

THE COLLECTOR'S DIGEST

VOL. 9, No. 107

NOVEMBER, 1955

Price 1s.6d

REPRODUCTION OF COVER PICTURE "THE SURPRISE" (A.P.)
No. 8, April 23rd, 1932



Back and forth the two shifted over the sands, moving at amazing speed. Convict 99 struggled against his bonds, striving to free himself as he saw the Countess now giving ground before her opponent's attack. She was driven back—back, until she was almost against the post of the beacon, fighting desperately against the flickering staff of her opponent. (This dramatic incident from "The Red Triangle" is depicted on the cover of next week's SURPRISE. Order your copy in advance.)

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Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY,
c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
7, The Shambles, YORK.

From the Editor's Chair

ITS DRAWING NEARER: Yes, I'm talking about the Annual again for there's news about more articles that have reached me since I wrote last.

First Bill Lofts has been digging out still more information about the papers of the past. For instance, he got on the scent of what must surely have been the very first boys' periodical. The British Museum possess no copies but he was told there might be some in America, so what did he do but write to Yale University. Whilst in London Bill showed me a letter from that seat of learning giving him the information he wanted. Here's a terror when he gets on the trail, and no error.

Then came some great stuff from John L. Jukes. He calls it "I Must Have Been Tough" and the title fits. In vivid style he gives you some of his experiences in Fleet Street and its environs. They're both gay and thrilling. He tells of the occasion when he found he was being fitted for a suit intended for R.J. Macdonald and as a contrast, a hair-raising account of an adventure on Waterloo Bridge one dark night. And, oh but you must wait until you see it.

Next, Jack Cook breaks new ground with "Spotlight on Red Circle School". This in response to requests for something on the Thomson papers. Jack's done the job in real amusing style. It seems the boys did grow up at Red Circle, in somewhat haphazard fashion it seems for one youth moved up after being in one form seventeen years!

Following that came Bob Whiter's sketch for the cover. All I'll say about that is that Bob improves as he puts the years behind him.

Then just as I was about this came a fat packet from Len

Packman despite the fact that he was just getting ready to go into hospital for a spell. The packet contained the contributions from the members of the S.B. Circle, Len himself, Josie, Walter Webb, Charlie and Olive Wright, Ben Whiter and Bill Lofts. I won't attempt to deal with them individually, but I'll guarantee they'll satisfy all the Blake fans.

Now at the moment orders are running neck and neck with last year, but quite a number have come from new members. That's very gratifying of course but it means that some regulars are a little behindhand. The duplicating agency has started running off and I have risked it and ordered more copies than ever before. I'm sure you won't let any be left on my hands, still the sooner I have your orders the better for my peace of mind.

* * * * *

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE! The following advert appeared in the 'Observer' on Sunday, October 2nd:

"AUTHORS OF BOYS' STORIES: The Editors of well-known boys' papers would like to contact experienced or potential writers of adventure, sport, school, humorous stories. Payments on acceptance. Write, not call, General Editor, D.C. Thomson & Co. Ltd., 12 Fetter Lane, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4."

If you do decide to have a go, here's wishing you luck. But if you do succeed in getting into print you will have to tell us, for Thomson's, of course, don't believe in publishing authors' names; a mistake in my opinion. It's true their papers seem to be successful, nevertheless such a policy leaves something wanting - the intimate touch.

In the 'golden days' of boys' weeklies, the A.P., Pearson's Aldines' and others did give the authors' names real or otherwise, sometimes with photos and biographies and the stories were all the more interesting thereby.

Just think of how much less we should have had to write and talk about if we had never heard of Maxwell Scott, Sidney Drew, Gwyn Evans, E.S. Brooks and hundreds more. What of the thrills we got when we discovered that David Goodwin was also John Tregellis or when we deduced that Henry St. John and Mable St. John were one and the same. Above all when we learned the real truth about what some of us had been curious for years - was Frank Richards really Martin Clifford and had "they" anything to do with Charles Hamilton?

When we also learned that the same typewriter tapped out the stories of Owen Conquest, Ralph Redway, Hilda Richards and one or two more, why, we hav'n't stopped talking about it yet.

Yes, indeed, our world would have been vastly different if all the stories we loved had been written anonymously. There's a lot in a name.

Anyway if you do send a story to Thomson's and it does not drop back through your letter box "with a dull thud" be sure and let me know.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

I INTERVIEW GEORGE E. ROCHESTER

by W.O.G. Lofts

Living within a stone's throw of Victoria Station is a man who, although no longer writing boys stories, was one of the most popular pre-war authors of boys fiction. This man is George Ernest Rochester.

I was very pleased to meet Mr. Rochester one recent Sunday morning, and I greatly enjoyed several hours of interesting conversation from which I learned quite a lot about himself and his work.

The first story he wrote was for the B.O.P. (in 1926) and was entitled "FUNK". The publishers then asked him to write a serial, and this was so successful that it started him well and truly on his long career.

He holds a very fine record in the B.O.P. which has only once been surpassed, that of opening four consecutive volumes with a serial story. The record is held by Major Charles Cilson; in the Vols. 42 to 46.

He classes the B.O.P., CHUMS, and MODERN BOY as the three best publications of their kind ever produced. The writers for these papers, asserts Mr. Rochester, had a mission in life - that of inculcating the highest moral code in the reader through the medium of their works. (Charles Hamilton's work in MODERN BOY is but one proof of the truth of this assertion.)

As most MAGNET readers are aware, Mr. Rochester wrote a number of fine serials for that paper, including: "THE LOST SQUADRON", "THE FLYING SUBMARINE", "THE SEA SPIDER", "THE BLACK HAWK", "THE SHADOW OF THE GUILLOTINE" and "THE BULLDOG BREED".

Mr. Rochester wrote for the THRILLER (Weekly and Library), UNION JACK, BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY, MODERN BOY, CHUMS, SCHOOLBOYS OWN LIBRARY and, unknown to most of us, quite a lot for the Thompson Papers: WIZARD, ROVER, ADVENTURE and VANGUARD. He also wrote for the KNOCKOUT, BEANO and DANDY comics.

Deploring the present-day shortage of papers for boys - unfortunately there is no market for them - Mr. Rochester deprecates the 'comic-strip', and although offered several commissions in this field he has refused, on the grounds that he does not consider it right for a story-writer to do this type of work.

