being extracts from the Journal of FRED BASON

The First Day of the Year

IT'S NO USE ME MAKING any New Year resolutions. I only break 'em. Last year I said I'd give up smoking, as I knew it wasn't doing me any good. Six days later I was back again smoking like a kipper. Instead of a resolution I'll make a wish: to find a companion of the other sex. Something in the Jane Russell style would suit me dandy, as long as she would get fond of me for myself and not for the reflection of the little limelight that comes my way. The fascination of contrasts! There's me, five-feet-five—and I like 'em high, wide and upholstered.

Michael Sadleir wrote me today a very kind letter saying R. C. Hutchinson and me were the best things in last year's SATURDAY BOOK. As boss of Constables, the publishers, he's a bloke with opinions to respect. I'd

THIS contribution and the three following touch on various aspects of our rough Island story, ranging as they do from Mr Bason's impressions of life in the little Ice Age we call the present to Mr Brodrick's glance down the corridors of time to a Britain covered with an immense glacier. But it is not for a connection as distant as this that they are grouped together. Rather is it because each piece in its different way has given particular satisfaction to the editor of this book.
like to write a book for that firm—at any rate, the boss being a fan of mine is a blooming big help! Ivor Brown has promised to autograph that nice book of his, _Master Sanguine_, for me. I am now reading _The Chequer Board_, by Nevile Shute. He really is a superb writer. I must get his autograph, and I think I must invest in his first editions. He looks like a gilt-edged investment. _Chambers' Journal_ to-day accepted an article off me. A step up the ladder. Strange that the first magazine I ever sold twenty-five years ago was a _Chambers' Journal_ . . . and here I am still selling books a quarter of a century later!

My landlady gave me breakfast in bed for a New Year treat. That wonderful family, the Newingtons, of Spalding, Lincs (Saturady Book readers), have asked me to stay a week with them again this year. Bless them!

**Busy Day**

**UP AT 8.30. WASHED AND BREA**ckfasted by 9.10. Got the post and read it till 9.30. On a bus and over to the Strand Theatre to book a sixpenny stall outside the gallery for the first night of _Dark Eyes_. Lucky to get stall number 54, which means front row of gallery. Back on another bus; home at 11 a.m. Got out barrow, filled it with magazines and books, and pulled it to Bermondsey, reaching there at 11.45. Stayed there till 1.40, taking 7s. 4d. (1s. for loan of barrow and 1s. for casual licence to stand in the gutter). Home at 2.20. Remove books and then take barrow back to its owner. Start midday meal at 3. Finish at 3.20. Answer four letters, pack the parcels of book orders and write invoices for same. Manage to get parcels and letters to the post office by 4.15 for the 4.30 collection. Return to write a longer letter to a friend. Have tea and read the morning's paper. (See that we are to be forced to join the new medical scheme, which will cost me 6s. 8d. a week as self-employed, under penalty of £10 a day fine. Who says we are free! I am forced to join and I don't want to because I can ill afford 6s. 8d. a week.) Finish tea, the news and letter to a friend by 5.15. Have a very good wash and shave, put clean clothes on, and am out of house by 5.45. Bus to Strand. Arrive 6.5. We go in at 6.25. Play billed to start at 7 starts at 7.16. The amusing comedy over, I capture exclusively the autograph of George Sanders. Then go to stage door and get signatures of the author of the comedy plus eight others, including the enchanting Irina Baranova.

Having got nine fresh autographs feel that my luck is in, so a taxi and I get to the Princes Theatre at 10.20. Five minutes wait and out come Marjorie Reynolds and Bonar Colleano. I get both their signatures and Bonar promises a photograph will be sent to me (I have one of his uncle

Well I Never!

I WAS REMINDED the other day of something W. H. Davies told me years and years ago. He said that on one occasion he gave a reading of his latest poems at a posh house, and some old dame with a title came up to him afterwards and said, 'I'm given to understand that you have actually worked with your own hands for a living like the common men one meets in the streets. How amazing! How very extraordinary!' And Davies mimicked her wonderfully. Today something very much like this happened to me. I was struggling home with a sack of books on my back, hot and bothered (I have one decent suit but that's for high days, holidays and social engagements). Outside me house was a proper posh car. I staggered up the steps to the front door, and was putting the key in the keyhole when a lady dressed up to the nines got out of the car and said, 'Excuse me, are you Frederick Bason?' 'Yes, miss, or ma'am,' I said. 'Frederick Bason, the author?' she asks again. 'The same,' I answers. 'You write articles in the _Saturday Book_?' 'Oh, yes.' And she said, 'Well, I never!'—and with that gets back into the car and drives off.

