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THE EDITOR'S CHAT



LOOKING BACK - AND LOOKING FORWARD

As I was preparing this month's C.D. it struck me that almost all of its articles deal with stories and characters which were created in late Victorian or Edwardian times. Our range is wide, from Raffles, Sexton Blake, early Gems and Magnets to that most famous of all garden stories, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

The article on Film Fun, of course, brings us closer to our

own time, while this month's Club reports demonstrate that our hobby, though retaining its nostalgic roots, is beginning to harness extremely up-to-date and forward-looking technology. By a happy coincidence, both the Northern and London Clubs are now announcing their accessibility by E-Mail and the Internet! So it is indeed a case of 'wider still and wider' shall the O.B.B.C.'s bounds be set.

I wonder whether the authors, editors and illustrators of those books and story-papers launched at the beginning of this century could have envisaged that we should still be relishing their creative efforts as the millennium approaches, and that articles about their work would find their way onto the world-wide web.

It seems a far cry from the days when Frank Richards, after several years of producing pen-and-ink manuscripts, was reflecting with satisfaction about the increased productivity that the typewriter had brought him. In our hobby as in many other areas of life, advances in technology can be very welcome. I feel, however, that there is still nothing to beat the good old-fashioned book for pleasurable handling and easy portability (we can read in different rooms, in our gardens, in bed, even in the bath, and, of course, on trains, buses and aeroplanes).

By today's computer and multi-media standards, the book cannot be categorised as 'inter-active' - but it certainly is wonderfully and resiliently 'user-friendly'.

I can now wish you Happy Information-Super-Highway-Surfing as well as Happy Reading!

MARY CADOGAN

WODEHOUSE'S 'LOST' SCHOOL STORY TO BE PUBLISHED

Fortunate possessors of the 'Chums' volume for 1908-09, will know that it contains a serial story, running in 19 instalments from September, 1908 to January, 1909 by one 'Basil Windham' and called 'The Luck Stone'. It was a 'blood-and-thunder' school-mystery-adventure yarn about a mysterious stranger from India, a valuable talisman stone, and a mysterious new master, and set at Marleigh College. It was graphically illustrated by the prolific Gordon Browne. And it was one of the first stories written by the great P.G. Wodehouse with an 'assist', as PGW quaintly put it later, from his friend and fellow-writer, William Townend) under the pen-name of 'Basil Windham'.

Wodehouse was only 27 when he wrote it, and it came soon after he had finished his superlative school story 'Mike' (the one that introduced 'Psmith'). He had been an avid reader of 'Chums' for many years and knew what they required. It was perhaps his nearest story to the 'penny dreadful' category and he enjoyed writing it enormously.

'The Luck Stone' is the only major work by Wodehouse never to have been published in book-form. Its first and last appearance was in 'Chums' nearly 90 years ago. Now Galahad Books has announced that they are to publish the book and it should be available from April, 1997, at the price of £40.00, post-free in the U.K.

Anyone interested should contact Galahad Books, c/o Nigel Williams Rare Books, 22, Cecil Court, London, WC2N 4HE. (Tel: 0171 836 7757).

This is not an advertisement - but I felt, on hearing about it, that this excellent piece of publishing news should be brought to the attention of 'SPCD' readers.

BRIAN DOYLE

ST. JIM'S TITLE ROLES

(Quiz from Peter Mahony)

Name the "PERMANENT CHARACTERS" who filled the title roles in these stories, written by MARTIN CLIFFORD for the "GEM".

	<u>Year</u>
1. The St. Jim's Inventor	1909
2. The Waif of St. Jim's	1911
3. The Rascal of St. Jim's	1913
4. The St. Jim's Recruit	1915
5. The Bounder of St. Jim's	1916
6. The Black Sheep of St. Jim's	1927
7. The Japer of St. Jim's	1931
8. Prime Minister of St. Jim's	1932
9. St. Jim's Mischief-Maker No. 1	1936
10. The St. Jim's Surprise Packet	1939

(Answers on page 32.)

THE WONDERFUL GARDENS

By Donald V Campbell

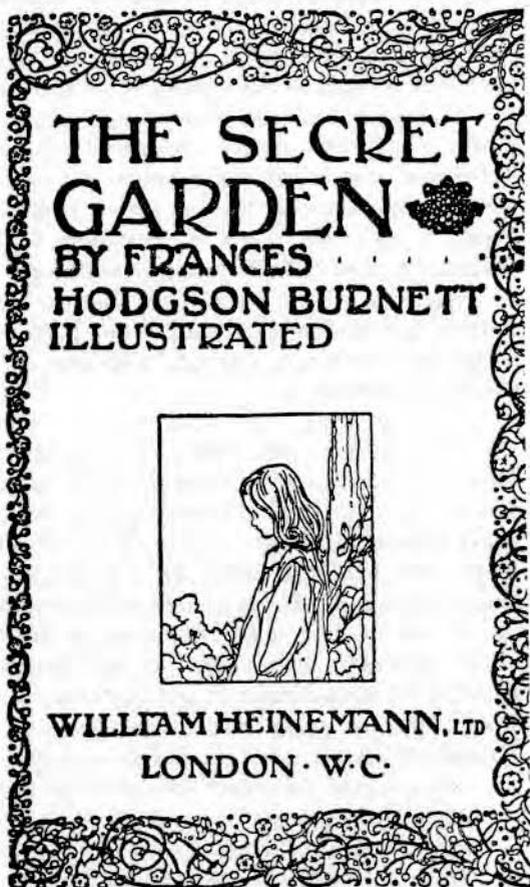
2. Frances Hodgson Burnett

If E. Nesbit's *The Wonderful Garden* is my favourite children's book with a garden theme, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* must come a very close second. So close in fact that it would be unkind to use the number at all. *The Secret Garden* is one of my favourites - how's that? Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* is more famous but a touch more cloying perhaps than *The Secret Garden*. Both books have been awarded the accolade of TV or filmic treatment and, so good are the originals, they come across well in the alternative medium.

But to the book. The story of the unwanted/unloved/unlikely child who overcomes the odds and triumphs and goes forward towards adulthood (or something like that) is not new. In the hands of a great author like Frances Hodgson Burnett it becomes burnished, polished yet accessible and friendly. In *The Secret Garden* there is a two-fold element to the unlikely/unwanted child - there are two of them - Mary and Colin. At first we don't know this - our attention is centred on Mary who comes to England after losing her mother and father to cholera in India. Mary has been brought up solely by a succession of ayahs. She is contained, withdrawn, rather sullen and - at least at the start of the book - plain:

"She is such a plain child," Mrs Crawford said pityingly afterward. "And her mother was such a pretty creature. She had a very pretty manner, too, and Mary has the most unattractive ways I ever saw in a child. The children call her 'Mistress Mary Quite Contrary', and though it's naughty of them, one can't help understanding it."

What appears from the start is that the book is written in direct, unforced and 'adult' English. This is the mark of most good children's books. There is no condescension, no talking down. In this respect the author matches E. Nesbit. Something else that she conveys so well is the language, understanding and insight of children.



Title page by Charles Robinson, 1911

Where Burnett succeeds rather more than Nesbit is in the drawing and the drawing out of the subsidiary, usually adult, characters. Martha the maid-servant; Susan Sowerby - Martha's mother (so direct and straightforward and a gem among mothers); Ben Weatherstaff the gardener; the crotchety Mrs. Medlock, who mellows in the end.

The children's relationship is well-balanced. However, it is merciful that Mary's cousin, Colin Craven, who believes himself to be crippled and destined for a short life, manages to get to grips with himself in just a few pages. In any case he doesn't turn up until halfway through the book - otherwise he would have been somewhat tedious to read about. Dickon, the young brother of Martha the maid, is very different, a kind of gem to his mother, his family and friends. He has the magical art of communicating with nature, both flora and fauna. He also has a warm, understanding disposition and manages to sort out the problems of the well-off but psychologically insecure Mary and Colin. Too good to be true? Well we need un-flawed heroes from time to time and he is not prissy.

The story is well enough known, of course, so I shall refrain from re-telling it. What is worthy of comment though is the internal balance of the book, which, although it has no real villains, manages to sustain interest and to create its own tension. Mary, hearing the cries that are rather ghostly and feeble, is sensible enough not to be palmed off with Martha's suggestions of the "wind wutherin'". Mistress Mary is singularly unafraid to search for the source of the cries, even at midnight.

Maybe the interest for the child reader is in the relationship between the two "only-children" and the family-centred Dickon. In the end, of course, the play and development of the three children is a private thing observed more by the reader than by the other participants in the story.

Victorian writers were well used to the garden as metaphor, the garden as trysting place. The natural world of the garden supports the idea of both life and death, of growth and renewal. So it is in the secret garden that aspects of love and renewal are opened to us. We see this in the spirit of Colin's dead mother, his grieving father, and in Mary's new-found strength and beauty, and in Colin's straightened back and ability to walk again. Magic forms part of the story, and even though we don't see Hum the Hunter there is a kind of mythological feel to the renewal of the garden and the people in it.

If there are flaws in the book it may be that Colin has too much of the "t'master at t'mill" approach to the servants. At times Burnett relies heavily on such "dialect" writing to define her adult characters, and this weakens her narrative style. However, the scene where Colin, the young 'rajah', demonstrates at last to the world (in the person of Ben Weatherstaff) that he is not crippled has a palpable power:

"Do you know who I am?" demanded the rajah.

How Ben Weatherstaff started! His old red eyes fixed themselves on what was before him as if he were seeing a ghost. He gazed and gazed and gulped a lump down his throat --- and then he did answer in a queer, shaky voice.

"Who tha' art?" he said. "Aye! That I do - wi' tha' mother's eyes starin' at me out o' tha' face. Lord knows how tha' comes here. But tha'rt th' poor cripple."

Colin forgot that he had ever had a back. His face blushed and he sat bolt upright.

"I'm not a cripple!" he cried out furiously. "I'm not!"

[Ben Weatherstaff] was an ignorant old man and he could only remember the things he had heard. "Tha' - tha' hasn't got crooked legs?" he said hoarsely.

"No!" shouted Colin.

It was too much. The strength which Colin usually threw into his tantrums rushed through him now in a new way. Never yet had he been accused of crooked legs His anger and insulted pride made him forget everything but this one moment, and filled him with power he had never known before, an almost unnatural strength.

"Come here!" he shouted to Dickon, and actually began to tear the coverings off his lower limbs and disentangle himself. "Come here! Come here! This minute!" Dickon was by his side in a second. Mary caught her breath in short gasps and felt herself turn pale.

