

THE EDITOR TO HIS FRIENDS

MASTER WILSON writes a letter in which he tells me that he has been a reader of "CHUMS" from the beginning. There is something a little Scriptural in this phrase; and obviously he could not have read "CHUMS" before the beginning. But I am not going to quarrel with him on that account; indeed, how shall I quarrel at all with one who assures me that "CHUMS" is the best paper for boys? When first our paper made a bashful bow to a bountiful public, Master Wilson was given the choice whether he would have "CHUMS" sent every week or a solid hamper of edibles once a term. Wonderful to tell, he chose the paper. Neither jam-tarts nor almond-cakes turned him from a purpose so noble. He was not to be lured away from the journal by sweet-smelling savouries nor by dainty pies. Ginger-beer did not tempt him, nor inviting bon-bons neatly done up in silver packets. He chose the weekly subscription, and has been happy ever since. Admirable boy! Excellent Chum! Let us hasten to give him a monument, delicately adorned with this editorial tribute, and inscribed with the record of our admiration.

Waggles styles letters like the above "chest-expanders." When he hands me one, he waits to see the swelling of the editorial breast and the satisfied smile hovering upon the editorial "counting-house." Should there be more than one such letter, he has qualms for the editorial health. "You'll go horf like a ges balloon wot's had a knife stuck inter it," he said to me one day when he handed me the third "expander." This morning he is unusually anxious, for our letter-bag is very full of highly flattering epistles. As the writers of these do not desire to contribute to "that lovely paper," I am inclined to think that their praise of us is honest.

Certainly, this new volume of ours does seem to be pleasing people very much. We have never printed a tale which has won more admiration than Mr. Walkey's "Rogues of the Fiery Cross." Take, for example, a letter which reaches me from Mr. Wodehouse. He says, "I think that 'Rogues of the Fiery Cross' is the best story I have ever read. It knocks spots off 'In Quest of Sheba's Treasure,' which I didn't think was quite up to 'CHUMS' usual standard." Here, you see, we have both praise and criticism. Many other correspondents agree with the former; I wonder if many are in accord with the latter. For my own part, I thought "In Quest of Sheba's Treasure" a rattling good yarn, though I admit that "Rogues of the Fiery Cross" goes one better. Happily, the old adage, "Tot homines, tot sententiae," is as true of stories as of anything else in this miserable world. If it were not, how would poor authors live?

I often think that we people who are so ready to call stories good or bad, "jolly" or "rot," do not make enough allowance for individual opinion. That which we call "rot" may amuse our friend Jones very much. The story which is "jolly" to him is to us tiresome. It is an editor's business to try to please all sections. This, if I may judge from your letters, our new stories are doing. And so the editorial chest expands, and the editorial voice is soft and cooing, and there is no malice in the editorial eye, even when Waggles goes for his top note and misses it. (Mem.—That is the fourteenth time he has missed it this morning. He says he is going to have another try, just for luck. There will be a corpse to let in this office by-and-by.)

Harking back to the letter from Mr. Wodehouse, he puts a couple of questions to me which seem of some interest. His first question deals with that popular subject—"bed-time." He is at present employed upon some work which keeps him out of bed every night until half-past eleven, and he desires to know if such a practice is harmful. If I knew Mr. Wodehouse's age, I could answer him more readily. As a matter of fact, half-past eleven is much too late an hour for any lad under twenty-one to go to bed habitually. I can stand late hours as well as most people; but if I were never in bed before

half-past eleven, I should soon be looking about for my energy, and asking what had become of it.

To my way of thinking, half-past ten is the latest hour for any lad between sixteen and twenty-one years of age to fix upon for his habitual bed-time. I don't mean to say that he is never to break this rule. If he break it twice a week, it will not hurt him, provided that he is in bed by half-past ten sharp on the other five nights. One of our busiest literary men, one who has worries and cares by the thousand, told me the other day that he never consulted doctors. When he feels unwell, he is in the habit of going to bed at eight o'clock and sleeping until eleven or twelve next morning. The result is unquestionably good. There is not, in spite of his multitude of affairs, a healthier man in London.

There can be no doubt whatever but that sleep is the best of all medicines. Boys who desire to be strong, mentally and bodily, who would do well in the schools and well in the playing fields, must make up their minds to have nothing to do with late hours. Speaking from a memory of old times, when I myself was much in strict training, I remember that our first care, when we desired to get fit for a rowing, running, or bicycle race, was to go to bed every night by ten o'clock. The man who sits up until half-past eleven or twelve o'clock will never be a successful athlete. And if business compel anyone, as it compels Mr. Wodehouse, to adopt such an hour, then he should make up for it by sleeping as late as possible in the morning.

We have come to think nowadays that the most foolish thing ever said by George the Third was his adage:—"Six hours' sleep for a man, seven for a woman, and eight for a fool." If eight hours' sleep fitted a fool, then George the Third must have slept eight hours every night. Your sensible man nowadays does not object to nine hours' sleep, if he can get it. He knows that he is the better for it, both physically and mentally.

