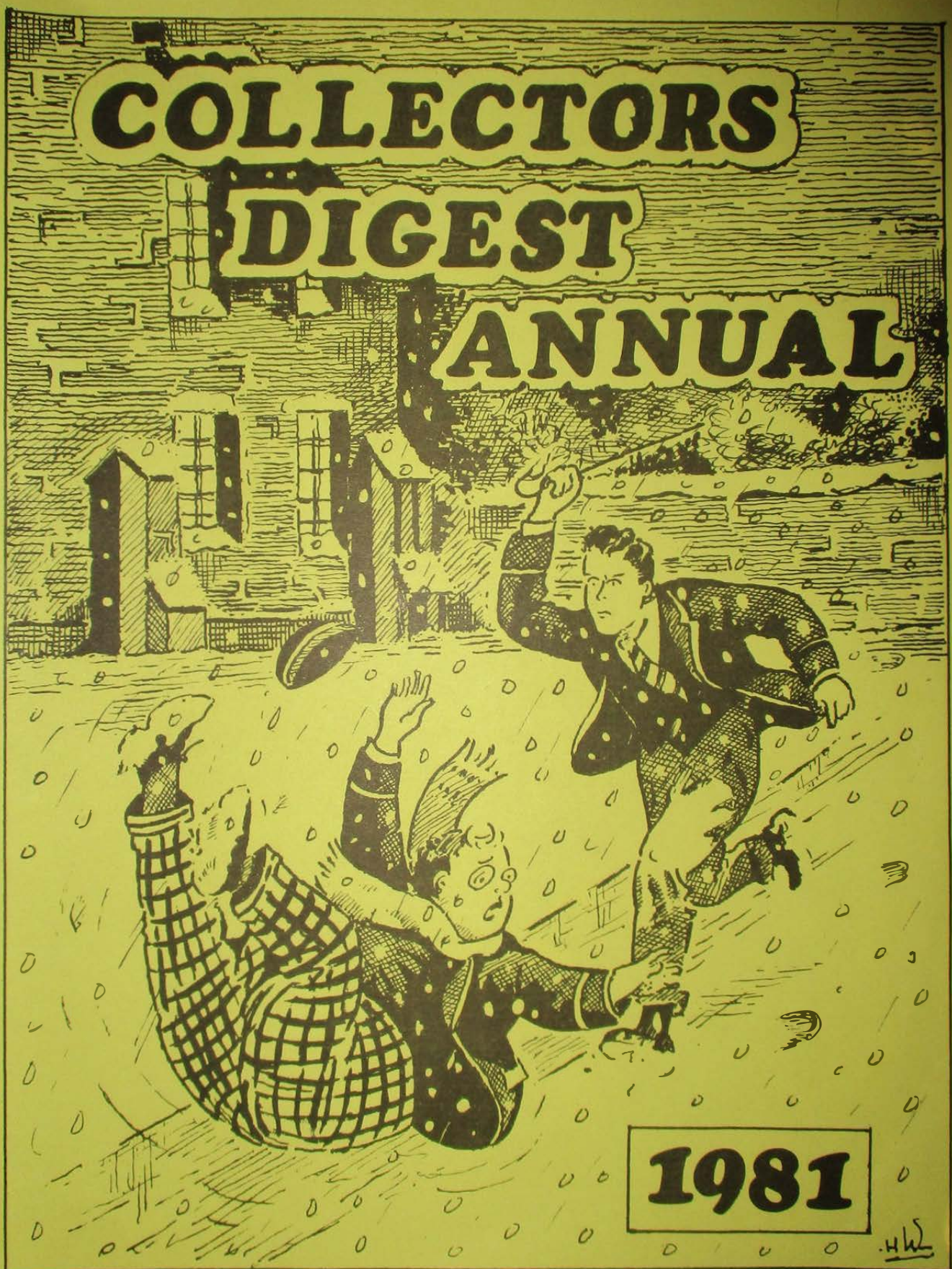
COLLECTORS DIGEST ANNUAL



1981

COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

Christmas 1981

THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR

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INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Another stepping-stone. Another Collectors' Digest Annual. The Thirty-Fifth of them. Each one provides an Avenue of Memories down which the reader will wander, re-living old times and old joys.

But our beloved Annual is no mere wallow in nostalgia. It is a volume of articles about the people who could write, by people who can write and who are mainly experts in their own field. There is much to make you think; much to make you laugh reminiscently; and, just now and then, something perhaps to make you sigh for the land and life we once knew.

Our band of much-loved and esteemed contributors, famous in their own circle which means world-famous, for our circle embraces the entire world, have given of their best for this Annual which marks its Coral Jubilee Issue. There is something for everyone, no matter what his or her taste.

Many of you, I know, will have saved the Annual for Christmas, and you may well be reading these lines on the afternoon of Christmas Day. There is no time quite like Christmas for remembering the friendships we cherish, and there are no wishes like those good old tried and true ones.

I wish you all a Very Happy Christmas among your loved ones, and may the warmth and love, that is all around us at Christmas time, shed radiance over the year that lies ahead.

Happy Christmas! Happy New Year! Happy Reading!

God bless you!

Your sincere friend.

Eric Fayne

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Wanted - Expulsion

BY

Harold Truscott

Certain themes Hamilton used on a number of occasions, and at different schools, partly because he was writing for gradually changing generations of boys; and even when the themes were different, situations were sometimes the same. Mostly, they were not handled in the same way, details were different, results were often very different. It has been said that there are only twelve basic plots (some limit it to half-a-dozen) for an author to use, and I take off my hat to those novelists - and there have been many - who have managed to disguise this fact time after time, and quite convincingly. But since there is this dearth of basic plots, it is perhaps not surprising to find them being repeated from time to time in the Magnet and the Gem. We might even, at times, appreciate the art with which Hamilton did extract different results from basically similar material - aspects of his genius which would not have been revealed if he had not, at times and for whatever reason, fallen back on a certain amount of repetition. After all, there are enough instances in our finest literature of plot being the least important factor.

There is one theme that one might have expected Hamilton to find particularly fruitful, and yet, to my knowledge, he used it only twice - in the stories of his three major schools, at least. It was used once at St. Jim's, and once again at Greyfriars. Although it is true that a fair number of themes later expanded for one or other of these two schools were first tried out, necessarily in somewhat cramped conditions, at Rookwood, I cannot discover that this particular one was ever used for the Hampshire school. The theme is that of the boy who is unwillingly at school, and wants nothing better than to be sent away or, if it has to be that, expelled. It was used first at St. Jim's, in a six issue series of the Gem concerning Angelo Lee, in September 1926. Twelve years later, in the autumn of 1938, it cropped up at Greyfriars, when its central figure was Gilbert Tracy.

I do not know how Gem buffs rate the Angelo Lee series today. At a time when, so far as genuine Hamilton was concerned, the Gem was in the doldrums, it must have seemed like manna from heaven for regular readers, who had been putting up for long enough with mainly substitute work. Although I was taking the Gem at the time, I cannot recall what I thought of it. My reaction now is that it is a pleasant series, with some of Hamilton's really first-class writing, but that I am not completely at ease with it. Lee's determined attempt to appear an utter fool, while fresh and, in some ways, delightful to begin with, seems now to be carried on too long, before it is discovered that it is a gigantic leg-pull. On the other hand, since he was a decent boy, once he knew that that chicken would no longer fight he was in somewhat of a quandary as to how to worry his kind teachers sufficiently to get them in the mood to eject him. Indeed, it is two other characters, one a leading light, the other a nonentity as a rule, who do most to help him (and Hamilton) to keep

the story going. Arthur Augustus is one (at his pig-headed best) and Bates, Lee's study-mate, is the other. The latter, in fact, blossoms out as quite a vigorous character in this fruitful soil.

Now. I do not want to criticise too harshly what, as I have said, remains a pleasant series, with, at times and as one would expect from Hamilton in the twenties, some good character-drawing. Lee himself is well-drawn, hot-headed and with a mischievous sense of humour, somewhat misguidedly employed, and so geared to one idea - aviation - that he cannot see anything else. For the moment, let us leave this series and turn to its Magnet counterpart.

With basically the same idea - that of a boy who is at school against his will and wants desperately to leave it - we have a vastly different central character and set of circumstances. One overwhelming difference concerns the reason each of these boys has for wanting to leave school. Lee's is, in the right circumstances, a quite meritorious reason, that of wanting to pursue aviation by actual flying and by invention; he happens to assert it at quite the wrong time and in the wrong circumstances. Tracy's reason has no merit at any time or in any circumstances. He simply wishes to pursue the idle life to which he had become accustomed during the previous year, away from the influence of his father, who is an invalid, and under the guardianship of an uncle who is too old and weak to be able to cope with him; idleness, so far as anything worthwhile is concerned, but pursuing shady activities, such as smoking, which is the least of them, gambling, lying to anyone as and when it suits him, harbouring grudges and playing any dirty trick to score and be revenged for real or imagined offences, and generally bucking up against authority whenever that runs counter to his wishes. There seems to be no limit to what he is prepared to do to attain his end, even, as it proves, locking up a middle-aged man and, so far as Tracy's intention is concerned, keeping him without food long enough seriously to impair his health. That it is not allowed to go to that extreme, in the management of the story and so far as we are given the workings of Tracy's mind, is not his fault; and, in fact, he gets in a rage when he learns that Mr. Quelch and Bunter have been let out of the punishment room.

It is true that, twelve years earlier, in Magnet No. 957, Billy Bunter's Barring-In, Bunter had done precisely the same thing. But between Bunter and Tracy there is a great gulf fixed. Bunter acts on impulse, the spur of the moment, without a thought of what his act means to anyone but himself. Selfish, yes. But no wicked intention. Tracy, on the other hand, is not a thoughtless fool; he has thought it out and is fully aware of what he is doing and its consequences to Mr. Quelch, and he does not care. A nasty bit of work; and, because of this, a very interesting character. Certainly one of the most unlikeable (in real life) Hamilton ever invented. Not quite so bad as Ponsonby (in the light of later developments) is, I suppose, about as much as one can say for him. He is at the school not only unwillingly but, in a sense, under duress. Mr. Quelch is a friend of Tracy's guardian, Sir Giles Oakwood, and offers, subject to Dr. Locke's approval, to try what he can do to improve Gilbert at Greyfriars for one term. Dr. Locke does agree, but makes it clear that it is on Mr. Quelch's responsibility, and so the affair becomes a matter of Tracy v Mr. Quelch almost from the start, with some sidekicks at Harry Wharton.

The series has much to recommend it, and it has always been fairly popular with Hamilton admirers. This is partly because of the maturity of the writing, for it shows Hamilton at his ripest, partly because of the splendid handling of so many of the regulars among the characters; and then there is Tracy. The whole thing, one would say, I think, is masterly. And so, up to a point, it is.

And here, mainly because it seems to be quite a good place for it, I am going to digress for a while. I said of Tracy that he is a nasty bit of work, and that, because of this, he is a very interesting character; and I think that this might be an excellent opportunity for a word about Tracy, and Hamilton's handling of character in general. Tracy is well-drawn because his creator so obviously enjoys him. Hamilton has an obvious gusto - the intent enthusiasm of an artist doing with apparent ease what he knows he can do as no-one else can - in drawing such boys as Tracy and Ponsonby. Allowing for his desire to get away from school, which is not a feature with the others, Tracy is, for a good many of the ten issues, one of the worst boys Hamilton ever imagined, and as such he is absorbingly interesting. I am sure that Hamilton had no liking for the character shown by Tracy, or Ponsonby, or Edgar Caffyn, or Bright, or Arthur Carter, to name a few others. But they were necessary to his plan and he had an artist's enjoyment in doing well what had to be done.

Now, it could be argued that it is easier to present a thoroughly bad character, and hold the reader's interest, than it is to convey and successfully portray an essentially good character. It is human nature to like to be horrified at the actions of others, and a writer who supplies this in sufficient quantities has part of his problem already solved. This, presumably, is why newspapers are full of the bad things that governments and people do, and devote comparatively little space to the good. And yet the basically good are necessary, from a novelist's point of view and in real life. Hamilton needed characters like Ponsonby and Tracy, Caffyn and Bright, but if everyone is bad the bad characters cannot hold one's interest. In fact, in that case, who are the bad characters? Hamilton needed, just as much as the Ponsonbys, etc., the Bob Cherrys, the Nugents, the Ogilvys, Linleys, etc., and, especially, he needed Tom Merry. Not only did he need him as an example of a normal, decent boy for the benefit of the young readers for whom he wrote primarily, but as a creative artist on any level he needed Tom.

Characters such as Jack Blake and Tom Merry have been criticised as colourless, an opinion which is the result of unimaginative, even thoughtless, reading. Try to imagine almost any outstanding St. Jim's story without Tom Merry and you will, I think, realise that it would fall to pieces. Try to imagine Gussy without Blake, and you will realise how much the colour of Gussy's character depends upon the apparently colourless Blake. Notice how an otherwise dull room becomes colourful if the sun shines into it. To our eyes the sun normally is a flaming, whitish yellow, so far as we can look at it at all, but the colourful aspect of that room comes from the sun. Do we value it the less, or do we appreciate the colourful warmth imparted to that room by the sun? If the nature of Blake's colour comes from Gussy it is just as valuable, for there is much about Arthur Augustus we should not know without such as Blake to receive and bounce back Gussy's colour. The quality of D'Arcy's personality stands out the more. And the case is more so with Tom Merry. Apart from the obvious qualities of a thoroughly decent boy, Merry

alone has no noticeable characteristics - designedly so; he does not need them. It is those characters who are called interesting who need them. So the lack of notable characteristics in Tom is true; but it is a half-truth, and one that has been badly misunderstood and has caused an amount of lop-sided criticism. Think for a moment of Tom Merry and another Shell fellow, Talbot. The Toff has had much of the limelight ever since he came to St. Jim's, and that is natural; he is an outstanding person. There have been critics who have complained that Hamilton devoted too much space to Talbot. It is true that Hamilton seems to have lost no opportunity to write about him, although whether what he has given us constitutes too much I am not going to argue. What, I think, is interesting particularly about Talbot, and one or two other characters, although the Toff was the first and obviously the best loved by his creator, is that he is an example of Hamilton's trying, fairly successfully, too, both to keep his cake and eat it, by providing figures who are linked with crooked ways but are, also, innately good, or decent, given the chance. Lancaster at Greyfriars is another, who, unfortunately, was not permanent; Kit Erroll, I suppose, must be counted another at Rookwood, though I feel that he does not quite come into this category. Joe Frayne is yet another, a mixture of Talbot and Erroll. They are all interesting experiments in character drawing, and they all interest me; but I suppose Talbot leads by a fair margin, with Dick Lancaster, for the length of his series, a good second.

However, what matters here is that, although the Toff is on good terms with almost every decent fellow, and some who, at the time, were not so decent - Levison, for instance, or Talbot's study-mate, Gore - he has only one real friend: Tom Merry. Without understanding Talbot's nature in the least - or, perhaps it would be truer to say without understanding the effect of such an upbringing as Talbot has had, or being able to imagine such an upbringing as possible - Tom gives Talbot his friendship unreservedly almost throughout the St. Jim's saga, from Talbot's coming permanently to the school. Now, again this has bred criticism. It has been said that the Merry-Talbot duo interferes with the Merry, Manners, Lowther trio, which existed before Talbot came on the scene. It was a danger, although I do not think it materialised. Hamilton, in my opinion, has always managed to steer the two groups without their clashing, and I will admit that this is a remarkable feat of navigation. Talbot likes and respects Manners and Lowther, although there is not the feeling for them that he has for Tom. Manners and Lowther equally like and respect Talbot, but again there is not the feeling they both have for Tom. But I can think of no instance where the duo get in the way of the trio, or, and this is the important point, where the reader's loyalties are interfered with, more than was designed in any particular story.

However, this is not the main issue here. Tom Merry as a character is, for the moment. I have maintained for many years that Johnny Bull, another of Hamilton's permanents who has been criticised as being unnecessary, as contributing almost nothing to the stories, is almost the subtlest character Hamilton ever invented. I am not going into my reasons here; I did so fully in an article in the 1972 C.D. Annual. But Merry, without being a similar character, is a similar case. It would appear that many readers are so taken up with other obviously important characters that they do not notice what is helping them to appreciate that importance.

This is the case with Talbot and Tom Merry. Talbot sends out rays that everyone recognises, but they are recognised as they rebound from Tom Merry. It is Tom's "colourlessness" that puts them in focus. Talbot needs Tom just as another famous Tom needs Jerry.

A like case in another art is the pianoforte. We talk about the 'colour' of musical instruments - oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, etc., - because it is a convenient way of conveying something. We could say 'timbre', but it would not have the general communication of an idea that comes from the word 'colour', so we use this word. Now, you will seldom find anyone talking about the colour of the piano; of the colour of certain types of piano music, yes, but not, as a rule, of the sound of the piano. And this is because, in one sense, unlike other instruments, it has no individual colour. It is like a blank screen. In so far as one can associate it with colour at all, it approximates to white - and white is either the absence of colour, or, more truly, the presence of all colours. And, in another sense, the piano is all colours. Its very absence of an individual colour allows it to take on the colours of other instruments in sympathy. If it is playing with a clarinet, it will at times sound like a clarinet, to such an extent that for a moment one can be deceived. Tom Merry is like the piano; other people's characteristic colour is received and sent back enriched, because he is there. There is much we would never know about the depths of other apparently much more interesting characters without the presence of Tom Merry. He is a triumph on Hamilton's part, and nearly as subtle an achievement as Johnny Bull. For such a creative artist as Hamilton was, the creation of Harry Wharton, Bunter, Coker, Talbot, Tracy, Ponsonby, and numbers of others, was comparatively easy. It is such as Bull, Blake, Tom Merry, that are really difficult to create and, still more, to maintain in their reflective relations with others. That they are often taken for granted and even dismissed as unnecessary is a tribute to their creator's genius; they are in the category of things we would "feel the miss of" if they were not there.

The Tracy series is one of Hamilton's maturest productions and, therefore, is a mine of fine writing and apt wit, with verbal felicities which include one of the neatest in-jokes in my experience. Mr. Prout, expostulating at finding the Remove waiting outside their form room because Mr. Quelch has not appeared, ends his remarks with one of his two favourite exclamations: "Unprecedented!" Vernon-Smith gravely says "Unparalleled, we were thinking, sir!" thus neatly returning the ball to Prout with his other favourite. It is no wonder that, as we are told, there is a gurgle from the Remove. The series is full of good things, Hamilton's invention at its finest in such details - the sort of thing that makes him a pleasure to read, even when one has something to criticise, and has caused many to describe him as a classic; if, as I understand it, "classic" means unique, a classic Hamilton certainly was, and nowhere more so than in the Tracy series. Nonetheless, there are criticisms to be made, and I hope I shall not seem churlish if I proceed to make them.

To return to the Lee series for a moment. This has not many holes, but there is one that I think is serious. When Mr. Lathom takes Lee to the Head to show him the ridiculous clothes in which the boy has appeared (Lee has delibertately changed from the Etons with which his parents had provided him) Dr. Holmes is

aware of Lee's desires, and that he did not want to come to St. Jim's. He says "I have been warned that you might prove troublesome, and that you would be greatly pleased to return home". He goes on "Mr. Lathom considers that you should be sent back home at once. I should agree with Mr. Lathom if I did not suspect that your present line of conduct was a species of trickery". The Head canes Lee. Now, this is the first Mr. Lathom has heard of any lack of desire on Lee's part to come to the school, and, even then, it is not imparted directly to him. This being so, he considers that Dr. Holmes is surmising and, while he cannot openly disagree with the Head, privately he does. Later we are made aware that Mr. Railton also is quite in the dark as to this aspect of Lee's activities, and Mr. Lathom, since he has dismissed Dr. Holmes' words to Lee as a misjudgment, says nothing to the Housemaster. They are, both of them, allowed to continue regarding Lee as a fool until he himself, inadvertently, makes it quite clear that he is not. This is what I find difficult to accept. I cannot believe that the Head of such a school as St. Jim's, with a new boy coming about whom he has had a definite warning from the boy's father of what may be expected from that boy, would not have acquainted the staff concerned with Lee with this information. Railton is his Housemaster, Mr. Lathom his form master. Both would naturally have been informed, and would have been prepared for whatever freakish behaviour Lee produced, knowing full well why he indulged in it. This is a definite lapse; on the other hand, a good deal of the story would have gone west if Dr. Holmes had acted as he should have done. In other words, Hamilton, in this instance, planned his story to depend upon something that would not happen. However, while this is, in my opinion, a serious hole in the story, it is as nothing to what we can find in the Tracy series, which has not one but a number of serious holes.

The Tracy series, in spite of all its good points, and they are many, is, for me, a flawed series; there is any amount of evidence of the presence of the master hand, but it is not a masterpiece. It has a number of drawbacks, of a kind one does not as a rule find in Hamilton's work. It is unusual, for instance, to find him ignoring the dictates of reason, as he does here, apparently in order to push the story, and certain episodes, along particular marked out lines. This not only concerns Tracy's escapades in his war with Quelch, but also his attempts, successful to a point, to land Wharton in trouble. Here, in fact, I think that Hamilton came close to disaster, since he pushed this aspect so far that he all but got to the point where, in addition to Tracy v Quelch, he had a third Wharton the Rebel situation on his hands; and this seems to me to get in the way of the main theme. However, with a certain amount of what is at times rather precarious juggling Hamilton does manage to avoid quite getting to that point.

There are other lapses involved in this causing of friction between Wharton and Mr. Quelch. In Magnet 1602, for instance, Tricky Tracy, we have Tracy, watched by Bunter as he hangs on the window sill, pouring marking ink into Mr. Quelch's desk, and puzzling Bunter by putting some on the handle of Wharton's pen. Bunter, of course, does not know that it is marking ink. Later, Mr. Quelch makes it quite clear to the form that someone has been in the form room during break to play this trick. He examines hands, and finds marking ink on Wharton's hand: naturally, since the Remove captain has picked up his pen. Mr. Quelch is angry

and distressed, but convinced that Wharton has done this. Now, Hamilton has made it equally clear in the first chapter that Wharton and his four pals spent break in the quad talking football, except when they were interrupted by Bunter. And yet Nugent, Cherry, Bull and Inky sit there without saying a word. They know that Wharton has not been in the form room during break; he was with them in the quad. Why do they not say so? Presumably, because this sequence had to follow its course and, from Hamilton's point of view, it would have been spoiled if such an alibi had been produced. Which argues bad planning. Either he should not have included that first chapter or he should have so contrived it that Wharton, for some reason, was not with the others, or at least not all the time. But Tracy's trick had to have its full development, and so four boys sit like dummies instead of speaking up. To cap it, it does not even occur to Wharton, either, that he has four witnesses to his innocence.

Then, in Magnet 1603, The Mystery of Mr. Quelch, there is Tracy's attempt, again successful for a time, to show that the Remove master has lost mental control - that he is mad, in fact. I have in the past found this whole episode distasteful and, having recently re-read the series, I find that I still have this reaction. Apart from this, which is purely personal, there are too many holes. No-one ever sees the form master as such at the window, mainly an arm throwing a firework; or his face is covered by a handkerchief, or his head is down and only the top of a mortar-board can be seen. Now, I can believe that schoolboys, not, on the whole, given a great deal to thinking, might be taken in by this sort of thing, but I would expect other form masters, supposedly thinking men, to allow a suspicion of so peculiar a set of circumstances to dawn upon them, with mature thought; especially in the face of Mr. Quelch's stout denial that he was in the study at all. Prout, we know, is self-centred, almost as much so as Bunter, and an affront to his dignity blots out all commonsensical thought for the time being, but the others, I think, should surely have shown some commonsense, instead of being so taken up with merely being incensed about the matter. Hamilton manages to make all this palaver of the masters fulminating against Quelch quite entertaining - he was an expert in a line he had originated - but not, to me, convincing. At least, one would think that their colleague's stern and emphatic denial would give them pause. It does not. But there is more than this. Again Hamilton has provided an alibi which is conveniently forgotten at the crucial moment. In Magnet 1601, The Runaway, when Dr. Locke first realises that Mr. Quelch has apparently disappeared, he looks for him personally. We are told "He looked into the library, where he found Mr. Woose, the librarian, who could only tell him that Quelch had not been there". That establishes Mr. Woose in the context of this series. But in 1603, with the first throwing of a firework at Mr. Prout from the Remove master's study window, when Mr. Quelch states that he has been in the library, no-one believes him, including the Head, who very kindly takes the view that events have proved too much for his friend and colleague. He is not believed, either, on a later occasion, when he has also been in the library. Now, why did no-one, including the Head, on either occasion, think of consulting Mr. Woose, who would surely have known if Mr. Quelch had been in the library? And, exactly as with Wharton and the marking ink, Mr. Quelch himself does not think of this obvious procedure. Again, the avoidance of this perfectly natural course weakens the story for me, although such a

verification would have finished Tracy's pranks - this aspect of them - and they have to be allowed to complete themselves, right up to Quelch's dramatic appearance outside the woodshed. As with the episode of the marking ink, it seems to me to be, unusually for Hamilton, badly planned.

One last point about this episode: the manner in which intelligent men, including again Dr. Locke, are completely taken in by an article of dress. It does not occur to any of them that a cap and gown is not a form master, or that it can be put on and taken off just as easily as a coat or trousers, or any other article of clothing. What we have here, in fact, is the converse of the situation in G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown story "The Invisible Man", in which no-one noticed the postman because they were so used to seeing him. In the Tracy incident everyone thought they saw Quelch because they saw someone in a cap and gown at Quelch's study window.

One more such point and I have done with these criticisms. In 1605, Saved by His Enemy, Tracy burns the 500 lines Wharton has unwisely said he will not do. Under persuasion from his friends he does write them, using a half-holiday for the purpose. He has already angered Mr. Quelch by trying to go out of gates without having done them. Later, after they are finished, he thinks Bunter has taken them, but Mr. Quelch does not believe that Wharton has written them. So he doubles the imposition. Again, material for Wharton's justification has been built up and is not used, presumably to allow the clash between Wharton and his form master to run the whole way. The other four of the Five leave Wharton in the study to write his lines. In spite of interruptions, from Tracy, among others, when they return we are told:

> "But Bob had come back in cheery spirits, after a tramp in keen, wintry air, rather a contrast to Harry Wharton, who was in anything but cheery spirits, after hours in the study, grinding out Latin lines.
>
> A pile of written lines lay on the table before him, and he was still wearily grinding when his friends arrived."

And a few lines later:

> "'I jolly well wish I'd never started these rotten lines - I'd better finish them now'.
>
> 'Pile in, old chap!.' said Frank Nugent. 'Fifty more won't take you long'."

And yet, in spite of the fact that his friends have this clear evidence that Wharton had written the lines, when Mr. Quelch, in the Remove passage, says that he believes that Bunter did not take the lines, and makes it quite clear that he does not believe that Wharton had written them, again not one of the four speaks up. Why? I can only think that it was because Hamilton was determined that this clash between form master and head boy should go the full way. Johnny Bull, famed for his commonsense, and with a gift for widening any breach that may exist, adds insult to injury by hinting that he does not believe that Harry had written them:

> "'That's all very well', said Johnny Bull slowly. 'But if a fellow doesn't hand in an impot he can say anything - and there's plenty of fellows would

spin a yarn like that if they could get by with it'."

So, in spite of Johnny's saying, a moment later, that he does believe Wharton (which is good of him, considering what he knows), he has managed to slip in the hint that it's difficult to believe; and yet he knows, as the others of the Five do, that Wharton did write the lines. So does Bunter, but he is a broken reed in such circumstances. But in this and the episode of the marking ink Wharton's pals are of no more use than Bunter.

These are instances of what I referred to as Hamilton ignoring the dictates of reason. It is very unusual to find him doing this, and what makes it the more remarkable is that he has, in each case, provided the material of an alibi, or of proof of the accused one's innocence, only to ignore it at the crucial moment. All stories, unless they are true, or are on a scale no larger than the anecdote, have a certain amount of contrivance about them, and it is part of the writer's business to see that the contrivance does not show - at least, not obviously; and it does not show, obviously, in Hamilton's best work as a rule. But it does, badly, in this series; he has, indeed, made it show when, with a better arrangement he need not have done so.

There is one other thing to note about the Tracy stories. In them, and to some extent in the second Wharton the Rebel series, Mr. Quelch is made to appear as a man not intelligent enough to learn from experience - and we know that this is not true of the Remove master. It is a peculiar portrait, a mixture of the real Mr. Quelch with characteristics that are not his. It seems that in order to keep the Quelch v Tracy v Wharton set up going Hamilton also had to make one of his finest established characters act out of character.

For these reasons, in spite of a richer content in many ways, I rate the Tracy series as spoiled, and lower in the scale than the earlier Angelo Lee story. This has its faults, but they are minor in comparison.

One peculiarity is shared by both series, apart from the basic theme. In each case the central figure is brought to his senses by a talking-to from a girl: Ethel Cleveland in the case of Lee, Marjorie Hazeldene with Tracy.

So we have Hamilton twice handling a theme rich in potential, one would think, and yet producing two series neither of which is free from faults, and one of which, the riper, is, in spite of many good things, badly flawed.

Many years before the Angelo Lee series appeared Gunby Hadath wrote several groups of stories about a boy called Sparrow. One collection, later published as a book, was called Sparrow in Search of Expulsion. Here the set up was quite different from that of either of the Hamilton series. Sparrow was a quiet, mischievous boy, not much like Lee - he had no overriding ambition except not to be at school - and nothing like Tracy at all. He had a running battle, quiet and mainly dignified, with his mathematics master, Mr. Eggett, "next in authority to the Head", the object of which was to be sent away from school - because he was poorly, because the school food did not agree with him, because school did not agree with him; he didn't think any school would agree with him. His letters home were full of pathos, if one took them seriously. No-one did. Here is an extract from one of

them:

> Dearest Mother,
>
> I write to tell you I am no better and my chest is very sore. I think it must be the air here and the chalk in the school water which ought to be boiled or filted but isn't I'm sure. I am sorry I am costing you and father so much but I do not think school is any good. Willett, one of the fellows, borrowed my camera to make a musicle box and he can't make the inside fit again. I hope Mabel's cold is better. I am glad she is not at school. I think I have caught consumption. Will you send me a book called A Happy Sunset its all about a boy who got hit by a cricket ball and a disease set in and he died peacably. Its wonderful I don't get hit by a cricket ball so many fellows smack them all over the shop at practice. I don't think the food is good but I should not mind if I was stronger.

And so on, and so on. Here, too, is part of an exchange between long-suffering Mr. Eggett and the prime cause, as he sees it, of the indigestion which dogs him:

> "But, Sparrow", remarked Mr. Eggett with some emphasis, "I spent all last lesson explaining a trial balance to you!"
>
> "Yes, sir", said Sparrow.
>
> "And that is all you can make of it?"
>
> Sparrow's hand slid from the desk to his waistcoat. "Sir", he sighed, "the food here disagrees with me. The harder I try to eat it, the iller I feel."
>
> "But what has that to do with book-keeping?"
>
> "I wish I knew, sir", was the even reply.

This sort of fencing is carried on with a mastery not even Hamilton could have bettered. The relationship between Mr. Eggett and Sparrow is friendly - each knows and respects the other. The whole adds up to one of the most attractively amusing works of one of the best of school story writers.

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MORCOVE'S FINAL YEARS

By Esmond Kadish

It is always a sad business when a favourite paper appears to be in decline - "on the skids" as it were. Certainly there seemed to be little sign of this in the "Schoolgirls' Own" in the latter part of 1932. The Morcove saga appeared to be proceeding apace, as smoothly and serenely as the fictional career of one of its favourite characters - Pam Willoughby, "the little lady of Swanlake". Horace Phillips' stories - written, as everyone knows, under the pen-name of "Marjorie Stanton" - had, in fact, been extended to fill half the paper from the customary eleven or twelve pages, and, at one point in the early 'thirties, Morcove's allotted space went well beyond eighteen pages. Thus, the Morcove stories seemed destined to delight readers of the "Schoolgirls' Own" for some years yet, although some of the more discerning might, perhaps, have detected signs that all was not well.

One such indication might have been the expulsion from Morcove of Cora Grandways in late 1932. As a character, Cora is arrogant, snobbish, spiteful and greedy, and is appropriately named. By pre-war standards, she was, in fact, a brazen hussy - not even possessing the redeeming qualities of a good and bad mixture like Diana Royston-Clarke at Cliff House - but she had been prominently featured in the Morcove tales since their inception in 1921, so it must have been something of a shock for readers to realise, in the autumn of 1932, that she was no longer to be part of the Morcove scene, apart from two later "guest" appearances. Cora was, in short, a "character" - an unpleasant girl, but interesting. In the 1925 Morcove series in which he introduced the delightful Jemima Carstairs, Mr. L. E. Ransome, who was "substituting" for Horace Phillips, describes how Cora reacts when she is suspected of using a "crib" in an exam:-

> "But Cora returned the glances defiantly. Cora might be reckless, and she might be unscrupulous, but cheating was not quite her game; it was far, far too petty for Cora."

Mr. Phillips who, of course, created Cora in the first place, seems to share this view. Cora is not just a thin-lipped, lank-haired meanie, like her toadying "friend", "Ursula Wade. She is, by and large, a thoroughly unpleasant bit of work, and a schemer and mischief maker, but, somehow, bold, defiant and brazen about it all.

At the beginning, Cora had a sister, Judith Grandways, as unlikeable as she. Subsequently, Judith "reformed", and was, therefore, known to the wayward Cora, (with, perhaps, some justification!) as "Misery". Cora, herself, reformed during the course of a long series of stories in 1928, but the reformation was, happily, not permanent, and she soon reverted to type. In a series written in late 1931, and

using not a little of what our "C.D." reviewer would rightly call "heavy contrivance", Judith and Dave Lawder of Grangemoor become brother and sister, in finding their long-lost, widowed mother, and are thereafter referred to as Dave and Judy Cardew. This is one of those "missing heirs" series, wildly improbable, but, at a youthful age, very satisfying to read.

Cora, herself, is "written out", less than a year later, as a result of some typically arrogant and disloyal behaviour. In "Forced to Leave Morcove", Polly Linton, the Fourth Form "madcap", is forced to quit the school, and go to a new "swanky" rival establishment, Fallowfield, because Mr. Linton has had a "business quarrel" with Madge Minden's father. Fallowfield had once been a private country house, and is described as being furnished with:-

> "mahogany wardrobes, radiators, easy chairs, chromium plating, colour schemes in carpets and curtains - nothing had been omitted that makes for lavish appearance and comfort".

Shields' illustrations show the pupils of this new, rival school to Morcove as belonging to a rather "horsey" set, and Mr. Phillips describes their arrival at the local station for the new term:-

> "Some of the scholars mobbed round their headmistress in a distinctly 'teacher's favourite' style. Others minced about the platform in twos and threes, showing a studied unconcern about luggage. Let porters and chauffeurs see to the mountains of trunks and bags that had come on the train, along with golf bags and other 'gear'."

No doubt the attitude of the Fallowfield girls was coloured by the fact that the fees were "one hundred and thirty guineas per term", so, perhaps, they felt themselves justified in demanding such (for Morcove) unheard of luxuries as "matching colour schemes".

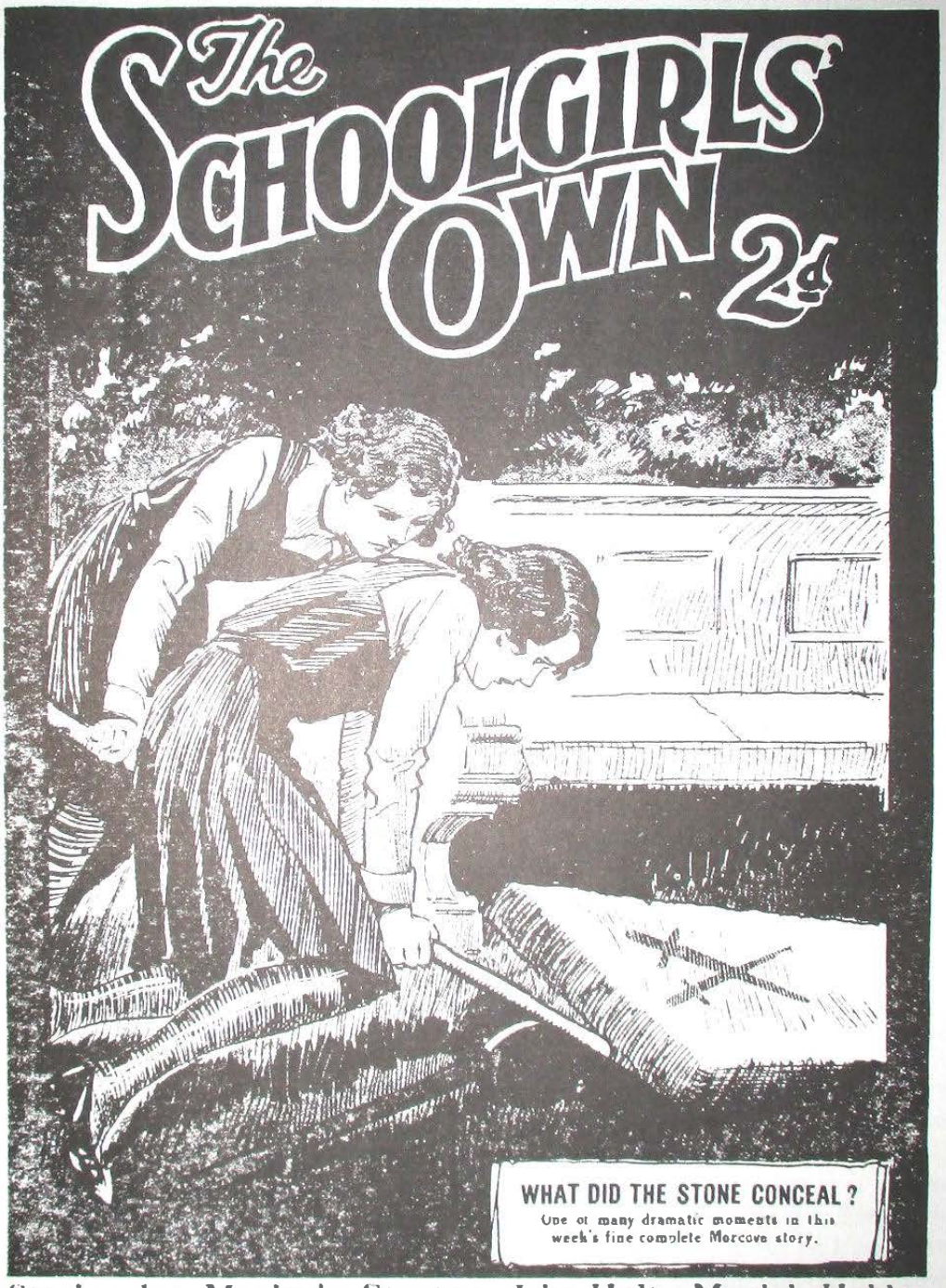
Polly Linton, of course, is desolated at the thought of substituting Fallowfield for Morcove, and even more upset when she learns that Cora is to go too. Cora's reaction is quite different:-

> "'No more Morcove for me - hurrah, hooray! You've seen the brochure? But the more girls they get, the sooner they can lower the fees. Not that I ever want to see paupers creeping in!'"