"He can do it! He can do it! He can do it! He can!" she gabbled over to herself under her breath as fast as she could.

There was a brief fierce scramble, the rugs were tossed on to the ground. Dickon held Colin's arm, the thin legs were out, the thin feet were on the grass. Colin was standing upright - upright - as straight as an arrow and looking strangely tall - his head thrown back and his strange eyes flashing lightning.

"Look at me!" he flung at Ben Weatherstaff. "Just look at me - you! Just look at me."

..... [Ben] struck his old hands together. "Eh!" he burst forth, "th' lies folk tells! Tha'rt as thin as a lath an' as white as a wraith, but there's not a knob on thee. Tha'lt make a mon yet. God bless thee!"

Mary is also a touch imperious but moderates rapidly once she unlocks the secret garden. And here we wonder if there are more metaphors: "secret gardens of the heart" perhaps. Who knows? The craft and style of the book are beguiling - warts and all.

The final metaphor must be Life with a capital "L":

'It was the strangest thing he had ever heard, Archibald Craven [Colin's father] thought, as it was poured forth in headlong boy fashion. Mystery and Magic and wild creatures, the weird midnight meeting - the coming of spring - the passion of insulted pride which had dragged the young rajah to his feet to defy Ben Weatherstaff to his face. The odd companionship, play-acting, the great secret so carefully kept. The listener laughed until tears came into his eyes when he was not laughing. The Athlete, the Lecturer, the Scientific Discoverer was a laughable, loveable, healthy young human thing.'

THE FILE ON VERNON-SMITH

by Margery Woods

Part 4 SWEET REVENGE

From the day Vernon-Smith arrived at Greyfriars he had proved to be one of the most troublesome, defiant and vindictive boys ever to grace (?) Mr. Quelch's form. Now, incarcerated in the dugout shelter at Sea View chalet, Mr. Quelch's thoughts may have taken a very strange turn had he known that he had been replaced by another victim of the Bounder's anger. For the shrewd and agile brain of Vernon-Smith was once again hell-bent on vengeance. Smithy's progress in the German language was never fully documented but that wonderfully expressive word, Schadenfreude, could aptly have described Smith's feelings as he began piecing together the clues that would lead to the downfall of the hated and treacherous Pet Lamb. But fate was to remain cruel yet a while to the unfortunate

Remove master, bringing rescue so tantalisingly close on several occasions, then snatching it away.

The Remove's paper-chase was one example, although at the time Smithy did not suspect any connection between the empty holiday chalet and Mr. Quelch's disappearance. Smith's suspicions were all centred on its unsavoury caretaker, Nobby Parker, whom he had seen in the company of Mr. Lamb. And Smithy meant to find out the reason for that odd and unsuitable association. His deliberate trespass, with Tom Redwing protesting in vain, to strew the trail across the grounds, where the hounds must follow, produced a sequel that surpassed his most hopeful expectations, even though he did not know that Lamb was actually on the scene at that moment, with Mr. Quelch almost at touching distance.

It was a shame that some of the boys took the brunt of Nobby Parker's stick in the fracas that followed, but the aftermath back at school was worth it all, at least to Smithy. The boys were summoned to the Lamb's presence for punishment and then Smithy requested Lamb to call the police because Nobby Parker had attacked the boys.

The master was aghast and forbade the Bounder to do any such thing, thereupon Smithy (with delighted schadenfreude!) dropped another bombshell. He tells Lamb that it is a matter for the Head to decide. Several of the boys have injuries which the Head should see. The thought of these being displayed to the Head and the many verifying accounts which could be made defeats Mr. Lamb. The Bounder's ironic amusement is plain to be seen as the Lamb is forced to climb down and content himself with issuing a somewhat lame warning.

A second close miss of discovering Mr. Quelch comes about through the unlikely intervention of Miss Elizabeth Bunter of Cliff House School and a bag of toffee.

Bessie is ambling along the cliff road, her jaws happily engaged, when she encounters Ponsonby of Highcliffe who thinks it no end of jolly good fun to seize the bag of toffee and fling it over the fence into the grounds of Sea View. Toffee and Bessie Bunter were not happy apart and her screams bring gallantry to the rescue in the form of Lord Mauleverer. His attempts to retrieve the toffee bring Nobby Parker with stick at the ready. Then the air-raid siren sounds, causing the quite natural desire of Miss Bunter to take shelter. But Mr. Lamb is also on the scene, anything but pleased at the sight of the schoolgirl and one of his own pupils demanding admittance to the dugout. There follows an exchange between Bessie and the irate Lamb which is a sheer delight, during which Lamb hears some pungent home truths from the indignant Bessie. No doubt the Bounder would have been quite proud of her, had he been present, but trouble had caught up with him yet again back at Greyfriars.

While out in the quad with Redwing, Smithy had lost a certain incriminating letter from a racing tipster and too late had seen Mr. Lamb find it. Smithy had to get that letter back, and while Mr. Lamb was being told his home truths by Bessie and the air-raid sirens were wailing, Smithy was taking a desperate chance. In the Lamb's study he smashes open a locked drawer to retrieve the vital letter and burn it. Had he not been in so urgent a state Smithy might have spared time to be curious about the heavy locked leather wallet, clinking with metallic sounds inside it, which also lay in the locked drawer. But Smithy was starved for time; he needed to get down to the vaults which served as the school's air raid shelter in time to call "Adsum!" in response to Mr. Prout's calling of the roll.

A perfect alibi! But the Bounder's hope was to be dashed.

Mauleverer had returned to school as ordered, to wait in the master's study for punishment for defending Bessie and socking Nobby Parker when the ruffian had threatened to assault the girl. The innocent awaiting the slaughter from the Lamb.

It all seemed so obvious. The smashed drawer. The missing letter. And dear old Mauly, who'd never even noticed anything amiss in the study, obediently waiting as bid and minding his own business. Nobody could believe it; Mauly blamed, and expelled.

Least of all could the raging Bounder believe in this unbelievable twist of fate. Even as he raged and chafed he knew what he had to do. His faults might be legion, but cowardice had never been one of them, nor the ability to let another take the blame for his misdeeds.

And so the honourable side of the Bounder's character takes him to the Head to make his confession. Mauly is vindicated and the Bounder is sacked. This time for real.

However, it does not take Smithy long to realise there is a bright side to the darkest cloud. He may be able to do far more harm to Lamb out of school than in, now he is not bound by the rules and restrictions of school life. What is there to stop him from waging unfettered war on the enemy?

And wage it he does.

During "his last fling" we rejoice in his lawlessness as he whistles, airs his opinion of Lamb to anyone in hearing, taunts Lamb about his little secrets, locks the infuriated master in his study and hooks a neat tackle on Mr. Hacker, which floors the Acid Drop and leaves the appalled Mr. Prout booming "Amazing! Unprecedented! Unparalleled!" as Smithy goes grinning on his way.

Mayhem follows in the Remove Form room with Smithy revelling in the last hour of limelight before a prefect takes him to his train. Greyfriars believes him to be on his way home. Actually he was simply getting off the train at the next station, en route back to Greyfriars to enlist the help of John Robinson, the new chauffeur (aka Ferrers Locke) with a proposition that he rent a room in the chauffeur's quarters. This is refused. The detective, while he had

FOR SOME WEEKS FERRERS LOCKE HAS BEEN WORKING TO TRAP "SLIM JIM," THE MYSTERY CRACKSMAN, WITHOUT SUCCESS. BUT WHERE THE BAKER STREET DETECTIVE HAS FAILED, VERNON-SMITH SUCCEEDS!



Vernon-Smith, from the high tree, watched Mr. Lamb dart in at the gate of Sea View and make for the direction of the air-raid shelter!

listened with considerable interest to Smithy's earlier observations and theories regarding the true character of Mr. Lamb, did not want a vengeful schoolboy getting in his way while he investigated Mr. Lamb and tried to track down Slim Jim, the cracksman. But, if he thought Smithy was deterred, he was wrong. Smithy simply took up residence in one of the school attics, nourished by the contents of a luxury hamper sent by doting Aunt Judy to her favourite nephew, Horace Coker. This had been considerably heaved up all the stairs by Bunter, assisted by Skinner, Stott and Snoop.

From his hideout Smithy could cause a great deal of alarm for the Baa Lamb, as well as indulge in pranks of a strictly schoolboy nature, the prime of which was improving Lamb's sketches and redecorating his study very thoroughly in green paint. Harry Wharton and the chums discover Smithy's presence very soon but keep the secret, as does John Robinson, although his patience is tried to the utmost when the Bounder, vengeance bound in the midnight hours, ruins the detective's stake-out of Slim Jim. Then Bunter, eager to be a bold bad Bunter, starts bragging about giving the Lamb's study a second coat of paint any time.

Someone once said that confession is good for the soul. Doubtless Smithy would have cheerfully thumped the author of that old saw when yet again his conscience forces him to the Head's study to confess his sins ... all to save Bunter from the chop. Is he always fated to be thwarted by idiots?

But the way of the transgressor turned here is short now. In the enthralling climax to this great series the Bounder now decides to investigate the Sea View chalet and its dugout. He aligns the facts and his suspicions. The day of the paper chase; the day Mauly and Bessie Bunter encountered Nobby Parker and Lamb while seeking shelter during the air raid warning; and the time one of the fellows said there was a locked door in the dugout. Why was Lamb invariably on the scene at these times, apparently in collusion with the ruffianly Nobby Parker? Smithy is determined to find out, once and for all.

He makes a tour of every locksmith he can find and amasses a grand collection of keys, until he finds one that fits the door to the dugout. Now for Lamb's secret!

First a room barred from the outside, then a store room with boxes of food. For whom? For use in the shelter? But the chalet was empty apart from Nobby Parker. For a prisoner?

The arrival of Nobby Parker from the dark night causes Smithy to hide himself ... until he hears a voice that fills him with sheer amazement, a voice he'd never expected to hear; that of his old form master; Mr. Quelch. Smithy listens to an exchange between Mr. Quelch and the ruffian that fills in many gaps in the puzzle, then he launches himself into attack, calling to Mr. Quelch to set to as well.

Meanwhile, at Greyfriars, Ferrers Locke has baited a trap for Slim Jim and waits for it to spring. Slim Jim is caught at last and unmasked before the astonished headmaster, as his erstwhile arts master and temporary replacement for Mr. Quelch.

