THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

FRANK RICHARDS

CREATOR OF "BILLY BUNTER"

FOR over thirty years thousands of schoolboys — and grown-ups—demanded from their newsagents each week *The Magnet* and *The Gem*, wherein were chronicled the adventures of two schools, Greyfriars and St. Jim's, with their host of characters, including Harry Wharton & Co., Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Tom Merry, and most famous of all, the immortal Billy Bunter

Not until a few years ago was it revealed that these magazines and others were written by one man, Frank Richards, to use his best-known nom-de-plume, who at the height of his career was writing a million and a half words a year, and wrote over sixty million all told. His stories were written each morning, sometimes in Britain, sometimes at Rome, Venice, Nice, Munich or other Continental towns; and his foreign reminiscences include descending into the crater of Vesuvius and hanging on to the outside of the Monte Carlo express

In adventure of this kind, Frank Richards no longer indulges approaching his eightieth year, he nevertheless still the stories which made him us. Frank Richards is the favourite author of a great many persons in all walks of life; his output and continuity have undoubtedly made him a literary phenomenon, and the chapters which give the story of his writings will be immensely interesting to others besides the thousands of "fans" who must comprise the most solid following

10s. 6d. net

Photo by Peter Powell, Broadstairs

FRANK RICHARDS WITH SAMMY

The
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
of
FRANK RICHARDS

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CONTENTS

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Who would not love to wander
With Keats in realms of gold,
With Wordsworth muse and ponder
Upon the lonesome wold ?

With Milton at the portals
Of Heaven itself to sing,
To soar above all mortals
On Shakespeare's mighty wing ?

But these are dreams of glory
That never can come true.
To tell a simple story
Is all that I can do.

And if my tale give pleasure,
And ease the daily task,
And charm an hour of leisure,
Then what more need I ask ?

FRANK RICHARDS

CHAPTER I

FIRST SHOT

FRANK RICHARDS, at seventeen, was at a loose end. He was in the perplexing state of not knowing what he was going to do.

So he was again, by a curious coincidence, at seventy ! But let us not, as the novelists used to say, anticipate.

What Frank was going to do, and to become, was in those days a problem to which a solution had to be found.

Frank was rather good at chess problems : but not at that sort of problem.

He had many ideas — perhaps too many. He wanted to be either an author or a pen-and-ink artist : or both. He had had, from earliest boyhood, a strong desire to go to sea. He had an almost equally strong desire to become a famous cricketer. But chiefly, all the time, he wanted to write. And in fact he did write, though his earliest works, dating from the age of seven, are fortunately lost to humanity.

But though he was never quite himself without a pen in his hand, he hardly dared dream of print.

But he had to do something. It was necessary to live : or at all events it seemed necessary. Covering page after page of foolscap with small neat hand-writing filled up many happy hours : but it produced nothing tangible. Frank was too diffident to indulge more than the faintest hope that it ever would. When it did, he was the most amazed, as well as the most delighted, young person in the universe.

It came about in this wise. An elderly relative put him in touch with a certain Mr. M.

Mr. M. was a publisher and printer — I rather

think that he was a big printer and a small publisher. He had the idea of launching a new Boys' Paper, and was looking round for writers.

There were plenty of writers in 1890 : but they did not crowd the highways and the byways in uncounted hordes, as in these happy latter days. In those old days there was room to move, and a chance for everybody. That was Frank's chance.

He had many doubts. He almost trembled at the thought of his writings coming under the eye of a real live publisher. He hesitated to make the plunge. Still, he made it.

He sorted out a fresh block of foolscap, put a new nib in his pen, and set to work. The veil of the future hid from him the fact that that pen was never to be idle again for ten years : not till it was replaced by the typewriter. He was dubious of the result. But with a pen in his hand, as in later years on the machine, he forgot all doubts, or rather he was impervious to doubt : he lived what he was writing, and was lost to everything else. Doubt could not return till the pen was laid down : and if it returned, it was only to be banished again when the pen was resumed. Frank was always like that when he was writing : deaf and blind to all else. In later days an earthquake shock passed him unheeded while he sat at the typewriter : and in still later and more hectic days, bombs burst, and doodle-bugs whizzed, like the idle wind which he regarded not. While he wrote, the world of his imagination was much more real to him than the humdrum world outside.

So there was Frank, not yet eighteen, writing—not his first story by many a one, but the first that a publisher ever saw. For days he was rather a hermit, writing and writing. And the story grew and grew. And at length it was completed, and despatched to Mr. M.

After it was gone, Frank turned his mind to other things, trying not to think about possible happenings.

But he could not quite help it. He almost took it for granted that his manuscript would either return to the sender, or find a resting-place in a waste-paper basket. Anything else seemed too good to be possible. Yet in the intervals of doubt there were gleams of golden hope. It was a long time ago : but Frank remembers those days as if they were yesterdays.

More than a week elapsed before a letter came—a letter, not a bundle of rejected manuscript. Frank clutched that letter with an eager hand, stared at the style and title of the printer-publisher on the flap, and realised that his fate was in the balance, to be decided by the contents of that envelope. He bolted into his den before he opened it. Was a rejected manuscript to follow that letter ? Or had a miracle happened ?

He shut the door, grabbed the envelope open, and drew out a letter with eager fingers.

There was something folded in the letter.

It was something amazing—entrancing—incredible. It was a slip of engraved paper, with his name written on it, and figures, and a signature. It was, in fact, a cheque—the first he had ever had.

He stared at it. He blinked at it. He almost expected it to fade away like fairy gold.

But there it was !

It was a cheque for Five Guineas—Five Pounds Five Shillings—and it was real. Guineas, in those days, were guineas : not the small change they have since become. This was Golconda ! This was the mines of Mexico and Peru ! This was the treasure of Ali Baba !

And unreal as it seemed, it was real.

Not that it was the cash value of the cheque that delighted Frank. He never was a practical man : and as a boy he was still less practical : he did not think much about the value of money. When, in later days, it came in large quantities, it generally went as easily as it came. Frank did not think of the

things he could buy with that cheque. He did not care whether he bought anything with it or not. That cheque was not mere money. It was a symbol.

It meant that he was going to write. It meant that he was going to live by writing. It meant that he was going to be an author, and touch the stars with his happy head.

No more perplexities about what he was going to do. He was going to write, and write, and write: world without end.

He counted his chickens very early, in the happy way of youth. One swallow might not have made a summer! But, as it happened, that swallow did.

Frank read, at length, the epistle that accompanied the cheque. It was brief and business-like: but it seemed to him to be written in letters of gold.

It stated that his story had been accepted: that a cheque for Five Guineas was enclosed herewith, for which a receipt in due course would oblige: and—most delightful of all!—that Mr. M. would be very pleased to receive further manuscripts.

Frank sat down to write a reply to that epistle, and it was dropped into the post the same afternoon. Needless to say, it stated that Frank would undoubtedly supply the further manuscripts which Mr. M. had said that he would be pleased to receive. Howsoever pleased Mr. M. may have been, he certainly couldn't have been more pleased to receive than Frank was to despatch.

Frank remembers walking down to the pillar-box with his letter to Mr. M. in one hand, the wonderful cheque still clutched in the other. As he came back a young relative met him, and glanced at the slip of paper in his hand.

"What's that?" he asked.

It was a moment of pure joy.

"Oh, that?" said Frank, negligently. "Only a cheque for a story I wrote the other day."

And he walked on—on air—leaving amazement and incredulity behind.

But it all seemed unreal. Frank found it hard to believe in that cheque, though he looked at it every few minutes.

When he went to bed that night, he pinned it up with a drawing pin, at his bed-head, so that it would meet his eyes immediately they opened in the morning. Only thus, he knew, could he be assured on waking that he had not dreamed it.

Since that far-off day, Frank Richards has received some thousands of cheques, from many publishers, and generally for much larger amounts. But the whole lot never gave him such delight. Subsequent cheques were merely money. The first cheque was the key that unlocked Paradise to the Peri.

When the dawn peeped in at his window in the morning, it shone on the cheque, pinned up over his bed. Frank's eyes, opening, glued on it. It was no dream.

No dream—or rather, a dream come true ! Many days elapsed before Frank could make up his mind to part with that cheque, for the prosaic purpose of paying it into a bank.

CHAPTER II

FIRST EDITOR

THE nineties are very far away. How far away they are, Frank does not always find it easy to realise. One day in 1947 he was preparing a script for a broadcast. He had occasion to mention " the eighties." A charming young lady from the B.B.C. who was conning over the script with him, murmured gently, " Shall we say the eighteen-eighties " ? For the first time it dawned on Frank that he was much nearer the nineteen-eighties than the eighteen-ditto.

But those dim old eighties had just ended, and the nineties were setting in, when Frank " commenced author." True he had been writing stories all through the eighteen-eighties — fortunately unpublished.

In these latter days, we don't think much of the Victorian era. No doubt it was, comparatively, a dull time.

No bombs ever fell through our roofs. People discussed whether men would ever fly : few believed that they ever really would. No Victorian ever dreamed of V-bombs, in the worst nightmare.

Radio was still unborn. Any man with a peculiar taste for dubious jesting had to go to the music-halls : it could not be turned on in the home. There were as yet no cars : Juggernaut was dying out in India, and had not yet been introduced into Europe. Films were still in the future : Hollywood unknown.

Cars were coming : radio was coming : movies were coming : battle, murder and sudden death were coming : bombers and doodle-bugs were coming. They were all on their way : but had not yet arrived to shed their blessings on a sleepy old world. The

last decade of Victoria's reign was the calm before the storm.

It seems to Frank Richards that the world was very young and happy in those far-off days.

Once a young relative asked Frank about those nineties. It was rather as if he had been asking him about the Stone Age. He seemed puzzled. He asked, in quite a perplexed way, "But what did you *do*?"

Without films, and radio, and speeding cars, and roaring planes, and death that cometh in the night, it really seemed to the lad that it must have been a strange empty world. It must have been, he said, "slow." He actually grinned when Frank told him how he had been used to dashing about in hansom cabs.

"Good Lord!" he said.

On the other hand, to Frank Richards, looking back, it seems that that forgotten world was full of light, and life, and youth, and hope. Perhaps that is because Frank himself was in that happy state.

Doubtless, fifty years hence, young fellows will ask their elders, "But what did you *do* in the nineteen-fifties? Did planes really crawl about at merely supersonic speeds in your time? Was New York really out of gunshot from Europe? Good Lord!"

The truth is that all these things are only the "light externals" of existence. There is little real difference between one period and another. Life goes on much the same, accommodating itself to varying circumstances.

Anyhow to Frank Richards the closing years of the Victorian era were a Golden Age. The good old Queen still reigned: symbol of peace and security. Wars, certainly, occurred: but they seemed to occur chiefly in the newspapers. It seemed possible, indeed easy, for human beings to live in peace with one another. Bonaparte was forgotten: and Hitler not yet heard of.

But, of course, we had it coming. The wretched

Hitler must have been born about the time Frank was writing his first story. Little did Frank, as his pen raced over the smooth foolscap, dream of the portent that was growing up on the other side of the North Sea.

But it was far from an empty world in those quiet old days. To Frank Richards, at least, the nineties were packed with life and adventure. Was it not an adventure, for a boy not yet eighteen to receive a call from an office in Bouverie Street to interview his first editor ?

For some time matters had gone happily and prosperously. Frank wrote story after story—he does not recall now how many—which the P.M.G. delivered to Mr. M., and with which Mr. M. expressed unbounded satisfaction : apparently as pleased with his author as Frank was with his publisher. But it transpired that Mr. M., whose business was in the North, had an office in London, to which he paid periodic visits. Naturally he desired to see the author with whom he was so satisfied.

Frankperhapswasnot quite sokeen. He was a little shy : he was more than a little diffident. But at the same time, he did want to see a real live publisher. Anyhow as Mr. M. asked him to call, he had to call, and he called.

In these happy days Frank could see his way about, and had never even dreamed of a twinge in his leg. He walked up Fleet Street in a cheery mood, turned into Bouverie Street, and presented himself.

The great man was in the inner office, occupied, and Frank had to wait. While he was waiting another caller came in : a portly gentleman with a bronzed face. Frank learned later that he was a Baronet. This gentleman also sat down to wait till Mr. M. should be at leisure.

When that time came, Frank thought that, as first comer, he was going in. But it was not a case of first come, first served. The claims of the Baronetage outweighed those of a boy in a straw hat. Mr. M.'s

factotum showed in the bronzed gentleman with considerable empressment : and Frank had to wait on.

He waited till the portly one emerged, when he heard a voice from the inner office saying, in quite unctuous tones, " Good-bye, Sir Gilbert." Sir Gilbert departed, and Frank blew in.

Mr. M. was seated at a desk, facing the doorway across it. He was a little man at a big desk. Probably he was about sixty—a tremendous age to Frank in those days.

Now that he is older and wiser, Frank is aware that sixty is next-door to juvenile. Frank was still playing tennis at sixty—of sorts, perhaps. But in his eighteenth year it was quite different somehow. He stepped into the presence of Mr. M., as he might have stepped into that of the Venerable Bede.

Mr. M.'s eye fixed on him. He gave quite a start. He was expecting an author : but not one of so very late a vintage. For a long, long moment he gazed, or rather goggled, at Frank, and then ejaculated :

" You're very young, aren't you ? "

It could not be denied. Frank, undoubtedly, was very young. He could not help it : but there it was ! It was a fault that time would cure : but there, for the moment, it was ! Frank has never forgotten his first editor's first remark. Editors—alas !—never say that to him now !

However, having recovered a little, Mr. M. courteously bade him be seated, and entered into conversation, his keen grey eyes scanning Frank the while. Frank did not know then, though it has dawned on him since, that Mr. M. had some doubts : possibly suspecting that a schoolboy was pulling his leg.

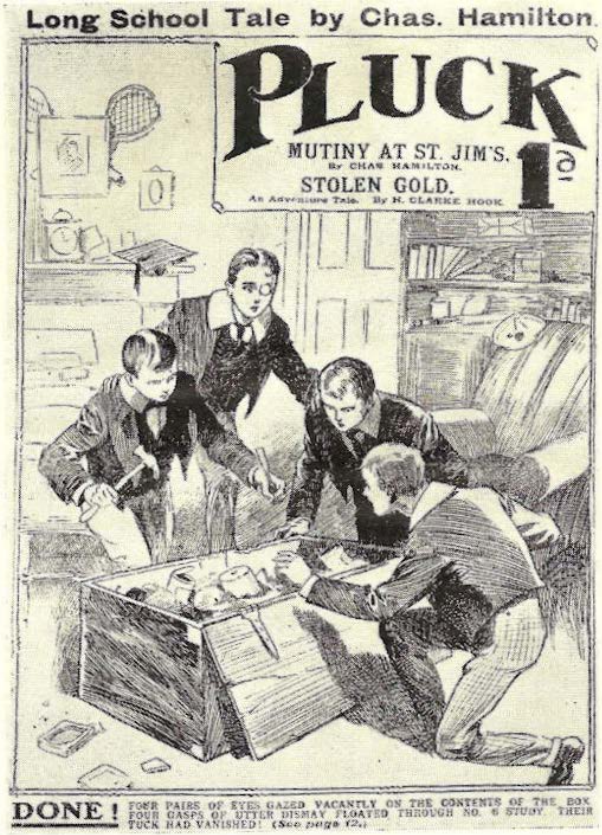
But whatever doubts Mr. M. may have had, they disappeared after a little talk. He was satisfied that the blushing boy really was the author of the stories that had pleased him so much. Then conversation ran on business lines.

Frank's idea of business then—which has not changed

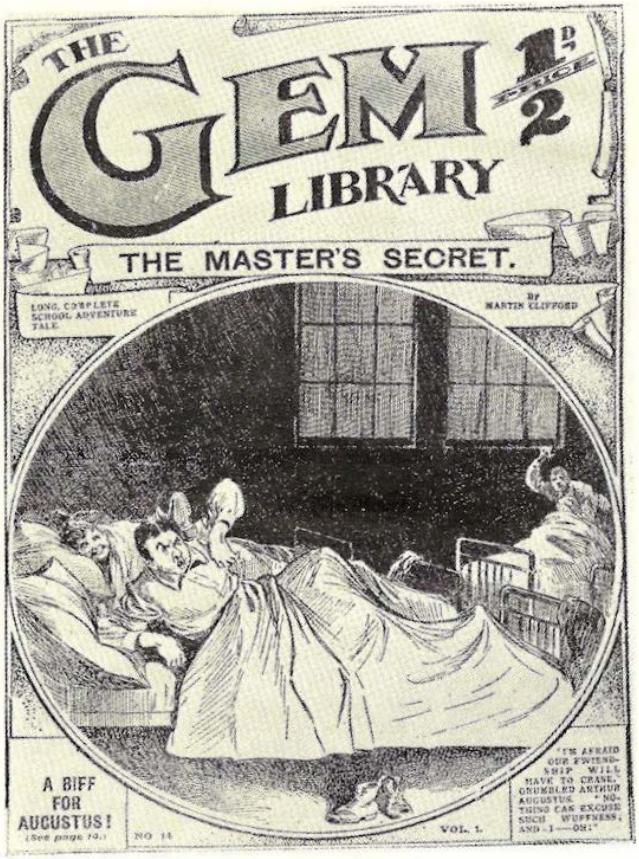
much since—was to let the other man talk as much as he liked, and have things the way he wanted them. He never could get down to brass-tacks in business matters, even when they very seriously concerned his interests. This was natural enough in a boy of eighteen : but it was rather asinine when the boy was thirty or forty years older. But asses, like poets, are born, not made. Yet I am not sure that the innocence of the dove may not work out, in the long run, as prosperously as the wisdom of the serpent. Frank has had to deal with some Gradgrinds in his time, who ground him fairly hard : but he has oftener had to deal with good men and true : and in one case, at least, he found that his interests were very much safer in his publisher's hands than in his own.

Mr. M. was collecting authors for his new paper. Among them was the portly gentleman who had just gone out. Mr. M.'s office seemed to Frank, who loved the open air, a little musty. Mr. M. himself was just a trifle musty. It transpired that he was both publisher and editor, rolled into one : perhaps he was the Master Printer too : Frank doesn't know. But as one of those god-like beings who published books, Frank was more than prepared to regard him with awe. So he could hardly make it out when Mr. M. almost smirked in mentioning that one of the authors he was collecting was a Baronet. Apparently he liked Baronets. He could not have guessed, of course, that Frank regarded a publisher as of infinitely more importance than the whole of the Baronetage : indeed, than the whole of the peerage, from the greatest Duke down to the smallest Baron. Frank would have swopped dozens of Baronets for one publisher. But Frank, if he found Mr. M.'s attitude hard to understand, was quick on the uptake. He looked as impressed as he could, as that seemed to be expected of him.

It was quite a pleasant talk, on the whole, with Mr. M. The outcome was that Frank was to produce



A COPY OF 'PLUCK' CONTAINING
AN EARLY ST. JIM'S STORY



A HALFPENNY 'GEM'
(1907)

more copy. That, of course, was what Frank wanted more than anything else to do. Luckily it was also what Mr. M. wanted. Frank's story was to appear oftener—I think once in three weeks. That was delightful. Obviously he was going, as he had so happily anticipated, to write, and write, and write.

At that time, Frank was very far from foreseeing that some day he would be writing a much longer story every week, and then two every week, with short stories and serials going on all the time. Certainly, he would have been glad to write every week for Mr. M. had he thought of it, and had Mr. M. thought of it. But neither did.

Mr. M. shook hands very cordially with Frank when he left. He seemed to Frank a very nice man, even if a trifle musty. Frank took his leave in cheery spirits : and Fleet Street was paved with gold as he walked away.

A few days later he received a letter from Mr. M.

It stated that, owing to circumstances, the rate of payment for Frank's contributions would be, in future, £4—Four Pounds—instead of £5 5s.—Five Pounds Five Shillings, as heretofore.

Such was Mr. M.'s graceful tribute to his youth and innocence.

CHAPTER III

UPS AND DOWNS !

THIS is the Autobiography of Frank Richards : *ipso facto* that of Martin Clifford, Owen Conquest, and Charles Hamilton. But " how use doth breed a habit in a man." Charles became so accustomed to the name of Frank Richards, that it grew to seem to him like his own. Since he has used that name, he has thought of himself more as Frank than as Charles : though undoubtedly he began as Charles in the earlier days.

He used two or three pen-names, now almost forgotten : but generally his own name. So though he habitually speaks of himself as Frank Richards, and thinks of himself as Frank Richards, it must be understood that for many years he was just Charles.

It was in 1907 that the ' Gem ' came into existence and Charles became Martin Clifford. About a year later followed the ' Magnet,' and Charles and Martin became Frank Richards — later still, all three became Owen Conquest, not to mention Ralph Redway. With all these names to choose among, Charles somehow feels more like Frank Richards than any other. So Frank he is and will remain.

My readers will observe that these memoirs are written chiefly in the third person. Frank, like Stendhal, dislikes the " je's " and the " moi's." He dislikes a page spotted about with aggressive personal pronouns. Indeed he would rather adopt the amazing method of Sully, and write autobiographically in the second person, than spill obtrusive I's. He is still rather a diffident chap.

Judging by fan-mail, readers are more likely to take interest in the ' Gem ' and ' Magnet ' period than

in earlier years. So we will pass lightly over the nineties and the first years of the present century—in fact, cut the cackle and come to the hosses. The briefest sketch will suffice.

Mr. M. lasted a year or two. His mission in life —of course he may have had others!—was to set Frank going, and provide him with some useful experience while he was feeling his feet: getting on his sea-legs, as it were, for his life's voyage. Mr. M. was not often in London: when he was, Charles generally called to see him, first at Bouverie Street, later at another office somewhere in the City.

He was always very affable: and always professed a high opinion of his author: undoubtedly sincere, for was he not the man who exuded the cheques? The fee remained at £4 a time: a much larger sum, of course, then than now: worth perhaps a tenner in our modern money. Having scaled it down once, Mr. M. nobly refrained from giving it another push on the downward path. The author, in the meantime, was growing older: gradually getting rid of the sad handicap of youth.

Having fulfilled his mission, Mr. M. faded out of the picture, at length. His paper ceased to appear: a circumstance partly due, perhaps, to his predilection for baronetic authors. He had told me that he was collecting authors: but he seemed to have collected only one, and that a very juvenile one. Of my own early writings I am not perhaps a judge: but whatever my numbers may have been like, the others were undoubtedly sad stuff. It was surprising that the paper lasted so long, really, with so little jam among so many pills. But it was in the days before the Amalgamated Press overspread the whole horizon like the Genius from the Bottle in the Arabian tale. There was room for everybody in the spacious Victorian days.

Before Mr. M. finally disappeared into the Ewigkeit, however, other publishers had turned up. I think it was in 1895 that I first wrote a story for "Harms-

worth Brothers" : later developed and expanded into the Amalgamated Press. But the connection at that time was rathercasual : sometimes twoor three stories would appear, and then nothing for weeks or months. There were still other fish in the sea : though signs were not wanting that sooner or later the big fish would swallow up most, if not all, of the little fishes.

One publisher was Brett's : a firm that had published boys' papers many, many years before Frank Richards was born. Another was Roberts', who published a multitude of papers : Frank remembers writing some young ladies' romances for them. Another was Trapps and Holmes, for whom Frank did yeoman service. Another, later, was Pearson's. There were others, and others, and others, for whom Frank wrote more or less : a complete list would be about as interesting as the Catalogue of Ships.

Frank was in great luck—as he has since realised, though it was not clear to him at the time—in his early days. People have sometimes asked him about "early struggles." But he never had any. His writing life was indeed rather topsy-turvy. Everything started well, and went on well : whatever he wrote was lapped up, and more was asked for, and more and more and more : and for about half-a-century this seemed a matter of course. But destiny was only lying in wait ! There was a kick coming. Quite a big punch was waiting for Frank all the time, round the corner.

But though the Big Punch held off till Frank was rising seventy, there were "alarums and excursions" every now and then, even in his early lucky days. One publisher, having taken copy from Frank regularly for five years or so, was smitten with the bright idea of republishing the whole lot over again from the beginning : which implied a space of five years before he would want anything more from Frank. Frank is glad to be able to add that after two or three years of this republishing stunt, the paper died : it is not

uncommon for the substance to be lost when a snatch is made at the shadow. The public, like the ancient Athenians, are wont to run after new things, also, they are a good deal more observant than they are always credited with being, and don't like second-hand goods sold as new.

This bright idea on the part of this particular publisher was rather a jolt for a young author then in his early twenties : but that was where his usual luck came in. While he was absorbing that jolt, he was asked to call in Maiden Lane to see the editor of a paper called the 'Big Budget,' published by Pearson's. There he met a plumpish and thirtyish gentleman with very agreeable manners called Wentworth James. After which he wrote for the paper, on and off, for a considerable time.

Meanwhile he was writing now and then for the Carmelite House, then the Harmsworth headquarters, later changed to Fleetway House. Hamilton Edwards, chief editor of many papers, seemed to take a fancy to his writings. Our young author did more and more for him as the years rolled on. There were papers —now long extinct—called 'Marvel,' and 'Pluck,' and 'Union Jack, and 'Boys' Friend,' and 'Realm,' and 'Herald' : most of them under Mr. Edwards' control, and into all of them Charles found his way.

In the course of time, Brett's and Roberts' and Pearson's faded out, and Charles did more and more and more for the Carmelite House. But Trapps and Holmes, like the poet's brook, went on for ever. It was not till after Charles had contacted Percy Griffith at the Carmelite House, that he reluctantly severed all other connections, under pressure from the pushful Percy.

Hamilton Edwards never asked anything of that kind. He was keen on getting Charles's copy into his papers, and that was all. Indeed though Charles met people who groused, his own experience of H. E. was invariably on pleasant lines. The years during which

he wrote for him—chiefly school stories for the 'Herald,' and serials for the 'Realm,'—are happy in his recollection. When his football song, "On the Ball," was published, Edwards kindly put in a spot of publicity for him, which was probably of considerable help: he was a kindly man.

This chapter is rather an *olla podrida*: filled with odds and ends of occurrences before the 'Gem' and 'Magnet' came to light. Before these papers were very old, Frank was writing only for the Amalgamated Press: so he may as well wind up the others and have done with them.

His experiences were often very different with different publishers. One, who shall be nameless, was in the habit of allowing three months to elapse after publication before coughing up his cheque. So it came about that when Frank ceased to write for him, payments were three months in arrear. Frank innocently expected the cheque to arrive. It didn't. After about a year, this did seem to him rather forgetful on the part of that publisher, so one day he rang him up on the telephone. To his astonishment he was told in quite a matter-of fact manner that the money was not going to be paid.

This rather took his breath away.

There was another publisher—a very different one—who owed Frank a moderate sum. It had been overlooked—nobody's fault—such things may happen in the best-regulated editorial offices. Frank, as usual, had let it drift. But one day, as he was passing the end of Maiden Lane, it recurred to his mind, and he dropped in to mention it. Not long afterwards, he received a very nice letter, enclosing a cheque, and apologizing for the inadvertent delay. He preserved that nice letter as a souvenir, and still has it.

Of these two firms, the first shall be nameless: the second—honour to whom honour is due—was Pearson's. Frank, like an ass, had ceased to write for them, when Wentworth James left to start a new

paper on his own. That paper was called the 'Gleam,' and Frank wrote a few things for it.

One more odd end to close this chapter. A certain editor, for whom Frank had done a great deal of writing in the nineties, was offered no less a prize-packet than Billy Bunter. That was years before the 'Magnet' came into existence.

Frank had rather a fancy for his fat creation. In his diffident way, he thought his Bunter not too bad. But that sage editor shook a sage head over Bunter. He did not "see much" in him. He did not think that the readers would care for him. Certainly he did not foresee that, fifty years later, the 'Evening News' would describe Bunter—accurately—as the "Million-Pound Schoolboy."

Frank, easily discouraged, dropped Bunter like a hot potato. In view of subsequent developments, he often calls that episode to mind. Modest as he is, he cannot help thinking that Bunter would have proved rather an asset to an editor whose papers were then going down, and not very long afterwards ceased to exist. Bunter did really become a rather well-known character later. Had that editor seen differently, he might have started on his plump career years earlier.

CHAPTER IV

THE 'GEM'

"TOM MERRY" fans have written innumerable letters to Martin Clifford, about that popular schoolboy, inquiring how, when, and where he came into existence. Tom himself was born with the 'Gem': but his school, St. Jim's, was of earlier date.

In 1906, Mr. H. J. Garrish edited a paper called 'Pluck,' among others, at the old Carmelite House, then the headquarters of the Amalgamated Press. For this paper Charles wrote school stories, and for that purpose evolved St. Jim's. These stories appeared fortnightly for some time.

It was always one of our author's weaknesses that he never could write anything to his own satisfaction, unless it was also to the satisfaction of the person for whom it was written. An adverse word discouraged him unduly. In fact it might almost have been said of him, as of Little Nell, that "the faintest summer breeze was too rough to fan his cheek." This over-sensitiveness sometimes led to a spot of bother: but he could not help it: he could only unfold in the sunshine. A few words and a shake of the head had consigned Billy Bunter to cold storage for years.

It was great good fortune, therefore, that his early St. Jim's numbers fell into the hands of an editor who was pleased to express satisfaction in the most agreeable way, with never a word to which the most touchy author could have taken reasonable or unreasonable exception. So the St. Jim's series was written in a very cheery and happy atmosphere.

The first characters to appear were Blake and Herries and Digby, of Study No. 6 in the School House: with Figgins and Co. of the New House. To

these later, on a suggestion from Mr. Garrish, was added Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

These stories appeared under Charles's own name. Later, in the War years, when potent reasons prevented Martin Clifford from producing copy for a time, they were revised and partly re-written by his hand, including Tom Merry, to run in the 'Gem.' But Tom Merry was not yet born when they saw the light in the columns of 'Pluck.' Nothing would have pleased the author better than to keep the original series going on indefinitely. But that was not to be.

One day he was asked to call at Carmelite House to see Mr. Garrish. How and why he was shown, instead into the office of Mr. Percy Griffith, he did not know. No doubt somebody had pulled the strings. Anyhow, there he found himself, and there he had the happiness—or otherwise—of making the acquaintance of the future editor of 'Gem' and 'Magnet.'

Griffith was a young man of great ability and tremendous vitality. He was not of great stature: but he gave the impression of being large: indeed a little overwhelming. He seemed to fill the room, and to breathe up most of the air in it. A man more unlike Frank himself it would have been difficult to discover anywhere.

Frank must have been, by a year or more, the older of the two: but he felt a good deal as he had felt in earlier days when called into the presence of the head-master.

But Griffith, though so dominating that he took one's breath away, was very pleasant. He could be extremely agreeable when he liked: though there were sometimes occasions when he did not like.

As Frank had called at the Carmelite House in the belief that he was to discuss St. Jim's with Mr. Garrish, he was a little bewildered to find himself discussing a new paper, to be called the 'Gem' with a man he had never seen before. It was not of much use for him

to say anything. Griffith's conversation was largely a one-way traffic. He had little use for interruptions. A nod of assent was all he really needed—if that. A shake of dissent passed unnoticed. He was so accustomed to having his own way, that I verily believe that it never occurred to him that another man might have another way and want to follow it.

In later days, Frank saw a great deal of this vehement and volatile young man. He then adopted a conversational method which produced satisfactory results. One of his hobbies was learning verses by heart—another, memorising master-games of chess. Often, on a long railway journey, he would while away the time by playing over, in his head, wonderful games of Morphy, Andersen, or Kieseritski : especially the "Immortal Game" of the two last-named, which was his favourite. Or he would run through an ode of Keats or Horace, or Fitzgerald's Omar, or Tennyson's Lotus-Eaters, or half a canto from Dante. Now, on many occasions when Percy talked, Frank, not being required to do so, would sit with an expression of earnest attention on his face, playing Andersen-Kieseritski in his head, or inaudibly running over his favourite verses. This device enabled him to keep up quite long conversations without undue fatigue.

However, on the first interview, there was no call for these defensive measures, which came later. Frank was interested in what he had to hear : though being human, he would have liked to make a remark or two occasionally.

The new paper was discussed. It was settled that Frank was to invent a new set of schoolboy characters, for a series of stories to appear once a fortnight, and a pen-name for them to appear under.

It is amusing to recall that this seemed, at the time, rather a large order. Frank was far from foreseeing that ere long he would be writing the 'Gem' every week, with the 'Magnet' alongside. He had, as he then regarded it, plenty to do, with the St. Jim's

stories for Mr. Garrish, serials for Hamilton Edwards, and many thousands of words weekly for Trapps and Holmes, who seemed to want more and more as fast as the Carmelite House wanted more and more. Frank liked the new idea, but he thought that he would like to think it over. It was not quite settled in his own mind when he left : but that cut no ice : it was settled in Percy Griffith's as firmly and irrevocably as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

When Frank had any thinking to do, he headed for water like a duck—he always fancied that he could think better in a boat. So, floating in a boat, he thought it over. The more he thought it over, the better he liked the idea : and the characters began to form in his mind.

The name of the central character was first decided upon : Tom Merry. Actually this very name had once been that of a pen-and-ink artist, whom Frank did not know and had never met, but of whom I think he must have heard. So whether the name of "Tom Merry" was evolved out of his own inner consciousness, or whether it was a sub-conscious recollection of a name he had heard, it would be hard to say.