At the present time he is writing for the MIRACLE and the MIRACLE LIBRARY under the following pen names: 'Elizabeth Kent', 'Martin Hale', 'Hester Roche', and 'Allison Frazer'. He also wrote as 'Barton Furze' and 'Frank Chatham' (CHUMS), 'Hamilton Smith' (BOYS MAGAZINE) and 'Eric Roche' and 'John Beresford' (MODERN BOY). For Hutchinsons's as Mary West.

Mr. Rochester has written over seventy bound books and publishers since the war include: Epworth Press, Hutchinson, Ward Lock, C.H. Daniels and Lutterworth Press.

At one time he had copies of all the papers containing his own stories, but during the war they were destroyed by fire in the 'blitz'.

Born in Northumberland, Mr. Rochester lived for a number of years at Broadstairs.

When the war resulted in the A. Press closing down a number of their boys publications, he said it was like a knife cutting through him, and he thinks his life has been divided into two parts.

During the first World War Mr. Rochester served as a Flight Lieut. in the Royal Flying Corps, and that is why his air stories are so authentic. He was a member of the ill-fated 97th Squadron, flying bombers in the first world war. He was shot down by anti-aircraft guns behind the German lines, and was very fortunate to escape serious injury, but he was made a prisoner, and endured very great hardship during the remaining months of the war, moving from one prison camp to the other. In the last war he was in the R.A.F. Rég't.

In 1930 he killed off the "Beetle" but it drew such an outcry from readers, who wanted it to continued that he had to write "The Return of the Flying Beetle" in a later Volume. Mr. Rochester thinks that Frank Richards was the finest writer of them all, and he is very pleased that he is still writing stories with success, as he believes he deserves all the luck in the writing world that is going.

In his opinion one of the greatest school stories ever written was Talbot Baines Reed's "Fifth Form at St. Dominic's", also those by Gunby Hadath and R.S. Warren Bell in THE CAPTAIN.

The reason why he only wrote but one Sexton Blake story (S.B.L. 3rd series No. 104 "The Riddle of the Missing Wardress") is that the scope is so limited, only two stories appearing each month.

Another paper for which Mr. Rochester wrote several stories was the WESTERN LIBRARY, which ran for 110 issues.

Aged about sixtyish, but looking much younger, Mr. Rochester plans to write for the American market in the future, for he feels there is much more scope there.

(NOTE: This article is a typical example of how Bill Lofts, once he has got on the trail of an author, who's writings would be of great interest to readers of the C.D., sticks it out until he has "found his man". He had one set back, which would have made me retire in confusion, but not Bill.

Mr. Rochester by the way denies that he ever wrote under the name of John Allen, as reported in some of the earlier C.D. Annuals. He would like to know who John Allen was. H.L.)

WANTED: Bound or Loose: Gems, Magnets, Nelson Lee's, Champions, Boys Mags, Early Wizards, Rovers, Adventures, Hotspurs (Nos. 1 to 200), "Chums" 1900-20, Scout, 1908-21. Any issues No. 1 Boys Papers:- Rocket, Boys Cinema, S.O.L., Grey Friars Herald, S.B.L. (Any Series), Empire Lib., Lion Lib., etc. HAVE QUITE A FEW ODDMENTS FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE, SEND FOR LIST. J.R. SWAN, 3 FIFTH AVENUE, PADDINGTON, LONDON, W.10.

HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR ANNUAL YET?

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

I am sure you will all be pleased to hear that Len is slowly recovering from his recent illness. I should also like to thank all those who have so kindly enquired after him. He was able to sit up in bed and type out this month's 'Blakiana copy' - which is a good sign.

Don't you think Bill Lofts article on Harry Blyth was interesting. It seems incredible that over 50 years had to pass before the curtain was raised on the mystery of Sexton Blake's origin. It must surely have been a point of interest to the many lovers of the "U.J". even before some of us were born; but we shall never really know the reason for all this secrecy. I think we should all feel grateful to Bill for obtaining this information, even to the extent of travelling to Broadstairs to see Harry Blyth Junior.

JOSE PACKMAN.

MORE B.BELINGS OF BARDELL

by Victor Colby

"Eggs is eggs, and I don't hold with this labelling 'em fresh and new laid. If an egg isn't fresh new laid, they oughtn't to let it be deported. What are farms and poultry runs in the country for anyway? As I always says to the grocer, eggs can't help being suspicious coming from foreign parts thousands of miles away like Scandiwegia. And I remember my poor 'usband saying, when he was alive, that he went into the Sam Suey restaurant in Soho once upon a time, and they tried to serve him eggs deported from China. Fair green with age they were, and hard as the sole of your boot. Call them eggs! Why my 'usband said that if his teeth were not crackers, and all the mandolines in China was to offer him precious frankenstein and myrrh, he couldn't have masticulated such eggs for his meal, poached or scrambled".

(S.B.L. 2nd series 552 "The Dockyard Mystery".)

"There's a young lady come, sir, wantin' to see yer immedjit",

the old dame announced, "Mislaid she sez, though what she's been an' mislaid I couldn't figger. She's got about everything a good young gal should 'ave, an' a whole lot more besides, if you ask me. Wot with a 'ole joolry shop an' a minx coat 'arf way down to 'er ankles, an' 'eels that 'igh Pedro could good as walk under 'er hinstep, she certainly don't look like she's got anything left to mislay, unless it was an empty rouge pot".

"Never mind, Mrs. Bardell. We'll soon find out what's missing. You can show her up".

"I reckon I could show 'er up, an' without strainin' meself, neither"! Mrs. Bardell sniffed. "I'll lay she never got all them fallals an' finery honest. You 'ad better look out that she don't put somethink acrawss yer"!

(S.B.L. 3rd series 84 "The Strange Case of the Footman's Crime.")

"One of them Tottenhots you was talking about Mr. Tinker. A blackamoor - at our front door - and he says he wants Banana Blake".

"How do you do Bwana Blake", interposed a reedy voice from a little Kafir at the door.

(S.B.L. 3rd series 214 "The Mystery of the Forbidden Territory.")

