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A LOOK BACK, DOWN MEMORY LANE

By J. A. WARK

I HAVE ENJOYED immensely my copy of the reprinted *Magnet* Number 1. It brought back happy memories of my schoolboy days and the weekly papers and "hard cover" school stories I used to read. I must confess to being a Frank Richards man every time, but I thought I would examine my stock on hand, and from memory, some of the "hard cover" books I read down the years.

Hylton Cleaver, John Finnemore, Michael Poole, Richard Bird, Harold Avery, Gunby Hadath, Dean F. W. Farrar, and

others, were all read. I think the Finnemore books were my favourites because of the well-described cricket matches in them, but I also enjoyed P. G. Wodehouse's yarns. *The Rease-dale School Mystery*, by a Scot named Smith, was another of my treasures. Alas, I handed it to a chum to read and never saw it again. I would give a lot to have a copy of this work on my shelves once more.

Looking back, I realise how lucky we were, compared with the youth of the present day. All they get, and sadly I must admit

it, want, are stories in picture form. They do not know what they are missing. Rightly, John Wilson, bookseller, wrote,

*For a jollie goode Booke whereon
to looke*

Is better to me than Golde.

MAYBE THE URGE I had to read the Companion Papers and "hard cover" books was pure escapism. When I recall my early schooldays I chuckle at the difference between my lot and the life depicted at boarding schools. I well remember my worthy teacher in the Qualifying Class, year 1920—I went to a Scottish School—saying that if we did not pass this examination we would finish up with a pick-and-shovel job! Often I was told that my relatives were clever boys, but I was a poor fool with no ambition in life other than reading "penny dreadfuls." A friend of mine was constantly kept "up to scratch" by the dominie roaring at him that "his Pa expects."

There was no sparing of the rod, either, and as the desks were arranged in long rows the quickest way an erring pupil could be chastised was for the master to tread over the desks to get at his prey with a belt. Many an escape I had from a flying boot as he took off

over the desks separating him from the culprit.

I often wish that I had a flair for expressing myself better. If I had, I would try my hand at writing about this phase of my life. A great authority on Scotland's Bard, Robert Burns, that teacher, long since gathered to his fathers, was a "character." The escapades we had under him could have filled many issues of *The Magnet*! Modern education would not tolerate his methods, I know, but he could "put it over." If one of us went home complaining of being ill-treated, all the unsympathetic parent would say was, that the punishment must have been deserved!

My father was a fair artist. I could not draw a stroke, and this earned me the belt and a stern reprimand that I was a stupid fellow despite the fact that I saw so much fine art at home. Looking back on it, I realise that the rudiments of English were well and truly planted in me by that dominie's unorthodox methods. At one time I could recite Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* and its Scottish counterpart, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, by heart. Woe betide any of us if we failed to turn in a correct version when asked to stand up and perform.

Happy memories!

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THE MARVEL OF THE MARVEL

By MAURICE KUTNER

IN THE DAYS when the East End of London was alive and vibrant, a certain youthful mind focussed itself upon a particular cinema in the very centre of things called the *Premierland*. At the back of this cinema ran a narrow street, sordid, cheerless, deserted, and forever associated in the youthful mind with Jack the Ripper. A street of bleak warehouses and heavily locked and bolted doors, there was yet one point of interest—a high, heavy, green-painted wooden double gate which, in theory, guarded the rear of the aforesaid cinema from intrusion.

To the adult mind this gate was unassailable, but to the young where-ignorance-is-bliss athlete of ten years of age it was just possible. At the risk of not attaining the age of eleven, a quick scramble up, using certain well-known and well-worn footholds, a heave and a seemingly never-ending drop on the other side, then a palpitating speedy dash across the yard and into a door marked *Gents*. A few moments were allowed to elapse

behind a bolted door, moments of acute listening for any shuffle of alarm, and to permit the thumping in the chest to subside. Thereafter, an apparently careless but wary saunter into the almost impenetrable darkness of the cinema itself. The seats were hard, but this was truly the golden age of the cinema. At what other golden period was it possible to see Pearl White, Charlie Chaplin, and Theda Bara? — and all for free!

Eventually the golden facade began to show cracks, and ominous signs appeared. To help pay the rent, or the commissionaire's wages, teas and cakes began to be sold to those patrons who were capable of concentrating on, and co-ordinating, refreshments and romance, "cuppas" and comedy. Frequently a love scene, or a runaway chase, would be punctuated by the *cra-a-ck* of dropped or trodden-on crockery.

Whether the economics of these breakages were too bad to be borne, or the youthful section of the audience contained far too

many non-paying members, suffice it to state that the *Premierland* closed its doors and eventually re-opened as the Mecca of boxing in the East End. The darkness of the cinema and the flickering silver screen gave place to bright, garish lights, somewhat be-fogged, however, by a heavy-laden atmosphere of stinkaroo cigar and cigarette smoke.