But an even greater astonishment awaits the Head ... and Ferrers Locke ... when out of the night comes the Bounder, not alone. It was his greatest moment of triumph to arrive with his form-master and know that everything was going to be great. He was back at Greyfriars and he was back to stay.

There wasn't much sleep in the dorm that night when Smithy, bunking in with Tom, tells the story to the Remove, and well might he revel in the telling. For hadn't he been

right all along? And hadn't he, single-handed, rescued Mr. Quelch where all others had failed?

The Bounder's star was certainly in the ascendant that night, to make up for the dark, dark times in the deepest valleys. Life for the Bounder would hold many adventures, many good times and many sad times, but none of them would ever be dull

(To be continued)

FILM FUN

by Bill Lofts

Part 3: Conclusion

The coming of the Second World War saw drastic changes to 'Film Fun', as in all other papers that were able to survive the acute paper shortage. Film Fun was raised in price to 2½d, despite being shrunk from 20 pages to a flimsy dozen, with some strips reduced to half size. To be topical, some characters joined the Army, some became air-raid wardens, with the blackout being a good medium for comic situations. Food queues, rationing, air raid shelters, evacuees, all added to the fun in adventures that echoed real life happenings during those wartime days.

Some contributors joined up or were engaged in important war work elsewhere, so with lack of fresh contributions, the editors were forced to reprint old strips. It should be said that the readership of any boys' paper or comic was estimated to be about five years in length, so they were fully entitled to do this. Another device of which readers would be completely unaware was called the matchstick or stick-on-label method. For example, a strip featuring Joe E. Brown had appeared in 1936. As he was identical in size to George Formby, with similar features and clothes, by superimposing the head of Formby one would have, to all intents and purposes, a brand new strip. They even did this with double comedians, with Wheeler and Wolsey being replaced by Abbot and Costello. There were difficulties with Laurel and Hardy because of the enormous size of Hardy, who was reputed to be 6 ft. 6 inches in height, and weighing twenty six stone! They simply rubbed out both, substituting another famous pair by means of a stick-on label.

George Wakefield, the star artist, died in 1942, whilst another body blow came in 1949 when editor Fred Cordwell died at Richmond aged only 62. Cordwell had spent his whole working life on the comic papers, twenty nine of them as 'Eddie, the Happy editor'. Whilst enormously successful with 'Film Fun', he had had failures with several other papers. 'Sports Fun', which appeared in 1922 and featured sports personalities of the day in comic situations, closed the same year. 'Film Picture Stories', which had a 30 issue run in 1934/5, was, as the title suggests, a paper devoted to Cowboy/Crime/Thriller strips.

'Kinema Comic' could not be classed a failure, having a 12 year run. It closed because it lacked the more popular stars of its companion 'Film Fun', its sales never reaching the same height.

Cordwell was very superstitious, never having a man with one leg (the peg-leg sea-captain) in his comics, or an octopus. Neither would he stand for any character depicted under the influence of drink, or for the slightest bit of cleavage being shown. Despite his seemingly temperance outlook, Cordwell died, it has been said, with his favourite tipple in his hand.

He also hated Danny Kaye, for some reason, refusing to have this highly rated American comic in his paper. Cordwell was replaced as editor by Philip Davis. 'Phil', as he was called, was Cordwell's total opposite. Serious minded, dressed in a neat charcoal suit, he looked like a bank manager instead of the traditional 'Happy Eddie'. One felt sorry for him, because he had taken over when the paper started its decline. The space age had arrived for the new and post-war reader!

Starting with the 'Eagle', with its brightly coloured pages, soon there was a flood of new-age papers, and 'Film Fun' with its traditional black and white pages looked very dull

Joe E. Brown

The Famous Fellow of The Films



1. Jolly Joe and his Auntie Lou were setting out for a prime picnic when the dear old dame decided to hamper the outing by having her hair waved! So she popped into the hair-curling emporium, leaving our chum and the cats to wait outside. And old Joe have to wait? We'll say. After a couple of hours and the smoking of many cigs, he felt it was high time he got outside some of the rations in the hamper. In other words, he was peckish. In the third masterpiece, you see him tuckling on, watched by the long and skinny tramp.



2. The kind-hearted Joe couldn't sit there and let the tramp stand by without as much as a mouthful, could he? Of course not. He passed over a juicy sardine and a few other tasty morsels, which were received with many thanks. But time still passed on—as usual—and still Auntie Lou didn't come out of the parlor. "Twas growing chilly, too. "Oh dear!" sighed Joe. "What on earth was Auntie he doing?" Then a small kid passed by pushing a lawn mower, which reminded our chum that his face whiskers were commencing to sprout.



3. So Joe pushed open the door of the gents' saloon with the intenz of having his beard trimmed. "I'll have a cut at passing some of the time away," quoth he to himself. He succeeded okay, folks, but passed TOO much of the time away, 'cos when he came out with a face as fresh as a daisy he found Auntie Lou standing outside! She'd actually been waiting a couple of minutes! As it was too late to partake of a picnic, she told Joe she'd have a snack on the spot. "Sorry, auntie," murmured Joe. "I got so hungry I ate everything!"



4. Questionably, Joe and his aunt wended their way to the cafe just around the corner in order to have a bite, but their luck was out, for the cafe was closed. "Oh dear!" sighed Auntie. "And I'm so hungry. What'll we do?" Then a large slice of good luck lay up—in the shape of the tramp to whom Joe had given some food a few hours before. But now he was pecked up to the brim, as you see, and he told Joe and Auntie he was Sir Lotts Dough, the eccentric millionaire. What's more, he was so impressed with Joe's generosity that he invited him and Auntie home to dine. And instead of Joe doing the waiting, Sir Lotts Dough's slaves waited on our chummy chum!

in comparison. History was really repeating itself. Films had eventually killed off the old music hall, and now the latest craze of television was to some extent killing off the traditional several times a week visit to the cinema. The sales of 'Film Fun' were dropping all the time, and by the mid-fifties it had only a 175,000 readership. Something drastic had to be done. Firstly they disposed of most of the old artists, then decided to have a touch of colour, mainly on the front cover. The price had gradually increased from 2½d to 3d., 4d., 4½d. and 5d. I can well remember the new editor showing me the jazzed up masthead, for my views and comments. Diplomatically I expressed the view that it was certainly a great change from the old! At this period Tony Hancock and Bruce Forsyth were the only survivors of film stars. Hancock was essentially a T.V. star, though he did make a few films. Forsyth, until a musical a few years ago, had only had a few 'bit' parts in films. Jack Keen, 'Film Fun's' faithful detective, had also been retired, being replaced by the adventures of a news-hawk of the name of 'Scoop Donovan', the rest of the paper being filled up with Walt Disney strips.

Phil Davis by 1960 had left the firm to take up a more lucrative appointment, being replaced by Jack Le Grande. Jack, who became almost a personal friend of the writer, had been on the staff since 1936. War service saw him as a sergeant in the red beret Airborne Division at Arnhem, where thousands of his comrades were killed. He had taken over 'Film Fun' almost at the death, as it were, when the Daily Mirror group took over Fleetway Publications, killing off low circulation papers. 'Film Fun' was now down to only 125,000 so it was to end. On the 8th September 1962, after a magnificent run of 2,225 issues, it was amalgamated into the comic 'Buster'.

Curiously, the first 'Film Fun' Annual had not appeared until 1938. This was due to some unwritten rule before this date that only coloured juvenile comics should have Annuals, these being mainly bought by parents for children at Christmas. At this period they had also brought out a 'Chips', 'Funny Wonder' and 'Jester' Annual, but none lasted for long. 'Film Fun' annuals were obviously far more successful as they ran almost through the war years until 1961, the contents being mainly reprints from the weekly issues. Not only are they widely collected, but it can be quite expensive to obtain any pre-1950 copies in good condition.

Unlike most comics 'Film Fun' has several spheres of collecting. The early twenties featured a number of silent stars, and today there is a big cult of collectors interested in any aspect of this field. Many people collect the thirties issues from their own childhood days. Then the comic's numerous stories adapted from films have a separate following. Years ago the writer discovered a series of Tarzan stories in 'Boys Cinema' which were seemingly unknown to the huge cult of Edgar Rice Burroughs fans, and they have been greatly sought after ever since.

The keen student of the film world would find some puzzling features in 'Film Fun'. Arthur Askey, Jimmy Edwards, Charlie Drake, Tommy Trinder and Gracie Fields, who all made a number of films, had been used by a rival department to appear in 'Radio Fun'. Tommy Cooper was in 'Film Fun' in 1956 but never was a film star! Ken Dodd, appearing in 1960, has never appeared in any film. The nearest he got to it, was a 30 second T.V. commercial dealing with second hand cars. Ted Ray, who had made ten films, was never to appear in any comic at all!

Another surprising thing about the readership of 'Film Fun' was that although it aimed for the adolescent age-group, the bulk of letters to the editorial office were from adults. Many claimed to have taken it as far back as the 'twenties. I've never heard, however, of any collector having a complete set, which suggests that it is collected in specialised fields. The late Derek Adley, for instance, once had a 25 year run, collecting only the Laurel and Hardy strips. Another collector I knew who was a great enthusiast for the silent films, was only interested in the 'twenties.

Mentioned earlier was the free gift of a George Formby Song Book which had boosted the circulation. Actually a far greater value free gift was given slightly earlier in No. 926, 16th October 1937, 'The Laurel and Hardy Book of Wisecracks'. Such is the rarity of this small booklet that only six copies have been known to exist. It is much sought after by enthusiasts of the famous comedians, as well as members of various clubs and Societies of Laurel and Hardy.

Around 1984, I was requested by the powers-that-be at the offices of International Publishing Company (Magazines) Ltd to give full co-operation regarding 'Film Fun' to Graham King, who was writing a Bibliography with a slant on Social History. I did so, the result being 'The Wonderful World of Film Fun' in 1985, with Ron Saxby doing the graphic work. This is a lavishly illustrated, wonderfully nostalgic tribute to one of the most popular and greatly loved comics of all time.

THE EARLY GEM CLIFFORD'S CLAVERING CONNECTION

Part 2 (Conclusion)

By Peter Mahony

The second Clavering story, "Troublesome Tom", ranks with Hamilton's (Martin Clifford's) best. It begins with Tom and Gore being paired as hares in a paper-chase. Tom's fitness soon shows up the heavy-footed bully, who plays one of two dirty tricks on his partner. They reach the final stage of the run; then Gore gives up - on a bridge beside a mill-stream. A little girl falls into the stream and is in danger of drowning under the mill-wheel. Tom dives to the rescue and keeps the child clear of the wheel until Manners and Lowther arrive in a punt.

