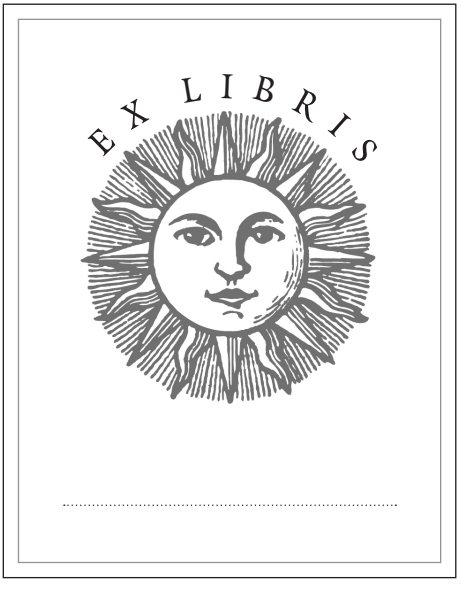
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Nemo's ALMANAC

A Quiz for Book Lovers

Edited by Ian Patterson

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INTRODUCTION

I first encountered the literary quiz called *Nemo's Almanac* round about 1990, when Alan Hollinghurst was the editor. A friend read an article about it and sent it to me, and I was immediately captivated by the small, slightly austere pamphlet with its thematically organised and, I thought, completely mysterious quotations. For months I tried to track them down, discovering new reference books in the library, keeping my increasingly dog-eared *Nemo* in my pocket all the time, phrases sometimes running round and round in my head like earworms. I still didn't do very well: my first score was 142 out of a possible 730. But I was hooked.

And I am not the only one to have fallen for its charm. *Nemo's Almanac* has been quietly appearing every year since 1892. The first issues were called *Nemo's Illustrated Almanac* and had a brief and apt quotation as a legend running along the top of the front cover. (In 1895 it was 'Wit's Pedlar', the following year 'This fellow picks up wit as pigeons peas'.) In recent years it has settled down to a regular pattern of quotations arranged according to monthly themes, but when it started it was much more varied. For a start, it was an actual almanac, including memorable anniversaries, phases of the moon, saints' days and the like. A Twickenham widow and governess called Annie E. Larden started selling it to a range of subscribers in 1892 as a quiz that had 'evolved ... from a holiday task set for her charges'.

More than a century has passed since then, and although it has changed considerably over the years, the Almanac is still

going strong; in 1997 Alan Hollinghurst passed the editorship on to the late Gerard Benson, poet and anthologist (and one of the Barrow Poets, for readers with long memories); he was followed ten years later by the poet, actor and broadcaster Nigel Forde, who in 2016 handed the editorship to me. I hope that this book will attract many more competitors to the annual. The cultural world the competition finds itself in today is very far removed from its innocent earlier years. The internet has made it possible to track down even the most recondite of quotations in almost no time at all, which means that it ought to be possible to polish off a whole *Nemo* in an afternoon.

But why would anybody want to do that? If you deny yourself the instant gratification of Google and the vast array of available databases, you find that a whole hinterland of investigative possibility opens up. Finding quotations without electronic assistance means reading (or re-reading) novels, flipping through volumes of poetry and prose, poring over anthologies of writing from the last five centuries, day after day, month after month, for the best part of a year; looking for some half-remembered turn of phrase or description or snatch of dialogue, all for the unparalleled pleasure of the moment of discovery. And there are plenty of other pleasures, even sociable ones, to be found on the way ('Hey, listen, I didn't know X had written poems like this, did you?' and 'You remember when I said Y was such a turgid writer, and you disagreed? Well I've just been re-reading him, and I was right.') You can ask the advice of everyone you know, friends and relations, workmates, casual acquaintances. Some of the quotations, if I'm anything to go by, stick in your mind forever. Lines from Hugh MacDiarmid's poem, 'On a Raised Beach', for instance: 'I study you glout and gloss, but have / No cadrans to adjust you with' ran round my brain for so long that I'll never forget them. And for no particular reason, Edith Sitwell's words 'Said the musty Justice Mompesson' stuck

too, probably because of the half-rhyme between 'musty' and 'Justice'. It's a matter of time. Like slow food, or long-distance walking, undertaking this might seem a luxury, a self-indulgence, or a waste of time, but like them it can be – and I would argue it is – beneficial and restorative. Competitors who subscribe to the pamphlet Almanac always have the best part of a year to work out their answers and send them in, so there's space for obsession to take hold, and plenty of time for leisurely investigations. The quotations in *Nemo's Almanac* often contain passing clues to the author's identity – some stylistic signature, some internal allusion or reference, or just the subject matter; but it can take a long time musing on them before they swim into focus. Writers are all different, just as people are different, and it's only by absorbing their work slowly that the range of their world view emerges.

