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Founded in 1946 by
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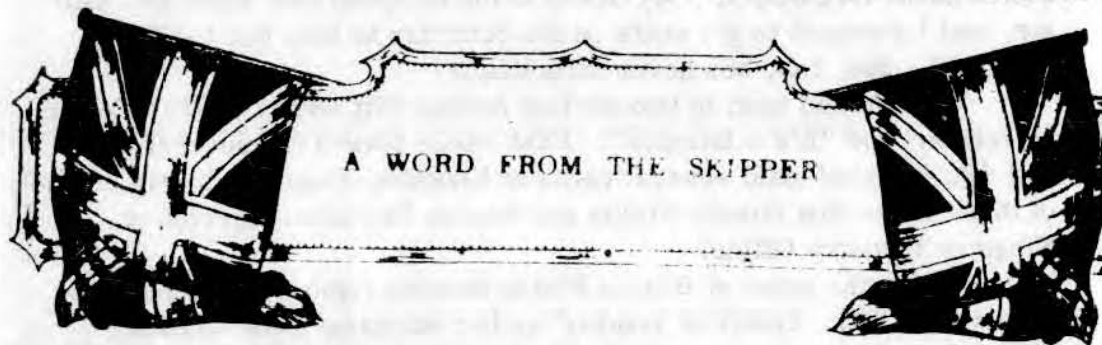
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GRACIE FIELDS

"Gracie Fields is at the Empire next week", said Mrs. Andrews. She was the parent of one of my first pupils in Surbiton.

"Who's Gracie Fields?" I enquired.

"She's wonderful!" replied the parent. "Be sure to go and see her." I recall that I had just returned to Mrs. Andrews her gramophone which had been borrowed for a school dance.

So, the following week, I went to see Gracie Fields for the first time, at the lovely Kingston Empire (front seat in the Dress Circle, two bob - programme tuppence). The show was a revue "By Request". It

was presented by Archie Pitt, who was one of the Aza brothers (big names in touring music hall shows in those days). Bert and Pat Aza ran a theatrical agency. Archie changed his name to Pitt and became a producer.

Archie Pitt himself was not in "By Request", but Tommy Fields and Edith Fields were. Tommy was lanky, youthful, and very funny. I always considered that he came nearest to Gracie for natural talent. Edith, a younger sister, was an attractive little lady, but lacking the talents of Gracie and Tommy. She married Duggie Wakefield, and, many years later, it was a fine Duggie Wakefield revue which played to packed houses in the last week of the Empire.

Gracie was superb in "By Request" - a splendid revue even apart from her. In revue she always had a solo spot, just before the final scene. On this occasion she sang "You Forgot to Remember", and I have never forgotten it. My sister came to spend that week-end with me, and I managed to get seats on the Saturday to take her to "By Request". She, too, has never forgotten it.

Gracie had been in two earlier Archie Pitt shows - "Mr. Tower of London" and "It's a Bargain". Each revue toured for several years, and "By Request" paid several visits to Kingston Empire. It was on one of these visits that Gracie Fields and Archie Pitt were married at Kingston Registry Office.

After the name of Gracie Fields became famous and reporters referred to "Mr. Tower of London" as her stepping-stone to fame, "Mr. Tower" was re-presented with the other sister, Betty Fields, in the original Gracie Fields part.

All the Pitt shows were rehearsed and produced at the Alexandra Palace Theatre, and it was there that I saw "The Show's The Thing", destined for the West End, and, as it turned out, probably her last revue. It was magnificent. Gracie was the big star, but there was a strong supporting cast. I forget many of them, but Tommy and Edith Fields were there, and so was Edward Chapman and Archie Pitt himself, no mean performer in character sketches, also took part.

The revue had a long run at the Winter Gardens Theatre and a long run at the Victoria Palace, but I forget which theatre was played first.

It is a wonderful thing when a great star reaches a very ripe old age, but there is one drawback. Most people who knew them at their greatest have long passed on. The people who write tributes in newspapers and magazines, or talk about them on television are not old enough to have personal memories. They write or speak with tongue in cheek as it were. That was the case with Mary Pickford, who died recently at an advanced age. So it was with Chaplin. So, one might even add, it was with Charles Hamilton. He was writing till the end, but those who only knew his post-war work knew but little.

And so it was with Gracie Fields. To appreciate her remarkable versatility, you have to have seen her in revue. She had a beautiful voice, which needed no mike. You could hear her clearly all over a large theatre. She was a good dancer, and was the most graceful and highest "kicker" I ever saw. She had a keen sense of comedy, which was at its best in revue when she sang such deliciously gentle fun-songs as "The Co-op Shop", "The Little Pudding-basin which belonged to Auntie Flo", and "Granny's Little Skin-rug". (When she passed to strident items like the Biggest Aspidistera and "Walter", the comedy became forced and she risked her superb voice, later on.)

In all her revues there was a dramatic sketch written round her, and she played the part to perfection, and the comedy sketches were innumerable and priceless. To have seen Gracie Fields at her very greatest you must have seen her in the twenties - and that means going back a long, long way.

I have mentioned before that our school had a close association with Gracie Fields, as, when she was working in London in the middle thirties, she always stayed with one of our school parents at their home in Hinchley Wood. On one occasion, when she was filming in Ireland, Gracie flew back specially to attend one of our school's musical comedies. To avoid taking audience attention away from the young players on the stage, she slipped into her seat just before the curtain rose after the auditorium lights were lowered. The sort of kindly thought which was typical of Gracie. (She and Archie lent us scenery.)

In a way it was remarkable that Gracie Fields held the love of the British public right up till the time of her death, for she had not lived in England for the last forty years. It is proof of that rare magic

which she possessed and which endeared her to those whom she met.

OUR OLD SONG ITEM

Dozens of readers have written to say how much they enjoyed our little contest on old song titles. Actually it was prepared a year ago, intended for the C.D. Christmas Number of last year, but it got squeezed out by pressure on space. It was only by chance that I used it recently, but it set readers tapping their feet. "It was both fascinating and frustrating", wrote Mr. S. R. Dalton of Leeds, and that seemed to be the general view.

Lots of readers have asked for a second helping, and some time in the coming months we will see what we can do to meet that request. Just part of the gentle nostalgia which makes C.D. what it is.

THE ANNUAL

Work is going on apace with the finishing stages of this year's C.D. Annual. I hope and believe that this year's edition, the thirty-third, will be every bit as popular as the 32 which have gone before. All our most popular contributors will be found between its pages, following the superb cover by our incomparable Henry Webb. Whatever your tastes, there is something for everybody in the 1979 C.D. Annual.

