

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

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JANUARY 1980



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THERE'LL ALWAYS BE AN ENGLAND

I seem to recall that the old war-time song said that there'll always be an England while there's a country lane. I don't know whether there is anything ominous in the fact that the country lanes seem to diminish in number with every passing year. Even in a semi-rural district such as the one in which I live, a country lane would not be all that easy to find. They have fallen before the planners and the developers and the road wideners.

When the widening is done in the cause of greater safety for travellers one could not condemn it. It seems to me, however, that

there are times when the widening is done simply and solely to let the rushing, roaring traffic rush faster and roar more loudly.

Some months ago I commented that my daily journeys to hospital way back in the summer were often made a nightmare by the sheer awfulness of the bus services. They were totally unreliable, running late or early or, just as likely, not at all. I was speaking of the services in North Hampshire, but from the shoal of letters I had on the subject, the awfulness of bus services is nation wide.

A reader, Mr. Lang, whose letter featured in our "Postman Called" section, wrote pithily and aptly on the subject, and regretted the collapse of public transport and its take-over by the private car. I agreed greatly with our reader, for I always loved trams and buses and trains and the services they used to give. Nevertheless, last summer, when I had waited for ages for a bus which obviously would not come, I breathed a deep sigh of relief when a friend in a car - or sometimes a stranger - would stop and say "Can I give you a lift?"

I would say "You're a good Samaritan", or, perhaps, even more simple and heart-felt: "Bless you."

The question arises: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? In other words, did the awfulness of public transport cause the glut of cars, or did the glut of cars cause the decay of public transport? In my view, it was the growing awfulness of public transport which led to vast numbers of people buying cars to become independent of buses and trains. As wages went up and up, and fares followed suit, so the crews became more and more indifferent to the general public, discipline became almost non-existent, so that it often seems that public transport is run more to benefit the crews than those who try to use the buses and trains. My own experience tells me that the buses are far worse than the trains, though, with ever-increasing train fares, soon only the rich will be able to afford to go by rail.

Mr. Lang commented: "They were part of the Bunter books I read, when buses and trains reigned supreme; and were in themselves a reflection of older values." Certainly the heyday of the old papers was also the heyday of public transport, but I do not recall that Hamilton introduced public transport much into his stories. Tom Merry & Co. rode on the trams in Dublin. Bunter bilked the railways

or fell when alighting from a bus. The Greyfriars chums took note of the trams in Singapore, though there were no trams there in later years. Tom Merry & Co. noticed the double deck buses in Paris, where a cheaper fare was charged on the top deck. But I have been to Paris a good many times, and never saw a double deck bus there.

The local lines - the small branch lines, connecting Friardale or Rylcombe with the main lines - often figured in the story, usually when a new boy was being met at the station.

Ending up on the branch line, did you see the picture of the daredevil stunt rider taking his machine across a huge 80 ft. gap in a disused railway bridge. It was at Maldon in Essex, where a picturesque branch line used to link Maldon with Witham. There used to be another branch line which connected Braintree with Witham. Branch lines abounded on the Great Eastern, and, in their day, they were much used by travellers. Alas!

JOYCE GRENFELL

I cannot let the occasion pass without a few lines in grateful memory of Joyce Grenfell who died recently. I first saw her, I think, in the delightful Farjeon revues in the very early post-war years. She was in her element in intimate revues.

She could always have her audiences splitting their sides with laughter, yet there was never a word of smut or the remotest suggestion of indecency in any of her performances. What an example she was to the run of British so-called comedians who cannot be funny without being dirty. Mrs. Grenfell's death is a great loss to the world of real entertainment.

A COTTAGE FOR SALE

No, we are not putting the little Excelsior House on the market. The witch is not disposing of her gingerbread cottage in the forest. Mr. Joyce, the woodcutter, is not selling off his cottage in the wood, along with his horse and cart. (Do you remember when Coker helped Mr. Joyce to back his horse into the cart, or something, and told the scandalised Mr. Prout that he had been backing a horse? "Mentally deficient!" crooned Prout.)

Forget all that! A month or two back I quoted a line - "The lawn we were proud of is waving in hay" - from an old song, and offered ten bob for the first correct title of the song from which it came. Nobody sent in the correct title, and I was not surprised.

It came from a song entitled "A Cottage for Sale". I have it on a Broadcast record. It must be 50 years old. I have a number of Broadcast records, and every one is excellent. They cost 1/3 for a normal length, and 2/- for a long-playing record. What real value for money they gave in those far-off days.

A Very Happy New Year to All My Readers.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

Danny's Diary

JANUARY 1930

I spent a few days with my Gran and Auntie Gwen at Layer Marney at the start of the year. Mum was with me. We went into Colchester one day, and it seemed a bit forlorn. The trams ended in Colchester a fortnight ago, and they were taking down the overhead wires and tarring over the tram-lines. It was a narrow gauge tramway in Colchester. It doesn't seem right without the trams.

The Playhouse there (a newish theatre) has been turned into a cinema with talkies, and we went to see the big musical film entitled "Innocents in Paris" which stars Maurice Chevalier. It has a lovely song "Louise" sung by Chevalier, and I bought Doug the record which is played by De Groot and his Orchestra.

After we got home the weather was terrible. There were days of severe gales with sleet and snow, and a naval tug was hit by a huge sea in the Channel and 23 officers and men were lost.

King of the Islands is back in the Modern Boy at the end of the month. The opening story of the series is "Pearls and Peril". Ken, in his ketch "Dawn", picks up a white man who has escaped from the blacks on a small island. He says his name is Robinson, but Ken is suspicious of him. A lugger comes up to the ketch, and the villainous crew say that

the man's name is really Egan, and that he has stolen a magnificent diamond from them. Ken has the man searched, but no diamond is found.

I'm glad that the South Seas stories are back, for the Modern Boy is a bit empty without them. There is a new serial entitled "The Escapades of Esme" by A. M. Burrage. The hero is turned out of Oxford; he is a fine sportsman though he is girlish in appearance. He dresses up as a woman and becomes tutor to a boy whose maiden aunt hates men and won't employ male tutors.

There are an awful lot of advertisements in Modern Boy.

Two splendid tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "The Kidnapped Schoolboy" tells of the arrival of Wun Lung Minor, Hop Hi, complete with pigtail, at Greyfriars, and of his kidnapping. The second tale is "Smuggled to School". Tom Merry & Co. visit Digby's uncle in Liverpool. A ragamuffin named 'Erbert saves them from danger, and they are so grateful to him that they take 'Erbert back to St. Jim's where he is mistakenly accepted, for a time, as a new boy named Bernard Glyn who is expected at the school.

