

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 27 No 317

MAY 1973

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Founded in 1941 by
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COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 27

No. 317

MAY 1973

Price 15p

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REMINISCENCES & FOOTNOTES

"A friend of mine," said Miss Marple, "had a most nerve-racking experience only a few years ago. A dead body on their library floor one morning."

That extract is from "Nemesis" of 1971. A warm glow for the Christie fan who knew, of course, that it was a reminiscence of "The

Body in the Library," written over thirty years earlier.

In her 50-year writing career Agatha Christie has always delighted her admirers with her throwaway reminiscences. One felt that the author had the same happy memories of past stories as were enjoyed by her readers.

But to the latest Christie, "Elephants Can Remember," comes something which I, at least find unwelcome. The reminiscences are there, but against them is the asterisk, with the footnotes informing the reader where the recalled past event took place.

The reminiscence changes from a warm titbit for the older fan to an advertising gimmick. They used to do the same thing in the later Sexton Blake Library, and I always deplored it. I wonder whether it is done by the author or by the publishers.

SMELLY DARKNESS?

Speaking of the Chaplin film "The Immigrant," shown the night before on BBC T. V., the critic of the Daily Mail said that it reminded him of going to the Coronation, Surbiton, in the early twenties. He reminisced: "An attendant would tear your ticket in half, and draw back a curtain or horse blanket to allow you to pass from the foyer into the auditorium, and you would step into the smelly darkness."

He seems to be suggesting that the Coronation, Surbiton, was something of a flea-pit. Of course, there were plenty of "flea-pit" cinemas in the twenties, but the Coronation was not one of them. It was well run, and was, indeed, quite a classy cinema, rather on the pricey side, too. It was typical of large numbers of small cinemas which were built, all over the country, in the boom between 1910 and 1914. Most of them seated about 700 people. When the giant palaces went up between the wars, plenty of the smaller houses did deteriorate, according to the amount of competition they had to meet. But the Coronation always maintained its classy status. I knew it from the later twenties, and, though I don't suppose I visited it more than a dozen times all told, I remember it as a pleasant little theatre. Of course, in later times, there were always people who had no time for any cinema except the gradiose palace with a couple of thousand or more seats.

The D. M. critic mentioned that he went home from the Coronation

in an "iron tram." Just why he mentions an "iron tram" I don't know. At any rate, the trams gave a very frequent service, were reliable, and were cheap. The penny tram fare costs a shilling on the modern bus, which may snort along after you have waited 30 minutes or more, or may not come at all.

In passing, some years ago we reproduced a playbill of the Coronation (circa 1913) in the C. D. Annual.

MUSING

There are a thousand and one things to attend to between one issue of this magazine and the next. The old brain, such as it is, has to be kept working overtime between those same two issues.

To produce a 32-page magazine, every month without a break, is an ambitious undertaking. Probably, it is too ambitious.

Nevertheless we have done it, and S. P. C. D. is now in its 27th year. It is a labour of love. It is only when strain and constant worry are piled on top of everything else - Pelion piled on Ossa, as Frank Richards used to love to quote - that it becomes a burden, and one wonders whether life isn't sweet.

In times of pressure, slip-ups occur, as last month when we got the wrong serial number on our cover. So sorry. Please alter it on your copy with a pencil, so that, later on, when looking over your back issues, you don't find yourself in a muddle.

Finally, Mr. Lennard of Stockport has sent me a page from a recent Manchester Evening News. Though the reading matter runs true to form, the pictorial lay-out is exceptionally good, with a cluster of much-loved old covers. Quite the best I have seen.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

DANNY'S DIARY

MAY 1923

It has been a most remarkable month for weather. For nearly the whole of the first fortnight it was unusually hot, with temperatures up to the eighties. The hottest early May since 1871, so they say. But

in the middle of the month, the temperature fell with a vengeance, and on the 19th there were snowfalls in many parts of the country. There have been pictures in the papers of cricket grounds with the stumps sticking out of the snow.

The first story in the Gem this month was a delicious single tale called "Trimble Tries It On." Mr. Lathom is giving a cricket bat for the best essay on Shakespeare as a playwright. Levison has gone to Greyfriars for a while, but he left behind the rough sketch for his essay. Trimble finds this, and decides to pass it off as his own entry for the competition. Unfortunately for him, Levison has posted his essay and Mr. Lathom receives it. Awful for Trimble, but great fun for us.

In contrast, "Disowned by His Father" was a rather poor tale, though it starred Lumley-Lumley whom I used to like a lot.

But another winner followed in "Taming a Tartar." The Third Form collect for a birthday present for Mr. Selby, to put him in a good temper. They buy a lovely cake for him. But Trimble eats the cake and puts a brick in its place. A scream, this one.

Lastly "Fifty Pounds Reward" was offered for anyone finding a gold brooch, lost in Rylcombe Lane. A little girl finds it and hands it to Trimble who claims the reward. A bit weak, this effort.

At the pictures we have seen Charlie Chaplin in "The Pilgrim" which was a good laugh; Mae Murray in "Jazzmania;" Mabel Normand in "Head Over Heels;" Rudolph Valentino and Gloria Swanson in "Beyond the Rocks" (this was from a story by Elinor Glynn, and I found it dull); Tom Mix in "The Fighting Streak;" and Billie Burke in "The Frisky Mrs. Johnson."

We also saw a lovely Albert de Courville revue, entitled "Smoke Rings," and starring Syd Howard. I very much like revues. This was at Holborn Empire.

In the Magnet the series has continued about Levison at Greyfriars where his young brother is in the sanny. This is a fine serious series and I am enjoying it a lot.