In recent years, something of this pleasure has been lost. Our grandparents and their grandparents were used to storing things in their memories – information, stories, scraps of verse or whole poems, songs, hymns, chunks of the Bible. All this is differently available to us in our reliance on our electronic resources. The advantage we have is that most questions can be answered almost immediately. The disadvantage is that the knowledge (or information) we get that way seems to have less purchase on our minds and can disappear as quickly as it comes. In many ways, *Nemo's Almanac* might seem a strange and quaint survival, despite the extent to which it has changed since the 1890s, but though at first acquaintance it might appear out of place in the twenty-first century, in fact it is more engaging than ever. Both the process of searching and the writings themselves can strengthen parts of the mind the internet cannot reach. The rhythms of poetry, the balance and structure of well-written prose, the patterning of life into language – these can all take a stronger hold in our minds than the endless flow of information that now defines our lives. It also broadens our knowledge; speaking just for

myself, I know that taking part in the competition over the last twenty-five years has led me to read hundreds of writers, and quantities of novels and poems I might never have thought of reading otherwise, from the poetry of Jan Struther, Charles Cotton and T. E. Brown to novels by Thackeray, William Plomer and May Sinclair, and I'm sure that the experience has widened my appreciation and deepened my understanding. And of course I've read many more novels, plays, and poems that *didn't* contain the quotation I was looking for than those that did – and that's good, too.

A hundred years ago, before they were abandoned, the direct questions in *Nemo* reflected a very different world. I don't know, for example, how I would set about answering a question like this one from 1902: 'By what three virtues is the frame of British freedom to be sustained?' (please don't send in your suggestions). Others were more allusive than this, such as 'How did Aunt Deborah know that the Squire was a bachelor?': hard to answer if you haven't read *Kate Coventry* by Whyte Melville, which these days practically nobody (including me) has. They sound halfway between crossword clues and the kind of questions favoured by Radio 4's 'Round Britain Quiz', or the Christmas quiz that appears in the *Guardian* each year set for the pupils of King William's College in the Isle of Man. *Nemo*'s quotations, because they are just quotations, have none of this cryptic impenetrability. They are just quite hard to pin down. Not all of them – some are quite straightforwardly recognisable. But most take a bit of puzzling over and a bit of research.

The tone and the competitors have changed, too. In the early Almanacs, there was a note to reassure readers that 'Biblical allusions are never intended or allowed.' And as Alan Hollinghurst points out in his history of the quiz, there were some encouraging patriotic themes in the wartime editions. There are plenty of notable names among past competitors, too: bishops and aristocrats, civil servants,

writers and academics (the literary critic Dame Helen Gardner was apparently famous for talking about nothing else at dinner parties and Oxford high tables, and made her research students look for answers, but to her great chagrin never actually achieved full marks, despite being a frequent runner-up). But while new names are added each year, the pseudonyms that many competitors once used have fallen out of fashion. Gone are 'The Mollpolls' and 'Merrytwang', 'Yam', 'Hilarius', and 'Badger', although one or two, like 'Gli Amici', still survive. As you enter into the quiz, and join the historic ranks of *Nemo* competitors, perhaps you will be tempted to resurrect this tradition and come up with your own. I still haven't settled on one myself, after nearly thirty years; but as editor, my pleasure has to come from choosing the quotations rather than tracking them down.