Gore, who has not shown up well, resents the "conquering hero" treatment given to Tom when his bravery becomes common knowledge. He sends an alarming telegram to Miss Fawcett, who arrives post-haste to nurse her "invalid" ward. Tom suffers more embarrassment, as does Mr. Railton: both are angered because of the distress caused to Miss Fawcett. Gore tells lies under questioning and Tom is flogged because he won't "split" on the bully. (Whenever I read this episode Railton goes down in my estimation. He really was adding injury to insult for Tom.) After recovering, Tom decides that Gore needs a lesson. A proper fight is arranged.



Tom rushed in and hit out with both fists. Gore received them in the face, and went down with a thud.

Martin Clifford's account of Tom's first stand-up scrap is one of his best pieces of writing. (Just try it for size: pages 164/6, HOLIDAY ANNUAL 1931 or pages 14/15 of GEM No. 5.) The bigger, heavier Gore is soundly thrashed by a determined, implacable opponent. It takes seven tough rounds; ends with a superb K.O.; and Tom is no longer 'Spooney'. Indeed,

he is soon 'Cock o' the Walk' in the Clavering Shell.

The third Clavering story takes Tom further up the ladder of success. The school captaincy falls vacant. Gilbert (!) Wingate of the Sixth Form is opposed by Edgar Devigne of the Upper Fifth. Tom, merrily self-confident, persuades the Shell to 'run' him as a third candidate. In a thoroughly entertaining yarn, he rallies the support of the Middle School and is set to be elected. Mr. Railton, daunted by the prospect of a disaffected, disgruntled Upper School, explains to Tom the gravity of the situation and asks him to withdraw his candidacy. Tom, already a bright scholar and a capable sportsman, now shows that his leadership qualities are complemented by a good ration of commonsense. He withdraws; Wingate is elected; Railton and Clavering breathe again. The author is maturing his hero all the time; after three stories, Tom Merry is a really formidable character.

Two other traits of Tom's which should not be overlooked are his adaptability and his mischievous streak. By the second yarn he was moderating his vocabulary. Slang and colloquialisms were entering his speech, but he was quite ready to revert to verbosity if it would serve his turn. The irascible Herr Schneider's stilted English gave Tom the opportunity to baffle the German with flowery long-windedness. Schoolmasters always find the astute, 'clever-dick' type of pupil difficult to combat! Poor old Schneider lost a number of battles of wit with this redoubtable new boy.

The critics who find Tom 'too good to be true' should re-read these Clavering stories. Tom is ever-ready to 'educate' Herr Schneider in the hope that he will develop a proper sense of humour. Climbing from a dormitory window; accidentally breaking Schneider's study window on the way down; and then falling and playing 'dead' to frighten the harassed master are not exactly the acts of a goody-goody. Neither is breaking bounds at night to retrieve a hamper of tuck previously concealed in a railway tunnel. On that occasion, Tom saved a train from being wrecked, but he still slid away in the confusion to organise the dormitory feed! Other boys would have stayed at the railway - to enjoy the kudos, or because the authorities would expect them to remain. Not Tom! He had promised his schoolfellows, and a leader does not let his henchmen down.

The final Clavering story "Tom Merry on the Warpath" is a culmination of Tom's rise in the school. He scores an unbeaten 50 in a 3 wicket win for the Shell over the Lower Fifth. Manners, the Shell captain, seizes on a sneering remark of Gore's to issue a challenge to the Upper Fifth. Edgar Devigne, the Upper Fifth leader, scornfully rejects the challenge.

The rest of the story involves the Shell in forcing the Upper Fifth to 'come up to scratch'. Tom takes the lead in organising a 'band' which plays fortissimo outside the Upper Fifth's windows. Having attracted a large crowd, he then accuses the seniors of funk. Soon the whole school is ridiculing the Upper Fifth, especially after an "In Memoriam" card is placed on the notice-board stating that the "Upper Fifth died of fright" etc. Wingate, the school captain, prevails on Devigne to accept the challenge. In the process he makes it clear that the last place in the college's first eleven rests between Devigne and Tom. The challenge match will decide the issue.

Devigne (a prototype of the later Gerald Cutts) bribes "Honest Jim", a rascally tramp, to noble Tom before the game. Fortunately, Tom escapes injury by the skin of his teeth, and turns out for the match in fine fettle. The Upper Fifth bat first and Devigne knocks up 15 before falling to a splendid running catch at cover point by - guess whom - Tom Merry! Cary scores 25 and the Upper Fifth's total is 100.

The Shell's reply is spectacular. Tom, supported in turn by Lowther, Manners, French, Jimson and Harris, scores 100 out of 170 for 4 - at which point Manners declares. Despite a useful 26 by Devigne, the seniors' second innings collapses for 50 all out - defeat by an innings and 20. After this *tour de force*, there can be no disputing Tom Merry's right to a first eleven place.

So there we have it. Four stories charting the development of an extra-green new boy to school champion; plausibly done, with humour and sensitivity. Tom Merry is clearly a good fellow, but he is never a prig - that mischievous streak makes sure of that. But, when the crunch comes, he does the proper thing: he lets Miss Fawcett embarrass him rather than offend her; he risks his life for the miller's little girl; he takes a flogging rather than sneak; he settles Gore's hash by beating him in a fair fight; and he withdraws from an election he was sure to win for the sake of harmony in the College. Martin Clifford certainly matured him in a hurry. It was this in-depth development of Tom's character which sustained the interest in him and the "GEM" for so many years. Other characters hardly changed at all but Tom controlled his impish streak and became steadily more adult and responsible as the stories progressed. He never lost his good humour, but his attitude towards rascals hardened considerably.

Clavering College had only three more chapters of existence. In "Tom Merry at St. Jim's" (Gem No. 11, 25th May 1907), Mr. Railton is foreclosed on by Mr. Isaacson, who has lent the college money, secured on its land. A rich seam of coal has been discovered and Isaacson wants to exploit it. The only way out for Railton is to close his college and merge it with St. Jim's.

Not everyone transfers to St. Jim's. Railton does, along with Herr Schneider, and a handful of the Shell Form go with them. Wingate and Mr. Quelch depart - their names reappear at Greyfriars a year later; but the rest fade away. Devigne might have been preserved; but Martin Clifford had a better villain up his sleeve in Gerald Cutts. Miss Fawcett, of course, continued; though later stories had Tom protecting her, rather than his being molly-coddled. The only character I regret losing from Clavering was "Fatty" Daly, the prefect. Though a 'walking-on' part, I think he had distinct possibilities which Clifford chose to neglect.

Clavering College may have expired, but the name "CLAVERING" didn't. At least three times Hamilton revived it in subsequent stories. In "MAGNET" 204 (January 1912) a Sidney Clavering makes a fleeting appearance at Greyfriars. He was the unwitting dupe of his uncle and a rascal named Gander - the whole yarn a bit of a pot-boiler.

Much more important was the arrival of Reggie Clavering in "GEM" No. 272 (26th April 1913) entitled "Under a Cloud". Reggie was Tom Merry's physical 'Double', and a thoroughly bad lot. His escapades were blamed on Tom, whose reputation suffered accordingly. A year later (April 1914) Reggie turned up again; this time as an accomplice of Gerard Goring, Tom's rival for an inheritance. Tom was captured; Reggie took his place at St. Jim's; and did his best to get expelled. Tom's resourcefulness saved the situation and Reggie had to contemplate a spell in a reformatory. He never reappeared.

Finally, early in 1918, a Leonard Clavering turned up at Greyfriars (MAGNETS 517-21). The real Leonard, a big lad, wanted to 'join up' and he persuaded Tom Redwing, a poor sailor's son, to assume his identity and go to Greyfriars. This was the beginning of the splendid Vernon-Smith/Redwing partnership. The imposture was exposed, but the real Clavering was by then "off to the front".

All of which shows that Charles Hamilton had a soft spot for the name "CLAVERING". He certainly got full value from it.

TOM THRASHES GORE (see extract, opposite page)

Under the elms, in the golden afternoon, a crowd of boys of all the Lower Forms at Clavering gathered. Not only the Shell, but Upper and Lower Fifth, and half the Fourth Form came to see how Spooney would show up in the fight.

Their glances were approving as Tom Merry came on the scene with Monty Lowther and Manners. Whether a licking awaited Tom or not, he certainly didn't seem the least bit scared. His face was calm and cheerful as ever.

Gore came down to the spot with a swagger. Jimson had offered to act as his second, and Jimson bore a huge sponge and a bottle to fill with water in the stream. Monty Lowther was to act for Tom.

Devigne, of the Upper Fifth, volunteered to keep the time and was accepted. Devigne did not like Tom Merry. He was a bit of a bully himself, and was inclined to favour Gore. He had really come there to see Tom Merry licked.

The two boys stripped and faced each other. Gore was so much the bigger of the two that most of the spectators, comparing them, dismissed from their minds the belief that Tom had even a sporting chance.

"Now, then," said Devigne, looking at his watch, "shake hands and buckle to! Time!"

The adversaries shook hands and "buckled to." Gore commenced with a confident swagger, which seemed justified by his weight and size. But there was a surprise in store for him and for the lookers-on. He drove Tom Merry twice round the ring, and then his fist came home on Tom's nose with a whack that brought the water to the recipient's eyes.

But Tom countered swiftly, and before Gore could recover his guard, Tom's knuckles had come in contact with his mouth, and Gore gave a gasp. He rushed on furiously, and then came Tom's chance. Up came his left in a rapid upper-cut. Gore wasn't looking out for it in the least. Tom's fist caught him fairly on the point of the chin, and he staggered back and fell heavily on the grass.

"Ray, 'ray, 'ray!" shouted Manners jubilantly. "That's a sample of the Merry upper-cut, kids! He's my giddy pupil! What price Gore now?"

Jimson helped Gore to his feet. He sponged his heated face, and whispered words of counsel.

"You'll have to look out, Gore. He ain't such a spooney, after all. If you fancy you're going to carry it off with a high hand you're mistaken, old chap."

"Rate!" snapped Gore. "That was a fluke."

"Hum!" said Jimson.

"Do you think it wasn't?" snarled his principal angrily.

"Time!" called out Devigne.

Gore stepped up to the mark. Tom came up smiling, as cool as a cucumber.