In "Under the Shadow," Levison helps Hazeldene who has borrowed £10 from Mr. Mulberry of the Feathers Inn. Levison promises Mulberry that he, Levison, will pay the bill, but what Levison doesn't know is that Hazeldene has borrowed the money to put on a horse.

Long ago, Levison did Vernon-Smith a good turn, and it is Smithy who hands £10 to Levison as a loan. Unluckily for Levison, he is caught by Wingate at the Feathers.

In "A Friend in Need," though Levison is ordered to leave Greyfriars, Vernon-Smith steps in, and the Head learns the truth.

In "A Debt Repaid," the Bounder once more helps Levison, and, in some amusing chapters, the rumour gets round Greyfriars that Levison is in love with Bessie Bunter. "J'aime la soeur de Guillaume," says a paper pinned on Levison's back.

In "The Hand of the Enemy," the enemy is Ponsonby of Highcliffe, who has a nasty scheme to wreck Levison's career. The nasty scheme is foiled at the finish. This grand series continues.

The covers of the Magnet are still being drawn by the mysterious new artist. His work is a bit like Mr. Chapman's in certain details, but I think he is really a better artist, though I wouldn't hurt Mr. Chapman's feelings by letting him know that I think so.

Postage has been reduced so it now costs $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. instead of 2d. to send a letter, while postcards cost 1d. Mr. Bonar Law has resigned as Prime Minister, and his place has been taken by Mr. Stanley Baldwin. The Lord Mayor of London, Sir Edward Moore, was knocked down by a bus, and he died a few days later.

The lovely stories about the Rookwood Four in Canada have gone on this month. In "The Tenderfeet Make Good," they manage to find the horse, Blazer, and also round up the horse-thief, Pequod le Couteau. In "Foes of the Ranch," the chums have further trouble with their cowboy enemy, Kentuck. In "Jimmy Silver's Enemy," Kentuck frees the horse-thief Pequod, who manages to escape, but Kentuck himself is "ridden out on a rail." Must have been uncomfortable for him.

Final tale of the month was "The Peril of the Prairies." The Four go after the escaped Pequod. Jimmy saves Pequod's life, at great peril, and Pequod is finally taken by the mounties. But Pequod tells Jimmy he will remember how the Rookwooder saved his life.

Jack Hobbs, of Surrey, scored 116 not out against Somerset, towards the end of May. It was his hundredth hundred. And I've never scored more than 10 - singles, not hundreds.

A timely finish to the month. Big Ben has been stopped for

overhaul. The first time for eight years.

* * * * *

MY CAMPAIGN

by Win Morss

For some months I have been conducting a hair shirt campaign in the London Club.

As most of you know libraries will reserve any book for you for a small fee, all you have to do is fill in the necessary form and leave it with the librarian. All public libraries have a sort of "inter-flora" or rather "inter-book" scheme, whereby any book in existence can be borrowed for the reserver. Some libraries will buy a requested book if they feel the public demand for it to be sufficient.

Now, this is where my "hair-shirting" comes in ...

I have always believed that our books by their own merit - have won a place in the literature of our country. The popularity of the Billy Bunter hardbacks in the school and junior libraries proved this; still more, enquiries at my own library revealed the fact that not only were the Howard Baker reprints there, but that they were being very well read in the adult libraries too.

So come all Ye Faithful, and get as many books as possible circulating through the library complexes in the way I have outlined above. In this way more and more people will see our books and want to read them.

If your librarian happens to be a poor benighted soul, snootily unaware of the existence of Messrs. Richards, Brooks, Clifford, etc., DO NOT surrender your rights, "summon up the blood ... , lend the eye a terrible aspect" and pitch him or her the facts ...

I had a brief chat with Ros Long of the Publishers Association and she assured me that all publishers "lean very heavily on the lending libraries for the purchase of their books." So that disposes of the point of view some people have, that publishers do not want library sales. Libraries reach a tremendous section of the public who do not or cannot for some reason or another, buy books for themselves. I also rang Howard Baker who is extremely enthusiastic about the idea. "If we can get more books into the libraries, it would be the greatest break-through ever," he said.

Just one more final point (hope you are all as keen as I am on this campaign now), remember we are The Old Boys' BOOKS Club, and it is very important to get all authors circulating, so even if you do have a favourite, fire a shot for some of the others too. Best of Luck ...



Conducted by

Josie Packman

PROFESSOR KEW

by J. E. M.

A suggestion I made (C.D. 310) that some research should be done into the pre-criminal origins of Sexton Blake's more distinguished criminal foes prompted me to do a little homework myself. My first choice of candidate for investigation was Professor Kew, a villain Blake originally encountered in The Aylesbury Square Mystery (UJ 511). So far - and this doesn't sound a very promising start to my research - the story has eluded me. However, The Return of Professor Kew (UJ 1181) comes

LONG COMPLETE TALE OF DETECTIVE WORK IN THE MIDLANDS!



up with the information that the prof. was once chief surgeon at St. Stephen's Hospital, London, where he distinguished himself by his extraordinary skill. Convicted, according to the Baker Street Index "of a serious offence" and "sentenced to a term of penal servitude ... he perforce abandoned medicine and took to a life of crime."

The nature of Kew's non-criminal skills and attainments are clear enough. But what was that "serious offence" which led to his downfall? Regrettably, but perhaps significantly, Blake and his author withhold the information, Blake himself musing, "H'm. Well we needn't go into all the sordid details." Note that adjective, which surely carries a hint that Kew's original crime against society was not one for financial gain (after all, why should it have been - brilliant and successful surgeons are not usually hard up); at least, if money was involved, the label "sordid" hints at other things. Was Kew's first brush with the law of the kind that finds its way into the columns of the more sensational press?