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S COLUMN

I'm not much of a one for a drink. I never touch water, and usually dodge milk, yet, unless a cat drinks plenty, it is likely to get kidney trouble. It is no use putting a saucer of milk down for me. I won't even look at it. I will, however, deign to drink a big saucerful but only when they wake me out of a profound sleep and stick it under my nose.

THEN I drink it, providing it is full-cream evaporated, with just a tiny drop of water, and all slightly heated. So they know what to do if they want me to drink.

I like sleeping on their discarded clothes. If the missus puts a skirt on a chair or the boss slings a sweater on his bed, I just curl up on them and go to sleep. Just lately the boss threw his anorak over the banisters upstairs, in his slovely style. It fell down near the banisters.

I have been sleeping on the anorak ever since. They haven't the heart to pick it up and disturb me. Untidy things, aren't they?

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

Danny's Diary

NOVEMBER 1929

Freeman Wills Crofts, the famous writer of detective stories, reaches his 50th birthday this month. He has earned his living till now as a railway engineer and has written his stories in his spare time. To celebrate his birthday he is retiring from engineering, and giving all his time to writing. He has bought a house out in the quiet country near Guildford. His detective is Inspector French, and though his work is a bit too lofty for me as yet, Doug says that his story "The Cask" is one of the finest detective novels ever written.

A truly lovely couple of connected tales to start off the Magnet this month. They are "Blackmail!" and "Fool's Luck". Mr. Prout is being blackmailed by a villain named Mr. Tighe. Prout's nephew, Eustace, has broken the law - and the blackmailer sees his chance to victimise Mr. Prout. But Coker happens to see Mr. Tighe and recognises him as a villain who stole money from his Aunt - and, in fact, Mr. Tighe has a number of other aliases. And Mr. Tighe-Buzzard-Sharp-Brown is brought to justice at last. There are some gloriously funny incidents, as when Mr. Prout, unthinkingly, tosses his cigar-end away into a box of fireworks.

The next story was "Coward's Courage" and it starred Snoop. Mr. Huggins, who pays Snoop's fees at Greyfriars, is not pleased with his nephew, and decides that there is nothing to say in Snoop's favour, and that he must leave Greyfriars. But actually Snoop has done one out-of-character brave action - and, unexpectedly, he gets another chance.

The month wound up with a couple of first-rate single tales. In "Six in the Soup", Monsieur Charpentier gets swamped with purple ink in the dark. The "six" are the Famous Five and Peter Todd. Tons of

chortles in this one. Finally, another rib-tickler "Bunter, the Bandit". Do the films influence boys? According to this story, they do, with a vengeance. Billy goes to the pictures to see an American crook film - and comes out a different Bunter. Great fun.

The weather has been very bad, on and off, all through the month. There were very severe gales in the second week, and in the third week the rainfall was very heavy and there was much flooding, especially in South Wales.

Good mystery tales in the Nelson Lee this month. "The Living Guy" is a November the Fifth tale. A sinister, yellow-faced figure is seen skulking in the nearby district. Wellbourne & Co. of the River House come into the limelight. Next week brought "By Order of the Tong". The unknown menace strikes again, this time against Lee and Nipper. An attempt is made on the life of Nelson Lee.

Then the series continued with "Fu Chang the Terrible", and we find Nelson Lee and Nipper in the torture-chamber. This is a very thrilling tale, in which Nipper has to hold a huge boulder over the head of Lee - and if Nipper lets go ---

In "The Peril of the Yellow Men", the ruthlessness of the Fu Chang Tong knows no limits, and it looked as though we were in for one of the old sort of long series. But the St. Frank's heroes won through, rescued Lee and Nipper, and the Tong was routed.

Finally, the start of another new series, leading up to Christmas, I expect. It is "Handforth's Girl Chum" in which Eileen Dare comes to stay at St. Frank's. She has acted as Lee's assistant on some previous occasions. And she has a niece, Molly Dare, it seems. And when Willy Handforth learns that Molly is in danger, he takes a hand. At the end, the girls are invited to go to Travis Dene, the home of the Handforths, for Christmas.

An excellent old Greyfriars tale "The Impossible Four", in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. The Four are the two Todds, Dutton, and Bunter, who all occupy Study No. 7 in the Remove passage. I did not have the second S.O.L. this month - a Rookwood tale and a feeble one not by the real Owen Conquest. It ran not so long ago as a serial in the Gem.

At the pictures this month we have seen Ronald Colman in "The

Rescue"; Hayford Hobbs in "The Third Eye" (this is the first motion picture to introduce the new invention of television, which reminds me that a few weeks back there was a story in the Gem where Glyn caught some rascals by his invention of television); Hoot Gibson in "The Winged Horseman". Then a talkie, George Bancroft in "The Wolf of Wall Street"; then a magnificent film "The Trail of 98" with Dolores del Rio and Ralph Forbes; then another talkie, a lovely one which makes it obvious that talkies are here to stay - "The Broadway Melody" starring Bessie Love, Charles King and Anita Paige, with lovely tunes like "Broadway Melody", "Wedding of the Painted Doll", and "You were meant for me".

And, while on the subject of films, the Alhambra in Leicester Square has been turned into a picture house, which seems a bit of a shame.

I wish I could like the Gem stories more, but they have been pretty feeble this month. "The Haunted Study" was Mr. Railton's study where a burglar had hidden the loot in the ceiling, the loot coming from a robbery at Colonel Bland's house. Then "The Fifth at St. Jim's", a story of rivalry with the Grammar School. Then "The Tyrant" and "No Surrender", a couple with a far-fetched plot and a lot of it. Mr. Lathom got the push and his place was taken by Captain Ratcliff, a relative of the Mr. Ratcliff. He wasn't a captain or a real schoolmaster, but he was a forger of some sort, and he caused a barring-out before he vanished before the police came for him.

Last of the month is "The Jester of St. Jim's" who is George Alfred Grundy, the big I AM of the stories.

The world's finest airship, the R.101 has done a trial flight with 82 people on board, the largest number ever to fly in one airship.

Throughout the month in the Popular the Rio Kid has carried on as the owner of the Lazy 'O' ranch. In "The Arm of the Law" the Texas Rangers, led by Mule-Kick Hall, arrive on a visit. The Kid manages to dodge coming face to face with Hall, but Barney Baker tells Hall about the new rancher, and his description brings a faraway look into the Ranger's face. Next, "Rancher or Outlaw", in which Barney Baker suddenly tumbles to it that the new boss of the Lazy 'O' is really the outlaw, the Rio Kid. Next "The Luck of the Rio Kid". Next "Barney

Baker's Last Trail" in which Baker, hating the Kid, contrives to bring about his downfall, while the White Pine outfit rides to take over the Lazy 'O'. But Baker is dropped by a bullet from Long Bill's gun, and his fight to take over the Kid's ranch is finished. The last tale of this magnificent western series is "Driven Off His Ranch". The bunch of the Lazy 'O' are ready to fight for their young boss - Mister Fairfax - but the Kid won't let them get on the wrong side of the law. He slips away, sees a lawyer, and transfer the ranch to the bunch as their own. Then the Kid rides off into the sunset.