The second round commenced, and Gore, though he had snarled at his second for his counsel, acted upon it. He was a good deal more careful, and used more science. Tom received a couple of heavy blows in the face, but he returned them with three harder ones, and at the end of the round it could not be said that Gore had recovered his lost ground.

The opinion of the onlookers was veering round now. The fact that Spooney had stood up to Gore for a couple of rounds and had decidedly not had the worst of it showed that he was, in fact, a "dark horse," and that he possessed a quality hitherto undreamt of.

The fight now became more keenly interesting than ever. The possibility of Gore being licked was freely discussed, not without an expectant satisfaction. The bully of the Shell was not popular. The third round was more to Gore's advantage, and it finished with Tom on his back on the grass. Monty Lowther looked rather anxious as he helped him up.

"I'm all right," said Tom, reading his expression. "I let him get one in straight from the shoulder then, and he can hit! It won't happen again."

And Tom played very carefully in the fourth round.

Both the combatants received severe punishment, but neither gained a decided advantage until the end of the round. Then Tom's swift upper-cut came into play, and Gore "got it" on the chin a second time. He went down as if he had been shot, every tooth in his head jarred by the impact.

Monty and Manners exchanged glances of satisfaction. Tom was coming out strong now, with a vengeance. Gore was looking extremely groggy as he came up for the fifth round.

"Better chuck it, Gore," said Devigne curtly. "You can't stick it out."

"I'm going on," said Gore obstinately.

"All right. Time!"

The last round—for such it proved—commenced. Tom was feeling the effects of the hard tussle, though not so severely as Gore. He felt that he had the fight in his hands now if he played his cards carefully. Taking care to keep out of reach of Gore's desperate drives, he kept his adversary on the move, and suddenly, deceiving him with a feint, rushed in and hit out with both fists.

Gore received them both in the face, and went down with a thud. He staggered up again, and reeled into Jimson's arms.

"I—I'm done!" he gasped.

Gore was gasping for breath. He was utterly and hopelessly licked, and he knew it. Tom's face, however, did not express anything like exultation over a fallen foe. He held out his hand.

"Shake!" he exclaimed. "We've had it out, fair and square, Gore, and it's over and done with. No need to bear malice."

Gore was not proof against that appeal. He took Tom's hand.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW ONE'S RITES

by Derek Hinrich

It was Sherlock Holmes' contention that a wide knowledge of criminal history was of inestimable value to a detective for, as he explained to Inspector MacDonald in *The Valley of Fear*, "Mr Mac, the most practical thing that ever you did in your life would be to shut yourself up for three months and read twelve hours a day at the annals of crime. Everything comes in circles The old wheel turns and the same spoke comes up. It's all been done before and will be again"

Mr Holmes had the good fortune to make his name at the very outset of his professional career, at any rate in official circles, as he later tells Watson - whom he had not met at the time - by solving the case recounted by Watson as "The Adventure of The Musgrave Ritual" in which Holmes was consulted by an old university acquaintance, Reginald Musgrave MP. This was in 1877 or '78.

You will recall that the Musgrave heir had, on coming of age, to go through the question and answer of the Musgrave Ritual - to which the family incredibly attached no significance - as through the catechism; and that the ritual, when properly interpreted, revealed the hiding place of royal treasure hidden by an earlier Musgrave for King Charles I.

Some thirty-seven years later, in 1915, Mr Sexton Blake while hot foot on the trail of Ezra Q Maitland, the American master criminal turned spy in the service of Austria-Hungary, who had escaped from custody when the police station in Dover was partially demolished in an air raid, encounters besides the problem of "The Spectre of The Normanvilles" (see Union Jack No. 612 of July 3rd 1915).

The Normanvilles were an ancient Kentish family whose seat, Normanville Hall, was a rambling old mansion of great age surrounded by a densely-wooded park and enclosed by a high, sombre-looking stone wall, which stood on the cliffs close to the outskirts of Deal.

The hunt for Maitland becomes entwined with the mysterious death of the late baronet, Sir Gregory Normanville, whose son now Sir Maurice, asks Sexton Blake to investigate this as well (certainly there is perfidy somewhere!). It develops that a ritual current in the Normanville family may have some bearing on the matter, although we are never told in what rite this ritual is used, unlike that of the Musgraves.

In fairly short order thereafter Sexton Blake solves the mystery of Sir Gregory's death, the riddle of the Normanville Ritual, and succeeds in discovering the hiding place of Ezra Q Maitland, though that elusive villain manages to evade capture yet again.

As a comparison may be of interest to students of folk-lore, I append the texts of the Musgrave and the Normanville Rituals.

The Musgrave Ritual

Whose was it?

His who is gone.

The Normanville Ritual

Whose is it?

His who was slain.

Who shall have it?
 He who will come.
 What was the month?
 The sixth from the first.
 Where was the sun?
 Over the oak.
 Where was the shadow?
 Under the elm.
 How was it stepped?
 North by ten and by ten, east by
 five and by five, south by two and
 by two, west by one and by one,
 and so under.

What shall we give for it?
 All that is ours.
 Why should we give it?
 For the sake of the trust.

Why must ye seek?
 That his soul may rest.
 Where shall ye seek?
 Where the shadows are one.
 The shadows of what?
 The Oak and the Elm.
 When is the day?
 The one hundred and sixty-seventh.
 When is the hour?
 The twelfth.
 What must ye do?
 Where the shadows do meet and fall,
 Take eight-and-twenty from the wall,
 To the right draw it ten feet in line,
 There ye shall the passage find.

MARTIN THOMAS

by Robert D. Pepperday

I was very interested in Naveed Haque's letter in "Collectors' Digest" No. 601, speculating on the identify of "Nemo" alias Tom Martin of Bristol.

In fact, as "Martin Thomas", Mr. Martin went on to become a very popular Section Blake author of the fifties and sixties. His stories, which seem very well researched, often featured occult or science fiction themes. "Touch of Evil" dealt with a threat from outer space. "Bred to Kill" involved astral projection and Theosophy, and "Assignment Doomsday" featured a Creole witch and mad scientists who threatened to destroy the world with anti-matter.

For the Mayflower Books series his works included "Laird of Evil", dealing with satanic rites in the Highlands, and "Sorcerors of Set", about the worship of ancient Egyptian gods in modern-day London. Several of his stories featured the occult investigator Gideon Ashley. He also wrote many more conventional thrillers.

One of his most interesting novels (which he also illustrated) was "Dead Man's Destiny" (SBL No. 466, December 1960), wherein Blake investigated Edward (Tinker) Carter's background, identified his parents, and explained the origin of his nickname.

I first encountered Blake in the Mayflower Books series as a vital, modern detective, only later learning of his long history. With the greatest respect to those who have kept alive the memory of the traditional figure, I do think that there might be much to be gained from a study of



the "modern" Blake stories (also, alas, written quite a long time ago now). -The excellent Lofts/Adley book "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction" (Howard Baker Books, 1970) is a treasure house of information about Blakian writers. In view of your comments in "Collectors' Digest" No. 602 about the need for new Sexton Blake articles, I wonder if Mr. Lofts could persuade any of the living authors to provide reminiscences of their time working on the Sexton Blake Library? I believe it would be of great interest to many who like me enjoyed their stories.

YESTERDAY'S HEROES

In the fourth article of his series about popular fictional characters of yesteryear - best-sellers in their day and still affectionately remembered by people in the present-day (and still often in print now) - BRIAN DOYLE reminds you, with a luxurious gold-lettered calling card, of that charming and elegant gentleman-burglar, A.J. Raffles who, like the late Fred Astaire, often donned top hat, white tie and tails, before going to work - in his case, stealing and safe-cracking

Was A.J. Raffles a famous cricketer who carried out successful burglaries in his spare time? Or was he a successful burglar who happened to be a famous cricketer in his spare time? You pays your money (rather as Raffles' unfortunate victims did) and takes your choice

Arthur J. Raffles was, of course, E.W. Hornung's fictional gentleman-thief (or burglar, or cracksman, or crook, or whatever nefarious epithet you prefer). To put it simply, he was an upper-class gent who took things that didn't belong to him.

Raffles was handsome, elegant, suave, smooth, immaculate and charming (though he could be tough and ruthless when occasion demanded). He usually stole money and jewellery and valuable *objets d'art* from the houses of wealthy people to finance his own luxurious way of living. After all, he lived in exclusive Albany, just off Piccadilly, in London's West End, enjoyed the good things in life, dressed well and smoked Sullivans, the most expensive cigarettes that money could buy, back in the 1880s and 1890s (even the smoke-rings he blew so expertly were said to have a silver lining). He was, I suppose, a kind of Robin Hood, but he stole from the rich to pay - himself - though he did occasionally help others too. Bunny, for one.

Bunny Manders had been his fag at public school (which one was not clear, though I think Harrow was mentioned somewhere once). Bunny had hero-worshipped old A.J., so it was perhaps only natural that, when he had lost all his money at gambling, it was to Raffles that young, innocent Bunny turned, arriving at his chambers in Albany one night to beg for his help. Raffles agreed to do what he could for his erstwhile fag and promptly took him along on his next robbery. Bunny was initially shocked and scared, but eventually fascinated and grateful, and from then on, Bunny (actually Harry, but it was never used) became Raffles' close friend, assistant, admirer and 'Dr. Watson' (for it was he who narrated all the stories).

Mention of the good doctor is appropriate, since author Hornung was Arthur Conan Doyle's brother-in-law, being married to his sister, Constance. And, as Watson was to the great Sherlock Holmes, so was Bunny Manders to A.J. Raffles. Many fictional 'heroes' have had their close friends, helpers, companions or 'side-kicks', who also listen to their mentors' comments and explanations. They act as 'sounding-boards' to their hero or adventurer. After all, whom else can they confide in? And who else can chronicle their adventures and exploits?

Bunny was loyal and trusty and, as I've said, worshipped old A.J. He once said: "Raffles was a villain when all's said and done; but my villain was more than any hero to me"

Both Raffles and Bunny were decidedly snobbish. They had been brought up to believe that, as members of the upper classes, they were not required to work. Raffles worked at meticulously planning his robberies, of course. And he was also a superlative cricketer.

