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What is the strength of a chain?

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Bardell's Gremlins

BARDELL, who is not my friend but a privileged bore who infests my leisure hours, is convinced that he has a personal gremlin. The last time he dropped in, the ostensible reason was to borrow a stamp. I hunted up one that had been thriftily removed from an unsent letter (containing a birthday cheque to a female cousin). It was gumless and there was no gum in the gum bottle. We tried some aged paste and it spread a dark stain through to the face of the stamp.

Written for "The Listener"
by F. L. COMBS.

methods. This was easy as he is even less reluctant than most human beings to talk about himself.

I induced Bardell to lie down on the couch in his front room, placed a bottle of tonic on a small table between us and got him to agree to level pegging. Then I locked the door. Such an action in my house causes intense suspicion, a suspicion which I have never yet succeeded in dissipating.

Then I started in on Bardell, trying to keep the facts in chronological order, viz.

Boyhood

(1) His family had had many removals. In every new home they went to there was a clothes line over the only spot convenient for cutting stove wood. In the end he had become case-hardened to the way in which the axes, catching on these lines, had recoiled on his forehead. He attributed a permanent bump over the right temple to these gremlin-located lines.

(2) Always when he was in urgent need of getting to school on time (as, for instance, after three "lates" running) his bootlace had broken or been purloined by a brother in a similar predicament.

(3) His school cap became notorious for planting itself—this in days when no boy however otherwise disreputable would dream of flouting the decencies by not wearing a cap.

(4) There was always an unduly large number of sticks with knots in them in the cord-wood delivered over the back fence—gremlin matai, surely.

(5) He had failed at three inspections through getting a hard arithmetic card when his next neighbours were dealt easy ones. Even today he registers resentment at the phrase "To be kept clean and returned to the inspector," or anything of the kind on paste-board of any kind.

BUT enough of these juvenilia which, I admit, to those who have doubts about gremlins will read like trivia.

When we went on to the misfortunes of his youth, Bardell spoke first of the trouble he had had with neckwear which always delayed him when, dressed in something like taste, he had a date to keep. "If it wasn't the tie," he said, "it was the confounded back stud. I have at times had to go out with a paper clip rasping the back of my neck—only to find three back studs in the cuffs of my pants next morning. Try to tell me that isn't gremlins."

But his worst misfortune was to fall in love with an identical twin, a beautiful but giddy young creature whose sister, of course, was exactly the same. Being in the coquettish stage they thought it sport to take turn and turn

(continued on next page)

BUT Bardell's case seemed worth investigating, and I determined to try the counterpart of psycho-analytic

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 21, 1949.