses properly?"

"Yes --- sir."

Smithy touched Harry's arm. "We'll go then. Goodnight, Larkin."

Neither spoke until they reached Harry's room. Then Smithy said slowly: "It was, you know. The sound I heard. Like a sort of singing."

"Yes, I think it was," Harry murmured. "It must have been a guest with a radio."

Smithy did not look convinced. "I suppose so," he concurred unwillingly. It couldn't have been Jed playing silly chumps if he was washing glasses for Larkin. You know, I'm sure I've seen him somewhere before, yet I know I haven't, before today." Smithy shook his head. "I must be imagining things. 'Night, old bean."

There were no more mysterious sounds in the night, imagined or otherwise, and the chums awoke bright and early to their first morning at Thorne Abbey.

"Sleep well?" asked Smithy as they gathered for breakfast.

"With the sleepfulness of the proverbial spinning wheel," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Top!" they shrieked, but the Nabob of

Bhanipur merely grinned.

"And did you do any bounds-breaking, Smithy, to sample the local hostelry?" teased Bob.

"It being a bit of the hike to the Cross Keys," said Frank.

"Chumps!" The Bounder aimed mock swipes at their heads. "Come on."

Outside, a crisp winter sun, already thawing the light overnight frost, beckoned the chums out to greet the day before Christmas Eve. Only part of the extensive garden had been laid out in a simple pattern of lawns and paths. The main feature was a large stone fountain, not yet working, although the wide bowl was brimming with sunlit water and reflecting the central piece of statuary formed by a tall nymph in sculptured draperies at whose feet played a couple of plump cherubs.

A large conservatory flanked the side of the abbey and overlooked the curving drive and an overgrown shrubbery. Beyond this were a couple of dilapidated cottages and many signs of the extensive work still taking place. Several Portakabins, timber stacks, piles of other building materials and a lone JCB silhouetted against the sky like a great ungainly yellow bird that might come to life at any moment. The boys rambled on through another patch of woodland and reached the ruins of the priory.

A strangely eerie atmosphere emanated from their silence, and sadness hung over the broken columns, the remnants of archways --- always the longest surviving parts of stricken buildings --- and the mounds of tumbled stone. Several notice boards warned in red letters: DANGER. KEEP OUT. One hole was sealed off with a heavy grille, and near it a broken stairway ended up in mid-air.

For once Smithy showed no sign of his normal reckless disregard for rules. He waited while the chums took in the scene and then turned back towards the abbey. "We'd better move. We don't want to be missing when the girls arrive."

They got back just in time. The Galaxy came up the drive, driven today by Mr. Vernon-Smith's own chauffeur, who looked faintly worried as he opened the door for the girls. The boys clustered round, then fell back with disbelieving cries.

"I don't believe it," groaned Smithy.

"Oh no!" whispered Harry.

"This is all your fault, Bob --- you wished this on us," grunted Johnny Bull.

From the vehicle rolled an all too familiar figure, the most extensive circumference in all Greyfriars. Check trousers, big round spectacles like giglamps on a fat round face; Billy Bunter had arrived!

He bestowed a stern glare on the Famous Five and Smithy.

"I must say, you fellows, it's a bit thick your leaving the girls to come here unescorted." Bunter extended a gracious fat paw to Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House. "No consideration at all for ladies."

"What!" hooted Smithy. "We sent the car for them, from door to door."

Bunter snorted disdain and turned to help tomboy Clara Trevlyn, junior sports captain, who nimbly evaded the Fat Owl and sprang out.

"Of course we don't expect any manners from you, Smithy." Bunter concentrated his courtesy on fair-haired Mabel Lynn, who, clever actress though she was, could not quite conceal a slight expression of strain. An expression that could also be discerned in the other girls. Bob Cherry couldn't wait for Marjorie Hazeldene to emerge. He barged Bunter aside and climbed into the Galaxy to stake his claim as her personal escort.

"I don't believe this," Smithy repeated savagely.

Bunter sniffed. "It takes a chap with finesse and good breeding to look after girls properly."

"Why --- you fat, burbling barrel of lard!" yelled Smithy. "Who asked you, anyway, you --- you---" Words for once failed the Bounder.

Almost helpless with laughter now, the chums reached for pieces of luggage. Bessie descended, tripped over her own feet and was steadied just in time, and lastly, a tall, elegant girl with a shining cap of Eton-cropped hair and a gold-rimmed monocle stepped forth and gazed appreciatively at the abbey's magnificent facade. Smithy forgot Bunter and beat Frank Nugent to welcome Jemima Carstairs and escort her into the abbey, where his father was casting a look at Bunter which said more than any words.

Suddenly the great hall was alive with laughter and everyone talking at once. Explanations as to the unwelcome advent of Bunter would have to wait, although, as Harry Wharton remarked, it didn't need a Sherlock Holmes to work it out. Despite all Smithy's careful planning Bessie had managed to find out the "surprise" destination, and that was all the most expert gatecrasher in the Remove needed.

There was lunch, and delicious plans to be made for the day. The girls expressed a wish to do some last-minute Christmas shopping, so they set off for Thorne-le-Cross, all except the Bunter siblings who were exhausted after their journey and needed to build up their strength again in the only possible way.

After a couple of hours in the shops, with much secret buying of gifts, the chums repaired to the Abbey Tea Rooms for a much needed cuppa, and toasted teacakes piled with jam and

thick cream. But Marjorie was not quite relaxed. She whispered to Bob: "I want to get something for Smythy and his father. Any suggestions?"

Bob shook his head. "Smythy's got everything. And so has his dad. It happens to millionaires, you know," he added dryly. Then he saw disappointment cloud her gentle face. He said hastily. "Shall we have a look in that bookshop across the road?"

"Hey! Where are you two off to?" Smythy half rose.

"We'll be back in five minutes," said Bob. "Marjorie forgot something."

"Oh." Smythy subsided, not altogether happily as he watched them depart.

The bookshop, however did not seem to provide inspiration for Marjorie's gift problem. Then Bob pointed. "Look, there's Dick Francis's latest racing thriller. Get that for Smythy. He likes the gee-gees!"

But there still remained the choice for Mr. Vernon-Smith. Here Bob could not help her. She circuited the shop until she came to the section devoted to second-hand and antiquarian. In the shelf of local interest, one caught her eye. She drew it out. "Look, Bob! Here's an old history of the abbey. I wonder if Mr. Vern ---"

But Bob was not at her shoulder as she believed. A stranger was there, an untidy man with a floppy-brimmed hat over long, straggly hair. Half hidden in beard, the man's mouth was a thin cruel line. "I'll have that, miss," he snapped and snatched the book from her hand.

Marjorie stared, then protested. "I found it --- I'm going to buy it!"

"Hey! What's going on?" The Bounder and Harry Wharton stood in the shop doorway. They blocked the unpleasant stranger's path as he pushed Marjorie aside. Then Bob Cherry rushed up from the other end of the shop. The man glared at the trio of schoolboys.

"Want to make something of it?" said Bob.

"You'll apologise for that," said Harry, grimly.

The Bounder raised clenched fists. "Give her that book, or else ---"

The man looked directly at Smythy for the first time. Suddenly he turned and thrust the book at Marjorie, then shouldered his way past the three angry boys.

"Ill-mannered brute," said Bob, hovering protectively over Marjorie as she paid for her purchases. "He didn't seem to like the look of old Smythy."

But they forgot the unpleasant encounter as they returned to the abbey and unloaded their shopping, although Harry noticed that Smythy seemed unusually thoughtful. Had he

recognised the surly, scruffy man? It was unlikely. Harry dismissed the thought and a vague sense of uneasiness, and entered into the joyous preparations for Christmas.

"It's been a great day," laughed Babs, when at last the chums gave in to the call of Father Time, long past normal school bedtime.

"It's going to be an even greater one tomorrow," promised Smythy. "No rules and regulations here. Do as you like."

"Is this the first hint of that?" queried Bob, apparently rapt in study of a series of Cecil Aldin hunting prints along the corridor wall.

"Heard the call of the horn, old bean?" said Johnny.

"No, these." Above the hunting prints were hung a set of fine old prints of Hogarth's *Rake's Progress*. "Signs of things to come, Smythy?"

"I don't think I've quite reached that stage of corruption, you cheeky idiot," Smythy retorted sharply. "Nor do I intend to." Abruptly he asked: "Did that foul brute in the bookshop remind you of anyone?"

"Not of any of my friends," said Harry. "All the same, Smythy --- First Jed, then that brute ---" His unspoken words suggested that Smythy might be getting fanciful.

They said their goodnights and retired, albeit reluctantly. Night and silence and a big silver moon stole over the abbey and its sleeping inhabitants. At least, over those who did sleep!

Chapter 3

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC

Bunter lay awake. No snores echoed unmusically through the midnight reaches. Bunter was hungry. The bag of canapés and mince pies he had managed to snaffle from the buffet table had long gone. And it was a long time till breakfast.

He sat up and reached for his dressing gown. It was a bit risky to venture downstairs. Some of the adults or that beast Larkin might be hanging about, and there were all those pesky alarms. As if anyone wanted that mouldy old book. But Bessie had had a large tin of shortbread given that morning. Bunter peered out into the dimly lit passage. Quite a trek lay between his room and the corridor off the long gallery where the girls' rooms were situated. Bunter got up speed: the corridors did not seem as friendly during the night. Somehow he managed to reach Bessie's room without getting into somebody else's.

Bessie was sound asleep. All the better. If he could find that tin of shortbread she wouldn't know until it was too late. He cackled to

himself but the cackle turned into an "Ouch!" as he banged his fat knee against a chair. Bessie stirred.

"I sus - say, you girls --- that's not rising bell ---!"

"Shut up, sis. It's only me."

Bessie sat up. "What do you want? If you're after my shortbread I've hidden it, so there!"

Bunter glowered at her. He knew his sister too well; and that knowledge was reciprocated. Already she'd pestered him five times for the pound she'd lent him last Easter. The shortbread was probably under her pillow and any hopes of wresting it from her were a lot slimmer than the wrestler! He made a final appeal. "Aren't you a bit peckish, Bess? I am, and ---"

"What's that?" Bessie quavered.

"What's what?"

"Listen!"

"I can't hear any --- Oh, lor!" squeaked Bunter. "What is it?"

"It's the chanting monk!" squealed Bessie. "It's coming! Don't just stand there! Stop it!"

Bunter showed no inclination to follow this simple instruction. He backed nearer to the bed while the distant sound of chanting swelled in volume.

Bessie vanished beneath the duvet. Bunter had nowhere to vanish. The chanting came nearer. Bunter wished he'd shut the door. Then a movement stirred there, a shadow. Bunter blinked at the open door like a mesmerised rabbit. A figure stood there. A ghostly figure in the long habit and cowl of a monk.

Bunter made a frantic dive under the bed. Half the duvet went with him. Bessie tried to hold onto it, then her eyes widened. She began to scream, and scream, and scream.

The chanting faded. The monk passed silently on.

"Who was that?"

"Somebody screamed!"

"It sounded like Bessie!"

"Where did that chanting come from? Come on, girls!"

The corridor was alive now with movement and excited voices. Clara Trevlyn burst into Bessie's room. "What's up, Fatima? Did you hear it? It's only some japer playing silly chumps."

"I sus - saw the ghost! It was awful!" Bessie's eyes were nearly as wide as her big spectacles.

"You're safe now, Bess." Babs put her arm round the fat duffer's trembling shoulders. "Did anyone else see it?"

Marjorie, Jemima and Mabs shook their heads. "But we heard it."

"We heard it too." The boys had tracked down the scene of the disturbance and crowded into the room. "What exactly happened?"

"Bessie thinks she saw the monk. It stood in the doorway."

"It was huge! All hooded," quavered Bessie, "with a green face and skeleton teeth. It ---"

"Oh, lor! Has it gone?" came a squeak from the depths of the room. "It ---"

"Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry. "Where are you, you fat frog?"

"Under the bed," said Clara, scornfully. "There are his feet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton and Smithy bent as one. Each grabbed a fat ankle and pulled. Bunter was yanked, unceremoniously and ungently, from his refuge. Halfway out he stuck, and more willing hands came to help. With a wild yell Bunter emerged like a cork from a bottle, smothered in the big goosedown duvet.

"Ow! Beasts! I'm strangled!" Bunter sat up and glared wrathfully at the circle of grinning faces. "I wasn't scared you know. I was trying to --- to protect my sister. Then the great glowing monster flung me up in the air and ---"

"What a Samson!"

"--- and I sort of ---"

"You sort of got flung under the bed!" jeered Smithy.

"You fibber!" Bessie, safe under Babs' protective arm, glared at her brother. "He was trying to pinch my tin of shortbread, then ---"

"Then you both had a nightmare!" chortled Bob.

"Come on," cried Smithy, "let's go and find that fiery monster."

"With the green teeth and the ---"

"I think not." Mr Vernon-Smith and several guests had arrived to find out what all the racket was about. "It sounds as if that foolish boy imagined it all."

"But we all heard it!" they chorused in one voice.

"Well, I doubt if you'll hear it again now. Back to bed, every one of you, and let's all get some sleep."

Reluctantly they began to disperse, though not without a delay. Bessie announced that in no way was she going to be left alone. She

wanted to be in Babs' room, a large bedroom shared by Babs, Jemima and Mabs. Jemima, to cut short the argument, volunteered to swap, saying she was quite confident that no monk would stay long after she'd flung a jug of cold water over him.

"Bravo, Jimmy!" they cheered, and at long last peace and quiet was allowed to return to Thorne Abbey.

The event of the night certainly displaced Christmas Eve as the main topic at breakfast next morning.

"Right," said Smithy. "Are we going to have a ghost hunt?"

"Yes! Yes!" they cried.

"Something is making that chanting," said Smithy. "I've asked all the guests if they have a radio or a ghetto blaster with them, and none of them have. But somebody has."

"There might be a secret passage," said Clara, hopefully.

"I doubt it," said Mr Vernon-Smith. "We'd have found it during the alterations. But go and have a look, by all means. No invading the guest rooms, mind."

With fervent promises they raced away under the amused eyes of the adults, some of whom looked a little envious, especially the girl in the silvery dress, now casual in jeans and shirt, as if they'd dearly love to forget adulthood and join in this fun.

More than an hour later the ghost hunters had found nothing. Not a single hidden spring in a carved rosette, not a single hollow panel, not a single thickened wall that didn't measure out logically against its relating angle. Nothing. Not even a smear of green paint or a scrap torn from a monk's habit.

Disappointment shrouded their faces.

"Let's have just one more look along the upstairs corridors," suggested Clara. "That's where it came from."

Again they ascended the wide oaken staircase and examined closely the first corridor, then the long gallery, then the second corridor where the girls' rooms were. They had already tapped and tested every inch of their own rooms, now they looked in and then wandered back along the corridor. Jemima, however, had not joined in the second look. She stood now, staring up at the ceiling.

"Too early to be moonstruck," scoffed Clara.

"No, no. Suspicious." Jemima continued to gaze up at the ceiling.

"But what?" cried the girls.

Then: "Oh, yes! Yes!" exclaimed Harry. "Look!"

They craned their heads back, and at last noticed the small, unobtrusive black panel high up in the angle of ceiling and wall. At a careless glance, if one bothered to look up, it appeared to be just another intruder sensor, of the many with which the abbey was fitted. But closer examination showed it was larger, and minus the tiny red glow that came on whenever its range was invaded, even if not armed to trigger the alarms.

"I'll find a ladder," said Smithy.

"And we need to be along here," called Clara, pointing up to a trapdoor in the ceiling.

Dancing now with impatience, they waited until Smithy found the nearest storeroom and returned with a ladder. Clara won the race to be first up it. She pushed open the trapdoor and scrambled up through its aperture. Eagerly they all followed, to find themselves in a long attic. Stark white patches of new timber contrasted with dark ancient rafters. Some light came from a small skylight, and a number of cables snaked across the floor.

"Yes," said Harry, "we've got a trickster right enough." He held up a bundle of dull brown material, letting it unroll and fall into the shape of a monk's habit.

"And here's the mask!" cried Babs.

"And here's the chanting," announced Jemima. "Programme commencing immediately after the nine o'clock news!"

She was kneeling beside the Bounder, examining a mini CD player. He said, "That lead must go down to an amplifier."

Jemima was experimenting with the CD player and cried "Voila!" as the sound of chanting welled into the attic.

"Sorry, Jimmy," the Bounder threw the switch. "We don't want to start a scare."

Jemima now opened the player and held up the silvery disc from it. "It's that recording of those famous monks in Spain."

"There's a door along here," called Bob. "But it's sealed up, I think. No handle."

"Now listen," said the Bounder. "We'll leave everything as we found it and say nothing to anyone. If we are asked, we simply say we didn't find anything and look disappointed. Then tonight we'll wait up and catch the blighter. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"But what's their game?" Harry frowned. "They surely don't think they'll scare the lot of us out. And for what?"

"Well, old Spartans, it's in the library, isn't it?"

They looked at Jemima and their faces were worried now. "But surely they don't want us all

screaming and roaming all over the place," said Marjorie.

"Perhaps," said Jemima slowly, "that is exactly what they want. To distract us from what they're really up to."

There was a silence. Then the Bouncer nodded. "You could be right, Jimmy. In fact, I think you are."

"So we watch. Right?"

"Forewarned is forearmed."

Stealthily, they returned downstairs for lunch.

Chapter 4

BUNTER TAKES A BATH

It was a wondrous lunch. Even the Bunters reached a happy state of repletion. Then the Tree arrived, a verdant, bushy, twelve foot affair. It was set up in the great hall and the chums began the time-honoured ritual of dressing it. Several boxes of decorations, strings of coloured lanterns and the essential angel were needed to form its mantle, and there was still ample branch space for hanging up small gifts while larger parcels were heaped round the base. Indulgent adults drifted by, pausing to offer advice, hang a bauble or gift, and drift away again.

The chums were spared the assistance of the Bunters. The plump pair had discovered the TV room and settled down for a lazy afternoon. "Probably watching the Teletubbies," said Bob, "and no doubt well fortified by chocolates and grapes and marzipan petit fours."

Christmas Eve was racing by too fast. The carol service at the parish church, more last minute gift wrapping, another diet-defying evening meal and an impromptu comedy turn at the piano by two of the guests. The girl in the silver dress was wearing a black and gold creation now. She was steadily getting tipsy, which, sadly, did not seem to cheer her, and she seemed to want to attach herself to the chums. Bunter had found a piece of mistletoe and was getting skittish. Smithy drew Jemima and Harry aside.

"Let's slip away and get the torches and ladder handy. We'll stash them in your room, if that's okay, Jimmy. It's the nearest."

They went upstairs to complete these preparations. "The oldies are going to the Midnight Service," he whispered, "which works out perfectly. We'll be able to get up into the attic while they're out. When they get back they'll think we've all gone to bed like good little infants after we've posted our messages up the chimney to Santa Claus."

"I sent mine off by first class post last week," said Bob, smugly.

"I just faxed mine," Jemima yawned. "Much quicker."

"But," said Smithy, "if anyone would rather catch up on sleep, say so. No disgrace."

But no-one wanted to miss out on the excitement.

Someone put on a tape and a few couples started to dance. And somehow the chums got split up. Bunter was pursuing Marjorie; the tipsy girl, Trish, was pursuing Bob, and Bessie suddenly announced that she felt sick. Babs and Mabel Lynn led her away, and Smithy looked at his watch. It was quarter past eleven. Then Mr Vernon-Smith announced that it was time to leave for the Midnight Service. There was a gathering of wraps, and suddenly the abbey seemed almost deserted.

"We'll give them ten minutes to get clear," said Smithy.

"And we'd better collect ourselves," said Harry. "Where've they all got to?"

"I'm here," said Clara.

"Adsum!" Jemima appeared.

"The presentfulness is terrific," said Hurree.

"And we'd better get cushions and blankets, and change out of these togs." An important afterthought from Harry; black tie not really being the ideal choice of wear for a midnight vigil in an ancient attic.

"I'm looking forward to this," chuckled Clara. "Cliff House has never been beaten by a ghost."

"And we've seen a few off," laughed Harry. "Remember Polpelly, Smithy?"

"Do I!" Smithy looked at his watch and at that precise moment darkness swooped. Every light in the abbey went out.

"What on earth ---?"

"Is it a power failure?"

"Help!" The chums blundered around, instinctively making for the glow of the fire. "It's okay," came Smithy's voice out of the darkness. "There's an emergency back-up system. I'll find Larkin."

Wisely, the chums stayed still. Then suddenly they could see. The lighting was thin and dim, but at least it revealed the scene. Larkin came hurrying into the hall, almost colliding with the Bouncer. The butler was startled and worried. "Try not to be alarmed," he said. "I'm going to try and get the main power on again. I can't ---"

"The front door is wide open!" somebody shouted.

"Someone's calling for help!" another voice

cried.

The chums ran to the great front door, which gaped open to the night. Somewhere outside a voice was yelling frantically; a voice all too familiar to the chums.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Harry. "What on earth has he got himself into?"

They rushed out across a lawn shimmering under a great silvery full moon. They stared around. The garden was deserted. Then a splashing sound reached their ears.

"Help! I'm drowning!" the voice rose to a shriek. "Hurry, you beasts!"

"He's in the fountain!" yelled Harry.

"How the devil ---?" Smithy set off at a run after Harry, with Jemima and Clara close on his heels. Gales of laughter rang across the garden at the sight that met their eyes. Bunter was in the fountain, floundering like a great porpoise of blubber in the wide bowl. He was yelling his head off.

"I'm stuck! Do something! Don't just stand there howling, you beasts."

"Oh, my ribs won't stand this kind of punishment," hooted Smithy. "Hasn't anyone got a camera?"

Bunter did seem to be wedged, with his head stuck between the two fat cherubs, while the tall nymph, in her scanty draperies, gazed down disdainfully on this unseemly invader. "Ugh! I'm freezing! Ug - glug! Do something!" howled Bunter.

"Who's ready to give their evening togs a free wash?" gaped the Bounder. "Don't all rush at once!"

"One of us must," cried Clara. Before anyone could stop her, the tomboy of Cliff House had leapt up onto the rim of the fountain, keeping her balance by a miracle. "If someone hangs onto my hand I can reach the silly frog and haul him out." Instantly Harry grabbed her hand and she stretched towards Bunter.

"No!" cried Smithy. "He weighs a ton --- he'll drag you both in. Come down, Clara --- we'll drag him out by his feet."

It was quite a heave. Bunter yelled that they were breaking his legs, that they were pulling his ears off, that they were breaking his head. Suddenly, with a great yell Bunter was free. He landed on the lawn with a bump that almost shook the abbey. Trails of green slime and bits of dead plants festooned his fat face and plastered his circumference. During the rescue he had managed to soak his rescuers as well.