In its efforts to establish itself, Fallowfield tries to "collar" Morcove's pupils, and, to this end, Cora, in collusion with Hetty Curzon, supplies her new school with the names and addresses of Morcove parents - an act for which the Fourth Form mistress, Miss Everard, is unjustly suspected and dismissed. In the end, both Miss Everard and Polly are restored to Morcove, but Miss Somerfield, Morcove's headmistress, refuses to take Cora back.

Why, Mr. Phillips decided to drop such a colourful character as Cora from the Morcove stories is not quite clear. Perhaps he had grown tired of her, or thought that she was a little out of date for the 'thirties; whatever the reason, it left a vacuum in the Morcove tales which was not really filled until the Denver sisters appeared on the scene in early 1934. Cora, in fact, turned up again, like a bad

"Morcove's Treasure Trail" A Fine Complete Story About a Famous School



Stories by Marjorie Stanton, Iris Holt, Muriel Holden

penny, in 1933, when the Morcove girls return to school from their Easter holidays to find a "property development" in progress - quite a topical theme!

> "Significant, dismaying changes; a marring of the lovely coastland scenery by gigantic hoardings and new fencing, and notice boards, and dumps of building material."

A new hotel, the Headland, is being erected adjacent to Morcove with "hundreds of acres of private grounds, with golf course and private bathing beach", and Mr. Grandways and the "syndicate" have shut off access to the moors and seashore for the Morcove girls. This is Mr. Grandways' revenge for Morcove's rejection of Cora, who figures prominently in the stories. Finally, much to Morcove's relief, father and daughter abandon their connection with the project, and the hotel is built without any attempt to infringe on Morcove's land rights.

But, apart from this brief reappearance, Cora plays little part in the affairs of Morcove; the main interest during 1933 and 1934 was in Mr. Phillips' development of the four Grangemoor boys, and their increasing importance in his plots. Polly's brother, Jack, had been featured for some years, and so had Dave Lawder (who, as has been said, became Dave Cardew); to these two, Mr. Phillips added Jimmy Cherrol and Bobby Bloot, usually known as "Tubby". Mr. Phillips seemed, for a while, undecided about whether to feature Jimmy or his cousin Dick as regular members of the Grangemoor Co., but Jimmy finally prevailed.

Just as Edwy Searles Brooks' Moor View girls seem to me the most successful introduction of the "opposite sex" in a boys' story, so Marjorie Stanton's Grangemoor boys appear to take the honours in a school story written primarily for girls - in some ways they were more successful, because Mr. Phillips created four distinct and real characters out of his boys. Jack was breezy and fun-loving, perhaps too much of a "wow" not to be a little tiresome in real life. In contrast, his best pal, Dave, was serious, steady and unemotional - he made an excellent detective when required. Jimmy Cherrol was described as an "ordinary" boy, and was inclined to be bashful in the presence of his favourite Morcovian, Pam Willoughby. Tubby Bloot, a plump youth, is referred to as "good-natured", and he needs to be, since he seems to spend his time putting up with so much "ribbing" from his pals without complaint, that in modern times one feels he would be a candidate for the psychiatrist's couch. A fifth member of the Co. was introduced in 1935 - Tom Trevor, but he is a mere cipher, apparently dragged in to complement the arrival of his sister, "Bunny" on to the Morcove scene. It should be remembered, of course, that the Grangemoor characters were essentially schoolboys in a girls' school story. They were presented as girls might imagine an ideal brother or boy-friend; such little tricks as always bestowing boxes of chocolates on the Morcove girls, whenever they met them, would probably be considered an excess of gallantry in real life, and would not endear them to the average schoolboy. However, the Grangemoor boys became very popular amongst the readers of the "Schoolgirls' Own", and in 1935 Horace Phillips wrote a serial, "Grangemoor to Guard Her", which was described as "a boys' story written specially for girls". Perhaps this falling between two stools may have been the reason for its not seeming entirely successful, but, at least, it was a brave effort.

1934 also saw the arrival of Cora's successors, Fay and Edna Denver. Both were put in the Fourth, although they were not twins. Fay is the leader of the duo, and is described as being "excessively pretty", and is pictured by Shields with fair hair curling in a "long bob" to her shoulders. The sisters seem charming girls when they first arrive at Morcove, but appearances are deceptive. Fay causes a feud with Grangemoor by dressing up as a Grangemoor boy and leaving an "insulting" effigy of Betty Barton for the Morcove girls to see. "War" is declared between Morcove and Grangemoor until the sisters are unmasked and harmony is restored. From then on, the Denvers are the arch enemies of Betty and Co. They are good characters in their own right, although, possibly, not as colourful as Cora in her heyday.

It was in 1935 that the first obvious signs of decline appeared in the "Schoolgirls' Own". The Morcove stories were reduced in size to their former limit of barely twelve pages. Perhaps in a bid to revive a flagging circulation, Horace Phillips introduced a new character, "Bunny" Trevor who was intended to be a permanent and important member of the famous Study 12 Co. Bunny first appears in No. 737, having a go on her brother's motorbike:-

> "It was not the first time Bunny had taken liberties with her brother's brand-new 'speedy', finding it temptingly at hand at the top of a garden path."

Mrs. Trevor is, apparently, less concerned about possible injury to her daughter than in the damage to her dress:-

> "'Oh, what a trial she is!' sighed Mrs. Trevor, and yet there was a half-amused expression guaranteeing a hope that this Bunny always would be just as she was today. 'And wearing her best things too!' "

A proper sport, our Bunny'.

She is described as an "up-to-the-minute modern girl" in the editor's chat, and, later, it is said, rather hopefully, that "Bunny has now established herself firmly as a much-admired member of the Study 12 'chummery' ".

Well, maybe, but she seems a little too much like an up-dated version of Polly Linton to me to be entirely successful. The main distinction is that when she speaks she "sparkles" whereas Polly is moodier, and is said to "gloom". Shields shows her with a mass of tight curls - a little like an early "Afro" hair-do. Altogether, a pleasant character, but not one of Mr. Phillips' most exciting creations.

Thus, the "Schoolgirls' Own" proceeded on its inevitable downward journey throughout 1935 and the first half of '36. There were still good things to come, of course:- a seaside concert party setting for the Easter holidays, an "impersonation" of Head Girl Ethel Courtway by her double, Agatha Drew, which, naturally, deceived everyone, and final visits by Morcove and Grangemoor to Mr. Phillips' favourite mythical countries - Nakara, Naomer's desert kingdom in North Africa, and Turania, a mountainous Balkan state. Finally - and fittingly - Cora Grandways bobs up again in the pen-ultimate series, as scheming and arrogant as ever:-

"She had good looks and she knew it. No girl could have been more conceited about her attractive appearance than was Cora."

- and, again, a typical Horace Phillips' judgement on Cora's character:-

"'Mr. Grandways, miss, asked me to see if I could find you,' said the smart boy-in-buttons. No amiable 'Thanks!' not even a smiling nod rewarded the page. Like her over-rich and vulgar parents, Cora did not believe in politeness to servants."

As the Morcove stories appeared to contract, Leonard Shields' depiction of the characters became ever more glamorous. The girls looked, at times, like film stars in the days when Hollywood, not Paris, really set fashion trends for women. Miss Flinders, too, drew some attractive and charming Morcove illustrations while Mr. Shields was "on holiday". There were (sinister portent!) some non-Morcove covers as well, and the "Schoolgirls' Own" limped on until May 1936, when it amalgamated with the "Schoolgirl", to the detriment of both papers. Why they decided to kill it off we shall probably never know. Perhaps it was the competition of the newly-emergent "Girls' Crystal", or perhaps Mr. Phillips was just tired of writing about Morcove. The Morcove serials in the "Schoolgirl" continued until February 1938, and the final instalment of "Schoolgirls in Society" contained some appropriately wistful comments, expressing the never-to-be-realised hope that, one day, Morcove would live again. There were, though, Morcove stories in both the 1938 and '39 "Schoolgirls' Own Annuals", and Horace Phillips wrote the first and last non-Morcove story, under the pen-name of Marjorie Stanton, for the 1940 'Annual' - as well as one using the name of Joy Phillips. However, for all practical purposes, Morcove no longer existed.

What, then, can one say of Horace Phillips - or Marjorie Stanton - on the sixtieth anniversary of the birth of Morcove School? His outlook and style were certainly, to some extent, a bit Victorian and strait-laced, and his stories were, on the whole, on the serious and moral side. He was at his best, for instance, writing about a conflict of loyalties, as in the 1934 series where Pam Willoughby is torn between her duty as temporary captain of the Form, and her concern for her wayward boy cousin. As Joy Phillips, he wrote, for the "School Friend" of the late twenties, such serials as, "Clarice of the Cheerful Heart" - a much better story than the rather dreadful title might indicate! He wrote boys' stories, too - and good ones! - starting well before the first World War. An interesting example is a 120-paged "Boys' Friend Library" school story entitled, "The Worst House at Ravenshill", which, incidentally, contains some interesting advertisements for "Cheer Boys Cheer", and a "grand new weekly story paper - 'The Penny Popular'." (There was also one for Pears' Soap, described as "beautifully scented" and "matchless for the complexion". I wonder which readership this was aimed at!

However, it is for Morcove and its characters that Mr. Phillips will, obviously, be chiefly remembered, and if I have made him sound a trifle solemn and austere, let me hasten to add that he did, indeed, have a sense of humour. This extract from a 1927 Christmas series where Naomer, the girl from North Africa, and Paula, "the elegant duffer", are preparing to go to bed in a large, somewhat eerie country house, is a good example:-

> "Paula, closing her eyes for sleep, chuckled softly. It added to the pleasant sensation of drowsiness - the sound of impish Naomer rustling about, filling that other stocking.
> Then, suddenly, there were startling sounds, as of lots of little things falling to the floor, and Naomer tittered.
> 'Naow what's the matter?' inquired Paula, sitting up again.
> 'Heah - Healp! That stocking of mine -'
> 'He burst! He, he, he!' "

And, later after hearing an uncanny noise:-

> "Down went Naomer's head under the bedclothes. Not for a few seconds did she venture to peep over the edge of the bed-coverings, and then she got a fresh scare.
> Where was Paula?
> When at last Naomer sat up, with great courage, she saw that Paula was back in the other bed. She had not been spirited away. In fact, she had merely followed Naomer's example, and hidden herself under the blankets! "

Such gentle humour is, alas! no longer fashionable, but those of us who read and enjoyed the Morcove tales in the twenties or thirties - and I'm not ashamed to be numbered amongst that company - will have many fond memories of "the romantic world of Morcove School". When the mood is right, we can visualise, for instance, the surrounding moorland, ablaze with yellow gorse, the storm-lashed Devon coast, the steep flight of steps leading down to the school's "private bathing beach", the picturesque old market town of Barncombe, where, at the Creamery, Betty and Co. are wont to have tea and cream buns on a "halfer", the imposing Barncombe Castle, and, in contrast, Dolly Delane's cottage at the side of the moorland road. Above all, we recollect the girls themselves: sterling Betty and her chums - Polly, Pam, Tess, Madge, Paula, Naomer, Judy and the rest of the "coterie", settling down to the cosy and civilised security of a "tea in Study 12".

All dreams and fantasy, of course, are quite inappropriate for the rough, tough, terribly real world of the eighties - but, sometimes, Morcove, too, seems almost real!

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A Letter from St. Frank's

by JIM COOK

In a Public School like St. Frank's birthdays are of no general concern except to the individual who may look forward to a big tip from home and perhaps a hamper to augment the alleged spartan diet the school authorities consider is sufficient. 27th March dawned like any other day. The weather was seasonal and the domestic staff went about its business of preparing breakfast long before the boys were awakened by the first rising bell. Old Josh Cuttle admitted Mudford, the postman, through the big gates, and a solitary sparrow perched high on the North Tower of the Ancient House, looked with a sideways glance down into the Triangle for his first meal of the day.

27th March began so like many thousands more days at St. Frank's that nobody expected it to be different; nobody, that is, except the Hon. Douglas Singleton.

The Hon. Douglas shares Study N in the West House with Hussie Ranjit Lal Kahn. And they sleep in their own little dormitory. The clangour of milk churns from the domestic quarters probably was responsible for a premature awakening as Singleton sat up in his bed and realised he still had another hour before going down. So he settled down to enjoy the warm comfort between the sheets until the bell clanged.

Today was Singleton's birthday. The Hon. Douglas was well aware of it as he lay snugly in bed. Not that it mattered whether it was his birthday or anybody's for birthdays came and went as far as he was concerned. What was unusual about a birthday he asked himself as sleep had now left him and he lay there in pensive mood. Some of the many attributes ascribed to him was that he was reckless with money, a great gossip, generous and lazy, and Singleton agreed to them all.

Reckless with money! He studied that doubtful quality in his character in his mind as he lay there thinking.

It was his birthday; he had plenty of money; it was going to be another humdrum sort of day of lessons and prep to round it off. Why not make this birthday an event that would be long remembered at St. Frank's? It was a half holiday today and there were no particular sport fixtures on.

Singleton continued to turn the idea of spending his birthday over in his mind, and when the second Rising bell had tolled its unwelcome message he had a plan that staggered even him. It wouldn't be the first time the Hon. Douglas had shocked the school. It is in records that he once bought a school as a rival establishment to St. Frank's. His fortune was threatened when consorting with crooks in London; but the ever watchful Nelson Lee joined the London rogues in disguise and was able to rescue Singleton.

Now it seemed the Hon. Douglas was going to be reckless with his money in a

different kind of way. By the time he had entered the form-room for the first lesson of the day he was determined that 27th March was going to be a day to be remembered for many years to come; a day that would be known as Singleton's Day!.

After dinner, a meeting was held in the Junior Common Room, and Singleton's great idea for celebrating his birthdate was put to the vote. Every junior in the Lower School attended the meeting and they voted unanimously in favour. Singleton's suggestion was accepted nem. con. and without a division; even nonentities like Enoch Snipe, Clifton, Hubbard, etc., were included in the great plan. Billy Nation, Study 3, Modern House, who is given to quoting sayings and proverbs commented 'There's good new yet to hear, and fine things yet to be seen'. Which summed up the general mood of the juniors. Even Nipper could find no fault with Singleton's idea for a birthday celebration and since there were no dissenters it wouldn't have mattered if he did.

Yung Ching, Study R, West House, who rarely takes part in any activity got up by the juniors, shook off his Chinese inscrutability and joined in the great cheer that came at the end of Singleton's speech. Although Chingy did quote a familiar Chinese maxim about it was better to bend with the wind when it blows!.

Thus it was than ten luxurious coaches could be seen entering the Triangle and driving round the fountain where they halted. An hour had passed since Singleton's meeting in the junior Common Room and evidently he had been very busy.

Boys from the four Houses quickly filled the standing coaches while seniors and masters looked on in amazement, and within a short time the coaches were travelling down Bellton Lane with their cargo of excited schoolboys - the entire Lower School of St. Frank's.

It was the most unusual of half holidays the school had ever known. And after the last of the coaches had passed through the gates into the lane a great silence descended upon the school.

After passing through Bellton and Bannington the coach drivers halted at Helmford where they filled up their petrol tanks and fixed destination boards to show London was their point of arrival.

London!.

St. Frank's on its way to London on a Wednesday afternoon!. The inhabitants of Helmford, slightly less accustomed to the ways of the St. Frank's boys, probably wondered as they saw ten coach-loads of schoolboys on their way to London, but schoolboys were doing all sorts of strange things these days.

The route to the Capital lay through Guildford, Ripley, Esher, where they left the Portsmouth Road and entered Kingston. Soon the boys were being driven through Fulham Road, Brompton Road, then into Park Lane to finish at Hyde Park opposite the Dorchester Hotel.

It was the end of the journey.

Singleton had booked reservations at the Dorchester for the entire Junior Lower School; it was his birthday celebration and included besides the boys, Archie

Glenthorne's man, Phipps, Tubbs, the page of the Ancient House; Mary Jane, and Mrs. Poulter.

It was a splendid gesture from the Hon. Douglas to invite so many to his party and it was a pity some had been unable to accept because of various duties connnected with the school.

The dinner was a huge success and Fatty Little did full justice to the variety of dishes listed in the menu.

Towards the end of the meal Singleton announced he had booked seats at the famous London Palladium for his party.

Limousines were waiting in the forecourt to take them to the well-known music hall and within ten minutes after leaving the Dorchester the boys and guests were in Argyle Street and entering the Palladium.

The show, which included many world famous artistes, was acclaimed the finest the party had ever seen. And all too soon the National Anthem was played to end the night's performance.

The party was ready to return to St. Frank's after a glorious outing.

But Singleton hadn't finished yet. There was still another item in his programme to be fulfilled.

Although the great crowds of London Town were very much in evidence that evening, Singleton had little difficulty collecting his party to the waiting limousines that stood in readiness outside the theatre. For some strange reason these cars were not hindered or blocked in any traffic jams as they made their way through Oxford Street and Bayswater Road soon coming to Shepherds Bush where they turned off at Westway and entered Western Avenue.

The Hon. Douglas Singleton was thoroughly enjoying himself.

The long line of limousines sped along smoothly and comfortably. Nobody had questioned the reason for this journey out of London ... it was all taken for granted.

Singleton had never known Handforth & Co. to be so quiet as they sat with Nipper & Co. with the Hon. Douglas sitting beside the driver. A strange unreality was beginning to invade the happy atmosphere. But this was swiftly dispelled as the cars suddenly pulled off the road and entered Northolt Airport.

There they were met by Sir Hobart Manners, father of Irene of the Moor View School.

Sir Hobart led the party to an enormous plane that stood in the shadow of a giant hangar. Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi were standing by the gangway that led up to the entrance to the plane. Splashed across the body of the plane was WANDERER in glowing red letters.

Nelson Lee then took charge and very soon the entire party was seated in the plane and the door shut. The interior of the machine reminded Singleton of Big Hall

at St. Frank's.

It seemed as though the plane was divided into three parts, each the size of Big Hall.

In a matter of moments they were airborne, and soon the lights of London lay beneath them - one great mass of illumination.

Nelson Lee appeared and made an announcement. Instead of lessons they were to see a film show which brought a great cheer from everybody. But a light meal was first served by stewardesses who reminded Singleton they looked very much like some of the Moor View girls. But they were all dressed in blue uniforms and seemed indifferent to the look Singleton gave them.

The plane was now soaring to its scheduled 42,000 feet as previously announced by the pilot and was on its way to St. Frank's.

The film was shown and Singleton had an idea he had seen it previously at the Bannington Palladium. But that film lasted very much longer than this one for it was over it seemed soon after it began.

Lord Dorrimore came along when the lights went up and said they were now approaching the playing fields of St. Frank's. The plane glided down and landed quietly as a feather.

Ten coaches were awaiting the party as they disembarked the plane and were driven round to the Triangle at St. Frank's. The clock in the North Tower of the Ancient House was striking as Singleton stepped down from the coach and fell to the ground. He had missed his footing and seemed to be covered in bedclothes. He was alone.

He was back in his little dormitory and he realised it was all a dream. The clock striking from the North Tower had been the Rising bell.

Thus ended Singleton's birthday celebration. After he had awakened his thoughts had returned him to sleep and to dream what might have been one of the most extraordinary of parties ever given by a schoolboy at St. Frank's had it been true.

But Singleton is rich enough and reckless enough to give such a celebration except, of course, the charter of the giant plane which belonged to the future.

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- GOLDHAWK REVISITED -

By ROY PARSONS

Christmas 1981 will mark the twentieth anniversary of Charles Hamilton's death. It is very common for an artist - particularly a writer or musician - to suffer something of an eclipse following his death to be followed by a revival some twenty years or so later. It is doubtful whether public tastes could now change to such an extent that Hamilton's work will be as widely read as it was in his golden years. But then it is also doubtful whether it suffered the common decline after his death. Probably critical and informed interest in his writing has been, and remains, very high.

That interest has been expressed in many articles over the years and perhaps the one thing now lacking is a comprehensive study of his work in one collected volume - a task for the future perhaps. The most difficult part of such a task would be to cover Hamilton's earliest writing because of the difficulty in tracking down material. The post-war period may also not be easy - partly because of the diversity of publication in which Hamilton's work appeared at that time but also because there is a natural tendency to view it as inherently inferior to that of the inter-war period. Now that this work is itself part of the history of the hobby it is worth an occasional review to examine it in a little more perspective - if not in total at least in part. I have recently, through the help of one of our club members, had the opportunity to do this. I managed to obtain a set of the Gold Hawk Series and, in reading them through for the first time in over ten years, I thought I might look at them afresh and see how they can be compared to the overall St. Jim's genre.

Readers will remember that the Gold Hawk series consisted of 11 issues of St. Jim's stories published 2 per month (Number 9 excepted) dated 1952 and 1953 in not-quite-S.O.L. size paperback form, priced 1/6. The titles were as follows:

1. Tom Merry's Secret
2. Tom Merry's Rival
3. The Man from the Past
4. Who Ragged Railton?
5. Skimpole's Snapshot
6. Trouble for Trimble
7. D'Arcy in Danger
8. D'Arcy on the Warpath
9. D'Arcy's Disappearance
10. D'Arcy the Reformer
11. D'Arcy's Day Off

The publishers were Hamilton and Co. (Stafford) Ltd. - no relation, one assumes - from an address in Goldhawk Road, Shepherds Bush, and they were crested as Gold Hawk Books. I have never come across anything else published by this firm who have long since disappeared.

These were not the first post-war St. Jim's stories. Hamilton had already written five hard-backs published by Mandeville - indeed there is at least one cross-reference to the hard-backs in this series. They were eventually to outlast the paperbacks by several years.

I found re-reading these stories an undiluted nostalgic delight. It took me back, not just the thirty years (nearly) to their first publication but further to the days of the Gem. As a series it is like a shorthand review of the Summer Gem as all the stories are set in the cricket season. One is conscious of differences - new pieces of slang for example, recognition of that peculiar post-war creature, the 'spiv', and references to Carcroft rather than, perhaps, Rookwood. But then it was Carcroft which was currently being featured in Pie magazine. But there were appearances from characters long-forgotten (Skimpole particularly) and the last new boy to arrive at the school, Ridd - a cousin of Jack Blake and coming from Yorkshire rather than the West Country as his name would suggest. He plays an important part in Tom Merry's Rival.

The plots are generally variants on familiar themes, including the inevitable Talbot story in the Man from the Past; the most melodramatic and to me least successful of the set. But stories of inter-house rivalry as in D'Arcy on the Warpath can always be made to come up fresh if the incidents and characterisation are good enough. And there are some very good passages in the series - for example, the final chapter in 'Who Ragged Railton' with D'Arcy lecturing his house-master on honesty, or the passages between Knox and Skimpole in Skimpole's Snapshot. Some of the writing is near-vintage Hamilton.

However I must beware of over-praising the stories. The canvas on which they are painted is, perhaps, rather smaller than of old. With the exception of one story the New House get comparatively little mention. A more serious imbalance however is the over-emphasis on Cardew who is made to feature too prominently in too many of this short series. Finally the emphasis at the beginning of the series of 'Do You Remember Tom Merry' as the back cover said, switched to featuring D'Arcy as a lead character - certainly featured in each of the last five titles. It seemed that a decision had been taken to build up D'Arcy as a main comic character. This seems to me to be an error and sometimes resulted in D'Arcy's role being over-written and his intelligence being reduced to Alonzo Todd level in an effort to create more humour. It was, perhaps, an attempt to emulate the Bunter books where success had been achieved by concentrating even further the previous style of Greyfriars stories to plots based upon this central character. It is interesting that the reference to Frank Richards in each issue, acknowledging the common authorship, refers to him as the creator of Billy Bunter rather than Harry Wharton and Co.

In considering this series the illustrations should not be overlooked. In the first four issues only the cover was illustrated by an anonymous artist hardly in the

Hamilton tradition. From issue number 5 onwards C. H. Chapman was acknowledged as the cover artist and although the covers for 5 and 6 are hardly typical the remainder are. He also added a drawing at the head of the text. The change was a great improvement although, of course, Chapman was not the traditional St. Jim's artist.

Eleven issues was not a long series and one is left wondering why it was not extended. Perhaps it was just not successful enough; perhaps the publishers failed for other reasons. Perhaps Charles Hamilton could not by this time sustain a long series at the rate of two stories a month plus his other commitments.

To conclude, how does one rate these stories? Obviously not at the top of the list, but they should have a respectable place in the St. Jim's catalogue. They are at least genuine and not substitute stories and not all of Hamilton's own work, even from the inter-war years, is of uniformly high standard - Packsaddle, Bunny Hare for example. Possibly the best summary I can give is to point out that perhaps it was appropriate that the prevailing colour of the covers was blue - a generally happy colour to associate with St. Jim's. Why not revisit Gold Hawk and judge for yourselves?

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Greetings to all Laurel and Hardy enthusiasts from "The Helpmates Tent", sons of the Desert, and Malcolm Stuart Fellows

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= =

Greetings from Cambridge to all Digest friends and warm thanks to Eric for keeping us all together with the Digest.

BILL THURBON

= =

A School For All Seasons

BY Leslie Rowley

I - THE SCHOOL

The breakers, in their fury of spume and spray, lash the steep white cliffs of the Shoulder before thrusting themselves upon the dark rocks of the Black Pike and the treacherous entry to Seagull's Cave. High above the questing seas, the fresh green of the grass crowns the white of the cliff face, save where the meandering brown of the cliff path winds its way from Pegg to Hawkscliff. From those two fishing villages, stray wisps of smoke escape from chimney pots set in the distant red tiled roofs. Turn your back on the strong winds from the east, and face the fields and meadows that mark the limits of smallholding and country estage. There, beyond the intervening patchwork quilt of farm and orchard, a grey shroud of buildings intrudes upon the clouded blue of the sky. On that spot, many centuries ago, monks in their sober habits followed the stern bent of their calling. Today, most of the buildings that sheltered them have gone. Only the broken arches of the cloisters and the crumbling masonry of the ruined tower remain.

Dignified, almost aloof, the buildings that we know as Greyfriars School, and the grounds in which they are set, reach out toward the nearby village of Friardale, where the square Saxon tower of the church casts a maternal shadow over the thatched cottage and mullion-windowed shop and inn. The river Sark, a ribbon - sometimes of silver, sometimes of blue - flows on, under the small stone bridge, its pleasant reaches skirting the grounds of the "Three Fishers" inn and the game preserves of Sir Hilton Popper. Popper Court stands further back, half hidden by a conspiracy of trees as though ashamed of its mortgaged indebtedness. Fed by tributary and stream that edge their dwindling passages across Courtfield Common, the Sark sulks onward to reach the market town of the same name, breaking only where it passes either side of a small ait known as Popper's Island.

Further afield, the occasional oast house gives evidence to the county in which it is set. Whilst, to the west, Friardale Wood spreads its miscellany of trees around the taller, more ancient, Prior's Oak. The shriek of the small local train on its branch line progress, does solitary battle with the squeal of some adventurous seagull. Along the Redclyffe Road the country bus is ferrying the folk from Friardale to the great outside world of Lantham.

No survey map will guide you to this corner of the lovely county of Kent. No

ticket is available to transport you by road or rail to any of the places I have mentioned. Walk your feet off, if you will, along country road or dusty lane, and you will find no signposts pointing to Lantham, Courtfield or Friardale. Search gazetteer or guide book, and your industry will be in vain. To discover this part of Kent you must select another route, and place your hand in that of the man who created it all. Go down the path that stretches from 1908 to 1940, and travel - as countless legions have journeyed before you - through the wonderful world of Greyfriars. Let your age be eight or over eighty, it is a journey once made you will make again and again, untiring and happy.

Nearby Courtfield, with its small cinema and even smaller police station; its branch of the Courtfield and County Bank; the rather ambitious Chunkleys' Stores; and Mr. Lazarus' store where one could buy, pawn, or hire jewellery, bric-a-brac and theatrical costumes, is large enough to have its own council and grammar schools. Across the river, Highcliffe caters for those whose aristocratic purses can afford a public school education. It is doubtful whether they receive value for money. The weak administration of Dr. Voysey together with the sycophancy of Mr. Mobbs, does not augur well for academic performance! There are times, indeed, when the education of such young rascals as Ponsonby, Monson, Vavasour and Gadsby might more properly be directed by officers of a Borstal institution! No doubt Inspector Grimes is familiar with the names of the 'knuts of Highcliffe', but his attention is not infrequently directed toward members of the established criminal fraternity that visit the neighbourhood.

If the chance of promotion for Inspector Grimes seems small, then it is even more remote for his subordinate at Friardale, Mr. Tozer. As this village bobby pensively tends the beans and lettuces in the garden of his police cottage, he knows the booking of the occasional poacher or the apprehension of the equally occasional drunk will be his lot until retirement. The one street that Friardale can boast contains the small cobbler's business of Mr. Penfold; the grocery and light refreshments of 'Uncle' Clegg; and the tiny post office. Near the end of the village street stands the "Cross Keys" inn where dubious characters most do congregate to back their fancies for the Lantham or Wapshot races. Next to the vicarage stands the home of Dr. Pilbury, who ministers, not only to the sick of his neighbours, but to the staff and scholars of Greyfriars.

Away to the east can be seen the tall chimneys that mark Cliff House School for girls, a twenty minutes spin on a 'jigger' by any of the Greyfriars 'men' who wish to visit relations or friends among the pupils. On their way, they may well run into Mr. Joyce, with his horse and cart loaded with freshly sawn wood, or Mr. Boggs, the local postman, whose bag would be heavier, much heavier, if it were carrying all those long-awaited postal orders.

Little has changed during the passage of years. Tea in the Palm Court at Chunkleys may be had - as it can at the Pagoda at Lantham - for half a crown. One can visit the cinema at Courtfield for a shilling, and the price of doughnuts at both Uncle Clegg's or at Mrs. Mimbles remains at a penny each, jam or apple turnovers at three-happence and a bottle of pop at two pence. For those in funds and who can stand a spread (to which the uninvited as well as the invited will attend) there are

truly massive cakes of fruit and marzipan icing.

This is the setting for the best known and most loved school in fiction. Give or take a point of the compass or two, it is a part of Kent familiar to men and women the world over. Some may approach from a different direction, or appreciate from another vantage, but I am confident that all will recognise what others find on the way. Having got our bearings, so to speak, we have now to pass through the great gates of the school itself.

Made of wrought iron in the days when the smithy knew his stuff, they are flanked on either side by massive pillars of stone. When they are closed, the authorities deem - in all their innocence - that all is safely gathered in! There is, however, the master's wicket gate that has been used by the unauthorised on more than one occasion; and there is - as you and I well know - that broken wall by the cloisters about which more will be mentioned later.

Beside the gate is the porter's lodge, a small building of stone, from which will emerge the aggressive form of William Gosling at the given time, in hopeful anticipation of slamming the gates in the face of some latecomer. If we look through the doorway we can glimpse a massive keyboard (many of the locks in use at Greyfriars were made before the days of Yale), a large oak dresser on which rests a dark green bottle, and the deep armchair in which Mr. Gosling takes his ease. Away to our right is the bow-windowed tuckshop, over which live Mr., Mrs. and Master Mimble. Here, all boys (excepting those desiring terms of extended credit) are welcome, a small room at the rear being set aside for the seniors to take their fill in state. Further away, discreetly half-hidden, are the wood and cycle sheds - the former having been used in the past for meetings by subversive elements, the latter being the shelter for bicycles from the handsome Moonbeam of Lord Mauleverer down to the mangled wreck belonging to William George Bunter.

Crossing the Close to the Quadrangle, we pause to inspect Founder's fountain, into the bowl of which many a recalcitrant head has been ducked. Like Agag of old, we walk warily lest we stop a football in mid-flight. On the far side of the main building lies the carefully mown carpet known as the Sixth Form Green, and woe betide any junior with sufficient 'side' to trespass thereon only to be spotted from one of the sixth form windows above.

The Sixth may have their green, but the masters have the better view from their studies. We can be sure that the gimlet eyes of Mr. Quelch miss nothing as he gazes out into the quad. Just a stone's throw away is the lovely Elm Walk, the gravel of which is nightly pounded by the elephantine walk of Paul Pontifex Prout, accompanied - on the rare occasion when a victim can be found - by a junior master. What sage counsel, what superfluous advice has boomed out on such nightly prowls when the Fifth form master has a companion by his side?

'The House', as we know the main building of the School, is watched over by the high clock tower, the illuminated face of which has witnessed the stealthy return of many a breaker of bounds at an hour "long after the last light has been extinguished, the last door closed". The gymnasium, behind which many a personal argument has been settled, lies well clear of the other school buildings, and is of a

later period.

Hall, with its high ceilings, supported by a hammerbeam roof, displays to us the long forms and tables at which the boys take dinner under the supervision of their masters. High table, on its slightly raised dais, from which the Sixth loftily look down upon the juniors, is of oak, darkened with age and polished with constant use. Roll is called by a duty master from the platform at the far end. Here, too, the Headmaster will perform some more serious task such as an exemplary flogging - a performance far more dramatic (especially for the victim!) than the end of term celebrations which threaten to raise the roof with lusty voices.

Those with a bent for history will wish to linger a long time in the School Library. Many valuable black letter manuscripts are available for the serious student of public school archives. What scant leisure is available to the Remove Form master is often spent within these walls. With patience and diligence, he will seek - for long hour after hour - some elusive record that will provide material for that labour of love, "A History of Greyfriars School". One day, perhaps, Mr. Quelch will come across a clue to the long hidden Greyfriars treasure.

Masters' corridor, with its common room and long row of studies, carries an aura of austere sobriety. Many have trod its length wondering what fate awaits them in their form master's study; others have made their way there with caution, seeking revenge by the application of gum or drawing pins to a chair or merely to use one of those candlestick telephones for reasons best known to themselves. From Prout's study, at the end, may be heard the sound of a fruity snore as "Old Pompous" rests from the Herculean task of coping with Horace James Coker; and we shall know at whose door we are at if we hear the staccato tapping of typewriter keys. Right at the end of the corridor is a small lobby, the door of which leads to the school grounds and, by a short walk, to the Headmaster's house. Retracing our steps to the main staircase, we notice the short passage leading to the Headmaster's study, that dread apartment within which the most heinous crimes are judged and the severest punishments have been determined. Expulsions are rare, but when they occur it's here that the culprit will hear his sentence.

The form rooms are nearby, with their uniformity of desks and seats; blackboard and easel; the map of the world; and its stationery cupboard. They are silent now, but we know well that it is not always so. Classroom 10, where the French set foregather, is often the scene of riotous ragging of the unfortunate M. Henri Charpentier, whilst the Remove form room has known its moments of din during the temporary absences of Mr. Quelch.

On the first floor landing the passages leading to the junior studies and commons rooms branch off. On a slightly higher level are to be found the Fifth form studies and the Games Room, the occupants of which bask in the reflected glory of such a "Blood" as the Fifth Form captain, Blundell. Sometimes that 'glory' is rudely interrupted by the strident voice of Coker demanding why he hasn't been given a place in the footer or the cricket. It is a corridor that receives much attention from W. G. Bunter on those happy days when a well filled hamper arrives from Coker's Aunt Judy.

The junior 'day' or 'common' room bears the brunt of the day-to-day high spirits and hilarity. The Remove Debating Society has its meetings here, so do the Debating Societies of the Fourth and the Shell. It is not surprising, therefore, that words should sometimes be followed by deeds! The resulting uproar bringing prefects or masters to restore discipline and an uneasy truce which lasts only until the next dormitory raid and pillow fight. The 'Rag', as the common room is fondly known, is not that far from the Fifth form passage and the uproar within its four walls will often awake in Coker the desire to demonstrate his short way with fags - a demonstration doomed to a devastating failure for the demonstrator!

Coker, constitutionally incapable of minding his own business, will often venture up the Remove staircase to do battle in one or other of the Remove studies, only to be rolled down it minutes later. We are almost as familiar with the occupants of those studies as is Coker. We are not surprised, for example, to discover that whereas Study No. 4 is expensively furnished, the style is opulent almost to the point of flashiness, Study No. 12, also furnished regardless of cost, has been equipped with some concern for good taste! On the top of the bookcase in Study No. 13, a solitary footer boot inelegantly decorates the text books below, and the study cupboard contains a miscellany of cooking utensils necessary for the practice of obscure Chinese culinary arts. The well-worn carpet of Study No. 11 bears a number of cigarette burns, due probably to the hurried stamping out of the guilty weed upon the arrival of authority. Further down the corridor in Study No. 7, a variety of crumbs surround the legs of a rather dilapidated armchair and several weighty tomes on legal practice are in evidence on the study shelves.

