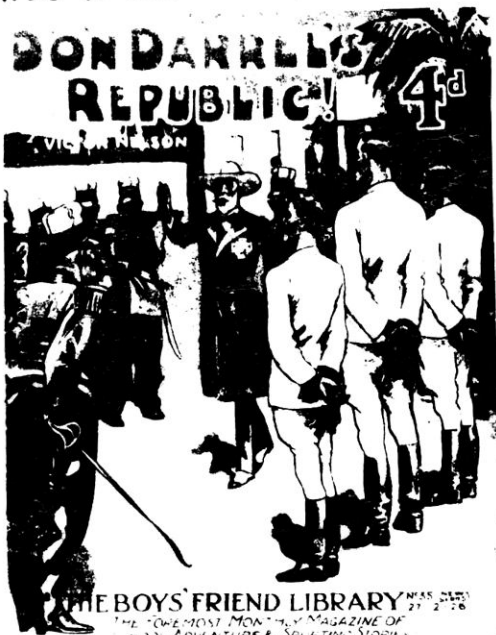


STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 28 No 333

SEPTEMBER 1974



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THE "ONE" MOST MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF
ADVENTURE & SPLITTING STORIES

16p

THIS MONTH'S SPECIALS

SALE!

Startler, bound volume, July - Dec. 1931, 7 defective and 19 complete copies, £12. Scarce. 6 Kinema Comics, bound Vols., $\frac{1}{2}$ years, 1923-30. Some defective cut copies in each, but £50 for the six volumes only. If complete would be worth £160! Bound Sports Library, 1914. Some defective, £8. 2 Marvels, bound, 336-362, leather spine, Nos. 180-205, cloth 1907. £10 each. Pluck, 62-87, 1906, £10.

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STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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CHARACTERS & AUTHORS

In certain cases characters in fiction are far better known than the men and women who created them. Everyone has heard of Little Lord Fauntleroy, for instance, but I doubt whether one out of a hundred people you asked would be able to tell you that his creator was a woman named Francis Hodgson Burnett. The character is world-famous; the writer

is not. I recall that Fauntleroy was a great favourite of my mother's, and she had a copy of the book among her most precious possessions.

Fauntleroy has been ridiculed down the years, yet he was a good character and the story makes excellent reading. The picture of Fauntleroy was actually marred by Mrs. Burnett herself who dressed the little Lord in absurd clothing. And, the "cissy" aura was added to as time passed by the fact that, on stage, he was often portrayed by a girl, for some obscure reason. On film there was the absurdity of his being played by the mature Mary Pickford. But boys portrayed Fauntleroy occasionally. Buster Keaton, as a boy actor, starred in the part on stage, and, much later, Freddie Bartholomew took up the same role on film.

A pleasant biography of Mrs. Burnett, who created a character destined to be far more famous than she was, has just been published and is recommended. It is "Waiting for the Party" by Ann Thwaite, published by Secker and Warburg at £3. 50.

Billy Bunter, of course, is far more famous than Charles Hamilton. Everybody knows Bunter, but I wonder how many people you stopped and asked in the street could name his creator.

Bunter is a word which is becoming an integral part of the English language. More and more so, as the years go by. Bunter restaurants and cafes and road houses and pubs are springing up all over the place. The latest is the Bunter Restaurant at Guildford, with one of the famous old drawings of the "old fat man" featuring in their advertising. The next time I'm in Guildford I shall sample the Bunter lunch. I may report on how it impresses me.

IT WAS GOOD IN THOSE DAYS

Recently, in the Daily Mail, there appeared a letter from a youngster who complained about "modern comics". They contain nothing but pictures, he laments, and asks the £100 question: "Why don't they publish good comics like the pre-war Gem and Magnet, of which I am lucky enough to possess a few copies?"

The lad in question needs some attention to be given to his education - the Gem and Magnets were never "comics" - but his heart is in the right place.

A New Zealand reader, Mr. O. W. Wadham, in a letter in this month's "Postman" column, makes a few poignant points about those two old papers, and comes to the conclusion, that, because of the papers he had to read, "it was good to be a boy in the teen years of this century."

Those of us with long memories often feel that the poor little rich kids of today, who seem to have so much, will never know the joys we had out of our weekly visits to our newsagent or to the second-hand stalls in the market.

THE 1974 ANNUAL

With this issue we send you the order form for the 1974 C. D. Annual, due for publication in mid-December. The giant bill of fare is now on the way to completion, and next month I hope to lift the curtain and tell you of some of the treats in store. On the order form is space, as usual, for your advertisements or announcements. The Annual is an excellent medium by which you can make known your wants or send your season's greetings to your hobby friends. And at the same time, your ad. helps towards general costs.

With inflation rife, and with no sign of its ever being controlled by any government, our readers are having to look at their pounds and their new pence before they spend. In publishing the Annual it is essential to plan ahead, yet never has it been more difficult to plan ahead. In a way, it would have been tempting to miss a year with the Annual, but we knew that such a move would cause great disappointment to many. So we have gone forward, and hope for the best.

If you are ordering the Annual, and I hope you will, I need hardly mention that it will be deeply appreciated if you are able to order early to make sure of your copy.

THE EDITOR

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£1 per copy offered for Magnets 1038, 1039, 1040, 1051, 1050, 1056, 1057, 1068, 1090, 1092 to 1102, 1133 to 1137, 1158, 1201, 1202, 1208, 1220, 1230, 1232 to 1235, 1243, 1263, 1303, 1309, 1323, £1.50. S.O.L's 161, 163, 165, 185, 187, 209, 237, 251, 259.

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DANNY'S DIARY

SEPTEMBER 1924

There is a new serial in the "Boys' Friend" entitled "Chums of St. Kit's" by Frank Richards. It's about a new boy named Harry Nameless who comes to St. Kit's on a scholarship, and on his way to the school he dives off a bridge to rescue St. Leger from the river.

At least, it's not a new story, for I read some of it a couple of years ago in a paper named School & Sport which didn't last long. And they didn't say then that it was written by Frank Richards, though I guessed that it was.

The Rookwood hiking series is going joyfully on. In Somerset the Fistical Four try to get shelter one wet night at a bungalow owned by Mr. Smith, who turns them away with fleas in their ears. But, looking through a window, Lovell sees Mr. Smith nailing up a long packing case. Later, Lovell breaks into the bungalow, opens the packing-case, slides in his fingers, and feels a cold, cold face. This was "The Mystery of the Lonely Bungalow."

In "Lovell the Sleuth", he calls in the police, only to find that Mr. Smith is a sculptor, and the packing-case contains a statue.

Next week there is "Danger Ahead" for the hikers in Devon, where a lion has escaped from Chiggers' Circus. And in the last of the month, entitled "Stranded", the motor-scooter plays up, and Lovell gives it running repairs, not very successfully. This series isn't over yet, though most schools are back at work at the end of September.

Dario Resta, the famous racing motorist, has been killed this month while he was attacking the world record at Brooklands.

In the Nelson Lee Library the exciting holiday series about the boys in the strange Roman city of Isirium in the heart of the Sahara has continued and ended. The deposed Emperor Titus waited for his revenge and at the end of "Left in the Desert" it was Handforth and his chums who were left to die in the desert. The last of the series was "The Crimson Eagle" in which all came out well for the stranded boys, but Professor Zingrave and the Green Triangle came on the scene to prepare for the old paper to be divided into two stories - one about Nelson Lee's

adventures with the criminals and the other about St. Frank's with the juniors led by Pitt while Nipper is away.

