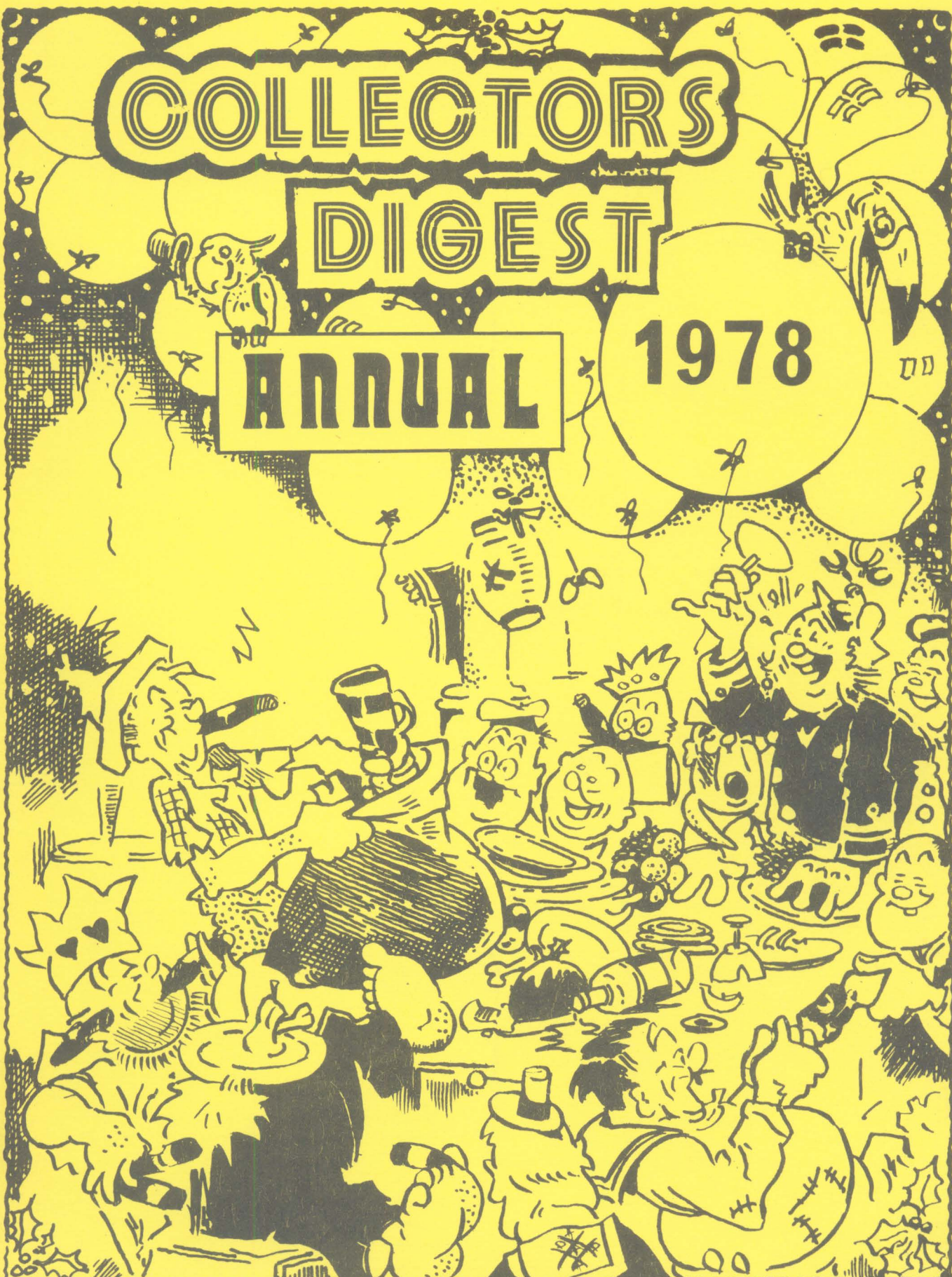


# COLLECTORS

# DIGEST

# ANNUAL

# 1978







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# COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

## Christmas 1978

### THIRTY-SECOND YEAR

EDITOR: ERIC FAYNE, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Road, Crookham, Hampshire, England

#### INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Early this year, in the monthly Story Paper Collectors' Digest, we reproduced an impression of The Fleetway House in 1912. For many decades our favourite periodicals were to be planned in that building, which has now fallen before the great god "Progress".

Readers of C. D. liked that picture. They wrote and told me so. Some said: "Now we know what the place looked like - the place from which the 'Magnet' and the 'Union Jack' and the rest came to us, week after week, year after year. It would be nice if we could see the house from which, all these years later, the Digest comes to us month after month."

Which brings me to the picture on this page. No, it is not the cottage, with roses round the door which make me love mother more. Though there are, indeed, plenty of roses. Nor is it the gingerbread cottage which Hansel and Gretel found in the wood.

It is, in fact, Excelsior House, from which the Digest goes out every month and the Annual goes out every Christmas. The picture was taken with a cheap little camera, one sunny afternoon in late autumn. The upper room, in the front, is the Editor's Den. If you can see it, the typewriter is a Bluebird Portable which was given to me, long years ago, by the boys and girls of the Modern School at Surbiton. Millions of words have flowed from it - some into the C. D. and the Annual, some into letters to you, and, probably, even more into the waste-paper basket at the side.



If the light is right, you may just be able to spot a proud form, in a beautiful white and grey fur, stretched gracefully across the whole desk at the rear of the typewriter - across letters, articles, stories, pictures, and the like. That proud form is the Princess Snowee who has graciously agreed to come to live in Excelsior House and to hunt in its little garden and to frolic on its little lawn.

This is the 32nd edition of Collectors' Digest Annual. And still the wonder grows that so giant a tree came from so little an acorn. For me, it is the 20th edition of this famous book for which I have to take the blame. It just doesn't seem possible. Where have all the years gone?

My grateful thanks to our contributors who work so hard to make it possible - to the York Duplicating Services who slave away loyally in the interests of perfection for us all - and to you, dear readers and friends, whose loyalty and love, in sunshine and in showers, make everything in connection with it all so rewarding.

May you have a truly Happy Christmas, and may the New Year bring you everything that you hope for and so richly deserve.

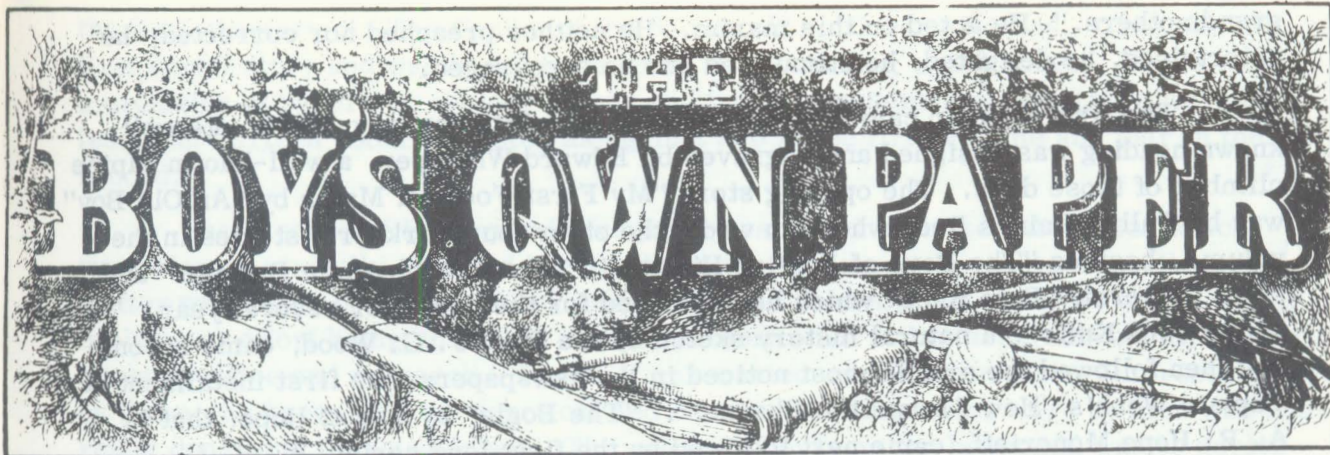
Your sincere friend,

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No. 1.—Vol. I.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 1870.

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## MY FIRST FOOTBALL MATCH.

BY AN OLD BOY.



to-morrow."

It was a proud moment in my existence when Wright, captain of our football club, came up to me in school one Friday and said, "Adams, your name is down to play in the match against Craven

I could have knighted him on the spot. To be one of the picked "fifteen," whose glory it was to fight the battles of their school in the Great Close, had been the leading ambition of my life—I suppose I ought to be ashamed to confess it—ever since, as a little chap of ten, I entered Parkhurst six years ago. Not a winter Saturday but had seen me either looking on at some big match, or oftener still scrimmaging about with a score or so of other juniors in a scratch game. But for a long time, do what I would, I always

seemed as far as ever from the coveted goal, and was half despairing of ever rising to win my "first fifteen cap." Latterly, however, I had noticed Wright and a few others of our best players more than once lounging about in the Little Close where we juniors used to play, evidently taking observations with an eye to business. Under the awful gaze of these heroes, need I say I exerted myself as I had never done before? What cared I for hacks or bruises so only that I could distinguish myself in their eyes? And never was music sweeter

## A CENTENNIAL REVIEW

by J. W. DOUPE

Men need enlightening and cheering influences and they are most easily influenced when they are boys, although they would probably deny it. Influence is most effective when it is least obvious and operating unsuspectingly on those who would resent it if they knew. Sometimes it comes by accident, often by choice in good entertainment, certainly it was thus in the case of the many who read the Boy's Own Paper. It became evident in the late 1870's that there was a strong conviction in the minds of many that an urgent need existed for a magazine for boys differing in tone from the penny dreadfuls of the day. An appeal was made to the Religious Tract Society, the publishers of the highly successful Leisure Hour, to take the matter up; which with considerable hesitation the committee decided to do. Dr. Macaulay, as general editor of the society's publications, was entrusted with the preparation of the new journal. Very little progress was made until George Andrew Hutchinson was appointed acting editor and was instructed to compile a specimen number. This he did. It was accepted and from that point onwards he made up the paper and went ahead on the lines that he had proposed. Year after year, for thirty years and more, the paper thrived under his guidance. When he was asked by someone whether such a paper could succeed, he replied: "Yes, if it is written for boys and not for their



grandmothers." He acted on this maxim. He neither preached nor corrected; he entertained, he delighted, he stimulated and he encouraged.

The first number came out on Saturday, the 18th January, 1879. Its well-known heading was designed and engraved by Edward Whymper, a well-known Alpine climber of those days. The opening story "My First Football Match by "An Old Boy" - was by Talbot Baines Reed who also wrote the other four Parkhurst stories in the volume, besides "The Boys of English History", "The Troubles of a Dawdler" and "The University Boat Race" which he described for the paper for several year. "Out with a Jack Knife", a natural history sketch by the Rev. J. G. Wood, came second and then followed the article most noticed in the newspapers, the first instalment of Captain Webb's "How I swam the Channel". "The Bogle" by Ascott Hope, that is A. R. Hope Moncrieff, came next followed by the first long serial, W. H. G. Kingston's "From Powder Monkey to Admiral", the title and subject of which were suggested by Hutchison and the manuscript had to be so severely revised in the course of its thirty-seven chapters that it might justly be described as a joint effort. The second number was almost as good, its prominent feature being an article on John Macgregor of "The Rob Roy Canoe". In the third was "My Boat and How I made it", the first of the "how to make" articles that continued to be a prominent feature throughout its life. In the fifth, H. F. L. Meyer began his chess articles which continued until the end. Among other writers was David Ker, a special correspondent, who wrote in tiny script on thin note-paper folded into strips that fitted into his revolver-case so that a complete story of more than a dozen chapters packed into less than five cubic inches. Among the articles was a series on Conjuring by a Professor of the Art which were contributed by Maskelyne, and another on Postage Stamp Collecting.

As the first weekly number had met with approval, so to a great extent did the first monthly part. It contained the first five numbers with a frontispiece on toned paper by S. L. Fildes, A.R.A., and a coloured plate of National Flags, and retailed at 6d. The first volume was completed with the issue of the 37th weekly part on 27th September. This first volume of the Boy's Own Annual was greeted with enthusiasm as an ideal Christmas present and secured the reputation which the annual volumes never lost.

The second volume opened with R. M. Ballantyne's "The Red Man's Revenge". The other long serials were "Peter Trawl" by Kingston, "The Amateur Dominie" by Ascott R. Hope and Jules Verne's "The Boy Captain" translated by Kingston, or rather by his daughter and revised by him. There was a Parkhurst story by T. B. Reed and "The Battle of Carter's Hill" introduced Paul Blake, that is H. M. Paull who was to contribute many stories subsequently. It also contained Dr. W. G. Grace's "Cricket and How to Excel in it", afterwards published in book form and articles by Gordon Stables on "Boy's Dogs" and Theodore Wood on "Entomology".

In the third volume, the first number contained the opening instalment of "The Adventures of a Three Guinea Watch" by Talbot Baines Reed; his first long story. This met with marked approval, which was endorsed when "The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's" appeared in the fourth volume and was repeated in further stories. All were good but the school stories were the best. On the 19th March, 1881, appeared



the first chapters of "The Cruise of the Snowbird" by Gordon Stables. This was his first serial story and was based upon some of his whaling experiences. There was a profusion of papers on outdoor games and indoor amusements; and there were no less than thirteen coloured plates as against two in the first volume and four in the second.

The success of the paper is frequently ascribed to its serial stories which were always carefully selected but its characteristic merit lay in its miscellaneous matter which was of a much wider range than had been attempted before and of better quality, no effort being spared to make it authoritative and in accordance with the very latest practice and research. The best was wanted, put in a readable, interesting way by those who knew, and the practical and constructional articles were by men who had really done what they described. The general plan from the beginning was to devote half the pages to fiction, the rest consisting of "quicquid agunt pueri nostri", whatever our boys busy themselves about. Errors were not tolerated. The adult readers took good care of that; the critics were the schoolmasters of England, and there never seemed to be an error that was not pointed out. Another important feature was the answers to correspondents which kept the paper in touch with boys all over the world; its publishers having facilities for distribution that competing journals could not hope for, it went to every corner of the British Isles, to every part of the empire, and beyond it. When the questions were on matters of interest to other readers they were answered through the paper, but when they were on strictly private matters, they were replied to by letter. The circulation steadily increased and it was used as a reading book in many schools, being so well thought of that the fourth volume was dedicated by special permission to two of its readers, Prince Edward and Prince George of Wales, later the Duke of Clarence and King George the Fifth, respectively.

In December 1883 a special Christmas number was issued and this was followed by a special summer number at the end of June. These were in addition to the usual monthly numbers and were not included in the annual volumes although the index included a list of their contents. The main interest of this first Christmas number is that it contains the first contribution by Conan Doyle titled "My Lecture on Dynamite". There was another story by him in the next Christmas number and also in the one after that. His first appearance in the ordinary volume was with "Uncle Jeremy's Household" which began on the 8th January, 1887, and was completed in seven parts.

It was not until volume 18 that the name of G. A. Henty appeared amongst those of the contributors. "Life of a Special Correspondent" appeared on the 6th June and continued in two further instalments. Volume 19 opened with his serial story "The Fetish Hole"; Vol. 20 with "Among Malay Pirates"; Vol. 21 contained "Burton and Son" and Vol. 22 "In the Hands of the Cave-Dwellers". His last contribution, "Down a Crevasse" appeared in the Special Summer Number in July 1901.

Every year bound volumes of the annual were produced for the Christmas market in attractively decorated cases which could be obtained for two shillings from booksellers by those subscribers who collected the weekly or monthly parts. For the first five volumes the design was altered slightly each year, but that provided for volume six was quite different and this became the standard issue, remaining un-



changed until Vol. 24; different colours were available. With Vol. 24 it became the practice to have a completely different front and spine every year; the back cover remaining unaltered until 1924 and thereafter it was no longer decorated.

Over the years the lay-out and form of the paper had crystallised into a set pattern but changes were on the way. The standard engraved heading appeared only on the first weekly issue of each month in 1909 with a different design for the other weeks. In the next volume it disappeared for good. In October 1911 several new features and improvements were introduced with new type, better paper, improved illustrations and printing. However the general form remained much the same. G. A. Hutchison retired from the active editorship in 1912. "It is rest not rust I am after; I shall work to the end", he said. The end was near, for it came on the 11th of February, 1913. The new Editor was Mr. A. L. Haydon. He had been a contributor to the paper and he had been associated with Hutchison in an editorial capacity before assuming control. He had travelled widely in Canada and Australia before joining the staff. He continued as Editor from 1913 to 1924 and during this period the paper reached the peak of its attainment.

In 1914 the issue of the weekly parts was discontinued and thereafter it appeared as a monthly only. The continued rise in the cost of paper, wages and other production items as a result of the war compelled other alterations. In November 1916 the price was raised to 7d. and rose again in the following year to 8d, and in 1918 it finally reached 1/- and remained at this price until 1935.

The abandonment of the weekly parts facilitated other alterations and developments. The serials were completed in six monthly instalments, usually three in the first six months followed by a further three in the last six months and one of each three was nearly always a school story. There were articles on an ever widening variety of subjects from the construction of wireless sets to career prospects in many different fields. The Natural History articles which had started in the first number under the auspices of the Rev. J. G. Wood continued as the B.O.P. Field Club and the correspondence page still showed good support. Many of the leading writers of boys' fiction such as Major Charles Gilson, Argyll Saxby, Richard Bird and Harold Avery contributed whilst many others such as J. Claverdon Wood, Godfrey Sellick and Frank Elias wrote exclusively for the B.O.P.

In 1924 the Editorship was taken over by Mr. Geoffrey Richard Pocklington who took a keen interest in scouting and wrote many articles on this subject. The major alteration that he introduced was the concentration of the serial story into two instalments so that each monthly part carried only one serial story completed in two issues. Along with this of course there were several short stories and fiction continued to occupy a half or more of the production.

On the 18th of January, 1929, a Jubilee Luncheon was held at the Connaught Rooms, Great Queen Street, London - the actual anniversary of the publication of the first weekly part - and proved a most successful function. His Grace the Duke of Athol, K.T., presided over a company of more than 350, headed by the Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Stanley Baldwin, M.P., who proposed the toast "Prosperity to the Boy's Own Paper".



Mr. G. R. Pocklington retired from the Editorship in 1933 and was succeeded by George Northcroft who was the general editor of the Religious Tract Society. During this period, the Editor's Page and the Correspondence Page were omitted, a sure indication of malaise. Mr. Anthony Parker, in an article in the Story Paper Collector, describes him as "the only Editor in 76 years who really had no idea how to edit". In my view his occupation of the Editorial Chair was only a "holding operation" until such time as a suitable candidate could be found and finally in 1935 Robert Harding was appointed. From the measures that he adopted it is obvious that for some years previously the circulation had been falling and that the paper had not been adapting itself to changing circumstances. He reduced the number of pages and cut the price from one shilling to sixpence, a daring and highly successful venture. Under his leadership it rapidly regained its popularity and writes like Percy F. Westerman, Gunby Hadath, Major J. T. Gorman and Sercombe Griffin continued to contribute to its pages. In 1940 when almost every other boys' paper ceased publication, it continued to appear but the number of pages was drastically reduced. In 1941 the office at 4 Bouverie Street was bombed and the editorial headquarters were moved to Doran Court in Redhill, Surrey. The number of copies printed was severely limited and numerous "circles" were formed where copies could be circulated. In March 1942 further draconian measures were required and the size of the page was reduced to 10" x 7½". This happened in the middle of Vol. 64 so that the first six months form a half volume of the hitherto standard size followed by three copies of the smaller size. Thereafter it shrank again and settled at 7½" x 5" with an average of forty pages per copy, ten of them devoted to advertisements. Lip service was paid to the old division into volumes in that the numbers were recorded above the list of contents but the concurrent pagination was abandoned as each copy was numbered from page one to page forty or whatever it might be and there was no segregation of the advertising matter. Serial stories might commence in one volume and conclude half way through the next. The length of a serial was gradually reduced until each instalment could be read easily in fifteen to twenty minutes. In later years many of these tended to be abbreviated versions which appeared "prior to publication".

In 1946, the Editorial Chair was taken over by Jack Cox. When the question was raised about increasing the page size, readers decided that they did not want a return to the pre-war size. However, the size was increased to 8" x 6" and in comparison with the pre-war copy, the content was quite different. The school story went completely out of favour so that there were no school stories in the paper that had nourished Reed and Hadath and many others. Adventure serials soon followed and in 1953 there were no serials at all. In the last volume No. 89 there were only two or three short stories in each monthly issue with the majority of the space given over to features, special articles and practical hobbies. The only feature to continue undiminished throughout the entire life of the magazine was those pages devoted to stamp collecting.

In 1963 the Lutterworth Press who were the successors of the Religious Tract Society sold the production to Purnell and Son Ltd. and No. 8 of Vol. 85 for May 1963 was published by them. No. 1 of Vol. 86 was increased in size to 10" x 7½" and the price went up to two shillings but the changes were not radical enough. Suddenly in

the February 1967 issue appeared the announcement that this issue of the magazine was to be the last. They stated that the number of readers was exceptionally high in relation to purchasers, sample checks revealing that single copies of the magazine were read by as many as 25 to 30 boys.

In conclusion it is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the longevity of the Boy's Own Paper and also on the causes of its demise. It is obvious that the original ideas and principles upon which it was based were entirely those of its first editor, G. A. Hutchison. He built well and he built truly and it was his character that permeated the first 33 years. It adapted to changing conditions and this adaptability was to continue throughout its life. No doubt this contributed to its long survival but also carried the seeds of decay. The early yearly volumes carried as many as sixteen or seventeen serial stories or story series. In 1914 this figure had been cut to eight; in 1938 to three and in 1953 they had disappeared completely. Speaking personally, I can remember vividly the avidity with which I looked forward to the 25th of each month when the next instalment of the serial could be devoured. They provided a continuity of interest. After 1953 the reader could miss one, two or three months or more without any sense of deprivation.

It is worthwhile noting that most of the well-known writers of boys' fiction contributed to its pages. Of 381 authors listed in "The Men behind Boys' Fiction" by Lofts and Adley as appearing in the B.O.P. more than two thirds wrote exclusively for that publication. With the disappearance of the long, well developed adventure story - the number of authors dwindled and the short story of two or three thousand words hardly gave time for anything more than the deployment of cardboard figures. This was paralleled by the practical disappearance of the fine illustrations by well-known artists.

The cause of failure was not that it was losing readers or that it could not attract advertising revenue but rather that it could no longer persuade its readers to buy for personal consumption and retention. All the world loves a Teller of Tales and these no longer occupied more than fifty per cent of production as of yore.

\* \* \* \* \*

WANTED: Boys' Friend Libraries with stories of 'BALDY'S ANGELS' or Flying Stories by Hedley Scott.

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Science-Fiction, fantasy, film and comic books (de-luxe): "Prince Valiant", "King Kong", etc. Happy Xmas and prosperous New Year. Edgar Wallace, Henty, Tolkien and Folio Soc. books also available. Many historical books.

LAURENCE S. ELLIOTT. Tel. 01-472-6310



I dedicate this article to Princess Snowee, the puss who reigns supreme at Excelsior House. She inspired it because our Editor very nearly named her after Grace Kelwyn, thus stirring my memories of this attractive Cliff House character. (M.C.)

# Girl Crusoe at Cliff House

by MARY CADOGAN

'She bounded with lithe and graceful step over the reclining figures of the girls... and took one prodigious leap which cleared the crystal fountain of water ...

"A wonderful, wonderful girl!" breathed Marjorie Hazeldene.'

Desert island castaways have been extremely popular in a wide range of fiction, from Daniel Defoe's stalwart original to the numerous dusky damsel/'jungle jess' stereotypes who have enlivened the schoolgirls' papers of the Amalgamated Press.

Grace Kelwyn - pretty, passionate and endowed with extraordinary physical strength - was surely the most charismatic of these teenage girl Crusoes. For a short period she became a somewhat restless pupil at Cliff House and a member of Barbara Redfern's chummery. Her most celebrated adventures however have been set against exotic backgrounds like the South Sea islands, or lost cities in remote areas of Brazil.

Grace was stranded on a desert island at the age of twelve and she did not return to civilization for three years. Not surprisingly she was something of a 'loner' when she first met up with the Cliff House girls, though she soon demonstrated her capacity for leadership, and for inspiring affection.

Her story is not particularly original. As well as echoing Defoe it owes something to Rider Haggard, but it comes across with its own zest and charm. Written in 1921 it was not of course the earliest tropical island tale in the girls' papers, for in 1919 the first School Friend had



**THE STRANGE GIRL!** The figure of a girl—a girl dressed in torn and tattered rags, with bare arms and feet, and flying, long hair—appeared suddenly above the heads of the Cliff House girls, clinging to the face of the cliff.

included a castaway serial. But Grace's saga had a depth and freshness that were lacking in many of the A.P. variations on this theme. (Fictional girl castaways cropped up at regular intervals in the two decades before the second world war. The 1920's versions seemed to be wild and woolly derivatives of Topsy from Uncle Tom's Cabin; those of the 1930's were more sophisticated and reminiscent of Hollywood's sleek, sarong-clad Dorothy Lamour.)

Grace's catalytic qualities contribute to the memorable quality of the series. As well as being an attractive personality in her own right she brings about interesting responses in most of the Cliff House juniors who are made vitally aware of their hidden capacities or emotions. In some girls, however, Grace's tremendous strength of character produces feelings of inadequacy or hostility.

Bessie Bunter is the first Cliff House girl to encounter Grace, and she is initially repelled by 'that kik-kik-cannibal' though later in the series 'Fatima' becomes one of Grace's keenest admirers. Bessie, gate-crashing as usual, is staying with her school-mates at the Cornish seaside home of Babs's uncle and aunt. She has sloped off alone to do a spot of beachcombing - for food, of course! On a lonely part of the shore she discovers a steaming cooking pot, the contents of which she begins to devour with relish. Suddenly Bessie is confronted by a brown-skinned, ragged, 'barbaric-looking' girl, who attacks her in 'uncontrolled, savage anger'. Grace is strong enough to heave Bessie about very roughly, and the fat girl gets a walloping for this particular act of tuck-pinching that she does not forget in a hurry.

Bessie of course gives her chums a highly embroidered account of this incident with descriptions of bows and arrows, spears and cannibalism. She is convinced that she has narrowly escaped being killed and eaten - a fate which would certainly have had an ironic appropriateness for any member of the Bunter clan. Babs & Co. eventually find Grace hiding on the desolate, rocky beach. She is terribly frightened of people; her strange manner and tattered appearance at first suggest to Barbara Redfern that she is mad. However she and her chums are soon reassured.

Grace is coaxed down from the rocks. Although deeply suspicious of the grub-scavenging Bessie she is drawn to the other Cliff House girls, with whom she shows no sign of savage behaviour. She is in fact a lonely, bewildered and pathetic figure. Her speech, though faltering, belies her dark-skinned Polynesian appearance, and the Cliff House juniors realize that Grace is as English as they are. Responding quickly to kindness she is immediately attracted to Barbara Redfern whom she feels she can trust:

'She looked at Babs steadily, and a smile illuminated her sun-tanned face. She came forward to meet the Fourth Form Captain with outstretched arms.

"You are my friend?" asked the girl ... "A real friend?"

"Why, of course!" cried Barbara Redfern,

The girl sprang across the intervening space and suddenly clutched Babs to her in an embrace, so strong that it almost took her breath away ... And Babs, looking up at the face of her new friend, saw that tears had come to her eyes, and they were streaming down her face.'

It turns out that Grace Kelwyn has been a victim of the Great War. Three years earlier, in 1918, she and her scientist father Dr. Kelwyn had gone on a boat trip,



# The SCHOOLFRIEND

Every 1½d Thursday

No. 97. Vol. 4.

Three-Halfpence.

Week Ending March 19th, 1921.

“THE GIRL FROM THE DESERT ISLAND!”  
A New Story of the Girls of Cliff House. Also In this issue: A Splendid Number of “The Cliff House” Week’s!



## BESSIE BUNTER'S INTERRUPTED FEED!

(An Incident from “The Girl from the Desert Island!” the magnificent story of the Girls of Cliff House, contained in this issue.)



and been torpedoed by a German submarine. Although Dr. Kelwyn was picked up with other survivors his daughter had disappeared. It was then of course that Grace got stranded on the desert island. Now after stowing away on a steamer that had eventually called there she has managed - by one of those happy coincidences that occur so frequently in the A.P. papers - to get washed up on the beach of the Cornish village where her father lives! She has suffered from slight amnesia since the torpedo explosion - but reunion with Dr. Kelwyn restores her memory.

Grace tells him and the Cliff House chums marvellous tales about her island; it was apparently a place of great beauty, with coral caves, sandy beaches and crystal springs; and a profusion of tropical flowers and fruit. There were also wonders of a different kind. Grace had discovered two boxes in a hidden cave; one of these contained an amazing cloak. This was made of 'colours never before seen . . . a mass of the most exquisite and wonderful embroidery that could possibly be done', with huge tassels that shimmered like beaten gold. The cloak when worn was held in place by a silken girdle from which 'hung fully two score of tiny cords, on the end of which was some wonderfully carved figure in alabaster or flashing amber.'

The second box also contained a treasure; this was 'a single, large glass bottle of yellowish liquid bearing a faded black ink label in Latin'. The medicinal contents turned out to be a marvellous cure for many kinds of fever. (Grace had to put the remedy to the test when she was gravely ill on the island, and she realizes that this medicine would be 'a wonderful boon to all suffering humanity'.)

Dr. Kelwyn rightly surmises that another remarkable coincidence has taken place. The island on which Grace was cast away is in fact one where Dr. Knowles, his former colleague, had gone into voluntary exile and died some years earlier. (Knowles had wished to study the effects of isolation and had been working on various medical experiments.)

So, of course, it is off to the tropics for the hols. for Babs & Co., Grace and Dr. Kelwyn - to hunt for the unusual treasures of a magical cloak and medicinal formulae.

Their experiences on Castaway Island are both dramatic and amusing. The crew of the yacht on which they sail mutiny, and connive with other 'baddies' to steal the valuable cloak. Needless to say, the Cliff House chums eventually outwit them, and in their island exploits Grace becomes the natural leader of the party. Apart from teaching them spear-fishing and numerous other techniques for survival she inspires them all with her grit and resourcefulness. There is one engaging incident that is very characteristic of the Cliff House juniors. They have to repulse an attack by the extremely tough mutineers who are armed with thick staves, etc. Babs & Co. exploit their English public school sporting prowess, successfully bombarding their attackers with coco-nuts:

'There was a difference in throwing cricket-balls and coco-nuts of course. But strength and good aim, the essentials in both cases, were there.'

The Cliff House juniors have the delightful knack of remaining typically English schoolgirls, even in the most bizarre and difficult situations. They are resolutely attired in gym tunics, blouses, ties and black stockings on their tropical expeditions



though Bessie, always the most self-indulgent, wears a safari jacket over her school tunic, and sports a pith helmet.

Throughout the series Bessie plays a prominent part. Like Billy she is usually greedy, self-centred and a bit of a funk; however under Grace's influence she begins to behave in a more mature way. Of course Bessie loves one aspect of island life: 'roaming continuously in the direction of the banana grove and the mango trees Bessie enjoyed herself as everything was free here and life seemed one dream of delight'. She is at first apprehensive about the possibility of meeting savages and cannibals; and she is reluctant to do her share of the necessary chores. By the time the girls return to England she has managed to overcome her fears and also to be less work-shy!

The Cliff House girls become quite attached to the island and when their mission is accomplished they and Grace are tearful about leaving it. Babs feels she must put some stiffening into her chums and does so with her characteristic blend of firmness and sweetness: "'You must bear up'" she whispered. "You will have regrets - we all have them. But they will pass. England, home, and beauty - three magic words which will always mean the world to us all! Girls, three cheers for old England and for Cliff House School!"'

Later on Grace joins them at Cliff House, where she has a tempestuous and trying time. After being a castaway for three years she is, of course, very backward in her studies; also she cannot adapt her unrestrained island ways to the quieter tempo of school life. She out-tomboys Clara, engages in wild pranks, climbs on to roof-tops, ties up fifth-formers and even canes the bullying prefect, Connie Jackson.

Nevertheless Grace is quick to pick up one part of the Cliff House ethic; she becomes a keen cricketer and practising at the nets one day -

'... she sees Marcia Loftus (the fourth form snob who is especially vindictive towards Grace) strolling idly across the playing field ...

"Ah, that girl Marcia!" she muttered to Mabel Lynn. "I know why she is always up to horrid tricks! It is because she doesn't play games ..."

Grace has to suffer the humiliation of demotion to the Third Form because of her backwardness; Marcia constantly schemes against her and, suspected of theft, Grace is sentenced to expulsion. However she becomes the heroine of Cliff House when she saves Marcia's life and endangers her own. The sentence of expulsion is rescinded, but Grace's father decides to take her away from the school, and on a world cruise.

The episodes of Grace at Cliff House are full of drama but they still manage to be credible and rather moving. Throughout, Babs remains loyal to Grace and tries to help her to settle down. Their parting is tearful; in fact almost everyone in the school is sorry to see Grace leave. Her stay at Cliff House ended in the School Friend of 25th June, 1921. Readers perhaps missed her as much as did her Cliff House chums, for Grace turns up again in the saga only a few weeks later.

On 30th July in School Friend 116 she joins the juniors for the beginning of a four-issue holiday series. The world tour with her father has apparently been postponed. Grace's holiday with Babs & Co. is planned as a three-day sea trip, but it ends



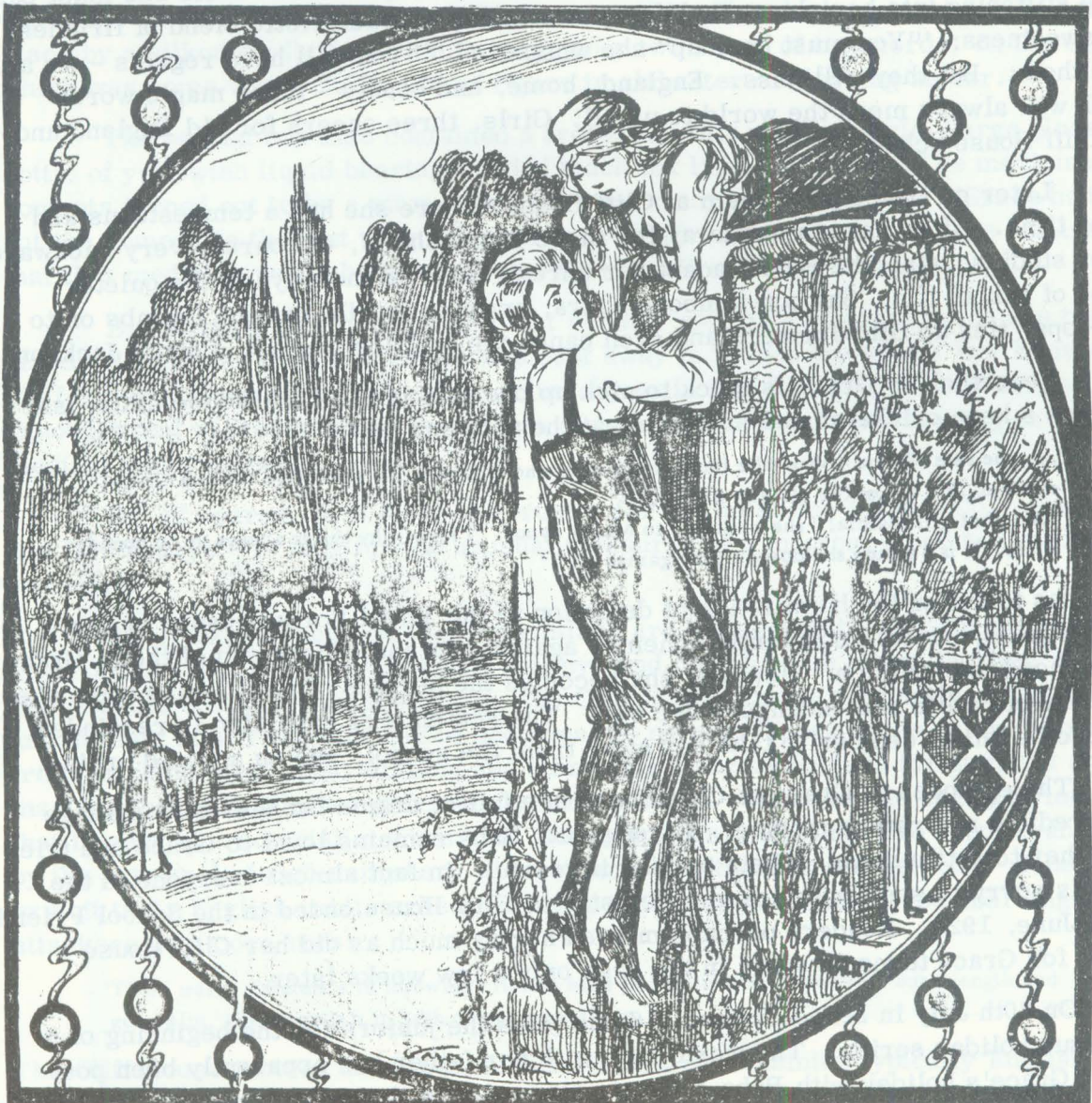
# The SCHOOLFRIEND

Every  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d Thursday

No. 111. Vol. 5.

Three-Halfpence.

Week Ending June 25th, 1921.



**“THE SEARCH FOR GRACE KELWYN!”**  
A New Story of the Girls of Cliff House School. Also in this issue: A Splendid Instalment of “The Mistrustful Girl!”

**A HEROINE IN SPITE OF ALL!**

(An incident from the magnificent new long complete tale of the Girls of Cliff House School, contained in this issue.)



up as an exciting voyage to South America, where the girls encounter primitive tribes, discover secret cities and Grace becomes a jungle queen. The chums start off from Cornwall. Bessie as usual is one of the party. As in the earlier Grace Kelwyn series she starts off as a true Bunter, bragging about her supposed stately home and rich connections; again she plays an important role in the story and becomes a more acceptable character as it develops. Before the girls sail Bessie is swanking to them about 'the palace' next door to her home:

"Picture palace?" asked Freda Foote sweetly.

"Oh, really," said Bessie indignantly. "You know I'm referring to the palace of Lord - Lord -"

"Lord Gottnun and Neverhadany?" suggested Clara.

"Yes - that's it - I mean, I wish you wouldn't be so silly Clara!" said Bessie crossly . . .'

Clara is always adept at putting Miss Bunter in her place; so it is impressive that at the end of this series the tomboy pronounces Bessie 'a perfect brick', 'an absolute mascot' and 'wonderful'. This is because - again under Grace's influence - Bessie manages to behave with unaccustomed courage and determination in face of real and imaginary dangers.

Grace, one feels, should never be allowed to set foot on a ship, as this always seems to bring about mutiny, shipwreck or some other kind of disaster! She does notice that as she gets on the boat off the Cornish coast the rats immediately scuttle off, and the old saying about their deserting a doomed ship flashes through her mind. However she keeps quiet about this, and sure enough the steamer begins to break up as soon as it is a few miles out in the Atlantic. The party is picked up by a liner which is on a speed trial to South America. Sir Stanley Beech who is on board is an old friend of Dr. Kelwyn, so he invites them all to stay on his ranch, or fazenda.

There are some vivid descriptions of the long inland trip from Rio de Janeiro up the River Paraguay, against a background of howler monkeys, crocodiles, cresta screamers, green parakeets and vegetation as exotic as the animal life.