Further stairs at the end of the Remove passage lead to the Remove box room, a repository for empty cases, trunks, and crates. It serves other purposes, as Herbert Vernon-Smith can testify. The window opens on to leads from which it is a short journey to the ground below. Behind the heavy stone walls lies one of the many secret passages with which the House appears to be well supplied as others are to be found behind walls in Mr. Quelch's study as well as behind the corridor leading to the Head's sanctum. Covert means of ingress and egress to the School are almost as popular today as they were in the years long past when a life may have depended upon a quick and unobtrusive get-away.

The dormitories are almost Spartan in their aspect and in their furnishing. Orderly ranks of simple iron bedsteads are spaced with precision against the wall. The high windows are uncurtained as the room is unheated. A single row of wash basins and cold water taps meet the needs for cleanliness - a necessity of life not much welcomed by one member of the Remove!

The appetites of the two hundred Greyfriars 'men' are catered for in the large kitchens below stairs, the food being prepared under the supervision of the House dame, Mrs. Kebble whose duties also embrace those of Matron. But it is not Mrs. Kebble who presides over the world downstairs, it is a cat! Thomas, a monster of the tabby kind, surveys his realm with all the haughty arrogance of a Caesar of old. This is his domain, and we are sure that he jealously guards his right to any tit-bit that may fall from the table - just as we are sure that those large green orbs will follow, with suspicion, the stealthy entrance of the fat Owl of the Remove.

From the cliffs of the Shoulder to the side door of the "Three Fishers"; from Pegg to Lantham, from Friardale to Courtfield, we have sojourned many years in this land of make-believe. A corner of Kent that thousands know better than they know Maidstone or Ashford; Canterbury or Deal. And there - amid the twisting lanes of countryside, and beyond the narrow streets of town and village - is the best known school!

Greyfriars is where my heart is - and the hearts of many others. For us it lives longer than the years of its chronicles. For us it starts with the obscure years of its foundation. and will go on to that unknown hour when we can no longer read. May that hour be long delayed so that we can continue to find fresh joy and remembrance at each turning of the page.

Just as we are familiar with the Greyfriars countryside, so are we familiar with the characters, whose human strengths and weaknesses are the basis on which their history depends. We know who is likely to subscribe to the "Sporting Snips", we know who will settle personal scores by the use of the prefectorial ash. We know who has a 'short way with fags' and the boys who have more pocket money than is good for them. We respect the wisdom of the Headmaster and the integrity of Mr. Quelch. We understand the dignity and pomposity of Prout and the acidity of Hacker. We are conversant with the irascibility of Sir Hilton Popper and the tempting voice of Mr. Lodgey. Every flaw and every facet of those who move across the Greyfriars stage is as apparent to us as are those of our personal acquaintances which - in effect - they all are.

The author's magic is in every closely printed word upon the paper yellowed with time and our personal age. Yet, even when the eyes are tired and weary of their fill, we can lower the lids and let our fancy follow through imagined seasons.

II - THE SEASONS

Spring

"Urrghh! Beast! Oh lor'!"

William George Bunter leaned against the gnarled trunk of the old oak, as he tried to regain his breath. Through the leafy branches overhead, the sun shone in an azure sky. Somewhere, in the higher limits of that oak, two thrushes sang a duet of happiness and gratitude for a lovely Spring day. Bunter felt neither grateful nor happy as he waited, panting, for sounds of pursuit.

Not for the first time in his life was Bunter repenting the sins on his fat conscience! Bob Cherry had been in receipt of a parcel from home that day and had made plans for sharing the good things it contained with his pals in the famous Co. Alas! those plans were fated never to come to fruition. Bunter had got to the good things first, and now Bob was anxious to get to Bunter! Never one for exerting himself, the fat Owl of the Remove had mustered enough effort to take cover in Friardale woods. Really, it was as though fear lent him wings as he blundered through briar and bramble, bush and thicket, until he came to the clearing in which stood that massive oak. In the distance, the sound of snapping twigs, advised him that pursuit was continuing and that he should not linger if he wished to escape the

booting that he so richly deserved.

Bunter was not built for running and, as he stood with the perspiration running down his fat cheeks, his thoughts were not of continuing the race but of hiding himself from the vengeful Bob. As his eye caught sight of the lower branches of that tree, he realised that his best avenue of escape lay in climbing upwards and hiding himself in the masses of foliage above. Summing some last vestige of his strength, the fat Remove grasped the lowest branch and heaved his plump carcass on to it. With many a grunt and groan, he worked his way from branch to branch, up into the upper reaches of that tree, until the spread of leaves hid him from sight.

"I'll spifflicate that fat gormandizer, when I find him!" Bob Cherry made that solemn vow as he pressed on. He had left his friends at the school gates, when he had caught sight of Bunter vanishing down Friardale lane. Doubtless they would wait for him or follow him, but for the present Bob's one aim was to lay his hands or boots on the schoolfellow who had scoffed all that tuck from home. Cherry was normally a happy-go-lucky fellow, with a patient and peaceable nature. There was little resembling patience or peacefulness about him now, as he came up to the ancient oak in which Bunter had sought refuge. He, too, was in need of a rest, and he paused, listening for any sound that would take him in the direction of that fat villain he was pursuing.

A few moments later came the sound of movement through the woods, but the sound was not that of a single fellow but of several. As he waited Bob thought that it was probably the rest of the fellows coming in quest of him, but the sight of five fellows, clad in elegant Etons, and with shiny toppers on their heads, warned him of the coming, not of friend, but of foe! Five foes in fact, for into the clearing strode Cecil Ponsonby and four other members of the nobby set at Highcliffe.

It took only a single glance at those five faces to warn Bob that he was in for trouble. Had two, or even one, more member of the Famous Five been in attendance, Pon & Co. would have sauntered on their aristocratic way. But at five to one, the odds were definitely in their favour, and as they approached, they were certain that they had the sturdy Bob at their mercy. Nevertheless, they still approached with care, for most of them had suffered through a past acquaintance with the fists of the boxing champion of the Remove. Cherry watched them as they came, his back to the sturdy oak, and his fists clenched.

"Five to one! Call that Highcliffe style," he taunted, as the menacing group of knuts gathered around him, "The kind of fair play I can expect from you fellows! Well, who wants to get hurt first?"

Monson and Gadsby, being the nearest, received the first attentions of the plucky Bob, and painful attentions they proved to be! But, seizing his chance, Ponsonby had closed in and delivered a vicious kick on Cherry's knee. The next moment Bob had lost his balance and found himself submerged under his attackers. Still he fought on and there was a sudden yelp from Vavasour as a hefty fist connected with his right eye.

"Hold the cad still," urged Pon, all the evil in his character coming to the surface, "hold him still while I give him the biggest thrashing he's had in his life."

Several feet up, in the sanctuary of the tree, Bunter looked down in dismay. Had he been a fighting man, Bunter would have leaped to the rescue. Unfortunately, Bunter wasn't. To his credit, he tried to summon some measure of British pluck as he watched the unequal battle below. Whether he would have managed that supreme effort or not was a debateable point, but manage it or not, the matter was suddenly decided for him.

In its time that branch had been a sturdy limb of that still sturdy oak; but the years had gradually taken their toll, and that branch on which Bunter rested was not all it seemed! It had accepted its present, unusual, load with several creaks of protest. Now it felt its burden more than it could bear! There came a sudden snap and Bunter suddenly found himself dropping earthwards.

In the normal course of events, Bunter's descent should have followed the laws of gravity so ably demonstrated by Sir Isaac Newton. Naturally, the earth's crust would have stopped him from proceeding to the centre of the earth, but in this case there were additional obstacles for gravity to overcome. Unfortunately for them, those obstacles were Ponsonby and Drury! In its flight, Bunter's avoirdupois had gained impetus and, as he landed, there came two gurgling gasps from the unfortunate knuts beneath him. Pon took the lion's share, but there was plenty to go round, as Drury painfully discovered.

Bob Cherry struggled clear. He had nothing further to fear from Pon or Drury, so he occupied himself pleasantly with Gadsby, Vavasour and Monson. At three to one, the odds were now in his favour, as his opponents found to their cost. One after another they dropped where he had pitched them and, when they painfully picked themselves up, headed for the horizon as fast as their legs could take them.

Bunter looked around him. Some of the wind had probably been knocked out of him by his fall, but there was no manner of doubt, no possible, probable, shadow of doubt, whatever, that all the wind had been knocked out of Pon and his pal. The Owl of the Remove was possibly grateful that he had found something soft on which to land, but there was no gratitude at all in the hearts of Ponsonby and Drury as they writhed in pain under his weight.

Bob looked down at Bunter as the fat man of the Remove struggled to his feet. Any anger that he had felt to his schoolfellow was rapidly evaporating. For once in his fat existence, Bunter had come in useful and the fact that he had been the initial cause of the trouble was forgotten. As he resumed the perpendicular, considerately stepping on Pon's nose to do so, Bunter gave Cherry a wary blink, but he need not have worried, for it was Pon and Drury that merited Bob's attention. Seldom had a more sorry pair been revealed! Their natty outfits torn, their silken toppers ruined, they presented a woebegone sight. Bob Cherry turned down his shirt sleeves.

"You two look as though you've had enough!" he grinned, "come on, Bunty, unless you want to be around when those two recover!"

Bunter came on with alacrity. Very much he did not want to be around when Pon and Drury regained their composure. Trotting by the side of the burly Bob, he recognised the prudence of being away from that spot as soon as possible.

From their point of vantage, high in the old oak, the two thrushes recommenced their duet. As those silvery notes called out into the Spring sunshine, perhaps the two Highcliffians appreciated the beauties of the lovely season of Spring. Perhaps, but very improbable!

In Friardale Lane the two Removites met up with the rest of the Co. who were enjoying the unexpected pleasure of the company of Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn, who had cycled over from Cliff House, and were discussing the merits of a study tea. As he spotted them, Bob halted in his tracks. With one of his eyes blinking and a nose as red and raw as Marian's, he was rather reluctant to show himself in feminine company. But there was no option for him as both his form fellows and the girls gathered round, their faces bearing expressions of concerned enquiry.

Bunter did not share Bob's reluctance to meet the girls. Bunter was only too ready to bestow on them the undoubted delights of such an entrancing presence as his. Besides; it looked as though there was going to be a spread. He positively beamed upon them, and was not the least perturbed when they failed to beam back.

His explanations over, Bob stepped out ahead of the others. He was rather anxious to render first aid to both nose and eye. The ruddiness of his embarrassed cheeks now almost matched that of his nose, and he was felling rather shame-faced that Marjorie and Clara had seen him in such a state. As he swung through the School gates, Bob felt a touch on his arm. Marjorie had caught up with him.

"Let's go ahead, and see what we can do for that nasty eye," she suggested. Bob Cherry looked at her doubtfully through his sound eye, but the look that she bestowed on him made both nose and eye worth while.

"Let's," he agreed.

The days move on, taking with them the end of the footer and bringing cricket in its place. As the white flannelled figures move quickly between the wickets, or as some watchful opponent in the field leaps to snatch the flying ball from the heavens, those not wanted in the game are following other pursuits. The scene changes from the shady paths of Friardale Wood to the cool and placid waters of the Sark. It is a picture that might inspire the pen of poet and the brush of artist alike. Into this pastoral idyll, this golden realm of

Summer

may come some hint of discontent.

"Wingate is a fool." exclaimed Coker for what might have been the hundredth time. Potter and Green sighed. They had come on that pull up the river because of a magnificent hamper that had arrived that morning from Coker's Aunt Judy, and they were prepared to stand Coker on why he had been left out of the cricket. but their tolerance had certain limits. Those limits were in danger of being reached with every passing moment.

"I can understand him leaving out a butterfingers, like you Potter, or a careless ass, like you Greene," continued Coker in his condescending way. "Heaven

knows why he ever picks you. Perhaps the fact that neither of you are playing today might be a sign that he is coming to his senses. If you ask me ---- What did you say, Greene?"

"Oh, nothing," said Greene resignedly, with an exasperated look at Potter.

"If you ask me," went on Coker relentlessly, "there are plenty of other duds that he could get rid of, in order to play me. Gwynne and North, for instance ---- What are you choking for, Potter?"

Potter never answered. He couldn't really trust himself to or he might have been tempted to tell Coker what he thought of him.

"Look, there's Loder!" observed Greene pointing to a figure on the towpath. It wasn't that Greene was interested in the bully of the Sixth, but anything was welcome to get Coker off the subject of cricket.

"Smokey rotter!" Coker had little time to spare for the high and mighty Sixth, and even less for that particular member of it. "On his way to that dingy den, the "Three Fishers", I shouldn't wonder."

Both his study mates nodded in agreement. They had about as much time for Loder as Coker had, but they were grateful to the prefect nonetheless. Coker's opinion of the Sixth in general, and Loder in particular, wasn't the most scintilating of subjects, perhaps, but it was a definite improvement on Coker on the subject of the great summer game!.

"A disgrace to the School, who should have been bunked long ago," continued Coker, warming to this new theme. "Well, if he thinks he is going to play banker with Joey Banks this afternoon, he'll have to think again. Pull into the bank, you fellows!."

Potter and Greene exchanged hopeless glances. A moment ago they had been relieved, even grateful, to Loder for appearing on the scene. Now, they wished that they had never set eyes on him. Coker it seemed, was bent on kicking up a shindy with the Sixth Former, and - appetite as they undoubtedly had for the contents of Coker's hamper - they had no appetite, no appetite, at all for an argument with a Sixth Form prefect!.

"Give it a miss, Coker, old man!." urged Potter.

"Yes, give it a miss, old chap!." seconded Greene.

Coker snorted indignantly. "If you two fellows funk a showdown with that cad, then you can get out and leave it to me. He's not going to disgrace the school if I can help it. Make up your mind!."

On the bank, Loder had spotted the three Fifth formers, and had slackened his pace. The "Three Fishers" was only a little way ahead, and he was anxious that Coker & Co. should be out of sight before he entered the unkempt grounds of the riverside inn. Loder had an important engagement with Mr. Banks that afternoon, but such engagements had to be kept very quiet indeed, and an audience was unwelcome.

An unexpected eddy in the current sent the small craft closer to the bank and seizing a boathook, Coker stabbed wildly at the grass verge, found a hold, and brought the boat to rest in a clump of rushes close to the "Three Fishers" mooring post.

"Hold on a minute, Loder!" he bellowed, and the prefect turned and faced him with an unpleasant expression on his face.

"What do you want, Coker?" It was not a polite enquiry, and - if he expected a polite reply to it - Loder was disappointed. Certainly he did not expect what Coker had to say next.

"I suppose you think that you are going to crawl into that den for a game of cards, or is it billiards this afternoon? Well, you can think again, because I'm here to see that you don't disgrace the School. I'm going to ----"

Loder gazed at the Fifth former. He knew of old that Coker was all kinds of an officious ass, but this took the biscuit, even for Coker!

"Pity the Head doesn't know what his precious prefects get up to," Coker ran on. "Just as well that there are fellows like me about that have the good of the School at heart! No smokes or cards for you this afternoon, my pippin. You can either turn around and go back, or you can try and pass me and see if you get to the "Three Fishers"."

Loder looked at Coker, and, if looks could have killed, Coker would have perished on the spot. Loder's inclination was to box Coker's ears, as he had so often boxed the ears of fags, but Coker was a different proposition to a kid in the Second or Third, and Loder dismissed that inclination almost as soon as it was made! He rather suspected what might follow if he carried out that intention! True, punching a prefect was a serious offence which ensured an early train home for the offender, but there was little joy in that prospect if one had had one's nose knocked through to the other side of one's head! So Coker's ears, extensive as they were, and as deserving of punishment, as they might be, remained un-boxed!

"Get out of my way and mind your own business," stormed Loder, but Coker had no wish to do the first, and was incapable of doing the second!

"Perhaps you'd like to make me," challenged the fool of the Fifth, threateningly. "If you do, you'll soon find out your mistake, prefect or no prefect!"

Loder took a deep breath as he glowered across at Coker. He was in possession of a red hot snippet of racing information, and was anxious to profit thereby. "Blue Boy" was priced at thirty to one, and the investment of a fiver with Joey Banks would ensure, or so Loder believed, the really stupendous sum of one hundred and fifty pounds coming his way. Yet, eager as he was to be 'on', he could not risk that visit to Banks whilst the three Fifth formers were around. It seemed he was at an impasse, but Loder wasn't done yet!

"Very well, Coker, as you persist in this wild accusation that I am about to visit a place put out of bounds by the Headmaster, you will now return to Greyfriars with me and you will repeat those accusations to Dr. Locke. I take it that you have

some kind of evidence to back them up," he added sarcastically, "otherwise it will be a flogging or the sack - I rather fancy the sack, myself. The Head is bound to make an example of a fellow who slanders one of his prefects." Loder nodded to the sorrowing Potter and Greene, "You men will be needed as witnesses to what Coker has said'."

"I say, Loder," Potter pleaded, "you know that it is only that stupid ass's habit to talk a lot of nonsense ---"

"Yes, Loder," Greene joined in, "Coker can't help being the biggest idiot that ever breathed ---"

Coker looked at his two pals in pained surprise. So this was what his study mates thought of him. All his prowess at leadership; all his vast experience of what was right for the school; and this was their appreciation of Coker. Such plain speaking had seldom come from Potter and Greene before, but now it seemed - for some reason obscure to Coker - that they were betraying their leader. His wrath, hitherto directed at Loder, now focussed on his two form fellows.

"Stupid ass, am I?" For a moment it seemed that he would breathe fire like the dragons of old'. "The biggest idiot that ever breathed, am I? I've a good mind to knock your heads together. In fact," he continued, "I think I will'." He stepped forward suddenly, before Potter and Greene were aware of what was coming.

Crack'. Two leg of mutton fists each grasped a neck and two heads were brought together with almost sickening concussion'. Thus demonstrating to his erstwhile pals what he thought of them, Coker considered that he was finished with them. But, if he was finished with them, they were not finished with Coker'. Potter and Greene threw themselves on Coker with a vengeance. All thoughts of tea had fled'. For two hours in the boat they had suffered Coker on the subject of cricket. Now they looked like being involved in trouble with a prefect and even hauled before the beak. And all because of Coker'.

What followed was harrowing. Usually Coker could hold his own, but now the pent up emotions of Potter and Greene came to the fore - with painful results for all three, but most painful of all to Horace.

Loder looked on for a while, grinning, then turned on his heel. Coker and Potter and Greene were too busily engaged to follow him now. A minute later and he was entering the side gate of the "Three Fishers".

It was probable, very probable, that when "Blue Boy" failed to deliver the goods, Loder would repent himself for not having paid heed to Coker. For the present, having placed his bet, he was content to while away the rest of the afternoon playing billiards. If he thought of Coker at all, it was to wonder if Potter and Greene had managed to convince him that it was not politic to threaten a Sixth Form prefect'. Whatever thoughts Loder may have given to Coker, Coker was giving no thought to Loder at all'. He had other things to occupy his attention; his study mates saw to that. And, when Coker was at long last left alone to struggle to his feet, it was to make the pleasant discovery that his boat - and Aunt Judy's hamper with it - was lazily drifting out of sight round a distant bend in the river'.

The golden day draws to its close; the colour fades on the deepening blue of the rippling Sark. The warm, summer air changes to the damp of early November, as the leaves - so recently vivid in their greens - fall in a shower of russets and browns on the hardening soil beneath ....

Autumn

The poet has called the 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness'. For Mr. Prout it was an insolvable problem to reconcile the mists of the season with mellow fruitfulness of Prout'. He felt no fellow feeling with Keats on the beauty of late October and early November. The dampness in the air, combined with the bitter winds, brought with it those little spasms and twinges that warn of more than a trace of reheumatism or a soupcon of sciatica. Worst of all, it activated Prout's pet corn. That corn was an enemy of long standing. A sudden change in the weather and that corn would transmit a shock wave of pain to the rest of Prout's extensive being'.

It was not as though Prout could get to grips with that enemy'. In fact, Prout could not get even sight of that foe that had caused him so much trouble. Aeons had passed since Prout's eyes had lighted on that, or any other, toe. True, Prout had grown in majesty as he had grown in girth, but there is little that is majestic about a man with a shooting corn, for the pain would halt the majestic tread, so often likened to that of the "great earth-shaking beast" of Macaulay. No longer would the fellows wonder whether a bull elephant had been let loose in the corridors; no longer would the gravel in Elm Walk protest under that heavy and ponderous tread'. In the solitude of his study, Prout would rest that corn as best he could until better weather came to his rescue.

The Fifth Form master was paying more attention to that corn than usual'. Or perhaps that corn was paying more attention to him'. Wedged in his deep armchair, Prout was hoping to seek solace in an afternoon nap, but much as Prout wooed sleep, so did that corn murder it. Otherwise Prout would not have been aware that his study door had softly opened and that someone had had the sheer effrontery to use his telephone'.

"Hello'. Is that Chunkleys? Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars School here'. I wish to place an order for some fireworks. Yes, please. Forty, no say fifty rockets, about six dozen loud crackers; two dozen --- Oh gad'."

Smithy had become aware of the wrathful countenance of Prout gazing at him over the top of the armchair. Hitherto Prout had been hidden from view behind the tall back of that armchair and the Bounder had concluded that the study was unoccupied. The apparition of Prout could have hardly had a more startling effect on the Bounder, but he regained his self-control.

"Oh'. Good afternoon, sir. I do hope that you don't mind a fellow borrowing your telephone to order a few things from Courtfield. Had I known you were in the study, I would have asked your permission, or course. Instead I ----"

"You have entered this study uninvited, Vernon-Smith, for the purpose of using a master's telephone, so breaking two of the School's rules. In addition to this you have placed an order - an extremely large order for fireworks, the

possession of which is forbidden before the fifth of November --" Prout moved away from his armchair, but he moved with difficulty and pain.

"If you will let me explain, sir," interrupted the Bounder, "I was going to ask Chunkleys' to deliver the fireworks on the fifth. Only you barged in ---"

"Barged in!" echoed Prout, looking as though he was about to have a fit of apoplexy. "How dare you address a senior master, the master of a senior form in the slang of the Junior Common Room!" Prout shuffled to a nearby table on which lay a cane seldom used in the Fifth but now about to get some unaccustomed exercise!

"Normally," Prout continued, shifting his considerable weight on to his good foot. "normally I would not discipline a boy of another form. I would report him to his own form master for punishment. However, I feel that I can make an exception in your case. You have ventured into my study, for the purpose of using my telephone for an improper purpose! I think that even Mr. Quelch will agree with my decision to punish you myself." He had grasped that cane almost convulsively, "You will bend over that chair, Vernon-Smith!"

For a moment Smithy thought of telling Prout to go and chop chips and not imagine that he was master of the Remove! Just in time he realised that it would not do. The punishment that he would have then received from Quelch would not have been any lighter than that he was about to receive from Prout. Smithy knew of old that his own form master disliked receiving complaints from other members of the Staff and, though he had never received a whopping from Prout before, he had received many from Quelch and knew what to expect. He bent over.

Whop! Both Prout and the cane might have been out of practice, but there was nothing wanting with the way both performed now. It was such a swipe as made the Bounder wish that he had, after all, left it to Quelch!

Whop! Prout seemed to be warming to his task, and it was as much as the Bounder could do to keep silent! Prout, at heart a kindly man, wished to make it quite clear to this Remove boy, this boy of another form, that the study and the telephone of Prout was sacrosanct. The intensity of those swipes had nothing to do, nothing to do at all, with Prout's corn, or so Prout would have emphatically proclaimed had he been asked. He raised the cane once again.

Whop! It was a case of third time unlucky! As the cane landed, the impact caused the Bounder to take an involuntary step backward. Unfortunately for Prout, the Bounder stepped on his foot, pet corn and all.

The cane dropped from the Fifth form master's grip as excruciating agony flooded through his nervous system. Vernon-Smith stood amazed as Prout executed a dance that would have done credit to a Dervish on the warpath!

The master of the Fifth forgot Vernon-Smith, forgot the caning he had been inflicting, forgot everything to the exclusion of the pain that brought water to his eyes. Usually he was never at the loss for words, but none came to his aid now that the burning sensation attacked that foot. Perhaps it was just as well, for "goodness me" or "bless my soul!" would hardly have met the need of the moment!

The Bounder stood watching Prout in amazement. Then, of course, he wasn't aware of that corn. It was impossible that Prout could suddenly have taken leave of his senses; quite impossible, but how could one explain this performance on the part of Prout because he had trodden on Prout's toes?

The cane lay where it had fallen, and Smith was rather anxious that it should stay there! If the three swipes that he had already received were anything to go by, he had no desire for the whopping to recommence!

Prout gradually ceased to cavort as he realised that this behaviour in front of a junior boy appeared somewhat lacking in dignity, and Prout was a whale on dignity! All Prout wanted to do now was sit in his armchair, remove his shoe and let some cooling air reach the affected part of that toe.

"You may go, Vernon-Smith. I shall mention the matter to Mr. Quelch. I shall tell him that I have punished you, but I shall be recommending, strongly recommending, that you be given a detention on the night of the bonfire celebration. Now go!"

The Bounder closed the door behind him. He was glad that the caning was over, but he was concerned over Prout's promised 'recommendation' to Quelch about Bonfire night. Smithy, who always had plenty of cash, and who liked to splash it about, was rather keen on putting on an expensive show of fireworks on the glorious fifth, but it was no good obtaining that vast list that he had given Chunkleys if he was unable to set them off.

Back in his study, Prout was nursing that corn with great care and affection. Released from the tight confines of its shoe, the pain in his foot was subsiding, bringing in its place a relief that was almost delicious! Once again he settled back in that armchair in happier contemplation of a nap. But the wicked had not yet ceased from troubling so that the weary could be at rest, or so it seemed to Prout as there came a tap on his study door.

He gave a grunt which could be possibly, but not definitely, interpreted as an invitation to come in, and Mr. Capper entered.

The master of the Upper Fourth regarded Prout's extended foot with interest. One look at the inflamed toe, and he understood Prout's predicament. From his chair, the Fifth form master regarded Capper balefully. It rather detracted from Prout's sense of propriety that his naked foot should be on public view. He rather suspected that that foot, that corn would soon be the subject of tattle in Masters' Commons! Prout often found delight in indulging in such tattle himself. It could be very entertaining - providing, of course, that one wasn't the subject of the tattle oneself!

But Prout need not have concerned himself. The sympathy on Mr. Capper's face was not of the usual condescending type one could expect from a colleague on the prowl for some juicy titbit to relay to others over afternoon tea! And when Capper spoke there was none of the inflexion in his voice that usually betokened the barbed comment one often suffered in the daily cut and thrust of the common room!

"My dear fellow," Capper's voice was full of concern. "My dear Prout. What agonies that corn must be causing you, and how opportune, how very opportune, that I have looked in at this moment! I myself have often suffered - especially at this time of year - in a similar fashion. Now I suffer no more," Capper continued rather like one of those 'before and after' advertisements, "due to the wonderful properties of Dr. Swindlem's foot balm!"

These cheering words brought a fleeting glimmer of hope to the extensive features of Prout. Was this to signal the end of his torment? Was this a chance to rid himself of the burning pain of that diabolical corn?

"Anything, Capper, anything that can even soothe let alone cure this insufferable agony ---"

"You shall judge for yourself, Prout! Fortunately I have a jar of the balm in my room, which I will gladly place at your disposal. Relax my dear fellow, whilst I fetch the jar from my study." With a reassuring nod to his colleague, Capper whisked from the room on his errand of mercy. A few minutes later he had returned, bearing the Swindlem remedy in his hands, to the expectant Prout.

The master of the Upper Fourth knelt by the master of the Fifth and inspected the offending corn at close quarters.

"Allow me, my dear fellow." In silent appreciation of the fact that Prout could not reach that corn himself, Capper dipped his fingers into the balm and gently applied it to the inflamed area. Almost immediately Prout felt relief as the ointment spread its cooling and soothing effect on that corn.

Having tended to his sick colleague, Capper rose to leave. Prout halted him with a gesture of gratitude.

"Capper, how can I express my thanks, my deep and sincere thanks, for this kind and timely act. Do tell me, can one dare hope for permanent relief; dare one expect ---"

"Prout, be reassured. I can preduct that in a short while, a very short while, you will forget that you ever had such an affliction. Once, I suffered like yourself! Now, I face a five mile walk with equanamity. So, too, will you, my dear fellow. I will leave you the remainder of the balm which, if you apply as directed, will do for you what it once did for me!"

Two days later, the master of the Fifth, newly galvanised, so to speak, by Dr. Swindlem's balm, was walking with lighter step, with more confident tread, in the quadrangle when he espied Vernon-Smith of the Remove. As he spotted Prout, the Bounder scowled. He had not heard from Quelch that Prout had reported him, but he had no doubt that Prout would remember now that their paths had crossed again. To his surprise, the master of the Fifth signalled to him to approach. In no good demeanour, Smithy came up to see what Prout wanted.

"Ah! Vernon-Smith! You will remember that I was going to report you to Mr. Quelch about your using my telephone to order fireworks the other day." He paused, for breath, not for reply. "I have since reconsidered the matter. I am, I

hope, a tolerant man with no desire, no desire at all, to deprive anyone of some harmless amusement. If you are prepared to give me assurance that you will bring no fireworks into the House, then the matter is closed and you will hear no more. I must add," continued Prout ponderously, "I must add that I am aware of the misplaced trust in your word on other occasions; nevertheless, I am inclined to give you a chance ..."

The scowl had vanished from the Bounder's face, and surprise had taken its place. Usually, Smithy had little time for authority least of all for a master he considered a pompous ass! But this was a new, a different Prout who was talking to him now. Smithy, of course, was in total ignorance of the marvellous properties of Dr. Swindlem's balm! He probably, was not quite easy about the reference that Prout had made to the value of his word in the past. In the Bounder's book, beaks were fair game as far as fibs were concerned. Now, however, he was being asked to give his word direct, and it did not take him long to make up his mind.

"Thank you, sir, for your kindness. I promise you that no fireworks of mine shall enter the House. I assure you ..."

Prout waved a fat hand in benign dismissal, and - as he watched Vernon-Smith disappear - congratulated himself on having brought about the obeisance of one of the most troublesome boys in the School. When next he met Quelch, he felt, he could sagely counsel that gentleman on how to bring even the most wayward boy to heel.

Later, when the flames and sparks flew upwards into the velvet of the November night; when the cheering was at its height; and when he watched that massive supply of fireworks explode and cascade into the heavens, the Bounder did a bit of thinking himself. He had kept his word to Prout, and was not sorry that he had done so. Positively, for one performance only, he had not pulled the wool over the eyes of a beak!

The year is growing shorter now! The damp and mists of Autumn are followed by the cold, clear, frosts of

Winter

Mr. Quelch was tired. The last day of term was always a busy one for members of the Staff, and the last day before the Christmas Holidays was the busiest of them all. At the best of times, the Remove was a difficult form to control, and it said much for their form master that he managed to overcome that difficulty. The bestowal of impots and the application of the cane provided the necessary deterrent in term, of course, but were of restricted purpose on the day before vacation began. Impositions were not likely to be met, and the cane seemed to be wanting in its sting so near to the happy days of Christmas.

He had joined the rest of the Staff in Hall for the traditional end of term sing-song. It was extremely unlikely that Quelch's own voice had been raised with those of the Remove and other forms, but that sing-song was part of tradition, and Quelch supported tradition with all his heart. Some of the music had been out of tune, some of the words half-forgotten, but this did not diminish the volume or the spirit with

which they were sung. As time progressed, one by one, his colleagues took themselves away to the peace and quiet of their rooms. Quelch was the last to go, knowing that a few more choruses and then the Hall would empty as the prefects shepherded the juniors back to their quarters. Dormitory was at a later time than usual, and doubtless the chatter of happy youth would continue long after the lights were out. On this one night of the year a little licence was permissible and, knowing his form as he did, Quelch rather suspected that that licence would be exercised to the full! But, just in case those limits were exceeded, a cane lay ready to hand. Quelch hoped that it would not be needed, just as he hoped that the exuberant chatter would give way to the carefree slumber of boyhood!

He walked over to close the curtains at the window, the panes of which bore the sparkling, crystal rime of the season. The roofs of other buildings beyond, with their feathery coverlet of snow, were white against the dark pall of night. The high riding moon cast its cold light on tall chimney stacks to make uncertain shadows on the slates beneath. Fitful clouds, heavy with their burden of future snow, drifted by slowly as would a becalmed galleon of old. It seemed almost as though Winter was out to prove she had a beauty of her own!

Lights in the distant windows would soon be extinguished as master and prefect sought their rest as the juniors had earlier sought theirs. Quelch could not count the many times he had watched the school sink into slumber at the close of term and, as he watched it do so now, he drifted into a mood of quiet reflection.

No-one knew boys like Henry Samuel Quelch! His colleagues would boast of their methods, and Quelch would listen in silence. Each claimed that his form was the best at Greyfriars, and each would seem rather disappointed when Quelch did not acknowledge those claims. Prout, hogging the common room fireplace, was the worst! As the Fifth form master, airing his expansive trousers at the flames of a fire that no-one else could see, paused in his peroration, there would be the acid observations of Hacker and the presuming tones of Capper to fill the gap. And as they espoused the virtues of their teachings, they would cast a suspicious look at the master of the Remove. Perhaps he did not feel that he had to advertise! The proof of the pudding was in the eating. It was his form, the Remove, that was the best form at Greyfriars, of that there could be no doubt whatever!

It was of his boys that he was thinking now. He had plenty to remember them by; the Remove had seen to that! The term that was closing had been full of incident, but he found his mind ranging further afield. From a forest of memories came one of a winter several years ago. That term had been more trying than usual, due to the fact that Wharton, his Head Boy had fallen from grace. Wharton had been in disgrace, unfairly as it was later proved. Now he gave an involuntary shudder as he recalled how their reconciliation had been contrived when they had faced the swirling waters of Seagull's Cave with death only a short margin before them. Later, that same winter, his life had again been in peril! Stranded in the blizzard-stricken countryside on his way to Wharton Lodge, he had faltered, exhausted and frozen, miles from shelter and warmth. He was remembering now the boy, called Valentine, who came out of the depths of that winter's night; the boy whose perseverence and courage had led them both to safety.

Through those two boys, Quelch had lived to teach another day, another term, another decade. He almost began to think that his teaching could not be restricted by the normal measures of time. He was right, of course, it couldn't!

He dismissed his thoughts of the past from his mind, and closed the curtains on the winter's scene.

As I am writing these last few paragraphs I found myself, like Mr. Quelch, looking back over the years to a winter that now seems so long ago. I was surprised to find that twenty years have passed since Frank Richards left us on that Christmas in 1961. No man has given me so much happiness in my lifetime, a sentiment I have heard expressed by many others. I was in Warsaw, when I heard the news from the B.B.C. There was a well loved story of Greyfriars open on my knees at the time and I was about to embark upon another Christmas adventure at Wharton Lodge and, as I listened, I wondered if an era was coming to an end.

It wasn't, of course. As time has readily proved, the legend and the magic live on as we draw from the rich store of literature that well-loved author left us. For some there is St. Jim's; for others there is Rookwood; and I can well understand the loyalty that bind the reader to his choice. My choice is Greyfriars, a school I have known through peace and war; in climates hot and climates cold. In the common ups and downs of life that we all suffer or enjoy I have found it rewarding beyond measure to have beside me the stories of Greyfriars, a school for all our seasons.

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

NORMAN KADISH, 126 BROADFIELDS AVENUE, EDGWARE, MIDDX., HA8 8SS - A Merry 'Hamilton & E.S.B.' Christmas to everyone. I am still looking for missing pre-war 'Tiger Tim' and 'Rainbow' Annuals.

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To London and South-West Clubs our season greetings. Many S.O.L's still wanted.

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= =

Soccer fans! Don't miss Laurie Sutton's "As I See Soccer". Commended by famous Managers, players and football personalities, includes "fascinating" autobiographical account of the disabled author's involvement in the game. £2.00, post free, from LAURIE SUTTON, 73 LANCING ROAD, ORPINGTON, KENT. "Greyfriars For Grown-ups" available at £5.95.

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May this Christmas be a happy reminder of days gone by, reading those double Christmas numbers. Wishing all Friars everywhere a joyful time.

JUNE and BRIAN SIMMONDS

= =

Some Feline Favourites

by MARY CADOGAN

(This article is dedicated to all the Cats who belong to members of our collecting circle, and particularly to Eric and Madam's Princess Snowee, to Josie Packman's Bebe, and my own family's Felicity - who has lived up to her name and provided us with much happiness for fourteen years now.)

As well as a wide range of human characters, our story and comic papers have from their early days produced plenty of animal heroes. A colourful assortment of species - elephants, ostriches, 'brainy baboons' and 'fearless flies' for example - have starred in or helped along the action of the stories. But the role of the domestic pet and especially that of the pussy cat is particularly interesting. I suppose many of us first made the acquaintance of fictional felines through nursery rhymes. Our family never had a cat until I was eleven, but as a very small child I was always moved by

'I love little pussy
Her coat is so warm,
And if I don't hurt her
She will do me no harm.'

I was also fascinated by the long suffering puss who'd been so basely put down the well, and by the confident one who'd gone up to London to see the Queen. Equally I was inspired by that magnificent catty-character in Edward Lear's famous poem; space permits only the first verse here, but this is perhaps sufficient to convey its perennial charm:

The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat;
They took some honey, and plenty of money
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
"O lovely Pussy, O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

And the serenaded Puss, one felt, lay languidly back in the pea-green boat, basking in the awareness of her captivating beauty!

Other fictional cats, of course, were less favoured and these had to resort to wit and wiles rather than physical appeal to achieve their ends. Their intriguing air of mischief, alertness and superiority is nowhere better conveyed than in the celebrated drawings of Louis Wain. His illustrations are now quite expensive collectors' items, his output was prodigious and it is gratifying to find that his cat pictures frequently crop up in our juvenile papers. In an article called 'In Praise

of Cats', the Girls' Realm of 1899 featured seven pages of Wain illustrations, some of which are now reproduced here in the C.D. Annual.

