COLLECTORS DIGEST ANNUAL 1969

.H. WEBB.

Collectors' Digest Annual

CHRISTMAS 1969

TWENTY-THIRD YEAR

Editor: ERIC FAYNE, Excelsior House, Grove Road, Surbiton, Surrey, England. ***

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

-- And so we come to the Twenty-Third Edition of Collectors' Digest Annual. Which means that our Annual has lived longer than the Holiday Annual, with which many of us grew up.

Twenty-three editions, covering a history of nearly a quarter-century. A quarter-century of hope and disappointment; of frustration and fulfilment; of progress and decay. It was, as we realise with something of a thrill and something of a chill, a far different world when Herbert Leckenby, of cherished memory, wrote his first Introduction to the first Collectors' Digest Annual. Had he been able to look into a crystal ball, he would have been proud, happy, and, perhaps, a little amazed to see the long line of Annuals forming stepping-stones into the future. He might even have been a wee bit depressed had his crystal ball revealed to him what was to happen in the outside world as the Annuals passed by.

There is, maybe, something remarkable in the constancy of an Annual which, though it is as modern as tomorrow, reflects the past rather than the present. What you and I desperately need, in an era which allows too many changes to be brought about by trend-setting freaks, is something constant and durable for us to cling to in this age of dissolution and transformation. Possibly we have found something like that in our own Annual. I hope so. Perhaps that is the secret of the never-failing success of the Annual.

My grateful thanks to our stalwart contributors who burn countless gallons of midnight oil on behalf of the hobby. My sincere thanks to our printers, York Duplicating Services, who love the Annual as much as we do, and whose keenness is only equalled by their efficiency. My affectionate thanks to you, my readers, whose loyalty makes it all a dream come true.

A Happy Christmas to you all, and may your New Year be the best yet.

Eric Fayne

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THE EARLY HISTORY OF HIGHCLIFFE

BY ROGER M. JENKINS

In the heyday of school stories, Charles Hamilton had the engaging habit of endowing subsidiary schools with independent life of their own. Rylcombe Grammar School, for long a subsidiary of St. Jim's in the Gem, was made the centre of a story in its own right in "The School Under Canvas." Cliff House which was occasionally mentioned in the Magnet was brought to a life of its own in the pages of the School Friend. Before the Rookwood stories began in the Boys' Friend, Rookwood was given an honourable mention in a Greyfriars story, by way of a preliminary advertisement.

Highcliffe began in a very modest way in the pages of the Magnet. In No. 109 we read:

> The cap belonged to a fellow from Highcliffe school, a college some distance up the coast, beyond Cliff House. Highcliffe was too far from Greyfriars for the boys to come much in contact; but when they did happen to meet, it was not in a friendly fashion.

The fellow was in fact Vavasour, the junior captain of Highcliffe. The only previous reference to a Ponsonby had been in No. 15 of the ½d. Gem, when he was mentioned as a member of the visiting Greyfriars cricket team. Charles Hamilton must have come to the conclusion that such an aristocratic name was too good to waste, because in No. 138 of the Magnet the Ponsonby that we know had put in an appearance, and both he and Vavasour visited Greyfriars in a trap. By this time he was apparently the leader of the Highcliffe juniors. Their well-known propensities towards gambling, boasting, ill-natured trickery, and general dishonourable conduct were apparent from the very beginning. Meanwhile, the two schools were moving closer together geographically, a fact which will not surprise anyone who tries (in vain) to make a consistent map of Greyfriars and its environs. At any rate, in No. 311 of the Magnet Mr. Mobbs was able to walk the distance between the two schools when making complaints.

Highcliffe is unique among the subsidiary schools for two reasons: one is the initial lack of friendliness in the rivalry between the two schools; the other is the vividness with which the school and its characters were drawn. Although Highcliffe was repeatedly featured in Magnet stories from 1910 onwards, it was not until 1914

that Charles Hamilton etched the details of the school in our memories in a manner which he never bothered to do with Rylcombe Grammar School or Bagshot.

There is something fascinating about society in decay, and that was precisely the case with Highcliffe, as described so vividly in Magnet 311. Dr. Voysey hardly knew what was going on in the school, and relegated most of his authority to the under-masters, who were not well-chosen men:

> Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, hoped for great things some day from the influence of Ponsonby's father, a noble earl; and nothing would have induced him to find out anything that would have got the honourable Cecil into trouble. Mr. Mobbs, like Nelson, could turn a blind eye upon things he did not wish to see.

The story has an unusual plot, in that Mr. Mobbs came twice to Greyfriars to make complaints that caused trouble for the Remove, while the Highcliffe juniors got away scot-free. His complaints make amusing reading:

> "Then they burst into Ponsonby's study!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs, "and forced that highly-born and delicate lad to enter into a brutal fistical encounter with a rough brute - "
> "Oh, cheese it!" said Johnny Bull.

To do Ponsonby justice, he was not a complete coward, but he usually preferred to have overwhelming odds on his side. This story was in fact the one that introduced Gadsby's handsome gold watch, a celebrated ticker that was to be heard of a great deal in future years.

We now come to two of the most puzzling and contradictory events in all Hamiltonian lore, and our difficulties begin with Magnet No. 344 entitled "Ructions at Highcliffe," which appeared in September 1914. This dealt with the arrival at Highcliffe of a new boy, Clare, who was knocked down by a car containing Ponsonby & Co. Harry Wharton took him to the doctor and later Squiff, a recent arrival at Greyfriars and thus not known to Ponsonby, masqueraded as the new boy at Highcliffe. When Clare eventually did turn up, he was treated like all the other boys at the school, and no antagonism was displayed towards him.

On New Year's Day of 1915, however, was published what Charles Hamilton declared was his finest story - No. 288 of the Boys' Friend Library, entitled "The Boy Without a Name," in which Clare, a scholarship boy whose parentage was unknown, aroused great hostility from Ponsonby & Co. when he arrived at Highcliffe. Although the story was published in 1915, it makes no mention of the war, and was probably written much at the same time as Magnet 344. Why two contradictory accounts should have been written of the way in which Clare arrived at Highcliffe is a mystery that will never be solved now, but there seems little doubt that the Boys' Friend version is the authentic one. Perhaps the two Clares were not intended to be the same person, and Charles Hamilton was just indulging in his favourite pastime of repeating names.

As most collectors know, "The Boy Without a Name" deals with Ponsonby's plots against Clare, and the story concludes with the discovery that Clare was the long-lost son of Major Courtenay, Ponsonby's rich uncle. The sentimental theme of a missing heir was growing old-fashioned in the nineteenth century, and the snobbishness of Ponsonby & Co. seems unbelievable now, though it was far from being unreal half a century ago. Nevertheless the story carries conviction because of the sheer panache with which it is written. Some of the characterisation may seem too bad

to be true, but the thrust of stroke and counter-stroke is so compelling that it is difficult to put the book down. Of course, the main character of interest is de Courcy, the Caterpillar, who made his debut in this celebrated tale:

> He was an extremely well-dressed fellow, with curly flaxen hair and sleepy blue eyes.

The Caterpillar befriended Clare (or Courtenay) out of a whim, and then puzzled him by a series of remarks about the working classes which were made half in jest and half in earnest, and they are a sheer delight for the adult reader.

It is seldom indeed that a sequel can reach the same heights as the original story, but this remarkable feat was achieved in No. 328 of the Boys' Friend Library entitled "Rivals and Chums." Ponsonby's plots were going on unabated, though Major Courtenay was at the front. The new feature of the story was the gaming den run by Mr. Banks. I know of no other description of gambling so enthralling as chapters 17-19 and 31, which describe de Courcy's attempt to understand the tricks of roulette, and beat Mr. Banks at his own trickery. Roulette was a game that Charles Hamilton knew well, and it is described here in fascinating detail. It need hardly be said that Courtenay saved the Caterpillar from arrest when the gaming den was raided by the police, just as the Caterpillar had saved Courtenay from expulsion at the end of the previous story. It also seems quite clear in these two stories that Gadsby ranked second to Ponsonby in sheer unscrupulousness and Vavasour, the previous junior captain, was regarded as too weak-natured to keep pace with them in all their schemes.

It is irritating beyond measure to know that these were the only two Highcliffe tales to be written. Having given this school an independent existence in two unforgettable stories, Charles Hamilton allowed it to lapse into a subsidiary state again, to be mentioned in the occasional Greyfriars or Rookwood story but never to resume its full splendour or to revisit the glimpses of the moon. As a consequence, a first-rate character like de Courcy was virtually discarded. A few years later his ghost arrived at St. Jim's under the name of Ralph Reckness Cardew, but no one could quite equal the careless drawl and gay insouciance of Rupert de Courcy.

The first Magnet to feature the new set-up at Highcliffe seems to have been No. 374, the April double number for 1915, which was published between the two Highcliffe Boys' Friends. It ended with one of those enormous gatherings at Eastwood House, and de Courcy's reaction to meeting d'Arcy for the first time is told with a dry humour that means a lot to the reader who knows "The Boy Without a Name," but not very much to anyone who is not au fait with Highcliffe. This remained the case during the years: Ponsonby & Co. could always interest the reader because of the sheer villainy of their actions, but the whimsical regard of de Courcy for Courtenay was merely a pale echo of its former greatness.

It is impossible to list all the Magnet stories featuring Highcliffe, and there was a particularly rich crop in 1915, but it remains true that every time Highcliffe was mentioned in the Magnet the Greyfriars story seemed to gain an added interest, a sharpening of focus which shed a merciless light on the moral bankruptcy

that spread through most of this decaying institution. When Highcliffe was featured in the Wally Bunter series of 1919 or the Levison at Greyfriars series of 1923, the Magnet stories seemed to become more tautly constructed and more fascinating to read. There were two later series that had notable Highcliffe episodes: the first was the Courtfield Cracksman series, and in Magnet 1141 Bunter was suspected of having stolen a Louis Quinze snuff-box from Dr. Voysey's study, and he was questioned by Dr. Locke:

> "Dr. Voysey believes, for some reason, that you were in his study this afternoon, Bunter. How do you account for that?"
> "Well, sir, Dr. Voysey's well known to be a silly old ass -"
> "What? What?"
> "Doddering, sir, in fact," said Bunter. "I've heard Highcliffe fellows wonder why the governors don't sack him, sir, he's so old and doddering."
> "Bless my soul!" gasped the Head, while Mr. Steele turned his face away to hide his emotions. "Bunter! How dare you make such remarks about Dr. Voysey?"
> "But you asked me, sir," said Bunter.

Dr. Locke drove over to Highcliffe with Bunter so that the matter could be sifted. There was a fine description of the two headmasters' relations with one another in the same issue of the Magnet:

> The meeting of the two headmasters, in Dr. Voysey's study, was formally polite. They seldom met, except on account of some trouble cropping up between the boys of the two schools; and there was, perhaps, little love lost between them. Dr. Voysey had a fixed conviction that Highcliffe was, in every way, an establishment of a higher tone than that prevailing at Greyfriars; and Dr. Locke, at the bottom of his heart, had an opinion of the Highcliffe headmaster that tallied with Billy Bunter's disrespectful description of him. But the manners of the two old gentlemen were irreproachably courteous, though somewhat frosty.

The other Magnet series with a memorable Highcliffe incident was the Lancaster series, and there is a curious similarity in the pattern of the two episodes, for in Magnet 1216 it turned out that the apple of Dr. Voysey's eye was his Rembrandt, a smudgy picture on which he loved to feast his eyes. We were also informed that he had refused many handsome offers for this painting, just as two years previously we learnt that he had turned down munificent offers from museums for his Louis Quinze snuff-box. It was a picture that attracted the attention of the Wizard, just as the Courtfield cracksman had shown an interest in the snuff-box, and Dr. Locke had occasion to pay Dr. Voysey another visit in this number of the Magnet, but perhaps the greatest pleasure of the story is Charles Hamilton's picture of the inefficient old headmaster:

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

But when all is said and done, it is the character of Ponsonby who made the greatest contribution of all Highcliffe characters to the working of the Magnet plots. There was no other regular character in the Hamilton schools who seemed to be such an unmitigated young rogue, and perhaps no single Magnet story featured the Highcliffe scene so well as No. 1323, aptly entitled "The Worst Boy in the School." Ponsonby had no compunction in burning Mr. Mobbs's stamp collection as part of a plot to incriminate Courtenay, and for once Dr. Voysey seemed to possess sufficient initiative to push the enquiry to a successful conclusion. The fame of Cecil Ponsonby spread far beyond the precincts of Greyfriars, and he was no stranger to the pages of the Gem and the Boys' Friend. If de Courcy was the finest piece of character-

drawing on the Highcliffe scene, there is no doubt that Cecil Ponsonby was the mainspring of many an enthralling Magnet plot. And so Highcliffe remains to fascinate us and tantalise us: we are very grateful for the stories we have, but we cannot help but sigh for those that were never written.

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Well, thanks to Geoff Harrison, of New Zealand and Gerry Allison, of England, I was able to further my collection of "Super Detective" and "Thriller Comics," Libraries and S.B.L's by John Drummond. Thanks, again, to both. Now - ANY MORE?! Am particularly looking for S.B.L. (3rd Series) Nos. 80, 100, 182, by Drummond. Also any S.B.L's (2nd Series) by John G. Brandon and John Hunter (particularly, "Captain Dack" novels by the latter). Also - any Boys' Friend Libraries (1st Series) with stories about Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee. Please state price and condition; the latter, MOST IMPORTANT - all items must be in very good nick! Season's greetings to all, and good luck in 1970 - from:

CHRIS LOWDER, "EYETHERMES," CRADLEY, NR. MALVERN, WORCESTERSHIRE.

- -

WANTED URGENTLY: £2 offered for a nice copy of Nelson Lee "Old" Series No. 11. Will anyone oblige?

L. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, LONDON, S.E. 22.

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BRIDGWATER, 20 BAY CRESCENT, SWANAGE, DORSET, requires "Proud" tram season ticket. Anxious to renew business with Messrs. Cynos, Kravitch and Mist, onion men; also Kestrel, Severance and Death, "Night Birds." Home offered to Ben of "house opposite," "number 17." Please write first, all offers answered.

- -

WANTED: Bound volumes "Strand" containing Sherlock Holmes stories. Would welcome correspondence, Holmes stories, etc.

J. BUSH, 34 FORD CLOSE, STUDD HILL, HERNE BAY, KENT.

- -

WANTED: School Friend 1919 - 1921; Schoolgirls' Own Libraries, 1st Series.

LACK, 4 RUSHMERE ROAD, NORTHAMPTON.

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First four Eagle Annuals also numbers six and twelve. £1 post free.

MORGAN, 14 LITTLE GREEN LANES, SUTTON COLDFIELD, WARWICKSHIRE.

- -

STILL NEEDED: Many vols. "Captain," "B.O.P." and "Holiday Annual" 1941.

ROBINSON, 185 RECULVER ROAD, HERNE BAY, KENT.

"Concerning our Artists"

From the Personal Recollections of
HERBERT A. HINTON
(Editor of Gem and Magnet for some years between 1912 and 1920)

The pictorial side of the Companion Papers is a most important one. A description of our art and artists will prove less romantic, perhaps, than the record of our stories and authors.

At the same time, these Recollections would not be complete without a brief summary concerning our artists and their work. Sketches are essential to the success of a paper. A periodical without pictures is like a house without a window. Imagine the Gem Library, for instance, as a book of solid prose, unrelieved by sketches. I am afraid its circulation would become "small by degrees and beautifully less!"

The average reader knows very little about our artists, for the simple reason that they seldom affix their names to their work. Frank Richards and Martin Clifford are more in the limelight than C. H. Chapman and R. J. Macdonald; and yet the two latter gentlemen have played just as important a part as the authors whose stories they illustrate.

Mr. Chapman has done the bulk of the Magnet sketches, and Mr. Macdonald the bulk of the Gem. But these two are by no means solely responsible for the pictorial output of the Companion Papers. Other artists who have played a big part are Warwick Reynolds, Arthur Clarke, E. E. Briscoe, Hutton Mitchell and Philip Hayward.

It was Hutton Mitchell who first illustrated the Magnet stories. He was succeeded by Arthur Clarke - a man whose charming personality endeared him to all.

Arthur Clarke's schoolboys were universally recognised and admired. We find his work in the back numbers of the Magnet Library, the Boys' Friend, the Boys' Realm, the Boys' Herald and other periodicals. We were deprived of Arthur Clarke's services under tragic circumstances. Whilst executing a sketch for the Magnet, the artist fell dead, leaving a host of friends to mourn his loss.

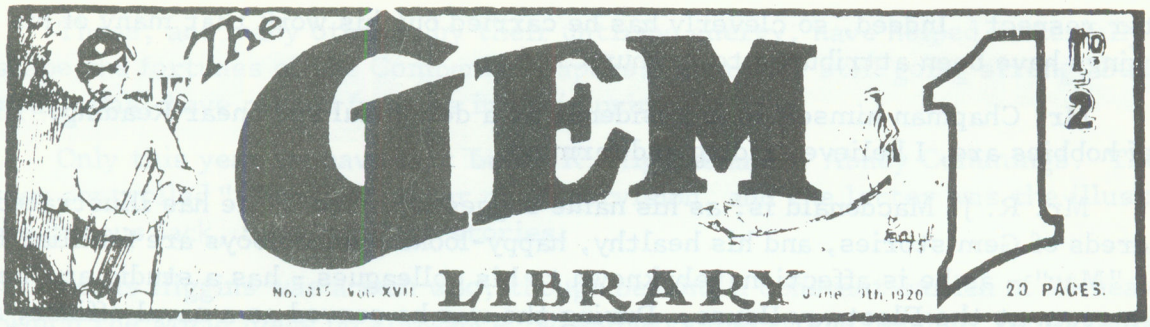
The unfinished sketch is still in my possession.

Following Arthur Clarke's untimely death, a successor was found in Mr. C. H. Chapman who was instructed to produce sketches of the same style as those of his predecessor. Some rather unkind things have been said from time to time concerning Mr. Chapman's work. It has been implied that he is not a master of his craft.

But, before they throw stones at Mr. Chapman's reputation, let the critics remember this - that he came to the rescue of the Magnet Library at a very critical time, and that he was faced with the very difficult task of carrying on the illustrations in the style of Arthur Clarke.

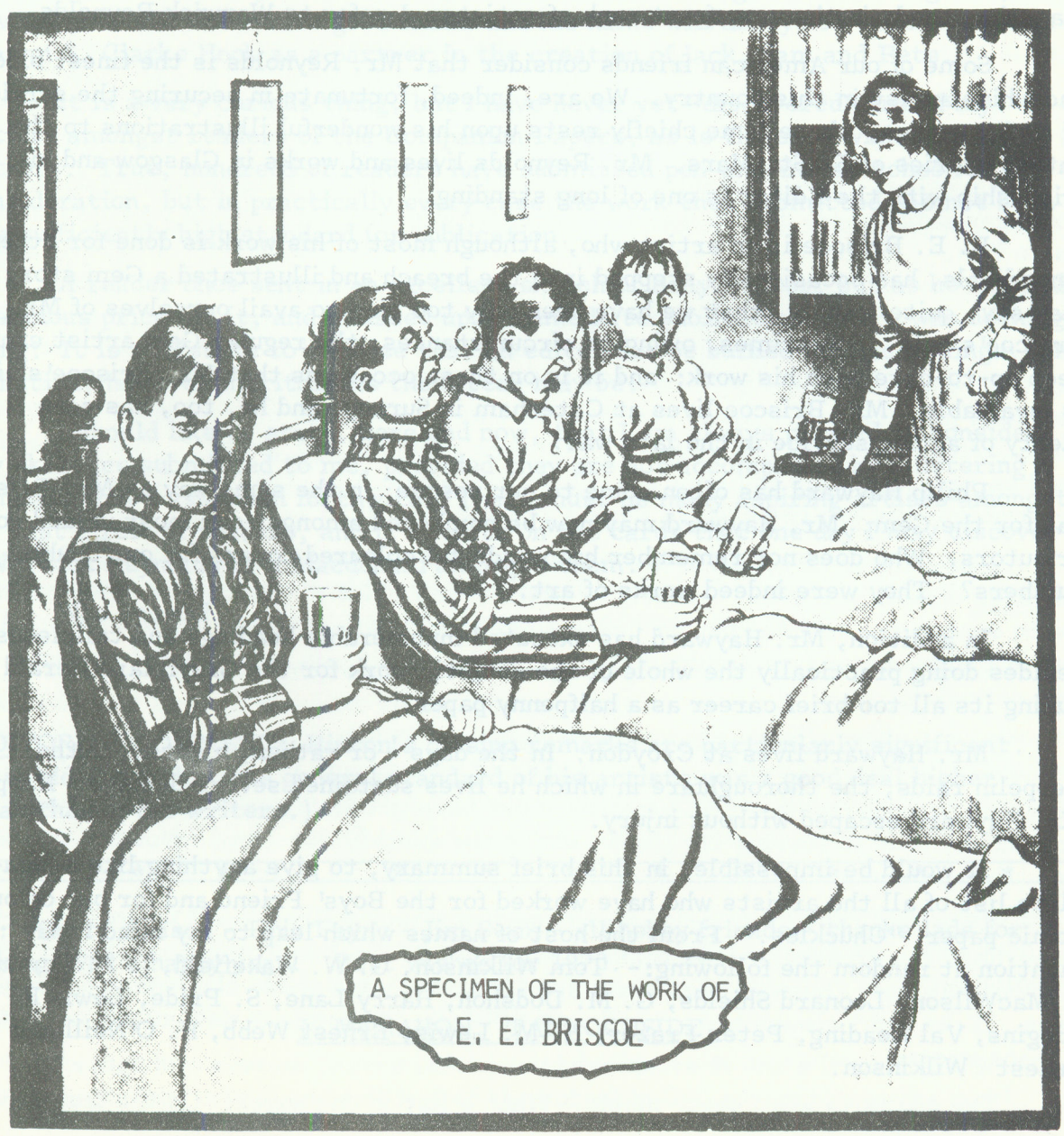
Not even the severest critic can deny that Mr. Chapman has succeeded in the

THE VALUE-FOR-MONEY STORY PAPER!



"THE TUCK DOPERS!" & "MAKING A HERO!"

Two Grand Complete School Stories in this Issue



A BAD TIME FOR THE "NUTS" OF THE SIXTH!

latter respect. Indeed, so cleverly has he carried out his work that many of his drawings have been attributed to Arthur Clarke.

Mr. Chapman himself is in residence at a delightful spot near Reading. His chief hobbies are, I believe, riding and farming.

Mr. R. J. Macdonald is, as his name suggests, a Scot. He has illustrated hundreds of Gem stories, and his healthy, happy-looking schoolboys are familiar to all. "Mac" - as he is affectionately known to his colleagues - has a studio at Chelsea and a room at the Fleetway House. During the war he served as a naval officer, and the record of his experiences would fill whole volumes. The clever Gem artist has only recently returned to England, and has not yet resumed work for the Gem Library.

For the past four years the Tom Merry stories have been illustrated by a man who stands in the very front rank of artists. I refer to Warwick Reynolds.

Some of our American friends consider that Mr. Reynolds is the finest black and white artist in this country. We are, indeed, fortunate in securing the services of such a genius, whose fame chiefly rests upon his wonderful illustrations to the nature stories of F. St. Mars. Mr. Reynolds lives and works in Glasgow and his friendship with the Editor is one of long standing.

E. E. Briscoe is an artist who, although most of his work is done for other periodicals, has occasionally stepped into the breach and illustrated a Gem story. I may say, quite frankly, that we have been only too glad to avail ourselves of Mr. Briscoe's help. Sometimes, owing to circumstances, the regular Gem artist cannot keep up-to-date with his work; and it is on these occasions that Mr. Briscoe's aid is invaluable. Mr. Briscoe lives at Caterham in Surrey, and he, too, has seen plenty of active service in the late war.

Philip Hayward has often come to our rescue, in the same way as Mr. Briscoe has for the Gem. Mr. Hayward may now be numbered amongst our most valued contributors. Who does not remember his wonderful coloured covers for our double numbers? They were indeed works of art.

In addition, Mr. Hayward has executed innumerable headings and tailpieces, besides doing practically the whole of the artistic work for the Greyfriars Herald during its all too brief career as a halfpenny paper.

Mr. Hayward lives at Croydon. In the days - or rather, nights - of the Zeppelin raids, the thoroughfare in which he lives sustained severe damage. Happily, Mr. Hayward escaped without injury.

It would be impossible, in this brief summary, to give anything like a complete list of all the artists who have worked for the Boys' Friend and for our coloured comic paper, "Chuckles." From the host of names which leap to my mind I may mention at random the following:- Tom Wilkinson, G. W. Wakefield, J. A. Cummings, J. MacWilson, Leonard Shields, G. M. Dodshon, Harry Lane, S. Pride, Lewis R. Higgins, Val Reading, Peter Frazer, H. M. Lewis, Ernest Webb, H. O'Neill and Ernest Wilkinson.

These, and many others, by their untiring energy, have helped materially to shape the fortunes of the Companion Papers. Many are still going strong, but several, alas, have passed from us in their prime.

Only this year we have lost Lewis R. Higgins and J. Abney Cummings. The former controlled "Chuckles" under my supervision, and the latter was the illustrator of the famous Jack, Sam and Pete stories.

Lewis Higgins was a man who, though bearing a constant burden of ill-health, for which the world made no allowance, was always merry and bright. He was a good editor, and one of the best cartoonists of his generation.

Following upon the death of Mr. Higgins came the tragic news that J. A. Cummings had suddenly been taken from us. Mr. Cummings lived at Paignton, Devonshire. He was a rare good fellow and his name will always be bracketed with that of S. Clarke Hook as a partner in the creation of Jack, Sam and Pete.

It is a very curious thing, but I have never yet "discovered" any of my artists amongst readers of the Companion Papers, as is the case with certain authors. True, hundreds of readers have submitted pen-and-ink sketches for my consideration, but in practically every case the work thus submitted has not been of a sufficiently high standard for publication.

A reader once sent in an excellent sketch of Billy Bunter, but as he demanded a fabulous price for it, and insisted upon immediate publication, there was nothing doing! It is a mistake to suppose that an editor can be bullied into accepting a contribution, however meritorious the latter may be.

I should like to state, here and now, that I am always pleased to consider any sketches submitted to me, provided they are not accompanied by blustering demands that I use them forthwith. There must be many aspiring artists amongst my vast circle of readers, and it is quite on the cards that one day I may discover a Warwick Reynolds or a Macdonald amongst them.

Who knows?

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(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Hinton's closing remarks are particularly significant. It would seem that the general standard of his artists was a good deal higher than that of his writers.)

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TO: Gerry Allison - Eric Fayne - Jim Swan - all hobby friends - thanks lads for making 1969 a happy year. Best wishes for 1970.

J. McMAHON, TANNOCHSIDE.

Random Recollections

By LAWRENCE MORLEY

THE COMICS

Few of us can deny that nostalgia plays a large part in our enjoyment of the old papers; we remember the first time we bought such and such a paper, or read a certain story; each one of us has his particular period of time, when re-reading a story, memory comes flooding back.

With this in mind, I would like to try to recapture some of my own memories and incidents from before the war, when children's papers, to my mind, were at their best.

The mid-1930's were the "Golden Age" of children's literature; providing one had the necessary cash the list was tremendous.

As well as the old established favourites, new periodicals were introduced. Some stayed the pace, others died after a short life. "Pilot," "Wild West Weekly," "Radio Fun," "Jingles & Tip Top," "Buzzer" and "Modern Wonder" — magic names. Things were very hard in the part of Derbyshire where I lived; therefore I could only afford one comic per week, this was "Funny Wonder," still a favourite if one is lucky enough to come across any old numbers to-day. To read the rest of the comics available, one had to do a great deal of swopping and changing. Break-time at school was like a miniature "Exchange and Mart." I would exchange my "Wonder" for a "Comic Cuts," read it, and next day, exchange again for the "Joker." The process would be repeated time and time again until the whole A.P. list was exhausted; for one humble penny one got a whole week's reading matter.

A boy who lived opposite me - a rather superior youth (both his parents worked) - had three comics per week, "Jester," "Larks" and "Puck." His mother didn't allow him to exchange - said the papers "carried germs" whatever that meant. Here was corn in Egypt, three free comics just for the asking, it was a case of "first come, first served."

For some reason the papers were delivered at his house on a Saturday morning. So from Sunday onwards there was a continuous parade of kids knocking at the door asking for "Alan's comics." His mother must have got fet up with the whole thing because she took to leaving the papers under the dustbin lid; I was favourite in the race, living so near.

When I was about eleven years of age I gave up my first love "Funny Wonder" for perhaps the greatest comic paper of all time, "Film Fun." What a splendid publication that was! Even at that early age I realised what good value one got for twopence. "Film Fun" always had a "well-packed" look, economic in design, not a morsel of space wasted.

The contents were sheer magic. What a list in one paper! On the front and

back pages, Laurel and Hardy; inside, Harold Lloyd, Joe E. Brown; Wheeler and Woolsey (remember them?); Sydney Howard (The Whimsical Wag); Jackie Cooper; "Schnozzle Durante," and the picture serials on pages eight and nine featured Tim McCoy, Buck Jones and other cowboy heroes.

The stories caught my imagination also. "Secrets of Chaingangs Jail," "Jack Keen, Tec," "Through Closed Doors," etc.

The stories in "Film Fun" at this period always seemed to me to have an old fashioned, gothic touch which added to the charm. Another favourite item was on page 23, "Chaff and Chatter" by Chester Conklin and Charlie Murray (later replaced by Roland Butter and Hammon Deggs); sample gags vintage 1936.

Quote:

"Well, you know Mrs. Banks?"
"Yes, old man, and a very nice lady too."
"Well, she is suffering from kleptomania."
"Dear me! How awful! Is she doing anything to cure it?"
"Well, she's taking everything she can for it."

And there was this specimen:

"Talking of funny names, Chester, I was introduced to a little girl named Postscript the other day."
"That's a funny name for a girl, Charlie. Why was she called Postscript?"
"Because her real name was Adeline Moore." (Add a line more.)

I often wondered in later life who wrote such items. Still, they are funnier than some of the stuff on T.V. today.

Free gifts were frequent, and we "Film Fun" readers got our share. Two I remember in particular, one was a pocket cinema; it consisted of a metal magnifier and individual frames of old film stock. You placed a frame in a slot and held it up to the light. Another was a "Pocket Knife" this was about three inches long with a blade so sharp I swear you could have performed a surgical operation with it. As I cut my thumb a time or two, my mother consigned it to the fire.

Now a note of tragedy enters. It became my habit to exchange "Film Fun" with a boy who lived in the next village about a mile or so away. He took the "Triumph" which to me at that time was a new paper. We usually made our "swops" at school on a Monday, but one Monday he didn't turn up. Upon enquiry I learned he had been sent home after being sick. I waited until mid-week and anxious to read the latest episodes of "Mad Carew" and "Superman," which were running at the time, I made my way to his home.

As long as I live I will remember knocking at the door, "Film Fun" clutched in my hand; his mother answered. I could sense something was wrong. The poor woman broke down and his father came and told me Norman had died of appendicitis the night before. You can imagine my feelings.

Strange how certain papers link up with incidents in one's life. I had just entered secondary school and fell foul of the school bully, a huge boy in the sixth

named Cyril. For weeks he made my life a misery, until one day I could take it no longer. From a safe distance in the manner of Bunter, I yelled defiance at him. His reply would have put Ponsonby's language to shame. He gave chase but I had got a good start, what he wasn't going to do to me the next day was nobody's business.

Anyway the outcome of it, the following day I played truant. Starting from home at the usual school time I walked miles, right into the Derbyshire countryside, where the peak district begins. On my travels I passed a newsagent's shop and there displayed in the window was a brand new paper, "The Buzzer." "The Biggest Boys' Paper on the Market" was printed on top of the cover. All that day I yearned to get a copy but I had no money on me so it was out of the question. I arrived home at the usual time and was overjoyed to learn my mother had just drawn some "divi" from the Co-op (it was 1/6d. in the pound those days); she gave me threepence and I rushed out and purchased my precious "Buzzer." What happened about Cyril? you may ask. Well his bullying came to the notice of the school's football captain, a fine youth who later got a trial for Derby County. He took Cyril in hand in no uncertain manner, and after that I was left strictly alone.

Saturday was when the local market was held, and among the many stalls was regular el-dorado of boys' papers. It was owned by an old man who wore a very long black overcoat and bowler hat, winter and summer alike. He always stood to the rear of the stall leaving the transactions to his assistant, a furtive looking man who was constantly sniffling.

"Good morning, Son (sniff, sniff), what can I sell you today? (sniff, sniff)."

The old chap who had stood silent all the time would break in with a well observed remark. Addressing the sniffling one he would ask drily, "Handkerchiefs are half-a-crown apiece I presume?"

"No, gaffer, why do you ask? (sniff, sniff)," was the reply.

Laid out on the stall were piles of papers and comics of every description, hundreds of them. Pink "Boys' Magazines," "Union Jacks," "Thrillers," "Film Funs," everything you can think of, except "Gems and Magnets."

The price was a penny each for the books and a half-penny for the comics; if you bought in bulk, say two bob's worth, you got a few extra - 30 books or 50 comic papers. They were all back numbers, of course, but some of them still had the free gifts inside.

By the time the old chap died in 1943, I must have accumulated six or seven hundred different papers. These I stored carefully in an old chest of drawers at home; but on returning from the army, learned my mother had given them away for the "war effort."

The old fellow's assistant made a few shillings on the side by standing outside the school gate. He offered comics in return for old woollens: "Nip home and ask yer mam if she's got any old woollens" (sniff), "woollens, remember, not rags." In return for a carrier bag full of woollens you received half-a-dozen comics; ironic to think that nowadays it would cost thirty shillings or so to buy the same papers.

He also had a stack of bound copies of the half-penny comics, about the same size as the "Overseas Daily Mirror." These consisted of half-a-dozen or so titles like "Bouncer," "Dazzler," "Sunshine" and "Target," also included were free issues of the Ovaltine comic. He charged two-pence for these and good value they were, too. No doubt he had pinched them from the old fellow's stock.

Incredible as it seems now, there was hardly any sale at all for the "Magnet and Gem" in my part of the country. The Thompson papers swept the field. Everyone seemed to take the "Wizard," "Rover," "Adventure" or one of the "Big Five." This was due I should imagine, to the massive advertising campaign the company put out in the form of "throwaways," it seemed to me never a week went by but one of these were shoved through the letter box.

The "throwaways" consisted of two printed pages, one containing a chapter from a story in one of their women's papers; "Red Letter" or "Secrets." The other devoted to a story appearing in the "Wizard," "Hotspur" or another of the Thompson school. This way the wily Scots killed two birds with one stone; and it certainly paid off.

I didn't discover the wonderful world of "Greyfriars" until I was about 14 years of age. A young fellow who lived nearby was called up for the R.A.F. and presented me with five years run of the "Magnet." Imagine my delight when I delved into them, transported from a mining village to that magic corner of Kent. Time and time again I read them; and afterwards purchased the "Magnet" every week; times were getting a little better then; I added them to my precious collection in the chest of drawers, what happened to them all I described earlier on. Still it's no use crying over spilt milk. What's done is done! I don't suppose mother realised that, years later, the papers would be sought.

\- - -

THE DARK HALLS OF MAGIC

The cinema, or 'pictures' as we called them, played an important part in our young lives. Every Saturday afternoon we gathered at our local picture house, (Premier Electric Theatre 1912) to pay homage to the "B" picture heroes. A full forty-five minutes before the show started a crowd of five or six hundred kids would be gathered outside the pay box, shouting, scuffling, yelling to friends across the street; it must have caused a deal of discomfort to the local residents. The second operator, acting as unpaid, unwanted crowd-controller would emerge from his box in an attempt to restore some kind of order, although I suspect it was just an excuse to get a quick smoke; by design or accident he had adopted a way of speech in the manner of film gangsters of the period.

"Quit squawkin' you punks, or you'll be seein' no show in this movie house today," he would yell. Accompanied by jeers of derision and showers of orange peel, scowling like a baffled ferret, and breathing out clouds of "Woodbine" smoke, he would depart to his own private world of ageing projectors and canned dreams.

Once inside we would wait impatiently for the lights to dim; then a great roar went up as the screen lit up and on would come a picture of two bowler-hats and the

strains of the cuckoo theme; it was our old pals Laurel and Hardy. For two hours we sat entranced through the serial, and then the main feature - Buck Jones, Tim McCoy or Ken Maynard. We did not think much of singing cowboys - Gene Autry, Eddie Dean or Roy Rogers, we classed them as "soft" or soppy. At last the magic was over until the following week, so we all made our way home to a "Saturday tea" - tinned salmon, celery and shop cakes; then the Saturday night treat "Music Hall" on the wireless.

I hope readers will forgive me for digressing a little, but our childhood reading and cinema-going habits were closely akin, so if I may I will relate a few more anecdotes about the pictures.

Standing adjacent to the "Premier" was a smaller house called the "Empire" and it was obvious even in those days of avid cinema going that it was in deep trouble - no-one was going there. The owners appointed a new manager, a youngish man named Mr. Arch, and from then on they never looked back.

It was clear from the start that the new man was a "go getter," he went in for "gimmicks" to sell tickets; I will give you a few instances. To advertise a re-issue of "King Kong" he employed a chap traipsing round the district in a gorilla skin, frightening old ladies and young children half to death. For "The Crimson Circle" a British made Edgar Wallace thriller he persuaded we kids to walk around dropping squares of pasteboard into people's letter boxes and shopping bags. The cards bore the legend:

> BEWARE YOUR TIME IS RUNNING OUT. ONLY A FEW DAYS LEFT BEFORE YOU SEE "THE CRIMSON CIRCLE" AT THE EMPIRE CINEMA

A friend of mine was set upon by an irate lady in the local Co-op while attempting to slip one of the cards into her shopping basket. She had the impression he was trying to steal things; there was quite a to-do about the matter.

The greatest fiasco as far as we were concerned was when the Empire showed the Rogers-Astaire film "Top Hat."

One glorious summer morning during a school holiday, Mr. Arch drove up to us in a monstrous yellow car. It was a "Sunbeam" about half the size of a bus. An open car, it had a canvas hood attached, you pulled up the hood and it became a saloon. He was dressed immaculately in white tie, top hat and tails - like the great Fred himself, but a trifle plumper. He asked us if we would accompany him around the countryside handing out leaflets advertising the film. We must have covered about ten miles, and were in a remote district when a thunderstorm broke out. Struggling frantically, we tried to pull up the canvas hood but it refused to budge. In a matter of seconds everyone was drenched to the skin; Mr. Arch was a sight to behold. His beautiful clobber was a wreck; bow-tie bedraggled and showing a good six inches of leg from his shrunken trousers he drove us glumly home.