The Pavilion on the Grand Pier at Weston-Super-Mare has been completely destroyed by fire. I wonder whether they will be able to build it again in readiness for the summer crowds.

Rather a rum lot of tales in the Gem, as usual these days. Also, as usual, though the plots are not all that bad, there is too much plot and the writer lets his typewriter run away with him. Two stories "All Through Pongo" and "The Fugitive Schoolboy" tell of Pongo getting hurt, though he has really been beaten by Mr. Selby in a temper - and Piggott finds out and blackmails Mr. Selby. And Tom Merry goes through the ice and is rescued by a thief named Joe Tuttle. And Taggles is knocked over the head by Joe Tuttle. They think Wally did it, but Tom Merry knows that Joe Tuttle did it, so, to save Wally and Joe Tuttle, Tom Merry goes to the Head and "confesses" that he, Tom, struck down Taggles. But nobody believes him - he isn't a good liar - so Wally is sentenced to a flogging. But Wally takes Pongo and hides behind a secret panel. And it all comes right in the end.

Then a new series starting with "Under Trimble's Thumb" and "A Rogue's Reward". Lots and lots more plot in it. Figgins's father can't afford to keep him at St. Jim's, so Figgins sits for the Armitage

Scholarship, along with Tompkins, Dick Brown and Bates. But Tompkins drops out with chicken-pox, and Figgins expects to win. He writes 21 pages of answers. But Figgins has punched Racke, so Racke breaks into the Head's study and steals seven of the 21 pages. So Figgins loses and Dick Brown wins.

But Trimble finds the stolen sheets, and blackmails Racke. And Figgins has to leave St. Jim's. And Racke bribes Captain Gallon to shanghai Trimble on to the ship the Harvester bound for South America. And the Head finds the stolen sheets of answers and says "Bless my soul!" So Figgins wins the Armitage, and Dick Brown weeps. And Cousin Ethel, in her Spalding Hall gym-slip and hat helps Figgins pull Brown out of the river and breathes "How splendid of you". And Racke confesses and is expelled from St. Jim's. So Racke has gone for good, and Trimble is shanghaied.

The series continues next week.

There has been a big fraud trial in the law courts, and a man named Clarence Hatry has been sent to prison for 14 years for planning the frauds which have ruined many people.

Our wonderful new airship, the R 100, has just completed its third flight, and it has been a great success.

The wonderful Christmas series about the mysterious cracksman has continued in the Magnet. It must be the finest ever in the old paper. First tale of the month is "The Artful Dodger". Bunter falls through the ice near Wharton Lodge, and he is pulled out by the strange man with the square jaw. And Bunter gets a cold. And the friends leave for Bob Cherry's home, leaving Bunter at Wharton Lodge. And the Head turns up at Cherry Place, driven by that pleasant young man Barnes (whom Colonel Wharton knew as an army officer named Poynings). And Bunter foils a burglary at Cherry Place, and gets knocked out by the burglar.

Next week, back at Greyfriars, in "The Form-Master's Favourite", where Mr. Quelch has not come back for the new term. He is replaced by the man with the grey eyes and the square jaw. He is Mr. Steele. And Wharton recognises him as the man he saw in the lane. But Mr. Steele is well-known, as a friend, to Inspector Grimes of Courtfield. And then Bunter remembers, too.

Third tale of the month is "Wanted by the Police", and the Bunder

suspects that the new master is really the Courtfield cracksman. Final of the month is "The Mystery Master", with some person unknown cracking cribs all round the district. Who is the Courtfield cracksman? The Bounder, at the end of the month, is the bitter enemy of Mr. Steele and feels sure he is the criminal. This truly magnificent series goes on next month. It is turning out to be a very long series.

Sound cartoons have become very popular in the cinemas, and Micky the Mouse is great. I have seen two Micky Mouse cartoons this month - "Opry House" and "Steamboat Willie" - and they have both been on several times.

All the big pictures I have seen this month have been talkies, though there are still as many silent cinemas as talking ones, and there are silent versions of all the talking pictures except the musical ones. The talkies I have seen this month are Laura La Plante in "Hold Your Man"; Jeanne Eagels and Herbert Marshall in "The Letter"; the big musical "Syncopation", with lovely songs like "Jericho", "Do, do Something", and "I'll Always be in Love With You"; and Ronald Colman in his first talkie "Bulldog Drummond" which had such a long run at the Tivoli in London.

A fine new series of Rio Kid stories begins in the Popular with "Black George". Black George holds up stage-coaches, and then disappears. Nobody knows the identity of the black raider. The second tale in the series is "The Marshal of Kicking Mule". The Kid has gone to Kicking Mule to try to find Black George, but he makes a bitter enemy of the town marshal.

Then "The Rio Kid's Enemy", with the Kid on the trail of the mysterious black outlaw. Last of the month is "Lynch Law", in which the town marshal tries to pin Black George's crimes on the Rio Kid, but the Bar-One bunch and their boss stand by the Kid, so the marshal retreats defeated. The series go on. It's fine!

There have been some big mysteries in the Nelson Lee Library over the years, and we seem now to have reached the biggest mystery of the lot. They have re-started the paper at No. 1 (new series). Goodness only knows why! And the old school of St. Frank's has crumbled to dust. By the order of the all-powerful Professor Zingrave, the Green Triangle has completely destroyed the old school. The

opening story of the series is "Rogues of the Green Triangle".

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 115, "The Kidnapped Schoolboy" comprised two Red Magnets which welded well into one story although they had been published four years apart. The first tale "Wun Lung's Minor" appeared in the Spring of 1910 and told of the arrival of Hop Hi. The second tale "The Missing Chinese" appeared in the Spring of 1914 when Hop Hi was kidnapped. S.O.L. No. 116 "Smuggled to School" comprised two blue Gems (consecutive) from early in 1909. They were then entitled "Tom Merry in Liverpool" and "Smuggled to School". A joyous read, all these years later, far-fetched in theme and with mild Dickensian overtones. Digby is invited by his uncle, Mr. Murphy, who lives in Cork, to take a party of friends to Liverpool for a brief visit. Mr. Murphy sends £20 in 1909 to pay for the fares; the same amount to pay the fares in the S.O.L. in January 1930, and the same amount in 1932 when the story appeared yet again in the Gem. Reasonable enough, in those days. Today I fancy it would take that sum for a railway return ticket for just one of them.