Who she was or why she called God above knows!

Shall I?

AMONGST TODAY'S MAIL IS A letter from a woman who says she is twenty-five, intelligent, willing and ready for anything! Says she has read a great deal of my writing on and off and would very much like to meet me. She lives at Watford but would be willing to meet me anywhere in London, on any date I care to make, in order to get to know me. It seems that she is herself an unsuccessful writer but loves good books and good writing.

What shall I do? Shall I meet her? Will it be prudent? God knows I want a nice young lady to take out and about. But—there's the rub! There always is a 'but' in these things. She reads as if she fits the bill exactly, but does a lady say she's willing and ready for anything to a man she has never met? My landlady says 'No.' My landlady says a lady might show her readiness at the right time and in the right place,
but she wouldn't say so in black and white, for that invitation would be a man's complete defence if anything that wasn't 'quite nice' did happen. My landlady is a wise lady of fifty-five, and I reckon I'll stand by her opinion. . . . And yet? Am I passing by a very nice decent girl who would share my pleasures and successes—and my moods and possible failures? I've read the letter three times. It reads too much like a dream come true. At my age—forty-one—one doesn't jump. . . . I have now burnt the letter. I just don't know how to reply, and so the willing lady of Watford must take the absence of an answer for a shy man's 'No, I don't think I'll jump. You'll find the anything you are ready for right in Watford.'

**Hero of my Schooldays**

A PLEASANT SURPRISE CAME MY WAY last night. I was invited by Tom Morgan, who in his day was the greatest amateur boxer in England, to visit the Lynn Boxing Club, which happens to have its headquarters right here in Walworth. And although it has been running fifty-four years, this was my first visit. When I went in Tom's fellow-instructor was introduced to me—"This is Matt Wells." I was pleased! I reckon it is close on thirty years since I last had a chat with Matt Wells. He was the hero of my schooldays, the first boxer whose autograph I ever got and the first I ever saw train. He used to go running and walking in a gaudy sweater and a loud-looking cap and kid gloves all around the streets I spent my schooldays in. Often and often I had the privilege of running and walking with him, and I'd be in my glory.

Matt Wells was the lightweight champion of England in 1911, conquering Freddy Welsh and winning the Lonsdale Belt. When he retired he managed a pub opposite The Ring, Blackfriars, and still kept in training—and I followed him around. He naturally frequented The Ring, where attaching myself to Matt as he strolled in, I would say if ever stopped, 'I'm with Mr. Wells'—and in I'd go as well. Matt was, and still is, a very good-natured bloke. And a witty one! He looks more like an ex-boxer than anyone would think possible, and has a couple of the most glorious fat ears on show. Pointing to his ears last night, he remarked, 'They said, friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I lent 'em mine—and look what they did to 'em!'

Matt gave me last night a copy of his book *Come Out Fighting*, and on the very first page I read, 'Strolling along Westmoreland Road one day, I chanced upon a hooligan who was interfering with a milkman, and, feeling quixotic, intervened and remonstrated with the tough. He, somewhat naturally, I suppose, resented my intervention and attempted to translate his resentment into action. Side-stepping, I aimed a heavy blow at his middle, connected, and made him lose all interest in the subsequent proceedings. The milkman, apparently astonished, patted me on the back and asked if I would like to join a boxing club. My reply was, 'I'd love to.' And so young Matt Wells joined the Lynn—in 1902.' Now I don't quote this for its style, which is pretty high-toned, but because all this happened in the Westmoreland Road I have lived in for over forty years. In my road Matt started his career, and last night I found him again! He's not a chicken now, but he can still out-run, out-walk and out-punch any man of his age in England. He (with Tom Morgan) helps to keep the youth of Walworth fit—and off the streets. I was amazed to see the vim and vitality, the sweat and the blood last night at the Lynn. And what a wonderful old boy Matt is, with his ramrod back, rosy cheeks and hairy chest and arms; and what a pleasure to see
that one's schoolboy hero hasn't 'gone back.' Still fighting, still teaching the young 'uns exactly how to do it as he did it himself forty years ago! I must get my friend Albert Houthesuen, the artist, to draw a picture of Matt, so that readers with sporting interests will realize that Matt Wells is still in the ring.