The same kind of energy and ingenuity he also applied to the children's matinees. Talent competitions were held; I must have witnessed hundreds of budding Shirley Temples and embryo Bing Crosbys, all of them pretty awful. Between the serial and main picture he would bounce on stage and yell "Now boys and girls, surprise time, everybody with a cross chalked under their seat gets a bag of sweets, a comic and a free pass for next week's show."

Because of this sort of thing business boomed. You had to queue a good hour before the show started to get a seat. Mr. Arch left a year or so afterwards. He was offered a good job by the "Granada" circuit. Good luck to him. He was a great fellow.

Sometimes the serial shown ran more or less concurrently with one appearing in "Boys' Cinema." The printed version appeared a week or so previous so that anyone lucky enough to buy this paper could tell all and sundry how our hero got out of a particularly sticky situation.

Ah! those happy days of picture-going. I still see the kids going to the Saturday morning shows, but I wonder do they get the same enjoyment as we did. I doubt it.

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TIME PASSES BY

It's surprising in later life where some of the old papers turn up. One finds them in most unusual places.

For instance, on the company taking over an army barracks near Venice in 1946, I discovered a pile of "Rovers" of the 1930's. Needless to say they made a welcome change from the victorian and early twentieth century novels which seemed to be the staple diet of army libraries.

On another occasion at the invitation of a book-seller in Rome, to step inside to see "something more interesting" (wink, nudge) I found a pile of old series Sexton Blake libraries. The "more interesting items," masterpieces from "Olympia Press, Paris," I later sold to a book-seller in Nottingham who shall remain nameless.

It is seldom one comes across such windfalls nowadays unless you spend hours haunting street markets, hoping like Mr. Micawber "for something to turn up." Still it's surprising what stuff is still hanging about.

And so my odyssey into the past is nearly over. Forgive me for wallowing in nostalgia; I have not mentioned the social conditions of the time, there was a great deal of poverty, injustice and victimisation. God forbid that such conditions should return, but we do not think of such things as children.

But for all the hardships, some things were better. Family life was more closely knit. People had better manners, it was a common sight to see a man raise his hat or cap to a woman; and children had respect for their elders; (except for pompous second operators), and there was a greater sense of values.

I can't help feeling sorry for the children today. No more the weekly helpings of Harry Wharton or Tom Merry; no more laughs at "Alfie the Air Tramp," "Basil and Bert," "Casey's Court" and the like; they are gone forever; we will never see the like again.

AFTERTHOUGHT:-

On reflection I think the people who wrote the aforementioned "Chaff and Chatter" column in "Film Fun" now work for the Rowan and Martin "Laugh In."

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

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- -

MAGNETS and GEMS WANTED. Magnets before 1934. Gems after 1931. Good prices paid for complete copies in readable condition. Your prices for really good grade copies. A few for exchange or sale. Mostly after 1937.

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- -

FOR EXCHANGE: Magnets, Holiday Annuals, Lees, Hotspurs, School Friends, Lions, Bunter Books. Scarce B.F. Libs., 3d. & 4d. of Greyfriars, St. Jims. S.A.E. please.

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- -

WANTED: No. 36 and 37 Aldine Dick Turpin and No. 62 Aldine Robin.

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DOCTOR NIKOLA

By M. DAVIDSON

Very few of the story book characters we read about in our golden youth remain truly memorable. Those which do are undoubtedly examples of nomenclative genius on the part of their inventors. Sax Rohmer's, Dr. Fu Manchu; Maurice Leblanc's, Arsène Lupin and of course, Harry Blyth's, Sexton Blake as perhaps the most famous of them all (I deliberately omit Sherlock Holmes) require no effort to be recalled, and indeed, even "Sax Rohmer" as a nom de plume for Arthur Sarsfield Ward was a brilliant thought which gave to the author that aura of mystery (which he deliberately cultivated) entirely in keeping with his earlier and undoubtedly best novels.

However, another less well known character in a book intended for adult readers, but really a super thriller ideal for youth was created by an Australian, Guy Boothby, when he wrote Doctor Nikola. Well do I recall the cover of my six-penny Ward Lock edition illustrating the strange man with his colourless face and brilliant black eyes, accompanied by his equally weird cat glaring defiance.

The tale which really gripped the the vivid imagination of youth - and the not so young - purports to relate the adventures in the China of the early nineteen-hundreds of one Wilfred Bruce: a former government official now down in his luck with the horrors of a Shanghai jail imminent, due to his inability to pay off his Chinese landlord. But a former subordinate comes to his rescue and Bruce is eventually introduced to the reputedly notorious but extremely clever cosmopolitan Doctor Nikola, an explorer into the unknown who determines to gain access to a weird Tibetan monastery in order to witness the mysteries reputed to take place within its walls - mysteries which are so horrible that they can never be whispered without the hearers shuddering . . .

Nikola seeks a companion for his project who must be able to speak the perfect Chinese of the educated classes; to disguise himself faultlessly as Chinese and to be completely fearless. And he knows Bruce to have all these attributes and indeed has engineered his introduction to Bruce who eventually agrees to share the dangers of the adventure.

A short time before their time of departure, Bruce is awakened after midnight by an armed intruder and taken to a house where he is grilled regarding himself and his connection with Nikola. He refuses to speak and is thrust to the ground. "A curious wooden collar was clasped round my neck and a screw turned in it until another revolution would have choked me."

How this situation was resolved reads like one of Agatha Christie's startling denouements and in case any reader comes across the book I won't divulge it.

Eventually the "Priest of the Temple of Han-kow" and his "secretary" set out on their long journey and after many dangerous weeks arrive at their destination.

The Great Secret is almost within their grasp - and here it may be recalled that the founder of the cult of Theosophy, Madame Blavatsky, claimed to have been instructed by Lama "adepts" at a Tibetan monastery in the Secret Wisdom for many years.

But again it would be unfair to describe what Nikola and Bruce saw when they penetrated to the Unholy of Unholies - if I may coin a phrase. I will only say that I have every sympathy with Mr. Samuel Pickwick's action when his midnight candle went out just as he finished "The Madman's Manuscript."

Half a century ago I did likewise!

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

WANTED: Marvels 925, 926, 929, 930, 940, 942, 943. Mapleton Rovers B.F.L. by Randolph, also Department 2 by Creasy, all Blue Crusaders stories by Arthur S. Hardy.

HARRY BROSTER, PRIMROSE COTTAGE, STONE LANE, KINVER, STOURBRIDGE, WORCS.

- -

WANTED: "Knockouts" and "Wizards" pre-war, wartime, post-war, any condition. Buy or exchange. Other boys' papers/comics.

W. J. WRIGHT, 147 ST. HILDA'S WAY, GRAVESEND, KENT.

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WANTED: Union Jack's Lobangu Tales and John Lawless Tales.

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CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO CLUB MEMBERS EVERYWHERE FROM ALL AT FRIARDALE.

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SEASON'S GREETINGS
to
EDITOR, STAFF, ALL.
BERT HOLMES, BARROW, LANCS.

The Making of an American Hamiltonian

By J. RANDOLPH COX

I first met Billy Bunter in the pages of Punch. The encounter was a brief one as the name leaped out from a now forgotten article. From time to time I would find some reference like that to what I concluded was an unknown (to me) figure in English literature. I felt uneasy about this. Not knowing who Bunter was I was unable to fully appreciate any comment about him. I seemed to be ready for some great discovery. I was certain that something was about to happen.

When it happened I was in a bookstore in Edinburgh. I had heard the name of Bunter and his creator Frank Richards used at a dinner the previous week. Not knowing what the books were about or whether they were still in print, I decided to ask about them as I visited bookstores. Visiting bookstores in large cities seems to be more than merely a way of passing the time with me. It is almost an occupation. In this case it was in James Thin's in Edinburgh that I made my formal introduction to Frank Richards. The book I found there was Bunter's Last Fling.[1]

It was some time before I was able to read the book. I did glance through it in the car as we drove toward Abbotsford. A strange sort of story, I thought. My main encounters with boys' fiction had been through the mystery-adventure type. I wasn't certain who was the hero in this book. Was it this Bunter? But why was he sneaking food from Study No. 4? Why was he called the Owl of the Remove? The illustrations by C. H. Chapman seemed to suggest one reason: those tufts of hair and the eyeglasses. But what was a Remove anyway? My only experience of secondary education being an American High School, I could find no clue there. I gave it up as too deep for me at that point. There would be time to find out later.

There must have been something in that story that made me a Hamiltonian. Without realising how much more there was to the works of Frank Richards than those books published by Cassell, I invested in as many as were currently in print. It was a good story (I thought) with a bit of suspense (what is Derek Vernon up to and how can Bunter help to foil the plans? Or is he to foil them at all?). In re-reading it I still find it to be a good story. I am so familiar with what others have said in praise of the works of this remarkable Mr. Hamilton that it is difficult to sort our my own original and special reasons for reading him. Lest some think I base my interest solely on the post-war stories, I hasten to add that I have been fortunate in acquiring quite a number of issues of The Magnet and The Gem. Not enough to be a really good collection, but enough to give me some familiarity with various parts of the whole Saga. I have read most of the Merlin paperbacks, which I understand are "edited" reprints of the previously "edited" stories from the Schoolboys' Own Library. If some of my comments seem based on diluted or dehydrated Hamilton rather than the authentic brew, that may be the reason.

1. My brother has suggested that this must be considered an historic occasion as so many of my conversations later were full of references to Bunter.

I think that an American may have to be a bit of an Anglo-phile to appreciate Hamilton to the fullest. There have been few "school stories" in the British sense in our popular literature. Early in this century, boys' heroes often went to military academies or prep schools in books. If the stories lasted long enough to become a saga, the next step was college. As with the British school story, sports played an important part in these tales. It is difficult to think of a series such as the Frank Merriwell one without thinking of sports. It would seem that this type of school story ended in America about the time the Rover Boys stopped travelling and Merriwell hung up his spikes.

The realization that I was reading what amounted to a new (to me) genre of popular literature may have helped me enjoy the Hamilton stories more quickly. Apart from the initial feelings of stumbling into a new world, I adjusted quickly. Some other people to whom I have tried to introduce Hamilton have seen only the differences between his stories and what they have been used to reading. "His heroes are not like Frank Hardy or Ralph of the Roundhouse," said one. "I can't get used to a hero with characteristics like those of this Bunter," said another. It may amount to simply liking his work or not liking it with no accounting for tastes. I think there are definite aspects of his work that I can point to with admiration and say, "See! Isn't that a marvelous characterization? Doesn't that phrase say it all?" Of course, I have learned not to expect anyone to agree.

The illustrations certainly are one of the attractions. If they weren't there would have been no need for such a stunning work as The Billy Bunter Picture Book. This is a book I am in danger of wearing out through use. I carefully ration my enjoyment of it and turn to other examples of art. The Chapman drawings seem to round out the world of Charles Hamilton for me and make it really three-dimensional. If I give Chapman the edge in my interest in the Hamilton illustrators, it is probably because his were the first drawings I came upon. The man who gets there first sometimes has the edge with me. There is no other logical way of putting it.

So many have tried to account for the appeal of Charles Hamilton. Some have done quite well and others have made it a study in popular sociology. I think that a statement by Alan Shadwick in the Manchester Guardian of some years back is as expressive of my own feelings as any:

> "a world in which the winters were cleaner and colder, the summers hotter, and the autumns crisper than we knew them in the rude North . . . jam tarts and doughnuts at Greyfriars evoked the flash of white flannels and the merry sound of bat against ball, bicyle rides through lanes incredibly leafy, and even picnics by the sea . . . ."

Is this a real world? Was there ever an England like the one I read about as a boy and seem to be reliving in the pages of Hamilton's stories? It is certainly easy to believe there could be such a world and if there isn't (or wasn't) there should be (or should have been). It is a fully realized world that Hamilton has described. It is a schoolboy's world with all of the dangers that a boy would like to have, all of the delights, and few of the sorrows of the real world. The sorrows that are present seem related to a boy's experiences. Is the Saga too long for credibility? What

about a series that keeps a boy a school for more than thirty years? Doesn't school often seem endless — to a boy?

The characters that seem most memorable are, of course, Billy Bunter and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It seems a shame that Gussy hasn't been tapped for the same sort of publishing immortality that has come to Bunter. Publishers must feel (perhaps with some justification) that "Bunter" on a title will sell more quickly than "D'Arcy." There are other interesting figures in the Hamilton troupe (Herbert Vernon-Smith seems to me to be a more credible character than the complete rotters that used to make things rough for Tom Swift), but it would take volumes to do them all justice and everyone has his own favourites anyway. I shall stick to saying a few words about Bunter and D'Arcy.

In a world, such as our own, which makes an industry of keeping slim and fit there would seem to be no place for a fellow of Bunter's proportions. Yet, because he is "larger than life" (in several senses of the term) Bunter is perfectly believable. Perhaps he is more believable than many real celebrities. He has all those recognizable characteristics: a passion for eating, a knack of putting his foot in his mouth when telling whoppers, butting in when he is least wanted, and trying to borrow money against a postal order which may arrive, but seldom does. Hamilton rings the changes on these familiar ingredients and it is all in fun. Bunter's constant attempts to get invited to spend the holidays with his fellows is made funny when the others pretend not to understand what it is he wants. It is a ritual that is made all the funnier for its having happened before. Bunter never realizes when he is not wanted and that is why the situation is funny and never tragic. Hamilton is caricaturing a scene from real life: the fat boy made unhappy by rebuffs from his fellows. Bunter is never allowed to remain unhappy. He is resilient and though down, he is never there for long.

When I first met D'Arcy I thought of him as the St. Jim's counterpart of Bunter — the "comic relief" in the Tom Merry series. I soon learned differently. D'Arcy is not just a switch on Bunter's characteristics: one being fat, the other lean; one being concerned with food, the other with clothes. (In actual fact, of course, it would have to be that Bunter was a switch on D'Arcy since the great Gussy was created first.) D'Arcy's role in the Tom Merry stories, though concerned with whatever humour is present, is decidely different than that of Bunter in the Harry Wharton stories. For one thing, Bunter so overshadowed the rest of Greyfriars that The Magnet later became known as "Billy Bunter's Own Paper." The post-war annuals were called Billy Bunter's Own. The post-war Tom Merry annuals always bore his name, not D'Arcy's, just as The Gem never became "D'Arcy's Own Paper."

The attitude toward D'Arcy was somewhat different than that toward Bunter. Harry Wharton & Co. put up with Bunter. They had to. Bunter would seldom allow himself to be ignored. Sooner or later one had to admit that Bunter was there. With D'Arcy there was no such attempt to exclude him from affairs. Except at the beginning, no one resented his intrusion except as part of the fun. Often it was the reverse: others had to interrupt D'Arcy, or sit on him to keep him from making an ass of himself. They made fun of his wardrobe, but they wouldn't have had it any

different. He really belonged to the circle of friends at St. Jim's. He didn't have to force himself on anyone.

Of course there will be stories which some may recall that may seem to negate these opinions. That is one of the real strengths of the Hamilton stories. There may be things about the characters you cannot take for granted at all times. If Bunter and D'Arcy were completely predictable at all times there would be no point in reading more than one or two of the stories. It is only to the superficial reader that "to read one Hamilton story is to read them all." Certainly there are similarities. It would be strange if there were not, considering the great number of stories that he wrote. But to state that one does not have to read more than one story is a bit like saying one does not have to live more than one day.

I find some of my enjoyment comes from little bits of business that add to the humour or to the characterizations. A volume the size of Bartlett's Quotations (Hamilton's Quotations?) would be needed to preserve them all.

> "It really was odd how people naturally assumed the opposite from any of William George Bunter's statements. The same experience must have fallen to the lot of Ananias, Baron Munchausen, and George Washington."
>
> (Billy Bunter's Big Top, p. 67)

> "High Oaks was a land of plenty to Mr. Juggins, and to innumerable relatives of Mr. Juggins, who were having the time of their lives in Lord Mauleverer's service. The end of High Oaks School meant that the horn of plenty would run dry, which was not, from the Juggins' point of view, a consummation devoutly to be wished."
>
> (Billy Bunter and the School Rebellion, p. 22)

> "'I wefuse to be called an object. I wefuse to be called to ordah. I wefuse -'
>
> 'Silence!' said Blake, taking up a stick. 'Another word, and bang goes your eyeglass!'
>
> D'Arcy relapsed into silence. A threat like that always subdued him."
>
> ("'Easy Terms' for the Saints," Gem No. 1241, p. 17)

> "'Weally, it would be a much bettah plan if you fellahs did all the work, and I just stood by diwectin' you and givin' you advice,' said Arthur Augustus. 'That is the pwopah occupation for a fellah of bwains, you know.'"
>
> ("Banned by the Beaks," Gem 1246, p. 3)

But perhaps the most revealing quotation one could cite is a rather lengthy one which may explain the remarkable tolerance Harry Wharton & Co. bore toward the fat Owl.

> "A resolute fellow like the Bounder had to be let go his own way - a fellow of vicious tendencies like Skinner was not amenable to his Form captain's influence. But it was different with a fatuous ass like Bunter.

"The Remove knew him, and knew that he was a prize duffer. His dabblings in 'rortiness' only made them sillier. But if Bunter was discovered by the school authorities to be pub-haunting or backing horses, Bunter was booked for the sack, short and sharp. That was certain. The fact that he was a fool would not save him. And the chums of the Remove realised that it is the duty of the strong to help the weak, of the sensible to guide the erring footsteps of the foolish. Bunter was a prize ass. And on many an occasion that Famous Five had been fed-up with him; but they did not want to see him expelled from Greyfriars."

(Billy Bunter and the Crooked Captain, p. 72)

Perhaps it is sufficient for me to say that I find Charles Hamilton's stories interesting enough to read to the end, his characters delightful enough company to want to share the same again, and his world refreshing enough to want to visit it more than once. There are few authors whom one wishes would write enough so there could always be something one has not read, a new thrill to anticipate. Hamilton's output has been great enough to make it well nigh impossible for anyone to say "I've read all his books."

The last sentence in Bunter's Last Fling is "Bunter vanished through the doorway." I didn't realize it at the time, but I had followed him through that doorway. Perhaps it is of some significance that the usual phrase at the end of a book ("The End") is missing from the end of this one.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

HAPPY HOLIDAY to Frank Lay, Albert Watkin, Norman Shaw, Bill Hubbard, Eric Fayne, W. H. Baker, Bill Lofts and all others helping to preserve and contribute to the hobby.

L. S. (LARRY) ELLIOTT

- -

WANTED: Boy's Journal Nos. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 25.

W. GRIBBEN, 12 WATSON STREET, BELFAST, BT12 5GX.

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GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUALS wanted in clean condition.

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- -

WANTED:- D. C. Thomson's boys' papers, comics, 1921-50. Fair offers.

J. SWAN, 3 FIFTH AVENUE, PAD., W.10.

The Headmistress of CEDAR CREEK SCHOOL

By GERRY ALLISON

Last year we considered the character of Miss Penelope Primrose, the elderly Headmistress of Cliff House. This year I would like to introduce you to another of Charles Hamilton's headmistresses - the young Canadian girl school-teacher of Cedar Creek School in British Columbia.

As the instructress of the youthful Frank Richards, Miss Meadows has a call upon the affection and goodwill of all those who have received pleasure and happiness from the writings of her gifted pupil. Although the Cedar Creek stories are fiction, there is, as I have previously pointed out, considerable genuine autobiography in them. Who knows whether Miss Meadows is not based upon a living character?

Len Packman once said that the author must have had a very particular fondness for Miss Meadows to make him give her his favourite female Christian name of Ethel. And she has all the charm and winning personality of Ethel Cleveland, beloved of George Figgins of St. Jim's.

We first meet our heroine in Boys' Friend No. 847, dated the 1st September, 1917. Frank Richards was at St. Kit's School in England when his father lost all his money, and had to accept a post in India. Frank's uncle, Mr. Lawless, a rancher in Canada, offered his nephew a home, so Frank sailed to Canada, where he was met at Quebec by his breezy, boisterous cousin, Bob Lawless.

Having arrived at the Lawless ranch in the Thompson Valley, Bob told his cousin that the Head at Cedar Creek School liked a fellow to be decently dressed, and so Frank arrived at the school on his first day, dressed in Etons, and sporting a topper - to the hilarious amazement of the other pupils, whose ages ranged from nine to sixteen, and whose numbers included a good sprinkling of girls.

By now, Frank Richards suspects that, once again, his leg has been pulled.

"Look here - Bob," he said --

"Shush! Here's the Head!"

Frank Richards jumped.

As they entered the wooden porch, a trim young lady, with bright eyes and a very pleasant face, appeared in the big doorway. Frank took off his hat at once.

"Good-morning, Miss Meadows!" said Bob cheerfully. "This is my cousin Frank, from England. I've brought him along to school. Miss Meadows is the Head, Frank!"

And Frank Richards ejaculated: "Oh, my hat!"

Miss Meadows gave the new boy a kind smile and nod. She was undoubtedly

astonished by his get-up, but, naturally, had a little more restraint than the schoolboys and schoolgirls, and she did not allow her astonishment to appear in her looks.

"I am glad to see you," she said pleasantly. "Mr. Lawless mentioned that his nephew, Frank Richards was coming."

"I - I - " stammered Frank. He foundered helplessly, as he realised this was another of Bob's practical jokes. "I - I - Ma'am, is it the rule here for new boys to wear Etons and a topper?"

"Good gracious, no!" Miss Meadows smiled. "You should not play jokes on a newcomer, Lawless. It would be advisable to change your clothes tomorrow, Richards. Something a little stronger and more serviceable is required in this district." Miss Meadows disappeared into the schoolhouse. The silk topper and Etons were almost too much for her gravity.

There is an assistant-master at the school - Mr. Slimmey - a tall young man, with somewhat watery eyes and gold rimmed glasses perched upon the bridge of a long thin nose. "An Englishman, and spoons on Miss Meadows," as Bob Lawless tells his cousin.

But we find that Miss Meadows controls the school with much skill and good temper. However, although very kind, she can be remarkably firm. One boy, Eben Hacke, is a sort of Bolsover Major in the rough, whilst Kern Gunten - a Swiss, and son of the wealthy, powerful store-keeper at Cedar Camp is a thorough rogue.

Many stories show Ethel Meadows to be a young woman of great courage and bravery - as for instance when a fierce grizzly bear invades the school and Mr. Slimmey can only wish he had a sword.

An even more powerful tale relates how a Mexican rustler - pursued by the Mounted Police tries to force his way into the school stockade and steal a horse. Here is a passage from this story:-

"The schoolmistress listened quietly to the news of the Mexican's proximity.

"Call everyone inside," she said, "and bring all the horses inside the corral at once."

"Yes, ma'am."

There were six or seven horses and ponies grazing along the Creek, belonging to fellows who came a good distance to school. Half a dozen fellows brought them within the corral at once, and the school gate was closed and barred.

Frank Richards regarded Miss Meadows rather curiously when he came in to report that the horses were corralled. He expected to see some sign of nervousness in the young lady. But the Canadian schoolmistress was perfectly calm and quiet.

"Thank you, Richards," she said. "You may go into the school-room."

As Frank went he noticed that Miss Meadows was loading the shotgun that usually hung in the hall. The schoolmistress, with the gun under her arm, went the

round of the strong timber palisade that surrounded the school-ground, and examined the fastenings of the gate.

It was evident that Miss Meadows anticipated that the Mexican might appear there, and that she did not intend to admit him within the gates if he did. Miss Meadows did not take her class - they were turned over to Mr. Slimmey. Frank guessed that the schoolmistress was keeping watch.

Suddenly Bob Lawless started up.

"Hark!"

Knock! Knock! Bang! Bang!

"Please keep your seats!" exclaimed Mr. Slimmey, but Mr. Slimmey was not heeded. Frank and Bob and a dozen other fellows rushed out of the school-room, and Mr. Slimmey was left with the girls of the class. The knocking on the gate was loud and furious, and a savage voice could be heard:

"Open! Open! Caramba! Will you open?"

It was the Mexican!

Frank Richards ran towards the gate with Bob at his heels. He had some vague idea of backing up Miss Meadows; certainly, he did not intend that the schoolmistress should face the desperado alone.

But the Canadian girl was perfectly cool. She had stepped upon a bench within the barred gate, and stood looking over the top of the gate at the man without. The shot-gun was in her hands, and her hands did not tremble.

The Mexican stood without, thumping savagely on the gate. He ceased, and looked up furiously as Miss Meadows looked down on him from within. The ruffian was breathless, dusty, and evidently fatigued. His swarthy face was thick with perspiration, and red with rage.

"Senorita, open the gate!" he said hoarsely.

"You cannot enter here," said Miss Meadows quietly. "What do you want?"

"Carambo! Un caballo - a horse - a horse!" hissed the Mexican. "Let me in! I will harm no one. I want simply a horse, and that I must have!"

"You will have nothing here," said Miss Meadows quietly. "Go your way!"

The Mexican ground his teeth.

"Woman, let me in!" he shouted. "I am a desperate man! I tell you that I must have a horse, and I know there are horses here!"

"You will not be allowed to enter. If you attempt to do so, I shall shoot!"

The ruffian laughed savagely.

"With that popgun?" he said. "Look you, Senorita! The Mounted Police are on my track. I have escaped them so far, but I must have a horse or I am lost!

Death to anyone who stands in my way! Listen! I am Pedro Garcia, and in my country I have killed more men that I can count on the fingers of my hands. Your life is no more to me than a mosquito's. Open the gate!"

"I have warned you!" said Miss Meadows coldly.

"Will you let me in?"

"No!"

"Carambo!"

The dusky hand dragged at a revolver, and Miss Meadows stepped down within the gate. Her face was a little pale, but quite calm.

"What are you doing here?" she exclaimed as she caught sight of the boys. "Go back into the schoolroom at once!"

"But, ma'am ---" protested Frank.

"Go back, I tell you."

The boys unwillingly retreated. But they did not go into the building. There was a loud report outside the gate, and a bullet seared through the stout wood. Then two dusky hands appeared on the top of the gate. The Mexican had made a jump and caught it, evidently to climb over.

Bob Lawless stooped, and picked up a jagged stone, and Frank Richards and Eben Hacke followed his example. A fierce and swarthy face rose over the top of the gate.

Miss Meadows levelled the shot-gun.

"Go!" she said quietly.

The fierce, black eyes of the Mexican glared at her.

"You dare not!" he hissed.

"You will see, if you do not go!"

Whiz! Whiz!

The stones flew through the air with good aim. One of them grazed the Mexican's ear, but another crashed fairly into the dusky face. There was a howl of pain and rage from the ruffian, and the dusky face disappeared instantly. He was heard to roll on the ground outside, shrieking out Spanish oaths as he rolled.

"Good shot, Franky!" yelled Bob.

Outside the gate, the Mexican was still cursing furiously. But his head did not rise into view again. His footsteps moved away, following the line of the palisade round.

"Hark!" exclaimed Bob Lawless suddenly.

From somewhere in the distance came the crack of a rifle. A loud shout

followed. There was a growl of fury from the Mexican and his footsteps were heard retreating towards the creek.

"The Mounted Police!" shouted Bob, as galloping hoof-beats approached the gate. "By gum!" They're after him! They'll have him, sure!"

"Kindly return to your class, my boys," said Miss Meadows, severely.

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Kern Gunten gave Miss Meadows serious trouble, and once caused her acute embarrassment. On one occasion the school-mistress asked Frank Richards to take a letter to Mr. Penrose - editor of the Thompson Press. It contained an advertisement for a handyman for the school.

By a trick, Gunten substituted another advert which read:-

> SCHOOLMISTRESS, age twenty-three, tall, considered good-looking, would be glad to hear from a bachelor of equal position, with a view to matrimony. Photographs exchanged.
> Miss Meadows, Cedar Creek School, Thompson Valley.

The story "A Peculiar Persecution" in Boys' Friend No. 864, which tells of the result of this cruel trick, is one of the most remarkable ever written by Charles Hamilton.

As can be expected, the reply was overwhelming, and Miss Meadows had suitors galore. The first was Ching Ling, owner of the Chinese laundry in Thompson. Others included a rough gold miner; Frisco Bill, the bar tender in Gunten's store; Poker Pete - a card sharper; Sam Huggins - a cattle-man. Poor Mr. Slimmey, who had been a humble and devoted admirer of Ethel Meadows ever since he came to Cedar Creek as assistant-master made a faltering proposal. This episode was most touching.

Finally, Mr. Penrose himself, the bibulous editor came along.

"Madam," he said. "I have long adored you. I should never have ventured to put my fortune to the test, however, having little to offer but a devoted heart, but for the encouragement I have now received from your advertisement."

The mistake then came out, and Frank Richards was blamed for Gunten's wicked trick. How the truth was elucidated by Sergeant Lasalle of the Royal Mounted Police makes enthralling reading. The big bronzed sergeant would be my choice for a husband for Ethel Meadows, if ever she decided to retire from being the Head-mistress of Cedar Creek.

For the story of how she was dismissed from her post by the machinations of Mr. Gunten; the barring out which followed; and the establishment of a rival school under the detestable Mr. Peckover, I can only refer you to the pages of the Boys' Friend - or to the late Gems, in which many of the Cedar Creek stories were reprinted. I am sure you will find the story of Ethel Meadows and her gifted pupil, Frank Richards well worth reading.

SHERLOCK HOLMES ON STAGE AND SCREEN

By NORMAN WRIGHT

Throughout the years since his conception in the mind of his creator, Sherlock Holmes has been portrayed on stage and screen, in cartoons and advertisements, etc. Through these mediums he has become a household word to millions of people who have never read a word of his adventures. His name conjures up visions of curved pipes, dearstalker hats, inverness capes and London fogs. Yet, if we look at Doyle's description of his detective we find a rather ugly, tall slender fellow in his mid-twenties, not at all like the popular smoke dream image.

"In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed considerably taller, his eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded: and his thin hawk like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision, his chin too, had the prominence and squareness which marks the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch." ("A Study In Scarlet," 1887.) Compare this description with the elegant Holmes of Sidney Paget's illustrations (modelled on his brother Walter).

In 1901 William Gillette's play "Sherlock Holmes" opened at the Lyceum theatre, London, after a very successful run in the U.S.A. Gillette was the first actor to bring Sherlock Holmes to thousands who had never read the stories in the "Strand Magazine." He was an American from South Carolina, who had made his first stage appearance in 1875 at the age of eighteen. When Gillette had written to Doyle asking what liberties he could take with Holmes in his play, Doyle replied "You may marry or murder or do what you like with him." The actual play was written in four weeks, burnt to ashes in a hotel fire and had to be re-written. In an article in the "Strand Magazine," 1901, the play is described by Harold Shepstone in glowing terms - "Mr. Gillette has not written 'Sherlock Holmes' by merely stringing together a number of incidents from the adventurous career of the detective. It is an original play in the title role of which Mr. Gillette has adopted the methods of Conan Doyle's world-famous creation. It is nothing less than an interesting episode in the career of the great detective, wonderfully conceived and cleverly acted. In the space of three and a half hours acting, with some 10,000 words, Mr. Gillette and his company present an adventure of the endominable Sherlock Holmes that would require at least 80,000 words of cold type to relate." Whether all of the praise was deserved is perhaps suspect, but it cannot be denied that the play was very successful, and popular with the critics. (It was revived in the winter of 1929.) At the same time as the play was running at the Lyceum, a burlesque titled "Sheerluck Jones" was running at Terry's theatre. (Dorr Steele the famous American illustrator of the saga used Gillette as a model for his drawings.)

In 1916 a silent film version of the play was made by "Essanay." Gillette

again took the title role, and the heroine was played by Marjorie May. Another film version of the play was made in 1923 and titled "Moriarty." It starred John Barrymore as Sherlock Holmes, and Roland Young as Watson. Inspector Gregson was played by John Willard and Moriarty by Gustav Von Seyffertitz. The film was made by "Goldwyn." This was not Barrymore's first role as Sherlock Holmes, he had played the detective in an "Independent" film in 1920.

One of the best known Sherlock Holmes actors was the late Basil Rathbone, who was born in 1893 in South Africa. Rathbone began his stage career in 1911. Altogether he starred in eleven Sherlock Holmes films, with Nigel Bruce as Watson. The first of these was made in 1937. ("20th Century Fox.") The most famous of the series was probably "The Hound of the Baskervilles" made in 1939. (An earlier version was made in 1932.) A later version of the film was made in 1959 and starred Peter Cushing as Holmes. Basil Rathbone died in 1968 aged 75.

Since the war a variety of films have been made featuring Holmes. On the radio Carlton Hobbs had played Holmes in the popular Sherlock Holmes series that have been broadcast. A Sherlock Holmes ballet, and later an opera (starring Fritz Weaver as Holmes and Peter Sallis as Watson) have been produced.

The latest screen appearance that Holmes has made was in the B.B.C., T.V. series, which starred Douglas Wilmer as Holmes and Nigel Stock as Watson. The first of these series cost £60,000 to produce. In the most recent series, Holmes has been played by Peter Cushing (of Frankenstein fame) a keen Holmes fan.

At the moment a film titled "Sherlock Holmes" is being made, the plot of this film is being closely guarded. And so the story goes on.

Apart from the films mentioned in this article, the following have been made using plots taken from Doyle's original sixty stories.

"His Last Bow" (film title "Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror")	1942 by "Universal."
"The Man with the Twisted Lip"	1951
"The return of Sherlock Holmes"	1929 by "Paramount"
"The Sign of Four"	1932 by "Wide World Films"
"The Six Napoleons" (film title "Pearl of Death")	1944 by "Universal"
"A Study in Scarlet"	1933 by "Wide World Films"

(Other films have been made using plots other than those taken from the saga.)

Blakiana

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN
27, Archdale Road, London, S.E. 22

IN DOUBLE HARNESS

By WALTER WEBB

In the early days of the saga the Sexton Blake stories were given an added fillip by the occasional introduction into them of Nelson Lee and Nipper. These stories were published mainly between the pink covers of the UNION JACK when it sold at the modest price of 1½d. following the cease fire of world war one. Principal author was E. S. Brooks, who, at that time, was writing tales of Lee and Nipper in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY with the unbounded enthusiasm of a young man in love with his job.

Some of these stories were part of what was called the Letter File Series, with chapters set down by Blake and Tinker in the form of letters addressed to Nelson Lee and Nipper at St. Frank's College, in Sussex. If, despite the fact that the telephone would have been a quicker and less arduous means of communication, you can imagine Blake sitting at his desk at Baker Street, or from any other address he may have been occupying at the time of the assignment he was engaged upon, and writing a long letter to Nelson Lee appraising him of the progress he was making on the case, then you might consider these tales as quite feasible, and, although I certainly enjoyed the first two or three as a novelty, I thought they ran on too long and was not sorry when they were discontinued.

The NELSON LEE LIBRARY at that time was doing extremely well, with Brooks fast approaching his best work. The more popular characters of St. Frank's were still to come. Archie, Phipps, Travers and Willy Handforth, had yet to make their appearances and Ralph Leslie Fullwood to be reformed, and the limelight shone brightly upon the leading lights of the Remove; Nipper, Sir Montie, Reggie Pitt (The Serpent), Cecil De Valerie (The Rotter), Jack Mason - later to become known under his real name, Jack Grey - and Edward Oswald Handforth. Two popular characters of that period - Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi - appeared in the holiday series, and were, I suspect, suggested to the author by Sir Richard Losely and Lobangu, great favourites of the U.J. clan, created by Cecil Hayter.

Another series Brooks wrote for the U.J. was the Tinker Case Diary Series, in which the narrative was set down by Tinker in the same way as did Nipper in the N.L.L. It was in this series that Waldo, the Wonder-Man made his first appearance, and besides being the Christmas Number was also the last issue of the year 1918, and probably the most memorable of all Brooks's stories.

But it was not Brooke who staged the first meeting between Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee. Lee, in fact, had been in practice at Gray's Inn Road for quite a long time and was by no means the second fiddle in Blake's orchestra, having, in fact, under the guiding hand of his creator, John Staniforth, a doctor of Hinderwell, in Yorkshire, been instrumental in rounding off successfully a number of intricate cases. Staniforth it

was who first brought Blake and Lee together in friendly rivalry, when, on neutral ground, he staged his well-remembered "The Winged Terror," a serial dealing with the early days of aviation and of Nipper's schooldays at St. Ninian's. This story commenced in the BOYS' HERALD on November 6th, 1909, and ended March 26th, 1910. By one of those unfortunate oversights which is apt to occur in the most carefully compiled work of reference, no mention of this serial is made in the SEXTON BLAKE CATALOGUE.

When he teamed up with Nelson Lee a second time, Blake was on his home ground, for it was in the UNION JACK, in 1916, and under the title of "In Double Harness," that he and Lee successfully concluded a case together. It was Robert Murray Graydon's fourth U.J. Blake story, not a particularly good one, but notable for the first appearance of that great character of the C.I.D., Scotland Yard, Detective-Inspector Coutts. Whatever the younger Graydon's shortcomings were, he will always be remembered for his conception of Coutts, just as his father will for his introduction into the saga of Mrs. Bardell and Pedro.

Nelson Lee made two appearances in the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. The first was in 1919 in a novel called "The Bathchair Mystery" (No. 80) and written by Andrew Murray, and the second and last was in 1921, when F. Addington Symonds introduced him into his story, "The Valley Of Fear" (190). The first, set in the tranquil beauty of the Devonshire holiday resorts of Torquay, Brixham and Falmouth, concerns the efforts of Blake working on behalf of a missing baronet, and Nelson Lee, commissioned by the Colonial Office, in foiling the attempts of representatives of certain foreign powers to obtain a concession granted to the baronet by a Central African chief, involving quantities of essential minerals such as coal, iron and lead, situated on land of great strategic importance to Britain. Blake is drawn into the affair when, recuperating in a Torquay nursing home following a severe bout of flu, he observes the peculiar movements of a paralytic in a wheel-chair. His investigations take him to a darkened garage at the rear of an empty house, where he and Nelson Lee have a rare set-to in the gloom when each is unaware of the identity of the other. This is a highlight of the case, which ends with the two detectives foiling the attempts of foreign interests to get hold of the concession. Incidentally, the death of the paralytic in the story had a tragic coincidence nine years later, when the author himself died from paralysis at a comparatively early age.