A.J. Raffles was the best-known England cricketer who never existed. "He was a dangerous bat, a brilliant field, and perhaps the very finest slow-bowler of his decade," wrote Hornung, no mean player himself and a member of the M.C.C. After captaining his public school at cricket and playing for Cambridge University, Raffles went on to play for Middlesex and England (and, naturally, for the Gentlemen versus the Players once a year at Lord's - a famous fixture that no longer takes place in these politically-correct times). He was also a member of the famous and exclusive I. Zingari cricket club, whose colourful blazer and cap he would wear on occasion. He had also been the fastest man in his rugby Fifteen at school, as well as being athletics champion. Raffles was, in fact, an all-round 'good egg' and could do no wrong - except when he did it regularly to replenish his own private coffers

Raffles once said to Bunny: "Cricket is a good enough sport until you discover a better. As a source of excitement, it isn't in it with the other things you wot of, Bunny. Where's the satisfaction of taking a man's wicket when you want his spoons?" But he appeared to love and relish the game, nevertheless.

Cricket was much more of an English obsession than it is nowadays. In one story, Inspector Mackenzie (the Scotland Yard man who suspects Raffles of being the mysterious cracksman, but who can never find enough evidence to actually arrest and charge him) hangs about at Lord's for hours, because he just can't bring himself to detain and question Raffles until he has bowled the Australians out ...! Raffles' view of suicide was "I'd rather be dropped by the hangman than throw my wicket away". And his ambition was to bowl the great W.G. Grace for a duck

Cricket, in fact (or fictional fact, anyway) was Raffles' main preoccupation, apart from thieving and enjoying the good things of life. The opposite sex seemed to figure very little in his way of living. He was certainly no Romeo or Casanova. He liked to steal beautiful and precious valuables, but not feminine hearts. Women do not seem to loom in his ambitions or his collections. After all, you can't sell a pretty face or figure to a 'fence' for a useful sum of cash in hand. Raffles prefers the booty to the beauty - he desires the vital statistics of money, not of the lady; the only figures he is interested in are those of the profits, not of the girl. Though he can, and does, charm the ladies when he wants to and when it may be useful to him. He is, after all, 'an attractive devil', as someone describes him at one point.

Raffles would rather take 5 wickets for 60 runs or make a century at Lord's, than make love to a lady. Sixes are more important to him than the sexes. He'd rather bowl a maiden over than do it literally, one feels. Though, it should be recalled, he did once have a rather passionate affair in Italy, with an Italian girl named Faustina, whom he had met there; she - and the sun - melted his heart on that occasion.

Raffles, incidentally, was one of Agatha Christie's favourite characters in her youth though, as she said in her Autobiography: "I always felt slightly shocked by him"

Raffles and the faithful Bunny still seem to live for much of the time in the world in which they first met - that of the English public school. Raffles is a little reminiscent of Lord Mauleverer of the Greyfriars Remove at times, with an added touch of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the infamous 'Bounder', with Redwing perhaps doubling as Bunny Manders. Public school joviality and parlance often prevail in the stories, with Raffles

remarking regularly "By Jove, old boy!", "we're jolly lucky!", "the deuce there are!", "Oh, joy!" and so on. Venturing forth on a robbery is often akin to playing a jolly jape on an unpopular school prefect, and dodging the police is like keeping out of sight of a couple of masters on the prowl after 'lights out' and when you've broken out of the dormitory. One feels that the most in the way of punishment Raffles and Bunny might receive if caught would be 500 lines rather than 5 years in jail. But no matter, this is all in the fun and entertainment of reading the stories.

Raffles, as we know, lived in Albany, off Piccadilly. One of the most exclusive addresses in London, indeed in the world. And it still is today. It's always called 'Albany', by the way, *never* 'The Albany'. This was actually laid down in the original articles of law and lease in 1804. Also, the inhabitants live in 'chambers' or 'rooms' or possibly 'apartments'. *Never* 'flats'. Anthony Berkeley's fictional detective, Roger Sheringham, lived there too, as did two or three other 'gentlemen of English fiction'. Albany dates from 1770 and comprises 69 sets of chambers. Real-life residents have included Lord Byron, Thomas Macauley, Lord Melbourne, William Gladstone, the Duke of York, Lord Beaverbrook, Georgette Heyer, J.B. Priestley, Graham Greene, Edward Heath, Lord Shawcross and Alan Clark.

In his famous essay "Raffles and Miss Blandish" (1944), George Orwell wrote: "Raffles is still one of the best-known characters in English fiction the truly dramatic thing about him is that he is a *gentleman* he is presented to us as an honest man who has gone astray, but as a public school man who has gone astray. But how if it were a plumber or a greengrocer who was really a burglar? Would there be anything inherently dramatic in that? No. Raffles is of upper middle-class origins and is only accepted by the aristocracy because of his personal charm. 'We were in Society, but not *of* it,' he says to Bunny towards the end of the adventures. Both Raffles and Bunny have no real ethical code, merely certain rules of behaviour."

The latter didn't, perhaps, apply in at least one of Raffles' exploits. In one story, "The Gift of the Emperor", he crawled completely naked through a small ship's ventilator to steal a precious pearl - his bare effrontery must have shocked many readers of the time, but no doubt delighted others

What of Raffles' creator? Ernest William Hornung was born in Middlesbrough, Yorkshire, on June 7th, 1866, and educated at Uppingham School. He suffered from poor health, mainly asthma, as a youth and, at 18, went to live in Australia for over two years, hoping that the climate there might benefit him. He worked as a tutor at a school at the Mossiel Station, Riverina, during this period, and also began writing. On his return to England in 1886, he continued writing and soon afterwards his first two novels, both with Australian backgrounds, were published: "A Bride from the Bush" (1890) and "The Boss of Taroomba" (1894). He also contributed short stories to various magazines, including the recently-started "The Strand". He later wrote a fine public school story, "Fathers of Men" (1912) set at Uppingham in the 1880s. In 1893, he married Constance, the sister of Arthur Conan Doyle, with whom he also struck up a firm friendship. Doyle apparently considered him one of the wittiest and most good-natured men he had ever met. Hornung died, at the age of 54, on March 22nd, 1921.

In the years before he created Raffles - in what might perhaps be called his 'Pre-Raffleite' period - Hornung published eleven novels and many short stories. When he was thinking of writing his first Raffles stories, he discussed with Conan Doyle his plan of making Raffles a kind of inversion of Sherlock Holmes - 'the reverse side of the coin' as he put it - with Bunny Manders as Dr. Watson. Doyle rather disapproved of Raffles, telling his brother-in-law: 'But you must not make the crook a hero'. The two men debated the matter for hours. But Hornung went ahead anyway and dedicated his first Raffles book to his famous relative with the words: 'To A.C.D. This Form of Flattery'.

Hornung may have borrowed the name 'Raffles' from an early story of Conan Doyle's called "The Doings of Raffles Haw", which had appeared in 1892 (though Doyle's Raffles was a scientist in that). And while we're on the name of 'Raffles', let us reflect that it was originally the name for a game popular in the 14th century (and mentioned by Chaucer), playing with dice, with its name taken from the old French word 'raffle' meaning 'the act of snatching' - an appropriate derivation for A.J. Raffles, who did very well for himself out of 'snatching' other people's valuables ...! The modern meaning of the word, pertaining to a Prize Draw, did not emerge until the 18th century. And, of course, we mustn't forget Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the British administrator who served for years with the East India Company, and bought and founded a settlement called Singapore, in 1819. The famous Raffles Hotel in Singapore was named after him in 1886 and still exists today. Raffles also founded the London Zoo in 1824. There is, in fact, a statue of *this* Raffles in Westminster Abbey. A statue of Raffles in the Abbey - you can just hear old A.J. enthusing to Bunny: "A Raffles monument in the Abbey, old boy! Oh joy! By Jove, that's jolly lucky all round, what?!"

The first Raffles short stories originally appeared in "Cassell's Magazine" in 1898, when it was edited by Max Pemberton (who had been the first editor of the boys' magazine "Chums" in 1892). Advertisements for the stories at the time compared them with those about Sherlock Holmes. It was Cassell's who had published Hornung's early novels. In his publishing history "The House of Cassell" (1958), Simon Nowell-Smith states: 'Hornung was faithful to Cassell's through some years of obscurity until another publisher offered a better price for his first collections of 'Raffles' stories - collected from "Cassell's Magazine" too - than Cassell's were prepared to pay'.

So it was that Hornung's first collection of eight short stories about Raffles was published in 1899 by Methuen, under the title "The Amateur Cracksman" (also published that same year in New York by Scribner's). A second collection of eight stories appeared in "The Black Mask" in 1901 (titled "Raffles" in America), and these initial two books were subsequently published in one volume as "Raffles, the Amateur Cracksman" in 1906. A further ten stories appeared in "A Thief in the Night" in 1905 (this was the volume which concluded with the death of Raffles, from a sniper's bullet [a cracksman of a very different kind] during the Boer War in South Africa). The only full-length novel about the gentleman-crook was "Mr. Justice Raffles", published in 1909, and this dealt with an earlier episode in his career. So, chronologically, the sequence runs: "Raffles, the Amateur Cracksman", "Mr. Justice Raffles" and "A Thief in the Night". Thus, there was a total of 26 short stories and one novel covering the adventures of Raffles. These were all collected (together with a non-Raffles novel "The Shadow of the Rope" (1902), in a 1000-page omnibus titled "Raffles" and published by Newnes around 1930.

There have been numerous reprints of the stories ever since (the latest in 1994), some with titles such as "The Complete Raffles" or "The Collected Raffles", but these are misnomers because they always seem to omit the novel "Mr. Justice Raffles".

In addition, there have been many 'non-Hornung' sequels or pre-sequels. These have included "Raffles" by David Fletcher (1977), adapted from the TV series by Philip Mackie (of which more later), and "The Return of Raffles", by Peter Tremayne (1981), which begins after the death of Raffles! Old cracksmen never die, it seems, they simply come back for the sequel And going back to 1905, the American writer, John Kendrick Bangs (the author with the onomatopoeic name!) published a book called "Mrs. Raffles", in which Bunny Manders recounted the adventures of an amateur crackswoman, Henriette Van Raffles, described as the widow of A.J. Raffles! She was a successful safe-cracker and her fingers were apparently as nimble and skilful as her late husband's. The illustrations showed her to be an attractive and curvaceous young woman in fashionable and tight-fitting clothes. It was not stated whether or not she played cricket.