The St. Jim's tales in the Popular are so good - the series has just ended in which Levison was expelled over the theft of a banknote - that it is impossible not to compare them with the new stuff now appearing in the Gem.

In 18 months' time the school-leaving age is to go up to 15. Some boys, who would like to leave at 14, grumble about it, but Mum says it's a good thing.

I had a Sexton Blake Library this month - "The Motor Show Mystery" in which a man is murdered at Olympia, and his body is found in one of the demonstration cars. A good puzzler, this one.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 111, "The Impossible Four" comprised a red Magnet tale of the Spring of 1913, with the same title, plus a number of chapters from one of three months' later, entitled "The Sports of the School" of similar theme and featuring the rare quartet of Study No. 7. Good fun, if you don't find Dutton's deafness a trifle wearisome. S.O.L. No. 112 was "For the Honour of Rookwood". A curious choice the latter, as not only was it a story by a substitute writer but it had been serialised in the Gem only the previous year.)

* * * * *
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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Herewith is the fourth part of the Dr. Huxton Rymer story. I do hope you are all enjoying it especially if you do not possess a copy of the C.D. Annual in which it first appeared. An article on Zenith the Albino appears this month. One of my favourite characters after those of the real masters - Teed, etc., but I am always pleased to have something about any of Blake's adversaries, they are all good.

THE DR. HUXTON RYMER STORY

by Josie Packman

Part 4

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 1913. This was predated by the first two stories of Rymer in the Union Jack. Now this was by no means the case in our second section. Several of the tales appeared to have been written by the author 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 had occurred.

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 is 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 S.B.L. 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 then 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 two 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 outwitting 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 case in particular 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 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 around from one country to another, pursued by both the police and 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 quiet country life of an eminent Professor. But alas, the urge to be once more 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 seclusion, but it was not long before Mary found out that her employer was the notorious criminal Dr. 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.

To be continued

AT THE VERY TOP

by J. E. M.

No Blakian character was better named than Zenith. He touched the heights in every way. Top of the popularity poll for many readers, he outshone all Sexton Blake's other foes in courage, chivalry and uniqueness of personality. Who can forget his brilliant melancholy, his famous sad, glittering smile? To say nothing of that curious affliction of albinism, in itself more than enough to attract our attention.

Should we still be unimpressed, however, we could hardly ignore the man's sartorial whims. Even that very socially superior criminal, King Karl of the Double Four, did not wear evening dress at all times of the day. But Zenith did. It became difficult, in fact, to imagine the Albino in bed or bath without his white tie and tails. Full rig for outdoors naturally included topper, silk-lined opera cloak and swordstick, all handed to him by a Japanese servant. It's a fair bet that nowhere else in fiction can be found an albino outlaw of possibly aristocratic Rumanian descent with a faithful oriental lackey. With such trappings and background, what else was needed to dazzle us? Monsieur Zenith was surely Blake's most spectacular adversary. But strangely all this

was not enough for his creator.

From time to time science fiction raised its fanciful head in the pages of the Union Jack, Sexton Blake Library and Detective Weekly, and one of its most enthusiastic promoters was Anthony Skene. Not content with creating a character who would have been easily spotted in a crowded Wembley Stadium, Skene provided him with even more eye-catching - and mind-boggling - enterprises to match. We shall not easily forget Zenith's excursions into rainmaking (U.J. 1505) and the manufacture of gold (U.J. 1510), or that famous gadget for immobilising all electrical functions while Zenith himself went about his criminal business in a steam car (D.W. 26).

Even when the more outrageous ambitions of science were absent, Zenith was not the sort to rely upon the humbler tools of the criminal's trade. In one story (U.J. 1420), armoured tanks were used to attack Whitehall and, if I remember correctly, the same tale reaches its climax with the bombardment of a naval target ship on the high seas. Everything about Zenith, in fact, seemed to be at white heat. Perhaps that deathly white face and those glittering crimson eyes were symbolic.

Was it all a bit too much, a case (in the Bard's words) of gilding refined gold, painting the lily and adding another hue to the rainbow? Skene's chronicles of the Albino were certainly very much larger than life - a long way from the comparative realism of G. H. Teed or Donald Stuart, or the more homely fancies of Gwyn Evans. But Zenith remains unforgettable and, curiously, in spite of everything, he can still carry conviction. Perhaps this is because, as Skene himself once told a correspondent, Zenith the Albino was inspired in part by a living person. One would like to have met him.

* * * * *

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Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

Claude Gore-Pearce, of Study B, Ancient House at St. Frank's, stirred restlessly in his bed as the school clock boomed out midnight.

Gore-Pearce had had a day he wasn't likely to forget. A sequence of events had occurred to conspire against him and he was accused of many incidents for which he was innocent.

It was all Forrest's fault. It was Forrest who had usurped Claude's leadership of Study A. It was Forrest who had sneaked to Mr. Crowell ... it was Forrest who had ... Suddenly something seemed to snap in Gore-Pearce's overwrought mind! He flung the bed-clothes aside, dressed hurriedly and descended the stairs to his study.

His thoughts in a whirl of conflict he opened the study window and dropped down into the Triangle. In a few moments he had scaled the wall and was out in the lane and making his way in the direction of the Moor View School for Young Ladies.

The night was black and very still. A dog barked in the distance ... a night bird twittered nearby.

Arrived at the Moor View School Gore-Pearce paused and looked about him. He began to think a little more clearly. A vision of a schoolgirl rose up in his mind. Maudie Royce.

He recalled how he had met Maudie in Bellton the day before ... or was it today? They had waited in the little village post-office to be served and exchanged a few words in the meantime. The outcome of this was that they arranged to meet again. But Maudie Royce was a friend of Joan Tarrant and, like Joan, had very little time for the boys of St. Frank's, and juniors like Gore-Pearce were easily japed and fooled into thinking they were of interest to the girls. So a very disillusioned Gore-Pearce returned to St. Frank's that evening from a date Maudie Royce knew she wouldn't keep.

This, plus the events of the day, had boiled up in Claude's brain and had made him troubled and anxious. He had been inattentive in class and Mr. Crowell had exhausted his patience with him until he had

threatened Gore-Pearce with a visit to the Head for a flogging.

He fancied he heard a piano playing somewhere in the school. Thought he recognised it as a piece from Rachmaninov . . . one of those Preludes . . . those fast, noisy and sometimes hateful C Sharp minor gallops that Claude was compelled by his mother to learn during holidays because she wanted her son to understand Classical music, play it well, and perhaps gain entry into some of the best families of Society.