"Bunter needs another bath now," gurgled Harry.

"Must be a record --- two in one day," said the Bounder disgustedly, picking green fronds off his hitherto immaculate cashmere jacket.

"Beasts! Help me up, you sniggering idiots."

"Isn't he grateful? I've a good mind to sling you in again," snapped Smithy. "Come on, fatso."

Bunter was hauled to his feet and helped,



spluttering and grumbling, back to the abbey. Babs and Mabel ran towards them in alarm and three cars slid up the drive, bringing the party home from the Midnight Service. Mr Vernon-Smith got out of the first car, exclaiming in puzzlement, and the power came on. The floodlighting turned night into day and robbed all the colour from Larkin's face as he hurried from the doorway.

"Oh, sir --- something dreadful has happened! The library, sir! The Holy Book! It's gone!"

"What? Gone? It can't have," snapped Mr Vernon-Smith.

"Yes --- I saw them running away!" piped up Bunter. "I chased them!"

"You! Rubbish! Has everyone gone mad?" demanded Mr Vernon-Smith.

"But I did!" All eyes were on Bunter now. "I did chase them and they threw me in the fountain, and ---"

"Must have been regular samsons," jeered Smithy.

"They did!" hooted Bunter, trailing water and slime as he made for the fire. "Marjorie was there, she tried to stop them and ---"

"What?" Smithy grabbed Bunter's shoulder. "What did you say?"

"They dragged her away --- one of them said she'd seen him and --- they took her away. It's true! They did!"

With dawning horror they stared at Bunter, then stared at each other. They were all together now, except for one girl. Marjorie Hazeldene. Bunter was shivering and terrified now. He moaned:

"I think they kidnapped Marjorie."

Chapter 5

DAWN OF A DREADFUL CHRISTMAS

Stunned disbelief brought silence. Bunter was talking through his fat head, as usual. Marjorie must be in the abbey, somewhere. Then fear crawled through them. Babs had thought Marjorie was with the others in the great hall when she and Mabs took Bessie upstairs. Jemima thought she saw Marjorie go into the conservatory. Clara thought Marjorie had gone upstairs with Bessie. Bob, colouring, said he'd tried to stop Bunter pestering Marjorie, then he'd gone into the conservatory with Trish, who was now hanging onto his arm and looking scared.

"We've got to find her," said Smithy, desperately.

"Has that priceless old book really been stolen?" asked a guest, somewhat bewilderedly. "How dreadful!"

"Hang the priceless old book," jerked the Bouncer. "Come on, we've got to search. She can't be gone. You know what gammon Bunter talks."

"Sir ---" Jed rushed in. He thrust a card at Mr Vernon-Smith. "This was in the front hall. It says it's urgent."

Mr Vernon-Smith stared at the missive. "It's just another Christmas card. It --- oh, my God!"

"What is it, Dad?"

Mr Vernon-Smith held out the garish glitter card. Smithy opened it. His cheeks drained of colour. "Read it," he whispered to Harry.

Slowly, Harry read aloud: "On no account call the police or you'll never see that girl again. You'll hear from us. Happy Christmas, folks."

It was true. Bunter hadn't been talking clap-trap. The arguments began. To call the police. The police knew how to handle these things. But how could they put Marjorie's life at risk? They turned on Bunter. Why hadn't he told them straight away? They might have caught up with the thieves. Bunter said he'd heard a car. He was unsure whether there had been three, four, or even five men. Getting a coherent account out of Bunter was never easy. He'd followed Marjorie to the conservatory, but she'd gone outside. He'd seen her in her white dress. Then the lights had gone out. Then he'd crashed into somebody. Then Marjorie screamed. And then they'd pushed him in the fountain.

Then they turned on Bob. If he'd seen Bunter pestering Marjorie why hadn't he stayed with her? The inference regarding Bob's new conquest was blatant, and his stammered explanation that Trish only wanted a sympathetic ear because her boyfriend had quarrelled with her met with little understanding. "At least your ears are big enough," grunted Johnny Bull.

The Bouncer was distraught, but he was beginning to reason out the possibilities. His first move was to bring down the robe and CD player, after forcing the other door in the attic and finding it led to a small stairway near Jed's room. "Don't you see, Dad, there had to be someone in the place who knew where the switchboard was, and the alarm control panel?" Backed now by an equally suspicious Famous Five, he accused Jed of being that accomplice.

To Smithy's disgust, his father accepted Jed's hot denial of any complicity. He turned on his son. "This lad has worked well for me all this year. There isn't an atom of proof against him. You might remember that he hasn't had your advantages, my lad. He's had to work for

his living." With that verdict, Mr Vernon-Smith retired to the denuded library to confer with the tall silver-haired man, who, it seemed, was something very high in HM Customs & Excise.

Smithy was furious. "That's typical of my father. Take him away from money to people and he hasn't got a clue!"

The adults resorted to alcohol; the chums to despair. Smithy wanted a quiet but very painful session with Jed. He was still convinced that the boy knew something, and when Smithy got an idea into his head nothing would shift it. They could make him talk.

"No," said Harry. "We can't do that."

"Then suggest something better," challenged the Bounder. "I'm going out to search the grounds --- they might have shut her in one of those old cottages. You lot can please yourselves."

None of them had much hope of this, but they seized on a course of action that would make them feel they were trying to do something. They'd scarcely left the abbey when running feet pursued them. It was Jed, with what seemed a heartfelt plea to be allowed to help with the search. "I've got all the keys," he added, "and I know the place better than you."

Smithy looked dangerously belligerent, but Bob caught his arm. "Let Jed help, for goodness' sake. Fighting won't get us anywhere."

With an air of confidence Jed opened up all the dilapidated cottages, and several outbuildings, then the Portakabins. Nowhere was there any trace of a girl's presence, or anyone else, apart from odd workaday garments left by the workmen.

"What about the ruins?" said the Bounder.

"There's nowhere in there." Jed turned away. "And they're not safe. You could break your neck there in the dark."

"He's right," said Harry. "We saw that yesterday."

Smithy still hesitated, then reluctantly turned back towards the abbey. There, Mr Vernon-Smith told them he'd managed to contact a very efficient private investigator who, not altogether happy at being dragged from his bed in the middle of Christmas night, had promised to be at the abbey by breakfast time. "And now," said Mr Vernon-Smith, "you youngsters must go to bed. There's nothing else we can do until morning."

As if they could sleep!

The investigator arrived promptly. He wanted Bunter, who had to be hauled, protesting, out of bed. Bunter did not seem to impress the sharp-featured little man, who turned next to guests and staff. He wanted the

names of everyone who knew about the ancient book, who'd seen it, who had been present when it was discovered. The comfort he could offer was scant, at least to the chums. "It's a common ploy with kidnapers" he said "to threaten like this. The victim is their lever until they get clear. In this case they've already got their ransom."

"I think we should call the police," said the C&E man. "Art thieves are in a different category from the usual type of kidnapper."

"I can't risk it," said Mr Vernon-Smith. "These youngsters are in my care here. We dare not do anything to antagonise these scoundrels. And they said we would hear . . ."

"Maybe," said the investigator. "They must have an accomplice here who knew his way around the place. Has anyone suddenly left?"

This justification of his own suspicions would have pleased Smithy, had he been capable of feeling pleased about anything at that moment. "Do you think they'll keep their word?" he groaned.

"We don't know."

"Well they got what they came for, didn't they? They must know its value."

"You can't put a value on a relic like that."

"I don't give a damn about the relic," snarled Smithy. "I never want to see it again, as long as we get Marjorie back safe and sound."

The day dragged on miserably. The tree remained unlit. Music was silenced and voices were muted. No bright candles cast their warm glow, and the circle of gaily wrapped gifts stayed unopened under the tree.

No-one wanted Christmas dinner, except the Bunter siblings, but out of consideration for the staff who had worked so hard producing the magnificent meal as planned, the guests gathered round the table and tried to look appreciative.

But the Bounder pushed his plate away, scarcely touched, and bowed his head in his hands. Harry did the same and propped his unhappy face in one hand. Even Bessie, who seemed recovered, suddenly lost her appetite. Fat tears began to roll down her plump cheeks. She said brokenly: "Do you think they've given Marjorie any Christmas dinner? Oh - oh, Babs ---!"

"I know." Babs put her arm round the woebegone duffer and proffered a clean tissue. "We all feel the same, so helpless." Bessie snuffled into the tissue and decided she didn't want anything to eat.

Only Bunter's jaws continued a steady, relentless champing. Disgusted glares eventually got through to him. He glowered defensively at the chums. "I don't know why you beasts are just sitting there. I did try to save

Chapter 6

A KISS AND A SERMON FOR SMITHY

her, against all those great rough brutes. Where were you lot? You --- Ow! Leggo! O-o-w!" Bob had seized a fat ear. "You great guzzling lazy useless layabout! You ---" Words failed Bob and he stamped away.

The company had dispersed by now, leaving Bunter the sole occupant of the great baronial dining table. The staff began to clear away, inconsiderately removing the edibles first. "Beasts," muttered Bunter, after stuffing his pocket with petit fours, and rolled away to the great hall, where disconsolate guests drifted into groups.

The Bounder stood alone, near the tree.

Bunter surveyed the scene and gravitated towards the tree. The Bounder ignored him and lit another cigarette. After months of abstinence Smithy had succumbed to the dubious comfort of the now discredited weed, lighting one after another, only to stub them out half-smoked. Bunter stooped, with some difficulty, and began to root among the presents under the tree. A sudden cacchination sounded. Bunter straightened, holding a neat silver packet. "I say, Smithy, old chap, this one's for you."

The Bounder swung round impatiently. Bunter's fat paw had found the gift tag. "He, he, he! It says: 'To Smithy, Affectionate greetings from your friend, Marjorie'."

"How dare you touch that! You fat, sniggering porpoise!" The Bounder seized the gift with one hand and Bunter's ear with the other. The foot that landed on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars had all the force of the Bounder's temper, worry and despair behind it. "Now get out of my sight before I ---"

"O-o-w! You beast! Is this the way to treat a guest? You brute!"

"God! I can't stand any more of this!" The Bounder stormed across the hall, uncaring of the glances following him. Bob Cherry stood up, but Harry put a checking hand on his arm.

"Leave him, Bob. This has hit him as hard as it has hit us."

Smithy's rage impelled him up to his room. He looked at the beautifully wrapped little packet, then put it down on his bedside table, knowing he could not bring himself to open it at that moment. The opening of gifts was for joyous times --- Suddenly he longed for the steadfast presence of Tom Redwing. But two days remained before Reddy got here. And in two days --- Smithy shivered, not daring to speculate on what those two days might bring.

He returned downstairs and wandered restlessly along to the conservatory. It appeared to be empty, then he saw that the door to the terrace stood wide open. Smithy frowned and went to close it, then started as he saw Jemima Carstairs standing out there in the gathering dusk. "Jimmy ---" he said, uncertainly, moving to her side.

"There's somebody out there," she said, "under those trees. He came from the house and he seems to be carrying something."

"Is he, by jingo. We'll soon find out what he's up to." Smithy was longing for action, any action that might release the tension gripping him. "Stay here. I'll call the others and grab a torch."

"By then he'll be a mile away." Jemima stepped forth coolly.

Smithy hesitated only a moment then rushed back into the conservatory, to a small lobby-cum-potting shed at one end that held essentials for tending a conservatory of plants. He snatched a portable lamp, praying it had a battery in it, and, with an afterthought, an old anorak that hung there. He raced out after Jemima, who had reached the end of the shrubbery, and tossed the anorak to her. "You'll need that."

"He's got a light now," Jemima whispered. "See?"

They followed, careful to keep in the shadows and shield the rays from the lamp. The first light still bobbed on ahead through the trees. "I think it's Jed," hissed the Bounder. "I think he's heading for the ruins."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking, old Spartan?" asked Jemima.

"I'm hoping what you're thinking," returned Smithy. "Yes, he is!"

The dark figure stopped by the tumbled stone wall with the danger sign and set down the shape he was carrying. He pulled at the grille that covered the opening. It came away quite easily. He picked up the shape he was carrying and disappeared into the black hole in the mound of stone. The Bounder's heart was thumping now. He gripped Jemima's arm as they picked their way over the rough ground. At the yawning black opening he stopped. "You'd better stay here," he said.

"Not likely!" retorted the brainiest girl at Cliff House. "I served my crime-busting apprenticeship with Clara Trevlyn!"

Slowly, silently, they crept down the short flight of crumbling stone steps within. The light

ahead was quite a distance away now, then it stopped. They seemed to be in what must have been the crypt of the old priory. Then suddenly the Bounder gasped aloud and seized Jemima's arm. "Look!" He shone the lamp downwards.

Inches from their feet was the oily gleam of black water, a long extent of it ahead. One more unwary step ---

"Ye gods!" murmured Jemima. "It's ye ancient cistern. Where the monks had their water supply"

Smithy neither knew nor cared about the monks of old and their water storage system. He was skirting the edge of it, to where the light had vanished. Then he heard a voice, an alarmed voice, and he began to hurry, uncaring now of betraying their presence, and reached an ancient door, wide open, and the figure of Jed within.

"Where are you?" Jed repeated. "I've brought ---"

Smithy did not hesitate. His flying tackle brought the youth crashing to the ground. The tray Jed was carrying went flying, scattering a plate of sandwiches and a carton of milk.

"What do you mean?" gritted the Bounder. "Where is she? You've got her down here somewhere, haven't you?"

"I - I don't know what ---" Jed was trying to struggle up, only to meet Smithy's fist and topple headlong again. "Urgh - I ---"

"Who are you bringing food for, in this godforsaken place?" Smithy planted his knee in the youth's chest. "Where is she?"

"She was all right this morning. She tried to ---"

"Smithy. Here," said Jemima.

Hidden by the angle of the open door, Marjorie Hazeldene was huddled on a low stone bench. The filmy white dress she had worn on Christmas Eve was soiled and torn at the hem. There was a dried trickle of blood on her arm, and a bluish bruise on her forehead. Her face was the colour of marble and she seemed unable to move. Behind her, the wall of the underground cell oozed with moisture, and a greyish, damp-sodden blanket was all that protected her from the deadening chill. The Bounder and Jemima dropped to their knees beside her. Smithy touched her forehead. "Did that brute do this?"

"No." Marjorie was so chilled she could hardly move her lips. "I tried---this morning--- to get away. He brought some food---I tried to trip him and get past. But I couldn't see---he pushed me back and I slipped."

Smithy and Jemima looked at each other. Each with the thought of that deadly trap awaiting in the darkness. The cistern... They tried to chafe warmth into her icy hands, and

with an impatient exclamation at himself, the Bounder pulled off his jacket. Instantly the dank chill struck through his shirt and brought stark realisation of the hapless girl's ordeal. Jemima helped him to guide Marjorie's arms into the sleeves and enfold her in the soft warmth of cashmere. Then a movement brought the Bounder whirling to his feet. Jed was groaning and trying to stand up. The flat of Smithy's hand stopped that and Jed collapsed back. "I think you've broken my leg," he moaned.

"Good," snapped Smithy. "I'll be back soon with Bob Cherry and he'll break the other one."

Jemima was trying to get Marjorie to her feet. "Come on, old wonder-woman. We've got to get you back." But Marjorie was so numbed she could scarcely move.

Smithy touched her hand. "Relax. I'm going to carry you. Just hang on." The Bounder was strong and he lifted Marjorie into his arms as though she were a child. "Can you bar that door, Jimmy," he directed, "and make sure that devil's spawn is locked in. See how he likes being shut in this hell-hole."



"With pleasure, Sir Spartan!" Jemima secured the ancient latch and led the way out into the clean sweet freedom of the night. The first soft white flakes of snow were falling that Christmas night as the Bounder carried

Marjorie Hazeldene back to warmth and safety.

Everyone came rushing to Jemima's call. First were Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry. The Bounder ignored their pleas and outstretched arms and carried her to the warmth of the fire. Bunter was deep in the best armchair, as usual. "Out!" snapped Smithy. "Now!" Bunter obeyed, and Marjorie was put gently down into its comfort.

There were more than enough helping hands. Hot sweet tea was brought. Warm slippers. Blankets. Someone produced a thermometer; someone else balm for the bruise. More sweet tea. Hot water bottles. Dainty sandwiches. And all the time she clung to the edges of Smithy's jacket as though it were her lifeline. She kept repeating that she would be all right when she got warm again. Then she said: "It was that man in the bookshop."

Meanwhile, Smithy and the Famous Five, plus Clara and Jemima, had gone to collect Jed, and it could not be said that his journey back to the abbey was exactly gentle. It took all the self-control of his escorts to leave him in one piece. A formidable barrage of Nemesis awaited him and suddenly he became a pathetic, frightened youth.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry---I didn't want her hurt but I had to because of my mother, if---if I'm found out it'll kill her."

"You're not talking sense," snapped the investigator.

"He said he'd see I went to prison because I worked with him until my mother left him. A collector said he'd pay him a million if he got that book for him, and---"

"Who?"

"I don't know his name. They'd get away in his big ketch then I was to let the girl out and---"

"Who are you working for?"

"My father. He---"

"Soames!"

The gasp from the Bounder startled them all. Then Harry cried: "Yes! Yes! It was Soames in the bookshop, under all that fungus. He recognised you, Smithy. That's why he got out sharp!"

"And you!" Smithy turned to the youth. "You're his son! No wonder I thought I'd seen you before."

They were struck silent. Soames again. Once Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet: then his greatest enemy.

A deal was struck. Jed would get off lightly in return for information. The power round Mr. Vernon-Smith got into action, Christmas Day or no Christmas Day. Joy flowed back into the abbey. Marjorie was borne upstairs, supposedly

to rest but actually to be tended by her chums. A bath filled with soothing unguents; her hair shampooed; her nails polished; all the pampering they could think of. Downstairs the phones and faxes of the power circle were humming while the guests celebrated. The tree lights glowed, gifts were opened and crackers pulled. Trish found Bob again, and champagne corks began to pop.

The Bounder was very quiet. For once he was not ready to celebrate. All he was conscious of was the tremendous sense of relief that it was all over. He went to the drinks table and poured a glass of ginger ale. Then someone nearby said: "Look, she's coming downstairs, poor girl. What an appalling experience, shut up all night in that ghastly underground crypt place."

Smithy looked towards the staircase. Marjorie was indeed coming down, her chums beside her, laughing and happy. She was still pale but seemed much recovered. At the foot of the staircase she turned and came straight across the great hall to the boy who had carried her back to safety. Smithy said awkwardly: "You look fine."

She smiled. "I want to thank you for--- for---"

"None needed---you know that. Anyway, it was Jemima, really."

Then suddenly, impulsively, she put her hand on his arm and reached up to kiss his cheek.

For a moment he stared down at her, and for once his usual arrogant self-possession deserted him. A confused desire to gather her up again and return that kiss shocked him with its intensity. He began to stammer and colour rushed into his face.

Marjorie's smile faltered. Her hand fell away from his arm. She said, uncertainly, "I'll never forget---"

There was a rush of feet. Harry and Bob and Frank held out their arms as music surged into the great hall. Couples began to dance, to the nostalgic, bitter-sweet theme from the old Coward musical Marjorie hesitated, then moved past the trio, to go to Johnny Bull, who looked surprised, then delighted. Clara, who did not worry about the old-fashioned niceties of waiting at the side of a dance floor to be asked, caught Bob's hand. "Come on--and watch where you put your feet!" Boys and girls paired off, somebody dimmed the lights, and the Bounder was left alone by the drinks table.

The colour had gone from his face now and his mouth set grimly. You idiotic fool, he told himself. Abruptly he dumped the untasted glass of ginger ale and reached for a decanter. He splashed whisky and a dash of soda into a glass and turned to survey the party scene with a sardonic gaze. Clara and Bob had stopped.

Clara was rubbing her ankle and Bob was shuffling his feet. Marjorie looked safe and secure in Johnny's arms. Harry was dancing with Babs, and the love-lorn Trish had settled for Frank Nugent.

The Bounder's mouth twisted in a wry grin. He raised his glass and murmured, cynically: "And a happy Christmas to one and all!"

"Now, now! Chin up--not elbow up!"

He turned sharply, not really ready for party talk, even with the enigmatic Jemima Carstairs. She shook her head and calmly took the glass from his hand, and his cigarette, possibly the only person ever to succeed in such a reprimand to the Bounder--and get away with it!

She disposed of those items and said: "I take it that your present cause for concern is not the fate of the jolly old treasure?"

"No exactly."

"Sad, but quite right. It's people who matter. The ketch has been spotted off the French coast."

"Really." The Bounder did not sound terribly interested.

"It seems that someone at this end got their wires crossed about Soames, the antiquities trafficker," said Jemima blandly, "and the name of a fearfully badly wanted drugs baron got mentioned. Half the crack drugs squads in Europe have been hauled away from their turkey and pud, which won't leave them in sweet tempers. The French connection is surrounding a certain isolated farmhouse in the Lisieux area. The entire kaboosh should be in the bag by tomorrow."

"Good," said the Bounder, "but that reptilian, snivelling little toad is going to get off scot free, after what he put Marjorie through. I'd like to flay him alive."

Jemima regarded the hard, angry face of the Bounder. She adjusted her monocle. "Ahem, we're taking root here, methinks. Care to join the whirl?"

"I'm not very good at it," he said ungraciously, "but if you want to take the risk..."

"That makes two of us," she said airily. "You know, Sir Spartan, revenge is supposed to be sweet, but its satisfaction is so fleeting. Turns the jolly old soul into iron, blocks in all the talent and wisdom a chap might turn to much better account."

"Do you go in for sermonising at Cliff House as well?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," said Jemima in innocent tones.

Smithy had no difficulty in homing in on Jemima's wavelength. He also knew she was remarkably accurate in tuning in to his own. It was a disconcerting experience for someone who had always considered himself to be master of his fate. He smiled unwillingly. "They warned me not to be fooled by your burbling. You perceive too much, Jemima Carstairs!"

But her attention had moved, to where Bob had been recaptured by the still tipsy Trish, and to where Marjorie, a little white and strained now, drifted in the arms of a very happy Harry Wharton.

Jemima murmured: "The menace has gone now. Think positive, Sir Spartan! There's all next week to look forward to. And New Year's Eve. Auld Acquaintance and all the jolly old orgies of kissing and so forth. Quite exhausting," Jemima sighed, "but pleasant, don't you agree?"

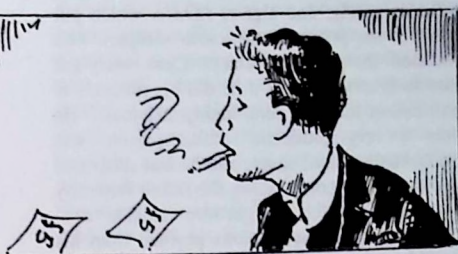
Over Jemima's shoulder he watched Marjorie, and encountered her tremulous, somewhat troubled gaze. He smiled at her, then followed that tentative smile with his cheekiest wink. Suddenly laughter lit her face like sunshine.