As Danny mentions, Bernard Glyn comes into this tale before he becomes a St. Jim's man. Oddly enough, in 1908, the following week brought a sub story "The St. Jim's Terriers" in which Glyn, a Hamilton creation, appeared for the first time at St. Jim's.

In the 1930 series, very complicated, about Figgins taking the examination, Racke was expelled, as Danny mentions. So a sub writer phased out one of the creator's characters. He was no great loss, admittedly, but he had been at St. Jim's since "Moneybags Minor" in 1916, one of the earliest of the white cover period.

Later on, the same sub was to phase out Mr. Linton, which was more serious. But evidently the sub writer felt he had things all his own way.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Well here it is, 1980, a new decade, let us hope that Blakiana will continue to enliven the C.D. and bring pleasure to our readers. Many thanks for all the help received making it possible for me to run Blakiana to everyone's tastes. May I take this opportunity to thank all of you for sending Christmas greetings and in return wish you all a Happy New Year.

THE DR. HUXTON RYMER STORY

by Josie Packman

Part 6

We now come to the final part of this story. After the last mentioned Union Jack No. 1177 which was quite out of the context of the Saga, there are only four more tales of Rymer in the Union Jack, the numbers being 1368, "The Twilight Feather Case", No. 1421, "Voodoo

Vengeance", No. 1438 "Yellow Guile" and lastly No. 1465 "Doomed Ships". All these were described by the then Editor as being the best of Teed's tales!!! Personally I found them all unreadable. They were not written in Teed's usual style, more like the modern thriller of today, absolutely awful. Sexton Blake was on his own, no Tinker or any other familiar characters. Dr. Rymer and Mary Trent appeared in all the tales but the plots were unfathomable. In two of the tales the action takes place in China (not the China of the early days), one tale in which Rymer gets mixed up with Marie Galante in the West Indies, and the last story about doomed ships begins in the fogs of London and ends in the jungles of Malaysia. No doubt to some of our readers this type of story will appeal, but the character of Dr. Rymer was so differently portrayed it seemed like someone else writing his adventures.

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

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

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

The remaining adventures are related in the S. B. L. and are quite good, several of them being set in the rebellious small Republics in Central America. Somewhere along the line Rymer had apparently become the leader of a criminal organisation known as the crooks' Trust. I am unable to trace the story in which this organisation is first mentioned, probably there wasn't one or that story was not published. Dr. Rymer still uses his brilliant talent for organising various crimes for his underworld associates, but it is with deep regret that I have to say that the last original story to appear in S. B. L. No. 608 dated January 1936, was a very bad one. I can hardly believe that it was written by Teed. Rymer seems to have turned into a murderous person, killing all and sundry, finally he is caught in the holocaust of a burning Abbey Towers, thus eliminating any chance of his returning to a more sane way of living. Mary Trent does not appear, not even mentioned at all, which seems peculiar after all her adventures with Rymer. Did

Teed really write this tale and was it at the request of the Editor? No, I feel that this is one time when Teed did not write the story credited to him.

To sum up the whole Saga, one of over twenty years, I am of the opinion that the stories written during the first 15 years were the very best.

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

The End

THE AWESOME, the EERIE and the UNCANNY by Raymond Cure

In the years 1927/1928 there burst upon us, on our ears (not to mention our eyes) Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool* and *The Jazz Singer* the miracles of the age. Talking pictures! I could not believe it, nor could thousands of others until we saw and heard for ourselves. That's the way with miracles. By the time we had settled down to the idea that "Talkies" had come to stay along came *Dracula* followed later by *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Now it appears that around this age of wonders a chappie by the name of J. W. Bobin decided to cash in on this craze for the mysterious and the occult and sent his script to the Editor of the *Union Jack* and he (wise man) accepted it, calling on Mr. Kenneth Brooks to provide the illustrations, yet another wise choice. So it came about that around 22 December, 1928, *The Mystery of the Siping Vampire*, reached the newsagents via the pages of the *Union Jack* No. 1314. Awesome, eerie, uncanny, a tale of the weird. Kenneth Brooks rises to the occasion with the illustrated cover. If you are a lover of the uncanny frame it for your bedroom (that is if the wife will give her consent).

Sexton Blake and Tinker are trudging through a snow-covered graveyard, surrounded by grim snow-capped gravestones while Pedro the bloodhound sniffs his way around a large private tomb. They don't appear to have noticed the huge, black and hideous bat that flutters overhead, and we all know what that means if we have seen *Dracula*.

If I have a complaint to make at this point it is that the Editor doesn't realise we are still in the throes of Christmas. 22nd December indeed and nary a mention of the fact on the cover or inside the *Union*

Jack apart from a small heading on a couple of pages "Special Xmas week U.J." and you will have to look hard to find this grudging admission of the fact. Here we are with a seasonable tale of the uncanny - dead on the eve of Christmas and the Editor forgets to splash the festive setting around. Still, we have to thank him for accepting J. W. Bobin's tale. A tale which itself has a Christmas background, a good sprinkling of snow scenes, and hint of the festive holidays and all surrounded with an Edgar Allan Poe flavour.

"The Mystery of the Siping Vampire" opens with the sound of a mournful, long-drawn-out howl, guaranteed to make the blood run cold. As Tinker remarks "It's a sign of death" a saying I doubt myself as in 67 years I have heard dogs of all shapes and sizes give the death howl. It's made my blood run cold but all was well in the morning as everybody seemed to be O.K. even the neighbours with their cheery good mornings. I had a dog myself once which occasionally let it rip but his forecast did not turn out either. Though in this case it was Pedro's howl and he was right. From that first howl, comes a man screaming out of the woods, a body with Vampire bites on the throat, a Mr. Paul Henty, who was known to be dead and buried, was seen at the side of his tomb; and villagers raring for a chance to drive a stake through the corpse to stop its capers. (Well you've got to play it safe eh?)

What about Sexton Blake? Let me draw aside the curtain for a quick peep behind the scenes, I quote:

"The match flared up and spluttered out - the only one in the box that would light. Its momentary gleam showed musty coffins in all their dilapidations. Sexton Blake was alone with the dead - trapped."

The tomb door had been pushed to and locked, Blake had just unscrewed the new coffin and saw for himself the body of Dr. Paul Henty lying there. The very man whom he had seen in the snow-covered graveyard.

Sounds good? It is good. Get your copy out or borrow it from Josie Packman's Sexton Blake Library.

* * * * *

WANTED: C.D. Nos. 289 to 299, and Nos. 340 to 344. Also 1941 Holiday Annual (original).