If this is about as far as we can go with the professor's early biography, there are perhaps one or two points to be noted about his possible literary ancestry. In physical appearance he bears a suspicious resemblance to Mr. Reece of the Criminals' Confederation - stunted, bald and hook-nosed. (To be fair, the dwarfish, hairless and generally repellent is a constantly recurring figure in crime fiction if not fact.) Kew's professional background, on the other hand, bears a remarkable similarity to that of a character neither hairless nor ugly - G. H. Teed's Huxton Rymer, who had also once been a brilliant surgeon and medical teacher - in his case, in a hospital in Vienna - before becoming a social outlaw.

(With grateful acknowledgements to the SB Catalogue and Mrs. Packman's superb Library, without which most Blakians would be lost.)

SEXTON BLAKE SERIALS

by S. Gordon Swan

In the supplement to the Sexton Blake Catalogue there is a list of Sexton Blake Serials which appeared in The Dreadnought - a total of eight stories in all. But this list omits two other yarns which ran through the pages of this periodical.

Page 2 of Dreadnought No. 96, dated 28th March, 1914, carries the

following announcement in the editor's chat:

"Next week's great treat, the 'plum' of next Thursday's issue, will be the opening instalment of our new Sexton Blake serial. It has been decided to entitle the yarn 'The Man of Mystery,' which title refers to 'Lightning' Jim, the audacious criminal who mystifies Scotland Yard, and constantly baffles Sexton Blake, the famous detective.

In the author's own words, this remarkable yarn tells of the 'thrilling adventures of a notorious rascal who defied Sexton Blake, and announced beforehand the crimes he would commit, inviting capture. His genius for lightning changes of costume was developed into a fine art, and he evaded capture by entirely new tactics, and never broke his word.'"

This story began in No. 97, 4th April, 1914, and finished in No. 107, 13th June, 1914. I possess three instalments, but having read them, cannot arrive at any conclusion as to who wrote the yarn. Sexton Blake seems to have been made a fool of on several occasions, and Lightning Jim disguised as the detective more than once. He even invaded the precincts of Scotland Yard.

A second tale which was serialised in The Dreadnought was The Mystery of the Yellow Button, which was a reprint of a George Marsden Plummer story that was first published in Union Jack No. 334. About a quarter of a century later this same story was to be reprinted in The Detective Weekly.

Four of these ten serials in The Dreadnought were reprints from the Union Jack, the other six were original, and three were republished in The Sexton Blake Library - The Merchant's Secret, The Men Who Changed Places and The Heir From Nowhere, all under different titles.

The Supplement lists four Sexton Blake serials in The Boys' Friend Weekly, but there were at least six. In No. 316, 29th June, 1907 - a Summer Fiction Double No. - commenced Accross the Equator by W. Murray Graydon, a sequel to Sexton Blake in the Congo. This story was reprinted many years later, in the nineteen-thirties, in The Boys' Friend Library, with Nelson Lee and Nipper substituted for Blake and Tinker, and Nelson Lee's bloodhound, Rajah, taking the place of Pedro.

Yet another Blake serial in The Boys' Friend was Sexton Blake,

Foreman, by E. W. Alais. This yarn is to be found in complete form in No. 172 of The Boys' Friend Library, and is an exceedingly good story. As a serial it appeared during 1910, I believe, though I have no copies of that periodical for the relevant period.

Fresh information concerning the Blake Saga frequently comes to light and it is always interesting to stumble across some hitherto unrecorded item in the long list of stories about the great detective. One wonders why the serial, The Man of Mystery, was never reprinted in The Boys' Friend Library, and why Herbert Maxwell's three serials in The Boys' Friend Weekly were likewise overlooked.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 108 - Magnet 238 - "The Form-Master's Secret"

1912 was a fine year for both the Magnet and the Gem, but there is a feeling that the Gem reached a much higher standard most of the time in those days. "The Form-Master's Secret" was an entertaining story with some good characterisation but it would not have been classed as a notable story if the venue had been transferred from Greyfriars to St. Jim's.

The story revolved around Mr. Quelch and a beery loafer called Percy Punter, who called at Greyfriars and was received by the form-master in his study, with obvious embarrassment. Both Bolsover and Vernon-Smith were eager to take the opportunity of scoring off Mr. Quelch, and their different natures were clearly brought out in this story, Bolsover being stubborn and overbearing but with some sense of honour, Vernon-Smith being unscrupulous and devious, prepared to lie to masters and boys alike, a very different Vernon-Smith from the Bounder in the days of the coloured cover.

The story was not without its lighter moments (such as Hazeldene's exploding pie) but most of the time it was sombre and even rather brutal. Mr. Quelch's irritation led him to inflict some excessive punishments, Bolsover major was thrashed with a cricket stump by every member of the form in turn, and Vernon-Smith was tarred and feathered by the Famous Four. The two miscreants were certainly culpable, but one

could not help wondering whether they deserved quite as much as they received, and it was even more surprising that Dr. Locke, who came to learn of some of these events, should go out of his way to congratulate Wharton for having acted in a manly way.

It is a truism to state that the Greyfriars characters developed whilst St. Jim's was a more static institution. There is a measure of truth in this, and it is easy to notice how red Magnet stories seem dated: both characters and customs at Greyfriars changed so radically over the years that the world of 1912 in the Magnet seems much further away than the same year in the Gem. "The Form-Master's Secret," badly illustrated and harshly told, will not please a keen collector of the later Magnets, but on the other hand it will not disappoint those who admire deft construction of plots and convincing manipulation of characters. Nothing that Charles Hamilton wrote could wholly fail to please.