When the Club had closed somebody insisted on taking me to a pub and treating me—I hadn't been inside a pub for years. Four ports I had—and I staggered home very tipsy. Tipsy for the first time in my life! I now know what a fat head and the morning after the night before is. What with Matt's thick ears and my thick head—but still, a memorable night.

Later, Houthesuen has done the drawing, and you will find it reproduced here. It's first-class! But then Albert is a wonderful artist. I must go to the Tate Gallery one day to see his pictures there.

London Life

I was passing through St. James's Square on the way to St. James's Theatre, to see the celebrities come out of a first night, when a woman stopped me and asked for a cigarette as she was dying for a smoke. Knowing what it is like to be dying in that way, I gave her one. Without a thank you she asked for a light, so I gave her my box of matches. Having lit the fag she asked me if I'd care to go along with her for a nice time. I said that I hadn't the time or the inclination. She then asked me if I'd like a nice kiss for a shilling, and I said I could kiss myself for nothing! Then she said, 'Well, will you buy a box of matches for twopence?' And she held out my own box of matches! I saw red. I snatched the box with one hand, and my cigarette from her overripe lips with the other, and stamping on the fag said, 'Would you like to know the blooming time—for threepence? It's time you realized the Yanks have gone home!' And off I went.

 Didn't she swear! And her all dressed up in the New Look and with a fur coat what cost some blighter all of £500! On I went to the theatre and was lucky enough to get the autograph of Eric Portman, who tried to sign his name with my pen the wrong way up. That play must have disturbed him.

We Love Policemen in Walworth

Crowd sit on P.C.—When a policeman tried to arrest a man who had thrown a brick through the window of a gown shop at Walworth Road, S.E., late last night, a crowd of people set upon the constable and pinned him to the ground while the man escaped.—Reynolds News, February 29, 1948.

Well, Well!

In January Reynolds News published a letter from me in which I said that if the present heavyweight champion of Germany thought he could beat Mills or Woodcock he should be given the opportunity to have a go: sport should be international and not a matter of politics. And as an afterthought I added that if this German heavyweight did beat either, I should have much pleasure in asking for his autograph! To-day, via the Sports Editor of Reynolds, I have been sent two pictures of the heavyweight champion of Germany specially autographed for me in Hamburg by this here heavyweight. Never seen a better example of putting the cart before the blooming horse. Now he has only to beat Woodcock or Mills!

Before I Forget

I was out book hunting to-day. My stock of 'sure' sellers is a little low, for I like to keep it around the 2,000 vol. mark at all times. So I popped over to Streatham to a pal in a wardrobe shop—he kindly keeps exclusively for me any books he gets—and he usually gets very clean ones. He had eleven for me—three by my friend L. A. G. Strong, two by Michael Sadler, four pocket editions of Kipling, a nice occult book, and finally an attractive modern reproduction of A'Beckett's Comic History of England. I hadn't had a Comic History for nineteen years. It brought with it a memory.

Nineteen years ago I had a little bookshop, and to it came a lady who asked me to go to her house to see her lodger, a customer of mine, who was 'poorly.' It was a dismal, untidy room, that second floor back, and it looked out on to a blank factory wall. The chap was lying in bed, and it took only a minute to see that he was far more hungry than actually ill. He was practically starved and he was broke: owed three weeks' rent and had had nothing to eat for two days save three or four lumps of sugar and a stale bun. But it was the rent that worried him—he didn't want to be turned out. Would I buy a few books? I looked at them—some were junk, but there was a remarkably fine first edition of the Comic History in parts, and the coloured plates were spotless. It was a joy to see such a clean set. I told the chap I thought I could ease his problem, for I was pretty positive that in New Oxford Street I could get him £12 to £14 for that choice set. I gave him a fag and said I was
going out to see it. In little over an hour I was back—got ten guineas for the Comic History. I spent the odd ten shillings on food for the chap and with much pleasure gave him ten one pound notes. He broke down and cried. Three days later he came into my shop looking a bit sheepish, with three or four books under his arm. Would I care to buy some books, as he was stony broke? 'But, hell, man, I gave you a tenner only a few days ago,' I said. He knew all about that, but he'd been told a certain winner at the White City: it could fall down and then get up and win, his favourite at 7 to 4. Well, he had put £8 on it, and lost. He put £1 on another dog, and that lost as well. Finally he put 5s. on a 10 to 1 outsider, and that had lost by a nose. So there was £9 5s. left at the White City, and still he hadn't even paid his rent. I won't repeat the words I used to him. I didn't buy his books and I never saw him again. And didn't want to!