The new series, starting with "The Scandal at St. Frank's" is really very remarkable. During a champagne party a senior named Wallace dies of a heart attack, and a newspaper prints the story. Many boys are taken away by their parents, and Dr. Stafford was on the point of closing down the school. The series continued with "The School With a Bad Name" in which Reggie Pitt and most of the Remove determine to fight to keep St. Frank's going strong.

In Ayrshire there has been a fire in an outhouse where potato-diggers were living, and nine people died in the blaze. And at Westminster some scaffolding collapsed and two men were killed, so it has been a bit of a tragic month.

The holiday series set in North Africa has continued in the Magnet. In "The Schoolboy Tourists", Major Cherry sets off on his quest for Ali Ben Yusef who is a prisoner of Sheik Mustapha in the desert. But Harry Wharton & Co. are left behind at Biskra, where the Hazeldenes and Clara Trevlyn are on holiday. In "The Call of the Desert", Harry and Bob and their chums follow the Major into the desert, but Ibrahim, the guide, turns out to be a treacherous plotter.

In "Foes of the Sahara", Ibrahim is saved from death and has a change of heart, there is a mirage, and Bou Saoud, the son of the sheik, is killed. In the final of the month, "In The Power of the Sheik", the party catches up with the Sheik and Ali is freed - but Bob Cherry falls into the Sheik's hands and things look black for Bob.

A fairly good month in the local cinemas. We have seen Richard Barthelmess and Dorothy Gish in "The Bright Shawl"; Sessue Hayakawa in "The Battle"; Conrad Nagel and Mae Busch in "Name This Man" (a story by Hall Caine which I found very heavy going); Marion Davies in "Adam and Eva"; and Edward Everett Horton in "Ruggles of Red Gap". It's nice to go to the pics now the shorter days are coming along, and enjoy a programme with a quarter of American gums (4 ounces for 2d.) in one hand, and some bananas (4 for 3d.) in the other.

In the Gem the holiday series about the Seven on Tramp has continued. In "The Captured Caravan" they come across Coker & Co. who prove a nuisance, and to punish them Tom confiscates their caravan.

Then, in "The St. Jim's Caravanners", Potter and Greene, led by Coker, try to turn the tables on Tom Merry & Co., but fail dismally.

In "Tom Merry & Co. in France" the Seven meet up with Levison, Clive and Cardew and all cross the Channel, where Cardew tries his hand at the casino. And that ended the series which was very pleasant, but all too short.

Final of the month was "The Lightning Shaft" about Bernard Glyn and a Mr. Vining who has invented a gun with an electrical ray. Cutts is involved, and it all goes on next week.

A new serial in the Gem is "Chums of the Iron Way" by Roland Spencer and Francis Warwick in collaboration. I wonder whether they wrote a chapter in turn.

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

An article appeared in the July C. D. by J. E. M. which needs a small correction. On page 11, line 5. The sentence should read: - Of course not all the ladies listed ... Will readers please amend their copies. As you will see the omission of the little word "not" altered the sense of the whole sentence.

ISN'T IT FRUSTRATING?

by William Lister

A recent visit to Falmouth on holiday, led to a day trip to Helston Village on the occasion of their Annual event - "The Furry Dance."

Held originally to celebrate the coming of Spring, it dates back many hundreds of years. To this day, once a year, the Mayor, Councillors, etc., plus the children of the district, with the aid of two or three bands, dance round the village, in and out of the flower-decked shops on the main road. An audience of thousands gather from far and near. All very interesting, I had heard of this event at some time or other, and of course was pleased to be there. However, you can not go anywhere or see anything without eventually finding out that Sexton Blake has been there before you. I found it so in this case.

Mentioning my visit to a friend led to her lending me a copy of the

Union Jack of 1929 "The Mystery of the Four Buffalo Bills" by Coutts Brisbane, and here before my very eyes was proof that Sexton Blake had been there before me. He was evidently there in 1929 and so beat me to it by the space of forty-five years ... isn't it frustrating?

My visit to the Helston Furry Dance is of no interest to readers of the CD, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they want to know what Sexton Blake was doing there in that vintage year of 1929. He was not on holiday! I've never known Blake to be on holiday. Not that he hasn't tried from time to time, but even as he arrives at his destination, he becomes involved in crime-busting.

That is one thing about Blake's job, he does get around and about, he does see people and places, if you know what I mean. There are some jobs where you stand at a bench or sit at a desk all day. The only time you see the world (or a small part of it) is on your annual holiday. Not so for our Sexton, in his line of business, chase crooks and you'll run round the world and back. (How about Ronald Biggs of Train Robber fame.)

Where has Sexton Blake not been? South America, North America, Australia, China, Japan, Germany, France and Holland, or Morocco, you name it, he's been there. It would be of interest if one of our Club Historian's or somebody with a large collection of Union Jacks could trace for us where he has been or not been. Not having any sort of collection this would be beyond me.

However, back to England and Cornwall, Falmouth and Helston Village. During the case of the Four Buffalo Bills, Sexton Blake and Tinker come upon a dying man. Blake bends to catch his last words, but only one was clear, "furry", a mystery to Tinker until Blake explains. "Have you ever heard of Helston? It's a very old town and every year the people indulge in a very old festival. It's called The Furry Dance and I suppose Furry is a corruption of Floral. Anyway, they prance through the streets got up in fancy costumes in a long line, and they go through some of the older premises and generally indulge in a regular carnival, and this Carnival takes place tomorrow."

Blake decided to park his car at Porthleven, three miles from Helston, a place already emptying itself, everyone that could get away was on the road to Helston. (If it was that popular in 1929, believe me,

it was even more popular in 1974, as my wife and I could not move for the huge crowds.) I use the words of Coutts Brisbane, they could be my own.

"Strains of distant music floated down wind and grew louder. A couple of brass bands at different points were rendering different tunes. The dancers were mustering. Everybody was in pleasant humour, bunting fluttered, costumes gave a splash of colour. Everybody was chattering, singing and whistling. The scene was more like one would expect of a Mardi Gras Carnival in some town of Southern France than anything in England."

It has occurred to me while writing that where Sexton Blake has been his author has been also. On second thoughts this may not always be true. After all, many authors who specialize in certain tales glean their information from books of travel. One example is Edgar Rice Burroughs of Tarzan fame, who had never been to Africa and did say if he went he might be disappointed. Or Zane Grey who knew little or nothing of the Wild West, yet achieved world fame with cowboy stories. He was, I think, a dentist. However, it is quite possible that being in England Coutts Brisbane, author of the Mystery of the Four Buffalo Bills had himself been at the Furry Dance either in 1929 or before.

THE SLEEPWALKER

by S. Gordon Swan

A rare item in the Sexton Blake Saga is to be found in No. 49 of the Boys' Friend Library (First Series), which contains a story entitled "The Sleepwalker". The theme of this tale is an unusual one and Tinker plays an unexpected part.

Sir Reginald Hobbs was a Cabinet Minister who, in accordance with tradition, had been handed a seal of office by the King at the time of his appointment. One day the Minister found that the seal was missing from his safe. This token was the outward semblance of his position in the Government, and without it in his possession his authority as the head of a State department was unsubstantiated. Moreover, the Government he represented was in a parlous condition and the scandal attached to the losing of the seal would give its political opponents further opportunity for attack against its prestige. So Sir Reginald called in Sexton Blake.

Blake had been on holiday and on his return he found Tinker in an

exhausted condition. The lad had been working hard on a case during the detective's absence and appeared to be in a state of fatigue. Blake left him asleep while he went to interview Sir Reginald.

