

YAROOH! WHAT A FEAST FOR FANS OF STUPID BUNTER

By ROSALIND DUNN

Billy Bunter was fat and foolish, sly and bespectacled, short on courage and long on sticky buns, a terrible sport and a fine fib.

But, oh crikey, the Fat Owl of the Remove at Greyfriars School had a lot of small boys panting over his doings for many years.

Billy was probably the most popular figure ever to appear in schoolboy annuals, not to mention strips, radio and record. Heaven only knows why — even his creator, Frank Richards, admits Billy's shortcomings.

Book of the week

"His fingers are always sticky, and he often gropes in sticky pockets with sticky fingers for a coin which he thinks he may have forgotten, but which isn't there. He is not very fond of washing. He does wash, but the other boys often describe it as a catlick.

"Bunter is certainly the stupidest boy in the Remove, but he has rather a gift of cunning. He is simple but at the same time a little sly. Bunter wanders from the truth without realising what he is doing."

Delight

The plain truth is that **YAROOH! A FEAST OF FRANK RICHARDS** (Eyre and Methuen, \$14.99) is likely to bring every once-upon-a-time Bunter fan out of hiding and into the bookshops.

It is a delight of a book, an incredible collection of Bunter masterpieces, school stories, adventure larks, song lyrics and comic verses.

For Bunter fans, it is a joy to wade through scenes such as Bunter badly translating some Latin:

noctem plurima volvens — Aeneas rolled over during the night.

"Oh my hat," gasped Bob Cherry involuntarily. "Ha, ha, ha."

"Silence!" Quelch almost roared. "Bunter how dare you?"

"Iss-isn't that right, sir?" stammered Bunter.

"Upon my word! You have no knowledge whatever of this passage in Virgil. How dare you utter such absurdities."

"Oh crikey," gasped Bunter. "You beast, Skinner." It dawned on his fat mind that Skinner had been pulling his fat leg.

Later, Skinner, who had whispered the wrong translation to Bunter gets his just deserts with:

"Such a practical joke should be severely punished. I think you fellows will agree."

"Hear, hear." "Duck him!"

Splash! There was a gurgling sound from Skinner as his head went over the rim of the mountain into the water. It came out



Crikey, someone's being beastly to Bunter a gain . . . an illustration from Yaroooh! A Feast Of Frank Richards

dripping. "Oooogh! Grooogh! Legol! Gurrgh! gurgled Skinner. "Give him another." Splash. "Wurrrrggh! Urrrggh!" "Now you rotter — " "Wurrrrggh!"

Fortune

God English it may not be, but it made Frank Richards a fortune. Richards was born Charles Hamilton in 1876

and died in 1961. He was probably one of the most prolific writers ever to put pen to paper.

His total output was words, and his works, more than 72 million, came in all shapes and sizes — latin verses to cowboy adventures, melodramas to romances, thrillers to television scripts.

He used 28 different nom de plumes for the several dozen different papers and magazines he

wrote for. At 30 he was writing a novel a week, and at 80 was still capable of producing 250,000 words a year.

This book, fascinating as it is, represents less than 0.1 per cent of Richards's output in the 60 years he was writing.

It is edited by Gyles Brandreth, who tries very hard to capture the cream of Richards's work in a very short space.

It works well. What makes the book

even more acceptable is the fact that a fair amount of the stuff has never been printed before. While a large bit of the book is pure schoolboy saga — Hard Lines, Just Like Bessie Bunter and Exit Bunter — there is also a fair representation of Richards's talent in other directions.

Songs

There is a Wild West adventure, a murder mystery and one of the cases of that super-

duper spoof sleuth, Herlock Shoimes of Shaker Street.

There is also a pair of interesting songs written on the occasion of the Abdication crisis in 1936.

Neither is flattering to Wallis Simpson!

"It was sung like this By a Yankee Miss Who was married but not for long, oh, It's the song of a Simpson pale and wan, Who left her Teddy and went to Cannes And was photographed with a Brownlow man. For she was a flighty lady."

Richards is at his finest when he is writing school songs: "A man doesn't come to Barcroft to learn But because his dear Pater has money to burn. The rottenest thing you can say of a chap Is to call him a swot, or a greaser or sap. At Barcroft we disdain to learn at all, But think, you men, of Speaker in Big Hall, And the pots on the side-board in silver ranks, Who cares if the brains are all perfect blanks?"

But the pick of the book for Australian readers must be the song that begins:

"Olim sedebat prope ripam fluminis, Solus grassater sub umbra jagi, Et cantabat donec aestuaret in cortina aqua, Veni ut saltemus, Matilda, veni!"

It is the opening lines of *Waltzing Matilda*, in Frank Richards's finest Latin.