

# COLLECTORS DIGEST

ANNUAL

1973



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# Collectors' Digest CHRISTMAS 1973 Annual

TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR

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### INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

The Annual, like Christmas, comes round once a year - and, from the evidence of my mail-bag, it is just as welcome.

Year after year our contributors find new slants on old themes, while our readers seem to renew their youth in reading the efforts of our gallant band.

This year, possibly, we are just a little top-heavy with reminiscent articles, when our writers have looked back a long way to those far-off days **long** before the hobby was born. Before deciding to go overboard with reminiscence, as I admit we have done this year, I gave the matter a good deal of thought. I came to the conclusion that most of us like to look back to times when there was far less money about yet everybody seemed to be happier and more contented with life and their lot. A relief, maybe, from Channel Tunnels, Maplins, Concordes, and the riotous use of oil.

Our main aim, though, as always, has been variety, and I think I can safely claim that there is plenty of variety in this particular Annual. Plus a magic lantern show of pictures showing different landmarks down the corridors of time.

With this, our 27th Annual - and what a record it is, when one comes to think of it - I remember the folks who have gone from us and who have left their happy footprints in the hobby's sands of time, and I express my grateful thanks to our contributors and to our printers at York who do such sterling work, and to you, my readers, without whom none of it would be possible or worth while.

May this Christmas, for all of you, be the best of all time, and may the New Year bring happiness, joy, and serenity.

Your sincere friend and editor,

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# The Dr. Huxton Rymer Story

by Josie Packman

This is the story of a vivid personality created so perfectly by one of our best Blake authors, Mr. G. H. Teed, that the great Doctor always seemed to have been a real living person. A man pulled in two directions - the great Surgeon striving to help his fellow men with his wonderful command of the new surgery he himself had helped to create, and the quite equally great criminal, using his twisted, but brilliant brains, to plan the outrageous crimes related in the Sexton Blake Saga.

The story of his decline and fall covers a period of some twenty years, but his real character emerged in the early stories of his adventures and battles with Sexton Blake.

Dr. Rymer came of a good family and had been sent to Vienna for his medical and surgical training, early in this century. At that time in history Vienna was the "Mecca of Medicine," nowhere else could a young doctor of Rymer's ability have learned his trade as a surgeon. He was the first to discover the practice, the delicate hip operation which was to revolutionise modern surgery. His discoveries were sensational and given to the world through the Franz Joseph Hospital in Vienna where his services were sought by Royalty and commoner alike.

Then, suddenly and mysteriously, the Master disappeared, he was seen no more by the pupils who carried on his teachings. Why had this man deserted his chosen profession? Was there a kink in his brain which caused him to relinquish all that he had worked so hard for? From a brilliant surgeon he evolved slowly but surely into a no less brilliant criminal, destined to end his career in disgrace and imprisonment. The seeds of good and evil were implanted in this man at birth - who could say from which parent he inherited them - or was it from his ancestors, for "the sins of the fathers are visited on their children unto the third and fourth generation."

Yet, in spite of these criminal instincts Rymer could still immerse himself in medicine. In the story called "The Sacred Sphere," U. J. No. 529, we first hear of his treatise on "The Emanations of Radium in Relation to their action on Cancer and the Curative Power Thereof." A description of Rymer is given where - on board a deserted ship on a raw cold December day - he was so engrossed in his writings that he noticed nothing of his sordid surroundings. Several times in the many stories about Dr. Rymer written in future years, this profound treatise was mentioned but eventually in the late 1920's this theme was dropped by the author and Rymer became a skilled operator in anything he undertook.

In the meantime, many fine stories of Rymer's adventures were published, quite a number of them in the famous Double Numbers of the Union Jack. Altogether there were seventy-six stories in which Dr. Rymer appeared, more than some so-called best-selling authors produce in a life time. These are the ones published in the Union Jack and Sexton Blake Library and one solitary tale in the Boys' Friend Library.

To get a real picture of the Dr. we need to divide these tales into three sections, as follows: -

The first section covers the period from 1913, No. 488 of the Union Jack to No. 692 in early 1917.

The second section began in 1922, when the author Mr. Teed, returned from his war service and world wide wanderings to start writing for the Blake Saga again. In my opinion this section lasted until the end of the first series of the Sexton Blake Library in 1925 and correspondingly with the same period in the Union Jack.

The third section covers the remaining years until the death of Mr. Teed in 1938, and were among the more modern and sophisticated tales. Not that they were any better than the early ones, but were brought up to date and written in gangsterish style as apparently ordered by the then Editor.

Before beginning with Rymer's first meeting with Sexton Blake, I feel impelled to mention the tale of Dr. Rymer which appeared in 1916, in No. 11 of the new Sexton Blake Library and shows his characteristics to advantage. It is a strange and haunting story of the grim battles in war-torn France and particularly of the happenings in a small field Hospital back of Nancy run by a surgeon of the greatest genius. "Lt. Col. of the Army of France is his rank and on his breast there is attached the ribbon of a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. Lt. Col. de Loulay is the name by which the French Government knows him and the name by which the lesser surgeons speak of his wonderful surgery with bated breath. No more brilliant handler of the knife is there in all the French lines than de Loulay. Yet little do any of his associates dream that de Loulay hides the identity of Dr. Huxton Rymer, once the most brilliant surgeon of Europe. Yet so it is." Yes, after many of the adventures of which I am about to tell you, Rymer had ended up in France and joined the French Army, and in so doing had nearly won back his self respect and had worked hard for the lives of broken and wounded men who had arrived at the small hospital, without thought of anything else, his criminal career forgotten amongst the horrors of the Great War, and the knowledge that he held in his hands the relief of suffering for so many of those men. But even in this environment, temptation looms and once more the Dr. has to fight against the evil in him. This is a sad story and involves the loss of the last son of a French nobleman, an almost lost inheritance and stolen jewels. It is also one of the few tales in which Rymer joins forces with Baron de Beauremon. No other Rymer adventures appeared in the Sexton Blake Library until 1922.

Now, back to 1913, and the start of the story, which begins in U. J. No. 488, "When Greek meets Greek." In this tale we hear that Blake has met Rymer in New York and foiled one of his plans. He escapes from the New York Police and boards a boat running to the small Republic of Salnarita in South America. The cargo turns out to be guns for the usual rebels in that particular country and it is here that Rymer also meets Mlle Yvonne Cartier for the first time and falls in love with her. At that time Yvonne is still the Adventuress and invites Rymer to join forces with her, but a reckless disobedience of the rules laid down by her had severed their relationship and Rymer has been set adrift but with well-filled pockets.

He landed in Melbourne and set about enjoying the luxurious life he loved, but soon the demon drink overcame him and he was eventually down to his last shillings and living among the dregs of humanity. This adventure is related in the Easter Double Number of the Union Jack, No. 493, called "The Diamond Dragon," a tale of Chinese intrigue in which Rymer gets involved, but after returning to England with his loot he eventually ends up in Bleakmoor Prison.

These two stories pre-date the only Rymer one in the Boys' Friend Library of May 1913, entitled "The Great Mining Swindle." Rymer has been transferred to Bigmoor Prison which is supposed to have been the most secure of all the English prisons but Rymer escapes with the aid of some of his criminal friends. It was during the course of this adventure that Rymer showed he still had some remnants of decency. Although in the earlier adventure with Yvonne he had tried to kill Tinker, in this one his better nature comes to the fore and he rescues Tinker from sinking to his death in the quicksands near Bigmoor Prison. One cannot but admire this man who could at one time submerge himself in Medicine and Surgery to help others, and then the next fall victim to drink and drugs.

By now the true character of Dr. Huxton Rymer had been set by the author who then went on to enlarge on his theme. The great Doctor succumbed to the snares of drugs and in the adventure related in U. J. No. 512, dated 2 August, 1913, he continues his disastrous career by becoming involved in the plans of Prince Wu Ling (who had appeared on the scene by this time) and once again he lost the fight and ended up in another small Republic in South America. Time and again Rymer returned to that part of the world as there were ever rich pickings to be made and no extradition law existed between South America and the European Countries or North America, thus making a safe haven for the wrongdoers. But the Chinese plots follow him there as told in U. J. No. 526, "The Yellow Octopus."

The next adventure has already been mentioned - "The Sacred Sphere," in which we first heard about Rymer's treatise on Cancer. This was also a Christmas Double Number of the Union Jack, but although Rymer appeared to profit from his many crimes he was a spendthrift and soon ran through the money he obtained and often he was foiled by Sexton Blake from making the large coups he planned.

A gap of several months passed before another tale appeared, but it was worth waiting for. This was a Spring Double Number and the story was of such a length that the magnificent plot could be unfolded to the full. Dr. Rymer decides to use his remaining capital to return home to England and books a first class passage with the hopes that something big might turn up. It did, but vastly different to what Rymer expected. He comes into contact with a wealthy landowner, one Thomas Brail, who is suffering from Cancer and thereby lands in a most unexpected situation. Thomas Brail is hoping to find the man who wrote the wonderful treatise on the cure of Cancer and when he learns that Rymer is that man he offers him a fantastic fee to cure him (Brail), a fee that should have satisfied even Rymer's craving for money. However, from the moment he first examines his patient a marvellous change comes over Rymer. Every thought of a criminal nature fled as he was gripped by his professional instincts.

For part of the voyage home Rymer was satisfied to treat his patient and plan the further treatment when various drugs were available. But gradually the idea came to him for getting his hands on a larger sum than even the huge fee Thomas Brail had offered him. The criminal instincts once more came to the fore and in spite of Sexton Blake's eventual appearance on the scene Rymer did cure his victim but got away with a considerable amount of his wealth. This he was able to do because Brail was grateful to Rymer, not only had he been cured but re-united with his estranged wife and daughter. The plot of this story is far too long and complicated to tell in a few words, but if anyone is lucky enough to possess a copy or able to borrow one, of this Union Jack, then they are in for a real fine read. In my opinion it is one of the very best of Teed's fine tales. These double numbers of the Union Jack certainly did give the author scope for wonderful tales, as well as developing the character of Dr. Huxton Rymer to the full.

Rymer disappeared abroad with his ill-gotten gains but soon gambled most of it away. In his years as a criminal he must have stolen or acquired in some way or another, a fairly large fortune, but with his besetting sins of gambling, drink and drugs, sank to so low a level that after certain happenings in Sydney he found it prudent to depart from that city, the only way being as a deck hand aboard the Japanese ship Kara Maru. The Kara Maru was plying as a passenger ship between Sydney and Hong Kong calling at Manilla and various other islands on the way. But she was destined never to reach Hong Kong on this voyage, neither were the majority of her passengers and crew. A hurricane hit the ship during its course through the Great Barrier Reef, but one man was able to escape from the wreckage carrying with him the beautiful rare crimson pearl which had already been the cause of much bloodshed and was destined to do so once again. This adventure was told in Union Jack, No. 564, dated 1 August, 1914, entitled "The Crimson Pearl." This was another of the grand 80,000 word double numbers which were such a feature of the period. It was the length of these stories which enabled Teed to enlarge on the character of Rymer, especially where he fought to outwit Blake who was often on his track. Very few of these early adventures happened in England, they were mostly set in the Far East or South America with an occasional one in New York. The descriptions by Teed of the countries and terrains in which Rymer worked, helped to make one realise the true bravery and courage which Rymer sometimes had to show, gave one the real key to his character.

The next four stories of Rymer's adventures are very good ones but as they are shorter tales, the themes are necessarily easier ones for Blake to settle. All four are, however, quite different in plot and location. No. 591 "The Mystery of the Banana Plantation" being a tale of chicanery in the financial world. No. 613 "Scoundrels All" is another version of the South American adventures but this time Rymer joins up with Beauremon again, and other members of the Council of Eleven. No. 618 "Sexton Blake - Pirate" is a good yarn about the activities of spies in war-time. Submarines and bullion abound and Rymer kills the spy early on in the story and makes his own plans for obtaining the bullion being sent from America to Germany. There is no doubt about it, these war years lent themselves to many a plot which would have been impossible in peace time.

The last of this particular set of tales is recorded in No. 623 called "The

Case of the Frisco Leper." This tale opens with a description of the great San Francisco Exposition. Despite the war raging in Europe the State of California had decided that the Exposition could not be postponed and it was because of this decision that the appearance in San Francisco of Dr. Huxton Rymer was to be of great moment. Rymer appears to fall in with a man who is apparently a leper and the Dr. treats him after discovering that the disease was not true Leprosy, but Rymer's agile brain soon sees a way to make a profit out of this - Blackmail! For what city containing thousands of people visiting the Exposition could afford to let it be known that a case of Leprosy was in the city. But Sexton Blake also turned up in San Francisco bent on catching an escaped German prisoner of war, so of course Rymer's plans as usual go awry. No wonder he has sworn to kill Blake. Yet when he gets the opportunity he does not act - the remains of his streak of decency are still there - he really admires Blake for his persistence.

Our next tale is the last of Teed's double numbers. It is Union Jack No. 685, "The Blue God" and introduces another of Teed's characters - Hammerton Palmer, who joins forces with Rymer in this tale of orchids and sapphires. Both very rare specimens. Never before had the wonderful blue orchid been seen by white men, nor had the large sapphire embedded in an idol hidden deep in the jungles of Borneo. This is a magnificent tale and once again shows the wonderful courage of the one-time brilliant surgeon in venturing into the jungle where few had gone before him. But he is a true gambler and fighter who, when bested by Blake merely waits for the next opportunity to come along.

The last tale in this section of our story of Dr. Huxton Rymer is quite a good one, although it seems to be a copy of the earlier gold bullion one, but with a different setting. This is what we hear of the Dr. in the last paragraph of this story "Coasting up through the Solomons was a schooner bearing Dr. Huxton Rymer and the rest of the scum who had escaped from Tahiti. Rymer had played for high stakes and had lost, but as he leaned over the rail smoking and watching the green water slush by, his face betrayed no hint of disappointment. He was too much of a gambler to reveal what he might feel, and when the hand was played it was to him dead."

So there we leave him until five years in the future when once again his adventures are chronicled in the pages of the Union Jack and the Sexton Blake Library.

## Part 2

In the first part of our story the tales of Dr. Huxton Rymer's adventures followed in chronological order in the Union Jack with one exception, the story called "The Great Mining Swindle," published in the Boys' Friend Library in May 1913. This was predated by the first two stories of Rymer in the Union Jack. Now this was by no means the case in the second part of our story. Several of the tales appeared to have been written by Mr. Teed for publishing in the correct order, but no doubt the Editors of the Union Jack and Sexton Blake Library decided otherwise, so we have the curious effect of knowing about Dr. Rymer's quiet country estate near Horsham long before the actual fact happened.

After an absence of five years, Rymer returned to the pages of the Union



Jack in No. 980, dated July 1922, entitled "The Case of the Winfield Handicap," one of a set of three tales which involved Blake, Tinker and Yvonne in a chase half-way round the world after Rymer and the absconding Whidden Crane. In this particular U. J. there appears a synopsis of Rymer's adventures since he dropped out of sight as a brilliant surgeon. This states that he has already purchased the estate called Abbey Towers but the origin of this statement is written in the story "The Case of the Courtland Jewels," which appeared in the Sexton Blake Library, No. 253, 1st Series, dated 31 October, 1922! Actually the first story of Rymer after that long absence was in the S. B. L. No. 219, "The Ivory Screen" dated March 1922, thus pre-dating the Union Jack No. 980. At the end of this section will appear a list of the numbers and dates of the S. B. L. and U. J. as the stories should have been printed according to the various references given.

It was during this period that there emerged a somewhat different character, Rymer was, or seemed to be, more humane and mature. Gone were the days of his reckless indulgence in drink and drugs and only now and again did very adverse circumstances bring him to the verge of poverty and possible imprisonment. Even his dealings with Sexton Blake took on a new attitude. Despite being on opposite sides these men came together at times in mutual help. A much more reasonable state of mind than implacable hatred, especially where Rymer was concerned. His previous hatred evened out and he could not but admire Blake's persistence in out-witting him on many occasions. Several times both were instrumental in aiding each other and Tinker, to escape certain death at the hands of other criminals and in one particular case I remember, saved Tinker from death by cannibalism. This story was the "Secret Emerald Mines" in S. B. L. No. 271 in 1923. A man with Rymer's criminal instincts could never wholly reform but as he matured his better nature came to the fore more often.

After the adventure of the Ivory Screen, Rymer was once more adrift and turned up eventually in New York. The tale is related in S. B. L. No. 229 "The Spirit Smugglers" an excellent tale of the Prohibition Era. Rymer managed to get involved with certain bootleggers and rum-runners and although the Organisation was smashed by Sexton Blake in cahoots with the New York Police Department, Rymer was able to get away with a considerable fortune. It was this money that enabled him to return to England and buy the estate at Horsham under the name of Professor Andrew Butterfield.

For some time now he had had this urge to find himself a settled place of his own. The many years spent drifting round from one country to another, pursued by both the police and Sexton Blake, had at last palled on him, at least for the time being, and the acquisition of Abbey Towers was the best thing he had done since the start of his criminal career. A fine description of this house is given in "The Case of the Courtland Jewels" and Rymer spent months and a lot of money, setting the estate in order, and with the aid of a manservant, and a housemaid, lived the quite country life of an eminent Professor. But alas, the urge to once more be up and doing something exciting returned and it is in this particular story that he decided to set up as an adviser to the denizens of the underworld. Now it is also that he meets his one and only real partner - Mary Trent, who, although a well educated girl and an artist of some merit, was acting as housemaid at Abbey Towers. We are never

given the real reason for this attempt at seclusion, but it was not long before Mary found out that her employer was the notorious criminal Huxton Rymer. Mary proved her worth to Rymer and this was the beginning of an association which was partly the cause of Rymer's new character. This new feminine influence in his life had a somewhat mellowing effect although Mary entered into Rymer's schemes, and it was during this period that his relations with Sexton Blake took a change for the better.

Now although the stories were sometimes out of sequence they were complete adventures in themselves. Sometimes Mary Trent was with him, other times he was on his own or else involved with Marie Galante. Rymer first met her in the story called "The Voodoo Curse," U. J. No. 984.

A tale of a very different kind appeared in the Union Jack No. 1000. It was called "The Thousandth Chance" and was specially written for that number. The theme was excellent but the story suffered from being too short. The space allowed in those far-off days of 1922, was not enough to develop a decent plot such as appeared in the famous double numbers. This Christmas story could have been much better as a full length Sexton Blake Library tale. A number of Blake's opponents were invited to Abbey Towers by Rymer at the request of Wu Ling who had a plot to steal Blake's art treasures and required assistance. All he wanted for himself was the Ling - tse Vase, the others could have the rest. Naturally the plot failed. A later Christmas story in No. 1105 in 1924, featured Rymer and Mary Trent, together with Plummer, in "A Christmas Truce" which was fairly successful.

Many of the later stories appearing in the Union Jack up to the end of 1925, were what one might call for want of a better title "odd ones out," meaning just adventures which although still interesting were not all part of the Saga. No. 1110 for instance, "The Treasure of Tortoise Island" was a shortened version of "The Case of the Radium Patient" of 1914. The last story of Dr. Huxton Rymer in the U. J. in this second part No. 1177 "The Case of the Stricken Outpost" was a tale of a Canadian town stricken with an epidemic in which Blake and Rymer get together and bring aid to the people. Only four more stories appeared in the later Union Jacks and these will form part of the third section of this story of Dr. Huxton Rymer.

Following is a list of tales as they should have been published in correct order.

Sexton Blake Library No. 219, dated March 1922, "The Ivory Screen"  
 " " " No. 229, " May 1922, "The Spirit Smugglers"  
 " " " No. 253, " October 1922, "The Case of the Courtland  
 Jewels"  
 Union Jack No. 980, dated July 1922, "The Case of the Winfield Handicap"  
 " " No. 981, " " " "The Sexton Blake's Blunder"  
 " " No. 982 " " " "The Case of the Rickshaw Coolie"  
 " " No. 984 " August 1922, "The Voodoo Curse"  
 Sexton Blake Library No. 271, February 1923, "The Secret Emerald Mines"  
 Union Jack No. 1014, dated 17 March, 1923, "The Pearls of Benjemasin"  
 " " No. 1015, " 24 March, 1923, "The Painted Window"  
 " " No. 1017, " 7 April, 1923, "The Indian Fakir"  
 " " No. 1020, " 28 April, 1923, "The Mystery of the Moving Mountain"  
cont'd ...

Sexton Blake Library No. 283, 31 May, 1923, "The Eight-pointed Star"  
" " " No. 307, 30 November, 1923, "The Crimson Belt"  
Union Jack No. 1047, November 1923, "Huxton Rymer - President"  
Sexton Blake Library No. 312, 31 December, 1923, "The Orloff Diamond"  
" " " No. 356, 30 November, 1924, "The Case of the Clairvoyant's  
Ruse"  
" " " No. 360, 31 December, 1924, "The Case of the Jade-Handled  
Knife"

### Part 3

We now come to the final part of the Dr. Huxton Rymer story. After the last mentioned Union Jack story No. 1177, which was quite out of the context of the Saga, there are only four more tales of Rymer in the Union Jack, the numbers being 1368 "The Twilight Feather Case," No. 1421 "Voodoo Vengeance," No. 1438 "Yellow Guile" and lastly No. 1465 "Doomed Ships." All these were described by the Editor as being the best of Teed's tales!!!! Personally I found them unreadable. They were not written in Teed's usual style, more like the modern thriller of today, absolutely ghastly. Blake was on his own, no Tinker or any other familiar characters. Dr. Rymer and Mary Trent appeared in all the tales but the plots were unfathomable. In two of the tales the action takes place in China, (not the China of the early days), one tale in which Rymer gets mixed up with Marie Galante is centred in the West Indies, and the last tale about Doomed Ships begins in the fogs of London and ends in the jungles of Malaysia. No doubt to some of our readers this type of story will appeal, but the character of Dr. Rymer was so differently portrayed it seemed like someone else writing his adventures.

However, we can return to the Sexton Blake Library to find tales of the usual calibre - Teed's best. No. 1 in the 2nd new series was particularly good and showed how much Rymer had benefited from his partnership with Mary Trent. It was certainly a more natural one than the early abortive attempt with Mlle. Yvonne, and also showed how Rymer had matured and spent more of his time, when in funds, at Abbey Towers engaged in the scientific research which was his first love. Every now and again the Medical Journals published articles by a Professor Andrew Butterfield but no-one ever saw him. But the criminal itch was still there and led to him undertaking new exploits. But Mary was his real partner and proved her worth to him when in "The Secret of the Coconut Groves" she packed a small fortune in pearls (stolen ones) in a box and posted them to her friend Zulaika in England, to await Rymer's return. This was something which even Rymer had not thought to do, but when Sexton Blake discovered what had happened to the pearls he really appreciated how he had been defeated. In subsequent tales Rymer would have done better had he taken more of Mary's advice. But there are more tales where Rymer shows he has some decency left, for instance, when he is wounded in the attempt to warn Blake of the plot to kill him. This event is recorded in S. B. L. No. 35 "The case of the Mummified Hand."

There is now one tale to record specially. It is "The Black Emperor" S. B. L. No. 53 and the tale is like something out of the modern newspaper reports on

the "Black Power" movement. No, there is nothing new under the sun and this story written nearly half a century ago prophesies just what is happening in America today. At that time, Caesar Lorraine, known as the Black Emperor of New York's Harlem district, headed the organisation concerned with bootlegging, drugs, prostitution, and illegal entry into the U. S. A. of immigrants from Southern and Central Europe. Except for the bootlegging of Prohibition days, the whole tale could be read as a modern thriller, right bag up to date. And it was into this maelstrom that Rymer landed as one of the links in the chain which stretched to Europe and brings the illegal immigrants to America. At some stage in his career Rymer had acquired ships' papers and was able to charter a ship and pack it with 500 of these poor desperate people each time he made the Atlantic crossing, which began at Genoa and ended in New York. But once again he gets involved with Marie Galante, whose wild schemes for a Black Empire has brought her to New York to meet Lorraine, and once again, although Rymer seems unable to resist the lure of this "Glamour girl" from Haiti, he finds it pays him better to return to England and Mary Trent who loyally waits for him at Abbey Towers. In subsequent tales Rymer cannot resist joining forces with Marie Galante but each time his efforts to make a fortune come to a sad end.

The remaining adventures are related in the Sexton Blake Library and are quite good, several of them being set in the rebellious small Republics in Central America. Somewhere along the line Rymer had apparently become the leader of a criminal organisation known as the Crooks' Trust. I am unable to trace the story in which this organisation is first mentioned, probably there wasn't one, or else the particular tale was never printed. Dr. Rymer still uses his brilliant talent for organising various crimes for his underworld associates, but it is with deep regret that I have to say that the last original story to appear in S. B. L. No. 608, dated January 1936, was a very bad one. I can hardly believe that it was really written by Mr. Teed, Rymer seems to have turned into a murderous person, killing all and sundry, finally he is caught in the holocaust of a burning Abbey Towers, thus eliminating any chance of his returning to a more sane way of living. Mary Trent does not appear, not mentioned at all, which seems peculiar after all her adventures with Rymer. Did Teed really write this tale and was it at the request of the Editor? No, I feel sure that this is one time when Teed did not write the story credited to him.

To sum up the whole Saga, one of over twenty years, I am of the opinion that the stories written during the first fifteen years were the very best.

A brilliant surgeon and scientist lost to the world, a great tragedy, but his adventures made exciting reading.

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Scarce U.S.A. magazines and Fan Magazines, ref. E. R. Burroughs, for sale, plus many other Burroughs and associated writers' books, etc.

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HAPPY XMAS & PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR TO ALL

# Charles Hamilton & Women's Lib!

by Mary Cadogan

Hamiltonian heroines may stand low on the ladder of liberation, according to the ideals of Miss Germaine Greer, but at Greyfriars and St. Jim's a few joyful blows have been struck for the Women's movements. At the same time Charles Hamilton enjoyed swiping them occasional back-handers, especially during the days of Suffragette militancy. He was always sympathetic with characters like Cousin Ethel and Marjorie Hazeldene, whose sturdiness never eclipsed their femininity: an aura of graciousness surrounds them, surviving from the Edwardian days of their creation until the GEM and MAGNET ended. Conversely, Hamilton relished writing about hefty harridans like Miss Bullivant, gym mistress of Cliff House School, and her fictitious fellow-campaigners for women's suffrage.

In 1908 (MAGNET No. 28) Hamilton champions Dr. Locke's young sister, Amy, who volunteers to become temporary 'master' of the Remove so that Mr. Quelch can extend his much needed sick-leave. Fresh from Girton ... there was nothing of the "blue-stocking," the learned miss, about Amy Locke ... a young and graceful girl



The grip on Gussy's collar was like iron, as Miss Bullivant marched him through the gateway into the road. "Now go!" she cried. "Reappear here at any other time, and I shall hand you over to the police: Wretched boy, take that as a punishment!" "Yawoop!" D'Arcy staggered to one side as Miss Bullivant gave him a powerful box on the ears. (See page 15.)

with a sweet face, and soft, brown eyes.' Needless to say she is in for a tough time from the wilder spirits of the Remove, especially Bulstrode, Levison and Skinner. Even Harry Wharton & Co., whose natural chivalry is heightened by Miss Locke's youthful prettiness, are aghast at the prospect of 'knuckling under' to a woman, knowing this would make them the laughing stock of other forms. The Head's sister, during her first morning in class, soon proves herself mistress of the situation, in spite of persistent insults from Bulstrode, Levison, Skinner and Bunter.

'There was a painful silence in the Form. The Remove had chafed at feminine government, but now that there was actual rebellion, some of them began to think that, after all, it was not very manly to "rag" a woman ... Wharton's eyes were beginning to sparkle. He was strongly inclined to back the Girton girl up.'

Bulstrode receives his just deserts from 'that confounded suffragette' - a sharp cut across the palm from Miss Locke's pointer! This humiliation takes the fire out of Bulstrode's revolt against the despised 'petticoat government' and Harry, as form leader, is implored by the Removites to find a way out of their embarrassing predicament: falsetto-voiced jibes from other forms about 'good little girls' have to be endured because Amy Locke has forbidden the Remove to engage in fighting!

'The Girton Girl ... looked very fresh and pretty in the dull old classroom, and it struck Harry that she brightened the place very much, and was a much more picturesque figure than Mr. Quelch.'

Her charm, however, does not prevent Skinner from releasing a clockwork mouse which instantly undermines Miss Locke's independence and sends her leaping up on to the nearest chair, clutching her long skirts about her. This prompts Bunter's fatuous observation, "Look there, Levison! I told you she hadn't blue stockings!" Wharton helps to restore order and repress Skinner's malevolent schemes.

'As the Form filed out, the young lady from Girton signed to Harry Wharton to come to her. Somewhat wondering, Harry obeyed. Miss Locke detached a rose she was wearing, and pinned it to Harry's coat. "In recognition of the good example you have set the class, Wharton," she said, with a sweet smile.

Wharton was crimson and dumb.'

Too considerate to refuse the rosy tribute he has to resort to 'wild and whirling conflict' with those who jeer at him, in defiance of Miss Locke's veto on fisticuffs. Strengthened through battle, Harry decides he will give every support to his temporary form-mistress.

'"My hat! ... I say, you'll be giving the women seats in Parliament next!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.'

Though doubtful, with the rest of the Co. Bob backs up Wharton and Amy Locke is eventually accepted by the Remove.

Very different exchanges take place between conventional schoolboy and blue-stocking schoolmistress in GEM 756, GUSSY AMONG THE GIRLS. D'Arcy is in

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CONSTERNATION AMONG THE GREYFRIARS' JUNIORS.

hiding at Cliff House, one of his several refuges on the notorious occasion of his 'retirement' from St. Jim's, to avoid the indignity of an unjustified flogging. Gussy, concealed in a woodshed, is discovered by Bessie Bunter, who ventures there to devour a bag of jam tarts appropriated from Clara Trevlyn. Bessie's screams rend the air and bring the gym mistress to the scene.

'Miss Bullivant was a determined character. In younger days she had helped to wring the Vote from terrified Cabinet Ministers, whom she had waylaid with golf clubs.'

Now, with her club at the ready, The Bull commands Gussy to come forth.

'Arthur Augustus did not come forth.

"Oh dear! S - s - suppose he rushed at you, Miss Bullivant!" exclaimed Barbara. "Hadn't we better all go away, and - and send the porter ..."

"Nonsense! What a mere man can do a woman can do - better!" said the Bull.'

When her repeated commands to the 'ruffian' to come forth are ignored, Miss Bullivant announces her intention of stunning him with one blow, and, swinging her golf club through the air, she crashes it down on the stack of faggots sheltering D'Arcy. Crumpled and dishevelled he has to emerge, to a chorus of laughter from the girls and fury from Miss Bullivant: at first she suspects him of criminal intent and then of 'holding surreptitious communication with a girl belonging to this school.'

"You are a young rascal! ... An unscrupulous and precocious young scoundrel!" continued Miss Bullivant, who had learned a fine flow of language in her early days of the struggle for the Vote. "Well may you cringe before me ..."

"Bai Jove! I was not awah that I was cwingin' ... "

"I look upon you with disgust, detestation and abhorrence!" said Miss Bullivant. "Wretched interloper!"

Gussy's gorgeous manners and niceties are utterly lost on the Bull who, after lacerating the Swell of St. Jim's with her tongue, propels him protesting to the gate. With an iron grip on Gussy's collar the ex-suffragette yanks him along so vigorously that he has to trot to keep pace with her.

"Wretched boy, take that as a punishment!"

Smack!

"Yawoop!" roared Arthur Augustus, staggering to one side as Miss Bullivant gave him a powerful box on the ears.

Smack!

A box on the other ear righted the swell of St. Jim's.'

D'Arcy, discomfited and muttering about the 'feahful thwashin' he would administer if only Miss Bullivant were a man 'stood not upon the order of his going - but went!'

Gussy has a delicious knack of involving himself in skirmishes with



suffragettes and the 'new woman.' In GEM 78 (in 1909) he determines to talk Cousin Ethel out of the 'Gal Scouts'. (The Guide movement had not then been officially recognized, and Baden Powell inspired female pioneers had dubbed themselves Girl Scouts.) Arthur Augustus confides to his chums ... "A man bein' so much supewiah to a woman in intellect is bound to look aftah her and give her fwiendly advice." Tom Merry, Figgins and most of the St. Jim's juniors do not share Gussy's convictions and are inclined to think the Girl Scouts an excellent innovation. Undeterred, D'Arcy continues his crusade ...

"'There is an old maxim about wesistin' the beginnin's ... I wegard it as necessary for a woman to wemain in her place ... It would be absolutely howwid for women to get into Parliament, you know, when you considah what kind of boundahs they would have to mix with there ...'"

Gussy favours a view widely held by men of the period that women were too noble - or too foolish - to participate in government! His attempts to point out to Ethel the error of her ways are somewhat emasculated by the fact that, when going to meet her in Rylcombe woods, he is attacked by Grammarians and ignominiously 'rescued' by Ethel and her Girl Scout Curlew Patrol! With his customary exquisite tact and delicacy Gussy explains to Ethel that she should stay quietly at home and set a good example to her sex. She suggests that she can best judge her own needs, and Gussy, exasperated, declares that she will be wanting a Vote next! Ethel proceeds to challenge the St. Jim's juniors to a scouting contest - which the girls win! However, this victory is achieved as much by Mellish and Gore's sabotage against Tom Merry's patrol as by the girls' skill, so honours are declared even, and the story ends with Gussy converted ... "An assuahed and convinced supportah of the idea of patwols of Gal Scouts."

His further struggles with the fair sex are described in GEM 274, D'ARCY THE SUFFRAGIST, in which Charles Hamilton tilts at feminist militancy. (Another Amalgamated Press author once told me that when he was five years old he was kissed by a suffragette: he found this a terrifying experience as the rating of these ladies was then much the same as witches and vampires!) Violence was increasing in the Women's Suffrage campaign when, after more than fifty frustrating years of constitutional agitation, there still seemed no hope of gaining the Vote. Charles Hamilton was doubtless horrified by the suffragette who took a horse-whip to Mr. Churchill in 1910, and presumably equally appalled at the beating-up of Mrs. Pankhurst by roughs at an election meeting in 1908. Ironically a few weeks after 'D'Arcy the Suffragist' was published in May 1913, the hideous climax of violence came: Emily Davison, just released from six months in prison for setting fire to a letter-box, went straight to the Derby and threw herself under the King's horse, to die a few days later.

In GEM 274, D'Arcy's involvement with the 'Feminine Liberty League' is pure farce. Its leaders, Mrs. Jellicoe Jellicott and her daughter, Miss Gloxianna Jellicott, are tyrannical termagants in true Hamiltonian tradition. Arthur Augustus, now a convert to the cause, is ambushed by Figgins, Kerr and Wynn, on his way to a Suffragette meeting. Disguised, they claim to be Asquith, Winston Churchill and Lloyd George, and strip Gussy of his clothes. He has to dress in a

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weird assortment of feminine attire, daubed with Suffragette slogans: D'Arcy is then pelted with rotten eggs and thrown into the horse pond by local residents, who resent the window-smashing and letter-box burning activities of Mrs. Jellicott and her League. All this is mild compared with the shrieking vehemence of the Suffragettes who consider that Gussy, a male impersonating a female, must be a spy! Their ferocity ends his determination to help the fair sex in their struggle for freedom: from then on they have to go it alone, minus his invaluable assistance!

Charles Hamilton describes a happier aspect of feminine independence in another of his creations - Clara Trevlyn: she is typical of the Edwardian new woman, the 'sport' or 'tomboy' who gets on well with the opposite sex and would rather play a vigorous round of golf with a man than have a remantic relationship with him! Clara occasionally dumbfounds Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry by her daunting observations, particularly concerning their obvious devotion to Marjorie. In MAGNET 1535, after estrangement and suspicion, Bob is reconciled with Marjorie: Greyfriars and Cliff House parties meet at the Old Priory for a picnic. . . Bob has suffered long agonies for Marjorie's sake, and Clara's unsentimental comment is characteristic.

"So you've got over it?"

"Eh - what?" stammered Bob.

"You had your back up about something . . ."

"I - I hadn't . . ."

"Bow-wow!" said Miss Clara. "Think I didn't know. So did Marjorie! Didn't you, old bean?"

Marjorie coloured. "Nonsense, Clara!" she said.

Miss Clara laughed and ran on into the priory . . .

Marjorie lingered in the old gateway and Bob remained with her.'

And we can leave them there, standing together in Hamiltonian sunlight and serenity, undisturbed by echoes of Emmeline Pankhurst or the clarion calls of Women's Lib! . . . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

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# Some Early Christmas Settings

by R. J. Godsave

The two highlights of the year in the Nelson Lee Library were, no doubt, the summer holiday and Christmas series. Of the Christmas stories E. S. Brooks could always be relied upon to give his readers a good measure of snow and mystery.

His first attempt in writing a St. Frank's Christmas story was the double number o. s. 130 "The Phantom of Tregellis Castle." This was a fascinating story in which the reader was introduced to Sir Montie Tregellis West's ancestral home. With its massive terraces and snow covered lawns the reader was able to get a mental picture of the castle. Since everyone knows what a castle looks like this was fairly simple.

Another Christmas party held at Tregellis Castle was during the Solomon Levi series some three years later. Once again Brooks enthused on the deep snow, described a fancy dress skating carnival on the lake and the old world charm of the village.

A single Nelson Lee o. s. "The Mystery of Grey Towers," contained the Christmas story. This issue was really the sequel to the Jack Mason series in which St. Crawford Grey found his long-lost son Norman Grey. With his father and friend, Reggie Pitt, it was his return home after some thirteen years. Grey Towers was described as a 'noble-looking pile, although not of any great vastness. It was old - very, very old. Towers jutted out at different points, and gables abounded. On a dull, drab day the old building would look almost sinister, perhaps - gloomy and forbidding.'

In this issue Sir Edward Handforth had recently been knighted and was indulging in a joy ride with his son and Church and McClure. The car ran into a ditch during a snow storm, fortunately near Grey Towers. This was an interesting story of how the butler endeavoured to kidnap and cause any visitor to disappear in order to leave Grey Towers empty for his thieving activities.

The village of Pellton, near Grey Towers, was not so favourably treated by Brooks as was Tregellis village. It appeared to lack old world charm and of the two inns, the Blue Lion was far better in outward appearance than the Broken Pitcher.

Although the Duke of Somerton arrived as a pupil at St. Frank's in o. s. 167 "The Moor House Mystery," it was not until four years later that Somerton Abbey featured as a setting for a Christmas story in o. s. 394 "The Ghost of Somerton Abbey."

With the introduction of the Moor View school-girls, the Christmas stories took on a more balanced aspect. An excellent series of three Lees in which

Dorrimore Castle in Derbyshire was the setting for Christmas and the New Year, 1925/26. The story started with a breaking-up party given by Irene Manners and her friends at Moor View School, to some of the St. Frank's juniors. Willy Handforth and his two chums gate-crashed on the party and were thrown out mainly on account of their disreputable appearance. Staying in Derbyshire as guests of Chubby Heath's parents, Willy found that Dorrimore Castle was in the neighbourhood of Chubby Heath's home and was informed by his friend that the castle for the last ten years was bolted and barred-up at Christmas.

How Willy, vowing vengeance for the treatment given at the Moor View party, sent telegrams to the boys and girls in Lord Dorrimore's name inviting them to spend Christmas at Dorrimore Castle, makes good reading. Severe snowstorms and drifts cause chaos on the railway, and it was extremely difficult for the recipients of the telegrams even to approach the castle. Willy, who now realised that his hoax had gone wrong, met the party at the castle and did his best to right the wrong. Being in the Peak district, heavy falls of snow with deep drifts, were only to be expected. The party of St. Frank's juniors and the Moor View girls led by Archie Glenthorne's valet, Phipps, forced an entry to receive shelter from the bitter weather. A touch of romance was introduced into the story, the parties being Miss Halliday, a school-mistress at Moor View School and a Mr. Bruce - a relative of Lord Dorrimore.