Grace, always intrepid, does not travel in the comfort of the motor launch with the others; a canoe is attached to it by a tow rope and she insists on riding in this, for thrills. Bessie rather rashly decides to keep her company, and once again Grace's presence seems to invite nautical mishap. One night the tow rope breaks (actually it is severed by a scheming native) and Grace and Bessie suddenly find themselves adrift in the frightening darkness without even a paddle to control their frail craft. There are rapids ahead - and other unknown terrors. Grace of course faces the thought of death courageously; she comforts Bessie, who despite her fears tries not to panic. She reflects that she has been 'a little greedy, and a little vain and a little conceited' and wishes that she could see her chums again just to admit this to them. They, meanwhile, having discovered that the canoe is adrift, are desperately worried about Grace, and even more so about the vulnerable Bessie:

' . . . they forgot her funny little ways, and they realized as never before what a place she occupied in their hearts. The thought of how frightened her fat face must be as the canoe was borne on into the Brazilian night brought the tears to not a few eyes. Certainly Marjorie Hazeldene, Peggy Preston and Vivienne Leigh were crying unrestrainedly. '

Taken out of context all this probably sounds extremely sentimental. In fact, however, it is a case of what Charles Hamilton has described, regarding his own stories, as

'unobtrusively inserting the pill in the jam'! Morality and strong emotions often crop up in the early Cliff House stories but they are counterbalanced by humour and dramatic situations, and they therefore come across to the reader with naturalness and credibility.

Bessie and Grace survive their journey through the rapids and reach a small native settlement; they are surprisingly well received. Tall, impressive Grace, with the sun burnishing her red hair, is hailed as the lost Queen of the Pareci tribe. Almost immediately after landing she puts her amazing physical strength to good use and rescues a child who has been snatched by a puma - which of course reinforces her queenly image in the eyes of the tribe. They think Grace is fulfilling a prophecy that their Queen will return to them by magic (i.e. in a canoe with no paddle) led by a messenger/guide known as 'The Daughter of the Full Moon' (i.e. Bessie Bunter, moon-faced and of unusual appearance by anyone's standards).

Being the Queen of a primitive tribe, however, is not all beer and skittles! It transpires that according to the prophecy Grace has to lead the Parecis to a secret city - their original home. Grace and Bessie are joined by the rest of the Cliff House chums who find them, at last, and Marjorie Hazeldene cleverly works out the whereabouts of the lost city. She does so from the pictures and symbols on the Golden Goblet (a magical talisman of the tribe, which Grace as their Queen uses for food and drink).

The tribe in fact behave ambivalently towards Grace and Bessie, who are sometimes treated as near-gods, and sometimes as captives. Marjorie, who has unearthed the secret of the long sought for city, is suspected of being able to practise Black Magic. She is in danger of being abandoned on a remote island, in case she attracts misfortune to the tribe. Grace intervenes on her behalf - and, also, Marjorie's utterly British straightness pays off, and communicates itself to the savage Parecis. When asked to prophesy she answers honestly, "I - I cannot tell"; and feels 'weak and foolish'. But this straightforward answer convinces the tribe that Marjorie is 'a quiet and gentle girl', incapable of Black Magic: 'And honesty had won! The very thing that had seemed to Marjorie to be her failing had proved her strength'.

Grace is a worthy leader of the Cliff House chums who have some hair-raising adventures when they reach the secret city. Several of them, including Bessie Bunter, demonstrate surprising heroism. They eventually manage to get away, hotly pursued by the angry and outwitted Parecis. In this thrilling escape the Cliff House girls show their resourcefulness by - apparently - defying the laws of gravity and shooting almost vertically back up the rapids in simple native canoes!

As well as providing plenty of adventure the series gives a sense of romance and history. Nevertheless the girls are quite relieved, eventually, to find themselves safely on a thoroughly sound ocean going liner, en route for England, and a return to their beloved Cliff House. They enjoy

'days and nights of tropic delight as the liner ploughed on the long journey that led to home.

The days were bright with the burning sun, but under the shade of the awning the girls appreciated the soft scented breezes that caressed their cheeks. At night it was very peaceful and very still, and the brilliant stars spangled the perfect velvet of the purple sky.'



After their adventures Babs declares, as England approaches: "For my part, I have realized the value of friendship as never before"; and she and her chums part with Grace reluctantly - hopeful of meeting her again soon.

\* \* \*

As far as I know, however, the Girl Crusoe did not re-appear in the Cliff House stories, though she is still remembered by many of us with affection.



**BESSIE AND THE BLACK GIRL!** "Yoooop! A kik-kik-cannibal!" Bessie Bunter yelled with alarm at the peculiar sight that met her eyes. As the intruder approached her with soft, stealthy step, Bessie shook like a jelly.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Seasonal Greetings to all readers, especially our good friend Frank. Many thanks to the Editor and all contributors."

REG, MAUREEN, MELISSA and KATHRYN ANDREWS  
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Very best wishes to all my friends/customers for Xmas and the New Year. Come and see me sometime! Please ring first.

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+ + + + +

A Merry Christmas to one and all - BOB MILNE.

# A Ghost at Moat Hollow

by JACK HUGHES

The years have rolled by all too swiftly and I suppose Schoolboy Detective Len Lex, nephew of Inspector Bill Nixon of Scotland Yard, has all but been forgotten. Certainly I do not read of him in the eulogies to yesterday's detectives which appear from time to time in the pages of Collectors' Digest.

I first met Len Lex in a most excellent Schoolboy's Own Lib. No. 535 (Nov. '38) "The Schoolboy 'Tec" by Chas. Hamilton. I enjoyed this yarn immensely, I remember, and wished for more but it was not for many years that I would have the opportunity to read all the saga of Schoolboy Detective Lex which had been chronicled in the MODERN BOY.

The first Lex series appeared in 1936 (452-461). Shortage of funds caused Len to come from his school to reside with his Uncle Bill whose investigation of the case of a notorious thief, 'The Sussex Man' has got him nowhere. Nephew Len has a dawning suspicion that the cracksman may have some association with Oakshott School, Sussex, so to that school and the Fifth Form Len is sent and successfully unmasks the villain. This was the yarn reprinted in S.O.L. which I had read.

Immediately there followed from 462-465 The Moat House Series, then after three months, in 1937 issues 479-484 we are told of the strange behaviour of a new Fifth-Former and his evident desire to both be sacked and to lose a soon to be inherited fortune. This was followed by the final series, 485-488 "The Hold Up Man". These two latter series also appeared in S.O.L. (371).

But now it is Christmas 1978. Let's draw up our chairs to the fire, turn the lights down low and listen as Harvey who has invited his chums to spend the Christmas vac. with him at Moat House warns of the ancestral apparition they may meet whilst there.

"I suppose I know whether my own uncle's house is haunted or not" said Harvey warmly. "I tell you, Jerningham Moat House has been haunted since the umpteenth century - sportsman in white, clanking chains, horrid groans and all that."

"Seen it?" asked Banks, winking at Len Lex.

"I haven't exactly seen it, and I have'nt exactly heard it! ..."

But Len Lex is interested ...

"Tell us about it, old bean ... a haunted house at Christmas is simply jolly" ...

It was dim and dusky in the study. The December darkness had fallen on the school. The winter wind whistling from the Sussex downs pattered snowflakes on the window-panes. The study fire burned with a ruddy glow gleaming on the faces of the three fellows sitting round the fire, casting strange lights and shadows ... As the dusk deepend only the fire illumined the study, and shadows lurked in the corners and danced on the walls.

"I'm not guaranteeing that the story's true" confessed Harvey, "but I tell you that lots of people round the Moat House believe it. It happened centuries ago. There was a Sir Lucian Jerningham then, same as there is now. He had a nephew who was heir to the title and estate. This chap bagged him one dark winter's night, and parked him in a dungeon below the level of the moat - a dark, damp,



dismal dungeon where he --"

"Caught a cold" suggested Banks.

"Shut up ass. Where he perished."

"Must have been perishing cold there" said Banks. "That nephew must have been a bit of a perisher too."

"Will you dry up, idiot? The new man held high revel in the old oak hall," went on Harvey, "while the rightful lord of the mansion was perishing in chains in the deep dark dungeon. On Christmas night, when the new man was holding his revels with his boon companions, there came a sudden strange sound from the dungeon stair." Harvey paused impressively.

"It was the sound of a rattling chain," he continued. "Clink, clink, clink, Clank, clank, clank. The new lord of the manor started to his feet. Slowly the sound approached the great oaken doors of the hall -- and all within stood stricken, silent, their eyes fixed on the doors, which slowly opened of their own accord." Harvey paused again.

"From the darkness", he went on, "came a haggard figure, with hair white as driven snow, and chains on its limbs that rattled and clinked as it moved, uttering deep groans at every step. Slowly, with rattling chains, it drew nearer and nearer to the new lord, who stood transfixed, gazing at it in frozen horror. An icy finger touched him."

"Grooogh" said Banks.

"And he fell on his face amid the wine cups. Then suddenly all was dark."

The fire in study No. 8 blazed up for a moment, and died down, leaving the study almost in darkness.'

Mr. Charles Hamilton continues the story. It is now several days later. Oakshott School has broken up for the vac. and the chums have arrived at Olkham and in vain wait the arrival of Uncle Lucian's car.

'Through the winter dusk a few light flakes whirled on the sharp wind. Four fellows coat-collars up about their ears, caps pulled down, bags in their hands, stood in the dim street outside the little village station at Olkham, and stared about them in the gloom. They had been waiting about, and staring into the thickening gloom for a quarter of an hour or more.'

It is a mile or more to Moat Hollow. Nothing else for it, the chums must walk. A short cut through the park will save half the distance.

'The gate groaned on rusty hinges ... Beyond lay a footpath under leafless, frosty old oaks and beeches. Snow and fallen leaves crumpled under their feet. If the lane had been dark, the footpath was darker ...'

But lights move and glimmer under the trees and a policeman questions their presence in the park before allowing them to proceed.

"Listen" muttered Len.

His keen ear caught a sound close at hand. The four Oakshott men came to a halt, their hearts beating faster. The darkness -- the silence of the desolate park -- were having rather a creepy effect on them. The sound came again -- a faint rustle in frosty thickets ... It was somebody ... but he did not choose to make himself known. ... From the blackness, moaning on the wind, came a strange eerie sound -- a long groan ...

"Look" breathed Pie.

It was a glimmer of white from the black -- the height of a man's face from the ground. But no features could be distinguished: only a patch of flat whiteness, ghostly and eerie. And from that patch of glimmering white came the sound of a groan, prolonged, rising and falling on the wind.'

'Len was not insensible to the eerie influence of that strange unearthly sound in the lonely and desolate wood. But he pulled himself together. Superstition had no part in the make-up of Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew.'

Len then lies in wait for the person haunting their footsteps, attacks him but he escapes into the darkness. Arriving at the house the chums learn that Sir Lucian has disappeared and that a police search has been undertaken.

That night, after midnight, Len Lex is in bed but he is not asleep.

'The December wind wailed in the leafless old trees round the Moat House, and the old house itself was full of strange sounds ... Len was thinking of the spectre that was said to haunt the Moat House -- the restless spirit of the old lord of Tudor times ...

Len sat up, his heart beating with a sudden throb, his breath coming faster. That was no natural sound of the ancient building. It was the clank of a chain, rattling as it moved ... human or ghostly, the spectre of the Moat House was walking within a few yards of him ... Harvey had flashed on his bed-lamp and in the lighted doorway a strange, weird, startling figure stood. It was the figure of an old, old man, in the ruff and trunk hose of Tudor times, with long hair, white as the driven snow, a long, white beard, and a face of such ghastly whiteness that it was like the mask of death. Round the figure's waist was a chain, old and rusty, with loose ends that clinked and clanked as he moved.'

Hotly pursued by the chums the spectre disappears into a secret passage and is not seen again.

Eventually Sir Lucian is rescued from the hidden dungeon beneath Moat Hollow and the secretary, Chard, is off to prison. Another success for Detective Len Lex.

"Merry Christmas" roared Pie Porringe.

Len roared too, as a snowball caught him in the ear.

Bright and cheery was that Christmas morning.

And for all of us, thanks to Mr. Hamilton, it is going to be a Cheery Christmas this year.

\* \* \* \* \*

A Merry Christmas to all Friars and Saints, especially Bob and Betty Acraman, founder of the first Friar's Chapter at Courtfield, Ruislip, and all the fellow members.

LEN BERG, WEMBLEY.

+ + + + +

A Happy Christmas to Bob Blythe, Ben Whiter and you, dear Editor, and all Saints, Friars and Bakers. WANTED: S.O.L's 347, 146, also B.F.L. 656. Your price paid for decent copies.

ERNEST HUBBARD, 25 PLOWRIGHT MOUNT, SHEFFIELD, S14 1LP.

+ + + + +

Xmas Greetings to all. Still required: "Nick Carter", Nos. 1-7, coloured cover, 12" x 8", top price; also "Nugget Library" 265, 268, 274.

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# Les' Rowley takes a Day Return To Friar dale.

The penny-in-the-slot machine, its slim figure clad in post office red, now slowly rusting with the passing of numerous seasons, stood with its delivery tray open like a mute soliciting for alms. The name plate crumbling with decay proclaimed the legend 'N-s-l--s -ho--lat-', whilst - like the fading backcloth for a long forgotten play - a weatherworn hoarding affirmed the properties of Hudson's Soap. Further along the platform three milk churns gave stolid witness to the rustic location of this village station.

The ancient train, the engine of which could have claimed a close affinity with Stephenson's 'Rocket', had noisily made its exit from this sun-lit pastoral setting having set down a small consignment of freight and a solitary passenger - myself.

The sun shone down from an azure heaven on green fields and stately trees that reached beyond the limit of the eye. Even the buildings of the small station seemed to belong to Nature rather than to man. As I made my way **along** the platform, past the poster that promised 'South for

Sunshine', I congratulated myself on my choice of a day's outing.

Friardale had not been reached by any easy means of travel, nor had this pilgrimage known a route that was direct and uncomplicated. I had changed at Lantham and Courtfield and each change had involved a wait of more than thirty minutes, time enough and more to stretch the legs that had been cramped in third class carriages of uncertain vintage. But, here I was, at long last in that particular corner of Kent that it had always been my wish to visit.

I surrendered the outward half of my ticket to the solitary porter and dispensed with the auspices of the Southern Railway. A brisk walk of a few hundred yards took me into the High Street of the village and I began to look round me with a lively interest.

Thatched roofs and mullioned windows; white walls supported by beams that were black with age. Through an open doorway, I caught a glimpse of the village cobbler at work on his last and I read - with some



satisfaction - the name of 'Penfold' over the porch. A moment later and yet another familiar name caught my eye and I crossed the street to savour the hospitality of the little bunshop known as 'Uncle Clegg's'. As the ginger beer bubbled from its stone bottle and fizzed invitingly in my glass, I scanned the glass shelves to make my choice from the cakes and pastries displayed. The proprietor, a kindly looking, grey haired gentleman, nodded approvingly when I bypassed the doughnuts with their cream and jam filling and selected some buns that were full of peel and currants.

In answer to my enquiry, my host admitted that business was quiet but, being a Wednesday, would liven up that afternoon when the boys from the School forsook their classrooms for the open air. As I took my ease, I gazed out from my seat in the bow shaped window to where a brewer's dray was off-loading at the Cross Keys inn across the way. The drayman disappeared inside the tavern, no doubt to slake his thirst as his horse was already slaking its own from the trough of water that some long past benefactor had provided.

The Saxon tower of the village church, flanked by an avenue of dignified elms, offered a sanctuary from whatever troubles beset the villagers of the day. The ancient grey building beckoned me and, finishing my buns and ginger pop, and carefully negotiating my passage past a crate of eggs marked "Best Fresh" I stepped again into the village street. A trio of hens, met as though in some solemn conclave of the poultry world, were pecking reflectively at some nameless titbit on the grassy verge whilst, at some greater distance, a dog of indeterminate species was engaged in dispersing its fleas upon the

gentle breeze. It was a pleasing scene that justified some greater pen than my own. Wordsworth perhaps, or even the Bard himself, could have caught the beauty of the moment. They would have had to be quick however. For, as I prepared to cross the road, there came a crescendo of sound, a hideous blend of tortured tyre upon gravel, of throttle opened to the full, and the defiant blaring of a horn.

A cloud of dust and fumes heralded the arrival of some hurtling monster from whose path both beast and fowl ran screeching. I caught but a quick sight of helmet and goggles above the swerving frame of a motor cycle ere rider and machine disappeared as suddenly - and as noisily - as they had come. Somewhat shaken from this encounter, I retraced my steps and leaned against the doorway of the bunshop to regain my scattered wits.

The experience had been as breathtaking as it had been brief but it was some moments more before my ruffled demeanour - like the fur and feathers of the other participants - calmed to anything like normalcy. Mr. Clegg, who had come to the door of his shop, murmured consoling words of sympathy.

"That'll be a young gent from the School named Coker," he volunteered, "regular threat to life and limb on that mo'bike of his. Folk wonder as to how he got a licence to drive the danged thing." I found myself sharing in this local speculation, but 'Uncle' Clegg continued. "Why you looks quite shaken up, sir," he voiced in concern. "Mebbe a glass of brandy at the 'Cross Keys' wouldn't go amiss."

The advice was too sound to

ignore and it would be as well to settle the butterflies in my stomach before visiting the church. This time I was able to cross the road without incurring risk to life and limb and was soon pushing open the side door of the village inn.

Many similar hostelries reflect the quiet rustic beauty of their village. To this pleasant rule the 'Cross Keys' was somewhat of an exception. The air was stale and heavy with tobacco smoke and stale beer and the bar was dimly lit by a low wattage bulb and whatever light could filter through the unclean windows of the bar. The sawdust on the floor had obviously not been changed that morning, that week, or probably that month. The ceiling and walls had long since given up any pretence of immaculacy and a half a dozen fly-blown sporting prints did little to relieve a general atmosphere of neglect.

I obtained my brandy from the surly attendant behind the bar and sat myself at a table that blended well with the dinginess of the surroundings. From a back room came the sound of the clicking of billiard balls, whilst the only other occupant of the bar, a florid looking gentleman in a loud check suit, regarded me with a look of familiar interest which I did nothing to encourage. The purple haze from the cheap cigar that he was smoking rose and lost itself in the limbo of the shadowy and discoloured ceiling. After a brief interval this person quitted his own table and, uninvited, came over to mine. He gave me what he seemed to consider an affable smile before settling himself into the seat opposite me.

"Sanders is the name," he began by way of introduction. "'Soapy' to my

friends but I take no offence. On seeing you, sir, I says to myself, says I, 'now there's a gent that should know his fancy for Wapshot this afternoon. And, if as be as I'm right, then I'm your man, sir. Just say the word and you're on! Myself, well I fancies Gay Goldfish for the three o'clock. Now there's a horse on which a quid or a fiver won't go amiss, sir, or even a tenner if you're a goer. Soapy'll see you right, sir, if your horse comes up. An' you can count on that!'"

I regarded him through a small fog of smoke and fumes. His had not been an attractive countenance even at a distance; now, at closer quarters, it was quite clearly a case where distance had lent enchantment to the view! His furtive eyes were set close together, enhancing the shiftiness of the glance that he gave me. With what was intended to be an engaging smile he displayed a number of teeth broken by decay and stained by nicotine. The stubble on his chin indicated a severance of relations with his razor whilst what else remained of his visage proclaimed an ignorance of the hygienic qualities of soap and water.

I am not a betting man but, even if I were, I would not entrust anything in the nature of cash to the grubby hands of Mr. Sanders, a point that I was about to make clear to him. He had, however, taken my hesitancy as being due to some other reason.

"Oh! I get it, sir. No taste for the gee-gees, what? Well, now, how about giving the Game Chicken a little bit of support? He'll be meeting the Courtfield Mauler for a few rounds in the old barn in a couple of hours time. Take my word for it, sir, the Chicken'll murder the Mauler and now's



the time to put your money on -----"

I fixed Mr. Sanders with my most serious expression.

"Are you aware," I enquired, "that the touting for wagers and bets on licensed premises is illegal?"

"Eh?"

"-- and unless you remove yourself from my table I shall advise the licensee that you should be barred from the premises!"

"Come, sir!" His voice came in wheedling tones. "No 'arm done and as for you complaining to Cobb, why bless you, 'e's a man that 'as backed 'is fancy more than once."

I had finished my brandy and, there being no reason to stay and prolong this acquaintance, I rose from the table and prepared to quit the premises when a potman appeared from the back parlour and shouted across to my tormenter.

"Seen Bill Lodgey around Soapy? Young gent from the School enquiring for him on the blower."

Mr. Sanders suddenly lost interest in me.

"No," he replied. "Bill's over at the Three Fishers, but if it's Mr. Loder or Mr. Walker wanting to be on, then I'm their man!"

"No, it's someone by the name of Hazledene and he sounds as though he's in a bit of a bait. Are you interested or shall I tell him to ring off?"

"You can bet your sweet life that I'm not interested. Why that young fool already owes Bill a tenner from last week and that ain't the first time

he's welshed, either. Tell him that he'd better pay Bill what he owes instanter if he don't want his school-master to know what he's been up to."

The potman disappeared to convey this sad message to the waiting Hazledene. I had little pity to waste on a young rascal that had played the silly goat and was ready to play it again. Yet I hoped that the aggrieved Mr. Lodgey would think carefully before fulfilling his threat and reporting the boy to his headmaster. If Mr. Sanders was representative of his kind then it was doubtful whether Mr. Lodgey would be imbued with the milk of human kindness. My feelings were mixed as I pulled open the bar door and breathed once more the clean, pure air outside.

My next port of call was at the tiny post office, where I was able to purchase a postcard view of the village and the necessary penny stamp to send it on its way. As the elderly post-mistress counted out my change I could not but notice that she peered closely at each coin, her tired-looking eyes making that inspection through a pair of thick lensed spectacles. I found myself thinking back over the years. Was this weak-sighted lady the same postmistress who had wrongly identified a schoolboy and who had, just as wrongly, unwittingly contributed to his disgrace? Half-memories play havoc with the mind and the incident was one of long ago. Perhaps I was confusing it with that play - now, what was it? Ah yes! The Winslow Boy. I stuck the little maroon coloured stamp on the card and dropped it into the pillar box.

Not far distant was a trim little cottage fronted by an equally trim

little garden in which a man in shirt sleeves was busy trimming a hedge of yew. A notice board proclaimed that this was the residence of the local representative of law and order and I paused to study a notice, rather more prominent than its fellows, that appealed to the passer-by for information. Apparently there had been a series of burglaries in the district, the proceeds of which were not inconsiderable, and the local constabulary were anxious for clues. I reflected how outrageous it was that a law abiding person (like myself, of course) was taxed at the iniquitous rate of eight pence in the pound whilst rogues and rascals could steal and thieve without donating their just (or perhaps unjust) due to the common cause. My reflections were interrupted.

"I see you're interested in that 'wanted', sir," the gardener had straightened his back and stood facing me, an enquiring look upon his rustic visage. "Be a bit of a feather in my hat if I could get on to the feller that's done those break-ins. Make the Inspector at Courtfield sit up and take notice. It's about time that the name Tozer had Sergeant in front of it!"

I nodded understandingly. From his appearance, I doubted if the constable would achieve any rank without an element - a very strong element - of luck. No doubt he had his successes, a poacher or two; a cyclist without a rear light; or maybe a drunk from the "Cross Keys" on a Saturday night.

"Wish I could help," I replied, with as much sympathy as I could muster, "from what the notice says you appear to be honoured by one of the professionals from London. I see a chap named Popper was unlucky the other night."

"That's Sir Hilton." Mr. Tozer did not utter the name with any marked show of respect but spat, with some accuracy, at an unoffending marrow patch. "And we won't hear the last of it until the fellow's been caught and sentenced. Gave the Court a fair going over and nearly gave Popper a fit of apoplexy!"

After a few more words I passed on my way convinced that the villain had little to fear from the honest but unimaginative Mr. Tozer. The policeman's cottage was almost the last one in the village and the dusty road was soon winding its way between the hedgerows and had become little more than a country lane.

To my left, almost screened by a curtain of lofty trees, could be seen the preserves and plantations of an extensive estate, probably the property of the unfortunate and unloved Sir Hilton Popper. It would be pleasant, I considered, to walk in the cool of the shade. Surely no-one would object to a passer-by taking a pleasant stroll through the welcoming trees. I had not progressed very far before I was made to realise exactly how wrong that judgement had been.

"Joyce! Joyce! Where are you man? I do not pay you to loaf and idle your time away! I can hear sounds of a trespasser. After my birds, no doubt. We must stop him, Joyce. Do you hear me, man?"

Into a clearing directly ahead of me appeared a tall, angular figure clad in plus fours of rough and hairy tweed. The single lens of a monocle gleamed in the sunlight and the face in which it was set was as irritable in its expression as the voice had been bitter in its complaining. It was clear that



this was to be no cheerful encounter!

"Here, Sir Hilton," came an answering voice, and a moment later the man in plus fours was joined by another clad in the velveteen breeches of a gamekeeper.

I had felt some fleeting sympathy for a man who had such a bad tempered employer, but now my concern was all for myself. The Lord of Popper Court did not look a welcoming address at which to direct amiable courtesies and gentle explanations, so I turned to leave that gentleman's domain. My sudden movement attracted their attention.

"There he goes! Don't stand there gawping, Joyce! Will you take the rascal in charge or will you not take the rascal in charge? Waste no time ..."

Thus urged into action by the irascible baronet, the not to be envied Joyce came running after me. If I was not exactly running myself, I was - at least - walking very fast! It was with a feeling of relief that I reached the safety of the King's highway once more, for a hurried backward glance had shown that Sir Hilton himself had joined the chase, brandishing aloft a dangerous looking horse crop as he advanced.

"Stop! Come back! You shall be given in charge for trespass! Why are you stopping, Joyce? Why did you not take the rascal in charge? I shall have to consider whether to discharge you. I do not pay you exorbitant wages for nothing. I shall have to -----"

The sound of tumult died in the distance and I slackened my pace along that pleasant country lane, able to breathe more freely. The tall trees that bounded the Popper acres were left behind and open farmland with its

fences and hedgerows took their place. In the distance, a stately group of buildings, surmounted by a clock tower, came suddenly into sight. Presumably this was the school of which Mr. Clegg had spoken, and - as if to bear testimony to this presumption - there came a whirr of cycle wheels and a group of schoolboys came riding round the nearest corner. Happy to be free of their form-masters surveillance and glad to give their school books a miss for the afternoon, they passed me by and their happy chatter faded on the air.

I looked round and spotted a convenient stile on which I could sit and admire the view. From this coign of vantage one could study the school more appreciatively together with its setting of the fields and meadows, the orchards and copses of the beautiful Kentish countryside.

It was difficult to imagine what the locality looked like in other seasons. That little ditch, now embellished with a host of stinging nettles, would probably be filled in autumn with green and slimy mud. Winter snows would cover the grass and roadside with a blanket of snow providing ample ammunition for youth to make into snowballs.

"Excuse me. Have you noticed a schoolboy waiting by this stile?"

The speaker was a cadaverous looking gentleman clad in dark and sombre grey. His enquiry was made politely enough, but a pair of closely set eyes, narrow lips that dropped at the corners into a perpetual sneer, gave him the appearance of a wily old fox. The austerity of his garb was not relieved by a pair of elastic sided boots and a black brief case that he grasped

in a bony fist.

Civil, though his manner was, something in the tone of his voice boded no good for the absent schoolboy. In acknowledgement of my shaking my head he gave an impatient snort.

"Sending a boy to an expensive public school should at least ensure that punctuality in attending on his elders is of importance. My time, sir, is money - money that the boy's guardian seems reluctant to pay!"

This time I did not even bother to move my head for I felt no inclination to subscribe to discourse with such an irritable and impatient man. There was, however, little need to reply for the next moment a schoolboy appeared round the bend in the lane.

"You have kept me waiting. Waiting for over fifteen minutes! If you were a nephew of mine I would box your ears with the utmost severity!"

"Jolly good thing for me that I'm no nephew of yours, then!" retorted the newcomer.

"Do not be impertinent. My time is of value, your's is not. We cannot talk here so you will walk with me part of the way to the station and give me a report of your progress as we go."

The boy made no effort to move. Over his handsome but rather sullen features had crept an expression that was a mixture of resolution and defiance.

"What I have to say can be said here and now ----"

"Don't be foolish. We cannot discuss such matters in public ----"

"I don't care if the whole world hears what I have to say. You haven't

asked me why I am late for this meeting, but I'll tell you just the same. I've been with my form-master and I've told him all that has passed between us ----"

"What do you mean, you young rascal?"

"You call me a rascal! What do you call yourself? I may have been a rascal - under your direction - but no longer. It is you who is the rascal and rogue; you who set yourself up to give advice to others. Well, I've some advice for you ----"

I started to move away. This confrontation was interesting enough but I had no wish to involve myself in other people's affairs. As I went, the boy's impassioned voice carried over the hedgerows.

"My advice to you is to make yourself scarce before the police catch up with you. When I left him, Quelch was on the 'phone to Inspector Grimes. Doing another fellow out of his inheritance is fraud. If you want to go to chokey I don't. I can tell you that when Wharton's uncle gets to hear of this ----"

His next words faded as the distance between us increased and I was left wondering about the man to whom they had been addressed. Was he some legal johnnie who had led the boy into some crooked enterprise? I wondered what the Law Society would say!

Such speculation was short lived as I felt something sting me on the cheek. I raised my hand to the smarting spot and, as I did so, that sting was joined by another, and yet another. Something dropped at my feet and I stooped and picked it up.



It was a pea.

As I examined my find, yet another missile found its target.

"My dear sir, are you hurt?"

It was a rather superfluous question, but the concern with which it was voiced robbed it of some of its superfluity! The tall, rather angular, gentleman who had uttered it turned to the short and rather portly companion at his side.

"Had it not been for this gentleman being in the way those - those - ahem - missiles may have struck us, Prout ---"

"Fortuitous!" boomed Prout. "Very fortuitous indeed!" Really, I could see nothing fortuitous in the matter at all! My cheek still smarted and I was obsessed with a desire, an intense desire, to come to grips with those responsible!

"Did either of you gentlemen manage to see my attackers?" I enquired with more than passing interest. "I am anxious that such a dangerous act should not go un-punished!"

"Quite so," agreed the angular gentleman, "and I shall be only too happy to oblige you. There were three young rascals concerned in the affray - three boys of Highcliffe School, and their names are Ponsonby, Monson and Gadsby, and this present outrage is completely in character with their previous behaviour ---"

"Completely in character, Quelch!" agreed his companion. "Only the most condign of punishments should be meted out to those young ruffians and, if you will permit me to make a suggestion, I would recommend that you make your complaint to Dr. Voysey,

rather than to the master of the boys' form."

"I agree," concurred Quelch. "Past experience has proved that it is pointless to approach Mobbs on matters relating to his form. You are at liberty, sir, to quote my name as reference to this affair and I am sure that my colleague will also be ready to lend weight ----"

"Most certainly so!" interjected the boom.

With a brief nod, the two men turned and resumed their walk. As they turned a corner and were hidden from sight, fragments of the conversation reached back to me.

"Fortuitous!"

"Most fortuitous, my dear Quelch, most fortuitous, indeed!"

I looked at my watch. Dearly as I would have liked to have visited Highcliffe and laid my complaints against Ponsoby & Co. there was too little time left in which to do so. Trains from Friardale station were not all that frequent and prudence counselled me not to miss the last one! I shrugged my shoulders and headed back the way I had come. Something seemed to tell me that retribution in some painful form or the other would eventually catch up with the knuts of Highcliffe School.

Overhead, the sun had taken its measure of the day and was already beginning to line the westerly fleece of clouds with gold. The breeze was now a little sharper and the rustle among the trees and bushes more intent.

"Mebbe you could 'elp a covey on his way!"

The rough voice intruded upon

my reverie just as much as its owner was now intruding upon my path. The figure that confronted me was not an enchanting one. It did not blend gently into the surroundings of that pastoral scene. Its aggressive attitude was not relieved by surly countenance that was both unshaven and unclean. Two small, greedy eyes, and a pair of snarling lips drawn back to reveal broken and discoloured teeth, lent a menace to his expression that could not be misunderstood.

"I reckon as 'ow a gent like you can afford a oncer or mebbe a fiver for a man as is down on 'is luck," he slid a wooden cudgel from under his arm down into a hefty and grubby fist.

"Stand aside and allow me to go on my way or I shall report you to the nearest police station."

"Ho! Go running to the peelers, will yer?" The ruffian took a look up and down the country lane. It was a lonely spot, closed in by high trees on one side and a tall, wooden fence on the other and I began to think that my day was going to finish far less pleasantly than it had begun.

"Now, look 'ere," he tapped the end of the cudgel as though to add emphasis to what he had to say. "Either you 'and over wot cash you 'ave about yer or else yer gets a cracked nut from my little persuader. Quick now, I've no time to waste!" I watched, as though mesmerised, as he lifted the cudgel back over his shoulder. Doubtless a 'cracked nut' would have been the next item on the programme, and that 'cracked nut' would have belonged to me! But there came a sudden interruption!

Over the tall fence behind the footpad the figure of a schoolboy had

appeared, a finger held to his lips as a signal for me to be silent! Not having eyes in the back of his head, the rascal could not see the new arrival to the scene. But, seen or unseen, that new arrival made his presence felt the next instant by leaping from the fence on to the back of the man who had threatened me! Taken by surprise, the villain staggered, the cudgel falling from his hand as he did so. I rushed forward to lend what assistance I could to my benefactor.

"Hold him still, sir. He seemed mighty keen on giving someone a cracked nut and it's a pity that he should be disappointed." The lad had retrieved the cudgel and was regarding the footpad with a smile of cool and amused contempt on his face. "Let me introduce you," he added with mock courtesy, "the gentleman with the five o'clock shadow and the taking ways is known as 'Honest' Joe Jobson who is wanted for selling a stolen jigger to a schoolfellow of mine. I rather fancy that old Grimey, over at Courtfield, will be very pleased to see this chappie."

A string of oaths that threatened to turn the air blue came from Mr. Jobson upon whose unpleasant person both my knees and all my not inconsiderable weight now rested.

"And whom have I to thank for coming to my aid?" I enquired gratefully. "I must certainly let your Headmaster know of my appreciation of the risk you took in helping an unknown wayferer."

"Thanks may be taken as read," the boy replied, giving Mr. Jobson a tap on his head with his own cudgel as that individual struggled to rise. "I'd rather you didn't mention the matter



to the jolly old Beak. He might enquire why I had been out of bounds before I butted in." He nodded to the fence, over the top of which appeared a weatherbeaten noticeboard on which I could just make out the legend "The Three Fishers Inn". I thought I understood.

With the aid of handkerchiefs we managed to secure Mr. Jobson's grubby paws behind him and tied his feet together with a tie that I gladly sacrificed to the good cause. The schoolboy waved aside my renewed thanks and, having assisted me in dumping Mr. Jobson in a ditch full of stinging nettles, we went our different ways.

As I walked once again through the cobbled streets of Friardale I wondered how Mr. Jobson would fare in the coming hours. The shadows were already lengthening and the cool of early evening was taking the place of

the warmth of the day. I hoped - for Mr. Jobson's sake - that it would not turn to rain; a sudden acquaintance with water might prove a shock to that gentleman's nervous system!

Pausing only for a brief snack at 'Uncle' Cleggs, I made my way without further incident or delay to the little railway station. It was as well that I did so for the ancient train, the steam hissing impatiently from the stack of its locomotive, was already waiting at the platform.

I climbed into a compartment and settled myself comfortably enough in a corner as, with a shrill farewell of its whistle, the train got into motion. Through the windows the beautiful county of Kent slipped slowly away into the descending dusk of twilight. Soon, only too soon, the memories that I enjoyed from the yellowing pages of book and paper would be joined by those of my day return to Friardale.

\* \* \* \* \*

FOR SALE or SWOP: First three B.F. 3rd Libs., offers to:

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+ + + + +

To Bob and Betty Acraman, thanking you both for all the wonderful Friars meetings at Courtfield, wishing you at this Christmastide with all the other Friars of the first London Chapter, a Happy Christmas. From -

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Once again we take this opportunity of wishing all our friends the compliments of the season.

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# A New Look at the "New Look" SBL's

by JOSIE PACKMAN

It is now ten years since the last issue of the New Look Sexton Blake Libraries was issued. Strange though it may seem I have still not received any articles about them during recent years. The only conclusion I can come to is that no-one is or was, interested. However, I recently decided to re-read this last series - enlarged paper-back type of book, and publish my present opinion of the stories therein.

One's taste in literature can change over the years, although I think mine is fairly consistent, but a second reading can make one appreciate a good story, well written and with a good plot - after a long period of ignoring them. The 45 stories in the 5th series were a great improvement on the previous New Look S.B.L's and as I have previously said, the best ones are those by Martin Thomas. They are the only ones I can re-read with pleasure.

Another of the reasons I was able to enjoy this last series was the occasional glimpse of the old Baker Street consulting room atmosphere. After all this set-up was established over eighty years ago and is the one most readers throughout that period would have had in their minds-eye when perusing a Blake story. Sexton Blake and Tinker are essentially English characters, that is why one does not expect them to behave like American Private Eyes or the French Maigret and various other foreign detectives. It was a pity though that this new old-style type of story did not portray Tinker in a better light than the "red-head chaser" invented by Anthony Parsons. Admittedly a young man of 26 would be interested in pretty girls and enjoy their company but not to the detriment of his characterisation. G. H. Teed, whom I consider the most famous of Blake authors described Tinker as "an intelligent, well-trained young man capable of handling expertly the work he had been trained to do by Sexton Blake" and his loyalty to this standard was never in question.

Apart from all this I feel that the increased size of the last series made it possible for the authors to extend their plots and finish the tales properly with full explanations at the end. The length of the stories was similar to the old double-number Union Jacks, all, except one, written by Teed. Even some of his tales in the 1st series S.B.L's seemed to end rather abruptly as if he had no more room available and had to cut short the last chapters. So the extra length of the last issue made quite a difference to the development of the plots and also enabled the authors to insert those glimpses of Baker Street which made the stories so homely. Another factor for the success of these tales was the fewer appearances of the "Gaggle of Girls" from Berkeley Square. They were not really needed - a secretary perhaps but one confined to the office not used as a detective. Not that I am against lady detectives far from it, but not the Paula Dane type. I thought she was an intruder into the Blake regime right from the start of the new look but strangely enough all those readers who approved of her have seldom taken the trouble to write anything about her for Blakiana. However, I set out to write something nice about these last Sexton Blake tales and I must say that they came well up to par for detective fiction,



well up to the standard of say, Ellery Queen, Nero Wolfe, etc., not forgetting our well-loved Sherlock Holmes.

At the time of writing we have not seen the new TV series of Sexton Blake stories written by Simon Raven (or should I say serial), but if this series is good I would suggest that more tales by Mr. Raven might be welcome in a new series of Sexton Blake Libraries.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jack Hughes needs old series Nelson Lee: 137, 140, 142, 143, 227. Write:-

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+ + + + +

WANTED: Magnets, Nelson Lees, S.B.L's, S.O.L's. Merry Xmas C.D. readers.

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+ + + + +

Seasonable Greetings to the many friends made through C.D. and their help with my collection. Still like to hear from anyone with Old Boys/Children's Annuals/mags. for disposal.

LEN HAWKEY, 2 SEAVIEW ROAD, LEIGH-ON-SEA, ESSEX.