But the author who subsequently wrote far more stories about Raffles than even E.W. Hornung ever did was Barry Perowne, who was clever enough to officially acquire the Rights to the character of Raffles from the Hornung Estate, and whose first tale about the cracksman appeared in the weekly paper "The Thriller" in Issue No. 208, on January 28th, 1933, and titled simply "Raffles", following it up with "The Crime of A.J. Raffles" in Issue No. 210. He wrote a total of 12 Raffles stories for "The Thriller" in 1933-35, all illustrated by Ernest Hubbard (later to find fame with his 'Jane' strip in the "Daily Mirror"). Perowne also wrote four stories featuring Raffles and Sexton Blake: Sexton Blake Library (2nd series) No. 577 "Raffles Versus Sexton Blake"; SBL. No. 601 "Raffles' Crime in Gibraltar"; SBL. No. 699 "The A.R.P. Mystery"; and, in the first "Sexton Blake Annual", "Scuttlers' Cache".

Perowne's early books about Raffles included: "Raffles After Dark" (1933), "Raffles in Pursuit" (1934), "Raffles Under Sentence" (1936), "She Married Raffles" (1936) and "Raffles and the Key Man" (1940, in the USA). In these earlier stories, Perowne transformed Raffles into a contemporary (1930s) two-fisted action adventurer (rather reminiscent of Berkley Gray's 'Norman Conquest').



From a Barry Perowne Raffles story in *The Thriller*

But when he returned to the character

after seeing service in World War Two (in the Intelligence Corps), Barry Perowne reverted to the original late-19th century period, style and tradition, with gas-lit streets and horse-drawn cabs. His many stories about the 'old' Raffles now appeared in such magazines as "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" (in the U.S.), "The Saint Magazine" and "John Bull Magazine" (where they were superbly illustrated in colour by Edwin Phillips); nearly all these tales appeared during the 1950s, '60s and '70s. And most were collected into three books by Perowne: "Raffles Revisited" (1975), "Raffles of the Albany" (1976) and "Raffles of the M.C.C." (1979). They are excellent stories and often involve Raffles and Bunny with such real-life personages as Queen Victoria, Kipling, Shaw, Churchill and even Mata Hari (and also with Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes!)

Barry Perowne's real name was Philip Atkey and he was the nephew (and one-time secretary) of popular author, Bertram Atkey, who wrote humorous mystery yarns, often about a character called Smiler Bunn. Apart from his Raffles saga, Atkey/Perowne was a prolific writer and turned out many other novels, short stories and boys' tales.

I haven't left myself much space to deal with the Raffles films, plays, etc. So briefly: there were at least 11 Raffles films, mainly silent productions made between 1905 and 1925. The first major movie was "Raffles" in 1930, starring Ronald Colman in the title-role, with Bramwell Fletcher as Bunny, and Kay Francis lurking as the feminine interest. In 1932 came the British-made "The Return of Raffles", with George Barrard as A.J. and Claude Allister as Bunny.



Raffles in action: David Niven in Sam Wood's 1939 film

Master criminal

RAFFLES

9.0



"Poetic justice — so much juster than the ordinary kind, don't you think?"
A. J. RAFFLES

ANTHONY VALENTINE in
Mr. Justice Raffles
BY PHILIP MACKIE, FROM THE STORIES
OF E. W. HORNUNG



with CHRISTOPHER STRAULI
and JOHN SAVIDENT

Gentleman thief Raffles has often taken the law into his own hands. But when he runs across an unscrupulous money-lender, he decides to mete out his own justice.

Brigstock
Raffles
Bummy
Detective
Albany porter
Teddy Gariand
Lady Camilla
First heavy
Duchess of
Darlington
Cabbie
Second heavy

John Savident
Anthony Valentine
Christopher Strauli
Alan Downer
Victor Brooks
Charles Dance
Lynette Davies
Maurice Bush
Gabrielle Brune
Andrew Jackson
Steve Emerson



Beautiful suffragette who steals Raffles' attention. Lynette Davies plays Lady Camilla Belsize . . .

DESIGNER ROGER ANDREWS: DIRECTOR
CHRISTOPHER HODSON: PRODUCER
JACKY STOLLER: EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
DAVID CUNLIFFE
Yorkshire Television Production

The definitive and most famous screen version was made in 1939 and released in 1940. This was a scene-for-scene re-make of the 1930 version, was also titled "Raffles" (what else?) and starred the incomparable David Niven in a role which might have been made-to-measure for him. Douglas Walton was Bunny, and also starring were Olivia de Havilland and Dame May Whitty. Niven had always fancied playing the role, ever since he had enjoyed reading the tales as a schoolboy at Stowe. I once remarked to Niven, when on a film location with him in India: "You'll always be Raffles to me, David". He replied, with his usual amiable grin: "I think I'll always be Raffles to *me*, old boy!" The film was, of course, a big success.

Just space for a mere gallop through the rest of the media versions

In the theatre, Gerald du Maurier (later Sir Gerald, and father of Daphne), one of the leading actors of his time, made the role of Raffles his own, in London in 1906 and later in a revival in 1914. He scored a huge success in the long-running play "Raffles" (co-written by Hornung himself). There was another London play, "A Visit from Raffles" in 1909, but this wasn't so successful (it didn't have du Maurier in it, for a start). "Raffles" was also produced in New York, with one Kyrie Bellew in the leading part, and there were two others - "The Girl Raffles" and "Little Miss Raffles", of which little is known.

Graham Greene's play "The Return of A.J. Raffles" was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, at the Aldwych Theatre, London, in 1975, with Denholm Elliott as Raffles and Clive Francis as Bunny. Generally good reviews and a successful run, but apparently a somewhat rum affair, with A.J. and Bunny having a homosexual relationship, and with Lord Alfred Douglas (Oscar Wilde's chum) and the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) in the cast. The "Daily Mail" reviewer said: 'Bunny is everything that Bob Cherry might grow up to be'. Which showed just how much that reviewer knew about old Bob

The most famous Raffles of recent times, of course, was that of Anthony Valentine in the Yorkshire/ITV series "Raffles". After a pilot episode in 1975, the 13-part series of one-hour episodes ran in 1977, with Christopher Strauli as Bunny, and many excellent and well-known actors in supporting roles. This was a superb series in practically every way and it's surely long overdue for a repeat. The "Daily Express" reviewer, sticking with the Greyfriars analogies, said: 'Valentine played Harry Wharton in the "Billy Bunter" TV series - now he plays Raffles as a sort of Harry Wharton 20 years on'.

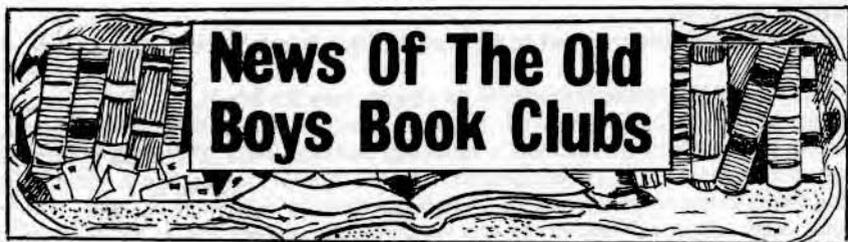
On BBC Radio, Raffles was portrayed by Malcolm Graeme (in 1942), Frank Allenby (in 1945) and Jeremy Clyde (a one-time Sexton Blake, who had also played Raffles in a brief TV episode) (in 1988), while the stories were read by Neil Stacy (in 1977) and Nigel Havers (in 1995) (and what a good Raffles *he* would make on TV!)

Raffles is still very much with us. The cigarettes that bear his name are still on sale. There's a "Raffles Club" in the King's Road, Chelsea. Also in London, there's a Raffles Wine Bar, a Raffles Antique Shop, a Raffles Shopping Centre (rather incongruously at the Elephant and Castle, in South London), a Raffles Car Hire Company, and four people named Raffles in the London telephone directory (but none of them live in Albany, sadly!) The name also crops up in newspaper headlines whenever an 'upper-class' criminal is on trial. At least one of the books is currently in print. And 'The Raffles Stories of E.W. Hornung' was a subject in BBC TV's 'Mastermind' programme recently.

Raffles' almost last words to Bunny, as he lay dying on the battlefield in the Boer War, were: 'I've had a good time, Bunny'

And so had his readers

(Next in the series: 'Bulldog Drummond')



NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A warm welcome was given to the thirteen present on a fine March evening. Congratulations were offered to our C.D. poet Keith Atkinson, who had recently received a certificate of merit from the International Library of Poets. Also, to Richard Burgon, who had received a prize for a paper he presented on a theme of local history.

We welcomed our first speaker, Alyson Leslie, who had made the journey from Dundee to be with us. "Not My Brother's Keeper" was the title of her look at brotherly relationships as depicted in Greyfriars - especially the Remove. Greyfriars had 120 boys of whom fewer than 10% had brothers at the school. Alyson explored the possible reasons for this in an excellent presentation, greatly appreciated by all.

"Mark's Musings" from Mark Caldicott considered his boyhood views, and how technological developments had influenced the book field. E.S. Brooks was very futuristic in some of his writings, and word processing would have been a boon to him, as he edited and adapted stories for future use. For those who are computer and technically-minded we can now reveal that Mark and Alyson are developing a web site on the Internet for our Club. There are already some references to Sexton Blake and others on the Internet. For those who have access, Northern Old Boys' Book Club E-Mail address is: nobbc@caldicott.demon.co.uk.

Our informal Club dinner will be on Saturday evening 5th April at Brigg Shots, Leeds and our meeting on April 12th will feature Alan Pratt, from London O.B.B.C., with "Westerns", and "Life After Blyton" with Mary Francis of Children's Department, Leeds Libraries.
Johnny Bull Minor

LONDON O.B.B.C.

The March meeting was a jovial gathering at the house of Peter and Dorothy Mahony in Eltham.

A programme which celebrated the ninetieth anniversary of the Gem's origination got off to a humorous start as Roger Jenkins made us laugh with excerpts from the "old bus" river holiday series. This was followed by Peter Mahony's fascinating potted history of the Gem. After a delicious tea, Peter tested our memories with a Gem quiz based on his earlier talk. Next, Mary Cadogan presented us with a lively and interesting examination of Tom Merry and Co's "girl chum", Cousin Ethel.

The next meeting will be held at Duncan Harper's flat in Acton. He promises a lavish tea, so please ring to confirm your attendance on 0181-993-7933.

TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT: As we move ever closer to the next millennium, I am pleased to announce that the London O.B.B.C. can now be contacted via e-mail on the Internet. Those who dare to surf the information super-highway can contact yours truly at this address: houbens@dial.pipex.com
Vic Pratt

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

For our March meeting we met at the Linton village home of our Vice-Chairman, Roy Whiskin.