With the girls and boys of both schools, Brooks was able to write more fully of the winter sports held at the castle than he could in the pre-Moor View Nelson Lees. As more characters were introduced Brooks had more scope for Christmas settings in the years to come.

\* \* \* \* \*

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CHELTENHAM

## FRANK RICHARDS'

# 'JACK OF ALL TRADES'

by Harold Truscott

In the last chapter but two of his autobiography, discussing the 1939-45 war period, Frank Richards wrote: "He also planned, and partly wrote, books about a new character called 'Jack of All Trades,' which he had long had in mind, but never had time to write." As far as I know, what is published about Jack Free, as he called himself during his circus days, or Jack Nobody, consists of four short stories and three hard back books of novel length. Together they form a curious conglomeration of some of Richards' best writing. It seems pretty clear that outlets for his work were few and far between during the war. A little got through, some of the short stories about his new school, Carcroft, appeared in *PIE*, but a good deal of what he wrote during the war period was written for publication after the war. And his 'Jack' stories are in this category; nothing about Jack appeared in print until after the war. The *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* gives 1950 as the date of Jack's first appearance in print, but this is not quite accurate. The first of the three novels, *JACK OF ALL TRADES*, certainly was published in 1950; but the first *TOM MERRY'S OWN* appeared in 1949, and included the first published story about Jack, called *JUST LIKE JACK!* And here begins what I have called a curious conglomeration. Chronologically, this story appears to be one of the two latest episodes in Jack's saga:

'It was a late hour for a boy of sixteen to be abroad. But it was no new experience for the boy who had been called "Jack of All Trades." Jack Free had had many ups and downs in his young life, in many lands. Now he was going through one of the "downs"; on tramp, looking for a job that seemed hard to find.'

In that passage from the beginning of *JUST LIKE JACK!* he is described as a boy of sixteen. But in the first of the three novels, published during the following year, Richards gives him as a boy of "fourteen or fifteen." The third of the short stories, in a later *TOM MERRY'S OWN* and called *A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT*, has this passage:

'Dreams came in his slumber, of old days with a caravan on the road, of riding in the circus ring, of a windjammer rocking to a gale - the kind, pleasant face of the St. Jim's junior mingling with many other faces from the past.'

The reference to his dreams of a caravan and circus days is a reference to events which take place in the three novels. Where the windjammer fits in we have no idea. We are given no clue as to what kind of ship holds Jack captive at the end of *JACK OF THE CIRCUS*, except that, by the language used by the one member of the crew who has appeared by the end of the book, it would appear to be Dutch. But Dutch seamen have been known to form part of the crew of ships of quite other nationalities, so that that is not conclusive. At the time this third of the short stories appeared only the first of the novels had been published. We have no idea in what order Richards wrote

these stories, but the publication order is quite haphazard, not to say perverse, and the time sequence not easy to sort out, although, as I have partly shown, the necessary hints are buried in the text. Here are one or two more: JUST LIKE JACK! refers to the boy as Jack Free. This name was not used until he began to appear in the circus ring. None of the events described in these two short stories are treated in the three novels, where we are with Jack practically all the time. Also, up to his first escape at the beginning of JACK OF ALL TRADES, Jack had been with Bill Hatchet from the time he was a very small boy; in the two stories he is on his own. This does make a rather formidable list, but the items need looking for.

But this also means that a great deal happens in a very short time. At the beginning of JACK OF ALL TRADES Jack escapes from the pedlar, Bill Hatchet, by riding off on Bob, the pony. Jack has been with Bill ever since he was a small boy, badly and brutally treated, as well as the victim of unsuccessful attempts to train him to steal. This is the first time he has escaped, although it will not be the last. Therefore, everything that happens between his first escape and JUST LIKE JACK! and A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT happens in the course of little more than a year. It includes the period with the caravanners, his recapture by Bill Hatchet, his second escape and a longish spell in a circus, until at the end of the third novel, JACK OF THE CIRCUS, he is left a prisoner on, presumably, a Dutch ship. The story of his involvement with Lord Cortolvin and his great likeness to Cortolvin's son is not finished - in print, at least. Between the end of that third novel and JUST LIKE JACK! and A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT he obviously managed to escape, but with no better fortune, for in these two stories he is still on the tramp, looking for work.

This brief period of a year or a little more must also have included his "ups and downs in many lands," referred to in my first quotation, and possibly this is where the windjammer figured, unless, of course, it was the ship on which he was held captive. Of what these ups and downs were we are given no hint, nor how he came by them.

Nonetheless, if the gap between the end of JACK OF THE CIRCUS and JUST LIKE JACK! were bridged we should, probably, have the complete story of Jack as the tramping waif, up to the events of JUST LIKE JACK! and A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT, although not the resolution of the situation which involves his likeness to Lord Cortolvin's son or the question of his relationship to this family. But Richards has made such a strong point of this situation that I cannot believe that he did not intend to bring it to a climax and resolution, although how long he intended this to be delayed is another matter. Obviously, any such resolution would mean the end of Jack Nobody as a character. However, there is probably quite a bit more of Jack's story buried in the mass of unpublished MSS. Richards left behind him.

I am inclined to place JUST LIKE JACK! as the latest episode in his career as we have it in print. (The short story, ONE GOOD TURN, although the last to be published, is simply a brief anecdote about an old widowed lady giving Jack shelter for the night and Jack's finding her husband's hidden savings while digging over her garden, and could have happened anywhere and any time during his days on the tramp,

after his first escape.) In A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT, which I believe to be roughly contemporary in Jack's career with JUST LIKE JACK!, he tells Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that he is tramping to Ridgate to look for work. But the story ends with Jack, as the result of a very good turn he does Gussy and, through Gussy, the latter's brother, Lord Conway, being taken to St. Jim's for a few days, with Mr. Railton's blessing. Of this we hear nothing more - in print. Did Richards mean this to be merely a temporary episode in Jack's story? Did he, among his unpublished writings, give any account of Jack's stay at St. Jim's? Did he, even, contemplate Jack's becoming a St. Jim's boy? If this were so, then A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT would be the latest published episode. The answers to these questions would be extremely interesting.

As it is, we have Vernon-Smith, at the end of JUST LIKE JACK!, promising Jack a job if he will go to see the Bounder's father. Smithy also promises that he will telephone Mr. Vernon-Smith, so that the latter will already know about Jack when he calls to see Smithy's father. Again, we have pertinent questions. Jack goes off, in the final paragraph, light-hearted and happy at the prospect of a job. Did he see Mr. Vernon-Smith? Did he get work? This, too, would mean the end of Richards' character as he conceived him. To maintain the character, it looks as though his creator had doomed Jack to wander eternally, with nothing but temporary refuges on the way - visions of a settled life which were then, in order to continue the story, of necessity snatched away from him.

We have not yet come to the end of the peculiarities embodied in these stories. The remaining short story, JACK AND THE CARAVANNERS, is an episode in which Jack is helping two ladies on their caravan holiday; they surprise him very much by calling each other by their surnames, Hunt and Brown. At the opening of the story Jack is already with them. Brown, who is plump, writes mystery stories and is very forgetful of everything outside her work, has mislaid her pen. She says she has looked everywhere, then gets Jack to look again. He spends half an hour searching the caravan but cannot find it. Then he suggests that it might be in Brown's handbag. She is quite sure she has not put it there and therefore has not looked there, but she tells Jack to have a look, anyway. When Jack opens it and searches through the mixed collection of things it contains, there is the pen. Later, Brown's purse is missing, with a pound note, ten shilling note and half a crown. Later still they discover that Jack has half a crown, a fact which clinches the ladies' unwilling suspicions, for they know that Jack had no money. Actually, Jack has earned the half crown, while Hunt and Brown were away shopping, by directing a man on a bicycle to the nearby village. The man is really searching for the caravan, which he cannot see because it is the other side of a tall hedge. He is Brown's brother, George, and is equally absent-minded. Rather than confront Jack with their suspicions the two ladies tell him that they are ending their holiday and, very despondently, Jack starts his travels again. He meets the man on the bicycle, still searching, and this time Jack learns that it is the caravan for which he is looking. Jack guides him to it and then it comes out that he gave Jack half a crown. Brown's purse is found on the grass beside the camp stool on which she had been sitting - the obvious place where, naturally, she had not thought of looking.



I have given a fairly full outline of this tale for this reason: in JACK OF ALL TRADES, the first of the three novels, we are shown how Jack came to meet Hunt and Brown and the caravan, and the beginnings of his travels with them, travels which take up the bulk of the book. Here, too, Jack is twice suspected of theft, first by Hunt, later by Augustus, Brown's nephew. But the whole of the events leading up to Augustus' suspicion (or certainty, as he thinks), including the quarrel between Hunt and Brown, the breaking up of the holiday, Jack's disappearance, his being kidnapped and taken to a cellar below a Roman ruin, where the caravan is camped, by a wanted criminal, Denvers, Lord Cortolvin's erstwhile secretary, who has stolen £1,000 from his employer and made off, Hunt's gradually dawning belief that Jack is a thief, that he has gone off with the things given to him by the two ladies, and with the horse - for Denvers has removed the horse, to further just this belief - all are handled much more subtly, with obviously far more detail, since they take up a large part of the book. It is Hunt who rescues both Brown, who has been kidnapped after Jack, and Jack. And it is because she was wrong about Jack in this instance that Hunt will not believe Jack is a thief later on, when Augustus is so convinced that he is. Brown does not believe Jack is a thief because she had not Hunt's experience of doubting the boy. Now, the short story is a well-written episode. But why does it exist? It takes for granted what is explained in JACK OF ALL TRADES: Jack's presence with the caravanners: and leaves him with them. It is possible - indeed, I think this is the only explanation that fits the facts - that Richards wrote the short story before he wrote the book, or as a sketch while he was planning it, then decided that he needed something that went deeper and would develop further or that the novel would not bear three episodes based on the same idea. In either case his reaction was right. But this left him with a complete episode on his hands, unconnected with any other story. So he put it into one of the TOM MERRY annuals.

Next curiosity: I wonder if Richards had read H. G. Wells' fine comedy, BEALBY. It is more than likely that he had. I would not suggest that he consciously borrowed from this novel, but it could well be that he borrowed from a subconscious memory. On the other hand, he may never have read it, and we may be faced with an extraordinary coincidence; for Wells' novel concerns a boy, the Bealby of the title, who is placed in service in a large country house, Shonts, does not like the treatment he gets from the butler and the footmen, causes a tremendous commotion which has its repercussions on the guests above stairs, including a very superior, bad-tempered and touchy Lord Chancellor, hides in a priest's hole, runs away and comes up with a party of three ladies and a caravan, is taken on by them as a helper, and stays with them some time. Three ladies, it is true, not two; also, two of the ladies have husbands, who later appear. The details are very different, the book develops differently, and Wells' writing is different. But there is the basic idea, of a runaway boy who finds refuge with some ladies and a caravan. However, even if Richards had deliberately borrowed Wells' idea, the fact remains that he has written a very fine and entertaining book, quite independent of BEALBY. Plagiarism, as Brahms once remarked, is a topic for the noodles.

There is one other curious coincidence, this time involving nothing but a title. Again it concerns a story Richards must almost certainly have read: one of

the greatest short stories in our language, Stevenson's A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT: a vivid, grim and quite unsentimental portrait of Francois Villon and the Paris in which he lived. It is astounding that this masterpiece was Stevenson's first published story. It could well be that, since it fitted his own story perfectly, Richards chose this title as an intentional tribute to Stevenson, or as an expression of personal pleasure - as he chose the pen-name, Martin Clifford, from the titles of two of his favourite books, Ballantyne's MARTIN RATTLER and Lytton's PAUL CLIFFORD; or the use of this title could be sheer coincidence, although I am inclined to doubt this.

Throughout his career Richards proved his ability to vary his style according to the particular situation, characters and surroundings which were his particular concern at the moment. I am convinced that there are subtle differences in a basic style in the Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood stories (although it took some time for the Greyfriars and St. Jim's writings to come together as far as they did - they were much more different in style from each other in their early days), and that a different atmosphere radiates from each of these schools and their characters, but by 1930, when I was sixteen, and long before I knew anything about Charles Hamilton as the author of them all, I strongly suspected that, in the main, these stories were the work of one writer - I say "in the main" because I did, from time to time, suspect that a particular story was not by the usual writer. The well-nigh incredible output this represented did not worry me - indeed, I doubt if it even crossed my mind; I was already far too accustomed to the idea of the equally incredible output of men such as Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Clementi and Schubert; to say nothing of that of Balzac and the elder Dumas. It is well to see these things in proportion.

When Richards set out to write of Jack, there was again, especially in JACK OF ALL TRADES, a subtle change in style. This may be partly because he is here not writing mainly of boys, but of adults. Jack, Augustus Brown and Cecil Cortolvin (the latter two for only a short space in this first of the three novels) are the only young people involved, and Jack's upbringing has made him, perhaps, somewhat older than his years. The style is wonderfully economical, yet evocative, as we know Richards could be, but the flavour is different from that of the MAGNET or the GEM. In a sense, it is as though the camera had shifted. Although in the school stories we do from time to time see things from an adult's point of view, in the main they and their ideas are seen from the angle of the boys. In the three main Jack stories we see things in the main from the adults' point of view - from that of the younger element much more rarely. I do not say that the difference is completely summed up in this fact, but it supplies a great deal of the cause. Things are rather different in JUST LIKE JACK! and A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT, where the two main characters are respectively Jack and Vernon-Smith and Jack and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; for this reason these two stories approximate more closely to the MAGNET and GEM in style.

One portrait is cast in an older mould: that of Bill Hatchet, the pedlar to whom Jack had been given as a tiny child. He is the latest in a long line stretching back to the earliest days of the MAGNET, from Melchior and Barengro, through Mick the Gypsy and various other gentlemen of no fixed abode who appeared from

time to time in Richards' school stories. Bill, latest in the line though he may be, is no more merely a type than were most of his predecessors. Perhaps partly because he is a concentrated portrait in a fairly short space, there are a number of outstanding characteristics that make him an individual. One of these is his part in the dialogue: that with Jack laced with types of expression which give full rein to his evil temper, that with Lord Cortolvin coloured with an obsequiousness which is never overdone, and which has a hard fight at times with the rougher side of his nature. One of the most expressive words put into his mouth is "Gor!" This has at least half-a-dozen uses and is very revealing. It is obviously a variant of "Cor!", itself an abbreviation of "Cor lumme!", which is the Cockney version of the far older "God love me!", an oath frequently used by gentry who certainly meant by it anything but the pious sentiment expressed in the words that make up the phrase. But Richards' use of G instead of C somehow imparts to the expression a number of extra shades of meaning. It is an evidence of great mastery on Richards' part that he has been able to show so much of Bill's varying moods through the application of this one expletive, in its different contexts. What is more, with an enforced limitation in the choice of expletives for such a character as Bill Hatchet, Richards manages to convey a really scarifying tension in the scene in which Hatchet tries to get Jack to come down from the top of the caravan and is confronted by Hunt with a thick stick; Bill is convinced that he can handle two women with ease, and his rage when he discovers that one woman can handle him even more easily is so vivid that it all but scorches the page as one reads. Conrad got the same result in suggesting foul language without using any in *THE NIGGER OF THE 'NARCISSUS.* Donkin is a triumph in this respect. Richards' achievement in this scene is very little less than Conrad's.

Hunt and Brown are two sharply defined characters, and sharply contrasted - the first very clear and precise, the other dreamy, forgetful, but both very good-hearted. Without being at all similar they play to each other rather in the manner of a feminine Laurel and Hardy. Jack's real practical sense, sharpened by his having been forced to fend for himself under difficulties at a very early age, emphasises Hunt's lesser practicality, which is none the less sharp enough to grasp essentials and keep her eye on the things of first, though possibly mundane, importance - after all, Cobbett was right when he said that it is useless to preach religion to men whose bellies are empty - and Brown's complete detachment from necessary but, to her, not very interesting everyday things of life. She will, no doubt, eat her share, nonetheless. Richards, a writer and artist himself, frequently gently satirised the representatives of his profession, and Brown is one more such portrait.

Here is a little more of the ladies' practical nature:

"You are unpractical, Brown."

"On the other hand, Hunt, I am very practical. I have written a thousand words of 'Murdered for Millions' while you have been bothering about water. Hogg and Hackett pay me three guineas for a thousand words."

"Easy money!" said Miss Hunt.

"Quite! In this scenery," said Miss Brown, dreamily, "I feel that I could write a novel like Thomas Hardy. But I cannot afford it, Hunt. Alas!"

"Have you peeled the potatoes?"

"No! Have you?"

"No!"

The drop back to earth at the end of that quotation after Brown's dreamy flight is brilliant in its timing and effect, a little like Beethoven's use of what Sir Donald Tovey called "broad daylight" to bring the listener back to earth after some sublime moment.

Possibly the most remarkable character achievement in JACK OF ALL TRADES (and, by suggestion, in JACK'S THE LAD and JACK OF THE CIRCUS, although he does not appear in person in either - he merely lurks like a great shadow behind Jervis, his servant) - is Lord Cortolvin. Now, whether or not Richards felt a need to balance things up a bit, to show the other side of his Lord Eastwoods and Sir Reginald Brookes, I do not know. Dickens inserted Mr. Reah into OUR MUTUAL FRIEND in what I think was a mistaken compensation for Fagin in OLIVER TWIST. It is possible that in drawing Lord Cortolvin, Richards attempted a reversal of this process. For Cortolvin is from an altogether different mould from the one from which Lord Eastwood came - a mould I sincerely hope was broken after Lord Cortolvin emerged. He is probably the most potent figure of evil in all Richards' writings as I know them - perhaps the more potent because he is completely and sublimely oblivious of any right on this earth (possibly in Heaven, too) but his own; icily so. He is the incarnation of the worst of sins, which we have already fought two major wars and several only slightly less in extent in this century to put down: sheer overriding arrogance and pride, against which nothing whatever should ever be allowed to stand. Ponsonby can express hauteur pretty well and certainly radiates evil in more than sufficient quantities. But against Cortolvin he is a rank amateur, allowing for his age, and I cannot imagine Ponsonby acquiring Cortolvin's malignant repose at any age. Pon will do his own dirty work and joy in it; not even Pablo Lopez, who could give Ponsonby some lessons, is as potently evil as Lord Cortolvin, for at least Lopez executes his own evil designs. Cortolvin sits back and draws everything and everyone who will fall for the lure of money into the service of his own evil intent, the quagmire of his vicious, wicked will, somewhat like an icily haughty spider. He keeps himself clear of the much he himself exudes. Externally, he is clean and contemptuous of the dirt on his hirelings, while calmly ordering the execution of a scheme that will increase that dirt and secure at the same time the gratification of his all important will. Even Hatchet stands aghast at the depths of evil revealed by this nobleman. Rarely has Richards conveyed so much with so little.

Jervis, who has been mentioned, is a sort of evil echo of his master, the main instrument of his will: quiet, determined, emotionless, cold, without an atom of feeling for any living creature other than himself, unless it be Cortolvin - it is difficult to imagine such dedication as he shows to Cortolvin's cause being given in return only for money; there is also a satisfaction of his own personal appetite for evil involved. But at a real or fancied insult to himself his eyes will glitter like a snake's, the reptile to which the Handsome Man of the circus, Dick Kenney, once likened him. But Jervis has, so far as one can judge from his appearance in these stories, no redeeming feature; not even that of courage. He is a coward, and this is in keeping.

Against these two almost too convincing figures of evil (beside them, Bill Hatchet is almost pleasant) Richards sets a number of circus characters one would

very willingly meet and be friendly with. There is Mr. Pipper, that rare creature, the employer who has a conscience and cares for employees to the extent of keeping them on his payroll when there is really no work for them to do. An impossible image in today's grossly selfish hurly-burly? Maybe; but there are still people about who place conscience and loyalty even above money, incredible (and, to many today, stupid) as it may seem. Like many generous people, Mr. Pipper can lose his temper very quickly, and regain it as fast. Once regained, the thing's over.

There is the clown, Montgomery Cyril Chipmunk ("Chip"), whose humorous outlook is proof against most things; he is the staunchest possible friend to Jack. And Wad Wadi, the Hindu elephant trainer, who is rescued from an imminent watery grave by Jack, and twice is instrumental in removing dark suspicions from Jack: once of theft, once of having cruelly battered the Handsome Man on the head. His English, not in the least like Hurree Singh's, is perhaps a little truer to life, as I have sometimes heard Pakistanis use our language:

"No doubt the recovery was of soon consequence, and honourable Kenney proceeded to make return to circus!" murmured Wad Wadi.

Mr. Tizer gave him a stare. Why the black man could not speak plain English was a puzzle. Plain English was good enough for the Watton constable, and ought to have been good enough for anybody, white, black or yellow.'

There is, of course, to set against these, the vicious bad temper of the Handsome Man and his persistent hatred of Jack - which leads him eventually to lie in order to secure Jack's removal from the circus, as a result of his associating with Jervis (for much needed money) to bring about Jack's downfall. But Dick Kenney has this much on his side, as Jervis has not, that he is no coward and he does eventually give Jervis the good hiding he so richly deserves. Whether this brought repercussions on Kenney we cannot know in the present state of the published stories.

Finally, Jack himself. He is a typical Richards boy of the best kind: good-hearted, honest, cheerful at most times, and very capable in most directions, including defending himself. He would fit in perfectly at Greyfriars or St. Jim's, and, as things are, we do not know how well he may have fitted in at St. Jim's. Nor does his likeness to other Richards characters mean that he has no individual features; but there is a suggestion of his having come, in some particulars, from a mould, and, because of his similarity to such boys as Harry Wharton and Tom Merry, he is the least individual character in a most remarkable gallery of portraits.

As a bonus, the two short stories, JUST LIKE JACK! and A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT, contain unusually interesting glimpses of two of Richards' longest-standing characters. The first shows Vernon-Smith giving vent to a very interesting piece of self-analysis:

"Do you know what they call me at my school?"

"No," said Jack, in wonder.

"The 'Boulder' - that's my nickname." Vernon-Smith spoke with a half sneer. "Too many fivers for my own good, and a spot of swank - rather a big spot. That's why they nicknames me the Boulder."

Jack could only look at him, at a loss what to say.

"But I've got my good points," said Vernon-Smith. "You've chucked my fiver back in my face ----"

"Not exactly that," said Jack, colouring. "But----"

"I should have done the same in your place - at least, I think so! But I've never been on my uppers, so I don't know."

And Vernon-Smith goes on to tell Jack about the job Mr. Vernon-Smith can give him,

as I've already recounted. It is interesting to find Vernon-Smith looking at himself so clearly, with no illusions; but it is only what one might expect from his contradictory character.

And here are Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's views on hard work and roughing it:

"I'm more used to hard work, you know," said Jack, smiling.

"I don't know - we work pwetty hard at St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Form ewevy day, you know, and pwep aftah tea, and then the games. It's wathah a stwenuous life, weally."

Jack chuckled ...

\* \* \* \*

"I can't quite see you in the fo'c'sle of a coasting tramp," said Jack, laughing. "A fellow has to rough it."

"Oh, I can wuff it all wight! Nothin' soft about us at St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus.

"The fact is, deah boy, that fellows have to wuff it at school - it's vevy diffewent fwom home.

F'winstance, I bwush by own hat ---"

"Do you, really?" gasped Jack.

"Yaas, wathah! And I help Blake and Hewwies and Dig to wash up the cwocks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There is the delightful (and, in this world, precious) innocence of Arthur Augustus. Because of this, and his complete lack of any pretence to be what he is not, he has no idea of the devotion he inspires in others:

'Pleasantest of all, to him, was the cheery, friendly manner of the St. Jim's junior, who seemed wholly unaware of any distinction between himself and his new acquaintance, and treated him exactly as he would have treated Blake or Herries or Digby at St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus was quite unconscious of the impression he had made on the waif of the roads, and would have been surprised to learn that Jack Free, after a couple of hours' acquaintance, would willingly have gone through fire and water for him.'

Frank Richards created a world in these stories which has surface connections with his older world of MAGNET and GEM, but with far greater and deeper differences. These stories constitute a valuable new departure in his old age, and show a side of his writing which is essential to anything like a complete view of his work as an artist, although Jack's story as we have it is not complete; but I feel sure that this is merely because much that he wrote is still not published, and that what is not yet published contains the explanation of the loose ends and curious anomalies that I have listed. When, if ever, are we to get the remainder? Whoever has these MSS. is in duty bound to see them published.

\* \* \* \* \*

YULETIDE GREETINGS TO FRIENDS AND MEMBERS EVERYWHERE. Many thanks for correspondence during the past year.

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# My friend, Sexton Blake

by J. Randolph Cox

There are some people who always seem to have been a part of one's life. Parents certainly, but also some who could not possibly have been there always. Yet it is difficult to indicate a point in time and say, "There, that is when we met." Robinson Crusoe. Sherlock Holmes. I can recall listening to the radio series about Sherlock Holmes, but little of that remains in my memory. ("Observe, Watson," Holmes would say. I recall the theme music, but not its title; I recall Doctor Watson's voice and Professor Moriarty playing the bagpipes - or a flute, perhaps, the memory is hazy - to vibrate a castle to the ground.) My father told me something of the saga (the Reichenbach Falls episode) and handed me the two volumes of The Complete Sherlock Holmes which had been a part of the household since before I was born. But just when this could have happened is difficult to say with any certainty. I must have been no more than twelve years old.

I was older than that when I first heard the magic name of Sexton Blake. Sometime in the early 1950's while reading Dorothy Sayers' introduction to her Omnibus of Crime (known in England as Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror) I found a mention of the stories. There also was the source for that quotation used ad infinitum on later copies of the Sexton Blake Library, that "they present the nearest modern approach to a national folk-lore, conceived as the centre for a cycle of loosely connected romances in the Arthurian manner." I copied the whole passage in my notebook and filed it away for nearly ten years.

As a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, I found in the library catalogue of current British periodicals. There was the Sexton Blake Library listed (this would have been 1960). I thought it must be a large-sized magazine. How I wanted to subscribe.

My first meeting with Blake himself came six years later during a too-brief vacation in Great Britain. Unlike other tourists, who only look for historic buildings and restaurants, I also look for bookstores and newstands. I like to know what people read where I visit and I like to collect books. There, in the back paperback nook of a large bookstore in Edinburgh was a book called The Man With the Iron Chest by Richard Williams. "5th Series, Sexton Blake Library, No. 7" it said on the slightly lurid cover. "Silent death brushed Sexton Blake in passing - and triggered off a series of dangerous incidents that challenged his ingenuity to the utmost," read the advertising blurb above the title. I immediately bought the book and all else I could find. Unhappily, the date was not recorded although it must have been in June of 1966. I read that book later in a hotel room in Oslo and realized I must find more.

At home that autumn I sent a check to the publisher for all of the books in that

"fifth series" that I had not been able to find and placed an order for the next volumes to come. I read them all one Winter, gulping them down at a prodigious rate.

Shortly afterwards I was able to see, to touch, and actually to read vintage Blake stories. These were in the Hess Collection of dime novels, story papers, and popular fiction in the library at the University of Minnesota. I was working on a book about America's Sexton Blake, Nick Carter, at the time. (I still am.) For helping prepare an exhibit around Nick Carter (to advertise the Hess Collection) and for writing the text for the exhibit brochure, I was paid (not in mere money) in duplicates from the Collection. Though some were tattered and lacked a page or two, these were treasures indeed. Several issues of the Union Jack, a few dozen Sexton Blake Library issues, and two of the Annuals, were among these. Since then I have been able to add a few additional items (all but two of the 4th Series SBL, for example), but none thrilled me so much as those first books. I am still reading them and (in some cases) re-reading them, and searching for the elusive (especially from this distance) stories to fill the gaps on my shelves.

But what is it about the name Sexton Blake and his world that can have created such an interest for me? (I recall that I didn't feel that first story was very good, yet, there was something compelling about the hero that made me want to read more.) Is he just "the office-boy's Sherlock Holmes" in that phrase written out of ignorance or envy? I once met a college student from India who had read both Sexton Blake and P. G. Wodehouse and who was delighted to find I knew of them too. This was nothing to my delight in learning how far their fame had travelled.

Part of the appeal may be traced to the depiction (in the earlier stories especially) of a sort of Romantic England, the land every American sees when he reads English books. There is a newer image of England emerging from the world of rock groups, but it isn't likely to replace the Romantic View completely. America is still the Wild West to many who have never been here, and to some of its natives as well. The Romantic View is inevitable and not to be despised.

Sexton Blake's world is a cosy one, once you are inside and out of the rain and away from the crime. The Baker Street quarters of Sexton Blake are as snug and warm as those of Sherlock Holmes, perhaps more so. (When I am tired, I imagine sinking into Blake's well-worn armchair.) Familiar figures in familiar surroundings, safe (if not for long) from evil men and evil weather. To appreciate this fully one must turn (as I have done) first to the vintage Blake (in the Union Jack omnibus, perhaps, or an early UJ story called Lost Pedro) and then to the later Blake (The Case of the Missing Bullion by Peter Gordon or Peter Saxon - it depends on whether you look at the title page or the dust jacket). The framework is the same, but there seems to be much more meat to the vintage stories. The later writers seem uncertain what to do with the basic Blake characters, especially poor Pedro (whom Miss Sayers referred to erroneously as a bulldog). By now he must certainly be the oldest bloodhound in the world, but if his masters aren't permitted to age, why should he be given nothing to do but raise his head from his place by the fire?

In Lost Pedro (Union Jack, No. 160) the faithful dog is the centre of a lengthy



search. Though admittedly sentimental, there is an authentic thrill to the scene when he reappears after Blake and Tinker have decided they will never see him again. A commotion is heard outside and from down the street comes the baying of the dog as he nears home. Oblivious to traffic, passersby, and his own weariness, Pedro comes pounding down that street, up the stairway, and into the sanctuary of the Blake quarters. I felt like cheering myself.

Dorothy Sayers suggests that Blake is more prone to human emotions than Sherlock Holmes. Perhaps this accounts for his appeal. I would like to meet Holmes, to sit at 221b Baker Street and talk with him about past triumphs, but I am not so certain I would feel I was a part of his group. With Blake I know I would be at home and received with cordiality. Mrs. Bardell would come in with something to eat and drink. Tinker would set aside his scissors and paste and leave the Scrap-books for another day. Splash Page might be there to nose out a story. Pedro, yes, would be relaxing after a strenuous hunt. The sound of the bell, a summons by Inspector Coutts. Comfort, be hanged! We're on the trail again. Friends and colleagues, shoulder to shoulder, back to back.

Though the crimes in the later stories are more contemporary to my own time; though the stories may be more realistic, there is not the same feeling of camaraderie. My friends, Blake and Tinker, have placed a barrier between us. So I turn back to the good years when I can find the records to which to turn. Perhaps The Marble-Arch Mystery (SBL No. 145) when the year was 1920. The first page calls this "A fascinating tale of London mystery and clever detective work," but I don't need to be told that. It did take me awhile to realize that the publishers used the term "introducing" in the sense of "featuring" on nearly every book and that this did not indicate the first appearance ever of a character. Likewise, "long complete story" seemed redundant. I hoped the story was complete. After several dozen issues would not the readers expect the story to be "complete" without being told? Minor points. It's 1920. We're on Baker Street again and there stands, no 221b, but Sexton Blake's home. What do you suppose my friend has in store for me now?

\* \* \*

Someone suggested once that collecting Sexton Blake was like collecting sand. If he meant only the vast number of stories, he may not have been quite accurate, but if he referred to tracking down the various publications in which the stories appeared, he was right. What we really need (apart from a systematic reprinting of the Union Jack from the beginning) is a volume collecting the earliest and rarest stories from the 1/2d. Marvel and one bringing together stories from The Champion, Dreadnought, Detective Library, and whatever other sources may yet be discovered. I'd like the moon in my back yard too, but that will have to wait.

\*\*\*\*\*

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# The Brain Wave of Bunter Court

by J. F. Bellfield

"Bunter Court," "Ha, ha, ha," thus was the beginning of Charles Hamilton's "piece de resistance" of his phantasy creation, William George Bunter, in the Bunter Court series. Bunter was to become a character from fiction, whose name meant something to everybody and to rank with Robinson Crusoe, Mr. Micawber, Gulliver and Sherlock Holmes as household words. "The Bunter Court" series epitomizes all that was funniest in Bunter.

In the first page Bunter is described as resembling the poet who gave to airy nothing a local habitation and a name, but such an appellation might well be used to describe Charles Hamilton himself. We do not know whether from accident or design Bunter became the foundation stone of the long saga of the Magnet stories, but we cannot help realizing that the anti-hero, to use a very modern term of literary jargon, became the lynchpin of so many of his stories and the more Charles Hamilton used Bunter's fatuous cunning and half-witted lack of scruple, the more he found could be made of it. Why people laugh at those who lie, cheat and fiddle and eat other people's food, spend other people's money, do no more work than can be thrashed out of them, and who are swanks, snobs and parasites all rolled into one, I am quite unable to give a reason, but they do. Shakespeare's Falstaff had the same effect. Many people like Horace Walpole, have found humanity a huge joke and perhaps because there is a little of Bunter in all of us, we laugh when we see it "writ large" as it were.

Edwy Searles Brooks is usually compared to Charles Hamilton as being superior in all those ramifications of plot and counter-plot, fitted together like a very complicated jig-saw puzzle, and Charles Hamilton accredited with superiority in character portrayal, but in bringing Bunter Court to life and making it sufficiently credible to fool the other characters in the story, if not the reader, Charles Hamilton in this series approaches genius. When I say the reader is not fooled, I do not mean that the reader does not join in with the author's plan to let him fool himself for the time being. Were it not for this facet of the imagination we should never enjoy fiction.

To bring to the verisimilitude of reality Bunter's fatuous swank about his magnificent residence at Bunter Court with hosts of flunkies ready to wait on his beck and call and lordly commands, must have taxed the fertile fancy of Charles Hamilton even in 1925, when he was becoming a very mature writer and to do it slowly with one set of circumstances leading inevitably to another, needed all his craftsmanship. For it is often forgotten that even in fiction, indeed, even in Fairyland, we need to be logical. Also we need to be moral, without being priggish and sentimental.

When one reads some of the very early Magnets, it is very much to be feared

that the good characters were priggish and Charles Hamilton was often sentimental in his characterisation. It was only very gradually that he shed this fault. By 1925 it had virtually disappeared from his stories. The Famous Five and all the other high-spirited fellows about whom he wrote, were boys with their full share of boyish mischief blended with good nature and a proper respect for the decencies of life.

It is a far cry from Macbeth to Bunter Court, but "mutatis; mutandis" the moral is the same. Macbeth found that one crime needed another to cover it up and Bunter finds that one piece of fatuous folly needs another and yet another to keep up the deception. With bills piling up like Pelion on Ossa and one person after another being locked in the cellars in the lower regions of Combermere Lodge, renamed Bunter Court by Bunter's lordly behest, the reader begins to feel that the sins of William George Bunter have reached such proportions that the author must be an exceedingly clever fellow to end his story in any other way than Bunter finishing up in Borstal, or, alternatively, as the lawyers say, that he shall have his skull cracked by the irate Mr. Pilkins and an end put to his nefarious activities. In fact, towards the end of the story there are so many persons thirsting for Bunter's gore, so to speak, that whatever punishment is meted out to the Fat Owl it is bound from the nature of the case to be far less than he deserved. If Mr. Pilkins could have had his way of dealing with William George Bunter, The Spanish Inquisition, the rack, the thumb-screw, the bed of Procrustes and the whole catalogue of all the torture chambers that ever existed, being brought into operation, could have scarcely inflicted upon the fat person of Bunter a half of the punishment he deserved.

Bunter's only excuse was that he was a fool, the one thing he would never have admitted. As Harry Wharton remarked "He's a born fool and simply doesn't understand the seriousness of what he's been doing."

Here was Charles Hamilton's dilemma. He had to keep his most precious character creation unpunished to the extent that he could be used again in future stories, but he was too sound a moralist to let the Fat Owl get away without suffering for his sins. The result is that in the last two Magnets, Billy Bunter's Bolt and "Bunter Caught," the fat swindler lives the life of an outlaw, on the run with a host of creditors and those he had imprisoned to keep up the deception on his track, like the Furies of Greek mythology. It was said of old that the way of the transgressor was hard and Billy Bunter found it exceedingly so.

With the sure confidence of the accomplished writer, Charles Hamilton makes the "denouement" of the Bunter Court series easy of acceptance by a dry humour and grace of style that by now was so natural that it was a case of art concealing art. Dr. Johnson in his criticism of Shakespeare observes that our greatest writer was often in too much of a hurry to end his fable once the end was in sight and was guilty of abruptness, but this fault is quite absent from our greatest writer of school stories. On the other hand Charles Hamilton has been criticised for tautology. But this fault, if fault it is, was turned into a virtue by the dry wit and satirical way in which Charles Hamilton used it. Perhaps as a weekly writer it paid him to know how to string out his stories, but it was a necessity he knew well how to turn into an art. It has been remarked by G. K. Chesterton that even fools can sometimes be possessed of enough imagination to gull the public, but no fool can have wit. The two

things do not go together.

A sample of Charles Hamilton's satirical wit comes from the last Magnet in the Bunter Court series. "Bunter was in a bad way. In the first place - first and most important - he was hungry. When Bunter was hungry matters were serious. Bunter's was not an ordinary hunger. It was like the hunger of five or six fellows rolled into one. An hour after a meal he was hungry. Two hours after he was famished. Three hours after he was ravenous. Four hours and he was in a state of desperation. And now it was ten or twelve hours since he had fed; so the anguish of William George Bunter may be better imagined than described.

"In the second place - not so important, but still very important - he was tired. His fat little legs felt as if they would fall off at every step. A mile was enough for Bunter at the best of times. Now he had walked miles and miles.

"In the third place it had started to rain. As if matters were not already bad enough, the rain came on as a sort of finishing touch.

"It was no wonder that the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove groaned."

This passage of artful satire does not advance the story by a single step, yet who would wish to leave it out?

It is said that experience is a hard school, but fools will learn in no other, but hard a school as it is there are some fools who will not even learn in that. Charles Hamilton was careful to see that Bunter remained that kind of fool which is artfully illustrated by Bunter's encounter with Bolsover major, Skinner and Snoop, in his wanderings after fleeing from Combermere Lodge.

Barging into a barn where Bolsover, Skinner and Snoop are trying to find a tin opener, the Fat Owl finds it for them by sitting on it and howling his head off. He is allowed to share their meagre supper of dry biscuits and corned beef, which poor though it is compared with the magnificent spreads of Bunter Court, it at least staves off the pangs.

Despite the harrowing experience of being on the run like an outlaw, Bunter can no more stop swanking than he can stop breathing. He informs Bolsover, Skinner and Snoop that he is on his way to Maulever Towers. "Does Mauly know he's invited you?" chuckles Skinner. Bunter calmly informs them that a regular invitation is not necessary as Mauly is bound to be delighted to see him. He then offers to take Bolsover, Skinner and Snoop with him on certain conditions. These are, that Bolsover should stop his bawling and shouting, Skinner should stop his sneering and snapping as it was bad form and Snoop should wash more often and keep his finger nails clean. Also they must not claim to be friends of his - one had to draw the line somewhere. For some reason that Bunter could not quite make out, his conditions for their accompanying him to Maulever Towers seemed to upset Skinner, Bolsover and Snoop so much that his fat person was booted out into the pouring rain and he was only able to crawl into the barn again when the other three Removites had settled down for the night.

That Bunter was heading hopefully for Maulever Towers points significantly to the conclusion of this series. Mauly is the one person whose good nature is as

limitless as his purse. And as Bunter makes out it is Mauly's fault anyway.

