



THE OLD BUNTER . . .

BILLY BUNTER'S METAMORPHOSIS

Greyfriars emerges as Carcroft School, but the pupils are the same old merry crowd, all ducked as "new bugs" in the fountain of eternal youth, all living in their old familiar, ink-stained ivory towers (or, if the critic too is to be up-to-date, behind their ivory curtain). Bunter emerges in the atomic age as the ever-so-slightly more streamlined Turkey Turk. If he wears glasses they must be of the contact-lens type, for they aren't apparent, and to judge from an advance portrait of him there is more drinking of coke in the new milieu than there was eating of it in the old. Bob Drake of Carcroft is Bob Cherry, Harry Compton is Harry Wharton, Dick Lee is Frank Nugent. But Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, whose chee-chee English was such a terrific feature of the original stories, has disappeared. Even Greyfriars appears to have felt the influence of Mr. Gandhi and the Congress Party.

Only to a slight extent, however, has there been any change in the atmosphere which George Orwell, in his essay on boys' weeklies (written while *The Gem* and *The Magnet* still appeared) described as follows:

The year is 1910—or 1940, but it is all the same. You are at Greyfriars, a rosy-cheeked boy of 14 in posh tailor-made clothes, sitting down to tea in your study on the Remove passage after an exciting game of football which was won by an odd goal in the last half-minute. There is a cosy fire in the study, and outside the wind is whistling. The ivy clusters thickly round the old grey stones. The King is on his throne and the pound is worth a pound. Over in Europe the comic foreigners are jabbering and gesticulating, but the grim grey battleships of the British Fleet are steaming up the Channel, and at the outposts of Empire the monocled Englishmen are holding the niggers at bay. Lord Mauleverer has just got another fiver and we are all settling down to a tremendous tea of sausages, sardines, crumpets, potted meat, jam and doughnuts.

After tea we shall sit round the study fire having a good laugh at Billy Bunter and discussing the team for next week's match

against Rookwood. Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever. That approximately is the atmosphere.*

The Man Responsible

According to *Picture Post*, source of our present news of Bunter & Co., Frank Richards (who had been writing school stories for over 30 years when *The Gem* and *The Magnet* closed down in 1940) was born Charles Hamilton about 70 years ago. He has had about 15 different literary aliases, including Martin Clifford, of *The Gem*, Hilda Richards (under which disguise he wrote a parallel series of girls' stories, starring such names as Bessie Bunter), Owen Conquest, and Winston Cardew. Age has made him shortsighted, and these days he finds it difficult to move about. He seldom leaves his house in Kingsgate, a bungalow village near Broadstairs in Kent, and most of his day is spent, in dressing-gown and black skull-cap, working at his typewriter. But though he is almost a recluse, and well on in years Frank Richards is still writing the same boisterous type of extroverted school-story as he has done for two generations.

As well as the Carcroft stories, he is writing about a parallel establishment, Sparshott School, for a London publisher, and about two others, Ferndale and Oakhurst schools, for a Manchester house. One of the Ferndale characters, by the way, is Cedric St. Leger, whose archetype was, of course, D'Arcy, the dude of St. Jim's.

There are not, of course, and never have been any young Woodleys at Frank Richards's schools. The chaps of the Remove and the Shell were (and are) all simple, uncomplicated little animals enjoying what should be, rather than what

*From Critical Essays (Secker and Warburg).



. . . AND THE NEW

actually is, public school life. The ash-plants might be flying in the air continually, but no one appeared one penny the worse for them, and psychoses existed in inverse ratio to the "whoppings" administered.

It is all good clean escapism, and in reply to those who criticise this kind of writing, Richards says quite rightly that he did what he set out to do; give a lot of pleasure to a great many children. And, one might add, a great deal of retrospective pleasure to many grown-ups. His stories seem easy to imitate; many have tried to do so. But no one ever quite reproduced his essential charm. Now, at 70, he is at it again. There are a few concessions to modernity, says *Picture Post*, but even these new stories have a curiously dated flavour. They are full of the old vitality and high spirits, and old fans will read them with delight. Richards himself thinks that they can still compete, in England at least, with pulp magazines devoted to popular mechanics, Dick Tracy and the neo-atomic adventurers. Whatever our own doubts may be we can't help hoping he's right. As Orwell himself admits, Richards has never introduced the fuhrer-principle to his writings.



FRANK RICHARDS, who has started on a new cycle of school stories, looks back over some of his old ones



"YAROOOOGH! Scrag him, chaps." The model T Bunter was invariably at the receiving end in any horseplay