PHONE 0702-79579

+ + + + +

SEASONS GREETINGS from LAURIE YOUNG to all Friends made in the Hobby Circle. Special thanks to Josie Packman, Darrell Swift and our tireless Editor for help and pleasure given. WANTED: S.B.L's, 2nd and 1st series, Union Jacks and Detective Weeklies. FOR SALE/EXCHANGE: S.O.L's, Gems, Tom Merry's Own, Bunter books and oddments. S.a.e. for details to:-

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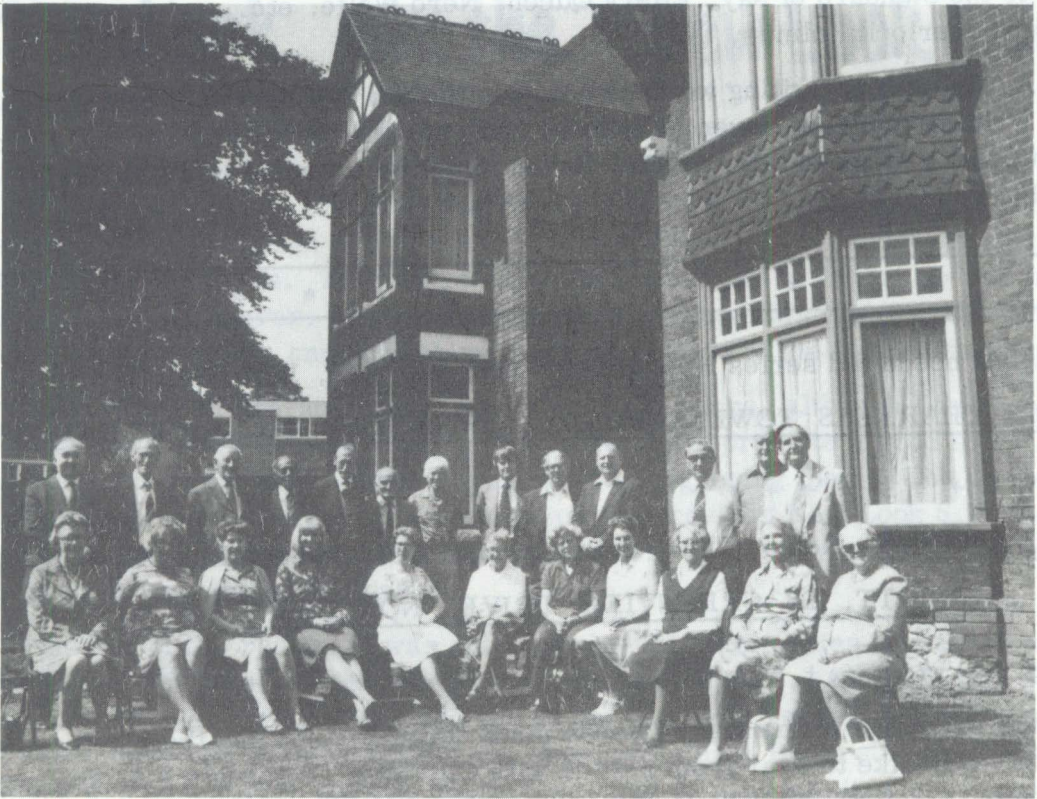
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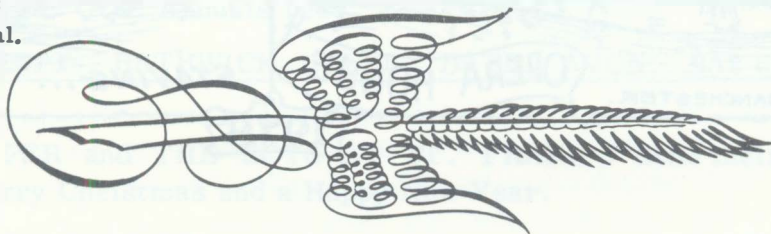
# The London Club .....

← as it is

and as it was →

The photograph on this page was probably the first picture taken of any of our clubs. The cameraman who was at work was Mr. John Robyns who was attending his first OBBC meeting. Now, nearly thirty-two years later, Mr. Robyns lent us the negative, and this picture is the result. The meeting, held at the Surbiton venue (though the setting was actually at Kingston-on-Thames at that time), was the third meeting of the parent club. The date was May 1947.

The pictures on the opposite page are the most recent ones of the London Club, and were taken at the Maidstone meeting in July of 1978. The cameraman was Mr. John Wernham, who sent us the actual pictures for inclusion in this Annual.



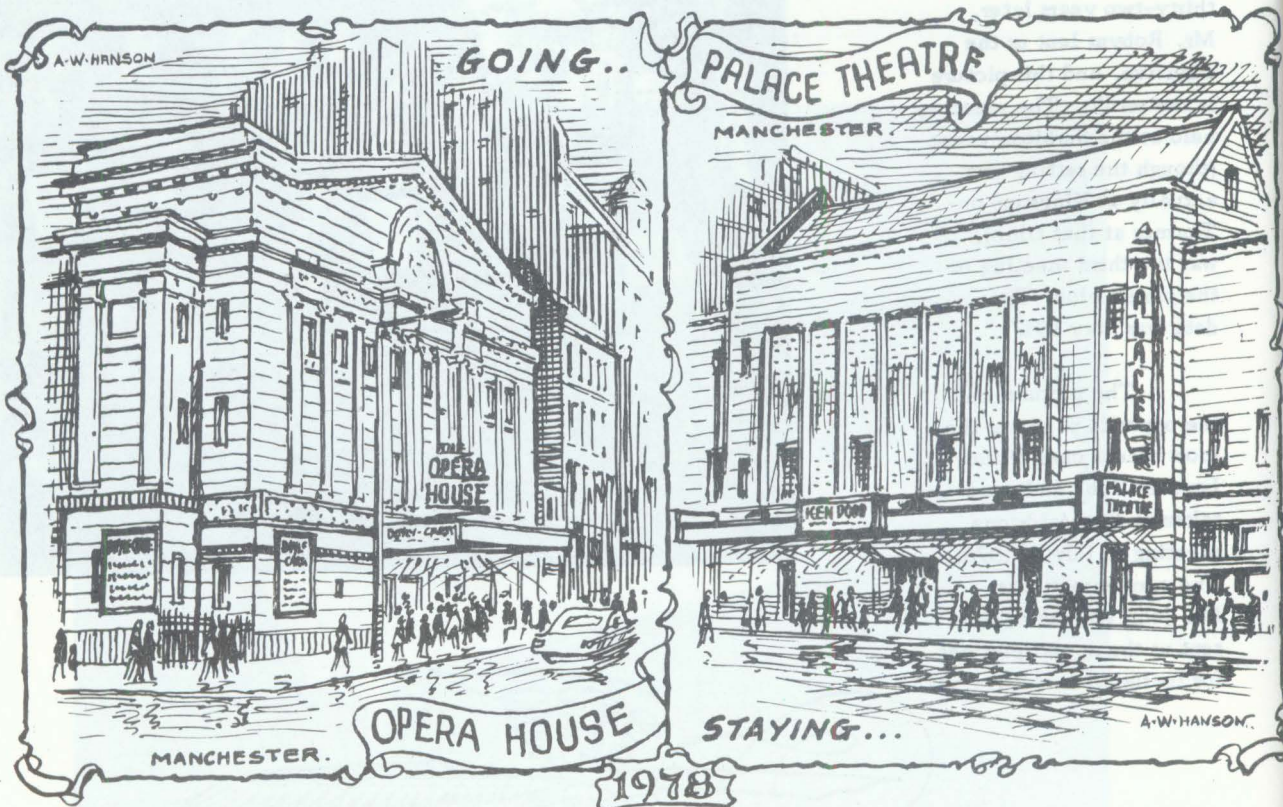
# The Palace of Variety

by ALF HANSON

You see here pictures of two old Manchester theatres. Their future, like those of many others, recently reached a crisis; in consequence one - the Opera House - has had to go (though it may finish up as a Bingo palace, like another famous theatre, the Theatre Royal, built in 1845). Ah well, this day and age can seem to put an end to anything nice! But we still have our memories of the old theatres.

The Palace at least remains. It is smaller inside than the Opera House but cosy and splendid with the familiar side boxes, balcony and 'gods', and all the usual figures and decorations that go with them. One can't forget the Palace Bar - now long gone - where famous variety artists, band-leaders, etc., could be seen after the show - including personalities like Ambrose, Roy Fox, Nat Gonella, Lew Stone, Al Bowlly, etc.

I have strong personal memories of the old Queen's Theatre, at Keighley in Yorkshire, where my Uncle Charlie was Orchestral Conductor during the First World War. I lived at Keighley when I was a boy. I well remember that my cousin Geoffrey and I (about 7 and 8 years of age) sat at each side of my uncle on some occasions, and wow! what exciting days! The noises, when imitating guns at the front; a terrific





banging of drums and flashes all around; then silence. The next scene in London, on top of a bus with soldiers and girls singing all the war tunes: - Tipperary, Roses of Picardy, Keep the Home Fires Burning, etc.

Then I remember another time; there was a woman trumpet player who imitated Louis Armstrong. She was great, although I forget her name now. I still went to the theatre on frequent occasions down the years, some of the greatest pleasures being the Keighley Amateur Society productions of such shows as 'The Desert Song', 'Maid of the Mountains', and of course the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Great days!

All this was during the thirties, and I was young and in love with the lady who was to become my wife (in 1938). What happy memories! Sad to say the old Keighley theatre was pulled down shortly after the war to make way for the bus station. I think I'll always regret not sketching the old landmarks while they were still there as in my boyhood - as also were the steam trains that passed near my old home.

You can't put the clock back, but at least as a collector I can still play with my pre-war Hornby 'O' gauge trains on a tinsplate track; read my treasured Old Boys' books, and browse through my lovely cigarette card collection. 'Any cigarette cards with variety stars, Mister?' Yes, still a wonderful world where you find it. And let's hope that the old Palace Theatre will show the way to a more hopeful future - and may all its stars forever shine brightly!

\* \* \* \* \*

WARMEST GREETINGS for Christmas and the New Year to Eric, Madam and Princess Snowee, to all Members of the London Club, and other friends. I still require and will pay good prices for the following: Popular Book of Girls' Stories 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1941; Girls' Crystal Annual 1940, 1941; Golden Annual For Girls 1929, 1939; School Friend Annual 1943; also Dorita Fairlie Bruce's 'Mistress Mariner', 'Sally's Summer Term', 'Serendipity Shop'; Elinor Brent Dyer's The Chalet School in the Oberland, Prefects at the Chalet School, The Chalet School and Rosalie; also several books by Elsie Oxenham.

MARY CADOGAN, 46 OVERBURY AVENUE, BECKENHAM, KENT.

Tel. 650 1458

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Best Christmas wishes to Ron Nicholls, Tim Salisbury, Darrell Swift; to Librarians Bob Blythe and Roger Jenkins; and to the Editor with many thanks for another happy year of C.D. WANTED: C.D. Annuals 1947, 1948, 1949.

SIMON GARRETT, BATHWICK HOUSE, BATH, AVON, BA2 6NX.

+ + + + +

NELSON LEE, NIPPER and THE BOYS AT ST. FRANK'S send their very best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

# The legend of the Sealed Room

by NIC GAYLE

It is Christmas 1922. Outside, whirling snowflakes are adding the right kind of seasonal touch to the weather, and our many friends from the various Cos. are preparing for the coming Christmas holiday, a holiday which is going to prove to be a tense and dramatic one for them all. Harry Wharton and Co. will go to Mauleverer Towers and save Mauleverer's life and reason while they are there, while Tom Merry will be wrongfully accused of theft and will hold a barring out with his friends over Christmas. And St. Frank's? ... What of St. Frank's? ... They plan to go to Tregellis Castle as the guests of Sir Montie Tregellis West, but at the last minute an outbreak of scarlet fever prevents them from going. And so a fateful invitation is proffered - and accepted. The youthful Duke of Somerton invites them to spend Christmas at Somerton Abbey, as he has the strictest instructions from his guardian Lord Norberry to return there for the holidays. Happily for him - for otherwise he would have had to spend this fateful holiday alone - Nipper and Co. accept and travel home with him. Thus begins one of the most tantalising mysteries in the St. Frank's canon. Call it if you like 'the legend of the sealed room', it is a mystery which for private and personal reasons has remained unexplained until now. Let us set the scene then, to this remarkable story.

The party, in the first instance, consists of many old friends; Nipper and Co., Handforth and Co., Archie Glenthorne, Fatty Little, Reggie Pitt, Willy Handforth and of course Somerton himself. Their arrival at Somerton Abbey is quite unexpected, although this large stately home is able to absorb a dozen or so youngsters without disturbing the equanimity of such a household. Surprisingly, Nelson Lee is already there, staying as a private guest of Somerton's uncle and guardian, Lord Norberry. And it is Lee who first reveals the mystery surrounding the legend of the sealed room, and the reason why Somerton must spend this Christmas time at home. Outside the wind is howling through the snow bedecked trees, and the dazzling and alluring effect of the white carpet of snow covering the countryside is lost in the dark shroud of a moonless December night. And inside, lolling in luxurious couches in front of a blazing, crackling log fire Nelson Lee takes up the tale and recounts the legend of the sealed room.

"... 'I hope not' agreed Nelson Lee. 'You see, the whole thing arises from the well-known Somerton tradition. In the north wing there is a mysterious room - a room which is always kept locked. Nobody but a holder of the ducal title can enter this locked apartment.'

'Begad!' said Sir Montie. 'That sounds frightfully eerie, sir!'

'Well, in a way, it is eerie' said the gov'nor. 'I understand that the rule is that the dukes of Somerton shall enter this room for the first and only time in their lives upon their accession to the title. In a case like the present one - when the title is held by a boy - the duke shall not know the secret of this room until his fifteenth birthday. Previous to that age he is too young to withstand the ordeal.'



'Is it so dreadful sir?' I asked interestedly.

'It may not be dreadful at all - no-one knows' replied Nelson Lee. 'But the fact remains that nobody on this earth but a Somerton shall enter the sealed apartment. And it is only the duke himself who can pass through the locked doorway. The history of the Somertons shows that more than one duke has hesitated at the ordeal, and has afterwards suffered from severe nervous prostration. Other holders of the title have displayed no effects whatever. I think it is largely a question of courage and nerve ... and imagination.'

'But what do they see inside the room, sir?' asked Watson.

'My dear lad, that is the mystery that has remained a mystery for centuries,' replied the gov'nor. 'We shall never know, because we shall never be permitted to go beyond the locked door ...'

'Mr. Lee was saying something about the rules of the family a minute or two ago' exclaimed Tregellis West. 'If there is a Duke of Somerton who succeeds as a child, he must enter this sealed room on his fifteenth birthday?'

'That is so' replied Nelson Lee.

'Well sir, it's Sommy's fifteenth birthday on the 27th - the day after Boxing Day!' said Sir Montie. 'That's frightfully interestin' - it is, really! So he'll go through the fearful ordeal while we are here! ...'

Thus, the stage is set for what could have been one of the most dramatic and sensational scenes in the history of the St. Frank's saga. What a wave of disappointment then, must have swept over generations of readers in the last 56 years as they read these words, Nippers terse description of Somerton's trial.

"... And while this was going on, the youthful Duke of Somerton was going through his ordeal. His uncle and his mother had advised him to wait until later in the day. But he insisted upon getting it over at once. We saw nothing of it - and it is quite impossible for me to set down what Somerton saw behind that iron studded door. It was a secret which he could never tell - so I cannot set down any record of that interesting event. I can only say that the young duke was looking pale and shaken after he came down. He went about looking thoughtful and grave. But we were very glad that the effects wore off before the holiday was over."

Well, you might be thinking, so Brooks ducked out. He set up his own aunt Sally and did not even bother to knock it down. And on the surface, there seems to be a grain of truth in the accusation. But then, that is not really fair, as Brooks never ever cheated his readers, having more manners and more business sense than to do so. The legend of the sealed room is, in all accuracy, only a sub-plot, the main story being about a ghostly haunting at the abbey, and the ensnaring of that particular spectre. Brooks made a misjudgement, I think, by making his sub-plot too fascinating, and although it is **DRAMATICALLY** correct that we are left in the dark over a solution to the mystery of what lay in the sealed room, (it being after all a private matter relating to Somerton and his family alone) it is nevertheless infuriating as a reader to be left in the lurch, as it were.

Or at least it was; it is not any more. At last an explanation is to hand. 56 years late, it is true, but there's an old saying that covers that one. What is to follow will doubtless surprise many, as it did Somerton during that eventful Christmas of 1922. Many, I'm sure, will give it no credence, and in the peculiar circumstances, perhaps that would be for the best anyway. However, it is a story that has to be told, if only to satisfy the curiosity of many readers. Whether or not it is worth waiting 56 years for is another matter; probably not, but the reader must form his own opinion. But at least the question will at last be settled. So let us join Somerton once again then, on this fateful Sunday morning after Boxing Day, as he prepares himself to enter the sealed room for the first and last time in his life. Only this time we shall be there as spectators, and will know what happens.

\* \* \*

" ... As the door closed behind him Somerton stood with his back to it, straining his ears to catch at an unfamiliar sound; that of his own heart beating. The palms of his hands rested on the great door behind him as if for reassurance, but they dropped to his sides in a more natural position as he gazed round in wonder. Of all things he had not expected this! An hour ago, if asked, he could not have said what he expected to see - he hadn't the vaguest notion, and there was no-one that could give him any hints. But he certainly felt that there should be something more spectacular than this. It suddenly flashed into his mind as he looked about him that this was cheating. That it must be some kind of a stupid joke ... But then no, surely not? Surely the legend of the Somertons meant something? ... His uncle would not put him through a charade for nothing.

He stared round the spacious dusty room until his eyes became fixed upon the only articles in it; two great wooden chairs, obviously of great antiquity, set in the centre facing one another. That was all: just two chairs. His glance travelled upwards, and he noticed for the first time a door set in the far wall, and he had to look at it twice before he realised with a start that it was slightly ajar. Was there something beyond this room that contained the secret of the Somertons? ... Something - instinct perhaps - kept him where he was, and he just stood perfectly still, watching it. It was as if he understood now that what he had to face was on the other side of that door. The imminent question was, did he go to it, or did it come to him? ...

A distant shuffling from the other side of that door answered his unspoken question, so distant that it took an eternity for him to realise what it was - a soft footfall of someone drawing closer. Somerton stared in fascination as the door silently opened, and a tall hooded figure appeared and stood there. A startled exclamation sprang to his lips as he saw that he was facing what appeared to be a monk. The robed figure moved silently to one of the chairs that stood in the centre of the room, and sat himself down, motioning Somerton to do the same. The boy mechanically obeyed. There was a pause, which was broken by the monk.

'You are early' he said, in a distant voice.

'I .. I d..did'not know there was a special time for ... for this' stammered Somerton. 'I just came.'



'It is of no consequence' replied his companion. 'I would have waited for you, whenever you chose to come.'

Somerton could not see the man's face, which was hidden in the depths of a black hood, but his quiet, clear voice was reassuring. It was benign. There were no evil spirits abroad here.

'Why am I here?' asked Somerton, hesitating.

'To learn about yourself.'

'What is there to learn?'

'You will see.'

There was another pause, and a sigh seemed to escape from the monk's lips. It was this, rather than the actual timbre of the man's voice, that made Somerton realise that he was in the presence of a very old man.

'Tell me, what do you know about the Wars of the Roses?' The question was abrupt, and the volte face of the conversation took Somerton by surprise. He endeavoured to gather his wits.

'Why, we've just done them in History last term ... in the Remove at School,' he replied, in some surprise.

'Tell me about them.'

'Well ... there were two rival factions of the nobility in the fifteenth century; one called Lancaster, the other York - and they fought a private war for years up and down the country. It was something to do with who should be King, I think. And anyway, York won and Edward IV came to the throne. That's about all I can remember, I'm afraid.'

The monk nodded.

'And after? ... What came after? ...'

'Wasn't it Richard III? ... Richard Crouchback? ... He was Edward's brother, and became Protector until Edward's son, the future Edward V came of age and was able to rule by himself? ... Oh, yes, I remember now. Richard put Edward and his younger brother into the Tower of London and had them murdered there, and made himself King. The famous Princes in the Tower. That's it. But Henry Tudor led a revolution from France, and beat Richard at Bosworth in 1485. After that Henry had himself crowned King and became Henry VII. And that is really all I know.'

'I see.' Another sigh. 'The same old time worn lies.'

Somerton blinked. 'I beg your pardon? ...' He was unconscious of the half smile that wearily flitted across the old man's face.

'The lies are not in your thoughts but in your tale' he said.

Somerton started up. 'Well anyway, what's this all got to do with me?'

'Everything. Listen to me and I will explain it to you. But listen well, for the words that you will hear are a sacred trust. You said that you know something of that period of time that men called the Wars of the Roses. I will tell you more.'

Somerton sat forward in his chair, intent.

'The world was a very different place when Edward IV of York won the throne of England, but he was in every sense of the word an ENGLISH King. The purity of his blood was finer than that of many a monarch who has sat on the English throne in the last one thousand years. He had a younger brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, a brilliant and able soldier and statesman who was devoted to him, and when Edward died unexpectedly in 1483 he had sensibly left the protectorship of the throne and country in Richard's hands. An act of parliament and popular acclaim made Richard King though, because these were turbulent times, and the last thing that the people of England wanted was the insecurity of a boy King. The parliamentary act passed the throne to Richard, and the young Edward was now out of the line of succession.'

'But just a minute' interrupted Somerton in surprise. 'If that's so, then why did Richard bother to put Edward in the Tower and murder him, along with his younger brother? ... If Edward wasn't in the line of succession any more, I mean. There'd be no point, surely?'

'You misunderstand, as generations of historians have done, the meaning of their being placed in the Tower of London. At the time of which I speak, the Tower was not the grim place of imprisonment that it later became. It was in fact a royal residence - nothing more. Young Edward and his brother were placed there in comfort and security under their tutor Dr. Alcock, with family and friends in regular attendance.'

'But what about the murders? ...'

'There were no murders, at least not then. The boys lived happily and in safety at the Tower until that cursed day of Bosworth Field in 1485, when, through a deed of treachery, the usurper Henry Tudor won the throne of England. And one of Henry's first acts was to repeal the act of Parliament that had made Richard King.'

Somerton looked puzzled. 'Why?'

'His only claim to the throne was that Richard's was false.'

A startled look crept into Somerton's eyes. 'But that still left then ...'

'Precisely. The two princes in the Tower. By repealing that act, Henry had effectively made Edward King of England again, and that put the boys' lives in danger. However, Dr. Alcock, their tutor, who was a wise and good man, conceived a plan to save Edward. There was a young member of the nobility of Edward's age who bore a striking resemblance to the young prince, and whose family was loyal to Richard and the Yorkist faction. They smuggled their son into the Tower to take the place of the young prince, and Edward was in turn conveyed in secret to the young nobleman's estates. The two boys - Edward's brother and the changeling - were never seen again. Henry had them murdered, and some time



later began to spread tales all over the land that Richard had murdered them. His own position was precarious, and so he did his utmost to villify Richard's good name.'

'But the history books don't say anything about this' exclaimed Somerton in amazement. 'They all say that it was Richard who murdered the princes in the Tower!'

'That is because all the history books are based on the record of one man who lived through the times and recorded the events; one John Morton, a Tudor historian loyal to Henry and a man who hated Richard, and who through lies and calumny did his best to discredit Richard's name. It is upon his word that Sir Thomas More wrote his famous Life of Richard III and Shakespeare his play, and upon this that all subsequent history is based. History was virtually rewritten during the first part of Henry's reign.'

'But what happened to the real King? ... Edward I mean. Where was he taken, and what happened to him? ...'

There was a long pause. The monk seemed to be meditating. Finally, he spoke.

'There was an accident. It was one of those tricks that fate sometimes plays. Or perhaps there was a greater plan behind it.'

'What happened? ...'

'En route to his new home, the carriage that carried the young prince - or should I say King - overturned, and left him crushed and helpless inside it. It toppled down an embankment, and it took over four hours to release the poor boy. Many bones in his chest and legs were broken. The shock was something that he never really recovered from. He remained a simpleton for the rest of his life.'

'What happened to him?'

'He took the place of the young nobleman who had taken his, and was immediately sent to France on the pretext that the doctors were better there. In actual fact, he stayed there until he grew to manhood, when it was safe for him to return home to England without being recognised. He did marry to continue his line, but died at a very early age. He had a son.'

'Well, why didn't that son claim the throne of England when he came of age then?' queried Somerton.

'Who would have believed him? ... There was no proof that any of it ever happened.'

'Well, what happened to his family line?'

'It continues to this day.'

'Well why hasn't any of the family down the centuries tried to claim the throne?' persisted Somerton. 'Surely one of them must have tried it.'

'No, none have ... you are mistaken. Nothing could ever be proved. It

would be pointless and futile to make the attempt. Worse, seen as a stupid lie and a false claim, it would bring disgrace upon the family concerned. But they at least have a right to know who they truly are. That is why I am here.'

The colour slowly drained out of Somerton's face.

'What . . . what do you mean?' he faltered.

'Can you not guess?' replied the monk, speaking as if from another room. Then, suddenly, he stood up. His voice for the first time rang out vibrant and clear. 'That family's name was and is Somerton. You are the direct descendant of Edward V, and as such have a just claim to the throne of England. There is nothing you can ever do about it, and you may never tell another living soul of what you have heard today. This is a secret which has been passed down for four and a half centuries and only known to the Duke of Somerton upon his accession to the title, and to the order to which I belong, we being the guardians of that secret. What I have told you is a sacred trust, a trust which you must never betray.'

Somerton sat dumb and stricken. A lonely tear was the only visible sign of the emotions that seethed within him. He suddenly stood up, and feeling ashamed, blew his nose. The monk took him by the arm.

'Come with me' he said in a whisper, 'there is one thing more to do.' Somerton nodded and followed drunkenly behind him. They passed through the door which the old man had arrived by, and found themselves in a small ante chamber with steps cut in the wall that led Somerton knew not where. This must have been where the old monk had come from, he reflected afterwards. He drew the boy over to a trestle in the centre of the room upon which an ancient glass cabinet stood. Fumbling in the folds of his robe, the old man produced a key and with this unlocked the cabinet. From this he produced the largest parchment that Somerton had ever seen, and spread it on top of the cabinet, and then pointed to it with a withered finger.

'This records the solemn oaths of every member of your family who knew the secret, and swore never to reveal it to another human being. Will you do the same? . . .'

Somerton nodded, and added his signature where the old man indicated. This done, the manuscript was locked away again.

'It will not come out again until your death' the monk said simply.

'What about you?' asked Somerton as they passed back into the sealed room.

'My task is done' came the reply.

'Will I see you again? . . .'

'Never.'

'What do I do now?' asked Somerton searchingly.

'You go about the business of your life. May it be a long one.' And the robed figure suddenly passed through the doorway and shut the door behind him. There



was a click from the lock.

For long minutes Somerton stood where he was, staring at nothing in particular. Then, with an effort, he roused himself and disappeared through the door. He emerged pale and shaken, and slowly made his way down the stairs to rejoin his Christmas party . . . ."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Season's greetings to all O.B.B.C. and C.D. friends, also thanks to the Librarians who keep me in touch with St. Frank's and Sexton Blake throughout the year.

W. LISTER, BLACKPOOL.

+ + + + +

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# Pathways of Pleasure

by ROGER M. JENKINS

"The open road, you know!" Arthur Edward Lovell had remarked when the subject first came up; a rather vague remark which seemed, however, to express the view of the chums of the end study.

The thought of open roads, winding over rolling downs, and by sunny sands, was very attractive on a blazing hot day.

Holiday series are not always the first choice of Hamiltonians, and it is the foreign holidays in the Magnet, at least, that have received the chief accolade, with the Christmas series coming a close second. This article, however, is designed to examine a few 'stills' from the summer holidays spent in England in the inter-war years. These stories breathe an atmosphere of rural delights, of lazy punting down the river, of strolling along quiet country lanes, of horse-drawn caravans creaking past the fruitful countryside - idyllic pleasures set against a calm background with few motor vehicles and with time moving slowly, if at all. The southern counties of England are a veritable treasure-trove of memories, fascinating and timeless. If Hamiltonian ghosts haunt any places at all outside schools, they must surely be the rural byways frequented by confidence tricksters, irate landowners, footpads, and boys from other schools.

## Berkshire

It is only appropriate to start with the Fistical Four, whose remarks opened this article. In 1922 in Boys' Friend 1110 they encountered the prototype confidence trickster, who stated that he was known as Honest John Williams. He had three bicycles for sale, going cheap, and Lovell had to be forcibly restrained from making a purchase. It turned out that the bicycles belonged to Grundy, Wilkins and Gunn, who were rather unusual characters to be met with on summer holiday, and at one stage Honest John made off with the Rookwood juniors' pony and cart to transport the bicycles. A fortnight later, Jimmy Silver tackled an armed burglar fleeing from Deepden Manor. The man escaped, but the echoes of this incident were to form the basis of a long series at the school in the autumn term.

In 1923 Cutts & Co. were staying in a holiday bungalow near Cookham. They gave the St. Jim's boating party permission to camp in the paddock - and then ordered the gardener to turn the hose on them! This of course was an insult that had to be avenged before they left. During the following weeks they encountered Coker, surely the most ubiquitous of holiday makers, and they left that Greyfriars fifth-former with enough dissatisfaction to make him seek vengeance in Surrey a year later. They were still in Berkshire the following week when they found Bunter marooned on an island in the Thames: it turned out that he had tried to bilk a boatman who had left him there. Fortunately for the party in the Old Bus they managed to get rid of Bunter by the end of that number - Gem 816.

Bunter was equally detestable in the Magnet in that same year, but Charles



Hamilton was portraying him with considerably more humour than in earlier days. In Magnet 810 he ingratiated himself with Johnny Bull's aunt in order to join the holiday group:

Miss Bull beamed again.

"I'm sure Johnny has an ennobling effect upon all his friends!" she said. "It must be so nice for Dr. Locke, having him at Greyfriars."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Yes! Of course! It's ripping! I'm sure the Head thinks so. In fact, he said to me one day -"

"The Head did?"

"Yes. He said to me -"

"To you?"

"I - I mean, I heard him say to Mr. Quelch - that's our form-master, you know. He said to Quelch: 'If all the boys at Greyfriars were like Bull this school would take the cake!'"

"Bless me!" said Miss Bull. "What a very slangy expression for a headmaster to use!"

"And Quelch said to me," continued the Owl, "'Bunter,' he said, 'the best thing you can do is to form a friendship with Bull and stick to him. He's the best and straightest boy in the school, and his example will be very beneficial to you.'"

"I have a high opinion of Mr. Quelch," said Miss Bull. "He seems to be a gentleman of very great judgment."

Bunter winked solemnly at the fat tabby cat that lay in the sunshine outside the window.

Bunter later borrowed £2 from Miss Bull and would have borrowed half a crown from the cook and sixpence from the gardener, had such borrowings been practicable. Still, he did not accompany the juniors on their holiday any further as they succeeded in ditching him in a Berkshire village before they boarded the Penzance express at Reading. This no doubt explains how Tom Merry & Co. came across him a few weeks later.

It was in 1933 that the Greyfriars hikers came across the Thames near Lechlade. It was in Magnet 1334 that Bunter, while fishing, hooked a sunshade from a passing skiff when casting a line. Four weeks later they were still in the royal county, this time with Ponsonby as a prisoner. Tired of his constant attempts to steal the Holiday Annual (which had a clue to the proceeds of a jewel robbery), they made him cook for them and do menial tasks, and when Ponsonby appealed for help to a farmer they convinced him that Ponsonby's real name was Jones and he was a little insane:

Ponsonby fairly gurgled with rage.

"Will you help me?" he roared. "They're only pulling your leg - can't you see that they're stuffing you? I belong to Highcliffe School -"

"Highcliffe asylum," said Bob Cherry, explaining to the farmer. "He thinks it's a school."

The farmer nodded.

"You rotter!" shrieked Ponsonby, mad with rage if not mad in any other sense. "I tell you they're kidnaping me, sir! My name is Ponsonby. My father's Sir Cecil Ponsonby of Ponsonby Hall."

"Sometimes he thinks he's the King of England," said Bob gravely, "and sometimes the Shah of Persia!"

"Poor lad!" said the farmer, pityingly.

## Buckinghamshire

A surprising number of holiday episodes took place in Buckinghamshire. This remark is not intended to disparage that county, but there is no doubt that it is a little off the beaten track. The explanation probably lies in the fact that Charles Hamilton had a bungalow in that county which he used as a retreat from the air-raids on London in the first world war. The repeated descriptions of the Chilterns looking like a whale's back must have come from continual observation, and it can be no co-incidence that he brought the St. Jim's juniors to the actual neighbourhood of that bungalow in 1919, the first post-war summer.

The caravan party had a horse that Monty Lowther called Circumstances, because it was something over which they had no control. In Gem 600 Cutts crashed on his motor bike as a result of driving dangerously, and demanded that they take him to Wendover. Gussy went shopping in Aylesbury and was mystified to find all the shops closed and puzzled by the explanation 'Thursday'. It is interesting to note that real towns were used less and less for holiday stories as time went on. The following week Gussy took umbrage and went to stay with St. Leger, who was entertaining Cutts, Gilmore and Prye, all of whom were hoping to prise some of Gussy's money away from him in gambling.

1929 saw Coker touring in a Buster seven with Potter and Greene crammed in beside him. A fracas with the Removites in Magnet 1120 left Coker with a grievance against his fellow travellers for failing to come to his assistance:

That ragging of Coker had passed them by like the idle wind which they regarded not. They had sat, as Coker bitterly reflected, like spectators in a Roman arena, while a gladiator went down under sword or trident. They had sat indifferent.

Was this, Coker asked himself, the conduct a fellow had a right to expect from his pals - pals whom he cherished, whom he corrected in their faults for their own good, whom he was never tired of lecturing for their own improvement?

Matters were made even worse when he fell into a box of over-ripe eggs and the Removites ran off with their fingers to their noses. As all expenses were being paid by Coker, Potter and Greene had to work hard to bring him into an affable mood again, and in the end they had to admit defeat.

It was in the 1933 Hiking series that Bunter fell asleep and Ponsonby painted his face in stripes. Bunter and a policeman reacting to his appearance each accused the other of being a lunatic, a typically good-humoured episode from Magnet 1339. A more serious incident occurred at Gadsby Croft where Vernon-Smith joined the Highcliffians in a gambling party. It seems that a number of shady characters lived in Bucks! Gadsby also had an obsequious butler called Pawson who was playing his own mysterious game.

## Cornwall

Ghosts were rather rare on summer holidays, but in 1923 Sir Jimmy Vivian's house at Pengarth was haunted by shrieking in the night and spectres of Spaniards who had been drowned nearby in centuries long past. In Magnet 811 they were welcomed by a tree that blocked the road and a fall of rocks from the hill above. At



sea by night they could discern a phosphorescent figure dressed in trunk hose and doublet and plumed hat. Skinner boasted that he would sleep in Sir Jimmy's room, and found that the ghostly figure haunted him. The following week Cardew, Levison, and Clive rescued the Greyfriars juniors from the cave where they had been left to drown, and it was discovered that Pengarth House was being used for smuggling opium and cocaine - a very modern touch!

### Devonshire

The counties of the far west were, naturally enough, visited less frequently than others in Southern England. In 1919, however, the St. Jim's caravanners were in Tuckleton at the time of an election, and Skimpole's uncle, Mr. Chinn (and note the irony of the name), was standing as Socialist candidate. As Skimpole himself said in Gem 604:

"People here seem to have some objection to nationalisation of the coal mines because it will make coal scarcer and dear. They are so very unintelligent, you know. It is really an important matter, because if coal is nationalised my uncle hopes to secure a post as under-secretary in the Coal Board."

At the same time, Gussy fell in love with a land girl - another topical reference.

1924 saw the Fistical Four in an equally imaginary Devonshire village, where a lion had escaped from a circus. There were one or two exciting adventures until the circus owner was forced to admit that the lion was a tame one and quite harmless:

"I've just passed a farmer with a gun- looking for my lion! A gun - and loaded!" said Mr. Chiggers, evidently deeply aggrieved. "How would he like me to go out with a gun looking for his cows, I wonder?"

In Boys' Friend 1262 the following year, the yacht Silver Cloud docked at Bideford. Lovell had a guide book which he kept reading from until the others were heartily bored by it. When Lovell dropped it by accident they tipped a tramp to take it away. Unfortunately the tramp tried to sell it back to Lovell, and then the fat was in the fire!

### Dorsetshire

In 1919 the St. Jim's caravanners passed through this county. In Gem 603 the van stuck fast in the mud. Coker passed by and offered to help, after which the two nearside wheels ended up in the ditch and the van was at an angle of 45 degrees. Later in the same issue in the village of Tatcham Coker met his match in the blacksmith, Harry Hodge.

The Greyfriars juniors also made a caravan tour in this direction two years later. They came across a man with a wooden leg, an ex-serviceman, deafened by the guns in Ypres, and they gave him the job of driving the caravan, despite Bunter's protests that the man could be better employed:

"I could do with a batman. I don't like this blessed roughing it. It's not at all what I'm accustomed to at Bunter Court, I can tell you. I'd like somebody to clean my boots and brush my clothes and - Yaroooh!"

The man was very different from what he appeared to be, and did not have wooden leg at all - his real leg was strapped back at the knee behind his thigh, which must have been a difficult and painful masquerade.

In 1924 the Fistical Four were also in Dorsetshire en route for Wareham when they encountered Coker who was on his way to Dorchester. This time it was his caravan that was in the ditch in Boys' Friend 1216, with the wheels stuck fast in the mud. Dorset was evidently a dangerous county for caravans!

### Hampshire

Hampshire was the Rookwood county and it is not surprising that Jimmy Silver & Co. feature in most of the events recorded here. 1922 was noteworthy for the journey made with the Fistical Four and Putty Grace and the pony and cart purchased by Lovell from someone who did not own it. The real owner was a good-natured young man with a sun-browned face, in dusty Norfolk, by name of Richards, who eyed Lovell very curiously as he told his story to Dr. Chisholm. Lovell showed the receipt to the headmaster, whose lips twitched as he saw the signature 'H. Walker'. (Brewer's Dictionary states that 'Hookey Walker' was a derisive Victorian exclamation meaning 'Nonsense!') Mr. Richards kindly loaned his pony and cart to the juniors and thus made possible their holiday trip, and it is quite simple now to realise the irony of the situation - Charles Hamilton under one alias appears in the story written under another alias, and thus made the summer holiday trip possible in two different ways. They called the pony Trotsky because he did not like work but in Boys' Friend 1104 his progress was even slower than expected until Tubby Muffin was found hiding in the cart.

In 1924 Lovell persuaded the other members of the Fistical Four that an antiquated motor scooter was just the thing for a summer cycling tour. They all paid towards the cost of the scooter, but of course Lovell rode it and made caustic comments about the slowness of the others on push bikes. It was in Boys' Friend 1211 that Lovell first met Mr. Parkins who also went by the soubriquet of 'Honest John'. Lovell, who had run out of petrol, gave Honest John two shillings to fetch petrol and promised him another five shillings on his return with the can: Lovell thought he had been very clever about this:

The tramp's eyes gleamed covetously as the shillings were dropped into his horny palm.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "I've got to 'urry back. Mr. Giles has offered me a job with the hay, and I'm a demon for work, I am!"

After Honest John had hurried away, Lovell found the can was full of water! On this occasion, Charles Hamilton must have thought that Honest John was too good a character to use for only one episode, and he seemed to haunt the Fistical Four for quite a time on their cycling holiday.

One of the most outlandish episodes on a summer holiday tour occurred at Rutland Park at the end of the 1924 series. They came across a little timber building that resembled a Swiss chalet (possibly a duplicate of Apple Trees, Charles Hamilton's bungalow). They were looking for shelter from the rain when the keeper



set the dog on them. Whilst hiding from the dog, they happened to see Philip Packington, the son of the guardian of Sir Harry Rutland, and of course at school the following week Philip turned up, masquerading as Sir Harry: so once again, a Rookwood holiday series neatly dovetailed into the next term's episodes at school.

1925 saw the celebrated Silver Cloud series begin. Captain Muffin had previously run the Sea View boarding-house at Brighton. Now he was running a floating boarding-house, and Tubby was getting ten shillings for every boarder he rounded up. In order to improve his commission, Tubby omitted to mention the question of charges:

"You'll be fixed up jolly comfortably on the Silver Cloud," went on Tubby brightly.

"My uncle knows you're coming, of course, and he's fixing up state-rooms ready; two bunks in a room. A fellow can have a state-room to himself, if he likes: but that, of course, would be an extra."