* * * * *

FIRST MAGNET ARTIST

(The following item, concerning Mr. A. Mitchell, son of Hutton Mitchell, the early Magnet artist, is an extract from an Australian newspaper snippet, sent to us by our Australian enthusiast, Bette Pate.)

"My father the artist, Hutton Michhell, did the drawings for the original Billy Bunter stories. He would receive the manuscript with sections underlined, and he would have to do a sketch of the underlined incident.

"It might be Harry Wharton walking into a room and giving Bob Cherry a whack on the ear, with Billy Bunter looking on.

"Usually I was Harry Wharton, Alan was Bob Cherry and Bruce was Billy Bunter.

"Father would pose us and we would have to stay in position until he sketched the incident. It sometimes got a bit tiring, particularly if you were stretching your arm to punch someone, but he used to give us a break every fifteen minutes or so.

"We thought it was great fun, because the Billy Bunter stories were all the rage in those days. There was a bonus, too, because we got the new Bunter stories before everyone else."

Hutton Mitchell drew six or eight illustrations for each weekly Greyfriars' story, and his three sons modelled for about six years.

Mr. Mitchell said yesterday: "I think the Billy Bunter stories were better for children than the present-day comics with gangsters and monsters.

"The Bunter stories were a bit far-fetched, but they were good, clean, fun, and always had a moral in them."

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 181. AGATHA AND CHARLIE

I suppose that, during the recreational part of my reading life, I have read more of Agatha Christie and of Charles Hamilton than of any other writers. In my library I have practically everything that both of them ever wrote.

In many ways I find their methods of writing very similar. Both had main characters which were used over and over again, and which, for their fans, are still living vividly today, all these years later. Both employed reminiscence of past adventures which always delighted older readers. Both had a propensity for using the names of people which they had used before. Both re-introduced minor characters after long lapses of time, and both abandoned characters for no obvious reason.

Agatha abandoned Captain Hastings who, for so long, was Poirot's "Dr. Watson." Perhaps the reason here was that Hastings, who told the stories, linked the Christie stories too much with Sherlock Holmes. Agatha abandoned Inspector Japp, possibly because he was a little too much the large-footed, bowler-hatted policeman of the twenties. Far more believable was her Inspector Spence, who figured in stories of the forties, and has turned up again delightfully as Superintendent Spence in much more recent times.

The Rev. and Mrs. Dane Calthrop featured in several Christie yarns, always marvellously portrayed, but it has not seemed to me that they were intended to be the same couple each time. It seemed more like the author landing on the same names, and nothing more.

Minor characters who have delighted us by turning up unexpectedly

Nelson Lee Column

HANDFORTH THE VIOLENT - SHOCK REPORT

by Len Wormull

I must confess to being a little disturbed and perplexed by the violence of Edward Oswald Handforth. Throughout his chequered career there was always the emphasis on his fistical superiority over others, and not infrequently it brought him to the unhealthy kind of violence reserved for rank outsiders and bullies. Hot-headed and unreasonable, his was a policy of might is right, hit first and ask questions afterwards. Often it became so irrational and uncontrolled that one could be excused for calling it 'violence for kicks.' For a character clearly meant to be loved, Handforth projected a brutishness which almost defied you to like him. Like the trigger-happy baddies, his fists were ever cocked for action, his aim unerring. No schoolboy was more dedicated to the punched nose. He could be mean, moody and malignant. And never more so than with his own chums, Church and McClure. Here were two likeable characters yearning for peaceful co-existence, yet subjected to a rule of intimidation and violence as the price of friendship. By some strange sense of devotion their leader, like a father-protector, ensured their safety from others, when what they sadly lacked was a shield against their own leader! But what did they do? Rather than hit back they regarded it as a duty to humour him. It was all so unreal. If only Handforth had met his match just once in a while, how his stock would have soared! How could brute force triumph over reason and command respect? Having said this, now to illustrate by way of The Master Of The Remove, from Nugget Library, No. 3, and I quote:-

Scene 1. Common-room. A little skirmish with Nipper & Co.

"Handforth was charging forward; for when words failed him he always resorted to violence.

Crash!

Handforth shot through the doorway, and collided violently with Church and McClure, who were just on the point of entering. He sent them flying, but as they were his own study chums, it didn't matter ..."

They protest at injuries received ...

"I don't want to fight you chaps!" interrupted Handforth grimly.
"But if I have any more of your rot, I'll flatten the pair of you!"

Scene 2. Handforth gives Mr. Crowell a 'sooting,' mistakenly for Bob Christine impersonation. To unwilling aides, Church and McClure, he threatens:

"If you don't lend a hand, I'll swipe the pair of you until you can't see straight!"

"Ropes were passed round his ankles (Crowell's), and drawn tight. Then he was dragged across the Triangle, his protests unheeded."

"Handforth dabbed a handful of soot in his mouth ... his face was smothered with soot; it was rubbed into his hair."

A vicious punishment even for a japer. For all three: flogging.

Scene 4. Village post-office. Once inside, Church gives cue for instant assault and battery upon his person with the remark, "You silly lunatic."

Whereat ...

"Put up your hands, you bounder! ...

Biff!

Handforth's fist smote the unfortunate Church fairly upon the nose. With a howl, Church staggered backwards through the doorway. And that little scrap, commonplace and innocent enough, nearly developed into a tragedy ... Church came flying through the doorway, and he floundered upon his back in the muddy road ... a heavy, closed-in motor-car was speeding along ... it seemed absolutely positive that Church would be killed."

He is saved by a stranger.

"I say, Churchy, I'm awfully sorry! I didn't know that car was coming ..."