The last of the black shadow vanished from Smithy's brow. Oh, yes!" he exclaimed softly and swung Jemima exuberantly into the centre of the floor. Yes! The menace has gone. There was another whole week--and there was New Year!



THE CAPERS OF CUTTS

BY PETER MAHONY



Charles Hamilton's schools had a liberal sprinkling of blackguardly senior pupils. Loder, Carne and Walker (plus Hilton and Price of the Fifth) at Greyfriars; Carthew, Knowles, Frampton and Catesby at Rookwood; Monteith (in the early days), Sefton, Knox, St. Leger, Prye and Gilmore at St. Jim's: all played caddish roles in adding spice to Hamilton's yarns. But most of them were predictable. Loder, Knox and Carthew were bullies; Hilton was generally idle; Price, St. Leger, Prye and Gilmore lacked the courage of their misdemeanours. Monteith had the makings of a complex character, but he faded into the background after the early stories in the Gem. This was probably because Hamilton (Martin Clifford) had created a better 'villain', namely "Cutts of the Fifth".

Gerald Cutts was the complete anti-hero. His character included most of the traits of Hamilton's other 'blades'; but he had extra qualities which set him apart from the rest. Two of these qualities were brains and courage - and both were required to extricate him from the consequences of his nefarious capers. Loder & Co. came regular croppers, their misdeeds catching up with them. Cutts rarely did. He was clever enough to cover his tracks and was always ready with a brazen lie to turn away suspicion. In many ways, Cutts was an older version of Herbert Vernon-Smith - without the Bounder's redeeming features. Martin Clifford made regular use of Cutts' deviousness in creating some of the saltier yarns in the St. Jim's saga.

Of the 768 original stories which Martin Clifford/Hamilton wrote for the Gem, Cutts plays a significant role in nearly 40 - a proportion of about 5%. This may not be impressive at first glance, but it compares with Ernest Levison's 7% and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's 9%, and outstrips the feature roles of such stalwarts as Blake, Figgins, Manners, Lowther, Cardew and Talbot. Only Tom Merry, who 'starred' in about 16% of the stories, was of clearly greater importance in Clifford's plot themes. Indeed, if the unsavoury Ernest Levison had not been present to engineer most of the 'dirty work', Cutts could well have played an even larger part in the annuals of the 'Saints'.

Cutts was wealthy, presentable, clever and, generally speaking, affable. He was leader of the Fifth Form in everything but name. Philip Le Fevre, a rather vacuous nonentity, was the official "Captain of the Fifth", but that was because Cutts had no use for a position which carried duties but very little kudos. His influence - usually for the worse - in the form was great, and there can be little doubt that he could have ousted Le Fevre if he wished. Le Fevre had to deal with Mr. Ratcliff - not the most understanding of Form-Masters - and Cutts preferred to leave him to it.

Enough evidence appears in the stories to show that Cutts was - potentially - the most able scholar in the Fifth. He probably could have earned promotion to the Sixth Form, but that would have involved regular hard work and, perhaps, a prefectship which would have restricted his freedom to 'kick over the traces'. Cutts was much happier as the bright star of the lower firmament.

Mr. Cutts was a wealthy merchant: he gave his hopeful son an "ample allowance". Gerald, however, had military ambitions. He was aiming to go to Sandhurst and join his uncle's cavalry regiment. (This may explain his lack of interest in reaching the Sixth Form, where the scholars were preparing for University. St. Jim's Fifth were studying for matriculation - a natural means of entry to Sandhurst.) Inevitably, with his abilities under-stretched in the form-room, Cutts devoted his brain to less worthy pursuits.

There is no dispute that Cutts, to quote Clifford direct, was "a blackguard of the first water". Beneath a veneer of gentlemanly good humour, he concealed a number of unpleasant qualities. He was ruthless, unscrupulous, cunning, and dishonest. He was also quick-thinking and could shift his ground with bewildering rapidity. None of Hamilton's other 'villains' was as resourceful as Cutts in a tight corner. He could have been an outstanding leader - but for that kink of blackguardism.

An interesting sidelight of Cutts's capers is that he was a successful gambler. Most of Hamilton's other 'cads' were significantly unsuccessful in their 'plunges'. Generally, they backed horses which "came in eleventh"; lost

more than they could pay at cards; played billiards poorly; and signed I.O.U.s which put them in the power of rapacious sharpers who 'dunned' them for the money. Cutts rarely got into such scrapes - and if he did his methods of extricating himself were highly original. He was a very proficient billiard-player; was undoubtedly a card-sharp; and he had cultivated a wide acquaintance among the racing fraternity - a resource which brought him valuable 'tips' about horses to back. Cutts profited from his gambling and was rarely in financial difficulties.

Another fascinating facet of Cutts' character was his sporting prowess. He was a genuine all-rounder at cricket; a fast and tricky winger at football; and he could 'handle himself' in a scrap. Many seniors envied him; impressionable juniors admired him; Knox, Sefton and other prefects deferred to his lead; the masters regarded him with favour. Cutts, potentially, "had it made"!

Unfortunately, the outstanding trait of his character militated against conventional success. Cutts had 'nerve'. In many ways this was a redeeming quality - a cool and determined courage comparable with Tom Merry's. However, when this 'nerve' was linked with Cutts' blagging propensities, it did more harm than good. Where Loder & Co., through lack of courage, would tread carefully, Cutts would 'try his luck'. Often he got away with it - 'fortune favours the brave' - but occasionally he came badly unstuck.

Quite early in the saga Cutts was at loggerheads with Tom Merry & Co. A clash on the way to the Theatre Royal in Wayland left the outnumbered Fifth Formers cleaning off mud. Cutts retaliated by catching the Terrible Three alone and giving them a thorough ragging. Revenge became the order of the day and the juniors ruined a concert staged by the Fifth Form. All schoolboy fun, except that the takings, ostensibly for the Fifth Form football club, were 'milked' of 'expenses' by Cutts. The shape of things to come.

Not long afterwards, Cutts approached Tom Merry for a loan of £20! For once, his gambling had proved costly - his normal allowance plus an extra £50 had been lost - vast sums in the early days of this century! Griggs, the local bookie, was threatening a 'show-up' if his £20 was not forthcoming. Cutts' solution was to 'borrow' the Junior Sports Club funds - if Tom Merry would let him. Tom indignantly refused, but second thoughts - not always the best - led him to change his mind and help the 'lame dog'. Cutts promised solemnly to return the funds 'by Friday'. He didn't: he'd been relying on another horse to recoup his losses; and Tom was left minus the funds and with bills to pay.

After a great deal of agonising with his

conscience, Tom saved himself by wrestling with a circus champion for a £20 stake ("Stand up to our man for five minutes and win £20"). Cutts, callously indifferent to Tom's predicament, had the cheek to suggest that the winnings should be risked on yet another horse! He never repaid the £20 - a blatant swindle.

The next ploy was even more wicked. Cutts laid bets against St. Jim's winning a special cricket match with the touring Wallabies. To make his bet safe, he persuaded Knox to bowl at Darrell in the nets. (Body-line in 1913!) Darrell was injured and Cutts was promoted into his place. Later, Langton, St. Jim's star bowler, was assaulted by a footpad and crooked as well. With Cutts planning to play badly, St. Jim's looked set for defeat.

The plot was failed by Fatty Wynn. He had overheard Cutts arranging his bets with Crewe, the bookmaker, and he informed the prefects. Cutts, confronted with the charge, brazened it out. He denied the whole story: "I've been accused of having dealings with bookmakers - of playing money against the team I'm playing in - of all kinds of rotten conduct! I'm not going to take it lying down! Either Wynn will withdraw his words, here and now, and beg my pardon, or the matter must be taken before the Head!" That's how to bluff a thing out! (I especially enjoyed that "beg my pardon" touch!)

Of course, Cutts didn't get away with it. Kildare rejected Wynn's story, but he was wary enough not to select Knox as Langton's replacement. Instead, he chose Wynn (the junior team's demon bowler). Cutts did his worst to lose the game - a 'pair of spectacles' and some very expensive bowling - but St. Jim's, thanks to Fatty Wynn, pulled off a narrow victory. Cutts was left owing the bookies £60 - with little prospect of paying it.

One thing about Cutts - he was never beaten. With a visit from his uncle, Major Cutts, in the offing, the Fifth Former 'conned' Digby into writing "a play" with him. (Apparently, Cutts had injured his hand and needed an amanuensis!) At Cutts' dictation, Dig wrote a letter in which a character in the play confessed to his father that he had lost £75 'on the horses', was under threat from the bookies and was 'going to end it all'. Cunningly, Cutts had named the character "Robert" (Digby's name) and when he detached the page from the rest of the 'script' it appeared to be a genuine letter from a distraught Digby to his baronet father.

Sir Robert Digby was an old friend of Major Cutts. When the Major arrived at St. Jim's, Cutts, posing as a concerned 'friend' of a wayward junior, produced the letter to illustrate Dig's dire distress. The Major, thoroughly alarmed persuaded Cutts to tell "the whole story". Apparently, dear Gerald had borrowed

£75 from a moneylender - at 5/- per week interest - to clear Digby's debts! He emphasised to the Major that he - Cutts - could be expelled for dealing with a money-lender. What a noble youth! To run such risks for the sake of "the son of your old friend". The Major, complete deceived, made out a cheque to "Hooke and Griggs" for £75. Cutts, his losses paid for, was sitting pretty.

Nemesis appeared in the shape of Tom Merry. Mindful of his own experience at Cutts' hands. Tom had been suspicious of the 'taking up' of Digby by the Fifth-Former. Sent by Knox to Cutts with a message Tom inadvertently heard a snatch of the Major's discussion with his hopeful nephew. Tom, always implacable with proved villains, barged straight in and called Cutts "a liar". The ensuing row ended with the Major going into the whole seedy business. Digby, cross-examined, revealed the "play" episode: Cutts, faced with exposure, had to come clean. The Major, bitterly disillusioned, had the last word: "You have acted like a scoundrel, Gerald. I am done with you! I shall not stop the cheque. You may take that as a final gift from me. You will never have anything else to expect. You understand? Good-bye!"

Cutts, shaken to the core, took some time to recover his composure. Nevertheless, his villainy had saved his position at St. Jim's and it was not long before his wits were at work again.

An interesting side-issue in this story

demonstrated Cutts' almost unlimited 'nerve'. Before the Digby 'con' was effected, Cutts had been visited at St. Jim's by Hooke, the bookie. Cutts had the man in his study - a great risk - and coolly admitted that he was unable to 'settle' Defying Hooke to expose him ("If I go under, I'll see that things are made warm for you") he had reached an uneasy impasse when Mr. Railton arrived. Only Cutts would have had the nerve to conceal Hooke behind a screen, while he told his Housemaster a pack of lies about "a discharged soldier" who had cadged assistance from him on the strength of having met "at my uncle's place". Hooke, amazed by Cutts' effrontery, remained concealed in Cutts' study for some hours, imbibing whiskey-and-soda! What Railton would have said if he had discovered this precious pair defies imagination!

Cutts' next exploit involved a serious risk of physical injury. Convict 101 was on the run near St. Jim's - with £100 reward on his head. Cutts, after the cash, went hunting the convict on his own. He got lucky and ruthlessly stunned the criminal with a 'life-preserver'. The chapter (in Gem 301) describing this episode is brilliantly written. It illustrates Cutts' mercenary motives; his cold courage; his self-reliance; and his grim determination to do whatever violence is necessary to gain his end. What other schoolboy in Hamilton's canon ever possessed a 'life preserver' - and used it?

Having made his capture, Cutts anticipated the reward with pleasure. The pleasure did not last long. Convict 101 turned out to be an old



As Gerald Cutts stood looking down at him, a sudden flash of recognition came into the convict's eyes. "Master Cutts!" he exclaimed. Cutts started. "You know my name?" "Know your name and you, too," said Convict 101. "You didn't know it was an old pal you was arter, I'll be bound!"

accomplice of Cutts! Sentenced as Jonas Racke, he was really Peter Dunn, a professional fighter. Cutts had, some time previously, laid bets against the "Bermondary Bantam" and then had feared that he would lose his money. His solution had been to bribe Dunn to help 'nobbler' the Bantam. Together, they had attacked the Bantam in a dark alley and left him with a cracked head. If Cutts now turned Dunn in to the police, he would be exposed as a thug and a criminal himself.

The rest of the story involved Cutts in breaking the law to help Dunn 'get clear'. He arranged to provide food and clothes for the convict and, in the process, incurred the resentment of Tom Merry & Co. To prevent the juniors from interfering with his activities, Cutts reported them to Dr. Holmes for "running risks in pursuing the convict". Gated by the Head, Tom Merry asked several other juniors, not affected by the ban, to 'keep an eye on Cutts'. Kangaroo, Redfern, Reilly and Fatty Wynn lost Cutts 'in the dark', but ran into the convict and captured him. The £100 reward ended up at Rylcombe Cottage Hospital and Cutts had to sweat for several days, hoping that Peter Dunn would not 'shop' him. Of course, he got away with it, but this was one of the narrowest squeaks of his chequered career. (A crack yarn, this one!)

A few weeks later, 'Arry 'Ammond, the Cockney schoolboy, arrived at St. Jim's. Hammond, wealthy but uneducated, seemed easy prey for the Fifth Form 'Smart Set'. Cutts & Co. invited him to join them for a card party. The 'hawks' were ready to pluck the 'pigeon': unfortunately, it went the other way. Hammond, a sharp-brained East Ender, outplayed the seniors and scooped the pool! Cutts, enraged, accused Hammond of cheating. In the ensuing row, Hammond grabbed the poker and serious mayhem loomed. His summing-up of Cutts makes interesting reading:

"I know what you are - a sharper! You 'ad me 'ere to win my money, and you're cuttin' up rusty 'cause you ain't collared the boodle! That's you!"

The problem was resolved when Cutts withdrew the 'cheating' charge and Hammond returned the money.

Defeats always rankled with Cutts. In a later story, he inveigled D'Arcy into playing him at billiards. Gussy won - Cutts played poorly deliberately - and pocketed £2. Then Cutts raised the stake to £5 - and won. Next he gave Gussy a chance for 'revenge' - and won again. Hammond, an interested spectator, took up the next challenge and - despite Cutts' best efforts - deprived dear Gerald of £10. Cutts did not react in sporting style - his 'gentlemanly' manner was only a veneer. Hammond had exposed him as a 'welsher' - and Cutts did not

like it.

The Fifth-Former's next escapade was to sabotage St. Jim's Soccer XI. The Saints were due to meet the "Isthmians", and Cutts recruited a 'scratch' XI to give them a practice. (Cutts was never a regular player for St. Jim's himself: Kildare did not trust him sufficiently to select him more than occasionally.) The Saints won the trial 4-1 and Spencer Dodd, a friend of Cutts, was appalled by what he saw. Dodd, an Isthmian footballer, had been running a 'book' on the Saints/Isthmians - and stood to lose £600 if the Saints succeeded. (Cutts certainly moved in 'big-plunger' circles!)

The two put their heads together. Cutts - in return for £100! - undertook to 'nobbler' the Saints. He achieved this by luring four of the team into a 'spin in a car'. They missed a vital train - the car 'broke down' - and Kildare arrived at Abbotsford three men short. (He had a reserve travelling with the team.) To make up his side, Kildare called on Tom Merry, Harry Noble and Fatty Wynn - a crowd of juniors had come to watch the game. The Saints won a close-fought match 2-1. Cutts (with the missing players) turned up during the second half - just in time to see his £100 disappear. Spencer Dodd, like many a swindler before him, had to "exit running".

Cutts' high living always left him in need of the 'readies'. His next stunt was a visit to Muggleton Races. This time, his attention was centred on "Four-in-Hand" a 'dark horse' outsider. He recruited Knox, Levison and, surprisingly, Monty Lowther to make up his party. (This bad-influencing of Lowther was part of Cutts' running battle with Tom Merry. Since Tom's personal experience of Cutts' duplicity, he had set out to thwart Cutts' capers whenever the opportunity occurred. Getting Lowther to go 'blagging' was a knock at Tom.)

The four set out by car - Cutts driving. (This was another example of the worldly sophistication of the Fifth Former. Not many people drove in 1914 - Cutts was well to the fore with modern developments.) Tom Merry rustled up a 'posse' which followed on bicycles - a forlorn hope. A fortuitous break-down delayed Cutts & Co. Tom Merry caught them up and, in the fracas which followed, Cutts was thrashed with a stick cut from a hedge. Lowther was prevented from going on; the other three made their escape in the car.

At Muggleton, Herr Schneider was attending the races as a guest of one of the owners. He recognised Cutts & Co. through his binoculars. Knox and Levison ran for it, but Cutts, with sturdy hardihood, stood his ground - he wanted to see his 'outsider' romp home. Schneider collared him and took him back to St. Jim's. All three culprits were taken to the Head: hard lying became the order of the day.

They nearly got by with: "It was only a spur-of-the-moment visit - just to see the races - no intention of gambling." But, as always, they over-reached themselves. Levison let slip that Lowther had been one of the party. Sent for, Lowther admitted that he had laid a bet on "Four-in-Hand". By implication, the others were equally guilty. Dr. Holmes caned the two juniors (corrupted by bad example from their seniors - which shows that Dr. Holmes did not know his Levison!). He offered the seniors a choice - a public flogging or expulsion.

Cutts, the dandy, the leading 'blade', jibbed at the flogging, but Knox was ready to take it - and Cutts saw the wisdom of avoiding expulsion. Dr. Holmes laid it on - hard, but that was not the worst. "Four-in-Hand" had failed to 'oblige' - so £150 (Cutts had laid a fiver at 33-1) failed to materialise. It's a hard life for transgressors!

The zenith of Cutts' career now loomed. In a brilliant series (Gems 317-321), Cutts ran for - and acquired - the School Captaincy. Kildare had to leave the school for a time. Cutts, in an unscrupulous campaign, set out to eliminate all rivals for the vacancy.

Initially, there were three candidates - Knox and Cutts of the School House; and James Monteith, the New House leader. Cutts, as a Fifth Former, appeared to be the back marker, but he was soon working the angles. Monteith was attracting most of the senior school's support - after all he was a stalwart of the School XIs and a senior prefect. Knox, as a result of the races escapade, had lost his prefectship and was very unpopular with the juniors. Cutts decided that Monteith was his chief rival and had to be eliminated.

In earlier days, Monteith had 'gone the pace' with Knox and Cutts. After an offer to decide their continuing candidacy by the toss of a coin had been declined by Monteith, Cutts tried a more sinister tack. He hinted that Monteith had been careless with I.O.U.s in the past and that one or two might materialise "to queer your pitch". Monteith called in the rest of the New House prefects and told them of Cutts' threat. A row followed and Cutts floored both Baker and Gray in making his escape. The news of the scrap spread like wildfire: Cutts' reputation with the School House juniors soared. Later, when the true reason for the rumpus became known, it plummeted again.

One of Cutts' most dangerous qualities was his readiness to employ wicked methods to gain his ends. With his prospects in the balance, he decided that Monteith 'had to go'. Enter Ernest Levison. In a masterly chapter, "Rogues in Council", Cutts and Levison plot Monteith's downfall. Martin Clifford does not waste a word of dialogue as he demonstrates that, however wicked Cutts may be, Levison is just

that shade worse. Here's a sample:

"Oh, don't pretend to be a fool!" said Cutts irritably. "You make half crowns by writing out impositions for fellows, because you can imitate hard-writing so well, it can't be detected. I want you to bring me a note from Monteith to Joliffe, fixing up a meeting at the Green Man. I can give you the wording."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's all in the game," he said. "I'm hard-up, and when a fellow's hard-up, he can't afford to be too particular. Is the note worth five quid to you, Cutts?"

"No, it isn't!" snapped Cutts.

"Then I'm afraid I shan't be able to find it," said Levison coolly.

Gerald Cutts glared at him.

"If you begin haggling with me you greedy young scoundrel --"

"I'm on the make, same as you are!" said Levison, with another shrug of his thin shoulders. "There's a certain amount of risk, and it's a dirty thing to do, anyway. I'm not doing it for nothing! You've done very well out of the races lately."

For some moments Cutts stared at the cad of the Fourth. Levison met his stare with cool effrontery.

"Well, it's a go!" said Cutts at last. He felt that he had met his match in this precious supporter.

"Five quid?" asked Levison.

"Yes," said Cutts reluctantly.

"Cash down?"

"Look here --"

"Cash down, or it's no go!"

Cutts set his teeth hard. He opened his pocket-book, took out a crisp five-pound note, and passed it to the Fourth Former."

The incriminating forgery arrived in Dr. Holmes' mail. Monteith, confronted with it, had to admit that he had once been a 'blagger' at the "Green Man". (He could not remember how many notes he had sent during his 'rorty' days and Cutts had given Levison some authentic details to include in the text.) Monteith managed to convince the Head that he had reformed, but Dr. Holmes insisted that he was not a fit candidate for the captaincy. The prefect's punishment was to withdraw from the election.

For Cutts it was now plain sailing. Monteith accused him of sending the letter to

Dr. Holmes. Cutts denied it; they fought; Cutts was thrashed. Nevertheless, he had achieved his object. Monteith had withdrawn; Cutts proceeded to bribe Knox to follow Monteith's example. The captaincy was his.

Actually, it wasn't - not for a while. The juniors, jibbing at Captain Cutts, ran Tom Merry as a candidate - and he romped home in the election by over 100 votes. A period of strife followed. The seniors would not acknowledge a junior as captain. Tom's attempts to impose his authority led to a series of hilarious semi-riots. Eventually, Dr. Holmes appealed to Tom's "good sense and right feeling" and persuaded him to resign. Cutts, as the only other candidate at the election, was installed as School Captain until Kildare's return (which was now imminent).

A short reign of terror ensued. Cutts cunningly used his position to pay off old scores and Tom Merry & Co. had a rough time of it. But it wasn't one-way traffic by any means. Cutts, acting on information from Levison, barged into Bernard Glyn's study and ran into 'burglar alarm' which sprayed him with a noxious-smelling liquid. The Dandy of the Fifth had great difficulty in getting rid of the pervading smell - a torment which destroyed his normal nonchalance.

But this was only an interlude. With Kildare due to return, Cutts had to devise some way of prolonging his spell as School Captain. Being Cutts, his solution to the problem was drastic. He enlisted the aid of Lasker, a Rylcombe rough, to attack Kildare on his way to the school - "and lay him up". £5 down and another £15 when the deed was done.