"The Valley Of Fear" was a much better story, although one would not credit it with full marks for originality. I have read of missing white girls of fair beauty ruling over strange South American tribes, and of skulls containing secrets of great scientific importance much sought after by individuals of doubtful origin and even more doubtful morals, before. Blake and Tinker are destined to follow the trail of what is known as the Sacred Skull, whilst Lee and Nipper, hard on the visit to Gray's Inn Road of a youthful explorer just back from a trek into the Peruvian Hinterland, after meeting the strange white girl known as the Veiled Queen, set their sights on Peru. With their trails converging, the two famous detectives and their assistants elect to see the affair through shoulder to shoulder. A strong cast of familiar old characters make this a quite fascinating novel, for, besides the celebrities of Baker Street and Gray's Inn Road, there is the Arab crook, Karib-el-Dhas, one-time

confederate of the notorious adventuress, Mademoiselle Claire Delisle, who is also featured; Elspeth Drell, a criminal cast in the Kestrel mould; and the Scotland Yard detective, Inspector John Mordaunt of the C.I.D., who appeared in nearly all Mr. Symonds' stories in both the S.B.L. and U.J.

Although Blake played host to Nelson Lee in 14 UNION JACK novellettes, it was extremely rare for Lee to repay the compliment in his own little paper, the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, and my only recollection of this ever happening was in the twenties, in a tale called "The Mystery Of Reed's Wharf," when Sir Montie Tregellis-West, one of Nipper's chums, was kidnapped in London and Blake helped to find him. On one occasion in the Hunter the Hun series, Tinker paid a flying visit to St. Frank's, and I seem to have a hazy recollection of him appearing with his master in a N.L.L. Christmas Number just after the first world war, in which, I think, the girl detective, Eileen Dare, also appeared.

In these days of deterioration in civilized behaviour, it is good to get back among the pages of the U.J. and N.L.L. and enjoy once again the freshness of those Blake-Lee link-up stories, written with an enthusiasm so lacking in the work of many of our modern writers, who deem the sacrifice on an altar of depravity and corruption of all that is decent and entertaining in the art of good writing, is what the public want. They should think again, or, to use that terse idiom of the modern adolescent, 'get lost.'

* * *

"YULETIDE and SEXTON BLAKE" By RAYMOND CURÉ

"Christmas was very near - you could tell its proximity in the gaily-decorated shop windows with their coloured lights and cotton-wool snow, the chains of artificial holly, whose green leaves and red berries were greener and redder than ever appeared in nature.

"You could tell it in the rows of plump turkeys hanging outside the butcher's. You could tell it in the huge pile of oranges and rosy-faced apples that adorned the fruiterers and which peeped at you shyly and tantalizingly from behind bunches of holly and evergreen and mistletoe.

"Christmas! the magic word that conjures up pictures of past delights and happiness to come; that lifts for a short space of time the curtain of care from rich and poor alike, that is as welcome in the cottages as in the mansions.

"Christmas, the time that brings back youth to the aged and makes the young still younger." (From "The Crimson Smile" by Donald Stuart, Union Jack - Xmas 1932.)

Make no mistake about it, you either like Christmas or you do not. If you do, you automatically respond to the Christmas touch in a story about yuletide. Unfortunately in the world of literature the Christmas touch is disappearing. Donald Stuart in the above extract has "captured" the spirit of Christmas as a setting for

his story, but then this was in 1932.

The fun-packed, thrill-packed, seasonable numbers or even the reduced size numbers packed with Christmas cheer are no longer with us. Not only the "Old Boys' Book Club" favourite periodicals have disappeared, but most of their contemporaries also. A few survive including Tit-Bits. Compared with the Christmas fare Answers and Tit-Bits offered us before the war, the last few years of Yuletide "Tit-Bits" and like papers have been disappointing. Some periodicals seem to ignore the festive season altogether.

For one thing I do not think the younger contributors to magazines and papers have the Christmas spirit in them, and it has to be in to come out, if you know what I mean; a lot of people don't "go" for Christmas now. Just before last Christmas I spoke to a driver about the approaching season — "Xmas," he said, "It means nothing to me, I have two days off a week and always have a good bust up and a few drinks - I cannot do more when Xmas comes."

Well! good luck to him. Many of us never had that kind of money, most of us don't have it now, but we do know how to get a thrill out of Christmas. Part of that enjoyment came from our weekly papers, they worked us up to that event, coming out as most of them did a week or a fortnight before the Great Day.

Among the writers that had what I call the Christmas "touch" were Edwy Searles Brooks, Charles Hamilton, Gwyn Evans and Donald Stuart.

But modern writers - no, definitely, no! and therefore there is a famine of Christmas literature in the land.

Mind you - members of the "Old Boys' Book Club" can take heart for stored in the archives of our club libraries are some of the finest old world Xmas fare you could wish to read, and this supplemented by C.D. and the Annual. ("Nelson Lee" and "Magnet" fans in particular have wide yuletide choice.) Unfortunately for Sexton Blake lovers, the choice is not so wide.

Gerry Allison, keeper of a strong Sexton Blake library recently sent me three "Union Jacks":- "The Phantom of the Opera" by W. H. Elliott (1931); "The Mystery of Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Pudding" by Gwyn Evans (1925) and "The Crimson Smile" by Donald Stuart (1932), along with a covering letter from which I quote "very few Blake stories have much about Xmas." In fact I don't know of any S.B.L's out of the many hundreds in the library which deal with the season as did the "Nelson Lee" and "Magnet" though the "Union Jack" did.

Of the three "Union Jacks" I read, I thought Donald Stuart's "The Crimson Smile" was the best, and began this article with a quote from it. Now a further excerpt:-

"The night was dark - very dark indeed, for heavy snow-laden clouds obscured the sky. The wind which had come with the darkness, was from the North and blew in fitful gusts, a freezing, icy wind that cut one through and chilled the blood. Across a white carpet of snow Sexton Blake stared out at the flickering pin point of light."

Don't you get the very feel of Xmas as Donald Stuart injects this weather into his story?

Gwyn Evans, too, gives us insight into one of Sexton Blake's Yuletides in "Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Pudding." Addressing Tinker, Blake says "Home is the best place at Christmas-time - my lad," and watching the increasing droves of Xmas holiday makers seeking the answer in Blackpool's hotels and clubs and bingo halls, I feel sorry for them. My sentiments are the same as Sexton Blake's even if it is 1969.

Here is a delightful Yuletide peep into Sexton Blake's study. "Sexton Blake reached for a small leather-bound volume. It was Dicken's 'Christmas Carol.'

"Outside there came a light flurry of snowflakes, that seemed to thicken swiftly. With a little sigh the detective snuggled back into his saddle back chair and plunged into the ghostly adventures of Ebenezer Scrooge."

The third story by W. H. Elliott while reasonably good did not seem to grip me Xmas-wise. So may I now fade out with another Donald Stuart gem?

"From neighbouring churches the Christmas chimes began to ring a merry clangour of sound that pealed the joyous message of Yule through the scurry of a snow-filled night."

* * *

THE SPORTING SEXTON BLAKE By DEREK SMITH

Sexton Blake the sportsman is almost as compelling a figure as Sexton Blake the detective, and over the years he has developed an abiding interest in the sport of kings - and crooks!

On and off the Turf, 1927 was an intriguing year for the sportsman detective. "Was it not Sexton Blake ... who had solved the Blue Ensign mystery? Wasn't the detective responsible for Blue Ensign not only going to the post, but winning a very sensational Grand National?"

That affair had been chronicled under the title of "The Puzzle of Blue Ensign" in The Union Jack, no. 1223, dated March 26th, 1927. The author was Tom Stenner, who besides being a talented writer was responsible for the National Speedway Trophy Competition, and was Speedway correspondent of the London papers. No less compelling was his second contribution to Sexton Blake's case-book, "The Case of the Disqualified Derby!" (U.J. 1232, May 28th).

This time Tinker was well to the fore. Displaying a knowledge of "form" well beyond his years and swopping friendly insults with Detective-Inspector Coutts, he strolled through the case with breezy self-assurance that was well justified. It was he, not his "guv'nor," who spotted the vital clue that exposed an ingenious fraud and re-wrote racing history.

Their next sporting adventure was "The Great Yachting Week Mystery" (U.J. 1241, July 30th). Sexton Blake had promised to spend Cowes week with Lord

Lamberhurst on his yacht Seamew. The great sleuth and his host had broken their journey at Goodwood to see the race for the Cup, and it was there that the case began. Owner of the winning horse, Misty, was James Heniker, the well-known financier, but he did not have long to enjoy his Cup triumph. His body was washed ashore off Cowes under the very noses of Blake and his assistant. He had apparently fallen off the liner Alatania which he had boarded at Southampton the previous day - but, as Blake pointed out, he had been poisoned, not drowned.

Blake was drawn into the case at the request of a charming girl named Joan Marshall, whose fiancé, the murdered man's nephew; had fallen under suspicion. The great detective soon uncovered a complicated plot in which impersonation played a major part.

Three months later the Baker Street duo was on the Turf again. The occasion was the Cambridgeshire, the last big event of the flat racing season, "and, by all accounts, the great race of the year ... England's last opportunity of showing what her thoroughbreds could do against her foreign rivals."

Blake's biographer this time was "Norman Taylor," alias Noel Wood-Smith, sub-editor and second in command to Maurice Down on the Magnet in the twenties. The tale was "The Norman Duke Mystery" (U.J. 1253, October 22nd, 1927).

The race promised to be a three-cornered duel between the French, German, and American owners. Horse "nobbling" was an obvious danger, and the Comte d'Ancoats wanted Blake to guard his colt, Romus. Though he sympathised with the French owner, Blake refused the commission. "It was a plain, straightforward sort of job that could be easily handled by the smaller fry of his profession."

He was soon to be involved, however. The next day a man collapsed against the bonnet of the Grey Panther on a country road below the North Downs. He was soon identified as William Tett, head lad of the trainer of Norman Duke, the English hope in the Cambridgeshire. Accompanied by the owner, the Hon. John Canon, Blake was witness to an attempt to injure the horse during a trial gallop. More dirty work followed - nobbling, kidnapping, and murder included - but perhaps the most startling complication was Tinker's encounter with the devil!

"Two glowing orbs of light showed high above the hedge. Twin pools of flame floating on air ... What was this supernatural, unearthly thing of the night?

"Tinker caught a glimpse of a pointed head, a huge bulk of a body, with demon eyes floating in the middle of it ... Tinker flung up his revolver and fired ... Came that maniacal scream ... and the phantom of the night had gone ...

"He searched the road and found a mis-shapen piece of lead that was once a bullet... What was it that even a bullet could not harm - that could deflect it so certainly?"

A striking cover picture by Eric Parker showed the "devil" - as usual - in human guise: mounted in armour on a fiery steed.

Anything after that might have seemed like an anticlimax, but there was

plenty of excitement still to come. After a thrilling race which Norman Duke won by a short head, Blake arranged a classic confrontation with all the suspects in the stewards' room. The "devil" was finally unmasked, and the great detective brought the case to a triumphant conclusion.

1927 had been a very good year for the sporting Sexton Blake!

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

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- -

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SEASONAL GREETINGS TO Eric Fayne; to Midland Club friends Bill, Harry, George, Ian, Ivan, Jack, Norman, Ted, Tom and all the gang; to Uncle Ben, Frank, Len and all London Club Members; to Cyril Rowe; to New Zealand chum Albert Watkin, and especially to Henry Webb and family.
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WANTED: S.O.L. Nos. 149, 151, 166, 169, 170, 171, 173, 177, 181, 186, 189, 207, 215. Other S.O.L's for exchange.

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WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, Magnets, Turner's "Boys will be Boys."
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- -

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL HOBBY FRIENDS — JOHN and GILL BECK, LEWES, SUSSEX.

PHIPPS

By R. J. GODSAVE

When Phipps was introduced into the pages of the Nelson Lee Library as Archie Glenthorne's valet and Dr. Stafford's butler - the duties being shared - he was just Phipps. As a character he was, no doubt, modelled on Jeeves. His conversations with Archie were humorous and interesting. His worldly knowledge was of a high order, although the reader was not given any information of his private life or even his Christian name.

Nelson Lee O.S. 385 "The Remove to the Rescue" was to my knowledge the only one to give any information about Phipps prior to his employment as valet to Col. Glenthorne's youngest son. Even then his Christian name of Richard was doubtful, he being addressed as "being known as Dicky Phipps."

This particular Nelson Lee deals with the past life of Phipps as no other has done before or since.

The story opens with Handforth kicking a football with tremendous force from the Triangle into the lobby of the Ancient House with dire results to Archie's chin and spotless collar. Phipps was away on a visit to Bannington, so at that moment he was not available to assist his master in his trouble. A few minutes later Phipps entered the lobby and walked past Archie without taking any notice of him in spite of a welcome from Archie.

The following extract from the "Remove to the Rescue" gives the reader an inkling that all was not right with Phipps.

> He hastened through the lobby, and gave a quick furtive glance over his shoulder, as though he was in fear that demons were after him. And Archie could see that the man's face was white. A startled, scared look was in his eyes. And he hastened into the passage, and vanished.

This was a very different picture from the sedate and imperturbable Phipps that the reader of the Nelson Lee knew. To see him upset was something of a phenomenon.

To Archie this behaviour on the part of Phipps came as a shock. Arriving in his study he rang for Phipps, but nothing happened for quite a while. When Phipps entered the study in due course he was questioned by Archie as to the reason for his behaviour. Phipps on his part refused, as he put it, to burden Archie with his troubles.

Archie was soon to know what it was that had so changed Phipps.

* * *

Nipper, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Watson were in the Triangle when they

saw the figure of a lady appear - rather indistinct in the gloom, but had no difficulty in recognising she was a stranger. The lady was large, although not plump. She was about forty years of age.

The boys went towards the newcomer, and as they approached, they politely raised their caps. Giving the boys a severe look, she demanded to know if the school was St. Frank's College, adding that her name was Miss Arabella Pringle and whether anybody of the name of Phipps was there.

Nipper was rather puzzled as to her native country., for he was quite certain that she was not English. Her talk was peculiar in many ways, and he came to the conclusion she was Australian - a rather low class Australian.

"Hallo! What's the trouble over here?" demanded Handforth, suddenly appearing on the scene.
"Don't you come interfering, boy!" exclaimed Miss Arabella Pringle severely. "I want to find Mr. Phipps!"
"Phipps!" echoed Handforth, "What the dickens do you want Phipps for?"
"Mind your own business, you insolent young rascal!" shouted Miss Pringle shrilly. "If you had any manners you'd offer to help me!"
"Manners?" repeated Handforth, "Well I don't call it polite manners to talk like that! What's the matter with Phipps? I suppose you're his aunt?"
Miss Pringle screamed.
"How dare you?" she exclaimed, her voice rising. "You - you impudent puppy! His aunt! Indeed! I'll show you whether you can insult me or not. How dare you call me his aunt?"
Slosh! Slosh! Slosh!
Before the unfortunate Handforth could dodge, the lady's unbrella descended with considerable force on his back. Handforth howled wildly, and staggered away. He was more surprised than hurt.
"You young rascal," shouted Miss Pringle, "I want to find Phipps and shake the life out of him! The deserter - the ruffian. Eight years ago he deserted me - in Sydney, Australia. I'll teach him, I'll make him understand he can't play about as he likes."

From these remarks made by Miss Pringle the boys were under the impression that Phipps was guilty of deserting his wife. At the same time, it was difficult to believe that Phipps could have any connection with Miss Pringle.

During the summer holiday adventures Phipps had proved himself to be a man, a hero, and a gentleman. To imagine he had deserted this fearful person was unbelievable.

In order to settle the matter, Nipper offered to take Miss Pringle to Phipps. Together they entered the Ancient House, passing through the lobby, and entered upon the Remove passage. And just at that moment, at the far end, a neat figure appeared. It was Phipps, and he paused for a second to glance down towards them. Then he gave one dive, and vanished like a rabbit into Archie's study.

The very fact that he had bolted proved that there was truth in the lady's story. If she was unknown to him, Phipps would never have acted in that way.

* * *

Miss Arabella Pringle was hot; she was untidy, and she was angry. Her eyes blazed. Her lower jaw protruded and there was an air of determination about her as she arrived at Archie's study. At that moment Archie himself appeared. He stood no chance against the furious woman as she forced her way in and stalked into the study.

Phipps stood there, a mere ghost of his usual self. His face was pale, and it

was only by an effort that he kept himself under control.

The same could not be said of Miss Pringle as she stood there shouting and raving at Phipps.

"Now, you villain," shouted the lady, "Now I've got you!"
"Look - look here, Arabella!" said Phipps. "Shut the door! There's no need to let everybody know ---"
"Oh yes there is!" shouted Miss Pringle. "Eight years ago you asked me to be your wife! I was young then, I ought to have had more sense than to trust you! You proposed to me and everything was settled. And then, without a moment's warning, you ran away - deserted me. You left me helpless ----"
"I - I ---"
"Don't interrupt me!" shouted the lady. "Don't dare to speak! I'll teach you to go about jilting young girls!"

At this point Archie thought it about time to assert his authority. He strode into the study with a firm tread and informed the lady that she must leave.

Miss Pringle made no reply. She simply brought round one hand, and gave Archie a slap in the face which sent that astonished youth reeling backwards until he collapsed into the lounge.

The shrill feminine voice was heard by Nelson Lee. Arriving at Archie's study he was confronted by Miss Pringle who advised him to leave before he got hurt.

"You will pardon me, madam, but I am the Housemaster of the Ancient House," said Nelson Lee curtly, "I must demand an immediate explanation of this scene. It is not usual for lady visitors to ---"
"Don't you try to bully me, my good fellow!" shouted Miss Arabella, "I don't care who you are - it doesn't matter to me! I've come here to find this cringing wretch, and I've found him!" she added, grabbing Phipps by the shoulder.
"Please - please let me explain, sir," gasped Phipps, his eyes full of misery.
"This - this lady is - is a friend of mine, sir! She came to see me, and - and I - I ---"
"It is a pity, Phipps, that you cannot see your friends in your own quarters," interrupted Nelson Lee.
"I couldn't help it, sir ----"
"Oh, don't you talk!" interrupted Miss Pringle tartly. "I'm not going to put up with any nonsense ---"
"Neither, for that matter, am I," interrupted Nelson Lee curtly, "I must request you to leave the school premises at once."
Miss Arabella seemed to have all the energy taken out of her. She was at a loss for a moment, and then she gave a shrill laugh, and accompanied Nelson Lee down the passage.

* * *

In the meantime Archie and Phipps were left alone. He seemed afraid to look Archie in the face. Again Archie asked Phipps what it was all about, and this time Phipps had no option but to unburden himself.

It appeared that the whole trouble cropped up owing to the publicity given to the St. Frank's expedition to the Antarctic region, and Miss Pringle had recognised Phipps in one of the many photographs that had appeared in the press.

Eight years previously Phipps had been in Sydney and with some friends had been invited to a party by Miss Pringle's father. Miss Arabella had fastened herself on to Phipps during the evening and at supper had him sit next to her. After drinking some wine he had no recollection of what took place for a period of two hours.

It seemed that during this period Phipps had proposed marriage to Miss Pringle. There were at least three witnesses - Mr. Pringle and two of his friends.

They congratulated Phipps much to his dismay. For a week he was compelled to keep company with Miss Pringle while preparations for the wedding were being pushed ahead. His only remedy was to flee. Meeting an old friend from a boat which was bound for London, Phipps was able to leave Sydney immediately. As the years went by he was convinced that he had completely escaped.

* * *

Phipps paced up and down the Triangle moodily. He had gone out into the chilly air in order to cool his fevered brow. The evening was now practically dark and the lights from the windows gleamed brightly, but they had no attraction for Phipps.

While he was doing this he suddenly became aware of a big, burly, form in the gloom. Apparently it had come from the small gate which was especially provided for use of masters. The burly form evidently saw Phipps at the same moment for it came across, and peered forward.

"I'm looking for a fellow named Phipps," exclaimed the form. "If you can direct me I reckon I shall be obliged."
"What do you want?" asked the valet. "I'm Phipps."

The stranger started and took Phipps by the shoulder and turned him round so that the light from the school windows fell upon him.

"Gosh darn me, so you are!" he exclaimed, "Phipps - Dickie Phipps, as they used to call you - although I don't believe your name's Dickie at all - I s'pose you remember me, don't you?"
"Why you're Jim Pringle!" he said huskily.
"Sure!" agreed the Australian. "That's me, Jim Pringle."
"What do you want?" demanded Phipps harshly.
"What do I want?" repeated the man. "Say, you've got a damn nerve, ain't you? You marry 'Bella and things will be smooth. See! If you don't, we'll make you pay! A chap who jilts a girl is a low down dog, and generally has to pay through the nose."
Phipps breathed hard.
"I didn't jilt your sister!" he declared.
"You were drunk, eh?" said Jim Pringle coarsely. "Look here, Dickie, there's no reason for us to quarrel!" said Pringle lowering his voice. "After all 'Bella's a bit too old for marrying now, and I suppose she'll be an old maid. You're about the only chance she's got, and she means to hang on. Do you get that?"
"I understand exactly," said Phipps coldly.
"It'll either be an action in the law courts or we'll settle on the quiet," said Jim Pringle.
"'Bella only wants a couple of hundred ----"
"She won't get it," interrupted Phipps curtly.
"Oh, won't she!" snarled Pringle. "Take that you low down dog!"

Crash!

Phipps had no chance against this ruffian, who stood over six feet, and was proportionately broad. Phipps knew a bit about boxing, but he was a light-weight.

He gave a cry as he staggered back. His nose was bleeding, for the blow had been a heavy one. The next moment, Pringle's other fist came round.

Phipps went down with a thud on the ground. His head was singing, his brain seemed in a whirl. But he wasn't going to stand this treatment without making some effort to retaliate.

He sailed in, and his fist caught Pringle on the jaw.

And then Phipps saw stars.

Blow after blow was rained upon him. He went down, half stunned under the

brutal attack.

It so happened that Handforth & Co. emerged into the Triangle at that moment. The lights from the windows showed up the figures. They saw Phipps fall to the ground, and then Pringle delivered a kick which caused Phipps to groan.

Handforth & Co. glanced at one another, their faces flushed. To see anything of that nature was like showing a red rag to a bull. Handforth pushed his sleeves up, and clenched his fist.

"The coward!" he shouted. "Kicking a man when he's down. By George! Come on, you chaps. Hi! Rescue Remove. Hi! Rescue."

A few moments after, a crowd of Removites hurried out into the Triangle in order to see what the trouble was. They were just in time to see Phipps rising unsteadily to his feet. He was fearfully knocked about; his lip was cut, his nose terribly swollen and still bleeding. An ugly scratch ran across his forehead.

"Hi, you asses, come here!" roared Handforth. "Come and collar this beast before he gets away. He half-murdered Phipps just now, and then kicked him after he was down! Buck up!"

Jim Pringle was standing with his back towards the high school wall. It was too high for Pringle to climb. Pringle stood no chance against a rush of Removites. Nipper, making a dive for Pringle's legs caused him to crash over.

Pringle was frog-marched round the Triangle, after which he was thrown into the fountain.

Phipps was still standing near-by, and had now partially recovered. He expressed his thanks to the juniors, and went into the Ancient House. In the lobby he ran into Archie Glenthorne - the very last person he wanted to meet. Archie stopped dead in his tracks, and gazed at Phipps with open horror.

"What the - I mean to say!" he gasped. "Phipps! My dear old scout, what evil has befallen you? You're a frightful sight!"
"I - I have met with a little trouble, sir," said Phipps. "I shall be glad if you'll let me pass, sir."

Archie offered no objection. He was too startled to stand in Phipps' way. A moment later the juniors crowded in, and Archie heard the details.

* * *

The following morning Archie awoke to find it was twenty minutes past his usual hour of rising, and no sign of Phipps. Archie dressed with unusual rapidity. He was astonished to find that Phipps was quite unnecessary. Dressing after all was quite a simple business.

Archie went downstairs to his study to find a letter from Phipps on the table, informing him that he found it impossible to remain at St. Frank's under the existing circumstances.

Leaving the study, Archie soon made known Phipps' departure and was informed by various juniors that the Head's bureau had been burgled during the night. Also a handkerchief had been found in the room with Phipps' name on it.

Half an hour later, Tubbs, the Ancient House pageboy, approached Archie and told him he was wanted in the Head's study. When he was ushered into Dr.

Stafford's presence, he found the Head looking very grave. Without any preliminaries the Head asked to see the letter which he understood that Phipps had left with Archie.

During the interview in which Dr. Stafford expressed his belief in Phipps being guilty of the theft, much to Archie's horror, Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police, was shewn into the Head's study.

When Dr. Stafford stated that he had instructed Phipps to draw £145 from the bank the previous day for the monthly payment of wages, and Phipps had brought it to his study and seen the Head put the money into his bureau, Inspector Jameson saw it as a clear cut case of Phipps being guilty.

A telephone message from Col. Glenthorne to the Head informed him that Phipps had arrived at his house before the household was awake and was now making active preparations for leaving by the first available train to London. Col. Glenthorne, of course, knew nothing of what had happened and had 'phoned the Head to find out. Dr. Stafford promised to let him know all the details later.

Acting on this new information the inspector rang up the police-station and instructed two men to detain Phipps. The inspector gave an accurate description of the valet, and then hurried off himself.

That morning Archie did not go in for breakfast, and walked about the Triangle. He had the place quite to himself, since breakfast was proceeding. And then two figures appeared in the gateway. Archie glanced up and stiffened visibly as he recognised them. The two figures were Arabella and Jim Pringle. The pair came up, and Archie sallied towards them.

"I'm afraid there's nothing doing, old dears!" he said pleasantly. "I gather that you are having tremendous hopes of interviewing old Phipps."
"We don't want any talk with you, my lad!" said Jim Pringle roughly.
"We want to see Mr. Phipps!" said Arabella.
"Well you won't see Phipps to-day," said Archie. "As the matter of fact he's gone for good."
Jim Pringle scowled furiously.
"I knew it!" he snapped, "What did I tell you, 'Bella? I said it was no good coming up here!"
"By gosh! If I cath him I'll ----"
"Gadzooks!" said Archie.

He had gone pale with excitement and was staring at Jim Pringle's coat. It was an ordinary lounge jacket of thick tweed, and the colour was an unusual green. Intermixed with it were shreds of light brown - a most peculiar mixture, and just at this particular spot was a distinct pluck.

It was not a tear, and probably Jim knew nothing about it, for it was just against the left hand pocket. The broken end of wool stuck out, but only a person with sharp eyes would have noticed the pluck at all. Archie did so more by accident than anything else.

Archie was by no means the ass he was supposed to be. He remembered the sharp edge on the bureau, where the woodwork was smashed. There, clearly and distinctly he had noticed a couple of shreds of wool. The shreds were greenish and brownish in colour.

All this proved to Archie that Jim Pringle was the person who had entered

the Head's study during the night. He realised that it was up to him to act quickly.

One point worried Archie. If Pringle had stolen the money, why had he come to the school now? But a moment's reflection told Archie that this is just what Pringle would do in his attempt to put the blame on Phipps. He had, as a matter of fact, picked up Phipps' handkerchief during the scrap the previous evening.

By suggesting that he had something private to say to Pringle the pair followed Archie to his study. At first they were suspicious, but Archie made this all right by a vague reference to money.

As they passed through the lobby, the juniors came out from breakfast. Nipper and the other juniors looked at Archie in astonishment. The trio quickly passed by without Archie giving any information as to why he was on apparently friendly terms with the Pringles.

Once in the study Archie came straight to the point.

"Last night, you broke into the School and lifted a large assortment of notes from the Headmaster's bureau!" said Archie.

Jim Pringle started back, his cheeks blanching.

"You infernal young fool!" he gasped. "It was Phipps who took the money."

"There's a priceless clue here!" went on Archie, pointing to the pluck in the man's coat. "I saw some shreds of this stuff sticking to the bureau, and the police will be most deucedly interested when I tell them."

"You fool, Jim!" gasped Arabella. "I knew you'd make a mistake. You oughtn't have done it ---"

"Keep your infernal mouth shut!" snarled Jim. "And lock that door."

Then with a quick movement he grasped Archie in his bear-like arms. The elegant junior attempted to shout, but a hand was clapped over his mouth, and he only succeeded in uttering a queer kind of gurgle.

* * *

Reginald Pitt with Jack Grey looked across the Triangle thoughtfully. Arabella and brother Jim had just gone. They had in fact walked out somewhat hurriedly, although they had obviously been at some pains to hide the fact that they were in haste.

"I wonder why they came?" said Reggie Pitt. I think we ought to buzz inside, and interview Archie. We'll demand an explanation."

Arriving in the passage they found Handforth banging vigorously on Archie's door demanding admittance. There was no reply, although the juniors knew Archie was still in his study.

The juniors hurried outside to look through the window which was tightly closed. Nipper who had joined Handforth and the others thought he saw something move under the lounge.

A large stone flung by Handforth crashed the glass and entry was then simple. The juniors dragged the lounge from the wall and found Archie bound and gagged by large lengths of torn table cloth.

After Archie had recovered he told the others of his suspicions. Phipps would be quickly released when the juniors gave the police the information in their possession.

The first thing was to get hold of Jim and Arabella Pringle. It was most

likely that brother and sister would make tracks for the railway station. Although Nelson Lee had been absent from the school the last few days, his racing car was always held in a state of readiness. Nipper and the others hurried round to the garage. He started it up and in a few minutes was speeding across the Triangle. Archie and Pitt succeeded in getting in beside Nipper with the others hanging desperately on to the sides.

They went through Bellton village at a speed which caused the inhabitants to gasp. Even as they swept up the station approach the juniors could see the train had just left the station. If Nipper had any doubt on the matter, this doubt was dispelled as he caught sight of Jim Pringle's head projecting from one of the carriage windows.

As the train usually waited at Bannington for ten minutes before proceeding to London, Nipper shot the car round from the station and was soon speeding along the main Bannington Road. It was necessary to slow down as they entered the old High Street, and even as they shot up towards the booking-office the guard was waving his flag and had whistled for the train to start. The juniors rushed past the startled ticket collector onto the platform.

Handforth let out a terrific bellow as he caught sight of a face at one of the windows. Heads were now appearing from every compartment - the guard was rushing up, flustered and angry. For at the last moment he had been compelled to stop the train from going out.

Nipper tore open the door of this compartment and dashed in. Jim Pringle was there, white-faced and scared. He was just about to open the opposite door, with the desperate idea of making a dash for freedom along the track. His sister lay back in her seat nearly fainting.

The next moment Handforth & Co. were in the compartment, too. They all seized the man's jacket, and gave one tremendous heave. Pringle came out upon the platform in a rush, and in a moment the juniors were on top of him.

It was fortunate that the police called in by the station-master knew Nipper, who was able to explain the position and have them arrest Pringle. Handforth had dived down Pringle's pockets and produced a wad of currency notes. Arabella was a wreck and proved to be no trouble as both she and her brother were taken to Bannington police-station.

Only a few of the juniors were allowed in the charge-room. Inspector Jameson was pleased when matters were explained to him as the notes found on Phipps were not the same numbers as those missing from Dr. Stafford's bureau.

Phipps, in any case, would now be released from custody, and if the notes found on Pringle corresponded with the numbers known by the bank, it would be proof of his guilt.

The money which had been found on Phipps had been obtained from his own room at Col. Glenthorne's house.

A few moments later, Phipps appeared smiling. He expressed his thanks to

Archie and the juniors. Phipps was not likely to be troubled by the Pringles anymore.

"What about trickling forth and whizzing back to the good old precincts of St. Frank's," said Archie.
"We shall all go at once," put in Nipper. "Come on!"
"Your jacket, sir, is considerably ruffled," said Phipps. "I might also point out that the necktie does not match your shirt."

Things were back to normal.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

—in Friday's issue of the "Popular"!

The four juniors, all feeling very sheepish, entered the large hall. "General S-Skeppleton?" stammered Billy Bunter to the manservant. "I'm Wharton. You know, Harry Wharton of -of Grey ?ars. The the General is expecting us!" "Yes, sir!" replied the man. "Will you wait here?" (See Chapter 9)

HAMILTONIA — Why?

By GEMINI

"Hamiltonia," as the ardent collector terms it, is a taste normally acquired by embryo afficianados in boyhood, and which lingers strongly into middle age as a very pleasant afterglow. It is a taste, also, which must have a little self examination and appraisal, from time to time, if only to keep a balance.

As an example, I've been an "on and off" collector of Hamiltonia for many years - and how I wish I'd kept the discards - but only over the past 12 months (particularly since meeting Mr. Tom Porter - who put me in touch with "Collector's Digest," the existence of which I'd had no previous knowledge) have I gone much more seriously into what I see so frequently referred to as "The Hobby!" (my capitals!).

This being a personal comment, let's continue that way.

I find "Collector's Digest," that doyen of hobby publications, delightful, habit-forming and - if you'll forgive me, Mr. Editor - just a little quaint at first sight.

This initial reaction, I think, is because the subject of such intent collector's interest is not old English porcelain, or Shakespeare folios, or butterflies, or stamps, or something equally dignified and understandable; but, instead, old children's books, magazines and comics, many of which really deserved nothing better than to be allowed to return to the dust from which they arose. Artistically and intrinsically, a fair proportion were largely valueless and, from the background of social history throughout the first decades of this century, they were misleading, inaccurate and virtually without any depth of expression or creative comment to sustain them. But I must say honestly here that they never set up such standards and none were published, of course, with an eye to the future collector.

So, I have to ask myself (having said all that, which I feel strongly to be true) why am I a collector within this field? Why, since early this year have I built up a Magnet collection stretching back, so far, to 1931 (with still a few missing copies, of course) with the intention of building up from this base; and have since started in the same way with Gems?

The answer for me, of course, is Hamiltonia - that quite unique sequence of storytelling which began long before the first World War and which only ceased a few years ago when a great man, who had given pleasure and inspiration to millions, died.

At this point - and to avoid the incensed shafts of other enthusiasts - I must insert the very important comment that the worth of Sexton Blake; Dixon Hawke; Nelson Lee and St. Franks (or without St. Franks, for that matter); Ferrers Lord, Jack, Sam and Pete, Morgyn the Mighty; Waldo - whatever the favourite and beloved characters, scenes, yarns and nostalgic recollections - were and are still just as important to their adherents as are Magnet and Gem for the Hamiltonia collectors. A great many of these fields of story and narrative were tremendously interesting, attention gaining and very effective material representative of the decades during

which they were written, much of which deserved the preservation since gained. I know that many "Digest" readers place them highly, and rightly so. But this appraisal is about one man - Charles Hamilton - his works, his methods, his environment, the atmosphere of the fiction he created and the longevity of that fiction, and I stay with that theme.

Collecting books is not a new hobby for me. I've been doing it all my life and I've thousands of volumes which annoy my wife by the dust they gather and the space they take up. But the Hamiltonia bug, which has been dormant, more or less, over the years (apart from buying the Skilton/Cassell Bunter books) now commands my devotion and I find this impulse difficult to analyse.

As a professional journalist (I've spent years as editor and writer) I suppose I've written millions of words and am accustomed to phrasing my sentences with some care, so I hope you'll believe that I do not give my devotion lightly.

Even so, as I said at the commencement, one must retain a critical viewpoint, particularly where one's own collecting impulses are concerned and one of my reasons for writing this is a reaction against what I feel to be a strong vein of unreality that I've seen running through some "Digest" comment whenever the Hamilton philosophy of story content and presentation is discussed. In particular, this is apparent when set against the true social context of the times during which they were conceived and published.

George Orwell's famous comments on the subject are too well known to require further publicity here and I certainly do not wholeheartedly subscribe to them.

In my opinion, there is no doubt about the following factors:-

(a) Hamilton was a brilliant storyteller - particularly so when one considers his unique ability, over the years, to adapt and adjust fundamental themes and basic plots over and over again without losing any credibility. In fact, I believe it is this single factor which has done much to evoke - among those of us "bitten" by his writings - the almost compulsive readership and collectorship urge so well displayed in "Digest."

(b) He created a really "original" wonderland - a "true blue" British escapist world which never was and never could be. But so strongly, by plot, style and characterisation, did he create this world that it remains magnetic and effective today; although whether it will survive the present middle-aged generation (except to the few) is debateable and, perhaps, unlikely.

(c) He was a truly professional writer, always working to policy, editorial requirements and space availability.

I do not know at what period of his writing life that Charles Hamilton actually realised he'd created for himself a minor form of literary immortality; particularly by his Greyfriars work and, to a lesser extent, through St. Jims and Rookwood - the post-war (1945) "new" schools didn't count very much! I suspect, however, that it

was during the 1914-1918 War that the first suspicion of this might have come to him and that this is why the Magnet, particularly, came into its full harvest during the 20's and 30's.

Clearly he must have known that Greyfriars and all his other schools were symbols of British never-never land. His own practical journalistic training and approach to the job would have seen to that.

He never claimed to truly reflect any class-oriented set of values in his stories but instead, I think, he put together some strong principles which seemed good and proper as a way of life to him and, to his readers, he gave an ethical leadership which was quite inspiring, probably helpful but altogether (re-reading in middle age) rather uncomfortably restricted.

In making this assessment, however, it must be remembered that Hamilton was essentially of the Victorian period and the restrictive limitations seen within his stories must inevitably spring from that factor.

The coyness, in Magnet and Gem, about God and religion, co-education and girl-friends, depths of emotion and a general unwillingness to dig deeply into emotive reasoning - all these were all part of this background. As was the exclamatory descriptive use of words such as "dagoes," "wops," "froggies" and "niggers" ("Inky" apart) to describe foreigners, a style of expression straight from the Victorian "jingo" period.

Surprisingly, however, I believe that it was the very restrictions which are evident in his writing which contributed the unique warmth and feeling to his style, because he put what he felt sincerely into his characters, his situations and the environments that he created so well.

Many critics of Charles Hamilton scorn his extreme wordiness and powers of repetition, a particular hallmark of his stories and one which ghost-writers could never achieve effectively. What those critics can never properly see is the skill with which he used the art of descriptive, emphatic repetition to create an indelible impression of situation and a tremendously effective sense of reality within the mind of the reader. Indeed, I believe that it was this aspect of his style that has done more to endear him to his admirers than any other.

In "Digest," from time to time, I read emphatic denials that the fascination for Hamiltonia is not a form of escapism. I really cannot accept this. Alice escaped into Wonderland and the Looking Glass, but in the end she lost her sense of wonder. We who collect Hamiltonia have not lost our particular "wonderland" - so why deny it? Because it is well worth having!