After Tom Merry came the name of the school —Clavering. Then the names of Tom's chums, Manners and Lowther. With the name came the character, which was always so in the mental processes of Martin Clifford and Frank Richards.

A rather amusing episode, remembered from early days, came into Martin Clifford's mind : and Tom Merry was started as a big growing boy whom a fond aunt persisted in regarding as still a dear little kid, and dressing in velvet and a lace collar. In this guise Tom arrived at school.

However, he soon settled down to be a normal healthy schoolboy, like innumerable boys in real life. The fact that he was just the kind of boy you might meet anywhere was, I think, his chief attraction. He did

not run in dangerous terrorists single-handed : he did not discover German spies posing as waiters : he did not turn out to be the missing heir of the Duke of Bayswater or the Marquis of Colney Hatch. He was just a live healthy boy, and he caught the fancy of average boy reader.

In its first days, the 'Gem' was a sort of mixed grill. Tom Merry appeared fortnightly, written by "Martin Clifford," the pen-name Charles had adopted. Martin came from 'Martin Rattler,' a book by Ballantyne that Charles had read over and over again in boyhood. Clifford came from Bulwer Lytton's 'Paul Clifford.'

Between the Tom Merry numbers appeared other stories written by other authors. But this did not last long. Very soon, Martin Clifford was called into the Presence, and informed that he was to write the 'Gem' every week : Tom Merry all the time.

This he consented to do : or, to speak more accurately, silence was taken for consent. Griffith, as usual, did all the talking : and Martin, also as usual, retired into inner defences in company with Andersen and Kieseritski.

From that date, Tom Merry and Co. made a weekly appearance in the 'Gem.' But soon there came another change.

Griffith announced that he had decided to amalgamate the St. Jim's series in 'Pluck' with the Tom Merry series in the 'Gem.' This almost drove the author to resistance.

He thought it a rotten idea, and disliked mixing up his works in that way. Also it meant a break with Garrish's papers, to which he strongly objected. But, as usual, he was swept away by the torrent. He fancied that Garrish might intervene, and save him from being wholly devoured by the insatiable Percy. But his former editor made no sign : and the pocket-Dictator had his way, as he always did.

So Clavering School was shut down, for some plaus-

ible reason : and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther went to St. Jim's. As they were in the Shell at Clavering, they were placed in that form at their new school. Whereupon readers, whom nothing escaped, wrote to Martin Clifford that hitherto there had been no Shell at St. Jim's, and asking why and wherefore. But it could not be helped : Tom could not be up-graded or down-graded : so St. Jim's, like a mollusc, had to develop a Shell. It sprang up like a mushroom in a night.

This was not the last change. Later came the doubling of the size of the paper, and consequent lengthening of the story.

At this period, Martin Clifford used to call at the Carmelite House twice a week, to listen to the editorial solo, which was called "discussing the stories." Martin's contribution to the discussion was to listen, or to appear to listen, which he patiently did.

Griffith was an extremely clever man, and had seen a good deal of the world, and heard the chimes at midnight. But what he did not know about writing a story would have filled huge volumes. Some of his suggestions were very good : some so absurd that Martin had to be very wary. Many, probably, Martin did not hear at all, his mind being elsewhere. Of one of them Frank Richards has recently been reminded in a rather curious way : but as that has to do with the 'Magnet,' he will leave it for its appropriate chapter.

One very bright idea Griffith had, which took Martin's fancy immensely. He had lived in France, and knew that country and its language well, and he had the idea of starting a boys' paper in Paris—in French, of course, with French characters, the scene laid in a French school. As he was aware, and as Martin later observed for himself, juvenile literature in France was such hopeless trash, that a French 'Gem' could hardly have failed to collar the market. Martin Clifford was to write the stories in French, as he

could easily have done, French having been a second language to him from early boyhood.

But that bright idea never came to anything. Probably there were difficulties in the way. Perhaps Percy's ideas were too bright for the powers higher up. All that came of it was a few dozen pages that Martin wrote by way of experiment: and Raoul—the name chosen for his Gallic hero—never came to life.

Martin was now writing a double-length 'Gem' story every week. He was also writing serials for Hamilton Edwards: the "Cliveden" series was running about that time in the 'Herald,' and Charles, in spite of the persuasive Percy, was still turning out huge chunks of copy for H. J. D. of Trapps and Holmes. But it all came easily enough, and left him plenty of time for music and other things in which he delighted. But then — !

Then the 'Magnet' happened. But that, like Peter McGrawler in Lytton's novel, deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER V

THE 'MAGNET'

MARTIN CLIFFORD knew that something was "on," when he entered Griffith's room at the Carmelite House that afternoon.

He did not know what it was. Certainly he never guessed that Charles, having become Martin, was now about to become Frank also.

But it was plain that there was something unusual in the air. Griffith's expression showed as much. Moreover, he was even more than usually cordial in his manner, which looked as if perhaps he wanted something. Herbert Hinton, the sub-editor, on the other side of the room, had his long legs stretched out, and a sort of anticipative grin on his broad school-boy face.

Martin had been expecting the usual editorial chat, which after a few brief words contributed by him, would degenerate into the usual editorial solo. He was prepared to screen his thoughts, as usual, behind an earnest aspect of attention. But on this occasion, things were not quite as usual.

After a few desultory remarks about the 'Gem,' and its rising tide of readers, the editor came to the point.

"I'm starting a new paper."

To Martin's surprise, he paused for a reply. He did not often play Brutus.

As there was a pause, Martin Clifford put in a word. He did not see how the new paper concerned him, having no idea so far of the editorial intentions. But he evinced a polite interest in the communication. So he said "Yes?" more or less interrogatively.

"Yes!" said Griffith. "It will be called the 'Magnet'."

"Yes?" said Martin, again.

"Much on the same lines as the 'Gem,' though there may be a little difference here and there. They lap up the 'Gem'!" said Griffith, with a beaming smile.

"Still lapping it up?" asked Martin.

"More than ever."

"Their taste——" began Martin. He was going to say "Their taste does them credit." But this mild jest was never completed. It had to remain, like Schubert's symphony, unfinished. Griffith was going on.

"You will write the story," he said. He had it all cut and dried.

"Oh!" said Martin. He began to see light: and to understand what was in the air.

"Can you do the two papers?" asked Griffith.

This was surprising. Never before had the editor asked whether the author "could" do anything. It had seemed hitherto that he regarded this particular author as an inexhaustible reservoir, to be drawn upon *ad libitum*. So, indeed, Charles must have seemed to him, for never so far had he failed to supply anything and everything that was required.

The unusual question rather put Martin Clifford on his mettle. Moreover as he gave himself no time to think, he did not realise what a very big order it was. He replied simply:

"Yes."

His reply was followed by a sudden irrepressible cachinnation from the other side of the room.

Glancing round, he discovered Hinton in the throes of merriment. The idea of one author writing the whole contents of two weekly papers seemed quite to have overcome the sub-editor. Glancing back at Griffith, Martin saw the editorial visage, generally serious, wreathed in a grin. It dawned upon him that neither editor nor sub-editor really deemed the thing quite possible.

Martin, more on his mettle than ever, took it calmly, as a matter of course. Perhaps he was smitten by a slight inward doubt. But he had said "Yes": and what he had said, he had said! So he was going to do it. Griffith took him at his word: and from that moment, there was never any doubt on the subject.

"You'll find a new pen-name," said Griffith. "The 'Magnet' will have its own special author, like the 'Gem.'"

"Quite," agreed Martin.

"When can you let me have the first number?"

"Oh! A few days," answered Martin, negligently.

Without turning his head, he was aware of Hinton on the verge of another explosion. However, this time the sub-editor suppressed it before it escaped.

"'Gem' copy as usual, of course," said Griffith.

"Of course."

"Well," said Griffith, "I shall be very glad to see that first number." Was there the faintest note of dubiety in his voice?

"Right-ho," said Martin, "You'll see it."

Sitting in his hansom—they were hansoms in those days: taxi-cabs were only just beginning to appear on the streets—after leaving Carmelite House, Martin Clifford thought it over. He realised, as he had hardly done at first, that it was rather a big thing that he had undertaken to do.

It would mean that writing, which had hitherto seemed more or less of a pastime, might develop—or degenerate—into something very like work! Martin did not quite like that aspect.

Not that he was lazy, or objected to work in principle. But he did not think that writing ought ever to become work. And he did think that writing which was work to the author to write, might very easily become work to the reader to read. Unless the stream of invention ran freely and naturally, how could it be expected to interest?

But everything, as the French say, will arrange itself.

Hitherto, in spite of incessant and ever-increasing demands for copy, Charles had devoted a day a week to music, never allowing Martin Clifford to encroach on it. He had given the greater part of another day to drawing : though Martin did sometimes get him away from the drawing-board to the typewriter. Some spots of cash had come his way from both these sources : mere trifles compared with the golden stream that flowed from his writing. But he did not want to give them up : and a glimmer of common-sense warned him against putting all his eggs in one basket. But there was only one solution to the present problem : music and drawing had to go by the board, to make room for the ' Magnet.'

That solved the problem, so far as getting the necessary time went. Not wholly satisfactorily, for he felt it a jolt to abandon his piano and his pencil. On the other hand, he reflected that a man cannot serve two masters, much less three : surely one trade was enough for one man to follow. Many years later Frank Richards evolved a new character called "Jack of All Trades," and remembered that he been something in that line himself in early days. But the advent of the ' Magnet ' inevitably made him a Jack of One Trade.

But he had not the slightest anticipation that the ' Gem ' and the ' Magnet ' would go on and on and on for over thirty years. Such an idea never entered his head. He had written many series during the past fifteen years or so, but howsoever long the run, they always came to an end at last. So the present enterprise had a deceptively temporary aspect.

Had Charles been able to see into the far future, very likely he would have turned the ' Magnet ' down on the spot. There was to come a time later, when, with breath-taking suddenness, Frank Richards was to find himself stranded on the beach, and when another string or two to his bow would have saved

him from "*peine forte et dure.*" But when those dark days came, it was too late to take up the forgotten pencil. Who would draw, must not turn his back for thirty years on the drawing-board.

But all this, at the time, was happily hidden by the veil of the future. The matter was settled : the next step was to select a new pen-name : the next, to invent a new set of characters for the new paper,—this as usual, was done drifting in a boat.

Griffith saw no reason why the new series should differ widely from the 'Gem.' The author saw many reasons : and he made it quite different from the start.

First came the new pen-name. This was an important matter to begin with. For names have a great effect, consciously, on an author, as they have unconsciously on everybody. Charles and Martin were one and the same person : but Charles did not write quite like Martin.

Juliet may ask "What's in a name?"—and the simple answer is that there is a very great deal in it. A rose by any other name may smell as sweet : but a scent appeals to the nose, not to the intelligence. Shakespeare himself would assuredly not have asked Juliet's question. He knew. He was not likely to name Falstaff Tommy Jones, or Aubrey de Vere, thinking that it would do just as well. If he ever did really name him Oldcastle, he soon thought better of it.

One has only to try to imagine Beethoven named Schmidt, or Shakespeare named Bert Wilkins, or Monsieur Arouet called Dupont instead of Voltaire, or indeed Romeo called Timothy or Mike, to realise how very much there is in a name. It is said that Cromwell should rightly have been called Williams. That is a good old name, and borne by a friend of mine : but it is certain that Cromwell would never have made a convincing Lord Protector under the name of Oliver Williams. In more recent times, can anyone believe that Adolf Hitler would ever have become the Big Shot under the name of Schickel-

gruber? There is very much indeed in names: both for the impression they make on oneself, and the impression they make on others—chiefly perhaps on oneself.

When Charles wanted a pen-name, his method was to run over names in fiction, and those of relatives and friends, and select a couple that could be suitably combined. He decided upon "Frank Richards" for the 'Magnet'—Frank came from Scott's Frank Osbaldistone, Richards from the name of a relative, pluralized into a surname.

The chief thing was to select a name totally different from those under which he had hitherto written: so that when he used the name, he would feel like a different person, and in consequence write from a somewhat different angle. I have been told—by men who do not write—that all this is fanciful: that a man's work must be the same, whether he be called Cripps or Cholmondeley. This only means that they don't understand. A Briggs aspiring to be a poet would be well-advised to rename himself Vavasour, as he does somewhere in Kingsley.

Be all that as it may, "Frank Richards" was settled upon: a name that later became more familiar to me than my own, and indeed seems to me now to be my own. To relatives, and bankers, and the Inspector of Taxes, I am still Charles Hamilton: to everybody else, including myself, Frank Richards.

Having settled this important—or if you like, unimportant—point, Frank Richards sketched out the new characters for the new series. He drew them from the stores of observation and recollection. Harry Wharton he had known at school, not of course, under that name. Frank Nugent was another life-portrait: and one may as well confess that it was one's own. Billy Bunter, of course, had long been in mind.

As already related, the one and only Bunter had been offered to a certain editor, long before Charles began to write regularly for the Amalgamated Press.

That editor shook a sage head over him, and that was that. Perhaps it was no wonder that that particular publisher's papers dropped out in the race, for surely he was a man of mistakes. Surely Frank Richards may claim that Bunter was a best-seller, in his own line : and still is, though now in book form in these changed days of the mid-century. Bunter had a run of thirty-three years, terminated only by the last War : and his name became known wherever the English language is known. Even in foreign lands he was not unknown : for I well remember hearing a Frenchman in Paris describe someone as "*gros comme le Buntair* !" Billy Bunter "made" the 'Magnet,' as he afterwards "made" the 'Greyfriars Holiday Annual' : and he might just as well have "made" the periodical for which he was originally designed.

But it was only after the lapse of years that Frank ventured to revive Bunter and put him in the 'Magnet.' Even then, he did not develop him fully as he had him in mind. For many numbers, W. G. B. remained a minor character, generally in the background, often little more than a "looker-on in Vienna." Gradually, however, he emerged into the limelight, and at long last practically "stole the show."

So the 'Magnet' came, with Harry Wharton and Co., and Billy Bunter, and the rest of the happy family in the Greyfriars Remove.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had originally appeared in another of Griffith's papers, to which Frank occasionally contributed. He had to cut that paper out : so, being unwilling to lose the dusky nabob, he transferred him to Greyfriars School.

Hurree Singh, with his remarkable flow of English, was derived chiefly from a boyish recollection of Frank's, when he had contacted a smiling, affable, dark-complexioned gentleman, who to his surprise gave him the unusual greeting, "Top of a beautiful morning !" Frank saw his dusky gentleman only once, and for a brief time, one day in the nineties :

but he never forgot the smiling dark face, the flash of white teeth, or the exotic English.

Almost everybody Frank ever met came, sooner or later, into his writing, in one form or another : and I do not think that there ever was a character in ' Gem ' or ' Magnet ' that was wholly imaginary. Having passed through the crucible of Frank's vivid imagination, no doubt they often emerged in an improved or idealized shape.

But Frank's object in making the dusky nabob a member of the " Famous Five " of Greyfriars School was not only to introduce an entertaining character. There was a pill in the jam. Frank did not forget that his young readers were growing up citizens of a great Commonwealth, which included many dusky millions. By making an Indian boy a comrade on equal terms with English schoolboys, Frank felt that he was contributing his mite towards the unity of the Commonwealth, and helping to rid the youthful mind of colour prejudice. And he has reason to believe that he did some good in this direction.

Innumerable readers have asked Frank whether there ever really was a Billy Bunter. Certainly there was : though the original Bunter was divided, like ancient Gaul, into three parts :—derived from at least three different persons. His extensive circumference came from an editorial gentleman who, to Frank's eyes at least, seemed to overflow the editorial chair, and almost the editorial office. His big spectacles were borrowed from a relative of Frank's, who had been wont to peer at him somewhat like an owl, in boyhood days. His celebrated postal-order, which he was always expecting but which seldom came, was a reincarnation of a cheque which a certain person constantly expected but which did not often materialise, and on the strength of which that person was generally anxious to borrow a pound or two.

Other little ways of Bunter's were picked up from a variety of people. Once, for example, Frank was

astonished to hear the most selfish man he had ever known remark "There's at least one thing I can say—I never was selfish!" That went immediately to Bunter. And the fat youth's impenetrable fatuousness was borrowed from a very eminent Victorian public man, whose name it would be tactful not to mention.

The 'Magnet' was a success from the first number. It differed from the 'Gem,' and did not cut into its market. Very many readers took both papers, little dreaming that they were written by one and the same author.

A few very penetrating young gentlemen did "tumble" to it. That could not be helped. Only on a few occasions did Frank hear from a very perspicacious reader who identified Frank and Martin and Charles, all three. This was all the more remarkable, because while Martin was writing the 'Gem,' and Frank the 'Magnet,' Charles was writing serials, and a series, for other papers, very often taken by the same readers. Later, when Charles was writing "King of the Islands" in 'Modern Boy,' only one reader spotted him as Martin and Frank. And only quite recently have I learned of a reader who identified the three of them as "Ralph Redway," who wrote the "Rio Kid." And nobody at all, so far as I know, ever knew that these authors were also "Peter Todd," who chronicled the adventures of that wonderful detective, Herlock Sholmes.

Frank Richards was a busy man in those days. Shaw has told us that after many years, he found the well running dry. That was never Frank's experience. Nevertheless, with so many Richmonds in the field, some spots of bother were bound to accrue.

The three authors generally enjoyed good health—and they still do, in spite of the accumulation of years. They had an indefatigable capacity for writing. Their eyes gave them a hint of trouble now and then, but they had not the faintest idea of what was ultim-

ately to come of it, and hardly heeded it. But they were naturally subject to mortal vicissitudes. If Charles caught a cold, it was inevitable that Martin and Frank should have a cold on the same day. And it was such a trifling matter as a common cold, that led to the first rift in the lute at the Carmelite House.

CHAPTER VI

RIFTS IN THE LUTE

THE 'Gem' and 'Magnet' were always under one editor. In later days, there was an editor of these papers who was the best fellow breathing, with whom Charles and Martin and Frank during twenty years never had a word that was not harmonious. This was the gentleman who, in his sub-editorial days, had unconsciously furnished a model for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He was the third of the dynasty. Altogether there were only three: barring a War *interregnum* when J.N.P. took charge of the papers while editor and sub-editor were on active service.

With Percy, the first editor, there were some spots of bother. With Hinton, the second, there were often arguments. With J.N.P. the stopgap, there was real worry. Frank Richards and Martin Clifford did not glide into a happy haven till the third and best, Maurice Down, sat in the seat of the mighty. Then all was calm and bright.

It was Percy, founder and first editor of the papers, who was in truth the "onlie begetter" of the spots of trouble that came along, and that continued long after he had made his dramatic exit, and disappeared across Atlantic waters.

Percy was, to put it mildly, a pushful person. He pushed too hard, and he pushed too far.

From the middle nineties Charles had written, on and off, for "Harmsworth Brothers," later metamorphosed into the Amalgamated Press. It was about that time, I believe, that that live-wire journal, the 'Daily Mail,' came into existence, of which Frank has been a reader from the first number. But Frank

was interested in such publications only as a reader : his writing belonged to an altogether different department. He has many recollections of those old days. He remembers the time when a great man, afterwards a most tremendous person, became a Baronet, and when, according to a story then current, the office-boy pushed into the Presence with the remark "A rise, Sir Alfred!" But Frank never had anything to do with the Colossus. He saw him—a cat may look at a king. But he, probably, never saw Frank, a mere unit in the myriads under his imperial sway. Frank had but one communication from him, and that was brief, though gracious.

Once, twice perhaps, Frank exchanged a word with another great Personality, who also, in later days, adorned the peerage. All that Frank remembers of him is that he had extremely courteous manners. He could not, of course, have remembered Frank for ten seconds. A man at the Fleetway House told Frank, years afterwards, that this big gun used to read his numbers and chuckle over them, which Frank was too modest to be quite able to believe. The fact is that, so far as Frank remembers, all the men at the Amalgamated Press were good fellows. Even Percy was a good fellow, in his own way. But some of his ways would have exasperated a saint.

Frank has had to do with many editors during an unusually long life. Almost all of them were quite nice and quite reasonable. Hamilton Edwards was said by some to verge on the dictatorial, but Frank never found him so : his recollections of H. E. are wholly agreeable. Probably he did not see him more than a dozen times, for Edwards was not always dragging an author to his den for chin solos. Edwards, at least to Frank, always showed a kind consideration that made for ease and comfort. Of his wild adventures in Ireland in the War time it is not for me to speak. Frank never saw him after he left the A.P. From editors like Edwards and Garrish, it was

a change, and a very queer one, to Percy Griffith.

Percy never meant any harm: he was a good-hearted fellow. He only did a great deal without meaning any. He was so immutably fixed on getting what he wanted, that he really had no time to bother about anything else.

One day he handed Martin Clifford a partly-written manuscript. Looking at it in considerable surprise, Martin saw that it was a story about Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's, which he had never seen before. As the creator and author of Tom Merry, Martin naturally had never expected to see a Tom Merry story by another hand. He looked at the typescript, and looked at the editor, who was as cheery and breezy as ever.

The editor explained. A friend of his had tried his hand at a Tom Merry story. This man was a well-known newspaper correspondent, whose work Martin had seen in London newspapers: chiefly I think in the 'Daily Mail.' Apparently he had a fancy for writing a school story. The man was quite a good writer in his own line, and I believe had some distinction as a War correspondent, in those days of Lilliputian wars. But his idea of a school story was appalling.

Here I may mention that Frank Richards is not good at dates. He remembers almost everything else. Remarks made to him in 1880 are quite fresh in his retentive memory. But he wouldn't like to declare positively that they were made in 1880, and not in 1879 or 1881. He remembers verses by the thousand:—master-games of chess by the dozen. But his mind seems to jib at precise dates. He is disposed to refer to dates as Lord Randolph referred to dots. So he cannot give the date of that 'Gem' number. It could be sorted out, of course, in the files at the British Museum, if anybody wanted to know: which seems improbable. As a clue, it was a story in which Tom Merry and Co. were somehow carried off in a balloon.

"Will you go through that, and knock it into shape here and there?" asked Percy, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

"But . . . !" said Martin, dazedly.

"A touch here and a touch there . . ."

"But . . . !"

"You will get half the cheque!" said Griffith.

He did not seem to hear the remark Martin made about the cheque. It was an emphatic remark.

It is painful to relate that Martin Clifford gave in. It seemed only an isolated case: he never dreamed that it was to be taken as a precedent. He was sure that Percy's newspaper friend did not realise that he was a cheeky interloper, and he hated hurting anybody's feelings. Percy could not have let the man know how the author would regard his meddling. Percy indeed did not know himself, until the author told him. And even then he did not understand.

Martin, as stated, hated to hurt a man's feelings, even those of a man he did not know, who was butting in where he was not wanted. He repressed a natural desire to walk round to a different part of the building with that typescript, and chuck it at the interloper's head. Taking it for granted that this was to be an unique experience, he gave in, though with deep feelings, took the wretched stuff away with him, and doctored it sufficiently to make it readable.

But that experience did not prove unique.

The real trouble began when Frank, and inevitably Martin also, caught a cold. Again the exact date escapes. It could be given, if Frank still had his old collection of 'Gems' and 'Magnets': but in 1940 most of that collection was handed over to the salvage, to help relieve the paper shortage. Any curious reader must be referred, as before, to the British Museum. Not that it matters.

Frank, at that time, was writing as if for a wager, He did not wholly like giving up so much time to it, much as he liked writing. He was keeping 'Gem'

and ' Magnet ' and other things going. It must have been about this time that Frank, at an urgent request from H. J. D. wrote an 18,000-word story in a single day : a *tour-de-force* that he has never repeated or wanted to repeat. But when Frank and Martin were sneezing in chorus, they had to slacken down.

In agreeing to carry so much on his shoulders, he had not considered such every-day mischances as this. Neither, probably, had Percy. But when the mischance materialised, Percy had a remedy, if Frank had not.

The horn of plenty, for the moment, ran dry. Frank had often been on the edge of time. He really had other interests in life. It was somewhere about this time that he first heard Tetrazzini, and was enchanted —though it is Melba whose golden voice lingers most magically in his memory. It is as indelibly inscribed there as on a gramophone record. He can still hear it when he chooses : and he often chooses—' Caro nome ' or ' Ah fors' è lui ' : turning a tawdry opera into a work of magic.

Frank in those days haunted Covent Garden in the opera season, and this was not always good for the typewriter. Often he got home very late : especially on " Ring " nights. Late nights generally mean late mornings. Martin and Frank often had to push, in order not to be left behind by the machines. As a rule they were lucky. But a cold in the head did it !

Percy's unexpected and astonishing remedy was a " substitute " author : a strange creature of which Frank had never previously heard. A story not written by Martin Clifford was put into the ' Gem ' : he never knew who had written it, but guessed, from the literary style, that it was probably the office-boy.

To this in itself Martin could hardly have objected. He could not have asked that a weekly paper should fail to appear, because an author had a cold in the nose. Had Percy reverted to his former system of alternate authors, and put in a different story by a different hand, Martin of course would have had no

kick coming. That in fact was what he would naturally have expected.

But that was not the method. The "substitute" story was written round Tom Merry, just as if Martin had written it. Unkindest cut of all, it was published under Martin Clifford's name.

Martin Clifford's feelings, at this, were very, very, very deep. They are still so, when he thinks of the incident, and to what it led in later days. And indeed, when Frank Richards wrote the first sketch of these memoirs, in London in the War time, to a happy accompaniment of bombs and doodle-bugs, he rather let himself go on this subject: and covered several pages with it: all of which, reading it over after the lapse of years, he has decided to delete. Why dwell upon unpleasant things, when there are so many pleasant things on which one may dwell? So long as Percy's amazing idea of editorship, and its outcome, irked him, Frank could not help feeling sore: but it is all over and done with, and he has long ago forgiven if not forgotten. So that is that.

But it did undoubtedly cause a rift in the lute. He wished from the bottom of his heart that Garrish had never passed him on to that remarkable editor: yet all the time he rather liked Percy, who, off the editorial desk, was not at all a bad chap, in his own way. He could not help feeling, however, that the less he saw of his editor, the more likely they were to remain on civil terms.

There was still balm in Gilead. At this time Frank had a flat in London and a bungalow in rural regions. He rather preferred the latter, as when he was sixty miles away the benevolent Percy conceded that he should call at Carmelite House only once instead of twice a week. But it occurred to Frank that there were other places still further off, and therefore desirable.

He had always had a strong desire, like Lord Lovell in the ballad, "strange countries for to see." He had

wandered about his own country and the adjacent continent. Now he went to Paris to stay : taking the bit between his teeth, as it were : and cutting off those calls at Carmelite House for whole happy weeks.

So Frank Richards and Martin Clifford packed for Paris, where they settled in the Etoile quarter, arriving in happy time to get mixed up in the Ferrer riots : so exciting at the time, though now so utterly forgotten.

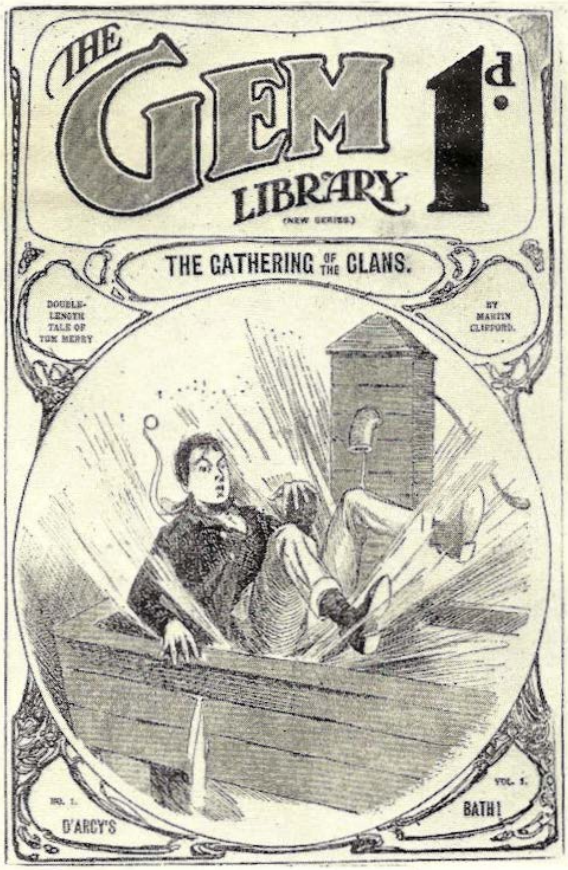
CHAPTER VII

PARIS

WHEN Frank Richards began to write these memoirs, he soon realised that it must be a matter of selection, indeed compression : otherwise his autobiography would have run to the length of Jacques Casanova's, and filled ten volumes instead of one. Many of his experiences have been used in the ' Gem ' and the ' Magnet ' : others are even now coming in useful for his latest character, 'Jack of All Trades.' Frank had a facile pen, when he used that implement —from 1890 to 1900—he is still more facile on the typewriter : and could easily run this book to a length for which no publisher would stand. He could be as discursive as Scott : but, taking warning by that great man, he will refrain. Having arrived at the period of the Ferrer riots in Paris, he was tempted to discurse : instead of which, he will skip : for which no doubt his readers will feel duly grateful.

Probably not one reader in ten has ever heard of Ferrer, or would care to hear about him, or his execution, or the terrific uproar it caused. A few words will be enough, if not more than enough.

Frank, probably, had never heard of Ferrer, till the poor man was shot. The Spanish Government of that time seemed to be of the opinion of Lord Essex, that " stone-dead hath no fellow." Sympathisers in many places felt the deepest indignation, and signified the same in the usual way. In Paris, a roaring mob set out to sack the Spanish Embassy, and the authorities did not find it easy to keep them in check. Frank was not likely to remain indoors when the " *vox populi* " sounded as if Ninety-Three had come back again. In



THE FIRST PENNY 'GEM'
(1908)

THE LAST 'GEM'
(1939)

company with a friend, a gigantic Swede, he set forth to see what was to be seen.

He remembers it all as if it happened yesterday. He was swept away with his companion in the midst of a yelling mob. The military barred them off from their intended destination, and kept them on the move. Every minute they looked like tackling the military in deadly earnest. Soldiers on the pavements kept the crowds, with difficulty, to the roadway. If you stepped on the pavement, you were barked at to step back: if you did not step fast enough, you received first-aid. Most of the crowd looked very ugly: but peaceful citizens among them, like Frank, were by no means anxious for battle, murder, and sudden death, to begin.

From moment to moment, there was an alarm that the soldiers were going to fire, and the mob swayed, and yelled, and roared, and whirled. But they never did fire: not, at least, so far as Frank knows. What may have happened in other parts of Paris that wild night he does not know, being no Asmodeus. They did not fire where Frank was. Had they done so they could scarcely have failed to get his companion, the Swede, who fairly soared over the crowd, and must have been a splendid mark. Frank can still hear a little fat man who clung to his elbow to keep his footing, squeaking from minute to minute, "On nous assomme! on nous assomme!" Frank had never seen the little man before: he had never seen Frank: but he clung to Frank's elbow as his only visible means of support. Why he chose Frank's elbow, among so many, I cannot say, unless it was because Frank did not shake him off, as others might have done. Frank held on to the Swedish giant's arm on one side: on the other, the little fat man clung to Frank like a limpet to a rock: with incessant squeaks. The Swede was nearly a foot taller than Frank: Frank was nearly a foot taller than the fat man: and thus they grew in beauty side by side, and whirled and swayed and

stumbled in the whirling, swaying, stumbling mob. Frank never let go his Swede : the little fat man never let go Frank : they were more inseparable than the Three Musketeers.

But, like so many popular tumults, it all ended in noise. The Spanish Embassy was never sacked : the soldiers never fired—at least so far as Frank knows. The little man was never " assommé " : neither, I believe, was anyone else. Some priests were chased : I remember seeing them disappear rapidly round corners like black night-birds. And that was all : there was enough noise to have taken a dozen Jerichos : but it all fizzed out in noise. And that, I am sure the reader will agree, is enough about the Ferrer riots in Paris in the year of grace 1909. Anyone further interested is referred to the famous institution afore-mentioned, in Bloomsbury, where in musty old newspaper files he may read about it by the yard, if not by the league.

Apart from this episode, all was peace and plenty in Paris, and Frank found it a delightful place. He felt that he would like to live there for ever. But he often felt like that in pleasant places. He felt like that in Venice, and at Pompeii, and at Capri, and in the Austrian Tyrol, and on Lake Lugano and Lake Como, and at Monte Carlo. He never felt, in those happy days, that he could have too much of a good thing.

He explored a few spots that would, perhaps, have been better left unvisited. But a man who writes must acquaint himself with the world he lives in, even on its seamy side. Moreover, in his travelling as in his writing life, he generally let others have their way, did what he was wanted to do, and went where he was wanted to go.

The " night " life of Paris had no attraction for him whatever. He yawned his head off at " Le Néant " and " L'Enfer " and other such dreary places. Indeed one of his most ludicrous recollections of Paris is that of seeing English and American tourists, quite respect-

able people, trying to look reckless and wicked, when it was obvious that they were neither the one nor the other.

But he liked taking small people to Luna Park : and one of his happiest days was that on which he shepherded a party of such to the Jardin des Plantes.

Paris caters for all comers. You can enjoy the sunshine and the vivifying air, the chattering crowds, the book-shops, good theatres and good music. Or you can maunder into dismal dives where the only attraction is a laboured viciousness, largely got up for foreigners who expect to be wicked in Paris. "You pays your money and you takes your choice."