"If you don't mind me mentioning it sir, bacon at one and ten a pound ain't intended to feed 'ounds with, such being a sin, to my mind, when cats meat can be obtained at a twentieth of the price".

Blake laughed and flung to Pedro the last of the rashers, which the expert caught deftly, and swallowed in one gulp.

"There!" cried the indignant Mrs. Bardell, "and quite wasted on 'im, for no mortal creatures Heaven made could possibly taste anything swallowed like that! Might as well 'ave been fried calico for all the difference 'e'd have known".

Pedro rubbed a cold nose into the old lady's hand, and her eyes softened.

"Well, sir, I ain't denying that, for a nobler dog there never was on this earth, I'm sure. But, still, to a Christian a 'ound should be a 'ound, and you can't make a sow's purse out of a silk ear".

(S.B.L. 2nd series 563 "The Blackmailed Baronet".)

A MATTER OF HONOUR

by Derek Adley

There can be no doubt about it, so far as Huxton Rymer was concerned, he was a complete out and out crook and a deadly foe; but one story published in the "Union Jack" proved that he was not without honour.

The story in question was entitled "The Case of the Stricken Outpost" which was published in "U.J." No. 1177. This was a story that took Sexton Blake all the way to the frozen Yukon to get his man, the theme of which briefly follows:-

Mr. Jacobus Gardiner, who was a partner in a firm of bankers, had been embezzling the firm's money to such an extent that it was to the stage when it was impossible even to hope that he could ever pay it back. His partner had been absent from the firm for some time, convalescing in Scotland after a serious illness, therefore he was unaware of the firm's position; but Gardiner knew it was only a matter of time before the end came and everything would be known.

As he sat going over and over his figures one night late at his office, he surprises a burglar who has broken into the building to rifle the firm's safe.

Gardiner bargains with the man and offers him his freedom if he can put him on to someone who can help him get out of the country. The burglar seizes the chance and gives Gardiner the address of a real master-mind in the underworld - none other than Huxton Rymer.

On contacting Rymer, the crooked banker came to the arrangement that he would completely drain the firm's resources and pay Rymer the sum of £20,000 to get him clear of England away from the arm of the law.

Dr. Huxton Rymer keeps his word and smuggles Gardiner out of the country, and accompanies him thousands of miles from England to a trading post in the Yukon-America.

The banker's partner, hearing the news of the firm's collapse, summons Sexton Blake to track Gardiner down and bring him back to England to pay for his crime.

Blake gets on the trail of Rymer and Gardiner, due to a bit of help from the underworld, and proceeds to track them down, right to this little trading post in the middle of nowhere.

Then came Black Death, otherwise Black Diptheria, and men were dying throughout the area. It is then that Blake comes face to

face with Rymer and asks him to hand Gardiner over; but Blake is too late, for Rymer informs him that Gardiner has died from the deadly disease.

Blake is at first taken aback, but then demands the money that Gardiner had taken out of England, a total of £70,000 in all. Rymer, however, denies all knowledge of this and defies Blake to prove otherwise.

As conditions worsen at the trading post, due to the spreading of the diphtheria scourge, Blake more or less forces Rymer to accompany him with a dog team to the nearest town for help, a feat that is regarded by the trappers as impossible due to a raging blizzard that had lasted for weeks, and also because of the distance being 400 miles.

Eventually they make the trip, but on the way Rymer is struck down by cramp; he then tries to persuade Blake to go on without him, but Blake, knowing that no man could survive alone in the snow, performs the heroic feat of conveying Rymer the remaining thirty miles to the town - and after travelling 370 miles in impossible conditions, that was really something.

Then came the whole point of this article, for after they had reached the safety of the town, Rymer called Blake to his bedside and confessed to the place where the money was hidden. He also honestly admits that he would have liked to have accompanied Blake on the return journey, had it not been for his leg. The narrative reads as follows:-

"I'd go if I could, but I can't move my leg. You don't think I am malingering?"

"No, I believe you!"

Rymer was silent for a few moments, then:

"I'm not forgetting what you did for me. If you reach White Buffs safely and will go to my shack, you will find what you want".

"You mean?"

"Beneath the floorboard under the lower bunk, you will find most of the money that Gardiner got away with. He gave me £20,000 to help him. Nearly all my share is there too - in American dollar notes. There are some papers of Gardiner's as well. And if you want to take me back on that warrant, I give you my word, I shall be here when you come back"....

Yes, Huxton Rymer certainly had a code of honour, even if he was a crook; and I like to think of him as my favourite criminal

character, for he was truly a foe worthy of Sexton Blake.

EXPERIENCES OF A SEXTON BLAKE WRITER

by Walter Webb

PART ONE

If there was one thing about which the various editors of the Sexton Blake stories prided themselves, it was the fact that their many authors had visited, and were fully conversant with, the places about which they wrote, and that the situations introduced into the stories of the famous sleuth were experiences shared by the writers themselves in the course of their colourful and eventful careers.

Most extensively travelled of all was George Hamilton Teed, perhaps the most popular, but certainly the most famous of the Blake writers, who, having been born in the province of New Brunswick, lived in Paris for many years, between which times he travelled round the world and obtained first hand knowledge of the places and peoples he later came to write about so vividly and with such conviction.

Rex Hardinge was another well-known author-traveller, and to him the call of the African jungle seemed irresistible. There were others, too, such as Andrew Murray, who spent many years out East; Cecil Hayter, who gave us those cheery characters Lobangu and Sir Richard Losely; W.W. Sayer, who, as Pierre Quiroule, brought many hours of enjoyment to thousands of Blake readers with his tales of Granite Grant and Mademoiselle Julie; Stanley Gordon Shaw, whose special offering to the Blake fan was the unfolding of the exploits of Janssen the Moonlayer, nearly all of which took place in the Canadian North West. No character quite like Janssen ever appeared outside the pages of the "Union Jack"; he was a most original creation, and reading a story in which he was one of the leading figures one could always be assured of being taken into the right atmosphere, for Gordon Shaw, when a youth of seventeen, went to the land of promise, and worked there on farms, lumber camps, and cattle ranches during his stay of nearly seven years as an emigrant. A very well-developed youth for his age, young Shaw was as muscular as a fully grown man.