A Louis Wain picture
(The Playbox - July 1908)

Wain also did a lot of work for 'The Playbox' (the forerunner of the comic, and at first a monthly supplement given away with the World and His Wife). He created the Furry Fluffkins for this paper in 1905, and his group of lively cats - with variations and embellishments by different artists - was to survive for decades in Playbox and other Amalgamated Press papers. There may have been cats in children's papers before Wain's, but he seems to have been the originator of the cosy but lively feline tradition in the comics. By 1908 the Furry Fluffkins were being drawn by S. J. Cash, whose

CURIOSITY.

'HOW DO YOU DO?"

cats were as attractive as Wain's and perhaps a little softer. Wain, however, was continuing to contribute cat pictures and covers to the paper.

Beaming and benevolent pusses drawn by S. J. Cash and L. Church became very familiar to many of us not only in Playbox but in Rainbow, Tiger Tim's Weekly and other of the classic A.P. comics. Furry Fluffkin types by Cash and Church simply thrived in the nursery papers: Tiny Tots from its first issues in 1927 had included Church's cats, and his Tink-er, Tab-by and Tib-by (hyphenated for easy reading of course) are playing pranks on each other as late as in 1954 in this comic. Church was also still drawing cats in the 1950's for Chick's Own ('The Com-ic-al

COVER OF FIRST ISSUE OF TIGER TIM'S TALES (1919)
ARTIST - H. FOXWELL

1. "A penny a jump over the breakwater!" cried Snowball. "There will be a fine surprise for the winner!" "Hurrah! We'll have a jump!" cried Tinker and Nigger, giving their sister the two pennies.

2. And then they went a long way back to take a run. "Look out, here we come!" cried Nigger. "We are going to jump higher than the cow who jumped over the moon!" And off they ran!

FROM TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY - 1930's
(MRS. TABBY AND HER TIBBIES)

Kit-tens Gath-er Chest-nuts). This paper also featured a different kind of cat on its cover page - in the shape of 'Kind Stri-pey Tig-er', who was a permanent member of the Chick's Own "Co".

Tigers in the comics were really part of the cosy pussy-cat tradition which reached apotheosis in the character of Tiger Tim. From 1904 when J. S. Baker began drawing Tim and his friends (then Mrs. Hippo's Boys - they became the Bruin boys later on), they captured the imagination of hundreds of thousands of young readers. Their exuberant and good-natured antics, and the unusual combination of a tiger, an elephant, a bear, giraffe, parrot and monkey made them consistently big and long-running money-spinners for the A.P. Their ranks were later increased by a dog and an ostrich, of course, and Porky-Boy came into prominence in the saga after H. S. Foxwell took over the illustrations. Baker's drawings in the early Playbox are simple and charming, and so too are those by Foxwell in the very attractive story-cum-comic paper Tiger Tim's Tales, which began in 1919. The sense of warmth and well-being generated by Tiger Tim and his chums spilled over into several comics and different annuals: nothing seemed to hold them back, and Tim, with his solid but lithe pussy-cat charm, was of course the character who gave most delight. 1930 was a Halcyon year for the Bruin Boys who starred then in no less than five annuals - the Rainbow, Mrs. Hippo's, the Bruin Boys', Playbox and Tiger Tim's. When Foxwell left the A.P. for the Daily Mail and Teddy Tail, B. O. Wymer continued drawing the Bruin Boys in the same style and tradition. (In fact they continue today in the nursery comic Jack and Jill, but they are no longer in bright colours, they've lost a lot of their vigour and Mrs. Bruin has discarded her mittens, mob-caps and long skirts!)

Although Tiger Tim must, without doubt, be one of the most famous juvenile feline characters in the world, I must admit to a preference for the skirted version of him - Tiger Tilly. Tilly and the rest of the Hippo girls didn't stay the comics course nearly as long as the boys, but I loved them. Facially they exactly resembled their male counterparts, but they wore pretty dresses, shoes and socks (the boys were usually bare-footed), and great big hair ribbons. These were usually perched on the tops of their heads, and the giraffe wore an extra one half-way down her long neck. As Tilly and her chums are less famous than the boys, some readers might like to be reminded of their names which are, of course, Tiger Tilly, Baby Jumbo, Gertie Giraffe, Polly Parrot, Olive Ostrich, Betty Bruin, Jenny the monkey and Fifi the dog. And the anti-heroine was Pearl Porky. In a way, Tiger Tim always reminded me of Harry Wharton; his friends were his 'Co', and Porky-Boy seemed to have strong affinities with Billy Bunter. (Similarly Tiger Tilly made me think of Barbara Redfern, and Pearl Porky of Bessie Bunter.)

The Bunters, one feels, were not exactly cat fanciers. Billy was always trying to blame Mrs. Kebble's cat for the purloining of comestibles that he carried out himself. It would have been a strange cat indeed that could eat the wide and varied range of grub that Bunter filched from other boys' studies'. And Bessie also tried to make a Cliff House cat (probably Miss Primrose's pet) into a scapegoat, as the following essay in her own words and spelling indicates:

'The Catt walks and runns about. It playes with mouses. Little girls do

> not play with others and eat them. Catts stele food a lot. The catt is always taking food from my studdy. It robbes all the studdys and I am blamed. I do not like catts for that reason and bekos they skrach.'

Considering Charles Hamilton's obvious affection for his beautiful cat Sammy, it is rather surprising that cats did not play a more prominent and sympathetic part in the Greyfriars and early Cliff House stories.

A very appealing pussy was Teddy Tail's friend Kitty - a nice white little girl cat who lived most amicably with a mouse (Teddy) a chicken (Dougie) and a pig (Piggy) in the care of another mouse - the adult Mrs. Whisker! Foxwell drew her for the Daily Mail with a giant hair-ribbon reminiscent of those of the Hippo Girls, and like them she was full of mischief: '"It is all very well for Mrs. Whisker to tell us to be good," said Kitty Puss, "but how are we to know when we are being good?"' How, indeed! There were many really naughty cats in the comics, of course, and one that spends a great deal of his time getting into trouble is Korky, the cover-star of D. C. Thomson's Dandy. Korky's adventures began in the first issue (4 December, 1937) and he is still going strong in the Dandy of the 1980's.

In a way, Korky the cat is more in the tradition of the animated cartoon feline than of the Louis Wain cosy pussy-cat. After Pat Sullivan created Felix The Cat for a 1919 film, cats in the cinema came in all shapes and sizes and degrees of amiability - from heroes to villains. Some of the most popular are the toughies - like Tom who is always frantically pursuing the lively and likeable mouse Jerry; and Sylvester the 'puddy-tat' sparring partner of the Canary, Tweetie Pie. It is impossible to list them all, though it is a sign of recent times that one catty-character, the notorious Fritz, should appear in films that were X rated. (He was of course adapted from an 'underground-comix' anti-hero.)

But - to end this article on a happier note - can any C.D. reader tell me the name of the artist of the Mrs. Tabby and Her Tibbies adventures in Tiger Tim's Weekly? They began in 1929 and continued during the 1930's, and the same artist drew other lovely cats for this comic, and the other Tiger Tim papers. I loved his trio of white, black and tabby pussies when I was a child - and they still amuse me whenever I take an adult look at their exploits today.

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WHAT AN EXCITING CHRISTMAS TREE!

The Dove

By

JACK OVERHILL

George Gower lived alone in a thatched cottage off the high street. Nobody knew where he'd come from or how he'd once earned a living. He had means, not in a big way, but enough to live comfortably.

He was short and squat and was jeered at because of it by many of those whose apple cart he upset; for he was the sort to make tempers fly.

He wouldn't let people alone; that was his trouble. He'd stand at his gate and wait for them; and if they didn't come along, he'd go and look for them. And then, whatever bee was buzzing in his bonnet, he'd let it loose, stinging them more often than not. For you couldn't take sides with him; his ideas were so queer and different from anybody else's. The most you could do, for his sake and your own, was to listen, nod, say nothing, or very little, and get away as soon as you could. No easy job, for he'd tag on to you, and keep on and on till you darted into your house and shut the door in his face. No good going into a pub or shop; he'd follow; and drive away customers, so the publicans and shopkeepers said. They dreaded the sight of him. Black looks were no good; not even the straight griffin: in that dour way of his he'd have his say and be damned to you. Like it or lump it it was written all over him.

There was one thing people would have liked to know about him: the reason he put out a flag every year on a day that had no public significance. Had it been Empire Day, Oak Apple Day, Armistice Day, even American Independence Day, or the day the Bastille fell, they could have understood it, but to put out a flag, seemingly for no reason, was daft. They asked one another what it meant and ended up by asking him. They didn't get any change out of him. He was as mum as an oyster.

He had no friends, and apart from his cussedness, he didn't want any, but somehow he cottoned on to me. In the beginning, it was because of his dog, an alsatian he called Ben. His house, an old one, had a wall all round and high enough in front to stop anyone in the street looking over it. But the ground of the garden was above that of the street and the alsatian, which was always prowling up and down, used to rear up level with passersby and snap at them. That was a fright, walking along and suddenly finding the dog - all teeth - going to take a bite at you. That led to all sorts of rows, but nobody was bitten - it's surprising how quickly most people react to danger - so nothing was done about it.

The sight of the alsatian looking over the wall made tradesmen give the house

a miss - a letter-box on the gate told its own tale. All very well for George Gower to say the dog wasn't vicious, they weren't giving it the chance to practise on them.

A baker's roundsman, I heard all this and more as I delivered bread in the village and I felt well out of it. Well, I did till he waited beside my van and asked me if I'd supply him with a small brown loaf every day. I didn't like to say no, so I said yes, thinking I'd let myself in for it when I did.

The dog wasn't in the garden when I called the next day, but as I walked up the path to the house it came - well, it seemed from nowhere - straight for me. I tried keeping it off with my basket, but I might as well have tried keeping a lion at bay with a walking-stick. It was all over me - and not to tear me to bits, to make a fuss of me. It whined and barked and gambolled, went for me with its tongue, not its teeth, and slobbered all over me.

George Gower came out of the house. He was as pleased as punch. That showed the dog wasn't savage. All the talk about it was a lot of nonsense. And straight away, he asked me had I read Edward Lear's BOOK OF NONSENSE. I handn't. And in no time he was letting off steam about it. But I had to go or I'd be late on my round.

Surprising how chummy we got. He talked a lot, but it was different from the chit-chat of other customers and I liked it. Patting Ben, I got so that I had a fag there; and he got so that he made me a cup of tea or coffee; until, at last, I was quite at home in his kitchen and spent a quarter of an hour and more on a chair there, every day.

He laid down the law about all sorts of things: religion, education, politics, housing, money, even the law itself. He must have read a lot. And understood what he'd read. I didn't understand half of it. Half? Not a tenth.

He came out with some odd sayings. Once, pointing at an ant, he said it was a pity their breathing system extended all over their bodies. Had it been centralized in the chest like ours they'd have ruled the earth.

'Been a good thing, too,' he said. 'Human beings are unpredictable, ants aren't. In other words, they know where they stand with one another. We don't. The world would be a better place if we did.'

He seemed to know a lot about astronomy. Would talk about stars and planets as long as I liked to listen. He scoffed at the theory that light didn't go straight, it tacked all over the place. If that was the case, it wouldn't be possible to measure the distance between the earth and the stars.

'You don't think scientists know?' I said.

'Not everything. They wouldn't be scientists if they did.'

I think he meant they'd be Gods.

The world, he declared, was flat.

'I can't swallow that,' I said. 'Start at a certain place and you'll come round to it again. That's proof that it's round.'

'Of course it is,' he said. And picking up a pencil he drew a circle on the flat top of the table.

I'd got no answer to that one. But I've an idea that he was pulling my leg. And I think he was when he said the earth didn't turn on its axis, if it did arrows shot westward would fall behind the archer who shot them. It was just his sense of humour - as, for instance, when we stood and looked at the damage caterpillars had done to his cabbages.

Smiling whimsically, he said: 'Insects eat so many plants that it's a comfort to know that some plants eat insects. Wouldn't be so bad if it stopped there; balance of power; but it doesn't. Some insects eat the plants that eat insects and still others eat what is left of the insects that the plants have eaten - all the while on the lookout for the birds that will eat them, who must in turn be on the watch for the animals, especially man, that will eat them.'

That's how he'd run on ...

With pencil and paper he seemed able to prove anything. Pons Asinorum, the square of Pythagoras and things of that sort. I couldn't contradict him. Never was much good at arithmetic. He always had a good laugh when I totted up figures on my thumb-nail.

Talking about magic, he said it was like coffee - black and white. He believed in both. I didn't. One thing leading to another, he said he was certain that by making a ring and voicing an incantation, he could make the devil appear. I wasn't swallowing that guff.

'Then, why don't you?' I said.

'I daren't,' he said. And so seriously that I believe he meant it. Educated or not we all harbour queer beliefs and, allowing for the fact that more often than not he was joking, he had plenty. The future, he thought, was an open book - if only we could read it. He was always looking for signs and certainly practised what he called bibliomancy - opening a book at random and regarding the first word or passage that meets the eye as an omen. I've seen him do it. He told me the Greeks and Romans did it and what was good enough for them was good enough for him - they were a clever lot.

Indeed, he was a queer stick, wanted some understanding. But I got the hang of him. It was soon after his old dog died. He lost his tongue for a while. Used to sit brooding instead of talking. One day, he suddenly came to.

'Love is the finest of all human feelings,' he said. 'When it turns to hate, it's the vilest.' And then, to my surprise, he said: 'That flag I put out every year - I suppose you wonder why I do it. I'll tell you. It marks the day my wife left me. But keep it under your hat.'

I expected him to say more. He didn't.

At first, I thought his putting a flag out was to celebrate his wife leaving him. I found out I was wrong. It was only a gesture. He was pretending he didn't care. Pretending to himself.

He did care. Things he let drop showed it. And soon I could see why he talked so feelingly about love. And thought, as human beings were unpredictable, it would have been a good thing had ants lorded over the earth. All that in turn seemed related to his quaint ways and curious beliefs. But I had still to learn how deep was the wound made by his wife's betrayal. Before that happened, I had a surprise. I found him reading the GEM.

He held it up. 'Ever read it?'

'No, comics were more in my line.'

'I took it every week for years - and the MAGNET. Had a compulsive urge to long after I stopped reading them. And I kept them. Glad I did; I read one every day now, have done for a long while. That takes me out of myself. Makes me young again and the world a better place to live in.'

He ran on, praising the MAGNET and GEM.

I sat down and listened to him in silence. It was another side of him, one I knew nothing about, and I needed time to adjust myself to it.

After we'd talked as usual over a cup of coffee, I rose to go.

'Half a tick,' he said, and leaving the room, he returned with three GEMS and gave them to me with the one he'd been reading. 'I know you read a lot, take these and tell me what you think of them.'

I looked at the titles: "The Toff", "Hero And Rascal", "The Hidden Hand", "The Parting Of The Ways". 'Not my cup of tea,' I said.

'You never know. They may have the same effect on you as they've had on me.'

He was right. You never know whether you like a book until you've read it, or tried to, and that series of tales about the arrival of Reginald Talbot at St. Jim's was a case in point. I liked them so much I welcomed other GEMS - and MAGNETS - from his collection, which he showed me on shelves in the alcoves beside the fireplace in his sitting-room - MAGNETS on the right, GEMS on the left, all in numerical order.

'There's about two thousand five hundred,' he said. 'I don't have them bound. Apart from easy handling, there's something about them I'd miss if I did. A feeling - ' he stopped as though seeking a way to express himself.

'To do with the past?' I said.

He nodded. 'That's what it is - must be.'

I soon became well acquainted with the MAGNET and GEM. Then, we discussed all aspects of life in and around Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Masters and boys came in for praise and criticism.

He liked Mr. Quelch. I thought he had his good points, but Mr. Railton came top with me. Tom Merry was his favourite, Bob Cherry was mine. With similar

physical attributes and mental qualities they were fine characters for boys to model themselves on. We held Harry Wharton in high esteem. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, although outdated, was the foundation-stone of St. Jim's. It was the same with Billy Bunter, always in the limelight, too much of a good thing, but Greyfriars couldn't do without him. I liked Levison before he reformed. He liked Lumley Lumley at all stages of his career. He found Coker funny, I found him a fool, and Grundy a worse one. We regretted the passing of Alonzo Todd, Skimpole, Bulstrode and lesser lights like Rake, Treluce and Trevor, whose names, if not their deeds, brought renown to them ...

We thought good illustrations added much to the stories. They brought the reader in close contact with scenes and incidents, made them seem real. Look at someone breaking bounds by climbing down an ivy-clad wall after lights out and you were in his shoes at once.

Our common interest in the MAGNET and GEM brought us closer than roundsman and customer. We called each other by our christian names - a sure sign of friendship, christian names not being bandied about then as they are now - and I welcomed his invitation to drop in for a chat outside working hours by doing so.

Time passed and he dropped his hectoring ways - I attributed that to the softening influence of the MAGNET and GEM - and I had glimpses of him when he was young: good-natured, friendly, carefree. Undoubtedly, the break-up of his marriage had been a blow from which he never really recovered.

The weather was seasonable on Christmas Eve and as I walked up his garden path, I looked forward to a glass of port with him.

I tapped and opened the kitchen-door. He sat listening to the carol service that was being broadcast from King's College, Cambridge.

'Come in,' he said warmly. 'I've been waiting, knew you'd be late - double delivery.'

'Treble,' I said. 'Shan't be round on Boxing Day.' I put my basket on the floor. 'How many?'

'Two,' he said.

'Will that be enough?'

'I'll make it enough.'

I put two small brown loaves on the table and sat down. He brought out a bottle of port and two glasses. We drank and he filled them again.

He now had a daily help and the room, warm and cosy, was spotlessly clean, and though I was in a hurry to get done, I was loth to go.

We sat listening to the carols. I thought of the time I'd sung them, hopefully for ha' pennies, with one or two mates, at the doors of big houses.

An old favourite, "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks", began. The choir was singing the third verse:

To you in David's town this day
Is born of David's line,
A Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord,
And this shall be the sign:

when a pigeon lodged on the window-sill.

He looked up quickly. 'A dove,' he said. There was an odd note in his voice.

The bird walked the length of the sill, turned and walked back. After a brief pause, it took flight.

He sat transfixed, looking out of the window. I watched while, seemingly, he came out of a trance and switched off the wireless.

'"And this shall be the sign",' he said, slowly. He looked at me, his eyes curiously bright. 'You know what a dove signifies?'

'Peace,' I said.

'Peace,' he repeated.

'No more war,' I said, cheerily, and picking up my basket, I wished him a happy Christmas and left.

The next morning, his daily help found him dead in bed.

He left his money, a considerable sum, to a dogs' home, his personal effects to a distant relative, his collection of MAGNETS and GEMS to me.

They are a storehouse of memories. Not least of him.

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Christmas Greetings to hobby friends from KIT and RON BECK of LEWES; SUSAN, NEIL and DAVID BECK of POLEGATE.

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Yuletide greetings, Madam, Eric, Princess Snowee, friends, readers, subscribers everywhere; also James Gall, Guy Smith, Darrell Swift.

H. HOLMES (BARROW-IN-FURNESS)

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Happy Christmas everyone. Any s/h, cheap, condition not important; HB's considered.

R. KEOGH, 78 GREENVALE ROAD, LONDON S.E.9.

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Warmest Seasonal Greetings to our esteemed Editor, bless him, to Tom and all Midland Club friends, Uncle Benjamin and all the London Club, to Cyril Rowe, Albert Watkins, New Zealand, and all worldwide who love our hobby and especially to Henry Webb and family.

STAN KNIGHT, CHELTENHAM.

Sexton Blake "Answers"

by JOHN BRIDGWATER

"Answers" could possibly be considered a rather apt title for a journal in which Sexton Blake appears. The Sexton Blake Catalogue lists 156 stories which appeared in it during the period September 1908 to December 1911. Although this is a large number of stories it is a chapter of the saga about which we now hear nothing. I do not find this particularly surprising as copies of "Answers" for this period are very hard to come by. In all my years of collecting I have only obtained seven. Seven stories out of 156 is only a small sample and they all come from the period May to November 1910, so it could reasonably be said that they do not represent a good sample by which to judge the Answers stories in general. However, they do conform to much the same pattern and are, I think, an example of the "Answers" middle period. They are sufficiently alike to have probably all been written by the same hand. They are all short, occupying only four columns, and most of them are divided up into three sections. Only one is not so divided. The crimes are all solved by intellectual detection and there is no really thrilling action. They show Sexton Blake the thinker in good form. Two of them actually give Blake a base in Baker Street, but no assistant or even a confidential friend. Blake seems to be a young man already quite well-known in his profession whose powers and opinion, even medical opinion, is respected by professional men. His relations with the police, who only appear in minor roles, is such that his actions and opinions are accepted without question. Blake carries handcuffs and makes his own arrests. All the seven cases are "mini-cases" cleared up in a day or two. A brief outline of them will give some idea of their period flavour.

No. 1145 of 7th May. "A Blind Chance - How Sexton Blake restored a stolen Treasure". An ancient ring is stolen from a Professor's country house. The thief is a deserter from the Navy, a nephew of the crippled, blind lodge keeper. He fell from the ladder after the robbery and was unable to make good his escape so he masqueraded as his uncle. The uncle's hobby is knitting. Blake confirms his suspicions by quietly picking up a ball of wool which has the ring hidden in it and by doing so makes the culprit drop four stitches, a thing the real blind man would not do, being unable to see the ball being touched.

No. 1150 of 11th June. "The Marked Sovereign. Another capital Blake story." A girl is falsely accused of stealing a sovereign. One of the partners of the firm employing her tries to force her to marry him against her will by planting a marked sovereign in her handbag and getting her dismissed. The story is made unbelievable by having the partner substitute another sovereign he has marked himself for the original sovereign, left on his desk to trap the supposed criminal, when he has no need to do so. The substitution makes it too ridiculously easy for Blake to expose the trickery.

No. 1156 of 23rd July. "The Onyx Button" - Sexton Blake makes a "tube" arrest.

A girl who has become an expert diamond cutter is robbed of some emeralds. A button belonging to her sister is found near the safe, incriminating her. The sister has been disowned by their father for marrying against his wishes. Blake discovers that the father is the thief and is jealous enough of his daughter's success to rob her. He has also become enamoured of an adventuress who has lured him into the crime. Blake tracks the pair to a tube train in which the adventuress stabs the father as he shows her the emeralds. Blake arrests her and later finds the sister entombed alive in the cellar of the adventuress' house. The sister's husband and son are found dead upstairs. An unexpectedly nasty end to what started out as a straightforward robbery story.

No. 1157 of 30th July. "The Skating Rink Mystery - Sexton Blake solves a pier poser."
Blake on holiday at the seaside finds a murdered girl skater on the pier where there is a rink. Near by are two strange bloodstained footprints going nowhere. Blake suspects the box-office attendant, but he has a good alibi. Having no proof Blake uses the Hindoo game, sitting himself in front of the box-office and staring at the attendant to wear him down. Eventually a coastguard who had provided part of the alibi comes to collect a sack of bait. The sack actually contains the bloodstained boots. Blake arrests the coastguard as the murderer but the attendant, who was his accomplice jumps into the sea and is drowned. The strange footprints are explained by the coastguard having skated down the pier. The motive for the crime was the money in the girl's purse. It is interesting to note that skating is called "rinking" in this story.

No. 1158 of 6th August. This is a double summer number with a free coloured plate of the King specially painted by the president of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters. This issue contains the following story:- "Pawned for 7/6 - How Sexton Blake scored at the eleventh hour."
Blake intervenes in a murder trial because he believes the victim committed suicide. He finds the weapon, a revolver, had been taken from the suicide's hand by a destitute workman who then pawned it. Thus the accused is saved.

No. 1161 of 27th August. "Sexton Blake's Failure - the mystery of the Anadez frame."
The valuable Anadez photograph frame is one of the wedding presents on show in a country house. It is mysteriously stolen although the presents were guarded. Blake finds that it was taken by a tramp but when he and the bride's brother catch up with the tramp he only has the photograph which had been put in the frame. The photograph is of the brother and it turns out that he and the tramp were comrades in the South African war. The tramp only wanted the picture as a memento. He had thrown the frame away on leaving the house. Of course Blake fails to make an arrest this time.
In the same issue the life story of Ethel le Neve by her father begins. The introduction refers to her as:- "The most talked of woman in Europe ... so prominently identified with one of the most sensational murder mysteries in history. The first murdere to be caught by wireless."

No. 1171 of 5th November. "King Graft - Sexton Blake turns gasman."
A man is gassed by being in a locked room with the key in his pocket. The man is killed in mistake for his employer, a financier fighting crooked trusts. By

disguising himself as a gasman Blake finds out that a quantity of heavy stupifying gas had been introduced into the gas pipe between the meter and the jet. When the man turned the tap on the bracket to light the gas he became unconscious before he could strike the match and so was asphyxiated. A (possibly?) unconscious pun is perpetrated at the end of the story:- "... then the pressure of the ordinary gas clearing the pipes, the ghastly work was completed."

Well there they are. I found them decidedly entertaining in spite of their weaknesses and only wish I had more of them.

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Greetings to all collector friends. Require some Wodehouse and Specs McCann.

JOHNSTON, 18 COBHAM ROAD, MORETON, WIRRAL.

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Sherlock Holmes - anything always wanted.

48 SHALMARSH, BEBINGTON, WIRRALL.

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Seasonal Greetings to all from the South West Club.

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HAPPY CHRISTMAS; Success, Good Health in 1982 to Eric, Madam, Snowee, and all Hobby Friends. Congratulations to "C.D." and its Editor on its Coral Anniversary.

ESMOND KADISH, 18 GROVE GARDENS
HENDON, LONDON N.W.4.

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Once again the Festive Frolic,
Ending prap's with chronic colic;
Still I wish you all fair measure,
Of a Christmas you can treasure.

JOHN BURSLEM

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Seasonal Greetings to all hobbyists everywhere. WANTED: copies of "The Magnet" below 1133; William Books by Richmal Crompton; Jane Books by Evadne Price.

DARRELL SWIFT, 22 WOODNOOK CLOSE, LEEDS, LS16 6PQ.

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Many thanks to our Editor and contributors for the pleasure of our magazine each month. Happy Christmas to all.

WILLIAM TURVEY, 71 HIGHAMS ROAD, HOCKLEY, ESSEX.

~The Greyfriars Guide to St. Frank's~

by NIC GAYLE

St. Frank's fans pass on - there is little here for you. This article is addressed to those Greyfriars/St. Jim's/Rookwood fans who know little or nothing of St. Frank's, who, if we're honest, have little or no real interest in the school, and who perhaps have only even proceeded this far because of the word 'Greyfriars' in the title. There are many such folk in our hobby. I divide them here into two groups, those that have read a little St. Frank's once and decided not to read any more, and those that have read none at all. And why on earth should they bother? Well, here are two good reasons. Firstly, by reading St. Frank's as a contrast and inevitably making comparisons they will increase their appreciation of Hamilton, and secondly, should they bite into the right series (unfortunately many don't), they'll be hooked for ever. The trouble with dipping in blind to the St. Frank's saga is that, unlike the Hamilton schools, it does not present the same facade of continuity as the others do; style, emphasis, and characters undergo constant changes in its sixteen year history. This can at first be offputting to those who are used to the 'timeless saga'. Therefore I have limited my 'dips' - and all the comments that appertain to them - to the first seven years of St. Frank's history where the stories were at their best and the school at its most stable.

'All right' I hear you say, perhaps a little grudgingly. 'I've heard all this before, in one form or another. But go on - convince me if you can'. Well I can't - only the author, Edwy Searles Brooks can do that - so for much of what follows I shall let him do the speaking. For our starting-point, let us take four elements in Hamilton that make him such a powerful writer and trace their counterparts in the St. Frank's tales; that way our guests will feel most at home. Those elements are Atmosphere, Characterization, Drama and Humour. Though both were very different writers in terms of style, these are the four common links they share.

The complete beginner will be reassured to know that the essential St. Frank's is modelled on Greyfriars; the result of a direct order from editor to author when the school was first brought into being in 1917. What makes it unique is that it has Nelson Lee, the famous detective, as a housemaster, and his ward Nipper (Dick Hamilton) as a junior pupil, thus allowing the school element and the detective element to be mixed together, most usually by means of a double plot. It is this that gives St. Frank's its individual flavour. As a school alone, St. Frank's is basically another Greyfriars; as detectives, Nelson Lee and Nipper are no different to Sexton Blake and Tinker. But when the two elements are fused together, something magic is born.

The very early stories have a great deal of charm. They are almost all related by Nipper, whose style of writing encourages a most pleasant feeling of intimacy between the reader and the author. Consider here how Nipper, using the 'chatting' technique, suddenly drops the narrative level to touch the personal:

'Night!

Night, black and gloomy, with heavy impenetrable clouds obscuring the stars. The whole countryside in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's was asleep and silent, but there was an air of sinister mystery brooding over the district.

That paragraph is meant to be dramatic - I want that clearly understood - because, to be exact, on this particular night there was something doing. It was a night which had already contained several exciting incidents, and seemed likely to provide a good few more.'

Hamilton could have written the first paragraph - never the second.

Both writers excelled in creating the right atmosphere for their settings; it is for this we forgive Hamilton for always making it painfully obvious 'who done it' in his mystery stories, and Brooks the annoying inconsistencies that arise from time to time as a result of hurried, slap-dash writing. Both writers share the same technique of opening a paragraph with a single terse word, then going on with detailed scene-painting. The following openers were particularly popular with both authors: 'Night!' 'Midnight!' 'Dawn!' 'Snow!' Consider these two passages that demonstrate the technique:

'Midnight!

Ravenspur Grange lay buried in silence and slumber. Harry Wharton stirred uneasily, and woke.

He had been dreaming, dreaming of the strange and tragic events that had happened at the Grange since the Greyfriars party had arrived there. Perhaps it was the uneasy dream that had awoken him, or perhaps the chime of twelve from somewhere in the great house.

The August night was warm. The windows of the great room occupied by the Greyfriars fellows, high up in the old building, stood wide open to the night air. High over the park soared the full round moon. The light fell in at the open windows in a flood of silver.'

'Midnight!

The last echo of the booming notes died away on the still air. St. Frank's lay bathed in the radiance of the midsummer moon, and the night was peaceful and calm.

Scarcely a light showed in any of the windows of the famous old pile, for the school was asleep. It seemed, however, that there was one wakeful person, for the Remove passage in the Ancient House was not as barren and deserted as one might have supposed.

The passage was dark - the only light filtering down it from either end. On both sides were the doors of the junior studies, and as these were closed the corridor itself was pitchy. A figure moved noiselessly and stealthily along towards the end. There was something strangely secretive and even sinister about this mysterious figure.'

The stuff of most good school stories is conflict, and the drama therein. Both Brooks and Hamilton recognized this, and served up drama as basic weekly fare. The difference in their individual approaches is difficult to define. It is a gross simplification, but I will say this: drama in Hamilton often results from inner conflicts that affect exterior things, whereas in Brooks the drama comes the other-way about, that is, the outer affecting the inner. This was never more so than the time when, in a dastardly attempt to bring the Public Schools into disrepute and St. Frank's in particular, both Dr. Stafford the headmaster and Nelson Lee were given a drug that brought the evil sides to their natures to the fore with ineluctable force, suppressing the good. The results were truly terrifying:

'A piece of coal fell out of the fire, and rolled into the fender, flickering and smoking. With a sharp exclamation, Lee thrust his foot forward and savagely kicked at it. It flew into a hundred fragments.

"Good gracious!" muttered the detective.

He was rather startled - he couldn't quite understand what had caused him to act in that way. It was so abrupt - so drastic. It was not his habit to give way to such unnecessarily savage impulses. For a few minutes he sat quite still, thinking it out, and he was slowly becoming aware of a subtle change in him.

Without exactly knowing why he did so, he rose to his feet and commenced pacing the study. The clock on the mantelpiece seemed to be ticking louder than usual. The regular swing of the pendulum irritated Nelson Lee beyond all measure. This was strange, since it had never irritated him before.

Acting on another impulse, he suddenly strode forward, seized the clock, and smashed it down into the fender with a terrific crash. At the sound of it Nelson Lee burst into a harsh, gloating cackle of laughter. The sound startled him exceedingly. It didn't seem like his own voice - it had a queer, unnatural sound in his ears. Yet it was to his liking. And the fact that he had smashed the clock pleased him to an absurd extent. It was a valuable clock, too.

He continued his pacing, and with every step he took he became more and more strange. It wasn't as though he was unaware of this. He knew it - he felt it distinctly in his very marrow. Happening to pause opposite the mirror, he glanced at his reflection. Then he stood perfectly still, a choking sound coming into his throat. For that vision in the mirror looked out upon him like another being. And it was a terrible shock to him.

For Nelson Lee saw a strained, distorted face with glaring eyes and twisted lips. He had been expecting to see his own reflection.

But this - this!'

The process of mental disintegration continues.

'And then something seemed to snap in his head, and in a second his face was more distorted than ever, and he glared at the window with savage ferocity. Two juniors outside were shouting, and the sound filled Nelson Lee with black hatred. It was nearly 9.30 p.m.; nearly time for the juniors to go to bed. Those voices in the Triangle were like a spark to a fuse within Lee's brain. He tore his coat open, and whipped a revolver from his hip-pocket.

He knew why he had done so - his desire was to fling open the window, dash outside, and shoot down those wretches who were disturbing his peace. The very thought of killing them sent the blood tingling through his brain with ghastly joy. The desire to see blood flowing gripped him like a vice.'

But drama has always been available from sources other than the school story, and it needed more than this to turn Brooks and Hamilton into the mainstays of the Amalgamated Press that they became. It was, I'm sure, the wonderful characters that they created that have caused generations of readers to delight in their creations. Here the divergence between the two writers emerges the clearer. Hamilton plumbed the psychological depths in a way Brooks rarely attempted (though he DID do it forcefully on some occasions), whereas Brooks concentrated upon the creation of colourful, larger-than-life personalities. Brooks also gave distinctive personalities to many minor characters and walk-on parts, and this, though unrealistic in terms of real life, is a boon to the reader of a 'saga'. There were five major personality creations at St. Frank's, each helped to give drive, feeling, and the unique flavour that characterizes a St. Frank's story. They were Nipper - the 'I' of the early stories - Edward Oswald Handforth, the impulsive, endearing, brawny leader of Study D - his younger brother Willy, the leader of the fags, utterly

cheeky and utterly brilliant - William Napoleon Browne, the loquacious dandy of the Fifth - and Archie Glenthorne, a sort of teenage Bertie Wooster. An impossible, indigestible mixture I admit - but somehow Brooks made it all work. To his eternal credit.

As Archie's valet, Phipps doubles as the Head's butler - that way Archie can keep him at St. Frank's. In the following exchange between master and servant, we see just how far outside the normal run of schoolboy concerns Brooks cast his net for his plots. A tempestuous and violent Australian woman turns up at St. Frank's, creating a public scene. She claims that she is Phipps's jilted fiance, come to claim her rights. Rarely - for Phipps - has the future looked so grim:

> Phipps drew himself up.
>
> "I feel, sir, that it is my place to ask you to accept my resignation" he said quietly. "After this occurence, I cannot expect you to keep me on. And I further believe it would be better for me to leave the school."
>
> Archie looked absolutely dismayed.
>
> "But I say!" he exclaimed. "I say! I say!"
>
> Archie paused, unable to think of anything else. He seemed absolutely at a loss for words. Then he grasped Phipps' sleeve, and clung to it.
>
> "Impossible, old lad!" he said. "You can't do it!"
>
> "You don't wish me to go, sir?"
>
> "Absolutely not!"
>
> "Thank you, sir."
>
> "Pray don't be ridic. Phipps!" said Archie with relief. "Gadzooks! You made the old heart thump like the very dickens! I can feel it now. It's buzzing about in the most shocking state of disorder! I mean to say, when a chappie gets a shock like that all his tissues bally well wilt!"
>
> "I did not mean to disturb you, sir -"
>
> "But you did disturb me, Phipps, in large chunks!" said Archie. "My dear old scream, I couldn't get on without you! I mean, what should I do? I don't want you to get a frightfully swelled head, old lad, but the fact is you're a most dashed brainy cove, and I simply couldn't get on without you. If you desert me Phipps, I shall fade like a plucked flower. Absolutely!"
>
> "You flatter me, sir."
>
> "What priceless rot!" said Archie. "Nothing of the absolute kind. But we're wasting time. It's up to you, Phipps, to reel forth a few hundred feet of explanation. Proceed. Who is the lady?"
>
> "Her name is Miss Arabella Pringle, sir, and she is the daughter of a greengrocer in Sydney, Australia -"
>
> "Gadzooks!" said Archie. "The daughter of a greengrocer, what? I mean to say!"
>
> "There is nothing wrong with that, sir" said Phipps. "Some greengrocers, I expect, have quite charming daughters. Mr. Pringle of Sydney was an acquaintance of mine when I happened to be in Australia just before the war. As you know, sir, I have knocked about the world a good bit."
>
> "Quite so," said Archie. "But I didn't know that you had got yourself mixed up in a frightful number of entanglements. I mean to say, a sweetheart in every port kind of thing - what?"

Needless to say, Phipps is no villain, but just a victim of some oompus-boompus. It all comes right in the end.

We turn now to Christmas, a special time to both Brooks and Hamilton. As men, they both clearly loved the season, and as writers they used it to indulge in

some fine atmospheric scene-painting.

Here the St. Frank's Carollers are planning an impromptu carol concert in the grounds of Glenthorne Manor for the other guests - at midnight!