In a way, Bunter is right if he means by fault putting temptation in the way of a fat fool and rascal out of sheer laziness. In order to avoid exerting himself Mauly had sent Bunter to inspect Combermere Lodge with a view to renting it. Owing to an accident to the estate agent, Mr. Pilkins, who is now laid up for weeks in hospital, Bunter's cunning mind seizes upon the chance to pass himself off as a rich client. So with Mauly's money to impress the butler Walsingham, and his trick of imitating Mr. Pilkins' voice, having told Mauly that Combermere Lodge is a washout, he calmly takes on the role as Lord Bunter of Bunter Court, without having so much as a brass farthing to meet the astronomical costs of running such an establishment. As fools rush in where angels fear to tread, Bunter has not given much thought to the fact that if he cannot pay somebody else will have to. Concern for such niceties was not part of Bunter's peculiarly constructed mind. He had, however, given it some thought for when his brother Sammy reminds him of the fact that somebody will have to pay, he calmly assures Sammy that nobody can make a person pay money he hasn't got, besides he is a minor in law and they could not claim on Bunter's pater because it was not what is called in law a necessity. One can only reflect that as Mr. Bumble said in *Oliver Twist*, that if the law says that, the law is an ass. Evidently the law and William George Bunter had much in common.

Bunter in the role of a lord is a sight for gods, men and little fishes. His idea of a lord is one who issues orders with a lofty wave of his hand and becomes so helpless that he is quite incapable of moving a pillow or tying up his own shoelaces. It is often said that the aristocracy in England has survived so long because they did not act like aristocrats in the countries of Europe, but actually took their responsibilities seriously and tried to take care of those who were dependent upon them. Thus the saying "The English love a lord when he doesn't act like one." Billy Bunter's ideas were very much at variance with this notion. Unlike Mauly who never gave anyone any trouble if he could help it because this is the essence of good breeding, William George Bunter insisted on putting butlers and servants to the greatest possible trouble in order to impress upon them his own importance. Despite the fact that Bunter's trickery has fooled the menials at Combermere Lodge as to his lordly credentials, they cannot help wondering how such a low vulgar person could be a lord. Fortunately for Bunter, they think that he is a newly rich upstart.

But Bunter has never reflected upon Sir Walter Scott's lines, "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive." His deception floats upon very thin ice. Bunter had no doubt in the Remove form room been told by Mr. Quelch the Latin tag "*Magna est veritas et praevalabit*" without having the slightest notion of what it meant or if he had understood it would have disagreed with it. Truth had no chance of prevailing with William George Bunter.

Sordid or not, as Bunter calls it, people do not provide goods and service on Good Samaritan lines. His lavish tips with other people's money could not really disguise the fact that servants want wages and shopkeepers want paying for their goods.

But the pressure of tradesmen demanding payment is not the only danger to Bunter's deception. Mr. Pilkins, the estate agent, is out of hospital sooner than

Bunter expected or hoped and to ward off the evil hour, Bunter tricks him and locks him in the wine cellars of Combermere Lodge. Pilkins is as sceptical about Bunter's postal orders from his rich relations as ever his form mates had been and calls Bunter a young swindler. Accurate though it is, such a description Bunter considers, is an insult. Therefore it serves Pilkins jolly well right to be locked up in the wine cellars on a diet of water and bread and cheese. Even Bunter does not want Pilkins to starve to death, though no doubt he felt he deserved it. It was only too likely that the jury would take the unreasonable view that Bunter was responsible if Pilkins died of starvation, when the matter was brought to the courts.

Walsingham is the next to be imprisoned in the cellars. Having lost the key, Bunter is very alarmed when he is informed by D'Arcy that he has given it to Walsingham. Bunter finds the butler in the act of letting out Mr. Pilkins. He, however, finds the key in the lock and promptly slams the door on both of them.

With two prisoners on his hands, stupid as he is, Bunter realises that the situation is getting desperate. To feed them it will be necessary to pay nocturnal visits and this will mean Bunter getting up in the small hours to feed his prisoners. This hits Bunter where he lives, so to speak, for in the sleeping line he has Morpheus, Rip Van Winkle and the Sleeping Beauty beaten into a cocked hat.

It is during one of his many nocturnal visits to the cellars when he is disturbed by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the swell of St. Jim's joins Pilkins and Walsingham as a prisoner.

But Nemesis is on Bunter's track and the Famous Five eventually discover what is going on and releases the prisoners. The state of mind of Mr. Pilkins, Walsingham and D'Arcy is virtually homicidal and there is a very amusing illustration on page 19 of "The Prisoners of Bunter Court," showing Mr. Pilkins rushing downstairs with a golf club brandishing it with the intention of knocking out Bunter's brains if the fatuous Owl had any brains to knock out. But Bunter had fled realizing the game was up.

It may well be supposed that after Bunter's mad capers at Combermere Lodge the last two Magnets where he is on the run should be something of an anti-climax, but this is very far from being the case. The wanderings of Billy Bunter are as full of incident as the celebrated wanderings of Ulysses and his men on their return from the Trojan War.

It is Mauly who pays up in the end and Bunter is finally rounded up and Walsingham and Thomas, the footman, have the privilege of booting the Fat Owl, which they have wanted to do since they had the dubious honour of knowing him.

This series is to me the very quintessence of Bunterism. It shows Charles Hamilton in full flight, as it were, showing what could be done with a character who is a born fool and rogue prepared to carry selfishness, snobbishness and fatuous arrogance to their logical conclusion. Bunter was to figure in many grand series after this and I am not prepared to use too many superlatives to recommend it to the reader.

Among the readers and admirers of Charles Hamilton's writing there have

grown up people who have given such concentrated attention to his works that they may be called experts. Among these are many who complain that there was too much Bunter and more attention should have been given to the other characters. Their opinion is worthy of respect, for I am no expert on the writings of Charles Hamilton and have read them only for the pure pleasure of doing so.

But it does not appear that the vast reading public for whom the great man wrote, were of the opinion that there was too much Bunter. The sub-title "Billy Bunter's Own Paper," began to appear in the later Magnets and the other features disappeared and the stories lengthened. To the objection that the majority are not always right, one can only say that as a general principle this must be conceded, but there is only one judge for a weekly writer to acknowledge and that is the reading public. Who else is to be the judge except those who pay for the pleasure of reading the stories that he continuously pours out?

I am not prepared to say that the Bunter Court series was Charles Hamilton at his very best for others better informed would be sure to cavil at such a dogmatic statement and there is such an inexhaustable fund of Magnet lore to be drawn upon. But this series was Charles Hamilton at his funniest, surely.

It is a very different world now from the twenties when the Bunter Court series was first published. We have gained much and I do not join in the chorus of complaint against the modern generation of teenagers. I am not like the gentleman mentioned by George Ade, who was kicked on the head when he was young and believed everything he read in the Sunday newspapers. Newspapers thrive on people's follies and misfortunes. Good behaviour is not news.

But I am sorry that there is no genius comparable with Charles Hamilton to entertain them. In this they have missed a lot. But perhaps it is not too late for them to get enjoyment yet, if they can be persuaded to read the reprints now appearing in bound volume form. Even if we succeed in doing this we shall not escape critical comment. There have been disparaging references made to Charles Hamilton's work from time to time in periodicals suggesting that his books make a laughing stock of fat people and create self-consciousness on this point.

This sort of fastidiousness goes very ill, mixed with the bookshops full of pornography to which young people have easy access. It is as I have said a pity that the younger generation have no literature as healthy and wholesome as that which Charles Hamilton provided. As for making a laughing-stock of fat people, this is a trait in human nature about which nobody can do much. All humour has to be at somebody's expense. In any case, it was not Bunter's fatness that caused most of the laughs but his fatuousness. Nobody laughs at Fatty Wynn or Wally Bunter.

He who has provided humour in this sorry world is a benefactor. Satire seems to be a lost art amongst us. While we have freedom almost amounting to licence in some things from which our fathers were carefully protected, there has sprung up in our day a kind of silliness which sees in every sort of competition or comparison a threat to its unrealistic nonsense about equality.

To such minds nobody should win and then nobody would lose. Therefore all the literature of which they are capable is introspection into the minds of

mediocrities who fail because they live in too hard a world and is nothing but self pity.

The world of Hamiltoniana is a wholesome antidote to such maudling sentimentality. One can only suggest that they should read Billy Bunter of Bunter Court as a first step on their way back to that humour which is part of the mental *balance* which makes the mature human being. Perhaps in the realm of juvenile literature we shall never see the like of Charles Hamilton again and Howard Baker's work in preserving and perpetuating his writings is worthy of all the support we can muster. We can only hope that the laughter generated by the Bunter Court series will continue loud and long for many years to come.

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WANTED MARVELS: 925, 926, 929, 930, 940, 942, 943, B. F. L., 745, 753, 757, 761, 733, 360, 717, 97, 245, also School and Sport, Blue Crusader (Arthur S. Hardy). All very urgent.

HARRY BROSTER, KINVER, STOURBRIDGE, WORC.

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A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR is the time honoured wish to all "Old Boys" everywhere, especially to "Ye Editor." From -

STUART WHITEHEAD, 12 WELLS ROAD, FAKENHAM, NORFOLK.

P.S. Still need few early Magnets, etc.

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GREETINGS TO OUR EDITOR, STAFF AND CONTRIBUTORS, who give us so much pleasure, and to all readers, from one of this year's new (old!) Boys.

WANTED: Nick Carter Weekly (1911), covers in colours, Pink "U. J. S.", earlier than December 1917.

WHITE, ASH TERRACE, ASHMORE GREEN, NEWBURY, RG16 9EU.

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DISPOSAL: Some 3d/4d B. F. L's, S. O. L's, U. J's, "Murder Ship" (Teed).

WANTED: British Detective/Mysteries 1920-1960, (authors Berrow, Connington, Mann, Rhode, others).

4533, WEST 13th AVE., VANCOUVER 8, B.C., CANADA.

=====

GREETINGS TO ALL FRIENDS. WANTED: Monthly C.D's, Nos. 1-6, 8, 9, 16, 18.

MAURICE KING, 18 BARTON RD., SLOUGH, BUCKS., SL3 8DF.



# *King of the Castle 1919-1940*

by John Geal

This is an endeavour to chart the Amalgamated Press fight to regain the dominance of the Boys' Periodical Market that they had enjoyed prior to World War One, to record how the Thomson Press successfully challenged and held a large share, and of the A/P's repeated attempts to find a formula to withstand that pressure.

To cover so many books in one Article, some will get no more than a brief mention of start and stop dates. To analyse and discuss in more detail would fill the Annual twice over, the main purpose here is to record a sequence of events. I have taken the dates of some of the lesser known books, that are beyond my personal knowledge, from the lists compiled by Bill Lofts. I would like to tender my thanks to him for making my task an easier one.

The Chart, completed as an Appendix, shows the running times, also the changes and mergers that took place. Further comment on this is at the end of the Article.

LOFTY HEIGHTS. "I'm the King of the Castle" begins the Nursery Rhyme, this certainly applied to the Amalgamated Press. During the period 1900-14, they had become a powerful force in the area of Boys' Papers, so much so, that at the start of World War One they had 12 regular Titles on the market. These were (starting dates in brackets) - MARVEL (1893), UNION JACK and PLUCK ('94), BOYS' FRIEND (1901), BOYS' REALM ('03), GEM ('07), MAGNET ('08), BOYS' REALM FOOTBALL & SPORT ('09), PENNY POPULAR and DREADNOUGHT ('12) and FIREFLY ('14).

The War and the paper shortage had its effect; of the 12 entering the lists, no fewer than 7 ceased publication. They did manage one new book in 1915, NELSON LEE (replacing the B. REALM FOOTBALL & SPORTS), this was to become one of their major successes in spite of the handicap of starting under such adverse conditions. At the end of the War, A/P were left with 6 "Base Bricks" on which to build again - MARVEL, UNION JACK, GEM, MAGNET and NELSON LEE.

RESTORATION 1919. Determined to recapture their former glory, A/P had obviously laid plans during the closing stages of the War, for with less than two months elapsing and paper restrictions easing, they launched a revival of the POPULAR on the 25th January, 1919 (a sound choice to start, it was to run for another 12 years). This was followed by another old favourite reborn, BOYS' REALM, on the 5th April and later in the month, 3 new Titles - ROBIN HOOD LIB., PRAIRIE LIB., and CHEERIO. On a booming market, the remainder of 1919 saw the introduction of YOUNG BRITAIN in June, DETECTIVE LIB., on the 2nd and ALL SPORTS on the 30th of August. On 1st November came GREYFRIARS HERALD and finally, with

Hollywood Studios pouring out films to an exploding demand, A/P cashed in on this interest with BOYS' CINEMA in mid-December. The end of the year saw the A/P firmly astride the market with 16 Titles.

1920-21. INDIGESTION & THREAT FROM THE NORTH. The issue of 10 new Titles in one year was too much, the market had been swamped and 1920 saw some reshuffling. CHEERIO was the first to go, closing in April. PRAIRIE, ROBIN HOOD and DETECTIVE LIBS., were all closed down on the 10th July and the following week NUGGETS emerged from their combined ashes. This move too, was a failure, and NUGGETS ceased publication in March 1921, after only 34 issues. Of the 1919 newcomers, BOYS' CINEMA had got off to a good start and was to last until 1940 - ALL SPORTS was to be another strong runner (1930). Following ALL SPORTS success, two other similar books were started, FOOTBALL & SPORTS FAVOURITE in September and SPORTS FOR BOYS in October. The latter following so close on the heels of F. & S. FAV. never got going and after 28 issues was merged into ALL SPORTS in April 1921.

For A/P, 1921, was a time to get their second wind. Early in the year GREYFRIARS HERALD changed its name to the BOYS' HERALD (but kept its number sequence). This, plus the closure of NUGGETS and the merger of F. & S. FAV. as outlined above was the only activity - but the potential of the market had caught the eye of the Thomson Press in Dundee. In August they started ADVENTURE.

HAMMER AND TONGS 1922-24. The ADVENTURE was an immediate success and must have quickly started to bite into A/P sales, for they retaliated with CHAMPION in late January 1922, followed by SPORTS FUN on 11th February. By this time one of the A/P long running "Base Bricks" was beginning to crumble - the MARVEL, going strong since 1893, was in trouble. BOYS' HERALD, which was also having a bad time, was merged into MARVEL on 25th March, in an endeavour to revive its fortunes. The move was too late and on 22nd April, MARVEL ceased and was replaced the following week by SPORT AND ADVENTURE (cashing in on their rival's Title ?). Unfortunately this counter blow was effectively parried whilst still in the planning stage, by Thomson's second foray into the Market with ROVER in early March. In a few months this too was selling well and was followed by WIZARD in September. Yet again Thomson's had found the formula of success. This last effort was to prove the last straw for SPORT AND ADVENTURE. After only 26 issues it stopped on the 21st October, and was replaced by yet another (3rd) series of PLUCK. To return to SPORTS FUN - a complete disaster - it was scrapped after only 13 issues and a new revamped series began on 13th May. Again failure, after 29 issues they gave up and incorporated it with FOOTBALL AND SPORTS FAV. in November. The MAGNET and GEM were affected by this turmoil. A/P hastily discarded their plain Blue on White covers and they emerged with Two Colour covers in November. The GEM's was particularly effective, the Deep Red and Blue colour balance plus fine Draughtmanship became, in my view, one of the finest covers to grace any Boys' Book. The GEM took off with a bang!, and had a glorious run, was it just co-incidence?

1923 dawned. Ever hopeful to find the answer, A/P launched the ROCKET in February and first returns were encouraging. This was followed by SPORTS

BUDGET in October, unfortunately its much heralded debut was overwhelmed by Thomson's issue of VANGUARD the following week.

The first half of 1924 was quiet. The last blow from Thomson's had rocked A/P back on its heels. This was a time to look again at the position. The outlook was rather grim. PLUCK started late in 1922, was groggy, so too was their 'White Hope' the ROCKET, its early promise had proved to be short lived. YOUNG BRITAIN, one of the smaller successes was also fast slipping down the charts, something had to be done. Something was, Y.B. merged with CHAMPION in August. The CHAMPION?, this paper, started in January 1922, had been steadily consolidating its position, perhaps the secret lay here? Someone thought so, for on 11th October, both PLUCK and ROCKET were jointly merged into a new paper, and TRIUMPH was born, based on the CHAMPION format. As the year closed, the Editorial Staff at A/P must have crossed their fingers as they awaited the outcome.

The success of their intrusion into A/P territory must have amazed the Thomson Press. Having marched up to the fortress, steeling themselves for a long grafting fight; what must have been their thoughts when they found the battlements crumbling before the engagement had started. It was almost - No Contest!

The onslaught from Dundee must have caused a stir in the August Halls of A/P. Four books launched into THEIR market in the space of 2 years, the first three going at a spanking pace! The format of the new entries seemed to have an appeal that was irresistible. Could there be no end to this takeover? The fourth entry, the VANGUARD gave the answer. Maybe it was the pale Orange cover which failed to catch the eye but somehow the magic was missing, perhaps it was just plain oversaturation. Soon VANGUARD was struggling and although it had about two and a half years of life, it finally ceased in May 1926. Dundee took the hint. No new attempts were to come from the Thomson Press for some four years, Entrenchment and Consolidation were to be their watchwords. A very successful policy it proved.

UNEASY TRUCE, 1925-28. This period was very quiet. There was no activity to record for 1925, the only one of the years under review to have this distinction. In 1926 both sides had their troubles, at A/P the small sized NELSON LEE found the competition increasing and a sure sign of difficulty - a new series - began on 1st May, in a larger format. Over at Thomson's, VANGUARD closed down on 22nd May. The outside world was in recession, so possibly the order was given to ease up on new projects. 1927 had three items to bring to notice. A/P took over CHUMS from Cassells in January. BOYS' REALM finished in mid-July and the following week emerged as the BOYS' REALM of SPORTS & ADVENTURE. The last and most important event was the closure, on the last day of 1927, of the BOYS' FRIEND, affectionately known to its readers as "The Green 'Un." Another of those "Base Bricks" gone!, such a popular paper in the early 1900's, it was sad to see its ignoble end by being merged into the TRIUMPH, although the latter, boosted by the addition of a percentage of the B. F. readers, was to have a good run until the shut down of 1940. The peace continued in 1928, nothing from Thomson's and the only event at A/P was the starting on 11th February of the MODERN BOY, aimed at the older boy and containing stories by many big named authors. The updated style of this paper was a quick success and it ran until 1939.

POINT AND COUNTERPOINT, 1929-33. This was the beginning of a period of intense activity. 9th February saw A/P's BOYS' REALM of SPORT & ADVENTURE changed yet again to REALM OF FUN & FICTION and the same date saw the start of THRILLER. The latter was aimed at the older teenager in an endeavour to retain his custom as he turned away from the younger styled books, by giving him a full length top quality story each week. The other change in 1929, was the ending after a run of 452, of the FOOTBALL & SPORTS FAV. at the end of April, and the following week the BOYS' FAVOURITE took its place. 1930 opened with NELSON LEE starting a 2nd New Series on the 25th January. The REALM OF FUN & FICTION stopped after a run of exactly one year on the 1st February, thus ending the REALM line that had restarted in 1919. On the 1st March, BOYS' FAVOURITE, after 43 issues changed to STARTLER. ALL SPORTS, another stalwart from 1919, ended life after a run of 556 on the 3rd May. Thomson's roused from their slumbers at this point and SKIPPER came out on 6th September. In January 1931, A/P launched BULLSEYE with its macabre Blue Cover and weird Victorian styled illustrations. A large number of its stories were reprinted from the pre-1914 War FUN & FICTION and were to be printed yet again in FILM FUN in later years, so that A/P certainly had their money's worth here. In March, the POPULAR, flagging for some time was scrapped and replaced by the RANGER, a much more colourful, more in line with Thomson's style.

1932, and Thomson's SKIPPER was settled in and matching the success of their earlier efforts. It was followed in March with the issue of RED ARROW. This surprisingly, broke away from the format of its Companion Papers by printing in the half sized  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$  and having 56 pages. In the intense competition for display space on the Bookstalls, this small size was a distinct disadvantage. Possibly because of this, RED ARROW did not have a widespread sale, and on 18th February, 1933, it was withdrawn after 52 issues.

Back at A/P, the UNION JACK which had been a best seller for so long was losing support and they decided to 'update'? its appearance, much to the dismay of the regular readers and aim for the older age group as they had done so successfully with the THRILLER. So in February 1933, the DETECTIVE WEEKLY was born. This must have been worthwhile for the new Book ran until 1940. On the same day in February, NELSON LEE despairingly started yet another (3rd) New Series, but this was even more of a failure than the other two and NELSON LEE was merged into the GEM in August, much to the chagrin of both sets of readers. The STARTLER now two years old was scrapped and replaced by SURPRISE on 5th March. Another link with pre-war days was broken when the once mighty CHUMS was merged into MODERN BOY in July, although it did continue as a monthly for another two years. Thomson's, having learned the lesson the lack of appeal in the smaller size, came back again with HOTSPUR in September. This quickly established itself and was to run a good second to the WIZARD, now their best seller. Unexpectedly, in view of this success, Thomson's called a halt, no more books were to come from them from now on. 1933 closed with the SURPRISE, after 89 issues, ending in November, and so yet another line, that begun in 1920, with FOOTBALL & SPORTS FAVOURITE came to an end.

EROSION OF A GIANT, 1934-40. A/P having the field to themselves, kicked off

with PIONEER in February 1934, a complete failure, it closed in the last week of July after 25 issues. BULLSEYE ran out of luck and closed the same week. BOYS' BROADCAST appeared in October, this too was a failure and it ceased in January 1935 after 35 issues. All three closures were absolute - no new books were to take their place! The other change in 1935, the RANGER became the PILOT in September. 1936 saw one new Title, FOOTBALL WEEKLY, at the start of the Football Season. Once again failure, and in late January 1937, it merged into SPORTS BUDGET. At the end of 1937, both the GEM and MAGNET were forced into cheaper plain covers by falling sales, the GEM going over to a reduced (8" x 5") format. 1938 had only two items to report, WILD WEST WEEKLY began in March and PILOT merged into the newcomer in April.

We reach 1939 and A/P sales were in decline - tastes were changing and the run down continued. In February, WILD WEST WEEKLY merged into the THRILLER. In mid-October, SPORTS BUDGET merged into DETECTIVE WEEKLY and on the same day, MODERN BOY merged into BOYS' CINEMA. The last and saddest event of the year - the GEM staggered into oblivion on 30th December. At the time of this last shut down, the MAGNET was the only 1919 "Base Brick" still running.

The Boys' Book Section at A/P ground to a sudden halt in May 1940, caused by the loss of a large consignment of paper, through enemy action. The remaining available supplies being diverted to the more lucrative divisions of their empire. The Books that had marched forward with so many reinforcements and casualties since 1919, had, by the start of the year, been reduced to six - back virtually to where they had started 21 years earlier. The paper was the final blow, on the 18th May, with no previous announcement, five of the six books still running, were cut. THRILLER, MAGNET, DETECTIVE WEEKLY and BOYS' CINEMA ceased publication and TRIUMPH was merged into the CHAMPION, so that one survivor, appropriately called the CHAMPION went on through the Second World War years.

At Thomson's, the "Big Five" as they were called, selling well and so possibly having a better claim on the paper resources available, went through the same barrier unscathed. All five went on into the 1940's - true one fell in 1941, but the other four were to have a further twenty years of life before changing tastes were to transform them, but that is another story, beyond this Article.

WHEN THE DUST HAD SETTLED. So we come full circle. To paraphrase Lewis Carroll, A/P had, between the Wars "by running furiously, managed to stay in the same place." Did A/P stay "King of the Castle?" On the whole they had precious little return for the energy expended through the period - Thomson's, having gained a substantial foothold, never really put the boot in, they seemed content with about half the sales in a market in which they had a third of the Titles offered for sale, so that for the effort involved, they had a good return. Maybe the A/P record of failures at that time dissuaded further effort on their part and they turned their attention to the Comic arena. In this, they shook established practice by the introduction of BEANO and DANDY - but that is beyond our reckoning here.

Looking back it is surprising how the great Amalgamated Press, with so much experience in the Boys' Book field, were, on the whole so unsuccessful with their new

entrants during the times under review. How old fashioned their papers seemed in the early Twenties, to the boys who were demanding something livelier - how they had the example of the successful challenge of TRIUMPH and CHAMPION to the Thomson threat, and never followed it up - how, in the Twenties they seemd to be obsessed (not too strong a term) with the words Sport, Favourite and Budget, in their titles.

Many other aspects have not been looked at. Other publishers of the period under examination, although small in number, have not been mentioned. One should study the A/P attempts in the field of Girls' Papers - and we have not looked at the area of the Comics, both A/P and Thomson's were active participants here. It is only by studying the whole broad canvas can one get a true picture. Perhaps these parts too, could be charted and co-related to this Article.

Those of us who lived through those years can consider ourselves fortunate to have been offered such a wealth of reading matter, such a diversity of taste and styles, through our formative years. I am sure that everyone found his favourite theme somewhere in the wide variety on offer. Possibly we shall never see their like again offered to boys in the years to come, the era of cheap paper has gone and reading by the young is in decline. The picture story is King.

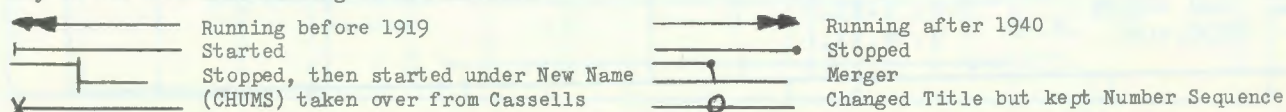
I hope the recording of events, the mention of books, whose lights have dimmed with the passing of the years, has stirred the memories of the older collectors. If it has also aroused the younger in our ranks to look again at the entire field and not concentrate on particular favourites, so much the better; and if the reader gets the satisfaction from the perusal of the Article as I received from the compiling, then the work will have been worthwhile.

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APPENDIX CHART. This traces the life span of each Book over the years 1919-1940. The A/P Books are not listed alphabetically or in order of publication. Rather, they have, in order to clarify the changes and mergers, been grouped with those books with whom their fates were linked. This avoids a mass of genelogical lines crossing like a "Spagetti Junction."

By keeping them together this way, patterns emerge - the stop of one, the start of another. It is interesting to note that when a book was merged into another, it was not haphazard. The one to close was placed into a companion in order to boost its circulation but NO book received more than one merger (apart from CHAMPION. It had received YOUNG BRITAIN in 1925 and also TRIUMPH in the final shut down of 1940) the next closure went to another and so in turn all received a boost. This could explain why, for example, the MODERN BOY merged into BOYS' CINEMA, a book with which it had very little in common, it had to go to one of the books still running that had not received help in this way. A feather in the cap of the MAGNET here, is the fact that in its life, it neither received a merged book or had the indignity of a merger thrust upon it. The only long runner of the time in question to have this 'honour.'

Key to the life line marking is as follows:-



	TITLE	Starting Date	Year					
			'19	'21	'23	'25	'27	
AMALGAMATED PRESS	FENNY POPULAR	25. 1.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	RANGER	14. 2.31.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PILOT	5.10.35.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	WILD WEST WEEKLY	12. 3.38.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	THRILLER	9. 2.29.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PRAIRIE LIB.	15. 4.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	ROBIN HOOD LIB.	15. 4.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	DETECTIVE LIB.	2. 8.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	NUGGETS	17. 7.20.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	CHEERIO	17. 5.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	MAGNET	15. 2.08.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	UNION JACK	28. 4.94.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	DETECTIVE WKLY.	25. 2.33.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	SPORTS BUDGET	6.10.23.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	FOOTBALL WKLY.	22. 8.36.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	BOYS FRIEND	29. 1.95.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	TRIUMPH	18.10.24.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	ROCKET	17. 2.23.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	PLUCK	28.10.22.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	SPORT & ADVENT.	29. 4.22.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	MARVEL	11.11.93.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	GREYFR. HERALD	1.11.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	CHAMPION	28. 1.22.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	YOUNG BRITIAN	14. 6.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	ALL SPORTS	30. 8.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	SPORTS FOR BOYS	9.10.20.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	GEM	16. 3.07.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	NELSON LEE	12. 6.15.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	BOYS REALM	5. 4.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	B.R'LM SPT/ADV.	23. 7.27.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	R'LM of FUN/FIC.	16. 2.29.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	BOYS CINEMA	13.12.19.	—	—	—	—	—	—
MODERN BOY	11. 2.28.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
CHUMS	14. 9.92.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
SPORTS FUN	11. 2.22.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
FOOT.SPORTS FAV.	4. 9.20.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
BOYS FAVOURITE	4. 5.29.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
STARTLER	1. 3.30.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
SURPRISE	5. 3.32.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
BULLSEYE	24. 1.31.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
PIONEER	10. 2.34.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
BOYS BROADCAST	27.10.34.	—	—	—	—	—	—	
THOMSON	ADVENTURE	17. 9.21.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	ROVER	4. 3.22.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	WIZARD	23. 9.22.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	VANGUARD	15.10.23.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	SKIPPER	6. 9.30.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	RED ARROW	19. 3.32.	—	—	—	—	—	—
	HOTSPUR	2. 9.33.	—	—	—	—	—	—

Year							Closure Date
'29	'31	'33	'35	'37	'39		
P.P.							7. 2.31.
RAN.							28. 9.35.
PIL.							2. 4.38.
W.W.							18. 2.39.
THR.							18. 5.40.
FRA.							10. 7.20.
R.H.							10. 7.20.
D.L.							10. 7.20.
NUG.							5. 3.21.
CHE.							17. 4.20.
MAG.							18. 5.40.
U.J.							18. 2.33.
D.W.							25. 5.40.
S.B.							14.10.39.
F.W.							23. 1.37.
B.FR.							31.12.27.
TRI.							25. 5.40.
ROC.							11.10.24.
PLU.							11.10.24.
S.A.							21.10.22.
MAR.							22. 4.22.
B.H.							25. 3.22.
CHA.							
Y.B.							16. 8.24.
A.S.							3. 5.30.
S.BY.							16. 4.21.
GEM							30.12.39.
N.L.							12. 8.33.
B.R.							16. 7.27.
R.S/A							9. 2.29.
R.F/F							1. 2.30.
B.C.							18. 5.40.
M.B.							14.10.39.
CHU.							2. 7.32.
S.F.							25.11.22.
F.S/F							27. 4.29.
B.FA.							22. 2.30.
STA.							27. 2.32.
SUR.							11.11.37.
BUL.							21. 7.34.
PIO.							28. 7.34.
B.B.							29. 6.35.
ADV.							
ROV.							
WIZ.							
VAN.							22. 5.26.
SKI.							
R.A.							18. 3.33.
HOT.							





Here is a 42-year old programme from New Cross Empire. Though built just before the turn of the century, this truly delightful theatre was typical of the lovely music-halls which were built by Oswald Stoll and his rival in the business, Sir Horace Moss. All red plush and gold, with carpeted floors and stairs, New Cross Empire was music-hall at its best.

Sitting 2000 people, on four levels, it seems to have been built by Stoll, and then, for some reason or other, passed under the Moss control after a few years.

Our programme was for one of the visits of the famous Splinters Co., produced by that superb rough diamond of show business, Lew Lake. Splinters was an all-male show - "every lady a gentleman," they used to say - and was originally the "Les Rouges et Noires" pierrot show of the Western Front in the 1914 war. It is likely that by 1932 (the date of our programme) the only old soldiers remaining were the two stars, Reg Stone and Hal Jones. Reg Stone, who made a truly beautiful leading lady, died comparatively young, somewhere about 1935. He was 36 years old. Though Splinters carried on for a time with a new leading lady, it was never the same again, and the show folded before 1939, after so many successful years. Reg Stone, though an attractive girl on the stage, was a married man, and there was nothing effeminate about him off-stage.

Hal Jones was a priceless comedian. One of his famous songs

was "I'm Fond of Swistles Ness Milk, I Am." So far as I know he is still living, but, if so, he must be nearly or quite ninety. I last heard of him about 8 years ago, when he was Chairman of the Water Rats.

I do not know whether New Cross Empire still stands. The tragedy of our age is that money-grabbing developers were ever allowed to destroy those things which were essentially British and so much part of British tradition.



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R. H. GILLESPIE

OVERTURE .. .. . Orchestra  
(Musical Director: Frank Hills)

LEW LAKE presents

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Entire Book, Lyrics and Production by  
**L. ARTHUR ROSE**  
Music by David Hunter

- SPLINTER 1 ..... JUST A GREETING
- SPLINTER 2 ..... A FEW IMPRESSIONS
- SPLINTER 3 ..... ON THE TILES  
Ginger Cat ..... HAL JONES  
White Cat ..... REG STONE
- SPLINTER 4 ..... THE QUEEN OF THE RING  
Circus Clown ..... LESLIE PEARCE
- SPLINTER 5 .. THE CLASSIC PLAYLET, "PASSPORTS"  
Bill ..... HAL JONES  
Mademoiselle ..... REG STONE
- SPLINTER 6 ..... THE GARDEN OF EDEN  
Adam ..... HAL JONES  
Eve ..... REG STONE

## INTERVAL

- SPLINTER 7 ..... WITH FLYING FEET
- SPLINTER 8 ..... PUBLIC TELEPHONES
- SPLINTER 9 ..... PUBLICITY
- SPLINTER 10 ..... A POLITICAL MEDLEY  
The Heckler ..... HAL JONES  
The Candidate ..... LESLIE PEARCE
- SPLINTER 11 ..... WHO WON THE WAR?  
The Muse of History ..... REG STONE

SPLINTER 12 .. THE COMING EFFECT OF THE AMERICAN TALKIE ON THE ENGLISH THEATRE

Hamlet ..... HAL JONES  
The Ghost ..... LLOYD VICTOR

SPLINTER 13 ..... THE STROLLING PLAYERS

Tenor ..... LESLIE PEARCE  
Soprano ..... ANDY PATERSON  
Contralto ..... GEORGE TAYLOR  
Dancer ..... PETER PHILLIPS

SPLINTER 14 .. HAL JONES BEMOANS HIS BALDNESS

SPLINTER 15 ..... REHEARSING THE PANTOMIME

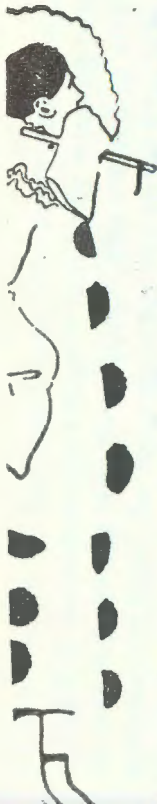
General Manager .....	For	..... SAM ROSE
Stage Manager .....	LEW LAKE	..... WM. MORRIS
Musical Director .....		..... TOMMY THURBAN

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ANNA ROGERS, THE SINGING NEWSBOYS,  
and Star Varieties

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Conductor - Mr. TOM MORGAN ALSO PICTURES

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- In accordance with the requirements of the Lord Chamberlain:—
- 1.—The public may leave at the end of the performance by all exit doors and such doors must at that time be open.
  - 2.—All gangways, passages and staircases must be kept entirely free from chairs or any other obstruction.
  - 3.—Persons must not be allowed to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, and standing can only be permitted in the gangways at the sides of the seating where there are no steps. Sufficient space must be left in gangways, where standing is permitted, for persons to pass easily to and fro and to have free access to exits.
  - 4.—The safety curtain must be lowered and raised in the presence of each audience.
- NRW CROSS EMPIRE. Manager.....G. H. RICHARDSON.  
Telephone Nos.—Box Office—2902 New Cross. Manager's Office—2901.



# A Lad from Lancashire

by Roger M. Jenkins

Mark Linley was one of Charles Hamilton's more questionable creations. He arrived at Greyfriars in Magnet 45 in 1908, and was presumably intended to enlist the support of some of the Magnet's poorer readers. We learnt that Bishop Mowbray in the reign of Edward VI had founded some scholarships so that poor boys could have the benefit of a college education. As Bulstrode said, they were used to having "sons of officers killed abroad, and sons of poor parsons, and sons of poverty-stricken naval captains" but this time the governors had passed the limit. It was the same sort of antagonism that was later aroused when Courtenay arrived at Highcliffe some six years afterwards.

Linley had been a part-time minder in a cotton mill, and used to buy books with his odd sixpences. With the assistance of a local curate he had studied in his spare time and won a scholarship. He arrived dressed in a cloth cap and tweeds that were not of the quietest pattern. He brought not the usual trunk, but a wicker basket that he called a skip, and Bulstrode & Co. had great fun teasing him when they met him at Friardale station. The story ended with Linley thrashing Bulstrode in a fight, but in later years his boxing prowess was gradually forgotten.

A more dramatic story occurred in No. 58 "Cut By the Form," when Bulstrode, Skinner, Snoop, and Stott decided to tar and feather Mark Linley in the study as a gentle hint that he was not wanted at Greyfriars. Mr. Quelch found out about the affair, and Bulstrode was flogged by Dr. Locke, an episode that was described with gruesome vividness. It was thought that Linley had sneaked about it, and as he was too proud to explain he was sent to Coventry. It was left to Marjorie Hazeldene to set things right in a story that was told with considerable force and skill, considering its age.

When Charles Hamilton introduced relatives into the stories in the early days they were often freakish or eccentric. This was not the case with Linley's sister Mabel, who put in an appearance in No. 66, but Bulstrode & Co. were provided with another opportunity for malicious jokes, and that part of the story was not particularly pleasant.

A little series in Nos. 88-90 gave Mark Linley a bigger showing. Articles began to disappear from the Remove dormitory at night, and Bulstrode was not slow in insinuating that the new boy might be responsible, since nothing of the kind had occurred before he arrived. It turned out in the end to be the work of Bunter, who was then a victim of somnambulism. Even if the reader thought that this explanation was rather far-fetched, the series did at least allow Linley to have a star part, and had Charles Hamilton left matters at this all might have been well. Unfortunately,

Linley's home background began to assume prominence in the stories, and he felt obliged to subsidise his indigent family by winning prizes: indeed, a few years later he was suggesting that those pupils who wanted to attain honours should compete for medals and leave the money prizes for those who really needed the cash, a sentiment which might have been unexceptionable had it not come from Linley himself.

This position was made crystal clear as early as Magnet 180 "A Schoolboy's Crossroads." Vernon-Smith entered for the prize not because he wanted the money or the glory, but out of spite, and he nearly succeeded in robbing Linley of the prize. By 1911, Charles Hamilton was beginning to develop the Magnet stories quite impressively, and No. 180 is in the middle of a run of good quality tales, but the basic defect in Linley's particular situation was that the grinding poverty of the sort described was quite out of place with the atmosphere of the Greyfriars stories. There is little doubt of the reality of the situation: life for the poor in 1911 must have been very wretched indeed, but all this was inappropriate in the context of the Greyfriars stories and, as Charles Hamilton himself (in his contribution to the magazine 'Horizon') later remarked, concerning the average Magnet reader, "Mr. Orwell would have told him that he is a shabby little blighter, his father an ill-used serf, his world a dirty, muddled, rotten sort of show. I don't think it would be fair play to take his twopence for telling him that." Nevertheless, in these early days, Charles Hamilton did go on suggesting just that at times. In Magnet 192 we read:

"Hallo! How are the mills going on?" asked Ponsonby.

Mark flushed.

"Any strikes on at present?" asked Monson. "Father out of work and getting strike pay - hey? Family going round with the hat?"

And the Highcliffians chuckled in chorus.

When they went on to throw Linley in the water, it was made clear that he could not afford the damage to his clothes. Strictly speaking, he could not afford to be at Greyfriars at all.

Of course, the Famous Four supported Linley from his earliest days, and Wharton's fair and reasonable attitude was in marked contrast with Bulstrode's vindictive snobbishness. But it was Bob Cherry who was Linley's closest friend: in Magnet 75 they were "The Tenants of Study 13" together with Hurree Singh and Wun Lung, and when Bob Cherry was the victim of Heath's plot in Nos. 173-4, only Linley and Wharton believed in Bob despite all evidence to the contrary. Again in Nos. 247-54 when Vernon-Smith contrived to get all the Co. expelled, it is significant that Mark Linley was also a victim of the plot, and in No. 281 when Major Cherry's financial disaster meant that Bob would have to work for a scholarship it was Mark Linley in whom he chose to confide. The relationship between Bob Cherry and Mark Linley was in many ways the most convincing aspect of the description of Linley at Greyfriars: Bob Cherry's rather thoughtless exuberance and Mark Linley's quiet firmness of character supplied that juxtaposition of opposites which occasionally does provide the foundation of a harmonious relationship. Here Charles Hamilton was treading on much firmer ground.