"That's all right," said Church gruffly. "You should be more careful with your fists, Handy."

Scene 4. Soccer field. No escape.

"McClure handled the ball unintentionally, and the whistle went.
"Hands!"

"Penalty! Penalty!"

"You - you clumsy ass! hissed Handforth from his goal. "I'll punch your silly nose for that later on!"

Later.

"Do you call it nothing to say you're fed up with me?" roared Handforth. "If you're not jolly careful, Arnold McClure, I'll pick you up and chuck you out into the Triangle - and duck you in a puddle!"

Scene 5. Weak-kneed Teddy Long comes into the picture, while Handforth comes into his Flashman-like own:

Long: "I was wondering if you could lend me a hand ..."

"Certainly! said Edward Oswald promptly ... "You asked for it, and I'm always willing to oblige."

Whack! Bang! Wallop!

"Yaroo!"

Same place, same target.

"Handforth's fist went back.

"Take that!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"Yaroo!"

Teddy Long took it - on the nose ... he had certainly received a considerable punch, and it was rather hard on him, considering that he had said nothing to arouse Handorth's ire."

Curtain down on one single drama. Did I neglect to mention two black eyes apiece in the closing scenes? A trifle really. To Handforth The Violent it was all in a day's work. For his long-suffering chums, a brief respite until the next time.

Postscript: Funny, never gave it a thought in the old days. Maybe it was the little savage in me. Might even have murmured ... 'One of the best, old Handy, true blue, generous to a fault, a real hero; rather an idiot, though, but really quite harmless (!!!) and lovable.'

A pity there's such a gulf between the man and the boy.

REPRINTS

by R. J. Godsave

It is generally assumed that a reprint means exactly what it says,

and it is taken for granted that it adheres faithfully to the original wording, and in effect is a photo copy.

The cutting out of chapters for the purpose of condensing a story to contain it in the required number of pages is a natural order of things.

In "The Bullies of St. Frank's," No. 5 of the Monster Library which were reprints of the "Mysterious X" series of ten Nelson Lees, o. s. 195-204 the method of shortening a story was somewhat different.

Of the story contained in o. s. 198 "The Bullies' League" the only part to be reprinted was approximately one and two thirds chapters out of seven. These related to a substitution of a registered letter containing £50 in currency notes addressed to Dr. Stafford, which was taken from Mudford, the postman, by the Mysterious X. This was the detective element running side by side of the bullying activities of Starke & Co. against the Remove throughout the story.

The remainder of the story was re-written, and bears no resemblance to the original part of the story relating to Starke & Co's intention of forcing members of the Remove to fag for the bullying prefects.

An interesting story of how pressure was brought to bear on Grey of the Remove by the simple expedient of inflicting undeserved punishments on other juniors until Grey agreed to fag for Starke.

Continuous punishments by the seniors caused quite a few of the juniors to think that Grey should give in, although this action would establish fagging by the Remove.

How the Remove gave in and agreed to fag for the prefects, makes a good story. Grey, with the assistance of Pitt, who was Wilson's fag, was detailed to help prepare a sumptuous tea for Starke and his guests. By the purchase of stale bread, stale cakes, rancid butter and rotten eggs, the table was made to look inviting and attractive until the food was touched.

This episode was replaced in the Monster Library by three chapters relating to the hounding of the juniors by the bullying prefects, and how protest meetings were broken up.

This curtailment of the Lee stories was only done when the original series consisted of more than the usual eight.

WE LET MR. ACRAMAN HAVE THE LAST WORD!
(and, verily, we MEAN the last!)

Mr. R. F. ACRAMAN writes:

Come, come, come, Mr. Wilde, I am sorry if my article last month upset you - as clearly it did - but after all, you cannot complain. You began with a personal attack on me in the February C.D. although you say in your letter that you are "at a loss to understand" why I should think this is so. "Nothing that anybody had written constituted a personal attack?" - just re-read your expressions - Stupefying farrago of illogic; insulting, irrelevant and quite absurd; transparently spurious; incoherent; red herring and 'With friends like these' quite apart from completely misquoting my remarks about Mr. Hopkinson and attributing words such as "gullible innocent brainwashed by the Editor" and "jealous schemer" neither of which I said nor implied. Who there was putting an imaginary argument into an opponents mouth? I spoke as I found in my March item, saying what I believed clearly needed to be said. I am sorry if my article has upset you, old lad, but you have only yourself to blame.

As everybody is aware, I have never demanded or suggested that opposing views should be suppressed - merely that good taste and manners should be exercised in correspondence. (My letter 9th Feb.) I suggest that it is letters such as yours in the February C.D. that make an Editors position untenable, not my reasonable and justified protests.

Now let us put the record straight, from the beginning without any further nonsense. My article in the January C.D. is clearly in a friendly tone addressed to Mr. Hopkinson and others like him along the lines of a previous contribution of mine in C.D. No. 248 - remember G.A.'s appreciative reply in No. 250 "Brand from the Burning?" However, Mr. Hopkinson was apparently not impressed and said I was talking through my hat. Too bad. Still no harm was done, no bones broken and most certainly his feelings are not hurt any more than Mr. Truscott's from my article in the February C.D., as the March C.D. shows, and here the matter should have ended. Your outburst in the February C.D. was completely unnecessary old lad, and as a result, a pattern begins to emerge in the correspondence which I believe every member deplors and which my article sought to show. Friendly and constructive criticism is always welcome - spiteful and personal attacks are not.