The melodic, romantic strains of *Hearts and Flowers*, and Elgar's *Salut D'Amour*, were superceded by a continuous hum of loud conversation and explosions of coarse laughter, while above the noise and bustle could be heard the unceasing appeals to the inner man: "Peanuts—penny a bag!" and "Who says a luvverly apple?" The whole of the proceedings was presided over by the master of ceremonies, one Buster Cohen (may he rest in peace!), whose expansive smile matched his more than ample waist-line.

THE CIGARS and well-tailored suits which occupied the ring-side seats, like the Corinthian dandies of the bare-knuckle days, would bet on their particular fancies. Their cheers, or jeers, at the referee's decision were often in accordance with the correctness, or otherwise, of their "intuition" or judgement. In those depressed times the

appeals from the ring on behalf of some charity or other were distressingly frequent, and those cigars and well-tailored suits were most generous in their donations.

The cheaper parts were occupied by cloth caps and working clothes, which exuded a caustic wit added to a passing comment on the goings-on, a wit which often was more interesting and entertaining than the proceedings in the roped square itself.

All types of boxing fans were there. The twitchy individual who lived, and probably felt, every blow delivered in the ring, bobbing, ducking, and weaving about in his seat, much to the annoyance of his more stoical neighbours. Or the well-fed, over-weight, and obviously out-of-condition cigar-smoking ring-sider, giving his continuous free advice to the lads in the ring, the burden of which was "Have a go!" and "Get stuck in!", with such insistence that one would infer that for two pins he was quite prepared to climb up into the ring himself and show the young tyros how it should be done.

In these days of the screaming 'sixties of reported hooliganism at various sporting events, when flying bottles and stones appear to be a pleasant adjunct to the rules of the game, it can

truthfully be said that the spectators at the old *Premierland* were innocent of missile-throwing—perhaps a core or two of those “luverly apples,” but nothing more.

The combatants who fought beneath the blazing arc lights were either young battlers with the bright light of ambition in their eyes, or foxy old-timers who, the realisation of their limitations having dulled the bright light long ago and with a reduced enthusiasm for the noble art, floated along, going through the motions of putting up a show until such time as wobbly legs, too-slow reactions, and periodic black-outs forced them to call a halt.

WITH BOXING enjoying a boom period during the first quarter of the century it was natural for boys' weeklies to cater for their readers with a fair proportion of boxing yarns. The *Marvel* weekly was no laggard in this respect, for during and after the first World War Arthur S. Hardy was responsible for numerous tales of the boxing ring concerning Tom Sayers, middle-weight champion of the world; not the Tom Sayers of the bare-knuckle days, but a twentieth century knight-errant.

Like all good stories of local-

lad-makes-good, Tom had, as a boy, begged and starved in the East End of London. Through masterly boxing ability, plus certain “investments,” he had not only risen to the top of his profession but was “reputed to be worth a fortune.” Always prepared to drive a hard bargain, he admitted in one story that his motto was “What I have I hold.” Being the champion with a most businesslike attitude, he usually obtained the best possible price he considered his due. He was, however, most generous in his dealings with old-time boxers down on their luck, and other unfortunates.

During the war our hero had been a flight commander in the R. A. F., had “hundreds” of daring adventures, had been wounded on more than one occasion, and on that account had been released from further military service. Also, wonder of wonders, he was a double V.C.! Although Arthur S. Hardy's enthusiasm for our hero had apparently bubbled over more than somewhat, Tom Sayers, with certain reservations, was still a fine model for the young reader. Always keeping faith with his public, he gave of his genuine best, and was a clean, wholesome sportsman.

To be rejected as unfit for military service and yet be champion

of the world cast more than a slight on the rest of the contenders in the middleweight division. Either they were a poor lot, or the Air Ministry had made a sorry miscalculation. Despite the physical handicaps he was supposed to have suffered from his war service, Tom still had what is known in boxing parlance as a beautiful left hand and a devastating right. Other physical attributes were the usual complement enjoyed by any worthwhile hero: "a splendid stalwart figure, a musical rich but commanding voice, and a handsome face." One or two details knocked slightly askew, maybe, but still handsome.

TOM SAYERS differed from the pugilists of the old *Premierland*, not only in his supposed skill, accomplishments, and affluence, but in his style of living. The palatial home he had set up for himself, The Grange, Wimbledon Common, was a large house surrounded by gardens. Big, handsome iron gates led to marble steps which led into the oak-panelled entrance-hall. In the study book-shelves lined the walls, and The Grange possessed a fully equipped gymnasium, a superb panelled billiard-room, and all the usual modern conveniences.