It was at the end of March 1901 that the coming young Sexton Blake writer arrived at the "shanty" town of Clearwater, Manitoba, to experience the first of a long string of disappointments. With

nobody to meet him on stepping off the C.P.R. train, he had perforce to make the seven-mile journey to the farm of his employer on foot, due to the roads being so bad with the spring thaws and floods that no wheeled vehicle could traverse them.

The author's first experience was in the art of wood-cutting which, at the end of the first day, saw him with a back which would not bend and with his hands raw with blisters. Two weeks later, commencing 14 April, with the ground being dry enough to seed, young Shaw was awakened at the unearthly hour of 4.30 a.m. and ordered into the fields, where he worked like a nigger, clearing out stables, feeding horses, milking cows, harnessing, and filling bags with seed, after which, with a three-horse team, he was set to the job of seeding.

It was work all the time, right from 4.30 in the morning to 9 o'clock in the evening, with five hours spent on Sunday doing the numerous odd jobs. For this the author was paid five dollars (\$1) a month, in addition to board, lodging and washing, rising to fifteen dollars at the end of the third month. By this time young Shaw was well of his stiffness, and was finding it far easier to do the work expected of him, his general condition having so improved that he could lift weights that would have defeated him six months before.

During the winter the author and his employer had a disagreement, young Shaw having become sick of the work he was called upon to do during the cold season, and felt he could do better elsewhere. Consequently he threw in his lot with his employer's nearest neighbour, who lived but a mile distant. Shaw's new employer was only too pleased to take him on, and from that time the author found things much easier for him, for he made many friends, something he hadn't had time to do before, and was invited out to dances and other functions.

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HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

CURIOSITIES: You'll remember that last month I told you that some C.D's had turned up in the British Embassy, Tokio. Well, Ben Whiter now says in a letter:

"The chap who left the C.D's in the Embassy was named Johnny Bull! This information came from our new member out there Leslie Rowley, but where Johnny Bull obtained them from perhaps you can tell."

I'm blown if I can but I'd certainly like to get in touch with the one in real life who bears the name of one of the Famous Five.

Following that came a very interesting letter from Percy North of Basingstoke. As you will see there's another name curiosity in his last sentence.

"Hurree Singh at Netherby. This article was very interesting, and bears out my conjecture mentioned by Anthony Baker on p. 201 of the July C.D. In the copy of the Marvel which I possess, "The Boys of Beechwood", Netherby boys are transferred to Beechwood Academy in Sussex, Inky among them. Netherby had to close down owing to an epidemic of scarlet fever, "Crimson Fever" the Nabob called it. All the Aliens who eventually went to Greyfriars are featured, and the French master at Beechwood was a Monsieur Morny. I wonder if he was any relation to the one at St. Jim's.

Martin Clifford was named as the author of the Netherby - Beechwood story, and is therefore the creator of the character of our dusky chum from Bhanipur, not Frank Richards as is generally supposed. One more reason why Frank should look after Martin during the latter's retirement.

Did Uncle Benjamin mention, while you were in London, that I heard a broadcast one Wednesday afternoon, in August or early September, during the programme "Indian Summer", and lasting, I should think, about seven or eight minutes? The talk was given by a fellow who had found some Magnets in a loft, about twenty or so copies. "Yellow covered Magnets" he called them, and mentioned a picture of Billy Bunter in a sampan. I've got all the China series of 1930 except the last copy, but I think the broadcaster must have been referring to an inside picture in Magnet 1181. This

makes the chap who gave the talk to be about forty years old, as the picture I mentioned is one that he remembered seeing in his youth.

I can't remember all that the chappie said, besides Bunter he mentioned Wharton and Cherry, and remarked upon the high moral tone of the stories, achieved without preaching, cads and bullies getting their just deserts and right triumphant in the end, etc. He seemed to think that the Greyfriars stories are well worth re-reading, a thought with which we heartily concur, suitably qualified by the inclusion of St. Jim's and Rookwood within the sentiment.

He also remarked that one of the chief claims to fame of W.W. Jacobs was his creation of the fictitious Wharfedale. (I haven't read any of these stories, but I think I have the name right). The inference being that Frank Richards, judged by the same standard, has an equal claim. A perusal of the list of "schools" in the C.D. would cause the broadcaster to raise his eyebrows somewhat!

He mentioned that he passed the Magnets on to his son, and upon asking the lad his opinion of them he was told "I'll let you know when I've read the lot".

Well, it's comforting to know that not every modern boy is crying for the moon.

The name of the broadcaster? Richards!"

-----ooOoo-----

Now you'll all have experienced or heard stories of how the 'Magnet' attracted, still does for that matter, but this little gem will take some beating. A new member confesses on his "Who's Who" form for the Annual that his best man had to drag him away from reading a 'Magnet' on his wedding day! My word, what a lot Frank Richards has to answer for.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 13 - Magnets Nos. 945 - 948.

The Shell at Greyfriars was really more interesting than the Fourth Form. It is true that the supercilious Temple and the unscrupulous Angel both played their part in the stories, but the Shell had the more promising characters. The ill-tempered Mr. Hacker, for instance, was far more prominent than the unassuming Mr. Capper, and, though a little of Temple went a long way, one could never have too much of Hobson and Hoskins.

In those far-off red Magnet days, when Coker was in the Shell,

he had been Hobson's bosom pal. After Aunt Judy had secured Coker's remove into the Fifth Form, he snubbed Hobson at once. Poor old Hobson! He was rugged, honest, and simple; he thought the world of his study-mate Hoskins, the mad musician of Greyfriars, who so carefully cultivated an artistic curl on his forehead. Hoskins was clever enough to compose symphonies and sonatas using minor ninths and consecutive fifths despite the disapproval of the music master. Hobson loyally listened to Hoskins playing the violin, and even pretended to share his study-mate's indignation over the fact that pianos were not allowed in the studies. This ill-assorted couple played their greatest part in Magnets 945 - 948 the series about Pedrillo, the boy acrobat.

When Zorro's circus came to Friardale, Hobson received a letter from his father, Sir James Hobson, forbidding him to go to the circus, and the mystery was heightened when Sir James was seen visiting the circus himself to see Senor Zorro. Pedrillo, the acrobat, was injured during the performance, and Dr. Locke kindly let him stay at the school sanatorium. Later, when it was discovered that Pedrillo was an English boy who had been kidnapped in his youth, the Head arranged for him to enter the Shell; of course, he was placed in Hobson's study.