'Moonlight was streaming over the quiet, snow-covered grounds of Glenthorne Manor. There was scarcely a breath of wind, and all trace of the snow-clouds had gone. The sky was clear and starry - with a hard, metallic brilliance that denoted a sharp frost. The scene was peaceful in the extreme, and the silence was so intense that the distant throbbing of a motor car on the main road could be distinctly heard.

"It seems a wicked shame, but it's got to be done!" whispered Pitt, with a chuckle. "It wouldn't matter so much on a blustery night - but to start howling amid all this peace is nothing short of a crime!"

"Howling?" repeated Handforth. "Who's going to howl?"

"You are!" said Reggie. "At least, I hope so. We're relying on you to make most of the noise! We want your manly voice to boom over the roof tops in great wave lengths! You're our star loud-speaker!"

"Fathead!" snorted Handforth. "If you've simply come out here to make a noise, I'm going in! I thought we were goint to sing properly!"

- But things don't go quite according to plan. As you might have guessed!

'The little circle looked very picturesque amid the snow, with the gleam of the lanterns casting yellow rays in all directions. There was something really Christmassy about the idea.

"Ready?" whispered Pitt. "All right - let her go!"

The beginning was somewhat weak and wavery. Archie completely forgot bis lines and merely opened his mouth. Church and Maclure started bravely, but without much confidence. And Adams, in spite of all his boasting merely produced a thin treble which quavered pitifully.

Handforth, on the other hand, started off like the exhaust from a motor lorry. He beat everybody. Unfortunately, he chose the wrong carol, and made the further blunder of starting on the second verse.

"They looked up and saw a star" roared Handforth lustily, "shining in the East beyond them far -"

"Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the feast of Stephen" sang the others. "When the snow lay round about, Deep and crisp and even -"

"And to the earth it gave great light" thundered Handforth defiantly. "And so it continued both day and night! No el - No-oh - el - "

Pitt waved his arm wildly.

"Hi, stop!" he hissed. "You're all wrong! Handy!"

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Handforth, breaking off in the middle of his finest effort. "You fathead! You've spoilt it now! And all you chaps have been singing wrong, too -"

"You dummy!" snorted Church. "You're the one who's wrong! We're singing 'Wenceslas', not 'Noel'! You've ruined the whole thing at the start!"

Handforth gave a jump.

"My goodness! Was I singing 'Noel'?" he gasped.

"Singing it?" snorted Willy. "I've never heard such an unearthly din in all my life! It sounded like a mortar-mixing machine! I thought somebody was mending the roads!"

There were two clear areas in which Brooks excelled over Hamilton in school story writing: mystery stories that really were mysteries, and realistic friendships between girls and boys. Brooks created what Hamilton was incapable of doing - a variety of lively, teenage girls who not only could compete with the boys on their own terms, but also had a slight edge on them in terms of physical and

mental maturity. Whilst Hamilton managed nothing more than Edwardian dolls, Brooks - with help from his wife, Francis - created a number of realistic teenage romance/friendships which, though never straying beyond an affectionate kiss, nevertheless managed to convince. In this next scene, Handforth is waiting outside a shop in the eager expectation of carrying the purchases of one Mary Summers, a newcomer to the district, and a most pretty girl. In the shop she meets William Napoleon Browne who engages her with his extraordinary conversation, and then, unfortunately for Handy, Nipper walks in.

'Nipper pulled his cap off with great promptitude, and Mary gave him one of her friendliest smiles. In fact, it was even more friendly than any of the smiles she had bestowed upon the other fellows. She recognized Nipper at once, although she had never been actually introduced to him.

Browne realized the situation in a flash.

"Let me do the honours" he suggested promptly. "Miss Mary Summers - Mr. Richard Hamilton. In case you are unaware of the fact, Miss Mary, our friend readily answers to the name of Nipper. He is locally known as the World's Youngest Sleuth. In addition to these accomplishments, he is the champion centre-forward of the Junior School, the holder of the running and swimming championships, and in the boxing ring he is second to none. Even the redoubtable Brother Lawrence fails to sing in his bath after an encounter with Brother Nipper. In a word, the Marvel of the Age." '

The plot thickens. The following joyous exchange is typical Brooks.

'Browne made his excuses and departed. When he got to the door he found a face peering through at him, a face with a flattened nose. Browne started back.

"You must forgive my hesitation, Brother Handforth" he said, opening the door. "Under normal conditions your face is vaguely recognizable as a human accessory, but when pushed against a glass door - "

"You leave my face alone!" hissed Handforth. "What's Nipper doing in there? I knew it! By George! Talking to Mary. And I'm stuck out here in the cold - "

He was about to push past, but Browne held him back.

"A fatal step, Brother Ted!" he said firmly. "Indeed, a disastrous one. The slightest revelation of jealousy, and you will undoubtedly be undone. In these trying circumstances your only hope lies in assumed indifference."

Handforth paused.

"But that bounder is talking to her!" he breathed.

"Do nothing for the moment" urged Browne. "Later we will acquaint Scotland Yard of the fact, but we must have the evidence. Such crimes as these are difficult to bring home to the criminal."

He closed the door, and Handforth had a last glimpse of Mary talking animatedly to Nipper. Both were leaning against the counter, inspecting sundry kettles, and were getting on famously.

"They're as thick as thieves!" muttered Handforth huskily.

"Further evidence that Scotland Yard will be needed" nodded Browne. "Heed the words of an expert, however, and assume an air of careless ease. Girls, Brother Handforth, are strange creatures. One gleam of anger in your eagle eye, one glimpse of the green-eyed monster, and you are in the soup."

"Who's a green-eyed monster?" roared Handforth.'

I cannot end without mentioning a certain name, a name so famous in the St. Frank's saga that it has long exceeded local fame and passed into general hobby lore.

Incredibly, he was never even a permanent member of the St. Frank's cast, but for eight short weeks in 1925 left a mark on the Nelson Lee Library that will never be forgotten as long as school stories are read. A magnificent though flawed series, the character himself was quite perfect. Is there anyone amongst us who can claim never to have heard of the sinister, mysterious Ezra Quirke? ... Here is St. Frank's first glimpse of him.

'Nipper and Tregellis-West felt themselves become rigid as they stared in the direction of Watson's pointing finger. A curious tingling sensation assailed their scalps, and their hearts throbbed.

A figure had appeared from the West Arch, coming through from the Triangle. The figure had come noiselessly, and there was something unreal and spectral about it. The moon came out full at the moment, and shone with all her white brilliance.

"Who - who is it?" muttered Watson.

"Hush!" breathed Nipper. "I can't understand - "

He stared, his words unfinished. The figure below was moving out into the middle of the square, and was walking with a curious deliberation that seemed almost inhuman. As far as the watching trio could see, the stranger was a boy. He was attired in a curious cloak, and wore no hat. His long hair was waving in the wind, and his white face looked utterly ghostly. It was even possible to see the fixed expression of the eyes.

He was certainly no inhabitant of St. Frank's.

A stranger - a wanderer in the school grounds without any apparent reason. His slow, deliberate style of walking was impressive in itself, and the effect of the moonlight added to the air of unreality.

"It's a ghost!" muttered Watson hoarsely.

"Begad!" whispered Sir Montie. "Dear old boys, I believe - "

"By Jove, look there!" broke in Nipper. "What on earth - "

Something was fluttering in the air - hovering over that spectral figure in the square. At first sight it resembled a gigantic bat. Its wings made no sound on the air, and the creature was just as ghostly as the human form above which it circled. Then with a swoop it dropped, and perched itself upon the shoulder of the walker. The whole experience from start to finish was unnerving. Even Nipper was strongly affected.

"It's an owl!" he breathed. "Can't you see? It's a long-eared owl! But what's it doing with that chap? Who is he? And why are they here? There's something pretty beastly about this!" '

- Nipper, old son, you never spoke a truer word!

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

Wishing Stan and all O.B's a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year. WANTED: H.B. No. 18, your price.

R. G. ARNOLD, 40 LOCKINGTON CROFT, HALESOWEN, WEST MIDLANDS.

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Season's Greetings to the Editor and Bob Wilson, Norman Shaw, Josie Packman. I am still interested in copies of 'Baldy's Angels', War Stories by Herbert Macrae.

J. ASHLEY, 46 NICHOLAS CRESCENT, FAREHAM

HANTS., PO15 5AH.

Cooking Up The Story

(Artist & writer in tandem)

by CHRISTOPHER LOWDER

On the 10th of February, 1935, the artist, J. H. Valda, sent a letter to the writer, Clifford Gibbons. It read as follows:

My Dear Gibbons,

The idea for this cover is -- this man trains these rats to bite people, whoever the leader of his gang wishes him to pick out. The rats' teeth are poisoned, so the rats do the crime not the crooks. That's my idea of the whole story. The rats are carefully trained; the man is covered with aniseed; rats are white, green or any colour. He carries them round his neck and in the bag. Mr. Hunt thinks this would suit you and asked me to send sketch and particulars, if you will kindly let him have synopsis of idea for story.

The sketch I enclose with (this) is the cover. Background will be slum area near the docks or any wretched, evil place. Of course, you can make what you like of the idea. Anyway, the cover sketch is passed. Haydon was very pleased with it.

Well, all my best wishes.

I am,

Yours very sincerely,

(J. H. Valda)

I enclose drawing of pistol for story you are doing.

J. H. Valda was a regular and prolific Amalgamated Press artist, although, unfortunately, not much appears to be known about him biographically.

He seems to have sprung up in the early 1920's with a style that was already assured, distinctive, and almost fully mature. In those days he worked mainly for Addington Symonds' stable of papers -- Champion, Pluck, Rocket and Young Britain -- but soon branched out to other AP departments. Harold Twyman (always keen to foster new talent) soon began to use him regularly on the Union Jack, and there were times during the 1920's when he was deputising for Eric Parker far more than any other artist.

It seems likely that for part of the 1930's he held some kind of art editor's post at the AP (although possibly on a freelance basis), but towards the end of the decade he had graduated to painting dust-jacket covers for minor publishers.(1) Probably, however, Valda will be best remembered for the remarkable series of full colour covers he painted for the AP's St. Frank's reprints in the Monster Library (The Voyage of the 'Wanderer', with its scene of charging mastodons, is particularly impressive).

His style is almost unique; at least, one cannot authoritatively point to any one major influence in his work (unlike that of Eric Parker, for instance, which was clearly indebted to the artist Fred Bennett). He had a thick, heavy, almost chunky

line more suited to cartoon work, and yet his forte was undoubtedly scenes of the gruesome and the macabre. There is a late-Gothic quality about much of his work which leads one to suspect he had a more than nodding acquaintance with the more wildly Romantic artists of the 19th Century, from the apocalyptic John Martin through to Doré. Certainly Valda's illustrations oozed atmosphere and brooding menace.

Clifford Gibbons is, of course, better known to Sexton Blake enthusiasts as 'Gilbert Chester'.

Chester (as it seems easiest to call him) had had a varied career before taking up writing full-time fairly late in life. He was distantly related to the band-leader and arranger Carroll Gibbons, and had a number of show business connections (at one time he seems to have had some sort of link with a theatrical booking agency, possibly run by a cousin); he was also an amateur inventor, and was keenly interested in the development of the racing car and, somewhat paradoxically, the 'science' of astrology (he was expert at casting horoscopes, and a number of his Sexton Blake stories reflect this enthusiasm).

During the 1920's and 1930's he was one of the AP's most dependable contributors, although the manner of his arrival in the fiction business is (like that of many of his contemporaries) somewhat shrouded in mystery. He seems to have devilled as ghost-writer for Andrew Murray at the end of, or just after, the First World War, and then -- possibly when Murray's behaviour became more and more eccentric -- decided to launch out on his own. Clearly he had no problems selling himself to Twyman or Len Pratt; his first genuine UJ (1012, The Case of the Petrol Turbine) was published in March of 1923, and his first SBL (1st Series 289, The Great Revue Mystery) was published three months later.

From then on a steady stream of Sexton Blake stories came from his typewriter (60 UJ's and 13 Detective Weeklies, and 101 SBL's) right up until February 1949, when ill-health finally forced him to retire. He also wrote romantic fiction for the AP women's papers, serials and short stories for the AP boys' papers, and did a great deal of work of all kinds for D. C. Thomson. One of his prime assets (at least as far as editors were concerned) was his utter reliability.(2)

To be sure, reliability more than hints at stodginess, dullness, plodding unreadability, but in Chester's case nothing could be further from the truth. A highly literate man with an enviable understanding of the uses to which the English language may be put, he could with great facility create gripping and highly-wrought word pictures, whether of mood, atmosphere or whip-crack action, yet at the same time he had a singular grasp of the vernacular; his dialogue positively crackles with energy.

He also exhibited a vast general knowledge (you don't catch many Blake authors bothering to differentiate between housebreaking and burglary, for instance, or showing any understanding of the correct legal interpretation of terms such as 'misprision'), highlighted Blake's gifts of ratiocination (some of his deductions are truly bravura performances, worked up logically and utterly convincingly, and with none of the fakery Chester's colleagues often descended to), and had a quite stunning

line in tough and emancipated heroines who stand out amongst the general run of genre fiction females like flame-trees in a sea of daffs. Added to all of which he was a master of what is known in the trade as the narrative hook. (3)

These two, then -- Chester and Valda -- are the principals in this behind-the-scenes glimpse of the creative processes at work in the production of Sexton Blake stories of the Golden Age.

The idea Valda referred to in his letter was eventually published as The Man With The Rats, and what he'd done was simply dream up a visually dramatic situation, rough-sketch it, and send it in to the editor of the paper to see if he was interested -- although the idea of concocting a story around a cover rather than the other way round may perhaps be slightly puzzling to the average person, whose experience of magazine fiction is limited solely to reading it.

Surely, it might be argued, the writer writes his story and the editor chooses a dramatic scene from it for the artist to illustrate, in as eye-catching a manner as possible. In any case, is it not somewhat mechanical -- lacking in the creative spirit; even downright lazy -- to be handed a picture and told "That's your theme this week -- do it"?

The simple answer is, not at all. A writer may be inspired to write a cracking good yarn by a picture (even as he may be inspired by an abstract idea or a clipping from the newspaper) just as much as an artist may be inspired by a vivid stretch of prose. Indeed, one could argue that there is far more creative brain-work involved (certainly for the writer) in such a process.

However that may be, 'story-concocting' was fairly standard practise in the AP and elsewhere during the inter-war years and, as E. S. Turner pointed out in Boys Will Be Boys, long before that. (4)

Certainly Chester was no stranger to the process -- a thorough-paced pro, he was just as happy working up a story from a picture as he was banging out a synopsis off the top of his head -- nor would it be the first time that he had worked in tandem on such a project with Valda. Indeed, on an earlier occasion the combination of Chester and Valda, worked in just such a manner -- picture first, story after -- had resulted in what is certainly one of the classics of the Union Jack's later years.

This was The Gnomid (UJ 1362, 23 Nov. 29), and in my own collection of Chester's private papers there is a 2½-page synopsis for this story headed 'To Valda's cover'. Clearly Valda had submitted a rough drawing of the eponymous monstrosity and Twyman had let Chester loose on the idea. The result must have delighted Twyman; Chester came up with one of his paciest and most readable thrillers, and Twyman quite rightly blurbed it on the front cover as "Gilbert Chester's masterpiece" (and masterpiece was a word he rarely used).

The story of The Gnomid is 'the old family curse' brought bang up-to-date, featuring a 16th Century painting of a hideously ugly monster (the Gnomid) which, it appears, is based on a real-life creature said to lurk in the Amazon basin, and which is now (1929) terrorising and killing off members of the family to whom the

portrait belongs, at their ancient pile, Murwood Manor, in the Fen country.

There is more to it, naturally, than that, but it would take up too much space to deal with Chester's ingenious and complex plot more extensively here. However, it might be instructive to go into his original synopsis in slightly greater detail as it does give some idea of how a writer can flesh out the bare bones of a 1500-word idea into a 22,000-word story.

Basically the synopsis consists of 500 words of preliminary explanation (the plot, to be "spread over yarn as requisite") and 1000 words of development, which is mainly a number of action-packed set-pieces linked by the narrative thread.

The writer's main problems in such a story have nothing to do with action, descriptive passages, dialogue, or a satisfactory climax; these are relatively simple matters. His biggest headache is to keep things moving -- to shift characters from A to B, for instance -- without destroying the flow. That is, bridging the gaps between scenes. Too often in genre fiction the writer labours heroically over the colourful and dramatic set-pieces but leaves the connecting scenes almost to fend for themselves, which results in a jerky and unconvincing narrative. Chester was one of those writers, uncommon in pulp fiction, who worked hard at tightening up his story to achieve a smoother flow.

At one stage in the narrative Blake, Tinker and Warrender (an actor, and hero of the story) are at the manor where the elderly Lord Carham has just been murdered. A mysterious and hideously mishapen 'thing' has been seen legging it off into the darkness. The butler (Calvert) is on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and Lord Carham's wastrel of a nephew (who hated his uncle) has just appeared, drunk. At this point, a girl, shrieking, crashes through the French windows. Let us take up Chester's synopsis:

> "Actor recognises her as a chorus girl he has met professionally. Revived, she declares something sprang at her. But she is unhurt, save for glass cuts.
>
> "Terrified she refuses to stop at Manor so is removed by Blake and actor to a farm in the vicinity. Detective's car followed by mysterious plane. The two men go out to explore but are alarmed by sight of blaze. They rush back to find farm a holocaust. They dash into blazing building but girl is gone. On floor is the wastrel, dead, and his throat gashed."

Now although this is all good meaty stuff, calculated to please any editor who knows his business, it has to be said that if a beginner had sent it in it would have been returned to him in double-time with a curt note to "beef this up". There are enough gaps in the storyline here to sink the entire enterprise (who is the girl; how is she linked with the Carhams; what was she doing outside the manor in the first place; how on earth did wastrel jump from manor to blazing farm, and with a slit throat to boot?; and so on), but Chester needed no such rap on the knuckles, and Twyman was perfectly happy to accept such a synopsis, knowing that those gaps would be plugged to his and his readers' satisfaction.

Chester often made brief notes to guide him as he typed. Here is that same passage expanded even more, although in a form of shorthand which he would develop as he wrote the story:

"Girl explains ... butler calls down for water, etc. ... while girl's cuts are dressed, Calvert tells the story of the picture ... girl astonishingly like lady in one of the family portraits (but don't make this too strong yet) ... wastrel appears ... girl and wastrel, furious argument ... girl refuses to remain ... removed to farm, etc. ... Blake & Warrender go to inform police ... girl left with Tinker ... phone call -- Tinker leaves (girl in bed) ... Blake & W return to find place ablaze, etc."

There is of course still room for further improvement, but all is settled in the actual writing. One change is made; a sensible one, which Chester almost certainly dealt with as he typed. Mention is made of a phone call. This is in fact from one of the villains, pretending to be Blake; its object, to inveigle Tinker out of the house so the girl can be snatched. However, it would be too hackneyed (not to say absurd) to have Tinker fall for such a dodge, and thus it is Tinker who accompanies Blake to the police, and Warrender who is left with the girl and who takes the call. Since he's only just met Blake he can't be expected to recognise the detective's voice over the phone, and in any case Chester clearly felt this to be an ideal opportunity for a quick scene of Warrender and the girl (hero and heroine) alone together to boost the romance angle.

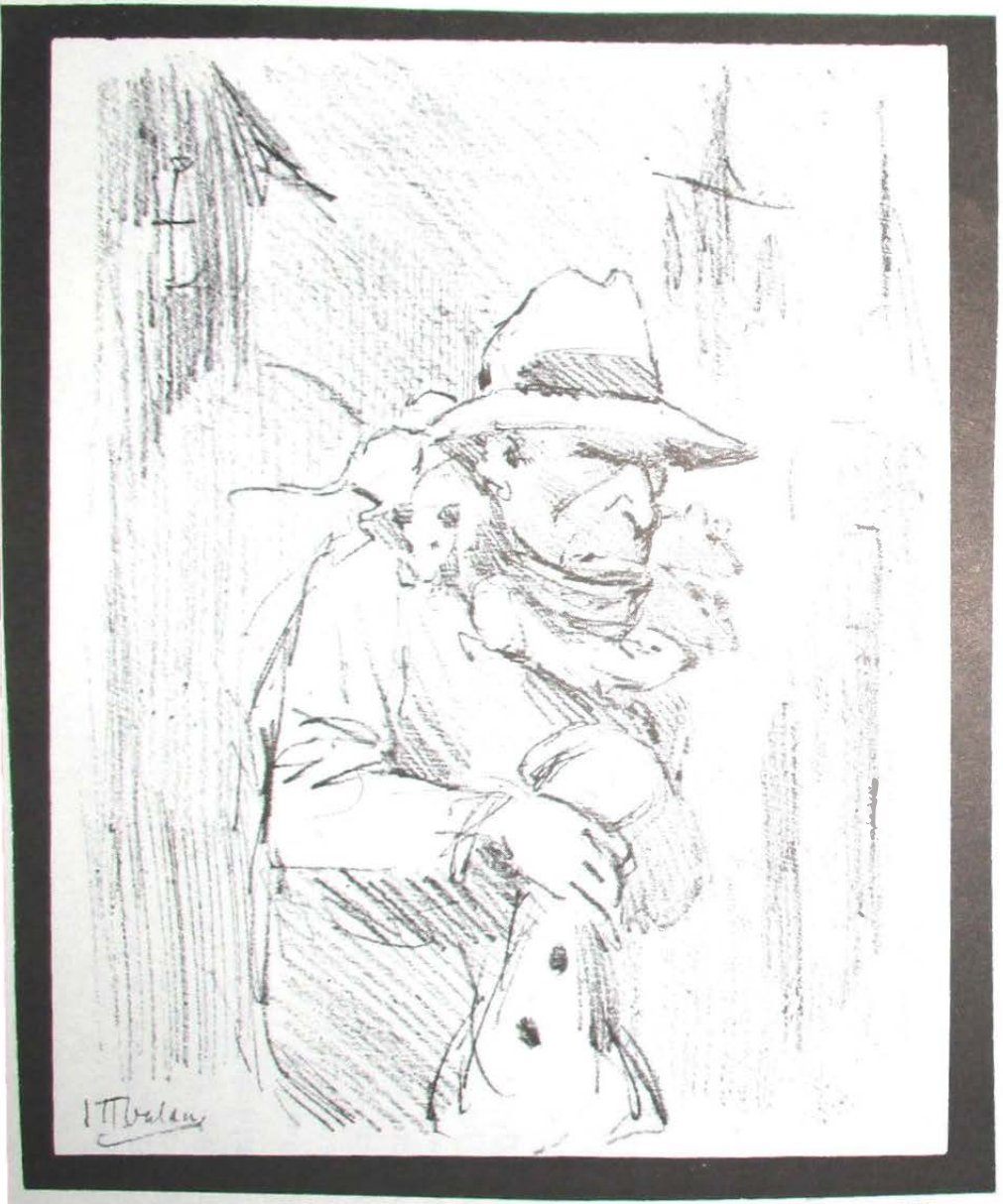
Of its type, The Gnomid is a splendid story, stuffed full of all the ingredients -- plenty of action, a solid plot, realistically racy dialogue, a touch of the weird -- that went to make up a successful pre-war thriller, and which characterised most of Chester's own Sexton Blake offerings. No wonder Twyman applauded. And of course, one should not forget Valda's contributions: not only the rough sketch that sparked Chester off but also the finished illustrations. An interior picture of the Gnomid attacking Blake is a real tour de force, and the cover itself is surely one of the most memorably macabre in the entire run of the UJ. (5)

It has to be said that, enjoyable as it is, The Man With The Rats is not up to the high standard of The Gnomid, and the reason for this may, I suspect, have much to do with the then-current situation at the Detective Weekly itself, which was, to put it mildly, in a state of considerable flux.

The DW had been launched in 1933 as an adult version of the Union Jack, and a stable companion to the A P's hugely successful Thriller. Yet almost from the start it was an ailing paper -- not because the stories themselves were poor (for those who care to look, there are some fine Sexton Blake yarns in the first eighteen months or so of the paper's run) but because basically its size was over-large and its appearance unattractive. (6) There are of course other, more complex, reasons but again it would take too long to go into them here, and they are in any case outside the scope of this article.

Suffice it to say that by the early months of 1935 the DW's circulation was by no means healthy, and there was something of a panic on in the editorial offices.

One editor -- Len Berry -- had left suddenly, and another -- Jack Hunt -- had swiftly (perhaps too swiftly) been installed in his place. Hunt was a young man, the DW was his first paper as editor, and almost his first act was to reject out of hand a Blake synopsis submitted by Chester. What Chester thought about this is, alas, not known, but he must have been more than a little put out at having a synopsis



No. 117. May 13th, 1933.

Gripping **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER** *Story Inside!*

DETECTIVE Weekly 2d

FOR THE BEST MYSTERY AND DETECTIVE STORIES

COOKING UP THE STORY

(Left) The preliminary pencil sketch of 'the man with the rats' which Valda sent to Chester, and which so delighted AP controlling editor Monty Haydon, and (Right) the final printed version as it appeared on newsagents' counters in 1935.

turned down by a comparative tyro when he himself had been punching out fiction of one sort or another for a good 15 years or more and had a reputation amongst the senior and more experienced editors at the AP for his solid story-telling skills and (perhaps more to the point in a field where writers are by no means paragons of virtue) his conscientiousness and dependability. Here is Hunt's letter:

> Dear Mr. Gibbons,
>
> I do not know whether Mr. Berry told you that he was leaving Detective Weekly ... However, he has gone, and I have taken the paper over from him.
>
> Before he left, he handed me a synopsis of a Blake story from you. I have now read this and am afraid ... I do not care for it. J. H. Valda, the artist, has sent us a suggestion for a cover ... it depicts two hands, in one of which is gripped a somewhat queer-looking gun. In the background a body is sprawled out in the usual inert attitude.
>
> The attached synopsis has been concocted by Mr. Haydon and myself with the idea of incorporating this gun ... (and) is rather in the form of a rough suggestion and requires some considerable building up. Will you chew it over, and let me have some opening chapters and a more detailed outline of the remainder?
>
> If you can get on to this fairly quickly, I can use your story almost at once.

Of course, Hunt's slap in the face is a manoeuvre, more bark than bite. He is in fact merely exercising a new editor's prerogative of administering a short, sharp shock, just to let his writer know who controls the purse-strings[7], because while cutting loose with the left hand, as it were, Hunt is at the same time offering a pound of steak for the black eye with the right.

Actually, it's clear that, despite this heavy-handed gamesmanship on Hunt's part, he wanted a story out of Chester (or, indeed, anybody) extremely urgently (the giveaway words are in the final paragraph of his letter -- the two qualifier's 'fairly' and 'almost' are diplomatic redundancies, often used in editorial tactics; in any case it's noticeable that he wants the "more detailed outline" with the "opening chapters", instead of before), and Chester, whatever his feelings may have been, was enough of a professional not to disappoint him.

The story Hunt and controlling editor Montague Haydon had cooked up between them[8] later appeared in print as The 'Pepper' Box Mystery (DW 113, 20 Apr. 35), complete with Valda cover and interior illustrations. The synopsis itself is a somewhat pedestrian affair which Chester did well to cheer up as much as he did (the fact that it had a theatrical background helped; Chester had a wide knowledge of the stage, and often turned this to good use in his stories); even so, it is not one of his best efforts.

Still Hunt must have been satisfied with the preliminary chapters (which are indeed very good and atmospheric) because he decided to send the next Valda suggestion -- the 'rats' one -- straight to Chester with no editorial messing about, even while Chester was still writing the 'pepper-box'. Thus, Chester was working on two Valda covers at the same time.

Valda sent, with his letter (quoted earlier), a detailed drawing of the "queer-looking gun" -- an early 19th Century 'pepper-box' pistol with six barrels -- along with plenty of historical background material, much of which Chester used in the story, although it's clear he supplemented Valda's data with his own researches or (more likely, considering his wide technical knowhow) his general knowledge of the subject.

Once The 'Pepper-Box' Mystery was out of the way he probably dived straight into The Man With The Rats, and the first thing he did was discard Valda's basic premise as being too fanciful. Chester himself was by no means averse to bizarre plots, or stories with a hint of the weird or outré about them [9], but if one looks at his work as a whole it will be seen that even his most fantastic stories were based on a bedrock of hard fact, or (in the case of ideas springing from his astrological interests) something he himself believed in and about which he could argue plausibly. Rats with poisoned teeth was fair enough as an interesting plot-idea, but training such creatures to attack a specific human target (with all that that implies) was simply not on. For Chester 'the man with the rats' becomes a shadowy, sinister figure -- a frightener, whose sudden appearances at key points in the story signal danger to those who see him and recognise him for what he is.

The Man With The Rats concerns the efforts of a typically Chesterian tough and salty heroine to get back on to the straight and narrow after an involvement with a criminal gang, set against a background of high finance, about which Chester could always write convincingly. [10]

In Chester's papers there is a synopsis headed 'Man With Rats' which runs to 1½ pages but is unfinished, and comparing it with the story as it appeared in the DW it is easy to see why Chester broke off when he did and started over. The central core of the plot is all there, but he has run himself into a cul-de-sac by concentrating on the heroine and her major set-piece.

In the synopsis the girl has married a man whom she does not love, to escape from the gang. A paper exists which, if produced, will ruin her, and she contrives that she and her husband (who knows nothing of her past) go to a certain West End hotel for the night. A man is staying there who has the paper, and, after drugging her husband, she nips into the man's room to steal the paper, only to find him murdered. At that moment the police (headed by Coutts) arrive, and bang at the locked door. She escapes with a man (who will turn out to be the hero) who emerges from a cupboard in the room, but when she gets back to her own room discovers to her horror that she has lost her key. She rushes back to the hero's room to hide there. After a certain amount of to-ing and fro-ing, Coutts works out (plausibly) that the killer must be the girl's drugged husband (in fact, it's not) -- but where is the girl? She is forced to merge from the hero's room (and that is, after all, something like 2 o'clock in the morning) wearing a nightdress and not much else. "An alibi," as Chester says, "but what an alibi!"

The major defect here is that the husband is a cypher; in fact, to all intents and purposes, he does not exist at all. Chester clearly recognised this after he had pegged suspicion of the murder on to him. There is no drama here; since the girl

does not love him, who cares if he did the murder or not? It would, of course, be rather better if the husband is an evil man -- good twist. On the other hand, it would be even better if in fact the girl does love the husband ...

Thus, in the printed version Chester involves the husband in the plot to a far greater extent. The girl loves him and will do anything to stop him finding out about her crooked past, and this adds real drama and human interest to the police pinning the murder on to him, especially as they do so as a direct result of her own actions (the man who emerges from the cupboard in the bedroom is now a member of the gang to which she once belonged). And the man with the rats? The murderer, of course, but the least likely person (and, within the story's limitations, quite well held up).

A word or two must be said about Valda's cover, one of the most assured and striking he drew for the DW, a paper not noted for its brilliant covers. The original rough sketch was amongst Chester's papers, and it is fascinating to compare it with the final printed version (see illustrations).

The rough itself is interesting, but static; an image whose potential is largely unfulfilled. However, like Chester, Valda knew how to bridge the gaps, as it were, without being told, and one can see why Monty Haydon was "very pleased with it". Any editor who knew his business (and who also knew his artist) would cheer on being handed such a sketch.

In the finished illustration the background is relatively unchanged, apart from the obvious technical detail any artist worth his salt would put in: the lamp-post on the left and the bollard on the right, which act as pillars, holding the scene together. The main changes, such as they are, occur within the frame. The expression on the ratman's face has been transformed from a kind of grumpy ill-humour to tense watchfulness tinged with hatred, and a crucial feature has now been added in the shape of the stick under his right arm, which takes the viewer's eye away from what is merely a colourful figure (although eye-catching enough in itself) to the major new element in the picture, the suspicious policeman. Although in the background, the caped policeman is vital to the scene; and, indeed, it is precisely because he is by no means as strongly delineated as the central character, the ratman, that the illustration works as dramatically as it does, and on such a high level. On his own, the ratman would be a bizarre and striking figure (as in the rough sketch), but in juxtaposition with the shadowy symbol of authority, of law and order, he has been metamorphosised into a representation of real evil. In short, the entire picture, both technically and artistically, is an extremely skilful piece of work.

The Man With The Rats was published as DW 117, on the 18th of May, 1935. It was the final Sexton Blake story Chester was to write for weekly publication, and in fact was one of the last original Blake stories to appear in the paper. It was already becoming clear to Haydon that some kind of drastic action was needed to stop the circulation slide, and it probably seemed to him that the best move would be to take out the Blake stories (in any case already relegated to second feature) altogether and turn the DW into another Thriller. This he did, with results that were not entirely satisfactory, or successful.

Oddly enough, Chester -- who had written 73 22,000-word Blake novelettes over the previous 12 years, and, as a freelance, had clearly depended on this market to keep him going in between his £60-a-time SBL appearances -- seems to have taken on a new lease of life. He wrote for the DW in its altered state, and also for the Thriller, but his main detective-fiction energies were now channelled into the SBL, with extraordinary results.

Some Blake authors wrote their best work at the beginning of their careers (Robert Murray, for instance), others (George Teed and Anthony Skene are two) hit a high spot in the middle. Gilbert Chester is one of the very few writers I can think of -- possibly the only one -- whose stories as he grew older far surpassed those of his youth. This superiority began to manifest itself during the mid-1930's and I don't believe it is at all fanciful to suggest a link between the late burgeoning of his creative powers and the end of the weekly Blake stories. What is even more extraordinary is the undoubted fact that Chester's novels for the 3rd Series SBL (generally regarded as a Blakian dead end) are amongst the finest Sexton Blake stories ever written.

But that, to coin a phrase, is another article.

* * *

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to acknowledge with gratitude help given me in the preparation of this article by John Bridgwater (who lent me his copy of The Man With The Rats, and xeroxed two of the stories dealt with here), Derek Adley (who, as usual, helped out with certain factual data), Terry Williams (who photographed Valda's cover-rough, and the printed version), and George Locke (who offered me the Gilbert Chester files in the first place).

NOTES

1. Two dust-jacket illustrations in my own collection spring to mind simply because of their all-round excellence: a book of 'unexplained mysteries' (the 'Marie Celeste', Campden Wonder, and so on), which features a splendidly busy jacket, much in the style of the Victorian monthly or weekly part-work novels (the cover for Dickens's Mystery of Edwin Drood, for instance) with a number of small dramatic scenes set around a centralised title-piece; and the dust-jacket for Walter Tyrer's Jane the Ripper, a startlingly grisly illustration clearly executed with great relish.

2. The esteem in which Harold Twyman, for instance, held Chester may be gauged from the fact that it was Chester who was asked to continue the extremely popular Criminals' Confederation series in 1925/26, when its creator Robert Murray was 'indisposed' (euphemism for Murray's notorious lethargy), and it was Chester who was given the important task of writing the full-length Sexton Blake insert -- Midnight Gold -- given away as a publicity stunt with The Thriller in 1930.

3. And I defy all but the most prejudiced to stop reading after the opening chapters of any or all of the following SBL's: The Caravan Crime (2nd, 435), The Tithe War Mystery (465), The Coronation Mystery (573), The Mystery of the Condemned Cottage (654), The Riddle of the Gas Meter (706), The Crime of Corporal Sherwood (3rd, 7), The Case of the Kidnapped Pensioner (64), Previously Reported Missing. Now ...? (66), and The Mystery of the Confiscated Ship (110). This is just a sample.

4. And it continues to this day. Only a year or so ago the editor of the SF comic 2000 AD invited his artists to send in the wildest, weirdest cover pictures they could think of, and writers were then given the task of justifying, in a short-short of 500 words or so, the bizarre events depicted. One of my

own jam (as opposed to bread-and-butter) jobs is to cobble together a story every twelve months from a large and varied selection of cowboy illustrations. The publishers concerned own the copyright to the pictures, but not to the story for which they were originally commissioned. Thus, they cannot reprint the story without paying out a hefty fee, but they can offer a much smaller (but still tempting) fee for a writer to choose a dozen or so pictures and let his imagination roam. I've never, thankfully, had to take on the daunting task Turner described, which was to patch together a story around a set of illustrations which included, as far as I can recall, a shipwreck, an 18th Century highwayman, a spaceship, and a wagon-train attacked by Indians - although one could, I suppose (should inspiration dry up altogether), grind out a quite serviceable time-travel story using these ingredients.

5. It was Twyman himself who put the final seal on the story by giving it its brilliantly evocative title. On his synopsis Chester has started to write the word 'The Gno', then crossed it out, substituting the more mundane 'The Murwood Mystery', doubtless thinking that the word 'gnomid' might not trip off the tongue too easily; possibly, despite a vivid cover, putting the casual buyer off. Twyman had no such doubts, and banged in the title <u>The Gnomid</u> with, I suspect, no hesitation whatsoever -- just another example of his superlative editorial skill. For my money (and this has nothing to do with the fact that he happened to run a paper which featured Sexton Blake) he was one of the very best editors the AP ever bad.

6. Of course, it could be argued that The Thriller was on the large side too, but in fact it just fell short of being unweildy; nor was it printed in the atrocious combination of blue or black on yellow that characterised the DW during the first two or three years of its existence.

7. And I can say this with absolute assurance from hard experience of receiving -- and, indeed, sending -- such letters.

8. Probably most of the idea was Haydon's. Hunt was his protégé and Monty Haydon was, to put it mildly, a forceful personality.

9. It is often said that the only writer who successfully handled the more bizarre of Blake's cases was Gwyn Evans, but Chester was equally adept at generating a weird and macabre atmosphere -- perhaps more so, for there's no doubt that there was a streak of laziness in Evans's character. Time and again his stories would start off in cracking style, only to fade away at the end with enough loose ends lying about to knit an Arran sweater. Chester was rarely guilty of this, the most heinous crime of which the writer of detective fiction may be accused.

10. In fact, of all the Secton Blake scribes, only George Teed had a better grasp of financial chicanery, for reasons which it would perhaps be impolitic to go into here.