The staff of this boxer's home-

de-luxe consisted of Mrs. Bethel, housekeeper, a pretty maid, Eva, and a Chinese chauffeur, Chin Chow, who, fully accoutred in smart driving coat and peaked cap, attended to his master's Rolls Royce. War-time restrictions requiring self-sacrifice and denial on the part of every citizen, the aforementioned gardens were attended to by only one man and a boy.

So much for Tom's household; his social life was a little more complex. A member of the fashionable sporting clubs, he hobnobbed, not only with Lords and Honourables, but with those of a much lower caste, too. His maid Eva was quite used to the master bringing down-at-heel and very dubious-looking visitors home with him to The Grange and causing feminine flutters below stairs through the necessary production of impromptu meals.

Being friendly with the upper-crust meant visits to sumptuous restaurants and pleasant dinners at the Savoy Hotel, and besides being normally a pipe smoker, the cigar was also one of his after-dinner weaknesses. This style of living had a softening effect and our hero knew it, for on one occasion, being matched to give an exhibition bout, in aid of charity, with an American middle-weight, Tom decided, as he

always did, to leave nothing to chance, and went into serious training for six weeks to bring himself into a state of fitness, aided by a varied assortment of sparring partners. Six weeks' training for an exhibition bout!

In the morning, while the dew lay heavy on the grass, and the mist hung between the trees, Tom and a crowd of famous boxers could be seen speeding over the common in shorts, running shoes, and sweaters, their faces aglow, as they footed it on a six-mile spin that made every vein tingle, every muscle glow. At the start, when Tom commenced his training, his old friends, those who loved him best, felt anxious, for the war had left its mark upon him. He seemed to tire easily. He was quickly bored. He missed the excitement of his flying. He seemed to find difficulty in concentrating his interest on anything. But like magic he responded to the influence of the exercise. In a week he was a different man, in a fortnight he had become years younger. His voice rang with the old musical note whenever he laughed. His skin was clear and healthy. His eyes flashed with a bright light that told of a newly-born enthusiasm. And so Tom went on with his training until he'd tired all his sparring partners out and conclusively revealed the fact that he was still the best middle-weight boxer in the world.

Tom's intensive training was not misplaced as his American opponent, with an eye on Tom's title, had every intention of administering the K.O. despite the occasion being a "friendly" exhibition spar in aid of charity. The unfortunate patrons got no value for their money: the charity show was a fiasco with Tom winning easily, too easily perhaps, in 40 seconds, despite a damaged wrist sustained during training. Truly the marvel of *The Marvel!*

REFERENCE HAS BEEN made to Tom's "investments." One type was to finance a boxing showman who, having toured the provinces with his booth, wished to "settle down" by opening an arena in direct opposition to an established local hall. A forlorn and tumble-down building which had stood empty for many years is converted at great expense, labour, and materials, and in great detail by the author, into a place fit for the patrons and demonstrators of the noble art. Could this have been part of the war effort? One wonders what the local authorities could have been thinking of.

After the war Tom entered another kind of activity, brought about by periods of boredom. Uncertainty whether to buy a

yacht and sail abroad, tour the East, go exploring or big-game hunting, is resolved by buying a boxing academy in a most insalubrious neighbourhood, the object being to teach young boys the art of self-defence and standing up to the bully. In the belief that being a well-known celebrity would hinder his work, Tom assumes the name of Professor Attwood and uses a disguise which consists of a false moustache, touched-up eyebrows, the passing of a comb through his hair to alter the set of it, the wearing of an old suit, and adopting a deeper tone of voice. Shades of William Wibley!

A word must be said concerning Tom's belief that a disguise was necessary. Mr. Sexton Blake, the famous criminologist of Baker Street, was a well-known face. Most London taxi-drivers knew him by sight and practically every policeman, even on the darkest or foggiest of nights, would accost him with a "Good evening, Mr. Blake." Yet Tom Sayers, the middleweight champion of the world, outside of his immediate circle of acquaintances went through life practically unrecognised even by people interested in boxing.

It is reasonable to assume that the author had a very strong motive for this unlikely state of affairs. It was like dangling a bait

to be nibbled at by a varied assortment of rougs and toughs, ex-jailbirds to whom robbery was the normal procedure. When money was short, as it often was, they became more daring and vicious than usual and were not averse to violence, whether with the cosh or the boot. Tom dealt with such men with an ease delightful to the young reader's heart.

A VIOLINIST or pianist with any sense of responsibility towards his hands would shy from such chores as repairing creaking floorboards or chopping wood, but Tom permitted himself to become involved, not only in side scraps, but in sheer brawls. On one occasion he offered to fight the biggest of three thugs, and allowed himself to meet this criminal character (who, incidentally, was two stone the heavier*) in an unsavoury boxing arena, even with the knowledge that his opponent had packed away into his right-hand glove some lumps of iron that must have been part of the proverbial kitchen sink. Needless to say, our hero won.