J. JONES, 11 GILLINGHAM HOUSE, ROCHESTER ESTATE

WALKER, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE, NE6 3HQ.

Nelson Lee Column

A DISAPPOINTING RETURN

by R. J. Godsave

I have always been of the opinion that it is very often a mistake to make a return to something or somewhere, after a fairly long interval, as the result is often disappointing. No. 127 New Series of the Nelson Lee Library "The Return of Ezra Quirke" is a case in point. Although Quirke does not figure largely in this Christmas series he is a very pale echo of the Quirke who dominated the original series written by E. S. Brooks some three years previously.

Although Quirke was exposed as a cheat who had used material aids in the seances he had held while a scholar at St. Frank's. The whole set-up had been used for the purpose of extracting money from the Hon. Douglas Singleton, Quirke's uncle being the prime mover.

The setting of this Christmas series was Raithmere Castle near Market Donning, some sixteen miles from St. Frank's. A great-uncle - Roger Merton - of Reginald Pitt had died leaving the castle to Pitt. The Lawyer who had visited Pitt with the news of his legacy had little knowledge of the condition of the castle. As the Christmas holidays were approaching, Pitt decided to cycle over in the company of several juniors and see the castle for himself.

As they approached the castle they were met by a slim youthful-looking figure who seemed to be somewhat familiar to them. As the figure came nearer they recognised him as Ezra Quirke who had sometimes previously been a scholar at St. Frank's and had been known as the schoolboy magician. The strange boy came running up, out of breath, to inform the boys that they entered the castle at their peril, as it had strange, sinister associations. It further transpired that Quirke was now living with an aunt in Market Donning and had made a study of the occult, gaining a reputation locally as a spiritualistic medium.

As a person Quirke was extremely suitable for research into the occult. Although exposed as a cheat in the original series, he exerted a great influence lower school at St. Frank's by his strange manner. Although Handforth called Quirke's research as 'rubbish, and a lot of rot' strange things happen in this world which cannot be dismissed out of

hand. Some years ago I attended some seances held by the parents of a friend, and have yet to have explained how a table can rise from the floor without any assistance whatsoever from those present. Like Handforth I was sceptical and on the look out for trickery, but found none.

Pitt decided to invite some of the juniors and girls from Moor View School to spend Christmas at the Castle. Strange happenings of pictures falling from the wall, furniture overturning and figures of gnomes, witches, etc., were seen by the boys and girls sitting on the bedposts. Fairies were seen dancing up and down on the snow in the moonlight. With the staff leaving due to fright the difficulties facing Pitt and his guests were numerous. All these happenings were due to an old servant of Pitt's great-uncle, who feared that a change of ownership would force him to leave the castle, where he had been living secretly for some time. He had during his stay invented a beamless cine projector which was responsible for the strange figures that had appeared.

Quirke's warning of the supernatural happenings at the castle now made him look extremely foolish when the ghostly happenings were explained by the old retainer. It was quite unnecessary for Ezra Quirke to be re-introduced to the readers of the Nelson Lee as he made little impact and was only a shadow of his former self.

"MEMORIES OF LIMEHOUSE"

by Jim Cook

A pen friend of mine has recently been kind enough as to send me a photocopy of that famous No. 1 of the Nelson Lee Library published in 1915, "The Mystery of Limehouse Reach". It must be many years ago, I do not know how many, since I last saw a copy of No. 1 and reading it again I appreciate how realistic this story is. I am struck by the length of the yarn and the grammatical rhythm. Compared to present day novels of the genre those old story papers contemporary to the Nelson Lee were immaculate in presentation. All we get in books today is obscene language and violence for the sake of violence.

As a boy I spent many hours around the locality of Limehouse Reach. I was born at Poplar which is the next and much bigger borough to Limehouse. The incidents and atmosphere of this story are not only very true of the period but amazingly accurate in detail.

Naturally, the yarn brought back many memories to me of the time

I used to roam about Limehouse after school hours and during holiday times. There were opium dens and crooks and smuggling and, in fact, all those sinister things the story deals with. There were the pubs, too, alongside the wharves that were to me just pubs then. But looking back in hindsight I wonder what villainy went on when I used to rove around the area and by the wharves when the tide of the river Thames was at ebb.

Many times did I see police raids and fights with police by ruffians. Once or twice I went to Thames Police Court in Arbour Square as a member of the public. Once I went with a friend who had been caught playing football in the highway and he was fined 2/6 or one day in jail. I always smile when I think of him going back to the police court after he had paid the fine and wanting to change his mind and do the day in prison. Of course, the sergeant with well simulated fury, threw him out. After all, 2/6 was a small fortune those days. And had he done the "time" in quod he would have been released at 4 p. m. - just a few hours from the time of his judgement.

There were some awful characters those days in the east end of London. But somehow they all had a kind of loyalty towards their own kind and to their own class. It was the law to which they were most arrogant and hostile. Still, compared with today's crime those days were nothing. I never saw a gun either used or shewn then. And most thieving was petty. Nothing like the big hauls of today, but the river Thames did have a mysterious atmosphere that perhaps is missing today. I've been around the shore at Limehouse Cut at all times and all seasons but the crime scene I think has now shifted to more profitable realms.

I did not live near the locale of the river, but somehow it always fascinated me. I can recall even today seeing the big ships that used to come up as far as Tower Bridge to unload their cargoes and depart for the Orient and Australia, etc. And I often saw them on their way as they left and thought of tropical climes and south sea islands which they would perhaps pass. Well, today, I live here in the south Pacific in New Zealand with the Tasman Sea on the other side of Auckland. Perhaps that old saying - It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive - might sum up my feelings.

The Chinatown of those days is no more. It has transferred to Soho after Hitler's bombs wiped it out. Last year I looked over the places where I used to go during holidays from school and Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway have changed out of all recognition. I well remember a Tong war there many years ago when the people in that neighbourhood were kept indoors by the mounted police. This was for their safety as Chinese with choppers were chasing other Chinese and it was not safe to be out!

How different everything is today along the Limehouse and Wapping waterfronts. I think crime has now shifted to more salubrious areas. Which is perhaps why it is flourishing so well at the moment.

I am going to read that No. 1 of the Nelson Lee Library again and live once more those old times in London's Chinatown.

* * * * *

THE GHOST OF MAULEVERER TOWERS

by T. Keen

It was my first Christmas Magnet ever, the marvellous, exciting "Ghost of Mauleverer Towers", and in fact it was only the third issue of the Magnet I had seen, my first being "The Black Man at Greyfriars" (No. 774).