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Paul Pontifex Prout

By

Roger M Jenkins

For an adult reader, Charles Hamilton's masters have an especial interest, since they were depicted as fully rounded characters, to use the words of E. M. Forster. The most successful masters were not mere cardboard constructions as a schoolboy might imagine them; the reader was privileged in being able to participate in their private thoughts and conversations, since he was taken behind the scenes, as it were, and so it was that some of the masters were as vivid and real as the boys themselves.

I must confess to feeling little enthusiasm for the young, athletic, good-natured masters like Lascelles, Railton, and Dalton, since they were in fact little more than nonenties. I must also confess that their opposites, the tyrants like Hacker, Selby, Ratcliff, and Manders were not my favourites, either: they undoubtedly played important parts in a number of dramatic stories, but from a realistic angle they were too extreme to be credible, and the possibility of their being able to retain their positions in famous public schools seems very remote.

The masters whose characters have my unstinted admiration as a literary critic are those well-meaning but slightly eccentric or highly individualised creations like Quelch, Prout, Bootles, and Greely (and it must be significant that not one St. Jim's master is on this list). These four were among Charles Hamilton's most accomplished character drawings, and the one whose presentation was most heavily enmeshed in irony was the most delightful of all, Paul Pontifex Prout, the master of the Fifth form at Greyfriars, whose alliterative name promised a rich vein of ridicule.

Readers in early days could have little understanding of the great treat in store for the future when Prout was first mentioned in Magnet No. 38. Wun Lung was flying an illuminated kite painted like a dragon, and Mr. Capper (a keen ornithologist) seeing it in the dark wished to capture it, and enlisted the support of Prout:

> Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, was something of a sportsman, and he had a couple of guns in his study. He was supposed to be a good shot, and Mr. Capper immediately thought of Mr. Prout and his guns. He hurried into the Fifth Form-master's study, and found him cleaning a rook rifle.

From the illustrations, Prout appeared to be a thin young man of thirty whilst Mr. Capper looked close on eighty.

It is undeniable that the development of Prout's character came about because of the development of Coker's character. In the beginning, Coker was in the Shell,

but Aunt Judy (originally conceived as a second Mrs. Nickleby) persuaded the Head to promote her nephew to the Fifth Form, a move which is stated to have rejuvenated Hacker but considerably aged Mr. Prout. Thus it was that Prout came into prominence as well, and so began that delightful interplay of character between Coker and Prout, the latter often being torn by the conflicting desires to treat his Form like responsible seniors and to treat Coker like an irresponsible juvenile: it was the latter inclination which was triumphant in the famous story specially written for the 1937 Holiday Annual, in which Coker was sentenced by his exasperated form-master to have English lessons with the Second Form.

Mr. Prout was still slim and also irascible in 1912, when he annoyed the Removites and they got their own back in No. 229 by sending typed invitations to various seniors to have tea in Prout's study. The final set of guests were chased out of the study with the aid of a cane. By the time of the first World War, however, Prout had grown both portly and middle-aged, and in Magnet 458 he was cleaning a rifle and thinking of battle, murder, and sudden death, and regretting that he could not join up:

> It was true that Mr. Prout's girth had become somewhat extensive as his years ripened, and that the largest suit of khaki would have been in danger of bursting if buttoned round his ample waist. It was true that a walk of a mile made Mr. Prout gasp, and that even with his big glasses he could not see a target at twenty-five yards clearly enough to hit it. But, as often happens, middle age had crept unnoticed upon Mr. Prout, leaving his soul as youthful and ardent as ever, whilst it increased the bulk of his figure, and played other objectionable tricks that middle age does play.

In this story, Coker convinced Prout that there was a German spy in the neighbourhood and the inevitable anti-climax did nothing to cement good relations between Coker and Prout.

The first Hamilton story to have the Fifth Form-master's name in the title was No. 763 in 1922 - "The Persecution of Mr. Prout". Prout was upset to hear Vernon-Smith refer to him as 'Old Prout', one thing led to another, and eventually an advertisement appeared in the Courtfield Times to the effect that an elderly gentleman growing bald was seeking professional advice. A series of eccentric charlatans visited the bewildered master in an hilarious tale that had more than a little Rookwood flavour to it.

It was in the late 'twenties, however, that Prout's character was eventually rounded off with a series of artistic little touches that were the hallmark of the Golden Age of the Magnet. In this way he was brought completely to life, and no better description of the Fifth Form-master can be imagined than the words which Charles Hamilton himself used at this glorious time:

> Time was when Mr. Prout had weighed only twelve stone, and could have been measured around the waist with an ordinary yard measure. (1129)
>
> Once upon a time, if his memory served him well, Mr. Prout had been a mighty hunter of big game, a terrific climber of Alpine cliffs. Grizzly bears had rolled over before his deadly rifle; though, for one reason or another, Mr. Prout had not brought home their skins. Unnumbered buffaloes had perished under his withering fire, though various trifling circumstances had prevented Mr. Prout from adorning his walls with their horns. Mr. Prout

had climbed the Matterhorn; though, owing to some petty incident, he had not reached the top. No-one, looking at the portly Form-master, would have supposed that he had ever been, like Nimrod, a mighty hunter; and it was barely possible that Mr. Prout's memory did not serve him well. It was possible that memory fondly lingering on past glories exaggerated those glories a little, indeed, a lot. That, at least, was the opinion current in Master's Common Room at Greyfriars. (1042)

Charles Hamilton was equally delightful in his descriptions of Prout in the present tense:

But those days were long past. Since those days Prout had found, with every passing year, more and more difficulty in buttoning his waistcoat. Perpendicularly, Prout was not impressive; but his diameter and circumference were imposing. His form - not in his hearing, of course - likened him to the "huge earth-shaking beast" mentioned by Macaulay. (1129)

Those mighty hunting days - if any - were over now, at all events, and Mr. Prout was now rather an irritable old gentleman, who had not seen his toes, let alone touched them, for years and years. Years had touched his form to a riper grace, as a poet has expressed it poetically. It was considered in the Fifth that it would have been a good exercise to walk round Mr. Prout. (1042)

Henry Samuel Quelch was a man of few words, and those were not always pleasant words. Chatting was not much in his line. Prout, on the other hand, was a chatty gentleman. Prout would take a colleague by the arm and walk him from the Common Room to his study for a chat; and the expression on the victim's face at such a time might have moved a heart of stone. Prout would drop into the games study to chat with members of his Form. He believed in keeping up a spirit of free and friendly confidence between master and pupil. What the Fifth Form men felt like on these occasions Prout never knew and never suspected. Sometimes, in a chatty mood, he had found the games study deserted at an hour when it was usually full of the Fifth; but he never guessed that that was because he had been espied from afar, and warning given in time that Prout was coming for one of his talks. He did not know that Fitzgerald of the Fifth had suggested having a fire escape fixed to the window of the games study, so that fellows could escape by the window when Prout got to the door. Prout valued those free and friendly chats with his Form in his leisure hours. He had no doubt that his Form valued them; and he often spoke of them in Common Room. (1129)

Charles Hamilton once stated that "The Fellow Who Wouldn't Be Caned" in Magnet 1042 was one of the two funniest stories he ever wrote for the Magnet. The plot could scarcely have been flimsier: in a moment of exasperation Prout sentenced Coker to be caned. Coker "retired" from the Form-room rather than face such an indignity and then both he and the Fifth Form-master spent some time waiting for the other to come to his senses. Despite the slenderness of the theme, however, the story is one of sheer delight: it bristles with good humour from beginning to end, it is chock-full of quotations and classical allusions, and it represents the beginning of a new era in the history of the Magnet. The issue is dated 4th February, 1928.

The Fifth Form-master was on one of his many trips to the games study when from the door of that celebrated apartment he heard Coker within expressing the opinion that one day he might be driven to punch Prout. It was no wonder, therefore, that when such a fell deed was done the blame should fall on Coker or that he should refuse to leave the school when expelled for it. How Prout finally discovered that Coker was not to blame and that he could face his colleagues once again in Masters' Common Room as the victim of an accident and not of a deliberate assault by a member

of his own Form was told in an amusing pair of stories in Magnets 1084-85.

The indignity which Coker so narrowly escaped in No. 1042 was actually visited upon him in No. 1129, when Mr. Prout requested the Head to chastise the most irresponsible member of his Form. That, so far as Prout was concerned, was the end of the affair, but Coker had other ideas. Prout was extremely surprised when a bearded man of Coker's height entered his study shortly afterwards and told him to bend over:

> "Amazing!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "My dear Prout, are you sure he uttered those words?"

Mr. Prout had grasped his rifle, fully convinced that he was dealing with a madman, and Coker's programme of revenge somehow became unstuck.

Prout was usually presented as a figure of fun, a man with absurdly pretentious notions of his dignity, wisdom, and experience. For this reason, the series in Nos. 1133-34 made a distinct change. Captain Eustace Prout, whose name stood on the Greyfriars Roll of Honour, had forged a cheque, and Prout was being blackmailed to redeem it at ten times its face value. This story presented a new aspect of Prout's character: in the face of disaster he was shown as vacillating, indecisive, and swayed by emotions rather than reason. The reader was here intended to pity Prout instead of laughing at him.

The series in Nos. 1187-88 also left one feeling rather sorry for Prout, though it was a completely humorous story this time, with no tragic overtones. Like the celebrated couple in the Gilbert & Sullivan opera, Prout had become the victim of circumstances. A thick fog was rolling in from the sea, and Coker mistook Prout for a Removite, with the result that Prout collected a black eye which he mistakenly attributed to a collision with a tree. Prout's lovely black eye became a joke in the school, and he had to bear with the barbed sympathy of Mr. Capper, who went to speak to him as a friend, urging him to tell the truth and stop pretending to have had an accident in the fog. This, however, was only the beginning of a chapter of accidents, and he eventually collected enough disfigurements to convince everyone in the school from the Head down to Gosling that he habitually indulged in riotous orgies of drinking and fighting:

> "Take my arm - the arm of a friend!" urged Capper. "Walk as steadily as you can! Lean on me! ... Think of the sensation it would cause if you were to fall or even to stumble! Think of the boys, sir - think of the Head!"

All Prout's unbearable patronage in past years came home to roost with a vengeance in this pair of stories which represent the high-water mark of all Charles Hamilton's saga of the Fifth Form-master. Nothing which he ever wrote before or since can quite compare with these two stories for sheer brilliance, mellow humour, and a lively sense of the ridiculous. They constitute the very epitome of Prout's character.

Prout in his customary role was nearly always an amusing figure, as we have seen, but when he stepped out of that role and played a new part he frequently ceased to be a comic creation. At the beginning of the Popper's Island Rebellion series in Nos. 1374-82, he took the Remove for Third Lesson until Quelch's return, and the

troubles that ensued from overstepping his authority made the story dramatic rather than humorous, because of his effect upon the heroes of the tales. Episodes relating to the Fifth Form could be told in a detached manner, but the reader associated himself with the Remove, and detachment was not a possibility in that case.

Prout often considered himself a natural successor to Dr. Locke, and when the Head was injured at the beginning of the Brander series in 1169-74, Prout immediately thought of himself as Headmaster:

> "Dr. Locke was a good headmaster - a great headmaster," said Mr. Prout. "He is fully entitled to rank with Arnold and other great headmasters. But, after all, there are men worthy to take his place."
>
> "I know of none!" said Mr. Quelch briefly.

When Prout reminded him that Dr. Locke had appointed him as temporary headmaster, Quelch stated that the Board of Governors might think differently:

> "Surely you do not think that they are likely to disagree with the Head's selection," said Mr. Prout anxiously. "I am prepared to carry on. Without conceit, I think I may say that Greyfriars will not suffer under my guidance."
>
> Mr. Quelch looked at him again.
>
> He read Mr. Prout's thoughts and stiffened. If there was any master at Greyfriars who was worthy of stepping into the Head's shoes, he did not think his name was Prout. Mere regard for facts would have forced him to admit that he name was Henry Samuel Quelch.

Prout did in fact take over for a short while at the end of the series, but not before Mr. Brander had chased him down the Head's corridor with a cane.

The occasion when Prout's abilities were put to the test was the Secret Society series in Nos. 1390-1400, when he actually did become Headmaster for practically a whole term:

> Mr. Prout sat in the Head's armchair in the Head's study. He was filling Dr. Locke's place and felt that he filled it well.
>
> It did not occur to Prout's pompous mind, for a moment, that he was rather like the dwarf who dressed in a giant's robe!

Nevertheless, Prout the headmaster of Greyfriars was a vastly different figure from Prout the assistant master. The assistant master could be snubbed by Quelch and gently reproved by Dr. Locke, but when Prout became Head his little foibles ceased to be amusing: he showed a lack of judgment by appointing Loder as Captain of the school and by upholding him in a dispute with Quelch, who soon decided to leave Greyfriars until Dr. Locke was well enough to return. Prout's pomposity, now imbued with the authority of his position, led him to such lengths that the reader began, for the first time, actively to dislike Prout. It was a logical extension of Prout's character, but it was nonetheless an unlikeable manifestation, with the result that drama rather than humour was the keynote of this series. In a grand scene in the final number, Dr. Locke returned unexpectedly when Prout was about to administer some unjust floggings, and he saw his authority collapse like a pack of cards. Like Richard III, Prout was then himself once again, and from everyone's point of view - except, possibly, his own - it was a distinct improvement.

Fortune's wheel turns full circle, and when the Head was indisposed in the Tuckshop Rebellion series in 1510-15, the Governing Board had not forgotten Prout's disastrous rule and so this time Hacker was appointed Headmaster. Thus it was that Prout was at the receiving end of all the humiliations he had cheerfully dispensed to others on the previous occasion. This time it was Prout who was so grateful to see Dr. Locke's unexpected return:

> "I need hardly say, sir, how glad, how relieved I am to see you here, sir!" boomed Prout. "Even, sir, if I go, I am glad, sir, very happy, to greet you once more, sir, before I leave this scholastic establishment, where I have passed so many happy, happy years, perhaps I may say useful years -"
>
> "You are not leaving us, Mr. Prout?" exclaimed the Head.
>
> "I trust not, sir - I trust not!" boomed Prout. "I trust in the justice, sir, and the good sense of a chief whom I respect, sir! But Hacker- Mr. Hacker, sir, has taken it upon himself to dismiss me from my post, sir -"
>
> "Goodness gracious!"
>
> "I have refused, sir, to take heed of that - that - that man's impudence!" said Prout. "The matter, sir, is in your hands! I leave it there with confidence."
>
> "You may do so without hesitation, Mr. Prout," said Dr. Locke. "Nothing would induce me to part with so trusted and honoured a member of my staff!"
>
> "Sir!" said Prout, his fruity voice trembling with emotion - "Sir, I hoped, I trusted to hear suchwords from you!"

It is perhaps surprising that Dr. Locke reversed Hacker's decision without even hearing what the Master of the Shell had to say for himself, but the Head knew Hacker well enough, and went on to reverse several other decisions as well.

Mr. Prout was at his best from about 1928-31, but he still had many parts to play in the years after, and indeed he was featured in the very last Magnet of all, still aspiring to be the friend and confidant of all his boys, still hoping to trust them and be rewarded for his trusting nature. It is weaknesses of his nature of these kinds which bring him to life, as in the case of Mr. Bootles of Rookwood. Few of us are perfect in the fashion of Mr. Railton or Mr. Lascelles, and it is the little human touches which Charles Hamilton added that rounded off so many of his characters. That is the secret of the success of Mr. Prout as a character - in the main a worthy man, a man of integrity and dignity, but one whose character is marred by trivial, venial faults which arouse neither our contempt nor our compassion but only our mirth. That is the magic touch that brought to life the Fifth Form-master in such a remarkable fashion and which always induces a keen sense of anticipation when we take up a Greyfriars story featuring Paul Pontifex Prout.

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A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

A Story of Slade

By Eric Fayne

Homer was the Headmaster's dog. That was now recognised by everybody at Slade. Homer was an Irish terrier. He was healthy, lovable, and mischievous. He was also quite clever. Had he not been the means of trapping a burglar, and saving the Headmaster a considerable loss? That was mainly the reason why Mr. Scarlet had decided that Homer should join his private household.

Homer had originally belonged to Mr. Buddle, the English master at Slade. Under Mr. Buddle's ownership, Homer had been named Pongo, and he still answered readily to both names. To some people it was an open secret that Pongo's name had been selected from a paper named the Gem, where another Pongo was a doggy character at a fictional school named St. Jim's. For, under the influence of a Mr. Meredith, the father of one of Mr. Buddle's most trying pupils, Mr. Buddle had become a Gem enthusiast.

If Mr. Buddle bore resentment at his loved pet being snaffled from him by the Headmaster, he tried not to show it. Pongo was not a suitable name for a dog owned by a dignified Headmaster, so Mr. Buddle's Pongo became Mr. Scarlet's Homer.

Homer had entered the Headmaster's private home not long before Christmas, and Homer quickly adapted himself, as dogs do. But Homer never lost his love for his former master, and, it must be admitted, Mr. Buddle never really lost his sense of proprietorship over his newly-named Pongo. The Headmaster was not too happy to find that his dog sometimes sought out his late master. Whether Mr. Buddle actively encouraged Homer it is hard to say, but, almost certainly, he never discouraged the animal.

As the winter months merged into the soft spring of Devonshire, Homer, being the shrewd fellow he was, often played truant from his home. Had this not been so, the little affair with Farmer Vyse, who had a large mixed farm on the Plymouth side of Slade, would never have happened.

It was a Wednesday in early

March. It had been a trying morning for Mr. Buddle. His final session in class had been a lesson in English Grammar for his own form, the Lower Fourth at Slade. Mr. Buddle had discussed the difference between tautology and pleonasm, and certain boys had been, Mr. Buddle suspected, wilfully dense.

Shovel and Meredith were two youths who had developed to a fine degree the art of being "wilfully dense". Mr. Buddle insisted that "the manager shut the shop" was a sufficient number of words to make the meaning clear. Shovel argued innocently that "shut down the shop" did not mean quite the same thing, and Meredith weighed in with the respective value of "shut up".

Mr. Buddle was not sorry to see the back of his class that morning. In the early afternoon he took his hat, donned a light overcoat, and made his way down the big staircase with the intention of having a walk in the Spring sunshine. Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday at Slade, and the weather was unusually warm and sunny for early March.

The big hall was deserted. Those boys who were not playing football were, for the most part, out somewhere, making the best of the unseasonable weather while it lasted.

Mr. Buddle passed through the main doors into the sunshine. At the bottom of the steps he paused to take in the scene.

A middle-aged lady was crossing the quadrangle, and Mr. Buddle recognised her as Mrs. Scarlet, the Headmaster's wife. She saw Mr. Buddle, and, changing her direction, hurried towards him. He raised his hat.

"Mr. Buddle, can you spare me a moment?"

Mr. Buddle waited. Mrs. Scarlet came up. She was hatless, but wore a woollen cardigan over her dark blouse. She looked worried.

"Mr. Buddle, we have lost Homer."

"Again?" murmured Mr. Buddle.

"I'm afraid so. It's so difficult -- The servants, you know. They will leave doors open. Homer slips out - he is very naughty."

"Couldn't you fasten him up?" asked Mr. Buddle drily. "Or shut him in a room for a while until the servants have completed their duties?"

"One tries to take precautions," said Mrs. Scarlet. "Do you happen to have seen him, Mr. Buddle?"

"I have not seen him today." Mr. Buddle compressed his lips.

"Once or twice he has come to you. My husband wondered --" Mrs. Scarlet paused.

"Indeed? Please assure the Headmaster that I have not seen your dog." Touched by the concern evident in the lady's expression, Mr. Buddle added: "I will keep an eye up for him. I am going for a walk. No doubt he will return in his own good time."

"I expect so." Mrs. Scarlet looked towards the school gates. "There is a fair amount of traffic on this road --"

"There is." agreed Mr. Buddle. "It makes it all the more necessary for the animal to be kept under control."

Mrs. Scarlet made her way to the side of the School House where

there was a private door to the Headmaster's flat.

Mr. Buddle stood frowning. In the past few weeks there had been a number of occasions when the Headmaster's dog had gone "absent without leave", as it were, and it annoyed Mr. Buddle, particularly when there was a mild hint that he, Mr. Buddle, might be responsible for such a happening.

Meditating on the matter, Mr. Buddle had strolled near the round seat in the Mulberry Walk. A gentleman was seated there, and he called: "Mr. Buddle!"

It was Mr. Fromo, the Housemaster at Slade, who taught the Classics to the senior forms. Mr. Buddle did not want to spend his afternoon listening to Mr. Fromo, an individual who liked to hear the sound of his own voice. Mr. Buddle wished he had spotted the Housemaster earlier.

Mr. Fromo rose to his feet as Mr. Buddle came up.

'Dormitat Homerus!" murmured Mr. Fromo, an amused smile playing over his lips.

"Pardon!." said Mr. Buddle in surprise.

Mr. Fromo gave a little laugh. His large nose twitched.

'Homer nods!. Or, more completely, 'Homer, usually good, nods!.'" he explained. "I was quoting Horace. Latin is not your strong suit, perhaps, my dear Buddle?"

"I could hardly have secured my degree in English without an adequate knowledge of Latin," retorted his dear Buddle.

"Do not be touchy, my dear Buddle. I saw Mrs. Scarlet chatting earnestly to you. No doubt, on the subject of their absurd dog. Homer has nodded yet again, has he not?"

"Any dog would stray if not kept under proper control," said Mr. Buddle tartly.

"I agree with you. A school is no place for a domestic animal. That dog once belonged to you, did he not? Does the Headmaster think that you have reclaimed him?"

"I have no idea what the Headmaster thinks," said Mr. Buddle.

Mr. Fromo made his way towards his own house, and Mr. Buddle sat down to enjoy his ten minutes in the sun. His brows were knitted. The subject of the Headmaster's Homer, who had once been Mr. Buddle's Pongo, was still a sore one with the little English master.

Two boys had come in at the school gates, and they made their way towards the schoolmaster on the seat under the Mulberry tree. They were in running shorts and vests, and carried linen bags slung over their shoulders. They were Meredith and Shovel, the two stars of Mr. Buddle's own form.

Mr. Buddle nodded to them, and, without waiting for an invitation, they sat down, one on either side of him.

"No football today, boys?" enquired the master.

Meredith replied:

"No Third Eleven game this afternoon, sir. We fixed up a form paper-chase. Shovel and I are the hares. We've left the pack miles behind."

"I hope you haven't been leaving litter over the countryside," said Mr. Buddle, with mild disapproval.

"You can't have a paper-chase without dropping paper," explained Shovel. "But we were sparing with it, sir."

Meredith chuckled.

"Perhaps that's why we've lost the pack." He looked at his form-master mischievously. "You've heard of Farmer Oates, sir. We've been trespassing on his land. And I've rescued Farmer Oates' daughter from a rushing stream. So, when he comes to Slade, it won't be to complain, but to thank us for rescuing his daughter." He chuckled again. "The Scamps of the School, sir", he added, as a hint.

Mr. Buddle tried to look stern. Meredith was a keen reader of that paper named the Gem, which was Mr. Buddle's secret vice. Mr. Buddle recalled the plot of "The Scamps of the School", lent to him, in fact, by Meredith's father.

"You should give less time to reading trashy school stories, Meredith. You will catch cold if you sit about after your run. Get yourselves in, and change into more substantial clothes."

Meredith and Shovel ran off in the direction of the House.

Mr. Buddle rose, and strolled towards the main gates. As he did so, a small dog came creeping round the side of the wall, and in through the gates. It was a brown terrier, and Mr. Buddle recognised him at once.

"Pongo!" called Mr. Buddle.

The terrier stopped stock still for a moment. Its face turned towards the speaker. Then, with a joyous bark, the little animal bounded forward, and tore up to his late master.

"Pongo!" repeated Mr. Buddle. He bent down and fondled the shaggy neck. "We must take you home to your mistress. You are in disgrace."

Undeterred by being in disgrace, Pongo was obviously happy. He barked and leaped in the air, and frolicked around his late owner.

With the dog barking joyfully at his side, Mr. Buddle made his way back to the seat round the mulberry tree, and sat down. In a second, Pongo was up on his knees, and licking the much-loved face.

"This is too much, Pongo," murmured Mr. Buddle smiling with pleasure.

Pongo has settled down serenely enough as the Headmaster's Homer, but he had never forgotten that he was also Pongo, and there was always a demonstration of affection for Mr. Buddle whenever Homer-Pongo met his former master.

The minutes passed as Mr. Buddle fondled his delighted, erstwhile pet and talked doggie language to him.

A shadow fell across Mr. Buddle. He looked up.

Mr. Scarlet, Headmaster of Slade, stood there, a look of acute disapproval on his scholastic visage.

"Oh, Headmaster --" gasped Mr. Buddle, taken by surprise.

"Really, Mr. Buddle." Mr. Scarlet's lips set in a firm line for a moment. He went on: "I have been worried over Homer's absence. My wife, too, has been acutely worried by

Homer's absence. And, after all this upset, I find that you have the dog. It is too bad, Mr. Buddle. I repeat, it is too bad."

Pongo-Homer jumped down, and Mr. Buddle rose to his feet. There was a red spot in each of Mr. Buddle's cheeks. He spoke breathlessly:

"You are wrong in assuming that I have the dog, sir. At least, I have the dog now, of course. He came in through the gates --"

Mr. Scarlet raised his hand.

"We will say no more about it, Mr. Buddle, but please do not entice the dog on any future occasion. My wife and I have trained him to be affectionate, but there is a limit, of course."

"I have never enticed the dog," said Mr. Buddle, with some indignation. "He should not be allowed to roam at will --- A restraint should be --"

"If the dog is enticed from his home, it is difficult for restraint to be placed on him," returned Mr. Scarlet, with a show of taxed patience. "No dog can serve two masters. As a reasonable man, you will realise that point, and appreciate it, I am sure."

Mr. Buddle tried to get a few words in.

"The dog has not been enticed. Any animal that gets the chance will slip out -"

Mr. Scarlet interrupted ruthlessly.

"We will not descend to argument, Mr. Buddle. It is beneath our dignity, and unprofitable. That is all. My wife will be relieved to know that I have found Homer, though surprised to learn that I found him with you." He turned away, saying over his shoulder: "Come, Homer!"

Pongo-Homer had jumped up on the seat once again, and was rubbing his head against Mr. Buddle's sleeve as the schoolmaster stood motionless and speechless.

Mr. Scarlet was a few yards away. He turned and his eyebrows rose as he noticed Mr. Buddle caressing the terrier's head.

It was a new experience for the Headmaster of Slade to have to repeat an order. He raised his voice.

"COME, HOMER!"

The dog leaped down, gave a muted bark, and trotted in the Headmaster's wake.

Mr. Buddle's feelings were too deep for words as he watched them disappear into the School House. For a good five minutes Mr. Buddle sat, fuming, under the mulberry tree.

"Intolerable!" he said aloud, at last.

"Did you speak, sir?" came a voice behind him. Mr. Buddle looked round. Vanderlyn, a Slade senior, had come up. He had paused, and was regarding the English master with polite enquiry.

Mr. Buddle breathed very deeply indeed, and rose to his feet.

"Yes, Vanderlyn, I spoke - and I meant every word of it," he said with emphasis. He stalked away towards the School House, leaving a surprised senior staring after him.

. . . .

The passing hours of that day did not lessen Mr. Buddle's annoyance. The more he thought of the matter, the more incensed he grew. It is sad to relate that, on this occasion, Mr. Buddle forgot the advice of the apostle, St. Paul, to the Ephesians. He let the sun go down on his wrath.

The next morning he felt a little better. He was not a man who bore malice. Unfortunately, the flame of Mr. Buddle's wrath was to be rekindled late on that Thursday evening.

With a vast quantity of marking finished, he rose from his desk in his study on Masters' Corridor. He glanced at the clock on his mantelpiece. It was getting towards ten o'clock.

He stretched himself, and yawned. He poured himself a cup of coffee from the flask which, earlier, Mrs. Cleverton, the housekeeper, had brought him. He took a large volume from his shelf, and settled down in his armchair against the fire. He took a sip of his coffee, and then opened the volume.

It was a bound volume containing copies of the famous paper, the Gem, loaned to him by a Slade parent. Mr. Buddle often turned to the Gem for relaxation when his day's work was done.

The story he selected this time was entitled "The Scamps of the School". He knew the story well; it was one of his favourites. It concerned the adventures of three schoolboys, known as the Terrible Three, who were anathema to a certain Farmer Oates, though, at the end of the delightful tale, Farmer Oates changed his opinion concerning those particular scamps from the big school.

Mr. Buddle was smiling as he read. He knew only too well that this was the story to which the boy, Meredith, had referred obliquely under the mulberry tree the previous day.

He had been reading for about ten minutes when the silence of the room was broken by a curious scratching sound from the other side of the door. He looked up in surprise from his book.

"Come in," he called.

Nobody entered. The door did not open, but he heard a very low and familiar whine.

Mr. Buddle rose, placed his book on the table, crossed to the door, and opened it. With an excited bark, a small dog bounded in.

"Pongo!" exclaimed Mr. Buddle.

With another bark, Pongo ambled to the armchair. He turned, his head on one side, a gleam in his velvety eyes, and wagging his tail.

"I've come home, Guv'nor!" he was obviously saying.

"Pongo, you're a very, very bad dog," said Mr. Buddle softly.

"Your bark is worse than my bite," Pongo was clearly replying. He sprang into the armchair, and gazed at his late master over the arm-rest. He gave a muted little gurgle of pleasure.

Mr. Buddle stood nonplussed for a moment. He looked out into Masters' Corridor. The lights were on, but there was no soul in sight.

Mr. Buddle moved a couple of doors along the passage, and tapped gently on the door of the Headmaster's study. All was silent within, and there was no reply.

Mr. Buddle moved on to the extreme end of the passage and the green baize door which separated Masters' Corridor from the Principal's private quarters. Mr. Buddle turned the handle slowly. The door did not open. It was locked.

With knitted brows, he returned to his study. From the armchair Pongo looked doubtfully at his late master.

Mr. Buddle closed the door. He stood in thought, and Pongo gave a gentle wuff.

"It is my duty, Pongo, to take you back to your owner," said Mr. Buddle. His face creased into a happy smile. "Pongo, I am not going to do my duty. Down, sir!"

He crossed the study. The obedient Pongo was on the floor in a trice, and rubbing his head against his late master's legs.

Mr. Buddle sat down. In a twinkling of an eye, Pongo was on his lap and licking his chin.

"Nice old Pongo!" said Mr. Buddle, with a sense of guilt.

Pongo settled himself contentedly, yawned, and closed his eyes. Mr. Buddle leaned forward and took up his volume of Gems from the nearby table. Gently massaging the dog's ear, Mr. Buddle resumed his reading of "The Scamps of the School". Pongo's back made a handy book-rest for the volume.

The minutes ticked by as the schoolmaster read on. It was half-past ten when he heard a footstep outside his study door. He looked up self-consciously. There was a knock.

The door opened.

"Am I disturbing you, Mr. Buddle?"

The Headmaster of Slade stood framed in the doorway.

Mr. Buddle sat transfixed. He should have risen in the presence of his chief, but the presence of Pongo on his lap made such a movement difficult. For the moment, the dog was obscured from view by the open volume of Gems.

"Oh -- Headmaster --" Mr. Buddle stammered.

"Please do not move, Mr. Buddle," said Mr. Scarlet courteously. "I have ventured to disturb you because Homer is missing again. I just wondered --"

Further concealment was impossible. Mr. Buddle closed his book with a snap. He moved his knees. Pongo looked up at him, and then jumped down.

In the doorway, the eyebrows of the Headmaster rose towards his greying locks.

"So I was right!" muttered Mr. Scarlet. He raised his voice an octave. "Can I believe my eyes?"

Pongo popped under Mr. Buddle's table. Mr. Buddle rose to his feet. He knew now the meaning of the expression "covered with confusion". Confusion, like a blanket, covered Mr. Buddle.

He said: "The dog came here. He scratched the door --"

Mr. Scarlet raised his hand.

"Please do not make excuses or apologise, Mr. Buddle. You have brought the dog here, though you know how essential it is that Homer should have but one master and one home. I

have nothing to say, my dear friend, but it is too bad. Too bad!."

"Headmaster!. I did not bring the dog here. He scratched on the door and I let him in. I thought that you and Mrs. Scarlet would have retired for the night --"

Mr. Scarlet shook his head, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Say no more --"

"I must say more, Headmaster," said Mr. Buddle with some indignation. "The dog could never have come here, but for some carelessness in your own household, Mr. Scarlet."

Mr. Scarlet's eyebrows rose again, even higher than before.

"Really, Mr. Buddle --"

"Really, Headmaster!." yapped Mr. Buddle. "I insist. This dog did not come here by way of the main hall. Had he come that way, somebody would have seen him and apprehended him. Clearly you yourself must have left the green baize door ajar, and he slipped through unobserved."

Mr. Scarlet stood rigid, staring at his English master. Some seconds passed. At last he said:

"Come, Homer!. COME, HOMER!."

Homer ran across the study and out through the door.

"Good-night, Mr. Buddle," said Mr. Scarlet. He looked back in the doorway. "If your conduct in enticing the dog from his home continues, I shall have no resort but to find another home for him - or to arrange for his disposal."

"His disposal?" Mr. Buddle was taken aback. "May I ask what you mean, Headmaster?"

"I mean what I say. We cannot constantly have these upsets. My wife loves Homer dearly, and I love Homer. But I cannot tolerate --"

"If you arrange more efficient control over the dog --" began Mr. Buddle.

"Enough!." snapped Mr. Scarlet.

The door closed with a slam. A moment later there was the sound of another slam down the passage, no doubt indicating that the Headmaster and Homer had passed beyond the green baize door.

Mr. Buddle stood there. His face was red with anger.

"This," he said to the silent study, "must be the beginning of the end."

. . . .

The next day, Friday, the rain came. The weather had changed with a vengeance. It had been cloudy all the morning, though the rain did not start until morning classes were ending. And then it came down in torrents.

Mr. Buddle had his lunch at the staff table in the dining-hall, and then made his way to his study. He had just reached that room when the green baize door at the end of the passage opened, and Mrs. Scarlet came through.

"Oh, Mr. Buddle!." she called.

Mr. Buddle waited patiently. He sensed what was coming. Mrs. Scarlet's cheeks were a little pink, and she spoke apologetically.

"Mr. Buddle, Homer has gone again."

"Indeed, Mrs. Scarlet?" Mr. Buddle's voice was cold.

"My husband wondered --"

"Will you please assure Mr. Scarlet that I have seen nothing of your dog since he removed him last evening?" exclaimed Mr. Buddle.

"Forgive me, Mr. Buddle. I felt sure that Homer had not come to you again." Mrs. Scarlet smiled nervously. "It's the servants, you know. They leave the doors open, and the naughty dog runs out. It was different in the winter. They closed the doors then, but since it has got warmer --"

Mr. Buddle inclined his head.

"I hope that you will soon find him," he said.

That afternoon, Mr. Buddle's last teaching session for the day ended at three o'clock. Still smarting over his annoyance at being suspected of enticing his late pet, he decided to take a walk into Everslade, have some tea in the little town, and then stroll back to the school in the late afternoon.

"A little Friday walk will do me good," he confided to the bust of Shakespeare on his study mantelpiece. He donned an overcoat and his hat, selected an umbrella, and sallied forth.

It was not raining now, but the sky was threatening. Swinging his umbrella, he strode across the quadrangle, and out through the main gate. He made his way at a brisk pace towards Everslade. The roads were wet, and the trees were dripping, but it was pleasant. Occasionally, cars passed.

He had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile when, with a welcoming hark, Pongo came through the hedge. The dog, limping a little, trotted up, and rubbed his furry head against the English Master's legs.

"It doesn't seem as though anybody has looked very far for you," said Mr. Buddle. He bent down and caressed the animal's ears. Pongo was soaking wet, bedraggled, and muddy, very different from his normal appearance. He looked up at his former master. "Aren't you pleased to see me?" the little terrier was saying in his own way.

"And now what am I going to do with you?" demanded Mr. Buddle. "Am I going to walk you home?"

He stood in thought, his brows knitted, uncertain what to do.

There was the sound of a heavy motor vehicle, and an omnibus came into view round a bend in the road. It was the regular service bus, on its way from Plymouth to Everslade.

Suddenly Mr. Buddle made up his mind.

"No, I am not going to walk you home." He signalled the bus, and stooped and held Pongo by his collar. The bus stopped.

"On you get, Pongo," ejaculated Mr. Buddle.

A man and his dog climbed aboard, and the bus rolled on towards Everslade. In Everslade High Street, a man and his dog alighted.

Mr. Buddle had made up his mind what he was going to do. He hooked the handle of his furled umbrella under Pongo's collar, and, using the umbrella as an improvised lead, he went some hundred yards down the High Street, Pongo, still limping a little, trotting at his side. They entered

a Pet Shop, and Mr. Buddle purchased a lead, which he attached to the dog's collar. Then, feeling a little less conspicuous now, he went on down the street, and turned into the lane which led to the railway station. Everslade was fairly busy just before 4 o'clock on a Friday afternoon, but things were quiet in the Station Road.

Mr. Buddle mounted the steps of the last house before the railway station, rang the bell, and waited. Pongo looked up in patient enquiry.

The door opened, and a middle-aged woman in a white overall stood there.

"Is the vet at home?"

"Mr. Croft is out at the moment. We expect him back very soon." She glanced down at Pongo. "You wish Mr. Croft to see your dog? Do you care to come in and wait?"

He was shown into the vet's waiting-room, and the woman left him. Pongo sprang up on to his knees, and Mr. Buddle smiled, and fondled the animal pensively.

It was some ten minutes later that a voice said:

"Bless my soul, it's Mr. Railton himself."

Pongo jumped down, and Mr. Buddle rose. He had met Mr. Croft before, and had been intrigued to find that the vet himself was an old Gem fan. It had made something of a bond between the two men on that previous solitary occasion.