This lack of discrimination on Tom's part was forced upon him by the author, who knew full well that young boys who read

* For we North Americans: 28 pounds the heavier.—Editor.

boxing yarns were entitled to their money's-worth and expected fights to take place weekly in one form or another. As champions defend their titles most infrequently, "punch-ups" had to be arranged on an off-the-cuff basis.

THE DESCRIPTIONS given by Arthur S. Hardy of the night of any big fight built up the excitement and atmosphere for the young reader. The trams and motor-buses crowded with boxing fans, the long queues stretching down the street. The milling crowds around the entrances, ticket-holders struggling indignantly to push their way through gaping onlookers and furious at the slow rate of entry. The sudden closing of certain entrance doors in an attempt to prevent a mad rush. The policemen on duty, like patient saints at the gates of Paradise, trying to keep the "pushers and shovers" in some order, with an especial eye on ticket speculators who were asking four times the value of a seat—and getting it!

Inside the hall was all the intensity and noise of men who had looked forward to that

evening for the past week. The swing seats, the floor covered with thin felt, or just bare floorboards, the stretched resinised canvas, and the special seats for the officials and the Press. The gangways, the numerous doors serving as exits according to the demanding rules of safety precautions. The door leading to the dressing rooms set apart for the boxers and their seconds, the bath-rooms and showers in the better equipped establishment, the wash-hand basins and lockers in the less modern "joint." The atmosphere was all there, even to the walls covered with portraits of boxing celebrities and photographs of thrilling moments in famous fights.

BOXING TALES for boys should give examples of pluck, skill, and sportsmanship. The tales of Tom Sayers had these in abundance. After his rise to the top he may not have lived the spartan life and he showed some very human failings. But generous, and a doer of good deeds, he also had the aforesaid cardinal virtues, pluck, skill, and sportsmanship, and with that the reader had to be content.

COOMBE was a quiet, old-world spot, and never produced a crime—it was, in fact, very much behind the times.—Owen Conquest: *Morny's Master-Stroke* in *The Holiday Annual*, 1924.

SIDNEY DREW'S CHING-LUNG STORIES IN PLUCK LIBRARY

TURNING AGAIN to an old favourite of mine, *The Pluck Library* of the years 1915-16, I read the stories written by Sidney Drew about Prince Ching-Lung and the members of the crew of the *S. Y. Swansong*. The first result was the short article in *S. P. C. Number 93* headed *Early Charles Hamilton Story Reprinted in 1916* — which article only referred to the Ching-Lung stories in passing. Here, further attention is given to some of the Ching-Lung tales.

In *A Dead Man's Chest* (*Pluck* Number 564, August 21st, 1915) Prince Ching-Lung's yacht, the *Swansong*, anchors in a small bay while he visits Professor John Dayton Engleford who lives nearby. A note regarding a Spanish ship sunk in the bay centuries ago and recently located by the Professor is "planted" by him on crew-members Barry O'Rooney and Tom Prout. Though dubious about the note they decide to do some diving, there being diving-suits on the yacht. Barry breaks into "song":

"Oh, how fearful the loife of a doiver must be.' Go on."

"'Seekin' for gold,'" sang the

steersman — "'seekin' for gold in the der-hepths of the sea.'"

"Choke it off!" shouted the angry voice of the bo's'n. "You ain't only frightenin' the fish away, souse me, you're frightenin' the poor bait off the 'ooks. . ."

One would think that writing dialogue so it looked like it was supposed to sound would have slowed down Mr. Drew, but to judge by his output he must have grown used to it. It may be doubted if the Linotype operators cared much for it. Not only would they be slowed down — which they might not mind if paid by the hour — but it must have been tedious to set, as I found with the short excerpt given above. There is a great difference between setting straight matter and handling dialogue sprinkled with dropped *gs* and *hs* and mis-spelled words and single quotes inside of double quotes.

Perhaps one more brief excerpt from *A Dead Man's Chest* may be given without bending too much any copyright which may still remain in the stories:

"And I go downs, and if that ugly old slopfessors say anythings, I pull his noses," said Gan-Waga.

"All rightness, Barry O'Lunaticks, yo' needn't troubles. I nots tell Chingy about the dirty wet boxes. Don't yo' be any afraidness. I nots had my dinners yet, and I jolly hungrifuls!"

Sidney Drew's humorous stories are sheer slapstick comedy, from the viewpoint of an adult who has never read them before, or even of one who read them as a youngster and goes back after many years to see what they really are like. But I was surprised to find that, after an initial impatience with them, they seemed to "grow on me" so that I read another, and another, ending with the feeling that there should have been more of them.

KNOWING ABOUT Mr. Drew's Calcroft School stories, although I have not read many of them, and remembering that Prince Ching-Lung once went to school at Calcroft—where did that happen, in *The Boys' Friend*?—it was interesting to find that the author brought this fact into the story *Not In Season* (Pluck Number 553, June 5th, 1915).