The latter swore Blake to secrecy regarding the theft of the seal, and the detective examined the safe from which it had been stolen and found that all fingerprints had been wiped off by an over-zealous domestic. As the door to the room had been locked Blake concluded that the thief had entered through the window -- a difficult feat, as the window was only accessible from the front steps by means of a narrow ledge. When, later on, the detective confided his theory to Tinker, the young assistant perplexed his master by announcing that he had had a remarkable dream in which he performed such an act himself.

Next day the news was out in the morning paper that the seal was missing and Blake was thunderstruck and mortified. This revelation meant that his and Tinker's reputation were at stake, for only four people had known of the theft -- Sir Reginald, Blake, Tinker -- and the thief himself.

There was a great commotion over the theft and Sir Reginald was called on to resign, while Blake himself, hitherto a popular idol, was subjected to a measure of opprobrium. Ignoring this, the detective concentrated on finding out who supplied the information to the newspaper and, after some difficulty, succeeded in learning the identity of the man, an ex-convict named Mumford, recently released from gaol.

As the story proceeded it became apparent that Tinker had been subject to sleepwalking fits consequent upon overwork and that during those trances he encountered Mumford, who took advantage of his condition to prevail on Tinker to steal the seal of office in the manner described. Blake was horrified, but determined to track down the man or men responsible. Mumford was arrested and accused Tinker of aiding him in the crime; inevitably Scotland Yard was on Tinker's heels, while Blake was endeavouring to trace the band of international criminals to whom Mumford handed over the seal.

The trail led to Paris, thence to Marseilles and from there to Constantinople, for Blake discovered that a Turk was behind the scheme to overthrow the British Government. Numerous adventures followed, including a mutiny aboard a cargo steamer in the Mediterranean, before

Blake recovered the seal and returned in triumph to England, his reputation vindicated. The charge against Tinker was withdrawn and at the end of the story we were led to believe, via a doctor's report, that the lad had fully recovered from his temporary aberration.

I know of only one other instance where Tinker was similarly placed, and that was in a later story by John W. Bobin -- "The Boy Without a Memory" (Sexton Blake Library No. 92, First Series) published in 1919. In that story he received a blow on the head and as a result his faculties were impaired to the extent that he lent aid to the notorious George Marsden Plummer.

It has been said that "The Sleepwalker" is now attributed to W. Murray Graydon and certainly the presence of that author's creation, Inspector Widgeon, in several chapters would appear to confirm that belief. But the story in general is not in Murray Graydon's unmistakable style and I am confident in asserting that it was written by an author who wrote three other long Blake stories in the early Boys' Friend Library -- Beverley Kent.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

This really isn't a letter from St. Frank's because it was written at the Traveller's Club, Pall Mall, London, where I happened to be passing and ran into Lord Dorrimore who was about to enter that famous London club. I was invited in and this narrative is the outcome of that meeting.

I had often wanted to talk to Lord Dorrimore personally, but on the few occasions I had seen him at St. Frank's he was never able to spare the time and always seemed to be in a hurry.

I had never expected to see him in London as one thinks of Dorrie beating a path through an African bush or hobnobbing with the natives in the Solomons. And whenever he appears one looks for old Umlosi by his side. But Umlosi wasn't with him on this occasion.

I asked Dorrie why he suffered London on that bitter cold day.

He told me to look at the great number of his fellow members sitting comfortably in their chairs, reading and enjoying the conversation of well travelled men, as his explanation. But I still wondered why these people seemed to prefer the grey skies of an English winter to the warmth of the tropics and blue skies and white sandy beaches fringed with waving palms. Perhaps all those seasoned explorers had a greater desire to be in London rather than enduring the doubtful pleasure in the Isles of Paradise.

Lord Dorrimore, or to give him his full title, Spencer Fitzhugh Cambridge, 11th Baron Dorrimore, is an amazing man. He has never been involved in any scandal and is probably the kindest millionaire known. With his great friend, Nelson Lee, by his side, they have made a formidable pair against overwhelming odds and more than once saved the lives of an entire St. Frank's party. But I must include Umlosi, that wonderful African King, who is ever ready to leave his beloved Kutanaland to follow Dorrie to the far corners of the Earth.

It was natural I would ask Dorrie his most exciting adventure he had experienced with the boys of St. Frank's and the following is his account of it as he told me in the subdued and refined atmosphere of the Traveller's Club.

I have said Lord Dorrimore is an amazing man. What else can I say about a sporting peer who roams the world at will, owns a magnificent steam yacht, a racing speedboat, a plane, several lovely houses and a castle? He also has an island named after him. Yet he still retains his fortune. But then Dorrie is a clever speculator and has reliable friends. But above all he has one of the world's greatest detectives always ready to assist him; Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, a truly great combination, a piece of Old England that will never fade.

I did not know - couldn't know - to what particular adventure Dorrie was to choose from the many expeditions, explorations and holiday adventures he had taken part in with the juniors that, to him, would be the most remarkable, the most exciting and, of course, the most dangerous. And the one he selected was what has been recorded as The Rishnir Tyrant.

I wasn't surprised Dorrie picked this story because it surpasses in thrills and tension anything I have read.

It is one of those events that hold you in amazement and tests your head for heights for most of the adventure is centred in a palace set on a crag a thousand feet from the ground.

The St. Frank's party had set out to rescue Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn of the St. Frank's Remove. Hussi had been kidnapped, taken to India and held hostage by the Ameer of Rishnir. At least, that is what had been assumed. But Hussi was with his own people and a violent thunderstorm had forced the St. Frank's party into the Ameer's territory with the result Dorrie, Nelson Lee and all the boys and girls had been seized by the Ameer's soldiers and held. They were to be held as hostages to force Hussi Kahn to surrender his country.

That, in the smallest of nutshells, was Dorrie's best adventure. The party was taken to the Idar Crag, a thousand feet in the air, and although allowed the freedom of the palace yet they were imprisoned by reason of its great height.

A strange and remarkable palace in the clouds with all modern innovations. A cruel, ambitious and tyrannical Indian potentate, greedy for the neighbouring Kurpana of which Hussi's father, the Maharajah and Goolah Kahn, the heir to the throne, were already prisoners in the Idar Palace.

It was a strange and dangerous situation. This gleaming and luxurious palace, a thousand feet high, with every comfort and charm, was really a prison. The only escape being by way of the verandah or the lifts that led down to the ground level. But the lifts were constantly guarded and at night the power that operated them was cut off.

It makes me shudder even now the way Dorrie explained how Handforth had been thrown by the Ameer over this verandah after Handy had biffed him. Handforth had stumbled over the balcony, lost his balance and fell over the balustrade. He had gone to his death a thousand feet below.

This story of the Tyrant of Rishnir will rank as the most exciting, the most emotive adventure of all time.

How the St. Frank's party escaped from the palace in the clouds using guns and explosives makes fascinating reading.

Lord Dorrimore has been in some extraordinary tight corners and dangerous situations, but the expedition to the Indian State of Rishnir

and the subsequent overthrow of the arrogant Ameer Ali Rajen will outshine them all.

I am sorry I missed Umlosi. I would have liked to have seen him braving the winter cold in London. I did ask Dorrie where he was and I was told the 'old friend' was staying aboard the Wanderer at Southampton.

It is not very far from Southampton to St. Frank's. Perhaps Dorrie has a scheme taking shape in his mind for another summer holiday for the St. Frank's juniors, to say nothing of the Moor View girls.