Cutts' reasoning was sound. Already, he had ingratiated himself in the senior school by a mixture of bonhomie, flattery and money-lending! If he could extend his tenure of the captaincy through the remainder of the term, he felt that he could challenge Kildare for the post with every prospect of success. The old skipper had to be kept out of the way while Cutts consolidated his hold.

Lasker's attempt failed. Cutts' second try involved two other toughs who attacked Kildare on the train to Wayland. Tom Merry & Co., through Gussy, got wind of the plot and travelled to meet Kildare *en route*. They were in time to foil the assault - and the rascals implicated Cutts in order to avoid prosecution. To save St. Jim's from a scandal, Kildare let them go, but Cutts' reputation was destroyed. He had played for high stakes - and lost.

That was virtually the end of Cutts as a major character in the stories. He slid back into his rorty ways and turned up from time to time in his conventional role of a 'corrupter of youth'. He tried fleecing Lumley-Lumley (unsuccessfully) and Gussy (successfully until

Blake & Co. chipped in). He led Reggie Manners astray when that hopeful youth came to St Jim's. Reggie didn't need much leading - and Cutts was able to settle some old scores with the Terrible Three in the process. He gave new boy Cardew a brutal battering when he interfered to stop Cutts bullying Frank Levison. Cardew told Mr. Railton the strict truth - without mentioning Cutts by name:

"I've never seen the fellow before today, sir. I suppose I could describe him. He was about five feet nine and a regular hooligan". Cutts had to squirm and sweat, waiting for the chopper which didn't fall.

Later, in the "Cardew-Captain" series, Cutts had another go at Cardew - the Fourth Former had humiliated him in an earlier encounter. Tom Merry intervened, and a Homeric tussle ensued while a helpless Cardew looked on. Tom, whose brushes with Cutts over the terms had been frequent, was in no mood to let the Dandy get away with vicious brutality. Skill and determination more than matched Cutts' greater stature and a 'fight to the finish' followed. Cutts, always a clear thinker, realised "it was not good enough". He might well beat Tom, but victory would cost both of them so dear that an enquiry was bound to follow. Discretion took over: Cutts broke off the tussle. Tom and Cardew, previously at loggerheads, were reconciled.

Martin Clifford still had uses for Cutts. In the "Toff" series, when Tresham of the Fifth embezzled the football funds and tried to 'frame' Talbot for it, Cutts 'rumbled' the truth - and did nothing about it: "I'm not going to say anything. It's not my business to round on a fellow who's been my pal --- Hoe your own row: don't expect me to have a hand in that kind of game. You can rely on me to keep my mouth shut, that's all!" Which, when you think of the earlier plundering of Tom Merry's sports fund, was pretty cool of Cutts.

The Fifth Former also played a vital minor role in the "Schoolboy Pug" series. When his pal, St. Leger, was saved from 'bookie' trouble by Oliver Lynn's taking of the blame, it was Cutts who counselled St. Leger to keep silent. Lynn went back to the 'Ring' and St. Leger continued his scholastic career - a satisfactory solution all round from Cutts' pragmatic point of view. St. Leger, a less callous soul, probably had a 'guilt complex' for a long time on Lynn's account.

Cutts' appearances became even more fleeting after this. However, on the odd occasion, Martin Clifford made telling contributions with him. Trouble on the Thames with Tom Merry & Co. (The "Old Bus" series) spilled over into a nasty case of term-time bullying. The Fifth Form 'Smart Set' captured the Terrible Three and tried to force them to

'Cock-fight'. Kildare intervened and, for once, Cutts' prudence deserted him. He defied Kildare openly and only came to heel when the School Captain threatened to report the whole matter to Dr. Holmes. Kildare warned him that any further outbreaks would involve a "Prefects' Beating".

Cutts took advantage of Kildare's absence at a soccer match to wreck the captain's study. He intended to throw suspicion on Tom Merry - two birds with one stone! - but Jack Blake spotted him and roped Kildare's door handle to Darrell's (the next study) and imprisoned the wrecker at the scene of his crime. When Kildare returned, Cutts had no excuse to offer. The "Prefects' Beating" followed - a salutary lesson for the lordly Cutts. He had fallen a long way from the heady heights of Captain of St. Jim's.

There was still a triumph in store, however. If Cutts and Levison were the most unsavoury characters at St. Jim's, neither was quite as repulsive as the unpleasant, cantankerous, suspicious, over-bearing Mr. Ratcliff. In addition to being Housemaster of the New House, 'Ratty' was also Fifth Form Master. Cutts, no doubt, was often a thorn in Ratcliff's flesh - a 'clever-dick' student can always irritate a touchy teacher. In Gem 858 "The Housemaster's Mistake", they clashed head-on.

Ratty, ill-tempered as usual, indulged in knuckle-rapping in the form-room. Cutts & Co., the victims, were naturally resentful - after all, Fifth Form Seniors are not unruly fags. Morning lessons ended in an electric atmosphere.

After lunch, Ratcliff had a 'phone call while he was doing the House accounts. The caller purported to be Dr. Holmes who wanted to see Ratcliffe about "the assaults" on his Fifth Formers. Ratty swallowed the 'con' and went, fuming, to see the Head. The accounts were left on his desk, along with a pile of money. While he was away on this wild-goose chase, Figgins called in the forlorn hope of being excused from an unjust imposition. As Ratcliff was missing, Figgins improved the shining hour by hiding a tenner from the pile of money in one of the House Master's text books. Then, taking a calculated risk, Figgins left St. Jim's to go home for three days - the Head had given him permission; Ratty had deliberately dished out lines in order to delay Figgins' departure.

The prank had unexpected repercussions. Ratcliff missed the tenner; linked its loss to the 'phone-call; and decided that he had been duped in order to be robbed. The Fifth Form had an awful afternoon to follow their fraught morning.

When enquiries got under way, Ratty accused several juniors in succession. Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and some others were cleared, but Baggy Trimble, using his

natural proclivity for falsehood, drew suspicion on himself. Eventually, under questioning from Dr. Holmes, Trimble revealed that he had seen Cutts going into the Head's vacant study at the time the 'phone call was made.

Cutts was hauled 'on the mat' and he made the most of it. Dr. Holmes was told of the 'knuckle-rapping' and Cutts admitted the telephone hoax - a natural tit-for-tat from an angry schoolboy. Briefly, Cutts enjoyed seeing Ratty squirm.

But it didn't end there. Ratcliff accused Cutts of stealing the tenner; and he reminded the Head of Cutts' previous record of dealings with bookies. Cutts had to submit to being searched.

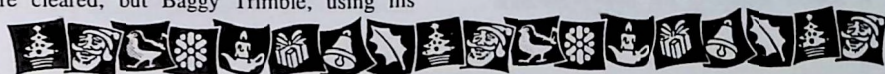
The result was disastrous. The tenner did not come to light - Cutts hadn't taken it - but a cigarette-case, "Turf Tips", and a betting list did. His earlier denial of gambling transactions was shown to be false. Consequently, a denial of the theft carried no credence whatever.

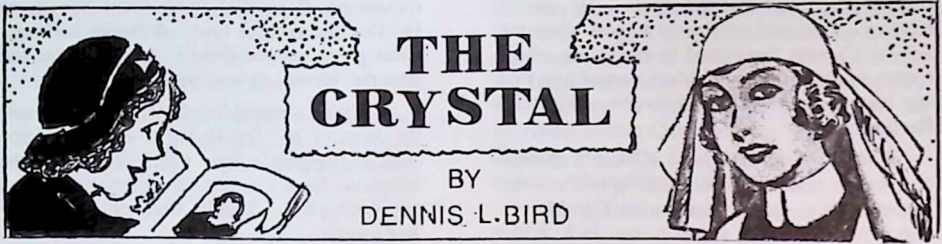
Dr. Holmes deferred his decision. Mr. Railton searched Cutts' belongings - nothing transpired. Cutts' familiar friends did not show up well. Some believed he had stolen the tenner; others were afraid that he would 'shop' them as fellow-blackguards. High words ensued: the Smart Set had an unhappy night.

Next day, Ratcliff tried to exclude Cutts from the form-room. Cutts, as yet uncondemned, stuck to his guns and remained in the class. Latin began; Ratty opened his tea-book; out fell the tenner. Cutts, livid after his tortured night, demanded an apology. Ratcliff refused: Cutts went and fetched the Head.

The pay-off was impressive. Cutts maintained that Ratcliff's accusation had been the talk of the school: he wanted vindication on the same scale. Dr. Holmes, conscious that Ratcliff's excessive discipline had sparked the whole unsavoury business, agreed. Ratty had to make a public apology to Cutts - the dear innocent lad - in the School assembly. (I suspect that Dr. Holmes would not have been upset if Ratcliff had refused to carry out the humiliating task - it would have given him an excuse to sack the old blighter!) Anyway, Ratty complied: and Cutts had his pound of flesh.

And that's about it. Cutts, once or twice, had soared to the heights; more often he had plumbed the depths. Gambling was his besetting sin; he was also probably too clever for his own good. Like many men of ability, he had an incorrigible idle streak. A little less wealth and a little less brain might have made him work harder and achieve more solid results. Nevertheless, his presence at St. Jim's added a 'rackety' element to the stories. 90 years on Cutts' capers still make excellent reading.





The Amalgamated Press struck a rich vein of commercial profit in the Edwardian era, when they launched their immensely popular boys' weekly papers *The Magnet* and *The Gem*. Although read very widely by working-class lads, they were mainly about the activities of the sons of the upper and middle classes at expensive public schools. After World War I the publishers decided to mine another seam: the schoolgirl reader. They launched new weeklies - *The School Friend* in 1919, *Schoolgirls' Own* two years later, and *Schoolgirls' Weekly* in 1922. The format was similar to the boys' papers: stories of boarding-school life at Cliff House and Morcove formed the bulk of each issue, although there were other serials and short stories with a broader background.

Then in 1935 Amalgamated Press decided to try something slightly different: a new paper aimed at the fifth and sixth former and the girl who had left school to take a job. Thus was born *The Crystal*, first issue dated October 26th, 1935, consisting of 28 pages (11½" x 8¾"), published every Friday at 2d (less than a penny in today's money). The Editor was C. Eaton Fern, who contributed to his own paper right from the start under the pen-name "Gail Western".

A notable feature of the new publication

was the full-page editorial letter "Over the Tea-Cups". Eaton Fern set the tone of these editorial effusions with his first paragraph: "First, I suppose I must introduce myself to you or you will be wondering who this person is who has dared to bag the first reading page of your brand new paper!" He was to maintain that arch, chatty tone for years to come, until paper shortage in World War II deleted the Editor's page.

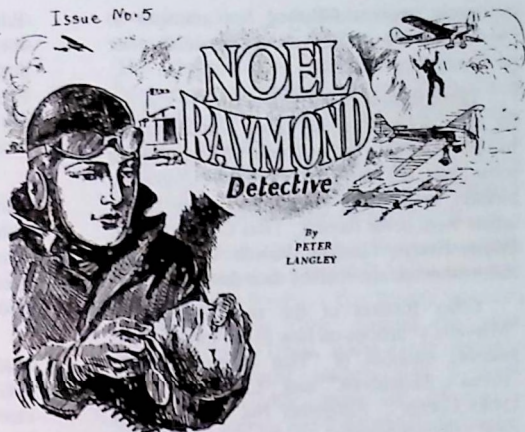
Eaton Fern's breezy style, 1930s slang, and liberal use of capital letters bring back fond memories of lost childhood to anyone who lived through those times. His first priority was to gauge his readers' reactions to the new venture: "Now can I ask you how you like *The Crystal*. And what do you think of the FREE GIFT? You simply couldn't resist trying on the SILVERINE BRACELET before you even peeped at the stories, now, could you? . . . Do, when you have time, write and tell me how you like *The Crystal*." He went on to introduce

"Penelope", supposedly the girl in the Editor's office who would provide all the fashion notes and practical things to make ("A Necklace from Nuts") in forthcoming issues. Finally he gave a preview of the seven stories that would appear in Issue No. 2.

The contents of No. 1 are worth recording. They were mainly short stories complete in themselves, but with characters who would recur

week by week; and there were two serials:

Issue No. 5



1. "Film-struck Fay" by "Pearl Fairland" (Roland Jameson). Fay Royce was a dressmaker who was film-crazy (a typical theme of the 1930s). "Her adventures in search of film fame will enthral you every Friday."
2. "The Menace of the Green Dragon" by "Peter Langley" (Ronald Fleming). This story featured a marked departure from all previous Amalgamated Press stories for girls. The author adopted a male pen-name, and his main character was not a teenage girl but a debonair, university-educated young man of 24 - Noel Raymond. He was a private detective, and was to be one of the *Crystal's* most enduring personalities; he survived until 1951. He began by adopting a rather foppish, Lord Peter Wimsey persona. Later in World War II, he became much tougher, but after the war he subsided into an avuncular domesticity when his role was mainly taken over by his niece and partner June Gaynor. But throughout his career the Noel Raymond stories were unique among the A.P. papers for providing mystery stories which almost always had a surprise denouement; the villain was often hard to spot among the various suspects.
3. "The Madcap Form Mistress" by "Jean Vernon" (Ronald Fleming). The Noel Raymond author showed his versatility by creating a totally different protagonist: Vera Desmond, BA, fourth-form mistress at St Kilda's and the sportiest girl in the school. This was to be the most light-hearted series in the new paper.
4. "Mazda, The Girl who Knew No Pity" by "Stella Knight" (real author not known). This was another innovation: an anti-heroine, the fortune-teller who planned

revenge. Mazda's father had gone to prison thanks to the Rayson family, and when Angela Rayson consulted her about her lost engagement ring, Mazda saw the chance of a cruel revenge. "Read next Friday of the startling results of her bogus fortune-telling."

5. "Tony the Speed Girl" by "Gail Western" (C. Eaton Fern). Toinette Farrell was always known as Tony, and she was the driver of "a big, gleaming thunderbolt" of a racing-car. The series described her adventures in attempting to become accepted as a woman Grand Prix competitor.
6. "Nurse Rosemary" by "Audrey Nichols" (John Wheway, principal author of the Cliff House stories in other A.P. papers). Rosemary Hope "brought happiness wherever she went - no wonder all her patients called her a ray of sunshine".
7. "She Was a Fugitive!" by "Diana Martin" (another of John Wheway's pseudonyms). Gilda Marsh, who had been earning her own living for four years, was suspected of being a thief, and for many

Issue No. 3



weeks readers followed her attempts to evade the police and establish her innocence.

These stories set the pattern for *The Crystal* for many weeks to come. Each was illustrated by two drawings - rather coarse and unsubtle in some cases, but they soon improved. Unlike the pictures in the A.P.'s companion papers, the artists were never named. Thus C. Percival, J. Pariss, Evelyn Flinders, Valerie Gaskell and many others never received their due.

Other features of the new paper were "Marvella's" articles on how to tell fortunes, the amusing cartoons of "That Scamp Scottie", "Roma's Sketchbook" and "Claudine's Good Looks Corner". Altogether No. 1 represented good value for money.

The new paper soon prospered, and Eaton Fern in No. 2 was thanking readers for telling him how much they liked it. He thought they must be "thrilled now that you actually have the FILM STAR AUTOGRAPH AND PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM" (the second free gift). A new feature was "Close-ups of the Stars: Snappy paras about the stars whose autographs are given away this week" - names like Gracie Fields, Greta Garbo, Clark Gable, Jack Hulbert.

Issue No. 3 had a new picture for the

Issue No. 10 (New Title)

7 SPLENDID STORIES FOR GIRLS INSIDE



Editor's page. "That handsome gentleman on the left is me. Between ourselves, I can tell you it doesn't do me justice!" He went on to say "how much I enjoy your letters . . . My readers are the most charming any editor could have." Sheer flannel!

More autographs were issued with that number, among them Nova Pilbeam's - "a star although she is only 14 years of age". (She married the film director Penrose Tennyson, great-grandson of the Victorian poet, and still lives in London.)

In Issue No. 4 the Editor recounted his delight when his morning train journey was enlivened by three schoolgirls who entered his carriage. "Were they swotting up last night's homework? . . . They were doing nothing of the kind. Would you believe it? They were reading *The Crystal*. Each had a copy and each was equally engrossed!"

No. 5 found the Editor indulging in pure fantasy. He had invited a friend for a spin in his car - which would not start. To his rescue came "a snappy little four-seater - and at the wheel no one other than Miss Gail Western, who is writing TONY, THE SPEED-GIRL for us. 'Like a lift?' she asked. He forbore to tell his readers that Miss Western was the Editor himself. In that same issue Noel Raymond went beyond the bounds of credibility in "The Mystery of the Menaced Girl Pilot". Jean Dare, the daring young girl pilot, was seeking the Ragley Trophy - but every time she tried, something went wrong. "Noel flicked the ash off his cigarette . . . he had some at Jean Dare's earnest request, in case the unforeseen should happen." Of course it did, and it led to "Noel's Daring Midair Leap". Jean's crash helmet had been fitted with a poisonous gas capsule by her enemy. She was airborne before Noel could warn her; he followed, piloting a borrowed biplane (shown as a monoplane in the illustration) and manoeuvred himself above her aircraft. Then, abandoning the controls (whatever happened to the biplane?), he jumped off without a parachute, landed on Jean's machine, and "in the nick of time" got it under control. Jean herself had passed out, but revived when they landed. That is probably the most far-fetched of all the Noel Raymond stories; in later year they became much more plausible.

The reference to Noel's cigarette is another example of how this detective series differed from the usual A.P. stories. Smoking would of course be totally forbidden to most of *The Crystal's* readers, but this dashing

young man was, quite realistically, permitted to do so. This indulgence did not, however, extend to alcohol. Noel never drank anything stronger than tea or coffee. Sometimes he would ply fainting females with 'a strong stimulant' (presumably brandy), but the drink was never specified.

No. 7 included an article on "What Your Name Means". As it was our Editor Mary Cadogan who gave me these early *Crystals* and thus made this article possible, I looked up her name. According to *The Crystal*, Mary means "blest, or star of the sea".

No. 9 was the Christmas Number, dated December 21st, 1935. The Editor's page was full of seasonal fun. "Try these riddles: How do we know Moses wore a wig? Because he was

sometimes seen with Aaron, and sometimes without. . . Which is quicker, 'Hot' or 'Cold'? 'Hot', because you can catch cold!" Very Bunteresque, that sort of humour. Elsewhere in that issue, Vera Desmond the Madcap Form-mistress indulged in "High Jinks at Xmas". Tony the Speed Girl survived the worst snowstorm in memory, and Nurse Rosemary provided Christmas cheer for her patients.

That was the last of *The Crystal*. Issue No. 10 dated December 28th, 1935, had a new title: *Girls' Crystal Weekly*. The *Weekly* was soon dropped, but as *Girls' Crystal* the paper survived into the 1960s. It was a bold attempt to provide its young readers with a wider perception of life than its school-story companion papers, and it deservedly succeeded.



A FAN AND A FRIEND

BY
TOMMY
KEEN

On January 9th 1998 a certain Lancashire town may be celebrating the birth of one of their most famous characters because on that day in 1898 a baby girl was born to Fred and Jenny Stansfield of Moresworth Street, Rochdale. A baby with a very lusty voice, and in years to come that voice would serve her well. The baby was named Grace, but for many years and most of her life she would be known almost the world over not as Grace Stansfield but as Gracie Fields. The voice was known almost everywhere. Gracie died in September 1979 and I'm not attempting to give her complete history: this is just to describe my initial interest, my admiration, my involvement and later my good friendship with this most famous of stars; so let me see what I can remember.

Centuries ago (or so it seems) when I was young it was my habit on Saturday evenings to go to the second house performance at my local cinema in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, that is if I had the necessary one shilling and threepence. One warm Saturday evening in the 1930s I thought the queue seemed unduly long. What was the film? *Sally in Our Alley* it was called. The star was Gracie Fields. Her name at that time meant little to me, she was not really a proper film star, film stars of that period were glamorous unattainable ladies such as Marlene Dietrich, Norma Shearer and my special favourite, Joan Crawford. And so I saw *Sally in*

Our Alley and was not at all impressed. Gracie still belonged to what I'd heard was her milieu, the Music Hall. The theme song didn't appeal to me either, and I soon forgot about *Sally*, but several months later when her second film arrived in Aylesbury I found myself going on the first evening instead of waiting until the Saturday. This film was called *Looking On the Bright Side*. In it she sang two songs: I was quite thrilled to find she had such a gorgeous voice, the songs were *After Tonight We Say Goodbye* and one which was to become my all-time favourite, *You're More Than All The World To Me*. She also sang comedy songs which did not really appeal to me although I realised they were part of the Gracie Fields personality. I left the cinema that evening thinking of her lovely voice. The seeds were sown: I think I was falling in love, not with a person but with a voice.

I was then at an age where I was beginning to feel that I was too old to read the *Magnet* and *Gem*, so I began reading the film magazines and finding out as much as I could about Gracie Fields. I discovered that she had become famous through appearing in a revue with a certain Mr Archie Pitt which had toured the country from 1918 to 1925. This revue was called *Mr Tower of London* and from then on she had become famous, appearing in two or three more revues, the last of which was called

Walk This Way. In 1928 she appeared in a straight play at St. James' Theatre with Sir Gerald Du Maurier called *S.O.S.* Also her first record was issued for His Master's Voice. She sang *Because I Love You* and *My Blue Heaven*. Her records in the years to come would be best-sellers: also in 1928 she appeared in her first Variety Command Performance.

By the mid 1930s I was a real Gracie Fields fan although still devoted to Joan Crawford as a film star. I decided I would like to see Gracie,

who was then appearing at Golders Green Hippodrome. Living in the wilds of Buckinghamshire I had no idea where Golders Green was but after catching a Greenline Bus from Aylesbury to London I found it. I saw Gracie perform and, to my utter amazement, she was a red-head. I'd quite expected to see a brunette but she was superb, whatever the colour of her hair. She sang *I Remember, Little Man You've Had A Busy Day* and *South American Joe*. Then for the next two or three years I was able to see her several times more.

By 1937 she was so popular and famous that even Hollywood noticed her. She signed a contract with 20th Century Fox but insisted that the films should be made in England. She came back in 1937, the Coronation Year of King George VI. I saw her at the Palladium, when she was a glamorous, beautifully gowned blonde. In the following year I heard her sing at the Royal Albert Hall. Now she was at the peak of her career and sang *The Holy City and Land of Hope and Glory*. Queen Mary was there with the then Princess Royal. The following year, 1939, was not so good for Gracie. She had finished her last film *Ship Yard Sally*, and was taken ill and admitted to the Chelsea Women's Hospital. She was dangerously ill. Regular public bulletins were issued, prayers were said in churches and apparently people even knelt outside the hospital and prayed. She eventually recovered, and when she left the hospital she broadcast to the nation and sang *I Love the Moon*.