"I feel more like Mr. Ratcliff at present," confessed the schoolmaster. "My normal tranquility and my common sense have both deserted me at the same time."

Mr. Croft regarded him wryly.

"Trouble with the dog? He looks fit enough, apart from the Devonshire soil which is sticking to him. What did you call him after all? You thought about 'Towser', if I remember right."

"I called him Pongo," said Mr. Buddle gruffly. Mr. Croft laughed appreciatively.

"He went out very early this morning. Become a bit of a wanderer lately," explained Mr. Buddle. "I found him in the lane near Slade. He was soaking and dirty, and limps a little. I would like you to look him over."

"Bring him into the surgery." The vet led the way, and a moment later was running expert fingers over the animal. Mr. Buddle looked on in silence.

After a while, Mr. Croft looked up.

"Nothing wrong with him that a good night's rest and a bath won't put right," he observed drily. He ended: "Has he borrowed a pal's collar? I see the name 'Homer' is on it."

Mr. Buddle pursed his lips. He reddened.

"He is named 'Homer' now - the name the Slade Headmaster gave to him. Officially, he is Mr. Scarlet's dog. Perhaps I should explain. We had an attempted burglary at Slade - you may have read about it in the local paper. Pongo prevented the robbery. After that, the Chief decided to make Pongo his own dog. He re-named him Homer. I had to agree."

"But you resented it," suggested Mr. Croft.

"I tried not to. The Head of Slade is a splendid schoolmaster, and a fine man in many ways. He is not an easy man to pull with at times."

Mr. Buddle stopped, and gnawed his lip.

"And --" prompted the vet, patiently.

Mr. Buddle shrugged his shoulders.

"Of late, since the days pulled out and the weather improved, people have been leaving doors open in the Headmaster's quarters, and the dog has got out on a number of occasions. Once or twice - several times - Pongo has come to me. He could easily be run over in the road. More than once Mr. Scarlet has hinted - indeed, stated - that I have been enticing the dog --"

"And have you?" murmured Mr. Croft.

"Certainly not. I cannot be held responsible if Pongo comes running to me, or scratches on my study door."

"No!" said Mr. Croft. He added: "But you did not repulse him and drive him away, as you should have done if he was to settle down with a new family. Dogs are canny. They soon know what they can do. Possibily you petted the dog whenever you saw him?"

"I will not allow this dog - my dog - to be neglected," exclaimed Mr. Buddle heatedly.

The vet spoke soothingly.

"This dog is not neglected, sir. He is in fine condition. He needs a bath from rolling in the muck somewhere. He is not neglected."

"He is neglected if he is allowed to get out at all times of the day and night and roam the countryside. My patience has been sorely tried. I found him this afternoon out on the Everslade road. I do not intend to let it continue. From now on, this dog is mine - aren't you Pongo?" Mr. Buddle rubbed the animal's ears, and Pongo responded happily. "I do not intend to take him back to Mr. Scarlet. It is possible that I shall seek another post. Slade is not the only school in the country, though it is the best." Mr. Buddle smiled sadly. "I shall be sorry to leave Slade, but -"

He lapsed into silence.

Mr. Croft said: "Do you mean that you would sacrifice your career for the sake of this dog, Mr. Buddle? Is not that a little rash?"

Mr. Buddle threw back his head proudly.

"It is a matter of principle, Mr. Croft. I shall make a definite decision - make my plans - very soon. In the meantime, I would like you to look after him here."

Mr. Croft raised his eyebrows.

"We have no kennels here, Mr. Buddle. There is a place in the town where they board pets while their owners are on holiday. All we have here is a hospital for pets --"

"That is what I mean." Mr. Buddle nodded. "I want you to take Pongo into your pets' hospital, and look after him till such time as I am able to take him away."

"The dog isn't ill," protested Mr. Croft, impatiently.

"Perhaps not - but I should like him under your eye."

Mr. Croft blew out his cheeks in

resignation.

"Our pets' hospital is at the back of this house. There are two qualified and experienced nurses in charge all the time. You would find it less expensive to use a regulation kennels."

"I ask you, as a favour, to have him, Mr. Croft. The cost does not bother me."

"We tend the animals' ailments," murmured Mr. Croft. "But a healthy animal needs exercise. My staff would not have the time to exercise your dog."

"I will come down myself, some time every day, and take him out for an hour," rejoined Mr. Buddle.

Mr. Croft hunched his shoulders.

"You have made up your mind, I see. Very well, Mr. Buddle, bring the dog, and I will introduce you to Mr. Bute and Miss Lavender in the hospital."

"Thank you," said Mr. Buddle, with dignity. "Come, Pongo!"

. . . .

Dusk was falling when Mr. Buddle returned to Slade. He had enjoyed tea in Everslade, and then strolled, deep in thought, back to the school.

He had only been in his study a minute when there was a tap on the door, and Mr. Scarlet looked in.

"Yes, Headmaster?" enquired Mr. Buddle stiffly.

The Head of Slade looked worried.

"I presume that my dog is not with you again, Mr. Buddle --"

Mr. Buddle's lips set grimly. If he had been on the verge of repentance he now understudied Pharoah of old and hardened his heart.

"Your dog has not been in my study since you took him away last night, Headmaster."

"He has been missing since mid-morning when he had a meal. He has never before been gone as long as this. If he is not in shortly, I must notify the police."

"I am sure you will deal adequately with the situation," rejoined Mr. Buddle, and the Headmaster departed.

In bed, late that night, Mr. Buddle thought over the situation before he switched off his bedside lamp. He had made up his mind now. It would be costly to keep Pongo in the Pets' Hospital for the remaining weeks of term, but it was likely that the vet would make special terms for the long period. He would ask Mr. Scarlet to release him from his contract without the normal term's notice. He would leave Slade. He might get married. There was an attractive widow with whom Mr. Buddle had something of an understanding. Her son was a senior student at Slade, so the matter had been left in abeyance until such time as her son left school.

As a married man, Mr. Buddle could obtain a housemastership, maybe at Eton or Harrow. It would be a step down after Slade, but Mr. Buddle was desperate.

Just for a moment, he asked himself whether he was justified in taking back Pongo as his own in this way. He answered himself.

"It is a matter of principle,"

he said to the silent bedroom.

It was sophistry, of course. But Mr. Buddle needed the consolation of easy sophistry just then.

He turned out his light, and went to sleep.

. . . .

The next morning, Homer was still missing. It was no surprise to Mr. Buddle. If a few hours of uneasy sleep had softened Mr. Buddle's resolve, he hardened it again when Mr. Scarlet came along and enquired whether Homer might have turned up in Mr. Buddle's study. Mr. Buddle assured the Headmaster that such a thing was most unlikely, which, under the circumstances, was true.

A notice on the board in Big Hall informed all and sundry that Homer was missing, and asked all Slade boys to look out for him. It would be appreciated, added the notice, if those boys, who were not occupied with sport that Saturday afternoon, would make up small parties and scour the immediate countryside.

Mr. Buddle was indifferent. That half-holiday afternoon, he made his way to the vet's house and the Pets' Hospital at the rear. Pongo greeted him rapturously. Clean and spruce and well-groomed, and no longer limping, Pongo was a dog of which to be proud. Miss Lavender, the chief nurse, assured him that Pongo was in excellent shape, though pining a little.

So Mr. Buddle, with Pongo on the lead, set off into the Devonshire countryside. He did not go towards the town, where he might easily meet some Slade boy or master on a Saturday afternoon. He went beyond the railway station, down lanes, over stiles, and through woods. He met very few people at all, and no-one he knew. For two hours, the man and his dog enjoyed themselves. Mr. Buddle was surprised at how quickly the time passed. He felt all the better for the exercise, and there is no doubt that Pongo benefited to the same extent. But Pongo looked woebegone and sad when his master left him in the expert hands of Miss Lavender.

After a brief chat with Mr. Croft who was also there, Mr. Buddle took a taxi back to Slade.

There was now a notice on the main gate, to catch the eye of passers-by. It announced that a Reward of Ten Pounds would be paid to anyone bringing the Irish terrier, with the name "Homer" on the collar, back to the school.

Mr. Buddle read it with mixed feeling.

"It's a matter of principle," he said aloud, at last.

He strode away towards the School House.

. . . .

Sunday - and Homer still missing, as Mr. Buddle learned from many sources - as if he didn't know.

A slight feeling of guilt began to assail the English master, but so far, at least, it did not weaken his determination. Pongo was his dog. Pongo had been neglected in the Headmaster's household. Therefore Mr. Buddle had reclaimed him.

Usually, on Sunday mornings, Mr. Buddle attended school chapel. This morning he did not. He walked down into Everslade, where the little town was dignified and quiet in the

Sabbath peace and calm. He collected Pongo - a rather dejected Pongo to start with - and took him for an hour's ramble in the countryside. Master and dog enjoyed themselves immensely.

"You're back with me Pongo, where you belong," Mr. Buddle confided to his excited little canine friend. He took the dog back to the Pets' Hospital, where Mr. Bute, one of the nurse-attendants, greeted them with a broad smile.

"I shall be back this afternoon to take you out again, old fellow," Mr. Buddle told Pongo, and the dog rubbed his head round his master's legs.

Once more, Mr. Buddle walked back to Slade. He thought about his coming departure from Slade. A pang shot through him. It would be a wrench - a terrible wrench - to leave Slade. But it was a matter of principle.

He had his lunch in the Slade dining-hall. It was a good lunch. The catering at Slade was first-class. Mr. Buddle wondered whether it would be as good at Eton or Harrow.

He took his hat, donned a light coat, and left the School House.

In the quadrangle, he looked round him in the Spring sunshine, which was warm and bright again. He looked up at the lovely old building. "Those ivied walls!" somebody had once said of St. Jim's in the Gem, Mr. Buddle remembered. There was ivy on the walls of Slade, too, and, once again, Mr. Buddle felt a pang. He stifled it, and set his lips.

A few boys were strolling in the quadrangle, or going out through the main gates. A slight, feminine figure was coming in through those gates. It was the Headmaster's wife. Mr. Buddle watched her as she went aimlessly into the Mulberry Walk, and sat down on the seat which surrounded the tree there.

Something in the dejected appearance of that slight figure brought an odd feeling to Mr. Buddle. He followed her. She looked up at him as he approached.

"I've been out looking for Homer again," she said. "I can't find him anywhere. I didn't expect to, really, but one goes on hoping that he must be somewhere around. He's been gone a long time - two days and nights. We told the police. It won't help. We won't find him now --"

Mr. Buddle did not speak.

"You are so kind, Mr. Buddle. I know that you must feel it as much as we do --"

She drew a handkerchief from her pocket, and pressed it against her cheek.

"I'm so sorry," said Mr. Buddle, feeling every sort of a hypocrite.

Mrs. Scarlet bent her head. She was crying.

"Excuse me being so stupid." She looked at him with an attempt at a smile. "It's just not knowing -- He may be lying somewhere, hurt. He may be dying and unable to move. He may have been stolen. He would have come home if he could, I'm sure. I'm sure he had got to know me and love me. It's not knowing that makes it such an agony. If we knew that he was dead, it would be better than fearing that he may be injured somewhere --"

"I know!" murmured Mr. Buddle. There was a strange expression on his face.

Mrs. Scarlet wiped her eyes, and blew her nose softly.

"Perhaps it's poetic justice. I told my husband so." She made another attempt at a wan smile. "We took Homer from you. I expect you were beginning to love Homer very much --"

"I was very fond of him. Pongo was my name for him for a week." Mr. Buddle spoke in a low voice. "Don't think about that, Mrs. Scarlet. He is your dog now, and he has a good home with you and the Headmaster."

Mrs. Scarlet shook her head doubtfully. Mr. Buddle rose.

"Don't give up hope," he said. "He will probably turn up, safe and sound, and if so --"

"I must go in. Have a nice walk, Mr. Buddle. Spring comes early to Devonshire, doesn't it?"

Mr. Buddle raised his hat. A few minutes later he was striding down the lane yet again, towards Everslade.

. . . .

At three o'clock that Sunday afternoon a taxi deposited Mr. Buddle at the walls of Slade. Pongo was with him. An excited Pongo dragged on his lead as Mr. Buddle let himself in at the gate in the wall - a gate used only by masters and prefects. Mr. Buddle did not want to attract attention. He went round by the garages, and approached the door to the Headmaster's private quarters without crossing the quadrangle. He bent down and removed the lead from Pongo's collar, and slipped it into his pocket. He lifted the dog up into his arms, and rang the bell.

The door opened, and Mrs. Scarlet stood there. She threw up her hands, as though unable to believe the evidence of her own eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Buddle, you've found him. You've found Homer. It's a miracle -- Oh, Homer, darling --"

Mr. Buddle set down the dog. Homer barked joyously, and leaped forward. Mrs. Scarlet went down on one knee, and Homer frantically rubbed his face into hers.

Mr. Buddle was smiling. Perhaps his sacrifice - if it were a sacrifice - had its compensations at this moment.

"Where did you find him, dear Mr. Buddle?" asked Mrs. Scarlet breathlessly.

"He came down, out of a field, and landed at my feet," explained Mr. Buddle, omitting to add that it was an event which had happened two days earlier.

"He looks so well. Somebody must have been caring for him. I was so afraid --"

"We must make sure that such a catastrophe does not happen again." said Mr. Buddle calmly.

Still barking - glad to be home, quite obviously - Homer ran past his

mistress and into the hall beyond.

Mrs. Scarlet laughed happily.

"What a load off our minds!." she exclaimed. "Oh, it's wonderful. My husband will be so happy -- Oh, Mr. Buddle, you're a magician."

Smiling a little ruefully, Mr. Buddle strolled out into the quadrangle. He drew a very deep breath. His feelings were mixed. A load seemed to be lifted from his mind. He would not be leaving "those ivied walls", after all, unless Mr. Scarlet asked too many questions, and Mr. Buddle did not see why he should. He would surely be only too pleased to have Homer home again.

Mr. Buddle had a little chat with Larner of the Fifth, who was going rambling with Carslake, also of the Fifth. Splendid fellows, thought Mr. Buddle. There's no place like Slade, thought Mr. Buddle.

He met up with Antrobus, captain of Slade, and they had a little discussion on nothing in particular before the skipper went on his way.

Pilgrim, Meredith and Garmansway ran up to him.

"Boys, you will be pleased to know that Pongo has been found. He is now home again," Mr. Buddle told them.

The boys were delighted.

"Did he just come in, sir?" queried Meredith.

"I found him in the lane. I have turned him over to Mrs. Scarlet. She was very pleased. Let us hope he will not stray again."

"We wanted to tell you, sir. Farmer Oates is here," said Meredith conspiratorially.

"Farmer Oates?" echoed Mr. Buddle.

"Farmer Vyse, sir," explained Pilgrim. "We trespassed on his land on Saturday in the paper-chase. He's brought the law with him. Do you think he's come to see the Head?"

He pointed towards the school gates. Mr. Buddle and his boys were under the trees near the wall, not far from the entrance. Mr. Buddle looked across at the gates.

Four men had entered. One of them was talking to Parmint, the lodge-keeper. The man who was talking was stout and middle-aged, and looked a prosperous farmer. Two others, Mr. Buddle assumed to be farm labourers. The fourth was a policeman in uniform, and Mr. Buddle recognised him as Sergeant Comber of the Everslade police.

Mr. Buddle had seen them all about the district, and the stout gentleman struck a familiar chord in the schoolmaster's mind, though he could not, at the moment, determine where he had spoken to him at some time.

After a few moments, the four men, led by Parmint, crossed the quadrangle, and disappeared round the side of the School House.

"Parmint's taking them to the Head's house," remarked Garmansway. The three boys looked curiously at their form-master.

"Do you think it's about us, sir?" asked Meredith nervously.

"If you trespassed on Farmer Oates' land, it probably is," said Mr. Buddle severely.

"Farmer Vyse!" corrected Pilgrim, with the ghost of a smile.

"You will know in good time, if your presence is required," went on Mr. Buddle. Pilgrim and his friends went towards the School House entrance, and Mr. Buddle went out through the gates.

The schoolmaster had a short walk along the road, and then turned back. When he got back to the gates about fifteen minutes later, he found Parmint standing outside his lodge. Parmint came forward.

"Mrs. Scarlet asked me to look out for you. She's in a rare stew. She said to ask you to go to see her as soon as you can."

Mr. Buddle looked puzzled.

"I will see her at once, Parmint."

"It's them lot, sir. Comber, and Farmer Vyse, and his men. They say that the Head's dog, Homer, has been sheep-worrying. They're going to take Homer away and have him destroyed."

Mr. Buddle stared at him in amazement.

"I can't believe it," he said.

"It looks as though it may be true, sir. After all, the dog was away for some days. I didn't even know he was back."

Mr. Buddle left the lodge-keeper, and hurried round the School House to the Headmaster's private door. He had barely touched the bell when the door opened. Mrs. Scarlet drew him into the hall, and closed the door. She looked harassed and sad.

"They accuse Homer of sheep-worrying, Mr. Buddle. There is a farmer and a couple of his men. They all identify Homer as the dog who has worried the animals. The policeman wants to see you to ask just where you found Homer this afternoon --"

Mr. Buddle spoke urgently.

"Take me to them, Mrs. Scarlet. I will do what I can."

Mrs. Scarlet opened a door on the right, and ushered Mr. Buddle into the private lounge of the Head of Slade and his wife. It was already well occupied.

The Headmaster stood against the mantelpiece. He was a large man - large in body and personality - and dominated the scene. The farmer sat in an armchair. He, too, was a large man, though not so tall as Mr. Scarlet. Mr. Scarlet was large in all particulars, while the farmer was larger sideways.

The two farm workers, looking self-conscious, stood together near the farmer. Sergeant Comber, his uniform hat in his hand, stood against the window, gloomily gazing out.

Homer, the Irish terrier, lay at the Headmaster's feet, looking around at the unwelcome guests. Homer seemed bored with the proceedings. When Mr. Buddle appeared, the dog stood up, stretched himself, and ambled across to his former master.

"Ah, Mr. Buddle," said Mr. Scarlet. "Thank you for coming. A distressing state of affairs has arisen. Mr. Vyse, here, claims that our dog, Homer, has been worrying his farm animals on several successive days." Mr. Scarlet addressed his wife. "Shut the door, my dear, and please remain."

Mrs. Scarlet closed the door, and stood with her back to it. There

were tears in her eyes.

Farmer Vyse had risen to his feet, and he eyed Mr. Buddle thoughtfully. Mr. Buddle had seen Farmer Vyse before, but he could not bring to mind just when and where. He nodded to the farmer, and also to Sergeant Comber whom he knew well.

Mr. Scarlet went on: "I find it difficult to believe that Homer would worry farm animals, but a dog has been seen on a number of occasions worrying sheep, and Mr. Vyse and his two workers here state that they recognised the dog as the one they have seen out with my wife several times. I think we must accept their testimony. I have admitted that Homer was absent for 48 hours, and that, only this afternoon, you found him and brought him back to Slade."

The policeman came a little forward. The good-natured man looked uncomfortable, but he had his job to do.

He said: "This animal is very like your own pet, Pongo, Mr. Buddle. Is it the same dog? I remember him well."

Mr. Buddle smiled faintly.

"He is the same dog, Sergeant. It is difficult for a member of the staff here to have a pet. So the Headmaster took him. He is now Mr. and Mrs. Scarlet's dog, and they named him Homer."

"I wondered about it," said the Sergeant. He scratched his head. "Well, it seems clear that he has been worrying sheep. These three gentlemen have identified him, and that is sufficient. He will have to be destroyed. If Mr. Scarlet is agreeable to that, it will save trouble. Otherwise I will obtain a warrant."

"I do not believe for one moment that this dog has ever worried sheep," exclaimed Mr. Buddle heatedly. "He has never shown any tendencies of viciousness."

Farmer Vyse spoke.

"We saw him, sir!" There was a vigorous nodding of heads from his two farm workers. "Days ago we first saw him, chasing the sheep. Several have been bitten. It is a serious matter at any time, but it is especially serious at this time of year."

"I realise that," admitted Mr. Buddle. "But you must be mistaken. This dog is no sheep worrier - of that I am convinced."

"Remember 'Owd Bob'!" said Mr. Vyse. He nodded ponderously. "That's what I say. Remember 'Owd Bob'!"

Mr. Buddle regarded him pensively.

"You mean the novel concerning a faithful dog which turned sheep-killer in its old age. I am acquainted with it, but there is no comparison. This dog is young. Barely a year old."

"Some dogs are born killers," said Farmer Vyse. "Tell Mr. Buddle how you recognised the dog, George."

George did so.

"We saw that the sheep were being pestered," he said. "We mounted a watch, and, sure enough, he come. I said to Frank here - 'Why, that's the dog belonging to the lady at the big school'. And sure enough it was."

"Sure enough it was!" echoed Frank.

"They pointed it out to me, and I recognised it, too," added Farmer

Vyse. "I've often seen this lady walking in Everslade with the dog. I knew it at once. Several times we all saw it - others on the farm, too, recognised the dog. I took a shot at it, the last time, and it cleared off. I thought I might have hit it, but we searched and didn't find it again. That dog will have to be put down, Mr. Buddle."

Sergeant Comber spoke again.

"The farmer is right, sir. With all these witnesses, there is ample proof. The dog is a killer, and it will get worse. They always do."

Mr. Scarlet spoke. There was a deeply worried frown on his brow.

"Where did you find the dog today, Mr. Buddle?"

There was a slight pause before the English master replied, speaking slowly:

"He came down out of the hedge. It was near Slade, on the road to Everslade. Not far from the hostelry they call the 'Plough and Sail'."

"He was in excellent condition," put in Mrs. Scarlet. "He did not look as though he had been running wild or attacking sheep. Look at him now. He is just as Mr. Buddle brought him back to me."

"It was a long way from your farm, Mr. Vyse, if Mr. Buddle found him near the 'Plough & Sail'," commented Sergeant Comber.

"Not too far for a dog to travel," said Mr. Vyse. "You know, as well as I do, Sergeant, how these killer dogs will get about. They're as tricky and shrewd as monkeys. I took a shot at him this morning, and, you may depend, he was off like the wind. No wonder Mr. Buddle found him a mile away."

Sergeant Comber looked embarrassed.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said to Mr. Scarlet. "I think we must take the case as proved against this dog. Mr. Vyse and his men are quite certain that they have identified the animal as the sheep-worrier. Do I take him with me, or will you insist that I bring back a warrant?"

Mrs. Scarlet was down beside the dog, stroking its shaggy head. Pongo-Homer looked up questioningly into her face. Mr. Scarlet moved across to his wife. He placed a hand on her shoulder.

"My dear, I am afraid we must do as the police officer and Farmer Vyse wish," he said gently. "Homer will have to go."

"I'm sorry, Madam!" said Farmer Vyse gruffly.

"You agree to my taking him then?" asked Comber.

"Wait!"

It was Mr. Buddle. His voice rang out sharply.

He said: "This dog is no sheep-worrier. It's all a mistake."

The two labourers grunted, and Farmer Vyse said surlily: "There's no mistake, Mr. Buddle."

Mr. Buddle spoke evenly.

"There is a mistake, and I will prove it to you. You say that you shot at the dog this morning, but you missed him, and he went off in a panic. When did this sheep-worrying occur?"

One of the labourers spoke.

"Started Thursday. I told the guv'nor, and we watched in case the dog came back. He came back Friday evening. It was then we recognised him through the guvnor's glasses --"

"My binoculars!." explained Mr. Vyse.

"Saturday he was there again, and a half-dozen of us saw him. He was there Saturday night, and we picked him out with flashlights. That was the night several sheep got bitten. He was back again this morning --"

"We know that Homer was away from home for a good 48 hours over this week-end, Mr. Buddle," said Mr. Scarlet sadly.

Mr. Buddle nodded with a hard smile.

"He was away from home - but he was not worrying Farmer Vyse's sheep in those 48 hours," he said crisply. "I told you that I found the dog near the 'Plough & Sail'. So I did. But not this afternoon. I found the dog on Friday afternoon."

Everybody in the room was staring at Mr. Buddle in astonishment.

"But that was two days ago," exclaimed Mr. Scarlet. "Where has he been since that time when you allege you found him, Mr. Buddle?"

Farmer Vyse gave a short laugh.

"It's obvious where he has been. He's been attacking my sheep."

Mr. Buddle shook his head.

"Nothing of the sort. I will prove to you that it is quite impossible that this dog has been worrying sheep."

"Then prove it," snapped Mr. Vyse.

"Certainly'. On Friday afternoon I found the dog, drenched and limping, down the lane towards Everslade. I took him, on a bus, to Everslade. I have no doubt that the bus conductor will, if necessary substantiate my statement. I bought a new lead for him from the pet shop in the town. There, again, I am sure the shop proprietor will remember me and the dog. I then took him to Mr. Croft, the Everslade vet. We arrived there at about four o'clock. Since that time, Pongo has been in the pets' hospital which Mr. Croft runs in the town - a splendid institution, I might add. On Saturday afternoon, I went myself and took the dog for a ramble, returning him later to the hospital. I did the same thing on Sunday morning - this morning. After lunch, I had a chat with Mrs. Scarlet, and noted how distressed she was. I went, at once, and fetched the dog away from the hospital, and back to her."

There was silence in the room. Mr. Buddle went on:

"Mr. Croft will tell you that the animal was in his hospital from Friday afternoon till this afternoon. His assistants in the hospital - a Miss Lavender and a Mr. Bute and others - will bear out what I say. I am sorry, Farmer Vyse, that your sheep have been worried, but Mr. Scarlet's dog is not the culprit. I do not ask you to take my word, gentlemen. Have I your permission to use your phone, Headmaster?"

"Please do," said Mr. Scarlet faintly.

Mr. Buddle moved across to the

table, and dialled a number. In a few moments he was speaking.

"Mr. Croft. Buddle, here, from Slade College. About the dog, Pongo. Can I trouble you to have a few words with Sergeant Comber who is here? There is a suggestion --"

They talked for a few moments. Then Mr. Buddle held the instrument out to the police officer.

"Mr. Croft will give you all particulars, if you will talk to him."

Mr. Croft gave the Sergeant all particulars.

A few minutes later, the Sergeant said: "That is very clear, Mr. Croft. Thank you very much. Will you have a few words with Mr. Vyse?"

Mr. Croft had a few words with Mr. Vyse. At last, the Farmer replaced the phone on its cradle. He turned to George and Frank.

"Out, men," he said, staccato. "We've been barking up the wrong tree. But for Mr. Buddle we might have executed the wrong culprit."

The men departed, a little surprised, and a little shamefaced.

"You are satisfied, Mr. Vyse?" asked Sergeant Comber.

"Quite satisfied, Sergeant!" He gave a throaty chuckle. "Sorry you have been troubled, as they say at the telephone exchange. It was our mistake. This dog, Pongo, has got a twin."

"My dog's name is Homer," said Mr. Scarlet.

"What's in a name?" asked Farmer Vyse. "I can only apologise to you, Mr. Scarlet - and to you, Madam." He gave a little bow to Mrs. Scarlet. "And to you, old chap," he said to Homer-Pongo, bending down and caressing the dog's shaggy head.

He turned to Mr. Buddle.

"We're all grateful to you, sir. I love all dogs - except killers and sheep worriers, and this one is obviously not one of those."

"Good-bye, Mr. Vyse. I am so glad the matter has been cleared up satisfactorily," said Mr. Buddle courteously. They shook hands cordially.

"I've just remembered where we met before," said Farmer Vyse, slapping his thigh. "We sat side by side in the Everslade Empire - that place the Wests started. Remember that girl on the stage who tried to reflect the limelight on to the two of us?" He roared with laughter.

The warm smile froze on Mr. Buddle's face. He looked self-conscious. He stole a glance at the Headmaster who had moved to the window with Mrs. Scarlet and Homer. Mr. Buddle hoped that the Headmaster had not heard the farmer's reminiscence. Back into Mr. Buddle's mind had come, like a flash, the picture of that evening when he and Farmer Vyse had sat, side by side, in the "circle" of the "Everslade Empire". The Headmaster would hardly approve of a senior member of his staff attending such a place of amusement.

"I hope we'll meet again one day," he observed casually to Mr. Vyse, and the Farmer took his departure.

Sergeant Comber, visibly embarrassed, murmured his own words

of apology, and followed the Farmer and his men. The door closed behind them, and Mr. Buddle was left alone with the Headmaster and his wife - and Pongo-Homer.

The latter gave a joyous bark, and loped across to his former master. He rubbed his head round Mr. Buddle's legs.

"Homer is saying 'Thank you'," murmured Mrs. Scarlet.

Mr. Scarlet sat down in an armchair, and stared hard at the English master.

"We have reason to be grateful to you, Mr. Buddle," said Mr. Scarlet. "All the same, I think you owe us an explanation. If you found the dog on Friday, why did you not bring him home to us at once? Or, at least, let us know that he was safe?"

Mr. Buddle did not speak immediately. He had no intention of offering excuses, but it was a delicate situation.

It was Mrs. Scarlet who saved the day. She had been looking at Mr. Buddle, with a slightly sad little smile on her face. She moved quickly across the room, and placed a small hand on his arm.

"We owe you so much, dear Mr. Buddle. I can see what happened. You found Homer, and he was dirty and cold and ill --"

"He was in a poor way," agreed Mr. Buddle.

"He was limping, you told us," went on Mrs. Scarlet, her voice breaking a little. "He had hurt himself somehow. You knew that I would be terribly distressed --"

"He was limping very badly," agreed Mr. Buddle.

"So you took him to the pets' hospital for him to have expert attention, and, when he was quite well, you brought him back to me."

"All the same --" interposed Mr. Scarlet.

"Robert, we owe Mr. Buddle so much," said the Headmaster's lady. "He has been so very thoughtful - so very thoughtful."

The Headmaster rose. He held out his hand, and Mr. Buddle clasped it.

"If my wife is so happy, we have nothing of which to complain," said Mr. Scarlet. "I am glad that, due to you, this matter has been so happily concluded."

Pongo was still rubbing his head affectionately round Mr. Buddle's trouser legs.

"He clearly loves you very much, Mr. Buddle," murmured Mrs. Scarlet. She looked at her husband. "Perhaps, dear, we should share Homer with his first master."

Mr. Scarlet smiled.

"Impossible! No dog can serve two masters!" He thought for a few moments. "I think you should have a reward, Mr. Buddle, all the same. An idea of mine might appeal to you. My wife and I have planned a ten-day trip to Norway during the Easter vacation. We had decided to leave Homer in kennels in Everslade for that period. However, it might please you, Mr. Buddle, to remain at Slade during part of the vacation, and take charge of Homer. He would be happy, and you would be happy, would you not?" He

smiled engagingly.

Mr. Buddle counted ten before replying. He looked fixedly at the Principal of Slade.

Mr. Buddle said: "You are generous, Headmaster. I will have to see whether my own plans would permit of such an arrangement. It is, in fact, just possible that I may decide to adopt a cat."

"A cat?" Mr. Scarlet sounded as though he could hardly believe his ears. "Did you say - a cat, Mr. Buddle?"

"A cat!" agreed Mr. Buddle. "A black cat, Headmaster, for luck."

And with a bow to Mrs. Scarlet, Mr. Buddle was gone.

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Merry Xmas, Happy Healthy 1982 to everyone.

BOB MILNE, 21 DURHAM TERRACE, W2. 229 8258.

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Merry Christmas Greetings to all hobbyists and grateful thanks to our revered Editor for all his sterling work.

JOAN GOLEN, STREETLY, SUTTON COLDFIELD.

= =

"Knockout" Yuletide to "Knockout" fans, and others - everywhere. Have you any "Knockouts" for sale? Particularly mid-1940's; also "Annuals" 1940's only.

T. PEED, 91 SHELFIELD ROAD, BIRMINGHAM, B14 6JT.

= =

Xmas Greetings and Happy New Year to Friars everywhere.

LEN BERG, WEMBLEY, MIDDX.

= =

Golden Hours Club, Sydney, wishes all our friends in U.K. a Happy and Peaceful Xmas and New Year.

RON BROCKMAN, BOB WHITE, STAN NICHOLS
ERNIE CARTER, SYD SMYTH

= =

Xmas Greetings to all good friends in the hobby. Remember with pride Charles Hamilton, Edwy Searles Brooks, Gwyn Evans.

LES FARROW, FYDELL STREET, BOSTON.

= =

JOHN BARTHOLOMEW, 77 EDINGTON STREET, NORTH ROCKHAMPTON, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA, sends Christmas Greetings 1981, all hobby friends here and overseas and Happy New Year for 1982.

Mighty Mickey Mouse

By W. O. G. LOFTS.

And, as the apocryphal story goes ... The hard-up artist, struggling to make ends meet, used to watch a sympathetic small mouse that used to sit on the corner of his drawing board. For idle amusement, he drew the mouse's head in a circle, with two smaller circles for ears. Legs, almost like sticks were stuck into circular shoes, and curiously only three fingers and a thumb for hands that fitted into large gloved hands that looked like boxing gloves. It was so simple to draw, with no mousy hair, or any other awkward or difficult-to-copy characteristics. Seeing the great possibilities of having a team of animators drawing him economically in a studio, eventually in 1928 the very first black and white cartoon film was made featuring Mickey Mouse entitled 'Steamboat Willie'. The artist's name was of course Walt Disney, who in a short time, built up a multi-million dollar Empire.

Curiously enough, Walt Disney could never draw Mickey Mouse properly, nor was the familiar copper-plate flowing signature his. Though he did at least supply the mouse's film voice for about twenty years. His characters invariably were syndicated into comic-book form, which were sold in England. Also in this country, Dean & Son commenced the yearly Mickey Mouse Annuals in 1930. Yet, strangely enough, in view of the tremendous appeal to children of the Walt Disney characters, probably, and as far as it is known, the only comic-strip in a weekly publication prior to 1936 was in the Bristol Evening World Children's Supplement. This had an extremely limited circulation to say the least, though it is possible it was syndicated into yet untraced periodicals. However, all this was changed in 1936, when William B. Levy, European Manager of the Walt Disney marketing organisation, started Mickey Mouse Weekly. In a small office in Shafetsbury Avenue he quickly gathered a staff together. For his main assistant, surprisingly, he chose a woman. Sylvie A. Clarke who had worked at Amalgamated Press in a minor capacity, whilst staff artists included Wilfred Haughton, who had drawn Mickey for the Dean's Annuals, and had at one time drawn Bobby Bear of the Daily Herald. Haughton who lived not far from John Nix Pentelow at Carshalton was also a gifted inventor. Other artists included Basil Reynolds, who drew the popular strip Skit & Skat (based loosely on Pitch & Toss in the Funny Wonder) and Stanley White who drew the science fiction material.

Like most other children in that period, my main joy in visiting the cinema was seeing the Walt Disney cartoon films, and so it was logic that a comic appearing with strips of them, would be a must with me. No. 1 of Mickey Mouse Weekly appeared on the 8th February, 1936, by Odhams Press, and it was also the first comic to be printed in photogravure, and it can only be described as a phenomenal

success reaching 350,000 copies a week. This greatly exceeded the colour counterparts at the Amalgamated Press, and certainly caused them some concern. Even their answer in the beautifully drawn Happy Days comic was a failure - simply because the Walt Disney characters were so well-loved, and were readily bought by parents for their children, who had greatly approved of the cartoons in the cinema.

Whilst many popular coloured A.P. comics were forced to close down in World War II owing to the paper shortage, MICKEY MOUSE WEEKLY continued and went from strength to strength. William Levy eventually left the firm, Sylvie Clarke married a Canadian and also retired. Barry Appleby, now of the Daily Express Gambols fame, took over Basil Reynolds' Skit & Skat, whilst 'Jimmy' Cauldwell a former editor of The Nelson Lee Library, whose MODERN WONDER had folded up, took over the editorship. In 1957, unfortunately there was a Court case over the copyright - which ended in Odham's starting up their own comic Zip, which had a short life, and Walt Disney promoting their own comic. After just a year, they in turn decided to call it a day, and so a glorious run of the world's most famous cartoon characters ended. It was left to the tremendous enterprize of a friend of mine, who went over to the U.S.A. and secured the copyright in England of the characters that they were eventually revived to appear exclusively in the now I.P.C. comics. DISNEYLAND has proved a fantastic success, whilst the new venture DONALD and MICKEY, was according to a recent visit to Fleetway House also doing fantastically well. Mickey Mouse! who was the pass-word for the D-Day landings. Who won a medal from the League of Nations for his goodwill in all Nations. Mickey Mouse at Madame Tussaud's. Mickey Mouse who makes more in Commercialisation in over 200 products than his actual films. Mickey Mouse a big cult figure today, a hero for the hippies, and who is on T-shirts and jumpers. That original small mouse that sat on Walt Disney's drawing board surely deserves a glass case in a National History Museum, being truly a Mighty Mickey Mouse.

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AS ALWAYS, Love and Thanks to Eric Fayne and Madam, and Warm Greetings to all Members of the O.B.B.C. Clubs and collectors everywhere. For my collection I still need, and will pay good prices for, the following: ANNUALS: Girls' Crystal 1940; School Friend 1943; Golden 1939; Popular Book of Girls' Stories 1936, 1941. ALSO WANTED: by DORITA FAIRLIE BRUCE: "Mistress Mariner"; "Sally's Summer Term". By ELSIE OXENHAM: "Biddy's Secret", "Rachel in the Abbey", "Maidlin to the Rescue". By ELINOR BRENT-DYER: "The Chalet School and Rosalie". Please contact me at 46 OVERBURY AVENUE, BECKENHAM, KENT, Telephone 01-650-1458 or 01-650-7023.

MARY CADOGAN

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The School Friend, issues Nos. 78, 122 (new series), 49, 88 FOR SALE. Your offers please.

MR. NORMAN LINFORD, 18 THE GLADE, STREETLY
NR. SUTTON COLDFIELD, WEST MIDLANDS, B74 3NR.