Mr. Wodehouse's second question is also one of health. I may well bracket it with another question reaching me from Scotland, a question put by a correspondent who informs me that one of the apprentices in his place has flabby cheeks and desires to rid himself of them. Both Mr. Wodehouse and this writer wish to know how they are to get rid of superfluous fat. I am afraid a good many people are in the same difficulty. As for the flabby cheeks—well, they are not ornamental, I admit (Mem.—Waggles's cheeks will hold a quarter of a pound of butter-scotch, measured); but the whole question of reducing fat is a serious one, though less serious when lads are the victims.

The thing to avoid is fat-producing food. Butter should be knocked off as much as possible, butter and milk and pastry and anything containing fat. Lean meat is good for these fat people, but they should eat dry toast instead of bread, and they should not drink beer or cocoa. Potatoes, again, are supposed to put on fat, and are to be avoided. I take it, however, that the main thing is exercise. People often get fat because of indolent and lazy habits. They sit about reading, when they should be on their bikes or stepping out briskly on country roads. They do not encourage energetic habits, and they do not deny themselves, but eat as much as they can and whenever they can get it. There are exceptions, of course, but your fat man is nearly always a lazy man, and is, therefore, deserving of little sympathy.

Master Bert Lloyd, of Portrush, in Ireland, thinks that electricity is a thing of the future, and that we have not discovered half the things we can use it for. Well, I agree with Master Lloyd. Possibly some day there will be electric editors, who will be able to give office boys of musical tendencies such shocks that fourteen top notes will be produced all at once. Some people, you know, predict a time when electricity will do everything for us—even to providing us with wings to fly like a "beird," as the old ballad hath it. In those days the threepenny omnibus will be at a discount. Waggles and your Editor will poise a moment gracefully upon the window-sill here prior to flying home to tea. The wicked burglar will soar upward with his plunder and settle to rest awhile on the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. We shall make appointments in the air—"Half-past two: meet you on the roof of Olympia." Oh, surely electricity will be a wonderful thing!

Meanwhile, and before Edison and his rivals have invented all these wonderful electric machines which are going to burn towns wholesale and to sink ships and to play old gooseberry generally, Master Lloyd thinks there is a good living to be made as an electrical engineer. I believe that there is, though it costs a good deal to educate yourself for the work; and you must serve for some years in an electrical business, and, I think, pass an examination as well. Master Lloyd would like to do all these things, but is short-sighted, and asks if this is a fatal objection. I should say that it would depend how short-sighted he was. If he can see well with glasses, there does not seem to me any valid reason why he should not make a good electrical engineer. But perhaps he had better seek out someone in the business, who will be able to advise more fully than I can possibly do from a letter.

Followed the Directions.

"I NEVER was rebuffed in so pleasant a way as on my last journey," said a commercial traveller, lately. "I was just about to enter an office when I saw a staircase with a sign, 'This way for commercial travellers.'"

"I supposed the stairs led to the counting-house, so I went up and found myself in a long hall, with walls where pointing boards directed the way. I passed through the hall and came to a staircase leading down as another board pointed. I descended, and opening the door at the lowest step, I found I was—in the street again!"

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GLASGOW'S MANY "CALLS."

I CERTAINLY took it as a genuine compliment to "CHUMS" to be accorded an interview right off within a few seconds of sending up my card to the busy chief of Glasgow's Fire Brigade (the largest out of London), more especially as Captain Paterson deprecates any approach to self-advertisement.

Our pleasant chat had proceeded barely a quarter of an hour when the ominous ringing of his private alarm made me nearly tip over the rocker on which I was comfortably seated.

"That's a fire; come and see the turn-out," was all my host said as he instantly disappeared. Snatching up the hat nearest reach, I sprinted downstairs at his heels, throwing door-closing etiquette to the winds like a barbarian in my haste to witness how they manage these things in Scotland's commercial capital.

And I was well repaid. But what a disillusioning anyone expecting to hear the precincts resound with loud military-like commands would have undergone! The quiet and orderly way in which all the sinews of war were got ready with lightning speed was truly admirable, and only the frantic barking of a dog was to be heard above the subdued sound of the rapid movements of feet and wheels.

As for the Chief, he simply tumbled out of his ordinary clothes into uniform with the nimbleness of a quick-change artist, inquiring the while in his quiet way for the destination; and leaping up in front of the pioneer car, was off at breakneck speed with the cavalcade following close behind.

Of course, I, too, proceeded to the scene of operations, but the affair was a trivial one in a slum locality.

Resuming our seats in his cosy snuggerly later on the same afternoon, I mentally rehearsed my string of queries, apprehensive of another interruption, while the genial captain lighted one of the numerous briar-roots he keeps going.

"Have you many fires?" was my first.

"Well, last year—that is, 1896—we attended an average of two for every working day, or, to be precise, 652 in all. Two years ago we had no fewer than 102 during the month of February. An exceptionally hard 'freeze' prevailed, but we didn't lose a single minute on that account. Our municipal regulations require all hydrants to be placed on the foot-path and always kept clear, which helps us greatly; and while the hoses were being uncoiled, the plugs were thawed by the hot water which each detachment carried for that purpose."

"About how much does a fire generally cost in Glasgow?"

"I estimate that last year the average ran about £166, and for the last ten years about £240 each. The cost of the whole brigade to the city is between