The Gore-Pearces were war-time profiteers and had made money by that nefarious method. Sending Claude to St. Frank's was, in their eyes, the right thing to do as befitting the rich.

Gore-Pearce silently approaching the entrance to the school became very excited again and was determined to see Maudie and reason with her.

The music had now stopped, and a deathly silence hung over the building. Then suddenly Maudie Royce appeared framed in the doorway. The light in the background brightened as Claude rushed in and embraced the girl, madly and emotionally.

The following morning, Gore-Pearce had a high temperature. Hubbard and Long, his study mates, were alarmed at his ghastly appearance and before lessons had begun Dr. Brett had been called and Claude was placed in the sanatorium until further examination could be made.

But Gore-Pearce was out again in a day. Dr. Brett could find nothing really wrong and the leader of Study B resumed his place in the Remove. But the experience of the day in the sanny deepened Claude's resolve to get back as leader of Study A and oust Forrest. He realised his nightmare was the accumulation of thoughts of his inability to share friendship with the Moor View girls simply because he was a nobody; a deposed leader, that had first started with the reformation of Fullwood and then the coming of Bernard Forrest. These two juniors were the cause of Gore-Pearce's fading popularity . . . a popularity that had once shone brightly with a certain section of the juniors and seniors.

THE GLORIOUS FIFTH AT ST. FRANK'S

by J. H. Mearns

What a pleasure it is to open a volume of the Nelson Lee Library 1931, new series (Nos. 94-111)! The enjoyment lies not only in the ordered format of the production itself, although Kenneth Brookes'

illustrations are never less than vivid and arresting, but in the quality of the writing and the sheer narrative drive of the stories. The situations, the episodes are carefully worked out and throughout the greater part of the entire sequence of eighteen stories the focus of interest is St. Frank's; the School and the neighbouring environs.

The sequence begins with "Handforth the Guy!" Fireworks, fun and thrills on the 'fifth' at St. Frank's (the title caption tells us) in a lively Guy Fawkes yarn that goes with a bang. It certainly does.

A number of firework explosions occur in the Remove Form Room during class. It is later discovered these result from ingeniously conceived booby-traps, but although the method is revealed the source remains a mystery.

Further explosions occur in the studies belonging to Nipper & Co., Vivian Travers, Archie Glenthorne and Bernard Forrest. Again, each and every outbreak bears the stamp of originality and cunning; but, again, the Remove are baffled as to who is responsible.

Unfounded suspicion falls upon Lionel Conovan and his Fourth Form henchmen as well as Willy Handforth. Kirby Keeble Parkington has long since departed St. Frank's for Carlton College. William Napoleon Browne, who appears briefly and amusingly in the story, is also exonerated. So, when Nipper enters the telephone box in the Common Room to telephone Hal Brewster of the River House School, a further explosion of fireworks confirms the Removites in their belief that they have solved the mystery and found the culprits.

But they haven't.

And it takes two or three diverting chapters more and a stand-up fight on the tow-path by the River Stowe between Saints and River House juniors, not to mention a mysterious, isolated shower of rain falling only upon St. Frank's fellows in the vicinity of the bonfire, before the true identity of the culprits is discovered.

There is, perhaps, a tendency to dismiss Fifth of November tales as trivial and certainly this story is a light-weight in comparison with what was still to come. It is, at the same time, a light-hearted school story with a bit of a mystery at its centre, as well as a bit more wit and fibre in the writing than E.S.B. had been putting into earlier stories when attempting to write in similar light view.

The finest two years of the post-war Gem are often said to be mid 1921 to mid 1923. I put this to Charles Hamilton when I interviewed him all those years ago, and he said that dates meant nothing to him. I then mentioned some of the series that were published at that time, and he said "Yes, yes, yes," in a pleasant reminiscing manner when I enumerated them one by one as best I could from memory. It may be that those hundred odd Gems are not among everyone's favourites, but there is no doubt that the year 1924 could not stand comparison with that famous sequence.

"Japers of St. Jim's" was a reprint of four consecutive Gems from that particular year (Nos. 844-7). The post-war St. Jim's stories never really recovered from the enforced shortening caused by the war-time paper shortage, and four Gem stories fitted nicely into the format of one of the larger Schoolboys' Owns. The first two stories were about Trimble, who seemed to receive particular attention in single stories. The initial tale revolved around Mr. Lathom's gold tie pin and Trimble's fixed idea that findings were keepings. The following story also involved Trimble and a gold article. Racke had an old-fashioned wallet with room for currency notes and six sovereigns (then stated to be worth thirty shillings). One sovereign fell out, and Trimble retained it in hopes of a reward. Glyn meanwhile was working on an invention to transmute base metals into gold, and the perspicacious reader could see the inevitable outcome.

The second half of the volume was filled by a series of two Gems concerning a feud with Mr. Ratcliff. It was first taken up by Grundy, who was also featured a good deal at this time, but he seized Mr. Railton by mistake in the dark, and a flogging was his reward. Glyn had a partial success but was also discovered, as were Blake and Co., and it was of course left to the Terrible Three to organise a successful vengeance, when Mr. Ratcliff was lured to Pepper's barn and thrashed in the dark.

The four stories constituted an agreeable quartet, but some objections might be raised at the way certain characters like Trimble

and Glyn were overplayed when more interesting characters like Cardew had only a few words to say and an old stager like Skimpole was almost out of mind for years at a time. Again, unpleasant though Horace Ratcliff undoubtedly was, there is something distasteful in the thought that the juniors were flogging a man old enough to be their father. A more satisfactory ending would have been a spectacular public humiliation - hurt feelings rather than a hurt body - but maybe these criticisms are too carping and too censorious.

What I have always felt certain of is that the year 1924 marked the beginning of Charles Hamilton's gradual loss of interest in the Gem. It is not that the standard of writing declined but that he wrote fewer stories, and the situation was to become more and more marked as the 'twenties sped by. We must be grateful for what we possess, and "Japers of St. Jim's" was not altogether an insignificant offering.

* * * * *

THE FRUSTRATIONS OF AN AUTHOR

by H. Truscott

The ills an author is likely to encounter include, apart from his own gift for mistyping, the tendency of the compositor, or type-setter, to spoil his (the author's) finest thoughts, so that, with the wrong word at the crucial place, or the right word in the wrong place, the frustrated writer can only bewail the fact that a gem of literature has been for ever spoiled for a public waiting with bated breath for its next allowance of greatness. That is what it feels like to the author, of course; not what it is really like, as a rule. It can be infuriating, nonetheless; it can also be very deflating, and perhaps "misprints" occur for the good of the author's soul.