The reader was under no delusions about Sir James' complicity, though it was necessary to wait for the end of the series to learn all the whys and the wherefores. Pedrillo turned out to be Hobson's cousin Peter, but the mystery is really not the major point of interest in the story, any more than the secret of the Chuzzlewits can be said to take precedence over Mr. Pecksniff and Mrs. Camp (which is the reason why the work of Charles Dickens and Charles Hamilton alike can be read over and over again with no diminution of pleasure). For the collector, the chief item of interest in the schoolboy circus series is the light it sheds on Study No. 3 in the Shell passage. It is to be hoped that much more will be heard from this quarter in the near future.

R E V I E W S

"BACKING UP BILLY BUNTER" by Frank Richards. (Cassell's 7/6).
by Eric Fayne

A first-class story which should be a complete joy to all Frank Richards' countless admirers. Though the plot becomes

obvious after the first few chapters, it moves at a spanking pace, and the natural dialogue and delightful summer settings make it a joy from the first line to the last. That irascible old land-owner, Sir Hilton Popper, makes a welcome re-appearance to assert once more his doubtful claims to the island in the river. Billy Bunter is slightly more subdued than usual, and is no less welcome for that. In fact, the subtle pen-picture of the fat junior trying to conquer his inherent laziness is a real gem.

Vernon-Smith is probably the star of the story, and it is perhaps the best characterisation of him that we have enjoyed for many years. It can, in fact, be said that Frank Richards never puts a foot wrong in his latest offering, and it is a splendid addition to the bookshelf of every household.

SAYS JACK WOOD

BACKING UP BILLY BUNTER, the latest novel to come from Frank Richards, was awaited with some eagerness by many of us, not only because of it's being a new Bunter book to be read and cherished with the rest, but especially because it brings back to the old partnership the artist's pen of C.H. Chapman, an artist whose long association with Mr. Richards and the old Magnet we ever recall with joy. This is, of course, the first of the Bunter books that Mr. Chapman has illustrated, and he takes up the task on the lamented death of R.J. Macdonald, with whom we were more familiar as an illustrator of the famous St. Jim's characters in the Gem.

When Mr. Macdonald first began drawing for the Bunter books, I recall that we criticised his unfamiliarity with the Greyfriars characters, but with experience he was making them more as we oldsters remembered them. Now, it seems, in many of the illustrations, that someone will have to send Mr. Chapman a copy of some of his former work to refresh his memory, for while Bunter is a recognisable character I'm afraid that many of the others have indeed altered with the passing of the years. At least, we may thank Mr. Chapman for remembering that the Greyfriars colours were blue and white, and not red and white, but our old caps, sir, had, I venture to think, only one ring and not two.

But, oh Mr. Chapman! Smithy has changed only a little; there is, for instance, the familiar prominent nose and the supercilious look. On the other hand, the Famous Five and Dr. Locke are almost unrecognisable by the old standards. Please, someone, send the

artist an old-time drawing of them!

But this is, after all, only minor criticism for the artist's well-known expertness in portraying a scene from a purely scenic point of view has not deserted him, and there is some excellent craftsmanship to be found in this direction.

So far as the story itself is concerned, Mr. Richards is in fine form, and I feel sure that those readers who used to write to the editor of the Magnet asking for less Bunter would now hide their heads in shame. Here we have a new Billy, actuated by thoughts of others -- a possibility which would have been far from the author's mind in the early days. Now, hit by the belief in his father's sudden poverty, he really determines, backed up by the Famous Five, to study hard for a scholarship, and not, mind you, merely with the idea of hoodwinking old Quelch.

Happily for those of us who prefer our Billy as the familiar fat fozzler with his eye mainly on the tuck shop and Mrs. Mible's superb plum cakes, he is back to normal after some crafty work by a spiteful, but, as always, lucky Smithy has retrieved his father's fortunes and led to the arrest of the absconding chauffeur. As the curtain falls, "I'll watch it", gasped the Fat Owl. "No more swotting, no more extra toot, oh, crumbs. Now it's all right." Evidently the career of a swot was over! (Whoever was going to bag that schol at the end of term his name was not going to be William George Bunter. "The wicked had ceased from troubling and the weary Owl was at rest: after so many trials and tribulations Billy Bunter was enjoying life once more." And so are we, Messrs. Richards and Chapman.

'BILLY BUNTER'S OWN' MANDEVILLE 8/6d.

It is good to see another issue of 'Billy Bunter's Own' Annual - the 3rd - in the bookshops. The bright cover is by C.H. Chapman, with Bunter dressed in hunting pink, taking a toss from a spirited bay.

The book reminds me of Magnet No. 682. Why? Well, the title of that particular story was 'Thin Bunter!' for alas, Billy is again losing weight and getting quite slim - only 132 pages. However, he is in better case than Tom Merry, who has faded away completely. No 'Tom Merry's Own' this time.

There are seven stories in the new Annual - all by Charles Hamilton & Co. Three are about Greyfriars, and one dealing with

an episode at Cliff House.

The remaining three are about 1. Felgate, (where is that place?) 2. Dolcot. 'Science Fiction' this! and 3. Kenya and the Mau-Mau. Quite gentlemanly chaps, who talk like Rider Haggard's noble Zulus.

The piece de resistance is 'Wibley to the Rescue' (72 pages). An amusing yarn, with Johnny Bull saying 'I told you so' on every other page. In the tale Wibley repeats his well-known turn as Mossoc. The editor has to apologise for a blunder by the artist on page 53, where Loder is shown receiving the contents of a paint-pot. In the story Monsieur Charpentier gets the stuff. Oh, Mr. Chapman.

Well, I read it all too quickly, and thought sadly of the days when a 2d. Magnet would keep me happy for days. Still, we must be thankful for what we receive, but I must shed a tear for the absence of the St. Jim's and Rookwood chaps. They were stout fellows.

I hope 'Billy Bunter's Own' No. 3 will sell very well, but I rose from the table still hungry.

G.A.