"Extra?" repeated Jimmy Silver, staring at the fat Classical.

The bitter truth was not clearly revealed until they were on board at Southampton in Boys' Friend 1260.

In 1928 Whiffles Circus found itself in Hampshire, with Bunter masquerading as the circus owner, and the Famous Five were his bodyguard. At nearby Eastwood House, a mammoth party was assembled, and Cardew alone refused to attend the circus performance as he felt it would be too much like a school treat. Whilst there is no doubt that Cardew's attitude was shown to be supercilious and hypocritical, there is also a nagging feeling that perhaps Charles Hamilton was beginning to wonder if enormous gatherings were sensible, since so few of the characters could play any part in the story. D'Arcy had the pleasure of sitting in the royal box with 'Mr. Whiffles' in Magnet 1074:

"There'll be another Greyfriars man with them," went on Bunter, coming to the point at last. "A fellow you know well, and like."

"Indeed?" said D'Arcy, a little interested now. "That's wathah wippin'. Who is it?"

"You remember me -"

"Eh?"

"I mean, you remember Bunter -"

"Buntah? Yaas, I wathah remember Buntah," said Arthur Augustus. "I saw him at Greyfriars last time I went to play cwicket."

"He will be on hand, tomorrow," said the Boss, with a fat grin. "I knew you'd be jolly glad to see him."

"Not at all, Mr. Whiffles," answered Arthur Augustus. "I have no special desiah to see Buntah."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Of course, he will be welcome to come along with the othah fellows. But he is not a fwiend of mine."

Whilst Bunter was learning the truth about himself from D'Arcy, Cardew was being taught a lesson elsewhere: on his own, he was being knocked almost senseless and robbed by a footpad that was haunting the circus.

Kent

In 1918 there were two Rookwood caravans on tour, the Fistical Four in one

and Tommy Dodd & Co. with Sergeant Kettle in charge of the other. A number of topical items were not reprinted, such as the occasion when a notice "Sugar Without Coupons" was affixed to the Classical caravan in Boys' Friend 893. In the same number Jimmy Silver got his own back on the Moderns when he persuaded Cuffy to put mustard in their milk to preserve it, quinine in the stew for taste, and pepper in the beds to disinfect them. The following week the Moderns were so tired of Clarence Cuffy that they began to think of ways of dislodging him:

"I'm going to have botulism."

"Whatter?"

"Botulism."

"What on earth's that?"

"It's the new fashionable disease. It's the thing you die of nowadays if you're really up to date," said Tommy Cook. "Look here, I'm going to have a bad attack of botulism, and get a rash all over my face - I can work that - and Clarence can be scared off."

Unfortunately, Clarence overcame his fears and nobly promised to nurse poor dear Cook back to health.

In 1922 one of the most unusual events occurred at Hythe (close to Charles Hamilton's seaside cottage at Sandgate). In Boys' Friend 1106 the Rookwood juniors were camping on the beach on a spot that Lovell insisted was above the high-water mark. They woke up in the middle of the night to find the camp awash, and Putty Grace was nearly drowned. It was a very sombre episode for such a light-hearted series. The following week, Trotsky dashed up the drive of Stacpoole Lodge where they found Mornington, recently expelled from Rookwood, being taunted by his cousins and reprimanded by his uncle. Mornington decided to join the walking party, but Sir Rupert Stacpoole was not to be evaded so easily, and they found him in pursuit for some time.

The Greyfriars juniors had a number of summer holidays in Kent, but they were not exactly tours. When Bunter was billionairing in Margate in Magnet 1384 he was staying at the Hotel Splendide, and a year later they were all staying at Portercliffe Hall and seldom moved out of the grounds. The Muccolini circus series of 1936 was more in the nature of a touring holiday so far as Bunter was concerned, and this series featured parts of Kent that Charles Hamilton knew so well, Magnet 1484 being in Folkestone and the next two weeks being in Margate. Manston aerodrome was mentioned, and the circus owner left Bunter picknicking on the beach while he ran to Kingsgate to avoid getting cut off by the tide himself. Bunter's life was saved by a rope let down from the Thanet cliff top. This was certainly a series that used real place names all the way through.

### Oxfordshire

Oxford county is as far north as Bucks, but it is more on the beaten track because the Thames flows through it, and it is not surprising that the last number of the celebrated Old Bus series of 1923 should have taken place in Oxfordshire. Gussy was being restrained by Blake who was tired of hearing lectures and quotations about places of interest they were passing, and an old gentleman in a passing skiff was given to understand that Gussy was a violent lunatic. Having taken



umbrage, Gussy departed and fell in with Levison, Cardew and Clive on their way back from Pengarth in Cornwall. They invited him to stay with Cardew's uncle, who of course turned out to be the old gentleman in the skiff:

"Oh my hat!" said Tom. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! Gussy's done it now!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy -"

"Doesn't he always do it?" said Levison, with a chuckle.

"Weally Levison -"

"Frightening old gents and nearly drowning them!" said Blake. "What on earth made you pretend that you were a lunatic, Gussy?"

"I - I - " speech almost failed Arthur Augustus in his indignation. "I - I - you - you uttah wottah, it was you - "

"Oh, put it on me!" said Blake resignedly.

This was typical of the light-hearted episodic nature of the Old Bus series that had no central theme but just an entertaining series of incidents nicely knitted together to form a satisfying whole.

It was on the towpath in Magnet 1121 six years later that Ponsonby with a towing rope caused Bunter to trip up and succeeded in overturning Bob Cherry on Methuselah, the old motor tricycle. A fight ensued, and afterwards the Famous Five had the novel experience of finding that Bunter was ashamed of them:

"Look here, you get away!" snapped Bunter. "Don't let all those people know that you belong to me."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Pretty low scene to be mixed up in," sneered Bunter. "Hooliganism on the towpath! Pah!"

"You fat chump -"

"For goodness' sake, get off!" hissed Bunter. "I'm not going to be mixed up with a low crowd rowing on the towpath. I'll see you later!"

As a matter of fact, Bunter left the party rather quickly when Bob Cherry discovered that Bunter had sold the tricycle to Gunner of Rookwood.

It was after this part of the holiday that the Famous Five arrived at Ravenspur Grange in Oxfordshire. They reached it at night in pouring rain and found a body that subsequently disappeared. Strange and foreboding as this detective story is, one cannot help admiring the twists and turns in the story, the red herrings strewn across the path, and the ingenuity of the final solution - but it was a curious post-script to the Methuselah series and it was not in itself a touring holiday.

The 1933 Hiking series, however, was a true tour, and in Magnet 1335 they found themselves at the Golden Pig in High Hoad, an old-fashioned inn that still used candles. Ponsonby tried to steal the Holiday Annual from Bob Cherry's room at night, but he had stretched a cord across the doorway. Later there was the episode of the ghost of Hoad Castle and the remarkable estate agent, Mr. Watkins, who seemed anxious not to let the castle although it was on his books.

The 1939 Water Lily series was centred mainly upon Oxfordshire, where two more residences were revealed, Tipton Lodge, the home of Price's uncle, and Monson Chalet, the riverside holiday home of the Highcliffe junior. Ponsonby had introduced a guest to the chalet who later robbed Mr. Monson of a hundred pounds.

Ponsonby left hastily when the arrest took place, and Monson's parting words to the Famous Five were, "If you meet Pon . . . smash him!"

## Surrey

The most famous of all the Gem summer holidays was the 1923 boating trip down the Thames, already referred to. The title "Seven Boys in a Boat" gives a clear indication that the theme (though hardly the incidents themselves) was borrowed from the Jerome K. Jerome novel. In Gem 812 they found themselves on Kingston station with Gussy intending to take a large trunk on board with him. Blake had thoughtfully redirected the trunk to Eastwood House, and Gussy mistakenly claimed someone else's luggage, which led to an hilarious prologue in Kingston police station.

The St. Jim's juniors enjoyed a summer holiday hiking in 1924, and once again Coker was encountered, this time caravanning. He told D'arcy he wanted a boy to lead his horse to Ponders and munificently offered him half a crown. One thing led to another, and in a highly entertaining pair of stories in Gems 864-5 Coker wrecked their camp, they appropriated Coker's caravan, and it was eventually annexed by a third party. It was the end of the Indian summer in the Gem and the heat of the home counties blazed forth from the very pages of these inimitable tales.

One of the shortest holidays was the Greyfriars cycling holiday of 1928. Someone annoyed the elephant in the circus and let it loose, and it went on the rampage flattening their bicycles and their tent whilst they took refuge in a tree. 'Mr. Whiffles' then asked them to stay on with him at the circus to act as bodyguard and they were quite mystified at the way Bunter and 'Mr. Whiffles' appeared alternately but never together.

The Greyfriars Thames trip also began in Kingston in Magnet 1643 with Bunter as a stowaway aboard the Water Lily - but unfortunately he chose the wrong Water Lily, which happened to belong to Ponsonby & Co.

## Sussex

Whilst the St. Jim's juniors were hiking in 1924, Jimmy Silver & Co. were cycling, with Lovell on his antiquated motor scooter. In Boys' Friend 1212 the scooter was stolen by Honest John Parkins who offered it to Gussy for five pounds:

"Thank you very much," said Arthur Augustus. "But weally -"

"Make it four pound ten, sir," said Mr. Parkins generously.

"I did not mean that, Mr. Parkins. I have five pounds to spare; but I'm bound to say that the machine is worth more than that," explained Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not feel quite justified in takin' it from you for five pounds."

"Oh, my eye!" murmured Mr. Parkins.

D'Arcy's scruples having been overcome, he rode triumphantly away on his newly-acquired motor scooter, with Lovell running after him shouting 'Stop thief!'

1929 was a glorious summer, and Bob Cherry was riding Methuselah. The other members of the Co. had declared that they would not be found dead on the trike, but nevertheless they did envy him the comfort of not walking up hill, and they did feel like stopping before he did. In Magnet 1119 they stopped at an old-fashioned inn,



almost covered by creepers, with red chimneys and diamond-paned windows. To their dismay they found Bunter waiting for them. He had been staying at the inn for three days:

"If you fellows hadn't come goodness knows how my bill would have been paid."

The Greyfriars hikers passed through Sussex in Magnet 1333 where a road was blocked by angry farmers in a tithe war. The bailiff was going to sell some of Farmer Wegg's 'coos' on account of unpaid tithes, which were eventually settled by Lord Mauleverer. This was a dated episode in an otherwise timeless saga, and it is significant that it was not reprinted in the Schoolboys' Own Library.

Magnet 1486 took place in Brighton with Muccolini's circus nearby. Hazeldene had thoughts of 'borrowing' a fiver from Johnny Bull's pocket book to invest on Purple Peter at a handsome profit, and he consulted Guglielmo at the circus, to be astonished at the fortune-teller's knowledge of him and his family affairs. Guglielmo looked in his crystal and saw Purple Peter winning by three lengths, and it was not until later that Hazeldene found out that the fortune-teller was in fact Bunter himself.

### Warwickshire

1921 was another blazing summer, and the St. Jim's juniors were on their way to Shakespeare's birthplace. They were hiking with a donkey called Solomon because he was deep. They had in fact bought him twice over, Gussy from Honest Joe Harris and Tom Merry from the same individual who called himself George Orrocks. The donkey had been trained to return to its owner, but when he was offered to them a third time they commandeered him and set Towser on to Honest Joe. In Gem 701, the last number of the series, they met the Greyfriars juniors who were caravanning (actually the Magnet series did not begin until 704 and their caravan trip was in the South of England, but probably readers were not over-bothered about such discrepancies). The St. Jim's holiday ended with a cricket match against some supercilious young men at Ashpen Hall, and it was a match that ended in a most surprising manner.

As the examples have amply demonstrated, no English summer holiday tour would have been complete without coming across Coker, who was one of the joys of the countryside. He was at his best in Magnet 1336 when he was searching for Potter and Greene:

"Look here, I've lost those two duffers," he said. "I mean, they've lost themselves. We had a bit of a row and I knocked their heads together."

The same thing happened to Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull when they refused to go searching for Coker's missing companions, after which Coker was dealt with summarily. Later, however, in the same number Coker joined up with the hikers until they, like Potter and Greene, lost themselves as well.

### Yorkshire

How the hikers managed to reach Yorkshire in one week is a bit of a puzzle, but there they were in Magnet 1337, on the Yorkshire moors, with Ponsonby still on

the track of the Holiday Annual and arranging for Bob Cherry to be kidnapped by gipsies, an episode seen by Bunter, but he forgot to mention it for some time as he was rather hungry. As they rushed off to rescue Bob Cherry, Bunter called after them, and Wharton returned in haste, thinking that there was an important item of information still to come:

Harry Wharton ran back.

"What is it - quick?" he snapped.

Bunter gasped.

"Oh! I'm out of breath! I say -"

"What?" roared Wharton.

"Where's the sugar?" gasped Bunter.

"The sugar!" shrieked Wharton.

"Yes. I want some with the pudding - yaroo!" bellowed Bunter, as the captain of the Remove smote.

As this all occurred near Grimslade School, one cannot help thinking that the Removites were transported such a long way as an advertisement for the Grimslade stories that were appearing in the Ranger at the time.

ENVOI

It is difficult not to close these old volumes with a sigh, partly of contentment and partly of regret that the author did not write even more stories about the open roads of England. Charles Hamilton spoke through the Rookwood juniors in the quotation that began this article, and it is perhaps only appropriate that we should end with another Rookwood quotation in which his own opinions come over equally clearly:

"Topping place," said Jimmy Silver, looking away across the stream and the glowing fields to the blue Downs beyond in the distance. "Some silly asses waste time buzzing off to Switzerland in the summer, when they might be here! Give me old England!"

"Yes, rather!" said Lovell emphatically. "My people hiked me off to Zermatt one summer vac. Nothing like this here! Stones and smells, if you like. Beastly streams with colourless stones in them, and hardly a bit of green anywhere. Expensive, if you like; nothing else in it. Merry England for me!"

We do not usually sympathise with Lovell, but on this occasion, at least, our hearts warm to him. Merry England for us as well!

\* \* \* \* \*

Best wishes. Happy Christmas reading of Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, Union Jacks, comics, etc.

CEDRIC RICHARDSON, MILL HOUSE, LOXWOOD, WEST SUSSEX.

+ + + + +

Greetings to everyone. WANTED: Magnet 1676, S.O.L. 336 and "Bunter's Bargain".

MAURICE KING, 18 BARTON ROAD, SLOUGH, SL3 8DF.



# A unique case of Interblakenisation

A paper presented before the Society for the Preservation of Blakiana

Read by J. BRIDGWATER

All Blakophiles will agree that during the years since the world-wide recognition of the Baker Street Establishment there has been a deplorable traffic in Deblakery which, in extreme cases, has led to Nonblakenarity. Blakologists have elaborated intricate theories to explain this phenomenon but can suggest nothing to ameliorate the situation.

One of the earliest examples of the development of this trend was the dilution of RSVP into ASP. This process commenced some fifty years ago and although there are numerous well authenticated cases, it is now very difficult to procure concrete examples unless considerable time and funds are available. The regular interchange between Blakolites and Nelsonian Leeatoms is not considered generally to be a deleterious proceeding. Both systems benefit from such commerce and it can easily be studied by the veriest tyro with minimal means and equipment.

With this sad history in mind Blakophiles will rejoice at news of the recent discovery of a unique specimen of Interblakenisation in a state of perfect preservation. It came to light during the routine examination of a newly imported consignment of material by a member of the Blakular Studies Group. As a bonus members will, no doubt, be delighted to learn that this discovery forges yet another of those all too few links with Thrillerism. Subjecting the specimen to the standard Blakographic and Blakoscopic tests and rigorously applying the Blakometric criteria to the results the following facts emerge:-

The original story, called "The Trapper", ran as a serial in *The Thriller* from No. 1 to No. 13 (9th February to 4th May, 1929). The Interblakenised version appeared in No. 613 of *The Sexton Blake Library*, Second Series, dated 3rd March, 1938, under the title of "The Black Ace". Authorship of both is credited to George Dilnot. The SBL version is largely a word for word reprint of the original serial but judicious pruning and careful selection of dialogue, together with suitable action taken from the original characters and given to Blake and Tinker, neatly Interblakes the whole without any rough edges to show it is not an original Blake story.

The story concerns what the serial synopsis calls "The Trapper, a wealthy but dangerous fanatic (called the Black Ace in the SBL version) under the impression he is performing a very necessary and wanted service to the community at large by independently dealing with criminals where he considers the police powerless or incompetent ..." The Trapper (Black Ace) is forming a gang and an early recruit is Dick Estrehan who has embezzled a very large sum from his stockbroker employers. Dick spends most of his ill gotten gains on a girl called Stella but too late finds out she is a crook and with her confederate Grimshaw has been systematically fleecing him. With no money left he is an easy victim for the Trapper (Black Ace) who, in exchange for a year of unquestioning service, pays back the money Dick took.

Grimshaw is murdered and Dick disappears. Blake is neatly inserted here by having Dick's employers as his clients. The police are represented by Chief Constable Winter of the CID and Detective Inspector Martin Wilde. They both loose enough of their parts in the story to supply Clake with a respectable amount of material. Tinker takes over from the Detective Sergeant and Constables but only appears briefly. But to get back to the story. Dick is suspected of the murder but another prime suspect for the police (not Blake as they were old buddies it seems) is an American millionaire named Quenton Thorold. He was at the scene of the murder and had a gun to boot so Wilde takes a lot of convincing that Thorold is not the Trapper (Black Ace). Thorold assists with the investigation and keeps his final explanatory speech which he gives in the SBL version at Blake's invitation. The story has many twists one of which is the Trapper's (Black Ace's) spectacular rescue from the dock at the Old Bailey, during his trial, of a burglar known as Paddy the Ghost. Another is the whipping, tarring and feathering of a moneylender and a swindling private investigator who are 'persuaded' by the Trapper (Black Ace) to contribute large cheques to a hospital in the process. At one point in the tale a cypher expert is called in to find the secret messages hidden in two letters. This is a 'natural' for Blake so the original expert disappears in favour of Blake in the SBL version. The Trapper used a thin wire noose, such as used to trap rabbits, as a trade mark. The Black Ace uses ace of clubs playing cards. One little oddity arises here, the cover of the SBL version includes a large ace of spades in the design.

It is not the policy of the Society to deprive members of the pleasure of discovering for themselves the identity of the mysterious master mind by giving too much detail in the papers presented before it, so this discourse will be closed by quoting a few examples of Mr. Dilnot's smooth inblakenisation.

From "The Trapper" (Thriller No. 1, page 24)

Chief Constable Winter discusses the wire nooses with Inspector Wilde; "Wilde listened with impassive face, his chin resting on his cupped hand.

"Funny business, guv'nor," he commented. "What do you think of it?"

The other adjusted his horn-rimmed glasses, and his eyes twinkled.

"I'm too old a bird to think," he declared. "I don't make anything out of it. That's your business. The crooks I've met don't advertise - not in this way ..."

From "The Black Ace" (SBL 2nd series No. 613, page 6)

Sexton Blake discusses the black aces with Inspector Wilde; "In an incredibly short space of time he (Wilde) presented himself at Blake's rooms where he dotted the i's to a certain extent.

"This is a funny business," he remarked. "What do you think of it, Blake?"

Sexton Blake's eyes twinkled and he shook his head.

"I'm too old at this game to begin thinking before I know all the facts. What's in your mind?"

Wilde closed his eyes in concentrated thought.

"Like you, nothing - yet," he admitted. "It may be someone doing a bit of leg-pulling. The crooks I've met don't advertise - not in this way. ""



From "The Trapper" (Thriller No. 6, page 26)

Wilde goes to Liverpool to check on the movements of Paddy the Ghost.

"Can you remember if this gentleman signed the book himself?" he demanded of the reception clerk.

The man turned the book round to inspect the signature.

"No," he replied almost immediately. "The gentleman had sprained his hand, and had it in a sling. This is my writing. He asked me to fill in the details."

From "The Black Ace" (SBL 2nd, No. 613, page 45)

Sexton Blake goes to Liverpool to check on Paddy the Ghost.

"Can you remember if this gentleman signed the book himself?" he demanded of the reception clerk.

The man turned the book round to inspect the signature.

"No," he replied almost immediately. "The gentleman had sprained his hand, and had it in a sling. This is my writing. He asked me to fill in the details."

"Ah!" said Blake.

From "The Trapper" (Thriller No. 9, page 25)

Winter in conference with Wilde and the area Superintendent.

"They were rushed in their getaway," suggested the area superintendent.

"It was too much trouble and risk to carry away two unwilling people."

"That doesn't explain why they left them to fall into my hands - alive," said Wilde.

Winter emphasised a point with a heavy forefinger.

"Seems to me you're overlooking something ..."

From "The Black Ace" (SBL 2nd, No. 613, page 68)

Sexton Blake drops in to Scotland Yard to learn what is happening.

"They were hurried," suggested Chief Constable Winter, who had strolled in while they were talking. "It was too much trouble and risk to carry away two unwilling people."

"That doesn't explain why they left them to fall into my hands - alive," said Wilde.

Sexton Blake intervened quietly.

"It seems to me that you're overlooking something ..."

### GLOSSARY OF BLAKONIC TERMS

Blakographic Test	Is it written about Blake?
Blakolites (or Blakitems)	Stories about Blake.
Blakologists	They know a lot about Blake.
Blakometric criteria	Quantative interpretation of the presence of Blake. If small a high Primotinkeron count compensater.
Blakophile	I like Blake.
Blakoscopic Test	Can I see that it is written about Blake?
Blakular Studies	I read anything about Blake.



Deblakery  
Interblakenisation

Blake replaced by some piffing upstart.  
The interweaving of Blake into a story writ  
without him in mind in which the original  
characters and story remain almost  
unaltered with the advent of Blake.

Nelsonian Leetoms (or Leetems)

Nontlakenarity

Thrillerism

R.S.V.P.

A.S.P.

Stories about Nelson Lee.

Wat! No Blake?

I like the Thriller.

R.S.V. Purvale in Sexton Blake Library.

A.S. Pennington in hardback books.

Note: Both are the same character by  
John G. Brandon, ASP is a derivative  
and concomitant of Deblakery.

The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness and express his thanks to  
Danny for the use of the term 'piffing'.

\* \* \* \* \*

Best wishes for Christmas and New Year to Josie, Cobber, Bert, Norman Shaw,  
Skipper Eric and all collectors. Can anyone supply originals or photo copies of  
UJ 177, 675, 680, 686, 858, 876, 892, 895, 898, 927; Bullseye 15, 16, 24, 28, 39, 40, 72,  
85, 100, 101; Boys' Magazine 276, 277, 278, 317, 318.

JOHN BRIDGWATER, c/o TELS. AND RADAR BRANCH REME

LEIGH BINTON RD., MALVERN, WORCS.

(All letters answered)

+ + + + +

WANTED: Captain Marvel, Whiz comics, Marvel Family and other Fawcett comics.  
Good prices paid for nice copies.

D. M. BENTLEY, "GAILES", 70 WOODHALL LANE

CALVERLEY, PUDSEY, WEST YORKSHIRE.

+ + + + +

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all my friends in the London O.B.B.C.  
and to all enthusiasts everywhere. WANTED: "Ha! Ha! Ha!", any Donald Stuart or  
Gerald Verner stories, either Sexton Blake or hardback. Also B.F.L. historical  
stories. I live in hope.

SAM THURBON, 29 STRAWBERRY HILL RD., TWICKENHAM, MIDDLESEX.

+ + + + +

Merry Xmas cheer to all in the hobby, especially Eric, Jim Cook, Norman Shaw and  
Darrell. Best wishes from - NIC & JAYNE GAYLE

4 QUEEN ST., BUDLEIGH, SALTERTON



# Why did Men write for Girls?

by W. O. G. LOFTS

Like most other readers in my boyhood days I was always under the impression that 'Frank Richards' author of the Greyfriars stories in *The Magnet*, and 'Hilda Richards' who penned the Cliff House girls stories featuring Bessie Bunter, were brother and sister. It was certainly a surprise to learn soon after becoming interested in juvenile fiction, that they were one and the same person - namely Charles Hamilton. An even greater surprise came later on when it was revealed that he had only penned the first few stories of Cliff House in *The School Friend*, all the following tales being written by other authors.

Life was certainly full of surprises in the early days of the hobby, when I discovered that practically all the well-known writers for girls papers were men. Writers such as 'Marjorie Stanton' of Betty Barton & Co. of Morcove fame in the *Schoolgirls' Own Weekly*, being Horace Phillips who had once edited *The Scout*. Equally as famous was 'Mabel St. John' real name Henry St. John Cooper. Indeed, such was the belief that the feminine names attached to stories were women - and this even by adult readers connected with other fields of publishing; that I cannot give a better example told to me by E. L. McKeag an editor on the famous *Schoolfriend*. One evening whilst dining with Henry St. John Cooper, a member approached their table, and said he would like to meet Cooper's sister. As his sister was the famous actress Gladys Cooper, it embarrassed him, as he was always having to make excuses. Just as he was thinking up something to put him off, the fellow club member, suddenly blurted out 'that he had always greatly enjoyed sister Mabel's stories in *The Girls' Friend*'.

The more seriously one thinks about it, the more puzzling it really becomes. One would think that quite naturally women would be more suitable to write about girls. What went on in the schoolgirl mind, their tastes, clothes, and things close to the schoolgirl heart, hockey, netball and everything else that is feminine. Most men writers were hard-bitten professionals with little knowledge about these things, unless of course they were married and had daughters.

One interesting theory given to me some time ago, certainly explains the reasons why the Amalgamated Press popular girls papers from the start of *The School Friend* in 1919 used only male writers. As this former sub editor wrote Cliff House and Morcove stories himself he was certainly in a position to know what he was talking about. According to him it all started during the First World War, and when John Nix Pentelow was editor of *The Magnet*, *Gem*, *Penny Popular*, *Boys' Friend* and its *Boys' Friend Library*. He was assisted by a young man named Reginald Eves who being unfit for war service, found himself as second-in-command. Despite his sudden rapid promotion from office-boy he always had one big worry on his mind. When the war ended, with H. A. Hinton, C. M. Down, G. R. Samways, H. W. Twyman, W. Pike, W. S. Hope and other staff members returning from the front, he would soon be out of a job - unless of course he had a new paper.

During those far off days long before T.V. and even Radio, boys and girls not only read a great deal more, but even had the time to put pen to paper in letters to the editor. These letters used to come in their thousands, and quite often the editorial staff - mainly Clive R. Fenn, used to answer as many as a hundred a day. It was Reg. Eves who first noticed that the girls were the most prolific writers, and that they wrote more freely than boys. Not only by their opinions of stories, but chatty letters, their pets, likes and dislikes, giving a big inside view of their pattern of behaviour and thought. He was also struck by the big difference between boys and girls in their reactions. This gave him the splendid idea of creating a sort of girls Greyfriars School with a brand new character - a sister of Billy Bunter in the leading role. If Billy Bunter was a popular figure in The Magnet likewise his sister would be in the new School Friend.

How wrong he was! It is now old history that Charles Hamilton wrote the initial stories in The School Friend and was then stopped by C. M. Down the Magnet editor, as it was a sheer impossibility to also write a Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood weekly. But apart from this the stories were not well received by school-girl readers. They wrote in shoals (especially the plump girls) saying how much they disliked Bessie Bunter, and so other writers with experience in the woman's market field were brought in to continue the stories under the 'Hilda Richards' pen name. Bessie (who was originally named Bertha, Bernice, Blodwyn, and Beryl in pilot stories) gradually became at Cliff House a more likeable and slightly plump duffer. According to editors, whilst Charles Hamilton was easily the best writer for boys, he lacked something in the writing of girls stories, and they were simply boys yarns with girls names, and were not acceptable to the reader. Curiously some years ago a lady enthusiast of E. S. Brooks' St. Frank's school in The Nelson Lee Library, made no secret of her dislike of the girls of Moor View School, and they spoilt her reading in this famous Library. Possibly E. S. Brooks likewise could not write girls material satisfactorily either.

Reg. Eves in his new role as The School Friend editor, chose men to write stories for several reasons - first and foremost after seeing some scripts by would-be female writers he had come to the conclusion that they simply could not write girls stories for his market. Whereas a man is psychologically a boy all his life, for instance playing with his son's train set he would become a young lad again, whereas a girl psychologically completely changes when she becomes a woman. She becomes a potential mother, she becomes didactic with such expressions as 'Don't do that'. 'That's not the way to walk or talk'. 'A girl should be more refined'. It is a human trait in a woman to always back-seat drive a car, control and improve, educate and develop the young - even her husband if she has no children. This is of course essential, and highly moral in every respect, but unfortunately when writing stories this seems to come out in the script, and is totally unacceptable to the reader. Women in the twenties and thirties, and long before this did not think that girls should read anything but improving stories, and girls who behaved in even a moderately rompish or unladylike manner are best not to be written about, and most certainly no character could ever be cheeky or answer back!

Basically then, although a woman should know what girls do or did at school,



far more than a man, she thinks it is best forgotten. (This could explain the reason why the male collectors easily outnumber the lady members.) Another reason, and a good one, was simply that the editor also had first-class proven writers on his staff, who were already skilled in the female market. Horace Phillips - a former editor on *The Scout* for instance, who later wrote those delightful tales of Morcove under the 'Marjorie Stanton' pen-name. Reg. Eves was also not at ease in handling new woman writers on his staff and criticising their work. His criticism was frank, thorough, and not tender, anything less would have been useless in getting first-class material. Telling a woman that her story was rejected, or having to rewrite most of it when she was expecting a cheque was not quite the same thing as saying it to a man.

These theories are of course feasible but do not really explain the fact that practically all the girls stories in such earlier A.P. papers as *Girls' Friend*, *Girls' Realm*, and *Girls' Home* markets were also written by men, and also going back to the 1890's since the Harmsworth Brothers started. It may also surprise some readers to know that girls stories paid a much higher rate than those of boys, simply because the sales were much higher. Sexton Blake writers especially in the twenties and thirties submitted girls stories because of this higher rate, but very few succeeded in writing for this market for long.

A logical explanation for the absence of female writers in those days could simply be that a woman's place was supposed to be in the home, and such an occupation as a lady journalist was frowned on, through curiously the *Girls' Own Paper* types of periodicals did have female writers and a famous woman editoress Miss Flora Flickman, though this was aimed at the older girl, and the stories were not so light hearted. Flower arranging, patterns, needlework, and other strictly feminine pursuits were included in its pages. One must also not forget the famous classic writers of girls stories such as Angela Brazil, etc., in hard back form, that do not come into the category of this article which refers to writing for popular weekly schoolgirl papers.

Despite what editors may have said about Charles Hamilton's girls stories, I must confess that I always enjoyed his introduction of Marjorie Hazeldine & Co. of Cliff House in the Magnet stories. Although very much like Billy, Bessie was a very amusing character, with a stronger will than her more famous brother. But through the eyes of the female reader, they obviously viewed things more differently.

Girls papers of 1978, are of course so different and contain things that would be unthinkable in pre-war days. Whilst most of the strips are written by men, they are controlled by young editors of the female variety, who keep pulse on the latest pop stars, fashions and music. We must move with the times, but it still seems remarkable that all those famous schoolgirl stories in the popular weekly papers were all written by men.

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\* \* \* \* \*

WANTED: School Friend 1919-1920, 174, 196, 203, 258-268. New series! 185-229. Holiday Annual 1922.

LACK, 4 RUSHMERE ROAD, NORTHAMPTON.

# MRS. WALKER'S ACADEMY AND THE TEACHINGS OF SEXTON BLAKE

A REMINISCENCE BY J.E.M.

Although I was born and brought up in the same city as Herbert Leckenby, the legendary founder of C.D., it is not, perhaps, surprising that I never met him. For one thing, I appeared on the scene a good many years after Herbert, and also - unlike him - left York as a very young man. However, in a sense, our paths did cross, for we both seem to have owed some of our wider education to the same source.

As far as his formal learning is concerned, I know nothing about the schools Herbert attended. For my own part, I was lucky enough, York being generous in such matters, to win a scholarship to the municipal grammar school in 1932. But my new studies were not confined to French, Latin, Physics and Chemistry. This was also the period when I commenced a different sort of learning with the aid of a lively and, sometimes, even sharp-tongued old lady called Mrs. Walker. She kept a second-hand story-paper shop in Colliergate, not far from York Minster. And this was my link with Herbert Leckenby. For Mrs. Walker's emporium - dusty, dingy and gas-lit (yes, in the 1930's!) - was one of the places where, according to Herbert himself, he encountered all those exciting fictional heroes who had such a powerful and permanent influence on his life. This was the "academy" where his imagination was fired in a way rarely experienced at school in those days. Treading in his footsteps, I shared in some of that extra-mural "education".

The story papers and characters which opened up Herbert Leckenby's mind and gave him such delight were, as he has told us, many and varied: from Pluck and Marvel to the Magnet and Union Jack; from Jack, Sam and Pete to Nelson Lee and Harry Wharton. I don't know who his favourite hero was but high on the list of contenders must surely have been the name of Sexton Blake. At that time, Blake and his vast army of adversaries were certainly at the top of my list. Of all the treasures displayed in Mrs. Walker's shop, it was the pile of old Union Jacks - the UJ then just being replaced by the Detective Weekly - which captured my attention.

Naturally, by the age of twelve, I had had my share of comics and story papers but, apart from the Hamilton sagas, most of these now seemed either infantile or plain silly - the comics with their animals in human clothes (Tiger Tim, et al.), the story papers with wildly implausible heroes and plots. The Union Jack, though now in its twilight days was, ironically enough, a bright new star in my life.

As George Orwell noted in his famous essay on boys' weeklies, the Sexton Blake periodicals fell into a rather different category from the rest. They were aimed both at adults and adolescents and for me, as perhaps for thousands of others, they formed a bridge between childhood and adult reading. To begin with, unlike any of the other story papers (apart from the Thriller), the UJ recognised the existence of the opposite sex as more than mere background decoration. Some of the female characters, in fact, were not only rather sexy creatures (though not sufficiently so, I think, to corrupt a young reader!) but were also often rather complex in their



attitudes to the law and society in general. Young ladies like Yvonne Cartier and Roxane Harfield, for instance, were light years away from - say - the even younger ladies of Cliff House whom we occasionally encountered in the Magnet. Not that this is meant as any sort of criticism of Charles Hamilton. In fact, I have deliberately dragged in the Master and his works at this point precisely because he stood in a class of his own as a creator of character.

Like all readers of the Magnet and Gein, I was - and still am - enormously impressed by Hamilton's subtle explorations of the human heart. But even such intriguing figures as Wharton or Levison in their many moods did not quite satisfy me in the period I am writing about. I think, perhaps, that even at this stage I was starting to look beyond schooldays, both fictional and real. After all, though my own new school was not a great public school in the style of Greyfriars, I was now familiar enough with many aspects of its "glamour" - graduate teachers in academic dress, Latin construe (Caesar and Virgil were far more attractive in the pages of the Magnet than on one's own desk!), compulsory games, house rivalries, the Wednesday "half", a prefecture of eighteen-year olds, detentions, "impots" and all the rest. (Indeed, the "great" Remove itself had actually been diminished in my eyes. Hitherto, of course, it had been heroically associated in my mind with the Greyfriars Famous Five but, at my school, the Remove Form was reserved for those who had failed to matriculate in the Upper Fifth before passing into the Sixth Form and was, therefore, somewhat despised!) Thus was some of Hamilton's special appeal dimmed for me, at least for the moment.

Whether the characters in the Sexton Blake saga appeared more complex, more genuinely "real" than those in the Hamilton stories, I just don't know. The point is that for me at the age of twelve or thirteen, the great Blakian figures were credible adults - and enjoyed the freedom and excitement which most boys on the edge of adolescence associate with the adult world. As a brilliantly drawn character, the Greyfriars Bounder, for example, was no doubt the equal of Zenith the Albino or George Marsden Plummer but he suffered the disadvantage of being only a year or two older than myself. I knew fourth form schoolboys personally!

Moreover, some of Blake's chroniclers were remarkably well-travelled men, their illustrators - especially Eric Parker - sharply observant artists who opened up for me a whole new world scarcely heard of at school. For example, though we "did" modern European history at my school, it was Gwyn Evans with his famous UJ "Onion Men" stories who made the French Orleanist movement so exciting and memorable for me. In Chemistry we manufactured all manner of substances and smells, as well as studying such arcane subjects as valency and basicity (I can't even remember exactly what these were!); but it was a UJ Zenith story which first drew my attention to experiments then actually taking place to create rainfall by the bombardment of clouds with chemicals. We were also taught that the atom was the smallest indivisible particle of matter, although experiments at Cambridge had just shown that it wasn't and, nearly ten years earlier, the UJ had carried a serial called "The Atom Smasher".

Our geography master taught us about the tundra, and the savannah and the tsetse fly and why typewriters were made in Detroit. But it was G. H. Teed who,

by way of some stunningly exciting Blake stories took me on a world tour I have never forgotten. It was also Teed, among other UJ writers, who provided my course in "Current Affairs", such a subject not being considered respectable for school curricula in those days. Stories like "Sexton Blake in Manchuria" helped to fill a few gaps in my knowledge of world events.

It was the greatest of all Blakian illustrators, Eric Parker, who not only showed me what foreigners looked like - from German policemen to Mongolian bandits - but also took me into the homes of every social category in my own country. If I was familiar enough with the dress, furniture and fittings of an ordinary household, I had never seen a nineteenth century chaise longue or a spirits tantalus or a city gent's morning clothes till Parker drew them for me; and one of the most memorable interiors of a country mansion I have ever seen was sketched by Parker for a Rupert Waldo story called "The House of Light". I could, in fact, fill a great many pages of the C.D. Annual with an account of the actual information I got from the adventures of Sexton Blake as written and depicted in the old UJ.

As to any deeper effects on my mind and imagination, I can only say that the Sexton Blake saga gave me enormous entertainment and stimulus and carried me comfortably on to other reading. My old grammar school - which has so far received scant praise in this article! - really gave me more than I can repay and launched me into exciting things. But if I can now claim a wider literary horizon than I knew in the times I have just recalled, I still go back to the old Blake stories. And though I do so largely to relive some happy and special moments of forty-five years ago, I also - still - find things to learn . . .

(AFTERWORD: It is, on reflection, likely that I did encounter Herbert Leckenby when I was young. He was, I believe, still a patron of Mrs. Walker's shop in the period I have been writing about and we may well have made purchases in that drab, yet somehow glittering, establishment at the same time. Alas, neither of us could then know that Herbert was to found a movement which would link us in these pages long after his death.)

\* \* \* \* \*

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# There's a Fortune Coming Someone's Way

by WILLIAM LISTER

Meet Nelson Lee, the world's greatest detective, inside! Inside where? Inside the Nelson Lee, of course, where else? Mind you, the world's greatest detective could be a debatable point; but one must allow an editor a little lee-way; he has to convince you that your two pence will purchase the best when you buy this paper.

Don't misunderstand me. As a St. Frank's fan, I believe the "Nelson Lee" was the best and I backed that to the full with my two pence a week. In other words, I put my money where my mouth was.

Still, I must admit our editor was stretching a point when he claimed ("The Final Round" - Nelson Lee, n. s. 115, 2nd April, 1932) that Nelson Lee was the world's greatest detective. I refuse to debate that point with either Sexton Blake fans or Sherlock Holmes fans. I know I would lose the day. After all, I took the "Nelson Lee Library" for the boys of St. Frank's and not for its detective. In this case I got the detective and there was not a St. Frank's boy in sight, though at the end of the tale, we were told they would be back next week.

I must admit though that "The Final Round" makes a good tale. Shades of Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty - only in this case it is Professor Mark Rymer, and what a cover! Against a flaming red background two struggling figures drop towards the sea. Now this Mark Rymer had a rich relative upon whose death Mark was to come into a huge sum of money; that is, until ... it turns out that this rich relative had married secretly and there was a son. The news upsets Mr. Rymer; it would have upset me. Rymer seeks to find and dispose of this son, whereupon, he assumes, the nightingales will sing again in Berkeley Square.