It would be surprising if, in the course of a long-running paper like the Magnet, there were not many of these gaffes, and there were, in fact, a great many. They were of two basic types: a) the omitted word, or the line or two placed in the wrong position, or the repeated line, or even the omitted line which never appeared at all; and b) the wrong word, or the misspelling, which ruined Hamilton's point. There were many of the latter. I have sometimes thought it would be worth someone's while to compile a list of such things and issue it. The number involved and the devastation caused to many of Hamilton's finest

ideas could be surprising to many aficionados.

Obviously, I cannot give a lot of examples in a short article; I have chosen three. The first is from the Loder Captaincy series. Wingate has resigned the captaincy and Loder is putting up in a new election. But to the surprise of all Loder heads a petition to Wingate to withdraw his resignation. The bully of the Sixth is clever; everybody thinks what a fine fellow he is, after all, while he knows that Wingate cannot withdraw his resignation without reporting his minor to the Head. It was his decision not to do this which caused his resignation in the first place. In "The Whip Hand", Magnet 927, Wingate is thinking things over. Hamilton writes: "He (Loder) had taken part in a general movement of the Greyfriars fellows to get Wingate to withdraw his resignation, on the eve of the captain's election; he would not have done that, had he known that withdrawal was impossible". For a long time I hesitated about this one; these are Wingate's thoughts that Hamilton is giving here, and it could mean that it had not occurred to Wingate that Loder was quite such a rotter as to initiate the petition, knowing that Wingate could not respond to it. But the paragraph ends (still Wingate's thoughts): "He (Loder) had done it to conciliate Wingate's numerous friends; to gain their confidence and their votes in the election, knowing that Wingate could not accede to the demand that he should resume his old position". This, I think, makes it quite clear; and in the first quotation there is a necessary word missing. The last few words should read: "He would not have done that, had he not known that withdrawal was impossible".

The next is from the Bunter the Billionaire series. In Magnet 1384, "A Snob in Clover", Bunter's new car stands before the School House steps, the Chunkley's chauffeur rigidly at attention. Hamilton makes play here with Bunter's pleasant little habit of not remembering the names of "dashed menials". He asks the chauffeur his name and is told "Parkinson". In his reply Bunter says "I hope you're a good driver, Parkinson". This is what is printed in the Magnet. Hamilton comments: "Neither did he (Parkinson) seem to notice that Bunter called him Watkinson, after he had just stated that his name was Parkinson". But according to the Magnet (and, presumably, the compositor) Bunter had not called the chauffeur Watkinson, which rather spoils Hamilton's little

character sketch of Bunter at this point.

The last example comes from the Egypt series, and is the most devastating of the three. In Magnet 1278, "Southward Bound!" Bunter has a problem in that his perfect French is not understood by a French Customs Officer. When asked if he has anything to declare, he answers "Rong!" evidently meaning "Rien!" Naturally, the Frenchman does not understand him and, in his turn Wharton corrects Bunter's French. This is where the compositor steps in. I quote from Magnet 1278: "Vous avez quelque-chose a declarer?" "Rein?" answered Harry Wharton; and the man understood this as French." Yes, I am sure he did; it is French. It is also German, but in neither language does it mean "nothing", which it is supposed to. In French it means "kidney" or "one's back", in German it means "clean, pure, fair", or as an adverb "quite, absolutely"; it also means "nett", as in "nett weight". But none of these has anything to do with "Rien", or "nothing", which Wharton intended to say and was prevented, presumably by the compositor. A particularly unfortunate place for such a mistake. Incidentally, why the question-mark after "Rein"?

Really, I must compile that list.

* * * * *

Au Revoir to Marmaduke as we reach the close of our old, old story.

THE MISADVENTURES OF MARMADUKE

Blake looked curiously at Marmaduke when he appeared in Form the next day. The new boy's features showed signs that he had been "up against it" since he transferred to the New House,

He returned Blake's look with a scowl, but there was an expression on his face that rather puzzled the chief of No. 6 Study. It was an expression of mingled anticipation and triumph, as though Marmaduke thought there was a good time coming for him.

"I wonder what the bounder's got in his head," murmured Blake. "He

seems to be very satisfied about something."

"He's been saying that he's not going to stay at St. Jim's," said Figgins.

"Well, that's good news!" Blake exclaimed. "But I fancy it's a bit too good to be true, Figgy, old son."

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"How do you like him in your house?" asked Blake politely.

"Oh, don't talke about it!" growled Figgins. "He'd disgrace any well-brought-up pigsty. I never met such an absolutely impossible snob as that fellow is. He simply takes the cake!"

"Silence, there!" said little Mr. Lathom.

The lesson proceeded. Marmaduke seemed to be listening for something, and frequently glanced towards the door. The sound of a distant ringing bell, and then of wheels, made him brighten up considerably.

"Hall, what does that mean?" murmured Blake.

The Form-room door was open. A high-pitched feminine voice was heard outside.

"I insist upon seeing him at once!"

"But --"

"I have come to take my dear boy away. I do not desire to see the doctor. Is this the room? Very good!"

A strange figure appeared at the door of the Form-room. Mr. Lathom stared at it in astonishment, and the whole class stared, too. Marmaduke gave a chirrup of glee.

"Mamma!"

A stout lady, with a very red face, very over-dressed and wearing a small fortune in jewellery, stood in the doorway. Little Mr. Lathom, wondering who on earth she could be and what she could possibly want in the Fourth Form-room, advanced towards her.

"My dear madam --"

"Who are you?" demanded the high-pitched voice.

"I am the master of this Form. May I inquire --"

"I have come to take Master Smythe away. I am his mother, sir!" exclaimed the stout lady, towering over little Mr. Lathom. "Where is my darling boy?"

"Mamma, here I am!" squeaked

Marmaduke.

"My darling, persecuted boy, come to me."

Marmaduke rose from the form. Mr. Lathom passed a hand over his heated brow.

"My dear madam --"

"Don't talk to me! My son has been shamefully treated. I dare say you are as bad as the rest. Go away with you."

The stout lady was armed with an umbrella, and she looked very much inclined to start on Mr. Lathom with it. The little master jumped back in alarm.

The class had realised now what it all meant, and they were grinning gleefully.

"Come, Marmaduke, the cab is waiting."

Marmaduke crossed over to his dear mamma.

"I cannot allow it," protested Mr. Lathom. "It is really impossible for me to permit --"

He jumped back again as Marmaduke's mamma turned upon him.

"Marmaduke has been shamefully treated," she snapped. "I had a telegram from him last night to implore me to fetch him away. I came by the first train. You ought to be ashamed of yourself - yes, all of you!"