NEMO'S FIRST CENTURY

Alan Hollinghurst

For the first five years of its existence *Nemo's Almanac* was an almanac in more than name: the pages of questions faced wood-cuts of well-loved scenes (University College, Aberystwyth, Bridlington Harbour, The Old Sulphur Well, Harrogate) and a full calendar of anniversaries: Sydney lit by gas (25 May 1841), earthquake at Menton (24 February 1887), Oldham Theatre burnt (6 April 1878), suicide of Admiral Fitzroy (30 April 1875), the Clerkenwell explosion (13 December 1867), birth of the Duchess of Albany (17 February 1861) – a catalogue of forgotten triumphs and calamities. If the early issues were rather improving in tone, that must be put down to the profession of the first Nemo, Annie E. Larden, a Twickenham governess who evolved the publication from a holiday task set for her charges, who gave marks for 'neatness' and 'intelligence', and who observed drily in her first annual notes that 'Competitors are advised to persevere'. For all this the first edition was 'wonderfully successful' (it made a profit of £5) and its formula was clearly one that touched on a British passion for national literature and history and a fondness for amateur sleuthing.

Literary quotations were interspersed with quite wide-ranging questions – neither easy. One speciality was the characterless one-liner ('The leaves fell russet golden and blood-red', 'The sweetest song ear ever heard'); another the query either tediously particular ('How many persons connected with the Royal Family have been in the Navy since the Accession of Henry VIII?') or impossible to ascertain

('What was the favourite colour of the ancient Irish?' – saffron, apparently). Clearly competitors thrived on these; in 1894 the question 'Did Oliver Cromwell use blotting paper?' drew a deeply researched answer from 'a competitor at the Cape'. Mrs Larden's farewell number asked recklessly for contestants to 'Mention some remarkable events in history of which you have been personally aware' – and in 'Old Nemo's last words' the following year (her retirement was as protracted as that of some great diva) she took the self-made opportunity to reminisce. She was 70 at the time and recalled gaining her 'first idea of public events from a Black Frock, worn with much pride, as mourning for William IV'. A touch miffed, one feels, that two competitors could remember the death of the Duke of York in 1827, she lets us know that Grimaldi's song, quoted in the Almanac for 1898, had been heard by her grandfather in London in 1814.

If such details open up a haunting perspective beyond the Almanac's own century, much else remains obscure. Who were the numerous competitors of these early years? Their names sound as indefinably fictional as their pseudonyms are whimsical. Pseudonyms were very much the norm, yielding up their secret only when their wearer won a prize. One longs to know more about 'Gypsy' and 'Mopsa', 'Two Bees' and 'Three Spiders', 'Lovey and Dovey', 'Tomatoes', 'Twee' and 'Mieux Sera'. 'Skids' was Mrs Pledge of Epsom; 'Botanist' the Countess of Mexborough. And who were Mrs Dobbs of Castle Dobbs, Co Antrim, Miss Clive Bayley of 'The Wilderness', Acot, Miss Ina Clogstone and Lady Blanc of the rue de la Pompe, Paris? Titled ladies abounded in the marks list, and Mrs Larden (who had dedicated early editions of the Almanac to the Duchess of Sutherland and the Duchess of Leeds) was not above preening herself on her correspondents: under the heading of 'Claims to Distinction' she pointed out that Horatia Cocles, an entrant in 1901, was 'connected with Tower Bridge'.

When Ethel Marion Atkinson takes over as editor in 1902 at the age of 25 we find a distinct change in the Almanac's character: questions are phased out until by 1911 they have virtually disappeared; and thematic setting appears for the first time ('Great Men', 'Fair Cities', 'A Family Group') and will continue through the half-century of Miss Atkinson's reign, adapting only during the two world wars to reflect events beyond the backward-looking bookishness of the competition – 'Service', 'Struggle', 'Leaders' in 1916; 'Fortitude', 'Justice', even 'Resurrection' in 1942.

The picture we piece together of her own life is an endearing one: she had been introduced to *Nemo* as a teenager by Miss Champion, for a while the editor of *Nemo*'s slightly younger sister *Hide & Seek*; an ardent Wagnerite as a young woman, she alters the entry date to accommodate her August visits to Bayreuth (the 1905 cover quotation is from *Die Meistersinger*); her home in Hersham, Surrey, is 'broken up' in 1933, when she asks competitors to tell her of 'a nice little house by the sea'; and the next year sees her in St David's, where she remains until her death in 1967 at the age of 90. In 1943 she is extending her sympathy to those who have lost their books in the blitz, and the following year she expresses (if in rather different terms) the problem which is Nemo's to this day: 'Between having no maid, nor daily help, – the garden, which *must* be done – savings group secretarial work, WI, and various other activities, it has really been difficult to find time. And house-work was the last straw!' It was during this time that the poet Katherine Watson, who seventeen years later was to become Nemo herself, was stationed at St David's and given the run of her library.