A Note on Ballet

I WAS FORTY BEFORE I HAD a bash at ballet—always thought it was arty-arty and for daffodils. But, having been, I am for thinking it is the goods, and I'm going again often. I now often stand at the stage door at Covent Garden getting the autographs of ballet stars. The first autograph of this kind I got was Margot Fonteyn's, and I'm afraid I was just a tiny bit rude. You see, she had scrawled an absolutely undecipherable signature, so I says to her, 'Miss, your bank manager wouldn't pass that. Would you kindly oblige and do it again on the opposite page.' And being a dear kind person, she did so. And when she'd finished the gentleman who was esquiring her said, 'Margot, that's not better—it's only bigger.' And Margot shrugged her shoulders in such a graceful way, and with a smile returned my book, saying, 'I'm sorry.' Ballet is a delight to watch. Bason is blewed backwards with ballet!

The Boy Who Likes Animals

I WAS SEATED IN OUR LOCAL Faraday Gardens (forgive the word gardens, there's not a single flower there) reading The Bay, by L. A. G. Strong, when a boy came up to me and said, 'Look, mister. This dove is proper ill.' The boy, who was about twelve, was a funny looking, good-looking youngster, and he carried the pigeon like a girl carries her favourite doll. I looked at the pigeon and said, 'Perhaps it's got the bellyache.' But the kid would have none of that, for he replied, 'Oh, no, mister—it's his wings that are ill.' I took the pigeon from him and gave it the once-over, but the kid obviously looked to me to do something more. But I couldn't see what was wrong, for I had never before in
my life handled a pigeon—it's not the sort of bird I go in for. I put the pigeon on the seat between us, and it lay as if dead. The kid began to snivel. Something had to be done. I wrote a note on an endpaper torn from The Bay (which is a wicked thing for a bookseller to do, but I just hadn't a scrap of paper on me) saying, 'Please give this boy any sort of harmless ointment or coloured water to rub on a pigeon, and give him some pastilles or something with the change.' Wrapping a bob into the paper, I instructed him to go to the chemist's nearby. He was back within ten minutes, and as I sat and read my novel he sat at my side, rubbing some white stuff from a bottle all over the pigeon and talking to it—'This will make you better. I'm not hurting you. You'll soon be well.' He even opened the bird's mouth and stuffed in a sweet, and he seemed very happy looking after the sick creature.

After perhaps half an hour of gentle administration of the lotion, I reckoned the pigeon was either quite well or quite dead. I gave it the once-over again. It was quite dead. I broke the news gently. The boy was upset. I sent him across to a tobacconist for a little box. We made a tiny grave behind the entrance to the air-raid shelter in the park, and the boy wouldn't fill the hole in until I'd said a prayer for the dove. So I said, 'We are sending this here dove to You and we hope You will give it Your best attention. Amen.' That pleased the boy, and he buried the pigeon in the Player's carton. I went back to The Bay and he went out of the park sucking a sweet.

Just as I was leaving some half an hour later, to go home to tea, he came running up to me again. 'Mister, mister! Look!' And he had in his arms the dirtiest, mangiest diseased cat you ever did see. It turned me off the thought of me tea to see that blooming cat. 'It's ill, mister, it's proper ill!' he said. I said he'd be ill as well if he hugged it for long, and took it from him and put it down, and it ran across the park and over the wall. The boy looked at me sorrowfully. 'It was proper ill, mister, it was. What's the difference,' he asked, 'between a dove and a cat when both are ill?' 'The answer, little boy, is a lemon!' I was all I could think of in reply. And I left him pondering over that one.