Roy presented the research results of an enquiry into the life and works of one of the best-known illustrators ever: Ernest H. Shepard. Born in St. John's Wood, London, in 1879, he became a prolific pen and ink, watercolour and oils, artist. Exhibited by the Royal Academy at the age of 22, he joined the staff of *Punch* in 1921, staying for 31 years, having also contributed to that magazine for the 14 years previous to his joining the staff.

In the early decades of this century he decorated the works of A.A. Milne (*When We Were Very Young* etc. and the Winnie the Pooh books). Later he became associated with the books of Kenneth Grahame and illustrated *The Wind in the Willows*. Still working on commissions, he died at the age of 90.

Bill Lofts then delivered a very humorous paper on the ancient art of the wilful misuse of advertising monies in our hobby publications before any Trading Standards rules were established.

Adrian Perkins

THE MAGIC OF BROOKS

by Ross Story

(Reprinted from C.D. Annual 1962)

It is now (alas, how time flies!) more than thirty years since I first read about the Boys of St. Frank's. They came to me through the medium of a cousin who loaned me his copies of the Monster Library - and what a marvellous shilling's-worth they were! A few months later, while still at school, I came across some old copies of the Nelson Lee Library on sale outside a shoe-mender's shop in Watford High Street. They were displayed at 1/2d each - 5 for 2d! Pennies were not so easily come by in those days but from then onwards my weekly pocket-money found its way into the hands of that enterprising cobbler - and the local newsagent. There were times when I surreptitiously sacrificed my 'dinner-money' to feast metaphorically on the Nelson Lee - truly greater love hath no man (or schoolgirl!)

I was an avid reader, devouring everything I could get my hands on - with the exception of girls' stories, which I loathed! I read *The Magnet*, *The Gem*, *the Popular*, and of course *the Nelson Lee*; and I took them right up until the time the dear old Nelson Lee folded. Yet out of all these stories it was the stories of the Boys of St. Frank's which truly lived in my heart.

It is strange to find, now that these books have again come into my hands, how much about them I remember - or, rather, never forgot! When after more than thirty years the first Nelson Lee fell into my hands again I felt a most undignified lump come into my throat. The writing - the pictures - the characters themselves were all so clear in my mind that I found I could repeat verbatim (and without looking at the page) sentences I had not read for more than three decades. I knew exactly what words would follow the sentence I had just read before ever I turned the page. And this, I think, was the Magic of Brooks.

Compared with Brooks, all the other writers seemed dull, the situations trite and repetitious. What Brooks had to give his readers he gave with all his heart - generously, sometimes even ruthlessly. There was a punch and gusto in his writing which, to my mind, no other writer has ever succeeded in emulating. Many of his stories could be regarded as far-fetched - but like H.G. Wells he managed to make the most improbable scenes believable. His enthusiasm for what he was writing simply spilled over, so that no matter what he was writing about, you went along with him.

His stories had everything - suspense, humour, thrills and superb characterisation. And they had, too, what none of the other stories of this period possessed - a double plot. Running parallel with the school story there was inevitably an undercurrent of mystery or crime and these Brooks blended together so perfectly that, like threads running through a cloth, they joined together at the end without a flaw. His plotting was amazing - in the

midst of a thrilling scene he would suddenly cut to a humorous interlude with Handforth & Co, indulging in one of their perpetual arguments, and you would wonder where the scene - which seemed quite irrelevant at the time - tied in. But it always did. I often wondered how far ahead Brooks plotted his stories; for at the beginning of one story he would often sow the seed of the story which was to follow. Each story held a link with the story to come, so that you felt you were irrevocably bound up with these boys and their adventures, either at the school or away from it.

To my mind nobody could 'capture' an atmosphere as Brooks did. Every time I re-read the series dealing with the Floods at St. Frank's I almost expect to see the water running down the pages; and whenever I read that superb summer story of Handforth's return to the school (to find Chambers in possession of Study D) I can hear the crack of bat against leather and see the open-necked shirts and the white flannels of the players. And when Brooks took you away from the school and plunged you into Peril in the Pacific who could ever forget the description of the storm at sea - the coppery, fiery sky, the stillness of the water - the vast devastating YELL with which the cyclone burst upon them? And in *The Tyrant of Rishnir* who else could have captured and portrayed the crash in the jungle, the trek to the city of Rishnir, the war against the evil Ameer, the siege in the clouds and the escape by parachute to find the Wanderer and land her on top of the crag. This to my mind was one of the best 'away' stories Brooks ever wrote - nothing has ever rivalled it for excitement and suspense.

It is only now perhaps that we can realise what a true artist Brooks was in his ability to create characters. In our schooldays we were probably too immersed in the story itself to pay much attention to the characters as characters; but now that I am privileged to read about them again I am amazed at the strength and forcefulness behind his characterisations. Who can forget the arrival of Reggie Pitt - his amazing vendetta against the whole Remove; the absolute ruthlessness behind his plotting and scheming? You got the impression he could have accomplished anything he set his mind upon - that he could have got the Headmaster himself 'sacked' if he had wanted to. His arrival left an impression upon my mind which still persists in spite of the fact that the bad old Reggie is no longer with us. In actual fact, Reggie's reformation was much more believable than that of Fullwood - somehow Fullwood's villainy had been going on too long for us to accept his change of heart. It was a pity, in a way, he did reform - for he afterwards seemed to become just 'one of the boys' and not a very prominent one at that. Reading of his treatment of Nipper, when Nipper first arrived at St. Frank's, and the number of times he almost succeeded in getting Nipper and his friends expelled, I can only marvel at the forgiving nature of his companions. But perhaps that was just another of the things Brooks taught us - to forgive our enemies.

Another character whose arrival made an indelible impression was Buster Boots. Who could forget his single-handed domination of the Remove - his brutal treatment of those who opposed him; his almost unbelievable drive and determination? True, he 'reformed' and became a much pleasanter character in consequence - although I don't think I ever really forgave him for 'outing' Bob Christine from the captaincy. For me Bob always had been and always would be the real leader of the Modern House.

Then there was Ezra Quirke - the Magician of St. Frank's - and who can ever forget the truly spine-chilling events which surrounded his arrival. Brooks was as much at home here as in any other sphere about which he chose to write - the impossible became possible; the unbelievable became believable. Everything fell neatly into place at the end, as it always did. Yet, somehow, like the boys themselves, I was glad to see Ezra go. He seemed to have no true place in the clean, healthy, normal atmosphere of St. Frank's.

Whether you liked or disliked any of Brooks' characters, you had to acknowledge their strength - their superb portrayal. Some say Nipper was a prig and that he was too perfect -

I say he was not and that he revealed all the qualities of leadership which gave him and caused him to retain his hold on the captaincy. No matter what difficulties the boys encountered you felt a terrific confidence in the fact that Nipper was there - you knew he would evolve some plan to extricate them. It was Jane Trimble who once said, rather grudgingly, that she felt Nipper would one day make a 'great man' and I think she was right.

And Handy! - for me at least there would have been no St. Frank's without the aggressive, obstinate yet truly lovable Edward Oswald. He was a masterpiece of characterisation and I think he truly deserved the popularity which became his. Where Handy was there was trouble, excitement and, inevitably, humour. Brooks' humour was unique - the under-statement rather than the over-statement; the subtle rather than the slapstick. He could make you laugh until you cried with a single line of dialogue.

Even the less prominent characters - weaklings such as Hubbard and Teddy Long, bullies like Kenmore and Grayson, buffoons like Chambers and Armstrong - all of them fell into the prescribed pattern so that your imagination was peopled not by fictitious schoolboys but by characters so real that they remained in your mind and heart long after their stories had ceased to be chronicled. And if I were asked which of all the characters was my own personal favourite I would reply: Church. He was such a good-tempered boy, so loyal and so quick to forgive, never bearing malice or antagonism - that I sometimes felt that Brooks himself misjudged him when he described him as 'lacking initiative'. I think he had a great deal - as well as many of those qualities which would make the world a much pleasanter place today if only more of us possessed them!

Perhaps we should be glad that the Nelson Lee Library ended when it did. Perhaps if another writer had tried to assume Brooks' mantle (for it was obvious towards the end that Brooks himself was losing interest) we should have lost forever that marvellous style, those truly unmatched plots, those vivid characterisations. Perhaps, too, we should have lost the boys themselves - for who can live in the world of today, with its atom-bombs, its nuclear weapons, its mad race to be first to establish war-bases on the moon, without assimilating at least some of its cynicism and disillusion? No - let the boys of St. Frank's remain for ever undisturbed in their leisurely and pleasantly world where time stands still and we may, whenever we wish, reach back and shake their hands in everlasting friendship.

LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty Lowther.



Hallo, Everybody!

Universally professor says being a poor speller may be a sign of intelligence. Good news for Grundy!

A reader wants to take up some bright but smooth occupation. What about becoming an apple-polisher?

Brief story: "Boy, oh boy," exclaimed one comedian to another, "our names are in lights at last! The theatre is on fire!"

At the Cliff House concert, I hear one critic described Clara Trevlyn's singing as the trill of a lifetime. Vocal girl makes good!

Save old Pepper, the Rylocombe miser, in Wayland. He had just been running after a bus, but missed it. "Oh, well," he remarked philosophically, "now I've missed it I shall walk on to the next bus stop, and save a penny." I couldn't help grinning. "Why didn't you run after a taxi?" I asked. "You'd have saved a lot more!"

A motorist skidded in Rylocombe High Street, and just touched Mr. Lethom. "Most fortunate, sir!" exclaimed the driver, finding Mr. Lethom unhurt but for a torn trouser. "This is my first accident in twenty-two years." "Indeed, sir!" said Mr. Lethom courteously. "Then let me be the first to congratulate you!"

A motorist says it is cyclists who take up most of the road. It is hoped motorists will not take this as a challenge.

Next: The stage actor went up to the film director and asked for a part. "Well," said the film director, "have you had any experience of playing without an audience?" "I'll say I have," replied the actor. "That's why I'm deserting the stage for the screen!"

"I think I cut rather a good figure," said Grundy, surveying himself in a full length mirror. "Well," said his chum Wilkins tactfully, "of course, there's a lot to be said for both sides."

A specialist in Hollywood fixes up all the trees on the outdoor sets. Even the director has to "bough" to him.

I hear wrong facts have been circulated about a film of a mythical kingdom. A few mythologists?

The Head's gardener is a marvellous old chap. He knows all about politics, the local council, society gossip, the prospect of the local football team, international affairs, the servants, and so on. If only he knew a bit about gardening!

I'll be writing for you next week, chaps.



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