I asked him if he had any particular place in view for a trip in the near future. He glanced at a window and saw the snowflakes beginning to settle outside on this very cold and bitter day in London. His reply was non-committal. All he would say was that it all depended on 'the professor'.

I left Lord Dorrimore to his memories in the Traveller's Club and went to Victoria station en route for St. Frank's.

REVIEW

THE HAUNTED SCHOOL

Edwy Searles Brooks
(Howard Baker: £3.20)

Inevitably very few stories of school life are remembered above everything for their originality. This one, the Ezra Quirke series of nine tales of the Nelson Lee Library of 1925, happens to be one of the few, and plenty of readers regard it as the best of all the many series which the famous author wrote. Whether that claim is justified you can only decide by reading it for yourself, but nobody can deny that it is a rattling fine story, absolutely alive with an atmosphere which is likely to make one reluctant to turn off the light if it is enjoyed late at night.

The new boy, Ezra Quirke, dabbles in the occult, and he soon collects a retinue of followers who believe in his powers. The question the reader asks himself is whether Quirke is or is not a charlatan.

Most school stories are predictable. This one is not. The twist in the tail of the tale is most unexpected.

The production is splendid and one congratulates the publishers on what they have accomplished. Obviously it is a pity that the interior covers are not reproduced in original colours, which gives a slight sense

of unreality. But the size of the book is superb, and the blowing-up of the format to something rather larger than the original has meant an increase in the print size with improved readability for ageing eyes.

To sum up: a tip-top story for anyone who likes to have his or her nerves set a-tingle, and a really class job to fit snugly on the book-shelf.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 121 - Magnets 1133-34 - Blackmailing of Prout Series

Aunt Judy, like Lord Eastwood, was singularly unfortunate in her choice of secretaries. In 1929 she had employed a man called Buzzard who had decamped with several valuable items, and with the benefit of hindsight Coker was certain that he had been suspicious of Buzzard from the very beginning, and he bored Potter and Green to tears about the whole affair. While Coker was fulminating about this, his form-master, Mr. Prout, was anxious about his nephew, Captain Eustace Prout, who had suffered from shell-shock during the war and had recently signed another man's name to a cheque. Mr. Tighe wanted £500 from Mr. Prout for that £60 cheque, to save Mr. Prout from being involved in the scandal that would otherwise follow. It was made quite clear to the reader that Buzzard and Tighe were one and the same person, and there was a pleasant irony in the fact that Coker was searching for the one man his form-master most wished to avoid.

The discerning reader would have noticed that the blackmailing theme had been used a few years earlier in the Gem, when Mr. Selby had been asked £100 for a £10 cheque forged by his nephew. Like Mr. Prout, Mr. Selby was a public school-master, a man of high standing with a well-paid position, quite free from all breath of scandal - in short, the ideal victim for a blackmailer. In addition, Mr. Selby was an irascible, unsympathetic personality, just the sort of master to have an unsavoury nephew, whereas Mr. Prout was a subject for comedy, not tragedy. Yet, oddly enough, the Magnet series was far superior to its Gem counterpart. In the Gem series it was Wally D'Arcy who overheard the incriminating conversation and it was Cardew who scotched the black-

mailer's plans by cunning and brute force. In the Magnet series it was Coker who caught up with Buzzard, searched his pockets, and found the cheque which he kept to hand to Mr. Prout without realising its significance.

The blackmailers themselves were different. Mr. Sneath carried a life preserver, whereas Mr. Tighe was shifty and often on the run, but he had a more plausible line of approach and was even sinister, especially when he explained that he was quite willing to see the Prout scandal break (and lose his money) because it would encourage other victims to pay up more quickly. The Gem series was powerful, but not polished, whereas the Magnet series was detailed, fully drawn, and completely convincing. In addition it had the benefit of the sub-plot which involved Coker and his aunt. The Removites were also-rans, but this could be overlooked in a short series which gave such close attention to a character study of one of Charles Hamilton's most fascinating masters.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 194. RIVALS & CHUMS - of St. Kit's

Charles Hamilton's first very long school story seems to have been "Rivals of St. Kit's." It appeared as a serial in the Marvel of 1906; in book form in the B. F. L. about 1909; and again as a serial in the Empire Library of 1912. Oddly enough, though I have long possessed all three versions of it, I had never read it till last week.

One wonders why, among the mass of oft-reprinted Hamilton material, this one never turned up again after 1912. The most likely reason is that it was overlooked. Or it might have been that the heroes were Talbot, Trimble and Nugent - names which later became very familiar attached to much more famous characters.

It is unfair to appraise a story written for youngsters and read for the first time from the lofty pinnacle of adulthood. I am sure I should have liked it had I read it as a 12-year old. Today, with its predictable missing heir theme, it seems a bit old-fashioned. I don't feel it was a particularly good story, even though it is a definite

collectors' item now.

Talbot, a sixth-former, has been a ward of the Headmaster for years. Talbot and Lacy are rivals for the captaincy, and there are the familiar snobbery sequences. Lacy's elder brother is Squire Lacy, and, predictably but extremely coincidentally, the wicked Squire has stolen the birthright of the true heir, Talbot. Quite incredibly, Talbot has a silver box, which both he and the Head know contains the secret of his birth. So, of course, Squire Lacy tries to steal the silver box. And Talbot, in spite of his sufferings, will not break the amazing promise he made not to open the silver box till he reaches the age of twenty-one.

St. Kit's turned up again in 1917. This time, its famous pupil was Frank Richards himself, though it is probably not intended to be the same place where Talbot gazed longingly at his silver box and wondered what secret it contained. And, when Frank Richards arrived at Cedar Creek and became the schoolboy author, he wrote "Tales of St. Kit's" for Mr. Penrose's newspaper in the Thompson Valley.

Finally, in 1921, St. Kit's came once more on the printer's ink scene. This time it was in a serial "The Nameless Schoolboy" and its sequel, which Hamilton wrote for editor Hinton's renegade paper School & Sport. This was yet another missing heir affair, and this time the hero had the unbelievable name of Harry Nameless. It was a re-hash of "The Boy Without a Name", with many of the familiar characters and sequences out of the stock drawer.

Two years ago I wrote an article entitled "Strange Eventful History" in which I remarked that these two School & Sport tales were reprinted in the S. O. L., while Hamilton wrote two new tales of Harry Wilmot (Harry Nameless was the missing heir of Colonel Wilmot) which were serialised in the Boys' Friend.

From the extract which we publish this month from Danny's famous diary it is evident that the strange, eventful history was even stranger than I suggested in the article of two years ago.

Danny notes, and he is right as he always is in these factual matters, that "The Nameless Schoolboy" from School & Sport, followed by its sequel, was published as a serial in the Boys' Friend, commencing in September 1924. So, in all, four St. Kit's serials about Wilmot & Co. appeared in the Friend; two of them reprints and two of them

previously unpublished.

As I have mentioned before, it is an intriguing question whether the A. P. knew that they were using old stories from Hinton's defunct paper, or whether Hamilton submitted them as new stories. It seems unlikely that, had the powers-that-be of the A. P. known the whole background of the Wilmot tales, they would have bought them for one of their own top papers. Yet the fact remains that though the Harry Nameless serial under its new title of "Chums of St. Kit's" was praised to the skies in the editorial columns for many consecutive weeks, and double space was sometimes given over to instalments, the editor never used the word "new" in connection with these serials.

So the solution is anybody's guess, and the question remains: Did the A. P. know that they were publishing stories which had appeared not much over two years earlier in a minor rival paper?