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The Postman Called

(Interesting items from the
Editor's letter-bag)

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): I well remember the "Magnet" of March 1923, mentioned by Danny, about the death of Stott's brother. Not knowing at the time that it was a substitute story, I reflected that Stott's promise to reform had not lasted long as the very next tale told how Skinner, Snoop and Stott, performed a particularly cruel action by throwing stones at somebody. This does not sound much like the tale of Bunters boat-race party, but it must have been, for I know it was the next story to the Stott-brothers' episode. (I've never known Danny to miss out any story yet.)

Wait until we get to 1925, in the diary (trusting I am still reading the "C.D." then!). I can remember both "Magnet" and "Gem" perfectly for that year - the "Gem" had a good lot of single-tales, and although I know some were not by Charles Hamilton, I enjoyed them just the same.

The substitute writers seemed rather fond of reforming bad characters, but Charles Hamilton would then come along and rectify the position again.

W. JAMES MARTIN (Southampton): With all the talk of taxation changes and VAT my mind goes back through the years to a proposal to tax children's comics in Dublin, very early in the last war. There appeared in the "Daily Mail" a short poem by the resident poet BEE. I may not have got it quite right but from memory it went something like this:-

Sean me darlin', I abjure
Such a Tax on Literature
Pedro, Sexton Blake and Tinker
All agree that it's a stinker.

Think how Merry, Blake and Cardew,
Wharton, even Quelch regard you!
And the fellows in the Shell
Use such words as I daren't tell,
Sean man! This fills my bitter cup,
Sean man! Were you born grown up?

One thing they can't tax is memory.

JIM COOK (New Zealand): I cannot agree with Martin Thomas at his thought that the Blake and Lee sections would benefit from features like "Let's Be Controversial."

I am of the opinion both these sections are not in need of a similar amount of dispute that arises from the Hamilton saga.

M. LYNE (Ulverston): I was glad to read your view of that childish send-up of Sherlock Holmes on T. V. My view of it was identical with your own. I have a low opinion of most so-called critics. They seem to be scared stiff of not being thought "trendy." Or perhaps they really are morons.

RON GARDNER (Whitnash): I'd like to mention that I recently bought a second-hand copy of "Bessie Bunter And The Missing Fortune," by "Hilda Richards." I've read twenty-odd pages so far, and was agreeably surprised to find it a very good-quality yarn. The action flows smoothly, and the style is extremely agreeable and appealing. There are hints of "Hamiltonia" in some passages.

If the author is still alive, I hope he has gained the success his ability suggests, and under his own name.

Now if you'll pardon me, I'll get back to "Bessie Bunter!"

D. B. CLEGG (Wantage): If you resume, as I hope, classic serials, why not examples of early Rookwood material, quite out of reach of an interested enquirer, since the libraries do not include the Boys' Friend.

* * * * *

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Meeting held 7th March, 1973.

We welcomed Stan Nicholls back from a spell in hospital, and congratulated him on his present obvious state of good health.

The commemorative menu of 'The Silver Jubilee of the Old Boys' Book Club' held at the Rembrandt Hotel, in London, on Sunday, 18th

February, was commented upon and admired. U.K. members will doubtless be familiar with this menu, but nostalgia comes to different people in different ways, and the section which touched our several British-Australian members was the reference to the first Annual General Meeting, held in February 1949, where in spite of a struggle with the current rationing 'an excellent tea was provided.' The several reproductions of the covers of such publications as Boys' Friend, Magnet, Gem and so on (1d. each!) was appreciated, as were the informal photographs of guests at the dinner.

Club members would like to congratulate Bill Lofts on having been made an honorary member of the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, U.S.A. - a great honour and well deserved.

A pleasant ten minutes or so was spent listening to Stan Nicholls reminiscing about early bookshops in Sydney. As with architecture, books reflect the feelings, habits and technology of the times, and the second-hand bookshop performs an invaluable function in that it combines the old with the new and gives an overall picture of our civilization, besides performing the down-to-earth function of satisfying the connoisseur.

The meeting regretted the death of Rudolph Friml, from whose pen came such productions as 'Rose Marie,' 'The Vagabond King' and 'The Three Musketeers' and also 'Going Up' - the latter appearing in U.K. in 1912, and in Sydney around about 1916.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8.30 p.m., to the pavement outside the Restaurant, where it was continued animatedly for at least another ten minutes!:

MARIAN BROCKMAN
Acting Secretary.

§ § §

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at 3 Long Road, on 8 April. The President welcomed guests from the London Club, Mary Cadogan and Graham Bruton.

Among the correspondence the Secretary read a letter from

Mr. Cheshire of Messrs. Heffers, expressing his pleasure at the interest raised by the Club's exhibition at Messrs. Heffers' gallery.

The Club discussed at some length the idea of a federation of Clubs.

Danny Posner gave a talk on boys' papers in the two world wars. He thought the Thompson papers had fantasied the war for children. He discussed the effect of the war on juvenile books and papers. He wondered if the war and the paper rationing were sufficient to account for the fall in the number of papers. He quoted statistics of the loss of papers during the war. In 1939, there were sixty-five papers for youngsters, by 1941, thirty-one of these had gone. Compared with the A. P. the Thompson "big five" in the same period lost only the "Skipper." Comparative statistics for the 1914-18 war showed that out of fifty-eight papers, twenty-one disappeared, but a number were revived in 1919, and during the war the S. B. and Nelson Lee Libraries appeared. He discussed the attitude to the war shown by the "middle class" papers (Captain, B. O. P., etc.) and how the high patriotic note of the first years of the war was gradually abandoned for non-war stories. He also spoke of the pre-1914 imaginary war stories, especially in the Northcliffe papers, and quoted a pre-1914 American expression of opinion that Northcliff's anti-German propaganda was causing a war situation. He also pointed out that as late as 1913, Sexton Blake was on friendly terms with the Kaiser. An animated discussion followed. The talk, and discussion, served to illustrate the value of the hobby as a social study.