"Without his father's authority I cannot --"

The umbrella whisked in the air, and Mr. Lathom, who had made a motion to catch hold of Marmaduke, beat a hurried retreat. The class were yelling by this time. Marmaduke cast a haughty glance round.

"Mamma, let us leave this low

place --"

"Go it!" said a voice from the class. "Go back to Petticoat Lane, Marmaduke, where you belong."

It was Percy Mellish who said this, and, unfortunately, the eyes of Mrs. Smythe were upon him, and the next moment the umbrella was upon him.

Mr. Lathom did not try to stop them. He would just as soon have attempted to stop a wild elephant as Mrs. Smythe; but the stalwart form of Mr. Kidd, the housemaster, appeared in the doorway.

"What does this mean? Where are you taking that boy?"

"I am taking him home."

"Ah, I see! You are his mother, I presume? I am sorry - extremely sorry - but without the authority of his father I cannot consent to --"

"Let me pass --"

"I repeat that without the --"

The umbrella went up for a telling stroke, and the housemaster dodged.

"My dear madam, pray calm yourself. Mr. Lathom, pray explain to this lady that --"

"If you will excuse me, Mr. Kidd, I'd rather you explained," said little Mr. Lathom. "You could do it so very much better."

"Nonsense, Mr. Lathom! I must really - yes, madam, I will not detain you, but pray be calm. Thank goodness, here's the doctor!"

Even the awe-inspiring figure of the Head of St. Jim's, in gown and mortar-board, did not seem to terrify the terrible parent of Marmaduke.

"Dear me!" said the Head. "What

is this disturbance? The class is very noisy. Yes, madam, what can I do for you? Mrs. Smythe - ah, yes, to be sure! I hope you find yourself well this fine morning? You wish to take Master Smythe for a little walk? Certainly; no objection in the --"

"I'm going to take Master Smythe home --"

"Without his father's --"

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Smythe.

"Nonsense!"

"My dear madam, I beg of you to - to - Pray explain to her, Mr. Kidd! Mr. Lathom, pray attempt to make this good lady understand. Dear me! Bless my soul!"

The doctor jumped away as the umbrella came dangerously near his nose. Mrs. Smythe marched out, holding her dear Marmaduke by the hand, and the two of them disappeared from the view of the convulsed Fourth Form. The doctor, the housemaster, and Mr. Lathom looked at each other with an exceedingly sickly expression. There was a sound of wheels in the quadrangle. Marmaduke and his mamma were gone.

"Dear me!" said the doctor.

That was all he said. He felt a great deal; and probably what he felt most was relief that St. Jim's was rid of Marmaduke and his mamma. He retired from the scene with the housemaster; and Mr. Lathom in vain tried to reduce the class to order. The Fourth were shrieking with merriment, and all Mr. Lathom's efforts were unavailing, and finally he dismissed them. As they left the class-room Blake gave Figgins a slap on the back by way of congratulation

which made Figgy stagger.

"Congratulations, old son!" grinned Blake.

"Well, you needn't break my back!" growled Figgins. "Still, I'm jolly glad. Marmaduke was a terror, but his mamma - oh, his mamma! Still, we ought to be grateful to her, considering that she's taken that horrid bounder away.

Let's give her a cheer!"

And the juniors joined in a cheer for Marmaduke's mamma. A good many more misadventures awaited Marmaduke in the course of his career, for St. Jim's had not seen the last of him.

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 68. GREEN DOLPHIN STREET

Last month, owing to a glut of big programmes in the term we were considering, I only reached half-term before my space ran out and the editor called a halt.

The first feature in the second half of the term came from M. G. M. and was Robert Taylor and Herbert Marshall in "High Wall". I have no recollection of it at all, and even the title rings no bell in the memory. In the same bill was a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "The Cat and the Mermouse", and I see that a 3-Stooges comedy from Columbia was "Hocus Pocus".

Next, this time from G. F. D., came an Ealing comedy "Kind Hearts and Coronets" starring Alec Guinness and Joan Greenwood, plus a number of British character players. Alec Guinness played several different roles in what they call today a black comedy. It delighted me at the time as something out of the ordinary, but I am not sure that it would please me so much now. In the supporting bill there was a technicolor featurette "Soap Box Derby" which may also have come from G. F. D.

Then, from Warner Bros., Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall in "The Dark Passage". Once more, the story of this one eludes me, but it was probably a winner in its day. A coloured Barney Bear cartoon was "What's Brewin' Bruin?"

Next by far the longest film of the term - 12,702 ft. This was from M. G. M. and was Lana Turner and Richart Hart in "Green Dolphin Street". In the supporting cast there were many fine British character players, including Gladys Cooper and Edmund Gwenn. It was hailed as "M. G. M.'s most spectacular masterpiece since 'Gone With the Wind'," but I can't remember much about it except that it was a story of a family feud set in primitive New Zealand. It played to big crowds all over the world, I believe. The male lead, Richart Hart, was regarded as a big star find, but he died young, and this one may well have been his last film.

A coloured cartoon was "Out Foxed" and the programme was completed with a Fitzpatrick travel-talk "The Lazy Hunter", in technicolor.

The following week brought what must have been a popular show. From Warner's came Errol Flynn and Ann Sheridan in "Silver River". A Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon was "Jerry's Diary". (A bit of a swindle, this Tom & Jerry, for it shows entries in Jerry's diary, with extracts from earlier cartoon to illustrate the diary.) A Mack Sennett pot-pourri (from Warner's) was "Just for Fun", and a 3-Stooges comedy was "Fueling Around", (from Columbia).

Final of the term brought, from M. G. M., Walter Pidgeon and Deborah Kerr in "If Winter Comes". A famous book, and I daresay a fine film. There was a big supporting show: a coloured cartoon "Senor Droopy", a Joe McDoakes comedy "So you want to be a Musclemann", a coloured Sports Parade "Underwater Spear-Fishing", a Pete Smith novelty "You Can't Win" and a coloured Travel Talk "Glimpses of Guatemala". (Another article in this series Next Month)

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News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the Trumpington home of Jack Overhill on Sunday, 7th October. Members were very pleased to welcome back Jack Doupe, who was on a short visit to England.

The Secretary explained that the September meeting had to be cancelled at the last moment owing to unforeseen circumstances. In the absence of Adrian Perkins, who was chairing a meeting of the Eagle Convention Committee in London, Bill Thurbon passed round the latest information about the convention, which is to take place next year.