Easier said than done. The said son takes some finding (being in Australia); also Nelson Lee has been engaged to find him by the rich relative who naturally wishes to bestow his goods on his own offspring. There's the plot that leads to some good reading, during the course of which I discover our Nelson Lee is but a mortal. According to page five it appears that fiction detectives suffer the same as the rest of us mortals, I quote -

"As a matter of fact", said Nelson Lee, "according to the Corba doctors, I am suffering from the effects of a dislocated internal semilunor cartilage" - hence the limp mentioned earlier.

At this point may I ask my readers who are the Corba doctors? I seem to have heard of them in days gone by; and can any of our detective enthusiasts give records of the mortal aches and pains of Sexton Blake, Dixon Hawke, etc., or even more about the ills of Nelson Lee? I am aware that Sherlock Holmes had a drug problem.

However, back to this Mark Rymer chappie. I give him his due; he sticks at it. Finding that one named Seymour is likely to inherit the nice little nest-egg,

he seeks to eliminate him (to use modern jargon), once by lobbing a bomb at a train carriage in which Seymour was travelling and again; to quote -

"Mark Rymer crawled towards the lone figure. The heir to the Easington fortune was in his grasp at last. One knife thrust and Rymer knew he would be rid of the one man that stood between him and fabulous wealth."

Does Mark Rymer succeed in destroying this young man? Does he inherit the fabulous Easington fortune? Does he live happy ever after?

The answer is, "No, Sir". By the time the final curtain falls, Mark Rymer lay dead. Young Seymour gets the aforesaid doings, and Nelson Lee returns to St. Frank's (still limping, I assume) and there is a promise that next week all our old St. Frank's favourites will be back on the stage!

\* \* \* \* \*

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# *What kind of school stories?*

by HAROLD TRUSCOTT

It is rarely, indeed, that we can find a creative artist who can also write objectively about his art in general or the work of other creative artists in his field in particular. In music Schumann was one, in literature Henry James another. We may not always agree with their opinions or estimates, but we can recognise in them a definite attempt at objective criticism, which is successful more often than not; and when it errs, it does so usually on the side of generosity rather than otherwise. But these are two, and there are not many more.

That paragraph is preliminary to a study of an essay written as an introduction to a collection of school stories. The volume was originally issued twenty years ago, in 1958, and when I first read it I was mostly concerned with, and interested in, the stories there collected together. I did read the introduction, and made a mental note that there were points which needed clarifying, and some years ago I did write a sort of answer to this essay which, at that time, went no further. Now I have read the introductory essay again, decided that it certainly merits some discussion, and I have accordingly re-written and expanded my original answer into what follows.

The author of the introductory essay was Anthony Buckeridge, and I must begin by giving a rather lengthy quotation from it:

'In recent years there has been a decline in the popularity of certain types of school story. In the days when Talbot Baines Reed was establishing the St. Dominic's tradition nearly all fictional adventures took place in term time. This trend continued for many years, the only innovation being that games were made to figure more prominently as time went by. Now, partly due to the influence of Arthur Ransome, the emphasis has shifted from term time to holidays.

'Another reason for the change of fashion is the poor standard of many school stories which ignore the basic fact that the tale must be told and the scene must be set against an authentic background. Instead, these stories attempt to combine the more sensational aspects of the thriller with those features of the Talbot Baines Reed tradition which are today outmoded.

The result is the creation of an unrealistic type of school story which the reader cannot accept as genuine because it is outside his experience. Masked gunmen, mysterious spies and plastic-suited space-men may exist vividly in a boy's imagination - and they may be fit and proper characters in books of a different type. But every schoolboy knows that he is unlikely to encounter such phenomena in a well-conducted seat of learning. A detective story does not necessarily become a school story merely by transferring the scene of action to some improbable academy, when the plot could be unravelled with equal facility elsewhere. Indeed, the whole essence of a successful school story is that the action must develop from the relationship of contrasted characters who are, in the main, all members of a closely-knit community.

'There is, at present, a shortage of good stories about day-schools, and this is a pity, for it is in the primary, secondary and grammar schools that the majority of boys and girls are educated. The day-school story does, of course, present problems for the author which do not apply to boarding-schools.

'Analysis shows that, as a rule, very little of the tale concerns the events that take place in

the classroom. It is out of school that the plot thickens; but if the author follows his characters into their homes after lessons have finished he may find that his tale tends to become less of a school story and more of an account of the adventures of a very much wider community. This is, of course, only a minor obstacle (my italics - H. T.) and the authors who have contributed day-school stories to this collection of tales have taken it in their stride. For even when the action is allowed to range freely we can sense that the school still retains its influence and the characters are always aware of this bond which exists between them.'

I have a respect for Mr. Buckeridge as a writer of school stories, but his reasoning in this introduction is a little peculiar, to say the least. He begins by giving us two reasons why the popularity of certain types of school story has declined; remember, he was writing in 1958. He does not say what the certain types are but implies one of them by referring to Talbot Baines Reed's establishing the St. Dominic's tradition, where nearly all fictional adventures took place in term time. (The stress on 'fictional' adventures is curious; he seems to be implying that Reed wrote other adventures of schoolboys which were not fictional and did not take place in term time. I do not think this is what he means, but it is what he implies.) The only added innovation for many years was that games were gradually made to figure more prominently. This, incidentally, although Mr. Buckeridge does not say so, is because the English view of games, especially cricket and football, as a near-religion, is of comparatively recent origin (which explains a certain loose attitude towards cricket in the second part of Tom Brown's Schooldays, which has puzzled a good many devotees of that book; England in the eighteen-thirties had not the reverence for games that has grown up since). There is a later reference to those features of the Reed tradition which are today outmoded. What this reference concerns I cannot imagine, unless it be the religious aspects of these stories, very restrained in Reed's, much more evident in Tom Brown's Schooldays (the scene where Tom faces the bully to allow Arthur to say his prayers, for instance) and most to the fore in Dean Farrar's books. The only circumstance in the Reed stories and others (which?) are in this tradition, to which Mr. Buckeridge refers, is that nearly all fictional adventures took place in term time. This, of course, is a very odd thing in a school story. I quite see that Arthur Ransome's transference of these to the holidays was a great improvement - provided one wanted a totally different type of story. But how was it then a school story? A school story, I should have thought, in my simple way, is a story about school; which obviously will include environs of the school to several miles but will still be centred in the school. I have read Arthur Ransome's stories of children's adventure with delight but, at the same time, gleaned very little evidence that the children concerned attended school at all. I admire these stories but I fail to see the slightest connection between them and school stories.

I agree that the standard of many so-called school stories of the thirties and forties (I do not know of any worth considering from the fifties, barring Buckeridge's own) was poor, but this is mainly because they are not really school stories; the thriller type predominates, even, on a very low level, in the Famous Five stories of Enid Blyton (the title I imagine she blatantly stole from Frank Richards, or else it is a singularly unfortunate coincidence). But this is nothing new; here is Frank Richards writing in his autobiography, about his schooldays (in the eighties):

'There really was no need for desperate crooks hiding in the chimneys, or foreign spies under the beds. The average healthy schoolboy really would rather see his hero at the wicket, or speeding



along the touchline with the ball at his feet, or even perpetrating a "howler" under the gimlet eye of his form-master, than handling deadly weapons and shedding oceans of blood. All this was vaguely in my mind when I was a boy, dissatisfied and often disgusted with the trash that was then purveyed for boys to read. That was not, of course, why I began to write. I wrote because I just couldn't help it. But it was why my writing took the line it did.'

Richards' autobiography was published in 1952.

I agree that a school story needs to be set against an authentic background - which, I may add, Reed and other older masters did, for the most part. This background was the school; surely authentic enough for a school story! But Mr. Buckeridge seems to be under the impression that boys will not accept what they do not know from their own experience: "The result is the creation of an unrealistic type of school story which the reader cannot accept as genuine because it is outside his experience"; what does Mr. Buckeridge mean by this? We agree about the unreality of the story with the accent heavily on the thriller aspect, as a school story; but Mr. Buckeridge has also ruled out stories in the St. Dominic's tradition, and none of these were thrillers, or anything but school stories. Presumably (I can only presume, because Mr. Buckeridge has avoided being specific) he would include Gunby Hadath, Eden Phillpotts, Warren Bell, R. A. H. Goodyear, Michael Poole and P. G. Wodehouse as being in the Reed tradition, for they certainly were. But they wrote about public schools - boarding schools, in other words. Can this be what he means? Although he himself writes of a boarding school in his Jennings stories. But I can think of nothing else, on the basis of what he has stated, that he can mean. If this is what he is getting at (it would have been better if he had explained a little more what he means) he is certainly underestimating the average intelligent boy's power of imagination and assimilation.

What the reader cannot accept as genuine because it is outside his experience; this is quite a subject. If Mr. Buckeridge had taken the trouble to read, for instance, G. K. Chesterton's remarkable essay, A Defence of Penny Dreadfuls, he might at least have found reason to think again. The whole essay, which I wish I could quote here, is worth reading, for anyone interested in what is called "popular" literature, or was so called, but I will content myself with one quotation: "Among these stories there are a certain number which deal sympathetically with the adventures of robbers, outlaws and pirates, which present in a dignified and romantic light thieves and murderers like Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. That is to say, they do precisely the same thing as Scott's Ivanhoe, Scott's Rob Roy, Scott's Lady of the Lake, Byron's Corsair, Wordsworth's Rob Roy's Grave, Stevenson's Macaire, Mr. Max Pemberton's The Iron Pirate, and a thousand more works distributed systematically as prizes and Christmas presents. Nobody imagines that an admiration for Locksley in Ivanhoe will lead a boy to shoot Japanese arrows at the deer in Richmond Park; no-one thinks that the incautious opening of Wordsworth at the poem on Rob Roy will set him up for life as a blackmailer. In the case of our own class, we recognise that this wild life is contemplated with pleasure by the young, not because it is like their own life, but because it is different from it".

The final underlining is mine; Chesterton has made the point that should have occurred to Mr. Buckeridge, and to many another writing portentously about what

appeals to young people in the books they read. It is not necessarily what is like their own life that appeals to them. The so-called "Penny Dreadful" was a case in point, and, although the circumstances have changed, this literature is still with us. Today it is Steve Austin, the bionic man, and various other stories of space fiction; some of it may not be fiction much longer. But the point here is that all over the world today, millions of children, and adults, too, for that matter, watch as a religious ritual on the television screen the bizarre adventures of bionic man, and, when they cannot watch, read about him in magazines that, for gaudiness, would make most of the oldtime penny dreadfuls blush for shame. He and his like are the new folk heroes, and are far more removed from any personal life of their millions of adherents than Harry Wharton & Co., and Tom Merry & Co. were from that of their readers. In comparison, those schoolboy heroes were more or less in the home backyard of those who followed their adventures for so many years.

We know that the majority of English boys and girls do not go to boarding schools. I did not. But I never found this any bar to accepting and understanding the conditions pertaining to such a school, and, from the story point of view, always preferred it. I do remember also that on the one or two occasions I came across stories of day schools, in different collections of such stories, I found them much less interesting and was disappointed. This might have been partly because they were not always very well written, and I was choosy over such things as a boy, but it was far more the actual setting that disappointed me. Admittedly, I knew nothing about real public schools, and I have read criticism of Richards' schools by those who do know about these things. I could not care less. It was the set up one found, and finds, in Richards' stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood that fascinated me, which wrapped me around like a cloak when I read his stories. And, from the enthusiastic support the Magnet and the Gem received for three decades or more, so did numbers of other children feel exactly the same thing - and most of them knew no more about a real public school than I did.

Mr. Buckeridge has already applauded the transference of school adventures to the holidays; and by doing so he does not mean the kind of holiday adventure that Frank Richards wrote so marvellously as part of his school year. He refers to stories which have no connection with school at all. Yes he also says: "Indeed, the whole essence of a successful school story is that the action must develop from the relationship of contrasted characters who are, in the main, all members of a closely-knit community". I could not agree more; but this condition was surely fulfilled admirably by the stories of the writers I have listed above, who have presumably been rejected by Mr. Buckeridge, on the evidence of his rather vague remarks. He seems to be more than a little muddled - or maybe it is merely that he has not expressed himself with the clarity he attains in his Jennings stories.

However, he has told us what is not acceptable in school stories. Masked gunmen, mysterious spies and plastic-suited spacemen; well, I will agree that these are mostly out of place in a school (Richards did at time involve certain juniors, mostly foreign, Putnam van Duck, for instance, with gangsters, without allowing the story to cease to be a quite plausible school story, and sometimes a story would turn on a holdup in Courtfield - was not one of the greatest of all school stories the superb Courtfield Cracksman series?). Such stories were, in the total, rare; but I have



myself known of one case where gunmen, masked or not I do not know, invaded a school and caused considerable havoc before being apprehended. However, I will agree that this sort of thing is not a regular part of the curriculum at a "well-conducted" school, to use Mr. Buckeridge's term. He also writes that "a detective story does not necessarily become a school story merely by transferring the scene of action to some improbable academy". I really do begin to believe that Mr. Buckeridge's acquaintance with schools is somewhat limited. Crimes have been committed in schools and other places of various degrees of learning - and I have no doubt that local police stations could enlighten him considerably on this point. I have myself attempted to teach for a time in a secondary modern school where, among unruly and positively rebellious boys (a fair number of the school's total pupils) who were also unwilling visitors to school, fighting with knives, even artists' palette knives if there was nothing else available and they could get hold of them, took place, where boys were seriously hurt and police had to be called in. And this was not a specially badly conducted school. It was, in fact, mainly very well run, with an excellent Head and a good staff with only one or two weak links, of which I was, at that time, one. But a quicker, more willing, recognition of the truth that has been outlawed in educational circles - that boys (and girls) have a natural propensity for human wickedness (their fair share of original sin, in other words) - would probably have brought quicker and more effective solutions to the school's, and the boys', problems. I have known, too, of cases of theft where police had to be called in and one where for some days suspicion hung heavy over many before the girl responsible was cornered and even then managed to twist and turn with a barrage of lies, nearly every one of which had to be patiently investigated. This sort of thing may not happen so often, but every Headmaster knows it does happen - and it happens in school. It would seem that Mr. Buckeridge's school experiences, on the evidence of his writing in this introduction (after all, I have nothing else to go on, and it is his own fault if his writing is misleading) have been rather sheltered, nor does he appear to have a very wide experience of secondary modern schools - or junior or grammar schools, either. This sort of happening has nothing to do with a school's not being well-conducted, although there are a fair number of schools that are not well-run.

Mr. Buckeridge laments the fact that there is a shortage of good stories about day-schools, because it is in the day schools that most children receive their education. This is true; but he admits that the day-school story presents the author with problems which do not arise from the use of a boarding-school as the setting. This is a more important truth, and he has put his finger on one such problem. "Analysis shows that, as a rule, very little of the tale concerns the events that take place in the class-room. It is out of school that the plot thickens; but if the author follows his characters into their homes after lessons have finished he may find that his tale tends to become less of a school story and more of an account of the adventures of a very much wider community." I would have thought that this is an excellent reason for using the boarding-school setting. It is true that not all school events take place in the class-room. A boarding-school allows for the story to range about other aspects of the school community, a day-school does not. But this "is a minor obstacle" - although Mr. Buckeridge has already told us that "the whole essence of a successful school story is that the action must develop from the

relationship of contrasted characters who are, in the main, all members of a closely-knit community". This I would have thought an excellent description of the boarding-school, and certainly it does not fit the wide ranging over a very much wider community - outside the school. Mr. Buckeridge's argument becomes more and more of a muddle. If the removal of the school story from the school to a wider community outside school is only a minor obstacle, it is sheer pedantry to continue to call it a school story at all. I am most certainly not against stories set outside school - I love them; but not when I want a school story.

Mr. Buckeridge claims that those authors in his anthology who have written day-school stories have taken this difficulty in their stride. But this, I am afraid, they have not. All the stories are good as stories, but there are only three I would class as good school stories: Mr. Buckeridge's own Jennings Runs Cross Country (his Rex Milligan contribution is, I think, a failure as a school story and not too good as a story), and, way ahead of any others in the collection, P. G. Wodehouse's episode, Mainly about Shoes, from the story originally called The Lost Lambs and later retitled Mike and Psmith, and Billy Bunter's Booby-trap, by Frank Richards. Perhaps this is a little unfair, for the latter two authors are masters of this genre. But there it is; they are in the volume, and Mr. Buckeridge put them there. The competition they provide, the standard they set, are his doing.

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The twelfth and Christmas meeting of Friars, Connoisseurs and Saints will be held at COURTFIELD on 17th December, at 3.00 p.m., and will be duly reported in the Christmas edition of the COURTFIELD NEWSLETTER.

If you have not received your copy of the current issue number 10 meeting report then write now for this 16,000 word documentary complete with photographs and pictures, coloured cover and over 50 letters and articles, many from well-known Friars and Saints - featuring also an actual visit by Friars to FLEETWAY HOUSE in May this year, (by kind permission of the owner) and actual photographs of the Magnet office. A few copies of the second reprint, No. 10, still available. The next issue due out in October, of the September meeting will feature the visit by Friars and Saints to Harrow School to see the many historic rooms therein, including the Speech Room, Library, Governor's room, Wood and metal workshops, Gymnasium, private grounds, golf course, etc., etc., and will of course contain another 50 letters and articles, and pictures. Christmas number will feature fascinating extract from Herbert Leckenby's secret diaries and Christmas meeting report, articles and letters. Annual subscription to the Courtfield Newsletter is £1.40 p.a. U.K. to Hon. Sec. below.

Your Courtfield Correspondent and hostess extend Christmas Greetings to all those who have continued to make our hobby the enjoyable pastime it is.

R. F. (BOB) ACRAMAN

COURTFIELD, 49 KINGSEND, RUISLIP, MIDDX.



# The Haunting Of Mr Buddle

BY  
ERIC  
FAYNE



## A STORY OF SLADE

It was sheer melodrama. It was also irritating and a little eerie.

"Is that Mr. Buddle, the schoolmaster?" came the voice over the telephone. The words were clear, though the speaker's voice seemed muffled.

"Speaking!" announced Mr. Buddle.

"This is a warning!" said someone at the other end of the line. "Don't go to Spider Point if you want to stay alive."

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Buddle. "Who is speaking? You have the wrong number."

"You have been warned!" said the owner of the muffled voice.

Mr. Buddle stared at the telephone. He compressed his lips.

"Who is speaking?" he repeated.

"It is a message from the other side," came the reply.

There was a click on the line, and then a buzz. Whoever had been calling had rung off.

With a murmur of annoyance, Mr. Buddle jammed the instrument back on its hook. There was a frown on his brow.

"The young rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Buddle at last. He saw it all now, or thought he did. It was some boy - one of his pupils - playing a stupid practical joke. Several boys in Mr. Buddle's own form were capable of such things. Meredith, perhaps, but Mr. Buddle did not think it could be Meredith. Shovel was a practical joker, and might think it funny to try to alarm his form master in holiday time. Or Tammadge. Yes, Tammadge was the most likely. Only a few months ago Tammadge had put out a false fire-alarm, and had brought the Everslade fire service rushing to Slade in the middle of the night. Tammadge was the most likely culprit, but it was so easy to blame the wrong person in circumstances like these.

The caller had said something about a Spider Point. Mr. Buddle had never heard of a Spider Point, so the message was meaningless. It was too utterly absurd, but very annoying all the same.

It was two o'clock on a mid-December afternoon. It was several days now since Slade had broken up for the Christmas vacation. With the exception of Mr. Buddle, all the teaching staff had gone off to the four corners of the kingdom; even Mr. Scarlet, the Head of Slade, had left the day before with Mrs. Scarlet. Just the domestic staff remained to prepare for the new term; there was

cleaning to be done and repairs and decorations to be attended to. Mr. Buddle remained, as usual, in charge of affairs for the few days after term ended. And, tomorrow, Mr. Buddle himself would be leaving to make the most of his vacation. He did not like holidays. He often found himself at a loose end in holiday time, and he regarded it as a period when his pupils lost the threads of his teaching and forgot a great deal of what they had been taught.

Mr. Buddle had come to his study after having a lonely meal in the dining hall, a meal which had been prepared for him by no less important a personage than Mrs. Cleverton, the school housekeeper, herself.

There was a tap on the door, and Mr. Buddle called out "Come in", expecting to see one of the staff coming to him for instructions.

The door opened, and a smartly-dressed gentleman with greying hair, looked in. Mr. Buddle leaped to his feet in surprise and pleasure.

"Mr. Meredith!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Meredith came in, smiling and holding out his hand. He was the father of one of Mr. Buddle's Fourth form pupils, and a close friend of the schoolmaster.

"Your young Taggles on the gate said that I could come up and that I might find you here," he said.

Mr. Buddle gave a rusty chuckle.

"Parmint might not be flattered at being compared with Taggles," he said. He added: "But we both have a soft spot for Taggles, haven't we? Sit down, my dear friend, and tell me what brings you here."

Mr. Meredith closed the door, and sat down in one of the chairs near the electric fire.

He said: "I must not stop long. I have to get to Plymouth for an appointment, but I have made the time

to drop in on you and ask a special favour of you."

Mr. Buddle eyed him curiously.

"A favour? If it is within my power, you have only to ask, as you well know. Will you take off your coat?"

Mr. Meredith shook his head.

"Thank you, no. You will remember that I told you, some time ago, that we were moving out to the coast, not far from here. I invited you to join us for Christmas, but you were unable to accept."

Mr. Buddle turned a little pink. He said:

"From what you told me, it was to be something of a family party. I would have felt an intruder. I shall enjoy paying you and Mrs. Meredith a little visit some time when you are on your own."

Mr. Meredith nodded.

He said: "I have ventured to call on you personally, to try to persuade you to alter your mind. No, do not say anything yet. We were disappointed that you decided not to come to us for Christmas, but we accepted your decision. But, since then, some rather mysterious things have been going on, and we would value your advice on the spot."

Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows.

"Mysterious things? Do you mean in your new home on the coast?"

"Exactly! Let me give you the details. Last summer my wife's uncle died, and he bequeathed to her the house in which he was living, together with all the contents. It is a Victorian mansion, built near the sea. The house is named Old Hall --"



"I recall your mentioning it in your letter to me," said Mr. Buddle.

"It may not have sounded too attractive to you for a Christmas visit", admitted Mr. Meredith. "It is, of course, far more pleasant in the summer, but, even in winter, it has its attractions. My wife, Doreen, was always devoted to her uncle. When she was a girl, she spent many holidays there, and loves the old house. It was to please her that we went to Old Hall several weeks ago. Cedric joined us there when Slade broke up last Friday."

Mr. Buddle regarded him thoughtfully.

"Is your move permanent? You are selling your house at Taunton?"

"It is possible," said Mr. Meredith. "We have not decided yet. We are very fond of the Grange at Taunton, of course, but I could not afford to keep up the two houses, even if there was any point in doing so."

"You have a lovely home at Taunton," suggested Mr. Buddle.

"The Grange is a pleasant house," agreed Mr. Meredith. "We have been happy there. But, as I said, Doreen dearly loves Old Hall. It is close to the sea. There is a good beach for swimming, and Cedric could have his friends there in the summer. It is quiet. The normal run of servant would not like it, probably, but the Camps, whom you know, have been with us for years, and they are a quiet, reserved couple who do not bother about the life and bright lights of a town."

"You have Mr. and Mrs. Camp with you at Old Hall?"

"Oh, yes. The Grange is closed for the present. Doreen and I,

with Charlie Camp and his wife, moved to Old Hall some four weeks ago. I have transferred my business headquarters to Plymouth for the time being, and go backwards and forwards by car daily between Plymouth and Old Hall. The only other servants at Old Hall are a couple who were with my wife's uncle for some years - some people named Coveney. After old Mr. Shepherd died, the Coveney's stayed on as caretakers. Now, for a while, we have installed them in a cottage near the house."

Mr. Buddle moved restlessly.

"You spoke of mysterious occurrences --"

Mr. Meredith leaned forward.

"Old Hall has a reputation for being haunted - you know how it is with these old places. People are said to have heard weird sounds and seen flitting forms, but Doreen says she never saw or heard anything, nor did her late uncle who lived there, a semi-invalid, for many years. All old houses have strange noises if one is listening for them. When visibility is bad we hear the siren on Start Point - they sound it at intervals in foggy weather - and that in itself reminds one of some giant creature in mortal agony."

There was a pause, and Mr. Buddle stole a glance at the clock on his mantelpiece.

Mr. Meredith went on: "Nobody takes the ghost story seriously, but in the past fortnight, rather inexplicable things have happened. One morning, when we went down to breakfast, every single clock in the house had stopped. The clock in the hall, the one in the

morning room, the one in my study, the one in the kitchen - all stopped at exactly the same time."

Mr. Buddle looked interested, but made no comment.

"Another time, cushions were found in one giant pile in the centre of the lounge -"

"A poltergeist at work," observed Mr. Buddle, a twinkle in his eye. "Or a mischievous boy," he added softly.

"If you are thinking of Cedric, you are off-side," said Mr. Meredith. "He may be a troublesome boy at school, but he would not worry his mother by doing anything of the sort at home."

"I'm sure of it," conceded Mr. Buddle.

"Two days ago, something more serious happened," said Mr. Meredith. "My picture disappeared - my Rembrandt --"

Mr. Buddle started.

"Your Rembrandt - the one of the Dutch cook?"

"That's right. The picture was on the wall of my study at Old Hall until two days ago when it vanished. I had thought it safer not to leave the picture at Taunton - in fact, it is a stipulation of the insurance cover that it should not be left in an unoccupied house. So I took it from Taunton to Old Hall."

Mr. Buddle frowned. He said:

"It is unlikely that a practical joker would play tricks with a picture worth several thousand pounds. Have you notified the police?"

Mr. Meredith shook his head.

"I do not wish to call the police if it can be avoided. I am sure that it was not stolen by an intruder from outside. The picture was on the wall in my study when I went to bed that night. The next morning, it was gone. There was not the slightest sign that anyone from outside had broken in."

"Who is living in the house, apart from you and your family?" asked Mr. Buddle.

"My secretary, Mr. Hart, is staying with us over Christmas. His home is in Scotland, and he did not wish to make the journey north for Christmas. Since we moved to the coast he has been living with us. He has been in my employ for a year, and I have a high opinion of his character."

"Who else?"

"Doreen's cousin, and his wife, have been with us for several weeks. Percy Shepherd is a solicitor in Cornwall. His wife, Zoe, is something of an invalid, and they are with us for a limited time. They invited themselves, really, though Doreen is pleased to have her cousin with us. Percy Shepherd, of course, knows the house well. He lived all his boyhood at Old Hall."

Mr. Buddle said thoughtfully:

"Mr. Shepherd is, then, the son of your wife's uncle who died and bequeathed Old Hall to Mrs. Meredith?"

"That is so," agreed Mr. Meredith. "The only son."

"I wonder --" Mr. Buddle eyed the other man doubtfully. "It seems a little strange to me that the family



home was not left to the son of the house."

"On the face of it, yes. But my wife's uncle had settled a sum of money on his son, who has his own house in Cornwall, and who is Director of a thriving firm."

"Does he resent in any way the fact that his father left the family home, not to him, but to his cousin."

"I have no reason to think that he does," said Mr. Meredith. "He and Doreen have always been good friends."

Mr. Buddle leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and stared at his visitor.

He said: "You believe it is your wife's cousin who has stolen your Rembrandt? That can be the only reason you have not called in the police."

Mr. Meredith drew a deep breath.

"Candidly, I don't know what to think, Mr. Buddle. That picture of mine is registered with the Old Masters' Society. It could not be sold on the open market. It could only be sold, secretly, to a collector who would not ask questions. That means it could only be sold by somebody who has plenty of contacts in the monied class. My wife's cousin, as a prosperous lawyer, has such contacts."

Mr. Buddle listened in silence. Mr. Meredith went on:

"Naturally I want my picture back, but I do not wish to call in the police if such a step can be avoided. I have come here today to ask you to come to us for Christmas - to come to Old Hall to see what you can make of the matter. In the past, we have seen proof of your ability at detection. After all --"

Mr. Buddle had lifted a hand in protest. He said:

"Are you asking me to come to your home to act as a detective? Really, Mr. Meredith, I am not a detective. I am a schoolmaster. My name isn't Nelson Lee - is not that the name of the famous detective of boys' fiction?"

Mr. Meredith smiled faintly.

"It is! I know you are not Nelson Lee, Mr. Buddle. We would like you at Old Hall for your company alone. You know that. But at the same time --"

"At the same time, you would like me to look around for cigarette ash or finger-prints which might lead a trail to the thief. I can't do it, sir. I am not a detective. You should call in the police."

Mr. Meredith heaved a sigh. He rose to his feet.

"I understand," he said. "It was an impertinence on my part to try to persuade you. Forgive me. I had the idea that to you, shrewd and deep-thinking as I know you to be, some aspects of the situation at Spider Point might be clearer. I was asking --"

Mr. Buddle interrupted.

"Did you say 'Spider Point'?"

"Yes, I said Spider Point. Old Hall, our new home, is situated on Spider Point. It is the next head-land along from Start Point."

"Is it indeed?" murmured Mr. Buddle. There was an odd expression on his face.

"You are acquainted with Spider Point?" asked Mr. Meredith, curiously.

"I had never heard of it till this afternoon. I had a telephone call, not long before you arrived. Some anonymous person warned me not to go to Spider Point. I thought it was some boy playing an end of term joke." He paused, and the two men stared at one another. "Did anyone at Old Hall know that you were inviting me to your home for Christmas?"

Mr. Meredith looked surprised.

"Everybody knew. I spoke of it at dinner last evening. I praised your powers to the skies. It was no secret that my Rembrandt was missing. I thought it might move someone to action if I let them all know that I was calling in an expert to find it for me --"

Mr. Buddle rose. He said:

"It seems to have done that, doesn't it? Somebody hoped to frighten me off from accepting your invitation. It is a challenge, in a way. The sort of challenge which men like Sherlock Holmes or Sexton Blake would not refuse." He rubbed his chin, while Mr. Meredith stood in silence with a glimmer of amusement in his eyes. Mr. Buddle asked: "Are the walls at Old Hall panelled, Mr. Meredith?"

Mr. Meredith smiled broadly.

"The good old Gem again. Is it possible that it is more persuasive than I am? You are thinking of the secret panel in Nobody's Study. Yes, some of our rooms are panelled, but secret panels have gone out of fashion since Edwardian days."

Mr. Buddle spoke reflectively.

"In the Painted Room story, it was the butler who was guilty, I think. What was his name? Pilkington? But you haven't a butler. The nearest thing

to a butler would be Mr. Camp or Mr. Coventry --"

"Coveney." Mr. Meredith chuckled. "I can't see either Camp or Coveney as butlers."

"And your secretary? Secretaries are always objects of suspicion, aren't they? Do you remember Bloore, who tried to poison Lord Eastwood. The Earl was particularly incompetent in choosing his staff, it always seemed to me."

Still smiling, Mr. Meredith nodded. He said:

"The father of Jimmy Silver of Rookwood was even more unfortunate - especially where his pictures were concerned. He lost his Rembrandt one Christmas and his Tintoretto the next."

Mr. Buddle went on a little dreamily.

"And your wife's cousin? Relatives, in the stories are usually criminals, aren't they? I think I recall Mr. Selby's nephew who turned out to be the spectral monk one Christmas - but he was more sinned against than sinning, wasn't he?"

"I think he was," observed Mr. Meredith. "Of course, there were Brian Mauleverer and Edgar Ravenspur - relatives and rogues, as you say. Perhaps you don't know the Magnet so well?"

Mr. Buddle gave a frosty chuckle.

"Very little." He paused for a moment. "I have changed my mind. I will come to Spider Point. I shan't be free till tomorrow afternoon. I still have duties here. I will come to you after lunch tomorrow. How do I



come? By taxi? Or is there a bus?"

Mr. Meredith gripped his hand.

"Bless you, dear friend. Doreen and Ceddie will be so pleased. In the next day or two, over the Christmas, you may discover something --"

"Don't bank on it!" said Mr. Buddle drily.

"I shall thank you for trying, at all events. If nothing emerges as a result of your visit, I will call in the police at once. Spider Point is only twenty miles from Everslade. I myself have appointments all day tomorrow at our Plymouth office, but I will send Charlie Camp over with the Austin. Will two o'clock be too early for you?"

"It will be excellent!" replied Mr. Buddle.

Early the next afternoon, accompanied by his small suitcase, Mr. Buddle walked down to the school gates. He looked out Parmint, the lodge keeper, and gave that worthy his usual Christmas box. He was chatting with Parmint when the small Austin car came up to the gates, with Charlie Camp at the wheel.

Charlie was middle-aged, thin and somewhat negative in personality. Charlie and his wife had been the Merediths' sole resident domestic staff for many years - "ever since before our cherub was born" Mrs. Camp would say, with reference to Cedric Meredith, Mr. Buddle's trying pupil, on whom both the Camps doted.

Mr. Buddle shook hands with Parmint, and wished him a Merry Christmas. Then he greeted Charlie Camp, who had opened the rear door of

the car in readiness for the school-master to climb in.

"I'll ride with you in the front, if you don't mind. See the scenery better from there," suggested Mr. Buddle.

"Of course, sir. I'll be very pleased," said Charlie.

So, a minute later, the car was on its way with Mr. Buddle in the front seat of the Austin, beside the driver.

Charlie was a careful driver, and they did a steady thirty miles an hour.

It was a fairly busy road into the little town of Everslade, and then Charlie turned off to the right, through narrow lanes overhung with leafless trees.

"How far is it to Old Hall, Mr. Camp?" enquired Mr. Buddle, with a glance at the man beside him.

"Twenty miles, about, sir. We take the road for Start Point, follow that for a while, and then turn off for Spider Point."

"Spider Point! A curious name," commented Mr. Buddle. "I had not heard of it before."

"It's the next headland to Start Point," explained Charlie. "Lonely place."

"You like it there?" queried Mr. Buddle.

"Well enough, sir. It doesn't make much difference to the missus and me. We're not people for bright lights and theatre shows. Mr. and Mrs. Meredith treat us well, and where they want to be suits us all right."

"I suppose so," murmured

Mr. Buddle. "You have another couple assisting you in your duties, I believe Mr. Meredith said."

"Oh, the Coveney's. They had been with the old gentleman in the house for a year or two before he died. Mr. Meredith has kept them on for the time being. They're living in the small cottage in the grounds, near the generator. They don't like it. They say the generator is noisy. I daresay it is, too, but we don't use electric lights after eleven at night, so it's quiet for them till the early morning. Until we all came there, the Coveney's lived in the big house. They may do again, after the Christmas party is broken up, unless the boss decides to get rid of them."

"So they are a little resentful, perhaps," mused Mr. Buddle.

"You bet your life, sir, they're resentful all right," said Camp.

The car approached a crossroads. A sagging signpost, showed two arms, one pointing in faded white paint to Start Point and the other to Spider Point. Charlie Camp turned into the narrow lane for Spider Point.

"How does Mrs. Camp like it here?" asked Mr. Buddle.

"All right, I think. She puts up with it. It's been better since the cherub came home. He livens things up."

"I'm sure he does," agreed Mr. Buddle.

The car took a steep hill, and a great expanse of sea came into view. From the distance it looked calm and unruffled.

"We shall see Old Hall in a few minutes," said Charlie Camp.

The car was starting to descend, and Camp slipped into low gear.

"I understand from Mr. Meredith that you have had some worrying happenings at Old Hall since you went there a few weeks ago," mentioned Mr. Buddle. "You know that your master's picture has disappeared."

"Everybody knows about it," said Camp gruffly. "It's a worry for all of us. I wish we'd never left Taunton."

"Have you any idea who might have done it?" asked Mr. Buddle.

Camp shook his head. He had his eyes on the winding road ahead as the car went steadily down hill.

"I hear that the house is haunted," went on Mr. Buddle cheerfully. "Have you seen anything Mr. Camp?"

Camp laughed uneasily.

"No - and don't expect to, sir. Nor has anyone else, if you ask me. It's all a tale. Some of them talk about seeing things and hearing things, but I reckon it's their imagination."

Mr. Buddle nodded.

"I expect you're right. Does Mrs. Camp mind? Ladies are sometimes more nervous than men."

"You're right, sir." Camp changed up with a crash of gears. "The missus worries a bit, in private. She wouldn't let Mrs. Meredith know that she's worried, though. I tell her it's all nonsense."

"You are sensible. You don't worry about the supernatural," said Mr. Buddle.

"I don't, sir. I've no time for



ghosts and rappings and messages from the other side, and that sort of thing. I'll believe it when I see it. That's what I say."

The sea had come into view again. They were only a hundred feet up now, and Camp braked the car in a lay-by near the cliff edge. He pointed to a house, built on a slightly lower level.

"That's Old Hall, sir."

Mr. Buddle viewed the house with interest. It was a sprawling building on two floors. Double fronted, it faced on to the lane below them. The back of the house gave on a garden which ran down to the edge of a low cliff which overlooked the sea. A path-way from the garden led down to a beach.

A small section seemed to have been built on to the house at the rear. It looked like a letter "E" with the two outer sides missing.

"It must be very attractive in summer," said Mr. Buddle.

In a few minutes the Austin turned in at the drive in the front of Old Hall.

Mr. Buddle found himself received with warmth by his hostess. He was never in doubt that he was welcome at the Meredith home.

The hall was impressive, with doors leading off into rooms on each side, a wide staircase at the end, and a passage leading to the domestic quarters. Brightly decorated with holly and mistletoe, and pleasantly warm, it contrasted sharply with its austere exterior.

Mrs. Meredith led him up the stairs and down a corridor to a room at the end. Of the left, a second staircase led downwards. The servants' staircase, Mr. Buddle assumed - a relic from the days when gentlemen's houses had servants and back stairs for them.

Mrs. Meredith opened the door of the end room, and they entered.

"I hope you will be comfortable here," said Mrs. Meredith. "It is not a large room, but you have your own bathroom adjoining."

"I shall be very snug," Mr. Buddle assured her.

After his hostess had gone, Mr. Buddle took stock of his surroundings. It was a pleasant room, though it lacked the cosiness to which Mr. Buddle had become accustomed in the Merediths' home at Taunton. The furniture was old and heavy, and there was rather too much of it.

The single bed, with its elaborate eiderdown, looked comfortable. There were two armchairs, a chest of drawers, a wardrobe and a small mahogany table. A coal fire burned in the grate.

Heavy bronze-coloured velvet curtains, now held back by loops, hung at the window. Mr. Buddle looked out.

This was evidently the room which had appeared, from the outside, to have been built on the house as an afterthought. An extension, perhaps, to accommodate the second staircase.

Down below was the garden. It ended at a fence, some feet away from the edge of a low cliff. At the side was a path which zigzagged down among trees, and led to the beach.

There was a tap on the door, and a buxom lady in a print dress looked in. It was Mrs. Camp, who had served Mr. and Mrs. Meredith since "before our cherub was born". Mr. Buddle had met her on several occasions, and had always liked her.

"Mrs. Camp, it is nice to see you," exclaimed the schoolmaster. He held out his hand, and she grasped it gingerly.

"It's nice to see you, sir. Our cherub's schoolmaster is someone special for us. Mrs. Meredith said to tell you that there is a nice fire in the library when you come down. Our cherub has cycled to the shops. He'll be back soon."

Mrs. Camp departed, and Mr. Buddle unpacked his case. He crossed to the window again, and gazed out. In the distance, far away to the left, he could see another headland, on which stood a lighthouse. It looked small from the distance.

Mr. Buddle scanned the immediate surroundings. In a far corner of the garden was an attractive white cottage. Near it was a squat structure; presumably the generator to which somebody had referred. It was half-hidden by shrubs.

Mr. Buddle left his room and went down the back staircase which, he presumed, would be the quickest way into the garden. He made his way to the little white cottage which he had observed from his bedroom window. There was a low hum from the generator in the brick structure nearby.