Parental hardship returned once more in No. 398 "A Lancashire Lad's Luck," when Linley won a short-story competition, which he entered so that he could send

some money home if he were successful. After this, Linley ceased to receive quite so much attention in the Magnet, perhaps because the 1920's dealt mainly with the developments in the career of another scholarship boy, Tom Redwing. They had much in common, but Redwing was presented far more successfully. First of all, he became the special friend of a major character, Vernon-Smith, whereas Linley was seldom more than on the fringe of the Famous Five; secondly, Redwing's father, though poor, was not impoverished or unemployed - he maintained a sturdy independence and left Redwing to make his own way unhindered. Quite apart from all this, the increase in the frequency of series writing and the dearth of single stories meant that Linley was edged out still further.

It was not until the depression of 1929 began to loom that Mark Linley returned to a starring role in the Magnet for the last time, in a little series in Nos. 1116-17. The old ingredients were there as before - a desire to win a money prize so that cash could be sent home to a father out of work, a set-back in the plans, and final success. But this was not just a case of the mixture as before: in the Golden Age, Charles Hamilton could write with humour and penetrating insight, and few stories were not embellished with these qualities:

"What about the dole?" asked Snoop.

"The dole?" repeated Mark.

"Yes. Don't they get the dole in such circumstances? You've heard the favourite song of the unemployed?" said Skinner, "It runs: 'You great big beautiful dole!'"

Mark set his lips.

Quite clearly Skinner is not intended to be a sympathetic character, but the joke he made is also one that Charles Hamilton probably thought quite funny; it reveals a dichotomy in outlook between the right-thinking sympathiser of Mark Linley on the one hand and the cynical attitude of a writer with a keen sense of humour on the other hand. Nevertheless the series does go on to develop in some detail the dislike that Skinner had for Mark Linley, and to analyse the reasons for it - "A mean nature resented the mere existence of a noble one." Even when Mark Linley spoke to Skinner in a friendly manner "Skinner clung to his bitterness as to a pearl of price." This pair of stories undoubtedly represents the highlight of Charles Hamilton's portrayal of Linley's character.

At Greyfriars there was the rather unusual custom of Greek being deferred as a study until the Sixth Form, where Dr. Locke seemed to teach the subject practically all the time. Mark Linley, of course, studied Greek as an extra subject in the Remove, a fact which always earned him Mr. Quelch's good opinion. In the last decade of the Magnet, Linley's role was to exhibit these particular qualities. So if Bunter wanted to win a prize for writing a Latin ode, it would be Linley's that he would pilfer, as in Magnet 1159. If Mr. Quelch wanted another Head Boy, as in the second Rebel series, it would be Linley to whom he would turn. Linley's final part in the Magnet was as a supporting actor, never in a star role.

It is not easy to assess Linley's value in the Magnet without allowing emotional or sentimental overtones to cloud one's judgment. Obviously, nearly every boy at Greyfriars came from a well-to-do family, and there was no attempt made to pretend

that the whole social range was represented: that is why the really poor boys stood out like a sore thumb, and that is why the continual harping on poverty tended at times to spoil the pattern of the stories. Dick Penfold was in a similar situation, but his father (like Redwing's) was a local character, and Penfold quickly dropped into the background, to become merely a name like Rake or Vivien: his only claim to fame in later years was the fact that a number of poems written by substitute writers for the Holiday Annual or Greyfriars Herald were attributed to his pen. Redwing's poverty was never emphasised in the same manner as Linley's, and of course he eventually acquired a fortune of his own, anyway.

Within the Remove itself, there was quite a range of fortune. Lord Mauleverer, Vernon-Smith, and Newland, were among the wealthiest boys in the school, whilst the Bunter family seemed continually in financial troubles. In my opinion, Charles Hamilton was at his most sympathetic when describing the slight difficulties experienced by people in the middle range: for example, in Magnet 1255, when Colonel Wharton walked to Greyfriars from Courtfield to save money, and replaced his cigar case without taking one out, these slight hardships seemed much more convincing than descriptions of greater ones; again, when Bob Cherry in the Hilton Hall series, admired a wireless set far more expensive than he could afford, his father's relatively modest status was clearly brought before the reader.

It is not obligatory for a writer to deal with the whole range of society in the manner of Fielding or Dickens; so long as he is able to display, within a convincing framework of morality, an outlook on life which forms a pattern from apparently unconnected events, and which enlightens the reader by extending his appreciation of the mainsprings of human character and motivation, then he has fulfilled his artistic purpose. Charles Hamilton, like Jane Austen, preferred to deal almost exclusively with the middle classes, and consequently his excursions from his chosen field are not always acceptable to the reader. One does not have to lack sympathy for the unemployed to find the repeated references to the plight of the Linley's a regrettable lapse from Charles Hamilton's own standards, and one cannot help wondering whether Linley himself was much of an attraction to the poorer readers. Certainly there is reason to suspect that Charles Hamilton may have reconsidered the matter himself, for Linley was played down in later years, and there were never any more mill hands in cloth caps at his schools. Second thoughts are proverbially the best ones, and the quiet dependable Linley of the last dozen years of the Magnet's existence was undoubtedly a more successful development of his character. The Linley who had shed the albatross of his family round his neck was a more attractive person, better fitted to play a subsidiary role in the Magnet saga. This is the character who could earn our sympathy and respect; it is a pity that he was too calm and remote to claim our affection as well.

\* \* \* \* \*

Best wishes for Xmas and the New Year to all Hobbyists. My warmest thanks to the Editor and all contributors for the happy hours spent with the C.D.

R. J. McCABE

DUNDEE

# MEMORY LANE

by Jack Overhill

It all started when I went in a little general stores in Cambridge on a wet autumn afternoon in 1914. I had a penny to spend, wanted something to read, and the girl behind the counter handed me a GEM. That led to my becoming a regular reader of the Companion Papers and other weeklies. I was soon hunting for back numbers with the excitement of a treasure-seeker. The Gem published lists of all its titles; I cut them out and stuck them on strips of pink paper. How I longed to read them! Some came my way but, alas, many did not.

I drew maps of Greyfriars and St. Jim's and the surrounding districts, cut portraits out of the MAGNET and GEM and stuck them in a book, and listed the studies with the names, ages, and heights of the boys in them. The editor's weekly chat and answers to correspondents helped with the details.

I read the advertisements. Amazing what was offered:

'Do you lack self-confidence, are you sensitive, irritable or depressed?  
(Picture of the sufferer before and after the 12-days' cure.) Fee not stated.'

'Send three penny stamps for particulars of the £100 guarantee to increase your height five inches by a simple system. (Nature had the last say in growth and I knew I was going to be six feet, anyway.)'

'Blushing? (Fork out sixpence to cure that!)

'50 comic songs, 750 riddles and connundrums, 4 stump speeches (what were they?), 30 card and conjuring tricks, 50 jokes, 21 humorous recitations, 150 witty toasts - the lot 8d. (The cost of eight Saturday afternoons at the Alex to see films of cowboys and indians!)

'25 lovely Xmas cards 1/3d - easy to sell at a big profit. (The people I knew couldn't afford to buy Xmas cards.)'

'Free Gifts of Bicycles, Gold and Silver Watches, Ostrich Feathers, Furs, Boots, Shoes, Clothes, etc. (Tell me another!)

I joined the Boys' Friend Anti-German League. Who wouldn't as it cost only a ha'penny postage stamp, the German soldiers (according to newspaper reports) rampaging through Belgium with babies stuck on their bayonets. I splashed another ha'penny on a stamp to join Chuckles Club and received a Free Coloured Certificate of its front-page characters, Breezy Ben and Dismal Dutchy, and a secret code, which I could use when writing to my friends with no-one (except the thousands of Chuckles Club members) being the wiser. Laboriously, I wrote in code on a postcard to my schoolmate, who lived in a village near Cambridge. He didn't reply, was more

interested in poaching.

I destroyed three photogravure plates given with the BOYS' FRIEND. A bit later, I regretted it. The editor of the BOYS' FRIEND wrote about the joys of having a 'den.' If there was a small, empty room in your house, get parental permission to make one of it. There was a little back-bedroom in our house and I inspected it. The window, whitewashed halfway up, looked out on the conjoining backyards of two cul-de-sacs. The backyards were walled in and each had in it a wash-house and water-closet. On the roofs were old bicycle wheels, pram wheels, empty boxes, pieces of wood, bits of rusty piping, bricks that held down loose slates, and other junk that a giant dustman might have tipped there. But that was no drawback to my making the room into a den; I was used to the rubbish cluttering up the roof-tops, had grown up with its being there, and wasn't going to look out of the window. With my father's permission - he readily gave it - I set about turning the room into my own, one in which I could read my favourite weeklies and write in isolation from the world outside.

The floor was bare - I had dreams of pegging a mat to help cover it. The ceiling was grimy - so was I pretty often; a reflection that overcame my dislike of it. The walls - well, something had to be done about them. The pattern of the wallpaper had faded to a dun colour that spoke of the past: it had probably been put on shortly after the Napoleonic wars when the house was built - on the site of a pond, I'd heard somebody say. But it wasn't the colour of the wallpaper that mattered - not really; it was the unsightly cracks in it. A long and wide one in the middle of a wall I covered with a picture of the sinking of the Titanic by an iceberg in the Atlantic. How I came by that four-year-old newspaper I took it from I don't know, but the picture hid the crack. Unfortunately, there was no fireplace in the room; had there been one I could have gone wooding - customary at the time - and had a fire, which would have made the room more cosy, the iceberg towering over the sinking ship and people struggling in icy water making me feel cold, even on a warm day, when I looked at it. I covered other cracks with pictures out of newspapers and it was then I wished I hadn't destroyed the photogravure plates in the BOYS' FRIEND.

I had an idea. Maybe, I could get them by writing to the editor. I wrote to him and in the BOYS' FRIEND, No. 781, 27th May, 1916, there was his reply.

'Jack Overhill, Cambridge. Very sorry, but our stock of the presentation plates entitled The Battle On The Land, The Battle On The Sea, and The Battle In The Air is exhausted. Perhaps, one of my numerous readers will oblige Master Jack.'

Christian names weren't bandied about then like they are now and I thrilled to his use of mine.

Frank Forster, of Macclesfield, kindly obliged at his own expense.

I'd got my den; it was decorated; now, I must furnish it. I did so with a kitchen chair and a big, square, wooden-box; then, I went there to read and write in solitary splendour.

It wasn't long before I found reading on a kitchen chair without a fire was



nothing as comfortable as in the old armchair beside the fire in our kitchen-workshop, where my father earned a living as a shoemaker. As for writing, I couldn't do it, the wooden-box wouldn't let me. Sitting on the floor, my legs curled round the sides of the box like a contortionist, I couldn't get close enough to the top to write on it; sitting sideways was just as bad. But it was loneliness that beat me. I went back to the old armchair downstairs, glad to be there.

An aftermath of the affair was the friendly correspondence that developed with Frank Forster. He was seventeen and had a big heart. He sent me a leather pocket-wallet as a Christmas present. Presents of any sort rarely came my way and I cherished it for years. He was called up for the army, went to France, was wounded, but pulled through, and his photo, taken at Aberville in 1919, is in the family album.

The BOYS' FRIEND offered half a crown for jokes. One of the four Smiths in class at school had a joke accepted. Encouraged by his success, I sent in a few. No half-crown came my way.

In a burst of patriotic fervour, I wrote to the editor of the BOYS' FRIEND about sending magazines to the troops in France. In No. 786, 1st July, 1916, he told me all I need do was to hand them in at a Post Office. I sent four hundred MAGNETS and GEMS. I wrote my name and address in some of them and had letters from soldiers - two were officers - thanking me.

The GREYFRIARS HERALD was published. On the front page was a picture-puzzle competition: first prize £1, second prizes 5/-, third prizes tuck hampers. A tuck hamper was the bait with me. I'd often shared in the contents of one off scene at Greyfriars and St. Jim's until the U-boat menace and the severe loss of British shipping created a food crisis that brought in rationing of a limited kind and queues outside shops - all of which put an end to picnics of a lavish kind and dormitory feeds after lights out. I had a go every week. After eighteen issues, the GREYFRIARS HERALD closed down and the competition was carried on in the BOYS' FRIEND. I continued doing it.

A letter came. Again, I had the satisfaction of seeing my name in the BOYS' FRIEND, No. 790, 29th July, 1916, the winner of a tuck hamper in Competition No. 13. (That made me favour '13' as my lucky number.) The tuck hamper was a long while coming and impatient I wrote to the editor saying I hadn't received it. I had no reply. I despaired. But at last it came. The delight when I arrived home from school on a wet afternoon and saw it under the table! Packed by Selfridges, it came up to expectations - not high ones in wartime and when boys were marched from Cambridge workhouse to the school I'd attended till I won a scholarship.

There was a sequel. Hearing that I'd won a tuck hamper, the eighteen-year-old niece of a shoemaker my father knew, enlisted my aid to help her win a prize in a similar competition in the GIRLS' FRIEND. I suggested 'bouquet' for the picture of a man holding a bunch of flowers. The solution was 'bunch of flowers' and the error of three words failed her for a prize. She never forgave me, was always disdainfully aloof afterwards.

The magnitude of the prize of £100 for the MAGNET story competition must have swept readers with literary ambitions off their feet. A leaning in that direction had come over me and I was determined to have a go. In "Mystery Island," a serial in the BOYS' FRIEND by Duncan Storm, two brothers named Boyd were wrecked with their mother and an old sailor on a South Sea Island while travelling to England. The brothers were going to Greyfriars School, the elder boy first, and as they were eventually rescued, I decided on his adventures there for my story. I wrote the first chapter, about 1400 words, found the task beyond me and gave up. But I liked writing stories and I submitted one called "A Holiday For Two," to CHUMS. The editor returned it with a friendly letter, urging me to try again a bit later. (I was never likely to forget his heartening and encouraging act. Lately, I've learned through Bill Lofts that he was F. Knowles Campling and that he was knocked down and killed by a bus in Lancing, Sussex, in 1940.)

Hard times in the home cut short my scholarship and I left school two days before my fourteenth birthday to start learning my father's trade. From my thoughts while at work there emerged:

#### Bunter's P. O.

It was a bright and glorious day,  
When my postal order came;  
It made me feel extremely gay,  
And brought me world-wide fame.

It had beard and whiskers all complete,  
And looked a perfect dream;  
The shaving really was a feat,  
And made the beggar scream.

Ah! how the fellows envied me,  
Why, several nearly died;  
As I prepared to have a spree,  
The rest stood by and sighed.

I scoffed jam-tarts and chocs galore,  
My death warrant all did sign,  
As doughnuts vanished by the score,  
And cream-puffs so divine.

I cleared out Mrs. Mimble's stock,  
Ye Gods! it was a scream;  
Then, I awoke - what an awful shock,  
'Twas only a blessed dream!

Not up to Keats, but it showed my feelings.

I had a compulsive urge to buy the MAGNET, GEM and BOYS' FRIEND long after I gave up reading them. That showed my feelings, too.

The war over, old and new weeklies came to life. Among them was YOUNG BRITAIN, with the offer of "Peace And Victory" medals for the best essays on indoor sports. Sixteen years old, I'd come under the spell of billiards at a club I'd joined and I sent in an essay. I received one of the medals and a printed slip "With The Editor's Compliments." The medal 'To Commemorate The Victorious Peace Of Great Britain And Her Allies 1919' is a large and ugly one, but being a hoarder of odd items I've still got it - and the printed slip!

I had another cut at writing a story about Greyfriars. The title was *Catching Quelchy*. It was returned with a blast from the editorial chair. Mr. Quelch would never condone a trick oath of Skinner's. So many persons thought they could write in the style of Frank Richards; they could not; he was a master of his craft, unequalled, and could not be imitated. There was more, much more, in that line, and doubtless it was true, but its effect was shattering. (I've always felt that I could have been treated, if not as kindly as F. Knowles Campling treated me, with a little more consideration.)

The urge to write was still strong and I satisfied it by contributing to several amateur magazines edited by youthful readers of the *MAGNET* and *GEM* who appealed for support in their pages. That led to a number of pen friendships with both sexes and I sometimes wrote as many as ten letters a day. Some of my correspondents wrote in shorthand that was often difficult to transcribe (they probably had trouble in transcribing mine), and several had inquiring minds. 'What is your opinion of the relative merits and demerits of Capitalism and Communism?' was the sort of question I was asked. That would set me mugging up the subject before answering the letter and I always got some change out of it. The magazines were usually got out on hand-printing presses or duplicating machines, but whatever form they took they showed ingenuity and industry on the part of those that issued them. The stories in style and plot always seemed superior to mine and I felt that Jack McGraw of Stockton-on-Tees, Nigel Van Biene of London, and Eric Chatfield of Uckfield, Sussex, would soon be in the professional class. I liked best the pass-around magazines: they had so much variety. One copy of the original works of the authors, artists and poets, it was not spoiled by reproduction and often grew to two or three inches thick. I've still got copies of *Pals*, an amateur magazine, edited by Godfrey Wengenroth of Paisley. In 1919 a friend of mine joined the army; before going, he gave me all his Nelson Lees, which he'd taken from the first number. I offered Godfrey Wengenroth one hundred of these as the prize for a best story competition in *Pals*. He agreed with the idea and I sent him the one hundred Nelson Lees. The competition wasn't held before *Pals* shut down. He never returned the Nelson Lees.

Jack London, William Clark Russell, Frank Bullen, Louis Becke, Dickens, Doyle, Farnol, Weyman, Sabatini, Merriman, Wells, were the authors I read in my teens and they undermined and destroyed my interest in the many boys' weeklies I had read. But I had a lingering affection for the *Companion Papers*. I saw copies of them in newsagents and like a man who has left home and friends, I still felt part of them. Indeed, I regarded myself as an 'old boy' of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood. There was nothing happening in those schools that I didn't know about! I had a few copies in a safe place. What links with the past! At times, the mood on me to renew their acquaintance, I browsed through them - and felt the better for it.

The years slipped by - how they slipped by; then, in 1936, I dreamt of a story called *Nobody's Study* that I had read in the *GEM* twenty years earlier. I was so struck by the vividness of the dream that I wrote to the editor of the *GEM* about it. He said it was a tribute to the force of the story and sent me a copy of "Nobody's Study," which had been reprinted in the *GEM*. I read the story again and

handed it to my eight-year-old son. Straight away he became an ardent GEM fan (his sister read the SCHOOLGIRL) and it soon came to my notice that he was reading the stories that I'd read as a boy. Inquiry revealed that a changeover to the 1908 stories had been made in 1931. He developed a craze for back numbers; I advertised and bought a sackful of MAGNETS and GEMS - about six hundred - for thirty shillings and a bound volume of the GEM, numbers 27 to 52 inclusive, for five shillings. On outings together, we always took some of them with us; they helped to create a holiday atmosphere.

My lingering affection for the old papers showed itself in a note in my Diary, dated December 1939:

'Barry Ono, of North Side, Clapham Common, S.W. is, according to the NEWS CHRONICLE, the "Penny Dreadful King." The paper gives details of his sales at Sotheby's and other West End auction marts, of old boys' books and of his collection. If I get a chance I must go and have a look at them, if he will let me.'

There followed an urge to write a book about old boys' books - something I couldn't do until the war was over and not then unless circumstances changed and I had the time and the facilities of the British Museum Library. I mentioned this to Neil Bell. He approved of the idea and in passing mentioned George Orwell's article in HORIZON about Greyfriars - and Frank Richards' spirited reply.

E. S. Turner's "Boys Will Be Boys" was published and eager as I was to buy it, a copy arrived first from Neil Bell. In it he'd written: 'I think you should ration yourself to 10pp a day of this or you'll get nothing else done or possibly die from an attack of nostalgic spasm.'

How I enjoyed that book. And how I missed a clue on page eighteen! Club member Bill Thurbon didn't. He had the wisdom to write the author and so got in touch with Herbert Leckenby, John Medcraft, and Dick Whorwell, three stalwarts of the hobby that had long claimed him.

I felt impelled to write Frank Richards. Finding out his address I did so and had a warmly friendly letter, dated 1st October, 1946, by return of post. In it, he deplored the paper shortage: it was more than two years since he'd written his autobiography, it had been bandied about here and there and had only just found a publisher willing to spare the paper for it. And at that very minute a Manchester publisher had 400,000 words of his copy, which he had paid nobly for in advance and which he couldn't find the paper to print as yet. He spoke about back numbers of the MAGNET and GEM becoming rare and fetching absurd prices - as much as 12/6d for an old double number of the GEM called "The Housemaster's Homecoming:" usually, they fetched about 1/- each. He mildly reproved me for saying that when I reached adult age I grew out of boyish fiction. It was quite true that Greyfriars was written primarily for young people: but it was designed for people of all ages; there was a good deal in it that was overlooked by the boy and more appreciated by the adult. He knew of readers up to the age of 80 and a deluge of letters from old readers had determined him to resume writing 'Greyfriars,' which he had regarded as dead and gone. In other letter he told of his early success in life, of the swing of fortune when nearly seventy when everything went: papers closed down and there

was nothing left but a taxation hangover and the problem of living through the War on an income of Nothing a Year! The letter went on: 'You had it in youth, I had it in age! I suppose we all get it some time or other. And the only thing to do is to bite on the bullet, trust in Providence and keep going. On the whole, I think you had the better luck, for you tell me you have a boy and girl, God bless them!'

How touching were his remarks, especially when he said he was placing an order for a book of mine that was about to be published. Of course, I wanted to meet him, to thank him personally for all the happiness he had given me as boy and man. He said: 'No, my dear boy, I can't ask you to call for the lamentable reason that I am too old to see visitors. Don't think this ungracious: I always have to make the same reply. I just love reading letters from old readers: but at my age an old Johnny has to be assembled like an engine for interviews ...'

So, to my sorrow, we never met.

Correspondence with pen-pal Jack McGraw - the one who put the question about Capitalism and Communion - continued intermittently for over thirty years. It was time we met. I invited him to spend a holiday with me and my family. He'd never told me that he'd lost a leg during his boyhood, but we got about in my old Ford car. He was overwhelmed by the spacious beauty and rural-urban air of Cambridge. And how he enjoyed seeing Newmarket racecourse!

Barry Ono had died in 1941, so there was no going to see his collection of old boys' books, but a newspaper report of an exhibition of juvenalia in London, included old boys' weeklies and I went to it. Entrance fee was five shillings - steep then (sixpence the half-quartern loaf indicates the price level of the period). Number 2 of the MAGNET was the only weekly on show and as it had a very unattractive cover my visit was a disappointment.

I kept in the cold, unaware of what was going on around me in old boys' books circles, until Boxing Day, 1961; then, I heard on the radio that Charles Hamilton, the creator of Billy Bunter, had died in his 86th year. It was a punch. I lost interest in the book I was reading. Beside the fire with my wife, daughter, one of my grandsons, and our collie, I thought of the happiness he had brought into my life. I was reminded of my brief correspondence with him. His letters, like his stories, had been filled with fresh air and sunshine. Undoubtedly, he'd done for me as a youth what H. G. Wells had done for me as a young man - helped me to grow up.

There were tributes to him in the Press, but to my surprise, none on the wireless. For nearly six months, I kept a watchful eye on the Radio Times; then, as I had broadcast just over thirty Talks, I wrote and asked the B. B. C. if they would like one about him. Jack Singleton telephoned me the next day. They would very much like a Talk about Charles Hamilton. I wrote the script, MAGNETS AND GEMS, and broadcast it on the 23rd June, 1962. It was one I'd have been glad to do for nothing.

One of the letters from listeners was from Tom Porter. Had I any Nelson Lees (old series)? I had a few and was able to send him one for his collection. He told me about COLLECTORS' DIGEST and STORY PAPER COLLECTOR. I immediately subscribed to COLLECTORS' DIGEST and on Saturday, the 28th July,

1962, I received number 187, a special enlarged summer edition. Impossible to describe my feelings when I looked at the cover, so remindful of the early MAGNETS, and the sylvan scene of the picture that had in it the charm of the rivers Sark and Ryl. A letter to Bill Gander in Canada - blessed in memory - I was put on his mailing-list and began receiving free copies of STORY PAPER COLLECTOR. Indeed, it was all like becoming a reader of the Companion Papers in 1914-15 - and with the same urge for back numbers, this time of COLLECTORS' DIGEST and STORY PAPER COLLECTOR.

There followed correspondence with devotees of the old papers. That led to new friends - needed as so many old ones had gone.

My wife was caught up in this resurgence of feeling and she came with me to see "Billy Bunter Meets Magic," starring Peter Bridgemont as Billy Bunter and David Nixon as the magician, at the Shaftesbury Theatre in London. There, I had the pleasure of shaking hands and a short chat over the orchestra rail with Eric Fayne, who played at the piano selections of his own composition of Billy Bunter music. (How young he looked in blazer and school tie!)

My son Jack and I visited Tom Porter in Worcester to see his collection. Ever since I was a boy I'd had a recurring dream of finding an Aladdin's cave filled with old boys' books. After Tom's warm greeting we entered that cave and the dream came true. What a thrill! And what a spread before we left! The way Bunter gobbled up the grub! For the gourmand of Greyfriars was there - must have been the way it went!

Bill Lofts, that erudite source of old-boys'-books' lore came and had a day with me. He was looking up his pedigree. We went to Wendon Lofts, a village near Cambridge, where his forbears hailed from, and others round about, with some success.

A profile of me appeared in the CAMBRIDGE NEWS. It began: 'Worlds away from reality, Jack Overhill talked about a long-gone age of old boys' books. Billy Bunter lived again - there were whoopings in the Remove, spreads with Harry Wharton and Co., in Study No. 1 and Quelch on the warpath at Greyfriars; Sexton Blake was pitting life and limb against the Grip of the Tong; and Robin Hood was swinging from a castle parapet, holding the Sheriff of Nottingham's man at bay. At St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was waxing wrathful over a prank ...'

Well, that showed I was human.

Impressed by Leonard Packman's article Those Comic Papers Of Yesteryear in the 1967 'Annual,' I telephoned him in London. How delightful to speak to somebody who could share with me memories of that fine serial, The School Bell, in CHIPS, in 1916. Alas, that we delayed too long and never met. It was the same with Gerry Allison, with whom I corresponded as a member of the Northern Club. His letters, like Bill Ganders, were so interesting that I still read them.

One Sunday afternoon in May 1971, the telephone rang. A collector of old boys' books, named Danny Posner, would like to have a chat with me and some others he was getting in touch with about them. He arranged a meeting. The following

Sunday, at his house, I met Deryck Harvey, Bill Thurbon and Mike Holliday. We talked in comfortable surroundings about old boys' books and other things from 3.0 p.m. till 7.0 p.m., Mrs. Posner providing tea, laid by two of the children. It was most enjoyable. From those beginnings the Cambridge Old Boys' Book Club was formed with Bill Lofts as its President.

In 1972, with Deryck Harvey, a journalist, I visited the Charles Hamilton Museum at Maidstone. The friendly atmosphere and smiling faces had in them the spirit of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood.

There followed a journey to Minehead to meet 91-year-old Cecil Henry Bullivant (Maurice Everard) whose Polruan serials in the BOYS' FRIEND gave me so much pleasure when I was a boy. What a treat to shake hands with him sixty years on. The drive - 430 miles there and back - in my 18-year-old Ford car was well-worth it. And so it was to go to Crookham to see Eric Fayne's collection of MAGNETS, GEMS and BOYS' FRIENDS, all in mint condition, many of which I'd read during the first world war. How warmly I was welcomed - and how well Madam fed me! It was home from home. Indeed, that was a happy day.

I have on my bookshelves 155 COLLECTORS' DIGESTS, 90 STORY PAPER COLLECTORS, and a dozen COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUALS. Growing-old pains ranging from headaches to heartaches sometimes make me come down in the night. I don't seek solace from the books in the house on ologies, isms, and ics; it's C.D. and the Annuals, and S.P.C. I go for. And though I've read the articles in them many times - with silent thanks to the writers - they continue to bring contentment and after an hour or two, comforted, I go back to bed.

I didn't think when I went in that little general stores and bought my first GEM so long ago that its effects would be so far-reaching - and all-embracing.

\* \* \* \* \*

WANTED: Thriller 588, "Front Line Cameraman," Sexton Blake Library 171 and 723 "Crimson Conjurer." 102 "Amber Room." 470 "Sealed Room" (Stuart). 667 "Black Feather" (Gregory). 641 "Three Frightened Men" (Gray).

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=====

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## A LEE FAN IN TWO MOODS

(Our popular contributor, WILLIAM LISTER, in festive spirit)

# *Norestria Kaleidoscope*

Give me knights in armour and I am a new man! Don't ask me to explain it. It must have started years ago, when I was quite a little fellow and relished stories (told or read) of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Later I graduated to "Ivanhoe" and "Don Quixote" and much later to such films as the "Black Knight." The coming of T. V. found me gathering round the small screen on all "Knightly" occasions. Even "Yellow Knight" starring Jimmy Edwards, has its appeal for me.

So it will come as no surprise to readers to learn that, as a St. Frank's fan, the "Knights of Northestria" series in the "Nelson Lee," of 1927, ranks high in my reckoning.

It is not that the series features knights alone. The fertile imagination of E. S. Brooks devised a double thrill for his customers, because his knights and their doings were to be found in a "Lost World" situation.

Yes, you've guessed! I am a "Lost World" addict, too. Ever since A. Conan Doyle created "The Lost World" and Jules Verne, "The Journey to the Centre of the Earth" and the "Boys' Magazine" churned out its quota of Lost World situations, this theme has had its fascination for me. Worlds of which we know nothing. But they did get to know something of it, and so did we.

"What's it all about?" says the song, well! our story is all about knights in armour, and pirates, and slave ships, and jousting, and duels with spiked clubs, complete with a Norman Castle with its towers and turrets and keep, to boot. Discovered by our St. Frank's friends, as they had been driven along in a blinding snowstorm and a gale force wind in an airship that had broken from its moorings, and drifting across the Arctic.

It's breath-taking, man! In fact, it leaves "James Bond" standing. It all goes to show you what can be done if you take a set of well-known characters and put them in an unusual setting. Immediately you have the plot for your story. Edwy Searles Brooks was a past master at this.

Now look at the Kaleidoscope of titles.

"Knights of Northestria," "Handforth the Bold," "The Schoolboy Knight-Errant," "Kasshers Armada," "The Schoolboy Slaves," "The St. Frank's Crusaders," and "The Secret of the North."

Any of these titles will show the St. Frank's enthusiast that here we have E. S. Brooks right on target, and when Brooks is on target things begin to hum.



# THE GHOST TRAIN

I can almost see that train pulling into the station. Before it has time to stop, schoolboys are pouring on to the platform. A thick coating of snow nests on the front of the engine and on the roof of the carriages. The snow had been coming down gently, and the country through which the train had travelled was clothed in its Christmas cloak.

As the boys stepped on to the platform, their feet sank into a deep carpet of snow. The station was a small one, but there was an unusual bustle about it. The platform was piled with boxes, hampers and packages of all kinds, an indication of the nearness of Christmas.

Here is a train that has pulled into that station for a decade or two. Here are excited schoolboys that have poured on to that snow covered platform likewise.

Edwy Searles Brooks grew used to describing it, and his readers expected it. After all, you could never think of Christmas without that crowded platform, those bustling schoolboys, and that train.

The second paragraph and a little of the first are a free-style quote from a "Nelson Lee" dated 1918, though without doubt that train had pulled into that station on previous occasions relating to the festive season.

I would be six at the time, and a few more Christmases were to roll by before I boarded that train for the first time. After that I joined all the rest of E. S. Brooks' customers in looking forward to the nearness of Christmas.

I trust my readers can keep a secret; I still do. I know the old steam trains are a thing of the past, the thrill of tearing through the countryside to the clicketty-click of the wheels, the smoke drifting past the windows, the steam hissing furiously as myriads of snowflakes batted against the engine.

But all is not lost for all owners of Christmas Nos. of the "Nelson Lee" and to all borrowers, the Ghost Train rides again this festive season. It is because so many copies of the old paper are still in existence we can take our seats beside those ghosts of the past: the boys of St. Frank's, the train that carried them and us into those seasonable thrills of long ago. We can follow the pen of E. S. Brooks, through a thousand Christmas thrills. And what more thrilling than a good old-fashioned Christmas story featuring the St. Frank's schoolboys.

Of course, not all their travelling was done by train. A 1918 copy of N. L. tells of Handforth & Co. struggling through the snow in a small car (rather like an Austin 7). See it through the eyes of E. S. Brooks, "the car ploughing through the snow, steadily and relentlessly. The black clouds rolling up, bringing sudden nightfall. The snowflakes in myriads covering the ground and banking into drifts. The dull evening developing into a wild hurricane."

In the very early days Nipper made a hectic journey by motorbike and

sidecar. He tells us, "Uncle John had an old crock of a motorbike. He made out it was a spiffing machine. Late in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, he decided to go to London. I was as keen as mustard. I hadn't had many rides in a sidecar.

We arrived at Colchester in good time. The back tyre went with a bang that could be heard a mile away, and you could imagine us effecting repairs in a blinding snowstorm, with the help of an acetylene headlamp. Even the giddy lamp went wrong and the snow was coming down like the very dickens."

Then there was travelling by foot. All of us did a fair share of that in those days.

"The boys and girls started their trudge in the best of spirits. Three miles through the snow was rather fun. Somewhere behind the clouds there was a full moon. The diffused light was sufficient to show them the road and the hedges. The countryside was assuming a wonderful aspect. As they travelled, the snow fell with greater density. Then came the drifts, and they were obliged to plunge knee-deep through the piled up snow."

Nipper takes up the story - "Walking in Belton Lane was by no means easy. The snow had become so thick we had to plough our way along. It was a constant struggle. The driving snow swirled along by the force of the gale, struck into our faces like so many pellets of ice. We were compelled to bend our heads and trudge on blindly."

And so, once again Christmas is upon us. And with Christmas (if we are wise) we will pick up our Festive copies of the "Nelson Lee" and allow E. S. Brooks to load that ghost train of his, with that happy crowd of St. Frank's schoolboys, and dump them down right on our front doorstep. You will begin a Christmas that will never end. After all, CHRISTMAS IS FOREVER.

\* \* \* \* \*

WANTED: Amalgamated Press "Robin Hood Libraries", numbers 8, 10, 12, 19, 21-24, 28, 37, 43-46, 48, 50, 52, 55-57.

NORMAN WRIGHT, 79 ELFRIDA ROAD, WATFORD, HERTFORDSHIRE.

=====  
Complete your Holiday reading with a copy of the E. S. Brooks Bibliography and Guide to the Nelson Lee Library. 81 information packed pages, plus twelve pages of illustrations of St. Frank's and District. Price £1.50, inc. postage.

BOB BLYTHE

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=====  
Best wishes all my cheerful friends - Josie, Bob, Stan, Bill, Norman. Good reading. Merry Christmas. WANTED: Chuckles 1917, 1923.

ROWE, LINDENS, HORSFORD, NORWICH, NOR 84X.



MR

BUDDLE'S

OLD

FLAM

BY  
ERIC  
FAYN

Mr. Buddle turned in at the gates of Slade. It was a warm and sunny afternoon in early July. Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday at Slade, and two cricket matches were in progress on the playing-fields on the opposite side of the Devonshire lane which ran past the school gates.

Mr. Buddle had been down into Everslade, and had spent a half-hour browsing through the books in Mr. Passenger's second-hand shop. Once upon a time Mr. Buddle had found an old Holiday Annual in the stuffy, junk-laden little shop, but this afternoon he had not been so lucky. However, books of all types always fascinated him, and he had enjoyed himself.

As Mr. Buddle passed through the school gates, Parmint, the lodge-keeper, came out from his lodge and called to him.

Mr. Buddle turned round and

smiled a greeting.

"Good afternoon, Parmint.

What is it?"

"There's been a lady asking for you, sir. One of the parents, I think, down to watch the cricket. I told her I thought you would be back for tea. She went up to the school house, and I haven't seen her come out again."

"Oh!" Mr. Buddle gave a resigned little nod. "Did she give you her name?"

Parmint shook his head.

"No, sir. I told her to go up to the school and ring for the matron, as she seemed set on waiting for you."

"Thank you, Parmint."

Mr. Buddle crossed the quadrangle at an unhurried pace. He mounted the flight of wide, stone steps to the school house, pressed the bell button in the porch, and entered the hall.

He waited, and soon Mrs.

Cleverton, the Slade housekeeper, came along with a rustle of her bombazine dress.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mrs. Cleverton. Parmint tells me that a parent has called to see me --"

"Yes, sir." Mrs. Cleverton folded her arms across her vast bosom. "I've put her in the visitors' room. She's been waiting about twenty minutes now. A Mrs. Tomms --"

Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows.

"Mrs. Tomms, is it? A senior boy's relative. Did she mention me by name, Mrs. Cleverton? Maybe she wants to see Mr. Fromo --"

"No, sir, it's you she wants. I told her you didn't have much to do with the Sixth Form, but she still wants to see you."

Mr. Buddle gave a little sigh.

"Thank you, Mrs. Cleverton. I hope I haven't interrupted your tea."

He went up the stairs to his room, had a quick rinse at his washbasin, and then descended again to the ground floor. He hurried along a corridor, and entered the Slade visitors' room. A pleasant room, with a number of comfortable armchairs, a settee, a small table on which stood a bowl of roses, and bright chintz curtains at the windows.

For a moment Mr. Buddle thought the room was empty. Then he saw the lady, seated in one of the cushioned window-recesses, from which could be obtained a corner view of the playing fields.

As Mr. Buddle entered and closed the door, the lady turned, and, with a slight exclamation, rose to her feet. She was a short person, with a plumpishness which made her look dumpy. She possessed a faded prettiness. She wore a cool green frock, and had a mass of dark brown hair piled in

ringlets on her head. She smiled as Mr. Buddle approached.

"Mr. Buddle?" she enquired. She held out a small hand. A gold bracelet encircled her wrist.

"Mrs. Tomms?" queried Mr. Buddle, as he clasped her hand.

"My son, Lance, is in the Sixth Form here," explained Mrs. Tomms. "I hope I am not encroaching too unforgivably on your spare time. I know I should have made an appointment, but I came down to see Lance play cricket, and so I took the opportunity of meeting you."

"I'm glad that you did," said Mr. Buddle untruthfully. There was an awkward pause. Mr. Buddle added: "If you want to discuss your son's scholastic progress, you should see Mr. Fromo. He can give you far more information, as he is directly responsible for the Sixth Form. I teach English to Tomms, but beyond that --"

"And how is Lance progressing with his English?" asked Mrs. Tomms.

"He works well," said Mr. Buddle. He indicated the window-seat, with a movement of his hand, and Mrs. Tomms seated herself again. "He is not brilliant, but he is keen, and I find him satisfactory in every way."

Mrs. Tomms nodded. Her strawberry-and-cream cheeks dimpled as she smiled again.

She said: "I'm glad. I'm sure he does his best. I must confess, though, that I did not come to see you about his progress in English. There is another matter --" She broke off, a little nervously.

"I see," said Mr. Buddle, hoping to inspire confidence by this entirely meretricious statement. He sat down in the window-seat recess, several yards away from Mrs. Tomms.

"Something concerning his future career, perhaps. If I can help or advise in any way --"

Mrs. Tomms was regarding him whimsically, and Mr. Buddle found himself mildly and unaccountably embarrassed.

"Lance will be at Slade another year," remarked Mrs. Tomms. "I should like him to be a Slade prefect before he leaves. It is his own great ambition. Even when he was a junior he looked forward to being a prefect later on. Beyond that, I feel that, if a boy leaves Slade without having held the position of prefect, he has lost one of the big advantages of an education at a school like Slade."

"That is true, of course," agreed Mr. Buddle. "The appointment of prefects is nothing to do with me, Mrs. Tomms. Mr. Scarlet appoints the prefects, and he does not ask the advice of his staff in the matter."

"You mean he is an opinionated man?" murmured Mrs. Tomms.