The Prince and his followers arrive in Calcroft town by car, and we are told that he had spent a couple of happy terms at Calcroft School. In this story some of the Calcroft juniors are

introduced as un-named "extras" and we meet—of course—Mr. Bloomby, mayor of Calcroft, and his sworn enemy, Councillor Whiffler.

Mr. Bloomby—sixteen times Mayor of Calcroft, and seemingly quite prepared to take that important office for another sixteen years—was short and fat and pallid, but he was a very great man. He was a fish merchant and owned trawlers and fishing smacks. In this story he had also become owner of the local hotel. His rival, Mr. Whiffler, or, rather, Alderman Whiffler, was still flourishing as a cheese merchant. The alderman was also a tremendously great man, but he had never been able to catch up with his rival, whom he hated and despised.

The amount of verbal abuse which Sidney Drew let these two worthies throw at each other is amazing, especially when it is seen that neither of them used any really bad language:

"Benighted bloater! Miserable boiler of lobsters and skinner of hapless eels! Capering wheelk!"

That is Alderman Whiffler addressing Mayor Bloomby.

"A cheesemite! A chunk of cheap gorgonzola! Cheesemite, I defy you!"

And that is Mayor Bloomby's response to Councillor Whiffler. In their battle of words Mr.

Bloomy seemed to be at a disadvantage, there being, apparently, more kinds of fish than there are of cheese the names of which could be used as denigrating epithets.

In the piece about *Pluck* in S. P. C. Number 93 it is stated that Ferrers Lord, the millionaire adventurer, and Rupert Thurston were among "all your old favourites" in the stories. These two actually were among the players in the Ferrers Lord adventure stories, but they are missing from these complete humorous tales in *Pluck*. The regular cast in the Ching-Lung stories: Prince Ching-Lung, apparently wealthy; Captain Tom Prout; Benjamin Maddock, the bo's'n; Barry O'Rooney, seaman; and Gan-Waga, Eskimo.

NOW A FEW WORDS about *Getting Them Out*, the story in *Pluck Library* referred to in S. P. C. Number 93. As stated there, this story is claimed to be original, not a reprint, though the illustrations are by Arthur E. Clarke. The heading of the story also is by Mr. Clarke and the title is hand-lettered, evidently done at the same time as

the picture of which it is a part, the lettering being similar to that of the titles of the Ching-Lung stories which follow.

From all of which it seems that: 1) The Editor was mistaken in claiming the story was original; 2) The title design and pictures had previously been used for another story of the same name in which were incidents similar to those illustrated in this story; or, 3) The story and the illustrations had been in the Editor's hands for several years but not used until now.

AND THE STORY, *A Dead Man's Chest*, how did it turn out? The diver, Tom Prout, found a "fake" chest, but he also found a genuine old chest filled with silver coins, thus turning the tables on the Professor.

In the last issue of *The Pluck Library*, Number 595, March 25th, 1916, it is announced it would be "discontinued for the present as a separate paper." "For the present" has lasted for a very long time and the suspension looks like being permanent. The *Pluck* published in 1922-4 cannot be regarded as a revival of the old *Pluck Library*. — W. H. G.



HARRIETTE P. — Will you kindly refer to the number in which the answer took place? You can hardly be in your right senses. — *The Family Reader*, April 28, 1883. — A customer lost!

AROUND AND ABOUT

By FRANK VERNON LAY

I HAVE ALWAYS ADMIRED *Chums Annual* which contained over the years some of the finest boys' stories ever penned. At one time I was the proud possessor of a complete set—or was I? I have heard of a volume published in the Colonies only which was dated 1942, while all the collections I know of finish at 1941, but no amount of research has so far thrown any further light on this. Perhaps my informant was mistaken.

Again, some years ago a friend in Birmingham referred in a letter to the stories of Sax Rohmer that appeared in *Chums*. They certainly were not in my *Annals* and it was only when some copies of the monthly issues came into my possession that the mystery was solved.

It appears that for some years the weekly and monthly issues incorporated a supplement of eight to twelve pages containing serials as well as single stories. This supplement was numbered in Roman numerals as opposed to the normal numbering of the rest of the pages and was not included in the annual bound volume. The period was around the middle 'twenties and some

of the stories were particularly good. There were two series of Sax Rohmer stories commencing in Number 1629, dated December 1st, 1923, and these ran at least until Number 1635, featuring his famous Dr. Fu Manchu, and again from Number 1681, terminating in Number 1689. This time the stories were the well-known "Si-Fan Mysteries," again featuring Fu Manchu.

In the supplements of mid-1926 the well-known story *The Luck Stone*, written by P. G. Wodehouse in collaboration with his friend W. Townend and originally published in the 1908-9 *Annual* (Volume 17), was reprinted under the title of *The Tear of Allah* but still under the pseudonym Basil Windham.