He looked back at the main building, a little forbidding against the winter sky.

"Were you looking for something,

sir?" said a voice behind him.

Mr. Buddle turned round. A man had come out from the cottage and had moved silently across the dank grass. He was middle-aged, with black hair over a broad forehead. He was eyeing Mr. Buddle suspiciously.

"I hope I didn't disturb you," said Mr. Buddle. "I am a guest of Mr. Meredith over Christmas. My name is Buddle."

"I heard you was coming. You're a detective, aren't you?"

Mr. Buddle smiled faintly.

"I am a schoolmaster. Mr. Meredith's son is one of my pupils."

The man's attitude thawed a little.

"I hope you have a nice Christmas here. My name is Coveney, sir. My wife and I served the old gentleman while he was living." He called out: "Laura, come and meet young Ceddie's schoolmaster."

Promptly, a thin, rather placid-looking woman came out of the cottage. Mr. Buddle raised his hat.

"Good morning, Mrs. Coveney. You have a pleasant cottage here."

The woman nodded.

"It's pleasant enough, sir. We're only here temporarily. We shall move back into the big house when all the people have gone."

"I see." Mr. Buddle nodded. "I suppose the electric generator is in the little outhouse yonder. Does it worry you when it is running?"

Coveney shrugged his shoulders

"We don't notice it in the day-



time. It comes on when somebody switches on anything in the house. Mr. Meredith gave orders that nobody should turn anything on after midnight, but some of them do. It wakes us up if it starts going in the night."

After a few further general comments, Mr. Buddle left the couple and went on his way. He sensed that they were watching him.

They seemed harmless. Efficient and loyal, probably. The old type of servant who was growing more rare these days.

Mr. Buddle had just reached the lane when Meredith of the Fourth came cycling up. He had a box fastened to the carrier of his bicycle. He had obviously been shopping.

Meredith sprang from his machine. He beamed on his form-master. There could be no doubt of Mr. Buddle's welcome from his pupil.

"It's grand to see you, sir. I'm so glad you could come"

Mr. Buddle smiled.

"Thank you, Meredith. I am very pleased to be here. I have been walking round your new home. It must be lovely in the summer."

"Yes, sir. We have a beach - shingle. Nice in the summer, as you say, sir."

Mr. Buddle smiled. He turned back towards the house, and Meredith walked by his side, pushing the bicycle.

"My mother likes it. She was a girl here, and had some lovely holidays. She would like to stay here for good," said Meredith.

"I see!" murmured Mr. Buddle. "You will be sorry to leave Taunton for

good, maybe."

"Pumpkin doesn't like it here," said Meredith gloomily.

"Oh, yes, Pumpkin. You have your cat with you, then."

"Of course - but he isn't happy here. Cats don't like chopping and changing. They get attached to one house. I'm afraid he may run away and get lost."

"You must watch him for a few weeks," suggested Mr. Buddle. "I expect he'll settle down all right."

"He doesn't like it," repeated Meredith. "Doesn't like the noise of the sea when it's rough. And when that siren gets going on Start Point, Pumpkin just runs for cover."

"I haven't heard that siren yet," said Mr. Buddle.

"It starts when the visibility gets bad," said Meredith. "It blasts out about every three minutes. We've only heard it a few times since we've been here, and then it hasn't lasted long. But if a long fog set in, it might be awful. When it starts Pumpkin runs for his life." He smiled ruefully at his form-master. "As long as my mother is happy here, my Dad and I can put up with it. Pilgrim and Garmansway are coming for a week in the New Year. We shall do some exploring along the coast. I shall like it better then."

During the afternoon Mr. Buddle met Mrs. Shepherd. He was introduced to her as Ceddie's school-master. She was a fragile-looking woman, in her middle thirties.

Mr. Buddle went into Mr. Meredith's library to borrow a book. He was standing by the shelves when Mrs. Shepherd came in and joined him.

She came to the point at once.

"Do you think you will find the picture?" she asked.

Mr. Buddle was taken aback. As he made no reply, Mrs. Shepherd went on:

"Lionel should call in the police. It has been stolen by somebody who got into the house from outside."

"You may be right," admitted Mr. Buddle.

"You don't look like a detective," said Mrs. Shepherd.

Mr. Buddle smiled.

"That is not surprising. I am not a detective. I am a schoolmaster."

Mrs. Shepherd nodded. She moved across to the window, and stood staring out.

She said over her shoulder:

"Are you a widower, Mr. Buddle?"

"Alas, no!" said Mr. Buddle.

As she turned, a surprised look on her face, Mr. Buddle explained himself.

"I expressed it badly. I am not a married man, Mrs. Shepherd. I often regret it. Long ago I proposed marriage to a young lady, and she rejected me. There has never been anyone else."

"Ah!" Mrs. Shepherd turned china blue eyes on him. "That is a mistake. My mother, a very shrewd woman, always said that every success-

ful man has a woman behind him."

Mr. Buddle nodded his agreement with that sentiment.

"I suffer a lot from migraine," said Zoe Shepherd. "My doctor advised complete rest. That is why my husband and I are spending a few weeks with the Merediths. I shall be glad to get home. There is no place like home. You know that this house is haunted?"

"I have heard so," admitted Mr. Buddle cautiously. "Have you heard or seen anything, Mrs. Shepherd?"

"Oh, definitely! I'm very sensitive to such things."

"To what things?" queried Mr. Buddle.

"Oh, this and that!" She shrugged her thin shoulders. "My mother also is a sensitive woman. My mother is an angel."

Unsure whether the lady meant that her mother had ideal qualities on earth or that her mother had departed this life for a better world, Mr. Buddle made no reply.

Mrs. Shepherd continued: "Did you know that this house was my husband's home till he embarked on his career? He spent all his boyhood here. He knows every nook and cranny. His mother died when he was small."

"Did your husband resent his father leaving a will in which the family home went to his father's niece instead of to his son?" asked Mr. Buddle.

Mrs. Shepherd stared at him.

"My husband didn't bother, but



I must say that I felt it wrong that the old gentleman should leave the family home to someone outside the family. Doreen Meredith played her cards well. Of course, it is not a convenient house --"

"And it is haunted," hinted Mr. Buddle.

"It would make a very good seaside hotel," said Mrs. Shepherd tartly.

At dinner that evening, Mr. Buddle met the other two members of the Christmas party. Percy Shepherd - a man of about forty, with a tendency to embonpoint, was very well turned out - correct to every crease and button. His mode of speech was pedantic.

Hector Hart, Mr. Meredith's secretary, was younger. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles which seemed to give him an owlish expression.

It was a pleasant enough meal, in the large dining-room tastefully decorated for Christmas, but Mr. Buddle sensed a strained atmosphere.

Cedric Meredith, as always in his home circle, was on his best behaviour. It always surprised Mr. Buddle that a boy, so troublesome at school, could be so well-behaved and sensible when he was at home.

Mr. Meredith looked worried at times, and abstracted. Mrs. Meredith worked hard to keep the conversation going. Mrs. Camp, that domestic treasure, helped with the serving of the meal. This evening she looked strained, unlike the bright little body she normally was.

When the meal was over, the party moved into the lounge where Mrs. Meredith dispensed coffee and her son handed round the cups. Mr. Buddle had seated himself on a settee at some distance from the log fire, and young Mr. Hart came over to him.

"Do you mind if I sit with you, Mr. Buddle?"

"Please do." Mr. Buddle patted the seat beside him, and Mr. Hart sat down.

"I gather you are going to find Mr. Meredith's picture," said Mr. Hart. "I hope you succeed. It is a terrible thing that he should be robbed. He is so generous to everyone. He seems to believe that somebody in the house is the guilty one. I'm sure he's wrong."

"I hope so," agreed Mr. Buddle.

"Have you any concrete ideas?" asked Mr. Hart.

"Oh, yes, I have drawn several conclusions," admitted Mr. Buddle. "Whom do you suspect, Mr. Hart?"

Mr. Hart looked confused.

"I don't suspect anybody. I leave that to the expert - to you, Mr. Buddle."

"But I am not an expert on crime," said Mr. Buddle gently. "I am a schoolmaster."

"I must say you look more like a schoolmaster than a crime expert," remarked Mr. Hart.

"And how exactly does a schoolmaster look?" enquired Mr. Buddle with interest.

Mr. Hart smiled.

"Oh, studious and perhaps a

little over-powering. Intelligent, of course. Used to being in command."

"A trifle pompous?" enquired Mr. Buddle.

"Oh, certainly not." Mr. Hart raised his hands as though to indicate "Perish the Thought!"

It was an hour later that Mr. Buddle found himself alone with Mr. Shepherd. The schoolmaster fancied that Mr. Shepherd had been on the lookout for the opportunity to speak to him privately.

Percy Shepherd dropped on to the settee beside Mr. Buddle.

"So you're Ceddie's schoolmaster!" said Shepherd. "Slade, isn't it? The school, I mean. Is it a good school?"

"Slade is the finest school in England," said Mr. Buddle.

"Ceddie is a nice kid," remarked Mr. Shepherd. "Quite a credit to Slade."

"Quite!" agreed Mr. Buddle.

"I hear you add detection to your duties as a pedagogue. You once put the police on some passport forgers, so they tell me. Must have been exciting."

"It made a change," admitted Mr. Buddle.

"I knew a Headmaster once. He said that half the success of a good schoolmaster was being adaptable."

"Did he mention what the other half was?" asked Mr. Buddle coldly.

"I can't remember," said Mr. Shepherd. He yawned.

"I understand that this was your

old home for many years," said Mr. Buddle, changing the subject carelessly. "Did you resent your father leaving the family house to his niece instead of to you?"

Shepherd stared at him.

"Resent it? Good heavens, no. Why should I resent it? I have my own home in Cornwall."

"Naturally. But this property could be quite valuable these days. Your wife seemed to think it would make a nice little hotel."

"I daresay it would, but not for me. I never liked the place. Too remote. In any case, my father's wishes were law for me. I can assure you that I had my full share of his estate, and I felt no resentment at all that he left the old home to my cousin Doreen. She's welcome to it."

It was after eleven when Mr. Buddle went up to bed. He found Mrs. Camp making up the fire in his room. She rose to her feet from the grate as he entered.

"I'm afraid you're spoiling me, Mrs. Camp?" he said.

"Nothing's too good for our cherub's schoolmaster," she replied, and Mr. Buddle smiled his thanks.

Mrs. Camp was not looking well. Her eyes were heavy, and she did not seem her usual lively self.

She indicated a candle in a brass candlestick, with a box of matches nearby, on Mr. Buddle's bedside table beside his electric reading lamp.

"We don't normally turn on the electric in the night, sir. It starts the

generator going, and it's near the Coveney's' cottage, and they complain at the noise. But that won't apply to you, sir. You turn on the electric if you want it in the night."

"I shall do as everybody else does," Mr. Buddle assured her. "I'm not likely to want to turn the light on in the night, in any case."

"No, sir." Mrs. Camp turned to the door. She stood in the doorway for a moment or two.

Mr. Buddle said gently: "Is there anything else, Mrs. Camp?"

"Yes, sir." Mrs. Camp put the door nearly closed, and spoke quickly. "You lock your door tonight, sir."

Mr. Buddle was surprised.

"Lock my door? Why should I do that? I couldn't lock my door when I am a guest in Mrs. Meredith's home."

Mrs. Camp did not speak.

Mr. Buddle said: "You don't like this house very much, do you, Mrs. Camp?"

"No, I don't like it." Mrs. Camp stared at the floor. "It seems to be an evil house, sir. It's haunted."

"Have you seen or heard anything yourself?" asked Mr. Buddle.

"Yes, strange noises and funny things happening. It's haunted. I hope we don't stay here."

"You hope that Mr. and Mrs. Meredith decide to go back to Taunton," said Mr. Buddle.

Mrs. Camp's abundant bosom heaved.

"I do, indeed, sir. You lock

your door tonight. That's my advice."

Mr. Buddle nodded, and Mrs. Camp left the room closing the door behind her.

The schoolmaster had a wash in the adjoining bathroom, and donned his pyjamas. He looked round his bedroom, which was cosy enough with the fire glowing in the grate, and the velvet curtains drawn across the windows.

He switched off the ceiling light, leaving his bedside light burning. On the small table on which the bed-lamp was standing there was a volume. Mr. Buddle turned into bed, and took up the book. He smiled with pleasure as he discovered it was a volume of Gems for the later part of the year 1913. He had read the stories in that volume before. He had become a Gem fan as his friendship with Mr. Meredith ripened. Mr. Meredith possessed all the Gems, and Mr. Buddle knew how he prized them.

Automatically, Mr. Buddle turned to the Christmas Number for that year - "The Mystery of the Painted Room". It was a favourite story of his, and he read for half an hour.

At last Mr. Buddle closed the book and returned it to the table beside his bed. He lay there for a few moments, gazing at his ceiling, which was shadowy in the shaded light from the bedside lamp and the flickering from the fire.

So Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had gazed at the ceiling in the Painted Room at Eastwood House. In that ceiling there had been a carved figure of Bacchus. And as Gussy watched, the eye of Bacchus had moved. "It's alive!" D'Arcy had called out, in



horror.

Mr. Buddle felt that there was something about his own room which was eerie. The ceiling, in its shadows, was plain. There was no eye to gleam and move. The room was panelled, but, as Mr. Meredith had said at Slade, secret panels were no longer in fashion even in fiction.

Mr. Buddle stretched out his hand, and turned off the electric lamp. Darkness rushed over the room, but, as his eyes adjusted themselves, he saw outlines of the heavy furniture lit up by the glow from the fire.

Mr. Buddle fell asleep.

Mr. Buddle awakened. For a short time he lay, wondering what had brought him out of his sleep, and whether all was well in the school. Then realisation came back. He was no longer at Slade. He was a guest in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Meredith on Spider Point, near the sea.

It suddenly came to him that his shoulders were cold. When he had gone to sleep the room had been warm, and filled with shadows from the flickering fire. There was no light in the room now. He had been lying, in his warm room, with his arms and shoulders outside the bed covers. But the room was very far from being warm now, and it was very dark. He could feel a strong draught, and he wondered where the breeze was coming from. He was wide awake now. It seemed incredible, but the door must be open. Yet he knew that he had latched it securely before retiring, though he had not taken Mrs. Camp's advice to turn the key in the lock.

For some reason, he was cold and shivering - in the haunted house.

He went to sit up in bed, but, even as he made the effort, he was dragged back. Some ghostly hands must be holding him. What nonsense, Mr. Buddle told himself.

Again he tried to rise, and again he found himself hampered and dragged back. He panted in something like alarm. Level-headed though Mr. Buddle was, he almost felt the hair rising on his scalp.

He put out his hand to switch on the bedside lamp. He paused. In this house, they did not turn on the current at night, for it would start the generator going, down near the little cottage where Mr. and Mrs. Coveney were temporarily residing.

It couldn't be helped. He must have a light - and quickly. He did not want to lose time fumbling for the box of matches which he had seen placed near the candlestick. He found the switch on the electric light, and pressed it. The room was illuminated, and he blinked in the light.

There was no other living soul in the room. But the door stood wide open. The chill breeze was blowing in from the dark and silent corridor without. There must be a window open somewhere.

Mr. Buddle tried to twist his head round. He found suddenly that there was a cord of some description under his chin. He clutched it with both hands, and managed to squirm underneath it and wriggle out of bed. He stood for a moment panting in the shaded light from the bedside lamp. Then he went to the door and looked out. All was dark and silent in the

corridor. He closed the door, and this time he locked it.

He stared at his bed, and at the loop of thickish cord which lay across his pillow and had been fastened to the bedpost behind his head. There was anger in his heart as he recalled the near panic that cord had caused him.

He unfastened the knot, drew the cord out from the bedpost, and eyed it thoughtfully. It was a cord from somebody's dressing-gown. Mr. Buddle wondered to whom it belonged.

Mr. Buddle's eyes fell on a small piece of paper which had been placed on top of the book which he had been reading several hours back when the night was young. Printed in pencil in block letters on that piece of paper were two words: GO AWAY.

"So that's it!" murmured Mr. Buddle aloud. His words sounded eerie in the quiet room.

It was a horrid feeling. After he had fallen asleep, some person had entered his room. Quietly the intruder had slipped the silken dressing-gown cord under Mr. Buddle's chin, and had fastened the ends to the bedpost. He had left that note, with its blunt message "Go Away" on the bedside table where Mr. Buddle would be bound to see it.

Then the unknown had left, leaving the door wide open in the knowledge that the temperature of the room would fall very rapidly and Mr. Buddle would awaken.

"He thought to scare me!" murmured Mr. Buddle. If Mr. Buddle had been entirely truthful he would have admitted that the unknown, whoever he was, had largely succeeded in that aim.

Mr. Buddle looked at his watch. It was nearly four o'clock in the morning. Nobody would be stirring for hours yet. It was still quite a long time before the light of day would fill the morning sky.

Mr. Buddle drew back his velvet curtains from the window, and stood, for a moment or two, looking out over the dark sea. He could see the distant flashing light from Start Point lighthouse.

He turned into bed, switched off his bedside lamp, and drew the bed-clothes up over his shoulders. He was very cold now. But as the minutes slipped past, he felt the warmth coming back into his bones, and, at last, he slept.

Mr. Buddle was late down to breakfast the next morning. Mr. Meredith and his secretary had already left for Plymouth, and they had been followed by Mr. Shepherd and his wife. Mr. Shepherd was to put in a few hours in his office before the firm closed for the Christmas break, and Mrs. Shepherd had gone with him to spend her time in a shopping spree.

Meredith of Slade was just finishing his breakfast with his mother when Mr. Buddle apologetically put in an appearance. Mrs. Meredith poured out coffee for Mr. Buddle, and Mrs. Camp came in to place a plate of bacon and eggs before him.

After Mrs. Camp had left the room, Mr. Buddle produced the dressing-gown cord which had added to the excitement of the previous night for him.

"I found this in my room this

morning, Mrs. Meredith," he remarked casually.

Mrs. Meredith took the cord with a chirrup of surprise.

"That's from my husband's dressing gown. It disappeared a couple of days ago, and he was very annoyed about it. How extraordinary that it should turn up in your room, Mr. Buddle."

"I think that several extraordinary things have been happening recently, from what Mr. Meredith told me," said Mr. Buddle.

During the day Mr. Buddle wrote several letters, took a walk along the sea shore, and then did some reading from Mr. Meredith's Gem volume. He quite enjoyed his day.

In the afternoon the weather turned very cold and misty. He took a cup of tea with Mrs. Meredith before the fire in the cosy study, and then made his way to his own room. It was getting dark before four o'clock. Mr. Meredith and his secretary arrived back at about that time, and soon after that Mr. and Mrs. Shepherd came into the house. Mr. Buddle heard them in the hall below, but he did not go to greet them. Dinner time, later on, would be soon enough for that.

Mr. Buddle turned on his light, and sat down in an arm-chair before the bright fire in his room. He had a volume of Gems in his lap, but he had not yet started to read. The room was warm and cosy, and he felt sleepy after his disturbed night.

Suddenly the mournful hoot of a siren came wailing in from outside. It startled him, and he rose and walked across to the window. It was still misty, and snow was falling, though it

seemed to be melting as it touched the ground. The siren wailed for some ten seconds and then was silent. Some minutes passed, and then it sent out its mournful sound once again. This was the siren on Start Point to which Meredith had referred, which sounded at intervals to warn sailors of a treacherous coast when visibility fell below a certain level.

Dusk was falling fast, and it almost seemed to grow darker as Mr. Buddle watched. With a shiver he pulled the velvet curtains across, and moved back towards his arm-chair. He had only just seated himself when a loud crack came from the window. Some missile had struck the glass.

Mr. Buddle was startled. With a bound he was back at the window, flinging wide the curtains again. He peered out into the gloom. He could distinctly see some person below - someone in a long cloak with a scarf or something of the sort tied over the head. In the failing light, it was impossible to see whether it was a man or a woman. The face was a black patch.

Mr. Buddle flung up the sash, and a rush of cold air came in with a flurry of snow. At the same moment, the siren rang out again, and the schoolmaster waited until the mournful warning ended. The person, whoever it was, was still standing below. An arm waved in the air. Something - a small stone probably - hit the window-sill and bounced off.

Mr. Buddle leaned forward, his anger growing.

"Who is there?" he called out.

A voice, low and husky and anonymous, came up from below.



"Go away!" somebody said.

Again an arm waved, and again a stone cracked on a pane near Mr. Buddle.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Buddle.

He slammed down the window. This was too much.

"Am I a man or a mouse?" asked Mr. Buddle of the cosy room. There was no reply. There was another crack of a stone on the window, and the tinkle of breaking glass. The siren rang out again from distant Start Point.

Mr. Buddle grabbed his overcoat, donned it quickly, and, without bothering to stay for a hat, opened his door and left the room. A light was burning in the deserted corridor, and Mr. Buddle slipped down the servants' staircase, which was the quickest way to reach the garden from whence he had been attacked.

The stairs ended in a narrow passage. Through a glazed door he could see a brightly-lit kitchen, with Mrs. Meredith and Mrs. Camp busy beside a table. They were probably preparing the evening meal.

Mr. Buddle hurried on to the door at the end of the passage. It was not locked, and he opened it, and passed through into the cold early evening air. It was dusky and gloomy in the garden, but it did not seem so dark as it had appeared from the window of Mr. Buddle's well-lit bedroom up above.

Mr. Buddle looked up, and scanned the expanse of the rambling old house. In the centre was Mr. Buddle's own room, and he realised that he had left his light burning in the room. One of two other rooms showed

lights, where curtains had not yet been drawn. The reflection of those lights gleamed across the misty, wintry garden.

Mr. Buddle hurried forward. Nobody now stood on the spot from whence somebody had thrown stones at his window.

He looked round him.

A husky voice came from the shadows, at the end of the garden. Soft, but clear.

"Go away." The siren boomed out again from Start Point.

Mr. Buddle moved forward. He could see a shadowy figure under the trees, against the winding path which led down to the beach.

When he reached the path, the figure had gone. He could hear the sound of footsteps on the path ahead which wound down to the beach.

It was not dark yet, and Mr. Buddle's eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom. He broke into a trot, but the path was getting steeper, and Mr. Buddle was unused to strenuous exercise. He did not want to take a tumble.

In a couple of minutes he came out on to the beach. He looked ahead through the lightly falling snow-flakes. He could see a figure some yards ahead of him - a figure in a flowing cloak of some sort. He could hear the sound of feet crunching on the shingle. Mr. Buddle gulped out steamy breaths on the raw air.

"Stop!" he called out.

"Go away!" came back a husky voice.

Mr. Buddle moved as fast as

he could over the shingle.

They were under the low cliff now. Somewhere, back on that low cliff, stood Old Hall, but the lights of the house were not visible from where Mr. Buddle now was.

He saw the figure ahead for a moment. It occurred to him that someone was playing with him. That the person he was chasing could have out-distanced him, had that person so desired. Then, suddenly, the figure disappeared.

Mr. Buddle plodded on, and came to a stop where he had last seen the figure. He was against the cliff face; a face of red sandstone as Mr. Buddle knew from earlier inspection. He heard more crunching. The sound was muffled now. Mr. Buddle ran his eye over the cliff face in the gloomy murk. There was a cave of some sort, and Mr. Buddle's tormentor had entered that cave.

Mr. Buddle could make out the outlines of the opening. It was clearly a largish cave. Whoever it was, the person was trapped, unless there was another exit, which was possible. Mr. Buddle clicked his tongue in annoyance and perplexity.

As he stood there, the siren from Start Point rang out again. It wailed on. As it died away, Mr. Buddle stood panting in worried thought. Perspiration was running down his face despite the cold evening air.

A groan came from the interior of the cave. It startled Mr. Buddle. He called out, as though speaking to some member of his form, back at Slade:

"Come forth! I am waiting. Come out at once."

Another little groan. A cry for help. A husky voice said "I'm hurt!"

Gingerly Mr. Buddle moved into the entrance of the cave. It was very dark inside. He wished he had stopped to collect a torch of some sort. A non-smoker, Mr. Buddle carried no matches.

"Where are you?" demanded the schoolmaster.

"Here!" came a whisper. "Help me!"

Mr. Buddle took another step or two into the darkness. He knew that it was a foolhardy thing to do. Whoever was in the cave, it was an enemy. By far the most sensible thing for Mr. Buddle to do would be to return to the house and fetch Mr. Meredith - or find out who, in the Christmas party, was missing. But while he was away, the miscreant would escape. One thing was certain. It was no ghost that had been throwing stones and crunching on the shingle. "It's alive!" Arthur Augustus had panted out, in the Painted Room. And somebody, apart from Mr. Buddle, was certainly alive in this cave on the beach of Spider Point.

The siren screeched out again. Here in the cave, the noise was muted, but the wail still echoed from the walls and the rocky roof.

Suddenly Mr. Buddle heard a sound behind him. Even as he swung round, he received a heavy push in the back. He staggered forward, and crumpled up on to his knees as he lost his balance. Luckily the floor in the cave was of soft sand or he might have hurt himself considerably.

A clang rang out in the darkness

of the cave.

Mr. Buddle stumbled to his feet, panting. He turned in the direction of the cave outlet, from whence the clanging noise had come. He gave a smothered ejaculation of alarm and dismay.

The outlet was no longer open. An iron gate had been closed across the exit from the cave. Mr. Buddle gripped the bars of the gate, and shook it, and pushed it, and pulled it to the left and to the right. It did not budge. It was closed tightly.

"Let me out at once," called out Mr. Buddle. There was no reply, and he shook the gate again. It rattled, but it did not open. Anger and mild panic fought within Mr. Buddle.

Beyond the gate, the last daylight was fading from the sky. Inside the cave it was pitch black. Just the navy-blue circle of fading light showed where the exit was, but the iron gate prevented Mr. Buddle from making any exit.

"Release me, I command you!" hooted Mr. Buddle.

There was no human reply. The only sound was the slight murmur of the distant sea as it lapped across the shingle.

The siren from Start Point rang out again, its muted wail filling the formaster's prison.

Mr. Buddle turned round, at a loss what to do. In fact, as he knew only too well, there was nothing he could do.

Mr. Buddle froze. From the heart of the cave, distant in the blackness, came a clinking sound. Before his eyes, a faint light became evident -

a phosphorescent light - a ghostly light. Mr. Buddle watched the pale light dancing, away in the heart of the cliff.

And then he heard the terrible noise. His scanty hair rose on his scalp. It was the cry of a being in distress - an appalling cry - a cry which was not human.

Mr. Buddle did not recognise his own voice as he panted out: "Who is there?"

The light was growing whiter. The blueness faded from it. He watched it dancing as though it were moving about. It came round a corner and seemed to blaze on Mr. Buddle.

There was a crunching on the sandy floor of the cave. Somebody was approaching. Somebody uttered a gasp of surprise.

"Who is that?" asked Mr. Buddle, shielding his eyes from the light with his hands.

"Sir!" said a well-known voice.

"Meredith!" gasped Mr. Buddle. "What are you doing here? Surely it was not you --- but, of course, it was not --"

The light was lowered. Mr. Buddle could see now that the newcomer was Meredith of the Fourth Form at Slade. Under one arm he held a large marmalade cat. With two fingers of the hand which was gripping the torch, Meredith was holding the collar round the cat's neck. The animal howled again.

"Were you looking for me, sir?" Meredith sounded astonished as well he might. "I came after Pumpkin. He dodged into the cave, and I had to go quite a long way in after him."



Mr. Buddle was staring at his pupil. In the light from the torch he could see that the boy was wearing his overcoat, and had the Slade muffler twisted round his neck.

"Someone has shut us in the cave, Meredith. Apparently there is a gate across the entrance --"

Still holding Pumpkin, Meredith focused the torch on the gate. He moved across, seized the bars, and strained to pull it back. It would not budge.

He said: "The gate was open when I came in. I saw Pumpkin run in here. They used to keep stores in this cave, and then they padlocked it, but it hasn't been locked since I've been here this holiday. What happened, sir?"

Mr. Buddle told him the events which had led up to his incarceration in the cave, and Meredith listened, wide-eyed.

"You don't know who it was, sir?"

"It was getting dark. The rascal kept himself at a distance --"

Meredith spoke soberly in the gloom.

"He's wedged something in at the back of the gate. It slides along on rails. Not very easily, either. You need some strength to move it, usually."

"Somebody had greased it in readiness," said Mr. Buddle grimly.

All of a sudden, the marmalade cat twisted out of Meredith's arms, and went through the gate, between the bars, like a streak.

"Pumpkin!" yelled the boy.

But Pumpkin was gone. Meredith spoke ruefully:

"I hope he goes home all right. There's no telling. He doesn't like being here." He stared at Mr. Buddle in the light from the torch. "Here's a to-do, sir. What on earth has anybody locked us in for?"

"The idea is to cause me to go away from Old Hall. Whoever has taken your father's picture is afraid that I will get on his track. Somebody hopes to frighten me away."

"Let's yell for help, sir. They wouldn't hear us from the house, but somebody might be about."

He went up close to the bars, and shouted at the top of his voice. He shouted until he was hoarse, when he desisted.

The Start Point siren has ceased to give out its warning wail. The wind had risen, and the mist had cleared.

Meredith flashed the light round and brought it to a standstill with its beam showing up a low boulder.

"We could sit down there, sir. Do you think we shall be left here long, sir?"

"A very long time, I imagine," said Mr. Buddle grimly. "All night, possibly, though surely the wretch could not run such a risk. He will have to unfasten the door in darkness, at any rate, to avoid detection."

They sat down on the boulder.

"You had better switch off that light for a time, my boy," said Mr. Buddle. "We may need it later, and a battery will not last very long."

Meredith switched off the light,

and pitch darkness fell.

"It's a bit exciting, isn't it, sir?" came Meredith's voice. "Like the Gem. Perhaps in a year's time they will find two mouldering skeletons here in this cave."

They could hear the waves dashing on the shingle, well down the beach at present, as the wind rose. Mr. Buddle shivered a little.

"Does the sea come into this cave when the tide rises?" asked Mr. Buddle.

"I think not, sir. I've never seen it come up so far as this, though I haven't been here a great deal when the weather has been bad. If it does, we shall have to go farther back. That tunnel goes a long way, though I don't think there is any exit that way. But the floor is quite dry at the back there."

"Luckily it is not very cold in here," said Mr. Buddle. "Can you keep warm enough, Meredith?"

"I'm all right, sir, so far," Meredith assured him. "Lucky we've both got our coats on, though. Would you like to have my scarf, sir?"

"You keep it round your own neck," said Mr. Buddle gruffly.

Silence fell. The crashing of the waves increased outside, like an orchestral accompaniment to the little drama which was being played.

Meredith spoke at last.

"Would you like to know the time, sir?" Meredith flashed on the torch, and they both blinked in the light. "Bother, my watch has stopped. I banged it when I was getting Pumpkin. I wonder where Pumpkin is. I hope he's all right."

Mr. Buddle looked at his own watch.

"It has turned six. We have been here over an hour."

"Keep smiling, sir!" said Meredith. The light was switched off. "That's Jimmy Silver's motto, sir. He's a Rookwood fellow. We could do with him here now."

In the dark blue of the sky, beyond the mouth of the cave, they could see an occasional light. Mr. Buddle realised that it must be the beam from the distant lighthouse on Start Point. In the beam, the falling snowflakes looked like pieces of silver dropping from the sky.

"Maybe we could flash a signal, sir. S.O.S!" said Meredith hopefully.

"There would be nobody to see it," said Mr. Buddle.

Conversation lapsed. Ten, twenty minutes passed. Then they talked of Slade. Of the term which had just ended, and of the term which was to come with the New Year.

"Wait till I tell Pilgrim and Garmansway about this, when they come here after Christmas," said Meredith. "Just think, sir, it's Christmas Eve tomorrow."

Meredith's torch came on again. Again they blinked. Outside it seemed darker than ever now. Mr. Buddle looked at his watch.

"It is seven. Two hours have gone."

"I'll try another yell," said Meredith.

He did. He went to the barred gate, and yelled and yelled. He

desisted at last.

He said huskily: "They will all be ready for dinner at home. They'll miss us. They'll wonder where the dickens we are. They'll wonder whether we're together. They'll think we've gone for a walk and lost our way. My mother will be anxious. Maybe they'll call the police out."

"They are not likely to call the police for some considerable time" said Mr. Buddle. "We are not like young children."

Talk stopped again. The noise from the sea sounded louder, as the tide rose. Minutes passed. A half-hour.

"It's like Mr. Quelch and Harry Wharton, sir," came Meredith's voice. "They were in a cave together. They got cut off by the tide. They had been very bad friends, sir. Wharton had become a rather bad character - a kind of a thorn in the flesh to Mr. Quelch. Do you know the story, sir?"

"No, I do not know the story," said Mr. Buddle. "Tell it to me, my boy. It will help to pass the time."

So Meredith told him the story. Mr. Buddle listened with interest, though his main reason for encouraging his pupil to talk was to take Meredith's mind off their predicament.

"So Wharton really saved Mr. Quelch's life," said Meredith. "It wasn't a dry cave, like this one. The water came in, so far as I remember. I must read that series again. So you and I being here in this cave is like Mr. Quelch and Wharton being in that other cave, isn't it, sir? Of course, I haven't saved your life, sir --"

Mr. Buddle smiled in the

darkness.

"You might still save me from something very unpleasant," he said. "I think you might put the light on for a few moments, so that we can walk up and down and get our circulation moving again."

The light came on again. The two of them walked up and down in the cave for a while. It made them feel better.

Mr. Buddle looked at his watch.

"It has turned eight. We have been here over three hours." He sank down on the boulder again.

In the dim light, Meredith held up his hand.

"Listen, sir," he whispered.

Mr. Buddle listened.

For a few moments there was no sound. Then there was a clink, and a sound of crunching feet on the shingle.

"Somebody's there," panted Meredith. He ran over to the gate, while Mr. Buddle sat and held the torch. Meredith gripped the bars, and shouted.

Hastily, Mr. Buddle rose, and moved to stand beside him.

"Help! Help!" shouted Meredith.

"Is somebody there?" came a voice from the other side of the gate.

Meredith gave a chirp of delight.

"It's Charlie, sir. He's found us." He raised his voice. "We're here, Charlie - Mr. Buddle and me. Somebody locked us in."



Mr. Buddle shone the light on the gate.

A white, scared face peered in. It was the face of Charlie Camp.

"Mr. Buddle - and the cherub," he exclaimed. "How did you get here? Your Mum and Dad are getting awful worried. We searched the house - all of us. Nobody but me thought of coming down to the beach a night like this."

"Let us out, Charlie," panted Meredith joyfully. "Are you a sight for sore eyes? It's no good shaking the gate. Somebody has wedged it somehow."

Charlied moved to one side. They heard him wrenching on the gate.

"There's a chunk of wood driven here behind the gate so it can't move back." They heard him panting as he wrenched. The gate slid back at last, and Mr. Buddle and Meredith emerged from the cave which had been their prison for several hours. Meredith threw his arm round Charlie's neck and hugged him.

"Thank the good Lord that I found you," said Charlie Camp in a low voice. "When I heard you calling out, well, I thought it must be the ghost of Old Hall up to his tricks again."

It was two hours later. The members of the household had been uneasy at the inexplicable absence of Mr. Buddle and Meredith. When they came on the scene, there were startled cries of amazement as Meredith told the story of their adventures. His mother twittered around, but made immediate plans for the welfare of both her son and his schoolmaster.

Mrs. Camp came rushing along from the kitchen, and clasped Meredith to her bosom, and wept tears of relief.

Hot baths were the immediate order for both Mr. Buddle and Meredith, and, later, they took dinner alone together at a table drawn up before the fire in Mr. Meredith's study. Then Meredith was sent off to bed, and, as the erring Pumpkin had put in an appearance, the boy went without protest. He admitted that the experience in the cave had left him a bit weary.

And now, at about ten-fifteen, Mr. Buddle, clad in a warm dressing gown, sat by the fire in the study. Mr. Meredith was with him, and he looked strained and anxious.

Mr. Meredith said gloomily: "Christmas Eve tomorrow." He added grimly: "I cannot forgive myself for landing you in this, old friend. It can't go on. I must take some action --"

"It won't go on!" replied Mr. Buddle reassuringly. "You have asked Charlie to come here, so that I can speak to him?"

"Doreen is fetching him now. Thank heaven that he had more sense than the rest of us. You might have remained in that cave a very long time."

"It seemed to us that we did remain in that cave a very long time," observed Mr. Buddle drily, and Mr. Meredith nodded ruefully.

The door opened, and Mrs. Meredith came in, followed by Charlie Camp. Charlie looked pale and embarrassed.

"Here he is, Mr. Buddle," said Mrs. Meredith brightly. She

seated herself on the settee beside her husband.

Mr. Buddle spoke quietly.

"We were very glad that you came to release us, Mr. Camp. How was it that you thought of coming to the beach cave on a cold and snowy evening in winter, when it was most unlikely that we would have gone there?"

Charlie said: "It was nothing, sir. I heard you calling --"

Mr. Buddle said: "When you found us, we had not called for help for at least an hour."

Charlie Camp started to say something, and fell silent. Mr. and Mrs. Meredith looked at Mr. Buddle in some surprise.

Mr. Buddle rose to his feet, his eyes fixed on Charlie Camp. There was a frozen expression on Camp's face.

"Mr. Camp, you came to that cave because you knew I was there. You had caused me to go to the cave late in the afternoon. It was you who locked me in. Hours later, you found that Mr. Meredith's son was also missing. Everyone in the house was speculating as to what had become of us. Suddenly you knew what had happened - what must have happened. Cedric Meredith must also have been in the cave when you closed and fastened the door. Actually, he had gone after his cat. The animal ran into the cave only a minute or so before you arrived there in the afternoon. He went into the cave to find the animal. He was well away at the back of the cave when you enticed me to enter, and then locked me in.

"That you and your wife have a deep affection for Cedric, I am well aware. You were horrified and stricken at what you had inadvertently done. So you hurried to set us free. For me, you had not the slightest concern. Possibly, you intended to leave me in that cave, a prisoner, endangering my health and possibly my life, for the entire night --. That could have been - murder!"

"No!" The words burst from Camp's bloodless lips. His face was white as death. He stuttered. "I did - didn't - mean to l-leave you there. I was go-going to let you out v-very soon. Then I found that Ceddie, our cherub, must be there w-with you --"

Mr. and Mrs. Meredith were both on their feet now, pale and shaken. Neither spoke. Mr. Buddle stepped forward a pace. He looked like some avenging angel in his blue dressing gown, with one arm outstretched.

He barked out: "Go and fetch your master's picture, you stupid little man. You have it safely hidden, I'm sure. Is it in some safe and dry recess of that cave down below? Ah, I see it is!"

There was still no word from the Merediths. They seemed frozen in disbelief. Mrs. Meredith sank down on to the settee.

Charlie Camp, inarticulate, was trembling violently.

"Fetch the picture at once," ordered Mr. Buddle. It was the voice of authority, such as he was accustomed to use in the form rooms at Slade, with no thought that it could possibly be disobeyed. It was not disobeyed now.

"It's s-safe enough," mumbled Charlie Camp. "I'll g-get it."

Deflated, shaking, he fumbled with the door handle and was gone. The door clicked shut behind him.

Mr. Buddle looked at Mr. Meredith, a triumphant gleam in his eyes.

"Pilkington, the butler, makes a stately exit," said Mr. Buddle softly.

It was Mrs. Camp who came to the study, some fifteen minutes later, bearing the picture wrapped in a blanket. Ashen-faced, she moved to a chair, stripped off the blanket, and carefully placed the picture upright in the chair. Mr. Buddle, Mr. Meredith and Mrs. Meredith, sitting near the fire, watched her.

She turned to them, and spoke in a low voice.