I would not have recorded this incident but for the epilogue. The pigeon incident happened a week ago, and to-day, having some proofs to check, I sat again in Faraday Gardens. Cor luv a duck, that kid came up to me again, and this time he'd not only a cat in his arms, but a fish in a jam pot and a frog in his pocket! Fortunately all the zoo seemed to be healthy, and he looked so picturesque that I had the inspiration to take his name and address and then tell Albert about him. Albert agreed with me that the boy might make a picture (Albert is cautious), and said he'd go to see him. So I left the whole thing to my artist friend.

Later: Albert says the boy will make an interesting study, and as

Albert has a very nice playful cat the kid will no doubt be very happy as he sits for his picture. Still later: I like the picture of the boy who likes animals—it's just like him. Hope you like it too.

Mae West Regrets

I wrote a friendly letter to Mae West, at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, in which I said I'd often heard her say 'Come up and see me sometime' and now I wondered if it would be a bit of a change for her if she'd come down and see me some time—and have a cup of char and a nice chat about this and that. I told her I was a working-class chap who sells books for a living (and does a little writing as a sideline when the weather's too bad to have the barrow out). I said that I was forty-one, a bachelor, and no relation in size to Bruce Woodcock—being, in fact, the same size as Napoleon! And I ended by asking her for an autographed photograph. I got a reply five days later. Miss West thanked me for my kind invitation but pressure of engagements made it impossible for her to accept. She had much pleasure in sending me an autographed photograph, which she hoped I would accept. The letter came via her secretary. Of course, it was a chance in a million. But if you don't take chances no one comes up to see you sometime—and you have your tea alone.

Pretty Funny Fanmail, Isn't It?

Mr. Enoch K. ODoi,
c/o Fred. A. ODoi, Esqr,
Accr Academy
P.O.Box 501, Accra
January, 48

Dear Unknown friend—In reading a certain book called A' SAT BOOK' and I came across your lovely article and address I am the stamps collector in Gold coast, and I want to keep a lovely friend with you. I am very glad when I have got your lovely name and the address. Please try to send me a photograph of yourself and the S.C.E.C. addresses book. In few days ago I have sick very bad, so that I cant send you any stamps in my first letter. But, I will try to send you more stamps in my next letter kindly reply me as soon as you receive this letter. I waiting to you. Yours faithfully friend

Enoch K. ODoi

My reply: It's nice to know that you've enjoyed my work in the Saturday Book, and I hope you will like my future work in it. I can't
write a long reply as I have so much to do, but I appreciate a letter from so far away. Good Luck.

c/o Philip Major Flescher, Esq.
P.O.Box 190
Accra. G.C.
March. 48

MR. BASON—I received your letter with great thanks. I know you have no time to write me; but yet, as a friend you will get little chance to write me. As you said, you dont like Gold Coast news, I think it better to avoid mentioning it to you. I hope casablanca is a very fund place of enjoyment. It is a mistake for me to use your name like that. I creat for pardon. Give me some hints about the Boxxing of Tommy and Braddock. As for Joe Louise he is well known to be a good Boxer. I will not send you newspapers again as you dont read them. I have collect cigarettes cards I want to send them to you. Did you like them. Please don't take our school address always take this new address. Earthquake occured in Gold Coast damage houses and killed people. We are not well in our town we fell asleep in tents and playgrounds, because every time he occured. And if you live in your house and he occured you will die. You don't know wheather your house will be break and fell unto you. So we don't sleep or live in our houses. I am learning my lessons. Best compliments to you. Urgent reply please.

I am,
Yours sincerely,
Jacob A. Annan.

Amazing thing, the reply comes from another person!

Collar Studs and So On

POPPED INTO CONSTABLES and had half an hour's chat with Michael Sadleir. I was able to sell him some fifty tissue-paper souvenirs of events during the last fifty years. Asked him fifty bob. He said, 'Very cheap, I'll buy them. I don't know what on earth I'm going to do with them, but they're mine.' So I made ten shillings, which was a nice afternoon's work.

He told me he knows a bloke who collects back collar studs. When he finds one of the 1860 period, brown with age and looking like ivory, he goes crazy with delight. So I told M.S. of the bloke down in Berkshire who collects toilet paper—the whole lot is in neat albums marked with the countries of origin. He even has royal toilet paper, monogrammed and all!