* * * * *
(To cheer you up in these troublous times, here is a mirth-quaking little tale from the original Sholmes series of 60 years ago.)

THE YELLOW PHIZ!

Herlock Sholmes was examining a series of pawntickets, of which he had a large and interesting collection, when a visitor was shown into our sitting-room at Shaker Street.

He was a young man with a somewhat pale and harassed face. It was evidently some deep-seated trouble which had brought him to consult my amazing friend.

"Mr. Sholmes!" he began eagerly.

"One moment!" said Sholmes. He finished his examination of the tickets. "Jotson, three of these are nearly up. Perhaps you will be good enough to see our friend Mr. Solomons in the morning. Now, sir, I am quite at your service!"

The young man plunged eagerly into his story.

"My name is Green," he said. "I live in the salubrious suburb of Peckham. I am sorely troubled, Mr. Sholmes, by a

mystery that weighs upon my spirits and disturbs my domestic peace. I have recently --"

"Married," said Herlock Sholmes quietly.

Mr. Green started.

"How did you know?" he gasped. Sholmes smiled.

"To a trained eye it is obvious," he replied. "A button is missing from your waistcoat, and your coat-collar requires brushing. It is quite evident that you have no longer the advantage of possessing a careful landlady."

"It is true, Mr. Sholmes. I have married - and when I was united with my dear Sempronia Whilks, I deemed myself the happiest man living! She had every charm that the most sensitive lover could desire or dream of - a comfortable balance at the bank, a large house standing in its

own grounds, two motor-cars, and a relation in the peerage. She was a widow, Mr. Sholmes, the late Alderman Whilks having died suddenly after a dinner at the Mansion House. For three months, sir, I was deliriously happy. But now" - he made a tragic gesture - "now, Mr. Sholmes, my happiness is dashed - perhaps for ever!"

"The bank has failed?" I asked sympathetically.

"No, it is not that."

"The motor-cars have broken down?"

"No, no!"

"The mortgagees have foreclosed on the house?"

"No, no! In all those respects, Sempronia is as charming as ever. But a hidden mystery preys upon my peace of mind."

"Pray give me some details, Mr. Green!" said Sholmes. "You may speak quite freely before my friend Dr. Jotson."

"From the first week at Whilks Hall, Mr. Sholmes, I became aware that Sempronia was concealing something from me. One wing of that imposing mansion was never opened to me. Sempronia kept the key, and sometimes she would disappear into those deserted rooms alone, and remain for hours. After a time I grew curious on the subject. I asked for an explanation. To my surprise, Sempronia burst into tears, and begged me to trust her. Mr. Sholmes, I would have trusted her with my fortune, if I had possessed one; but I was uneasy and alarmed. That closed wing of the house became an obsession in my mind. I could not find it in my heart to force an entrance there against Sempronia's wish, but I prowled round the place occasionally, looking at the windows. On several occasions I heard

cries proceeding from the rooms, yet it was supposed to be untenanted."

"Cries! Of what nature?" asked Sholmes, interested.

"It was somewhat like the crying of infants, Mr. Sholmes. But when I asked Sempronia for an explanation, she trembled and was silent. Mr. Sholmes, I know well that Sempronia loves me. Only this morning she stroked my hair and called me her dusky little Charley. Yet she keeps this weird secret from me. She tells me that if I knew it I should love her no longer. Mr. Sholmes, I can bear it no more. You must help me to penetrate this mystery, for Sempronia's sake and my own."

"I am quite at your service, Mr. Green," said Herlock Sholmes, rising. "We will proceed at once to Whilks Hall. Come, Jotson, unless you have another engagement."

"My dear Sholmes, I had intended to attend the funeral of one of my patients, but I will come with you with pleasure!"

"You have no more details to give me, Mr. Green?"

The young man hesitated.

"I have, Mr. Sholmes, yet it is so extraordinary I almost fear to relate it."

"Pray proceed!"

"In prowling around the ruined wing, a prey to uneasiness and curiosity, I happened to glance at the windows, and I saw" - Mr. Green shuddered - "I saw a face, Mr. Sholmes. It was a terrible-looking face - yellow in colour, and marked with what appeared to be daubs of black and blue paint. A grocer's boy, who was passing on his way to the kitchen door, saw it too, and ejaculated: 'What

a chivvy!" It was indeed an extraordinary and alarming chivvy, Mr. Sholmes! It disappeared at once!"

"Extraordinary!" I exclaimed.

"Since then," said Mr. Green hoarsely, "I have seen it again - and others. In all, I have counted fifteen - every chivvy of them a hideous-looking phiz, as ugly and ferocious in expression as the masks used by the boys on the fifth of November. Mr. Sholmes, I am not dreaming. Extraordinary as it appears, it is the fact!"

Sholmes smiled.

"The improbability of your story, Mr. Green, renders it all the more likely to be correct, in my opinion. My system, as you are perhaps aware, is not that of Scotland Yard. But let us go."

And, in a few minutes more, a motor-bus was bearing us to Peckham.

* * * *

We arrived at Whilks Hall, one of the finest of the great fashionable mansions of Peckham. As we crossed the extensive grounds, Mr. Green pointed out to me the deserted wing. He gripped Sholmes' arm suddenly.

"Look!" he breathed.

At a large window a face suddenly appeared. I could not help a thrill of horror as I saw it. It was a face that, once seen, could never be forgotten - yellow in hue, with strange marks of red and blue and black - a huge misshapen nose, and wide, curling, grinning mouth. As we gazed it was joined by a crowd more, all looking at us as we stood. Then suddenly a blind was drawn, and the yellow phizzes vanished from our sight.

"You saw them?" said Mr. Green

huskily. "What do you say now, Mr. Sholmes?"

Sholmes' look was sombre.

"Let us proceed," he said.

A door opened, and a lady came forth, and Mr. Green ran towards her. It was evidently Mrs. Green, late Whilks. I turned to Sholmes.

"Sholmes, what does this dreadful mystery mean?" I murmured.

He shook his head.

"Jotson, I confess I am puzzled.

Let us go on."

We hurried after Mr. Green.

The beautiful Sempronia was endeavouring to prevent him from entering the door of the deserted wing. She threw herself on her knees.

"It is useless, Sempronia," said the young man. "Let me pass with my friends who have come to investigate this mystery. Otherwise, I leave this house to-day, and return to my humble but happy lodging in Camden Town."

"Then I will tell you all!" sobbed Sempronia. "But do not forsake your little Sempy! Follow me!"

She swept into the house. We followed, amazed. What strange mystery was about to be revealed?

"Bobby! Tommy!" called out the beautiful Sempronia. "Gladys! Mary Ann! Willy! Herbert! Charley! Frank! Fred! Wilhelmina! Francesca! Rupert! Cecelia! Ethel! Johnny!"

There was a rush of feet. The hideous faces we had seen at the window surrounded us. Even Sholmes stood dumb-founded. But in a moment more the secret was revealed. With a sweep of her hand, Sempronia removed the fifteen Guy

Fawkes' masks from the fifteen faces, and fifteen boys and girls of varying ages stood revealed.

"In mercy's name, Sempronia, what means this?" gasped Mr. Green. "Is this place an orphanage?"

Sempronia drew herself up proudly.

"Nothing of the kind, Charles Green! Forgive me! I have always intended to reveal the truth, but always I have put it off, even as one puts off a visit to the dentist's. When you met me, you knew that I was a widow, but you did not know that I had fifteen children. I dared not tell you; I feared that it would diminish your love, that it would outweigh, in the balance, the bank-account, the freehold house, and the motor-cars for which you adored me. Forgive me, Charles, and take them to your heart!"