"I'm so very sorry. I didn't know what Charlie was doing. He isn't a bad man. I knew he wanted us all to go back to Taunton. He did those things he did just to make you want to go back there. And then - he took the picture - he thought - oh, sir --" Her voice broke, and she fought for control. She was almost inaudible. "Oh, sir, you're not going to send for the police, are you? I couldn't stand it --"

Mr. Meredith shook his head.

"There is no question of that, Debby."

Mrs. Camp drew a sleeve across her eyes.

"Thank you, sir. You'll want Charlie to leave the house at once. I must go with him, too. After all, he

is my husband -- I don't think he's well -- he knew our cherub didn't like being here -- I'll go and pack our things."

She turned away. Mrs. Meredith was on her feet. She crossed the room to the shrunken figure of Debby.

"Oh, Debby, darling, of course you're not going. Is she Lionel? We're both so very, very sorry --"

She threw her arms round Debby's neck and burst into tears.

"Oh, missus --" Debby clung to her mistress, and both women sobbed.

Mrs. Meredith smoothed Debby's hair. "There, there, Debby, don't cry -- it's going to be all right --"

Mr. Buddle gazed into the fire. There was a glimmer in his eyes.

Mr. Meredith had risen from his chair. He cleared his throat. He spoke briskly.

"Pull yourself together, Debby. We know that you are not to blame. Neither you nor Charlie is going to leave before Christmas, at any rate. I'll talk the matter over with your mistress and with Mr. Buddle, and I'm sure we can think of something. I will see your husband tomorrow. You can dry your tears, Debby. You heard what I said. Christmas is a time for forgiving, and we will do our best to do that."

Mrs. Meredith said: "You heard what my husband said, Debby. Come on down to the kitchen. I'll make you a cup of strong tea."

Debby's sobs increased, and Mrs. Meredith led her gently from the



room. The door closed behind them.

Mr. Meredith took up his picture from the chair. The Rembrandt, with its vivid colours, seemed to be unharmed by its adventures. Mr. Meredith replaced it in the vacant space over his desk at the back of the room.

He came across, poked the fire into a comforting blaze, and sat down on the settee.

"Did you suspect Charlie Camp all the time?" asked Mr. Meredith.

Mr. Buddle replied after a moment's thought.

"Everything pointed to it, really. Somebody wanted to stop me from coming to Spider Point. After I arrived, somebody feared me enough to try to drive me away. I chatted with Mr. and Mrs. Shepherd and with Mr. Hart. They did not take me seriously. To them I was clearly just a schoolmaster whose powers had been exaggerated. The Coveney's struck me as unlikely to be the culprits. But the Camps knew, at first hand, what I had been able to achieve in the past. They alone knew of my modest successes, for I daresay that Mrs. Meredith, in particular, had often recalled those old adventures."

"That is true, of course. You don't think that Debby had any hand in the hauntings and the theft?" asked Mr. Meredith, incredulously.

"Certainly not. But she was a worried woman. She suspected that her husband was up to something. That was why, last night, she warned me to lock my bedroom door. I'll tell you of that episode later on . . ."

Mr. Meredith was watching him

with a troubled expression.

Mr. Buddle continued: "At Slade, it was clear that you suspected your nephew. You thought that only an educated man, with contacts in the wealthy collecting world - people who would pay a large sum for a picture of which they could never boast to their friends - could possibly steal a painting which is registered as your property. But it occurred to me that the culprit could be a simple, unimaginative man, who did not realise that such a work could never be sold on the open market."

He gnawed his lower lip.

"Somebody tried to scare me off from coming to Spider Point. That rather pointed to Camp, who knew my reputation. Then, when I was in the car with Camp, he said something which, at the time, I noted. He referred to 'messages from the other side' - the same expression which my telephone caller had used. It was not conclusive, but it made me decide to bear Mr. Camp in mind."

Mr. Meredith sighed.

"So you were not surprised that the culprit was Camp?"

Mr. Buddle lay back on his cushion, and gazed meditatively at the ceiling. He went on: "In the cave, I told your son that he might save me from something very unpleasant. I meant a long, long time in captivity. He did! Camp was shattered when he found that your son was missing as well. When he came to release us from the cave, I knew for certain that he was guilty."

There was a silence. Both men gazed into the leaping flames of the fire.

Mr. Meredith said: "Would he have stolen my picture?"

"He did steal your picture." Mr. Buddle regarded his host seriously. "I think he started the haunting business with the idea of making you decide to return to Taunton. He saw how easy it was. He took the picture, thinking to make money from its sale later on. I think that, just possibly, he might have changed his mind in a few days, and put it back. But I'm not sure."

"What do I do about the Camps?" Mr. Meredith asked. There was a note of appeal in his voice. "My wife has great affection for Debby. They have been with us for so long."

"Only you and Mrs. Meredith can decide that!" murmured Mr. Buddle. He added softly: "I am sure that Debby is guiltless, and, as for Camp, I assure you that I, who suffered a little at his hands, feel no

animus against him whatever. And it's Christmas, isn't it?"

Mr. Meredith gripped Mr. Buddle's hand.

"You are an understanding man, and a kind friend. I must tell the others that the picture has been returned. I shall not go into details."

Mr. Buddle smiled faintly, but made no rejoinder.

Mr. Meredith said, in the slow tones of reminiscence:

"There was a story once in the Magnet when Brian Mauleverer was turned out into the snow at Christmas time. He was a villain, and his villainy had been exposed. Yet it was a bit callous to turn him out in the snow at Christmas - or so it seemed to me."

"I'm sure you're right!" said Mr. Buddle.

\* \* \* \* \*

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# «THE SHARPSHOOTERS»

by W. T. THURBON

"From the fury of the Norsemen, Good Lord deliver us". So ran the prayer of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers as they watched fearfully for the dragon-prowed long ships of the Danish invaders.

55 B.C. and 1066 are dates still probably known to most schoolboys even in modern schools, in spite of the trendy attempts of Shirley Williams and others of like thought to improve (?) our educational system. For those two dates mark invasions of Britain, and invasion has been a recurrent phobia in British history over the centuries. The Spanish Armada, the invasion fleet whose covering force was so decisively defeated by Hawke at Quiberon Bay, and particularly the Napoleonic invasion fleet that was foiled by "those far distant, storm beaten ships" whose mission was completed so gloriously at Trafalgar were all the culminating points of invasion fears. This fear has, in fact, been a perennial phobia throughout our history. In the early years of Napoleon III it led to the volunteer movement in England, and produced one of Tennyson's less memorable poems "Riflemen Form".

These fears were illustrated in the latter part of the 19th century and the early years of the present century by a flood of invasion stories. The genre is usually regarded as beginning with Colonel Chesney's "Battle of Dorking", a warning story of the invasion and conquest of Britain by the Germans, published in Blackwoods Magazine in 1871, shortly after the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War. This story proved a sensational success, raising questions about the safety of the Country, and gravely annoying Mr. Gladstone, whose Government, like our present rulers begrudged expenditure on defence. This story was the first of many in the succeeding forty years. In the earlier stories the enemy was usually France or Russia. But when the German Emperor began to build up his fleet, and particularly in the early 1900's when the Entente Cordiale with France was being formed, more and more the enemy faced in these stories was Germany.

Few of these stories had much merit. H. G. Wells in "The War in the Air" foretold the overthrow of the battleship by air power, forty years or more before Midway and the Coral Sea; just as he foretold the tank in his 1903 short story "The coming of the Landships". But while others, and one in particular, were more sensational, only one became a classic: Erskine Childers' "Riddle of the Sands", a story of espionage and sailing that has never been out of print since its first publication in 1903.

Naturally the Northcliffe press joined in this popular field. The most famous, or notorious, was written in 1906 by William Le Queux, a writer of sensational stories of the time, claimed to be Queen Alexandra's favourite novelist! This was "The Invasion of 1910", the classic standard story of German invasion and British defeat. Northcliffe "puffed" this with all the resources at his command.

Naturally this type of story spread from the adult novel, intended to warn the



nation against the peril of invasion, to the various boys' papers. "The Captain", "Chums", and the Northcliffe papers all published these. The bulk of the Northcliffe stories were based on Le Queux's "Invasion of 1910", but with the ending changed to show the final defeat of the invaders. "John Tregellis" was the leading author. Turner, in "Boys will be Boys", says they only appeared as end of paper serials and thought they were not of great interest. He corrects this in the later edition, for in fact the first of the "Tregellis" series was launched in "The Boys' Friend" with very full publicity, and was the main feature for its early instalments. This first series, "Britain Invaded", "Britain at Bay" and "Britain's Revenge" commenced in the "Boys Friend" on 26 May, 1906, the stories running altogether consecutively from No. 259 to 357. They were subsequently reprinted as end page serials first in the early blue Gems and then in the Marvel during 1913-14. They were also published, somewhat abridged, in the Boys' Friend Library. The heroes were two cadets, Aubrey Villiers (known as "Sam Slick") and his brother Stephen, of Greyfriars School. Not, be it noted Charles Hamilton's school. That famous academy was to come later. The second series of stories followed on "Britain's Revenge". This time the hero was Jimmy Dagers, a boy scout of the Curlew Patrol, whose adventures were recorded in "Kaiser or King", "The Capture of London" and "The Flying Armada". Both series followed the same pattern: invasion and partial conquest of London; national uprising and defeat of the invader; final counter-invasion and conquest of Germany by means of a fleet of aircraft.

But I want to deal with another paper, Cassells rival to the Northcliffe papers, "Chums". "Chums" joined in the invasion story spate; but in doing so they pulled off a publicity stunt, what we would now call a "promotional gimmick" which must have turned Northcliffe green with envy, and left many red faces in his advertising staff.

"Chums" published its quota of invasion stories. The late Peard Sutherland in an early Digest Annual, in Herbert Leckonby's days, gave a list of the "Chums" invasion stories as follows:

1. The Peril of the Motherland - April-Sept. 1908. Enemy Russia.
2. Vengeance of the Motherland - Sept. 1908 - May 1909 (sequel to 1)
3. The Great Mutiny of 1911 - June 1910 - Sept. 1910
4. The Terror from the east - Sept. 1910 - Feb. 1911 (sequel)

Here the enemy was first mutinous Indians, later joined by China and Japan. Now the author turned at last to the German threat in:

5. The Swoop of the Eagle - Oct. 1912 - March 1913
6. Lions Teeth and Eagle's Claw - Dec. 1913 - April 1914

Sutherland says the author of all six stories was Captain Frank H. Shaw, although he wrote Nos. 3 and 4 under the pen name of "Frank Cleveland".

Incidentally we mustn't confuse the Swoop of the Eagle with "The Swoop", P. G. Wodehouse's attempt to "guy" the invasion story, which was reprinted in the "Digest" a few years ago.

But "Chums" real contribution to all the invasion fears and discussions was the "Sharpshooters' League", with which they pulled a fast one over the Northcliffe people.

Those members of the fast fading band among us who remember the early years of the century, before 1914, will have, some of us rather vague, memories of Lord Roberts (Kipling's "Bobs"), who had learned the lessons of the then recent South African War better than either the politicians or most of his fellow soldiers, was campaigning for National Service, warning of the danger of Germany, "Germany always advances" he said, arousing as much fury among the then politicians as reference to Russian arms does in Left Wing M.P's today. But he also pleaded with his fellow countrymen to learn to shoot, to be a nation of citizen riflemen, as the Boers had been who held out so long against the British Army in South Africa, and he encouraged the development of the Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs.

Who, in "Chums" editorial office, first had the inspiration to form the "Sharpshooters" is not recorded. It could well have been Ernest H. Robinson, who was stamp collection editor of the paper, and a well-known rifle shot who had shot for England in the Elcho shield and had won the long distance rifle shooting cup at Bisley. He was the author of a book on rifle shooting which went through several editions, "Rifle and Carton", and he was to become "Chief Sharpshooter".

It was in April 1910 that "Chums" began to urge its readers to take up rifle shooting. Wrote the Editor "I would like to think that every young fellow was learning to handle a rifle properly, so that Lord Roberts' idea of a nation of citizen riflemen might come about during that grand old soldier's lifetime". In 1911 "Chums" launched the idea of the formation of a "Sharpshooters' League", with Robinson as its Chief. Anyone owning, or having the use of a rifle or air rifle was urged to send in his name and join the League, whose objects were to attain proficiency in shooting and encourage others to do the same - the league had a button-hold badge and a motto "To aim straight and to live straight" - all very admirable in 1911.

References to the Sharpshooters continued to appear in "Chums" during 1912 and 1913, but one is given the impression that the idea was rather cooling off as the novelty wore away. But then came August 1914 and the outbreak of the Great War. Immediately the idea of the League was enthusiastically revived, and a series of articles on shooting with rifle and air rifle appeared in "Chums" during 1914 and 1915. A Committee, including a number of men prominent in the shooting world was formed. Robinson became Organising Secretary. Sharpshooters could be formed into companies of from ten to twenty members. Proposals to form a uniformed cadet organisation were not followed up, and Sharpshooters wore only the badge in their buttonholes. A boy who formed a section of ten members became a "pioneer Sharpshooter", and the editor reported the formation of sections or companies in various parts of the country. At the same time, to avoid any risk of rivalry with existing boys' movements - and consequential possible loss of readers - the suggestion was made that sections of Sharpshooters could be formed in Boy Scout Troops or Boys' Brigade Companies. "Chums" certainly gave much publicity to the Sharpshooters during this early period. The movement probably attained its high point in 1915 when a national Sharpshooters competition in Marksmanship was held. This was divided into miniature and air rifle sections. The targets were printed on the front cover of four issues of "Chums". The rules provided for sets of these four targets to be shot in the presence of witnesses and sent to "Chums" office. Rather optimistically they permitted the sending in of as many sets of targets as the

competitors chose, the Editor presumably hoping that competitors would buy extra copies of the relevant issues of "Chums" for the purpose. The competition was declared by the Editor to have been very successful, although he expressed disappointment at the small number of entries for the air rifle section. We have not, however, traced any reference to the actual number of entries.

Naturally "Chums" had to publish tales about the Sharpshooters. The Editorial announcement about stories of "Sharpshooter Smith" claimed that the author, Mr. Wingrove Willson (real name Walter H. Light, see Lofts and Adley) "was so struck with the idea of the Sharpshooters' League that he could not get the matter out of his mind. It seemed so excellent in every way that he wondered no-one had thought of it before". The hero of the series was John Thompson Smith, "Sharpshooter Smith". He made his first appearance in a story of that title which tells how Smith, a keen sharpshooter, becomes a new senior at Hartlip College. His interest in shooting at first aroused only either contempt or indifference. Challenged to show his marksmanship by shooting at some live pigeons he declines to kill a living creature unnecessarily, but proves his skill by shooting a small projecting knob from a fence. However this arouses the anger of the school gardener who attacks Smith. The school captain, Hardy, intervenes and is forced to deal drastically with the gardener. Shortly afterwards, however, a fire breaks out at the school at night. One of the Masters has a pet dog, which is trapped in his room. Hardy climbs down a rope to rescue the dog. However, the gardener, who is still madly angry with Hardy over his forcible intervention, climbs a ladder and tries to cut the rope up which Hardy is climbing to safety. But Sharpshooter Smith has his air rifle with him. Slipping a pellet into the breech he takes a quick aim and shoots the gardener in the wrist, causing him to drop his knife. Thus the school is converted to the Sharpshooters and soon all the seniors have joined the league.

There were five other stories in the series. In story two the school league is threatened with closure following complaints by a nearby farmer that his chickens have been killed by the shooters. But Smith proves the killing was done by a wild cat; shooting the cat which is savaging the farmer's small son while doing so.

In story three Smith uses his marksmanship to save one of the sharpshooters who has got into bad company with the school "fast set".

Story No. 4 was somewhat lurid. While visiting a circus some of the boys, including Smith and Hardy, interfere with an Indian who is cruelly treating a dog. The Indian attempts to knife Hardy and is knocked out for his pains. Later, as they are leaving the Circus, Hardy becomes separated from his friends and is stalked, and knocked out by the Indian, who is the circus snake charmer. When Hardy comes round he finds himself tied to a tent pole and about to be attacked by one of the snake charmers snakes. But Smith, never far separated from his trusty rifle, has missed his friend and returns to the circus to find him. Once again his marksmanship is needed and with his extremely lethal air rifle he shoots the snake just in time to save Hardy - although this time it does take him three shots. Story No. 5 turns on some valuable papers belonging to one of Smith's chums, stolen by a rascally Master. Smith, suspecting the man, hides in a tree overlooking the Master's window. Here he sees and hears the Master bargaining with an equally rascally stockbroker (why



are stockbrokers always bad characters in school stories?). But rogue tries to out-rogue rogue, and the watching Smith sees the stockbroker doping or poisoning the Master's drink. Taking careful aim he shoots the glass out of the Master's hands. Both men dash out to try to discover who has overheard them. But Smith has dodged down the tree and a quick dash to the Master's study recovers the stolen papers. Next morning the school is mystified by the disappearance of the Master.

In story six, and final, Smith and his section shoot a carrier pigeon sent off by a German spy and capture the spy.

So ends the story of "Sharpshooter Smith". For their time, and bearing in mind their special object, they are not bad tales. As school stories they could rank with those of many of the Hamilton substitute writers - remembering too they were written in 1915 in the early years of the Great War there is also an echo of one of Henty's heroes in Sharpshooter Smith himself.

As to the League it continued to be referred to in "Chums" during the rest of the War from time to time, but I think the "great shooting competition" saw its peak. There was an attempt to keep it going just after the end of the Great War, but the general war weariness of the time, and the difficulties created by the new firearms legislation that came into effect caused the League to fold.

But it was an interesting, and successful, attempt to "cash in" on the pre-1914 invasion fear.

It is an interesting afterthought that while before 1914 there was a very real fear of Invasion, during the interwar period there seemed no interest at all in this - those people who thought of another war, most people preferring not to think about it all, were obsessed with the risk from the air. It was only after the fall of France in 1940 that invasion became a real scare during 1940 and 41.

In conclusion I express my warm thanks to Jack Doupe for the invaluable information supplied by him from his collection of "Chums".

\* \* \* \* \*

JAMES HODGE, LONG ASHTON, BRISTOL, sends his greetings and good wishes to all Digest readers and in particular to our Editor and the London Club.

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Still interested in buying copies of School Friend, years 1924 to 1929. Very Happy Christmas to all readers of the Digest.

MR. NORMAN LINFORD, 18 THE GLADE, STREETLY

NR. SUTTON COLDFIELD, WEST MIDLANDS

=====
Seasonal Greetings Editor and Madam, Staff, readers, friends, everywhere, and a thought for "absent" friends.

BERT HOLMES

# King of Sherwood

by JACK OVERHILL

I first read of the adventures of Robin Hood and his Merry Men in a paper-covered book at school. The story was one dear to the heart of a small boy before the first world war: Robin, the rightful Earl of Huntingdon - a small town only sixteen miles from Cambridge, where I lived - robbed of his inheritance and outlawed, fleeing to the greenwood and becoming the leader of a band of stout-hearted men who, with long bow and broad sword, fought to free themselves from the Norman yoke. Their battle-cry was 'Sweet Liberty or Death' and like a true Saxon (I was fair-haired and lived in Saxon Street!) I was ready to shout it as I lined up with them against the tyrant invaders trying to enslave them.

The book had black-and-white illustrations: Robin Hood's meeting with Little John on a narrow bridge, on which they fought with quarter-staffs rather than give way to each other; Friar Tuck carrying Robin Hood on his back across a stream in which he dropped him; Alan-a-Dale in distress over a fair lady; the Sheriff of Nottingham tied back to front on a horse because of his villainy; the outlaws storming a Norman castle. Over all reigned the charm of sweet Maid Marion who, in a magical way, hallowed the lives of those to whom she was Queen.

After reading the book I couldn't have enough of Robin Hood. I went to Coe Fen and Sheep's Green near my home to cut sticks from the trees to fashion into bows and arrows and to play at the satisfying pastime of killing Norman knights. The more I killed, if only in imagination, the merrier. The drawback was that I didn't wear clothes of Lincoln green. How heartily I wished I did.

Books about Robin Hood were what I wanted. Paying a penny fee to join the Public Library, I got a catalogue and searched through it for them. Alast, titles were no guide. Under The Greenwood Tree was a love-story for grown-ups; so were others that I thought dealt with the heroes of Sherwood Forest. There were also tales of out-laws that didn't interest me.

At last, I came across a bulky volume called The Life And Adventures Of Robin Hood. The book was a disappointment. It told me about things I didn't want to know: Maid Marion going to live in a nunnery and the death of Robin Hood through the treachery of a Prioress - old and ugly according to an illustration. I was filled with gloom. In a vague way, I had felt that Robin Hood was immortal. To learn that he had died so cruelly was shattering. I shut the book out of my mind and again he became alive and vital, eating venison, drinking nut-brown ale, merrymaking, a champion of King Richard the Lionheart, an enemy of base Prince John, a terror to the Norman foe, the defender of the right, the dispenser of justice, the friend of the poor.

My devotion to Robin Hood showed itself in a long poem I wrote. The first verse ran:

How often I think of good Robin Hood,

Of jolly old Friar Tuck, too,  
They used to sport in the greenwood,  
And shoot from their bows of yew.

Further evidence of esteem was the purchase for sixpence each (part of my earnings as an errand-boy out of school hours at three shillings a week) of two empty V-shaped, ornamental sweet tins from separate shops, portraying in colour, one on each side, Robin Hood, Main Marion, Little John and Friar Tuck. Holding nicknacks, the tins stood on the kitchen mantel-shelf for years.

When I was twelve (1915), I saw hanging from a clip attached to a line in Dobbie Loker's paper-shop window, a penny copy of the Aldine Library called ROBIN HOOD AND THE WRESTLER.  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches long,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide, it had an attractive coloured-cover of the moon shining on a castle moat. Out of a window, leaned a ginger moustached Norman knight in armour and red cloak, swinging a battle-axe over his shoulder at Robin Hood hanging, sword in hand, from a rope on level with him. Clad in Lincoln green, skin boots up to his calves, goose feather in his hat, dagger at his belt, horn slung over one shoulder, the King of Sherwood looked the picture of daring. Underneath were the words: 'Sir Brian delivered a slashing blow with his battleaxe.'

I was quick to buy the book. Never had I read a more thrilling story. In speech and action the characters diffused the air of the middle ages. Knights, men-at-arms, and outlaws were vibrant with life. And, happily, so was Robin Hood at the end of the story.

The book had 32 pages and by good fortune I obtained five more of the same issue which, I learned later, was composed of fourteen numbers, published 1912/14 - reprints of an edition of 88 numbers published 1901/03. Dr. Jack Doupe has the complete edition and for readers interested in statistics he has listed the authors and the number of their contributions:

Ogilvie Mitchell	.	.	18
Escott Lynn	.	.	15
Alfred S. Burrage	.	.	13
H. Philpott Wright	.	.	9
G. C. Glover	.	.	9
Charles E. Brand	.	.	7
Richard Mant	.	.	7
Singleton Pound	.	.	4
A. W. Bradley	.	.	3
Roderick Dare	.	.	2
(No author named: No. 84)	.	.	1

Alfred S. Burrage contributed the first ten and 14, 17, 18. Jack thinks these can be read as an entity, particularly the first ten. Ogilvie Mitchell wrote a solid block, 55 to 75 inclusive and, he says, they also have an elusive continuity. W. O. G. Lofts, President of the Cambridge Old Boys' Books Club, says Robert Prowse always signed himself R.P. and probably did all the very artistic covers.

I liked the other five stories as much as I did ROBIN HOOD AND THE WRESTLER and on a cold night while reading one of them when my father was out,



I let the fire go out in our kitchen-workshop without noticing it. He didn't jaw me when he came in, simply said: 'Well, if that ain't the Daddy!' - a favourite saying of his to express astonishment.

ROBIN HOOD AND THE WRESTLER, because of the fine cover-picture, was always my favourite and when I was nineteen I read the story again. Its charm had gone and I wasn't tempted to read the others, but as the years slipped by I got a lot of pleasure in looking at their coloured covers. Part of a little store of old boys' books, they always cheered me when I was in the doldrums. They began to fall to pieces; I stuck them together and put them in a tin trunk. Sixty-three years on I had an urge to read them again. The pages a faded yellow, the print faint, it was an eye-straining job that took some time. Here are short summaries of the stories.

ROBIN HOOD AND THE WRESTLER by H. Philpott Wright

Bede, a sturdy Saxon wrestler, thinks he's been cruelly used by Robin Hood. Seeking revenge, he leads Sir Brian de Bec of Castle Black and 21 men-at-arms to the house of Ozmund the smith in Moss Heath, where Robin Hood, Little John and Will Scarlet are staying the night. Robin Hood is recruiting men for his band, depleted in attacks on Norman castles, and is fifty miles from his camp in Sherwood Forest. The outlaws, aided by Ozmund and Saxon serfs, beat off their assailants and the villagers, 35 men, women and children, knowing Sir Brian will exact vengeance, go there with them, harassed by the Normans. (The difficulty of providing for their needs is dismissed by the author with 'It is not our intention to give a detailed description of the journey with its narrow escapes.')

Unknown as the instigator of the attack at Moss Heath, Bede joins Robin Hood's band to fulfil his purpose.

Sir Brian, noted for his evil deeds, claims 500 nobles as Lord of Ladywell, a village on the Leicester border. The villagers refuse to pay. The rightful owner is Sir Basil Mountfort, fighting with King Richard in the Holy Land. After much slaughter, Sir Brian takes twenty prisoners, hangs three and is intent on hanging the rest. Robin Hood hears of their plight and attacks Castle Black. Aided by a thunder-storm, the outlaws drain the moat in a night and storm the castle. (The author halts in his story to admire his own handiwork by praising Robin Hood for what he thinks was a brilliant performance.)

The battle, excitingly described, leads to some of the outlaws being trapped in the tower. Robin Hood descends on a rope to find ways of rescuing them. Sir Brian appears at a window and delivers a slashing blow with his battleaxe. Robin Hood avoids it, slashes Sir Brian's face with his sword and climbs in the room. Sir Brian has disappeared. He releases his men and they search for him. Bede follows Robin Hood in a room, slams the door and cries: 'At last, we are alone, you thief and murderer. Draw and defend yourself.'

The pair are engaged in mortal combat when Sir Brian and several of his men rush in the room. Sir Brian, apparently indifferent to a sword-slashed face, thinks Bede betrayed him at Moss Heath.

'Ha, dog eats dog,' he cries. 'Let us help each to his meal.'

Robin Hood and Bede accept the challenge and in the fierce fight that follows, Sir Brian and a number of his men are killed. Little John and several foresters dash in the room. A dying Norman asks speech of Robin Hood. He tells him that Neal the Devil, a Norman outlaw, had disguised himself and his men in Lincoln green and sacked the house of Edmund, the rich Franklin of Dotswold, killed all except his daughter Frida and three servants. He'd released the servants to spread the story that it was the evil work of Robin Hood. Frida was still held captive.

'Woe is me!' cries Bede.

He is Sir Edwin Dotswold, a Crusader knighted by King Richard in the Holy Land, oldest son of Edmund, the Franklin.

THE OUTLAW OF THE FENS - a sequel to BEDE THE WRESTLER by  
H. Philpott Wright.

Neal the Devil, a cruel Norman outlaw, transfers his base from Yorkshire to the Lincolnshire Fens. He sends Robin Hood a letter and threatens to hang him for besmirching his name unless he publicly withdraws his charges. Robin Hood replies in a similar vein and the two sides meet in combat on neutral ground. Neal and his 400 men suffer heavily and retreat. They swoop on Robin Hood's camp in Sherwood Forest, slay the few men in charge and carry off the women, including Maid Marion. Robin Hood and his band go in search of them. There is treachery on the way.

Robin Hood and Sir Edwin Dotswold (Bede the Wrestler), who has joined forces with him, are attacked by five of Neal's mounted knights when alone together. Four of the Normans are quickly despatched. Robin Hood is engaged with the fifth, a skilful and courageous fighter who had been with King Richard through the first Crusade, and feeling he has met a foeman worthy of his steel, he cries: 'Stand back, Sir Edwin Dotswold, man to man is fair. If this fellow beats me, let him go.' In gentlemanly fashion, Sir Edwin says: 'Nay I should not presume to interfere.' The Norman throws back his vizor. Sir Edwin cries out: 'Sir Arnold Fosdyke!'

Sir Arnold has saved Sir Edwin from the sword of Saladin's emir. He'd joined Neal's band like many Norman knights because perfidious Prince John had given his lands to one of his favourites during his absence in the Holy Land. He changes sides and becomes an ally in the enemy camp. Robin Hood and his men catch up with Neal; there is more fighting; Neal retreats. The plunder is recovered, but Neal still holds the womenfolk captive. He is tracked to his stronghold in the centre of a large mere. Robin Hood steals his boats, uses them as landing craft and storms it. Sir Edwin shows himself as Bede the Wrestler by sending the gigantic mail-clad Neal flying through the air like a shot from a catapult.

Neal is not dead. Sword in hand, he faces Robin Hood, says 'Have at you dog of a Saxon,' attacks in a blind fury, leaves himself open and is mortally wounded.

Only twenty of Neal's men are left after the battle. They are freed. All the women are saved without harm. Sir Arnold Fosdyke is prominent in their rescue and Frida becomes his wife.

## THE WITCH OF EPPING by Charles E. Brand

Robin Hood and members of his band succour a wounded knight, Sir Hubert Aylmer, in Epping Forest. He is taking a verbal message from King Richard in the Holy Land to the Earl of Essex in London and has been attacked by men-at-arms in the service of Sir Stephen Waldegrave, who thinks the message is likely to affect his relations with Prince John. Robin Hood is entrusted with the task of king's messenger, the knight giving him a signet ring to prove his faith. He is captured by Sir Stephen's men and about to be tortured in his castle to make him reveal the message when the torturer falls dead with a black arrow in his brain. Robin Hood's men miraculously appear, there is a fierce fight, the Normans are beaten and Robin Hood rides on to London. He takes shelter from a storm at night in the cavern of Merlina, an ugly old witch. (The author advises his readers not to shelter under a tree in a thunder-storm, it might be struck by lightning.) Merlina knows he is Robin Hood and says: 'Fix your eyes on me and I will foretell the hour and manner of your death.' Contemptuously, he watches while she talks in a strange tongue amid the smoke of the fire. Three Normans steal up behind him unawares, one raises his dagger to strike, there is a crash of thunder, a flash of lightning and the cavern collapses into splintered rocks. Robin Hood falls senseless. He comes round to find the witch gone and two dead knights beside him. 'I faith,' he mutters, 'treachery', and concludes she is in league with Sir Stephen Waldegrave.

Merlina calls on Sir Stephen. He says her spells have been of no avail against Robin Hood. To demonstrate her skill, she throws water over a mirror hanging on the wall and, muttering, sprinkles grey powder over the surface. A thin cloud of steam arises, clears, and in the polished surface of the mirror there is a picture, not of Robin Hood as she intended, but of Sir Stephen Waldegrave, a black arrow in his brain, lying dead in a forest glade. He is furious, but she wheedles into his favour again, and promises him the body of Robin Hood for shelter in the castle. He agrees.

The story sidetracks to the revels of Norman barons at Sir Morris Baynard's castle in London in the presence of Prince John. Robin Hood and eighty of his men, masked and armed, put in an appearance to champion the cause of Sir Hubert Aylmer, recovered from his wounds, who is there to claim his bride Editha, daughter of Sir Bevis Turner, who wants her to marry Sir Guy Domville. Robin Hood does so to the consternation of Prince John and the barons. After defying the Prince, Robin Hood and his men, threatening death to those that stand in their way, depart as easily as they had come. Sir Hubert and Editha marry the next day. His lands are seized by Prince John, but they live in a castle at Maldon, graciously given them by the Earl of Essex.

Sir Hubert and Sir Guy Domville meet in the lists. Sir Guy is slain.

Sir Stephen Waldegrave comes on the scene. He has imprisoned Editha's father, is about to hang him and seize his estates. Robin Hood and Sir Hubert attack his castle at Stamford. During the fighting the castle catches on fire. Sir Stephen and Merlina seek refuge in a thick-walled chamber. He threatens to kill her for not destroying Robin Hood. She says 'Fool, you know not to whom you speak.' He says 'I know only too well I speak to the witch of Epping.' She says 'Proud baron that you



are, you may address me by another name.'

'By what?'

'Mother!'

He recoils in horror.

'Are you mad?' he cries hoarsely.

She pours out her story. Young and beautiful, she had been his father's mistress. His father's wife had borne no children and he was supposed to be the offspring of their union.

'Enough,' cries the baron. 'While we talk we are letting the chance of escape go by.'

She leads him to safety through secret passages she had used when indulging in clandestine meetings with his father. Not wanting to preserve her life she perishes in the flames.

He escapes from the burning castle to meet his death shortly afterwards from a black arrow piercing his brain in a forest glade as Merlin had inadvertently shown in the mirror.

FOR RICHARD AND THE RIGHT by Charles E. Brand

Friar Tuck brings in a captive - Solomon of Sheffield, a rich Jew, in great distress. His daughter Mirian has been abducted by Sir Guy Montferris, the Baron of Roystone. She had once tended Robin Hood when he was ill in her father's house. He releases the Jew and champions his cause.

The matter resolves itself into a trial by combat, Robin Hood, as an unknown knight, wearing arms and armour provided by Solomon, defeating Montferris in the lists at York, presided over by Prince John, who saves Montferris from death by throwing down his warden. Robin Hood treats Prince John with disdain: says he intends to burn Montferris's castle about his ears, swears to rescue Mirian and rides away on the horse of his vanquished adversary.

Walking around the castle walls, Friar Tuck sees a female waving from a turret window. She throws him a piece of linen with a message on it asking for help. In a nearby forest that night - a stormy one - the Friar comes to the refuge of a Saracen hermit and shelters there. The Saracen, in the pay of Montferris, gives him a glass of red wine and throws a powder on the fire burning in a brazier. The beautiful face of Mirian appears in the grey cloud that arises from it. Faced with trickery and treachery, Friar Tuck strikes out fiercely with his quarter-staff. A mocking laugh rings out, there is a crash of thunder and he falls senseless.

A messenger arrives from Leofric, the Saxon, to say Friar Tuck is dead, but Friar Tuck turns up alive - and hungry - in garments of the grave. He'd been taken to Montferris's castle in Roystone and had escaped.

The scene shifts to Mirian in a room in the tower - captive ten days and still resisting the advances of Montferris who wants to marry her. Angered, he becomes

threatening. She leaps to the open window to throw herself out. The door opens and Robin Hood appears with Little John, Friar Tuck, Will Scarlet, Much the Miller, and Roger Derwent. They had got in the castle by slipping through the open wicket-gate when the sentinel had his back turned. After a wordy duel between Robin Hood and Montferris, the pair are left on their own to square accounts with each other. Montferris is killed.

The six outlaws are intercepted by forty Normans in the courtyard. Protecting Mirian, they fight their way out and the Saracen, in spite of his scimitar, meets his doom by a blow from Friar Tuck's quarter-staff. Outside the castle, Robin Hood blows his bugle, a score of foresters leap out of a grove of trees and with a flight of arrows, join in the fight, which ends in victory.

Dressed as a monk, Robin Hood takes Mirian to her father in York. He is waylaid by men-at-arms as he leaves the house. Taken before the governor of York, he is suspected of not being a priest and connected with the death of Montferris. He is put in a filthy cell. An arrow comes through the window. On it is a piece of parchment outlining plans for his escape. Putting them into effect, he renders his gaoler senseless, exchanges clothes and slides down a rope, conveniently hanging from a lower tower, to two of his band waiting with three horses. They gallop to freedom.

#### THE BRANDED ARROW by Escott Lynn

Edwin, son of Thane Alfred of Ashburn, is riding through Sherwood Forest with Leofric and his daughter Edith, to whom he is betrothed, and four Saxon servants, when they are attacked by a dozen men-at-arms, retainers of De Maulac, a Norman knight known as the Wolf of Blackstone. Leofric is killed. Robin Hood and his men come to the rescue. Edwin finds the arrow that killed Leofric and vows vengeance.

Leofric's house is attacked by De Maulac. Some of the servants are killed, others are taken to the town gaol. Robin Hood and Edwin, disguised, go to Ashburn to rescue them. This leads to a brush with the Normans, but they succeed in releasing the prisoners - Edith's maid Ellen is one of them.

Edwin is determined to state his case to Prince John. Against Robin Hood's advice, he sets out with Edith, her maid Ellen, and a few servants. Robin Hood and fifty men escort them to the Derbyshire confines of the forest and wait to see what comes of the attempt.

Edwin and his party are ambushed by De Maulac's men-at-arms. Edwin is felled by a mace and left for dead, one servant is killed and several are wounded, Edith and Ellen are abducted and confined in Blackstone Castle.

Tended by a cowherd and his wife, Edwin recovers and rejoins Robin Hood. Disguised as a shepherd, he makes his way in the castle and sees Edith and her maid, thus knowing for certain they are there.

A week's feasting takes place in Ashburn. Prince John is in attendance at Blackstone Castle. Edwin goes to the castle and denounces De Maulac as a murderer and abductor. He is fortunate in getting away with his life and only does

so with the aid of Robin Hood.

A tournament is held in Derby. An unknown knight - Edwin in disguise - challenges De Maulac and they meet in the lists. De Maulac is defeated and saved by Prince John throwing down his baton. The affair ends in a riot. Robin Hood and his band, disguised, are there in full force and there is a stirring fight, both sides suffering heavily. The outlaws draw the Normans into the forest; they are defeated and wearing the dress of their beaten foes, Robin Hood and his men enter the castle as De Maulac's men-at-arms. The ruse succeeds, there is more fighting, and the Normans overwhelmed, Robin Hood and several others hunt for De Maulac. A piercing shriek rings out from a room. They break in. De Maulac stands with a blood-dripping dagger in his left hand and a crossbow in his right. A female figure crouches before him. On the floor lies another woman, evidently stabbed. He fits an arrow to his bow and shoots at Edwin. The bolt does no harm and he is made a prisoner.

De Maulac had threatened Edith with death as she would not consent to be his wife; he had struck at her with the dagger, Ellen had thrown herself before her mistress and received the blow.

Edwin examines the arrow. It is identical with the one that killed Leofric. De Maulac is hanged from the battlements, the arrow sent into his body. The castle is plundered and set on fire.

Thanks to Friar Tuck's surgical skill and a good constitution Ellen recovers and Edwin and Edith marry.

#### THE KNIGHT OF THE FOREST by Escott Lynn

Robin Hood rescues a wounded Norman knight, who is being attacked by men-at-arms in Sherwood Forest. He is a Crusader just returned from Palestine and he's suffered a number of such attacks since landing in England. Rumour saying he was dead, Prince John, although knowing that to be untrue, had ceded his estates to a relative. He accepts Robin Hood's invitation to stay with him and his band awhile.

Thorkyn, of Chaddesden, comes to tell Robin Hood that the Baron Roger de Rainault, of Nottingham and Derby, had arrived with 100 men-at-arms and taken possession of the town. Two of his men had been murdered for cheating an innkeeper and insulting Gaffer Jean's daughter. De Rainault had reacted by imposing a fine of 5000 marks on the people with the threat of hanging every Saxon in the town unless it is paid in two days. He was intent on extortion and cruelty.

Friar Tuck, on a visit to Dale Abbey, is one of the prisoners De Rainault has taken and put in the town gaol and by a trick Robin Hood and three of his men, disguised, enter the prison at night and release them. This leads to hard and bitter fighting in which all Robin Hood's band is involved. Hard pressed they are on the verge of defeat but the Crusader arrives with retainers of the Earl of Witton - his oldest friend - and the Normans are beaten.

The Crusader has with him a son of the Earl, an old friend, who has changed from the bold and lusty lad he knew when he went away; his once masculine figure is that of a young woman, he's rather timid and shudders at the sight of blood.