I was so young, so excited, so full of Christmas, and already enraptured by Harry Wharton & Co., and could hardly wait for the grand Christmas issue. Even now I can see those marvellous Chapman illustrations, surrounded by sprigs of holly (although I have an idea the cover was not by Mr. Chapman), and the Editor's Christmas Greetings to all the Readers. What a glorious story. Breaking up day, with the boys bowling away in brakes from the School, and although I was hardly aware of Bunter at that time, he was not included in the holiday party to be spent at Mauleverer Towers. The Famous Five were in excellent spirits, although Mauly had some rather depressing news to impart, that a cousin of his, a Brian Mauleverer, aged about 25, who had the reputation of being rather a blackguard, would be there. But the snow fell, and the Christmas decorations were up, and the lake would sure to be frozen by Christmas.

And of course there would be a ghost. As Bob Cherry, or was it Harry Wharton, tossed another log on to the fire in Mauly's den, Brian

related the story of the ghost. Mauly's evil ancestor, Sir Fulke Mauleverer, lived during the reign of Richard I, and his suit of armour was standing in Mauly's room, together with the suit of armour worn by a Sir Gilbert Mauleverer, and the story went that when part of the armour falls to the ground, there will be a death in the family. Naturally, the gauntlet falls. Later, Mauly is almost scared to death by the sound of tramping iron feet, and many more such scares, Mauly really would have been scared to death. However, enter Jack Drake, late of Greyfriars, and now Assistant to that most famous detective, Ferrers Locke.

He of course solves the mystery, Brian is the villain who has been playing ghost, but instead of using the armour of the dastardly Sir Fulke, was discovered in the armour of Sir Gilbert, and was therefore turned out immediately from Mauleverer Towers, into the cold, cold snow.

A marvellous paragraph from the end of the story:-

"Five minutes later, Brian Mauleverer stood at the open door below, with the Famous Five. Outside the night wind howled, drifting snowflakes against the old windows of Mauleverer Towers. The adventurer looked into the snowy winter's night - he looked at the juniors. There was no relenting in their faces. As he hesitated on the threshold, Bob Cherry raised his hand (very dramatic illustration of this scene). "Get out you cur" he said, and with a black scowl on his face, and with a curse on his lips, Brian Mauleverer quitted Mauleverer Towers - for ever".

Perhaps because it was my first Christmas Magnet, it was always the one I remember with so much affection. Perhaps because there was no Bunter.

* * * * *

WANTED: Pre-war School Friends, Schoolgirls' Own Libraries, Annuals. State price.

FOR SALE: Schoolgirls' Own Annual 1925, £1. Pre-war E. Wallace books.

MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM ST., BELFAST,

* * * * *

WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1920, 1940, (originals). Howard Baker Book Clubs, Vol. 3 particularly. Chapman and McDonald, original sketches.

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THOSE SCHOOL REBELLIONS - FACT AND FANCY

by J.E.M.

Consider the following plot for a Charles Hamilton school story:

A new and tyrannical headmaster at St. Jim's earns the nickname of 'Black Tiger', his cruel reign soon provoking a revolt under the slogan 'The Rights of Boys'. After great violence, including the smashing of windows and a huge bonfire of desks and books, a local battalion of soldiers - yes, soldiers! - is called in to crush the rising. The boys retreat to good defensive positions but, while a magistrate reads the Riot Act, they are outflanked by another force of troops. After the restoration of order, many boys are expelled and many more savagely flogged by the vengeful 'Black Tiger'.

Too far-fetched for a Hamilton tale? Well, here is another story outline, this time of a more successful rebellion:

After a long reign of tyranny at Greyfriars by headmaster and staff, a revolutionary council of pupils is formed. Explosives and even artillery (!) are secretly acquired and, on a given signal, revolt breaks out. The school rocks to the sound of explosions, doors are blown off their hinges and windows shattered. Violence rages without cease for two whole days. Then a sortie by a number of masters seizes five boys (the Famous Five?) and expels them, an act which fires the rebels to even greater wrath. The whole school of five hundred boys now surges into the local town where the residents also join in the riot. Finally, after a week of anarchy, the Head surrenders and all the boys' demands for reform are met.

Hamilton, of course, would never have written this incredible tale either. But, like the first one, it simply happens to be true. Substitute in the foregoing accounts the name of Rugby for St. Jim's and that of Marlborough for Greyfriars and you have actual history. The Rugby rebellion occurred in 1794 and the Marlborough insurrection in 1851. They were by no means unique. Early in the last century, the poet Byron, who was a pupil at Harrow helped to organise a gunpowder plot to blow up the whole school. A trail of powder was actually laid but the idea was abandoned when the rebels realised they would destroy many illustrious signatures carved on the walls of the school hall! Right up to the Boer War, in fact, similar uprisings and disorders occurred in a

number of our great schools, including Eton and Winchester, against the cruelty of staff or the often appalling living conditions. By comparison with such events, Charles Hamilton's accounts of rebellions and barings-out at Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood seem somewhat tame.

There is something else worth reflecting upon. Ours is the era of the 'blackboard jungle' - a period, we are told, of juvenile violence and indiscipline without precedent. The historical truth is not so simple; like all fact, far, far stranger than fiction.

(I am indebted to Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy's book, "The Public School Phenomenon", how republished in paperback. I note that it came under fire at a Northern OBBC meeting and, no doubt, the strictures concerning the author's views on Hamiltoniana were justified. Nevertheless, his book remains important - it is, indeed, the first full historical account of the English public school - and is worthy of all school-lovers' attention.)

* * * * *

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 70. THREE GIANT TECHNICOLOR MUSICALS

Our opening feature came from Warner Bros., and was a British film "The Golden Madonna" starring Michael Rennie and Phyllis Calvert. I haven't the slightest memory of it, which may be some indication of its worth. A Technicolor Speciality in the same bill was entitled "A Boy and His Dog", and a coloured cartoon was "The Gay Aunties".

The following week also brought the main feature from Warner's, in "To The Victor" starring Dennis Morgan. A new Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon was "Saturday Evening Puss", and a collection of Mack Sennett highlights was "Animal Antics" which must have been attractive.

M. G. M. was turning out big

Technicolor Musicals with a speed which put them far out in the lead for entertainment of this type. We played no less than three of these big musical films in glowing colour during the current term. The first came now - "A Date With Judy", which had a great star cast including Carmen Miranda (her first film for M. G. M.), Wallace Berry (his one and only musical, I fancy), Jane Powell and Elizabeth Taylor. I can't remember anything about this one, which suggests to me that musicals were no longer what they were, or, possibly, we were entering the time when they no longer wrote memorable tunes, and that films in general were just starting the downhill slide. In the

programme, there was another new Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "Texas Tom", and a 3-stooges comedy from Columbia "Three Hams on Rye" completed the bill. "A Date With Judy" was, incidentally, the term's longest film, running to 2½ hours. Mere length, mere colour, or mere spectacle do not necessarily make great entertainment.