FRANK RICHARD'S MOST GRIPPING SERIES

By Basil Adam

While on holiday at Grange on the borders of Westmorland, I happened to be out walking in rather wild and lonely countryside, when suddenly the sky darkened in, and there was the low rumble of thunder. Just at that moment I came out of heavy wooded country into parkland studded with fine trees. Set at an angle in one corner of the park was a long low built country house with mullioned windows. It looked dark and sinister against the lowering sky.

Without thinking, 'Ravenspur Grange' flashed across my mind. That is how I came to write this article on the most gripping series ever written by Frank Richards.

The story goes with a bang, right from the very first chapter, when Harry Wharton & Co. find the body of a dead man almost at the gates of Ravenspur Grange. And it grips you until the very last chapter of the series, when Ferrers Locke puts the handcuffs on Black Edgar, alias Edgar Ravenspur.

In this series, the thrills come thick and fast. The four numbers of the 'Magnet' containing this story are written in a

powerful, direct and compact style, so different from many other Greyfriars series, which appeared to be rather drawn out. I remember in this splendid series, murder following attempted murder with swift precision. The atmosphere of gloom and horror which hung over Ravenspur Grange, simply held you in its spell.

Ferrers Locke must have his full praise but one could not help feeling a sneaking admiration for Mr. Garnish of Scotland Yard, before he met his violent end.

I have often wondered why Frank Richards did not write more stories in this more compact, and yet most interesting, style.

However, we must thank him for this masterpiece which is one of the jewels of my collection.

But Anthony Baker did not agree with Bill Champion in a recent article for he argues:-

Christ Church Vicarage,
Barnet, Herts.

Surely Mr. Champion was leaping a little hastily to his conclusion that Johnny Bull, Herries and Lovell are "as like as the proverbial peas in the pod."

It does not say much for Frank Richards' genius if he merely reproduced the same sort of character at each of his 3 main schools - and, of course, he did no such thing. Bull has an irritatingly high percentage of common sense, and his level-headedness is almost monotonous. Lovell, on the contrary, is something of a fathead - not much commonsense in his head. He is the one who has fantastic schemes which never come off. Can you imagine that from Bull? In Owen Conquests words "It was not to be denied that Lovell had a somewhat hot and hasty temper." Has Bull got a hot and hasty temper? I think not. He may grumble if the others do not follow his words of wisdom - but nothing more.

Herries has, perhaps been more overshadowed by other leading lights at St. Jims, but it is easy enough to see that he has less temper than Lovell and more commonsense but with none of the stolidity of old Johnny.

MAGNET TITLES (Cont'd.) 1503, The Boy with an Enemy; 1504, The Way of the Transgressor; 1505, Billy Bunter's Christmas Party; 1506, The Cruise of the "Firefly". 1507, The Man from the Sea; 1508, The Ship of Secrets; 1509, Mutiny on the "Firefly".

Nelson Lee Column



by JACK WOOD

NOSTAW, 328 Stockton Lane,
YORK.



In last year's C.D. Annual I briefly referred in my survey of the Nelson Lee story to a few numbers of the Nugget Library, a threepenny publication which appeared in two issues per month in the early 1920's. This month I thought my readers might be interested to hear about one or two of these stories, which have come into my possession since I wrote the Annual article.

The first to which I want to refer, therefore, is No. 45, The White Man's Secret, or the case of the Ward in Chancery, which is said to be specially written for the Library and which is most notable for the fact that it tells of the first meeting of Nelson Lee, his boy assistant, Nipper, and Professor Kew and County Carlac. The two latter individuals, of course, are well-known in the Blakiana field, but they made several appearances in which they were opposed to Nelson Lee and Nipper -- in the later Nelson Lee Library issues, of course, these appearances were in repeat Blake stories with the names of the detective altered, but in the Nugget I think they may be said to be original Lee stories. Possibly reprints from the Boy's Friend or the Boy's Realm, but still Lee, and not Blake, yarns.

Presumably, too, the author was Andrew Murray, creator of Kew and Carlac, who we find in No. 45 are on the track of a million pound legacy.

Early in the story Nipper finds himself having a friendly fight with the real heir to the millions, and from that moment the two are friends with whom Lee is linked in the search for a fortune and

the secret of a white man's grave in German East Africa. Both the youngsters are kidnapped in turn, and in following up the search Lee gives a description of a person concerned to Supt. Marsden of Scotland Yard, who tells the famous detective that "if you've not met the man we know as Professor Kew, then you've certainly described him in a most extraordinarily close way."

Lee replies, "Professor Kew. I don't remember having heard of him or met him." The Supt. continues, "No, perhaps not. His activities were centred round a hospital, in the first place, and, indeed, the man was quite a genius. For many years he was head of a big London hospital, until his crimes were revealed, and he had to flee the country. For some time now he has associated himself with another criminal, a man of a very different type, Ivor Carlac. Between them these two have ranged all over Europe and America, and I should think that they are known to the police all over the world."

Marsden goes on to say that Kew has slipped back into London, but unfortunately has no special brand of crime. He is always after the big stuff, an opportunist taking whatever comes his way. He is 5ft. lin. in height; head abnormally large; neck 14 ins; small hands and feet; has the appearance of being a hunchback.

Lee soon runs into Kew and his companion, but not for long, and an arduous chase across East Africa follows before the case is cleared up and the true heir inherits. Kew and Carlac disappear to turn up in future stories, of course. Pity we have no master crooks of their calibre in current literature.

In the companion number, No. 46, *The Man in the Copper Casket*, Lee and Nipper meet up with another popular Murray character, the famous adventurer aristocrat, the Hon. John Lawless. In this, owing to a curious incident when Nipper's motor cycle breaks down and he becomes interested in a derelict lorry and sees a copper casket, the Gray's Inn Road pair become involved with Lawless and his black valet, Sam, in high politics.

The casket contains the body of a European President suffering from mental paralysis. Lawless, an ex-King's Messenger and a very wealthy man with a penchant for the unconventional, plays a leading part in a grand adventure story as a result of which Lee is awarded the Gold Star of a Balkan Order, and Nipper the Silver Cross.

In No. 47, the third story to which I want to draw your attention Lee and Nipper make the acquaintance of another notable

Murray creation, Trouble Nantucket, the American detective. The story, *The Bridge Builders*, opens with Nipper lounging in the window of the Gray's Inn Road chambers, overcome by the lassitude of the spring holiday feeling.