Perhaps Miss Atkinson was editor for too long. Though she lacked Mrs Larden's homiletic zeal, she was unshakeably conservative in taste, and over her half-century there is only a slight shift in the booklist on which she draws. Typical authors quoted are Owen Meredith, Bret Harte, Elizabeth

Barrett Browning, Whittier in 1909; Whyte Melville, Aytoun, Mrs Ewing in 1919 (though there are soon complaints that 'Nemo's choice of books is too modern'). In 1922, the great modernist year, the twentieth-century authors included are Binyon, Masefield and Tagore; and over the coming decades Humbert Wolfe was to be her sole concession to the new. Miss Atkinson remained in essence a Victorian, promoting the reading of her own childhood ('Macaulay's letters are not *yet* out of date') even as she realised that the world was changing around her. In her last years she seems like a figure out of Miss Mitford, making jam and bottling fruit, sending news of a snowdrift ('the lifeboat fetched provisions') and regretting that 'the splendid education of the young gives them no time for the leisurely "Culture" in which most of us were brought up'. Meanwhile her circulation had plummeted and in 1945 she had only 19 competitors.

Her successor, in 1949, was Lady Birkett, née Dorothy Forbes, the wife of Sir Thomas Birkett, who had been Sheriff of Bombay during the Great War and subsequently retired to fish and shoot on an estate at Beldorney, Aberdeenshire. They were divorced in 1923, and the following year Lady Birkett was the first Nemo to produce a book of her own, the anthology *Hunting Ways and Hunting Lays*. After that she is hard to trace, and in the late 40s and 50s is found moving between a number of addresses in Belgravia and Bayswater: a cottage, a mews house, a flat above a milliner's shop. The current Lord Birkett (no relation) recalls that his mother received a letter from her, 'suggesting that she was the senior Lady Birkett, and why didn't my mother call herself by some other title'.

Lady Birkett's reign is marked by various attempts at improving the Almanac. The prizes are doubled (to £5, £2 and 10/-); she introduces new authors (T. S. Eliot, Lytton Strachey, Carl Sandburg, Auden, MacNeice, Christopher Fry), invites competitors to name their books of the year (*Kon-Tiki* and *The Boy with a Cart* in 1950), their favourite authors (significantly

still Tennyson, Browning and Kipling; Dickens, Trollope and Lamb), and their Desert Island Books, 'as in the radio programme'. For all this, the Almanac's fortunes continued to decline, and by 1958 only 12 competitors were left.

Nonetheless, Lady Birkett was an excellent setter, who brought a new range and wit to the game; all her pages were thematic, and often on subjects, such as 'Cherry Stones' or 'Indigestion', that are not easy to find six or seven instances of. Eye trouble compelled her to give up (at I guess the age of about 70), and when Miss Watson took over in 1959 she maintained the freshness, breadth and virtuosity of her predecessor; and benefited too from some publicity – the first that the eccentric byway of the Almanac seems ever to have attracted. In 1960 a competitor had written about *Nemo* in the magazine *Books*; this lead to an article by Leonard Russell in the *Sunday Times*, which in turn stimulated a letter from Graham Greene, who had participated in a family Nemo syndicate as a boy. Circulation rose and many competitors still at work joined the list. Even so, it was only a cash injection from the US in 1966 that saved the Almanac from closure.

The demands of Miss Watson's Burford bookshop obliged her to give up in 1970, and John Fuller's accession was marked, as one might have expected from an Oxford don who is also a distinguished poet, by an increase in arcana (Coleridge notebook jottings known only to specialists, never reprinted anagrams by Joshua Sylvester) as well as in modernity (whether Empson or Highsmith, Redgrove or Angus Wilson). Publishing from his own Sycamore Press, and offering discounts for larger orders, Mr Fuller raised the circulation from 150 to 500 in three years, and a mention in the *TLS* in 1976 was to add several hundred more, many from the US. (Further publicity under the current editorship has brought the figure to 2,000* – big enough, perhaps, if the Almanac's

* This refers to Alan Hollinghurst's editorship, from 1988 to 1996.

air of innocent obscurity and cliquish obsessiveness is to be preserved.)