Next, from M. G. M., Spencer Tracy and Deborah Kerr in "Edward, My Son". This was made in M. G. M.'s British studios, which were not noted for turning out many successes, no matter how hard they tried. This was the film of a famous stage play, and, as I have observed many times before, stage plays rarely made good films. This was one of those, like "Rebecca" and "George and Margaret", in which the people mentioned in the titles do not appear at all in the production.

Edward was the son ruined by the indulgence of his father, a self-made millionaire, played by Spencer Tracy. Deborah Kerr was the wife, unhappy and alcoholic. It sounds dreary, but I remember it because I had seen the play at "Q" Theatre. Some people thought Tracy marvellous in it; some, including me, thought he was miscast - a far cry from the lovable Tracy we had once known in "San Francisco" and "Captains Courageous".

In the same bill was the perfect, Oscar-winning Tom & Jerry cartoon in colour "The Cat Concerto".

Next, from Warner's, a long forgotten film in "John Loves Mary" starring Ronald Reagan. There was a big supporting bill including a coloured cartoon "Fair and Wormer" and a True

Life Story "Hit & Run".

After that came another of M. G. M.'s giant Musicals in Technicolor: "Luxury Liner" starring Jane Powell and George Brent, with the affable Schnozzle Durante popping on and off as he had done in M. G. M. films for a long time past. I can't remember the story, but chunks of it featured in "That's Entertainment" years later, so no doubt the spectacle was greater than the story-line.

Then, from Warner Bros., Richard Greene in "-- Now Barabba Was a Robber". I have an idea that this was British made and very well received by the critics at the time, but the story eludes me now.

A big supporting bill included a Bugs Bunny coloured cartoon "Slick Hare".

Next, from M. G. M., came "Three Godfathers", starring John Wayne, and directed by John Ford. It is sometimes quoted as John Ford's finest work. It had been made several times before down the years, but this one is memorable for its exceptionally fine technicolor. The son of the old star, Harry Carey, had a leading part with John Wayne, and also in it was Mae Clark, who, many, many years earlier had starred in a wonderful silent film "Over the Hill".

With "Three Godfathers" was a new Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "Safety Second", plus Gary Cooper in "Snow Carnival" in technicolor. So everything was glowing this week.

Then, from Warner's, Bette Davis and Robert Montgomery in "June Bride". Montgomery, who had made his name with M. G. M., had now transferred to Warner's, and I believe this was his first

Warner film.

In the same bill was a Bugs Bunny colour cartoon "A Lad in His Lamp" and a Harry Van Zell comedy "Radio Riot". The latter came from Columbia. Van Zell was a popular comedian in his time.

Last of the term was the third big Technicolor musical "Good News", starring June Allyson and Peter Lawford. This was probably the best of them for the simple reason that it was a remake of a musical comedy of the time when they wrote real tunes and lyrics. The songs were "Good News", "The Best Things in Life are Free", "Lucky in Love", "Just Imagine", and "The Varsity Drag". Somewhere I have a record of the song hits.

I had seen the musical comedy "Good News" at the Carlton Theatre in

the Haymarket, somewhere about 1930. It was a new theatre then, and I think that "Good News" was its first production. A wonderful, zestful show, in which I revelled. On stage, the star of it was George Murphy, later to become famous in films. My record of the tunes comes from the stage version. In the early 30's, M.G.M. made a film of it, but the Small Cinema was not then wired for sound, and I have no recollection of seeing that one.

In the same bill with "Good News" was a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "Yankee Doodle Mouse", and another coloured cartoon "Mouse Breakers".

(ANOTHER ARTICLE
IN THIS SERIES
NEXT MONTH)

* * * * *

News of the Old Boys Book Clubs

MIDLAND

November Meeting

The weather was fine and mild, and our meeting was well attended. Two new members, Peter Masters and Joan Golen, were welcomed.

Our small room at Dr. Johnson's House was packed and chairs had to be brought in. This is the kind of attendance we want and everybody was in excellent spirits.

Bob Acraman had brought along some interesting items. The famous Remington typewriter was on show and items of Charles Hamilton's belongings including a "crib" on Cicero, his famous Latin story, which appeared a long time ago in the Times Education Supplement, some scripts written for the B.B.C. and Greyfriars stories written in Braille for the blind. These, Bob pointed out, were but a few

of the great man's belongings left at "Rose Lawn".

Our two new members addressed the meeting and Joan Golen told us how she bought a pile of Magnets from a shop for £2.10s. She said she had for many years been a keen reader of the Magnet. Her bargain buy is not likely to be repeated.

Peter Masters said he had always been interested and had taken in the Magnet. He had all the Howard Baker reprints except Nos. 22 and 23 and all the £12 Library editions except the first four.

A discussion was started on the question of bound volumes and loose copies of the old papers. Most members preferred bound volumes to loose copies. Tom Porter and Peter Masters preferred the loose copies.

Our usual feature Anniversary number and Collectors' item was on display. New members were intrigued by them. The Anniversary Number was Popular No. 409 dated 27th November, 1926, and 53 years old to the day. The Collectors' item was a Magnet volume Nos. 86 to 98 in lovely condition.

A reading from a Bunter Book, "Billy Bunter among the Cannibals" by your correspondent was very amusing.

We finished our meeting after refreshments, which consisted of hot coffee and lovely cakes provided by Joan Golen, with Greyfriars Bingo, a game invented by Tom Porter.

We meet again on 29th of January, 1980. There is no meeting in December owing to the Christmas activities. We wish all members of Old Boys' Book Clubs everywhere a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year with plenty of seasonal reading.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

The Cambridge Club met at the home of Edward Witton on Sunday, 2 December. The gathering was rather small, since both the chairman and also President Bill Lofts, were both ill. The meeting expressed best wishes for their recovery.