There enters Trouble Nantucket. "A tall individual, very loosely built, and his face was a long, cadaverous one on which there was stamped a melancholy expression which never seemed to change. The pointed chin, the long nose, the sleepy eyes added to the general mournful appearance of the countenance, and Nipper, who was quite a student of physiognomy in his way, wondered just who this individual could be."

"This individual", of course, was the American detective, Septimus Nantucket, who is searching for Walter Brisdale, an English head of an engineering college in Sencutt Main, U.S.A. The search, in which Lee and Nipper join, brings thrills and romance amid the wild, lonely scenery of the west country before the secrets of a new bridge are finally placed in the right quarter.

To find the scene in Dorset, all Lee's knowledge of tracing the histories of the various counties has to be brought to bear, but quickly Lee's files give up the secret of Bleakridge, an old Roman camp, and the inhabitants of an old asylum there come into a grim picture which causes the reader many a shudder. As Professor Edwards might say, "Just the stuff for the kiddywinkies!"

However, there it is. I hope my recollections of three grand old stories may awaken some memories at least. Even to modern ears the stories ring true, and make enjoyable reading amid a spate of different - and indifferent - literature.

Old Boys' Book Club

LONDON SECTION

"Cherry Place" was the venue of the second Autumn meeting, held on Sunday, October 16th. Unfortunately Len Packman was unable to be present, owing to indisposition and Bob Blythe due to removals. However several of the old faithfuls turned up and the attendance was excellent. Whilst the correspondence was being read, a pleasant surprise was experienced as Miss Beryl Russell and Tom Porter arrived after being misdirected. However they soon made

up for lost time and with Tom addressing the meeting with some choice remarks all was well. The couple of hours that they spent with us went all too quickly, two quiz competitions and the usual good feed ably put on by the two sisters, Eileen and Kathleen, plus the numerous conversations all going together to make up the true expression, "The Brotherhood of the Happy Hours". Departure time came and it was my pleasant task to escort them to Paddington whilst brother Bob took over the reporting side of the gathering. His individual quiz was won by Cliff Wallis, his team beat Mike Moorcock's one in the Consequences team quiz and a further team quiz was won by Mike this time. The latter member is very enthusiastic and has been very helpful in quite a lot of matters. Finally about twelve members stayed to supper and a general discussion. Venue of next meeting undecided but date fixed for Sunday, November 20th.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

-----ooOoo-----

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, OCTOBER 8th, 1955

So engrossed were we plotting some teasers for the inter-Club Quiz with Midland that no one noticed the clock ticking away. Suddenly, someone did: there was a rush to catch buses and trains and in five minutes the club room was deserted. Look out, Midland! They'll test you, but they'll be fair to those who do know their Hamiltoniana.

Altogether it was a lively evening. There was a good attendance, and it included a new member, Miss Dorothy Robinson, a staunch Gemite from its beginning.

The minutes were read by secretary Ron Hodgson, and librarian Gerry Allison read some of the interesting letters he had received, including one from Inspector Roger Stacey (appropriately a Magnet fan) of the Kenya Police. The world-wide brotherhood!

I gave some account of my whirlwind tour down south, along with some stories which can't very well appear in print.

Top of the bill was Jack Wood's talk 'St. Franks and Other Schools'. Jack had gone to a lot of trouble preparing this task. He displayed numerous Briscoe sketches from the Nelson Leo Library, together with a map of York he had borrowed from York Public Library, a part of which he linked up with St. Frank's school. A conscientious chap, Jack, a hundred per cent Brooksonian. He

received a well deserved round of applause at the finish.

After refreshments we got down to an Allison cross-word, mainly Hamiltonian. Ingenious! How does he do it? However, it didn't beat that dark horse Bill Williamson. The rest of us were somewhere down the course.

Yes, a very good evening. Next meeting, November 12th. We shall be entertained by J. Breeze Bentley's usual November talk on Greyfriars. Alas, there's a five week's interval.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section
Correspondent.

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MIDLAND SECTION MEETING, SEPTEMBER 26th

Holidays are now a happy memory and members arrived in force for what is really the first of the Winter meetings. Unfortunately our Chairman was unable to be present owing to the onset of a cold, but Mr. Handley very kindly consented to act as Chairman at very short notice.

Naturally the minutes included reference to that very important landmark in the history of our Club; namely the visit from Merseyside.

The principal item was a reading by Mr. Handley Junr., of extracts from a Housemaster's case book, in which the author (Everett Barnes), related an incident based on his own experiences. It told how the Beaks had reasoned out a case of fire raising. Very interesting too, as it gave a glimpse of School Life through the eyes of a Beak, being quite a novel angle for most of us.

As usual quite a lively discussion followed in which, naturally enough, our own "Beaks" played a prominent part. Interestingly enough our own Headmaster, (Mr. Ingram), had also known a case of fire raising at School. So long as dear old Greyfriars is not burnt down; THAT is the main thing!

EDWARD DAVEY.

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MERSEYSIDE SECTION REPORT, OCTOBER, 1955

The attendance for the fourth annual meeting was a trifle disappointing, but nevertheless a most enjoyable evening was spent. After the preliminary business had been dealt with, including a

report on the recent Birmingham trip and the proposed Exhibition in Bootle Public Library in early December; the Club Rules were discussed, and the election of officers took place.

These resulted as follows: Chairman - Don Webster, Vice Chairman - Norman Pragnell, Hon. Secretary and Treasurer - Frank Case, (hurry up back again Frank, we certainly miss you), Librarian - Peter Webster.

As this was "Magnet Night" a session of "Twenty Questions" revolving round Greyfriars was held, and strange to relate the Panel were undefeated, getting "The Gates of Greyfriars" in five, but "An egg in Uncle Clegg's" in nineteen. When the break for refreshments and Library business had been disposed of, a most interesting discussion took place on "The Magnet" and the panel of Don Webster and Jim Walsh found themselves submitted to a volley of questions, and the interest was as "Inky" says "terrific" insomuch as we had to reluctantly close the meeting, at 10.30 p.m. with so much left unsaid. Next meeting is on Sunday, 13th November at 7.0 p.m. and members are asked to be punctual please. 'Nuff said'.