All the while, Remington was clicking off the daily quota, which Frank, once or twice a week, walked down to the Poste to "recommander."

Wherever Martin Clifford went, Tom Merry was sure to go : and the scene of some of the 'Gems' at that time was laid in France. Many things that happened to Martin happened in turn to Tom : sometimes a 'Gem' chapter was little more than a description of occurrences of the previous day, experienced or observed. Frank and Martin have, in fact, done a great deal of autobiographical writing in their time, but it was in the form of 'Gem' and 'Magnet' numbers.

How often Frank has stayed in, or passed through, Paris, since the far-off year 1909, he can hardly recall : but that, his first prolonged stay in the delightful city, is the brightest in his memory.

Among other things, he was acquiring some knowledge of French school life, with a view to that great idea of Percy's—a French 'Gem.' But that bright idea faded out. Perhaps that was just as well, for where Frank would have found the time to write a French 'Gem' as well as an English one, and a 'Magnet,' is a mystery that would want a lot of solving.

This is not a travel book : and Frank does not

intend to give long descriptions of places and people that have been described over and over again. But he will mention just one item.

Alone, or almost alone, among writing fellows who have lived in Paris, Frank Richards doesn't know a charming little restaurant, off the beaten track, where a wonderfully-cooked dinner may be had at an absurdly moderate price, with a good sound old wine at a few francs the bottle, and where Henri, the quaint old waiter, bows with his old-fashioned courtly grace on receipt of a moderate *pourboire*—the name of which restaurant he will not disclose, lest it become over-run by the vulgar crowd of tourists, spoiling its rare old charm for the chosen few.

Frank knew all about that fascinating little restaurant, long before he ever set foot in Paris. He had come across it again, and again, and yet again, in pages of travel and fiction.

Sometimes it was in Vienna : but oftener in Paris. Indeed Frank once made a calculation, that, according to the many writers from whom he had derived information on the subject, there existed in Paris alone no fewer than a hundred such charming little restaurants, off the beaten track, whose proprietors, perhaps possessing private means, were prepared to carry on for the sole behoof of a chosen few, disdaining the common herd and their rascal counters. In each and every case, the man who knew would not disclose the name of the place, lest it should be over-run by tourists, spoiling its old-world charm for its happy chosen clientèle.

Frank explored Paris fairly thoroughly : up and down and round about. But he never spotted that charming restaurant—not one of them amongst so many. He came to know Paris pretty well. Nevertheless, he confesses that he knows not a charming little restaurant, off the beaten track, where a wonderfully-cooked dinner may be had at an absurdly moderate price, with a good sound old wine at a few francs

the bottle, and where Henri, or Adolphe, or Jean, the quaint old waiter, bows with his old-fashioned courtly grace in acknowledgment of a moderate *pourboire.* Frank believes that he is almost the only writing chap with Parisian affiliations who knows it not. And if he did, he wouldn't keep it dark like all the others—he would disclose the name here and now, and let the tourists rush in !

Sunny weeks in Paris flew by all too quickly. And Frank and Martin came back to London, and Fleet Street, and Percy.

CHAPTER VIII

CONVERSATION PIECE

THERE will not be much more in Frank Richards' memoirs about Percy Griffith. The following year he was gone. So Frank may as well wind him up in this chapter.

The regular calls at Carmelite House were resumed. Once more Frank sat and played chess in his head, or recited verses *sotto voce*, while the editorial solo was on the air.

But Frank's eyes were open : and they were more useful in those days than in these. Perhaps it was rather naughty of him : but Frank never could resist turning people into copy.

He never saw Maurice Down without noting some fresh detail of elegance to be passed on to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Herbert Hinton had long ago become Figgins of the Fourth, without being in the least aware of it. Frank had only to visualize them at the appropriate age, and there they were.

It was the same with Johnny Bull. Frank never met Johnny till that son of Yorkshire's spacious county had turned forty. But he knew, or at least he was sure that he knew, just what Johnny had been like at fifteen.

Characters "grew" in Frank's hands. They became more and more like themselves, if I may put it so.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy owed his existence to a suggestion from H. J. Garrish. Frank had never seen Down at that time : but when he did see him, he simply said to himself the one word "Gussy." And from that hour Arthur Augustus acquired new life. I am permitted to mention this, for afterwards—long afterwards—Maurice Down learned what the author

had done, and was quite good-tempered about it. In the same way, George Figgins had been born before Frank met Herbert Hinton. But when he did meet him, there was George Figgins. Really it was rather a compliment: for surely Figgins was a very nice chap. Martin Clifford always liked him, and so did his readers: especially, for some reason, girl readers.

Frank Richards is taking it for granted that his present readers—if any—have been readers at some time or other of the 'Magnet' and the 'Gem,' or of the Bunter Books and the Tom Merry Books. It is really for such readers that he is writing. Others, he imagines, will hardly want to look at it. So when he mentions Tom Merry, or Figgins, or Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, or Harry Wharton or Billy Bunter, he assumes that you know all about these interesting youths, and that explanations are unnecessary.

Almost everybody who came his way furnished him with a character, or details for the adornment of a character. But he will not always mention the names of his models. Some of the originals might not be flattered.

Ferrers Locke was drawn from no less a personage than an Amalgamated Press director—an incisive, clear-cut sort of man who looked the part. In many respects, of course, Ferrers Locke, like all the marvellous detectives of these days, could trace his descent back to Sherlock Holmes: and through Sherlock Holmes, to Auguste Dupin. All such detectives are, in fact, the sons of Sherlock, grandsons of Dupin: and great-grandsons, perhaps, of Zadig. There were giants in the earth in those old days, who laid waste many fields, and left nothing for their successors but gleaning. Frank claims more originality for his "Schoolboy Detective," who appeared in the pages of 'Modern Boy.' But no detective since Conan Doyle has been much more than a variation on the original theme. Edgar Poe produced him, possibly with a spot of assistance from Voltaire: Doyle

popularized him: since when innumerable writers have been busy turning the old coat, with more or less success. So Frank leaves Ferrers Locke at that.

Skinner and Snoop, in the 'Magnet,' were drawn from life: which they never knew, and will never guess. Even Fisher T. Fish was a life-portrait—no doubt with a little artistic exaggeration. In real life he was what the Americans call a "drummer." It is rather hard on Frank that some have supposed, from Fisher T. Fish, that he had some sort of prejudice on the subject of our friends and allies across the Atlantic. Nothing could be further from the truth. Frank really loves Americans, and admires their great country almost as much as they do. He has drawn quite nice American boys. But they are forgotten, and Fisher T. Fish is remembered. That is all there is to it.

Oddly enough, Percy never appeared in either 'Gem' or 'Magnet': though he had a very strong character that impressed itself very much on Frank. He came into use later, though I will not say where or when.

It was one of Percy's foibles to suggest "plots" for 'Magnets' and 'Gems.' Sometimes they were not too bad: when they were, the author contrived to forget them. Sometimes, perhaps, he never even heard them! Percy must have made myriads of remarks that Frank never heard. But one of these "plots" was very curiously recalled to Frank's mind recently. A writer in 'The Times' referred to Harry Wharton's habit of fingering a loose button when he desired to concentrate. It was Percy who related that story to Frank, and asked him to make a 'Magnet' of it. That 'Magnet' was published in 1908 or 1909: so it may be imagined that Frank sat up and took notice on seeing it referred to in the majestic columns of 'The Times' over forty years later. He felt impelled to compliment the leader-writer on a feat of memory: and his letter in 'The Times' evoked a deluge of corre-

spondence, from which Frank was astonished to learn that a host of old readers also remembered the incident.

I think Percy sometimes considered Frank absent-minded. He was not really so : but whenever he found the conversation a one-sided affair, as so often he did, he would retire to his inner line of defence, in company with Kieseritski or Andersen, or Shakespeare or Dante. Frank was once described as a "good conversationalist" by a literary lady, who literally did not allow him to complete a sentence. On that occasion his conversational powers must have been almost wholly auricular. He was at any rate a good listener : in outward aspect at least.

Frank has a tremendous memory : nothing escapes it except dates. He learned the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" by heart before he was twelve : and in subsequent years reared, on that solid foundation, a vast superstructure. In these latter years, when sleep does not always come so easily as of old, and his dotted eyes do not permit him to read in bed, he often runs through hundreds, or perhaps a thousand or so, lines, and nods off under the kindly influence of Shakespeare or Dante or Goethe or Keats. His favourite passage in Dante was always the episode of Paolo and Francesca, and this was often his stand-by in Percy's office in the Carmelite House. His favourite chess game was the "Immortal" and this, too, often stood him in good stead.

It was quite comic sometimes. Conversation might run something like this : Frank's part, of course, inaudible.

P. G. "I see you're still doing something for the 'Jester'."
Frank. Ma dimmi, al tempo di dolci sospiri,
P. G. "I was looking at it the other day——"
Frank. A che e come concedette amore
P. G. "I don't quite like that, as I've said before——"

Frank. Che conosceste i dubbiosi desiri.
P. G. "And look here, I noticed——"
Frank. Ed ella a me : Nessun maggior' dolore
P. G. "M-m-m!"

(Percy's words, no longer heeded, have become merely a buzz, like that of a bee.)

Frank. Chericordarsi del tempofelice
P. G. "M-m-m!"
Frank. Nella miseria : e cio sa il tuo dottore.
P. G. "M-m-m!"
Frank. Ma se a conoscer la prima radice
P. G. "M-m-m!"
Frank. Del nostro amor, tu hai cotato affetto
P. G. "M-m-m!"
Frank. Farò come colui che piange e dice.
P. G. "M-m-m!"

Or Frank might be playing chess in his head, instead of reciting verses *sotto voce*. Then the dialogue would run like this : Percy audible, Frank inaudible : Frank silently concentrated on chess, Percy going strong with his chin.

P. G. "I've got a title here for a 'Gem' story——."
Frank. Pawn to king's fourth—pawn to king's fourth.
P. G. "I think it's rather a good title——."
Frank. Pawn to king's bishop's fourth : pawn takes pawn.
P. G. "What about 'The Rugger Fourth'?"
Frank. Bishop to bishop's fourth : queen to rook's fifth : check.
P. G. "You see? You put in a Rugby game—somehow—."
Frank. King to bishop's square : pawn to queen's knight's fourth.
P. G. "A sort of change, see—Rugger instead of Soccer! You can work it somehow——."
Frank. Bishop takes knight's pawn : knight to king's bishop's third.

P. G. " And I think—m-m-m ! "

(Percy's voice degenerates into a mere buzz or drone as before.)

Frank. Knight to king's bishop's third: queen to rook's third.

P. G. " M-m-m ! "

Frank. Pawn to queen's third : knight to rook's fourth.

P. G. " M-m-m ! "

Frank. Knight to rook's fourth : queen to knight's fourth.

P. G. " M-m-m ! "

Frank. Knight to bishop's fifth : pawn to queen's bishop's third.

P. G. " M-m-m ! "

And so on. Sometimes, in a conversation-piece of this kind, Frank would play the Immortal Game through from start to finish, and have time for a spot of Dante or Keats to follow : P. G. never dreaming that Frank was far away with a chess champion or a poet, and Frank hearing hardly a word of what P. G. was saying. Frank's eyes would be fixed earnestly and attentively on P. G., and that was really all that he wanted—silence and attention. He got both. There was no harm in Frank's thoughts straying to chess or verse, as Percy had all he wanted or needed. Why not ? After a cheery conversation conducted on these lines, editor and author would part with a cordial handshake, both satisfied.

But there were still spots of bother : and it was not long before Frank Richards and Martin Clifford were on the move again. They went back to Paris : but this time not to remain there. There were further places than Paris : and Frank and Martin packed their bags and their typewriter, and headed for Nice and Monte Carlo.

CHAPTER IX

THE SUNNY SOUTH

THE Villa at Nice was a very pleasant place. From what Frank hears, in the rural retreat where he passes a cheerful and contented old age, the Riviera is not what it was in the golden days when Frank and all the world were young. It seems rather like a dream to think of an exchange of twenty-five francs to the pound : at the time of writing it is about a thousand. Silver and gold piled on the tables at Monte Carlo—it is all counters now. Frank at one time used to keep a thousand-franc note in reserve, in case of a sudden need of cash : it was worth about forty pounds. He is rather glad that he didn't keep it too long : for its value now would be but a single, solitary "quid." The blue Mediterranean, the glittering beaches, the nodding palm-trees, no doubt are the same as ever, and the white villas on the hillsides. But in many ways, from what Frank is told, the glory hath departed from the House of Israel. Sometimes Frank feels that he would rather like to find himself on the Blue Train, rushing southward—Paris, Lyons, Dijon, Nice ! But he knows that he is done with all that. After all, he has had his day : and it was a brighter day than dawns now : everything in Frank's youth having been ever so much better than in later years : as everything in every old man's youth always was, from the beginning of Time, and will ever be !

The Villa was one of the innumerable white-walled, red-roofed buildings dotting the hillside. Guests were received "en pension" by an English lady, who was very popular among other English ladies because she knew all about tea.

Tea, in France generally, was one of those things that wanderers from the wrong side of La Manche had to endure with fortitude. But at the Villa, tea was tea : you could have fancied yourself drinking tea with your aunt at Surbiton.

Frank was indifferent to tea : but the coffee also was good. He was chiefly pleased by a big, airy room, with a balcony that looked over the lovely Mediterranean. It was airy, it was pleasant : it was quiet—its quiet broken only by the click of the typewriter.

Frank had settled down to the fixed habit of giving three hours every morning to the machine. This generally disposed of his quota for the day : though revisions sometimes required an hour or two in the afternoon. As a rule, however, the leather case was locked on Remington when he went down to knock about for an hour or so in the fresh air before lunch, and was not taken off again till the following morning.

Frank was always a quick worker. His own belief is that a good story must always be written at a good speed. If the author is carried along by it, so will the reader be. Generally his speed on Remington was fifty words a minute. It might rise to sixty, or fall to forty : but fifty was about the average. That rate of speed could never keep pace with his mental processes. No machine that ever was invented could have done that. Shorthand, perhaps, might have : but Frank, though he made several attempts, never could master shorthand. We all meet our Waterloo somewhere : that was Frank's. His story unrolled of its own accord, and he got it down as fast as he could.

After it was finished, he would read it over, blotting out redundancies, inserting little touches that the machine had been too slow to register, changing a phrase here and there. Occasionally a page would look a little like a jig-saw puzzle when he had done with it. Then, as often as not, Frank would put a fresh sheet in the machine, and type it out anew.

Often his cleanest pages, which looked as if they had not been touched at all, were the most elaborately edited.

At the Villa there were bright and cheerful mornings on the machine, bright and cheery afternoons roaming over the hills, or running out in a boat: evenings as often as not at the Casino Municipal or the Jetée. Both theatre and opera were available: but neither was much to write home about. But the Jetée was a very pleasant spot, where you could smoke a cigar over your coffee, and listen to a really good orchestra: and, if the spirit moved you so to do, wander along to the "boule" table, where your money was taken off you with ease and grace.

Ladies came to the Villa like homing pigeons: attracted doubtless by the tea. Men were always in a minority. Some of the latter unconsciously furnished copy for Frank—as indeed almost everyone he ever met did more or less. In particular there was a dear old major with whom Frank played endless chess, and who never knew that he became "Colonel Wharton" in the 'Magnet.'

The Villa was rather high up. You came up the avenue from the boulevard, and turned in at a wide gateway, to walk under over-arching wistaria to the house. Cabbies shied at that avenue, which was very steep. They seemed to fear that their horseflesh might fall dead at every step. Much, if not most, of that horseflesh looked as if it might have been left over from the Second Empire—if not from the First.

Often and often Frank stepped out at the foot of the avenue, and walked up to the Villa, feeling that no man with a conscience could permit the cocher to push his venerable quadruped up the ascent. Besides, walking saved time. Drivers who did push up to the top, looked first at the horse, to make sure that it was still alive, and then at Monsieur, in confident expectation of a handsome *pourboire* for the feat they had performed.

Remington clicked busily almost every morning : Tom Merry and Billy Bunter jostling one another on the machine. Almost everyone else in the place was a holiday-maker, or else an exile living abroad to make the most of an exiguous income. But Frank was used to being the only worker in a hive of drones. Hardly ever did he miss his morning's quota : never indeed unless he was fairly dragged out. Morning is the time for work : you are fresh, and keen, with your head full of ideas, in the morning. That is, of course, if you have had a reasonable night's rest. If you have been looking on the wine when it is red, or the roulette table when it is green, and crawled home to bed at half-past one, you will not be in the " mood " in the morning. Frank Richards generally kept sensible hours, and was seldom or never bothered about " moods."

All sorts and conditions of people came and went during Frank's rather long stay at the Villa, in those happy, carefree pre-war days. Many were interesting studies. Frank particularly remembers a gentleman whom he will call Mr. X., from whom he learned a valuable lesson : to look old age cheerfully in the face when it came, and make no bones about it—not that he was thinking of old age in those bright days. Mr. X. was a man who refused to make any concession to advancing years. " In the shade with the light behind him " he might have passed for thirty-five or so, so amazingly well was he got up, and groomed, and garnished, and put together. Seen in the cruelly searching sunlight of the Riviera, he revealed a pinched look queerly out of keeping with a summer boy's garments and manners and customs. His long suit, it seemed, was ice-skating.

Frank loved to spin round a rink at dizzy speed on rollers, which at that time had a great run of popularity. There was a rink within an easy walk of the Villa, and he often went in for half-an-hour or so. Mr. X. sometimes walked down with him, and looked

on, but never deigned to put on rollers. He was tolerant of them, for people who couldn't skate : but the Palais de Glace was his own sphere of activity. Frank, who hardly ever doubted what he was told, had no doubt that Mr. X. was a stout lad on the ice. And but for a chance, he would probably believe so to this day.

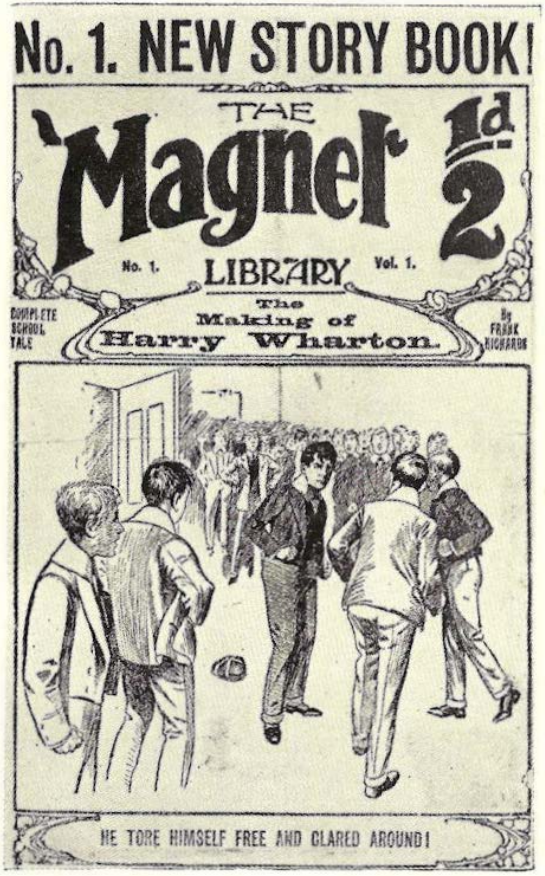
But it happened that one evening Frank, at the Casino Municipal, was relieved of his financial resources at an unusually early hour. Sauntering Villa-ward in the early evening, he passed the Palais de Glace, into which a well-known figure was turning : an almost boyish figure in beautifully-cut tweeds, which he recognized at once. Having nothing to do at the moment, Frank decided to take a turn in the Palais also, join the spectators there, and enjoy a view of Mr. X.'s dexterity on the ice. He thought that it might be worth watching, after all that he had heard about it. And it was.

The hour was early and the attendance so far sparse. Two or three instructors were taking out beginners. Among them, to his surprise, Frank spotted a figure in grey tweeds, in the grip of an instructor who seemed to have all his work cut out. For a moment, Frank fancied that there might have been some mishap : that Mr. X. had been barged over by some clumsy novice, and picked up. But that was not it. It soon became clear that Mr. X. was undergoing instruction. He was, after all, a novice—and what a novice !

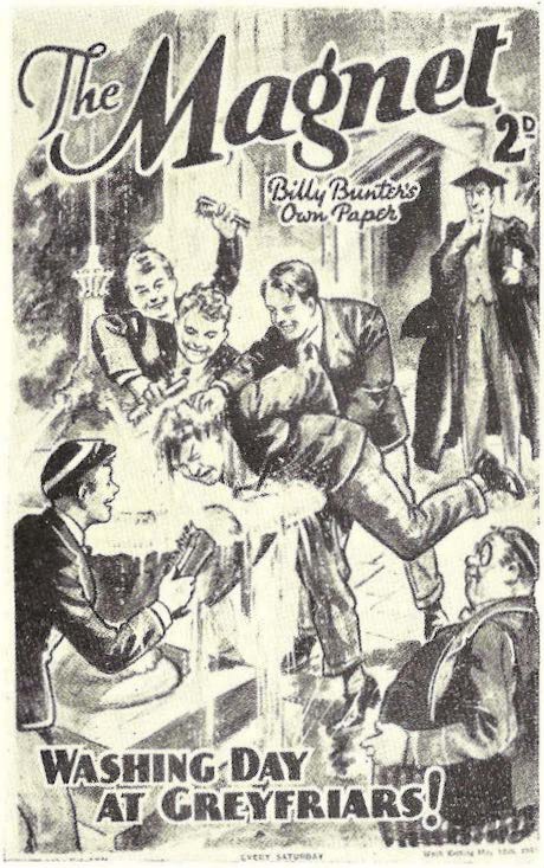
" C'est drole, ça," said a Frenchman at Frank's elbow, grinning, " N'est-ce-pas ? "

" Mais oui ! " Frank could not help agreeing.

Mr. X., was in fact a picture. Never was a fish so hopelessly out of water as Mr. X. on skates. How even a skilled instructor kept him perpendicular, or partly perpendicular, was quite a mystery. Every moment Frank dreaded to see them crash together. Once the unhappy man was actually clinging with



THE FIRST 'MAGNET' (1908)



THE LAST 'MAGNET' (1940)

both arms round his saviour. Frank watched the performance with the deepest interest, remembering all that Mr. X. had told him of the delights of the ice, and his amused scorn for roller-skating.

Frank was tempted to remain till Mr. X. came off—that is, till he was dragged off. But second thoughts are proverbially the best. Frank immediately realised how very awkward such a rencontre would be for poor Mr. X. So he slipped quietly out, and Mr. X. never knew that he had visited the Palais de Glace at all. Mr. X. was not a reader of the 'Magnet,' and so he never knew that his exploits on the ice were reproduced in that journal, featuring Billy Bunter.

Life in Nice, with afternoon excursions up to "Monte" and the world of roulette, passed very pleasantly, and Frank remained much longer than he had originally intended. Carmelite House called—but called in vain. The call of "Monte" was more insistent. Frank invented systems which, on paper, showed vast profits for the punter. Tried out on the green tables, they showed considerable profits for the Casino. But he always had a hopeful nature: and when, at last, he left, it was with the fixed intention of coming back for a really serious campaign, to break the bank. Which in due course he did—though it was not the bank that was broken.

We are all sinners: and roulette, I suppose, must be counted among the minor sins. Such things would be barred by a really perfect character. Frank's, I am afraid, had a spot or two of imperfection. It seemed to him very pleasant to run up to "Monte" by the afternoon train, possibly to return with one's pockets crammed with ill-gotten gold. If it was a sin, the wages of sin were duly paid: for seldom had Frank so much as a five-franc piece left when he quitted the Rooms.

The Carnival of Nice came and went. Frank was still at the Villa; reluctant to leave such comfortable quarters, where his writing ran off the machine with

ease and rapidity, and golden days and silvery nights succeeded one another in happy procession. The weather grew warmer, and warmer : others went : the company thinned out : man after man disappeared, leaving the feminine element, which seemed a fixture, more than ever in a majority. Quite a bevy of ladies remained : some no doubt were permanent residents : anyhow, there they were. One morning Frank woke to find himself the only representative of the lesser sex in a company of no fewer than twenty women. The next morning Frank was gone also.

CHAPTER X

VIE DE BOHÈME

THIS chapter is about a curious personality, whose identity it would be interesting not to reveal.

He was so curious a character that Frank Richards could write a whole book about him. He was one of the cleverest men and one of the most utter asses that Frank ever knew. Frank has not heard of him for many years, but if he still lives, has no doubt that he is quite unchanged, still very clever and very foolish.

He was a man whose life was an extraordinary comedy—a more or less conscious comedy. By nature he was a steady, sensible, practical man : by choice he was a Bohemian. Bohemianism, which did not accord with his real tastes at all, was a sort of bee in his bonnet. From some fantastic kink in his mind, he was determined to be what he was not.

Most Bohemians, so far as Frank's observation goes, are more or less humbugs. It is a pose. But in this case humbug was carried to such a length that the comedy became something like a tragedy.

As I mustn't reveal his identity, perhaps I might as well leave him out. But he had a great deal of influence on Frank Richards' life at one time : and he really was a very interesting study.

In 1910 Frank Richards alternated between his flat in Hampstead and his bungalow in rural regions, with every now and then a run across the Channel. At that time he saw a great deal of the subject of this chapter. As I must call him something, I will call him V. C.—a name not inappropriate, as he was in many respects the original of the character of Vane-Carter, in the Carcroft stories, who was called V. C.

He happened to be an editor, like a number of

Frank's acquaintances at that time. What he edited, and where, I will not particularise. But he was a very active and busy editor, full of brains, and full of beans. I think he looked on Frank rather as a harmless ass. Frank regarded him as an interesting idiot.

V. C. was a conscious play-actor. The part he played was that of a reckless and shiftless lounger of the "Boul' Mich." He must have read Murger's 'Vie de Bohème' and apparently it had got into his head. 'Vie de Bohème' was real to him: or at all events he tried his hardest to make it real. He played his part with an earnestness worthy of a better cause. He "saw" himself in the part of Rudolph or Schaunard. He had himself lounged on the Boulevard St. Michel in his time, and enjoyed the acquaintance of its more-or-less artistic and much-more-than-less disreputable habitués. He was in fact absolutely one of them, except that he washed. And it was all pure imagination from start to finish.

Frank was himself rather an imaginative fellow. As a boy, he had ridden at midnight with William of Deloraine, and kept the gate with Horatius—he had fought Spanish galleons with Amyas Leigh, and had been wrecked on desert islands with Robinson Crusoe. He had chased slavers with the heroes of George Manville Fenn: hidden in the heather with Alan Breck: broken lances with Ivanhoe, and engaged in desperate duels with the Three Musketeers. But there was always a spot of common-sense in Frank—not a large spot, perhaps: but it was there. It kept him in mind of the dividing line between day-dreams and realities. V. C. seemed unconscious of that dividing line. And his day-dreams were not those of a boy, but of a man old enough to be the father of boys. And they were real to him.

Had he been content to be himself, he would have been a capable and successful man on Fleet Street. As likely as not he might have joined, in the fulness of time, the noble army of Press barons. But he was not

content to be himself. He was determined to be a character out of Murger's novel.

His life was a queer kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde existence. His two characters ran side by side for years. But they were an ill-assorted tandem, and the consequences were sometimes disconcerting. It was quite awkward, for the editor, in the morning, when the Bohemian had collected a black eye at midnight—the punch-ball story was heard with politeness but incredulity. It seemed to Frank that sooner or later the Bohemian must be the ruin of the editor, unless the editor reformed the Bohemian in time. Which he never did.

In the summer of 1910, Frank Richards and several other people were making plans for visiting Oberammergau, where the Passion Play was to take place after the usual interval of ten years. There was always a swarm of people in Munich for the Passion Play. Quarters had to be secured well in advance, tickets booked, and so on. All of which was perfectly easy, with the assistance of that Friend of Man, Thomas Cook. As August drew near, Frank was very busy: getting a little ahead with his copy, to allow for loss of time later at München: and collecting financial resources for expenditure in the land of the Hun—not at that time a Hun, for it was four years before the World War, and nobody knew what was coming.

Peace and plenty smiled on Europe in those happy days. Nobody seemed to realise that the Boer War had been a signal inaugurating a new era of death and destruction: or that Coleridge's attractive trio, Fire, Famine and Slaughter, were only waiting to pounce. You went to Germany as easily and cheerfully as you went to Brighton or Boulogne. You found yourself among a law-abiding, hospitable, amiable population: though even then, there were not lacking signs that a sharper eye than Frank's might have detected. All sorts of little things came back to Frank's mind a few years later---straws which might have shown the way

the wind was blowing. But at the time, Germany was to him the land of Beethoven and Goethe and the Nibelungen Lied, and a very pleasant country for a holiday. It seemed strange afterwards to remember how much he liked the Germans.

Frank succeeded in getting his copy well in hand: and, not so easily, in accumulating funds. He had a pretty good income in those days, but for one reason or another, seldom much in the bank. But that was always Frank's state more or less: he never has had much in the bank at any given time.

One evening he was smoking over coffee with V. C. somewhere in Fleet Street, talking about the Passion Play, and Anton Lang, who was taking the chief part. He discerned that V. C. seemed to be thinking of something else. V. C. suddenly interrupted him with a request for a loan of a hundred pounds.

Frank was quite astonished. Indeed he thought for a moment that it was a jest. He could hardly have been more surprised had the Governor of the Bank of England asked him to lend him sixpence. V. C. had plenty of money: or at any rate should have had: ever so much more than Frank, anyway. But it seemed that there was a temporary embarrassment. Frank never was a man to lock such rascal counters from his friends: and he had, for once, cash in the bank. So that night a cheque for the required sum was despatched: and that was that.

Frank was a sympathetic fellow: it was quite a painful discovery to him that V. C. was hard up. Apparently the wild extravagances of the Bohemian had washed out the quite substantial emoluments of the editor, and a little over. He might have weighed in with a few words of sage advice: but he was aware that V. C. was stone-deaf to sage counsels. His Bohemian comedy had become second nature to him.

The day before Frank started for Munich, V. C. had another spot of difficulty. This time it was more moderate: only fifty. Frank was a little dis-

mayed, with a continental wander before him : but he played up, and in the morning, before he started, the cheque for fifty was duly dropped in the post. After which, with continental travel, and companions to look after, he forgot all about V. C. and his affairs. Indeed he almost forgot Remington, packed and locked for the journey, not to be opened again before Munich.

Frank Richards and Co. were in no hurry to reach their destination, having allowed plenty of time before the date of the Passion Play. Their route lay through Belgium and Holland, with some wanderings by the way, and then by steamer up the Rhine : a delightful trip on which Frank's memory still lingers. In his youth, Frank was a great reader of Byron : indeed there was a period when he believed that eminent nobleman to be a poet. So he just loved to see the castled crag of Drachenfels frown o'er the wide and winding Rhine, whose breast of water broadly swells between the banks that bear the vine, and so on.

Cologne—Bonn, where Beethoven was born—Nuremburg with its ancient Schloss and Iron Virgin, Frank had plenty to think about, without recalling the amateur Bohemian, and his ludicrous determination to hear the chimes at midnight when in point of fact he would really have preferred to be sensibly in bed.

Frank and Co. arrived at Munich at last. There Frank found a telegram awaiting him. He had rather expected a letter from V. C.—not a telegram. But it was urgent, brief, and to the point. " Have not received the fifty." Thus it ran.

V. C. must have been very impatient. Not having received the cheque by the first post in the morning, he had taken alarm at the idea that Frank had wandered off into South Germany and forgotten it. So he had despatched that urgent telegram to meet him at Munich when he arrived there—only to receive the cheque by the next post, while the tele-

gram was on its way. V. C.'s telegram turned up when Frank was sorting over bundles of old letters and papers for the purpose of these memoirs. It turned up in company with a lengthy legal-looking document, of which more anon.

Frank Richards had a jolly time in Munich. He has wondered since whether Adolf Hitler, then a youth, may have been hanging about while he was there. In those days there was no hint of Hitler or Hitlerism : though there was quite a lot of Kaiserism, to which Frank did not think that the Bavarians took very kindly. There was good beer, galleries of priceless pictures, and good music, and such vast quantities of food as would hardly be credited in these hungry days. Frank was rather cut off from some of these delights : eating and drinking never had much appeal for him. But he did enjoy the pictures and the music.

Oberammergau, where it was necessary to put up for a few days for the Passion Play, was less interesting : a pretty operatic sort of place largely got up for tourists. You sat in the open air and listened—or did not listen. Frank ventures to confess that he was bored. He sat it out because his companions wished to do so, resorting to his old device of playing chess in his head, or running over verses, while the unending German droned on and on and on. It was partly, no doubt, because he does not like to see a sacred subject commercialized.

Frank could write whole books about the Germany of those days. But that Germany disappeared a few years later, never to be restored. Whatever its faults, it was a good deal better than what came afterwards. But War, almost the greatest evil that afflicts mankind, must naturally make all things worse : only very young and very hopeful people can expect a " brave new world " to be the outcome of an orgy of ferocity and destruction. But in those lovely days in Bavaria, Frank no more thought of war with Germany than of war with the man in the moon.