In the period 1927-29 these supplements seem to have appeared at certain times of the year only. Number 1915 contained the first instalment of Gunby Hadath's story *The New School at Shropp*, illustrated by H. M. Brock. In these supplements there was also a very fine Great War story, by Alfred Edgar, entitled 1918.

As a point of interest, the supplement in Number 1594 was

separately titled *The Comrade* and numbered from Number 1, but how long this was maintained I cannot say. As the pages of *The Comrade* were numbered consecutively from Number 1 onward it possibly was intended that they should be bound as a separate Annual.

Copies of the monthly *Chums* are well worth collecting for the beauty of their coloured covers, and this applies to some extent to *The Captain and Boy's Own Paper*. A lot of the attractiveness of these papers is lost in the Annual form—but, alas, copies of single weekly and monthly issues are far harder to come by than are the Annuals. I have no doubt that many more items of interest remain to be found in these *Chums* supplements.

In *Chums* Number 1742, January 30th, 1926, there is a story entitled *The Silence of Lung* with the author given as S. S. Gordon. In a later issue the Editor apologises and admits the story was actually written by Edmund Burton and Captain Reginald Glossop. Messrs. Burton & Glossop insisted on an apology, but one wonders if other authors took the trouble to ensure similar accuracy. If they didn't, it might explain a lot of mysteries.

SOME TIME AGO I was asked if I could throw any light on the

phrase "sporting his oak," used by Charles Hamilton on many occasions, generally when someone is wanted and finally run to earth in his study "sporting his oak." No amount of consultation of reference volumes has brought results and the many explanations I have been offered range from the ludicrous to the obscene. The most likely, offered by a very erudite friend, is that it was a racing term used just before the Great War and meant "having a breather" or "taking a rest from whatever one was supposed to be doing," but the actual derivation remains obscure. Can anyone throw any light on it?

I AM STILL PLAGUED by the mystery of Fenton Ash who wrote some very fine stories, among them *A Trip to Mars* and *The Black Opal*, all of which attained hard-cover form. I am informed that his publishers state his name was actually F. A. Atkins (notice the initials, F. A.), but recently I had in my possession a very scarce hard-cover book entitled *The Devil-Tree of El Dorado* by Frank Aubrey (F. A. again) inscribed on the fly-leaf "from his sister Florrie Fenton Ash. Frank Aubrey is Fenton Ash." This hard-cover book also appeared some years later as a *Boys' Friend Library*, but I have

not been able to trace its appearance anywhere as an Amalgamated Press serial.

THE ONLY OTHER AUTHOR I can recall from memory whose hard-cover books were published in *The Boys' Friend Library* was Jules Verne with *Dick Sands the Boy Captain* (incidentally the only story to be split into two issues, I believe) and *The Begum's Fortune*, and again I have no knowledge of how this came about. On second thoughts another case does come to mind, that of

Leslie Charteris, whose first Saint story was later reprinted anonymously in *The Boys' Friend Library* under the title of *Crooked Gold* in August, 1929.

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To Sport One's Oak

§ UNDER "OAK" in Funk and Wagnall's *Practical Standard Dictionary* we find:

to sport one's oak, to exclude visitors, as by closing the outer oaken door of a student's apartment; primarily English university slang.

— W. H. G.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

A TRIBUTE by W. O. G. LOFTS

FOR THE FAITHFUL and enthusiastic readers of the old boys' papers, December seems to be making a habit of being an unhappy month. Following the sad event of the death of Charles Hamilton on Christmas Eve, 1961, admirers of Edwy Searles Brooks were greatly saddened and shocked to learn of his sudden death on December 2nd, 1965. His age was seventy-six.

I do not think that any other writer was subjected to two conflicting loyalties, as was Edwy Searles Brooks. First, loyalty to

The Nelson Lee Library and the countless numbers of old readers who used to write to him from all corners of the earth. Many of them would ask him questions about St. Frank's and the school-boy characters he brought so vividly to life. All these questions would be answered, though I believe he was sometimes exasperated at the time spent in doing this; time which could be more usefully—and gainfully—employed on his present-day writing. This, as his adherents well know, represented a totally different kind of fiction.

Mr. Brooks' second loyalty was to these later books, detective stories, in which he excelled—as readers of *The Nelson Lee Library* well remember. He wrote them under the names of Berkeley Grey and Victor Gunn and is famous for the creation of Norman Conquest.

Mr. Brooks' readers were loyal to him—and it is a fact that he was loyal to them. It speaks volumes for his character and integrity that more often than not his loyalty to his old readers won the day. I shall always remember the Sunday a year or two ago when, despite a biting winter day, he attended a London O. B. B. Club meeting to speak to the gathering of old readers. The weather alone might understandably have prevented a man half his age from attending—but Edwy was there and answered questions for several hours, to the great interest and delight of us all.