Bill Thurbon reported a letter from Jack Doupe, who was hoping to return to Britain, possibly to Scotland, and had sent his greetings to the Club. Bill Thurbon gave a talk on exotic detective stories,

reminding members that the first Perry Mason style of story appeared in the Apocrypha; Susanna and the elders. Bill chose as examples of the exotic story Josephine Tey's story "The Daughter of Time", in which the detective, laid up in hospital, studies the story of Richard III and the Princes in the tower; John Dickson Carr's "The Bride of Newgate", an early 19th century story, and "The Devil in Velvet", an example of the supernatural in Detective fiction; Agatha Christy's story "Death comes as the End", set in Ancient Egypt, 2,000 years ago; Robert van Gulik's Chinese "Judge Dee" stories; Peter Lovesey's "Sergeant Cribb" stories, especially "Waxwork"; "Azimov's Mysteries", 13 short Science fiction Detective stories, and Ellis Peters' "One corpse too many", in which a monk plays the Detective at the time of the capture by King Stephen of Shrewsbury castle. He also recalled Richard Falkirk's "Blackstone" stories, about a not too scrupulous Bow Street Runner, and E 'Doc' Smith's S. F. futuristic detective-cum secret service "Family D'Alembert" stories.

Members recalled Christmas stories: Edward read a short story of his own composition, which caused much merriment. While enjoying Edward's hospitality members called up past Christmas experiences, fires in front rooms, smell of fathers' cigars, etc. Jack Overhill in his inimitable style told stories of his boyhood days, conjuring up vivid pictures of the times. Edward then conducted a quiz, on general subjects, won by Bill. The meeting closed with a warm vote of thanks to Edward for his hospitality.

Next meeting on 6 January.

The Cambridge Club send their greetings and good wishes to all other O. B. B. Clubs for a happy and prosperous 1980.

LONDON

"God bless us everyone" was the anagram of Bob Blythe's Musical Quiz whereby competitors had to guess the answers of the recorded tunes and take the initial letters to form the Dickens' quotation. The winner was Norman Wright. Maurice King donated the prizes. The quotation signified the happy and jolly atmosphere that prevailed at the Yuletide meeting at the Ealing home of Bill and Thelma Bradford. Previous to the quiz, Bob Blythe had read extracts from a newsletter of

December 1963 and the account of the Christmas meeting in Cricklewood.

Roger Jenkins read chapters from Magnet 1141 which dealt with the Xmas presents that Bunter received from the Famous Five.

Winifred Morss gave a reading from Nelson Lee Library, New Series, No. 34. This was about Handforth and the Haunted House.

Several notices were pinned up in the hall of the house and the clues of 24 Old Boys' Books were thereon inscribed. Roy Parsons was the winner and the host, Bill Bradford, who compiled the competition, kindly donated prizes. A novel quiz which had everyone guessing.

Highlight of the gathering was the performance of the Heritage Singers. They sang songs that suited the occasion and were accorded great applause at the conclusion, a very notable performance indeed. Following these four singers, our own Eric Lawrence sang the Hippopotamus Song and wound up with that old favourite "The Mighty Deep".

An excellent spread was available which included hot mince pies. Bill and Thelma were thanked for such a fine meeting which was enjoyed by over forty persons, amongst whom were Beryl and Eric Wafer from Sydney, Australia.

BENJAMIN WHITER

NORTHERN

Christmas Party held 8th December

A number of friends were unhappily prevented by illness or by other obligations from attending our party this year, though it was a joy to meet again some who had joined us from far afield. These rather reduced numbers, however, ensured that a pleasant intimacy prevailed. The general atmosphere was that of Christmas at Wharton Lodge rather than one of Gussy's expansive gatherings at Eastwood House. Certainly our dining quarters at the Swarthmore Centre did much to create the setting of a study feed, and there was no shortage of festive foodstuffs.

Posted round the wall were pithy, if polysyllabic, summaries of old nursery rhymes, and clearly some of us were long past our nursery days. Vera Good is rumoured to be a grandmother, but obviously has a good memory; she romped home with the highest score of rhymes correctly identified.

Geoffrey Wilde presented us with a quiz based on tape-recorded voices from the past. A sharp memory again helped, but so too did a keen ear, and musician Harold Truscott was the winner of this event.

Other items included our traditional Bunter Drive and a Team Quiz race. In the Bunter Drive Neil Durden secured the lavish booby prize despite the handicap of picking up 15 bonus points in one round! For the Quiz, prepared by Darrell Swift, the two teams were separated and each privately given the same questions one at a time; with a 20-second penalty for wrong answers and "don't knows" the winning team was the first one to complete the full set of questions. The race was decided by a mere 10-second margin.

With library business and plenty of conversation as usual this was another happy get-together which broke up at about 9.30 amid a chorus of seasonal good wishes.

Next meeting: 12th January, 1980.

JOHNNY BULL

* * * * *

PIXIE O'SHAUGNESSY

by Mary Cadogan

In the November C.D. (The Postman Called), N. Yandle asked for information about 'a girl named Oshaughnessie'. I am not surprised that he was confused about the spelling of Pixie's surname; it is not easy to remember, but her personality is unforgettable. Pixie, who was 'at once the joy and terror of the school' was created for the 1900 Girls' Own Paper by Mrs. George de Horne Vaizey, who wrote some 40 novels dealing with '... the essence of femininity in the springtime of life'. In retrospect these have an old-world charm, but they are also at times pithy, and very lively. Pixie was known as the 'wild Irish tornado', and her pranks at a sedate English boarding-school are rather like those of Angela Brazil's celebrated 'spiffing schoolgirls' thought of course Pixie preceded these by several years.

Pixie was one of a large family; her brothers and sister are handsome but Pixie is plain. By sheer force of personality, however, she becomes the darling of the whole family. Her story appeared in a hardback book called Pixie O'Shaughnessy and her fortunes were followed into womanhood in two further books, More About Pixie and The Love

Affairs of Pixie. Published by the Religious Tract Society, these often turn up in Oxfam and other charity bookshops. They might also be obtainable from public libraries.

Pixie's adventures are well worth dipping into, and so too are those of Mrs. de Horne Vaizey's other famous heroine Peggy Saville (About Peggy Saville and More About Peggy Saville). The book by this author which I like best, however, is The Salt of Life which was based on the experiences of her family and friends. This is the perceptive and amusing story of two families of girls on the threshold of adult life and romance.

I was able to contact Mrs. de Horne Vaizey's son a few years ago, a little before he died. He told me that his mother was one of seven children; she was born in Liverpool and began to write very early though she did not publish until her first marriage (as Jessie Mansergh). Her second marriage took place in 1899. She had a daughter by the first marriage and a son by the second; he remembers his mother as 'a woman of great courage ... Shortly after my birth she contracted typhoid/rheumatoid arthritis. Yet in pain, and having to be wheeled about in a bath-chair, she still contrived to write happy books.' Mrs. George de Horne Vaizey died in 1916.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

ERIC LAWRENCE (Wokingham): It seems to me that Jim Cook does not like the music of Rachmaninov and this may have led him into making incorrect statements in his "Letter from St. Frank's" in the October C.D. The Prelude in C Sharp Minor (only one) was such a well-loved piece of music that the composer, a virtuoso pianist who toured the world extensively and lived till 1943, was constantly being asked to play it. It is still a popular piece today.