After Munich, Frank wandered to and fro, and round about, among kindly people in lovely places, here and there settling down for a few days to tap the neglected typewriter, and chronicle the adventures of Tom Merry and the misadventures of Billy Bunter. Finally he found himself in London again. A few days after his return, V. C. asked him to smoke a cigar over a cup of coffee which he cheerfully did. But it turned out that that meeting was rather for business than for pleasure. V. C. did not want to hear about München, or Bonn, or Nürnberg, or Frank's fancies about the Rhine-maidens while floating on the Rhine. After a little desultory talk, he remarked, in quite a casual way :

" Now I'll tell you what I want you to do. I want you to make that loan up to a level five hundred."

Frank gazed at him. Frank was not a Bohemian, and perhaps V. C. supposed that he saved all his cash, and had an inexhaustible supply of that useful article. But there were many ways for money to go, quite unconnected with the chimes at midnight. Frank had returned from Germany in a state more arid than V. C.'s own. He might have managed a fiver ; or, with an effort, a pony. But three hundred and fifty ! Frank laughed, and explained. It is sad to relate that V. C. did not seem quite to believe him, and became sulky.

Frank fancied that that was the end. But it was not the end. A few days later Frank received by post the legal-looking document above referred to. It came from a firm of solicitors whose client V. C. apparently was. It indicated that V. C. was raising a loan, and all that was required to see it through was Frank's signature on the dotted line.

Perhaps it was fortunate for Frank that he was not good for the sum proposed, and did not want to diddle even a moneylender. His reply was a polite and really regretful negative.

He little guessed what was to follow. It transpired,

later, that that moneylender had been V. C.'s last hope of carrying on in the wilds of Bohemia. Frank never saw V. C. again. The crash followed quickly.

Only one more letter did Frank ever receive from V. C. It came from the steamer on which he left England—hurriedly. It was a promise not to forget the hundred and fifty. But V. C.'s memory must have failed him later, for Frank never heard anything more about it.

Once or twice afterwards he heard of V. C. though not from him. A few days after the climax he met the man on whom V. C.'s editorial mantle had fallen. This man asked him point-blank whether "he too" had been looted by V. C. before he left—a question that Frank tactfully evaded. But he surmised that he was far from being the only one whom the amateur Bohemian had "touched."

Some years later, when Frank came back from Holland, the same man told him that there had been a cable from V. C., requesting the aid of "all old friends." The "old friends" apparently regarded that cable as a joke.

Frank did not look at it quite like that. He could not help feeling a pang for a man who had thrown away great abilities and great chances, for no purpose but to play the fool.

V. C., at this distant date, may be dead or alive. If the latter, Frank has no doubt that he is still playing the part he adopted early in life, still "seeing" himself as Rudolph or Schaunard: age could not wither nor custom stale that extraordinary fantasy. Actually he was no more like one of Murger's characters than he was like one of Shakespeare's: and at the back of his mind he was aware of it. His natural bent was towards steady work and a respectable suburban home. But some queer kink made him cast himself for the part of a shiftless lounger of the Boul' Mich': and he played the farce out to the finish.

CHAPTER XI

A BELLE OF NEW YORK

IN those spacious days before the Great War, Frank Richards spent a glorious spring up and down and round about the Lake of Geneva.

Leman is not so lovely as the Italian lakes. But it is lovely. It is exhilarating, and roomy. There is room for almost a voyage.

All his life, Frank has always headed for water like a duck. Give him a boat, any sort of a craft with any rag of a sail, and he was happy. From early boyhood he wanted to go to sea : which he never did excepting as a passenger. But he always envied the men who went down to the sea in ships.

So in all his wanderings, whenever he came to a long stop he always abided, if he could, where there was water. He never dreamed, in those happy days, of the time that was to come, when he would look from his study window at a sunny sea, no longer able to push out a boat thereon. In youth we are all as immortal as Mr. Pumblechook : age is far off and unregarded. Though really it is not too bad, when it comes, as Frank knows now.

He loved the shining water : and there was plenty in Lake Leman ; almost an inland sea. Frank enjoyed scudding about the lake, which was generally calm and smiling. On occasion it could be very wild. Once or twice Frank had an experience resembling that of Byron and Shelley. He could not—or, at all events, did not—always consider weather signs. He went on the lake when he came off the machine, or before he sat down to the machine : and the weather, naturally, did not always accommodate itself to the exigencies of Remington.

A year or two later, on the same lake, Frank had a really narrow escape, owing to the antics of his dog Micky in a small rowing-boat far from land, on a very rough day. On that day, he came very near following a relative of his, who had gone down in the Lake of Geneva in the eighteen-fifties.

But that spot of excitement was still in the future : so far he had not met Micky, who was probably getting born about that time in the South of France. Frank could write whole chapters about Micky, who adopted him as his master in Marseilles, and refused to take no for an answer. However, we have not come to Micky yet. Frank's severest experience, at the time of which he is now writing, was a splashing, which did not bother him very much.

But it was not only Lake Leman that drew him to Switzerland that lovely spring. There was another attraction. It was, in the words of Orlando, "the fair, the chaste, the inexpressive she."

Frank will call this young lady Miss N. Y., from the initials of the great city from which she came. Frank had met her at Nice, and again at Monte Carlo. They had become great friends. She was very bright and intelligent, and a good talker : and Frank liked good talk. But she would listen as well as talk. Frank never had to take refuge behind an earnest attentive expression while he played chess in his head. He always had a third, at least a quarter, of the conversation. She would listen to his opinions for whole minutes before demolishing them.

She was an American, and Frank liked Americans. He has always liked to hear Americans talk, even when they were not so clever as Miss N. Y. The American accent is agreeable to his ear : it seems to him to lend, not only character, but music to the voice. Often and often in these latter days he turns on the radio merely to hear Americans talk. Miss N. Y.'s voice was just a voice, but its American savour was charming, to Frank's ears at least. And she talked sense—solid sense.

Let not the reader misunderstand. Frank was not a philanderer—neither was she. It is often said that men and women cannot be pals: the eternal sex aspect is bound to crop up sooner or later. But it is not so. If there was a spot of romance in Miss N.Y.—as doubtless there was—Frank never saw anything of it. Perhaps he was not the man to evoke it. No inexpressive she ever fell in love with Frank, so far as he knows. Certainly Miss N. Y. didn't.

Frank was in London, a little worried by some spots of bother that had cropped up in his papers, when a letter came from Lausanne. Miss N. Y. was there, and suggested that he should step across. Miss N. Y. had the regard for distances customary with Americans, for whom distance does not exist. She asked Frank to step over from London to Lausanne, as one might have asked him to step over from Hampstead to Golders Green. Frank rather liked this trait. Americans always gave him the impression of a more spacious life.

Frank was already thinking of getting a move on, and was not particular where he went so long as it was at a good distance from the spots of bother referred to. So naturally, when that letter came, his move was to Switzerland. It was a happy thought to meet Miss N. Y. again, he remembered many pleasant talks in the sunny south.

So off went Frank to Lausanne.

He found Miss N. Y. in a sort of Swiss pension near the lake. Her party had returned home, and she, with the self-possessed independence that is so delightfully American, had decided to stay on in "Yurrup" for a time on her own. Two ancient Swiss ladies afforded her the chaperonage of which she was not in the slightest need. They were dear old creatures. One of them, Frank remembers, visited Paris during his stay, and returned greatly amused by the way they talked French in Paris—not at all, it seemed, up to Lausanne standards! Frank located himself at a

place a little further up the hill, whence almost every afternoon he walked down to foregather with Miss N. Y.

She was a free agent and could do as she liked. Frank was not quite that, as he had to write in the mornings. Frank has, in the course of his life, come across wilful young ladies who, in a spirit of mischief, tried to " vamp " him away from his work : generally with small success. But there was nothing of that kind about Miss N. Y. She understood that a man's work was a man's work. Besides, probably she had enough of Frank, nearly every afternoon and evening for weeks on end.

Frank was always an early riser. Every morning he would turn out when Aurora gilded the Alpine summits, and rush down to the lake, for a ramble on its shores or more often to push out a boat. He would get back to breakfast by nine : after which, Remington reigned supreme. Seldom or never did Frank quit before twelve, sometimes twelve-thirty. Then a breath of fresh air, and lunch : after which he was annexed by the United States.

It was a glorious spring. Sometimes in his boat Frank would chant " Plus d'hiver, déjà le printemps commence," from a French version of Wagner he had heard somewhere : it seems somehow to linger in his ear as the glistening lake lingers in his mind's eye. He would type his copy at a sunny window in the blithest of spirits, and roll off great quantities without an effort. And later in the day there was fresh air and sunshine and Miss N. Y. But—— !

At Nice and Monte, Miss N. Y. had been with a party, and often otherwise engaged : and Frank had had only talks with her : after the day's work was done, so to speak. Sometimes there would be coffee at a cafe : sometimes a walk and talk on the terrace : sometimes an encounter in the Rooms, where Miss N. Y. apparently only studied human nature, for Frank never saw her put so much as a five-franc

piece on the tables. She had, in fact, rather a scorn for roulette and its votaries, in which she was doubtless right. Frank could not wholly agree, as he was at that time still nourishing his happy hope of some day breaking the bank ; and he did not always find relish in her remarks on roulette. But he liked to hear her, when the sound of popping came to their ears, express her opinion of the wretched creatures who thought it amusing to shoot pigeons. It was vigorous and refreshing. However, it so chanced that Frank's contacts with Miss N. Y. in the sunny south were merely local and vocal. He knew that she was actively occupied from early morn till dewy eve : but he did not know how very actively. He did not dream how tirelessly she was wont to pass her day. He learned this at Lausanne.

Frank's survey of historic and remarkable spots, in his travels, was generally rather casual. There might be a renowned museum next door to him, and he might never step into it. There might be the tomb of some Great Panjandrum within five minutes' walk, and he might not give it even the once-over. He remembers, at Amsterdam, having stood for a solid hour before a single picture : but he did not really like picture-galleries. He found Baedeker useful in many ways, but never looked at his asterisks. True, at Bonn he spent hours and hours in Beethoven's house, but who would not ? One day he even let Tom Merry and Billy Bunter slide, while he shot off to Montreux, just to see Leoncavallo, who was there at the performance of some of his works. From a respectful distance Frank gazed at the Grand Old Man, and reckoned his day well spent. But these were exceptional cases. Frank cared hardly a boiled bean whether Voltaire had ever lived at Ferney or not : whether there ever was a Prisoner of Chillon : the names of Gibbon and Rousseau left him cold : and once when he stayed at the Hotel d'Angleterre it did not give him the remotest thrill to know that

Byron had stayed there. In all this his tastes were diametrically opposed to those of Miss N. Y.

She was doing Europe thoroughly, scientifically, and ruthlessly. Frank was a fairly active fellow in thosedays : but Miss N. Y.'s activity left him standing. It was amazing.

She was not at all hefty or masculine. She was rather petite, and at twenty-seven looked years younger. Perhaps she was made of tempered steel. She loved walking. Almost everything within foot-slogging distance was viewed peripatetically. Frank, in his time, had often unintentionally walked other people off their legs. Now he was walked off his own. She did not, unluckily, care for boats. No doubt there was little of touristic interest in the middle of the lake. Frank would have been happy to sail or row her all over Leman, if only to use his arms instead of his legs. But when it was necessary to cross the lake, or go along its shores, they took the steamer to save time. On the steamer one could, at least, sit down : but it was with the knowledge that ten to one there was a tremendous walk to come, at the other end.

A frightful number of historical spots, out of reach oflake steamers or Shank's pony, could be reached by train. Frank has a confused remembrance of catching trains, sitting in trains, changing trains, and jumping off trains---trains and trains and trains. For a far, far radius round Lausanne, Frank came to know the country like a book : though his knowledge was a little mixed from the speed with which it was acquired. At night he would fall upon his bed, and never reopen his eyes till the morning coffee came.

Not a single spot, I believe, which it was possible to reach by train, returning by midnight, was left unexplored. But on that one point Miss N. Y., with all her Transatlantic independence, was adamant. Once, at Grindelwald, they nearly lost the train back, after a long, long ramble over snowy slopes and steeps. How many miles they covered in that

ramble Frank does not know, only that it seemed like hundreds. He yearned for a spot of rest and a smoke : but there came the startling news that the train was about to start : by some unhappy chance no vehicle was immediately available : and Frank could not help thinking that they had done it, at last. But they hadn't. There was no spot of rest for Frank—no spot of coffee —not a whiff of smoke. The speed with which Miss N. Y. walked to the station quite dazed him. He kept pace, he knows not how. They caught the train—just ! During that rapid walk a fair face had been fixed, almost grim. But once safe on the train, Miss N. Y. was immediately her own charming self again. Frank just slumped.

Frank liked Miss N. Y. immensely. So his feelings were mixed when, after many weeks of this strenuous life, she told him that she was joining an American party in Germany, intending to go home with them from Trieste. He was sorry to lose her. But the prospect of a prolonged rest was grateful and comforting.

She was going by a morning train : and for once Remington reposed in its case, while Frank saw his fair friend off. That afternoon there was no fair Americaine, and it seemed rather blank : still, there was a spot of consolation in a luxurious laze.

The few weeks that followed were merry and bright, though Frank really did miss the talks if not the walks. Still it was a relief to slow down. Frank loved clambering over mountains, he did not dislike trains, and he was willing if not eager to behold historic spots : but he had had rather a surfeit of all these. So except for his morning quota, he slacked about and enjoyed ease.

Then there came a letter from Venice.

Frank had not at that time yet seen Venice, and knew nobody there, so the postmark of Venezia was a surprise. But the letter proved to be from Miss N. Y. Her party, it seemed, had gone into Austria : she was staying for a few days with some friends or

acquaintances in Venice : and would Frank like to step over before she had to take the steamer for Trieste.

Venice, from Lausanne, is quite a good step—from an old-world point of view. To an American, no doubt, it was like strolling across a square.

Frank had Remington to consider : also he had arranged a boat trip with a Swiss acquaintance for the week-end. But he locked Remington for a few days : his Swiss friend let him off : he walked up to the Place St. François for his tickets. The young man at Cook's told him to change at a place he called Millan : why young men at Cook's always pronounced Milan as if it were spelt "Millan" Frank didn't, and doesn't, know. Frank shot off from Lausanne, duly changed at Milano, and arrived in Venice.

It was a happy meeting. MissN. Y. wasas charming as ever : but even, it seemed to Frank, more tireless. Anyone might put in an active year without seeing half the wonders of Venice : but Miss N. Y. was going to see them all, if she could, in five or six days.

At a later date, Frank loved Venice. But he had no time to love it on his first visit. In retrospect, it seems to him that he must have engaged hundreds of gondolas, and visited as many islands as could ever be discovered in the south seas ; while the historic sights he saw in those few days are packed in his mind like sardines in a tin. Miss N. Y. was indefatigable : and Frank had to be so too. It was summer, and hot : and through the long hot days there was perpetual motion. Not till the crowds on the Piazza were thinning out at a late hour was Frank permitted to crawl home, to his hotel on the Grand Canal.

Came the day when Miss N. Y. had to take the steamer for Trieste, to rejoin her party for the voyage home. Frank, with a last expiring effort, saw her off on that steamer. When the bell rang, he fell rather than stepped into his gondola. The steamer faded away across the lagoon—she was gone. It left

a blank. But Frank bade his gondolier take him across to the Lido, where the rest of the day was spent lying in the sand and sunshine, recuperating.

He never saw that charming belle of New York again. But a long time afterwards, at Naples, he received a letter from her. She had not forgotten him. It was a very pleasant and friendly letter, and wound up with a kind invitation to visit the United States : which Frank had always longed to do, but had—and has—never done. That great country was out of his range : he had to keep more or less in touch with London and editors and things. Communications in those days were not what they have since become. Otherwise, probably, he would have gone.

But much as he liked Miss N. Y. and much as he would have liked to see her again, it was a relief on the whole that he couldn't go. He rather dreaded being taken on a walk from New York to San Francisco : perhaps without being allowed to sit down and rest for a few minutes on the Rocky Mountains !

CHAPTER XII

THE NEW EDITOR

THE second editor of 'Gem' and 'Magnet' was Herbert Hinton. He had been sub-editor with Percy Griffith: and when Percy left, an Amurath an Amurath succeeded. Hinton was, I believe, liked by everyone who met him. Certainly Frank Richards liked him. He was big, and strong, and good-tempered, and had a hearty pleasant way with him that was very attractive. His chief fault, or weakness, or whatever it was, was that he seemed never to have ceased to be a schoolboy. But that was, in its way, a charm. You liked him as a matter of course. If you were angry with him—as Frank sometimes was, and had reason to be—your angry feelings died out at once under the influence of his hearty hand-shake, and his cheery grin. You might walk into the Fleetway House with the fixed determination to say frightfully unpleasant things: but the minute you entered Room 57 you were disarmed. He was a schoolboy first and last: and Frank would never have been really surprised to see him punt a 'Gem' volume over his desk, or use the inkpot for a drop-kick.

He was utterly unlike Percy in every respect. In his sub-editorial days he seemed never able to take Percy quite seriously. He towered over him, and seemed unable to take with much seriousness a man whom he could have picked up in one hand, and tucked under his arm.

Percy was highly gifted with brains: packed with vitality: but packed in a small compass. Hinton always seemed to regard him with a more or less comical eye, as a placid giant might regard a very

busy and very earnest grasshopper. It was rather a surprise for Frank to find Hinton in Percy's place as editor : it was rather like finding Figgins of the Fourth in place of the headmaster.

On the whole, it was a pleasant change. When Frank called at G.H.Q., he no longer had to play chess or recite Dante in his head while he listened to a solo. And Frank has always liked and admired big strong fellows : perhaps because he was slim and slight himself. Also he rather hoped that, now that Percy was gone, some of Percy's peculiar ideas on editorship would be gone also.

In that he was disappointed. Herbert had inherited Percy's place, and Percy's system along with it. But here Frank will be discreetly silent. Speech may be silvery, but silence is golden, and never so golden as on the subject of old troubles. Perhaps it is just as well that this book has been written twice.

It was first written, in London, in the War time, when Frank had nothing particular else to write, and a kind friend suggested that he should write his memoirs. Often and often a bomb burst in the middle distance, or a doodle-bug hummed over the chimney-top, while the typewriter clicked on unheeding. Frank was at that time at the nadir of his fortunes, living like the Rawdon-Crawleys on an income of nothing a year : experiencing for the first time the " downs " of life after a long and happy experience of the " ups." He doesn't recall 1944-45 with much pleasure. Possibly that was why it did not occur to him to leave the black spots out of his narrative. But reading the typescript over, after a lapse of years, he has quite different ideas. The first edition of his memoirs is still in existence, but it will never be published. The present edition is ever so much more pleasant to write and to read. It is wiser and kinder to forget all about " battles long ago." So this chapter, which was originally one of the longest in the book, is going to be one of the shortest.

Hinton was at all events much easier to get on with than his predecessor had been. He was all good-nature. Whenever Frank was in London, he looked in at Room 57 at the Fleetway House : but he had a quite loose rein, and could wander where and when he liked. Which he did. Hinton was always glad to see him : always had the same hearty hand-shake and the same cheery grin : and Frank, in spite of the spots of bother about which he will say nothing, always liked him. No one was sorrier than Frank Richards when the portals of the Fleetway House closed so suddenly behind him. But that was not for some years to come : and the first world-war intervened.

CHAPTER XIII

ADVENTURE?

FRANK RICHARDS spent happy years wandering about the highways and by-ways of Europe—those happy years before the war-clouds gathered. Generally it was the by-ways. Adventures fell in his way: but he rather doubts whether they are worth recording.

For adventure in real life is very different from adventure in fiction. A story has—as required by Aristotle—a beginning, a middle, and an end. But episodes in real life have only, as it were, the middle. They have no cause and no consequence.

To give them connection and interest the writer must resort to fiction. That is inadmissible in a work dealing with facts. Frank has had hair's-breadth escapes: and he could—and indeed often did—work them up in fiction with some effect. In actual experience they had no thrill. Generally they were rather irritating. It is Frank's considered opinion that facts are a bore: worth little till they have been transmuted into the pure gold of fiction.

As an example, Frank has clung for his life on the outside of an express train thundering through the tunnel between Nice and Monte Carlo. It ought to have been a thrilling adventure. But it wasn't. It was just annoying. While it lasted, he cursed his stupidity in getting landed in it: when it was over, he gave it no further thought.

In fiction it could take better shape. Our hero, clinging on the thundering train, might have spotted mysterious conspirators crouching in the corridor within. The roar of the train would hardly have prevented him from overhearing their dark plot. He might have

crashed in at a window just in time to stop them kidnapping the millionaire in the sleeping-car : or abducting the fair maiden travelling alone and unprotected. But did anything of that kind happen in real life ? It did not.

Frank has met only one millionaire in his life, and that was at a tea-table. He has seen many and many fair maidens, but never a one of them has been abducted. There was nobody on that midnight train excepting absolutely ordinary and commonplace passengers. Frank's adventure is not worth telling : and I will tell it to prove the point. The reader may skip it if he likes. I should.

Frank was staying, at that time, at Monte Carlo. He was busy in the mornings, as usual, with Billy Bunter and Tom Merry : in the evening with determined but ill-starred efforts to bankrupt Monsieur Louis Blanc. His sister and brother-in-law came to Nice. So one evening, ceasing for the nonce to contribute to the upkeep of the Casino, down came Frank on the train to dinner and social amenities. His return to Monte was timed for the last train.

Close on midnight his fiacre whirled him away to the station. This, as was usual at such a late hour, was practically deserted. Frank had his ticket in his pocket : the train was in : he was barely in time and he bolted for the train. But he had cut it too fine. He had to cross the line to get to his platform. The train, which seemed of endless length, stood in the way—it was the continental express from Paris to Ventimiglia. It was plain at a glance that if Frank negotiated the length of that train to get round it, he would arrive on the opposite platform only in time to see the tail-light disappearing into the night. So there was only one thing to be done : to board the train on the wrong side.

Frank had done so before, more than once, and thought nothing of that. In theory, no doubt, the doors on the wrong side ought always to be locked.

In practice they often weren't. So he cut across the near line, and clambered on the train : and then discovered, to his dismay, that some faithful servant of the company had done his duty not wisely but too well. The doors were locked.

Frank thought, for a moment, that he had lost that train after all. But he hadn't ! It started while that thought was occurring to him.

In what seemed to Frank a nasty stealthy way, it heaved into motion. Before he quite knew what was happening, Frank was travelling on that train : outside, holding on to a door-handle.

His feeling was not alarm, but intense exasperation. He pressed his face to the glass, hoping that somebody in the corridor would see him. But there was nobody in the corridor. The train, long as it was, had few passengers, as was often the case at that time of night. It might have been absolutely empty, for all Frank could see of any inhabitant. And it gathered speed.

Frank hung on. He could do nothing else. To jump off, or fall off, was sudden death. He was wearing a heavy overcoat that rather impeded his activity, and he had a book under his arm which his sister had lent him to read in the train. He still remembers that book : it was a novel called 'Vivian' though the name of the author has escaped him. It was about a poor girl in London in sad need of an extra pound a week, who afterwards turned out to be somebody in the duchess or princess line. Frank did not want to lose a book that did not belong to him : and, perhaps strangely enough in such a situation, he thought of jamming it into his pocket to keep it safe. But he could not venture to release a hand now that the train was going fast. He kept that book under his arm, much to his inconvenience. It did not occur to him till afterwards that a novel might as well have been chucked away.

In the meantime the train was roaring on. How many miles an hour the Vintimille express was

supposed to do, Frank did not know : it seemed to him that the brute was doing a hundred or more. He thought of yelling for help. All that was really needed was the conductor to come along and let him in. In normal times it often seemed to Frank that the conductor was perpetually buzzing up and down the corridor. But probably at that late hour he was immobile : perhaps taking a snooze in some quiet corner. Anyhow he did not materialise. Nobody appeared in the corridor : not a head was poked out into it. However, Frank shouted :

" A moi ! A l'aide ! A moi ! "

He shouted five or six times. Then he realised that he might as well have whispered, the roar of the train drowning every other sound. Stentor himself could hardly have made his voice heard. Frank was rushing through a tunnel, a regular gale of wind seeking to tear him from his hold : half-suffocated by the foul fumes of the tunnel. He clung on, wondering savagely whether, and when, that rotten train would stop at a station. Frank did not care much, by that time, if he lost that train. Indeed he was more anxious to lose that train than he ever had been to catch one ! But the train did not stop ; the tunnel seemed endless, and the wind almost wrenched Frank away.

Luckily it did not occur to him to get excited about it. Quietly, he worked his way along the car, till he was able to get round the end of it, sheltered from the wind, though not from the horrible fumes.

There, in the space between two cars, he held on more securely : also, from the narrow end window, he had a view of the length of the lighted corridor inside. But it was still vacant : nothing was to be seen in its whole lighted length : no chance of help, no chance of attracting the attention of passengers, most of them probably asleep or dozing.

Frank's next idea was to smash the end window and clamber in. That seemed good to him, and he tried

it on. But even in his new and somewhat sheltered position, it was a dangerous game to let go with one hand. However, there was no help for that ; and, holding on as hard as he could with his left, he grasped 'Vivian' his right, and banged on the glass. An ordinary window must have cracked to splinters under the blow. But train windows seemed to be made of sterner stuff. Twice, thrice, Frank banged energetically with 'Vivian' and the window passed the test undamaged. Then, in desperation, he crashed with his elbow, and that did it.

The glass flew.

There was a crash, and a scattering of fragments in the corridor within. A great gap opened before Frank. He wrenched away jagged pieces that remained, sticking out like daggers. Even then it was not easy, for the window was narrow, like all the end windows on the cars. Frank, by good fortune, was a slim fellow. Daniel Lambert or Henry the Eighth or Billy Bunter could never have got through that window. But he had a thick overcoat on, and even then he did not chuck away that idiotic novel. How he scrambled through that window, without cutting himself to ribbons on jagged glass, he hardly knows. He tumbled headlong into the corridor inside, surrounded and accompanied by fragments of glass, and still with 'Vivian' in his hand. As he landed, panting, Frank heard a sudden, startled, gasping ejaculation. He looked up to see a passenger who had stepped out into the corridor, doubtless having heard the crash. The man stared at him with goggling eyes, as if at a ghost.

No doubt it was surprising to see a man come aboard a train, in a tunnel, by way of a smashed window. The man in the corridor stood as if entranced, his eyes popping at Frank. Then he backed into the doorway from which he had emerged, and Frank saw no more of him. Nobody else came out or even looked out.

Then Frank made the happy discovery that his right wrist was streaming blood. He had been unconscious of the cut till that moment. He thought of getting the conductor to bind it up : he had no doubt that the conductor would turn up after that terrific crash. But the conductor did not. Nobody on the train seemed to have heeded it, except that one half-awake passenger who had appeared for a moment and then disappeared again.

Frank stepped along the corridor, found the first compartment empty, went into it, and sat down. He rather expected the solitary passenger who had seen him, to give him a look-in. But the man did not appear : Frank never saw him again. With his left hand and his handkerchief, Frank bound up his right wrist as well as he could. The cut, though painful and though there seemed enough blood to have satisfied the young man in Dickens who was so fond of it, could not have been dangerous, for it never had any ill-effects, and it mended in the course of time.

The train roared on—Frank now sitting in it as a passenger as he was entitled to do. It was a change much for the better. But he envisaged with considerable uneasiness the probable outcome of his adventure. Gesticulating Frenchmen, and a long bill for damages, the difficulty of explaining to foreigners how and why it had happened : it was not an attractive vista. It seemed certain that the incident must come to light before the train reached Monte : and there seemed no help for that. Frank, of course, was willing to pay the damage : but he did not want to spend the remainder of the night, and perhaps the next day, explaining to one official after another. Then the train stopped at Eze.

Eze-sur-Mer is a lovely spot, with lovely cliffs for clambering over—at a later date, Frank spent happy weeks there with Micky. On the present occasion his stay was brief : it could, I think, be computed in seconds. With considerable presence of mind, Frank

stepped out of that train at Eze. It was a fairly long walk from Eze to Monte, and the hour was very, very late : but it seemed to him a good idea, and he lost no time in acting upon it. The express rolled on to Monte, and Ventimiglia, without Frank Richards. Frank did not want to dodge his just liabilities : he would gladly have paid for the broken window : but he did want to avoid torrents of French, a whole pantomime of gesticulations, and waste of time. Which he successfully did, walking up from Eze to Monte under the stars.

And that was all !

Frank arrived at his hotel at Monte at a very late—or rather, a very early—hour. He went to bed and slept like a top. The following morning, with a bandaged wrist, he was typing Billy Bunter as usual. What the population of the train thought when the smashed window and blood-stains were discovered, he never knew. Probably there was a spot of excitement—perhaps quite a big spot : but Frank never heard anything about it, and was quite pleased never to hear anything about it. And that, as I have already remarked, is all !

If this chapter has bored you, dear reader, remember that Frank warned you at the beginning that adventures in real life are not worth relating.

CHAPTER XIV

MONTE

MONTE CARLO is—or was—a delightful place. It is quite unreal. Perhaps that is one of its charms. At Monte you have left the common earth—and commonsense—behind you. You live an airy, fictitious sort of existence, in which money has little meaning, and hardly any value.

When a cabby in Nice overcharges you ten francs, you reason with him. When you step across to Monte, the bare idea of bothering about ten francs would make you laugh. You have left such considerations far away. If you play for small stakes, ten francs goes in a whisk. If you play for large, you lose enough in an evening to buy the cabby and his horse, and everything that is his. If you are staying in Monte, you pay for everything on generous lines. And you don't care. For if you score at the Rooms, you can afford it, and more. If you lose at the Rooms, you go stony anyhow: and take the departing train a sadder though probably not a wiser man. So it really matters little whether the croupiers take it all, or whether Boniface who keeps your hotel, François who bows you to your table, and Lisette who potters about your rooms, take a whack also.

And, strange to say, it is worth it.

You arrive at Monte with a hope, almost a quiet confidence, of breaking the bank. You retire defeated, but feeling that you have had a run for your money, and that you may have better luck next time. You won't, of course. But there is always—or seems to be—a chance that luck may run your way. Anyhow while it lasts, you have stepped off the common earth, and lived an exotic life in the realms of faerie.

You live, whatever your means, at a rate that only a millionaire could afford—if he could! Obviously that cannot last very long. But while it lasts it has a sweet savour. A man who "blues" fifty pounds a day is living at the rate of about twenty thousand a year. Even if it lasts only one day, for that day he is a millionaire. When it has lasted a week, you begin to wonder—at least Frank Richards did—how many pages of typescript you will have to turn off the machine to get your finances in order again. When it has lasted a month, you pack up and go—unless you have, like some extreme cases, a fancy for a gun and the Suicide's Cemetery. Millionaires may carry on as long as they like—ordinary mortals cannot. But it seems very good while it lasts.

What Monte may be like these days, after so much "woe, destruction, ruin, loss, decay" have been scattered so far and so wide, I think I would rather not know. I like to remember the Monte of my own time. I think of that lovely spot on the shores of the Mediterranean, as I saw it year after year, in the days when Plancus was consul: and I prefer to think of it as it was, not as it probably is.

Frank Richards often had a run to Monte Carlo in those days. He would go up for the afternoon when he was at Nice. He would cut across from San Remo. He would take a trip from Paris to test a new "system." On one occasion he made a prolonged and determined stay, within a few minutes' walk of the portals over which might be inscribed, for the behoof of hopeful punters, "Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate."

Not that such a warning would produce the slightest effect on a single punter. Hope springs eternal in the punter's breast. Really and truly, at the bottom of his heart, he knows very well that he will never trim the tiger's claws, and that the tiger will devour him. But he refuses to know it. He doesn't want to know it, and he won't.

Many a time, over many years, did Frank fancy himself in the role of a bold breaker of banks. He would try systems : many and varied. Or he would rely on his luck. In either case he came out, in the long run, at the little end of the horn, as the Americans say.

But he would always woo again the smiles of the fickle goddess of Fortune. The mirage would still lure him on. Not being entirely devoid of common-sense, he must have known, had he chosen to know, that there was nothing in it. And indeed his time might have been better spent. He is, he hopes at least, wiser now. Yet even now, in sober and serious old age, with much more urgent things than breaking banks to think about, Frank will stir at the mention of Monte, like an old war-horse snuffing the battle from afar. He hears again the click of the ivory ball tossing in the whirling wheel, he hears the nasal voice droning " Faites vos jeux, messieurs." With his mind's eye he watches the wheel slow down, the leaping ball come to rest, and the croupiers' long rakes reach for the stakes. Then he remembers the time that has passed, and that he is an old ass to be thinking of such things. Now he is old and wise. But it is very pleasant to be young and unwise. Ahimé ! Dov' é la giovanezza ? Dov' é ?

I t was a great occasion when Frank carried on his longest and most determined campaign to break the impregnable bank. For the time that mirage dominated him. Roulette haunted even his dreams—it even spilled over into the pages of the ' Gem ' and ' Magnet,' though as a warning to youth, not an example. Frank has always been wiser for others than for himself.

But it was only a phase. Frank wasn't really such an ass as all that : not at other times. And even in those hectic days, he is happy to record that he did not fail to turn out his average quota of copy. Almost every morning he put in his accustomed two or three

FRANK RICHARDS IN 1912

[*Photo by J. F. Lawrence*

FRANK RICHARDS IN 1951

hours on the machine. Tom Merry and Billy Bunter still received their due. But it was a welcome moment when he locked the machine for the day, and was his own man till midnight.