Why depreciate something that is rare enough in these latter, dollar-worthy, topless, space flight days - the ability to escape, occasionally, into Hamilton's very British land that never was, where the Empire and Greyfriars are forever young?

It's not eccentric, nor childish, nor wasteful of energy to collect and enjoy Hamilton. His purpose was the pleasure of his readers and he gave full value for every twopence that his magazines ever earned. The increasing value of his works and the

nostalgia they produce reflect continuing worth and pleasure.

Sometimes I read, too, opinions expressed (in looking backwards through the reflecting glass of Hamiltonia) about so-called values of bygone decades of this century, which seem to me to be rather inaccurately recalled.

I feel quite sure that, for most of us, to be transported into the 10's or 20's, for instance, would be a traumatic experience and one which would soon become unnerving - to go back further, even more so.

Today - with all the merits and demerits of the modern permissive society in which we live - there is a far stronger sense and practice of social justice than ever before in history; there is a far more developed local and national political maturity; there are health and unemployment benefits which may be abused (and are thus derided) by some, but which prevent the evils of degradation and desperation of illness, unemployment and starvation that used to be; and a growing understanding and continual sense of groping forward on issues which today we know concern us all and which are not, any longer, confined to within a rigid power structure.

Of course there's a lot wrong with this modern society but we're aiming and trying for goals which are much more clearly defined in terms of human environmental evolution than they could ever be in the days when Hamiltonia was being written.

This kind of progress can only be good for the human race.

Hamiltonia was good for us - and still is - too!

Its nostalgia, its misty recollections and heart-tugging associations of bygone youth, its timeless values and, above all, its style and characters and stories - all these and many more facets go to making a living, moving and truly existing saga that has thrust into being its own immortality. A saga that received the breath of life from a man who, in his chosen field, was a creative and quite unique genius.

Well, I started all this off by asking myself the reasons why, in middle age, I began collecting and enjoying "The Hobby." I find the answers very adequate, now I've got them off my chest.

I hope the analysis is equally adequate!

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WANTED: Reasonable copies Gems 805, 807, 828, 841, 846, 852, 862. For exchange only for any of above on generous basis. Gems: 364, 378, 574, 608, 773, 797, 844, 846. Caravanning Series 596/605. Double number 510. Christmas numbers 776, 1930/31, 1055. Some Magnets 1491/1582 and others.

CHARLES VAN RENEN, BOX 5046, PORT ELIZABETH, SOUTH AFRICA.

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A MERRY XMAS to all readers of Collectors' Digest. Thanks to all contributors for splendid articles and the happy memories they bring.

LES FARROW, FYDELL STREET, BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE.

A HOST OF NEW PAPERS CAME ON THE MARKET DURING 1919. THIS WAS ONE OF THEM.

The School Friend, 1925-1929

By RAY HOPKINS

A banner headline on the cover of No. 8 of The School Friend states proudly: THE ONLY GIRLS' SCHOOL STORY PAPER PUBLISHED. Within three years of its birth it had two sister papers: The Schoolgirls' Own, which began in February 1921, and The Schoolgirls' Weekly, whose No. 1 appeared in October 1922. These papers were known collectively in advertising contained in all three as "The Companion Papers." The School Friend itself was so popular that it ran for ten years from May 1919 to July 1929.

When it began, it was the same size as The Magnet and The Gem and used a similar format to those papers: one long school story, with a serial at the back and occasional bits of variety such as "The Cliff House Weekly" as a supplement in the centre pages. This was supposed to be written by the pupils themselves, like "The Greyfriars' Herald," and "Tom Merry's Weekly." The School Friend is remembered by many readers with affection because it introduced one of the two famous girls' schools which ran for many years in the Amalgamated Press papers. Cliff House was invented by that great creator of school stories Charles Hamilton, and for it he used the by-line of Hilda Richards. Many readers noting the name and the fact that the locale was near Greyfriars, and the fact that Greyfriars' boys came into the early stories, concluded that Hilda must be sister to Frank and that they probably wrote their stories at desks facing one another, with a gorgeous countryside view from the window, inspiring them to pen some of those mouth-watering rural descriptions that we love to pause over today while reading him. However, the first Hilda did not last very long. In "Your Editor's Corner" in No. 6 of The School Friend, the comment is made that the first six stories were all in humorous vein and that for a change, future stories would be more dramatic. So it would probably be safe to assume that Mr. Hamilton wrote no more than the first six Cliff House stories. The School Friend, perhaps taking a lead from its two older brothers, also started a "Portrait Gallery," but unfortunately did not include any biographical details beneath the face, perhaps because the "Gallery" began in the first issue and neither the author nor the editor had invented any pre-publication "lives" of the characters. This feature must have proved popular because by the end of 1919, there were no less than three in each issue, all containing a lengthy "life" below the portrait. This new series of portraits and biographies was called, "Who's Who at Cliff House."

During this early period of The School Friend's career, the Cliff House stories must have been immensely popular and the chief drawing card of the paper, and unless it was one of those well-known examples of "change for the sake of change," there would seem to be no reason to alter the formula for its previous success. So it was a surprise for this researcher to discover that in March 1925, after 303 issues, The School Friend went back to No. 1, and began a new series. It was cut down to that smaller size we all became familiar with in the later 1930's in connection with the cream-coloured Gem. But did the smaller size mean that this popular paper was due

for the axe, or was it reduced in size to bring it in line with the smaller size and great popularity of its sister paper, The Schoolgirls' Own? This was the paper in which lived the other celebrated Amalgamated Press girls' school, Morcove. As far as is known, this school is unique in that its creator, Marjorie Stanton, wrote every story, so there are no substitute writers to clutter up the records and to cause wonderment at the difference in writing styles. Marjorie Stanton was the pen-name of Horace Phillips, and he it was who took over the Cliff House series after Charles Hamilton stopped. It is probable that his success in writing the Cliff House stories caused the A.P. to ask him to invent another school for their new paper, The Schoolgirls' Own, which resulted in Betty Barton and Co. of Morcove School. It is also highly likely that Mr. Phillips gave up the Cliff House stories, finding it more of a satisfaction to write about characters that he himself had invented, than taking over some other author's creations. The writing of the Cliff House stories was also done by R. S. Kirkham and E. L. Ransome. So Cliff House sounds like a bunch of characters in search of an author, and the change in writing styles would not have helped in the editor's desire for a continuous readership.

Nevertheless, the Cliff House series was the backbone and mainstay of The School Friend, and 18 of the 36 pages of the new, smaller School Friend were still devoted to the doings of the Cliff House girls. However, the Cliff House story, which had always appeared inside the front cover in its larger days, was often relegated to the latter half of the paper, and illustrations from the Cliff House story were not featured on the cover any more with any regularity. G. M. Dodshon, with his curiously ugly and sometimes almost oriental-looking schoolgirls, who had been the Cliff House artist right from the beginning, still continued to draw Barbara Redfern and Co.; however, there was a different look about the illustrations themselves. Whereas, in the Magnet-size School Friend, they were line drawings, in the smaller sized paper, they were composed of minute dots and resembled newspaper photographs.

The other half of the paper comprised one serial story and one complete school story. The latter was the important new item because, not only were nine schools introduced, but these same schools were featured at regular intervals for a period of just over two years, until July 1927. Studying the volumes of forty years ago, one wonders if the editor was trying to find another school popular enough to replace Cliff House.

The first school to be introduced under this new program was Vere Abbey, its main character being Hilda Manners of the Fourth Form. Hilda, as a well-drawn comic character in her own right, deserves an article to herself, and it is perhaps because Hilda is such a good humorous character that she appeared in so few stories at this time. A good school series must have many varied characters and different types of stories. Hilda tended to overshadow everybody else, so that the stories were not Vere Abbey tales, but Hilda Manners' comic adventures. This series was surprisingly brief, for Hilda appeared in only three complete stories. Her creator, Ida Melbourne may have been helping with the Cliff House saga at the same time so that Hilda had to take second place for the time being. However, Hilda Manners was to come into her own in a much longer second series comprising 32 stories in The Schoolgirl, running from June to November, 1930.

Templedene, the second new school, created by Renee Frazer, also had as its main character a schoolgirl who was destined to become very popular, and whose adventures also followed over into The Schoolgirl. Tess Everton of the Fourth Form is the leading character at Templedene, and she is sometimes characterized in the story titles as "The Madcap." Tess speaks with an Irish accent, and her dialogue is liberally sprinkled with "spalpeen," "Darlint," and "Begorra." Tess is not averse to singing comic songs in order to confound unpleasant characters, as per the following sample:

"Shure, I was borrn in Oireland
Beside the Oirish Sea
An' you were borrn in Africa
An' leapt from tree to tree!"

While Tess herself may be added to the list of comic heroines of the schoolgirl papers of the 1920's, the plots she is involved in are full of drama and mystery. Of the nine new schools introduced into The School Friend in 1925, the Tess Everton of Templedene series was the longest running. There were 28 stories in all, the last one appearing in the issue of 30th July, 1927, which contained the final story of all the nine new schools. Tess Everton, also, was the only one of the new school characters who appeared in serials as well as short, complete stories, both in The School Friend and The Schoolgirl. The serials were later reprinted in the 4d. Schoolgirls' Own Library.

Reginald S. Kirkham, who spent most of his time writing humorous serials for The Schoolgirls' Weekly, was represented by two of the new schools. Under his pen-name of Hilary Marlow, he wrote of The Island School, his heroine being Adela Burns; and as Joan Vincent, he wrote of Mereside School, the leading character being Elsa Gayton. There were only five stories of The Island School; however, Mereside School ran almost as long as the Tess Everton series, for a total of 25 stories. The fact that Mr. Kirkham could put out so much wordage is surprising because at this time he was also keeping The Schoolgirls' Weekly humour department going strong with what was going to turn out to be a continuous ten-year run of serials featuring his other well-known comedy characters May and June Reece, the girls who love to dress up; Jill and Phyl Greenhill, "those tantalizing twins," and Laughing Lily Lane, the celebrated schoolgirl ventriloquist.

Only two of the remaining new schools had very long runs. The last one to be introduced was by Madge North and featured Judy Gray of Newcombe House School. This series ran to 18 stories. The next longest consisted of ten tales and featured Jill Lincoln of Holmwood School. This series was written by Louise Essex. The remaining three ran to series comprising 5, 6 and 7 stories, and were written by Muriel Holden, Evelyn Standish and Dorothy Vernon, respectively.

These sporadic series of short, complete school stories lasted until July 1927. The program of The School Friend then became the Cliff House story - still pushed to the back of the paper - and two serial stories, one of which featured Tess Everton in "The Madcap's Mystery," her first appearance in a serial story. A couple of weeks later appeared a one-page feature called "The Cliff House Notebook," which states as a sub-title that it contained, "Interesting Items about the Famous Old

School and its Inhabitants." It not only gave the results of current Cliff House sporting events, not covered in the stories, and humorous tit-bits involving Bessie Bunter, Freda Foote, and Jemima Carstairs, the most notable comic characters at Cliff House, but also harked back to the plots of earlier series. Here is one with an intriguing sound: "Buried treasure was once found at Cliff House, and thanks to the efforts of Babs and Co., a pair of schemers who had been striving to obtain the hoard were cleverly outwitted." This one-page feature, when it wasn't omitted so that full-page advertisements for the Annuals or the current numbers of The Schoolgirls' Own 4d. Library could be inserted, appeared until within two or three months of the end of The School Friend.

Toward the end of the series featuring the nine new schools, Cliff House and G. M. Dodshon returned to the cover of the paper and remained securely there until January 1928, when a scene from a current serial appeared. This continued until Cliff House returned to the cover in June and July 1928, then made one final appearance on the cover in September 1928. From then until the end of the paper in July 1929, G. M. Dodshon never again drew a cover for The School Friend.

And so the Cliff House story plus two serials continued until September 1928 when Renee Frazer, the author of the Tess Everton stories, introduced what was to become her best-known character, Sally McAllister, or Sunny as she is more popularly known. In 1927, Sunny made her first appearance in a non-school serial called "When Sunny Came to Stay," in the weekly Schoolgirls' Own, and then, early in 1928, she made a further appearance in "With Sunny to Shield Her," in the same paper. Perhaps she was moved over to The School Friend to boost flagging sales, or perhaps it was that May and June Reece had begun to appear in The Schoolgirls' Own, but whatever the reason, they made a tremendous fuss of Sunny in her new home and even gave over the front cover of the paper the week before she made her first appearance in order to advertise the forthcoming attraction. For the next 16 weeks, the whole length of the series, Sunny appeared on the cover of The School Friend. This long series presented Sunny in a school setting, the Fourth Form at St. Claire's, and was the only story feature in the paper other than the Cliff House tale. It was also the first feature in the paper, poor old Cliff House again being banished to the back. Sunny, portrayed by T. Laidler with bobbed hair, deep fringe, wide smile and perky stance, became a familiar sight to weekly buyers of The School Friend. Admirers of the T. Laidler cheerful style of drawing were to become very familiar with his work in The Schoolgirl when the weekly Cliff House stories began again in 1932, for he illustrated them, and also did the covers right to the end of the paper.

But a school background was too narrow for Sunny, and the St. Claire's series came to an end in January 1929, being immediately followed by a serial story called "Sunny in the South Seas." And so The School Friend was back to the Cliff House plus two serials program. When Sunny was rescued from the shipwreck she had been involved in the last serial story, she continued her adventures in a series of ten complete stories which brought her safely back to England via America, and this series concluded with the last number of The School Friend dated 27th July, 1929. Its number was 229 (New Series), Volume 9.

The ending of The School Friend had been gently forecast in May 1929, when, upon the 10th anniversary, the Editor's Chat, a lively half-page item headed "Between Ourselves," contained a nostalgic glimpse of No. 1 way back in May 1919. It mentioned the first School Friend serial, "The Girl Crusoes," by Julia Storm, as well as the very first Cliff House story "The Girls of Cliff House." Keeping up the fiction that Hilda Richards was only one person, the Editor stated: "and it was written by Hilda Richards, who has thus been a regular contributor to our paper for ten years." He also mentioned that he was thinking of giving The School Friend a "new dress." "The time will come," he said, "when your favourite paper may have its second new frock - after all, two in ten years isn't much, is it?" In one of the suceeding issues appeared letters from two old readers who remembered No. 1 with affection, and assured him that they still enjoyed the old paper though they had attained 21 and 22 years of age respectively. They also liked the idea of a new dress for the paper.

The Editor's 10th Anniversary chat signalled the approaching demise of The School Friend, but there was one difference. When old papers die, an announcement in small print appears beneath the title of the paper that swallows them up. "'The Triumph,' with which is incorporated 'The Gem'" is one many of us remember with sadness. However, no such announcement appeared beneath the title of The Schoolgirl, the paper that replaced The School Friend. The Schoolgirl was a brand new paper especially created to take over the readership of The School Friend. It was The School Friend renamed, and it reverted to the Magnet-sized first series of The School Friend. The Schoolgirl went on for another eleven years and finished in May 1940 when the war took its toll of many of our favourite papers. By that time, The School Friend's original sister papers had both vanished forever. The Schoolgirls' Own was incorporated with The Schoolgirl in May 1936 and The Schoolgirls' Weekly with Girls' Crystal in May 1939.

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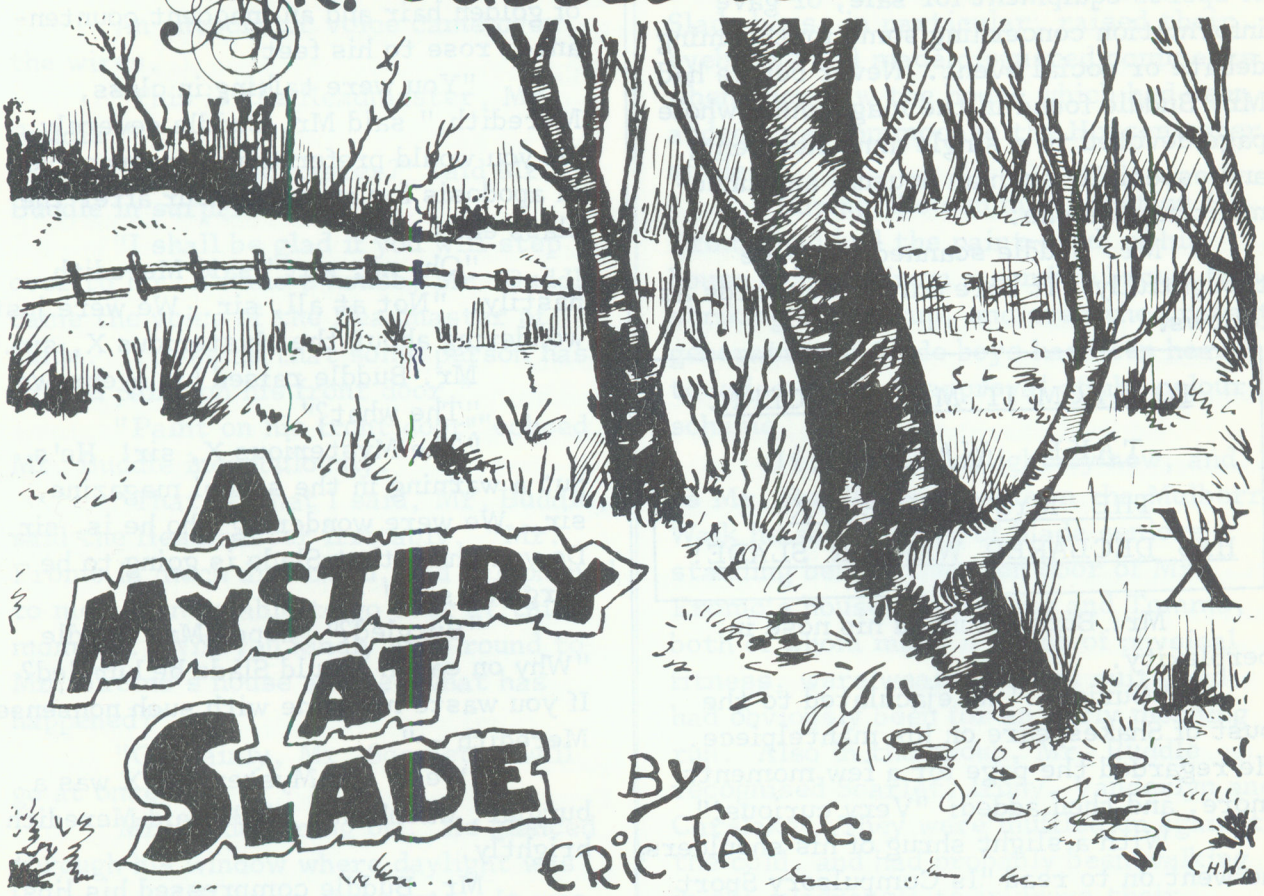
MR. BUDDLE IS BACK!



A MYSTERY AT SLADE

By ERIC FAYNE.

It was in the Slade School Magazine that Mr. Buddle found the first hint of the mystery.

It was a misty day in early November. Morning classes had ended, and the schoolmaster had gone to his study for twenty minutes or so of relaxation before lunch. Mr. Buddle had taken with him the mid-term issue of "The Sladeian." He had collected his copy during the short break between first and second sessions that morning, and now he was taking the opportunity to browse over it while he toasted his toes before the electric fire.

As school magazines go, "The Sladeian" was reasonably good. Peter-Roy Shannon of the Sixth Form edited it with enthusiasm and a good sense of variety, and he managed to avoid dullness and stuffiness.

Mr. Buddle read Shannon's editorial, glanced at the sports reports, skipped through an article by Antrobus, the captain of Slade, and enjoyed a humorous piece of verse by Lorch of the Fifth. Once or twice Mr. Buddle grunted at some piece of English which offended him; once or twice he gave a rusty chuckle at something which amused him.

Then he turned a leaf and came upon a whole page devoted to an announcement. Shannon, the editor, accepted advertisements for publication in the school magazine, but they were always short and, up till now, had been used

merely as fill-ups and occupied but little space. They normally referred to items of sports equipment for sale, or gave information concerning some forthcoming debate or social event. Never before had Mr. Buddle found in the magazine a whole page devoted to a single announcement, and especially such an unusual announcement as this one.

Mr. Buddle scanned the page thoughtfully. It bore only a few words as follows:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

TAKE WARNING!

THE MYSTERIOUS "X"
HAS DECLARED WAR ON SLADE!

Mr. Buddle rubbed his nose in perplexity.

"Curious!" he ejaculated to the bust of Shakespeare on his mantelpiece. He regarded the page for a few moments more, and then added: "Very curious!"

With a slight shrug of his shoulders, he went on to read "Is Compulsory Sport Desirable?" an article by Michael Scarlet. The writer of the article, a Sixth Form prefect who was also the son of the Headmaster of Slade, wrote well, and Mr. Buddle approved.

With the ringing of the bell for lunch, Mr. Buddle thought nothing further of the school magazine until an hour or two later. That afternoon he took the Upper Fourth for English for the first hour, and then had the doubtful pleasure of instructing his own form, the Lower Fourth, in the same subject. He found the Lower Fourth more than usually inattentive and inclined to chatter among themselves as soon as his back was turned.

"Meredith!" snapped Mr. Buddle at last.

"Sir?"

Meredith, a youth with a wealth of golden hair and an innocent countenance, rose to his feet.

"You were talking in class, Meredith," said Mr. Buddle severely. "If you would prefer that I instruct you in apodosis for an extra hour after the class ends --"

"Oh, no, sir," said Meredith hastily. "Not at all, sir. We were just wondering about the Mysterious X, sir."

Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows.

"The what?"

"The Mysterious X, sir! He's put a warning in the school magazine, sir. We were wondering who he is, sir. Do you think that Slade is going to be burgled, sir?"

"Burgled?" gasped Mr. Buddle. "Why on earth should Slade be burgled? If you waste my time with such nonsense, Meredith --"

"Well, the Mysterious X was a burglar, wasn't he, sir?" said Meredith brightly.

Mr. Buddle compressed his lips grimly.

He said, his eyes glinting a little: "Any boy who interrupts again during my English lesson will be detained for the next half-holiday."

No boy interrupted again during that English lesson, and long before class was dismissed Mr. Buddle had forgotten all about that strange message in the school magazine. In fact, he had no cause to think of it again until the next morning.

* * *

Mr. Buddle had just put the finishing touches to his early morning toilet when the telephone rang in his study which was adjoining his bedroom. Wondering who on earth could be ringing

him at seven-thirty in the morning, Mr. Buddle hurried into the study to take the call.

An autocratic voice came over the wires.

"This is the Headmaster, Mr. Buddle."

"Yes, Headmaster?" said Mr. Buddle in surprise.

"I shall be glad if you will step over to Mr. Fromo's house, Mr. Buddle," came the voice of the Headmaster of Slade. "It seems that some person has daubed paint on his front door."

"Paint on his front door!" echoed Mr. Buddle incredulously.

"That is what I said, Mr. Buddle," said the Headmaster irritably. "Mr. Fromo is much disturbed, and telephoned to me. I am unable to go over at this moment. Will you kindly step round to Mr. Fromo's house and see what has happened?"

"Certainly, Mr. Scarlet, I will go at once."

Mr. Buddle rang off. He glanced through his window where daylight was beginning to light up the scene. It was foggy and cold outside, and with something of a grunt Mr. Buddle donned a thick overcoat and a scarf. A few moments later he left the School House. With knitted brows, he strode along the Mulberry Walk which was a paved way beside the main school building.

Mr. Fromo, who was Housemaster at Slade, was a married man. He lived in a house which had been built on to the main buildings in comparatively recent times. Slade itself was a majestic pile, dating back to early Georgian days, but various additions had been made to it with the passing of time. Mr. Fromo's house was the most recent, and though an effort had been made by the builders to make it fit in fairly well with its surroundings, there were plenty of people who disliked the newer structure which has been added to the historic one. Old Slade boys, in particular, raised their eyebrows and made disgusted comments when they saw the house which had been added to accommodate the Housemaster of Slade.

During the summer vacation Mr. Fromo had had the paint-work of his house changed from a sombre brown to a striking buttercup, and even the present generation of Slade boys had been heard to voice their disapproval of the colour scheme.

It was full daylight by now, and as Mr. Buddle hurried down the Mulberry Walk he saw a group of Slade seniors standing before the open door of Mr. Fromo's house. Antrobus and Tomms, both of whom made a fetish of physical fitness, were wearing track suits and had obviously been for an early morning run. Also in the group, Mr. Buddle recognised Scarlet, Irony, Vanderlyn and Carslake. They were muffled up against the cold, and had probably been walking in the quadrangle to improve their appetites for breakfast.

As Mr. Buddle hastened up to them, the seniors saluted him respectfully.

"What is the trouble, Antrobus?" demanded Mr. Buddle of the Captain of Slade.

Antrobus moved to one side, and indicated the front door which was standing open.

"Someone has done this in the night, sir," he said.

When Mr. Buddle had last seen Mr. Fromo's front door it had been shining with its pristine buttercup enamel finish. Now someone had spoiled considerably the effect of that pristine finish. In brilliant red paint, somebody

had drawn a huge cross, running from each corner and meeting in the middle of the door. The result was an outsize 'X.'

"Calamity!" gasped Mr. Buddle, aghast.

"Bring out your dead!" came a voice, and Mr. Buddle swung round frowning to see who had spoken. However, at that moment, Mr. Fromo came down the hall of the house and through the doorway. He looked grim and angry. His large nose had taken on a grape bloom tinge as it always did when he was angry.

He said sharply: "You see what some vandal has done, Mr. Buddle?"

Mr. Buddle spoke sympathetically. "I see it, sir. It is disgraceful. The Headmaster asked me to come across to see you, and then to make a report to him."

Mr. Fromo sniffed.

"I thought the Headmaster would wish to see this personally. I want his permission to ring up the police."

Mr. Buddle looked troubled. He said: "I should not act precipitately, sir. If a Slade boy is responsible for this --"

"A Slade boy?" Mr. Fromo raised his bushy eyebrows. "No Slade boy would commit an act of vandalism of this kind. It must be some passing hooligan, or a lout from the village."

Mr. Buddle shook his head doubtfully, and it was Antrobus who spoke.

"I'd like to think it wasn't a Slade fellow, sir, but I just can't see an outsider scaling the walls with a pot of paint to daub on your door."

"I agree with you, Antrobus," said Mr. Buddle.

He moved forward and lightly touched the paint which had been applied in the shape of a cross on the buttercup surface.

"This red paint is tacky," he observed. "In my opinion, Mr. Fromo, this wanton act was committed late last night. It has dried very slowly in the foggy atmosphere. If the paint had been put on in the past few hours, it would still be wet."

Several of the seniors stepped up and touched the red streaks. Some of them were grinning.

"The boy who has done this must be found," said Mr. Fromo in a grinding voice. "He must be expelled from Slade and his parents compelled to pay for the damage done."

"First catch your hare," murmured Irony, and there was a slight chuckle.

"Parmint has paint of this type," ejaculated Mr. Fromo. "I remember seeing him apply red paint to seats on the top of the sports pavilion early this term."

"The school porter could not be guilty of a stupid act of this kind, Mr. Fromo," protested Mr. Buddle.

"I'm not suggesting that he could!" said Mr. Fromo frostily. "We can at least ascertain whether any of his paint is missing from his shed. This is a serious matter, Mr. Buddle."

"Quite!" said Mr. Buddle. He turned to the Captain of Slade. "Antrobus, perhaps you will enquire from Parmint and see whether he has missed any paint."

"May I speak, sir?" said Vanderlyn. "It seems to me, sir, that if some fellow has been sloshing paint about in the dark, he may well have got some of it on his hands or his clothes. It might be worth a check."

Mr. Fromo nodded his head in approval.

"A good suggestion, Vanderlyn! Whoever did this may well have got spots on his shoes. A thorough investigation must be made."

There was the sound of a bell ringing.

"There's the first breakfast bell," said Mr. Buddle. He turned to Mr. Fromo. "Do you wish me to make a report to Mr. Scarlet, sir, or will you walk across to the Headmaster's study yourself?"

Mr. Fromo grunted. He scowled at the red cross on his front door. After a brief pause he said:

"I think I had better go in person to see the Headmaster. This is a serious matter and serious steps must be taken to find the villain who has done this wretched piece of vandalism. Antrobus, please go to the Porter's Lodge and ask Parmint whether any paint is missing from his stock."

"I'll do that sir," said the Captain of Slade.

The small crowd dispersed. Fellows drifted towards the main school building through the November mist.

Antrobus and Scarlet hurried away to the porter's lodge, and Mr. Buddle went with them. It turned out that Mr. Parmint, the porter at Slade, had missed a pot of red paint.

"I missed it several days ago. I thought I had thrown it away by mistake," he said helpfully. "A two-pound tin, it was, though I'd used more than half of it."

"Where do you keep your paint?" asked Mr. Buddle.

Parmint jerked a thumb over his shoulder.

"The stores room is at the back of the lodge, sir. I lock it up at night, but it's left open all day. I'm often popping in and out for something or other."

"Have you seen anyone hanging about outside the stores room in the last day or two?" queried Michael Scarlet.

"Not that I recall, sir," replied Parmint, shaking his head.

The two seniors returned to the main School House, and Mr. Buddle walked with them.

"It seems such a senseless thing for anyone to have done," said Antrobus. "Whoever did it must have got rid of the paint pot and the brush somewhere? If we can find those, we may be well on the way to landing on the culprit."

In the Sixth-Form corridor, Scarlet and Antrobus entered the Captain's study, while Mr. Buddle pursued his way towards his own quarters. He had, however, only covered a few yards when he heard a shout behind him. Mr. Buddle turned.

Michael Scarlet - known to all and sundry as Pinky-Mi - was standing in the doorway of the Captain's study.

"Will you step here a moment, sir?" he called.

Mr. Buddle retraced his steps, and entered the study. Antrobus stood by the table, his face pale with anger. He pointed to the table. Mr. Buddle's eyebrows lifted and his mouth opened at what he saw.

Antrobus's table was covered with a rather nice blue cloth, fringed with tassels. The Captain of Slade liked the little niceties of life and his study was well furnished. Some person unknown had now added to the effect.

In the centre of the blue table-cloth stood a paint-pot. It was upside down. An unsightly pool of red paint surrounded the reversed pot. Just clear of the pool of red paint has been placed a card - a white card with broad black edging. In the centre of the card, in ink, was just one symbol - a large 'X.'

* * *

For the moment, the affair did not cause so much stir in the school as Mr. Fromo - and possibly Antrobus, as well - thought it should have done. Only

a handful of boys were acquainted, first-hand, with what had happened, though the news was spreading quickly, causing much speculation as it spread. Mr. Fromo thought, privately, that the Headmaster was dealing rather inadequately with the matter. Truth to tell, though Mr. Scarlet deplored the action of some persons unknown, he had looked unfavourably upon Mr. Fromo's colour scheme, and he now took the opportunity of advising the Housemaster that the door of his house should be re-decorated in a shade more fitting with the decorum of Slade.

Antrobus, naturally, was infuriated at the ruin to his table-cover, as well as by the impudence of the vandal in going into action in the study of the Captain of the School. Antrobus enquired diligently, but without any result. The culprit had hidden his trail well.

Antrobus had left his study before seven that morning. He was quite certain that there was no paint on his table then. It was clear that, after the skipper had left for his sprint, some person unknown, taking advantage of the darkness and the fact that the rising-bell did not ring till seven-thirty during the winter, had entered the study silently and stealthily, and then had left it just as silently and stealthily, leaving the paint behind him. Mr. Fromo asked, hopefully, who could have known that Antrobus would be going for an early morning run. The answer provided no clue. Everybody in the school seemed to know that the skipper often went for sprints with Tomms before breakfast.

After lunch, on the day when Mr. Fromo's front-door and Antrobus's table-cloth were disfigured, Mr. Buddle made his way to the Sixth Form corridor to the study of Peter-Roy Shannon, the youthful editor of the school magazine. Mr. Buddle found Shannon there, pounding away at a typewriter at his table. The editor of "The Sladeian" spent a good deal of his time pounding away at his hard-worked Remington.

Shannon looked up in surprise as Mr. Buddle entered.

"I want a few words with you, Shannon," said Mr. Buddle.

Shannon rose to his feet politely, as the schoolmaster closed the study door. There was a serious expression on Mr. Buddle's face.

"I presume, Shannon, that you have heard of the damage which has been done to Mr. Fromo's property, and to that of the Captain of the School?"

"Yes, sir." Shannon's eyes danced with fun behind his glasses. "It's going though the school like fire in a gorse bush. It's news, sir! I'm just writing up an account for the next issue of the mag."

Mr. Buddle frowned.

"I suggest that you do nothing of the sort, Shannon. An account of anything of this kind would be nothing but sensationalism."

"Oh, sir, not much happens at school, and anything like this --"

Mr. Buddle raised his hand.

"Reports of violence and vandalism serve no purpose but to encourage imitators," he said sourly. "I suppose you realise, Shannon, that this affair must be connected with the announcement which you inserted in the latest issue of the school magazine?"

"I suppose so, sir. I didn't insert it, sir."

"You must have accepted it at any rate," snapped Mr. Buddle. "Who asked you to publish that advertisement, Shannon?"

"Nobody asked me, sir," said Shannon indignantly. "It went in without my knowing anything about it. I never

saw it until I was reading through the magazine after it was printed."

Mr. Buddle stared at him.

"How could that possibly be?" he demanded.

"I packed up the parcel of 'copy' ready for the printers a week ago, sir. That advertisement was not among the items. I can swear to that. I packed the parcel on the Wednesday evening, and left it here on my study table. The next morning, Mr. Ness, the printer, sent his boy over before breakfast, as he always does, and I gave him the parcel."

"Does Mr. Ness send back your original 'copy' with the printed magazines?" asked Mr. Buddle. He was eyeing the senior dubiously.

"Yes, sir." Shannon crossed to a shelf and picked up a little pile of manuscripts. He pulled out a sheet from the heap, and handed it to Mr. Buddle. "That's it, sir! But I never knew anything about it. Some cheeky sweep put it in without my knowledge."

Mr. Buddle scanned the sheet thoughtfully. Typed in the centre in black was the announcement from "The Mysterious X." At the top, in the corner, was typed, in red, the instruction: "Full-page advertisement. Can be placed anywhere in the magazine."

There was silence for a few moments in the study. Then Mr. Buddle said slowly:

"Have you no idea who inserted this, Shannon?"

"None whatever, sir. Somebody unpacked my parcel of 'copy,' and slipped it in."

Mr. Buddle gave him a sharp look.

"Was this sheet typed on your machine, Shannon?"

Shannon smiled, with a slightly mocking expression.

"No, sir! It wasn't! My type is larger than that. Several of the fellows have typewriters, but I'm pretty certain that this notice was typed on Mr. Crayford's machine." He jerked another sheet of paper from the heap of copy. "This is Mr. Crayford's account of the boxing tournament. He uses a black and red ribbon, and you can see that the capital 'T' is out of alighment."

Mr. Buddle examined both sheets carefully.

"I think you are right, Shannon," he said at last. "I should think it likely that both these sheets were typed on the same typewriter." He eyed Shannon thoughtfully, and added: "It is remarkable that you were able to note the similarity."

"It's just that I'm observant, sir," said Shannon demurely.

* * *

Mr. Buddle discussed the matter with the Headmaster. They both inspected Mr. Crayford's typewriter, much to the annoyance of the games master.

"I hope you don't think --" he began hotly.

"Be sensible, Crayford!" said Mr. Scarlet irritably. "Typewriters have all the characteristics of fingerprints, as Mr. Buddle said. Nobody thinks for one moment that you had anything to do with the childish vandalism. Some boy obviously entered your room and used your machine while you were absent."

"The young --," ejaculated Crayford, luckily biting off the final word before he uttered it.

"The guilty boy must be found and punished, Mr. Buddle," said Mr. Scarlet sternly.

"Yes, sir, I agree." Mr. Buddle rubbed his nose in perplexity. "One of the seniors - I think it was Vanderlyn -

made what I think a sensible suggestion. He mentioned that anyone using paint, as this unknown person did, may very well have got smears of it on his clothing. Would some form of examination be possible, Headmaster?"

"An excellent idea!" said Mr. Scarlet with approval.

So, while the majority of the Slade boys were in their classes that afternoon, the prefects carried out a wide inspection. Studies were examined, coats hanging in the cloak-rooms were gone over minutely, soiled shirts and other items in the matron's laundry-baskets were inspected. In the class-rooms, the various masters scanned jacket-cuffs and shoes.

Nothing was found to indicate the identity of the Mysterious 'X.' Throughout the school that evening, there was much chuckling and speculation as to whether 'X' might strike again.

The days slipped by. Happenings at school are quickly forgotten. The identity of the Mysterious 'X' had not been discovered, and the subject had dropped out as a general basis of gossip. Then, one bright Wednesday afternoon, following a foggy night and a morning of misty sunshine, Slade was reminded sensationally that there was a mysterious wrongdoer in their midst.

Early in the afternoon, Mr. Crathie, the science master, went round to the school garages to collect his Austin. He was astounded to find, stuck on each of his headlamps, a white card, with broad black edging, with the letter 'X' inked firmly in the centre. Mr. Crathie panted with wrath. Exactly one minute later he let escape several expressions which were not really expected to be in the vocabulary of a dignified schoolmaster. All four of his tyres were flat. With his anticipated excursion for that afternoon definitely off, Mr. Crathie hastened to his study to ring up an Everslade garage for assistance, and then stamped along to convey his complaint to the Headmaster.

Half an hour later the same afternoon, Mr. Crayford, the games master, strolled round to the school garage to get his motor-cycle. He had an appointment with a busty young lady in the little village of Brent, some ten miles from the school. Mr. Crayford's motor-cycle started chugging merrily. Then, just as he had adjusted his goggles and his helmet, the engine spluttered and died. It refused to start again. Walking in front of the machine, Mr. Crayford found, stuck to his headlamp, a white, black-edged card, bearing the symbol 'X.' Fuming and swearing, he examined the machine, getting dirty and oily in the process. He discovered that some person unknown had tipped sand into his petrol-tank. It was quite obvious that Mr. Crayford would not be using his machine for several days to come, and the busty young lady of Brent would be disappointed on that particular afternoon at least.

Mr. Crayford, in his turn, dashed off to carry his report to the Headmaster of Slade.