He had the misfortune to be somewhat overshadowed at times by that other great writer of school stories, Charles Hamilton. Yet Mr. Brooks was a writer of first-class ability in his own right. His creation, St. Frank's School, and its characters were undoubtedly enjoyed by thousands of readers in their day, and they are still avidly read, dissected, and collected by

enthusiasts throughout the world today.

The names of Nipper, Edward Oswald Handforth, William Napoleon Browne, Archie Glen-thorne, Reggie Pitt, and a score of others—not to mention the famous detective himself, Nelson Lee—have become legendary. It is a certainty that as long as there are still readers who remember *The Nelson Lee Library*, Edwy Searles Brooks himself will not be forgotten.

*

Brief Biographical Details

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS was born in South London around 1890. His father was George Brooks, a Congregational minister. Edwy often deplored his unusual Christian name (a Welsh spelling of Edwin), for many people queried whether it was his real name or not. His second Christian name was the surname of one of his grandmothers.

When a boy he moved to Langland Bay, South Wales, where he avidly read *The Magnet* and *The Gem*. An advertisement of his appeared in one of the *Companion Papers*.

His first story was written for a magazine called *Yes or No*, and later he wrote a serial for *The Gem*. Then, due to the thorough grounding he had acquired in

his reading of the St. Jim's and Greyfriars stories, he began writing for *The Gem* and *The Magnet* and supplied many of the substitute stories. Very good they were, too.

Stories by Mr. Brooks also appeared under the pen-names Robert W. Comrade and Norman Greaves. The year 1915 saw the start of *The Nelson Lee Library*, where for the first two years a detective story featuring Nelson Lee and his youthful assistant, Nipper, appeared weekly.

Eventually it was decided to turn the series into a school detective paper and the Director—then W. H. Back—asked Edwy, who had already contributed most of the stories, if he could create a new school.

Mr. Brooks did so, naming the school St. Frank's after his wife Frances (Franky), and all his life he paid unstinting tribute to the great help she had given him in the typing of his stories and suggestions regarding them. He once wrote a St. Frank's story in three hours, and a series of six in one week, when he was going abroad.

It speaks a great deal for his energy and creative ability when it is known that he wrote every single St. Frank's story which appeared in the *Library*, and editors were never at a loss through lack of "copy."

Apart from his St. Frank's output, E. S. B. was a prolific writer in *The Sexton Blake Library* and *The Union Jack*, later *Detective Weekly*. His own creation was Waldo the Wonder Man, and later Waldo's son appeared in the St. Frank's School stories.

Since 1940, when he left the juvenile field of literature and went into adult writing, Mr. Brooks' name became a household word with his Norman Conquest novels.

In appearance Edwy Searles Brooks was a heavily-built man, five feet nine inches in height, and was always very smartly dressed, in modern style and fashion. He had a fresh complexion and sandy-grey hair parted back from his forehead.

The Corner Cupboard: 12

The 2 Flakeys: A Music Hall "Turn"?

THE JANUARY meeting of the Northern Section, Old Boys' Book Club, being held in Leeds, we discussed the problem of Who Were The 2 Flakeys (S. P. C. Number 93) with enjoyment and animation. The St. James Hospital in Leeds, one of

the largest in Europe, covers a large area including the ground once occupied by 5, St. James Place, where The 2 Flakeys had their "permanent address."

In the year 1898 there were ten theatres in Leeds. Of these, only the *Grand* and the *City Varieties* remain and flourish. As all of the theatres were providing weekly performances, and as all except the *Grand* and the *Royal* were of the variety type, there was naturally a large floating population of theatrical performers who were domiciled temporarily in Leeds.

At the back of his self-drawn Christmas card to me, John Jukes, member of the Northern Section, O. B. B. C., and a famous artist whose work has appeared in many comics, wrote: "I think The 2 Flakeys were a music hall turn and that 5, St. James Place was their 'permanent' residence for postal purposes."

This opinion was fully agreed with by all the members who took part in the discussion. Many similar stage names were recalled by our older members: The Skyrockets, The Three Bonzos, The Two Topnotes, and others.

It was also our opinion that the rubber stamp, which was most likely used by the music hall pair for their stationery, was purloined by one of their off-

spring to decorate his copy of *The Boys' Friend*.

We could not agree upon the derivation of "Flakeys," but we think it was most likely a concocted word, such as "Bonzos," "Folderols," and others which may be found on any stage bill of the period. Perhaps they merely smoked the popular Gold Flake cigarettes! Who knows?

— GERRY ALLISON

Menston, Ilkley, Yorks. Jan'y 10th, 1966.

* *

¶ Two readers, A. M. Davidson, of Muchalls, Scotland, and L. M. Allen, Bournemouth, Hants, also wrote suggesting the same explanation for The 2 Flakeys.