Graham Bruton then talked about his collection, and his interest in Hamiltonia. He explained how he first became interested in the Armada Bunter books, and was put into touch with Eric Fayne through writing to the publishers.

Finally, Mary Cadogan delighted the club with her memories of a war time schoolgirl. She recalled her disappointment on seeing American soldiers who did not resemble film heroes, and to the joy of the members described her experiments with a toothbrush and type-writer ribbon in making mascara.

LONDON

The ultimate gathering at Friardale, on Sunday, 15th April, marked the end of an era as after six years, and about fifteen happy and jolly meetings, the last call over sounded by the nearby church. Mary Cadogan, in the chair, conducted a very good meeting and was supported by a large muster of members.

Bob Elythe reading extracts from the issue of April 1956 newsletter, a Trackett Grimm story entitled "Murder on Muddy Marsh," and then winning the Nelson Lee Quiz, three enjoyable items. The Collectors Quiz was won by Don Webster, Bob Acraman read a paper on Mr. Bunter. Mary Cadogan read passages from Gem number 78, to illustrate the Girl Guide movement as portrayed in the old books; Graham Bruton read two chapters from the Frank Richards' autobiography; Winifred Morss gave an account of her campaign to get the facsimiles in the public libraries.

In nearly all the afore mentioned items, there were enjoyable discussions and with the last study feed taking an extra long time in duration, no doubt get togethers and photography indulged in, a great time was had by all. Being springtime, the garden looked very lovely. But all too soon it was time for dispersing. Hearty votes of thanks to the five Acramans and the last view of Friardale was Bob and Betty standing at the front door waving goodbye. On the way through Ruislip homewards, Ray Hopkins, Josie Packman, Charlie Wright, Mary Cadogan and myself, passed the New House, as yet un-named.

However, it is Sam Thurbon's meeting at his Twickenham home on Sunday, 20th May, when we meet again. Let him know if you are going.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

§ § §

NORTHERNMeeting on Saturday, 14th April

On this pleasant spring evening Chairman Geoffrey Wilde, welcomed a goodly gathering to the 277th meeting and the 23rd A. G. M. of the Northern Section.

He was sure, said Geoffrey, that to the two founder members who were present, it didn't seem like 23 years!

The customary thanks for their devoted services were made to the outgoing officers (Chairman: Geoffrey Wilde, Treasurer/Librarian: Mollie Allison, Activities MC: Jack Allison, Minutes Secretary: Geoffrey Good) who were then welcomed back as the 'new team,' being re-elected en bloc.

All, that is, except Vice-Chairman, Harry Barlow, who was re-elected separately, and to which he responded, "Barkis is willing!"

Not least, there was thanks from Mollie to Myra Allison for providing refreshments, to which Harry Barlow added an appendage by thanking Myra for the wide variety of sandwiches now appearing and might he at the same time raise the question of increasing subs? Did he mean for refreshments, asked Geoffrey Wilde? No, said Harry, he meant subs!

Subs, however, after discussion, were to remain the same for the present!

Our first activity of the new year, so to speak, was a cleverly compiled quiz by Geoffrey Wilde, consisting of 26 questions, the answers being simple names relating to the Hobby and each beginning with a different letter of the alphabet.

Bill Williamson came first with 16 correct and Elsie Taylor next with 15.

A quiz which I hope Geoffrey may be induced to send to C.D!

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TRUE BLUE WEEKLY

by O. W. Wadham

Nowadays a paper calling itself TRUE BLUE would be suspected of being a very sexy publication, but surely not at the turn of the century. The copy of half-penny TRUE BLUE that I have has no date on it, but I should say it first appeared about 1902. It was number 13, and was published every Thursday, with an eleven page dose of "high-class fiction" as the main attraction, and two pages of a serial as a side attraction. It had a MARVEL green cover, and the issue gave some details of several companion papers that have never been

REVIEWSTHE HOWARD BAKER HOLIDAY ANNUAL
OF 1974(Howard Baker Press:
£2.75)

Dated 1974, this, clearly is the volume of tomorrow, which contains all the genuine charm, worth, and dignity of yesterday. A veritable Treasure Cave which, when opened, delights the explorer with a pot-pourri of real art, real style, and real talent - some things which publications had yesterday but often seem to have lost to-day.

Despite the competition of the Magnet and the Gem, I have a feeling that the star turn is the reproduction of the 1938 issue of Film Fun. Readers will be Oliver Twists over this one.

Two pleasant single Magnets, both immensely readable, are the Vernon-Smith story "Condemned Without Evidence" of 1939, and "Johnny Bull on the Run," a winner of 1936. The former looks slightly unreal with a yellow and black cover on a 1939 issue, but this is a minor detail.

A Gem presents "Battling Grundy" (which had Mr. Linton's name editorially changed to Mr. Pilbeam), an above-average Grundy tale, and, incidentally, the final new story of 1931, the week before the reprints began. It is one of the few new Hamilton stories of the 1928 - 1931 era of the Gem.

Morcover and Cliff House are featured in a 1936 issue of The Schoolgirl; there is a 1936 issue of The Pilot, which, among other fascinating items, contains a tale with the incredible title "The Worst Boy at Borstal;" there is a 1929 Popular, and a 1932 Modern Boy.

A disadvantage of a book of this type is that one is certain to be landed with stories which are parts of long series - for instance, all the Popular stories here are parts of series, and the same thing applies to Cliff House and elsewhere. In my opinion that does not really matter a lot. The real charm of this book is as a browsing ground, and, for that purpose, it cannot be faulted.