Mr. Scarlet was annoyed, but he attributed the happenings to "some stupid, mischievous boy." Both Mr. Crathie and Mr. Crayford thought that the understatement of the term, but could hardly say so to Mr. Scarlet. Later, Mr. Crathie observed, privately, to Mr. Crayford that he thought the Headmaster was doing less than his duty, and Mr. Crayford observed to Mr. Crathie that "old Pink was an incompetent, doddering old fool."

The Headmaster instructed his prefects to make stringent enquiries,

and to ascertain whether any boy had been seen anywhere in the vicinity of the school garages. The prefects duly carried out their enquiries, more or less diligently. Nothing was discovered.

That evening, Mr. Buddle sat in his study for some time, engaged in deep thought. Then he sent for Meredith of the Lower Fourth.

* * *

Mr. Buddle frowned upon the fair-haired youth who stood before him.

"You have kept me waiting, Meredith," he said.

Meredith looked sulky.

"I'm sorry, sir. We were playing table-tennis in the Day Room."

"Your form-master is of more importance than table-tennis," said Mr. Buddle. He coughed and then blew his nose. Sitting at his table under the cosily-shaded electric light, he stared hard at the innocent-looking youth.

Mr. Buddle said, at last: "I want to speak to you about this vandalism that is going on in the school, Meredith. Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes, sir, I know all about it," said Meredith placidly. "The Mysterious 'X' declared war on Slade in the school rag. It's rather a lark, isn't it, sir? The chap's got plenty of nerve."

"It is anything but a lark, Meredith," said Mr. Buddle severely. "If I remember rightly, you read a paper named the Gem. I seem to recall that you once had a Gem which contained a story about a Mysterious 'X.'"

There was a glimmer in Meredith's blue eyes.

"Yes, sir. The Captain Mellish series, sir. 'X' was a burglar, sir, and Ferrers Locke, the detective, caught him out in the end."

Mr. Buddle nodded. For a moment he sat silent. Then he said:

"I hope, Meredith, that you have not been misguided enough to attempt to imitate the activities of that Mysterious 'X' of fiction. I need hardly tell you that when the boy is discovered --"

Meredith's eyes opened wide.

"Me, sir? Me, the Mysterious 'X?' I wouldn't have the nerve, sir. Besides, the Mysterious 'X' in the Gem was a burglar. Not a bit like our Mysterious 'X.'"

He sounded sincere enough, and Mr. Buddle coughed again.

"What you say is true, Meredith. All the same, if that Gem has given you ideas for this stupidity --"

"It's nothing to do with me, sir," said Meredith, his voice rising a little. "It's not fair to try to land it on me, just because I read the Gem. I daresay there are plenty of other Slade men who read the Gem."

"Possibly - but do not raise your voice, Meredith. That Mysterious 'X' story in the Gem was a very old one." Mr. Buddle was speaking slowly. "You happened to read it because your father has a collection of the old papers. It is most unlikely that any modern reader would know the story."

"A senior might. Pinky-Mi reads the Gem. He could easily have had that one."

Mr. Buddle spoke sharply.

"If you mean Scarlet of the Sixth, Meredith, he cannot have been born at the time that story was published in the Gem periodical. You must not say things like that about a Slade prefect."

Meredith looked sullen.

"Well, you said it was me, sir. It wasn't!"

"I did not say it was you, Meredith," said Mr. Buddle. He spoke mildly. "I was merely warning you."

"I don't need to be warned not to do something that might get me bunked from Slade. It wasn't me, sir."

"It was not I, Meredith."

"Of course it wasn't you, sir. It wasn't me, either."

Mr. Buddle sighed.

"Plenty of the men think it might be Shannon," volunteered Meredith suddenly.

"Shannon?" Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows. "Why should they think it was Shannon?"

"Hot news for the school magazine!" said Meredith. "Shannon's writing reams about it, all the time, so the fellows say. It's as likely to be him as me. Can I go, please, sir?"

"You may go, Meredith!"

And Meredith went, leaving Mr. Buddle in troubled thought.

* * *

News of the latest outrages of the Mysterious 'X' spread through the school quickly. Once again there was considerable amusement and speculation.

"Somebody must be getting out at night and doing all this," said Antrobus, in the Sixth Form Common Room.

"The Head ought to have the prefects patrolling the quad all night," said Shannon. "Send out pairs of 'em, for two hours at a time."

"If the Head thinks I'm going to lose my beauty sleep, he's got another think coming," commented Irony.

"If that chap isn't detected soon, we shall have other lunatics imitating him," said Vanderlyn.

"A whole family of little X's," added Restarick.

"It's really serious! put in Pinky-Mi. "It's time something was done."

In the Junior Day Room something like excitement prevailed.

"I bet it's Carslake of the Fifth," said Garmansway. "Everybody knows he's half-way round the bend."

There was a delighted chuckle.

"I plump for the Gump," said Brazenbean happily. "He hates Crayford. I bet the Mysterious 'X' is old Buddle."

A day or two passed, and before the excitement had died, there was a fresh sensation. Mr. Greenleaf, the senior mathematics master, received an envelope through the post on the Monday morning. The envelope was typewritten. Later, it was discovered that it had been typed on Mr. Crayford's machine. The envelope contained nothing but the now familiar white card with the black edging and the large 'X' inscribed in the centre.

Mr. Greenleaf wondered, rather anxiously, what it meant. He was soon to know. Later that day, at intervals, he received visits from the representatives of four different insurance companies. Those representatives came from Plymouth. They had been given to understand, by telephone, that Mr. Greenleaf wished to take out substantial life-insurance policies. They took a great deal of convincing that Mr. Greenleaf had no wish for life insurance, and they wasted a great deal of his time. He rushed to the Headmaster finally, and Mr. Scarlet, much incensed, instructed the school porter to lock the gates and admit nobody who called to see the unhappy Mr. Greenleaf.

Soon after tea, Mr. Greenleaf's telephone rang. When he answered it, a gruff voice said: "Hallo, Greenleaf. This is 'X.' Give my love to the man from the 'Pru!'"

"Who are you?" hissed Mr. Greenleaf.

"X," came the reply, and the caller rang off.

It was on the last day of November that Mr. Drayne, the master of the Third Form, received his envelope through the post. It contained nothing but the black-edged card bearing the hallmark of the Mysterious 'X.' Mr. Drayne sped with it to the Headmaster who, irritable and annoyed, sent for Mr. Crayford and Mr. Buddle.

"This is intolerable - quite and utterly intolerable," said the Headmaster. "Mr. Buddle! Please inspect this envelope and tell me whether, in your opinion, it was typed on Mr. Crayford's machine?"

Mr. Buddle was soon voicing the opinion that it had, indeed, been typed on Mr. Crayford's machine.

"It's not my fault," moaned Crayford. "It can't have been typed on my machine."

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Scarlet.

"I tell you I've kept my door locked, my typewriter locked, and everything else locked," hooted the games master.

"Don't shout, Crayford! You have clearly been grossly careless," said Mr. Scarlet icily, venting on Crayford the wrath he would like to have vented on the Mysterious 'X.'

"Sir," said Mr. Buddle, pacifically, "I am sure that Mr. Crayford is speaking the truth. This envelope, like that sent to Mr. Greenleaf, was typed on Crayford's machine, but I think it likely that it was typed some weeks ago, before Crayford had any thought of the necessity of locking up his quarters. This vexatious business was obviously planned well in advance."

One day later, on the first of December, Mr. Drayne knew the meaning of the warning card he had received from 'X.' A large carton arrived, delivered by Carter Paterson from a Plymouth firm. When Mr. Drayne opened the carton he found it contained the entire Encyclopaedia Britannica, latest edition. It was a massive work, running to a great many volumes. The bill, a substantial one, was enclosed with the carton.

Mr. Drayne went fuming to Mr. Scarlet. The Plymouth firm was contacted. It transpired that somebody, assuming the personality of Mr. Drayne, had ordered the Encyclopaedias by telephone. The Plymouth firm became quite unpleasant, suspecting that a schoolmaster, who should have known better, had ordered the work and then changed his mind. It cost Mr. Drayne the price of a journey to Plymouth before he convinced the vendors that he did not want the volumes and had not ordered them. It also cost him a considerable sum in carriage charges when he had re-packed and returned the volumes to their reluctant owners.

"Some young fool has got his knife in all the beaks," said Crayford in the Masters' Common Room. "Some little squirt of a junior, I'll be bound."

"Meredith, of Buddle's form, is a repulsive boy with asinine propensities," remarked Mr. Fromo, acidly.

Mr. Buddle looked up from the newspaper he was reading.

"It could not possibly be Meredith, Mr. Fromo," he said.

"Huh!" grunted Mr. Fromo.

"You wait till it's your turn," said Crayford with a vindictive chuckle. "This 'X,' whoever he is, is gunning after all the resident staff. Your turn will come, Buddle."

"Possibly!" murmured Mr. Buddle.

He returned to his newspaper.

* * *

A few days later two large crosses were discovered to be making their appearance on one of the football pitches on the senior side of the playing fields. The crosses were unsightly, and it took no stretch of imagination to link them with the activities of the notorious Mysterious 'X.' It was Fleet, the Slade groundsman, who drew the attention of Antrobus to the phenomena.

"What is it?" demanded the Captain of Slade, viewing the desecration of the grass with some anxiety. The last First Eleven game of the term - the match with Sutherby - was due to be played in less than a week's time.

"Weed-killer," replied the groundsman, laconically. "Some young sweep has been walking up and down with a can of weed-killer. Looks unsightly, don't it? And it'll look worse before it's better. Won't spoil your matches, of course."

"I hope the blighter has left the cricket pitches alone," said Antrobus. He and the groundsman walked round the senior cricket table, carefully roped in for the winter between the two soccer pitches. So far the table looked all right, and Antrobus hoped for the best.

But at the same time a similar cross - the hallmark of the unknown 'X' who had made that half-term memorable for Slade - suddenly took shape in the centre of the well-kept lawn in the Headmaster's private garden. Mr. Scarlet could scarcely believe his own eyes, and he was icily angry when he learned from his gardener that some vandal had been at work with weed-killer, as in the case of the senior football-pitch.

The school was seething now with excitement and something like awe.

"I shouldn't like to be in his bags when they catch up with him," remarked Pilgrim, Head Boy of the Lower Fourth.

"It's rather eerie to think that somebody is looking on, and, inside him, he's laughing fit to bust," said Meredith.

"Like Crippen!" added Garmansway, with relish but obscure relevance.

At the moment, there was no other subject of conversation in the school but the Mysterious 'X.'

At Roll Call that evening Mr. Scarlet addressed the assembled school. He invited anybody who could throw any light on the recent occurrences to step forward for the sake of the good name of the school. Nobody responded. He invited anyone who might have committed "these acts of vandalism in some misguided spirit of adventure" to make himself known so that some clemency for the offender might be considered. Nobody availed himself of the kind invitation.

With knitted brows and deep tones he finished up by instructing masters, prefects, and anyone who valued the name of Slade to step up investigation so that the rascal could be unmasked. It all sounded most dramatic.

A little later Mr. Buddle walked along to the Sixth Form corrider and stopped outside the study of Michael Scarlet. There was the sound of voices within the room. Mr. Buddle tapped on the door, and someone called out "Come in."

The schoolmaster opened the door and entered. Michael Scarlet, the Headmaster's son, was lounging in an armchair before a glowing electric fire. Seated on the table, swinging his long legs, was Vanderlyn. Both seniors rose to their feet when they saw Mr. Buddle.

"If you are not busy, Scarlet --" began Mr. Buddle.

Pinky-Mi smiled

"I don't look very busy, do I, sir? I must get down to work. Van and I were just making surmises about that

damage done in the playing fields."

"A stupid business," said Mr. Buddle gravely. "I gather that weed-killer was used. Most dangerous stuff to play around with. Presumably somebody went to the playing fields after dark."

"It gets dark early now," said Vanderlyn. "It's dark by four o'clock but the school gates aren't locked till six. The gates to the playing fields are locked earlier, but anyone could force a way through the hedges." He moved to the door. "I suppose you want to talk to Scarlet, sir. I'll clear."

Mr. Buddle nodded absent-mindedly. He watched Vanderlyn as the tall senior with the tow-coloured hair left the study. It was not so long ago that Mr. Buddle had saved Pinky-Mi and Vanderlyn from the results of their own folly. He had found no cause to regret his leniency on that occasion. In Pinky-Mi, in particular, Mr. Buddle took a great interest.

"Sit down, sir," said Pinky-Mi. Mr. Buddle did so, and the senior waited for him to speak.

"You get on well with Vanderlyn?" enquired Mr. Buddle, obliquely.

"Pretty well, sir. He's not a fellow who makes friends easily, but we've some things in common. His parents are parted, which makes life difficult - and as for me --"

Pinky-Mi broke off. He coloured a little as he met Mr. Buddle's steady gaze. The little schoolmaster brushed an imaginary bit of fluff off the sleeve of his coat. He knew what Pinky-Mi meant. It was not all honey to be the son of the Head of Slade. Any other senior could relax at times. More was expected of the Headmaster's son than of the others. He could not write home and blow off steam to his parents. They were always with him. In term-time, they were so near and yet so far. Even in vacation time he could never be anything but the son of the Head of Slade. There was no respite.

True, Mrs. Scarlet was a pleasant little woman, but she was overawed by her husband. Mr. Scarlet was a great scholar, a pedant, severe in his standards. Fond though he was of Michael, he had never understood him. Mr. Buddle had observed those things for years, as he watched Pinky-Mi going up through the school. He had always been sorry for the Headmaster's son.

He said, mildly: "It is as well if we count our blessings sometimes, Scarlet. It is all too easy to be sorry for oneself."

Pinky-Mi smiled faintly, and nodded.

Mr. Buddle changed the subject abruptly.

"Meredith of my form reads a paper named the Gem. You, yourself, are acquainted with this paper, Scarlet. Do you recall a set of stories in the Gem about a character who gave himself the title of 'The Mysterious X?'"

Pinky-Mi looked startled. He stared at Mr. Buddle.

"I don't think so, sir. Was there such a story?"

"There was, Scarlet. It appeared a good many years ago, probably before you were sitting up and taking notice. You don't know the story, then?

Pinky-Mi wrinkled his youthful brows.

"There have been so many. It is hard to remember them all."

"Do you retain your copies, Scarlet?"

Pinky-Mi gave a light shrug of his shoulders.

"Yes, I've got a hundred or so -

packed up in parcels. I keep them under my bed." He indicated the curtained alcove where his bed was placed, and gave a dry chuckle. "Just sentiment, this keeping of old treasures. I don't suppose I shall ever read them again."

Mr. Buddle rose to his feet.

"I mustn't keep you from your work, Scarlet. As I said, Meredith of my form has read that old Mysterious 'X' story in the Gem. I must confess that I wondered whether it might have given him - shall we say? - ideas."

Scarlet stood up. He rubbed his chin, and gnawed his upper lip for a moment.

He said: "It doesn't make sense, sir. A kid like Meredith couldn't have caused all this upset. This Mysterious 'X,' whoever he is, has thought things out to the last detail. He's jolly clever. It couldn't be Meredith."

Mr. Buddle smiled sourly.

He said softly: "You must not under-estimate Meredith. He is quite clever!"

* * *

Term was growing old. There was only a week to go to the start of the Christmas vacation. The end of term examinations were over, and masters had been busy marking papers and sketching out reports. As the boys, juniors and seniors, become more and more light-hearted as the vacation approached, so the masters became touchier and testier as they began to feel the need of a change from their duties.

Once again the Mysterious 'X' was fading out as a topic of gossip, being replaced by the anticipation of the festive season which was coming nearer. Then, suddenly, on Parents' Day, the school was reminded yet again of the mystery man who had been making himself such a nuisance since half-term.

On Parents' Day, proud relatives and friends descended on Slade soon after lunch. Boys entertained happy Mums and Dads and Aunts and Uncles, and the masters mingled with the throng and exchanged confidences and passed opinions.

At four o'clock in the afternoon it was customary for all to assemble in Big Hall for speeches, after which a buffet tea was provided in the dining-hall before the parents went off in their cars or by taxi to the railway station.

Big Hall was equipped with an extensive stage at one end, with striking red curtains and tabs. The auditorium of Big Hall was fully illuminated but the stage was only dimly lit as the Headmaster, followed by two school governors and the Member of Parliament for Plymouth, went on to the stage and took their seats at the front. The governors and the Member would all have their say, being either facetious or unctuous, but it would make a pleasant end-of-term interlude, all being duly reported in the "Plymouth Bugle," the representative of which paper sat among the audience in the front row. Behind the Headmaster, on the stage, sat the resident and visiting teaching staff of Slade. It was an impressive assembly.

Through the ranks of the schoolboys, accompanied by their parents and friends, there ran a murmur as the Headmaster struck a small bell on a table before him on the stage. The headlights were switched on by Mr. Parmint, out of sight at the rear. The Headmaster rose in his place as the stage lights came on overhead.

Then Parmint switched on the footlights. There was a distant pop, and the whole stage was plunged into darkness. A delighted chuckle ran through the audience.

The Headmaster could be seen on the stage in the shaded light thrown by the auditorium illumination.

"Just a fuse!" he said, patiently. "It will be repaired in a few moments."

There was a gentle applause.

Hurriedly, Parmint went off to the fusebox. He mended the fuse. He returned, and switched on the stage headlights. The audience clapped. The Headmaster rose again. Parmint switched on the footlights, and this time there was a louder pop, a distant flash, and every light in Big Hall went out.

There was confusion, laughing, bumping and bustling in the darkness.

This time the main fuse had blown. The whole of Slade was blacked out.

"Can't open the main fuse box. It's sealed!" reported Parmint. "We'll have to ring up the electricity works."

Mr. Scarlet groped his way to his study to ring up the electricity department in Everslade to ask for assistance. The electricity department said they would send out an engineer. It was an hour before he arrived. It took him two further hours to trace the fault which had caused the main fuse to blow.

Long before that time the large crowd of parents and friends, the two school governors, and the Member of Parliament had left the school, dimly lit out by the flickering light of candles brought from the domestic regions and by a dozen or so electric torches. The Speech Day programme had, of necessity, been abandoned.

At seven o'clock the electrician traced the fault, and, at long last, the school lights came on again, and Slade returned, more or less, to normal.

The electrician explained the fault to Mr. Scarlet. In the long row of footlights, somebody had removed a bulb, inserted a farthing into the holder, and then replaced the bulb. As soon as the footlights were switched on, a short occurred, blowing the stage fuse on the first occasion and the main fuse on the second.

Behind the bulb, slipped in against the footlight screen, was a white card with black edging. It bore the symbol 'X.'

* * *

The next morning the Headmaster addressed the assembled school. Pale with suppressed anger, he held up a farthing. He spoke in tones which seemed to come from a refrigerator.

"Yesterday, our Slade Speech Day, was ruined by the act of some boy at present unknown. This coin was placed in an electric holder with the deliberate intention of ruining a function which should be the pride of every member of this college. I order the owner of this farthing to step forth and claim it."

Nobody stepped forward. There was deathly silence in the Hall. Nobody even shuffled a foot.

Mr. Scarlet lowered his hand.

"When this boy is discovered --" his voice rose. "--and he <u>will</u> be discovered - he will be expelled from Slade at once, and leave the school within the hour. We clearly have in our midst someone who is a lunatic. My staff is not trained - and I am not trained - to deal with the mentally deficient. That is all! Dismiss!"

A little later, he addressed the staff and the prefects.

"It astounds me," he said bitterly, "that, despite all your efforts, nobody in the school has the slightest idea as to who is responsible for these insane outrages."

But Mr. Scarlet was wrong.

The Mysterious 'X' himself knew who he was - and Mr. Buddle was beginning to have a very good idea.

* * *

"Correspondence cards, with fairly broad black edging," said Mr. Buddle. "Do you happen to stock anything of the sort, Mr. Troke?"

Mr. Troke was the only newsagent and stationer in Everslade. His counters formed three sides of a square. The right-hand counter had a disply of newspapers and the latest issues of periodicals and magazines. From the centre counter Mr. Troke sold tobacco of various brands and all the paraphernalia of the smoker. On the counter at the left there was a show of writing pads, envelopes, fountain pens, picture postcards, and the like. Mr. Troke was a pleasant, obliging man, and he did a good trade in his shop.

It was Wednesday morning - cold, gloomy, with a threat of snow in the still air. Mr. Buddle had had no English lesson to conduct for the final session, and he had arranged for a taxi to be waiting for him at eleven o'clock. The run to Everslade by taxi had taken but little more than ten minutes.

Mr. Troke rubbed his small button of a nose.

"I think I know what you mean, Mr. Buddle. Memorial cards, I believe they call them. I might have some, somewhere. They are, of course, out of fashion these days. Have been for years."

"I suppose so," murmured Mr. Buddle.

"You have not been bereaved, I hope," said Mr. Troke.

"Only very indirectly," admitted Mr. Buddle.

"Good!" said Mr. Troke with satisfaction. "Let me see what I can find."

He went round to his stationery counter, and disappeared underneath. Mr. Buddle could hear drawers being opened and shut as Mr. Troke rummaged through his stock. While the newsagent searched patiently, the schoolmaster glanced over the periodicals on the other counter.

After a minute or so Mr. Troke gave a grunt of satisfaction. He rose to his feet and placed a small packet of cards on the counter.

"Is that the kind of thing you're after, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Buddle picked up the packet, and nodded his approval. There were about a dozen white cards, with a broad black edging to each. The cards were made into a packet by a narrow paper band on which was printed "Wreath Cards."

"This is just the thing, Mr. Troke. I will take this packet. How much do I owe you?"

"Say sixpence, sir. We used to sell those cards at a penny each, but nobody asks for them now."

Mr. Buddle handed over sixpence, and Mr. Troke slipped the packet into a bag for his customer.

"You haven't sold any of this type of thing recently, Mr. Troke?" enquired Mr. Buddle carelessly.

Mr. Troke smiled.

"Not for years, sir. It's all very old stock."

"I suppose large stationers in the towns might still stock them?" hazarded Mr. Buddle.

"Possibly, sir, possibly. It's surprising what people ask for, now and then."

After a few more comments, Mr. Buddle went out to his taxi, and had himself driven back to Slade.

* * *

Mr. Buddle had his lunch, and then he strolled away to the Sixth Form corridor. A senior was coming along the corridor, muffled up against the wintry elements outside.

"Oh, Restarick," said Mr. Buddle. "Can you tell me which study is Vanderlyn's?"

"No. 15, sir. Right at the end of the passage."

"Thank you, Restarick. You are venturing out in this weather? Snow is coming, I think."

"I'm going for a cycle spin with Mell, sir. Can't waste the last half-holiday of the term. We won't go too far in case it snows."

Mr. Buddle smiled and nodded. The senior went on his way, and Mr. Buddle moved on to the end of the corridor. He tapped at the door of No. 15, and entered.

Vanderlyn, the lanky, tow-haired senior was seated at the table writing a letter. He looked up at Mr. Buddle in surprise.

"I am disturbing you, Vanderlyn? No, please do not rise."

Mr. Buddle closed the door, and Vanderlyn waited for him to speak. It was unusual for the English master to visit the seniors in their studies, and Vanderlyn wondered what was coming.

"I have been thinking over this Mysterious 'X' business, Vanderlyn."

"Yes, sir." The senior gave a wry grin. "Most of us have been thinking about that merchant lately."

"No doubt!" Mr. Buddle's face was worried. "I am speaking to you now in confidence, Vanderlyn. I think I can rely on you."

Vanderlyn stared at him in astonishment.

"I hope so, sir. How can I help?"

"You are a friend of the Headmaster's son - of Scarlet of the Sixth."

"Yes, sir, we're pretty friendly." Vanderlyn's eyes narrowed. "I'm not a chap who makes friends very easily. It's harder if you're not good at sport. It's a bit different in the summer term --" He broke off, and then continued: "Yes, I suppose Pinky is really my best friend here, though he's keen on sport, and I'm not."

"I see!" said Mr. Buddle. "Yes, I see! Vanderlyn, I have had reason to wonder whether this young rascal who calls himself 'X' might, in fact, be Scarlet of the Sixth."

Vanderlyn's rather wide mouth gaped open. He rose to his feet, sheer astonishment evident in his face.

"Pinky-Mi the Mysterious 'X'! It couldn't be, sir!"

"I think it could be!" said Mr. Buddle softly. "There is a matter of a certain story which I believe Scarlet possesses, though that is only one detail."

"Why should Pinky-Mi set the whole school by its ears?" demanded Vanderlyn, with some heat. "He's the Headmaster's son. He would be the last fellow --"

"Yes," said Mr. Buddle. "He is the Headmaster's son. I have realised for a long time that Scarlet finds his position a little onerous. It could be that the unruly conduct of the Mysterious 'X' has a psychological angle."

Vanderlyn stood in silence.

"If," murmured Mr. Buddle, "I had the opportunity to search Scarlet's study without his knowledge, I might find the clue I am seeking."

"Sir!" The colour had risen in Vanderlyn's sallow cheeks. He spoke impetuously. "What could you possibly find in Pinky's study?"

"I might," said Mr. Buddle

gently, "find garments spotted with red paint - gloves which were probably worn when 'X' disfigured the Housemaster's front door. You, yourself, made that suggestion once, Vanderlyn. There is also the possibility of a certain book being found - a story entitled 'Baffled' ---"

"The studies were all searched long ago," said Vanderlyn.

"The prefects searched the studies," agreed Mr. Buddle. "I have no doubt that your own study was searched, but you are not a prefect. Who searched the prefects' studies?"

Vanderlyn shifted uncomfortably.

"I don't know, sir. I don't suppose anybody searched the prefects' studies," he admitted. "I never thought much about it before. It doesn't seem possible that a prefect could be 'X.'"

Mr. Buddle moved across the room and looked reflectively out of the window into the quadrangle where an occasional flake of snow drifted down. Vanderlyn stood watching him.

"There is no football match on this afternoon, I think," said Mr. Buddle.

"No, sir. The last First Eleven game was played on Saturday."

"Then presumably Scarlet will be in his study this afternoon."

"Sure to be, sir! Though we break up tomorrow, the Head still expects his son to be digging into the Classics any half-holiday afternoon, unless there's a school game on." There was the slightest trace of a sneer in the senior's voice.

Mr. Buddle turned round. He spoke deliberately.

"Do you think that you could get Scarlet out of his study for an hour or so this afternoon?" he said.

Vanderlyn gave a start. He looked a little contemptuous.

"I couldn't do that, sir."

"There was a time once," said Mr. Buddle gravely, "when I saved Scarlet from a punishment he deserved. I might be able to do it again. If Scarlet is 'X' - and if I can confront him with it now - I might save him from expulsion later."

Vanderlyn searched Mr. Buddle's face. The senior stood silent for some moments. He said, at last:

"You mean that if you discovered something in Pinky's room to link him with 'X' ---"

"I mean just that, Vanderlyn. I could, possibly, check Scarlet before it is too late for anyone to help him."

Vanderlyn thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. There was a strange light in his unusual green eyes as he stared hard at the schoolmaster. Mr. Buddle stared back at him imperturbably.

"I don't like it, sir," said Vanderlyn.

"I promise you that Scarlet will not suffer as the result of any discovery I may make," said Mr. Buddle gently.

Vanderlyn made up his mind.

"All right, sir. I'll do my best. I've just finished a letter and I want to post it in the town. I'll persuade Pinky to come with me. Antrobus is going over analyses and planning sports fixtures with the games master this afternoon, so he won't be around. Antrobus is Pinky's close pal, of course --" there was a shade of bitterness in Vanderlyn's voice, "--but I reckon Pinky will come into Everslade with me for tea, if I ask him."

"Excellent!" observed Mr. Buddle. He added: "But it is confidential between you and me."

Vanderlyn said, doubtfully:

"You'll let me know if you discover anything, sir?"

Mr. Buddle smiled faintly.

"I will let you know, Vanderlyn. I promise you that."

* * *

Twenty minutes later Mr. Buddle stood at his own study window. It was a grey afternoon, with a leaden sky. The snow which had threatened all day had not yet come.

Two big fellows were walking quickly across the quadrangle towards the school gates. Both wore heavy overcoats, and had the Slade mufflers twisted round their necks. Both wore the Slade senior cap - mauve and white with the large peak which only the seniors were allowed to sport. One had a tassel on his cap, denoting prefectship.

Mr. Buddle recognised them as Scarlet, who was a prefect, and Vanderlyn who was not.

Humming a little tune, Mr. Buddle turned away from the window.

* * *

The early afternoon dusk of mid-December had fallen. On the last evening of term there would be no preparation for any boy to do, and there was plenty of animation and excitement throughout Slade. Outside, the long-threatening snow had commenced to fall heavily, and boys who had been into the village during the afternoon had hurried back to the school.

Mr. Buddle had his tea, and then made his way down into the entrance hall. A group of boys stood chatting at the foot of the big staircase, and another group stood in the doorway looking out into the snowy quadrangle. A few juniors were actually in the quadrangle, enjoying a minor snow-fight in the gloom.

Antrobus was pinning a number of papers on the notice-board, and Mr. Buddle spoke to him.

"Has Scarlet come in yet, do you know, Antrobus?"

"I haven't seen him lately, sir," answered the Captain of Slade. "I believe that he and Vanderlyn went to Everslade for tea." He glanced over at the doorway. "There they are, sir. They're coming in now."

Antrobus left the notice-board, and ran up the staircase. Pinky-Mi and Vanderlyn were just coming in. In the porch they shook snow from themselves, and Pinky-Mi was laughing as he dislodged a chunk of kneaded snow from his cap. Evidently one of the snowballers in the quadrangle had been a good marksman.

Mr. Buddle stood against the notice-board, and the two seniors made their way up the staircase without observing him. Mr. Buddle followed them. In the Sixth-Form corridor, which was on the first floor, Pinky-Mi turned into his own study, and Vanderlyn went on down the corridor to his own room.

A minute or so later Mr. Buddle stopped outside Vanderlyn's study, tapped on the door, and entered.

Vanderlyn had drawn back the curtains which, during the day time, screened his bed in the alcove. He had thrown his cap, scarf, and coat on to the bed, and was standing with his hands to the electric fire.

"Come in, sir," he said. His normally sallow face was ruddy from the brisk walk through the icy lanes. "It's pleasant to get indoors. It's cold outside."

"Very cold!" agreed Mr. Buddle. He closed the door, and moved towards the table in the middle of the room.

Vanderlyn drew the curtains

across his window. He turned round. His brows were creased in a frown.

"Were you able to do what you wanted to do, sir?" he asked diffidently.

"Oh, yes!" said Mr. Buddle.

"I see! You searched Pinky-Mi's study, sir?"

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Buddle.

"No?" Vanderlyn looked puzzled. "But I thought that was the idea. I thought you wanted me to get Pinky out of the way so that you could search his study."

Mr. Buddle's expression was benign. He said softly:

"Did I give you that impression? I wonder how that happened. I knew there was nothing to find in Scarlet's study. I wanted to get you out of the way, so that I could search your study, Vanderlyn."

* * *

There was silence in the room. From outside came the sound of squeals and laughs from the juniors who were snowballing, down below in the quadrangle.

Vanderlyn was standing motionless. The ruddy glow in his cheeks had paled. Mr. Buddle drummed his fingers softly on the table, but his gaze never left the senior's face.

"You claimed that your study was searched earlier in the term." Mr. Buddle shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps it was! But when one senior searches the study of another senior, that search is likely to be very cursory, is it not, Vanderlyn? Besides, you knew in advance when the inspection was coming. That made all the difference. This time, you did not know."

With an effort, Vanderlyn pulled himself together. He said, a little unsteadily: "Well, what a surprise, sir! So you searched my study while I was out with Pinky-Mi this afternoon. Did you find anything, or is that a leading question?"

Mr. Buddle inserted a hand into his breast-pocket. With a movement, he flung a number of cards on the table. They were white cards, bordered with a broad black edging.

Speechless for a moment, Vanderlyn gazed at them. Suddenly he found his voice. He said, his voice rising shrilly:

"You had the damn cheek to break open my desk."

Mr. Buddle said nothing.

With glittering eyes Vanderlyn turned and strode to the bureau which stood beside his bed in the recess. He pulled at the flap. It did not open. Breathing hard, he turned again and faced the schoolmaster.

He said thickly: "It's not open -- you must have had a key --"

Mr. Buddle spoke now.

He said, very quietly: "I bought those cards in Everslade, from Mr. Troke, the stationer!"

"I thought --"

"I know what you thought!" said Mr. Buddle.

Vanderlyn's face was white. He threw himself into his shabby armchair, and ran his fingers through his thick, tow-coloured hair.

"I seem to have made a fool of myself," he said.

"You were certainly a fool if you thought that I am a man who would search schoolboys' studies. You have, at least, proved my theory."

Vanderlyn stretched out his long legs, and stifled a very artificial yawn.

"You think I'm 'X.'"

"I know you're 'X!'" murmured Mr. Buddle.

Vanderlyn drew a deep breath.

"Well, it's been fun while it lasted. I thought I was safe, and nobody could get on to me. How did you do it?"

Mr. Buddle drew out a chair from against the table, and sat down. Resting his elbows on the table, he looked long and searchingly at the scowling senior.

He said, dreamily: "I read a story once in a paper called the Gem. It was about a lawless individual who called himself the Mysterious 'X.' The 'X' in the story was a thief, but the element of mystery was similar. I knew that Meredith of my form had read the story, and I wondered, for a while, whether he might have been indulging in a little romantic imitation. But it soon became clear to me that 'X' could not be a junior. When damage is done in any school and the culprit is not discovered, it is a certain indication that a senior is the guilty party. A junior would boast to others. He would soon be found out, because his seniors would inevitably find him out."

Vanderlyn put his head back on the cushions of his chair, and gazed at the ceiling. He was biting his lips.

"It soon became obvious to me that this was not a junior prank," went on Mr. Buddle. "'X,' whoever it was, hated Slade and hated authority. Meredith is a troublesome boy, but he loves his school. He could never have been guilty of what 'X' did. In any case, it had to be a senior. 'X,' on several occasions, must have left the school buildings at night. It is unlikely that a junior could have left a dormitory without someone else knowing that he had done so. For a senior, with a private study-bedroom, the matter was simple."

Vanderlyn crossed one long leg over the other. He transferred his pale gaze from the study ceiling to Mr. Buddle's face. He sat in silence, his lips set in a firm line.

Mr. Buddle sighed.

"So I was satisfied that 'X' was a senior. He had to be a senior who was no sportsman, for, because he did not engage in games, he was able to slip into the games master's room adjoining the gymnasium and use the games master's typewriter while Mr. Crayford and most of the school were on the playing fields. He had to be a senior who hated football, for he damaged the football pitch. He had to be a senior with a liking for cricket, for he left the cricket table untouched. You hate football, don't you, Vanderlyn? But you are a promising bowler in the summer term. He had to be a senior without friends, for friends would have been on the spot to prevent him giving rein to his malice." Mr. Buddle paused. He went on, a little cruelly: "He had to be a boy incapable of making friends, and one who was spiteful and malicious because he resented the fact that he had no friends."

Vanderlyn stirred in his chair. He said, thickly:

"That's a lie. That's a darned lie."

"No, Vanderlyn, it is not a lie. In your secret, spiteful little world, you gloated over the power that you had given yourself - over the mystery which you had created and which you thought nobody had the intelligence to see through. You laughed in your small soul as you suggested that a painter would get spots on his clothing or his shoes, while you had taken care that no such spots existed.

"This morning I mentioned psychology to you - and you assumed that I was referring to Scarlet of the Sixth. But Michael Scarlet, though he

faces difficulties as the son of the Headmaster of Slade, is brave and honest and decent. He would be utterly incapable of such cowardly meanness as 'X' displayed - and I knew it. You knew it, too. If you had imagined for one moment that anything detrimental to Scarlet's reputation might be found in his study, you would not have agreed to take him out this afternoon so that I might search his study."

"So you give me credit for that!" sneered Vanderlyn.

"Oh, yes - and I give you credit for something else, too - something which helped to give you away, to me, at least. 'X' attacked almost every senior member of the Slade resident staff. The fact that I was not given attention by the Mysterious 'X' made me think that, for some reason, 'X' might be grateful to me, in his own way. There was an occasion when both you and Scarlet had some cause to be grateful to me."

A twisted smile flickered across Vanderlyn's face.

"An elephant never forgets!" he said. He added, a little bitterly: "I ought to have fixed up a booby-trap for you."

The snowball fight had ended out in the quadrangle. No longer was there the sound of excited boyish voices outside. From somewhere distant - somewhere in the school buildings - they could hear singing and shouting. The boys of Slade were letting themselves go on the last evening of term before the Christmas holidays.

Mr. Buddle rose to his feet. Methodically he pushed the chair in under the table, and leaned on the back of it. Vanderlyn still sprawled in the armchair.

Mr. Buddle said, softly: "When I spoke of psychology, I had you in mind, Vanderlyn. Your home life hasn't been too happy, has it? Perhaps the tragedy of a broken home has rubbed off on you at school. You got your own back on your school for the shortcomings of your home."

Clumsily, Vanderlyn got to his feet. He slipped his hand in his pocket, and drew out a letter. He held it out towards the schoolmaster.

Mr. Buddle looked at him curiously.

"You wish me to read this?"

Vanderlyn nodded, and Mr. Buddle unfolded the letter. He read:

Dear Son,

A few hurried lines, my dear, to let you know something which will make you very happy.

Your father and I have made up our differences. There have been faults on both sides, as there always are in little matters like this. But we are going to try again, and this time we believe all will be well.

We shall be all together for Christmas, and it will be just like old times. Your father will call for you, with the car, at Slade on Thursday morning. I can imagine how glad you will be.

Your affectionate,
Mother.

Mr. Buddle folded the letter, and placed it on the table. He gazed thoughtfully at Vanderlyn. The big, ungainly senior had a dogged look on his rugged, not unprepossessing, face.

"That is very good news for you," said Mr. Buddle.

Vanderlyn nodded.

"Well, I'm ready, sir --" he said.

"Ready for what?"

"To go to the Head!" Vanderlyn looked away. He picked up his letter, and slid it into his pocket. "That's the next item on the programme, isn't it? I don't suppose he'll kick me out to-night. It'll be a pleasant surprise for my Dad when he comes for me tomorrow. Don't say it, sir! I'll say it for you! You ought to have thought of that before, my dear Vanderlyn."

The final sentence was in passable mimicry of Mr. Buddle's own tones, but the senior's voice broke and he stumbled

over the final words. There were tears in his eyes, and he dashed them away with the back of his hand.

"I had that letter this morning," he said, in a low voice.