"Sempronia!"

"In my dread that you would see them, and discover my fatal secret, I disguised them with Guy Fawkes' masks," murmured Mrs. Green, "otherwise, the resemblance would have betrayed the secret; but in these masks there is little or no resemblance to my features!"

"None!" said Mr. Green.

His face had cleared, and he drew Sempronia to his heart.

Sholmes and I slipped away quietly.

We felt that we should be de trop at that tender scene of reconciliation. As we glanced back from the gate, we saw Mr. Green taking the merry fifteen to his heart, as requested by Sempronia; but, owing to their number he was taking them on the instalment system!

* * * *

SALE OR EXCHANGE: 86 Buffalo Bill Library (good condition); 15 Marvels, 1918-1919.
Other items details on application.

18 LON Y GROES, GABALFA, CARDIFF.

Tel: Cardiff 62860

=====

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing same of BOYS' FRIEND - issues between Nos. 1182 and 1256. Good copies essential.

ERIC FAYNE

EXCELSIOR HOUSE, CROOKHAM RD., CROOKHAM, HAMPSHIRE.

=====

WANTED: HERLOCK SHOLMES - any Magnets, Gems, Heralds with Also Strand Magazines, anything Sherlock Holmes or Jack the Ripper comics, 1947-55.

BAKER, SHALMARSH, BEBINGTON, L63 2JZ.

The Postman Called

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

ARTHUR FENNER (London): It is now over twelve years since I first took C. D. , and I still look forward to its arrival every month without fail.

JACK COOK (Newcastle-on-Tyne): Poor old Rookwood is never mentioned in C. D. Instead we have had a spate of articles on the cinemas of yore. We seem to be getting away from O. B. B. collecting. One could almost call it a "Film Digest." I have B. F. 3d. Lib. No. 1 "Jack, Sam, & Pete's Adventures in Africa", No. 2 "Jack, Sam & Pete's Treasure Hunt", and No. 6 "Pete's Boyhood."

CLIFF HOWE (Alberton, Australia): The "Small Cinema" articles are super!

O. W. WADHAM (Wellington, New Zealand): For me, the years between 1909 and the twenties were the best in the Magnet and Gem. Those papers were everywhere then. School friends had lots of both papers for exchange and I had my share of both. Stands to reason they were the best, because they were written by Chas. Hamilton, all of them. They were deadly rivals to Jack, Sam & Pete in the Marvel; they finally ran off that popular trio. No wonder the Penny Popular was started; it cashed in on a popular trend.

Other school story papers had a measure of success, too, and Chas. Hamilton led the field. Bunter was coming into his own, assisted by those two other fat boys who never really lived as he has; but Hamilton created all the boys who are remembered today.

It was good to be a boy in the teen years of this century.

H. MACHIN (Preston): Many thanks for the most interesting paragraphs in C. D. recalling that entrancing film "Good-bye, Mr. Chips," and the lad, Terry Kilburn, who played four generations of the Colley family. Well, there is a remarkable likeness of him on page 5 of Magnet No. 1188, "Who Punched Prout?"

Mrs. MARY CADOGAN (Beckenham): As Mr. Kadish suggests, it is impossible to accept any one Cliff House writer as definitive, and the history of this illustrious establishment abounds with incongruities and

and contradictions. Although I agree that John Wheway in the 1930's did an excellent job with his characterizations (in spite of dropping old favourites like Dolly Jobling, Phyllis Howell and Philippa Derwent) I feel that almost equal credit must be given to the earlier authors, Horace Phillips and L. E. Ransome for giving us Augusta Anstruther Browne, Jemima Carstairs and other great characters. Whatever the limitations of Charles Hamilton's female creations - and there were many - his image of Cliff House may well be the one which outlives all the others. This is because he not only structured the original Cliff House set-up, but kept Marjorie, Clara and Miss Bullivant (his most attractive Cliff House characters) evergreen in the MAGNET for three decades. The MAGNET, in 1974, is far from dead, whilst regrettably THE SCHOOL FRIEND and THE SCHOOLGIRL seem to be remembered by only a handful of ardent Cliff House admirers like Mr. Kadish and myself. Mr. Kadish may be interested to know that I had the good fortune to spend a long and pleasant evening with Mr. Wheway shortly before he died. He gave me a great deal of background on his approach to the Cliff House stories, and confirmed that firebrand Diana Royston Clarke was absolutely his favourite character.

P. A. CILLIERS (South Africa): In your Editor's Chat, in the section "Oddity", you apparently deny the author Walter Edwards the honour of writing his Jack, Sam & Pete yarns. However, to the best of my knowledge, he wrote these yarns for a considerable period for the Boys' Friend Weekly. I read lots of them in my youth, and think they were original, as I have not found any like them in S. Clarke Hook's stories. (I have 39 BFL's of Hook and two of Maxwell's BFL's.)

Maxwell wrote about the japes that Pete played on Amos Gumbriel, the mayor of some town. If you will look at Goalie Pete you will find that it is two distinct yarns strung together in each book, i.e. it was two weeks' stories in one BFL.

H. TRUSCOTT (Deal): Mr. Wormull puts against my statement that there is no evidence that Harry Langdon's business sense was bad two quotations, neither of which constitutes evidence of any kind. Facts are what are needed, and these are in Langdon's favour. First National gave him a contract to make six feature films in two years, with 150,000

dollars production budget for each picture. He produced all six and directed the last three. Sennett claimed that Langdon had spent the whole production allowance for the first film before the first story was written. The question no-one, including Sennett, has ever answered is this: in this case, how did the film ever get made? For made it was - it was called The Strong Man. And the other five? All completed within the time allowed. Is this proof of bad business sense? The best business man could do no more than fulfil a contract.

* * * * *

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 6. TRADE SHOWS, P.D.C., and W. & F.

Tickets for Trade Shows were now flooding in from the renters. In the Kine Weekly, opinions were often expressed that far too many of these tickets were sent out, the ground for complaint being that far too many people were getting free entertainment. It seems unlikely to me that attendances at trade shows really made much difference to the numbers paying at the box offices.

Sometimes I gave tickets away, but I did not attend many trade shows. First National held their trade shows normally in the mornings at the New Gallery Cinema in Regent Street, but I recall going to the trade show of the new Richard Barthelmess film "The Patent Leather Kid", one afternoon at the London Hippodrome.

It was a long film, running for two hours or more, and I am sure that when we played it, we boosted it as a big super production de luxe. I can't remember much about it, except that it was a boxing film. It was made from a well-known American novel, with which the producers, as usual, took liberties. For instance, in the book the Patent Leather Kid was a girl; in the film it was a young man, played by

Richard Barthelmess. Other First National films this term were Milton Sills in "The Valley of the Giants"; Charlie Murray and George Sidney in "Lost at the Front" (Charles Murray, if not George Sidney, was a comedian pinched from Mack Sennett); Jack Mulhall in "The Poor Nut"; Milton Sills and Molly O'Day in "Hard-Boiled Haggerty"; Babe Ruth in a baseball film "Babe Comes Home"; and Ken Maynard in "The Land Beyond the Law".

Cashing in on the success of "Second to None", Gaumont British put out "Carry On", not a sequel, but another naval film, once more with Moore Marriott badly miscast as a Jack Tar. I have already mentioned New Era Films, which released splendid documentaries. From New Era this term we played "A Life on the Ocean Wave" of which I recall nothing, and "The Emden" which was magnificent, a true story of the German ship which wrought havoc among our shipping for a time during the First World War.