In my copy, the instructions LENTO (slow) and ANDANTE (slowish) apply to three of its five pages. The remainder is AGITATO which does not necessarily mean quickly. So it is hardly fast or a gallop. The dynamics, or degrees of loudness, show that less than half the piece is to be played loudly and most of the remainder is either at a

medium level or else very soft indeed so to call it noisy is not really correct. Also, the word noisy suggests an unpleasant sound which can certainly be applied to some of today's so-called music but that is hardly Rachmaninov's C Sharp Minor. Perhaps the piece Gore-Pearce could hear was not being played properly.

Jim does seem to have a poor opinion of Rachmaninov's music and of course he is quite entitled to his opinion, but let us keep to reasonably accurate descriptions.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): I was intrigued by Fr. F. Hertzberg's statement that 'Schoolboys found the School Friend stories exciting'. I have always known that certain boys' periodicals attracted an audience of girl readers - Magnet and Nelson Lee were two - but always believed this to have been largely a one-sided affair. No doubt some boys did read girls' papers, though I personally never knew any who did. My sisters read both School Friend and Schoolgirls' Own, yet at no time did I feel tempted to invade their province. Who needed them when boys had the monopoly in reading? School Friend was undoubtedly a first-rate School paper for girls, but dare I say it was rather tame stuff by boys' standards? Never short of a good mystery, perhaps the biggest is what the girls saw in Bessie Bunter. Sorry to give the poor girl another caning, but she gets my gong as the most colourless and objectionable character in the Hamilton household.

F. STURDY (Middlesborough): In the newly published Holiday Annual 1980 I note the central characters were in minor roles. Although a sub-story this was typical in the blue Magnets in that a little more scope was given to the lesser lights. I found this most welcome. In the later Magnet one had the impression the tales could have carried on with a round dozen or so characters. What happened to Russell, Penfold, Rake and Bulstrode? Surely they could have been kept going if only to interpose with a "Buzz off Bunter". This would have reassured us that Greyfriars was still Greyfriars. I am aware this point of view is not new, but this de-population was always regrettable to me and why I always had a leaning towards the blue Magnet. There were exceptions of course, i. e. "The Mailed Fist at Greyfriars".

W. SETFORD (Derby): I have been re-reading the Courtfield Cracksman series from December 1929. Well, in the second Magnet of the series No. 1139, I have come across an interesting extract. This issue is of course devoted to Christmas 1929. I quote "I'm expecting a Postal Order shortly".

"Do you mean this Christmas or Christmas 1959?" asked Toddy.

"Eh? This Christmas of course."

"Then your Postal Order won't come in time. Better make it 1959."

The point of my letter is that Charles Hamilton was writing Christmas stories of Wharton Lodge for 1929, and in one of those stories he mentions Christmas 1959. And he actually wrote a Christmas story set at Wharton Lodge for Xmas 1959. I find this amazing. And now it is Xmas 1979, 50 years have passed by since that Xmas story of 1929, and we are still avidly reading Charles Hamilton's unique stories. I am sure they will live on forever.

J.E.M. (Brighton): Thank you for the continued excellence of C.D. The December issue is a delight, particular highlights for me being Roger Jenkins' piece on the Mauleverer Towers Series and a long-standing favourite, Biography of a Small Cinema; what memories it recalls.

More power to C.D. in 1980. Like all your readers, I look forward especially to Number 400 and regret that I only joined your fellowship around Number 250.

* * * * *

BOOK REVIEW

by Mary Cadogan

THE GREAT CARTOON STARS: A Who's Who! by Denis Gifford. (Jupiter) £7.50

Denis Gifford has built up this lively history of animated cartoons by focusing on the characters whose lives and 'careers' are charted - for easy reference - in alphabetical order. Almost all of our favourites are here in text and pictures, from Felix, 'the first cartoon superstar' of 1919 to his underground-'comix'-originated successor, Fritz the Cat of the 1970's. Felines of course are not the only animals who have proliferated in the animated cartoon, and the author highlights a host of animal favourites. I am particularly glad that he includes Clarabelle Cow and Horace Horsecollar, who both disappeared from the Disney sagas as Goofy gained ascendancy. Naturally a good deal of attention is given to the achievements of Disney; but other giants of the cartoon industry, including the Hanna-Barbera, Fleischer and UPA

groups, are represented, as well as plenty of lesser lights.

The text is informative and witty: I was reminded that many cartoon stars began in story-books, comics of newspaper strips - from classics like 'Alice' and 'Peter Pan' to engaging but more ephemeral characters. (I had forgotten that Pip, Squeak and Wilfred had been featured in some cartoon films.) There are 128 large and beautifully illustrated pages, several in full colour. Betty Boop rubs shoulders with the Beetles and the Big Bad Wolf; Popeye, Pinocchio and the Pink Panther jostle each other for the reader's attention, and The Great Cartoon Stars is well worth blowing some Christmas book tokens on.

BEST WISHES FOR THE NEW YEAR to all Hobbyists, especially our Editor.

R. J. MCCABE, DUNDEE, SCOTLAND.

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WANTED REALLY WANTED: Two issues of the Magnet, Nos. 948, 949. Any help will be greatly appreciated, believe me. Thank you.

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JIM COOK REPLIES:

Re Mr. Truscott's letter in the current (December) issue of Collectors' Digest: he evidently failed to recognise the St. Frank's junior's interpretation of Rachmaninov and his Preludes. Gore-Pearce, the upstart son of a millionaire, would naturally, because of his background, exhibit his ignorance of classical music and his views I faithfully reported according to character.

I am never excited writing my Letters from St. Frank's. The only excitement seems to have been engendered by Mr. Truscott's rushing into print his opinion on my Letter and his haste to give me a lesson in Rachmaninov.

But there, there, Mr. Truscott, old chap, you stick to Billy Bunter whose thoughts are the more easily interpreted.

THE WONDER OF 1980. Story Paper Collectors' Digest reaches its FOUR HUNDREDTH NUMBER.

We deeply regret to record that our loyal reader, Mr. Warwick Setford, died suddenly just before Christmas. An obituary will appear in our next issue.