Not often, either, did he play in the afternoons. There was the sea : there was the magic coast, there were the mountains—earthly paradise all round him. There was the ebb and flow of humanity : the Babel of innumerable tongues, some of which Frank understood, many of which he didn't. He might be speaking French one minute, Italian the next, and then guttering in German. But every evening, or almost every evening, Frank did not fail the Casino.

Sometimes he had great luck. He would stroll into the Rooms, stop at the first table, and carelessly toss a piece, the first that came to hand, on Number Seventeen, which he had an idiotic fancy was his lucky number—perhaps because it was at seventeen that he had struck lucky with scribbling. And strange to relate, Number Seventeen did come up, many times. One special occasion Frank recalls. He joined a crowded table : all seats were taken, perpendicular punters staked over the shoulders of the sitters : and Frank tossed a louis over a shoulder to land on Number Seventeen. He was barely in time : hardly had the louis landed, when a rasping voice rasped out " Rien ne va plus." And seventeen came up, and thirty-five similar pieces of gold were pushed across to Frank : and there was a murmur at the table, and heads were turned. It seemed to the whole table a wonderful spot of luck, and so, no doubt, it was. But how many times Frank tossed a coin on his lucky number, when it failed to come up, he could hardly compute.

But such an incident made a punter feel on top of the world. He was in the vein : the game was his, wax in his hands. The subsequent course of events during the evening would generally undeceive him.

Sometimes Frank would leave the Rooms walking

on air, with a roll of notes, and gold clinking in his pockets. But these days were worthy to be marked with a white stone : for they were rare. Generally Frank resigned his financial resources to the care of the croupiers.

Luck, good and bad, alternated for weeks : but the balance was always in favour of the bank. And then came a bad spell, when Frank got it good and hard. Absolutely foul fortune haunted him. He had only to back a number to make it, apparently, a physical impossibility for that number to come up. He had only to back a carré, to make it unimaginable for any of the four numbers in that carré to materialise. If he descended to the child's play of backing the columns and the dozens, the winning number would always be in a column or a dozen that he hadn't backed. If he gave his support to red, black would supervene. If he changed to black, red would immediately proceed to make up for lost time. Never was such a run of rotten luck.

You don't think about money or bother about it, at Monte—so long as it lasts. Not till a certain moment comes. That moment is when you find yourself at the end of your tether.

Frank, determined that it should be now or never, scrounged resources from all quarters. His bank account ran dry. Cash came from various directions : only to disappear in a single direction. Frank recalls that he even touched his publishers for an advance on ' Gems ' and ' Magnets.' But he had to realise, at long last, that he would never drive away from Monte in a two-thousand-guinea car of his own, humming " I'm the Man that Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo ! "

Still, if his luck and his funds were low, his spirits were high. On one of the last evenings, a croupier, who had raked and raked and raked, without Frank being in the least disconcerted by the Rake's Progress, remarked to him, with a cheery grin, " Monsieur

perds toujours, mais Monsieur est toujours gai ! " It was true. Frank was as gay as a lark.

Neither were his spirits dashed when finis came. He still had his typewriter, his dog, Billy Bunter and Tom Merry. With considerable self-restraint, of which he is duly proud, he devoted his last remittance to paying his bills, instead of chucking it away in a last flutter, as he was of course strongly tempted to do. He was left with just enough to hire a car to carry him into Italy : heading for a remote, salubrious, unexciting spot where, with rigid economy, he would be able to carry on till things came round.

He departed. He dismissed his car—his final extravagance—and in Italy boarded the horse-diligence for the Col di Tenda. And then for a long time he buried himself in the mountains, in the region of Cuneo, where you could live on next to nothing, and there was not a thing upon which money could be spent. And things came round.

CHAPTER XV

DAYS IN VENICE

VENETIAN gondoliers, it is said, used to sing the verses of Tasso. They had chucked this in Byron's time, for he tells us that "silent rows the songless gondolier." Neither had they revived it in Frank Richards' time. Their chief utterances that he remembers were prolonged howls, somewhat in the manner of a scalded cat. These they would utter when rounding corners on narrow canals, especially after dark, no doubt to give warning that they were coming : as effective as, though less musical than, motor-horns.

Frank's favourite gondolier---or rather, the gondolier of whom Frank was the favourite—on his second visit to Venice, was Felice. If Felice had a surname, Frank never heard it. He was a cheery, happy, obliging fellow, handsome in a dark unwashed way. Frank sometimes wondered what he would have looked like had he washed. He never learned.

Felice became one of the most familiar sights of Venice to Frank. Frank would have known him at almost any distance : unless, of course, he had taken a sudden and unexpected fancy to soap and water, which might have turned him into a complete stranger.

Frank's hotel, on the Grand Canal, had once been a palace. It was not very far up the canal ; he had a good view of Santa Maria della Salute. It had many remains of past magnificence : as well as some of the discomforts in which, it seemed, the ancient noble families of Venice must have lived in the days of the Doges. Vast marble steps led down to the canal, and as soon as you appeared on those steps, gondolas and

gondoliers materialised out of the blue. There were many and various gondoliers : Frank saw every sort, excepting the sort with which he had become acquainted chez Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan.

After his first trip in Felice's gondola, Felice took possession of Frank. He attached himself to Frank in Venice just as Micky did in Marseilles. Sometimes he had arguments with other gondoliers, who desired to annex the signore inglese : but Felice always carried off the prize.

In Venice, of course, you take a gondola as in London or Paris you take a cab. But in Venice you do not always want a gondola, any more than you always want a cab in London. It was an easy way of getting about, but it was slow. Very often Frank preferred his own legs as a means of locomotion. It was but a few minutes' walk to the Place of St. Mark. When Frank wanted to take a saunter round the Piazza, before lunch, after a morning on the machine, he really did not want to make a voyage of it. This, Felice either could not or would not understand.

Felice spoke little English : chiefly, "You want a gondola : yes ?" Frank would come out with the intention of sauntering, resolutely not looking towards the canal. But it booted not. Felice would appear out of space, with his graceful bow, his happy smile, his flash of teeth, and his persuasive murmur, "You want a gondola : yes ?" It was futile for Frank to explain that he did not want a gondola. Felice knew better, and Frank would end by taking the gondola. It was not till he discovered a side door that gave on a lane out of sight of the canal, that he was able to take walks in Venice without the assistance of Felice.

Venice is a lovely city. How many times has that been said ? However, Frank will say it once more. Frank Richards had thought about Venice almost as long as he had thought about anything at all. From boyhood it had been associated in his mind with Antonio and Shylock ; with Marino Faliero and

Venice Preserved : with the Stones of Venice, and—of course—that Barcarolle. Often had he dreamed of walking on the Rialto : of floating down the Grand Canal humming " Nuit d'amour, belle nuit d'amour." Of gliding on the silvery lagoon in the soft moonlight of the south : of feeding the pigeons in the Piazza : of gazing up at the ancient Campanile : of exploring that deadly prison " sous les plombs " from which Casanova so marvellously escaped. Frank was now able to realise his boyish dreams : and it was like another dream to him.

But even Venice was not always romantic and poetical. Even in Venice the Italian is quite a normal and practical fellow. In fact you take your poetry and romance with you, and the magic of the sea-city's loveliness helps on the illusion. But your illusion sometimes runs up against a snag. Frank remembers a lovely moonlight night, undoubtedly a " nuit plus douce que le jour." Felice was steering his gondola through a dark narrow canal, between immense high walls broken only by a few glimmering windows. Felice handled the immense oar : while Frank, reclining on cushions, half-dreamed of ancient Venetian days and nights, of Doges in their gorgeous robes, of cloaked bravoes lurking in shadowy corners, and what not. Suddenly a window, high up in a towering wall, opened. A hand, an arm, and a bucket, emerged.

On narrow Venetian canals one's motto ought to be that of the Boy Scouts : Be prepared. But there was no time to prepare. The bucket was up-ended : down came the bilge, in a streaming flood. The gondola was in the middle of the canal, but the passage was so narrow that that cut no ice. Down came the flood: and even now, after so many years, Frank feels thankful that he, on his cushions, had already passed the danger-zone. But Felice was standing at the stern with his oar. He got practically the whole benefit of it.

The yell that burst from Felice bore no resemblance whatever to the sweet songs of the old gondoliers. Frank Richards has heard a Red Indian utter a war-whoop—not on his native heath, but when the famed "Buffalo Bill" was giving a show in London with genuine redskins. But the war-whoop of Sitting Bull and his warriors hadn't a thing on Felice's when he got the bilge. He left Sitting Bull standing!

Felice ceased to labour with his long oar. He stared upward with a streaming face at a glimmering window. He talked to that window.

It was the first time that Frank had seen Felice in anything but a good temper. On all other occasions he had lived up to his happy name. Now he let himself go, and demonstrated that the sweet Italian tongue could sound as savage, as rasping, as German uttered by a Prussian officer. His Italian was largely a Venetian dialect unknown to Frank: but what Frank could understand of his tirade was fearfully expressive. The mildest word he used was "furfante," which is sufficiently vigorous.

No face appeared at the high window. The bilge-hurler did not look out. He must have heard Felice—indeed Felice might almost have been heard as far as the Dolomites---so he must have known that someone had intervened between his bilge and the canal. But he did not seem interested. Like Byron's gladiator, he heard but he heeded not. Felice wasted his sweetness on the desert air.

"Andiamo!" exclaimed Frank. He was anxious to get out of range, lest another bucket might be emptied. His luck might not have been so good a second time. "Andiamo, Felice! Presto! Prestissimo! Andiamo!"

But Felice did not, for once, heed the master's voice. Standing on the gunwale, he howled up at the window, fairly spitting in his wrath. Not till several minutes had elapsed, and his eloquence still failed to draw the unseen bucketeer, did Felice at length ply

his oar, and push on, much to Frank's relief. But Felice continued to mutter, if not to yell, as he poled. There was a near corner, into a wider canal, which the gondola turned. As he swung slowly round, Felice gave a last glare back at the high glimmering window, and uttered a final howl :

" Furfante ! "

Then we disappeared round the corner, and the incidentclosed.

Felice, with his happy nature, seemed to get over it : indeed I think he forgot all about it soon afterwards. Frank did not forget so readily, for when Felice passed up and down the gondola, a scent totally unlike attar-of-roses reminded Frank of it. The Italians say " Vedi Napoli e poi mori " : and on some of the obscurer canals of Venice one might say " Smell Venice and nearly die." The scents of Venice indeed linger in memory's nose. After his unwonted bath, Felice was as aromatic as the most neglected canal in the sea-city. Frank rather wondered whether, after that experience, Felice would wash. But the next day there was no sign of it.

Frank Richards, like Byron, has " stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs, a palace and a prison on each hand." But he has not, like Byron, " seen from out the wave her structures rise " from that coign of vantage. Frank is not a poet : no doubt that is the reason why. From the Bridge of Sighs Frank could see two vast walls shutting in a narrow canal, with a glimpse of lagoon in the distance. How Byron contrived to see Venice's structures rise, from such a look-out post, is one of those things that are " wropt in mystery." Perhaps " the poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling," may see things hidden from common mortals.

Frank enjoyed his second visit to Venice ever so much more than his first. In four or five days with Miss N. Y. certainly he had seen more " sights " than in four or five weeks on his second visit. But Frank never had much of an eye for the attractions so duti-

fully catalogued by Baedeker. He liked to take things easy, and did not care a boiled bean if he missed the most amazing example of the Corregiosity of Correggio. He could spend an hour just watching the pigeons in the Piazzo di Sammarco, or lying in the sun at the Lido. He loved to float in a gondola far out on the lagoon, just doing nothing. It was reluctantly that he landed one day at Murano to explore a place where they made glass—wonderful glass. He was pressingly invited by a gentleman belonging to the place, who, as an overpowering inducement, explained that it was free of charge. What he said was " It will cost you something "—but obviously meant that it would cost you nothing : his English, not his hospitality, was at fault. And in fact it cost Frank nothing, except that " noblesse oblige " caused him to buy glass things that he did not want.

Only one spot of excitement came his way at Venice : a blow that came on, on the Adriatic, during a run in a little felucca : when he had to hold on for dear life. All the rest was " dolce far niente." Frank, as a native of the vigorous North, would not find it " dolce " to " far niente " over a long period : but he did enjoy almost every minute of those lazy weeks in Venice. There was one fly in the ointment : as in this imperfect world there generally is : Remington did not seem to run so freely in Venice as in other places. Mountains are really the place for writing.

Frank will close this chapter with one little incident —one of his many blunders. It was quite an idiotic blunder, very like the one he made later at Mill Hill Barracks, when he attended that delectable spot in the War time for his " Medical " : and not being able to find his car when it was over, requested guidance from a man he took to be a corporal, but who turned out to be a captain. However, we have not come to the War yet : here is the Venetian episode.

It was a hot afternoon, and Frank had arranged to

meet somebody somewhere. Not being so well up in Venetian topography as he had supposed, he missed his way and wandered. A man in uniform, no doubt observing that this was a lost foreign sheep, came up and offered his services, with a polite bow, in the charming Italian manner. Frank was glad of his aid : and they walked together for some distance, his uniformed friend guiding. Frank had not the remotest idea that he was an Army officer—still less that he was quite a high officer. In continental places there are so many uniforms. The head-porter at Frank's hotel looked like a general, if not a field-marshal. Frank, in the innocence of his heart, supposed that his friendly helper was some sort of a guide, or cicerone, or something of the kind : his beautiful manners did not reveal the truth, for practically all Italians have beautiful manners. He supposed, without even thinking about it, that his guide and helper would expect something in the way of cash for his services—so very many Italians did expect cash ! Frank never was stingy in recognizing services rendered. Judging by the uniform that the man was something rather high up in the guide or cicerone line, he simply resolved to make it a decent tip—not a mere couple of lire, but a five-lire piece, equivalent to a French five-franc piece. I am speaking, of course, of the days when francs were francs, and lire were lire, not the farthings they now are.

They arrived at a spot from which Frank's way was clear, and as they parted, Frank placed a five-lire piece in a brown hand. It was the most natural thing in the world to do : he had done it hundreds of times. But—— !

The silver cartwheel did not adhere to the brown hand. It dropped with a ringing clash on the pavement. Surprise and reproach, luckily not anger, were registered in the brown face. The man talked rapidly, and it dawned on the dismayed Frank that

this was not a guide, not a cicerone, not a man to be tipped at all, but an officer in the Italian Army. The five-lire piece lay unheeded while the military gentleman talked rapidly with his tongue, and almost as rapidly with his hands. Frank was overwhelmed with remorse.

In his best Italian he expressed his deep, his heart-searching regret for his error. He was glad to see the smile return to the Italian gentleman's face—the excellent fellow held out his hand, which Frank shook most cordially : they bade one another adieu in the most friendly manner, and Frank went on his way—completely forgetting the five-lire piece that lay on the pavement.

Patter, patter, came after him in a few moments. He turned—it was the Italian officer. For a second Frank wondered whether the military gentleman had decided, after all, to make a quarrel of it. But it was not that—it was far from that. The smiling gentleman extended to Frank the forgotten five-lire piece, which he had kindly picked up, pattering after Frank to restore it to him. Frank caused that wretched piece of silver to vanish into a pocket very swiftly. Then once more they shook hands, Frank raised his hat, the Italian officer saluted, and they parted with mutual esteem.

CHAPTER XVI

ROME

BILLY BUNTER, in the 'Magnet,' visited Rome, and tea'd on the Pincian Hill, and remembered Rome as a place where you got jolly good cakes. It is true that you get jolly good cakes in Rome: but there are undoubtedly many other reasons for remembering the Eternal City.

Frank Richards has been often in Rome. Often he approached the city with his mind full of classical reminiscences. Generally these evaporated after arrival.

Rome is a very ancient city: and there is hardly a city more modern. At every step you are reminded of the past, and jarred by the present. The past has a deep appeal for the foreigner: the native's thoughts and feelings are very much in the present tense. If modern Romans are descended from ancient ditto, they bear little resemblance to their forefathers. True, every now and then you are startled by the sight of a noble face that might have come off an old Roman medal. Often it is in need of soap and water. Frank has seen peasants who, on their looks, might have been lineally descended from the Caesars. But if Brutus or old Julius could come back at this time of day, they would recognize the Roman citizens no more than they would the Roman city. If anything has come down from the old time, it is perhaps the rather bitter sense of ironic humour of Juvenal's day.

Romans, and Italians generally, do not care two hoots for the "grandeur that was Rome." The Italians are an intensely practical people. And the Romans are probably the most practical of the lot.

Not only Time and the Goth are responsible for the devastation of the ancient city. The Romans, generation after generation, have done their bit. Ancient buildings, priceless to sentimental foreigners, have for centuries been used merely as quarries. Laws were passed, at last, to check it: but they came late. In the Middle Ages the noble Roman would drag away priceless relics of the past by the cart-load, to strengthen his ugly fortress. Up to quite recent times the enterprising builder would use the Colosseum as a supply dump. The Palazzo di Venezia, where a fat Dictator used to sit in state, was erected by dragging away whole sections of the Colosseum. A peasant would think nothing of knocking the head off Antinous to stop a gap in the wall of his hut. For centuries on end the modern Roman "rived what Goth and Time had spared."

Shakespeare tells us that imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay, might stop a hole to keep the cold away. Undoubtedly a statue of imperial Caesar might be used to plug the wall of a barn.

Many, if not most, tourists merely "do" Rome. They open their Baedeker or their Murray, and follow his guidance. They are led like sheep, and having, like sheep, been shorn, they return to their native folds. But there are an earnest few—very earnest: and Frank has more than once suspected that their earnestness provides the Romans with a little satirical amusement.

Frank Richards has wandered in the Colosseum by moonlight, and pictured the past in his romantic mind. But seldom or never did he catch a Roman at that game. Germans, yes: but the Romans preferred brightly-lighted cafés to any amount of impressive ruins in the dim mysterious light of the moon. They are cheery practical souls, with little use for the past, glorious or inglorious.

We in this country are much less practical. Our own antiquities are of yesterday, compared with

those of Rome. But one can hardly imagine a Brixton builder carting away Westminster Abbey to build a block of flats. The Italian outlook is much more utilitarian. Still, the peasant may no longer patch his hovel with priceless marbles. If there be a hole in his wall, he must let the wind blow where it listeth : he must not plug it with a leg snapped off a statue, or with an emperor's bust. Which is rather rough on him really, for he is terribly poor, and has no use whatever for antiquities except from the point of view of their practical utility.

Frank Richards has headed this chapter " Rome ": but what is he to say about Rome? Everything that can be said about Rome has been said, not once, but many times. Rome has been done so often, almost to the last brick, that Frank mercifully refrains from doing it again. Besides, Frank, rather curiously perhaps, never gave much heed to the things that travellers generally describe at great length and with much gusto. He doesn't even know the height of St. Peter's: and doesn't want to know. He doesn't know the depth of the Catacombs : and again he doesn't want to know. He hasn't kissed the Pope's toe : and doesn't want to. He has even forgotten which Pope it was that he saw arrayed like Solomon in all his glory. He did not visit Keats' tomb : tombs never had any attraction for him. He did enjoy exploring the Castle of St. Angelo, thinking of Benvenuto Cellini, and the deeds of derring-do performed—perhaps !—by the bold Benvenuto, as chronicled in his " Vita scritta per lui medesimo." Of all his experiences in Rome, and they were many, Frank will relate only one. And that, like the baby of Mrs. Easy's nurse, is a very little one.

Frank happened to be in Rome when the great monument to Victor Emanuel was a-building. Frank's idea was that there were already too many buildings in Rome, both ancient and modern : but they were adding one more mighty edifice. Privileged people

were allowed to go in and view the unfinished structure : but you had to get a special ticket somewhere for that purpose. Frank, with his usual carelessness, omitted that detail. Some relatives of his were in Rome at the time, and they wanted to see what was to be seen, and Frank undertook the duty of cicerone. He arrived on the spot with two ladies and a gentleman, but minus the indispensable ticket of admission.

The entrance was barred by a big, stout, important man in uniform---some sort of a super-custodian. He demanded to see the " biglietto "—the special ticket of leave, as it were. That was a *sine qua non :* without it admission was impossible, unthinkable. Frank, having no such ticket, naturally could not produce it. He talked in his best and most persuasive Italian—in vain. Cerberus was adamant. Without a ticket you could no more enter that building, than the Peri could enter Paradise. All Frank's blandishments were wasted on the desert air. Inexorable, Cerberus proceeded to close the wicket.

There was a murmur behind Frank from two ladies: while a masculine voice murmured " Silly ass ! "

But Frank was equal to the occasion. He had not knocked about in Italy for nothing. He had picked up knowledge of the manners and customs. He put his hand in his pocket, as if he had just remembered that he had the ticket there, after all.

" Va bene," he said, " Ho un biglietto."

The custodian eyed him doubtfully, with the wicket half-closed. Frank drew his hand from his pocket. Within his palm was a five-franc piece, held carefully so that it should meet no eyes but those of the super-custodian.

The man looked, expecting, at last, to see the ticket. He gave a little start when he saw what kind of " ticket " it was. He gazed at the five-franc piece which Frank had described as a " biglietto " : and for a moment his face was worth a guinea a box,

struggling between a grin and a frown. But the grin won the day.

" Si, signore," he said.

The " ticket " disappeared into his hand, then into his pocket : the way was open, and Frank led his flock in.

CHAPTER XVII

VESUVIUS

"ANDIAMO!" said Giuseppe.

The horses were waiting at the foot of the bridle-path. Dusky Italians, in unnecessary numbers, held them ready for the signori. We mounted and rode. Vesuvius loomed up before us, against a sky of amazing blue. It was a February morning, fresh and clear. A smoky patch high above indicated that Vesuvius had put on his morning pipe.

We were going up from the Pompeii side. George had been reading Baedeker in the carriage from Pompeii to Casa Bianca, and when we went to the horses, he stated, on the authority of Baedeker, that the ascent from the other side was easier, with more adequate arrangements for the comfort and convenience of ascenders.

That was George, all over. He was always full of information a little too late to be of use. The hotelier at Pompeii had decided everything for us, like the good managing man he was: and at the time George had been thinking chiefly about lire, not about ease of ascent.

Looked at from Pompeii, Mount Vesuvius did not seem much of a proposition. Closer at hand he appeared a little tougher. Anyhow we were for it now, in the saddle, bucketing up rocky slopes.

Frank Richards has written many tales of adventure, and would not have been displeased to find material for another on the slopes of Vesuvius. He would not have been sorry to hear a dull, hollow boom under the lava-fields. Though probably, in that case, he might have been left guide-less on the spot.

But there was no hollow boom. There was nothing

but the clatter of hoofs on crumbled lava, jingle of bridles, and an occasional grunt from George. Lava, and sunshine, and the beaming faces of guide and horse-boys.

It was fairly easy going. Frank has ridden on far tougher trails than the bridle-path up Vesuvius. So long as the way was on horseback, there was nothing to worry about. Unless, of course, the old volcano should wake up at an inopportune moment! In which case a modern tourist might be encased, like an ancient inhabitant of Pompeii, in a sarcophagus of lava, to furnish an interesting discovery for the archaeologists of future ages. What would they think, say in the year 2000 or 3000, if a copy of the 'Magnet,' in Frank's pocket, revealed the classic features of Billy Bunter?

But there was no danger of that. Had there been, Giuseppe would not have been trotting contentedly beside the horse. He would be but a timid tourist who would not follow where Giuseppe led.

Easy going—till we reach the hut marking the spot where the old bridle-path becomes impracticable. Above that spot it had been severely upset by the last eruption. Horses could go no further. So there the steeds are left, and we proceed on foot, in a bog of crumbled lava and dust—dust and dust and dust and more dust.

This, at last, is hard going. Feet slip in the powdery layers, slide in it, almost ramble in it. It is a fresh morning, with a breeze: but one grows warmer and warmer, and breathes harder and harder, and begins perhaps to wonder whether Vesuvius is worth while after all. George's grunts grow more frequent and more emphatic. He slips, sits down in a sea of scattering dust, and utters, in bitter accents, the German word for "therewith." At least that is what it sounds like. For readers who may not happen to know, the German word for "therewith" is "damit."

Frank mops a brow that is wet with honest sweat.

George, sitting in dust like Marius in the ruins of Carthage, looks up at Vesuvius's cone, or rather glares up at it, as if it had done him some personal injury.

Frank begins to feel that he has had about enough. But he has bargained with Giuseppe to be taken right up, and then down into the crater, within the cloudy cone. He is going to keep to that : he has to explore that crater for a very good reason. On the morrow, when Remington will be clicking again, Harry Wharton and Co. are going to discover a treasure-cache in that very crater—being on holiday in Italy like their author. Frank is very particular about his local colour. So Frank's motto is " excelsior." Dust or no dust, blaze of sun or no blaze, ashes or no ashes, grunts from George or no grunts, Frank is going up to the cone, and down inside. Moreover, what would Giuseppe think, if he abandoned his intention, after having made such a point of it? Frank has never counted himself a hero, but he would really hate to seem less endowed with courage than Giuseppe. Giuseppe, accustomed to dust and ashes and sun-blaze, would misunderstand. So Frank struggles onward and upward, " stepping heavenward " like the good little people in the good little books he read when he was a good little boy. George heaves up to the perpendicular, knee-deep in powdery lava-dust, and surges on, repeating at intervals the German word for " therewith."

Frank wastes a little breath, of which he has none too much to spare, on a cheery call.

" How are you getting on? "

George, who doesn't really know German, seems attached to that language. He replies with the single German word before mentioned.

" Is that how you feel? " asks Frank.

German word again. George seems to like less and less stirring up layer on layer of thirsty dust.

" Excelsior ! " suggested Frank.

Grunt !

But George keeps on. His brow is black, his eye beneath flashes like a falchion from its sheath: Mount Vesuvius is not going to beat him. It is doubtful whether a sudden eruption would stop him, as he has paid in advance for the trip, and George is the man to have his money's worth. George belongs to a northern county where they always have their money's worth or know the reason why.

But we are through the lava dust at last! We tread on hard rocks once more. There is still plenty of dust, but the going is easier. The rim of the volcano is over us: we are on the last lap. This is as high up as most tourists go: and George, a sternly practical man, sees no reason to make history. He comes to a halt, shaking dust off like a Newfoundland dog shaking off water, and stares back accusingly at the dusty tract we have so laboriously traversed. Frank pauses. There is a long pause.

"Well?" said Frank at last.

"Filthy!" said George.

"Tired?" asked Frank, with solicitude.

"Tired?" George has never been known to admit fatigue. "No! And don't talk rot."

"Coming on?"

"I'm going to sit on this rock."

"But you said you weren't tired."

"I said I'm going to sit on this rock."

George sat on the selected rock, and disinterred sandwiches and a flask of Lacrimae Cristi. George had no 'Magnet' in mind. Frank was tempted to follow his example: there really was little reason for going further, had not the attraction been, so to speak, a Magnetic one. He scrambled onward and upward with Giuseppe. Gladly he would have sat it out with George and the sandwiches. But he had to go inside that crater—it was Pike's Peak or bust! Giuseppe, for some reason, now began to lag.

So far, Giuseppe had been eager, helpful, indeed officious, with a ready hand to lend aid whether

required or not—generally not. But on the final lap he lagged, his unwashed face growing pensive. Frank, warmer and warmer, almost in a melting mood, clambered on. Breathing hard and breathing deep, he clambered to the summit. On the crater's rim Giuseppe halted.

Frank was not sorry to stop and rest for a few minutes. He peered down into the crater, as into an extensive pie-dish. Here and there, little wisps of smoke emerged from crevices. The sun was high, and made the rocks hot to the touch. A spot of shade would have been grateful and comforting. But there was no spot of shade anywhere. It was a little like being cooked : and after some minutes, Frank, tired of cookery, turned to his guide.

" Andiamo ! " he said.

Giuseppe did not stir. He shook his head. Frank, perplexed, stared at him. Here they were, on the crater's rim—descending into the interior was comparatively easy going. But Giuseppe seemed rooted. Then it occurred to Frank that Giuseppe did not want to descend into the crater. All the way up, he had seemed willing enough. But on the crater's rim, a change came o'er the spirit of his dream ! He gazed into the crater, at its floor of glimmering dead lava, and spiralling wisps of smoke. He seemed to listen. He did not seem at ease.

" Oggi, no ! " he said, at last.

" Not to-day ? " repeated Frank, " and why not ? E perche no, Giuseppe ? "

Giuseppe shook his uncombed head again.

" Forse domani, signore."

" We're here to-day, and gone to-morrow," Frank pointed out, " Avanti ! Andiamo insieme."

Giuseppe held up a brown hand as a sign to listen. Frank listened. Plainly Giuseppe did not trust the lava floor of the crater, solid as it looked. Perhaps he had witnessed the last eruption, when that solid floor must have cracked like an egg-shell. Possibly he had

banked on the signore inglese changing his mind when he reached the summit. Failing that, Giuseppe changed his own.

Was there a faint murmur from under the lava floor? If so, it was too faint for Frank to hear it. Giuseppe seemed to hear something.

Frank Richards has very keen hearing. But it has sometimes happened that he has not heard what others have heard. Later by a few years, in September 1914, when Frank was in Paris, almost everyone else could hear the thunder of the German guns. But Frank couldn't. Here and now, on the rim of Vesuvius it seemed that Giuseppe could hear some threatening sound from beneath the lava crust in the silent old crater. To Frank it was as silent as the tomb.

"Rot!" said Frank, tersely.

Giuseppe became eloquent, with his tongue and his hands. To-morrow, descent into the crater would doubtless be practicable. Yesterday it might have been practicable. But oggi—to-day—no! Any time but the present Giuseppe would gladly, happily, have accompanied the signore. But oggi, no! It was the present tense that worried Giuseppe.

One thing was clear: Giuseppe was not going down into that crater, and he never had intended to go down into that crater. As the signore did not jib at it, Giuseppe jibbed.

Frank stared down into the lava pie-dish. It looked as solid and safe as Fleet Street. No doubt, deep under the lava crust, the ancient fires were burning: the molten stream ready to emerge for the next performance. The wisps of smoke indicated as much. Was that lava floor as solid and safe as it undoubtedly looked? Certainly it was, but there might have been some imaginable element of doubt. It was, of course, easy enough to ascertain, by walking on it. But "solvitur ambulando" seemed to have no appeal for Giuseppe.

Giuseppe, probably, had never heard of Empedocles.

But he did not want to run the slightest risk of plagiarizing that ancient philosopher's performance on Etna. He was a fixture on the crater's rim.

"I'm going," said Frank.

And he went.

Giuseppe argued and gesticulated. He talked with his tongue, with his hands, almost with his legs. Leaving him doing these physical jerks, Frank descended into the crater on his own. A helping hand on rugged slippery rocks would have been useful: but it was not indispensable. Frank clambered down—and then peace, perfect peace, came to Giuseppe. So long as he was left up on the rim, he did not mind what fearful imaginary perils might beset the obstinate signore inglese.

Frank slipped, and slid, and clambered. Did a startling crack sound sharply from under the seemingly-solid lava? Did a dull hollow boom echo ominously from unknown depths? Did a crevice yawn suddenly into a gap, emitting a burst of flames? Did the lava floor tremble under his tread?

Alas—no! Nothing of the kind.

Giuseppe's determination not to enter the crater had given Frank a slight feeling of adventurousness. But it faded out in the crater. It was rugged going—that was all. The lava crust on which he stood was like iron. If a faint murmur came to his ears, it was the wind. Where the lava was hot to the touch, it was only the Neapolitan sun that did it. Vesuvius was as dead as a dodo.

Scrambling over rugged rocks soon palled as an entertainment. Frank rambled about for perhaps ten minutes. And then——

Then he clambered out again, and rejoined Giuseppe on the rim. The descent into Vesuvius was as facile as the descent into Avernus, but on his return Frank could not have said "hic labor est." It was a rough clamber, and that was all. Frank's exploit bore a resemblance to that of the famous Duke of York,

who marched up a hill and then marched down again.

As he rejoined his guide, sulphurous fumes greeted his nostrils. But it was not the old volcano waking up at last ! It was only Giuseppe smoking a Neapolitan cigar.

Giuseppe led the way down—outside Vesuvius. They rejoined George, still sitting on the rock, and finishing the last sandwich, washed down by the last gurgle from the flask. George seemed in a better humour : doubtless owing to the encircling policy he had adopted towards the sandwiches and the Lacrimae Cristi.

" Where have you been all this time ? " he asked.

" In the crater."

" What on earth for ? "

" Local colour."

" What rot," said George, " I expect it's all in Baedeker. Time we started down. Baedeker says you get down in half the time it takes you to come up."

We started down. George started with a swinging stride, slipped, and did some yards in a sitting posture. He brought up against a huge chunk of lava and clung to it lovingly. Twice, thrice, he uttered the word that was apparently all the German he knew.

Frank Richards followed more sedately.

" At that rate," he remarked, " You'll beat Baedeker —you'll get down in about a tenth of the time coming up."

George did not reply in his native tongue. That German word seemed to have a fascination for him.