I notice that at this time we were playing plenty of films released by "W. & F." What the initials stood for I

cannot remember now, but they seem to have released films from both Britain and America. One we played this term was a big British naval documentary "The Battles of Coronel and Falkland Islands". Others from W. & F. this term were Ivor Novello in "Downhill"; Ellaline Terris and Jameson Thomas in "Blighty"; and a French circus film "The Circus Kid".

Kennington Theatre at this time was running plenty of P. D. C. releases (Producers' Distributing Corporation) and, as a regular patron of the Kennington, of which Vernon Keith was then manager, I was much impressed with them. There was

never a bad P. D. C. film. The first we ran was William Boyd and Jobyna Ralston in "The Night Flyer", followed by Rex, the horse, with Barbara Bedford in "Man's Law".

Our serial this term was Rex Lease in "The Mystery Pilot", and our supporting programmes always included educational subjects, 2-reel comedies, and the News Reel. Among our two-reelers were the "Snookums" comedies (I wonder how many old cinemagoers remember these amusing and popular films) and the "Let George Do It" comedies, both series from Universal.

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

Nine members at Dr. Johnson House, Birmingham, for the July meeting. There was a full programme. Ivan Webster gave a reading from a Coker story featuring that celebrated youth in a hilarious telephone conversation with Dr. Locke. Jack Bellfield followed with a selection of choice passages from 'Battling Bunter' (1928 Holiday Annual).

John Tomlinson spoke about Danny's Diary and there were one-minute talks on such diverse subjects as The Rio Kid, Virgil, and Old Boys' Books Clubs. Tom Porter again provided an anniversary number - Magnet 1015 of 30. 7. 1927 'Smithy's Pal'. The collector's item was the latest Howard Baker volume 'The Shadow over Greyfriars'.

It was the end of term meeting, the club is now on holiday until the last Tuesday in September, and members went home for the 'summer hols' in nostalgia land: Wharton Lodge, Cherry Place, Eastwood House, The Three Fishers, Gosling's Lodge, Justice Island, Eastcliffe House, Mauleverer Towers and Bunter Villa.

LONDON

Widely acclaimed as one of the finest series written by Edwy Searles Brooks, the Ezra Quirke stories appear under the collective title of "The Haunted School" in the latest of the Howard Baker facsimile reprints. This volume was brought to the meeting at Kensal Rise by Josie Packman and proudly displayed.

By a coincidence, Bob Blythe gave an extract from a newsletter of September 1962, which dealt with this very fine series, and he followed this with an excellent treatise on two of the best characters of the Nelson Lee saga: Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi. Bob illustrated his talk with points taken from individual copies of the Lee.

Great pleasure was had by all from Brian Doyle's recording of the Brookfield School song, from the sound track of the film "Good-bye Mr. Chips." Ray Hopkins entertained by reading chapters from Magnet No. 305 (circa 1913). A discussion followed on the forthcoming meeting at Maidstone, and on the visit to the Bunter Restaurant planned for November.

So, with hearty thanks to Laurie, Gladys, and Olive, it was au revoir till we meet again on Sunday, 15th September, at the home of Reuben and Phyllis Godsave at 35 Woodhouse Lane, Leytonstone. Phone 534-1737.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* * * * *

FOR SALE: Schoolgirls' Own Annuals 1920's and 1930's, Bobby Bears Annuals 1932 to 1937 inclusive and 1941 and 1948, William Books and Biggles Books. S.a.e. for list.

STAN JENKS, THE LODGE, NORTHBROOK, NR. FARNHAM, SURREY.

=====

WANTED: Adventure (magazine) 1931 - 32.

WESTWOOD, 9 CHEVIOT CLOSE, CHADDERTON, OLDHAM, OL9 8PR.

=====

SHERLOCK HOLMES: Wanted - Herlock Sholmes and anything relating to Sherlock Holmes, Basil Rathbone, Jack the Ripper. Sale - Sherlock Holmes books, models, etc. Free monthly lists.

FATHER HERTZBERG, 48 SHALMARSH, BEBINGTON, L63 2JZ, WIRRAL.

This month's offerings include Mickey Mouse (1940-1941), Boys' Magazine (1929-1932), Swans for 1946-1949, inc. Scramble, Slick Fun, Cute Fun, Kiddy Fun, Hotspur, Rover, Adventure, Wizard, Skipper (1939-1945), bound Gem (first 20 issues, New Series, 1908). Send for comprehensive catalogue of boys papers (1830's to 1950's), and also list of original newspapers, periodicals, etc., for 1642 (Yes, 1642) to 1945.

ED. JONES

43 DUNDONALD ROAD, COLWYN BAY, LL29 7RE, CLWYD. Tel. 0492-31195.

=====

CHARLES HAMILTON MUSEUM: Back numbers of Collectors' Digest required for binding, as follows: Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 69, 71, 72, 79, 321, 331. Also wanted - C.D. Annual No. 1.

30 TONBRIDGE ROAD, MAIDSTONE, KENT.

=====

KID CARTOONIST

There is on the market a weekly comic paper, devoted entirely to picture stories, named WHOOPEE. Every week they offer prizes for some "kid cartoonist" to supply a page of pictures. In the issue dated 27th July, the page is contributed by Paul Wormull, the 14-year old son of our own popular contributor, Len Wormull.

The drawings, and the thought behind the picture story, show considerable talent. We fancy that Len's boy will go far. Hearty congratulations to them both.

* * * * *

THE PLANET

by W. O. G. Lofts

You won't find PLANET listed in any section of my OLD BOYS' BOOK CATALOGUE, nor indeed mentioned in any other Bibliography of boys' papers or comics. I only learned of its existance a short while ago, when apart from only one collector (Denis Gifford) having copies in his collection, its history is also rather a complex affair.

Comic collectors will no doubt remember the SUN and COMET publications by J. B. Allen of Sale, Cheshire. By a curious twist in the law, he was able to obtain a rare quota of rationed newsprint to start these comics during the second-world war. This was by amalgamating

old periodicals, of which he held the exclusive copyright into comic publications. These included a health magazine entitled "Fitness & Sun" - and the local newspapers "Gosport" and "Stretford" Courier's respectively. Such a good job J. B. Allen did with SUN and COMET, and the sales were so successful, that in May 1949, the powerful Amalgamated Press decided to take them over, offering a sum too big to refuse. From that date they were published from the Fleetway House in Farringdon Street in London.

However, two months earlier in March of that year, J. B. Allen had brought out a new juvenile magazine for the slightly younger children entitled PLANET. This was officially a continuation of the newspaper SUN which had started in 1928. One could correctly class this paper as a picture story type. It had comic strips, stories, articles, competitions, clubs, and other items of interest. It was priced 3d. and was the smallest juvenile paper I can remember seeing, measuring 4' x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ '. Its front cover showed a very young boy and girl with pets looking out of a lattice window. The artist, I believe was Bill Holroyd, drawing several comic strips including "The Mayor of Bird-Burg", and "A Story of Puppet Land". The PLANET had a total of 31 pages, main stories being "The Jigsaw Boy", "The Doll in Smugglers Cave" (a mystery tale), "Little Boy Goldie Locks" (whose hair just grew and grew) and "The Talking Tree", in which readers were asked to paint the illustration for a prize.