Mr. Buddle moved to the door. He stood for a moment in thought. Then he turned round.

"I am not taking you to the Headmaster, Vanderlyn."

Vanderlyn stared at him.

"Why leave it till the morning? Let's get it over with." He sounded sullen.

"I am not leaving it to the morning. I have no intention of informing Mr. Scarlet of my conversation with you. I am not taking you to the Headmaster at all."

Vanderlyn had a gleam of hope in his strange green eyes.

"If you're inviting me to go to the Head and confess, sir, there's not a chance. I'm not the story-book hero who goes to make a clean breast of everything to wind up the tale."

"No!" Mr. Buddle gripped the handle of the door. "I would not advise that. I trapped you into making your admission, and I explained to you my reasoning that made me positive that you were the guilty boy. I very much doubt whether, at this stage, anybody else in the school will come to the same conclusion."

"Your name should be Sexton Blake!" said Vanderlyn. He sounded stifled. "You've mistaken your vocation, sir."

"I have been told that before," said Mr. Buddle, curtly. "I have only to add the warning that if the Mysterious 'X' walks in Slade again, I shall tell Mr. Scarlet all I know. You will then leave Slade at once, and your future career may be ruined. Remember that, Vanderlyn."

"The Mysterious 'X' is dead!" said Vanderlyn.

"Then keep him dead! That's all I ask! If you develop a bit of backbone, you will do better next term. Good night, Vanderlyn."

Mr. Buddle left the study.

* * *

Slade broke up the next morning for the Christmas vacation. A great many seniors and juniors came to say goodbye to Mr. Buddle, and to wish him a Merry Christmas. But Vanderlyn did not come. Mr. Buddle did not see the tall, gangling senior again that term.

Mr. Buddle did not mind. He was, in fact, feeling rather pleased with himself.

That afternoon Mr. Buddle addressed the bust of Shakespeare on his study mantelpiece. In his time, he had passed many a confidence to the Bard of Avon.

"You know, William, I'm too soft-hearted and too sentimental to be a schoolmaster. It's time I retired!" Mr. Buddle gave a little chuckle, and patted the poet on his unresponsive head. "But, after all, William, no very serious damage was done. Fromo had to write a cheque for the repainting of his front door - but Fromo is a pompous pest. They say it cost Crayford £12 for the motor-cycle to be put right - but Crayford is a slug. And the Headmaster's lawn will recover in the spring."

Shakespeare looked disapproving, but he said nothing.

A day or two later, just before Mr. Buddle left Slade for his own holiday, there were a number of Christmas cards for him in the morning mail. One of them had on the front, in large gilt lettering, the words "A JOYFUL XMAS." Somebody had drawn a thick black circle round the giant 'X' of Xmas.

Mr. Buddle opened the card.

Printed inside were the words: "Good Christian men rejoice! It's Christmas Time again." And, added in ink, was the message: "With real and grateful thanks — Bruce Vanderlyn."

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THE SEASON'S GREETINGS to all O.B.B.C. enthusiasts and in particular to those with whom I have corresponded during 1969.

WILLIAM LISTER

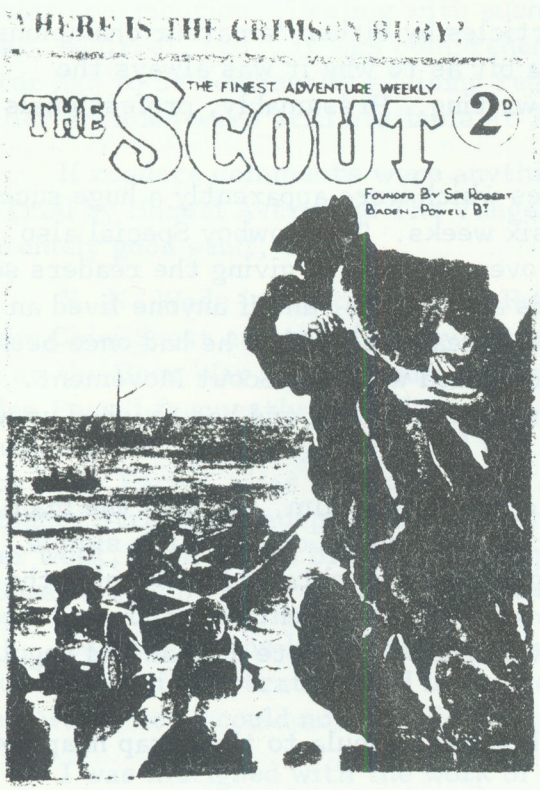
HIGH ADVENTURE IN THE SCOUT

By ALBERT WATKIN

An old boys' paper which never aroused my interest much was the SCOUT. I wasn't a boy scout and I didn't subscribe to, or even ever see a copy of, the magazine. The few odd ones, of different periods, which I gathered up in my collection of old boys' papers didn't make much of an impression either. Illustrations of cherubic looking cubs trying to start a camp fire and smiling scouts peering out of tents didn't arouse any enthusiasm.

However, about a year ago, when I acquired a complete run of SCOUT for the year 1924, my opinion was changed, and it became clear to me that the paper was as red-blooded and virile as could be desired by anyone. In those halcyon days it must have been a very lusty and serious rival to the Amalgamated Press CHAMPION and Thomson's ROVER and ADVENTURE.

The SCOUT, which first saw light of day 18th April, 1908, was a product of George Newnes. Born of stern Edwardian days it was probably an appropriate paper of the times in that its main concern was to see boys on the right path in life. It



digressed on such subjects as What To Do When Lost In The Woods, How To Camp Out, How To Keep Your Boots Dry, How To Clean Your Teeth Without A Brush and a thousand other ideas for solving life's problems. Its policy was "to guide and instruct," though it probably wasn't the first publication in that field.

When the Great War destroyed that way of life and wrought big changes in the land the SCOUT proved well capable of changing with it.

Boys who couldn't keep their boots dry were left to fend for themselves and the SCOUT provided a weekly paper with a content which embraced every field of adventure.

In the 1920's the SCOUT was about GEM size and favoured a similar red and blue colour scheme for the cover, which bore the inscription "founded by Sir Robert Baden Powell." It is hard to say, however, if this was supposed to mean the magazine or the Scout organization. As with other boys' adventure weeklies, the SCOUT contained on an average, six stories dealing with widely diversifying subjects. About every month a 'special' number appeared, viz. The Special Pirate Number, followed by Football, Cricket, Boxing, Highwaymen, Cowboy, Robin Hood, Red Indian, Swimming, etc. The festive seasons were not forgotten either with a very fine Xmas Number and both Easter and Whitsun holidays being marked.

The technical stuff connected with the Scout movement was dealt with in Cub's Corner, and limited at the most to two columns.

The 'sporting specials' all contained articles by either "amateur champions" or "amateur internationals" and one wonders a bit as to why it was always the amateurs who were able to cash in on a little writing. Presumably, professionals were paid only to indulge in their sport.

A. C. Russell supplied the cricket notes which were apparently a huge success for they were allowed to run on for a further six weeks. The Cowboy Special also aimed high and none other than Tom Mix took over the role of giving the readers some first-hand information. He related many of his adventures, and if anyone lived an adventurous life it was certainly Tom Mix. He revealed also that he had once been a 'scout' himself - though that was not to be confused with the Scout Movement. Rather he had served as a scout in the Spanish-American War and had finished up with a bullet in the face.

Douglas Fairbanks, who played the title role in the film, supplied the main item for the Robin Hood Special. In a hard hitting article he outlined the simple rules of health and success for all boys. The goal could be obtained by keeping the circulation and digestion in good order, plenty of fresh air, plenty of study and a cold bath every morning. These, along with hard work, should create a clean and regular way of life.

Later in life Fairbanks was to consign his own formula to the scrap heap, but in those days he was an idol.

The pattern for the 'specials' was generally the same, whereby somebody high in the field supplied an article. However, in the Grand Red Indian Number some

difficulty was probably encountered in obtaining the services of a Red Indian to pen a few notes, for none appeared, and readers had to be content with two fine western tales, and in that they would have been adequately compensated. This was one of the few occasions when the SCOUT departed from its regular policy of having each one of its stories set in a different field. Similarly the Special Dick Turpin Number passed off without a personal message from Dick Turpin.

1924 was a great year for scouts the world over and also for the British Empire. At the Wembley Empire Exhibition (possibly the greatest ever held in Britain) was a world Scout Jamboree and the SCOUT cashed in well on the occasion. The special supplements provide a fine record.

The SCOUT appears to have had at its service a large band of contributing authors. A check list reveals that 58 did some writing at some time or other during 1924, presuming of course that not too much doubling up was done with the use of pen names.

Percy F. Westerman, F. Haydn Dimmock, Robert Leighton, Harold Avery, Christopher Beck, T. C. Bridges, E. le Breton Martin and Rupert Chesterton were among those who had a field in the hard cover market. Eric Townsend was a noted CHAMPION author while Francis Warwick wore the mantle of Frank Richards in the GEM on many occasions.

A weekly page of nature notes by H. Mortimore Batten, F.Z.S., was a popular contribution. Dealing with such animals of the countryside as the fox, otter, stoat, squirrel, etc., it was comprehensive by any standard, so much so, that the editor had to be continually advising readers that the back numbers containing earlier articles were still available at 3d. per copy.

If readers comments were anything to go by then the two serials, A Term On Trial by Harold Avery and The Vengeance of Li Fan by Percy F. Westerman, were extremely good stuff, too.

E. K. Wade (secretary to Sir Robert Baden Powell) contributed a biography of the Chief Scout and this lengthy feature detailing much of his earlier life in Africa and at the Boer War could be summed up as being a fine historical document. Similarly, Baden Powell frequently penned a few notes of a quality somewhat out of touch with a magazine for young boys. A word too about the SCOUT'S own detective, The Man With Many Faces, alias Frank Darrell, and his boy assistant Roy Martin. Written by Sidney Strand and adeptly illustrated by Eric Parker these stories appeared week after week, each with a bright and snappy plot and in their day they must have been followed avidly by hundreds of lovers of the detective yarn.

Backing up the large number of writers who contributed to the SCOUT was a good team of illustrators and in the year 1924, 27 of them signed their name to their work, so it could not be said that the paper lacked variety.

I was intrigued with the work of another artist who used only his initials, W.G.W., and at the moment I am unable to name him.

A bit of revenue was brought into the paper weekly with the two pages used

for advertisements. Firms who dealt in scouting equipment seemed to be the chief users of the space and surplus material from World War One was offered. Apparently the scouting movement was considered to be a likely dumping ground. Thus was seen a great array of tents, boots, knives, hats, lamps, mess tins and hundreds of other considered necessities. There was also large spreads on Meccano and Hornby Trains, Cherry Blossom Boot Polish, Fry's Belgravia Chocolate and Icilma Brilliantine.

The SCOUT featured two slogans frequently on its covers, one being "The Very Best Authors Write For The Scout." Other papers in the same field used a similar line but even so, the SCOUT'S claim would be hard to deny. The other was "The Finest Adventure Weekly." If a summing up was made of all the old papers, the SCOUT must have had some small claim.

Check List of Authors in the SCOUT, 1924

Adams, F.	Everett, Bernard	Pearson, Alex. G.
Avery, Harold	Fanshaw, Cecil	Phillips, Horace
Baden Powell, Sir Robert	Gorman, Major J. T.	Prout, Geoffrey
Beck, Christopher	Harding, Robert	St. Lawerence, J.
Bridges, T. C.	Hawley, Ross	Strand, Sidney
Burton, Edmund	Hedges, Sidney G.	Sweet, John W.
Chaffee, Allen	Henderson, Bernard W.	Taylor, James
Chapman, W. G.	Hugill, R.	Townsend, Eric W.
Chesterman, Rupert	Hay, Bernard	Wade, E. K.
Cole, Edwin	James, S. T.	Warwick, Alan Ross
Collier, Norman	Leighton, Robert	Warwick, Francis
Corcoran, Brewer	Lynn, Escott	Wells, William
Cox, R. W. H.	Lyons, Ronald S.	Westerman, Percy F.
Cross, Pennington	McDonald, F. S.	Wood, Eric
Dallas, Captain Oswald	Maycock, S. A.	Wood, Rodney
Dean, Leon W.	Martin, E. le Breton	Wood, S. Andrew
Dimmock, F. Haydn	Martin, Stewart	Wynne, M.
Dorning, Harold	Mitchell, Alan	Young, Fred. W.
Dudley, Frank	Nendick, F. R.	Zimmerman, Edward

Check list of Illustrators in the SCOUT, 1924

Ambler, C.	Eyles, D. C.	Rogers, Stanley
Bennett, Fred	Grey, Frank R.	Shackel, G.
Bishop, J. H.	Henry, Thomas	Shelley, E.
Blake, C. H.	Holmes, Fred. - Holmes, T.W.	Shindler, R. L.
Bowes, R. B.	Laidler, T.	Stevens, E. A.
Brock, R. H.	Norfield, Edgar	Strange, Robert
Brookes, Kenneth	Parker, Eric R.	Taylor, J. B.
Constable, Douglas	Potts, Leonard	Williams, Norman
Evison, Henry	Robinson, T. H.	W. G. W.

THE READERS WERE INVITED

By JIM COOK

Contact between reader, author and editor of the Nelson Lee Library was always sincere and interesting. But when Edwy Searles Brooks took over from "Uncle Edward" - Edward O. Handforth - who ran his "In Reply To Yours" column with such remarkable and unexpected success, it was Edwy who realised that a section of his readers were demanding a better service than the flippant - but cheerful - correspondence old Handy was giving. In fact, the chorus of approval expressed in the avalanche of letters to "Uncle Edward" meant that the readers were proving they needed a definite source of information that only the author himself could give. They wanted to know more about St. Frank's, its environs and the characters. No other contemporary boys' paper had ever taken on such a demand from its readers and accepted it. And although Edwy began with "Our Author's Page," Handy's column was still going strong so that we had two sources of information about St. Frank's. Later on, the editor as Chief Officer of The St. Frank's League, replied to letters. But the contact was never lost. In The St. Frank's Magazine, Nipper as editor, gave us a cheery weekly Letter and in his absence Reggie Pitt and even Buster Boots filled this position with equal merit.

Looking through one's collection now and reading those weekly replies en masse it is not hard to conjecture Edwy's feelings of his invitation to readers to write to him and express their likes and dislikes. The revelation that he had opened up a hornet's nest may have come to him too late for he found it impossible to please all the readers all the time. That he tried is certain; an instance may be quoted when so many were requesting he change Nipper's name to that of Richard Hamilton - Nipper's real name - but then he was soon swamped by irate readers who preferred Nipper to Hamilton; so back to Nipper it was. Perhaps the moral is for authors not to get too familiar with their readers.

It is worth noting that Edwy received letters from almost everywhere. I know he valued this correspondence very highly for his secretary once destroyed six by mistake and Edwy was very upset. Later on, he offered his photo in exchange for one sent to him by his readers and this also was a huge success.

Brooks never pandered to his readers. He was sincere but strict with them all. Let me reissue a few replies he gave:-

"I'm afraid I can't promise to drop them - the Moor View girls - to please you!" 14/2/25
"I'm always ready to consider suggestions...but don't give me your orders." 28/2/25
"I don't like to call you a silly ass...but there's no other way to describe you." Thus Edwy's reply to W.W. 19/9/25.

Just around this period saw the advent of the St. Frank's League and due to its phenomenal success the editor took over from Edwy for a while answering queries about the League, and Between Ourselves didn't appear very often. Until many letters were sent to Fleetway House asking for it to return.

Although Edwy advertised for suggestions from readers he sometimes appeared

to be impatient and launched some himself. "How about a series featuring the School Train?" he asked. "How would you like the St. Frank's School Train to visit your town? Is this a good idea, or is it a dud?" 22/12/28.

I think he must have upset reader Sydney G. Hamilton when he replied.."...as a matter of fact I receive quite a lot of typewritten letters, so you must not think that yours was an exception." 24/7/26.

If only Brooks could have waited when he answered Eileen Byrne..."..No, I have never been to New Zealand....wait until we get a 300 miles an hour aeroplane service in operation! Then I'll drop over to Christchurch for a week-end!" 24/7/26.

Old Edwy wasn't always abrupt or facetious with his replies to correspondents. Probably he gave as he got and those silly asses who thought they could write to him in the same way they wrote to Handforth were soon brought up with a jerk.

He tells G. W. Mitchell in No. 88, New Series "Yours is such a jolly nice letter...that I'd like to quote it in full." That same number shows him quite adamant about sending his photo in exchange for the readers; but not before he receives theirs.

Brooks penned these replies from his study in his home at Barton House, Halstead, Essex, - this was before he moved to Norbury, South London, - but the sketch which headed "Between Ourselves" was not an actual drawing of his study he once assured me. In the story "Victory For The Rebels" 14/1/28, he denies a reader's statement that the St. Frank's fellows have ever been on a voyage to the moon!

Like most of us, Edwy made New Year Resolutions and in the January 15th issue of 1927, he resolves to write his "weekly pow-wow" as regularly as clockwork. In the event of his replies not appearing we were to "slang the editor" and not him. Actually he kept his promise for 1927 was a good year for "Between Ourselves" and never was reader closer to an author at this time. Concomitant with Brooks' replies to his readers the editor, as Chief Officer of the St. Frank's League, was also having a weekly chat to those who were members of the League; thus it was we were regaled each week to items of interest about St. Franks and good advice and news from the editor. And again, since the year was a very good one for stories in the N.L.L., 1927 must be regarded as a very important part of one's collection.

The Chief Officer got brickbats as well as Brooks. One writer from Birmingham "is inclined to think the C.O. is a lazy old josser." Apparently the illustrations had displeased the reader and a letter to this effect had been sent to the editor. 22/1/27.

In No. 41 of that same year, the question of the Sectional Map of St. Frank's was again raised. Edwy makes a "definite, solemn promise" that the Map will appear "between now and Christmas 1937."

Terence Sullivan receives a lashing in the next number. Terence writes to say Edwy has never given a hint as to the exact whereabouts of St. Frank's. Brooks replies:- "If you can't find these places on your map of Sussex, don't blame me." And why Edwy hasn't prepared the Sectional Map? "...you accuse me of being lazy. All right, Terence, - just come and try my job for a week..." That was the way to

answer those types. Give them as good as you got. Incidentally, I cannot recall Terence applying for Edwy's job!

A reader in No. 44 asks "where Alf. Huggins got to?" Old readers will know that he didn't get anywhere. To this day Alf Brent is in Study E in the Ancient House.

March 12th, 1927, issue has a bunch of readers - five of them - who "..feel it is their duty to remonstrate...the majority of your stories are..ridiculous. For instance, the 'Eldorado,' 'Dr. Karnak,' 'Moat Hollow,' 'China tales' ..." Edwy replies:- "In reply to your criticism, I will only point out that....the very series you have selected for condemnation were among the most popular I have written.... I should soon lose my job altogether if I confined my writings to matter-of-fact every-day happenings."

No. 49, April 9th, 1927. "Sorry to disturb your opinion 'South African Reader,' but I have written all the St. Frank's stories that have ever appeared in the Old Paper."

True Blue & Co. writes in No. 52 "...Your stories are clean, wholesome, and in every way beneficial to youth. Fit for anyone to read, from paper boys to princes, from dustmen to dukes."

In the next number comes bad news about that Sectional Map of St. Franks. To Ralph Sewell, Edwy writes:- "I'm afraid I haven't much cheering news for you. ...The map depends entirely on me, for I am the only one who can get out all the details. And I am so tremendously busy that I cannot see any possible way of applying myself to this work for quite a long time to come." He urges some of the enthusiastic readers to make maps of their own.

"You do seem to be prejudiced against your own sex," he tells Ethel Ormerod in No. 53. It appears Ethel is prejudiced against Irene & Co. of the Moor View School because Brooks wrote a description of Winnie Pitt crying during a quarrel with Fullwood. "Is the modern girl so hard that she has lost the power of sobbing when she is unhappy?" asks Edwy.

No. 57 sees Edwy very annoyed because some readers will write in pencil. And in the same number James W. Hoser-Cook has to be told that he can't buy Edwy's photo. Brooks also states here that "dozens and dozens of readers have written suggesting the St. Frank's Magazine should be re-started."

In the "Congo Series," No. 63, Edwy deplores the fact he is getting letters without signatures. Or rather, instead of signatures, they have a kind of undecipher-able cryptogram, frequently accompanied by sundry dots and flourishes. He also mentions that he is "getting snowed under with reader's letters." Poor Edwy is always getting accused about these letters. The writers blame him for all sorts of things such as not reading them, just glancing at the names of the writers, confining them afterwards to the w.p.b. Actually, Brooks took these letters very seriously. They gave him a guide to what the readers were thinking about his stories. The more flippant ones he ignored; but one must assume the task became too onerous in the end because far too many letters were being received and Edwy just could not reply to them in detail.

It is impossible to do justice in this little article to Edwy's full replies to his readers as I have touched only the fringe of them. But looking back, this liaison between author and reader was a very fine idea and if one suspects that the editor who began shoving his oar in when he took on the job of replying to members of the St. Frank's League was responsible for putting a wedge between the readers' interests, one would not be very far wrong. Because one felt an atmosphere of jealousy creeping in the Chief Officer's page of replies. In the end, he took over all replies to readers.

I never saw an instance where the editor would refer the readers to Mr. Brooks....rather was it the other way round. On matters of the St. Frank's League policy Edwy would tell the writer that it was to the editor that such questions should be sent. And questions about St. Frank's that were sent to the editor would be answered by him although this was strictly Edwy's province.

Very many letters spoke of the fine quality of the St. Frank's tales and must have given Edwy a splendid reward for all the hard work he put in getting to the top of his profession. Such letters as the one that appears in No. 67, August 13th, '27 ..."Dear Mr. Brooks... I have read the Nelson Lee for some years now, in fact, before Nelson Lee and Nipper came to St. Franks. I thought perhaps, you would like to know I am married, with three kiddies, and still enjoy reading (the stories).." When one thinks of the dissuasive presentation that such boy's papers gave on the bookstalls and elsewhere to a married man with three children, Edwy must have felt highly elated at receiving such a fine letter.

In No. 71 a reader complains of Edwy re-telling the main events of a series in each successive story. Another reader thinks "it a splendid idea to publish a kind of synopsis of the previous weeks."

Although 1927 was perhaps the best year for "Between Ourselves," Edwy did not manage to keep to his resolution he had made at the beginning of the year by stating he would have a weekly appearance of replies to readers. Towards the end of the year "Between Ourselves" failed to appear but it did come back again in 1928. But in August of that year "Between Ourselves" was nowhere near as presentable as it had been. The close association between reader and author in the new format was sadly missing, and one felt Edwy was no longer really interested. But later on Edwy's photo appeared opposite that of one of his readers and this gave the page a more popular appeal. And there is more evidence that "Between Ourselves" will continue to be published.

In the Christmas number of 1927 "hundreds of readers" had got their wish. The return of Ezra Quirke was featured in the Raithmere Castle story. This was one of the few times that Edwy had settled for a reader's wish.

Some of Brooks' replies took up space that should perhaps have been used for other purposes. Information about the boys, their studies, etc., were repeated many times. But now and again Edwy would give a piece of news that really was news to the faithful readers who wanted facts. In the December 15th, 1927 issue he tells "Old Letonian" of Glasgow that "the reason you've seen nothing of Matthew Noys is simple. This junior left St. Frank's some time ago. He was never a prominent junior, anyhow,

and I don't think his loss has caused much pain." That was all very well, but it made one wonder just who had left the school in a similar hush. Yet it made for a very ordinary account of an everyday existence. A very minor character leaves a famous Public School; an item that doesn't require publicity. Perhaps the senior Jesson left in similar circumstances?

The year 1929 was just as exciting as 1927. Brooks gave a lot more detailed information about St. Franks to his readers. Perhaps this will appear in the next Annual.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * *

SALE - Hamiltonia, S.B.L's, B.F.L's, Nuggets, Champions, Pilots, Rangers, Scouts, Triumphs, Marvels, Plucks, Vanguards, Aldines, Y. Britain, Lees, Modern Wonders, Chums, Captains, Y. Englands, B.O.A's, Strangs, Boys' of the Empire, Thompson's and many others, please specify interests. Also wanted.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, S.E.19.

- -

WANTED: To buy Magnets 664, 797, 1117, 1125, 1126; Gems 461, 564, 600. £3 offered for clean binding copies to complete long runs. My copy to you.

SMYTH, 1 BRANDON STREET, CLOVELLY, N.S.W. 2031, AUSTRALIA.

- -

WANTED: O/S Lees Nos. 128, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 144, 145 and most before 111. Gems 1181, 1182. Newnes 3d. Dick Turpins. Aldine Dick Turpins - Claude Duvals, hundreds of O/S Lees, Gems, Magnets for exchange.

E. B. GRANT-McPHERSON, 1 ST. JOHN STREET, WELLS, SOMERSET.

- -

WANTED: Young Folks Tales, early comic papers, old "Bloods." Have plenty of exchanges in Magnets, Gems, S.O.L's comic papers. Xmas wishes to all.

W. HALL, 16 WALDER,HAMMONDVILLE, N.S.W., AUSTRALIA.

- -

MODERN BOY: Can anyone please help with any of the following numbers in order to complete the full set? 13, 22, 29, 48, 50, 52, 55, 217, 225, 228, 230, 237, 283, 287, 363, 369, 381, 382, 384, 389, 390, 461, 479, 521, 523. New Series 1, 4, 23, 26, 44, 45, 65, 66, 70, 73.

R. HODGSON, "BLUE GABLES," 47 GORDONDALE ROAD, MANSFIELD, NOTTS.

- -

SMALL NUMBER of Boys' Weeklies available from private collection, including Magnets, Gems, B.F.L. and S.O.L. S.a.e. with enquiries or offers please. MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYBODY!

F. A. SHAW, 5 GRONGAER TERRACE, PONTYPRIDD, GLAMORGAN.

A UNIQUE MANUSCRIPT

FROM THE E. S. BROOKS' ARCHIVES

By BOB BLYTHE

To be able to reprint a popular author's first published story is quite an achievement - but when that story is one which had never been heard of until recent years and, moreover, published in such an obscure paper as "Yes or No," the reprint is even more remarkable. Nevertheless, this was done, as you know, in last year's Annual.

This year we present something which must be unique in the world of old boys' books - the very first story ever written by E.S.B. This was discovered among his papers, carefully preserved for over 60 years.

Whatever the merits or demerits of this story, one thing outweighs all else - the very uniqueness of the mss. Nothing else should be taken into consideration.

Imagine, if you can, the boy (he was just 16 years old that year) sitting at home, possibly his father's vicarage, writing these words, in those far off Edwardian days. Sense the urge to write which was to be the first step to an output that was to be second only to Hamilton.

Unfortunately, space does not permit reprinting the whole story and so chapters 3 and 4 have been summarized by E.S.B's own chapter headings.

The remaining chapters are reprinted exactly as Edwy wrote them, punctuation and gramatical errors and all.

And now, as they used to say in the old papers — read on!

THE ROCKY ISLAND

OR

THE TREASURE OF THE BARNABY'S

By

MERRICK MEYNARD

CHAP. I

The large American liner, "San Francisco" was ploughing its way across the vast Atlantic Ocean, one fine, hot summer afternoon. The officer on the bridge, who seemed to be half asleep, owing to the intense heat, quickly awoke on the approach of the Captain, who was then coming up the steps.

"Say, Blake," said the Captain, when he reached him, "can you make out what that peculiar humming noise is?"

"Humming noise, Sir?" replied Blake, "I can't hear any noise."

"Yes you can if you keep quiet - listen."

They stood listening for a few moments, and a faint whirring noise reached their ears.

"I can hear something now, Sir," said Blake. "Sounds like a motor, don't it?"

"I wonder where the deuce it's coming from," exclaimed the Captain. "Sounds as if it's coming from overhead!" And shading his eyes with his hand, he looked up. A moment late he turned to Blake with a gasp.

"Can you see anything?" he cried.

"What the dickens is it,sir?" ejaculated Blake, who had been looking as well, and well he might be surprised, for a large, glittering oblong-shaped object was hanging in the air, directly over them, about three hundred yards above the deck.

"I guess its an airship or something of that kind," said the Captain quickly. "Here! Fetch me that microphone from over there," he added as an afterthought. Nobody else had seen the airship - for airship it was - up to this point. But when they saw the skipper continually looking upwards, they naturally looked to see what he was staring at. Most of the passengers saw what it was at a glance, and cries of amazement came from all parts of the vessel.

As soon as Blake had brought the megaphone, Captain Nugent, for that was his name, seized it, and, putting it to his lips he roared at the top of his voice:

"Airship, Ahoy!"

And a voice coming from above, was heard, "Ship Ahoy!" it said. "Coming alongside!"

And the big cigar-shaped ship swooped downwards in a half-circle, and was alongside a moment later. Everyone looked curiously at her - as she stopped. It could be seen, now, that she was about 100 feet long, and was made of aluminium, which was lightly polished. Above the deck were two powerful helixes, which were revolving at a terrific rate, whilst at the stern, there was an enormous driving screw, or propellor, which was going at a rate so as to keep the two ships exactly parallel.

"Say, guess she's a beauty!" observed Nugent.

"If it wasn't for the heat and the noise," said one of the other officers, who had just appeared on deck, "I could almost believe myself dreaming! I wonder what they want?"

He was to know soon enough, for the door of the beautifully finished conning-tower opened, and a strikingly handsome young fellow of about 20, with a frank and open face, appeared. He was dressed in a blue reefer coat and peaked cap. Following close behind him was another young fellow, every bit as honest looking as the former,

but with an unmistakeable American appearance about him.

"Guess I'd like to see the Captain," he said, shortly, but loud enough for the skipper to hear.

"Say, you lubbers, exclaimed the Captain to two of the crew. "Just hustle around an hitch the gangway across - sharp!"

"Ay-ay, Sir!"

As soon as it was across, Nugent walked to the airship and shook hands with the young men.

"Reckon it's a mighty rum way to travel, Sir," said the Captain. "I didn't know that there was a flying-machine that could fly! I've heard of such things before but they've all been a failure."

"Well, you see, this one isn't, is it?" laughed the one who had appeared first. "I'm sorry to trouble you but I only came down to ask you if you can give us some fresh water, we've run dry!"

"Certainly," said Captain Nugent. "Here, Blake, just get two or three kegs of water from below. Excuse me asking," he added, "but I reckon I'd like to know your names."

"Mine's Richard Hamlyn."

"And yours?" said the skipper turning to the American.

"Oh! mine's Sam Freeman."

"Sam Freeman! The Inventor! I might have known it. Nobody else could have made such a thing as this," Nugent said, looking around admiringly.

"I don't know," said Sam, "I reckon he's done half the inventing of this craft" -indicating Hamlyn-"but here's the water. We're very much obliged to you sir."

"Don't mention it," said the Captain, "you're quite welcome."

"Well, I think we'd better be going," said Hamlyn, shaking hands with Nugent. "We're keeping you from your post, I expect."

"Good bye and Good luck," said the skipper, shaking hands with Freeman. "Hope you'll have a pleasant journey."

"Thanks, Good bye," they said almost simultaneously.

* * *

CHAPTER 2

Introduces Mike O'Donnell. The Letter. The Captain's yarn. They arrive at the Island. G. Briscoe Yacht.

\- - -

We must now leave Captain Nugent and follow the adventures of Dick Hamlyn

and Sam Freeman.

After saying goodbye they went into the conning tower, and closed the door. Sam went across to a switch board and pressed an electric bell-push. Almost immediately the airship began to rise. Pressing another button she started moving rapidly forward. The steering of the ship was worked by an automatic arrangement in the fore part of the tower. Sam, going over to it, touched a lever, whilst at the same time a dial beside it registered that the ship was flying in a south westerly direction. Directly over this was a tremendously powerful searchlight which brought into bold relief, all objects ahead within a mile. A faint throbbing could be felt all over the ship which seemed to suggest - to a stranger - that a motor was running somewhere down below, which certainly was the case.

"They treated us jolly decently, didn't they? Sam," observed Dick.

"Guess so," said Sam shortly, "I say," he added, "just have a spell at looking after the machinery, will you? Mike and I can then get our tea ready."

"Alright, but how fast are we going now?"

"50 miles an hour," replied Sam, consulting a register. "Go on though, there's a good chap. Mike hasn't been on deck for hours, he'll be stifled!"

And so Dick went across the room to a small staircase. Having got to the bottom of these he walked along a passage which was illuminated by electric light, until he came to a door over which was the sign - ENGINE ROOM. To get to this he had to go down some more steps. This room was filled with glistening machinery, which was driven by powerful motors which in turn were supplied with electricity from a huge accumulator - another invention of Sams. For he had discovered how to store thousands of volts of electricity in one accumulator. The place was tremendously hot, and Mike O'Donnell, the engineer, was perspiring profusly.

"Well, Mike, you look hot," observed Dick.

"Shure, Sorr, Oi'm almhost milted into a grease spot, intiorly!" returned Mike. "But have they given us some whater Sorr?"

"Yes, they've give us 3 kegs, large ones, too. You can go upstairs now and get some tea ready. I'll look after the machinery."

"Aye! Aye! Sorr!"

By this time they had completely lost sight of the liner. They were about a mile above the sea. The airship rode as steadily as a balloon in a light breeze.

As soon as tea was ready, a small electric bell tinkled in the engine room. Dick had a last look round to see if everything was alright, and then slowed her down to 25 miles per hour. He then came up to the dining room, which was a sumptuously furnished and decorated apartment. In the centre of the room was a billiard and dining table combined. At the further end was a small screen, on which was depicted a reproduction of the course ahead of the ship. The table was set for a light tea.

"How fast have you left her at?" enquired Sam, of Dick.

"Twenty five miles."

"That's all right then. I think it's pretty safe to leave her to herself for a while."

"Yez said that when we'd been out for a day, Sorr, ye'd tell me why yez harve taken me away from ould Oirland. Why have yez come to the Atlantic in a blessed airship? That's what oi can't make out!" exclaimed Mike.

"Alright Mike!" replied Dick, "don't worry yourself, you'll know all in good time. It's not a very long story, so I'll tell you now."

"I suppose you know," he continued, "that my uncle Sir George Hamlyn is dead - died about two months ago. Well just before he died, he sent for me and gave me a letter and told me not to open it until he was dead. I told him I wouldn't. Of course, I was curious to know what was inside it. I didn't break my word, but opened it the day after he was buried. Here is the letter," he added, putting an envelope on the table. "Read it for yourself."

Mike picked up the envelope and drew a letter from it; this is what he read:

"My dear nephew Dick,

I am writing you this letter to tell you about a treasure which, if you ever find it, will make you rich for life. One day, just before I fell ill, I was sitting, reading, in my library when the butler announced that someone wished to see me on important business. He added that he looked like a seafaring man. I told him to conduct the man to the library at once.

Well, I needn't run into all the particulars, but he gave me a letter and told me this story, which I will try to narrate in his own words:- 'Well, sir, my ship - the Vulcan was crossing from New York to Liverpool. One night, in a nasty storm, we were blown clean out of our course, and when the storm abated the next morning what should we see but an Island! Of course we should 'ave passed it an' tried to get into our proper course agin but for the fact that we saw right on top on't a kind of flag. I looked through a pair of glasses to see what it was an' 'lor' sir, what do you think it was? Why! - a brig right on top o' that there rock, only one mast left, and tied to this was a large flag. How the ship got there beats me! I forgot to tell you that the island was nothing more'n a clump of rocks an' there seemed to be cliffs all the way around that ran straight into the sea.

'It was lovely and calm then so I put off in a boat with two of the crew, to see if we could land anywhere. We went right round the island but it was the same all the way round - straight cliffs that were impossible to climb.

'Then, all of a sudden an idea struck me. It was this - that one of us should get a long lassoo an' try an' lassoo the mast and then climb up the rope - it seemed easy enough. So we tried it. O' course we couldn't do it the first time, but after 4 or 5 failures we got it on at last.

'So myself and the two men swarmed up to the top. Lummy! that was a rum place. All hollows and caves and things. We went into one o' the nearest of 'em and blow me if we didn't find a mans coat and a pipe there. After seeing them we felt certain there was somebody on the island, so we went into another cave and there we

found the dead body o' a man, whilst clasped in his hand was a letter to you, Sir. I put it in my pocket and then we carried the poor fellow out - he had been dead a fortnight I should think - and buried him at sea. We were just going back, to see if there was anything else when all of a sudden one of the men yelled: "To the ship for your lives - look!" and he pointed ahead. I looked and what I saw made me start running for the rope quick, for dead ahead was a tremendous tidal wave coming straight towards us.

'We rushed for the rope to get down into the boat, but the man who saw the wave first was before us, so we jumped and swam to the ship. An' only just in time, for as soon as we were aboard the wave struck us, washing everything that wasn't lashed off the deck. The other poor fellow must ha' drowned, becos when we looked at the island not a sign o' the boat or the brig was there! As we couldn't do anything else we got into our right course again and arrived at Liverpool yesterday, and that's the end of my story, Sir!'

Of course I gave the fellow a reward, and being satisfied, he took his leave. I then took up the letter and looked at it. 'Why! I said to myself, 'I can swear that's Sir Clifford's writing.' I hastily opened it and discovered that it was from Sir Clifford Barnarby, one of my oldest friends. In it he told me that he was bringing home a box of precious stones, worth millions of pounds in the brig (St. Mary?). How he got them he did not say, but I presume that they were the ones that he had often spoken to me of - the ones he said he was going to find, for he had many a time said that he had a hidden treasure somewhere in Brazil. He said that the brig had been wrecked on the island during a terrible storm when all hands were lost. He was the only human being saved. Then he went on to say that he had hidden the treasure in a concealed cave on the other side of the island. There was a plan of it, too. I will give you as good a reproduction of it as I can, because you must know, that I burnt the original letter after I had written this, for safety's sake, but I think it is almost the same."

Here there was a plan of a small island, whilst underneath was a paragraph giving the longtitude and latitude.

"Shure, an' it's a treasure ye're after, thin," exclaimed Mike O'Donnell, when he had finished.

"Yes, Mike," said Sam Freeman, "it's a treasure right enough."

"How long d'you think it'll be before we git to the oisland, Sorr?" asked O'Donnell eagerly.

"Oh! two or three days, I reckon."

On the second day after the above conversation, Sam and Dick were having breakfast, when Mike's voice was heard coming from the conning tower.

"Land ahead, Sorr!" he shouted.

The two young fellows jumped up from the table, and ran up to the tower, where they stood looking for a few moments.