Giuseppe, grinning, gave him a hand up. We proceeded on the downward path. We were glad enough to get back to the horses, for the ride down to Casa Bianca. George got better and better in the saddle : once sitting down, his outlook on life seemed to improve. Frank did not hear any more German from him all the way back to Pompei'i.

CHAPTER XVIII

1914

FRANK RICHARDS had been playing golf at Cadenabbia, in 1914, when the war-clouds darkened over Europe.

Frank, like so many other people, did not see what was coming. It was his first world-war. There has been another since : and now that he has got used to them, Frank would not let one take him by surprise. But his first world-war did.

It was a hot summer, even in the mountains. Even Frank, who loved the Italian sun, thought that it was getting near time to get a move on for higher altitudes. Some relatives had joined him, and they decided on a trip into the Austrian Tyrol, where of course it was cooler. Even Micky, though born under the sun of Marseilles, seemed to feel the heat a little. However, when Frank and Co. arrived up in Bormio, close on the frontier, there was a change—it was cool, and most of the colour had gone. At Bormio they stopped for a few days before crossing into Austria.

At Bormio Micky, who was a very friendly dog, chummed up with canine natives, and became so thickly populated with fleas that his hair had to come off. The local barber undertook the task, and rather overdid it, shaving poor old Micky to his very skin. Certainly it got rid of the small unpleasant lodgers : but it was rather drastic, and Frank found with concern that Micky felt the chill of the mountain air in his bald state.

Another local artist was called in : this time in the sartorial line. He made Micky a little coat, which fitted him like a glove. Only one cloth of good quality was available, that of which the Italian

military uniforms were made. Micky, when he had his new coat on, became the cynosure of all eyes.

At the first sight of it, Frank wondered a little whether some of the plump Bersaglieri who loitered about Bormio might not take offence at it, as derogatory to the military dignity. But his doubts were set at rest when a grinning soldier greeted Micky with " Dammi la zampa, piccolo soldato ! "

Europe, as Frank learned later, was convulsed with all sorts of rumours and fears and misgivings in those sunny July days. But Bormio, perched high in the mountains, was almost beyond the reach of news, though rumours circulated. The Paris ' Daily Mail ' which generally followed Frank's footsteps faithfully by post, failed to come through. People in the hotel talked, but nobody seemed to know what was going on. Frank gave little or no heed to such rumours as reached his ears. The thing was really so impossible. He could not guess that the impossible was going to happen. It is different in these latter days, when we live in the midst of war and rumours of war, and when it is peace that seems improbable ; and a new crisis comes along with the milk in the morning. In 1914, peace had been a fixture so long that one simply couldn't picture it coming unstuck.

Frank's world had been an orderly and peaceful one. Anyone can be wise after the event. Frank knew afterwards that he was rather an ass to keep on into Austria when war was on the verge of breaking out. But there had been rumours of war a couple of years earlier, and it had all come to nothing. A German ship looking in at a place called, I think, Agadir, had caused the newspapers to spill immense quantities of printer's ink. The brief excitement had died out, in public at least : not perhaps behind the scenes. Frank gave no heed. We have measured since the height and depth and breadth of human folly : nobody now would be surprised at anything, but in 1914 we were very much surprised.

Instead, therefore, of trekking home to his own country while the going was good, which would have saved him infinite trouble later, Frank continued to type Tom Merry and Billy Bunter imperturbably, in the mornings, to take Micky on long rambles in the mountains in the afternoons, and generally to carry on as if the statesmen of Europe could be trusted not to make an unholy mess of everything. Cheerfully he made his arrangements for crossing the mountain pass into Austria : the Stelvio Pass, or Stilfserjoch, as the Germans call it. Europe blundered on to destruction unheeded.

The Stilfserjoch was rather an experience.

We had a big car—it had to be big, to take three passengers, a dog, a typewriter, no end of baggage, with the chauffeur and the chauffeur's friend. Before he reached the top of the pass Frank would have been satisfied with a smaller car. Indeed at some of the windings and turnings he would have preferred to be on foot. Looking down into thousands of feet of space from a car window, with jagged rocks showing their teeth far below, was exhilarating in a way : nevertheless, one could have too much of a good thing. We climbed and climbed between steep rocky walls and yawning abysses.

At some of the windings, which were very abrupt, the chauffeur had to slow down to dictation speed, as it were, and back the car to get round. Backing a car on the edge of a frightful precipice required a very good driver—luckily, we had one. In such ticklish spots, his friend would get down, and, standing on the very verge of Eternity, would indicate to the driver just how many inches he had to spare—when he had any. At one particular spot, almost a right angle, the car backed, and backed, and backed, till it seemed that only a miracle could keep it from slipping over the edge. Then for once there was a note of anxiety in the voice of the chauffeur's friend as he squeaked to the chauffeur. Frank looked down from the back

window—it was fairly overhanging the abyss, and he had a wonderful view of vast empty spaces, which he would perhaps have preferred to view through a telescope.

At Bormio a magazine had come his way, containing a cartoon of a car plunging headlong over a precipice, of which the caption was "Do you call this volplane or volplaney?"—spoken by the passenger to the driver. This had amused Frank, and he remembered it. So, as his car backed to the verge of the end of all things, it recurred to his mind, and he turned to his brother-in-law and asked "Would you call this volplane or volplaney?"—at which the good man had to laugh. His sister, luckily, was so occupied with her motor-veil, which was giving trouble in the wind, that she did not notice the precipice till it was past. However, we did get round that corner, and proceeded cheerily on our way.

Finally we arrived at Spondinig, then an Austrian town, but which, I believe, was taken over by Italy after the war.

Frank Richards will not give a description of scenery in the Austrian Tyrol. Words would fail him—and perhaps the patience of his readers also. Spondinig was—perhaps is—a bright and cheerful little place. There were not many people there at the time: probably rumours of war had cleared them off. Frank remembers no English in the hotel with the solitary exception of one parson, who had drifted in from Trieste, and who soon vanished—wiser in his generation than Frank.

The hotel was a very comfortable one, the proprietor an old-world gentleman with beautiful manners, and the head-waiter a broth of a boy. For some reason the head-waiter seemed to like Frank and Co., and could never do enough for them. Perhaps, having had so many English through his hands in better times, he was glad to see a few specimens remaining—the last remnant of the Old Guard, as it were.

The war, of course, was blank ruin to the tourist traffic, on which so many continental people lived prosperously in the good days. Anyhow the head-waiter, though an Austrian, seemed to like English better than he liked Germans. There were Germans there: but he never showed them the particular attention he reserved for the last of the English.

He was full of news. At every meal he had news, of war breaking out here, there, and everywhere: early news, too, for he had it before it happened. The shooting of some archduke or other was taken with what to Frank seemed undue seriousness. How was Frank to guess that such an incident could be the cause of war? He listened to the news as recited by Heinrich, and he remembers that he worked it up into a 'Gem,' in which no doubt it may still be found.

But as facts—disturbing facts—at length filtered through, Frank had to sit up and take notice: though he did not, of course, allow the flow of copy on the typewriter to be interrupted. It did look unpleasantly like War—and Austria was Germany's Ally: and Italy also was a member of the Triple Alliance, and there were Frank and Co., perched high in the mountains in the midst of the three of them.

The party agreed, reluctantly, that they had better get out. Soon afterwards they came to realise that the sooner they got out, the better. But there was a lion in the path. Remittances, long expected, had notcome through. Frank was in the same position as his own Bunter, daily expecting a remittance that showed no sign whatever of materialising. The dislocated state of Europe no doubt accounted for it: but that was no present help in time of need. Supplies had run out: there was not even the wherewithal to pay the hotel bill till something came through. Frank's relatives had supplies no nearer than Zurich—they might as well have been in the moon. It would have been as easy to get in touch with New Zealand as with Zurich.

It was a problem.

Afterwards, Frank knew that he could have cut back into Italy. But he did not know it then. Italy was at the time allied with Germany and Austria : and getting out of Austria into Italy looked a good deal like getting out of the frying-pan into the fire. Later, Italy came in on the side of the angels : but Frank was no prophet.

Getting into Switzerland by the shortest cut was the idea, and the route of escape was duly planned. But many short cuts were blocked, and much had to be left to fortune. The question of when the start could be made depended on when the cash came through—if it did ! The cash obstinately persisted in not coming through. Somewhere in the post was a quite considerable sum in English banknotes addressed to Frank. It remained in the post. At Spondinig, where it was wanted, the supply of cash grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less.

In the meantime Frank and Co. remained quite cheerful. You couldn't help being cheerful, in that invigorating air, amid those lovely mountains. And everybody was good to them, and as helpful as possible. They preserved their equanimity, which was, I think, largely founded on ignorance : they knew little or nothing of war, and had never heard of internment camps. The whole thing seemed to Frank, in fact, something in the nature of a lark. He knew afterwards that it was heaven-sent good fortune that he was in Austria and not in Germany, as he might easily have been : and as, in fact, he would have been had not his relatives joined him in Italy and changed his plans. In Germany it would have been anything but a lark. But in truth everybody was so kind and considerate and helpful that it would not have been easy to get alarmed.

The weather was lovely, the place was lovely, and the inhabitants generally were rather lovely: and, uncertain as the outlook was becoming, Frank and Co. enjoyed every one of those strange days in the Austrian Alps.

CHAPTER XIX

DIE DREI ENGLANDER !

"DIE drei Engländer !" chuckled the old dame. She was enormously amused.

Every day, after the diurnal pilgrimage to the Post, for the registered letter that came not, Frank and Co. went down to the newspaper kiosk for papers—only German ones were to be had. The kiosk was kept by a very plump old lady, who always greeted the three with friendly smiles. This old lady was rather a character.

Recruits were coming in from various quarters, and going off again from the railway station, all day long. Whenever a batch of them arrived for the train, the old lady would desert her kiosk, and go to see them off : and as Frank saw her weeping streaming tears and mopping her eyes, he naturally felt sympathetic. He supposed that she must have a son or grandson, or some other near relative, in the batch. But after this had happened several times, he began to wonder how ever many relatives the old lady had in those drafts.

It was Heinrich who enlightened him. Frank learned that the old lady of the kiosk hadn't a single relative in those batches. It was, Heinrich explained, her tender motherly heart. It seemed rather queer to Frank, for every day, sometimes twice or thrice in a day, there would be the old lady weeping and mopping, over the departing recruits, not one of whom had she ever seen before.

But she recovered her spirits in remarkably quick time, after each batch was gone. Back at her kiosk again, she was all plump smiles. Regular indulgence in the "luxury of woe" did not seem to affect her cheerful outlook on life.

The continued presence of Frank and Co.—in the circumstances—seemed to her a great joke—in fact a real shriek. She named us "die drei Engländer"—the three English—and every day when we appeared at the kiosk, her entertainment at our continued sojourn seemed to increase. Perhaps she knew all about internment camps, which we didn't! On the day that the news came through that England had declared war on Germany, and we turned up at the kiosk as usual, I almost thought that she would have a fit.

Meanwhile, everybody was as good as gold. Except for one chauffeur who was drunk, and one innkeeper who was a rogue, Frank did not meet a single Austrian who was not kind, and polite, and helpful, to the three strangers from a far land so unluckily caught in a remote corner by the War. Frank has retained from that time a liking and admiration for Austria and the Austrians, to which a subsequent war made no difference at all.

At the hotel, the bill ran up and up. In the strange circumstances mine host must have known that there was some doubt whether it ever would be paid—all depended on that unhappy remittance coming through. The Anglo-German War started: and the crucial question was, would Frank and Co. get into Switzerland before Austria was involved. Obviously that could not long be delayed. Once the country was involved in actual war, the problem of getting out might well prove insoluble. On and on the bill had run: there was no help for that: but did mine host show a sign of uneasiness, the remotest hint of inhospitality? He did not. If he had been an Austrian noble entertaining guests in his ancestral castle, his manners could not have been more superb.

The route was mapped: the car engaged: all was ready, if only that tantalizing cash came. I believe that the hotel-proprietor would have let us go without paying, had we asked: but even so we

could not have travelled without cash. Mine host continued affable and courteous : Heinrich was, if possible, more than ever affectionately attentive. Only one small spot of discord came—from a German, a tourist who was still there, though the rest had gone. This German was a young man who appeared to have imbibed the Hymn of Hate before it was written.

Frank, careless as usual, and also having more important matters on his mind, hardly noticed the man—in fact did not even notice at first that he was a German at all. He was conscious occasionally of a scowling face in the background, without heeding it. But once, when we came out of the dining-room, there was his Nibs, standing near the door : he folded his arms, and fixed us inimically with as frightful, fearful, and frantic a frown as the Lord High Executioner. Even then Frank did not grasp that this was a German having his morning hate. He thought that the man had been drinking !

He mentioned him to Heinrich, who shrugged his shoulders, and said "He is a German." That explained it ! It was rather surprising to Frank, who had known hospitality and good manners in Germany in days gone by. But there are, of course, Germans and Germans !

The next morning, when Frank came down for his usual trot with Micky before getting on the typewriter, he beheld a singular figure of fun at the end of the long corridor that gave on the doorway. In that doorway, clear in the morning sunshine, stood a figure, shaking its fist !

That fist was shaken at Frank from the length of the long corridor. Frank, staring, recognized the German tourist. He was all dressed up to go, from his heavy boots to his ridiculous little Tyrolese hat, and was just going—but, catching sight of the enemy in the distance, paused to shake his fist : brandishing it, in fact, in the air, apparently hurling mortal defiance along twenty yards of corridor. Frank stared at him, thinking that

he had never seen so utter an idiot in all his born days. Having brandished his fist, the German went out and disappeared, and Frank never saw anything more of him.

Frank was, of course, all this while typing Billy Bunter or Tom Merry, or both, in the sunny mornings. With his accustomed fatheadedness he registered copy at the Post-Office without reflecting that the post might have become unreliable. Actually, the last batch was held up, and did not arrive at the Fleetway House till after Frank was back in England. From the varied inscriptions on the envelope, which Frank saw after his return, it had passed through many hands, including those of a German censor at Munich. Frank could not help feeling that it was rather decent of that German to let it go on. It was, of course, perfectly harmless, but War is War! Strange to relate, it came on safely, though very much delayed.

There had been much talk of Zeppelins before the war. Frank, always topical, introduced one into a 'Gem' story while he was at Spondinig: or rather I should say that Martin Clifford did. The word "Zeppelin" was spotted all over a number of typed sheets in his room when the spot of trouble came. This, his beau-frere remarked when he heard of it, was just what Frank *would* do!

But Frank was always heedless of other matters when he had his work in hand. Having thought out a Zeppelin story, naturally he wrote it. The word "Zeppelin" staring at him from the page did not strike him particularly. It had more effect on others, and might have cost Frank dearly.

One morning Frank was typing Billy Bunter, and had only just got going, when there came a knock at his door. Without getting up, or even turning his head, Frank called out "Herein!"

The door opened, and two men in uniform appeared. One was a young officer with a pleasant intelligent face. The other was a soldier, solid and stolid, with no expression whatever.

Frank hated interruptions of his work. But he realised this time that there was no help for it. So he rose from the typewriter as politely as he could.

Indeed, at the sight of the military uniforms, he wondered whether " die drei Engländer " had stayed a little too long ! It quickly transpired that they had. He bowed politely to the Austrian officer, who saluted him quite civilly, and explained.

His explanation was brief, but to the point. The " three Englanders " were under suspicion. They were under arrest pending inquiry, which would be made by some man higher up, due to arrive during the day. Personally they were under no restraint : they were only to consider themselves under arrest in their rooms. They would be apprised when they were wanted for interrogation. In the meantime, the polite young man regretted that Frank must remain in his room, and the soldier would be left on guard to keep watch on him and see that he did not leave it.

Having thus delivered himself, the polite young man saluted again, and went : and the soldier remained on guard, with an expressionless face and a fixed bayonet.

CHAPTER XX

UNDER ARREST

THE soldier stood with his back to the door, his eyes fixed on Frank Richards. He was solid. He was stolid. He did not, in fact, look a bad fellow, and very likely he was quite a good one, in his own way. But his face expressed nothing whatever. His eyes, though fixed on Frank, had no more life in them than the eyes of a codfish. Macbeth's remark to the Ghost of Banquo came comically into Frank's mind, under that fish-like gaze—"Thou hast no speculation in the eyes that thou dost glare withal."

He stood motionless, " eyes front " in a rigid gaze : rifle perpendicular, bayonet pointing to ceiling. Had not Frank seen him in motion when he entered, he might almost have taken him for a wooden soldier with glass eyes. Frank spoke to him, but he seemed deaf and dumb, judging by results. If he heard, he heeded not : and his fixed gaze remained immovable.

Frank, naturally, wanted to go along and speak a word to his sister. This he explained in his best German. He received no reply : there was no sign that the man heard a word, the idiot just gazed steadily at him without batting an eyelid. Reflecting that Austrian soldiers were recruited from all sorts of Central European races, and that the man might not perhaps understand German, Frank tried him in French, Italian, and English. Not a flicker of animation appeared in the wooden face, and there was no answer.

So Frank had to conclude that the man had been given orders not to communicate with the prisoner at all. As he did not speak, did not move, and gave no sign of life, Frank decided to ascertain whether it was possible to go round him and walk out.

But at his first step towards the door, the wooden soldier woke to sudden life, as if a spring had been touched. The perpendicular bayonet suddenly became horizontal, within a foot of Frank's waistcoat. For which good reason Frank did not make a second step forward.

Still the man did not speak : still his face was as blank as a lump of dough. But his action was sufficiently expressive. It was only too plain that if Frank made another step, he would be impaled on the bayonet. The unutterable idiot was prepared to run him through the body, as you might spit a lark.

Frank shrugged his shoulders, and turned back to the typewriter. No communication, it was clear, was to be permitted with the other " Englanders," and that was that.

Frank had to stay in his room, and he was not disposed to waste his time. He had his copy to turn out, though the skies fell. Military fatheads might come and go, but Billy Bunter went on for ever. So Frank sat down to work again, under that fixed owl-like and fish-like gaze, fixed on him from the door. The bayonet resumed the perpendicular : the man became a motionless wooden soldier once more, codfish eyes glued on Frank. But in a few minutes Frank completely forgot his existence.

Frank was always lost to his immediate surroundings when he was writing. How else, indeed, could one write at all ? Once in the south of Italy Frank, coming down to lunch, learned that there had been an earthquake tremor that morning. Had not the signor been aware of it ? The signor hadn't been in the least aware of it—having been, so to speak, at Greyfriars at the time ! And so it was in the present case. Frank typed and typed and was unconscious of a fish-like gaze from the door, a wooden face, and a bayonet pointing to the ceiling. Once or twice, as he put a fresh sheet on the roller, he noticed the wooden soldier—and then forgot him again.

This lasted for two or three hours. Frank, having completed his quota for the morning, rose from the machine. He glanced at the soldier—wooden as ever, immobile, expressionless. Frank had a number of pages that required fastening together. His paper-clips were in his suit-case on a chair at a little distance. Frank, quite indifferent to the wooden soldier by this time, crossed over to the suit-case, opened it, and put in his hand for a paper-clip.

It was very nearly his last action in this world. The wooden statue woke to sudden life again, in the same sudden way as before. And it woke to fearfully active life. There was a rush of feet across the room towards Frank, and he, staring round, found the man right on him, the sharp point of the bayonet at his very ribs. No longer wooden was the face, it glared fierce suspicion, and the bayonet was in the very act of a thrust.

Frank never quite knew why he did not fall across his suit-case run through and through. The wretched man, of course, believed that he was guarding a foreign spy. He suspected, or felt certain, that Frank had groped in his suit-case for a weapon, a revolver perhaps, to shoot his way out, or a bomb. Between suspicion and alarm, both of which were legibly depicted in his suddenly-excited countenance, the man was, for the moment, merely a dangerous maniac. Frank believes that all that saved his life was the little brass clip in his fingers.

Luckily, the blockhead saw it in time. Frank, as he realised how the matter stood, held it up. It explained what Frank certainly would never have been given time to explain in words.

Possibly the man was not such a fool as he looked. Anyhow he understood. His bayonet was touching Frank's ribs. One shove would have spitted him, and that shove was almost given. Certainly had there been a revolver in the suit-case, Frank would never have lived to handle it. I still remember the sheepish look

that came over the fool's face as he saw the paper-clip, and understood that he had been alarmed for nothing.

For a second he stood, looking the most priceless idiot in Austria. Then he backed to the door again, and resumed guard there, as wooden as before.

Frank Richards clipped his typed sheets, and locked the cover on his typewriter. He was ready to go down, for the usual trot with Micky before lunch. But there was no going down for Frank. The man had orders to guard him in his room till he heard from his superior : and he was not in the least concerned about Frank's own manners and customs.

Frank was getting hungry. The trot with Micky had to be cut out. It looked as if lunch was going to be cut out also. Frank began to feel tired of this strange comedy : like the old Queen, he was not amused. Then, at long last, Heinrich happened.

Heinrich looked in, with a message for the soldier, in German, and another to Frank in English. The latter was to the effect that the Austrian officer had arrived at last, was ready to see him, and that his relatives had already gone down.

So Frank got out of his room at last. The wooden soldier revolved on his axis, following at his heels with half-raised bayonet, doubtless in case the foreign spy tried to bolt. Which the supposed foreign spy did not think of doing—not further than the dining-room, at any rate.

But the dining-room was not yet ! Frank was marched into another apartment, where he found that his sister and brother-in-law had preceded him. He was now in the Presence.

The Presence was not very alarming. The man who had come to investigate and interrogate was an Austrian officer, but Italian by race : evidently much higher in rank than the junior officer Frank had seen in the morning, but with equally polite manners. Heinrich, who remained during the interview as

interpreter and general help, treated him with deep respect, so no doubt he was, from the native point of view, something of a panjandrum.

He was, at all events, a very intelligent man, as well as an exceedingly polite one. I have no doubt that he saw at a glance that the party were harmless tourists : and it was plain, too, that the good Heinrich had done his best to make that clear. He talked German to Heinrich and Italian to us : if he had any English, he kept it to himself.

Heinrich interpreted : Frank did not really need an interpreter, but he was grateful for Heinrich's kind offices, and willingly let him run on. All was going well : but it transpired that while the interrogation was going on downstairs, a search was going on upstairs. A man came in with several typed sheets in his hand, which Frank immediately recognized as a section of a ' Gem ' then under way.

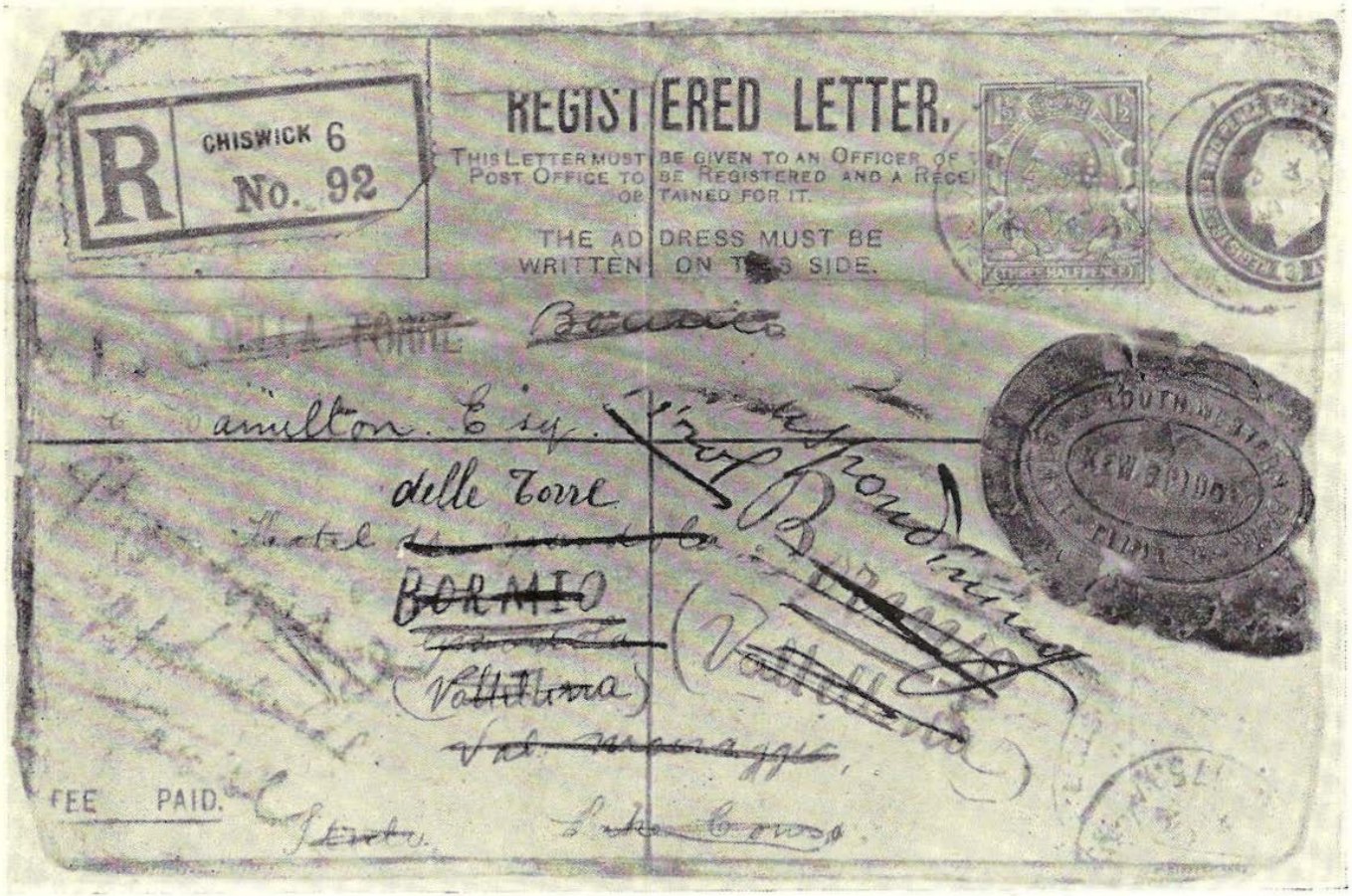
The Austrian officer's good-natured face altered very considerably at sight of them. That fatal word ZEPPELIN stared at him from the pages. Even Heinrich looked a little startled.

It was a tense moment.

Here were three Englanders, hanging on after everybody else was gone, while Europe was erupting like a volcano ; one of them constantly busy on a typewriter—in fact I think it was the typewriter that had done it !—and now—ZEPPELIN ! If those typed sheets were not a spy's report, what were they ?

Luckily Heinrich knew English as well as most other languages. The Austrian, whether he knew that language or not, obviously could not read it : only the word " Zeppelin " struck him—hard ! But Heinrich could read it, and he did---and as he perused a typed page he grinned.

The Austrian officer, with puckered brow, was puzzled by Heinrich's grin. He sharply inquired the meaning thereof : and Heinrich, not quite able to suppress the grin, explained. They were speaking a



A MUCH-TRAVELLED REGISTERED ENVELOPE

There are a further dozen postmarks on the back (see page 138)

little aside, but Frank caught the word "cricket-platz."

In that 'Gem' story a Zeppelin—before War-time, of course—descended on the cricket-field at St. Jim's, and Tom Merry and Co. became unwilling passengers on that Zepp. Of all this, the Austrian officer could see nothing but the word "Zeppelin." But as Heinrich explained, his face resumed its former expression of good-humour. Quite possibly he was rather amused and entertained by the discovery that the dangerous spy's "report" was in reality nothing more or less than a school story written for the delectation of youth! When he turned to Frank again, there was a twinkle in his eye.

So it all ended well.

The Austrian officer made quite a long speech in Italian to wind up. He pointed out that circumstances had been suspicious, and that in some other places—we guessed that he was thinking of Germany—the examination would have been "piu rigorosa." And Frank knew, afterwards, that such an examination in Germany would have been conducted on very different lines. Our officer was satisfied: he was courteously regretful of the trouble he had given, and he recommended the three English to get off home as soon as they possibly could. Then he took his leave in the most polished manner. After which, arrest being over, Frank and Co. were at liberty to get their delayed lunch: and Frank to take Micky for a run on the hill.

Frank never saw that polite officer again: but he came across the wooden soldier in the street, later, and to his surprise the man saluted him in passing. Probably he was quite a good chap, and glad, very likely, that he had not after all pushed his bayonet through a harmless author who only wanted a paper-clip.

Later that day, by happy luck, the post-office turned up trumps: or was it possible that the long

delay had been caused locally by suspicions of the "drei Engländer?" Anyhow, at long last a fat registered letter was handed over to Frank—stuffed with English banknotes. The envelope was so covered with various post-marks and inscriptions that it was quite a curiosity—and Frank has preserved it as one. It lies upon his desk now as he types. One post-mark is Lugano, another Menaggio: though what on earth that letter was ever doing at either Lugano or Menaggio is a mystery. But it had got to Bormio, and thence to Spondinig: and now it was in Frank Richards' hands—and Billy Bunter himself could not have been so glad to receive a remittance. Perhaps I will put a photograph of that queer envelope in this book: it looks like a puzzle.

All was clear now—or seemed so. Heinrich seemed quite sad to part with the last of the English: doubtless foreseeing how very long it might be before he saw any of that attractive race again. The long-accumulated bill was paid in English paper-money, which mine host seemed quite pleased to receive—and indeed if he kept those Bank of England notes a few years, they would have made him a rich man in his own currency.

All was ready for the start in the morning: and in the morning, the old dame at the kiosk received her last visit from "die drei Engländer"—which seemed to send her almost into convulsions of merriment: for that day England and Germany were at war, I suppose Russia too: for the German papers were splashed with news of war on "zwei Grenzen."

The car came round: good-byes were said, the kindest and most earnest good wishes expressed for the safety of the party: then, passengers and dog and baggage packed in, Frank Richards and Co. rolled away, en route for Switzerland.

CHAPTER XXI

GETTING OUT OF AUSTRIA

FRANK RICHARDS would like to describe that journey in detail : for it was packed with incident, and is entertaining to recall. It was no great distance, but it lasted over two days : and, reflecting on it afterwards, Frank rather wondered that they ever got through. Certainly they would have had no such luck in any country but Austria, where nearly everybody seemed as concerned about stranded foreigners as about his own affairs.

In Austria, it all seemed more or less of a lark to Frank. In Germany it might have been a very grim business. Frank heard afterwards of tourists in that country who had an extremely hectic time. Frank Richards has been a lucky fellow in many ways all his life : but never did his luck stand him in such good stead as in August 1914.

It was by the merest chance that he was in Austria and not in Germany. He had had an invitation from an old acquaintance to join up for a holiday in the Taunus: and thither he certainly would have gone, had not his relatives joined him in Italy. A German internment camp is one of those places Frank would much rather not explore.

But getting out of Austria, though almost everybody was kind and friendly, was not easy. The circus began half-a-mile out of Spondinig. The lovely country looked all peace and repose : the only sign of war an occasional batch of marching recruits. But the scene changed suddenly just like a scene in a theatre. All of a sudden, soldiers appeared from nowhere on both sides of the road, with rifles levelled at the car: an officer on horseback halted directly

ahead, with uplifted hand. The chauffeur halted with such prompt obedience that the car jumped.

The officer in the saddle was an old man, apparently a " dug-out " rooted out of retirement for such duties. He seemed just about able to sit his horse. Morning as it was, a fresh and beautiful morning, he looked tired. But his manners were impeccable. England was at war with the German ally, and obviously would very soon be at war with Austria: also but that made no difference at all to his beautiful Austrian manners. It was, no doubt, the inexhaustible courtesy of the country that enabled Frank and Co. to take their adventure so light-heartedly.

He ambled up to the car, and gave the party's papers a merely cursory glance: fortunately very cursory, for Frank's papers, with his usual carelessness, were not exactly in apple-pie order. Perhaps the old gentleman was too tired to do the business with much thoroughness : and doubtless, being an Austrian and not a Prussian, he could see that there was nothing to worry about. Then he made a sign, the soldiers lowered their rifles, and the car rolled on. Later, at Landshut, Frank was told that a car on that very road, which had not halted promptly, had been riddled with bullets. But he was told many stories of that kind.

Why roads and passes into Switzerland, a neutral country, were blocked and guarded, was rather puzzling. No doubt it was military precaution : military men often take extensive precautions that seem quite unnecessary to the mere civilian.

Frank and Co. had to depend on their chauffeur : and how much he told them was true, and how much the reverse, they had no means of discovering. That chauffeur turned out to be a rogue : one of the only two rogues Frank ever met in that happy country, where everybody else seemed to be a direct descendant of the Good Samaritan.

Various roads were blocked, or said to be blocked :

and at the end of the day, a halt was made in a village of which Frank never learned the name. The night was spent in a little inn, where Boniface was all bows and smiles—deceptive bows and deceptive smiles, as they learned later. He was the other of the two rogues.

In the morning, when the journey was due to be resumed, the chauffeur was drunk—though I suspected that he was not quite so drunk as he affected to be. He refused to take out the car. The inn-keeper, appealed to, supported the chauffeur, adding that he, on his own personal responsibility, would not permit the car to proceed: though the passengers were at liberty, if they liked, to go on without it. It was not difficult to discern what this meant.

That rascally inn-keeper had an eye on the baggage, and was obviously acting in collusion with the chauffeur. This was a real spot of worry for Frank and Co.