* * *

A Book of The Brownies

FROM FAIR LAWN, New Jersey. Amateur Journalist W. F. Haywood wrote in January last:

One of the things I enjoyed in recent S.P.C.s was the group of Brownies. I enjoyed their antics when I was young, and I still think the drawings possess a lot of charm.

It has now been learned that the Brownies date back to long before Mr. Haywood was young, and even to long before I was young. It is rather odd how, soon after something becomes known to one for the first time — such as the identity of the Brownies — one's attention is drawn to it again.

Also in January I received a copy of List Number 201 from Old Authors Farm, booksellers located at Morrisburg, Ontario. Item #830 reads:

The Brownies Book. Palmer Cox. Famous Juvenile. Large. 4to. Perfect. 1887. 1st. Thick. His wonderful plates. Sells \$15. Yours . . . \$6

From this it is apparent that the Brownies were indeed no longer young when I bought those rubber stamps about 1930.

Another item, #977 in the book list:

Jack Harkaway. Two Best Books. 275pp each. 1st Ed. . . . \$3

It is not often that Jack Harkaway is seen in a bookseller's list.

*

I HAVE BEEN supplied with details of Palmer Cox, gathered by Robert Craggs of West Hill, Ontario, from an old *Who's Who*. To quote very briefly: *Palmer Cox, author, artist, born Granby, P.Q., Canada, April 28, 1840. . . . His specialty is original humorous pictures illustrating his own books.* There follows a long list of books beginning in 1875 and ending in 1918. Mr. Craggs informs me that the *Who's Who* biography appeared in 1920 and Palmer Cox died about 1923, aged 83.

—W. H. G.

* * *

When you travel by the train
Stick to ANSWERS might and main!

The Comic Life Serial

SEEING THE INQUIRY by Tom Armitage in S. P. C. Number 93 regarding a serial in *Comic Life*, I checked the few copies I have and found, to my surprise, one that contained an instalment of the serial. I noted this information which I hope will be of interest:

Full title: *When Time Stood Still; or, In a Prehistoric Land.*

First instalment: Number 754, November 30th, 1912.

Author: John G. Rowe.

Characters: Professor Maurice Whalley, a zoological and geological investigator; his daughter, Ethel; Geoffrey Burdett, a young aviator.

Setting: New Guinea or Papua.

The three characters landed in New Guinea by 'plane and were attacked by natives. A number of prehistoric animals appeared and were hostile. Burdett used his rifle to some effect against a thirty foot high *Megalosaurus*, but it was polished off in the nick of time by a native boy with a sling arrangement! In the meantime other beasts destroyed the aircraft, so things appeared to be very sticky at the end of the instalment.

—L. M. ALLEN

THE SERIAL, *When Time Stood Still; or, In a Prehistoric Land*, was in

Comic Life Numbers 754 to 768, November 30th, 1912, to March 8th, 1913. The author was John G. Rowe. Other authors in *Comic Life* included Harry Huntingdon and Richard Randolph—both of them being John Nix Pentelow.

— W. O. G. LOFTS

* * *

The Comic Reader

THIS 20-large-pages coloured-cover litho-printed magazine is concerned with the Comics magazines, but it gives considerable space, with three cover-reproductions, in Number 45, January, 1966, to Old Boys' Books and Magnet Number 1 reprint. A copy of \$45 for 30¢, or 40¢ mailed in an envelope, from Derrill Rothermich, Box 801, Rolla, Missouri 65401, U. S. A.

* * *

Along the Trail

¶ I wish to make two changes in my article on Robin Hood in S.P.C. Number 92: 1) The final sentence of the last complete paragraph on page 327 should read: *The rout of the Genoese crossbowmen at Agincourt is a case in point*; 2) In the last sentence of the article, dealing with the existence of Robin Hood, I should have written *Azores* instead of *Andes*. — H. A. PUCKRIN

¶ Mr. Lofts thought of The 2 Flakeys having been a music hall

turn, but did not refer to it when he failed to find the name in stage papers of the period.

¶ Berkeley Gray is the correct spelling on page 366. Years ago we caught this error in a ms. Now it was our turn to make it.

¶ Out here in the West an alderman is a councillor and a councillor is an alderman, but Alderman Whiffler should not have been given both titles on page 361 of this issue.

¶ Fifty years since March and April, 1916, when war-time paper shortage caused the end of — among others—*Pluck Library*, *The Boys' Realm*, and that young one *The Greyfriars Herald*.

* * *

Sexton Blake Catalogue

AFTER THE expenditure of much time and effort the *Sexton Blake Catalogue* has been published. "It sums up to a magnificent job"—*The Collectors' Digest*. Price 15/- post free from Leonard Packman, 27 Archdale Rd., East Dulwich, London S.E. 22, England.

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