Bill Lofts gave an interesting talk on "Fleetway House". He gave a history of the various homes of the Amalgamated Press, and its predecessors from the beginning of the Harmsworth Brothers business in 1888 with "Answers". The original home was in Tudor Street. When the move was made to the new Fleetway House in 1911 the then new building stood out well against its surroundings. There were 600 offices in it. He gave various circulation figures, showing, for example, how the Magnet had fallen from its peak of 250,000 to 40,000 by its close. He illustrated his talk with many amusing stories. His talk was warmly applauded. After enjoying Mrs. Overhill's magnificent tea the club resumed. Mike Rouse told how he had contracted to write

a book on the East Anglian Seaside (in two volumes; to First World War, and after this to more modern times). He passed round three albums of postcards, one of Yarmouth and two of Seaside Entertainers, and read an article he had written on two such performers. This item was much enjoyed.

The meeting closed with a hearty vote of thanks to Jack and Mrs. Overhill for their hospitality.

SOUTH-WEST

On 30th September the S.W. Club met at 20 Uphill Road South, Nr. Weston-Super-Mare.

We were pleased to welcome Mr. Bill Lofts who made the special journey down to Somerset. Mr. Jack Parkhouse kindly arranged the visit.

Mr. Lofts gave us a talk on "Memories of Fleetway House" and invited questions on the subject.

After tea we had a general discussion on Hamiltonia.

The latest Howart Baker publications were on display and members brought other items of great interest from their collections.

The next meeting will be in the Spring of 1980.

LONDON

It was appropriate that the first item of the entertainment side of the East Dulwich Blakiana meeting was an excellent Grid quiz which the hostess, Josie Packman, conducted. It consisted of Sexton Blake characters and the winner was Jim Robinson. Surprisingly, the runners up were Hamiltonians, thus the club living up to its name of Old Boys' Books. Jim was presented with a book prize by Josie. The latter then read a letter that was sent to the editor of the Union Jack in 1932 requesting more English gangsters to be featured instead of the United States ones.

Winifred Morss read a humorous passage from a William book. Forty-six hidden names of seniors and juniors at the four main schools were in a criss-cross grid which Eric Lawrence had painstakingly contrived and it was Roger Jenkins who had the most correct answers.

Bob Blythe's newsletter reading featured a selection of "Desert

Island Companions" that Leslie Todd preferred and about the most interesting of the series which were featured round about sixteen years ago. Miriam Bruning then took over with a fine Letters quiz. Miriam must be a keen reader of the old books and the quiz had everybody guessing. But the two old mastros, Roger Jenkins and Eric Lawrence, were to finish first and second respectively.

The attendance was very gratifying and a hearty vote of thanks was accorded to hostess Josie at the conclusion of the gathering. Next meeting at 342 Hoe Street, Walthamstow, E.17 on Sunday, 11th November.

BENJAMIN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held on Saturday, 13th October, 1979

Ten members were present on a miserable Autumn evening; some well-known faces were missing, no doubt owing to holidays.

After formal business, Geoffrey Wilde and Mollie and Darrell Swift reported that they had inspected the collection of Old Boys' Books that had been left to the Club Library on the death of Tom Roach. Our Secretary, Fr. Geoffrey Good, mentioned that he had recently paid a visit to Norman Shaw and Darrell had also paid a visit on a separate occasion during the month of September. Our Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, then read an excerpt from Magnet 1114 "The Black Sheep of The Sixth", which is part of the Loder versus the Famous Five Series. These readings by Geoffrey are much appreciated by the members.

After refreshments, there was chance for long personal discussions re aspects of the hobby, and Darrell gave a twenty minute talk on some latest developments in the hobby which keeps the Northern Club Members in the picture.

Our meeting finished at 9.15. Visitors are always welcome: we meet the second Saturday of each month, beginning with library session at 6.30 p.m., at the Swarthmore Education Centre, Leeds, 3. Our next meeting will be on 10th November.

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WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1920 and 1941 in good condition.

WARWICK SETFORD, 155 BURTON RD., DERBY, DE3 6AB.

The Postman Called

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

TOMMY KEEN (Thames Ditton): Many, many years ago, soon after I became a devout reader of the Magnet and the Gem, I heard a voice on the radio which moved me greatly, and from that day, so long ago, until the 27th September this year, the owner of that marvellous voice has been a part of my life. The voice belonged to Gracie Fields, and to me it seems quite impossible that she is no longer with us, and although for the past forty years she has made her home on her beloved Island of Capri, she has always belonged to England.

I have been very lucky in knowing her on a very friendly footing for many years, and have visited her often on Capri. I think, maybe, I am the only person in England with an absolutely complete collection of her old 78 records, many of these have been useful to the B.B.C. Well over 300, is the record collection.

As, (with the Magnet and Gem) I was seldom amused by the supposedly funny stories featuring Bunter, Coker, Grundy, etc., neither was I an admirer of Gracie's "Biggest Aspidistra in the World", or "Walter", and "I Never Cried so Much In All my Life". Her serious songs enraptured me, the glorious "Oh My Beloved Father", "September Song", and my own very special favourite from an old film of Gracie's, an emotional, sentimental little ballad called "You're More Than All the World To Me". To me, she always was.

This superb woman will be missed by many. For me, the end of an era. Arriverderci Gracie.

BEN WHITER (London): I enjoyed your editorial on Gladys Cooper. Did not she hold sway for many years at the Playhouse Theatre at the river end of Northumberland Avenue? And is not the actor who plays Siegfried in the B.B.C. series "All Creatures Great and Small" some relation to the famous actress? I seem to remember vaguely that he received an award on her behalf some years ago, she being indisposed.

(Editorial Comment: Gladys Cooper was actor-manager of the Playhouse for many years, an unusual position for a woman to hold, I believe. Yes, Siegfried is a relative - grandson, I think. Henry St. John Cooper (Mabel St. John) was, of course, the half-brother of Gladys.)

Fr. F. HERTZBERG (Wirral): Schoolfriend gained at least part of its readership from the fact that schoolboys found the stories exciting, whilst Eagle lost a good deal when it spawned Girl specially for its female readers.

RAY BENNETT (Codsall): The best of September was your contributor "J.E.M." for "A Wizard World", the Thomson papers having been somewhat neglected, I feel. In days gone by I regularly read and enjoyed the Wizard, Adventure, and Rover, but Skipper and Hotspur (I have an idea there was another) made no appeal at all. I will concede that they are not really in the same class as Hamiltonia, Blakiana and St. Frank's - cream always rises to the top - but this well-written article made a refreshing contribution to No. 394. As you say, No. 400 is not too far away; here's one reader with doubtless many others, anticipating its arrival.

K. ATKINSON (Bradford): I was interested to hear about your 'cheap' haircut; however, everyone is not so grasping even these days. Down our road a genial Polish gentleman keeps a small establishment where he will cut your hair, and even trim your eyebrows into the bargain, for 45p, and in the next street it is possible to buy excellent Yorkshire fish and chips for 27p, surely a bargain by today's standards?