Nipper, on behalf of all at St. Frank's and Irene Manners of Moor View School for Young Ladies, wish you all a Jolly Christmas and a Happy New Year. Best wishes to everybody from:- JIM COOK AT ST. FRANK'S

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All best wishes and Christmas and New Year Greetings to the Editor and all those wonderful contributors to Collectors' Digest and the Annual. Many thanks for a year of marvellous reading and glorious memories.

ARTHUR HOLMES, 33 GRANGE HILL, EDGWARE, MIDDX., HA8 9PG.

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Season's Greetings to Josie, our esteemed Editor, Eric, Norman, Chris Lowder, Laurie Young, Bertie and a special greeting to Les Sutton whose Bullseye photocopies sent in reply to my last year's Ad. ended my long search for the end of "Scarbrand". Will some kind Boys' Magazine enthusiast photo-copy the "Iron Army" instalment in No. 317 for me? All expenses paid. Perhaps I could help you with a photo-copy of some long sought item?

JOHN BRIDGWATER, 58 SPRING LANE, MALVERN, WORCS., WR14 1AJ.

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Warmest Christmas Wishes to our Editor, Eric Fayne, to our respected Madam, to W. Howard Baker, Norman Shaw, Derek Adley, Darrell Swift and all readers and collectors everywhere. May 1982 be your best year yet.

PHIL HARRIS, 5542 DECELLES, APT. 4, MONTREAL
QUEBEC, CANADA.

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THE GREYFRIARS CLUB 5th GRAND CHRISTMAS and 38th MEETING of Connoisseur Friars and Saints will again be held at 'COURTFIELD' in DECEMBER and will be duly reported in the CHRISTMAS TREBLE NUMBER of the 'COURTFIELD NEWSLETTERS' containing as usual full reports of Club Meetings, and photographs and many scores of letters and articles from connoisseurs everywhere. Our President, Howard Baker (Club), Miss Edith Hood (Museum) both hope to be present.

Your Hon. Secretary/Curator, Bob Acraman, and Hostess, from COURTFIELD, 49 Kingsend, Ruislip, Middlesex, home of the FRANK RICHARDS' MUSEUM AND LIBRARY, (see C.D. Annual 1979 and 1980, pages 68 and 120, and C.D. March 1980, page 24) extend HEARTIEST CHRISTMAS GREETINGS to all our friends, subscribers and donors from all the clubs whose support and encouragement have done so much to make our hobby the enjoyable pastime it is.

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WANTED: Wizard, Adventure, Hotspur, Champion, Triumph, 1928-33.

MARTIN, 3 SOMERSET ROAD, ORPINGTON, KENT
(ORPINGTON 33564)

"Let's be Controversial" Series

The "Let's Be Controversial" series in the monthly Digest are essays, editorially written, which commenced in April 1957, and, by this time, must have covered every possible aspect of Hamiltonia and the Hamilton environs. We have been asked, time and time again, to publish a book containing a selection of them, and we may think about it one of these days. In addition, we are constantly asked for an index to the essays. Readers want to look up some specially-remembered topic, but find it difficult to find between 1957 and 1981. Last year, in the Annual, we listed the first fifty of them with details. Here the list continues:

51. (July 1961; C.D. No. 175) "There's Joy in Argument". (Concerning the sub writers.)

52. "The Man with the Brush". A look at the artists.

53. "The Tail and the Dog". The effect of readers' letters on the authors and editors.

54. "A Star is Born". Christmas stories - and the worth of Tom Merry as compared with Harry Wharton.

55. (January 1962; C.D. No. 181) "The Substance and the Shadow". More thoughts on substitute stories.

56. "A Star Has Set". Thoughts on Charles Hamilton at the time of his death.

57. "The Man and the Moment". Could the old Hamilton stories live again? - the question asked in 1962.

58. "Captains Courageous". Concerning the school captains.

59. "Second to None". A tart rejoinder to the Hamilton critics of the day.

60. "The Mystery of the Kid". Essay on the Rio Kid tales.

61. "'X' Marks the Spot." Concerning Hamilton mystery stories.

62. "The Idol". Another slam at the critics.

63. "The Iconoclast". Permanent changes made by sub writers.

64. "Et, tu, Brute!" Should we ourselves attempt to write sub stories?

65. "The Four Horsemen". The late Tom Hopperton had four pet aversions in the school stories. We muse over them.

66. "The Vital Spark". A comparison of tales of Hamilton's middle period with those of later years.

67. "The Branch Line". A look at Hamilton's "other" series.

68. "The Heavenly Twins". The Gem and the Magnet.

69. "The Ghost Story". Did Hamilton himself ever employ a ghost writer?

70. "The One and Only". Analysis of D'Arcy.

71. "A Hit or a Miss". Concerning pen-names

72. "Not Flawless, But --"

73. (March 1964; C.D. No. 207) "A Question of Taste". (Idle thoughts as to whether any Hamilton character showed bad taste.)

74. "No, Sir!" Thoughts on a certain Magnet story.

75. "Polished Pot-boiler". Concerning certain "run of the mill" tales.

76. "The Art of Contrivance". Contrivance, skilfully handled, can be delicious. Clumsily done, it is just absurd.

77. "Fifty Years of 'The Toff' ".

78. "The Rio Kid's Gold-Mine".

79. "The Post-War Greyfriars".

80. "The Hard Core". Concerning the 'old faithfuls' among readers, and how they were treated by the author.

81. "It's Just My Point of View". Concerning arguments and opinions among readers.

82. "The Holiday Annual for Christmas".

83. "Your Editor". How Herbert Hinton edited the old papers, and left his personality imprinted on them.

84. (February 1965. C.D. No. 218) "The Charm of Rookwood".

85. "Turn of Tide". How popularity swung away from the Gem to the Magnet.

86. "The Debt". What Hamilton owed to earlier writers - and what other writers owed to Hamilton.

87. "The Blot". Reasons for the decline of the Gem after 1914.

88. "Rookwood Overseas".

89. "When in Doubt --". The barring-out series.

90. "The Thousandth Man". Concerning friendships.

91. "The Ubiquitous Bunter".

92. "The Place of Religion in School Stories".

93. "The Exception that Became the Rule". The age of substitute writers did not dawn till mid-summer 1915 ...

94. "A Tale of Two Articles". It was a time of ill-informed criticism of Hamilton. This article takes a big swipe at a couple of ignorant critics.

95. "The Echo Lingers On". A few thoughts concerning Hamilton the human being, in contrast to Hamilton, the writer.

96. "The Rose". Characters' names, the duplication of names, and so on.

97. "Inquest". On the Popular.

98. "For the Record". Concerning the Hamilton record "Floreat Greyfriars", just newly published then.

99. "Rift in the Lute". The relationship between Hamilton and Editor Hinton.

100. (June 1966. C.D. No. 234) "The Last of the Blues". Mainly about the Valentine Outram two-some.

Well, that's all we have room for now. More anon, maybe. To wind up, here are some extracts from one of the essays of about sixteen years ago (a very popular one in its day).

THE THOUSANDTH MAN

(from the Let's Be Controversial series)

"One man in a thousand, Solomon says,
Will stick more close than a brother,
And it's worth while seeking him half your days,
If you find him before the other.
Nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine depend
On that the world sees in you,
But the thousandth man will stand your friend,
With the whole round world ag'in you."

My readers will recognise that I am quoting Kipling. When I was a boy, I was very fond of that piece of rhyme. And that is practically a confession that, as a boy I was rather sensitive, rather sentimental, and rather idealistic. I thought friendship the most wonderful thing on earth. My great ambitions were to score a century in a cricket match and to find a friend like Tom Merry. I did neither.

I think it likely that most of the youngsters - who had, for the Gem and the Magnet or for any other paper featuring the same characters all the time, a loyalty which lasted for many years - were sensitive, sentimental, and idealistic, too. Charles Hamilton, by luck or design, founded the system of the schoolboy Peter Pans, who remained the same, year in, year out, and that was part of the reason for his extraordinary success. He provided the type of friend for whom we yearned but could not find in real life. I say "part of the reason" because, in addition, his stories had to be well-written, otherwise we should not have gone on reading of his characters as we grew older.

Before my time, a music hall star named Tom Costello had made famous the song "Comrades". As a very small boy I heard Costello sing that very song at a flea-pit of a music-hall. It deeply touched my sentimental soul. Had I been older, I might have been even more touched by the fact that his heyday was long past, or he would never have found it necessary to top the bill at a flea-pit of a music-hall.

A ballad, sung hopefully by tenors even up till the outbreak of the last war,

was "Friend O' Mine". The sentiment was the same ...

... Friendship is the golden thread of many Talbot Baines Reed stories. A big boy can be warmly friendly with one of several years his junior, and only good for both results from it.

Our age has lost its innocence. Dean Farrar once wrote that the innocence of ignorance is a poor thing, for it can in no circumstances be permanent. That may be so. Nevertheless, it is sad that innocence, in our time, has been replaced with suspicion; that we tend to see an ominous reason for everything ...

... When, say thirty years ago, we read of the friendship between the 17-year old Tempest and the youngster, Jones, in Reed's "Tom, Dick, and Harry", we thought it ideal. In 1965 we shake our heads and wonder. Our broad minds and our narrow waists have changed places ...

... To the best of my recollection, Hamilton never depicted a friendship between an older boy and a younger one. It is probably true to say that the most successful and satisfying friendships in school life are twosomes. For this reason I would consider the bond between the Bounder and Redwing the most delightful in Hamilton history. Mornington and Erroll, carbon copies, provided a similar picture.

Of the schoolboy leaders, the Terrible Three provide the finest study, in my view. A trio was more likely to work out well than a group of larger numbers. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had just those little differences in characterisation which went to make a happy partnership. And they all shared the same study.

Broadly speaking, the Famous Five was an unlikely combination. In fiction, it worked out well; in real life, a thread linking five into close friendship would be improbable. Even allowing for the fact that breeding counts, five fellows going around together could easily become a little gang of rowdies. If Wharton and Nugent enjoyed an ideal friendship, as they did, helped by being in the same study, they would hardly have sought three more from other studies down the Remove, to diffuse the friendship.

Yet the Famous Five, due to the superb craft of their creator, got by with much success. We would not have had it different ...

... Hamilton always used the friendship theme with wise restraint. One recalls the friendship between Tom Merry and Talbot which was delightful in itself, the only drawback being that it upset the relationships among the Terrible Three - or it should have done. Wingate and Lancaster, in a famous series, gave a fine picture of the friendship between seniors.

It was often on the friendship theme that the substitute writers foundered in a morass of sentimentality ...

Talbot Baines Reed did not write the impeccable English employed by Charles Hamilton - one could not imagine Hamilton ever being guilty of "Being a fine evening, Tom went for a walk". Nevertheless, Reed had the rare gift of the born storyteller.

Even now, so many years later, his tales make spendid reading for the young and the not-so-young.

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Christmas Greetings to all C.D. readers and also to the Editor and all at Excelsior House.

NEIL LAMBERT

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MECCANO MAGAZINE 1939. The first volume in our new series of "M.M." reprints is now ready. Please send for current sales list which also includes many Howard Baker volumes including secondhand and out-of-print items. Write to Bentleyfilms Limited, P.O. Box 22, Pudsey, West Yorkshire, LS28 5NB, or call at our shop, 54 Albion Street, Leeds 1.

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Merry Xmas and Happy New Year to all.

JOHN COX, HARDEN FOLLY, EDENBRIDGE, KENT.

= =

WANTED: Collectors' Digest before 1978, also Annuals, except 1970, 1979.

TONY LINES, 14 WALTON DRIVE, KEYWORTH, NOTTS.

= =

Season's Greetings to all friends in Britain from:-

BERYL and ERIC WAFER, NEWCASTLE, AUSTRALIA.

= =

A Happy Xmas to all the good friends I have made in our beloved hobby.

MAC (E. B. GRANT-MCPHERSON)

= =

Season's Greetings to Eric, Madam, Princess Snowee, and all C.D. readers from:-

W. W. EDWARDS (NORTHFLEET)

= =

Compliments of the Season to all London Club Members and friends.

BEN WHITER

= =

WANTED GREATLY: Union Jacks, 949, 1016, 1229, others and early Magnets for disposal. Greetings all contacts.

J. de FREITAS, 648 STUD ROAD, SCORESBY
VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3179.

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A Christmas Melodrama

by WILLIAM LISTER

It could be that the age of melodrama reached its height between 1880 and 1930. Time was when books such as Uncle Tom's Cabin - East Lynn - Maria Marten, or the Murder in the Red Barn and Sweeny Todd, sold countless copies and the plays based on them performed by travelling players in many parts of the country were responsible for oceans of tears being shed by man, woman and child. Whether they were readers or theatre goers, to have seen the actor Tod Slaughter play "Sweeny Todd" was to have really lived, at costs varying from 6d. to a 1/-.

I have always thought that with the coming of Talkies and Al Jolson in The Singing Fool we saw the beginning of the end of mass audiences being reduced to tears of sympathy for the characters involved. Being born in 1912, the reader will realise that made me eligible for a full size dose of melodrama and I enjoyed it - I still do. So when a 1912 copy of the Union Jack, No. 481, dated 28th December entitled a "Christmas Conspiracy" came my way I knew that, handled well, such a tale could play heavily on my emotions. After all, that is the inner-meaning of melodrama, according to the Concise English Dictionary. I quote: "A sensational dramatic piece with violent appeals to the emotions and with a happy ending". If that is so "A Christmas Conspiracy" is certainly a melodrama, and though published at one penny (a penny of the old kind) it is worthy of its place among many better-known melodramas. If you care to take a look at the cover illustrations along with a few interior ones you would be inclined to agree with me. A half page of the cover sets the pace. "Through an open window can be seen a happy family in the midst of a bout of Yuletide merriment, piano playing, singing, talking - the lot, all the things you used to do before you had a wireless or TV. The table loaded with Christmas fayre. Now the bad news, outside, snowflakes and a bitter cold wind surrounds a distressed maid who clutches in her arms a little baby. The door of the rich residence of her wicked uncle closed against her, she gazes through the window with unfulfilled longing. The whole scene brings to mind a popular song of the early thirties - "Whose that knocking at my door? It's your little Nell, don't you love me any more? You left me on the night that Dumbell was born." It's a case of "Go! and never darken my door again."

The upper section of our cover sports three inset pictures, one of which one sees the opening of prison gates and a much-wronged prisoner rushing into the arms of his equally much-wronged wife. Our story opens (of all times) on Christmas Eve.

"Christmas Eve it was, with snow falling thick in places. The streets of Blackborough were full of Christmas shoppers. Ordinary, gloomy and dreary enough, the shops were gay with holly and ivy and bright-hued paper chains. If it's not one thing it's another and into this charming Yuletide scene struts our villain, a wicked uncle, a certain Richard Bellamy. Tis he folks, that has George Drakefield framed and cast into prison, torn from the arms of his wife on a snowy Christmas Eve. I quote:- "Thus they were parted. Thus was an innocent man torn from the arms of his wife and child. And of all seasons of the year, upon Christmas

Eve. Upon that night when human hearts, however hard they may be at ordinary times are prone to melt and turn to its fellows with a benign and charitable hand" end of quote.

Christmas!. and pretty Eva Drakefield, her husband cast into gaol, penniless and turned from her rich uncle's home in the midst of a snowstorm, with a young child clutched in her arms.

Melodrama!. Let's eavesdrop on this scene. "Uncle, I am alone, I am homeless and penniless. Give me shelter this night if only for my child's sake."

"No, I have told you, it is useless to beg of me."

"But shelter, see it is snowing again and I have nowhere to go - nowhere to take my baby."

"There is the workhouse" sneered Richard Bellamy. He slammed the door shut. Eva stood alone upon the step, her child held close to her breast, while the snow fell around them. To all appearances she was friendless. But as in all good melodrama, if you have a wicked Uncle you also have a good fairy to help you out of a jam. Enter Sexton Blake and Tinker to whom the job falls, and though poor little Eva and her much-wronged husband, George, pass through many misfortunes, hardships, calamities and other set-backs, Sexton Blake turns the tide for them. Unveiling the villany of the villain, by the following Christmas all is well.

Let's have a look at the "Concise English Dictionary" again, melodrama, a sensational dramatic piece with violent appeal to the emotions - well we have had those - but what about the happy ending? Here it comes. "In these days George Drakefield is a rich and happy man, in a position that brings him £5,000 a year (1912 standards). Pretty Eva and their son now share the good times. Sexton Blake slipped quietly away". It would be thoughtless of me not to point out the exact moment of the change of the fortunes of the Drakefield family.

As our Eva staggered through the snow to the Churchyard where her parents were buried she heard the strain of carol singers.

"And praises of redeeming love they sang
And heaven's whose orb with Alleluias rang,
God's highest glory was their anthem still
Peace on Earth and unto men goodwill."

As Eva knelt by the snow-covered grave, two others, a man and a boy, stood near the south door of the Church listening reverently to the singing of the Christmas hymn. They were Sexton Blake and Tinker. It was here that they found Eva and the baby and from that moment a happy ending hove into sight.

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Seasonal Greetings fellow collectors. Always wanted: Sexton Blakes 1st/2nd series; OBB's for exchange.

211 MAY LANE, KING'S HEATH, BIRMINGHAM, B14 4AW.

New Light On Some Old Stories.

By Laurie Sutton.

During the years when I was advertising regularly in "Exchange & Mart" between ten to fifteen years ago I accumulated some early Hamilton material along with the Gems and Magnets that I was primarily seeking. I have only recently read most of these early stories, and as a result I am able to add a little more detail to the Hamilton records even at this stage, when we might have thought that there was little likelihood of new information coming to light.

In the first place, I have discovered a previously unidentified story in the "Boys' Herald". The title is "In Honour Bound". The school is Castlehurst (unlisted among the Hamilton schools in "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction"). The year is 1906 - almost certainly November, as a forthcoming Christmas Double Number is announced; my copy comprises only the inner pages of the paper, so I cannot check serial number or exact date - an advertisement, and datings on illustrations confirm the year as 1906. The author of "In Honour Bound" is unnamed, being described merely as "By a New Author", but the story, both in theme, style, and characterisation, is pure Hamilton.

The familiar plot of "In Honour Bound" features Dallas Fane, of the Upper Fifth At Castlehurst, a weak-willed lad in debt to George Gadd, the bookie. Dallas turns for help to his elder cousin, Arnold Fane, as he usually does, and Arnold agrees to meet Gadd. The interview does no good, as Arnold strikes Gadd after being taunted. To make things worse, Arnold is seen in Gadd's company by the school captain, O'Neil. Dallas blames Arnold for making things worse (in the style of Dicky Nugent to Frank, Reggie Manners to Harry, etc.). Gadd tells Dallas that if he doesn't settle by Saturday the Head will be informed on Monday. Dallas takes £7 from his Form-master's desk to pay Gadd. As a result of O'Neil having seen Arnold with Gadd, Arnold is suspected, then condemned and sentenced to expulsion. He tackles Dallas, who refused to own up. However, the Head sends for Gadd, to ask him if he has received money from a Castlehurst boy. Gadd says it was Fane, but the Head says there are two boys of that name - does he mean Arnold? Seeing the chance to avenge Arnold's blow, Gadd says that it was he. Shortly afterwards, some boys are gathered at the locked door of Dallas's study; Dallas is delirious, moaning and muttering his guilty thoughts, which betray him. He spends a period in the school sanitorium, and the Head, out of pity, and the feeling that Dallas's recovery might otherwise be jeopardised, allows him to stay at Castlehurst.

By a truly remarkable coincidence, the next Hamiltonia that I read following my early Hamilton stories was S.O.L. 131, "The Moonlight Footballers" (reprint of

Magnets 292-3, 1913) in which a reference is made to a footpad by the name of Jem GADD (not exactly the most common of surnames) in recent stories - I have traced those stories to Magnets 282 and 283.

An extremely rare collectors' item and little-known story is "Football Fortune" (Boys' Friend Library No. 36, 1908). The story would appear to have been specially written for the B.F.L. and "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction" gives this as its only source. The story is utterly unlike any of the Hamilton school stories, and, were it not for the naming of the author, only a few character names would give indication that it came from his pen. The familiar names are Nugent, Arthur Lovell, Col. Darrell, Dr. Manners, Detective Ferrers and Loamshire county.

Only the first couple of the 120 pages have a school setting, and Blackdale College is unusual in that it is set in an industrial area, close to the mill town of Blackfield. The story is concerned exclusively with adult characters, and includes rivalry in love, a company share swindle, and two attempted murders. The hero, Pat Clare, has to leave Blackdale after his father (a mill-owner) has been ruined in the company swindle by Abel Darrell, also a mill-owner. Mr. Clare and Pat are unaware of Darrell's involvement in the swindle, and while Mr. Clare goes into a private mental home following a breakdown, Pat works for a time in Darrell's mill. He is forced out by the emnity of one Glyn Elmhurst, who was in league with Darrell over the swindle and now has a hold over him, which he used in an attempt to gain the unwilling hand of Darrell's daughter, Madge. Madge, in fact, loves Pat Clare, but his newly impoverished state comes between them. A further aspirant for Madge's affection is Pat's cousin, Phil Nugent, who regards Pat with jealousy and something close to hatred, although at times affecting cordiality and even friendship. After leaving the mill, Pat signs professional forms for Blackfield United, managed by Col. Darrell (brother of Abel). After early setbacks engineered by Elmhurst and Nugent, Clare settles in as a prolific goalscorer, and finds the net of such teams as Bolton, Leicester, and Bradford. Clare finally recovers his fortunes after he rescues Elmhurst from the blazing mill after Abel Darrell, goaded by Elmhurst's blackmail, has knocked him on the head and left him in the burning mill after firing it. Nugent is reconciled to Pat on realising that he has been Elmhurst's catspaw. Abel Darrell confesses to the swindle, and Mr. Clare's fortunes (and health) are restored. There is no further obstacle between Pat and Madge. Pat and Nugent prepare to go to Oxford after Pat has fulfilled his season with Blackfield United.

Also quite rare are the Trapps, Holmes "Vanguard" issues, which contain the mysterious featuring of a Billy Bunter by a writer named H. Philpott Wright at the same time that Charles Hamilton was writing for Vanguard. I can only confirm what is already an accepted fact - that Wright was certainly not Hamilton.

A fascinating feature of the Vanguard is the list of earlier titles given in some issues. They include the familiar sounding "Billy Bunter's Hamper" by Philpott Wright, but a title that arouses my curiosity is "Darrell Yorke: Detective" - by Arthur St. John. Now, apart from the fact that Hamilton's full name was Charles St. John Hamilton, and that Darrell was used at St. Jim's and in "Football Fortune", the name Yorke was a regular bit-part name given by Hamilton from time to time to the captain of lesser-known schools such as Abbotsford, St. Jude's, Redclyffe that

visited Greyfriars or St. Jim's for sporting fixtures; a quick glance at my records reveals that Yorke was the Redclyffe junior captain in Magnet 253. I should be very interested to read one of the Darrell Yorke tales.

The Vanguards that I possess include the regular crop of familiar names. In Vanguard 19 (10-9-07) we have at Northcote school Arthur Courtney (Sixth Form), Hilton (school captain), Clive Russell, Mr. Lamb (Fourth master), and Mr. Joliffe (Blue Lion landlord). The plot: Arthur Courtney has been persuaded from the path of a gay dog through his cousin in the Fourth, Clive Russell. George Mulberry, a Sixth Form cad, plots with Mr. Joliffe to get Courtney back to his shady ways. They inform Courtney of a betting coup in which a substituted horse will win at high odds, and Courtney succumbs and gets into debt. Russell and his friend, Frank Melton, intercept a note from Mulberry to Joliffe revealing the plot, and Courtney returns to the paths of righteousness.

Vanguard 31 (3-12-07) features St. Freda's, and the hero is Frank Clavering of the Fourth, this being the only familiar name in a story of high drama which, like "Football Fortune", features an attempted murder. The plot: Clavering has his fees at St. Freda's paid by a London lawyer on behalf of his father, Herbert Clavering, who is abroad in mysterious circumstances to Frank. In reality he is farming in Australia under an assumed name, being on the run after being framed and falsely accused over a robbery - actually committed by Mr. Bishop (now Frank's Form master) in association with a rascally Italian, Carlo Cellini. Herbert Clavering has returned to England, now a rich man, with the intention of proving his innocence through a detective. He arranges a rendezvous with Frank near the school during the holidays (Frank has stayed on at the school with his chum, Dan Morgan, who has volunteered his company). Also at the school are Mr. Bishop and Cellini (who is forcing Bishop to shelter him while he is being hunted). Mr. Bishop, knowing that Cellini will betray him if caught, gets the Italian drunk on Christmas Eve, with the intention of pushing him to his death down an old disused well. As he takes the bound Cellini towards the well, Bishop is confronted by Herbert Clavering, Frank and Morgan. Cellini confesses to his crime, and all ends well for Frank and his father.

Cliveden school in the "Boys' Herald" (1907) introduced another Bunter (the school porter and gardener). Cliveden's familiar names include Dick Neville, Price, Greene, Gatty, Trimble, Fish, Lincoln G. Poindexter, Insp. Snoop, Blaine, Mr. Isaacs (second-hand-clothes dealer), Kidd (bookie), Twigg (Green Man landlord), Cuffy. The Cliveden tales are in fairly short episodes, mostly inconsequential japing on the lines of the early rivalry between the St. Jim's Co's.

The story of St. Kit's apparently commenced as a serial in Pluck in January 1907, and must have run for just about the whole of that year. Remarkably, it was reprinted in a 120-page Boys' Friend Library early in 1908, only months after it ended in Pluck. I have only four of the 1907 Plucks in which St. Kit's was serialised, but they prove that the B.F.L. was heavily abridged, as three of my Plucks have large chunks cut out, while the other is omitted altogether. The story must be one of the longest continuous stories on one plot and theme that Charles Hamilton ever wrote, for practically everything directly relates to the story of how Squire Rupert Lacy, of Lynwood, and his brother Eldred, a Sixth Former at St. Kit's, attempt to

disgrace the school captain, Arthur Talbot, and to drive him from St. Kit's. The only junior school involvement lies in the support for the Sixth Form rivals by two factions led by Pat Nugent (supporting Talbot) and Trimble. As in "Football Fortune" and St. Freda's, there is an attempted murder, and, for good measure, the death of Squire Lacy. An extremely complicated plot finally reveals that Talbot, who had been looked after by the Head of St. Kit's (Dr. Kent) from infancy at the request of a friend is, in reality, a Lacy - cousin to Rupert and Eldred - and the rightful heir to the title and estate of Lynwood. The name Talbot was, in fact, Arthur Talbot's mother's maiden name.

Incidentally, the St. Kit's porter is named Josling. Familiar Hamilton names in the story are Brooke, Greene, Cleever, Cobb, Blane, North, Rake, and Manners.

Not exactly early Hamilton, a new St. Kit's came on the scene in 1921, with the launching of H. A. Hinton's weekly paper, "School and Sport". The story of Hinton's break with the A.P. and the over-ambitious venture of "School and Sport" has already been told more than once. It has also been revealed how Charles Hamilton was persuaded to take on the role of star author on the strength of his long association with Hinton, and how Hamilton waited for payment for his work with no better result than that of Bunter awaiting his postal order, until he finally abandoned the project. Bill Lofts has revealed that the stories were written by E. R. Home Gall after Hamilton dropped them, but I am able to add to this information from the possession of the first 24 copies of "School and Sport". I do not think the actual number of Hamilton stories has previously been listed, but I can now state that he wrote the first eight stories, and the first six chapters of the ninth, when the substitute author took over just as a typical Hamilton rebellion series was developing; the whole idea fizzled out like a damp squib, and all subsequent stories were very much sub-standard. I can also reveal that not all the substitute stories were by E. R. Home Gall, as those in issues numbered 20, and 22-24 were by an entirely different writer - I am, of course, unable to determine the author of my missing copies, 25-28. I am also unable to state whether Home Gall was the first or the second of the substitute authors, not having any other examples of his work in my possession.

There is no doubt that Charles Hamilton did all he could for Hinton, and his "School and Sport" stories were of a high quality. The stories centre round Harry Nameless, who had been found on the beach at South Cove after a wreck, and taken in and brought up by Jack Straw, a sailorman. Taught by a Mr. Carew (a St. Kit's old boy) Harry wins the Foundation Scholarship to St. Kit's. On his way to the school he dives into the river to rescue a St. Kit's junior, St. Leger, from drowning. The junior captain, Vernon Compton, makes an enemy of Harry, and tries to wreck his friendship with St. Leger. St. Leger's father comes to St. Kit's, intending to see Harry, whom he regards as an unsuitable companion for his son. On the way to the school, Mr. St. Leger is rescued by Harry from an attack by a tramp, and the friendship of the boys is then approved. St. Leger's uncle, Col. Lovell visits St. Kit's, and swears that he has seen Harry somewhere before; he assumes that it must have been through his work as a magistrate, and he makes efforts to get Harry out of St. Kit's. St. Leger takes Col. Lovell to visit Jack Straw at South Cove, with

the result that Harry Nameless is proved to be Col. Lovell's own son.

Familiar names in the "School and Sport" St. Kit's are, Lumley, Tracy, Durance, Bootles, Price, Myers, Rake, Scott, Elliott.

The Hamilton stories in "School and Sport" were reprinted in the S.O.L. over a long period of time, in numbers 64, 70, 136, 188 (1927-1933). The obvious thing would have been to publish them in quick succession, as they featured an unfamiliar school, in order that the same readers would become familiar with the characters. I do not possess the S.O.L's, but from the titles there were evidently only two weekly instalments to one S.O.L. taken from "School and Sport". Presumably the last S.O.L., entitled "Up the Rebels", must have included a conclusion by a sub writer, unless Charles Hamilton provided a genuine ending in 1933.

EDITORIAL COMMENT

I find Mr. Sutton's final paragraph a little confusing. The four S. O. L's he mentions were reprints of serials which featured in the Boys' Friend in 1924-5. Half of these serials had appeared in Hinton's short-lived paper "School & Sport".

The Nameless Schoolboy story received minor re-writing - I would have thought by Hamilton himself - for the Boys' Friend. Harry Lovell became Harry Wilmot, which was due, no doubt, to the prominent Lovell in the Rookwood tales in the Friend. Rather surprising is the presence of Hilton and Price in the Fifth Form, though, in the early twenties, their namesakes at Greyfriars had not become the stars they were to become later.

A question to which, all these years later, there is no answer, is whether the powers at the Amalgamated Press knew that they were publishing serials which had already appeared in a defunct rival paper.

Hamilton's possible reasons for writing for Hinton's paper were discussed in a Let's Be Controversial article "The Strange Case of Bunter's Baby" in the C.D. of June 1970. In post-war years, Hamilton made no secret of the fact that Hinton never paid for the stories which he, Hamilton, wrote for "School & Sport". Hamilton always assured us that he never bothered about money, so, perhaps, Hinton's non-payment did not worry him. If, however, as Mr. Sutton says, Hamilton left Hinton high and dry in the middle of a serial, it would have seemed to be mildly shabby treatment and took the gloss off the friendliness of the start. As Hinton had done a certain amount of sub-writing himself, it is not clear why he should engage another sub to finish off Hamilton's story.

Mr. Sutton speaks of the high quality of the writing in Hamilton's "School & Sport" work, and it certainly shows the normal Hamilton competence. All the same, the themes were a bit hackneyed, even in the early twenties. The Nameless Schoolboy who found his father was a re-run of the theme of "The Boy Without a Name". The rest, in the Boys' Friend and the S. O. L., were on rivalry for the captaincy, in which Wilmot emerged victorious, and a barring-out when the old Head was replaced by a martinet named Carker. They were published under Frank Richards' name, and I never had reason to think that any part was other than by Hamilton himself.

In conclusion, "Football Fortune" was not specially written for the Boys' Friend Library. It appeared as a serial in the Boys' Realm in 1905, and, according to editor Edwards, it was very popular. The reprint in the Boys' Friend Library was considerably cut.

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"Always a Knight" still wanted. Greetings to all.

MAURICE KING, 18 BARTON ROAD, SLOUGH. 'PHONE 43950.

The Princess Snowee's Page

"That cat treats me with disdain," said the Skipper.

I don't mean to, of course. It's just that my Mum has such a lovely lap for me to sleep in. I jump up on the Skipper's armrest, when he's sprawling in his chair with his eyes closed, pondering over what to put in his next editorial. I then walk across him, and land in the lap of my Mum, who is sitting in her rocker beside him.

I have my own cat-door to go in and out of the house, till after dark when I'm safely home for the night. Then they lock it up. However, all the doors are left ajar inside the house.

They leave the sitting-room door a bit open - and the dining-room door a bit open. They leave their bedroom doors a bit open. I was going to say "And the breakfast room and the music room and the snuggery" - till I remembered that we haven't any of those in our little house. (I was thinking of my kittenhood in the Palace before I became a lost heiress.)

I'm not complaining. They leave all those open because of me. So I can go where I like, when I like, because I like.

Mind you, I think there is sex-discrimination in Excelsior House. On our sitting-room walls we have two lovely big pictures of Mr. Softee, three lovely big pictures of Mr. Chips, and one lovely big picture of Mr. Tail. There is no lovely big picture of the Princess Snowee. They say it's because they are waiting for a good one of me. I'm sure that when those Women's Lib people hear of it they'll come marching up our road waving broomsticks and banners and looking very bellicose.

I know I'm not very photogenic. (You didn't guess I knew words like that, did you? I read a lot - and listen, too - and you'd be surprised what I know!) They say I'm like a lump of jelly, and it's a rare job to get hold of me. I dash down the lawn and up the big apple tree like a streak of lightning. No wonder they can't get a photograph.

They call me the "Boss Cat" in the neighbourhood, so I'm told. That's because I don't stand any nonsense or allow other cats to trespass on my estate. Not that there are many. In a house at the bottom of our garden there lives a Hampshire County Cricketer. (He brought his helmet in to show us the other day. The Skipper put it on, and looked like something from outer space. He said, faintly, "Do you really mean that you wear this thing and play cricket in it?" As if he didn't know.)

I'm wandering. The cricketer has a lady puss they call Tiger, but they don't let her out much. Sometimes I go in their garden and see Tiger through their French windows. We talk to one another through the glass.

I admit I don't encourage visiting felines in our garden. Oh, Purr! I admit that I chase them off like fury.

Did I tell you that there is an old disused well in the large garden of Ferneries Cottage, next door to us? It has a cover over it, but the cover gets moved sometimes. The Skipper and my Mum are always a bit scared that I might go exploring and fall down the well. Ding, dong, bell ... People ought to keep their wells covered. Of course, I know it would be a bit embarrassing to say "Will you please keep your old well well-covered as the Princess Snowee likes to come trespassing --"

I was sitting in the editor's letter-bag this morning, reading some of your letters. There was a nice card from Webster Horrible Hunt, my Prince Charming in Australia. He sent his love and also a kindly message about that Coral Jubilee thing the editor has been talking a lot about lately. (I don't know why they are proud of being 35. It sounds old to me. I'm 6. Well, going on 7 -- I'm sure I don't look it.)

I came on a letter from Mr. Brian Sayer who lives in Margate. Margate is a mountain resort in Cornwall, I think, so you see I have studied Geography as well as Women's lib. Mr. Sayer wrote, to the Skipper: "As a 'cat-worshipper', you may share my present happiness. More than two weeks ago my lilac-point Siamese opened the back door in the night and vanished. Advertisements brought some wild goose chases but no Shan. I gave him up as stolen or run over. Then, after more than two weeks, early one morning, he strolled in, thinner, smelling of vegetation, full of fleas, and with a cat bite on his face. A visit to the vet, grooming, and plates of food, have restored his beauty. My big Dalmation kept washing his face for nearly two days."

Oh, Purr! I'm very glad that Shan turned up safe and sound. It must be awful to be lost and not know which paw to follow. It reminds me of the time, over two years ago, when my Mum was taken to hospital, and I disappeared completely for two days and nights.

I shall never forget that late-summer morning when Skip came down at six o'clock, and there was I, half-asleep, in his rocking chair. I rather expected to be scolded, but he made such a fuss of me, that I'm sure I must have done something clever. Or, maybe, he was just glad to have me back.

My Mum and Skip often muse over it. They say "I wonder where the Princess really got to, that time she disappeared for two days and nights."

Ah, ha! Wouldn't they just like to know!

Come to think of it, I'm not sure that I know myself.

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Season's Greetings to all in the hobby. Many thanks for another wonderful year of Collectors' Digest.

ROBERT McCABE

= =

JACK HUGHES, P.O. BOX 92, HOME HILL 4806, QUEENSLAND, wants to buy comics of recent years. Topper, Hotspur, Dandy, Beano, Beezer, Disneyland, T.V. Comic, etc.

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£10 offered for No. 197 S.B.L. 1st series, "The Yellow Face". About 50 2nd series wanted, from £3 each offered.

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To My Little Friends.

Wouldn't you like to meet them every week in my coloured picture-paper THE PLAYBOX? It comes out every Friday and only costs twopence, so why not ask Mr. Newsagent to send it along with daddy's newspapers? Then I need not say good-bye for a whole year, for I can talk to you each week in my "Playbox" letter!

Always your friend,
MRS. HIPPO.

P.S.—I have just had a shower-bath! No cake for those naughty girls to-day!

DEAR BOYS AND GIRLS,

I have come to the last page of my Annual, and I only hope that you have enjoyed reading my book as much as I have enjoyed collecting the fine stories and pictures and putting them together for you. It is so thrilling to know that it will be read in all parts of the world, and I hope readers near and far will write and tell me the stories and pictures they like best.

Don't you think my Hippo Girls are funnier than ever this year? I thought I would keep them quiet while I wrote my letter to you, so I told them to water the garden; they can't get up to much mischief out there. They are so quiet that I really must make them a cake for tea to-day.

Although they are naughty sometimes, I am really very fond of them, and I am sure you are, too.