Articles included "Betty and her dresses" (cut-outs), "Nettie Nimble Fingers" (easily-made dolls furniture) and "Nature Rambles" by Joan Clement Jones. There were also instructions on how to make a Butterfly Kite, and the usual letters from readers. Comic strips included "Mr. Fluffy Tail" (an ancestor to our editor's former cat?) and "When Redskins Rose". Apart from the editorial and a pen-pal club, it had photos of famous film stars of that period on its final page. It was all in all an excellent paper of quality and had material for all tastes and also probably for a wide age group.

The second issue, which came out a month later, was however, almost twice as large, and the price reduced to 2d. - but the catch was that this time it had only eleven pages.

Unfortunately for PLANET readers, it was just about this issue

that J. B. Allen sold his comics SUN and COMET to the A. P. and so I understand there was also a clause in the contract that he would not produce or publish any more comics in opposition to them, and so PLANET ceased publication after only the second issue.

My friend the comic artist, John L. Jukes, who died last year, always had the greatest admiration for J. B. Allen, and thought him one of the cleverest publishers and editors he had ever met. We often discussed the Sale publications, and there were plans for Jukes to produce a new comic entitled CLOWN with some tie-ups with J. B. Allen, but this never materialised.

As with most obscure publications, some mystery still remains. A Cambridge Club member who first drew my attention to a boyhood memory of PLANET, does not think it the same one he remembered in his youth. His memory of it was that it had an orange cover and may have gone as long as six issues. Though so far, I have not discovered any other PLANETS. J. B. Allen is also believed to have produced another single publication, but more of this another time.

* * * * *
NEWS OF THE CLUBS continued from Page 26

NORTHERN

Saturday, 10th August, 1974

A memorable meeting and perhaps rather sad, for this was our last meeting at 239 Hyde Park Road. Mollie reminded us that we had been meeting here for twenty-four years. It was a room forever associated in our minds with the Hobby and the Northern Club.

Our 'Voice from the past' this evening was that of Frank Hancock and was presented by Ron Hodgson.

Frank became a member in 1958 and quickly showed himself to be a valuable asset to the Hobby.

Ron read an excerpt from Frank's article 'Remove Form at Greyfriars - those Forgotten Men' (from C.D. Annual 1960).

Then from Frank's first report as Secretary, on the Christmas party of 1960, when 'seventeen were present for what was a very enjoyable evening'.

Ron closed his anthology by reading Frank's report of the

November 1965 Meeting from C. D. December 1965, which same copy of the C. D. contained the announcement of Frank's death, and finally read from Frank's last article: 'Our Boyhood Heroes - What Future, if Any?'

Then a Quiz by Frank Hancock presented by Ron Hodgson. Top came Ron Rhodes with 23 and tying in second place with 20 were Bill Williamson and Mollie Allison.

We rounded off the evening (and our association of twenty-four years) by standing on the steps whilst Mollie took our photographs.

Next meeting will be held just a few yards further along the road at 137 Hyde Park Road.

* * * * *
URGENTLY WANTED:-- Magnets 1926-1932. Top prices paid. Also Boys' Friend Libraries featuring Rio Kid and King of The Islands. Some exchanges possible. All letters answered.

KEN HUMPHREYS

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'Phone HUCKNALL 2566

* * * * *

IN DEFENCE OF SUPERINTENDENT VENNER

by Geoffrey Wilde

Recently in C. D. Josie Packman published an article in which she expressed her detestation of Superintendent Claude Venner, the immaculately-groomed Scotland Yard 'ace' created by Anthony Parsons. It was a firm statement of the prosecution case, and as one of Parsons' greatest admirers I now want to come forward for the defence.

Most of Josie's strictures were levelled at Venner personally. That is to say, she took a fictional character as portrayed by his creator and pointed out how thoroughly dislikeable he was - which really means how dislikeable he would be if one had to deal with him in real life. This is a type of criticism we commonly encounter, but it's really neither fair nor entirely reasonable. Literature is rich in characters wholly delightful on the printed page who would be intolerable in actuality; but then actuality is not their province. Bunter is enormously entertaining to read about; he would be quite insufferable to know. And what of all those colourful villains who so enlivened the saga of Sexton Blake? Plummer, Reece, Wu Ling and the rest are frankly vicious and unmitigated monsters. But what marvellous stories they inspired! We are surely most ungrateful to complain of the personality defects, measured in real-life terms, of characters whose very imperfections have given us such pleasure in the world they properly inhabit.

But even at this level of criticism I feel Mrs. Packman's view of Venner reveals less than the whole man. Vanity, indeed, was Venner's besetting sin, but no less than Detective-Inspector Coutts the 'Super' possessed the virtue of physical courage, a courage which Blake and Tinker more than once had cause to be thankful for. Moreover, though volatile and some-

what inclined to reason ahead of his data, he was no fool. His flair for publicity was only part of a superb organising ability, repeatedly stressed by his creator, which perfectly complemented the inspired solo-work of Sexton Blake. Now this is a most important aspect of Venner, and it brings me to a second point: the remarkable skill with which the character in all his imperfection is portrayed. For here is a piece of portraiture which is not simply an end, however satisfying in itself, but one which contributes most cleverly to the variety, force and conviction of Parsons' narratives, and one whose ultimate effect - admirers of Sexton Blake please note - is to underline the supremacy of the Baker Street wizard.

In my view it was an entirely natural development within the Blake saga when individual writers began to create not only super-villains but their own subsidiary heroes. Nevertheless, characters like Splash Page and Granite Grant, while popular with the readers, posed considerable problems of balance for the author. If they merely duplicated Blake they were tedious and unnecessary; if not, they might end up stealing the show. For the writer sufficiently assured in his craft, however, these were risks eminently worth the running. And just as the stories gained in interest and variety, so the Blake who stood out among a band of adventurous and colourful companions emerged the more triumphantly confirmed as super-hero.

Now every crime writer faces a similar problem in his portrayal of the police. And policemen there have to be. Though the pre-eminence of the private criminologist is endorsed by long tradition, no-one in his senses imagines that credible fiction can be written which dispenses altogether with the official force. Somehow these unromantic adjuncts of authority have to be worked into the story alongside the charismatic hero. The Blake authors, like most of their 'respectable' hardback confreres, generally settled for a worthy, but rather slow-witted plodder ripe for kindly instruction by the brilliant private practitioner. In practice, unfortunately, the contrast proves ineffective. There's nothing brilliant in out-thinking a nitwit, so the detective gains nothing; meanwhile the nitwit remains to bore us to distraction. The true master-detective, of course, is the one who can find answers where even good brains are baffled.

Here again the writer who would succeed must boldly steer the most difficult course. Only Parsons in my experience could write logically secure stories of sufficient depth, complexity and ingenuity to give the police and Tinker a thoroughly competent share in the solution of the mystery and still leave scope for Sexton Blake to display his exceptional powers. In many of his cases Blake is only brought in after some quite excellent police work has led to a frustrating series of dead-ends. His intervention is the more striking, therefore, since he finds fresh resources in a situation where men of considerable ability have failed. What matter if Venner tries to hog the credit? It makes him the more memorable and entertaining, and detracts not the least bit from Blake.

By creating policemen - for we must not forget Venner's canny assistant, Detective-Sergeant Belford - who were efficient, capable professionals, and by having the courage, moreover, to make them well-defined personalities in their own right, Parsons gave us one of the most impressive and fully-characterised of all Blakes. He also happened to write some of the greatest Sexton Blake stories of all time.

As for dear old George Coutts, I confess to finding him, alas, pretty much of a bore. A sterling fellow, of course; but if I were Sexton Blake I'd rather work with the infuriating Venner.

Edited by Eric Fayne, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Rd., Crookham, Nr. Aldershot, Hants.

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