Mr. S. says when we're both in the Saturday Book we'll autograph each other's copies. He didn't want a book I'm writing on how to make toys at no cost whatever, but rang up another publisher on my behalf. I am for saying that Michael Sadleir is an English gentleman.

Taking a Photograph

TODAY A CHAP COMES FROM Odhams Press in a car and he says, 'Can I take your photograph?' I says, 'For how much?' And he says, 'For a few minutes!' So I says, 'How much do I get for getting up from this chair and putting some brilliantine on me little bit of hair and parting it neat and then coming back and looking thoughtful as I say the word cheese'—which Madeleine Carroll once told me was the word to say just as your photograph is being taken, and then it turns out a 'quiet smile.'

The bloke says I shall get 2ls. and a copy of the photo, and I says 'O.K.' I get myself up like a film star and come back. While he's getting his camera ready we have a chat on this and that, and he puts a question to me about the war that rather stumps me. So I scratch my head, puzzled, while I'm thinking out the answer, and he suddenly says, 'Ready?' and takes the photograph. And when it's over I see in the glass that me little bit of hair is as rough as a doormat. I dread looking at that picture!

Peter Pan Earns Half a Crown

ON TUESDAY I HAD A LOOK in at I Remember Mama (and I shall remember the old girl). When this Van Druten play was over I went round to the stage door to get the autograph of Mady Christians, the American star (although I thought Mary Clare would have done the job equally as well and probably would not have been so expensive to the management). Well, at the stage door was a bloke who kept popping his head out and saying, 'Have you seen the fireman?' So I says, 'No, I ain't. Where's the fire?' And he says, 'There ain't no fire, but the fireman has gone to find a taxi.' After a while I looks full at the bloke and I recognize him as Henry Edwards, the famous film star of years ago. So when he pops out again I says, 'Is your wife Chrissie White here with you?' And he says, 'Yes, she is.' So I says, 'O.K. The fireman is probably looking at a fire, but I'll chase a taxi for you. You hold hard on to my autograph album—and get me the autograph of your wife, and sign it yourself as well.' So off I goes.

Now one thing about being familiar with the West End is that you know where to find a taxi. It took me two minutes to locate one outside
a snack bar in Covent Garden. I tell the driver he's got celebrities to drive home, and that gets him, and soon we're back at the Aldwych stage-door. I call out, 'Taxi is here! Come and get it!' And out troop Mr. and Mrs. Edwards and daughter (it was her first West-End stage appearance). 'Have you got my album, and is it signed?' I ask. 'Yes, we've signed it,' says Henry Edwards. 'Thank you very much. Here's 2s. 6d. Buy yourself another album to-morrow, sonny.' Sonny! Sonny! I'm forty-one!

In Darkest Walworth

I ALWAYS SEEM TO BE DOING things for the first time these days. Tonight I visited the Walworth branch of Toc H. I hadn't known there was such a thing—and yet for years it's been running its meetings and doing amazing good work from its headquarters less than one hundred yards from my home! It was a lively, happy meeting of sixteen men of various ages—a band of brothers. Several things amused me. The secretary had been trying to get films to show to old people in the local institutions, and said, 'I have been in touch with the British Gas Chamber. . . . Chamber—Gas Chamber—that can't be right. Half a mo'... (a look at some papers). . . . 'Ah, I have it—the British Gas Council!' And a little later the vital question arose whether a dramatic society had a right to be offended at being addressed as a concert party. Personally I'd have said it was very much yes—but some seemed to think it depended upon how dramatic the dramatic society was!

I spent exactly one hour in the pleasant company of Toc H, and that was twice as long as I'd expected to remain. I found their ceremony of the Light and the simple prayers for their departed comrades very impressive, and I left with a feeling that there is much good being done in Walworth. Yet at the other end of the borough, around the Elephant and Castle, I am for betting that a dozen men were that very night planning robberies.

Down Our Street

AREA OF BRAWLS AND CRIMINALS.—Alderman Mrs. A. H. S. Hendries (Tory), at Southwark Council meeting on Wednesday, said the Westmoreland Road district was like the black hole of Calcutta, and they were frequently hearing of people being assaulted after dark here. The district was getting a bad name. 'Why not have every other light in Walworth Road, and more lights in the side streets,' she said.