A crowd gathered round. Almost if not quite all the village gathered: and all showed sympathy to the stranded strangers. Some of them argued with the inn-keeper: some with the chauffeur: but the two brigands stood to their guns, and it looked like Waterloo for Frank and Co. The chauffeur was a lesser rogue than the inn-keeper: the latter, certainly, had had to fill him with strong liquors: and once or twice he seemed to hesitate, but Boniface called him to heel again. Then a sympathetic bystander tipped Frank to call in the village guard, or constable, or whatever he was, pointing out the way to the man's cottage.

It was the last hope: and off went Frank, leaving his companions in the inn-yard with the car. He knocked at the cottage door, and it was opened by a grave-looking man in civilian clothes, who asked him what he wanted. Frank explained in the best German he could muster.

The man listened quietly and patiently, without

speaking, while Frank told his tale. Then he went quietly back into his cottage.

Frank was left standing, wondering whether that last resource had failed him. But he need not have bothered. In a few minutes the man emerged again, this time in uniform. He had only gone in to change into official garments. Thus arrayed, he walked to the inn with Frank.

It was like magic !

The man looked, and was, a simple ordinary village constable---own brother to any village constable in Kent or Sussex. But he might have been the Emperor of Austria from the effect he produced.

The inn-keeper blanched at the sight of him. The chauffeur became suddenly very nearly sober. A dozen words or less from my official friend, and the truculent inn-keeper became once more the bowing Boniface of the night before.

Within ten minutes, the car was on its way.

Only once did the sedate seriousness of that village constable break into a faint smile. That was when he refused to accept any reward for his priceless services. It was a pleasant friendly smile, but he immediately became grave again. And he stayed on the spot to see the party off; saluting them as they went with a grave courtesy that a General of Division could not have exceeded.

That day was a day of wandering adventures too numerous to relate. Suffice it that the evening found the party, not in Switzerland, but in Landshut—a place they had never expected to see. Whether the chauffeur was still planning some trickery, or whether he couldn't help it, Frank cannot say; but there the party were, in Landshut. There they found a good hotel, with a very courteous host, and crowds of people. A rest and a dinner were very welcome, but the general opinion in the hotel seemed to be, that England had now declared war on Austria as well as Germany, which was not pleasant hearing in the

circumstances. Fortunately, it turned out that it hadn't quite happened yet. And it made no difference to the friendly helpfulness of the people there.

Later in the evening, soldiers materialised. This time a sergeant was in charge: but a Field-Marshal could not have been more courteous. He explained that the baggage had to be searched—giving a reason that fairly made Frank jump. Gold—vast quantities of gold—were, it seemed, being smuggled from Russia to France, for purposes of the War, and they were searching baggage all over the place for that fairy gold. They were welcome to all the gold they could find in Frank and Co.'s baggage.

The sergeant was kind and civil, but wary: he meant to have that gold, if it was there! No gold being forthcoming, he seemed to take rather a fancy to Frank, who perhaps was as good as gold. Then a gentleman in the hotel, who, as Frank learned later, was a notary from Vienna, intervened. Frank had never seen him before: he had never seen Frank before: but he might have been the oldest of friends. He talked to the sergeant at some length, who, at last, took himself off with his men, to Frank's infinite relief.

It was an evening of much conversation in mixed languages, followed by a night of blissful repose. The next morning the party were on their way to Switzerland once more.

This time they got through.

If the chauffeur had had any ulterior intentions, he abandoned them: or perhaps he was not such a rogue, out of reach of that rascally inn-keeper and his strong liquors. Anyhow he played no more tricks. There was one more hold-up, surrounded by soldiers, at a frontier post: and then, to the unbounded relief of all concerned, the car rolled on into Switzerland: and never had Frank Richards been so glad to find himself on Swiss soil.

That evening, at a Swiss inn, Frank and Co. heard

some interesting news. England was at war with Austria, three days after the declaration of war on Germany. They had been only a little in advance of the facts at the Landshut hotel. Frank and Co. had got out only just in time !

CHAPTER XXII

HOMEWARD BOUND

ZURICH became Frank and Co.'s headquarters for a time. Zurich is a pleasant city with many attractions, but its chief attraction, at the moment, was the fact that there was cash available. Frank knew a very comfortable hotel where he had stayed before once or twice, and the party were glad to get into a restful haven.

There was news of the War in abundance: it was more abundant than accurate. English newspapers were to be had once more, and in one of them Frank read that the Germans had occupied Basel: news which made the surrounding Swiss smile.

All over Switzerland there were stranded tourists: many of them in Zurich. Many were without money, for there was endless difficulty in getting money through from home. Some believed that the Germans would march through Switzerland, as they had through Belgium. It did not seem improbable at the time.

Frank was getting uneasy—not about Germans, but about his copy. He had hardly touched the typewriter for days and days and days. From Zurich, however, he was able to communicate with home. A telegram arrived from the editor of 'Gem' and 'Magnet.' The Swiss, for some War time reason, translated all telegrams into their own languages, French or German or Italian, according to the canton: so as Zurich was German-Swiss, Hinton's telegram arrived there in German. It requested Frank Richards to travel "sofort heim wie mochlich." Frank was more than willing to travel home as soon as possible: no more than his editor did he desire the 'Gem' and

' Magnet ' author to be hung up abroad in War time. The party moved on at length to Lausanne, where they put up at the Hotel d'Angleterre—Byron's hotel, for what that was worth. A day or two later they crossed into France.

Travellers' troubles, in those hectic days, were unnumbered. Excepting in Austria, people generally were not very helpful—sometimes quite the reverse. Frank became separated from his party at the frontier. The crowd at the station was thick and suffocating : immense numbers of tourists trying to get home, among them a holiday crowd of schoolgirls with a very worried man in charge : and there was baggage, and baggage, and baggage, Pelion piled on Ossa, Alp piled on Apennine, of baggage. Frank's sister and brother-in-law were on the platform, with all the baggage excepting a light suit-case Frank had in his hand : but Frank had Micky too, and Micky did not take kindly to surging, shoving crowds, and he caused delay. Frank and Micky were shut out at the barrier by the most ill-conditioned porter ever seen on a Swiss railway. Perhaps the man did not like Micky showing his teeth at him.. Anyhow there was Frank, shut out : he was only able to yell across to his relatives that he would follow on, and then they saw no more of one another.

Trains were slow, infrequent, uncertain, and stacked with perspiring humanity and baggage. Frank decided to go on by road instead of taking his chance of a later train. This he did : hiring a trap, the only vehicle available : which had more difficulty in getting out of Switzerland than his car had in getting out of Austria. French officials were polite, and easily satisfied that Frank was a perfectly harmless Anglais on his way home ; but a screaming woman very nearly succeeded in turning him back. Who she was, why she was there, why the men let her carry on like a frantic virago, Frank could not begin to guess. But there she was : a Megaera, a she-dragon, suspecting

that they were letting a German spy into France, screaming and screaming and screaming.

Then it turned out that the little bag Frank was carrying, which happened to belong to his beau-frere, was locked, and naturally he had not the key. That did it. The men seemed glad of an excuse to give in to the screaming woman, perhaps hoping that silence would accrue, and save their ear-drums. Monsieur could not pass with that suspicous locked bag.

" Rompez ! " snapped Frank.

That resource did not seem to have occurred to his French friends. But they acknowledged it as feasible. They cracked the lock, opened the bag, and revealed the contents—chiefly shirts. Then they seemed to realise that they were making fools of themselves, and told Frank that he could pass. At which that horrible woman re-started screaming and screaming and screaming, and Frank was glad to get out of reach of her claws, which were dangerously near. One of the men rapped at her " Taisez-vous " : but she did not heed : scream came after scream, and it was an immense relief to Frank to get on in his trap, leaving the virago still screaming.

Six or seven miles on he was hailed from the road : it was his beau-frere, who had very sensibly stopped at the first opportunity, to keep an eye open for him. But the meetingwas ratherlucky : Frank had said that he would follow, but his relative had had to guess that he would follow by road : however, there he was, and the party were re-united.

It was at Dijon that Frank heard the Golden Legend over again. This time it was in reverse. Gold, it seemed, was being smuggled into France for the use of insidious spies, and all incoming baggage was carefully searched for it. However, the French had no better luck than the Austrians : there was no gold to be discovered in Frank and Co.'s baggage. It is quite curious what absurdities people will believe in War

time. Frank and Co., very glad to be in an allied country, continued by train to Paris.

There was a rather long stop in Paris.

By that time, Frank was quite uneasy about his copy. He did not want to let his editor, and the 'Gem' and 'Magnet,' down. He decided to remain in Paris till he had clicked off a considerable quantity. He found a pleasant quiet spot in the Rue d' Assas, where he installed himself with the typewriter and Micky. His relatives went on, having arranged to get a remittance through to him from London. And then, at long last, the keys of Remington began to click once more in the old familiar way.

It was rather queer in Paris in those hot and breathless War days.

The Germans were at hand—precisely how near nobody knew. But everybody knew that the Boche was coming. There were memories of last time, when they had goose-stepped in triumph through Paris. Belgian refugees were as thick as flies. Where Frank stayed in the Rue d' Assas, there were two or three Americans, and many French. Frank remembers a young American lady, who reminded him a little of his old friend Miss N. Y. She spoke in the American accent that Frank always liked to hear: she was American from the crown of her independent head to the tips of her dainty shoes. But when Frank was introduced to her mother, the old lady spoke in a broken mixture of German and English—she was as German as Bismarck. The process by which the United States turns, in a single generation, foreigners into dyed-in-the-wool Americans, is really astonishing.

These Americans soon disappeared—no doubt, having more sense than Frank. For really it was rather a miracle that the Germans did not take Paris in September 1914.

But Frank was always an optimist. He was terribly behind with his copy, and that washed out other considerations. He was determined to get level:

and morning and afternoon, the tapping of keys floated out of his window into the interior court of the house in the Rue d' Assas. He turned sheet after sheet off the machine, as oblivious of Germans as he was of Turks or Tartars.

Also, he was running out of money. Money had had to flow like water since Zurich. Indeed Frank would have fallen, like the seed in the parable, in a stony place, had not a Swiss banker at Lausanne cashed a cheque for him—a very trustful act, Frank thought, in the time and the circumstances, and which he still remembers kindly of Messrs. Galland.

The longer he remained in Paris, the more, naturally, his resources dwindled. The remittance from home did not materialise, and there was, in fact, a doubt about it getting through at all. It may seem curious that, heedless of all this, Frank typed and typed and typed. But he did : and he walked down, every now and then to the Poste to " recommander " his copy for the Fleetway House, just as he had been wont to do in the Paris of more peaceful days.

Every morning, a little French maid came up to potter about his room, and every morning she asked him the same question : did Monsieur think that the Boches would take Paris " cette fois." Frank's cheery and smiling reply was always the same : " Pas cette fois ! "

Frank, indeed, did not believe for a moment that the Germans would take Paris. He knew that there was a British army somewhere north-east of the city. That was enough for him. What Frank did not know about military matters would have stocked a military academy with unlimited knowledge. But his faith was strong and simple. There was a British army in the way—so the Germans would not take Paris. It was as simple as that. It was only afterwards that he learned what a very near thing it had been.

Whether the German guns were heard in Paris in those September days, Frank cannot say for certain.

His own hearing, which was always very keen, did not pick up their roar. Everyone else heard them, or fancied so—perhaps the incessant click of Remington drowned them in Frank's ears. But when he took his walks abroad, they still remained inaudible. Alone, apparently, in the vast population of Paris, he never heard a German gun.

Paris was strangely like a city of the dead in those strange sunny autumn days—utterly unlike the Paris Frank had known. People seemed often to speak in hushed voices—one almost had an impression sometimes that they walked on tiptoe. They seemed to listen, and listen : there was an air of expectancy—not happy expectancy—over the whole city. Every time Frank walked abroad, to " recommander " his copy, to take Micky for a run, or to look in at some former haunt, he had the same queer, eerie impression of a city of ghosts.

Nevertheless he was very cheery and contented in Paris. He typed unusual quantities : he seemed crammed with copy after his long rest from the machine : it flowed and flowed as if in an inexhaustible spate. His window looked out on a green old court, quiet to the ear and pleasant to the eye, whence a passage led out into the Rue d' Assas. Quite at his ease so far as Boches were concerned, he would probably have stayed on in those pleasant and comfortable quarters, but for the spectre of dwindling cash. A remittance did come through at length, but it was only for ten pounds. There may have been some regulation on the subject, for all Frank knew or knows : he does know that new laws and regulations spring up in War time like mushrooms, with or without cause, too fast for any man to keep pace with them. A further supply was supposed to be coming, but it looked more and more dubious : and Frank realised that he had better contrive somehow to get home on that tenner and the handful of francs that remained in his pockets.

So he made up his mind, and ambled down to Cook's for a ticket to Boulogne. The affable young man at Cook's inquired pleasantly :

" You want to go through the German lines ? "

Whether the German lines interposed between Paris and Boulogne Frank, naturally, had no idea. But in any case he did not want to go through them ! Cook's young man suggested Dieppe : adding, as an additional reason, that there were trains for Dieppe, none for Boulogne. Frank took his ticket for Dieppe.

He will never forget that journey from Paris to Dieppe in September 1914. He had reduced his baggage to the very minimum : much had been left at Lausanne, not to be seen again till after the War. But he had a pretty good pack all the same : a typewriter, a suit-case, a dog, a rug, and other odds and ends.

It was a No. 7 Remington in those days: several pounds lighter than the No. 10 of later times. But every inch of space in the leather case, round the screwed-down machine was closely packed with such things as shirts and socks, collars and ties, typing-paper, ribbons, and cartridge-envelopes—it was in fact a solid block that weighed well over thirty pounds. Frank had this packed on his back, strapped : a suit-case in one hand, a dog's lead in the other. Porters were not to be had for love or money. The crowd at the station was like sardines in a tin. It moved at a funeral pace. In the midst of all this, French officialism, which dieth not and cannot be quenched even in the crack of doom, sent him back for some idiotic paper or other which it seemed was essential to the official mind : I do not recall what it was, but think it was something in connection with Micky.

Back Frank had to go, surging through the on-pressing crowd, typewriter and suit-case and Micky and all. How he and his paraphernalia got through that crowd, is one of those things that no fellow can

understand. But he did, and he obtained the idiotic paper, whatever it was, and got back with it to the idiotic official. All that gave him little chance with the train. It swarmed like a bee-hive. But Frank succeeded in wedging into the corridor, where he sat on his typewriter all the way to Dieppe : a journey which did not take centuries, but seemed to.

The boat from Dieppe was another sardine can. How many passengers it was scheduled to carry Frank doesn't know : but it carried at the very least ten times that number. Passengers crawled like flies. You could hardly stir. From Dieppe Frank expected to arrive at Newhaven, as he had done on previous occasions : but no doubt for good reasons routes had been changed, and it was at Folkestone that he arrived. Once more he set foot on his native soil : and his first visit was to the post-office to despatch a telegram : his next to the Midland Bank in the Sandgate Road, his financial resources having now been reduced to a handful of five-franc pieces.

CHAPTER XXIII

WAR !

HINTON was very glad to see Frank Richards again. He gave him a heartier hand-shake than ever when he turned up at the Fleetway House.

Hinton was full of a new idea.

The paper called the 'Boys Friend' had recently been added to those under his control. He wanted to put up the circulation : to effect which, he could think of no better means than a series of school stories by Frank Richards : in which, no doubt, he judged with perspicacity.

London struck Frank as strangely different from Paris. There was war—but it was not just round the corner. Sitting as of old in Room 57 in the Fleetway House, Frank could not help feeling the contrast : Austrian bayonets, crammed trains, mobs of refugees, seemed very far away from him, as he looked at Hinton's schoolboy face with its cheery grin. The guns were going, in Flanders : but few envisaged the desperate struggle that was coming. It seemed natural to carry on from where one had left off, as it were.

Hinton, at all events, was full of his new paper and his new idea. Frank was asked to produce a new school, a little different from St. Jim's, and a little different from Greyfriars : but written, as Hinton happily expressed it, in the inimitable manner that caused Frank's lucubrations to be lapped up like milk.

Frank was always prepared to produce a new school, like a conjurer producing a rabbit out of a hat. He produced Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver and Co. came into existence. Rookwood School, with its Classical and Modern sides, was

not quite like St. Jim's, and not quite like Greyfriars. A new pen-name—this time "Owen Conquest"—was selected. But Charles was never so much Owen Conquest as he was Martin Clifford, and never so much Martin Clifford as he was—and is—Frank Richards.

Frank had plenty to do—some would have said too much. It was indeed because he had so much to do, that certain spots of bother had arisen, of which nothing need be said here. But Rookwood was only nine or ten thousand words a week, a few hours' writing to Frank. Being different from the others, it came fresh, and he had a whole ocean of ideas untapped. Moreover, his travels having been brought to a sudden stop by the Kaiser having let slip the dogs of war, he expected to have more time for Remington. In the quiet rural district he had selected for his habitat, copy rolled off the machine in abundance. And he was glad of an additional cheque, too, to help meet war time expenses, which soon accrued: packing parcels for prisoners of war being one of the occupations of his leisure.

In those early days of the War, Frank no more thought of soldiering, than he thought of exploring the mountains of the moon. He was in some ways a Peter Pan: when he was sitting at the typewriter, or scudding in a boat, he felt no older than he had felt twenty years earlier. But he had in actual fact arrived at a "certain age." He was, unconsciously perhaps, growing less and less like Peter Pan, and more and more like Tithonus. He was verging on the armchair stage of existence, and his twenty-mile walks were long over.

Other thoughts came later, as the war grew grimmer and grimmer: but for the time, Frank was content to keep 'Gem' and 'Magnet' and Rookwood going, and make himself useful in less strenuous ways than younger and more active men. Meanwhile, there were changes at the Fleetway House.

Maurice Down had long been gone : and Hinton seemed rather like a war-horse snuffing the battle. He was, I believe, only six or seven years younger than Frank : but he was a splendid specimen physically, every inch a " Trooper," which was in fact his nickname. Every time Frank went to the Fleetway, he half-expected to find that H. H. was missing.

Frank was back in London at this time. One day he had been doing more than usual on the machine, and late in the afternoon he went out for a whiff of fresh air, met his sister, and they went for a long walk. Frank, when he went out, had not had the faintest idea of making a drastic change in his way of life. It came while he was walking. His sister had had a letter from their cousin Gussy : a dear brave lad who was in the thick of it, and who was killed towards the end. Perhaps that letter put it into Frank's head : helped, perhaps, by the circumstance that they passed a recruiting-office : Frank remembers that it was in Kilburn. He said suddenly to his sister :

" Wait for me a few minutes."

" What for ? "

" I'm going to enlist."

Then occurred one of those idiotic incidents which always seem to haunt Frank when things ought to be very serious. That recruiting-office was scheduled to remain open till six. It was an empty shop which had been adapted for its present purpose, with the official notice on the glass door in the middle. It was after six—not much, but after. Frank found the door shut and locked : nobody apparently about, so he banged on the door. He could not guess that being a few minutes late would make a lot of difference when his King and Country called him. But it did !

He banged. The door was opened a few inches. Within, all seemed dark and deserted. Probably there had been a crowd there earlier : but it had vanished. A small boy opened the door, and inquired what

Frank wanted. Frank having explained, the small boy stared at him and said :

" Shut at six ! "

Then he closed the door.

This did not quite satisfy Frank. The place was not still a shop, and he was not a customer wanting to be served after closing time. It wasn't like that at all. Here was a man, old enough to know better perhaps, nevertheless prepared to exchange the fat cheques of the Amalgamated Press for the extremely limited emoluments of a defender of his native land. And he was told that the place shut at six ! Indignant, Frank banged again.

Once more the door opened a few inches, and the small boy reappeared. He seemed surprised to see Frank still there.

" Shut ! " he said, quite crossly.

" Now, look here—— ! " began Frank.

Then there came a deep, gruff, inquiring voice from the interior.

" What's up ? "

" There's a man here," squeaked the small boy.

" Tell him to go away."

" I have and he won't."

" Oh ! Won't he ? "

There was a heavy tread. The small boy gave place to a large man, in khaki. The large man looked at Frank, jutting out a chin that looked very aggressive. He was palpably annoyed.

Frank explained once more : or rather, he began to explain. He was not given time to finish.

" SHUT ! " said the large soldier, in a voice that Stentor might have envied, but never beaten. To add point to that brief remark, he slammed the door.

Frank was left standing—still a mere civilian !

Afterwards, reflecting on that episode, he could hardly believe that such things could happen. But it had happened, and he rejoined his sister and they walked home.

However, one swallow does not make a summer. Next time, at a different place, Frank was on time. I think it was some weeks later : Frank had been turning out copy at a great rate, with a view to eventualities. But even after he had taken the irrevocable step, he had time for turning out further copy, for it was some time before he was called for the " medical." And after that, there was a short period during which it seemed still doubtful whether Frank would be thrown into the discard, or despatched to deal with Ludendorff and Company.

When the call came, he thought that he had better let Hinton know what to expect, so he rang up the Fleetway.

" WHAT ! " yelled Hinton, at the other end.

Never did a man seem so surprised. Surprise is not the word for it—he was astonished—amazed !

Frank had always seemed, in his own eyes, rather a youngish sort of fellow for his age. He had had to take to glasses, it was true : but what of that ? He had no doubt that something of the glow of youth yet lingered. How often we have these fond delusions.

Hinton, obviously had not regarded him in the same happy light. He may have thought that Frank was in his fifties. Really, it was not so bad as that : he had some forties yet to run. But Hinton seemed as astonished as if he had fancied him rising eighty, as—alas !—he is, in these latter days.

" YOU ! " came from Hinton, over the wires, " YOU ! "

" Me ! " assented Frank.

" But look here—— "

" Well ? "

" Oh, come up and see me, anyway."

Frank went up and saw him. He did not quite see what use it was, but he was always pleased to see H. H. He found Hinton in Room 57 as usual, seemingly in a state of consternation.

It seemed that H. H. had been losing assistants

right and left. It could not be helped, and could hardly be objected to: but it left him rather in a hole, all the same.

"But YOU!" said Hinton, blankly.

All sorts and conditions of men were gone: matters were getting more and more difficult in every way: but it had never occurred to him that he might lose his author. 'Gem' and 'Magnet' might survive any other loss: but how could they survive that? Frank felt that keenly enough himself: but he saw no help for it.

"When I got your call this morning," said Hinton, "it put the lid on. I had to go out for an extra stout."

Frank hoped that the extra stout had afforded comfort and consolation. But it hadn't. H. H., however, had been doing some thinking. It was the kind of thinking that might have been expected of Figgins of the Fourth.

"Look here," he said, "can't I go instead somehow?"

Frank roared.

No doubt 'Gem' and 'Magnet' could spare their editor better than they could spare their author. Editors could be replaced somehow: authors couldn't. It was equally true that, as a recruit, Hinton was worth a dozen of Frank—the Army, undoubtedly, would have been the gainer. But the idea of one taking the place of the other, especially of a Goliath like Hinton taking the place of a David like Frank, was too much for the author's gravity, grave as the matter was: and Room 57 echoed to his mirth.

It had to be!

And, as it happened, that meeting was Frank's last with H. H. till after the War. Not long afterwards, when he phoned Hinton at the Fleetway House, a voice told him that H. H. was not there. Where was he? The Voice did not know, but thought that he was at Knightsbridge Barracks. And so he was: and it was not till 1919 that Frank saw him again.

But Frank Richards has no military experiences to relate. His contact with the War, from that angle, was brief, distant, and not without an element of the comic. He has preserved his discharge papers as a souvenir. But he has no tales to tell of glimpses through the cannon-smoke, or hair's-breadth 'scapes in the imminent deadly breach. He rather wishes he had : but this book, unlike Frank's other works, deals with facts : and to the facts he must keep.

CHAPTER XXIV

POST-WAR

FRANK RICHARDS was very glad to find himself in France again in the post-war days. Wandering was in his blood : the sound of foreign tongues music to his ears. When he stepped ashore from the Channel boat, years and years seemed to fall from him.

But they only seemed to fall. There was a change. Frank was older : neither was his health quite the same, owing to some experiences in the War time. He was in fact getting on for fifty : an age which seems to him now, at his present stage, almost boyish : but which seemed to him then serious, sedate, indeed almost solemn. Once upon a time he had walked twenty miles, up hill and down dale, without turning a hair. Once upon a time the steeps of Alps and Apennines had been little to him. But . . .

Reluctantly but inevitably, Frank had to realise that Alps and Apennines, sailing on the Adriatic, clambering over volcanoes, and ducking into Blue Grottoes, were getting out of his reach. Many things were receding, that had once been part of normal existence.

But one thing, at least, was unchanged, and that was an important thing, Remington clicked as cheerily as ever. Frank had crossed the Channel with a vague idea of a long, long wander, revisiting old haunts, looking at old scenes, renewing old acquaintances. Instead of which, he settled down at Wimereux—which was a very pleasant spot in which to settle down, and get used to the queer new world that followed the War.

Being a Victorian, Frank was unaccustomed to drastic changes. In his time, the old world had rolled on in the old way, and seemed destined so to do for

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ever. Every change as it came was assimiliated into the old system, without a shock. But the shock of the War had as good as blown up the old world : leaving the survivors, like the Swiss Family Robinson, to gather what they could from the wreck. Though the upheaval, terrific as it was, was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with that which was to come twenty years later. That, fortunately, was hidden by the veil of the future. Poor old humanity had a breathing-space, before they plunged into the last overwhelming tragedy.

Among other queer things to which Frank had to get used, was the fantastic state of the exchanges. In the quiet old world he had left behind him for ever, the French exchange had been twenty-five francs to the £. It might vary from 24.50 to 25.25, or something like that. Now it varied by the hundreds—not of centimes, but of francs. Those variations would seem small beer now, with francs a thousand to the £. But they seemed fantastic enough at the time. A franc was, as near as I remember: worth about a penny—though it went from bad to worse. I have mentioned in an earlier chapter that a cabby at Nice might over-charge you by ten francs, and you might make a fuss about it. In the post-war days a cabby would hardly have looked at ten francs.

But that fantastic state of affairs had advantages for travellers from a more stable country. Frank liked Wimereux so much that he decided to buy a chalet there. How many thousands and thousands of francs it ran into he does not recall but it amounted to hardly three hundred pounds in English money. At home such a place would have cost, in those days, about £1,500 : in these, more than twice as much. This kind of thing has to be got used to, by an old fellow brought up in days when money was supposed to have a fixed value.

It was a delightful chalet, and Frank enjoyed it, and it resounded merrily to the click of the type-

writer. Frank could no longer do many things thatonce he had been able to do, but nothing ever made any difference to his zest for writing. He remembers going about Boulogne giving quite royal orders for the furnishing of his chalet. Prices were high, from the native point of view : but not from the foreign angle. It was easy to be royal, indeed imperial, with francs four or five hundred to the £.

So there was Frank, going strong with Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood. He had finished with the ' School Friend.' I have not mentioned this periodical so far, and a few words will suffice. It was about Armistice time that Frank was asked to begin a series of school stories dealing with Cliff House and Bessie Bunter, sister of Billy of that ilk : which he cheerfully did, selecting the pen-name of " Hilda Richards " for the purpose. Now, in these latter days, " Hilda Richards " is again writing Bessie Bunter, in book form. But there were some spots of bother about the series in the ' School Friend,' which Frank will not now particularize—he will, in fact, say nothing more about it. In the original version of these memoirs he had a whole chapter on the subject. That chapter, with several others, has gone into the discard. Frank has, in fact, gone through these memoirs with an unsparing hand, and whole chapters have suffered the fate of the books in Don Quixote's library. They still exist in typescript, it is true : but are not likely ever to leave the drawer of which the key is turned on them. They have been read by many friends, almost every one of whom is of opinion that the locked drawer is the best place for them. So there they are : and there they will remain. And, comical as it may seem to the younger generation in an old gentleman rising eighty, Frank has never lost his habit of looking to the future, not to the past. The future looks bright and cheerful to him : and the past may keep its shadows.

Frank had another activity which he has not yet

mentioned. That was " Cedar Creek." Cedar Creek was a school in the backwoods of Canada, and the principal character there was Frank himself. It was an extremely imaginative account of " Frank Richards' Schooldays," written by Martin Clifford. It was not, of course, supposed to be a true account—it was fiction : though many of Frank's own boyish experiences were worked up in it. Frank was quite surprised, at a later date, to learn that many people had taken that Canadian series quite seriously : he rubbed his eyes when he saw himself referred to in an Australian paper as a Canadian ! Frank has never, as a matter of fact, set foot in Canada, though he has always wanted to do so : and certainly would have done so had there been air-liners in his young days. But he had his " local colour " from many Canadians : and in his usual way he lived what he was writing, and Cedar Creek was real to him while he was writing it. No doubt that made it seem real to others. In fact, when he had finished his weekly story, it was a sort of jerk to Frank to realise that really and truly he hadn't ridden with Bob Lawless through the timber to the lumber school, and reported himself to Miss Meadows there. Even now the Thompson River, the Lawless Ranch, the backwoods school, Miss Meadows and Mr. Slimmey, seem to him like a memory of what he has known.

It was about this time that Herbert Hinton left the Amalgamated Press. Into the whys and wherefores it is not Frank's business to enter. He saw Hinton a good many times after his editor returned from active service and resumed at the Fleetway House : always the same cheery big schoolboy with the same hearty hand-shake and cheery grin. Frank was sorry to see the last of him, though he was pleased enough to find Maurice Down in the editorial chair.

But, as it turned out, he had not seen the last of H. H. Some time after he had shaken the dust of the Fleetway House from his feet, H. H. evolved the

bright idea of starting a paper on his own. Quite a voluminous correspondence ensued.

Anyone curious about dates may ascertain the same by looking out a file of 'School and Sport,' Hinton's paper, which must, I suppose, lie entombed in that venerable institution, the British Museum. A considerable time elapsed between the evolving of the idea, and its fruition in the form of 'School and Sport.'

Frank was always pleased to hear from H. H. Little spots of bother had never made a difference to his liking for him. When he heard of his projected new paper, Frank wished him the very best of luck: and when Hinton asked him to write for it, Frank as usual did what he was asked to do. About that time Frank was staying in a country cottage in Bucks. From that rural spot a car bore him one day to London for an interview with Hinton at the Authors' Club. At that interview it was settled: and when, at long last, the new paper did come into existence, it contained a series about "St. Kit's" written by "Clive Clifford" —one more pen-name added to Frank's already long list.

Frank turned out quite a mountain of copy for the new paper. But something or other continually cropped up to delay the enterprise, and in the meantime, I seem to remember that H. H. took to editing some sort of children's newspaper for a firm of publishers in London. He sent me a copy of it, and I think it was called 'The Zoo,' or some such title. But the time came at last when 'School and Sport' was launched.

As it happened, that day at the Authors' Club was the last time Frank ever saw Herbert Hinton. But correspondence continued on ample lines. 'School and Sport' appeared—and disappeared. After that, H. H. vanished from Frank's ken for very many years.

It was not, in fact, till another world-war was convulsing the earth, that Frank Richards contacted Hinton again. He was then at Dalton's, and Frank

had a very friendly letter from him, after having lost touch for so many years. They had many friendly talks over the telephone: in fact his contacts with H. H. were chiefly telephonic.

On the phone, H. H. seemed as cheery, as genial, as boyish as ever. No doubt he had his little faults, as we all have: but I cannot imagine anyone who ever met him failing to like him. Whether he ever knew that he was Figgins of the Fourth I cannot say.

CHAPTER XXV

DIM OUT

FRANK RICHARDS, in the nineteen-twenties, came up against it with a bump.

It was a sort of bolt from the blue.

Everything seemed to be going well. Frank was back in his own country, located at a sunny spot, where his study windows looked out over the sea : a very sunny spot in the summer, where indeed the brilliant sunshine often recalled Italy.

He was turning out copy at the rate of a million and a half words a year. He was as fit as any man could reasonably expect to be at his time of life. He knew that he had to cut his travels down : there were no more Alpine summits for him. But he still had in mind a leisurely saunter over the old spots, taking things easily : Paris, Rome, Naples, Capri, perhaps Venice and the Austrian Tyrol once more. And all the while that vigorous kick was waiting for him just round the corner. It came almost suddenly.

For some years, Frank's eyes had bothered him a little—perhaps of late years more than a little. But he had never anticipated that they would let him down. Now they did.

Perhaps that brilliant sunshine, which he loved so much, may have had something to do with it. Perhaps his omnivorous reading in all sorts and conditions of time and place may have helped. Print was not always good : light was very often bad in out-of-the-way places.

Frank knows now that no book, not even Shakespeare, not even Dante, not even Keats, is worth risk to one's eyesight. That knowledge, like so much knowledge, arrived too late to be of service to him.

He mentions it here as a warning to young readers. He doesn't want to become too instructive, but he does most earnestly counsel his readers to steer clear of bad print, and never to read but in a clear and steady light.

Whatever the cause, it happened.

It was a long while ago. Frank was not much over fifty at the time. But he remembers very vividly how the mist settled down. Slowly but surely he had to realise that he must become accustomed to seeing things as in a glass darkly.

His day-to-day experience, for a time, was not exhilarating. Leaving the typewriter unused and silent was one of the spots of bother. For a while he was at a loss. He found it not easy to deal even with such simple things as cheques, which came in very frequently in those days : they piled up unheeded. His publishers had a rule that cheques had to be cashed within a certain period of the date of issue or they became void. Later he had to send a bundle of them back to the Fleetway House to be given a new lease of life. Little things like that did not matter much. Other things mattered quite a lot.