"Certainly not. We have a board of ten prefects at Slade, headed by the Captain of the School. Officially they are the Headmaster's prefects. Mr. Scarlet is a shrewd judge of character, a man of vast experience. His decision is the one that counts. Nobody but the Headmaster has any say in the appointment of prefects."

Mrs. Tomms clasped her hands together in her lap. She seemed about to make some rejoinder, but remained silent.

"Can I order tea for you?" ventured Mr. Buddle.

"No, thank you. I had tea with my son in a marquee beside the cricket ground. When he went back to the field I came over to the school to see you."

Mr. Buddle spoke patiently. He said: "But why me, Mrs.

Tomms? I only teach your son English. I have nothing at all to do with the appointment of the prefects of Slade." He paused momentarily, and then queried: "Did your son ask you to see me?"

Mrs. Tomms shook her head.

"Good gracious, no. Lance would be annoyed with me if he knew. You know how boys are - especially at Lance's age. But he has talked about you quite a few times. He told us how you solved the problem when a boy here was kidnapped. He regards you as something of a Sexton Blake. He admires you."

"Boys exaggerate," said Mr. Buddle.

Mrs. Tomms sat silent for a few moments. A sound of a cheer was wafted on the summer air through the windows from the distant cricket ground, and Mr. Buddle turned his head and looked out.

When Mrs. Tomms spoke again, Mr. Buddle was startled beyond measure. He turned his head towards her again.

She said: "It is Joe, isn't it?"

Mr. Buddle almost jumped. His parents had given him the christian name of Joseph, and he had answered to the abbreviation of Joe in the days of his youth. But the days of his youth were long gone, and it was a very, very long time since anybody had called Mr. Buddle by his first name - to his face, at any rate. And the last person Mr. Buddle ever expected to hear use his first name was a Slade parent, particularly one of the gentler sex.

Mr. Buddle stammered out the only thing which anybody would have stammered out under such circumstances.

"I beg your pardon."

Mrs. Tomms was smiling faintly.

"When Lance first mentioned your name, years back, I just wondered.

Buddle is such an uncommon name. When he described you, I became quite intrigued. As soon as I saw you, I knew you. But you have clean forgotten me. Once upon a time you asked me to marry you. Have I changed so much?"

Mr. Buddle was staring hard at the smiling face of the woman beside him. Astonishment became incredulity in his expression. He drew a deep, deep breath.

He said, very slowly, at last:  
"Maggie Winter."

Mrs. Tomms gave a low, husky laugh.

"You were the only one who ever called me Maggie. To everyone else I was always Margaret. You asked me to marry you - and then you forgot me. Have I changed so much?"

Mr. Buddle responded gallantly.

"No, no. You haven't changed at all. It's just my memory at fault. It's a long time. It must be twenty - no, nearer twenty-five years. But you haven't changed. Why, I declare, you haven't a grey hair in your head."

"My hairdresser sees to that," said Mrs. Tomms.

Mr. Buddle leaned back against the window-seat cushions. There was a strange expression on his face now - part incredulity, part embarrassment, part pleasure.

"Wonders will never cease!" he muttered. He raised his voice a little: "It hardly seems possible - after all this length of time."

Mrs. Tomms said diffidently:  
"You never married, Joe?"

Mr. Buddle shook his head jerkily.

"I'm married to my work. I should have made a very bad husband."

"You would have made a very good husband, for the right woman," said Maggie Tomms sturdily. She added, whimsically: "You should have

been more insistent with me, Joe. More domineering. You shouldn't have taken no for an answer. Instead, you just gave up. You went away, and twenty-five years go by before I see you again."

Mr. Buddle sat in silence. The years rolled back. He had been desperately in love with Maggie Winter. How old had he been exactly? About twenty-five - not so very young. But Joseph Buddle, idealist and dreamer in those days, had been young for his years. He remembered asking Maggie to marry him. It had been a warm, sunny day - June, or, perhaps, July; shyly he had popped the question.

She had laughed merrily. Her merriment had destroyed his will-power for the time. "Joe, dear, don't be so silly," she had said. "Of course I won't marry you. You're too much like a character from my brother's comic paper - Waddles, the waiter, or Homeless Hector."

He had gone away then - right away. He had never even seen her again - till now. He had been too sensitive, of course. He had been stupid, perhaps.

He had never blamed Maggie in the months of self-pity which followed. He had been no great catch in those days - a young schoolmaster, inhibited, uncertain of himself, only just beginning to work out his destiny. No, he had never blamed Maggie, the daughter of a fairly wealthy family. And, with the passing of the years, he had never wavered from his resolution that there could never be another woman for him. Easier by far to invent rationalisations than to risk another rebuff.

A reminiscent look had crept into Mr. Buddle's face as, in the space of a few fleeting seconds, his thoughts had gone roving over the bitter-sweet

memories of his vanished years. He shook himself back into the matter-of-fact present.

He said, awkwardly: "It happened for the best, Mrs. Tomms --"

Mrs. Tomms spoke impatiently.

"For heaven's sake, Joe, don't call me Mrs. Tomms. I'm Maggie to you --"

"Yes, of course - always Maggie to me. I've thought about you often, Maggie. And you haven't changed --"

It wasn't true, naturally. Mrs. Tomms had changed a lot since the days when she had been Maggie Winter. As a girl she had been pretty and petite. Tomboyish, perhaps. As a middle-aged woman, she still had a faded prettiness, but her petite quality had become a fleshy dumpiness.

The young schoolmaster had been bowled over by the vivacity of the girl he had asked to marry him. Now, in middle life, he congratulated himself that Maggie Winter had turned him down twenty-five years ago. He congratulated himself that he had not had to pass that quarter of a century in the company of the dumpy little person who was regarding him with mild amusement.

It was unfair, of course. The changes in Maggie Winter, which were so obvious to the little man who had not seen her for twenty-five years, would have passed unnoticed by a man who was with her always. The idealistic infatuation would have become a deeper love and respect, and the passing years would have meant nothing.

Mr. Buddle said: "It does not seem possible, Maggie, that you can be the mother of a seventeen-year-old son."

"Dear Joe," murmured Maggie. "Lance is my youngest. He has a

sister two years his senior."

"No?" ejaculated Mr. Buddle, in wonder.

"Lance was only ten when his father died. I missed my husband very much. I have been a widow for seven years."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Buddle.

"I think I ought to marry again. One day I will - after Lance has started on his career. You, Joe - you should get married. Surely a wife can be a great help to a schoolmaster --"

"In some ways," replied Mr. Buddle cautiously. "Had I been a married man I might have been a house-master. It's too late now. I'm over fifty, Maggie."

"Never too late," said Maggie serenely. "You must think it over, Joe."

These two talked for some fifteen minutes, reliving the old days when they had been so much younger. Then Mr. Buddle asked, casually:

"Does your son know that you and I were once acquainted?"

Mrs. Tomms shook her head.

"It's better for him not to know, isn't it? I may tell him when he leaves Slade. I told him once that I thought I had met you when you were a young man, but that was all." She gave a little squeal. "Good heavens, I must get back to the cricket. Lance will wonder what has become of me. This prefectship, Joe - it was what I came to see you about."

"I can't do anything about that, Maggie," said Mr. Buddle, a little helplessly.

"You can try," urged Mrs. Tomms. "You will try, won't you, Joe? I want Lance to be a prefect. Last Christmas there was a vacancy for a prefect. Lance thought he would get it. He never said much, but I know

it was a stunning disappointment when a boy named Mell was appointed instead. I know Mell - he is a nice lad - but--"

Mr. Buddle looked thoughtful.

"I remember. Most of us thought that Tomms would be the new prefect, but Mr. Scarlet decided on Mell. It was always a toss-up between your son and Mell. Your son is good at sport - he ran for Slade in the Public Schools competition at Stamford, and did well. But prefects are not appointed for their prowess at sport alone."

"You think that the boy Mell has made a superior prefect to what Lance would have done?" queried Mrs. Tomms.

"It's hard to say," admitted Mr. Buddle. "I haven't given the matter any thought."

"Why was Mell made a prefect while Lance was passed by? Lance had been in the Sixth longer - Lance was a better sportsman, I believe --"

"There was only one vacancy," Mr. Buddle reminded her. "As I have pointed out, it is the Headmaster who makes the decisions."

Mrs. Tomms nodded.

"From what Lance tells me, there will be another vacancy for a new prefect next term - and that is because the boy Mell is himself leaving Slade."

"I believe so," assented Mr. Buddle. "Possibly the Headmaster may decide to appoint your son this time."

Mrs. Tomms leaned forward and grasped Mr. Buddle's hand. She smiled faintly into his eyes. Mr. Buddle stirred uneasily.

"Lance believes that the same thing will happen again," said Mrs. Tomms.

Mr. Buddle looked mildly surprised.

"Has he any reason to think so?"

"I don't know. Lance does not think that Mr. Scarlet will ever make him a prefect. He believes the Headmaster is prejudiced against him."

Mr. Buddle knitted his brows.

"That's absurd, Maggie. Mr. Scarlet could only be prejudiced if the boy himself had done something to make him so - and I have not heard of anything."

Mrs. Tomms said: "I want you to put in a word for Lance, Joe."

Mr. Buddle shook his head dubiously.

"I am sure I can do nothing, my dear old friend."

"Oh, yes, you can. I'm sure that Mr. Scarlet sets great store by your opinions. It stands to reason - after the things you have done for Slade. For my sake, Joe ---- Remember, you once thought enough of me to ask me to marry you ----"

Mr. Buddle smiled. He said: "Naturally you would like to see your son a prefect. Could not you yourself broach the matter to the Headmaster?"

Mrs. Tomms pouted in a way which Mr. Buddle would have found irresistible twenty-five years ago.

"I couldn't ask the Head. I couldn't play the fond parent asking favours for her young. I'm not built that way, Joe. Besides, Lance would never forgive me if he learned that I had done anything of the sort."

"You're asking me!" said Mr. Buddle, pointedly.

"That's different!" said Mrs. Tomms.

. . . . .

Mr. Buddle had said that he would think the matter over, and see whether there was anything he could do. It occurred to him to wonder whether the approach to him by his old flame might have been a planned job between Mrs.



Tomms and her son. After all, Mr. Buddle had a reputation at Slade as a solver of mysteries. He dismissed the thought as unworthy.

For the next two hours, after Mrs. Tomms had gone, Mr. Buddle gave no further thought to the matter. He was busy, with end-of-term examinations in progress, and he had plenty to occupy his mind. He dismissed the matter of Tomms, pro tem. The days when Mr. Buddle's romantic urges were stirred were long passed, and he was only too accustomed to the vagaries of fond parents.

But, later that evening, Mr. Buddle was able to relax with a volume of Gems which had been lent to him by Mr. Meredith, a Slade parent with whom he was friendly. Undignified though it was for a schoolmaster, Mr. Buddle found a great deal of enjoyment in that volume which was packed with school stories written in a less-hurried age.

It was purely by chance that he happened to turn to a story entitled "Trimble's Auction." After reading for a while, Mr. Buddle came on the following: -

"Sturgis of the Sixth was leaving St. Jim's.

Sturgis of the Sixth was nobody in particular. Perhaps, dear friends missed him when he went. On the other hand, perhaps his friends were pleased to see the last of him. They might say 'Old Sturgis is gone,' or they might say 'Thank goodness that ass Sturgis has cleared at last.' "

Mr. Buddle looked up from his volume, and stared ahead. He had dismissed from his mind the case of Maggie Tomms who wanted her son to be prefect. It was a coincidence that the small item in the Gem suddenly brought back to him the conversation he had had that afternoon with Maggie.

The long summer evening was drawing to its close, and twilight was falling. Mr. Buddle put down his Gem

volume, rose to his feet, and stood looking through his window.

Sturgis - whoever Sturgis was - was leaving St. Jim's, and Mell of the Sixth would be leaving Slade in a couple of weeks. It seemed that nobody mourned the passing from St. Jim's of Sturgis, and it occurred to Mr. Buddle that nobody at Slade would bother unduly that, very soon, the old school would know Mell no more. But Mell was a prefect, which meant that a new prefect would be appointed to replace him.

Casting his mind over the Sixth Form at Slade, Mr. Buddle thought it likely that the fellow selected to replace Mell as a prefect would be Tomms. He would certainly have been Mr. Buddle's choice. Mr. Buddle's lips twitched as he thought of Maggie Tomms and her concern for her son. Maggie would be delighted if she could be assured that her son would be a prefect next term. And Mr. Buddle, that sentimentalist, would like to be the one to convey the good news to her.

He glanced at his clock. It was after nine, a little late for disturbing the Headmaster. But Mr. Buddle made up his mind. He lifted his telephone, and rang through to the Headmaster's private quarters.

It was Mrs. Scarlet who answered the telephone.

"Buddle, here, Mrs. Scarlet," said the English master. "The Headmaster mentioned that he would like to discuss with me the supply of new English Lit. books we shall need for the next term. I have my list ready, and could talk it over with Mr. Scarlet now, if he happens to be free. It is getting late, I know --- If he would prefer to defer it till another time ---" Mr. Buddle paused.

"I will ask my husband," said Mrs. Scarlet. A few moments later her voice came over the telephone again.

"My husband will be pleased to see you, Mr. Buddle. Come along, and I will make some coffee."

Five minutes later Mr. Buddle was chatting with Mr. Scarlet in the Headmaster's lounge. Their discussion ranged from "Samson Agonistes" and "A Winter's Tale" for the Sixth, via "King Richard the Third" and Chaucer for the Fifth, to "Twelfth Night" and Q's collection of Tennyson for the Lower Fourth. Some twenty minutes passed, Mrs. Scarlet brought in coffee and biscuits, and the requisition chat was over.

"I hear that Mell is leaving us this term," observed Mr. Buddle, casually.

"The family is going to the States," explained Mr. Scarlet. "The father is a doctor. It seems he has had an offer from an institution in America. Money isn't everything. The man should have waited till his son's education here was completed."

Mr. Buddle sipped his coffee. He paused in his sipping to say: "Will you be appointing a new prefect to replace Mell on our prefect board, Headmaster?"

"Naturally," said Mr. Scarlet. "I shall probably select Haley, but keep it to yourself until the announcement is official. Haley is a sound fellow. I think he will prove reliable."

"Haley?" Mr. Buddle shifted uneasily on his chair. "Yes, Haley is sound enough, but I was thinking of Tomms. I would have thought Tomms had a prior claim to your consideration, Headmaster. He is a little older than Haley, and he has certainly been at Slade longer."

"Quite!" said Mr. Scarlet.

Mr. Buddle became a little bolder.

"Last December, Headmaster, you informed us that a new prefect would

be appointed in January, and you made it clear to us then that your choice would be between Mell and Tomms. Many, I know, felt that Tomms would have made a stronger prefect, but Mell was your choice. I do not question your judgment, Headmaster, but is it not a little hard on Tomms if he is to be passed over yet again?"

Mr. Buddle waited for a sharp retort from Mr. Scarlet. Though Mr. Buddle stated that he did not question the Headmaster's judgment, he was only too well aware that he was doing just that. But the expected reaction did not come.

Mr. Scarlet sat in silence, frowning. Mr. Buddle drained his coffee, and set his cup down in his saucer. He regarded the Headmaster enquiringly, amazed at his own temerity. Mr. Scarlet was not the man to allow his personal judgments to be questioned by a member of his staff.

At last Mr. Scarlet spoke. He said, very quietly:

"A term or two ago you strongly urged me to appoint my own son a Slade prefect. I was against it, at the time. I was not sure of Michael, but, even more, I did not want it to appear that I was favouring my son. However, I took your advice, and I have not regretted it. I admit that I was pleased to take your advice then. This time, however, I cannot allow you to guide my decision." He paused, and then added: "Tomms will never be made a prefect at Slade, Mr. Buddle."

"Oh?"

Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows. He went on, after his surprised ejaculation: "I know you must have a good reason for saying that, Headmaster."

Mr. Buddle drummed on his table with his fingers.

"I think I may tell you the reason, Mr. Buddle, though you will let

it go no further. At the end of last year much damage was done to school property, and many undisciplined and outrageous acts were performed by someone who cloaked his identity under an absurd anonymity by calling himself 'X'. You cannot have forgotten."

Mr. Buddle was more startled than he wished to show. With an effort, he managed to conceal exactly how startled he was.

"Of course I have not forgotten, sir."

"The school playing fields were damaged, my private garden was vandalised with vicious hostility, prefects and masters were subjected to mischievous attack in one way and another. You, yourself, were probably a victim."

"I was not attacked," murmured Mr. Buddle.

"Many of my staff were attacked, as you will recall. Worst of all, on Speech Day, near the end of term, when hundreds of parents and distinguished people and the representatives of local newspapers were present, the gathering was wrecked by this boy calling himself 'X'. The school was plunged into darkness for several hours. It was a disgraceful act on the part of an irresponsible and spiteful person. The evil boy was never exposed."

Mr. Buddle stared at the Head of Slade. For a moment or two the form-master was bereft of speech, but some sort of reply was obviously necessary and expected.

He said: "It is two terms since all that happened, Headmaster. A long while in the world of school. The offences committed then were appalling, but they have never been repeated."

Mr. Scarlet said: "I have reason to believe that Tomms was the guilty boy."

"Tomms!" ejaculated Mr. Buddle. "Tomms the mysterious 'X'! Oh, no!"

He was stunned. In his worst nightmares, he could never have foreseen anything like this.

Mr. Scarlet's face was grim.

"Like me, you would have regarded it as out of the question that a Slade senior could have acted so basely," said the Headmaster. "An irresponsible junior was indicated, naturally."

Utterly shaken, Mr. Buddle sat in silence. In that old affair of the Mysterious 'X', Mr. Buddle had not been like Mr. Scarlet in believing that a senior could not be the guilty man. Quite the reverse. Quite early on, Mr. Buddle had decided that a senior must be involved, and continuing that process of reasoning he had unmasked Vanderlyn of the Sixth as the culprit. Mr. Buddle had kept his knowledge to himself. It remained a secret between the English master and Vanderlyn.

And now Mr. Buddle learned to his horror that Tomms was suspected. Mr. Buddle suddenly felt a warm sympathy for Sir Walter Scott who once ruminated on the "tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive."

Mr. Scarlet was speaking.

"Being strongly suspicious of him, I can never consider making Tomms a Slade prefect."

Mr. Buddle breathed hard.

"It could not have been Tomms, Headmaster - it could not. I mean --" Mr. Buddle floundered on. "Surely Tomms was out for an early morning sprint with the School Captain on the occasion when the Mysterious 'X' started his activities --"

"He was," agreed Mr. Scarlet. "On the spot, in fact."

"Headmaster," said Mr. Buddle desperately, "it is unfair to suspect any boy without good reason. It becomes

clear to me that an unsolved case can become tragedy for the innocent. When the real culprit isn't found, suspicion becomes rife. Rumour may be widespread. The innocent may suffer undeservedly when the guilty go free."

Mr. Scarlet rose to his feet, crossed to a bureau, and, after a brief search, produced a small blue-covered book. He returned to his seat near Mr. Buddle.

"I am not suspecting Tomms without good reason, Mr. Buddle," he said. "On the day after school broke up last December, my gardener found this diary in my garden. It was near a wall, under one of my rose bushes. My gardener, Fleet, brought it to me at once, for it had clearly been dropped by someone who was trespassing in my garden, and who had crept along between the wall and the rose bushes."

Mr. Buddle took the diary with interest. It had probably been an expensive little book when new, but the cover was now crinkled and heavily soiled by damp. The words "My Diary", embossed on the cover in gold, were faded and almost illegible.

Mr. Scarlet clasped his hands over his broad waistcoat.

"I have no doubt," he said, "that that diary was dropped in my garden by 'X' when he trespassed there in order to spread weedkiller over my lawn and my plants. You will observe that the diary is the property of Tomms of the Sixth."

Mr. Buddle turned the top cover. On the fly-leaf the following words were printed: "A Year in the Life of ...". In the following space a name was written: Lance Tomms.

Mr. Buddle turned over the pages. The little book was ruled after the style of diaries, two facing pages being allowed for every week's entries. For

a while, every space was filled with crabbed writing which Mr. Buddle recognised as the distinctive hand of Tomms of the Sixth. As the master continued to turn the pages, the entries grew less, until, by the time he had reached the section for March they had ceased entirely. In fact, the book was typical of the average diarist, whose good intentions do not last long. There were no more entries. The interior pages were soiled on the edges, but nothing more.

Mr. Buddle transferred his gaze from the diary to the Headmaster.

Mr. Buddle said: "This book is obviously the property of Tomms of the Sixth, Headmaster. It looks as though that senior must have trespassed in your garden, and unwittingly dropped the book while he was there." There was an odd light in Mr. Buddle's green eyes now. "Do you conclude that the book was dropped by the Mysterious 'X' when your garden was damaged?"

"It does not take a Sherlock Holmes to arrive at that conclusion, does it?" murmured Mr. Scarlet, with irony.

Mr. Buddle closed and unclosed his hand over the diary.

He said: "We do not know exactly when weedkiller was poured over your lawn and plants. It would take a day or two for the effect to show in the garden. It was certainly several weeks before the end of term. If, as you assume, the book fell from the pocket of 'X' when he was spreading weedkiller, then the book must have lay where it fell for weeks. I would not have thought, from the appearance of this diary, that it lay exposed to damp and fog and rain all that time. The covers are affected by dirt and damp, but the damp does not seem to have penetrated much into the interior."

Mr. Buddle looked thoughtfully at the Headmaster. "Why, do you think, it was not found by Fleet earlier?"

Mr. Scarlet shrugged his shoulders.

He said impatiently: "It was near the wall and covered by a rose-bush which sheltered it to some extent from the elements. Bushes also hid it from the view of anyone walking on the lawn which is about eight yards from the wall. It is not strange that Fleet did not find it earlier. In November and December the gardener is not doing a great deal of work on the flower-beds. His work would be mainly in the greenhouses."

"He found the book the day after school broke up in mid-December," muttered Mr. Buddle, "and he brought it to you at once."

"He could see that some boy had been trespassing," said Mr. Scarlet.

"It would appear so," agreed Mr. Buddle. "The circumstances look suspicious about the trespass, but I do not see that this book is any definite link with the Mysterious 'X' and his doings."

Mr. Scarlet smiled sourly.

"Look at the book again, Mr. Buddle," he instructed. "Examine the pages in the diary for November and December."

Mr. Buddle did as he was told. He turned over the November and December sections of the diary. He said at last:

"Nothing has been written in this part of the book. I do not quite see ---" He was still turning the pages, and suddenly he rose to his feet and stood nearer the light. He turned the pages one by one. He saw now what Mr. Scarlet meant.

From early in November till mid-December a very small 'x' appeared in various spaces allotted to the individual days. Sometimes the pencilled 'x'

appeared on consecutive days. A few days would be missed, and then the 'x' would appear again, pencilled in the corner of the space. Quickly, Mr. Buddle flipped over the earlier months. No 'x' appeared in the diary before November.

"Significant, is it not?" asked Mr. Scarlet. "You will observe that the first 'x' appears on the day in early November that Mr. Fromo's door and also the School Captain's study were disfigured with paint. The final 'x' appears on the 12th December, which was Parents' Day - the last occasion when the wretched fellow practised his vandalism."

"It seems significant as you say," muttered Mr. Buddle reluctantly. He continued to turn over the pages for November and December.

Mr. Scarlet resumed: "This creature entered these 'x's in his diary as a record for his own private enjoyment. He must have entered an 'x' in the diary on each occasion that he committed an outrage and caused a sensation in the school. He was in no danger. Even if anybody but himself saw the diary, there would be nothing to link the crosses with the outrages, but he had a daily record for his personal satisfaction."

Mr. Buddle was still gazing at the stained little book. Now he looked at the Headmaster.

"These 'x's must obviously be a record of the activities of the Mysterious 'X'. It would be too great a coincidence for them to be anything else." He paused, and then added, slowly: "Headmaster, has it occurred to you that, if this book was dropped in your garden in November, as you assume, it is odd that it should contain 'x's which presumably refer to later events, up till and including the wrecking of Speech

Day on December 12th."

Mr. Scarlet rubbed his chin reflectively.

"You have a point there, Buddle, but it is a minor detail. The boy obviously planned his outrages in advance, and entered them in his diary."

"Possibly!" commented Mr. Buddle noncommittally. An idea occurred to him. "That Mysterious 'X' affair caused a great deal of sensation in the school, Headmaster. Is it not likely that Tomms may have taken a morbid interest in what was happening, and just dotted down these 'x's as the outrages occurred, without having any connection with those outrages himself?"

Mr. Scarlet replied heatedly.

"If such had been the case, Mr. Buddle, the boy could have said so and would have said so. He made no such claim."

Mr. Buddle threw his Chief an uneasy glance.

"You questioned Tomms, of course, Headmaster? I heard nothing about it --"

"I questioned Tomms on the evening of the first day of term last January. He admitted that the diary was his - he could scarcely do otherwise. He professed himself mystified as to how it got into my garden. He denied all knowledge of the 'x's pencilled in the diary. He denied strenuously that he was 'X'."

Mr. Buddle's brow was deeply troubled. He made no remark, and Mr. Scarlet continued:

"You will agree that the finding of the diary provided grounds for the gravest suspicion that Tomms was actually the wretched 'X', although he denied it. To prevent any renewal of the sensationalism - the scandal - which had marred the previous term, I did not institute a full-scale enquiry about the

diary. Further gossip about 'X' would have been intolerable. So I waited to see whether any further outrages would occur."

"And no further outrages occurred," said Mr. Buddle heavily. "The Mysterious 'X' disappeared into oblivion when the autumn term ended."

"That," exclaimed Mr. Scarlet, "is something like proof that Tomms was the guilty boy. He knew I had the diary, and that he was suspected, and his common sense told him that he must offend no further."

Mr. Buddle shook his head involuntarily. Mr. Scarlet rose to his feet. He said:

"We may never know for certain, but, for me, this circumstantial evidence weighs greatly. Strict Justice is one of my gods, as you know, but I can never trust Tomms again. I can never appoint him a Slade prefect, feeling about this matter as I do."

Mr. Buddle said:

"I would like to think things over. May I take this diary with me, Headmaster? I will return it to you to-morrow."

"Take it, by all means," said Mr. Scarlet.

. . . .

Late that night Mr. Buddle sat in his armchair in his study, the small diary in his hand. With his head back against a cushion, he stared at the ceiling which glowed pink in the light which filtered through the shade over his table lamp.

He found himself with a problem.

He knew, of course, that Tomms was not the notorious 'X' who had thrown Slade into disorder and caused such a sensation in the school in the second half of the autumn term

the previous year. Yet Mr. Buddle could not see how he could clear Tomms of unjust suspicion without exposing Vanderlyn, the guilty fellow. And to expose Vanderlyn was the last thing in the world Mr. Buddle wanted to do.

By a process of reasoning, Mr. Buddle had tracked down Vanderlyn as the miscreant. So far as Mr. Buddle knew, nobody else in the school had the slightest idea that 'X' had been detected and faced with his misdoings. Nobody else had reasoned as Mr. Buddle had reasoned, or had linked Vanderlyn with what had been going on.

The activities of 'X' had ceased suddenly, and only Mr. Buddle knew why. Had Vanderlyn been exposed to the Headmaster, the senior would have been expelled within the hour. Mr. Buddle had kept Vanderlyn's secret. The matter was closed, so long as Vanderlyn did not err in the same way again. Mr. Buddle had, in fact, made a decision which he had no right to make. The matter should have gone before the Headmaster of Slade - and Mr. Buddle knew it. There would have been no mercy for Vanderlyn. Yet Mr. Buddle had taken upon himself the right to show mercy, and he had left the whole of Slade with an unsolved problem.

Mr. Buddle did not regret it, but he saw only too well, after his chat with Mr. Scarlet that evening, that unsolved problems have their own complications. Totally innocent people may be suspected unless a crime is brought home to the guilty party. It was unthinkable that, after such a long lapse of time, Vanderlyn should be made to face his Headmaster and almost certain expulsion - so reasoned Mr. Buddle - and yet it was equally unthinkable that the unfortunate Tomms should be left alone as the object of his Headmaster's suspicion. The whole thing was a heavy burden on Mr.

Buddle's conscience.

There, in his armchair, Mr. Buddle wondered whether, possibly, Vanderlyn might have had an accomplice in that 'X' business. It had never occurred to Mr. Buddle that a second senior might have been involved, working hand in glove with Vanderlyn. Looking back on it now, Mr. Buddle did not believe that a second fellow had been involved. He had ample faith in his own powers, and he felt certain that had there been two seniors concerned in the Mysterious 'X' business, he, Mr. Buddle, would have detected what was happening.

He could, of course, ask Vanderlyn. Mr. Buddle did not want to do that, for two reasons. First, where it was a matter of betraying a friend, Vanderlyn might not speak the truth. The second reason was the stronger one. Mr. Buddle did not want to re-open the matter with Vanderlyn who had delighted Mr. Buddle with the way he had improved that summer. Besides, Mr. Buddle was an observant man. He had never seen any signs of friendliness between Vanderlyn and Tomms. Vanderlyn was a loner. He did not make friends.

When Mr. Buddle went to bed very late that night, he knew what he was going to do the next day. Things might be worrying, but he had one more shot left in his locker. He hoped it would not prove to be a dud.

. . . . .

After class, the following morning, Mr. Buddle sent Pilgrim, his head boy, to request the presence of Tomms in Mr. Buddle's study, if Tomms found it convenient to come.

Tomms found it convenient. He presented himself in Mr. Buddle's study within a few minutes.

Tomms was a wiry-haired youth,

slim and athletic, tall and broad-shouldered. A good runner and a fast bowler, he was generally popular at Slade.

He looked at Mr. Buddle in polite enquiry. Mr. Buddle produced the small blue diary from his pocket.

"Do you recognize this, Tomms?"

Tomms took it, glanced at it for a moment, and then handed it back.

"Oh, help! That old diary of mine again! How did you get hold of it, sir? The Head had it early last term. He didn't give it back to me, and I never bothered to ask him for it."

Mr. Buddle studied the senior thoughtfully.

"Didn't you want it, Tomms?"

"Not really, sir. You know how it is with diaries. My sister gave it to me, and I kept a diary for a time. Then I gave it up. You need patience to keep a diary regularly, and I'm not patient."

"You brought it back to school with you, evidently."

"Yes, ages ago. January of last year, I suppose. A diary is always handy, even if you don't keep it up."

"How did the Headmaster come to have it?" enquired Mr. Buddle.

Tomms grimaced.

"He said the gardener found it in his garden. Goodness knows how it got there."

"Didn't you drop it there?" murmured Mr. Buddle.

"No, sir." Tomms spoke indignantly. "I've never been in the Head's private garden. I couldn't have dropped it there. The Head seemed to connect it with that Mysterious 'X' business last winter. It was all a puzzle to me."

"The Headmaster's garden was damaged with weed-killer. He

believes that the boy who spread the weed-killer dropped the diary at the same time."

"Impossible, sir," said Tomms.

"Is it? You know that there are 'x's pencilled in on a number of days during those weeks when the Mysterious 'X' was active? It would be too great a coincidence if the 'x's in the diary had no connection with the Mysterious 'X', would it not?"

Tomms shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know about that, sir.

Mr. Scarlet questioned me about that. He wanted to know whether I was 'X'. Of course I wasn't 'X'!"

Mr. Buddle did not speak.

Tomms said:

"Besides, I know who the Mysterious 'X' was!"

Mr. Buddle started.

"Indeed, Tomms? And who was the Mysterious 'X'?"

"Well, it stands to reason, sir. It was Cawby of the Fifth."

Mr. Buddle raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Cawby? You mean the Fifth Form boy who left Slade last Christmas? Why do you think that Cawby was 'X'?"

"Mell and I always thought so. Some other fellows thought so, too," said Tomms. "It's obvious. He didn't get on well with Mr. Fromo. There was a bit of a feud between them. Cawby wasn't happy in his last term at Slade, and he was glad to leave. And, once Cawby had left, we had no more maraudings of the Mysterious 'X'."

Mr. Buddle frowned. He said cautiously:

"It is a mistake to lay the blame at anyone's door on such flimsy evidence, Tomms. Let us return to this diary. When did you last see it?"

"When the Head showed it to me at the start of last term," said



Tomms innocently.

"Yes, yes, I know that. I mean, when was it last in your own possession?"

Tomms wrinkled his brows.

"I don't really know, sir. It was kicking around in my study desk for most of last year. My desk always looks as though a cyclone has hit it. I never really used it, so I never really missed it. I never carried the diary about, so I can't have dropped it anywhere. As for the Head's garden, I was never in it, so I can't have dropped it there."

"And you know nothing of the little 'x's pencilled in during the months of November and December?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Buddle went off at a tangent.

"You were disappointed when you were not made a prefect last January?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose I was in a way." Tomms reddened a little. "We knew, of course, that the choice would be between Mell and me. I thought I might be picked, as I had been in the Sixth longer, and I put up a good show for the school in the Public Schools tournament. Still, I didn't mind a lot. I was glad, if I couldn't have the job, that Mell got it. He's my best friend at Slade. I'm sorry he's leaving. I shall feel a bit lost without him next term."

Mr. Buddle moved across to his window and gazed out for a moment or two. He turned round.

"With Mell going, there will be another vacancy for a school prefect, Tomms. Do you think the Headmaster will choose you this time?"

Tomms looked rueful.

"I don't know, sir - I'm a bit doubtful."

"Why?"

"It's simple, sir," said Tomms.

"I fancy that, at the back of his mind,

the Head may be wondering whether I was the Mysterious 'X'. He can't prove that I was, but I can't prove that I wasn't."

"It needs a Nelson Lee to take a hand, Tomms, doesn't it?" said Mr. Buddle genially.

That afternoon, after tea, Mr. Buddle saw Mr. Scarlet come through the baize door at the end of Masters' Corridor. Mr. Scarlet went into his study, and Mr. Buddle moved along the passage and tapped on the door of the study.

"Come in," called out Mr. Scarlet.

Mr. Buddle entered. Mr. Scarlet was now seated at his desk, and he looked up at Mr. Buddle enquiringly. Mr. Buddle closed the door. He turned, and displayed the little blue diary.

"I have brought back Tomms's diary, which you allowed me to take last evening, Headmaster."

"Oh, yes, the diary."

Mr. Buddle moved near to the desk.

He said diffidently: "I believe that you have confidence in me, Headmaster? You know that I would not take a step rashly?" It was really a question.

Mr. Scarlet accepted it as a question. He looked astonished.

"Certainly, Mr. Buddle. But why on earth do you ask that?"

Mr. Buddle cleared his throat. He picked his words carefully.

"I want you to oblige me, Headmaster, if you will. I want you to send for Mell of the Sixth. I would like your permission to ask him a few questions in your presence."

Mr. Scarlet's look of astonish-

ment became more acute.

"Really, Mr. Buddle!" he ejaculated. "This is quite extraordinary. If you wish to ask questions of one of my prefects, there is nothing to stop you doing so in your own study."

"It will be advantageous if I am allowed to question him in front of you, Headmaster. You know me well enough, I hope, to appreciate that I would not make such an unusual request without good reason."

Mr. Scarlet spoke a little coldly.

"Does this mean, Mr. Buddle, that you believe that one of my prefects has infringed the rules of Slade?"

Mr. Buddle answered with dignity.

"I ask you to trust me, Headmaster, but the decision is yours. If you will allow me to speak to Mell, in your presence, I hope that we may both learn something. If I am wrong, I will apologise to you and to Mell."

Mr. Scarlet compressed his lips grimly. He sat back ungracefully in his chair, and stared hard at the form-master.

He said, at last: "You wish me to send for Mell now?"

"Please, Headmaster!"

Mr. Scarlet made up his mind.

"I will send for Mell."

He pressed a bell-button on his desk, and in a minute or two a servant, who answered the summons, was sent to fetch Mell of the Sixth Form.

Mr. Scarlet eyed Mr. Buddle doubtfully.

"You do not wish to enlighten me concerning this extraordinary request of yours, Mr. Buddle?"

"Not yet, Headmaster, if you will allow me that concession."

Mr. Scarlet grunted.

Twelve minutes slipped by, during which time Mr. Buddle sat down

in the chair by the side of the desk, and the two masters talked on matters well away from the reason for Mr. Buddle's unconventional request.

There was a tap on the door at last, and Mell came in. He closed the door behind him. Mell was a handsome youth, wholesome and attractive in the white trousers and Slade blazer which he was wearing. He had apparently been on his way to the nets for cricket practice when the Headmaster's message reached him. With dark, curly hair, a generous mouth, and eyes set wide apart in a healthy face, Mell looked the type of senior of whom any school might be proud.

"Sit down, Mell," said Mr. Scarlet kindly. "We won't keep you long. Mr. Buddle wishes to have a few words with you."

Mell sat down on a leather-upholstered chair near the door. He crossed one elegantly-trousered leg over the other. Claspng his hands over his knee, he looked with patent enquiry, but not uneasily, at Mr. Buddle.

Mr. Buddle spoke from his seat beside the Headmaster's desk.

"You are leaving Slade this term, Mell. I shall be sorry to lose you from my advanced English class."

Mell answered pleasantly.

"Thank you, sir. I'm sorry not to be able to finish my education at Slade. My whole family is going abroad, sir, so I have no choice. It's a big disappointment to me."

"Quite so. You will be sorry to leave your friends. You have plenty of friends at Slade, I suppose, Mell? Who is your best friend?"

"My best friend?" The senior showed his surprise at the question. "I'm friendly with most of the Sixth, sir. I make friends easily. Why, sir?"

"With Tomms in particular, perhaps?"

"Why, yes, sir. I get on well with Tomms. He has visited my home in the vac, and I have been to his."

"That's very nice," observed Mr. Buddle. "So Tomms is a close friend of yours. You, of course, are very often in Tomms's study?"

Mr. Scarlet gave a slight cough and adjusted the blotting-pad on his desk. Possibly he was indicating his view that Mr. Buddle was wasting the Headmaster's time.

There was undisguised surprise in the senior's face now as he answered Mr. Buddle's question.

"Yes, sir. I'm in and out of his study, and he comes to mine in the same way."

"I thought so." Mr. Buddle had slipped the little diary into his pocket before the arrival of Mell, and he now extracted it and displayed it in his open palm.

He said: "You recognise this book, of course."

At the sight of the diary, Mell's expression changed, a change which did not escape the watchful eye of Mr. Buddle. For some reason, Mell looked shaken.

"I don't think so, sir. Should I recognise it?"

"I think you should recognise it. It was lying about in Tomms's desk in his study for a term or two. You were in and out of that study constantly, as you have agreed. You could even have taken away this book if you had felt so inclined, without Tomms being aware that you had abstracted it."

Severely disconcerted, the senior uncrossed his legs. He stammered a little.

"Oh - oh, I see. It's Tomms's old diary."

"You recognise it as Tomms's diary?"

"It's obviously a diary," retorted the senior.

Mr. Buddle rose and crossed the study. He held out the book to Mell, who took it.

"Was it like this when you saw it in Tomms's study?" demanded Mr. Buddle.

Mell gazed down at the stained and wrinkled cover. He turned it over. He said, his voice husky:

"It looks as though it has been lying about in the open for a long time, exposed to the weather. But I can't fathom --"

Mr. Buddle interrupted the senior. He said sharply:

"Unless somebody took the diary and wrapped it in a dirty, wet cloth for twenty-four hours, and smeared it with soil, to make it seem that it had been exposed to the weather over a period of time."

Mell was visibly shaken now.

"That's far-fetched, surely, sir."

Mr. Buddle said: "There are a number of 'x's' pencilled into that diary during the weeks of November and December last year." The senior started to turn over the pages, and Mr. Buddle went on, very softly: "You need not look for them, Mell. You know they are there. You put them there."

Mr. Scarlet, a little bored and irritated, had been sitting behind his desk, staring at the blotting-pad in front of him. Now, startled, he looked up sharply at Mr. Buddle. The Headmaster opened his lips to say something, but thought better of it. He transferred his gaze to Mell.