D.B. WEBSTER.

FOR SALE: Wild West, Complete issue, 1938-39, 50 copies. Some Sexton Blake stories. £6.

EXCHANGE: Boys Own Library, Nos. 4, 14, 24, 67, 70 for any Boys Friend 3d. Lib: from this list, 30, 76, 122, 130, 142, 154, 159, 169, 184, 188, 196, 203, 208, 215, 245, 258, 293, 380, 385, 395, 397, 452, 707.

FOR SALE: Famous Crimes, Police Budget Edition, Vol. 1, No. 1 10/6.

Aldine Detective Tales, No. 23, 47, 285, 287, 289

Aldine First Rate Pocket Library, 405, 445

Aldine Robin Hood, No. 6

Amal: Press: Robin Hood, No. 10

Nugget Lib: No. 18

Dick Turpin Library, No. 85

Boys Friend 3d. Library, No. 167, 253, 257,

No Covers, Soiled

BEST
OFFERS
SECURES.

WANTED: 1d. Marvel, No. 393. Wonder 3d. Library, stories of Harry Hinton and The Red Rovers.

EDWARD BLIGHT, "TRENEGLOS", 12 TREVARTHIAN ROAD, ST. AUSTELL, CORNWALL.

MY COLLECTION

No.10

by George Sellars

I must say it does not seem anything like forty years since I bought my first copy of The Gem. Looking back through the years I remember that very lucky day for me, in March, 1915, as if it was yesterday, when I went to buy a book at my favourite newsagents and for the first time I saw the Gem. I remember quite clearly the blue cover seemed to attract my attention much more than any of the other books that were on the counter and I bought it without any hesitation. At that time I was nearly fourteen years of age, and for about ten years I never missed a copy of the good old Gem. Shortly after reading my first copy I was wanting to read more about Tom Merry & Co. and I was too impatient to wait for the next one being published, so I went searching the second-hand book shops. In those days of course they were not hard to find, and I eagerly bought every Gem I saw in these shops, and it was not long before I had enough to keep me going for a while. I remember one particular incident in my search for old copies when I was looking through a window of a second-hand book shop and saw to my delight about a dozen Gems, price two-a-penny. To my dismay I soon discovered I hadn't any money to buy them, and I had to wait until the following day and then when I arrived at the shop they were gone. I walked away with a heavy heart bitterly disappointed, but not for long because I was soon adding more to my growing stock.

Then it happened, in 1923 I must have had about 500 copies of the old paper, and at that time little dreaming I would want to read them again in later years, decided to sell the lot, which I did in no half-hearted manner. Even now although thirty-two years have passed by, a queer feeling comes over me when I think about it, and the price I received for them, 2d. a dozen.

In 1925 I thought the Gem was not so good as it used to be and I only bought it occasionally. Of course in those days I had not heard of substitute authors. Three years later I regret to say I ceased buying the old paper. In 1931 I went into a shop to buy a paper, as usual I glanced at the books on the counter, but this time the Gem somehow looked different, and I think I received one of the biggest surprises of my life when I read the title,

"Tom Merry - New Boy". Yes, it was the first of the reprints, my chance had come, and I was able to read the old stories once again, and I continued to do so until the end of the Gem in 1939. In 1940 I parted with my Gems again, for paper salvage this time, but not all of them. I had learned my lesson and I did not let my favourite stories go a second time. These were Talbot stories, my favourite character and in my opinion one of the greatest and most popular in Charles Hamilton's extensive gallery, Tom Merry and Lumley-Lumley, and Xmas numbers. Since then I have obtained several stories of these popular characters. These include No. 370, "A Split in the School", the first Gem I ever read, "Winning his Spurs" and a few more blue Gems, thanks to Richard Whorwell, and also Bill Martin for providing me with the majority of the Outsider Series, and not forgetting Tom Lambert as well. I am satisfied with my modest collection, and I am still adding more Gems to it. Finally I would like to pay a tribute to Martin Clifford's marvellous high standard of writing through such a long period, and also that grand artist the late R.J. MacDonald who illustrated the stories in such a charming manner for about thirty years.

FOR SALE - Acquisition of a large collection
leaves many surplus to requirements
'Magnets', 'Populars', 'Union Jacks',
'Sexton Blake Libraries' (First Series).
'Boys Friend Libraries'.

Harry Homer,
Yulden Farm,
Heathfield.

WANTED - A few green 'Penny Populars' to complete set
and clean green 'Boys Friends' between 1916 and
1923.

Harry Homer,
Yulden Farm,
Heathfield,
Sussex.

Leonard Packman is now home from hospital. It will, however,
be some time before he is back in circulation.

BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY 2nd SERIES FEATURING FERRERS LOCKEList Supplied by H.C. No. PriceAuthor

No. 23	A Marked Man.	
31	The Yellow Claw.	
127	The Mystery of Lone Manor.	F. Warwick
83	The Mark of the Crimson Cross.	Hedley Scott
99	The Sporting Detective.	" "
147	The Brotherhood of the White Heather.	
163	The Mystery of Flying V Ranch.	
175	The Curse of Thasa.	
267	The Danger Trail.	
279	The Secret of the Tower (Kew and Carlac)	
286	The Masked Death.	John Silvester
289	War in the Desert.	John Andrews
300	Peril Pit	John Andrews
254	The Terror of Tibet	
258	The Striking Shadow	Hedley Scott
305	The Toughest Team in the League	Hedley Scott
316	The Temple of Fear	John Andrews
320	The Fighting Detective	P.A. Clarke
325	The Rangers Recruit	Hedley Scott
366	The Secret of the Reef	John Andrews
372	The £1,000,000 Secret (Lawless)	John Andrews
398	Peril in Persia	John Andrews
401	Nobby the Shooting Star	Hedley Scott
428	The Mystery of the Moor	St. John Watson
478	Man Behind the Scenes	Hedley Scott
639	The Football Crooks	Hedley Scott
648	The Case of the Langdale Wanderers	Hedley Scott
659	The Wolf of Texas	Steve Rogers
731	The Yellow Spider	Stanton Hope

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The Sands are Running Out. Have You Ordered Your Annual
 Yet? If Not, Do So Now.

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