She then went to Capri, where she had



GRACIE FIELDS

Gracie as she appeared in her first film *Sally In Our Alley*.

a home, to convalesce but on September 3rd war was declared and she was soon back. By that time she was involved with Monty Banks, who directed her 1935 film *Queen of Hearts*, her first few films being directed by Basil Dean. Archie Pitt and Gracie were not really together any more though he did visit her in hospital. When she came back to England in the September of 1939 she was the first really great star to sing to the troops, and a newspaper announced: "Gracie Fields sings to the boys, somewhere in England". She sang a song called *Over The Rainbow* which of course was always considered Judy Garland's song.

Gracie Fields seemed then to do no wrong. She appeared in France on Christmas Day 1939 singing to the soldiers. It was splendid. I knew that in a very short time I would probably be in the army and I wondered if she might be singing to me the following Christmas. She went back to Hollywood, and in March 1940 married Monty Banks, having divorced Archie Pitt in the previous year, and we were all pleased that Gracie and Monty had married.

Soon afterwards they came back to England, and Gracie appeared at the Drury Lane Theatre in a superb concert for ENSA with Maurice Chevalier. She was everybody's heroine! That same month Italy came into the war, causing all hell to break loose for Gracie and her husband because of his Italian connections. I could not worry too much for I'd had my calling up papers and was due to go to Oxford in the June. Gracie and Monty took off to the then neutral USA, forced by circumstances. During the middle war years, in 1943, I was stationed at Hampstead and although Gracie had been mercilessly slandered in the press she was back in England singing to the factory workers, the troops and touring all over England and Scotland. In the September of '43 she appeared at the Royal Albert Hall. I managed to get a pass, and went there, but to my disappointment was told that all the seats were gone. So I stood outside, a depressed figure in uniform, but a taxi stopped, a man, his wife and a couple of children got out. The man said to me "Are you going to the concert, soldier?" I said "Well, I had hoped to but there are no more seats". He said "We have a spare seat in our box, would you care to join us?" Would I care! Gracie came on in a white dress, she might never have been away, the audience loved her. She sang *The Kerry Dance* and a comedy song of the time called *In My Arms*, and finished with *The Lord's Prayer*.

I went back to Hampstead, she returned to America and I was not to see her again for four years. In 1946 when I came out of the forces I decided to stay in London. In 1947 Gracie was asked by the BBC to do a series of concerts called *Gracie's Working Party*. These were broadcast three times weekly, each from a

different town or city of the British Isles, and she sang lovely, lovely songs. In 1948, now back in public favour again, she was at the London Palladium. The star of that show had been billed as Ella Fitzgerald, a great entertainer of whom at that time I knew little or nothing. Evidently tickets were not selling too well and suddenly it was announced that Gracie Fields would be there; Val Parnell had asked Gracie to return. Now living in London, I hurried along to the Palladium in my lunchtime, managed to get a ticket for the first night and so was there when Gracie made her comeback after nine years away from the Palladium. She was very wise with her choice of the first song which was *Take Me To Your Heart Again*. She had never left mine! She was at the Empress Hall the following year, and then due to do a tour of Britain. She had spent Christmas in England with Monty and they were returning to Capri when on the train he was taken ill and died; she arrived back in Italy a widow.

After the Working Party success, and towards the end of the 1940s and through the 1950s, Gracie was again recording regularly for Decca and so, of course, I bought all the records as they came out. I began to wonder if I could ever collect her early ones. I had quite a few which I had bought through the late '30s and wondered how I could find out which records she had made, so I advertised in *Exchange and Mart*. Several people contacted me; one man had a complete list of every Gracie Fields record issued. Luckily he lived in London so I was able to meet him. He had many duplicates and I obtained quite a few, previously unknown to me, from him.

Then a friend of mine from Aylesbury decided that now long-players and EPs were the rage and that 78s were too much of a bundle to keep, so he asked if I would take them. I brought them back to Thames Ditton in Surrey where I was then living. Now I had many in duplicate, what should I do with them? On an impulse I wrote to Gracie in Capri saying that I had duplicates of about a hundred or more of her records and were they of any use to her? Back came the quick reply: "Yes, I'd love the records and next time I'm over in England could you bring them down to Peacehaven?"

She soon returned to England with her new husband, Boris Alperovici. I received a card saying "I'm at Peacehaven, can you bring the records down?" So I went with a friend to help carry them. With no car, one hundred and twenty 78s were quite heavy! When she opened the door she had a duster in her hand, and a smile of welcome that was marvellous. "Knew I had guests coming" she said "so I was doing a spot of dusting. Come in." It was a week or so before Christmas and, to my amazement, came this great star pushing a trolley full of tea cups and a Christmas cake. We got on famously, she

gave me a lovely signed picture which I hadn't requested, although I had taken one for her to sign. I came back absolutely thrilled by the meeting. More was to come. She began writing from Capri, sending me queries from other fans and various people; could I do this, could I do that, could I help, which I did as far as I could. Wanting to complete my collection I still wanted one record, *Little Curly Hair In A High Chair* which was very rare. Eventually through contacts of Gracie's and her agent Mrs Lilian Asa, I obtained this precious recording, and, carrying it back on the train from London to my home in Thames Ditton, I seemed to hear the wheels saying "You have them all, you have them all".

In 1964 Harold Fielding, the theatrical agent, persuaded Gracie to give a concert tour of Britain. At this time the country was swept by Beatlemania and Gracie was rather worried about audiences' possible reactions to the tour. "Would the theatres be half empty?" She need not have worried, the concerts were a fantastic success. I went to the first one in Blackpool when she sang new and old songs. During the next two or three weeks I was able to see her again at Manchester and in Croydon, and before she returned to Capri she invited me and my friend to have supper with her at the airport.

She had then been asked by Harold Fielding to do a concert tour of Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Canada, and she said "Wherever I go Tommy, in Australia or Canada, I'll send you clippings of the reviews", which she did.

Way back in the 1960s I had haunted jumble sales and street markets, anywhere that I might find records. In Camden Town every Wednesday morning there was a stall with hundreds of 78s and there I found many Gracie records. One day, there on the stall were five *Schoolgirls' Own* Annuals. I wasn't then collecting old boys' and girls' books but as they were only 6d each I bought them all. One was the first 1923 edition. These annuals revived my interest in Morcove - and then I also went back to Greyfriars and St. Jim's.

By the mid 1960s I had been to Capri two or three times. On one occasion Gracie asked my friend and me if we would like to go on the chairlift with her up to Anacapri. "Meet me at half past five", she said, "It's the best time of the day, not too hot". So we met her, and she pushed me into one of the chairs. "I'll sit behind you" she said, and then my friend brought up the rear. It was a lovely peaceful ride and I sensed why she had said half past five; the air was fresher then. What made the trip so much more delightful was that she kept calling out "Which song do you like?" She sang *Deep Purple* and four or five others before we reached the summit. When we got off the chairs there was a little group of people standing with

cameras at the ready, they said they had heard the voice; we couldn't believe it! Pictures were taken, their holiday was made. Mine was always made when I was in Capri!

On another occasion my friend and I were having dinner at our hotel, the waiter came across and said "You're wanted on the phone". It was the 'Great Lady'. She said "Can you come down with your friend and have some supper?" I said "But we're eating our dinner". She said "That's all right, eat as much as you like because you won't get very much down here, but be down by nine o'clock". With Gracie, Boris, her husband, and six or seven of her Italian friends, we went to a cafe quite near her villa which in the daytime was busy with tourists but in the evening was comparatively deserted. We sat at a longish table with Gracie at one end. She said to me "You sit this side of me, and your friend can sit the other side, so we can talk about the theatre and let the others talk in Italian". It was a lovely evening, there was a moon over the sea, and, in the state I was in, it seemed as if it was twice its normal size, rather like the moon in a Carmen Miranda or Alice Faye 20th Century Fox musical! We just had pizza followed by fruit, we talked about the theatre and mentioned various songs. I said that what I liked very much was *Love's Last Word Is Spoken, Cherie*. She hum'd and ha'ed it then stood up and sang the song: she sang it in Italian, the local people all stopped eating and listened. For the next half hour she sang every song I whispered to her. It was superb. I thought then and have thought many times since, if only something like that could have been televised! She was brilliant! I consider it one of the loveliest evenings of my life.

Now, back to London. One afternoon in 1977 Gracie phoned me at work to tell me that she had something for me. "Meet me at Victoria Station", she said, "I'll be standing under the clock". My boss was amused, he said that he would drive me to Victoria Station to meet her. It was a grey November afternoon and she was wearing a mink coat and holding up an LP record. I said "Not advertising it by any chance, are you?" She said humorously "Well I am trying, but no-one has recognised me, anyway, this is for you", and gave me a signed copy of the record she had just made. She was on her way to Peacehaven, so I went along the platform with her. It was a dreary, foggy and chilly afternoon, but as the train went out, she leaned from the window and sang *On A Clear Day You Can See Forever!*

She had lent me many special recordings from Radio Luxembourg and the BBC's Working Party which she had asked me to collect from her home to tape for myself and then to make tapes from her. I was only too pleased to oblige. These were absolutely marvellous additions to my collection because so

many of the songs had not been recorded commercially, songs like *Lillie Marlene* and *So Deep Is The Night*. I had now quite a collection of Gracie Fields memorabilia: pictures, articles and records.

Gracie and I kept in touch and in 1973, on her 75th birthday, I was asked by the BBC to go to the studio to take part in the Michael Barrett *Nationwide* programme. This I did and it was quite successful.

The last time I saw Gracie was when she went to Buckingham Palace for her investiture as a Dame, an honour she should have received years before. As her car came to the Palace she spotted me, wound down the window and called out "See you later Tommy". When she came out there were so many well-wishers who wanted to see her that her car was stopped and caused some commotion in The Mall. Sadly, that was the last time I saw her. That same evening she wrote and told me about her great adventure, she was so thrilled. Later in the same year Gracie died. She was to enjoy her honour for just a short time.

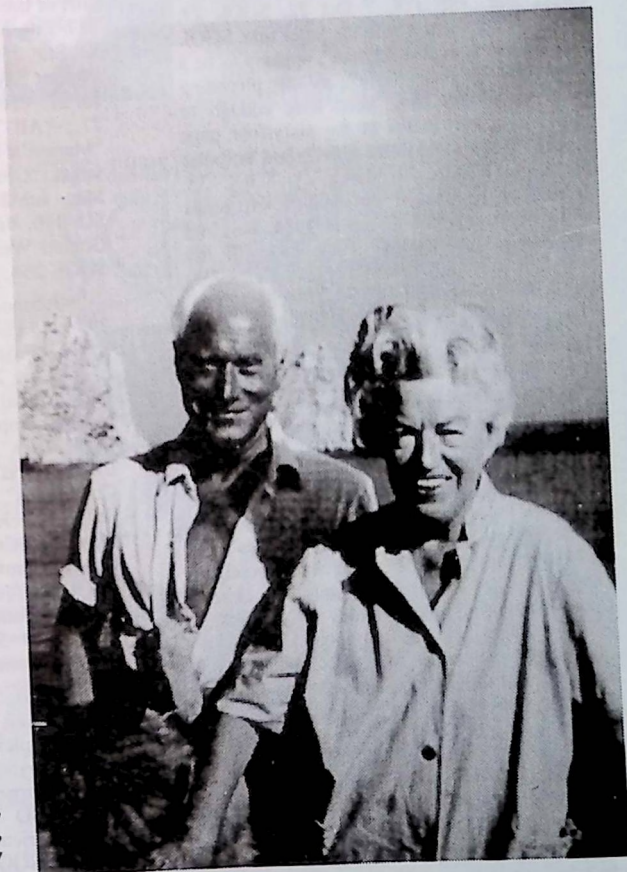
On the day of her death the BBC asked me to contribute a few words about her to the John Dunn radio programme. I did, but the reality hadn't sunk in until I saw posters everywhere declaring that 'Gracie Fields is dead'. John Dunn was keen to play the well-known *Sally* but I preferred a very old recording of Gracie's, probably from the 1930s, called *Thoughts Of You* (by Ivor Novello). It sounded beautiful. So, Gracie was gone and I came home thinking "That's the end of Gracie Fields". But of course, warm memories linger.

When I had been in Capri in 1975 she had said "One of these days I'll do a small tape of two or three songs you really like and send it to you". I didn't expect anything to materialise but, not long afterwards, the tape arrived. There were three songs, sung beautifully without any accompaniment. That tape is probably one of my greatest treasures. Gracie was 77 years old, yet her voice was stunning. One song was from *Dr. Zhivago* and another was *I Wish You Love*.

Eric Fayne once told me that, when he ran a school in Surbiton, Surrey, Gracie came to a few concerts there back in the 1930s. A local friend of hers had two children at the school. Eric said

that props had often been lent to him by Archie Pitt. Another link with Gracie and the Old Boys Book Club is that Professor Jeffrey Richards of Lancaster University, who is a film historian and an authority on juvenile and popular literature, came to address a recent London club meeting: although I did not meet him, we had both appeared in the same TV documentary on Gracie Fields.

On my last visit to Capri, I was having tea one afternoon at Gracie's villa when she said "There is one song I would love to have recorded, but who would buy my records now?" I replied "I would": she said "I know, so I shall sing it for you now". I asked "What is the song?" "*Send in the Clowns*" she answered. Gracie then held my hand, looked straight ahead as if she was on stage, and sang the song so beautifully. Afterwards, she still looked straight ahead for a second or two, then turned to me and said "Let's have another cup of tea luv".

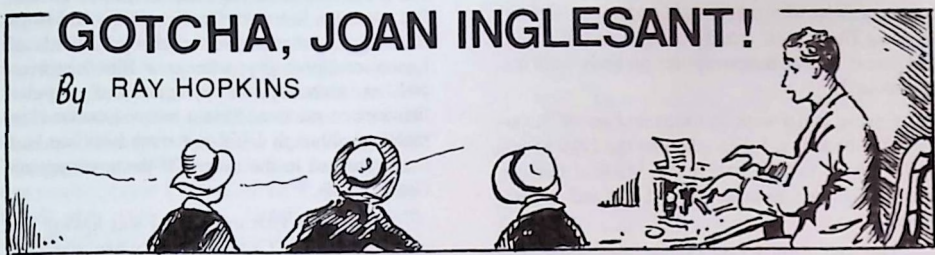


Tommy Keen with Gracie Fields on Capri



GOTCHA, JOAN INGLESANT!

By RAY HOPKINS



One of the most intriguingly mysterious among the unknown staff writers of the Amalgamated Press papers, particularly those who concentrated on writing in the girls' papers, must be he/she who wrote under the name of Joan Inglesant. The name first appeared in the early 1920s in the weekly papers. In *School Friend* (SF) 165, 8 July 1922, appeared the first instalment of a thirteen-week serial entitled, "No Joy in Her Riches" (not reprinted in *The Schoolgirls' Own Library* (SGOL)), quickly followed by "Doreen the Circus Star" (SF 178, 7 Oct 22, SGOL 27, 1924). In connection with the latter title, SGOL 28, "Doreen Harcourt Abroad", appears to be a "New and Original Story", as the preceding serial would not have been long enough to spread over two issues of the sixty-four page SGOL. "The School in the Hills" (laid in India) began in SF 202, 24 March 23, SGOL 33, 1924). Her two final SF serials in the first series of this weekly, which closed in 1925, were not reprinted in the SGOL. They were: "If her School Friends Only Knew" (SF 219-232, 1923) and "The Floating School" (SF 250-259, 1923).

In *The Schoolgirls' Own* (SO), Joan Inglesant's name first appeared as the author of an eleven-part series (SO 66-76, May - Jul 22) featuring Doreen Harcourt, the events in it also relating circus life, apparently preceding those in the SF serial reported above. The next appearance was as the author of a series entitled "The Seven Tests" (SO 140-146, Oct - Nov 23), quickly followed by a serial, "Sheila - Slave of the Desert" (SO 147-157, SGOL 61, Jun 25). Two completes followed: "Doreen Harcourt's Dilemma" (SO 163, Mar 24) and "The Desert Captive" featuring Sheila Hartley (SO 171, May 24), the two latter cashing in on popular characters in earlier serials. A second appearance of the author's name in SO 171, an unusual occurrence in the girls' papers, was the start of a serial, "The Secret of the Jungle", ending in SO 185, Aug 24, SGOL 124, Apr 27. "The Little Flower Seller", a complete story, appeared in SO 192, Sep 24. A serial, "The Lonely Princess", SO 200-212, Dec 24 - Feb 25, SGOL 102, Sep 26. A complete story, "Robbed of Those Dear to Her", followed in SO 217, Mar 25. "She Had Never Known Her Mother", SO 225, May 25. "The Silent Mere", SO 227, Jun 25. "Prisoners of the Desert", a serial, SO 239-

250, Aug - Nov 25, SGOL 138, Sep 27. "The Honour She Refused", SO 252, Nov 25. "The Outcasts of Charity Lane", SO 258, Jan 26. "The Last Term of Thelma Andrews", SO 260, Jan 26. "Phil's Fairy Godmother", SO 264, Feb 26.

A serial, "A Friendship of Mystery", SO 266-278, Mar - May 26, SGOL 153, Feb 28. A serial, "Adopted - For a Fortune", SO 292-305, Sep - Dec 26, SGOL 177, Oct 28. "Saved by Smiling Sue", SO 311, Jan 27. A serial, "A Girl of the Woods", featuring Meriel Joicey, SO 317-330, Mar - June 27, SGOL May 29. Also in SO 330 was a complete, "What Would Mother Say?". "Beryl Lends a Hand", SO 335, Jul 27. "No Longer a Schoolgirl", SO 342, Aug 27. "All Through a Ring", SO 250, Oct 27. "Marion's New Friend", SO 354, Nov 27. A serial, "Greta of the Mountains", SO 371-385, Mar - Jun 28. "The Holiday Camp - and Hilda", SO 390, Jul 28. A serial, "Gwen from the Golden West", SO 401-413, Oct 28 - Jan 29, SGOL 255, Jun 30.

"Abandoned by the Gipsies", SO 417, Feb 29. "No Fault of Nora's", SO 424, Mar 29. A serial, "From Princess to Slave", SO 430-443, May - Aug 29, SGOL 274, Nov 30. "Queen of the Carnival", SO 444, Aug 29. "She Cheated to be Champion", SO 448, Sep 29. "Gwenda's Good Turn", SO 451, Sep 29. "Little Miss Robin Hood", SO 460, Nov 29. "The Two Cinderellas", SO 465, Jan 30. A serial, "That Strange Secret of Pepita's", SO 471-482, Feb - May 30, SGOL 318, Oct 31. A serial, "The Golden Caravan", SO 499-510, Aug - Nov 30, SGOL 350, Jun 32. A series of complete stories featuring Foulk's Circus, "Friends of the Circus Ring", SO 519-528, Jan - Mar 31. "That Holiday Treasure Hunt", SO 545, Jul 31.

A serial, "Jasmin - Waif of the Desert", SO 551-561, Aug - Nov 31, SGOL 407, Aug 33. A serial, "Dulcie Dances Through", featuring Dulcie Mayne, SO 589-601, May - Aug 32. Jasmin returned in "The 'Beggar-Girl' from the Desert", SO 608, Oct 32. A serial, "Her Phantom Friend of the Caves", SO 609-621, Oct - Dec 32, SGOL 458, Sep 34. A serial and the return of popular character Dulcie Mayne, "Dulcie the 'Dreamboat' Dancer", SO 639-651, May - Jul 33, SGOL 482, Mar 35. "Dulcie and the Stowaway", SO 661, Oct 33. "The 'Secret'

BELLS of MYSTERY

By Joan Inglesant



27. "Sisters - But Oh! So Different" SW 265, Nov 27. "Because She Carried Favour", SW 269, Dec 27. "When Another Took Her Place", SW 302, Aug 28. "Why Did They Favour Me?", SW 305, Aug 28. "They Accused Her of Gossiping", SW 314, Oct 28. "Surrounded By Mystery", SW 320, Dec 28. "Nobody Seemed to Want Her", SW 329, Feb 29. "It Was All So Amazing", SW 338, Apr 29. "Left to Solve the Secret", SW 348, Jun 29. "Why Were They so Hostile?", SW 353, Jul 29. "Her Gift of Mystery", SW 363, Oct 29. "Robbed of Her Only Friend", SW 369, Nov 29. "Forced to Leave Her Happy Home", SW 376, Jan 30. "Why Did They Change Her Name?", SW 379, Jan 30. "Who Would Get Credit?", SW 385, Mar 30. "Because She Put Herself First", SW 391, Apr 30. "Forced to Fend for Herself", SW 395, May 30. "Humbled in Her Own Home", SW 400, Jun 30. "They Tried Hard to Deceive Her", SW 406, Aug 30.
- "Audrey Couldn't Be Like Other Girls", SW 423, Nov 30. "The Girl Who Took Charge", SW 429, Jan 31. "Had She a Secret Friend?", SW 437, Mar 31. "The

of Coombe Gap", featuring Lucy Devon, SO 663, Oct 33. A series of completes featuring Stella Moray and her horse, Starlight, of Mendelford's Circus, SO 666-675, Nov 33 - Jan 34, SGOL 659, Nov 38. A serial, "Sylvia's Locket of Fortune", SO 679-691, Feb - May 34, SGOL 511, Oct 35. A serial, "The Circus Wanderers", the return of Stella, Marion and Starlight, SO 695-707, Jun - Aug 34, SGOL 522, Jan 36. A serial, "An Outcast - on Mystery's Trail", SO 767-780, Oct 35 - Jan 36, SGOL 638, Jun 38. This was Joan Inglesant's final appearance in *The Schoolgirls' Own*, which folded in May 1936.

Joan Inglesant made her debut in *The Schoolgirls' Weekly* (SW) in No. 60 with a complete, "The Little Peacemaker", Dec 23. "A Christmas Cinderella" followed quickly the same month in SW 63. "The Girl who was Unselfish", SW 69, Feb 24. "She Wanted Admiration", SW 111, Nov 24. "The Girl who Refused Riches", SW 131, Apr 25. "They Forbade her the Circus", SW 134, May 25. "Separated from her Sister", SW 140, Jun 25. "The Duty She Shirked", SW 168, Jan 26. "Humbled Before Her Friends", SW 204, Sep 26. "Suspected by the Circus", SW 245, Jul 27. "She Had to be Flattered", SW 257, Sep 27. "You Couldn't Believe Ada", SW 261, Oct

THOSE CHRISTMAS BELLS OF MYSTERY!

SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY



No. 531, Vol. XXI.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

December 24th, 1932.

You'll revel in this grand 10-page complete story.

It features Helen Bourne, and Weirdslea, Village of a Hundred Secrets.

THOSE CHRISTMAS BELLS of MYSTERY!