The senior sat rigid for a moment or two. Now, with a face which was blotchy-white under his sun-

tan, he rose to his feet.

Quite nonplussed and unable to reason, he demanded thickly:

"Are you suggesting that I was the Mysterious 'X', Mr. Buddle?"

"You! You, the Mysterious 'X'?" echoed Mr. Buddle in elaborate surprise.

"I mention a few 'x's pencilled in a diary. Why should you associate that with the Mysterious 'X' who outraged the school last autumn term?"

"I thought --"

"You were not the Mysterious 'X'," said Mr. Buddle, almost contemptuously. "The Mysterious 'X' was a lawless and irresponsible young rascal, but he was courageous even though it was mis-directed courage, and he was clever. He never left one clue behind him in all his vandalistic enterprises. He would never have gone out on his nefarious lawlessness with a diary in his pocket and then dropped that diary to show that he had been there. He was far too careful, and that was why he was not discovered and punished. You, Mell, would never have had the courage or the cleverness to have been 'X', even if you had been spiteful enough. And the same applies to Tomms."

The white-faced senior was breathing heavily. He turned towards Mr. Scarlet and seemed about to speak. Before he could utter a word, Mr. Buddle cut in again, though his tone was almost conversational:

"You knew, at the end of term in last December, that a new prefect would be appointed in January. It was common talk in the school that the choice would be between you and Tomms. You knew it was generally assumed that Tomms would be selected in preference to yourself. You prepared that diary which you had taken from Tomms's study. You pencilled the 'x's in it. You found the opportunity, early on the day that

school broke up last December, to slip into the Headmaster's garden and plant that diary in a spot where it would be found and handed over to the Headmaster. You knew that it might make Mr. Scarlet wonder whether the owner of that diary was the Mysterious 'X'. You wanted to make sure that you became a prefect, and that Tomms did not."

Suddenly Mell's white face was flooded with crimson.

"You're a liar!" he shouted.

Before Mr. Scarlet could say a word, Mr. Buddle cut in again - this time staccato and accusing:

"You did not know, did you, Mell, that Fleet, the Head's gardener, actually saw you deposit that diary in the garden, though he did not realise what you were doing at the time, and did not associate you with it when he found the diary as you intended him to do?"

Furiously, Mell turned on Mr. Buddle. Self-control and caution were completely abandoned as the senior said loudly, in a burst of temper: "Fleet's a liar if he says he saw me put the diary in the garden. Fleet couldn't have seen me. Fleet wasn't there. It was his day off. Fleet was in Plymouth --" He broke off, suddenly and starkly. He relaxed, and his hand flew to his mouth.

"Just so!" agreed Mr. Buddle, gazing imperturbably at Mell. "Fleet was away in Plymouth, visiting his relatives there, as it is well-known he always does on Thursdays, his day off. You chose that day - the day that Slade broke up for the Christmas holidays - a Thursday - to plant your little piece of false evidence. Fleet could not have seen you, as you so truly say."

There was the sound of something between a gasp and a grunt from the

Headmaster of Slade. Mr. Buddle turned with dignity, and seated himself on his own chair. There was a brief silence.

Mell stood there, a rather sorry-looking figure. He raised both hands to cover his face for a few seconds. Then he lowered them again.

He said, stumbling over the words:

"I'm sorry. It was only a joke - just a joke on Tomms. I wanted to be a prefect - I've tried to be a good prefect. I'm leaving anyway. What does it matter now?"

He stared straight at the Headmaster.

Mr. Scarlet said, in a low voice:

"You may leave my study, Mell. Go to your own room."

The senior turned and left the study. The door closed quietly behind him.

There was perspiration on Mr. Buddle's brow. He jerked a handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped his face. As Mr. Scarlet did not speak, Mr. Buddle said:

"I had to cheat that boy to cause him to betray himself. It was the only way."

Mr. Scarlet nodded, his face sombre. He was regarding Mr. Buddle thoughtfully.

"I allowed myself to be deceived, as a result of that boy's cunning. Yet you yourself seem to have tumbled to the truth at once. How do you account for that, Mr. Buddle?"

Mr. Buddle replaced his handkerchief in his pocket.

He said slowly: "I was certain that Tomms could not be the Mysterious 'X', Headmaster. The finding of the diary was, to me, an obviously false trail. 'X' was a clever scamp. He made no slip. He left no trail. He

would never have taken a diary, let alone dropped it, when he was about his deplorable activities. That diary could not possibly have lain in your garden, from the time that 'X' spread the weed-killer around in it. The 'x's in the diary continued until the last outrage when Speech Day was ruined. It was a safe bet that the diary was not placed in your garden until after the date of the last entry in the diary. Once one decided that Tomms was not the Mysterious 'X', the matter was simple. I asked myself who had a motive for placing Tomms's diary in your garden? The answer was obvious - Tomms's rival for the prefecture."

Mr. Scarlet nodded.

"It seems simple now.

Unfortunately, it was not simple to me last January," said Mr. Scarlet. "But who would have looked for such duplicity in one so young?"

"Does any schoolmaster believe in the innocence of youth?" asked Mr. Buddle cynically. He quoted, softly: "There is no Art to find the mind's construction in the face."

Mr. Scarlet rose to his feet, and Mr. Buddle followed suit.

Mr. Scarlet said: "I wonder exactly what Shakespeare meant by that." He thought over it for a moment or two; then he asked: "Do you think there is any possibility that Mell may have been the Mysterious 'X'?"

Mr. Buddle spoke confidently.

"Neither Mell nor Tomms was 'X', Headmaster. Both boys believed that Cawby, who left Slade last Christmas, was 'X'. They were wrong. Cawby was not 'X'. 'X' was a clever scamp. He made no slip. He left no trail. He never dropped a diary or left any other clue when he was about his deplorable activities." Mr. Buddle added, with a lack of modesty which, mercifully, was

hidden from his Chief: "I think that even Sherlock Holmes might have met his match in our Mysterious 'X'."

Mr. Scarlet gave Mr. Buddle a searching look.

He said: "Mr. Buddle, you were guided in this matter by the assumption that Tomms was definitely not 'X'. Under that premise, it was easier for you to light on Mell as the one who actually planted the diary. I suppose, Mr. Buddle, that you do not know the real identity of the Mysterious 'X'?"

Mr. Buddle adjusted his necktie a trifle self-consciously.

"I may have my suspicions, Headmaster, but it is so easy to suspect the wrong person, as we have seen in the past few days. You would be the last man in the world, Headmaster, to wish me, or, indeed, to allow me, to give voice to what can be merely a suspicion."

"Well ---" Mr. Scarlet shook his head with some uncertainty.

"It would be very wrong of me to disseminate conjecture," murmured Mr. Buddle piously.

It was after ten o'clock that night when the telephone rang in Mr. Buddle's study, and he answered the call. It was the Headmaster of Slade.

"Mell has left Slade, Mr. Buddle," said Mr. Scarlet.

"Ah!" ejaculated Mr. Buddle.

"It seems that, after the interview in my study, he packed a suitcase, and took himself off on his motor-cycle. He went to his home in Glastonbury, where he told his father

frankly what he did last December, and why he did it. Dr. Mell is distressed. He called me on the telephone a short while ago, and I agreed with him that it is better that his son should be withdrawn from Slade now, and that he should not be sent back here. I thought you should know, Mr. Buddle, though the facts of the case will not be made known in the school."

Mr. Buddle sighed.

"It is a sad end to Mell's school life at Slade, Headmaster," he said, "but it is probably all for the best. I may say that the news you give me does not surprise me."

The next morning an official notice appeared on the board in the School Hall:

"Mell of the Sixth Form has now left Slade, for family reasons. Tomms of the Sixth Form is appointed a prefect from this day forth.  
Signed: R. H. SCARLET (Headmaster)"

A few days later Mr. Buddle received a letter. He read it with some amusement.

"Dear Joe,

You marvellous man! Lance range me to let me know that he has been appointed as prefect. I know - I just know, dear Joe - that he owes it all to your influence. Probably he won't thank you himself, but you have the undying thanks of his proud mother.

We must meet again very soon, you can give me a nice meal in a posh restaurant, and treat me to a seat at a theatre. We must talk over old times, and of what might have been. Aren't I a sentimental old thing?

Affectionately yours (but don't tell Lance),

MAGGIE"

Mr. Buddle smiled as he read that quaint little letter. Several times during that day, unaccountably, he found himself humming the famous waltz tune from "The Merry Widow."

\* \* \* \* \*  
HADATH, GUNBY, all titles wanted, all editions, especially early. Also any Lewis Carroll, in fine condition.

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# Girl Spies in the Blake Saga

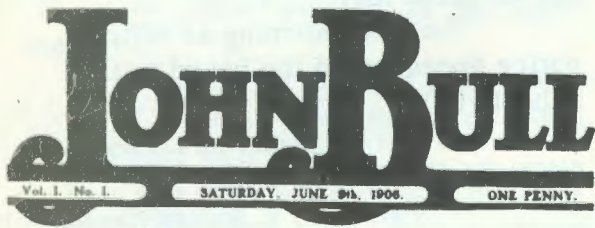
by S. Gordon Swan

Spies have been very prominent in fiction in the post-war era, particularly since James Bond entered the field. In fact, they have existed from time immemorial, and though the average person does not knowingly encounter any of the breed, it is possible that he may have brushed shoulders with a spy more than once in his lifetime. It is a chilling thought that even the ordinary man next door may be a spy.

Sexton Blake acted as a secret agent on many occasions. When his country called he was ready to abandon routine criminal investigation for the more dangerous occupation of spy. And in pursuance of his activities he met several girl agents. Sometimes he worked in co-operation with these ladies, sometimes they were opposed to him.

The female of the species was at her undercover work long before Mata Hari made her name synonymous with feminine espionage, and Fraulein Bertha Becker was certainly dealer than the male. Blake met her in the course of a mission that involved no less august a person than Kaiser Wilhelm.

The Kaiser's youngest son, Prince Gunther, was in love with the Princess Hilda of Saxenby, daughter of an English Royal Duke. His Imperial Majesty frowned upon this prospective alliance and banished his son to an island in the North Sea. While there, Prince Gunther captured two British spies who were photographing and taking notes of the fortifications. Subsequent to this, the prince surreptitiously sailed to England in a fishing-boat, where he had a secret meeting with his lady-love.



*The world is a bundle of hay;  
Mankind are the asses who pull;  
Each tugs it a different way,  
And the greatest of all is John Bull*

—BYRON.

Edited by  
**HORATIO BOTTOMLEY, M.P.**

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As he was departing from his rendezvous he was seen by Sexton Blake, who had been staying with a friend in the neighbourhood, but the detective did not immediately recognise him.

On his way to the fishing-smack in which he intended to return to Germany, the prince encountered an erstwhile schoolfellow and brother officer, who was in England as a spy. The Kaiser's son foolishly joined with him in his enterprise - which was to get details of nearby fortifications - and was himself captured, while his friend escaped. The prince gave a false name, so that the British did not know that their prisoner was the Kaiser's son.

Blake was commissioned by an attache of the German Embassy to find Prince Gunther, and at the same time the War Office summoned the detective to tell him of the capture of two British spies in Germany, and that a German spy had been seized in England, while his companion had eluded capture. It was then that Blake remembered the man he had seen in the district, and realised that it was Prince Gunther who was being held.

To offset the loss to Britain, Blake arranged to go to Germany and get the plans of the German fortifications. In brief, Blake and Tinker secured these plans and eventually found themselves in Berlin - in disguise, of course. Circumstances took them to a dinner with an Inspector Jager and his fiancée. When the latter turned up, Blake and Tinker recognised her, to their consternation, as an agent of the Prussian Secret Service. We were told that Fraulein Bertha Becker was the most daring, dangerous and cunning female spy that had ever practised that calling. Tinker had once been pitted against her alone, the result being to his disadvantage, and again and again she had matched craft with Sexton Blake, who had not always won.

From these remarks one is led to believe that Fraulein Becker had appeared in previous stories, and it would be interesting to trace such stories, if they exist.

The girl spy did not recognise her old adversaries at the dinner-table, but soon after she was able to unmask and capture them. This was due not so much to her own cleverness as to a mere chance happening, which was unlucky for Blake and Tinker. The two escaped, however, only to be trapped again by a clever ruse on the part of the girl, who was not slow to indulge in her feminine triumph over the male.

But the Baker Street pair got away again and Blake daringly approached the Kaiser and bargained with him. The detective's knowledge that Prince Gunther was being held as a spy in England under an assumed name was sufficient to enable the two to escape from Germany. In the end the Prince was released and betrothed to the Princess Hilda. We were not told what Fraulein Bertha Becker thought of it all.

This story was by W. Murray Graydon, as was the next with which this article deals. Once again we were taken to Berlin, but this time during the Great War. Here it is appropriate to comment on the authentic background. Murray Graydon showed a thorough knowledge of the German capital and its environments, as in different stories he did of other Continental cities. In this case we were introduced to a British agent named Glyn Chaytor, who had been living in Berlin for some years in three identities - as Adolf Conheim, Professor Joseph Mittelbach and



Rupert Dressler. When he was put out of action, a man who resembled him took his place - Sexton Blake.

Apart from his triple disguises, Blake acted as a double agent, as his predecessor had been doing. As Adolf Conheim, he worked for the German Secret Service, passing them innocuous information about the British and French. During this masquerade he encountered Roma Lorrain, a member of the French Secret Service, who had been living in Germany for some time under the alias of Countess von Saxe.

Roma was witty, daring and courageous and, as in the case of Bertha Becker, we were told that she and Sexton Blake had met before; but there was a big difference between the two girls, for Roma was on Sexton Blake's side. She was aware of Glyn Chaytor's masquerade and, finding that Blake had taken his place, she joined forces with the detective.

An English girl with whom Glyn Chaytor was in love had to be rescued; Tinker, who had been captured and imprisoned, had to be freed; German military plans had to be circumvented; and altogether Blake would have had his hands full had it not been for the French girl's assistance.

One by one Blake's disguises were pierced, until there was only Adolf Conheim left. Finally that deception was discovered, but not before Blake had contrived to free Tinker by forging his superior's signature to an order of release from prison. Blake's next move was to impersonate a certain Captain Armfeldt of the Secret Intelligence Bureau and accompany his old acquaintance, the Kaiser, on a train which was bearing him to the Western Front.

On the way Blake's impersonation was unmasked and he was compelled to jump the train and run for his life. Unfortunately he was captured, this time by an officer whom he had known as a headwaiter in a London restaurant.

Meanwhile, Roma Lorrain had arranged to take the English girl out of Germany by car, using her maid's passport to cover the girl's identity. Roma and Tinker were instrumental in freeing Blake from captivity, and the quartette in the car crashed the barrier at the frontier and found themselves in Holland.

This was one of Murray Graydon's best stories, and one would have liked to hear more of Roma Lorrain. The characters of Bertha Becker and Roma Lorrain contradict the general impression that this author's heroines were swooning maidens, for these two were both courageous and audacious, and if ever they fainted it would have been as a subterfuge to deceive their opponents.

Probably the best known and most popular girl spy in the Blake Saga was Mademoiselle Julie, sometimes known as Madame Coralie Standish. The stories about her are too numerous to quote: originally they were published in the nineteen-twenties and were reprinted in the thirties, when a few new ones were also written.

Julie was a fascinating character, with her house at 10 Rue de Ravenne, her Ethiopian servant, Pompom, and her yacht Bonadventure. She got on very well with Sexton Blake and "the Tinker", but her special affections were reserved for No. 55

of the British Secret Service, James Grant, better known as Granite Grant. One very excellent story dealt with the past life of her Ethiopian servant, and much of the action took place in Abyssinia.

Mademoiselle Julie's adventures were mostly in co-operation with Grant and Blake, but occasionally she was on the opposite side of the fence. Her exploits were recorded in fine style by Pierre Quiroule, but before the old ones were reprinted Warwick Jardine wrote two stories of Julie and Grant which were very acceptable. Remarkably, one of these two, The Man from Tokio, was reprinted in hard covers as Dene of the Secret Service, by Gerald Verner, an oddity I have commented on in another article.

When Mademoiselle Julie faded from the scene - regrettably - Anthony Parsons came to light with a similar character in Mademoiselle Yvonne de Braselieu. This was during World War 2, and her counterpart in the British Service was Beltom Brass. These two were obviously intended as substitutes for Julie and Granite Grant, but there were only a few stories about them before they disappeared into limbo. This was a pity, as the superior plotting power and excellent writing of Anthony Parsons could have provided us with a lot more adventures of his girl spy.

A lesser-known member of this dangerous calling was Suzette Fleurot, another French girl, who had an apartment in the Rue Hamelin, a stone's throw from the Arc de Triomphe in the Etoile. Suzette was described as being the envy of half the women of Paris. Her glorious, golden-haired beauty was the talk of half the clubs and most of the salons of that pleasure-loving city.

Suzette was involved in a complicated plot in which she doped a French courier - a friend of hers - took from his diplomatic bag, certain papers, and substituted other papers which had been given to her by a horrible old woman named Soulange. These other papers were of a steel formula which were being smuggled into England, as diplomatic bags were not searched by the Customs. Indirectly, Suzette was the cause of the courier's murder.

Blake met the girl only once and found her entrancingly lovely, but shrewd and unscrupulous. After he recovered the diplomatic papers from her she left and he never saw or heard of her again. Her creator, Maurice B. Dix, would have done well to re-introduce her in other stories, for she was an intriguing character.

These girl spies have added glamour to the pages of Sexton Blake's Case-Books, and it is to be hoped that further tales of their kind are yet to be told.

Bertha Becker in Sexton Blake - Spy

(B. F. L. First Series  
No. 199)

Roma Lorrain in In Triple Disguise

(S. B. L. First Series  
No. 20)

Mesdemoiselles Julie and Yvonne de  
Braselieu in various stories.

Mademoiselle Suzette Fleurot in  
Victim of the Girl Spy

(S. B. L. Second Series  
No. 519)

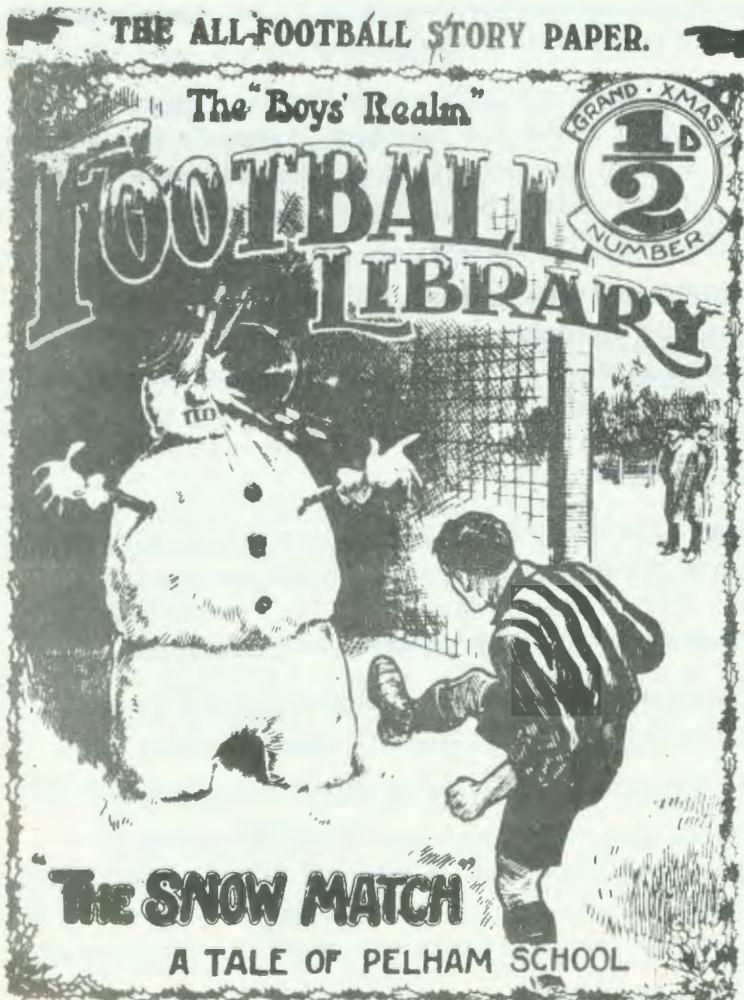
# A Letter from St. Frank's

by Jim Cook

Do you want to get away from it all? Do you wish to get away from a generation that has intruded into our twilight years with lies, hypocrisies and distortions of truth and reality? Then come with me to St. Frank's and enjoy the old way, the way we were taught to behave and to live. For like me, you must be tired of modern youth with its meaningless slogans. Non-conformity, peace, love, freedom - once these words meant something. You hear the same words at St. Frank's, but you know they really mean it.

You must be tired of being told what to do. You must be tired of being told of how the world should be. You must be tired of the empty-headed stream of sound that batters my ears from morning till night. Tired of being criticized, tired of being sneered at. Let us get away for a blessed few moments and go to the quiet village of Bellton, Sussex. To St. Frank's.

The St. Frank's juniors are still called schoolboys. Not students. I don't think at any time have they been referred to as students. Not that there's anything wrong with the word. But when we are in our own particular world the word student is synonymous with a generation that demands respect it doesn't deserve. Of a generation that goes around bashing and shooting; of a generation with paranoic fantasies.



How different we find youth at St. Frank's. Clean living and well mannered. True you will find the odd junior or senior who wants to be different out of sheer obstinacy, but put him among modern youth of today and even he wouldn't fit in.

Of the three hundred odd juniors and seniors in the four Houses at St. Frank's, the number of bad hats are a very small percentage.

But let us get among the decent chaps who made our days very happy ones when we were their ages. There's Nipper and Tregellis-West. Handforth with a heart of gold. Dear, lovable Archie Glenthorne. The untidy Duke of Somerton. Those very well dressed juniors, Cecil de Valerie and Douglas Singleton. Ralph Leslie Fullwood and his life-long friend Clive Russell. Then there's Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey. Solly Levi and Timothy Tucker. I doubt if the rebel-agitator T. T. would be accepted by modern youth today. Even Tucker has a code of conduct that stamps him as a gentleman.

Bob Christine & Co. over in the Modern House have faded slightly in the bright lights such as Buster Boots, Bray and Denny, but there is always someone behind you ready to take your place in the popularity poll. Then there's "Fatty" Little. He doesn't have any of the whims on diet and waist-line contours that are so worrying to modern youth in our world today.

When you visit St. Frank's you won't hear such silly expressions as love-ins, happenings, hippies. Of fashions in clothes slavishly followed, hair styles and all the arrogance that accompanies these things. Because they are not there. They never were and never will be.

I think it does us good to go to St. Frank's now and again. It reminds us of those good old days that modern youth has sneered at because those times do not fit in with their idea of living. It doesn't fit in with their idea of freedom of expression; of conforming to certain standards which have raised us higher than the animals in behaviour.

The pity of it all is that we have to live mostly with modern youth. They are forever in our midst. They enter our lives and demand communication and understanding and co-operation. But on their terms. And if we don't grant them those terms they moan and scream. Then after the moaning and screaming they band together and parade the streets with messages on boards written in their own peculiar style. The word Peace that adorns many of these boards is often shattered by the violence that erupts when they can't get all their own way.

I would be wrong if I were to say all is heavenly at St. Frank's. There is rebellion, violence and injustice at times, but always at the end when right triumphs over might there is the feeling that a good job has been done in the interests of happiness. And it was done by the boys themselves.

I mustn't forget the Moor View Schoolgirls. One cannot visit St. Frank's and not look in at the Moor View School for Young Ladies. I doubt whether Miss Bond would let you into the school unless you were accompanied by those particular St. Frank's juniors who are special friends of the girls.

But the same delightful atmosphere that is St. Franks's can be experienced

at the Moor View School. For the girls are really young ladies with all the grace and charm we have come to associate young ladies.

Then there's the masters of St. Frank's. The Old School has known bad men, evil men and strange men, but they have all overstayed their welcome and been shown the way out.

It is very pleasant to know such gentlemen as Mr. Nelson Lee and Dr. Malcolm Stafford. And Mr. Crowell, Mr. Stockdale and Barry Stokes. Not forgetting Mr. Wilkes, Mr. Pyecraft and Mr. Langton. Dear old Mrs. Poulter, the school matron, is ever ready to see to your comfort.

But let us look up some old records of the school's history. There are several events that happened to the St. Frank's juniors when overseas with Lord Dorrimore. And many strange happenings that took place right here at St. Frank's. Then there are the Christmas parties which were celebrated in many castles and homes of the boys' parents. But perhaps you would like to read about some of the famous St. Frank's Rebellions. Yet I fancy all these things are still fresh in your mind. After all, most of the whole world knows about St. Frank's - except modern youth who hasn't reached that degree of serenity to enjoy St. Frank's - and what happened there.

There is however, a commodity that isn't very easy to get at these days. It's around and very widespread, but not like it used to be. I speak of humour. The clean kind that gave you a hearty smile; not like the belly chuckle that sounds like water dropping down a drain with which we are becoming accustomed these days.

Humour is very well liked at St. Frank's and I don't think I could tell you of a better April the first joke than that was perpetrated when William Napoleon Browne first came to the school. Actually two major schemes for April Fool's Day were played out, first by Willy Handforth and then by Browne.

The ever resourceful Willy put all the school clocks on by one hour and fooled the whole school. At six o'clock on the morning of April the First, he first dealt with the servants' time pieces. But the school matron was a little more difficult. However, he jumped that hurdle by seeking her advice about an imaginary pain. During the brief time she went to get some liniment he had altered her clock to an hour later.

The big school clock was next on the list. He had paved the way for this operation by a visit to the winding room overnight. With his confederates all the other watches and clocks in the school were put forward an hour. It was a formidable task, but by seven-fifteen every watch belonging to juniors and seniors, masters and maids had been altered. The master stroke was the setting of the big school clock since everybody consulted the great dial when in doubt, and never questioned its veracity.

I leave you to imagine what followed.

Now at this same period a new arrival to St. Frank's was destined to make history. Browne makes his debut by posing as Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania and fools not only the Head, but also the masters and the school generally. But it was a

very good joke that made everybody happy.

Browne told me one day that if there were fifteen months in every year we wouldn't get old so quickly. Oh if only there were many more William Napoleon Browne's in this other world we live in.

I have just returned from a visit to many of the world's main cities and centres. But I was eager to get to Bellton and enjoy the Old World that still lingers there.

I remember dining in an expensive restaurant in America where candles and oil lamps had replaced the electric light. But one can see the villagers here sit down to their dinners in a similar atmosphere. For Bellton still uses oil lamps although Bannington went over to electricity a long time ago.

There are a few other schools not really far from St. Frank's who have refused to grow with the times. The River House in the vicinity is not so old as St. Frank's, but both are good neighbours. Then in the adjacent county are three more schools that still retain their individuality; and while they do not come within the orbit of the St. Frank's fellows, they have nothing in common with the sort of world that exists in their future.

It is Sunday today here and as I write these lines sitting in Study C in the Ancient House, I can hear the sacred music of a hymn coming from the Chapel. The St. Frank's choir - mainly composed of Third Form boys - are rendering in beautiful tones "O God, How Wonderful Thou Art."

Everything and everywhere is peaceful - as it should be on a Sabbath morning. I can see some of the chaps in their top hats and Sunday best. They are crossing the Triangle on their way to the Lane. Some are turning left now, probably paying a visit to the Moor View or a stroll across the Bannington Moor. Others have turned right to go down Bellton Lane where the villages of Bellton on one side and Edgemoor on the other side lie.

It is a beautiful morning. The sun is streaming through the window of the study; the chestnut trees and the elms in the Triangle have never looked so lovely.

So come down here for a short while. But I warn you, you won't be allowed in St. Frank's with long hair, jeans and general untidiness. We don't want your type down here at all. Your style of dress is getting out of date, like your thoughts.

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\* \* \* \* \*

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL C.D. FRIENDS, with special thanks to all my helpful correspondents, and our Editor, for a hard job, so well done.

H. VERNON

5 GILLMAN ST., CHELTENHAM, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

# COMIC LIFE

by Larry Morley

Like thousands of other boys of my generation, I cut my literary teeth on comics; the wonderful characters which lived (and I mean 'lived') within the pages of "Funny Wonder", "Chips", "Jester", "Joker", etc., were my friends - "Pitch and Toss", "Weary Willy and Tired Tim", "Basil and Bert", "Alfie the Air Tramp." The list is endless, and may I add immortal.

"There's a lad up Riddings" (the next village to ours) who's got a pile of American comics, great thick "uns, all coloured," said Frank Priest. Always the first with the news that lad; the eyes and ears of the world.

It was the summer of 1939, the last year of peace; a lovely summer, too, if I remember right. We were gathered round the lamp post, just outside my Mother's house. From someone's wireless we could hear Monte Rey singing "South of the Border."

Imported American comics were just starting to arrive in this country. It was said they were used as ballast on the ships; don't know how true it was. Anyway, we all trooped up to the lucky youth's home to see his collection of Transatlantic culture. I must admit we were very impressed by these



colourful, thick magazines; they had titles like "King Comics", "Famous Funnies", "Movie Comics", (a mixture of cartoon strips and movie stills), and "Don Winslow of the Navy." They put the lucky owner in a splendid bargaining position as far as exchanges were concerned. He demanded and got six penny English comics for one of his.

For a short time we gave up our old English papers and took to those American intruders. New expressions entered our conversation, in the mock battles with other boys. One could hear the cries of "Splat!", "Pow!", "Bam!" and "Zowie!"; - boys falling from three-foot high walls would scream "Aaieeee!", the number of E's denoting the length of fall.

Despite this, it was a gentle age. We managed fairly well without violence. Pop was something we bought for three pence a bottle. (There was a glass marble for a stopper those days.) And Pot was what I took to the shop to buy loose mixed pickles.

There was a boy named Mountford who was the only comic hoarder I had ever met up to that time, a silent surly youth. One day he said to me, "I've got more comics than anyone else in England, if you come to our house, I'll show you 'em." His bedroom looked like an explosion in a newsagents. Comics were piled everywhere, hundreds of them; some dating back to the 1920's. "Film Funs", "Kinema Comics", "Chuckles", "Butterfly", you name them, he had them. "I'm gonna sling all them damned things away, one of these days" shouted his Mother from down-stairs. I wonder what happened to them. The thing that puzzled me at the time was where he got them all from. He never seemed to buy or swop them with other boys.

Late confession of the soul department. There were two newsagents shops in the village - one was owned by two elderly sisters; the smaller one by an elderly man who weighed about eighteen stone, and had a wooden leg. As one entered his shop, a bell pinged above the door, and we could hear him leave his living room and make his way into the shop; thump! thump! thump! It took the old fellow about two minutes to reach the shop so this gave us ample time to pick up two or three comics, which were spread along the counter and push them up our jumpers, (if you will pardon the expression), for the price of one comic we would get three or four. Of course it was only a matter of time before we were caught out in our foul deeds, and this happened because of the mistake on the part of one of the boys. He picked up a copy of a new two-penny coloured comic, called "Happy Days", and slid it under his coat. Apparently the comic wasn't selling too well, and the old chap had only ordered about six copies; there were two left on the counter, and he noticed that one was missing. He called his son in and we were searched. It was no use stammering denials with the goods about our persons; anyway he took no action - but it made us feel ashamed. I made it up to the old fellow in later years by buying him pints of strong ale. It would have been cheaper to buy the comics in the first place.

I still get pleasure reading copies of those old comics. Recently browsing through a "Jolly Comic", I was reminded of when I first purchased a copy, it was in



the late 1930's, near Central Pier at Blackpool. A man would walk along the sands bearing a huge basket containing fruit, apples, oranges, pears, etc. He would yell "Come and get your fruit, eat, boil it, or stew it." He also sold comics and boys' papers. On the North Pier you could buy sixpenny copies of the latest song hits "Harbour Lights", and "September in the Rain."

The old movie on the TV is slowly grinding to a close; one more reel of boredom to go. Mediocrity in colour is only slightly more interesting than in monochrome; so I'm off to bed with a 1944 "Knockout Fun Book", anyone for our Ernie (Mrs. Entwistles little lad)?

Daft I calls it.

\* \* \* \* \*

S A L E: "Collectors' Items", bound, early Nelson Lee Stories, etc., by Maxwell Scott.

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO EDITOR, STAFF, FRIENDS, EVERYWHERE.

H. HOLMES, 13 ST. LUKE'S ST., BARROW-IN-FURNESS.

=====

Greetings to Hobby Friends everywhere, especially Bill Wright, Bill Lofts, Jim Swan, Eric Fayne, (our worthy Editor), Ern Darcy, and Geoff Harrison.

JACK PARKHOUSE, 74 THE OVAL, BATH, SOMERSET.

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AND FINALLY . . . . .

## "The Telephone Box was the Wrong Colour"

declare Jack Allison and Mollie Allison

At the meetings of the Northern Section of the Old Boys' Book Club a few years ago an item on the programme, for the entertainment of members, was occasionally an original tale written by one of the company.

This was a series devised by the Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, who drew up the following conditions for the writers. Firstly, the compositions had to be about hobby characters and places; secondly, they had to contain the words "icicle", "fez", "revision", "offside", "transcendental" and the phrase "a fourfoot square of hardboard", and, thirdly, the final words had to be "the telephone box was the wrong colour."

The Greyfriars Scene was chosen by both Jack Allison, in a Ballade, and Mollie Allison, in a Short Story. They are presented here for, they hope, the entertainment of a wider section of devotees to the old papers.

### THE BALLADE OF THE INCONGRUOUS TELEPHONE BOX

#### I

When autumn gales stripped branches clean  
 And tinted leaves blew everywhere,  
 With muttered oaths Joe Banks was seen  
 The "Fishers" fences to repair  
 With hardboard (say a four-foot square).  
 The tweedy shades of dyes by Pullar  
 Both he and Friardale Woods did wear  
 -- The telephone box was the wrong colour.

#### II

When winter winds and blizzards keen  
 With whirling snowflakes filled the air  
 The gargoyle spouts had altered mien  
 As each an icicle did bear;  
 Revision which made Bunter stare.  
 Their gullets gaunt seemed so much fuller  
 And white became them, he'd declare  
 -- The telephone box was the wrong colour.

#### III

When spring brought sunshine in between  
 The showers, while the days were fair  
 Old Mimble tended the Head's Green,  
 And fez-like flower-pots had his care.  
 Shrill cries of "Goal!" - Bob Cherry's flair -  
 And Smithy's "Offside!" somewhat duller  
 Oft reached his crocus-flowered lair  
 -- The telephone box was the wrong colour.

O prince, the summer's iridescent glare,  
 As Sark-wards strode some Sixth-Form sculler,  
 Was golden, transcendental, rare  
 -- The telephone box was the wrong colour.

### THE GREYFRIARS BEACHCOMBERS

"Hello! Hello! Hello! You fellows ready for the meeting?"

Bob Cherry, followed by Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh, tramped into Study No. 1 of the Greyfriars Remove. "Hello, Franky. All alone? Where's Wharton?"

Frank Nugent was packing up his prep books on the study table, and he looked up with a smile.

"He's taken the Form Oxfam collection down to Mr. Quelch. He'll be back in a minute or two. We've been trying to think of a Form stunt to help the funds as well. No ideas yet though. How about you chaps?"

"Um . . . . . no."

"Nunno . . . . . not yet."

"The ideafulness is not terrific."

There was a short silence as four brows were wrinkled in thought. A representative from the Local Oxfam Committee had been to speak to the School and had appealed for help in the District Effort. Each Form Captain had opened a subscription list and canvassed his form mates. The response from all had been good but, in addition, the boys wanted to do something more active than merely handing over their various contributions, and, for once, the Remove seemed to be lacking in enterprise. The Sixth Form were giving a display in the local Church Hall, part musical and part gymnastic. The Fifth were organising a White Elephant Sale. ("Going to auction Coker" Skinner had sneered.) The Shell and Upper Fourth had combined in a Sponsored Walk the previous Saturday.

But still the Remove had not decided on a plan and Wharton had called a meeting in the Rag after prep that evening to gather suggestions.

A patter of footsteps sounded along the passage and the Study door was flung open again. It was not, however, the Captain of the Remove, but the small figure of Dicky Nugent of the Second Form, who appeared.

"Franky, can you help . . ."

On seeing three of the Famous Five as well as his brother, young Dicky stopped short. In his hand was a sheet of foolscap with a sentence or two inscribed thereon.

"What's the matter, Dicky?" asked Frank. "Prep giving trouble?"

"Or the Muse dried up in the middle of a St. Sam's instalment?" said Bob.

"No . . . no." Dicky waved the sheet of paper. "Old Twigg is giving three ten shilling prizes for essays on history. The money has to be given to the Oxfam Fund - our sub list was pretty thin - we're all stoney."

"Sounds like bribery to me," growled Johnny Bull.

"Very cute of the Twigg Bird," grinned Bob. "Boosts the sub-list, and gets the microbes to work at one go."

He stretched out a long arm and twitched the paper neatly from Nugent Minor's fingers.

"This your entry? Let Uncle Robert take a look."

He proceeded to read from the paper. "The Life Story of Olive Cromwell. Who's she?"

"It's 'Oliver'," snarled Dicky.

"You'd better put an "R" on the end then, old son, or you'll be disqualified in the first round." He read on. "Oliver Cromwell waz a famus Roundhed. He cut hiz hair off and had a large wort on hiz fez."

"His whatter?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"That's what it sez - fez."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Johnny and Hurree Singh guffawed and even Frank Nugent's lips twitched a little.

"It's 'face'" howled the fag, and a black scowl adorned his brow. Ragging was something young Nugent often handed out, but he objected strongly to being on the receiving end!

Here Frank Nugent interposed. "Cheese it, Bob old chap. Give me the paper. You fellows go down to the meeting. I'll go over this with Dicky - it just needs a little revision I dare say!"

"Just a little," agreed Bob. "Oh! here's Wharton. All serene with Quelchy, old sport?"

Harry Wharton came into the Study and crossed to the table where he picked up a notebook and pencil. His face was a little clouded.

"Yes, oh, yes!" he said, "more or less. Quelch said we had given generously, but he sort of hinted he would like to know what else was on the programme. Well, come on, most of the chaps have gone down. I've just had a word with Smithy. He's gone to the gates to see if there's any sign of Redwing yet, but he'll be along shortly."

Tom Redwing had gone over to Hawkscliffe after school and had a late pass. His father's boat, overdue for many days in the icy February gales, had berthed at last, and Tom was anxious to see how his father had fared.

As the juniors left the study a crash and a howl higher up the passage made them turn. Alonzo Todd was

picking himself up outside Study No. 7.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," he gasped. "I really do not know what comes over Cousin Peter some times! Ah! Wharton, my dear fellow, you could be of assistance to me if you would."

"Later, Alonzo, later," said Harry. "We're going down to the Form Meeting."

"Ah! but I have a little scheme to swell the Fund, my dear Wharton."

"Eh? What?" The Captain of the Remove paused and looked doubtfully at the Duffer who was, he saw, clutching a small magazine and a pencil.

"Yes," beamed Alonzo, "here in the 'Potato Growers' Weekly' - my Uncle Benjamin kindly sent it to me ..."

"Never mind your Uncle Benjamin! What's the scheme?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes! It's a cross-word puzzle here. The first correct solution opened gets a guinea! I'm sending it in, but need one or two more words to complete it. This one here - T. something something something S. something, something, N.D. something, something, something, something, L. Can you tell me what it might be?"

"What's the clue, ass?"

Wharton's voice was weary, but he restrained his impatience.

"Oh! yes! It says "Vague, visionary, highly abstract." Look, I really cannot imagine what it can be."

Wharton took the magazine and studied it briefly. "It's 'transcendental'" he said, and thrust the paper back at the Duffer. "Come on, you chaps."

"Well," said Johnny Bull, waxing heavily sarcastic, "we're sure of another guinea, anyhow!"

"He's a silly duffer, I know" replied Harry, as they bounded down the staircase, "but, at least, he's doing something."

"In fact" grinned Bob, "you might say he's doing something, something, something, something, something!"

. . . .  
"Order! Order!"