The social history of *Nemo's Almanac* would make a touching and revealing study. It would have to do with time and memory, class and literacy, friendship and rivalry, education and ethics. (The whole question of swopping, and indeed of cheating, over which earlier Nemos sought vainly to exercise control with bannings, penalties and separate lists for 'non-exchanging' competitors, would have to be looked into as well.) Longevity has characterised its addicts, Miss Champion (comp 1894–1930) and Miss Overton (who competed for 54 years and never won a prize) among them. The Hon Mrs Bontine ('one of the earliest Nemoites') was looking for quotations to within a fortnight of her death in 1928 at the age of 97 (though in her zeal she is outdone by Sir Charles Clay, alleged to have died with the words 'I've just found October 2' on his lips). 'Three years existence is probably the limit of an ephemeral publication like *Nemo's Almanac*', wrote Mrs Larden in 1894. Miss Atkinson planned 'a natural war death' for the competition in its fiftieth year, but was persuaded to carry on, since it was found 'a real help and relaxation in these difficult times'. As it enters its 100th year it is flourishing as never before. I hope these words will be echoed by its editor 100 years hence.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

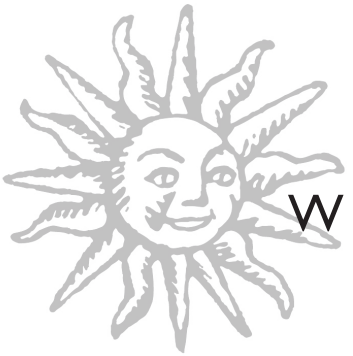
In this book, I've tried to maintain the best *Nemo* traditions while introducing a much broader range of authors. I hope there will be something for everybody: one of the great pleasures of the Almanac is discovering new writers. Sometimes just because you find you really like the style of Thomas De Quincey, the approach of Katherine Mansfield or the characters of Colm Tóibín, or sometimes because the answer is such a surprise. You thought it was modern, but it turns out to be eighteenth century (or the other way around) and you go off to find more poems by Swift or Edgell Rickword; or you just fall in love with a poet and want to read more Mary Robinson or Gertrude Stein or Kathleen Jamie. And with 440 quotations rather than the usual 73, there are plenty of writers to discover in the book.

The number of quotations has meant one departure from the normal rules. In the annual Almanac no writer is quoted more than once: here, some, including Shakespeare, are quoted several times. But there are no translations. Many of the extracts can be found in the sort of chronological anthologies published by Oxford University Press and Penguin, and books of extracts and quotations on a single theme are often useful, too. One good way to start the competition is with the theme. Each month has five separate subsections, each exemplifying a single topic. Space has been left blank for you to write this in when you have identified it. Once you have the theme, you can start thinking about when each extract might have been written, and who the author might be. Old or young? Modern

or earlier? Male or female? Novelist or essayist or poet? And when did people stop using that word or that phrase? It's a continuing process of narrowing down (although it's important to keep an open mind until you're sure about something) until you find the proper context and the original source. Don't expect instant answers; some will be easy to find, but others may take months. Some will be memorable and may stick in your mind as if you'd learned them by heart, others less so.

Unlike for the pamphlet form of the Almanac, most of the answers are provided here in the book. There is only one exception: each subsection has one answer, the seventh, missing, so that there are 60 answers that, should you want to, you can find entirely for yourselves. Apart from that, the book follows the same general structure as the Almanac: it is organised into twelve months, but instead of six quotations on a single theme, there are five themed subsections each containing seven quotations, of varying degrees of difficulty. There is also a short opening section, called 'Nemo's Welcome', of ten quotations, together with a matching closing section, 'Valedictory'. These do not include any unanswered questions.

The 60 seventh quotations, the ones with no answer provided, constitute a competition of their own. For more information about this, see www.nemosalmanac.com. But remember, the Nemo rules apply: don't use the internet to find the answers. It's a question of honour.



NEMO'S WELCOME

1.

'O! Don't cut my throat, sir,' I pleaded in terror. 'Pray don't do it, sir.'