By Joan Inglesant

Illustrated by C.H. Blake

SHADOWS AMID THE SNOW!

LOOK, Helen! Doesn't Weirdslea Manor look beautiful with the sun shining on all the windows and with the trees covered with snow?"

There was a thrill in Daisy Lane's voice as she spoke, and as her deep blue eyes were turned towards the dark-haired girl at her side, she noticed the significant expression that had passed across the face of Helen Bourne, her friend.

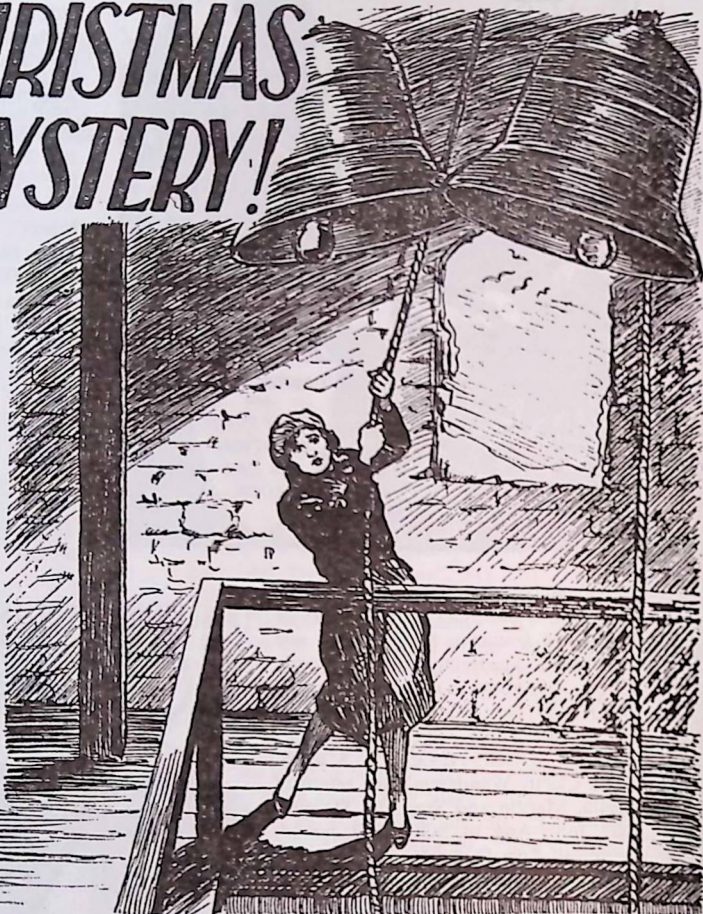
"Yes, Daisy, and mysterious as well!" came the quiet reply.

"Mysterious?"

Daisy laughed. Helen loved all things that savoured of mystery, and she was calling to mind the numerous occasions when she and Helen had roamed through the ancient ruins of Merlin Castle in search of the many secrets that it was reputed to hold.

That towering ruin lay behind them upon the summit of the hill, and its crumbling towers and shambled walls were thick with snow.

"Yes, mysterious," repeated Helen, leaning against the stile by which she and Daisy were



CHRISTMAS—TIME OF ROMANCE! IT BROUGHT TO HELEN BOURNE AND HER FRIEND, DAISY, THE MOST AMAZING, ROMANTIC PROBLEM THEY HAD EVER KNOWN.

standing. "As mysterious as Sir Vanel Doon himself."

She turned quickly to her friend.

"What wouldn't I give to explore the manor," she added. "But no one ever goes there save the few servants. And no one sees Sir Vanel save to catch just a glimpse of him when he passes in his car."

"They say that he was very rich once," put in Daisy.

"Once they were happier here in Weirdslea, too," said Helen, a touch of sadness in her voice. "It's a shame that everyone is going to have such a thin time this Christmas. To make matters worse, Sir Vanel is going to put up all the rents, and there is talk of him calling in mortgages, and that will mean people having to find money at a short notice if they wish to retain their homes."

"But why do you think the manor mysterious?" pressed Daisy.

Helen laughed lightly.

"Because there is so much legend and mystery round here, Daisy."

Helen's eyes were taking in the beautiful scene about her. The white fields that stretched away into the distance. The snow-clad trees, fairylike and gleaming in the dying radiance of the sun.

The ruins of Merlin Castle, and the gossamer traceries of the Knight's Wood that lay across the road and, to the left of Weirdslea Manor, an Elizabethan building and a place of many mullioned windows and overhanging upper stories.

"There's one legend that I would jolly well like to have happen!" exclaimed Helen now, as she turned to Daisy.

"What's that, Helen?"

For answer Helen pointed to an old church. Snow-covered, its broken windows and tumbling stones told how it had long since ceased to be tenable as a place of worship.

"If only the bells of St. Egbert's would

ring again!" she exclaimed. "If only the legend would come true!"

Daisy's hands were clasped.

"What does the legend say, Helen?" she asked.

Helen was regarding that quaint, beautiful old relic of the past.

She knew how that belfry had been silent for more years than even the oldest inhabitant of Weirdslea could remember.

It had fallen into decay, one of the chief causes of which was the waning fortune of Sir Vanel Doon, whose duty it was to keep it in repair.

"If only those bells would ring!" Helen whispered. "For the legend says, Daisy, that if the bells of St. Egbert's ring at Christmas-tide, peace and happiness, riches and contentment will return to Weirdslea."

"And they haven't rung for centuries!" Helen nodded.

"No; and they will never ring again," she added, "for the simple reason that the belfry is dangerous, and if they did ring it would probably come toppling down."

Secret of Harbour House", SW 448, May 31. "Her Strange Quest in London", SW 451, Jun 31. "When Orphans Were Parted", SW 458, Aug 31. "Barbara Alone in London", SW 463, Sep 31. "They Hiked to Adventure", SW 465, Sep 31. "Undeterred By Their Taunts", SW 473, Nov 31. "Cinderella of the Snows", SW 488, Feb 32. "Forced to Help in Secret", SW 492, Mar 32. "Her Quest at the House of Shadows", SW 502, Jun 32. "She Faced the Form Alone", SW 505, Jun 32. "Condemned For Her Loyalty", SW 508, Jun 32. "Not the Holiday She Expected", SW 513, Aug 32. "Let Down By Her Cousin", SW 519, Oct 32. "Helen Challenges the Spectre", the first Helen Bourne/Weirdslea story, SW 527, Nov 32. "Those Christmas Bells of Mystery" (Helen Bourne), SW 531, Dec 32. "The Phantom Girl of the Forest" (Helen Bourne), SW 537, Feb 33. "The Phantom Coach of Weirdslea" (Helen Bourne), SW 548, Apr 33. "The Riddle of Granny's Blue Dress" (Helen Bourne), SW 556, June 33. "When Weirdslea Wondered" (Helen Bourne), SW 560, Jul 33. "Movie Camera May" (May Airlie), SW 580, Dec 33. "The Mystery Violinist of Weirdslea" (Helen Bourne), SW 599, Apr 34. "May's Glorious Failure" (May Airlie), SW 612, Jul 34. "Greta, the Romany Minstrel", SW 644, Feb 35. "In Search of a Fugitive" (Greta), SW 651, Apr 35. "Friends of the Forest" (Greta), SW 660, Jun 35. "Waif of the Woodland" (Greta), SW 666, Jul 35. "A Romany Film Star" (Greta), SW 672, Sep 35. "Her Mission of Mystery" (Greta), SW 677, Oct 35. "Greta's Broken Melody", SW 683, Nov 35. "Only Greta to Warn Them", SW 700, Mar 36. "The Village of Discoveries" (Greta), SW 709, May 36. "Pearl of the Paddock" (Pearl Fraser), SW 721, Aug 36. "Midnight Melody" (Greta), SW 728, Oct 36. "Riders of the Night" (Pearl Fraser), SW 732, Oct 36. "The Riddle of Ringley Hall" (Mavis Andrews), SW 734, Nov 36. "Coward of the Carnival" (Greta), SW 737, Dec 36. There were no more appearances in *The Schoolgirls' Weekly*, whose final issue was No. 865, May 1939.

The Inglesant byline does not appear in the Second Series of *School Friend* until No. 228, Jul 29: a complete story, "Rivals in Fancy Dress". The Second Series SF ended with No. 229. However, it appeared early in *The Schoolgirl* (SG), which was the old *School Friend* in a new dress as the Editor put it. "Nan of Wonderley Fen" (complete), SG 3, Aug 29. "The Naked Masquerader", SG 11, Oct 29. A serial, "Glitter O' Caravans", SG 13-23, Oct 29 - Jan 30, not reprinted in SGOL. "Exiled From The Circus", SG 24, Jan 30. "The Gipsy Wanderer", SG 26, Jan 30. "All For the Sake of a Fancy Dress", SG 28, Feb 30. "When Twinkle Was Lured Away", SG 35, Mar 30. "When Dora Found the Secret Key", SG 41, May 30. "Myrtle's Mystery Piano", SG 45, Jun 30. A serial, "Wanderers of the Woodlands", SG 46-

58, Jun - Sep 30, SGOL 345, May 32. "When the Clock Struck One", SG 60, Sep 30. A series of four "Thrill and Mystery" completes, all with different titles. SG 113-116, Sep - Oct 31. "The Ghost Ship Sails Again", SG 119, Nov 31. "The Voice From Nowhere", SG 122, Nov 31. "Dena's Necklace of Mystery", SG 136, Mar 32. A series of completes featuring Lola the Strolling Player, SG 243-352, Mar - May 34. A serial, "Dawn of Derelict Castle", SG 310 -322, Jul - Sep 35, SGOL 561, Nov 36. "That Strange Bequest", SG 340, Feb 36. "The Message of the Bells", SG 342, Feb 36. There were no more stories by Joan Inglesant in *The Schoolgirl*, which concluded with issue No. 564, May 1940.

Apart from reprints of the serials in the weeklies, the Inglesant byline occurs in "New and Original Stories" (not printed elsewhere) in *The Schoolgirls' Own Library*. "The Secret Feud of St. Monica's", SGOL 74, Dec 25. "Scoffed At By The School", SGOL 98, Aug 26. "The Secret of her Schooldays", SGOL 125, May 27. "At Loggerheads at School", SGOL 170, Aug 28. "The School of her Dreams", SGOL 182, Dec 28. "The Schoolgirl 'Pretender'", SGOL 248, May 30. "The Secrets of Priory School", SGOL 288, Mar 31. "At School to Protect Her Sister", SGOL 296, May 31. "The Treasure-Hunting Schoolship", SGOL 372, Dec 32. "Just a Mystery Man's Daughter", SGOL 392, May 33. "The Schoolgirls of Outcasts House", SGOL 420, Dec 33. "The Waif of School House", SGOL 448, Jul 34. "At School in a Princess's Place", SGOL 500, Aug 35. "The School She Inherited", SGOL 540, Jun 36. "Rivals of the Riding Class", SGOL 576, Mar 37. "The Mystery of the New School", SGOL 596, Aug 37. "The Masked Schoolgirl", SGOL 644, Aug 38. "If Her School Friends Only Knew", SGOL 666, Jan 39. "On Secret Service at School", SGOL 694, Aug 39. "At School to Right a Wrong", SGOL 720, Mar 40. There were no further Inglesant titles in *The Schoolgirls' Own Library*, which closed with No. 733 in June 1940.

A recent enjoyable perusal of back issues of *The Collectors' Digest* found me reading the fact that Joan Inglesant's real identity had already been revealed as long ago as March 1985 in No. 459 by our late, great hobby detective, Bill Lofts. This prolific writer in the girls' papers was none other than Draycot M. Dell, well known as the author of historical adventure serials in the boys' papers. To confuse the issue further and, incidentally, to make this article longer than I earlier anticipated, this author also disguised his writings by using the other female pseudonyms of Mary Ellen Shirley and Ellen Draycot!

There are no stories by the first-named in either the first or second series of *School Friend*. In *The Schoolgirls' Own*, Mary Ellen Shirley has but two completes: "The Present That Broke

Their Friendship", SO 268, Mar 26, and "The Forfeit She Paid", SO 295, Oct 26. Ellen Draycot appears five times: "Loyal To Her Friend", SO 207, Jan 25, "The Promise She Broke", SO 246, Oct 25, "The Mystery of Cranston Castle", SO 249, Nov 25, "Princess of the Desert", SO 403, Oct 28, and "Leaving Out Lalla", SO 415, Jan 29. A series of eight completes under the general title of "Little Miss Twinkletoes", SO 707-714, Aug - Oct 34, with the byline Phyllis Draycot may also be by Draycot M. Dell, though this is only surmise on my part.

Mary Ellen Shirley turns up in *The Schoolgirls' Weekly* in the very first issue (Oct 1922) with a serial, "The Lass Who Was Nobody", concluding in SW 10, Dec 22, and not reprinted in the SGOL. A serial, "Sally the Scholarship Girl", SW 11-27, Dec 22 - Apr 23, SGOL 25, Dec 23. "Olive the Orphan Girl", SW 37, Jun 23. "The Little Wanderer", SW 40, Jul 23, "True To Her Trust", SW 49, Sep 23. "Friends Despite All", SW 53, Oct 23. A serial, "Without A Friend", SW 59-71, Dec 23 - Feb 24, SGOL 79, Jan 26. "They Thought Her Deceitful", SW 73, Mar 24. "She Longed For A Sister", SW 76, Mar 24. "The Friend She Deserted", SW 91, Jul 24. "The Unwanted Bridesmaid", SW 96, Aug 24. "The Lonely Heiress", SW 105, Oct 24. "Tess O' The Trapeze", SW 110, Nov 24. A serial, "How Could She Trust Them?", SW 113-124, Dec 24 - Feb 25, SGOL 82, Feb 26. A serial, "In Peril for her School", SW 131-143, Apr - Jul 25, SGOL 112, Dec 26. "Forbidden To Tell Her Friend", SW 154, Sep 25. A serial, "A Cheat Against Her Will", SW 157-169, Oct 25 - Jan 26, SGOL 130, Jun 27. "When The Shadows Lifted", SW 176, Feb 26. "Her Fortune Before Her Friend", SW 185, May 26. A serial, "A Ward in Name Only", SW 190-202, Jun - Sep 26, SGOL 168, Jul 28. "Her Sister Didn't Matter", SW 227, Feb 26. "She Wouldn't Take Their Wealth", SW 240, May 27. A serial, "Schemed Against At School", SW 247-258, Jul - Oct 27, SGOL 213, Aug 29. There are no stories by Ellen Draycot in the SW but one appearance as Daphne Anson, "What A Trial For Rosalie", SW 475, Nov 31. Bill Lofts reported Piers Anson as a pseudonym used by Draycot M. Dell.

In *The Schoolgirl*, Ellen Draycot appeared once only in No. 15, Nov 29, "Their Island of Good Fortune". No titles by Mary Ellen Shirley were listed in that paper.

Finally, *Schoolgirls' Own Library* titles by Mary Ellen Shirley, apart from those shown above as reprints of serials, were all "New and Original Stories". They are: "Her School of Many Memories", SGOL 155, Mar 28; "At School To Reform", SGOL 196, Apr 29; "The School of Secrets", SGOL 228, Dec 29; "The Circus School", SGOL 280, Jan 31; and "The

School of Mysteries", SGOL 340, Apr 32.

Draycot Montague Bell, unlike many another Amalgamated Press writer, had a successful career as a hardback fiction author. The British Library (BL) Catalogues list 22 titles from 1915 to 1939, including two with another successful hardback writer, May Wynne. "Stand And Deliver", published in 1933 by Puzzle Books, London was original in that the mystery outlined in the story was solved by a jigsaw puzzle issued with the book. This ties up with Margery Woods' article in CD 458, Feb 85, in which she says that Joan Inglesant was the author of a similar book containing a jigsaw puzzle as a denouement, issued by the same publisher in the same year. This is, in fact, the only hardback listed under Inglesant in the BL Catalogues with no indication that this is a pseudonym for Dell, so we know more than they do! Both books are illustrated by Glossop. In regard to the Inglesant volume entitled "Bells of Mystery", which Margery Woods says features Helen Bourne of Weirdslea, I wonder if perhaps it may be a rewritten and enlarged version of the second Weirdslea tale from *The Schoolgirls' Weekly*. In No. 531, Dec 1932 appeared the long complete story, "Those Christmas Bells of Mystery". A comparison between the two stories would be interesting to confirm or deny this idea. (See Editor's Note at the end of this article.)

The BL Catalogues also list 13 titles, from 1912 to 1938, by Oswald C.C. Dallas, indicating this to be a pseudonym of Draycot M. Dell. Interestingly enough, none of his hardback titles sound as though they are school stories, surprising in that so much of his output for the girls' papers consisted of school stories. *Who Was Who*, Vol III, lists him as Editor of *Chums* from 1926 to 1939. He also edited *The Musical Box Annual*. He became a journalist while working in the library of the *Daily Mail* and from there joined the Amalgamated Press. He also wrote two musical compositions entitled "Songs Poetique" and "The Forest of Menion". He was born in March 1888 and died at the too early age of 52 in March 1940.

His hardback, "Drake's Drum", published in 1920, appears again in *The Boys Friend Library*, Second Series, No. 343, July 1932, under the same title, having previously appeared as a serial in *Young Britain*. He had six other titles in the BFL, one as by Piers Anson, all published between 1927 and 1936. None of the titles appears to tie in with those used for his hardbacks with the exception of the one noted above.

Editor's Note by Mary Cadogan

Margery Woods kindly gave me a copy of the hardback book (complete with jig-saw puzzle) entitled *Bells of Mystery* by Joan Inglesant. I

have checked this with the story in *Schoolgirls' Weekly* 531, and they are indeed exactly the same tale. It is interesting that the ten-page story in the *Schoolgirls' Weekly*, which includes several large pictures, runs to 127 pages in the larger-type hardback. Published by Puzzle Books Ltd. of Garrick Street, London, *Bells of Mystery* has a cover illustration by "Glossop", which I reproduce here: the *Schoolgirls' Weekly* cover and title-page, with pictures by C.H. Blake, are also shown. The book appeared in 1933, soon after the story was published in *Schoolgirls' Weekly* in December 1932. It seems that Joan Inglesant (Draycot M. Dell) was grateful to his Amalgamated Press Editor, R.T. Eves, for allowing the story to be reprinted by Puzzle Books Ltd., for it carries the following dedication:

TO
 MY VERY GOOD FRIEND
 REGINALD THOMPSON EVES
 THIS LITTLE BOOK IS
 AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

"*Fin's coronat opus*"

INGLESANT GRANGE
 November 1933



ANSWERS TO PICTURE PUZZLE

1. **Baumann** alias Captain Basil Langton, "The Vanished Schoolboys", a tale of Rookwood by Owen Conquest.
2. **Bane**, Franz Koranz manservant. Bob Cherry kidnapped series, Magnets 1354-1358 (1934).
3. Thomas (**Tommy**) **Squidge**. A racing tout who haunts the Cross Keys. A frightened Angel, when caught by him out of bounds, gave Wharton's name. Magnets 1613-1614 (1939).
4. **Packington** alias "Black Edgar", Sir Richard Ravenspur's brother. He posed as the butler at Ravenspur Grange. Magnets 1122-1125 (1929).
5. **Tickey Tapp**. A card sharper who appears from time to time in the Gem. At one time he was in charge of a casino held at the old Manor House.
6. **Barney Stone**. The rascally foreman of the Kicking Cayuse Ranch in Texas, Magnets 1573-1582 (1938).
7. **The Weasel**. A number of Sugden's gang. His job entailed studying the lay of the land prior to a burglary. See no. 8.
8. **Sylvester Sugden**. The head of a gang and "fence" and moneylender. It was he that induced Sir Hilton Popper to enter Dick Lancaster at Greyfriars. Both 7 and 8 are to be found in Magnets 1209-1219 (1931).



Greyfriars And The Epic Tradition

(Echoes of Homer and Vergil in the Writing of Frank Richards)

BY
ANDREW
MILES



INTRODUCTION

I first came to know Greyfriars in the late 1960s as a 10 year old Prep school boy. I was browsing in the local library, having outgrown Enid Blyton and read all the available Biggles books. I was attracted by a well-thumbed volume which had on the front cover a picture of a fat schoolboy leaning out a window. He was facing a lean "gimlet-eyed" schoolmaster in cap and gown. The title was "Just Like Bunter", one of the later and more entertaining of the Cassell's volumes. It had many ingredients of a typical Greyfriars yarn: Bunter setting a booby trap for Quelch with the Bounder's Latin dictionary and giving the game away by leaving sticky, jammy "paw prints" on the cover; Bunter writing "opprobrious epithets" about Quelch, but leaving behind the clue of his unique spelling; (this is one of the few instances where Bunter misspells in attempting to write in Latin - he normally confines his "remarkable" orthographical efforts to English); Smithy in trouble with gambling debts after his father plays the "Roman Parent" and reduces his pocket money; Smithy "breaking out" after "Lights Out"; Smithy faced with the temptation to use Quelch's cash box keys to solve his debt problem; the Smithy/Redwing friendship at its strongest, for Redwing not only sees the Bounder through with £20.00 from his Post Office account, but also occupies Smithy's bed while Quelch carries out a late night check; Quelch does not think to look in Redwing's bed for a dummy!

I enjoyed the book enormously and have been a Greyfriars fan ever since. I quickly read or bought all the Magnet, Cassell's and other Bunter stories I could find. Many were available in Puffin paperback and - even at a tender age - I began to see significant discrepancies between certain stories. For example, Johnny Bull was missing from "Billy Bunter and the Man from South America" and "Billy Bunter the Sportsman"; Wibley was absent from a Remove "Hamlet" production; Alzono Todd was presented very differently in "Billy Bunter the Sportsman" from "Billy Bunter the Tough Guy of Greyfriars". Having read a little of the life of Charles Hamilton, I thought that I was reading the paltry efforts of one of the despised "subs". I later learnt (thanks to the Howard Baker editions and the Magnet Companion) that I was reading early Magnet stories from 1910 - as re-

issued in S.O.L.

Several S.O.L. issues - e.g. the Phantom of Mauleverer Towers (319), the High Oaks series (191/193), Bunter's Convict (211), re-published in Puffin, are adapted from issues of the Magnet in the later years. The "Egypt" series (409 ff), when republished in Puffin, makes the "politically correct" change from "nigger" to "Arab". In later years, I have been able to read the unabridged Magnets from which these stories were edited and appreciate the complete yarns. The judiciousness and effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the editing have been amply commented upon by others elsewhere.

Hamiltonian commentators have frequently referred to Richards' love of the Classics and the fact that he felt deeply influenced by them. Little attempt, however, seems to have been made to show how his narrative is indebted to Classical authors. The various stages of development of the Greyfriars tales and characters and the ways in which they were presented display many features of the great epic poets. For, although Biblical and Shakespearean quotes outnumber classical quotes and allusions, it is the world of Greece and Rome which has the most profound influence upon Greyfriars. This article also seeks to show some of the salient points of this central feature of Hamilton's writing.