For the umpteenth time Wharton's heavy ruler banged on the table. No one could pretend that the meeting had been a success. The slackers in the Form thought that enough had been done - Skinner suggested backing Bonnie Boy at Wapshott when the weather was fine enough for racing! At the moment Wibley had the floor.

"I suggest that we have a pageant of all nations. We've heaps of costumes in the property box. Morgan can sing - Oggy can do the sword dance."

"And Inky," interjected Skinner "can do the Indian rope trick!"

"Shut up, Skinner!" roared Wibley "just because you can't do anything yourself ..."

"Order - address remarks to the Chair." Wharton's ruler banged again. "Wibley, old man, I appreciate you're trying to help, but ..."

"No buts about it." Wibley ran on, "we can make some scenery. You can get a four foot square sheet of hard-board for 6d. at Lazarus shop. Bankrupt stock. A few of those ..."

"Hang on, Wib," Wharton ejaculated "we are trying to make some money - not spend it! And if we give a show in the School the other fellows won't want to pay to see it - they have done their whack."

"Oh! ... Um!" Wibley was suddenly deflated. "No. I suppose not."

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

The supper bell rang out and without waiting for Wharton to close the meeting, Skinner & Co., Bolsover, Fish,

Bunter and Hazeldene made a dash out of the Rag, almost colliding with a fellow just coming in. It was Tom Redwing, his cheeks ruddy and his eyes sparkling from his cold ride back to School.

"Hello, hello, hello!"

"Mr. Redwin all O.K.?"

"How was the trip?"

Several voices called out to Tom and he answered generally. "Dad's very tired but otherwise all serene. It was a tremendous trip - the seas were terrific!"

"All the cargo saved?" asked the Bounder.

"Yes, by a miracle!"

A pleased murmur ran round. All the fellows liked the open, good-hearted Tom. He now turned to the Captain of the Remove.

"I'm sorry, Wharton, I'm interrupting the meeting. Have you fixed a scheme?"

"No, Reddy, its been a washout. We shall have to close now. Supper bell has gone. I don't suppose you have thought of anything?"

Tom laughed. "As a matter of fact I think I have. No end of a wheeze if everyone helps."

"Well, here's luck," said Wharton. "Out with it!"

"My father really gave me the idea." Tom swung himself up to sit on the table. "When he left Pegg and sailed round The Shoulder he noticed the terrific seas had scoured out tons and tons of sand under the cliff where Sea View and all those holiday chalets are. There were boulders and ledges showing, and even the wooden beams of an old wreck, which have not been visible for years. The wreck's not been seen since Dad's grandfather's time."

"So what?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"This!" exclaimed Redwing. "Tomorrow afternoon at low tide we go

beachcombing. You know how busy it is there in the season - deserted now - but people drop heaps of things, and as the sand that buried them has been swept away there's more than an off side chance we might get quite a haul."

"Ah!" cried Wibley. "A Daniel come to judgment!"

"Rather." Wharton's face was bright and glowing. "Not a word you chaps to anyone else. We meet at the Bike Shed straight after lunch tomorrow for Operation Beach Combing."

"Wonder who lost his teeth?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thought I'd lost my fingers before we finished!"

"Me, too - but it was worth it!"

"Ra - ther! Make Quelchy open his eyes a bit!"

It was Saturday evening in the Rag and the beachcombers had returned, chilled, but triumphant. A select deputation had carried the spoils to Mr. Quelch, and whilst the rest of the form awaited their return the Rag was full of excited, cheerful noise as the day's adventure was discussed.

All the Form had gone, with the exception of the boys who had left the Meeting early the night before. Even little Wun Lung and the dreamy Alonzo, and also Lord Mauleverer dragging himself away from his comfortable sofa and cosy study for the bleak wind-swept beach. For it had been a bitterly cold day with a thin covering of snow, and the old School buildings festooned with many an icicle. The boys had cycled to the cliff top and left their machines there whilst scrambling down to the beach. Bob Cherry and Vernon-Smith had "borrowed" from Mr. Mible's garden shed two spades and two large

riddles.

The boys had taken turns to shovel, and two to shake each riddle, whilst the rest scattered and searched with the aid of sticks and fingers. And they were well rewarded. Actual coins dropped and lost in the shingle by holiday-makers amounted to £9.17.6d. and there were a number of other articles - false teeth, spectacles, rings and brooches, but the most exciting find of all had been made by Tom Redwing himself, clambering amongst the rotting timbers of the old wreck. A small lead box full of 17th and 18th century coins, the savings of some long-ago sailor.

The door of the Rag now swung open and the six boys of the deputation, Harry Wharton, Tom Redwing, Bob Cherry, Herbert Vernon-Smith, William Wibley and Peter Todd, marched in - all smiles. Behind them came the tall angular figure of the Remove Form Master, his austere face wearing a benign and pleased expression. The excited buzz in the Rag died away.

"Boys of the Remove," Mr. Quelch began, "I have come to congratulate all who took part this cold afternoon in this effort on the beach for the Oxfam Fund. The results are a very useful addition, and in particular, this box of antique coins, which I propose to send to London for auction. It was a most devoted and commendable action, and I am proud of you." And with a smile and a nod Mr. Quelch rustled out of the room.

Peter Todd rubbed his hands together. "We are in Quelchy's good books now. I wonder how long it will last?"

"Until Bunter starts to construe on Monday!"

"At any rate," Harry Wharton flung himself into a chair, "thanks to Reddy we've kept our end up with the

other Forms."

"Yes" came the mild tones of Alonzo Todd, "and if I can just elucidate one more clue we shall have another guinea I am sure. Look, Wharton, name of a writer I think - G. Something. Something F. F . . . ."

"Oh! for goodness' sake, give it up, Alonzo. There's no need. You've done your part."

"But, my dear Wharton, I want to do this little extra - the widow's mite, you know. Not, of course, that I am a widow."

"Ha, ha, ha."

"Well, try someone else."

Wharton waved Alonzo away. "Try Linley. Marky's a whale on writers."

"A good idea." Alonzo peered around. "Where is he? Ah! perhaps in his study."

And Alonzo wandered out of the Rag murmuring to himself, "G. Something, something, F. F. R. Something, Y. W. Something, L. D. E. 'A Northern broadcaster and writer. Coiner of the phrase, THE TELEPHONE BOX WAS THE WRONG COLOUR'."

\* \* \* \* \*

NOTE: The Kaiser and Hitler could not do it - so it took the Council to shift us out in the finish under their re-development scheme. "MERRY XMAS" to old and new friends everywhere! And a "HAPPY NEW YEAR!" from -

JIM SWAN

108 MARNE ST., PADDINGTON, LONDON, W10 4JG (new address)

=====

Compliments of the Season to: Josie Packman, Mary Cadogan, Eric Fayne, Cyril Rowe, Vic Colby, Herbert Vernon, Frank Lay, Les Rowley, Bob Blythe, Bill Lofts, Derek Adley, Norman Shaw, and others too numerous to mention, from -

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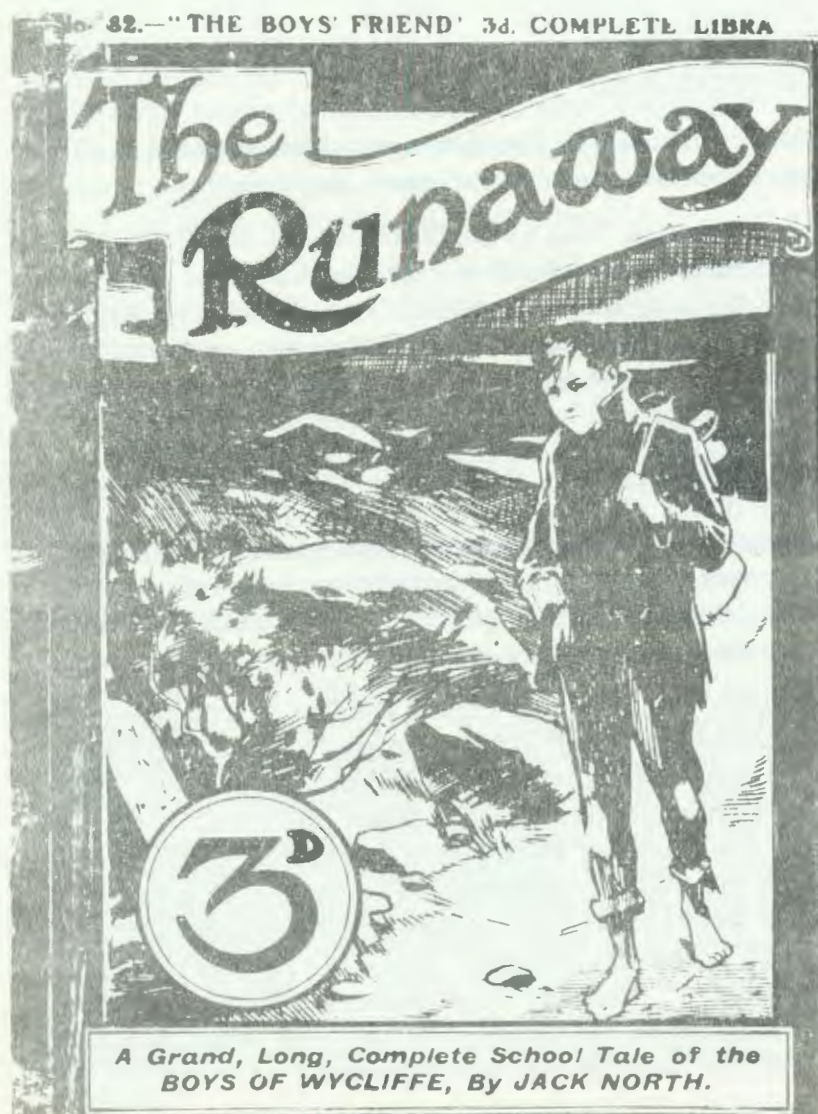
# George Alfred Henty

by W. T. Thurbon

All authorities agree that George Alfred Henty was born at Trumpington, near Cambridge, on 8 December, 1832. In spite of much research neither Jack, nor myself, have been able to trace his actual birthplace. The Vicar of Trumpington tells me that he has looked through his Baptism Registers from 1797 to 1890 and has found no trace of the Henty family. It may be therefore that his mother was merely staying in the village when he was born. Henty was educated at Westminster School, and in

1851 matriculated as a member of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, as a pensioner (that is, an ordinary fee-paying undergraduate - "Pension - payment).

From Venn's Alumni Cantabrigiensis the date of Henty's admission was 4 April, 1851; he began residence in the Michaelmas Term 1851. He is described as the elder son of James Henty, Gentleman, of Godmanchester, Hunts. (and Mary Bovill, daughter of Dr. Edwards of Wandsworth, Surrey). Caius Admission Books are at the moment in store because of work to their Muniment Room, and their Archivist was unable to consult them. She could not therefore give me any details of James Henty's address. A friend of mine has made an unsuccessful search at Godmanchester, but tells





me that Henty's father was a stockbroker. Henty did not complete the full Cambridge Course for a degree. He resided for only three terms and then left to take part in the Crimean War. He served in the Hospital Commissariat Department, and was invalided home. He was promoted to the rank of Purveyor and sent to organize the hospitals of the Italian Legion. At the end of the war he was in charge of first the Belfast and then the Portsmouth Districts. He resigned his commission and retired from the Department in 1858. He then for some time engaged in mining operations in Wales, where his father had mining interests, and where he later used his experiences of mining in his story "Facing Death", and in Italy.

In 1865 or 66, he became a special correspondent for the Standard Newspaper, acting as its War Correspondent, in the hey-day of the War Correspondents, in the Austro-Italian, Franco-Prussian and Turco-Servian Wars, with the Russians in their Khiva campaign in Asia, and with the Abyssinian and first Ashanti Expeditions. He was with Garibaldi in the Tyrol, where he is said narrowly to have escaped being shot as a spy. He travelled widely, India, Egypt, the United States, etc. He wrote accounts of the Abyssinian and Ashanti Expeditions: "March to Magdala" and "March to Coomassie." He then settled in London to use his experience of war and travel as background for his novels and boys' stories.

He married twice: in 1858 to Elizabeth Finucane, by whom he had a family, two sons and two daughters, and after her death to Elizabeth Keylock.

He wrote some ten adult novels and over seventy stories for boys. Roger Lancelyn Green credits him with some ninety works. He was Editor of the "Union Jack," 1880-1883. This was a B. O. P. type of paper and not the familiar later Harmsworth paper of that name. He wrote several serials for this, in one of which he introduced an anachronistic cannon in a story of the early crusades! He was later the mainstay of Beatons' "Boys Own Magazine", and collaborated with Archibald Forbes, the famous Victorian War Correspondent, in a short lived boys' annual "Camp and Quarters," and wrote for many other periodicals.

When he settled in London to commence his literary career he "crammed" carefully and conscientiously for each book, and then dictated some two or three volumes each year, ranging up to 150,000 words. Roger Lancelyn Green estimates his output as about 14 million words in thirty-three years.

His stories cover an extremely wide period from "The Cat of Bubastes (1889) set in ancient Egypt to "With the Allies to Peking" (published posthumously in 1904) dealing with the Boxer Rising of 1900. His first story published in 1858 was "Out on the Pampas", a typical Victorian adventure story, set in South America. I find this interesting, since it is one of the few stories I know which introduces Colt's revolving carbine. Colt made a carbine on the lines of his early six-shooter, but although this had some success in Texas, when used by Garibaldi's men it proved to leak fire at the breech and to have no future as a military weapon; unlike the revolver, which evolved into the famous "Peacemaker". The only other authors I know to use Colt's carbine in stories are Clarence Mulford in "Beckoning Trails", and John Edson, that master Corgi "Western" Gun-buff, in "Back to the Bloody Border."

Henty is, of course, famous for his historical stories - while he wrote a few

adventure stories the bulk of his output was historical tales. Roger Lancelyn Green in "Tellers of Tales" says of Henty that he never produced a masterpiece, but was an amazingly consistent writer at his own level. Green comments "He is an admirable author to read and to forget." Henty gives thrills without number, and leaves as often as not a real interest in history. This I can vouch from my own boyhood, for I owe my own interest in history to Henty and to the Aldine Robin Hoods. His weakness is that his plots became stylised and repetitive. Once you have read a few of his books you know the basic situation. The same young hero, dazzling his leaders with his brilliance and cleverness, gaining incredible promotion at a youthful age, captured, never by his own fault, and escaping, always ending honoured, successful, wealthy. The epitome of manliness and courage. Henty introduces chunks of history from the general historians of his day, and he writes often from his own experience of travel. But, too often, the history and the story do not marry. Henty was not a professional historian. He had a good knowledge of Victorian secondary works, but, unlike modern authors of historical fiction, he does not appear to have done research in original sources. His knowledge therefore, while wide-ranging, was shallow. He was solidly Victorian - he seems to have shunned the periods like Arthurian Britain or that of the early Robin Hood ballads where truth has to be sought behind myth and legend. Like so many writers of his day he lacked the real sense of history. Like Kingsley, his heroes, whether they be Young Carthaginians, sail Under Drake's Flag or fight with Lee in Virginia, are always the same English public schoolboys.

The range and number of his books is amazing - but he was too prolific to produce any great work. One has only to compare him with the best of the moderns to realise this. He lacked the time for the patient research and background knowledge that lies for instance behind Rosemary Sutcliffe's work.

But what a range he had; in *The Cat of Bubastes*, set in ancient Egypt, he can introduce Moses as an Egyptian Prince, and, remembering that Henty died in 1902, he was sufficiently up to date to write "With Buller in Natal" and "With Roberts to Pretoria", dealing with the South African War, and about the Boxer Rising of 1900. One of his heroes in "Through Russian Snows" can serve in the British Army while his brother finds himself serving in Napoleon's Moscow campaign. "The Young Carthaginian" fights with Hannibal and a young Jew fights "For the Temple against Titus" in A.D. 70. His heroes find adventures in "The Heart of the Rockies", with "Redskin and Cowboy" or go "Through the Fray of the Luddite Riots." They fight as Crusaders and as a "Knight of the White Cross" at the siege of Rhodes, "With Hotspur and Glendower" on "Both Sides of the Border." "Beric the Briton" fights the Romans. The hero of "The Dragon and the Raven" fights for Alfred and the "Cornet of Horse" with Marlborough; remains "True to the Old Flag" in the American War of Independence, fights for France as a "Young Franc Tireur" in the Franco-Prussian War, "With Kitchener in the Sudan", with "Clive in India", on the Irawaddy in Burma, "In Greek Waters", with the "Lion of the North", Gustaphus Adolphus, and involved in "St. Bartholomew's Eve" and "When London Burned." Their fortune is "Won by the Sword" under Turenne. And this is only a sample of his tales.

How does Henty compare with modern writers of historical fiction for

children? This is a field in which there has been great development in the last twenty-five years. We have writers of the stature of Geoffrey Trease, Ronald Welch and Rosemary Stuccliffe to mention only a few. Writers who concentrate on special periods or areas, and research their subject deeply as Rosemary Sutcliffe does so superbly with Roman and Post-Roman Britain.

It is particularly instructive to compare Henty with Ronald Welch. Henty was a Victorian Writer, and, whatever their setting, his heroes are Victorians and view matters from a Victorian standpoint and not with the contemporary attitude of their setting.

Ronald Welch, a better historian and a professional teacher of history, sets his characters firmly in their period. His characters are clearly of their contemporary day and age.

Henty's hero in "Under Drake's Flag", can be convinced that it is wrong to sack Catholic Churches on the Spanish Main - a late Victorian moral outlook that would have staggered a member of the crew of the Golden Hind. Welch's outlaws in Bowman of Crecy will cheerfully pin the Steward of a Manor who has offended them to his own door with a flight of arrows.

Even in his own period there were better writers of historical stories than Henty, e. g. Stevenson in "The Black Arrow." But Henty's great service was as a populariser of history. I first learned of the Thirty Years War through reading "The Lion of the North", and, sacrilege if any ex-Royal Navy man is present, still think Drake a greater seaman than Nelson through reading as a ten year old "Under Drake's Flag."

"Whatever his faults" says Geoffrey Trease, one of his modern successors, "his influence will survive as long as my generation and perhaps indirectly a good deal longer." This is proving true, as reprints and the price of first editions shows.

G. A. Henty died on board his yacht in Weymouth Harbour on 16 November, 1902. His London home was 33 Lavender Gardens, Clapham Common. He was a typical Victorian; traveller, writer, patriot, sportsman. In "Who's Who" his recreations are listed as rowing and yachting. Like so many Londoners of his day he was a keen Clubman, his clubs including the Savage, the Thames and the Royal Corinthian.

The amazing list of his works gives him a firm place among the Tellers of Tales, and the pleasure he gave, and the interest he aroused among generations of boys and girls in the history of both their own and other countries, shows how worthily he served his day and generation.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE BEST XMAS PRESENT ALL - ANOTHER YEAR OF C.D. - SEASONAL WISHES TO ALL READERS OF IT -

JOHN BURSLEM

# The 'ADVENTURE' - 1949

by J. R. Swan

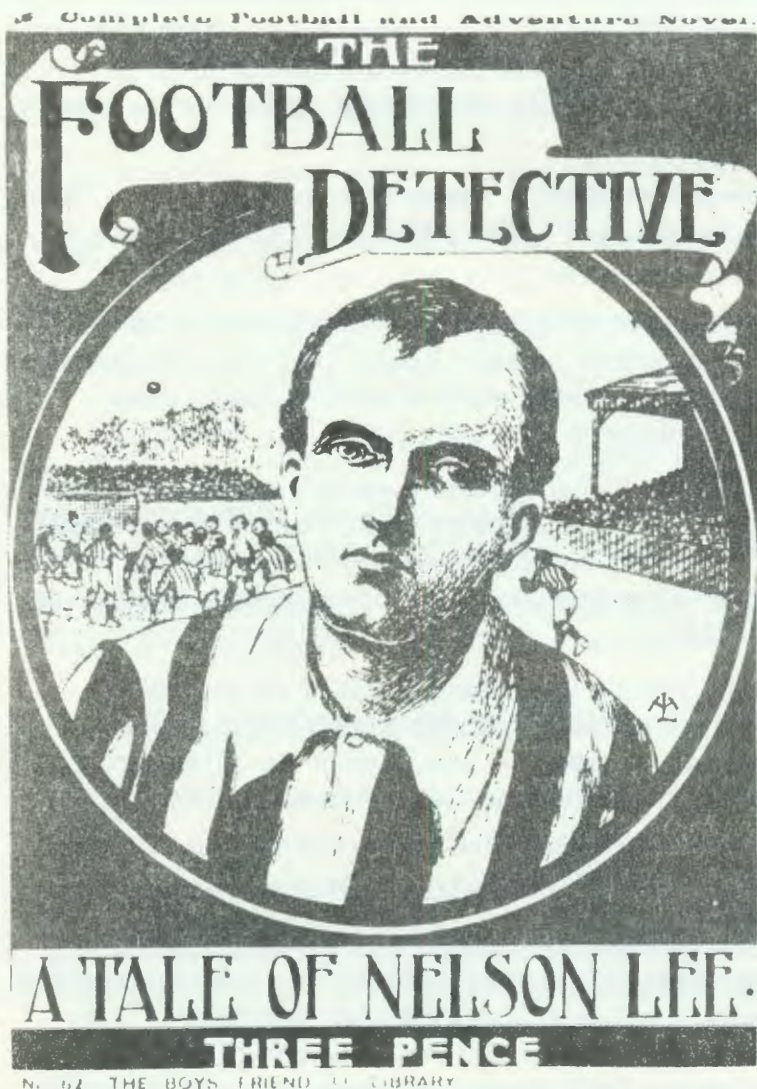
I was asked a few years back if I could put a word in about the Thomson Papers that had survived the 1939-45 war as this particular pen pal of mine used to read The "Adventure" around 1948-9 and he would like to refresh his memory of many happy hours of reading.

So having got a Volume for 1949, that starts from No. 1257, 5th February, and continues to September, let's see what stories were around at this time.

Well, for a start the front page was a picture story of The "Out-cast of the Incas" which went for about six weeks in this Volume - these copies were bound about halfway through the stories - so we miss what went before.

The stores were: -  
 "Wolves of the Mounties",  
 "The Menace of the Super-Men", "The Teams Gone Broke" - this is a "Baldy Hogan" story - the manager of Burhill United. The other story was "Professor Potter" - the sixty year old Dunce! I suppose this wasn't bad for only twelve pages at the time - the paper shortage was still on and only 2d. (the old fashioned money!).

In No. 1262 it saw the ending of three of the stories and the picture story - and in the next issue



(1263) was their celebration number - they were celebrating the fact that they now could come out once a week instead of once a fortnight!

In this issue was three new stories and two new picture stories. These stories were:- "Drums of War on the Tomahawk Trail", "Rusty Norton - The Red Rocketeer", and a boxing story - "I've Got To Lick 'Em Quick" as told by the boxer Pete Doble. Being at the age of thirty he finds he has to as the title suggests - "Lick 'em Quick" - particularly if his opponent is a lot younger.

The two new picture stories were:- "Lost Warriors of the Arctic" (the front page strip) and inside - "The Black Slink" ("The Shadow Spy"), "Baldy Hogan" was still on the ball - which made up this issue.

In No. 1266 a new story began, "Johnny Mischief" - thrills and excitement on a Mississippi showboat. This story took the place of "The Teams Gone Broke." The picture story "Black Slink", finished in No. 1266.

In No. 1271 there started a new sports feature called "Sports Review." These were Pictorial stories of Sporting Events. In this first one was the story of Freddie Mills and his fight with Bruce Woodcock and the events leading up to it. They both fought for the British Heavy-Weight Title on 2nd June, 1949, for the benefit of Boxing Fans!

In No. 1275 a new front page picture story - return of an old favourite - "Solo Soloman." And a new story taking the place of "Johnny Mischief" - "The March of the Lost Crusaders."

In No. 1278 a new story - "The Revenge of the Doomed 10,000." The Scientists have been at it again! They explode an atom bomb in the sea, wrecking one of the mermen's under-water cities! So the under-water warriors come on the vengeance trail! This story takes the place of "I've got to Lick 'Em Quick!"

In No. 1281 Baldy Hogan comes back again in a new story - "They've Kicked Out Baldy Hogan." This took the place of "Rusty Norton" that finished in No. 1280. Another new story began in 1282 - "The Red Fox Fights Alone." Trouble for the Redcoats when this lad starts trouble in the Highlands! This story took the place of "Slogger Dan" which began in No. 1274.

No. 1285 the last issue in this Volume was also the last of the old size "Adventure." The Editors "blurb" inside stated that next week's issue would be bigger with bigger stories printed in bigger type! A new picture story, featuring the famous detective 'Dixon Hawke' on the front page - and a brand new story of "Strang the Terrible."

The "Sports Review" article that I mentioned earlier also finished in this number with a review on Mountaineering!

There is an item of interest called "Collectors' Corner" that went through this Volume week by week. It was really in aid of "The Waste Paper Campaign", i. e. "Every scrap of paper helps to make extra copies of "The Adventure" - ran one slogan! But as I said the interest lay in a little snippet of information that went with it - as the following will show you:- "An English doctor spent over ten years

collecting 5,000 toy soldiers. Every unit in the British Army was included and the collection took six weeks to arrange in full review order." Then came the tag line: - "of all the collections you can make much the most important is, WASTE PAPER!"

So they had a different one each week - "Collecting Spiders Webs", "Police Truncheons", "Old Razor Blades", "Forged Cheques", "Pipes", "Dolls", "Matchbox Labels", "Cigarette Cards" and so it went on with tag lines such as - YOU can become a famous collector in your own neighbourhood - by gathering "WASTE PAPER."

You can say that for the "Thomsons" - they were a tidy lot!

\* \* \* \* \*

WANTED: Complete years of C.D. for 1962, 1963, 1964, 1967, 1968. Will pay £1 for each complete year. Also Tom Merry Hardback, Rallying Round Gussy, £1, and Billy Bunter Afloat, £1. The Bunter Book must be near mint with dust jacket.

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# MR. SOFTEE

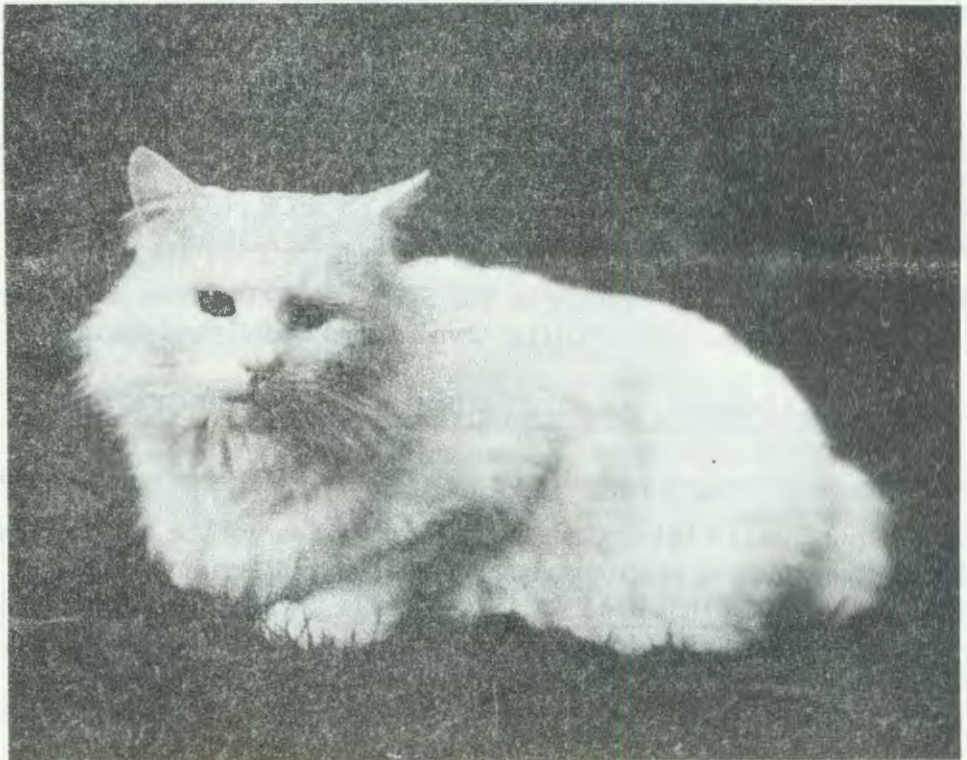
(Editorial Feature)

If you are not owned by a cat, then this item is not for you. For one thing you won't understand it. You will think it utter bilge. You will regard it as a waste of space. But if you are fond of cats, read on.

Mr. Softee is our editorial mascot at Excelsior House. Our office boy, if you like. Our Philpott Bottles, though he declines to write "Mi Kollum."

One question we have been asked dozens of times. "Is he deaf?" For Mr. Softee is all white, and white cats seem to have the reputation of being deaf. Not Mr. Softee, though. He's sharp as a needle - always on the "qui vive" at the slightest sound.

Mr. Softee came from the Animal Welfare Centre, several miles outside the



(Photograph by John Wearnham)

little town of Wokingham. It was quite a journey to get there, by bus and taxi and Shanks's pony.

We actually went to pick a tabby kitten. When we lost our dearly-loved Mr. Chips, we decided never to have another pet. The pinch is too great, when the time comes for them to go to the cats' heaven. Never again, we said resolutely. The resolution lasted a day or two. Then we decided that life wasn't worth living without a clever puss - even though our hearts still ached for Mr. Tail and Mr. Chips. Mr. Tail had been run over. Mr. Chips died of cancer. Chippy had been delicate for several years, and was well known to the local vet. We wanted a tabby like Mr. Chips, if we could find one.

At Wokingham, they had plenty of tabbies, but none much like Mr. Chips. While we were giving them the once over, the lady in charge mentioned casually: "We have a lovely white cat, just under a year old. His first owner has gone abroad."

"Oh, yes!" we said politely, and went on inspecting the tabbies.

The lady sighed.

She said sadly: "Nobody will have a cat which is fully grown. Everybody wants a kitten."

I picked up a little tabby and fondled it. And then another. And another.

The lady had left us. In a few minutes she came back, this time carrying a white cat. He eyed us balefully.

And you know what happened. For one thing, we were reminded of Diana Dors. No, not the actress.

At Surbiton, for a year or more, Mr. Chips's great pal had been a white cat, a sweet, nervous, and gentle creature, who adored him, and whom he treated with the utmost disdain. Mr. Chips would take his afternoon nap on my bed, while Diana would sit and watch him patiently until he woke up. In the garden they would play together, and the two of them looked really beautiful on the lawn. In all my life, I never knew a cat so deeply adoring of another as Diana was of Mr. Chips.

For a long time we did not know to whom Diana belonged, though it obviously came from a good home. We called the white cat "Diana Dors", assuming it was a lady because it was so gentle and devoted. It was not until Diana had long become a regular visitor that we found out to whom she belonged, and learned that Diana was, in fact, a gentleman. But that gentleman was always "Diana" to us.

Diana was run over. One morning a caller told us that a white cat was lying in the gutter, up the road. We dashed there. It was Diana, lying in a pool of blood. Dozens of people must have passed by, indifferent. Later, one of our own young fellows, who had set off to work two hours before we found Diana, said he had seen her hit by a vehicle and crawling into the gutter after it happened. He had passed on. If only he had come back to us and told us. We would have gone to "her" at once, and we might have saved her life, for Diana had bled to death. Sadly we picked her



up, and took the poor little body to her owner, who was heartbroken. And so were we, for we had grown to love our gentle, white visitor.

But I have wandered too far from Wokingham. Possibly with fond memories of "Diana Dors", possibly because we were sorry that "nobody wanted a fully grown cat", we said that we would have the white cat. We made a donation to the excellent Welfare Centre, signed a form to register the fact that he was now going to own us, and they promised to send our new acquisition over to us the next day.

And the next day, a Saturday I think, the new acquisition - he turned out to be the new boss - arrived at Excelsior House. He became "Mr. Softee".

"Mr. Softee" was suspicious and restless, not unnaturally. In his early days he swore like a trooper. His language was so bad at times, when he was crossed in any way, that I wondered whether he had been watching television plays. If annoyed, he would hit out. Clearly, like the Bounder of Greyfriars, he needed understanding. Of course, we made the mistake of thinking that he would have the same tastes and habits as Mr. Chips, forgetting that every cat is an individual, and runs the household in his own way.

For the first night he was all right, apart from being restless and knocking things over to wake the house and draw attention to himself. On the second night, in my innocence, I decided to take him to my own room. He had a meal and then went to sleep on my bed.

About three in the morning I was awakened by Mr. Softee patting me on the face. I said "Go to sleep, Softee." There was a crash as he knocked my clock flying. Then something else went down. As I switched on my bedside light, my spectacles went sailing. And Softee cried appealingly.

I thought that he probably wanted to answer a call of nature, so, clad in pyjamas, I trailed downstairs with him, and carried him through the back door into the garden. I put him down on the lawn. Suddenly, to my consternation, he was away like a streak, over the 6-foot fence, and out of sight. For ten minutes, I went all round the house outside, calling gently, and searching. The chill night air penetrated my pyjamas, and it occurred to me that if I carried on like that the editor of C. D. would end up with pneumonia. So I hoped for the best, and went to bed.

Next morning there was no sign of Softee. We searched all over the place. Even along the canal banks some distance away. No success. Houses aren't thick around, but we enquired at them all. Nobody had seen a white cat. We put a big notice on our front gate, and on a fence down the lane. "Lost - big white cat."

No good. It struck me as remarkable that nobody had seen him, for white cats are not all that common, and there is, in fact, no other within miles, so far as I know.

When we went to bed that night, we had seen nothing of Mr. Softee since he took his sudden departure from me in the middle of the previous night. We decided sorrowfully that Mr. Softee was lost, or, possibly, stolen. That he had gone for good. The next morning he was still missing.

We have, at the side of the house, a covered piece of the garden which we call, rather grandiloquently, "the patio". It looks rather pleasant in summer, with baskets of fuchsias and the like, hanging in it. Adjoining the "patio" is a small out-house-cum-cloakroom. In the middle of the morning his Mum came to me to say that she thought some cats were fighting in the patio toilet. We went together to investigate. The door wouldn't open. A ladder standing inside had fallen across the door, effectively barring it. Forcing and straining at it, I managed to open it a little way, and his Mum managed to push her head round the narrow opening.

"It is!" she said excitedly. "It's Softee!"

And it was. We got the door open, and he came out pretty quickly, though he was limping. He had fairly obviously gone in there some time during the second night - he had not been there all the time, of course, for we had searched everywhere in the garden more than once - and the ladder had then fallen across the doorway blocking his way out. More than likely he had thought it an entrance to the house.

What delighted us most, I think, was that, though he had been with us such a very short time, he knew where his new home was and where people loved him. Until then, I would not have thought it possible for an animal to have realised so quickly where he belonged.

He had an enormous meal, toddled off, selected an armchair, and fell asleep.

Within a day or so we had his cat door installed, and now he comes and goes just as he pleases.

Normally, he sleeps most of the day, sometimes indoors, sometimes in a chair in the garden in summer. In the evening, he sets off on his jaunts. We are not sorry that this is so. During the day there is a good deal of traffic roaring past in the lane in front of the house, but in the evening the traffic becomes a mere trickle and by ten o'clock there is none at all. So we are happy that Mr. Softee stays in his home all day and does not ramble till eventide. Even at night I don't think he goes very far, though at one time he would come in with a mouse from the fields, bringing it through his cat door and dumping it on the carpet in front of us, much to our consternation. Once or twice he has brought in a bird, though we tell him that nice cats don't go after birds. However, it is quite a long time now (touch wood) since he brought us an unwelcome visitor. Perhaps, like the Bounder, he has reformed.

Though he is probably the least amenable of all our "misters" he is a wonderful patient when he is ill. Yes, strong though he is, even he has at times cost us a packet for vets. On two or three occasions he has been bitten, though whether the bite came from another cat or from a squirrel or from a dog we have never known. But on each occasion the bite turned to an abscess, and then Softee is gentle as a lamb. The way he lets his Mum bathe and attend to the wound, which must be painful, has to be seen to be believed.

Mr. Softee, like almost all cats, is scrupulously and fastidiously clean. Once the vet told us to keep him in for 24 hours, so we provided a litter tray. A waste of time. Softee wouldn't make use of anything of the sort and made it clear

that he had no intention of doing so. We told the vet who said: "You'll have to let him out, and hope for the best." I daresay Softee knows what's good for him. He will come in grubby from rolling in the dirt somewhere outside, and then he'll wash and wash till his old pristine whiter than white is restored.

When he came to us his fur was straight and sleek. As months went by it thickened and fluffed out, and now he is a giant ball of white fluff.

He has his own dish of toys, kept on a small shelf under a little table near the TV set. He walks to the table, knocks down the dish of toys with one big sweep of his paw, and then selects the items he wants.

Mr. Softee is easier to feed than his predecessors were. Mr. Tail would touch nothing but English pigs' liver. It had to be English. It seems incredible that a cat should know the difference, but Mr. Tail did. Mr. Chips ate nothing but fresh fish. He wouldn't touch meat. Mr. Tail wouldn't touch fish. Neither would dream of even looking at any tinned foods. Both, however, loved the little yeast tablets known as "Kitzymes". In fact, when Chippy was hiding from us and we wanted him in for the night, we could usually lure him from his hiding place by rattling his Kitzyne tin.

Softee has three meals a day. (We have a friend who just gives her cat one meal a day. Goodness knows how she gets away with it.) Softee prefers fresh fish, which he has morning and evenings. But he has a meal of tinned meat (Whiskas) about lunch time, though he has made it clear that he doesn't expect meat more than once a day. He likes Purina cat biscuits, and we always have to spread a handful of these over his fish and meat before he will even start a meal. These Purina biscuits we have in two flavours - sea food and dairy. He has the sea food biscuits over his second and third meals of the day, and dairy biscuits over his first meal. I will explain why.

He likes his first meal at about 3 o'clock in the morning. This, as you will agree, is inconvenient. For a long time his Mum got accustomed to being roused about 3 a.m. by Softee wanting his "brekker". He taps you gently on the head and purrs loudly in your ear to wake you up. Nowadays his Mum places his breakfast in the bedroom doorway when she goes to bed. About 3 a.m. Softee eats it without rousing anyone. He has dairy Purina at this meal, scattered over his fish, because it is softer and he eats it quietly. The sea food Purina is crisp, and he crunches it loudly. Hence the dairy in the night, and the sea food crunchiness in the day time. In passing, Softee won't even look at the Kitzymes which both Mr. Tail and Mr. Chips loved so much.

Today, 2½ years after Mr. Softee came to Excelsior House, he is gentle and affectionate and lovable. He seldom swears now, though he still likes his own way. He doesn't like visitors, and when they arrive he takes himself off upstairs to show his disapproval. Gentle though he has become, he is a sound disciplinarian, and runs the house with a paw of iron.

We asked him what he thought of Mr. Wernham's picture of him. "Purr, purr," said Mr. Softee. "He's made me look like a Manx cat. What's he done with

my lovely tail? Purr-purr!"

We explained to him that cats are very, very difficult to photograph, and we thought the picture was lovely. He washed himself all over, said "purr-purr" again, covered his face with his paws, rolled over on his back, and went to sleep. Lying on his back with his paws over his face is a favourite position of his. We call it "Softee posing for September Morn."

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# The Guns of Gangland

FACT AND FICTION

by Geoffrey Wilde

By the end of the 1920's the gangs had unmistakably come to London. Calm, unwinking men in slouch hats committed methodical murder in full gaze of a horrified public; the hideous chatter of the sub-machine-gun was heard in Piccadilly; long, sinister saloon-cars prowled the West End, dumping corpses on the pavement or raking selected premises with gunfire: policemen were shot down in broad daylight.

In fiction,  
at any rate.