HARRY WHARTON'S ENEMYFrank Richards
(Howard Baker: £2.75)

This superb volume contains the first six stories of the Stacey Series. There is probably no praise that can be lavished on this series

which has not been accorded it already. A magnificent school series, packed with delightful cricket episodes, in the summer term at Greyfriars, this one is, in my own estimation, the greatest Frank Richards of all. Starring Harry Wharton, his double and cousin Ralph Stacey, and also Vernon-Smith, the tale contains some mighty fine characterisation.

Also in the volume are the final two stories of the Wilmot series, the opening of which series figured in an earlier volume.

The splitting of the Stacey series into two volumes has been criticised in some quarters, but, at least, it does give the reader that delicious yearning for more and the knowledge that he will soon get more - just like waiting for next Saturday in the days of our youth. Don't miss this one.

* * * * *

ORIGIN OF ROBIN HOOD

by G. W. Mason

A report on the Cambridge meeting on 11th March, including reference to the origin of Robin Hood, concluded that the hero of many a boyhood tale "was a pure creation of the ballad muse."

Hugh Latimer, in his sixth sermon preached before King Edward the Sixth, on the 23rd April, 1549, had this to say of Robin Hood: "I came once myself to a place, riding on a journey homeward from London, and I sent word over night into the town that I would preach there in the morning, because it was holy day, and me thought it was an holydayes work the Church stooede in my way, and I tooke my horse and my company, and went thither (I thought I should have found a great company in the Church) and when I came there, the Church dore was fast locked. I taryed there halfe an houre and more, at last the key was found, and one of the parish comes to me and sayes, Syr, this is a busie day with us, we cannot heare you, it is Robin Hoodes day. The parishe are gone to abroad gather for Robin Hoode, I pray you let them not. I was fayne there to geve place to Robin Hoode: I thought my Rotchet should have bene regarded, though I were not: but it woulde not serve, it was fayne to geve place to Robin Hoodes men. It is no laughing matter my friendes, it is a weeping matter, a heavey

matter under the pretence for gathering for Robin Hoode, a Traytour, and a Thiefe, to put out a Preacher . . ."

This shows, on the authority of no less a person than Hugh Latimer, that there was no doubt as to the existence of Robin Hood.

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SCHOOLDAYS

by Charles H. Matthews

The whole of my Schooldays were spent in South London, apart from two brief periods when my parents considered that a change of air and school at Brighton would be beneficial.

I could well say that between 1924 and 1930, I attended several schools - a very humble one in reality - the others more grandiloquent in a dream world in which I joined the more exciting activities of my favourite characters at Greyfriars, St. Frank's and St. Jim's.

My own London County School - Effra - situated almost equidistant between the parallel Railton Road and Norwood Road, Herne Hill, differed vastly from the scholastic academies described in my favourite weekly papers. The paper chase did not fall to my lot, nor indeed did Boating on the river, and illicit excursions into adjacent woods during break, were not at all possible. My cycle trips did not by any means of imagination take me along country lanes and over the hills to finish up with a jolly spread and a glass of pop at some cosy tea room.

Nevertheless, on looking back, I can only remember enjoying myself at play, and in a somewhat lesser degree, in class, and considered indeed that my heroes had it rather tough. After all, I had very little prep or homework, as it was then termed, and bed time and 'lights out,' as far as I was concerned, were my no means so hard and fast. School bounds and late passes didn't mean a thing, and I often wondered why it was such an awful offence to be discovered within the grounds of the "Three Fishers." My occasional but regular trips to the Bottle & Jug Department of my local hostelry for my parents, were encouraged, rather than frowned upon. Nor did I have bullying prefects invested with the power to cane, after me.

There were times, it is true, when I received 'six of the best' in class, and occasionally made the acquaintance of the Head's cane for

more serious offences such as when I played truant. In those days, however, one never thought of seeking sympathy at home, for more punishment would only too certainly follow.

Instead of Woods, Country Lanes and the sparkling river, we had our playground, and here in the Summer we sat in groups playing 'five stones' and swapping cigarette cards when they were new. I can still recall the superior merits of those obtained from De Reszke and Ardath, or was it B. D. V? With cards of less pristine condition, we played games in different and fascinating variations which no doubt my contemporaries will remember with nostalgia.

In the Winter we had conkers and tops, fought spasmodically, and kept warm by playing the very popular rough and tumble game called by various names in other localities, but known in South London at least, as "Weak Horses." Bob Cherry, Grundy and Ted Handforth would have excelled in this game, but the fat owl would have been too much of a good thing.

We were not allowed, however, to forget that primarily we were at School to learn something. Effra had a very good record in this respect, and our Head, albeit not perhaps so erudite as Dr. Locke, insisted none-the-less upon a very high standard from his Staff who, in turn made us work.

My "Quelch" was a Mr. Mangold in whose top class I spent my last eighteen months at School. He kept us at it, and although very fair and possessing a sense of humour, was very strict and there were no doubt occasions when I was in trouble, that the Famous Five's expression "A beast but a just beast" seemed most apt. Old 'Mangle' as we termed him, commanded complete attention from his class and received it without any difficulty, and we respected him for it.

Forty-four years have passed since I left Effra, but the attachment I then formed for my dream schools still remains. I took the Magnet up to the last day of issue, and for many years I have read and re-read the old papers at main meal times without fail. I shall always be grateful to Edwy Searles Brooks, and to Charles Hamilton for the many hours of pleasure that they have given to me.

Although I can return to Greyfriars, St. Frank's and St. Jim's daily, I can never return to Effra as an Old Boy, for it was demolished