THE GREYFRIARS FORMULA

The influence of Classical authors upon Frank Richards' writing is profound, with ubiquitous literary allusions and quotations from Classical texts. These include adjectives (e.g. Herculean effort), similes (e.g. like Pelion on Ossa) and direct quotations - in translation, with or without the original Latin text. Many others have commented on Hamilton's love of Latin tags and debated their rôle. It is true, I think, that Hamilton was an enthusiastic, if not a great Classical scholar. His quotations are well known ones, often drawn from Vergil - in particular Aeneid Books 1, 2, and 4 - or Horace. These are the most commonly studied by schoolboys even today. His classical allusions and metaphors - often drawn from Hesiod or Homer - reveal some knowledge of Greek in translation. The English transliteration of a few Greek words suggests at least a nodding acquaintance with basic Greek and Hamilton's autobiography seems to confirm this.

References are also made to Dr. Locke's and Mr. Quelch's many discussions as they seek to elucidate Sophocles. Few details, however, are provided. As a Latin teacher I have scrutinised "ultio Bunteri" (the Bunter story written in Latin and published in 1961) and consider that it is written in grammatically correct schoolboy Latin, but without the feel for idioms and stylistic polish which a better writer of Latin could have given it.¹ The same can be said of the standard of his French.

The extent of Hamilton's Latin or Greek is, however, not important. Rather, it is important to realise that he apparently received at school a thorough grounding - probably learnt by heart - in Latin, French, English literature, and the Bible; throughout his long life, he carried its legacy and was able to quote from it. In the Cassell's books, Latin adages abound, along with references to discussions among the beaks on textual criticism. The post World War II Greyfriars stories often feature Quelch's pocket Horace and his discussions with colleagues of that author. We even read of the problems of translating Horace's metre into English verse. This was apparently an interest of Hamilton's in later life and is mentioned in Mary Cadogan's book about him. Frank Richards' English prose style is not particularly Latinate, not containing, for example, long, compound sentences with subordinate clauses and participial phrases; it is very readable, polished and grammatically impeccable and contains a number of Classical features. For example, the phrase "thus Bunter" or "thus Prout" is adapted from a similar phrase in Vergil (sic Venus = thus Venus), used after a passage of direct speech. Other examples of phraseology adapted from Vergil and Homer are quite common. For Hamilton, a good yarn had to be couched in good quality English and follow the epic formula; classical and other allusions and tags were added to the flavour like spices to a stew.

Like the great epic poems, Greyfriars tales confirm to a formula which evolved gradually between 1908 and 1920. Over many years, we can see the development of Greyfriars yarns from their Victorian, melodramatic origins, though the formative World War I years, through the increasingly comic 1920s to the "Golden Age" of the 1930s. 1930 is a convenient year at which to note a watershed. By then, plots are largely comic, with a little drama added or providing a background. The Captain Cunliffe series of 1910 (Magnet 114/115), for example, is essentially an adventure yarn, with little humour, whereas the Egyptian series of 1932 (Magnet 1277 ff), while containing plenty of suspense, is amply provided with comic relief by both Bunter's bumbling and Mauly's cool, aristocratic demeanour.

Eton suits and toppers are discarded in favour of more contemporary dress by Greyfriars

after the Summer "hols" of 1930 (Magnet 1143) with little comment, (cf. the "row" at St. Jim's when the same decision is taken there). Canings become increasingly slapstick, with "six on the bags" and "bend over" invariably replacing "hold out your hand". This is a far cry from the vivid, melodramatic caning of Levison in the Magnet of 1908 (Magnet 46). Harry Wharton's somewhat brutal flogging in the "Rebel" series of 1932 (Magnet 1285 ff) is not typical of the corporal punishment scenes of that period. Sound effects (thump! Crash! Wow! Yaroooh!) and dialogue are far more commonly used to set the scene than the largely prose narrative of pre-1920 Magnets. In short, Frank Richards was able to shed the pompous and attempted uplifting features of early post-Victorian schoolboy fiction and relax into a less formal relationship with his readers, both juvenile and adult. When one realises this, the study of and comparison with earlier Greyfriars stories become all the more fascinating. It is thus that the development of Richards' writing can be appreciated.

During the 1920s, Greyfriars yarns began to settle into an established routine. They reach a point at which the plot is largely predictable, the character catalogue is unchanged (but regularly stimulated by many transients) and there is no further attempt to develop relationships or personalities. Frank Richards increasingly portrayed existing characters in familiar contexts - and in unfamiliar ones for the holiday yarns. The "Golden Age" of the Magnet, generally agreed to fall between - depending upon which commentators one prefers to agree with - 1924 and 1940, is the point from which no further development can be perceived. From 1930 to 1960, all Greyfriars characters act in strict accordance with what has come to be the reader's expectation of them. They are motivated entirely by the precedents set by their fully developed personalities. The repeated "downfall of Harry Wharton" sagas may seem to be an exception, but Wharton's largely controlled temper and stubbornness show that he, like the Bounder, has a far less superficial character than most of his peers and his and the Bounder's periodic outbursts are in keeping with their established patterns. In short, the last thirty years of Greyfriars may be seen to be a plateau, or a heightened stage of perfection.

FRANK RICHARDS AS A HOMERIC FIGURE

There are startling parallels to be found between the admiration - bordering on veneration - held for Frank Richards over many decades, and the Western World's perception of Homer. Homer lived - it is estimated - between 800 and 900 B.C. Tradition credits him with writing the Iliad, the Odyssey and some other shorter poetry. This has long been disputed; the Iliad and Odyssey form part of an oral tradition

of passing down epic poetry from generation to generation by means of bards and, later, rhapsodes. Later writers and critics questioned whether one man could have written so much; they pointed to discrepancies, contradictions and omissions. They claimed that social and religious detail in the two poems differ so significantly that they belong to different generations. Petelow's substitute stories in particular led to claims at the time that Frank Richards was "not a man but a syndicate". The parallel is interesting.

It is quite conceivable that, although Homer may have originally composed the Iliad and Odyssey, they underwent significant change during the oral passing on from generation to generation. Frank Richards, although the creator of Greyfriars, wrote barely 75% of the yarns, and many discrepancies and contradictions can be readily explained. The efforts of the substitute authors can easily be shown to be quite different in style, plot and content. Like the religious and social differences in the Iliad and Odyssey, the details of the routine and geography of Greyfriars are often different. In whatever light the efforts of the substitute writers may be regarded, they in no way diminish the greatness of the authentic yarns. Homer's real name may or may not have been "Homer"; it matters little, for it is under that name that he is venerated. Thus it is with Charles Hamilton, known in the Greyfriars yarns as Frank Richards, and as numerous other names in other sagas.

The identity of Homer - a most enigmatic figure - has long been a mystery. Traditional Greek sculpture depicts him as mature and blind, with flowing locks and the traditional beard of, at different times, Archaic, Classical or even Hellenistic portraiture; one can assume that such art portrays him at a time of fame, after the completion of the bulk of his work. The early life of Charles Hamilton is shrouded in mystery. The ubiquitous photographs of an aged Charles Hamilton - complete with skull cap, pipe and failing eyesight - were taken years after the publication of the Magnet stories - his finest literary achievement - had ceased. Homer's expression is always deeply pensive; Richards' thoughtful but revealing great kindness - particularly with his beloved cat or juvenile guests.

Frank Richards is, in the Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, published between 1920 and 1941, more than once featured in editorial accounts of visits to Greyfriars. He alone can reveal all to the readers of these tales of that mystical place combining Arcadia, Elysium and Tartarus. Significantly, Dante chooses Vergil - the Roman Homer - as his guide through Hell in his Italian epic of the after-life. The widely-circulated Frank Richards photograph published in Magnet 000 served a similar purpose - to convince

readers of the genuine existence of the man. It was in keeping with the readers' photographs and Magnet portrait galleries which periodically appeared.

FRANK RICHARDS' DEBT TO VERGIL AND HOMER

Tom Hopperton's excellent article in the Collectors' Digest Annual of 1960 tracks many of Hamilton's quotations to their literary source. Such quotes feature more frequently in the Cassell's stories. Quotes from Classical authors are not, however, *per se* the most important factor in the Classical influence upon Hamilton's writing. I have tried to set out below some features in Greyfriars yarns showing how the epic tradition of Homer and Vergil permeates many aspects - characterisation, plot, style, drama, pathos, comedy and the preaching of moral values.

In some areas, the greater debt is to Homer, in others to Vergil. Some readers of this article may be interested in pointing to influences from later authors such as Dante or Shakespeare and several better-known English poets, or to the numerous Biblical quotes - particularly from the Old Testament. Such sources have, I feel, only passing or superficial effect, their main contribution being the richness added to the narrative by the contextual appropriateness of the various references. This is because the Western literary tradition derives directly from the Classical Greats. Influence on modern drama, for example, of Shakespeare can ultimately be traced back to Classical times. Moreover, Hamilton himself was profoundly aware of the central rôle of the Classical World in the development of Western thought and drew much inspiration directly from it. It had clearly been the basis of his own Victorian education and, in most Hamiltonian schools, the masters are classical scholars and Latin sits at the heart of the curriculum. Other subjects - and their teachers - are peripheral and "stinks" is not even mentioned.

EPIC FORMULAE, STOCK CHARACTERS AND CATALOGUES

One standard feature of Frank Richards' narrative is his predilection of plunging *in medias res*. Chapter 1 of Magnet 1 begins with the immortal words: "Colonel Wharton drained ... send master Harry to me". "I say you fellows", "He he he" or "Hallo, hallo, hallo" are but some of the many comic and "... compressed his lips", "help" or "... stared blankly" some of the many dramatic introductions to the yarns. It is usual for each chapter in each yarn to begin at a dramatic point which is assigned to context in subsequent narrative. While I have no doubt that such features can be seen in the story-telling of many authors and genres, it must be remembered that Homer produced his poems

long before the others. The Iliad begins with the wrath of Achilles, the Odyssey in the middle of Odysseus' 10 year voyage, and the Aeneid with the arrival of Aeneas in Carthage. Each epic poem proceeds to relate in vivid detail crucial events which took place at a significant point well after the beginning of the tale. I do not seek to claim that Greyfriars yarns faithfully follow the epic formula; rather, I wish to suggest that the yarns are similar in structure to epic and are in themselves tightly bound to a Hamiltonian epic plot formula.

Greek and Latin epic followed a traditional formula, much aped by successive generations. The predictability of the plot - often a well-known legend re-told - detracts in no way from the quality of the narrative. Similarly, the Greyfriars yarns seldom have an unexpected ending. The reader can usually surmise the solution in the "whodunit" style yarns such as the Crocker (Magnet 1615 ff) and Courtfield cracksman (Magnet 1138 ff) series. We know that there will be a happy ending to barring-out stories with full reinstatement of the "sacked" and no floggings; we know that Skinner, Ponsonby and other cads will receive their just deserts; we know that the "sacked" will be reinstated; and we know that estranged pals will always enjoy complete reconciliation.

Others have written much about the unique brilliance of Frank Richards' narrative technique far better than I. It is worth noting, however, that his "stock plots" - repeatedly re-told to the delight of many generations - never weary the reader. The tales of heroic deeds, horrific monsters, beautiful and sometimes devious women and the machinations of the gods, oft re-told in Classical Literature, never palled on the listener. Homer's re-telling of Trojan tales and Vergil's account of the hero Aeneas were fresh telling of old stories. Thus are the Greyfriars yarns - despite their predictable endings - relished for their eternal freshness in each new re-telling.

One example of a common feature in the epic formula is the use of stock characters. Greek comedy and tragedy similarly employ such characters. These include mighty kings and warriors, love-sick youths, faithful or cheeky slaves and meddling gods. Hamiltonian schools - Greyfriars in particular - have mighty sportsman, Bloods, cheeky fags, meddling beaks, bullying prefects and a wide range of "rotters". Specific characters are repeatedly given specific rôles and tasks. The delivering of messages from kings and gods, the mundane tasks of subordinates and the periodic falling love of heroes have their Hamiltonian equivalents: fags cheekily delivering their messages to the Remove passage (or with great respect to the Sixth Form passage), fagging, Smithy sulking in his study like Achilles in his tent, Mauly or Wingate falling in love and

Quelch - god-like - materialising in the Rag - causing much trepidation to those present. Thus did Mercury terrify Aeneas in Carthage.

Many characters have standard rôles regularly repeated in the formula. Skinner is always loitering in the Rag or Remove passage to report what has occurred. How many times is Bunter kicked for eavesdropping or grub-raiding? Johnny Bull, stocky, blunt and taciturn, is an interesting foil to his more cheerful pals and reminiscent of the Greater Ajax, stocky and taciturn, who lacked the oratorical skills of his fellow Greek chiefs. Each gave sound advice to a "sulking" leader; Bull to Wharton, Ajax to Achilles. Discord among the Greeks in the Iliad stems from disagreement over a slave-girl. In the epic, all-male environment of Greyfriars similar discord over the Cliff House girls is not unknown. Both Richards and Homer display in such scenes a deep insight into human nature - and particularly into the complexity of inter-personal relationships, friendship and related issues.

Another example is Hamilton's use of the epic catalogue. The epic warriors responded to a trumpet call and sallied forth to battle. As they formed up, a detailed, but incomplete, list or "catalogue" was always given by Vergil and Homer. When the call "Rescue Remove" was heard in the Greyfriars quad, the mightiest "men" were always catalogued as they charged into the fray - the Famous Five "as one man", Smithy, Redwing, Squiff, Todd, Brown are among the most commonly featured. In such catalogues other forms are even less represented. Hobson of the Shell (who often brings news to the quad) and Temple, Dabney and Fry of the Fourth are the most commonly mentioned.² Like the incomplete roll of Greyfriars, the complete list of warriors fighting before Troy in the Iliad or in Latium in the Aeneid is never given. For decades, the Remove form and study lists have been disputed. Do Trevor, Treluce, Alzono Todd, Vivian, Smith (Minor), Delarey and Elliott still belong to Greyfriars? to which studies? The answer is not important. An epic catalogue gives a sweeping view, concentrating on the central figures and mightiest warriors only.

Many speeches and episodes in epic poetry - which was traditionally recited and not written, heard rather than read - are repetitive to ease the burden of recollection for re-telling. In producing so many readable Magnet stories - week after week - Frank Richards faithfully followed his own formula and engaged in much repetition of incidents and phrases. If he had not done so, his output of fine yarns could not have been so prodigious. Catalogues of heroes, stirring speeches, graphic battle scenes, pangs of sorrow and vividness of description are enjoyed as often as they are re-told. Likewise, as often as a boot or cane makes contact with the tightest

trousers in the Greyfriars Remove, Johnny Bull says "I told you so?", Coker is up-ended by the Famous Five in the quad, the Bounder slams the door of Study 4, or the booming voice of Paul Pontifex Prout is heard, we never fail to chuckle. A student of Vergil never says "oh not again" as the passage of the sun's fiery chariot across the heavens is again related; no Friar ever tires of "hallo, hallo, hallo!" or "Yaroooh!". A literary classic - of Homer, Vergil or Charles Hamilton - is ever verdant.

GREYFRIARS "MEN" AND THE EPIC WARRIOR

The epic poems of Homer are renowned for their presentation of, *inter alia*, the "rugged individualism" of the epic warriors. These were powerful men of strong emotion, dogged commitment to a sense of right, unshakeable loyalty to their comrades and almost superhuman strength. Battle scenes are vividly described in which individual warriors perform great feats of courage and repel whole battalions of the foe. The breathless narrative of a Greyfriars Soccer match, a scrap in the Rag or the repelling of tramps, Highcliffe cads or the prefect body seeking to break up a "barring out" is in this tradition. Greyfriars "men" share many characteristics of the epic warrior.

In the epic battle scenes, long shadowed spears are repeatedly hurled and repeatedly strike down valiant foes. Epic warriors did not miss; such was the strength of their arms that their opponents; armour could not deflect the deadly missiles. Greyfriars "men" similarly shoot goals, hit balls to the boundary and send unerring deliveries to spreadeagle the stumps of their opponents. Cushions, apples, Latin "dies" and inkpots are always hurled in the Remove passage with such accuracy and force that the victim is swept from his feet. There is a knockout blow in every scrap. When an epic warrior slew his foe, it was permissible to strip the body of its armour, then to return it - unabused - for religious burial or cremation. Desecration of a foe's body, cowardice and taunting in victory were "not done". Achilles' defilement of Hector's corpse in the Iliad and Smithy's occasional vicious gloating over the Famous Five, and over Wharton in particular, (e.g. Magnet 1255 ff) were vividly related to condemn such conduct. At Greyfriars, countless examples are to be found of the decent Remove chaps showing modesty in victory and cheerfulness in defeat. "An eye for eye" is not an acceptable attitude. Although honour must be satisfied, the better members of Greyfriars will often overlook trivial offences, but they do not meekly "turn the other cheek". They usually follow Vergil's exhortation in Aeneid Book VI to "spare the vanquished and topple the proud". Slackers like Hazeldene, cowards like Snoop, bullies like Bolsover and the temper tantrums of the Bounder are condemned. Achilles does not

sulk in his tent throughout the Trojan War and is persuaded by old King Priam to return the mangled body of Hector. Similarly, the tantrums of Wharton and Smithy always subside eventually.

BATTLES OF GODS, BEAKS AND PRE'S

Masters at Greyfriars are grim, unworldly, stern-faced figures, with little sense of humour. All are MA's and scholars in their own right. All receive respect from the boys appropriate to their standing. The fatherly Housemaster, cricket expert, clad in tweed and puffing a well-worn briar, who is often a feature of some pre-war schoolboy stories, is absent from Greyfriars. Games Master Larry Lascelles is the only master with any apparent knowledge of games. The fact that he is also Maths Master clearly indicates Frank Richards' belief in the centrality and superiority of the Classics. The Headmaster does not even give 1st XI fixtures a look-in.

Dr. Locke, silver haired and venerable, is not unkindly, widely loved (at a distance) and, when he frowns, feared. Thus is Zeus, "father of gods and men", set above all other deities. Olympus trembles when he nods. Zeus has his thunderbolts with which to keep the universe in order. Dr. Locke has the birch with which to keep Greyfriars in order. Such is the standing of each that neither needs to use his ultimate deterrent very often.

The other masters have good qualities and faults, well documented elsewhere. What they have in common is a position subordinate to Dr. Locke and a tendency to argue - sometimes quite violently - among themselves. Quelch versus Hacker or Prout feuds surface from time to time and are always narrated in a comic light. The squabbles and fighting among the gods in the Iliad - as they support either the Greeks or the Trojans - serve as comic relief. Significantly, neither Zeus nor Dr. Locke is ever involved in the squabbles of lesser deities.

The prefect body forms a complementary tier of "gods" - showing both the physical prowess so much admired by Ancient Greeks and Greyfriars boys and the larger than life frailties of human nature; for the gods of classical antiquity possessed all the vices of man. Loder, Carne and Walker, in particular, display many vices. Overseeing them, Wingate, like Zeus, holds unquestioned power and universal respect. It is interesting to note that Frank Richards used the epithet "Olympian" to refer only to the Prefects Room, never to Common Room. The prefect body is periodically referred to as "the giddy palladium" - a parody of "lofty Olympus".

Epic battles among the gods are not restricted to their own ranks. Athene not only defeats Ares in single combat; she also assists the hero Diomedes to stab both Ares and

Aphrodite. The reader of the Iliad laughs to see the bullying Ares, god of war, humbled by a mere mortal. Similarly, we laugh to see Loder held, bound, at High Oakes before the chair over which he will have to bend to be flogged (Magnet 1047); or Hacker whopped with a frying pan in the tuckshop rebellion until he agrees to be the "washer up" (Magnet 1515)! It is significant that both Olympian and Greyfriars "gods" are "handled" by lesser mortals only when they inappropriately interfere with their affairs. Zeus allows deities to suffer the humiliation of wounds at the hands of Diomedes only when they involve themselves on the battle field. Hacker's meddling outside his form and Loder's bullying proclivities earn them ridicule or humiliation. Generally, Homer's and Hamilton's "gods" receive the respect appropriate to their exalted position.

GREYFRIARS AND ROMAN VALUES

Although Vergil's Aeneid ostensibly tells of the feats of the warrior Aeneas, the poem was deliberately designed to glorify the Age of Augustus and to inspire the Romans of Vergil's day with Augustan ideals. Vergil repeatedly espoused such Roman values as bravery, respect for the gods, a simple lifestyle, patriotism and family values.

Similarly, the Magnet contains much propaganda of the day. During World War I, exhortations to eat less bread, (the Famous Five frequently eat a "war tea"), to join the cadets (the Alzono Todd recruiting posters, for example) and to give support for those in uniform (all Greyfriars turns out to cheer on troops from Wapshot camp doing route marches) are common. Treasonable or "prussian" conduct is condemned. We would no doubt have seen similar material if the Magnet had survived World War II. The depiction of Muccolini (Magnet 1481) (the unwashed "dago" circus master and spy with the name so similar to that of il Duce) and the "Eastcliff Lodge" series (Magnet 1677 ff) foreshadow what might have been.

In addition, Hamilton unashamedly preached against sneaking, "substance abuse", gambling, bullying, racism and snobbery. The latter two vices were most commonly and effectively attacked through the comic antics of Bunter. Richards also attacked vulgarity, opulence and ostentation. These are also attacked in the Aeneid. Vergil's condemnation of "Eastern" decadence has an interesting parallel in Richards' portrayal of the wealthy, cowardly and unscrupulous Ponsonby - easily his most odious creation. The direct honesty and bravery of the Famous Five always triumph over the wiles and ruses of the funky Highcliffe cad. Vergil's honest, spartan Romans are similarly superior to (as the Romans saw them) the devious, opulent and cowardly peoples of

Asia Minor and the Middle East. The vices and immoral conduct of the aristocratically-connected Pon parallel the opulent decadence of the Eastern monarchies despised by Republican Rome. Decent Greyfriars chaps like wholesome activities such as hiking, camping and cycling. They are always happier - unlike the snobs and "knuts" - to fend for themselves and to prepare their own food on "hols". Aeneas and his comrades - like the Greek warriors - hunt their own game and roast their own meat. Harry Wharton and Co. are presented as ideal British schoolboys to Magnet readers in England and the Empire, Aeneas and Co. as ideal Roman figures to the readers of the Aeneid in Vergil's Rome and its Empire. Vergil's and Hamilton's moral messages to their readers are strikingly similar - be like the heroes in this tale and do not fall into unwholesome, decadent ways!