However, his writing was not very long delayed. Indeed, he could have continued to write, had he not been able to see at all, and it was nothing like so bad as that. He could have typed with his eyes shut after so many years on the machine.

It is amazing how one can, with patience, accommodate oneself to circumstances. Kicking against what cannot be helped is neither reasonable nor useful. To rail against fate seems to me a futile waste of energy : fate is still there, and has to be faced, after you have wasted your time and your breath. Frank was philosophic enough to be able to grasp his nettle. And he had sense enough to consider how much worse it might have been, and to feel thankful for what was left, rather than to grouse about what was lost.

Of course it was a change. His travels were at an end. Not only Alpine steeps, which he had resigned without repining, as in the nature of things. But even the Channel steamer was now out of the reach of one who had once thought nothing of packing overnight and whisking off to Capri in the morning. It dawned on Frank that he had to sit out the rest of the dance.

He remembered how he had once left Lausanne in the morning, arrived at Genoa at night : turned out six thousand words on the machine the next morning, explored Genoa in the afternoon, and gone on to Nice in the evening. How he had shot off from Vevey to Zurich simply to see a performance of Parsifal there—from Milan to Capri to look at a grotto ! And now . . . !

Now all these things were over. Frank had to make up his mind to it : which he is glad to be able to say he found that he could do, without any perceptible diminution of his cheerful outlook on life.

What would have happened, had the typewriter never been invented, he doesn't know, and doesn't want to know. Remington is a blessed name to him. If Frank had had to use the pen, as he did from 1890 till 1900 !—luckily, he hadn't ! He found that he could get a particularly heavily-inked ribbon for his machine, which caused his typescript, like Chapman, to speak out loud and bold ! His writing continued as before, with as much zest as ever—or more. He even flattered himself that, like Milton, he found the inner light shine all the more brightly for the outer dimness.

Many of his readers have told him that his best ' Magnets ' were written in the nineteen-thirties, and Frank has no doubt of it himself. He had never written more actively, and never written so well. Frank is not—he hopes !—a conceited fellow, but he does think some of his writing not too bad. Anyhow the best of it has been done since it pleased God that his eyes should be darkened.

It is curious, too, how, when afflictions come, we

prefer them to others that might have come. Frank asked a deaf friend once which he would have chosen, if compelled to make a choice between the two. His friend, with a stare, replied at once, "Deafness, of the two!" Thus is the wind tempered to the shorn lamb. One's own spot of bother is never so bad as the other fellow's!

Frank could still read, almost as omnivorously as ever, though now he had to exercise care of the print and the light, which he ought to have done many years earlier. All his life Frank had been accumulating books, and books, and books, in many languages, to read at his leisure. Unaware of what was lying in wait for him, he had not troubled to consider the size or closeness of the print. Now he found great numbers of his books unreadable—small print was beyond his ken. German he found it impossible even to look at: the grotesque type made him shut his eyes automatically in self-defence. Except for what he knew by heart, he had to say a long good-bye to Goethe. He used to give a dear little niece a helping hand with lessons. But he couldn't help with the German. Reading and writing music became almost a hopeless business too.

But give him a well-printed book in clear type, and Frank was O.K. And he was a glutton for writing. Rookwood had come to an end when the paper in which it appeared changed hands: but it was replaced by "King of the Islands" and the "Rio Kid." And Frank wrote a series of school stories in 'Modern Boy,' in which publication his "Schoolboy Detective" also came to life. But the 'Magnet' was always Frank's favourite: he really seemed almost to live at Greyfriars. The Greyfriars story was made longer and longer, till it not only extended from cover to cover, but overflowed the covers. All the while he sat at the typewriter, Frank was a schoolboy of fifteen or sixteen, fit as a fiddle. Admittedly he felt a bit older when he got up from it.

Frank's eyes were dim. They have been dim ever since. But he has now reached an age when, in all probability, they would have become dim anyway. So, as Tom Merry used to say, why grouse?

The fact is that Frank couldn't grouse if he wanted to. He was born an optimist, and he remains one. Every cloud has a silver lining: and Frank always somehow seemed to see the silver lining and disregard the cloud. He always found the world a jolly old place to live in, and he still finds it so. As the croupier at Monte Carlo remarked, so long ago, "Monsieur perds, mais Monsieur est toujours gai!"

CHAPTER XXVI

BOYS' WRITER

PERHAPS Frank Richards ought to say a word or two about his work, and how he regards it. His own considered opinion is that, in his long lifetime, he has done a good job, and has been a useful citizen. He thinks that he has been, according to his abilities, worth his keep. He believes firmly that his job is a good one, a useful one, indeed an indispensable one, and worth everything that a man can put into it.

There are " writers for boys," I am well aware, who feel a lofty superiority to their task, who will dash off any trash thinking it quite good enough for their young readers, and who would much rather join the ranks of the innumerable novelists whose innumerable works cumber the bookstalls and the bookshops. Frank is not one of these.

Frank was a boy once, who enjoyed his boyhood : he is now a very old man, but his interest in youth is as keen as ever it was. To entertain young people, and in an unobtrusive way to guide and counsel them, seems to him a very worthwhile job. He even has the temerity to hold that it is more worthwhile than the production of silly sex novels and plays, even those produced by nerve-racked Norwegians and bemused Russians.

Once a friend, looking at the ' Magnet,' then about twenty years old, remarked :

" Don't you ever think of doing something better than this ? "

To which Frank replied :

" You see, there isn't anything better."

Let me explain.

Frank would have liked, of course, to have written

'Hamlet,' or 'Don Quixote' or the 'Divine Comedy,' or the 'Ode to a Nightingale.' Not being a genius, he couldn't rise to such heights. But there was one thing that he could do really well. That was the school story. It was less pretentious than the works of the unnumbered master-spirits of the age who are reviewed with respect in the more literary Sunday newspapers. But, of its kind, it was out of the top drawer. And he thought it worth doing.

Billy Bunter, or Tom Merry, Jack of All Trades, may not be very exalted personages. But Frank could make them live to his readers. He preferred less ambitious work well done, to more ambitious work ill done. Neither does he attach much importance to the label of "Boys' Writer." He is proud and happy to be a writer for boys and girls. He believes that the schooldays are a very important part of life, and the most interesting part; that if any person's character be worth delineating at twenty-five, or thirty-five, it is still more worth delineating at fifteen or sixteen, when it is forming, when hopes are high and all things possible. If the child be father to the man, it is surely worthwhile for an author to give his attention to the fathers of men.

Here I may quote from an article I wrote for the 'Radio Times' a year or two ago:

> "Boys love an exciting story, and why should they not? And if they cannot get a clean and wholesome one, they will take what they can get: if no Tom Merry is available, they will put up with Dick Turpin. The young mind turns naturally to good, not to bad: but the boy must and will have a story with life in it. It never seemed to occur to the writers of my day that there may be a genuine thrill in a closely-contested schoolboy cricket-match: that plenty of excitement may be found in the life of the day-room and the form-room. There really was no need for desperate crooks hiding in the chimneys, or foreign spies under the beds. The

average healthy boy really would rather see his hero at the wicket, or speeding along the touch-line with the ball at his feet, or even perpetrating a 'howler' under the gimlet-eye of his form-master, than handling deadly weapons and shedding oceans of blood. All this was vaguely in my mind when I was a boy, dissatisfied and often disgusted with the trash that was then purveyed for boys to read.

"That was not, of course, why I began to write. I wrote because I just couldn't help it. But it was why my writing took the line it did.

"It seemed to me that it should be possible to produce characters taken from actual life, with the faults and failings and good qualities of ordinary human beings, facing the trials and enjoying the little triumphs that come the way of schoolboys—characters that, while not pretending to perfection, might be likeable, even lovable, and above all credible and readable. So Tom Merry came into existence. I had an impression that I was supplying a long-felt want—and I still think so.

"Tom Merry, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Figgins and Co. were taken to the hearts of the young people in the pages of the 'Gem': and the 'Magnet' followed, with Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Billy Bunter, and the rest—joined later by Jimmy Silver and Co. of Rookwood."

There it is in a nutshell. Frank will add that a Writer for Boys who disdains his work, and is careless in the execution of it, is guilty of a very grave error, to call it by no more serious a name. A man who is not prepared to give his very best, should leave books for young people alone. Even his best will be hardly good enough for such readers.

Not that Frank Richards thinks that age has much to do with appreciation of a good story. If a story be well-told, it will find readers of all ages, whatever the

subject. 'Alice in Wonderland' delights a child of seven: and is good reading for a man of seventy. I revelled in Lear as soon as I was able to read at all: and I hope that I shall still find entertainment in the 'Dong with a Luminous Nose' if I live to be a hundred. Sometimes I take down 'Tom Brown's Schooldays,' and still find the old pleasure in the school chapters. The truth is that a good story is a good story, whether the reader be fifteen or fifty. Frank Richards is, primarily, a writer for young people, but he has readers of all ages: he even counts one of eighty, which is older than Frank himself. He is proud to know that his writings were read in the trenches in one war, and in the Western Desert in another. But his pride and his pleasure is to write for young people, and he is content to live and die a Boys' Writer—Billy Bunter and he are inseparable till death do them part!

CHAPTER XXVII

INTER-WAR YEARS

FRANK RICHARDS was a busy man in the inter-war years.

Life ran on smoothly—and swiftly. It is curious how the years seem to accelerate as one grows older. When Frank was a boy, it seemed an age from one Christmas to another. In the sixties, next Christmas seems to tread almost on the heels of last. Looking back, it seems almost incredible that twenty-one whole years elapsed between the end of one war and the beginning of another. The inter-war period seems somehow to be telescoped.

'Gem' and 'Magnet' had lived through one world-war, like canaries chirping in an earthquake. They were not destined to live through another. Thirty-two years was their allotted span. Certainly, Frank had never dreamed of so long a run when first he evolved Tom Merry and Harry Wharton. Still less could he have foreseen that, after the periodicals had shut down, those two characters would continue in book form, world without end.

These were not, of course, Frank's only activities. 'King of the Islands' was one of his pleasant tasks. Frank had always wanted to sail the South Seas, amid reef and palm. But he had never been able to get so far. He had to keep in touch with editors, printers and publishers. His copy could hardly have reached the Fleetway House on time from Honolulu or the Paumotus. But if he could not scour the Pacific on the deck of a schooner, he could at least do so imaginatively on a Remington. He had to see the islands of the south through other eyes : but he saw them fairly clearly. And he enjoyed every adventure of Ken King in his ketch 'Dawn.'

The "Rio Kid" came into existence about the same time, a series in a paper called the 'Popular,' under the pen-name of Ralph Redway. Frank, as he has stated already, has never visited America. But the rolling grass-lands of Texas, the Rio Frio and the Double-Bar Ranch, were real to him as he wrote of them—as real as the Canadian scenes of which he had written earlier. In another chapter I have remarked on the influence of a pen-name. When Frank wrote "Ralph Redway" on his title-page, he became, to all intents and purposes, Ralph Redway, a person quite distinct from Frank Richards or Martin Clifford. So distinct, indeed, that the little secret was never discovered. Many readers surmised that Frank and Martin might be one and the same: a few identified them with Charles: but, so far as Frank has been able to learn from fan-mail, only one single solitary reader ever guessed that Ralph was the same prolific author.

The 'Greyfriars Holiday Annual' was going on at the same time. In this publication the heroes of all the old schools were gathered together—as they now are in 'Tom Merry's Own.'

There was another series I remember with pleasure, which featured the popular comedian Will Hay. This series was published in a paper called the 'Ranger,' edited by Mr. Montague Haydon. But Mr. Haydon was by no means a common-or-garden editor, so to speak. He was that imposing and perhaps slightly unnerving figure, a Controlling Editor. From the early twenties he had been what Hamilton Edwards had been in still earlier days, the Jove whose nod shook Olympus: with so many and various publications under his control that one could only wonder how he did it. To Frank's eyes he loomed rather like a Brobdingnagian in the distance, but he was very kind and considerate to the Lilliputians, so that was all right. Quite unknowingly he brought Frank a wonderful spot of luck later, at a time when Frank was very badly in need of a little luck, as I shall

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relate in a subsequent chapter. The Will Hay series lasted a long time, and is a pleasant episode in Frank's memory.

Even these were not all. Frank wrote many other things, but perhaps the reader will agree that the list is already sufficiently long.

In the meantime Frank was, as we all do, growing older.

He did not quite realise at first that he was verging on the sere and yellow leaf. One grows old imperceptibly. Age somehow seems something that happens to other people, not to oneself.

Little things fall away, but you don't realise that they are gone for good. Your Alpine summits have long been abandoned, but you still walk your ten miles, you still step out briskly over the hill. But it is all diminuendo. Slowly, inexorably, Father Time closes in—and, sometimes quite suddenly, you get it into your head at last that you are growing old, and must make up your mind to it.

This period comes to all, and a wise man will meet it when it comes, without repining—and, above all, without making futile and undignified snatches after a youth that is gone. You can grow old gracefully: or at least cheerfully and contentedly. In your sixth or seventh decade, what is the use of mourning over the third and fourth, that have gone for ever? Make the best of the sixth or seventh, and you won't find the going too hard, after all.

Frank found himself in his sixties, almost unexpectedly. It seemed a little absurd, as he was still a boy at heart. But there it was!

Almost unconsciously his ten-mile walks had been cut down by half. As a young fellow he had crossed England in a single day on a bike—glorious days when there were no cars on the roads to get in the way of cyclists! He still mounted his faithful old jigger, on which he had once pedalled happily in France and Switzerland and Italy. But now he did not stay in the

saddle very long. Like the Romans in their decline, he had to draw in his frontiers : and year by year his empire grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less.

Far, very far away, was the day when Frank's first publisher had remarked, " You're very young, aren't you ? " That drawback had been completely eradicated : only too completely.

Growing old is a not uninteresting process, though perhaps more interesting to observe than to experience. Frank has made many philosophical reflections on it since he has exceeded the span allotted by the Psalmist. Being a born optimist, habitually looking on the brighter side of things, he has found old age quite a tolerable business.

Frank spent many happy years travelling from one country to another. All the while, he was, without thinking about it, travelling from one decade to another. And the truth is that a new decade is a good deal like a new country. It is different from the one you have left. But it is just as good.

You don't expect to find English common-sense in France, or French gaiety in Germany, or German seriousness in Italy. But each country, in its own way, is as attractive as the other. It is different, that is all. And it is the same with decades. Each, even the eighth or ninth, has its own charm, if you choose to look for it. The fifties are not so good as the twenties if you want to play football. But they are ever so much better if you want to edit a newspaper. In every decade, as in every country, you can dwell happily, if you are built that way.

It is wise, as the years accumulate, to resign what is out of one's reach, and content oneself with what remains. And you will continually find new interests to replace the old. Life, I believe, would be crammed with interest up to the age of Methuselah.

There are many things which, in youth, one has no time to do. Time to do them accrues, as the more strenuous activities fade out. I believe too that the

intellectual powers become more and more acute, as the physical powers decline. True you can do at twenty many things that you couldn't do at sixty. But at sixty you can do many things that you certainly couldn't have done at twenty. So really it is as broad as it is long. Or almost !

Frank has no doubt whatever that he writes better at seventy-five than he did at twenty-five or thirty-five. Neither has the zest diminished. His ten-mile walks, even his five-mile walks, have gone the way of his Alpine summits : but he is tireless on the typewriter. Perhaps that is the real secret of a happy old age—just work ! So long as a man can do his job, and feel that it is a useful one, that it gives pleasure to others as well as to himself, what has he to grumble at ?

Anyhow Frank had no time, and no inclination, for grumbling. Older and older, as the fleeting years sped, Frank was as busy as ever, indeed busier. He never failed to produce his million and a half words a year, and very often exceeded that quota. And this, probably, would have gone on happily to the present time of day, but for the emergence of an unpleasant phenomenon called Adolf Hitler. Little did Frank Richards dream, while Billy Bunter rolled on year after year, that all the while such a portent was growing up across the sea—destined to set the world once more in flames, and give both Frank and Bunter the K.O.—for a time at least.

World War II came : and this time ' Gem ' and ' Magnet,' which had swum out one such storm, ducked under and disappeared. And for the first time since he was a boy of seventeen, Frank Richards, like Othello, found his occupation gone. He had been at a loose end at seventeen. And there he was again, at seventy !

CHAPTER XXVIII

HARD TIMES !

IT is a somewhat curious experience to change over, at a minute's notice, or less, from an adequate income, to one of nothing at all.

Worse things happen in War time. Financial disaster is, perhaps, one of the milder woes of War. But it is very disconcerting. Frank Richards was ill-prepared for going on the rocks, after fifty years in smooth waters. And he was rising seventy : rather late in life to begin the battle all over again.

In truth, it was a knock, and a hard one.

The ' Gem ' had petered out at the end of 1939, after a few months of war. Everything else had petered out, excepting the ' Magnet,' which looked as if it might repeat its 1914-18 performance, and survive the storm. But the paper shortage in 1940 finished the ' Magnet.' Martin Clifford had already lost his income. Now Frank's followed it into the Ewigkeit. The A. P. cheque, which had come along so regularly, for so many years, that it seemed to Frank as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, had suddenly, silently vanished away, as if it had been a Hunter of the Snark suddenly confronting the Boojum. Fairy gold could not have dissolved into space more abruptly and more completely. Just a letter one morning apprised Frank that it was finis.

By way of consolation, perhaps, there was a taxation hang-over. Frank made the cheering discovery which he had never thought of before, that the end of income did not by any means imply the end of income-tax. The total disappearance of your income in May made you none-the-less liable for taxes falling due in July, and sur-tax falling happily just

after the following Christmas. Frank could not but admire the ingenuity of a system, which must have caused very wise men to exert their powerful intellects to the utmost, to produce such happy results.

With the prospect of living on nothing, and the problem of extracting some hundreds of pounds from empty space to pay his taxes, Frank had some considerably hard thinking to do.

There still seemed to be a spot of balm in Gilead. Frank had never had much care of money : but he had some little property on the south-east coast, where he now lived : and a bundle of investments which had been put away as a nest-egg for old age. Alas ! his little property was in what was considered a danger zone : it could not be let or sold for love or money, and it produced nothing but demands for War Damage Insurance. And his investments, once almost gilt-edged, had fallen from their high estate, and great was the fall thereof. As a sample, Amalgamated Press shares, which Frank had bought at anything from twenty to thirty shillings, were quoted in the market at half-a-crown ! The war had struck the share market like a hurricane. Other things were in even worse case. But there was no help for it : they had to go for what they would fetch : and at long last Frank succeeded at least in paying off his taxes.

In the meantime, he was not idle in his new-found leisure. With his own fair hands, so to speak, he planted up two gardens and a field with vegetables, all ready for the shortages that were bound to come. He settled down in a little bungalow to live frugally. But another kick was coming. Civilians were superfluous on a coast just opposite Holland, now in possession of the Germans. Frank received a polite request from the constituted authorities to get out. So he found himself in London once more. This was in July 1940. He arrived in happy time for the bombing, which reminded him of how he had arrived

in Paris, long ago, just in time for the Ferrer riots.

It was quite easy to get a house in London in those days. Frank, on inquiry, was given a list of sixty from which to choose. Frank learned that many people had left London, in anticipation of Hitler's coming activities. They must have changed their minds later and returned, for not very long afterwards the superabundance of houses was succeeded by a house-famine. However, at the moment, Frank had only to choose. Now it happened that, many years before, Frank had lived for a time in a quaint little house in Hampstead Garden Suburb, which belonged at that time to a relative. So, remembering this, he thought he would take that house, if available. But it was occupied, and he had to take another. This is where Frank's usual luck came in for the house he had wanted was afterwards wrecked by a bomb, while the one in which Frank did live never had anything worse than a chunk of metal through the roof.

So there was Frank, settled for the duration, with the nightly Hun roaring over his roof: and the typewriter, once more, going strong. For Frank just had to write. He wrote many things, and planned others—ready for the after-war days—books about Carcroft, a new school he had evolved: verses, which afterwards appeared in 'Poetry London' and 'Tom Merry's Annual': a comedy novel called 'Hiker's Luck': a book of crossword puzzles in six languages: songs to which he composed sweet music: all sorts and conditions of things. And a kind friend having suggested that he should write his memoirs, he did so, and produced the Autobiography now re-written. And the same kind friend having introduced him to 'Pie,' he wrote Carcroft stories for that magazine, which helped to keep the wolf from the door. He also planned, and partly wrote, books about a new character called "Jack of All Trades," which he had long had in mind, but had never had time to write.

Times were tough.

Frank had reached an age when little comforts had become necessities, and he will not deny that he rather missed them. Nevertheless, he did not feel in the least like the Raven's unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster.

For one thing, he had a firm faith in Providence. It was at this time that he sketched out his little book on religious belief, called 'Faith and Hope' which he has since written. Frank wouldn't like to preach to his readers : but he will say this much, that he found his faith a very present help in time of need.

For another thing, he was too resilient by nature to take dolorous views. He never had any doubt that things would come round. He was not in the least disposed to buy a parrot and teach him, like Robinson Crusoe, to say "Poor Frank Richards." The very last thing Frank would ever think of would be to sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings.

There is a passage in 'Gil Blas' which impressed itself on Frank's mind when he was a boy, and which always recurred to him when prospects looked bleak.

> "J'avouerai pourtant que j'avais tort de me laisser aller à la tristesse. Apres avoir tant de fois éprouvé que la fortune ne m'avoit pas plus tôt renversé qu'elle me relevoit, je n'aurois dû regarder l'etat facheux où j'etois que comme une occasion prochaine de prosperité."

And so it proved : for things did come round.

Frank declined to take the knock. He never let himself "aller à la tristesse." He continued cheerful and hopeful, if not exactly, as the man said at Monte, "toujours gai." Of those clouded days Frank will tell only one story, and will then get on to happier times.

CHAPTER XXIX

SPOT OF LUCK

THE story in this chapter begins before the War. It was at the time that Frank Richards was writing the Will Hay series for Montague Haydon. That serieslasted a long time : but it came, at length, to an end. About the time that it was winding up, Mr. Haydon put Frank in touch with a gentleman who was a director of a film company called Gainsborough Pictures. Frank did not meet this gentleman, his communications with him were postal and telephonic : Frank at that time was living a long way from London. So all that Frank knows of him personally is that he had a pleasant voice and nice manners. It transpired that Mr. O., as Frank will call him, wanted a film story for a scenario featuring Will Hay, and Frank was asked to write it.

Writing a scenario itself is a considerable task : but writing a story to provide a scenario is a very simple business, which came easily to Frank, and he thought the fee of £25 for the same somewhat generous. So he wrote the story, which he called ' The Lost Loot,' and despatched it to Mr. O., who, with promptness and despatch, came back with the agreed " pony," and that was that.

That might have been the end of the transaction. It was, so far as Mr. O. was concerned. But there were unexpected results in store for Frank. Monty Haydon, when he set the ball rolling, certainly couldn't have visualized how it was going to turn out years later. He never knew : and probably never will know unless he should chance to read this book. Frank, who has a good memory for good actions, will always remember it.

Not very long after 'The Lost Loot' had been written and despatched, Frank happened to be looking through the 'Financial Times,' and in the informative columns of that journal, came on the name "Gainsborough." He discovered that the shares in that company, nominally of the value of ten shillings, had a market price of one-fifth of that amount, viz., two shillings. Why this was so, Frank did not know, not being very well up in abstruse matters of finance. He knew that the film business experiences a good many ups and downs, and concluded that this was one of the downs.

Now Frank did some thinking—which, off the typewriter, was perhaps not his long suit. Mr. O., on the telephone, had impressed him as an able man. A film featuring so popular a character as Will Hay could scarcely fail, Frank thought, to score a success. He may even have thought that the story of the film having been written by the author of Billy Bunter might prove a help. The omens seemed to Frank to indicate that those shares, low as they had fallen, might turn out a good investment, in all these circumstances. The "pony" had come very easily. Why not invest it in those shares, and wait for happy results?

No sooner thought of, than done. Frank wrote to his banker to buy for him 250 Gainsborough shares.

There was some delay. During that delay, Frank thought the matter over again, and realised that he was an ass—just as he did after his asinine essays to break the bank at Monte Carlo. In financial matters he was as a babe in the wood, and except in very optimistic moments, he was well aware of it. So, as the shares had not yet been bought, and as second thoughts are proverbially the best, Frank wrote again to his banker, cancelling the order to buy.

That, again, might have been the end of the transaction. But again it was far from the end. Some days later, Frank was quite surprised to receive a

contract note, indicating that 250 Gainsborough shares had been bought on his behalf.

Quite puzzled, he rang up his bank manager. Something like the following ensued :

" I've just had a contract note for 250 Gainsboroughs."

" Yes ? "

" Didn't you get my letter cancelling the order ? "

" We had your letter, but it did not cancel the order."

" Will you look at it again ? "

" Very well ! "

Several other matters had been mentioned in that letter relating to other affairs. The bank manager, evidently, had overlooked one item. He came back to the telephone apologetic.

" It's there ? " asked Frank.

" Yes, it's there. It is our mistake, and if you do not want the shares—— "

There was a moment's pause. Frank, by that time, certainly did not want the shares. But neither did he want to be a spot of bother to anyone, and it was all his own fault, anyway. So he answered :

" All right ! I shall take up the shares."

And that, once again, was that.

Those 250 Gainsboroughs became Frank's. His " pony " was gone, in exchange for them. However, a pony was not a tremendous amount to Frank in those days, and he dismissed the matter from his mind.

It continued dismissed from his mind. Nothing came of it : the story of the " Lost Loot " never was, so far as Frank knows at least, used in a film, and he never received as much as a threepenny bit on his shares : and in fact he quite forgot that he was a shareholder in Gainsborough Pictures. He was to be very strangely and unexpectedly reminded of the fact.

The War came, and Frank was in London, as already related. He was having a somewhat tough time. Cash which had once come in so freely, was

reduced to a mere trickle. There came a period when the outlook was unmistakably bleak. And then J. Arthur Rank happened.

Frank had never met that eminent gentleman, but he had, of course, heard of him. Who has not heard of the Fairy Prince of Filmland ? I doubt very much whether Mr. Rank had ever heard of Frank Richards. Certainly he could never have dreamed that one of his magnificent and munificent operations would extract that venerable author from a very deep hole. But it did.

One morning Frankreceived acommunication which recalled to him that absurd investment of his " pony." It appeared that the Rank organization was taking over Gainsborough Pictures, and that all Gainsborough shareholders were offered the full value of their shares, which was ten shillings. Frank, needless to say, jumped at it : and in due course he received a cheque for £125 for the shares that had cost him £25 years before.

It could not have happened more opportunely or more happily. Frank, as I have said, was in a hole, out of which he was now enabled to clamber. It was the last into which he fell : for after that, things began to look up again. He could not help feeling very much obliged to Mr. Rank and admiring his magnificent business methods. He felt still more deeply obliged to Montague Hayden—who, though blissfully ignorant of the whole affair, was in truth the " onlie begetter " of that wonderful spot of luck.

CHAPTER XXX

ADIEU !

FRANK RICHARDS is coming to the end of his story. The past tense has become the present. A few words will tell the rest.

The War ended. Victory came, and peace—blessed peace. Not, it is true, the peace that Frank had known in calm Victorian days. The world does not seem likely to know that peace again in Frank's time. But if it was a troubled peace, with one crisis treading on the heels of another in the interesting modern way, at least it was not war, and more or less normal life could re-start after the long interval. One was done with the black-out, if not with the rations. One could get out of a hired house and make room for an anxious house-hunter, and go home. Which Frank lost little time in doing.

Everything, of course, was in a shocking state, after five years of neglect, when he did get home. Fences were down—chimney-pots fallen—the garden a jungle. But no real damage had been done in the little hamlet: though places close by had been badly bombed. Frank, at any rate, had the luck to find his house still standing. Many people were less lucky. Some sort of order was educed out of chaos. Every now and then came a tremendous bang from the shore, as mines washed up, reminding Frank of the early days of 1940. But it was peace at last: and though the paper shortage was still a trial and a tribulation, Frank was busy again, and the clicking of the typewriter sounded cheerily in his old study.

'Gem' and 'Magnet' were gone for ever. Frank was seventy. It was, perhaps, a little late in life to begin over again. But he had never doubted that a good time was coming. Now it came.

At the time he was writing the Sparshott series, and Headland House, and other things numerous and various, and his " Carcroft " stories were going on in ' Pie.' Other activities came his way : spots of broadcasting, which he enjoyed : he found that he quite liked listening to his own dulcet tones on the air ! Shortly before leaving London he had written a radio play, called " Plus ça Change," for the B.B.C. : it came on the air in October 1945. When the Bunter revival came, the B.B.C. were kind enough to let him tell the world about it on the radio. And did Frank enjoy that occasion ?

The Bunter Books came.

The dear old ' Magnet ' was dead, but Billy Bunter was only in a state of suspended animation. He had rolled in weekly numbers for over thirty years. He had had a long rest during the war. But it seemed that age could not wither him nor custom stale his infinite variety. As plump and as lively as ever, he rolled once more, this time in book form. It was Charles Skilton who proposed the Bunter Books : and never had a publisher a brighter idea. The first volume was called ' Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School.' Its reception astonished and delighted its author. That volume is now, at the time of writing, in its 40th thousand. It was followed by others, among them ' Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School ' by " Hilda " Richards. In fact, like the oysters in Wonderland, " Thick and fast they came at last, and more and more and more."

Later came the Tom Merry Books, which made Martin Clifford almost as busy as Frank Richards. Not quite : for Frank, in addition to Bunter, was writing " Jack of All Trades," and " Carcroft." And to the great satisfaction of Owen Conquest, " Rookwood " came to life again. And finally, Frank found himself writing once more for his old publishers, the Amalgamated Press—a series of Greyfriars stories in a weekly publication. The click of the typewriter,

like the voice of the turtle, was heard in the land—at something like its old speed ! And all was calm and bright !

AN autobiography is not a biography. It cannot go on to the finish. That is the affair of the biographer, who, one hopes, will not have occasion to get busy yet awhile. Autobiography must necessarily end on a half-close.

Frank is still here. He is still alive and clicking ! He is as busy, once more, as in pre-war days. He enjoys writing as much as ever he did : his interest flags no more in 1950 than it did when he wrote his first story in 1890. He passed the seventy mark in the War time. His eightieth birthday looms on the horizon. He envisages it with equanimity.

He will never see Alps or Apennines again. He will never ride on the Corniche road, or sail a boat on Lago Maggiore, or saunter on a sunny boulevard—or even walk up Fleet Street. And he doesn't mind very much. He still finds the world a jolly old place to live in, and is happy and contented. He has many readers, and judging by their kind letters they are all his friends. Every morning he reads "fan" letters over breakfast : which, if it were needed, would put him into a cheerful mood for the day. And when he looks up from the typewriter, at his window over the sea, at the book-shelves with innumerable photographs of young people pinned along the edges, at Sammy the cat watching him solemnly from the cushion in the armchair, he feels that he is as lucky in age as he was in youth.

And so, dear reader, adieu !

THE END

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THE BUNTER BOOKS

By FRANK RICHARDS

Illustrated by R. J. Macdonald

BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS SCHOOL (1947)
BILLY BUNTER'S BANKNOTE (1948)
BILLY BUNTER'S BARRING-OUT (1948)
BILLY BUNTER IN BRAZIL (1949)
BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PARTY (1949)
BILLY BUNTER'S BENEFIT (1950)
BILLY BUNTER AMONG THE CANNIBALS (1950)
BILLY BUNTER'S POSTAL ORDER (1951)
BILLY BUNTER BUTTS IN (1951)
BILLY BUNTER AND THE BLUE MAURITIUS
BILLY BUNTER'S BEANFEAST (Both to appear in 1952)

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by R. J. Macdonald

BESSIE BUNTER OF CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL (1949)

"Billy Bunter has become a proverb, and what other living writer can claim as much for one of his characters?" *The Listener*

"Bunter is a national institution." *Evening Express*

"Harry Wharton and Co. of the Greyfriars Remove are among the best-known characters of fiction." *North Western Evening Mail*

"In his sphere Frank Richards is a genius. Ask any schoolboy." *Empire News*

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(*continued from front flap*)

of any living author. So keen are his readers that a great many make a pilgrimage to Frank Richards' home in Kent; he cannot see them all, so he does not see any. This book, however, in picture and text, now gives the story of Frank Richards to everyone—and to the hundreds of thousands who used to read *The Magnet* and *The Gem*, it will be a welcome and enthralling escape to nostalgia, spiced with humour.

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" Billy Bunter has become a proverb, and what other living writer can claim as much for one of his characters ? " —*The Listener*

BILLY BUNTER'S BENEFIT

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BILLY BUNTER AMONG THE CANNIBALS

" This is a book crammed with excitement and adventure to thrill the heart of every healthy-minded boy." —*Stirling Observer*

BILLY BUNTER'S POSTAL ORDER

" Mr. Frank Richards continues to charm us with the perennial schooldays of the immortal Billy Bunter." —*Sussex Daily News*

BILLY BUNTER BUTTS IN

Many exciting episodes take place in this unusual and very gripping new story of Greyfriars, which is sure to please all readers.

BILLY BUNTER IN BRAZIL

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BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

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