Keep up the good work, and may you edit the 400th and also the 500th number of C.D.

DAVID HOBBS (Seattle): I was quite delighted by your new venture into recalling old popular songs - when there was music and singers, instead of percussion and screamers.

(Editorial Comment: Last month, in the course of our Editorial, we quoted an old song - "The lawn we were proud of is waving in hay . . ." Anybody recall the title? Ten bob for the first correct answer received at Excelsior House.)

LEN WORMULL (Romford): The C.D. is as good as ever, and I always look forward to it each month. I enjoyed the Song Competition, and managed to get most of them, but left it too late to send in. Strange you should have included Sally at this very time. No doubt you will be paying your own tribute to Gracie. After the "Songs" - what about Films? I particularly enjoyed Barry Macilroy's "Danger Child" in the

current issue. I haven't read the book, but it was hardly surprising, in the hands of Jack Trevor Story, to find Blake caught up in some past sexual tangle. He is a fine author just the same.

I came across an amusing reference to the old Gattis cinema (Westminster Bridge Rd.) in Monty Modlyn's book, "Pardon My Cheek". Monty, who once lived in the Cut nearby, puts it this way: 'You went in clean and came out lousy. You went in single and came out married.' I wouldn't even attempt to better that description.

E. H. HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): I am writing as a result of J.E.M.'s article in the current C.D. I think, like myself - and probably many others - he found that the 'Dundee School' formed a phase in one's youthful reading. I went from 'Rainbow' and similar comics to the Thomson story papers, prior to graduating to 'Magnet', 'Gem', 'Nelson Lee' and 'Union Jack'. I doubt if I read very many Thomson papers once I was 'hooked' on the A.P. weeklies.

Remembrance of Thomson characters is extremely limited. I used to take 'Adventure' on Mondays and 'Rover' on Thursdays, in the first half of the twenties. In the former, I can only recall the adventures of a Private Potter and his exploits as an Army recruit - in the last of the series, he was promoted to Corporal. Dixon Hawke and his assistant Tommy Burke (with the bloodhound Solomon) were in the same paper but I have only the slightest memory of them. 'Rover' had a series of a schoolboy known as 'Wily Watkins' who always managed to escape the cane and, in fact, offered the sum of £1 to somebody if such an event ever took place. In the end, he was caned - and a Sporting Master gave him the £1 to settle his account! Blue Blaze and Eagle Eye slightly ring a bell from 'Rover' days.

The longest-remembered character in 'Rover', however, was undoubtedly 'Invisible Dick'. So popular were these stories that Thomson actually republished them in a hard-back in the mid-twenties (2s. 6d. I believe) and my parents purchased this for me during one of those schoolboy-illness recovery periods. I wonder if, today, anyone happens to possess this book? (The author - probably not mentioned at the time - was Frank Topham.)

D. LANG (Nottingham): On reading your comments about public

transport, I was moved to reflect on how it mirrors the change in society over the last twenty years. To me, buses and trains are a link with the world Charles Hamilton wrote about. Although I was brought up in the age of the car, I was very much aware of the tradition of public transport. They were part of the 'Bunter' books I read, when buses and trains ruled supreme; and were in themselves a reflection of older values. I am probably old fashioned compared with my contemporaries, but I do not like the way in which modern society is heavily slanted towards the individual's satisfaction, as represented by the car. I would prefer a return to a public transport system which serves everybody; and which, I believe, is a much more pleasant way of travelling than the egotistical isolation of the car.

(Editorial Comment: As one who always had a soft spot for trains, trams and buses, I agree to some extent with our correspondent. All the same, I ran a car till I could no longer afford it. And there are times when I am deeply thankful for a lift in somebody's car. Aren't we all?)

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WANTED: Greyfriars Book Club edns., Numbers 1 & 3; Greyfriars Holiday Annuals 1920, 1940. Dandy, Beano Annuals, Elsie Oxenham Books.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN.

Tel. Aberdeen 0224 - 491716

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THE MYSTERY OF THE PHANTOM OF
CURSITOR FIELDS

by W. O. G. Lofts

One of the most famous 'ghost' stories ever to appear in a boys' paper was "The Phantom of Cursitor Fields". This was serialised in the blue covered Bullseye in the thirties, and was reprinted in the Film Fun at a later date. Many people seem to recall this serial, probably because its ghostly atmosphere made such a deep impression on the schoolboy mind. I was able to elucidate from official records many years ago, that this anonymous story was written by Alfred Edgar, one time editor of The Nelson Lee Library, and who in later years became quite famous as Barre Lyndon the playwright who wrote such great successes as The Man from Half Moon Street, and the Amazing Dr.

Clitterhouse. Alfred Edgar died in Hollywood in 1973.

Not all that long ago, a query was raised by the London O.B.B.C. as to whether there was at any time a locality as "Cursitor Fields". According to the editor of The Bullseye whom I once met, this was originally situated on the site of where now Cursitor Street stands - a short narrow turning off of Chancery Lane, and running up towards New Fetter Lane. Investigation in checking old maps however shows that no such fields were ever on that site. Quite recently, however, I obtained a book of "Supernatural Stories for Boys", published by Hamilyn in 1968, republished in 1971. In its collection of ten tales, four stories were reprints from Fleetway Publications - including "The Phantom of Cursitor Fields". This time an author's name was given as 'Henry Pope', obviously a pen-name for Alfred Edgar, though no other boys' stories are known under that name. I was then able to read the story right through probably for the very first time, and was frankly disappointed. Whilst it had thrilled me in odd weekly instalments as a boy, I now found it very juvenile indeed, and it did not scare me in the slightest. In comparing it to an Edgar Allan Poe story "The Black Cat" in the collection (though why this should be regarded as a boys' story is a mystery in itself!) I could see the vast difference between a classic ghost or horror writer and one writing one for boys. A paragraph in the Cursitor Fields story did grip my attention in which it stated that "Cursitor Fields was close against Cheapside, almost within a stone's throw off the Bank of England", which is over half a mile away from where one imagined the fields to be - so one must assume that the old Bullseye editor was only guessing as to its locality. However, another check through old maps at the British Museum again show no signs of any Cursitor Fields being there. As this was supposed to be there in the setting of the story in the thirties, one can only conclude that Alfred Edgar passing through Cursitor Street on his way to Fleetway House, thought it perhaps a good name for a locality as any. Actually on the original site of Cursitor Street once stood a large building that housed 24 Cursitors who issued writs for the Court of Chancery. They were absorbed by the Petty Bag Office in 1838, and this in time was abolished in 1888. Cursitor Fields unfortunately was just a figment of imagination by a boys' writer, and a 'ghost' like the phantom of a very popular boys' story in the thirties.