It was a great blessing, to be sure, that these outrages were confined to the printed page, but even there in far too many cases the perpetrators ought to have been prosecuted. It is my opinion that the gangster craze produced some of the most tedious, sloppily-written and thoroughly unconvincing stories ever to disfigure the old boys' papers - and, for that matter, popular adult novels. Craves, of course, leave neither editors nor authors much time to fuss about literary standards. At the time we are speaking of, the Chicago gang-wars

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were exposed to such sensational publicity, especially with the advent of the 'talkies', that the fiction-industry couldn't afford to be critical: the essential thing was to ensure itself what the mobsters might have called a piece of the action. Even so, there were special reasons, I think, why this particular craze found most writers so miserably wanting.

It was at the 'pictures' that I first encountered the gangsters. I can vividly remember crowding with my friends into the Saturday matinees, where we could watch enthralled as gangsters and G-men assailed each other with sub-machine-gun fire and a spectacular shoot-out invariably crowned the final reel. Those Saturdays, I am sure, shaped certain youthful convictions for us. America, though in some ways odd, was clearly a very go-ahead place to live. There was an air of unorthodox but irresistible progressiveness about the place which produced the world's most daring criminals in exactly the way it produced heavyweight boxing champions. Crime was a serious matter, true, but you had to admire the toughness, the bravado, the staggering ambition required to take on the police-force in pitched battle. I think we honestly saw the whole thing as a simple question of enterprise. But for all that, I had my doubts. If it was simply a matter of acquiring some guns, were British crooks really so backward that they just hadn't thought of it? Anyway, hadn't they been to the pictures? And how was it that our own police, without a machine-gun to their name, were troubled by little more than the occasional Trunk Murder? Facile patriotism was ready with an answer, but it all seemed too easy, somehow. I remained puzzled.

Well, at least I was asking the right questions. It is of the greatest importance to recognise that gangsterism can flourish only in a certain kind of social climate. The complex socio-political factors which make America so fertile a breeding-ground for the rule of criminal violence constitute a study in themselves, but we can pick out of few that are crucial: corruption in public office, deep ethnic or cultural divisions within the community, and a generally scant regard for the due process of law. All were endemic in the big cities of the U.S. before the 20th century. For most Americans the law gave rights rather than conferring responsibilities - an attitude inherited from the thrusting frontier days; the use of public office for private gain was another established custom in the Land of the Free. The large immigrant communities posed a special problem. They almost inevitably withdrew into tribal enclaves whose traditions were the only law they instinctively respected. Upon the children of these immigrants the real stresses of assimilation fell: and they found a sense of identity in a way which combined the worst of both worlds, the aggressive self-assertion of the new and the racial exclusiveness of the old. They joined a delinquent gang. Nearly every gangster of the '20's was a first-generation American of European parentage.

These disruptive forces, and the emotions of greed, fear, racial hostility and superstition which fuelled them, were already active in American urban society at the turn of the century, and nowhere more than in the city of Chicago, whose history can stand as the history of American gangsterism. The push towards total breakdown came, ironically enough, from the most high-minded sectors of the nation. Borne on the tide of idealism generated by the First World War, the other America,

old-world rural Puritan America, urged upon the nation one of the most astonishing measures enacted in democratic history: the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, otherwise known after its chief author as the Volstead Act, totally prohibiting the use or manufacture of alcoholic liquors.

The National Prohibition Act came into effect at midnight on 16 January, 1920, but no free, thirsty American citizen had any intention of submitting to the edict of agrarian temperance freaks. "Alky-cooking" instantly became the national pastime; for anyone who could meet the demand on a commercial scale there were millions to be made. And since it was all illegal anyway, business ethics just didn't apply. The result was a revealing study in Free Enterprise Capitalism carried to a logical extreme, with no constitutional or moral controls whatsoever. The reformers, alas, had ushered in the biggest, bloodiest binge in history. They would witness the nation's decline into almost complete moral bankruptcy, with consequences so bizarre that the sober record of the social historian reads like a penny novelist's nightmare; a time when brutal slayers from the slums waxed so unimaginably rich that they could literally buy out the administrative and judicial machinery of a great city; when criminal combines could order a police escort to safeguard contraband cargo against theft by brigand rivals.

Let us then, with this appreciation of the conditions which helped to bring them into being, look at some of the real-life gangsters.

The first of Chicago's gang overlords, Big Jim Colosimo, was in many ways typical of an earlier period - a colourful scamp of the river-boat gambler type. Big Jim ran bordellos and gambling-joints. As his control of Chicago vice began to earn him real wealth, he received the unwelcome attention of extortionists. He decided it was cheaper to bump them off than pay them off, and in 1909 he employed his nephew Johnny Torrio to organise his business 'insurance'. Photographs of Torrio reveal a small, dapper, benign-looking gentleman. Personally abstemious, he was kind to his wife, loved opera, and - like all the other gangland barons we shall meet - he adored his mother. He shrank from violence and claimed never to have fired a gun; but in the interests of sound business he would order the execution of a dozen adversaries without the least compunction. Torrio was that rare creature, a genuine criminal master-mind, far-sighted, original, and a formidable organiser. In ten years he became the real administrative brain behind Colosimo's vice empire and, already alert to the opulent prospects created by Prohibition, his head was buzzing with momentous schemes for re-organisation and expansion.

But Big Jim had grown torpid; his ambition was sagging; he wanted none of these new ways. On 11 May, 1920, he was conveniently shot dead in the vestibule of Colosimo's Cafe and ceased to be an impediment to Torrio's career. And Torrio now had working for him a young lieutenant, originally employed as a chucker-out, but obviously destined for greater things. His name was Alphonse Capone. Both were piously present at the Colosimo funeral, whose 5,000 mourners also included judges, Congressmen, civic dignitaries and members of the Chicago Opera Company - a remarkable manifestation of the intimate co-existence between crime and politics in America's second city.

The measure of Torrio's ability now became plain. In those young days of

Prohibition, Chicago comprised more than a dozen hostile criminal duchies competing for the illicit liquor trade; within these, lesser signories disputed the possession of single streets. By an admixture of diplomacy and despotism Torrio secured broad agreement on territorial rights, spheres of influence and profit-sharing. And for over three years it worked. Hostile incursions, hijacking and shooting-forays were common, but they only strengthened the dominion of the overlords: it was the little fish who were killing each other off.

The one fish in the pond big enough to rival Torrio was Dion O'Banion. A psychopath credited with twenty-five murders and a deadly shot with either hand, he was at best a difficult and unpredictable partner. By race and temperament he was out of tune with the Italians and resentful of their power. His vicious impetuosity was a constant threat to the general welfare, and at length his childish vanity urged him into arrogant infringements of the treaty and defiant affronts to his Italian confreres. As Capone laconically remarked, "His head got away from his hat." Torrio's patience was worn thin; the real war was about to erupt.

The battle-array of 1924, was in essence Torrio and Capone's Italo-Sicilian confederacy versus the Irish-Jewish North-Side mob led by O'Banion and Hymie Weiss; the spoil awaiting the victors, the complete control of bootlegging and allied vice in Chicago. The affairs of the former camp were complicated, however, by the internal struggle for control of the Unione' Siciliana, in effect the local Mafia. In 1924 the presidency of the Unione was held by one Mike Merlo, who on 4 November, showed great originality by dying in his bed of natural causes - a feat which eluded his five immediate successors - and who, so doing, put O'Banion on the spot.

For O'Banion's 'front' was a florist's shop, wherein he ran a thriving legitimate trade, since he got the orders accruing from all gangland's better burials. On 10 November, three men came in, ostensibly to collect wreaths for the Merlo funeral. The man in the middle took the smiling O'Banion's outstretched hand and held firmly on to it, allowing those to left and right to pump bullets into their unsuspecting victim. Appropriately, twenty-six wagon-loads of flowers (prominent among them the touching tributes from his assassins) followed O'Banion to the grave in gangland's plushest display of funeral pomp.

These flamboyant obsequies outraged such decent opinion as was left in Chicago, but Weiss lost no time in attending to the more practical business of revenge. Cold and implacable, unlike his volatile late associate, Weiss was the one man Capone really feared. He was also the inventor of those now familiar Chicago techniques, the one-way ride and the motorised ambush. It was just such an ambush that nearly accounted for Capone on 12 January, 1925; his car was shot to pieces and he himself escaped death by seconds. Big Al immediately ordered himself an armour-plated limousine. On the 24th, Torrio was similarly surprised, and shot down on his own doorstep. He was lucky indeed to survive, but the feel of lead and the prospect of indefinite warfare were too much for him: he retired to Italy and in March 1925, formally assigned all his interests to Capone. It was no easy legacy, for recent events had inevitably led to some re-alignment of forces and to internecine bloodshed; and meanwhile Weiss continued to strike.

His next moves, however, were not entirely displeasing to Capone. Control



of the Unione Siciliana was essential to leadership of the Italianate gangs, and Capone, a Neapolitan, was not eligible for the presidency. That office had passed to Angelo Genna, one of a fanatical Sicilian family not well-disposed towards Capone. Within three months three Gennas lay fatally shot and the family fled. The next incumbent, Samuel Amatuna, dropped into a barber-shop that November for a shave. The one he got was much too close: gunmen blasted him over the towel. Thanks to Weiss, Capone was now able to instal his own man as president of the Unione. But the war went on. Summer of '25 to summer of '26 saw seventy-six gang-killings in Chicago. No-one was convicted.

Then on 20 September, 1926, occurred the most astonishing daylight raid even Chicago was to witness. Capone was lunching at the suburban Hawthorne Hotel when the sound of a speeding car and a stutter of machine-gun fire were heard. As they receded, Capone, like the other diners, moved curiously toward the door. In a flash of intuition, his bodyguard Frankie Rio perceived the trap and hurled the gang-chief to the floor as bullets screamed over their heads. There were ten cars in the motorcade that followed the decoy-car: each halted briefly before the hotel and sprayed it with fire. Then from the last a man stepped out and emptied a machine-gun into the restaurant before the procession moved smoothly away. The frontage was devastated, the restaurant and its furnishings cut to pieces, but not a soul was killed. (This spectacular and almost incredible exploit was re-enacted in the 1932 film 'Scarface', starring Paul Muni.) By this time, though, Capone was sufficiently in control of his own machine to strike back effectively. On 11 October, Weiss stepped out of his car in front of the Holy Name Cathedral opposite the O'Banion flower-shop, and was cut down by gun-fire from the windows of a rooming-house across the street. Hired assassins had had the place staked out for a week, awaiting the propitious moment.

Weiss's death left Capone the sole authentic Big Shot in Chicago - the unelected mayor and effective dictator of the second-largest city in an alleged democracy. Some rash spirits still dreamed of removing him, but we may pass over the scheming and the bloodshed of '27 and '28 to the final coup which, by its psychological effect as much as anything else, crushed all thought of opposition: the legendary and infamous St. Valentine's Day Massacre of 1929. The leadership of the O'Banionites had now passed to George 'Bugs' Moran, whose gang used a garage-warehouse in North Clark Street as their headquarters. 'Bugs' had been led to expect a valuable consignment of hijacked liquor that Valentine's morning but, delayed by a fall of powdery snow, he and two henchmen arrived to see a police-raid apparently in progress; they prudently melted away. Inside the garage seven Morans tolerantly lined up facing the wall and submitted to a routine police frisking, whereupon the 'policemen' opened a side-door and admitted two plain-clothes executioners armed with machine-guns. A minute later they walked out with their hands in the air, as though in custody, and were driven off in the supposed patrol-car. For all its savage carnage, the plan was a brilliant one; it had taken less than ten minutes and but for a fluke would have accounted for ten men. As it was, seven lay slaughtered - though, more precisely, one still showed a flicker of life. Riddled with bullets, all he would tell the police before he died was "Nobody shot me."

By now the name of Chicago stank in the nostrils of the nation. The President

of the U.S. demanded Capone's downfall, and the Department of Justice stirred itself. One courageous government agent actually penetrated the Capone organisation, while a special commando squad was formed to strike at the breweries. The exploits of Eliot Ness's band of federal agents have been heavily fictionalised in the TV series 'The Untouchables,' but their achievement was real enough. By 1931 they had shut down and wrecked more than thirty liquor plants, thus staunching at source the income which purchased Capone his kingship, his homicide squads - and his immunity. Another line of attack was psychological - to convince the underworld that Big A was finally losing his grip. When Ness paraded a fleet of confiscated beer-wagons before Capone's headquarters, the gang-lord went into a maniac rage and smashed up the furniture. Meanwhile, Treasury investigators were meticulously building up their case in law.

In June 1931, Capone was arraigned on charges of income-tax evasion. For his trial in October, immense care was taken to ensure that he faced a judge, jury and witnesses whom he could neither buy nor terrorise. He was convicted, and on Saturday, 24 October, sent away for eleven years. Franklin Roosevelt was elected President the following year, and on 5 December, 1933, Prohibition was finally repealed. Gangsterdom's golden era was at an end.

Let me close this charitably compressed if unedifying history with a statistic. There were over 700 gangmurders in Chicago under Prohibition; the police secured one conviction. (A slip, that, but then he had shot his victim in a crowded courtroom.) A second statistic throws much light on the first: the bootleg syndicates at their height were pulling in profits nearing 100 million dollars a year. Content to reflect that it was simply hoodlums who were being murdered, Chicagoans, including over sixty per cent of the police force, just pocketed their bribes and assuaged their consciences with another beer.

When the facts were such fantasy, what could one do with mere fiction? Among the old boys' papers, understandably enough, it was chiefly the detective magazine which put the matter to the test. Their persistent weakness was to sport the sensational trappings of gangsterism - the ambushes, the one-way rides - in a setting where they couldn't hope to ring true. No amount of Chicago slang dropped into the tale with a casually knowing air could bring to it a hint of rhyme or reason. Early in one SBL I meet a character who imports Chicago gunmen one after another to rub out persons he dislikes. After each murder, he himself tidily kills off the gunman. Try working out the cost of that little scheme - and his chances of surviving the first double-cross! Hats off, though, to the most chirpily ambitious of all Union Jack titles: "Sexton Blake Cleans Up Chicago" (No. 1435). And all in one issue, too. Even the Onion Men took him five. In the SBL of this period just about every criminal had a gang. They blundered uselessly about the countryside machine-gunning innocent yokels, vicars and town clerks simply, it would seem, to draw attention to themselves and thereby wreck the Boss's master-plan for robbing Upper Sprockley post-office. One can't think why the poor bloke wanted these inept minions at all, but poor is the word: his takings wouldn't have kept them in cigarettes.

But let us pass on to those writers who made some serious and worthwhile attempt to translate the gangster credibly into fiction. Pride of place, as always,

must go to G. H. Teed, who fortunately contributed more stories to the genre than all the other Sexton Blake writers. A much-travelled man and clearly an acute social observer, he displayed a profound understanding of politics and the nature of political intrigue, in the Arab world and China as well as the West, that many a 'serious' writer would have envied. He was thus ideally equipped to bring authority and conviction to the fictional treatment of gangsterism. He was, moreover, an easy first in the field. 'The Spirit Smugglers', "a fascinating tale dealing with the Great Prohibition Law," was published as early as 1922 (SBL 1st, 229). Like all Teed's work, his gangster stories offer beautifully-structured story-telling with a meticulous sense of background and motivation.

An honourable mention, too, for John G. Brandon. SBL 2nd, 417, and its sequel 461, were both products of the gangster-craze, but they manage to be both topical and entertaining without the material getting out of hand. Even more interesting in many ways, though admittedly written as late as 1938-39, are Nos. 647, 670 and 699, which eschew the Americanisms and provide a realistic study of London's own gangland. These are strong tales, and what's more the sociology sounds right.

Before leaving the 'straight' gangster-story, let us accord tribute to a gripping novel by a one-time contributor to The Thriller - Leslie Charteris's "The Saint in New York". For all its hero's superhuman knack of staying unscathed it powerfully evokes the atmosphere of American gangland. The chapter in which the Saint is taken for a ride remains to this day a singularly chilling read.

With Charles Hamilton we enter into an entirely different world. For him the gangster, like many other things American, was an irresistible target for satire. Though many memorable villains stalk his pages I can nowhere recall his introducing a gangster of the Chicago school as a totally serious figure. Chick Chew, the 1936 model, is wholly a vehicle for comedy. It is easy to criticise this as lack of realism. Hamilton wrote two series actually about gangsters, the Fisher T. Fish and Putnam van Duck kidnapping series, and despite passages which shrewdly get to the root of the American problem we must concede that they are frankly implausible on several counts. One shudders to think of anyone from Greyfriars crossing the path of a real-life Caponeite, let alone thrashing one with a walking-stick, as Mr. Quelch did. But in plain truth I doubt if Hamilton was ever concerned in these tales to achieve a documentary level of credibility. They express the instinctive reaction of a healthy mind confronted with morbid excess. He allows a characteristically sane and refreshing light to play in the dark, deranged corners of gangsterdom; and many great minds would endorse his view that laughter is the best corrective for folly and wickedness.

The Magnet's Hollywood series ran for sixteen weeks, and almost the entire action takes place in the U.S. - in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. It must therefore stand as Hamilton's definitive commentary on the American scene; and it was written at the very climax of the bootleg wars. Indeed, timing the events related in each Magnet according to its date of issue, we should find by an extraordinary quirk of circumstance that the Greyfriars party were actually in Chicago at the time of the Valentine's Day Massacre. One of the series' most

conspicuous features is thus its failure to make any explicit reference to gangsterism or the beer-wars. Its rogues are the footpads, hold-up men and card-sharps already familiar to every Magnet reader. When Vernon-Smith visits a Chicago speakeasy it is called a night-club, and the emphasis is entirely on the gambling that goes on there. The moral of the story is that Chicago is a city where a careless youngster will be fleeced, not that it's one where he will see men gunned down in the street.

Despite its novel setting, the Hollywood series is in tone a typical Greyfriars story. To that extent it may tell less than the whole truth about America in 1929; but this is far from saying it is unrealistic. Not only the film world but customs, institutions and even the U.S. economy are the subject of shrewd comment. Prohibition, the 18th Amendment and the Volstead Act are all mentioned, references expunged from the SOL reprint, published after repeal, but they are never central to the theme. I am in no doubt that Hamilton understood well enough what was going on in the America of the '20's. In Magnet 1101 we read: "In Polk's bungalow on the hill above Hollywood, as in many other places in the United States, the laws of prohibition were more honoured in the breach than the observance ... Only he had to pay more for his drinks; that was all the difference the prohibition laws made to him. Instead of ordering his supplies from a wine-merchant, he ordered them from a gang of 'bootleggers' - getting inferior drink at a higher price." The author doesn't add that killing rival suppliers was also part of the bootlegger's trade. This suppression was not a matter of squeamishness, however, as the explicit cruelty of the China series was soon to show. But horrors in a remote and war-torn land were explained more easily than horrors in a supposedly civilised western nation, and the author wisely refused to allow such complications to disturb the balance of his story. Where Hamilton ridicules the gang-game he reveals the wholesomeness of his outlook; where he suppresses the uglier facts of gangsterism he displays the sureness of his literary touch. As a result he remains enormously more readable even on a subject which was not really his cup of tea, than many writers apparently better qualified to handle it.

Hamilton was not alone in portraying the gangster in a humorous light. Any kind of excess can become absurd and hence entertaining, and on an entertaining gangster the reader could release without guilt those feelings of furtive admiration the species undoubtedly inspired. It merely remained to give him a change of heart and enlist him with the good guys, whereon his homicidal tendencies and his ready way with hot lead became endearing eccentricities. Gwyn Evans's Ruff Hanson, who made his debut in UJ 1173, is a typical instance of the ganster as a "card". I could never really accept Hanson as the lovable buddy his creator intended nor see the level-headed Sexton Blake accepting this precipitate and murderous numbskull as an intimate; but he was clearly popular, which was a sign of the times. Strangest of all was Hanson's appearance in several Christmas numbers. The stories were still a delight, but one did have the odd feeling of joining a kind of Dickensian cobra at the festive board.

The gangsters came to St. Frank's, too, in a short topical series (2nd N. S. 48-50). And in the last story of all (serialised in Gems 1436-1449) it was scarcely surprising that the Black Hand should include among their number Lightning Luigi

Lombardo, "one of the most ruthless killers the Chicago police had ever failed to capture". But for the most part Brooks sensibly stuck to the colourful villains of his own creation.

As the old boys' papers wended their way through the '30's other crazes briefly came and went. One or two Magnet covers took their captions from popular songs of the time. But when the letters A.R.P. began to crop up in story titles the writing was on the wall; soon the papers themselves went, never to return.

Like them, all the principal actors in the drama of the bootleg years have now passed away. In January 1947, Andrew Volstead died at the age of 87, convinced to the end that legislation can make men moral. Al Capone, who had probably done most to prove him wrong, outlived him by just one week. In 1957, thirty-two years after falling under a hail of O'Banionite bullets, Johnny Torrio emulated his aptest pupil and died peacably a-bed. Eliot Ness succumbed to a heart attack the same year. Many of the physical relics of the period have vanished, too: the North Clark Street garage was demolished in 1967, and the Hawthorne Hotel razed by fire in 1970. But the Holy Name Cathedral is still there, of course, a bullet scar from the Weiss murder visible, despite restoration, on one corner-stone. The shop across the street is still a florist's.

The one thing that hasn't died, unhappily, is gangsterism itself. Organised crime today costs the U.S. more annually than its entire Defence Budget, but the modern practitioners have learned to subdue the impulse to exhibitionism so characteristic of their predecessors. Gang killings occur, but not enough to make steady headlines in a country where shooting people is virtually a national sport. The new generation of Big Shots are not going to repeat Capone's fatal mistake of becoming too well known. They run legitimate businesses, dress soberly, shun personal publicity - and they pay their taxes. They are not the stuff of which stories are woven, even bad ones.

Around the gangsterism of the '20's, though, the myths continue to accumulate. Over the last fifteen years there has been a great revival of interest in the period. Films like 'The Scarface Mob' and Rod Steiger's 'Al Capone' (1959) and 'Portrait of a Mobster' (1961) helped establish a vogue which as yet shows no decline. The folk-heroes of the hugely-successful 'Bonnie and Clyde' were not bootleggers, of course, but the film unerringly catches their period, the half-romantic sadness of an age of carefree, mindless violence. The TV series 'The Untouchables' has enjoyed immense popularity. Paperbacks proliferate. 'Gangster' styles have even influenced design in women's costume.

It seems strange that people should look back upon an era of such brutal wickedness with the kind of nostalgia we feel for the beloved story-papers of our youth. Perhaps we have simply come to see the gangsters of bootleg Chicago through the softening haze of time. Perhaps, like the Magnet and the best of the pre-war SBL, they too, in their macabre way, had that indefinable thing we call style.

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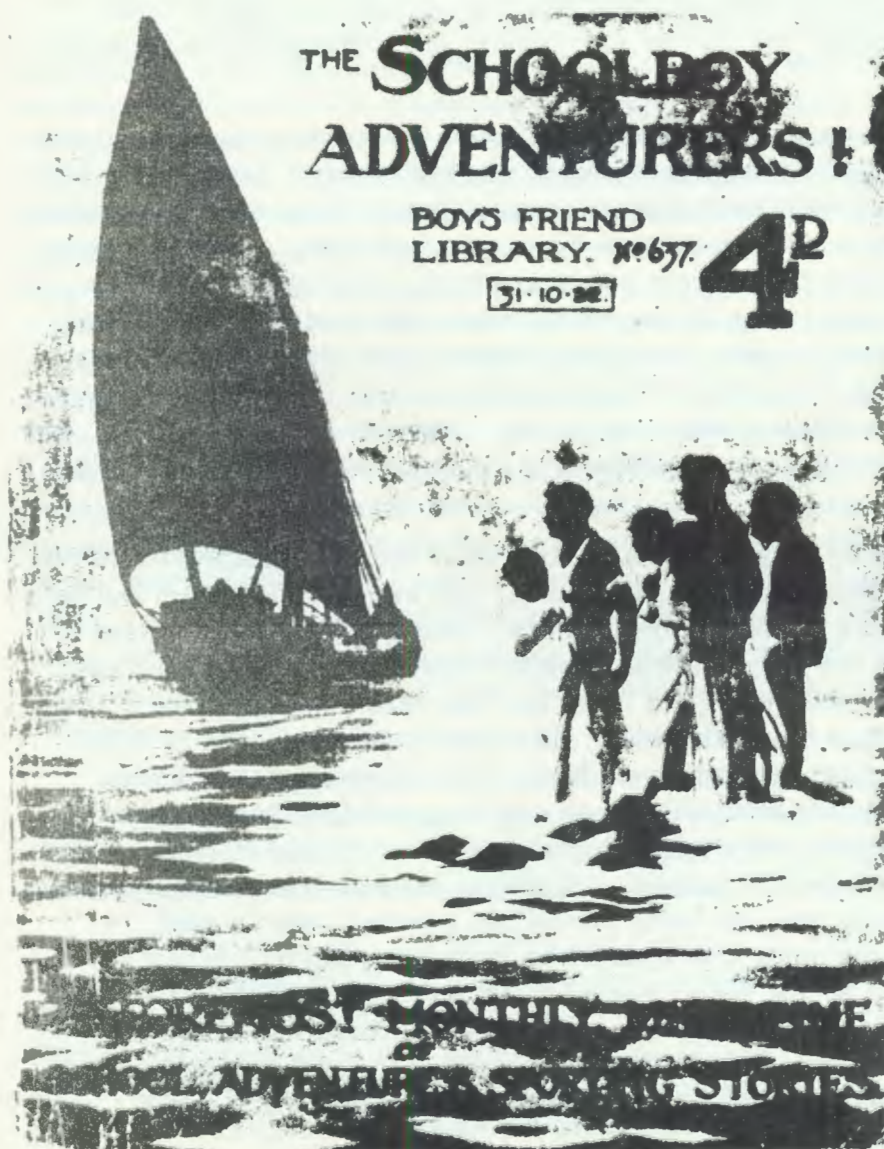
Greetings to all hobby friends. Best wishes for 1974. Are there any Dixon Hawke Libs. left in this old World? McMAHON, HOZIER CRES., TANNOCHSIDE.

# Some Early Recollections

by Charles Wright

My first memories of the book world was the five a 1d. comics man. On Saturday nights I was taken to the local market with my parents to get the Sunday joint. One of the reasons for Saturday night shopping was that butchers used to auction the meat. There was no refrigeration as we know it today so the butchers had to clear

their shops, and quite a large joint could be obtained for a few shillings with a pound of sausages sometimes thrown in as make-weight. In those days one could buy a pound of steak for about eight pence. Most of the shops were gas lit but the stalls had naphtha flares, which made a great hissing noise, especially when there was any wind. Between the stalls stood the man with 5 a 1d comics, back numbers in a paper wrapper. They usually contained "Comic Life," "Lot-O'-Fun", Frank Reade Invention Library which was far beyond my ken at that time, and a ladies' novelette. This



was my weekly treat and I used to wait for the daylight on Sunday mornings to read the comics. As I got a little older I found that other boys had comics and I soon began to swap and thus I made the acquaintance of many other comics. My favourite was always "Chips" - not only because of Weary Willie and Tired Tim, but also because of the half page picture on the back page of Casey's Court which used to amuse me immensely. My father took in "Ally Slopers Half Holiday" but I couldn't find much in it to amuse me and in after life I thought that Ally Sloper bore quite a resemblance to Charles Dickens' Mr. Micawber. Incidentally in one of my chats with the late C. H. Chapman the Magnet artist, he told me that Ally Sloper was one of the first papers that he worked on.

I was able to read at an early age. I was sent to school at 3½ years old in 1909 and our education began right away. We were taught the alphabet by means of trays of sand in which we shaped the letters until we were able to write them on a slate. As soon as I was able to read properly I travelled through the fairy stories of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Anderson and some of the Arabian Nights, and I remember the Blue Fairy Book, the Yellow Fairy Book, etc., delightful books edited I think by Andrew Suny.

On the corner of our street in Clenkenwell, was a sweet shop, but the window was rather large and old "Dad" as he was known to us, had rather a job filling it with sweets, most of which by the way were 4oz. 1d. except locust which one does not see today and that was 8oz. 1d. - so he decided to branch out and every so often he would trundle off to Whitechapel with his barrow and return with a load of back number Aldine Libraries, which made a nice display in the other half of his window. Dick Turpins, Claude Duvals, Robin Hoods, with an occasional Jack Sheppard and Spring Heeled Jack. These covers soon attracted me and I don't think that any finer covers have ever appeared on Boys' Papers before or since. However they were 2 a 1d. and I began to save my comics to buy these Aldines and I soon became enthralled by the stories.

The Robin Hoods were very good too. They were oblong in shape with yellow covers and it wasn't until later in life that I found out that one or two of them had been lifted word for word from Sir Walter Scotts "Ivanhoe." On one occasion I noticed in Dad's window six copies of the "Boys' Comic Library" which I bought. These were Nelson Lee size and the stories were quite funny for that period, some of the titles I can still remember. It was these six books, that were to be the means by which many years later I was to meet several times Barry Ono the penny dreadful king. Old Dad soon began to add to his stocks Diamond and Nuggett Libraries. The former had all kinds of stories, Adventure, School and Detective and in later numbers the stock detective was Dixon Brett. It also published reprints of Dick Turpin stories. The Nuggett was the better of the two however, with a nice coloured cover and one of the stock characters was Tufty Kingham of a school whose name I forget, but after his school days finished he became Tufty Kingham Detective and for many years these stories were collectors' items. There was also a detective named Peter Flint, but I believe there were only nine of these stories. Also in Dad's shop I picked up an odd Jack Harkaway story or two, but I never became wrapped up in them.

I was fortunate I suppose that my father never forbade me to read these bloods. In fact he used to read some of them himself, and I can't say that they did me any harm.

Now the First World War was raging. Father was in France and Mother had gone out to work and my happy carefree Saturdays became grim. I started off at the Maypole Fairs at Ludgate Circus and lined up for  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. margarine, then to the market to line up for potatoes and then to the coal yard if it was cold weather for 14 lbs. coal, the only consolation was that I always had one of the old papers to read in the queue. At 4 o'clock I had to go to the nursery to collect my little sister and then lay the table and get the fire lit and the kettle on. However we got by except for the horrible "Standard Bread" which used to seem gritty and the middle used to fall out. Sometimes we were lucky and got some Plum and Apple Jam.

It was half way through the war that I was to make the acquaintance of Charles Hamilton through his stories. I was sitting on the doorstep during a school holiday, reading the current issue of "Chips" when a youth on a box tricycle came by. He stopped and asked me if it was this weeks "Chips", I said "Yes" and he offered to exchange a "Gem" for it, I was not very impressed, so he pulled out a paper-bag full of lumps of broken chocolate and offered a lump as makeweight, so I closed with his offer. It was not till several days later when I had nothing handy to read that I remembered the Gem. It was a story of Racke and food hoarding. I found it very interesting and from that day I became "hooked" on Hamilton. I soon discovered the Magnet, but the Gem has always been my first love. I was doing odd jobs and earning a few coppers here and there, which all went on the old papers. Bookstalls in market places and rag shops were the happy hunting grounds and I discovered "Bunyon's" at Islington, just past "Collins Music Hall." This was a fairly large warehouse which dealt in old clothes, cats meat, waste paper and also second-hand books of which they always had a large stock. It was here that I obtained many Union Jacks and Nelson Lees, both detective books, but of the two I preferred Nelson Lee and I always managed to get it every week for many years. When I read that Nelson Lee and Nipper were going to St. Frank's to escape the attentions of a chinese Tong, I thought that it would make a nice change for a few weeks, never dreaming that they were going for good, so the Nelson Lee became another school book with a strong detective element. It was taken over by E. S. Brooks who certainly knew how to hold a boy's interest.

Nelson Lee having disappeared as a detective, I went back to the Union Jack and Sexton Blake Libraries for detective stories, and many of them I obtained from "Bunyon's." I was surprised in after life when I was corresponding all over the place, to find what a large number of chaps knew of "Bunyon's."

The war was still dragging on and I noticed that my mother was working very hard to keep things going, so I decided to do something about it. I went to the "Evening Standard" in Farringdon Road, who used to employ large numbers of boys after school hours to deliver papers to shops all over London. After attending for four or five evenings without any luck, I was eventually called out and paired up with a youth my own age, who was an old timer, and we had to do the Hammersmith round. The wages were 7/9d per week. I was able to give mother 6/- a week which she



said was a Godsend. We used to take over two enormous bundles of papers downstairs to a waiting paper cart after drawing our fare which I think was 8d from the office. The cart took us to Blackfriars Station, where we caught a train to Hammersmith. On arrival we used to get rid of one bundle in the sub-way to a chap with a large connection. We then divided the other bundle and delivered them to shops two stations up the line, Ravenscourt Park and Stamford Brook. When we had delivered all our papers, we caught a train to S. Kensington where lots of the Standard boys collected and then the Standard motors came along on their way home and crammed us all into the back and charged us 1d. to take us back to the Standard offices in Farringdon Road, so we gained a copper or two on our fare. I remember one summer evening and we were nearing the end of our round when there was an air raid. The maroons were going off and the police were scooting round on bicycles with large placards on which was written "Take Cover." We dived into a bookshop, but the raid did not last long and very few bombs were dropped. I got talking to the proprietor about boys' books and he said he had a few oddments and I bought six beautiful mint Gems and three Magnets of 1914 vintage. I remember some of the Gems were about Talbot the Toff. And so I plodded on until just before the Armistice in 1918, when my father suddenly died as the result of wounds he had received some years before at the battle of Arras, and also the government had just passed a law forbidding schoolchildren to work after school hours, so bang went my job on the Evening Standard. As I would be fourteen in the following March, I decided I would leave school, but as I was at a Central School and my father had signed papers for me to stop until I was sixteen it was a bit difficult, but I was determined to get a job to help out my mother who had my sister and I to keep, but after a lot of convincing and arguments I eventually succeeded and I left school at the Easter Holiday of 1919, and at this point I suppose I can say that it is the end of some of my early recollections. From 1920 onwards I was to correspond with collectors all over the place and also to meet many of them. In my humble opinion 1919 and the twenties were the Purple Period of boys' papers. The war time microscopic print had disappeared, new books were coming out and old ones revised, like the Popular, Boys' Realm, Greyfriars Herald, etc. Newnes had obtained the copyright of Aldine, Dick Turpin and Robin Hood and were reprinting them. The A. P. also had a Robin Hood Library and a Prairie Library, but these two soon became amalgamated in Nuggett Weekly and what with the periodicals that had survived the war the number of papers on the market was enormous, but that is another story.

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A new boy at collecting Magnets and Gems wishes to purchase. Is there anyone who remembering their early joy in starting their collection prepared to sell some of their spare copies. All replies will be appreciated.

STAN JENKS, THE LODGE, NORTHBROOK,  
NEAR FARNHAM, SURREY.

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WANTED: Champion Annual 1937, Puck Annuals, Puck Comics 1932, 1933, 1936, Sunbeams, Butterflies, Tip Tops, 1933-38. Will exchange or pay cash.

H. V. HEARN, 20 WINGATE WAY, TRUMPINGTON, CAMBRIDGE.

WANTED: 1922-44 Champions, Triumph, Champion Annuals 1931 and 35, Champion Library, Boys' Cinema Annuals, Boys' Friend Library, Boys' Favourite Library No. 1, 17, 18, 19, 20. Books by E. R. Home-Gall.

MERRY XMAS TO ALL MY FRIENDS BOTH HOME AND ABROAD. Special greetings and thanks to Bill, Jim, Jack, Sam, Jay Gee and E. R. H.

ERN DARCY, 47 FISHER ST., MAIDSTONE, VICTORIA 3012, AUSTRALIA.

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FOR SALE: Boys' Friend Libraries (22 copies, early and late, a few rare). School tales by Jack North, David Goodwin, E. S. Brooks. Jack, Sam and Pete, and others. Mostly excellent. 8 Magnets (Stacey series) £2. Magnet Nos. 1045, 1053. 25p each. S.O.L. Nos. 261, 280, 40p each. Popular No. 258, 25p. Nugget Library No. 43 (St. Frank's) 30p. Wonder Library No. 13 (scarce) 30p. Pluck (1915) 20p. Marvel (1912) 20p. Jack O' The Circus, Frank Richards, 40p. Billy Bunter's Own, 30p. Eagle Annuals, 25p each. Hundreds modern comics, long runs. S.A.E. Postage extra.

LEN WORMULL

245 DAGNAM PARK DRIVE, ROMFORD, ESSEX.

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WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1920 to 1925, 1929. Monsters, Dixon Hawke Libraries, Dixon Hawke Casebooks, Magnets, S.O.L's, Pre-war Rovers, Wizards, Adventures, Hotspurs, etc. Film Fun Annuals, Dandys, F. D. J. Smith Cigarette Cards of Footballers. O.B.B. Collections bought.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.

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THE SCHOOL FRIEND, approx. 68 copies, 1919, 1920, 1921. Offers please.

MR. NORMAN LINFORD

18 THE GLADE, STREETLY, NR. SUTTON COLDFIELD, WARWS.

=====

WANTED: Schoolboys Owns, Nelson Lees, Boys' Friend Lib., Populars, Gems, Magnets, Bullseyes, Boy Cinemas, Surprises, Monster Lib., Sreet Stories, Film Funs, Kinema Comics, Rangers, Champions, Triumphs, Wizards, Rovers and Adventures.

"DUN VARRAN," BELFAST RD., HOLLYWOOD, CO. DOWN, ULSTER.

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Magnets greatly wanted: 1201-2, 1165-4, 1158-7, 1137-5, 1132. Also most below, good prices, exchanges. Correspondence welcome.

J. de FREITAS

29 GILARTH STREET, HIGHETT, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3190.

# DUNCAN STORM

by W. O. G. Lofts

In the early days of our hobby "Duncan Storm" was something of a mystery. All sorts of theories were put forward as to his true identity, including that he was the same person as the equally mysterious "Michael Storm" (Ernest Sempill) but this was discounted in time, due to the great differences in writing style. Eventually I was able to discover that "Duncan Storm" was actually the pen-name of Gilbert Floyd - a former editor of The Boys Realm, and a very popular and well loved figure at that.

"Duncan Storm's" claim to fame was that he wrote those delightful stories in the Boys' Friend of a floating school called The Bombay Castle, headed by a group of schoolboys - Dick Dorrington & Co. Floyd, who had independent means, had a great passion for the sea, and his hobby was to embark as a passenger on a cargo ship bound for foreign parts. He would make friends with the Captain during the voyage, and on his return write up his experiences, with a great deal of imagination thrown in. He was also very fond of writing about shipwrecks and castaways-on-the-desert island theme, and these were tremendously popular with readers. As "Captain Shand" he wrote about Captain Handyman and it is also known that he wrote as "Harry Revel" and "John Grenfell." As "Julia Storm" he wrote a castaway serial in the opening issues of The School Friend. Known as "The Skipper" Floyd had a sailing yacht on the Norfolk Broads, and he also wrote a novel with Sydney Gowing entitled "Sea Lavender", published around 1925. In the late twenties, however, Floyd just after writing a serial for one of the comics, went away, presumably on another long sea-voyage and was never seen again by editors at Fleetway House. It was presumed that he must have died abroad. However, only recently I was able to explain his disappearance. He died at Great Yarmouth on the 26th July, 1935, aged 64. Born at Lewisham, London, in 1871. His home at the time of his death was at Mottingham, Kent. His second Christian name was Gover - Gilbert Gover Floyd, and at times this varied to 'Glover'.

It is quite possible that Floyd could have been G. (Gilbert) Clabon Glover, another prolific writer in the same period - of whom nothing is known. The latter gentleman curiously was reported to have died around 1934/5, but this cannot be confirmed. A comparison of the style of writing would be most interesting. Why Floyd chose to just drop out of writing, without any word of warning or goodbyes to his many friends, will never now be known.

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Offers (including postage) invited for: Teed 'Murder Ship' (hardcover); C.D., 50 issues between No. 107 and date; N. Lee, 60 issues between 259 (1½d) and 375; U.I. Xmas No's 1105, 1208, 1313, 1365, 1366, 1417, also 60 others between 1078 and 1530; BFL about 20 early 3d and 4d issues (including No. 489, 'Football Champions' by Richards (sub?)). No reply, regret disposed of.

4533 WEST 13th AVENUE, VANCOUVER.

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A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A JOYFUL NEW YEAR