Cllr H. T. Chadwell said it was the Council's policy to keep the main roads well lighted all night because they were used by a large amount of traffic, especially newspaper vans. The sidestreet lights went out at midnight. 'I suggest there is nothing low or terrible about the Westmoreland Road district,' he said.—South London Press, April 9, 1948.

Four of Us were Caught

TODAY I GOT CAUGHT FOR two bob. An old woman knocked at the door this morning and asked if I'd buy a rare Bible. The 'rare' Bible was of about 1850 and filthy dirty. I said it was worthless. She told a pitiful tale. I gave her two shillings for it to get rid of her and her blooming tears on me doorstep. This afternoon I visited a fellow bookseller and in talk told him of the old girl and her Bible. It turned out that he had also given her half a crown, and chucked her Bible into the salvage bag. Seeing we'd both been caught, he rang up two booksellers in nearby districts, and, dash it all, they'd given one shilling and one shilling and sixpence respectively for Bibles from an old lady who'd told a pitiful tale yesterday.

Anyone else bringing rare volumes of this kind to 152 Westmoreland Road, Walworth, will be told exactly where they can put them!

Grand National Night

HEAVEN PROTECT ME, a woman has sent me a manuscript that's a mess of, I reckon, 180,000 words: it's a damn big parcel. Would I read it? Would I 'touch it up' here and there? Would I sell it on twenty per cent commission? It's called This Age of Misery. As for me, I'm miserable enough meself, as the horse I had two bob on did not win the National. It will cost me a shilling to-morrow to return the MS. unread.

The Bow of Ribbon

SHE WAS ONLY A VERY LITTLE girl. Her age was probably eight. She came to my bookstall with a dozen horribly dilapidated 'rubbish' books, wanting to sell them. I explained that they were worthless for anything except salvage (and, in all probability, they were salvage books that had a little while before been piled against a dustbin awaiting the dustman). As she looked very disappointed I gave her a bob for the books and put them down at the side of my barrow to give away to some old lady who hadn't enough money to buy even at my cheap prices (if I get ninepence for a book I'm doing very well indeed). The girl politely thanked
me for the shilling and, all smiles, went off clutching it tightly. Two stalls further away from me is a man who sells tapes, cottons, silks, and ribbons in flaming colours. The child stopped, struck by the display. She seemed to be weighing up a problem, looking at the ribbons and then at the shilling. Suddenly her mind was made up. She handed over the shilling to the man and pointed to a roll of an amazingly brilliant yellow ribbon. The man measured and cut off what seemed to me a really liberal amount and handed it over to her. She stood there with the ribbon in her hand, then pointed to a mirror which was hanging from a strut at the side of the stall and which was quite three feet above her (sometimes the man sells hats at around 2s. 6d. each, and ladies naturally need a mirror when they're trying on a hat). The mirror was untied and the man obligingly placed it on the stall for her to use. But she picked it up and gave it to him to hold for her, and, being a good sort, he did so. Then she uncoiled the ribbon and, pushing forward her ginger hair, made for herself a huge bow, pulling the corners up so that the bow seemed to stick right up in the air while the ends trailed halfway down her back. Twice she adjusted the bow. Then she said, 'Thank you, it will do,' and off she went down the street as pleased as a peacock. I'm sure no other kid in Bermondsey had such a bow. I'll go further and say I don't suppose there was another girl in the whole of London with such a bow in her hair on that sunny morning.

I was pleased not only because I gave her the wherewithal but because inside one of those books was an autographed photograph of Ramon Novarro, who was the Charles Boyer of the films when I was a boy. And although I possess eleven thousand signatures, Novarro's was one I'd missed.

Ta-ta!

SO ENDS MY FOURTH SUCCESSIVE appearance in THE SATURDAY BOOK. An all-time record! I haven't changed much in those four years—still sell books and magazines, still wear a cap, but now possess a trilby for special occasions, still single, and often wish I wasn't—yet friends say I don't know how well off I am being a bachelor. The address is still 152 Westmoreland Road, Walworth, S.E.17, and I hope this finds you as it leaves me—not too satisfied but happy to be alive. See you next year, I hope.

AFTERTHOUGHT. I do wish James Agate was alive! He started me keeping a Journal. On the very first night the Whitehall Theatre opened he said, 'Freddy Bason, start keeping a diary of your doings—and some day it will probably keep you!'