It is worth noting, however, that neither Richards nor Vergil preaches spartan values to the point of poverty. The grandeur of Aeneas' armour and Augustus' Rome are quite acceptable, as are the casual elegance and wealthy good taste of Lord Mauleverer. Wealth is quite acceptable; using it for show or a slothful lifestyle is not.

THE POST WORLD WAR II YEARS AND HELLENISM

The thirty-eight Cassell's "Billy Bunter" books are not as highly regarded as the Magnet yarns. Although each is long enough for a good Magnet-like yarn, none forms part of a serial and all focus on a small number of characters (Bunter, the Famous Five, Smithy and Redwing, Mauleverer, Quelch, Coker and Co, Wingate and Loder). Many other well-known characters receiving fleeting mention, but without any depth of portrayal. One has the impression that Frank Richards preferred to reproduce the "old favourites" in each book, within the strict parameters of a thirty-five to forty short chapter narrative. Like the Hellenistic epic poets, who faithfully emulated Homer but never sought to surpass him, he merely follows his own great, epic formula established in the Magnet. His Cassell's yarns are generally considered inferior in quality, lacking the earlier Frank Richards' magic. Couched in Hamilton's impeccable English, they are entertaining and very readable, but defective because they explore no new avenues, contain no depth of characterisation and are merely shadowy adaptations of the earlier Magnet yarns. Classical tags and allusions, grammatical parsing, short snappy dialogue and plenty of "yarooos" - all important features of Magnet - abound in far greater numbers. The repetitive overuse of the same features, similarity of the plots to longer, more intricate Magnet stories and reduction of complexity and subtlety undoubtedly reduce their appeal to the Magnet devotee. Hellenistic poets, in doggedly

aping Homer, finally became near-parodies as they excessively featured his many brilliant literary devices. Cassell's yarns are to Magnet tales as Hellenistic poetry is to Homer.

Short Greyfriars yarns also appeared in the Holiday Annuals and Billy Bunter's Own. Rather like the "epyllion" (Hellenistic mini-epic poetry), they are episodic, with a few Hamiltonian flourishes. They, like the epyllion, successfully served a market seeking much shorter, simpler tales on familiar themes. A changing world, a changing market and, perhaps, an ageing Hamilton all combine to prevent another Magnet period. Post-war Hamilton did not re-produce his best; no one in post-Homeric Greece could produce another Iliad or Odyssey.

GREYFRIARS, ARCADIA AND ELYSIUM

Vergil's Elysium (Paradise) is separated from the hardships of Tartarus (Hell) and the Weeping Fields of the Roman Underworld. Like Arcadia of his pastoral poems, it is a pleasant place of shady trees, green fields and yellow sand, in which all live in idyllic, rustic harmony. Similarly, Greyfriars - and indeed much of the Hamiltonian "Arcadia" (Kent) - has little awareness of the strife of the outside world.

Many attempts have been made to plot Vergil's account in the Aeneid of Aeneas' journey through the Underworld. Yet it remains a magical place, hard to define physically, and certain apparent contradictions cannot be reconciled. Modern explorers, in authentic recreations of Bronze Age boats, have sought to re-trace the voyages of both Odysseus and Aeneas in the Mediterranean and to prove that they were not impossible. Similar attempts have been made to chart Greyfriars and the surrounding geography of Kent. Yet floor plans, study lists and layouts and wall maps are all in some way contradicted by one or more "genuine" Hamilton yarn. It would, I think, be disappointing if all anomalies were resolved, for we would lose the aura of mystery. Greyfriars is an Arcadia, and Utopia, which defies the normal physical laws of time and space. Like the Arcadia of Aeneas, it could exist, but, if real, would be sufficiently different on close examination to disappoint the connoisseur.

CONCLUSION

A reader of Homer is left breathless by the vividness of the narrative, the beauty of the poetry and the richness of the language. The reader of Vergil is left spellbound by the creativeness of the verse and inspired by the vision of the greatness of Rome. Readers of either epic are left enthralled by the journey they have made - as awe-inspiring as ever after 2000 years. They have been able to forget the troubles assailing the modern world and read tales of great adventures, brave and mighty warriors,

ghastly monsters and beautiful maidens. They have seen good invariably triumph over evil. They have been able to envisage themselves in a nobler and happier world, a Golden Age of gods and heroes.

All Greyfriars readers are left feeling as Frank Richards would have wanted - comfortable and reassured in a world not worsened by contemporary pains. Even the harsher realities of World War I are not too brutally introduced. There was no weekly reading of casualty lists, no enlistment of Wingate and Co. to the colours and no honour roll of fallen Friars. All Greyfriars families were left unscathed by the conflict. Such things were not, in Hamilton's opinion, fit for inclusion in his yarns. His readers are left with the fond memories - so vividly and beautifully described of the old stone, ivy-coloured walls, the ancient elms, the thwack of leather upon willow or boyish shouts from the soccer field on Little Side. Quelch grinding Vergil and deponent verbs into reluctant heads, rags in the noisy corridors and scrumptious (if cholesterol-laden) teas by a roaring study fire. The Mimbles, the tuckshop and the Sixth form green grace the quad and we can hear the clicking of Quelch's typewriter as he produces yet another chapter of his "epic" - the "History of Greyfriars". The Cerberus-like Gosling, who will open the gates for a tip - just as Cerberus will grant ingress to the Underworld for a honey-cake - jealously guards the scholarly walls. Outside are the thick, green woods and fields frequented by tramps and urchins, the fast-flowing Sark and the unchanging localities - Lantham, Courtfield and Friardale. Popper, Tozer, "Grimey", Old Joyce, "Mobby", Rev. Lamb and Uncle Clegg are immune to the ravages of time. On many a dust jacket of Howard Baker volumes appear the apt words of the Belfast Newsletter: "... an unchanging world in which the school clock always stands at ten to three."

Like the great epics of Homer and Vergil, the yarns of Greyfriars have stood the test of time and spanned the generations. Structured, like epic, according to a strict formula, old tales are told and re-told to the undying pleasure of their readers. For Charles Hamilton had the gift of taking a stock set of plots and characters and creating an unending number of yarns. His genius could feed on repetition and, by applying his formula, make each story fresh and new.

The wish expressed in the motto "floreat Greyfriars" seems assured of fulfilment by the brilliant and unique writing of its creator.

Footnotes

1. one significant error in "*Bunterum appropinquat*"; it should read "*Buntero*", since *appropinquat* always takes by the dative case!
2. Like Vergil, Frank Richards selects names to denote a particular significance to the character; that topic is, I fell, worthy of an article of its own.



ROCKFIST ROGAN, R.A.F. - THE BOXING BIGGLES

By Des O'Leary

Although in Biggles W.E. Johns created the most successful of fictional airmen, he had many rivals, at least initially. The story papers of the 1930s produced a number of air heroes, some, like Biggles, appearing in book form also. Among others, the well-known Standish (from Percy F. Westerman) and Scotty (from George E. Rochester) appeared in *Modern Boy*, but it was the *Champion's* Rockfist Rogan who perhaps came closest to Biggles as an equally famous name, at least until that story paper disappeared in 1955.

Compared to the relative wealth of biographical information we now have on Johns's life and books, there is always a problem in finding out about the writers and illustrators of story papers, for the D.C. Thomson 'Big 5' of *Adventure*, *Wizard*, *Rover*, *Skipper* and *Hotspur* were strictly anonymous and *Modern Boy* and *Champion*, while giving some authors' names, also used pseudonyms.

Thankfully, in the case of Rockfist we do know something about his creator and also his most famous illustrator. In a long interview with David Ashford in *Golden Fun Magazine* No. 8, published in 1978, we meet the man behind the Rogan stories. The name always given as their author was "Hal Wilton" but his real name was Frank S. Pepper.

One of those amazingly prolific contributors to boys' fiction in story papers and comics, Frank Pepper, born in 1910, calculated he had written five million words in over 1000 Rockfist Rogan stories. (There were also substitute writers while Pepper was away in the Forces in World War Two.) He also reckoned to have created hundreds of characters for story papers, comics and annuals, as well as contributing to adult publications like *Tit-Bits*, *Answers*, *John Bull* etc. Rockfist was not his only famous character. In the *Champion* we find his "Danny of the Dazzlers", in *Lion* "Captain Condor" and, best-known of all, "Roy of the Rovers", originally in *Tiger*, then in Roy's own comic.

Rockfist Rogan, drawn brilliantly by R. Simmons, made a great impact at his first appearance in *Champion* on October 8th 1938. He starred in that excellent paper until it ceased publication in March 1955 and continued for a time in its successor, the comic *Tiger*.

Rogan's nickname gave a far more vivid impression of the man than did the mere abbreviation of his surname borne by James

Bigglesworth, known to all as Biggles. Apart from being graphic, sharp and memorable, "Rockfist" was a name which was 'punchy' in emphasising his boxing prowess. For in the sports-mad *Champion* flying was not enough. Its heroes had to be energetic practitioners of at least one sport. E.S. Turner in *Boys Will Be Boys* (1948) put it this way: "In the *Champion* just before World War Two, sport grew from a fetish to a frenzy!"

What is most interesting is Pepper's own explanation for what gave him the original motivation to create a flying hero. In his own words: "The counters of Woolworth's at that time were stacked with Yank magazines selling at 6d a time. They had titles like *Warbirds*, *Flying Aces*, *Battlebirds*, *Wings* and similar, all giving the impression that the American Air Force won the First World War for us. I felt we ought to have a counterblast to this in the shape of a British fighter pilot hero and, since *Champion* at that time featured sport in all its stories, that we make him an amateur boxer." (Interview in *Golden Fun*.)

This statement rings bells of recognition in me. W.E. Johns explained the origin of Biggles in very similar words: "I was the Editor of an aviation magazine and needed an air story to counterblast some of the war-flying nonsense that was being imported in the cheap papers." And again we are told by his biographers: "Johns was well aware that people had to turn to American sources for tales of aerial warfare, to American pulp magazines such as *Warbirds*, *Flying Aces*, *Skybirds* and *G2 Battle Aces* . . ." (Both the above quotations from *By Jove Biggles* (1981) by Beresford Ellis and 'Piers Williams', better known as Jenny Schofield.)

Even more interesting is that Pepper makes no mention of Biggles! By 1938 there were already a number of successful books of the adventures of Biggles, and W.E. Johns was publishing these stories in *Modern Boy* before their appearance in book form. With George E. Rochester also frequently present in *Modern Boy* with World War One flying stories, Rockfist Rogan's debut as an R.A.F. pilot in France had distinguished antecedents. If Pepper really was unaware of Biggles, Rochester's 'Scotty' and others, you can be sure that the *Champion's* Editor would be very much aware of what was proving popular in competing story papers.

Initially Pepper had called his hero Bart

Reg Simmonds' best-known portrait of Rockfist (from the 1951 book *Rockfist Rogan, R.A.F.*)



ROCKFIST ROGAN — THE BOXING AIRMAN



Rockfist battling with the giant Indian wrestler

By Hal Wilton

ROCKFIST ROGAN — THE FLYING SPY-HUNTER

Rockfist, working undercover in Nazi Germany, fights a German professional boxer



Rogan, but it was typical of the status of mere authors that, without his knowledge, a member of the editorial staff coined the name 'Rockfist' and it was used in the first story. I think we can agree that this change contributed much to the stories' long-running success.

The first story was a typical fast-moving adventure, with Rockfist plunged at once into action in the air and on the ground. Arriving at St. Amery aerodrome in France during World War One he has the misfortune to suffer a jammed throttle, making his comrades on the ground dash for cover as he tries to land, and putting himself in the C.O.'s bad books. He clashes with a boastful Yank and while fighting him manages to punch on the nose a visiting General who comes upon them unexpectedly! He redeems himself when rescuing his C.O. from the enemy and, more important, meets the two men who are going to accompany him in his future adventures in war and peace. They are Curly Hooper and Archie Streatham. Curly is cheerful, steady and reliable. Archie is a contrast. Curly describes him to his new friend like this: "You'll like Archie Streatham. Looks a dandy. But wait until you see him in the air. Fights like a tiger."

The monoeyed Archie, then, like Lord Bertie Lissie in the Biggles stories, takes his place in the succession of those typically English heroes of fiction, the ineffective-seeming fops who turn out to be as tough as nails and have a quick brain. One can think of the Scarlet Pimpernel and Lord Peter Wimsey among many others whose inane exterior misled so many opponents. Incidentally, Archie is no copy of Lord Bertie Lissie. The former, as we saw, is present in the very first Rogan story in 1938. Lord Bertie makes his debut in *Spitfire Parade* in 1941.

The thought might strike one that Johns could have 'lifted' the character from 'Hal Wilton'? Surely not! As I have just pointed out, English popular fiction loves the type of the 'upper-class twit' whose amusing dialogue conceals a redoubtable character.

His initial adventure soon shows Rockfist's twin talents. With him he has brought boxing gloves "to get some sport while we have the chance", and after his fisticuffs with the unpleasant American and his debut in flying action the story ends with the words destined to be the best summary of his long career: "The new arrival was bent on making a hit, both in the boxing ring and in the air." (Rockfist's first story was thoughtfully reprinted at the end of the *Golden Fun* article already quoted since the original *Champion* of March 8th 1938 would be extremely difficult to find now.)

The lack of probability of an R.A.F. pilot combining an active boxing career with service duties and the many crafty ruses needed to co-

ordinate both activities did not seem to worry the *Champion's* readers. Pepper set such a furious pace in his stories that readers were content to be swept away by the action so vividly described by this experienced author. Rockfist boxed a huge variety of opponents, usually even bigger than himself, but they all, giant Indian wrestlers, German professional boxers - fought by Rockfist in Germany during the war! - Mexican bandits or Nazi spies armed with rapiers, were no match for his mighty fists!

I think Pepper was at his best in these fight descriptions. Take for example his encounter with the giant Indian wrestler:

"In the most murderous, desperate fight Rockfist had ever fought . . . He stuck to boxing but the native fought in all-in style with no holds barred. Rockfist concentrated on trying to tire his opponent . . . The big native's legs were beginning to tire. He went in slinging punches.

It was a fatal mistake . . . The bodyguard struck chopper-like with the edge of his palm. It was a terrible blow and landed on the other side of Rockfist's neck . . . he slumped to the dust . . . With a tremendous effort of will Rockfist had forced himself to his feet . . . Then he hooked a left and right into the native's stomach. One-two! Everything he had went into those punches!

The giant bodyguard jack-knifed under the blows. As his head came down, Rockfist smashed him on the jaw. The native's head wobbled and Rockfist followed up with another punch - and another . . .

The native swayed, threw both arms above his head like a high-diver and plunged full length in the dust." (*Champion* No. 1427.)

In contrast, his flying exploits, though depicted in Pepper's usual rapid style, are, it seems to me, lacking in the authentic detail that a Johns or Rochester could have supplied and, certainly, his descriptions of aircraft are by no means detailed. Although Rockfist suffered defeats in the air - as in his fights - his resilience in evading Nazis on the ground during the war or winning return fights soon restored his air of invincibility, or rather of triumphing over disaster, surely the mark of a true hero.

So what makes Rockfist Rogan a giant figure in air stories? The three slim hard-back volumes of his adventures did not appear until the 1950s and then they were stories reprinted from the *Champion*, (with the titles *Rockfist Rogan R.A.F.*, *Rockfist at the North Pole* and *Rockfist in the Kingdom of the Khan*). Yet even without the advantage of the frequent book publications which Biggles enjoyed Rockfist had luck on his side in the timing of his first appearance. War was again imminent in 1938



The
Greyfriars Club

Home of the Frank Richards Museum & Library



Now in our 21st year of operation and 18th year of the establishment of the **Frank Richards Museum & Library** once again, despite the shadows cast over this previous year by the very sad passing away of our much loved former Editor of the C.D & C.D.A Eric Fayne, your Hon Chairman & Secretary has very great pleasure in extending the **Heartiest Christmas Greetings** to all hobby connoisseurs of Christian goodwill and integrity everywhere - in particular our C.D/C.D.A Editor Mary Cadogan -, all those scores of club members who have written to us over the past year in praise of our 90 page full colour editions of the **Courtfield Newsletter** with all their news, articles and good wishes and also The CD/CDA printers whose work we look forward to so much. The sad passing of our Eric mentioned above, so soon after the passing of our Patron and leading Consultant George Samways (3rd para, page 120 1996 CDA) leaves a gap in our hobby memories of the cheery letters we used to receive from him, some more of which will be printed in our next newsletter, along with dozens of others. The splendid work performed by our present Editor Mary has been shown not only by her work on the C.D. and C.D.A but also on her research for her other published books on the hobby such as her Frank Richards volume, and those of her friend Patricia Craig. Excellent books indeed. In this instance we also must not forget the excellent work done by John Wernham in his Museum Book Press, of so many popular titles. Well done John.

Pressure of work and travelling have taken up much more of our time this year since, following our return from South Africa, Australia and China etc in November 96 as advised in last years C.D.A, we went back again to Singapore and Australia in February and did not get home until 21st March this year to catch up with correspondence from **Friars**. In addition to this we have, since we were asked last year, been acting as co-editors of our monthly Church Magazine, (we were also asked if we would join the Church Council of our Church in Ruislip, and later also in Stevenage when we moved here - both positions we accepted many many years ago) Now, just as we are beginning to catch up, we are again scheduled in November to visit the Far East and **Friars** in Australia and, with all tickets purchased, to stay at Bangkok, Bali, Sydney, Brisbane and Japan. For Japan we have purchased a long term rail travel pass so we can travel all over Japan on the bullet train, and others with no further payment so again please excuse me if I am unable to answer your letters during this time as we shall not be back in England until Feb., '98. As previously our son, **Friar** Roger, and his family will be living at our house during our absence, so that they can have the full use of the of both our own, and the **Frank Richards Library** and the heated indoor pool, as well. Regretfully, due to our commitments above as well as travelling taking up so much of our time and our purpose being fulfilled (for the reasons contained in the 4th para page 120, CDA 1995), future editions of the **Courtfield Newsletter** will only be published 'every now and then' as Sam Smythe used to describe the issues of his lovely Australian 'Golden Hours' hobby magazine.

All club members will be delighted to know that Paul Duval's old boys book shop is still in operation in Pitt Street, Sydney, Australia with all Frank Richards books and Annuals. Indeed the last time we called in on him, he kindly presented me with a very good mint condition Greyfriars Holiday Annual in appreciation for putting the relatives of our late Australian member, **Friar** John Bartholmew, who we met in Rockhampton, in touch with him. Needless to say after Bangkok and Bali we are looking forward to visiting Paul once again in his jam packed old boys book store, rather reminiscent of our late Norman Shaw's treasure trove. In Sydney we shall be staying at our old hotel, the Ramada at Bondi Beach, with our **Friar** son Robert and his wife Margaret and their two children for the weekend before moving back to central Sydney. A week later we will join them in Brisbane for a six week stay before departing for an independent tour of Japan, taking in Tokio, Kyoto, Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Again let me close by wishing you all another exciting and enjoyable read of the next **Courtfield Newsletters** and -

God Bless.



R. F. Scraman
Chairman/Secretary

SEASON'S GREETINGS



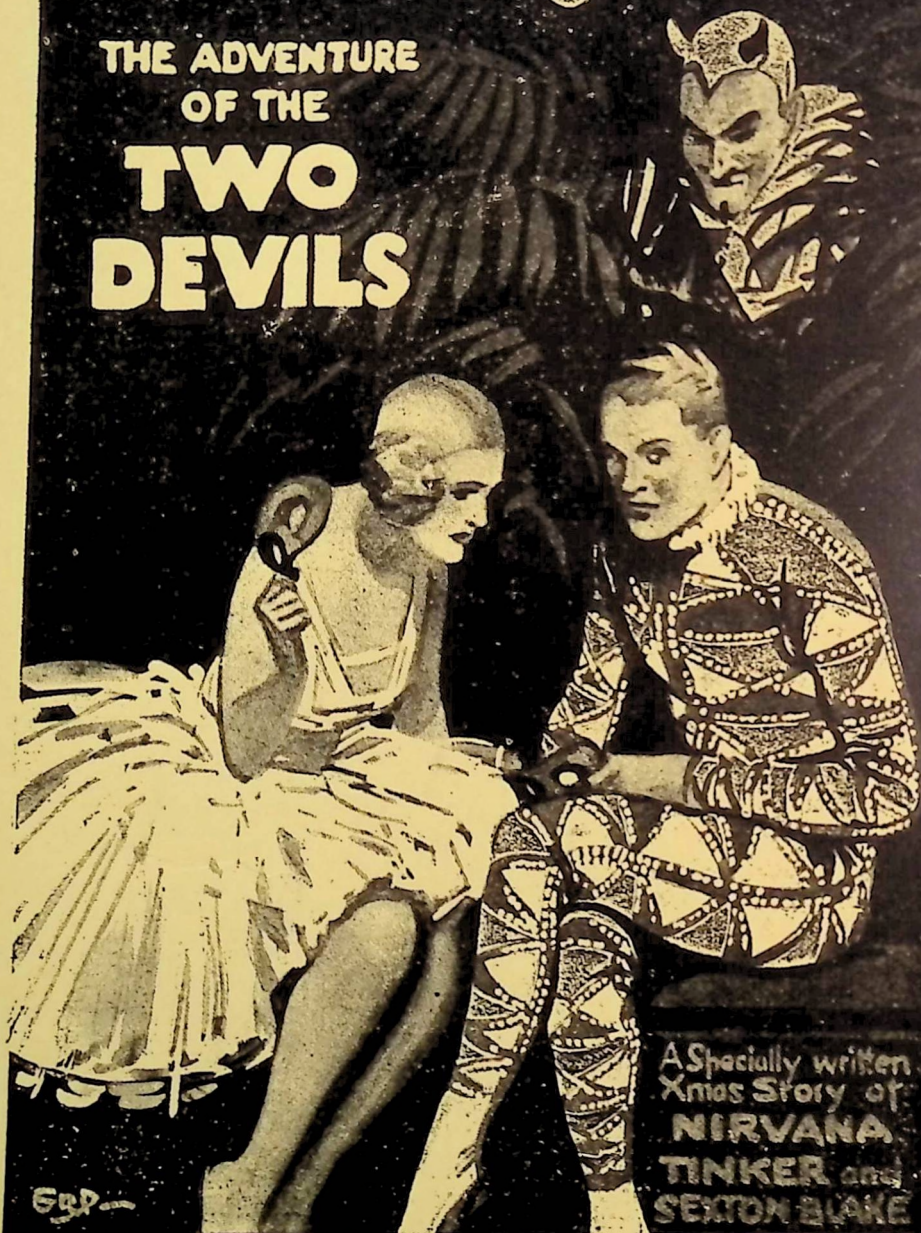
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No. 1,208.

EVERY THURSDAY.

December 11th. 1926.