"So there is!" exclaimed Freeman coolly. "It must be the island."

"Not a very large place, is it?" remarked Dick. He stood gazing through a powerful pair of binoculars for about a minute. "Can you see anything over there, to the left?" he said, excitedly. "There's something that looks like a balloon."

"A balloon? You must have made a mistake," laughed Sam. "Let's have a look."

"By Jove! I believe you're right after all," he cried a moment later. "I wonder who the deuce it is!"

"I don't know! What does anybody want here, I should like to know. I wonder if they know anything of the treasure being here?"

"Hardly likely. We're the only ones who knows about it - to my knowledge anyhow!"

By this time they were much nearer the island, and the shape of the balloon could be distinctly seen against the sky line.

"Why, it's resting on a steam yacht!" exclaimed Dick. "Can you see it? There, look!" he added, pointing to a small steam yacht that was moored off the island.

"Shure! an' it bewilders me intoirly," remarked Mike, "Pwhat the divil could the scalpeens want here, at all, at all!"

What the "scalpeens" wanted there was indeed the treasure. How it came about that they knew there was a treasure happened in this wise.

When Sir George Hamlyn, in his letter, had said that he had burnt Clifford Barnarby's one, he certainly had burnt it, but a few hours before he wrote the letter to his nephew, the butler, while he was out, was prying round Sir George's table when his eyes lit upon the precious document. After having read it through he had taken a copy of it, thinking that perhaps, Gerald Briscoe, an unscrupulous scoundrel, who was at one time his former master, might make use of it.

Hence it was that Briscoe and the butler - whose name was Potter - had travelled to the island in the formers yacht, with a ballon on board by means of which they intended to land upon the island. As events turned out, it proved that they did not get there quite soon enough, for they had only just inflated the balloon when our heroes sighted them.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if they are after the treasure though," said Sam, quickly, "because if they weren't why should they have a balloon. It must be that! Ordinary people wouldn't go carting balloons with 'em! besides it's right out of an ordinary vessels course. This looks like being exciting."

"What are you going to do about it?" enquired Dick.

"I think the best thing to do is to land and try to find the jewels before they get their balloon up to the top, if we can. If we can't get done in time, well, we'll have to trust to luck."

"Yes, I think that's the best way," observed Dick.

Sam, going over to the steering apparatus, headed her straight for the island. When they reached it he touched the bell for her to stop - for by this time Mike had gone below - and called to Mike down the speaking tube, to lower her to the ground.

The vessel began to descend and finally rested on a flat stretch of rock.

"Dick and I are going to have a look round," called Sam to Mike, "Keep a good watch on the ship."

"Aye, Aye, Sir," came up the tube.

"Come on Dick," said Sam and they both walked towards the conning-tower door, little dreaming the peril that awaited them outside.

* * *

CHAPTER THREE

Captured — No Hope Left —
Saved in the nick of time.

* * *

CHAPTER FOUR

Mike's Story — The Recovery of
the Plan — Diabolical Work —
The Death of Potter.

* * *

CHAPTER FIVE

Briscoe's departure. The Accident. The Railway Smash. The Recovery of the Treasure.

\- - -

We must return to the yacht for a little while to see what is taking place on board.

After discovering the treasure, Briscoe had made arrangements with Potter that while he, Potter, disabled the airship he was to get everything all ready for immediate departure. They intended to go to Buenos Ayres, in South America, where they would be less likely to be discovered.

Briscoe was all ready and was waiting rather impatiently for his confederate.

"I wonder why that confounded fool doesn't come," he was saying to Collins. "if he doesn't come soon I - hark! What was that?" They had heard Potter's shriek followed by a dull thud.

"Sounded like Potter's voice to me," replied Collins. "I know what it is," he added. "I bet you a dollar that Potter, like a fool, has gone and tumbled over the side of the airship and got killed. I heard his body strike the ground."

"Well, I'm not going to look for him," growled Briscoe callously. "I've waited long enough for him, an' if he's dead, so much the better for us! Now you go and order full steam ahead, because we want to get to Buenos Ayres as soon as possible. We've got the jewels, and that's all I care about! There's no cause to fear anything from Hamlyn, for before long he'll share the same fate as Potter."

"All right, I'll go and see about it now!" said Capt. Collins as he left the cabin.

Having buried the remains of Potter, Dick and Sam had gone below to see if they could discover what Potter had come aboard for. After a long search they failed to discover the spanner which was placed so cunningly as to be quite out of sight. They came to the conclusion that Potter must have just come aboard intending to do something but was seen before he could do anything.

They had got everything ready, and were just starting off to the other side of the island, to take Briscoe and his gang by surprise, as they supposed. They did not take long in getting there and when they did, it was to discover the treasure gone and no sign of Briscoe.

"They've got the treasure and made off with it," exclaimed Dick angrily, "and to think that we should be robbed of it under our very eyes. Why didn't we come before instead of going after this beastly chart?" He flung it down on the rocks.

"You seem to forget," drawled Sam, "that we can travel about four times the rate of their yacht. They're only just starting. Look! there she goes." He pointed to the yacht which could be plainly seen putting out to sea in a north-westerly direction. "We can follow her up and have 'em arrested for robbery and attempted murder at the first port they put into."

"By jove, so we can," cried Dick. "I'd clean forgotten that. We'd best get back to the airship and follow them up."

They started at a trot for the ship, and when they reached it, the yacht could be faintly seen on the horizon, for the first grey streaks of dawn could be seen in the east.

The chums got aboard, and fastening the conning-tower down, Sam went over to the switch-board. By this time Mike had arrived in the engine room.

Pressing the button for the airship to rise, he paused for a moment as he felt the airship ascending. Then he signalled for her to move forward at half speed. All went well for a moment, then a horrible grinding and tearing sound was heard in the engine room. The next moment Mike appeared at the conning-tower door, looking pale and startled.

"Bedad, Sorr," he gasped, "the instant oi started the propellor engines, they sort of crumpled up!"

"This is the work of that Potter, I'll be bound," ejaculated Dick. "There's no hope of catching them up now," he added miserably.

"I expect it can be repaired," exclaimed Sam. "Let's go and have a look at it."

They went down to the engine room, and found the accident not quite so bad as they had first thought. But it was quite bad enough to delay them for at least four or five hours.

It was rather a poor outlook for catching the ruffians up now. The most unfortunate thing of all was that the lads didn't know what port they were making for.

It took Sam and Mike till half-past eight before they got the machinery in anything like working order. And then it was only temporarily mended. They could not go any more than 50 miles an hour.

Being sure that Briscoe would land in South America, they made for the nearest port, which was Monte Video in Uruguay.

When about half way there the engines broke down again, causing another delay of about an hour. However they arrived there at about 4 o'clock the next morning. After inquiring they learned that a yacht answering to the description of the "Wasp" had been seen passing.

Encouraged by this news they continued their course across the Rio de la Plata to Buenos Ayres. The capitol of the Argentine Republic. Arriving there, almost the first boat they saw was the "Wasp." They immediately made inquiries and were rewarded with the news that Briscoe and Collins had been seen at the railway station.

Leaving Mike in charge of the airship, our heroes straightway went there, and found that they had bought tickets to Rio de Janeiro.

They then asked what time the next train left for that part, and were told that one left at 4 o'clock that afternoon. It was then half past two so they had plenty of time to have a good meal and a wash and brush up.

They were just going out of the restaurant when Dick, who was first, was jerked back by Sam, and the door closed.

"Didn't you see who they were, Dick?" he inquired, "they were Briscoe and Collins. I thought they were gone, but it seems as if they haven't. I reckon they're going by the same train as we are."

"I didn't see them," replied Dick. "But we'd better go now," he continued. "It's quarter to four."

When they arrived at the station they found the train waiting. They got into a back carriage and looking out of the window saw Briscoe, with a small parcel, no doubt the diamonds, followed by Collins, get into a carriage further forward.

It is a tremendous long journey between the two capitals, and that night feeling not a little pleased with themselves Sam and Dick retired to rest. They had hardly closed their eyes when there was a terrific grinding crash. The two boys were flung over to the other side of the carriage like ninepins, and picking themselves

up they tore open the door and dashed out.

The whole front part of the train was a complete wreck. A tremendous lump of rock, which had probably rolled down a hillside nearby, lay across the metals.

The train, going at full speed, had dashed into this, causing terrible havoc to the first two carriages.

Sam and Dick were running alongside the train, in the direction of the engine, when a faint cry for help was heard from one of the carriages.

"Come on Dick" said Sam, "We'll see if we can do something for the poor fellow!"

And suiting the action to the word he scrambled over some wreckage to come upon a man, whose face was almost unrecognisable. But for all that, Dick saw that it was Briscoe.

"We can't leave him to die here," exclaimed Dick, "although he is such a scoundrel!"

The lads went over to Briscoe, Collins was lying dead beside him - who was sinking fast.

"Come closer, I want to tell you something," he gasped in a hoarse voice. "There's no hope for me now. It's only what I deserve though," he added bitterly. "I know I am going to die, and I thought that I would tell you where - the treasure is - before - I die."

His words came out in jerks, and he was on the point of fainting. "Brandy," he whispered.

Sam took out his flask and gave him a pull, which revived him somewhat, and he started speaking again.

"Go back to Buenos Ayres and go to a house in a street exactly opposite where my yacht is moored. I forget the name, but you can easily find the house; it has a green painted door and it has six windows looking out on to the front. It's the only one in the street. Here's a key. When you get in you will find a large leather chair in the front lower room. Underneath that you will find a loose floor-board. The treasure is hidden under there. Perhaps you are wondering why we came to Buenos Ayres. I'll tell you. We had plotted our course and were just loaded up and ready to start when we saw your airship and being afraid that you would find us and get the police to arrest us we thought it would be safer to leave Buenos Ayres, for a time, so we hid the treasure in the house. There's only one thing more I want to ask. Will you forgive me so that I can die with a clear conscience?"

"Forgive you, Briscoe," said Sam and Dick in one breath, "of course we forgive you!"

"Now I can die happily," said Gerald Briscoe, with a faint smile. "I shan't last much longer now."

Ten minutes later he was dead.

Little remains to be told. After recovering the treasure, the chums returned to the airship. They had an uneventful voyage back to England where they lived to enjoy the wealth that they had had such a struggle to gain possession of. And so we must say Goodbye.

THE END

Merrick Maynard — Edwy S. Brooks

Started on Friday, July 6th, 1906.
Finished on Tuesday, July 10th, 1906.

My first story - M.M. - E. S. Brooks. Worked 3 hours, Friday, 3 hrs. Saturday, 6 hrs. Sun. 4 hrs. Monday, 1 hr. Tues.

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(Story Total: 8,220 words)

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By C. H. CHURCHILL

"Silence!"

Mr. Crowell's eagle gaze wandered over the Remove Form-room at St. Frank's. Afternoon lessons were in progress, and the day was fine and sunny. The weather was so warm, in fact, that most of the juniors were restless; they were anxious to be out in the glorious sunshine.

"Silence!" repeated Mr. Crowell. "Handforth, you were speaking!"

THRILLING NEW SERIAL BEGINS THIS WEEK!

Edward Oswald Handforth looked astonished.

"I, sir?" he repeated, in surprise.

"That expression does not deceive me in the least, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell tartly. "If I have to warn you again, I will give you fifty lines. I insist upon having silence during lessons."

Mr. Crowell glanced back at his book, but his attention was soon attracted once more.

"Alexis!" he rapped out. "What are you doing?"

Titus Alexis, the Greek junior in the Remove, looked up sullenly from his somewhat isolated desk in a corner of the big Form-room. There was no mistaking the hatred which smouldered in his eyes as he gazed at Mr. Crowell.

"The lock of my desk is stiff - that is all," he said sourly.

"There was no necessity for you to make that noise, Alexis," said Mr.

Crowell. "You were wrenching at your desk with unnecessary violence. I am afraid you are too apt to reveal your somewhat vicious temper. And you will remember, in future, to address me with more respect."

Alexis made no reply.

"Did you hear me, boy?" demanded Mr. Crowell warmly.

"I heard you," growled the Greek junior.

"I am rapidly losing all patience with you, Alexis," said the Form-master tartly. "Repeatedly I have told you to address me as 'Sir.' You take no notice whatever. When I am compelled to correct you again I will give you lines."

"I have done nothing!" exclaimed Alexis, his eyes flashing. "Why should I be punished? It is not the fair play! I have done nothing!"

Mr. Crowell took a deep breath, but said no more.

"The beastly cad!" murmured Handforth into McClure's ear. "I'd like to see him kicked out of the giddy school -"

"Handforth!" thundered Mr. Crowell.

Edward Oswald's whisper was always loud - although he was sublimely unaware of that fact - and Mr. Crowell could scarcely help hearing him. The Form-master's temper had been tried a good deal that afternoon, and he was not in the mood to overlook even a whisper. Alexis always shortened Mr. Crowell's temper.

"You were speaking again, Handforth," shouted the Form-master.

"Only - only a word, sir," said Handforth meekly.

"You will write me fifty lines, Handforth!"

"Yes, sir."

Hanforth glared at the juniors near him, and then glared at Alexis.

"Rotter!" he breathed.

In the early days of the Nelson Lee Library there were many instances of school life, such as Form-room scenes, which showed that E. S. Brooks could hold his own with most other writers of school yarns. Some of these Form-room scenes were comical, some dramatic. The above excerpt was taken from old series No. 222 "The Great Fire at St. Frank's," dated September 6th, 1919. This was the second story of a very good series in which St. Frank's was transferred to London when the College House was burned down by Titus Alexis in revenge for his imaginary grievances. In the later series of Lees the emphasis was more on bizarre and fantastic occurrences. This rather overshadowed normal school activities and as a result Mr. Brooks became better known as a writer of this type of story rather than as a writer of normal school events. This was a pity, in my opinion, as in the old "small" series there were many jolly good examples of Form-room and study life.

Mr. Crowell, the Remove Form-master, was a very excellent character. Strict and inclined to be fussy, he was, nevertheless, always ready to stand up for his form if they were ever threatened with injustice. This was shown in the "Hunter" and "Martin" rebellion series to great effect. This characteristic resulted in his boys having a high respect for his fairness in dealing with them, despite their nick-name for him of "Old Crowsfeet."

The story in which Mr. Crowell was mainly featured was No. 256 old series - "The Remove Master's Delusion," dated May 1st, 1920. In this, we learned that he was busy in his spare time writing a heavy book on astronomy. Putting so much of his time to it resulted in a breakdown in health and he had to leave St. Frank's for a spell. His place as Remove-master was taken by Mr. Heath or rather Mr. Kirby, Handforth's brother-in-law. Some of the Form-room scenes in No. 256 were most amusing, Mr. Crowell confusing his duties with his astronomy as the following extract shows:-

Mr. Crowell rapped his desk impatiently.

"Attention!" he exclaimed, glaring round the Remove Form-room. "I insist upon quietness and order! The next boy who speaks will receive five hundred lines, and will be detained for six hours!"

The Remove listened with grave attention. Nobody had been talking at all, and the Form-room had been deadly quiet ever since lessons had started. It was therefore astonishing that Mr. Crowell should demand attention.

I looked at the Form-master curiously, and I could not help observing that he was not himself. There were hollows under his eyes, and his cheeks were far paler than they had been a month earlier. For several weeks, in fact, Mr. Crowell had been looking somewhat out of sorts.

But, until quite recently, he had carried on with his duties in the same old routine way, with never a change.

Only a day or two earlier the servants' strike had come to an end, and after the excitement of that stirring episode, St. Frank's now seemed comparatively dull. The old staff were back at work, and everything was going smoothly.

We had, of course, plenty of sports to claim our full attention in leisure time. Cricket was just starting in earnest, and rowing was becoming popular. Very soon swimming would be the order of the day, and outdoor sports of every description would need attention.

But during lesson time the Remove found things somewhat dull. Or, at least, things had been dull until a day or so earlier. And then, for the first time, Mr. Crowell had shown signs of altering his behaviour.

He was generally absent-minded and moody now, and his temper, always somewhat razor-like, was becoming sharper.

His school duties could not be responsible for this curious change. Personally,

I had an idea that Mr. Crowell was filling in all his spare time by writing. He was compiling some historical work, perhaps, or a book on ancient mythology. We didn't exactly know, and the matter did not interest us in any case.

But the Remove-master was seldom seen out of his study, except at meal-times and when lessons called him. Wet or fine, he remained bottled up, and when he emerged he generally had a faraway expression in his eyes - an expression which indicated that his thoughts were in other realms.

During lessons, however, he nearly always came out of his shell, and confined himself to the work in hand briskly, and with all his usual vigour. But within the last day or two, Mr. Crowell had remained absentminded, even at lesson times. Not only this, but he sometimes acted in a very singular way, and would make the most irrelevant observations.

Only the previous morning he had ordered the Remove to write two lines, and to consider itself detained after lessons, for twelve hours! Naturally, this punishment was not taken seriously, and Mr. Crowell himself apparently forgot all about it. In other ways, too, he was acting very strangely.

On this particular morning things had been going smoothly so far, and Mr. Crowell had given no sign that he was in one of his "dotty" moods. For the Remove had come to regard their Form-master as being somewhat off his rocker. And, certainly, Mr. Crowell's attitude sometimes gave colour to this suggestion.

"He seems to be getting worse!" whispered Handforth, nudging McClure, and causing that junior to make a huge blot on his paper. "Didn't you notice the way he -"

"You - you ass!" hissed McClure. "Look what you've done! I shall get caned for having a blotted paper like this! Why the dickens can't you shut up? You know jolly well that Crowell is touchy about talking in class."

"It strikes me you're doing all the talking!" snapped Handforth.

Mr. Crowell rapped his desk again.

"Handforth!" he exclaimed harshly. "Stand up!"

Handforth stood up, gave a glare at Mc Clure, and then faced the Form-master. "Yes, sir?" he asked innocently.

"A moment ago, Handforth, you were talking," said Mr. Crowell, with dangerous calmness. "You were not only talking, but you were making grimaces at McClure. In order that you may thoroughly understand my instructions, I command you to write me ten thousand lines of Greek, to be translated into English."

Handforth gasped, and the Remove gasped.

"Ten thousand lines, sir!" repeated Handforth, faintly.

"That is what I said, boy!"

"Of - of Greek, sir?"

"Yes."

"But - but we ain't advanced in Greek, sir," said Handforth indignantly. "I couldn't translate ten thousand lines in two years!"

"Unless you take your seat at once, Handforth, I will make your punishment even harder," declared Mr. Crowell. "Remember my words. Ten thousand lines of Chinese to be translated into English!"

"Chinese, sir!" stuttered Handforth.

"Yes!" roared the Form-master.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove could not contain itself any longer, and they yelled.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "How - how dare you make all this noise? As for you, Handforth, I have altered my decision. I will cancel the punishment I just meted out to you."

"Thank goodness!" muttered Handforth.

"Instead of that, you will be placed in solitary confinement for a period of six hours," said Mr. Crowell. "Go to Mars at once, and remain there until I give you permission to return!"

Handforth stared.

"Go - go where, sir?" he asked.

"You distinctly heard what I said, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell irritably. "I detest all these unnecessary questions. You will go up to Mars at once, and you will remain on the planet until I instruct you to return to earth!"

"Oh, my goodness!" said Handforth blankly. "I - I don't mind going to Mars, if you'll tell me how to get there."

Mr. Crowell picked up the duster, and mopped his brow. The Remove, meanwhile, looked on with interest and wonder.

"Clean dotty!" murmured Watson into my ear. "If he goes on like this, we shan't be able to have lessons at all. I reckon he'll be fit for a lunatic asylum in less than a week!"

Mr. Crowell looked up, and glared at Watson. He had removed the duster, and his face was decidedly paler - probably because the duster had contained a good portion of chalk.

"Watson," said Mr. Crowell tartly, "you were speaking just now!"

"Was - was I?" asked Watson lamely.

"Yes, you were, and you will write me fifty lines!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "I have repeatedly said that I will have quietness in this Form-room, and what I say I mean."

This passage was just a sample of what we were to read in No. 256. Of course, in other stories we were treated to much more serious stuff such as in No. 339, "Shunned by his Schoolboys," published in December, 1921. This was one of the so called "Dr. Stafford's madness" series. Here Mr. Crowell had a very trying time with the Headmaster, who, when in one of his "moods" threatened to sack the Remove master.

I could go on for ages quoting episodes of Form-room events both serious and comic. There was the time when the boys took over running the school in the latter part of the Trenton series. There was fun and games the first time Singleton arrived in class. There was more fun with Archie. And when Mr. Heath arrived as the new Remove master we were diverted by the clash between he and Fullwood. The latter trying to take a "rise" out of the newcomer was flabbergasted by the new master's wit in devising a punishment to fit the crime, so to speak, when he ordered Fullwood to write out two hundred times the following -

"A head full of nonsense is equivalent to a head full of wood. If I, Fullwood, of sense were full would I act so foolishly."

The words "full" and "wood" being heavily underlined gave point to the pun.

Then, remember, there was the time when Miss Trumble brought mistresses to take the various Forms and immense trouble resulted. There were a number of good Form-room scenes in that series. Another time was in the Quirk series. Remember No. 546 "The Haunted Form-room?" This was when desk lids flew up for no apparent reason and so on.

Referring again to Mr. Crowell, another side of his character was shewn in No. 274 "The Return of the Wanderers," September 4th, 1920. The holiday party returned a little late for the new term and when the Removites reached the steps of the Ancient House, Mr. Crowell appeared. This was the first time the boys had seen him since his departure on sick leave many weeks before as described by me earlier in this article. Quoting from No. 274 this is what we read on page 25:-

"I am extremely pleased to see you back again, my dear lads!" said the master of the Remove. "According to all the reports I hear, you have met with some extraordinary adventures, and it is extremely fortunate that you have all returned safe and sound. You must be thankful for your good luck."

"We are, sir!"

"Rather!"

"And we're terrifically pleased to see you back again, sir!"

"Thank you, my boys - thank you!" said Mr. Crowell. "I have no doubt that we shall get along very nicely together this term - that is, if you behave yourselves as you ought to. I dare say we shall soon settle down to the regular routine of things."

"Oh, rather, sir!" said Handforth. "We're going to be tremendously good this term. We're not going to play any tricks, and we're going to be good little boys

generally!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suspect that you mean me to take that remark as a joke, Handforth," smiled Mr. Crowell. "It would not be natural for you to refrain from japes, as you call them. However, I will not spoil your pleasure by remaining here any longer. You may, of course, do pretty much as you like for this evening. I shall turn a deaf ear to any particular noises I may hear coming from the juniors' studies and from the common-room. It is an exceptional occasion, and I must therefore be exceptionally deaf!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Mr. Crowell!"

"Give him a cheer you chaps!"

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Crowell was quite flattered, and he retired into the Ancient House looking rather confused. He had not been cheered very often, and he was quite delighted to hear himself cheered now. He was quite popular and that little speech of his had made him ten times more popular. A master who turns a deaf ear to noises on a special occasion is always regarded as a brick.

"Good old Crowell!" exclaimed Handforth. "I think his holiday has taken some of the acid out of him. Let's hope he remains like it all the time, although I'm afraid he'll get soured before long."

I know I have been able to quote only a few selected items of Form-room life at St. Frank's, but enough, I think, to prove the versatility of E. S. Brooks' writings of school life and to show that he was a master of this type as well as of the more exotic and eerie stories we enjoyed so much, such as those about Dr. Karnak and Ezra Quirk.

Let me finish by wishing all readers the compliments of the season and all the very best for 1970.

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— WAKEFIELD —

By W. O. G. LOFTS

Although I take a deep interest in all aspects of our great hobby, I must confess that I take a greater interest in the authors than the artists. There is, however, one exception, and that is the artist G. W. Wakefield, whom most readers know best for his illustrating of the Rookwood tales.

Jimmy Silver was my own boyhood hero - to my mind the perfect, happy-go-lucky type of schoolboy that I would have liked to have as a personal friend. I must have read about him in the S.O.L. as the stories in The Boys' Friend had ceased, long before I started reading boys' papers. Jimmy, of course, was portrayed in Wakefield's charming style - with nearly always the 'Keep Smiling' theme on all the Rookwood boys. Once seen, Wakefield's individual style could be easily recognised again. The cherub, angelic, sweet, clean-looking boys, who were to my mind drawn exactly to size, and more youthful than the Greyfriars and St. Jim's Boys. Apart from my nostalgic memories, any mystery interests me deeply. For some strange reason so little has always been known about this artist. Indeed, many years ago, I think it was the late Herbert Leckenby, who suggested that the Christian initial of G. stood for Grace - and that the artist was a woman! This was later corrected by myself, but since that date, the only further scanty information about him has come from my pen. He was once a boxer; he died during the last war; he used to draw the background first and fill in the middle afterwards! An editor at Fleetway House, informed me, some years ago, that Wakefield had a son, who likewise was an artist, and it was only recently that I was able to contact him at his home in Twickenham, and learn the full story of George William Wakefield .....

Hoxton, London, in 1887, was reputed to be the toughest part of London. George William Wakefield who was born there, was the son of a small fiery Irishman, who was a painter and decorator. Mrs. Wakefield, who came from Suffolk, however, showed a great interest in art, and not only loved to talk about it, but used to visit all the art galleries in London. As mentioned earlier, Hoxton was a rough district, and as soon as he was old enough, Wakefield learned boxing, and so was able to take care of himself. Often he used to visit his mother's home town in Suffolk. On leaving school, 'Bill' as he was affectionately called, went to work as an apprentice cabinet maker, and was a promising pupil. However, probably due to his mother's influence, he started to take an interest in art, and after winning a scholarship, he entered Camberwell Art School. He showed such promise that he was able to get a job on 'Ally Sloper' edited about 1906 by a man called Roberts. Several times he drew the famous comic character of Ally-Sloper that was such a rage in this period. At this time, he was also drawing serious art, as with the death of King Edward VII in 1910 he had the task of drawing the lying-in-state at Westminster Abbey. Around this period, he joined Amalgamated Press, and worked in Fred Cordwell's dept. This is not the article to go into detail about Fred Cordwell except to say that after starting as Lord Northcliffe's office boy he soon rose in position to become a controlling editor, who thought up such brilliant and best selling papers as Fun & Fiction; Merry & Bright;

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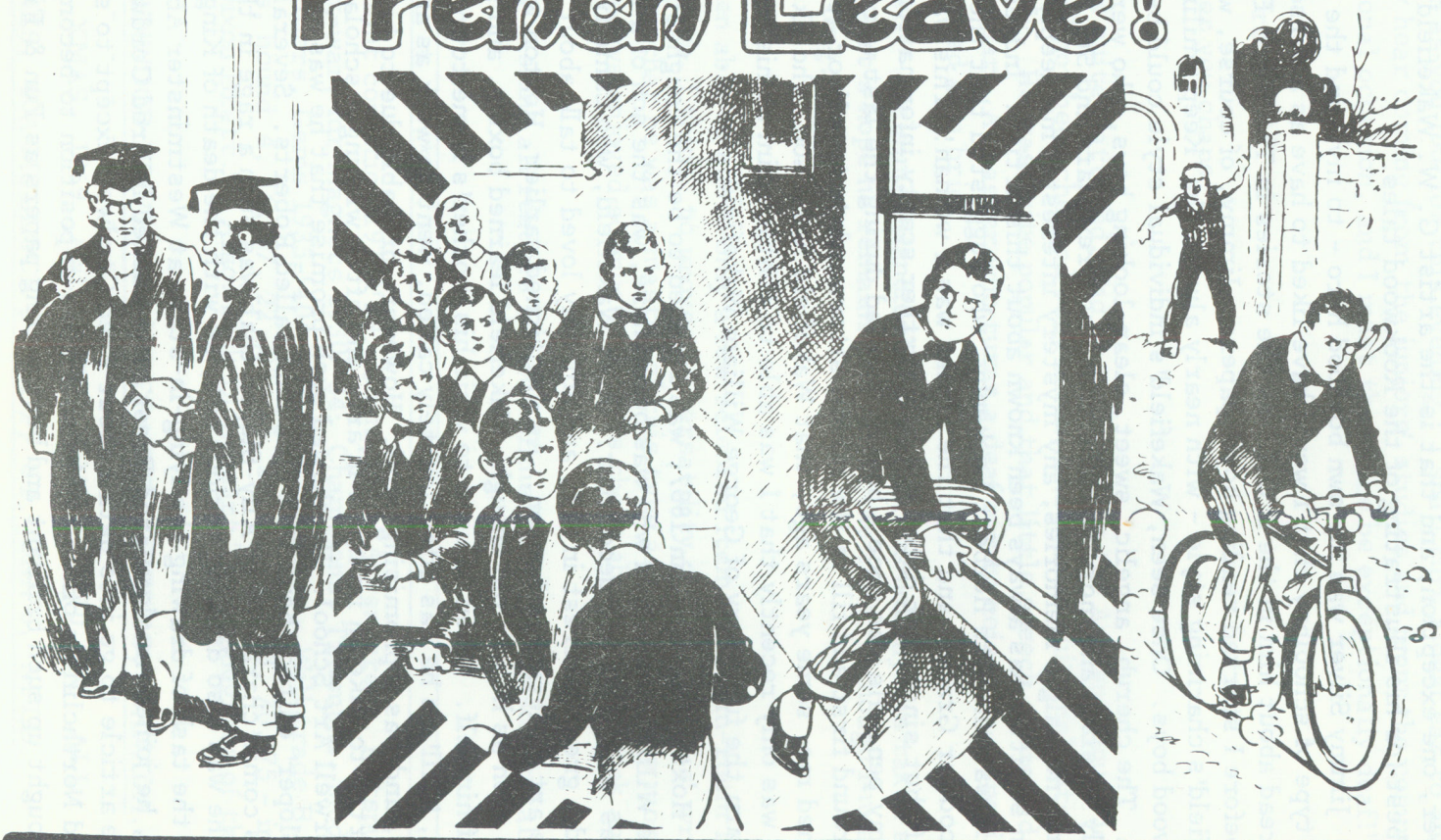

MORNINGTON'S RECKLESS ESCAPADE!

Whilst Mr. Bootles talked with the Head outside the Form-room, Valentine Mornington clambered over the window-sill and dropped to the ground below. A few moments later he was speeding out of the gates on his bicycle, with old Mack staring after him in blank amazement!

A SPECIMEN OF THE WORK OF G. W. WAKEFIELD

Film Fun; Kinema Komic; Bullseye; Surprise, etc. Wakefield's work was used a great deal in all these papers, and he and Cordwell became close friends. Wakefield was still keen on boxing, and he used to go round the fairgrounds and take on the boxers. 'Last six rounds with Joe Bloggs, and win £5.' It says much for Wakefield's skill in this field, that he once fought the famous Gunner Moir, who later became a British Champion.

There is no real explanation as to why he nearly always drew his characters with cherub, and angelic faces. Essentially a comic artist, when he first started he had to learn to draw with speed. He thought, quite rightly, that a sweet expression was far better than a sour one, or better than no expression at all. So he just got in the habit of drawing the sweet, and if I must say so, charming faces instinctively, though if the need be, he could easily draw an expression that suited the situation. Whilst it was reported by me some years ago, and this information was gleaned by an old Fun & Fiction editor, who had seen him at work, that Wakefield drew the background first, this was not strictly correct, though it strongly looked like it. He actually sketched the heads in first, but so lightly, that they could hardly be seen with the naked eye. Probably he may have blacked in the foreground first, when the mood suited him, but all the same he did have an unusual way of illustrating his work.

During the first world war, he joined up and served in the 6th Lancers, but was eventually invalided out. Of all the artists that he admired, one stood head and shoulders above the rest, and that was Warwick Reynolds. He simply doted on his work, and has at his home, many original drawings of his that had appeared in the Gem. The rather larger than life, but clean looking boys greatly appealed to him, and this was incorporated into his Rookwood boys. With the original artist of Rookwood dropping out, both Wakefield, and C. H. Chapman went after the job. How Wakefield got it, will make a very interesting story to tell one day. Regarding the situations to illustrate in the Rookwood stories, Wakefield had a free hand, and used to take the manuscripts home with him, and sketch out what he thought was the best. His son, Terence, used to avidly read the stories, weeks in advance of other boys at his school, and it is interesting to note that he 'knew' from his father as a boy, that 'Owen Conquest,' 'Frank Richards' and 'Martin Clifford' were all the same man. Wakefield's drawings of the Rookwood characters were not only popular with readers, but even the mighty Harold J. Garrish, who was a hard man to please, liked them. 'That's how boys should be!' exclaimed the Director of Juvenile publications. 'Clean, and always as if they had scrubbed their necks.' Probably slightly younger-looking than the Greyfriars and St. Jim's boys. That is how at least I imagined the boys to be.

Whilst there is no question that Wakefield's greatest fame in our hobby was the Rookwood illustrations, another fact is that he practically drew all the sets in Film Fun of those world-famous comedians Laurel and Hardy. The readership in generations of this comic paper went into millions, whilst the strip was the longest running of any film character. Wakefield always wanted to meet the famous comedians in the flesh, but was always put off doing so, by Fred Cordwell who feared that the film stars' agents might have wanted a greater fee if they knew the extent of their popularity. With Rookwood eventually ceasing, and the Bullseye and Surprise falling by the wayside, Film Fun was still going strong up to the war. Wakefield had moved

from London to Suffolk about 1926 as he felt he could concentrate more, and get more work done, away from the London scene of so many friends and late nights. He had for years suffered from an ulcer complaint, and when he entered a hospital at Norwich in 1942, no one knew how serious it really was. His son, who was serving in the Army at the time, received a telegram saying his father was seriously ill, but by the time he reached Norwich at 10 at night after a lot of Army red tape - he was shocked to learn that his father had died some 12 hours before. He was only 54 years of age.

Wakefield, apart from his comic work, was a really clever artist. A large oil painting hanging in his son's study shows a group of monks watching two other priests playing chess. The portrait is entitled 'The Bishop's Move' a method of play, I believe, that stops an opponent winning the game. I should say that to draw a chess board with figures on all the correct squares is the hardest thing possible to do in perspective, yet this is drawn exactly! Another painting features Roundheads.

As mentioned earlier, Terence Wakefield, the son, is also an artist, but now works in a hospital, as the old type of comic drawings is not so much now in demand. He worked at Fleetway House from 1927 until 1959, and knew all the other artists and editors, and is a mine of information on them. He took over the Laurel & Hardy strip after his father, and could have also continued the Abbott and Costello strip which his father had half-finished when he died. George William Wakefield was a very good family man who doted on his son and daughter, and his son always affectionately called him 'Dad.' Mrs. Wakefield is still alive and lives in very quiet retirement in Suffolk. Probably now, she can find consolation in that her husband's work is still remembered, as he undoubtedly gave pleasure to millions in his time.

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MERRY CHRISTMAS and HAPPY NEW YEAR to all collectors, everywhere. Still need Magnet 1351 and a few early Magnets, Gems, Populars, Black Bess, S.O.L's, etc.

STUART WHITEHEAD, 12 WELLS ROAD, FAKENHAM, NORFOLK.

- -

WANTED: Champion Annual 1937, Puck Annuals, Puck Comics 1933, 1935, 1936, pre-war Thomson Books and Comics. I have large number of Pucks (1930) for exchange, and others. Cash if wanted.

HEARN, 191 ARBURY ROAD, CAMBRIDGE, CB4 2JJ.

- -

WANTED — to complete run of Magnets, numbers 1544, 1555, 1562, 1566, 1587, 1588, also Grimslade S.O.L. 254.

THURBON, 29 STRAWBERRY HILL ROAD, TWICKENHAM, MIDDLESEX.

- -

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to all O.B.B.C. friends — especially Midlands members! WANTED: B.F.L. 446 and 457 (Captain Justice stories) —

IAN BENNETT, 20 FREWEN DRIVE, SAPCOTE, LEICESTER.

Waldo's Wonder Stunt!

By DEREK SMITH

Christmas, 1923, looked like being an easy time for the man from Baker Street. "Sexton Blake was no detective now - just a guest at Cloome Chase, enjoying a Christmas holiday." There was, however, a shadow over the occasion. The house-party was likely to be the last social event at the Chase with Lord Cloome himself as the host. Like the pauper of Pengarth - the protagonist of another E. S. Brooks adventure - the old peer was deeply in debt and the loss of his ancestral home seemed imminent.

Moreover his daughter, the Hon. Diana Pennant, was in love with Lord Reggie Hammerton - socially eligible but financially inadequate. In Lord Cloome's eyes, the favoured suitor was Colonel Rodney Marchmont. He was a distinguished soldier and rich enough to please any poverty-stricken father. Fortunately for the young lovers, the Colonel was also a genial old buffer who had no intention of acting dishonourably.

In the circumstances, the house-party was not as light-hearted as it might have been. As Tinker remarked: "Somehow, there's a feeling of gloom about the place!"

Tinker's craving for excitement was soon to be satisfied. Legend told of an unearthly visitor - the figure of a murdered Crusader who had defamed a holy cause with his villainy. "With his dying breath this Crusader declared that after reaching Hades he would return to Cloome Chase to haunt it for evermore." This was the family ghost: "THE FLAMING SPECTRE OF CLOOME" (Union Jack No. 1054).

It appeared on Christmas Eve "in the very centre of the big lawn. At first there was just a faint, blurry outline. It increased until the figure of a Crusader appeared - and it was indeed clothed in fire. Vivid sparks and flames seemed to shoot out from every side of the figure ... It was ghastly - unreal - in that cloak of fire."

Blake and Tinker gave chase. The Spectre fled - with a mocking laugh - and then proceeded to turn itself into the twentieth century equivalent of Spring-Heeled Jack.

At the end of the rose-garden was a high wall, a brick barrier of ten or twelve feet. The Thing reached the top of the wall in one soaring leap, ran along the top, leapt clean to the roof of a low annexe and glided up to the apex. "From there it reached the roof of the north wing. Whirling round the chimney-stacks, dancing madly on a mere ridge with a sheer drop on either side, the ghost was like some prancing demon. And then, finally, uttering a wild, sobbing laugh, the Thing leapt sheer into space, rising upwards with the force of its take-off. And then abruptly - dramatically - in mid-air it vanished."

There was, of course, only one man in the annals who was capable of a feat like that. He was Blake's friendly enemy, Waldo the Wonder Man.

Contact was soon established in a secret chamber in the north wing. Waldo had been waiting for the great detective and his assistant - and was coolly amused by their attempt to capture him. "With one effort of his tremendous strength he hurled Blake and Tinker aside as if they were children." And then: "Waldo commenced to spurt fire from every inch of his person! Hissing, sizzling blue sparks jumped out of him, as though he had suddenly become a great electric dynamo ...