De Rainault goes to Prince John in Sheffield to complain of Robin Hood's activities in Chaddesden. Robin Hood and the Crusader learn of this and follow him. After De Rainault has stated his case, the Crusader exposes him. Prince John is angry at De Rainault's extorting money from the people - that meant there was less for him to extort. The Crusader challenges De Rainault to trial by combat and when they meet in the lists he reveals himself to the Prince as Sir William Lancy, knighted by Richard the Lionheart, in the Holy Land. He vanquishes De Rainault and is about to dash his brains in with a battleaxe when Prince John throws down his warden. The Prince makes restitution and the Crusader's estates, including Chaddesden Castle, are returned to him. De Rainault is outlawed and banished from the kingdom. As he gallops away with his followers, one of Robin Hood's band sends a bowshot after him; it strikes home, but armour protected De Rainault is unhurt. That causes a riot. Robin Hood is recognized and captured and handed over to several of De Rainault's men for a reward of 100 crowns. Robert, now the Crusader's page, sees this happen, and two days later, when Robin Hood is about to be tortured in Rainault's castle, Little John, the Crusader and several others burst in the room - Robert of the Marsh, one of De Rainault's retainers, ill-treated by his master, had let them in the castle by lowering the drawbridge and opening the gates.

The Torturer, pierced by an arrow, falls dead. Little John is about to kill De Rainault with a blow from a mace but the Crusader says: 'He is a kinsman of mine; I would not that he should die in the midst of his infamy. Spare me his life and a hundred nobles are yours.' Little John agrees when two runlets of wine are added to the ransom. De Rainault goes through a postern door and leaves the castle.

Taken by surprise, the defenders of the castle are soon overcome.

Walking through the forest after they leave, Robin Hood and the Crusader come across the dead bodies of De Rainault and Richard of the Marsh. The pair had met and to avenge himself Richard had attacked his master; in the duel, sword versus battleaxe, Richard wielding the latter, each had received a mortal wound.

Robert the page is not the Crusader's old friend Robert, but his young sister, the Lady Isobel, who has loved and prayed for him since he went away five years ago when she was fourteen. She had played the part of her brother to be near him and to help him.

The Crusader rejoices.

A speedy wedding is arranged.

Reflections:

The authors, as narrators, make frequent appearance as commentators: fashionable in their day, but jarring now.

The dialogue is often an oration.

A description of Castle Black says it is on a slight eminence; later, when attached, it is (surely not!) in a hollow.

Robin Hood's band composed of 500 men! Neal the Devil's 400!

A claim of 500 nobles (originally £166) made against a few serfs. (The noble was first struck nearly 150 years later.)

The outlaws disguise themselves by wearing long cloaks concealing a six-foot bow, quiver of arrows, battleaxe, mace, sword, dagger. It didn't need a glimpse of Lincoln green to give them away, nor the goose feathers in their hats.

The defenders of Norman castles; there were plenty about - Prince John had seventy-two - pour boiling lead on the attackers. Lead was rare and expensive, boiling water would have done as well.

Richard the First was in the Third Crusade (1189), not the First Crusade (1096). In keeping with tradition, the writers pay homage to him - a bad son, a bad husband, a bad king. He was only in England twice, once for his coronation and once to raise money. He didn't like England, said he'd sell London if he could find a bidder. He ordered the massacre of the 2,700 survivors of the garrison of Acre, their wives and children with them, as he couldn't come to terms with Saladin over their ransom. He was too kingly to wear disguise convincingly - at great cost by way of ransom to the English people.

But no more carping about trifles. H. Philpott Wright, Charles E. Brand, and Escott Lynn crossed and recrossed one another's paths, but in spite of historical limitations, they wrote very entertaining stories for the young - and probably the not so young, the elderly, and the old.

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WANTED - Urgently! - to complete a collection: NELSON LEE LIBRARY (Old Series), Nos. 15, 17, 43, 55, 67, 71, 79, 81 and 89.

Also BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY (1st Series): Nos. 302, 328, 367, 413, 429, 433, 669, 723 and 727; (2nd Series) Nos. 22, 52, 58, 68, 79, 90, 111, 156, 194, 201, 204, 230, 243, 254, 284, 302, 351, 419, 472 and 530.

Also DETECTIVE LIBRARY (1920) No. 14, "The Case of the Kinema King" and THRILLER 4d. LIBRARY, Nos. 2, 3, 7, 9, 11 and 12.

Also the following issues of the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY, by G. H. Teed (1st Series) 253, 283 and (2nd Series) 8, 21, 41, 52, 85, 89, 129, 161, 250, 272, 536, 590; Andrew Murray (1st Series) 19, 21, 70, 148, 174, 184, 199; Anthony Skene (1st Series) 156, and (2nd Series) 317, 345, 368; Gwyn Evans (2nd Series) 9, 26, 76, 164, 171, 313, 321, 352, 576, 723, 728; John Hunter (2nd Series) 549, 614, 662; Lester Bidston (2nd Series) 108, 138, 201, 214, 274, 316; Donald Stuart (2nd Series) 105, 125, 143, 195, 198, 217, 255, 302, 385, 430, 481, 545, 561 and 634.

Finally - a desperate plea for SBL's, 1st Series 11, "The Two Mysteries", and 2nd Series 221, "The Silent Jury". All letters answered.

CHRISTOPHER LOWDER

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# The Coming of Princess Snowee

by "MADAM"

Again I send greetings to all, and especially fond ones to our catty friends (I mean those who have purry pets) who, all the year round, send us very interesting items of news which are also sometimes amusing and occasionally sad. The sad ones, too, we can understand, for we have had sad times as well as happy ones with our own pets.

Thank you all for the loving messages you sent when we said good-bye to our beloved Mr. Softee. They were a great source of comfort.

Many said they hoped we should soon find another furry friend, but, as usual, "never again" was our cry of grief. Mine, even more than Eric's as the weeks went by. He would say, in a wistful voice "Isn't the house dead without a puss!" or "It's not really a complete home without a cat." But I remained deaf. No, I could not go through it all again.

One day a favourite nephew came to stay. "Shall we go for a run in the car?" he asked one afternoon. "Lovely! Where shall we go?" was our reply. "Let's find a cattery and have a look round there," said Eric, with a faraway look in his eyes.



I knew I couldn't fight any longer. I replied: "What about the Animal Rescue Farm at Wokingham? Mr. Softee came from there - and we had seven years of happiness with Mr. Softee --"

Off we went to see dear Mrs. Biddlecombe, who rescues so many unwanted darlings. Once again we saw cats and kittens of all colours, ages, sizes and personalities. But no Mr. Softee.

"We never get a white one," explained Mrs. Biddlecombe. "Mr. Softee was the only white one we had in seven years."

Then, in a lonely cage, we spotted a pair. The mother, a beautiful white animal with grey persian markings, and her two-year old son, all grey. She looked at us with such sad eyes. Her owner had developed an allergy, and had been



compelled to part from them.

Reluctantly, and perhaps a little mournfully, we said we could not take two adults.

Mrs. Biddlecombe said: "Yes, we find everyone in the same position. I didn't want to part them, but I'm afraid I shall have to, very soon."

We told her that, if that ever happened, we would take Snowee, the mother.

Two days later, our phone rang. "We have found an excellent home for the male. Could you please have Snowee? She is feeling so sad."

I don't have to tell you our answer.

This time, we felt it essential to make a special resolution - to draw up a list of regulations which the newcomer would be expected to observe. For instance, one good meal a day, and that only. It would consist mainly of tinned cat meat. She would come in at dusk, and would sleep in a box. She would soon learn to know her place. She would come when she was called. She would never occupy our rocking chairs. Having been ruled by three Misters in succession, it was time now that we put our feet down.

And Snowee arrived. She soon settled down. For some weeks I had to remove my white china cat from a shelf, as she kept trying to get it down.

She has now been with us for eight months, and she has adapted us to her ways. She eats what she wants, when and as often as she wants, with a decided preference for fresh whiting. She sleeps wherever she likes, her favourite spot being on the top of Eric's desk, lying across your letters. When he starts to type she doesn't let it disturb her. He taps away while she snoozes.

She has even taught me to be more tidy. Sometimes, in my haste to catch a bus, I have left a drawer partially open. On my return, I find that drawer filled with a sleeping cat, who opens one eye and purrs when I catch sight of her.

Just occasionally she will disappear for an hour or two, and we search the house and the neighbourhood till she condescends to stroll in - or we find her in a new hiding place.

In spite of all our resolutions, she runs the house. Of course, we had not reckoned with the fact that she is a lost heiress - and a Princess at that. It makes a difference, doesn't it?

She is the first of our pussycats to wear a collar. It bears her name - the Princess Snowee - her address, and her telephone number. And it becomes her as well as any string of pearls, bless her heart.

My best Christmas wishes to you all.

(Editorial Comment: Our little picture of the Princess Snowee is not a very good one, but it will give you some idea of who rules now at Excelsior House. She is just rousing herself after a nap in the sun under the apple tree. Unfortunately it doesn't show one of her most striking features - her grey tabby tail. Cats don't like having their tails photographed, do they?)

# Pictures

and  
Picturegoer

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## 2<sup>D</sup>

PEARL  
WHITE  
NUMBER



This picture of the cover of Britain's much-loved film weekly of early days, showing a photograph of Pearl White, the great serial queen, comes to us from Mr. John Robyns. Mr. Robyns has long been a collector of Pearl White items, and possesses a complete run of the famous serial "The Exploits of Elaine".

# The Bounders Cometh

by ERNEST HOLMAN

Bounders; cads; rotters; dandies; knuts; goats.

Not a crib from a dictionary; just a label for Hamilton lads who, broadly, come into such categories. Without Skinner, Loder, Knox, Cutts, Racke, Smythe (etc., etc.), the chronicles of the three Hamilton establishments would have been more than somewhat reduced.

However, for the purposes of this article, I am only selecting the three main contenders who qualify for the use of the first word. I choose them because (a) they furnished the bones for some very good meaty growth in the stories and (b) because they are the only ones who could not really be classed entirely under any single one of the above descriptions. In their way they were, over a long period, a bit of each. Bounders, really, does fit the identities of Vernon-Smith, Cardew and Mornington. Ignoring the fact that Cardew was known as 'The Cad' (and then only in post-war stories, due to the use of the name by Douglas Robinson) and that Mornington on occasions was 'The Dandy', I am using Smithy's title to fit all three.

It is principally with the arrival of these characters that I am concerning myself; within the last year or so, thanks to Roger Jenkins' excellent service from the Hamilton Library, I have been able to read the stories of their 'coming'. Herbert Vernon-Smith's first appearance is dealt with in Magnets 119 and 120 (May 1910); Ralph Reckness Cardew arrived in Gems 475-477 (March 1917); I cannot specify in detail the Boys' Friend numbers that covered Valentine Mornington's arrival - for this worthy I have to take Schoolboys' Own Library 262 (1936), where he arrived during part of the issue entitled "The Fistical Four".

Magnet 119 commences: "Hallo, hallo, hallo! What the dickens is the matter with that chap?" Glancing from the passage window as a result of Bob Cherry's remark, the Removites see someone of about Wharton's height, perhaps a little taller but not nearly so well-built. He looks, we are told, weedy and a stranger to the sports field. His elegant dress is represented by well-fitting Etons, silk hat, lavender kid gloves; he carries a gold-topped cane. His adornments include a gold watch-chain, diamond tie pin and sparkling finger rings.

This youth is staggering about the Close; once he reels and clutches at a tree for support. The juniors rush out to him, to find him hanging on the balustrade of the steps. The newcomer, somewhat shakily, states that he is "Herbert Tudor Vernon Vernon-Smith" and it is left to Bulstrode to diagnose the reason for the boy's unsteadiness by suggesting to Wharton that he had better put him under the pump to make him sober!

Such a situation is, of course, soon observed by Mr. Quelch, who promptly walks him into the house with a strong grasp on his shoulder. The first chapter ends with the view that nothing like this has ever happened before in the history of



Greyfriars - they are left wondering what the outcome will be.

Such is Smithy's arrival. The Head is rather shattered as Quelch correctly describes the boy's condition; and continues to be even more shaken when Vernon-Smith tells him that, as a result of imbibing champagne, he is a 'little bit bosky!'

The remainder of the story (and the subsequent one) tells of the newcomer's misadventures as he fails to 'fit in' at Greyfriars. Needless to say, the Remove take all necessary steps to deal with the person named by Bulstrode as "The Bounder of Greyfriars". At the end of No. 120, as a result of severe measures, the Bounder begins to realise the impossibility of his situation and, swallowing his pride, offers Quelch apologies for previous behaviour. Wharton tells him that he has done the decent thing and that, if he keeps it up, he will find plenty of friends at Greyfriars.

The announcement by Mr. Bootles, Master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood, that Lord Mornington will be joining the class causes some discussion amongst the juniors; Jimmy Silver is not amused, as it has fallen to his lot to give up football and meet the newcomer. The Fistical Four repair to Coombe Station accordingly. When the train draws in they see a man with mutton-chop whiskers alight from a third-class carriage and proceed to open a door in the first-class section. A drawling voice asks "Is this the station, Jenkins?" - upon which the valet is handed a bull-pup to carry. Jimmy & Co. then see a slim fellow, with a seedy face and heavy eyes, getting out of the train. He is dressed in lounge clothes, very fashionably cut, and wearing diamonds and a gold watch. He is smoking a cigarette.

Conversation with the new arrival becomes difficult after Lord Mornington requests Lovell not to address him. Raby suggests bumping some of the impudence out of him but Jimmy is mindful of his promise to deliver the new boy to Mr. Bootles. It is only when his lordship threatens to lay his cane about Jimmy that ructions commence. In the end Mornington arrives at Rookwood at the end of a rope pulled heartily by the Fistical Four. The story tells us that such was the manner of Lord Mornington's arrival at Rookwood!

Mornington's life at Rookwood hardly goes smoothly. It starts next morning with Jimmy Silver jerking him out of bed by his feet. When he takes his place in the Fourth Form room he becomes the object of a good deal of curiosity. The story states that a titled fellow who was simply rolling in money was naturally an object of interest. If he had been a different kind of fellow, he might have become popular but his swank and overbearing manners did not conduce to popularity. Only the Knuts are friendly with him, on account of his obvious wealth.

In the afternoon, Mornington, Townsend, Topham and Peele are missing from classes. Rumour suggests that they have been involved in a car accident and Jimmy and Co. are sent to Coombe to make enquiries. In the meantime the car has actually deposited the four missing students at a public house. Refusal of Mine Host to serve whisky to schoolboys results in a rumpus and, on being requested to give their names, they use those of the Fistical Four.

Trouble looks likely for Jimmy & Co. when the names are reported to the Head; but Jimmy manages to enlist the aid of Bulkeley, who takes a photograph of Jimmy to show to the Publican. The result is obvious; not only does the Publican

realise that Jimmy is not one of the four but he returns to Rookwood with the School Captain. The real culprits are picked out. Only then does Mornington show a glimpse of being 'not quite so bad' when he admits that it was his idea and only he is to blame. He is brought up for a flogging in Hall next morning but his submission is anything but quiet. It takes two Prefects to go to the assistance of Old Mack, who has hoisted him. Not surprising, then, that the flogging is even more severe - equally so, the readers are not surprised to be told that afterwards his lordship was 'quite subdued'.

I have left Cardew until last for the only reason that, of the three Bounders under discussion, he has always been my favourite. It is war-time when R.R.C. enters the scene. His relative D'Arcy (accompanied by Digby) has the privilege of meeting this newcomer. Cardew's introduction into the Gem shows his arrival at Wayland Junction. He throws aside a pink paper, pitches the stump of a cigarette out of the window and rises to his feet with a yawn.

Rather than wait a long time for the local train, Cardew leaves the station just as Gussy and Dig come along. Cardew's manner to them is cold and steely. Gussy's welcoming smile fades. The meeting is not a happy one. Ignoring Gussy's opinion that to hire a car in war-time is bad form, Cardew immediately comes up with a compromise. He will hire a car, call at the local Hospital, collect some wounded soldiers, take them for a ride and end up with tea at St. Jim's.

The wife of the local Mayor, Lady Tompkins, is in charge of the appropriate Hospital department and gives Cardew very short shrift. It is left to Gussy's tact and judgment to work the oracle and he obtains the permission not granted to Cardew. Thus does Cardew eventually reach St. Jim's. In a car as intended, achieved by a scheme that, one day, would seem to come naturally to a chap like Cardew.

No. 475 ends with Cardew's peculiar taste for the limelight resulting in a scrap with Cutts and the first beginnings of a friendship with Ernest Levison. No. 476 brings Cardew a flogging for 'sooting' Ratcliffe - despite the fact that Redfern and Lawrence were the real culprits. Cardew is able to persuade them to leave the matter where it is. By the end of this story, we are being told that it was hard to size up Cardew. He wasn't, it appeared, quite a rank outsider.

No. 477 repeats itself at the end by producing another flogging for Cardew. This time Cardew IS the guilty person - after planting evidence to involve Tom Merry in serious trouble. It is Levison who forces Cardew to 'do the proper thing'. This trio of stories leaves us with the view that, as Cardew had not been sacked, he is left with another chance. It remains to be seen what he makes of it.

The foregoing details are, of course, very briefly sketched; from not-so-brief notes made at the time of reading. The later adventures of these three Bounders were to reveal many interesting aspects of individual character. Changes there were, inevitably. Vernon-Smith was, perhaps, the most strongly-drawn figure; there was, of course, so much more written about him than either of the other two. The tales of the arrival of Tom Redwing, the subsequent ups and downs of these two friends - these probably are the best remembered events of the many Vernon-Smith chronicles. He was still a prominent participant in the stories as late as 1940, in the Lamb series. (Even the final substitute post-war Bunter books - from Hamilton

television scripts, it is believed - largely featured the Bounder of Greyfriars.)

Cardew, as I have said, was my personal favourite. His whimsicality always made delightful little incidents in the stories; he was probably at his most finely-sketched in the Cardew Captain Gems of 1923/24. One thing above all stood out for me as far as he was concerned: he always seemed to come off best in any conversational 'get together' with Tom Merry. He had the knack of often making poor Tom most uncomfortable and some of their clashes gave a good example of two quite different personalities. After the mid-twenties, Cardew was mostly part of the background. He enjoyed a quite fair resurrection in the post-war St. Jim's yarns, capturing something of his old 'charm'; his last appearance, I believe, was actually in a Bunter book. Cardew's least likeable side came forth here when he encountered the Greyfriars hikers - but the story is notable for one rare item in Hamiltonia - a confrontation between Vernon-Smith and Cardew, resulting in the former severely thrashing the St. Jim's fellow.

Mornington was, I suppose, the 'lease' of the three so-called Bounders. Partly because Rookwood had a short life and most of the stories had equally short lengths, there was never much chance of sketching him in greater detail. Of course, I have not the advantage of Boys' Friends to refer to, only much reading and remembering from Populars and S.O.L's. Perhaps in the Mornington Captain Series, and in the 'Erbert saga, we saw the truest picture of this many-sided character. Undoubtedly he mellowed more than the other two Bounders - at the start, an early Levison type; eventually, almost a reformed Levison figure. Certainly from his arrival as his lordship to his last appearance in the post-war "Rivals of Rookwood School", much change took place. In this last story, he was automatic choice of cricket captain when Jimmy Silver was detained.

Cardew, Morny, Smith - Bounders all three; and their adventures provided many thousands of enjoyable words throughout the years. Their memory, I feel, will remain - long after some of their school fellows are forgotten.

They were great days for the Companion Papers when the Bounders arrived!

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A MERRY CHRISTMAS and a Happy New Year to the Editor, Staff and Readers of the Collectors' Digest. Long may you all prosper. Has anyone for sale any of the following:- Richmal Crompton's "William and the Masked Ranger", "William and the Space Animal", "William the Lawless", "William the Superman". Anything (books, comics, magazines) of "The Katzenjammer Kids", and Al Capp's "L'il Abner Yokum of Dogpatch, U.S.A.". Gene Stratton Porter's "Girl of the Limberlost", "Greyfriars Holiday Annual for 1929". Please write first. All postage incurred will be refunded.

J. P. FITZGERALD

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# HALCYON TIME

by TONY GLYNN

It was the darkest period of the second world war but, for me, it was a halcyon time. It was the summer of 1941. When I look back at it, I realise that it was then that the collecting bug first bit me.

The year began miserably enough for me. I had survived the Manchester "Christmas Blitz" of 1940. I was evacuated for most of the "phoney war" of 1939 and early 1940. By the middle of 1940, most of us had drifted back home because nothing really warlike was happening in England.

After the fall of France in June 1940, we began to get air raids whose intensity mounted until the crescendo came in December. After the horrendous Christmas, during which Manchester blazed from end to end, there was a fresh wave of evacuation. Early in 1941, just after I had celebrated my eleventh birthday, I went off with youngsters from my school in a hastily arranged flight from the city.

The severe cold was wholly in tune with my experience as an evacuee in a back-of-beyond Lancashire village. That experience lasted exactly a week and I do not intend to tell you much about it because my purpose is to relate the happiness of 1941 and not its miseries.

Nevertheless, you must know that, during that week in which I lay nightly in a cold room upon a wretched wood and canvas camp bed supplied by the authorities, I endured mental agonies. Every night, I heard the Luftwaffe droning overhead on the way to raid Manchester and Liverpool. My fear was that my parents would be killed and I should be left alone in this place of cold comfort. I simply wanted to be at home.

I wrote every day to tell my parents of my misery. The letters nearly broke my mother's heart and the most wretched week of my life ended when my father arrived on the Saturday to take me home.

The journey home was sheer bliss. We arrived in a bomb-shattered Manchester and I recall that one of our fellow passengers on the tram ride home from the station was a man whose head was heavily bandaged. I was back to the bombs and the cramped confines of our tiny air raid shelter and I was gloriously happy. I was reunited with my parents.

Throughout my life, the material I read at different periods and the popular songs of the time have become established in my mind as landmarks along the road of memory and the 1941 portion of that road is cluttered with them. For instance, "Mickey Mouse Weekly" has always been associated with my miserable week as an evacuee. Not the fat, colourful "Mickey Mouse Weekly" which I had known when it first appeared in 1936, but the thin, eight-page shadow of its former self to which the war reduced it. I took it regularly during 1940 and with the red-backed "William" books of Richmal Crompton, it made up part of my reading diet in the long nights in

the air raid shelter.

When I went off on my short-lived sojourn in the ice-bound Lancashire hinterland, I took my "MMW" collection with me. Such little happiness as I found in those cold and lonely days, came from re-reading those copies. I can remember now the dissatisfaction I felt at seeing how a drastic change had come to "Skit, Skat and the Captain" and a strip called "Pinky Green" at that time. The artist who drew them and whose richly textured work in "Skit, Skat" I had known since the first issue, had disappeared and someone with a looser style had taken over. What I now know had happened was that the original artist, Basil Reynolds, had gone to the war and Barry Appleby continued his strips.

It is 37 years since I saw any of those copies of "Mickey Mouse" of 1940 and 1941 but I know that should I ever cast an eye on them again, I'd be whisked away to that week of unhappy memory.

Back at School, went only in the afternoons, a pattern which was established the year before as the air-raids grew worse and we spent every night in the shelter.

There was a quality of marking time about those days because, in spite of the disrupted life of late 1940, many of us had sat for what was known as "the scholarship" at that period, which meant that, if we passed, we would go to a secondary school in September 1941.

The bombings continued. One day, little Jimmy who sat next to me came in and said: "We're all living in the rest centre. There's a land-mine outside our back gate and it's not exploded." Mercifully, the land-mine was disarmed by the experts and Jimmy's street remained intact until a few years ago when it was pulled down under an urban renewal programme.

One evening, my father who was working all manner of odd hours on essential work, as well as firewatching at his factory through the night, came home and had just started his tea when the sirens set up the "alert". He ushered the rest of us to the shelter at the bottom of our modest back yard, then came down the yard with his plate in one hand and his knife and fork in the other. His Irish flamboyance had hit a really high key and he waved the knife and fork at the sky in a threatening gesture: "You might have the decency to let a man get his tea in peace when he comes home from work!" he yelled at the Luftwaffe.

It was about this time that Syd's began to play a large part in my life.

Now, I have lived in this old house since Saturday, 2 September, 1939. A significant date, you'll notice. The following day we heard Neville Chamberlain telling us on our old Vidor battery wireless set that we were at war with Germany. Many changes have come to the area since then.

A couple of summers ago, I watched the shop which used to be Syd's being bashed to rubble. There were also many fond personal memories being bashed as the swinging iron ball smote the bricks. Many's the time I forked over a penny or twopence for some literary treasure found in Syd's and carried it home through the Manchester streets to devour it. I found my first "Union Jacks" there and, later, on a never to be forgotten day in 1942, I discovered my first "Nelson Lees", a

publication which had been defunct for nearly a decade. They sold at a penny each.

For Syd sold second-hand books and magazines. He ran a half-price exchange system but, having paid the full asking price for an item, you could keep it if you wished.

Syd came to our region with the blitz. He had been bombed out of a shop a short distance away, so he took one on the main road which ran like a spine through our neighbourhood. Syd was injured when his shop was bombed and when I first knew him he was on crutches. Opening up in his new premises, he displayed a defiant banner across the shop window, declaring that he'd been blown up on the Western front in 1915 and again in 1940, but he was still going strong. I can see him now, plump and with a little moustache. He bore a passing resemblance to Oliver Hardy, standing amid his piles of "Picture Post", "Illustrated", "Everybodys", "Cherry Tree Books" and the American pulp magazines of which, declared the rubber stamp with which Syd branded all the material passing through his hands, he had 5,000.

I soon became a customer of Syd's on finding some copies of the Schoolboys Own Library in his shop. At that time, Hamiltonia was so much gold. The grand old man had been forced to quit his monumental output earlier in the war. I belonged to the last generation which knew the "Magnet" and "Gem" and I became hooked on Greyfriars in 1938 and 1939, so to find a handful of tales of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood was to find treasure indeed. I did not know, of course, that Owen Conquest and Martin Clifford were the same man as Frank Richards, but few did at that time.

I still have those copies after all these years, battered and dog-eared, but dear old friends: "The Greyfriars Hikers", "The Man From the Sky" (Greyfriars) "Hidden Loot" (one of the last SOL's), "The Shanghaied Schoolboys" (St. Jim's) and "The Rival Guys of Rookwood". This last holds a particular nostalgia because I read it when huddled in the shelter during a night of tremendous bombing. Just to look at it brings back the smell of the candle which was our means of light, the whistle of the bombs and the crashings and reverberations of the ack-ack guns, positioned nearby on what had once been a sports field.

By the spring, most of the youngsters had drifted back from evacuation. Certainly, the school seemed to have more pupils and school life became more normal as the air raids slackened. I had a group of friends - henchmen is a better word - with whom I pursued adventures in the glorious world of boyhood which was quite apart from the adult world of the war raging around us. There was Dickie, a Belgian refugee, gallant and reckless, always ready to take a chance. Then there was George, Cyril and Mac, whom I had known since we were all in the infants' school together. With these three, I entered into two great adventures: that of the cinema and that of the raft.

The cinema adventure involved a fourth participant, Arthur. It was Arthur who one day disclosed that he knew a way of sneaking into the cinema which was, in our parlance, the local "fleapit". It was shortly before Easter because I well remember Cyril declaring at the peak of the cinema lark that if one of the nuns who taught us asked him what he had given up for Lent, he could truthfully say: "I haven't



passed the paybox of a cinema all Lent, Sister."

For the sneaking-in lark entailed the use of an exit door at the rear of the building. It was situated in a walled passageway. By deft pressure on one of the double doors, it was possible to make a gap big enough for a juvenile hand to be slipped inside to yank down the crash-bar which automatically opened the doors. The problem was that this brought a loud "clunk" from the crash-bar, so the next move was to scoot to the end of the walled passageway and take refuge there, peering around the walls to ensure that the "clunk" had not alerted anyone in authority inside the cinema. If there was no sign of the door being re-locked - and we were always lucky - we entered, one by one.

The exit door led you into a short tunnel, curtained off from the auditorium by heavy velvet drapes. This tunnel contained the entrance to the gents and the whole place reeked of Jeyes Fluid. Taking great care and moving at controlled intervals, we would go one by one through the curtains into the cinema proper, just as if we were legitimate ticket-holders who had been to answer a call of nature. We settled into the cheap seats at the front, bold as brass. I think wartime manpower problems helped us because the only attendant I ever remember seeing was an old chap in a tattered uniform who never cottoned on to our little lark.

I remember the first film I saw through the sneaking-in lark. It was "Turnabout", a slightly risqué feature based on a story by Thorne Smith, of "Topper" fame. Then there was "Ghost Breakers", with Bob Hope, Paulette Goddard and Willie Best and a now forgotten B film called "The Mystery Submarine".

I have a vivid memory of a sharp-aired spring night in which we accomplished a stealthy entry and shared "Piccadilly" cigarettes in the cheap seats with a great deal of swagger. It was a brand considerably more classy than our usual Red Label Woodbines, which were even cheaper than ordinary Woodbines. Our combined funds must have been better than average that evening. The shop at which we bought the cigarettes is still there, under the same management, a couple of doors away from the cinema, which has now turned to Bingo. I pass it daily and in doing so am always whisked away to that evening in 1941.

For me, the sneaking-in game came to an end when my parents, suspicious that I was up to something, clamped down on my evening gallivanting. We were never caught by the cinema management.

I connect that same period with my rediscovery of an old pre-war friend, Buck Rogers, the American comic-strip hero of interplanetary adventures. I first met him in the American comic pages which were a common part of our pre-war comic-swapping activities and I was an avid Rogers fan. Then came the war - and no more American comics. But, thanks to my rummaging at Syd's, I discovered that Buck Rogers was to be found in a half-page spot in old copies of "Everybody's". The other half was occupied by another US strip, "Smokey Stover", Bill Holman's crazy fireman.

On the home-grown fiction front, the Thomson papers played a major part in our lives. The "Skipper" became a war casualty in 1940, but the "Wizard", "Adventure", "Hotspur" and "Rover" continued and had yet to go fortnightly, as they

did because of the paper shortage.

The "Wizard" had that old favourite the Wolf of Kabul, with Chung and his faithful "Clickey-ba", fighting the Italians in the Middle East. Then there was a serial called "Musgrave of the Moors", about a doughty English yeoman who moulded a fighting force out of two warring factions of a Scots clan, to battle the might of Burgundy in the Europe of the middle ages.

"Hotspur" was a strong favourite of mine. In the spring of 1941, it had "The Sheriff with the Shooting Star", a western with a typical Thomson touch of fairy-tale. A timid schoolmaster becomes a sharpshooting lawman so long as he wears a star which has magic properties. Without it, he's scared of firearms. There was "The Lost School on the Whirling Planet", about a schoolful of boys kidnapped by invaders from outer space and taken to their captors' planet, a theme which the Thomson papers used again and again. At Red Circle, the only regularly established Thomson school, that spring was enlivened by the coming of the Great Vance, a super school-boy, and Red Circle went Vance-crazy for quite some time. There was also a "Hotspur" serial called "The Great Inventor is a Schoolboy", almost certainly inspired by the Mickey Rooney film "Young Tom Edison", current at the time. The "Hotspur" tale dealt with Tom Bell, a boy inventor in a pioneer American town. The story and its illustrations were full of overtones of Tom Sawyer.

So was my own life as we entered summer. George, Cyril, Mac and I were pretty much the spiritual heirs of William Brown and Attila the Hun. We went into bombed houses and had a particular hide-out in one. The stairway had been destroyed but, by clambering up the rubble, we could reach the landing and one of the bedrooms became our rendezvous for smoking Red Label Woodbines. At school, we were reckless enough to stage what we called a strike, but it was really a campaign of total disobedience. In the course of it, we painted Dickie with dots of red poster paint and thought we could create a panic in class by saying he had measles. The girls, sensible and prim misses all, told us we were daft. For myself, I didn't care about the opinions of the rest of the girls, but lovely little Grace so plainly shared them. I wanted to be high in Grace's estimation because I loved her madly and secretly.

The "strike" episode was mainly aimed at a new teacher, a woman who had done us no real harm. I suppose it was an example of the cruelty of which youngsters can be capable when they put their minds to it. We knew we were playing with dynamite because the headmistress was a nun with an incisive intellect and a prodigious caning-arm. She got wind of the "strike" and dealt with us personally in a manner not permitted since the Education Act of 1944. It was an instant cure.

The raft lark was the one with real overtones of Tom Sawyer. That summer, we rampaged through the dense acreage of rhododendrons and other evergreens which covered parts of the big Victorian park near my home. We were chased by the elderly park-keepers and even more ancient gardeners, but the only man who put real fear into us was the chief park-keeper, called "the constable", a powerful man in a police type uniform, complete with whistle. He had received a severe arm injury in the first world war, but he could run like the merry devil in pursuit of mischievous boys.



Sometime in the 1920's or the 1930's, Manchester parks were equipped with outdoor swimming pools, fine big concrete plunges, surrounded by screening bushes and with a row of wooden changing cabins along each side. In our park, the pool became an EWS - an emergency water supply - early in the war. So far as I know, it was never drawn upon during the furious incendiary bombings. When we made a stealthy invasion of it, the pool was a silent green, giving off an exciting vegetable smell because of the leaves floating on the surface. Shielded by thick shrubbery, the place cried out to be used for pure adventure.

We built a raft from some old planks. When all four of us were aboard, it sank noticeably so that it was always under about an inch of water. Nevertheless, it floated and we didn't mind wet feet as we used a long pole to punt it up and down the plunge. It was bliss itself to be voyaging in the silent, tree-shrouded place and the whole thing was spiced by a tingling element of danger because we should not have been there.

In the evenings, we tied the raft to one of the hand-rails of the plunge and it was always there when we made our stealthy return. Indeed, for a long time, we seemed to enjoy charmed lives. The park keepers and gardeners took a long time in detecting the raft and ourselves. We became complacent, thinking we'd never be discovered.

But, I get ahead of myself. Just before the summer holiday, someone at school swapped me a curio: a 1933 "Wizard".

I remember the date, 6 May, 1933, printed on the front cover, because that was the very day my sister was born. I haven't seen that issue since, but I remember the cover illustration being a circus scene. I was just a toddler in 1933 and, viewed from 1941, that era was lost in the glorious peacetime which was no more. That copy of the "Wizard" fascinated me and of particular fascination was the opening of a serial story, "The Raiders from the Red World" which was very much the Thomson brand of science-fiction. I took that "Wizard" with me on holiday to my relatives in Southport and read it more than once. I wanted more and I suppose my first bite from the collecting bug came in that halcyon time.

We were singing "Yes, My Darling Daughter" and "America, I Love You", a ditty from a new Alice Faye film, that holiday time, as well as "Deep in the Heart of Texas" and I cannot hear any of those songs today without seeing myself curled up, enraptured by that "Wizard" from the remote past of the early thirties.

I remember going through certain private worries that holiday time, wondering about the new school at which I would begin the autumn term. But, in between my return home and setting forth on my further education, something quite memorable happened.

I found the source of that 1933 "Wizard" - and there were more.

Looking back, it was that old collectors' dream of discovering a hoard of treasures and finding that you alone have come upon them and they are going for next to nothing.

It happened that I made an inquiry of the schoolmate who supplied my precious



1933 item. "I got it from a junk shop near us. There's bags of 'em there, penny each," he informed me in an unbelievably casual way. Off I went, following his directions. I remember the day well. There was bright sunshine. I hot-footed through the maze of streets to the north of my home, a gridiron of terraced homes bespeaking Manchester's great booming years under the reign of King Cotton. They have all been levelled now and the area totally developed on new lines, but I carry the sights and sounds of that locality as a country of the mind.

I could probably show you the approximate spot amid the new flats and maisonettes where the junk shop stood. It was on the corner of one of the grimy, adventurous streets. Strictly speaking, it was a second-hand furniture shop, full of tables, wardrobes and chests of drawers. Through the sun-smitten window, I saw the pile of "Wizards" on a table, a great heap of them, waiting for me. They had been there since before the school holidays started. I could not understand why the multitude of boys from the surrounding streets had not swooped on the shop and whittled away that pile of fat, pre-war publications, unaffected by paper restrictions.

I remember the dusty smell of the interior of that shop, with the strong sun streaming through the door. I remember the plump woman in charge. Yes, I was told, I could have any "Wizard" I wanted. A penny each. In those days, such items had not yet acquired antique value. They were simply out-of-date boys' books, so they sold cheaply.

Quite likely, they were found inside some wardrobe or chest of drawers and I remember that they dated not only from 1933 but from 1934 and 1935 as well. My store of pennies was meagre to say the least, but I think I had enough for half a dozen copies. Thereafter, the junk shop on the corner ousted even the glorious cave of wonders presided over by Syd. Every penny I could grasp was quickly transferred to the plump lady. Autumn came in with me living in my spare moments not in 1941 but in 1933, 1934 and 1935 with characters such as Thick-Ear Donovan, the Wolf of Kabul, Red Star Roberts, Smoky Mountain Joe, the Red M'Gregor, Lionheart Logan of the Mounties and Trig M'Fee. I didn't know it then, but I was hooked. I was a collector.

I progressed on this wave of fantasy towards my new life at secondary school. September came, with the nights drawing in. My sister and her girl friends, forever living out their own fantasies, were playing at being Carmen Miranda that autumn, dancing in the street and singing "Ay-Ay-Ay-Like You Very Much", "Two Dreams Met" and other numbers from the new film "Down Argentina Way". They were also singing a part-Swedish song called, as near as I can render it, "The Hut Sut Song".

Such ditties, if I hear them now, always bring back my first days at my new school and the memories of how, on my second day, I got on the wrong tram and was carried some distance out of my way before I realised my mistake. On the first day, somewhat to my humiliation, my mother took me to the new school, but it turned out that I was not alone in that. I remember that autumn with a peculiar vividness, probably because it marked the end of something familiar and the beginning of something quite new.

But that's all another tale.

There is a sequel. In the drought summer of 1955, when I was spending a week-end at home from my job as a reporter in Cheshire, my father and I called in at a pub when we were taking a stroll. The bar was lined with summer-clad men, all busily hoisting their elbows.

I didn't really notice one man standing close to us until he said to me jovially: "By gum, it's a few years since I chased you and your pals through the park!"

It was my old enemy the constable, retired now and looking a bronzed picture of health. Never in my schooldays did I appreciate what a merry eye he had and, of course, I couldn't guess then that he was undoubtedly the biggest boy of the whole bunch of us.

But, leaning against the bar, he gave a richly nostalgic sigh. "Weren't they grand days?" he asked me. "I enjoyed every minute of them!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Howard Baker extends warmest Christmas Greetings to all collectors and Friars and wishes joyful seasonal reading.

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Seasonal Greetings from Ben Whiter and Pathfinder.

\* \* \* \* \*

A Merry Xmas to all who enjoy our hobby. Thank you all for so many happy memories.

LES FARROW, 13 FYDELL ST., BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE

\* \* \* \* \*

WANTED: Gem 1258, Magnet 1223, S.O.L. 166, Scout Vol. 25, 1154.

J. H. MEARNS, 4 OGILVIE PLACE, BRIDGE-OF-ALLAN, STIRLINGSHIRE.

\* \* \* \* \*

Warmest Christmas Greetings to "Skipper", Eric Fayne, to our respected Abbot, W. Howard Baker, and to Norman Shaw, Derek Adley and all Friars and Saints everywhere. May your New Year be healthy and happy.

PHIL HARRIS, MONTREAL, CANADA.

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SALE: Collectors' Digest, nearly all numbers between 40 - 372. Offers for years only. WOOD, WHEELWRIGHTS, SWEFLING, SAXMUNDHAM, SUFFOLK

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Thanks Eric and Digest contributors for another year of delightful nostalgia.

CHARLES VAN RENEN, SOUTH AFRICA.

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Season's Greetings to all Hobbyists. To the Editor and all contributors, my thanks for the past year.

R. J. McCABE, DUNDEE

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Wishing all fellow members all good wishes for a Happy Christmas and a bright New Year with a special greeting to our Editor for all his sterling work at all times of the year.

MRS. J. GOLDEN, GATEHOUSE-OF-FLEET.