'Tell us your name!' said the man. 'Quick!'

'Pip, sir.'

2.

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name;
So in a voice, so in a shapelesse flame,
Angells affect us oft, and worship'd bee

3.

Gus is the Cat at the Theatre Door.
His name, as I ought to have told you before,
Is really Asparagus. That's such a fuss
To pronounce, that we usually call him just Gus.

4.

What's in a name? that which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet.

5.

Perhaps being old is having lighted rooms
Inside your head, and people in them, acting.
People you know, yet can't quite name;

6.

At length, in 1812, Mr. Williams made his début on the stage of Ratcliffe Highway, and executed those unparalleled murders which have procured for him such a brilliant and undying reputation.

7.

So peaceful rests, without a stone, a name,
What once had beauty, titles, wealth, and fame.
How lov'd, how honour'd once, avails thee not,
To whom related, or by whom begot;

8.

My True Name is so well known in the Records, or Registers at *Newgate*, and in the *Old-Baily*, and there are some things of such Consequence still depending there, relating to my particular Conduct, that it is not to be expected I should set my Name, or the Account of my Family to this Work

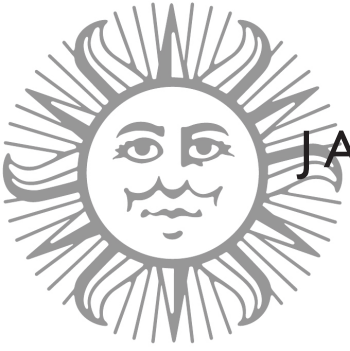
9.

I have no name
I am but two days old.—
What shall I call thee?
I happy am
Joy is my name

10.

She was likewise my School-Mistress to teach me the Language: When I pointed to anything, she told me the name of it in her own Tongue, so that in a few Days I was able to call for whatever I had a mind to. She was very good natured, and not above forty Foot high, being little for her Age.

THE ALMANAC



JANUARY

A: _____

1.

When icicles hang by the wall
    And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
    And milk comes frozen home in pail;
When blood is nipt, and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl
    Tu-whit!
Tu-who! A merry note!
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

2.

Say it is ásh-boughs: whether on a December day and furled
Fast ór they in clammyish lashtender combs creep
Apart wide and new-nestle at heaven most high.
They touch heaven, tabour on it; how their talons sweep
The smouldering enormous winter welkin!

3.

Twere wholsomer for mee, that winter did
    Benight the glory of this place,
    And that a grave frost did forbid
These trees to laugh and mocke mee to my face;
    But that I may not this disgrace
Indure, nor yet leave loving, Love let mee
    Some senslesse peece of this place bee;

4.

It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

5.

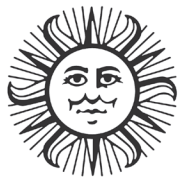
A neat, snug study on a winter's night
A book, a friend, single lady, or a glass
Of claret, sandwich, and an appetite
Are things which make an English evening pass.

6.

O come to the window, dear brother, and see
What a change has been made in the night;
The snow has quite cover'd the broad cedar-tree,
And the bushes are sprinkled with white...

7.

They watched the stellar points come out at last in a colder heaven, and then, shuddering a little, arm in arm, they turned away, with a sense that the winter night was even more cruel than the tyranny of men – turned back to drawn curtains and a brighter fire and a glittering tea-tray and more and more talk about the long martyrdom of women.



B: _____

1.

At Forty-ninth Street Peter turned to Dean. 'Beautiful morning,' he said gravely, squinting up his owlish eyes.

'Probably is.'

'Go get some breakfast, hey?'

Dean agreed—with additions.

'Breakfast and liquor.'

'Breakfast and liquor,' repeated Peter, and they looked at each other, nodding. 'That's logical.'

2.

The divine took his seat at the breakfast-table, and began to compose his spirits by the gentle sedative of a large cup of tea, the demulcent of a well-buttered muffin, and the tonic of a small lobster.

3.

I catched a good big catfish, too, and Jim cleaned him with his knife, and fried him.

When breakfast was ready we lolled on the grass and eat it smoking hot. Jim laid it in with all his might, for he was most about starved. Then when we had got pretty well stuffed, we laid off and lazied.