"With a laugh, Waldo reached out a hand and touched Tinker. In a flash Tinker was enveloped in a blue flame - a flame which shivered and literally outlined him in fire. He seemed to freeze stiff, and, a cry on his lips, he dropped to the floor like a log."

Then it was Blake's turn to be shocked into insensibility. When the pair recovered, it was only to find themselves at the bottom of a pit with steep, smooth sides - a kind of human disposal unit from the Middle Ages.

Blake's escape from this trap was pure Norman Conquest. The sides of the pit had been hewn out of the hard earth. With his heavy clasp-knife Blake scratched away until he had formed a rough kind of step. Then he commenced a perilous ascent, foot by foot carving his way upward, digging fresh foot - and finger-holds as he went.

At last,more dead than alive, he reached the top and clawed his way over the edge to safety.

Waldo, though a rough playmate, had meant the pair no lasting harm. In fact, in his own devious way, he had already arranged for a rescue-party. Nevertheless "it was a great satisfaction to the pair to realise that they would have escaped in any case." Sturdy self reliance was a cardinal virtue in the world of Edwy Searles Brooks.

Subsequent developments included the rattling of a family skeleton and the restoration of a missing heir, while the romantic sub-plot - which was not as irrelevant as it seemed - was tidied up in a most satisfactory manner. Waldo's wonder stunt as a kind of human Aurora Borealis was ingeniously explained. Seemingly not content with his already supernormal powers, the Wonder Man had equipped himself with "an electrically-charged suit beneath his ordinary attire, his body itself being effectively insulated." Added Blake: "Such a thing could be done, but with great risk." Which was putting it mildly.

Blake was capable of a stunt or two himself. At their next encounter the Wonder Man was disconcerted to find that his electrical trickery had no discernible effect upon his adversary. Blake had taken the precaution of equipping himself with thin rubber gloves and crepe-soled boots "thus insulating him from the earth contact necessary to effect an electric shock."

Waldo was eventually defeated less by Blake's endeavours than by his own good nature. The object of the exercise - from the Wonder Man's point of view - had been the acquisition of the lost Cloome heirlooms. Yet now he was prepared to relinquish the loot and restore the old peer's fortunes!

"'I don't know what to do with you, Waldo,' smiled Sexton Blake.

"'You'll do nothing with me,' said the other. 'And I shall be glad when Christmas is over. This Yuletide spirit saps my determination, and makes me a weakling! Think of it, Blake! A fortune in my hands, and I foolishly give it up to Lord Cloome!'

"'Not foolishly, Waldo. You have brought joy to a saddened heart.'"

And upon that seasonable note was concluded one of the most enjoyable of Sexton Blake's Christmas adventures.

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Rupert Waldo's encore as "THE ELECTRIC MAN" was published in the Union Jack, No. 1077 on May 31st, 1924. This time he was masquerading as "Wyndham Long," man about town and occupant of a luxurious flat in St. John's Wood. He was soon involved in the affairs of a talented but impoverished young electrical engineer and his miserly uncle, Septimus Croft. Uncle Septimus, of course, was just the kind of scaly specimen that Waldo loved to squash.

The Wonder Man's devious schemes always stopped short of deliberate murder. Therefore it was a surprise when "the old man was found in the library by the butler ... with a dagger driven to its hilt in his heart."

All was not what it seemed. When Sexton Blake accompanied Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard to the scene of the crime, it was only to find that the "body" had vanished from the locked and guarded room.

Septimus Croft was not really dead. Waldo had merely been indulging his weird sense of humour - and, as Blake had remarked at their previous encounter, the Wonder Man's keen desire for display was the one weak spot in his armour. It did not take the detective long to discover how Waldo had hocussed the stoutly-barred window and he soon guessed where Waldo was hiding his victim.

An examination of "Wyndham Long's" flat threw an interesting light on Waldo's development as the Electric Man. Two curious terminals, made to be gripped by hand, were found attached to the main electric switchboard. Waldo had actually been charging himself with an electric current that would have half-killed any ordinary man. "It has taken me months to accustom myself to such a high voltage ... I am wearing an electric suit, which I keep fully charged. But I have acquired such electricity in my own body that I can actually switch myself on and off as though I were a human dynamo."

Waldo was eventually cornered in Croft's private strong-room behind a secret door in the library. "Cornered," of course, is quite the wrong word since it was the Wonder Man's invariable habit to walk away from arrest however heavy the odds were against him.

Blake managed to dispossess Waldo of most of his loot by the rather comic process of entangling the Wonder Man's arms in his half-shed overcoat. This stopped Waldo operating the electric switch in his pocket and gave Blake the chance to retrieve most of the stolen diamonds. Waldo, however, was well satisfied with his remaining

haul and devoted a high percentage to rescuing Croft's nephew from his financial difficulties - which was ethically dubious but poetically just.

That was Waldo's last exploit as the Electric Man. He had refined and perfected the stunt until it had become an end in itself, and it was no longer serving any real purpose. Its novelty value was gone.

There might have been doubts about the credibility of this latest device of E. S. Brooks - but all his "stunts" had a natural or quasi-scientific basis, like the character of the Wonder Man himself. In fact, the tale was followed in the Union Jack by a short article about a real-life Electric Man.

He was Pietro Erto, from the town of Castellamare di Strabia in Southern Italy. He had been taken to Paris to have his case investigated by the foremost scientists of France, who - the writer claimed - had confessed themselves beaten.

After being stripped and examined "Erto then relapsed into the state of hypnotic sleep, or coma ... When he was completely in the trance state, rays or streamers of some mysterious kind emanated from all parts of his body... They resembled electric flashes or the wavering light of the Aurora... Around the head of the unconscious subject the rays formed themselves into the shape of a cone, while from his left side they shot out fan-wise to nearly three times the length of the recumbent figure."

The rays could be photographed. They passed through solid substances like X-rays and affected sealed photographic plates. The investigators were convinced they were dealing with a real psychic phenomenon.

Erto may have been genuine, but he was no Wonder Man. When he recovered from his trances there was nothing whatever unusual about him - and that could never be said about any character created by Edwy Searles Brooks!

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SEASONS GREETINGS to Old Boys' Book Collectors, especially Bill Sharpe, Sir James Swan, our esteemed editor Eric Fayne, V. Lay, A. Paynter, Geoff Harrison, S. Smyth, J. Murtagh, V. Colby, Miss B. Pate, Jim "Tarzan" Belton. Still interested in Lees, Blakes, U. Jacks, Thrillers, D. Weeklies, etc. Hope all have best of Christmas and New Year cheers. Note Mr. J. Belton, have just procured Robert W. Fenton's "The Big Swingers," Biography, Edgar Rice Burroughs - not bad, either. They have been good to us E.R.B. fans lately - "Tarzan of the Movies" plus most unpublished works. Hope you are keeping well, Jim. Yours For Ever,

A. G. DAVIDSON, 193 RAE STREET, FITZROY NORTH, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

- -

WANTED:- All years, Magnets and Gems. Particularly Red Magnets and early Gems, also post-war Hamiltonia. A Merry Xmas to all readers.

G. BRUTON, 205 LONG ELMES, HARROW, MIDDLESEX.

GEORGE ROBEY was born exactly a hundred years ago. 50 years ago, in 1919, when George was aged 50, the Boys' Friend was running a weekly series of articles on Cricket, by famous cricketers. Famous names used as authors in the old papers were often suspect, but it is probable that these short items were genuinely written by the cricketers named. George Robey, who was a good amateur player, contributed this article to the series.

OUR SPECIAL CRICKET ARTICLE

THIS WEEK: GEORGE ROBEY. "DON'TS FOR YOUNG CRICKETERS"

DON'T grumble if your captain puts you in somewhere near last, or even drops you out of the team altogether. He is a far better judge of your play than you are. If you could only hear him discussing you, sometimes, you would soon ascertain that he is not only well acquainted with your capabilities as a cricketer, but even knows where you are going to when you die.

DON'T imagine that you are the only man on the field, and that everyone is looking with reverence while you pose and admire that crease in your trousers. The other fellows are, of course, not half so impressive; but the hang of one's trousers and the quality of one's buckskins do not make a cricketer. Love is blind, and even admiration for yourself will probably result in your not seeing the easy catch when it comes along.

DON'T worry about your looks if the fast bowler accidentally drops one short and catches you in the right optic. It is far better to go home with a black eye from a cricket match than a horrible itching in the small of the back from visiting a picture palace.

DON'T play imaginary shots with your bat after you have been bowled out. Everybody who troubles to notice your dismissal thoroughly understands that you have not done what you wanted to, but they are not in the least concerned about the proper method of dealing with that particular form of delivery. You can take it from me that the other fellows in the pavilion are glad rather than sorry.

DON'T argue with the umpire, even if you are given out l.b.w. when the ball pitched a yard outside the off stump. He may be a married man, and the opportunity for having his own way may only come his way every Saturday afternoon. Who knows? I have umpired myself.

DON'T be suspicious if you see some shady individual hanging round the dressing rooms when there is no attendant; but, at the same time, don't put too much trust in human nature. Far be it from me to run down the sacred creed of Socialism.

DON'T trouble to come in out of the rain, nor put on a sweater after getting overheated. I know of plenty hospitals where you can spend a month with rheumatic fever, and if you cannot get laid up that way, there are thousands of motor-cyclists who will do the trick for you, and not even stop to see if they have done it properly.

DON'T drink anything stronger than ginger-beer during the interval. I know

a fellow who saw three balls and three bats when he took up his position at the wicket. The silly ass hit the left-hand ball with the right-hand bat, and got bowled.

DON'T pretend to know more about the game than you really do. Ignorance is bound to come out. A man went in to bat wearing only one pad, and that one on the wrong leg. Upon being told of his mistake, he excused himself with the plea that he thought he had to go in at the other end.

DON'T take your best girl to see you play. First of all, she will hear too much about your bad points, should you fail; and another point to consider, there are other members of the team. Every girl - and young man, if it comes to that - likes a change sometimes.

DON'T allow your love for cricket to interfere with your business or professional career. Play the game, by all means; but play it in your leisure hours. I can remember a period, many years ago, when there was a great cry about unemployment. Many thousands of young fellows couldn't get work; and as I took my morning stroll across a famous park, I used to see them searching for it - on the cricket field.

DON'T think, because you are a comedian, and can make the public laugh when in a theatre, that you can write funny stuff about cricket.

Now laugh!

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HAMILTONIAN LIBRARY — LONDON O.B.B.C.

An Invitation

Now that the evenings are drawing in, the attractions of Hamiltoniana become even more compelling. In the London Club we have recently acquired further additions to our extensive stocks which enable us to add a few more names to our postal section.

If you would like to know the rules for postal borrowing and also have details of the two thousand Magnets, Gems and Schoolboys' Owns stocked, and you have not yet obtained a copy of the new printed and illustrated catalogue issued last Christmas, send me a Postal Order for 1/6d. If you would like a copy of the previous catalogue (a collectors' item in itself with a different range of illustrations) send me 6d. in stamps. The two catalogues together cost 1/9d. (These prices apply only to the British Isles.)

Wanted

For years we have searched for Gem 780, to complete a series. Can you help?

Librarian

Write to Roger Jenkins, "The Firs," 7 Eastern Road, Havant, Hants., PO9 2JE.

Free Next Week

By KENNETH BAILEY

As I have already written in Collectors' Digest No. 267, Boys' Magazine was the first paper that I ever purchased, but its strong content turned me away and I then took Modern Boy from issue No. 1 in, I think, 1928. However, to be fair I found that B.M. in its last few years was an extremely good paper and I was sorry and surprised when its end came, for I had taken it for a longer period than any paper I can think of.

The free gifts given in the first four issues of Modern Boy were two dimensional tin replicas of the locomotive "King George V," a Canadian National Railways locomotive, Henry Seagrave's record-breaking Sunbeam car and the Supermarine seaplane which won the Schneider Trophy. These replicas had a base which could be bent at right angles so allowing them to be stood on mantelpiece or shelf. This type of gift enjoyed some popularity at this time, for Gem also issued a set of locomotives, Adventure a set of warships and Modern Boy gave a further set of locomotives a few years later. A problem arising with these plates was their reluctance to leave the pages wherein they nestled and very often a few sentences of a story came away with them.

Speaking as a keen railway enthusiast, I am happy to say that the real engine, "King George V," now lives quite near me and is frequently on show due to the good works of Messrs. H. P. Bulmer who have it on long loan from Swindon Museum.

Incidentally my interest in railways made me prone to buying any paper which depicted a steam locomotive on its cover and I really met Nelson Lee Library through such a move. But to return to Modern Boy or M.B. as it shall be referred to henceforth. Its stories were practically all derived from the world's of machines and transport and tales of railways, flying, motor and motor-cycle racing, fire-fighting and Thames tug boats all took their place in the pages of the paper. One motor racing story had Malcolm Campbell's name as its author and Charles Hamilton pitched in with a South Sea trading series "King of the Islands."

Despite the Americans claim to be the first men on the moon, this had already been accomplished by Professor Flaznagel in M.B. forty years previously, as well as other space cavortings.

All of us must remember the exhortations of editors to "look out for next week's bumper Christmas issue" and I always think that the M.B. issue was more bumper than anyone elses. Granted the extra pages were all adverts - but what adverts! Basset-Lowke, Hornby, Meccano, Bowman, Daisy, motor boats in which one placed a pill which somehow drove the boat through water, and many other, to me, unattainable delights. Covers of M.B. were always topical and depicted such events as the Boat Race, King's Birthday Parade and innovations in the realms of land, sea and air transport.

The page size used was that of the Magnet which I always thought an ideal size

as compared with Nelson Lee on one hand and Detective Weekly on the other.

In these days of which I write, we were much given to swopping, either papers for papers or papers for other things. (I once traded an old model steam engine for about 50 M.B's.) It was, therefore, inevitable that I became acquainted with many papers for the first time in this manner. Deals were often carried out on church choir practice nights after preliminary discussions during sermons on previous Sundays. I first met "Popular" by a swop, but alas, it was the final issue. Inside a large notice advised me to look out for the new paper "Ranger No. 1 - out next week."

The following Saturday morning, which I clearly remember as a very cold but sunny February one, I was early at the newsagent for this first issue. Although an A.P. publication, its bright, almost gaudy cover was very much in D. C. Thompson style with a page size similar to Adventure. Its leading story was a tale of modern piracy in which a fleet of flying boats preyed on ocean liners. I remember their leader as a Van Dyck bearded adventurer with a total disregard of his victims lives. Another story I can recall is a Biggles type Great War air series entitled "Baldy's Angels," but these may have been in later issues.

Rangers free gift was one of those elastic drive airplanes the assembly of which seemed beyond me, for several papers gave away these sort of things and I failed to complete one. Hobbies had issued one of these models as also did Scout, when that paper had a face lift in 1933.

Ranger gave a variation of this model in later years which took the form of the Bennie railplane, a car suspended from an overhead rail with a propeller for traction. Again Nelson Lee's last free gift was a four wheeled "road-car" also driven by elasticity.

A few years after its birth, Ranger changed its page size to that of the Champion's, but ailing sales finished it off. It was replaced by the Pilot in the mid-1930's and I have a sneaking suspicion that it became the Buzzer a few years before war came.

This period saw a lot of comings and goings as regards boys' papers, and towards the end of 1933 the Pioneer appeared in Magnet page size. I thought it a nicely laid out adventure story paper but I was now progressing to what I thought of as adult papers, namely Detective Weekly, Thriller and Sports Budget.

When these recollections were half written, I happened to be in Bristol and when purchasing a newspaper there I was struck by the fact that of all the pre-war boys' papers only those of D. C. Thompson are still published under their old titles and with very little change in content. It is a sad reflection that these less appealing papers (to me) have outlived those of which we now only know by memory or by nostalgic glimpses of old numbers.

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CAN ANY READER LOAN DON WEBSTER B.F.L. 'THROUGH THICK AND THIN?' CARE TAKEN.

Harry Wharton's Rebellion

By J. F. BELLFIELD

I received my copy of this beautiful volume on the day we broke up for the long school holiday, and I settled down to read it from cover to cover. I only had a hazy idea of what this famous series was all about; having read a few years ago the Schoolboys' Own Library version, but I had heard it praised by very knowledgeable people in the hobby as one of Charles Hamilton's masterpieces. As I put it down after reading the final story, The Runaway Rebel, I knew that it had not been praised too highly. This was Charles Hamilton at his very best.

As I sat back to feel the overall impression of this series a few lines from Alexander Pope came into my head

"Of all the causes that conspire to blind
Man's erring judgment and misguide the mind
What the weak head with strongest bias rules
Is PRIDE the never failing voice of fools."

As Wharton says to the other members of the Famous Five and Bunter: "Gentlemen, chaps and fellows, I've been a fool." That is Harry Wharton's conclusion when a final reconciliation with his friends is brought about. And it is Pride that has made a fool of him. Pride in its unpleasant manifestation is without doubt the theme that runs through this splendid series extending to half a million words and through all the intricacies of plot and situation continuing a whole term and taking in all, 12 long Magnets.

It has often surprised people that the Church has placed Pride as the very greatest of the seven deadly sins. To many this has seemed to be a mistake. Most of us are convinced that pride is a very proper feeling in certain situations. This may well be so, but when we are told that pride is the very devil and by this the angels fell, as we grow older we come to see that it is the root of nine-tenths of all the trouble in the world and is at the root of almost every quarrel. I venture to suggest that if one reads through this remarkable series the story speaks for itself.

Here is Charles Hamilton in no flippant mood such as we often find in the lighter stories, but in grim earnest as the theme of pride based on bitterness through ill luck and gross injustice is worked out to its logical conclusion. Pride is a subtle evil and though Charles Hamilton would make no pretensions to be a psychologist, he understands it in all its subtlety. When it has anyone in its grip it regards as an affront even the necessity of giving an account of itself and time and time again a few words of explanation from Harry Wharton would have set things right, but these words do not come. To those obsessed by pride it is thought too demeaning.

As the series develops we see a gradual deterioration in Wharton's character. He does not go to the dogs and indulge in blagging although he takes a grim sort of

satisfaction in leading Loder and Quelch to believe this is so for the purpose of making fools of them. The essential nobility of Wharton's character is maintained to the end and one cannot help feeling that like the prophet of old he was angry and felt he did well to be angry. But he is blind in the way pride makes all who nurse it blind. Blind to the fact that if only he would come off his high horse just a little, all would be well, but he will not give away an inch. If they wish to think ill of him, let them. Be hanged to his so called friends. He can do without them. Such are Wharton's reflections and they have a hollow ring. Deep down he knows that this will not do but he will not admit it even to himself. This is the way pride works. It is a respectable sort of quality; it does not drag us down to the depths of weaker and more despicable sins, but it is the lion in the path of good fellowship with others and thrives on bitterness which it nurses to give justification for itself.

This iron front of pride is continued right to the very end until final reconciliation is brought about not by Wharton climbing down but by situations in which pride is out of place and Wharton's true character is revealed without any explanation from him. He saves the lives of both Quelch and Loder and both have the scales fall from their eyes and realise that Harry Wharton is quite incapable of the lying and subterfuge of which they have long suspected him.

There is a curious irony in the final reconciliation between Wharton and the rest of the Famous Five. It is brought about not by Wharton climbing down or his friends making the first step, but by the fatuous antics of Billy Bunter trying to wedge into Wharton Lodge for the holidays at Christmas. He phones Bob Cherry pretending to be Wharton and invites the rest of the Famous Five and himself over to Wharton Lodge for Christmas.

When they arrive, Wharton, thinking they have come offering the olive branch, welcomes them. They, thinking they have been invited, are now all smiles and friendliness.

The truth comes out and a shattering experience it is for the Famous Five to find for once in a way the fatuous Owl had more sense than all of them. As Bunter puts it in his own inimitable way "If I hadn't chipped in you'd still be at loggerheads - the whole lot of you, too fatheaded to make friends again through you all wanted to. I think that you might be grateful. Not that I did it you know. I know absolutely nothing about it."

It must not be imagined that Harry Wharton is the only character who deteriorates strangely in this splendid series. I have read scores of Magnet stories but Mr. Quelch displayed a new side of his character to me. The usual description of him is "a beast but a just beast," but time and again he allows himself to be drawn into acts of injustice to Wharton. But veiled impertinence and sneers are not likely to make schoolmasters kindly disposed to boys who indulge in them.

The character who comes out best in this remarkable series is Lord Mauleverer. When Harry Wharton is accused of catapulting Quelch and Prout, he refuses to believe that Harry is capable of such a trick, despite the great weight of evidence against him. Mauly is not such a fool as the Remove sometimes consider

him to be. Faith in human nature is not always the sign of a foolish gullibility. Some of the very greatest men and women who have graced the pages of history have had this strange power of discernment - of knowing whom they can trust and have often been surprisingly right when the hard heads and cynics have been hopelessly wrong. Even Mauly, however, has a limit to his almost inexhaustible store of sheer good nature and breaks with Wharton when having saved him from almost certain expulsion, Wharton strikes him for butting into his affairs.

I had always thought that of all the characters created by Charles Hamilton in his Greyfriars saga, Ponsonby stood out as the very worst, but in this series Loder runs him a very close second. He shows however, the redeeming feature of gratitude when Wharton saves him from drowning.

Nugent's weak spot, his blindness as to the weak, wilful nature of his minor, causes him to desert Wharton and become very hostile to him despite the fact that Wharton unknowing to Frank Nugent has lent Nugent Minor a pound to save him from being expelled from the school for stealing. He had "borrowed" a pound from Wingate's desk to put on Bonny Bunion, who, the tipsters say, cannot lose, but unfortunately does and Nugent Minor cannot raise the money to put it back.

Amongst all these misunderstandings and misfortunes stands Dr. Locke with his calm and mellow wisdom to see that Wharton has justice, the very epitome of the finest type of schoolmaster, willing to explore every avenue so that as the lawyers say "Justice is done and seen to be done." But we must remember that a Head does not have to "live," as it were with the boys as a form-master does and is therefore less likely to act in a hurry or in the heat of the moment.

This compelling series teaches a moral lesson, and Charles Hamilton has rarely told a better story. It has all the ingredients, tense drama, moments of light humorous relief and a purpose in the telling.

There is so much sound psychology that as I look back to 1932 when it first appeared I cannot but think how fortunate were the youngsters of that time in having such splendid material to read. When we compare it with the material of to-day offered to young people, the Magnet's superiority stands out a mile.

There has often been criticism of Charles Hamilton that he created a fairy world and his characters and stories bear no relation to the ordinary human situation at all. In my view this criticism is beside the point. All work of the imagination is a matter of selection and restriction. If one were to write down the ordinary events that happened nobody would be likely to be very much interested. Small children often do this when doing written composition at school. They begin by having breakfast then going to school, having dinner, then going back to school then school again, tea and watching the T.V. and going to bed, and pretty dull stuff it is, but not much more can be expected at this stage.

At the other end of the scale people of genius such as James Joyce and Virginia Wolf have experimented with the stream of thought technique and though these writers are acknowledged to be great they are almost insuperably difficult to understand.

If Charles Hamilton created a fairy world he did so in very good company. So did Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Dean Swift, The Bronte's, Sir Walter Scott and Lewis Carroll and countless other writers too numerous to mention and so, in point of fact, did George Orwell.

All writing of fiction is in a sense the creation of a fairy world. As Shakespeare says in A Midsummer Night's Dream, "As imagination bodies forth, the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name." The situation may be fictitious as indeed it is bound to be, but the understanding of human nature is not a fiction. Charles Hamilton understood boys and he understood people of all ages. If his work which was written for young people is now read mainly by adults, this is not proof that it is dated, for so many books written for the young have gone through this process to be hailed as classics.

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DANNY'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT

(An extract from Danny's Diary for Christmas 1919 — Fifty years ago)

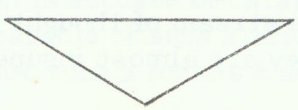
I had lots of lovely presents in the pillow-case at the foot of my bed on Christmas morning - Christmas Day is on a Thursday this year - but the one I think I really liked the best was a big new book called "The Holiday Annual." It was from my brother, Doug, and it cost him 5/-. It is packed with stories and verses and articles and pictures. A lot of the drawings are done by Warwick Reynolds, who illustrated the Gem until the end of the summer. There are long stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood.

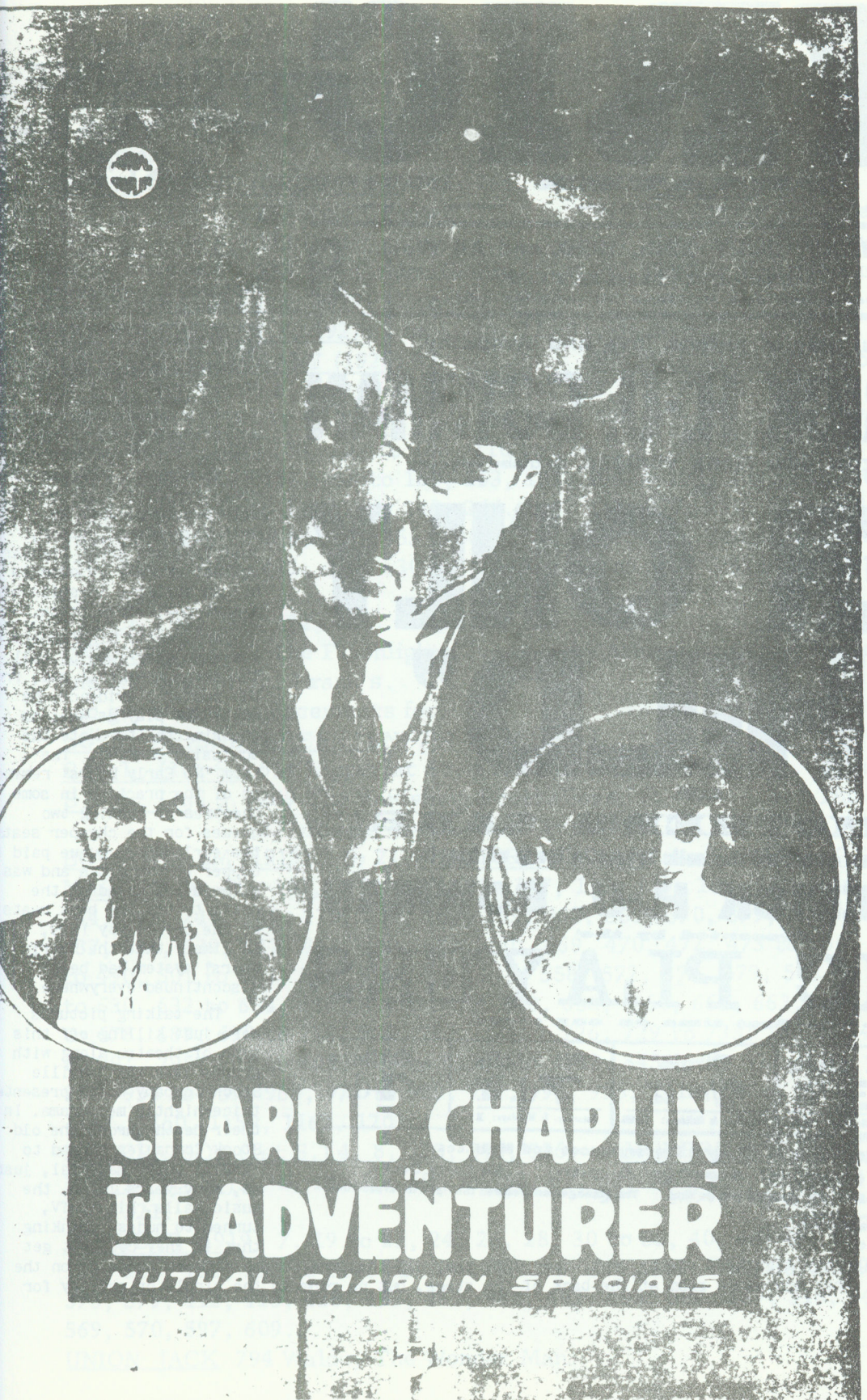
My favourite story was "The Wandering Schoolboy" in which Gussy ran away from St. Jim's and took shelter in turn at Greyfriars, Cliff House and Rookwood, before he was caught and taken back to his own school. Warwick Reynolds' drawings to this tale were awfully good.

There are two long tales of Greyfriars - a new one called "Ructions at Greyfriars" and an old one called "Fighting For His Honour" in which a boy named Heath, stole a postal-order and put the blame on Bob Cherry, who was expelled. Doug says that this tale came from the Magnet when it had a red cover, and the story is based on real life.

The other long story was "Rivals of Rookwood School" and Wakefield has done some grand pictures for it. The story is about a new boy named Oliver Loring.

"The Holiday Annual" is a tip-top book, and I hope it will come out again next year. Among masses of luscious items there are full-page maps of the districts round Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood, and these are all very interesting. The book is really something of a Christmas stocking, all on its own.





ANOTHER OF THE POSTERS which young Danny saw outside the cinemas 50 years ago. To the best of our belief, "The Adventurer" was not released under that title in this country. It was named "The Convict." It was, however, shown recently on BBC Television under its original American title.

LYRIC

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LOCAL THEATRE - 40 YEARS BACK

Some years ago we reproduced a 1913 cinema poster. This year we bring you a 1929 theatre poster which was sent to us by Liverpool author, Mr. Frank Shaw.

In a recent C.D. editori we referred to Sir Frederick Bowman. Of Sir Frederick, Mr. Shaw says: "He was trul eccentric, his title being self-bestowed. But as writer, producer, actor, musician, and great fighter against cruelty to animals he had ability, in spite of a most comic appearance."

Apparently Sir Frederick was what they used to call "an actor manager," and, fro the poster's evidence, he wrote the play as well as starring in it. Note the admission charges. The term "No Early Doors" remind us of the practice in some theatres of running two queues for the cheaper seats the early doors queue paid a copper or two extra and was allowed in, ahead of the rest, to bag the best seats at the price. By 1929, it is likely that the "early doors" system had been discontinued everywhere.

The talking pictures were just killing off this type of theatre along with groups like the Denville Stock Company which presente twice-nightly melodrama. In their death throes the old Stock Companies turned to "Adults Only" material, just as, many years later, the music halls, hit by TV, turned to nudes, thinking that if they couldn't get an audience by fair means they might get one by foul. In 1929, many old theatres became cinemas, usually on the rear-projection system. They had ample room at the back of the stage, but no room in the circle or gallery for a projection box.

TOM PORTER

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Requires:
BOYS' FRIEND (GREEN 'UN) 762, 764, 1042, 1257, 1294.
B.F.L. (1st S.) 237 King Cricket 649 The Green Triangle
B.F.L. (2nd S.) 213 Grit 257 The Cad of the Crusaders
253 The Golden Goalie 601 The Rio Kid's Return
BOYS' REALM (N.S. 1919) 31 to 44.
BOYS' REALM (N.S. 1927) 1 to 6, 18, 21, 31, 34 to 80.
DETECTIVE LIBRARY (1920) 39. EMPIRE LIBRARY 3, 5, 6, 7, 17.
N.L.L. (O.S.) 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 20, 52, 61, 73, 77, 79, 81.
POPULAR (1919) 34 to 39, 49, 52, 53, 55 to 59, 64 to 67, 70, 73, 76 to 80, 83, 85, 88 to 91, 95, 97, 100, 103 to 108, 110 to 126, 130, 131 to 134, 136 to 139, 142, 146, 149 to 152, 154, 156, 158 to 160, 163, 191, 196 to 199, 202, 203, 206, 207, 209, 210, 216 to 218, 230 to 241, 244, 245, 266, 269, 271, 277, 280, 284, 285, 287 to 289, 292, 293, 295, 296, 298 to 300, 353, 358, 364, 374 to 378, 380 to 384, 386 to 396, 399 to 410, 414 to 418, 421, 422, 530, 531, 541, 546 to 555, 557 to 568, 571 to 595, 598, 602, 628.
PLUCK 108, 110, 112, 114, 116, 125, 129.
UNION JACK 777 The Flashlight Clue and any others featuring Nelson Lee, Nipper and the boys of St. Frank's.
and good/mint replacements for:-
BOYS' FRIEND (GREEN 'UN) 752 to 761, 763.
B.F.L. (1st S.) 514 Nipper at St. Frank's, 633 The Idol of St. Frank's, 709 Phantom 1.
B.F.L. (2nd S.) 269 The Vanishing Footballers 619 The League of Bullies.
277 Rivals of the Blue Crusaders
BOYS' REALM (1919) 1 to 21. EMPIRE LIBRARY 4, 8 to 14. GEM 805 to 810.
MAGNET 64, 79, 108, 110, 112, 125, 137, 138, 139, 140, 143, 144, 145, 147, 148, 244, 245, 249, 264, 270, 281, 284, 293, 363, 369, 370, 379, 396, 402, 412, 416, 433, 437, 438, 439, 441, 442, 443, 457, 460, 469, 470, 472, 473 to 480, 482, 485, 486, 488 to 490, 501 to 503, 505, 512, 513, 549, 558, 572, 574, 579, 583 to 585, 592, 610, 625 to 630, 632 to 634, 638, 639 to 643, 648, 658, 660, 661, 663, 664, 668, 669, 671, 673 to 678, 689, 690 to 716, 719, 722, 724 to 726, 729 to 733, 736 to 745, 777 to 782, 784 to 791, 795, 803 to 805, 808 to 815, 823, 842, 845, 910, 911, 913, 915, 916, 917, 951, 952, 954 to 959, 968, 972 to 989, 992, 994, 995, 1015, 1016, 1062, 1078, 1117, 1145, 1147, 1150, 1159, 1162, 1203.
MODERN BOY (1st S.) 4, 8, 323, 346, 356. MODERN BOY (N.S.) 25.
N.L.L. (O.S.) 2, 4, 14, 15, 55, 56, 58, 69, 88, 109, 111, 120, 124, 127, 128, 179 to 200, 321.
POPULAR (1919) 7, 19 to 22, 24, 26, 28, 30 to 33, 40, 43, 47, 61, 82, 102, 157, 161, 162, 166, 182, 212 to 214, 221 to 223, 290, 316, 347, 356, 357, 359 to 363, 365 to 373, 379, 412, 413, 428, 453, 461, 463, 492, 493, 502, 517, 518, 540, 542 to 545, 556, 569, 570, 597, 609.
UNION JACK 794 Waldo, The Wonder Man.

HOURS OF FUN FOR A PENNY

By Fred Westwood

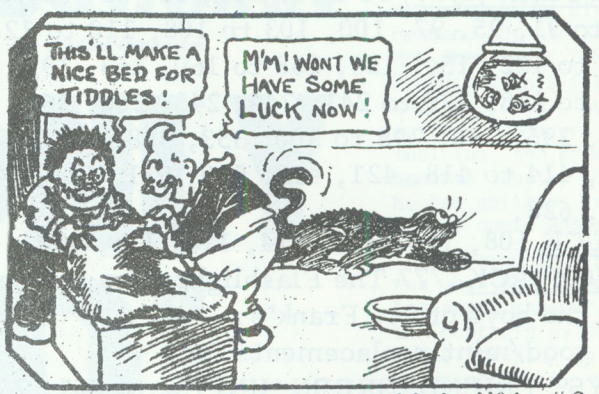
When I was a boy of about five before the war, Wednesday was the big day of the week. On that day a comic paper arrived behind the door. It was called Tiger Tim's, and besides Tiger Tim, it featured Mrs. Bruin, Jumbo, Jacko, Georgie Giraffe and Joey the Parrot. When the Bruin Boys had been up to their antics, which was every week, Mrs. Bruin used to hold up her paws and exclaim, 'Good-ness.'

From Tiger Tim's I progressed to Chips, Larks, Butterfly, The Joker, The Jester, Comic Cuts and Funny Wonder. Each cost a penny and consisted of eight pages of stories and strip cartoons. Although I read the stories I have little recollection of them, and it was mainly the cartoons which sent me hurrying to the newsagent with my Saturday penny. Those old comics contained a rich variety of cartoon characters: Pitch and Toss in Funny Wonder were two sailors; Alfie the Air Tramp in The Joker was a tramp who flew a little monoplane; Smiler and Smudge in Butterfly were two college boys.

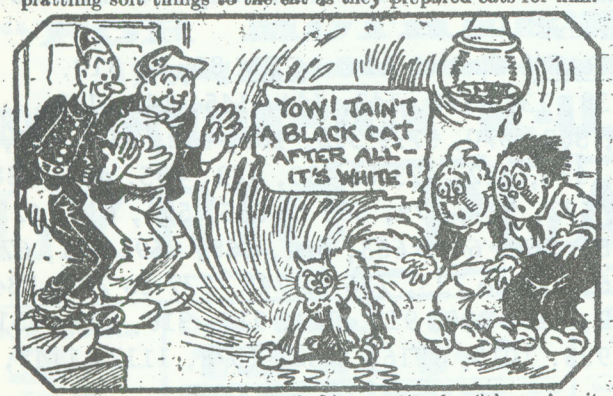
Other characters remembered with pleasure are Constable Cuddlecook, Basil and Bert (The Jester); Jackie and Sammy (Comic Cuts); and Pa Perkins and his son Percy (Chips). The things those characters did to amuse the children! They climbed trees, slipped on banana skins and fell down coal-holes; they were pursued by dogs, bulls and policemen. But for all their misfortunes they usually ended up smiling as they tucked into a feed or enjoyed the spectacle of the villain being ducked in a pond.

The few remaining copies of pre-war comics are now worth many times their original price, and little wonder: they are the sole relics of a vanished world of fun and fantasy.

8. "My word, I've clicked to-day!" mewed the mouser. "These two soft slices of tenderheartedness are going to do me proud. Good on 'em!" And there were Jackie and Sammy prattling soft things to the cat as they prepared cats for him.



9. But all at once Tiddles got an eyeful of goldfish. "O fie!" he purred. "Me eat stale catsmeat when there are fish about? Never let it be said!" And while Jackie and Sammy were making up a bed the moggy stole stealthily—



11. Which completely spoilt his appetite for fish. Ay, it did! And it spoilt the twins' appetites for black cats, too! You see, Tiddles wasn't a black cat at all, as they saw when the water had washed the coal dust off the ungrateful feline.

12. "Well, may we be stuffed and stewed for a brace of chumps," snivelled Jackie. "Black cats lucky? Pooh!" "Never mind, m'lads!" smiled Jolly Tom. "You shall share in the spot of luck that I've had. Help yourselves, infants!"